

The idea of having a diverse musical practice has long been important to me. Before I had a more concrete articulation of why I feel this is necessary, it was personally gratifying. Prior to composing, I picked up piano at a very early age and have continued since—I majored in piano during my undergrad at IU, along with composition and computer science. The piano introduced me to composition at the same time as it introduced me to different ways of experiencing music: studying jazz and playing keyboards in various bands with my friends shaped what I started writing and the other way around. This gave me a sense of ease in stepping outside whatever traditions I find myself initially inside of, something I have tried to cultivate as a conscious element of my work. I continue to try staying active as a performer: I regularly play other new student works, including my own when possible. By performing, I am not only able to understand but to enjoy better—this has motivated me to play cello with a number of orchestras and chamber groups, put together a band during my time in NYC as a guitarist, and gain a fluency with production and sound design (something I am currently making use of at Juilliard in a collaboration with a choreographer).

Just as being a performer lends advantages to being a composer, maintaining interests outside of music lends advantages to being a musician. I pursued a computer science degree with a math minor and specialization in AI during undergrad (the latter seeming like an increasingly serendipitous choice over the last couple years) in addition to piano and composition. This has not only given me another tool for approaching “problems” in the most general sense, but a separation in how I value the creative process and the experience that others have consuming the process’s results. The technological and programming fluency that came with it have given me an easy path into and a different understanding of electronic music, a medium that has become increasingly important to me.

My time in a conservatory setting has also caused some introspection about my own non-academic experience. Many things that I assumed were defective idiosyncracies in the ways that interact with the world I now understand to be expressions of generalized anxiety as just one component in neurodiversity. Much of my recent work has started from a place of dissecting the various ways of how my brain seems to operate differently. I have also learned that focusing on a single topic for too long reduces not only my enjoyment of it but my capacity to operate in it. For that reason, I have tried to get out of conservatory-mode as much as possible by reading and taking classes at Columbia—I am able to provide more of an interesting perspective when I can cross-reference, and the surface area to which my perspective can be applied increases accordingly.