

Mark Applebaum: *Stanford Promotion Statement*

Since receiving tenure I have continued to productively explore—one might say fanatically investigate—the idiosyncratic braid of artistic concerns that characterize my experimental inquiry, an instinctive, impassioned, and impatient agenda that frequently ignores the concerns of the “professional composer” in favor of posing intrinsic questions through the creation of new musical works in an effort to assuage fundamental if unruly curiosity and stave off existential boredom. I am steadfast in my dedication to *an aspiration to succeed but a willingness to fail* in service of new artistic insight. My own idea of what constitutes music—its ontological boundaries and expressive capacities—has remained open (unnervingly so for some audiences). During my years since tenure it has only expanded, and considerably so. (I’m especially interested in music that makes no sound, for example.) In that regard I would identify tenure as the most unexpectedly important gift: while I thought that my work was fiercely independent before, I now see that the confidence bestowed through tenure has freed my subconscious to explore further vistas. It has also afforded me the opportunity to unapologetically revisit (at least on occasion) a radically traditional agenda alongside my more typically progressive one.

The newest development has been a way of framing my work into two categories that, for me, carry moral valences: *experimentation* and *consumption*. Initially a response to an artistic crisis (I have them at least annually, but this was the most existential one of all, a profound and prolonged moment of asking “What’s the point of *me* making new work?”), I find the admittedly simplistic dichotomy a helpful way of organizing the abundant and continually increasing landscape of my artistic praxis. In essence, I recognize my compulsion to work in both unique (allied with *philanthropic*) and well-worn (allied with *hedonic*) cultural spaces, but I feel that my work in the former conveys a greater, more authentic “good.” A short overview of this very personal construction—*Aesthetic Dichotomy*—appears in my online portfolio. This conceptual framework has also become a cornerstone in my lectures at other institutions because I find that audiences, particularly students and younger composers, find it useful, revealing, and productively shocking to hear candid explications of an established composer’s struggles and doubts, as well as the breakthroughs (whether real or imagined) and newfound commitment that lead forward to new and worthwhile spaces of artistic possibility.

Lecturing at other institutions remains an abiding commitment. Since tenure I’ve given dozens of lectures at some 50+ institutions such as Princeton, Columbia, Yale, Harvard, UC Berkeley, Indiana University, the Cincinnati Conservatory, McGill, Queen’s University Belfast, the University of Melbourne, the Rotterdam Conservatory, the Sorbonne, and Oxford, to name a few. But I’ve also made potentially greater impact in the lives of students during residencies at many less “prestigious” institutions, such as Cerritos Community College in Los Angeles, Sam Houston State University in Texas, and Depauw University in Indiana. I’m proud of these, as well as my presence as featured artist in residence at places ranging from Cal State Fresno to the *Pro Arte Festival* in Russia (as one of two composers representing that year’s highlighted country—the USA); as master artist at the Atlantic Center for the Arts; as visiting professor at the University of Chile in Santiago and featured faculty at the Antwerp Conservatory’s *LABORATORIUM* course; and as keynote speaker at the *IAB Conecta Conference* in Mexico City (the largest media conference in Latin America). I’ve given a TEDx talk that has been seen by 1.2 million viewers, thus making it (unpredictably and certainly without commensurate merit) my most known enterprise. In it I talk about how boredom is the principal motivation behind my work, as well as the provocation to undertake roles ancillary to the narrowly circumscribed definition of composer: choreographer, carpenter, dramaturge, inventor, etc. This talk is not especially brilliant, but it does succeed at two things that are essential to me: it signals my dedication to far-flung artistic experience even when such polyartistic pursuit (to borrow Richard Kostelanetz’ term) risks criticisms of dilettantism; and it unexpectedly serves as a beacon, eliciting far-flung expressions of meaningful resonance—email depositions that arrive weekly: a catalyst for an elementary school teacher to change her curriculum; a role model for a disenfranchised teen who, until he discovered my work, felt alone; etc. In my work deliberately pitched at more specialized (elite, esoteric) audiences these precious prizes remain comparatively elusive.

Back to my music—or rather to the calculus of prestige enumeration—I have fulfilled commissions from the Kronos Quartet, San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, GRM in Paris, Banff Centre, Spoleto USA, and Fromm Foundation, among others; been featured at Other Minds; and undertaken a fruitful enterprise with Stanford’s Cantor Arts Center resulting in my yearlong, 72-foot pictographic score project *The Metaphysics of Notation*. Emerging from these diverse artistic enterprises is an abiding constellation of comingling interests:

choreography (and specifically an expansive nonsense sign language of my own devise), absurdist theater, graphic notation, silence, percussion music, and deliberately ludic inter-performer relationships. The body of work continues to demonstrate an almost religious commitment to syntheses of rigor *and* whimsy, gravity *and* levity. This can be seen in the aptly titled *Darmstadt Kindergarten*, a string quartet written for a Kronos Quartet children's concert in which thorny modernist counterpoint and twitchy rhythms are gradually replaced by highly disciplined but utterly ridiculous hand gestures—the kind of ritual that appeals to adult and child sensibilities alike, mutually inclusive, pandering to no one. My *Concerto for Florist* exhibits a similarly playful vibe.

And, extending from this aesthetic proclivity, I often lecture about the dangers of glib, new-for-its-own-sake “innovation” that lacks depth and rigor, something I fear just as much as blindly accepting tradition for its own sake. For this reason I've virtually halted my feverish invention of new sound-sculptures, preferring instead to learn how to really play the mouseketier (2001). Although I'm the world's best mouseketier player, I'm also the world's worst. The latter observation is the more useful one because it compels me to cogitate on what an intermediate and advanced level would be in its culture of one, or what kind of mannerist state of the art I might concoct out of absent pre-classic and classic antecedents. And *Rabbit Hole*, a fastidious, contrapuntal work based on page turns and making almost no sound, is so carefully wrought with fussy details that it preemptively defends against detractors who might say it is just a silly idea. *It is a silly idea*; but it is a highly considered, elaborately manicured one that took two years to construct. I have an almost pathological anticipatory defense mode for these “tricks and gimmicks.” *The Metaphysics of Notation's* ridiculous detail, scale, and meticulous visual logic (it can be read vertically or horizontally, and it loops in the fashion of a torus) seems to invite not only the rightful criticism “that's a preposterous idea” but also a conciliatory follow-up: “...but I guess Applebaum was really committed, so maybe it is pretty impressive if you are into that sort of thing.” My ludicrous inventions should not be superficial musings; they must be deep, considered universes of outlandish thought.

Since tenure I've continued to play jazz piano at events such as the Oxford Jazz Festival, and I perform with my father in the Applebaum Jazz Piano Duo. I have also had two more CDs and a DVD of my concert music published, and I've made several videos for my Vimeo channel (which seems to be an entirely apt way of documenting work in today's media landscape). Other ensembles have recorded my work on at least six commercial CDs that I know of (with more in store), and there are now dozens (and quite possibly hundreds) of performances on YouTube by performers from around the globe. I honestly can't keep track of them, and I seem to have recently passed a kind of critical mark in which there are now significantly more performances of which I'm not informed than there are of ones to which I'm alerted. I once thought it a good sign if at least once per month a piece of mine was played somewhere in the world; now I'm closing in on whole months in which at least one performance of my music is given each day.

So it seems that my international visibility has expanded considerably since tenure. Probably the most performed work is *Aphasia* for hand gestures and tape. Since 2011, I know of almost 200 performances in 17 countries, and not a week goes by without a request from a new performer. *Aphasia* can be played by anyone, but it is typically performed by percussionists—folks with plucky dispositions and the native urge to acquire new techniques. I've written a lot of music for percussionists. It is not only the expansive timbral palette that appeals to me. It is the sense of that community's identity, an intrepid one that matches my artistic adventurousness. Instead of saying “this is what I do, write me something like that,” the percussionists I know say “this is what I do, write me something completely different.” *Straitjacket*, commissioned by Steven Schick for the first *Roots & Rhizomes Percussion Residency* at Banff, is a work of which I'm very proud, a piece that responds to this kind of open-mindedness. And *30*—a piece for intersecting percussion solo, quartet, and septet—represents an important consortium commission from 21 distinguished groups. Most recently, 61 percussionists co-commissioned *Composition Machine #1*, a piece which generates its own score through what I consider a near-perfect blend of determinate and indeterminate enterprise, a veritable fusion of the composer-performer partnership. (I very much hope you will read the section *A Welcome Problem* in the forward to its score.)

PASIC (*The Percussive Arts Society International Convention*) has dedicated entire portrait concerts to me in each of the past two years, an honor that has never before occurred. Is modesty an attribute of these statements? I hope not because what I'm saying is that (just as David Hasselhoff is huge in Germany) I'm huge in the world of contemporary percussion. Perhaps this is just defensive offense because my artistic inclinations don't lead me toward a career with Donaueschingen orchestral premieres, Pulitzer, Guggenheim, or Rome Prizes, or

frequent *New York Times* reviews. (Although the latter did manage to cite *Aphasia* in its *Best of the Arts 2014* list.) Instead, my work connects me with an unusual but increasingly broad and artistically fertile set of overlapping musical communities, be they widely exalted or more locally admired. I won't (or is it *can't*?) be a different composer—my profile is what it is. But for all its diversity I think it is a profile of continuity, one that extends directly from the curious composer I've always been: *le compositeur curieux* and *le curieux compositeur*.

Separate teaching and service statements appear in my online portfolio. But let me share a few highlights here. I remain fully invested as a teacher and mentor at Stanford, and I'm grateful to have been recognized as the *Hazy Family University Fellow*—one of the *Bass Fellowships in Undergraduate Education*. I've designed many new curricula, including freshman seminars, composition courses at CCRMA for electronic musicians, and multimedia arts practica taught in our overseas programs in Paris, Oxford, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. In order to better teach the popular music appreciation and songwriting courses I've designed, I learned to play the electric guitar. My dedication has been directed mostly toward my undergraduate and graduate students at Stanford, but it is also represented by visiting professor residencies at the University of Oregon and the University of Chile; in courses taught at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Antwerp Conservatory, and Singapore Republic Polytechnic; and at Hope House (a halfway house in Redwood City for women parolees with chemical dependencies at which I team-taught a course on humor in music). I care deeply about the students with whom I work closely, but my interest in education is seen more broadly in my service as a member of the Carleton College Board of Trustees to which I've been recently appointed.

At Stanford I conceived and hosted the first-ever conference on pedagogical praxis in graduate composition for which over one hundred faculty and students participated, including keynotes from distinguished colleagues at eight peer institutions, and a subsequent volume I co-edited and published in *Contemporary Music Review*, including my own paper. The symposium adjusted my approach as a teacher and led to important structural changes in our own DMA curriculum. Plans are now underway for a follow-up symposium of even greater scope, including educational strategies relevant to undergraduates and in other types of academic institutions.

My commitment to Stanford is also shown in my record of campus service. These engagements have always tilted toward the good I can do to improve our educational infrastructure. I was the chair of C-UAFA (Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid) for which I convened an important roundtable of diverse high school principals to tell *us* what Stanford should be looking for, an inversion of the traditional resume arms race. Code named "The Rehabilitation of Childhood"—which to me is as earnest as it is implausibly optimistic—the idea was to say that Stanford and its peer institutions should stop boasting of the crushingly low admissions rate that confers elite status and start conceiving ourselves as unwitting, cartel perpetrators of the problem. I also serve on the Bing Overseas Study Program Oversight Committee and will review Stanford's Paris site this coming year. I've served on various committees such as SUES (the Study of Undergraduate Education at Stanford), the Provost's Diversity Cabinet, and the Introductory Seminars Advisory Board, and was elected to the Faculty Senate. I'm regularly invited to give lectures at glitzy alumni events such as *Stanford+Connects* in New York City, *Leading Matters* at the San Francisco Moscone Convention Center, Reunion/Homecoming *Classes Without Quizzes* presentations, and Parents Weekend lectures. I'm especially proud of my involvement selecting the common reading and moderating the panel for the 2012 freshman orientation program *Three Books*, one in which I, as an artist, was deliberately invited to think beyond the book as the solely puissant mode of expression. This was a precious chance to serve Stanford as an institutional citizen and make the broadest impact as an educator.

I have also exerted significant influence over our DMA admissions and I'm extremely proud of the diverse community of student composers we have assembled—all of them extraordinary and gifted, but ranging widely in their idiom (from visual music to installation art, live animation to new concert ritual, gritty modernism to expressive lyricism). None of them sound like any of us on the faculty, and I love that. Most recently I've secured a three-year grant affording our graduate composers an annual budget of \$70,000 for the performance of new works, a resource that has made an enormously favorable impact on the program.

Off campus I have curated and organized the extensive UCSD *Sonic Diasporas* Alumni Reunion Festival, served on ICMC and American Composers Forum adjudication committees, acted as an external referee for twelve tenure cases at ten institutions, and served as a board member of the Other Minds new music organization.