

Mark David Jones Scholarship

As I sit here, studying the soothing sounds of jazz pianist Bill Evans, I wonder where to begin a discussion of music and my career. Music is such an immense topic, its significance is almost impossible to put into words. But here I am, delegated the task of explanation. How do I plan to incorporate my love of music into my professional career? Professional or not, I plan on it being my career.

As a child, like many, I grew up listening to what my parents enjoyed. I can remember waking up early Saturday mornings with anything from a Verdi opera to a Beatles song blaring throughout the house. At the time I was annoyed -- I wanted to sleep! But little did I know that as I grew older, the music of my childhood would help shape my future.

Elementary school was where I became acquainted with the clarinet. Before that moment I didn't know what a clarinet was. I came home from school one day and it was sitting on the kitchen table. I was never ever forced to play, but everyday I practiced diligently, because it felt right, because it was something I was good at.

Three years after that first encounter with the clarinet - and plenty of private lessons -- I had become assistant-principle clarinetist of the Marin Youth Orchestra. I played in MSYO for five years, playing all sorts of student orchestra standards: Rossini, simple Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky. And when I was a senior in high school, I auditioned for the UC Berkeley orchestra and made the cut. It was there my skill jumped to a whole new level. We played Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, mature Debussy, and Mahler. It was one of the most gratifying experiences in my life.

I could have made this a career, a bay area clarinetist – my mentor at the time said so. (He was principle clarinetist of the Marin Symphony Orchestra, and subbed in the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, among various other gigs) Unfortunately, I didn't have the passion. Not for the clarinet at least. I had felt like it was an out of date medium. So after 2 years or so with the UCBSO, I quit the clarinet completely.

I didn't stop with music though. I turned to composition, an art that I *do* have passion for, an art that changes my perception of life everyday. To me, composition is a life-long journey into the world of sound, and much more than that. It's a form of self-exploration, not just expression. Each day that I work, that I practice composition, I define more and more my place in the world. It doesn't matter to me if people hear my music or not. It doesn't matter if I make money from it. What matters to me is that I can do it.

During weekdays, after school priorities, I practice. When the weekend rolls around, I stay inside. I stay in my studio. Sometimes I log many hours at the piano, creating riff after riff, and sometimes I find myself playing nothing at all. I'm still in the studio, regardless.

The odd part of it is, I don't really listen to music for pleasure anymore. In fact, I'm almost sick of it in a weird way (that's kind of harsh). I don't listen to my iPod, not the radio, and I don't go out to see live shows as much as I used to. There was a time when I was into these things, but not as strongly anymore. These are all enjoyable, pleasurable activities. But for me, it is more about the science of music. That is just it, music is my science and I'm a scientist in search of an answer. Sure, I love many artists, and I always have one or two major influences at any point in time, but I listen more to study rather than to enjoy.

I don't mean to sound elitist, unappreciative, disrespectful, or anything of the sort. It's just that I feel like music is more than just an enjoyment for me. It's more than a career, it's my life. The only thing I really care about, the only thing that really interests me. Music is beautiful and amazing. I love great artists and I'm in awe of what they can do and how they can manipulate the sonic sound scape to impact human emotion.

And so here I am, a BECA student emphasizing in audio production. Twice a week I wake up earlier than I would ever want to listen to Professor Barsoti lecture on old-school recording techniques. It's my favorite class. Meanwhile, at home and when I have free time, I tweak synth settings, explore rhythmic patterns, and sculpt loops. I make dance songs and remixes. I love being on the frontier of musical history and we're at a point where technology – computers mainly– is dictating style and tastes (at least I feel that way).

I'm so grateful for what music has done for me. It's shaped my way of thinking and the way I perceive myself. When I finally graduate and have that diploma, I'll be proud and honored. Not just because I completed school, but because I'll have this piece of paper stating I'm a "music engineer." A scientist. A confirmation of who I am and who I always will be.

So when I finish highlighting textbooks and showing up late to class, when I finally get out of school, I know what I want to do. I want to get a job, writing pop instrumentals, or composing music for commercials or movies, that would be ideal. But we can all dream, and so even if I end up stacking groceries or dealing with ungrateful customers in a retail store, I'm still going to dedicate my life to the art of music. All I want is to be able to lock myself in a room and explore a world that has no end.