

AMBASSADORS OF MULTIPLICITIES: YOUNG STRING PLAYERS IN THE
CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL MUSIC COLLECTIVE CALLED
“FACE THE MUSIC”

by

Ieong Cheng Weatherly

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Randall Everett Allsup, Sponsor
Professor Jeanne Goffi-Fynn

Approved by the Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

AMBASSADORS OF MULTIPLICITIES: YOUNG STRING PLAYERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL MUSIC COLLECTIVE CALLED “FACE THE MUSIC”

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This study explores the experiences of young string players in a music collective called *Face the Music*. The organization consists of musicians aged 10 to 18, and is dedicated to the preparation and performance of music by living classical composers. I begin with the assertion that contemporary classical music, hereinafter referred to as contemporary music, is often misinterpreted and underappreciated by the general public, and even musicians themselves. There is minimal research exploring what contemporary classical music education is or could be, especially regarding non-professional musicians and/or adolescents. From this starting point, I explore the experiences of 18 members, six coaches, and one parent. Data includes focus group interviews with young string players in quartet settings, individual interviews with coaches, field notes, and a variety of musical artifacts. *Face the Music* musicians were highly flexible and versatile musicians; they identified as performers, composers, and improvisers—and possibly rebels of some kind. In addition to these subjectivities, their most prominent characteristic was revealed

in their “polytonal roles,” a concept I explicate. Findings suggest complex relationships between their emotions and contemporary music. Several disparate benefits, especially social benefits, were manifested through the idea of community. Coaches at *Face the Music* perceived their roles as pushing the boundaries of traditional classical music training and promoting living composers. The unsureness and uncertainty from the young string players also reflect the ambiguous nature of contemporary music. Findings suggest that there is a space for music educators to re-conceptualize contemporary classical music education for young musicians.

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DEDICATION

To my 寶貝, Chris;
my parents in Macao, Helen Jeong and Pan Ho;
and my parents in New York, Terri and Jay.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In “possessing” music, we make it part of our own identity and build it into our sense of ourselves. (Frith, 2004, p. 41)

As a string performer of contemporary classical music, I have perceived a lack of understanding of and appreciation for contemporary music, whether by the public or musicians at all levels of training. Through a “sink or swim” approach, I learned to appreciate contemporary classical music during my college years without much prior experience, or affection for its sounds. Somehow, I became *the* violist who played contemporary repertoire for my recitals and juries at Juilliard. Increasingly, contemporary music has come to represent my musical identity in my adult years. But, while I have come to develop a strong passion for contemporary music, I cannot pinpoint its origin. Because of that passion—because of that mystery—I am keenly interested in investigating the experiences of young musicians who are likewise interested in contemporary music. This passion has something to do with identity, and how particular kinds of music, according to Simon Frith above, get built, “into our sense of ourselves.”

Through an ethnography-based study, I interviewed teachers, parents, and young musicians who were teaching and studying in the New York-based contemporary music collective *Face the Music* to explore their perceptions and experiences of playing contemporary music, specifically living composers’ music. In this study, the term *contemporary music* refers to *contemporary classical music*, broadly defined as post-

1913 musical styles that include, but are not limited to high modernist, postmodernist, neo-romantic, experimental, avant-garde, pluralist, new-classical, and minimalist music.

Why are these young musicians devoting time and resources to playing this music? What do they get out of it? How is it constructing who they are? How do teachers in such settings perceive their roles?

Overview

In modern music education and music-appreciation communities, contemporary music is often viewed as inaccessible and more suited for highly-skilled professional musicians than for young adults. Although some students may be fortunate to have their teachers introduce a few contemporary pieces in their music programs, most young musicians are rarely, if ever, exposed to contemporary music education and its associated challenges. This dilemma results in too few opportunities for young musicians to experience contemporary music in school. Relatively, too few music teachers have the access or resources to introduce contemporary music to their students. Some teachers may lack appreciation for contemporary music, making it difficult for them to bring the repertoire into their classrooms and rehearsal spaces. Schools may be unwilling to program contemporary music in the curriculum because of potential reproach from the public. As a consequence, this lack of exposure effectively prohibits young musicians from understanding and appreciating contemporary music.

In a few rare cases, some youth ensembles are focusing on this particular genre of music. *Face the Music*, established in 2005 and located on the Upper West Side of New York, is the country's first youth ensemble collective dedicated to studying and playing

works by living composers. The students range from 10 to 18 years old. Their ensembles include a chamber orchestra, string quartets, mixed chamber groups, a jazz big band, and an improvisation collective dedicated to studying and performing experimental, new-classical, new-jazz, and avant-garde music written only by living composers.

Despite the actual exposure of students to contemporary music in school, it is not unusual to find studies that have investigated young people's musical identities through popular music. One of the most prominent pieces of research related to popular music is *Identity and Music* by Simon Frith (1996), who asserted,

Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. (p. 109)

Frith argued that musical experience is an aesthetic experience that can be understood by a subjective and collective identity as a self-in-process, in which identity is always mobile. He reasoned that musical appreciation is a process of musical identification. He believed that describing the music and describing the listener's response to the music reveals some sort of identity and "a way of making sense of it [music]" (p.114). Other studies have also examined the importance of popular music for adolescents (Arnett, 1995; North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2002; Wells & Hakanen, 1991). Not surprisingly, they found that music is an important medium for adolescents to express themselves and to use as leisure entertainment.

My interest in this topic has prompted the following questions: *Does contemporary music reveal an identity or even construct identity through the communal music-making and listening experience? If so, how does this process work? How do individual stories unfold?* To explore these issues, I decided to focus my study upon the

exploration of musical roles in the *Face the Music* ensemble. Elliott (2010) asserted that music education can conceptualize *identity* as a free-flowing connection between the student's personal, psychological, social, and cultural selves. If all of these are attributes developed through belongingness in a community, one that is centered on enjoyment and self-growth, then would I find similar experiences at *Face the Music*? In addition, I also hoped to find out how educators at *Face the Music* perceive their roles.

Definition of Terms

Contemporary classical music repertoire is an unsettled term and is difficult to define because of its many subgenres. This challenge has been apparent to professional musicians and music educators since the term first appeared. According to *The New World Encyclopedia*, the term *contemporary music* remains unclear; moreover, "the argument over whether the term applies only to composers writing avant-garde music or 'modernists' music is a subject of serious debate." Baldacchino (2010) also expressed her struggles with defining the term:

Why am I using the term *Contemporary music* in favor of *New Music*, *Avant-Garde*, or *Twentieth-Century music*? The terminology that denotes the music of Modernity and what comes "after" it is often confusing. While the terms *Baroque* or *Romantic* music are clearly demarcated by style, specific composers and dates, the term *Modernism* in music gives rise to important qualified sub-definitions which do not entertain the same clarity. (p. 9)

There is no single definition of *contemporary classical music*, but there are historical turns that mark off one era from another. I consider the year 1913 the start of the contemporary era. In 1913, major artistic events occurred: the Armory Show; the *Skandalkonzert*, a concert of the Vienna Concert Society conducted by Arnold Schoenberg; and the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. In February of 1913,

the Armory Show gave 90,000 Americans their first look at what avant-garde artists in Europe were creating (Stamberg, 2013). In tandem with these events were the appearances of the paintings and sculptures of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse, and Duchamp, which shocked, puzzled, and challenged viewers' aesthetic conventions.

In March of the same year, the infamous *Skandalkonzert* was conducted by Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna featuring his own music, music by Gustav Mahler, and the music of his pupils, Alban Berg and Anton von Webern. The audience was shocked by the unfamiliar expressionist and experimentalist qualities of the music performed, namely: dissonances and atonality through composing with a 12-tone row technique. This extraordinary concert and its music had a profound impact on the development of music in the 1930s and 1940s. Two months after the *Skandalkonzert*, in May 1913, Igor Stravinsky premiered *The Rite of Spring* in Paris with the Ballets Russes. The audience was disturbed by the primitive choreography, the complex rhythms, and the blasting loudness and dissonant harmony.

Taking 1913 as a starting point, any music composed after this time is referred to as *contemporary music* in this dissertation. Thus, the terms *contemporary classical music* or *contemporary music* can be understood as music composed after 1913, which may also be referred to as modernist, postmodernist, experimental, avant-garde, and minimalist music. To further distinguish the parameters of this study, the term *contemporary music* will describe contemporary *classical* music. As the term *contemporary music* involves the present time as well, this term is constantly evolving and implies music-at-present; thus, living composers' music is also included. For simplicity, these specific genres of

music are identified interchangeably as *contemporary music*, *contemporary repertoire*, or a *contemporary piece*.

Personal Narrative

As a classically trained violist who grew up playing violin in Macao, I did not have much experience with contemporary music. When my teacher in China asked me if I could play viola in the orchestra because of a lack of violists in our school, my primary viola repertoire at this time was drawn from the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods. My teacher never asked me to prepare any contemporary pieces, even though I had the ability to manage the required techniques. In addition, contemporary music was not available in public spaces because this genre could not be comprehended easily in Macao.

After leaving my hometown to pursue a music performance degree in the United States, I was quickly submerged into contemporary repertoire due to a lack of classical repertoire written specific for viola. My college audition repertoire was the *Walton Viola Concerto*, written in 1929, which had been premiered by the violist and composer Paul Hindemith. I had a very difficult time interpreting the piece and my practice did not come easily. All I could do was imitate recordings.

During my freshman year at the Juilliard School, I was assigned the seat of Assistant Principal Violist in the Juilliard Ensemble for a contemporary ballet performance. I was completely underprepared for the challenges of the music, which included complicated rhythms and uncommon time signatures. With only a short preparation time, I learned to play the parts from the Principal Violist by ear. Although I

was able to play the required parts, I was still not able to learn how to play the music independently.

I did not give up on contemporary music and, in fact, I began to like how it *sounded* and how I *felt* when I played it. But I cannot recall the exact moment I started to *love* contemporary music. I realized that all the recitals I gave included at least one contemporary piece by such composers as John Cage, Krzysztof Penderecki, Elliot Carter, Béla Bartók, Benjamin Britten, Dmitiri Shostakovich, and so on. Contemporary music was becoming my *identity*. I became known as, “the violist who *chose* to play the Penderecki *Viola Concerto* for her jury.”

During the research for my dissertation, I became aware of the *Face the Music* program through my peers. I was astonished by the idea that this youth ensemble dedicated itself to playing only contemporary music. With joy and excitement (but also some skepticism), my curiosity was piqued. I was also surprised to learn that *Face the Music* is the first and only youth ensemble collective in the nation dedicated to performing the music of living composers. Through some connections, I was able to meet with the director of *Face the Music* to talk more about my primary interest in the ensemble. That interest compelled me to conduct this research study. *Face the Music* is an organization that provides music education to music students between the ages of 10 to 18. They provide chamber music, creative composition, orchestra, and band programs for students, and all repertoire focuses on living composers’ music. Chapter IV describes the programs in *Face the Music* in detail.

Background/Rationale

It is often said that contemporary music has drifted off track; that it has had a strange fate; that it has attained a degree of complexity which makes it inaccessible; that its techniques have set it on paths which are leading it further and further away. But on the contrary, what is striking to me is the multiplicity of links and relations between music and all the other elements of culture. (Foucault, Boulez, & Rahn, 1985, p. 6)

Contemporary music is still considered a marginalized art genre by the public.

Although a growing number of pieces have been created by contemporary composers and the number of performances of contemporary works has increased in 2015 and 2016 (O'Bannon, 2015), only 12% of music in programs played by 89 orchestras throughout the United States is composed by living composers, and audiences still continue to show confusion or reluctance when hearing this genre. Some music directors of professional symphonies are also reluctant to program contemporary music because of an overall lack of public interest. For example, the New York Philharmonic essentially fits a contemporary piece in between more traditional and familiar pieces into their program so audiences are more willing to accept it (Gilbert, 2015). Alan Gilbert, the New York Philharmonic's music director from 2009 to 2017, described this programming strategy:

Then there's what I call the "Bolero approach" to programming. In a nod to those same people who think that they don't want to hear new stuff, go ahead and program it, but wash it down with something so enticing that they take a deep breath and go to the concert anyway. (para. 14)

An advocate for contemporary music and American music, Gilbert acknowledged that among the growing challenges for modern orchestras today are: social media, live streaming, the high cost of live performances, and an audience's musical preferences. He

believed that orchestras need to be proactive and assertive in areas of education and outreach, and should help enact social change (Gilbert, 2015).

McLean (1977), a contemporary composer and a student of Krzysztof Penderecki, believed that to understand music intelligently, one needs a background of musical references. For example, Beethoven's music cannot be appreciated without music from Bach and Mozart. Without studying the pioneer composers of early contemporary music, such as Schoenberg and Webern, one could hardly understand modern contemporary music. For younger musicians, contemporary music is less familiar because contemporary music education is so rarely offered in most schools.

The area of research related to young musicians and contemporary music seems like an academic desert. Music educators face many obstacles to introduce contemporary music to their students, such as enhancing the teachers' own musical literacy; understanding students' techniques, performance levels, musical preferences; and countering negative stereotypes of the genre. In fact, the study of contemporary music offers new ways of exploring music that tap into students' creativity and expression by utilizing new forms of notation, unusual tonality, different techniques for playing instruments, multimedia technologies, and/or unconventional methods of interpretation.

Contemporary music is undeniably a form that was derived from, changed with, and nurtured by different art forms that react to current events, social justice, and technological changes. The French philosopher Michel Foucault wrote a little about contemporary music. With colleagues Boulez and Rahn, Foucault (1985) asked,

This [contemporary music] music which is so close, so consubstantial with all our culture, how does it happen that we feel it, as it were, projected afar and placed at an almost insurmountable distance? (p. 7)

Foucault compared contemporary painting to contemporary music, noting that painting tends to make itself transparent; it shows a visible and strong presentation and dynamics. Contemporary music, on the contrary, is imperious in the sense that listeners have to accept each hearing as if it is a new event; there are no patterns or familiarities which they can recognize—a contradiction of what happens with repeated hearings of classical music. As Foucault points out, “contemporary music owes this unique situation to its very composition. In this sense, it is willed. It is not a music that tries to be familiar; it is fashioned to preserve its cutting edge. One may repeat it, but it does not repeat itself” (Foucault et al., 1985, p. 11).

Boulez, one of Foucault’s co-authors, mentioned that these unfamiliarities create a tendency for people to, “establish a dangerously closed circuit” with this music, its performers, and society (p. 7). Contemporary music composers often have their unique perspectives on notation, forms, or tonality. Many remix other musical traditions, such as jazz, rock, folk, or pop elements into their music, making their work more diverse but difficult to categorize. The general public may be misled by the label of contemporary music and thus may refuse to further understand the compositions. Foucault et al. (1985) believed that there is no single form of contemporary music and it should be considered in terms of a plurality of musics: “Each is granted the ‘right’ to existence, and this right is perceived as an equality of worth. Each is worth as much as the group with practices it or recognizes it” (p. 8). Although contemporary music is unfamiliar to some audiences, it is nonetheless a *living* culture; it is an art with artistry and aesthetics that do not repeat themselves. With an open mind and open ears, one will discover its uniqueness and beauty.

Parakilas (1984) recommended treating contemporary music not as a specialty within classical music, but as a specialty distinct enough in and of itself to define it by contrast (p. 1). He argued that new uses and new media have increased the popularity of classical music even though it continues to be specialized. Through the increased popularity of classical music, the listener is served by the music's special associations rather than its universal appeal. Music in different genres entail different styles and different ways of performances that require different ways of listening. Parakilas indicated that listening to classical music is dealing with the familiar while listening to contemporary music is dealing with the unfamiliar. Moreover, he emphasized that "recognizing connections with the old is among the pleasures of listening to the new. Assimilating new [contemporary] music is not only a pleasure, but a need if listeners are to live with new works as they do with classic ones [*sic*]" (pp. 12-13). I concur that acquiring different listening skills for different genres of music is imperative. Because contemporary music is unfamiliar, as Parakilas suggested, one need not listen to it for pleasure, *per se*. Instead, one listens to it as a living genre, that is, one that is constantly evolving, one that demands unusual effort to understand it.

With the goals of preserving traditions and promoting the constant rejuvenation of a living culture (Beglarian, 1967, p. 30), the Contemporary Music Project (CMP) was launched in 1959. It was a mid-century American program with the goal of broadening the quality and scope of music education by promoting the composition, study, and performance of contemporary music. The CMP provides fellowships for young professional composers to take residence for one to two years in selected public schools to teach and compose contemporary music. From 1968 to 1973, the CMP launched three

programs—Professionals-in-Residence to Communities, Teaching of Comprehensive Musicianship, and Complementary Activities—to advocate for the works of contemporary composers and promote the teaching of musicianship. The project was ended in 1973 after 14 years for the reason—strangely stated—that, “its purpose [was] fulfilled” (Mark & Madura, 2013, p. 33).

The Contemporary Music Project (CMP) laid a foundation to further the use of contemporary music in public school curricula through their composer-residency program. In my own way, I would like to further their work by exploring the experiences of young musicians who practice contemporary music regularly through the lens of *identity*. We know that music has great influence on adolescent development, and many studies support this obvious assertion, including Coleman, (1974), Elkin and Handel (1978), Gavin and Furman (1989), Larson (1995), and Steinberg and Silverberg (1986). Larson (1995) claimed unsurprisingly that listening to music allows adolescents to explore their personal identity. Many studies (e.g., Coleman, 1974; Gavin & Furman, 1989; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) have indicated that adolescents focus on group behaviors and increasingly turn to the group as a frame of reference for their own behavior (Elkin & Handel, 1978). School music involvement is also said to relate to character growth and academic achievement in adolescents (Woody, 1998). This section is elaborated in the theoretical framework in the next section as well as in Chapter II.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the five main themes distilled from how adolescents expressed the meaning of music for them, as presented in a study

by Campbell, Connell, and Beegle (2007). These researchers investigated the reflection papers of 1,155 American middle and high school students, ranging from 13 to 18 years old, who participated in an essay contest. The focus of the essay was how adolescents viewed the role of music in identity formation, the musical and nonmusical benefits for engaging with music, the curricular content of secondary school music programs, and the qualities of music teachers in facilitating music-learning experiences in middle and high school classes. According to Campbell et al., the five themes that emerged were:

(a) identity formation in and through music; (b) emotional benefits; (c) music's life benefits, including character-building and life skills; (d) social benefits; and (e) positive and negative impressions of school programs and their teachers. In the study, these five principles were further analyzed as follows:

1. identity formation in and through music included how students saw themselves through a musical identity (e.g., students saw themselves as instrumentalists, vocalists, and listeners) as well as through a group identity (e.g., choir, orchestra, and band).
2. emotional benefits included how adolescents used music as a means of enjoyment, expression, emotion control and release, and other functions.
3. music's life benefits included the potential benefits of musical involvement in the broader spectrum such as academic success, self-discipline, character building, increased sense of compassion, responsibility, and confidence.
4. social benefits included music enabling adolescents to expand social circles and meet new friends, increase a sense of belonging, and decrease distractions.

5. positive impressions included recognizing music teachers as caring, motivating, and encouraging figures, and acknowledging the importance of music curriculum at school. Negative comments included criticizing the content or repertoire as too dull and teachers as poorly equipped pedagogically.

Although these five main themes were originally intended for popular music, I argue that they were identified within the expressed meanings of music by adolescents, and so can be used as a lens to investigate musicians playing different genres of music. For this study, these main themes were used as a lens to focus on the young musicians in *Face the Music*.

According to Campbell et al. (2007), music is necessary for adolescents as a means of self-expression and emotional expression as well as a bridge for building their communities of friends and peers. Adolescents may have a greater desire for independence and an increased self-awareness of public image. Music also increases their acceptance of diversity (p. 233). Adolescents also see learning music as an important way to support other academic and intellectual endeavors (p. 234).

The young musicians in *Face the Music* devote their free Sundays to a rigorous music training program. In doing so, they demonstrate a special interest in having contemporary music in their lives. As music plays an important role for young people's social, emotional, intellectual, and artistic domains, music represents a source of collective and personal identity (Frith, 1996). Frith (1981) proposed that adolescents use music as a vehicle for projecting their inner selves to the world; moreover, Frith (1987)

asserted that identity formation is one of the main social functions of music. In particular, he enumerated four social functions of popular music:

1. provides self-definition and creates a place in society through the pleasure of identifying, “with the music we like, with the performers of that music, with the other people who like it” (p. 140).
2. is a means of managing the relationship between public and private emotional lives.
3. provides the most vivid experience of time passing and shapes popular memory.
4. gives youth ownership of their preferred music in a manner that is not materialistic (p. 149).

In the field of sociology, researchers have investigated adolescent engagement with music through the uses and gratifications theory (Zillmann & Gan, 1997). This theory explains how people use media for their needs and gratification with an audience-centered approach. It discusses the reasons people seek out media to satisfy five needs: cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension-free needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Zillman and Gan (1997) explained that adolescents enjoy music based on their own rationalizations and personal experiences as influenced by social, individual, and situational factors.

Schaefer and Sedlmeier (2010) investigated several parameters that influence music preference, including cognition, emotion, physiological arousal, and familiarity. The results showed that the cognitive functions of music (i.e., music as a means of

communication and self-reflection) and the physiological arousal elicited by music were the most important determinants of music preference. The researchers proposed that,

the ability of music to convey information about people’s identity—who they are, what they feel—and to enhance social bonding seems to be the central key to understanding strong preferences for musical styles. (p. 9)

This section included the main theoretical framework (Campbell et al., 2007) of this study and other supported studies in regard to the musical identities of adolescents (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Frith, 1981, 1987, 1996; Schaefer & Sedlmeier, 2010; Zillmann & Gan, 1998). The next section addresses the need to produce more literature on contemporary music, especially in the area of music education, and the need to integrate contemporary music into the music curriculum for aspiring performers and young listeners.

Problem Statement

Of course, sometimes audience members don’t come back, and we all know of orchestras and opera companies that are struggling or have stopped operations. There are myriad reasons for this, but in many cases, there are simply not enough people in the community who care about what the orchestra provides. An alarmingly prevalent argument is to blame what is played—and in particular contemporary repertoire. You don’t hear a lot of people saying straight out that orchestras should do no contemporary music, but there are many who say that it’s ok as long as they don’t have to hear any of it. (Gilbert, 2015, para. 12)

The general public does not easily understand or appreciate contemporary music and, as a result, holds many misconceptions and stereotypes about contemporary music. These stereotypes also exist among professional music teachers and affect their work with young musicians. Unfortunately, contemporary music literature and music education that focuses on young musicians is very limited and there is a strong need for such work.

Jorgensen (2005) asserted the need to broaden the range of repertoire studied by students by including popular and classical music in general music education. This normative claim is particularly important as some educators may maintain a conservative role and are reluctant to be more diverse in choosing a wider music repertoire. To increase diversity in music classrooms, music educators over the past decade have begun to promote the need to integrate popular music and especially hip hop music into the curriculum. Despite these advances, however, promoting contemporary music in the music classroom is still only a suggestion and rarely executed, particularly when contemporary music is not easily comprehended even by in-service music teachers. Moreover, the few literature reviews that have been conducted on young musicians and contemporary music (e.g., Baldacchino, 2010; Gordon, 1995) reveal a lack of resources and support for music teachers to understand contemporary music education more deeply. Hence, exploring and investigating the experiences of young musicians with contemporary music may serve to illuminate this subject matter.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic research is to explore the experiences of young string players who are playing in a contemporary music ensemble collective through the lens of their identity, and its concomitant social and emotional aspects. This research may also provide a deeper understanding of how teachers perceive their roles in current contemporary music education.

Research Questions

My research questions were developed based on Campbell et al.'s (2007) five themes of adolescents' expressed meanings of music. The five themes underlying adolescents' expressed meanings of music include: (a) identity formation through music; (b) emotional benefits; (c) music's life benefits, including character-building and life skills; (d) social benefits; and (e) positive and negative impressions of school programs and their teachers (Campbell et al., 2007). Maxwell's (2013) approach aims to discover: (a) the meaning of events and activities to the people involved in them; (b) questions about the influence of the physical and social context of these events and activities; and (c) questions about the processes by which these events and activities and their outcomes occurred.

Based on this theoretical perspective, three research questions guide this study:

1. How do young string players come to know themselves and others through participation in *Face the Music*?
2. What are music's emotional and social benefits for young string players in *Face the Music*?
3. How do teachers in *Face the Music* perceive their roles in contemporary music education?

Research Methodology Overview

The study was conducted using qualitative research methodologies in the tradition of an ethnographic single-case study approach (Byrne & Ragin, 2009). A case study is an empirical inquiry that, “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 13). *Face the Music* is the first youth ensemble collective in the United States that is dedicated to rehearsing and performing living composers’ contemporary music. An exploration of *Face the Music* fits into the criteria of a single case because it, “represent[s] an extreme case or unique case” (p. 42) because this research investigated and identified a unique, accomplished, and distinct program. I hope that its findings will lead to a deeper understanding of contemporary music education in a non-generalized way.

I used qualitative methods to collect data, specifically observations, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Spradley, 1979). Observations took place during *Face the Music*’s Sunday rehearsals, sectional rehearsals, and concerts so that I could become embedded into the group and its activities. The young string players participated in different ensembles and included conductors and teaching artists. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. More details of the methodology are presented in Chapter III.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of literature is to provide a context for and perspective of contemporary music in relation to its discourse and research in music education. In addition, this literature review focuses on research that explores contemporary music and adolescents in multiple dimensions. Contemporary music involves an extensive yet complex content (in terminology, both technical and compositional) that is debatable and multidimensional while also constantly evolving and progressing. Because music is one key influence on adolescent development, it is also imperative to explore young people's identity formation, musical identities, and musical preferences. Despite a lack of research on the educational aspects of contemporary music, especially for adolescents, this literature review provides a framework and rationale for this dissertation that focuses on how contemporary music plays a role in the lives of the young string players in *Face the Music*. My literature review includes qualitative, quantitative, descriptive, ethnographic, and online resources. The review of literature is organized into four main categories:

1. history of contemporary music and related projects.
2. identity and music for adolescents.

3. contemporary music and young people.
4. contemporary music and pedagogy.

Each of these sections is discussed in turn with illustrations from the relevant literature.

Historical Background of Contemporary Music

The exact beginning of the term, “contemporary music” in Western music history is unclear. It might have started in the search for different modes of expression by musicians and artists at the turn of the 20th century. The late romantic style promulgated by Gustav Mahler, Jean Sibelius, and Richard Strauss stretched the boundaries of post-romantic symphonic writing, while Claude Debussy and the art world pioneered Impressionism. Together, these artists created new uses of color, innovative chord combinations, and ambiguity in tonalities. Composers influenced each other yet moved in different directions, broadening the scope of unconventional tonality, a, “linguistic plurality” of styles, and unfamiliar techniques and expressions (Morgan, 1984, p. 458). Béla Bartók used folk music to incorporate new ideas of tonality in his works. Dimitri Shostakovich, utilized a variety of different voices in his works with elements of grotesque and ambivalent tonality.

In 1922, Arnold Schoenberg invented a 12-tone technique emphasizing atonality, which was adapted by the composers Alban Berg, Anton Webern, and Hanns Eisler of the Second Viennese School. This technique was further explored by later composers like Pierre Boulez, Milton Babbitt, and Ernst Krenek. In the 1950s, R. Murray Schafer, John Cage, and Paulino Oliveros in particular pioneered post-war avant-garde music using electroacoustic music and implementing the non-standard use of musical instruments;

others such as Milton Babbitt, Luigi Nono, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luigi Nono, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Edgard Varese expanded our concepts of sound and even noise. Pierre Schaeffer, who developed a unique avant-garde form known as *musique concrete*, featured sounds from musical instruments, voice, the natural environment, and synthesizers and computer programs. Edgard Varèse, Pierre Henry, Iannis Xenakis, Luciano Berio and more concentrated on electronic music and sound production.

The roots of musical minimalism can be found in the serial structures of Anton Webern, John Cage's experiments with silence, La Monte Young's extended microtonal drones, and in Terry Riley's *In C*. In the 1970s, minimalism was explored in the works of American composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Both led their performing ensembles and created systematic transformational processes for generating melodic and rhythmic diversity over steady pulses and slowly-changing harmonies. Their focus was on the internal listening processes of music, with a lack of motion or goals. The compositions featured consonant harmony, drones, gradual changes, and small motifs or musical phrases, and are sometimes described as process music. The shifts of style elaborated the growth of, "post-minimalism," which loosened strict processes and allowed for harmonic complexity; obvious linear forms were avoided. In England, experimentalists like Christopher Hobbs, Michael Nyman, Michael Parsons, John White, and Garvin Bryars developed, "systems music," while, "Holy minimalism"—aesthetic composition that involves religious or mystical subjects—was pioneered by composers such as Arvo Pärt and Henryk Gorecki. In the early 1980s, "totalism" was led by many young composers who confined minimalism and used greater rhythmic complexity and

intricate tempos. Composers such as John Luther Adams, Ben Neill, Evan Ziporyn, and Arthur Jarvinen utilized totalism in their compositions.

Modernism in music is diverse and innovative, stretching well beyond the familiar and comfortable. Serialist, minimalist, experimental, electronic, postmodernist, new simplicity and new complexity music arose throughout the late 20th century and continued into the new millennium. To date, living composers have started to use a wider palette of musical composition techniques, mixing multicultural themes, multimedia, and a diversity of styles in their works. Some recent practitioners are: Meredith Monk, Tan Dun, John Adams, Missy Mazzoli, and Ennio Morricone. As contemporary music repertoire has greatly expanded ever since the early 20th century, different projects in the United States have advocated a fuller range of musicianship by expanding music learning beyond just the classical and romantic periods.

Controversies in Contemporary Music

Contemporary music has raised several controversies, perhaps the most prominent being the ambiguity surrounding its definition. The term *postmodernism* may shed some light on how to comprehend contemporary music today. According to Jann Pasler (2001) in *Grove Music Online*, postmodernism is a term with, “diverse and contradictory meanings” (n.p.) because of varied discourses over its parameters. Kramer (2002) suggests that postmodernism is best understood as an opposition of modernism through several centuries of the Western music tradition, which is, “not simply a repudiation of modernism or its continuation, but has aspects of both a break and an extension” (p. 16). Postmodernism can also be interpreted as a rejection of intellectual complexity in favor of increased accessibility. Given that the notion of accessibility can be defined in multiple

ways, the term *postmodernism* leads to multiple approaches and strands. Another view of postmodernism is as “radical postmodernism” (Kramer, 1995, p. 21) or, “postmodernism of resistance” (Foster, 2002, p. xii), which is characterized by the use of irony or critique to challenge formal or traditional conventions. A third strand of postmodernism, “connection or interpenetration” (Pasler, 2014, n.p.), focuses on the awareness of the contingency and tensions between traditional and new styles, but neither embraces or rejects its traditional forms. Most importantly, postmodern scholarship on music attempts to avoid generalizing approaches and trying to substantiate alternatives that, “speak to specificity of place or personal expression” (Slobin, 1996; see also Hisama, 2004; Lipsitz, 1997).

The ambivalence of contemporary music has existed since it began, and many other types of music are used in different contexts, such as “new music” and “modern music.” Each context seems to hold on to its own ideas, perceptions, and definitions of this music. Perhaps the ambivalence allows freedom and in-between space for the development of contemporary music.

Contemporary Music Projects in the United States

To provide a historical context of different major contemporary music projects in the United States, there is a need to exemplify the Contemporary Music Project (CMP), the Yale Seminar, the Juilliard Repertory, and the Manhattanville Music Curriculum. Each of these projects holds a substantial place in contemporary music history and has progressed music education in the United States. The Contemporary Music Project highlights the words of Dello Joio:

We are now on the threshold of what can be exhilarating times, a future inescapably to be characterized by transience, diversity, and innovation. Thus,

man [*sic*] today is being forced, in spite of himself, to examine and question past values. It is folly to cling to the links of tradition alone in the belief that by so doing we can cope with the future. Change in teaching procedures is inevitable. It is my belief that comprehensive musicianship can be that solid base on which one can build for the future without rejecting the past. (qtd. in Contemporary Music Project, 1973, p. 34)

The CMP was started through a suggestion by Norman Dello Joio, the Chairman of Contemporary Music Project, to the Ford Foundation to explore the relationship between contemporary arts and American society. The CMP was established in 1963 by the Ford Foundation's Program in Humanities and the Arts as an expansion program for the "Young Composers Project" that had been instituted by the Ford Foundation in 1959. In 1962, the Young Composers Project became a pilot program. In 1963, the Ford Foundation awarded the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) a grant of \$1,380,000 to establish this major project. The Young Composers Project, the initial venture, placed young composers in public schools to write for different performing groups.

In 1965, the CMP held a Seminar on Comprehensive Musicianship at Northwestern University in Illinois, with the purpose of improving music education in new directions and using a new concept of comprehensive musicianship. Between 1966 and 1968, six regional Institutes for Music in Contemporary Education were established. In May 1967, a symposium was held to discuss the practice of comprehensive musicianship. In 1968, the Ford Foundation awarded a 5-year grant of \$1,340,000 to extend support to the program. By 1968, 46 more composers had been assigned to public schools as resident composers.

The CMP eventually consisted of three programs: Professionals-in-Residence to Communities, Teaching of Comprehensive Musicianship, and Complementary Activities.

Its aim was to bring together composers and performers to revitalize the music life of communities, and thus broaden students' musical tastes and school repertoires. The CMP also held workshops and seminars throughout the country to help music educators better understand contemporary music. It designed an outline of the nature of music for students to gain awareness and comprehend the elements of any music in any style or culture:

- (1) Music is sound.
- (2) Sound exists in time and space and its elements are Frequency (pitch), Duration Intensity (loudness), Timbre
- (3) The organization and interaction of these elements produce music.

Horizontal organization:

Movement through time—a separation into units or the generation of a sense of continuous time.

Rhythm—the division of the duration of sound and silence into long or short, regular or irregular groupings.

Melody—the interaction of rhythm and frequencies. Frequencies are heard as white sounds; registral sounds (sounds of indefinite pitches); single pitches. A range of frequencies can be used in a continuous manner (sweeps) or be divided into units (scales).

Vertical organization:

Harmony—simultaneous sounds

Texture—qualities of the density of simultaneous sounds or the accumulation of individual lines.

Expressive qualities Intensity (volume dynamics)—energy that gives sound its qualities of loudness, from very soft to very loud. Intensity can involve both abrupt and continuous changes and can be used for such aesthetic effects [sic] as climaxes or surprises. (Contemporary Music Project, 1973, p. 39)

The outline emphasized the concept of comprehensive musicianship, focusing on the full range of music based on the idea that it is more than merely composition, theory, or performance. Moreover, the outline suggested that there are multiple ways to interpret and understand contemporary music: horizontal and vertical organization. However, the

outline did not include the culture of the compositions, which may be located outside the horizontal and vertical organization as a bigger concept. The CMP recommended that teachers focus on an entire range of music curricula so students can study broader styles of music from different cultures and time periods.

During the 1960s, the United States was concerned about students' scientific competitiveness after the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite. After the College Music Society's meeting in 1958, the Committee decided to concentrate on the preparation of music teachers in elementary and secondary schools. Claude Palisca, the chairman of the College Music Society and the American Musicological Society's Committee, proposed to the Office of Education to hold a Seminar at Yale University to address issues in music education. In 1963, the Yale Seminar took place to explore the problems facing music education and propose ways to improve current music education issues. Thirty-one participants, including music education leaders, composers, theorists, musicologists, public and private school music teachers, and college music educators, were invited to the seminar. The final report focused on 10 areas:

1. Musicality—focus on music education development from K through 12th grade.
2. Repertory—strengthen standard concert literature and bring in contemporary composition and advances in musicology in the present repertory.
3. Music as Literature—meaningfully listen and understand music literature of the past and present in elementary and secondary schools.

4. Performing Activities—marching band and stage band should not be ends in themselves. Instruction in vocal and instrumental performance should always be supplemented with classes in basic musicianship and theory.
5. Courses for Advanced Students—lead students to discover through music literature analysis and study.
6. Musicians in Residence—bring in professional musicians, composers, and scholars into schools, based on the Young Composers Project.
7. Community Resources—allow seasoned musicians in the community to teach in the schools as a new source of highly qualified music personnel.
8. National Resources—make opportunities for advanced music study in non-metropolitan areas.
9. Audiovisual Aides—use self-instructional devices to create opportunities for teachers to teach music subjects.
10. Teacher Training and Retraining—re-examine teacher training programs to broaden understanding of music and the increased mastery of technique to meet the greater emphasis on creativity and literature. (Werner, 2009/2010, pp. 102-103)

According to Werner (2009/2010), some individuals in the music education field called the conclusions reached by the Seminar, “unrealistic and naïve.” Nevertheless, this Seminar triggered important reactions from different music schools and programs. The Dean of the Juilliard School at that time, Gideon Waldrop, responded to the recommendation to upgrade and expand the repertory in schools and proposed a new set of curricular materials for teaching music from kindergarten through 6th grade. This was

the initiative of the Juilliard Music Repertory Project. To date, 50 years after the Yale Seminar, many of these recommendations are still applicable to current music education, especially the recommendation for the repertory, which many schools are still reluctant to present to teach contemporary composition to the students.

As an immediate response to the 1963 Yale Seminar, the Juilliard Repertory Project, from July 1964 to December 1966, received funding in the amount of \$308,310 through the U.S. Office of Education. Directed by head of the Composition Faculty at Juilliard at that time, Vittorio Giannini led eight representative authorities in various periods of music and three music educators as a consultant team to enrich the existing repertory from kindergarten through 6th grade. The project was to research and develop a large body of authentic and meaningful music materials to augment and enrich the repertory available to the teachers of music in earlier grades. The consultants were responsible to select music suitable for use in the school in these eight broad style periods: Early Monody, Renaissance, Baroque, Classic, Romantic, Post-Romantic, Contemporary, and International Folk Music. The publication of *Juilliard Repertory Library* became the collection of music recommended by the consultants of the Juilliard Repertory Project.

From 1964 to 1967, the Ann Arbor Public Schools tested the repertory compositions. The Juilliard School sent each music teacher 30 copies of each composition through random sampling. No teacher received compositions by the same composer. Teachers were also allowed to test other compositions if they wished. The Project requested the teachers to respond in writing to these questions:

1. a general description of how the music was tested.
2. a general reaction to various types of text (subject matter) and to foreign languages if either of these things can be generalized.
3. the pros and cons of translations—what were some of the problems and difficulties found in the translations provided.
4. how an anthology containing the best of the music tested would be received and what use it could serve in the schools.
5. suggestions for an anthology.
6. a general evaluation of the wide span of material (from Pre-Renaissance to Contemporary). (Scholten, 1998, p. 31)

The comments from the teachers indicated that students' interest in a repertoire were largely determined by how much time teachers devoted to teaching the particular repertoire. Students did not respond well to most of the Pre-Renaissance, Renaissance, and Romantic music because they had difficulty understanding the concepts behind the songs. The teachers reflected that contemporary music was valuable to the students because, "early music was meaningless to young children" (p. 32). The Contemporary portion included compositions by Otto Luening, Richard Felciano, Robert Starer, Ned Rorem, Peter Schickele, Ulysses Kay, and other composers living at the time. Other comments included that the *Juilliard Repertory Library* would be more suitable for junior high or high school levels rather than elementary, and there is a need to include suggestions for performance practices, stylistic concepts, and information on composers. Scholten (1998) suggested that more research and reviews need to be conducted on the process of selection of music. He concluded that the, "JRL (The Juilliard Repertory

Library) was unsuccessful in its attempt to improve musical repertory in the nation's schools" (p. 41).

Another contemporary project, the Manhattanville Music Curriculum Program (MMCP), launched a major curriculum reform effort during the 1960s in the wake of the Kennedy Administration's interest in and support for arts education and the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. The founder and the director of the project, Ronald B. Thomas, was a faculty member at Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, in Purchase, New York. The primary goal of the MMCP was to develop an alternative music curriculum for Grades K-12. The objectives were (1) "to prepare a curriculum guide and related materials designed for the primary through the high school years, all using discovery approaches"; (2) "to develop a meaningful sequence of basic musical concepts in terms of the children's understanding"; and (3) "to more closely unify philosophies and directions of all areas and levels of music learning through the development of a spiral-type curriculum" (Thomas, 1970, p. xi). Twenty-two expert consultants, including musical performers, music educators, and general educators, as well as 38 teacher-consultants were invited. A group of important composers, including Lionel Nowak, Henry Brant, Charles Wuorinen, and James Tenney, were also part of the project. Three phases of the project were created: extensive experiment, pilot testing, and final revisions.

In 1966-67, during the first phase, approximately 2,100 students in 81 classes were involved in the experiment process after a 5-week summer workshop at Manhattanville College. Nineteen teachers developed and tested out new ideas discussed in the curriculum seminar, based on Bruner's spiral curriculum and basic structural concepts of

music. After the teachers carried out the experiment, they continued to participate in the conferences and workshop to refine the draft of the new curriculum.

In the second phase of the project, a new group of 19 music educators joined the project, representing music directors and administrators from different parts of the United States. Then they continued to experiment with the new curriculum draft in participating high schools and colleges in the greater New York area after an extensive workshop. Following that, they continued to revise the new curriculum continued, emphasizing the spiral curriculum, teaching strategies, the conditions of the educational environment, teacher roles, effective scheduling, preparation, and rationale.

Finally, during the third phase, they continued to investigate a separate curriculum for early childhood, and to prepare and test plans for re-educating teachers about the new curriculum, and developed an assessment instrument. In 1970, the fourth revision of the new music curriculum had been completed and MMCP's *Synthesis: A Structure for Music Education* was published. The emphasis on contemporary classical music was one of the main features of the new curriculum. They introduced contemporary musical terms such as retrograde, serial form, broken chords, clusters, 7- and 12-tone rows, and whole-tone groupings. Composers of the 20th century, including Anton Webern, Bela Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, John Cage, and Edward Varèse, were introduced. Thomas (1970) believed that Contemporary music is most appropriate for people to begin their music study. MMCP aimed to offer a flexible guide for music teachers, who acted as stimulators for creative thinking. Leonhard and Colwell (1976) commented on MMCP's influences as follows:

[MMCP] received the greatest attention due to its radical departure from traditional modes of school music instruction.... MMCP has had a genuine impact

on the procedures and goals for music at every educational level, though its complete adoption has occurred in only a limited number of situations. (p. 90)

The challenges MMCP faced included music teachers who were reluctant to implement the MMCP curriculum. Because of tradition and status quo, creativity instruction was underrated for performance ensembles. Other issues, such as teachers' musical preferences, the culture of the traditional in music and music education, and instructional logistics were factors that hindered the implementation of the MMCP curriculum. In 1972, the grant for MMCP ended, although core music consultants continued to incorporate MMCP in their teaching. For example, Ronald Thomas incorporated an MMCP music laboratory into his freshman class curriculum; Carroll Rinehart incorporated MMCP composition into his *Spectrum of Music*, a K-8 music textbook; Alex Campbell continued to conduct MMCP workshops; and Lenore Pogonowski founded the Creative Arts Laboratory at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Moon and Humphreys (2010) conclude that the limited success of MMCP was caused by the reluctance of music teachers to appreciate MMCP's innovative features, which emphasized creativity and 20th-century musical idioms:

The MMCP experiences present powerful lessons for future reforms who seek to change educational realities. Significant change is unlikely without solid bottom-up support, effective implementation strategies, and success in sustaining and institutionalizing new curricula initiatives. (pp. 95-96)

Professional Ensembles in Contemporary Music

Professional contemporary ensembles in the United States have proliferated in the past 50 years. According to *The New Yorker's* music critic Alex Ross (2008), in 2008, there were 40 professional contemporary music ensembles in New York City alone, and this number is still growing. The objectives of these ensembles are often to promote

emerging composers who will break with traditional instrumentation, tonality, and musicality, and to refresh audiences with new concepts and sounds of music. Despite the increase in advocacy of contemporary music among professional musicians, however, other groups still do not have adequate access of contemporary music—the general public, most music schools (except for top conservatories), and public school students.

Smart (2009) investigates three successful professional contemporary music ensembles—Alarm Will Sound, The International Contemporary Ensemble, and The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players—in terms of their repertoire selections, motives, and methods behind programming decisions. In an interview, the director of The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players explained how their objective is blended with an audience-centered philosophy of producing programs that are thorough and meaningful for new music enthusiasts, while at the same time providing an interesting experience for newcomers. All three groups admitted that “likeability” is not the main factor behind their repertoire decisions since that alone would eliminate most of their choices. If understanding “likeability” is not the main point of their repertoire selections, it seems that professional contemporary ensembles are less about advocating contemporary music for how it sounds, and more about the ideas behind and within the compositions.

Smart (2009) concludes that these three ensembles, sharing similar missions to promote contemporary music, are committed to providing unconventional, compelling, interpersonal, and educational experiences for their respective audiences. However, they have very different sets of repertoires and with no commonly selected pieces. Moreover, their members are culturally and geographically diverse and the instrumentation for their repertoire is not standardized. As for budgets, each ensemble has employed a different

number of musicians for different pieces, ranging from five or fewer musicians to an ensemble of 28 musicians. Nevertheless, the general consensus is that even with the public's greater awareness of and increased exposure to professional contemporary music ensembles and professional musicians, the advocacy of contemporary music among young people still needs enhancement.

Music and Identity

As this study will also investigate the musical identity of young musicians, I am interested in exploring the research on musical identity regarding personal, emotional, interpersonal relationships, and identity within communities.

Music is always consumed and used in different personal or social contexts. In an extensive study carried out by North, Hargreaves, and Hargreaves (2004), a total of 346 participants were involved in a series of surveys for 14 days about the uses of music in their everyday lives. The results show that a high proportion of music-listening episodes occurred in the presence of others, but liking for music heard in isolation were higher than liking for music heard in the presence of others. The data also indicated that classical and jazz music were experienced infrequently. Music was experienced at leisure for the majority of participants. Furthermore, music listening was rarely the main task in which participants were engaged. They conclude that people consciously and actively use music in different interpersonal and social contexts to produce different psychological states. Musical experiences occur at different levels of engagement, and the value placed upon the music depends on the context (p. 75).

In addition to music that emerges in daily life, music is also a powerful tool for expression. According to Hudak (1999), it is,

an emergent, radical engagement with consciousness; an engagement which can “rattle” the hegemony of everyday life and open up the possibility of a common ground where differences might meet, mingle, and engage one another. (p. 447)

The music-making process provides the, “formation of a musical ‘We’”(p. 447). Hudak believes that the very constitution of a, “We” creates the community of, “yearning,” similar to bell hooks’s (1990) ideology in which, “the shared space and feeling of yearning opens up the possibility of a common ground where differences might meet and engage one another” (p. 13). Further on, Hudak (1999) uses Schutz’s (1951) idea of the alignment of inner time to illustrate the relationship between the composer and the performers: The performers become the beholders of the tunes that align with the composer, which unifies them as being on the, “same wavelength” (p. 453). Hudak (1999) asserts that music-making is a specific structure of temporality, connected with the constitution of what it means to be human. The formation of a sound identity embraces this modality of intimacy; without it, humans would be absent from social relations (p. 468).

It is almost impossible for me to find any musical identity research particularly dedicated to contemporary music; however, I did find research that focused on popular music and New Age music. Wang (2001) looks at a more specific group of people within the community, particularly, the Asian-American community. Wang (2001) examines popular music from the last 40 years to explore the changing social, political, and cultural identities of Asian-Americans. He suggests that music has been an important and meaningful form of expressive culture that has helped to shape ethnic and personal

identity (p. 440). Wang further asserts that there is a constant exchange of meaning between the creators of art and the consumers of arts (p. 462).

Boal-Palherios and Hargreaves (2002) investigated the effects of interpersonal context of the New Age music on the emotional responses of children and early adolescents. Participants included 9- to 10-year-olds and 13- to 14-year-olds; half of the participants in each age group were randomly assigned to one of two listening conditions. The researchers employed instrumental new age music to evoke different emotional reactions with no lyrics involved. The excerpts were especially chosen for their unfamiliarity. Popular music was not used in the study so as to avoid hasty reactions of dislike or rejection. After listening to the excerpts, participants were asked to rate their listening experience on eight 5-point scales within four quadrants of emotional response: positive/negative affect and high/low arousal. The findings revealed that the participants' emotional responses were polarized when they listened to music in groups rather than alone. This suggests that the group-related social functions of music were more distinctive than personal functions; this corresponded with developmental theories that emphasized the importance of peer-group relationships in adolescent social development (McGurk, 1992). Another result suggested that the younger children gave significantly higher mean ratings for positive/high arousal emotions, whereas the older children gave significantly higher mean ratings for negative emotions.

Contemporary Music and Young People's Musical Preferences

Research has shown that increased music training may positively influence students' musical preferences for non-popular styles of music (Brittin, 1996; Gregory, 1979; LeBlanc, 1979). These results could have implications for music educators who are

concerned with teaching non-popular music (Ginocchio, 2009). While many of these studies are quantitative research, the large sample of the findings assist my studies to further investigate the musical preference of young string players in *Face the Music*.

One of the questions implicit in this dissertation is whether one can learn to accept or grow to love contemporary music; Gregory (1994) suggests that training broadens receptivity within and across music genres. In Gregory's study, undergraduate college music majors, high school musicians in performance groups, and 6th-grade students in eight sites across the United States listened to selections of excerpts from early contemporary compositions by Hindemith and Stravinsky, popular classics by Mozart and other pieces from the Silver Burdett/Ginn elementary music education series, and crossover jazz recordings. Keyboard, band, choral, and orchestral excerpts were represented for each of the classical categories. Data were collected by the Continuous Response Digital Interface (CRDI), which is an interface used to measure ongoing and changing musical responses while people are listening to music. Results found instrumental biases among high school and college musicians' preferences for relatively unfamiliar classical music, i.e., early contemporary compositions. Results also revealed significant differences between the three groups for the Hindemith, Stravinsky, and Mozart excerpts. The 6th-grade students' ratings were consistently the lowest, while the music majors' ratings were consistently the highest. Further analysis revealed instrumental biases among high school musicians for the Hindemith, Stravinsky, and electronic categories, while music majors revealed own-instrument biases for Hindemith and Stravinsky.

Similarly, LeBlanc (1979) employs a listening tap with one example of 13 different styles of music ranging from classical, country, pop, rock, gospel, sacred choral to electronic pop, avant-garde, and even ambient sounds. He examined the listening preferences of 278 5th graders from 11 classrooms in the St. Louis, Missouri area in 13 styles. After the participants listened to the examples, they were asked to rate their preference for the examples on a scale of 1 to 7: (a) easy-listening pop, (b) rock, (c) ragtime, (d) Dixieland, (e) band march, (f) country western/bluegrass, (g) random-generated electronic sounds, (h) electronic pop, (i) modern swing, (j) sports car, (k) avant-garde, (l) classical instrumental, (m) black gospel, (n) windshield wipers with rain, (o) sacred choral, and (p) folk. The results showed that while there was a significant difference in responses for classical instrumental, black gospel, sacred choral, and folk selections, responses for the top six ranked styles were not significantly different.

A few years later, LeBlanc (1981) did another study to suggest there are high preferences for popular styles of music and lower preference ratings for non-popular styles. Mean preference ratings revealed that rock or pop music was the most preferred style, followed by country music, band music, newer jazz, older jazz, and finally art music. The results also revealed that the preferences were higher to music with a faster tempo than a slower one. In addition, LeBlanc (1982) concludes that educators, authority figures, and media have an influence on the music preferences and decisions of listeners at different stages of life (p. 31).

While other researchers have focused on different genres, Finnas (1987) looks through the lens of music preferences in relationship with peer-influences. He explored whether young people misjudge each other's musical tastes. He found that how teenagers

perceived their peers' musical taste played a role in forming their own musical tastes. The perceived taste of the peers may be experienced as associated with social expectations or even social pressures towards a similar taste for one's preferences. The research concluded that teenage participants tended to overestimate their peers' preference for, "tough/protesting/rock-oriented" music, which led them to pay more attention to such music while they underestimated their peers' musical taste for music that was more traditional and quiet, leading them to be more ignorant of and negatively disposed to such music (p. 164). Finnas implies that stereotypes should not be promoted. Rather, music teachers should facilitate students' communication of their genuine musical experiences to each other and encouraged them to express their preferences freely (p. 165).

A more recent study was conducted by Madsen and Geringer (2015) on 20th-century/contemporary music preferences. They queried K-12 students, undergraduates, and graduate students. Among graduate students, one group of students who had taken a 20th-century music class also participated in the research. The researchers played six contemporary excerpts twice to the participants. They found the children's responses were consistent in that younger children gave higher mean "like" ratings than older students. There was a large difference between younger students' responses between the 6th and 9th grades, with the latter being more similar to the undergraduate and graduate music students. Ratings from the graduate students who had taken a 20th-century music class were not significantly higher than those graduate students who had not taken the course. These findings indicated that children's preferences seemed to decline in early adolescence, yet younger children tended to have a more positive and open attitude

toward a wide range of styles in many aspects of art and design, including mid-20th-century art music.

These studies (Gregory, 1994; LeBlanc, 1979; Madsen & Geringer, 2015) indicated that contemporary music has the potential to be exposed to many age groups and taught with appropriate teaching strategies and creative methods. Music educators can expand their curricula by incorporating contemporary music as creative projects or listening exercises.

Contemporary Music and Pedagogy

Research is sparse when it comes to investigating contemporary music teaching pedagogy in a holistic sense. In the 1950s, Gordon (1950) writes about how the characteristics of contemporary music create problems for both music teachers and students. He noted two spheres of the music that contribute to its challenges: (a) melody, harmony, counterpoint—with its free use of dissonance and unusual melodic intervals; and (b) rhythm and meter—with its free use of irregular meters and unusual rhythmic progressions (p. 38). As a result, musicians are not able to *hear* the music simply from reading the score as they can with classical music. Gordon suggested that music teachers who are presenting contemporary music should know the music thoroughly, be able to conduct irregular meters, and provide the beats at, “the right time in the right place” (p. 39). Conductors will have to prepare rehearsals carefully to understand the composition and know how to explain it to their students in order to help them tackle the inherent difficulties. Moreover, Gordon emphasized how democratic teaching pedagogy serves the students better. Teachers can guide students, but students should not follow teachers

blindly. Lastly, Gordon also mentioned that contemporary works require longer practice sessions, even though it is difficult to sustain the concentration of students for lengthy rehearsal sessions.

McGowan (1999) writes about the ambiguity of modern (contemporary) music and suggested that students can better understand contemporary music through its development. He points out that, “‘Twentieth century music’ is a phrase fraught with associations and preconceptions” (p. 21). He illustrated his own growing love for contemporary music and described this as an influence on his teaching at the college level. Based on his experience in teaching contemporary music, McGowan suggested music educators have to acknowledge that contemporary music is not a single unit. The variety of styles of the past 100 years has made it difficult to choose repertoire, and it is impossible to expect consistent or predictable reactions from audiences. Another way to help students understand contemporary music is to stress the evolution from 19th-century styles, namely how composers such as Wagner, Debussy, and Stravinsky gradually sought to increase chromatic intensity, and Schoenberg created the 12-tone row to disrupt tonality. Teachers can also introduce pieces through the works of “bridge” composers, according to McGowan—pieces that are somewhat more accessible to the general public, such as Bartók’s *Suite* (1916), or the *Divertimento for Strings, Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* (1936), before moving on to other composers, such as Stravinsky, who provide similar music tonalities. Lastly, McGowan asserts that the end goal of introducing contemporary music to students should not be only to increase appreciation, but also to increase sensitivity for other musical elements such as rhythm, meter, timbre, and non-pitched elements.

Three studies by researchers and music educators—Tuley et al. (1979), Auh and Walker (1999), and Allsup (1979, 1999, 2002, 2003a, 2004)—present classroom pedagogy, contemporary and democratic composition, and the practices of graphic notation systems. Tuley et al. (1979) exhibits guidelines for contemporary composers of elementary-level music. They propose that, “mainstreaming, along with continuing emphasis on individualized learning and the open classroom, will require composers to create both non-traditional and traditional works” (p. 47). They explain that typical contemporary works for elementary students lack supplementary instrumental parts to meet wide competency ranges. They recommend that contemporary composers continue to write basic, graded elementary supplementary parts for major instruments, but also include supplementary parts at each end of the competency spectrum. However, rhythmic ostinato and simple melody should not be neglected. Another suggestion was to compose music that combines movement, dance, and drama with voices and instruments.

Auh and Walker (1999) explored the possibilities of graphic notation with young students in the classroom. They examined the possibilities of composing with graphic notation among 7th-grade students ($N = 38$; 18 males, 20 females) in Seoul, Korea. They explored musical creativity and compositional strategies with traditional staff notation versus graphic notation. The students were randomly assigned to either traditional or non-traditional groups, and were given compositional tasks. One group was asked to use traditional staff notation, while the other group was asked to use graphic staff notation to create a short piece of music using any type of instrument or voice. Then they were asked to perform their compositions for a videotaped recording. Finally, they were asked to describe their compositional strategies on the Compositional Strategies Questionnaire

(eight questions on structure, expression, motivation, judgment, and decision making).

Their works were evaluated using three criteria: Musical Originality, Musical Syntax, and Artistic Sensitivity. The results showed that musical creativity levels were higher in non-traditional compositions in which students employed multiple and diverse strategies.

Allsup (2002, 2003a, 2004) worked with students in small groups which were given a number of activities that involved both classical and popular modes of composition. After investigating their process of composition in relation with the making of community, he concluded that the genre of music directly impacts students' formation in a community. One of the groups that decided to compose in the genre of classical music became isolated. Group members did not communicate well and little process of composition was shown. In the end, they decided to switch to the genre of jazz and rock which enabled them to collaborate with each and to foster group composition in a democratic and mutual learning setting. As a result, Allsup calls for a new combination in instrumental ensemble that incorporates popular music practices in traditional instrumental pedagogies.

Hill (2009) and Baldacchino (2010) focus on higher education contemporary music education, the former focusing on contemporary folk music and the latter on applied lessons. Hill (2009) produced an ethnomusicological study about creativity and artistic freedom in Finnish Contemporary Folk Music. Although the genre of the music is not exactly contemporary classical music, contemporary folk music is a new music (sub)culture created by the Sibelius Academy Folk Music Department, who used the traditional process of making folk music as a starting point and transformed folk music into a living tradition relevant to contemporary society. They perform new compositions

in traditional, avant-garde, and other styles. Their contemporary folk music program engages students in divergent thinking and creative activities such as improvisation and variation. They view traditional Western art music as conservative, old-fashioned, encouraging of passivity, discouraging and stifling to creativity, and inhibiting of personal expression (Hill, 2009, p. 91). Hill concludes that in using experimental free improvisation as a pedagogical tool, musicians have deconstructed preconceived limits and judgment systems, which provide musicians the ideological tools and social appreciation to challenge restrictions and claim artistic freedom (p. 110).

Recent doctoral research by Baldacchino (2010) examined contemporary music in the applied flute studio by looking at the appropriate pedagogy and strategies that master teachers use and the issues that arose in teaching contemporary music. She concluded that the issues are related to the inherent nature and characteristics of contemporary music as well as the students' cultural frames of reference. Issues from the former category include extended techniques, new notational symbols or non-traditional notation; the music itself does not indicate one set style or musical language. Issues from the latter category include lack of enculturation, unfamiliarity with the music, and the new language of contemporary music. Baldacchino cited Hallam (2001), who suggested that one way to learn music involves *enculturation*, which is defined as the ways individuals come to know the musical structures that underpin the music of different cultures.

Gordon (1950), Tuley et al. (1979), McGowan (1999), Auh and Walker (1999), Hill (2009), Allsup (2002, 2003a, 2004), and Baldachhino (2010) described multiple ways to introduce and teach contemporary music that allow students at various levels of

familiarity and proficiency to understand context, overcome unfamiliarity, engage in divergent thinking, and increase creativity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a detailed framework focusing on four main areas: the history of contemporary music, the relationship between identity and music for adolescents, contemporary music and young people, and finally contemporary music and pedagogy. My literature review once again demonstrated the ambiguity of the term *contemporary music* that was raised and supported by multiple authors (McGowan, 1999). This ambiguity lies not only within the term itself, but also with the lack of support and development in contemporary music pedagogy from music educators. There were, however, numerous projects from the 1960s to the early 1990s promoting contemporary music-making and learning in school settings, such as the Contemporary Music Project, the Juilliard Repertory, the Yale Seminar, and the Manhattanville Curriculum. All these projects seek different goals and themes that encourage and inspire meaningful music-learning in multiple contexts, most of them promoting young, living composers and the expansion of genres. In recent years, there has also been an increase in the number of professional contemporary ensembles in the United States (Ross, 2009), such as the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) and Alarm Will Sound, both of which focus on advocacy for contemporary music in professional settings (Smart, 2009).

Research has suggested that preference for contemporary music is at a relatively low point among the general public (LeBlanc, 1979, 1981; Madsen & Geringer, 2015), although musical preferences can be reinforced by increasing exposure and training

(Brittin, 1996; Gregory, 1979; LeBlanc, 1979). As Gordon (1950), Tuley et al. (1979), McGowan (1999), Auh and Walker (1999), Hill (2009), Allsup (2002, 2003a, 2004), and Baldachhino (2010) have suggested, there are multiple ways to explore pedagogies and perspectives that encourage students to expand their contemporary music education. Would contemporary music become a meaningful resource in music education curricula if there is a greater public acceptance of contemporary music?

Some research (Boal-Palherios & Hargreaves, 2002; Hudak, 1999; North, Hargreaves, & Hargreaves, 2004) related to identity formation, music consumption, and music-making has suggested that music can be seen as intimately connected to the identity of an individual. Others, such as Hill (2009) have suggested that music can be a part of social identity, which is peer-influenced (McGurk, 1994) and is the formation of a, “We.” Wang (2001) asserts that music can represent a part of cultural identity. Does the practice and performance of contemporary music influence young string players’ identity formation or would they defy its impact? Do the complexities found in contemporary music make it more challenging to act as a representation of identity for young adolescents or could it act as a mirror for their complex identities as growing individuals?

In the next chapter, I explain the methodology for an ethnographic study that enabled me to further investigate the aforementioned affirmations, doubts, and questions.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to explore young string players' experiences and perceptions of contemporary music in a youth music ensemble collective. The project examined an afterschool music organization, *Face the Music*, in New York City, in which young musicians (ages 10 to 18) dedicate themselves to studying music written solely by living composers. I interviewed and observed young string players, teachers, and a parent who were attending or teaching at *Face the Music*.

My research questions were developed based on Campbell et al.'s (2007) five principles of adolescents' expressed meanings of music, which I condensed into three main questions:

1. How do young string players come to know themselves and others through participation in *Face the Music*?
2. What are music's emotional and social benefits for young string players in *Face the Music*?
3. How do teachers in *Face the Music* perceive their roles in contemporary music education?

In this chapter, I discuss the research design, instrumentation, procedure, participants, pilot study, and plan for data collection and analysis in this study.

Research Design

This research is an ethnography-based single-case study, which Yin (2009) defines as, “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). According to Siggelkow (2007), the existence of phenomena can be described in rich detail by single-case studies. Stake and Trumbull (1982) also highlighted that single-case study is not to provide generalizations, but to capture the uniqueness of the case. I employed multiple data collection procedures, such as semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and field notes.

Participant Observations

Bernard (1994) defined participant observation as the process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community. The researcher’s actions and attitudes are open, nonjudgmental, and interested in learning more about others. I immersed myself in the setting by moving throughout rehearsals, making observations, and having conversations and interviews with the teachers and students in *Face the Music*. Thus, as a researcher, I used multiple methods to check for nonverbal expressions, emotions, and interactions between the young musicians and the teachers, as well as noting their reactions to certain repertoire and rehearsal strategies. For example, I paid close attention to the how young musicians interact with each other, which helped me to define one of the emergent themes in *Face the Music* as a community. I also took field notes to record both descriptive and reflective information for meaningful insight and emergent themes that helped to develop

the study. I also interacted with quartet members to explore their group dynamics and their different personalities.

Participants

The participants in my study included both student participants, referred to as young string players/musicians and teacher participants, referred to as coaches. The criteria were straightforward: all of these participants must have some involvement with *Face the Music*. Young musicians were chosen on a volunteer basis or by recommendation from the coaches; they ranged from 10 to 18 years of age, played different instruments at various skill levels, and had had disparate educational and musical experiences. Some were enrolled in public schools while others were students at private schools. Further details and background of the participants were revealed in our initial meetings. I recruited five focus groups of students, each containing three to four students—a total of 18 students for the focus groups. I did not limit my interactions with other students; I also conducted semi-formal interviews or one-on-one conversations with other students outside of the focus groups as well. Teacher participants were also chosen on a volunteer basis and included the music director, conductor, and various teaching artists. For teacher participants, I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. I had some semi-structured interviews with six teacher participants and one parent in conjunction with ongoing casual conversations and dialogues before and after rehearsals.

Regarding participant recruitment, I received verbal agreement to conduct this study from the music director of *Face the Music* in October 2017. After briefly hearing my explanation of the study, the director and I agreed on the schedule of observations and recruitment protocol for participants. Upon receiving IRB approval, I sent letters to

inform potential teacher and student participants of the purpose of the research, informed consent, participants' rights, confidentiality, and data collection methods.

Setting

To explore the experiences of young musicians who are dedicated to contemporary music, I used a purposeful sampling of *Face the Music* students to maximize the process of identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who were especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For example, most of my participants have been participating in *Face the Music* for over three years. They have stronger perspectives in regards to their experiences at *Face the Music* than newer members.

The research site, *Face the Music*, is located on the Upper West Side of New York City and operated by the Kaufman Music Center. *Face the Music* is one of a few American ensembles dedicated to contemporary music, praised by *The New York Times* as, "extraordinarily skilled, passionate musicians" (Smith, 2002). It is comprised of a range of music ensembles, such as large ensemble, advanced projects, and string quartets from the tristate area, with young string players aged 10 to 18. A recent article published by *The New York Times*, was titled, "High School Musicians Take on the (Almost) Unplayable," which described the jazz improvisation ensemble. Students collaborate with established composers and performers and have multiple performance opportunities throughout the season. They rehearse every Sunday afternoon in the Special Music High School near the Kaufman Music Center. Students have to register, audition, and pay tuition fees to take part in the program. Scholarships are also available.

Pilot Study

In January to May of 2017, I conducted a pilot study to explore the implementation and perceptions of both conductors and young musicians of contemporary music in the youth orchestra. My initial idea was to conduct this pilot study to examine how the experience of contemporary music is perceived by public school teachers and students. Therefore, my main research questions for the pilot study were: (a) How and why do public school orchestra directors teach contemporary music? and (b) How do public school orchestra students perceive and experience contemporary music?

My participants included one orchestral conductor, one student, and a focus group of six students. In addition to the interviews, I also observed the orchestra rehearsals twice. The setting was a specialized art and performing high school in a northeastern region of the United States. There were approximately 800 students in the school: 11% Asian, 14% Black, 35% White, and 34% Hispanic. This pilot study represented a unique case in which the conductor wrote his own contemporary piece that he tailored to his students and which involved community music making. The final composition was similar to a musical, with dancers, singers, narrators, multimedia, and Native American instruments.

The first research question (How and why do public school orchestra directors teach contemporary music?) aimed to explore the rationales of orchestra directors who teach contemporary music. This question investigated this particular orchestra director's own contemporary music experiences. In this case, I examined the process of the orchestra director composing his contemporary repertoire and how he rehearsed it. This question sought to probe the orchestra director's contemporary music teaching pedagogy

in his public school orchestra. Findings were organized into four categories: rationales, challenges, rewards, and teaching pedagogies; these are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Findings from Orchestra Director/Conductor

1. How and why do public school orchestra directors teach contemporary music?				
I. Rationales	Living art is essential education for the students.	Great ranges of emotions and techniques demand.	Multiple different ways to engage the audience and musicians.	Increase motivation and loyalty of students.
II. Challenges	Writing the tailored piece and original composition for performing students.	Limited resources and assistance for individual musicians.	Lack of motivation from students.	
III. Rewards	The respect and attention to the orchestra class increased.	The students' techniques improved.	The level of interests of students raised.	Student helpers' sense of responsibility increased.
IV. Teaching Pedagogies	Conducting techniques of his own and rehearsing from the ending to the beginning.	Fast rehearsal pace, waste no time in waiting for everyone to get ready.	Tailored techniques level, aimed to stretch each student's potential.	Having teaching artists for individual sections.

The second question was geared towards public school young musicians. This question was important because students' perceptions are as influential as the perceptions of the teacher, educator, or conductor. This question provided me with in-depth views of the students regarding their experiences learning contemporary music. I was interested in

exploring their interests and perceptions, their comprehension or frustration with the experience, and whether or not the students found the experience of playing contemporary music rewarding. The findings from the students were organized in three categories: challenges, rewards, and others; these are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Findings from the Student Musicians

2. How do public school orchestra students perceive and experience contemporary music?				
I. Challenges	Encountering technical difficulties and constant meter changes.	Difficulties understanding the genre and style of contemporary music.	Difficulties in following with others because “there [is] too much going on.”	The dissonance and unusual quality of the piece (students using words like tragic/weird).
II. Rewards	Overcoming technical difficulties.	Positive about community music making.	Be able to react to constant meter changes.	Be able to react to key signature changes quickly.
III. Others	Students’ first experience playing a piece like this.	Most students have mixed feelings toward the piece.	Feeling lost in the rehearsals sometimes.	Most students were willing to play a piece similar to this, and emphasized they would prefer the music based on a different folk story.

The pilot study helped me to refocus my research direction. The experiences of the students reminded me of the challenges of learning contemporary music without having prior experience. The student participants used such words and phrases as, “confusing,” “all over the place,” “nobody’s really listening to each other,” and “it’s

really dissonance, it's something that's hard to feel." At the same time, the pilot also reminded me of how I have gained so much knowledge and different techniques after practicing contemporary music for a longer period and how I started to fall in love with the *sound* of the contemporary music. One student, Aralia (pseudonym), expressed her feelings of rehearsing the contemporary piece as a singer:

I feel like I learned a lot. First of all, I guess I can say that I'm a vocalist that can count now. Like, for real, sis, thank you. I have to thank the instrumentalists for that because they really know what they're doing. They play the music and everything. I don't know how they do it, they just do it, and then they're just like, "oh!" They practice a lot, and they count, and then they play and everything. I really admire instrumentalists for that.

This led me to wonder about the perceptions of those young musicians who have experiences and gradually *learn to appreciate* playing contemporary music. This pilot study thus helped me to reshape my theoretical framework and reconceptualize the 21st-century paradigm that contemporary music can be a part of an adolescent's life. Carrying out this pilot study helped me to further develop my methodology and interview protocol for my dissertation. For instance, I realized it is more useful to conduct more than one interview session, especially to find out how perceptions change over time and after special events such as concerts. In addition, multiple observations will give me a better idea of how students react to rehearsals and what their emotions are by noticing small changes and progresses during rehearsals and classroom pedagogy. This will also allow me time to reflect on and organize data in between each observation and interview, thus making any necessary changes. For a deeper experience and a more diverse perspective, I also plan to attend the young musicians' concert in June and conduct an exit interview afterward.

Instrumentation for Data Collection

To execute this study, I employed multiple instruments of data collection: semi-structured interviews, non-directive interviews, focus group interviews, and observations. Multiple interviews help to foster a stronger relationship between the participants and myself (Adler & Adler, 2002) and allow trust to be established through the initial interview and my multiple observations. The semi-structured design gives the participants time to express their different views and allows the researcher to react to and follow up on emerging ideas with questions (Nohl, 2009). The purpose of the semi-structured interview is to target those music teachers who teach contemporary music, explore what their teaching strategies are, and how they perceive their students' experiences as they study contemporary music. As case study is defined by boundaries, often physical place, and people inside the community, during my observations, I found it difficult to plan out an even amount of interview time for each focus group. Focus group interviews were sometimes adhoc. For example, I had to use the break time of Shao Quartet to talk to the string players, as many of them have engagements before and after their rehearsals. I employed non-directive interviews with such events as before and after rehearsals or during break times, when these presented opportunities to ask participants for their thoughts or feelings about particular moments. This also allowed me to gather in-depth information without a preplanned set of questions.

Creswell (1998) states that focus group interviews are most advantageous when participants are similar and cooperate with each other, as well as when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information (p. 124). Knowing that adolescents feel most comfortable in a group setting with peers, my purpose was to lead

my student participants by encouraging their engagement in the group to express their thoughts and feelings about playing contemporary music. To this end, the focus group was designed to stimulate new ideas among the students that result in deeper conversations. I also took reflective field notes before or after interviews to include my feelings, ideas, impressions, analyses, and thoughts for future inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). All data were transcribed and analyzed for ongoing understanding of similarities, differences, and emerging themes. All of the semi-structured and focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and field notes were taken of the observations.

Plan of Analysis

I designed an interview protocol (see Appendix A) based on the three main research questions that act as the parameters of the study. Each subcategory was constructed to prompt participants to discuss different aspects of their experiences that relate to the three main research questions in open-ended ways. These questions were intended to explore multiple perspectives of the framework. While they are guidelines, they were flexible enough to change and add more questions according to the participants' responses. It is always possible that one question may lead to another theme or main research question. Thus, I coded the themes with the help of the protocol, but was not limited by it. Coding can be defined as the process of organizing the material into sections of text before bringing meaning to the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2009). The coding procedure for this study included a combination of predefined and emergent categories. The process of coding was iterative and nonlinear. For instance, because many of my interviews are semi-structured, I found different interviewees provided me

different interesting insights, and I will focus on certain insights to follow up the questions. As a result, thematic materials emerged from different places. Given the total of three focus group interviews, the second and third interviews may modify and shift focus based on the responses of the participants in order to pursue the generation of a variety of themes that will potentially contribute to the study. Triangulation was used to help reduce the chance of systematic biases by using multiple methods as a checking system (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). Data was triangulated by advisor, founder of *Face the Music*, and doctoral students in the doctoral seminar at Teachers College. Miles and Huberman (1984) emphasize that qualitative research aims to develop local understanding rather than generalizing a theory broadly, and it can only develop general models based on valid site-specific explanations. As this was a single-case study, generalization was not the goal of my research; rather, my aim was to provide a rich and deeper understanding of how young string players perceive the experiences of practicing and playing contemporary music in *Face the Music*.

Ethics

Ethical considerations in the research are essential. *Face the Music* is one of the only youth ensembles in the country that has a mission of rehearsing and performing the music of living composers in New York City. Due to this unique posture, some information, such as the name of the organization, was disclosed with the consent of the organization. However, the actual names of students and the names of the quartet groups were not exposed; I used pseudonyms to protect their identities. In addition, I kept all information on a password-protected computer and locked in a file drawer. Any

electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) were stored on a computer that was password-protected. The data on the audio recording were written down and the audio recording was then destroyed. These procedures were clearly stated in the consent forms given to all participants prior to all interviews.

Informed Consent and IRB

I completed the Certified Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI program) to enhance my knowledge of conducting ethical research. For my next step, I prepared Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent forms and parental consent slips for every participant to sign in order to secure their confidentiality and protect their rights. The informed consent document included specific information about my study—its aims, statements about volunteering, a description of the procedures, and the minimal risks involved in this study. These forms were submitted for IRB approval before I began my observations and interviews. Scripts were also written in the interview protocol to make sure participants understand the recording and interview process. During the interviews, I verbally explained my study and the consent forms before each participant signed.

Chapter IV

FACE THE MUSIC

Walking Into the Un/known

Walking into a familiar part of the town on a Sunday in late January, and passing by my previous college where I studied for 6 years, numerous flashbacks flooded through my mind. I asked myself, “Did I really survive Juilliard?” Everything seemed like a dream at this moment. Once again, I walked into the unknown, only one block beyond my old school.

I once had a young student who lived very close to Juilliard, exactly two blocks away, in the nearby low-income housing projects. That student stopped playing shortly after starting because she constantly argued with her mother about practicing. At the crosswalk in front of the most prestigious performing arts high school in the city was my research site, Martin Luther King Jr. High School Complex Building. This area of the Upper West Side is framed on all sides by Juilliard, the New York Philharmonic, the New York City Ballet, the Metropolitan Opera, a highly selective music and art-based high school, and low-income housing projects.

Outside Martin Luther King Jr. High School is a huge elevated plaza with outdoor seating, but it lay empty on that cold, wintry Sunday. There is a large, cubic stature engraved with the name of the school. I walked up the stairs to reach the plaza, and as I

went through the door, I was met by two security guards. I had never seen a school equipped with such an intense security scanning system, similar to what you might find at an airport or jail. The security equipment was intimidating. One of the security guards kindly asked me to put my phone in a little tray and place my bag on the belt. The seriousness of the security check led me to conduct a little research when I got home—some sexual assaults and violent incidents had been reported in the 1990s and early 2000s in the educational complex. Maybe it made sense that they felt the need to set up extra security systems for the school. However, I had always felt very safe as I used to go to school nearby. I did not feel unsafe at all going to my observations either. I felt that it was necessary for me to disclose the history of the building to challenge the stereotypes of the “Upper West Side.” I think the Upper West Side, especially around Lincoln Center, is a cultural yet diverse neighborhood that had been enriched tremendously in the past twenty years. I feel it is important to highlight the dramatic changes the Upper West Side has experienced so as not to mislead myself or my readers.

The educational campus is a five-story public school facility, sharing space with a few other schools: Martin Luther King Jr. High School, High School for Law, Advocacy and Community Justice, High School of Arts and Technology, Manhattan/Hunter Science High School, and Special Music School. Special Music School is where *Face the Music* conducts its regular Sunday rehearsals. I found my name on the sign-in sheet and the security guard instructed me to walk two flights down to the basement of the building. Upon opening the door, I heard the expected cacophony of the myriad of rehearsals taking place, but *unexpectedly*, they were mixed with the percussive beat of a basketball game. The light was bright but there were no windows on the basement floor. I walked by

some giant black and white glass-framed photos on the wall: high school-aged students holding musical instruments, some holding string instruments, some posing as a group, some rehearsing in the auditorium. These photos were professionally done, similar to artist portraits or headshots. It seems the school must feel very proud of its music program. I wonder how the students must feel walking by these giant photos every day? Along with these professional pictures there were printed photos of some of the current students I saw every Sunday, holding up written signs. One sign read, “I go to SMS [Special Music School] because we have a great, respectful community”; another said, “SMS is unique because of its united passion.” There were also posters of music summer camps for young musicians, students’ recital posters, and outside performance posters on the wall.

While wandering the halls, I saw a young man in his early 20s transporting music stands down the hallway. I asked if he knew where the director was and he brought me to a small black-box theater. This person was Luke, who was working as a production intern. The black-box theater was small and dark, with black walls and low ceiling. The theater consisted of two small rooms, one the office of *Face the Music* and the other a, “library room.” The library room was not spacious, but in it were stored a few instruments that would be used in orchestra rehearsals and some original scores students were working on as well. I introduced myself to Claire, who was the administrator of *Face the Music*. Sitting across from her was the director, Vasu. Between them sat a small table and a tea kettle.

The director of *Face the Music*, Vasu, greeted me and took me on a tour of the school. This first day of my observations was not my first time meeting Vasu. Prior to my

data collection, I met with him in a café near *Face the Music* to discuss the possibility of writing my dissertation on *Face the Music*. He was a young pianist and composer in his 30s, who was *Face the Music's* first intern and had worked here since the very beginning of the program.

Vasu brought me to a classroom where a teacher was rehearsing with a quartet. Tables and desks had been pushed to the side to transform this geography classroom into a functional space for the quartet. Vasu introduced me to everyone, informing them that I would be doing my research here for six months. The musicians greeted me warmly, and returned to their rehearsal. After that, I went to a few more classrooms with a similar setup of a quartet rehearsing with a teacher. All rooms fit the description of a standard high school classroom: clean, plain rooms with some wall decorations, and blindingly bright with fluorescent light. No rooms had soundproofing equipment so music bled from room to room.

I was very pleased by the hospitality of both teachers and students, even the youngest students in elementary and early middle schools. No one seemed shy despite my being a complete stranger to them. Higgins (2007) suggests that community music is a democratic form of hospitality that promotes diversity, freedom and opportunity. I sensed that all the students in *Face the Music* were not afraid of being observed. Most of the students are very well-behaved during the rehearsal, yet there is also a sense of openness among them. There were spaces for them to speak, seemingly motivated by a sense of freedom, and not bounded by rules or consequences. In addition, I also saw a pretty diverse group of students in *Face the Music*. Before I went into the observation phase of the research, I would have imagined it as a fairly homogenous environment because of its

location. To my surprise, I could see many students of color, some immigrants, and students who spoke different languages. As I passed by a photo of a student holding a sign that emphasized the word, “community” in the basement of *Face the Music*, I realized the hospitality that the students showed may have emerged through the community that *Face the Music* has built.

Later, while I floated between different rooms during rehearsals, I sometimes felt invisible to them unless I talked to them. The musicians displayed a high level of focus and were not easily distracted. Vasu told me they were preparing for the Kronos Quartet program, where the members of that renowned quintet would rehearsal with each group. The program would last two weeks and some students would even perform on the same stage with the Kronos Quartet.

After visiting a few rooms, Vasu said I was welcome to explore this place on my own. A schedule for the day was taped at the front of each rehearsal room. When I jokingly told him that I might get lost, he told me the school was donut-shaped and so I would always be able to find my way back.

I found the auditorium and next to it, an instrumental storage room with drums, a bass, and various percussion instruments. I also found an interesting program called *HarmonicsLab* for younger musicians, mostly elementary and middle school-aged students. This group later became a focus of my research. There was also a jazz band, Samurai Mama Big Band, which rehearsed “new” jazz, incorporating world music with standard big-band instrumentation. Given my time constraints and limited expertise in a band setting, the jazz band could not be the focus of this dissertation.

My first observation surprised me. I had imagined something very different—I thought perhaps a highly specialized music school on the Upper West Side would have a sort of “upper-crust” air to it, but I was wrong. This program was run by one director and one administrative assistant with the help of one production manager and one student intern on Sundays. Their teachers were experienced musicians who work here as part-time employees and are familiar with contemporary music and teaching young musicians. While some might view *Face the Music* as a “privileged” program, it is located in the basement of the Martin Luther King’s Educational Complex. This program was indeed very down-to-earth.

After my initial observation, I felt I was walking into as many unknowns as knowns. As I continued to conduct my study, this feeling reminded me of the nature of qualitative studies as an, “interpretive, naturalistic approach” that involves a collection of empirical materials, such as life story, personal experience, interactional, interview, and visual texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). It is the nature of qualitative studies to amplify the unknowns. I was energized by sitting in on different rehearsals, learning about such different musical possibilities—for instance, FTMPHIL (the orchestra program) with car parts lying on the floor or entering the *HarmonicsLab* with cans and kitchen equipment on the table. These were not the typical rehearsals I was used to. I felt like a curious child again and thought to myself, “How cool is all this?”

Research Site: *Face the Music*

Face the Music inspires “a sub-culture where Radiohead and Portishead cross-pollinate with Bartók and Dvorák, where orchestral music feels newly relevant as a medium of self-expression.” - *New York Magazine*

Face the Music, a brainchild of the Special Music School and Kaufman Music Center, was founded by Jennifer Undercofler in 2005. She was the director for *Face the Music* for over 10 years and is now working as a director in the Conservatory of Music at Purchase College. The mission of *Face the Music* is to focus so-called “gifted” student musicians across and around the city on learning works by living composers. Jennifer started *Face the Music* as an experimental afterschool club for the Special Music School. In June 2018, I arranged a short meeting with Jennifer to learn about her ideas and experiences with founding *Face the Music*. She said in her interview:

I started it as an afterschool club at Special Music School, and that was just eight students in it. It was partly that I was ambitious to do certain pieces, so I recruited students so we could do that... [A]nd at certain point, I felt like we were just going from repertoire project to repertoire project, so it need to be organized in some fixed ensembles or there was not any way to stabilize it...

During the interview, Jennifer described her vision of changing the conservatory model and expanding students’ repertoire in the Special Music School. She had started a small group of young musicians which gradually became a large group of young musicians performing living composers’ music. At one point, there were almost 200 members in *Face the Music*.

When I asked Jennifer about the idea of only playing living composers’ music, her answer was simple but reasonable:

I felt like we need to run ourselves a little bit. And so after that, let’s just do music that is only living composers’ music, so in that way, we can work directly with them. Because there is a funny incident like when the students have questions about the piece, I will say, “Let me email the composer.” And then the students will say, “Oh, you are just showing off.” I am like, “No. That is actually what you do when the composer is alive, you need to check.” So that was real funny.

In 2011, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) awarded Undercolfer and *Face the Music* the Aaron Copland Award for the, “artistry and passion” with which they perform and champion the music of living composers (“ASCAP”, 2011). *Face the Music* has evolved into a well-established program with numerous concert series and various ensembles. According to the official website (“*Face the Music*”, n.d.), *Face the Music* is Kaufman Music Center’s contemporary music education program for teenagers, and the country’s only youth orchestra dedicated to post-genre music by living composers. Praised for, “stunning performances” by *The New York Times*, *Face the Music* features a collection of ensembles including a chamber orchestra, a jazz big-band, an improvisation collective, string quartets, and mixed chamber-ensembles, all dedicated to studying and performing experimental, new-classical, new-jazz, and avant-garde music written exclusively by living composers.

Face the Music also offers mentorship, support, and unique promotional opportunities to develop young performers and composers through its unparalleled network of professional contemporary musicians, organizations, media, and venues. In partnership with Luna Composition Lab, *Face the Music* mentors young female composers. Every Sunday, more than 100 students from the New York City tristate area come together to work with a team of coaches and conductors to explore and study the music of today as a vehicle to learn collaborative decision-making, gain leadership skills, and produce performances of music composed by its own members. Each year, *Face the Music* presents more than 20 concerts at some of New York’s best concert venues, experimental performance spaces, as well as schools and educational institutions.

Face the Music accommodates different skill levels, techniques, and age groups, but they do have an audition process. It recommends that students have a certain standard technical ability on their instruments. For example, for string instruments, beginners are required to complete the Suzuki upper book 4 or lower book 5, which is equivalent to intermediate or advanced levels for some schools. Younger musicians with only a few years of study are placed in the *HarmonicsLab*, a group for younger musicians to explore performing and co-composing contemporary music.

Teachers in *Face the Music* are young, versatile musicians referred to as, “coaches” by the administration and students. Coaches in *Face the Music* are familiar with various art settings and a variety of contemporary music performance, theater, composition, and conducting. All coaches have extensive backgrounds working with multidimensional arts and music pieces that are not limited to one genre. Many of these teachers have been working in *Face the Music* for several years. Usually, each coach is placed with only one group, except for *HarmonicsLab*, where an assistant works to facilitate the process of music creating and music making. In some special projects, such as the students’ work on the “Clunker Concerto,” which features a few percussionists playing junk instruments, a percussion coach is hired to instruct them. Substitute musicians are often hired if there is a need to fill a position in the ensemble or orchestra. Chapter VI presents and discusses my interviews with the coaches.

To have a better understanding of *Face the Music*, it is important to represent as many aspects of the program as possible. In the following sections, I describe the research site, and its different ongoing projects during the spring semester of 2018. I realized it was simply impossible for me to observe all the programs, as many happened

simultaneously on Sunday afternoons. As a string player and music teacher, I decided to give most of my attention to the Quartet Programs and *HarmonicsLab* and most of my participants discussed their experiences in these programs. I also observed other programs such as the FTMPHIL (orchestra program), Luna Composition Lab, and Samurai Mama Big Band. At the end of this chapter, I also presented a concert series of *Face the Music* to portray the contemporary performing experiences of the participants.

Special Music School

Many of the *Face the Music* students are from the Special Music School (both elementary and high school section), while others are from schools around the city. As mentioned above, *Face the Music* first started as an afterschool club for students at the Special Music High School.

The Special Music High School is the location where *Face the Music* rehearses every Sunday. While it is a public K-12 school, the elementary and middle sections are located in a different site nearby and the high school section is located inside the Martin Luther King Jr. Educational Complex. There is a strong relationship between SMS and *Face the Music* —the founder of the *Face the Music* previously worked in the SMS and the current director also works there. According to its website, SMS is

New York City’s only K-12 school that teaches music as a core subject. Its first graduating class of 12th graders in June 2017 is celebrating a 100% graduation and college acceptance rate. Special Music School High School is unique even among New York’s highly regarded arts high schools in providing talented young musicians the opportunity to pursue serious, pre-professional music studies along with a rigorous academic curriculum. (“Special Music School,” n.d.)

Special Music High school accepts 50 students per grade each year, for a total enrollment of 200 students. Students can apply from all five boroughs of New York City.

SMS [Special Music School] High School's music curriculum emphasizes the development of the student as a musician for the 21st century, updating the traditional model of classical music education in order to prepare students for the multifaceted and diverse opportunities available to today's musicians. ("Special Music School," n.d.)

They also aim to provide students different musical skillsets that involves improvisation, composition, music technology, as well as working with living composers. These mission is similar to that of *Face the Music*:

In addition to helping students build extremely strong core skills as music makers, SMS High School prepares them to improvise and compose as well as perform, understand music technology and collaborate with other musicians both in small and large groups while providing meaningful experience working with living composers.

After conducting more research on SMS, I realized that not only does the school have a very high graduation and college acceptance rate, but it also has high academic test scores compared to other city schools. SMS has a strong relationship with the Kaufman Music Center, which provides students with full music scholarships for two private instrumental lessons each week and group classes in music theory, history, and chorus. The school requires music auditions for students to regain their positions at school during 5th grade. According to the most recent data from the New York City Department of Education Statistics from (2016-17), student demographics in the school are as follows: 17% Asian, 16% Black, 17% Hispanic, 35% White, 1% English Language Learners, and 15% students with special needs. The report also indicated excellent scores for its supportive environment, effective school leadership, rigorous instruction, and trust from parents.

The Kronos Quartet Program at *Face the Music*

The Kronos Quartet also collaborates with *Face the Music*, working with the students for several weeks in a year. The Kronos Quartet is an American string quartet of rotating membership that has been a pioneer for contemporary music, commissioning over 900 works since 1973. They are famous for their experimental spirit and commitment to contemporary string quartet repertoire. Their educational initiative, “Fifty for the Future,” is an open-access resource for young musicians and early-career professional quartets to develop the skills to perform and honor contemporary works by 21st-century composers. Quartet groups at *Face the Music* who study with the Kronos Quartet have opportunities to practice selected repertoire from “Fifty for the Future” and work intensely with the quartet members. The partnership between the Kronos Quartet and *Face the Music* began in 2008 and their relationship has evolved so that more young musicians at *Face the Music* have the chance to work with them. During my observations, each member of the Kronos Quartet coached several quartet groups in the program. The Kronos Quartet also conducted a workshop where each member led a section in the orchestra program, FTMPHIL. A selected quartet group also had opportunities to perform alongside with the Kronos Quartet in a public concert in February 2018 at Merkin Music Hall at the Kaufman Music Center.

String Quartets Program

During my observations, I was most interested in observing the string quartets program because I was able to see the interactions of the young string players and coaches in a small group setting. There were five different string quartet groups in Spring

2018 (January to June 2018), as well as some special projects and groups that were assembled for specific concerts. Young string players could participate in the quartet program based on their individual interests in expanding their learning by playing contemporary music in a chamber setting as part of the extracurricular program. They could also join the orchestra program or the *HarmonicsLab*, or get involved in special projects from time to time. The quartet group members are usually at an intermediate to advanced level of musicianship.

Quartet groups usually rehearse early Sunday afternoons. These rehearsals are usually 1½ to 2½ hours long, including a short break. The schedule is adjusted weekly to accommodate needs and concert preparation. I noticed that members of the quartet groups were mostly stable, but some were replaced by substitute musicians because of schedule conflicts or personal reasons. For instance, a violist I spoke with in the beginning of the year did not show up in the second half of the year. In addition, one coach is assigned for each quartet group and stays on for the entire year. Some group members only stay for the quartet programs, while others stay for the orchestra (FTMPHILL) or the *HarmonicsLab* that meets Sunday evenings. Each quartet group is comprised of different groups of musicians of varying ages. Some groups consist of musicians who are younger and in early middle school grades, while other groups are with musicians who are in high school or even early college. Typically, the repertoire is chosen based on the suggestions of the director and coach in combination with the interests of the group members. I present all participating quartet portraits in Chapter V.

Luna Composition Lab

Luna Composition Lab is a program that provides mentorship, performances, and networking opportunities to female composers aged 13-19. Founded in 2016 by composers Missy Mazzoli and Ellen Reid in collaboration with *Face the Music* at the Kaufman Center, the inaugural season of Luna Composition Lab garnered attention from *The New York Times*, *Musical America*, *The New Yorker*, *Huffington Post*, and *NY1 News*. It aims to close the gender gap in the classical music field by providing participants with one-on-one mentorship with established female composers, performance opportunities in New York City, high-quality recordings, and instant access to a network of like-minded peers and professionals (“Luna Composition Lab,” n.d.).

In American orchestras, there is an overwhelming lack of representation of female composers’ works. Many top orchestras attempt to include female composers’ works in their programs but some orchestras, such as the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Chicago Symphony programmed no works by women on their subscription series in the 2018-2019 season for instance (Jacobs, 2018). This reflects the needs and importance of the Luna Lab.

The Luna Lab composers work closely with a female composer mentor throughout the year to compose new works. Selected works are performed by *Face the Music* musicians in a concert to showcase young female composers’ music and the performers’ musicianship. Luna Composition Lab is divided into three cycles: exploration, workshop, and refinement/performance.

Luna Composition Lab did not meet on Sundays; rather, it arranged its own schedules with the mentors. Young female composers from different states are also

encouraged to join the program. At the beginning of the process, the mentees meet with their mentors via Skype or another online platform every two weeks to engage in conversations, directed listening, and score study. The mentees develop ideas for their compositions at this point. Then in the second cycle, the mentors hear the sketches of their compositions through a series of workshops with *Face the Music* ensembles. In the last cycle, mentees submit a final draft of their compositions based on feedback from the mentors and ensemble coaches. Their works are rehearsed and performed at different concerts.

I was not able to witness their works in progress due to the one-on-one mentorship, but I attended their concert including some of the Luna Lab composers' compositions. The works were varied in instrumentation, ranging from chamber orchestra composition to small, non-standard original works. Compositions were performed by *Face the Music* musicians. During the concert, several young composers from different states came together and introduced to the audience the inspirations and ideas behind their compositions. The tonality and style were vastly different—from tonal to atonal, traditional to experimental.

Samurai Mama Big Band

Samurai Mama Big Band (SMBB) is a jazz band dedicated to playing modern jazz and creative music. In the 2017-2018 season, it performed works by many famous living composers/performers such as Anthony Braxton, Mary Halvorson, and Rudresh Mahanthappa. In addition to simply rehearsing and performing, leaders of SMBB encouraged students to compose their own music for the group, invoking the idea of multiple identities within musicians. I recall an impressive performance by SMBB of a

piece written by one of their saxophone players. He composed his first big band composition with the encouragement and guiding of coaches at *Face the Music*. As I am not a specialist in jazz or band instruments, I decided to direct my attention primarily to the string quartet programs, the orchestra program (FTMPHIL), and the *HarmonicsLab*.

FTMPHIL (Orchestra Program)

Walking into the “black box theatre,” where the orchestra of *Face the Music* rehearsed, was a little bit like walking into a magic show. You never know what is going to happen. Sometimes it might be the same old tricks, like pulling bunnies from a hat. But sometimes, you might stumble upon an amazing illusion. It was when they were rehearsing the “Clunker Concerto,” that I realized I had walked into an unexpected magic show. (Field Notes, February 11th, 2018)

David Bloom, a conductor and co-founder of Contemporaneous, a New York-based ensemble of 21 musicians dedicated to performing contemporary music, is the conductor of *Face the Music*'s orchestra program (FTMPHIL). By attending their rehearsals and concerts, I recognized some similarities and differences between FTMPHIL and other traditional orchestras. The rehearsal style was traditional—the conductor instructed the group. What was uncommon was their repertoire—all the works are by living composers, including premier works and unusual pieces such as John King's “Strings Vector” and Sean Friar's “Clunker Concerto.” King's “Strings Vector” allows each musician in the orchestra to be the “soloist” in which they have the freedom to choose sections that they want to play during the performance. Unless the score indicates a tutti part, performers can pick different sections within the indicated timeframe. The piece does not have to go in order, and the only parameter is time of each section. When the clock starts, the musician follows the minutes marking the time to perform a certain section (each section is usually a repeated figure). For some sections, musicians are

instructed to play together at a specific time; otherwise, they are allowed to move forward at their own pace. During the concert, instead of traditional seating, musicians are all spread out and stand among the audience. As I heard them play this music, I clearly detected different timbres and each musician standing out as a soloist. In King’s own program notes, he wrote, “The sonic elements were revealed, bloomed, and faded organically,” and “through spontaneity and chance allowed the work to unfold” (King, 2018).

STRING VECTORS

The image shows a musical score for four string instruments: violin (vn), viola (via), violin (vc), and bass (bs). The score is titled "STRING VECTORS" and covers measures 3 and 4. Each instrument part begins with a circled number "3" and a box containing "begin AFTER >>> 1:45". The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 2/2 time signature. The first measure of each part features a half note with a fermata, marked "sul pont." and "pp", with a "cresc/dim" instruction below. The second measure is a half note with a fermata, marked "i" and "mp", with "[keep same harmonic]" written above. The third measure is a half note with a fermata, marked "i" and "pp", with "norm." written above. The fourth measure is a half note with a fermata, marked "iii" and "pp", with "end AFTER >>> 2:55" in a box. A double bar line is placed between the second and third measures. A large double bar line is placed between the third and fourth measures. A circled number "3" is centered below the score.

Musical Example 1. Excerpt of John King’s “Strings Vector.”
Measures 3-4, score provided by John King.

Another contemporary highlight performance by the musicians at FTMPHIL is Sean Friar's "Clunker Concerto." The percussion ensemble uses different parts of a junk car to create an arsenal of familiar and unfamiliar percussive sounds, while the orchestra interacts with the percussion ensemble. According to Friar (2011),

Much [sic] of these ideas focus on seeking out the common timbral ground between these unusual junk sounds and those of the orchestra, and finding ways to fuse those two sound worlds as deeply as possible. The other, more playful, side of the piece, is its desire to capture the rickety, hobbling nature of a junk car. ("Sean Friar," n.p.)

Junk Percussion Assignments

these are specific to the original set of junk instruments used by the composer

Junk 1:

Fender
Bell-shaped hubcap (shared with Junk 3)
Steel drum tam-tam
Tuned copper pipes (should be mounted on egg crate foam)

Junk 2

Hubcap #1
Hubcap #2 (shared with Junk 3)
Large Hubcap (shared w/ Junk 3 and 4)
Small bent piece of sheet metal (it has F# written on it, and a few other pitches)
Hood spring (piece of black-painted metal with a spring on it... requires no practice, as the player just hits it once with a hammer and throws it on the ground)
Threaded bolt (a big bolt, maybe 8 or 10 inches long)
Copper pipe (not the thin cut copper pipes Junk 1 uses, but a bigger piece of scrap copper. I think it's painted white. No specific pitch.)
Coil Spring (mounted on a sheet of styrofoam, through which the spring resonates)
Assorted copper pipes (junk pipes. No specific pitch)
L-pipe (chrome pipe shaped like an L)

Junk 3

Metal clave (stainless steel approximately 6 inches long. Cylindrical, with a slit in the middle. Tuned to C)
Party ratchets
Twin Tail Pipe (Y-shaped exhaust pipe)
Metal plates (set of steel metal plates about 4x4 inches. Electrical cover plates.)
Hubcap #2 (shared w/ junk 2)
Large Hubcap (shared with Junk 2 and Junk 4)
Bell-shaped Hubcap (shared with Junk 1)
Wheel Gong (Dark blue. It has a dirty sound somewhere around G#. Shared with Junk 4)
Wheel Gong (Dark Blue. Tuned to A).
Wheel Gong (Silver. Tuned to C)

Junk 4

Brake rotors (arranged low to high)
Large hubcap (shared with Junk 3 and Junk 4)
Wheel Gong (Dark blue. It has a dirty sound somewhere around G#. Shared with Junk 4)
Wheel Gong (Silver. Tuned to F#)
Wheel Gong (Silver. Tuned to G)

Musical Example 2. List of Junk Percussion Assignments of the "Clunker Concerto." p. 3, score provided by composer Sean Friar.

Initial Setup:

At the beginning of the piece, the junk car parts should be assembled in a way to create something with the semblance of a car. The goal is not to trick the audience into believing there is actually a car on stage, but rather to present something theatrical that suggests “car-ness” rather than “regular percussion setup composed of junk car parts.” Below is an image and description of the setup used for the premiere performance. It is only one of many potential options, and creativity is encouraged in putting the mock car together!



The initial setup prior to dismantling. Secured on the floor, the wheels provide the foundation for the mock car. One of the large percussion racks is placed on top of the wheels, functioning as the chassis of the car. From there, shelving racks were attached to the percussion rack, which allows the car hood to be held in place above the chasses. Additional items may be added (for example, a side fender can be placed over one of the wheels, or an exhaust pipe can be attached to the rear).



*Musical Example 3. Overview of the Percussions Setup in the “Clunker Concerto.”
p. 5, score provided by composer Sean Friar.*

It was an absolute shock and perhaps somewhat confusing for me to step into the rehearsal room for the first day of my field observation and see different junk parts from

cars lying around. Percussionists wore gloves and experimented with different timbres on the parts. The main soloist, who was a percussionist, was asked to use a double bass bow to bow the fender of the car and produce different pitches that match the string sections. Being able to create, explore, and discover is common for scientists, but who is to say musicians cannot do the same? This experience reminded me something like scientist's laboratory. Allsup (2016) defines "laboratory" as a place to discover and create. "In the laboratory, students are making, not merely doing...What they compose reveals aspects of who they are and who they are becoming" (p. 103). How do we create a space that is similar to the laboratory for our students?

As I further reviewed the score, I was astonished by the complexity of the setup. When one thinks of using junk as instruments, it is usually because of their unique timbre or possibility for special effects, or maybe it is simply out of convenience. This repertoire brings to mind the Recycled Orchestra from Cateura, Paraguay, a group that uses "junk" to create their own music. Their mission is to create awareness on the education of children in Paraguay. Their repertoire ranges from Mozart, Paraguayan folk music, to popular music (Tsioulcas, 2016).

HarmonicsLab

Before coming into the observations, I did not expect to find an educational space that offers collaborative composition to young children like what is offered at *Face the Music*. *HarmonicsLab* was created in Fall 2017 purely out of necessity. The coach, Whitney, informed me of a growing need for younger musicians with a variety of instrumentations to explore composition and contemporary performance. Whitney said she used to teach a youth orchestra that was similar to FTMPHIL, but this year, there

were multiple young pianists and a percussionist who expressed interest in joining the ensemble. Within the group, many students also love to compose. The mixed-instrumental ensembles inspired them to launch *HarmonicsLab*.

Ten participants, ranging from 9 to 13 years old, gather every Sunday afternoon to experience and experiment with contemporary classical music as performers and composers. The participants have at least a few years of experience playing violin, cello, piano, drum, or any other instruments. A coach and an assistant for this course facilitate rehearsals and guide the participants to compose.

During my interview with Whitney, she walked through what they did and discussed the idea of the group. She mentioned the idea of *compositional commentary*. The students in this group will usually learn a standard contemporary repertoire and then will re-create and co-compose a piece with the idea of commentaries:

The first piece that we worked on was a Philip Glass re-working... We talked about it from the point of composition and then made our own compositional commentary by writing the reaction... So that is kind of our theme, taking a standard piece of repertoire and using it as a model for us to do a group composition. (Whitney, individual interview, April 3rd, 2018)

In addition to the Glass piece, the students also prepared Ernst Toch's "Geographical Fugue" and Meredith Monk's "Panda." *HarmonicsLab* also premiered their own work, "Kitchen Concerto," inspired by the "Clunker Concerto" by Sean Friar.

It is an interesting idea that contemporary music can be taught to elementary and middle school-aged students without strong resistance. I was fascinated by the openness and creativity of the young musicians. Whitney guided these musicians to explore the sound of water. Some were playing on the piano to find the water sound they imagined, some were playing glissando and pizzicato on the strings, and some were playing on the

actual water—pouring it into a can to create a splashing sound. Things sometimes got a little messy, water was everywhere on the table, but all of them were very engaged in the process of making. Kanellopoulos (1999) describes children’s engagement with music as a meaning-making process. I was inspired by the questions that they were discussing in my first observation:

Whitney [the coach] asked many interesting questions to guide these group of middle school students. Questions such as, “What notes do you like?” “How do you want to arrange them?” “How do you want to play it?” “How can you make the piano to be percussive?” “How to create water-like sound on your instruments?” I noticed that students are intrigued by the process of creating. One commented, “I feel like a science class here.” I noticed the creating process was messy, however, I believe the messiness is an essential part of co-composition. (Field notes, January 14th, 2018)

A few weeks into my observations, Whitney finalized “Kitchen Concerto,” in which the young musicians in the lab co-composed and utilized various unconventional contemporary compositional techniques, incorporating the sounds of water, cans as percussion instruments, crumpling paper, whistling into a piano for reverberation, and pencils and forks as mallets. Extended techniques, such as harmonic glissando on strings, striking the piano strings, and tapping on the instruments, were also incorporated by the composers. All of the participants also performed the “Kitchen Concerto,” and one of them acted as the conductor for the performance.

Kitchen Concerto
[1st Complete Draft: February 25th 2018]

HarmonicsLab
2018

Freely
(♩ = ca 60)

60 seconds

Percussion I: move water between containers. con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib.

Percussion II: move water between containers. con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib.

Percussion III: move water between containers. con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib.

Violin: pizz. con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib.

Violoncello: con't until notated, freely exploring natural harmonics on the C string notated if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib.

Piano: inside of the piano. con't until notated, freely exploring natural harmonics on the C string notated.

2

60 seconds

Perc. I: con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib, but play the rhythm together (tutti)

Perc. II: con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib, but play the rhythm together (tutti)

Perc. III: con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib, but play the rhythm together (tutti)

Vln: (pizz.) con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib & div., by the end of page, if more than one player, begin to move to unison rhythm (tutti)

Vc.: con't until notated. pizz. con't until notated, if more than one player, enter and exit ad. lib, but play the rhythm together (tutti)

Pno.: inside of the piano. con't until notated, freely exploring natural harmonics on the C string notated.

Musical Example 4. "Kitchen Concerto" Score.

pp. 1-2, score provided by *HarmonicsLab* Coach Whitney George

The students at *HarmonicsLab* had also work on other contemporary works that required minimal instrumental experience but some contemporary performance techniques, such as the “Spoken Chorus Geographical Fugue” by Ernst Toch (1930) and “Panda Chant” by Meredith Monk (1984). These two pieces have similar methods of performance, both incorporating spoken words. The rhythms of both pieces are complex, but the young musicians in *HarmonicsLab* had a high ability to read music and incredible aural skills to rehearse and perform these two pieces. These two pieces required some assertive actions such as chanting loudly or projecting in outrageous voices. Sitting in the rehearsal also allowed me to notice the students’ struggles. For instance, it was difficult to maintain a quiet classroom during the process of creation. The challenge of creating an “equal voice” was also present, as some students were less vocal than others during the co-composing process. Burnard (2002) also mentions, “leadership” and, “follower” roles in children’s group improvisation. Burnard describes that during the process of improvisation among children, there are communicative gestures that emerge under the leadership of some students (2002, p. 167). A “leader” will usually emerge to direct the improvisation. In *HarmonicsLab* I witnessed some students who have numerous ideas to contribute to the piece, acting as leaders, while some acted more as “followers.”

Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010) suggest that improvisation among children offers, “an intimate, powerful, evolving dialogue between students’ identities as learners” (p. 71). I would further argue that these students at *HarmonicsLab* are also developing their identities as composers and musicians, and not only as learners, as they improvise, compose, and perform their group composition. Wright and Kanellopoulos also propose

that autonomy, developing the self, and developing an open attitude towards children and their music are goals that imperative for music teachers to understand (2010, p. 81).

It was not common for classes like *HarmonicsLab* to exist in public schooling. Hopkins (2013) revealed that many of the orchestra teachers support composition as a beneficial activity in an orchestra class, however, most of the teachers have never or have only rarely implemented composition in their classes. Luce (2001) argues that collaborative learning models of composing engage students in discussion, deliberation, and critical thinking which helps students to build personal relationships.

In addition to encouraging these young musicians' creativities, the democratic progress of composition allowed these young musicians to explore their decisions as co-composers. The destruction of the traditional conservatory hierarchy provided an open space for these young musicians to grow into multiple musical identities. I further describe this matter in the last chapter of this dissertation.

Concert Series

Face the Music produces numerous concerts each year—there were 21 concerts alone in the Spring 2018 season (see Table 3). As a researcher, I attended as many concerts as I could . Each concert usually featured different groups and ensembles; therefore, not everyone was performing in all the concerts all the time. They also collaborated with different composers for different concerts and many were premier works. By talking to the director, Vasu, I learned that the performance aspect was a vital part of the program for young musicians. The performances motivated young musicians to prepare to the best of their abilities. A literature review conducted by Kjelland, Kerchner, and Dura (1998) summarize the effects of music performance participation on

the music listening experience. They investigate the effects on physical being, disposition, perception, and responses. They suggest that multiple studies (Erneston, 1962; Mitchell, 1984) have shown that music performance does influence the music preferences of students to some degree. In addition, as a result of participation, students develop positive attitudes toward music (Mitchell, 1984; Schuster, 1952). The students who participate in music performance also have better tonal memory and different listening strategies (Cuddy & Cohen, 1976; Dowling, 1973; Pollard-Gott, 1983). The young musicians did not only perform in the concerts by *Face the Music*, but they were also part of the audience, which helps them to develop music appreciations skills and concert audience manners.

Vasu mentioned that he had already reduced the number of the performances, compared to the 2017-2018 season, when they used to produce around 40 concerts. I thought to myself that 40 concerts seemed quite a lot of performances for younger musicians, knowing that they participate in many different activities aside from the performances or even music training. Many community orchestras perform fewer than 40 concerts a year. In my field notes, I reflect on how everyone came well-prepared, and I wonder if the concerts are motivating them to advance their musicality.

I see that most of the students have high-level technique. Their concern is not about getting the right note or intonation, but usually dwelling within the music as a group. They came here well-prepared, only having a short timeline of rehearsal before concerts. They did their assignment at home: listening at the music, score-reading, and self-practicing. (Field notes, January 21st, 2019)

Table 3

Concert Series at Face the Music (January to June 2018)

Date	Time	Place
January 16, 2018	6:00pm	Special Music High School
February 5, 2018	11:00am	Merkin Concert Hall with Kronos Quartet, for students from Special Music School, Avenues, and Stevenson School
February 5, 2018	7:30pm	Ecstatic Music Festival at Merkin Concert Hall with Kronos Quartet, hosted by Brooke Gladstone of WNYC.
March 12, 2018	7:00pm	Roulette with John King, Sean Friar, Greg Saunier; honoring Lydia Kontos
March 18, 2018	5:00pm	The Jazz Gallery
April 13, 2018	8:00pm	The Kitchen, MATA's Greatest Hits
April 24, 2018	7:00pm	Church of Advent Hope with The Firehouse Collective
May 3, 2018	7:00pm	Jalopy Theater with Brooklyn Raga Massive. Music by Rudresh Mahanthappa, Mainak "bumpy" Nagchowdurry, Neel Murgai, and Kala Ramnath.
May 4, 2018	1:30pm	Peck Slip School with Young Composers Improvisers Workshop (YCIW). Music by beginner YCIW composers.
May 12, 2018	12:00pm	National Sawdust with El Puente & Very Young Composers. Music by beginner composers of El Puente, Carlos Gutierrez-Quiroga, Emma O'Halloran, and George Crumb.
May 17, 2018	7:30pm	Harlem Arts Alliance.
May 22, 2018	7:00pm	Merkin Concert Hall (SMS performance). Music by Michael Gordon.
May 24, 2018	7:00pm	The Cell. Music by Daniel Wohl, George Crumb, and FTM student composers.
May 29, 2018	6:00pm	Special Music High School. Music by Michael Gordon.
June 4, 2018	7:00pm	Roulette with Luna Composition Lab. Music by Shelley Washington, Maria Schneider, Mary Halvorson, Reena Esmail, and Ellen Reid.
June 6, 2018	7:00pm	National Sawdust with Luna Composition Lab. Music by Shelley Washington, Maria Schneider, Mary Halvorson, Reena Esmail, and Ellen Reid.
June 10, 2018	5:00pm	The Jazz Gallery with The Tri-centric Foundation. Music by Anthony Braxton.
June 21, 2018	3:00pm	Make Music New York
June 24, 2018	4:00pm	Contemporaneous presents <i>Face the Music</i> and Luna Lab composers at National Sawdust.

Over several performances, I noticed some interesting decisions. Most of the time, the young musicians who were performing were not required to dress in the standard concert attire, something like “all-black everything” or “business casual.” These young musicians were allowed to wear their daily clothes to perform or choose to wear colorful *Face the Music* logo t-shirts. In addition, many of these concert venues were more casual and inviting than a concert hall; some were local venues and galleries, and some were inside the auditorium of SMS. I still remember that the lighting for some concerts was very colorful, projecting purple and pink lights on the stage. The atmosphere of some concerts was similar to a pop concert.

Young performers would arrive a few hours before the start of the concert. They were always encouraged to do their own work while waiting. To my surprise, for some of the students, some concerts started at 7 p.m. or 8 p.m. on a weekday, but this did not seem to bother the young performers who had school the following day. Their dedication to the performance was admirable. In each concert, there were brief interviews before the start of some repertoires, featuring a young musician interviewing the composer. The young musicians ask the composers about their inspiration for composing the piece and what music they were currently listening to. The opportunity for a composer and a young musician to talk together on the same stage is rare. Such a scenario brings the living composer’s music closer to both the performers and the audience.

The performance quality was always fascinating and inspiring, despite the challenging repertoire. The variety of pieces and ensembles that performed always kept the audience engaged. Producing a contemporary concert is not an easy task, especially

considering the general public's level of appreciation of contemporary music. The diversity and variety of pieces and performers allowed the audience to embrace some performances but not all. I noticed that once, an audience showed negative reactions to a certain piece.

I was sitting a few rows behind this lady, possibly a family member of the performers. One of the more contemporary pieces started playing – this was actually performed by a professional musician, not a *Face the Music* musician. She kept trying to hide her head next to her husband – almost seems like it hurt her hearing but she was reluctant to cover her ears with her hands. (Field notes, April 24th, 2019)

Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe my research site, *Face the Music*, with a detailed qualitative description through the observations and data I collected. A music program in the city under the Kaufman Music Center and Special Music School, *Face the Music* provides a variety of opportunities for contemporary music education for talented young musicians. It covers an expansive area of music education, from large ensemble programs such as orchestra (FTMPHILL) and jazz band (SMBB) to small ensemble program such as *HarmonicsLab* and String Quartet Program, to an individual composition project such as Luna Composition Lab. They aim to extend the musicianship and experiences of young musicians today. Although this is mainly a Sunday program, many young musicians dedicate their day off to participate.

Before observing the program, I did not expect to find so many disparate ensembles or concerts, all featuring contemporary music. During my observations, I found myself walking into the land of the unknown and learned that *Face the Music* was so much more diverse than I anticipated, in both music and education. As a researcher, I

am eager to share my experiences, multiple perspectives, and insights in the remaining chapters. To further inquire into young musicians' experiences with contemporary music, I focus on observing and interviewing young musicians, coaches, and a parent in the following chapters.

Chapter V

QUARTET PORTRAITURES

Playing in chamber music ensembles has been recognized as a type of musical training that promotes performance accuracy, musical sensitivity, and positive attitudes towards participation. This has been shown in several studies since the first by Zorn (1969). *Face the Music* contains several ensembles of various types and purposes, such as its orchestra, string quartets, big band, composition lessons, and other ensembles. It was impossible for me to dwell on each ensemble as deeply as I would have like as I acted as researcher and observer for only six months. However, the five groups of string quartets in the spring particularly stood out to me as a researcher. So I decided to devote a chapter to *Face the Music's* quartet program in order to observe the members' social interactions and their ongoing shaping, building, and re-building of their personal identities.

Based on my observations over six months during the Spring of 2018, I noticed that each group had its own unique individuality and personality and that the dynamics among group members were widely varied. The learning environment created by different coaches provided diverse learning experiences for the young string players. In the following sections, I describe each quartet group based on my impressions, observations, and conversations with their members. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

The five string quartets during Spring 2018 included the Premier Quartet, Sonora Quartet, Standup Quartet, Plato Quartet, and the Shao Quartet. All of the names here,

including names of quartet groups and quartet members are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the minors. Each had unique characteristics and personalities. Despite being in only middle or high school, some of the quartet members had been playing together for over three years. The configuration of each group was typically stable. If any member dropped out of their quartet or the program as a whole, outside musicians were hired to fill their seats. During the period of my observation, two cellists acted as substitute musicians.

Table 4 shows the makeup of the quartet groups I observed during the Spring season of 2018, with the pseudonyms of the members and their approximate level of schooling. Quartet members changed much more often in some groups than others (e.g., Premier Quartet and the Sonora Quartet Quartet). This table only reflects the grouping configurations during my observation period. All of these musicians except for one, who was a college freshman, were in middle and high school. Their levels of schooling were based on the average of the group rather than that of the individual musicians.

Table 4

Quartet Portraits (Spring 2018)

Quartet Group	First Violin	Second Violin	Viola	Cello	Level of Schooling
Premier Quartet	Emily	Carolina	Miguel	*(Cellist withdrew)	High School
Sonora Quartet	Nancy	Benjamin	Mike	*(Cellist is a substitute musician)	High School
Standup Quartet	Christine	Kenneth	Ashley	Abigail	High School
Plato Quartet	Sabrina	Jimmy	Charlotte	Joe	Middle School
Shao Quartet	Deanna	Jenny	Theo	Steve	Middle School

Premier Quartet

Premier Quartet is the longest established string quartet group in the *Face the Music* program. The musicians in this group were in their junior or senior years of high school. Emily was on first violin, Caroline on second violin, and Miguel on viola, but their cellist had withdrawn from the program weeks before the interviews. Mike from the Sonora Quartet also showed up for the interview and I let him join in on the conversations. Emily, the first violinist, had been at *Face the Music* for many years.

Table 5 indicates the members of the *Premier Quartet*.

Table 5

Premier Quartet Members and Their Schooling

<i>Premier Quartet</i>	Emily 1st violin	Caroline 2nd violin	Miguel viola	[substitute musician] cello	11th, 12th grade and a freshman in college
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Walking into their rehearsal always reminded me of a professional rehearsal, the atmosphere in the room was focused. The young string players' eyes were mostly glued to the music, seemed like they were trying to get every single notes. But when I got to know them more, they opened up very quickly. Our first interview ran 15 minutes over time, making them late to their next orchestra rehearsal.

Emily's face often appears on different posters around *Face the Music*. During the interview, Emily told me that she got accepted to a college in Canada and was preparing to pursue a degree outside of music. She was always friendly and conversations with her always left me with a smile on my face. Another group member, Caroline, was a college

freshman during the time of my research, but continued to participate in the program. Unfortunately, Caroline had to drop out near the end of the season due to her college schedule and a professional cellist was hired to cover her part. Miguel was a violist who also played the violin outside *Face the Music*. He had moved to New York by himself to pursue more musical activities while his parents lived in another state. His independence reminded me of myself, having left Macau to pursue music in New York at 17. I remember that from that moment on, I felt the autonomy to make most of my decisions, including the decision to practice contemporary music and pursue a music major. Mike, another violist from the Sonora Quartet, was also present during the interview. I do not remember the exact reason why he was there, but it seemed that because it was the first group interview, the director wanted him there.

This group usually performs repertoire traditionally associated with “contemporary” music, including a mix of tonalities, extended techniques, and diverse timbres. Towards the end of the season, they were working on a piece that challenged them with intricate and complex rhythms, making it difficult for them to stay together. When they could not, they all tried to figure out where they fell apart. Between the members, there were few conversations that were not music related. From what I noticed, this group communicated more when the music was challenging. The more they encountered difficulties, the more they were inclined to find solutions and ask questions.

I walked into their rehearsal room in their middle of their rehearsal sessions. There were many people that I did not recognize... I figured out later this was a reading session for young composers from the New York Philharmonics Young Composers Project. They were reading some pieces that were quite tonal, with many arpeggios patterns but a few surprising notes here and there. They were very focused as usual; nobody talked, nobody asked questions. The coach did not either. They were just thinking. (Field Notes, April 15th, 2018)

McClellan (2011) conducted a study that shows that parental influence is related to adolescents' self-conceptions as future music educators and their decision to major in music education. Davidson and Burland (2006) also suggested parents are critical figures in determining the impact of and interaction with music-related activities. I would like to understand the reasons and purposes for which these young string players participated in *Face the Music*, especially to understand if some of the parents compelled their child to come. I asked them about whether their parents supported their being a part of *Face the Music*. Their answers were surprisingly diverse, even unexpected:

Weatherly: So what does your family think about you being in *Face the Music*?

Emily: My mom is very into classical music, and sometimes she really enjoys what we play in *Face the Music* and sometimes she really didn't like it. But my dad is really invested in it because he thinks it's a really good way to express yourself. And he is very into the student composition thing...My dad is always interested in pushing that and making sure that more students are being composers, creating their own things.

Miguel: I live away from my parents....

Weatherly: So you guys don't interact?

Miguel: They had no idea what I was playing. They support it as long as it doesn't interfere with my academics.

Mike: My mom is kind of like...she likes it, but at the same time no. Like, some pieces she understands what they actually mean. And she is a musician. But when I play contemporary music, she has no idea what is going on. But my dad can't stand *Face the Music*, he likes all classical music.

Weatherly: So he is against *Face the Music*?

Mike: Well, I guess contemporary music has different timing and such, so I guess he is not used to it, so...

Weatherly: So, what you are going to do with it? Are you still going to come here, or you don't care about him?

Mike: I mean I really care about him, but he said I can do whatever I want. He is not gonna be against it.

Weatherly: And Caroline?

Caroline: Well, my mom was against the fact that I am going to *Face the Music*, but she was like, “Oh, you can just go to make some friends and have a great experience playing in the orchestra.” Like modern music, at first she says, “You can join in,” but then after time, she sees this continuing and says, “I don’t want you to continue going in.” But for that, I just kept going to *Face the Music* all through my high school years anyway.

Weatherly: Oh, I am fascinated. So a lot of you guys just come to *Face the Music* by your own choice, nobody forces you to be here, right?

All: Yeah.

During my conversations with Emily and Miguel, I came to understand that both were in the pursuit of degrees not related to music. Miguel mentioned that as long as *Face the Music* does not interfere his academic studies, his parents would not interfere with his musical studies. Bergee, Coffman, Demorest, Humphreys, and Thorton (2001), Bergee and Demorest (2003), and Madsen and Kelly (2002) find that music teachers or private lesson teachers are the most influential factor in determining whether or not students pursue degrees in music. Bright (2005) believes parental encouragement is also of heightened importance when students decide whether or not they will pursue music in college. For these young string players, being here was something they decided to do of their own accord. In conversation, some showed that their decisions were made in spite of their parents’ lack of support. These musicians are forging their own musical paths, starting with participation in *Face the Music*.

Many of the musicians told me that the founder, Jenny Undercofler, invited them personally to join *Face the Music*. That was how some of them started in this program and eventually came to study at the Special Music High School. As a matter of fact,

Caroline was a student of one of the first graduating classes at Special Music High School. The members of *Premier Quartet* have developed a strong connection with the people at *Face the Music* and Special Music High School. Since all the interviewers in this group were current students or alumni of the school, they related my questions not only to *Face the Music*, but to the Special Music High School as a whole.

Weatherly: How do you feel as a community here? I saw Mike holding a sign on the poster about part of the community, do you remember?

Mike: I don't remember what I wrote.

Miguel: I got handed in a sign that was already written.

Emily: Oh, I wrote mine. Special Music High School has a really tight community.

Miguel: Yes, it's also hard to hate anybody here because it's so small.

Emily: But like... we really felt like a family. But when we became two hundred kids, I think it was a little less connected.

Miguel: And that's not a lot, compared to where we started—it's like huge. Like there was people now, that I am like, "Do you go here? I haven't see you before, who are you?"

[laughs]

Miguel: It's like very surprising that I used to know everybody's name but now I don't, but I still think we are connected by music or Town Hall or something.

Emily: You can certainly go to anyone and have a really good conversation because there are so many points that you relate in it. Last year, I can still look at their names and what instruments they play, and this year, I don't even know half of the people.

As the members said, in the beginning years of Special Music High School, there were only two classes. They knew everyone and felt that everyone was part of the community. When the size of the student body increased, their connection weakened.

When I asked about their opinion towards contemporary music they played.

Miguel expressed:

I think because contemporary classical music is such a *broad spectrum* that there are certainly parts of it I enjoyed [...]. I think it is all interesting to play because of the difference of it. There are some pieces that cross over. So for instance, you may find an interesting serial-minimalism piece and then next semester—I played a very complex, almost Bartókian piece that sometimes you don't get it. And you know I don't particularly enjoy minimalism or Bartók.

Miguel had been playing contemporary music at *Face the Music* for five years, and the way he understands the term *contemporary music* is not as a specific subset of classical music, but as an umbrella term for a broad spectrum of new music. To him, this term does not represent music of a specific style or music that has a particular sound or timbre. The term *contemporary* means both nothing and possibly everything. For some, contemporary music is an experience. As Caroline explained,

I think my first time was “Fearful Symmetries” [John Adams’ composition]. I actually thought it was super cool [...]. It was actually a lot more fun because I was doing something *new*. You know, you do the same Mozart quartet every single year, but then now you are able to do something else.

The experience of doing something *different* stood out here. Something described as “weird” is something *new*, and something new is something *cool*. One might ask: Is it a positive or negative experience to try something new? The answer can be vastly different according to each individual’s taste and experiences. Answers revealed held disparate meanings, such as when Mike commented on playing “Armit” from Kronos Quartet’s “50 for 50”:

I mean when I first started the quartet, it was very similar to a classical quartet, because there was no yelling, no nothing. It’s just like playing. We played “Armit” from 50 for 50 Kronos Quartet and [...] the first movement was a viola solo[...] you have to do a lot to be able to put the music together because you get a lot of time to *express* yourself [...] But like, we also have the other

Philharmonic Orchestra [FTMPHIL], it's crazy because it's my first time hearing the drums sound like everything going crazy...

These mixed feelings toward contemporary music are fair and reasonable. Mike enjoyed expressing himself through a particular piece into which he needed to put a lot of effort. However, he disliked another piece of repertoire that was so loud, he worried it damaged his hearing. As contemporary composers strive to break rules and invent new tonalities, many contemporary works are widely dissimilar, resulting in disparate experiences for the musicians and listeners.

When I asked what these young string players learned from playing contemporary music, Emily first described herself as being more, "versatile" and, "confident" in her playing. Contemporary music propelled her out of her comfort zone and practicing it made playing classical music feel simple by comparison. Miguel responded to this question from the technical perspective of playing. He believed that practicing contemporary music enhanced his adaptability to a wide range of skills, such as pizzicato, bow strokes, and endurance.

Miguel: Oftentimes, you have to look at modern music and figure out how to dissect it and best practice it, so it teaches you very valuable practice skills. It also teaches you how to adapt really quickly in order to play a range of things in one piece. So you are more able to look ahead and better prepare things in pieces...

Emily: Endurance.

Miguel: Endurance, bow strokes, and doing a lot of new bow strokes so your classical bow stroke becomes a lot better.

Toward the end of our conversation, I found that most of the musicians were not interested in pursuing music in college, except for Caroline who was currently in a community college majoring in music. This led me to believe that the dedication and effort they put into *Face the Music* for four and five years were purely avocational.

Because of this initial interview with *Premier Quartet*, I wanted to find out more about the other musicians' personal experiences at *Face the Music*. I wanted to discover their social and emotional takeaways and their parents' perception of the music. Interestingly, the members of *Premier Quartet* and *Sonora Quartet* (which I will be addressing in the next section), are teenagers and their parents seem to be much less involved in their musical activities. Young string players at *Premier Quartet* reflected to me that many of their parents were not as supportive as I would have assumed and members at the *Sonora Quartet* also expressed similar experiences. By contrast, parental involvement and interest seemed to be much stronger in the youngest musicians' music-learning experience, despite their apparent, general distaste for the music.

Sonora Quartet

Sonora Quartet is comprised entirely of High School juniors. I remember going into the rehearsal on the first day and seeing the violist, Mike, to whom I once gave a substitute viola lesson at a nonprofit music organization. He also remembered our short acquaintance by smiling at me when I walked into the room. I noticed that this group was more racially diverse than the others. Through conversation, I discovered that two of the core members were not originally from the United States: one was from Venezuela and the other was from Russia. Both had just moved to the States within the last three years.

Table 6

Sonora Quartet Members and Their Schooling

Sonora Quartet	Nancy 1st violin	Benjamin 2nd violin	Mike Viola	[substitute musician] cello	9th-11th grade
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When I first arrived to observe the group, the members were preparing for the concert, *Ecstatic Music Festival: Kronos Quartet and Face the Music*. Sonora Quartet was one of the two string quartets to be featured in the concert with the Kronos Quartet at Kaufman Music Center. Their rehearsals were usually teacher-driven and they prepared highly challenging repertoire. The coach, Adrianna, would ask questions to specific musicians and their answers were quiet and brief. As a result, this group had such high rehearsal stamina that they could play for their entire rehearsal period with only minimal breaks for conversation. The main challenge I heard from the coach for this group was indeed the stability of the quartet members. This group needed substitute musicians from outside for their concerts and they had already experienced two to three member changes from January to June.

When I asked Nancy about her initial experience of playing in *Face the Music*, she described the experience as terrifying.

Weatherly: Do you remember how do you felt about the music you played at first in *Face the Music*?

Nancy: I was freaked out at first. The rhythm was really, really hard. We did “Triple Quartet” by Steve Reich like fifth grade, maybe? And my friend and we were struggling. And that’s how I learned all these rhythms.

Weatherly: How did you like the music or sound at that time?

Nancy: At that time, it was different. It took a while to get over how different it was. I like it more now, it is easy to appreciate once you get used to it.

When Nancy used the words, “get used to,” I felt echoes of my own experience. Playing and practicing contemporary repertoire required one to become acclimated to it which, only after some time allowed one to appreciate its beauty. However, this experience does not apply to all people. Because contemporary music covers disparate styles that are

sometimes in stark contrast with more classical repertoire, some people may never get accustomed to the new sounds. This is shown in Nancy's response to her friends' mixed feelings about contemporary music:

They think it is strange at first usually, because when you think classical, they think Mozart, Beethoven, all that stuff. So coming to this concert maybe it's a little bit strange. But some of the pieces...it really depends, really.

Benjamin had only been in New York for nine months at the time of interview.

He was shy and his answers to my questions were simply efficient. He did not show much resistance to his new experience.

Weatherly: Is it usual...contemporary music back at your home [Venezuela]?

Benjamin: No, it is new for me. I felt like [it is] kind of weird music. But it felt really good for emotions and [good to] learn about it.

Weatherly: Did you struggle learning the music?

Benjamin: No.

Weatherly: What about in terms of how it sounds like?

Benjamin: Yeah, I really like.

Weatherly: You really like it?

Benjamin: It depends which kind of composers. Sometimes it kind of [sounds like] music from movies.

Weatherly: What about music with other sounds?

Benjamin: You are going to learn different kind of things—it helps you.

Even though Benjamin had only been playing contemporary music for nine months, he realized that contemporary music helps him learn many different things. Most of the young string players I talked to acknowledged that contemporary music helps them better understand rhythm. However, few students see beyond this, treating contemporary music

as a sort of *étude*—something to help them improve rather than something complete in and of itself.

Another interesting bit of information I found through talking with them was that both Benjamin and Mike had never practiced contemporary music at home for their parents.

Weatherly: Are they [Mike's parents] in the states? Did they come to your Kronos Quartet concert?

Mike: They are not there, like my mom doesn't want to go out to the concert alone because it kind of changes if my dad is at work. My mom always wants to come to the concert, but she doesn't want to come alone...

Weatherly: Does she like it?

Mike: I mean, yeah, she supports it. I don't know whether she likes it or not. When she's home, I never practice things like that.

Weatherly: Really? So you try not to practice contemporary music at home?

Mike: I do practice contemporary music at home, but it's usually when they are not at home... It just happens. Because when my dad and my mom come home together, which is not good, because my dad doesn't really want to hear.

Weatherly: So he will stop you?

Mike: No, he won't stop me, but he will say something like "Put the mute on or play softly."

Weatherly: What about you, Benjamin? Do you practice contemporary music at home, is your dad okay with it?

Benjamin: Yeah, because my dad works at night, so when I come home, he is not there, so I just practice.

Weatherly: Has he ever listened to you practicing contemporary music?

Benjamin: No, never.

Weatherly: Are you avoiding that?

Benjamin: No, it just happened.

Although both Mike and Benjamin did not agree that they avoided practicing contemporary music in front of their parents, they would both prioritize their practice of classical repertoire. Benjamin told us that his dad asked Michael to practice with a mute or to play more softly while he was at home; this was very similar to my own experience, in which my mom told me to play something that “sounded good” instead of contemporary music. In another interview, Mike expressed that his dad was not happy about the music he learned, but he also would not interfere with Mike’s personal choices. It is unclear whether Mike felt supported by his parents in his studies at *Face the Music*—they did not come to every concert he performed and did not want to listen to his practice at home if the repertoire was contemporary. Research by Zdzinski (1996b) recommends parental support for young musicians include musical home study, emotional support, and family musical participation. Davidson, Howe, Moore, & Sloboda (1996) suggest positive parental music involvement such as supervision of home practice and home music listening activities. However, Mike’s parents seemed to be lacking in both areas of support.

A common theme that emerged between *Premier Quartet* and *Sonora Quartet* was the seeming lack of parental support for their children’s contemporary music education. Despite this outright lack of support, parents continued to pay the dues for their children’s enrollment, some for many years. The lack of enthusiasm showed by the parents contrasted starkly with that of their children. This made me wonder whether or not these young string players could be considered rebellious and if they were aware of this possible rebelliousness, or perhaps an inner sense of autonomy and exploration?

When we discussed the emotions of playing contemporary music, they expressed emotional detachment. Ali and Peynircioğlu (2010) conclude that increased familiarity with the music increased the perception of its underlying emotion. Benjamin expressed that he could not feel emotion from the music because he had to concentrate so intensely on playing it correctly. Gomez and Danuser's (2007) research about the relationships between musical structure and psychophysiological measures of emotion finds that the internal structure of the music plays a crucial role in the induction of the emotions.

Furthermore, they explain that,

Rhythmic articulation, harmonic complexity, and mode best differentiated between negative and positive valence whereas tempo, accentuation, and rhythmic articulation best discriminated high arousal from low arousal. Tempo, accentuation, and rhythmic articulation were the features that most strongly correlated with physiological measures. (Gomez & Danuser, p. 377)

Mike even claimed he had to remain positive during rehearsals so he could handle the music. I was very curious whether the structure and nature of the contemporary music make it difficult for these young string players to connect emotionally.

Weatherly: What about emotions like sad or excitement? Any emotions like that?

Benjamin: Not really. You have to be so concentrated that you won't be able to feel.

Weatherly: Interesting. You [Mike]?

Mike: Sometimes, you just want to bring a lot of positivity to the rehearsals; that's the main goal because sometimes the music won't be that good.

Weatherly: Do you think contemporary music can express your emotions like some popular songs?

Mike: Some of them. Like the piece doesn't really represent you, but some parts of it may represent you.

Benjamin: I think because the person who wrote the music is feeling certain emotions, and that is the emotion that person is expressing. Like if you are a

composer, whatever you feel, and you write the music how you feel, so you are the one to represent that.

Mike and Benjamin, who were good friends at school and shared a lot of commonalities in their lives, believed that contemporary music may only partly represent oneself. Specifically for Benjamin, contemporary music represents the composers instead of the performers. This manifested the notion of performers as a medium of the composers—a traditional concept in the performance classical music—where musicians are merely representing the composers' ideas. This idea is illustrated literally in Stravinsky's *Three Pieces*, in which he required that performers to interpret his work exactly as he wanted. In his notes on the piece, he put his admonitions for performers, "The breath marks, accents and metronome marks indicated in the 3 Pieces should be strictly adhered to" (Stravinsky, 1910). Performers should not alter their styles but only attempt to follow the score as much as possible, which constrains the creativity of the musicians. I doubt that Benjamin felt any ownership of the music he played at *Face the Music*.

Standup Quartet

The name "Standup" was of great interest to me as each group gets the chance to name its own quartet. From what I have heard, the name had two origin stories. One version is simply that all of the quartet members enjoyed standing up while they chatted and decided they should be named after this. Another version is that "standup" was developed in reference to "stand-up comedy" which they wish to their music to be entertaining to their audience. After talking to the group members, I confirmed that version one was the original story while the second was fabricated by the first violinist Christine for a concert introduction. Christine said she made it up on the spot so their

group would not sound, “stupid” in front of the audience. I found all of these stories very amusing and I believe there is a direct connection between them and the unique personalities of *Standup*’s members.

Table 7

Standup Quartet Members and Their Schooling

Standup Quartet	Christine 1st violin	Kenneth 2nd violin	Ashley viola	Abigail cello	9th-11th grades
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The Standup Quartet was one of the groups that I observed the least. Since all quartet rehearsals were conducted around the same hour every Sunday, I had to make choices about which group to visit, sometimes merely based on the convenience of the locations or just instinct—which I later on realized was not a strategically wise method to use. Unfortunately, the rehearsal room of *Standup Quartet* was located in a classroom that was very hidden. The room was located next to the back of the auditorium, which was also an instrumental storage room with a small hallway. I searched for the room once but failed before I was finally able to find the room toward the end of my observation sessions. This quartet was coached by Whitney, who was also the lead teacher of the *HarmonicsLab*. To my surprise, they were practicing Shostakovich’s String Quartet in C Minor, a piece which hardly qualifies for the “living composer” category. I immediately asked the coach about this decision. She informed me that the group planned to learn deeply and intimately about Shostakovich. Since all of them were also composers, they decided to prepare this piece in order to draw inspiration from the composer. They planned for each member to compose an original movement of the string quartet and put

it all together as a complete string quartet in the fall. While this group can handle challenging repertoire, they were more interested in performing their own compositions.

Mirroring Standup Quartet’s self-identification as composers, most young string players in quartet settings at *Face the Music* also see themselves as composers. This was a recurring theme throughout all interviews. It was not surprising to find musicians at *Face the Music* who also composed their own music and who were proud to call themselves, “composers.” The self-identification as composers helps give the musicians the opportunity to express their voices more freely than in a traditional music education setting. When I interviewed them about whether contemporary music was a sort of representation for themselves, Ashley replied,

I don’t think we are just playing the music. I don’t really know what, “music is representing us” means. I think it kind of depends on the pieces. We played the other pieces this year and we play Kenneth’s pieces this year, which super-represents us.

No Sleep Train

♩=108

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Hop in sleeping bag to seat. Then, completely get out of sleeping bag and puts it aside. Pick up instrument and start playing.

3

Hop in sleeping bag to seat. Then, completely get out of sleeping bag and puts it aside. Pick up instrument and queue to continue.

14

Repeated until Violin I ready to play

Repeat until Violin I ready to play

p Repeated until Violin I ready to play

15

p

Begin hopping to seat in a sleeping bag.

A tempo

Held until Cello starts playing at the down beat of next measure

23 *pp*

Held until Cello starts playing at the down beat of next measure

Held until Cello starts playing at the down beat of next measure

pp

Finish hopping to seat. Then, completely get out of sleeping bag and puts it aside. Pick up instrument and start playing.

mp

Musical Example 5. “No Sleep Train” p.1 – 3.

Music Composed and Provided by Kenneth (pseudonym used)

This group felt very strongly about the piece that their group members composed. They all agreed that if some music were to represent them, it would be Kenneth’s piece. When I asked in detail how exact this piece represented them as individuals, they all described the, “hopping out from the sleeping bag” experience with the funny socks story to me. This piece requires musicians to hop out off the stage in a sleeping bag. They also

decided to wear tuxes and formal dresses contrasted with funny socks, chosen at their personal discretion. At this point, I am not sure how this composition represented them musically, but I could plainly see their aptitude for fun and silliness, revealing itself through their compositions and conversations.

Menard (2013) argues that there is a need to develop creative thinking in music in middle school general music because many classes solely focus on the acquisition of performance skills. She believes composition offers students in ensemble classes the opportunity to be creative and successful regardless of their past experiences (p. 61). This need to develop creative thinking can be manifested not only in this quartet group in *Face the Music*, but also other programs like Luna Composition Lab and *HarmonicsLab*. Kenneth drew inspiration not only from his own experiences, but also from his peers and their experiences as well.

During rehearsals, the coach, Whitney, allowed for free-flowing conversations. She usually let them talk among themselves or even join the conversations instead of stopping the conversations. When I asked if they were friends with each other, they seemed to be astonished about my simple question. They said they were friends and spent time together outside of rehearsal.

Christine: We are actually friends outside the quartet, unlike just quartet friends. We also have a group chat.

Ashley: And I found out last time that I only have Christine's fake Instagram and she has a real Instagram!

Even in my very short observations, I found that very few of their conversations were related to music. Once, they were sharing their middle names with each other. Kenneth said his middle name came from Christopher of *Winnie the Pooh*, while Christine was

complaining that her middle name sounded silly together with her last name. This group of high-school musicians contained a multitude of ideas and personalities, even within single members. By the end of the conversation, they had decided to go to the New York City Pride Parade together before they performed their last concert of this season.

When asking about whether their friends liked the music, I got a very direct answer from Christine.

Christine: Oh, they hate it, oh god. They said it is *ugly*. And they say this isn't music.... Most of my friends are opera singers, and they hear this and they said, "no."

Weatherly: So what do you say to them?

Christine: I am like, "Right." This is just a different kind of music.

Weatherly: Do you guys like the music you play here?

All: Yeah, mostly.

Weatherly: Even if other people think it's ugly?

Christine: Yeah, I don't care what they think.

When I ask whether their parents liked the music they played in *Face the Music*, their answers were mixed.

Ashley: My mom loves it.

Christine: My parents are classically trained, and are not a huge fan of contemporary music. But my dad loves Shostakovich. And when I play some other piece, my dad said, "I can't stand this, I am going to throw up."

It is interesting because this group of musicians seemed to be very friendly and straightforward, with never a hesitation in their answers. From the conversation, I noticed they were in *Face the Music* not because of their parents and not because of their friends outside *Face the Music*, but because of each other.

Weatherly: Does anyone force you to be here?

All: No.

Christine: I was going to leave, but because of them I stayed.

Weatherly: Oh, Christine, so you didn't leave because of your friends?

Christine: Yeah, it was less cute but more difficult. But yeah. One of the main reasons I don't want to be here is because I am graduating this year. Next year I will be in college.

Christine informed me that she would not major in violin in college, but was more into opera singing. As a result, continuing to play in a quartet setting in *Face the Music* was not necessary for her. She only continued because of her friends here, as they have played together for two years.

While attempting to analyze the data, I found it very difficult to obtain information from them because of much cross-talking. Sometimes, they jumped to answer my questions all at once or they cut into someone else's answer; some even picked up an instrument and played some music during the conversations. However, by being in the conversation instead of a formal interview, I had a strong feeling of being a part of the group. Their friendly attitudes toward everyone, including me, proved how much they enjoyed rehearsing with each other.

Plato Quartet

Plato Quartet was an interesting group for its group dynamics. Each member was a middle school student. Each young musician had their own, unique personality. In this group, we had Sabrina on first violin, Jimmy on second violin, Charlotte on viola, and Joe on cello. The cellist, Joe, was definitely a strong and prominent character. He often sparked controversial conversations by saying what was on his mind. Sometimes, he and

the coach would disagree. Other members in the quartet often had to remind him to get back to the real work. Nevertheless, all of these situations usually happened in interesting, humorous, and sometimes slightly chaotic ways.

In a field note from January 21st, 2018, I wrote,

I was walking in the hallway of Face the Music, trying to figure out where the rehearsals were [...] because I was completely on my own. I peeked into every tiny window on the door to spot whether there were musicians rehearsing. I was so eager to start my observation. Then, I saw this girl [...] playing with her shiny, blue violin bow. I also noticed she had the bottom part of her hair dyed pink. I was curious to see how this girl played, so I walked into their rehearsal. They sounded pretty good! Their repertoire was not very difficult; it was tonal and with steady rhythm. The coach stopped them when I walked in the room, then one of the kids who had a shoulder-length hair started to talk and complained about the music instantly. All the other musicians joined in the quite chaotic discussion until the coach raised his voice and yelled “stop talking” a few times. One minute ago, they were so focused while making music, once they stopped, they reminded the coach and I that they are still children and early-adolescents who possess varied personalities. (Field Notes, January 21st, 2018)

Table 8

Plato Quartet Members and Their Schooling

Plato Quartet	Sabrina 1st violin	Jimmy 2nd violin	Charlotte viola	Joe cello	7th-9th grade
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I found that members of Plato Quartet each represented different characteristics of students in early adolescence. The first violinist, Sabrina, always responded positively to the coach with a smile on her face. With her hair dyed pink and her metallic-blue violin bow, she seemed to strive to stand out. The second violinist, Jimmy, a boy with dark skin, a yarmulke, and braces, seemed to only speak when I asked him a question. Charlotte, who also wore braces, but was perhaps a few years older than the others, occasionally tried to regulate the behavior of her quartet-mates. She occasionally spoke in Russian

during rehearsal, seemingly proud of her heritage or her polylingualism. Lastly, there was the cellist, Joe, who had shoulder-length hair and would sometimes command the spotlight by saying or doing outrageous things to others. Once, he took an oily cookie paper wrap and put it on Sabrina's violin during the rehearsal. Mark, the coach of the quartet, was a friendly and comical character who was also quite tolerant with his tolerance for getting off-track during rehearsal. He was the only coach at *Face the Music* that had to raise his voice from time to time.

I remember the first performance of the Plato Quartet that I attended. The piece involved a catchy melody in a folky, country-music style. Some members of the quartet had to stomp their feet during the performance. The group refreshed my conception of what contemporary music truly is. This exceedingly fun piece was performed by truly playful musicians, but their professionalism and dedication to their playing would never reveal how silly they could be.

This group demonstrated that a rehearsal space provides a social platform for them to communicate in their own unique ways. They were very open about their backgrounds, cultures, and personal issues. Their rehearsal was interesting and fun to watch, despite the slight chaos. For instance, Sabrina and Joe decided to switch violin and cello bows while playing. Sabrina once said during rehearsal, "I learned how to deal with pain, that's how I can deal with all of you." Of course, this was said humorously, but conveyed how this group normally rehearsed.

Throughout my conversations with these young string players, I found their honesty, divergent thinking, and even sometimes conflicted thoughts very insightful:

Weatherly: So how do you guys like the concert that you performed?

Sabrina: I felt like it went well.

Charlotte: It went much better than our first concert.

Jimmy: We were so dysfunctional.

Charlotte: We were not prepared at all by any means.

Joe: We were *dead* inside, we still are *dead* inside, but *less dead*.

[laughs]

Weatherly: What do you mean by “dead inside”?

Charlotte: We didn’t like the music, we just didn’t *feel it*. But we didn’t have any options than just play it.

Weatherly: Oh...describe that music to me. Is it too “contemporary”? Or was it not fun?

Charlotte: I mean it sounded nice. But you know that feeling when you don’t really... you don’t even like the music. And you just don’t feel anything for it.

Sabrina: Yeah...it is kind of boring.

Charlotte: It’s like a *really* boring person.

Sabrina: Yeah, I like the piece, but I didn’t like playing it. I thought it is a pretty piece.

Weatherly: So is it a slower piece?

Sabrina: Yeah...

To understand them better, I attempted to figure out why they could not *feel* the music, based on the characteristics of the repertoire, even though they acknowledged it was a “pretty” piece. Then, I realized the particular preferences these young musicians had were connected to young musicians.

Weatherly: So when you guys first came to *Face the Music*, do you remember how you liked the contemporary music? How did you feel about this kind of music?

Jimmy: I think I liked the pieces written by the kids more than the adults.

Joe and Sabrina: Yeah...I agree.

Joe: A lot better. There is a kid named Sasha, who wrote an *amazing* piece!

Jimmy/Sabrina/Charlotte: Oh yeah!

Jimmy: And then we played another piece after that, and it was really bad because it was written by an adult, no offense.

Weatherly: That's interesting.

[all jump in the conversations]

Charlotte: I feel like I *connect* more with the kid's piece.

Jimmy: Except for Philip Glass.

Joe: Oh, yeah. Philip Glass is a piece of glass.

Sometimes, I had difficulty understanding them because Joe could direct the conversations to a dead end. Despite this, the conversations above sparked something magical in the existence of this quartet, according to the Plato Quartet members themselves. When I asked them what this “magic” was, they had difficulty articulating their thoughts. Charlotte shocked me with her answer dealing with the complexity of characteristics from young composers:

[E]verything we play here is very contemporary. Sometimes I don't like it because I am kind of an old soul and at every single concert, I am always like either really liking the piece or just grappling about how kids these days write such music that is so...*not rhythmic*, so *out-of-tune*, and there are so many sounds as the color is all mushed together that makes me very *annoyed*, and at the same time it's *amazing*.

The phrases that Charlotte used to illustrate her statement, such as, “not rhythmic,” “out-of-tune,” and, “color that mushed together” were truly intriguing. Though these qualities frustrated her, she acknowledged that they were also amazing. This description matches

what they had discussed earlier. When a contemporary piece sounds nice, it might also seem like a, “boring person.” As young performers and not just listeners, these young people were frequently looking for challenges and excitement that would resonate with their *feeling*. Often, these qualities varied and each of their experiences differed. When I asked how they felt when they played certain pieces of contemporary music, the first answer concerned me.

Weatherly: What do you feel emotionally when you play some of these contemporary pieces?

Joe: I feel sometimes...depressed.

Weatherly: Why?

Joe: Like sometimes it's depressing.

Charlotte: We played it last week, we tried it, but we didn't like it.

Sabrina: It was a fun piece, but we just didn't *connect* with it.

Again, one student used the word, “connect.” Sabrina said, “It was a fun piece, but we just didn't connect with it.” This answer perplexed me once again. Even though a piece sounded fun, it did not necessarily mean they could connect with it. There were no textbook answers that could explain what they did and did not like.

Weatherly: What other emotions other than depressing?

Joe: I don't know. I feel like *polar opposite* for each piece. Sometimes, it makes me feel really sleepy and I just don't want to play it, or I really enjoy it and it is fun to play, and I like to play it.

Sabrina: The last piece we played at the concert—I really like that piece. I felt like it was...kind of like upbeat and it made me want to practice it and work on it a lot. But other pieces like...it just kind of makes me sleepy.

Similar themes about the emotion of playing contemporary music emerged again. Many of these young string players, just as Mike and Benjamin in the Sonora Quartet did,

reflected that there could be negative effects on their emotions stemming from playing contemporary music. It seemed like it was possible to feel great about the performance of a certain piece, but individual experience in playing the pieces varied greatly between each musician. In the very end, Charlotte summarized her experiences with contemporary music by describing it as, “modern human.”

Weatherly: You? [Asking Charlotte]

Charlotte: ‘Cause every piece is kind of like *modern human*, you have to go through a lot—some are really *confusing*, some make you really *angry*, some of them make you *depressed*. But when you find the right piece, it’s just so *amazing*, and so *exciting* and you want to play it. And that’s just the most amazing feeling.

Despite all these emotions that can be perceived as negative, the students were guided by the music to be more selective and to know themselves better. Finding the right contemporary music piece that one could identify with was rewarding. This group of young string players was goofy, yet hardworking in rehearsals. I appreciated their genuine answers, which provided me with a way to further my exploration.

Shao Quartet

The last group in this chapter is another young quartet group, comprised of four middle-schoolers, the Shao Quartet. They informed me that their name originated from the Chinese word *Xiao*, meaning, “small,” referring their young ages. Because their name was usually mispronounced, the group changed the spelling from “Xiao” to “Shao.”

All of them looked very young, even more so than the students of the Plato Quartet. When I was informed they had been playing together for three years, I had difficulty imagining what they could look and sound like three years ago. Despite their young ages and being in middle school, their musicianship and skills were excellent.

They were able to impress audiences with their handling of seemingly unattainable repertoire. During rehearsals, these musicians showed their youth in their behavior. However, compared to the Plato Quartet, the members of Shao Quartet were generally quieter.

Table 9

Shao Quartet Members and Their Schooling

Shao Quartet	Deanna 1st violin	Jessie 2nd violin	Theo viola (Theo was absent during the interview)	Steve cello	7th-10th grade
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During breaks from rehearsal, the musicians usually spread out into different spots about the room, doing different things. Some ate snacks, some played on their tablets or phones, some read books, and even put on headphones. None of them communicated with each other and the room was silent. Despite chatting during rehearsal, they did not talk much when they had free time. When asked if they considered themselves to be friends, they were hesitant. Though they met regularly for several years, their idea of friendship seemed different.

Weatherly: So are you guys friends?

Deanna: Well...I don't know if we are considered as friends.

Weatherly: Wow, I realize you guys have high standards of what friends are.

Deanna: I do.

Weatherly: So who can become your friends?

Steve: I don't feel like we really talk. We talk about the music.

Weatherly: Do you guys talk about life at all?

All: No.

Deanna: I don't think we are very social people, at least I am not.

Weatherly: You guys are very quiet. Imagine, if you don't play the instruments, will you still make friends if you are not very social?

Deanna: Yeah. But I think the instrument...I mean, I am social. It is just not social when I am here. And my anti-socialness...

Jessie: You are not anti-social, you are very talkative.

Deanna: Around people you don't know, I am very anti-social. You just haven't seen me.

The social atmosphere in this group was vastly different than the ones in the other groups. Rehearsal seemed to be a profession, a job, or a task, rather than a social space for them. However, I realized they indeed communicated with each other more often during their music-making time. For example, they shared their memories of previous concerts performances during their rehearsals. Rehearsals at *Face the Music* acted as a catalyst and medium that evoked their shared memories. They also told me that they didn't think of all musical activities as social activities. For instance, they told me if they were in orchestras, they would not talk to others except their stand partners.

Not only was the social atmosphere of the group's rehearsal unique, the musicians also showed a preference for classical music over contemporary music.

Weatherly: So some other group told me they like young composers' music, what do you think? Or do you like classical composers' music? [laughs]

Deanna: I mean...a young composer...when Mozart was young, I would love to work with him, because it was really great. And then young people these days are not as great as Mozart.

Weatherly: What do you think? [Asking Jessie]

Jessie: I mean I definitely think that composers like in the classical era, I like it more than the composers in the contemporary era.

Weatherly: Why?

Jessie: The composers in the contemporary [are] a little bit weird.

Steve: Those music are in new styles...

Deanna: Yeah, I don't really like it, because it's not very pretty. But, I like...I play classical in school, so I get to know this, but I think I like classical. I also play solo...I don't know. My dad also really likes classical quartets.

Weatherly: Have you guys played in a classical setting?

All: No.

Weatherly: You've only played in this setting? Okay, so now if you get a chance, if you can play classical music or contemporary music together, which one?

Jessie: We can't play classical music here, well, if we could, then *definitely!*

Deanna: Definitely! I used to do this music camp...and we played classical music in a quartet, and it was wonderful! It just reminded me of advertising, on June 12, I am planning a concert at a senior center; I think Steve's dad knows. He said we can play violin and cello duets together.

Weatherly: I think so. It will be very cool, you guys can play some classical together.

Steve: I wish here, we can play like more contemporary than classical, but we can still play like some classical.

Others: Yeah.

Steve: Like one concert is just classical music.

Others: Yeah.

Jessie: Because there are so many classical quartets.

These three members expressed their desire to practice, rehearse, and perform classical music at *Face the Music*. Their preferences were so strong that there was no doubt they

loved classical music. This interview was conducted after their concert in which they performed contemporary repertoire flawlessly and with excitement and energy. I could hardly believe that they actually preferred to perform classical repertoire when they had the choice. I continued to investigate why, considering this preference, were they even here.

Weatherly: So now here is a very important question—if you prefer classical music, then why are you here? Because you don't play classical music here.

Deana: It goes back to you don't want to be ignorant. You want to be worldly so you want to have the great experience. And nowadays, all great artists, they play contemporary music. So if you want a relationship with them, if you want a good future—opportunities in the future—you want to have this kind of music.

Jessie: It's like—for the experience.

Weatherly: For the experience, so not for the sound? Do you guys dislike the music you play then?

Deanna: No. [promptly]

Steve: Nah.

Weatherly: Okay.

Deanna: He said "nah." That's so funny. Once we played a piece called "Nah" and we hated it.

Jessie: I like it.

Steve: We have to be violent in the classical way.

Deanna: Yeah, you kind of have to knock on the instrument, and I have to do this really, like shivering noises. [making faces]

Weatherly: And you don't like it?

Deanna: No. But it is for the experience, you know? If you haven't ever done it, how did you even know you don't like it? So, I think it is good to do these things.

Weatherly: Now you did it, you know you don't like it, but you are still up for the experience?

Deanna: So it's like when I read nonfiction books.

Weatherly: [laughs] What does that mean?

Deanna: So I really like reading.

Steve and Jessie: Me, too!

Deanna: I really like reading but I only like reading fiction, but I still read nonfiction sometimes, just because I think I should.

“Just because I think I should.” This is the reason why Deanna chose to play contemporary music. I feel that although Deanna claimed to be anti-social, she input her voice into the conversations most of the time. Sometimes I wonder whether their answers were strongly influenced by one other because they are at a stage of social-emotional development in which searching for the recognition of other is commonplace. Despite the seemingly strong influence of their peers, I believe their answers were honest. Now I was curious. The musicians do not have a strong passion for contemporary music, so the reason they continue to participate remains a mystery. Could it be that their parents like the music? Maybe they believe studying contemporary music will aid in their study of classical music.

Deanna: Well, my dad personally and my mom both admitted to you that they hate listening to this music.

Jessie: Wow...

Deanna: But they still want me to do it because it's good.

Weatherly: So they still want you to do it even though they hate the music.

Deanna: I mean some of them are okay, but most of them... [crosstalk]

Jessie: My parents think it is cool.

Deanna: I think it's also kind of cool.

Steve: *Kind of.*

Weatherly: Deanna, I want to talk to you more about your parents. So you say they dislike the music, so do they come to the concert?

Deana: Yes, because I told them they should, and my grandmother just all the way just to see me.

Weatherly: Oh, that's so nice. They are very supportive.

The idea of contemporary music being “good for you” was common among the young string players, just as professional musicians understand that scales or études are, “good for you.” Similar to the *Premier Quartet*, they were very aware of the technical and musical benefits contemporary music provides them. Through these conversations with the young string players, I realized that they understood that practicing contemporary music challenges typical rhythmic and tonal patterns and that they have to advance their techniques through regular practice and learn to dissect the pieces wisely (as Miguel mentioned in his interviews) in order to perform them well. These younger musicians might not be able to pinpoint the benefits of practicing contemporary music, but Deanna, for example, strongly believed that contemporary music can help her expand her skill set, just as she does with reading both fiction and nonfiction books.

Emerging Themes for All Groups

As the founder Jennifer Undercofler mentioned to me during her interview, often times, the young musicians in *Face the Music* are not perceived as the, “cool kids.” They were often perceived as, “different.” Though some groups were more social than other,

there was strong evidence of community within *Face the Music*. Many of these young string players had collaborated together for several years, despite their young ages.

Even though they did not show aversion toward contemporary music, few expressed a preference for it and all musicians had derived a unique experience from their study. There were pieces to they were connected to deeply, such as those written by young composers or their friends and there were some pieces they considered as, “weird.” This led me to wrestle with the term, “contemporary music” during my research. For many people, this label carries a negative connotation. However, many of the young string players seemed hesitant to define all the music they played as, “contemporary.” It led me to believe there is a need, even for professional musicians and educators like myself, to re-conceptualize this term.

Some parents at *Face the Music*, according to the young string players themselves, were not a fan of the music their children practiced. Nevertheless, they continue to support them by going to their concerts and paying their membership dues. It seemed that parents of the younger musicians were more involved and more supportive about their music education at *Face the Music*. Almost all young string players agree that contemporary music challenged them in ways that would improve and enhance their different techniques, interpretation skills, sight-reading skills, and help them to be better and more experienced musicians. I believe this was also the main reason why some parents continued despite their lack of preference for contemporary music.

Another common theme that emerged is the idea of a multi-faceted identity that each musician displayed. It was fascinating to me that most of the musicians are composers as well. The concept of performers also being composers was not encouraged

where I completed my training. Most of my colleagues only concentrated on either performing or composing, not both. I found this multi-identity of musicians consistent with the modern theme of young string players being more and more versatile for today's music field. Benjamin reflected on the idea of musicians re-presenting (instead of representing) the composers. Many also implied that it was insufficient to play either classical music or contemporary music as contemporary musicians. The re-imagining of the definition of, "traditional" musicians is brought to the forefront at *Face the Music*.

Summary

The process of talking to these young string players in middle and high school about their experiences both in and outside *Face the Music* was rewarding. I became aware that different groups had very different dynamics: *Premier* was mature; *Standup* was fun and talkative; *Shao* was quiet but ingenious; *Sonora* was shy but meticulous; and *Plato* was loud and entertaining. By no means are these adjectives intended to circumscribe their potentials, but more so they provide a quick and contrasting glimpse from my personal lens. Knowing that there is no way to describe their rich characteristics in a few words, these complexities could only be captured in our conversations. Each group member also offered different characteristics that added to the whole.

I think it was very interesting that I received such diverse opinions and views from these young string players. No two quartet groups of musicians giving identical answers, all of these answers were interesting, similar, different, and thoughtful in its own way. While I was perplexed by some of the answers, I was also sometimes astonished by the profound depth of their thoughts. I was also aware that middle school-

aged students provided me the most honest answers without any filters. Their answers added layers of complexity to my research. Yet, this enabled me to open the opportunity for discourse. I was perplexed in a good way. As a researcher and student of life, I could reflect on their varied opinions and perceptions to think about myself and my daily life. I realized sometimes we can overthink, overcriticize, or overromanticize certain subjects. Because the young string players expressed that they neither hated nor loved contemporary music, I found this opened a new, “in-between” paradox for me to examine.

In the next chapter, I provide conversations and commentary from coaches who have taught in *Face the Music* for years, from the founder and current director of *Face the Music*, and from one parent to better understand the experiences of teaching contemporary music from both a pedagogical standpoint and an adult point of view.

Chapter VI

COACHES' COMMENTARY

During my observations at *Face the Music*, in addition to talking to the young string players, I also interviewed some of the people who have worked in *Face the Music* for years about their background, their experiences teaching contemporary music to young musicians, and their perceptions of contemporary music. This chapter includes commentary from interviews with Vasu, the director of *Face the Music*; Jennifer, the founder of *Face the Music*; John, second violinist from the Kronos Quartet; Adrianna and Hajnal, coaches who teach in string quartets; David, the conductor of the orchestra program (FTMPHIL); and Wayne (pseudonym), a dedicated parent who came every Sunday and waited several hours for his cellist son. Based on my agreement with the director of *Face the Music*, all actual first names have been used and only the parent's name is a pseudonym.

As I explored the many facets of *Face the Music*, I believed it was important for me to know what made coaches at *Face the Music* choose to work in a contemporary music setting, why were they so dedicated to teaching young players music that is the previous chapter was often described as, "weird." All the conversations emerged from the semi-structured interviews were free-flowing, with minimal guidance. I want to emphasize that I was not looking for particular answers during the interviews. As a result,

the focus of each conversation differed, sometimes remarkably. Through the conversations, I was able to catch a glimpse of the experiences of the young musicians better from the adults' perspectives. These conversations helped me understand their rationales and beliefs about teaching contemporary music.

Coaches

Adrianna

I knew I had this gift. I knew that this gift did not fit what they were looking for and what they were looking to promote, so I was like, "Okay, well, how can I survive and thrive in music like I know I can without having to work with this mold?"

Adrianna, a coach at *Face the Music* for Sonora Quartet, is a multitalented musician who performs contemporary music on violin, sings, writes songs, and performs throughout the East Coast, South Africa, and Southeast Asia. When I interviewed her about her own training and background, she informed me she was, trained as a pianist and violinist, but also learned flute, conducting, and composition when she was young. She described her training as, fortunate because her parents supported her to try multiple instruments. However, she explained her contemporary music experience before college as different. She regarded popular music as part of her contemporary music training when she grew up because it sounded so dissimilar from classical music. She stressed that popular music helped her to express her emotions as a first-generation Asian-American. As Wang (2001) states, "music has been a meaningful form of expressive culture that has helped negotiate the meanings of ethnic and personal identity for multiple generations of people" (p. 440). However, Adrianna never pursued contemporary music when she was young because that music was not regarded with respect by her family. This experience

was very similar to many other coaches that I interviewed. Most of the coaches had not had any contemporary music experience prior to college.

Well, nothing really to the extent of *Face the Music* but that's also because *Face the Music* is a very groundbreaking kind of program. There was nothing like that when I grew up. Contemporary music to me, I loved pop music. Everything from Pink to Eminem to Backstreet Boys and Spice Girls. I love that kind of music. I loved what I was studying because it's so intellectually and physically engaging and emotional, too[...] Music was so important to me as a kid growing up in a first-generation Asian American family where language is not the first thing that people go to when it comes to expressing emotions. Music was so important to me in terms of having a very healthy way of channeling all of those emotions that I could not express in a way that my parents would maybe literally accept[...][A]ll of these things pop music engaged me on a very different level as opposed to classical music[...]

Adrianna's position teaching for *Face the Music* was not an accident; she had been striving as a musician who was a multi-instrumentalist and performing repertoire by young living composers. She was also engaged in performing many nontraditional and popular concerts. Adrianna said that she did not feel she fit into the classical mold, but found her path as a contemporary musician. Techniques and competitions seemed to be the only things that matter in the current classical world, but there was so much more besides that.

From the very beginning, I knew that you can have all the techniques in the world, you can have all the gifts in the world, but you also need to push forward in terms of your choices, stylistically and musically. Taking that passion of like a combination of entrepreneurism and creativity and classical training really paves the way for me to teach contemporary classical music well. I'm interested in the art form, but I'm also interested in getting students and their family, just people in general, to think of music not in a competition like, you must win the Tchaikovsky Competition kind of way, but like, there's so much more music out there besides that. If you don't fit into that mold, that's okay.

Adrianna further described that she believed creative, nontraditional musicians were perhaps more successful. She believed working in *Face the Music* was helping students to be successful in different ways.

In fact, you'll probably be more successful because you don't fit into that mold, but you need to pursue it in a way that feels honest to you as a person and artist. I'm so happy to help people along that path because I think that so much talent has been lost. So [many gifts] and so much diversity have been lost because people don't fit into those molds that have been created without regard for people who are different.

I resonated a lot with what she said: The classical world is so binary to me. There is a lack of diversity in many conservatories. There is a mold for each so-called successful professional musician—someone who studies in a prestigious conservatory, wins a renowned competition, or gets into a top orchestra.

I remember as a young musician locking myself up in the practice room many, many hours a day, I often asked myself what my end goal was at that time. I was very reluctant to go to competitions. On one hand, it have might been because I was not confident or ambitious enough, on the other hand, I just dislike the idea that competition is the only way for me to be successful. As a result, I did not even enter a single competition throughout college. It seemed like I had been trying to defy the traditional definition of being a successful musician all those years.

Adrianna believed that diversity and gifts were lost because many young musicians simply do not fit in. Jorgensen (2003) suggests that classical music is marginalized in both general education and the civic spaces of public life.

Western classical music is inaccessible to the general public just as the pervasiveness of popular music renders it inaudible and invisible. Bridges to past, less accessible, and esoteric traditions are also too few or in disrepair. (p. 130)

How do we preserve classical music while celebrating the diversity of marginalized classical musicians?

I love being a musician; however, I do not like being marginalized as a classical musician in today's field. I feel like many professional musicians were pushed away

gradually by many limitations. When talking to my non-music friends about the classical music field, it seems so distant to them. They had no clue about how this industry works. We live in a bubble, almost seeming to marginalize ourselves.

In terms of Adrianna's teaching experience with the young musicians, Adrianna believed that they learn about collaboration skills and building community. She claimed that when she was young, she had no clue how to be a normal functioning human being because she practiced four to six hours in an isolated practice room. She almost believed that the intensive training of being a musician hindered her development as a young individual.

I know in some ways, socially it almost felt like I was deformed or I was just missing very basic things like body language, I wasn't so great at reading, wasn't great at communicating certain things. I was in a very professional [way] to run in the rehearsal sense but not on a human sense[...] And so being around high schoolers made me realize, it's not just about playing the very, very, very best that you can do at the concert. It's about the process that leads up to that and about the people, the feeling in the room, whether or not people feel comfortable around you, whether or not you make them feel comfortable and open. All those things end up making a better concert.

Adrianna realized that performing among young people was not only about the concert, but more so about the communications and interpersonal relationships with other musicians.

Allsup (2016) talks about the problem of routine expertise. He believes that the Master-apprentice model in the classical training aligns with the closed nature of some aesthetic forms, those that are bound by norms and historical conventions. Routine experts are those who followed strictly what was told and how things should be done; they rigorously follow the expectations of their masters. The institutional structure of classical music learning perpetuates a sequential and predictable pattern that rewards the

obedient students. This kind of education appears to have deformed Adrianna's social and interpersonal skills.

While hearing Adrianna's story, it reminded me of my own. I was never an outgoing character; I was never confident about myself in the conservatory. I locked myself in the practice room hours a day, hoping that it would boost my confidence and self-esteem. On the contrary, it gave me more fear to speak up or express myself. It was not until I stepped out of the conservatory that I realized I had to improve my communication skills.

Yet, Adrianna was still thankful because she struggled as a young musician and now she could better help the young string players in *Face the Music*. She said that she could help them and, "create the next wave of not only great musicians but genuinely good, communicative, empathetic people." She affirmed that those are the kinds of leaders she wanted to see more of in the world.

Adrianna expressed that the young string players in the *Face the Music* already have great foundations and techniques that allow them to be open-minded and embrace nontraditional concepts.

We're already dealing with kids who have a certain degree of technique, but after that, if you introduce some context to them, then they can just take it and run with it because they have the time and the openness intellectually and even just in their concept of what music is to the extent that they will really embrace the new techniques and concepts that we're introducing them to.

She then compared the musicians she worked with to young adults. She believed that the young adults in college or even in high school have already developed a fixed mindset that is less open-minded, while the musicians she worked with at *Face the Music* tended to be more open-minded.

It's pretty cool because if you had a college kid or even a high school kid but you got them a little bit later in their development, there's already kind of a concept that's like, "This is good, this is bad, this is acceptable, this is not, this is respectable or not." We've been quite lucky in that the kids that we do get tend to be a little bit open about that whether that's just the cultural thing. Not always set in stone, but yes, that's the nature of who we're getting.

We discussed extensively the idea of, "contemporary music." I asked her opinion of whether the general public feels contemporary music is not and should not be melodic, since I noticed that *Face the Music*'s contemporary repertoire could be melodic and tonal, which contradicts general perceptions. Adrianna then disputed that contemporary music could be on the "Top 40" list or categorized as movie music.

I think that's an interesting question because it actually reveals a little bit of a commonly held bias that contemporary music is not melodic, because if we think about contemporary, contemporary music is not just classical but it's also on the Top 40, which is super melodic, also super rhythmic. There [are] movie soundtracks which are also extremely melodic like lush orchestral stuff. I mean, it has been the norm for a long time that's changing slightly, but there's still usually a lot of strings and a lot of melody[...] I think a lot of contemporary music falls into the realm of academia, where it's without the influx of the cutting edge of musical technique, which also intersects with science and with math.

Adrianna also mentioned that the definition of contemporary music is wide open and should be accepted in multiple and various forms, shapes, and tonalities. She probed that contemporary music in different settings and schools involves a particular sound that varies from one to another.

It is ridiculously open. That's the world that we live in right now. Always had been, but only now is it becoming a little bit more widely recognized. I find in an academic context, particularly in certain schools, because in a school like Queens College, contemporary classical could mean anything between a movie sound track to twelfth tone to living music, which is like lost, which is really interesting actually. It's very similar to a lot of music by Ligeti and composers in that area[...] like if you go to a Columbia graduate composers' concert, they have a very particular sound as opposed to a Juilliard School graduate composers' collective concert.

Adrianna expressed,

It's such a sad thing when people live their lives in very kind of strict, rigid categories. Music doesn't work that way. Life doesn't work that way and you can isolate one or two things that work on them, but to live like that is just limiting your existence so much.

For her, contemporary music is not meant to fit into rigid categories, nor should it have a textbook definition. She believed more exposure to contemporary music concerts might help people understand the music and alter their thoughts.

During my advanced proposal for my dissertation, I was challenged by the idea of what *kind* of contemporary music I was going to focus on. My answer was broad and imprecise, which proved confusing. I was asked whether movie music is considered contemporary, and my answer always was, "Yes, if the composers consider that as contemporary music." In talking to Adrianna about this topic, she gave me a very powerful answer:

If they don't call it [movie music] contemporary music, then that's the moment when I would be like, well, what does the word contemporary mean, and music is pretty straightforward. If you don't regard that as contemporary music, I think you really need to hold a mirror up to what you think music is because there's so much intellectual snobbery that happens within classical education. There is this real defined line between high art and what is perceived to be low art, but that's really at its heart, classism. Something that separates us from them.

Time and again, I wonder: What makes contemporary music different than classical music? Is it because of its style, tonality, or experimental nature? Or is it because of the time in which it was composed? As I proceeded with my research, I found myself becoming much more open-minded and accepting of the ambiguities. I was struck by what Adrianna mentioned as the inclination to draw a line between different art forms. The hierarchy underlying within different art forms are still apparent and it creates unnecessary boundaries and discernment that interferes the development of art and music education system in the 21st century. The discourse between different art forms and

genres could be productive, yet binary classifications should not be encouraged in the music world today.

I think we have a long way to go to recognizing these [music education] privileges and understanding that we are now in a position of power where we can bring up these other people who we perceive to be on the outskirts of music and bring them into the curriculum so that we can create more interesting, more individual voices, which is what classical music is certainly lacking.

I certainly agree we are certainly in a position of power as any kind of music education is a privilege. Allsup (2005) probes,

Do we, in other words, teach a tradition or do we teach a child? If we choose to teach children first and to share with them our traditions second, then a life of narrowness can be avoided by attending to student needs and student desires. (p. 22)

To recognize this power and to transform and expand it to something meaningful, many musicians and educators need to work in multiple ways and with different purposes.

Many more work still can be done on this long journey.

David

I think that we inherit—as practitioners of new music, we inherit an unfortunate tradition in a way that there were several strains in the 20th century that led music away from the audience. That specifically, decidedly made music about structures that had nothing to do with the resulting sound. Unfortunately, that drove away a lot of people.

David, a quartet coach and the conductor of FTMPHIL, has been teaching at *Face the Music* for 5 years (at the time of the interview). He was trained as a composer but is now primarily a conductor. He is a founding director and conductor of Contemporaneous, a New York-based ensemble of 21 musicians dedicated to performing contemporary music. He has conducted over 200 world premieres in different venues in the United States and Canada. He recalled that during his childhood growing up in Alabama, he had no

exposure to contemporary music. He said his experience in composition began when he was 13 years old, but he did not start composing seriously until his high school years.

When asking about his experience teaching young musicians at *Face the Music*, David believed that many students who started in their early adolescence attained incredible ferocity and bravery.

I really think that—it's a large part of their ability to pick up this music and read it, is due to the fact that they've been working on really complex repertoire for five years. There's a kind of inhibition that one has, particularly in middle school, before one turns thirteen or fourteen, where a lot of the kids who begin at that stage with *Face the Music* just have this incredible ferocity and bravery that [are] just phenomenal.

The ferocity and bravery that he described for the young musicians at *Face the Music* came from their spirit—that they will always be willing to try. He gave examples that even some professional musicians were hesitant, reluctant, and afraid to play certain pieces. But these students at *Face the Music* always try.

They're just like, "Oh, okay, this piece looks really intimidating, let's do it." Or, "I have no idea how to do this on my instrument; I've never made a sound like that. I don't even know what that sounds like, let me try it." If you think of across the street [Juilliard], musicians who've been doing exactly this for a long time, when you put something in front of them that calls for a sound they've never made, they'll say, "Oh, my instrument doesn't do that. I'm afraid of this; I'm not going to make that sound."

This reminds me of my initial experience learning a contemporary repertoire for a contemporary ballet performance. I was very hesitant because I did not believe I could do it. I wanted to get out of that performance assignment but I was only a freshman. I was terrified that I would fail so badly. And I agree, many of the musicians at Juilliard would intentionally avoid contemporary assignments, many because they hated it; and many because they were afraid to make mistakes because perfection is the what everyone is trying to achieve.

Rudnitsky, Barclay, Lauren Binger (2017) propose using the framework BRAVE (Build on ideas, Risk tentative, Ask good questions, Value other perspectives, and use Evidence) for collaborative learning. The BRAVE framework is developed based on the acronym that represents a quality that students admire and would like to incorporate into their identity. They believe using this framework to teach or conduct workshops allows students to have the autonomous voices and freedom to share their thoughts responsibility. To possess such characteristics requires effort from both educators and students, who need to be motivated, encouraged, and challenged in order to take risks. From my experience, it is not unusual to see professional musicians express their aversion to practicing contemporary music. There are many reasons behind that, one of which might be their lack of experience and fear of playing contemporary music.

These students are just ready to do things that some jaded professionals really loathe to do. I don't know, I think that's really remarkable. Just the way that this repertoire calls on students to add them, to put themselves into the music and really commit to making it sound really good to preparing. I think it really does a really good work for their work ethic and for their camaraderie. I think it's really special.

It was not the first time I heard coaches commenting about the students as, "special." David described to me that their playing not only fostered their work ethic in terms of playing any repertoire, but it also flourishes their friendships and collaboration with others.

During our short interview, we also covered the idea of contemporary music in modern society. David commented on different strains in contemporary music, and stereotypes which have mainly come from a specific strain that focuses on structures more than the resulting sound. Unfortunately, he believed that that specific contemporary

music has driven audiences away, but maintains it is the mainstream perception of new music.

I think that we inherit—as practitioners of new music, we inherit an unfortunate tradition in a way that there were several strains in the 20th century that led music away from the audience. That specifically, decidedly made music about structures that had nothing to do with the resulting sound. Unfortunately, that drove away a lot of people. And that again, unfortunately, is the mainstream perception of new music.

David provided me with a new perception of the discourse on contemporary music. He further explained that contemporary music is such a broad spectrum (similar to how some young string players interpret contemporary music) that is impossible to generalize. However, he referred to himself as a, “universal listener” who listens to different kinds of music to enhance his understanding of contemporary music and vice versa. Because of contemporary music, his listening experience has been broadened.

Despite the fact that new music now is just exceptionally diverse in terms of aural qualities, in terms of medium, the kinds of expressions, the kinds of stories that it tells, I really believe that there is something in new music for everyone. It’s tricky because everyone wants to hear something specific, but there’s a very broad term that is new music and it’s like, “Oh, well, how could that be for everyone?” It’s so broad. I don’t know what to do about the branding of that, but certainly in my own experience, I’m like a free Catholic, pretty like the universal listener. I like to listen to a lot of different kinds of music and I like to work in a lot of different kinds of music. New music allows me to do that.

This led me wonder: Is contemporary music for everyone once each person finds the sound he or she likes? Is it just a matter of fact that most people refuse to listen, refuse to explore? What David mentioned was one should try to listen to different kinds of music. Jarijisian (1998) suggests there are dozens of ways to access unfamiliar music and bring meaning to it. There are multiple points of entry that involve verbal, graphic, or other creative instructions guided by teachers to engage the students to listen. Robertson (2013) asserts that audiences would enjoy contemporary music if this unfamiliar music were

presented as it was understood by their composers, and in a, “context that allows listeners to make connections between the familiar and unfamiliar” (p.38). Of course, this may sound overly simplified, contemporary music is far more than the familiarity and unfamiliarity. Atton (2012) defines some avant-garde music as, “difficult music,” difficult for people to listen for many reasons, the lack of repetition, the lack of melody, the complex rhythmic patterns, and the unusual tonalities. Yet, he asserts, “to engage with difficulty is not necessarily to find pleasure in it” (p 360), but it is to be able to strategically locate the difficulty and to turn it into an aesthetic experience. That process may be lengthy, and perhaps many people give up searching. It is admirable, I think, that these young string players at *Face the Music* continue to search before rejecting.

Hajnal

I think that that’s the level of that personal connection between the creator of the music and the person who performs the music that you don’t get in other music because the composers have been dead for hundreds of years.

Hajnal is a Hungarian-American violinist and violist. She is a strong advocate of contemporary music, having been involved in many new music organizations and festivals. She is a coach for the Shao Quartet and had been working at *Face the Music* for three years at the time of the interview. When talking about her training and background in contemporary music, Hajnal said that she was never exposed to contemporary music until college. She started to get more involved because her violin teacher at college commissioned many contemporary music pieces. When she moved to New York in 2001, she got more involved in the new music scene.

When asked about her teaching experience with her group and being in of the youngest quartet groups in *Face the Music*, Hajnal said that she watched the students grow as individuals and they are much more mature, focused, and knowledgeable now, compared to a few years ago.

A few years ago, it would be like you wouldn't be able to work on a passage for that long or like only work on this section for 30 minutes. You really need to move around a lot more because there can be a lot of boredom and losing the understanding[...] [Now] they understand what they need to be aware of in the music. They're able to approach the music from the beginning with an idea of like, "What do I need? What information do I need to be able to make this successful?" Other than just like learning their own individual parts, it then becomes a little bit of a score study like, "When am I together?" That's the biggest thing; it's like really being aware of when somebody else in the quartet is relying on you, and when you need to be the person that everyone is relying on.

Hajnal also expressed that the group learned how to problem solve through the rehearsal process. She said, "I definitely think that it's problem-solving, and then improving their rhythm. I think rhythm is a really big one because there's a lot of complex interplay with rhythmic material." Hajnal's teaching pedagogy was just to, "dig in." She said she never started at the easiest place or the hardest place of the repertoire. Most importantly, they did a lot of score studies to figure out different parts and how each musician's part interlocked with other parts. Because they could not always find recordings of contemporary repertoire, analyzing scores became essential.

She also believed that having living composers come in and work with the young string players was very beneficial.

The other thing that comes to mind, which this group has been really lucky to experience, is to have a composer come in and write something for them. When John came and wrote the "Game Plan," he came in and he actually came in with Alexander, and they were just getting to know the kids personally. The students were able to see the creation of a piece that was written specifically for them. I think that that's the level of that personal connection between the creator of the music and the person who performs the music that you don't get in other music

because the composers have been dead for hundreds of years. It's like you can only wonder what they were like [...]

I don't think that many composers today write music specifically for young musicians. There are some composers, though, who only write music for method books for training purposes. Colgrass (2004) believes that composers of today should develop the skills to compose for young musicians with musical ideas. He also recommends that more composers at least attempt to write some works for young musicians as it requires different compositional awareness. I worked with a composer once who was trying to learn how to write for young string players because the works he had previously written were too complicated for young players. In order to write for young musicians, composers have to be very considerate about the skill levels while still delivering their concepts and ideas.

In terms of choosing their repertoire, *Face the Music* allows students and coaches to select a literature as a group. Without being told, Hajnal said her group selected more than half of the repertoire from women composers. We know that there is a lack of women composers performed by professional orchestras. Though members of Shao Quartet did not purposefully select the repertoire based on gender, it was apparent they enjoy playing works by female, living composers. The process of selecting the repertoire was also a group decision and it was not always easy to find a repertoire they loved, she claimed:

We read through a lot of stuff and they just really didn't want to do it. For whatever reason, they didn't like how it sounded or it was too complex to put together. I think that they definitely need to be enthusiastic about the piece because there have been times where they don't necessarily enjoy a piece that we're playing. I hear about it every time we rehearse, it's like; "Ugh, why are we doing this?" or like, "We don't want to play this piece anymore. Why can't we

play this instead?” That’s also, I think, just age-related, that they just want to complain about something.

Hajnal said it was never like, “You have to play this” to the young string players at her group because there was no point in playing something they did not want to play. Much like Adrianna, Hajnal tried to balance the difficulties of the repertoire with the young string players’ preferences. It was a group decision, but the coaches essentially have the final decision; as Hajnal described, they, “just want to complain.” I also noticed Shao Quartet was generally quieter as a fairly young group. I asked if they had any conflicts when they rehearsed. Hajnal said all of them worked very well together and none of them had any oppositional behavior other than boredom. When I further asked if Hajnal thought the members were friends (Recall, in Chapter V, they said they were not really friends), Hajnal said,

I think they like each other. By the time they get here, they’re pretty tired. They are at an age they’re used to—before this year, there will be a lot more—like they would play around or be silly during the break. Now that they are a little bit more getting towards being teenagers, they’re on their phones. If they didn’t have phones, they probably would talk to each other more. They get on their phone and play games, or they check their email or read a book that they have to be reading for school. They all have so many things they’re supposed to be doing that I think that break time is for them to do all the other twenty things that they’re supposed to be doing.

It was interesting to me that this group was almost too quiet during their break, as mentioned in the previous section. Hajnal pointed out a few things: phones, exhaustion, transitioning to become teenagers, or just being busy. The notion of community making was lacking in this group but could be found in other groups. Hajnal added,

It changes the dynamic of the group when you get a different person. It’s like if you have somebody that gets along with everybody, it’s a really nice addition, or if you have somebody that’s more serious than others, it changes everything. It’s always really interesting to navigate that.

The group dynamic was so different among the various groups; the experience of each coach and each young musician was so dissimilar. Each configuration embodied a different level of complexities. Like a puzzle, a slight modification will alter the big picture.

Jennifer

I am very much at the outset that these were the students [at *Face the Music*] that already decided they were not going to necessarily succeed in the traditional way. And so it was fun to see them succeed in a nontraditional way. And discovered that they could do things that they didn't feel they could.

Jennifer is the founder of *Face the Music* and used to be a music director for Special Music High School for over 10 years. She is currently a director of a music department at a university in upstate New York. She is a professional pianist but she also conducts as well. During the interview, we talked about her experience establishing and teaching at *Face the Music*. It was started as an afternoon club because Jennifer wanted to break the norm of music schools' sole focus on classical music. She began with a few students, then expanded so they could have enough performers to do special projects by different composers. At one point, Jennifer had over 200 students participating in *Face the Music*. Impulsively, I asked if the students at *Face the Music* were regarded as the, "cool kids." She responded,

Well, I saw friendships forming within the group. I don't think they were always regarded as cool by their peers; in fact, I knew that they weren't. Being in *Face the Music* is *weird*. But they were out doing concerts; they were having a good time. And the fact that they were out doing concerts all the time, they were getting some publicity for it, and they were—I also got the sense that—Well, listen, I am very much at the outset that these were the students that already decided they were not going to necessarily succeed in the traditional way. And so it was fun to see them succeed in a nontraditional way. And they discovered that

they could do things that they didn't feel they could. And to me, it was a huge piece of what felt like success to me.

Not only did Jennifer deny they were, “special,” but she also said they were perceived as *weird* by peers. She asserted that these young string players were not actually the very top students who would succeed in traditional ways. Here, the common recurrence of the word, “weird” prompts me to explore further what it actually means. While young string players also refer to contemporary music as *weird*, they were also perceived as *weird* by others. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines, “weird” as, “of strange or extraordinary character: odd, fantastic” (“Weird,” n.d.) The word was often used by young people as meaning something they cannot comprehend. While many people perceive it as a negative characteristic, based on the definition, I saw two words that stood out—“extraordinary” and, “fantastic.” I am wondering whether contemporary music and *Face the Music* musicians are both *weird* and *extraordinary*, *odd* and *fantastic* at the same time, depending how one perceives it.

Face the Music was actually a venue to help them to succeed in nontraditional ways. Jennifer further explained:

I discovered that a little bit by accident, the students that I remembered the most prominently from the early years were the students who stopped practicing, which I now know, even for my own kids, middle school is tough; that's when you kind of decide whether [music playing] means enough to you that you would continue to put energy in it. Part of it for me was some of these students felt unmotivated by the traditional expectation, so this is a chance for me to help them realize themselves a little bit. So they started actually practicing, or having to practice. And of course, they were simply to put enough hours rehearsing they started to get better. So it was very—I found it very rewarding for me to watch them *catch fire*. A few of them have gone on really pursuing me and majoring in music in college. I'd like to think of that was part of the reasons why.

It shocked me when Jennifer said many of the students who joined *Face the Music* were indeed students who did not like to practice. Joining *Face the Music* actually helped these

students to practice and rehearse regularly. Most importantly, Jennifer believed that nonconventional expectations motivated these students.

Jennifer described being a musician as a very narrow and rigorous path. The Special Music High School that she worked at was musically very conservative, heavily concentrated on classical styles. Similar to Adrianna's comments, Jennifer said that rigorous music programs always require students to meet a series of requirements, juries, competitions, and recitals. However, the inflexibility of the requirements only sets boundaries and hinders the creativity of young musicians. Because of that, Jennifer believed those requirements discourage students from pursuing music in college.

I remember feeling like one of things that I want to change was that I feel like a lot of students, when they decide whether they want to pursue music, I feel like there is a lot of interesting students, diverse students in terms of what they think, [who] decided not to go to music school because it seems too narrow for them.

As I can imagine, Jennifer must have seen talented and creative musicians in her school who decided not to pursue music in college. Perhaps many of them felt they were more interested in other subjects, or some of them might be turned off by the idea that classical musicians have to meet certain standard requirements like everyone else. This creates a norm that Jennifer mentioned—conservatories train the same kind of people.

I wanted them to see if we could increase the band with the kind of students who would apply to the music school. I always felt like *Face the Music* would ultimately succeed if it was enough of the movement that we could start to see the audition department change. Because I feel like if students are still just being judged by the Paganini Caprice, Solo Bach, and you know we are going to get the same students. Then, we are going to keep admitting the same kind of students and then we sit on the other side wonder why classical music isn't more successful and yet what've we done, at the age of the teens, that we separated the free thinkers from everybody else. I still hope that will change.

In the interviews with the young string players at *Face the Music*, I realized that for many in their high school years, only a small proportion indicated they would like to

pursue music in college, while most of them expressed their desire to major in other subjects. For those in middle school, it was too early for them to determine that. This led me wonder more about the place of a program like *Face the Music* in today's music education field.

John

What's really great about that [*Face the Music*] is there's interaction between people. What's happening in that interaction, it's like your own little society. When you're in a quartet, it's your own society. It's your own culture, the culture that you set up.

John, a second violinist in the Kronos Quartet, was a Grammy-award winner and long-time member of the quartet. In our interview, he mentioned that he was very lucky to have a sufficient music education as a young musician. He learned violin and had the privilege of taking private lessons in his teacher's basement. He also recalled joining a great orchestra in school and a chorus that taught him solfège. Surprisingly, he informed me that he actually received significant training in contemporary music when he was young. Because his older brother was also learning violin, they played all the duet music they could find, then started to find contemporary duet repertoire. Later, he studied with a violin teacher who also composed, so he and his brother would play his compositions.

John described how his experience was fun for him as a young musician because he enjoyed playing music with his brother and working with a composer. He even explained that he just felt it was the right thing to do at that time. Even in his high school years, he would go to the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee and learn through their contemporary music program: "I remember with my lessons, I would be the guy who

instead of bringing them Beethoven Concerto, I would bring them the Walton Concerto, the Shostakovich Concerto I had I worked on, and this was in the early 70s.”

Undeniably, John is a musician for whom contemporary music is part of his life and identity. As a long-term member of the Kronos Quartet, he has never stopped playing contemporary music since middle school. When I asked him about his teaching experience, he said that the young musicians do not merely learn by playing music. By interacting with different composers and people, they will be able to see music from a wider perspective.

It’s really going to help their overall playing and also their overall being too. When you relate, it’s so nice to see how *Face the Music* will bring composers in so they get to work right with them. Having that interaction, what I found is every composer is a completely different person; completely different outlook. It’s really important for younger people to see that, that everybody is completely different but yet you relate to them. You find common ground and then there’s not that much difference actually.

We further discussed the young string players in *Face the Music*, and John asserted that in addition to all the benefits of playing the music, it is about the interactions between young string players within their small groups teach, just like living in a society.

What’s really great about that is there’s interaction between people. What’s happening in that interaction, it’s like your own little society. When you’re in a quartet, it’s your own society. It’s your own culture, the culture that you set up. In your own society, there’s going to be criticism that you have to take, there’s going to be criticism that you agree with, and you’re happy to get it because they may also not only criticize you, they may have a suggestion in the little society.

John referred to playing in a quartet as forming a little society. One has to be able to communicate effectively, persuasively, and respectfully. Dewey (1916) asserts that school itself has to be a community in which social perceptions and interests are developed through the social medium, “one where there is give and take in the building up of a common experience” (p. 416). Dewey also believes in a societal purpose for

students while learning. The learning experience of the students should build on his or her past experience, while providing support for students to fulfill their potential as members of society.

Within each group, there is a different form of culture where criticism and suggestions can be heard. Young string players learn how to collaborate with others. John enjoyed seeing young string players grow over the years and start to act differently. They no longer need that many breaks in between rehearsals; their attention spans increase and suddenly they are, “the same but yet different,” according to John.

When asked about his opinion on stereotypes of contemporary music, John gave me a very sharp answer:

For people to generalize and say, “I don’t like this composer,” then you start asking questions of what have you heard. Then there’s a hand in the hall, “Well, I heard his symphony.” The person could have written fifteen symphonies and you heard one symphony. Was it an early symphony? Was it a middle symphony? Was it a late symphony? They’re making a judgment. It’s like you’re not really researching.

John assumed that people who are holding stereotypes against a certain composer or certain style of music do not have an in-depth concept of the subject matter. One cannot jump to conclusions just because of one piece. He also said he would not like to make judgments generally because he did not feel qualified to unless he listened to every piece that a composer has written. John, a renowned musician who is highly specialized in contemporary music, reminded me that generalizations are unfair.

Robertson (2013) believes it is problematic to generalize about contemporary music.

We generalize to simplify discussion and make decisions. We generalize about repertoire, taste, and audiences. We base ideas of success on attendance figures,

which contain unnoticed generalizations about the appropriate size of the hall in which the music is presented. (p. 42)

However, it was much harder to measure the individual experience of a specific piece, or a specific concert. He emphasizes that music is only fascinating when it evokes unique changes in people.

Although the Kronos Quartet members did not stay with the musicians of *Face the Music* for the entire year, I got the feeling by talking to John that he really thought working with young string players was meaningful and rewarding. His favorite moment was when the Kronos Quartet played with everyone in the past year: “I remember we had really hard two lines that were way up high. We were all waiting for that part to come up to show we can do it. That was a good spirit there.”

Vasu

All the students are here by their own volition, so what that means is that we're able to wield their fiery creativity. [...] We [*Face the Music*] are like fire-wielders in a way and we have to raise the temperature when we need to and we need to pull it back and cool it down when we need to as well.

Vasu, born and raised in New York, is the current director of *FTM*. He was *Face the Music*'s first intern and later became its managing director. He was trained as a pianist but also turned to composition in college. As a multifaceted musician and entrepreneur, he conducts an ensemble and teaches a course in artistic entrepreneurship at Special Music High School. Vasu told me he really enjoyed running and building an organization, which he did at *Face the Music* for over 10 years. He recalled there was no formal contemporary music education when he was young. However, he said he was always intrigued by rock and popular music and played electric bass in a rock band. He

also listened to South Indian music as his parents are of Indian descent. However, he got into contemporary music through movies:

I can't say I ever studied contemporary music when I was a kid, but I also got into it rather young when I was fourteen or fifteen. I fell in love with the movies of director Darren Aronofsky. At that time, all of his music was being done by Kronos Quartet. Getting into his movies got me into Kronos Quartet which helps get me into the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich[...]

Vasu told me that he had seen many changes in *Face the Music* during his 13 years working in the organization. He said he saw much positive growth—not necessarily growth in the size of the organization, but growth in terms of students' experiences and quality of performances. He also believed that students' commitment was much stronger than ever. When asked whether he thought there were any benefits for the young string players at *Face the Music*, he said,

I see is that for many various students who come into *Face the Music*, it's their first experience with contemporary music. It's their first experience working with, meeting with, and playing the music of living composers. For many, it's also their first time performing at professional venues all over New York City, performing outside of their weekday school or weekend school environments. For many, it's their first time composing music, too. For many, it's their first time working with any sort of guest artist, or even performing alongside against artists in a professional environment.

Vasu believed that many of the young musicians gained their “first experiences” through *Face the Music*. It provided them with something they had not experienced elsewhere, such as playing contemporary music, composing, communicating with living composers, and performing extensively in the city. I recalled my exciting field notes shortly after a month of observations:

I had just finished seeing their first concert in Merkin Hall in the Kaufman Music Center. The two string quartets that collaborated with the Kronos Quartet blew my mind. They were so solid [...] Their music was commissioned by Kronos, part of the “Fifty for the Future.” Their project features many living composers, including minorities and female composers [...] They had such broad

styles in one concert: one of the pieces requires a drone playing in the background, another requires them waving their bows into the microphone to make special wind sound, another one just sounded like nice movie music. Now I understand why these students are excited by *Face the Music* (Field Note, February 11th, 2019).

Vasu further explained that all the students in *Face the Music* have a healthy degree of ownership because they want to be a part of this group.

One of the things that we do well is, I think, our students feel a healthy degree of ownership within their own participation in *Face the Music*. *Face the Music* is not a required curricular in-school activity and so the students who come to *Face the Music* do it because they want to do it. They have the hunger and the passion to do it and, not only to see their friends on Sundays, but to also write music for their friends and to be a part of these wild and wacky and *weird* creative music ensembles.

Again, the word, “weird” was used by another adult. He paired this word with, “creative.” It made me believe that weird is not only implying a negative meaning, but more an, “unusual” or, “extraordinary” meaning. Vasu also used the metaphor of, “fire-wielders” to describe their jobs at *Face the Music*. He saw himself as a fire-wielder who flamed the fiery creativity of young musicians. This made me think of the myth of Prometheus in Greek mythology. Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and the gods and gave it to the mortals, though he was punished by Zeus afterwards, he was perceived as an intelligent champion of mankind. Intriguingly, the name *Prometheus* also means the “Forethinker.” I wonder if Vasu and the young musicians perceive themselves as the forethinkers in music education?

In addition to creativity being aroused at *Face the Music*, Vasu also suggested that students at *Face the Music* have more freedom and confidence to believe they can do it themselves because he said that, “many of us who grew up studying classical music, I think we were taught that we could not do it and that we were not allowed to do it.”

Another benefit is the intensive training, with which the young musicians have narrowed the gap between the professional and educational world, thus allowing the creative voices of young people to be heard. As Vasu said, “It shows that the creative voices and the spirit and the vision of young people are just as interesting if not more interesting. I find that is more interesting because the youth, they haven’t been encumbered yet by society.”

It is true that children and teenagers have their own norms that exist among their peers. Through my interviews with the young string players, I found that many of them have unique thoughts and opinions that were somehow surprising for me. Each of their answers were genuine yet distinctive, and proved that their voices need to be heard. Some instances were: when Charlotte told me her experiences playing contemporary is like the experience of being a modern human being; when Miguel explained his own definition of contemporary music; and when Benjamin reflected his idea of re-presenting the emotions of the composers.

For instance, two groups said they preferred music written by their peers and young composers around their age. Randles (2010) explores the relationship of factors relating to high school instrumentalists’ involvement with music, including compositional experiences to musical self-concept. He concludes that students who had compositional experiences had higher measures of music self-concept than their non-composing peers. Because many young string players at *Face the Music* also called themselves composers, I saw an extension of music education that I did not have when I was young—the notion that musicians are multifaceted is a new perspective in music education today.

From there, I shifted my questions to the *HarmonicsLab* because I was curious how Vasu saw it as part of *Face the Music*.

I think also what I've seen in the past is with this, the younger orchestras that we had, so if they're setting and performing music by living composers, only contemporary music, but they were limited by their inherent technical and instrumental limitations because they're young, beginner, just maybe a little bit intermediate-level students. When they performed at public *Face the Music* performances, I think the response would always be very mixed because *Face the Music* is inherently our identity, there's experimentation in our identity.

Vasu said that the young musicians were limited by technical challenges; therefore, an orchestra for younger students might be challenging and ineffective. However, *HarmonicsLab* did not function like other traditional ensembles that I experienced. That was why I personally believe it is a great idea for younger musicians to experience more than just a traditional music ensemble setting. When Vasu said that, "*Face the Music* is inherently our identity," I was reflecting on the young musicians, and how their inherent identity is to explore and experiment. If experimentation is part of their identity, does this imply multiplicities underlying this manifold nature of exploration? If one agrees to let the experimentation be the *character* of young musicians, then traditional music ensemble, which are mostly teacher-centered, would be the opposite of the identity of *Face the Music*.

All of the young students in that group also experienced improvising, composing, and singing. Through *HarmonicsLab*, Vasu wanted to break the stereotype that contemporary music is not meant for children.

As an organization, Vasu said they used to struggle with attendance. Although at one point about 250 students attended *Face the Music*, they had terrible attendance problems. Half of them did not attend regularly; some of them did not pay tuition, which at that point was very low. After that, Vasu focused on getting participants who were genuinely interested in *Face the Music*. Attendance has improved tremendously since

then. He told me four students dropped out this year, but that was a very low number compared to other years. However, coaches like Adrianna and Hajnal also reflected that it was challenging for their quartet groups not to have a stable membership after someone has dropped out. Another big challenge is recruitment. *Face the Music* had always recruited through word of mouth and did not have a formalized recruitment process. For example, most of the oldest students at *Face the Music* told me it was the founder who recruited them personally. When the founder left *Face the Music*, many of the students also discontinued. This year, they are aware of this challenge and established some sustainable network for recruitment. Vasu expressed that they also struggled in getting funding as a nonprofit arts organization; in fact, they had their first successful year of fundraising at the time of interview. It was evident that they had asked for tuition fees, however, compared to other music institutions, I think their tuition seemed much more affordable. They also provided scholarships. Vasu also expressed that when they charged an even more affordable tuition a few years ago, they often struggled receiving the full payment because many of the parents actually did not take them seriously enough.

By contrast, Vasu described how extremely rewarding it is to see young musicians perform all over New York City. He believed that the process was important because it led to performance. The number of concerts used to be overwhelming in previous years—sometimes 45 concerts in one year. However, he said half of those concerts were not worth doing because every concert was a full-on production and caused a great amount of time and energy for parents and students. Vasu admitted that having around 20 concerts a year allows for higher performance quality and better experiences for the students. He noted that not all students are involved in every concert, and each

concert features a variety of performers, compositions, and ensembles. When asked about future plans, Vasu said he would like to continue having different guest artists, such as composers or performers, some of whom volunteer to come in and work with the young musicians at *Face the Music*.

Wayne

Again, music becomes such a part of you that you can't separate yourself from music. It's a language, you know languages, you don't think about it. You don't think about the language. You just speak it, it's the same with music. It's a language that you speak.

Wayne (pseudonym) is the parent of Steve (pseudonym), a cellist in the Shao Quartet. I interviewed him because I saw he was present most of the times I observed *Face the Music*. Usually he came in with Steve, then stayed, sometimes sitting in on the rehearsals, sometimes reading a book outside. Steve usually rehearsed at least four to five hours on Sundays at *Face the Music*. A typical *Face the Music* day for the students was 2:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. During the break, usually after the quartet rehearsal, Wayne would hand out food to Steve and eat some during the break. Also during the break, I saw Steve playing basketball by himself among other adults in the basketball court located on the same level. Steve was only 11 years old, but he was a mature, quiet, and talented cellist, from what I observed.

Wayne told me in the interview that he was an actor and fully supported Steve studying at *Face the Music*. He said Steve was invited to *Face the Music* by the founder, Jennifer, when Steve was only in second grade. Steve was challenged by the complex rhythms of the music and other technique issues. Wayne told me he believed Steve had

made huge progress, both academically and musically. He told me Steve passed a rigorous test in a demanding middle school, which was beyond his expectations.

I have to believe that his musical experience had to play a part in it, because the complicated processing of information that goes on with music, rhythm, timing, and notes is a language on its own. I do think that it has contributed to his academic or mental processing progress.

Wayne described music as part of Steve's life. He said that it seemed to be much harder for Wayne now than for Steve because he would have to come and spend all these hours just to make sure things went well. Steve never refused to come to *Face the Music*.

Music is a part of his life. Because this is his fourth year, it's hard on me. [laughs] It's a lot harder on me than it is on him, being the one that takes him here and makes sure he's all set up and make sure he has everything. It's just become such a part of his life that there's no resistance at all for him to come here and do it. Maybe as he gets older and develops more of his own identity and personality, but so far, not at all. It's just a part of his life.

It was interesting to me that Wayne said coming to *Face the Music* is just part of Steve's life. He continued to explain music was like part of, "Steve's language."

Again, music becomes such a part of you that you can't separate yourself from music. It's a language, you know languages, you don't think about it. You don't think about the language. You just speak it, it's the same with music. It's a language that you speak. By having him immersed in it at such an early age, even if it's on his own, those notes are there. He can listen to the music. He can know, "I hear it and I can see it on the page, and now I have to do this." It's speaking another language.

When I asked Wayne more about whether he thought Steve benefited from any extra-musical aspects, he replied that he believed the experience of playing in a group in *Face the Music* is a social experience.

I think that music is a social experience. It's a social experience for the players and it's a social experience for the audience. That is the primary benefit of gathering together to participate, either as a player or as an audience, in the experience of consuming, sharing, providing music to others... I'm talking about the social experience is unique. I love the fact that he gets to socialize and create something as a group. It has definitely had an impact on him socially because he

walks into a situation now and he engages as a team player, as a group member. He knows he has a role in that and he has a responsibility in his role for the group.

Wayne also believed Steve learned his roles and responsibilities by being in a group setting. He supposed that this social experience also included the performance aspect of being in *Face the Music*. The social experience that Steve received is more than building a community within *Face the Music*; it is more inviting an audience outside of *Face the Music* to be a part of their experience. Jorgensen (1995) illustrates community as place that has, “rootedness” and, “interconnectedness.” It ensures all learners value differences as well as similarities, and “accept and love their own music traditions, and are empowered to change those things that should be changed and embrace new perspectives” (p. 80).

That’s the best part about music, I think, is the fact that we’re all here together, trying to make something beautiful together, and we have a responsibility for an audience to provide that to an audience[...] [B]ecause to go to a musical event you have to leave your home or your apartment. You can’t click on a tube. You got to be with people. That’s the biggest reward for me, is just being in a group of young people sharing an experience together.

At home, Steve likes to listen to Bach and has a piano of his own; the *Goldberg Variations* by Bach was the piece he was learning over the past year. Wayne said that they did not have enough time for piano lessons anymore as they prioritized his cello playing. When asked how he thought of the music students learned in *Face the Music*, Wayne said,

I’m being very honest, I love a lot of it. I really do. That last concert with the John King, and the *Clunker Concerto* was a terrifically exciting concert. It’s like anything. Not all of it’s good. You don’t know if it’s good until you—I don’t mean to judge it by saying it’s good. Let’s say it’s something I prefer or don’t prefer. Until you hear it, and the kids have a chance to rehearse it, and play it and dig in to it, until you hear it, I wouldn’t know how much I like it.... It’s important to carry on a legacy and keep doing it for everybody to expose you to it, and have other kids get exposed to it, so they carry it forward.

Wayne told me that he did not like every single piece at *Face the Music*, but he could not judge the repertoire until he heard the full development, including the process (rehearsals) and the final product (performances). Most of the time, he ended up loving the performances and the music they performed by keeping an open mind. For him, it was important to have his child, Steve, be exposed to contemporary music so he could, “carry it forward.”

Summary

It became apparent that contemporary music is not black and white, even for professional musicians who practice, perform, and teach contemporary music for years. During these semi-structured interviews, I came to realize that different interviewees understand contemporary music differently: one might view it as art music that is written in the present; one might view it as music from the 20th century; and one might simply avoid classifying it. It was clear that all coaches saw their works at *Face the Music* positively and believed the young musicians they worked with benefited from the program in multiple ways, such as forming society, learning interpersonal and collaborative skills, improving in the technical and musical aspects of playing instruments, and increasing their creativity and problem-solving skills. Yet, these were opinions, experiences, and perspectives from the adults, while the students had expressed a mixed voice. I often found the complexities and richness of qualitative research to be captivating and non-generalizable. In attempting to discuss everyone’s experiences from multiple perspectives and to answer the research questions, I will present in the next chapter voices, dialogues, and texts from various levels and angles for interpretation and

analysis. I will attempt to remain unbiased as a researcher by neither romanticizing nor criticizing what I objectively recorded.

Chapter VII

POSSIBILITIES WITHIN THE COMPLEXITIES

In my previous chapters, I have attempted to present the richness and complexity of *Face the Music*: the thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and the experiences of multiple voices, including my own researcher voice (Walshaw, 2010). I hope to refrain from binary perspectives and present a complicated discussion of the findings. Still, these findings are not finished, I hope. I see them more as a catalyst for future discussions, and maybe to open the gates for more unsettling questions for researchers and music educators, such as the place of contemporary music in the current music education field. But in the end, I as researcher invite you, my readers to join and further explore my unanswered questions and doubts.

The three research questions which began this study were:

1. How do young string players come to know themselves and others through participation in *Face the Music*?
2. What are music's emotional and social benefits for young string players in *Face the Music*?
3. How do teachers in *Face the Music* perceive their roles in contemporary music education?

Research Question #1

RQ#1: How do young string players come to know themselves and others through participation in *Face the Music*?

Identity is more than just self-identification (O'Brien; 1995); it changes and transforms and it is not a singular unit (Burke, 2006). According to Burke, identity changes over time due to the hierarchical structure and perception of role performance. It also changes due to the multiple identities that influence each other (p. 93). Through my observations, interviews, and field work at *Face the Music*, I observed multiple ways in which contemporary music make spaces for young musicians to negotiate their musical self in *Face the Music*. I have come to see ways beyond a simplistic binary notion of identity. According to Abramo (2009), the understanding of the identity of musicians is insufficiently complex. After considering my observations, I propose that young string players at *Face the Music* displayed several, and possibly more, complex self-conceptions, such as (i) lives as contemporary music performers; (ii) flexible/versatile musicians; (iii) performers, collaborators, composers, and improvisers; (iv) self-motivating musicians or potential rebels; and (v) polytonal roles.

Some research suggests that the self is composed of multiple, *hierarchically* ordered identities (Deaux et al., 1995; Stryker, 2007).

Not only multifaceted, self is also postulated to be organized. Identity Theory has taken hierarchy as a principal mode of the organization of identities, again mirroring society. That is, self is a structure of identities, and identities—given their properties as cognitive schema—vary in their salience and centrality. (Stryker, 2007, p. 11)

The hierarchal self-concept implies that the judgments, cognition, and behaviors of one person tend to be consistent with the identities that are more important to that person. One's self-concept is a collection of beliefs, which are comprised self-schemas that interlock with self-esteem, self-knowledge, and the social self. These self-identifications also involve past, present, and future selves (Ayduk et al., 2009; Myers, 2009). Not only does self-identification involve a multitude of timeframes, it is also contradictory and fluid. Recent scholarship has explored the complexities of the relationship among the multiple dimensions of self, that is, the interpersonal, the intrapersonal, and the cognitive (Jones & McEwen, 2000). As a researcher, I have only been able to observe and inquire about the students' self in a delimited state, considering their lives and identities outside *Face the Music*. I am very curious how their identities within *Face the Music* interact with their multiple, musical identities. Nevertheless, I was also hesitant to put labels on them. I am not attempting to prove that all young string players at *Face the Music* display all the above identities. These categories are limited and constrained and I do not plan to limit their potential by forcing them to fit into neat categories. These identities that I proposed, perhaps, are possibilities of how some of these young string players perceive themselves, how outsiders like me perceive them, and what they might become in the future.

Lives as Contemporary Music Performers

All students at *Face the Music* are capable of playing and performing on their instruments at particular levels, many at advanced levels. Throughout this dissertation, I mainly referred to these students as, "young string players." What is so special about these young string players—compared to those who are, per se, already studying in the

conservatory pre-college programs—is their self-identification as contemporary music performers.

However, many of the young string players in *Face the Music* also did not show a particular preference for contemporary music, even though they continued studying and learning contemporary repertoire. “Youths exercise the identity construction centering on self-identity by the unconscious use of ritualization towards popular music” (Jing, 2017, p. 12). Again, I argue that this statement can apply to contemporary music as well. Ritualization in this context is the extensive practice and rehearsal time they willingly to put into practicing and performing contemporary music. Interestingly, according to Jing (2017), a process of ritualization young people may not necessarily establish the emotional bond with the context of the music, but they exercise the identity construction centering on self-identity (p. 12). *Face the Music* musicians, “ritualized” contemporary music as a way to distinguish themselves from other young musicians. They construct part of their self as contemporary musicians, building their self-images as members of *Face the Music*. Oddly, some participants might not have reflected a strong emotional bond with contemporary music; however, they do reflect a stronger bond with their friends, and their community. It is interesting that how some of these young string players can separate their preference, and sometimes emotions, from establishing their music role as contemporary music performers.

“Flexible”/Versatile Musicians

Young musicians in *Face the Music* are musicians who play a multi-genre music repertoire. Unlike most young musicians who devote their time to the study of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, or Tchaikovsky, learning from their sonatas, etudes and concertos,

Face the Music musicians go beyond the traditional repertoire and further extend their experiences by playing living composers' music. Many of the musicians expressed how they appreciate studying a *new* genre other than classical music.

Caroline: I actually thought it was super cool....It was actually a lot more fun because I was doing something new. You know, you do the same Mozart quartet every single year, but then now you are able to do something else.

Caroline recognizes her fluid status as a multifaceted musician; she sees herself being involved in both classical and contemporary genres of music as exciting. Although it might be hierarchical, her image of herself is manifold. Many have told me in their interviews that they love classical music, or at least were practicing other traditional pieces outside *Face the Music*. I recalled the conversation with the Shao Quartet, in which they expressed their fondness for classical music, which they preferred over contemporary music.

Deanna: I mean... a young composer... when Mozart was young, I would love to work with him, because it was really great. And then young people these days, are not as great as Mozart...

Jenny: The composers in contemporary music are a little bit weird... We can't play classical music here, well, if we could, then definitely!

It was interesting to me because many of them are in *Face the Music*, not really because they *love* playing contemporary music, but for the *experience*. Many of them see the *experience* as expanding their skills and musical language; they appreciate the extensive performing opportunities, the opportunities to learn from the Kronos Quartet, among other advantages. They are open to embracing the dissonance and complexities that reflect in their multifaceted self. I would argue the experience here in *Face the Music* makes them more versatile and flexible than other young musicians.

Deana: It goes back to you don't want to be ignorant. You want to be worldly so you want to have the great experience. And nowadays, all great artists they play contemporary music...

I would argue that *Face the Music* musicians are *flexible* musicians (Allsup, 2015) who are able to shift between musical languages and travel beyond the classical boundaries. "Flexible" musicians, according to Bennett (1983), are those whose, "master professional trait is the ability to use any and all forms of notation...with their ability to shift quickly and without prejudice between sources of musical information..." (p. 233). Unlike students at *Face the Music*, traditional classical musicians are usually not taught to be, "flexible." This inflexibility hinders many performers from attempting improvisation or music composition. Bennett adds that,

as people who have gone beyond their own initial musical identities, they are in the best position to understand how to surpass the organizational and ideological obstacles that subordinate both classical and popular musicians. (p. 233)

Face the Music musicians are, "flexible" musicians who are willing to take risks. David, the coach and conductor at *Face the Music*, describes characteristics such as "ferocity" and "bravery" (p. 134). He explains that young musicians at *Face the Music* that he worked with have the attitude to, "try." Bennett (1983) ended his research saying, "all musical flowers and weeds will bloom, but the next hybrids will attract the most attention" (p. 234).

Performers, Collaborators, Composers and Improvisers

One obvious finding for me as a researcher is the multiple musical self of the young string players at *Face the Music*. Almost all young string players that I interviewed told me they have composed, or they were involved in, some kind of composition project.

The classical tradition of learning one primary instrument, and focusing only one skill-set, is a concept of the past. Many researchers (Menard, 2013; Newton, 2005; Norris, 2010; Schopp; 2006) believe many of the musical activities that focus on the development of ensemble and individual performance do not always encourage creativity in students. Schopp (2006) criticizes the lack of opportunities for composing and improvising offered to high school music students. Although his study focuses on the jazz band, I believe there is also a strong need to focus on composing and improvising for string players. It was apparent that the music education field is aware of the lack of flexibility and creativity inherent in traditional music education. However, there appears to be little evidence of change in music pre-colleges or conservatories.

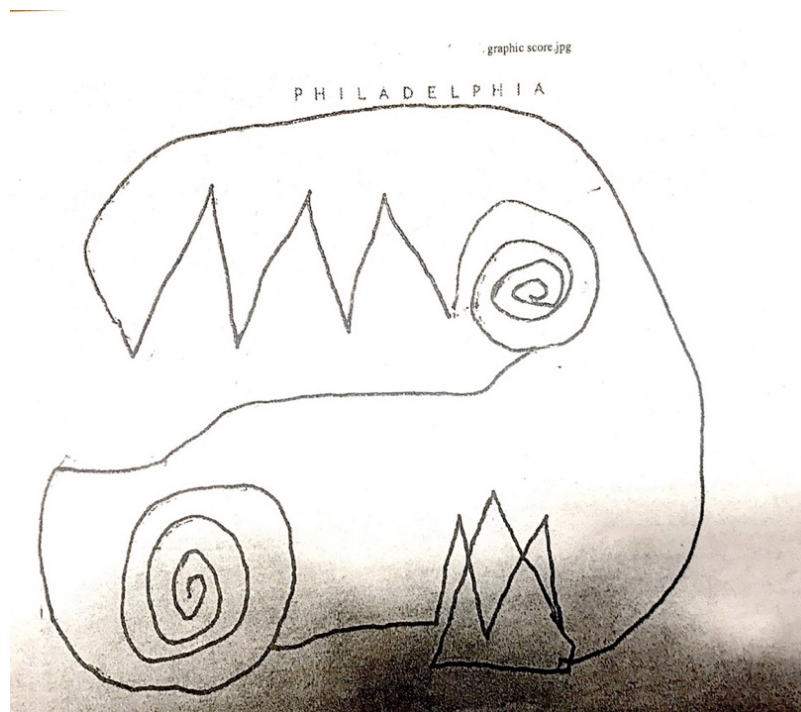
Many of the programs in *Face the Music* are very performance-oriented as most rely on heavy rehearsal and performance schedules. Yet, I can see their effort in promoting students as composers. During the interview, it was surprising for me to hear most of these young string players call themselves composers without hesitation. In Standup Quartet, all the members expressed to me how their friend and violinist, Kenneth, composed a piece that they feel very strongly that could represent all of them. As mentioned in Chapter V, Kenneth's piece "No Sleep Train" features all members hopping off the stage in a sleeping bag. They have performed this piece twice and believe Kenneth's piece represents their sense of fun, maybe more literally than musically. Jimmy and other members in the Plato Quartet also expressed that they preferred pieces that are written by kids (p. 116). They strongly agreed that they had a great experience playing young composers' music in the past and found that music more exciting.

In *HarmonicsLab*, young musicians also co-compose together and perform their own compositions on stage. They are encouraged to improvise on their primary instruments, secondary instruments, or non-traditional instruments to create and compose music. In a class at Teachers College, we had an intense discussion on the legitimacy of calling oneself a poet simply because you possess the ability to write a poem or haiku. During the class, many of the graduate students declined to recognize themselves as poets even if they had written poems in the past. They believed they would need to undergo professional training in order to be qualified as poets. However, even though the young musicians at *Face the Music* wrote casually and occasionally, they were confident in calling themselves composers. To them, if they believe they are composers, they *are* composers. They can compose in any way, even yet unheard of ways. Hulse (2015) addresses the emerging, “globally-minded” composers today (p. 220). Hulse believes contemporary composers need not come from the Western classical music canon. A global network of composers could come from any background, practice, or tradition. The notion that composers must be conservatory-trained is dated. There are many different ways to compose with the assistance of technology. Many of the students were familiar with web-based notation system; some were even familiar with professional notation software. Hulse asserts, “we need to cultivate musical-creative activity outside of academia, even as we resist the anti-creative intellectualism within” (p. 232). He believes there is a responsibility for composers to engage the world with both the old and the new.

When I asked a few young string players whether they compose, they said they do and were very open to sharing original works with me and their groupmates. Deanna in

the Shao Quartet shared an audio recording of her original piece with me during the rehearsal break; I think it was beautiful and modal in its tonality. Then when I asked what style she was trying to compose in, she had a hard time answering me. I then realized that she was not trying to mimic a particular style; it was her own style.

Below are three musical examples that young musicians at *HarmonicsLab* composed: (1) Graphic Notation Piece on Drum Set and Piano; (2) Violin, Cello, Piano Trio inspired by seasons; and (3) Soprano and Piano Piece inspired by poem written by Emily Dickinson. These are all musical drafts written by students who considered themselves both performers and composers starting from middle school.



Musical Example 6. “Philadelphia,” score provided by *HarmonicsLab* participant.

In Flight

Score/piano part

NOTE: every time it says; a season,
two seasons or to transition into a season,
think of what that season reminds you of and
try to express that through your music

*Pianists may build chords off notes if they feel it is necessary

The musical score for "In Flight" is written for Piano, Violin, and Cello. It is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (D major). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 75. The score consists of three systems. The Piano part has a treble and bass staff. The Violin part has a single staff. The Cello part has a single staff. Dynamics include piano (*p*), forte (*f*), and pianissimo (*pp*). The text "Spring/summer" is written above the notes in each system. The first system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system has a forte (*f*) dynamic. The third system ends with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic.

Musical Example 7. "In Flight," score provided by *HarmonicsLab* participant

In Flight

Score/piano part

NOTE: every time it says; a season,
two seasons or to transition into a season,
think of what that season reminds you of and
try to express that through your music

*Pianists may build chords off notes if they feel it is necessary

This musical score is identical to the one in Musical Example 7. It features Piano, Violin, and Cello parts in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps. The tempo is quarter note = 75. Dynamics range from piano (*p*) to pianissimo (*pp*). The text "Spring/summer" is repeated throughout the score.

Musical Example 8. "Hope," score provided by *HarmonicsLab* participant.

When I asked the young musicians' about the genre of music that they compose, it seemed that they have no idea how to define their works in that way. I found this interesting – it is not because they lack the knowledge to define their own works, but rather, it seemed they preferred not to compose in a box or compose in certain styles. Most of their works were inspired by a text, by an experience, or by something they are interested in rather than thinking about completing the composition as an assignment. In addition to writing their own compositions, they are also encouraged to use improvisation as a feature of composition. The ability to improvise for young musicians varied in *HarmonicsLab*; Higgins and Mantie (2013) propose that improvisation not only promotes creativity, but also ability, culture, and experience. They consider improvisation important to overall musicianship, whereas it is also a way to understand culture and musical practices. Improvisation is also considered a way of being in and through music. Thus, improvisation is not merely a technical skill that creative musicians should possess; it is a lens to provide a deeper experience for musicians.

There is a need to provide an accessible musicking experience (Small, 1999) to integrate activities such as attending concerts, listening, performing, composing, and improvising. *HarmonicLabs* attempted to provide students with, “expansive, playful, personal and interpersonal” experiences (p. 42). I see the expansive programs in *Face the Music* encouraging both composing and performing within small and large ensembles. The playfulness was revealed inside each quartet group as I witnessed a sense of friendship in the students' conversations and laughter. Their far-reaching performance opportunities also enabled them to get to different parts of the city and reach different audiences. These experiences are providing these young musicians with a more holistic

music education. I would argue a well-rounded music program today should focus not only advancing the skills and techniques of instrumental playing, but should also promote and cultivate the individuality of a “musician” as a plural rather than a singular term – a musician is a composer, a performer, and an improviser for future generations who are facing the ever-changing 21st century.

Self-motivating Musicians or Potential “Unconscious Rebelliousness”

“*I am just playing my violin, how does this make me rebellious?*” I asked some of the young string players at *Face the Music* whether they see themselves as rebellious figures because they are doing something so very *different*. Many of them did not recognize themselves as rebellious. Of course, considering their dedication to *Face the Music* – they showed up to rehearsal on time, did not skip a single rehearsal, practiced at home diligently – how could they be rebellious? But here is what they said in Chapter V,

Emily: My mom is very into classical music, and sometimes she really enjoys what we play in *Face the Music* and sometimes she really didn’t like it.

Mike: My dad can’t stand *Face the Music*, he likes all classical music...

Caroline: Well, my mom was against the fact that I am going to *Face the Music*...”I don’t want you to continue going in.” But for that, I just kept going in being in *Face the Music* for the whole high school years.

Swedenburg (2007) defines, “youth” as a socially and culturally determined category, a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood and also a product of modernity (p. 4). On one hand, I strongly believe that these young string players at *Face the Music* are self-motivated – some of them continue to participate in the program even without the approval of their parents or their classmates outside *Face the Music*. On the other hand, their comments may make them, “unconscious rebels.” Ter Bogt et al. (2011) states,

“adolescents can and do rebel against parental authority, and by adoring brash, ‘deviant’ music, young people gain a sense of independence from their parents” (p. 301). I have added the term, “unconscious” due to their possible lack of awareness of their own, unconscious stance. Research also shows healthy parent-adolescent relationships encourage independence (Grotevant and Cooper, 1985). As there is a mutual respect between the parents and the young string players in *Face the Music*, they may consider themselves more, “independent” than, “rebellious.” Although they choose to make music generally divergent from the preferences of their parents, they work diligently in order to become stronger, more learned musicians, something that each parent at *Face the Music* wishes for their child.

The parents support their children in several ways, most of all in their encouragement to pursue their own goals. A parent of one of the musicians, Wayne, explains his thought process:

Wayne: I'm being very honest, I love a lot of it. I really do.... It's like anything. Not all of its good. You don't know if it's good until you-- I don't mean to judge it by saying it's good. Let's say it's something I prefer or don't prefer.

It does not seem possible to determine the line between, “unconscious rebelliousness” and burgeoning independent musicianship. These labels simply act as a tool to further examine the musicians’ motivations. What is at the core of this discussion is that each musician possesses the drive to take hold of their own learning, a quality quite rare in such young students.

“Polytonal Roles”

Perhaps the most consistent responses about their identities that I received from young string players at *Face the Music* was indeed, “not sure,” or, “confused.”

Christine: I don't think we are just playing the music. [But] I don't really know what “music is representing us” means.

Through interviews with many of the young string players, I found that many of them were unable to define their musical roles. Like the ambiguous and ever-changing tonality of Charles Ives' *Piano Sonata No. 2 “Concord”*, their roles in their quartets and their self-conceptions as musicians are all expressed at the same time and constantly changing. Even identity that seems well-established may change throughout life. Identity transformation is complex and difficult to explain, however, sociologists do recognize those changes: “The fact of identity change is explained when changing power relations conflict with embedded categorical understandings, expectations, and values” (Todd, 2005, p. 452). The roles of the young musicians change throughout their study at *Face the Music*. Most first arrive having only played the role of a tool to recreate a composer's piece or to fulfill a conductor's vision. Throughout their training at *Face the Music*, they become so much more, learning to compose, conduct, collaborate, support one another, and take charge of their own education. They may not be consciously aware of these evolving roles, but they take the initiative in forming them themselves.

To some, identity is defined as a self-relevant social category (Deaux et al., 1995). Professional musicians, who often have a strong sense of identity, are accomplished musicians who play in orchestras, quartets, or play shows for a living. Their careers define them, like teachers or performers. Marcia (1996) developed four levels of commitment, each representing varying degrees of conflict and crisis resolution regarding

occupational choice, labeled Identity Achieved, Identity Foreclosed, Identity Moratorium, and Identity Diffused. It was shown that not all musicians consider themselves in the Identity Achieved category, while many were hesitant about their occupations and identities as professional musicians (Nagel, 1988).

I found many of the young string players at *Face the Music* to be exceedingly humble and unwilling to identify themselves as, “special.” In fact, when I asked the founder, Jennifer, she acknowledged that many other students viewed students at *Face the Music* as, “weird.”

Jennifer: I don't think they were always regarded as cool by their peers, in fact, I knew that they weren't. Being in *Face the Music* is weird.

Nevertheless, I argue that young musicians at *Face the Music* are more open-minded and thus more accepting of risk-taking and new ideas. I see these young musicians as fricative with identity-driven thinking: “Identity-driven thinking leads to biased judgment that resists change, that is a procedural bias or ‘sticky prior’ in favor of an initial identity-based judgement” (Bolton & Reed, 2004, p. 398). Many of these young musicians at *Face the Music* may not define themselves as one singular self because they are far more than just musicians. In fact, participating in *Face the Music* was just a one day activity in their busy, packed week. It was not surprising if they do not want to label themselves while they were still in exploration. When I asked many of them whether they would pursue a music major in the future, many of them said they might, but they were also interested in other options. While many of them are open to new tonalities, new ideas, and new experiences, many have expressed their interest in other fields than music. Their identities at *Face the Music* are one part of them only, which changes during different

stages of their life, and only represent themselves at that certain time. The notion of temporality is a crucial ideal among sociologists. Maines (1987) asserts,

To purport to engage in an act of sociological inquiry is to commit oneself to the investigation of temporality... Time drives society; it is a basic mechanism through which social acts, organizations, institutions, cultures, and social structures exist and operate (p. 303).

Therefore, I want to stress that the self-formation of these young musicians is a process rather than a product. Similar to the notion of “contemporary music,” how could we define such a broad spectrum with a single term? Most young musicians were reluctant to give me a singular answer. No single participants stated that they love or dislike contemporary music (as if it were *one thing*). I see this place as a space for ambiguity—a place that can tolerate and embrace the complexities, the polytonal nature of their self-conceptions, just like the nature of contemporary music. If we see one’s role as a static, singular form of a product, this will limit one’s potential and possibilities, especially for early adolescents and youths. It was the, “unsureness” which made this place different from the others. I believe *Face the Music* is a catalyst that energizes, assists, and inspires young musicians.

Research Question #2

RQ#2. What are music’s emotional and social benefits for young string players in *Face the Music*?

Many musicians at *Face the Music* recognize the benefits of musical training. For example, Miguel told me that playing with *Face the Music* improved his sight-reading. He was able to look ahead while playing and had much more endurance.

Miguel: Endurance, bow strokes, and doing a lot of new bow strokes so your classical bow stroke becomes a lot better.

His more granular technique, such as bow strokes and pizzicatos, had also improved. Practicing contemporary repertoire helped him to play better in standard classical music. For others like Nancy, she has improved her rhythms through her struggles in her first year. She was more capable of complex rhythms and change of meters.

Nancy: I was freaked out at first. The rhythm was really, really hard. We did “Triple Quartet” by Steve Reich like fifth grade, maybe? And my friend and me were struggling. And that’s how I learned all these rhythms.

It was also noticeable that young string players were able to play complex, polyrhythmic patterns at a young age. In one of my field notes, I wrote:

Shao Quartet has been working on this repertoire for a while. It contains a straight rhythmic pattern but the accents are all over the place. They had been working on staying together with gesturing the accents with their instruments and body movement [...] It was quite amazing when they all shift the meters to create the polyrhythms together (Field Notes, May 13th).

Although there is a lack of research into contemporary classical music education, recent studies (Azzara, 2002; Hartz & Bauer, 2016; Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007; Musco, 2010) show that vernacular musicians are able to apply more sophisticated knowledge to replicate a melody after listening to one. Vernacular musicians are defined as musicians who perform a variety of music styles like jazz, folk, bluegrass, and make heavy use of listening-copying processes and improvisation when they collaborate or create their original compositions by ear (Davis, 2005; Green, 2001). I would not classify young string players at *Face the Music* as vernacular musicians because, fundamentally, they are still classical-trained. However, I would argue that there is something, “unsure,” *weird*, and suspended at *Face the Music* that helps them to be hybrid musicians.

Musicians at *Face the Music* are able to improvise, read non-traditional notations, and compose original music.

Unsurprisingly, my data regarding the musical, social, and other life benefits of studying contemporary music are not straightforward. In this qualitative study, I heard multiple and varied voices. I saw some friendships blossom within groups yet some students hesitated to call each other friends. I felt there was a mixture of opinions and perceptions toward contemporary music playing. The data that I present attempts to capture the complexities underlying these postures. In the following sections, I analyze these data in a non-binary way of thinking in order to represent the multiplicity of the perceptions and individual patterns among these students.

“It Depends”

Based on my adoption of the theoretical framework of Campbell, Connell, and Beegle (2007), I consider how young string players at *Face the Music* interpret contemporary music as a means of enjoyment, expression, emotion control and release, among other things. Before I conducted this study, I was hoping that young string players would tell me how they felt when playing certain piece of music at *Face the Music*. The answer I got most was, “it depends.” I also realized there is an underlying problem in trying to understand what kind of emotions one feels while experiencing music. However, I received a few answers that helped me to understand how they feel while they are practicing at *Face the Music*. When Benjamin was asked whether he had feelings about the music he was playing, he answered

Not really. You have to be so concentrated that you won't be able to feel [the music]. (Benjamin, focus group interview, p. 105)

Benjamin stated that it was difficult for him to feel the music because he was concentrating on playing the notes. The literature also supports the idea that familiarity is one of the parameters for music preference (Schaefer & Sedlmeier, 2010). This perplexed me – perhaps this problem that contemporary music somehow hinders their emotions came from the complexities of the music, including tonality, extended techniques, and the structures of the music? How would their feelings change after they become more familiar with the music?

Many researchers state that music can induce basic emotions based on the apparent immediacy of emotional responses to music (Justin & Lukka, 2003; Panksepp & Bernatzky, 2002). Yet, many studies, according to Zbikowki (2010) only categorize emotions as happy or sad. As a qualitative researcher, I felt it was inadequate and impossible to search for the students' emotions because when one categorize music as either happy or sad, we are generalizing and oversimplifying the experience. For example, when I asked Joe how he emotionally felt playing some of the contemporary music, his answers were very ambiguous.

Weatherly: What do you feel emotionally when you play some of these contemporary pieces?

Joe: I feel sometimes...depressed.

Weatherly: Why?

Joe: Like sometimes it's depressing.

He said that he felt depressed sometimes because it was depressing. I wonder if he referred to the music as depressing or whether he simply disliked what he played so he was depressed. The next student jumped in the conversation and expressed their aversion towards the music. Kivy (1990) suggests that there is a significant difference between the emotions that are attributed to some sets of events and the actual experience of the

listeners. In another words, characterizing a sad melody does not mean the listener actually feels sad (Zibikowki, 2010, p. 41). This also made me wonder if there was a difference between the emotions the musicians felt themselves and the intrinsic emotion of the music. When I asked Mike whether contemporary music acted as a conduit for his emotions, he said some pieces might and some might not. Benjamin added,

I think because the person who wrote the music is feeling certain emotions, and that is the emotion that person is expressing. Like if you are a composer, whatever you feel, and you write the music how you feel, you are the one to represent that. (Benjamin, first focus group interview, p. 105)

Instead of expressing your own emotions with the music, you are representing the emotions of the composer. Some young string players also described their emotions as, “sleepy.” Although “sleepy” is not an actual term for emotion, it reflected how these young string players were bored with the music.

Weatherly: What other emotions other than depressing?

Joe: I don’t know. I feel like the polar opposite for each piece. Sometimes, it makes me feel really sleepy and I just don’t want to play it, or I really enjoy it and it is fun to play, and I like to play it.

When the music is fun to play, I assume there has something to do with how challenging the music is and how it sounds in addition to personal preferences. For the Plato Quartet to which Joe belonged, I saw the group having many musical and non-musical discussions, constantly trying to engage themselves in something interesting. From casually talking to Joe’s dad, I found out that Joe was indeed really interested in composing contemporary music; he once composed a piece inspired by the sound of construction. It made me guess these young string players had a very particular taste for music and sometimes it was, “weird” and not easily understood by adults.

Like any other genre of music, contemporary music conveys different emotions. There are numerous styles of music even at *Face the Music*; some are cinematic, with jazz or popular sounds, while some are more experimental. As a result, it is impossible for me or the young string players to generalize whether they use contemporary music as means to express themselves, because, “it depends.” Throughout the interviews, I received reports of ambiguous feelings from the young string players. For example, Sabrina said she really loved one piece that they performed. It made her feel, “upbeat” and made her want to practice the music. Conversely, Mike said that he had to, “bring a lot of positivity to the rehearsal [...] because the music won’t be that good sometimes” (p. 105). Here, I interpret it as a negative benefit as he was negatively affected by the music. Joe stated that the music could make him feel depressed. Each piece at *Face the Music* is different and each piece provides a different experience for each student. Some may enjoy playing it, some may enjoy listening to it, some may hate it, and some may feel depressed playing it. One big take-away for me is, “it depends.” And I would really refrain myself as a researcher to use binary categories to define musical emotions in this context. I would like to use Charlotte’s quote again to end this section,

‘Cause every piece is kind of like *modern human*, you have to go through a lot – some are really *confusing*, some make you really *angry*, some of them make you *depressed*. But when you find the right piece, it’s just so *amazing*, and so *exciting* and you want to play it. And that’s just the most amazing feeling. (Charlotte, focus group interview, p. 117)

“A Basement”

I remember vividly that a student held a poster that said, “A Unified Community” inside the building of *Face the Music*. My impression was that this place provides a safe space for young musicians who are daring enough to take risks, to be different, to strive

for success. I originally thought of using, “a unified community” as the theme of this section; however, I think *Face the Music* is more than that. For me, *Face the Music* is not only a unified community; it is also a *basement*. Here, I am not describing its actual location, but offering a metaphor. A basement is usually located below ground, and often carries negative connotations towards the basement. Some people might be put off by its lack of sunlight and fresh air, and its damp surroundings. On the other hand, a basement is also a place for enigmatic activities. It is a safe and protected space for all sorts of experiments. *Face the Music* is not exactly a hidden place; but it provides a safe environment for young musicians who are interested in experimenting with contemporary music. It allows experimentation, risk-taking, and adventurous musical activities to blossom. It allows and encourages uncertainty and diversity. Before coming in, one might be judgmental about this place. But after you get to know these people, learn about their music and the things they do, no one is walking out with judgments. It was because of its uniqueness that it brought many young musicians together. Elliott (2010) asserts that students’ personal, psychological, social, and cultural selves are developed through *belongingness* in a community that is centered on enjoyment and self-growth.

When the students perform in different venues in New York City, many of them wear colorful shirts with the *Face the Music* logo. I also followed the official Facebook page for *Face the Music* with information regarding concerts and the student performers. It was apparent that *Face the Music* reaches outside of the community and promotes their music, concerts, and performers to a bigger audience who may or may not be familiar with contemporary music. As Small (2010) argues, “musicking” is an event that can deconstruct the hierarchical distortions of traditional music concepts.

To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. Music, as such, is an event, in which layers of relationships are revealed. (Small, 2010, p.9)

McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, and Brooks (2004) state that art brings benefits to the communities it serves, such as bringing people together through their attendance at arts events and classes: “Regular involvement in these arts activities can produce social solidarity and social cohesion through the creation of community symbols and community identity” (p.28). For outsiders, it might be difficult to understand the reasons these young string players are so devoted in *Face the Music*. When I asked my participants the question, “why,” it seemed to them that being in *Face the Music* is just part of who they are. Many told me they joined *Face the Music* because the founder invited them; some told me because it would broaden their musical experiences; and some told me because they had friends here. Nobody forces them to come and nobody forces them to stay. I tried to remain unbiased as a researcher, but there was a mysterious force that drew me in as well. As I immersed myself in observing *Face the Music*, I started to *become* a part of them.

Some young string players also told me that they had established friendships over the years by being in the same quartet group. Of all the quartet groups, *Standup Quartet* displayed the strongest friendships. *Standup Quartet* told us that they were not only friends in *Face the Music*; they are also friends outside of rehearsals. Christine said in the group interview, “I was going to leave, but because of them I stayed.” Christine struggled between school and her musical training. Though she is the first violinist in the quartet, her passion lies more with opera singing. Conversely, the Shao Quartet informed me that they were not quite friends with each other, despite the fact that they have been working

with each other every Sunday for over three years. They were the quietest group and worked diligently during rehearsal. Whether or not young string players consider each other, “friends,” there are a multitude of disparate relationships formed at *Face the Music*. It is a program that provides students the opportunity to meet other talented musicians, which expands their musical/social circles, thereby increasing their sense of belonging to a community.

Research Question #3:

3. How do teachers at *Face the Music* perceive their roles in contemporary music education?

Many of the coaches see their teaching at *Face the Music* as particularly meaningful as most of them did not have any opportunities expand their contemporary music education when they were young. As classical music would not give the students the opportunity to interact and learn with the composers of the music they were preparing, some teachers believe having their students interact with living composers is particularly meaningful. Of course, many teachers focus on increasing their students’ level of musicianship and on helping them to prepare for their upcoming concerts. I must have to admit that their teaching pedagogies were rather traditional and conservatory-like, since many coaches were trained in conservatories. Most of the time, coaches were there to help students to tackle difficult passages and teach them about collaboration, rhythmic patterns, and listening skills. But when they passed the stage of learning the notes and were able to put everything together, I started to see different pedagogies from different coaches to inspire the students to be more musical and teach them about stage presence.

During the interviews, I discovered that the coaches' roles went beyond traditional musical training. I decided to name a few common themes throughout the interviews of teachers, such as (i) pushing the classical boundaries, (ii) encouraging growth mindsets, (iii) re-conceptualize contemporary music, (iv) promoting living composers, female composers, and young composers, and (v) fostering friendship and ownership.

Pushing the Classical Boundaries

Face the Music provides young musicians with experiences not normally obtained through classical music training, for example, playing music that is written by their friends or music written by a living composer. Some teachers believe that there is an underlying problem with traditional classical music education, which hampers students' creativity, diversity, interpersonal communications, and more. They told me in their interviews that there are many students who are currently constrained by the rigidity of classical music training. The coach Adrianna said,

I think we have a long way to go to recognizing these [music education] privileges and understanding that we are now in a position of power where we can bring up these other people who we perceive to be on the outskirts of music and bring them into the curriculum so that we can create more interesting, more individual voices, which is what classical music is certainly lacking.

Jennifer said, "I feel like there are a lot of interesting students, diverse students in terms of what they think, that decided not to go to music school because it seems too narrow for them." Alternatively, teachers believe *Face the Music* provides an educational and creative space for students who are, "in-between." These students were not necessarily those who, "fit in the classical mold."

Adrianna reflected, "So many gifts and so much diversity has been lost because people don't fit into those molds that have been created without regard for people who are

different.” Allsup (2016) writes about the Master-apprentice model that have existed in conservatory training for over 300 years that hinder learning and creativity. He further argues that there is a danger of teaching in a closed system:

The danger of teaching a traditional art form can be the danger of mistaking induction for education. A closed tradition uses knowledge of the part as its end... rather than as a means for understanding the present. (Allsup, 2016, p.20)

Although I am not implying that *Face the Music* is a complete open form of education, nor suggesting classical music training should be abandoned, I am arguing that *Face the Music* is an attempt to stretch the boundaries of classical music training. *Face the Music* still utilizes many facets of the classical training model, such as the master-apprentice model (Allsup, 2016) and the lack of autonomy for musicians in orchestra. However, I can see its work in recruiting young musicians that are seeking the freedom to possess multiple musical roles as musicians, and an education providing them the opportunity to compose, improvise, and perform music.

I love seeing young musicians at *Face the Music* perform. They do not have to wear all black; they are encouraged to wear their own clothes or colorful T-shirts. My personal performance wardrobe is virtually all black. What is the logic of all performances looking homogenous? When *HarmonicsLab* rehearsed their co-composed piece, “Kitchen Concerto,” the participants struggled to put the piece together without a conductor. The coach, Whitney, decided to leave this role to the participants. It was amazing for everyone to see a four-foot “little” girl standing on the podium and waving her hands to lead the piece she co-composed. The notion that young musicians can be *the composer* or even *the conductor* in the concert revealed that hierarchy of classical music can be re-structured and teachers at *Face the Music* are very much aware of their constant

pushing against the classical boundaries. I see *Face the Music* as a place to re-conceptualize, re-position the hierarchy of traditional classical music education system. It led me to re-imagine a place that can be, “in-between,” that can tolerate uncertainty, promote diversity and multiplicity. In addition to traditional training, young musicians are also being supported to develop their own musical languages and voices.

Encouraging Growth Mindsets

Many coaches recognized the young musicians at *Face the Music* as students who are open-minded in contrast with the students who have fixed mindsets in conservatory-like settings. Someone with a fixed mindset is someone who appears to be intelligent, and will not take risk of failure (Dweck, 2008). Conversely, many teachers expressed their belief that the young musicians at *Face the Music* are very open-minded and are willing to tackle difficulties. Adrianna described the young string players that she worked with as intellectually open. These students were encouraged to try several pieces before narrowing down one piece to work on. Sometimes, they will complain about the piece, and sometimes, they may even dislike playing a certain piece. After all, their willingness and their open-mindedness to perform is evidence of curiosity. Kohn (1993) writes about rewards and punishments as ways of manipulating behavior that destroy real learning. He believes that rewards and punishments hinder students’ natural desire to learn. Students at *Face the Music* are self-driven to learn, without any use of rewards or punishments.

During my observation, I saw that coaches at *Face the Music* always believe in the young string players’ potential, yet never settle for the minimum achievement. Encouraging growth mindsets is a responsibility of the music teachers. Hendricks, Smith, and Stanuch (2014) state that creating a safe space for music students will provide a

positive sense of self-belief, freedom, and purpose (p. 35). Though I must have to admit that I was a little bit disappointed by the teacher-centered and old fashioned pedagogy from several coaches, despite the unusualness within contemporary music, the pedagogy was sometimes mundane. However, I still witnessed some coaches at *Face the Music* often asked the quartet members constructive questions like, “how can we do better?” “which part can we improve?” “what is going on with the second violin part here?” When a rehearsal fell apart, it was not considered a failure, but a space for each quartet member to reflect on their own parts and also to learn more about others’ parts. In that way, they could truly collaborate.

Re-Conceptualize Contemporary Music

Many coaches at *Face the Music* have been working on cultivating the young musicians, their parents, and the audience to re-conceptualize contemporary music through exposure to a diverse selection of works. I struggled defining the term, “Contemporary Music” when I first started this dissertation. Before I went into my data collection, I was planning to define the qualities or characteristics of the music these young musicians at *Face the Music* practice. By the end of my data collection, I had a new conception of this term. Throughout my interviews, I asked many coaches at *Face the Music* for *their* interpretation of the term, “contemporary music.” Their answers were very helpful to me re-direction of this dissertation. However, I realized the more I tried to search for the single definition, the more biases I am going to encounter. Therefore, I am just happy to let the definition to be, “suspended” or, “unsure.”

David explained to me that there were several strains of contemporary music in the 20th century, specifically those musics that had nothing to do with the resulting sound,

which drove away many people. I also believe these several strains of music generate many stereotypes today. It is unfortunate because not all contemporary music has to be, “weird,” “ugly,” “difficult,” or “aggressive.”

Deemer (2011), a composer and professor writes about American contemporary composers in *The New York Times*:

They [the audience] are also fighting a decades-old stereotype that assumes that all, “new music” will be aurally dissonant, conceptually confounding, and, most of all, frustrating to experience. These hurdles have accumulated over time to the point where an entire generation of composers is almost unknown to many professional musicians and audiences throughout the country.

In fact, there are many beautiful neo-classic works composed by contemporary composers that are very innovative and beautiful sounding. John, a member of the Kronos Quartet, believes when people say they dislike contemporary music, it is based on a judgment rather than experience or knowledge. I found this quite accurate because I, as a professional musician, went into my data collection with my presumptions as well. I asked the young string players at *Face the Music* whether they liked contemporary music or not. It forced them into an either/or category that refused so many findings that dealt with, “unsure”-ness. The statement almost seemed illogical for them because every piece they have worked on was unique. Thinking about this question now, it seems as if I was asking professional musicians whether they like classical music (as a singular form). Some of them may say yes, but does that mean they like every work by every classical composer? Does this mean they enjoy every genre of art music, such as romantic symphonies or baroque chamber works, that are so often labeled, “classical music?”

Treating a genre as a closed and singular form is problematic (Allsup, 2016). Many studies generalize popular music as a singular unit (Mantie, 2013). In this

pluralistic world we as educators must be careful not to trap ourselves and our students in a closed or fixed mindset. Therefore, I urge my readers to re-conceptualize contemporary music as a pluralistic and purposefully unstable genre. In this way, we can embrace its ambiguity in terms of its definition, structure, sound, and more.

Adrianna believes that contemporary music is a medium for musicians to bring in more interesting and individual voices, which is what classical music is lacking. I am not denying that some contemporary music can be difficult for general audiences to enjoy and/or grasp. However, there are also many contemporary works that deserve a chance to serve multiple purposes (including aesthetics and educational) in this pluralistic society.

Promoting Living Composers, Female Composers, and Young Composers

Face the Music targets only the works of living composers, living female composers, and composers who are minorities. All the coaches are aware there is a strong connection between the young musicians and the living composers, especially when the living composers can visit their rehearsals. John, from the Kronos Quartet believes it is an opportunity to help the young musicians' playing and overall confidence. Hajnal thinks that the level of personal connection between the creator of the music and the people who perform the music is very special. It is something one would not be able to obtain to classical music.

Several times, I witnessed a composer sitting in the rehearsal section and answering questions from the young musicians. The composer also made it to the performance. Sometimes, one of the quartet members would interview the composer on the stage, asking them questions such as, "What is on your Spotify playlist?" This kind of interaction between young musicians and living composers closes the gap between

composers and performers and deconstructs the hierarchy that composers are all legendary, unreachable figures.

There seemed to be a deeper awareness that works of female composers were lacking. In 1981, when Aaron Cohen published the *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers*, it featured about 5,000 female composers. Yet, many works by female composers were still not being heard. National Public Radio described this as the, “Sound of Silence at the Symphony” in a recent article (Huizenga, 2018). It explains that both the Chicago and Philadelphia Symphonies planned to premier *no works* by female composers in the 2018-2019 seasons. Coaches at *Face the Music* have been trying to promote not only the works of living composers, but of female composers as well. Hajnal said in her interview that her quartet group, the Shao Quartet, had been performing mostly female composers’ works without originally planning to.

Many young musicians at *Face the Music* enjoy playing music written by composers around their age. Encouraging young musicians to compose helps them to be more confident and creative. Vasu, the current director of *Face the Music*, said that his goal is to let the students have ownership over the music they play and create. Freire states, “to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge” (1998, p. 49). *Face the Music* often finds opportunities to engage the students in, “creating,” not only in, “representing.”

A Bigger Picture

If this study is a picture, it would be an assemblage of all sorts of colors, not just black and white; maybe it would be an abstract impressionist painting that was filled with different shapes, not just squares and circles. Maybe it would be a painting that each spectator can interpret with their own thoughts. Earlier in this dissertation, I presented the question:

Do the complexities found in contemporary music make it more challenging to act as a representation of identity for young adolescents or could it act as a mirror for their complex identities as growing individuals?

Through my process of searching, I am inclined to answer, “yes” to both parts of the question. The complexities in contemporary music do make it more challenging for young musicians to acknowledge and recognize their identities on their own. At the same time, it also acts as a mirror for their complex identities as growing individuals.

Identities, here in its plural form, are non-linear and constantly developing. Young string players at *Face the Music* are ambassadors of multiplicities—they embrace their multiple identities as composers, performers, contemporary music performers, members of string quartets, and members of their community. For many of them, it made sense to possess different identities in the music world: “We are realizing how much the negotiation of identity today has to do with connectedness and membership” (Greene, 1991, p.19). They understand there is a *need* for them to expand and emerge, whether it is for social benefit or advancing their musicianship. They also believe their multiplicities can co-exist because it was not problematic for them to learn both contemporary and classical repertoire. It was not unusual that they were perceived differently by their classmates and friends. In their hearts, they knew some people, their best friends, or their parents, would

not fully understand their self as contemporary musicians, yet it did not seem to matter to them. These young string players continue to take risks. It was not because they *love* contemporary music. In fact, not a single person told me they *love* contemporary music. Rather, it was because they see every different piece written by a different composer as an individual and valuable experience.

Teachers are inclined to standardize education. It is teachers' innate responsibility to correct the mistakes of the students. Many music educators grew up in a music education system that focused primarily in the Classical and Romantic eras. So naturally, these materials are what we are comfortable teaching. In the past 15 years, popular music has made its appearance and more and more educators stressed the importance of informal learning (Adams, 2014; Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2001). Whether in formal or informal ways, will there be more and more selected contemporary music, music composed by living composers, music composed by young composers, or music composed by female composers, be embraced by educators one day? It is imperative in today's society to embrace diversity. How do we celebrate diversity if we come to music with preconceptions? How do we truly embrace contemporary music if we still see it as a solitary genre? The young musicians at *Face the Music* don't. Here, I invite all of us to re-imagine contemporary music.

Imagination alters the vision of the way things are; it opens spaces in experience where projects can be devised, the kinds of projects that may bring things closer to what ought to be. (Greene, 1997, p. 17)

I learned to set aside my biases and stereotypes through my participants, learned to appreciate through the complexities and ambiguities surrounding contemporary music.

Ambiguity is not error; it is not vagueness; it is not a simple lack of comprehension. Ambiguity is not a lie; it is not imaginary...She [the reader] is

placed in a position that requires her to arrive at possible meanings, judge the possibilities, and select her next course of action - embrace one option or wait for further enlightenment. (Muzillo, 2010, p. 454)

The very, unsureness of contemporary music, its openness and flexibility, its slipperiness in contrast to the closed nature of classical music was reflected in the experiences of the participants.

Personal Boundaries

I re-visited the rehearsals of *Face the Music* again in the Fall of 2018, five months after data collection. I realized a few things had changed—Charlotte from the Plato Quartet was not there anymore; there was a new violist in the group. The new violist was very talented. She managed to play all the notes, but she seemed to be hiding herself in the group. The coach was working with her and trying to have her to play louder with a full bow. The coach attempted to engage her to be more confident in so many different ways. In the very end, she was better, but still very much lacked the confidence the other members had.

I realized most of the young string players I observed and interviewed had been in *Face the Music* for several years. I came to realization that I was not able to witness the change, the process, or the improvement of the students because I observed the group in the middle of the year. I can only assume that these students must have improved and changed quite a lot by the time I conducted my research. During my period of field work, I could only try my best to capture their temporalities. In addition, I observed and interviewed only 18 students and seven adults at *Face the Music*, but I have done my best to represent their varied voices. I have attempted to present the complexities I have encountered without over-summarizing their context in my previous chapters.

If only time allowed, I would like to stay with my participants for longer. Unfortunately, this was not feasible. There are also many exciting changes to expect over the course of a year – changes of membership within the quartet due to drop outs, graduation, or new enrollment. Therefore, my dissertation only represents a small group of people in that specific timeframe and situation.

“Voices” alone will not suffice... And so what do we do with these luscious transcripts scattered around our living room floors? (Fine, 2018, p. 12)

When I did my observation, I was so immersed in everything in *Face the Music*. However, after I collected all data, what it was left were my own memories and piles of scattered transcripts. As Fine (2018) says, *how* can I represent these voices, or more than voices? Although I have done my best to *re-present* their voices, I regret that I am not able to capture *everything* I saw, *every* sound I heard. I strongly suggest to my reader, if you are interested, attend a *Face the Music* concert, to verify my findings with your own eyes and ears. You may see something new and fresh.

Recommendations for Further Research

One of my earliest challenges in writing this dissertation is the lack of related research in contemporary music, especially contemporary music studies targeting young musicians. Musical preference studies are helpful, but studying contemporary music education is challenging as there are significant gaps in the available literature. It is necessary to conduct a study that provides the participants a various of sub-categories within the contemporary music genre. There are almost no qualitative studies

interviewing students about their experience studying (through listening, playing, or composing) contemporary music.

How do educators teach young musicians to compose, particularly in a non-traditional way? Could there be more classes like *HarmonicsLab*, even in the public school? There is also a need to conduct research on young female composers. Does gender impact the compositional process or ideas? How so? Many of the young musicians also mentioned that learning contemporary music helped them to learn classical pieces. It will be interesting to explore this topic in a deeper matter, studying in what ways contemporary music is beneficial in music training. Also, for a longitudinal study, what might we find if we interview the same musicians when they get to college? Another interesting finding is most young string players enjoyed playing compositions written by their young colleagues, what does this mean? Can we look into research that is not only encouraging students to compose, but also having their compositions performed by young students?

Final Thoughts

What am I trying to say here? I asked myself many times during the process of producing this work. Am I urging people to love contemporary music? Certainly not. Am I proving to my readers that contemporary music is important and everyone should teach it? Not really. Then what I am *really* saying here?

I am attempting to advocate a space where traditional education can be reimaged, mixed up, or stretched, where traditional training is still preserved, but expanded. I do not think young musicians should *only* play contemporary music. But I

also do not think young musicians should *only* play classical music. Is the music education system nowadays accommodating free-thinkers and law-breakers? Are we able to celebrate free-thinkers and law-breakers along with the traditionalists in the conservatory system? Growing up in the culture of a master-apprentice relationship, I do appreciate and recognize some traditions can only be taught through a system such as this. However, once you are almost the master, then what? Or, when you realize you can *never* be the master, then what?

I still remember, on the first day of rehearsal, walking into a dark, labyrinthine basement. On the last day, I walked away from what I now realized to be a hidden community, a sparkling gym, an oasis. I imagine *Face the Music* as an oasis in the desert that is research on contemporary music education. It is unique not only in its repertoire, but also its drive and passion for its mission. Like cool water under the shade of a tree, it is refreshing to see, firsthand, how their work impacts young musicians. *Face the Music*, breathes a breath of life into contemporary music education like a cool, desert breeze. Also, like an oasis, it is exceedingly rare in an environment that would truly benefit from more places like it.

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Appendix A—Focus Group Interview Protocol

Introduction:

- Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Jeong Cheng Weatherly and I am a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am going to interview you for the purpose of gathering data on a research project on Vasu contemporary music in this youth ensemble collective. [Explain the term contemporary music briefly] I want to know more about how students experience contemporary music through multiple aspects. I will be recording your name, background, and the entire interview. You are welcome to share anything that you want to talk about in any of these questions. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Research Question 1: How do young string players come to know themselves and others through participation in Face the Music?

Participants' musical training backgrounds:

- How old are you and what instrument do you play?
- How many years have you been learning to play this instrument?
- Did you know each other before participating in this research study? How did you know each other?
- In which year did you join *Face the Music*?
- Did you know each other before participating in this research study? How did you know each other?
- Why did you join *Face the Music*?
- Do you study music somewhere else other than *Face the Music*? Why?

Cultural and Family Background:

- Who introduced you to your first instrument?
- Besides you, who else in your family plays a music instrument?
- Are your family members supportive about your musical studies? If yes, in what ways?
- What do your friends think about you being a young musician?

Experiences playing contemporary music:

- What do you think of this ensemble?
- What are the challenges?
- What are the rewards?
- Do you have a favorite contemporary piece? Why?

- Do you enjoy playing music here? Why?
- Tell me one special memory about making music here. Why is that so special to you?

Identity:

- How do you see yourself as a young musician who plays contemporary music?
- What do you think of contemporary music or, say, the music that you play here?
- What do your parents and friends think about you playing in this ensemble?
- What do you think about other musicians here who play contemporary music?

Research Question 2: What are the emotional, and social benefits of young string players in Face the Music?

Emotional, Social, and Other Aspects:

- What do you feel emotionally when you listen to or play contemporary music?
- What do you think about playing music in a group?
- Do you interact with other young musicians during the rehearsal? How? Do you interact with other young musicians outside the rehearsal?
- Have you made some new friends here?
- What do you like about coming here other than learning how to be a better musician?
- Is it worth it for you to come out on a Sunday to spend time here instead of using your time for other activities?
- Have you made some new friends here?
- What do you like about coming here other than learning how to be a better musician?
- Is it worth it for you to come out on a Sunday to spend time here instead of using your time for other activities?

Post-Concert Interview:

- Do you have any update since we last met? Anything new?
- How is the rehearsal going?
- How is the concert preparation going?
- Do you manage to play the piece better since the last time we met? How so?

Conclusions:

- What did you think about the concert?
- What are you most proud of?

- Did your parents or friends come?
 - What do you think you could have done better?
 - Will you come back to *Face the Music* next year? Why?
 - Would you like to add anything else or do you have any questions for me?
- Thank you for your time!

Appendix B—Individual Interview Protocol
(for teachers in *Face the Music* such as conductors and teaching artists)

Research Question 3: How do teachers in *Face the Music* perceive their roles in contemporary music education?

	Interview Protocol for Music Teacher(s)
Introduction	Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Jeong Cheng Weatherly. I am going to interview you for the purpose of gathering data on my dissertation on contemporary music in youth ensemble. I want to know more about how you teach contemporary music and how the students experience contemporary music. I will be recording your name, teaching position, background, and the entire interview. Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed. Do you have any questions before we begin?
Question 1: Personal Background	How many years have you worked in <i>Face the Music</i> ? What is your background? What instrument do you play? What is your reason for teaching contemporary music? Do you have memories of rehearsing or performing contemporary music in your adolescence?
Question 2: Working With Young Musicians	What does contemporary music do that other music (like the classical repertoire) does not? What do you think about the young musicians here who play contemporary music? In what ways do you think contemporary music impacts the young musicians here? What other benefits do you think the young musicians can gain from being here? Do you think they enjoy being here? Tell me one special memory you have from being here.
Question 3: Strategies and Approaches	How do you prepare the piece in your ensemble? What are your goals? Do you choose the repertoire? If yes, how and why? What are some strategies you use? What are other approaches that you use?
Question 4: Working Experiences, Rewards, and Challenges	Describe your experience working here. What are some challenging and rewarding experiences? If you could change something about what you did, what would you change?