

Deniz Aslan, Personal Statement

In appeal to Brown University, PhD program in Music and Multimedia Composition

My aesthetics have always been influenced by a diverse range of musical sources. Over the years, I have come to accept that these influences emerge concurrently in my own compositional process, resulting in the coexistence of different stylistic features in my music, often in the same piece. Therefore, I do not let concerns regarding stylistic consistency hold back my creative process; instead, I try to bring together these diverse worlds and explore various novel narrative and expressive qualities originating from their coexistence. I am particularly interested in the gray areas and distances between these worlds and how the perception of music changes when the emphasis shifts from one world to another. Accordingly, I strive to create a network of interconnections, which operate within different layers and ultimately provide a multidimensional narrativity to my music. *Visage* (2021) for large ensemble, *Omaggio alla storia* (2020) for piano, percussion, and live electronics, *New Nature* (2021) for baritone and fixed media, and *Music for Ensemble* (2020) are some examples that best illustrate this approach.

In *Visage*, various elements containing different stylistic implications appear throughout the music, thus creating a constant sense of divergence. This divergence, in turn, maintains narrative tension for these elements to evolve and transform. Eventually, what we hear is the various formations of these elements continuously emerging throughout the piece. In *Omaggio alla storia*, various quotations from historically monumental pieces appear throughout the music, situated in contradiction to one another, as mere materials to be developed. Over time, the vast stylistic and philosophic distances between these pieces alienate their unique personalities in such a way that they become almost indifferent to one another. This process creates the multidimensional narrativity I seek. The accompanying creation of a virtual 3D space, to which the live sounds of the instruments are fed, combines the contextual multidimensionality with its physical counterpart. *New Nature* is a duo for one person, with one voice being pre-recorded and played back together with the live performance, based on a text I put together from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. The main idea in the piece is the articulation of the distance and the proximity of the voices at the same time, to each other and to the listener. The music starts in equal temperament, and eventually, both of the voices fall into the same spectrum as their virtual distance closes, and ideally, they become the same voice. In *Music for Ensemble*, I continuously sculpt a timbral object throughout the piece, employing a strict microtonal language and noisy textures. By constraining myself to a global microtonal pitch space derived from two distorted sound spectra, I try to externalize novel timbres via the neutralization of pitch material. Through this process, a narrative percolates through the constant exploration of various harmonic and timbral qualities within the same pitch space.

As my musical language itself, my musical journey over the years exhibits a strong variety. I started taking piano lessons when I was six years old and continued until I enrolled in the conservatory, where I was professionally trained in bassoon for ten years before pursuing a degree in composition. I have played chamber and orchestral music, led chamber music groups, and trained the wind section of the youth orchestra of my university, also taking conducting courses and directing the mentioned orchestra in rehearsals. Thus, as a performer myself, I have a natural understanding of the individual expressivity of performers in chamber and orchestral music; therefore, I always give significant weight to individual gestures and lines in my compositions. In addition, I formed an experimental rock music group where I was the lead singer, and we performed, improvised, and composed together for several years. This was the time I started exploring diverse forms of musical expression and the physicality of sound. I have also led the

music branch in the musical theatre club of the university, where I trained choirs and orchestras of amateur musicians in several productions of musicals. Their raw passion for simply making music together contributed significantly to me as a composer and a musician.

Getting acquainted with electroacoustic music during my studies was a turning point for me. I was fascinated by the intense engagement with sound itself and the specific temporality each sound inherited. The organic concern about space in electroacoustic music, and its effect on how we perceive sound, also had a big impact on my musical language: from that point on, I perceived music itself as a multidimensional phenomenon. My first major project using electronics was the site-specific sound installation *Mahal/Window*. In *Mahal*, seven composers worked together to create one giant world of sounds in a museum. I placed three vintage sound systems in different locations in the building, each contributing to the global experience of the place through sound, trying to open a *Window* to the history of listening to music during this cumulative experience. I have made improvisations with bassoon, using interactive Max patches and M4L objects I created, in several projects over the years, either by myself or in sessions with other musicians. I also continued to refine my endeavor with spatiality by using the vector base amplitude panning (VBAP) algorithm in Ircam's Spat in *Omaggio*, with 12 loudspeakers positioned in a 3D setting inside the concert hall. It was in *Heavyweight* for wind quintet, whose performance was later canceled due to the pandemic, where I took things a bit further by placing the musicians around the listeners as well as the speakers. In addition, I planned to control the amount of reverberation of the instruments separately with Max and use it as the basis of all timbral and gestural transformations. In *Layers into Rural Unconsciousness*, a fixed media piece for Higher Order Ambisonics, I strived to create a unique schizophonic¹ experience of a rural soundscape combined with the developmental concerns of acousmatic music, connecting two opposite worlds of electroacoustic music; *Rue Schaeffer* and the *Schafer Street*² in my own way.

Apart from my compositional endeavors, during my graduate studies at Bilkent, I was the teaching assistant for courses on Sonata Allegro Form and Post-Tonal Theory, and for introductory and advanced electroacoustic music courses, where I delivered lectures and was responsible for the students' composition projects. In the advanced electroacoustic course, I took part in teaching students Max/MSP to create interactive devices and patches to use in concerts and installations. I am also the student supervisor for Bilkent University Studio for Electroacoustic Music (BUSEAM), and I record, mix, and master department concerts. This semester, I took part in installing a 3D printer for our department, which I will use in my next projects for augmenting instruments with 3D printed materials as well as for transforming 3D printed materials into instruments with distinct sonic qualities using transducers. I am also working with some of my professors in building a new studio that will support emergent immersive audio technologies, including Dolby Atmos.

I believe pursuing my doctoral studies at Brown University will provide me with the right opportunities and tools to follow up on and expand my artistic research. Besides being a genuine appreciator of the creative output of the composition department, both from the faculty members and the students and alumni, I also believe that my musical interests show a substantial resemblance to their work, and I can improve tremendously with their input and guidance. I particularly believe my musical interests coincide with Eric Nathan's investigations of meaning,

¹ Schizophonia: A term coined by Murray Schafer for the splitting of sounds from their original contexts. Often used in the context of electronic reproduction of sounds.

² Jonty Harrison, *Évidence Matérielle*, accessed November 9, 2021, https://electrocd.com/en/album/2312/Jonty_Harrison/%C3%89vidence_mat%C3%A9rielle.

causality, and the construction of a macro-scale understanding of a piece through rendering intuition and emotion with these notions; Wang Lu's engagement with the soundscapes and places in her music as a way of conveying how she perceives them and accordingly, her ingenious synthesis of these soundscapes with her abstract acoustic language; Shawn Greenlee's interest in spatiality and site-specific thinking and its expansion into a broader understanding of styles and aesthetics; and Anthony Cheung's historical awareness and his work's dialectical nature with the Western Classical Canon, also his skills in combining gestural and expressive characteristics with timbral concerns in his music. I especially feel very close to Professor Cheung as I find my musical language fairly similar to his.

Furthermore, I wish to use the latest technology provided by the facilities at The RISD Spatial Audio Studio and the Multimedia and Electronic Music Experiments studios to advance my search on spatiality and live electronics using the facilities both for my creative process and inventive concert settings and installations. I also wish to work with eager and creative musicians, artists, engineers, and scientists in close collaboration for multi-media and other interdisciplinary projects and gain diverse and imaginative insight from these collaborations. I can do so using the extensive collaboration opportunities offered at the Granoff Center and the Brown Multimedia Labs, where I can also take my experiments with 3D printing and instrument augmentation to the next level. I have always seized any opportunity to broaden my musical understanding by facing new challenges and getting out of my comfort zone, and I genuinely believe Brown University is the best place for me to continue doing so. I am sincerely excited because of all the opportunities provided by the Composition Department at Brown University and would be honored if I could become a part of it.

Thank you for your consideration. For more information about me and my music, please visit my website: <https://www.denizaslancomposer.com/>