

Statement of Academic Purpose

Marcus Heier

When I was 20 years old (12 years ago), I decided to move to Los Angeles to study and to pursue my career in music. This was by far the best decision I have ever made. It not only gave me a great start on my career as a freelance drummer, but it also made it very clear to me that the educational environment is where I really thrive.

This is also when I started focusing on the piano. It was a privilege to get to spend time with Carlton Schroeder (Sarah Vaughan), who was the Jazz instructor of the school. Besides working on jazz-piano, we spent the majority of our 1-1 lessons working on composition and harmony. He became a true mentor, and his wisdom and insights still guide me to this day.

After spending two years in Los Angeles, I got the opportunity to tour in Asia with a company called El-live productions for 2 years. This was a great experience and it made me truly understand the impact live music can have on the listener. And although this experience was great, I decided to move on because I wanted to pursue my creativity when it comes to writing original music. I wanted to do this in an educational environment.

This led me to the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) in the heart of London. I got accepted to their postgraduate (masters) program as a drummer in their very selective Jazz department. They only accepted two drummers that year. This program focused heavily on composition & arranging, and during the first year we focused on writing for octet and small band, and in the second year I focused on Big Band composition & arranging.

Here I really started to understand where I wanted to take my ambitions. Creating music is by far the most rewarding work I have ever done, and to perform an original big band arrangement live, made it obvious to me that composition is where I want my focus to be moving forward. During my time at RAM, I got to study with world leading composers such as Gwilym Simcock (Pat Metheny) and Pete Churchill (Main professor at RAM, and worked with Quincy Jones). A particularly inspiring class was the weekly 'composers ensemble', where postgraduate students would bring in ideas and workshop them under professor Churchill's guidance. It was a great class not only for the technicalities learned, but for the opportunity to develop my own sound as a composer.

Once I graduated with my Masters degree, I stayed in London and I started to focus on writing more original music. This I could do all by myself, and since I have worked in Logic Pro X for about 10 years, I did all the recording and mixing myself. To work through the entire process from idea, composition, arranging, recording, mixing is extremely rewarding for me, because I get to use all my strengths when it comes to brainstorming, organizing ideas, notation, music theory, and audio engineering. I love working with other creatives, but working alone allows me to fully explore my own creativity in a much deeper sense, and to follow my own musical intuition.

I of course wanted to release my original music, so I got in contact with Sonder House records, a record label in New York. During 2019-2020 I released 4 tracks under my own name Marcus Heier, which now can be found on all streaming platforms. Initially I had a lot of momentum, which sadly had to stop because of COVID-19. After Covid I started touring with El-live productions again, but this time as a band-leader for a jazz quartet in Macau.

I know that composition and arranging is my future. During my 20's I took substantial decisions in order to create space for composition and education, and I can with confidence say that I will continue to do this for the rest of my life. After visiting the Campus at Princeton, it was obvious to me that this would be the ideal and ultimate environment for me, in order to further develop and explore my own creativity when it comes to composition. Besides composition I would very much be interested in utilizing my access to the other departments resources - I have a strong curiosity and interest in the Natural Sciences as well as math, which for me is very connected to my interest in Harmony & Theory, as well as the different tuning systems.

For a very long time I've been wanting to spend time doing more formal analytical work about specific artists that have been influential to me, such as Swedish thrash-metal band Meshuggah, ambient composer Loscil, as well as Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy. The idea of writing papers and doing a dissertation seems like the best way for me to explore these analytical thoughts I've had since the initial exposure to the music of the artists mentioned above. I know an environment like Princeton would be priceless in helping me develop the skills needed for work like that.

My time at RAM in London was the best two years of my life. Being surrounded by like minded people is not something I take for granted. With that being said, I was part of the jazz program, and everyone looked at music more or less from the same perspective. The fact that your program is attended by musicians from all kinds of musical backgrounds is something I find extremely intriguing. I'm positive this would be a very eye (ear) opening experience for me that would greatly inspire and educate me in areas I haven't fully explored yet.

Another ambition I have is to question my role as a performer for my own compositions, as well as exploring different ensemble settings. So far I have played drums in my own arrangements, as well as performed my solo-piano pieces. But in an orchestral setting, the answer is not that obvious to me. The most intriguing ensemble constellation for me to explore would be a jazz piano trio plus a string quartet - mainly because it would so clearly mix the pre-composed from classical music, with the improvised from the jazz world.

The 3 main aspects of my musicianship and work that I wish to develop and explore the most are: solidify what my own sound is in composition and performance, no matter if I'm writing for jazz-orchestra, chamber music, moving pictures, or ambient music (Professor Lovett); understanding how I best utilize my skill & knowledge of rhythmic complexities and incorporate that in my original compositions in an organic way (SO Percussion); and, to explore and clarify my role as a performer in my own compositions, which also requires me developing a practice of intentional balance between my compositional and performance studies that utilizes all my strengths (Professor Mackey).

I'm convinced Princeton University is the place that will support all of these ambitions the most. I am not applying to any other program elsewhere. I always bring tremendous energy to all my projects, and with the support of the amazing faculty team and fellow classmates, I know I will reach new heights.
