



# *Hear Here!*

Volume VIII:  
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BSO



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***Hear Here!***  
**Volume VIII:**

# *modern*

Liberal Arts Student Journal  
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# *from the editors*

**MUSICIANS HAVE A VOICE.** For over a hundred and fifty years, great performers from all over the world have flocked to the New England Conservatory to develop this voice. Across all departments, music is the cornerstone of the lives of these students. It drives us, connects us, and empowers us. It gives us our voice, but it is not the only one we have.

Musicians have a voice. We have the ability to observe our surroundings and comment on them. We have the capability to think about ourselves and our world, and to express our opinions. We have the potential to bring change, to start movements, and to make people listen. Words, like music, are tools we use to interpret our world and express our visions. These tools are best cultivated through our Liberal Arts curriculum, where we transform the same passion we have for our music into thoughtful narratives and essays. Throughout all four years of the undergraduate program at NEC, students take non-musical classes that allow us to form genuine opinions about our surroundings. *Hear Here!* is a sampling of the student writing that has impressed a panel of student editors and earned a place in the journal.

Musicians have a voice. This year, we are using it to celebrate the 150th anniversary of our world-class institution. The construction of the brand new Student Life and Performance Center is a symbol of the old mixing with the new,



and it serves as a look into the future of NEC as a modern institution educating modern musicians. The modern musician is not solely defined by their music and should be offered a variety of venues through which their voice can be heard. Although there was no unifying theme in the original call for submissions to this year's journal, the editors felt that they could sense a common voice in many of the pieces. At NEC, we care about what is happening in the world around us; the topics presented in this eighth volume of *Hear Here!* span everything from NEC-specific issues to the global reach of social reform. These works inspire conversation about what it means to be living as a musician in the twenty-first century, and that's why this issue is subtitled "**modern.**" As musicians, as students, and as artists, the ability to influence the future is embodied in the voices of these writers.

Musicians have a voice. We are pleased to share with you a selection of the voices of NEC.

Alexander Garde  
Mark Macha

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Sarah Nalty



Ariel Mo

## still air

the carriage made its way  
through the tunnel  
silently seamlessly smooth;  
impossibly high heels black  
as the long coats, briefcases,  
hair, hidden eyes;  
four minutes in an endless day  
on repeat—  
stream of cackling keys broke  
the monotony of foreign syllables;  
pink blush, grey scarf, green seat  
spotless cushions and shiny floor  
the very air clear of words, thoughts  
found and lost while we  
were still moving—

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*In December 2017, I visited Tokyo for the first time and was startled by how clean and quiet the city's underground was. Between each station there might be convenience stores, ramen shops, entire shopping centres and financial districts packed full of people; but the moment you set foot inside a subway car, all was still.*

Yen Chun Wang (Angela)

## Learning to Read, Reading to Learn: Engagement and Experience Through Music-in-Education

Music is a universal language, but the recent development of technology is risking music's irreplaceable role as a medium for expression. The rapid progress of electronic music, many easy-accessible musical platforms, and the first album composed and produced by artificial intelligence are all ringing the alarm that alerts us to contemplate more in depth about the value of music and how it influences our everyday life. Education is without a doubt the most effective utilization of music because of its approachability, flexibility, and connectivity. However, there are misconceptions that link music education to talent, alienating people from music education by making it an exclusive, gifted education. Therefore, the essential role of music-in-education is to introduce and teach music by engaging students with experience, eliminating the obstacles that alienate and distance people from music study. Music in education not only affects non-musicians, it also engages professional musicians by developing their mindset from learning to read music to reading music to learn, which evolves music education into a philosophy that fosters learning strategies, skills, and process. To develop music-in-education into an interdisciplinary practice, educators should first break the myth of music education in both students' minds and their own, then structure their teaching into a methodical, cognitive framework, utilizing "flow experience"—a mental state in which a person is fully immersed, involved, and enjoying in the process of an activity—in their teaching as a strategic practice.

The misconceptions about inherited talent not only alienate non-musicians from stepping into music education, but

also raise professional musicians' arrogance on their path of learning music. The first step of exploring music-in-education is to break the misconception of musical giftedness. As Scripp, Ulibarri, and Flax mention in their analysis, *Thinking Beyond the Myths and Misconceptions of Talent*, "without a critical examination of where expertise comes from, 'talent' could become a self-fulfilling prophecy that can be used too easily to demonstrate to children that it is not worth trying to learn something difficult, something that does not come naturally, something that requires commitment to countless hours of practice from which only the 'talented few' will profit" (55).

Although "talent" is always correlated with music because of its spontaneity and difficulty, it could be a harm—to both non-musicians and professional musicians—that not only stops musicians from learning music with cognition, but also sets up the fixed mindset that is a stumbling stone to their entire educational path. Carol S. Dweck claims in her essay, *The Secret to Raising Smart Kids*, that "a belief in fixed intelligence also makes people less willing to admit to errors or to confront and remedy their deficiencies in school, at work and in their social relationships" (4), suggesting that educators should develop methods and strategies to help students build and create talent because advanced ability can be nurtured. For example, the myth of "perfect pitch" in solfège classes creates barriers in music education so obviously that sentences such as "I wish I could have had perfect pitch," or "I couldn't recognize that note because I don't have perfect pitch," or "She is so gifted, she has had perfect pitch since she was born" impede learning. The misunderstanding of inaccessibility of pitch memory makes a lot of musicians give up training and approaching long-term pitch memory, which is definitely approachable. In fact, by using methods such as memorizing themes, using reference notes, and singing while playing instruments as tools to pursue long-

term pitch memory and intonation, “perfect pitch” becomes such a vague expression that neglects the effectiveness of using methods in the idea of music in education. The myth of giftedness blocks our sight to see the possibilities of nurturing cognitive music education.

The structural educational framework suggests music-in-education as a two-way street that is a more interactive, methodical, and productive learning process that benefits both teachers and students. Solfège class is an essential platform to apply a structural educational framework because it not only trains student abilities in sight-singing, reading clefs, score preparation, etc., but also fosters students’ performing and practicing strategies, developing their understanding of how to progress. Solfège as a structured music education is not only about singing perfectly in tune or reading clefs fast, but also about “how” to approach and elaborate the methods of performance art, and being conscious of how to make progress. A malleable, holistic music education, as Scripp and Gilbert organize in their analysis, “requires the learner to simultaneously listen, question, perform, create, and reflect while learning to think, feel, invent, and play musically. These fundamental processes, once internalized in a music education, also can be applied to and deepen basic and applied language arts, math, or even social-emotional skills” (194). Applying structural music education to solfège curriculum, performance and practicing methods, such as “stop method,” “go ahead method,” and “pattern reading,” provide principles of cognitive and meta-cognitive thinking of performance art. Once students get involved in music education after breaking their misconception, a comprehensive structure of teaching needs to be presented and provided to build students’ skills rather than “teaching to the test” or asking them to learn by rote. The structural framework of music education is so crucial that it stimulates

students to use methods and organizes their thoughts while learning.

In combining and applying two main strategies of changing mindset and structuring educational framework, “flow experience” develops in teaching, piquing students’ interest and focus in learning, reflecting the educator’s strategic practice of structural framework. With respect to Csikszentmihalyi’s definition, “in contrast to normal life, these ‘flow activities’ allow a person to focus on goals that are clear and compatible, and provide immediate feedback” (1). A music curriculum that thrives on anxiety and boredom must rely on the insertion of flow experience, which not only requires students’ hyper-attention on method-using, but also their cognitive verification of the methods. Setting goals and challenges helps them to be meta-cognitive, learning about cognition, thinking about thinking, which stimulates their intrinsic motivation to learn music not only as a separate discipline, but also an interdisciplinary program that engenders learning strategies. Eric Booth, a teaching artist to the Juilliard School, emphasizes that “the fun is in the making of the stuff; the learning is all in this juicy process stuff ... but there is a necessity to keep that product passion alive and pay attention to the process along the way” (22). His ideas about keeping the balance of process and product is related to Csikszentmihalyi’s statement of flow: conscious, focused process and immediate feedback. To apply “flow experience” in music classes, asking students to rehearse a piece in several approaches, such as twice as fast, twice as slow, backwards, and play and sing, suggests a growth mindset that creates progress. This not only displays the variety of music education, but also captures students’ attention and focus in problem-solving and musical development.

Music in education serves a crucial role in the 21st century, focusing more on the engagement between teachers and students. It is both a student-centered and a teacher-centered education that fuels the students' intrinsic motivation to learn by providing them with experience instead of theory, captivating them by showing how effective music could be as an artistic expression of inner affect. By pursuing music in education, not only are students benefited, but teachers also learn a lot from their students and internalize the experience to the development of their own artistry. Education is the extension of artistry as well as the ultimate way to develop and explore our musical understanding. As a musician, digging into music education gives more motivation and meaning to my music studying, because I want to lighten up other people's worlds by introducing music, just as I have.

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Zach Egan

## Ravel's *Introduction et allegro* and the Modernization of the Harp

It is not often that a single piece of music reshapes the future of an entire instrument. Maurice Ravel's *Introduction et allegro* for harp, string quartet, clarinet, and flute accomplished that task by propelling the harp into the modern era, thus opening up a new world of possibilities for the instrument. Ravel is widely considered one of the most important composers of the Western Classical tradition. His unique use of harmony and orchestration created music with depth and new colors that helped to shape the tonality of the Late Romantic Era. While it is not especially groundbreaking tonally, *Introduction et allegro* serves as a textbook for composers who wish to write engaging and idiomatic harp parts. Ravel's *Introduction et allegro* was a groundbreaking work because it provided a guide to the possibilities of the new instrument designed by the Érard Company, becoming a staple in the repertoire and propelling the harp into the modern era.

The harp is considered one of the most ancient instruments. Its roots trace back to ancient Egypt, Greece, and Assyria.<sup>1</sup> However, the harp faced a pivotal problem as music modernized: The pedal harp was unable to easily play chromatic passages or passages that moved rapidly through various keys. Various methods of solving this problem have appeared throughout history, from lever harps to using a metal crook to

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<sup>1</sup> Fuller Maitland, J. A., II. "Harp." *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. II. N.p.: MacMillan, 1906. 324-27. Print.

turn the string to raise the pitch a half step.<sup>2</sup> Around the year 1500, a type of harp known as the double-strung harp emerged, followed by a triple strung harp.<sup>3</sup> Rather than using a mechanism to alter the string, these harps had two or three sets of differently tuned strings, similar to the black and white keys of a piano. While this allowed players to achieve the desired chromatic ability, reaching through strings to play other strings proved to be very cumbersome and difficult to maneuver.<sup>4</sup>

In 1903, the Pleyel instrument company devised a new solution to the difficult problem of achieving chromatics on the harp. The company designed a harp that featured twelve strings per octave, in one even row, rather than two or three rows like earlier chromatic instruments. In order to demonstrate the capabilities of the new instrument, Gustave Lyon, director of the Pleyel company, commissioned Claude Debussy to write *Danse sacrée et danse profane* in 1904. While the piece was considered a success and is still very important in the modern harp concert repertoire, this version of the chromatic harp was quickly abandoned.<sup>5</sup> The piece is now performed on the Érard style double action pedal harp.<sup>6</sup>

While Debussy was writing for the Pleyel company, another French company was devising a new system for the

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<sup>2</sup> Fuller Maitland, "Harp."

<sup>3</sup> Gutmann, Peter. "Maurice Ravel's 'Introduction and Allegro for Harp.'" *Classical Notes*. Classical Notes, 2003. Web.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "Danse Sacrée Et Danse Profane, L113." Hyperion Records. [www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W1494\\_66468](http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W1494_66468).

<sup>6</sup> Meijer, Lavinia. "Debussy, Ravel and Darwin." Lavinia Meijer, [www.laviniamelijer.com/world/new-album-voyage/](http://www.laviniamelijer.com/world/new-album-voyage/).

harp. Sébastien Érard, an instrument maker famous for his pianos, designed a new mechanism to provide the harp with chromatic capabilities. His earliest essays describing improvements to the harp appear around 1786, for what is called a single action pedal harp. He filed a London patent for a fork mechanism in 1794, made a double action pedal harp in 1809, and patented the double action pedal harp in 1809. However, he did not publically introduce his newly designed instrument until 1810.<sup>7</sup> To this day, Érard's ingenious design is the model on which all renowned modern harp companies, such as Salvi and Lyon and Healy, base their instruments.

Érard created an ingenious system to figure out how to switch between chromatic notes more easily. With the plate system that he created, the bridge of the harp has two sets of plates with pins, hence the term "double action." The harp is naturally tuned to C-flat major and has seven pedals, one for each note in the octave. By moving a pedal up one notch, one plate alters each string corresponding to the octave, bending the string up a half step to the natural inflection of that note. Moving a pedal up another notch spins the other plate, shortening the string to the sharp of the note.

Joseph Maurice Ravel was born in 1875 in the Basque town of Ciboure. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Paris. Ravel studied piano from a very young age and soon added harmony, counterpoint, and composition to his studies. He was a very gifted pianist from a young age but did not stand out as a prodigy of any kind. In 1889, he successfully auditioned for the Conservatoire de Paris where he studied composition with notable French composer Gabriel Fauré. Ravel eventually decided to focus his studies primarily on composition, rather

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<sup>7</sup> Fuller Maitland, "Harp."

than pursuing his studies exclusively as a pianist. His earliest successful compositions are *Jeux d'eau* for solo piano (1901), his string quartet (1903), and his orchestral song cycle *Shéhérazade* (1903). Ravel's harmonic language is widely accepted as being part of the French Impressionist movement although he himself never accepted that term. Ravel's music features extended chords, such as ninth and thirteenth chords, and chromaticism. These features, coupled with lush orchestration, create a rich and expressive musical language.

Albert Blondel, director of the Paris branch of the Érard pedal harp company, reached out to Ravel at an "inopportune time" in his life.<sup>8</sup> Gustave Lyon, of the Pleyel company, had just led a massive advertising campaign to push his company's new chromatic harp, which was mostly fueled by Debussy's marvelous work for harp and strings. Blondel hoped to counter Lyon's efforts with a commission to show off and impress more audiences with his company's double action pedal harp.<sup>9</sup> Despite having been patented by Sébastien Érard in 1810, the double action mechanism was still being refined in the early 1900s.

When Ravel was commissioned in 1905 by the Érard company, he wrote to music critic Jean Marnold, "I was terribly busy during the few days which preceded my departure, because of a piece for the harp commissioned by the Érard Company. A week of frantic work and 3 sleepless nights enabled me to finish it, for better or worse."<sup>10</sup> 1905 was an incredibly

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<sup>8</sup> Jost, Peter. "Preface." *Introduction et Allegro*, Urtext, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Orenstein, Arbie. *Ravel: Man and Musician*. N.p.: Dover Publications, 1975, p. 68. Print.

difficult year for Ravel, as he failed his fifth, and ultimately final, attempt to win the Prix de Rome.<sup>11</sup> He was eliminated in the first round, which caused a massive scandal. Despite his schedule and setbacks, Ravel accepted the commission and began to work on a piece for an instrument that was brand new to the music world, providing him an empty canvas full of creative possibilities. Because of the newness of the instrument, other than Debussy's *Danse sacrée et danse profane*, which has since been arranged for the pedal harp commonly played today, Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro* was the first piece of its kind, a work for harp and chamber orchestra. It was truly the first work for the modern pedal harp, setting the standard for all composers since. Ravel finished the piece in 1906, and it was premiered on February 22, 1907 at the Hôtel de la Société Française de Photographie in Paris.<sup>12</sup>

*Introduction et allegro* is scored for harp, flute, clarinet in A, and string quartet. It is written in a modified sonata form with a slow introduction. In the introduction, the flute and clarinet briefly present a theme, featuring the flute melodic line with clarinet harmonization. The first violin, viola, and violoncello present a theme in octave unison, with a dramatic appreciated interjection by the harp. This pattern continues, with other instruments presenting a theme with harp interjections, until bar 13. In bar 13, the violoncello plays the melody and the other instruments, including the harp, accompany this melody. The sonata exposition begins in bar 26, with the harp alone presenting the principal theme, elaborated with an arpeggiated figure and left hand harmonics, which add a depth of color to the theme. In bar 44, the flute takes over the principal theme, with the harp and other instruments trading the theme or

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<sup>11</sup> Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

adding to the texture. In bar 78, the flute and clarinet present the second theme, which gets traded off to the upper strings. In a similar fashion to the introduction, the harp interjects with glittering glissandi. At bar 100, the melody from the introduction reappears. Having melodic material from a slow introduction appear later in sonata form is relatively unique; however, Brahms employed this technique in his first symphony as well. The introduction theme reappears in the key of E-flat minor and is prepared with a B-flat in the harp, which gives the appearance of a dominant preparation, as one may expect in sonata form. With the reappeared introduction theme, the piece enters a development section. In bar 104, Ravel layers on the principal theme with the introduction theme and moves through different key areas. A unique aspect of this piece is the extended cadenza that the harp has at the end of the development, rather than at the end of the recapitulation before a coda, which would be a more common practice in sonata form. The harp cadenza uses various techniques, such as arpeggios, glissandi, and harmonics. Ravel's colorful writing, once again, allows the harp to demonstrate its full technical capabilities. Looking carefully at the actual pitches, Ravel employs a generous amount of chromaticism, which was previously impossible on the harp. Using a copious amount of chromaticism is a genius decision, as it highlights the purpose of the double action pedal harp: the ability to play chromatics seamlessly. Because this was impossible before Érard's design, Ravel's piece, especially the cadenza, allows the double action harp to demonstrate the ease of the mechanism to achieve what was previously impossible. After the cadenza, the principal theme returns, and the sonata enters the recapitulation and closes out with a coda.

*Introduction et allegro* was received relatively well, but also received some criticism. At the premiere, the audience



seemed to enjoy the work, but critics were wary of the harp and the role of the harp. This reaction was most likely due to the flashy glissando runs and extended cadenza the harp has, which allow it to cut through textures and play extended solos, thus highlighting the technical capabilities of the instrument, which was the reason for the piece's fruition in the first place. A famed French music critic, Louis Laloy, was present at the premiere of *Introduction et allegro*. In his critique, Laloy did not understand the role of the harp and heavily criticized the runs and glissandi.<sup>13</sup> Laloy wrote, "It seems to me that the piece would gain more than it would lose if the harp were left out."<sup>14</sup> Due to Laloy's strong influence in Paris at that time, his critique impacted the reception of the piece for Ravel's lifetime. Ravel frequently programmed *Introduction et allegro*, and audiences usually accepted the piece. However, critics continued to question the role of the harp and the importance of the work in its entirety.<sup>15</sup> Today, the piece is considered a standard in the harp repertoire. The prominent harp part allows harpists to play it similarly to a solo piece, giving the performer ample opportunities to shine. The piece also allows harpists to play in a chamber setting as well. Today, the piece is widely considered a gem and harpists love the dazzling harp part. When asked to give her impressions of *Introduction et allegro*, Emily Levin, principal harp of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra stated, "Introduction and Allegro is such a stunning work, especially considering it is one of the first pieces written for today's modern harp. Ravel's harp writing showcases the harp's color possibilities and its virtuosity, and the unique instrument

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<sup>13</sup> Laloy, Louis. "Maurice Ravel." *Le Mercure Musical et S.I.M.*, vol. 3, 1907, p. 282.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Jost, Peter. "Preface." *Introduction et Allegro*, Urtext, 2017.

combination creates a beautiful and immersive sound world. It's possibly my favorite chamber work!" Ms. Levin has performed the piece numerous times in recital, both as a student and as a professional. As she stated, the piece demands intense virtuosity, despite Ravel's writing for an instrument that had no precursors to its technical possibilities. Ravel managed not only to push the boundaries of an instrument with this piece but also to write a work that allows the performers to shine and immerses the audience in a new sound world entirely.

As a performer, understanding the purpose of the piece is critical. Ravel was commissioned in order to show off a new instrument, and he beautifully crafted a daring and dazzling piece that makes the harp a spectacle, standing out of the ensemble and creating a world of possibilities for a newly modernized instrument. Harmonically, the piece does not venture into unfamiliar territory, which was a primary reason why it was criticized, as critics did not feel like the piece was groundbreaking.<sup>16</sup> However, these critics missed the point, as the piece was not intended to be a groundbreaking theoretical creation. Ravel wrote a piece for an instrument that had never been written before and rather than using the harp as part of the ensemble, he created a quasi-concert. Ravel employed new techniques, such as chordal glissandi and harmonics to create a timbral exploration of the possibilities of the new instrument.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, as a performer, it is necessary to know that this piece was intended to be glitzy and showy, so that a performer can exploit this fact. Glissandi can be exaggerated, solo passages can be played with more soloistic freedom, and the harpist can, in a way, run the show by leading the ensemble.

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<sup>16</sup> Jost, "Preface"

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

*Introduction et allegro* is frequently programmed by harpists for chamber, solo, and graduation recitals. In addition, it is frequently recorded, as it is a favorite of today's harpists. There are many critically important recordings, all of which vary slightly in interpretation. An older recording, featuring harpist Lily Laskine, and a more modern recording, featuring harpist Lavinia Meijer, both follow the same tempo for the opening section *Très lent* and the following *Moins lent*. However, both of these sections have specific tempo markings in the score. At the *allegro* beginning in bar 26, Lily Laskine takes a tempo of roughly a quarter note equalling 130. Meijer takes more a brisk tempo of nearly 150, which makes this section more lively, causing more tension and release. Composer Narcís Bonet wisely said in a masterclass, "Le fondation de la composition et de la tension et de la détension," which means the foundation of composition is tension and release. Meijer's brisker tempo exemplifies Bonet's view of the foundation of composition, as the quicker pace allows for more flow between tension and release, thus creating a more fulfilling experience for the listener.

In conclusion, Ravel left a lasting impression on classical music by setting a precedent for the role of the pedal harp in the chamber music setting as well as the solo and orchestral possibilities of the instrument. More recent orchestral works, such as Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, have demanding harp parts or extended solo passages. Even *Symphonie fantastique*, which Berlioz wrote in 1830, before the modern pedal harp, is more easily played on today's modern instrument. This modern instrument allows the harp to cut through the orchestra more easily and play the extended patterns with more grace than the instruments of Berlioz's time. Ravel's *Introduction et allegro* certainly served as a guide for composers who wished to write successfully for the harp.

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David Norville

## Ham's Girls

It's what we Christians do when duty calls  
Do the deeds directly see  
To him believe that money makes it worth it all  
'Cause you can never make that work wait each work day  
Seedless pay, days decay, Hosanna takes the pain away,  
His plan's the way,  
Do that shit for Jesus' sake  
You need to pray,  
'Cause white men control the legislay  
On the sabbath day, regurgitate what you need to say  
These crackas won't say shit about the negroes inside of Hades' gates  
Here in this sphere man you must do what you can  
It's crystal clear who you fear as the american black man  
Cuz, this life will turn a pretty girl to a chump,  
and turn a nobles soul cold and make his whole heart numb  
Will you learn the art of the scum  
Or walk the way of the Son  
It's waste away or wash the clothes of Mr. Ofays mom

These men, aren't seen as equals in times of apartheid and  
These men, seek certain pieces of respect they won't find and  
These men, lose all their hope and grow stone cold inside so  
She's bent, over her knees gashed, official support beam slash  
Servant, back break, heart ache rocky skin ash  
Your bit, consorted, with Lucy showed her where your soul at  
Morbid, sordid, Lucy's surely taking your ass  
Close friend, ya porkin, we lost you when you closed the door past  
Melanin woman, coolin in the lowest caste  
Praying for Jordan, to roll and roll quickly past  
Too sick to ask, for help but made some honest wealth  
Stone cold and mad, outward sass and condemn herself  
Thought it out, think of sneakin' on some swine shit  
Thawed it out, toss it back like a vodka fifth  
Inside herself, she sees a portrait, black lady kin

### Y'all are Ham's girls, make your bed and lay in it.

Your job, take the heat, tender roast,  
 It's time to eat, lost life in me, heart coasted  
 Greasy mien black and cracked like most coal is  
 Sweaty feet, and her neck creaks, lack of passion showing  
 Her extreme highs and lows  
 Her sighs and moans  
 Her false sights and ghosts  
 Her need to do more way than the most  
 Her tendencies to digress and repress cries  
 Tell Jesus his lies  
 Forgive him too many times  
 Fantasize about a life with no stress  
 About no rings and no breasts  
 No more at odds with wife jobs  
 No more of God's tests  
 Who told you girls can't pop off  
 She says "Tell Lucy to fuck off me,  
 I know Jehovah is above me"  
 She seeks the sleek creek off of heath street  
 Soft sheets and clean heart beat  
 She seeks fidelity in a land that's free  
     and the comfort and the shade of the chinaberry tree  
  
 until it's all over

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### Analytical Rationale

My final project revolves around and was inspired by the Zora Neale Hurston short story, "Sweat." This was a short story that resonated within me. As a visibly black male born into a low socioeconomic family and raised in a predominantly white city, I've had the ability to commiserate with those in the story who experience discrimination, domestic abuse, and socioeconomic adversity. My creative project is a rap/spoken word poem that revolves around Sweat's various themes (marriage, religion, poverty, struggle, piety) along with an underlying question that many people asked during our



class discussion: Why does Delia deal with Sykes for so long? Why does she continue to deal with the beatings and not leave him? It's always easier to answer questions about a subject you have never observed and won't ever remotely be a part of. It's easy to question her reasoning but very hard to see things from her perspective. It's important to understand that Delia was a Christian woman of color living in the 1920's and so there were several things she had to do without question. It was her duty to find a man not only to fit her religious obligations, but also she needed to find a man because she had fewer rights and privileges as a single person because of her gender and color. The Christian doctrine teaches their followers to work hard, for your reward will come in the afterlife. This way of thinking persuaded a lot of blacks to trudge through the hard times because a better day is always twenty-four hours away. It is safe to say that these values and ways of thinking were instilled in a young Delia and encouraged her to live through twenty years of marital problems, menial labor and demoralization.

In the face of struggle, people often split into two different categories (within the categories, there are respective sub-groups and ambivalent groups): those who cling to the idea of hope, resolution, and perseverance with a chin (sometimes reluctantly) held high and eyes toward the future; others become consumed by their troubles and choose to sink into a state of realism and/or pessimism. Those consumed by their pasts live in their past, and react as such, with little regard to what the future will hold. This is the difference between Delia and Sykes—Delia recognizes her troubles and ends her days looking towards tomorrow, getting ahead on her clothes washing job knowing that Sykes's eventual demise will come to pass ("Sunday night after church, she sorted them and put the white things to soak"). Sykes contrastingly ends his days in disdainful rages and breaking the vows of his marriage, humming a song in a mournful key, but wondering through it all where his wife went with her horse and buckboard.

Hurston's presentation of this story resonated with me, evoking the emotions and other phenomena of what I observed growing up, including not only the use of ebonics or African American Vernacular English to convey each character's way of speaking, but the abrasive relationship between the supposed head of the household and the female breadwinner: "Ah been takin' in washin' for fifteen years. Sweat,

sweat, sweat!”—speaks to Delia’s commitment to God and highlights the sheer resilience and unyielding power of black American women, bearing the immense weight of political and societal disenfranchisement.

Through this work of rap, I wish to target those who were left puzzled by Delia’s marriage to Syke’s and her perseverance. It’s important to understand what external influences go into what some perceive to be an irrational decision. I wanted this rap to be recited in a way that is more similar to African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) but wanted the typed words to be written in a way that others could easily understand. My inspirations for this rap was the hip-hop artists Earl Sweatshirt, J. Cole, and Isaiah Rashad.

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Hear Here! 2018

Liana Branscome

## the visitor

she told me as we lay in darkness

*the dog suffered from insomnia  
he was wet and quivering*

*the mice in the wall knew and were afraid*

*i could hear them scurrying*

*sickening footsteps*

*it had horns and it knew who i was*

*then it was gone*

*the strangest thing:*

*i don't remember waking up*

---

*I wrote the visitor after a friend told me something terrifying. I asked her if she thought she'd dreamt it and she said, "No, because I ran straight to my dad's room, because I don't remember waking up."*

Motti Fang-Bentov

## *Apocalypse Now:* Human Nature in Extreme Circumstances

Joseph Conrad's perplexing title choice, *Heart of Darkness*, for his 1899 novella, invites many interpretations. Marlow, the novella's protagonist and narrator, journeys into the center of the Congo jungle, a setting that Conrad depicts as a hazy, ominously seductive place that morally corrupts its human inhabitants. In that sense, the theme "heart of darkness" could be interpreted as that mysterious and corruptive destination – as an ultimate embodiment of evil. The title also suggests a conflict: the heart, normally a symbol for love and empathy, turned malignant. Lastly, "heart of darkness" could be interpreted as a source of darkness – the beating heart at the core of evil. The American filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola was fascinated by Joseph Conrad's morally polarizing novella and its depiction of darkness, embodied primarily in the character of Mr. Kurtz. This fascination, buoyed by another concerning the Vietnam War, led Coppola to take on the making of the movie that would eventually become *Apocalypse Now*. The movie retains the book's basic structure and premise. As in *Heart of Darkness*, the plot of *Apocalypse Now* revolves around a journey. Captain Willard, who replaces Marlow in the movie, voyages up the Nung River into the depths of the Vietnamese jungle to assassinate Col. Kurtz, a rogue officer who has gone beyond the U.S. military's reach. It is a journey into the heart of darkness in both an external sense – the heart of war, a place of chaos and savagery – and an internal sense, an exploration of self, of morals and values, of man's dark unconscious. In choosing a war as controversial as the Vietnam War – a war that many consider a dark chapter in American history – as the setting for the movie, Coppola wishes to illuminate humankind's

dark and untamed sides: sides that are not exposed in daily life, but are brought to light under extreme conditions. In exploring these manifestations of darkness through character arcs, soundtrack and cinematography, Coppola articulates his philosophic critique on human nature.

Coppola, by pacing the film's opening slowly, in addition to composing the sound and visuals in a disorienting fashion, creates a contemplative mood. The film begins with a humming noise over a black screen, and as the image begins to clear a hazy line of trees appears. Fragments of incomprehensible black objects fly by the frame, accompanied by the song "This Is the End," by The Doors. Helicopters – it is now clear that they are the source of the humming noise – come into view as they fly over the trees. The trees blow up in a burst of flame. This slow-motion sequence takes more than 130 seconds to complete. The opening is thus composed to confuse and disorient. Establishing this contemplative mood in the beginning of the movie is essential to support the film's slow pacing and dense, thought-provoking scenes. Coppola dots the film with moments like the opening, moments in which the interplay between the SFX and the visuals encourage meditation and stimulate analysis. Right after the opening shot, for example, the image dissolves into a shot of Captain Willard's face turned upside down. That shot is then overlapped with the opening tree line shot. The whirring of the helicopters blends into the whirring blade of the fan in Willard's room, while "The Doors" continue to be played. This blending serves both as an invitation for questioning – where is this taking place? who is this man? what does he have to do with the helicopters and the trees? – and as a reflection of the Captain's emotional state, his inability to separate himself from the war, his chaotic mental state of confusion and lack of purpose.

Coppola also uses the sound and visuals as an external expression of his characters' emotions and morals. A good example for that externalization is the boat massacre scene: In the scene, the crew, in a fit of panic, shoots a group of Vietnamese natives on their boat. A woman survives, whom Captain Willard murders to prevent the crew from taking her to a hospital and thus delaying his mission. The massacre itself is bombarded with noise: the crew screaming over each other, the cries of the natives, the booming of the machine guns. The visuals move from one shot to another in a frenzy, never lingering on one camera for more than a split second. But then, when the shooting comes down to a sudden halt, an immediate silence ensues. The camera lingers on the crew's horrified faces. The sound and the pacing create a sudden change in atmosphere, from an all-out chaotic frenzy to a silent, flatlined horror. The aftermath is almost peaceful: sounds of crickets and flapping water, the sunset-lit river backdrop. This interplay of sound and visuals once again achieves two different effects: Firstly, it creates a break in the action that permits thought – the silent aftermath allows space and time for analysis, and the sunset backdrop heralds the end of day, a time for contemplation and reflection. Secondly, it conveys the characters' emotional state - the panic of the shooting, followed by the horror of the realization. The shooting is one of many instances where the crew is confronted with the horrors of war and the dark sides of human nature, including their own; it is an encounter with the heart of darkness. It is these encounters (Kilgore, the boat massacre, the Playboy girls, and finally Kurtz) through which Coppola expresses his views on morality and its fragility.

By means of cinematography, Coppola portrays Colonel Kurtz as an ultimate embodiment of evil. Kurtz is almost entirely shot from the shoulders up; there are very few full body shots of

him. His face is always the most dominant part of the shot, yet it is very rarely in full view. In all of Kurtz's scenes (excluding the newspaper reading scene), he is shot in a dark room with minimal lighting, shadows withholding some portion of his face while beams of light dance across it. This dramatic depiction portrays the rogue colonel with an ominous and god-like air. The extreme close up of his face and the magical dominance of his voice, coupled with the elusiveness of the lighting, invoke a mysterious image of a figure that is seemingly incomprehensible to humans, that is beyond the understanding of mortal men. Yet the interplay between shadow and light in the cinematography also symbolizes his corrupted mental state – his fall from military golden boy to murderer, his descent from decency and civility to evil and savagery. Kurtz, by trying to release himself from his earthly manacles, by seeking and finding god-like power, has, ironically, succumbed to the mortal sin of hubris.

By choosing to kill Clean, Chef and Chief, and by sparing Lance and Willard, Coppola highlights the merciless absurdism of war. Clean is a seventeen-year-old from the Bronx who is portrayed as inexperienced and naive. He is childishly playful and brash, he panics easily, and, as Chef points out, he is still a virgin. His name suggests a certain purity. Clean's character arc symbolizes innocence in war: he is a representative of the innumerable green teenagers forced into the horrors of war by the draft. His actions may seem cruel or inhuman (the boat massacre especially) but it is clear they are a result of inexperienced panic, rather than of malice. By killing Clean relatively early in the journey, Coppola both asserts that innocence has no place in war, and highlights how absurdly unfair war is. On the same end of the spectrum with Clean are Chief and Chef. They are both good-natured men: Chef is compassionate and empathic, while Chief is strong-willed, caring and fatherly. The fact that they share the same fate as

Clean is intentional. The unfairness of their deaths signify that war is cruel and ruthless, and doesn't reward compassion or empathy.

On the other hand, Coppola chooses to spare characters who are morally conflicted at best and savage and merciless at worst. Lance and Willard (and Kilgore to a certain extent) are representative of the mental and moral dangers of the war. War is inherently corruptive of mental stability and moral compass. Willard's character is an example of a possible end result of that corruption. He has already experienced the initial shock and horror of war that the crew struggle through throughout their voyage before the events of the movie. When he speaks of his first campaign, he describes his state of inner conflict:

WILLARD (V.O.)

When I was home after my first tour, it was worse. I'd wake up and there'd be nothing. I hardly said a word to my wife until I said yes to a divorce. When I was here, I wanted to be there. When I was there...all I could think of was getting back into the jungle. (Coppola)

The experience of war has altered him. He is constantly in conflict with himself: he says he wants the mission, but is afraid and reluctant to leave when the officers get him; he cruelly murders a wounded native civilian, but he saves Lance from a life of savagery; he carries out his mission and kills Kurtz, after much inner struggle, but proclaims he is not part of the army anymore. As Louis K. Greiff points out, "...reflections of morality in Willard's actions can only be described negatively, in terms of what harm he could but doesn't do" (4). As a result of being so morally ambiguous, he does not offer any catharsis or moral example as the film's protagonist – he is a "choice of a nightmare" (Greiff 4). If Willard's character is a possible end result of the war experience, Lance's character arc spells out the



process of its corruptive prowess. Lance is first portrayed as a perfectly agreeable surfer from California, but the farther the crew journeys up the river, the stronger the savage allure of the jungle grows on him. The change is expressed in his appearance first – he paints his face as camouflage. Covering his face with paint suggests a desire to hide, to turn into something else. Later, he ignores Carrie's emotional breakdown, while painting her in jungle colors as well, at the sight of which he seems sexually aroused. This suggests both his loss of ability to empathize and care, and his newfound attraction to the wild and savage. He inadvertently kills Chief by setting off smoke bombs on the boat and provoking an arrow barrage on the boat. When the depleted crew has finally reached Kurtz, he joins the natives in their rites and dances, completing his descent into savagery. Willard and Lance are examples of what a person can become under extreme conditions, and yet Coppola chooses to spare them. By sparing them, Coppola essentially argues that cruelty and savagery are not only not punished in war, but, on the contrary, are rewarded. The sheer absurdist unfairness of killing Clean, Chef and Chief and sparing Lance and Willard is a claim both specifically about the random and merciless nature of war and, more generally, about the existential nature of the world, a world in which morality and values are meaningless.

In his critical essay "Mythicizing the Unspeakable," Leslie A. Fiedler argues that the anti-war tone of *Apocalypse Now*, along with other films about the Vietnam War, was heavily influenced by earlier films or fiction. Fiedler doesn't refer to *Heart of Darkness* in this case, but, rather to pacifist works created in the context of World War I, namely Passos's *Three Soldiers*, Cummings's *The Enormous Room*, and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. These works' basic premise is, according to Fiedler, to convey that "the true enemy of all men of goodwill is not the ostensible foe but armed conflict itself" (1). These

pacifist ideas are a dominant presence in *Apocalypse Now*, and serve both as critical commentary on the war and as a mediate for a larger message Coppola tries to convey regarding human nature. *Apocalypse Now*, therefore, is not an optimistic movie. It does not have a pure hearted protagonist; the ending doesn't offer a feel-good catharsis; the character arcs are of corruption rather than redemption; and the only morally decent characters in the film are all killed. It is a full-scale, mercilessly uncompromising critique of the atrocities of the Vietnam War, and, through the lens of that war, of the possible untamed cruelty that is inherent in mankind. *Apocalypse Now* is, at its core, grimmer and bleaker than the book it was inspired by, and understandably so: *Heart of Darkness* was written in 1899, and while it is morally polarizing for its time, it does not reach the post-war absurdism found in *Apocalypse Now*. The novella's Kurtz at least offers a mildly redemptive tone: his death bed inner struggle and his recognition and remorse for his savagery still uphold Romantic presumptions about a natural triumph of good over evil. The Colonel, though, offer no such catharsis; rather, he seems to not only feel remorse for his atrocious sins, but to take pride in them. This Kurtz doesn't deceive himself – he knows what he is and doesn't shy away from it, just as Coppola sees mankind for what it is and doesn't flinch from ruthlessly, truthfully portraying it.

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Dan Hirsch

## White Male Jewish Musician: An Exploration of Identity, Privilege, and Disadvantage

My study of music has shown me so much about the concept of identity throughout my life. Beverly Greene states that “Clearly, no individual or group has just one identity. . . . Every person has an ethnic or cultural identification, is a member of a socioeconomic class, a gender, a sexual orientation, an age cohort, and so on. All those dimensions develop in some kind of dynamic interaction with one another across the lifespan” (16). These dimensions that Greene discusses create every bit of who we are, and each dimension comes with advantages and disadvantages of all types. It is wrong to judge someone based on the norms that we usually divide people into, because judgement should be based on how someone handles the advantages and disadvantages they have. The uniqueness of each person should be embraced, not feared, in society. In my life, I have found a way to use given advantage to reach new levels of success, while fighting disadvantage to turn it into something positive. This experience with the intersection of privilege and disadvantage has made me who I am today.

Music has had the most significant impact on my identity because the circumstances surrounding my upbringing allowed me to explore who I truly wanted to be. The feeling of uniqueness that came with being a musician—since most of my peers were some type of scholar-athlete variation in high school—made me feel that I had made a statement. I felt a huge sense of pride, in a non-arrogant way, knowing that I was not following what everyone else was doing. Many factors allowed me to reach this point. I had deep musical roots in my family on both sides, and that influence strongly pointed me in the direction of

playing an instrument. My mom is an elementary school band director and flautist. She would routinely ask me to buzz my lips as a child and then would tell me that I'd play trumpet one day. Her father was a singer who worked in show business for more than fifty years and traveled the world performing. My father, an avid lover of all music, would sneak into my room at night and switch the lullabies to Peter Gabriel on my stereo. His uncle attended Tanglewood as a teenage violinist. I even have a famous pianist in my lineage, Moriz Rosenthal, who was a pupil of Franz Liszt.

However, while I've had the genes and family background that gave me the potential to be an aspiring musician, I also had a large amount of societal traits working in my favor. I grew up on Long Island, in a middle class white family, with more than the appropriate resources needed to pursue music. I had two working parents who could drive me to and from rehearsals and buy me books, equipment, and a professional-level instrument. I lived in a place that had an abundance of incredible music programs and teachers, both in and out of public school. My town had a very strong school district that gave me the education in music and in other areas that would eventually get me into college. Basically, I was extremely lucky. There was no one to stand in my way and tell me I couldn't do something. I have seen other musicians who set up GoFundMe pages for school tuition, ask for rides to auditions and rehearsals on Facebook, and can barely afford reeds or other supplies they might need. It does make me feel guilty to an extent, but I don't think I should have to feel bad, because I took advantage of my advantage. I didn't sit around and have things handed to me. I used what I had, ran with it, and practiced my tail off, while always remembering to appreciate how lucky I was along the way. My advantages really only gave me a head start, but what I did with it was up to me. All of these experiences instilled drive

and determination into my personality, and now I'm studying at one of the best conservatories in the world.

In the end, New England Conservatory (NEC) accepted me because of the way I played, not because of my gender or the color of my skin. Greene's stance that we are all a lot of different things is the catalyst that makes music what it is. The paths that I and an underprivileged person have taken to becoming musicians are very different, one much easier than the other obviously, but it is crucial to understand that my skills are not strong just because I was privileged. The true beauty of music is that everyone brings their own style and interpretation to the table because of where they come from, and discovering that has made me a much more accepting and compassionate person. This art form teaches people to embrace difference rather than fear it, which is something that the rest of the world could learn from. Through my educational path, I have been exposed to various styles and cultures of music, which has given me a better understanding of the world. An impressive jazz solo is still impressive regardless of whether it was played by a white, black, yellow, or neon-green person. These different categories that define us, our experiences, our hardships, and our privileges all swirl together to make up the way we sound when we play. Our sound tells our story in an extremely powerful fashion. I would even go as far to say that music keeps people's identities ever-changing, because our styles of improvisation and interpretation are always evolving. The discovery of all these concepts has allowed me to see not color, race, or gender, but to see character and merit.

However, despite my privilege, I have had to deal with an underlying disadvantage in my life, which has also affected my path: being of Jewish descent. Earlier, I said I was white, but the truth is that I only pass as "white." I mean to say that I am not

the standard white Christian that has become the norm in American society, but I still consider myself Caucasian. That said, I am not a religious Jew by any means. I agree with the opinion of Melanie Kantrowitz, who states: "to be a Jew one need not follow religious practice; one need not believe in god. . . . Religion is only one strand of being Jewish" (292). I identify as a completely secular and cultural Jew—an atheist Jew, if you will. My family was never religious. Our version of celebrating Rosh Hashanah or Passover was a family dinner, and Hanukkah was all about lighting the menorah and getting a gift. It was the culture that I learned to love, not the religious aspects. For example, I love to eat matzo, brisket, and knishes; I always cherish the family time that results from our rare yearly celebrations; and I can confidently wear a shirt that says "Happy Hanukkah" along with a Team Israel World Baseball Classic cap when it's nowhere near December. I choose to embrace this aspect of my identity instead of shying away from it.

But that was not always the case. Being a minority of any kind does not come without abuse, but I was lucky that the abuse I did experience was only minor. The worst treatment I ever received was in middle school, where I had change thrown at me (which I honestly did not mind at all; if you're going to be stupid enough to give me your money, I will gladly take it) and was told I belonged in an oven. There have been other comments in passing, told as jokes, such as someone calling me a "Jew" for being cheap or identifying my hair or nose as "Jewish," but I never was physically hurt or endangered by anything. This minor abuse left me puzzled, though. I wondered, what did we as a people do to deserve this? That perplexity only turned into anger as I learned about the tumultuous history of Jews' being persecuted, enslaved, and killed. The concept that I could be killed just because I identify with a religion I don't

even practice really baffled me, and it made my confidence falter.

I know that other races and religions in our country have had it much worse and that the bias still exists (just look at Charlottesville from last summer or the treatment of Muslims); there was, and still is, a fear present that I could become a victim of that at any point. The instance when I started to embrace my culture was when I found out that I had two Holocaust survivors in my family, my paternal grandmother and great uncle (the same uncle who went to Tanglewood!). It gives me great pride to know that I exist because my family escaped a concentration camp and came to America. That moment was the beginning of my realizing that I shouldn't care if there were people out there who hated Jews. I knew that I should embrace this identity, just as I embrace anything else that defines me. The confidence came in full when I realized that being a Jew was another thing that made me different from most, which is what I aspire to be. When I bought my Israel hat, I knew that wearing it would set me apart from others and send a strong message that I am happy with who I am. People should not be classified based on norms. I am an ethnic Jew and not a religious one, yet I have been called a "bad Jew" before for not being religious. Most people see it as all or nothing, but plenty of Christians and Muslims can be exclusively cultural too. Deviating from the norm is positive because it keeps us human, as opposed to the robots we become when we conform. Life is what you make of it, not what others want you to make of it. Using this mentality, I turned being a Jew into an advantage. Despite the likelihood of discrimination, I love being Jewish because—like being a musician—it makes me different and allows me to support my family's origins. What makes it even better is that I've bridged the gap between these two identifiers and am now playing in the Jewish music ensemble through the CI department. We are

all a lot of things, as Greene says, and the combination of these things gives each person a completely different experience. I am very happy with mine so far.

Still, there is more I can be doing with what I have been given. I have taken a step that Amy Edgington highlights in her article, "Moving Beyond White Guilt," in that I am no longer "blissfully unaware" (128) of the privilege I receive as a white male, but the next step is to advocate for leveling the playing field for the future. I hope to do this as I continue to grow as a musician and person, so that anyone who wants to pursue music can do so without difficulty. It will be important to make people aware and appreciative of where they came from as well because it will lead to newfound self-confidence, passion, and drive. After coming to NEC and really putting my identity into perspective, I feel the most confident that I have ever felt about myself. I believe that my story is just one of the many that contributes to NEC's diverse community and the musical community as a whole. I can't wait to see how my identity and personality will evolve in the future.

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*Hear Here! 2018*



Alexander Garde

Sophie Stanley

## Turned Inside-Out

HAVE YOU EVER MET a person so successful at everything they tried that they drove everyone crazy, either in reverent awe or pure envy? The type of person that aces all the tests without studying, that has never baked before and makes a wedding cake, that picks up a sword and slays a villain without a single fencing lesson?

I have.

She was beautiful, she was successful, she was talented, she was charming, she was graceful, she was elegant. She had the biggest princess eyes that managed to ensnare everybody at will. She played piano and painted portraits, knew math equations like the back of her hand, and had the sharpest wit. She was a genius, and she was revered for it. Everything about her, essentially, was perfect.

And she knew it.

How she could have ever chosen to date a guy like me, I'll never know. I was clumsy, slow, quiet, prone to mood swings and time shut up in my room. And, well, I didn't go to Harvard.

Maybe it was because I listened to her endless chatter and didn't interrupt—I nodded my head and gave her logical advice. Maybe the rule "opposites attract" had proven true and we were the definition. I don't know what she saw in me, but it was what it was, and I was the glorified Karina's-somewhat-underwhelming-and-disappointing boyfriend. I can't count on my fingers how many times I was approached by her endless supply of admirers and contacts and told that I had "better take care of Karina or else."

So, I did. I made sure dinner was ready every night when she would come home exhausted and flop on the couch. I cleaned our apartment when she didn't have time, picking up her trail of socks and bowls and papers. I took over bills and taxes and housing. I even talked to her mom when she was occupied with assignments and meetings. She did so much, it was the least I could do.

I started a new job at a pizza place down the street from my college. Yes, I was a student. What was I studying? A question even I couldn't answer. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life yet. In my family, in high school, and even now I was considered a late-bloomer.

How Karina and I had gotten together is a mystery in itself.

Karina was into science. She was into psychology. She was into everything. Anything she laid her hands on turned gold (except me, apparently).

So, it was normal when she came babbling home one day, talking about her science-psychology project, and "beautiful" this and "wonderful" that and she was going to be a millionaire. I smiled at her and nodded my head as usual, but I wasn't listening this time. I was thinking about what I could eat for dinner. Our fridge only had salads, eggs, quinoa. Karina-food. Nothing to sustain a man's appetite. I needed to order a pizza.

"Are you listening to me, Drew?"

I looked at her. "Mm-hm. What're you going to have for dinner?"

She rolled her eyes. "Typical."

Over the next few weeks, Karina was gone a lot, busy doing this new project, and I was busy flipping pizzas and receiving lousy tips. "Why the sad face, pizza boy? You should

be happy being surrounded by food all day." I did get free meals. That was nice. No quinoa.

ooo

And then she disappeared.

At first, it was a chorus of "Hallelujah!" and sneaking ice cream and Little Debbie's.

And then her boisterous presence felt...well, missing.

I texted her. I waited. She didn't answer. I didn't have her co-workers' numbers, so I waited longer, a whole day (I mean, she had been missing for a week or something, but that was normal. She'd done it once or twice before and called me a "worrywart" for stressing out about an independent grown woman who could take care of herself. I didn't want to be associated with a wart again).

And then I just had to take action.

After my shift, I scrubbed my hands on my pants, gathered up my things, and set off to Cambridge. I would find her and ask whether she was going to come home or not.

"Excuse me, I'm looking for a Karina Chapman."

"You're in the wrong place, kid. You're looking for the Science Center. Down the street - can't miss it."

"Ah, thanks."

I found the building, walked in, and went up to the desk.

"Hey, I'm looking for Karina Chapman, and I think she works here..."

The lady looked at me. "Who are you?"

"I'm Drew Lightfoot, her friend."

"Drew... Drew... That sounds familiar. One second."

A few minutes later, she came back with an envelope.

"Here you are."

"Is she not here?" I asked, taking the envelope.

"No."

"Would you happen to...?"

"Read the letter. Maybe she'll tell you."

"Thanks."

I stepped outside, found a building corner, and slit the envelope open. Inside was a college-ruled sheet of paper with Karina's fancy cursive written on it: *I'm sorry, Drew. For everything I've done to you. I've seen what I truly am. Thanks for always being an angel. Goodbye.*

This had nothing to do with where she had gone. I looked for an address label, a note on the other side, something. Nothing. I knew nothing.

This wouldn't suffice. I walked back in there.

"Um, excuse me, but this does nothing for me. She doesn't say where she is. I need to know where she is."

"I can't help you, sir."

"Well, is there someone here that could?"

"I'm afraid not."

I was beginning to become frustrated. A door opened in the back of the room, and a man in scrubs walked out. He looked at me and smiled.

"How can we help you, sir?" he asked me.

"He's already been helped, Thomas."

"I'm looking for Karina Chapman," I said, ignoring the woman. "Could you help me out? I know she worked here for quite a long while... went on about some experiment/project thing. Do you know where she is?"

Thomas smiled. "What's your name, sir?"

"I'm Drew Lightfoot."

"Ah, Drew. We've heard so much about you. Why don't you come back to my office?"

I was surprised. I would've thought Karina had told nobody a thing about her pizza-worker boyfriend. Or, maybe she had. I followed Thomas back to his office, sat in the proffered chair, and stared at the man. He looked nice enough.

"What do you know, Drew?"

I was, again, taken aback. "Know?"

"Know about Karina's project?"

"Um, it was something that had to do with, er, psychology, science, something..."

"And?"

"Eh, it had to do with turning an object inside-out or something."

"What else?"

I strained my brain to think way back to the mindless chattering that had since ceased. I remembered her talking about an experiment that had to do with, what was it? Beauty. And exploring how people saw you on the outside compared to the inside. "She was talking about a machine that would turn you inside-out."

"Good." Thomas looked content. "And it's worked."

"You mean, she made a machine that turns you inside-out?"

"Yes. A clever, brilliant girl, really." Thomas got up, put his hands behind his back and stared out the window. "Without her, the whole project would have been a failure, not even an idea. It was her idea, after all. So full of wondrous ideas, that girl." He turned around to look at me. "But ideas aren't everything. So we've learned from this experiment."

I waited for him to go on, but I think he expected me to say something. "So, what exactly does this machine do?"

"Come with me. I'll show you."

I followed the tall man out the door, down a hall, through a series of doors that continuously had more locks and bolts on the outside. The hallways were still and cold, made of metal, windowless, our footsteps sounding heavily and echoing off the walls. We came to the largest door of them all and I watched Thomas unlatch a number of locks.

"Here we are. Come right in."

The room was rather insignificant. I had expected a dystopian movie scene with a chair surrounded by thousands of needles waiting to penetrate human flesh and distort it to its pleasure. There was just a big metal box with a small window looking into it and a couple of chairs.

"There it is. The Beauty Determinator."

"The what...?"

"Beauty Determinator. That's what it does, determines beauty. Take a seat, Drew."

I sat down. "So, it determines whether you're beautiful or not?"

"Yes," said Thomas, his eyes shining. "Whether you're beautiful on the inside or not."

"How would it determine that?"

"Before we start the analysis of the brain, we have the patient fill out a fairly rigorous, informative survey telling us about their studies, career, and also key memories and incidents from their past. We input that information into the side here." He got up and went to the side of the box, opening a hidden panel where a screen and keyboard were stored.

"When they've finished, the participant steps into the box and they're taken through a series of simulations and scenarios that test the temporal lobe of the brain, the empathetic part. They're asked to act through a series of life situations and tested on their response, but more importantly, their thoughts before the response. Actions may speak louder than words, but thoughts speaker louder than both."

"And then?"

"The machine processes all of the input manually put it in and recorded from the participant, and turns them inside-out."

I stared at him. "What does that mean, 'inside-out'?"

"Hm, what do you think, Drew?"

I imagined one of the rubber popper toys that you turn inside-out, place on the ground, and watch spring back into its normal position, kind of like the bottom of a plunger. "I suppose your innards come out, or something? I don't know."

Thomas laughed. "No, it's not that gruesome. Well, depending on the person. Some people really are quite ugly on the inside. No, what happens is a change in the skin, in the limbs, in the face. The participant is made to look like the kind of being that they treat others like. And if they're kind,



thoughtful, selfless beings, they typically don't change much. It's the people that are cruel, selfish, self-absorbed, etc. that anything remotely interesting happens to."

"And Karina?"

"You know, Drew. You knew her better than any of us."

I gulped and fidgeted in my seat. "Is she here?"

"She couldn't leave, not after seeing how she truly was. She was ashamed of herself."

All of a sudden, I imagined a hideous beast with one eye and tufts of hair staring at me, calling for help. No, she wouldn't look like that. "I need to talk to her."

"She probably wouldn't talk to you. She couldn't face you after it happened. She could hardly face me."

"Where is she? I have to know where she is!"

"She knew you would. She said you were one of the mellowest beings she'd ever met. Never contentious, always listening, always there for her. I wonder if the machine would change anything in you. Maybe some annoyances you had with her. Jealousy. Frustration. But all kept inside. But that's the idea, isn't it? Let all things out. I digress. As you wish, Drew. But it might come as a shock. She's not quite the being she once was on the outside."

"I know. And I know her inside better than anybody."

I followed Thomas outside the room, down a few more hallways, through more and more barred doors, and finally to an end door. He turned to look at me.

"Are you sure you want to see her?"

"Yes."

"Be on your guard."

"Oh, I always I am. But, she's not some kind of, erm, monster, is she?"

Thomas laughed. "You knew her best. You would know better than I if it'd be safe to talk to her in this traumatized, emotional state. You tell me."

"I'll go."

Thomas pulled back the latches on the door and opened it wide for me to enter. As soon as I had walked in the door shut, and I felt a rush of chills go up my legs to the hair on my neck.

She was in here. Amongst all these people. Deformed, mutilated, defected people.

Many had boils all over their faces and bodies, others had sunken faces and skeletal frames. One person's arms and legs had shrunk to the size of a baby doll's. I wondered if the machine just brought out the worst in everybody.

I looked around at the unfamiliar faces: ashamed faces, miserable faces, hungry faces. Maybe I wouldn't recognize her.

"Karina?" I said, my voice barely louder than a whisper.

Hands pointed to a door that led outside the room. I bravely took a first step and then a second, and then quickly walked into the next room. More people, more catastrophes. They pointed to yet another door and another. Finally, at the end of the maze of morose faces and scabbed index fingers, I found her. She was in a room by herself, sitting down with her back against the cold metal wall, a canvas bag pulled over her head with crudely-torn holes where her brown eyes barely peeked out.

"Karina?"

She looked at me for a second, then lunged. My flight instincts kicked in. I ran.

I ran and ran and ran, through the hallways and doors, past the people staring at me, afraid to stop running.

"Drew!" I heard my name.

It must've been Karina. I turned around. The masked figure coming towards me looked menacing. I itched the urge to start running again, but stayed. She caught up.

"Drew," she said, breathing heavily. "Why are you here?"

"I've been looking for you, Karina," I said, trying to recognize the eyes behind the sackcloth. "I was worried."

"What you should be worried about is yourself," she said, sitting down and clutching the stitch in her chest. "I've wasted away."

"What do you mean?"

She laughed, and it all came rushing back to me. This was the old Karina. Just with something covering her face and sitting in the dungeon of a messed-up experiment.

"You know what. Thomas told you everything. Now, just make sure you don't become such a pathetic, selfish being as I was and you'll be saved."

"You're not pathetic. You're amazing!"

"Then why did my body change?"

I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything. She began to cry.

"Why do I look like a hideous oaf? Why did you never tell me? Why did you not tell me I was verbally abusive? Why did you let my inside become so dark and disgusting?"

"I didn't want to hurt you."

"But you have. Look at me."

She took off her mask, and I suppressed the impulse not to barf. Where her perfect nose had come out in a ski-jump before now laid a gaping hole, strings of mucus hanging down over her upper lip. Her eyes, big and brown and outlined by thick eyelashes, were now devoid of lashes, brows, and had bumps growing around them filled with yellow pus. Her mouth was toothless and lipless, her skin pallid and stretched thinly over a skull that was too big. Her ears were extremely large, her hair was gone. I gasped.

"You're sorry, aren't you?" she said. "You don't like me so much now, do you? You were only ever about looks. Shallow."

The machine may have changed her appearance, but she was still the same Karina I had known. I just shrugged.

"I am sorry. I'm sorry that the project didn't work out the way you wanted it to."

She slammed her hand on the ground, tears leaking down her face. "It worked out exactly the way I wanted it to. What I didn't expect was this new face." She grabbed her face and pulled the flimsy skin down. "Or the fact that I, the beautiful, graceful, and talented Karina, might be turned into a nightmare."

I watched her and felt sad. "But everybody turned out this way, Karina."

"No, not everybody. The good people became more beautiful. They don't have to hide in this shame-house."

"You don't have to hide down here."

"Yes, I do. Nobody will recognize me. I'll be publicly humiliated. My parents will disown me."

"They would never..."

"Don't talk about things you don't know, Drew, you've never been good at that. I'm not leaving, never."

I put my hands in my pockets and noticed that we were being observed by every person in the vicinity.

"Can I bring you anything?" I said.

"No. Just leave."

I crouched down next to her and put my arm around her. She sobbed harder than before. I reached to stroke her hair, and then remembered she hadn't any.

"I'm going to do it. I'm going into that machine for you, Karina."

ooo

Thomas smiled. "I thought we'd get you to do it, Drew," he said, leading me back after fastening the door. "Karina said you would do anything for her."

"I will. What is there to lose? I've never been the most handsome chap..."

"The machine will determine that."

We got back to the room with the box in it, sat down, Thomas handed me a stack of papers to fill out, and I began writing. I was then struck with a thought. I looked up at him.

"Erm, you wouldn't mind if I took this home and did it there, would you? I'd like to collect some things, sort some things out before I step into that thing."

Thomas looked surprised. "You presume that you'll look like her?"

I shrugged. "You never know."

"Go right ahead. We can plan on it tomorrow at 10 am. Do whatever makes you feel comfortable. Maybe Karina will feel well enough to come watch you."

"I don't think so."

I went home and sat on my bed. I looked at all of my things, my Baby Taylor propped up against the wall, my stack of books for Dummies, my weight-set in the corner. I looked at our TV, the different board games that we liked to play on rainy nights, our jar for extra coins that we would sometimes use to buy a chocolate bar at the gas station around the corner. And I sighed. I was a homebody, and leaving this place and all the comforts it provided would be extremely hard. I then began to think about what needed to be done: the pizza place had to be informed, the landlady, my university. I had to fill out those papers. My whole life would change the moment I stepped into that box.

I made a few calls, trying not to cry, sounding extremely hollow.

"Are you alright, Drew?" asked my manager.

"I'm fine. Just changing a few things in my life. Thanks for the work."

My landlady didn't answer, so I left a message. I decided to email the university and text my family tomorrow, right before I entered.

And then I cried. For Karina. For home. For myself.

ooo

I woke up around 5 a.m. and couldn't go back to sleep. I tossed and turned. I decided to go for a run--it might be the last in a long while. The cool morning air felt good on my hot face, and the beautiful faces of everyday people made me realize

what I would miss. I took a long shower, took even longer to get dressed, and by then it was still only 8 a.m. I decided to treat myself to breakfast, went to the nearest Dunks and got a hot chocolate and sausage cheese wrap. I left the keys to my apartment in the mail slot at the apartment realty office, and took the long route to get to Cambridge by foot, kicking leaves on the way and breathing in the autumn smells. Why some people found it enjoyable to mess with nature and the physics of the human body was beyond me, but I never understood the "intellectual," as Karina always told me. Gosh, I'd miss these places.

ooo

"Welcome back, Drew," said Thomas, leading me down the corridors once again. "Do you feel ready now?"

I nodded.

"Good. It doesn't hurt, so I've been told. It just feels a little hot, like the sun on a summer's day in California. That won't bother you, will it?"

I shook my head. "Will Karina be there?"

"Unfortunately, she will not. She's not up to it."

My heart dropped a little bit. I was in this alone, not knowing what I was going up against.

"And you brought the papers?"

I handed the papers to him, out of my backpack.

"Good, all filled out," he said, thumbing through them. "Nice handwriting. Looks like you're a very careful guy--your letters are straight up and down and evenly spaced."

I didn't say anything. Entering an unknown machine didn't seem very careful to me. He asked me a few questions that I can't seem to remember. My mind was elsewhere, and time

seemed to be playing the game of "Stop and Go" at the maximum and minimum speeds. Before I knew it, I was standing in the metal box, stripped down to basketball shorts, waiting for that unbearable heat I imagined to pierce my skin.

I watched a series of episodes in which people asked for help, fires erupted, bags were stolen, people were held at gunpoint, old folk needed a chair on the bus or a listening ear, and I did what I thought was best in each scenario. I spoke my answers out loud to the machine, which would stop, input the answer, and then play a new reel.

And then, after a time, it all stopped. The questions stopped, the monotonous voice cut out, the simulations and exercises ceased. And I experienced an unearthly heat. My body felt like it was being scorched and manipulated, twisted and tormented, turned inside-out. I felt like I was rising off of my feet, my chest getting bigger and bigger, about to burst, my legs screaming in pain. I felt like my whole body was being blown up, amplified.

And then the machine went dark, and I heard my breathing, bedraggled and uneven in the stillness.

The door opened wide, and Thomas stood there, a grin spreading from cheek to cheek.

"Well, this is an interesting surprise," he said, bringing his hand to his chin and looking me up and down. "Why don't you have a look at yourself in a mirror."

"I don't want to see myself," I said, noticing that my basketball shorts felt uncomfortably tight.

"Oh, I'm sure you do," he said, taking my arm and leading me out to the hall. We went past the secretary from the first day who got up to see what we were doing.



"Who is that man you're with, Thomas?" she asked, goggling at me.

"This is Drew. He's just been through the machine."

"Wow, the machine has never worked that way on anyone before."

"That's why we made it in the first place. None of this 'uglifying' people. This is a phenomenal breakthrough, one that nobody will believe. Can you imagine what all the headlines will say!?"

I started to feel angry. These people were talking about me like some kind of experiment or animal to be ogled at.

"I need to see Karina," I said.

"Yes, just one moment, Drew," said Thomas, leading me through more doors and then to an office full of people. I hesitated before Thomas pushed me in.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, smiling his dazzling smile. "Let me introduce successful Subject #1, Drew Lightfoot!" He held up my hand, and at that moment, I realized I was taller than he was whereas before I had been quite a bit shorter.

Everybody clapped and threw things in the air and crowded around us, smiles on their faces, praises and congratulations echoing throughout the room.

"He's amazing!"

"Look at his smooth skin!"

"I'm glad my husband's not here! He'd be jealous!"

"Karina was right. He is beautiful."

"Now I won't have to go to the gym!"

"Who says the machine will work the same for you, Sam?"

"He makes me feel giddy!"

Thomas looked at me: "Congratulations, Drew, on being the most beautiful being turned inside-out on the planet." He held up a mirror to my face, and what I saw made me gasp. I slapped the mirror out of his hand and turned away from him as the mirror shattered on the ground.

"What have you done to me?" I whispered.

"We've turned you inside-out."

"Please, take it back. I don't want Karina to see me."

"Why not? You're beautiful!"

"Physical beauty isn't everything. She loved me and accepted me for who I am, not for what I looked like." I looked at my severely altered face in the thousands of reflections shining up at me from the ground. "I don't need some machine to tell me whether I'm beautiful or not. Beauty is more than the physical. It's the little quirks, habits, and characteristics that make up each unique person."

Thomas smiled. "And that's why you'll make a great poster boy."

Devan Maria Freebairn

## NEC STUDENTS ARE CALLING FOR A CHANGE IN PROMOTIONALS



At the end of each academic year, music students are required to prepare a “promotional.” The promotional requires rehearsing a specified amount of music and performing it for a panel of faculty members. If executed well, the students pass and are promoted to the next grade level. If they do not pass, they are put on academic probation, and if they fail twice, they can be suspended for an academic year. Every student is required to play a promotional, unless they have given a recital—a recital fulfills the promotional performance requirement. A promotional seems simple enough, but stress levels rise as the dates grow closer, and with this, students share their opinions with more emotion than usual.

Some students think that promotionals are a good thing, as they provide a deadline-based set of achievements to work towards. For example, one student stated, “Promotionals are useful in making sure students prepare pieces to performance level each semester.... It gives some focus to repertoire and training goals in the studio.” While this student seemed giddy

with the preparation and pending delivery of her promotional, most students feel something closer to dread.

For example, sophomore violinist Lisa<sup>18</sup> glumly complains that promotionals only give students one chance to prove their skill for the year. She says that “to base someone’s growth over a single performance is absurd, since many things can affect the player’s ability to perform—like stage fright, lack of sleep, or life problems. If [the purpose of] promotionals were to measure the musician’s ability to perform under pressure, then the school should give students more performance opportunities and performance requirements. Performance is a skill that needs to be practiced.”

Lisa isn’t the only student who feels that more performance opportunities should be offered. Violist and graduate diploma student, Stephanie, insisted that promotionals should be held every semester instead of once a year because they drive faster repertoire learning. She also recommends changing the name from “promotional” to “jury” because the term “promotional” “sounds pretentious.” This way, juries would be high-pressure practice performance opportunities to help students prepare for audienced performances rather than being a single performance to test a student’s progress or skill. There is plenty of precedence for this. Many music schools in the country require a jury each semester. However, the repertoire requirements vary significantly from school to school.

The repertoire requirements cause their own problems. Graduate vocal student Samuel is a countertenor (a male who sings soprano). Countertenors have a fairly narrow library of repertoire, and only certain genres commonly use this voice

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<sup>18</sup>all names have been changed

type. One of these genres is the oratorio. This year, Samuel chose to embark on a larger project of studying oratorio music for countertenor but is only allowed to use one piece of that type for his promotional. So, for part of this semester he has had to divert his attention to learning repertoire that is not as important in his training. Singers are required to prepare one aria from an opera, one aria from an oratorio, and four art-songs. Within these pieces, they must sing in four languages. There aren't many art songs written for countertenor, so to complete this requirement, Samuel must borrow repertoire. He says, "I'm a great stealer. I steal from sopranos, mostly mezzos, occasionally tenors and baritones, but I sing it up the octave from where it's written." While these requirements will broaden the range of what Samuel sings as a student, these pieces are unlikely to be of much use in his future career.



He's not the only student who believes that the repertoire requirements can be problematic. Another string player, a graduating master's student, mentioned that sometimes the best thing for someone's playing can be to step back and focus on technique for a semester or even a year. But promotionals require specific work to be shown, and this student finds that it is "kind of a pity that you arbitrarily need to work towards [preparing a promotional], and [students] would be better served by focusing on...non-repertoire related things." The students hoping for more performance requirements may disagree, but if focusing on aspects of music other than repertoire will make a student a better musician, shouldn't there be an option to do so? Students attend music school to become

the best musicians they can be. Perhaps this idea is the larger overarching problem.

The New England Conservatory, like most music schools in the country, is not just a space for playing and learning music. It is an institution of higher education. Because NEC confers degrees, there are certain standards that must be set for all students to accomplish. This allows much less individuality. A benchmark has to exist for moving students forward, such as passing an academic class. But music has no correct answers; technique will vary person to person based on hand size, face shape, or voice type; expression can even vary based on the performer's emotions on a given day; and it is difficult for teachers to grade these non-quantitative things.

Private lessons are listed as a class for students at the Conservatory. For master's students, lessons are four credits of a total possible twelve credits for each semester. That is a minimum of one-third of their semester. Receiving a B for this single class (even if they earned As in every other class) would pull their GPA down to a 3.6; a C down to 3.3. Teachers are very aware of this. A grade of B in this one class could severely hurt a student's ability to go on and pursue doctoral studies. But a grade must be attached to the class, and promotionals act as the final exam. One teacher was overheard joking with some undergraduate students: "If you can't do it that day, I will lower your grade!" Then, seeing the students' shocked and scared faces, he immediately retracted, saying, "not really, I want you to go to grad school, but I need to pretend to scare you somehow."

Martin, a clarinetist, had this to say: "Promotionals were intended to weed out students who weren't willing to put in the effort to become an elite musician and artist. Now, they're

considered a joke where even faculty claim they're unimportant....The result is a music school overpopulated by students with mediocre motivation and interest toward a lifelong pursuit of musical excellence. Would we think finals were important if they weren't a major part of passing a class? In the end, it just becomes a waste of time and resources. Either take it seriously and push students toward higher standards, or do away with it completely."



While it is unclear if NEC has used promotionals to narrow their ranks in the past, Martin makes a good point that many students don't take them very seriously, and it is partially because some teachers do not grade based on how the students play in that moment. The teachers want them to be able to continue their studies, work with more teachers, and become better musicians, and they know giving even a B could hurt those chances.

The Paris Conservatory does work under similar conditions to what Martin mentioned, with the promotional intended to identify the most elite musician. The end-of year performance is a competition for each instrument. The person who wins has their career set up for them. The person who earns second prize has the chance to try again to win the next year. The Curtis Institute has an opposite view. There are no juries or promotionals, only copious chances to work with the faculty. They believe in fostering mutual growth between students, rather than competition. But at both of these schools, the expectations are very clear from the outset. And perhaps that is the problem for NEC. In preparing this article, it was clear that

there is no consensus among students regarding the purpose of the promotional. There is no easily accessible handbook that describes it or outlines the requirements by department. Studio teachers are theoretically constrained by department requirements, but often expand them, and the result leaves students confused, some very stressed by the performance, and others indifferent.

One student had this to say: "I don't understand why some departments have set such hard-line standards. I feel like the department is where things can and should have some ambiguity, and then the studio teachers should set the requirements for their students." She compares it to writing classes, where the department may require a research paper at the end of the semester, but each teacher can decide the length, citation requirements and topic as well as what other essays to have the students write in preparation. "A studio teacher is essentially teaching 8-14 individual classes—as many as they have students. The final exam for each class should be catered to what that class has worked on." This would address the objections raised by the other students in this article. In the case of Samuel, the countertenor, the final would be on oratorio music; in the case of someone working on technique, technique; in the case of someone trying to expand repertoire, more deadlines; and in the case of someone working on performing under pressure, more performances.

NEC Promotionals will not change this year, but perhaps as these students join together future guidelines can be more clearly defined to better cater to individual students. Music making is unique to the music maker, and though the school awards degrees and so must adhere to some uniform standards, students are crying out for distinctiveness.



Ariel Mo

## nostalgia

in daylight,  
smoggy behemoths stoop  
wearily beneath  
the whirlpool of constant clouds  
pressing its weight  
on these grey unnameable  
pyramid-topped obelisks  
their shadows hazier now than  
in memory

new shoes on old roads  
same crowded intersections  
every bush flower and green leaf  
smaller now than  
in memory

from the 40th floor the stadium is laid bare  
red-earthed track here, there  
the grey tiles where an old man paints with a  
comically large brush and water that turns black  
when it touches stone.  
we took care not to step on his words they  
sat gingerly still but already dissipating  
the moment they formed  
gone now but  
in memory

Nan Ni

## Asian Students' Experiences on the American Campus and How Can We Support Them

According to NEC's Office of Student Services, international students constitute 45% of our student body. While this provides an opportunity for cultural exchange, we can't ignore that the existence of ethnically segregated groups within the student body prevents intercultural communication from happening. Based on my personal experiences, observations, and the interviews I have conducted at NEC, there is a general trend among Asian international students to gravitate toward those who are from the same country or similar cultural backgrounds. Several possible reasons for the formation of ethnically segregated groups are the language barrier, acculturation stress (Young 433), and Eastern and Western cultural differences (Cain) that create obstacles for Asian international students to integrate into the local community. Both students and the institution itself should work to support Asian international students in their acculturative process and to promote the unity of the whole student body.

One of the main reasons for this segregation is the language barrier. Even though Asian students have learned some English or may have achieved a high score on the TOEFL test, communicating with their local peers in English can still be a real challenge. As an American student responds in the interview, "Communication can be a difficult thing because even when an Asian student knows English, if it is not their native language then it can be difficult for them to understand casual, informal, or vernacular speech. I also do not speak Chinese or

Korean, and understanding a heavy accent is sometimes difficult for me.” The language barrier can also be a major obstacle for socialization between Asian and American students. It also adds to Asian students’ burden to adjust to an American campus. Sometimes even just the awareness of their accent and the lack of confidence in speaking English can keep Asian students from talking to American students. As Jennifer Young writes in an article about Asian international students, “Feelings of shame, shyness, and embarrassment can eventually lead to social withdrawal and lower self-esteem” (437). As an Asian student, I experience this self-consciousness every time I try to talk to American students. The awareness that I am not a native speaker makes me more careful about what I am going to say. I always have to organize thoughts in my mind before I say something in English, and many times if I feel unsure about the grammar or use of words, I tend to keep silent rather than to say something that is possibly wrong. I believe a lot of Asian students also have similar experiences. This can explain why it’s hard for Asian students to join in the conversation with American students and their tendency to look for and stay with those who come from the same country and speak the same language.

In addition to the language barrier, the perception of exclusion and discrimination can also lead to Asian students’ withdrawal from domestic peers and the forming of their segregated groups. It is interesting to note that although American students who were interviewed don’t think the segregation is an issue of prejudice or discrimination, research shows that Asian international students consistently report encounters with discrimination (Young 438). Seeking to explain this difference, Young explains, “It is also possible that Asian international students who are experiencing acculturative stress can perceive a stranger’s non-discriminating, but explicit expression of rudeness as discriminatory due to its unfriendly

nature and the fact that the interaction is occurring outside of a familiar context” (438). When Asian students move to a new country and try to adjust to the unfamiliar environment, they may bear a lot of pressure and become more sensitive than before. For example, even seeing their American peers gathering around talking to each other but “ignoring” the presence of international students can be perceived as discrimination. They receive the message that they are outsiders who can’t step into the dominant majority group. The perceived discrimination can become an invisible wall that prevents Asian and American students from integrating with each other. Young explains that “individuals who feel their sense of belonging is threatened will often experience existential angst and fear of being ostracized” (438). As a result, Asian students have to turn to their ethnically similar peers, seeking a sense of belonging. As Young states, “Ethnic clustering is mistakenly viewed as a lack of desire to integrate and participate in the larger campus community, rather than viewed as a natural result of individuals seeking belonging and sense of community” (442). She suggests that Asian students’ tendency to form their own groups is actually a sign of their desire for a sense of belonging when they encounter obstacles and difficulties in integrating themselves into the American campus community.

Besides Asian students’ social adjustment on the American campus, many also reported having difficulty in adjusting to American classroom settings where participation and interaction are highly valued. Based on my observations here at NEC and published studies around the U.S., Asian students tend to be quieter and less active in classroom verbal participation and discussion. The reasons include not just the language barrier, but also their previous experiences in Asian classrooms. Young describes the different values that are favored by American and Asian classrooms: While a U.S.

student's grade is partially based on participation, this is not encouraged in many Asian classrooms. "In fact, asking questions, offering opinions, challenging peers, can be perceived as rude or out-of-line by professors in East Asia, which can have undesirable consequences for students" (Young 441). These opposing values create a huge difficulty for Asian students to adjust to the new academic setting in America and contribute to the long time it takes for them to participate and express themselves in the classrooms.

I was educated in Chinese classrooms for more than ten years. The academic setting there, which is mainly about reading, writing, listening and memorizing, has profoundly shaped my learning habits and also my personality. This education developed my relatively introverted characteristics and habits, and has also made it difficult for me participate and interact in American classroom. As Susan Cain describes of introverts, "They listen more than they talk, think before they speak, and often feel as if they express themselves better in writing than in conversation. They tend to dislike conflict" (11). I am used to learning things by reading and listening, expressing myself by writing and studying individually; but now in the American classroom, speaking in front of other classmates makes me feel anxious, and joining in the conversation in class is a difficult thing for me. I am sure that a lot of other Asian international students also experience this problem in their adjustment processes.

So how can we help Asian students integrate into American campus community? One way might be to adapt Warren Blumenfeld's 4-level framework: personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural. Blumenfeld applied this framework to homophobia, saying all four levels should be addressed to break down segregation. In the case of Asian students' acculturation

process in American campus, at the personal and interpersonal level, both Asian and American students should adopt a more open-minded attitude and step out of the comfort zone to listen to and communicate with each other. Jamie Washington and Nancy Evans state that advocacy involves acceptance, support and inclusiveness (198). Acceptance is the first step of supporting Asian international students and promoting the unity of student body. As an American student suggests in the interview:

I believe that the main reason international students generally keep within their own groups is because they are in a new country, speaking a new or different language, and being immersed in a new culture. This is difficult in more ways than one, and since American students are not experiencing what international students are, I think it's largely up to the American students to be accommodating, friendly, welcoming, and ready to learn about other cultures.

Since international students may experience a lot of pressure and uncertainty in the new environment, local students' acceptance and friendly interaction with them can be the best way to let them feel that they are included as part of the community and thus help them better integrate into the campus community.

Integrating socially will also help with academics. Krishna Bista, a professor of University of Louisiana at Monroe writes, "Student interaction with peers can positively influence overall academic development, knowledge acquisition, analytical and problem-solving skills, and self-esteem" (47). For Asian students themselves, they should be more confident in both the communication with their local peers and the classroom participation, which means to try to connect with American peers rather than just staying within the segregated groups, and

to try to express themselves and to be part of the class discussion. Even though stepping out of the comfort zone and making such changes requires courage and determination, and the process may be not easy and comfortable, what you can get from it (for example, the friendship with people from different countries and culture, the exchange of thoughts and inspirations, the improvement in spoken English and socializing skills) are worth the efforts.

In addition to personal and interpersonal efforts, the institution should also pay attention to the difficulties that Asian international students experience in adjusting to the campus community, and support more on-campus activities and organizations that serve as platforms for Asian and American students to join together and know more about each other. These efforts would have more multi-dimensional benefits. Both Asian international students and domestic students can benefit from interactions with each other, and their connections to each other can also contribute to the diverse and collaborative campus community. Young suggests that university student services should provide programs that help increase awareness among Asian international students of their existing cultural values in a validating manner while exploring possible challenges to adjusting to a non-Confucian culture which values self-expression, boldness and individual freedom more than harmony within the group (444). The Northeastern University's Asian Student Union (NU ASU) sets a good example of the domestic-international, cross-cultural program. According to the website, their mission statement is, "To promote awareness of Asian American culture and Asian heritage in the University and the surrounding community. To facilitate new-coming students assimilation into the American culture and university life. To promote a spirit of friendship and unity among the student body and various student groups." It is also noteworthy that although

the name of the organization—"Asian Student Union"—seems like another form of ethnically segregated group, its main goal is to help Asian students integrate into the larger campus community and to promote the cultural awareness of domestic community members. I think this kind of organization should also be formed in the NEC campus community to address the problem of segregation and promote integration of the community at the institutional level.

Furthermore, increasing the connections between Asian and American students at the cultural level requires more than superficial conversation but deeper understanding of each other's culture and the inclusiveness of cultural difference. With the high population of international students, NEC is an ideal place for cultural exchange and students developing global perspective. According to the responses of the interviews, both Asian and American students believe that they can learn a lot from others' culture and broaden their horizons through the deeper communication with each other. For example, Asian students can learn from American students' self-expression while American students can learn from the strong communal values and group identity that Asian students hold. More importantly, they can also gain a deeper understanding of how the world is and how people live differently in the world. As Susan Cain states, "The point is not that one is superior to the other, but that a profound difference in cultural values has a powerful impact on the personality styles favored by each culture" (190). The experience of learning from other cultures and understanding the difference between each culture can be inspiring and instructive. It is also the significance of studying and living in such a diverse and international campus community. Moreover, as a student interviewee states, "I think students actively learning about the culture of students in another group will help the two groups understand each other



and work together.” Once we get to know more about other cultures and understand what the culture values, we can build more profound connections and relationships with each other. And the inclusiveness and appreciation of cultural diversity and difference in the community can be achieved.

When we look at the difference in American and Asian culture and values, we shouldn’t overlook the complexity of each individual. We should also acknowledge that there are some things we share in common. For example, it’s the pursuit of music that brings us together at NEC. Seeing these common areas that we have can also be a starting point of breaking down the barriers to help students from both sides integrate. Studying in such an international institution as NEC should be an inspiring and memorable experience for both local and international students as we have the chance to broaden our horizons with the diversity of culture and work as a whole community at the same time.

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Ariel Mo

## Three Views of Nature: Rethinking Wilderness in Multicultural America

"The time has come to rethink wilderness" (Cronon). This is the mission that William Cronon sets out to accomplish in his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness." According to him, our modern idea of nonhuman nature as being separate from humanity is only a construct of middle-class narcissism. Born of outdated, colonialist-Christian sentiments, this view of nature has often been a weapon with which a powerful class of white Americans was able to draw distinct and often lethal lines between themselves and other minorities groups. Two texts from contemporary, non-white American authors seem to affirm his arguments: In "Black Women and the Wilderness," Evelyn White, an African American journalist, describes her struggle to reconcile cultural memory with nature through the story of a canoe trip on the MacKenzie River. Meanwhile, "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" is Maxine Hong Kingston's re-imagining of her Chinese grandfather's time working on the historic Central Pacific Railroad; on the one hand, nature eased his initial entry into the new country, yet ultimately it was a symbol of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between immigrant and settler. Though each of these two women see nature through the lens of a different social context, there are similarities in the feelings of relief and rejection that they identify in their people's relationship with America and with American nature. Both experiences show that it is indeed time to revisit the American narrative of nature and recognize the consequences it holds for non-white peoples as we move forward with our quest to save the wild.

According to Cronon, wilderness is "entirely a cultural invention" (70); and in America this invention is sacred,

something untouchable that must remain untouched if it is to keep its revitalizing magic. He proposes that the concept of nature as a kind of Paradise, where one may rediscover oneself away from the evil influence of the city, was founded on the Romantic ideal of the sublime as well as a colonialist image of the American frontier. For Romantic writers, every flower, leaf, or drop of water was something supernatural, infused with the essence of God; all one had to do was stand in the midst of it all and open oneself to “any lesson in the divine manuscript” (Muir qtd. in Cronon 76). For the early European colonials, every corner of “unclaimed” America awaited only the conquest of a daring man. As Cronon points out, however, such narrow definitions mean that these lands would only be accessible to a particular class of white Americans with the means to enjoy it.

One group excluded from this privilege might include African Americans like Evelyn White. “Black Women and the Wilderness” is her powerful attempt to identify and conquer the “heart-stopping fear” (White 319) that she has always experienced in the wilderness. At a women’s writing workshop in the Cascade Mountains, Evelyn is heaped with invitations to explore the great outdoors. While her white colleagues are eager to seek some kind of spiritual reawakening in the woods and rivers, Evelyn is physically unable to join in on these explorations:

My genetic memory of ancestors hunted down and preyed upon in rural settings counters my fervent hopes of finding peace in the wilderness. Instead of the solace and comfort I seek, I imagine myself in the country as my forebears were—exposed, vulnerable, and unprotected—a target of cruelty and hate. (318)

This fear, then, is not a unique, personal phenomenon. In fact, it stems largely from a broader culture of violence and exclusion. As an example, White describes her memories of the aftermath of Emmett Till’s brutal murder. For White and the other

thousands of black children who saw the photo of Emmett's "pummeled and contorted face" (319), safety and nature became mutually exclusive. Her family, like many other black parents of the time, would use the story as an example of "how little white society valued [their] lives" (319). From a young age they were taught not to go out alone, and every fresh news story of an African American lynched in the woods was yet another reminder of the huge target painted into their skin. White America had sent a clear message: Nature is not for you.

But White still loves the wild, albeit from afar. She speaks reverently of "the river's roar," "the sun-dappled trees" (318); perhaps these clichés were chosen on purpose in order to evoke the widespread, American social veneration of nature that she, too, feels, but cannot participate in. She is eager to move out of the city and "[elated] at the prospect of living closer to nature" (318). White is fully engrossed in the American narrative of wild as pure, as beautiful—because she, too, is an American. Therein lies the heart of her conflict: the clash between overwhelming trauma caused by years of systematic social oppression, and her own fervent desire to embrace the wilderness alongside her fellow Americans.

The Chinese American experience with of nature, meanwhile, is more foreign. Maxine Hong Kingston's short story, "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains," uses beautiful imagery to explore the complex feelings of intimacy and isolation that plague many Chinese immigrants in America. The story follows an imagined version of the life of her grandfather, Ah Goong, who came to America to work on the Central Pacific Railroad. After his arrival, Ah Goong tries hard to make America his new home; in this task he looks to nature for comfort, calling the stars by their Chinese names—not Vega and Altair, but "the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy" (Kingston 130). While in the mountains, even the noise of hammers hard at work

trying to crack open a tunnel is reminiscent of noisy festivals back home in China. For migrants like Ah Goong, the earth itself is the first and easiest path to familiarity. Nevertheless, he already knows that this land is not his to enjoy.

In reality, to him and to the rest of the Chinese who came to America as manual labourers, the very environment is their enemy. In Kingston's story, Ah Goong's first job in America is to cut down a tree, an act which he instinctively labels as an "attack" (128); already the workers are at odds with the land. There is something poignantly sad about this scene as Ah Goong looks at the great redwood he has just chopped down and sees a "long red torso ... sap [running] from its cuts like crying blind eyes." Tearing up the roots, he says, "was like uprooting a tooth," (128) implying that he already felt a vivid connection to this new, foreign nature. Over the course of their time in America, he and his workers all develop an empathetic link with the earth they have to work against every day. Yet the excruciatingly painful and fatal nature of their later jobs—dangling over ravines in flimsy baskets, tunnelling beneath a mountain using only hand and hammer—makes them constantly aware of the land's resistance. When Ah Goong looks at the night sky, he is told, "Those are American stars" (130). No matter how much he reaches out to the American wilderness, he is barred from it by the very nature of his position as an immigrant worker.

Cronon's explanation of American environmentalism speaks volumes to both how White and Ah Goong are unable to embrace the land they love. The "frontier nostalgia" of a lone man returning to conquer nature is a dream characteristic of wealthy city-dwellers who can choose to visit the wild "not as a producer but as a consumer" (Cronon 78). More often than not, these "elite urban tourists and wealthy sportsmen" (Cronon 79) also belong to that same class of white Americans who worked

so hard to oppose any possibility of equal rights for White and her fellow African Americans. Thus while White, as an American, loves nature in all its purity and beauty, she is barred from enjoying it because she is not the right colour of American. Such a divide also shuts out Ah Goong and his fellow Chinese; to use Cronon's words, they "know far too much about working the land to regard unworked land as their ideal" (78).

But White knows that enjoying nature should not be and is not the exclusive right of white Americans, and the rest of her article is all about how she tries to circumvent these boundaries. She dares to join her colleagues a rafting trip on the McKenzie, determined to reach beyond her fear for the landscape that she knows she loves. Despite some reservations about being the only African American in the group (and the only one she's ever seen in these boats), the "stately rocks, soaring birds, [and] towering trees" (320) are all as she had imagined, and she is finally able to connect with the wild in a wholly American way.

Although White has seemingly submitted to the same white American narrative of the sublime and unconquered wild that Cronon criticized, her use of a quotation from the prominent black poet, Langston Hughes, forces us to revisit this assumption:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins. I bathed in the  
Euphrates when dawns were young. I built my hut near the  
Congo and it lulled me to sleep. I looked upon the Nile and  
raised the pyramids above it. My soul has grown deep like  
the rivers. (320)

Taken from his poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," these lines heighten the emotional intensity of White's triumphant scene, and also bring up a point that Cronon himself may have missed: non-white Americans identify with more than just American culture. To conquer her fear of the wild, White looked instead to

her people's relationship with nature, outside of the influence of America's race-class hierarchy. Beyond the Cascade Mountains, away from the roaring McKenzie River, White's ancestors built impressive civilizations that saw nature in a different light, that had their own stories, customs, and purposes for their environment. Since she had no desire to share in the "frontier nostalgia" (Cronon 78) of white Americans, she sought a different connection with her environment. It is this reconstruction and reclamation of a more personal wilderness narrative that allowed White discover American nature on her own terms.

Chinese Americans, too, have a different cultural narrative to take strength from. Faced with constant rejection from the people whose home they gave their lives to reshape, Ah Goong and his fellow workers had to remain alert to the distance between them and the earth beneath their feet. Like White, Ah Goong keeps a tight grasp on the lore of his homeland in order to remind himself of who he is and where he stands in this foreign landscape. He insists on calling the stars by their Chinese names, and on the summer solstice, observes the odd Chinese custom of collecting buckets and buckets of water despite the sneers of the other men; for the stories say that water from this moment "would stay fresh forever and cure anything" (Kingston 130). In this way he, too, is interacting with American nature on his own terms.

Still, there remains a barrier between Chinese Americans and America itself. As soon as the railroad is complete, an immense effort begins to rid America of the migrant workers. Legislation known as the Chinese Exclusion Act is soon imposed, limiting the number of immigrants allowed, and, later, forbidding any at all; these laws broke up families and left parents and children stranded on the wrong side of the ocean. It is the American government and, by extension, white

Americans' vindication of what the land had been trying, all along, to tell Ah Goong and his colleagues: They are not wanted here. As the workers travel the country for employment, they always seek the company of people with their same skin color, who speak the same language. Ah Goong only knocks on a door when he sees that it is a garden "laid out in a Chinese scheme" (146). This garden is particularly indicative: Once again nature is a place of work, a thing to be worked and used for sustenance. Maxine Hong Kingston even writes, "Ah Goong would have liked a leisurely walk along the tracks to review his finished handiwork, or to walk east to see the rest of his new country. But instead, [he is] Driven Out" (146). The Chinese workers are not given any time to discover the American way of enjoying nature.

There is a similarity between White's love and fear of the wilderness and Ah Goong's experiences of intimacy and alienation. Caught up in the narrative of the great outdoors, White desires to join the millions of Americans who go into the wild and return renewed, with a new sense of self. Similarly, Ah Goong wants to claim this foreign country for his own and have it welcome him in return. In both cases, however, the colour of their skin proved an obstacle. Ultimately, White's success stems from her ability to escape from the corrupting influence of an outdated European-American view of nature and take pride in the far more ancient roots of her ancestors. Yet Ah Goong's status as an alien bars him from even understanding what Americans would consider the correct way of interacting with nature. Set in an earlier time period, Kingston's short story does leave a question mark on the modern Chinese American attitude towards wilderness. However, contemporary politics and immigration legislation are swinging dangerously close to the violent discrimination that Ah Goong and his colleagues experienced in their own time. More and more, discussions of climate change and manmade pollution are tainted by bias;



blame for, as well as consequences of, environmental hazards fall heavily on racialized communities. In these times, the definition of America as a divergent society must be continually re-emphasized. If we can examine, understand, and protect divergent approaches to the enjoyment and conservation of nature that are individual to America's many minorities, perhaps we can even alter the destructive course of environmental exploitation that European industrialism first set in motion two centuries ago.

By deconstructing the privileged white American model of nature, Cronon alerts his readers to alternate possibilities of observing and interacting with the earth which go beyond preserving it for the enjoyment of a select few. The other two writings show us exactly why it is so important to take notice of his claims. Maxine Hong Kingston's story serves as a warning for the malevolence and intolerance of a closed, white American perception of wilderness. On the other hand, Evelyn White's tale of struggle and liberation is but one inspiring example of how the American nature narrative can indeed be redefined to welcome all of the vibrant cultures that call this country home.

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Liana Branscome

## staunton, va

a night of insomnia

watching traffic lights that blinked for no one

synchronized

like christmas in the underworld, eerie

the only creatures not asleep were the trains

howling softly as they limped home

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staunton, va came to be one night when I was studying at the Heifetz Institute. In the town of Staunton, shops close at 5 pm and most people are in bed by 8. I was creeping back to my dorm after a late night walk when I heard the trains and looked back on a scene that seemed to me at once sinister yet beautiful. I said to the friend by my side,  
"Something is happening in the town."

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