

Introduction

Dear Ms. Rau and The Cedar Commissions Review Panel:

Greetings and thank you for taking the time to review my application materials. My name is Benji Inniger, I am a 35 year-old freelance composer as well as an Associate Professor of Theatre and Music and Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN. Music composition was my gateway into all of my creative endeavors I am pursuing to this day. I am excited to share my roots and ideas with you and hope you will consider my candidacy for a commission. This is a wonderful program that I wish I would have known about earlier. Recently a musician friend forwarded me this information, and I was ecstatic for the opportunity to apply.

Above all, commission or not, thank you for expending the time and energy you have put into this program. Ensuring the success of your mission is no small task, and I am sure your efforts go a long way in the continued development of the growing and thriving Minnesota artistic community. Thank you for making a difference and for enabling others to make a difference.

In the following pages, you will find my relevant application materials. If you will permit me, it may benefit my application narrative to change the order a bit. A description of my background would shed light onto my project idea. A brief table of contents is as follows:

Page 1	Introduction
Page 2	Part I: Artistic Background
Page 3	Part II: Project Idea
Page 4	Part III: Feasibility
Page 5	Part IV: Work Sample Description and Conclusion
Page 6	Resume

You would be very welcome to contact me if you would like any clarifications or have additional questions. My contact information is as follows:

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Application page including audio samples: hearbenji.com/cedar

Thank you again for this chance to speak and best wishes with your deliberations.



Benji Inniger

Part I: Artistic Background

I began playing piano at a young age, soon to be followed by guitar, trumpet, drums, and a smattering of other instruments. I have never considered myself a performer, however. I could never find an instrument I loved to perform publicly, though I was constantly interested in making or arranging pieces for friends and events or making things up that would never really see the light of day.

I began my undergraduate work as a music major, but I did not find a great fit in the program. I enjoyed theory and history, but I wanted there to be a more practical outlet for the things I was learning. Early on, one of my theatre professors asked if I was interested in writing music for the play he was working on. I had done theatre in the past but never considered this as a possibility. This first play greatly helped me to discover my niche of writing more for live theatre performances. Since that moment most of my creative endeavors have centered around some kind of relationship between music and theatre. Over the years to follow, I have had the privilege of serving as the composer and/or sound designer for many plays. In 2009, I unexpectedly won a national sound design award at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC and completed my MFA in Sound Design in 2010. I have been active as a designer, composer, and director ever since.

During the last several years I have been able to branch out with my music making by composing for video games. The mobile and computer games I am currently working on are increasing in size and complexity, which has been an exciting and edifying adventure. By the end of this year, I should be releasing my first console game on the Nintendo Switch as well as other larger-market computer games. Most of my previous projects have been a blend of electronically generated music mixed with acoustic instruments that I record myself in my home studio in addition to collaborations with other musicians.

My regular job during the school year is that of professor of theatre and music at a small liberal arts college in Mankato. I am typically the sound designer and composer for most if not all of our productions as well as teaching directing, sound design, music technology, film scoring, and other subjects. It has been a great privilege to teach as I grow and evolve as an artist and to share my experiences and perspective with my students as their artistry concurrently grows and evolves.

There are also a few opportunities this coming summer, which should prove to be a significant challenge and a step forward for me as an emerging artist. First, I was commissioned to write a new orchestral work for the Mankato Symphony Orchestra. This is both my first professional performance commission and also the first time I will be performed by a full professional orchestra. The piece is entitled *The Next Bend: A River Adventure for Orchestra*, and it will be debuted during their July 4th concert. Second, in late July I will be traveling to Vienna, Austria to participate in the Hollywood Music Workshop to study film scoring techniques and practices with Conrad Pope, Nan Schwartz, and T.J. Lindgren.

I do not know what the future holds for me, but I know that I will always be a continual musical dabbler. I have been enjoying being able to network with other musicians and composers in the last few years and am looking forward to where that will lead. There is an outstanding display of talent here in Minnesota, and I hope to continue to foster those relationships and explore many more projects and collaborations in the near future.

Part II: Project Idea

As described in the previous section, much of my work outside of academia has been composing for theatre and video games. One of the aspects of composing for theatre that I find the most fascinating is the element of unpredictability, or at the very least how fluid it needs to be. Film music, once implemented, never changes and will happen the exact same way every time you play it. Theatre on the other hand demands adaptability. What if an actor forgets their lines? What if something happens onstage to delay the timing for a few seconds? This is something that a theatrical composer needs to take into account when working and is often addressed through the use of a conductor or live musician. This concept struck a chord with me when I began working on video games, as many games also require highly adaptable and responsive scores. Depending on the type, video game music often changes based on what the player is doing and can be a key component of communication in the player's experience. However, video game music is prerecorded and has a finite amount of predetermined and guided possibilities and manifestations.

After noticing these similarities between theatre and games, I began wondering if I could extract the strengths of each of these mediums to improve my writing for both. The first experiment came last year when I wrote the music for our production of the ancient Greek play, *The Women of Troy*. I wanted to have prerecorded music and all the advantages that come with it but have the music follow the pace of the action, much like it would in a video game. There is subconscious magic that happens when the music ends (as opposed to fading out) with an actor at the end of a long monologue, or when music can support the rising and falling intensity of a scene without taxing the actors to pay attention to the music and pace themselves to what we normally think of as fixed in time. Ultimately, *The Women of Troy* score contained nearly an hour of music for viola, cello, a 22-voice women's chorus, along with a smattering of other instruments I recorded or sampled. I used a few different methods to compose this, including small musical phrases connected by malleable, more ambient musical material; multiple layers that could be blended live; and through-composed sections that would drive the other stage elements. Using these methods along with the support of powerful music playback technology, I feel as though the project was largely successful in creating adaptable musicscape for these performances.

Despite the success, there were many things I learned for the next attempt. In the last several months I have been able to speak about this experiment at both at the International Game Developers Association Twin Cities (IGDATC) meeting as well as the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) national conference. Hearing the ideas and reactions of other professionals was an invaluable source of perspective and inspiration.

Using all that I have learned, I am ready to tackle the next iteration of this experiment. Next spring, I will be working on a new script of the beloved classic, *Anne of Green Gables*. This will be a great opportunity to build upon what I have learned to try to create a new, memorable score that can be both a unique adaptively implemented design for theatrical performance as well as a touching, stand-alone performance piece. The Cedar Commission would go a long way to help me continue this research in a composition method that I hope is uniquely taking the art form in a new interesting direction.

Part III: Project Feasibility

Completing this project is quite feasible. As I previously mentioned, the production of *Anne of Green Gables* next spring will be a great canvas for me to apply what I have learned thus far to try to improve this new and interesting method of composing. I have also been trying to use these experiences to connect and collaborate with other musicians along the way such as the violist, cellist, and choir from *The Women of Troy* project. Although the nature of the play did not require as much adaptability, this past spring I was able to work with with a woodwind trio named The Twin Cities Trio consisting of Maia Hamann on bassoon, Mary Beth Huttlin on clarinet, and Steven King on oboe for a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. I will also be collaborating with a local cellist on a video game project as well as commissioning a local luthier to build a custom fretless parlor acoustic guitar for another video game project. The bottom line is that there is a lot of unmistakable talent here in Minnesota, and I have wanted to focus more on taking advantage of these opportunities to join forces with our local talent pool.

For the upcoming *Anne of Green Gables* score, I hope to work with The Bekesh Trio consisting of Ken Freed on violin, Sharon Mautner-Rodgers on cello, and Bethel Balge on piano. I may find the need for other instruments when the piece is composed, but this is my starting point.

The theatre production will be based on a new adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables*, which will be completed by the end of this summer. I would be writing the score throughout the fall and early winter with a goal of being completed by early 2019. The timelines of both the Cedar performances and the theatrical performance are very complimentary, as the Cedar performance would debut in February which is right around the projected time I would be recording the music for the stage production opening in April. The potential for cross-pollination between different artistic fields is often intriguing, and this is a particularly strong and interesting opportunity for just that.

A Cedar Commission would additionally be invaluable to help give this music life beyond the production. I would want to compose the music (or an adaptation of the music) to be performable outside of the context of the play production. It would significantly help me grow as an artist to simultaneously consider the needs of both types of audiences to create music that not only supports the narrative of the performed story, but also can stand on its own and be thoughtful and stimulating to an independent audience. This would also give me an opportunity to compare how audiences react differently in the two formats. My hypothesis is that different parts of the music will be more memorable when attached to a visual image, and other parts will be more memorable when performed separately from the story. I have never before been able to make that direct comparison, and this commission would give me the opportunity to test that hypothesis and learn from it.

Part IV: Work Samples

Note: This information along with streaming and downloadable audio samples are prepared for this application at hearbenji.com/cedar.

Sample #1: *The Women of Troy*

Certainly not aesthetically, but the closest sample I have to what this project could be is my aforementioned score for *The Women of Troy*. This play is an ancient Greek drama with deep contemporary ties that focuses on the women and children that are left behind after a brutal war. These captive women, royalty and commoners alike, await their fates at the hands of Greek conquerors after the invasion and destruction of their homes.

The example provided contains selected parts of a larger work, but it is a sampler from several different parts of the 60-minute soundtrack. If you would like to hear the work in its entirety, you are welcome to visit <http://www.hearbenji.com/women-of-troy>.

Viola: Kenneth Freed

Cello: Sharon Mautner-Rodgers

Choir: The Mary Martha Singers

Other Instruments, Recording, and Production: Benji Inniger

Sample #2: *There Be Dragons Title Theme*

As theatre and video games are the topic of my application it may be appropriate to share a recent video game example. This piece is from a project active in development called *There Be Dragons*, which is a fantasy platformer that will be released in 2019. This title track is a combination of live percussion, piano, flutes, and voice with sampled strings and electronic elements. All instruments were recorded and performed by myself with the exception of vocals by Beret Ouren.

If you would like to hear more, there are many other samples of my work on my portfolio website hearbenji.com.

Conclusion

Thank you once again for reviewing this application. I believe I fit well into the category of “emerging artist.” I still have much to learn and discover, but hopefully my experience to this point will show that I respect deadlines, can work with performers, can budget for realized projects, and would not be afraid of a new and interesting challenge. Creating music is a substantial driving force in my life, and it would be a great pleasure to be a part of this program that would undoubtedly have a tremendously positive impact on my life and career. Thank you for your attention and consideration, and I wish you the best as you deliberate these applications. Thank you for the time and energy you have put into a program like this and for making a difference in the lives of emerging artists.

Benji Inniger

Sound Design, Music Composition

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Selected Sound Designs*

*A complete list of designs available upon request or at hearbenji.com

Underlined Productions indicate original music composed

Production	Venue	Director	Year
<u>The Women of Troy</u>	Bethany Lutheran College	Benji Inniger	2017
The Little Mermaid	Highland Summer Theatre	Melissa Rosenberger	2017
Footloose	Highland Summer Theatre	Paul Hustoles	2016
<u>Saint Guillotine</u>	Minnesota Fringe Festival	Benji Inniger	2015
<u>Metamorphoses</u>	Bethany Lutheran College	Benji Inniger	2015
Dead Man Walking	Des Moines Metro Opera	Kristine McIntyre	2014
<u>Hamlet</u>	Bethany Lutheran College	Peter Bloedel	2013
Compulsion, or the House Behind	Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company	Hayley Finn	2013
Leveling Up	Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park	Wendy C. Goldberg	2013
<u>National Playwright's Conference:</u>	Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center	Wendy C. Goldberg	2011-2012
<u>Play What's Not There</u>	The Guthrie Theater	Candace Barrett	2012
<u>The Merchant of Venice</u>	Trinity Repertory Company	Curt Columbus	2012
Three Penny Opera	Brown University/Trinity Rep MFA Program	Kristan Seemel	2011
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Brown University/Trinity Rep MFA Program	Shana Gozansky	2010

Other Selected Sound and Music Experience*

Project Type	Project Title	Role/Title	Year
Performance	The Next Bend (Mankato Symphony Orchestra)	Composer	2018
Video Game	Robot Farm (Nokoriware)	Sound Designer	2018
Video Game	Gravity Galaxy (Pixelbyte Games)	Composer/Sound Designer	2016
Video Game	Color Glide (Eternal Studios)	Composer/Sound Designer	2016
Video Game	Bloom Kingdom (BearWolf Studios)	Composer/Sound Designer	2016
Album Production	Where You Are Now (The Divers)	Producer/Engineer	2013
Original Musical	Jam Jar Sonnets (Published: Playscripts, Inc.)	Composer	2008

Selected Awards and Honors

International Theatre Soundscore and Music Composition Exhibit	Prague Quadrennial Scenofest	2011
Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival	National Sound Design Winner	2008
Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival	Region V Sound Design Winner	2004-2007, 2009

Selected Employment

Organization	Position	Supervisor	Year
Associate Professor of Theatre	Bethany Lutheran College	Dr. Eric Woller	2012-present
Sound Engineer	Trinity Repertory Company	Peter Hurowitz	2010-2012
Sound Designer/Engineer	Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center	Jill Mauritz	2009-2012

Related Information

Professional Associations: ASCAP, USITT, ACF **Musician** (Piano, Guitars, Bass, Drums, Trumpet, Eastern Flutes); **Playback Programming** (QLab, SFX); **Live Mixing** (Soundcraft Expression, Yamaha M7CL, 01V, 01V96, LS9, DM2000); **Recording Engineering** (Cubase, Acid, Sound Forge, Reaper, Audition, Protools, Sibelius); **Computers** (PC and Mac, Web Design, Lightroom, Photoshop, Microsoft Office, Vectorworks, Final Cut Pro); **Musical Direction; Stage Direction; Class D Driver's License** (Manual Transmission, Motorcycle); **Scuba OW Certification** (PADI); **Environmental Ecology Field Experience, Musical Instrument Sales/Repair**

Education

Achievment	Institution	Supervisor	Year
Hollywood Music Workshops	Baden Bei Vien, Austria		2018
Masters of Fine Arts: Sound Design	Minnesota State University, Mankato	George Grubb	2010
Bachelor of Arts: Theatre, Music, Biology	Bethany Lutheran College	Peter Bloedel	2006
KCACTF National Sound	Kennedy Center, Washington DC	Rob Kaplowitz	2004-2007, 2009
Broadway Sound Master Class	New York, NY		2009

References Available Upon Request