

What is your relationship to music?

Music is caring, annoying, and sort of messed up. Music has been there for my graduations (because they had to), for my tragedies (because they needed to), and often visits me at work (because they loved to). Music is my little sibling; I am shaping them up to be like me, their older sibling that he is today.

Chronologically, music came into my life when I started elementary school. I played the recorder which led to the performing arts shortly after. Then, I started playing the trombone in middle school. I became a songwriter midway into high school. While obtaining an astrophysics degree and a minor in theatre in college, I realized that musical theatre writing is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

My parents have had a role in supporting my relationship to music by taking me to operas, sending me to music camp to learn composition, and gifting me my trombone. They passed on Vietnamese bedtime stories that personified nature. I am now an animated human being because my family and community raised me to see everything in nature as beings. While trying to fit in with my college peers by writing pop and punk rock, I grew to appreciate and compose in Quan họ style. These aspects grant me the ability to work well as both a musical and fable writer.

My science musicals have been performed and produced in Atlanta, Boulder, Kalamazoo, New York City, and Coimbra, Portugal. At Abington Art Center in Philadelphia, Theatre on the Verge will produce a concert reading of my musical *Turnover: A New Leaf* on March 17, 2024. I currently live in Washington Heights, where I play the trombone in the Queer Big Apple Corps Marching and Symphonic Band. I am also a member of ASCAP and Musicians United for Social Equity. In addition, I taught a musical writing class for Harlem Writers United and have been in community with other composers at Musical Theatre Factory for the past four years.

Thanks to the Kennedy Center's BIPOC Critics Lab under Jose Solís, I have had the privilege of interviewing musicians about their own relativity to music. For TheatreMania, I interviewed songwriter Carrie Rodriguez, who shared with me her devotion and bouts with her musical theatre sibling as they composed *¡Americano!* for New World Stages. For The Public Theatre, I interviewed music director Jason Michael Webb, who spoke on his newfound relationship with his hip-hop/choral sibling as they staged *Hamlet* for Shakespeare in the Park. Recently, Alexis Hauk of American Theatre Magazine interviewed me about my relationship to music and theatre criticism. I told Hauk that music gives me hope and forces me to interrogate its complexities.

My practice in music helps me demonstrate hope not as something you have, but as something you practice. It is intimately entangled with ancestry and legacy. It is messy, uneasy, and contradictory. My civic engagement is to teach that hope requires bearing witness to social and historical trauma to confront our toxic past and take a stance against social injustices. Once we do that, we can hold space for love and connection.

Music is my hopeful sibling who is all (made) up in my head and (made it) down to my heart.

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