

## PERSONAL ESSAY

Although I spent much of my childhood practicing the Western classical piano repertoire, I never completely heard myself in the music. As a Los Angeles born child of Iranian immigrants, my upbringing was characterized by a dialogue between different cultures. On the one hand, I was accustomed to the sound of Iranian music, which my parents played on the home stereo system; and on the other, the energetic American pop music I heard on the radio.

My interest in composing only emerged when I discovered electronic dance music (EDM) as a teenager. My first compositional experiences involved designing intricate beat patterns, programming multi-layered synthesizer patches, and inputting notes into a piano roll rather than a five-line staff. Before I understood Western music theory, I cultivated an ear for nuances of timbre and groove, and developed a penchant for technologically-mediated music-making. To me, producing EDM was just as valid a form of expression as playing the piano.

During my undergraduate studies, I was actively involved with UCLA's Iranian Music Program, studying the vast repertoire of Iranian classical music. I learned to play the *setar*, a traditional Iranian instrument resembling a long-necked lute, and quickly grew accustomed to the sound of microtones. My culminating project was an hour-long lecture I delivered as part of the UCLA Iranian Music Lecture Series, in which I discussed the complex relationship between my compositional practice and my dual cultural identity. This experience encouraged me to embrace my role as a composer-activist, amplifying the voice of the Iranian people through my art.

At Indiana University, where I am currently a master's student, I realized that neither Iranian classical music, EDM, nor Western classical music fully encapsulates my hyphenated identity. My diverse life experiences can only be captured by synthesizing all the musical traditions that make me who I am. As a young piano student, I did not fully identify with the classical repertoire because the hybrid music I yearned to hear did not exist; now, a fluent musical polyglot, I have the ability to write it myself. Therefore, my graduate work has focused on composing pieces that blend my varied influences, reflecting my multicultural heritage.

My background has fostered a broad-minded perspective that aligns perfectly with the pluralistic atmosphere of Princeton's composition program. I am eager to engage with all musics, and assimilate them into my own eclectic musical language. I also look forward to sharing my unique expertise with the Princeton community through teaching opportunities. Currently, I serve as a faculty member for the Indiana University Jacobs Composition Academy, providing one-on-one composition lessons to pre-college students and encouraging them to fully embrace their wide-ranging musical influences. At

Princeton, I hope to promote a transcultural dialogue by designing a course about microtonal pitch organization and improvisation techniques in Iranian classical music. My dream is to teach others about the musical traditions I hold dear, and in return, to learn about the diverse musics that inspire my colleagues.

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