

URCO Fall 2018 Proposal

Amy Thacker, Student, Department of Music

Robert Waters, co-mentor, Department of Music

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Project

Citizen Musicianship: Communicating Crisis Through the Arts

Proposal Narrative

Introduction

Citizen musicians are artists who connect to their audiences by addressing social issues through music. Yo Yo Ma, one of the most celebrated cellists of our time, works with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to bring these ideals to life. Ma says this idea of citizen musicianship is “a call for musicians and orchestras to play a role in society as a cultural force for social transformation. It inspires them to find the place where they are needed most, often in areas not addressed by other means.”¹

The idea of citizen musicianship has been interwoven into my undergraduate career, especially by my teachers, the Fry Street Quartet. They are engaged in issues of sustainability through their own work, The Crossroads Project, a multi-disciplinary presentation that “fuses original music with art, imagery, and science to create live performance experiences that address global sustainability and provide a path toward meaningful response.”² I attended a performance of The Crossroads Project and was deeply affected by it. Since then, the quartet and Dr. Davies have created a sequel, Emergence, depicting a narrative of someone coming to terms with what they learned from Crossroads. Emergence addressed the feeling evoked by Crossroads that we need to change everything about ourselves and instead encouraged audience members to pick one thing and make it theirs.

Another example of citizen musicianship I encountered is the Chicago based Spektral Quartet. They are “...known for creating seamless connections across centuries, drawing in the listener with charismatic deliveries, interactive concert formats, an up-close atmosphere, and bold, inquisitive programming.”³ An example of their innovative programming includes having a visual artist come to explain painting techniques. The audience then created their own artwork, which the Spektral Quartet used as the basis of musical improvisation. This past semester, they gave a career talk to string students while in residence with the Chamber Music Society of Logan. In their presentation, they emphasized that each musician must pave their own path to a meaningful career and that creative programming that includes the audience is the future.

¹ “Yo-Yo Mas Citizen Musician Fellows, <https://csosoundsandstories.org/yo-yo-mas-citizen-musician-fellows/>

²The Crossroads Project www.thecrossroadsproject.org

³ The Spektral Quartet, <http://spektralquartet.com/about/>

Inspired by these encounters, I seek to become a citizen musician through programming a concert that addresses the dangers of plastic pollution in the ocean by interweaving scientific information with newly composed music.

Context

The ocean is one of Earth's most beautiful and precious resources. However, it is becoming increasingly polluted by one of human's most convenient products— plastic.⁴

Plastic is lightweight, durable, strong, and inexpensive to produce. Its widespread use began in World War II when other materials like rubber and glass were needed for the war effort. Plastics, especially single-use varieties, are extremely convenient and we use it in everything from water bottles to zippers. Many plastics find their way into the ocean where they remain for years.⁵ The ocean currents swirl the plastics into large garbage patches.⁶ As these plastics break down, the pieces become smaller and smaller, eventually becoming impossible to collect. Plastic's light weight quality allows it to float on the surface of water, where marine animals can get entangled or even eat the plastic, mistaking it for food. When eating plastics, the material fills the animal's stomach, preventing it from gaining nutrition. As a result, the animal starves to death.⁷ Plastic also retains chemicals such as DDT and PCP, so as marine animals eat the plastic, they are also eating chemicals. As the smaller animals are eaten by larger ones, the amount of chemicals found in the predator's bodies increases exponentially through a process called biomagnification.⁸

What does this mean for the ocean on a global scale? Scientists estimate that twenty countries in the world contribute to 83 percent of plastic debris (the United States is twentieth).⁹ Combined, these countries contribute 275 million tons of plastic waste, 4-12 million of which ends up in the ocean.¹⁰ Many countries have inefficient waste management. For example, despite our relatively good waste management, only 10 percent of plastic bottles are recycled in the United States.¹¹

⁴ Avio, Carlo Giacomo, Stephania Gorbi, Francesco Regoli, "Plastics and microplastics in the oceans: From emerging pollutants to emerged threat." *Marine Environmental Research*, Vol. 128 (July 2017): 2-11. (Accessed June 3, 2018).

⁵ Avio, Gorbi, and Regoli. "Plastics and microplastics in the oceans," 2.

⁶ Kaiser, Jocelyn "The Dirt on Ocean Garbage Patches." *American Association for the Advancement of Science, New Series*, Vol 328, no. 5989 (June 2010): 1509 (accessed June 3, 2018).

⁷ Avio, Gorbi, and Regoli. "Plastics and microplastics in the oceans," 5-6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8 (accessed June 3, 2018).

⁹ John H. Tibbetts "Managing Marine Plastic Pollution." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 123, no. 4 (April 2015): A90-A93. *Health Source - Consumer Edition*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 1, 2018).

¹⁰Tibbetts, "Managing Marine Plastic Pollution," A90-A93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

It is easy, especially in a landlocked state such as Utah, to say “This doesn’t affect me.” I was even one of those people. It made me sad of course to see videos of trapped wildlife, but it was easier to ignore the issues. Despite my exposure to the idea of sustainability, I was not truly affected until I took an oceanography class. The night I finished the ocean pollution chapter, I was devastated about what I had learned. On a rare whim, I decided to try and cheer myself up with a slurpee. Once I had purchased my drink, I realized I was part of the problem. The very beverage I had just consumed had several different kinds of plastic packaging. I was horrified when I continued to think about all the single use materials we use every day. I vowed after that night to cut out plastic where I could and educate others on why they should make a similar change.

This occurred around the time the Spektral Quartet was visiting Logan. I had begun thinking about a way to explore the idea of citizen musicianship. I tried to think of issues that were both important to the community and myself. However, I couldn’t find something that I was genuinely passionate about. After learning about plastic in the ocean, I knew I had found my project.

Project Description

The concert will take place in the Caine Performance Hall at USU on April 22, which is also Earth Day, in conjunction with the Art Impact Show, a series of visual art projects created by Caine College of the Arts students which address sustainability. Ideally, there will also be booths set up so that the USU Sustainability Council and similar groups could talk to people before or after the show. Following the general outline of the Crossroads Project, the concert would be approximately forty to sixty minutes in length, divided into different sections addressing plastic pollution of the oceans. These include the history of plastic, current statistics on plastic consumption, the ways in which plastic interacts with water, and its effects on marine life. The final part of the presentation would challenge the audience, asking what they can do to change. The music would be inspired by the ideas found in each section of narrative.

In order to gauge audience impact, I would create a survey that attendees could take either on their phone or laptops set up in the lobby. The survey would ask questions such as the audience’s prior knowledge of plastic pollution, their likelihood to change their habits, and will include a section for comments about the performance. The data collected from this survey would be used to inform me about the audience’s experience and whether I achieved my goal of motivating audience members to make a change. I would include the results in my final report as well as give a presentation about the project to students of the Caine College of the Arts.

To bring the project from the general outline I have just sketched to reality, I have assembled a team of qualified music students, a writer with a passion for issues of sustainability, as well as enlisted the mentorship of Dr. Rob Davies, a Professional Practice Associate Professor of Physics who was integral to the creation of the Crossroads Project.

The music would be a string quartet composed by Stephen Mitton, an alumni of Utah State University (<https://www.stephenmitton.com/>). Since graduating, he earned a Master’s degree in composition from Arizona State University and won an ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers’ Award for his piece, *Caricatures*. This work was based on the characteristics of

impetuosity, cunning, and vanity, and demonstrates Mitton's ability to create music based on specific topics. This will be important in creating a connection between the audience and the scientific data. Another reason I chose Stephen is practical. The timing of this project is relatively short, and he was willing to write the piece within the time frame I gave him.

The performers would include myself, Abby Wuehler, Audrey Hudgens, and Nicole Jaimeson, all current outstanding students from the USU String Performance Program. I hand-picked these individuals because of their professionalism and commitment to high quality performance. Both myself and Abby have won the USU Music Department Concerto Competition and performed concertos with the USU Symphony Orchestra. Abby is also a Caine Scholar. Audrey was a member of the Caine Undergraduate Research Quartet in the 2017-2018 school year. She was selected to perform a solo with USU's Wind Ensemble this spring, drawing high praise from the ensemble's director, Dr. Thomas Rohrer. Audrey is also a member of the Tribeca Ensemble, a chamber music group which aims to address social issues in the Salt Lake area. Nicole will be a Caine Ambassador for the upcoming school year, and was selected to perform in masterclasses for several visiting artists in the spring of 2018. In the chamber music program, most groups typically prepare one movement of a larger work from pieces written before the twentieth century. The musical language in these works is familiar to us. By preparing a recently composed work, we will have the opportunity to expand our musical language. Premiering a new piece is a unique opportunity that is largely unavailable to undergraduate students. We are a pre-formed quartet that will be together for the entire school year. Robert Waters will be our primary coach. His vast experience with and interest in new music will be critical to helping us interpret the unfamiliar musical style.

Kaylee Dudlee will write the narrative for the program. She is a recent graduate of USU with a degree in professional and technical writing. Beyond that, she has a personal commitment to ideas of sustainability. She was recommended for the project by Dr. Rob Davies because of her academic excellence. Kaylee made the Dean's list for her last three semesters and was the Technical Writing Student of the Year for 2018. She also presented original research at UCUR in 2017. She will be mentored by Dr. Davies as she writes the narrative.

Work on this project will begin during the summer, as Kaylee, Dr. Davies, and myself collaborate to create a narrative. This will be completed by the end of August in the form of a script for the concert. I will also be working to schedule the Caine Performance Hall and will also contact the USU Sustainability Council and the Logan City Recycling Department to see if they can be present at the concert. I have already contacted the Music Department Head, Dr. Cindy Dewey, who has agreed to pay for the rental of the Caine Performance Hall. By August, Stephen will begin writing the string quartet. He will have a copy of the script to work from as well as research we have compiled to further educate him about plastic pollution. It is anticipated he will finish writing the piece by November. The string quartet will work collaboratively with Stephen over FaceTime and in person to create music that we believe is true to the narrative. Once the piece is finished, the quartet will begin to rehearse the piece for six to eight hours a week. We will also have weekly coachings from Robert Waters. Rehearsals of the full program will begin in mid-February. We will begin advertising the concert at this time through social media, newspaper ads, and fliers. I plan to present my project at the Undergraduate Research Symposium in April 2019.

Conclusion:

There are many people who are unaware of the severity of the plastic crisis in the oceans. By producing this concert, the creative team will be able to help educate the public about plastic pollution, causing them to reconsider their own use of plastics. We will not only state facts, but enhance them with music that creates an emotional connection with the audience, allowing them to meditate on what the data means in their own lives. By doing this project, we will start on the path to becoming citizen musicians and have the experience to do similar projects in the professional world.

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Project

Citizen Musicianship: Communicating Crisis Through the Arts

My education objectives for this project include:

- Learning how to prepare a newly written piece of music
- Collaborating with others to serve a common creative goal
- Learning to meld music with other disciplines
- Gaining experience in creating a program which engages the audience

PROPOSED URCO BUDGET & COMMITMENT

Student Name: Amy Thacker	Department: Music
Student A#: [REDACTED]	Faculty Supervisor: Christopher Scheer/Robert Waters
Student Email: [REDACTED]	
Project Title: Citizen Musicianship: Communicating Crisis Through the Arts	
<i>Group submissions should use the Group Budget & Commitment form.</i>	

Expenses (Optional)

Each proposal may include an optional expenses budget of up to \$1,000 provided there is a 1:1 match (up to \$500/\$500).

EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES/RESEARCH TRAVEL BUDGET

TRAVEL

Description of Items	Budgeted Amount
N/A	\$ -
Total Travel Budget	\$ -

SUPPLIES/EQUIPMENT

Description of Items	Budgeted Amount
Commission for Steven Mitton- Approximately 100 hours of composing for a new string quartet	\$ 1,000.00
Total Supplies/Equipment Budget	\$ 1,000.00

By signing below, the mentor certifies that they have reviewed this proposed budget and find it to be reasonable for the project proposed. If funded, this budget is subject to review by the Office of Research & Graduate Studies to comply with URCO regulations.

Mentor Signature _____

EXPENSES MATCHING FUNDS COMMITMENT

As part of the URCO program, a 1:1 match is required for this optional additional funding.

The faculty mentor, department, college, or program that will commit to match the budget portion of this URCO scholarship is:

_____ Music Department

The matching support may come from any source, but RGS requires an F&A or E&G fund index number to transfer our matching funds to you. That index is:

If this URCO application is approved, I authorize the Research and Graduate Studies (RGS) office to transfer 50% of this proposed budget to this index to match the 50% of available funding from this source. If this URCO application is approved these matching funds will be made available for this URCO project's expenses. The faculty mentor's department will be responsible for overseeing the expenditures for this URCO project. RGS's funds will be transferred to the department.

Signature of Person with Direct Budget Authority _____

See memo

Scholarship (Required)

SCHOLARSHIP MATCHING FUNDS COMMITMENT

As part of the URCO program, a scholarship match is required.

The faculty mentor, department, college, or program that will commit:

The faculty mentor, department, college, or program that will commit to match the scholarship portion of this URCO scholarship is:

Music Department

The matching support must be in the form of F&A or E&G funds. The index that these funds will come from is:

[Redacted]

If this URCO application is approved, I authorize the Research and Graduate Studies (RGS) office to transfer \$250 in funds from this index to match the \$750 in funds from the RGS office to award the student a \$1,000 scholarship.

Signature of Person with Direct Budget Authority

See Memo

Total Budget

Overall Scholarship Summary

Scholarships are mandatory and require a scholarship match.

Total RGS Support	\$	750.00
Total Matching Support	\$	250.00
Total Scholarship	\$	1,000.00

Overall Equipment/Supplies/Travel Summary

Each proposal may include an optional expenses budget of up to \$1,000 provided there is a 1:1 match.

Total Travel	\$	-
Total Equipment/Supplies	\$	1,000.00
Total Equipment/Supplies/Travel Budget	\$	1,000.00

Total

Total RGS Support	\$	1,250.00
Total Matching Support	\$	750.00
Total Student Award	\$	2,000.00

URCO PROJECT TIM				
	June	July	August	September
Attend URCO Orientation				
Receive Scholarship & Budget				
<i>Research with Kaylee and Dr. Davies to create narrative</i>				
<i>Steven begins composing</i>				
<i>Quartet rehearsals</i>				
<i>Integrated rehearsals with narrative</i>				
<i>Prepare Project for Presentation</i>				
<i>Performance- April 22</i>				
Start final & financial URCO reports				
Present project at Research Week				
Submit final & financial URCO reports				

June
June 15th