

**BALANCING THE BAND:  
EXPLORING TRANSGENDER AND/OR GENDER NON-CONFORMING  
MUSICIANS' EXPERIENCES NEGOTIATING THE GENDER BINARY  
IN WESTERN INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC**

by

Beck Watt

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education

In conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Master of Education

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

(December, 2023)

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explores how rigid binary gender expectations in Western instrumental music are negotiated by transgender and/or gender non-conforming (TGNC) musicians. Data was collected from and generated with participants (N=4) from Winnipeg, Manitoba who self-identify as TGNC and have a high level of Western instrumental music expertise and experience. A theoretical framework of “queer creativity” was used to guide the development of this study and provide a unique lens with which to analyze these gendered experiences. Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews and came together to participate in a chamber ensemble focus group which centered the social art of music-making, pulling from arts-informed qualitative research practices. Acting from the position of researcher-participant, my own experiences as a transgender flutist were infused across the data through participating in the chamber ensemble focus group as well as collecting personal journal entries and field notes throughout the span of this study. This research brings a gender-complex perspective to gender-based research in Western instrumental music while illuminating the ways TGNC musicians negotiate binary gender expectations and even find gender affirmation within this art form. Research findings are applicable to music education fields—K-12, post-secondary, and community ensembles—via recommendations to music educators and directors on ways to encourage creative musical spaces that foster the development and exploration of musicianship, gender identity and gender expression. Recommendations also extended to fellow TGNC instrumental musicians, encouraging their continued active participation and highlighting the value in their unique perspectives and voice within these music-making spaces.

## Acknowledgements

When it comes to acknowledging all the people who have supported me through the journey of completing this study, the list quickly becomes a long one! I am eternally thankful to my supervisor Lee Airton who has been a supportive mentor since our first meeting back in 2018. Our chance encounter on the streets of downtown Winnipeg one chilly fall day when you suggested I take a break from Winnipeg and apply to graduate studies at Queen's has forever altered my path and I could not be more grateful. Despite the many ups and downs I have navigated over the past three years, your encouragement, support, and the occasional tough love through this entire process has been a gift, both professionally and personally.

Thank you to Ben Bolden for your enthusiasm and support of my research and teaching. Your kind, creative and curious nature opened me up to a new world of academia that hooked me in from my first day in your class. Your creativity class challenged me in new ways that have me continuing to think and look at the world, teaching and music from a new light. Thank you for allowing me space to run wild with your class projects and assignments; supporting me as I followed various rabbit holes that let me engage with my queer community from across the country and dig deep into the intersection of creativity and identity. Thank you for your positivity, support and encouragement throughout the process of completing this study.

A big thank you to my participants who made this study engaging and impactful. I appreciate your time and willingness to share your stories, experiences, and talents. Making music with you all was the highlight of my year and I look forward to what is in store for TGNC musicians and music-making in Manitoba in the years to come!

To my Winnipeg support team: Linsey, Jocelyn, Katrina, Andrew and many others through the years (you know who you are). Thank you for your patience, kindness and

encouragement. From applying to Queen's and moving away, to moving back home and completing this study, I have asked a lot of you all and none of it would have been possible without you. Thank you for always being available to help with any task from packing to plant watering and grocery trips, to fielding my never-ending list of questions, concerns and 'what if' anxieties. Special shout out to Max who ended up in Kingston during my time at Queen's and helped make a new city feel like home. From wine nights discussing queer theory to making holiday dinners and watching movies, our queer family home away from home was everything I needed and more. Special thank you to my grandpa and late grandma who committed to calling me each Sunday to check on how I was doing and listen to all my stories from the past week. Your interest and investment in my life and professional pursuits has meant the world to me. Thank you for your never-ending love and support.

To my new friends, peers, colleagues, and professors in Kingston across both academia and the bar industry, thank you for your hospitality! I appreciated diving into deep conversations about academia, politics, teaching, life, and work with you daily. I learned so much and loved every minute of my year in Kingston with you all. Your creativity, openness toward sharing ideas and knowledge was constantly a breath of fresh air. I learned a lot from your diverse experiences and am grateful for your openness towards collaboration. I look forward to crossing paths in the future. Special shout out to Matt and Amanda from my bar family. Our late-night talks about life, relationships, and my research were often my favourite part of the week. Special thank you to Kel and Jacob who were always a text away and willing to help me decode the grad school road map and support me at any stage of my study.

To my wonderful partner Cory, meeting you was not in my plan when I moved out to Kingston to pursue my graduate studies, but having you beside me over the past two years has

been everything I could have asked for and more. Thank you for challenging me, lifting me up, and putting a smile on my face every day. You have been my sounding board and cheerleader, no matter how close or far apart we are. Thank you for teaching me how to rest and celebrate success, and for unwaveringly supporting me through tough times, decisions and situations.

My final thank you goes out to every bar, bartender and bar patron who has come along this journey with me, whether they were aware of it or not. As a part-time bartender myself, bars serve as both my social space and workspace. When writer's block gets in the way, a change of scenery over to one of my favourite bar tops was often the cure. The hum of social chatter and clinking glasses was my white noise. The conversations with whoever happened to be on either side of the wood often served as my spontaneous brainstorming partners, allowing me to talk through concepts, ideas, and sometimes posing questions which encouraged me to think in all new directions. These spaces were my home away from home. While I couldn't possibly list them all, there are a few standouts that deserves recognition. From Winnipeg: Amsterdam Tea Room, Shannon's Irish Pub, The Toad, and from Kingston: The Everly, Musiikki, and The Toucan. Thank you for seeing me through every stage of this journey from stressing over deadlines and the numerous long days turned long nights writing sessions, to celebrating successes and grieving losses alongside friends, new and old.

Pursuing graduate work and completing a thesis is a labour of love that takes a village. I am forever grateful to my extensive network of friends, family, peers, colleagues and professors, both past and present, across Manitoba and Ontario who have supported me through this journey.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

K-12: Kindergarten to grade twelve

LGBTQ/LGBTQ+/2SLGBTQ+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and + indicating other identities such as intersex, asexual, etc., and 2S representing Two-Spirit

TGNC: Transgender and/or Gender Non-conforming

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

There is a tension between the artistic creativity the general population expects of musicians, and the formal practices and traditions inherent in Western music participation. Western music builds on rigid long-standing conventions of musical practice. Based on my years of experience as an instrumentalist and music educator, participation in traditional Western music requires: the ability to read, interpret and perform written musical notation in a way that reflects the historical context of the music, the ability to participate in ensemble playing and exhibit specific behaviors (e.g., punctuality, preparedness, ability to sit still for extended periods of time and follow the directions and musical vision of a conductor), and conform with rigid binary expressions of gender.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's definition (OHRC, 2014), describes gender expression as "how a person publicly presents their gender. This can include behavior and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language and voice" (p. 3). One example of rigid gender expression expectations in Western instrumental music can be found in many high-level ensembles where official performance dress codes police a performer's physical appearance (i.e., their gender expression), requiring performers to present a conservative, uniform appearance to the audience. This might look like prohibiting 'unnatural' hair colors, visible tattoos, and enforcing conservative gender-specific dress requirements such as men in suits or tuxedos and women in floor length dresses and shirts that cover the elbow. Gender expression

restraints not only preserve limited cisnormative<sup>1</sup> expressions of gender, but also project a subtle narrative that gender diversity is unwelcome. For me as a flutist, this narrative pushed my TGNC gender identity into the closet in favor of a recognizable and acceptable version of feminine gender normativity.

Kate Bornstein (1995) regards gender identity as something which attempts to answer the question: “who am I” and “which gender do I belong to” (p. 38-39)? Bornstein’s focus is not only on self-definition of gender identity but also how the selection, naming, and claiming of a gender may or may not enable someone to find belonging within a specific gender class<sup>2</sup>. The need to belong can sometimes outweigh one’s desire to answer her first question of “who am I?” Western music traditions, like the social construction of gender (Bornstein, 1995; Butler, 1990), exist vaguely within the boundaries of prescribed expectations of “man” and “woman” depending on the social, cultural, and historical context. The gender rigidity pervasive in Western instrumental music practices may create an inhospitable environment for transgender and/or gender non-conforming (TGNC) musicians who participate in these spaces; however, the ability of these spaces to curate a form of belonging for 2SLGBTQ+ members based on their shared identity as musicians draws them in – at least for a time (Clayton, 2020). Gendered policies pertaining to performance dress code, as an example, require that TGNC musicians either dedicate the personal labour required to come out and advocate for their dress code desires, or potentially leave these spaces if the labour required to make space for their gender identity and accompanying gender

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<sup>1</sup> Cisnormative refers to an individual whose gender identity and gender expression align with their assigned gender at birth and follow the normative binary gender roles, attributions, and expectations as defined by their social, historical and cultural space (Bornstein, 1995; Butler, 1990; 2004; Wilchins, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Gender class refers to early definitions of the word ‘gender’ which was used as a way to “sort” or “class” people into categories which were marked by distinct boundaries (Rands, 2009, p. 420).

expression outweighs the benefit they receive as an instrumentalist in that music-making environment.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of my study was to explore the various gendered experiences of TGNC musicians in Western instrumental music practices. My research was guided by the following research questions: how do TGNC instrumental musicians negotiate the binary gender expectations in Western instrumental music? What new possibilities does an all-TGNC ensemble reveal about gender in Western instrumental music?

The arts have historically served as a haven in public schools for students who are in some way non-normative and often faced with daily harassment and discrimination (Hendricks et al., 2014; Nicholas, 2013; Peter et al., 2021; Taylor, 2011); however, music classes have not always been a welcoming space for TGNC students (Silveria, 2019; Southerland, 2018; Teichman, 2020). Singing roles and voicing terms with highly gendered expectations (e.g., soprano, bass), sex-specific performance uniforms, and gendered instrument stereotyping can cause stress and alienation in students who already face challenges of safety when navigating a school climate unwelcoming of gender diversity (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Palkki & Sauerland, 2019; Peter et al., 2021). Music classrooms should be spaces where students can explore, create, and express themselves (Garrett & Spano, 2017; Nicholas, 2013; Taylor, 2018). Expression through a musical lens is often cathartic and reflective; allowing students to explore their identity through music can be affirming and even liberating for TGNC students who often lack the opportunity and safety to explore their gender identity in other school spaces (Garrett & Spano, 2017; Nicolas, 2013; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Peter et al., 2021). Participation in musical ensembles has been shown to be beneficial to 2SLGBTQ+ individuals as this group environment

can help to facilitate community building and belonging through the making of new queer and trans friends, in addition to being a creative outlet to support mental health and wellbeing.

Despite many of these spaces continuing to perpetuate rigid gender expectations and practices, many 2SLGBTQ+ individuals experience music ensembles as uniquely safer spaces (Clayton, 2020) when “being 2SLBTQ+ does not feel safe anywhere” because of the relationships and allies they make within these ensembles (p. 36).

Students who participate in instrumental music classes, like concert or jazz band, face a unique challenge when it comes to selecting the instrument they will play. Pressure from teachers, parents, peers, and social media, as well as expectations of what a student should play based on sex-stereotyping of instruments, have been found to be extremely influential in how a student chooses which instrument to play (Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978; Conway, 2000; Fortney et al., 1993). Decades of research on gendered associations of musical instruments have demonstrated long-standing expectations pertaining to who can play certain instruments, and who cannot. This contributes to a limiting and rigidly gendered learning space, exposing students to harassment if they decide to play a transgressive instrument (Abeles et al., 2014; Conway, 2000; Green, 1997; Sinsabaugh, 2005). These gender-based limitations are not only felt at the K-12 level but can be seen threaded through post-secondary music education, so far as to impact what career options are perceived as available to musicians based on their gender (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Griswold & Chrobak, 1981; Zervoudakes & Tanur, 1994).

### **Contributions to Literature and Practice**

My qualitative study explored the gendered experiences of TGNC instrumental musicians, filling a gap present in the literature on gender-based research in Western instrumental music through rooting my research in both queer theory and theories of creativity. The use of this

“queer creativity” framework encouraged a gender-complex perspective throughout this study, troubling the gendered expectations in Western instrumental music practices (Rands, 2009).

Kathleen Rands (2009) proposed a gender-complex approach to education which asked educators and students to actively question their expectations of gender and the way rigid binary gender norms are reinforced and even celebrated within traditional systems of education. My use of queer theory and theories of creativity encouraged an active questioning of gender expectations through highlighting TGNC voices and centering our music-making together within the data collection. Queer theory also requires gender, as a social construct, to be located within a specific social and cultural space (Butler, 1990; 2004). Rands (2009) points to the various examples of oppression experienced by individuals based on the ways their gender identity, gender expression and race interact within a “gender oppression matrix” (p. 422). The education system historically privileges a single normative, white definition of two dichotomous genders (i.e., boy/man versus girl/woman) which finds TGNC teachers, as well as racialized educators of any gender identity outside of these ideals as transgressive (Keenan, 2017; Rands, 2009).

My study also adds to the small collection of research on supporting transgender and gender-expansive students in the music classroom which has been evolving over the past few years (see Garrett & Palkki, 2021). My study adds to this research by considering how the unique gender expectations in instrumental music impact students who are negotiating a gender identity outside of the binary. This study fills a gap present in this literature on the ways that gender is utilized, negotiated, and expressed through instrumental music participation, both at an individual level and in an ensemble setting, keeping the expertise of TGNC musicians at the center as experts on how gender plays out in these spaces.

The centering of music-making within my data collection using a chamber ensemble rehearsal style focus group (more to come in Chapter 4) also contributes to the field of arts-informed research methods (see Knowles & Cole, 2008). Being able to act as researcher and participant allowed me to use the act of music-making amongst my participants and myself as a unique space for collecting real-time experiences and reflections on how gender functions within a common experience and setting of ensemble music-making. Being able to capitalize on our shared experiences of deeply interrogating gender as TGNC individuals allowed us to also consider the possibilities for gender affirmation and creativity while in our niche music-making space of all-TGNC musicians. Our music-making made space for the emergence of my secondary research question: what new possibilities does an all-TGNC ensemble reveal about gender in Western instrumental music?

In addition to these contributions to literature, this research encouraged conversations about, and questioning of, gender expectations in Western instrumental music within my communities as a music educator and practicing flutist in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The process of participant recruitment uncovered opinions from fellow musicians in my community about the nonexistence of TGNC individuals within our musician community (I was ironically told that ‘those people’ will be tough to find since they don’t really exist when I, as the other person in the conversation, do in fact exist!). This interaction demonstrated the need for greater visibility of TGNC musicians but also confirmed the suspected isolation experienced by these musicians, making it all that more important to try and gather them in community and music-making.

The final contribution I will highlight in this section demonstrates the lasting impact of experiences in instrumental music education. The experience of playing in a large ensemble like wind band, jazz band or orchestra appears to be impactful for individuals regardless of how long

they spent in these spaces. Casual conversations with musicians, academics, educators, parents, peers, and folks at my local bars commonly erupted into storytelling about “when I was in high school band...” with everyone, no matter their gender identity, centering a gendered expectation within their moment of musical reminiscing. The act of engaging in and completing this research has encouraged a dialogue around gender expectations in Western instrumental music within my local community that has encouraged the everyday cisgender, heterosexual individual to look at the ways gender expectations have impacted them, and has pushed musicians and music educators around me to consider the ways that they have been reproducing “gender-stereotyped education” within their respective classrooms and ensembles (Rands, 2009, p. 424). In the concluding chapter, I will respond to this with specific recommendations for educator practice.

### **Autobiographical Signature**

As a queer, transmasculine flute player and music educator, I have felt the dissonance of my positions within Western instrumental music; that is, my relationship to my musical practice has been viewed by others as incompatible with my gender expression and gender identity. My music-making as a flutist has always been important to me, even considered a source of relaxation and meditation to help manage anxiety during difficult parts of my life. However, the social side of performing with ensembles became a challenge as I came into my transgender identity. I have always loved playing in chamber ensembles, wind bands, and orchestras, but found these spaces difficult to navigate, requiring energy to make space and advocate for myself while encountering regular microaggressions and discrimination as a trans flutist. For many years I toed the line of what was “acceptable,” holding back aspects of myself to perform the role of “professional flute player” that was required of me. Eventually, my performance of traditional Western instrumental music expectations resulted in my lack of excitement around engaging in

these musical spaces that I loved. For a while, I distanced myself from these spaces, discontinuing my participation in ensembles and music education spaces that required more emotional labour than I was able to give.

As a junior high and high school music teacher, I believed I could make music classrooms more inclusive spaces. I tried to approach the classroom and learning with the knowledge of what did not work for me to make music education more inclusive, creative, and safe for the youth entering my music program. I wanted young people to experience Western instrumental music in a way that was exciting. I tried to showcase why I loved it, demonstrating the level of interest, expression, and diversity that can exist within this field of music. However, despite these desires, I reproduced the status quo. I taught my students how I was taught. I welcomed my students into a space that looked and sounded a lot like the grade seven, first year band class I had come from as a twelve-year-old in Winnipeg more than a decade earlier. However, what differentiated my experience as a twelve-year-old in a conventional music classroom then, and my experiences as a young music teacher now, were the questions my students were asking. Questions like “Watt<sup>3</sup>, why are we playing this piece?” and “What is the point of us being here if we do not want to be professional musicians?” challenged me to consider why *I* was emulating the Western music traditions taught to me. My students’ questions forced me to consider whether I was teaching things in a way that worked for my students. What was the purpose of music in the lives of these young people? And what was preventing me from making music education more inclusive, creative, and safe for these youth?

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<sup>3</sup> Determining how students will refer to you as a teacher can be a complicated process for TGNC teachers who do not identify with the normative binary honorifics of Ms/Mrs/Mr. Schools are often not aware of other options nor will provide flexible options outside of these standards in the name of professionalism. When I first started teaching, I was strongly encouraged to pick an honorific and initially went with Mx (the standard honorific adopted by non-binary individuals) Watt. I have since moved towards not using any honorific and adopting a last name only approach in my classroom.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada in March 2020 meant that the expected Western music traditions of rehearsing, performing, and teaching instruments were disbanded. Suddenly I, like thousands of other teachers and performers, were forced to reinvent the music classroom (Beach et al., 2020). The change to how music education was to be taught required me to begin answering the questions I had had just one year prior: what was I doing? Why was I doing it? And what is the purpose of music education in the current K-12 school system? Building stronger relationships with my students and reflecting more deeply on my own experiences through my life as a music lover and musician exposed the rigid expectations inherent in all musical genres, practices, and traditions. With my high school students, we explored the assumptions we make about people and music. We sought out examples that went against the grain (e.g., women composers, men playing flutes, genderbending in opera, etc.). We talked about why we are drawn to some kinds of music and not others. We thought about how music taught emotional intelligence, thinking about the ways in which we use music as a coping mechanism. What I started to discover through these conversations and explorations with my students was that the music I like and participate in had allowed me to explore different parts of my gender identity and gender expression before I even knew what any of that meant. I noticed a correlation between the experiences I was having with my students and my own understanding of my gender identity and gender expression which had been developing over the years. These moments of pandemic music teaching brought me to consider the highly gendered nature of Western instrumental music that I was taught and trained in, and that myself teach within, but that I had never really questioned in terms of its impact on students' connections and interactions with music education.

My graduate studies have allowed me to expand on these queries and consider a variety of angles, perspectives, and experiences that may be impacting and influencing student musicians. I found the published research literature circling my interests – transgender and/or gender non-conforming peoples’ experiences in music, music education, gender associations in instrumental music – to be either quantitative in its attempts to document the numbers of men/boys and women/girls playing various instruments to prove the existence of gendered associations with instruments (e.g., Zervoudakes & Tanur, 1994), and/or generally lacking a gender-complex perspective (e.g., Wych, 2012). My aim through my own research was to contribute a missing TGNC perspective to this literature, while also engaging my fellow TGNC instrumentalists across Manitoba in community and music-making after a period of isolation (both because of the COVID 19 pandemic, but also the isolation felt by myself – and I assumed, shared by others – as often the only TGNC musician in an ensemble).

### **Overview of the Thesis**

In the following chapter I will provide an overview of the literature currently present within the field of LGBTQ inclusion in music education in the United States and Canada, TGNC student experiences in music programs at the high school and post-secondary level, concluding with a timeline documenting the evolution of gender-based research in instruments and instrumental music.

In chapter 3 I detail my “queer creativity” theoretical framework which includes descriptions of queer theory and the various research and theories of creativity which I have taken along with me throughout this study. This chapter concludes with an overview of how each aspect of queer theory or creativity theories have specifically been utilized within my study.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of my research design including information about participant selection, data collection, and analysis. This chapter concludes with acknowledging the potential participant risks of this study and the efforts I made to mitigate these risks.

In chapter 5 I describe my findings which have been grouped into three primary themes: Rigid binary gender instrument stereotypes and then the ones in the middle, making space and finding community as a TGNC musician, and TGNC identity exploration and affirmation through instrumental music performance. Through each theme I thread together participant experiences with my own experiences and highlight unique findings which came to light through our all-TGNC chamber ensemble focus group.

In my final chapter, chapter 6, I conclude with an overview of my study findings, connect my findings back to the related research in the field of TGNC students in music programs and gender-based research in instruments, and provide a personal reflection on the study. I follow this with recommendations to music educators and TGNC musicians, a discussion of study limitations, suggest recommendations for further research and close with some last words on the significance of this study.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Research in the field of gender and sexual diversity-inclusive educational practices and experiences in music has grown exponentially in recent years but has been largely limited to the inclusion of sexual minority (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual) students, often referencing but not directly engaging transgender and/or gender non-conforming (TGNC) students through utilizing the broad acronym ‘LGBTQ’ (see Airton & Koecher, 2019). This commonly used acronym assumes a homogenized experience of students who identify with any of the associated labels (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer), which inadvertently fails to acknowledge the experiences unique to gender minority (e.g., transgender and/or gender non-conforming) students (Garrett & Spano, 2017; Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2020; Silveira, 2019). Due to this lack of TGNC-specific literature in music and music education, in this chapter I will be reviewing research that is TGNC-specific, where possible, as well as broader LGBTQ-related research where reference has been made to the experiences of TGNC students in music. It should be noted that the use of the acronym LGBTQ comes with its limitations and exclusions, most notably the lack of inclusion of Two-Spirit<sup>4</sup> identities and intersex<sup>5</sup> individuals; however, this is the most common version of the ever-shifting acronym found in the relevant literature which is why it will be used in this chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> The term Two-spirit is a translation of the Anishnaabemowin term *niizh manidoowag* and was introduced by Elder Myra Laramée in 1990 at the Third Annual Intertribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference, which was held in Winnipeg. This term describes individuals who embody the energy, gifts, and talents of the two spirits – “it’s nether male or female, but it’s both; it’s neither up or down, but it’s in the middle” describes Elder Myra Laramée. It is a cultural identity that goes beyond the simple claiming of a specific sexual orientation and/or gender identity (City of Winnipeg, 2021; Ross, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Intersex is an umbrella term for a wide range of bodily variations – “bodies that were born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies” (Pagonis, 2017).

The next sections provide an overview of the literature on music teachers' perceptions of LGBTQ students and their readiness to support and include these realities in the music classroom. Following details the experiences of TGNC musicians within these music classrooms, extending to experiences of TGNC musicians and educators-in-training at the post-secondary level. This literature sets the stage for my own findings on the kind of environment and challenges TGNC individuals experience while participating in formal music education. A subsequent section will address the extensive body of literature on the phenomena of gendered associations and sex-stereotyping of musical instruments. This literature is important to my study as it demonstrates the highly gendered environment of Western instrumental music that is rooted in rigid binary gender expectations. Together, all the reviewed literature paints a picture of TGNC musicians' experiences within instrumental music that may be both restrictive and harmful, while also being important sources of community and creative expression.

### **Music Teacher Readiness to Support LGBTQ Students**

Creating classrooms that foster every student's gender identity and gender expression can create a more welcoming space for all students to learn and express their authentic selves (Palkki, 2020; Southerland, 2018). Research (e.g., Silveria & Goeff, 2016) over the past decade has shown that despite a greater acknowledgement of the presence of LGBTQ students within schools and music programs, music educators do not feel adequately prepared to work with students who identify within the LGBTQ community and note a specific exclusion of these identities within music education training and curriculum. The lack of representation on diverse identities is often evident from the moment future music educators begin their formal training as musicians, with often no further representation or training being present throughout their journey to become music educators. While there has been a general increase in pre-service teacher

education courses dedicated to the inclusion of students with exceptionalities and various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, there is still a notable gap in addressing the inclusion of students with diverse sexual and gender identities (Airton & Koecher, 2019; Garrett & Spano, 2017; Kearns et al., 2020; Silveria & Goeff, 2016).

Despite the lack of training and potential risks felt by teachers in including LGBTQ content into their curriculum and classroom, the research has found that many music educators generally hold positive views towards LGBTQ students (Garrett & Spano, 2017) and believe in school practices which specifically support transgender students (Silveira & Goff, 2016). This continues to be in contradiction to LGBTQ student accounts of experiences within their schools and music classrooms; studies have found that these students often feel excluded and unsupported by their teachers (Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2018; Silveria & Goeff, 2016). For example, Jeananne Nichols (2013) shares the story of a transgender high school choir and band student in the American Midwest: “I felt like I had champion teachers in both [choir and band] 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” (p. 268). This statement highlights the importance of music education and having high-quality music educators for this student but acknowledges that, despite feeling supported in their musicianship and musician identity, this transgender student lacked support and inclusion for their gender identity. Joshua Palkki and Paul Caldwell’s (2018) research similarly identified a silence around topics of gender and sexual diversity inclusion felt by LGBTQ music students within their music programs which make these places and teachers feel less welcoming and supportive. Music and music education spaces are sometimes seen by LGBTQ students as being a “safe enough to not feel threatened. But not safe enough to disclose” climate (Baines et al., 2019, p. 7). This may ring true

for sexual minority students as well, however, the privilege not to disclose one's identity often comes at a high cost for TGNC students, if it is even possible (Nichols, 2013).

### **TGNC Peoples' Experiences in Formal Music Education**

The reviewed research in this section introduces some of the unique challenges TGNC musicians face in choral and instrumental settings while also demonstrating that these challenges are not limited to the K-12 classroom but continue to persist through post-secondary music programs and pre-service music teacher education. It is important to recognize that TGNC musicians exist in both music classrooms and in professional settings, and the gendered expectations continue to impact these musicians throughout their musical careers.

#### ***TGNC Student Experiences in the High school and Post-Secondary Choir Room***

The following section outlines the reviewed research addressing TGNC students participating in high school and post-secondary choral ensembles. While music classes are capable of being "uniquely supportive educational environments for LGBTQ students" (Southerland, 2018, p. 41), many TGNC students feel their music teachers are not educated on best practices for supporting gender and sexual minority students; further, these students often need to choose between becoming the token TGNC student who leads the education for their teachers (Palkki, 2020; Sims, 2017) or encountering regular microaggressions which impact their overall feelings of safety and acceptance (Nichols, 2013; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). Name and pronoun changes, and gender expression experimentation may all accompany a TGNC student's experience and, within the context of school, may open them up to bullying, harassment, and discrimination (Nichols, 2013; Sims, 2017). Within music classrooms in particular, students may be challenged by gendered vocal expectations and terminology, uniform expectations, and music instrument stereotyping (Abeles, 2009; Palkki, 2020; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018).

Within choral music education there has been a growing body of research on the experiences of transgender students (Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2020; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Rastin, 2016). Traditionally, choirs group singers based on their vocal range which has an assumed gender identity and gender expression connected with it. For example, soprano singers have the highest vocal range and therefore it is expected that women and girls with normative and recognizably feminine gender expressions will be the only ones in this section, and on the opposite end, tenors and basses have the lowest vocal range which is expected to be possessed by men and boys, presenting in a recognizably masculine way (Palkki, 2020; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Rastin, 2016). It often takes persistence for TGNC musicians to make space for themselves within these hyper-gendered settings. Nichols' (2013) research on the experiences of Rie/Ryan, a gender-fluid high school music student, negotiating and experimenting with their gender identity was one of the first studies of its kind within the field of music education. The study followed Rie/Ryan through multiple coming out experiences, instances of bullying and harassment, and the challenges of finding acceptance and support within music programs across the various schools they attended. Like many other LGBTQ students, music was an important expressive outlet (e.g., Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Rastin, 2016) for Rie/Ryan but the rigid gender practices and expectations imbedded within formal music education in schools created a tension: "Ryan was dedicated to the school's band and choir, but he was not willing to compromise his gender expression. He insisted on singing alto instead of tenor in the choir and chose feminine styled concert clothing" (Nichols, 2013, p. 271). Here, Rie/Ryan addresses the need to be assertive and eventually their music teachers would just "roll with it" (ibid.). However, many LGBTQ students in K-12 music education classes do not feel they are safe or able to disclose their identity to their

music teacher, let alone advocate for themselves and their needs (Garrett & Spano, 2017; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018).

More recently, Joshua Palkki (2020) added to this research by exploring the experiences of transgender women, transgender men, and gender diverse students i.e., —students whose gender identity and/or gender expression go against what is socially expected of them based on their assigned sex. In this context, Palkki’s participant identified as agender, participating in school choirs in the American Midwest. Palkki’s research uncovered that the rigidity in gender expectations within choral spaces may not only be difficult to navigate for transgender singers, but also singers who develop differently than their peers (e.g., students who reach puberty earlier or later in life compared to their peers). One of Palkki’s participants, Sara, discussed how the gendering in choir has also impacted gender-conforming and cisgender students, demonstrating that variety in voices is not specific to transgender individuals: “We have Ben Finney in concert choir who is a small guy who sings alto and we have some alto ladies who can reach very low into the tenor range” (p. 132). However, not all singers are comfortable accepting a non-normative singing role. Jon, a transgender man, expressed how his desire to sing tenor ended up with him having vocal health concerns: “I got [nodes] because when I came out to “pass” in public I pushed my voice really deep, which, you know, obviously caused friction in my vocal folds and now I have nodes” (p. 135). As a transgender man who had not undergone any hormone replacement therapy, he felt his voice was not reflective of his gender identity. For some TGNC people, their voice can be a source of gender affirmation, or not, making their participation in traditional choral settings difficult (Palkki, 2020; Rastin, 2016). Lia, a transgender woman whose voice was “not anywhere near as high” as she wanted, found that her

voice caused her to experience gender dysphoria which at times made participating in choir too difficult, ultimately damaging her relationship with music and singing (Rastin, 2016, p. 29).

These experiences are not only felt by TGNC youth but continue into post-secondary music programs. Loraine Sims (2017) documented the journey of a transgender undergraduate choral student undergoing hormone replacement therapy and the affect this had on his vocal health, flexibility, and range. Sims (2017) was ultimately focused on the educator implications for teaching transgender music students and encouraging music educators of all levels to question their understandings of gender and assumptions about transgender individuals. However, the detailed accounts of this student's experiences of coming out and transitioning during his post-secondary music program exposed the amount of educational and emotional labour transgender students need to give their teachers to help make these spaces more affirming of their gender identities and gender expressions.

This research represents snapshots of the challenges faced by TGNC musicians within choral settings at both the K-12 and post-secondary level. Rigid gender grouping and vocal expectations make this creative, expressive space a challenge for students whose voices fall outside the expected normative ranges, or whose gender identity and/or gender expression do not align with gender expectations of their assigned vocal group (Palkki, 2020; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Rastin, 2016). While research in recent years is demonstrating that music teachers and conductors are starting to make changes and accommodations for TGNC students in choir, what has not changed is the need for TGNC students to be their own advocates, and ultimately, the teachers of their teachers (Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Palkki, 2020; Sims, 2017). My research does not centre itself in the choral realm of musical experiences but does expose the challenges that TGNC musicians face while pursuing an interest in Western music traditions because of the

associated rigid gender binary expectations. These rigid gender binary expectations are threaded through all forms of Western music practice, including instrumental fields like wind band, orchestra, and music teacher education programs; however, there is limited research that speaks to TGNC experiences in these music settings.

### *TGNC Pre-Service Music Teachers*

The following section recounts the experiences of two TGNC teacher candidates in the music classroom, highlighting the continued need for self-advocacy and educational labour in these spaces. Sarah Bartolome (2016) and Jason Silveira (2019) both provide narrative accounts of two transgender music teacher candidates reflecting many of the same themes exposed in the research on TGNC high school students' experiences in choral classrooms, with the additional pressures of trying to either pass or deny their transgender identity while navigating expectations of professionalism within the teaching profession. Melanie, Bartolome's (2016) participant, expressed her concerns with negotiating her identity as a transgender woman early in her transition and teaching career:

“Oh my gosh! I have to go into a public school. This is terrifying.” And so I dressed obviously more masculine. I really stuck with identifying as my legal name and as male until junior year. Anything teaching-wise...I had to get into this mindset of, “I am male,” and “OK, be more masculine and try and remember what that's like.” And so, it was almost as if I had to learn to play a character. So I had the normal questions like, “Are the kids going to like me? Am I going to be an effective teacher?” And then for me it was even more exacerbated: “Are the kids going to realize that I am a ‘gender imposter?’” (p. 36)

Transgender pre-service music teachers encounter unique challenges because of their need to learn and participate in all aspects of music teaching while completing their post-secondary degree. This includes completing classes in singing and instrument playing. Joseph, the student central to Silveira's (2019) research, expresses the frustration and anxiety he experienced while navigating his changing singing voice after beginning HRT and his struggles breathing while wearing a compression binder and needing to play wind instruments like the flute and tuba. Joseph emphasized the need for music educators to be aware of these issues and think about how they are teaching core concepts like breathing in a way that would benefit all students, but especially those who may be experiencing more difficulty because of gender affirming measures:

It's worse because I have a binder<sup>6</sup>, but I don't think I've talked to a single person who has taken class flute and/or class tuba who didn't come out of there like [dizzy]... Just encouraging proper breath where breath should come from...If your student is like really breathing from up here [in their chest] then . . . just stressing the importance of breathing healthily, especially for someone who is wearing a medical compression vest. (p. 439)

Both Melanie and Joseph assumed the role of educator, both in the way they were training to do as music educators, but also about transgender people. They educated their peers and mentor teachers on specific challenges and considerations that were needed for greater and safer transgender inclusion within music education spaces (Bartolome, 2016; Silveira, 2019).

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<sup>6</sup> A chest compression binder (usually referred to as a "binder" within the TGNC community) is a compression vest used by TGNC individuals who have breasts that they would like to compress to give the appearance of a flat chest or more masculine physic. This can be a very affirming practice; however, it does come with physical limitations as wearing a binder is restrictive making the deep breathing necessary for wind instrument playing and singing more physically demanding for the musician.

### *TGNC Musicians and Concert Dress*

In this section I address a common concern found across the literature on TGNC musicians in either choir or instrumental music settings: navigating binary performance dress codes or uniforms. As in the above sections, research on TGNC students' experiences in music is largely located within the choral classroom, creating a gap in the understanding of TGNC experiences in instrumental music (Berman, 2017; Palkki, 2020). One common theme found in the literature across both the choral and instrumental fields (where the latter is available) is needing to disclose a TGNC identity to one's music teachers around performance time so that one can discuss a uniform option that better reflects one's gender expression. An article titled "Creating an LGBTQ Friendly Music Program" published through the National Association for Music Education in 2017 highlighted the experiences of a few TGNC choir and band musicians with the common theme of navigating concert attire being a source of anxiety for these students: "It started with a conversation about concert attire: Marcus felt more comfortable in a tux than a dress" (Berman, 2017, p. 37). Binary gendered expectations for performance attire are regularly discussed by TGNC students as being a barrier they need to negotiate within their music programs; however, this can also pose as a barrier to students whose gender expression and outward esthetic do not conform to a rigid binary dress code. Palkki's (2020) participants discuss how having non-gendered expectations for concert dress isn't as complicated as teachers think and benefit all students: "I subscribe to the binary but even in terms of people who don't . . . well, I haven't met people that couldn't choose between a suit and a dress" (p. 132). Outside of attire, research on gender within instrumental music classrooms seems to be limited to the discussion of instrument choice and gendered instrument stereotypes, which will be the focus of the next section.

## **Gender Stereotyping in Instruments**

This section details the evolution of research over the past 4 decades supporting the persistence of rigid binary gender instrument stereotyping (e.g., Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978; Griswold & Chroback, 1981; Delzell & Lappla, 1992; Sheldon & Price, 2005; Zervoudakes & Tanur, 1994). What is notably absent from this research is the discussion as to how these long-standing stereotypes impact TGNC students, their gender expression, and their gender identity development and affirmation. In choir, one's voice is one's instrument and it often is "how it is", meaning that students don't choose or have as much control over their vocal range and where that places them within a choir (Palkki, 2020, p. 136). While this comes with potential challenges for TGNC singers (as detailed in the above sections), this contrasts with instrumental musicians who can adopt an external instrument for their music-making.

Instrumental music classrooms, like wind band and orchestra, involve an element of choice introducing more external factors to the decision of what instrument a student may play and why (Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978). Pressure from teachers, parents, peers, media, and expectations of what a student should play based on the sex-stereotyping of instruments have been found to be extremely influential in how a student chooses which instrument to play (Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978; Conway, 2000; Delzell & Leppa, 1992; Fortney et al., 1993).

Research (e.g., Abeles & Porter, 1978; Griswold & Chroback, 1981; Delzell & Lappla, 1992) on instrument sex-stereotyping has also shown that, when asked to rank instruments as being either feminine or masculine, students are able to do so quite easily and throughout the years these orderings have remained quite consistent (e.g., Abeles & Porter, 1978; Abeles, 2009). Students rank smaller, higher pitched instruments as 'feminine' (flute, clarinet, violin) and larger,

lower pitched instruments as ‘masculine’ (trumpet, trombone, bass) (Abeles, 2009; Cramer et al., 2002). These stereotypes have been found to exist outside of the music classroom as well, showing the pervasiveness of these associations; they are expected even by individuals who do not participate in music (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Abeles et al., 2014). The following section outlines the progression of research associated with instrument gendering across North America over the past four decades.

Harold Abeles and Susan Porter’s (1978) research provided the foundation for explorations into the gender stereotyping of instruments. Their initial research study was interested in determining whether gender associations for musical instruments existed within the general population. They surveyed adults, asking what instrument would be best suited for their fictitious son or daughter to play based on eight available instruments: flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, drums, violin, and cello. Results showed that there were clearly instruments the general population felt were more appropriate for girls to play (flute, clarinet, violin), and instruments more appropriate for boys to play (trumpet, trombone, drums). Interestingly the cello and saxophone were seen as not sex-specific. Abeles and Porter continued to explore this phenomenon from three different angles. Using these eight instruments (flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, drums, violin, and cello), they asked both music and non-music majors to complete a paired comparison survey indicating which instrument in a pair (e.g., flute versus trumpet) was the most masculine. Based on the results, the researchers were able to create an instrument continuum from most masculine (drums) to least masculine/or most feminine (flute). Next, they explored whether age would affect how instruments were gendered through conducting a survey with students’ kindergarten through fifth grade. These students were asked to indicate which instrument they would most like to play after hearing it and seeing a picture of

it. Results indicated that sex-stereotyping was less evident in younger children but became pronounced as students aged into grade three through five. This prompted Abeles and Porter to add an additional question to their study to determine what factors might be causing this increase in sex-stereotyping as students age. They specifically focused on how students were being introduced to instruments and whether this had an impact on what instruments they believed were acceptable for them to play. Comparing an education tool widely used in schools to teach children about instruments, with gendered musical examples, to a control group which lacked the presence of gender bias and association, Abeles and Porter were able to determine that boys, but not girls, responded differently when introduced to instruments in the different contexts. This ground-breaking 4-part research study concluded that gender associations exist and are consistent across age groups and levels of musical experience. Abeles and Porter also determined that these associations could be lessened if music educators were more careful with how they introduced instruments to their students.

Research in this field continued to build on and update these 1978 findings from Abeles and Porter through the 80s, 90s, and into the early 2000s. The studies of Philip Griswold and Denise Chrobak (1981), and Judith Delzell and David Leppla (1992) have been regularly cited for their extension on Abeles and Porters' (1978) research. Griswold and Chrobak (1981) sought to "explore sex-stereotyping as a function of gender and college major" through surveying both music and non-music undergraduates from a northeastern state university (p. 58). This 1981 research was unique because it asked students to indicate which instrument in a pair was "most masculine" using a more extensive instrument list: seventeen total instruments, which was a jump from the usual eight (flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, drums, violin, and cello) that had been used in prior research. Griswold and Chrobak also included two musical professions:

instrumental conductor and choral conductor. Results from this research mirrored Abeles and Porter's (1978), determining there were still clear differences between instruments viewed by undergraduates as masculine (e.g., trumpet, tuba) and feminine (flute, violin). Additionally, Griswold and Chrobak (1981) found that students perceived the position of instrumental conductor to be masculine and choral conductor to be feminine which began to show how gendered associations and perceptions extended beyond just the instrument into various positions or career paths within music.

A decade later Delzell and Lappla (1992) tested whether these gender associations had lessened due to the impact of music educators' greater awareness of gender discrimination and there being a general push toward gender equity in schools. This research mirrored the paired comparison survey used by Abeles and Porter (1978), enabling Delzell and Lappla to directly compare their results to those 1978 findings. Ultimately, Delzell and Lappla (1992) found that "the magnitude of gender associations [appeared] to have lessened" over the years, but ultimately were still present (p. 100). This determined that awareness and educator attempt to minimize gender associations through showing instruments being played by the opposite sex (i.e., boys playing flutes and girls playing trumpets) could have some impact on lessening students' strict gender-normative instrument selections.

Jason Zervoudakes and Judith Tanur (1994) similarly tried to research instrument gender association changes through the decades by requesting instrumentation information (i.e., a list of all the members in an instrumental ensemble organized by name and instrument) from the 60s, 70s, and 80s (where available) from K-12 and college level bands and orchestras across the United States and coding the names of the individuals in each instrument section as female, male or neutral/unknown. While this was noted by the researchers as a problematic way of coding the

data, it allowed them to survey the largest possible data set. Researchers hypothesised which gender stereotype would be represented by each instrument available in standard wind band and orchestra orchestration based on data collected by the earlier Griswold and Chrobak (1981). Data analysis showed that there were stronger gender associations present in the younger ensembles, as compared with professional collage level groups. In general, Zervoudakes and Tanur (1994) note the general lack of women in higher level instrumental music but acknowledge that there has been an increase in these numbers and the numbers of women playing traditionally male instruments over the three decades of available data.

The latter half of the 90s saw a turn to research which began to acknowledge gender as a social construct and utilized psychological tools like Bem's Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1981; Hoffman & Borders, 2001) and the Children's Sex Role Inventory (Boldizar, 1991), which was specifically adapted to be used with grades three through eight students for testing participants' "psychological sex type" i.e., their understanding and self-identification of being masculine, feminine or androgynous (Green, 1997; Sinsel et al., 1997). Tiffany Sinsel, Wallace Dixon, and Elizabeth Blades-Zeller (1997) found that, as predicted based on the findings of earlier researchers Abeles and Porter (1978) and Delzell and Lappla (1992), "students' most preferred instrument was strongly matched with their psychological sex type" (p. 398). While most of this early research focused on the impact this had on women's and girls' participation in music, Lucy Green (1993, 1997) was amongst the first researchers to acknowledge the harm gender rigidity places on both girls *and* boys.

Inspired by these early studies on the phenomenon of instrument sex-stereotyping, Deborah Sheldon and Harry Price (2005) set out to determine whether these binary gender associations were consistent across the globe or only a trend in the West. Their study collected

name, sex and instrumentation data from wind and percussion ensembles from around the world. Band directors were invited to provide this information, but to collect data from more countries Sheldon and Price also used publicly available information about different bands combining image searches with ensemble instrumentation lists which list names of all the musicians and their instrument. Using images and consulting with name/sex recognition specialists, Sheldon and Price came up with sex designations for these band members where only names and images could be found. Names or faces deemed “not readily identifiable” were disregarded from the study (Sheldon & Price, 2005, p. 45). Their data demonstrated instrument sex-stereotyping which was consistent across all countries and congruent with the findings of earlier researchers (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Griswold & Chrobak, 1981; Delzell & Leppa, 1992; Zervoudakes & Tanur, 1994; Sinsel et al., 1997; Cramer et al., 2002). Their findings yielded expected results (flutes, clarinet, oboes are played by females and trumpet, low brass and percussion are played by males) in addition to noting instruments which appeared to be in the middle, with relatively equal numbers of the females and males performing on saxophone, French horn, and bassoon. Their approach to include countries outside of the USA and England demonstrated that these binary gender trends span not only through time but also place and culture. However, their assumptions of sex/gender identity based on first names and the intentional exclusion of ambiguous individuals (e.g., Pat or Chris, which are names that were considered possible for men or women) continued to perpetuate rigid cisnormative expectations of gender identity and gender expression.

Research in 2000s continued to report the presence of rigid gendered associations but began to consider the impact these associations had on all students and, in particular, students who transgress expectations by choosing an instrument that goes against their gender expectations (Abeles et al., 2014; Conway, 2000; Cooper & Burns, 2021; Cramer et al., 2002;

Sinsabaugh, 2005; Taylor, 2009). In her paper “Gender and Music Instrument Choice”, Colleen Conway (2000) highlights some of the many comments faced by students who choose to pick an instrument that goes against gender expectations: “I’ve felt the gender thing on clarinet” (male clarinet player), “...as I’ve gotten better people have made a bigger and bigger deal about me being female” (female tuba player) (p. 9). While both boys and girls playing transgressive instruments may experience some level of bullying and harassment, Kenneth Cramer, Erin Million, and Lynn Perreault’s (2002) findings showed that boys/men playing feminine instruments were judged more harshly than girls/women playing masculine instruments. This highlighted a shift from earlier research (Zervoudakes & Tanur, 1994) which suggested that women were the most restricted in their participation in music. Katherine Sinsabaugh’s (2005) research confirmed that boys were the most restricted by rigid gender associations, noting particularly the harassment boys who play the flute experience because of the flute’s highly feminine gender association (see also Taylor, 2009).

While this field of research is beginning to do more than simply quantify and determine the existence of binary gender associations in musical instrument selection, and actually consider what these associations might be doing to promote or hinder student participation in instrumental music, it is still firmly rooted in rigid binary gender expectations. These decades of research fail to consider gender identity as a factor in students’ instrument choice, as well as how these long-standing gender associations for instruments are impacting students with diverse gender identities (e.g., who are transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming). Harold Abeles, Mary Hafeli, and Colleen Sears’s (2014) study was one of the first to shed light on identity assumptions that are made about a musician who plays an apparently “wrong instrument” (p. 347). Adolescents in Abeles et al.’s (2014) study speculated and shared narratives about alleged homosexuality or

queerness when confronted with musicians who played an instrument not seen to be permissible based on their perceived gender. Of note was a participant who considered that perhaps a musician's queerness gave them unique permission to play a transgressive instrument:

I would like to point out that the 2 girls who played tuba, the 1 girl that played the drum kit in pep band, and the one guy who played flute, they were all queer. I wonder if our band director used their sexuality as a way of justifying why it was okay for them to stray from gender norms. (p. 359)

This quotation acknowledges the presence of diverse sexual orientation and queerness, but still makes no mention of gender identity. While the impact of identity or the possibility of identity construction through instrumental music participation was not the focus of Abeles et al.'s (2014) research, it did address the existence of gender norms and uncover a level of identity complexity that was absent from previous research in this field. The research of Patrick Cooper and Christopher Burns (2021), while being very similar to much of the early literature (e.g., Abeles & Porter, 1978; Delzell & Lappla, 1992; Sheldon & Price, 2005), did acknowledge the limiting nature of conducting gendered research using "admittedly heteronormative association[s] of boy-male and girl-female" (p. 255).

This extensive literature on the gendered associations of instruments demonstrates the highly gendered nature of Western instrumental music. What has been missing from this research is the experiences of gender-diverse musicians and a view of gender that is complex rather than dichotomous (Rands, 2009). Despite research showing that Western music spaces pose many potential issues for TGNC individuals (e.g., harassment, bullying, dysphoria) due to its rigid binary gender expectations, TGNC individuals continue to participate in these music spaces and even note benefits of their participation for their social/emotional wellbeing (Clayton, 2020;

Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Rastin, 2016). Music can be an important coping mechanism (Rastin, 2016), an expressive tool used to explore one's identity (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018), and musical ensembles provide opportunities for community and relationship building (Clayton, 2020). These benefits seem to outweigh the gender barriers for some TGNC musicians but have the potential to be strengthened to benefit all students in having a positive and affirming experience in Western music.

My research fills a gap present in the literature on the ways gender is negotiated and expressed through participation in instrumental music, both at an individual level and in an ensemble setting, centering the expertise of TGNC musicians as experts on gender and Western instrumental music practices in these spaces. The following chapter addresses queer theory and theories of creativity which have influenced the creation of my "queer creativity" theoretical framework which has been applied across my research.

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework

For my master's research I used a theoretical framework which I have titled "queer creativity" for researching the gendered experiences of TGNC musicians within Western instrumental music. This concept incorporates aspects of both queer theory and theories of creativity. In bringing together queer theory and creativity research, I was able to use a unique lens from which to study gendered experiences in Western instrumental music that acknowledges the simultaneously definable and fluid nature of both gender and creativity within the specific context of formal Western instrumental music practices.

The process of exploring and defining one's gender identity and the act of music-making are creative processes which rely on the understanding of existing boundaries which are known or can be known and defined. Through the lens of queer theory these creative endeavors – both music-making and exploring gender – can be viewed as having no finite end and are capable of being constantly in process. Queer theory also allows for the known or perceived boundaries around these processes to be questioned, disrupted, and expanded, allowing the individual to leverage creativity in the pursuit of affirmation and liberation. I suggest learning and playing an instrument as a unique site for creative explorations of gender identity that would not be accessible outside of this musical context. The following section defines queer theory as it will be adopted in the context of my research, including discussions about the limitations of "queer" and its complex position when utilized in research with transgender communities.

#### Queer Theory

I would like to start this section by acknowledging the assumptions and limitations connected with utilizing the word queer. Historically, queer has been used as an oppressive slur

against those within sexual minority communities, and those deemed to be outside of social norms for gendered behaviour and presentation (Baines et al., 2019; Dilly, 1999; Sullivan, 2003; Wells et al., 2012). In more recent history, the word queer was reclaimed by gender and sexually diverse youth – often white, upper middle class, and non-disabled – distancing a large percentage of ‘queer’ folks from the reclamation of this terminology: those who fall on the working class/working poor, people of color, and disabled end of the spectrum (Dilly, 1999; Johnson, 2001; Sullivan, 2003; Wells et al., 2012). It is important to acknowledge the diversity in queer history and the importance of the people who may not feel included in this ‘catch all term’ as, “even when we seek shelter under [the queer label], we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences” (Johnson, 2001, p. 3). In my work I am guided by DePalma (2013) who articulates queer as the following: “queer (as a verb) is the process of consciously engaging in troubling: transgressing normative categories or associations, recognizing and critiquing the social processes behind what feels natural, or simply refusing to believe in these categories” (p. 1). This definition encourages an active state of queering which encourages disruption of the assumed norm within a specific space, which in this research is Western instrumental music practices.

Queer theory acknowledges the power of the gender binary and the ways this binary has been reinforced, both explicitly and implicitly, through the expectation and adoption of a social, cultural, historic gender ‘norm’ (Butler, 1990; 2004; Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004). The way we move as individuals in the world is defined through a bipolar set of gender norms that set masculine men/boys and feminine women/girls as opposites, and subscription to either side comes with specific permissions and access to spaces, activities, interests, and relationships which are all similarly defined within a rigid binary gender system. While gender is often

conflated with biological characteristics (sex), this lived experience of ‘gender’ is not as easily defined as we have tried to make it through our understanding and use of binary gender norms in all aspects of society (Bornstein, 1995; Butler, 1990; 2004; Wilchins, 2004). For Kate Bornstein (1995) defining gender happens through self-reflection and attempting to answer the following questions: “Who am I?”, “to which gender do I want to belong?”, “how do I need to function/look/act in order for society to perceive me as belonging to a specific gender” (pp. 54-58)? These questions, while open for individual interpretation, keep gender rooted within the social and its contribution to the definitions of our gender.

Gender is a social construct which has been cocreated by our own thoughts and feelings, alongside and influenced by societies’ expectations, social norms, and perception. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler (2004) defines gender as “the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized” but also suggests that the very introduction of gender identities outside of these rigid binaries – those who identify as “gender trouble”, “gender blending” and “transgender” – acknowledges the ways that gender moves beyond this “naturalized binary” (pp. 42-43). Bornstein (1995) reminds us that gender is neither safe, sane, or consensual. For gender to be safe it needs to be void of pressure to pass or hide. “Sane gender is asking questions about gender...opening up about our gender histories and our gender desires”. And finally, a truly consensual experience of gender, according to Bornstein, would mean “respecting each others’ definitions of gender” (p. 55). However, within our current social, cultural, historical space it is a reality and, for some of us, a conscious ongoing negotiation and leveraging of labels, behaviours, and expressions which grant us “membership” and recognition within a gender box. This recognition contributes to a sense of belonging which is craved by all individuals (Bornstein, 1995; Butler, 2004; Sullivan, 2003).

Gender identity is so heavily wrapped up in binaries which assume that one has either a correct, acceptable, or normal gendered existence and experience, or not. Our various identities as complex beings (i.e., sexual identity, racial identity, gender identity, etc.) are attached to social, cultural, historically defined gender norms which place identity on a ‘this or that’ or ‘success/failure’ polarity (Coyote & Spoon, 2014; Halberstam, 2011). This can be particularly evident when considering the experiences of gender that some transgender individuals have. For decades, questioning gender and experiencing a non-normative gender experience was seen to be medical – something capable of being diagnosed and therefore cured so that a person can live a ‘normal’ life (Butler, 2004). While social and medical interventions are, for many, critical for providing bodily comfort and an affirming experience of gender, they also perpetuate a singular idea of opposing gender norms. If you do not identify with your assigned gender, you can switch sides, so to speak, and work to gain access and belonging in the ‘other box’ through various social and medical interventions – this is also known as passing. Kate Bornstein (1995) defines this binary transgender experience of “passing” to be “the act of appearing in the world as a gender to which one does not belong, or as a gender to which one did not formerly belong. Most passing is undertaken in response to the cultural imperative to be one gender or the other” (pp. 162-163). She further articulates the experience of silencing, invisibility, and self-denial which accompany efforts to pass because within this definition, a passing transgender individual denies all past selves and experiences in an effort to keep their transgender identity a secret. Passing, as Bornstein (1995) describes, provides the individual with the “privilege of gender membership” (p. 164), but at what cost? Genderqueers and those who are “transgressively gendered” question the expected norms and step into their own gendered experience, which is neither this or that or

the middle, but rather fluid and questioning of expectations and assumed ‘norms’, acknowledging all aspects of self and identity (Bornstein, 1995; Butler, 2004; Crenshaw, 1991; Wilchins, 2004).

Queer theory allows for an open dialogue around the active disruption of assumed gender norms which, while difficult to define on their own, are used as the basis for defining all aspects of our lives from navigating paperwork to accessing public bathrooms to defining relationships. It allows for a view on the gender binary which says: just because I am not this, does not mean I have to then be that (Bornstein, 1995; Butler, 2004; Wilchins, 2004). Queerness allows space for self-definition and the knowledge that identities are a kaleidoscope of intersecting pieces and experiences which can shift and change over time. This gender-complex (see discussion of Rand, 2009 below) perspective encourages an embracing of all aspects of identity, both past and present, which pushes back against the notion of gender as something we can perform successfully, or not, disrupting and ‘queering’ the gender norm (Bornstein, 1995; DePalma, 2013; Wilchins, 2004). The following addresses queer theory in the context of music and music education.

### ***Queer Theory in Music and Music Education***

While not always explicitly adopting a queer theoretical framework, musicologists have analyzed and questioned the ways Western art music (e.g., choral, instrumental, and dramatic – opera and staged performances) and their traditions have worked to construct and represent gender in specific times and places (McClary, 1991). Opera, which combines vocal traditions and staged dramas with instrumental accompaniment, provides a space for gender and sexuality to be “celebrated, contested, and constrained” (McClary, 1991, p. 37) and has been an interesting site for musicologists and performers to question and explore the queerness within Western art music. In *Queering the Pitch*, Joke Dame (2006) writes a chapter analyzing gender in opera through use

of the castrati<sup>7</sup>. Dame (2006) questions the difference in gender representations of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century opera with modern interpretations of these operas, often noting the erasure of homosexual relationships and/or transgressive expressions of gender in these modern reproductions because of our need to gender and assign a sex to voice in a simplistic and binary way. Musicologists are not the only ones questioning gender expectations in Western art music traditions. Artists, too, have begun to question norms and expectations of gender in their given context. A recent operatic production created and performed by transgender soprano Teiya Kasahara explores their questioning of rigid binary gender expectations in opera productions through queering opera. They combine aspects of different opera traditions (e.g., comedic and dramatic), with a variety of languages and composers, to question and challenge the rigid femininity that has been expected of them as a soprano, as well as the elitist and generally exclusionary nature of Western art music (Kasahara, 2022).

Within educational contexts, queer theory has been employed as a tool to question inherently limiting structures which restrict students' participation in formal educational communities, but also their personal identity exploration and development (e.g., Baines et al., 2019; Linville, 2017; Rosiek et al., 2017). A queer theoretical lens requires a reframing away from individual deficiencies and questions the oppressive structures, practices, assumptions, and expectations that individuals face that may impede their ability to find recognition in an educational space (Linville, 2017; Rosiek et al., 2017). Sue Baines, Jude Pereira, Jennyfer Hatch, and Jane Edwards (2019) suggest that a 'queering of education' should begin the work of disrupting the "binary categories that define social life, and disrupt the differential privileging of

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<sup>7</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica (2013) defines castrato (plural castrati) as a male soprano who has maintained the ability to sing high pitches because of prepubescent castration. Castrati were popular in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century opera because of their unique tone quality and vocal power, and often played both men and women roles in operatic productions.

those who claim normative identities” (p. 5). These ideas have begun to extend into the realms of music learning and education, notably in the field of music therapy to provide youth with a therapeutic space where they can explore their identity and find empowerment through participation in music. Music therapists and music therapy education programs that adopt a queer theory lens (e.g., Bain et al., 2016; Baines et al., 2019; Hogan, 2019) seek to challenge the traditional structures and expectations of therapeutic environments as well as the relationship between therapist and client using the tool of music. However, their use of music in these settings is also queer in its application as therapists often work outside formal music education structures and expectations, allowing clients to tap into the creative, expressive, exploratory nature of music participation, whether this is through improvisation, composition, song writing, guided listening, or instrument playing (Baines et al., 2016; Baines et al., 2019). These intentionally creative, queer musical spaces question and trouble expected gender norms within both society and music, giving TGNC individuals, in particular, a space to explore and express their gender identity (Baines et al., 2019).

### ***Queer Theory’s Trouble with Trans***

Despite queer theory’s openness to troubling expectations and exploring identities and experiences beyond the expected, it can still create its own box by virtue of utilizing the label ‘queer’ (Wells et al., 2012). Scholars (e.g., Airton, 2013) have praised the reclamation of the word queer within queer theory as a “site of indeterminate possibility”; however, when considering the disruption to gender, queer theory can miss out on the vast array of transgender experiences (Johnson, 2001, p. 4). Transgender folks who aim to be “gender passing,” a term used to denote folks who have transitioned from one binary gender to the other such that they are not ‘apparent’ as trans, may not identify with the term queer as they “desire to pass as ‘really

gendered' in the world without trouble" (Johnson, 2001, p. 3). It is important to note, however, that some cis-passing transgender folks do connect their understanding and embodiment of gender with being queer, as their relationships—personally, romantically, sexually—disrupt customary gender expectations (Bornstein, 1995; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Striker, 2004; Wilchins, 2004). These examples show the complexity of individual experiences within the transgender community alone and the limitation of employing a word like 'queer' to represent a whole community of people (Johnson, 2001; Nagoshi et al., 2014). The use of language and labeling is complex and ever evolving, especially within gender and sexual minority communities. Critiques of queer theory note the tension that exists between its "acceptance of identities as unstable" and "its tendency toward 'hailing' queer subjects into a unitary identity" (Wells et al., 2012, p. 114).

In utilizing a queer theory framework for this study with TGNC participants within Western music practices and expectations I am aware of these complexities and tensions and constantly reflected back on my application of queer theory using my own experiences as a transgender queer person, as well as taking a gender-complex (Rand, 2009) and intersectional approach to acknowledge how various forms of oppression/privilege change the way people experience and connect with queerness (Crenshaw, 1991; Rands, 2009; Striker, 2004; Wells et al., 2012; Wilchins, 2004).

Kathleen Rands' (2009) introduction to "gender-complex" education did not shy away from the intricacies within gender and gendered experiences, but rather encouraged educators to "constantly question the ways in which gender is operating and what the consequences are" (pp. 426). This approach acknowledges both the privilege and oppression experienced by individuals based on their gender category (also read as gender identity), gender expression and gender

attribution, with the later calling attention to the ways that gender is read on the body and then assigned a label and corresponding expectations by society. Quoting Pat Califia, Rands (2009) challenges current and future teachers to reflect on their own gender bias and consider what it would be like “to grow up in a society where gender was truly consensual” (pp. 428)? Education under a gender-complex lens asks teachers and students to view gender as fluid, constantly under review and socially constructed. It requires a conscious disruption of the dominant or normative discourse and “troubling” of one’s own understanding of their gender identity to uncover gender equity for all (Rands, 2009). Rands (2009) reminds educators that gender oppression is experienced by all people, not just students or teachers who self-identify as TGNC, and adopting gender complexity in the classroom offers social and educational benefits for everyone.

Through utilizing queer theory in collaboration with creativity and research on the creative individual, I worked to mitigate the limitations and critiques of queer theory’s use within a TGNC participant community. In the following section, I move away from queer theory and outline the various scholars and literature in the field of creativity that are informing my theoretical framework.

## **Creativity**

Creativity and the creative process have been widely researched with applications spanning many disciplines. Researchers (e.g., Amabile, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kaufman & Glaveanu, 2019; Sternberg, 2019) have attempted to define creativity to locate and label its existence in various settings and determine barriers and enablers to its development. In general, creativity has been defined as “something both new and task-appropriate”, with some researchers expanding on this to include characteristics like surprise, aesthetic, and authenticity (Kaufman & Glaveanu, 2019, p. 27). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) has a particularly unique perspective,

defining creativity broadly as the ability to change a domain. A subset of creativity research has been interested in defining the ‘creative person’ through various tests of personality, past creative accomplishments, attitude, and motivation. Jonathan Plucker, Matthew Makel and Meihua Qian (2019) provide an overview of these tests. However, pulling from the conclusions of Gary Davis, Gregory Feist, and James Kaufman (2019), the creative person is defined as being original, risk-taking, artistic, norm-doubting, self-accepting, driven and open to new experiences, just to name a few (p. 50). Defining the underlying structure and process of producing a creative work has been equally complex, with many different approaches developed and adopted by various creativity theorizers and researchers over the years (e.g., see Kaufman & Glaveanu, 2019 and Amabile & Pratt, 2016 for an overview of creativity theories).

Gender-related research in creativity has shown there is a correlation between high levels of creativity exhibited across various creativity tests and a participant’s connection to cross-gender identification. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Jacob Getzels (1973) have claimed that creative people:

will also exhibit more of the characteristics of the opposite sex than is usually considered ‘normal’ by the definition of a given culture. This can be explained in terms of a task requirement for artists to use a full range of cognitive and emotional responses regardless of sex-linked socio-cultural expectations. (p. 102)

While this provides an interesting opening for considering the creative potential of gender construction, and specifically the unique connection this may have for artistic individuals, creativity researchers were employing sex and gender scales to study participants that placed masculinity-femininity on a bi-polar scale (Kemp, 1982). This reinforces the idea of a binary

normal within gender construction and leaves no room for gender fluidity, simply expecting that individuals can fit into one gender box or the other.

A tool popularized throughout this research on gender, music and creativity is Bem's Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) which helped researchers define the feminine, masculine, androgynous or undifferentiated nature of participants. Sandra Bem's (1981) research on sex-role and gender pulls from a culturally-specific understanding of what is masculine and feminine, which maintains a very rigid and dichotomous understanding of these two characteristics. More recently, researchers interested in the creative capacity of gender have pulled away from BSRI, becoming more interested in self-definitions of gender identity. An example of this can be seen in Charles Hollenbeck's (2016) dissertation, *Open Source: Countering the Binary through Self Definition and Creativity*. Hollenbeck explores the construction of gender through the lens of social media messaging and usage, but specifically highlights the interconnectedness of creativity in self-defining gender identity and exploring various gender expressions: "self-presentation, self-definition, and unique ideologies of others [enables] one to question the domain [that] can be defined as creative" (p. 54). Hollenbeck's focus is on the creative potential of gender through the self-definition available to social media users, and through individuals finding communities that openly challenge expected norms and assumptions about gender and identity. This opens the dialogue on gender as an act of creativity or a creative process that can flourish, or be restricted, within various contexts. Participation in music, for example, offers a unique creative outlet that can provide space and inspiration for gender-expansive exploration.

There is an artistic bias connected with creativity that has existed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Romanticism movement that stretched across Europe into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Visual and musical art forms were influenced by nature, fantasy, imagination, horror and madness,

which curated an image of the ‘mad genius’ – artists with internal torment, struggling to find their place in society (Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 1973; Glaveanu, 2018). This artistic bias in creativity has left its mark on creativity research, with definitions of creativity including concepts of novelty and originality which, through the years, have been extended to definitions of creative people as those who are artistic, authentic, spontaneous, and self-expressive (Plucker et al., 2019; Glaveanu, 2018). The phenomenon of the Western instrumental music ensemble creates a unique space which, despite being recognized as artistic, does not allow for the kind of individual self-expression, originality and spontaneity generally associated with creative acts in an artistic context. The traditions within these formal music ensembles pushes musicians into conforming to specific expectations of performance, appearance, and creative behavior, creating boundaries around the creative potential available to musicians (Benedek et al., 2014; Dobson, 2010).

Creativity theories seek to define and structure the process of creativity and/or the creation of a creative work while also recognizing the fluidity and recursive nature of creativity. The processes and theorists that informed my research are Graham Wallas’ (1931) creative process model and Teresa Amabile’s (1988) componential model of creativity. Both models have the capacity to provide an overarching view of the creative processes that are music production and learning, as well as gender identity and gender expression exploration. However, the work of Amabile has the unique capacity to provide a more detailed account of these creative processes, acknowledging internal and external factors that can affect the outcome or trajectory of the process.

The Wallas (1931) model of the creative process looks at works of creativity and theorizes them as developing through four distinct phases: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. During preparation the individual is collecting information and ideas about a

particular topic or medium. For example, a musician might listen to recordings of various pieces of music before choosing which one they wish to play and then collect information around how to locate the score for the piece they have chosen. The incubation phase can vary greatly in length depending on the intended final product, but this is the time the individual spends thinking about the information they have collected and prepared. A musician might acquire the score for the piece that intrigued them but not begin playing it right away; they might look at it and decide perhaps it appears harder than expected or they do not yet have the time to begin learning it. The illumination phase is what kickstarts creativity into motion. The musician is feeling inspired and ready to tackle that new score they had prepped and acquired, which finally moves them into verification where they officially breathe into life this music for the first time. Perhaps verification confirms their suspicions that the score is too hard, which restarts the process all over again; this time, however, preparation would be focused on isolating the specific areas or skills needed to overcome the identified challenges in the piece. Wallas (1931) has provided a very simple four-step process; however, it is easy to see how it quickly turns into something complex and cyclical, never truly finding a definitive end point.

Amabile's (1988) componential model of creativity is another popular model used for describing the creative process. Amabile's (1988) research on creativity acknowledges the impact of both internal and external motivating factors which work to inhibit or promote movement through the creative process and defines three key components for creativity: expertise, creative-thinking skills, and motivation. Expertise, or domain relevant skills, calls upon the individual's skills, knowledge and professional expertise in a specific area which can be used in creative processing and in evaluating the outcome of a creative process. Creative thinking skills include "cognitive style and personality characteristics that are conducive to independence, risk-taking,

and taking new perspectives on problems”; self-discipline and “tolerance for ambiguity” are highlighted as two crucial personality processes (Amabile, 2012 p. 3). In motivation, Amabile (2012) focuses on passion and enjoyment for the creative task, noting that these promote intrinsic motivation which is critical to the creative process. These three components work together to allow an individual to be creative or produce a creative work but are also influenced by an external factor: the surrounding social environment. Social environments which promote high levels of creativity are seen to be collaborative, diversely-skilled and idea-focused. When these four factors are applied to a specific individual or small group task, one can see the formation of the componential model of creativity which acknowledges the impact these components have on the ability to make progress through a five-stage creative process model. These five phases resemble the earlier Wallas (1931) model but introduce an opening stage titled ‘task presentation,’ which acknowledges the presence of an external or internal task source which is activated by the level of internal motivation surrounding the task (Amabile, 1988). The higher the internal motivation, the more likely it is the individual will kickstart the creative process. Amabile (1988) notes that external task sources are the most likely to be presented, but the least likely to gain a high level of internal motivation. Where this model fell short was in its assumption that the creative process would end when the verification phase resulted in either a failure or success outcome. Pulling from advancements in creativity research post 1988, Amabile revised the model, creating the dynamic componential model of creativity.

The dynamic componential model of creativity reflects the dynamic and interconnected relationships within creative processes, as well as the impact of both individual creativity and small-group creativity when creative tasks occur inside of a group setting (for example, this could look like a group of musicians making music together in an ensemble) (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

The continuous feedback loops between all five creative process stages (task presentation, preparation, idea generation, idea validation, outcome assessment) allow for an understanding of creative processes as complex and dynamic, and influenced by not only the expertise of the individual, but also the affect and motivation which can be influenced by both internal and external sources. Amabile and Pratt (2016) noted that progress in creative work that was deemed meaningful by those involved, at either the individual or group level, created a positive experience and contributed to intrinsic motivation which helped individuals (and groups) continue to move through each stage of the creative process.

The final section of this chapter discusses the application and use of both queer theory and creativity research in the design of my research study, and its applications in the data analysis process.

### **Queer Creativity Research Application**

The combination of queer theory and creativity allowed me to maintain a researcher's eye on the creative potential of music-making within Western instrumental music practices as well as within self-definitions of gender identity and experiences of gender, while still actively questioning the assumptions, expectations and dichotomies that exist within the Western instrumental music tradition's understandings of gender, and even creativity. Creativity research is a field with a wide range of interests, applications and conclusions, making it flexible enough to sit within a queer theory framework, and queer theory enables a wider potential of research through accepting diverse, and arguably, creative forms of data collection and analysis (Dilly, 1999; Wells et al., 2012). While I have combined aspects of queer theory and creativity research to formulate this unique "queer creativity" framework to situate and guide my research, each theory informs aspects of my work in its own ways.

Queer theory was used as the primary and overarching lens across my research process, informing the formulation of my research questions, interview questions, data collection methods, and data analysis. A queer theory approach also allowed me as the researcher to take up a complicated position that is both inside and outside of my research (Wells et al., 2012). As a researcher-participant this helped position myself, my experiences and my personal biases as both evident across my research process and valuable knowledge. It also supports the use of data collection methods that “contribute to a community of care and connectedness as an antidote to forces that seek to define and limit individuals and groups” (Wells et al., 2012, p. 123), which was present through my use of a chamber ensemble focus group allowing for all participants to gather as musicians and engage in music-making and community building.

The core value of “troubling” or “queering” that exists in queer theory encourages questioning of current practices, structures, and norms within Western music education and performance. It also acknowledges the existence of diverse identities, respecting an individual’s own experience of gender and the fluid nature of gender identity and gender expression exploration (Bornstein, 1995; DePalma, 2013; Dilly, 1999). Through pulling from the work of Butler (2004) and Bornstein (1995), queer theory allowed me to explore and question the nuances of gender experienced by TGNC musicians within traditional expectations and assumptions of the binary man/masculinity and woman/femininity that exists in Western instrumental music spaces. These scholars also introduced the performative potential of gender which can be explored and celebrated through artistic expressions – as Bornstein (1995) explains through her work in theatre – and through repetitive expressions of gender (Butler, 1990; Sullivan, 2003). These concepts were applied through my chamber ensemble data collection which challenged each musician to engage in musical expressions outside of the norm for their instrument. This

promoted a dissonance in the normal performances of gender for each musician and offered up new experiences with expressing gender through music-making. Throughout my data analysis process, I looked for experiences and moments of queerness expressed or experienced by myself and my participants through our conversations during the interviews and our music-making as an ensemble. With queer theory as a lens, I was able to locate core themes that were common across my participants and the data but maintained participant individuality to not homogenize the experiences of TGNC musicians.

Creativity literature helped guide the formulation of my interview questions, data collection methods, and process of data analysis. The development of my open-ended interview questions kept in mind the process of creativity and the sign posted moments of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification outlined in the Wallas (1931) model which can be traced through the music-making process as well as the process of learning/unlearning about gender. Asking participants to talk about when they started playing their instrument and the kind of ensemble they enjoy making music with often unraveled information about where, when and how each participant learned about instruments and their accompanying gender expectations, and the steps that each participant took to negotiate these expectations across multiple music-making sites in an effort to discover and affirm their gender identity. Acknowledging the particularly complex and dynamic nature of creative processes, as detailed by Amabile and Pratt (2016), each interview also started with asking participants to define themselves. Having this question asked twice provided a snapshot look at how new information and experiences can be taken in by individuals and impact their understanding of their own identity. While the short span of this data collection left most participants in a state of incubation – still processing and reflecting on their experiences with gender as TGNC musicians – one participant was able to articulate a newfound

confidence in their fluid gender expressions and identity as a non-binary musician because of their experience engaging with and being affirmed by other TGNC musicians (see chapter 5 for more). Creative processes, like Amabile's dynamic componential model of creativity, acknowledge the recursive and truly never-ending process of creation – whether in music or in defining ourselves – and the various external and internal factors which influence each individual's ability to move through the process (Amabile, 1988; Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

In following the varied definitions of creativity and creative works, my data collection was partially completed using a creative method of music-making and music elicitation facilitated through participants gathering as an ensemble and making music together. This represented a new and novel approach to data collection and rooting the creative art of music-making within this study (Kaufman & Glaveanu, 2019). The creative processes of Wallas (1931) and Amabile (1988) were also used in initial open coding of my data to begin organizing data and tracing the gender journey of each participant through various gender identities and gender expressions throughout their lifetime as an instrumentalist. This helped illuminate both the overarching gender journey of the individual, as well as highlighted critical moments where a creative process was complete. For example, a complete process which I was able to initially code for was experimenting with gender expression and negotiating a binary performance uniform. Under the Wallas (1931) this could be organized as the following: the experience of gathering information about what might be permissible for a gender affirming performance uniform (preparation), taking time to consider the options and weight the benefits/risks (incubation), having allies to support and encourage an affirming change in uniform (illumination) and finally putting this new uniform in action for a performance and receiving

external and internal feedback – either positive or negative (verification), and then from this feedback, making changes which potentially kick start this process over again.

The selection and use of flexible orchestration quartets, spanning multiple time periods from Baroque era to movie soundtrack melodies, for the all-TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals demonstrated my use “queer creativity” framework through its flexible nature. Having the freedom to arrange pieces in any way we saw fit – often specifically exploring arrangements which troubled expectations for each instrument (i.e., euphonium playing melody while flute plays the bass line) which also encouraged creativity within the ensemble. We were able to ‘queer’ our music-making and disrupt our expectations of how our instrument exists in music-making spaces. We also discovered that this fostered greater conversation and connection between ensemble members which encouraged an openness to problem solving, putting the focus on idea sharing, collaboration, and creating musical experiences, over just demonstrating ‘successful’ performances of any piece of music.

The application of this “queer creativity” framework opened the door to research in the field of gender in Western instrumental music that recognizes gender complexity through engaging TGNC musicians of various gender identities and experiences, allowing for self-definition and removing normative gender expectations. This framework provided new insights to the ways gender is negotiated within the confines of Western instrumental music classrooms, performance expectations and music-making practices.

The following chapter provides details on my study’s methods outlining my process of sampling and participate selection, provide relevant background information about my participants, data collection methods, process of data analysis and concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations of this study.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology

Given the decades of research demonstrating rigid binary gender expectations in instrumental music (e.g., Abeles & Porter, 1978; Cooper & Burns, 2021; Zerkvovs & Tanur, 1994) and the lack of research which acknowledges the presence of TGNC individuals within Western instrumental music spaces, my research explored the diverse experiences of TGNC musicians in an attempt to contribute a gender-complex (Rand, 2009) perspective on musicians' experiences with gender within Western instrumental music. My research brought together TGNC musicians, including myself as researcher-participant and active TGNC musician, in collaborative conversation and music-making guided by a primary research question: how do TGNC musicians negotiate rigid binary gender expectations in formal Western instrumental music? Through the data analysis process, a secondary question emerged: what new possibilities does an all-TGNC ensemble reveal about gender in Western instrumental music? Together these questions illuminated the many ways TGNC musicians negotiate binary gender expectations while participating in formal Western instrumental music practices, and revealed the new possibilities for exploring and experiencing gender in diverse and creative ways through music-making in an all-TGNC ensemble.

My study was carried about using a qualitative and arts-informed approach, employing elements of autoethnography through my positioning as researcher-participant. This approach recognized my experiences as a member within the community I was engaging in research with, and allowed data collection to be situated within the social art of ensemble music-making allowing for deeper explorations into my research questions. Robert Sherman and Rodman Webb (1988) suggest an artistic approach to understanding qualitative research, explaining that

researchers employing qualitative methods look at life as the “real thing”, not a dress rehearsal. Through this perspective, qualitative researchers are interested in “[comprehending] not only the modes of cultural arrangements but ways in which those arrangements are experienced by individuals” (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 4). I drew inspiration from autoethnographic and ethnographic research design –which seeks to “generate insight and understanding” of particular groups, organizations, or culture (Wells et al., 2012)—to centre TGNC musicians, including myself, within the context of Western instrumental music practices, like ensemble rehearsals, performances, group learning environments and independent practice, and explore how my participants and I negotiate the gender expectations of these spaces (Adams & Jones, 2008; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018; Sherman & Webb, 1988). My data collection consisted of individual interviews, focus group sessions and reflective field notes, which I analyzed to explore what I and my participants have learned about gendered expectations while participating in traditional Western instrumental music practices, and how we have negotiated these expectations while coming into our own understandings of our gender identities as TGNC individuals and musicians.

This chapter details my process of sampling and participant recruitment, provides details about each participant and an explanation of my three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, ensemble focus group and personal journaling. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how my personal experiences were leveraged as part of my data analysis and the ethical considerations for this study.

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

Research on creative individuals (e.g., Benedek et al., 2014; Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 1973; Kemp, 1982) acknowledges the presence of “sex identity ambivalence”, with musicians, in

particular, being seen to need to be “psychologically androgynous” to be successful because of their ability to embody the positive qualities of masculinity and femininity within the context of music-making (Kemp, 1982, pp. 53-54). This locates TGNC musicians as uniquely knowledgeable about gender and how it operates in their own life and in society, or in this case, in Western instrumental music spaces and valuable participants for this research. Participants (N=4) were self-identified transgender and/or gender non-conforming (TGNC) musicians who have completed or are currently in the process of completing a post-secondary degree in music on a wind or brass instrument and are currently residing in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The degree criteria allowed the assumption of extensive knowledge and experience with gender expectations in Western instrumental music practices. The nature of how one comes to being accepted into and subsequently completing a post-secondary degree in instrumental music ensured that participants would at minimum, but to varying degrees, experience participating in music classes across their K-12 schooling, one-on-one instruction on their instrument and a minimum four years of post-secondary courses in music. Having participated in years of formal music training, these individuals were also well-versed in the specialized structures, rituals and jargon connected to formal Western music participation (Leavy, 2020).

As TGNC musicians, these individuals had years of experience developing their understanding of gender and questioning its binary rigidity which is socially created and reinforced through formal Western music education. There was an assumption, based on my own personal experiences, that they had also experimented with a variety of gender identities and gender expressions throughout their gender journey, giving them valuable diverse gendered experiences (Freiwald, 2001).

Participants were recruited through personal networks via purposeful and snowball sampling which allowed me to utilize my personal relationships within the instrumental music community in Winnipeg to locate participants who met the selection criteria. It also relied on the relationships between participants to collaborate in recommending potential participants who may not be known to me personally but are known to other participants (Patton, 2014; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2014) seeks to select the most information-rich participants to gain in-depth understanding into the research problem and question. Snowball sampling is a sampling strategy under purposeful sampling which hinges on the ability of information-rich participants to recommend additional potential participants to the researcher who they believe to be equally fitted for the research (Patton, 2014). The musician community within Manitoba, especially when considering Western instrumental musicians, is tight-knit which allowed for recruited participants to suggest other individuals who they believe might be interested and well-suited for this research allowing me access to a wider recruitment field. These sampling strategies allowed me to utilize my prior relationships cultivated through a decade of experience as a practicing TGNC musician and music educator in Winnipeg, Manitoba to carefully select participants who I know to be TGNC and have the necessary expertise in Western instrumental music to be considered information-rich ‘cases’ for this research.

Initial recruitment began in late November 2022, with emails sent out to TGNC musicians with whom I have a personal relationship with through my past and present experiences performing in various ensembles in Manitoba. Two participants were recruited during this initial phase (see below for details about participants Bassoon and Clarinet); however, to gain more diverse experiences I expanded my search by connecting with two local music directors with

whom I have professional relationships and utilized them as intermediaries to disseminate a call for participants to a wider audience of musicians. The call for participants required interested musicians to reach out to me directly by email if interested in participating (see Appendices B and C for the official call for participation sent to prospective participants by the intermediaries via email and the accompanying letter detailing requirements for participation). This phase of recruitment resulted in the addition of my third participant (see below for details about participant Euphonium). My final participant was recruited through snowball sampling, relying on already-recruited participants' own relationships within the small community of TGNC instrumental musicians in Winnipeg. During my first interview with Clarinet, he noted having a peer from university who would be perfect for this study and offered to reach out. As a result, my fourth and final participant (see below for details about participant French Horn) connected with me in late December 2022, excited to be included in my study.

My recruitment through purposeful and snowball sampling resulted in my ideal number of participants for this qualitative research study, which was four plus myself acting as researcher-participant (Patton, 2014; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Unfortunately, after completing their first interview, my initial participant, Bassoon, had to withdraw from my study for personal reasons unrelated to the study itself. As per their consent given through a signed Letter of Information and Consent before beginning data collection (see Appendix D for LOIC) the data collected from their interview was kept and analyzed alongside the other three participants' data. This was beneficial because of their unique perspectives as the only participant who had completed music education both outside and inside Manitoba. The following section provides a brief introduction to each participant, outlining their necessary biographical information to situate them as valuable participants in this research.

## Participants

At the beginning of each interview, participants were invited to define their gender identity and gender expression. It was important for me to offer this space to them as self-definition is an important part of each person's individuality, and especially so for TGNC individuals who are not always afforded this opportunity. TGNC individuals often experience conflict between their views of themselves and the way they are coded and viewed by the society around them. In the following quotation from my very first interview, Clarinet thanked me and immediately relaxed into the interview after being asked to define himself: "I think that like [asking participants to define themselves] is like the perfect question to start this with when you're interviewing all trans people...because we think about this a lot. We think about this more than anyone else does." This initial interaction confirmed my personal belief that providing these opportunities for my participants to define their identities would encourage them to center themselves within this research and allow for us to engage in deep thinking and reflecting about their gender identity journey. The following are short summaries of the biographical information provided to me by my participants throughout the data collection period of this study.

A proud member of the "rainbow community", **Bassoon** is a queer music educator, musician, education master's student, and self-identified "workaholic". Despite having grown up outside of Manitoba, they were drawn to Winnipeg after experiencing the instrumental music community while attending a local band festival and collaborating with various music educators. Bassoon, who began their musical journey as a flutist, credits their high school band teacher for introducing them to the "nonbinary instrument of the [band]" – the bassoon. As a "queer human" they found space for self-definition, self-discovery, and queer community building through

participating in bassoon learning and performing both in their post-secondary music education and their current roles as a performing bassoonist and music educator.

**Clarinet** defined himself based on his interests, ranging from a D&D loving drag queen to a queer resource and harm reduction worker. An avoider of mainstream identity labels and opting for terms like “man plus” and “just a little guy”, Clarinet has always sought out community who see and celebrate his identity and sees this as an important aspect of affirming his gender identity. Clarinet has not defined himself as a musician for many years after an injury pulled him away from the clarinet at the end of his degree; however, he jumped at the opportunity to participate in this study, finding a new sense of community and identity as a trans musician while participating in our TGNC chamber ensemble.

As **Euphonium** describes, “I’m a musician. My music and like my artistic expression defines a lot of who I am.” As the middle child in their family, Euphonium felt they were always pushing to be “different.” An interest in the tuba – which was the largest instrument in their middle school band – led to them playing trombone, until an instrument rental issue landed the euphonium in their lap which they credit as the most amazing “fluke.” Euphonium is a lover of wind band music, “with all the colors of all the different like timbres and stuff of the instruments, it's just like impeccable and its major composers...like Holst...I consider him like an olden day DJ the way he like just layers folk music.” Opting to wait until the transition from high school to university to come out as a “queer non-binary person” Euphonium has struggled negotiating the expectation of masculinity as a performing low brass player, but learned to appreciate the ways that music-making could be a creative and fluid space to express their full self. Their confidence in their non-binary identity as being truly something unique to them grew through their

participation in this study and engaging in dialogue and music-making with other TGNC musicians.

Star Wars-lover **French Horn** is a binary trans woman constantly looking to weave her love of movies into her music-making. Acting as musical jukebox for her friends, French Horn enjoys playing melodies she's learned from movies and musicals and "aims to...express every part of [herself], including [her] gender, through...the sound of music". French Horn is a Bachelor of Music graduate and considers the French horn to be a "unique enough instrument" to allow her space to be as queer of a musician as she wants. Considering herself one of the first to stir the gender pot in her various ensembles during post-secondary through being "dramatic" and "very queer" even before her transition. French Horn credits her ability to be liked by all and the "almost very gender-neutral" nature of the French horn for giving her space to come into her gender identity as a trans woman.

Developing relationships with participants is vital in qualitative research in fostering a supportive and welcoming environment where participants feel safe to share experiences around potentially sensitive or emotionally charged topics (Delamont, 2012; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). For TGNC individuals, feeling the need to explain their gender identity and related experiences with gender dissonance and affirmation can be exhaustive. These conversations can become enlivened sources of support and joy when shared amongst other TGNC individuals (Vincent, 2018). My position as a researcher-participant allowed me to utilize my insider knowledge from my own transgender experience within Western instrumental music, taking some of the weight off participants when discussing their experiences with gender, as they can be framed less as educating the researcher as outsider and more as sharing and creating of experience and community (Delmont, 2012; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018;

Vincent, 2018). This shared understanding of diverse gendered experiences allowed my participants to provide varied information about how they describe their identities, focusing on individuality and their whole selves over regurgitated explanations of their gender identity. The following section details how my data collection was completed and its timeline of completion within the scope of this study.

### **Data Collection and Quality**

Research data was collected through three methods, allowing for a rich exploration into the unique and diverse gendered experiences of TGNC musicians across various Western instrumental music contexts, as well as the triangulation of my findings across multiple data sets. Triangulation of data sources in qualitative research is not intended to “prove” a consistent result or single perspective on the research question, but rather allows for exploration into both the consistencies and discrepancies that emerge through different data collection methods to provide a deep and complex insight and understanding (Patton, 2014). Triangulation of data was carried out using semi-structured interviews, focus groups and field notes which allowed for a deeper exploration into participant experiences, discovering commonalities as well as exploring differences that arose (Patton, 2014; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

Structuring my data collection as an “interview sandwich” (i.e., first interview, followed by the three focus group rehearsals, closing with the final interview) allowed for an in-depth look into individual experiences because it encouraged participants to spend time, both during formal data collection and on their own, reflecting on their experiences as TGNC instrumental musicians, while highlighting the social aspect of music-making and allowing space for participants to share their thoughts and connect with other TGNC musicians. Pulling data from multiple sites (participants, locations, and times) promotes a queer theory approach to data

collection, recognizing the “connection between the institutional organization(s)<sup>8</sup> connected to education, and the lived experience of the persons in and affected by that organization” (Wells et al., 2012, p. 119).

My experiences as a practicing TGNC musician and music educator were used to create a list of questions to guide the initial participant interviews. Personal journal entries collected throughout my graduate courses and throughout this research study were reflected on prior to beginning interviews and the ensemble focus group sessions and were used to help create guiding questions for participant consideration during the latter. Memo writing and personal reflections on these journal entries were also used to inspire conversation with participants about their gendered experiences related to music learning, participation, and ensemble structures and practices during the ensemble focus group.

The chamber ensemble focus group served as the core site of exploration into the gendered experiences of TGNC musicians, with participant interviews, and personal reflections, journaling, and field notes providing additional detail on these experiences drawing from my personal experiences. Keeping music and Western instrumental music-making practices at the core of data collection was uniquely possible because of the shared musical expertise between my participants and myself. The listening, creating, and performing of music with participants helped to elicit emotions and memories connected with participants’ experiences within Western instrumental music (see Alett, 2010), which encouraged a deeper exploration into these experiences, exposing emotion and memory that would not have been accessible through

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<sup>8</sup> I am defining this as any of the formal music education spaces a musician may encounter throughout their development (e.g., K-12 music classes, post-secondary music courses, and various professional/community ensembles) and the expectations that are held within that organization.

traditional forms of data collection alone (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Leavy, 2020; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Dezell, 2018).

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

Data was collected from participants through two independent semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to gather participants' experiences of how gender expectations were learned, experienced, and negotiated through the lens of each TGNC musician. Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale (2015) quote James Spradly in describing the intention of interviewing:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (p. 124)

This quote highlights the use of interviews as a way for the researcher to, for a moment, step into the world of each participant. Providing them the opportunity to tell their stories and experiences to better understand their perspectives and lived experiences with gender as a musician. The TGNC experience is unique to each individual which is why I wanted to allow each participant time to share their experiences one-on-one in an interview. Participants engaged in two interviews: one prior to the ensemble focus group data collection period, and an exit interview after the data collection period with the ensemble was complete. This allowed participants the time to deeply reflect on their experiences both independently and alongside other TGNC musicians throughout the chamber ensemble focus group. Interview questions were open-ended, allowing space for each interview to take shape based on each participant's experience.

Interviews were conducted over the video conferencing platform Zoom, with three in-person chamber ensemble focus group rehearsals ‘sandwiched’ in between the two interviews, except for my participant Bassoon who was only able to complete the first interview before needing to remove themselves from the study for personal reasons. My interview with Bassoon was conducted in person over dinner at a local bar in downtown Winnipeg, prior to us both heading off to rehearsals. The interview was more conversational in nature because of the informal setting and because of our personal friendship outside of the context of this research study. This interview was recorded using a phone audio recording app and was later transcribed for analysis (Privitera & Ahlgrim-DeLzell, 2018).

For my other participants, the first interviews were conducted after the initial round of recruitment had been completed and three of the four participants had agreed to participate and signed letters of informed consent. The fourth participant, French Horn, was recruited during this first phase of data collection but was still able to consent to and participate in her first interview before the scheduled in-person chamber ensemble focus group rehearsals. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio recorded through the Zoom platform and later transcribed with the assistance of the Zoom-created audio transcription. This first interview built up a greater personal relationship between the participants and me as the researcher, and gathered biographical information about the participant’s identity, their timeline and experiences as an instrumental musician, and their initial reflections and reactions about gender expectations in Western instrumental music.

After the completion of the TGNC chamber ensemble focus group rehearsals each participant, except for Bassoon, scheduled a follow up interview with me. Each interview was, again, completed over Zoom, lasting approximately one hour. The interviews were audio

recorded through the Zoom platform and transcribed with the assistance of the Zoom generated audio transcription. Observations and field notes from the first interview and the chamber ensemble focus group rehearsals were used to help guide questions for the final interview, encouraging personal reflections on the experience of participating in the study (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Participants were given space to consider how participating in the TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals differed from their prior years of experience with ensemble playing, and allowed them to explore the ways their own gender intersects (or not) with the gender expectations in Western instrumental music.

### ***Ensemble Focus Group***

Focus groups are a manageable collection of individuals – defined as ideally between four and eight for maximum participation and communication—who have come together with a common goal of exploring a particular topic of interest, keeping conversation rooted in the social and not solely individual sphere (Delamont, 2012). Unlike interviews, they “promote and facilitate ‘interaction’ between participants” and enable insight and discussions that may not be accessible to a lone interviewer (p. 391). Adopting practices from arts-informed methods in qualitative research (e.g., Cole & Knowles, 2008), my focus group was structured like a small musical ensemble of three participants with the addition of myself as researcher-participant creating a group of four musicians; this is also known as a chamber ensemble or quartet. These chamber ensemble focus group rehearsals were structured to mimic a traditional chamber ensemble rehearsal – a practice that all the participants were familiar with because of their experience as Western instrumental musicians. This consisted of participants arriving at a set location and time, prepared with their instrument, their music – in the cases where participants opted to take music home with them after rehearsal 1 and 2 –, and any other materials they would

need during that time (i.e., pencil, metronome, tuner, instrument-specific supplies like woodwind reeds, etc.). Utilizing this arts-informed method allowed me to “enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative processes” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59), in this context, utilizing the structure and activities of a chamber ensemble as an alternative process or method of collecting data toward an understanding of how TGNC musicians negotiate gender expectations within these kinds of formal Western instrumental music spaces.

Ensemble playing is a significant part of Western instrumental music education and comes with many social and performance practices that reenforce gender stereotypes that exist within Western instrumental music contexts. The structuring of my focus group around the social conventions understood by musicians attending a rehearsal allowed me to invite participants to explore how formal music structures impact TGNC musicians while actively participating in this music-making practice. While formal Western instrumental ensembles are not always gender-affirming for some TGNC musicians due to their highly gendered nature (i.e., gendered uniform expectations and rigid gender stereotypes associated with instruments), Clayton (2020) identified musical ensembles as spaces which, for 2SLGBTQ musicians, can be “seemingly removed from society, [having] the potential to provide a reprieve from heterosexism, cissexism, and sexism; a space that, instead, fosters personal growth, collaboration, and connection” (p. 36). This curated ensemble of exclusively TGNC musicians provided these musicians with, for the first time, an explicitly supportive and inclusive ensemble space: one which broke down the constraints and expectations of traditional ensembles, providing musicians a space where they could be vulnerable, unfiltered, and find community, support, and healing.

The act of making music with others is multifaceted, requiring all participants to engage in critical listening and communicating, in addition to playing their musical part. As stated by

Liora Bresler (2008) in the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, “involvement in music as creators, performers, and listeners requires that we engage in the evanescent aspects of world, cultivating sensibilities that apply to ways of doing as well as ways of becoming” (p. 226). Here, Bresler illustrates the unique capacity of music to bring an understanding of the individual and, in the context of this research, their process of coming into and understanding their gender identity and gender expression through years spent developing their musicianship and engaging in formal music practices. Through music-making together as TGNC musicians, my participants and I were able to continue unpacking and widening our understanding of gender together, continuing this process as “becoming” with a shared understanding that this process is truly never complete (Bresler, 2008).

Bresler (2008) also addresses the concept of “ensemble research” in qualitative research which leans heavily on co-constructing knowledge and the ability of multiple voices to come together “driven by a common goal”, mirroring the practices of musicians working together in a musical ensemble (p. 228). Patricia Leavy (2020) also speaks to this unique capability of music and musicians to allow all “voices [to] speak together without negating one another” (p. 139), which is a critical component in both qualitative research where multiple participants are interacting, as in a focus group or in ensemble music participation. These skills, which musicians are practiced in, equipped us to navigate and allow for diverse perspectives to be expressed throughout the focus group data collection and helped promote critical conversations and in-depth understandings of diverse TGNC musicians’ experiences.

Using the chamber ensemble rehearsal as a setting and structure for my focus group built on the concept of elicitation as a powerful tool in qualitative research. Elicitation refers to the utilizing of objects, images, video or audio, often within qualitative interviews, as a tool to guide

and shape the direction of the conversation between participant(s) and researcher (Grant, 2019). In the case of my study, music created within my focus group rehearsals was used as the object of elicitation. Music listening and creating helps build relationships between researcher and participants, creating an “intense shared experience” (Allett, 2010, p. 6). Being able to utilize my skills as a musician and place myself as an active member within the ensemble helped to further situate myself and my experience within the research. Having myself as the researcher be an active member in the focus group ensemble also worked to create an authentic chamber ensemble music-making environment. Utilizing the act of creating music in an ensemble setting for the purpose of eliciting gendered memories and experiences across past ensemble experiences in comparison to the curated TGNC chamber ensemble as part of this study's data collection would not have been as impactful had myself as the researcher not been able to fully participate in the ensemble as any other participant. Playing music together as a group of all TGNC instrumental musicians elicited insights into gendered experiences which may have been left unspoken through utilizing conventional qualitative interviews alone (Allett, 2010; Grant, 2019).

**Ensemble Focus Group Rehearsals.** Each focus group rehearsal was conducted on a Wednesday evening over three consecutive weeks in January 2023 at a local affirming<sup>9</sup> united church. This space was chosen because it is commonly used as a rehearsal and performance venue for various chamber ensembles in Winnipeg. The venue also fit my selection criteria of being centrally located, and accessible by bus and had free parking available.

“Music is innately social”, even within the confines of a Western instrumental ensemble structure (Leavy, 2020, p. 129). After arriving at the rehearsal venue the musicians and I would

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<sup>9</sup> Affirming churches are defined as churches which publicly state an acceptance and expectation of LGBTQ+ individuals within their congregations. These spaces usually display visual signs of queer inclusion through the raising of the inclusive rainbow pride flag or various other rainbow pride inspired artwork throughout the space.

engage in casual socializing while warming up our instruments and getting settled into our seats. The conversations that occurred during these times ranged from sharing stories from the past week and community resources for various queer and TGNC supports or events, to providing advice and support on personal or professional issues. These conversations were enlivened by having a shared understanding of TGNC-related experiences.

Each rehearsal the TGNC chamber ensemble engaged in music-making using various flexible orchestration quartets which were collected by myself. Flexible orchestration means that each musician was provided with a score of all four parts written in their clef and key, enabling them to play which ever part or line they choose (i.e., each musician was provided with a soprano, alto, tenor, and bass line which they could play). This allowed the TGNC chamber ensemble to curate unique and nonconventional orchestrations for the music played (i.e., having a brass player who might traditionally play a tenor or bass line cover the soprano line, while the flute player performs the bass line when they would traditionally perform soprano lines). This experimentation into the gender exploration and performance possibilities in flexible orchestration, which we later named “auditory drag” (see chapter 5), allowed us space to discover how we connect, or could connect, to our gender identity through our instruments and our music-making. We also discovered that this fostered greater conversation and connection as it encouraged us to ask questions, learn about each other’s instruments, and put the focus on listening, collaboration, and connection, over just creating ‘successful’ performances.

The ensemble focus group also disrupted ensemble norms through our stage set up. Traditionally, ensemble set up and seats would have a commonly known default assignment based on the type of ensemble and the instruments present or the part distribution (i.e., first part/chair, second part/chair, third part/chair, etc.). Based on the instruments present in our

TGNC chamber ensemble the participants were naturally inclined to take seats which placed us in a highest to lowest pitch order (i.e., flute, clarinet, French horn, euphonium), or one that placed woodwind players in the front and brass players in the back when organized in a U-shape formation (i.e., flute, French horn, euphonium, clarinet), but in an effort to actively ‘queer’ this space I encouraged participants to take any seat they wanted (DePalma, 2013). Our initial set up placed myself as the flute player on stage left, opposite to where I would normally find myself, which quickly posed a problem for nonverbal ensemble communication and listening because the direction of my flute was in Euphonium’s sight lines of the other musicians and projecting my sound in a way that hindered Euphonium from hearing the full ensemble. Our final seating plan, which was held for all following rehearsals (following the nature of expectations and routines within Western instrumental music practices like rehearsals), had French Horn, Clarinet, Flute and Euphonium positioned from stage right to left in a U-shaped formation. This allowed all musicians to easily see and hear each other, promoting communication before, after, and during the rehearsal of various pieces. This seating plan placed the high wind players (myself on flute and Clarinet) at the back of the ensemble and the brass players (French Horn and Euphonium) at the front of the ensemble which is contrary to a typical arrangement. This flipped seating plan was a physical shake up of what we would traditionally expect in a chamber ensemble setting and set the precedent within our first few minutes in rehearsal that this space was going to be a different kind of music-making space. It also encouraged an open line of communication of individual musician needs right from the start as we had to move through two seating plans after Euphonium communicated an issue with our original set up.

All three TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals were audio recorded using a phone voice recording application. Each recording started once all musicians were present, capturing some of

the pre-rehearsal socializing, and was turned off when rehearsal was over, and musicians were finishing their instrument clean up. These recordings were transcribed for data analysis and were accompanied by a personal research journal which captured my thoughts, feelings and experiences surrounding this data collection process (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

### ***Personal Journaling***

The third and final data collection method I used was personal journaling. An autoethnographic research design allows the researcher to take a place at the center of the research, helping build a rich narrative around the interconnectedness of culture and self. This is a reflexive process that asks the researcher to make meaning out of experience and work to understand how culture and power have shaped these experiences (Adams & Jones, 2008; Wells et al., 2012). Anne Pezalla, Jonathon Pettigrew and Michelle Miller-Day (2012) describe self-reflexivity as being “necessary to understand ourselves as a part of the process of understanding others” (p. 5). As a transgender flutist and music educator I have a long history of negotiating my gender identity and gender expression across various musical spaces. Applying an autoethnographic approach to my research allowed me to use my own experiences with negotiating gender as data alongside my participants, keeping myself firmly rooted within this research as researcher-participant (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

Personal journaling and field notes were completed after each interview and TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsal as a way for me to capture my personal experiences, initial thoughts, and questions during data collection. During the TGNC chamber ensemble, these entries were also useful for keeping note of non-verbal nuances between participant interactions that would not have been collected via the audio recording. These writings were informal in style and sometimes even structured like short stories, setting the scene and capturing snapshots from the

TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals from my perspective, noting “vibes” and energies that were brought into the space by myself and the participants. These personal journal entries and field notes were analyzed alongside official transcripts during the analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

All seven interviews (four initial and three concluding interviews) and three TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals were audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. Field notes, observations, and personal reflective journal entries were also analyzed. The data analysis took on a few different layers because of the amount of data that was collected. During the first round of analysis, a single interview was selected for an initial open coding. This round of analysis was done by hand and resulted in the emergence of inductive codes like “personal labour” and “navigating dress codes” which were then applied to the remaining interview transcripts to find commonalities as well as differing experiences related to the key ideas. The codes which emerged through this first round of coding did not connect as well as I hoped when I introduced the field notes and transcripts from the ensemble focus group which encouraged me to take a step back and analyze the data in a different way.

In an effort to dig deeper into my data and apply my queer creativity theoretical framework, all data sources were next coded using deductive methods (Creswell, 2013). Deductive coding utilized the Wallas and Amabile models of the creative process as a way to signpost the experiences and moments in the development of each musician’s gender identity and/or explorations of diverse gender expressions. Here I aimed to situate the process of defining an individual’s gender as a creative process. While this level of analysis yielded findings which mirrored the literature on TGNC experiences in music programs and ensembles and gender associations and expectations within instruments (see chapter 2 for full review of this literature) it

failed to acknowledge my primary research question and ultimately, I decided to move in a new direction with my analysis in an attempt to provide a deeper insight into the diverse experiences of gender by each of my participants.

A final round of inductive coding was then employed across all data sources and surfaced more general codes related to gender identity, gender expression, instrument gendering, and affirming and dissonant gender experiences in music. During this phase of data analysis, I used NVivo to help organize data sources and track emerging themes. This process yielded various findings which were ultimately grouped under three primary themes illustrated in the next chapter: rigid binary gender instrument stereotypes and then the ones in the middle, making space and finding community as TGNC musicians, and TGNC identity exploration and affirmation through instrumental music performance.

### ***Leveraging My Experiences During Data Analysis***

Employing an arts-informed approach to my qualitative study in the field of music required myself as the researcher to have specialized training and experience in Western instrumental music in order to utilize music-making to collect and analyse data on the complex entanglements between gender identity and Western instrumental music practices. Music has historically been underutilized in qualitative research, even at the level of arts-informed research because its need for researchers to have specialized knowledge of discipline-specific jargon, practices, and written musical notation (Bresler, 2008; Leavy, 2020). My experience as a trained flutist with a Bachelor in Music Performance and a Bachelor in Education with a specialization in instrumental music education provided me the necessary training and experience to conduct, analyze, and interpret the music-informed experiences in my data sources. This training and

experience were critical to analyzing my data with music-making practices in mind, allowing for the emergence of my findings.

There are many skills shared between musicians and researchers which also equipped me with the necessary skills to conduct this research, as well as position me as uniquely capable of utilizing music as method. Leavy (2020) describes a cyclical process experienced by both musicians and ethnographers involving “creation, reflection, and refinement, using various sources for inspiration” (p. 147). Being practiced in the creative process as a musician assisted my analysis of my data which required me to be constantly in a state of “creation, reflection, and refinement” during this study as a researcher-participant (Leavy, 2020). Bresler (2008) adds to this the importance of having an “enlightened ear” when conducting qualitative interviews, as the act of engaged listening is critical and once again a well-practiced skill for musicians (p. 227). Bresler (2008) also discusses the importance of teamwork in both research and music ensemble participation as there was a level of teamwork and collaboration required between my diverse, but complimentary, skills as an experienced musician, educator, TGNC individual, and researcher utilized during the data collection and analysis phases.

My goal with this research was not to define the ‘transgender experience of gender’ as developed through formal Western instrumental music training, but rather to explore how TGNC musicians negotiate gendered musical spaces and their various gender identities/gender expressions while participating in the rigid gender binary world of Western instrumental music. I recognize this process of becoming an instrumental musician and exploring your gender identity as a journey without end, but rather one with defining moments which I have attempted to capture through this research (Bresler, 2008).

## **Ethical Considerations**

All research needs to be aware of the potential risks or complications involved in conducting the intended research, and the impact potential findings may have on participants or a larger community. This is particularly important when conducting research with participants who are members of a vulnerable, minority or underrepresented community, like those who are TGNC. As a researcher-participant and member of the community I am locating my research within (TGNC musicians), I was aware of potential risks and was able to mitigate these risks in a way that was honest and realistic.

In alliance with the Tri-Council expectations for participant consent, each participant was provided a Letter of Information and Consent (LOIC) which had been approved by the university ethics boards: Education Research Ethics Board (EREB) and Graduate Research Ethics Board (GREB). This letter provided participants with information regarding the purpose of the study, eligibility for participation, and time commitment, and outlined all identified risks and the efforts that would be taken to mitigate these risks.

There were four identified risks outlined in the LOIC with accompanying information as to how I as the researcher would work to mitigate those risks for participants. The first risk addressed the potential for perceived level of power imbalance and authority over participants by myself as the researcher, due to my decade of experience working and performing in Winnipeg at various levels and institutions, which may impact participant responses during individual interviews and/or the group rehearsal participation. Additionally, my position as researcher-participant had the potential to impact overall group power dynamics during the chamber ensemble rehearsal phase of data collection. To mitigate these risks I was explicit in explaining that I would be collecting data on myself as well as my participants, fully situating myself and

my experiences within my research alongside my participants data. During part distribution in our chamber ensemble rehearsals, we intentionally shifted parts each time we chose a new piece which allowed every member of the ensemble the opportunity to take the lead in a piece, dictating tempo and taking the lead on starting and finishing pieces. This allowed for power to shift across the ensemble throughout each rehearsal.

Risk two considered the community orientation and social nature of musicians, the relatively small number of high-level practicing Western music instrumentalists in Winnipeg, and the small number of participants included in this research study (i.e., there will be less than 6 participants), as increasing the risk that participant identities will be recognized by people outside the research, especially those who are members of these communities (i.e., Western instrumental music communities, as well as members of the transgender and/or gender non-conforming communities). This risk was increased due to the participants' interest in potentially being involved in public performance opportunities connected with the research. The publication of their names in supporting documents, performance programs and advertisement materials, as well as conference programs (if performances take place outside of traditional concert settings) will increase the risk that participants may become identifiable. To mitigate these risks of identification, all participants were deidentified during the data transcription and analysis process as much as possible without losing meaning for the purpose of articulating findings. Pseudonyms and generalizing names and places (i.e., "university", "wind ensemble" and "Manitoba") were placed to deidentify participant information. Information regarding participants gender identity and gender expression descriptors and instrument experiences were critical to my research question and not edited which could provide enough information to identify participants, even with the use of a pseudonym, but participants were made aware of this and agreed to the level of

risk during the informed consent process. Because participants expressed interest in performing as an ensemble outside of the scope of this research, all participants were offered the opportunity to provide verbal consent, on a case-by-case basis, to having their names published for any agreed upon public performances as part of the informed consent process. Should participants consent to participating in public performances, they will also be made aware that they are consenting to increased identification as participants in this research.

Participants participated in ensemble rehearsals all together which presented a third risk of other participants disclosing study participants or topics discussed during these rehearsal sessions to individuals outside the study. This risk was mitigated by instructing participants to not take any video or photography during the rehearsals and to maintain the anonymity of research participants by not disclosing specifics of their participation in the research study including details about the topics discussed, the time and location of the group rehearsals, and the names or other identifying information of the other participants involved. As a researcher I do not have full control over what participants choose to disclose to individuals outside of the research, but all participants were made aware of the risk of identification by other participants if they participate in this research.

My research asked participants to recall potentially difficult experiences related to their gender journey which had the risk of creating discomfort for participants. The level of discomfort experienced from their participation was not more than the discomfort TGNC individuals experience in their everyday lives. In the event that participants did require support during or after their participation in this study, they were connected with the following LGBTQ supportive mental health and counselling services in Winnipeg which are available by phone or in person: Klinik Community Health Crisis Line (204-786-8686), Trans Lifeline (877-330-6366), Adult

Mobile Crisis (204-940-1781), and various support groups (i.e., The DEN, the Transfeminine Circle, Transmasculine Manitoba) offered through Rainbow Resource can be found through their website (<https://rainbowresourcecentre.org/events/for/adults>).

Participants were required to acknowledge their consent to participate in the study through electronic signature and verbal confirmation. Participants were provided two different LOICs (one prior to participation and after data collection was completed) due to an ethics amendment. This was due to an increased risk of identification which emerged during data collection because of a collective interest within the TGNC chamber ensemble in contributing to a live performance at a later date; participants accepted this increased risk. This updated LOIC is Appendix D.

This chapter has addressed the details of my research design including information about my participants, data collection methods, data analysis process, and ethical considerations. The following chapter will articulate my research findings, which have been grouped into three primary themes, with evidence in support of each theme from across all of my data sources, including my own personal experiences beyond the scope of the present study.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Findings**

In this chapter I will detail three primary themes which emerged from my data. Within each theme I have outlined two or three subthemes which specifically address a particular topic related to the primary theme. Each theme encompasses my participants' experiences from the data collection and my own personal experiences.

My first theme speaks back to the reviewed literature on rigid binary gender instrument stereotypes which have been historically documented since the early days of research on gender and instruments in the 1970s (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Cooper & Burns, 2021; Delzell & Leppla, 1992). I detail my participants' experiences navigating binary gender instrument stereotypes in the early years of their instrumental music education, and my personal experiences with the flute which has been documented as one of the most highly gendered instruments (Taylor, 2009; Sinsabaugh, 2005). I conclude this theme by providing a look into three instruments which are represented in my research but absent or notably disregarded from prior literature on instrument gender stereotypes because of their lack of strong binary gender associations.

My second theme addresses how my participants and I negotiated binary gender expectations within our ensemble playing and worked to make space for our TGNC gender identities and gender expressions. I detail our prior experiences with performing in formal large ensembles, the benefits we have found in music-making in smaller groups and ensembles, and the perspectives that emerged from participating in our all-TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals.

My final theme highlights our experiences finding gender affirmation through our individual instruments and our music-making, including the unique experience of 'auditory drag' which we were able to engage with during rehearsals.

## **Rigid Binary Gender Instrument Stereotypes and then the Ones in the Middle**

The rigid binary gender stereotyping of instruments within Western instrumental music spaces is a practice dating back to the 1970s (see Abeles & Porter, 1978; Abeles, 2009; Cooper & Burns, 2021) which dictates who is expected to participate in music-making on specific instruments based on their perceived gender identity. Instruments are seemingly grouped into binary masculine and feminine boxes based on characteristics like size, pitch, and role within ensemble music-making, and then assigned as either “boy” instruments or “girl” instruments recreating rigid binary gender expectations for the musician playing each instrument (Abeles, 2009; Cramer et al., 2002; Taylor, 2009). This first theme explores mine and my participants’ common experience of encountering rigid binary gender instrument stereotyping during the early years of our formal instrumental music education, and the role of music educators in reinforcing (or disrupting) this gender rigidity in the music classroom. Next, I will highlight my personal experiences negotiating gender rigidity with the band’s smallest and most gendered instrument (the flute). I will conclude this theme by introducing three instruments from the middle of the band that have been absent from the literature on gender stereotyping of instruments and seem to have been spared the assignment of a binary gender stereotype. In so doing, I share my participants’ experiences with and perspectives on these instruments as TGNC musicians.

### ***Negotiating Gender Binary Instruments as TGNC Musicians***

When talking to people about their memories of junior high or high school band, a topic that often comes up is the connection between gender and instruments. “Flutes are for girls and the tuba is for boys” is a comment I often hear. Whether someone distinctly remembers a peer because they did not follow the gender expectations for their instrument or ends up leaving band because they were not granted access to an instrument they were interested in because of their

gender, the link between gender and instrument access is clear. Throughout my conversations with my participants in both our one-on-one interviews and in the TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals, what emerged as a common experience is the role that music teachers or conductors play in setting the ‘gender tone’ of the ensemble, especially when it comes to instrument selection.

Each of my participants came to playing their current instrument through participating in the band program at their local junior high school. This began with an instrument trial day. These instrument trial days provided an opportunity for each participant to test out a variety of wind and brass instruments before being placed with the instrument that was deemed to be their best fit based on personal wants, ensemble need, and success on the instrument during the trial day. While all my participants had the opportunity to advocate for the instrument they wanted, ultimately the final decision in most cases landed with the music teacher. Each participant recalled experiencing anxiety about potentially being placed on an instrument because of its gendered associations or had to spend time on an instrument they did not want to demonstrate their musical skills before being granted access to an instrument they did want.

Euphonium, during our first TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsal, discussed their feminine gender presentation and sex designation being perceived as a factor hindering them from being able to play a large brass instrument: “I wanted to play tuba originally but then I was too small or something, also I think sexism had played in there when I was in middle school.” They were drawn to brass instruments in part because they wanted to do something that separated them from their older sisters (who were flute and clarinet players), and as a middle child also noted that they “wanted to be different” and were drawn to the big and loud qualities of low brass. Brass instruments, and in particular larger instruments like the tuba, have a history of being categorized

as “boy” instruments, making them harder to access for girls or feminine presenting individuals (see Abeles, 2009; Abeles et al., 2014). However, Euphonium was determined to not let these gender stereotypes restrict them and recalled their instrument trial process during our initial interview: “I got to try flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, however, because I’m so stubborn, and I went in knowing I wanted the biggest instrument... I didn’t try to try. I just was like I’m gonna try and make the worst noises so I can play the trombone.” Here, Euphonium articulates their efforts to push back against the feminine instruments that they might have been encouraged to play because of these instruments’ better alignment with Euphonium’s assumed gender identity as a girl; instruments like the flute and clarinet would have been deemed more appropriate for them but were the furthest thing from what they wanted to play. Knowing that a large factor in the instrument trial process is their success on any given instrument, Euphonium spoke to me about intentionally playing poorly on all the smaller more feminine instruments, while working hard to produce the best sounds possible on the low brass instruments available to them. In a compromise over not being allowed to select the tuba, Euphonium was granted access to the next largest instrument (the trombone) and, after a happy mix up with instrument rentals their second year in band, was able to switch to the euphonium which satisfied their want for a large instrument: “I just wanted bigger.”

Clarinet shared a similar experience during our first interview of intentionally not trying his best on the flute because of its designation as a “girlie” instrument: “I feel like clarinet is like, good because for me like, it wasn’t a girl instrument, and like that was a big reason why I didn’t pick the flute.” Here Clarinet refers to feeling like he was able to “pick” his instrument and have agency in his band program to avoid being streamed toward a “girl instrument.” He was able to

start his musical journey on the instrument of his choice and an instrument he deemed to be more neutrally gendered.

Both Euphonium's and Clarinet's instrument trial experiences highlight student anxiety around music teachers' gendered streaming when it comes to the instrument trial process and the important decision of choosing an instrument. Once a student has been placed on or chosen an instrument it is common in my experience for that to remain the student's instrument for at least the length of the music course, if not the length of the student's time in a band program. Being placed on an instrument that works for the student both socially and skill-wise is important for student engagement and retention in music programs. My participants and I have all witnessed peers leaving these programs because of gender-based bullying or instrument gatekeeping. There are unique examples, which will be addressed next, where students may not immediately be granted access to their instrument of choice. For Bassoon and French Horn, the path to their current instrument was not linear, and was impacted by needing to demonstrate their skill as a musician on a more "gender appropriate" instrument prior to moving to their current instrument.

During our first interview, French Horn recalls her instrument selection process and entering her grade 7 band class confident that the French horn was for her: "I actually always knew that I wanted to play [French] horn". After witnessing Star Wars and being enthralled by the soundtrack, the specific timbre of the French horn stood out to her and she knew that whatever that instrument was, she wanted to play it. Unfortunately, the French horn was not available to her as a new band student, and she was instead guided by her music teacher toward the trumpet. As an outgoing theatre kid the trumpet was an obvious fit for her at the time. The trumpet allowed her to play all the loud, boisterous fanfare lines and be the centre of attention, but as a masculine gender stereotyped instrument (see Abeles, 2009) the trumpet was not going to

be the best fit for her as she continued to explore her queer, and specifically transfeminine, identity. French Horn pushed through her first year in band as a trumpet player and as promised was granted access to the French horn in grade 8 which allowed her space to explore her musician and gender identity as she moved through her high school and post-secondary music education.

Bassoon experienced a similar path in that they were introduced to the bassoon after seeing it played in a performance, which piqued their interest. After spending their junior high years on the flute with every other (female-assigned) girl in their band program – “If you have a penis you’re not playing flute” – Bassoon was introduced to the bassoon. Seeing their high school band teacher playing a bassoon with the pit band at their school musical, they were immediately hooked: “I really wanna play that thing.” Bassoon spoke many times about how their band teacher played a key role in their decision to switch instruments and pursue a post-secondary degree in music: “[S]he was like super role model. I was like: I want to be you, at that time. You know. I was like: You’re my safe human. You’re super inspirational. You’re so awesome with everyone like, just, I was like ‘you’re the coolest’.” In this quotation from our interview, Bassoon expresses how impactful it was for them to have a music teacher in their life who performed on a lesser-known instrument and defied expectations of what it meant to be a professional woman musician. Bassoon describes their music teacher as being the first adult they experienced who felt “safe:” an adult who, from their perspective, was inclusive of all student identities and encouraged queerness in the music classroom through not rigidly upholding binary gender stereotypes.

Each of my participants, despite the various journeys they took while finding or accessing the instrument that ultimately was right for them, was willing to be patient and demonstrate that

they could in fact be successful on the instrument they wanted despite it not being an instrument deemed ‘appropriate’ for them based on their assigned gender. However, this is not always the case for budding musicians. During our first TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsal, French Horn recalled a conversation she had with a co-worker who remembered the strict rigidity in binary gender stereotypes for instruments in her junior high band. French Horn was telling the ensemble a bit about her day prior to rehearsal and brought up a conversation she had with her co-worker about being an instrumentalist. The co-worker recalled not continuing in her own high school band program because she was not permitted to play the drums as these were ‘reserved for boys,’ according to her teacher. This experience, like those highlighted by each of my participants, demonstrates the presence of rigid binary gender expectations across many band programs and notes that they are often enforced, either consciously or subconsciously, through gender-based streaming by music teachers during the instrument selection process.

However, binary gender instrument stereotypes themselves may not always contribute to a negative outcome. After hearing French Horn share this story from her co-worker during our first TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsal, we continued discussing the seemingly unchanged binary gendered stereotypes of specific instruments, especially at the junior high band level. The primary examples that were brought up were that flutes are for girls and percussion, or drums, are for boys. This conversation led Clarinet to share about his partner finding community and masculine gender identity affirmation through being a percussionist and playing drums as a member of their school band:

[M]y partner is 41 and so when they were in high school doing band they were a drummer and that was like really affirming to them even though they didn’t realize they were trans yet because like, we weren’t having those kinds of conversations. So they like got to be a

drummer and got to be like, the lazy fuck around with all the guys [*ensemble laughs*].

And like that was a really affirming experience for them.

This anecdote demonstrates the possibility for gender affirmation using these ingrained binary gender instrument stereotypes, but only when access to the instrument itself is not contingent on the individual demonstrating a recognizable gender identity congruent with the gender stereotype of the instrument. Clarinet's partner was able to have a positive and gender-affirming music education experience because their music teacher did not limit them to only having access to "girl" instruments, which may have been seen as more appropriate for their assigned gender at the time. However, there are certain instruments with strong gender ties that even with access and support can require personal dedication and commitment to push against the ingrained gender stereotypes (see Sinsabaugh, 2005). In the next section I will transition from my participants' experiences and address my own personal experience with arguably the most gendered instrument: the flute.

### ***Flutes are For Type A, Feminine Girls***

I started playing flute in grade 5, a year before my school band program began because my mother wanted to give me a head start and thought the flute was "such a beautiful instrument." I did not agree. I was set on playing clarinet or trumpet, but the agreement was that after a year of lessons I could play whatever I wanted if I truly hated the flute. Turns out I loved it. However, I quickly discovered that the instrument I connected with had an unwritten set of gendered expectations attached to it that I would grapple with for years to follow.

In my experience as a flute player and music educator, it is widely understood that 'flutes are for girls', but not just any girls. There seemed to be the expectation that flute players were particularly feminine girls, delicate, often thought to be highly intelligent and type A. While I

regarded myself as a smart kid and a type A individual, the delicate and normatively pretty side never came easy and wasn't something I was interested in. As an alternative punk kid through my teens, I would try to push the boundaries as a solo flute player, attempting to perform in brightly coloured pants and masculine shoes instead of the expected white blouse, long black skirt and ballet flats or heels.

As I became more serious about my playing, I shifted away from this visual rebellion, attempting to better align myself with the expectations of the high-level musician community I wanted to participate in. This became a more taxing endeavor throughout my post-secondary performance degree as I began exploring my gender identity more and more, shifting between hyper-femininity and experimental masculinity when I was able to. A shift to wearing suits, which was not the approved uniform for women in my orchestras or wind ensembles, opened me up to questioning from peers and a feeling of being out of place in my flute section of all women. While I had experience playing with male flute players throughout my music education and spent a great deal of time listening to and watching professionals, who were often men, there was a prevalence of women in my local flute communities who, together, continued to replicate a singular idea of a flute player. This specific, singular image of who a flute player was or should be became increasingly rigid when completing my performance degree and pursuing high level performance opportunities. The expectation at auditions and solo recitals was to wear ornate floor-length gowns, performing a high femininity. The narrative being circulated around me was that to be successful as a flute player, you needed to be a specific kind of musician, and not only in skill but in appearance and accompanying (feminine) gender expression.

The idea of being TGNC while in Western instrumental spaces was not heard of or represented in any way during my formal music training and especially not in the flute section. In

my initial interview with French Horn, we spoke together about our post-secondary music training and the underlying gender expectations that seem to permeate those spaces:

[A]t the time there was this big narrative where like you can't like you can't have colored hair, you can't have visible piercings or like crazy visible piercings. You can't have tattoos. Like these are all of the stories that I got told when I was in university that made me like really like nervous to be myself because I felt like myself wasn't allowed to be professional in those spaces because I wanted to do the things that were being told were not allowed of me.

In this quote I express my struggle to explore my gender identity and find a home within my body while being faced with narratives that suggest that my expression of queerness is not accepted and will inhibit my professional pursuits in this field. My desire to decorate and dress my body in a way that reflected my gender identity did not align with the expectations of who flute players are or should be to participate in these spaces. My internalization of these messages that who I wanted to be was not accepted began to create a separation between my gender identity and my musician identity as a flute player.

While I enjoyed my music-making and it has remained an important creative outlet, source of income, and important part of my professional career as a music educator, I had to grapple with setting aside my gender identity in favour of a more recognizable flute player identity when participating in music performance spaces. This looked like wearing the expected floor length gowns for my solo recitals and opting to refrain from changing my name and pronouns when interacting in music spaces. It quickly became a dual life where during the day I was acting the flute player and at night I was trying to make space for my evolving queer and trans identity. Upon completing my post-secondary degree in flute performance, I began to

attempt to bring together my TGNC gender identity and my flutist identity but found that this visibility was almost as equally difficult as the hiding I did during my degree. Bassoon and I spoke about the challenges of being “visually queer” in Western instrumental music spaces during our interview conversation: “I [Beck] stick out like a sore thumb and like awkwardly because I’m like, in a section of all women and then I’m younger and then I’m the smallest one in my section and then I’m just like I’m just like aggressively queer.” Here I express my frustration with trying to blend my identity as a flute player with my gender identity as a TGNC individual. The high percentage of women who occupy flute sections in an ensemble, combined with my small stature, and the often-prior relationships with many of the musicians I still perform with, I feel all contribute to the consistent misgendering I experience in these spaces despite my efforts in very recent years to be out as queer and trans. The immediate assumption that as a petite flute player I must be a woman further demonstrates the femininity and lack of TGNC gender identity expectations of flute players.

My comment about feeling “aggressively queer” when amongst other flute players is a comment about my rebellion against the conservative appearance rules that I felt were set in place during my performance degree – no visible tattoos or piercings. After completing my degree, I felt free to explore tattoos and piercings but noticed that these body modifications made me stand out amongst other flute players, at times drawing unwanted attention and questioning about why I would choose to do these things to my body. This often required me to explain and defend my gender expression choices and by extension my, at that time, newly defined TGNC gender identity. Despite these outward changes to my gender expression and the attempts at coming out and educating musicians around me on they/them pronouns, I was often not being recognized as a TGNC flute player and continuing to encounter regular misgendering, especially when engaging

with ensembles or music-making spaces for the first time. Musicians around me were warming up to the idea of a petite, tattooed, masculine-expressing flute player, but returned to the conclusion that despite these visual markers of difference I was still a woman.

During the past decade, as a music educator I have witnessed gender trends in young flute players fluctuating to the point where at one time in my own band program I had a flute section solely composed of young men, and have also encountered a few non-binary flutists participating in music programs at the post-secondary level. However, there remains a societal understanding that “flutes are for girls” which doesn’t imagine a trans masculine nonbinary queer person like me in the ensemble or performing at a high level on the flute. The rigid binary gender stereotypes associated with the flute have remained relatively unchanged on a broad scale (Cooper & Burns, 2021); however, there is a collection of instruments in the middle of the band that have not been subject to the same gender rigidity (Sheldon & Price, 2005). The following section explores three of these “nonbinary” instruments: bassoon, French horn and euphonium.

### ***Who Are the Non-Binary Instruments in the Band?***

When asked to name various instruments, non-musician members of the public are less likely to say the bassoon, French horn and euphonium. There is an air of mystery around them as well as a unique potential for self-definition by their instrumentalists. My participants described a common experience of their instruments being mistaken for other instruments and the necessary explanations about what their instrument is. Euphonium and Bassoon both described this experience navigating ‘mistaken instrument identity’ during our first interviews together. Euphonium shared a common experience upon telling someone that they play a euphonium: “[t]hey would call it a mini tuba... Usually it’s just a lot of confusion surrounded around what it is.” For Bassoon, the questions and associations are often outlandish because of their

instrument's distinct features. Bassoon describes it as a "long tree of an instrument." However, when inside the case it gets mistaken for just about anything: "there was a man who was like: Is that a violin? And I was like: No sir, It's a bassoon. He was like: what is that?"

Here, Euphonium and Bassoon highlight their common experience of needing to explain what their instrument is and the randomness of when these conversations. For Bassoon they recalled simply walking around with their instrument case and, in this memory, being questioned by a man they encountered at a bar. Euphonium, as a university student, encounters questions as to the focus of their studies and credits their propensity for talking fast and glazing over their words as triggering questions around what this instrument is that they play. While these experiences can feel like prying, they provide each musician with the opportunity to create their own narrative around what these instruments are and who the people are playing them. The lack of general societal knowledge surrounding these instruments has meant that they have avoided being gendered in a binary way, allowing space for each of these participants to create their own gender narrative alongside their instrument.

Unlike rigid binary gendered instruments like the flute and drums described in the above sections, my participants Euphonium, Bassoon and French Horn self-described their instruments as "less gendered", "gender neutral", and even "non-binary." The musical characteristics of these instruments and the placement of them in the middle of large ensembles has almost created a "gender safe place" for these TGNC musicians where they could freely express and explore their identities without pushback stemming from ingrained rigid binary gender stereotypes. French Horn spoke about this phenomenon during our first interview: "[T]here's nothing particularly gendered about you know what a [French] horn player can be like, and so I think, if anything, what it allowed me to do... was sort of, more or less, come into my identity without shaking too

much up.” Here, French Horn highlights the near-invisibility of gender she experienced as a French horn player and how this allows TGNC instrumentalists like herself to move through various gender expressions with less public attention or questioning.

Bassoon described a similar experience participating in various ensembles throughout their post-secondary music degree. They found that, as a bassoonist, they were afforded gender flexibility and not required to perform a recognizable form of femininity, even while identifying as a queer woman at one point during their gender journey. This was different from what they experienced participating in other music-making spaces like vocal ensembles where gender was more pronounced: “bassoon is not so gendered.” This comment connects back to their feelings that being a bassoonist enabled them to, like French Horn, hide from gender expression expectations while participating in performance on the bassoon in a way that they could not in other musical expressive outlets they participated in, specifically in choir settings where they were assigned as a soprano with its accompanying feminine gender expression expectations (see Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). As a bassoonist they never felt pressure to conform to any specific gender standard, which became particularly clear when they realized that despite there being a “women’s” uniform for the wind ensemble they participated in during university, they were never instructed or challenged on what they could or should wear for these performances: “it says skirt in the wind ensemble syllabus but I just never realized. I was like: Ohhh I see. No one’s forced me to do it... I got to wear whatever the hell I wanted.”

Similarly, Euphonium, having experience in various artistic fields like choir and musical theatre, felt that the euphonium allowed them an opportunity to safely explore their non-binary gender identity because of the instrument’s lack of binary gender expectations, its in-built restrictions and, to an extent, its flaws:

I thought... holding the instrument made me feel safer. But it's like there's so much that's out of control about or not out of my control about the makeup of my instrument that it's so much easier to accept and I think that like ties in to like identity for me because, like my singing range is out of my control I but like it's me. But my horn's playing range, that's my horn's fault and I'm okay with that I can accept that because it's, a human-made thing rather than a human.

In this quotation from our final interview together, Euphonium reflects on the space that can be created between their instrument's 'voice' and their own to explore more expressive range than they could access using their vocal range alone. Participating in this research and being able to connect with other TGNC musicians also helped Euphonium learn how to accept and love the flaws that come with making music and by extension existing, exploring, and growing, as a TGNC individual.

Instrument gender stereotyping, in my participants' and my experiences, exists on a spectrum. Some instruments, like the tuba or drums, are perceived as more masculine, where others, like the flute, as more feminine based on the instrument's characteristics and typical use within traditional Western instrumental ensembles (Abeles, 2009; Cramer et al., 2002). However, there are some instruments existing in the middle, like the bassoon, euphonium, and French horn, with the ability to occupy diverse musical spaces and allow for their players to also identify and express gender in diverse and non-conforming ways. These "less gendered" instruments in the middle can provide a unique space for quiet gender exploration and questioning. However, no matter what their instrument is, TGNC instrumental musicians often still need to create space for themselves within ensemble settings. The next theme explores the personal labour TGNC musicians take on while making space for themselves within larger ensembles, coupled with the

support and joy they have discovered while making music in smaller ensembles, highlighting their particularly unique experiences as members of an all-TGNC chamber ensemble.

### **Making Space and Finding Community as a TGNC Musician**

TGNC musicians in instrumental and vocal fields have struggled to navigate the rigid binary gender landscape of Western music, specifically encountering challenges when it comes to participating as a member of an ensemble (Clayton, 2020; Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2020).

However, in conversation with my participants, there emerged a difference between the larger, more formal ensembles and smaller ensembles, with the latter being viewed as often more inclusive of TGNC people and able to provide a positive, and even gender-affirming, music-making experience. This theme explores the personal labour my participants and I have undertaken while attempting to make space for ourselves within our post-secondary music degree programs and participation in large ensembles like wind bands and orchestras, as well as the benefits of small ensembles in allowing a queer approach to music-making. Finally, I illustrate my participants' and my experiences in a uniquely gender-affirming ensemble through the curation of our first ever TGNC chamber ensemble.

### ***Negotiating Gender Rigidity in 'the Band'***

My participants and I expressed that playing in a large ensemble like wind band and orchestra is a powerful and satisfying experience; Euphonium described this as a “hurrah moment” during our initial interview together, or the powerful coming together of instruments and individuals through music-making: “[A]t peaks of pieces it, especially wind [band] with all the colors of all the different, like timbres and stuff of the instruments, it's just like impeccable. And some of those moments I like I feel them so deep and I'm like I absolutely adore this.” Here, Euphonium highlights some of the unique aspects of playing with a larger ensemble containing a

larger variety of instruments, as well as the emotional impact these performance opportunities can have not just on the audience, but on the players themselves. However, for TGNC musicians like Euphonium, there is a level of personal labour required to participate in these powerful musical experiences. Rigid binary expectations for concert dress, the struggle to come out or not, and the consequences of these were primary hurdles which emerged.

As TGNC musicians, navigating professional concert dress while participating in large ensembles is often the first topic of discussion between the musician and their conductor and/or fellow ensemble members. This can be the gateway which pushes TGNC musicians to come out or feel they need to come out to advocate for a change in uniform or feel they have access to a gender-specific uniform that may be different from what has been expected of or previously worn by them (Berman, 2017). Throughout our conversations, my participants and I all described moments where we encountered a boundary between what we were expected to wear and what we felt more comfortable in with regards to concert dress uniforms. For Bassoon and me (as previously discussed), this was a conscious pulling away from the modest feminine presentation of long skirts, blouses, and heels, and moving toward our version of the mandatory tuxedo for men:

Beck: [I had] a funny memory of like when I tried to wear a tux to a [large ensemble] concert. It's like, I don't have a tux...

Bassoon: Uhuh. It's like, what am I going to do, rent one?

Beck: ...I didn't even have like a white plain shirt. I'm pretty sure I wore like a white button up with a pin stripe. Like it was the most ridiculous thing ever and I remember getting made fun of for like trying to like wear this like bizarre like...suited attire and like...

Bassoon: Yeah. I did like this suit jacket and like the pants but like, a kind of straddling both worlds like I'm not going to rent a tux because I don't have money for that.

This back and forth with Bassoon demonstrates an interesting phenomenon that seems to have plagued most of my participants, which I have called the “tuxedo tax.” Whether it is wanting to wear a tuxedo, which was sometimes the case for myself and Bassoon as demonstrated in the above quotation, or navigating one's way out of needing to wear a tuxedo, which was the case for French Horn, the tuxedo has seemed to remain at the heart of discussions around professional concert attire for Western instrumentalists. Rigid binary gendered expectations for concert dress have required us as TGNC musicians to put in the work through questioning our peers, teachers, or conductors, or to take risks in trying out something new and potentially opening ourselves up to gender questioning and ridicule.

In the above excerpt from my interview with Bassoon, I brought up my experience being questioned and “made fun of” when exploring my masculinity through wearing my version of the tuxedo. While I continued to refuse the prescribed “women's” uniform, I did shift away from exploring more overt expressions of masculinity during the final years of my post-secondary music degree because of the questioning that occurred. French Horn similarly encountered a complication when navigating the gendered uniform expectations during her participation in wind ensembles, but highlighted a switch that she witnessed towards “concert blacks” as opposed to the more rigid, typically feminine uniform of black skirt and blouse that Bassoon and I were subjected to:

[I]n the wind ensemble it was actually for women concert blacks, for men tuxedos. Yeah. So there was there was that whole thing. But you know I was like I was even given the option when I was when I was asking about it before I started transitioning. You know I

was asking some people, just in general like ‘hey if this is something I want to consider what would be an option for me?’ And they’re like ‘oh, you know like if you’re not comfortable with the tuxedo thing you could always just do like whatever concert blacks you prefer, and you know talk to, we we can always talk to the conductor make sure that’s okay and everything’.

In this excerpt from my first interview with French Horn, she reiterates these gender binary concert dress expectations, but also highlights the questioning she had to do amongst her peers to determine how she might go about transitioning her uniform away from the tuxedo that was expected of her at that time. She needed to put in the work to not only learn how to make these dress codes work for her, but also take a risk in making these outward changes and having that open her up to others’ questions about her gender identity. From my own experience adjusting the concert uniform, I know that these questions can sometimes be unnecessarily prying and of a personal nature, coupled with teasing and “being made fun of” as I shared in a previous excerpt from my interview with Bassoon.

Navigating binary dress code requirements is one of the public changes that are often made by TGNC musicians within ensemble settings, but this comes to the fore only a handful of times a year (depending on how active an ensemble is with their performance schedule). The decision whether to come out, whether it is safe to do so, who needs to know, and how being out as TGNC may impact a musician’s fit within an ensemble are all regularly occurring issues that TGNC musicians need to grapple with. The gender climate of an ensemble can vary depending on who is present, which is something my participants and I have all experienced across the multitude of ensembles we have participated in over the years. However, there appeared to be a commonality across our experiences in Manitoba, particularly, that presented us with ensemble

spaces with limited (or sometimes no) other TGNC musicians, as well as the overarching feeling that TGNC people may not be respected there. The seemingly close ties between the Christian religion and Western instrumental music in Manitoba are cemented through the consistent use of church spaces for rehearsals and performances, and the large number of Mennonites in faculties of music and various community ensembles. Euphonium and I discussed this high percentage of specifically Mennonite musicians during our interview together: “It’s honestly very interesting because like the majority, honestly like a good 50% plus in the faculty I would say, especially on the singer side, are Mennonite, specifically. It’s kind of a running joke that a lot of everybody was like is Mennonite in the faculty.” Here Euphonium highlights their awareness of a dominant Christian religious perspective in their faculty of music through there being a “running joke” about the high number of Mennonite musicians present. While they also explain to me that these individuals are found more in the vocal communities, it does create a gender climate within the faculty that does not appear to be welcoming to or expecting of TGNC identities. During our one-on-one interview, Clarinet described the gender climate of his post-secondary music degree in Manitoba as one that was not supportive of his, at the time, non-binary gender identity:

I came out as non-binary to the people around me when I was... I want to say it was like 2015, so I would have been 20. But I came out very personally first and like, didn’t say anything for a while, and then eventually I came out kind of like, on Facebook and to friends and stuff like that and I think most of the students knew but like none of the [faculty of music] profs did, and that was by design. Like I didn’t really want everybody to know. Because I was concerned. Like I didn’t want, people to treat me differently or anything and there were some educators, or like some people I interacted with that I was worried about and others that I wasn’t. Because like a lot of religious people wind their

way into classical music especially [in Manitoba]. And, like, being someone who used to be very, very religious and is not anymore, it was always kind of like: I know what you think, even if you're not saying it out loud and... as an anxious queer person like that just wasn't the environment I wanted to be around.

In this quotation Clarinet highlights the undertone of Christian religious values that are felt to exist within many formal Western instrumental music-making spaces in Manitoba and how this creates a feeling of anxiety around topics like gender identity, which can make coming out difficult for TGNC musicians in these spaces. Bassoon and I shared an experience of trying to navigate a feeling of "TGNC identities are not welcome here" while performing in various ensembles across Manitoba.

My participants and I have each wrestled with the cost of coming out at one time or another. The act of coming out is not as black and white as it sounds for TGNC musicians, as we often jump between many different ensembles and encounter new musicians and conductors all the time. This makes the coming out process seem almost never ending. As Clarinet articulated in the passage above, sometimes there are peers who make you feel comfortable and coming out is easy, but there might be mentors and conductors and other members of ensembles with whom one has less of a relationship who make coming out feel taxing, especially when one does not know what the response will be. Bassoon and I discussed our shared experience of trying to use a chosen name instead of a legal name during the early days of our gender transitions while participating in various ensemble spaces and the resistance that we experienced from our fellow ensemble members:

I know that names and like in [ensembles] is an issue for you too, like: Hey my name is [Bassoon] now, please don't use [my legal name]. And it's not a thing that people

necessarily do. But it's interesting though because I've only been back to [my hometown] like a couple of times since Covid but everyone there uses my [chosen] name.

In this quotation Bassoon highlights the unique challenge of being a TGNC musician in Manitoba as compared to their home province, where making simple gender-affirming changes like using a different name were more quickly and easily adopted within their musical communities. Bassoon and I continued to discuss this difference, once again citing our thoughts around the entanglement of religion and Western instrumental music in Manitoba specifically:

Bassoon: I play in [a community ensemble] and I've just been like reflecting on my experiences and playing in this [ensemble] and oh my god. Like we pay for [all these different ensembles], and like it's money... And so I was thinking about it and I'm like: I'm playing this instrument because I love to make music, I love the conductor, but it's a stretch to make it there [during the weekday evenings]. It's not easy. Because I'm so exhausted, I'm so bagged, but I'm going to keep doing it but then come the emails to pay [the ensemble] to be there as a community member and I recently came to the decision that I will not be financially supporting any religious organizations. Any. So. Have I had that conversation with the conductor yet? No. [laugh] Is that a really awkward one? Yes. But could I cite the moments where I've just gotten weird dirty looks from humans. When I've gotten the cold shoulder from people. When I have gotten like: Hi I'm here I'm going to have a casual conversation with you, but no no.

Beck: No and it's funny that you say that too because I so I subbed in for them for like one day and like yeah I was only there for you know 30 minutes, I was only playing one piece, but like nobody talked to me...until after I played and then they were like: Oh your piccolo playing is really nice.

This back and forth between Bassoon and me brings together a specific experience with this feeling of a religious undercurrent in Western instrumental music-making in Manitoba, along with the feeling that “TGNC is not welcome here”, unless you can prove your skill level as being high enough to be accepted on the basis of your musical identity alone. Bassoon highlighted their love of their instrument and the importance in playing with ensembles, but also the extra challenge that is added when these spaces are asking for payment, and payment which directly supports religious spaces or organizations that may not be inclusive of TGNC individuals.

Overall, Bassoon has noticed an explicit lack of social inclusion and respect from ensemble members since they have been more public about their non-binary identity and requesting that people use they/them pronouns and a new name to refer to them. By contrast, Euphonium, being one of the younger participants in this research, suggested that in some spaces the tune towards TGNC individuals is changing, at least in small ways. During our first interview, Euphonium discussed deciding to make changes to their name and pronouns immediately when starting their post-secondary music degree as well as the ups and downs of occupying space as a TGNC musician:

I'm super fortunate that [my university conductor] is incredible and like, we had a bit of a conversation of it, just like a quick literally a couple of sentences exchanged at the first rehearsal. It was like a pickup your music rehearsal and [they] just came and checked in with me with everything because like it was on my forms. Because, like I didn't understand how it all worked at that point...So that helped me open up but then also brought a little stress with that in a sense. Because if, like I'm talking to my ensemble, other members of the ensemble that they don't know it requires, correcting in them and I'm like: Oh, but did they actually like she/her me, or like, you know?... With like my

[major practical studies] instructor, [they] also knew me prior as like who I like my old name and stuff. So that was, [they were] one of the people that like accidentally in an email, like everybody in my studio is great, but [they were] like: Oh, this is like them. And I was like: Oops. [Major practical studies instructor] I do not use that name anymore, and like a few things like that. Like also [bands outside the province were] a bit iffy on that because of legal name purposes they had to have it. But they published it publicly, twice. And so yeah, [the University conductor] went, like, [they're] like the [parent] of the faculty. [They] went a little bit berserk and responded to emails [trying to get this fixed] really quickly for me.

In this passage Euphonium reiterates a common TGNC experience of needing to constantly come out when meeting with new ensemble members, but highlights the powerful impact their conductor had in helping them do this personal labour.

For Euphonium above, a primary issue when starting up with a new ensemble, especially a university level ensemble, was knowing how to navigate the use and publication of their personal information like their chosen name versus legal name. Ensembles that my participants and I have participated in follow a practice of listing the names of all ensemble members on their performance programs and often on a public website connected with the ensemble. As expressed by Euphonium, this publication of names caused anxiety for them because they were unsure how to navigate the personal data that was collected by various ensembles they participated in and determining when and where they could use a chosen name over a legal name. This lack of clarity on what information was needed and where it would be used or publicly displayed ultimately resulted in their legal name being widely published during their participation in an ensemble. In this situation, they benefited from having a positive relationship with a well-known

conductor and music educator who was able to step in and help support them in getting this published information changed. However, Euphonium still expressed anxiety around participating in new large ensembles and pursuing high level opportunities because of their identity and the possibility of this ‘outing’ happening again. Large ensembles can provide participating musicians with that special musical “hurrah moment;” however, as TGNC musicians these ensemble spaces have been tricky to navigate, sometimes asking us to compromise our identity, comfort, and safety for a musical opportunity.

### ***Small in Size, but Large in Possibility***

My participants and I have all participated in various small ensembles settings from duets to quartets and quintets, and instrument family sectionals, with each size, purpose, and ensemble configuration having its benefits socially and musically. In our experience, the primary benefits of these smaller ensembles or group learning spaces were that they often lacked a conductor or primary leader—this created a more community-oriented environment giving some autonomy back to each individual musician—and their smaller size allowed for greater relationship building and learning opportunities amongst ensemble members. Clarinet describes his experience playing in duets and chamber ensembles during our first interview together:

[P]laying with a pianist is my favorite thing. Like I really just like the vibe of getting locked in with one person and then like doing that thing together... [L]ike clarinet duos are really really fun too. Like even just like those like silly like, beginner duo studies that are just in B flat for 2 instruments like that’s really fun because the clarinet to me is most satisfying when it has something else to work off of. And there’s a type of freedom you have playing where you are the only clarinetist, when you’re the only one playing your line so it’s like, a more intimate kind of collaboration.

In this quotation, Clarinet highlights the special kind of intimacy that can occur when a smaller group of musicians gathers to make music. Duets can be intimate and “really fun” when you and your partner are locked into each other, as Clarinet describes. Euphonium references a similar experience, calling it the “hive mind mentality” when they can communicate with their fellow musicians almost strictly through body language, eye contact and the musical lines they are performing. I think the intellectual and emotional connection required for this kind of “hive mind,” as Euphonium describes it, is only possible through building on the relationship, trust and respect of the musicians performing together in small groups. Having experienced these intimate performances a handful of times myself, I know that the most impactful ones are with musicians who I know well both inside and outside of our music-making. The flexibility and musician-first orientation of small ensembles lends the time and space to create these relationships which can turn into deep and lasting bonds even past the performance life of the ensemble.

In our one-on-one interviews, Bassoon and French Horn introduced instrument family sectionals as a form of small group music-making and learning space that provided them with a supportive musical space as TGNC musicians. In our final interview together, French Horn described the social side of instrument sectionals which became an important tradition during her post-secondary music degree:

[G]oing into university and seeing like: Oh, wow! People are actually like hanging out as their sections and having you know sectionals that they want to do together because there's something they need to work on, or just going to going to...going to that bar on campus for for drinks... Like just as a section then we started doing that, and I'm like: Wow, we like we never just had section hangouts in high school or like voluntary sectionals.

Here, French Horn illustrates the social side to being a musician which, for some instrument sections, becomes part of their weekly rehearsal and practice routine. The value in spending time together not only making music but also getting to know each other on a personal level is made easier by the smaller numbers and the commonality of each person playing the same instrument. However, as these relationships grow, instrument sectionals can become more than just a source of musical support. French Horn was able to build important relationships during these instrument sectional social hangouts which supported her coming out as transgender and helped her discover other TGNC musicians to connect with in the faculty of music.

Bassoon expressed a similarly empowering experience during their post-secondary music degree where, for the first time, they were exposed to individuals who were out and proud members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Their relationships within their studio – a studio is another word often used to describe a group of musicians who play the same instrument and study under the same teacher – extended far beyond the rehearsal halls and helped Bassoon feel safe, supported, and confident to begin exploring their identity for the first time:

I got to university and it was like gay mecca. [*laughs*] I just remember thinking: It would be easier to point out the straights, rather than pointing out everyone in the rainbow community here. And I was like: This is incredible. ... Yeah and also my whole studio was gay so I was like: Ok cool, let's try some things. So that was really rad.... My bassoon studio took me to a strip club for my birthday.

These relationships that were built between instrument section members were important to Bassoon's and other participants' feelings of belonging within large ensemble settings, where it can be more difficult to build meaningful relationships because of the large number of people and rigidity of these music-making environments.

### *The All-TGNC ensemble: We Can Focus on the Music, Finally*

Music-making at its core is a social activity. Musicians of all backgrounds and experiences come together as an ensemble and work towards the common goal of playing music together. For TGNC musicians like my participants and me, the focus on music can regularly be clouded by the personal labour required to negotiate the gendered expectations placed on them and their instruments in these various ensemble spaces. Large ensembles like wind ensembles and orchestras often maintain a high expectation of gender rigidity, however, my participants found that small ensembles and instrument sectionals often offered more freedom. Ultimately each spaces requires TGNC musicians to navigate a general lack of understanding of specifically TGNC experiences, as this is unique even when ensembles host our fellow queer yet cisgender musician peers. In smaller ensembles common experiences like navigating name and pronoun use can often be articulated within the first moments of rehearsal and tend to be spaces which are more conducive to relationship building which can be important for finding supportive allies. The following section addresses the unique discoveries my participants and I had while engaging in our all-TGNC chamber ensemble.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the core of my data collection occurred over the span of three chamber ensemble rehearsals curated by my participants and myself. Each rehearsal took place in the sanctuary of a centrally located affirming united church (which was familiar to us all as a typical rehearsal/performance venue) in Winnipeg on Wednesday evenings. We would gather as musicians in this space and casually socialize about our day to day lives before and after (and sometimes in-between) rehearsing various flexible instrumentation quartets from Mozart classics to arrangements of Over the Rainbow. In this small, TGNC-exclusive ensemble, my participants and I were able to explore the best parts from our ensemble experiences at an even deeper level

by removing the ever-present barrier of needing to explain TGNC-specific experiences. We simply engaged in music-making and socializing as TGNC people: “[L]ots of the smaller ensembles I play with like we’re all...queer but lots of them are still cisgendered and even with that I find there’s a connection, but it was much different when [gender is] like, a major major part of your identity I found.” Here, Euphonium reflects on the uniqueness of the TGNC ensemble in allowing for a different kind of connection between musicians that they felt was not possible when collaborating with cisgender musicians, even those who may identify as queer. Being able to enter a music-making space, knowing that each musician in the room had a personal understanding of TGNC experiences, enabled each of us to leave our identity filters at the door and bring our full selves to the ensemble without needing to field unnecessary, and sometimes very personal, questions about our sex and gender. Clarinet echoes this feeling of there being “layers of explanation” he needed to navigate when playing with other ensembles and trying to exist in professional music spaces:

I think that the things that made...this experience better it was that we were all... there for the same reason and that that reason had to do with being queer and trans and like our identity and stuff like that... [T]here’s a layer of explanation to being trans like that that you have to kind of wade through with cis people where like eventually there comes a point with nearly every cis person that I interact with where I have to in detail explain myself to them, and that’s really tiring... But when you’re in a professional space, first of all a lot of this people are really quick to jump on the: “I’m a good ally train” and so I want to know how trans you are because I want to show you how good of an ally I am - which doesn’t help anybody and is really exhausting. And then the second kind is: Explain yourself to me because I don’t believe that you deserve to be here or I don’t believe that

your...kind of people should be here. And like when I was being stealthy previously there was like this layer of explanation that I couldn't even get to because I was still hiding behind another layer of pretending to be like cis... as much as 2 people can really not ever completely understand one another's experience the fewer layers of communication I have to go through the easier a relationship is to like cultivate for me.

In this reflection from our final interview, Clarinet goes in-depth, explaining the social environment that trans musicians often navigate when engaging with other musicians. The frustration born from needing to explain his transness can make ensembles emotionally exhausting. Having the ability to let go of all that explanation and fear of judgement while playing with our all-TGNC chamber ensemble enabled us to build relationships with each other musicians more quickly and focus on the music-making. This had not been an experience that my participants or I had ever encountered before.

The uniqueness of this music-making space was highlighted during our first rehearsal while deciding which piece of music to play and which parts each person would take:

Beck: Yeah. What parts do people want to play, because we each have all 4 parts?

French Horn: I'll take T.

Beck: Ok.

French Horn: Which is ironic.

Beck: Yeah.

*[ensemble giggles]*

French Horn: I'm so glad that I can make that joke with people here.

In this back and forth between myself and French Horn, she makes a subtle joke nodding at transness and the experience of hormone replacement therapy, which some trans folks seek out,

and the irony of saying she'll take 'T' – referring to testosterone – when as a transgender woman that is not the hormone she would necessarily want to be taking. In trans communities, hormone replacement therapy is a common and well of shared daily experiences. The laughter amongst the ensemble members affirmed that this joke was received and understood. French Horn comments on the rarity of this experience and space we were creating. In another ensemble or music-making space, a transgender woman making a joke like this may have slipped by unnoticed, been misunderstood, or not been well-received. This opening interaction set the tone for our following rehearsals and reinforced that this was a different kind of music-making space than we were used to: one where we could be at ease with each other. Laughter punctuated our rehearsal time, with participants frequently remarking on how they were comfortable and enjoyed sharing space and experiences with each other.

The removal of commonly experienced social barriers (as articulated by Clarinet above) and the ability to simply be ourselves, be TGNC musicians together, helped to curate a music-making environment that was built on mutual respect for each other's identities as well as our skills as musicians. This in turn afforded opportunities for learning and sharing of musical knowledge throughout the rehearsals. Our TGNC chamber ensemble quickly became more than just a space for music-making but also music learning. During each rehearsal, we would share knowledge about our instruments or the music which was made possible because of the more social, musician driven environment of small ensembles (in comparison to the rigid teacher- or conductor-led large ensembles, as previously described):

Clarinet: Sorry I forgot I had to cut off because I was thinking about which fingers I am supposed to put down to tune the G [*ensemble laughs*]

Beck: What fingers are you supposed to put down to tune the G??

Clarinet: It depends on your horn but like because you have if you're playing in the throat tones you have to like ghost your fingers in weird ways to get things to come out properly.

This brief interaction pulled from our first TGNC rehearsal between Clarinet and I is an example of the subtle moments of learning that were naturally interwoven amongst our playing and socializing in rehearsal. Our small size helped facilitate collaborative learning about each other's instruments and the way our musical lines interacted throughout the pieces we rehearsed. We were able to take the time to ask questions and seek a deeper understanding of the nuances of each instrument in the room, as well as each musician. Having a shared understanding of the TGNC experience enabled us to by-pass the introductory explanations often needed when discussing TGNC related experiences and have more conversations regarding our unique perspectives and experiences in the ensemble as both an instrumentalist and a TGNC musician. The musician-driven nature of this chamber ensemble (like many smaller ensembles we have participated in) enabled us to seamlessly make decisions from what pieces we play to sharing ideas for modifying arrangements to collaborating on musical decisions. As TGNC individuals we often feel the need to explain ourselves or educate those around us on our perspectives, experiences and lived realities, in our all-TGNC ensemble we could leave that need to educate and explain at the door and focus more on sharing information and experiences amongst like peers. Sharing a base line understanding for TGNC realities releases the pressure to have to educate, and replaces that with a natural inclination to share ideas and receive new perspectives, experiences and information. This creative environment encouraged a constant flow of musical ideas and information-sharing across all musicians throughout our rehearsals. This learning and sharing of instrument specific skills/challenges as well as collaborating on musical decisions

allowed us to better understand each musician's unique perspective in the ensemble and craft performances that went against the expected. Altogether, being in a small TGNC-exclusive ensemble challenged our musicianship, in addition to affirming our transness.

Our small size and respectful music-making space allowed us to take musical risks through intentionally disrupting musical expectations for our instruments in an ensemble. I intentionally encouraged each musician to take up a musical line or voice that they might not traditionally. For this to be successful it required conversations about ensemble balance and the way our musical lines interact:

French Horn: It almost feels like and, don't take this the wrong way woodwinds, but it doesn't feel like there is as much support there, when it's woodwinds, especially flute and clarinet, taking the bottom lines and horn and euphonium taking the top lines... But like I think the way I sort of feel I feel... less like I am laying like a foundation for upper sounds and more that I'm sort of reeling you guys up, almost.

Euphonium: I agree. 'Cause it's like, especially as brass players we only ever play when there's like, this like solid bass underneath. Like the tuba's usually there or there's usually some other brass or the horns are doing their thing especially for me. And so like when there's not that it's so weird because that never happens in [wind ensembles]. And then I don't play like with woodwinds other than [in wind ensembles] ... It's really weird.

Beck: I'm loving turning things on our heads.

Euphonium: *[laughing]*

French Horn: Heck yeah.

Clarinet: Queering music...

In this excerpt from our second rehearsal together, the brass players bring up the new experience they have been having in our chamber ensemble, specifically with mixing up our arrangements. Encouraging this “queering” of music, as Clarinet stated, forced us to rethink the way our instruments interact as an ensemble and challenged us to perform in ways that may feel contradictory to our trained musical instincts. This quotation highlights probably the most challenging instrumentation, which found us completely flipped with our brass players on the upper two voices and me (on flute) and Clarinet on the lower two voices. The brass players, French Horn and Euphonium, experienced a new musical vulnerability and self-awareness through performing melodic lines without the support of lower, louder instruments backing them up on the accompaniment or bass lines. This lack of a lower voice below them forced them to rethink what it meant to play these upper voice parts. Instead of being able to play out these lines in a full way, French Horn and Euphonium found their power in dialing back the dynamic and thinking about balancing to a different bass: myself on flute and Clarinet. While this unusual instrumentation felt a bit uncomfortable at times, we found that when we did eventually land back into traditional instrumentation the performance felt a bit bland and expected. The piece we landed into traditional instrumentation for was a Classical quartet by Mozart, and in addition to the overarching “flat” experience performing this piece, our rehearsal became focused on technique and the mechanics of the performance rather than on connecting and expressing musical ideas as an ensemble. Details like navigating key signatures, note mistakes, tempo, and written dynamics were the focus while rehearsing this piece rather than balance, phrasing, direction, and breath. While understanding and perfecting the black and white of the musical paper is an important part of Western instrumental music practices, when that is the focus we miss out on the bigger creative experience. The relatively simple act of queering our

instrumentations through playing flexible orchestration music introduced a new musical challenge which was dynamic and engaging, encouraging us to be curious and take risks in our playing together. Having these diverse and creative musical experiences circle around to land back into something that felt traditional and expected had us missing the engagement, collaboration, and creativity within our music-making that we had experienced with our other pieces and arrangements. Overall, our TGNC chamber ensemble allowed us to experience more than just a gender-diverse and affirming music-making space. Our small size allowed for relationship building across all ensemble members – both on a musician level and on a personal level – which allowed us to take time to educate each other on our instruments and have a dialogue about what we were experiencing when we intentionally “queered” our music-making by disrupting musical voicing expectations.

In my third and final theme to follow, I will address our individual experiences with finding gender affirmation through our instruments and music-making, as well as detail our ensemble experience of “auditory drag,” a term which I use to describe the gender identity exploration, affirmation, and empowerment made possible through instrumental music-making as an all-TGNC chamber ensemble.

### **TGNC Identity Exploration and Affirmation through Instrumental Music Performance**

As Western instrumental musicians, my participants and I have found ways to make space for ourselves as TGNC musicians within the rigid gender binary expectations of this art form. In the all-TGNC ensemble, we were able to use our instruments and music-making to express complex emotions that we did not always have the language for, and access new forms of gender affirmation that were not possible through other outlets. When reflecting on the relationship between gender and music, the term “auditory drag” was introduced by French Horn in our final

interview together as a way to describe the performances of gender we explored and experienced together through our intentional deviations from expected instrument roles. Adopting the language of “drag” throughout this section reflects an understanding that gender expectations exist within Western instrumental music, but performing these binary gender expectations can create affirmative experiences when done with and for other TGNC individuals. The performance of gender that we explored through our “auditory drag” was not for an outside cisgender observer but rather for self-exploration and personal reflection on the gender binary expectations within Western instrumental music.

### ***Musical Gender Affirmation: Voice and Genre***

The unique and complex gendered characteristics of our instruments, coupled with the various gendered associations of instrumentation during our music-making enabled my participants and I to access colourful and complex forms of gender identity affirmation. Physical, visual, and auditory markers of gender can be difficult to navigate for some TGNC individuals, with vocal range being a source of dysphoria<sup>10</sup> for some (Bartolome, 2016; Palkki, 2020; Silveira, 2019). French Horn confided in our TGNC chamber ensemble about her efforts to perform a recognizable femininity early on in her transition by raising the pitch of her voice in public spaces; she did this to match the expectation of a higher pitched vocal range for women. These days, however, she has found comfort in expressing her version of femininity in whatever way that looks or sounds like, but also finds joy in music that can connect her back to a kind of auditory femininity:

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<sup>10</sup> Dysphoria is defined by the Oxford English dictionary as a “state of feeling unwell or unhappy”. In this context, gender dysphoria is being referenced where the “feeling of unwell or unhappy” is occurring due to a “persistent dissatisfaction with or distress relating to one’s anatomic sex.”

[M]y favourite... thing to play in general is just, it's Princess Leia's theme from Star Wars because Star Wars is the only reason I play this instrument. But it's like there's a couple reasons behind it one of them is like it's you know a theme for a female character... this is you know a female song... it just goes into [a] range that in my singing voice its always like an octave down...but it's just such a nice...piece that I still find myself singing it sometimes or humming it. But when I get to play it on [French] horn I'm like: Oh yeah, I get to hit the right notes, I get to hit the right range.

Here, French Horn comments on her singing voice being lower than what is scored for in one of her favorite pieces of music, but how she can accurately hit these notes and play in this 'feminine' range when she performs on the French horn. As an ensemble we discussed this special moment as TGNC instrumentalists: where, through our instruments, we access a voice that is not our own but still created by us. Our instruments require our physical bodies and breath to power them and this connection between our instrument and our own physical bodies turn our instruments into an extension of us. They can give us the voice we long for and help us speak the words we either cannot or do not yet have the language for. Our link to the kinds of music we choose to play on our instruments can provide another avenue for gender affirmation as it can allow us to sing feminine melodies, in the case of French Horn, or dive into the deep emotions that we may not have language or outlets to express otherwise.

The romantic era came up in conversation as a period of music with which some of us felt strongly connected. Romantic music is recognized for being highly expressive and emotive, attempting to capture and recreate powerful human emotions through sound. During one of our rehearsal conversations, Clarinet expressed his thoughts on why romanticism specifically might 'work for us' as TGNC individuals:

[S]o much of the music that I loved playing like the romantic [repertoire] that that I did was so punctuated by this like earnest yearning for something bigger and like as trans people we like we start longing before we know what we are longing for, right? It's like, really identifiable.

Here, Clarinet addresses how the romantic music he enjoyed playing as a clarinetist enabled him to access a deep and complex “earnest yearning” that he could not articulate at the time. The lack of text or lyrics and focus on sound and the emotion in the romantic sound resonated with Clarinet; it made romanticism feel “trans.” By performing romantic compositions on his instrument, he was able to feel deep emotions like longing and loss as a young TGNC individual before he even could articulate what he was longing for or losing. For French Horn, romanticism gave her space to perform and find joy even in longing:

I'm very much someone I like to be the centre of attention. I kind of like to be in the spotlight and everything and even when I you know longing for that thing that I don't know which was to be the gender that I am, you know, I was always putting on this big extravagant performance of my assigned gender at birth and everything in this sort of flamboyant way but there was always this sort of element of being big about it and everything and I think that can kind of be reflected too in the way that I approach playing romantic music...

Here French Horn highlights the capacity of romantic music to allow for flamboyant expressions of self. Even prior to coming out as a trans woman, French Horn found joy and gender affirmation in performing queerness and exaggerations of gender. These performances of gender were done not only through her outward gender expression but also performing works of music that called for big emotion, showmanship, and drama.

As trans people, some of us found an acceptable way to explore and express our complex emotions in Romanticism, allowing us to express everything from longing to extravagant expressions of passion, turmoil, and even flamboyant gender. However, romanticism was not the only musical era that we as TGNC musicians resonated with. The classical and baroque eras provided a grounding form of rigidity and precision, while still allowing for individuality, in a way that resonated with Clarinet and me. Perfection and “correctness” were two topics that floated in between the TGNC experience and the Western instrumental musician experience during our many conversations. Clarinet and I specifically noted struggling with a need to be ‘the perfect trans:’ neither too trans or not trans enough, and simply illegible to those around us. Therefore, we both noted a comfort we experienced while playing technique-driven music of the classical era.

While music of this time tended to focus heavily on the technical proficiency of one’s playing, we each used this focus as a distraction from the often complicated and frustrating feelings of not fitting in, and a way to practice expressing our individuality even within this more rigid musical form:

Clarinet: ...it’s so weird to think about like the different musical traditions and how like classical music has in so many ways that seems outwardly so repressive, like I feel like people have this idea that classical music is all old and cisgender white dudes composing and blah blah blah blah blah. But if you take that all away and you watch these musicians and you listen to the music and like just like appreciate the skill, there is something so trans [*laughing*] about like, perfectionism...

Beck: ...there’s a draw to the music that we play... I always go to Mozart... I wanna play it perfectly... There’s a clean way of conceptualizing what a performance of Mozart looks

like and sounds like and that is so satisfying. Because there is no question, there's no question mark, there's no like, there's no bullshit grey zone it's just like: this is what it is and I can do that.

Clarinet: But then with Mozart like if you're playing a concerto there's like all the personality you get to add to it within the perfectionism. Like, every clarinet player does the ornaments on the concerto differently right? So it's what like what's a perfect performance for me and what's a perfect performance for a different clarinetist are like two things are decorated and characterized in such different ways but you can tell that they're perfect still.

In this excerpt from our first chamber ensemble rehearsal, Clarinet and I dissect our shared understanding and enjoyment of performing works by Mozart. While our experience with classical era music centered technical precision, Clarinet reminds me of the space for nuance and personality which is also available in each individual performance thereof. Neither of us felt like we could do gender correctly, often experiencing the muddiness of never feeling legible to the people around us as our true gender. Through these performances, we could achieve the sense of "correctness" that we craved, while also practicing letting our individuality shine through our musical interpretations and crafting of turns, trills, and cadenzas. With Mozart there were no questions, no grey zone, no in-between. We could achieve the satisfaction of correctness and legibility through our expert performances of these well-known pieces of classical repertoire, while also still injecting our own musical voice, offering us safe, defined boundaries with which to be creative within our music-making.

For Euphonium, their perspective was the complete opposite, finding their instrument's versatility and lack of rigidity in the music they connect with to be freeing and affirming of their

fluid queer non-binary identity. In our first interview together, Euphonium spoke with me about the challenges of being the only TGNC musician in their ensembles and the personal labour required of them while navigating the various musical spaces they participate in. However, as they moved through the data collection process, meeting and playing with other TGNC musicians, they began to make connections between their music-making and their gender identity, discovering the hidden queer confidence and gender-affirming power existing within their euphonium playing. During our first TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsal Euphonium brought up the benefits of performing new music as a TGNC musician:

[Being able to use my instrument as an extension of my voice and create a unique to me performance] is why I am drawn to new music... there's so much that hasn't been performed or like no recordings yet so you get to just make it your own and interpret it in any way without the stress of 'oh like this guy did this, like this is the standard.' Because we don't have any standard repertoire and stuff like that.

Here Euphonium is describing the ability to create their own interpretations while learning and performing new music works, because new music compositions often lack professional recordings or standardized performance expectations. Euphonium explained to the TGNC chamber ensemble that because the euphonium is a relatively new instrument (as compared to the flute, for example, which is one of the oldest wind instruments), there are not many pieces written specifically for it and most repertoire is dated post-1990. The lack of documented recordings of these pieces allows for Euphonium to experience a piece of music truly for the first time and let their own interpretations shine. They get to define what a performance of these pieces is like without being heavily influenced by what has been historically expected of the piece. The lack of expectations when working on this kind of repertoire allows them to craft unique performances

that do not need to be defined by anyone's boundaries but their own, just like their gender identity. In a similar way, Euphonium also describes the extreme range and versatility they experience while performing as a euphonium player in wind ensembles:

[M]y instrument is incredibly versatile. I get to do like the fun like in wind [ensemble] scenarios I can do the fun like flourishes with the woodwinds, and do my 10 tuplets or like, also play the dope as baseline and getting to do a little bit of everything is a lot of fun. But also like with my gender identity, it's a little bit of everything [*laughs*]

In this quotation from our final interview Euphonium reflects on the versatility of the euphonium and the joy they find in being able to do “a little bit of everything.” This expression of joy was also demonstrated throughout our TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals where Euphonium would discuss their experiences with gender identity labels and gender expression expectations and their true desire to just be themselves, in whatever form that took on any given day. Their instrumental playing, like their gender identity, is a playground of potential where they get to be the interpreter and performer, experiencing and crafting a voice through performances that are uniquely theirs.

These individual experiences highlight the capacity of Western instrumental music to offer gender affirmation to TGNC musicians. There is room within the physicality of our instruments themselves and the music we play to find, access, and support our gender identities and gender expressions. As French Horn stated during our first rehearsal: “It all depends what flavour of trans you are.” Each TGNC experience is unique and the ways we allow our instruments and music-making to affirm our identities depends on what kind of affirmation we need. Whether physical affirmation through the adoption of our voice by our instruments, or in seeking refuge from a cis-centric world through the music we perform, each of us finds a form of gender affirmation through our instrumental music-making. We discovered that our music-

making could be made uniquely queer and gender-affirming when engaging in these practices with other TGNC musicians.

### *Auditory Drag in the TGNC Chamber Ensemble*

I presented the TGNC chamber ensemble with various quartets that had a key similarity: flexible orchestration. This meant that each of the four parts was written for any instrument and could easily be reorganized in any way we desired. For each piece, participants were invited to select which musical voice they wanted to play, with the intent that each musician could rotate between soprano, alto, tenor, and bass lines during each rehearsal. These musical lines, like our instruments, have a gendered association which allowed us to explore gender through our music-making together. Each musician brought their own experiences with gender, coupled with the gendered expectations of the musical lines we were playing and our instruments, in a way that allowed us to play with gender in a queer, auditory way.

During our final interview together, French Horn summed up our music-making experience as follows:

I couldn't help but think...if music is gender we are performing an extravagant satire of gender by, you know, messing with the expectations of where our instruments should fall and everything, and at the same time we're just having such a blast with it... We are performing the way that we want it... We are performing the ways that are fun to us, and we're good at it, obviously, but it is almost like a satire of you know, conventional approaches to music, and I think that's kind of nifty... It's auditory drag.

Here French Horn refers to our intentional approach to ensemble music-making where we gave each other the opportunity to perform musical lines not traditionally expected for our instrument, especially given the mixed instrumental make-up of our ensemble. We allowed any

instrumentalist to embrace their feminine side with expressive melodic soprano lines or dig into our masculinity through performing supportive bass lines, or even find ourselves somewhere in the middle with our alto and tenor lines.

Clarinet, who participates in drag in his personal life, spoke with me during our interviews about using drag as a way to embrace and exaggerate a part of his gender identity. Through drag he could embody a high femme look as a way to make space for femininity within his transmasculine gender identity, which also provided some necessary separation between his she/her drag persona and his slowly transitioning transmasculine identity. Our conversations about his experiences with drag illuminated a possibility for drag to be used to experiment with gender and allow us space to exaggerate gender, which can help us get closer to understanding our own gender identity. In our auditory drag space, we allowed each other to explore all the options available to us, not limiting ourselves by anything other than the physical/auditory limitations of our instruments themselves. Focusing on our sounds and our relationships with and through the music we were making – rather than on anything visual about our bodies or gender expressions – created an empowering experience of auditory drag.

Personally, there was a moment during our final rehearsal when I was able to occupy a bass line and embrace an auditory masculinity and position within our ensemble in a way that I don't typically get to experience. This illuminated some of my own internalized gender stereotypes. As a flute player I am accustomed to playing the melodic high parts in ensembles. The expectation of femininity in flute playing, because of its high pitch and petite, dainty quality, has been something that I have struggled with as a transmasculine person. In the TGNC chamber ensemble, I had the opportunity to pull out my masculinity in an auditory way by playing bass lines and more so integrating my gender identity with my identity as a flute player. However, my

internalized perspectives about who flute players are and where they sit within an ensemble came out during a rehearsal of Over the Rainbow. At one point during the rehearsal, I articulated to the ensemble that I felt I was “overcompensating for the fact that I’m a flute player” while performing on the bass line. I instinctually abandoned my musical instincts, as a typically expressive musician, to perform an exaggerated masculine bass line big enough to be the supportive bass I thought the musicians above me were expecting.

Upon reflecting on this moment, I realized this was my “short trans guy” moment. My queer and trans friends sometimes joke with me about my need to perform hyper-masculinity in loud ways as an attempt to feel seen; I do whatever I can compensate for my petite stature and others’ feminization even if that means losing myself in the process. As a flutist, I am known for my musicianship and expressive playing. One of the things I love and have always connected with as a flute player was the ability to be expressive and emotional through my playing, but this was immediately lost when adopting this bass line. Subconsciously I felt as if I needed to let that go to perform as big and as loud as I could: to perform masculinity.

The beautiful part about being in the all-TGNC ensemble while having these experiences and revelations was the response from my fellow musicians. After my comment about feeling “obnoxious” and apologizing for my lack of musicianship on the bass line, the conversation turned to how the ensemble could adapt and make space for me and my version of this bass line to help create a performance that was more balanced for us all. This was my auditory drag moment: I was able to adopt a masculine voice on a stereotypically feminine instrument, and with a little support from my TGNC musicians, find my own way to express ‘masculinity’ authentically through my bass line performance.

Our explorations with auditory drag were made possible because of our own personal experiences of experimenting with and performing gender as TGNC individuals. During our first ensemble rehearsal, Clarinet highlighted this special shared experience we have because TGNC: “[B]ecause we [as TGNC individuals] have had to interrogate our inner and outer expressions so deeply and like how these things match and don’t match and stuff like that, we’re so aware of ourselves in a way that most cis people aren’t.” Here Clarinet states the intimate awareness and interrogations of self that many TGNC folks experience on the journey of discovering and coming into our gender identities. This individual gender work provided a baseline understanding of common experiences and ways of thinking about gender which allowed us to collectively explore and disrupt gender-normative expectations in our ensemble music-making. We allowed for each musician to experience the gendered expectations of the four musical lines (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) and work through the kind of gender performance they would bring into the line. This happened whether we dove headfirst into trying to perform a recognizable version of the gender binary expectation of the musical line (like I did by struggling with performing an “obnoxious” masculine bass line), or allowed the dissonance between the gender expectation of our musical line and instrument come together in a truly queer, and auditory, experience of gender.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have illustrated the various ways in which TGNC musicians negotiate the gender binary across various Western instrumental music-making and learning contexts. My first theme addressed rigid binary gender instrument associations and the ways myself and my participants negotiated these gendered expectations during instrument selection processes and the eventual landing on the instrument of our choice; noting my experiences with the hyper feminine

instrument: the flute. This theme concluded by address three instruments which have not been subject to the same gender binary rigidity and have been labeled as “gender neutral” or “nonbinary” by my participants. In theme two I detailed various ways that my participants and I have worked to make space for ourselves as TGNC musicians. From coming out and negotiating the personal labour required to do so, to finding community and allies within instrument sections and small ensembles, each of my participants articulated the ways in which they were able to find themselves within their music-making. My third and final theme addressed the ways that each TGNC musician found gender affirmation through their music-making, including insights into the ways we as an all-TGNC ensemble were able to play with gendered expectations and create an empowering experience of “auditory drag”.

Each theme uncovered elements of Western instrumental music practices allowing these TGNC musicians (and me) to move through negotiating gender towards a gender-affirming and celebratory experience, culminating with our all-TGNC chamber ensemble. The centering of this chamber ensemble within the data collection allowed for both individual and collective reflecting as we were able to meet over three separate sessions as an ensemble, culminating with a one-on-one interview session where participants could reflect and process their experiences alongside myself. Being able to maintain music-making and the important social side of ensemble playing present in the data collection allowed for deep explorations into not only the structures surrounding formal Western instrumental music-making and learning, but also the music itself and the act of performing our instruments both independently and collectively as a member of an ensemble.

In my final chapter I will conclude with a summary of my study findings, relate my findings back to the literature I reviewed on LGBTQ inclusion and TGNC student experiences in

Western music at the high school and post-secondary level and the gender-based research on instruments, and provide a personal reflection on the study. Next, I suggest recommendations to music educators and TGNC musicians, outline the limitations of this study, make recommendations for future research, and close with the significance of this study.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

My study was guided by a central research question which asked: how do TGNC musicians negotiate the binary gender expectations in Western instrumental music? This question acknowledged the decades of research on gender in Western instrumental music which demonstrate an overall consistency in rigid binary gendered expectations connected to instruments and Western instrumental music-making practices (Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978; Griswold & Leppa, 1981; Zervoudakes & Tanur; 1994). My thesis aimed to fill a gap in the current literature on TGNC people's experiences in Western music-making (see Chapter 2) through engaging with TGNC instrumental musicians – whose voices were notably lacking in the current literature – and taking a gender-complex (Rands, 2009) approach through employing a “queer creativity” framework (see Chapter 3). Participants in this study were self-identified TGNC instrumental musicians, with gender identities ranging from “man plus” to “transgender woman” or “queer nonbinary” (see Chapter 4 for full participant descriptions), each with a dynamic gender journey which, alongside their growth and participation as instrumental musicians, afforded them a unique lens through which to reflect on Western instrumental music-making practices. In this concluding chapter, I will provide a summary of my research findings, provide a personal reflection on the study, situate my findings within the related literature, and outline recommendations based on my findings for music educators and TGNC instrumental musicians. I will conclude with the limitations of this study, my suggestions for future research, and my final thoughts on the significance of this study.

## Summary of Findings

My findings are embedded within three primary themes. Theme one and two addressed my central question which asked: how do TGNC instrumental musicians negotiate the binary gender expectations in Western instrumental music? My third theme answered my secondary question, which emerged during the data analysis process: what new possibilities does an all-TGNC chamber ensemble reveal about gender in Western instrumental music?

Theme one, “Rigid binary gender instrument stereotypes and then the ones in the middle,” addressed participants’ experiences negotiating rigid binary gender instrument stereotypes during their early years as musicians in the K-12 music education classroom, as well as my personal experiences as a transmasculine flutist negotiating that hyper feminine space. This finding describes the rigid binary gender landscape in instrumental music classrooms at the junior high and high school level and the various ways that students may alter their engagement to negotiate such a dichotomously gendered space. Intentionally performing poorly during instrument testing sessions to avoid being placed on an instrument that was viewed as in line with their assigned gender identity and exhibiting patience and musical excellence on a given instrument before having access to an instrument of their choice, were two of the primary ways my participants negotiated gender rigid instrument stereotypes in their first few years of instrumental music education. For myself, I wrestled with playing inside and outside of the lines for what a flute players should look like, act like, and be interested in, at times giving in to the soft, feminine, “girlie” expectation of myself as a flute player in the pursuit of professional recognition. This theme concluded by highlighting the “non-binary” instruments which have notably been absent from much of the literature on gender-stereotypical instrument selection: bassoon, French horn and euphonium. The exclusion of these instruments from the literature demonstrates the lack of

acknowledgment of gender diversity and fluidity within gendered expectations of instruments. This mirrors the lack of TGNC instrumental musician experiences and perspectives in the literature as well as in practice – as described by my participants and I in the following theme.

My second theme titled “Making space and finding community as a TGNC musician” explored how my participants and I have negotiated binary gender expectations within our ensemble playing and worked to make space for our TGNC gender identities. I detailed our experiences performing in formal large ensembles and the benefits we have experienced making music in smaller groups and ensembles. Based on our collective experiences, large ensemble learning and performing is a fundamental experience for Western instrumental musicians. Our discussions of negotiating this music-making environment illuminated the ways that gender rigidity and cisnormative expectations can hinder TGNC musicians’ active participation. In contrast, small ensemble spaces – duets, trios, quartets, and chamber ensembles – provided the opportunity for greater community and relationship building among musicians (TGNC or not), and placed more ownership into the hands of musicians, rather than a conductor or director. This was specifically beneficial for us as TGNC musicians because we had more opportunities to build personal relationships which translated into important allies in helping us negotiate large ensemble environments, as well as supporting us as TGNC individuals (outside of being musicians). In a small ensemble we could connect with each musician, and this created a more intimate music-making experience, fostering more collaboration and creativity. The discussion of this theme ends with outlining the various opportunities for TGNC-inclusive music-making that emerged through our participation in our all-TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals. As an all-TGNC chamber ensemble we were able to bring our full selves and experiences to rehearsal – both as TGNC people and as musicians. Entering a space where all members understand the

TGNC experience enabled us to speak freely, and honestly, without needing to expend extra emotional labour to explain or educate fellow ensemble members. This space took the pressure off needing to “come out” and allowed us to focus on the music we were making, connecting as TGNC people, and even exploring new ways of connecting with music and ourselves through music-making as TGNC musicians.

In my final theme, “TGNC identity exploration and affirmation through instrumental music performance”, I highlighted my participants’ and my experiences finding gender affirmation through our individual instruments and our music-making, including the unique experience of ‘auditory drag’ which we were able to engage with during our all-TGNC chamber ensemble rehearsals. These findings illuminated new ways for TGNC musicians to explore gender affirmation through making music on their instrument. Whether the instrument itself gave them access to a voice, or their music-making helped express complex emotions and experiences that words alone could not, each participant discussed how making music on their instrument provided them access to a unique form of gender affirmation or refuge from the gendered expectations placed upon them. When we gathered as an all-TGNC ensemble, we were able to build on our experiences with gender and queer our music-making through troubling gender expectations within musical lines. These findings demonstrated the unique opportunity for exploring gender roles and expectations through disrupting normative expectations of instruments within ensemble settings. Being able to adopt a new role within an ensemble that is not traditional (i.e., flute playing bass lines and euphonium playing melodic lines) encouraged this “auditory drag,” allowing TGNC musicians to explore a wide spectrum of gender through an auditory lens.

## **Relating the Findings to Literature**

The current state of literature on TGNC people's experiences within Western music has been limited to choral settings (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Palkki, 2020; Rastin, 2016) or binary transgender individuals within pre-service music teacher programs (Bartolome, 2016; Silveira, 2019). When addressing gender and instrumental music, the literature has focused on proving that binary gender associations exist for certain instruments and are known to exist within and outside of formal music settings and across a wide range of ages (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Griswold & Chroback, 1981) and cultures (Sheldon & Price, 2005). This literature actively shies away from instruments which were found to be in the middle or 'less gendered,' and in some cases researchers report intentionally discarding data from participants whose sex/gender information was not available or seemingly ambiguous (e.g., Sheldon & Price, 2005).

Three out of the four participants recruited for this study played instruments, underrepresented in the above literature, which had been described as in the middle or lacking a consistent binary gender association: bassoon, French horn, and euphonium. Even the clarinet, which has been documented in the literature as being a 'feminine' instrument, has become less rigidly gendered through the years, making myself as a flute player the only participant who plays a rigidly binary gendered instrument. Being able to contribute my experiences as a queer and trans flute player adds a valuable new angle on gendered expectations of flute players, as well as on students/musicians who transgress expected gender norms for instruments (Abeles et al., 2014; Sinsabaugh, 2005). As a hyper feminine gendered instrument, literature addressing gender transgression on the flute focuses on the experiences of men and boys (Sinsabaugh, 2005). Contributing my perspectives as a transmasculine flutist provides a new gender complex perspective which acknowledges the particularly challenging intersection of being a flute player

and trying to explore my gender identity and gender expression. While boys who play the flute experience gender-based bullying for playing a “girlie” instrument (Sinsabaugh, 2005), they would not have to also navigate advocating for their proper name and pronoun use, or their right to wear a gender affirming performance uniform. My findings contribute a TGNC perspective on negotiating and transgressing gender expectations of instruments, drawing attention to the specific personal labour that is required of the musician to be successful. My findings focus on the importance of supportive peer relationships and the personal benefits experienced through participating in Western instrumental music as a TGNC musician.

When TGNC people are included in the research literature on Western music education, this most often happens as part of the homogenizing acronym 2SLGBTQ+ (and its numerous variations), which can erase the uniqueness of these individuals’ experiences. This 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion in Western music education literature tends to focus on making suggestions for inclusive music classroom practices that help imagine 2SLGBTQ+ youth in K-12 music programs (Garrett & Pallkki, 2021), or pre-service music teachers in teacher education programs (Palkki & Sauerland, 2019). This is not the same as exploring the complex and creative nuances in how gender diverse musicians experience and connect with instrumental music-making.

My study contributes to the literature on welcoming 2SLGBTQ+ students in music education and pre-service teacher education by specifically highlighting TGNC people’s voices and experiences and doing so in a way that acknowledges the complexity of gender. My participants and I discussed our experiences moving through various gender identity labels and expressions of gender and acknowledged that the various ways we connected with our gender and found affirmation can shift along with our gender identity and musician identity. My participants and I experienced, in general, a lack of gender diversity across our educational experiences.

Exclusively binary language and cisnormative expectations created environments that were not accepting or encouraging of exploring gender in diverse ways. While I have seen this changing in schools during my time as a music educator through the increase in resources for educators on supporting 2SLGBTQ+ students and more open conversations around use of gender inclusive language and singular they pronouns, the literature still assumes a homogenized experience for all under the queer and 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella. In the case of transgender-specific (or TGNC where indicated) experiences, the literature tends to highlight binary transitions from one gender to the other and assume a singular notion of non-binary as being someone ‘in the middle’ who presents in an androgynous way. My study contributes a dynamic view of TGNC experiences which encourages fluidity and the possibility of change. Gender identity is not one size fits all and expressions of gender under any gender identity can be vast and varied. My study embraces the uniqueness of each individual and contributes an account of diverse experiences of gender within Western instrumental music, even under the TGNC umbrella.

### **Personal Reflection**

The process of engaging in this study, from its inception during my first year of graduate studies through the writing of this thesis, has afforded me the unique opportunity to reflect on my experiences as a TGNC flute player. Playing the flute has always been a significant part of my life. From the first moment I picked up the instrument (which naturally was before my first lesson even though I was explicitly instructed not to do so) it just clicked. It served as a direct extension of my voice, expressing any and all of the emotions I struggled to find words for, as well as offered refuge from the chaos of the world. The tedious hours of individual practice perfecting my technical skills, coupled with ensemble rehearsals which encouraged the leaving of all other concerns at the door, allowed me to get lost within the world of music-making for a few

hours a day, which has always been a comfort for me. These spaces became less of a comfort as I wrestled with my gender identity.

Coming into my identity as a transmasculine individual has been a complicated and messy process, but what has never changed is my personal connection to my music-making. The social aspect of being an instrumental musician continues to be challenging, as any social environment is, with misgendering occurring daily despite having come out publicly almost eight years ago. And yet, I am still drawn to these spaces. The physical, emotional, and creative challenges of performing an instrument at a high level, particularly a wind instrument, keep me invested and going back for more. There are so many outlets for music-making as a flute player and I have had the privilege of participating in many, from folk bands to orchestras, wind ensembles, flute choirs and military bands, and I have always found pieces of myself in these music-making spaces. The inception of my all-TGNC chamber ensemble, however, created a music-making space where for the first time I felt like my full self was invited and valued therein.

When I reflect on that music-making experience in contrast to the other ensembles in which I am currently participating, it was almost as if gender was not present. As I move through various musical spaces as a flute player I am keenly aware of how gender is made more visible and palpable by having me, as a queer transmasc individual, present. Some days this gendering is a banging gong that drowns everything around it, and some days it is barely there – just a constant hum, only perceptible when you chose to tune into it – but it is always present which can make it difficult to be present as a musician. Gathering in the all-TGNC chamber ensemble cleared all the extra background noise and allowed me to be present with my fellow musicians, enjoying the creative and collaborative act of music-making. Despite us talking about gender and

TGNC experiences in between our music-making, this space felt, in a way, like gender could be left at the door.

It has been interesting to reflect on this as a musician and music educator because I think these experiences helped highlight for me some underlying distractions which at times were inhibiting my ability to be present in rehearsals; however, unless something overtly negative occurred (which for me usually involves public misgendering or dead naming) I could never pinpoint where my sense of distraction was stemming from. These experiences can quickly turn to frustration and, recalling the creative process work of Amabile, do not foster a social environment which allows for creative progress to be made (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). The ability for an individual or group to move through the five stages of the creative process is contingent on the affect and motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) toward completing the creative task. The social environment surrounding the creative task can be a critical factor in generating positive or negative affect, contributing to high or low feelings of motivation. I think that often being the sole TGNC musician in an ensemble creates a social environment of negativity which can make affect and motivation low, affecting the musician's ability to progress through the creative process. Past experiences navigating deadnaming, misgendering, and expected educating on personal experiences or terminology associated with TGNC identities while trying to engage in social spaces can create an underlying sense of exhaustion and anxiety when entering an ensemble. However, the personal enjoyment for music-making, in my experience, often overrides this feeling that the social environment of the ensemble may be unsupportive or seen as an emotionally exhausting space. This dissonance between ensembles being potentially negative social environments and the personal high levels of intrinsic motivation for engaging in music-

making create a unique challenge for TGNC musicians working through the creative process of making music within an ensemble (Amabile, 2012; Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

As an educator this has made me reflect on how classroom and ensemble environments, including interpersonal relationships and dynamics between students and myself, impact student behaviour and engagement, especially in classes like music or band where, as creative subjects, we ask our students to be risk takers, problem solvers and collaborators. I don't believe there is an easy answer or solution to creating the perfect ensemble or classroom space that will work for every student, however I think that education has the capacity to be ever evolving and boundary pushing, and this should be especially true in the arts. Writing about opera, Catherine Kustanczy (2019) made an impactful statement when considering the role of formal music education in the inclusion and support of TGNC opera singers, stating that "academia is a good place for [queer and trans musical] ideas to percolate into mainstream, because...[there] we can challenge some of the ways in which we approach the art form in general" (p. 23). The findings of my study excite me about the creative potential of engaging with TGNC musicians and, by extension, leaning into the perspectives and experiences of various diverse individuals within these structured Western music spaces. K-12 and post-secondary music programs can be places where students and teachers challenge these expected norms and traditions together.

## **Recommendations**

This study offers many benefits to current/future TGNC musicians and music educators by highlighting experiences faced by various TGNC musicians in Western instrumental music-making environments: K-12 schools, post-secondary, and community ensembles. The following section provides recommendations for music educators and TGNC musicians, respectively.

### ***Recommendations for Music Educators***

Rigid binary gender expectations are found across Western instrumental music from performance dress code policy to gendered expectations of instruments to the ways we gender musical lines – soprano or high melodic lines often being equated with women/femininity and contrasting bass or low accompaniment lines relating to men/masculinity. Music education within school systems (K-12 and post-secondary institutions) is subject to the continuous normalizing of these rigid binary expectations due to a lack of imagining TGNC individuals to be in these spaces (Clayton, 2020; Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2018; Rastin, 2016). Music educators should begin adapting their practice to support gender diversity and TGNC music students by considering their own personal relationship with gender: specifically, their own gender biases and assumed binary gender associations and stereotypes. This self-reflection is a critical component when beginning to dismantle gender normative structures and expectations. Educators must know how gender is at play in their space and how it may be impacting the musicians in their ensembles and classroom (Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Rands, 2009). Recognizing that gendered expectations impact all individuals and anticipating the presence of diverse musicians – including those who identify as TGNC – is an important first step for music educators in mitigating the long-standing culture of gender binary rigidity in Western instrumental music.

Introductions to instruments and the instrument selection process are an important part of the instrumental journey as well as a ‘playground’ for gender stereotyping. Educators should take care to provide various examples of performers on each instrument (Byo, 1991; Cooper, 2021), while also being cognizant of social factors which may influence student choice (i.e., peer pressure, parental pressure, bullying/risk of being bullied; see Abeles & Porter, 2014; Conway, 2000; Taylor, 2011). For performing ensembles, loosening uniform or dress code requirements by removing any gender-based expectations can signal to students that gender diversity is

welcome. Refrain from labeling concert dress, for example, as specifically “male or female” and instead opt for a performance uniform that encourages professionalism through outfits that make the performers feel comfortable and confident.

In my experience as a K-12 music educator, school music education programs tend to focus on large ensemble learning; however, I encourage educators to consider infusing small and chamber ensemble learning opportunities. While I recognize the logistical challenges this may create for many schools as often the music room is just one large room, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and actively collaborate with their peers, even from their very first year playing instruments, can create valuable learning experiences which foster the development of life skills as well as musician skills. Musicians need to learn communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal, critical listening skills, problem solving and self-reflection skills, which I found to be heightened when collaborating with a smaller group of musicians rather than relying solely on a conductor or music educator. It turns the focus toward collaboration and sharing of experience and knowledge, rather than exclusively receiving information and instruction from a central leader. The less structured nature of small ensembles also leaves room for questioning and creativity allowing students the ability to make music that is uniquely reflective of them. My study findings also highlighted the importance of personal relationships which can be built more easily in a smaller group setting. Developing personal relationships is critical in contributing to the sense of belonging within an ensemble and can help break down limiting or rigid stereotypes about diverse people and experiences, which can in turn help foster positive creative music-making spaces where all students feel seen and supported.

The music played by ensembles serves a variety of purposes from skill development to enjoyment. I encourage music educators to think about how experimenting with unexpected

arrangements and instrumentation can also provide valuable learning experiences. Using flexible or adaptable arrangements can offer opportunities for ensembles to flip the script and place any instrument on any part (melody, harmony, accompaniment). This offers some exciting performance and skill developing opportunities for instruments who (especially in the early few years of playing) spend most of their time playing sustained bass line parts, while also opening an opportunity to actively challenge expectations of instruments and their role in ensembles. By extension, experimentation can offer opportunities to challenge normative binary gender associations and roles. Engaging with students in disrupting music-making expectations encourages questioning of traditional practices and illuminating rigid expectations that educators and students may have come to expect as norm. By exploring non-traditional instrumentation, music educators can provide not only engaging opportunities for music learning but also provide opportunities for students to try on different musical characters, potentially accessing new creative and expressive outlets or even avenues of gender affirmation.

These recommendations, while derived from my findings about TGNC musicians' experiences with Western instrumental music settings, offer dynamic opportunities for all students to engage in creative music-making and learning, while encouraging an active troubling of common narratives and rigid binary expectations. The following section contains recommendations for TGNC instrumental musicians ourselves.

### ***Recommendations for TGNC Instrumental Musicians.***

As a trans individual I am constantly seeking out stories and literature that reflect and represent trans and queer experiences. Indulging in these expressions of trans and queer reality offers me important moments of recognition and affirmation, when this can be hard to find in everyday life, and even opens a window to unimaginable ways of being and doing queerness and

transness in different spaces. Throughout the process of completing this study I had the privilege of helping curate and foster impactful moments of recognition and affirmation for my TGNC musician participants (including myself), which allowed for us to begin considering the previously unimaginable potential of an all-TGNC ensemble.

The all-TGNC chamber ensemble provided a space where, for the first time in each of our lives, a group of TGNC musicians was able to gather and, through music-making, share experiences related to the complex interwoven nature of Western instrumental music practices and rigid binary gender. This building of community allowed us to find stories and experiences which resonated with us. My hope is this study is just a beginning of these conversations, and that other TGNC musicians find pieces of themselves and their experiences in the stories portrayed throughout this study. These unique experiences of learning and connecting with an instrument as a TGNC individual in Western instrumental music are not ones often discussed and experienced in isolation. The deep ways that TGNC individuals interrogate our own gender identity and experiment with expressions of gender demonstrate valuable skills like risk taking, self-reflection, and creativity in the field of music, making these valuable voices and contributions to any music-making or learning environment.

As my participants and I have experienced, performing within large ensembles can be musically satisfying while also emotionally exhausting for TGNC musicians. Negotiating names, pronouns and performance dress expectations arose as our shared concerns within these spaces. Connecting with the conductor or musical director (or both in some cases where they are not the same person) prior to rehearsals can be helpful for setting expectations around what name and pronouns you would like to use in rehearsals and ensuring that you know what name will be printed or published in connection with any promotional material or information about the

ensemble. My participants articulated a particular concern over the use of a legal versus chosen name when negotiating ensemble spaces at the K-12 and post-secondary level as in most cases a legal name will be required for the purpose of registration and the invitation of identifying a preferred name may not be offered. In these settings, reaching out to the conductor or musical director can be particularly beneficial for mitigating deadnaming and misgendering at rehearsals.

Seeking out information regarding performance dress expectations early on can also ease stress around performances. Based on my participants' and my experiences, many ensembles are moving towards the adoption of an "all black" performance uniform, leaving room for musicians to determine what all black performance outfit works for them. In the case that a gendered uniform is still practiced, you may wish to discuss possible alternatives that better align with your gender identity and gender expression. Some of my participants and I have experience with negotiating a binary gendered uniform policy and the accompanying anxiety that can surround not knowing what you are allowed to wear, but have found that within instrumental ensembles many conductors end up being quite flexible to individual interpretations of these dress expectations.

Building relationships and finding supportive allies to help educate and advocate for you and your needs as a TGNC musician within large ensemble spaces was also identified as an important resource by me and my participants. Creative spaces like music ensembles are often home to many queer people and allies who may not fully understand the TGNC experience, but who can act as important supports and help shoulder the labour of being TGNC within these spaces. Having ally musicians who can question gendered uniform expectations, advocate for inclusive language practices, and take on some of the correcting labour when misgendering occurs can contribute to a more positive music-making experience for TGNC musicians.

I encourage TGNC musicians to continue challenging boundaries in the instrumental music world. Find other TGNC individuals and collaborate. Make music that is weird and fun and representative of the ways you see and experience yourselves and the world. Use music as a shield and your instrument as an extension of yourselves and your voice when the right words aren't there. And finally, paraphrasing a quote from Maya Angelou, when words and actions are exhausted or unavailable, take "music [as your] refuge and crawl into the space between the notes and [curl your] back to loneliness," fear, anger or exhaustion (Classic FM, 2023). Music can be a powerful tool for coping and a creative tool for finding comfort and affirmation for all individuals, but I think perhaps especially for TGNC individuals.

### **Study Limitations**

The major limitation of this research is that it does not include discussions as to how other aspects of identity like race, language, religion, or ability impact mine and my participants' experiences of gender. I recognize the assumed dichotomous and whitewashed nature of gender within systems of education, as well as the hegemonic whiteness of the study's broad site: Western instrumental music, which is a predominantly white art form. Furthermore, this research was located within Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, which as a middle province city houses less cultural diversity than larger cities in Canada. Aspects of the self apart from gender identity and gender expression were not discussed in a meaningful way throughout this study and did not emerge in the interviews or ensemble focus group rehearsals. Each participant shared understanding and experience of gender expectations through a Western, white lens. My addition of gender-complex perspectives on gender expectations with Western instrumental music is therefore limited by the lack of racial diversity represented by my participants and myself (Rands, 2009). The following section outlines some recommendations for further research in the areas of

TGNC people's experiences in Western instrumental music and the impact of culture and race on gender stereotyping and participation in Western instrumental music.

### **Future Research**

Future research in the field of gender and Western instrumental music could walk beside TGNC musicians who transgress gender expectations and play instruments that have highly rigid binary gender associations (e.g., flute, tuba, drums/percussion). From my own experience, this can be a complicated site of gender dissonance and affirmation, requiring a high level of personal labour from the musician. It would be valuable for gender-based research with instruments to explore more of these experiences because they have the potential to provide a new perspective on the extremes of gender rigidity within instrumental music and perhaps explore new ways to disrupt these pervasive gender stereotypes. Gender research from a TGNC perspective has the potential to provide in-depth and nuanced perspectives on gender because of TGNC peoples' extensive experience interrogating and negotiating gender personally and socially. On a personal note, as the only member of my study who played one of the identified hyper gendered instruments (i.e., the flute), I would be curious to learn how other TGNC flute players negotiate their gender identity alongside the feminine expectations of the flute and potentially see how these relationships might be evolving alongside increasing inclusion and awareness of TGNC identities.

Further research should also explore how TGNC instrumental musicians negotiate their gender identity and their professional expectations as practicing full-time instrumentalists in specific settings with their own cultures and histories, such as orchestras, chamber ensembles, and military bands. Setting-specific research could provide a window into the various ways that TGNC instrumentalist find success therein, as well as consider factors unique to each

professional setting. This research could provide useful roadmaps for up-and-coming TGNC professional instrumentalists who wish to enter these spaces.

Lastly, further research should consider intersections of homophobia, transphobia, racism and other forms of oppression in Western instrumental music settings, and how these contribute to students' perspectives on the gender stereotyping of instruments and instrument choice. Based on my anecdotal experiences as a music educator, there are shifts in gendered instrument associations in more racially and culturally diverse classrooms, as well as patterns of instrument gendering (and resistance to instrument gendering) among different groups of students. It would be interesting to explore how culture modifies Western gender narratives and expectations in the music classroom, and how this impacts student instrument choice and participation in K-12 instrumental music programs.

### **Last Word**

On a local scale, engaging in this study allowed TGNC musicians within Manitoba to gather in community with one another – an impactful experience for all, myself included! While my participants and I had experiences with supportive allies and queer friends along our various journeys, we acknowledged the uniqueness of the TGNC experience which we felt could only be understood by other TGNC individuals. Having one-on-one conversations with each participant began to set the tone that “you are not alone.” Experiences and thoughts that had been running through my brain for years were now finding friendship amongst others with similar stories. This bonding and building of community was only strengthened through the all-TGNC chamber ensemble. Creating a space for us to gather and make music as an ensemble was a significant takeaway from this study, especially after coming out of an extended period of extreme isolation which we had all experienced during the three years of Covid-19.

Engaging in this study has opened doors to conversations about gender with Western instrumental music and more specifically, about TGNC experiences. Throughout my data collection I was able to collaborate with fellow TGNC instrumentalists and deeply consider the interconnectedness and creativity within gender identity, gender expression, and Western instrumental music practices. I encouraged myself and my participants to reflect on our experiences, some of which were painful, and then come together as community to create new queer experiences of music-making to take with us into the world. I look at this study as the beginning of a conversation and hope that musicians and music educators, TGNC or not, continue to reflect on the ways gender operates within their music spaces and look to new ways of engaging with and ‘queering’ music making and education.

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## Appendix A

### General Research Ethics Board (GREB) Letter of Approval



November 22, 2022

Mx. Beck Watt  
Queen's University

**Title: "GEDCU-1135-22 Balancing the Band: Exploring Transgender and/or Gender Non-Conforming Musicians' Experiences Negotiating the Gender Binary in Western Instrumental Music;" TRAQ # 6037516**

Dear Mx. Watt:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "**GEDCU-1135-22 Balancing the Band: Exploring Transgender and/or Gender Non-Conforming Musicians' Experiences Negotiating the Gender Binary in Western Instrumental Music**" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405), your project has been cleared for one year.

You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/>; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one-year period (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/>; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/>; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies." Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, GREB, at University Research Services for further review and clearance by GREB or the Chair, GREB.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean A. Tripp".

Professor Dean A. Tripp, PhD  
Chair, General Research Ethics Board (GREB)  
Departments of Psychology, Anesthesiology & Urology  
Queen's University

## **Appendix B**

### **Recruitment Email**

Hello musicians,

My name is Beck Watt, I am a music performance and education grad from U of M, but am presently working toward completing an M.Ed. through Queen's University.

I am currently recruiting transgender and/or gender non-conforming wind and brass musicians to collaborate with me on my thesis study which is exploring gendered expectations and stereotypes in Western instrumental music practices. Please see the attached documents for further details about your potential participation.

All interested musicians are encouraged to connect with me via email at [b.watt@queensu.ca](mailto:b.watt@queensu.ca) at your earliest convenience!

Any and all questions can also be emailed to me at any time.

Thank you so much for considering participating in this research,

Beck

## **Appendix C**

### **Recruitment Letter**

Hello Musicians!

My name is Beck Watt, and I am seeking participants to collaborate with me on my master's thesis through Queen's University. I am pursuing study in the area of gender identity and gender expression in instrumental music. I am currently seeking participants who are:

- Experienced instrumental musicians (defined as having completed at least one year of study in a post-secondary music degree on a wind or brass instrument)
- Individuals who are transgender and/or gender non-conforming (for example, but not limited to those who are: transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, agender etc.)

The study will ask you to participate in 2 one on one interviews, as well you will be a member of a curated chamber ensemble of other transgender and/or gender non-conforming identified musicians which will rehearse 3-4 times. Music for this ensemble will be provided to you ahead of time and may be subject to change each rehearsal.

Tentatively the dates for participation are the following:

#### **Interview 1**

Where: Zoom or in person location of your choice

Length: approximately 1 hour

When: December 27-January 14

*Please indicate a date/time that is most convenient*

#### **Chamber Rehearsal Schedule**

Where: Crescent Fort Rouge United Church (525 Wardlaw Ave)

Time: approximately 7:30-8:30pm

When: Wednesday, January 18, 25

Wednesday, February 1 (*February 15<sup>th</sup> - make-up rehearsal if needed*)

#### **Interview 2**

Where: Zoom or in person location of your choice

Length approximately 1 hour

When: approximately February 5-25

*Please indicate a date/time that is most convenient*

Participants will be compensated \$100 for their participation in this research study.

Interested instrumentalists can email me at [b.watt@queensu.ca](mailto:b.watt@queensu.ca) to receive a letter of informed consent and be provided with further details!

Thanks! I look forward with connecting and collaborating with you!

## Appendix D

### Participant Letter of Information and Consent

**Study Title:** Balancing the Band: Exploring Transgender and/or Gender Non-Conforming Musicians' Experiences Negotiating the Gender Binary in Western Instrumental Music

**Name of Principal Investigator:** Beck Watt, Faculty of Education, Queen's University

**Name of Supervisor:** Dr Lee Airton, Faculty of Education, Queen's University

This study has been reviewed for ethical compliance by the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board (GREB).

This study has been funded by the Canadian Graduate Scholarship-Master's award by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

#### **Request for Participation:**

I am inviting self-identified transgender and/or gender non-conforming instrumental musicians who have completed at least one year of a post-secondary degree in music on a wind or brass instrument, and who are currently residing in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to take part in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore gender expectations, stereotypes and associations connected with various instruments, as well as standard Western instrumental music practices (i.e., rehearsal and performance expectations). This study will explore how transgender and/or gender non-conforming musicians negotiate their own gender identity and gender expression within these musical spaces.

If you agree to take part, I will interview you two separate times for approximately one hour each (for a total of two hours), at a public location of your choice and/or remotely over Zoom. You will also be a part of a chamber ensemble with other participants which will rehearse on 3 or 4 separate occasions for one hour each. Music for the chamber ensemble will be provided to you prior to the start of rehearsals but may be subject to change for each rehearsal. You will also be invited to provide suggestions and feedback on the music rehearsed during these sessions. Interviews and rehearsals will be audio-recorded for transcription and data analysis. Outside of your participation in the above data collection events, you may also be invited to publicly perform with the chamber ensemble. These performance opportunities will be voluntary and declining to participate in these has no impact on your participation in the data collection portion of this study in any way. Should you agree to be contacted for potential public performances you will be asked to provide verbal consent for each public performance opportunity.

#### **Risks and Benefits:**

The following section outlines the anticipated risks involved in participating in this research study, along with the measures in place to help mitigate these risks.

**Risk One:** There may be a perceived level of power imbalance and authority over participants by myself as the primary investigator (PI), due to my decade of experience working and performing in Winnipeg at various levels and institutions, which may impact participant responses during

individual interviews and/or the group rehearsal participation. As the PI I will also be acting as a participant during the group rehearsal phase of data collection which may have an impact on the overall group power dynamic.

**Mitigating Risk One:** As a researcher-participant, I will be collecting data about myself as well as from participants throughout the data collection process, but specifically the group rehearsal phase. Acting as a researcher-participant during the group rehearsal, I will be aware of the power imbalances that can exist due to the instrumentation, part assignments and the role I may play as a flute player within this chamber ensemble group. If possible, based on instrumentation and number of musicians, I will place myself in a position of least power within the ensemble (i.e., not playing the first or lead part if possible) to help mitigate this power dynamic.

**Risk Two:** The community orientation and social nature of musicians, the relatively small number of high-level practicing Western music instrumentalists in Winnipeg, and the small number of participants included in this research study (i.e., there will be less than 6 participants), increases the risk that participant identities will be recognized by people outside the research, especially those who are members of these communities (i.e., Western instrumental music communities, as well as members of the transgender and/or gender non-conforming communities). This risk may be increased due to the participants' potential involvement in public performance opportunities connected with the research (i.e., if participants agree to perform together on the basis of the relationships established in PHASE 3). The publication of their names in supporting documents performance programs and advertisement materials as well as conference programs (if performances take place outside of traditional concert settings) will increase the risk that participants may become identifiable.

**Mitigating Risk Two:** Participants will be deidentified during the data transcription and analysis process as much as possible without losing meaning for the purpose of articulating findings. Use of pseudonyms and generalizing names and places (i.e., "university", "wind ensemble" and "Manitoba") will be placed to deidentify participant information. Unfortunately, because participant gender identity and gender expression descriptors and instrument experiences are critical to my research question, I recognize that this information could be enough to identify participants, even with the use of a pseudonym. Participants will be offered the opportunity to provide verbal consent, on a case-by-case basis, to having their names published for any agreed upon public performances as part of the informed consent process. Should participants consent to participating in public performances, they will also be made aware that they are consenting to increased identification as participants in this research.

**Risk Three:** Participants will be participating in group rehearsals all together which presents the risk of other participants disclosing study participants or topics discussed during these rehearsal sessions to individuals outside the study.

**Mitigating Risk Three:** Participants will be asked not to take any video or photography during the group rehearsal and will be asked to maintain the anonymity of research participants by not disclosing specifics of their participation in the research study including details about the topics discussed, the time and location of the group rehearsals, and the names or other identifying information of the other participants involved. As the PI I do not have full control over what participants choose to disclose to individuals

outside of the research. All participants need to be aware that there is a risk of identification by other participants if they participate in this research.

**Risk Four:** Participants may experience discomfort responding to questions about experiences that have been difficult for them. The level of discomfort experienced from their participation in this research should not be more than the discomfort transgender and/or gender non-conforming individuals might experience in their everyday lives.

**Mitigating Risk Four:** Participants can connect with the following LGBTQ supportive mental health and counselling services in Winnipeg available by phone or in person: Klinik Community Health Crisis Line (204-786-8686), Trans Lifeline (877-330-6366), Adult Mobile Crisis (204-940-1781), and various support groups (i.e., The DEN, the Transfeminine Circle, Transmasculine Manitoba) offered through Rainbow Resource can be found through their website (<https://rainbowresourcecentre.org/events/for/adults>).

### **Data Analysis and Storage:**

All identifying data will be de-identified during the data analysis process to help mitigate the risk of participants being recognized by outside readers. Any specific identifiers like the participants' education, ensemble affiliation, or specific geographical location will be replaced with pseudonyms or more general markers such as "school/university" or "large ensemble" rather than specific names or titles. Participants should be aware that anonymity is not guaranteed should they choose to participate in this research. Information disclosed regarding gender identity and gender expression will not be edited. This data coupled with the participants instrument could provide enough information for an outside reader, particularly one who is a member of the music community in Winnipeg, to identify the participant. Participants' identities and any information disclosed during the group rehearsal participation will be known to the other participants in the study, but all data will be de-identified during transcription to minimize this privacy risk. Participants are asked not to disclose who is participating in the study or what other participants share in the study, to protect participant confidentiality. Participant information will be stored in a secure Queen's One Drive.

### **Potential Benefits:**

The benefits of participating in this study may include the opportunity to build new connections and relationships within the professional musician community in Winnipeg, as well as the social emotional benefits of participating in a musical ensemble with other transgender and/or gender non-conforming musicians. These connections could open participants up to a wider network of supportive musicians, which could aid in their ability to find supportive employment in music fields in the future. Finally, participants may find it valuable to have a space where their voices and experiences can be heard, and where these will contribute to advancing the literature on gender-based research within instrumental music performance practice and education. Study conclusions will also be used to make recommendations to music educators, directors and leaders on creating gender inclusive music spaces. The addition of public performances connected to this research may also help contribute to a continued development of community among transgender and/or gender non-conforming instrumental musicians. This may also provide space for these participants to be more involved in knowledge mobilization and outreach on topics connected to this research and their participation in this specific study.

**Compensation and Withdrawal:**

As a participant you will receive \$50 upon the completion of each study interview (for a total of \$100 for your complete participation in all aspects of the study data collection –i.e., individual interviews and group rehearsal participation).

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. You can stop your participation at any time by telling the researcher without penalty. You may withdraw from the study up until the week prior to the first rehearsal date by contacting me at [b.watt@queensu.ca](mailto:b.watt@queensu.ca). Your data cannot be removed from the study once the ensemble rehearsals have begun as it will compromise information provided by other participants. If you choose to withdraw after the first interview (and before the start of the group rehearsals) you will still receive \$50 for your time and participation in the initial interview, but this data will be destroyed and not included in the study. Should you have any questions or concerns please contact me at [b.watt@queensu.ca](mailto:b.watt@queensu.ca).

**Confidentiality and Data Use:**

Your confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by applicable laws. I will do this by replacing your name with a pseudonym of your choice in all publications and a study ID number in all study records. The researcher can assure their own confidentiality of your information but cannot guarantee that privacy and confidentiality is upheld by co-participants. The study data will be stored on an encrypted drive on secure Queen's One Drive. Access to study data is limited to me and my supervisor and data custodian, Dr. Lee Airton, as well as the Queen's General Research Ethics Board (GREB) may request access to study data to ensure that the researcher(s) have or are meeting their ethical obligations in conducting this research. GREB is bound by confidentiality and will not disclose any personal information. I will keep your data securely for at least five years per Queen's University Policy, after which the de-identified data will be deleted off the drive by my supervisor, Dr. Lee Airton. The code file identifying your pseudonym and study ID number will also be destroyed by Dr. Airton five years after the study's closure.

There is a risk that your past personal or professional relationships with the researcher could implicitly or explicitly impact the interview process. While participants are encouraged to share candidly, and while the researcher has neither professional authority over participants nor more social or institutional power than participants, it is recognized as per the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, that interpersonal relationships may be a conflict of interest.

Beyond the thesis manuscript, research findings may be shared as an infographic, a short article in a professional educator publication or longer article in a scholarly journal, and presentations with various stakeholders including music educator groups and music directors outside of the K-12 education system. I will not include any personally identifying information from the interviews when presenting my findings. I will never include any real names with quotes. I will make every effort to ensure information does not identify participants. During the interview, please let me know if you say anything you do not want me to quote. Participants may indicate in interviews or any time after the study is complete if they would like to be directed to the thesis link and further professional development and future collaboration materials once they are available by contacting me over email. Participants will have the opportunity to consent to participating in public musical performances connected to the research through checking a box

below. Those who agree will also be agreeing to an increased risk of identification of identity and personal information and experiences. Declining to public performances and the publication of participant's name has no effect on the participants participation in this study. In addition to checking the boxes below, participants will be asked to provide verbal consent for each public performance as they come up and will have the opportunity to decline any performance opportunity.

If you have any ethics concerns, please contact the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at 1-844-535-2988 (Toll free in North America) or email [chair.GREB@queensu.ca](mailto:chair.GREB@queensu.ca).

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact my supervisor Dr Airton at [lee.airton@queensu.ca](mailto:lee.airton@queensu.ca).

This Letter of Information and Consent provides you with the details to help you make an informed choice. All your questions should be answered to your satisfaction before you decide whether or not to participate in this research study. Keep one copy of the Letter of Information for your records and return one copy to the principal investigator, Beck Watt.

You have not waived any legal rights by consenting to participate in this study.

By signing below, I am verifying that: I have read the Letter of Information and all my questions have been answered.

- Yes, you have my permission to use quotes for the purpose of communicating research findings in the publication of the formal thesis and/or any subsequent scholarly articles or presentations that may occur
- No, you do not have permission to use quotes for the purpose of communicating research findings
- Yes, I consent to be contacted to participate in public performances connected to this research
- No, I do not consent to be contacted to participate in public performances connected to this research
- Yes, I consent to having my name published as part of any public performances I participate
- No, I do not consent to be contacted to participate in public performances connected to this research

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant                      PRINTED NAME                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Conducting                      PRINTED NAME & ROLE                      Date  
the Consent Discussion