

Word Count: 500

My educational background had an extremely strong impact on my development and interests, and consequently influenced my decision to pursue graduate studies in Composition at the University of XXX. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a community where there was an abundance of educational opportunities. The public school system in my town is known for its academic rigor, and I took full advantage of this as a student, taking as many advanced courses and electives as I was allowed. The more that I learned, the more determined I was to continue learning, through college and beyond. At YYY College, I eagerly seized the chance to take classes in as many different areas as possible. While I flourished in the liberal arts environment, however, I found myself slowly drawn into the Music Department, unable to resist the combination of interesting classes and talented professors. I had begun to compose before entering college, but it was only through my studies at YYY that I realized how strong my passion for music truly was.

My family and the musical environment fostered therein also had an enormous impact on my development. Of the extended family I knew, many were talented musicians; the most dedicated of these was my cousin Marcus, whose conversion from Catholicism to Judaism was primarily motivated by his desire to become a cantor. In addition to being surrounded by living musical relatives, I grew up knowing that music had been central to my family from their first arrival in America. My great-great-uncle Giacomo Ferrari was born in 1912 in Neverland, NY, the youngest of four sons. His parents had emigrated from Italy with his two eldest brothers in the early 1900s in search of a better life in America. Their struggles as immigrants are in themselves inspiring, but the challenges they faced are undoubtedly similar to those that many other immigrant families had to overcome; because of this, the actions that my relatives embarked upon are that much more extraordinary. Giacomo's oldest brother Antonio, my great-grandfather, decided to take a correspondence course in violin, and to teach his youngest brother Giacomo how to play as well. Giacomo Ferrari eventually became an accomplished violinist and started a free "Lunchtime Strings" program for all the elementary schools in the Neverland area, giving free violin lessons and monthly concerts. As a native English speaker who has had the privilege of studying viola and violin with trained, private teachers, I can only imagine the perseverance it took for my great-grandfather and great-great uncle to learn an instrument like the violin out of booklets and lessons that were not even written in their native language. Their passion and dedication to learning something new, something not part of their lives as blue-collar, immigrant workers, and their desire to share it with others, has inspired me as a musician and a person. It is this spirit that has motivated me to pursue an MA at Composition at the University of XXX.