

# Fractured (fairy) Tales: In Search of Transformational Spaces in Music Education

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## ABSTRACT

*What is teacher self-knowledge? What does it have to do with biography and our willingness or ability to change? As categories collapse around us, we can scarcely invoke the Socratic injunction “know thyself” without at the same time embracing a life of confusion and contradiction. In this article, I call upon a philosophical stance that is purposefully unfinished, fractured, and fracturing. As the pieces of my life conjoin with yours, I am able—if I so choose—to see the world as if it might be otherwise. Should teachers take up such a posture, we might better understand the contradictions that our students experience as they move between categories, testing and refusing identities. Using assemblage or bricolage as my method, I examine not only the contradictions of my own history as a “failed and not-failing” gay educator, but mixing my stories with others I reflect upon the simple notion that identity claims are less important than the time we spend between these claims. Embracing a life that prolongs these confusions is the path (I think) toward self-transformation.*

In this article, I want to speak about change—possibly, even, self-actualization. I want to think about life as an unbounded text, as opposed to mere biography. I want to make a nonheroic case for unfinishedness as not only a state of being, but as an aspiration for the music educator and his or her students. These longings have something to do with openness, and openness in its resistance to the fixed and categorical must have something to do with an interpretative stance in life, in choosing. But choosing is fraught. In the context of this special issue of the *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues in music education, we know that there are forces that delimit our capacity to choose, some that are self-created, others that are embedded in the structures of life and living. Ironically, schools are a perilous location from which to explore the topic of self-knowledge. As a gay music educator, I can hardly recall a moment when formal schooling did more than offer me the false assurance of secure categories. Even more problematic is the idea that we can authentically interpret our life and somehow challenge these categories. Looking backward and forward, reassembling the pieces of my life—the ugly with the beautiful,

the confusions that are always present, the natality of ideas now suspect—the “origins” of my story transmogrify. I break with repetition.

This article was a contribution to the third symposium on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) studies and music education at the University of Illinois. Challenged to tell my “story,” I was nonetheless afraid of what I would discover. Once started, self-examination felt like pulling apart the loose strands of a wet sweater. Unraveled and unraveling, I began to notice colors blending with those I once thought were historically my own, as well as tough fibers woven tightly around the burs of prejudice, privilege, and self-deception. These latter points concerned me. I realized soon enough that I make a not-so-great role model for queer youth and wondered about the wisdom of contributing to research in this field. But the painful process of unspooling was productive, not merely deconstructive; foreshadowing a secondary theme, I longed to remain unassembled so that I might have more time to remake my possible “self.” Put differently, I am no longer interested in being the sweater I once was.

Concerning sweaters and research method, I looked for others in the field of music and music education who were engaged in a similar process of unspooling: fellow writers, explorers, and weavers whose research remains open to new forms of reconstruction (Talbot, 2013). Borrowing threads of their research, I present a story that is biographical, multivoiced, fictional, and interwoven with texts that are old and new. The pleasures of blending both incongruous and consonant parts were pursued as an effort to destabilize the familiar and find something new; thus, the process of remixing was both method and form (Allsup, 2016).

## **SMALL STORIES AND TALL TALES**

It was the longing to read more and write more, to see and hear outside of categories, that helped Susan McClary (1991), keynote speaker of the third conference (QMUE3), “identify and analyze the ways in which music is shaped by constructions of gender and sexuality—not only in the context of opera or programmatic music, but also in some of the most fundamental of music concepts and procedures” (p. 9). It was not biography, but confusion and complicity, that compelled QMUE3 organizer Jeananne Nichols (2013) to tell the “small story” of Rie, a transgender musical youth whose survival and moments of flourishing in a rural Midwestern community merges with our own unfinished stories: “I mean[t] to provide readers with ‘interpretive space,’ textual room in which to contemplate Ryan’s [Rie’s] experiences, construct their own meanings, and consider ways in which Ryan’s story might illuminate their own experiences” (p. 265). McClary and Nichols have changed how we see and hear music and music education, but they did this by confusing categories, not clarifying them. They share with us the hunch that there are many more stories to hear. This is crabgrass research, the rhizomatic conjoining of your text with mine, so that I am separated, surrounded, infused, transformed.

The (fairy) tales of Nichols (2013) and McClary (1991) are not devices for clarifying life, though they achieve something. In McClary's rendering of Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony, with its dual themes of same-sex attraction and panic, we find ourselves looking at the fragments of what was once a unified history of music. Putting together and taking apart the shards of Tchaikovsky's life, we become newly aware of the insidious ways in which patriarchy and white supremacy choke the musical imaginations of artists, but we also realize how muddling through their constraints and oppressions led Tchaikovsky to strange inventions—to effectively “queer” the Beethovenian symphony. McClary (1991) suggests that Tchaikovsky's failure to self-actualize—to either become totalized within a heteronormative social and musical structure or to accept and somehow apply his homosexuality to his life and work—created a compromised in-between structure, one that was “trapped, but not passive” (p. 77).

Nichols's (2013) *Rie's Story, Ryan's Journey: Music in the Life of a Transgender Student* refuses the central structuring tenet of social science research (i.e., the relationship between inquiry [or an open question] and results), strategically inverting the position of research problem so that relevance emerges—indeed becomes amplified—as stories are revealed. We are left with problems that are unsolved, but urgent. In Nichols's hands, there is no false hope, no moment of discovery, no findings of record. The effect is not research that teaches you, but research that attaches to you. There is, for example, the constant sense of menace that haunts me as Rie moves throughout her day. I know the feeling—you know the feeling—of isolation and shock when an adult fails to intercede on your behalf when others call names, or laugh, or worse: “Nobody stopped it. There were male teachers standing there. Nobody did a thing about it. They let it happen” (Nichols, 2013, p. 275). I could count my “allies on one hand” (Nichols, 2013, p. 267), Rie remarks.

Our field plays too freely with the idea of musical identity (Dolloff, 1999; Woodford, 2002). The stories we tell, early memories of lullabies and guitar-playing grandpas, encourage a soporific vision of the music teacher as the gentle soul of the public school. If we can just honor and reaffirm and celebrate your identity, contemporary research seems to imply, all the problems of, and justifications for, a public education in music will be solved. But the *affect* of colliding identities is seldom talked about and not always pretty, especially as the fragments of your contested life splinter into mine. Drawing upon my past, on my own Tchaikovsky-like history of compromise, self-hate, and actualization for the comfort of others, I find myself in unlikely opposition to Rie's self-interest. As his story (*hers!*) attaches to mine, like cells under a microscope, a darkness swallows me, foreclosing empathy.<sup>1</sup> Damaged by my own lived choices, memories lash out at Rie: *You made stupid choices. You enjoyed the drama. Or worse: Can't you just butch it up a little?* Because . . . well, because *I* had to . . . because I policed *my* body, and *my* voice, and *my* laugh. Because *I* put the honor, and affirmation, and celebration of others' identities before my own. *I hid who I was. Why can't you?*

Now there's a vision of music teacher identity that won't go far in a foundations of music education course.

Alas, when it comes to teacher biographies, university music educators are a lot like the band director who says, “Never make a bad sound on your horn.” And when it comes to issues of race and sexuality, we know, and our students know, we are not allowed to make mistakes, say “wrong things,” or talk about how we *really* feel. Instead, we are expected to start at the end of the process, fully feathered, self-actualized, and self-aware. If true, this aspect of university music teacher preparation may be just another place in our curriculum where growth is framed by certainty.

But if there is any hope of change at all, then we have to return to this idea of the fractured fairy tale, or the imperfectly open text. Janet Miller (2005) has looked at the way that teacher autobiographies create misleadingly wholesome accounts of identity and growth:

What I have found is that the admonitions to “tell your story” often lead to . . . “cheerful” versions of teacher research in which teachers learn about and then implement new pedagogical approaches and curriculum materials without a hitch. (p. 221)

These exercises, Miller (2005) continues, “often impel teachers to craft autobiographical accounts of how they were ‘mistaken’ or ‘uninformed’ or ‘ill-prepared’ but now they have become fully knowledgeable and enlightened about themselves, their students, and their teaching practices” (p. 221). Ironically, through such iterative work, the concept of (choose any of the following) teacher, learner, clarinet player, band member, or band director becomes closed in signification through the normalization of so-called reflective writing.

In this sense, stories and autobiographies, instead of confusing and definalizing categories, delimit the search for new perspectives. The ending, like every bad Hollywood movie, is known in advance (only minus the kitsch). But if the work of choosing is long and fraught, and if its moments of insight are not always rosy, then teachers and students must create spaces of mutuality so that the friction of clashing concepts and clashing identities can produce something more than naïve empathy. Pity, after all, is empathy’s fraternal twin. Both dispositions fail to become productive without a breakdown in some kind of category or insight. I might be moved to pity you, but not moved toward any kind of meaningful action. I may even tell you to feel pride in your story, in your identity. Few would argue that empathy produces deep feelings of warmth and a loss of self-regard, but its achievements remain slight until we are ready to forego a privilege or challenge an indecency.

## **THE PLEASURES OF CERTAINTY . . . AND CONFUSION**

To say that we live in an educational world of certainty would be an exercise in understatement. Sixteen years of the Bush/Obama doctrine of evidence, competition, and surveillance have made even the safest educational concept seem as fixed as poured

cement. But what dismays me just as equally is that this very fear of confusion makes up the basis of so much contemporary music education research, particularly the school of thought that calls itself praxialism (Elliott, 2005; Regelski & Gates, 2009). In preparation for this article, I read McClary's (1991) *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* alongside Thomas Regelski's (2016) new book, *A Brief Introduction to a Philosophy of Music and Music Education as Social Praxis*. Both authors have a long history of arguing that the social aspects of music are ignored at our peril. McClary continues to look at how notions like identity, biography, and theory can exceed allowable frameworks, thus pushing open the field of musicology. I read Regelski's recent work as an effort to expand upon the perceived narrowness of fellow praxialist David Elliott (2005), an appeal I share (Allsup, 2013). As a kind of exploratory method, and in the spirit of clashing identities, I jumbled the order of these readings. I wanted to see how McClary's and Regelski's stories might attach, how they speak to each other, or don't. But never far from my mind was Nichols's (2013) work on Rie and the intertextual way in which their together story was—like crabgrass—inserting itself into my own biography, creating something “there and not there,” something “true and not true.”

Although Regelski (2016) begins his book with an attack on “confused thinking” (p. ix), it would be too easy to suggest that his praxialism has no place within my confusions. There are limits, after all, to the uncertainties we can sustain, and one purpose of philosophy is to make the relationship between our beliefs and our actions more coherent. I agree, furthermore, that music is a major source of sociality and that its values are best exercised in settings that are participatory. As a constructivist, and as a fellow admirer of John Dewey, I concur with Regelski that the meanings we derive from music are necessarily coproduced and that they are especially powerful when they are tested, *interpreted*, and found useful. But life stories, if they are to resist the false cohesion that Miller (2005) warns us about, are never so neatly unpacked. And insights about the value of music in one's life may exist outside of knowable frameworks.

Why, for example, was band so important to Rie, just as it was so important to me when we were both growing up in the rural Midwest? If the band room was a safe space in school (or, more accurately, a less dangerous place in school), we both share the memory that it certainly did not stem from “any conscious effort on the part of our music teachers . . . [we] showed up and [we] did what [we] had to do, and [we] did it well” (Nichols, 2013, p. 268). In this excerpt, Rie seems to be speaking for many of us:

I felt like I had champion teachers . . . but as far as role models or people you look up to for other purposes, no. For their musical abilities, absolutely. But other than that, I never felt like they were my allies. (Nichols, 2013, p. 268)

Eventually (inevitably?) the confusions of Rie's transgender identity unleashed violence against her, “unrelenting and unaddressed” (p. 286), which was used to justify her expulsion from public school and, therefore, band. Newly homeschooled and away from physical threats, a church community provided Rie with a piano, whereby she

armed herself with a songbook of Tori Amos tunes, teaching herself how to play the piano and compose. Songwriting “made me feel like I wasn’t crazy” (Nichols, 2013, p. 270).

But an unexpected turn takes place in Rie’s story, a problem that I simultaneously recognize and *fail* to recognize—a confusion, in other words, that attaches itself differently to the various fragments of my “identity.” Just when Rie is provided a safe place away from violence and neglect (i.e., just when she is provided a “transformational space” that fosters “self-actualization”), she longs to return to the high school band. Given the seemingly direct line that I have drawn in my own scholarship between identity formation and popular music (Allsup, 2003), and given the strong links I acknowledge between composing and self-expression (Allsup, 2013), why did Rie want to—*need to*—return to the high school band? And if band has embedded within its praxis a unique potential for alienation, as my coauthor Cathy Benedict and I suggest in *The Problems of Band* (Allsup & Benedict, 2008), why was Rie so eager to return to this kind of musical environment?

The feelings attached to this problem have so utterly blended with my own stories that its origins are beside the point. What did band provide? What *does* band provide? What values did its space foster? What values *do* its space foster? Why did I love band so much when one of my own music teachers was so openly homophobic and barely less benign in his attitudes than Rie’s teachers were in theirs? I do not like to think about the amount of time, resources, and energy that I wasted trying to convince myself that I was straight, in part so that a particular teacher would approve of me. Yet, like Rie, I needed something that band provided. So I ask, what does it mean that you can inhabit a space that is hostile to your self-esteem and yet, at the same time, deeply self-expressive?

At this point in my article, I am not prepared to answer this question, but I will foreshadow that its response has as much to do with function and visible social values as it does not. Returning to Regelski’s (2016) “down-to-earth” praxialism (p. 70), I find myself both recognizing and misrecognizing (both falling in with and troubling) the claim that music’s “many social values are right before our eyes and ears” (p. xii). “What is needed,” Regelski (2016) writes, “is clarity concerning the aims and benefits of school music stated in unambiguous, functional (i.e., praxial) terms” (p. 46). Seen from this vantage point, anything that is unclear with regard to its use-value or function is labeled by Regelski (2016) as aesthetic:

Moreover, the *covert* (nonobservable) nature claimed for aesthetic responding—that is, an *inner* state of mind—is an altogether unworkable premise for guiding teaching! Without *observable results* as clear evidence of teaching and learning success, there is simply *no indisputable way* of empirically observing whether the hypothesized “aesthetic responsiveness” of students is in fact being educated, advanced, expanded, or improved. Thus, there is no sure way of assessing whether teaching and learning have been effective! There is, as a result, no accountability for results—by students or teachers. (pp. 52–53; italics and punctuation in original)

I do not agree that the inner life can be so easily dismissed, or that the aims of public schooling are limited to empirically observable behaviors, especially those that serve as proxy for relevance. Nor does the writer appear to appreciate the inherent non-immediacy of learning and self-knowing. These conclusions, I think, are what happens when the idea of relevance is confused with function. Regelski's (2016) charter school language, it should be further noted, is congruent with contemporary educational policy in which evidence has become more important than interpretation. By way of contrast, I think that a good public music education can be nonobservable, relevant, obtuse, fractured, contradictory, and functional.

### **PROLONGING THE UNFINISHED SELF**

Lived in this way, learned in this way, your unfinishedness might comingle with my own. I might be tempted, in my confusions, to explore those visible and invisible frameworks that normalize the world within me. I may begin to reimagine what is permissible. Indeed, I may stray afield of those frames, reshaping life's contours in ways that foster or inhibit what I have been playfully calling self-actualization, but which could also be called self-knowledge or inner knowledge. In this sense, the loss that occurred when Rie was forced out of band was not hers alone but was also a loss to the boy who sat next to her and the director who conducted the band.

I am fond of "re" terms like renew, revitalize, and remake. Such words feel hopeful because they provide me with another opportunity to choose, to begin again. As a pedagogue, they insist that I pay attention to you. Nor could we resist the seductions of wholeness without some kind of reiterative storytelling. Still, when stories do comingle, there is no guarantee that you or I will rethink a previously held position, or revisit a frame or structure. I confess that I continue to reinstate and reperform gender norms, even though I know my choices limit, more than expand, richer landscapes of self-knowing. In this sense, when I think about notions like identity, self-knowledge, or what Regelski (2016) might call "covert" understandings, applying the "re" prefix to the word "identify" feels suddenly normative and static. This is the danger of repetition. This is the danger of empiricism. Pushed by the writing of this article, and conjoined now with Nichols's (2013) and McClary's (1991) stories, I am freshly attracted to the way that a prefix like "trans" refuses the praxis of origins. "Trans" gestures to the in-betweenness of self-knowing, when we are suspended between moments of finality. Regarding identity, it is to appreciate not merely the plurality of parts, but what lies between and ahead. Fatigued by a notion of music, education, and music education in which meaning is reduced to knowable codes and cultural functions, I value, more than ever, that which lies between every sign and its interpretation is the ineffable, and beautiful, possibility of fracture.

I am cautious, however, that the appropriation of the term *trans* might be self-serving. I mentioned at the beginning of this essay that I am, at best, an imperfect role

model. It was not long ago that I wanted to secure my rights as a gay man first, effectively asking my trans sisters and brothers to wait their turn. While selfishness is not the same as fear, it is certainly true that feelings of insecurity are mapped out differently across our identities. As a music educator, I am supportive when a student trespasses a musical category. As someone who advises doctoral students, I am often rigid with regard to formats and conventions. Transphobia is the reaction that occurs when the evidence of our observations does not fit into the categories that frame our worldview. Transphobia is the fear of being stuck in-between, the fear of what is on the other side. It is made manifest in the belief that we know what's best for someone else; it appears in our efforts to control another person's way of moving through the world.

Since the praxial turn in music education in the 1990s, I have come to miss complicated words like *transport*, *transformation*, *transience*, and, the most forbidden of all, *transcendence*. These words are sticky, I admit, shaped by rhetoric that was at one time exclusionary and hierarchical. But they also appeal to a sense of travel, more than repetition. Regelski's (2016) fascination with "down-to-earth" evidence is egregious, but it is not a bad strategy in an age of educational accountability. But that he never refers to Maxine Greene (2001) and her half-century of writings on aesthetics and education is simply craven, though possibly likewise strategic—he would have to admit that at least one important contemporary writer believes that an aesthetic experience can be participatory, political, and actively pursued. But Greene's absence does beg the question, why doesn't Regelski want his readers to know about her work? Put differently, why is he afraid of colliding stories?

In three sentences, Regelski (2016) admits that music can be conceptualized as a text, a point he does not pursue or enlarge:

[Music] functions culturally as a social text. Thus, for example, various social meanings inhere in music (everything from the instruments used to the different rationality of tonal and serial music used in various musical systems, such as those in the East and West). Moreover, social meanings—such as gender roles and especially social class—are read into and from it. (p. 13)

If music is understood as a text, as distinct from a work or object (Barthes, 1977, pp. 155–164; Eco, 2010; Goehr, 2007), Regelski is correct that the text must be *read* and by extension it must be conceptualized as open, plural, and irreducible. But here Regelski is stuck, because to follow this claim he must relinquish no small degree of control. He must allow the concept of text—the concept of music as text, or anything else as text—to travel between categories, to attach and reattach itself differently to other texts, even to transmogrify into things unrecognizable (into monstrous beauties). Just don't read, he commands us: "*Nothing you will read in the literature of aesthetics will enhance your appreciation of music. Nothing!*" (Regelski, 2016, pp. 8–9; italics in original); "Nothing of their theorizing can affect or improve how an individual actually responds to a musical praxis. Audiences don't study aesthetics; nor do teachers or their students!" (Regelski, 2016, p. 39); "Consider young children, for example, who decidedly do



not contemplate [music] aesthetically and who yet enjoy it immensely (thus, evidence against the aesthetic theory of art and music)” (Regelski, 2016, p. 39); “*Musicians rarely use aesthetic terms* in their praxis; they use musical terminology or ordinary language” (Regelski, 2016, p. 43; italics and punctuation in original). In other words, stick to what you can see and hear.

But Susan McClary’s (1991) seminal contribution to music and music education was her unwillingness to stick to what you can see and hear: “I have always detected in music much more than I was given license to mention” (p. 4). Riffing on her own fractured fairytale from *Bluebeard’s Castle*, McClary (1991) sees her work as opening forbidden doors, such that through “her explorations—behind every door—she finds traces of *something else*” (p. 3; italics added). Inhabiting a space of heightened contradiction, McClary (1991) refers to such a thing as the invisible convention:

[Such conventions] are usually not considered actively by composers, are not “intended.” They simply are the elements that structure his or her musical (and social) world. Yet they are perhaps the most powerful aspects of musical discourses, for they operate below the level of deliberate signification and are thus usually reproduced and transmitted without conscious intervention. They are habits of cultural thought that guarantee the effectiveness of the music—that allow it to “make sense”—while they remain largely invisible and apparently immutable. (p. 16)

If Regelski’s (2016) functionalism is large enough to include the invisible and unintended intention, and if his praxialism can produce a scholar like Susan McClary, then his philosophy ceases to provide the clarity he promises at the start of his book. It is now in the textual realm of *something else*. By his own definition, his philosophy has become aesthetic.

But there is more to say as these stories transmogrify. McClary (1991) talks about the “desire-dread-purge” reflex that emerges from male writers:

In which fear of female sexuality and anxiety over the body are inscribed . . . [where] women are located within the discourse in a position of both desire and dread—as that which must reveal that it is controlled by the male or which must be purged as intolerable. (p. 52)

The figure of Don José is one illustration, the very projection of Georges Bizet’s inner life, as captured in the opera *Carmen*. Out of the composer’s confusions come the character of Carmen, a fictional/not-fictional location where the ostensibly cohesive frames of masculine rationality and white supremacy could be trespassed, revised, transgressed, and reinscribed.

McClary’s (1991) double reading of Don José’s desire attaches itself to my biography. Newly sympathetic to Regelski’s (2016) longing for control, I think about my own panics—fears about how I appear to others, worries about pleasing the people around me (even strangers), and the daily, miniature anxieties about gay masculinity that direct and delimit my choosing. I think of the fragments of Don José’s story. He is not so different from many of my white male colleagues, straight or gay.

[Don José] would not become embroiled in this mess if he were not experiencing considerable discontent with what ordered, rational patriarchal culture offers him: control over others if (but only if) he repudiates his own body and feelings. As he ventures further and further from the clear-cut binary oppositions of masculine/feminine prescribed as social norms, he experiences that which has been denied him: pleasure. . . . [But] unable to endure freedom . . . he lunges to reimpose control, thus reproducing the very modes of behavior he sought to escape. (McClary, 1991, p. 66)

Our preoccupations are worth paying attention to because they tell us not only what we fear and wish to punish, but also what we desire. In today's educational climate, for example, our obsession with evidence speaks to a state of high anxiety about the very meaning of the American public school. We want schools to foster independent thinkers, but we fear the clashes and confusions that this would ensure. It is from this position that I find new sympathy for this theory of praxialism. I realize that my critique has been too simple, missing an important double reading. Attached to the praxial preoccupation with certainty are both the general anxiety of living with increased difference and a fascination with its hidden pleasures, an attraction to, and fear of, *transience*. Seen in this light, I wonder about my own research, about the place and purpose of instrumental music education, particularly band. Have I forgotten that transcendence can be found in the following of orders, in counting rests and sitting quiet—being one “small story,” one musical part, among many others?

It is hard to speak of Don José's tragedy when Carmen was basically killed for being a sexy and independent woman. But Don José died, too. The tragedy of Don José—or the failure of Georges Bizet's imagination—was that Don José was unable to make sense of the fragments of his life as his stories collided with others. Nor was he able to locate a space within which he could explore their contradictions, or live between categories. I think that this takes time. What if Don José could have stayed unfinished a little bit longer? Could he have self-actualized, in the ugly-beautiful way that Huckleberry Finn did so famously? I remember my professor Maxine Greene wondering aloud one day in class, asking us in that rhetorical/not-rhetorical way of hers, “How do you teach a Huckleberry Finn?” So I ask, How do you teach a young Don José? As university-trained teachers, we know the answer to this question. We draw upon our biographical capacity for empathy and then harness the power of teaching to produce social justice. It's that easy!

## **FUTURING SELVES**

I am thinking about time, location, and the need to let contradictions coexist, even linger, if there is any hope for transformation. I am thinking about the comfort of categories—how we long for them when they are denied to us and how we do not wish to release them when they afford us privilege. Concerning the former, I draw upon the wisdom of Rie, who wanted allies, safety, and protection so she could just play the

clarinet in band, without hurting anyone else or making a scene. Concerning the latter, I think about the hostility I have encountered when I have asked band directors to think more openly about what constitutes a band experience. As I have lingered with Rie, she reminds me all over again that the high school band is larger than our capacity to explain it. Here is Rie's attempt, beautiful in its failure to explicate:

I think that people should remember that music, whether you are playing something of your own or somebody else's, [whether] Beethoven or Rie Daisies, it is a form of self-expression, it is a form of release. I think people should remember that and keep in mind that music isn't the only way people express themselves, music isn't the only way people release things from themselves, that sometimes people need more. They need more room to express themselves. I think that more people should give that room, give that space to somebody, to say, that's who you are. Go with it. You do you. Play your music and play it well, but be yourself. (Nichols, 2013, p. 272)

I read this excerpt with fascination. It feels both heightened and banal; teenage blather and poststructural analysis all together. In one sense, it provides Regelski-like evidence of the powerful way that school music functions as a form of self-expression, as a marker of one's identity. But Rie's thinking is restless. Twice she speaks of release. Release, *to set free a person or animal who is imprisoned, trapped, or confined in some way*. Release, *to stop gripping or holding onto something*. Release, *to relinquish something as a right or claim*. Release is a courageous act because it is about letting go. Wholly different than the "desire-dread-purge" reflex, Rie's concept of release has something to do with achievement—with *freedom*—with new beginnings. If there are findings attached to this article, then I wish to stress that identity claims are less important than the time we spend between these claims.

In a related way, McClary's (1991) research locates those moments in music history when ruptures occur, when the legislation of a concept or aesthetic form breaks apart, or, just as importantly, *tries* to break apart. In hindsight, we see that such moments produce surplus meaning. Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony, the opera *Carmen*, Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, or Madonna's *Live to Tell*—McClary's readings are restless, but a little strange, too. She highlights spaces of unintended rupture, but I might describe them as passages. As I conclude this article, I would like to make a final, but related, pivot—no, a leap. I would like to propose that there are locations in schools where analogous breakdowns take place, where the legislation of a school space is reordered by the contradictions therein. These spaces are passages, too. I am thinking of libraries, locker rooms, hallways, and, of course, the band and the chorus room. They are larger than their legislation allows, more frightening than mere function. "Sometimes people need more," Rie says to me, "I think that more people should give that room, give that space to somebody, to say, that's who you are. Go with it. You do you" (Nichols, 2013, p. 272).

A passage. *A passage to elsewhere*. What does that mean? It has something to do with invention, the fictions and truths we create and perform as we try to understand

the why of what is inside of us. We do this through stories. We do this in spaces that foster exploration: spaces in school that are coinhabited, place-based, and unfinished. Here, stories, texts, music, and desires circulate and transform. “Writer and reader are both responsible for the universe brought into being through the act of reading,” writes Maxine Greene (1995) in her own fractured fairytale of an essay called *The Shapes of Childhood Recalled*:

A universe supported by the joint effort of two freedoms—the reader’s and the writer’s. Both are breaking with the mundane, with fixity; they are futuring, choosing in the face of possibility. The book [the *text*] becomes a kind of gift, largely because it is addressed to human freedom—the capacity to move beyond what is, to create identity in the light of what might be. (p. 77)

I remember Maxine telling me stories about how as a young girl she would read her books late at night, armed with a flashlight, with covers over her head. In band we have books, too. But they are more participatory, and more fleeting; like Maxine’s books, they are mixed with the stories of life and living. This form of interaction, directed toward freedom but plausible in its contradictions and regressions, was what Rie needed from band.

So the fractures of living continue. The unspooling of self-study leaves me formless. I am thinking of my high school band and where I grew up among the cornfields of central Illinois. I watched passively as my older brother was harassed out of band for being gay. (What? Two sons who are gay? *What went wrong with that family?*?) I consider that Rie is also my brother and that I did not risk my safety for either of them. (What is fiction, what is not? I can no longer say.) I saw the way my brother was treated by my parents, his Christian therapist, and the homophobic teachers I found so easy to love. But this contribution is a story about unfinishedness, not forgiveness. It is about allowing those transformational spaces to keep rewriting us. I want to hold their contradictions together. All I ask is that you give me a little more time.

## NOTE

1. There was a stubborn typo attached to this passage, and its side story is worth sharing. Throughout the writing of this piece, I was conscious to use the appropriate pronoun for Rie, who no longer goes by the name Ryan and prefers to be called “she.” I am a fastidious writer, but it was 5 weeks before I noticed that in this particular sentence—the moment where I lay bare my frustrations with Rie and confront my own internalized homophobia—I consistently used a masculine pronoun without noticing that I was doing so, in effect both consciously and subconsciously blaming Rie for the violence that fell down upon her by not being somehow “butch” enough to prevent it. Similarly, a reviewer was moved by this passage and asked:

Why do those with a little more power, a little more agency, who have experienced oppression, want it to be just as hard for the next generation? . . . The *It Gets Better* campaign reinscribes that idea. We try to tell LGBTQ youth that things will be better when they’re older. What can we do to make things better for them now, so that they don’t have to go through what the previous generation did?

To imagine a world as if it could be different, more caring and less violent, requires not merely a perception of injustice, but the will, patience, and effort to see what you hide from yourself.

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