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Area of Study: Music Performance
Title of Project: Unheard Dissonance: An Examination of Disability in Horn Repertoire

Project Summary

In recent years, diversity has come to the forefront of many discussions in Western art music. Several organizations have been founded to highlight composers of various genders, races, backgrounds, and ethnic groups, but disability is often left out of this conversation entirely. For example, no lists of composers with disabilities can be found in the databases of the Institute for Composer Diversity, the Composers Diversity Collective, or the diverse composer libraries of Ithaca College and Yale. All of these resources focus primarily on women, composers of color, composers from diverse ethnic groups, and those in the LGBTQ+ community. Although this research is both needed and beneficial for composers and performers, it is disheartening as a disabled performer to be on the outside of these discussions.

My goal for this project is to create a catalogue of music that is representative of the disabled community. Because there are many social and logistical barriers for musicians and composers with disabilities, this catalogue will include works by composers with disabilities, as well as music by able-bodied composers that focuses on disability as the primary subject matter. For the sake of this project, I will be focusing solely on works for horn to align with my horn performance degree. This project will create a list of works for me to draw on for my degree recital, as well as become an international resource for other horn players and musicians moving forward.



Unheard Dissonance: An Examination of Disability in Horn Repertoire

Until recent decades, Western art music was dominated in every area and sub-genre by a narrow canon of repertoire. This repertoire primarily came from composers of the same race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability status and excluded those who were marginalized along one or more of these axes. Although this canon still permeates classical music today, increased opportunities for minority groups and attention to social progress have inspired many efforts to diversify classical repertoire (Wheeler 1). Organizations such as the Institute for Composer Diversity, the Diverse Composer Collective, and Diversify the Stand have created composer databases and commissioned works to highlight composers from under-represented groups. However, none of the web sites or databases from any of these organizations, or from any music diversity resource that I have found thus far, have as much as a paragraph dedicated to the representation or lack thereof of composers and musicians with disabilities. Although these organizations have greatly impacted the music community for the better, they have also inadvertently excluded disability from the conversation about diversity by lacking disability representation or even conversation across the board.

This lack of representation is not necessarily due to the neglect or avoidance of disability by any of these organizations. Low describes the physical, social, and systematic barriers that musicians with disabilities face and how these barriers limit their participation in professional music making; physical barriers interfere with access to performance venues, social stereotypes and low expectations lower confidence and motivation, and music education systems often fail to meet the needs of disabled students (212-13, 254). In addition, Goffman, as quoted by Low describes the concept of “passing” in which individuals with disabilities, especially those in the public eye, attempt to disguise their impairments to appear more “normal” (44). This



phenomenon may lead some composers to avoid disclosing their disabilities, and these challenges and limiting factors are the reason that this project was broadened to include both works by disabled composers and those which represent disability. In addition, my goal of commissioning a piece by a composer with a disability is an attempt to counter these barriers and add one more authentic disabled voice to the repertoire for horn.

Questions and Research Overview

Through my research, I hope to answer the following questions: What horn repertoire exists today that represents the disabled community? Are these works written by composers with disabilities, and if so, is disability the primary focus? What disabilities are portrayed in these works, and how are they portrayed?

To answer these questions, I will begin by searching through databases of horn repertoire. “Guide to the Solo Horn Repertoire” by Linda Dempf and Richard Seraphinoff is the most comprehensive collection of repertoire available to horn players today, so I will begin by reading program notes for all pieces listed there to identify relevant figures and works. Then, I will move on to online databases such as those listed above. I will also use contact forms on these web databases where available to ask about disability-related resources that may not be listed. Although many of these resources contain works for horn and ensemble that may be related to my topic, I will only include works for horn and piano and unaccompanied horn in the final project to keep this list of repertoire accessible for the average horn player.

Once I have searched through all available resources and compiled a list of repertoire that meets my criteria, I will use other outside sources to write extended program notes for each piece. If I received funding and am able to commission a new work, the composer will provide program notes either in written form or via an interview. Program notes will include a brief



description of how the work is tied to or representative of the disabled community. The final project will consist of the list of works, program notes for each work, and links to recordings where available. Once my research is complete, I intend to create a web site where this database can be accessed for free and expanded over time.

Conclusion

According to Wheeler, “If we do not engage with music from a diverse group of composers, do not support the performance of music by a diverse group of performers, and do not foster a diverse group of educators, we lose the advantage of the intersection of music and identity” (13). Although Classical musicians have made great progress in diversifying our repertoire and making space for a variety of different voices, this progress will not be complete until composers with disabilities are acknowledged and heard as loudly as those with able bodies.

This project seeks to provide a resource for disabled musicians looking to see themselves in the repertoire they perform, as well as for able-bodied musicians who want to amplify the voices of disabled composers. I hope that through this research, I will be introduced to a variety of repertoire that allows me to enhance my performance skills and analyze the intersection of music and disability.

Monthly Timeline

Note: The goals in this timeline reflect the amount of time it will take to read these materials in braille and convert online resources to accessible formats.

January 2024: If funding is available, I will begin searching for a disabled composer during this month. I will contact organizations that promote composer diversity and gather a list of living



composers who are disabled. I will contact these composers for samples of their work, and by the end of the month, I will have chosen a composer to commission.

February 2024: In February, I will begin searching through the “Guide to the Solo Horn Repertoire.” By the end of the month, I will have read through the works for unaccompanied horn and collected the pieces which fit into my research category. If time allows, I will begin writing program notes for the works I find.

March 2024: In March, I will begin reading through the works for horn and piano in the “Guide to the Solo Horn Repertoire.” My goal is to have done research on one-third of the works in this book (pages 1-76) by the end of the month. I will also have completed program notes for any unaccompanied works I choose to include by the end of March.

April 2024: In April, I will research the second third of works for horn and piano in the “Guide to the Solo Repertoire for Horn” (pages 77-152). I will also complete program notes for any works I find in the first 76 pages of the book.

May 2024: In May, my goal is to finish researching pieces in the “guide to the Solo Repertoire for Horn.” By the end of the spring semester, I will have fully formatted program notes on all relevant works listed in this book.

August 2024: In August, I will begin preparing the relevant pieces which will be performed on my degree recital in the spring. In addition, I will begin searching online databases for relevant works, beginning with the Lin Foulk Baird database for works by female composers. I am beginning with this database because it is horn specific and contains helpful filters for instrumentation.

September 2024: In September, I will finish researching all works in the Lin Foulk Baird database and write program notes for relevant works that I find.



October-November: Search as many other online sources as time allows. Other sources will be more difficult because they are composer-focused, rather than piece-focused. During these two months, I will research as many composers as possible with the hope of achieving the broadest and most inclusive results possible.

December 2024: If I am able to commission a piece, the hope is that it will be ready before the end of the fall semester. At this point, I will begin learning the piece. I will also take this month to complete any unfinished program notes if necessary.

Spring 2025: During this semester, I will learn the commissioned piece and obtain program notes from the composer if applicable, make final edits to the project, rehearse and perform the pieces applicable for my degree recital, get faculty feedback before defending my honors thesis.



References

- Dempf, Linda, and Richard Seraphinoff. *Guide to the Solo Horn Repertoire*. Indiana University Press, 2016.
- Low, George A. *Where are all the Disabled Musicians?: An Exploration of the Attitudinal and Physical Barriers that Impact on the Identities and Lived Experiences of Musicians with a Physical Impairment*, The University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom), Scotland, 2018. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/where-are-all-disabled-musicians-exploration/docview/2204777743/se-2>.
- Wheeler, Kendra. "Disentangled: Why Understanding Identity is Essential to Establishing Inclusive Musical Communities." *The International Journal of Social, Political and Community Agendas in the Arts*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2023, pp. 1-22. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/disentangled-why-understanding-identity-is/docview/2871782959/se-2>, doi:<https://doi.org/10.18848/2326-9960/CGP/v19i01/1-22>.