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A Four Year Moment

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Honors Thesis: A Four Year Moment

A senior recital can prove to be a daunting task, due to the overwhelming and irrational feeling that it must perfectly represent oneself as their fullest and truest artistic selves. I wanted to explore how I could balance this need for personal representation while simultaneously keeping a level head about professionally producing a recital and preserving my physical and mental health and wellness in the process. The first thing I set out to do when beginning this capstone project was figuring out what was important to me about music, and the study of music. It was imperative that I represent myself as a human being first, and musician second. I determined that I wanted to focus on three things: composition, spirituality and values, and character as a human and a working professional. These elements would be reflected in the repertoire performed, but also in the working process, which represents the culmination of this project.

The title of my thesis and recital is “A Four Year Moment.” This was a natural reflection of the idea that time is relative in our existence as humans, and each period of time, no matter how long or short, is merely a moment in our lifespan and in the history of the universe. This was a mindset that helped me through many of my anxious moments in college. My spiritual journey throughout my four years at Western Michigan University has largely been centered around music and its role in my life’s purpose. Once I learned how to focus on spirituality as a mean of calming my anxiety, I found deeper meaning and personal fulfillment in my artistry. My recital, “A Four Year Moment,” is my opportunity to capture these experiences through the feelings that can’t really be fully shared with just words.

In preparation for the recital, I worked closely with my private teacher and thesis chair, Prof. Greg Jasperse. It was with him that I chose the program, and prepared the program notes. Choosing the program was a challenging task for me emotionally. I felt I had set a high bar with my junior recital given the year prior. I struggled at times throughout my planning, because I felt that I wasn’t representing myself and my art quite the way I wanted to. Leading up to the actual performance however, I felt more confident and connected to the music I was about to share due to the natural progression that occurs when one prepares for such an event.

The irony of performance day presented itself in the moments leading up to the recital itself. A few of my songs had connections to my experience with anxiety and panic attacks during my schooling. Though this academic year has been the best in management of my symptoms and recovery from my anxiety, I began to get extremely anxious and nervous, almost to the point of petrification, just minutes before I was supposed to begin the program. I found this frustrating, because I had used this music as a cathartic release of hardship, and thought I was in control of my disposition. I look on this moment now in hindsight with remorse but also joy, because it proves that I care so deeply about this art and where my place in it stands. The pressure to perform up to standards is something that I will need to continue to acknowledge, prepare for, and motivate myself to still execute with the high level of artistry that I have come to expect from myself.

While reviewing my work with my thesis panel, the conversation turned to that of my leaving soon after graduation to go on the road and perform with The Glenn Miller Orchestra. My other two panel members, Prof. Keith Hall and Prof. Matthew Fries, both have touring experience, and offered me wisdom about my upcoming tour. They explained how not just

coming from a collegiate music background, but also gaining so much self-awareness and dedication to my art during my time here, will aid me in my future career.

During a theatre class that I took in the Fall of 2017, a visiting guest artist shared this piece of wisdom: *If your art is an offering, it is simply given—it cannot be wrong.* I prepared myself before the program by reminding myself that this music is my gift to share with the audience. I knew that there will be some inevitable bumps in the road, but that it didn't mean I will have failed because of the self-perceived bumps. However, when I left the stage at the end of the program, I felt that I had not given the gift I had intended. I was truly disappointed in many moments that occurred during the recital. Despite this, immediately following my performance, the friends, family, and professors who attended my reception were exceptionally congratulatory. I had to decide to let go of my personal discomfort, and roll with the response. It really was a relief to see how I had succeeded in touching people in some way through my performance. I believe my reason for being so upset was because I felt I had not just *failed*, but *failed them*. To see that they had actually received my gift, brought me back from that anxiety.

Giving of art is what sustains artistry. When “art” is selfish, one can argue it isn't really art at all. The culture of humanity survives because people view art as a gift from someone else unto themselves. We feel understood when we hear a piece of music that resonates with us, or view a work of art that touches us in a way we've never contemplated, or when we listen to our bodies asking us to dance because they thirst to exist in a common rhythm. This is why I advocate for the arts; I am advocating for humanity. In the future, I see myself taking this passion for performance and advocacy into a professional leadership role. I know that I will continue to learn more about myself as an artist and leader in my communities, and it excites me to correlate my experiences at Western Michigan University with what I can now offer to others. The gifts I have received from those who came before me—my parents, teachers, thesis panel—are the ones that keep on giving, for I will continue to work for music selflessly as it has done for me.