

Four Words – Elise Arancio

Closet

I spent my childhood in closets. Something about being shut away from the world, in my own world, was preferable to me. As I got older it became less acceptable for me to spend my days confined with the coat hangers, so composing became my closet. When writing music, I was transported from the earthly domain into one that was unconstrained by time and space. While I've often been tempted to lock myself inside, I've come to realize the importance of opening the door, of moving between the world of music and the world outside of it. I've realized the importance of not being wholly ignorant of reality even when suspending it, of standing in the doorway with one foot in and one foot out.

As with my childhood closet, this composing closet is where I bring the trinkets and baubles I collect in the outside world. My primary plaything has always been words, but lately I have also been collecting the sounds of objects. I'm fascinated by the ripeness of the mundane, the creative potential in the objects and rituals of everyday life. Whether it's a chord progression, fragments of poetry or melody, a physical phenomenon, or a bundle of complex feelings, the closet is where I play with these things, dissect them, listen to them, and eventually discover what they are trying to say. Play is essential to me. In the initial stage of the creative process, it's important for me to approach the things that inspire or confuse me the way that small children explore their surroundings: not oversaturated with intention or preconception, but instead with curiosity.

Princeton is filled with endless treasures to squirrel away into my closet, with its exceptionally broad-minded and multifaceted student and faculty composers, as well as its unique curriculum and program structure that values growing artistic language through exploration. These would help stimulate the creative and passionate environment required for the optimal, most productive play experience. It is the ideal setting for my next dream closet.

Conversation

My music is driven by conversation. It's composed of animated dialogues between and within different instruments and mediums. It's often the result of a conversation between words and sound. A piece will often examine a personality, feeling, or moment in time via different affectations, ranging from the mundane dinner table argument, to the tragic effects of beauty in the life of a movie star, to a sonic rendition of an e.e. cummings poem. I am always seeking to deepen my understanding of traversing between the two mediums of music and text, the linguification of sound and action and the sonification of linguistics.

One of my favorite types of conversation is juxtaposition. I'm fascinated by putting distinct, sometimes disparate, elements together, how by merely placing them next to each other, their individual identities are altered and deepened, and they develop a new, collective identity. Whether juxtaposing complexity and simplicity, consonance and dissonance, the electronic and the acoustic, found objects and traditional instruments, speaking and singing, or Led Zeppelin

and Bach, I'm fascinated by how juxtaposition establishes their distance and closeness, how their colors may bleed onto each other, or how one may make the other more vibrant.

Juxtaposition creates a change of perspective; it allows a listener to look a piece in the mouth instead of the eyes and see an entirely different picture.

By engaging in conversations between multiple mediums and genres, I aim to achieve a type of synergy between them, and occupy a space of holistic creativity where the aesthetic being produced originates in the shifting constellation between all elements. Even in my works that don't explicitly combine different mediums, I'm interested in understanding how my love of electronic music or rap or jazz or poetry manifests in, say, a solo trombone piece, or how my love of Webern can manifest in a short story that I write. The Princeton campus has already proved to be open to conversation across fields of study, which I've seen as I've started collaborating with a friend of mine, a Princeton architecture student, on his thesis project. Because much of the music of the faculty members is so clearly engaged in conversation with many of the elements that I'm interested in, including text, electronics, and acoustic music, Princeton is an ideal incubator in which to further explore the conversations between disciplines and mediums that I've begun.

The Body

Energy and impulse are often central to my work, and I look to further my exploration of the establishment and disruption of pulse. I'm interested in the quality of lopsided rhythms that makes moving to them feel like an itch you're compelled to scratch, and how the bend of a microtone into a barely perceptible shade of blue can be felt in the stomach, how a well voiced chord produces the same effect as cold air on your skin. On the macro scale, I'm fascinated by the physical reactions produced by such a metaphysical medium.

Sponge

The best advice I ever received was to be a sponge. Though I love living in my closet, part of the joy and responsibility of being an artist is being awake to the place and time that I'm in, to explore and discover. As a young sponge, I was fed prog rock and jazz, and sitting in the viola section, I absorbed the sounds of the orchestra. I danced in my kitchen to Earth Wind and Fire, and learned how to play the ukulele because of Joni Mitchell. I fell in love with the versatility and humor of the Beatles while I soaked up the visceral expressionism of my favorite rap group, Brockhampton, the rhythmic complexity and range of the electronic artist Aphex Twin, the vibrant orchestration and juxtaposition of Stravinsky's music, and the clarity and focus of composers like Lutoslawski and Grisey. I felt the floor vibrate at a techno concert, and was thrown into the anarchical hedonism of a Kendrick Lamar mosh pit in Philadelphia, a rave in France, a Koningsdag celebration in The Netherlands. And then I sit in my closet, write a violin piece, and try to make the walls shake.

Through my time at Curtis, I learned the profound importance of soaking up the inspiration of my peers and teachers. I'm most awake artistically when surrounded by highly creative peers and faculty, of which the Princeton composition department is a uniquely exceptional illustration. The composers studying at Princeton possess a kind of musical autonomy; their voices are clear,

original, and wide-ranging, and many of them have already served as inspiration for my own voice as well as general composer-ship and friendship. This unparalleled autonomy is also reflected in the faculty. When I came across Nathalie Joachim's *Fanm D'Ayiti*, I was so inspired by her story-telling capabilities combined seamlessly with her eclectic, dynamic music, and I loved Tyondai Braxton's nuanced sonic sensibilities in both orchestral and electronic contexts, particularly in his piece *Multiplay*. For a while I had Donnacha Dennehy's *Pushpulling* on repeat, struck by his prismatic harmonic language. At times I have struggled with the relevance of traditional structures of music theory as it applies to my own work, but Dmitri has provided me with tools to think about harmonic variety in a refreshing way, as well as stirred up my new appreciation of improvisation. Juri Seo's love of contrast harmonizes well with my love of juxtaposition, as does Barbara White's engagement with text with my own love of words. As someone who often attempted to fiddle on my viola, I find Dan Trueman's music particularly fun, and I have already benefited from Steve's insightful mentorship in many ways, from his hands-on approach and intuitive musical solutions, to his recipe for cooking up a perfectly spiced orchestra piece.

Going forward, I hope to not only continue to discover my own voice, but to harness it and expand its range and capabilities. I plan to continue to play in my closet, while soaking up as much as I can outside of it. The stimulating vitality of its composition department makes Princeton the perfect environment in which to quench my thirst for inspiration.