

Personal Statement

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Music has been the guiding thread of my life, woven from the earliest moments of my childhood. Growing up with my musician mother who plays the geomungo, I was surrounded by melodies and rhythms that spurred my love for music. At five, I began playing the piano, dedicating myself to it for eight years. By twelve, I was performing Liszt's *Un Sospiro*, an achievement that demanded not only technical skill but also emotional depth.

By the time I joined an orchestra at nine, music had become more than a solo endeavor—it was an exploration of collaboration. Playing the piano alongside diverse instruments sparked my curiosity and led me to learn the violin in primary school and the double bass in college. From Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5* to Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, my journey through ensemble and orchestral performances taught me discipline and the profound joy of creating something larger than myself.

I see striking parallels between my musical journey and my research pursuits: both demand time, effort, and resilience. I recall spending weeks perfecting three measures of Beethoven's *Sonata No. 3* before a competition, only to falter on stage. Despite the setback, I refined my skills and eventually won first prize in a later competition. Similarly, my first research paper as a second author faced two years of rejections before it was finally published. Both experiences were painful but taught me to persevere, refine, and ultimately celebrate progress.

What sustains me through challenges is the joy I find in the process. Practicing music immerses me in a creative flow, where I can freely explore and experiment with sound and emotion. I find the same excitement in research, particularly in music. Developing a chord generation model and listening to over 450 chord progressions was not tedious—it was entertaining. Observing songwriters' creation process and listening to their compositions for 15 hours reminded me why I find music research so rewarding: it combines intellectual curiosity with the visceral beauty of music.

Music has also taught me the value of collaboration. To perform Piazzolla's *Libertango* as a pianist, I discussed with four other peer musicians to arrange a dramatic piano introduction and adapt melody lines for soprano saxophone to balance with cello and flute. Performing Schubert's *The Trout* as a bassist involved working with a cellist to refine *Var III*'s dynamics and bowing styles to create a unique and cohesive performance. I have experienced similar dynamics, such as co-authoring a design space for writing assistants with 35 researchers. These experiences have taught me the value of teamwork and the power of shared perspectives.

Pursuing a PhD in music feels like the natural next step in this journey—a perfect harmony between my passions for music and research. While I am aware it will bring challenges, I am ready to embrace them with the same dedication that has defined my musical and academic life. I am excited to take this step forward and am confident that the process will be as rewarding as the destination.