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CANDIDACY STATEMENT

My education as a teacher did not begin in the college classroom. Rather, it began the day I, as a recent organ performance graduate of college, walked into an inner city first grade classroom. After explaining the five-line staff and how to use it, I was asked by a six-year-old, “Why are there five lines?” I did not know. That was the beginning of my journey in learning what to teach and how to teach it, and, most important, the humility to admit that I do not have all the answers.

That first-grader taught me some very important lessons. The first lesson was to never underestimate the intelligence and curiosity of your students. The second lesson was to listen to your students. They know more than you might think. The third lesson is that in our information age, it is truly impossible for any one of us to have all of the answers. The only solution is to engage yourself and your students in lifelong learning. The next lesson that child taught me was that the search for answers is exciting and fun. When I went to the local library and asked the librarian for help, she brought out an ancient book in which I found some of what I needed to go back to that classroom and tell the story of how the staff developed. The lesson was so powerful that each year, as I am teaching the staff, I ask my students, “Why do you suppose there are five lines in the staff?” When there are no hands up, I tell the story, always to a hushed group who are fascinated with the simple and logical way in which the staff developed into what we know today. This excitement and joy in learning has led me to the brink of PhD candidacy in Music Education at New York University.

As an organ performance major, and a serious student of choral conducting, I never intended to be a teacher, except perhaps in an institution of higher learning. I had watched in one

undergraduate school after another how the music education students were exempt from the higher level courses in theory and history and even performance, but were thrust as early as the freshman or sophomore years into classroom teaching situations. This seemed to underscore and to give credence to the perception of school music as being shallow, just like its teachers.

After several years of teaching as a “permanent substitute” I began to discover, however, that I could actually make music with my young students. Music that was not shallow, that had integrity and was engaging to my students and to me. I had finished a master’s degree in organ performance and conducting and my standards were high. My students never disappointed me, but I needed help with new ideas for reaching them, and I had to be validated by the state. It was at this point that I decided to go back to school and become certified to teach music.

At Arts High School in Newark, New Jersey, is where my students taught me to conduct. Any deficiencies I had were immediately apparent because they did what I asked, and what they did was not what I *wanted*. I went to many workshops and sought the help of conductors wherever I could find them. I took my choirs to festivals and they began winning awards. The most interesting reaction came from conductors in the other schools in Newark and the urban centers of the area. They wondered how I was getting the particular sound from my students that could be heard in performance. Here was the contradiction: urban students (mostly African/American and Hispanic) had a characteristic sound, no matter what style they were singing. There was a racist and condescending attitude toward them, at festivals, and in the honors choirs auditions. What I had managed to do with them was to keep their characteristic sound to use for the style of spirituals, but to teach them how to change their sound when doing traditional classical music. They did Benjamin Britten’s *Ceremony of Carols* and sounded like

an English choir. They did Schubert's *Mass in G*, Fauré's *Requiem*, Vivaldi's *Gloria*. With all of these the solos as well as the choruses were done by my Freshman/Sophomore Choir. They sang all of Randall Thompson's *Frostiana*, beautifully and convincingly. I carry with me this spirit of adventure whenever I encounter something I want to know more about, and that has brought me to this place of inquiry.

While at Arts High School I became aware of the large number of female students in the vocal program. These girls were not being served well by being placed with a few boys who took most of the teacher's time. I was able to get the girls scheduled into different classes and this began my love affair with the women's choir. I sought out historical repertoire as well as pieces being written by composers interested in the sudden proliferation of gender choirs which came with the gay liberation movement. My women's choirs began to win awards and I was selected to serve as chair of the Repertoire and Standards for Women's Choir for the American Choral Directors Association, Eastern Division. As chair, I acted as liaison between conductors of women's choirs, set up choral reading sessions at the conventions, and wrote articles for the newsletter. I made many lasting connections. These are experiences which have brought me to this candidacy with a goal of helping prepare others for the music classroom and beyond.

While doing all of the above, I continued my work in community music as organist/choir director in area churches. My first church in Newark was down in the Ironbound section, where the old white population was being rapidly replaced by Black, Hispanic, and Portuguese. My only choir was made up of children from the neighborhood. They rehearsed once a week, sang at every service, led worship with the hymns and responses, and even gave concerts. Their parents were not members of the church and did not even come to see and hear them in the services. This

was where I taught the neighborhood, and some of these children came back later and thanked me. I taught piano to a few, none of whom could pay me. I let one babysit for me to pay for her lessons.

At another church, also in Newark, there was both a Spanish and an English congregation. While working with the choirs separately, I became aware of the bigotry of the English congregation and the resentment of the Spanish congregation. Here was an issue which had brought me to the Northeast originally. Raised as a Southerner, I recognized the fallacy and danger in the continued oppression of the African/American population in our country. I came to see my mission as one of bridging the gap between the races. What I did not realize is that racism and bigotry extended well beyond the issues between the white and black populations. There was (is) condescension and oppression between many groups, some of which are in the same racial/ethnic minority. At Arts High School I was embarrassed and even hurt by the racist attitudes my students had toward their darker classmates. This is what Paulo Freire spoke about in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. “Because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class....It is a rare peasant who, once ‘promoted’ to overseer, does not become more of a tyrant towards his former comrades than the owner himself.”(p. 46) The high school students had taken on the attitude of the white population toward themselves, the oppressed, and were using this very same irrational bigotry against their own. Bridging gaps wherever I find them continues to be one of my goals.

For the past five years, in addition to my work with school choirs, I have also had middle school music classes. I was told I had to teach them “music appreciation” but in the pursuit of music praxis, I developed world drumming and handchimes curriculums. The world drumming

program uses no notation but pays homage to the origins of the music from West Africa. The music, which is performance-based as opposed to literacy-based, is taught from speech, the way it is understood in Africa. The handchimes class, in contrast, must learn to read the grand staff. Their reward is in applying this new skill to the playing of handchimes while reading the actual notation. The action/reflection in each of these classes has underscored the value of the praxis approach to music teaching.

My preparation for teaching world drumming has opened up a whole new world for me. It became the most popular course in our school. It has been the source of several papers which I wrote about the course and its impact on the students and me. I presented a paper on drumming at the New York University Conference on Arts in Education. I also taught a workshop on drumming in the classroom at New Jersey City University. At that workshop, a group of my students performed for the teachers and students gathered there. Then my students taught all of them how play the drum ensembles just performed. Seeing first-hand how engaged my students are in learning music totally unlike their own has been an important counterbalance to the European classical tradition in which I was trained and educated. I had always been interested in using music of other cultures for my choirs, but here was my chance to actually teach a course in authentic music from West Africa and the Caribbean. I look forward to helping others do the same.

As a lifelong learner, my next step was the PhD program in Music Education at New York University. From my professors I have learned, once again, how much more there is to know and understand about the field of music education. My introduction to the music theorists in Dr. Benedict's class gave me an overview of the history of theory and its role in determining how

teachers have been prepared for the classroom.

Professor Joy Boyum's class was one of the most stimulating I have ever encountered. Our class was an intellectual "refiner's fire." Our papers were subjected to the most rigorous critique by her and by the class. I was learning that I enjoy thinking and writing. In one memorable lesson, the whole class sat and studied a painting (projected on the wall) for forty-five minutes. What at first seemed a static view of unrelated people in mundane surroundings, gradually began to take on life. Together we watched as the painting took on meaning.

From Dr. Zimmerman, I discovered the excitement of historical research. Through various readings we came to understand the role of the historian, not as just objective viewer, but as one who takes a viewpoint, supported by history, who then creates the narrative. My work in finding the root causes of the decline of the church music profession and the closing of several schools of organ and church music, led to a paper which I presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Education. This has laid a foundation for the historical aspects of my project.

Dr. David Elliott demonstrated the courage that it took to break with his former mentor over the issue of *praxis* as opposed to *aesthetic* music education. He communicated to us his passion on this issue and in so doing created passionate music educators determined to teach music passionately. Dr. Elliott also exemplified his own mandate to us for impeccable scholarship and hard work. We read his books proudly and proclaim for them a major role in our preparation for the classroom and research.

Dr. Anton Vishio swept aside the cobwebs of time (since my last theory courses) and brought me to a new understanding of Romantic music. My work with him in analyzing César Franck's Organ Chorale No. 3 in A Minor gave me greater insight into the workings of Franck's

mind. A classicist who admired Wagner, Franck can be seen to have created some of his greatest music in these last works for organ (there are three organ chorales, written just before his death).

This is where my research will center.

Dr. Vishio's class in the music of Olivier Messiaen and Elliott Carter gave me my first glimpse of *post tonal music*. Never having had post tonal theory, I was a novice. Dr. Vishio taught me by e-mail, much of it in the middle of the night. He exemplifies for me the passionate teacher who will stop at nothing to make sure his students understand the work. He introduced to me the music of Elliott Carter, whose only piece I was familiar with was a small choral work. My final project was based on a section of *Eight Etudes*. I came to really love the music of Elliott Carter. I was already familiar with the organ music of Olivier Messiaen.(Messiaen is a connection to my research project because he was a student of Charles Tournemire, who was a student of César Franck.). Being able to attend organ concerts as part of Dr. Vishio's class was an added bonus. I also came to a new understanding of how Messiaen composed. Dr. Vishio led us to concerts, sent messages about other concerts, stoked us with information about the music, showed us his own joy in the music, and took us through an immersion experience. He is my idol for a teacher.

Dr. John Gilbert gave to me and others his gift of the open mind, ready to see and hear value in a project, even when others do not. His ability to peruse writing quickly and to give insightful critiques has supported many of us. His sniffing out irrelevance, triviality, verbosity, superficiality, and sloppy research has sent others of us back to the writing desk. His recommendations for reading material no one else has ever heard of is inspiring. Here is someone, a guru in technology, who loves reading and will take the time to look for something

new, and find in it relevance to our work.

My respect for technology has grown immeasurably from my work with Dr. Gilbert. He has demonstrated the limitless ways in which technology can teach, even when we seem to have exhausted the traditional means. One of my present missions is to become more comfortable with technology and music technology so that I can use it more creatively.

These professors exemplify for me what it means to be a part of this field of higher learning. Each of them loves what he/she does and manifests a distinct role in communicating it to their students.

Much of my musical life has been spent in search of the peak experience in music, the musical equivalent of a glimpse of heaven, an out-of-body experience, but with the intensity of hyperinvolvement of the intellect and emotions. It may last for only a moment, but the impact is profound, often eluding explanation. For that brief interval of time, the physical separation of musician(s), music to be performed, and conductor, if there is one, is gone. There is only one entity, *music*. Elliott Eisner says this:

When the arts genuinely move us, we discover what it is that we are capable of experiencing. In this sense, the arts help us discover the contours of our emotional selves. They provide resources for experiencing the range and varieties of our responsive capacities. - Elliott Eisner, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*. P. 11

This has happened with my choirs when, just at the moment of performing, the communication between singers and me was so intense that I went beyond what we had rehearsed, and they responded. I can remember one such occasion when my high school choir was singing Palestrina's *Sicut cervus* for judges at a festival. On the tape, the judge began speaking at the beginning of the piece, talking his way through it with suggestions, then, all of a

sudden, he fell silent. It was at the moment in the piece when the voices converge just before the final section. Finally, we heard him, as if shaking his head, say slowly, “Oh, kids, this is beautiful.” He had felt it, too.

Jerome Ashby, the brilliant French horn player who was co-principal of the New York Philharmonic, used to attend services at the church where I was organist/choir director in New Jersey. I was fortunate to have him play solos with me in the service. On one such occasion, I asked him to play the simple hymn, “Amazing Grace,” with no accompaniment. He agreed but insisted that I conduct him in it. This was an unusual request. First of all, the hymn is so simple and so familiar, that neither of us even had to look at the notes. Second of all, he was a world-class player who did not need anyone to show him how to play that hymn. Third of all, as an African-American, he had experienced that hymn as part of his life. I thought at the time that perhaps he, as a classically trained musician, did not trust himself to play this simple hymn with a more earth-bound sensibility. As I think back on it now, what he may have been asking for was the communication between us which would open the emotional possibilities and expose the depths and heights of that dialogue. It did just that. It was an extraordinary experience. There was no player, no conductor, no piece of music. There was just *music*. When Jerome Ashby died, the day after Christmas in 2007, a light went out of me.

In my solo playing these experiences are ones which I prepare for and I then let the presence of the audience push me into overdrive. I love studying and taking lessons because I find learning something new to be so exciting. In lessons with fine teachers, I have found inspiration in their words and insights that connect with my own interpretation of the piece. This sometimes happens while I am actually playing the piece, and the teacher begins whispering

encouragement or giving metaphorical images. When I was playing the Franck *Chorale in A Minor*, in one of the sections, Marie Bernadette Dufourcet (wife of Naji Hakim) said to me softly, “stormy, stormy.” As a result, my playing changed, became more driven. I had a similar experience this past summer in a lesson with David Higgs, who talked me through the last toccata section of the same piece, Franck’s *Chorale in A Minor*. I felt like I was flying. And yet, there were no words to describe how it happened. He called my playing “superb.” Because I have received so much inspiration and stimulation from my teachers, I intend to do a study of some of the lessons to try to document how the pedagogy is delivered, and how it affects the player, me.

My research will be a search for the source of inspiration for me in the pedagogy and interpretation of organ music, specifically of César Franck’s *Chorale No. 3 in A Minor*. What I have found is that whenever I take a lesson on this piece, the interpretation coached by the teacher is totally different. In searching for answers to this, I have found that Franck wrote it just before his death. He never had time to go back to the organ loft to play through the piece and to write down his suggestions for *registration* (the organ stops he wanted used for particular sections and voices.) This is similar to orchestration. Nor did he leave much indication of tempo. Each player and each teacher has devised a way of playing and teaching it. I am fascinated with the difference and also with the pedagogy of each teacher. I am in the process of taking, recording, and transcribing lessons on this piece. These will be put together with contextual information about the period in which Franck wrote, about the music he wrote, about the organs for which he wrote it, and how this piece compares with the rest of his published works.

This has been my journey. I look forward to candidacy as a time when I can concentrate on my research and assess the part that teaching has played in my life.