June 2019

Seeking Creative Control: Musical Decisions & Activist Aspirations

Cecelia E. Monroe
Portland State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.
Seeking Creative Control:
Musical Decisions & Activist Aspirations

An undergraduate honors creative thesis submitted by Cecelia Monroe in partial fulfillment for the degree: Bachelor of Arts in University Honors & Music Performance

Thesis Advisor: Hamilton Cheifetz, BM
Table of Contents

Abstract 2
Acknowledgements 3
Artist Statement: Seeking Creative Control 6
Context: Definitions & Discourse 9
Context: Intentions & Methods 12
Program Notes 16
Artwork 20
Conclusion & Reflection 27
Into the Unknown 28
Sources 30
Abstract

Classical music academia is built upon a competitive, isolationist and judgmental framework. Despite the progressive attitudes, aspirations and actions of Portland State University, the foundations and structures of white supremacy, misogyny, patriarchy and capitalism are alive and thriving in the walls of classrooms, practice rooms and higher education. These systems oppress individuals, and in my mind, oppress and constrain the art they create. These conversations along with my queer politics, my love for music and my concerns for the future and contemporary state of academic musicianship and pedagogy lead me to develop this event: Seeking Creative Control. I have attempted to address such complicated ideas personally, musically, visually thanks to Victoria Gallegos, in the brief program notes and more extensively in the following thesis. As a cellist, queer woman and budding activist I have attempted to create a recital that incorporates my passions and social justice goals while representing the technical skill I have gained on my instrument.
Acknowledgements

Here I will take a few paragraphs and pages to give thanks. First I want to acknowledge that the land which houses Portland State University was stolen from the Multnomah and Clackamas Peoples. Our institution is here now because of the many sacrifices forced upon them. It is important to remember the ancestors of this place; to attempt an impossible understanding of the theft, loss and grief that they continue to experience as individuals and communities at the hands of colonialism. By offering a land acknowledgement, I honor the culture, traditions and descendents of these Peoples. I also remind myself, audience and readers of the necessity to honor this land and all its inhabitants. We are guests here.

I thank my mother, Dr. Beth Ammons, for being my constant. She drove me to swim practice, cello and piano lessons for over ten years. She always showed up at recitals, concerts and swim meets, ready with snacks and advice and support. Despite her chronic pain, despite financial stress, my mama always put me first. I strive to emulate her love and dedication.

I thank my siblings- Cory and Callie- and their spouses- Booke and Chris- for their acceptance, encouragement and unconditional love. They are my best friends, co-conspirators and partners in joy. The love that they have fostered within their marriages is beautiful, hopeful and tender love. It is love that I aspire to and carry the hope of everywhere I go.

I am grateful for a mending relationship with my father, Dan Monroe and for growing friendships with my step mother, Janis, and step sisters, Emily and Sarah. These are the people that got me outside. We hiked, biked, horseback rode and camped whenever possible. They instilled in me awareness of the food I put in my body and helped me explore nature. This
awareness and exploration has propelled me into veganism and minimal living. It has lead me to the field of outdoor education, a career that challenges and inspires me every day.

The Portland State University Outdoor Program has offered me community, professional development and purpose. I could not give thanks enough to all the wonderful coworkers, peers and mentors that this community has offered over the past four years. This program invested in me, they helped me feel worthy and valuable. They heard me out when I had feedback and challenged me to move with deep intention through life. I have made life-long friends and found work that is invigorating, important and empowering.

Now I thank the incredible legacy of cellists and musicians that have directly and indirectly inspired, challenged, taught and collaborated with me over the years. I specifically want to acknowledge Jen Slayden, my first cello teacher, whose studio was often on her back porch, who taught me celtic and fiddle tunes by ear, who has remained a constant source of laughter and empowerment. I thank the Slayden family- Cade, Grace, Mark, and Riley-who fed me, sheltered me and entrusted me over the past 11 years. I thank Riley for being my best friend for the past eight years and my partner for the past three. He is the most amazing man, the most passionate learner I have ever known, and a wildly accomplished banjo player. His belief in me has helped me make it through my undergraduate degree. There are no words to describe my gratitude for this family.

I offer my gratitude and respect to Professor Hamilton Cheifetz. Since we met in 2014 he has showed nothing but faith in me, challenging me as a student, performer and musician while holding space and supporting me emotionally. His office and studio will always be the place where I simultaneously feel the most excited, moved and empowered as well as growing and
struggling. I thank his teachers, specifically Janos Starker, for inspiring Professor Cheifetz to play and teach.

I thank my grandmother Carol Ammons for her financial support. I also thank Florence Levy for her donorship to the PSU College of the Arts. Both of these women’s assistance, along with the help of my parents and community has made it possible for me to attend college out of state and graduate without debt. This is an immense privilege. I only hope to pay it forward in the future.

I came into an understanding of my queer identity while studying at Portland State. I extend my gratitude to the PSU Queer Resource Center and Women’s Resource Center for the programming, community events and space they take up on campus. In my life and work I will strive to create safer spaces and support for others to explore and challenge aspects of identity.

Lastly I wish to thank the fellow artists who consented to participate in this recital and thesis. To Keely McMurry, Matt Meeks, Lauren Grant, Shion Yamakawa, Ben Battan, James Pick and Hamilton Cheifetz: Thank you for the time, energy and grace you brought to this performance. To Victoria Gallegos: Thank you for taking on such a large artistic commision, for being patient and always kind. You inspire me to create more beauty.

Special thanks to the above mentors, community, friends and family members. Thank you for loving and believing in me; for your compassion and accountability. You are the salt of the earth and the world is better because of the passion you share.
Artist Statement: Seeking Creative Control

Classical music is founded on competition, individualism, elitism, white supremacy, patriarchy and other power structures. There is no way to separate the art from the artist, and when artists are being constrained and confined by social and systemic oppression the art they create reflects those systems. The history of classical music reflects the oppression and selective exclusion of people of color, women, and in general, those who are not white and cisgendered. It celebrates colonialism. It was a tool used to dismantle culture, religion and language by imperialists and colonizers. Yet these realities are not discussed in music history class. When we gloss over history and consequence we continue perpetuating the oppression and erasure of First Nation Peoples. Acknowledging the past can help us understand how current environments are informed, how communities develop and what individuals exist in those communities. Acknowledging the past can help us create something new, something closer to inclusion, acceptance and freedom of creation.

In my four year journey at PSU I have spent many moments considering the culture in the college of music, trying to understand the behaviors and expectations put on my peers and self. While the majority of my professors were kind, reasonable and knowledgeable there were rarely conversations or critiques around the history, structures and problematic topics surrounding classical music. Yes, Mozart was a profound composer, but I want to know more. I want to know why Mozart’s father proudly toured little Wolfgang around Europe while reluctantly towing his daughter Nannerl. I want to imagine Constanze Mozart’s perspective of her husband. I want to know how Mozart’s privilege as a white cisgender man impacted his life, access to music, education and career. Tell me about how his masculinity informed his journey as a composer and
father. What is perpetuated in his legacy? What is the story we tell about him? What do we omit from that story?

I want essay prompts that force me to look into my own privileges within the community of classical music; prompts that ask me, "Why and how are you here? Who are the gatekeepers of this discipline? Who do you have to be or what do you have to do to be accepted and respected? Who sets the standard of playing?". I want mandatory courses that connect the use of space, policing of bodies, state-sanctioned violence and other intersectional social vulnerabilities to the way that classical music is taught, practiced, performed, observed and acknowledged. I am tired of the excuses “but that’s just how it was back then” and “it’s tradition”. I want critical conversations around the appropriation of music. I want critiques of Bach, Brahms and other composers. I want critiques of the appropriation and erasure of people, music and culture; about the power dynamics of the church and the consequences of those dynamics on the art and music that was and is created.

I feel that at this point it is important for me to say that I love classical music. I love every Bach Sarabande, Chopin nocturne and late Beethoven quartet. This music moves me. I critique the composers not to dismiss or devalue the masterpieces they created or to negate the developments they brought to music. I critique the structure of academic music study and the pedagogy that places Western straight white males as the standard. This perpetuates the ideal musician, composer, conductor, etc. in terms of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. To be transparent, I struggle against this ideal because of the identities I hold as a queer woman. I struggle against this unspoken, century-old ideal because I see many of my peers grapple with their self-worth and efficacy. The rhetoric within movies and TV which paints musicians as
socially-awkward or socially-deficient is played out in real life: A student barricades themselves
in a windowless practice room six days a week for two to six hours at a time playing scale after
etude after exercise, trying to uphold a standard of playing and existing that is nearly (if not
completely) unattainable. We are taught that to succeed in our discipline we must isolate
ourselves, buckle down and compete with our peers.

How do we create art without participating in life? How do we create something that is
new, moving, engrossing, engaging, if we are not ourselves engaged in community, in
relationship and with the environment? How do we create art that challenges social issues and
norms, involving the audience in more ways than clapping where they are supposed to and
stifling their cough and sneeze? How do we create rather than recreate music of the past?
Context: Definitions & Discourse

To expand on these ideas I need to define how I use queer identity, queer politics, art, art activism, and attempt to paint a clear discourse to anchor the remaining sections of my thesis.

Queer Identity

I use queer identity to distinguish myself from a heteronormative and patriarchal lens. I use queer to label my sexuality and gender as not conforming to social norms and hegemony. This is an umbrella use of the word. In contemporary and colloquial terms queer identity includes bisexual, homosexual, gender non-conforming, trans gender, polyamory, pansexual, etc. It is a broad word that unifies diverse individuals through a common resistance or divergence from straight and cis gender expectations of being.

Queer Politics

When I use queer politics I refer to a politics which seeks to dismantle systemic oppression, whether those systems are rooted in society, government, history, or other human constructs. For me this affiliation is a technique to challenge “acceptable” ways of doing and being, flipping ideas and morals on their heads in order to understand deeper context and experiences of marginalized communities. I often use queer as a verb in this political scope; queering a campaign or norm in order to envision more equitable solutions.

Art

Language is limited by perception, dialect, context and individual experience. Even defining something with one thousand words, two thousand words leaves an insurmountable gap between parties of what is trying to be conveyed. I see art as a bridge between the inner and outer. It attempts to exist without words boxing it in; it attempts to transcend the limitations of
linguistic communication and offer a gateway into that space in between. Art is not the content we contain within it; it is the various creative ways that emotion, vigor, heat, pressure, etc. are conveyed through that medium.

**Art Activism**

Art activism labeled as such is a relatively new phenomenon, though there is a legacy of international artists who have used art as a political tool. Art activism moves away from critical art, past superficial critiques of art systems in terms of socio-political structures. Art activism attempts to challenge and change the systems which have been historically only been critiqued intellectually and academically. Some artists that I am inspired by include Tracy Chapman, a multi grammy award winning black feminist woman who wrote prolific songs about domestic and interpersonal violence as well as racism, peace and revolution. Pablo Casals was a Catalan cellist who refused to perform in protest of Franco’s regime in Spain and Catalonia. He lived in exile for most of his life. A younger artist is Ben Sollee, a cellist who traveled on tour for five years only by bicycle. His band biked all their gear across various venues in Kentucky and surrounding areas, recording a documentary and raising environmental awareness.

**Discourse of Art Activism**

There is a contentious debate between the efficacy of art as a political tool. This debate originates from Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin and their assertion that the aestheticization and spectacularization of politics are “bad things because they divert attention away from the practical goals of political protest and towards its aesthetic form… [Therefore] the use of art for political action necessarily aestheticizes this action, turns this action into a spectacle and, thus, neutralizes the practical effect of this action.” As I nod to this side of the argument, I also want to
bring about the work of Boris Groys, who analyzes the difference between art and design and posits alternative relative definitions of aestheticization for art and design. To summarize, aestheticization in terms of design uses “certain technical tools, commodities, or events” and “involves an attempt to make them more attractive, seductive, and appealing to the user… it has the goal of enhancing and spreading this use by making it more agreeable.” Contrary to this, art exists or is created in response to experiences, society, the environment, etc. (Groys 2014). While there is a thin line between design and art, it seems that intention plays a large role in the possible dilution or “neutralization” of political and social activism. If the project is created in order to seduce the audience, to dilute or distort the political agenda in order to make it either more digestible or disguised, I would claim that it is design and therefore outside the umbrella of art activism. On the other hand, if a project is created from raw, unfiltered social systemic issues and is intended to shake social norms, make people uncomfortable or cause them to think outside of hegemonic identities, I suggest that that is art activism.
Wading through the debates of aestheticization, art activism and efficacy left me a bit bewildered. How do I understand art and music in the context of social and environmental justice? What is my role as an artist? How do I exist in the world as a queer woman? As an outdoor educator? An environmentalist and feminist? I circled around to intention. “Every artistic institution supports its own idea about what art is and comes with a set of political positions and aesthetic criterion that must be met. Some art forms, such as performance and spoken word art, give greater credence to the ends of social justice and change when making an aesthetic critique. A lot depends upon the intended audience and goals of the work.” (Nicholson and Deal, 2018) ...if a project is created from raw, unfiltered social systemic issues and is intended to shake social norms, make people uncomfortable or cause them to think outside of hegemonic identities, I might suggest that that is art activism.

I came back to my own words; my own understanding of art activism. I set the following intentions, purposefully simplifying them after struggling through academic language:

- Think differently about classical music
- Think critically about the systems, oppression and censorship that happens in academic music
- Create something that transcends and explodes modes of art, artist and audience
- Hold myself and my discipline accountable
- Integrate my passions and politics into my identity and work as an artist

Off of these intentions I developed parallel goals for the audience and event as a way to
attempt to assess the efficacy of the project.

- Experience a recital that shows an intersectional way of performing in terms of identity, art mediums and space
- Illuminate barriers limiting classical music performance and community
- Acknowledge privileges and land
- Demonstrate a queer lens of classical music performance

It is with these definitions, intentions and within this bumpy discourse that I began to develop my creative thesis: Seeking Creative Control. This event would be a multimedia recital featuring compositions of Bach, Brahms, Mozart, Popper and myself as well as visual artwork by a dear friend, Victoria Gallegos. I sought to move away from the confines and expectations of what a classical cello recital typically looks and sounds like. My methods included the following: A land acknowledgement, relaxing expectations of audience behavior, recital remarks specifying social justice issues, alternative program notes and commissioned visual artwork.

I opened the program with a land acknowledgement, honoring the traditions and sacrifices of the First Nation people. I granted the audience permission to laugh, cry, sneeze, cough and take care of their personal needs as an attempt to combat the very stiff environment typical of classical music events. I incorporated program notes that revealed a mixture of personal experiences, identities, privileges and causes that I believe are important. I brought in a visual medium with the expertise of Victoria Gallegos in the hope of inspiring a more radiantly inclusive, new and beautiful lens of what contemporary reiterations of classical masterpieces can look like. Gallegos’ art was projected behind me as the recital progressed, as were written
Prefering the music for this recital first began in fall term (September 2018). I slowly chipped away at the Brahms Sonata as well as polished and performed the Popper Requiem twice in November. Winter term (January 2019) I mapped out my program and began to revisit the Sarabande and Bourrees from the third Suite. I began bi weekly rehearsals with my quintet in January as well, methodically working on the first movement of Mozart. We started rehearsing the finale movement in March, and I simultaneously worked diligently on the Prelude of Bach’s third suite during this time. I had approximately 10 performance opportunities with my quintet between January and mid-May in various community spaces thanks to a start-up initiative at PSU called String Ensemble Community Outreach (SECO). I practiced an average of 12 hours independently, with an additional four hours in orchestra rehearsal and four hours in quintet rehearsal per week. When April showers began to suggest May flowers I invested in a looping pedal, cables and acoustic amplifier in order to refine and bring my composition “Autobiography” to fruition. Prior to acquiring the looping pedal the overlapping parts had only existed suggestively in my brain or messily as a layering of my voice on top of cello.

I try to be very intentional in the way that I practice. From stretching every fifteen minutes, taking a walk or snack break, to turning off all the lights and focusing on the vibrations through bare feet, I felt these notes in the very core of my being. They nurtured me. They challenged and frustrated me. It was sometime in the weeks after I completed my program notes (early March) in which I began to fully integrate the written concepts and emotions into my musical phrasing. After hundreds of hours of practice I finally felt a level of competency in the
notes, bowings and style. This growing command of technique and familiarity with each piece allowed me to explore emotion, character, phrasing and other aspects for cultivating audience experience. The activist aspirations within the program notes informed these emotive decisions.
Program Notes

Suite No. 3: Prelude………………………………………………………………………J.S. Bach

I stopped abruptly in the bright and modern hallway as the opening explosion of this prelude bounced off the walls around me. It was summer 2014, the bright and adventurous season preceding my senior year of high school. I found myself wandering the hallways of Portland State University by chance, following color-coded hallways and choosing my route based on the echoes each stairwell offered. When Bach’s third suite for unaccompanied cello colored the soundscape I was enamored. I was in the process of preparing this piece for college auditions in the coming months. I tracked the sound to an office door framed by mossy green paint. Warm peachy light leaked out across the doorjamb.

“Hamilton Cheifetz: String Area Coordinator, Cello” read a gray placard. I must’ve read that sign thirty times before the door opened and student exited, clearly surprised to see my eagerness. A small, energetic man with matching eyebrows and moustache followed the student. As I reached to shake this man’s hand, I remember thinking:

How do I even pronounce ‘Cheifetz’?

Suite No. 3: Sarabande………………………………………………………………………J.S. Bach

Growing up in Montana was a great blessing: The accessibility to wilderness, divine alpine lakes and the abundant support from my mother, grandmother, and sister to be my whole divine Self. The Sarabande is a dance that I offer as a tribute to my privilege growing up with fresh air and untouched wild places.
I also offer this piece as a recognition of my immense privilege being born in skin that is white and biology that matches my gender expression. It is important to know and recognize that there are people who do not hold these privileges. It takes immense courage to exist outside of the social structures and modes of acceptance. Everyone deserves the space to be and become their whole self. It is our responsibility to co-create these spaces under the leadership of women, trans and disabled folks, people of color, queer individuals and others who express themselves outside of heteronormativity.

**Suite No. 3: Bourree 1 & 2..........................................................J.S. Bach**

When I first moved to Portland I was overwhelmed by the urban landscape: huge buildings, buses, trains, streetcars and bikers huffing and puffing up Broadway Street. The few blocks of green space dividing campus seemed to be the only space I could go to dig my toes into grass and watch the trees dance in autumnal glory. It was natural for me to gravitate toward the Outdoor Program as a means to surround myself with people who share these cravings. In my years working for this program I have learned many things: how to tie knots, plan backpacking trips, repair stoves and tents, wax skis. But perhaps the most important thing I have learned is how knowledge and careful use of language can empower others and create safe(r) space where everyone can become and be themselves.

These two Bourrees are a gesture of gratitude to the community and self I have found in the outdoor community. May we all work on being better stewards of our Earth and better advocates for those who are and have been historically excluded and oppressed. With their permission let us uplift their voices and demands.
SEEKING CREATIVE CONTROL

Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38: Allegro non troppo………………………………………J.Brahms

James Pick, Cece Monroe

“Compassion and accountability.” My friend pronounces these words in the dimly lit hall with precision, grace and reverence. These two ideas surround me in absolute comfort. I imagine a world with radical vulnerability, open, honest and loving. I see people engaging with the earth deeply, shedding fear and bathing in the spectacular glow of an interspecies community.

This one is for the plants; for the moss mothers and their sporophyte daughters. This one is for the estrangement we all feel; for the grief and sorrow. It is for the hopes and dreams that can be realized when we open our hearts and live in radical compassion. It is in gratitude that I offer this piece to those who hold me accountable to my passions, challenging my language, ideas and action against a backdrop of unconditional love. It is only together through compassion and accountability that we can tear down systems of oppression and rebuild.

Requiem Op. 66………………………………………………………………………………………………………D.Popper

Hamilton Cheifetz, Ben Batten, Cece Monroe

Belonging is something that we all are struggling for. I was never really able to put my finger on why I made such few deep connections and relationships with my musical peers. Why did anxiety run so high during orchestra rehearsals? Why did my classmates cover the windows of their practice rooms, hiding themselves? Were they embarrassed to be a student? A work in progress? A human? The irony with this competitive and exclusionary culture is that we are artists. How can we create art, transform pain, reframe hardship and encourage solidarity when we cannot look to the person next to us for support and confidence?
This piece pays homage to a search for belonging, honoring the immense beauty that we can create when we work together, affirming vulnerability to move past insecurities toward a common purpose.

INTERMISSION

Get up and move your body! Ten minutes to stretch and take care of your primordial needs. I challenge you to introduce yourself to someone you’ve never met before.

Let’s build community.

Autobiography…………………………………………………………………………………C.Monroe

I have been writing this piece my whole life. I say that knowing that a statement as such sets expectations for this composition that are incongruent with the imperfect work in progress you are listening to. There are four short sections within the piece which represent the many diverse passions I call my own: Environmental advocacy and education; Anarchy against patriarchy, consumerism and industries which perpetuate violence, apathy and cruelty; Queer rights, education and the cultivation of safe(r) spaces; Redefining masculinity and femininity in ways that allow people to express themselves along and outside of this spectrum and be seen in holistic ways; Cello and the making of music for health; Intentional art as activism. It’s all an autobiography. What story will you choose to tell?

Quintet in G minor: Allegro, Adagio & Allegro……………………………………..W.A.Mozart

Matt Meeks, Keely McMurry, Lauren Grant, Shion Yamakawa, Cece Monroe

This one is for you- for those who chose to take the time to be out in the community and travel into my small container of divine queer feminist musical activism. You are the salt of the earth.
Artwork

Suite No. 3: Prelude…………………………………………………………………………………………J.S. Bach

How do I even pronounce Cheifetz?
Everyone deserves the space to be and become their whole divine Self.
May we all work on being better stewards of our Earth and better advocates for those who are and have been historically excluded and oppressed.

With their permission and leadership let us uplift their voices and demands.
Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38: Allegro non troppo

It is only together that we can tear down systems of oppression and rebuild.
How can we create art, transform pain, reframe hardship and encourage solidarity when we cannot look to the person next to us for support and confidence?
It’s all an autobiography.

What story will you choose to tell?
Quintet in G minor: Allegro, Adagio & Allegro……………………………………W.A.Mozart

You are the salt of the earth.
Conclusion & Reflection

This project was incredibly personal, fulfilling, eye-opening and full of imperfections, missed opportunities and successful ideas. As with all artistic endeavors, it is necessary to open oneself to the reality that art will be interpreted diversely and divergently. There is really little way to qualitatively or quantitatively measure success of an artistic venture; there is no way to control or calculate the emotions, health and receptivity of sixty plus audience members as one might seek to control and measure variables in a science experiment. After the participants leave the hall I am left to pick up crumpled programs, tuck my cello gently in his case and double check all the doors of the recital hall are locked. I am not left with data to analyze, but rather stuck in a haze as I attempt to unpack, release and discover a complicated disarray of emotions and closure.

Cultivating the space and framing the context for the audience to experience and process certain ideas and emotions is delicate. There is a profound necessity to balance activist urgency with freedom of art, experience and emotion. I consider this to be the foundational understanding I have gained through preparing, performing and reflecting within this project. In the week leading up to the recital I spoke with my professor and thesis advisor Hamilton Cheifetz about the power of music to cross barriers and provide healing emotional liberation. We debated the efficacy of activist content and personal storytelling, considering the potential that too much structure would limit the audience’s ability to connect with the music. We wondered where the line was: How do we challenge norms and structures of oppression explicitly and artistically? How do we allow freedom of emotion and experience while shepherding in and providing an activism context? Is it possible to find space within the liberty of music to advocate for the
liberation of others?

**Into the Unknown**

This project fundamentally changed me. For the past two years I have often regretted my path studying cello, the money buying a diploma that will give me credentials of a Bachelor of Arts in Cello Performance. “How obscure,” I internally would mumble, “This is so distant from my queerness, from my passion for environmental and social justice. What am I going to do with a music performance degree?”

Envisioning and completing “Seeking Creative Control: Musical Decisions and Activist Aspirations” became a way for me to consider and vocalize my frustrations with society, classical music and academia. With bow in hand, cello pressed against my chest and words seeping out of my fingertips I was able to create something for myself and my community; something more transformative than simply a final project and paper required to fulfill requirements. This project became a representation of who I am and who I hope to be. It gave me traction and confidence in my cello skills without causing me to feel as though I were sacrificing parts of my being.

As my undergraduate academic career comes to a close I find myself searching for ways to integrate music and activism into my current work as an outdoor educator. I find myself queering spaces, relationships and habits with a strong vocabulary and academic understanding of queer theory, identity, politics as well as classical music and cello performance. Though I remain open to the wild uncertain beauty that awaits, I hope that someday I will have the resources and experience to develop curriculum and learning spaces that uproot systemic oppression, freeing children, adults and communities through autonomy, art and connection to
place. As I draw my bow across each string I set the intention to play my cello with love, tenderness and vulnerability. I commit to be present while I am in the field with my students, marveling over constellations and the carmel smell of Ponderosa pine in the summer sun. I will live in gratitude. I acknowledge that I have a limited understanding of my privilege. I will ask for clarity and guidance from those who are and historically have been oppressed. I will use my art, network and abilities to uplift their voices and demands. I look forward to continue pushing the boundaries of classical music and music academia, and hope that together we can explode the boundaries of what art is and what art can become.
Sources
