

BITE: NEW MUSIC CONCERT AND MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION FEATURING
VOCAL SOLOISTS FROM THE KC VITAS CHAMBER CHOIR AND DANCERS
FROM THE UMKC CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC AND DANCE

A THESIS IN
Music Composition

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MUSIC

by
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Stacy Busch, Candidate for the Master of Music Degree
University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2016

ABSTRACT

BITE is a multi-media installation that features all new music in an entirely immersive space. There is no complete, written score for the full performance. Instead, there is fixed media with semi-improvised, cellular vocal motifs and spoken word. The concept is to create a space in which activity can entirely surround the audience. By placing the audience inside the activity, there is nothing to directly watch onstage. In this way, audience members become protagonists as opposed to viewing a character outside of themselves. This use of space is an attempt to move people more fully inside of their own bodies and minds, allowing them to better experience and appreciate the present moment. More specifically, the music, setting, and actions of the performers express my personal struggle with drug and alcohol addiction, bipolar disorder, and sexual orientation. They are the impetus for creating something that moves from isolation to inclusion.

The event takes place in the Alexander Major's Barn in Kansas City, Missouri. The space is manipulated using installed lighting and a custom-built platform housing a live-triggered spotlight. The performers weave through and around the audience. The music utilizes fixed

electronics with six vocal soloists, though the full libretto also includes pre-recorded spoken text. Each performer interacts with the space, audience, and other performers by both sonically and physically pushing themselves through the extreme emotional progression that is the performance.

Even though the emotional journey portrayed through the music is autobiographical, it is meant to express core themes of the human condition that are innately relatable to everybody. BITE addresses the questions that are repeated throughout our lives with severe starkness at some points and with the tenderness of humility at others. Ultimately, BITE reveals itself as a true celebration of life, showing that one of the greatest human gifts is the breadth and strength of our own sheer emotional capacity. BITE provides an entire environment that provokes self-inquiry and challenges audience members to extend beyond their comfort zone both physically and emotionally.

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance have examined a thesis titled “BITE: New Music Concert and Multimedia Installation featuring Vocal Soloists from the KC VITAS Chamber Choir and Dancers from the UMKC Conservatory of Dance,” presented by Stacy Busch, candidate for the Master of Music degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

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Conservatory of Music

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
Chapter	
1. CONCEPTUAL MATERIALS	1
Concept diagrams	
Implementation	
2. PERFORMATIVE MATERIALS	4
Scenic Breakdown	
Text	
Cellular Scores	
Implementation	
3. INSTALLATION	12
Alexander Major's Barn	
Lighting	
Blocking	
Implementation	
4. OUTREACH AND AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT	15
VITA	17

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Primary Conceptual Inspiration	1
2. Complete Performance Timeline	2
3. “You Can’t Catch Me” Vocal Cells.....	9
4. “Hymn to the Past” Canon.....	10
5. Still Shot of Barn Space.....	11

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To Emily Spradling who slows down time so that I may notice it.

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUAL MATERIALS

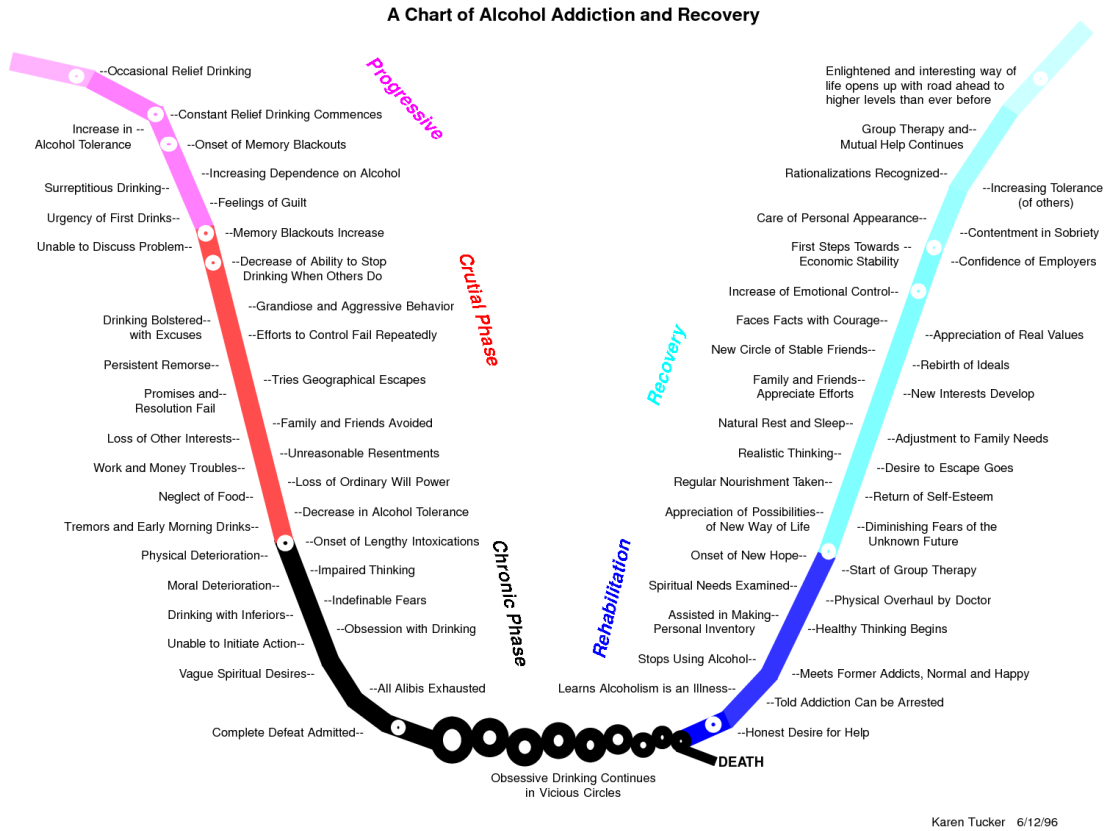


Figure 1. Primary Conceptual Inspiration

The diagram above provides a detailed account of the personal decay and subsequent rejuvenation associated with drug and alcohol addiction and recovery. When I spent time in inpatient addiction treatment I was bombarded with information; however, this one sheet of paper caught my attention. It has stayed with me for several years now. As I start at the top left corner and read my way down and around, I vividly recall each step along this difficult path. It occurred to me that its simple yet powerful shape

portrayed not just the story of addiction, but also a fundamental and timeless journey of human life. This shape, and the many emotional obstacles it addresses became my primary inspiration for the BITE: New Music Concert and Multimedia Installation performance.

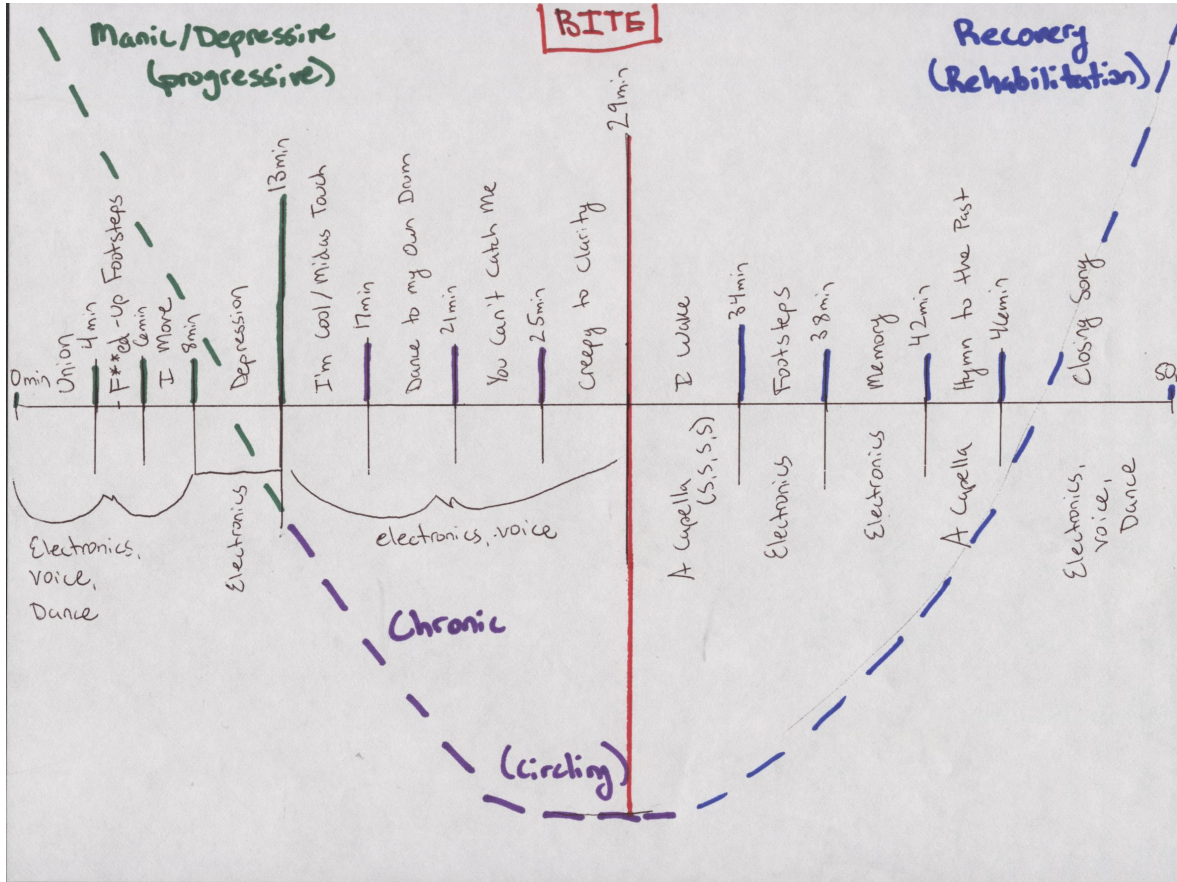


Figure 2. Complete Performance Timeline

While developing the method by which the full performance would create this emotional experience, I found it helpful to overlay the U-shaped progression over the desired timeline of the performance (approximately 50 minutes). This allowed me to see how the temporal progression could be accomplished. For example, I broke the

performance into 3 smaller sections and each of these sections was inspired by one of the larger phases named in the initial diagram (i.e. progression, chronic, recovery). Then I could see the approximate length of each of these sections. With this skeleton, I was ready to begin the writing process. This diagram continued to develop throughout the writing process, as I would organize my musical ideas and pieces into “scenes.” It was also helpful to appropriately name these scenes. Usually, these diagrams were drawn on extremely large sheets of paper hung on the walls of my workspace. This visual element is one of the most clarifying and problem-solving tools I used throughout the entire making of the performance.

I felt that the final performance successfully portrayed the original inspiration without straying into an overtly literal reproduction of addiction. I preferred working with a large and open timeline rather than composing a piece in a more traditional form. Even though I found it less stressful to work in larger contexts, the performers did not feel the same way. Many of them had a hard time grasping how the performance would come together and felt that the amount of material was daunting. I was not fully equipped to handle this difficulty in foresight from the performers and I realized that I needed to devote more time guiding the performers through my thought process. I was not able to get the musicians to fully commit emotionally during rehearsals and so they were not able to accomplish that commitment during the performances. This issue raised important questions in my mind about how I can better foster my unique performance etiquette in performers throughout the rehearsal process. In addition, it made me consider the advantages and disadvantages of classical musicians compared to other types of performers.

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMATIVE MATERIALS

I found it useful to write a list of all of the “scenes” in the order that they would appear in the performance. Reading the titles in a list was a concise way for the collaborators to familiarize themselves with the full progression of the performance. The breakdown of scenes would also be an asset in future iterations of the performance where the full program may not be realized in exactly the same order. This is the full scenic list:

Union

Fucked up Footsteps

I Move

Depression

I’m Cool/Midas Touch

Dance to My Own Drum

You Can’t Catch Me

Creepy to Clarity

I Wake

Memory

Hymn to the Past

Closing Song

In the early stages of the collaborative process, it was difficult to express the fluidity of these scenes and the idea that the scenes were made up for rehearsal purposes only. I found that the dancers grasped the aesthetic more easily and therefore their role as performers-- specifically, the idea that they were not acting as any particular character. I

found this to be the true crux of working with performers. Performers are comfortable wearing a wide array of masks and they have strong abilities to portray those different characters. However, I ask my performers to take off the performance mask and deeply access themselves. It is an internal concept of performing, not an external portrayal of something outside of themselves. This vulnerability is difficult for performers to access and frequently a foreign and uncomfortable method of emotional portrayal. Because this personal emotional exposure is the single most important feature of the performance, the success of the performance is completely dependent on full emotional commitment. The performers are so near to and integrated with the audience that any momentary lapse of commitment is magnified and very distracting. For this reason, I need to have the appropriate time and resources to specifically develop performers' ability to access this vulnerability under the pressures of intimate performances.

The full text below includes both the pre-recorded spoken text and all of the text that was sung.

Text

I Move: (Pre-recorded Voice and Fixed Media)

I only circle. Winding back.
And then a slight, oh no, slight falter.
I trip.
The moment is gone. And I begin again.

I move. (repeated)
Swirling back, I move in silence.
You can't catch your breath, you're breathless.
You keep coming back, you can't stop.
I've got you now, it's what you wanted.

Depression: (Pre-recorded Spoken Voice and Fixed Media)

And sometimes I realize that one of my favorite activities seems to be thinking. Over and over again, like, in a circular fashion. Just circulating over and over in my mind. And you know, it's a trap.

But I don't ever realize that. It's not like I can be like, "Oh I'm gonna stop this from happening, because I'm smart and realize things and then I fix them." No. I don't do that. I'm in here constantly and, ya know, there's just voices. And I can't, I just, stop! Stop please. I can't, I'm now paralyzed on a couch. I can't breathe well. And I. And I. I've never. Seen that other people have this issue. And so. I guess that's when you do things to help like, you said that's self-medication. Okay.

I can't see clearly. I don't how I'm ever going to get past this. And I'm the only one on the planet that knows anything about this. I'm the only possible human being that's experienced this before. So yeah, it's an insecurity fueled by egoism and narcissism. The self-pity is, ya know, arrogant. Which adds up to basically one of the worst human beings that have ever existed! I am the worst possible person that has ever been even on the fucking planet!

So, I don't expect you to understand and I can't help myself. No one can help me. It's totally beyond helping. I'm just going to be like this forever. And ever. And, you're not even listening to me.

Would you stop the tape already!

I'm Cool/Midas Touch: (Live Voice and Fixed Media)

I've got the midas touch, you want a piece of. Everything I want turns to gold.
And every step I take is on the water, yeah I'm talking walking further than that martyr.
(He's God. He's saying He's God.)
I'm feeling absolute. (It's from that Absolute)
Fearless and bullet-proof. (Probably not.)
Don't make me prove to you. (We never asked.)
Whatever you can do, I can do much better. (Whatever you can do, he can do much better.)

Dance to My Own Drum: (Live Voice and Fixed Media)

Hey, are you watching? I can feel your eyes while I dance to my own drum. I can tell you're judging me.

You Can't Catch Me: (Live Voice and Fixed Media)

You can try to catch me now. (repeated)
I will never fall down. (repeated)

You can't catch me. (repeated)
You can't catch me now. (repeated)
I won't break. (repeated)

I Wake: (A Cappella for Four Sopranos)

Stillness. Stillness. Stillness in the light.
I see clear to you. Extend my hand to you.
Footsteps not one but two.
Clearly you. Clearly you.
I wake. (repeated)
As if from a dream.
Suddenly I see the forest for the trees. (repeated)
Suddenly I see. (repeated)
Wake. I Wake. (repeated)
And I've stopped spinning.
Colors in forgotten hues. Chance, I feel a chosen few.
A second chance, and now I see balance.
Quiet. Quiet. Quiet.

Memory: (Pre-Recorded Spoken Voice and Fixed Media)

I think the first thing I remember is my dad. Ya know, he didn't play the piano very well. No he did, he could play a few things. He's such a ham, that he seemed to make the few things he did know how to play work really well. But I remember him playing the theme song to Peanuts, the Charlie Brown Theme Song, Vince Gauraldi. (singing). And, that was the first thing I remember really playing. I remember having to learn it. I would have to sneak around him when he was playing it and look over his shoulder and see where his hands were. And then when he would go away I would go to the piano and try to remember what had just happened. And eventually I learned how to play it. Which I think he secretly did not want me to know. Because of course I played it better than him. No I'm kidding. But seriously though I did play it better.

Hymn to the Past: (A Cappella for Full Ensemble)

And from my darkest days, I have learned to lift up my eyes to seek the truth.
And what I do not hold, I can't give you.
The days ahead are my canvas.
And each moment is a brush stroke. In forgotten hues I've found.
Though the past, it carries with me.
Those painted colors set me free.

Closing Song: (Live Voice and Fixed Electronics)

(verse)

I was walking through. Just always passing by with no reason to assume that I would stick around.

I'd try every flavor I could find, I could always lie behind false pretensions, fearful lines, I would draw to keep my side.

Safely tucked away, nothing real anyway. I could find the ways. That I could slink and slide away.

Always hiding from the time that I would have to feel inside. False pretensions, fearful lines, I would draw to keep my side.

(chorus)

I found a feeling, I found a feeling.

You made me feel things, you made me feel things

(repeated)

(verse)

Written off mistakes. Chances I should never take. Drifting place to place.

And I would try every flavor I could find I could always lie behind false pretensions, fearful lines, I would draw to keep my side.

You would never guess. Stories as a testament to own recklessness. But I would laugh and roll with it.

Always hiding from the time that I would have to feel inside. False pretensions, fearful lines, I would draw to keep my side.

(chorus)

I found a feeling, I found a feeling.

You made me feel things, you made me feel things

(repeated)

I wrote the vocal music considering efficiency in learning the material. The vocalists were all classically trained musicians that had little experience with multimedia performance and working with fixed electronics. Because of this experience level and since the dramatic elements involving acting, staging, and lighting were first priority, the vocal music was not technically demanding. However, this was also an aesthetic decision. I wanted to portray the laymen experience in its rawness and unfiltered expression. It was important to me to write music that had no markings of superiority. I contemplated the idea that simplicity, the act of subtracting more than adding in the writing process, and using “basic” musical features like major and minor modes is bolder

and more artistically daring than virtuosity. The vocal music expressed these artistic ideas of the laymen that I felt so connected with.

I used cellular writing for the vocal music in order to create some temporal freedom while still providing specific melodic lines and text. The canon was an effective form because each vocalist only had to hear one other vocalist in order to begin and end singing. This way, the vocalists had improvisatory freedom while singing their individual line and there was still a structure in place that moved the piece forward, eventually getting to the next musical scene. Vocalists would be numbered 1 to 6 and I would arrange these numbers based on the text. The two images below are examples of the cellular writing that were performed in canon.

“You Can’t Catch Me”
Ostinato cells over fixed electronics

The musical score consists of four staves, each representing a different vocalist. Each staff begins with a tempo marking of ♩=90 Confidently. The first two staves are for Melissa, the third for Elizabeth, and the fourth for Jonathan. Each staff includes a vocal line with lyrics and a corresponding ostinato cell. The ostinato cells are marked with a dynamic of *f* full voice. The first two staves for Melissa have a 5-measure rest before the vocal line begins. The third staff for Elizabeth includes a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff for Jonathan includes a 5-measure rest before the vocal line begins.

Melissa
♩=90 Confidently
You can try to catch me now

Melissa
5
I will never fall down

Elizabeth
♩=90 Confidently
f full voice
Ah Ah Ah Ah

Jacob
♩=90 Confidently
f full voice
You can't catch me now You can't catch me now

Jonathan
♩=90 Confidently
f full voice
I won't break. I won't break. I won't break. I won't break. I won't

Figure 3. “You Can’t Catch Me” Vocal Cells

Hymn for the Past in Canon

Stacy Busch

$\text{♩} = 100$ with great temporal and rhythmic flexibility. In any octave

The musical score is written for voice in 4/4 time. It consists of five staves, each labeled 'Voice' on the left. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 100, with a note of flexibility. The lyrics are: 'And from my dark-est days I have learned to lift up my eyes to seek the truth and what I do not hold I can't give you the days a-head are my can vas And each mom-ent is a brush stroke in for-got ten hues I've found though the past it car-ries with me those paint ed col - ors set me free.' The score includes bar numbers 7, 14, 21, and 27. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 4/4.

Voice

And from my dark-est days I have learned to lift up my eyes to seek

7

Voice

the truth and what I do not hold I can't give you the

14

Voice

days a-head are my can vas And each mom-ent is a brush stroke

21

Voice

in for-got ten hues I've found though the past it car-ries

27

Voice

with me those paint ed col - ors set me free.

Figure 4. "Hymn for the Past" Canon

The vocalists were receptive to having a written part that they could safely memorize and then apply greater flexibility and improvisation in the performance. I found it interesting that even though I recorded myself singing each part a cappella and along with the fixed electronics, the musicians still preferred to understand the music via the written score. I tried to introduce the idea that it did not matter when they started or

ended singing as long as the group reached a given point but this idea was difficult for them to understand. In almost every instance, the musicians felt more comfortable and requested to have more specific direction that they could memorize rather than have a looser set of guidelines that I felt would then require less preparation time.

CHAPTER 3
INSTALLATION



Figure 5. Still Shot of Barn Space

Location acquisition was the first step in understanding how I was going to write the show because it determined the size and scope of the performance. The space was also vitally important for me because I wrote the music in tandem with choreographing the movement and lighting. Aesthetically, it was important for me to find a space that had little to no connection with artistic performances. I avoided concert halls, gallery spaces, churches, and auditoriums because I wanted to remove any preconceptions about what to expect from the performance. I found the Alexander Major's Barn by accident and immediately wanted to work with it. Even though the idea of a barn elicits some aesthetic expectations, it still offered me a clean workspace to craft a performance from the ground up.

The lighting and staging for the musicians was based on the simple concept that performers move in and out of spotlights. The space would be completely black outside of these different spotlights and each spotlight could be triggered on and off by the performers. In my mind, this would create mystery around where the performers were and what was about to happen at any time. It also made the space more diverse and gave each audience member a different view of the performance. There were eight spotlights including the large platform in the middle of the space. I choreographed the vocalists' movement by assigning them a spotlight location for each moment they were performing. There were two locations that acted as off stage areas that the vocalists accessed during breaks. One was in the loft and the other was on the main floor.

Audience seating was a critical design issue that I wrestled with throughout the rehearsal process. It was of the utmost importance to me that each seat felt immersive and provided a unique view of the performance. For example, I choreographed and staged the performance keeping in mind that the seats underneath the loft offered just as beautiful a view as the seats in front of the loft. I felt that I accomplished this goal even though I could not motivate people to sit in, what appeared to be, more adventurous seats.

I appreciated the aesthetic qualities of the barn and felt that I accomplished a unique visual experience despite the lack of professional quality lighting and staging equipment. However, the feature of the barn that I was so adamant about at first, proved to be a difficult obstacle to overcome. The space was not equipped to handle all of the staging, lighting, and technical equipment needed for the performance. In addition, the contract to use the space did not include any rehearsal time other than a dress rehearsal the night before the performance. It was extremely difficult to craft a site-specific event

without having more access to the site and many of the original lighting and staging ideas had to be quickly modified because of logistical issues with the space. That being said, I became fond of the “DIY” aesthetic and energy that the performance exuded and found that many of these logistical faults turned into lovable quirks. The whole production seemed to don a “warts and all” attitude that was fitting for the emotional subject matter.

CHAPTER 4

OUTREACH AND AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT

One of the most valuable outcomes of this performance was the time I spent considering who I was as an artist. I recognized that the developments in my person were creating the same developments in my work. For example, I was cultivating greater honesty in myself and therefore becoming less fearful in relationships. This directly impacted my work and what I wanted to represent as an artistic voice. I spent most of my time in school trying to hide my non-musical upbringing. I did not want to be found out as a musical layman. I tried to fit the given mold of a contemporary composer and it always led to a personal artistic conflict. I was not happy, fulfilled, or inspired by any of my own work. I wondered what would happen if I simply wrote what was closest to my intuition without passing it through all the filters of learnt knowledge, various teachers' voices, and over-wrought intellectual understandings. When I did this, I instantly found more appreciation for my work. Even though it was not virtuosic composing and it exposed the cracks in my early music education, it was far more honest and unique. It had more of a distinct voice than anything I had written prior. This honesty more than anything, was encouraging and made me feel like I was one step closer to becoming my own artist.

I did not anticipate that this performance would take on an advocacy role for the recovering community. I was surprised to find out that many members of the audience felt that the performance facilitated further growth and discussion about their own struggles with anxiety, ego, addiction, depression, and other personal difficulties. A social worker asked me if I had considered showing this performance at treatment

centers, halfway houses, and schools as a method of outreach. I had not thought about my work serving this type of role though it was an exciting prospect. Since the performance, there has been more opportunity to take my work in this advocacy and outreach direction. I now realize that my work can serve the communities that I represent and there are exciting artistic avenues that I had not considered prior to this performance.

VITA

Stacy Busch has a unique artistic voice that stems from her interest and study in a variety of creative mediums. She believes that collaboration is essential in creating work that both lives in the present and pushed current conventions forward. Working closely with movement artists, performance artists, videographers, and spoken word artists, Stacy creates innovative concert experiences that are provocative and yet accessible. Stacy aims to entice a different and broader audience to re-cultivate artistic interest and concert viewership. In particular, reaching underserved and misrepresented communities is a primary motivator for her work and a personal initiative. At first pursuing a writing career, Stacy developed a strong sense of portraying emotion and character via the literary arts before she began writing music. Now, Stacy utilizes her distinctive artistic style to imagine, write, and produce projects that offer a profound emotional experience in new and cross-disciplinary contexts.

Stacy has had her work performed throughout the Kansas City area including: the Kansas City fringe Festival, Art in the Loop Kansas City, as aprt of the electronic music non-profit KcEMA where she serves as public relations chair, the experimental concert series ArtSounds, with the Charlotte Street Foundation, partnered with the Kansas City Streetcar, the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, in partnership with the UMKC dance program and on UMKC Composer's Guild Concerts. Her work has been performed at the University of Colorado-Boulder, the University of Michingan, Western Michigan University, VCentral Michigan University, by ensembles including Bent Frequeency, the Beo String Quartet and the Zodiac Trio. She is a two-time ArtSounds Grant Rrecipient, a UMKC Women's Council Grant recipient and was a CITS Scholar at the University of

Missouri-Kansas City. Her work has also been featured on international electronic concert series including Exhiitronic in Strasbourg, France. Her teachers include Rome Prize winners Paul Rudy, James Mobberley and Pulitzer Prize winners Zhou Long and Chen Yi. Other influential teachers include Guggenheim Fellow Curtis Curtis-Smith, Christopher Biggs and Lisa Coons. Prior to studying music, Stacy studied print journalism at Boston University.