Celebrating Utah County in Multi-Media Recital with Progressive New Music and Photography

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The primary goal of this project was to better the quality of knowledge and education of a handful of composition students. By working one on one with each of them over an extended time, I would lend them my experience as a string player in order to help each of them feel confident in their understanding of how to write for the instrument. I wanted to enable their creative process without inhibition, but also refine their technical abilities in writing.

In order to help facilitate this, I found and commissioned a student photographer to take a series of photographs for the composers to use as a source of inspiration. These photographs were taken in and around Provo Canyon. I was very happy with what they gave back to me- there was a range of pictures of nature close up and from a distance, as well as man-made elements that gave sharp contrast to the scenery.

While the photographer was working on their end, I was working closely with my mentor Dr. Steve Ricks to select a group of composition students to work with. I created a couple documents that provided written instruction on things to keep in mind when writing music for the cello, and also created a playlist including a wide variety of standard cello repertoire. This was done to help kickstart the brainstorming process. Eventually, I was able to pass along the photographs to them for additional inspiration, and each composer began to write.

Over the next few months I would meet with them one on one as they were making progress to fine tune their ideas. Occasionally I would have feedback about the form and structure of the music, but most of the questions they had were about the technical abilities of the instrument. I was able to demonstrate in person many standard techniques as well as the capabilities for extended technique. We worked closely on how to notate these techniques so that they could present their ideas as clearly as possible. I had no agenda for the type of music I was looking for, and each composer created a piece that was very different and very uniquely their own.

I was very impressed with the quality of some, while others did not put in the same amount of time and intention. One piece in particular I loved so much that I included it in my performance repertoire for graduate school auditions. Those who I played it for were also impressed and also commended my efforts to be involved in new music.

After the completion of all the pieces (even including a short one written by my mentor), I performed them in a special recital, and recorded video and audio to give back to the composers for their portfolios. I am currently working on putting together a website with all the details of the project. This has been a very rewarding experience, and I loved being able to help bring new pieces into the current cello repertoire.

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