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Draft

Music and Hope: An Essay

Right along a stretch of the narrow and winding Tongue River was The Lodge at Diamond Cross Ranch. It was located on private ranch land of 120,000 acres recently sold from the third richest family in the world–the estate of the late co-president and heir to the Mars Inc. enterprise, MF Jr.[1]–to a group led by a Belgian baroness/philanthropist, dMC[2], a prominent member of the fourth richest family in the world. Sale price: nearly $65 million. A transfer from candies to booze, one perhaps could say. (Bechtel)

In closing the sale, so went the lodge. During its Mars Inc. times, the lodge was there almost exclusively to accommodate (serious) hobbyist hunters. At dawn, it was not hard to come across a scattering of white-tailed deer dotting the low-grass meadows between the lodge and the Tongue, shrouded by a light mist blanketing the fields. Deer may have been most common, but from the decor in the social room of the lodge, it was evident that elk, mountain lion, and bear were the desirable possible prizes nearby.

The lodge was managed by a couple, HL and HD[3], both licensed outfitters. Breakfast and dinner were served with the help of one or two additional staff members in a shared dining room with three tables. In the social room before dinner, under the watchful presence of various taxidermy trophies and dark wooden walls, beverages were served, sometimes by HD himself.

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[1] [Forrest Mars Jr.]
[2] [Charlotte de Mevius]
[3] [Laurie and Dick Hosford]

The lodge, in this area of Montana and Wyoming, was designed for visitors from distant places. And, usually those with means.

It was in that social room that I asked WS what seemed to be a rather ordinary question: "How does hope operate in Lame Deer?"

NEW SECTION

Lame Deer is the capital and municipal seat of the Northern Cheyenne tribe and people. In 2020, the population was 2156, between a third and a half of all tribal members in residence (Census Reporter). In land area, the reservation is roughly equivalent to half the size of the State of Rhode Island. There is one grocery store in Lame Deer; one medical center operated by Indian Health Services (IHS) which serves the entire reservation (there are no other medical facilities); and, at the edge of the municipality, is the Lame Deer School for middle and high school students.

In 2011, WS and her colleague, PN, with backing from administrators at the Lame Deer School, applied to a new arts infusion initiative directed under the Obama White House Administration titled Turnaround Arts[4]. The pilot phase of the initiative was set to be for two years. If selected, one nationally recognized artist would be paired with the school. To be eligible, the school had to give evidence of being within the lowest percentiles of performance, as measured by commonly accepted metrics used by state and national education agencies. In other words, some of the most notably struggling public schools, purportedly, where youth were receiving their education. WS, newly arrived with no prior experience as an art teacher, and BJ, ~~the music teacher married longtime to a spouse with Cheyenne heritage~~, applied to the

[4] turnaroundarts.kennedy-center.org

Turnaround Arts pilot program. Only eight schools were selected. The Lame Deer School made the cut.

NEW SECTION

WD, a former New York City Ballet dancer and member, at the time, of the President's Council on the Arts and Humanities (PCAH), was assigned to be the Lame Deer School's Turnaround Artist.[5]

Among those accompanying WD on the first visit to work with the students were three musicians: a Galician bagpiper and pianist (PC), a hand and frame drum virtuoso from New York State (SS), and a Japanese/Danish shakuhachi player (UK/yours truly). All three were performing artists with The Silkroad Ensemble–a collective of musicians mostly associated with classical (and some folk) music traditions with ties to the historic Silk Road regions on one hand and Western art music on the other.

Not unlike schools in all corners of the world, the Lame Deer School had its share of dysfunctional classrooms. We were made aware of this during the first visit. A middle school science teacher, having possibly given up on whatever he was capable of doing as an educator, sat in a chair in a corner of the classroom seemingly asleep while the students did whatever for most of the 50-minute class period. The only boundaries seemed to be the walls of the room itself.

The most immediate memory from that first visit was the gap and silence between me/us and the students on one hand–some combination between blank and silent "what are you doing here?" stares–and uncontrollable chaos on the other. Any sustained states of balance in between

[5] [WD is currently the President of The Juilliard School.]

the two extremes seemed momentary at best. A kind of seesaw in constant motion resisting equilibrium.

On the last day of the visit, the Lame Deer community was invited to join a school-wide event at the gym (Woodcock). The plan was to have the students with whom we were working present a work-in-progress run of dance, poetry, and music, based on a version of the story, "How the Cheyenne Got the Flute." (Oldmouse) It was an afterschool event. At 4pm, perhaps. WD directed the performance. Here is the version told by OR and transcribed by PN:

> Story goes that we had a warrior, just wasn't good at anything. A hunting party would go out and everybody would get something, but not him. They'd go out on a berry picking excursion and he be the only one to get a bush with a bear in in. They'd go out on horse stealing raid, everyone would get a horse, but he wouldn't get nothing.
>
> Well, he was coming home pretty frustrated...slamming things around, giving his wife a hard time. She said, "why don't you go by yourself, maybe you'll get something." So he took off on horseback and as he was riding through a valley, off in the distance he could see this elk, a nice big bull elk. He thought, 'if I could just get that, I'd have the horns the hide, the hoofs and the meat.'
>
> You know he kept meandering and hiding and stalking and wouldn't you know, he got within range and shot and hits this big bull and again, because he thinks of his luck, he doesn't kill it right away. This bull walks away and goes over the hill. The warrior thought I've got to go get it. So he jumped on this bull's trail, followed it all day. Went to sleep, woke up and finally, just a couple of hours away, here's this bull laying down, and it is dead.

Now he sings his song praising himself and his bull, he'd finally shot. So he's working on this bull dressing it out. He is happy now, he finally got something by himself. He hears some music. He's looking around, oh it must be the wind, it was kind of breezy. So he continues to work and he hears this music every so often. Mealtime comes, he makes his fire sitting and he sits thinking about everything.

He goes to sleep, gets up in the morning to finish what he's doing and a woodpecker flies over. this woodpecker says to him, "how are you doing?" The warrior says, "well, I got me a nice bull I'm just taking care of it." "Yah, I saw that," says the woodpecker. " You're that warrior that couldn't get anything." The warrior says, "I was frustrated feeling bad."

The woodpecker says, "I know just what you're going through. For me, did you ever hear the meadowlark sing, the robins, even the chickadees...all these bird can sing. They got nice songs. Me, I got a voice but I couldn't make a tune if my life depended on it. Just once I'd like to sing with these birds and be recognized for a song. Creator somehow just turned me into a carver, allowed me to peck wood. It makes a good sound, but not like singing, or hearing a robin." The warrior says, "well we have to have you, you are important to us."

The woodpecker says, "I found out something, come with me," and he flew over to this dead tree. The woodpecker jumped up on there and starts bouncing around. "Look I pecked these holes on this hollow branch and when the wind blows I can sit here and spread my wings, and move out over these holes and as the wind is blowing it makes this music." The warrior says "well that is as pretty as those birds singing." "I realize that now," says the woodpecker. "Even though I can't sing, I can still make music."

> "I want you to do me a favor," says the woodpecker. "Cut this branch and fashion it so you can blow like the wind. Take it to your people and play that branch for them." So the warrior packed up his elk and headed for home. When he gets there his family watches him coming in and the drum people jumped up and sang, "This is the way it is meant to be." He then takes out the branch and plays it, and tells the story of how the woodpecker gave it to him. That is how the Cheyenne got the flute. (Oldmouse)

My part was to assist a group of students with developing additional sonic and musical elements to accompany the story, music, and dance. Many of the students had instruments I bought in Manhattan at the old Pearl River Mart on Broadway. Flutes, mouth organs, etc. Participation was surprisingly good at the dress rehearsal before the public event. There were eight girls and five boys in the group I worked with. I had been warned that students would often not show up to such events. After all, attendance, in general at the school was unpredictable at best–one of the contributing elements in its designation as an underperforming school. As warned, even though the dress rehearsal was only minutes before on that day, only one boy (H) and a few girls in the group I was working with showed up to the public presentation.

One of the main student narrators was WD. He wrote text and recited it at the public event. Normally very shy and withdrawn, in performance, he took the stage with dramatic flair, closing his leading contribution to the performance with the deepest of bows. Could this have been a moment for WD in exploring new pathways for self-expression? For WD, was the stage, which many feel exposes one to judgment and vulnerability, a safe place? A place hard to find in one's regular and routine environment? What he wrote in a letter/reflection after the event, probably after the second visit in early 2013, is telling:

> Silkroad made me belive that I could've do anything it let me see the world and understand things and it open up my Heart but now I can't because I... will in the end will I started getting friendly I thought everything was going my way my imaganation grow bigger my pride was great untill I fanil woke up during a 8th grade promotion I sat and reality came I sat there waiting for my name to be called for the 4.0 club but didn't and I realize that yes things can be done I failed but I'd sorrowd but I got back up now things are going to be different now I believe that working hard pays off when gifted things are worned out. (W)

Hard work pays off only when rewarded, seems to be a central conclusion in WD's statement. Simply opening up to the world–through performance in this case–was not enough as WD had hoped.

NEW SECTION

The gap felt during most of this first visit did close for a moment. Because the plan before arriving was to develop a performable piece around the "How the Cheyenne Got the Flute" story, it seemed reasonable to be prepared to share a folk tale from Japan. 鶴の恩返し seemed to be a reasonable fit. After what felt to me like an intensely chaotic morning with the students, plans switched during the lunch break and I decided to try telling the 鶴の恩返し story with an occasional musical interlude on the shakuhachi, borrowing excerpts from 山口五郎's version of 鶴巣鈴慕 (Kurosawa), in particular the version included in the time capsule now traveling into deeper space on the Voyager space probes. (Voyager) In so doing, something worked. There seemed to be an attentiveness during the narration and some noticeable amount of ease among the students during the instrumental shakuhachi moments.

There was not much mention about that storytelling/music activity in WS's classroom for the rest of the visit. It was like a moment of clear sky before the weather remembered what it was up to and resumed its course. But, at the dress rehearsal two days later, there was a surprise. Just as WD was getting students to start a run of the piece–and while asking for everyone's attention, BL said something along the lines of, "Hey, I can tell you that Japanese crane story." And, he did. In so much detail, that it seemed almost word for word. In that instant, it seemed that what seemed to be the irreconcilable gap between the students and us, as visitors, closed, like a short in an electrical circuit. It was only for an instant, though. BL did not return to participate in the public run of the piece shortly thereafter.

Notwithstanding the no-show by many students, the perceived closing of the gap with L at the dress rehearsal I interpreted then as a breakthrough. I was wrong.

NEW SECTION

Around the time after that first visit, I had been asked to write a piece featuring shakuhachi and cello. I chose to write a piece based on the 鶴の恩返し story I shared during that first visit to Lame Deer. It would eventually include narration and a part for singing bowl.[6] The piece would not even have been an idea without BL having recited it so well at the dress rehearsal during our first visit to the Lame Deer School. It seemed like a no brainer, then, to continue a dialog with BL, especially to see if he would narrate parts of the piece in a future performance, possibly in Billings (Webb). BL, however, would not engage. In fact, it was hard to even get him to

[6] To date, the piece has been performed publicly in places such as [_____, _____, …], Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, MT with students from the Lame Deer School, and at the Lame Deer School itself. A recording of it is available as a bonus track on a special edition of The Silkroad Ensemble album, *A Playlist Without Borders*. (Umezaki)

acknowledge my presence during subsequent visits to the Lame Deer School. What was going on? How could I have been so wrong about the perceived breakthrough?

It probably was the kind of wishful thinking on my part that Shane J. Lopez–the late prominent scholar in the field of hope research–cautions against when mistaking it for hope. Middle school has middle school students, after all, with all that comes with being of that age. The enormous pressure to be "cool at school" among a community of adolescents and young adults is not unique to the youth in Lame Deer, for sure. What middle school students wouldn't feel distant from and suspicious of the intent behind a middle-aged outsider coming to your school to lead you with a shakuhachi in some performance project that you didn't even take part in planning?

NEW SECTION

According to a 2017 report prepared by Eugene Littlecoyote when he was the Public Affairs Coordinator for Northern Cheyenne Tribal Board of Health (NCTHB), the average life expectancy for the Northern Cheyenne is potentially 55 years. 23 years less than average American life span of 78 years. Qualifying the numbers with the term "potentially," some interpret, as differences between those roughly half of the tribe of 11,200 members, 5000 of whom reside on the reservation. (Caufield)

Health and Human Services lists the projected average life expectancy for American Indians/Alaska Natives as 77.5 years. Non-Hispanic Whites as 79.8 years. (Office of Minority Health)

How does one reconcile this vast disparity between the average life expectancy of the Northern Cheyenne and others overall in the same part of the world? If hope is an equal opportunity resource, but reliant on future-casting, as Lopez and other hope researchers suggest,

does the cultivation of hope operate differently when one is confronted with evidence of life ending well before it does for others? (Lopez) And how do the youth in Lame Deer form their relationship with hope knowing and witnessing that life expectancy is also not an equal opportunity affordance for them?

Middle schoolers, like BL, must be processing such questions. What effect, if any, might the high level of uncertainty of the prospect of a rich and long life have on the "gap" with encounters between insiders, like BL, and outsiders, like the Silkroad musicians? Might BL's choice to resist pathways to strangers be linked to how hope operates with students at the Lame Deer School?

NEW SECTION

Fast forward several years to another visit to the Lame Deer School by the Silkroad artists. PC had picked up on two simple prompts from another Turnaround Arts school. At the school library, she asked the students to write a response to: "I remember a time when _____" and "I hope for a time when _____." Here is what BAH wrote in response to the prompt:

> "I hope for a time when my family can care for each other instead of hurt one another. For a time when my mom and dad can live without medication every day. I hope for the day when I can see my family as a whole. For a day when C gets out of prison. The day S gets off her addiction. The day I see A walk through the door again smiling as we all say hello to him. The day when I can say I love my family, every last one" (B)

NEW SECTION

There is a healthy amount of absurdity and hubris when a federal institution like the White House implements an initiative with non-indigenous outsiders coming to organize an activity

with a native tribe like the Cheyenne who have had a particularly complex history with American Imperialism. Yet, Turnaround Arts was founded under a historically groundbreaking administration, and Michelle Obama was the guiding advisor for the initiative. Hope carried a special meaning and captured the imagination of many, especially during the early years of the Obamas as POTUS and FLOTUS.

Historically, tribes like the Cheyenne have been subjected to a seemingly endless cycle of hope and betrayal. Pekka Hämäläinen's *Lakota America* offers insight into the Lakota-Cheyenne alliance beyond its most commonly known moment: the Battle of Little Big Horn (a.k.a. Custer's Last Stand). (Hämäläinen) Despite such triumphs by the alliance, repeated betrayals of promises made by the federal government characterizes most of its recent history, with strategy designed to wither away the Lakota alliance's political influence in the region.

Students now and generations before them in Lame Deer are inheritors of this history. One could observe that the Lame Deer School represents one main strategic goal of American Imperialism manifest: youth educated at schools regulated by state and federal agencies. The dissonance and skepticism towards a Whitehouse initiative to bring in arts activities as a thinly veiled form of cultural diplomacy is not lost on even the younger generations within the Northern Cheyenne community, even if they are still developing ways to express and explain the complex life they've inherited.

But, why the arts? Is there something inherent in the arts that can be leveraged to cultivate hope among youth who are not only prone as pre-adults to feeling disenfranchised, as a phase in life, but also to see beyond their generation evidence of isolation and confinement, political subjugation, disproportionate cases of incarceration, and little guarantee for a rich and long life?

It was in reflection of the visits to Lame Deer that led me to the question I posed to WS: "How does hope operate in Lame Deer?" And, a piece of thinking around that question came out during an interview with NM, the famed documentary filmmaker and director of The Music or Strangers–a film that examined why culture matters mainly through the stories of six Silkroad Ensemble artists. "The arts is about opening oneself up to possibility; possibility links to hope; we all need hope...," was what was said in response to some now-forgotten question posed by the director, NM. (Neville)

Background information on Silkroad[7] and the Silkroad Ensemble might be useful to provide here, but for the moment it may simply suffice to quote CN, one of the former Artistic Directors of Silkroad, and his description of the mission of Silkroad, what it has evolved into after nearly 20 years of existence and what it was at the beginning:

> There has also been significant revision of Silkroad's mission over the years. The latest mission was revised a few years ago to the following: *Silkroad creates music that engages difference, sparking radical cultural collaboration and passion-driven learning for a more hopeful and inclusive world*. Silkroad's first mission statement read something more like the following: *The Silk Road Project illuminates the Silk Road's historical contribution to the cross-cultural diffusion of arts, technologies, and musical traditions, identifying the voices that best represent its cultural legacy today, and supports innovative collaborations among outstanding artists from the lands of the Silk Road and the West.* (Cords)

Hope researchers in the likes of Lopez point to obstacles as being defining elements of the hope equation. If Silkroad–a music and learning organization–is about creating and activating

[7] silkroad.org

pathways across boundaries (i.e., obstacles), in what ways is the organization fundamentally about taking action on goals, agency, and pathway, as Lopez states?

NEW SECTION

I've made numerous references to Lopez's views on hope, so allow me to digress a bit into some theoretical, yet common sense, and practical details he outlines. To start, Lopez argues that hope is bound to obstacles and action. And, without action it is not hope, but wishful thinking.

> In other words, hope trumped wishful thinking. When we hope, we have high expectations for the future and a clear-eyed view of the obstacles that we need to overcome in order to get there. We are primed for action. But wishful thinking can undermine our efforts, making us passive and less likely to reach coveted goals. (Lopez, ?)
>
> We reinforce our capacity for hope each time we experiment with problem-solving strategies and persist until one works. (Lopez, ?)

Lopez also identifies three learnable skills–first proposed by his mentor Rick Snyder–in making hope happen: goals, agency, and pathways. He calls this the *hope cycle*. It might be that these three elements are fundamental to certain kinds of pedagogical philosophies in education, in general.

> "**Goals**: We seek out and identify an idea of where we want to go, what we want to accomplish, who we want to be—whether tomorrow or over a lifetime. Some goals are vague or fleeting and quickly forgotten. Others are actively shaped and modified over time. Hope is built from the goals that matter most to us, that we come back to again and again, and that fill our minds with pictures of the future."

> "**Agency**: The word agency is shorthand for our perceived ability to shape our lives day to day. As "agents," we know we can make things happen (or stop them from happening), and we take responsibility for moving toward our goals. Over time, we develop our ability to motivate ourselves; we build our capacity for persistence and long-term effort. *Agency makes us the authors of our lives*." [my emphasis]
>
> "**Pathways**: We seek out and identify multiple pathways to our goals, pick the most appropriate routes for our situation, and monitor our progress over time. These are the plans that carry us forward, but we're aware that obstacles can arise at any time. So we remain curious and open to finding better paths to our desired future." (Lopez, ?)

He reinforces his mentor Rick Snyder's ideas on how these three elements–Goals, Agency, and Pathways–interact in The Hope Cycle. (Figure 1.)

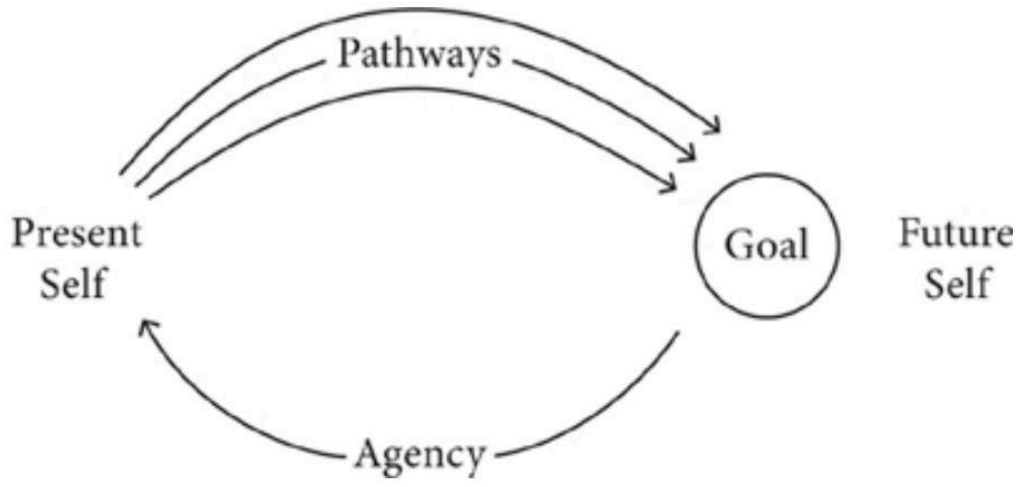

Figure 1. The Hope Cycle (Lopez, ?)

Furthering Lopez's views on cultivating hope, one might factor in the challenging economic conditions many youth in Lame Deer experience, as well as lesser opportunities for

discovering, exercising, and encouraging the broadest range of so-called intelligence. In other words, is hope a function of income? Is it a function of intelligence? Lopez suggests otherwise, referring to recent (un-cited) research, framing hope as an "equal opportunity resource." (Lopez, ?) Instead, what differentiates those with lesser and higher degrees of hope, according to Lopez, are entitlement and passivity. "Entitlement and passivity are hope killers," he states. Lopez cites mindset research which differentiates between *fixed* and *growth* mindsets. "If you have a fixed mindset, you are less hopeful about the future." (Lopez, ?)

How is music, as a practice, particularly suitable for training a growth mindset? (This is not to say that other practices and disciplines are less suitable, of course.) Organizations like Silkroad aspire to add to the community of organizations promoting growth mindsets through the arts. There is an acknowledgement of the existence and forces that construct all kinds of boundaries, including geographical, social, cultural, economic, political, etc. And, that the arts can be harnessed to reconsider boundaries as being defined by obstacles (fixed mindset) to being defined by pathways (growth mindset).

The above framework for developing skills in cultivating hope through a holistic lens of music will be explored later. For the moment, the following questions are presented simply as a way to guide further thinking on the topic of music and hope:

- Can one's sense of hope be heightened in experiencing music?
- What is hope anyway? (What is music anyway?)
- Can hope exist without obstacles? Do obstacles serve as a precondition for hope?
- If we had no goals, would hope exist?
- If we had no inequities, would hope exist?

- Should the focus be on obstacles–self-constructed or imposed by other forces–if they are what give rise to hope.
- What are obstacles generated by other forces?
- What are obstacles generated by systemic inequities?
- What, if anything, can a piece of music do to constructively contribute towards eradicating the inequities that give rise to the need for hope?

Simple common sense might lead many to agree that there is some kind of symbiotic link between music and hope, even if it is difficult to articulate the specifics of the relationship. What in music cultivates and/or induces hope? What in hope inspires the creation of music? These questions linking music and hope, through work with Silkroad and the Lame Deer School, will be explored in subsequent sections of this writing.

NEW SECTION

While there is ample common sense in the ideas around making hope happen in Lopez's and his colleagues' work, there is a tragic part to the story. Lopez died young at the age of 46. Through standard channels of information, there is no mention of how he passed. Tom Krieshok, an academic and close personal friend, however, continues to have the eulogy he delivered posted online. (Krieshok) In it, he mentions in the last two years of his life, Lopez suffered from acute depression. It seems almost improbable that such a champion of and expert on hope could struggle to overcome life obstacles–albeit some of the darkest one could be faced with. How is it that such reasonable practices of hope could escape its most superlative of advocates? What does this mean for Lopez's ideas on how hope is cultivated? Are there other ways of cultivating hope

that are fundamentally different? Does music and the practice of it provide additional insight into the complex process of cultivation of hope?

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