

Statement of Academic Purpose

Princeton University

Cole Reyes

Music is about people: those who create, those who perform, and those who listen. We have a unique opportunity as composers to relate with others by creating something entirely new and unheard. This music, coming from our deepest selves, might resonate with someone in a way they have never experienced. We are constantly in dialogue with players, other composers, and audience members in pursuit of something greater than any one of us. My music cannot exist without the players who play it, the composers who influenced it, and the audience members who listen to it. Without each and every part, the work is incomplete.

I believe that my music cannot be insular. It must derive from a diverse array of compositional voices, approaches, textures, backgrounds, and genres. Though there is an advantage to diving deeply into specific compositional aesthetics within my usual sound-sphere, I am far more interested in surrounding myself with compositional voices different from mine. I continue to engage with players who may not even play classical music entirely, and listeners who may have never before engaged with contemporary music.

During my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I often found that my compositions were influenced by my peers, my a cappella group, and my concert attendance potentially even more than in my private lessons and composition seminars. These external moments for inspiration allowed me to think creatively and wildly while I then took my ideas and refined them in my lessons. In my bachelor's degree, I also studied mathematics. During this time I began to think of my harmonic language in terms of group theory. Each small deviation within the modes I would create for pieces would open new possibilities for harmony and tendencies — like how adding one new element to a group in abstract algebra completely changes the structure and algebra of the group itself.

During my master's degree, I was also a full-time barista at a specialty coffee shop. Though the parallels between my experiences at the cafe and in my academic career are minimal, they are perhaps the most influential in my musical philosophy. Most of my coworkers were not musicians but were genuinely interested in hearing my work. I take the opinions of non-musicians with as much credibility as I would my peers. I do not want to write music only for highly-trained and intellectually astute fellow musicians. Rather, I seek to engage with a wide audience by reflecting on my own narrative and relating my experiences sonically.

Ultimately, each one of these factors — such as the interaction with high-level and passionate players and musical scholars, a diversity in compositional voice and path, and access to opportunities to create boldly — drew me to Princeton University. After meeting several current and past doctoral students, I have learned that the faculty cultivates each student's unique voice and helps them grow to

become the best version of themselves. I was also specifically drawn to Princeton due to the culture of stylistic pluralism that is cultivated throughout the program. The community surrounding the university inspires the composition students to dream big and create boldly while also enthusiastically supporting each other. The university's partnership with the leading contemporary ensembles in new music from around the country offer a unique opportunity to work with and learn from the most dynamic players of our time.

At Princeton University, I hope to continue to explore my love of narrative and the shared human experience through music. From exploring the relationship between my queerness and sense of self to competing expectations and realities of what home is, I seek to relate my experiences to an audience bigger than myself. I believe that music is the vehicle in which I can share this with my audience.

During my time music directing various groups, teaching private lessons, and working with young students learning about music for the first time, I have found the joy and satisfaction the students receive when they realize their potential is unlike any other. In my path ahead as a composer, I would be remiss if I did not nurture the next generation of composers and musicians. As with any art form, the current generation of pedagogues must pass down the practice, and we must know that it will mold and transform with each generation, and I believe that the faculty at Princeton University will prepare me to do exactly that.

As well, I would pursue relationships with the students at the university beyond the music department. As a composer, I believe that the totality of a musical work is interdisciplinary. I hope to collaborate with the students of other creative disciplines such as the visual and literary arts to conceive of new works bigger than just each of its individual artistic contributors. My hope is that these collaborations would extend beyond the campus and into the new music community as a whole.

I believe the experience at Princeton University would equip me in a way no other program would – not only as a student, but as an active contributor back to the community. The promotion of an innovative and individual artistic voice alongside unique partnerships with the top new music ensembles working today culminates in a unique, enriching, and critically diverse academic atmosphere that has been vital to my work for years. As I hope to work in academia and have my own collegiate students in the future, I believe that Princeton University would prepare me to teach a wide array of students whose styles may or may not be like mine. At Princeton, I believe the student body, faculty, and visiting composers and ensembles will genuinely support me as I pursue my goals. The opportunity to study with your distinguished faculty would be incredibly enriching while I pursue a career in the world of new music. I long to continue my academic journey at Princeton by striving to be better than the student, composer, and person I was before.