

Evan L. Snyder — Statement of Purpose
for the PhD in Composition at Princeton University

My name is Evan Snyder, I'm a composer, specializing in opera and classical vocal music, and I'd very much like to make the PhD in Composition at Princeton University the next step in my artistic journey. My motivation for pursuing a doctoral education at this point in my career is twofold: I'm seeking an academically and creatively stimulating environment in which to continue to improve at my craft and I am aiming to prepare myself to undertake a collegiate teaching position. These two purposes are entirely intertwined—for me, teaching as a creator is just as important as creating as a teacher; the work I do in each of these areas enables my growth in the other.

The thing that pulls me to opera, as an art form, is the incredible potential it has to enable empathy. Through its interwoven music and drama, it can tear an audience from their seats and fully immerse in them in the experience of another—gifting them with a new perspective on the human condition. As a young person, this capacity of opera's drove me to pursue singing. In my early twenties, however, I found that path upended by health problems that made a career in singing seem likely impossible. It was then that I found a new artistic voice through composition.

In the decade since, I've learned a great deal about writing music. My first serious attempt was an evening-length opera, a murder mystery called *A Capacity for Evil*. Although an opera might seem like a somewhat daunting place to begin, the passion I had for that project enabled me to develop my compositional skills quickly, serving me well both artistically and professionally. *A Capacity for Evil* helped me secure a place as a master's student in composition at Michigan State University, it garnered me my first professional attentions through Fort Worth Opera's Frontiers Showcase, and it was eventually premiered in Detroit, in 2018 by Opera MODO. During that same time, through my studies at MSU, I worked to shore up a number of

deficits in my skills, broaching composition for the first time as a master's student—studying instrumental capabilities, orchestrational techniques, and more. Since finishing that first composition degree, I've continued to carve a path for myself composing opera and writing for the classical voice—I've written a modular song cycle for soprano Tamara Wilson, orchestrated *A Capacity for Evil* for Opera Las Vegas, and composed an hour-long song cycle for tenor Eric Ferring, based on TJ Klune's *Tales from Verania*. Along the way, I've also written for a handful of chamber ensembles and orchestrated works for other composers, most notably orchestrating Eric Whitacre's one act opera, *The Gift of the Magi*, for its 2024 performance at Carnegie Hall. Two years ago, I also continued my studies in opera writing, through a one-year intensive in London with the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Opera House—a program which I employed to study compositional approaches to comedic writing and to adapt my own approach for their commissioned opera, *The Casserole*.

In the time between and since my graduate degrees, however, reflecting on what I really want out of my career, I've found myself yearning for a more permanent home as part of a collegiate music department. During my time at Michigan State, I had taught theory, aural skills, and composition lessons, work that was incredibly rewarding for me—getting to see students grow, helping them to overcome their various stumbling blocks, and, best of all, giving them the tools to teach themselves in the next steps of their music lives. Not only that, but my creative endeavors, too, flourished in that setting. Certainly, this was due in part to the excellent teaching that I received and my many collaborations with colleagues, but it was also as a direct result of the work that I did with students. Ideas and solutions in my creative work often sprang forth from my theory teaching, my students' lessons, even conversations about their coursework with my colleagues—the minutia that makes up your everyday as a professor. The funny thing is, I think I

could pursue teaching at the university level for either entirely selfish or completely selfless reasons—it is simultaneously both the most useful thing that I can do for myself as a creative and also the beneficial thing that I can do for others as an artist.

The PhD in Composition at Princeton would be an ideal environment to prepare me for these intended next steps of my professional career. Princeton would give me the space to pursue both the creative and pedagogical, and the opportunity to grow more well-rounded as a composer. The Princeton Sound Kitchen concerts, for example, would allow me to return to chamber writing, and to improve my mastery of orchestration in its most intimate form—something that would serve me both in my operatic pursuits and more broadly as an artist. Princeton's model of unassigned private study—access to the composition faculty at large, rather than any one specifically, is another aspect of the program that I find incredibly exciting. By allowing me access to a wider array of perspectives, the program wouldn't simply have me become more adept in my areas of expertise, but also help me to broaden my own creative perspective. I would also be delighted by any opportunity to share the expertise that I do have—at Michigan State and at Guildhall I often helped to workshop and perform other composers' vocal works, and offered constructively from my experience at working with voices. I understand that this kind of collaboration is common at Princeton, as part of the the Mixtape concerts and other events, and the opportunity to learn from other performer/composers reciprocally further cements for me the fact Princeton would be an excellent home for me in my doctoral studies. I hope you'll consider my application—I would be overjoyed to find myself a part of the Princeton community, through these final steps of my scholastic career.