

Queer Perspectives in New Music Perspectives queers en musique nouvelle

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Quelle norme ? Parole queer et création musicale

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

This collection of texts investigates how queerness manifests in contemporary new music practices. Six contributions by queer artists (Annette Brosin, Anthony R. Green, Luke Nickel, Emily Doolittle, Symon Henry and Teiya Kasahara 笠原 貞野) are framed by an introduction and conclusion by Gabriel Dharmoo. Dharmoo's definition of queerness expands beyond sexual orientation and gender identity; it entertains the notion of queerness as an anti-assimilationist stance that defies normalcy, breaks down binaries and reveals the wideness of spectrums. As each statement illuminates how a marginalized experience as queer can profoundly inform ways of conceptualizing, creating, disseminating and understanding artistic output, this range of perspectives aims to broaden our understanding of queerness not only as an identity, but also as an artistic epistemology in and of itself.

Enquête

Queer Perspectives in New Music

GABRIEL DHARMOO (With contributions from Annette Brosin, Anthony R. Green, Luke Nickel, Emily Doolittle, Symon Henry and Teiya Kasahara 笠原 貞野)

This collection of texts by queer artists is an invitation to reflect on the many ways queerness manifests in contemporary new music practices.¹ In order to go beyond a self-reflexive analysis of my own multifaceted, yet limited experience as a queer cisgender male person of colour who engages critically with the new music scene, I sought the perspective of six other artists spanning different gender and sexual identities. These musicians work both inside and on the fringes of the new music scene as composers, sound artists, performers, interdisciplinary artists, educators and/or curators. Their statements convey the extent to which their queerness affects their artistic output, as well as their relationship with the new music scene.

“Queer” is a word with fluctuating, overlapping and paradoxical definitions. At different points in history, it has been used to describe, to stigmatize, and to reclaim power for marginalized individuals and communities. Although gender and queer studies have vastly theo-

1. Mentions of new music, or the new music scene refer to what is also called Contemporary Western Art Music.

ried upon it, its meaning remains elusive, porous and malleable.² From my perspective, the lack of a conclusive, absolute or scientific definition does not obfuscate; it recognizes how queerness allows or begs for indefinite answers and even, contradictions. In the context of this article, “queer” refers to the recognition or the celebration of one’s marginalized and non-normative sexuality and/or gender identity. Self-labelling as queer may also involve an anti-assimilationist stance towards the standardized heteronormative lifestyles that are broadly legitimized and accepted. However, for some lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transgender people, the emulation of heteronormative lifestyles or gender roles offers safety, self-preservation, the benefit of *passing*,³ and access to equal opportunity. A monolithic view of

2. For a succinct history of “queer” and its multiple definitions, accounting different points of view, see Somerville, 2014.

3. *Passing* refers to trans people being perceived as, or assumed to be cisgender in mainstream society, whether intentionally or not. *Passing* can also apply to sexual orientation or race.

“queerness” is not helpful; one’s sexual orientation or gender identity does not determine one’s degree of adherence to the dominant culture. Therefore, using “queer” as an umbrella term for the whole LGBTQ2IA+⁴ spectrum while necessarily implying a form of social nonconformity has its limits. Self-identifying as queer is an individual and personal decision; reasons will vary. In the context of this article, queerness defies notions of normalcy, breaks down binaries, reveals the wideness of spectrums, and increasingly takes into account how intersectionality impacts people’s existence.

While queerness exists in relation to an accepted form of normalcy in the form of heteronormativity, “normalcy” is certainly not a concept we would instinctively associate with the new music scene. I acknowledge that creations by new music composers and sound artists hardly match the expectations of the overwhelming majority of music and art lovers (or consumers). However, it is important to establish that despite being culturally marginal, the new music scene still operates around consolidated ways of doing, creating, understanding and perceiving, which loosely delineate what is considered usual, standardized or expected. If we investigate how dominant new music institutions fund and program music,⁵ we gain insight on what might

4. University of Guelph defines the acronym as: “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, two-spirit, intersex, asexual and other identities that fall outside of cisgender and heterosexual paradigms.” See www.uoguelph.ca/studentexperience/LGBTQ2IA (accessed December 1, 2020).

5. In the Canadian context, new music institutions include pedagogic and academic institutions (music faculties, conservatories), associations or networks (Canadian Music Centre, Canadian League of Composers, SOCAN, Canadian New Music Network, professional musicians’ guilds), funding bodies (Canada Council for the Arts, provincial and municipal

be favoured or equated with a concept of “normalcy” in new music: the commissioning paradigm, notation-based scores, the various models inherited by Western classical music, the concert protocol, the target (and the actual) audience, the well-defined roles of composer and performer, etc.⁶

Given that the scene generally promotes risk-taking, innovation and the coexistence of multiple outlooks, the point of this article isn’t to prove that “queer” artistic practices refuse normalcy, while “heteronormative” ones embrace it. There are countless artists, of *any* sexuality or gender identity, who challenge, enrich, redefine, evolve, stand out or disrupt. Race, ethnicity, age, class, education, citizenship, physical ability, neurology, spirituality, and language: many aspects of identity are bound to influence one’s artistic output. Therefore, to what extent does sexuality or gender identity play a role in one’s (non-)conforming relationship with new music? Is divergence from the norm necessarily “queer”? Is queerness inherently LGBT, exclusively LGBT, or can it be both?

The following statements illuminate how a marginalized experience as queer—and this experience’s intersection with other layers of identity—can profoundly inform ways of conceptualizing, creating, disseminating and understanding artistic output. Written by six artists who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, gender non-binary and/or genderqueer, this range of perspectives

art councils), as well as small or large cultural organizations that stem from or espouse these institutions’ models (in the context of Montréal, Société de musique contemporaine du Québec, Groupe Le Vivier and its affiliated organizations).

6. For thoughts on how coloniality is linked to these standardized ways of doing, see Dharmoo, 2019.

aims to broaden our understanding of queerness not only as an identity, but also as an artistic epistemology in and of itself.

Annette Brosin (she/her)

Queerness is present in my musical practice in various ways, some transpiring through deliberation, others simply as some sort of pre-existing condition.

I experienced the latter as an inherent awkwardness in my music when I was pursuing my undergraduate degree in composition: as an inability to conjure the conventionally beautiful. Weirdly enough, even within new music, there are certain expectations and norms that are often interpreted by a general audience as “beautiful.” Additionally, several of my undergraduate courses conveyed the notion that there is supposed to be something specifically *feminine* about the output of female composers. I would try and fight my “awkward” musical tendencies but was never able to fulfill either one of these expectations. Luckily, I was able to have a coming out, and the following years of self-reflection and navigating my queerness have allowed me to slowly learn to embrace (or rather, claim) my “deviant” propensities and to commit to working with them—be it with regards to my personal relationships with others and myself, or to my creative work.

To be clear, I differentiate my queer identity from a homosexual or bisexual identity. It isn’t possible for me to view my “being different” only by looking at who I feel attracted to. Queerness, however, provides me with a lens that involves an awareness of a comprehensive identity politics and a tool to see my performativity really only considerable from an interdisciplinary point of view. One that isn’t just looking into the bedroom,

but into the whole house and with the occasional glance out of the many windows.

I don’t believe I could ever claim that my sexual or gender identity is ever not engaged with my creative output. As much as I engage with music without being constantly conscious of my several identities, the person sitting at the table will always be me: shaped by all my memories, by past and current experiences of navigating a world dominated visually and audibly by straight, white males, when I am a queer, mixed-race female who loves pop and rock as much as she loves new music.

I don’t deem it productive to consider that identity politics should be engaged with the creative process. After all, I believe that such politics can only be perceived by non-queer folk if the work involves elements that, to them, are identifiable as queer. Two questions come to my mind: 1) Does the very nature of “queer” preclude its identifiability? 2) Provided that the answer to the previous question is *no*, should it be the responsibility of queer artists to make the queer as clear to others as possible? Follow-up questions are: To what end? To bring about a kind of socio-political and cultural change?

Historically, the onus has been on marginalized groups to bring about such change. Writing these paragraphs in July 2020, however, it should be clear that it is the overall environment that needs to change.

Imagine this: with regards to music—the programming and curating, the academic discourse and the secondary literature—all of it could finally move away from considering and perceiving music as absolute, universal, self-present, and autonomous. Because it isn’t that simple. Overall musical discourse could move towards perspectives that involve broader cultural and

interdisciplinary frameworks, with an emphasis on historical and cultural contingency, as well as corresponding performative aspects.

Queer perspectives offer this. Queer perspectives don't seek to "understand." Queer perspectives know that everything is complicated.

I take queerness as a place of opportunity. Instead of narrowing down, I allow myself to break up elements that suggest stifling normativity. Rather than trying to make things clear, I hope to make new connections and leave things as open and interpretable as possible so that performers and audiences can experience them in a growing number of ways. To me, this allows for proper discourse inviting a properly diverse audience and properly authentic experiences. In that sense, I believe my work is queer.

Anthony R. Green (he/him)

I. AM. BLACK. AND. QUEER.

Not proud to admit this, but I have spent most of my life not thinking about what these terms mean to me and how they have shaped me personally and professionally. My multifaceted practice includes composing all types of music and divergent theatre works, piano and experimental vocal performance, and engaging in social justice, mostly through artistic expression and through my organization, Castle of our Skins.⁷ While these three elements form the bulk of my practice, I am also a writer, a teacher, a concert and project curator, and an amateur entrepreneur. I also engage in fitness, I enjoy books, TV and film, I cherish family and friends, travelling, *haute cuisine*, *haute couture*, queer and drag

7. See: www.castleskins.org (accessed December 1, 2020).

culture, cats and other cute *aminalz*, and I am thriving in a committed relationship with a beautiful Israeli MRI physicist named Itamar. All of this has conveniently resulted in me not allowing myself to take time to intimate being Black and Queer. And the more subtle yet crippling racism and homophobia within various music scenes didn't exactly guarantee any safety with regards to these personal, necessary pursuits.

Perhaps the opportunity for such conversations and contemplation never arose in a way that felt honest and genuine until quite recently. But there were moments in my past that forced me to examine how my identity affects my life. One occurred when I was about nine. I was biking with my older brother and his friend, and we stopped to fix a flat. A cop came by, asked us what we were doing, and watched our every move, occasionally muttering into his walkie-talkie, until we biked away. As a tween, I remember being followed by security guards in the mall, desperately trying to suppress how my identity may have been the reason for their pursuit. I remember being told by an older white woman that I was a "good example" (of my race) because I could play Chopin and Debussy. Most recently, I remember being the only person in the first-class car of a train from Berlin to Bern who was asked to show identification. I was also the only person in that car with brown skin. Regarding sexuality, I remember being teased for being effeminate, even getting into a fight because I enjoyed knitting. I remember secret bookstore trips to read *xy* magazine and other queer books. My mom took me to church every Sunday, and there often was anti-gay rhetoric from the pulpit, despite the significant number of queer parishioners. Consequently, I was out to my friends, but not my family until my late 20s.

Family always played a role in not being as out in my creative endeavours as I would have liked to be. I didn't want my mom to be confronted by my queerness, and I didn't want her friends to criticize me behind my back. Today, she accepts me and also loves Itamar. We spend Thanksgivings together, and she knows to give him extra collard greens. My dad also accepts me and loves Itamar, and sends love to him at the end of our phone chats. Now, I have more safety, knowing that if I premiere a love song to Itamar, or celebrate queer love in a composition, my family will understand—perhaps not completely, but enough for them to never want to stop loving me. By starting *Castle of our Skins*, I've plunged deep into Black identity via classical music, and have gained a pride in belonging to this rich, powerful history and legacy, a pride that the gatekeepers of classical music do not encourage, yet simultaneously want to control. I'm just starting to do similar work regarding my queerness. Hopefully within the coming years, I'll be as uninhibited as I can possibly be. For now, I will keep saying I AM BLACK AND QUEER until that little feeling of uneasiness when saying this completely disappears.

Luke Nickel (he/him)

When I think about queerness in relation to my compositional practice, three memories continue to emerge and submerge. Each relates to a queer experience of time:

1. In the first memory, I am staring at a blank page. A piece of music sits in my head like a painting on a wall. I need to transform that static painting into music that occurs in time. I try to write down some rhythms, and find myself frustrated. I cannot imagine how any-

one chooses so many specific events that occur in time. I cannot even choose one.

2. In the second memory, I introduce a grad school teacher to my current work—a mix of notated pieces and text scores. He is baffled as he moves to the text scores. He says that he and his colleagues have done this work already. He says I am stuck in the 1970s. He says this as if time is linear, as if things happen only once, as if we only move forward and beyond, and never around or through or with or beside. He says this as if we did not lose a generation of gay and queer artists to HIV/AIDS between then and now.

3. In the third memory, it is a hot night on a bench at a bus stop. I am speaking with a good friend—Cassandra Miller—about an idea for a new piece. The conversation stretches into the night. I fizz with the pleasure of being around my chosen family. The piece lingers in the air. It will never be realized.

Eventually, these memories fuse and I reject written musical notation altogether. I begin undoing my musical training and making pieces by transmitting poetic instructions to musicians in unrecorded conversations and short recorded broadcasts. Listening and memory become key aspects of my collaborative practice. My speaking voice becomes both my pen and my instrument.

The results of this undoing are far-reaching. Making music takes a different kind of time because my collaborators must engage in a process that is mostly unfamiliar to them and that requires them to listen actively. It becomes more difficult for me to apply for grants. My

work cannot be easily evaluated because its process is purposefully hidden and ephemeral. I disregard the idea of a fixed legacy. At the same time, the pleasure and meaningfulness of creating reaches an apex. I work with fewer people, but they are the right people.

I invite my queerness to seep into my work: I borrow musical fragments from deceased, repressed LGBT composers; I dance with a musical collaborator in Berlin at a club; and I purposefully undo my musical training by embracing an explosive plurality of creative practices. I draw rocks, I design roller coasters, I make techno, and I tattoo on skin.

Rejecting written musical notation may put me at odds with much of my niche field of eurological music composition, but it places me in resonance with—and in debt to—many other practices of music making. My feeling of otherness within my field is at once familiar because of my lived queer experience, and also somewhat false because it is an otherness that is at least partially of my own choosing.

Now this undoing must continue beyond written musical notation and singular classical music training. It is past time for me to address my role in colonialism. As a queer white cisgender man, I have often unconsciously chosen to champion able-bodied settler-descended artists rather than disabled and/or BIPOC individuals. I must change this. Similarly, in my writing I must prioritize citing new voices in order to transform the Eurocentric discourse around experimental music. As I am learning now in a project led by author Dylan Robinson, I must also extend this undoing to the ways in which I listen. I want to learn to listen with my queer ear: to listen across time; to listen as an other and with others; and to listen to and with pleasure.

Emily Doolittle (she/her)

The last time I wrote about my sexuality and my music was in 1995. I was 22, and newly trying to figure out if “bi” was a good label for me—after a teenagehood spent trying to ignore sexuality entirely, because I didn’t want to acknowledge my attraction to women. If the word “queer” had been available to me, perhaps I would have found that a better fit, but the word was not in common usage in my circles at that time—as it is, I’ve never really settled comfortably into a label, perhaps because I resent feeling like if we don’t claim labels, we’ll be assumed to be straight. I’m more comfortable saying I’ve been attracted to and had relationships with people of a variety of genders. Though my sexuality felt like the most pressing aspect of my identity to figure out, I was dealing with the feeling of being not this enough to be that, and not that enough to be this on a number of fronts. I was born in Halifax—which was much more culturally homogeneous then than it is now—to parents who had recently immigrated from the United States, and never felt that I “belonged” there in the way that my classmates with family going back generations in Nova Scotia did—though in retrospect, Halifax feels very much like “home.” My ancestry is partly Jewish: I didn’t fit in with the predominantly Christian cultural backgrounds of many of the kids I grew up with, but I also didn’t fit in with the then very small and conservative Jewish community in Nova Scotia—which at that time was not very welcoming to intermarried families. And as a child of a difficult divorce, I was all too aware that most stories have multiple sides.

Looking back, this all seems a bit self-absorbed, and, of course, there would have been people who felt much

more excluded from the mainstream—I'm white, cis, mostly able-bodied: but I was 22, and not very worldly. I wish I could find my 1995 essay, because I remember very keenly feeling that my sense of not being quite this, and not being quite that, was a formative force in developing my musical voice. I loved and felt drawn to so many genres of music, and to so many schools within each of these genres, but never felt like I “belonged” in any. At the time, this felt like a lack, like a fault in myself. I thought I ought to be able to take a stand for one kind of music and against another: I'm not sure why! Now I see it as a strength: I like being a bit of this and a bit of that, and find myself seeking out situations where ambiguity and multiplicity are embraced, both socially and musically.

My first instinct, when asked how my sexuality is reflected in my music now, was to say that it isn't—or at least not beyond my interest in multiple styles and genres, and lack of adherence to any one. Few of my pieces centre romantic or erotic love of any sort. I prefer to write music which allows for multiple possible emotional and/or narrative interpretations by performers and listeners. Even when there is a story—and I do like stories—I want it to be interpretable on many levels. I don't want to tell stories which privilege one kind of relationship above another. So on second thought, maybe there is an indirect connection. I've never felt comfortable with stories being imposed on me, and I also don't want to impose stories on others. I always want to remain open to new understandings, new kinds of interactions, new interpretations, new feelings: and I want my music to facilitate a similar kind of openness and sense of possibility for those who play or listen to it.

Symon Henry (they/them – ille)

Crier sur *mute*, dans le vide, en permanence. État stable. Parfois, une petite enflure: la courbe de volume croît puis décroît à peine. Plus rarement elle s'amenuise, apaisement passager. Dans ce cri continuum, une envie d'arriver au monde, d'y résonner avec les sonorités ambiantes. Les scientifiques sociaux disent « intersectionnalité ». Ma *queerness* de genre et d'attirances. Mon arabitude et ma québécoisité. Ma santé mentale failible. Ma pauvreté. « Il n'y a que la musique qui compte, je n'entends pas les couleurs, les genres et les orientations », disaient – disent encore? – les collègues, les directions artistiques. J'ai joué le jeu au piano puis sur du papier à musique: Liszt, Ravel, Boulez, la Sorbonne, les diplômes et les prix, composer pour orchestre, pour quatuor à cordes, pour l'ancrage et le capital culturels, parce qu'on finit par y croire.

Crier sur *mute* pendant deux décennies. Une personne comme moi ne peut pas montrer sa colère: l'isolement n'en serait que plus grand, la carrière artistique impossible. C'est ce qu'on m'a enseigné, ce qu'on attendait de moi pour que mon travail et ma réalité soient validés. Ce cri, c'est l'enfouissement derrière une esquisse de sourire, un hochement de tête poli, de mille petites phrases cinglantes:

printemps 2004, ton d'adulte responsable

— Avec une oreille comme la vôtre, vous ne serez jamais musicien.

C'est ce que m'affirme un homme blanc hétérosexuel assez âgé, barbe fournie et bouclée, légèrement teintée de jaune fumeur; moi, je fixais le diachylon qui maintenait les deux ovales de ses lunettes en place. Je vivais sur un sofa fleuri, à l'époque. J'ai appris plus tard qu'il

était rembourré de paille : j'ai trouvé ça poétique. L'avis de cet homme détermina mon inadmission universitaire dans l'institution dont je rêvais afin d'échapper à mon monde. Heureusement, existent les universités de la deuxième chance. Stigmates et apprentissages de plus.

Cet homme n'était pas totalement dans le faux. J'ai développé de l'empathie pour ses limites de compréhension face à l'altérité de mon oreille, de ma réalité, tout en continuant de nommer la violence de son ignorance. Avec mon oreille, je ne pourrai jamais être un-e musicien-ne s'inscrivant en douceur ou en spectacularité dans la grande tradition eurologique classique. Non plus dans la tradition pop ou « indie » anglo-étatsunienne. Mon oreille est – a toujours été – autre. À quelle(s) partie(s) de mon identité dois-je cette diffraction ? Et ce besoin de créer un sens sonore malgré tout ?

automne 2010, avec déférence

— *That's just French shit.*

Classe de composition sur le bord du Pacifique, seuls mots reçus du « maître » – homme blanc homosexuel assez âgé – à propos d'une de mes toutes premières pièces d'envergure.

été 2012, ton bienveillant

— Votre pièce a un arrière-goût de merde.

C'est ce que m'affirme un autre « maître » – blanc hétérosexuel assez âgé, barbe soignée. Nous étions installé-es dans la cafétéria d'une institution de perfectionnement idyllique où j'avais été invité-e *in extremis*. La voix du bellâtre était douce, cultivée, assertive.

été 2012, ton mielleux

— Je ne savais pas trop comment vous dire d'arrêter la musique.

C'était le lendemain, ou peut-être la veille, de la discussion avec l'homme âgé bien mis. C'était cette fois un « maître » blanc hétérosexuel légèrement plus jeune, imberbe, cheveux hirsutes, devant une quinzaine de collègues à qui je venais de présenter mon travail, rassemblé-es dans une salle de conférence avec vue sur le fleuve sublime. Le silence des collègues.

Tough love.

Il ne s'agit pas ici d'apitoiement ni de vengeance. Il s'agit plutôt de nommer cette violence conservatrice, colonialiste, capacitiste et classiste ; d'illustrer que ces phrases ne sont pas anecdotiques, mais systémiques. Qu'elles s'exponentialisent dans nos têtes à chaque moment de doute. Il s'agit de nommer le fait que tout cela est surmontable, mais au prix d'un lourd tribut – personnel, financier, social. Il s'agit de nommer le fait que mes projets – sonorement, formellement et téléologiquement autres – continuent d'exister une décennie plus tard grâce à des interprètes et à des directions artistiques d'exception. Grâce aux autres collègues des marges. Je suis fièr-e de nous. Je suis fièr-e de moi.

J'ai souvent été finaliste au prestigieux Prix d'Europe de composition. Chaque fois, je me suis préparé-e le même discours mental : nommer ces phrases, les plafonds de verre – genre, origine, orientation, santé mentale, classe sociale ; nommer aussi le bonheur d'exprimer la beauté du monde sous forme de sonorités lyriques bruitistes décomplexées, celui de dessiner le son plutôt que de le composer, de savoir mes

communautés d'appartenances de plus en plus fortes et respectées. Au plus récent gala, j'ai laissé tomber le veston bleu poudre que je portais tous les deux ans pour l'occasion. J'ai minutieusement choisi maquillage, vernis à ongles et jupons. Je ne sais pas ce que je voulais prouver à cette salle homogène et triste. Quand mon collègue – jeune homme blanc brillant diplômé de la plus prestigieuse université du royaume canadien – l'emporta, j'ai été étrangement soulagé·e: je ne suis toujours pas l'un·e d'entre euxelles.

Teiya Kasahara 笠原 貞野 (they/them)

Before I began a career in opera, I used to write poetry and compose piano and guitar music. I saw myself becoming a rock star or an action hero in my wildest dreams. And I dreamt wildly! But my formal education told me to focus on my operatic singing only: to learn roles, study, and perform. There was no room for any other exploration because the goal was for the opera industry to see me as a legitimate professional opera singer. This expectation (still held today) also bled into cultivating the perfect image of me as a soprano, one that was undeniably heterosexual, white, and feminine, presenting a particular idea of soft, demure, “ingenue” womanhood. The pressure to be seen as legitimate increased when it meant continuing to deny my queerness (both sexuality and gender) in professional spaces. As I began to reject the industry's expectations of me, I found myself searching for what I had denied myself creatively as well. I had to make changes, because I knew the opera industry wouldn't change for me.

In the 2017 Emerging Creators Unit at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, I wrote and first performed an operatic play called *The Queen In Me* (TQIM), which

addresses my frustration and continual gender, racial and sexual oppression within the opera industry as a gender non-binary, bi-racial, masculine-presenting queer soprano. The creation of TQIM allowed me to unpack the complicated and demoralizing experiences that I encountered, and to critique the art form and industry through catharsis and humour. But it wasn't—and isn't—as easy as simply becoming creatively unmoored. Now there were all these blocks that weren't there before.

I realized I had changed. I was now conditioned by a colonial, Eurocentric art form that slowly and pervasively left me internalizing racial inferiority (and superiority) while keeping a tight lid on my otherness. I loved opera, but what I wanted was for the opera industry to love me back. As I unpacked my own latent homophobia and transphobia and began to honour all sides of myself, I decided to do the same artistically as well. This choice is still a daily choice for me, active and intentional: embodying fully who I am. It is an act of rebellion against the oppressive confines of the industry where I was treated as though, by being myself, I was disgracing the “sacredness” of opera. Now I choose to honour the sacredness of my body, and my personal well-being.

In 2018 the expansion of TQIM gave birth to another work, called *Yoru no Jo-ou, or The Queer of the Night*, which is currently in development. This interdisciplinary project combines opera, taiko (Japanese drumming), and original and found music and text. It takes its inspiration from the dichotomies I possess within myself including my polarizing Japanese and German heritage, and the masculine and the feminine gender expressions I have always struggled with.

I don't want to abandon opera. There is so much sonic beauty, power, and theatricality within the canonic works. Sadly, that beauty is surrounded by racist and misogynistic storylines. I increasingly find it troubling to perform in such works, and continue to reckon with this. I think one way forward is to ensure that these works are presented truthfully and in respectful, transparent ways by artists whose lived experiences can best reflect the storylines. We have to move far beyond "blackface" and "yellowface," and it cannot stop there. We have so many diverse talents in the opera world who rarely get a chance to be seen or heard because they do not fit the stereotypical mould, and many are used for a one-time, token-ticking box by predominantly White institutions that wish to absolve themselves of addressing their complicity in perpetuating systemic racism.

After performing my first *Madama Butterfly* with the Windsor Symphony Orchestra, I decided to pick up where Puccini left off. I sought to question what Butterfly could have been doing and dreaming of during those three years of her life from geisha to bride, wife to woman, finally mother, and understand where her race, sex, and social class in Meiji-era Japan intersects with my race, sex, gender, and privilege in 2020 Toronto. Through a solo set of opera, electronics, and a looping machine, "The Ballad of Chō-chō san" reimagines and reinstills the original cultural inspiration appropriated for this work by elevating the Japanese folk songs quoted in the opera, forefronting the Japanese language, and various Japanese instruments (mostly created electronically) such as taiko, shamisen, fue, and koto. This is one small step in the right direction for me as an intersectional opera singer and interdisciplinary creator.

I have decided that I cannot and I will not create without thoroughly acknowledging the way my love for this colonial artform intersects with my queerness, race, and privilege. The space where my creativity can live simultaneously beside and beyond opera is my act of decolonization, defiance, taking opera back: it is my activism.

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I am grateful for the contributions of the six artists who agreed to share their queer perspectives for this article. I have been mentally mapping out the different ways I could conclude such a collection of texts. I even wondered whether a conclusion was necessary; could an open-ended, porous and inconclusive ending be, in fact, some form of queer epistemology? Revisiting Annette's text, I was reminded how "queer perspectives don't seek to 'understand,' [they] know that everything is complicated." She also put forth a question asking whether it should be "the responsibility of queer artists to make the queer as clear to others as possible?" On one hand, I believe these six statements speak for themselves; on the other hand, I acknowledge that my perspective could constructively enlighten a readership with a different outlook and experience. However, I don't want to impose my own reading or imply that mine is the most correct or valuable insight. Emily mentioned she "never felt comfortable with stories being imposed on [her], and [she also doesn't] want to impose stories on others." I too believe in the strength of openness, I too "find myself seeking out situations where ambiguity and multiplicity are embraced." The only conclusions I can draw are the ones that speak to my own experience, not those of a reader whose identity I can't assume.

Yet, many passages in these texts deeply resonated with me. Luke and Symon’s recollections of misguided figures of authority were all too familiar. I’ve come to reject many values that were drilled into me during my training as a composer: the obligatory lineage of Western classical music, the ocular-centric primacy of the score, and the suggestion that audiences are of secondary importance, or that their opinion doesn’t matter at all. I have been intentionally self-distancing from the new music scene, with the purpose of growing closer to other subcultures. Luke mentioned how his rejection of musical notation helped place him “in resonance with—and in debt to—many other practices of music making.” I have felt a similar sense of debt and resonance towards practices from outside the usual canon twice: first through my live-arts piece *Anthropologies imaginaires*, which connected me to embodied practices and live-arts, and second through the development of my drag persona Bijuriya,⁸ which allowed me to explore the intersection between my queerness and my brownness in ways that could *never* have happened with a 99% white and 90% straight new music audience. Even in the midst of a global pandemic, when most projects and events—the ones usually legitimized by our structures—are tremendously hindered, I’ve experienced strange, yet glorious moments of artistic freedom and social relevancy through my drag practice. The future of my relationship—or my level of engagement—with new music is honestly in question; this self-distancing may allow me to reassess my sense of belonging in ways similar to those Symon expressed,

8. Bijuriya’s journey can be followed on Instagram and Facebook with the handle @bijuriya.drag.

or it may energize me and lead to the creation of new hybrid works.

Reading the testimonies of the BIPOC queer artists who contributed to this article, I was reminded of Muñoz and the concept of “disidentification,” which unpacks how different types of marginalization might coexist. Disidentification is defined as a “mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology.”⁹ Anthony works “on and against” Western contemporary art music; he acknowledges Western classical music has historically erased the contributions of Black composers, yet he has “a pride in belonging to this rich, powerful history and legacy” and his work critically engages with these challenges. Teiya works “on and against” the operatic tradition; they acknowledge the art form’s systemic racism and the fact the “opera industry wouldn’t change for [them],” yet these contradictions offer the opportunity to “express [their] journey of gender and internalized racial oppression” through the creation of new artistic work. A practice that disidentifies hopes to produce something new, achieve something different: a better representation of intersecting identities.

The importance of intersectionality is increasingly acknowledged in social justice, academic and artistic circles, whereas its discussion in the new music community still feels new, tentative and vulnerable. Teiya, Annette, Symon and myself all mention our mixed background; Anthony clearly states he is Black; Emily

9. Muñoz, 1999, p. 11.

and Luke both acknowledge how their whiteness affords privilege. These self-identifications matter, *especially* in discussions about LGBTQ2IA+ issues where the dominant culture—or the dominant stream within a minority subculture—has the convenient tendency to whitewash history. Every Pride season, activists relentlessly have to remind privileged members of the community that Stonewall was a riot, that we owe our rights and progress to the pivotal contribution of Black trans women who are constantly erased by history. I thus encourage LGBTQ2IA+ members of the new music community to be in tune and learn from the conversations happening in different artistic or social justice networks, to be proactive in self-education, and to recognize the power dynamics within their own marginalized communities. Exercising empathy and sharpening our understanding of divergent realities, perspectives and experiences can only lead to growth—personal, interpersonal and societal.

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