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**Musical Humility:**  
**An Ethnographic Case Study of a Competitive High School Jazz Band**

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**Abstract**

Musical Humility: An Ethnographic Case Study of a Competitive High School Jazz Band

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In any form, musical participation is an intimately social activity. Yet, as musicians unflinchingly commit their fullest selves to shared musical collaborations, the natural human penchant for self-interest inevitably comes along for the journey, threatening to compromise collectivistic desires with more egocentric comportments. Undeniably, the ego plays an inextricable—and at times antagonistic—role in the negotiation of musicians' performed identities. But as pervasive as the ego may be throughout various spheres of musical practice, it has yet to become a topic of empirical music research. In response to this gap in the literature, the purpose of the current study was to contribute an initial understanding of humility's role in musical participation.

This research utilized an ethnographic case study (including non-participant observation and interviews as the primary means of data collection) over the course of six months to examine the presence of prosocial and antisocial behaviors among the students and director of a competitive high school jazz band in the Pacific Northwest. First, three broad themes of musical egoism were identified: (a) seeking and desiring superiority, (b)

displays of self-importance, self-promotion, and self-orientation, and (c) an inflated self-view. These emergent egoistic behaviors became central to uncovering socially desirable displays of humility in following. A five-component definition of humility particular to musical participation was consequently established, resulting in a nascent construct referred to as *musical humility*. Its classification is generated by the interactions between interpersonal, intrapersonal, social, and musical domains: (a) purposeful musical engagement and collaboration, (b) a lack of superiority, (c) the acknowledgement of shortcomings and learnability, (d) other-orientedness, and (e) healthy pride. Evidence suggests that each of these components interact fluidly with one another, but with healthy pride emanating throughout all facets of the virtue in order to support a concept which is socially empowering rather than disparaging.

This initial step in musical humility research contributes a musical perspective to the growing ontology of 'humilities' currently identified within the field of social psychology, including general humility, intellectual humility, cultural humility, organizational humility, and others. Specifically, the research posits that musical experiences rooted in humility enable the enhancement of both musical and social relationships. Ultimately, the model is envisioned as a potential exemplar for cultivating egalitarian, hospitable, and other-oriented ways of being not only within music participation, but society more broadly.

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*The image of an individual, alone in a laboratory, working on some new invention or exotic equipment, that no one else could possibly understand, is best left to class B movies. Yet that is the stereotype we impart to our doctoral students, whose dissertation efforts are typically characterized by a sense of quarantine from the world—a pervading detachment so intense as to be remembered throughout life as perhaps the most lonely time the person has spent. This is not science. It is more like some misguided initiation ceremony into a secret order which requires a kind of intellectual celibacy as a condition of membership. (Reimer, 1985, pp. 17–18)*

I recall reading this statement for the first time in my doctoral seminar during my first year at UW. Sitting around a conference table, we were four professors and three doctoral students, meeting weekly to discuss independent projects, current topics in music education, and academia at-large. We exchanged ideas, presented our research, and evaluated each other's work. As such, Bennett Reimer's image of the dissertating Ph.D. candidate's loneliness, working feverishly in solitude, was admittedly somewhat lost on me. I always felt like I had a roundtable of brilliant scholars within arm's reach. It is this community at the University of Washington that has undoubtedly helped me get to where I am today. It started in the windowless Room 27 and extends far beyond. I am forever grateful for that community, and for the many ways in which it supported me—intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **SETTING THE STAGE: A MUSICAL CALL FOR HUMILITY**

#### **A Historical Vignette**

It was a warm June evening thirty-two years ago in Vancouver, British Columbia. Standing on the stage of a packed amphitheater, the iconic Miles Davis had reemerged from a performance hiatus just a few years prior, complete with an electric band of synthesizers, pedals, pickups, and a decidedly *avant garde* styling. As he tells it in his autobiography, the iconoclast was in the middle of his set when a young, up-and-coming 25-year-old trumpeter unexpectedly joined him on stage:

So here I was playing and getting off on what I was doing. All of a sudden I feel this presence coming up on me, this body movement, and I see that the crowd is kind of wanting to cheer or gasp or something. Then Wynton [Marsalis] whispers in my ear—and I’m still trying to play—“They told me to come up here.” (Davis, 1989, p. 374)

As Davis tells it, he turned around and yelled at Marsalis, “man, get the fuck off the stage!” before stopping his combo and kicking him off the bandstand. He declared that Marsalis was unable to play the type of music that his band was playing and was offended that he seemed to lack a sense of respect for his elders. Truly, Davis and Marsalis did not seem to get along very well in general; apparently, Marsalis had “...talked real bad about [Davis] in the papers and on television and in magazines...” (p. 374). Furthermore, Davis

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expressed that “Wynton thinks that music is about blowing people away up on stage” (p. 375). “But music,” Davis contended, “isn’t about competition, but about cooperation, doing shit together and fitting in. It’s definitely not about competition, at least not to me. That kind of attitude has no place in music as far as I’m concerned” (p. 375).

Not surprisingly, Wynton Marsalis recalls a different story, as he recounts in a 1990 *Down Beat* magazine interview:

In [Miles’s] autobiography, he gives the impression that he ran me off his bandstand in Vancouver. Not true. I went on his bandstand to address some disparaging statements that he was making about me publicly. I felt I should address them publicly with my horn. I don’t know who this mysterious ‘they’ was that he claims told me to go up there. *I* told me to go up there. I told him I’m up here to play, and he said come back tomorrow night. I said, “I’m here tonight.” ...He claimed I didn’t know what they were playing. Bull. His band was playing blues, and when I started playing he was trying to cut them off [...] When I had left, then he picked his horn up. It struck me as being strange that the same breath and lungs that could carry those disparaging words failed him when it was time to play some music. (Helland, 1990, pp. 16–17)

Marsalis’s pugnacious response did not stop there: after stating in his interview that he wanted to close the door on the notorious altercation, he added,

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but any time that these questions can be settled musically, he's free to come on my bandstand or, if invited, I will show up anywhere in the world at anytime with my horn to let it be known publicly how I feel about these things. We can go to the bandstand with it. Let's play some music and then we'll see what's happening. (ibid, p. 18)

Which famous trumpeter was guilty of 'grandstanding' more here: the seasoned veteran who cut off Marsalis mid-solo rather than taking the young, perhaps arrogant performer 'under his wing' that evening, despite his personal feelings toward him? Or the young, impetuous trumpet player who had the audacity to walk onto the bandstand during another musician's—indeed, a *living legend's*—performance, and then publicly criticize the jazz master for not engaging him in a musical battle?

Regardless of which side someone may choose, what lays at the center of this infamous exchange was a mutual human quality—one that has haunted humankind for as long as we have been self-aware beings (Leary, 2004): the unruly, out-of-control *ego*. In the end, it does not matter who was more righteous in the notorious Davis–Marsalis exchange; it is indisputable that both suffered from a self-interested desire to put the other 'in his place.' Today, many jazz musicians colloquially call this "vibing," or a "...mean-spirited attitude toward other musicians and the way they play the music" (Hughes, 2016). If a more famous example of vibing could be named within the jazz world, it might be the fabled 1937 story of drummer Jo Jones (of the Count Basie Orchestra) tossing a cymbal at a then-inexperienced Charlie Parker for not being able to keep up with the music (Gioia, 1997, p. 191). Or, perhaps the ill-famed "Buddy Rich Tapes" in which the celebrated

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drummer and bandleader's voice was recorded as he verbally assaulted his band for not meeting his extreme expectations (Milkowski, 2002).

### **Music and the Pervasive Ego**

Each of these events in jazz history share a common thread of antisocial behavior emanating from self-conceited conflict between a musician's creative desires on the one hand, and his or her interactions with others sharing in that musical experience on the other. Indeed, such conflicts are seemingly pervasive throughout musical interactions broadly, both anecdotally and historically. Whether speaking of arrogant trumpet players, diva sopranos, vain rock musicians, bigheaded rappers, or egomaniacal conductors, a natural human penchant for egocentrism becomes possibly more pronounced amidst highly personal expressions through music. For better or worse, our social identities are inextricably interwoven throughout the musical interactions in which we engage, and the ego assuredly comes along on the journey, often brimming at the surface. Yet curiously, while our egos allow us to reasonably commit to a performative musical experience, that very same internal mechanism also paradoxically threatens our ability to sustain the interpersonal relationships that are required for broader musical processes. In short, the ego uplifts as we seek to perform at the peak of the human spirit, but it can just as quickly betray us in the name of creative egocentrism and vanity.

### **Jazz: A Negotiation Between Self and Other**

Further blurring this negotiated ebb and flow of one's musical self is the tradition of jazz music as embodying an integral negotiation of the individual within the context of the

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larger collective. Referred throughout this study as the *individualism-collectivism*<sup>1</sup> dualism, jazz music embodies this careful negotiation through an attentive sociomusical balancing act, which is deeply rooted in the complex interactions of West African and European musical traditions (see Gioia, 1997; Ake, 2002; Hersch, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. On the one hand, “individualism places focus on a single person and his or her own desires, choices, interests, and goals, based on the specific idiosyncrasies of his or her own personality” (Rinzler, 2008, p. 17). It was from this side of the spectrum that the individual jazz solo entered the spotlight, pioneered by Louis Armstrong, who was celebrated as one of the originators of individual improvisation (as opposed to more collective improvisations historically preferred within New Orleans jazz). On the other side of the spectrum lies collectivism, which “...refers to mutual relations among people. It includes the interactions among two or more people as well as the influences people may have on each other” (Rinzler, 2008, p. 27).

This balanced negotiation of self and other is further seen as powerfully meaningful through the musical and social education of students. Montuori (1996) views the jazz tradition—with all its interactive complexities and uncertainties—as an ideal model for the creative and collaborative efforts that are central to teaching and learning in a democratic society. Given the preference for individualistic ways of thinking and behaving within American culture (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985/2008), Montuori embraces the “unpredictability” associated with jazz improvisation, which he views as a

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<sup>1</sup> Or *individualism-interconnectedness* dualism, as preferred by Rinzler (2008).

<sup>2</sup> The origins of jazz are far more complex than can be articulated in the space of this brief discussion. Beyond the blending of African and European traditions, a significant mixture of Creole and Caribbean cultures further contributed to what we now identify as ‘jazz’(ibid).



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metaphorical means for realizing more collectivistic modes of human behavior. Abstracting slightly from literal jazz performance, he refers to broader social forms of improvisation as “social creativity,” which extends beyond the literal invention of artistic ideas and into the negotiated creativity of social practices as well. From his lens, then, jazz music represents far more than a way of viewing musical participation; it represents a way of being human *wholly*.

Using jazz as a metaphor for social organization means jazz musicians have created a model that I believe can be transferred to other social systems and settings. If we are to benefit from the jazz metaphor, we need to study the qualities musicians embody during performance, learn from them, and apply them to other contexts. We must learn how to translate musical performance into everyday life and nonmusical interaction. (Montuori, 2006, pp. 59–60)

In action, the cooperation between individualism and collectivism is rarely dichotomous, whether through music (Rinzler, 2008) or in society (Dewey, 1916). Particularly in music, an improvising soloist is never fully singular in the moment. The musician negotiates his or her improvisation against the rhythm section’s groove, the band’s backgrounds, or perhaps even another soloist. On the other end of the continuum, no collectivistic performance is ever fully so. The individual never loses his or her identity fully within the context of the group’s contributions. Each member works to blend, balance, and contribute equitably to the creative output of the group, but nonetheless carries an individualized tone, aesthetic approach, and technical mastery. The Duke Ellington

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Orchestra, for example, was famous for its exceptional ability to create a powerful and unique ensemble sound that celebrated the individual strengths of the band members (Williams, 1993)—a historical embodiment of the collectivistic ensemble through which individualistic identities shone through. Therefore, as with all dualisms, I argue that it is impractical to view them as black-and-white, polarized ways of musically being, but rather an integrated exchange of independence and interdependence roaming constantly along a continuum.

Nevertheless, when this negotiation of individualism and collectivism interacts with the competitive tradition of seeking to outplay one another through friendly jam sessions and ‘cutting contests,’ the ego becomes activated—sometimes perniciously so—and the need to demonstrate superiority threatens to supersede all other matters. This is precisely what Miles Davis lamented with respect to a young Wynton Marsalis, who he thought had lost sight of the friendlier side of the tradition’s competitive rituals. Quoting trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, Berliner (1994) articulates that historically,

[r]ivalry among the participants added spark to an already charged atmosphere.

“During that time, there was somewhat of a mutual respect among the musicians, and they had cutting sessions. They would say, ‘I am going to blow so and so out.’ It wasn’t with malice. It was no put-down; it was just friendly competition.” (p. 44)

Today, Wynton Marsalis is heralded by many within the jazz community as one of the greatest living jazz trumpeters, and now sits at the helm of the nation’s largest non-profit jazz organization, Jazz at Lincoln Center. Marsalis still values competition, to be sure,

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which is revealed through the establishment of the nation's most prestigious jazz competition for high school bands, the *Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition and Festival (EE)*. But at least with respect to *Essentially Ellington*, it seems that either Marsalis's views of supercilious competition have evolved since his altercation with Davis, or perhaps Davis (and the media) got Marsalis's stance wrong entirely.

Welcoming the fifteen finalist bands one May afternoon in 2011, Marsalis hosted an annual 'one-on-one' session with students, allowing them to ask any question they wished. Topics ranged from preserving the art form, to the state of competition in music, to Marsalis's fashion sense. When a student asked a particular question about the role of the ego and self-esteem in pursuit of greatness, Marsalis took a brief pause before thoughtfully responding:

Now one thing in our music—jazz—is that you cannot be great by yourself. How many times has a rhythm section just stopped playing because the horn player was too great to play with them? It's a manifestation of that horn player's greatness that they *can't* stop playing...on either end of the spectrum of egotism, the music affords you the opportunity to see yourself<sup>3</sup>.

Evidently, Marsalis was promoting the importance of humility within the art form. But his comment carried with it a balanced avowal that humility alone neither advances the art form nor makes musicians particularly desirable to play with. Greatness, he seemed to

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<sup>3</sup> This statement was made in a public forum during the *Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival* at Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York, NY on May 12, 2011.

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suggest, comes from having the state of mind in which collaboration with others is central to its pursuit, and in the process makes musicians desirable to be around simply because of their inspiring skill and exceptional musicianship. In effect, Marsalis was responding to the question with great respect toward the individualism–collectivism dualism that defines the music: on the one hand, humility is desirable, but nobody is inspired to play with someone who acquiescently ‘plays it safe’ all the time. Yet, on the other hand, no one wants to play with someone who singularly attributes a powerful musical experience to him or herself alone. ‘Greatness,’ therefore, could perhaps be attained in isolation, but is only worthwhile in collaboration.

Taking a further opportunity to wax philosophically about the state and survival of jazz, Marsalis (2004) also published a series of letters intended to share his wisdom obtained over the many years of participating in the art form. These letters were directed toward young, developing jazz musicians who were in the process of “cutting their teeth” within the jazz idiom. Given the opening vignette at the start of this chapter, his letters might be viewed as ironic, but his first full letter is titled “The Humble Self.” In it, he writes, “humility is the doorway to truth and clarity of objectives for a jazz musician; it’s the doorway to learning” (p. 5). He stresses that the “first level of mastery occurs over the self” (p. 10) and that “[h]umility engenders learning because it beats back the arrogance that puts blinders on” (p. 11).

### **Humility: A Matter of Personal & Collective Responsibility**

If humility is indeed the “doorway to learning,” as Marsalis suggests, then it is certainly understandable why he might view it as so central to musicians’ self-growth. Yet

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as a human virtue, humility opens doors far beyond one's individual penchant for mastery. In fact, it extends into the lives of others through gregarious and hospitable interactions in which ethical and moral responsibilities are effectively garnered. Truly, the pursuit of the 'good life'—and humility's role in that quest—has been pondered by philosophers for centuries. Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016) summarize the Western philosophical notion of the 'good life' as "a life lived well, a life devoted to virtuous action (and that avoids vices of excess or deficiency)" (p. 7). Surely, if humility is accepted as a worthy human virtue, then its existence arguably contributes meaningfully to this elusive pursuit of the 'good life.'

### **Responsibility to Self**

But in fact, humility was not always viewed unilaterally as a virtue, at least not among Greek and Roman philosophers. As Bobb (2013) summarizes, "[f]or most ancient Greek and Roman thinkers, a humble existence was by definition an abject existence" (p. 16). Instead, virtuousness lay within the appropriate acceptance of one's own greatness. Depicted by Aristotle's (trans. 2011) icon of the 'great souled man,' a person with virtuous pride both "deems himself worthy of great things and *is* worthy of them" (book IV, p. 75). This so-called magnanimous person was neither acquiescently humble nor blindly arrogant; instead he or she upheld the pinnacle of human pride and greatness and celebrated it willingly. Thus, Aristotle's notion of *megalopsychia*—literally 'great-souledness' or 'magnanimity' (Bobb, 2013)—held that people should hold a proper estimation of their worth. As Aristotle saw it, humility gets in the way of the true valuation of one's worth.

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While a deeper philosophical discussion of these ideals is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to at least recognize that within the context of the current study, this Greek notion of empowered self-pride is viewed decisively alongside my forthcoming interpretation of humility. Unequivocally, these philosophical perspectives have shaped the ways in which I view the virtue, and as such will naturally work into my subsequent interpretations of humble acts throughout the study. Specifically, humility is interpreted to be more of an *appropriately* prideful act in which people neither overestimate nor underestimate their self-worth. In this way, it becomes clear that *both* egoism and modest deference are pernicious to progress.

Furthermore, the Greeks' belief in and apprehension over egoistic *hubris* is viewed as central to the perspectives held within this study. Defined as the excessive possession of pride which (usually) leads to some ultimate punishment or downfall, it was believed by the Greeks that hubris threatened the prideful human's downfall (but not for the truly 'great-souled human,' for his pride could never be held in excess). As we will see in action, the surfacing of hubris became a significant consequence of the egoistic musical mindset, and its recognition signified a need for humbler comportments within the jazz band culture.

However, the Greek notion of *megalopsychia* is clearly deficient as well, because first, it recognizes no need for the truly magnanimous person to ever mitigate his or her expression of personal greatness and suggests that interacting with others of 'lesser' status is wholly unnecessary. Second, it believes that people are more or less deserving of the degree to which they possess certain virtues (Bobb, 2013), which neglects the 'learnability' of virtuous behavior. These aspects of Aristotle's viewpoints are viewed as outdated and

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unconstructive to human progress, and as such are rejected from the present inquiry—which will instead hold that humility is less a fixed trait than a practiced behavior that can be possessed and learned by any willing human.

### **Responsibility to Others**

Aristotle's perspective of prideful magnanimity appears productive in terms of thinking about appropriate pride that is neither self-effacing nor supercilious, but is ultimately flawed in that it neglects an understanding of the collective responsibilities that are necessitated by the virtue of humility. More contemporarily, Martin Buber's (1970) writings on the egalitarian notion of 'I-It' and 'I-You,' Immanuel Kant's commentary on the intersections between humility, morality, and ethics (Grenberg, 2005), and Paulo Freire's (1970/2010) charge for humility in transformative education have refocused the virtue of humility to be more central to one's collective obligations. Within the context of music education, these contemporary philosophers' writings maintain that virtuous action is a matter not just for the progress of the musician him or herself, but necessarily extends to everyone engaged within a collective musical experience.

Thus, the enactment of humility within a music ensemble arguably begins with the director him or herself, who is charged with the moral responsibility of leading the ensemble with an egalitarian, prosocial, and student-centered approach. The music educator who leads his or her ensemble with an arrogant disposition—including the assumption of ultimate knowledge and the adoption of autocratic power—risks passing a false sense of 'earned egoism' along to the students. In other words, by falsely suggesting that arrogance can be earned through mastery, the director implicitly communicates to the

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student that once knowledge is gained, autocratic power and importance may follow (Leary, 2004). Innocuously as this approach may be harnessed, the teacher effectively risks cloaking their egoism in a “false generosity of paternalism” (Freire, 1970/2010, p. 54). Therefore, much of the solution lies in the teacher’s ability to create an open dialogue with the students, facilitating a relationship that is horizontal (suggesting egalitarianism) instead of vertical (suggesting authoritarianism). The effect can be transformative as the teacher reconsiders his or her role in an educative environment: “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students” (ibid, p. 80).

### **Responsibility to the Musical Tradition**

Finally, it appears that the enactment of humility within musical contexts may be harnessed for a third purpose: neither for the individual nor the group, but for the music itself. In other words, humility allows musicians to compel their efforts in favor of the art form to which they have committed themselves. For jazz musicians in particular, understanding the rich history of struggle and subjugation out of which much of the jazz tradition was born demands a humble obligation to uphold this tradition reverently, piously, and even exultantly. Synthesizing these sentiments, jazz educator Cecil Bridgewater expresses precisely this impression. As he sees it, choosing to partake in the jazz idiom is not a decision to be taken lightly, which he explains during an interview for a book called *Jazzing* by Thomas H. Greenland (2016):



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I tell [my jazz students]: “There’re too many people who have given their *whole lives* to this music so that you have an opportunity to do this, and you’re not going to fuck it up!” And I get real, real serious...And it’s not about *me*, it’s not about *them*, it’s about respect for the music. ‘Cause if you’re going to do this, do it well; if you’re *not* going to do it, get out of it, ‘cause I don’t want you to go out misrepresenting what this music is about. There’s a *whole history* that goes with this music, people that gave their *lives* to it, went through *hell* so that you could be in this situation and have an opportunity to play. (p. 10, italics original)

Clearly, Bridgewater’s commentary pinpoints the humble effort of reducing one’s self-focus for the greater good of the musical journey (and the tradition it celebrates). Trumpeter Art Farmer contributes eloquently to this belief as well, expressing how a humble ‘forgetting of the self’ allows musicians to become willingly acquiescent to the musical experience that is to pave its way through the collective process: “You see, when you forget *yourself*, you get to the point where the music doesn’t come from you, it comes through you. You become part of the total experience of ‘now’ (Greenland, 2016, pp. 163–164, italics original).

While some may attempt to dismiss Farmer’s sentiments here as overly capricious or cockeyed, it nevertheless holds true that the musical experiences in which these young jazz musicians will embark throughout the pages of this dissertation will reflect the very purposeful efforts of musicians attempting to ‘find their way,’ as it were, within an art form for which they share a deep affection. That affection represented a binding thread between them each, and as such it necessitated a non-selfish, committedly collective pursuit. As

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Greenland (2016) writes, “...while performers need strong personalities and egos to assert themselves as artistic individuals, they must also have sufficient humility to immerse themselves within their sociomusical environment” (p. 164).

### Identifying the Problem

For as long as music has been a social activity, and for as long as humans have been social beings, the ego has played an inextricable—and often antagonistic—role in the negotiation of musicians’ performed identities. To be sure, egoism is not exclusive to jazz. Historically, it could be seen and interpreted within the nineteenth century’s iconic *prima donna*, who constructed a caricatured stage identity of superciliousness (Cowgill & Poriss, 2012). It could arguably be heard through the long-winded libretto of Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It could be interpreted in the temperament of Igor Stravinsky (1947), who held rigid beliefs about the aesthetic execution of his music (see Small, 1998). More contemporarily, it has apparently found its way to Rihanna, Justin Bieber, Madonna, and others who have selfishly kept their audience waiting as they arrive casually (or many hours) late to their own concerts. And perhaps most famously (at least in pop culture today), it was exemplified within the conceited expressions of rapper Kanye West<sup>4</sup>, who infamously interrupted Taylor Swift during her 2009 MTV Music Video Award speech with his now-notoriously patronizing words, “I’mma let you finish!”

Yet, such self-regarding behaviors are not unique to musical artists. Cultural shifts and trends have arguably contributed to a larger societal shift in self-importance

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<sup>4</sup> Kanye West is perhaps the most fascinating figure of contemporary arrogance in the arts, who has celebrated a successful career through the construction of a performed identity rooted in unabashed egoism (see Comentale, 2016).

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throughout the United States and world (Worthington, Davis, & Hook, 2017), resulting in an observable surge of what many identify as narcissism and egotistic pride among not only celebrities and political leaders (Twenge, 2006), but to those with access to social media platforms as well (Moon, Lee, Lee, Choi, & Sung, 2016). Jean Twenge (2006) labeled the millennial generation “Generation ME,” and although these trends were similarly observable in prior generations, conceptions of self-interest, narcissism, and selfishness are inexorably tied to this maturing age group as well as their incipient offspring. Perhaps in response to this recent trend, an outpouring of scholarly research on the topic of humility has materialized from social psychology, which has investigated the benefits of leading a life of humility and eschewing the natural human predilection for egoistic self-pride.

Fortunately, this overdue investigation of humility also offers to contribute appreciably to our understanding of identity, personality, social bonding, and prosocial behavior broadly. But as pervasive as the unruly ego may be throughout various spheres of musical practice, it has quizzically yet to become a topic for systematic music research. This is both baffling, and I argue, rather problematic. Plentiful research has examined identity development in music and music education, yet no studies to date have explicitly examined the very mechanism that psychologists (i.e., Freud, 1962; see Bauer & Wayment, 2008) have argued to be central to identity and personality development: the ego<sup>5</sup>. If it holds that our egos are central to the cultivation of our social identities, and our social identities are viewed as being inseparable from our musical efforts, then it must follow that an investigation of how the ego interacts with the human processes of making music is central

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<sup>5</sup> While Freud’s work was foundational to our current understanding of the ego, his theory represented a psychoanalytical line of inquiry that is beyond scope for the present study. As such, only contemporary psychologists will be discussed henceforth in regard to the psychological ego.

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to comprehensively understanding music in and through identity. Furthermore, if we understand the ego to be an oftentimes-flawed human trait which serves to diminish our capacity for collaborative and other-focused behaviors, then we ought to further consider the development of humility—specifically as it pertains to the diminishing of the destructive ego—as a worthwhile pursuit of any social practice, especially music as a performed and embodied social practice.

### **Purpose & Research Questions**

Given the rationalized importance of humility in collective musical participation, the purpose of the current study is to contribute, for the first time, a nascent understanding of humility and egoism's role in musical participation. Such discussions have been informally and anecdotally shared, but systematic research is now necessary and overdue within the field. To be clear, I am particularly interested in the role of humility and egoism in music *generally* (and not exclusively within the realm of jazz music); however, as will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3, an exploration of humility and egoism manifested within the context of the jazz idiom will provide a most salient demonstration of their enactments within an art form that is centrally concerned with the negotiation of self and other. This belief stems from the previously-discussed dualism of individualism-collectivism (Rinzler, 2008) that has been historically inextricable from the art form—a dualism wherein compromises between self-interest and collective responsibility rise saliently to the surface. Given the research problem and purpose, as well as a meaningful context through which the problem can be explored (the jazz idiom), the following research questions became central to this study:

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1. Is there a distinctive form of humility specific to musical participation evident within the context of a competitive public high school jazz band?
2. What are the sociomusical ramifications (both positive and negative) resulting from such manifestations of humility and egoism on the musicians, the ensembles in which they participate, and the larger musical outcomes of the group?

The first research question is primarily descriptive in nature and necessitates a holistic understanding of the musical environments in which humility and egoism are revealed. The second research question seeks to establish a deeper understanding for how the patterns of behavior established from the first research question are manifested. Necessarily, each of these research questions will be observed both (a) in the context of interactions between students, as well as (b) between the director and his students, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the construct within a school-based competitive high school jazz environment.

### **Overview, Scope, and Limitations**

Throughout the trajectory of this dissertation, I will seek to integrate the important work of humility research developed within positive psychology with the field of music and music education. Not only does the current study represent the first-known investigation of humility and egoism in music or music education, but it additionally represents the first-known study to utilize an ethnographic method to probe the constructs of interest<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 3, all existing humility research has utilized either quantitative or philosophical modes of inquiry. This is with the exception of some recent work conducted within cultural humility, which has utilized qualitative research methods, but primarily for intervention-based research.

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Following this introductory chapter, I will offer a background of the relevant work that has been conducted within social psychology and sociology in Chapter 2. Specifically, I will discuss relevant research on prosocial behavior (for reasons which will become clear within that chapter) as well as the literature on humility and egoism. I will further seek to introduce the core understandings of humility and egoism that will become central to the study.

In Chapter 3, I will provide a detailed scope of the research method, as well as a fuller description of the chosen setting for the study. I will additionally provide an overview of the strategies behind collecting and analyzing data, which were central to how the definition of musical humility was systematically developed. Chapter 4 will comprise the ethnographic core of the study through thick descriptions of the behaviors, rituals, mores, and dispositions of the Grant High School Jazz Band, as well as the participants invested in the program.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I will present the interpreted findings of the study with regard to the manifestations of egoism and humility (respectively) uncovered within the Grant Jazz Band. I will conclude both chapters by discussing the ramifications of egoism and humility on the social dynamics of the jazz band, followed by a brief problematization of the constructs' salience and consequence. At the conclusion of Chapter 6, I will provide the emergent five-part model of musical humility.

Finally, I will begin Chapter 7 by positioning the definition of musical humility against the growing ontology of humility research in an attempt to relate it to the construct

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studies. As such, the present study appears to be the first to seek an operationalized *definition* of humility through qualitative inquiry.

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of general humility but differentiate it from the various sub-forms of humility—including intellectual humility, cultural humility, organizational humility, and so on. Beyond that, I will seek to shore up the various theoretical and practical matters and remaining questions that remain unresolved to the study. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the potentials for future musical humility research.

As a burgeoning body of research, it is necessary to ensure that the parameters of this study are clearly defined and delimited so that the investigation does not spiral out boundlessly. In order for the current study to retain a semblance of cohesion and concision, relevant dialogues surrounding musical humility and egoism ought to be carried out beyond the limits of this dissertation. As such, I will not actively seek to develop perspectives of musical humility and egoism beyond the sphere of a competitive high school jazz band, as much as it is certainly a matter of considerable interest to me.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR, HUMILITY, AND EGOISM**

The decision to investigate the broader prosocial dynamics of a competitive high school jazz band (rather than the exclusive manifestations of humility and egoism) from the start of the project emanates from a desire to engage with my research interest in a more inferential manner. That is, by examining the broader prosocial behaviors of the band, I was able to employ a more inductive approach by consistently asking: *what spectrum of possibilities could provide explanations for the underlying social behaviors occurring within this jazz ensemble culture?* This approach seeks all possible conclusions rather than engaging in a potentially-misguided deductive reasoning process in which I attempt to illustrate the themes of humility and egoism as singularly driving the narrative of events. Indeed, while many prosocial and antisocial behaviors may be rooted in humble and egoistic tendencies, they may not always be the most appropriate explanations for such behaviors. After all, as will be revealed in the following pages, concluding whether a particular action or behavior is rooted in humility or egoism is far more complicated than concluding whether that action or behavior was a display of prosocial or antisocial behavior broadly.

To clarify, the trait of humility is not itself a prosocial behavior per se, but they are highly aligned with one another (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Davis et al., 2017). As such, "...it is possible that humility is not causally related to prosocial behavior, but allows for a sorting of larger groups based on other variables that are causally more proximal to criterion behaviors" (Davis et al., 2017, p. 111). With this in mind, the following review of literature



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will by necessity begin with a brief discussion of what constitutes prosocial behavior, as well as why people appear to be motivated to engage in such behaviors. These considerations will enable a concluding discussion of recent scholarship on humility—stemming primarily from the field of positive psychology, which examines the construct both empirically and theoretically.

### Prosocial Behavior

#### What is Prosocial Behavior?

Prosocial behavior refers to any act that serves to benefit another person (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006; Schroeder & Graziano, 2015). In the field of sociology, the equivalent construct is referred to as *solidarity* (Lindenberg, Fetchenhauer, Flache, & Buunk, 2006). According to work conducted in social psychology, there are four primary subtypes of prosocial behavior (under which many other forms may fall): helping, altruism, volunteerism, and cooperation (Schroeder & Graziano, 2015). Correspondingly, the sociology community identifies five types of solidary behavior: cooperation, fairness, altruism, trustworthiness, and considerateness (Lindenberg et al., 2006). Like the concept of relational humility (which will be discussed later in this chapter), an important facet of prosocial behavior is that actions and behaviors are not inherently or universally prosocial but judged within a particular context (Schroeder & Graziano, 2015). This will be important to consider throughout the chapter on method (Chapter 3), as this consideration informed the primary rationale for choosing the present methodological approach.

**Helping.** Helping is a broad domain of prosocial behavior that may include a wide range of behaviors, motivations, and degrees of involvement. Pearce and Amato (1980)

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offer a three-part taxonomic structure for helping behaviors. First, they propose that helping behaviors may involve anything from “formal and planned” to “spontaneous and informal” actions. Second, it is important to consider the seriousness of the help-inducing situation, which may affect a person’s willingness to engage in a helpful act. For example, the simple task of picking up a dropped pencil will be considered quite differently from the decision to risk one’s life for the sake of another. Finally, the level of involvement is a third factor to consider: to what extent must the person involve him or herself to conduct the helpful behavior? Choosing to donate money to a non-profit jazz education organization (for a relevant example) will require a different degree of involvement than volunteering one’s entire weekend to raise money for the local school jazz band. Regarding the association of helpfulness to humility, LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang, and Willerton (2012) provide evidence that humility may predict helpfulness, with humbler people self-reporting greater helpfulness.

**Altruism.** Altruistic behaviors are sometimes conceived of as a subcategory of helping. Specifically, Schroeder and Graziano (2015) state that helping behavior can be prosocial without being altruistic—especially if the helping behavior leads to some benefit for the giver as well as the receiver. Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (2013) clarify that “[a]ltruism is helping purely out of the desire to benefit someone else, with no benefit (and often a cost) to oneself” (p. 302). For Batson (1991), one of the most prolific scholars on altruism, the key consideration is the helper’s *motivation* for engaging in altruistic behavior. He recognizes that many helping behaviors may manifest from egoistic intentions—namely, that the helper may willingly increase his or her own welfare in the process (Batson, 2011, p. 20). However, Batson (1991) also emphatically insists that ‘true’

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altruism can indeed exist and is triggered by an empathic concern for a person in need, which supersedes any egoistic personal gains. He refers to this postulation as the *empathy altruism hypothesis*.

**Volunteerism.** Volunteerism is another form of helping, but is distinct in that volunteers typically have no direct contact with the recipients of their contributions (Schroeder & Graziano, 2015, p. 5). For example, given the previously offered example of a helper donating money to a non-profit jazz organization, this volunteer would typically not be a parent or invested community member, but perhaps an unaffiliated or anonymous donor. Since most interactions within the present study occurred with invested members of the jazz band program (i.e., parents and family members, booster club members, ‘feeder’ jazz educators within the surrounding area), most volunteer-like behaviors were treated as more general acts of helping rather than volunteerism.

**Cooperation.** Cooperation was unequivocally the most salient form of prosocial behavior identified in the current study, which is perhaps not surprising given the participatory and collaborative spirit of jazz. It is also perhaps the most dynamic of the prosocial behaviors, considering that it typically involves multiple parties which purposefully “...*coordinate* their actions, to pursue common goals, and promote mutually beneficial (i.e., prosocial) outcomes that may include social as well as material rewards” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 270, italics original). Importantly, cooperation is distinguished from other forms of prosocial behavior in that parties involved in cooperative acts are typically treated as more-or-less equal partners, pooling their resources so that they can accomplish more than they can achieve individually (Dovidio & Bandield, 2015). Contributions “...need not be equal, but each party contributes what is possible, and all expect to realize some

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benefit” (Schroeder & Graziano, 2015, p. 6). For example, a pianist actively responding to a saxophonist’s improvised solo may contribute through harmonic and rhythmic support underneath the soloist. The pianist does not need to contribute equally to the moment; in fact, contributing much more would likely detract the spotlight from the soloist, thus becoming selfish or antisocial. But by offering what he or she is able (and what is appropriate), the pianist arguably realizes the same benefit as the soloist—namely, the realization of a satisfying musical interchange.

The group dynamics of cooperation are particularly relevant to this study, which are strongly informed by the principles of *interdependence theory* (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). This theory posits that within every interpersonal relationship, members consider the costs and rewards associated with that relationship, and that people continually seek to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. These ‘costs’ may be emotional, social, instrumental, and/or opportunistic. Group cooperation, then, is essentially concerned with each member working together to “...find ways to contribute to some common good that will benefit all concerned” (Schroeder & Graziano, 2015, p. 7). Surely, perspectives from interdependence theory will be relevant to matters of humility as well; a similar cost-benefit analysis will likely play out during a person’s decision to act humbly or arrogantly in a particular situation.

Of even greater relevance to this study, *intergroup cooperation* is a particular type of cooperation in which insiders within a particular group establish a degree of cooperative interdependence (Dovidio, & Bandield, 2015). Generally, people feel more positively about ingroup members than outgroup members (Otten & Moskowitz, 2000). This is mostly logical, given the principles of *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests

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that people identify strongly with their social identities. As such, people naturally engage in “...ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation, and are inclined to compete with and discriminate against other groups to gain or maintain advantage of their group” (Dovidio & Bandfield, 2015, p. 564). This theoretical foundation establishes the logical relevance of competitiveness, at least insofar as between-group competition goes. It also may help explain how intragroup (within-group) competition may be subdued for the sake of greater intergroup cooperation.

Interestingly however, relations between groups tend to be less cooperative (and more competitive) when individuals act as members of a group as opposed to individuals. For example, many of the students in the Grant Jazz program shared that they individually engaged in jam sessions and friendly group hangs with members of their rival programs at Chester and River Gorge High Schools, while there simultaneously exists a more salient sense of competitiveness (albeit friendly) between the groups (see Chapter 4). This phenomenon is known as the *interindividual-intergroup discontinuity effect* (Schopler & Insko, 1992).

As it relates to humility research, humility (when measured through the “Honesty-Humility” dimension of the popularly-used HEXACO model) correlates with fair resource allocation (Hilbig, Zettler, & Heydasch, 2012) and cooperation (Zettler, Hilbig, & Heydasch, 2013). Furthermore, humility is hypothesized to help promote positive intergroup interactions, because their other-orientedness makes them highly cooperative and strong facilitators of social interactions (Van Tongeren & Myers, 2017).

### **Motivations for Prosocial Behavior**

Disagreement over whether humans are either naturally selfish or authentically altruistic has been long debated by philosophers throughout history. While some thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Thomas Hobbes believed in the natural and universal state of human self-interest, others such as Aristotle, Rousseau, and Freire believed (albeit in different ways) that people could be inherently good and prosocial, but that social influences often corrupted these human proclivities. To this day, philosophers continue to disagree over humankind's natural state of selfishness or altruism. Nonetheless, a number of theoretical and empirical studies have attempted to better understand the motivations behind prosocial behavior.

**Evolutionary factors.** Starting briefly with an evolutionary explanation of prosocial behavior, Dawkins (1976) argued that first, engaging in prosocial behaviors could have contributed to the survivability not only of individuals, but the individual's genetic material as well. Second, he argued that prosocial interactions between unrelated individuals were evolutionarily beneficial because they enhanced the chances of one's survival when people came together to share resources and provide mutual protection from predators (ibid)—in other words, the old adage of “I’ll watch your back if you watch mine” was believed to ring true from an evolutionary perspective (Schroeder & Graziano, 2015, p. 8).

**Egoistic motivation.** In following with philosophical discourse, strong evidence supports the rather ironic notion that prosocial behavior is not authentically other-oriented at all but is rather fueled by self-interested motivations. Egoistically-motivated behaviors are performed to contribute to individual personal gain (or avoid personal loss). Psychologically, this principal is evidenced strongly by the principles of behaviorism

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(Skinner, 1953), which purports that any behavior (including prosocial behavior) contains a self-serving component which is socially learned through positive or negative reinforcement. The work of Alfie Kohn (1993) in education and organizational management has argued the perniciousness of behaviorism, specifically citing the hindered development of intrinsic motivations through reward systems.

As it pertains specifically to prosocial behavior, egoistic motivations mean that prosocial acts such as helping and cooperating are not conducted for the exclusive benefit of the receiver, but also lead to desirable outcomes for the actor as well:

[t]he helping act is done primarily for the benefit of the helper. Helping behavior may result in a positive outcome for the person in need, but that benefit for the victim is essentially a secondary consideration as far as the helper is concerned.

(Schroeder & Graziano, 2015, p. 9)

Truly, viewing prosocial behavior from an egoistic perspective has been the dominant perspective of the field given an absence of other explanations, although other motives are acknowledged to be simultaneously in play as well (ibid).

**Altruistic motivation.** As discussed previously, Batson (1991, 2011) is a strong proponent of altruistic motivations behind prosocial behavior, although he does not dispute that egoistic motives may play a role as well—perhaps even simultaneously. His empathy-altruism hypothesis holds that people are altruistically motivated to help another person when they feel empathically for another, regardless of what personal gains may be achieved in the process. Batson argues that while egoistic motivations can perhaps be

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explained in nearly every act of prosocial behavior, the important consideration is which of these two factors (egoism or altruism) is the predominant motive for the prosocial act (Batson, 1991, 2011, 2015).

**Collectivistic motivation.** Beyond the individually-conceived egoism–altruism dualism, another important component to consider is the potential degree of collectivism under which the prosocial behavior might take place. In other words, the benefit of some prosocial behaviors may not always serve an individual, but a collective group instead. For such situations, Batson (2011) further offers that some prosocial behaviors are collectivistically motivated, pursuing “...the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of a group or collective” (p. 216). Often, the balance between egoistic and collectivistic motivations leads to a social dilemma, in which the individual must choose between maximizing his or her own personal payoff or increasing the combined payoff of the group. For example, the third trumpet player in a jazz ensemble choosing to balance his or her part within the texture of the rest of the band is appropriately embodying collectivistic motivations. Alternatively, the second alto saxophone player choosing to play louder than the lead alto may be employing more egoistic motives.

In the current study, collectivistic motivations played an essential role in the everyday success of the jazz band. Put most succinctly, Feygina and Henry (2015) suggest that

prosociality is necessary to engage in activities that require cooperation between multiple contributors, all of whom must engage in fair participation for the group to attain success. This is the fundamental tenet of a sustainable society: Only if all



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individuals contribute to the whole, and restrain from drawing out more than their share, will the collective succeed. (p. 194)

### **The Subjectivities of Prosocial Behavior**

Because prosocial behavior represents the personified actions of social motivation, it becomes essential to better understand how existing relationships, power dynamics, social identities, and cultural considerations may affect a person's willingness to engage in prosocial behavior. The general framework of solidary behavior (the sociological equivalent of prosocial behavior) shares a similar perspective of subjectivity with the psychology community, holding that such behaviors take place "...in the context of a subjectively perceived *relationship* with its own expectations and identities" (Lindenberg et al., 2006, p. 10, italics original). Relationships, of course, are intricately concerned with matters of power and authority, and so it becomes essential to acknowledge that behaviors are neither inherently nor universally prosocial. As Schroeder and Graziano (2015) emphasize, the behavior must be judged through the social context in which the act occurs:

What might otherwise be seen as a helpful act may, in some cases, be an opportunity for an apparent "benefactor" to assert power and control over the recipient, with the final result of the would-be putative positive action and the negative impact (e.g., loss of self-esteem or social standing) of the act being a net loss for the one receiving the aid. (p. 4)

Larger cultural considerations come into play here as well, with partial respect to

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the degree of individualism or collectivism adopted within particular societies. While every culture practices prosocial behavior (Feygina & Henry, 2015), the degree to which a culture or society considers itself individualistic or collectivistic carries implications for how, when, and by whom prosocial behaviors are expected to be practiced. Typically, in individualistic cultures, personal conceptions of the self are manifested by personal goals, experiences, and beliefs, while collective conceptions of these matters contextualize and inform the individual's identity within collectivistic societies (Hofstede, 1980; Feygina & Henry, 2015). Furthermore, collectivistic cultures are typically marked by strong, cohesive groups that mutually depend on one another, while individualistic cultures are indicated by positions of personal strength and self-determination. Brett (2001) finds that individualistic societies establish meaningful cooperation through direct communication, which explicitly establishes the cooperative intentions of each member of the group. In a traditional jazz band setting, this might take the shape of the director or section leaders explicitly reminding players about matters of ensemble balance, uniform tone, and a 'locked in' groove.

The individualism-collectivism dualism is further complicated by the verticality (i.e., authoritarian) or horizontality (i.e., egalitarian) of the power structures in existence. For example, regarding collective decision making, vertical individualist societies (e.g., Israel) scored the lowest, while vertical collectivists scored the highest (e.g., Hong Kong) with horizontal individualist (e.g., U.S.) and horizontal collectivist societies (e.g., Germany) existing between the two (Probst, Carnevale, & Triandis, 1999).

Intriguingly, there are a number of deeply-rooted traditions of prosocial behavior that are entrenched within the social fibers of particular cultures. The Latin notion of

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*simpatía*, the Greek principle of *philotimo*, the South African concept of *Ubuntu*, and the Japanese belief in *amae* all represent so-called ‘cultural scripts’ of prosocially-related behaviors (Feygina & Henry, 2015; Triandis, Marín, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984).

Importantly, culturally-contingent behaviors of prosociality appear to be activated when a person enters a culturally-rich situation. This has been observed particularly in bicultural individuals who switch between two different sets of cultural scripts in response to relevant cultural cues (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000).

Beyond cultural matters, is it also necessary to consider gender differences in the context of prosocial behavior. While there is little demonstrated difference between genders regarding how much help is offered overall, given the socialization differences between men and women in most cultures, stereotypic patterns of gendered behaviors are deeply embedded within societies. Specifically, women are generally socialized to be more nurturing and supportive, while the nature of men’s helping behavior is stereotypically viewed as more chivalrous and heroic (Feygina & Henry, 2015).

Finally, matters of economics and class can also play a role in a person’s likelihood of practicing prosocial behaviors, although perhaps not in the way one might expect. Generally speaking, it was found that within the U.S., the less wealth and fewer resources available to a person, their greater likelihood that they would help others (Levine, Martinez, Brase, & Sorenson, 1994; Levine, Reysen, & Ganz, 2008). That socioeconomic status and helping behavior is inversely related suggests that underprivileged people living with fewer means may possess decreased beliefs about their personal control to overcome difficulties, resulting in greater unanimity (Feygina & Henry, 2015).

### **Prosocial (and Antisocial) Behavior in Music**

Several studies investigating prosocial behavior in music have sought to examine the effect of musical exposure on people's proclivity to engage in prosocial or antisocial behaviors. Some research has been conducted which articulates the prosocial benefits of musical participation among children (Ilari, Fesjian, & Habibi, 2018; Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010). Further research has been conducted on the effect of antisocial and/or violent music on aggression-related thoughts (Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks, 2003) and behaviors (Fischer & Greitmeyer, 2006) in comparison to neutral music. Regarding prosocial outcomes with prosocial music, Greitmeyer (2009a, b) provides evidence that helping behaviors can be promoted by exposure to prosocial music. Similarly, Jacob, Guégen, and Boulbry (2010) found that exposure to music with prosocial lyrics resulted in a significant increase in tipping behavior at a restaurant in western France.

Other studies have examined the role of synchronization or rhythmic entrainment on promoting prosocial behaviors (including cooperation and affiliation) between participants (see Stupacher, Maes, Witte, & Wood, 2017 for a review of such studies). Specifically, Kokal, Engel, Kirschner, and Keysers (2011) demonstrated that participants engaged in a synchronous drumming task exhibited more helpful behaviors (than those who engaged in asynchronous tapping), as assessed by their willingness to pick up pencils that their drumming partner (the experimenter) dropped on the ground.

In summary, prosocial behavior represents a dynamic and well-researched body of literature whose close relatedness to humility allows for a more holistic and inductive examination of the particular constructs of interest. With the broader lens of prosocial

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behavior now adequately understood, the necessary discussion of humility (and its counterpart, egoism) comes more fully into focus.

### **Virtues and Vices: Humility and Egoism**

#### **Empirical and Theoretical Definitions of Humility and Egoism**

**Humility.** The empirical study of humility is a relatively new line of scholarly inquiry, largely because the establishment of a comprehensive definition has been categorically elusive. Indeed, the vast majority of theoretical and empirical contributions on humility have been published within the past five or six years (Worthington et al., 2017). It appears as if, with this recent exponential growth of literature on humility, definitions and measurements have become increasingly more nuanced and precise in recent years. However—especially when it comes to social constructs—beliefs and stigmas may be slow or difficult to change, and so it is important to understand how conceptions of humility have shifted over recent decades. This understanding will help provide a richer definition of humility from which to embark. Indeed, Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, and Kumashiro (2008) maintain that when empirically defining any social phenomenon, that definition must be concrete, exact, related to extant literature, and suggestive of practical avenues for investigation.

Social scientists seem to seem to have agreed that humility is *not*, after all, holding a low self-view of oneself, and seem to reject almost unanimously its association with diffidence. Means, Wilson, Sturm, Bion, and Bach (1990) believed humility to be “an increase in the valuation of others and not a decrease in the valuation of oneself” (p. 214). Emmons (1998) pointed out that “to be humble is not to have a low opinion of oneself, it is

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to have an accurate opinion of oneself" (as cited in Tangney, 2000, pp. 71–72). Similarly, Templeton (1997) viewed humility from the positive perspective, distancing it from self-debasement:

Humility represents wisdom. It is knowing you were created with special talents and abilities to share with the world, but it can also be an understanding that you are one of many souls created by God, and each has an important role to play in life. Humility is knowing you are smart, but not *all-knowing*. It is accepting that you have personal power, but are not omnipotent...Inherent in humility resides an open and receptive mind (pp. 162–163, italics original).

Distilling the existing literature into a concise set of observable characteristics, Tangney (2000) offered what has come to represent perhaps the most agreed-upon operationalized definition of humility to be adopted by the psychology field's research community. These characteristics include: (a) an accurate assessment of one's abilities and achievements; (b) an ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations; (c) openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice; (d) keeping one's abilities and accomplishments (one's place in the world) in perspective; (e) maintaining a relatively low self-focus, a "forgetting of the self," while recognizing that one is but one part of the larger universe; and (f) an appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to the world (pp. 73–74).

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Even today, Tangney's definition appears to be the most comprehensive, although perhaps not the most parsimonious. Other humility scholars have narrowed the definition to three or four components, but fortunately, few resulting definitions appear to disagree or contradict. However, despite a general sense of agreement with Tangney's definition, it is necessary to avoid painting the construct from a single researcher's lens. Therefore, I will presently offer a comprehensive definition of humility as an amalgam of all features currently identified within the research community.

The most agreed-upon characteristic of humility is an *accurate view of self* (Emmons, 1998; Tangney, 2000; Davis, Worthington, & Hook, 2010; Davis et al., 2011; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013; Van Tongeren & Myers, 2017). Additional characteristics include an *openness to new ideas* (Templeton, 1997; Tangney, 2000; Owens et al., 2013; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016), and an *appreciation of all things and peoples' contributions to the world* (Means et al., 1990; Tangney, 2000; Owens et al., 2013; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; Worthington et al., 2017). Further characteristics include an *acknowledgement of imperfections* (Templeton, 1997; Tangney, 2000; Worthington et al., 2017), *relatively low self-focus, or other-orientedness* (Tangney, 2000; Davis et al., 2010; Van Tongeren & Myers, 2017; Worthington et al., 2017), and *keeping one's accomplishments in appropriate perspective* (Tangney, 2000; Davis et al., 2010).

This final part of the definition reveals what may be considered a gaping oversight of many other conceptions of humility, and it may seem curious that so few studies have explicitly listed it as being inclusive of the construct. It seems apparent that *perspective* is key, and ought to be a requirement to accompany an accurate view of self. After all, the

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‘accurate view of self’ component seems to suggest that as long as someone can ‘walk the walk’, they are entitled to ‘talk the talk’. However, socially speaking, this is simply not true. If someone is truly the greatest pianist alive (for sake of imagination) but brags incessantly about how great he or she is, few would call this musician humble. Yet, this pianist is in fact holding an accurate self-view because he or she is indeed among the best, and to subvert that fact would be to act differentially (which, as others have confirmed, is *not* contingent with humility). Thus, this crucial component of an appropriate self-perspective appears to have some sort of upper limitation, which seems to be dictated by social norms (however they may be perceived or constructed).

Working beyond Tangney’s definition, Davis et al. (2010, 2011) and others have offered that to have humility also means to express other prosocial emotions such as empathy, compassion, sympathy, and love, each of which appear to be closely-aligned with the virtue of humility. Davis and colleagues (2011) suggest that humility further includes such interpersonal qualities as respect and empathy during conflict, openness toward different cultures or worldviews, and acceptance of self as subordinate to God or the transcendent (p. 225). Peters, Rowatt, and Johnson (2011) add that it involves interpersonal characteristics such as being down-to-earth, rarely calling attention to oneself, and a preference for not standing out in a crowd. However, Peters and colleagues’ criteria seem to reflect introversion instead of humility, raising the important point that while other prosocial qualities may be reflective of a humble person, they are not necessarily *defining* factors of humility. Indeed, this has been a contested element in constructed definitions of humility, because it becomes difficult to know if the construct being studied is indeed humility, or something related—such as honesty (Allgaier, Zettler,



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Wagner, Püttmann, & Trautwein, 2015; Zettler, Hilbig, & Heydasch, 2013), empathy (Davis et al., 2011; Means et al., 1990; Murphy, 2017), forgiveness (Peters et al., 2011; Worthington et al., 2017) or something else entirely.

Moving beyond empirical definitions of humility, there are a number of evocative theoretical conceptions which merit contemplation as well. Murphy (2017) argues an altogether different set of characteristics that define humility: (a) attention, (b) a strong sense of the role that luck has played in one's own life, and (c) empathy or compassion (p. 21). With regard to attention, Murphy sees humility as the human act of working toward an understanding of others sympathetically and deeply. As he puts it, humility is "...one's primary disposition to see others at their best and not their worst" (p. 23). Regarding luck, Murphy believes that humility involves attributing one's abilities as resulting from "one's own genetic endowment, upbringing, and education" (p. 24). However, recognizing the obvious fallacy of attributing every success and achievement to luck (which could be interpreted as false modesty), Murphy clarifies the role of luck to a humble person: "This does not mean that they should take no legitimate pride in what they have done with the hand they were dealt, but an awareness of all this good luck should make them avoid taking excessive pride in their accomplishments..." (p. 24).

**Egoism (and its synonyms).** Just as humility is closely aligned with prosocial behaviors, egoism (and its many related manifestations such as narcissism, selfishness, superiority, and entitlement) appears to be closely associated with antisocial behavior as well. Specifically, Paulhus and Williams (2002) claim that such antisocial behaviors are linked with what they call the "dark triad" of disagreeable traits, which includes

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psychopathy (high impulsivity and low empathy), Machiavellianism (manipulative behavior), and narcissism (grandiosity, entitlement, and superiority).

***Distinguishing egoism and egotism.*** Although many use the word *egoism* and *egotism* interchangeably, there is in fact an important (yet subtle) distinction between the two which requires clarification. *Egotism* refers to the “...exaggerated *estimate* of one’s own intellect, ability, importance, appearance, wit, or other valued personal characteristics” (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997, italics added). On the other hand, *egoism* refers to the constant *pursuit* of one’s self-interest (Walker, 1905/1972; Leary et al., 1997). In effect, a person can conceivably be an egoist without being egotistical—for example, a person who self-promotes but doesn’t actually possess an inflated self-view. Similarly, one could imagine an egotistical person who is technically not egoistic, because despite their inflated self-view, they are perhaps introverted or otherwise disinterested in asserting their superiority over others. Put another way, an egotistical musician might say “I am the most talented musician in the group,” whereas an egoistic musician would instead say “it’s all about me, regardless of how others compare to me.” In practice, there seems to be little distinction between the two, perhaps because more often than not, they appear to be inclusive qualities. For sake of clarity, then, I will generally default to the term *egoism* because it may include within it both broader philosophical conceptions of the trait as well as specific manifestations of egotistical behaviors.

***Egoism and arrogance.*** Most relevant literature tends to examine the humility-egoism dualism from the prosocial perspective. That is, a greater emphasis has been placed upon investigating and defining humility rather than egoism. Part of this may reside in the fact that humility is so nuanced and difficult to reliably identify—especially given its

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subjectivity through the many cultural, philosophical, spiritual, and personal understandings of the virtue—and so it has become a construct of deep and puzzling interest to social scientists. Conversely, egoism is thought to be much more easily identified (although, as we will see, even this is questionable). Yet, as Dewey (1916) stresses, the examination of any dualism must occur from both sides. Thus, an understanding of egoism is necessary to understanding the desirable traits of humility.

Österberg (1988) describes egoism as a way of thought or behavior that can be considered self-serving, self-promoting, or selfish. More broadly, it can be conceived as a human condition existing through its relationship between two different worlds. The first is the external, so-called ‘real world’ in which a person’s self-image is judged by external figures (e.g., peers, family members, coworkers). The second world is that which is inside a person’s head, including the individual’s thoughts, feelings, experiences, and inner dialogue. Egoism thus becomes a product of the external self in relation to the internal, perceived self. Leary (2004) claims that when a person views themselves more favorably than others view them, egoism or arrogance results.

Roberts & Cleveland (2017) describe an egoist as someone who desires such things as social status, glory, credit, adulating attention, honor, superiority, special entitlements, prestige, and power (p. 34). But most importantly, it is the *motivation* for these accolades and entitlements that define the egoist. Specifically, it is the desire for self-importance that fuels the egoist’s aspirations. If a person desires greatness for selfless reasons, they are not necessarily acting egoistically. For example, a musician who spends multiple hours each day in the practice room with the unflinching desire to become the greatest drummer of his or her generation may arguably be doing so not for the pursuit of personal greatness, but

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for the desire to propel the art form (or the limits of the instrument) forward. Of course, many pursuits such as these truly include some combination of both selfish and selfless motivations. To further clarify their position, Roberts and Cleveland (2017) acknowledge that the sort of importance that leads to egoism must be both *comparative* (the egoist wants to be more important than, or at least as important as others) and *non-instrumental* (the egoist wants greatness because it makes them superior to others, not for its own sake).

***Pride.*** Pride can be a tricky construct, specifically because it holds within it both sides of the same coin. It can both live happily within the humble person, as well as destructively within the egoist. Thus, pride is all about *direction* and *degree*. On the positive end, Tucker (2016) describes pride as the “confidence that comes from humility” (p. 11). This is what he would call ‘authentic’ pride, which includes extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and agreeable self-esteem (Tucker, 2016). It includes within it “a proper and appropriate estimation of one’s worth as well as one’s limitations and power” (p. 16). On the other hand is ‘hubristic pride,’ which is more associated with narcissism, vanity, and shame proneness. It includes “an inaccurate, warped, or unreasonable estimation of one’s worth as well as one’s limitations and power” (p. 16). Ultimately, pride—as with many of the constructs under consideration—is about *intention*.

***Narcissism.*** While narcissism is not the direct construct being investigated in this study, a few words should nevertheless be mentioned about it since it invariably plays a role in the egoism–humility dualism. According to Tangney (2000), a narcissist is more than just conceited and egoistic. They are someone with an “unwhole, damaged sense of self, which [he or she] tries to mitigate with fantasies of grandiosity” (Tangney, 2000, p. 75). Leary et al. (1997) distinguish narcissism as invariably involving egoism, but

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additionally carrying a sense of entitlement, lack of empathy, and an exploitative approach towards others (p. 113). Thus, someone who is narcissistic is always acting egoistically, but not all instances of egoism are inherently narcissistic. Gender differences in manifestations of narcissism are possible as well, with women associating narcissistic behaviors through both private and public self-absorption, while men were associated only with public self-absorption—an effect that may be explainable through disregulated status-seeking evolutionary tactics (Barnett & Sharp, 2016).

The issue of narcissism has been gaining traction over the past few decades, particularly with Jean Twenge (2006) labelling the millennial generation as the most narcissistic generation in history. This has been arguably propagated with the rise in popularity of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, of which their usage is associated with higher levels of narcissistic behavior (Moon et al., 2016). However, it is crucial at this acknowledgement to recognize that an absence of narcissism does not necessarily conclude the presence of humility (Tangney, 2000). Indeed, Peters and colleagues (2011) found that the two constructs are inversely related to each other, but they are not necessarily opposites of one another. This point ought to be well taken and should also be considered with the construct of egoism as well. At this time, not enough data supports the claim that such prosocial and antisocial traits are direct opposites of one another.

### **Shortcomings with Definitions of Humility**

What is not entirely clear is whether humility may be interpreted as an ‘all-or-nothing’ virtue. I have previously raised the example of the pianist who holds an accurate

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self-view but lacks an ability to keep his or her accomplishments and talents in appropriate social perspective. Further consider the person who has well-developed interpersonal traits of humility (such as a lack of superiority) but lacks strengths in the intrapersonal realms (such as an acknowledgement of personal limitations). Can this person be called humble? In fact, this may not even be a black-and-white, yes-or-no question. It is likely that people judge humility by degree. But questions still remain: Is humility a matter of having every possible trait, a majority of them, or any combination them? Are some traits more important than others? While I will attempt to directly address these queries near the conclusion of Chapter 6, answers to these questions are not entirely understood within the research community and seem to further challenge measurement strategies.

Moreover, it may be that many people perceive arrogance more readily than humility in others. Interestingly, the opposite seems to be true once we look inward: Leary (2004) recognized that people more readily observe humble behaviors within themselves and arrogant behaviors in others. Because our own rose-colored lenses tend to blur reality, it appears as if the attainment of 'true' humility is relatively rare. Ultimately, Murphy (2017) concedes that "humility will be a matter of degree, with some more fully (but never perfectly) realizing the virtue than others" (p. 30).

Another apparent issue with understanding humility is that it at times appears to be paradoxical to natural human behavior. Philosophers have contended with this issue for centuries, working to understand how humility can be considered a positive virtue while apparently requiring the possessor to reject his or her own greatness and 'clip their wings.' Further confounding the issue is that someone can conceivably be both humble and arrogant at the same time, even within the same domain. For example, a person may be

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effective in acknowledging personal limitations and weaknesses, but this may have nothing to do with his or her tendency to brag externally about personal strengths (Church & Barrett, 2017). For instance, a trumpet player who acknowledges being a subpar improviser but brags about his or her ability to play high notes is perhaps acting both humbly and arrogantly at the same time. Yet curiously, as Leary (2004) points out, an observer might identify this person as ultimately arrogant, with the haughty behavior superseding the humble one.

Additionally, the etymological makeup of the word humility seems to carry within it an assumption of self-disparagement, with evidence suggesting that lay conceptions of humility include feelings of *humiliation*. Exline, Bushman, Faber, and Phillips (2000) found that participants asked to recall humble experiences actually described experiences that made them feel badly (as cited in Tangney, 2002). Certainly, in colloquial terms, when humility is made into a verb—to *humble*—it is often interpreted either as a personal put-down or an expression of false modesty. For an example of the former, an instrumentalist who loses a concerto competition may call the experience ‘humbling,’ which might really mean that the experience led to a perceived loss-of-self, and thus became ‘humiliating.’ For the latter example of ‘being humbled’ as a cover for false modesty, we can envision the musician who says, “I was humbled by the opportunity to play at Carnegie Hall.” In fact, such statements are not humble at all, but bragging in the false face of humility—a veiled proclamation of personal achievement. Humorously, this behavior is often colloquially referred to as ‘humblebragging’ (Wittels, 2012). Finally, the act of feeling humbled can also be attributed to a sense of spiritual connection, the loss of self being a necessary reminder

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of human imperfection. Tucker (2016) believes that “such a bringing down is meant to remove the weight of pride so that the soul can rise up to God's celestial heights” (p. 121).

Finally, perhaps the most confounding—and I argue problematic—understanding of humility is its continued association with modesty. Dated conceptions of the virtue perpetuate this conception, which are further propagated in much of the spiritual discourse heard in churches, synagogues, and temples. However, it is crucial to accept that for the purposes of this study, I will purposefully distance humility from modesty. While the two are certainly related, they are simply not the same. Davis et al. (2011) found that modesty is a characteristic of humility, but humility may not be a characteristic of modesty; in fact, at times modesty may more closely reflect low self-esteem. As such, social psychologists have conceptualized modesty primarily as a subset of humility, which has gained empirical support (Davis et al., 2015; Van Tongeren & Myers, 2017). Tangney (2000) stated that “modesty is both too narrow, missing fundamental components of humility—and too broad, relating also to bodily exposure and other dimensions of propriety” (p. 74). Gregg and colleagues (2008) found that participants rated humility as being the most central characteristic of modesty, but also rated shyness and solicitousness as central to the construct as well. They assert that although modesty is certainly a desirable character trait, humility further requires genuine caring. Thus, modesty primarily exists intrapersonally, whereas humility carries both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions.

### **A Multifaceted Construct: Multiple Forms of Humility**

Responding to the ostensibly situational characteristics of humility, researchers have identified a number of distinct ‘types’ of the construct which are each ontologically



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related to the general concept of humility in differing ways and degrees. While each subdomain of humility is generally related to what has come to be called *general humility*, subdomains do not appear to be highly associated with one another (Hill et al., 2017). But that each subdomain responds well to the general construct bodes well for the future of humility research, as investigations become more nuanced and instruments become more streamlined.

**Cultural humility.** Given the increasingly diverse society in which we live, a rise in cross-cultural conflict has followed closely behind, usually resulting from differences in group beliefs and values. In today's American society, conflicts of racism, xenophobia, chauvinism, and homophobia are pervasive in public discourse. Many of these issues have resulted in stringent and seemingly-dichotomous factions of belief: left versus right, liberal versus conservative, religious versus atheist, and so on. These conflicts present a veritable need for *cultural humility*, which "...involves remaining open to cultural diversity and seeing the value in people of different cultures" (Worthington et al., 2017, p. 4). The notion of cultural humility aligns well with the philosophical notion of *cosmopolitanism*, or viewing oneself as a citizen of the larger world whose "allegiance is the worldwide community of human beings" (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 4). Like general humility, cultural humility involves both interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. Intrapersonally, it requires an understanding of the limitations of one's own cultural worldview, as well as the limitations in one's ability to understand the cultural background and experiences of others (Mosher, Hook, Farrell, Watkins, & Davis, 2017). Interpersonally, it involves being other-oriented toward others' cultural backgrounds (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013). Altogether, cultural humility "prioritizes developing mutual respect and partnerships with

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others” (Mosher et al., 2017, p. 91), and it ultimately requires “...vulnerability, specifically to be able to adopt a ‘non-expert stance’” (p. 94). Cultural humility is closely related to the concept of cultural competence, a construct which suggests that someone can become culturally competent through training, experience, and practiced empathy. Comparatively, scholars have sought to articulate cultural humility as a lifelong learning experience. They argue that it can never be fully attained but can only be constantly developed throughout one’s lifetime. Mosher and colleagues (2017) suggest that the term cultural *competence* may suggest that someone can, with enough training and experience, become an ‘expert’ of a culture. This mindset could plausibly engender an arrogant mindset when it comes to cultural aptitude. Thus, the ‘lifelong’ journey of cultural humility helps maintain one’s humble mindset, because it erases the possibility of attaining complete expertise on another culture.

**Intellectual humility.** *Intellectual humility* is a response to the human tendency to dismiss, reject, or argue dissent over one’s ideas. A person who is intellectually humble possesses (a) insight about the limits of one’s knowledge, marked by openness to new ideas; and (b) regulates intellectual arrogance, marked by the ability to present one’s ideas in a non-offensive manner and receive contrary ideas without taking offense, even when confronted with alternative viewpoints. (McElroy et al., 2014, p. 20). Worthington and colleagues (2017) add that it “...includes an openness to modifying one’s ideas and to negotiating ideas fairly” (p. 4). Yet, the groundwork for this construct comes largely from Roberts and Wood (2003, 2007), who developed the preeminent literature on intellectual humility by first exploring the concept in its broader moral context. In their theoretical investigation, they found that examining the ideal from both the standpoints of the virtue

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as well as the vice-counterpart was especially important to gaining a rich understanding of the construct. Although a dominant or shared view of intellectual humility is still difficult to come by (Church & Barrett, 2017), significant advancements have been made within the domain over the past half-decade or so. Haga and Olson (2016) distinguished intellectual humility—much like general humility—as an unfixed point between intellectual arrogance on one extreme and intellectual diffidence on the other. Krumrei-Mancuso (2016) confirms that it is important for the intellectually humble person to be able to strike an appropriate balance between obstinate rejection of dissenting viewpoints on the one hand, and coy acquiescence on the other. Ultimately however, one's commitment to the attainment of truth and knowledge—and the dismissal of their intellectual status—becomes the primary criterion for intellectual humility. In this way, intellectual humility becomes a virtue rather than merely the “absence of a vice” (Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016, p. 209). Indeed, continued work on intellectual humility is gaining considerable traction within the spheres of both philosophy and social science (Church & Samuelson, 2017).

**Relational humility.** Alluded to earlier in this chapter, the concept of *relational humility* has emerged as a promising advancement in humility research by seeking to focus on the interpersonal domains of the trait. Conceptualized by Davis (2010) in his doctoral dissertation, humility is conceptualized as a *subjective* personality judgment. While relational humility is interested in both the interpersonal and intrapersonal domains a person may possess, it is concerned with how others perceive or judge the manifestation of that trait in a target person. Thus, relational humility is not examining a subcategory of general humility per se, but rather represents a new way of conceptualizing the construct *interpersonally*. According to Davis and colleagues (2010), relational humility involves (a)

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other-orientedness in one's relationships with others rather than selfishness; (b) the tendency to express positive other-oriented emotions in one's relationships (e.g., empathy, compassion, sympathy, and love); (c) the ability to regulate self-oriented emotions, such as pride or excitement about one's accomplishments, in socially acceptable ways; and (d) having an accurate view of self (p. 248). Thus, when one person judges another's humility relationally, he or she will examine the target person's interpersonal humility through seemingly other-oriented behaviors and an apparent lack of superiority, and may judge the intrapersonal domain of what he or she believes to be the target's self-view. Thus—and this is the most important distinction of relational humility—the researcher is not interested in a person's *intrinsic* or true humility, but rather how it is judged by others. The belief here is that a person's actual humility, or even how the person thinks about his or her own humility, is irrelevant; as a prosocial character trait and virtue, the true mark of humility is how it is interpreted by others.

**Other humilities?** Beyond these subdomains of humility, there exist many others, making the plausible case that for different situations, a different form of humility may be called for. For example, when interacting with a diversity of people from various backgrounds, cultural humility is necessary; when negotiating ideas and participating in scholarly pursuits, intellectual humility will be desirable. In times when gregarious dialogue determines the prosociality of a given interaction, relational humility is desirable. Others have posed other subdomains of humility, such as political humility (Worthington, 2017), religious humility (Porter et al., 2017), and spiritual humility (Rowatt, Ottenbreit, Nesselroade, & Cunningham, 2002). This begs the question which serves as the impetus for

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the current study: might there exist a form of humility that is specific to musical participation?

### **The Benefits of Humility and the Perniciousness of Egoism**

Templeton (1997) offers that “humility is the key to progress” (p. 30). Tangney agrees that a humble concern for others allows us to have a clearer picture of ourselves and others: “By becoming 'unserved,' we no longer have the need to enhance and defend an all-important self at the expense of our evaluation of others” (p. 73). It is clear that humility is a most desirable trait with tremendous personal and social profits, and yet continuing evidence of the advantageousness of humility continues to build as research in the field progresses. Indeed, humility has been linked with such prosocial qualities as forgiveness (Powers et al., 2007), helpfulness (LaBouff et al., 2012), and generosity (Exline & Hill, 2012). Humility also correlates positively with academic performance (Owens, 2009; Rowatt, Powers, & Targhetta, 2006) and organizational leadership (Owens et al., 2013), and has been additionally tied to Social Relationship Quality (SRQ) (Peters et al., 2011) and social desirability (Exline & Hill, 2012). Finally, Davis and colleagues (2013; 2017) have shown that humility helps to promote and strengthen social bonds, and that humility is associated with greater group status and acceptance—which they refer to as the *social bonds hypothesis*. Summarizing, Worthington et al. (2017) have identified a number of other-oriented virtues that positively correlate with humility, including love, compassion, forgiveness, altruism, generosity, gratitude, and empathy (p. 3). Of course, given the absence of literature on humility in music, one cannot say for certain what virtues and

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strengths would carry over into musical realms, but one could posit that many (if not all) of them would manifest themselves similarly in musical engagements.

On the other side of the coin, egoism is accepted as being a highly undesirable character trait. But what exactly is it about egoism that is so interpersonally harmful? Indeed, many claim to detest arrogance, but often have difficulty expressing why it rubs them the wrong way. Why is it that others are so affected by egoism, and why can't the undesirable trait simply be ignored?

First, to many, displays of superiority may tacitly imply the inferiority of others, thereby making egoism function as a veiled insult that threatens others' self-esteem (Leary et al., 1997). If a display of arrogance is perceived to have an irrelevant effect on the identity of the observer, little harm is done; however, when egoistic actions hit closer to home, that behavior is experienced more negatively (p. 119). Second, egoists tend to see themselves as both entitled to adulation and praise, and defensive against criticism, which makes maintaining a social relationship with them challenging and tenuous (ibid). Third, Myers (1995) and Leary (2004) identified the egoist's tendency to blame others for failures while accepting sole responsibility for successes. For example, a jazz musician may accept personal credit for a great solo but blame the rhythm section for not establishing a solid groove if it was felt that his or her playing was mediocre.

Intrapersonally speaking, the egoist may find him or herself making ill-informed choices based on an overreliance on personal beliefs, may bite off more than he or she can chew on given tasks, may fail to learn from personal mistakes, and may ignore sage advice from peers and experts (Leary et al., 1997). Tucker (2016) holds a harsher view of egoism, suggesting that it ultimately leads to social ostracism: "isolation, imperial loneliness,

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unconsciousness, delusion, arrogance, and a slavish submission to one's own thoughts and perceptions seem to be the outcomes of the self-centered default” (pp. 62–63).

Egoism and arrogance has also been tied to physical aggression (Tangney, 2002) and antisocial behavior generally (Allgaier et al., 2015). Worthington et al. (2017) have identified a number of vices that branch from egoism (by negatively correlating with humility), including:

narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, self-absorption, narcissistic entitlement, high emotional reactivity, impression management, group dominance, right wing authoritarianism, prejudice, antisocial behaviors, aggressive bullying, proclivity toward sexual harassment, deviant behaviors in the workplace, vengefulness, and the belief that the world is a competitive place. (pp. 6–7)

Yet, perhaps most dangerous of all, Myers (1995) reminds us of the deepest threat of the unruly ego: “...self-righteous pride is at the core of racism, sexism, nationalism, and all the chauvinisms that lead one group of people to see themselves as more moral, deserving, or able than the other” (p. 203). Nazi atrocities, Myers reminds, were rooted in conceited Aryan pride and self-righteousness. Citing Dale Carnegie, Myers warns that through egoism, “each nation feels superior to other nations. That breeds patriotism—and wars” (p. 204).

Given the obvious association of egoism with social averseness, a provocative question remains regarding why people would knowingly act egoistically at all if it so clearly harms their social standing. Leary and colleagues (1997) provide three theories for

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why egoism survives and thrives in our modern world. First, he posits that egoists who may have been subjected to constant glorification from childhood may not stop to consider that their self-inflated views may not be shared by the rest of society. This is called *veridical egoism*. Second, egoists may be acting in response to a fragile self-concept, compensating for their unstable self-esteem by convincing themselves (and others) that they are more competent and self-assured than they really feel. This is called *defensive egoism*. Finally, egoists may behave accordingly because they believe that doing so will impress or intimidate other people, leading to a more positive social standing. This is called *strategic egoism*.

With all this in mind, humility should not simply be viewed as a purely utopian virtue either. For example, its association with modesty, deference, and submission raises concerns about its social utility if not applied properly. Some social psychologists warn that humility could result in social or ideological exploitation by others, with humble persons falling prey to socially dominant influences (Van Tongeren & Myers, 2017). For an example from the perspective of gender politics, Tucker (2016) poses a story of the deferent housewife who is forever a humble servant to her husband. This pernicious form of humility can debatably be every bit as suppressive and damaging as egoism. He writes, “humility can be a form of submission that reinforces power and responsibility” (p. 7). Such associations survive today and can be seen in oppressive settings ubiquitously: ideals of submissive women, African Americans entrenched in subservient roles, culturally-deferent Asian Americans, and modestly-dressed Muslim women still consume notions of humility and modesty in contemporary society. At present, some of these matters are still unresolved, awaiting further discourse, debate, and interpretation. And given the weight of



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the issue, these matters must lie beyond the immediate scope of this dissertation but should be addressed in future humility research (see Chapter 7).

### **Personalities and Leadership Roles Among Musicians**

While no identified research has examined the exact constructs of humility or egoism among musicians as of yet, there are a number of studies which have examined the identity characteristics of musicians and are acceptably relevant to the current study. To begin, I will offer a brief discussion of personality traits that are stereotyped or believed to be embodied by particular musician groups, followed by a brief glimpse of studies examining leadership roles among musicians.

#### **Personality Traits of Instrumental Musicians**

Notable literature has examined personality traits of musicians (e.g., Bell & Cresswell, 1984; Buttsworth & Smith, 1995; Cribb & Gregory, 1999; Kemp, 1981; Lipton, 1987). However, few have addressed beliefs and stereotypes about musicians with respect to their dispositions of humility or arrogance. One prominent study that has examined these traits is Lipton's (1987) study of personality stereotypes among professional orchestra musicians. In it, he revealed that woodwinds and percussionists stereotyped string musicians as "arrogant" and "prima donnas," respectively. He also found that brass musicians largely stereotyped woodwind musicians as "egotistic" and percussionists as "over-confident"—yet referred to themselves as "gregarious" and "confident" (p. 89). Among popular musicians, Dyce and O'Connor (1994) found that performers were "significantly more extraverted, arrogant, and dominant when compared to the population

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norm” (p. 172). Later, Cribb & Gregory (1999) found that folk fiddlers and Salvation Army brass players rated orchestral violinists as more arrogant than they. Finally—and perhaps ironically, given his outspoken perspectives at the end of the first chapter—trumpeter Wynton Marsalis (1994) anecdotally described the so-called ‘trumpet persona’ as “brash, impetuous, cocky, cool, in command...that’s just how we are” (p. 11).

### **Leadership Traits Among Musicians**

Displays of prosociality (and at times, antisociality) were often exhibited through acts of leadership throughout this study. Indeed, the source of many humble and arrogant behaviors were often identified as musicians negotiated leadership roles within the ensemble. At times, these leadership roles were official (i.e., section leaders), but informal leadership roles arose as well, as students self-selected their desire to compel the band’s progress forward. Most music literature on leadership has been focused on conductors, mentor teachers, and student teachers; however, one particularly notable qualitative investigation of peer mentoring in a high school jazz ensemble (Goodrich, 2007) provided excellent insight into the presence and importance of student leadership roles in a competitive high school jazz band. Additionally, King (2006) identified emergent leadership roles in a wind quartet as being fluid and transferable between the musicians, suggesting that these roles need not necessarily be ‘assigned’ (i.e., section leaders), but that students can ebb and flow between leader and follower roles. However, King’s study also suggested that groups with a regular leader recognized a more focused group dynamic and exhibited greater progress than ensembles without such a leader.

### **Conclusions**

A thorough discussion of prosociality enables a broad-based perspective of how humility may be derived from or informed by displays of prosocial behavior. In following, humility unfolds amongst a person's more general disposition of prosociality, and from there lends itself to deeper analysis of the specific motivations and meanings behind such behaviors. Importantly, manifestations of humility are not merely framed through a broader prosocial perspective, but simultaneously compared to contrasting displays of egoism.

As it applies to the presence, function, and necessity of humility in music and music education, there is clearly a prominent gap in the existing body of scholarly literature. In response, I seek to address this gap through the nexuses of prosocial behavior, humility, egoism, and musical participation. While the potentials for humility research in music education are certainly expansive and seemingly boundless, I seek to contribute a convincing basis for musically-fueled practices of humility first and foremost. In effect, the research questions as expressed in Chapter 1 were deemed the most important preliminary matters to address within the context of music education. Subsequently, through following chapter I will systematically describe the method through which this study was designed and implemented.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **METHOD AND CONTEXT**

##### **Methodological Framework**

##### **An Alternative Research Strategy**

Noting its inherent complications from a social scientific standpoint, Halling and colleagues (1994) once quipped that doing research on humility is humbling. Indeed, choosing an appropriate method of inquiry for this study became significantly complicated as I attempted to match my research questions with the currently-accepted methods of exploration used within the field. Given the fact that virtually every example of humility research conducted thus far has been quantitative and experiment-based, it might logically follow that this study should also adopt a similar approach. However, it was deemed that an alternative research strategy would be the most appropriate given several factors: (a) the nature of my research question, (b) the current shortcomings of quantitative humility research, and (c) my continued commitment to viewing humility and egoism as socially-constructed, subjective, and contextualized personality traits.

To start with the first concern, my research question is simply of a different nature than most humility research that has been conducted thus far. The research question for this study is primarily descriptive, whereas the bulk of the humility research in psychology has been measurement-based to-date. To be sure, this study is *not* about measuring or developing/teaching humility. While judgments of humility and egoism are of course central to the current investigation, they are based on subjective conclusions made by myself (as the researcher) and other students about their peers (see section on relational

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humility in Chapter 2). Because my research is description-based and does not attempt to objectively measure humility and egoism in any form, existing quantitative models are of lesser relevance.

Second, continuous measurement issues have stymied quantitative humility research efforts, including problems with questionable validity and reliability ratings (Davis et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2017). A number of clever approaches to measuring humility have been attempted, but none seem to have become the ‘gold standard’ of the field. Early measurement strategies were conducted through self-reports using various psychometric scales (i.e., modesty-humility subscale of the VIA (values in action) strengths inventory, the Honesty-humility subscale of the HEXACO Personality inventory). However, it became quickly evident that asking participants to rate their own humility is inherently flawed, as truly humble persons would logically underrate their own humility, while arrogant persons would likely overrate their humility. Davis and colleagues (2010) referred to this phenomenon as the ‘self-enhancement bias.’

In response, humility researchers developed what is believed to measure a more automatic and intrinsic rating of one’s humility through an Implicit Association Test (IAT). Essentially, the strategy is thought to measure humility more authentically because humble persons would logically associate with humility-related concepts more quickly than arrogance-related concepts (Rowatt et al., 2006, p. 200). While a promising contribution to the field, more work is necessary to establish construct validity (i.e., is it really measuring humility, or something else closely related?). To date, the previously mentioned concept of relational humility appears to be the most resilient system of humility measurement, which reframes humility from an objective ‘trait’ to a subjective personality judgment. In a round-

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robin format, informants are tasked with rating target subjects using a Relational Humility Scale (Davis, 2010). Because relational humility operationalizes the construct as a personality judgment, interrater reliability is usually not expected to be particularly high (p. 248).

Regarding the final consideration, psychometric measures currently in use largely fail to take into consideration the inextricable social construction of humility. Their measurement strategies are generally unable to examine how humility is either judged or manifested according to gender, race, religion, and other social characteristics. Adopting a commitment to viewing humility as socially sensitive, a more holistic research strategy was required which would consider sociocultural characteristics and their implications throughout every facet of the research strategy.

### **Rationale**

Given my research interest of exploring the presence of humility and egoism in music ensembles, cloaked within an examination of the prosocial (and antisocial) behaviors occurring within a competitive high school jazz band, long-term observations of behaviors became necessary for fully understanding how social interactions formed and changed during the development of the band's identity, as well as uncovering how these interactions affected the resulting social and musical relationships within the ensemble. Following the lead of several other music researchers similarly interested in the social dynamics occurring within musical contexts, I utilized an instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) employing ethnographic techniques (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Spradley, 1980) as the chosen research design.

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While observing the presence of prosocial and antisocial interactions may seem relatively straightforward from a qualitative perspective, engaging in deeper interpretations of the implications of these positive and negative behaviors on the musicians, the jazz ensemble in which they participated, and the larger musical intentions of the group required significantly greater methodological rigor. Epistemologically speaking, ethnography does not necessarily concern itself with revealing hard-and-true, objective ‘fact’ (in the positivist sense) as much as it is concerned with revealing specific patterns of social behavior (in a more pragmatic sense). Yet, truly understanding the issues and variables at hand required both extended participation in the field as well as my own professional experience as a jazz musician and music educator as tools of interpretation.

To be sure, the basal social science question of “what is going on here?” (Luker, 2008) is an analytical one, and in the spirit of qualitative research, it calls for interpretation as its trustworthy unit of analysis. As such, there is arguably no such thing as ‘raw’ data; my fieldnotes, for example, were filled with on-the-spot analysis of what transpired in real-time. As a researcher functioning myself as an analytic instrument, it is essential to acknowledge that data was constantly filtered through my own eyes and framed through my own experiences and sociocultural positions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Luker, 2008; Spradley, 1980).

Henry Kingsbury’s (1988) ethnography of an American music conservatory represents a pertinent example of this type of methodological inquiry. Kingsbury’s study is both methodologically rigorous and unapologetically imbued with the researcher’s explicit role in the ‘field.’ Kingsbury’s ethnography was similarly concerned, as he put it, with the “importance that music and music making played in the personal lives of...young adults” (p.

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3), and as such studied the “complex weave of intensely ambiguous friendly-competitive social relationships” (p. 5). As such, the clear parallels between Kingsbury’s ethnography and the present study meant that the former became central to the design of the latter.

Beyond Kingsbury’s ethnography, I additionally relied upon several other established models which utilized similar methodological approaches. While Kingsbury examined the social dynamics occurring within a musical setting, I sought out other studies which addressed other relevant matters such as the development of prosocial behavior, the role of competition, and group identity development. For example, Mary Caufield’s (1990) dissertation entitled, *“Doing the Loop”: An Ethnography of Prosocial Behavior in One-to-Three-Year-Old Children* examined the prosocial behaviors of preschool-aged children from a qualitative perspective; David Hebert’s (2005) ethnography of Japanese wind bands investigated the role of competition, cooperation, and community on the development of Japanese students’ musical identities; Leah Pogwizd’s (2015) ethnography of Seattle-area jazz musicians described the development of musicianship alongside the cultivation of practicing musicians’ jazz identities; and Matthew Swanson’s (2016) ethnographic case study of collective identity studied the negotiation of musical identities through a child-centered composition project with elementary-aged students. Referring to these related studies throughout my fieldwork and analysis strategically grounded the methodological approach throughout the study.

### **Ethnography and Music-as-Culture**

There are several methodological strengths associated with employing an ethnographic research strategy. Rooted in cultural anthropology, Spradley (1980)



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described ethnography as the work of describing a culture (p. 3). Wolcott (1975) called it the “science of cultural description” (p. 112). Both of these conceptualizations indicate that the actions, behaviors, and attitudes of a particular *culture* is generally at the heart of any ethnographic study. Pertaining to music education, it has been argued that young musicians indeed seek to develop and maintain their own unique cultures through musical participation among their identified musical groups. For example, existing within and beyond the physical borders of the rehearsal space and emanating into the school and community culture at-large, Steven Morrison (2001) describes how the “customs, conventions, and conversational manner” (p. 25) of music ensembles develop into a sense of belonging, commitment, and responsibility. As students create their own identities within their ensembles, they develop a shared sense of responsibility and take proud ownership of the group. Carlos Abril (2013) similarly reports that beyond the walls of the rehearsal space, the ensemble culture serves as a socially unifying force as it extends its responsibilities into the larger school culture and community beyond<sup>7</sup>. Finally, in Patricia Shehan Campbell’s (2010) ethnography of children’s musical expressions, she offers that young children develop their own sense of enculturated behavior by naturally gravitating toward shared activities of musical engagement. These are but a few examples which illustrate musical learning as the embodiment of culture—a notion that has been adopted to great measure by several leaders within the field of music education.

Given these arguments, a case for highly competitive high school jazz bands developing their own unique cultures can likewise be claimed, especially given these

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<sup>7</sup> While Morrison’s and Abril’s works may not represent ethnographies themselves, they nevertheless articulate the strong evidence behind musical participation as a meaningful practice of ‘culture.’

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members' significant commitments to the group through intense daily rehearsals, out-of-school interactions (e.g., jam sessions, sectionals, friendships, fundraisers), high-stakes performances, and of course, the thrill of winning (and disappointment of losing). The relationships developed within the competitive jazz band 'culture' are thus undoubtedly salient and assuredly provocative, and viewing them through an ethnographic lens allowed me to more deeply examine and understand their richness and complexities. The investigation thus becomes, as Kingsbury (1988) puts it, "...a study of a cultural idiom produced by and in a rather specific configuration of social production" (p. 17).

Beyond its appropriateness in studying a particular culture, there are a number of additional benefits which add testimony to the power of employing ethnographic techniques for this study. First, data in ethnographic research is, by necessity, richly contextualized. All observations are situated within a particular sociocultural landscape, which affects both the participants' actions and behaviors as well as the researcher's interpretations. The ethnographer's task is thus to frame all observations within an understanding of what sociocultural knowledge the participants may possess and how these knowledges may affect behaviors, interactions, conflicts, communications (both verbal and nonverbal), and the like. For the researcher, this also includes framing observations within one's own sociocultural awareness, so that it may be better understood how the researcher's potential biases and assumptions may affect the interpretation of data. Specifically, attempting to observe social interactions as they manifested themselves in the field required more beyond merely examining interactions according to objective definitions of prosocial and antisocial behavior; instead, I was required to consider the specific contexts of these observed behaviors as they occurred in

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the moment. For example, it was essential to examine the established relationships between the actors of particular behaviors, what power dynamics might have been at play (either explicitly or latently), what intentions existed underneath these behaviors, as well as what complications of social identity (i.e., race, class, gender) may have affected these interactions (and my interpretations of them). Indeed, the social dynamics of a high school jazz band are inextricably concerned with matters of power and authority: the power and authority of the director over his or her students, of section leaders over their sections, of the rhythm section over the band's 'groove,' and so on.

Second, ethnography finds its most salient data in the prolonged and repetitive actions and events which give rise to more meaningful patterns of behavior. Thus, data are not collected based upon singular 'slices of life' which may or may not accurately capture the true essence of the situation; instead, acts become significant as they develop into larger patterns of behaviors over time. Such a temporal approach necessitates that interpreting the meaningfulness and significance of observations is delayed until the field becomes 'saturated'—that is, the point when the researcher has established all of the pertinent themes and no new data is expected to contribute further to the development of existing or additional themes (Cresswell, 2015, p. 250).

Finally, it has been argued that prosocial behaviors should be examined from a broad-based and descriptive perspective (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983), further reinforcing the appropriateness of an ethnographic research strategy. Specifically, this suggestion held two implications for the current study. First, it supported the notion that social science research of this variety ought to be conducted inductively, so that themes emerge directly from the data instead of from *a priori* assumptions. Second, by

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examining the totality of prosocial behaviors among participants—including generosity, altruism, sharing, helping, forgiveness, and others—I was able to understand the virtue of humility within the greater context of prosocial behavior broadly, and to develop an initial understanding of how these various traits may interact with, predict, complement, or contradict the construct of humility.

### **Instrumental Case Study**

Instrumental case studies are intended to focus on a particular issue within a group (Cresswell, 2015; Stake 2005). In this case, the issue in its broadest scope was the social dynamics of a competitive high school jazz band. While the construct of interest was the presence and role of humility (and its vice counterpart, egoism) within the environment, I continually refocused my attention toward this broader issue throughout the study to maintain an openness to emergent and unexpected findings. As Stake (2005) describes, case studies gain credibility “...by thoroughly triangulating the descriptions and interpretations, not just in a single step but continuously throughout the period of study” (pp. 443–444).

In some ways, the extreme characteristics of the sample (see Sampling in the next section) may reflect the implementation of an *extreme case study* (Jahnukainen, 2012). The purpose of an extreme case study is to “try to highlight the most unusual variation in the phenomena under investigation, rather than trying to tell something typical or average about the population in question” (p. 379). Because the participants were members of a highly competitive and nationally-recognized high school jazz band (see Setting & Context), I reasoned that data collection may have reflected the emergence of more extreme

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behaviors, given the significantly greater stakes associated with participating in such a group.

### **Research Setting & Context: Grant High School**

Grant High School (pseudonym) is a suburban public high school located just outside a large metropolitan city in the Pacific Northwest<sup>8</sup>. It has a total enrollment of 1,749<sup>9</sup> and is situated in a quiet neighborhood with median home prices around \$825,000. As such, many students—though certainly not all—are likely of a middle- to upper-middle class background. This section will begin by describing the sampling strategies used to determine Grant High School as the best fit for this study, followed by the detailed characteristics of the school and the jazz program.

### **Sampling**

For the present study I employed what is known as criterion-based sampling (Cresswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). In this technique, the characteristics which the target sample should possess are decided upon in advance. The Grant High School Jazz program was selected because it had (a) multiple high school jazz bands which were (b) hierarchically-structured, (c) audition-based, (d) considered highly-competitive, (e) and located within an acceptable distance from my academic institution and home.

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<sup>8</sup> Some details about the school, school district, and surrounding neighborhood deemed inconsequential to the study may have been changed to protect the identity of the school.

<sup>9</sup> Data is current as of the 2016-17 school year (district website).

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To clarify my reasoning behind studying high school adolescents, according to Lawrence Kohlberg's (1976) stages of moral development, adolescents possess a greater capacity to engage in moral reasoning and ethical behavior by comparing their actions to social norms and expectations. They knowingly and actively pursue desirable social standards (i.e., maintaining a 'social contract'), understanding that existing within the 'good graces' of society ultimately bodes positively for the self. Younger children, on the other hand, tend to conduct reasoning in a more egocentric manner, typically rationalizing through the impetus of self-interest. Furthermore, the teenage years are those in which negotiations of identity are at their most turbulent, as developing adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood psychologically, biologically, and socially (Erikson, 1959/1980). While the implications of children's self-interested behaviors are certainly ripe territory for future prosocial research (and humility research as well), my decision to study high school students stems primarily from a need to understand how prosocial behaviors are negotiated among musicians who already possess the developmental capacity (and psychological desire) to act in morally- and socially-conscious ways. Had I chosen to study pre-adolescents, the self-interested nature of their psychological development would have likely created unpredictable sources of variability during observations, ultimately rendering it more difficult to hypothesize the underlying meanings of their behaviors.

### **Grant High School and the Jazz Program**

**School achievement & demographics.** According to the district website, Grant High School is a high-performing school in all disciplines within the district, outperforming

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the district average in English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science by between 16 and 21 percentage points. Moreover, approximately 96% of Grant students are considered 'college ready' by twelfth grade (as measured by the proportion of students taking and passing a college-level course).

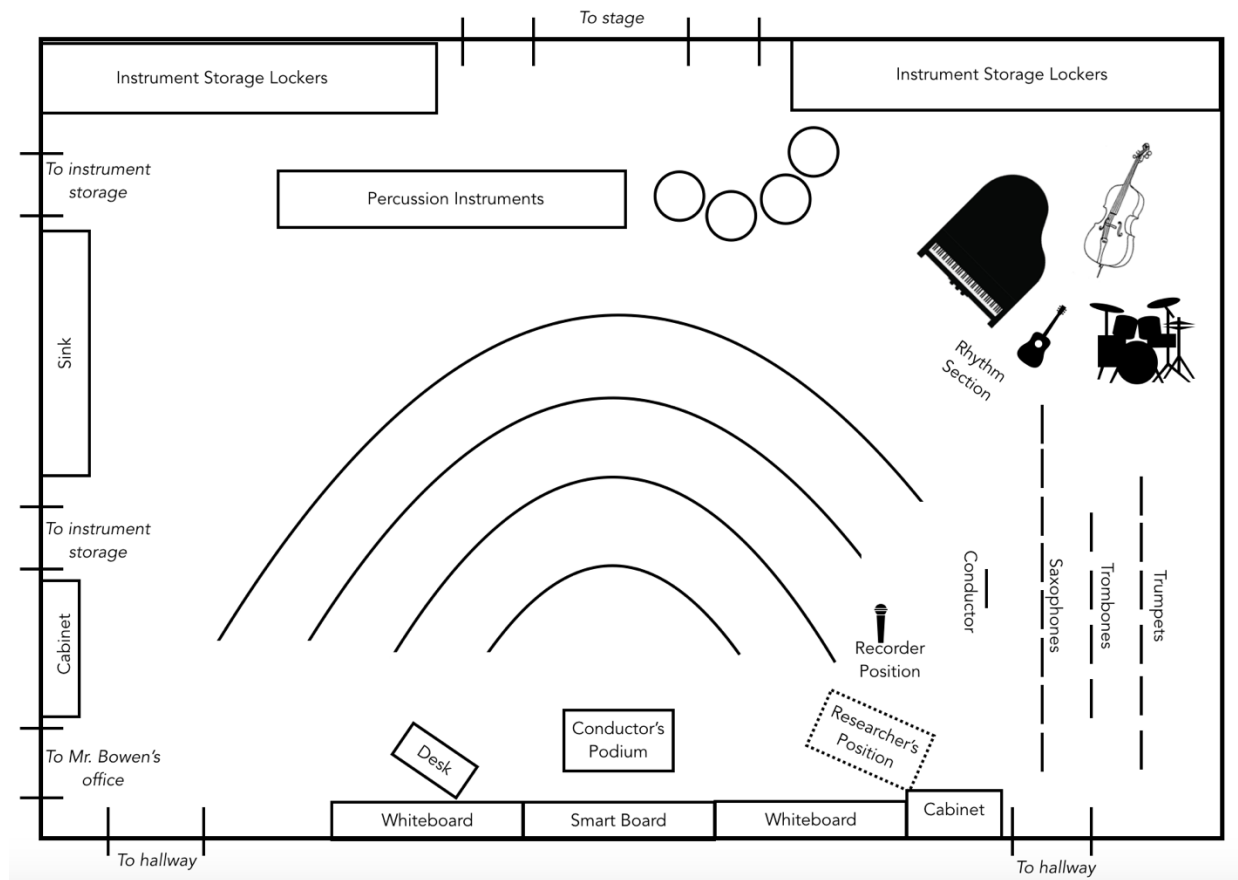
However, while Grant High School does perform quite favorably within its district, it does not boast a particularly diverse student body. 68% of students identify as White, while Asian Americans are the most represented minority with 12% of the school population. Hispanic, Black, and Multiracial students respectively comprise 8%, 5%, and 7% of the population, respectively (0% identify as Native American or Indigenous). Finally, 14% of students received free or reduced lunch (compared to 36.4% within the district), supporting the claim that many students at Grant are relatively affluent in comparison to the school district at-large.

**The music wing and band room.** All of the jazz band rehearsals occurred within the large band room, off to the north side of the space where a drum set and piano were permanently positioned. The band room was always set up in a traditional semi-circle arrangement centered around the conductor's podium for wind band rehearsals. For jazz band rehearsals, chairs and stands from the north side of the room were repurposed into the traditional big band format (three parallel rows for saxophones, trombones, and trumpets, and the rhythm section off to the left of the wind players). Students grabbed their own chairs and stands and moved them into position at the start of every rehearsal (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

On several occasions, the band broke out into sectionals, leaving the rhythm section in the band room while the other sections (trumpets, trombones, and saxophones)

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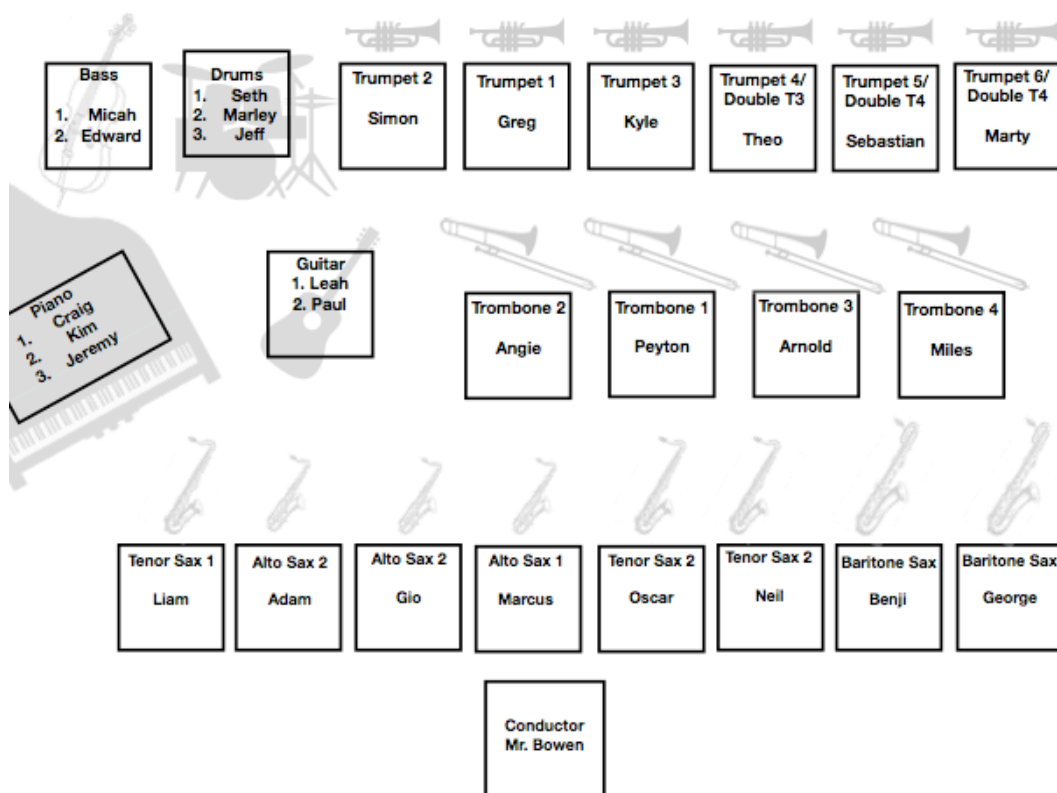
negotiated their own private spaces (usually larger practice rooms) on their own. These rooms were located in the hallway immediately across from the band room.



**Figure 3.1.** Setup of band room for jazz rehearsals.



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**Figure 3.2.** Seating order for Jazz Band 1 with students' names (pseudonyms).

**The jazz program.** The Grant Jazz Band boasts a proud history of musical excellence for more than thirty-five years, beginning under the direction of well-known jazz musician and educator Hugo Duke (pseudonym) in 1969. Under his direction, Grant High School featured a strong vocal and instrumental jazz program through his retirement in 1983, after which the program was handed over to its current director, Rob Bowen<sup>10</sup>. Under Mr. Bowen's direction, the band began to perform in national and regional festivals starting in 1989 with the Down Beat National Jazz Competition in Philadelphia, and continuing with performances for International Association for Jazz Educators (IAJE)

<sup>10</sup> This pseudonym has been chosen as a dedication to Hofstra University jazz professor and bassist Robert Bowen III, who was tragically killed in a hit-and-run bicycle accident in 2010.

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conferences, the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival, the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, Jazz a Vienne in France, the Umbria Jazz Festival in Italy, the Pori Jazz Festival in Finland, and multiple appearances at the *Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition and Festival* in New York City (program website, n.d.). Grant's jazz program has graduated an impressive list of professional jazz musicians and composers over its nearly four-decade tenure. Today, the Grant Jazz program consists of four audition-based jazz ensembles and a vocal jazz program, with Mr. Bowen directing the top jazz band, and professional jazz musicians and educators directing the other jazz bands on campus.

***The Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival.*** The *Essentially Ellington* (EE) competition has evolved to become the nation's most prestigious competition for high school jazz bands. As one jazz educator notes in the documentary *Chops*, "In the jazz world, *Essentially Ellington* is considered the Super Bowl of high school jazz competitions" (Broder, 2007). Grant High School has arguably earned most of its notoriety through repeated appearances at this festival over the past two decades. The competition was initiated to promote the legacy of one of America's greatest jazz composers and bandleaders, Duke Ellington. According to the program website,

Duke Ellington's music is at the very heart of America's 20th-century musical heritage and the core of the rich canon of jazz music. Jazz at Lincoln Center, committed to instilling a broader understanding of this music, created the *Essentially Ellington* program (EE) during the 1995–96 school year to make Ellington's music accessible to as many high school musicians as possible and to support the development of their schools' music programs.

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Notably, participation in *Essentially Ellington* includes far more than a traditional jazz competition. The organization offers a wide range of educational opportunities for jazz programs all over the country through published big band scores<sup>11</sup>, mentoring opportunities with renowned jazz educators and musicians, free adjudications of recordings, noncompetitive regional festivals, and educational resources (including teaching guides)—all through a free membership. Each year, high school (and more recently, community) jazz bands around the country submit recordings for the official competition, which are judged by a blind screening process by professional jazz educators and musicians. Of those who have submitted audition recordings, fifteen bands are selected from around the country to travel to New York City and participate as finalists. Each finalist band receives an in-school workshop led by a professional jazz musician or clinician before the official festival in May. At the festival, the fifteen finalist bands spend three days participating in workshops, rehearsals, and competitive performances. The final evening of the festival concludes with the selection of the three top bands, who perform at an evening concert and awards ceremony.

Ever since participation in the *Essentially Ellington* competition was made available to all fifty U.S. states in 1999, the Grant High School Jazz Band has been invited as a finalist band a historic seventeen times<sup>12</sup>. In fact, the only two years in which the band was not

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<sup>11</sup> These publications are full transcriptions of Duke Ellington's (as well as Benny Carter's Count Basie's, Mary Lou Williams's, Dizzy Gillespie's, Gerald Wilson's, Fletcher Henderson's, Tadd Dameron's, and Benny Golson's) music rather than simplified arrangements intended for educational use.

<sup>12</sup> This number is current as of the start of the 2017–18 school year, and does not include the finalist decision for the 2018 festival. This decision will be revealed later in the study (Chapter 4). Beyond Grant, only one other school in the country has been selected seventeen times, a public high school located in New England.

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selected as a finalist was in 2003, and the year before this study began, in 2017. The opportune timing of this research—commencing the year after Grant High School had not been selected as a finalist for the first time in fourteen years—became particularly noteworthy to the current investigation. In effect, this unexpected interruption of their championship standing forced the band to take renewed stock of their efforts, perhaps making the emergent themes more salient than would have otherwise been expected.

### **Participants.**

***The director.*** Rob Bowen has been the director of the Grant High School music program for thirty-four years. In addition to directing the school's top jazz ensemble, he also directs the school's wind ensemble and marching band. A recipient of numerous teaching awards (including *Down Beat Magazine's* coveted Jazz Educator of the Year award), Mr. Bowen has inspired countless musicians to pursue musical study at the professional level at universities and conservatories nationwide.

Despite his national and international notoriety, Mr. Bowen tends to maintain a relatively low profile throughout the school day. His graying hair and thick-rimmed glasses frame a youthful face which mysteriously defies his many years of service as a public educator. Most of his students stand at or above his height, and he carries himself with a seemingly positive disposition, always with a stride that reflects a sense of pride and confidence in the program that he has inherited and developed. In one way or another, many students seem to place him on a bit of a 'pedestal,' especially those who are younger and are not [yet] members of his coveted Jazz Band 1. Yet underneath their awe of him lies an apparent air of great affection. As one senior in the top band noted, "you're not friends with your band director. It's like, he's your boss. I mean, you work for him, and you still

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have a lot of fun, but it's a professional relationship." Mr. Bowen is quick to offer generous compliments to both students performing at their highest level and those noticeably working toward their potential, but will abruptly flip 'on a dime' when students are falling short of their potential (as measured by his own expectations). Over the course of my fieldwork, conversations with Mr. Bowen were always congenial but typically brief, given his busy workload before and after rehearsals.

***The Grant Jazz Band.*** The top jazz band at Grant High School is most commonly referred to as the Grant Jazz Band (or GJB), and more colloquially within the school as 'Jazz Band 1.' It consists of twenty-eight members in total, including a rotating rhythm section and several students doubling lower instrumental parts (i.e., Trumpets 3 & 4, Alto Sax 2, Tenor Sax 2, Baritone Sax; see Figure 3.2). The majority of the students are White (n = 21), though a few are of Asian (n = 4) or mixed-Asian (n = 3) descent; no African American or Latino students are represented within the band (see Figure 3.3). There are only three female students in the band<sup>13</sup>, compared to the twenty-five males: a trombone player (Angie), a guitarist (Leah), and a pianist (Kim).

The selection of the band occurred during auditions in June, where students were required to perform scales (to test range), a brief jazz excerpt, and improvise over the jazz standard, "All of Me." Despite being an elite group, however, the students in the band reflect various levels of ability when it comes to the skill of improvising. While a handful of

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<sup>13</sup> The jazz idiom has suffered from a widely-recognized and problematic gender discrepancy in both professional and educational settings. For a discussion of these gender representation issues within the context of the educational K-12 jazz ensemble, see Clingan's (2017) article, *The Educational Jazz Band: Where are the Girls?*

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students are highly capable improvisers, many were chosen for their strong ensemble skills and were relatively inexperienced with improvising.

Name	Instrument	Class Standing	Gender Identity
Greg	Trumpet	Senior	Male
Simon	Trumpet	Junior	Male
Kyle	Trumpet	Senior	Male
Theo	Trumpet	Senior	Male
Sebastian	Trumpet	Junior	Male
Marty	Trumpet	Senior	Male
Peyton	Trombone	Senior	Male
Angie	Trombone	Junior	Female
Arnold	Trombone	Freshman	Male
Miles	Trombone	Junior	Male
Marcus	Alto Sax	Senior	Male
Adam	Alto Sax	Senior	Male
Gio	Alto Sax	Senior	Male
Liam	Tenor Sax	Senior	Male
Oscar	Tenor Sax	Senior	Male
Neil	Tenor Sax	Senior	Male
Benji	Bari/Tenor Sax	Senior	Male
George	Bari Sax	Senior	Male
Seth	Drums	Senior	Male
Marley	Drums	Senior	Male
Jeff	Drums	Junior	Male
Micah	Bass	Senior	Male
Edward	Bass	Junior	Male
Craig	Piano	Junior	Male
Kim	Piano	Senior	Female
Jeremy	Piano	Senior	Male
Leah	Guitar	Senior	Female
Paul	Guitar	Senior	Male

**Figure 3.3.** Students' instruments, class standing, and gender identity.

**Gaining entry.** I had been familiar with the reputation of the Grant Jazz Band since volunteering at the *Essentially Ellington* festivals from 2007–2010. After developing the research purpose of the present study and identifying the desired criteria for sample

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selection, I identified the Grant Jazz Band to be a suitable field site for the present study. Although I had officially met the Mr. Bowen at *Essentially Ellington* in 2010, as well as several times in following years, I had developed no significant relationship with him through those interactions. However, as professional acquaintances, I reasoned that he might be more willing to allow me to conduct research with his group than another director with whom I had no prior associations. Near the conclusion of the 2016–2017 school year, I scheduled a visit with Mr. Bowen to explain the purpose of my proposed study, and to gauge his interest in participating. I notified him that I was interested in examining “the social dynamics of a competitive high school jazz band,” purposefully remaining broad in my research purpose to avoid priming him for any specific behaviors that I might be privy to observing and risking any possible manipulation of behaviors during future fieldwork.

Mr. Bowen exhibited interest in the study and welcomed my presence at all jazz band rehearsals during the 2017–2018 academic school year. After human subjects permission was obtained, I applied for permission to conduct research with the school district through the district research office. Final permission was granted by the research office and the school principal the week before the start of the school year in September. Afterward, Mr. Bowen granted me final access to the site, and I began my observations during the first full week of school.

***Human subjects.*** Permission to conduct the study was obtained by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) in June 2017 and by the school district in September 2017. Prior to the start of fieldwork, I distributed consent forms to the school principal, jazz band director, and all students of Jazz Band 1. A welcome letter accompanied all consent/assent

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forms, and together the letter and forms informed participants of the purpose, procedures, possible risks, and timeline of the project, in addition to notification of the use of audio recordings, my intent to conduct interviews, and their right to withdraw their participation at any time.

**Timeline.** Ethnomusicologist John Blacking famously urged music scholars to plan a minimum of one year to conduct fieldwork of an unfamiliar musical culture so that the researcher can document and experience every instance of musical activity throughout a calendar year (Stock & Chiener, 2008). A 'calendar year' for an academic music program consists of ten months (in the U.S., September through June). However, it was not deemed necessary to conduct a full year of fieldwork for several reasons. First, as a jazz musician who myself has performed in and conducted several jazz bands (as a student and professional), I was already quite familiar with the culture of school jazz bands. Becoming acquainted with the routines and customs of a competitive jazz band was assuredly different from what I had personally experienced before, but I became quite accustomed to their procedures after only a few months in the field. Second, it was most important to study the evolution of relationships, behaviors, and power dynamics over an extended period of time. This required me to observe a variety of interactions including rehearsals, jam sessions, fundraisers, social gatherings, and perhaps most provocative, competitions. Opportunely, there were plentiful opportunities to observe each of these types of engagements throughout the six months of fieldwork. Third, while it was certainly desirable to conduct fieldwork through the entirety of the ten-month school year, time demands made it possible to conduct intensive field work for six months (September 2017 through February 2018). The remainder of the school year (February through June 2018)



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was devoted to data analysis and writing, with occasional return visits for jam sessions, concerts, competitions, and festivals in which the bands participated. As it happened, Kingsbury's (1988) ethnographic study similarly lasted for six months and proved to be plentiful for the production of meaningful data and salient patterns of behavior in his study. With this reassurance, I remained satisfied with my intended timeframe allocated for fieldwork, with the possibility of conducting ongoing fieldwork beyond the six months to observe additional performances and competitions as necessary.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Non-Participant Observation**

According to Spradley (1980), participation in the field may range anywhere from complete participation to nonparticipation. For this study, my role in the environment often straddled the line between 'passive participation' and 'moderate participation.' While I was never fully engaging in the activities of the group (such as playing my instrument along with the group or guest conducting with them), I also did not remove myself from the social interactions of the group altogether. At my least involved, I adopted the role of a 'passive participant,' where I was "...present at the scene of action but [did not] participate or interact with other people to any great extent" (Spradley, 1980, p. 59). I adopted this research role during most rehearsals and performances to avoid becoming a nuisance during rehearsals. However, before and after rehearsals I occasionally made casual efforts to speak with students in an informal manner. This type of involvement reflected the role of 'moderate participation,' and was important to developing a degree of trust within the group so that they would be more comfortable with my presence (especially during one-

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on-one interviews). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) refer to these active efforts to engage in the day-to-day affairs of the participants as *resocialization*, which allows the researcher to learn “...what is required to become a member of that world and to experience events and meanings in ways that approximate *members’ experiences*” (p. 3, italics original).

As expected, the first few weeks of rehearsals proved to be quite challenging in terms of establishing a level of comfort with the students. While none of the students objected to my presence or scope of my study, it was clear that many were uncomfortable with my presence during the first few months. This was evidenced most commonly by students who would awkwardly divert their eyes away from me while passing by, and several instances in which the students became suddenly quiet once I entered a room. I certainly expected this discomfort to a degree, given that I was an outside researcher with no direct affiliation to Grant High School, and was observing them with a recording device and laptop from the start of the school year. However, while it may have been preferable to initiate fieldwork without taking conspicuous notes and using recording equipment, I considered it important to capture the direct sounds of the social interactions and the level of playing throughout the school year.

Nonetheless, I worked patiently toward establishing a degree of comfort and rapport with the students over time, often attempting to talk to them about non-research-related matters (such as sports, music, and school-related events) and without recording equipment. I also made a conscious effort within the first week of fieldwork to dress casually (jeans or khakis and polo or button-down shirts) so as to not create a perception of power between myself and the participants. For most rehearsals, I sat in the same location since it provided the clearest vantage of all members and Mr. Bowen (see Figure 3.1), but I

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often moved freely around the band room during rehearsals to hear the band from various positions around the room. However, to avoid becoming a distraction I avoided approaching the ‘bandstand’ except before rehearsals to speak briefly with individual students.

**Limitations to participant observation.** Because participant observation occurred within the boundaries of the high school, I must acknowledge a necessary limitation of the research strategy. By definition, data in participant observation is collected through the directly observable actions and events that I personally witness. While the daily rehearsals, performances, jam sessions, and competitions represented the majority of the group’s shared interactions, there were undoubtedly a number of exchanges that I could not have reasonably witnessed as an external researcher. These interactions would have certainly included everything from formal and informal gatherings at a band member’s home or social place (including at-home sectionals and/or ‘group hangs’), private conversations over phone or text, passing dialogues during lunchtime or shared classes, and so on. They would have also included their participation in other ensembles (i.e., the school marching band, wind ensemble, and orchestra), as well as the social dynamics (whether parallel or dissimilar to those within the jazz band) occurring within their out-of-school jazz combos. (Members of the GHS Jazz program were often contracted to perform small gigs around the community.) Truly, these students’ social lives do not begin and end within the boundaries of the Grant High School Jazz program but emanate well beyond into the larger school and community culture. As such, the data collected through this study necessarily represents merely a glimpse into the life of a Grant High School jazz musician—a glimpse that became

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deeply enriched and contextualized over the course of six months, but a glimpse nonetheless.

**Fieldnotes & memos.** I took copious fieldnotes during all rehearsals, which amounted to 110 pages of single-spaced text in total. When necessary, I referred to the specific interactions of interest on the audio recording (which was running during all rehearsals) in order to transcribe any relevant commentary as they transpired during rehearsals. These direct quotes were transcribed in full within my fieldnotes. Also included within these fieldnotes were in-process memos (written in italics) for the purpose of “identifying and exploring initial theoretical directions and possibilities” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 123). Overall, I spent upward of 80 hours with the students at rehearsals, approximately 17 hours with them at various concerts and festivals (not including the final *Essentially Ellington* Competition; see Epilogue), and about 6 hours with them at sectionals.

**Audio recordings.** All rehearsals, jam sessions, and band interactions were recorded using a Zoom H2n handheld digital multitrack recorder, which was positioned near the front of the ensemble to pick up exact quotes and commentary from the director and students, as well as to capture musical interactions<sup>14</sup>. These recordings amounted to approximately 97 hours of audio files. As mentioned, audio recordings from rehearsals functioned as an extension of my fieldnotes, capturing commentary that was otherwise missed by my own ear. However, since audio recordings certainly cannot replace the researcher’s analytical eye, it was essential to not rely on the recordings as a primary tool of data collection, as much would have been missed in terms of gestural behaviors, body

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<sup>14</sup> Video recording was not permissible, according to the research protocol outlined by the school district’s research office.

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language, and other non-verbal forms of communication. As such, audio recordings were treated as supplementary to the ongoing collection of fieldnotes. Recordings typically began approximately five minutes before each rehearsal and continued until all students left the band room in order to capture the social interactions before and after rehearsals. All audio recordings were stored in a 'cloud'-based online storage program, which was password protected for security.

### Interviews

I designed interviews to be semi-structured (with a series of guiding questions but an openness to digressing into topics of interest as they arose throughout the conversation) and they were conducted one-on-one with the students and director (Weiss, 1994). One-on-one interviews were preferable given the potentially sensitive nature of the data, where students were at times sharing judgments of their peers (and the director of his students). Most interviews took place in a nearby practice room and lasted between 45–60 minutes each. All students were invited to participate in interviews, and eleven of the twenty-eight students volunteered to participate. Other students were unable to participate given their school work-load and/or extra-curricular activities before and after school (and of course, some may have been simply unwilling or uninterested in participating). Interviews were transcribed according the discussion of matters relevant to the study, resulting in 120 pages of single-spaced text. A list of all interviews is outlined in Figure 3.4.

Participant Name	Interview Date
Theo, <i>trumpet</i>	October 16, 2017

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Simon, <i>trumpet</i>	October 16, 2017
Greg, <i>trumpet</i>	October 16, 2017
Sebastian, <i>trumpet</i>	October 19, 2017
Oscar & Neil, <i>tenor saxophone</i>	October 20, 2017
Benji, <i>baritone saxophone</i>	November 7, 2017
Kyle, <i>trumpet</i>	November 8, 2017
Micah, <i>bass</i>	December 5, 2017
Jeremy, <i>piano</i>	December 14, 2017
Angie, <i>trombone</i>	January 9, 2018
Rob Bowen, <i>director</i> <sup>15</sup>	April 25, 2018

**Figure 3.4:** Interview schedule.

I must further point out that adolescents can sometimes be a challenging group with whom to conduct interviews, because while some felt perfectly comfortable sharing their feelings and experiences with me, many appeared far more hesitant to express themselves with an ‘outsider.’ To account for some students’ potential discomfort, I provided the additional option of conducting interviews in pairs if they felt that the information they share would be appropriate for both to hear (only two students exercised this option). Finally, to establish a level of congeniality between myself and the participants (as well as an incentive to participate), I asked them to list their favorite snack when signing up for interviews, which I provided for them at the start of the interview.

Interviews proved to be a critical element of this investigation because they allowed the participants themselves to express their personal feelings and experiences toward

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<sup>15</sup> Mr. Bowen’s interview was conducted last in order to remain open to the students’ ascribed meanings to the constructs of question before gaining Mr. Bowen’s insights—which were thought to be potentially more insightful given his 34 years of experience. Additionally, this interview was used as an opportunity to share the theoretical framework of the study and to ‘member check’ (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) my own findings.

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prosocial and antisocial interactions in musical contexts (Weiss, 1994). Additionally, they served as an additional level of rigor to support (or refute) the behaviors that I observed as a participant observer. For this purpose, I strongly encouraged direct input from the students and directors, since they have developed different (and stronger) relationships with each another than I ever could over the course of my relatively brief fieldwork. Further, in support of Tucker's (2016) claim that intentionality is at the core of perceptions of arrogance or humility, interviews allowed me to judge behaviors based on their apparent intent (by following up with the participant(s) regarding particular events) instead of judging them at face value as the observer.

Given the time demands related to transcribing interviews, I elected to transcribe in-full everything that seemed even marginally relevant to the study. As such, comments deemed irrelevant and superfluous were paraphrased in brackets. Furthermore, while it is often suggested that the respondent's every verbal gesture (including hesitations, stutters, and fillers) ought to be included in the transcription, I elected to remove these superfluous expressions from the record in order to maintain the greater coherence of the participant's response (Weiss, 1994). These included a significant glut of filler words as "like," "um," and "you know."

## Material Culture

In addition to fieldnotes and interviews, material culture allowed for an additional layer of data to be subjected to triangulation during the generation of emergent themes. Material culture took the form of concert programs; publicly-available enrollment, achievement, and demographic data; the Grant High School Jazz Band's website; and the

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band's public Facebook page, which posted advertisements for performances, articles regarding students' activities within and beyond the community, YouTube clips of performances, and so on.

### **Identifying Egoism and Humility in the Field**

While observations of humility and egoism in the field were based upon the definitions of the constructs discussed in the literature, knowing what qualified as egoistic and humble behavior was a constant challenge of this dissertation, stemming from the fact that (a) the character traits appear to be subjective and socially constructed, and (b) intentions, which are ultimately at the heart of prosocial and antisocial human tendencies, are not easily known or observable. Leary et al. (1997) found that the most direct way of detecting egoism was through verbal claims of one's accomplishments or abilities. In practice, I witnessed very few demonstrations of explicit egoism, such as self-promoting comments, brags, boasts, and put-downs. However, these displays alone failed to capture the full picture of egoistic behavior within the group. For example, someone may have failed to self-aggrandize verbally, but might have done so through approaches to soloing, playing with others, and balancing with the rest of the band (i.e., overplaying or not listening within the section). Because egoism and humility go so much further than what people say, Leary and colleagues offer that such behaviors must also be inferred. Inferences of such behaviors may be obtained through repeated self-centered actions, displays of dramatic flair, a preoccupation with one's body language and/or self-presentation, and how they handle the accomplishments of others in the group (acts which downplay, denigrate, or take attention away from the achievements of others were read as signs of



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egoistic behavior). Finally, egoists may not acknowledge other people at all, conveying a sense that others are less important than themselves (Leary et al., 1997). Finally, it must be acknowledged that judging egoism was far from straightforward, because of the ever-present question of a person's underlying intentions (Tucker, 2016). While the intentions which inspire apparently egoistic behaviors may not be fully known in every circumstance, they can be made more apparent over extended participation within the group culture. The strategy of observing prosocial and antisocial behaviors generally aided significantly in these concerns.

### **Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality**

To briefly discuss my role as the researcher in this study, my adoption as a passive participant during rehearsals and performances meant that I was partially removed from the events of rehearsals. Additionally, I had no pre-existing knowledge of or existing relationships with any the students participating in the ensembles, which allowed me to take a position of greater impartiality during fieldwork. However, I must acknowledge a degree of positionality as I have personally performed in many jazz bands throughout my musical career. Thus, as a researcher who has already experienced first-hand many instances of egoistic behavior in jazz bands, it was imperative for me to understand how such past experiences may have shaped my observations in the field.

Moreover, this sort of admission becomes further complicated as I consider the role of my own potentially biased ego—which is, of course, ever-present and inextricable. As a qualitative researcher, it would be irresponsible to simply ignore how these considerations could have potentially reflected a hued interpretation of the constructs, and so they were

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consistently reflected upon throughout my fieldwork to ensure that the study developed an understanding of humility and egoism as corroborated through the perspectives and experiences of the participants themselves (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Finally—and perhaps most importantly—it is crucial to make it clear that in the process of describing this emergent construct of musical humility, I in no way attempt to position myself as an ultimate figure of humility. Certainly, the study was not about me or my ego, but it is my responsibility as the researcher to acknowledge that while it is ultimately *my voice* that is writing about the need for humility, such an act does not imply the assumed personal possession of pure humility. Indeed, many psychologists and philosophers (e.g., Myers, 1995; Tangney, 2000) agree that there is conceivably no such thing as a ‘truly’ humble person, and thus, such an admission would not threaten to invalidate my findings.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Coding & Selection of Emergent Themes**

I entered the more than 230 pages of fieldnotes, transcriptions, and memos into the qualitative research software program ATLAS.Ti, which were subjected to two stages of open coding (Cresswell, 2015; Saldaña, 2013). The first round of coding occurred simultaneously with the six-month data collection process, with data being coded approximately one month after its collection. This timeline allowed me to more effectively remove myself from the data and view it from a more detached perspective. During this first round of coding, I established 138 thematic codes which were categorized into 10 parent codes, resulting in a total of 780 code quotations.

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After fieldwork was mostly completed, I conducted a second round of open coding followed by a final round of focused coding (Cresswell, 2015; Saldaña, 2013), in which I refined and narrowed the emergent themes to a “fine-grained, line-by-line analysis of selected notes” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 191). Through careful and repeated analysis, I triangulated the data such that various perspectives (i.e., students and director), types of data (i.e., field notes, memos, material culture), and methods of data collection (e.g., nonparticipant observation, interviews) could be corroborated against one another to establish a coherent theoretical interpretation (Cresswell, 2015). This analysis included support from multiple perspectives grounded in “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), as well as tenuous and/or contradictory evidence which challenged these findings.

### **Conclusion**

Given the research strategy described throughout this chapter, it becomes necessary for me to initiate the current investigation through an ethnographic sketch of the daily workings and rituals of the Grant Jazz Band during rehearsals in addition to their social dynamics during the various competitions and festivals in which they participated during the 2017–18 school year. This detailed description of the Grant Jazz Band culture is intended to richly illustrate the general habits and mores of the band, as well as to detail their negotiation of leadership, identity, and power relations as they pertain to prosocial and antisocial behaviors. It is from this description-rich portrayal that I will subsequently establish and argue a theoretical basis for the existence of musical humility and egoism.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A NATIONALLY-RECOGNIZED HIGH SCHOOL JAZZ BAND**

#### **Arriving at Grant High School**

The traffic has finally steadied in the neighborhood of Grant Hills, but nearing the high school, movement begins to slow again as several cars halt to parallel park across from the school. Apparently returning from an off-campus lunch, students begin to fill the empty spots one-by-one and rush off to their fifth period class. Following suit, I find an open spot and tuck my vehicle behind the others.

Knowing the neighborhood of Grant Hills to be a relatively affluent area with housing prices continually on the rise, I am surprised to find that I have parked in front of a sign forbidding entrance to a quaint but decaying tutor home behind a chain-link fence across the street from the school. Multiple houses along the street wear the same deterioration: dwindling facades with boarded-up windows and modest front yards with browning grass. It is clear from the cobwebs and peeling paint that they have gone unoccupied for at least a few years now.

Yet in contrast to the boarded-up houses in the immediate vicinity, a large red crane suggests that change is apparently underway. Looming just beyond the football field to the west of the school, slightly obscuring the snowcapped mountains in the distance, the crane marks the spot of another apartment complex being erected some blocks away. Sitting near the top of a hill, the high school maintains an imposing stature, unobtrusively standing by as the neighborhood around it begins to change amidst an apparent real estate boom in progress. On the campus grounds, overgrown foliage outlines the walking paths toward the

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school, and a large elm tree provides shade to some students eating their lunch on the front steps and lawn. As I near the three sets of front doors, details begin to emerge: an all-brick rectangular shape gives way to a sandstone façade reminiscent of Palladian architecture, with the words GRANT HIGH SCHOOL carved near the top of the building.

Students come and go freely from the building with no questions asked. The main lobby is an open space, adorned with Classical columns framing a newly-remodeled library straight ahead. Short call-and-response refrains of Japanese bleed from a classroom nearby, contrasting with the stark silence of an American Sign Language class taking place further down the hall. The sound of distinct conversations throughout the hallway mixes with the sound of a music video playing from a student's phone as she sits with her friend on the floor. From behind me, two Asian American boys enter with hip-hop music blaring from a small Bluetooth speaker. As they turn the corner and head up the staircase, they turn to each other and deliver a profane lyric in unison, gesticulating to each other and snickering up the stairs. I continue down the long stretch of hallway until I begin to hear the muffled sounds of wind instruments in practice rooms.

### **The Music Wing and Band Room**

As I approach the music wing, more pockets of students appear. They find nooks and crannies, staking claim with strewn backpacks and sweaters on the floor. Some talk and gossip, some eat while playing on their phones, and a few sit quietly with a book. Further down the hall, a handful of chairs spill out into the hallway, and a placard on the wall tells me that this is where the band room is located. Students gather in the hallway, waiting for fifth period to start. The gathering begins to grow as students enter from the

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side doors, horn cases thrown over their shoulders, also returning from their off-campus lunch.

I wander the halls a few moments before the fifth period bell rings. Around the corner from the band room, a row of glass cases is filled with awards won over the years by the Grant High School music program, from national and international awards obtained by the orchestra and marching band, to state competitions won by chamber groups. One case is dedicated solely to the Grant Jazz Band, and it is filled to full capacity. The awards are mostly from the nineties and early two-thousands, now gathering a thin layer of dust. Pictures of students and the director with well-known jazz musicians and signed posters from past jazz festivals complement the awards inside. Further down the hall, lining the walls of the music wing are bulletin boards covered in the school's colors of purple and green—each bulletin board provides information about the various school ensembles (band, chorus, orchestra—the vocal program is presumably located elsewhere) and performance opportunities (i.e., clinics, gigs, private lesson offerings). Noticeably, the bulletin boards in front of the band room are filled with pictures and announcements while the orchestra section remains relatively blank in comparison.

In front of the band room entrance is a large purple-and-green plaque decreeing the behavior and work ethic that is intended to take place beyond: "CREATE EXCELLENCE INSIDE, LEAVE EXCUSES OUTSIDE." I enter the band room to find more trophies of various sizes surrounding the perimeter of the beige room, sitting atop large instrument cases—apparently the resting place of the jazz band's newer awards since the glass case had been filled nearly two decades ago. Additional awards are found on top of the music cabinet, a few collecting dust and laying on their side, apparently tipped over and forgotten about

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some time ago. A handful of more recent trophies line the computer desk at the front of the room. Pinned around the space are posters of various jazz festivals in which the band had assumedly participated. There are no posters of Bach or Mozart here (although perhaps they would be found in the orchestra room). Instead, walls are sparsely lined with exclusively jazz-related artwork: a framed photo of Dizzy Gillespie standing under a 52<sup>nd</sup> street sign in New York City, a student-painted piece of artwork with the words “Grant Jazz,” and two more professional abstract jazz paintings sitting atop cabinets. If it weren’t for the typical curved formation of chairs and stands indicating the presence of a traditional wind band, this room could be easily mistaken for a space dedicated exclusively to jazz. Percussion instruments are messily situated toward the back of the room, apparently pushed out of the way by students passing through the room. But sitting in the corner, always in perfect position, is a grand piano with an open top and an eight-piece drum set. Here, positioned off to the north side of the room, is where one of the nation’s top high school jazz ensembles practices daily.

### **The First Rehearsals**

Mr. Bowen is sitting in his office, eating a microwaveable pasta dish and listening to Ella Fitzgerald through the computer speakers. He greets me with a warm “hey man!” as the band room door squeaks to announce my arrival. We chat momentarily, and I offer to leave him to his lunch while I set up my equipment for rehearsal. Finding a spot by the jazz band setup, I prop my audio recorder on a music stand and take out my laptop, pulling up a chair in front of another music stand, turning it into an impromptu desk. With fifth period about to start, I press ‘record’ on the audio recorder and settle into my seat.

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The bell rings, and before long the door squeaks again, letting in the din of hallway noise. A young man with coffee-toned skin and curly, brown hair enters first with a joyful and confident strut, whistling Juan Tizol's "Caravan" before disappearing into the instrument closet. Neil is his name—the second tenor saxophonist in the band, and one of the featured soloists of the band. Shortly behind him enters his friend Oscar, with whom he shares the second tenor seat. Oscar is of mixed-Asian descent and stands a few inches taller than Neil, whether by physical height or thorough a more confident gait. Seth, the first-string drummer, enters the room next with a buoyant step, twisting his hands around each other as he makes a beeline for the drum set. Giving off a distinct 'hipster' vibe, he wears a vintage trucker hat underneath messy dark brown hair and a nylon American Airlines jacket. Moments later, a swarm of students follow closely behind—a few continuing their hallway conversations, but most entering the room quietly. The first-string pianist, a dirty blonde-haired senior named Craig, goes to the piano and voices some blocked chords above Seth's independent drumming. As the wind players grab their horns from the instrument closet, the noise level begins to rise as saxophones run through the range of their instruments and brass musicians play through Chicowitz and Clarke long-tone exercises.

Mr. Bowen is now seated at the computer at the front of the band room, sipping his coffee while he searches through the computer's music library. Another tall, blonde-haired boy wearing a Seattle Mariners cap and thick-rimmed rectangular glasses takes his trumpet out of his case, and skipping the Chicowitz long tones played by the others, chooses instead to immediately play in the high range of his horn. Pinning his elbows tensely to his sides, Simon plays a short bebop passage in the upper register of his horn and shakes on the final note momentarily before ripping the trumpet from his lips in a forceful, forward motion.



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His eyes awkwardly dart around the room, but catching no one's eye, he repeats the same procedure a few more times before making his way to the classroom 'bandstand' setup. But as he finds his spot, he places his music on the stand closest to the drums—the traditional spot of the second trumpet player. I briefly catch myself, falsely assuming that Simon is the lead trumpet player (given his warm-up behaviors), and now make a note of figuring out who the lead trumpet player is, since no one seems to be announcing it through their playing.

Finally, a tall-and-lanky young man with a youthful face steps to the stand immediately to the right of Simon—the traditional lead trumpet spot, positioned to create a straight line with the lead trombone, lead alto, and director. Where Simon's arms are pinned to his sides and his neck veins bulge with tension, Greg holds his arms out to his sides and plays with a carefree, floating quality. His sound is not particularly brazen, which is perhaps why I struggled to make him out amidst the din in the room—but it is certainly present and assertive. And now that I hear his warm tone, I recognize that he is unequivocally the leader of the trumpet section.

Mr. Bowen casually approaches the front of the band five minutes after the start of the period, and the group continues to play: a few saxophone players improvising and reading through transcribed solos, Seth playing a post-bop swing rhythm on the drum set, Craig improvising to himself on the piano, and first-string bassist Micah walking an unrelated bass line. All of these activities create a cacophony in the room, given their independence from one another; no one communicates musically or verbally during these opening moments. Off to the side, six students sit quietly in chairs as they watch it all unfold. These are the second- and third-string rhythm section musicians who must wait

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their turn to play: two drummers, two pianists, and a guitarist. They will rotate with a new piece (which the students will autocratically decide). But today, they happen to stay put for the entirety of the first rehearsal.

With a circular wave of Mr. Bowen's arm, the band quiets instantly. Claspings his hands together excitedly, he says, "Alright! It's the afternoon...it must be time for jazz band!" The students excitedly respond with a mixed smattering of "woo!" and "yeah!" Mr. Bowen begins by thanking the band for their work during the summer jazz band camp, which turned out record numbers. He offers brief announcements for a few minutes, and then offers me an opportunity to explain my presence. The students are receptive but reserved during this initial introduction, and after explaining the purpose of my study and passing out the assent/consent forms, I take my seat again. Mr. Bowen shifts gears suddenly, asking the students to take out "Shiny Stockings." He immediately focuses their attention on the composer and the performing band: Frank Foster and the Count Basie Orchestra. He asks them what they know about the aesthetics of the song, specifically knowing that Frank Foster composed the tune. The students are able to immediately identify that he is associated with the "New Testament Basie Band"<sup>16</sup>. The knowledge base of the students is immediately striking, with all clearly possessing a level of comprehension that I find to be impressive among a group of adolescent musicians.

Finally, Mr. Bowen stands up, announcing as he walks to the computer that he will play two versions of "Shiny Stockings"—the original from 1956, and another recording from 1958. He quizzes the trumpets to see if anyone can name some trumpet players on the

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<sup>16</sup> The New Testament Basie band was different from the "Old Testament" band because it featured more involved arrangements — whereas the Old Testament band was better-known for playing "riff-based arrangements" and head charts.

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earlier recording. Presumably by the recording year alone, trumpeters Simon and Sebastian are able to respond with ease. Mr. Bowen clicks ‘play’ and the room fills with the sound of Count Basie’s iconic piano introduction. Once the muted brass enters with the presentation of the *head* (main melody) in-time, several feet and heads begin to kinesthetically respond to the ‘soft-shoe’ beat. The most enthusiastic of bodies belongs to tenor saxophonist Neil, who squints his eyes, cranes his neck backward, and shakes his head from side to side with each soulful line. At the piece’s conclusion, the band briefly discusses the notable elements of the recording until Mr. Bowen finally says, “let’s not get bogged down by analysis and get paralysis by analysis. Let’s play!”

\* \* \*

On the second day of rehearsals, a routine appears to already be underway: Simon continues to play his screeching high notes, looking around immediately after ripping the horn from his lips; the rhythm section all continue to play independently from one another; the saxophones continue to play short solo excerpts (whether improvised or learned through transcriptions) on their own; and the trumpets (with the exception of Simon) play long tone exercises in an ascending chromatic fashion, slowly warming up to lip slurs and short excerpts from the repertoire.

Today, Mr. Bowen opens by playing an early jazz tune, “Yellow Dog Blues” by Bessie Smith. Featuring collective improvisation between the clarinet, trumpet, trombone, and Bessie Smith’s vocals, Mr. Bowen prompts the students to think through the social process of developing a collectively improvised performance:

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How do you think they decided who played one response and who played the next? How did they decide who's playing what? Just think: how would've it have been done? 1925, a bunch of the greatest musicians in the world get together to back up Bessie Smith. I mean, I wonder how it came together! They certainly didn't have *Finale*. They weren't going to, like, *iReal Pro* and figuring out what the tunes were. I don't know if they even would have written anything out! Isn't everybody improvising? [Smattering of agreement] Including Bessie Smith! Now, there may have been a melody, but she then varied it as she went throughout. [...] So, this is how the music started out. And then everybody kinda developed a certain role. Like, the [tuba] or the bass are gonna play the bass line. Oftentimes the trombone was sliding around through things. Everybody had a certain role.

Finishing, he offers the band an opportunity to give it their own shot. A few students volunteer willingly, including the second trumpet Simon, lead trombone Peyton, tenor player Neil, and the rhythm section. Before starting, Mr. Bowen challenges the students to see if they can "...work it out so that [they] don't get in each other's way." Providing further instructions, he says, "Simon, you're the trumpet player. Trumpet players always take the lead on everything. So why don't you take the lead, and you guys respond to that. But be forgiving! Don't take it *all* the time—leave a little space." Simon nods, and Mr. Bowen counts off the group.

The playing starts off immediately with Simon improvising a simple blues melody with the rhythm section (Figure 4.1). Getting his bearings straight first, Neil plays in a quiet 'subtone' in the lower range of his tenor sax. Peyton follows somewhat coyly at first on the

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trombone, scooping on a repeated 'blue note.' Simon is clearly taking the lead, leaving few clear 'holes' for the others to play in, and instead prompting them to play around his melody rather than interject within it. After one chorus<sup>17</sup> of collective improvisation, Mr. Bowen cues Simon, who takes the first solo. He starts off with a scooped 'blue note' in a brash, growling *fortissimo* before quieting with a simple melody inflected with blue notes and pleasant voice leadings. Craig takes the next solo on the piano, and halfway through, Simon interrupts with a single half-valve blue note, laughing quietly to himself. Neil takes the next solo and goes on for a second chorus as the trombone interjects with brief exclamations. Finally, coming out of his solo, Simon and Peyton begin to establish a more palpable presence, but Neil fails to relinquish his solo spotlight during this additional chorus, wailing louder than the two of them collectively. Next, taking Mr. Bowen's cue, Simon takes another two-chorus solo, again with a straightforward approach that is more reserved than his warm-up behaviors despite a number of growls, shakes, and half-valve 'tricks.' Throughout all of this, Neil continues to wear impassioned expressions in response to his classmates' licks and solos. When they finish, Neil fervently nods his head in approval, looking at Mr. Bowen as he says, "yeahhhh."

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<sup>17</sup> A 'chorus' is one complete revolution of the song form (i.e., 12-bar blues form, AABA form)

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The musical score is written for three instruments: Trumpet, Tenor Sax, and Trombone. It is in 4/4 time and features an A-flat blues progression. The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number (1, 5, and 9) and a key signature change (A $\flat$ 7, D $\flat$ 7, and E $\flat$ 7).

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):** The Trumpet part starts with a half note A $\flat$ 4, followed by a half note G $\flat$ 4, and then a half note F $\flat$ 4. The Tenor Sax part starts with a half note A $\flat$ 3, followed by a half note G $\flat$ 3, and then a half note F $\flat$ 3. The Trombone part starts with a half note A $\flat$ 2, followed by a half note G $\flat$ 2, and then a half note F $\flat$ 2. The key signature is A $\flat$ 7. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). Performance instructions include "hold back" and "1/2 valve".

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):** The Trumpet part starts with a half note D $\flat$ 5, followed by a half note C $\flat$ 5, and then a half note B $\flat$ 4. The Tenor Sax part starts with a half note D $\flat$ 4, followed by a half note C $\flat$ 4, and then a half note B $\flat$ 3. The Trombone part starts with a half note D $\flat$ 3, followed by a half note C $\flat$ 3, and then a half note B $\flat$ 2. The key signature is D $\flat$ 7. Dynamics include *mp*, *mf*, and *f* (forte). Performance instructions include "subtone" and "hold back".

**System 3 (Measures 9-12):** The Trumpet part starts with a half note E $\flat$ 5, followed by a half note D $\flat$ 5, and then a half note C $\flat$ 5. The Tenor Sax part starts with a half note E $\flat$ 4, followed by a half note D $\flat$ 4, and then a half note C $\flat$ 4. The Trombone part starts with a half note E $\flat$ 3, followed by a half note D $\flat$ 3, and then a half note C $\flat$ 3. The key signature is E $\flat$ 7. Dynamics include *mp*, *mf*, and *ff* (fortissimo). Performance instructions include "growl".

**Figure 4.1.** Excerpt of student-led collective improvisation on an A-flat blues (approximation).

\* \* \*

By the conclusion of the first week of rehearsals, I find myself astounded not only by the quality of the band's musicianship, but by their work ethic in particular. The students are mostly silent throughout rehearsal—not from fear, but from focus. As a music educator, I admit that I have seldom seen such a committed work ethic from high school-aged

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students. Admittedly, I find myself surprised to find so few instances of self-promoting behavior. Indeed, Simon's showy trumpet warm-ups had been the only salient demonstration of self-promotion all week (beyond what might have been identified as a self-focused solo by Neil during the collective improvisation exercise), and I begin to wonder if I would be privy to observing a range of prosocial and antisocial (and particularly, humble and arrogant) behaviors during my fieldwork. However, trusting in the longer-term strengths of the ethnographic method, I pack up my recording equipment on the first Friday and prepare to leave.

But as I slip my laptop into my bag, the baritone sax player, Benji, and the tenor sax player, Oscar, begin to play the complex melody to "Some Skunk Funk" by Michael and Randy Brecker. As the rest of the band departs for sixth period, Oscar joins Benji in playing the fast-running sixteenth note licks of the melody. Benji takes out his phone and brings up the recording and tries to play along with it on his bari sax, only to find that he's been playing it in a different key.

"Oh shit, what key did I learn it in?" Benji asks himself.

"You learned it in tenor key<sup>18</sup>," Oscar replies.

Benji shoots back immediately, "No I didn't...."

They begin to argue over how it could possibly be that Benji learned the melody in a key different from the recording. After a few moments, Oscar finally exclaims, "I don't know! You're just wrong, and you always act like you're right about everything!"

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<sup>18</sup> Both the bari and tenor saxophones are transposing instruments, with the bari sax in E-flat, and the tenor sax in B-flat. It is likely, as Oscar suggested, that Benji learned the melody from a B-flat lead sheet, which would sound in a different key on the E-flat bari sax.

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Considering this brief interaction (which likely would have otherwise been considered an immaterial display of adolescent banter if not for its timing), I'm incited to focus renewed energy not only on the in-rehearsal behaviors and attitudes, but particularly on their interactions in the absence of Mr. Bowen. I reason that egoistic and general self-interested behaviors will make themselves known eventually, of course (particularly between students promoting their own knowledge and skill), but perhaps they will be assuaged in the interest of more focused rehearsals.

### Sectionals

Mr. Bowen began planning sectionals as early as the first week of rehearsals. On average, sectionals occurred about once every two weeks, and were either scheduled by Mr. Bowen or were decided by the students whenever Mr. Bowen was absent from school<sup>19</sup> (which occurred about 7–8 times throughout my six-month fieldwork). From the beginning of the school year, Mr. Bowen was clear to communicate that sectionals were one of the most important opportunities for the development of the band—not only in terms of rehearsing the music, but especially in establishing a strong interdependent community within each section. He certainly promoted the 'de facto' leadership roles within each section, which were held by the three lead wind players (Greg on trumpet, Peyton on trombone, and Marcus on saxophone) and the four first-string rhythm section musicians (Seth on drums, Micah on bass, Craig on piano, and Leah on guitar). However, he also made it clear that a more democratic approach was desired during sectionals, as opposed to an

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<sup>19</sup> These absences did not only include typical sick days, but also included his responsibilities with adjudication work for various school music festivals, given his notoriety throughout the Pacific Northwest as a music educator.



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authoritarian attitude in which the lead player had the only (or at least final) voice. On the first day of sectionals, he front-loaded his expectations for sharing these leadership roles, as well as articulated the concepts on which he wanted each section to focus:

I want you guys to—as much as you’re working on the music, use this as a time to develop some leadership, and also to pass along the concepts [...] Use these tunes as a vehicle for working on concepts, for having people be leaders. I mean, the natural leaders in the band are the section leaders going down the horns. But those aren’t the only leaders that we have. The drummer is the natural leader in the rhythm section, but they might not know chord voicings for the piano and the guitar. So, spread the love a little bit and work in sectionals.

Left to their own, the students seem to be highly experienced running their own sectionals, and they waste no time in advocating for themselves. Over the course of my fieldwork, I sat in a number of sectionals and found compellingly positive social dynamics existing among the trumpets, saxophones, and rhythm section<sup>20</sup>. Accordingly, I will briefly describe the social dynamics of the trumpets, saxophones, and rhythm section as exemplars of prosocial and antisocial dynamics occurring in Mr. Bowen’s absence.

**The trumpets.** I enter the trumpet sectional first, stepping into the crammed ‘ensemble room’—a small practice room designed for chamber-sized rehearsals. Because it currently acts as a storage unit for marching band equipment, little more fits comfortably

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<sup>20</sup> While the trombone section had an affable chemistry combined with a strong work ethic, their interpersonal dynamics did not establish many striking behaviors of prosocial or antisocial conduct and are left out of this discussion in the interest of a more focused argument.

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inside this space. Seeing the six trumpeters crammed inside the room, I ask timidly if I might listen in on their sectional and am met with a single “yes” and a few ambivalent nods and mumbles of consent. I enter and lean uncomfortably against a metal shelving unit holding various instruments.

The first to speak is Theo, followed by Sebastian: two trumpeters that seemed relatively soft-spoken throughout the first week of rehearsals. Theo is a senior, and carries his skinny frame with a confident gait, his thin arms often half-extended to his sides with a persistent readiness. I easily recall Sebastian, a junior of Asian American descent who played a remarkably mature trumpet solo during “Shiny Stockings” on the first day of rehearsals. Otherwise soft-spoken during rehearsals, Sebastian is the shortest member of the section, wearing glasses framed by naturally-falling jet-black hair. Their voices ring loudly in the cramped space, getting straight to business over the sound of Simon, Greg, and Neil’s warm-ups:

**Theo:** [Loudly, shouting over the noise] Okay, what are we working on first?

**Sebastian:** If we’re practicing in sectionals, like, blending and that jazz...

**Theo:** [Catching Sebastian’s wordplay] Hey-o!

**Sebastian:** We shouldn’t be doubling.

**Theo:** You wanna take like, five minutes to warm up and then get started with “Autumn Leaves”?

At Theo’s suggestion, everyone nods and begins playing independently: Simon plays into his high range again, shaking on screeching notes and ripping the horn from his face as

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before. The others continue their long-tone warm-ups and play short snippets of “Autumn Leaves.” After a moment, they reconvene to discuss a matter of business: what clinicians they might want to invite to assist with sectionals over the course of the school year. Simon is the first to speak, and advocates for his private teacher—a well-known award-winning trumpet player who earned acclaim with Maynard Ferguson’s Big Bop Nouveau Band (artist’s website, n.d.). Nonchalantly, Simon expresses the apparent interest of his teacher to participate in masterclasses, saying, “yeah, he told me that he wanted to like, come up here for more than just giving me lessons, so...” They share other names, some of which are also private teachers, and others who carry established names within and beyond the Seattle area.

With a short-list of names prepared by Theo, the group refocuses attention back on “Autumn Leaves,” playing through the introduction together. After a few bars, Sebastian asks them to evaluate their playing:

**Sebastian:** How’d it go?

**Theo:** It was tight.

**Simon:** I think that was—

**Sebastian:** I don’t think we— I still don’t think we *crescendo*-ed good enough [others agree]. Like, we just kinda started loud and [inaudible].

**Sebastian:** Maybe make it like *mezzo-forte* to *fortissimo*.

**Theo:** Greg? Are you doing—I don’t know the technical term, it’s some like turny-ish thing, like— [demonstrates a mordent on his trumpet].

**Greg:** Oh yeah. Yeah. It’s marked in my part, though.

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[Inaudible, simultaneous talking]

**Sebastian:** Well just let him do it, and then we'll...we'll just get out of the way.

As evidenced by the above scene (as well as those that followed), leadership responsibilities seem to be most immediately adopted by third and fourth trumpet players Theo and Sebastian, with lead player Greg merely endorsing his stylistic choices. When asked about the leadership roles in the band during interviews, all of the trumpet players readily identify Sebastian and Theo. During his interview, Theo communicated that he defers expertise to Sebastian, saying, “he’s kind of like our *de facto* section leader, and if it’s intricate phrasings, we’ll just kind of listen to Greg.” Meanwhile, Sebastian believes himself to not be very much of a leader, because he thinks he isn’t outspoken enough—except when it comes to soloing, in which case he recognizes that the other trumpets look up to him quite a bit.

Everyone seems to agree, however, that Greg does not seem to be a particularly outgoing leader, but rather directs the section through his playing—“leading by example,” as they expressed it. Kyle comments, “like, in the *music*, Greg is the leader, but I mean, he’s just kind of quiet. That’s just his nature, he’s not a super talkative guy, so he doesn’t necessarily take charge in sectionals or anything. That’s mostly Sebastian.” But that the section recognizes different manifestations of leadership amongst themselves—Sebastian and Theo for rehearsal matters, and Greg for matching sound and style—indicates that a largely cooperative spirit seems to maximize the section’s productivity during sectionals.

As the year goes on, however, first-year member Simon begins to grow more comfortable in the section and speaks his mind more frequently, which results in some

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minor conflicts between he and Theo. In one situation, it's an early November rehearsal, and the trumpets are working on the opening of Ellington's "Crescendo and Decrescendo in Blue." Multiple times during this sectional, Theo tries to solicit agreement on the articulation style of their initial descending lines, and Simon insists that the answer lies in the recording. Simon consults the recording three times (which he plays from his phone) following occasional disagreements with Theo's suggestions. Eventually, Theo grows slightly frustrated and turns the debate toward Simon's fragile self-esteem through a personal insult. He finally jabs, "jeez, not everything is a challenge to your manhood, Simon!"

**The saxophones.** My first opportunity to observe a saxophone sectional came in early October. Like the trumpets, I found a surprisingly similar organization of leadership among them. Specifically, lead alto player Marcus is relatively quiet, and like Greg, offers his perspective when asked (also usually choosing to communicate through his playing rather than verbal explanation). Meanwhile, others in the section take more direct charge of the sectionals—in particular, Benji, Neil, and Liam. Perhaps the most outspoken member of the group is Benji, the baritone sax player. Many acknowledge Benji's leadership role within the section, including tenor saxophonist Neil, who notes that "...in our sectionals, he's the one that, first off, listens to the chart and tells us what we're supposed to sound like. And oftentimes he has good ideas—and we trust him."

Benji's comments are always focused on improving the group's collective sound, and his high standards consistently push his section mates to pursue higher ideals. As early as their first sectional, Benji's remarkable work ethic is evident, which he exemplifies while

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the group rehearses a vulnerable unison/octave introduction on the standard, “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning”:

**Benji:** But do you hear how you’re articulating the *da-dah*? [sings top two notes] Like, the ‘A’ at the top?

[Neil plays it again, looping it]

**Liam:** No, it’s like, super smooth.

**Benji:** I still hear it. Like, a little bit— [Neil plays it again]. Yeah, like that. That’s good.

[...]

[Benji counts off, the full group plays. Benji cuts it off after first phrase again]

**Benji:** No! I still hear the articulation at the top.

**Gio:** Everything is perfectly even and straight and it should be the exact same dynamic—

**Neil:** Alright, let’s try it again.

**Gio:** *Forte* for every note!

[They loop it over and over again]

**Marcus:** Just don’t articulate it so much.

**Neil:** I’m tryin’. I’m tryin’ real hard.

**Benji:** I still hear it! The top note is still articulated. [Inaudible]

**Neil:** Do you hear it in that? You just have to be really...diligent with how you take your fingers off [the keys], I guess. [He plays it again]

**Benji:** (frustratingly) I still hear it!

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Their work on this introduction—which lasted about thirteen minutes in total—was particularly notable because while the tensions were clearly rising in the room, their language remained mostly patient and democratic. While everyone was committed to making each note and phrase sound as smooth as possible, Benji seemed to take on the role of ‘drill instructor’ during these moments, while others might have been more likely to simply move on to another section.

Like the trumpets, the members of the saxophone section feel empowered to speak up at-will. Of the eight members, five are relatively outspoken, although their candidness often results in time lost due to interrupting and talking over one another. Tenor saxophonist Oscar expresses that to mitigate this potentially unproductive dynamic, having key members adopt leadership roles (including Benji and Marcus) is important because “...most of the other people in the section really like to argue” and “not come to a decisive decision.”

While all members appear to be committed to the common musical goal of exceptional section cohesion, some members choose to joke around during sectionals more often than Benji, who is almost always ‘all business.’ For example, lead tenor player Liam can be simultaneously described as one of the group’s most effective leaders, but that he also seemingly plays the role of the ‘class clown.’ He is usually responsible for making others in the section break into laughter by quoting melodies from pop culture (such as the “Nationwide Insurance” jingle) and facetiously playing deliberately ‘out’ notes during otherwise tonally-focused solos. The other members of the group respect Liam as both a leader and as a musician and acknowledge his skill as one of the strongest soloists in the band, but also understand his more flippant demeanor toward the group.

### **Jam Sessions**

The Grass Fed Café sits in the center of one of Seattle’s busiest neighborhoods, offering coffee and espresso drinks, craft beer on-tap, and quality foods with weekly live music. The quaint coffee shop/bar features weekly open mics and performances by local artists, as well as a standing monthly residency for the Grant High School Jazz Band during the school year. Once a month, on Wednesday evenings, individual members of the Grant Jazz program (including all four bands and the Vocal Jazz group) gather for an open jam session. Rob Bowen claims that the jam sessions signify important opportunities for the older band members to take the younger members “under their wings,” so to speak, either by encouraging them to get onto the bandstand and take a solo, or by guiding them through the form and chord changes of a standard.

It’s the first jam session of the school year on a warm and sunny September evening. Arriving ten minutes early, I find the chairs and tables already filled by students and parents. Students mostly sit closer to the stage, propping instruments on their tables next to their dinners and sodas, and parents sit at high-top bar tables toward the rear of the space, drinking coffee and beer over light conversation. I grab a seat at one of the cocktail tables with a coffee, and attempting to appear less like a researcher and more like a truly invested member of the GHS community (which indeed, I truly felt), I kept note-taking to a minimum and instead relied on my memory (and audio recording) as I enjoyed the evening’s live music.

Against the backdrop of a colorful mural depicting various icons of the Pacific Northwest—mountains, evergreen forests, salmon, and Chief Si’ahl, various members of



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Jazz Band 1 take the stage among a select few from the younger bands. Soon after, Mr. Bowen takes the mic, and offers his introductions and ground rules for the jam:

So, what's most important to me as the director of the program is that we get lots of students up here, taking risks, having a good time, and that they feel supported, and jump in on a melody. And if you don't know the melody, then jump in on the improvisation part. And just come on up and participate. We would love to have you just come up here.

With that, he introduces the first tune, Sonny Rollins's "Sonnymoon for Two"—a straight-ahead blues—and offers the younger musicians an improvisational entry point, reminding them that they can simply play over the B-flat minor pentatonic scale. Finally, he adds,

The ground rules for this—for this engagement is...take no more than two choruses unless it's *absolutely* burning in you—just are *on a thread*, and you have to tell your story, then you get *one* more chorus. That's a maximum of *three*. Just so you know the numbers. Alright?

But despite Mr. Bowen's open invitation for musicians of all ages to come up to the bandstand, the first handful of tunes are clearly dominated by the members of Jazz Band 1. Eventually, a few younger musicians find their way to the bandstand—some with a confident demeanor, and others coyly stepping onto the stage gripping their horns like a

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security blanket. Yet the balance remains in favor of the advanced members of Jazz Band 1, with the younger musicians continuing to be reticent to join the stage. Noticing this, a mother of one of the younger musicians shouts, "Go up there, Griffin! Get some fresh blood up there, we need fresh blood!"

Noticing that general encouragement for younger students to take the bandstand is only working for a handful of already-confident younger musicians, Mr. Bowen takes to the mic again, gregariously targeting specific individuals. He calls "All of Me," the tune that every musician prepared for their audition last June, and picks out one young trombonist to join them, affably saying, "Now Kate, I remember the last time you were here last year, we sat over there, and the instrument never came out of the case. You're in high school now. Make sure you get your horn out, alright?"

After an hour or so into the evening, younger players begin to more willingly join their older classmates, and while there are rarely any verbal exchanges between them, the older musicians seem to readily support the younger players during their solos. For instance, while playing a blues, one of the younger bassists loses track of the chord changes, and neglects to move to the IV chord during a solo. Craig and Leah both react effortlessly on the piano and guitar, responding immediately by staying on the I chord with him. With his left hand, Craig guides the young bassist along by accentuating the bass movement to the V chord and the harmonic turnaround at the end of the chorus, to which the younger bassist responds without missing a beat. The three rhythm section musicians smile as they accent the downbeat of the new chorus together, the audience apparently none-the-wiser (with the exception of myself, some more seasoned jazz students, and Mr. Bowen, of course).

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At the end of the evening, various members of Jazz Band 1 return to the stage for a 'closer,' including Sebastian (trumpet), Neil (tenor sax), Marley (drums), Craig (piano), and Leah (guitar). They call "Cherokee," an up-tempo standard with a relatively complicated chord progression—one that is perhaps beyond the experience level of most young players. Having played simpler tunes all evening in an attempt to keep the jam session accessible for the younger players, the older members take a final opportunity to make the most of their evening with a challenging tune. They each take a solo, and perhaps stirred to express themselves freely without fear of blackballing their younger peers, they begin to test their own limits through the range, speed, and harmonic complexities of their improvisations. By the final downbeat, most of the younger students' families have left, and the older musicians are left to collect the equipment. Finishing my drink and packing up my belongings, tenor player Neil makes eye contact with me and shouts across the room, "Will! That's your name, right?" I nod and walk up their group—he, Oscar, Sebastian, Theo, Craig, and Leah, and I compliment them on their playing. Neil asks why I didn't play, and I chuckle, saying, "It's not about me!" (although inside my head, I'm more truthfully stymied by these young students' improvisational skill, which simply surpasses my own). As I turn to leave, Neil gregariously responds, "yeah, but you should still play. Next time!"

### **Performances**

Contrary to my initial assumptions, the Grant Jazz Band was not always preparing for a performance or festival throughout the school year. While I assumed that their notoriety was largely established by their exposure to and participation in endless performances throughout the west coast (and beyond), the band had several periods of

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‘down time’ where they would read through charts for fun or to expand their stylistic experiences (for example, playing a handful of modern jazz compositions immediately after preparing their more ‘traditional’ *Essentially Ellington* audition recordings). Typically, rehearsals for performances would begin mere weeks before a given concert, given the students’ exceptional sight-reading skills and work ethic to learn compositions seemingly overnight. As such, preparations for performances—even high stakes ones—were rarely perceived as overly intense, stressful, or taxing.

The following section describes in detail some of the year’s most significant and noteworthy performances. The performances described in this section will establish a foundation for the empirical and theoretical discussions of egoism and humility in the following chapters.

### **Matt Wilson and the Grant Jazz Band**

The first performance of the school year is in late October, featuring renowned jazz drummer Matt Wilson. Known internationally as a gifted composer, bandleader, producer, and teaching artist with a jovial sense of humor, Wilson is a featured musician in *Down Beat* and *Jazz Times* magazines, and has played with such jazz greats as Herbie Hancock, Cedar Walton, Kenny Barron, Wynton Marsalis, Bill Frisell, Hank Jones, and others (artist website, n.d.).

Preparing the band for Matt Wilson’s one-day residency, Mr. Bowen tells the group that the first half of their end-of-October concert will feature the GJB with repertoire that they’ve been working on since the start of the school year, including “Shiny Stockings,” “Tip Toe,” “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning,” and “Autumn Leaves.” The second half of

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the concert will feature Matt Wilson with big band arrangements of his compositions. This elicits a skeptical eyebrow raise from Greg, who seems to be calculating in his mind the likelihood of his chops<sup>21</sup> making it through the entirety of the performance.

On the afternoon of the concert, Matt Wilson arrives for a single dress rehearsal with the band during their fifth period class. The group has been rehearsing the charts over the past few weeks, with Mr. Bowen venturing best guesses on stylistic choices, noting to himself to ask Wilson when he arrives. When he finally appears, Matt Wilson's presence is immediately known: He towers over Mr. Bowen in height and carries a grin that appears to be permanently fixed with his jawline, making his thick-rimmed oval glasses balance atop upstretched cheeks. His wavy, graying hair is combed back with a small quaff in the front, and with his colorful button-down shirt, he seems to embody a caricature of the 1950s.

At the start of the period Mr. Bowen introduces the famed drummer, quasi-apologetically saying, "there's not enough time for formal introductions," which Wilson waves off nonchalantly and says, "nah, no introductions necessary!" With that, they dive right into the first tune, "Outerwear." Moving straight to the drum set, Marley obsequiously offers Matt Wilson a seat at the drummer's throne as he unsheathes two drum sticks from his percussion bag. Wilson counts off the band, and immediately the groove feels unlike anything the group has yet played: the rhythm section is instantly invigorated, with everyone locked in with Wilson's ride cymbal, which resonates with a distinctive shimmer—yet the vigor of his playing never seems to overpower the music. Feeling enlivened in the groove, the trombones look to each other and grin, Arnold fervently

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<sup>21</sup> A colloquial term for "embouchure," usually referring to one's stamina and endurance during a performance — especially for brass players.

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nodding along with a beaming smile and momentarily bouncing in his seat. Before Marcus can enter into his alto solo, Wilson stops the band and asks the rhythm section to write in a 'break' two measures before the solo. He speaks rapidly with an eccentric loquaciousness, stopping himself at the end of his direction to ask Marcus convivially, "is that okay?" Marcus obliges with a face that seems to say, *duh, it's your tune!*

On the remaining charts, Matt Wilson tells the band that he wants to "open it up" and have them "take charge" by playing backgrounds, singing, doing the wave, or whatever they desire. I can't help but notice that the band looks especially uncomfortable in this moment, coyly looking to each other and smiling at the apparent absurdity of Wilson's instructions. They begin to play another one of his tunes, "Scenic Route," and Wilson asks Kim if she wants to take a piano solo. She nods, but hesitates and asks, "um, how many choruses?" to which he flippantly replies, "just play the blues!" After a handful of solos, the collective mood in the room begins to shift palpably from puzzled to emboldened—the band mutually replacing their raised eyebrows and bewildered faces with large grins and energized bodies.

As the tune progresses beyond solos, they enter into an undeniably awkward-sounding section in which the band freely speeds up repeated eighth notes against a steady rhythm section groove, which eventually climaxes to announce the piece's conclusion. At the final downbeat, the band erupts into laughter at the absurdity of what just happened, and Matt Wilson shouts over them, "Try doing *that* for *Essentially Ellington!*"

\* \* \*

Arriving for the concert later that night, I find a seat in the rear of the concert hall and inconspicuously set my audio recorder on an adjacent armrest. The band comes to the

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stage shortly after 7:30 donning all-black tuxedos and dresses, the grins and kinetic energy from their earlier rehearsal no longer easily evident. They find their spots on the bandstand and patiently listen to the emcee of the Earshot Jazz Festival<sup>22</sup> make his introductions.

On their own for the first half, the Grant Jazz Band performs as soundly as ever before, but after witnessing their invigorating rehearsal with Matt Wilson, I can't help but interpret their playing as rather polite and reserved. Few risks are taken, and after a handful of cracked notes, the group's cohesion begins to unwind for just a moment—perhaps unperceptively among the audience, but evident to me given my more extensive experience with the group. Knowing them for nearly two months now, I can read their facial expressions from afar and see that they are less than satisfied with their overall performance. Finally, Matt Wilson joins them for their first-half closer, Frank Foster's "Shiny Stockings," and as expected, the band's groove suddenly improves with Wilson's more emboldened drumming. But still, the band still lacks the more carefree vigor that I had witnessed during their dress rehearsal earlier that day.

After a brief intermission, the band reconvenes for the second set. By introduction, Matt Wilson enters the stage with Mr. Bowen, and chooses to walk behind the bandstand, stopping momentarily to bow appreciatively at the audience's applause before making his way to the drum set. Rob Bowen walks to the front of the stage, grabs the mic, and says, "alright, fasten your seatbelts, we're gonna have some fun!" With the start of the second half, I notice that it takes several moments for the relaxed spirit of Wilson's playing to percolate among the players again in fact, it doesn't seem to make its way into the music

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<sup>22</sup> Earshot Jazz is a Seattle-based jazz organization that programs and promotes local jazz artists in and around the community. Earshot Jazz sponsored this event.

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until their second tune, “Scenic Route,” which Wilson described as having a “boogaloo” sixteenth-note groove. He plays the up-tempo groove effortlessly, looking around the stage as his head tilts and dips like a bobble head doll. Liam stands to take a tenor solo, and behind him Sebastian wrangles the trumpets into a huddle to discuss what kind of background they should play behind him. After a few choruses, Simon takes the next solo, and tenor saxophonist Neil turns in his seat with an impassioned nod in reaction to Simon’s lines. After a few choruses, Marcus wordlessly leads the saxophones in a simple background by repeating it as an ostinato throughout the rest of Simon’s solo. It appears that slowly-but-surely, the band begins to recall the spirit that Matt Wilson so enchantingly produced earlier that day.

Still, for some time the group’s collaborative efforts reflect careful, ‘non-rule-breaking’ musical decisions—like one might see at a standard jam session. But during Kim’s piano solo, Wilson suddenly begins singing the roots of the blues chords, and the band hesitantly joins in. As Arnold stands to take the next solo on the trombone, Wilson suddenly shifts to a straight-ahead swing groove, and Micah, Kim, and Leah bring up the rear with a belated shift in the feel in following. As they pick up on the new style, Wilson nods and smiles appreciatively before changing the groove yet again to a 4/4 shuffle after a few more choruses.

Soon, I begin to lose track of how many soloists have played during this stretch of music. At the end of Benji’s bari sax solo, Wilson suddenly stops playing, looking to bassist Micah with raised eyebrows and an expectant smile. Micah freezes momentarily, having apparently not volunteered himself for a soloing opportunity (as he later declared during an interview, “I suck at soloing!”) but soon defaults to the boogaloo ostinato from the



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beginning of the tune, eventually using it to propel himself into other licks. He abandons the blues form altogether, either with intent or by mistake, and begins to just play in a free manner, never losing touch with the boogaloo's double-time feel. All throughout, Matt Wilson nods along, pursing his lips in approval. Soon, Wilson joins him on the boogaloo rhythm again, looking to the trumpets and leading them into a whispered chant: "go Micah, go Micah, go Micah...." underneath his continued solo. Soon, the entire band's bodies are moving like the crankshaft of a locomotive as they repeat their chant. Micah finds his way out of his extended solo, and after an uproarious applause, he shakes his head and smiles nervously as if to say, *what did I just do?!*

Eventually, the piece seems to approach its end and the band fades out in unison. The audience begins to applaud hesitantly, but Wilson smashes the crash cymbal and begins playing in a pointillistic, *avant garde* manner. Taking his cue, Marcus pops a single note on his alto sax, and others join in following, contributing to a fast-growing cacophony. Mr. Bowen stands at the front of the band somewhat awkwardly, and with nothing to cue during the free-for-all, he grabs his music stand and slams it on the stage floor with a sharp *WHACK*. Then he walks around in a circle, looking for some other way to contribute, and landing his eyes upon the microphone, puts his mouth up close and shouts: "*WHHAAAAAA!*"

After a moment, Wilson steps away from the drum set, gesturing to Seth to take his seat as he offers him his sticks. Wilson makes his way to the front of the bandstand alongside Mr. Bowen and begins pointing to Leah to improvise on the guitar. He makes a cyclical gesture with his arms as he looks to the wind players, and Mr. Bowen steps to the side, suddenly looking out-of-place and superfluous. Soon, Wilson raises his arms high in the air, and the band responds with a collective crescendo of random notes; he lowers

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them, and they respond accordingly. Leah decides to play a guitar solo in the space, and eventually deciding that she's had enough, fades herself into obscurity. Neither Leah, Mr. Bowen, the audience, or even Matt Wilson could have predicted it, but they had apparently reached the end of their creation. After a tentative beat, the audience applauds enthusiastically, perhaps still unsure what they had witnessed—after all, it was certainly unlike anything the Grant Jazz Band had ever done before.

### ***The Jazz Nutcracker Performance***

It is the band's fourth and final performance of Duke Ellington's *Jazz Nutcracker*. *The band must be getting tired of the music by now*, I think to myself, as I find a seat on the far-right side of the Grant High School performance space. They have been working on the music nearly every day since mid-November. They put on two performances for Seattle-area elementary schools on Thursday and had their official opening night of the performance yesterday. It is now Sunday, December 3, and members of the rhythm section are casually playing together on the stage as families enter and find their seats. A few minutes before show time, they retreat backstage to create the illusion of a bound performance; to denote its distinguished start.

Soon, the lights come up to rousing applause. Pinks and purples fill the large space, and a giant snowflake lighting effect fills the back wall with smaller snowflakes along the sides. Mr. Bowen enters after the students, all of which are donning black tuxedos and dresses. Parents and family members point and wave to their children on stage, some of whom respond with a small smile but otherwise maintain a professional degree of distance, aided by the outcropping of the proscenium. Mr. Bowen is quick to cross this 'fourth wall'

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gesturally, pointing and waving at members sitting in the audience as he makes his way to the microphone to welcome the audience and introduce the band. He quips that he hopes the audience has warmed up their voices, since they will be recording this performance for an album. With that, he turns on his heel, faces the band, and says, “dig it!” as he gets counts down the tempo. The audience applauds, and he turns his head back toward them.

“Sounding good!” he shouts, in reference to their collective applause. As their laughter subsides, Micah brings in the band with Ellington’s iconic descending bass line to start the “Overture” movement.

It may be their fourth live performance of this music, but the band sounds as powerful as they ever before, with stiff articulations and stunning vibratos that bring Ellington’s music to life anew. It is evident that they are somewhat fatigued this afternoon, which can be heard in a few of lead trumpeter Greg’s missed notes. Yet he consistently declines to show frustration and instead noticeably throws more air behind his next high notes to ensure their perfect sounding. After Greg, Theo plays a short solo taken directly from Tchaikovsky’s original ballet. As his melodic line ascends, he cracks the top note, but like Greg, finishes without batting an eye. Seconds later, I am still looking to Theo, who finally expresses some frustration in his face as he readjusts his microphone, probably reasoning that all eyes are off him by now.

Mr. Bowen introduces the next movement, “Toot Toot Tootie Toot,” while drummer Jeff walks to the front of the stage. Mr. Bowen takes the microphone once again, and with a playful reverence, introduces Jeff: “And one of the great artists in the band, Jeff will be playing the finger cymbals.” Jeff smiles wide and nods with dramatized pride as the audience chuckles at the apparent absurdity of a finger cymbal solo. They start off the

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movement, and Jeff performs a dramatic wind-up gesture with his hands, holds the finger cymbals in front of him, and strikes them together with playfully calculated precision. The audience laughs, and he does it again. After his feature, the audience applauds appreciably, and the introduction turns into the main melody. Later in the suite, tenor saxophonist Liam has a similar moment with a slapstick. Performing his role to an even greater degree, Liam holds the slapstick far in front of him, the 'V' shape framing his face, and with a sideways smile, he pushes the wood together with a loud *CLACK*. He smiles proudly, giving a small tip of an imaginary hat and a little bow. Again, the audience plays along, laughing and applauding.

According to Mr. Bowen, the *Jazz Nutcracker* concert has become as much a staple to the Grant Jazz Band as their participation in *Essentially Ellington* each year. Both performances uphold the timeless music of Duke Ellington, but there is a decidedly unique approach between the two. From the distinctive sense of humor imbued throughout the concert, this performance is clearly about a festive holiday offering intended specifically for the joy of the community. It is not a competition, Mr. Bowen is keen to remind, but the pursuit of high-level musicianship is nevertheless visible from all facets of the performances. Even without the stakes of winning or losing, the band convincingly balances a highly entertaining performance with a musical commitment to playing at their highest level. It is not quite the Matt Wilson performance, with musical risks being taken freely and willingly, but the enjoyment on stage slowly emerges to demonstrate a comparable palpability.

The band's collective pursuit is marked by a mutual obligation, with everyone appearing to contribute convincingly to the ensuing environment. In the heat of

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performance, as some students decide to take greater charge of cultivating this environment however, small cracks in their bonding begin to show. For example, Theo and Simon are playing a short duet with plunger mutes. Although playing the supporting harmony underneath Simon's lead, Theo is noticeably louder than Simon. They had struggled with this section during previous rehearsals as well, as both played with an individualized sense of swing—one ahead of the beat, the other behind. Even now at the performance, perhaps compounded by the acoustics of the space making it more difficult to hear, Simon and Theo continue to struggle and fail to negotiate their sense of swing. I will later come to understand that their relationship is largely characterized by these minor disagreements—but by the time it comes to record the audition music for *Essentially Ellington*, they will have worked past their differences and will balance quite well with one another (both musically and socially) from there on out.

### **The UW Jazz Festival**

Inside Meany Theater at the University of Washington, audience members come and go freely. Families enter in droves as their children's schools prepare to take the stage. Random musicians from various high school bands sit in small pockets around the venue. Most groups wear matching outfits, suggesting that they all come from the same school; but there are a handful of groups donning varying attire. I recognize a few Grant Jazz musicians among these groups, noting their apparent friendliness with other competing bands around the area. I take a seat near the back of the theater, and after a moment I realize that I am sitting a few rows behind Mr. Bowen and a number of other Seattle-area jazz directors (mostly male, one female). They talk and joke with one another, their sociability implying

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well-established relationships. When bands play, they stop talking immediately and listen intently. Mr. Bowen nods his head enthusiastically after a well-performed shout chorus or an inciting solo—even when it is clear that the performing band is young, inexperienced, and frankly unimpressive. He looks over each band like a proud father supporting all of his children equally.

With the Grant Jazz Band ready to perform soon, I make my way into the lobby area and find pianists Kim and Jeremy, followed by a number of others as they wait to be granted access to the green room for their warm-up time. A handful of students greet me, and I ask Kim how she feels about their upcoming performance. She shrugs and says matter-of-factly, “eh, we’re guaranteed to be one of the finalists, so...” I tease her about their over-pride getting them in trouble last year (with their rejection from the 2017 *Essentially Ellington* festival), which she concedes with a smile. I ask the group who they think the three finalists will be, and without hesitation they name River Gorge, Harborview, and themselves. One student points out that it is no coincidence that they are among the last three bands to perform; they reason that the organizers purposefully planned the festival this way so that none of the finalist bands would have to perform in the morning and then wait around all day for the finalist’s concert.

During their performance, it is clear that the Grant Jazz Band is incomparable to the others that have previously performed. Now hearing a sampling of bands side-by-side, I begin to re-appreciate their astounding musicianship. They play three Ellington pieces: “Theme From ‘Asphalt Jungle,’” “Banquet Scene,” and “Harlem Congo.” For the final piece, Simon and Sebastian engage in a trumpet battle for the closer. Simon begins, blaring immediately in his high range in a Dizzy Gillespie-like style. After sixteen bars (measures),

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Sebastian interrupts in the center of his range, maneuvering nimbly around the chord changes with a distinct maturity. Lacking the same harmonic prowess, Simon continues to play into his high range, but accidentally lands upon a series of dissonant pitches. While reaching for a wailing blue note, his valve becomes stuck and it speaks with an awkward tone. As they continue to trade four-bar phrases, Simon wears some frustration from his continually sticking valve. Greg and Theo look to each other with concerned faces, empathizing with the curse of a stuck valve in the middle of a competition. But despite Simon's technical difficulty, the fast tempo and locked-in rhythm section groove adds to the excitement of the moment, and before long the music propels into Oscar's clarinet solo.

After the performance, walking with the band toward an offstage room for their clinical session, I catch up with Simon and Sebastian, who are speaking animatedly. I congratulate them both, saying that I wasn't expecting a trumpet battle (which had apparently been a last-minute decision), and that I thought it was a really cool idea. But the backstage darkness mixes uncomfortably with the stark silence following my compliment. Simon says nothing, but stares straight ahead, still toying with his sticking valve. Finally filling the silence, Sebastian non-committedly says "thanks" with a sharp descending cadence. Escaping the awkward silence, I move to the front of the group, and I hear Simon reprise his valve sticking complaints to more of his peers.

Arriving in the clinical room immediately after their performance, there is little to be said of critical matter. The clinician offers a few pointers, namely regarding the negotiation between preserving Ellington's original and imbuing an originality to their pieces. Mr. Bowen nods along attentively, taking note of each suggestion. Suddenly, the director of the festival enters and whispers to Mr. Bowen that they have indeed been

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selected as one of the finalist bands. Mr. Bowen nods expectedly as the festival director re-tells the band the news of their selection. There is genuine excitement—some applause, high fives, excited whoops. As they quiet, he reminds them that the top three bands will have an opportunity to play during the finalist concert, but that there will be no 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> place selections beyond the finalist decisions. Some awards will be distributed to strong soloists as well, and I notice Simon’s face change quickly to a downcast frown. Theo asks who the other two bands are, and as expected, the director names both River Gorge and Harborview. On his way out, the festival director smiles slyly, saying “are you guys surprised?” with a small laugh as he exits.

### ***Hot Java Cool Jazz***

*If a high school jazz musician will ever get to understand what fame feels like, tonight will be it,* I think to myself as I enter the ornately decorated Paramount Theatre in Downtown Seattle. The Paramount is Seattle’s premiere performance venue, as evidenced by the lavish French Renaissance-styled façade adorned with gilded wall medallions and ornate chandeliers. Sponsored by Starbucks, the *Hot Java Cool Jazz* Festival is now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year and has become a highly anticipated event each March—as substantiated by my personal difficulty in obtaining a last-minute ticket. The event’s tagline reads, “soon-to-be legends let loose,” and inside the concert program, the history of the event is briefly explained:

Tonight we celebrate the students—their passion, dedication, and hours of practice—in Hot Java Cool Jazz live at the Paramount. It’s the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of this one-



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of-a-kind concert where 100% of ticket sales benefit participating high school music programs. [...] Since 1995 Starbucks Hot Java Cool Jazz has raised more than \$625,000 for local schools, supporting students and their love of music. Thank you for ensuring the future of jazz and those who make it.

One thing is for certain as the lights go down and the first band takes the stage: tonight, these students are celebrities. The emcee introduces the evening and shares the same news that three of these five bands had ecstatically received five weeks prior: Harborview, River Gorge, and Grant High Schools will be returning to New York City as finalists of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual *Essentially Ellington* Competition & Festival in May.

A professionally-made introductory video plays, featuring various students from the five schools. The young musicians share their experiences, anecdotes, nicknames for their instruments, and their director's most [in]famous sayings. Each time a new student is shown in the video, contained cheers burst from various corners of the sold-out venue. As the video fades and the stage lights go up on Harborview, the ovation becomes evocative of the headliner of a popular music concert. I notice immediately that the bands are amplified almost to a displeasing degree, and it is not until I hear the applause following the first soloist that I understand why. Each soloist's improvisation is met with ardent approval throughout the audience—not just from the pockets containing each school's families, but truly throughout the packed house. I note that there seems to be a direct relationship between the intensity of applause and how high or fast the soloist plays. After Harborview, Zion takes the stage followed by River Gorge, Chester, and Grant High Schools, respectively. However, by the time Grant is ready to play, it is past 9 p.m. and the energy level in the

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audience has waned noticeably. But the band remains unaffected, playing with a heightened vigor as if keen to attest how they came to be the most-invited *Essentially Ellington* finalist in program history.

Mr. Bowen reminds me earlier that afternoon that this festival is decidedly *not* a competition, even if each of the bands are competitive in their own right. Instead, there is an aura of celebratory affection between the five groups. Having ceased my daily fieldwork in February, I am unaware of the music that Grant has been working on lately, and am surprised to hear them open with the Count Basie Orchestra's arrangement of "April in Paris." After the presentation of the head, Sebastian comes to the front of the stage with a confident strut, his short stature compounded by the sheer size of the stage. He plays a four-measure solo with a bright, confident tone, and his improvised lick clearly leaves the audience wanting more. After some ensemble/section writing and a brief solo by Liam, Sebastian re-enters the stage to complete his idea with a provocative solo.

The band moves on to their second piece, a modern composition called "Vital Frequencies," featuring a handful of soloists at a breakneck tempo: Oscar (tenor sax), Peyton (trombone), and Marley (drums). I will find out later that this is one of Peyton's first improvised solos with the band. An early attempt to develop his improvisational skills—and at one of the biggest concerts of their year, no less—Peyton distinguishes himself from Oscar's highly virtuosic solo with simple-yet-confident melodic lines in the baritone range of his horn. Finally, Marley takes an opportunity to close out the piece with an extended drum solo, which he delivers with an impassioned energy.

Finally, as if offering a 'teaser' of what will likely become a dominating presence at *Essentially Ellington* a mere six weeks later, the second half of the set features two of their

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festival selections: Ellington's "Banquet Scene," which features alto saxophonist Marcus on a poignant ballad, and Basie's "Every Day I Have the Blues," featuring Neil on vocals and several soloists. Before closing out the evening however, Mr. Bowen takes the microphone and responds to some kind comments delivered earlier by the director of River Gorge—who warmly thanked both Mr. Bowen and the Chester High School director for their leadership in developing the high school jazz culture in the Seattle area over the course of more than three decades. Taking attention away from his efforts, Bowen paternally responds, "it's really just a beautiful community of a lot of great educators, and a *heck* of a lot of great young musicians from elementary to middle school. [...] And all these beautiful high school bands and *amazing* high school musicians." The audience applauds appreciatively for the village that has been built around the Seattle high school jazz culture before an ensuing piano solo by Craig kicks off the evening's conclusion.

**CHAPTER 5**

**MUSICAL EGOISM**

A thorough discussion of the presence, function, and importance of humility occurring within the context of Grant High School's competitive jazz band culture first requires an understanding of what often existed in its absence: specifically, sociomusically-fueled manifestations of egoism. To be sure, interpreted displays of egoism are not necessarily vice-like, malicious, ugly, or shameful; rather they often represented behaviors that were more broadly interpreted as self-oriented, self-inflated, and/or elitist, but not always perniciously so. I narrowed emergent themes of musical egoism into three broad categories: (a) seeking and desiring superiority, (b) displays of self-promotion, self-importance, or self-orientedness, and (c) demonstrations of an inflated self-view.

Drawing from the ethnographic accounts provided previously, the organization of this chapter is designed to postulate how the social dynamics of the Grant Jazz Band occasionally reflected egoistic tendencies, and to explore how these behaviors occasionally led to unfavorable consequences. These perspectives were interpreted largely through my eyes during fieldwork and were further expressed (either corroboratively or contradictorily) through interviews. Importantly however, while it is largely antisocial and undesirable behaviors to which I refer throughout this chapter, it is crucial for readers to suspend judgement of these behaviors at least until a deeper understanding of the antisocial and egoistic actions can be further developed, and especially until after these behaviors can be framed comparatively against coinciding enactments of humility. This is the intention of Chapter 6: to develop a systematic understanding of musical humility as

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fueled by the emergent patterns of behavior solicited through ethnographic accounts. As with any investigation which attempts to dissect subjective and inferential behaviors, a full understanding of how particular actions were manifested in the experiences and perspectives of the participants (as well as how they may have affected the identity of the group) is suspended until the full picture comes into focus. It is essential to continually keep in-mind the complexity and subjectivity of egoism in order to prevent the wrongful ostracism of the members of the Grant Jazz Band or the actions for which they were responsible. Indeed, no participants in this study would be described as wholly antisocial, arrogant, narcissistic, or otherwise. Thus, while I am more heavily concerned with the negative social dynamics occurring within the band throughout this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that every participant possessed redeeming prosocial qualities as well.

### **Musical Egoism**

Intriguingly, while direct observations of arrogant behaviors were relatively few and far in-between during the initial weeks of fieldwork, the theme of egoism became nearly ubiquitous through interviews. Despite carefully-worded and deliberately non-leading questions (e.g., “tell me about the personalities of the members in your section/in the band”), nine out of the eleven interviewed students expressed the prevalence of egocentric behaviors within the band. Imploring them further, most described a particular student with whom they had personally experienced either conflict or frustration rooting from egocentric motivations.

While expressions of egocentric behaviors were broad and varied, the band member that was most prevalently identified as arrogant was trumpeter Simon, who was named

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such by nearly every member of his section, as well as several members beyond.

Interestingly, trumpeters Theo and Kyle both chose to express the prevalence of egoism within their section through stereotypical trumpet player jokes. Theo identified it specifically with Simon, flippantly remarking, “we joke that he’s sort of the stereotypical trumpet player, like [extends hand], ‘Hi, I’m better than you!’ kind of guy.” Riffing further on this perception, Kyle offered another joke about the stereotypical arrogance of trumpet players generally<sup>23</sup> (not specifically in regard to Simon):

**Kyle:** [Chuckles] Well, I mean, there’s the joke that’s like, “how many trumpet players does it take to screw in a light bulb?”

**WJC:** [Laughs] Wait...I’m a trumpet player and I don’t think I know that joke! Tell me the punchline.

**Kyle:** Twenty. One to screw it in, and nineteen to say how they could’ve done it.

Simon also acknowledged personal experiences with arrogance but identified it within the community college big band he plays with rather than existing within the Grant Jazz Band<sup>24</sup>. In fact, Simon identified a rather democratic spirit within the Grant Jazz Band, which, comparatively speaking, might not be particularly surprising given his expressed experiences with a much more arrogant lead trumpet player of the community college band.

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<sup>23</sup> While the arrogance of trumpet players has been colloquially expressed throughout my fieldwork, no empirical studies have sought to examine this supposed stereotype to date.

<sup>24</sup> Simon was invited to play with the local community college big band because one of his private teachers is the director of the group. Two other members of the band, Benji (bari sax) and Liam (tenor sax) also play in this big band as well.

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Significantly, mentions of egoism occurring within the Grant Jazz Band culture were most often in reference to the social dynamics present within the band the previous schoolyear. These mentions of past egoistic behavior were typically expressed for the sake of comparison—specifically, to elucidate how much more favorable the social dynamics in the band are *now*, compared to how they once were. In his interview, for example, Mr. Bowen straightaway identified a pervasive issue of self-absorption among the musicians the previous year and lamented that the students' exceptional individual skills failed to translate into a cohesive ensemble identity and sound. Citing a resulting "divisiveness" in the band, Mr. Bowen and the students apparently came to terms with the toxicity of such selfish ways of thinking during the present schoolyear. As he explained,

So, the thing that I feel about this year is that there's...there's more of a selfless attitude from the students. And that they're more...they're more motivated as an entire group about making the group better. And everybody doing their best, you know, and fulfilling their role to make the group better. And I think what we went through over the previous couple of years is...it's not that the level of musicianship was necessarily lower. In fact, there were some individuals who were really, really phenomenal players. But, um...it was hard for those individuals to think past themselves—either as a player, or just in terms of how they related to the others. And so, it became divisive. So, I think *those* experiences coupled with not getting into *EE* last year kind of sent some messages to the kids who were continuing, that, "hey, we gotta do some things differently." And we need to do our best encourage the others in the group.

### **Seeking and Desiring Superiority**

The desire for preeminence within the GJB was identified within two different contexts: on the one hand were behaviors, remarks, and viewpoints in which a sense of elitism was expressed on an ensemble-wide level; on the other were expressions of individual superiority, which included personal displays of self-identified greatness.

**Elitism of the Grant Jazz Band.** The outstanding reputation of the Grant Jazz Band within the Seattle metropolitan area, the Pacific Northwest, and throughout the United States (as earned through their many finalist titles at national and international competitions) has not surprisingly resulted in a heightened group awareness of their exceptional ability and status. Notably (and admittedly to my surprise), commentary regarding the elite standing of the Grant Jazz Band was not expressed very frequently by the musicians themselves (at least, not during casual interactions and/or rehearsals). However, it could nevertheless be argued that the group promoted a sense of ensemble elitism through puffed-up comments during rehearsals and before/after performances.

Again, while not voiced frequently during rehearsals and informal interactions, ensemble elitism was commonly expressed by the students themselves during interviews. For example, trumpeter Theo expressed the emphasis that jazz music receives at Grant High School, stating, "I mean, everyone knows that the jazz program is sort of the best of the best in the music department." He further expressed an apparent divide between the instrumental ensembles, where students are either 'orchestra kids' or 'band kids,' and those who play in the wind ensembles or jazz bands are "on that side of the hall." But even on Mr. Bowen's 'side' there existed a further delineation of ensemble valuation. Gesturing



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with his hands in a top-down fashion, Theo went on to list the hierarchy of Mr. Bowen's ensembles: "So it's like, jazz, marching band, and then the concert bands and wind ensembles." This sentiment was not possessed by Theo alone. Comparing Jazz Band 1 to Bowen's 'other' (i.e., non-jazz) ensembles, pianist Jeremy stated, "I feel like we get more respect than the band kids, 'cause on average, we're a bit higher level."

During their interview, saxophonists Oscar and Neil further shared that the apparent reputation of Grant Jazz Band as an elitist group swelled well beyond the school and into the surrounding community, often with disparaging associations:

**Oscar:** People just aren't incredibly fond of Jazz Band 1 because of like, a jazz elitist kind of thing.

**Neil:** Yeah, 'cause I played in a band outside of school, but a lot of the kids in that band went through this jazz program with Bowen, and they [laughs] have lots to say about how elitist this program really is.

**WJC:** So, what makes it elitist?

[...]

**Oscar:** Well, I think the elitist thing just comes from the fact that there's such a prestigious background to that program specifically. Obviously, there's awards for orchestra and everything around, but...we're known for jazz, and obviously now that we haven't been going to *Ellington* and we haven't done incredibly well in a while, um...but there's still that vibe of—we're still known nationally to be very good. And I think a lot of people take that to heart without considering individuals in the band.

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Of course, the primary source of the band's elitist self-view emanated from their historic success at the *Essentially Ellington* festival. That the band had become a 'household name' at the festival (receiving eighteen invitations over the past twenty years) speaks volumes about the expectations of the students who are accepted into Jazz Band 1 each year. As such, it might come as no surprise that these students adopted such an elitist view of their program, because high-pressure stakes seemed to be placed directly upon them to uphold the program's reputation. Trumpeter Kyle explained what feelings existed behind the weight of the band's winning status:

There's definitely, I mean...I *know* there are expectations that are like, "we need to be good." [...] I think there's always an expectation—and I think Bowen always feels that expectation, that Grant Jazz has to be one of the best jazz bands in the country, but I feel like we've all been raised through Peabody and through Jefferson [Middle Schools] and through jams, and up through the Grant program, so we know that we're good enough.

He went on to express the weight of their expectations to perform at a high-level year after year, and to participate in the *Essentially Ellington* festival:

There's also the sense that we're *going* to go to *Ellington*, like it's a guarantee. And it's definitely not—there's just a sense that Jazz 1 goes to *Ellington*, that's just what Jazz 1 does. But they *didn't* last year, and that kind of broke everything, kind of shattered the whole world, and now we need to really work, you know?

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Trumpeter Sebastian further explained how this reputation is not just felt within the program, but within the school culture as a whole:

I think we're kind of the top of the music program. Um, just everyone's like, "oh, you've been to *Essentially Ellington* all these years." [...] And it's basically become a culture here, like in Seattle here, that the good kids go to *Essentially Ellington*.

**Director-expressed.** As mentioned, a significant proportion of the seemingly-elitist comments were actually made by Mr. Bowen himself, who commonly seemed to employ them either as a motivation strategy for the students, or as a way of reminding the students of their responsibility as members of the school's top band. Importantly, all of these remarks were delivered innocuously and upliftingly—never blatantly speaking of the band as if it were *the* nation's superlative group, but rather as a group that successfully shared the elite ranks with other local and national programs as well. Mr. Bowen's comments occasionally reminded students of their 'pedigree,' having risen through the ranks of the local school feeder programs from sixth grade. On one occasion, Mr. Bowen mockingly (but affectionately) referred to the group as the "musical jocks of the school," which trumpeter Simon supported, stating, "there's a lot of truth to that, of like, you know, maybe the wind ensemble views us as kind of cocky or something."

**Social harms and benefits of ensemble elitism.** It should be evident from the above examples that the apparent elitism of the Grant Jazz Band was rarely expressed in any sort of toxic form. Like Mr. Bowen, the commitments of the students participating in such an

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elite ensemble usually reflected a positive and productive work ethic and resulted in mostly prosocial interactions. At least internally, it seemed that adopting an elitist viewpoint was not drastically harmful to the social or musical operations of the jazz program. Indeed, as trumpeter Simon expressed, winning the *Essentially Ellington* festival (the apparent yardstick of achieving ‘elite’ status) had only positive ramifications for the band:

The winner of *Ellington* is considered the top band in the country, and it’s one of the coolest festivals. You get to clinics with Wynton Marsalis, and all the members of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, and if you get featured, you get to have one of those players actually play with your band.

From this perspective, being considered one of the nation’s elite bands clearly carried with it a number of privileges—namely, having the opportunity to perform alongside well-known jazz musicians. However, just as self-pride can be either uplifting or damaging (Tucker, 2016), elitism can carry similar social risks. Of course, expressions of ensemble elitism can certainly lead to some socially-damaging interactions as well. Theo recognized this potential ‘double-edged sword’ of elite status, commenting, “...certainly it can turn people against each other. It can inflate the ego, like, ‘yeah, every festival I went to I won,’ like, ‘we’re the best ever.’”

Taken together, it is evident that while the beliefs and expressions of the members of the Grant Jazz Band largely reflected an elitist stance, they were typically successful in eschewing the danger of becoming damaging or toxic to the program. Recalling Roberts &

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Cleveland's (2017) argument that acts of 'true' egoism must be both *comparative* and *non-instrumental*, it is evident that the ensemble's elitism was mostly embodied through a relatively healthy manner of practice. Indeed, the members and director rarely compared their playing to other bands (and if they did, it was only used to communicate that they were not meeting their *own* expectations); similarly, their elitist comments and actions were instrumental in that they were not enacted in order to claim superiority over other bands, but rather based on a collective commitment to greatness. For their actions to become perniciously elitist, they would have constantly compared themselves to other high-performing bands and would be motivated to work hard *only* for the purpose of beating them in competitions. A further discussion challenging the consequences of elitism—and egoism generally—will be continued near the end of this chapter.

**Superiority of individuals.** While not exceedingly common, a natural human affinity for self-aggrandizement peeked through various interpersonal interactions throughout my fieldwork. They came in many forms—verbal and gestural, musical and social, explicit and inferred—but were typically shrugged off by other members of the ensemble when recognized. As such, displays of superiority rarely led to direct conflicts in the band, but occasionally resulted in an eye-roll or frustrated sigh from a peer.

As mentioned, Simon was most commonly perceived as possessing a superior mindset within the top band. His interpreted acts of superiority were identified by nearly everyone in his section as well as a few beyond. As second trombonist Angie put it,

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**Angie:** He's just...you know [he's like], "next year I'm definitely going to be first trumpet, even though Sebastian's been in the band longer." And he's just like, "oh yeah, you know, you *might* be first trombone, but I dunno."

**WJC:** He's said those things to you?

**Angie:** Yeah! No, he's—ugh!—and so he just thinks he's super amazing at the trumpet. I mean, he's really good obviously. Like, he wouldn't be in this band if he wasn't. And he's an amazing soloist and everything, but sometimes, he's just gotta calm down a little bit, you know?

Beyond this illustration, Simon's acts of superiority were almost always gestural and rarely verbalized. He never spoke negatively of another member of the band and never engaged in direct conflict with anyone throughout my fieldwork. Nonetheless, through transient moments of 'showing off' (as illustrated in the previous chapter), it is possible that Simon was attempting to tacitly communicate superiority over others within his section—and specifically over the lead trumpet player, Greg. While it was not something I could directly ask him during interviews, Simon's position as the lead trumpet player in Jazz Band 2 the previous year indicated the possibility that he might be seeking to demonstrate superiority over Greg in order to 'unseat' him from his lead trumpet spot and earn it for himself. While questioning him about this, Greg shared that he had similar thoughts, but was ultimately un-phased by it. As he obsequiously put it, "If he sounds better on it, he should just play it."

Citing a more specific interaction, Theo recalled a moment when Simon's perceived sense of superiority resulted in a trumpet battle in which Theo's contribution was

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dominated by Simon's 'interruption.' In sharing his anecdote, he suggested that Simon's actions served as an indicator of his personality more generally:

**Theo:** ...the way we play is usually pretty reflective of who we are as a person.

**WJC:** Okay, can you say more about that? That's an interesting statement.

**Theo:** Well I remember last year, I was playing with Simon and we both were doing some trumpet battle thing where I take my solo, he takes his solo, and then trade choruses, trade 8s, 4s, 2s...um, and then soloing at the same time, just delving into chaos basically. But there was one moment where he came in like, eight bars early and just started playing over me and I just said, "Okay, I mean, sure.....!"

Theo had many further tales of blatant egoism to share, not only within the Jazz Band 1, but between the upper and lower bands as well. Specifically, he expressed how particular students in the younger bands would attempt to convey superiority by claiming to be more talented, hard-working, or successful than members of Jazz Band 1. Regarding one of the freshman saxophone players in Jazz Band 2, Theo explained:

**Theo:** He just has this *ridiculous* ego.

**WJC:** How so?

**Theo:** He just thinks he's just the best person to walk the face of the planet.

**WJC:** And he says things like that, or he just gestures?

**Theo:** Both in his gestures and in his words...We were just on a run, and me and Marty [trumpet player]...we just happened to run by the Grass Fed Café, where our

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jam sessions are, and I'm like, "Marty, are you going to the jam?" And he said, "no, I don't know any tunes." And we just hear this scoff, like "*pshh!* I'm a freshman and I know like, over a hundred!" I was like, "okay, that's not the point..."

Nevertheless, displays of superiority between the younger and older bands were not particularly prevalent on the whole during my time at the school. Most members of Jazz Band 1 understood that their role (as encouraged by Mr. Bowen) was to work with the younger players and "take them under their wings." Indeed, this was seen as vital to the program, given that the majority of Jazz Band 1 was made up of seniors, and that the younger members would make up the majority of the following year's top band. As such, practicing prosocial support and cooperation toward them would set in motion the parameters for the continued legacy of the program. Unfortunately, as described with the students at their monthly jam sessions, this understanding was occasionally superseded by older musicians' self-interested desires to demonstrate personal superiority. For example, while trumpeter Sebastian was empathetic of the desire for younger players to perform with their older peers, he also recognized that high-performing players understandably enjoy playing with other similarly-skilled musicians. In regard to the jam sessions, he shared:

I feel like other people don't accommodate other people as well and they just want to play with the Jazz 1 people...which, I understand that. Like, Jazz 1 is like the top of the jazz program, so you wanna play with the people who are at the top and not people who are like, not as good, I guess. But that just makes everyone else kind of



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feel bad. And if you were in Jazz 2, you'd be like, "hey, I really wanna play with those people in Jazz 1."

### **Self-Importance, Self-Promotion, and Self-Orientation**

Musical manifestations of egoism deriving from perspectives of self-importance, self-promotion, or self-orientation fell into six subcategories: (a) overplaying and 'showing off,' (b) aloofness, (c) bossiness & pushiness, (d) poor ensemble balance, (e) name-dropping, and (f) humblebragging and false humility.

**Overplaying and 'showing off.'** Given the exceptional musicianship skills found among the members of the Grant Jazz Band, it was inevitable for self-promotive musical expressions to manifest themselves during rehearsals and performances. Drawing from the description of Simon's warm-up 'ritual' (depicted in the previous chapter), his 'peacocking' behaviors seemed to imply a belief (or at least the enactment) of personal superiority.

Commenting on his behavior, Greg remarked, "I don't know, sometimes [Simon] does weird stuff. Like, I don't know if you hear him warming up, but it's this like, squealing out. I feel like he could be better if he didn't do that. I think it messes you up, but maybe it works for him." Theo added, "I think it's so funny when he warms up, though. I mean, I can't play that high. I'm not a lead trumpet player." Finally, Sebastian added that the ritual seems to come from an egocentric place, but he was assuaged by the fact that Simon could at least live up to his character:

**Sebastian:** Everyone kind of makes fun of Simon a little bit, just 'cause his warm-ups, he just like, blasts the loud—like, the highest note.

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**WJC:** Yeah. Why do you think he does that?

**Sebastian:** I dunno, I think he has a big ego. I can't really tell, though. I mean, he's good...

**WJC:** He can live up to it, at least...?

**Sebastian:** Yeah, he can live up to it.

Again, Simon's actions never became toxic or malicious toward others in the group; in fact, he seemed to possess what social psychologists refer to as a sort-of 'quiet egoism' (Bauer & Wayment, 2008) because his self-promotive tendencies were apparent but conducted without intentional harm to others. On one occasion, however, Simon's overplaying led to a rather humiliating interaction. While performing Ellington's "Asphalt Jungle," Simon attempted to play above Greg's final lead note. Unsuccessfully cracking his final pitch, Mr. Bowen supportively asked Simon of his intentions for the ending:

**Mr. Bowen:** So, on the end, Simon, are you trying to do a little Cat Anderson<sup>25</sup> on there? Do you want to try that? Like, screech out something super high?

**Simon:** I think I can get an A<sup>26</sup>...

[Band members mockingly gasp and laugh]

**Simon:** ...That should be Greg's job, though, so...

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<sup>25</sup> Cat Anderson was the trumpet player of the Duke Ellington Orchestra (intermittently from 1944–1971). He was particularly known for his exceptional ability to play fluently in the extreme registers of the trumpet.

<sup>26</sup> Referring to an A6, or sitting atop the fourth ledger line above the staff.

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**Greg:** I don't think I could do that after all this [pointing to his music, presumably pointing out how high his part is generally].

**Mr. Bowen:** What are you playing right now?

**Greg:** Right now, I'm just trying to play anything!

[Laughter]

In response to his peers mockingly gasping and laughing at his self-promotive comment ("I think I can get an A"), Simon decided to 'wear' a sense of false humility by other-orientedly suggesting that Greg should play it. It seemed that the 'wearing' of this humble behavior was intended to serve the purpose of protecting himself from potential humiliation. The social utility of embodying inauthentic or 'performed' behaviors became a common finding throughout the study and will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 7.

**Aloofness.** Adolescents acting interpersonally cold, distant, or indifferent is certainly not an unexpected encounter within a typical high school setting. Of course, aloof behaviors themselves are not directly indicative of egoism, but they tend to be antisocial at the very least. However, recall that Leary and colleagues (1997) posit that egoists will often struggle with interpersonal relationships, categorically viewing others as inferior to them. As such, egoists may act aloof toward others by acting as if they do not care about certain social relationships, are too good to interact with others, or too important to be bothered by the efforts of the group. Importantly, the impetus behind these acts must be closely inferred, since high schoolers struggling with establishing their social identities may often come off as aloof or distant, but not always due to egoistic motivations (for example, one possible source of aloof behavior is social awkwardness or social anxiety; see Leary & Kowalsky,

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1995) As such, recognizing patterns of aloofness *in combination with* other forms of self-focused behavior became important to consider over time. By learning about the daily attitudes and behaviors of each band member over the course of the school year, I became more confident in identifying egoistically-derived aloofness from other misinterpreted acts.

As expressed by multiple members during interviews, tenor saxophonist Liam most commonly behaved in ways that could be interpreted as aloof, and his demeanor of indifference often led to minor spats of conflict with the other members of his section. Oscar and Neil both mentioned how Liam's aloof disposition—which they suggested stems from a position of conceited vanity—would at times detract from the group's progress during sectionals. As Neil shared:

Sometimes, I feel like he plays like he's too good for the music. Like, sometimes—this is really childish stuff—but sometimes at sectionals we'll be working on stuff and he'll just play it super terribly or he'll emphasize—like we're playing a figure, *dah-doo-DAH*, and he's like, *dah-doo-WAHHHH!* So then, it's almost like he's saying, "I'm way better than this. I don't have to pay attention to what's on the page," or, "I don't have to play with you guys—I'm better than you."

Indeed, Neil and Oscar's points about Liam made themselves evident during the saxophones' very next sectional, in which Liam maintained a largely uncooperative attitude (which admittedly, likely originated from innocent playfulness). Throughout the rehearsal, Liam would purposely make mistakes while playing "Asphalt Jungle," looking up at his peers with a smug smile. However, his somewhat apathetic aloofness in this context was

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peculiarly distinguished from his reputation otherwise, with most band members (and Mr. Bowen) identifying him as one of the more dedicated leaders in the band.

It was because of the apparent dissonance between Liam's rather hospitable identity as one of the band's most trusted leaders, and his more playful, 'class clown'-like behaviors that make his aloof behaviors so notable—specifically because his demeanor seemed to change depending on the social context. Nonetheless, his aloofness was certainly not unique to his participation in sectionals and were just as likely to be displayed in Mr. Bowen's presence. For instance, during a mid-November rehearsal, Mr. Bowen was working on developing basic improvisational skills with the band by having them play through the roots, thirds, and fifths of the chord progression of "Asphalt Jungle." Throughout the entirety of the mini-lesson, Liam wore a face of exceptional boredom. After going through the exercise, Mr. Bowen questioned aloud whether that exercise was helpful, to which Liam audibly said under his breath, "it wasn't," with a slouched and disinterested posture—as if to communicate that this exercise was well beneath him as a seasoned improviser. Finally, while listening to their recording of the same tune for their *Essentially Ellington* submission, Mr. Bowen offered a glowing compliment of Liam's "very well-developed" solo. But throughout the delivery of his praise, Liam's face remained almost scornful, staring down at the music in front of him and slowly blinking his eyes in a nonchalant manner. Finally, he said, "thank you" quietly, but with an air of false humility—acting subservient to Mr. Bowen's words, but ultimately disinterested in the praise.

While Liam's displays of aloofness were most prevalent, other students portrayed similar behaviors as well. For example, I noticed the apparent aloofness of tenor saxophonist Oscar and trumpeter Simon during a late January rehearsal of their

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complicated 5-part soli (plunger trumpet and four saxophones) on Ellington's "Asphalt Jungle." With disinterested gazes as their fingers flew over their keys and valves, it seemed apparent that their disinterestedness attempted to communicate their self-importance and superiority at the particularly challenging musical task.

Musicians' aloofness would be evident during live performances as well, usually in response to the audience's applause. Many would acknowledge the audience's applause through small bows, but the diminutive size of their gestures in addition to passive gazes implied a lack of authentic appreciation. However, it is plausible that these students were actually seeking to demonstrate [false] humility in response to their applause by bowing non-committedly—as if to say, "thank you, but that wasn't so great." That such behaviors can be similarly be interpreted as aloof egoism and self-deprecatory 'humility' clearly reiterates the complications of such interpretations.

**Bossiness & pushiness.** Those who sought to demonstrate self-importance often did so at the partial expense of others. By attempting to 'flex their muscles' interpersonally, so to speak, members occasionally demonstrated self-importance by expressing their opinions or beliefs more forcefully than others. As one might expect, these behaviors were most commonly found during moments in which Mr. Bowen was not present, leaving the students to vie for leadership roles on their own. While each section leader was officially the 'de facto' leader within each section, each of the groups adopted a predominantly egalitarian approach to their management. In some cases, then, ego-fueled practices of bossiness and pushiness were seen from each section's leader; however, more often than not, they emanated from someone who did not possess an 'official' leadership role but

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carried an exceptional knowledge of and dedication to the needs of the band—and felt the need to express it rather than yielding their expertise to the official leader of each section.

Most salient examples of bossiness and pushiness were evident in the saxophone section, which continued to struggle with its cooperative efforts throughout the year (although to a far lesser degree than the previous year). Micah conveyed some of the conflict arising from some of the saxophonists' exceedingly assertive personalities, specifically comparing the work ethic of the section at-large to second alto player Gio's more acquiescent tactics. He concluded by comparing the saxophones to his section (the rhythm section), positing that the saxophones' 'up-front' presence facilitated such supercilious behaviors:

I do think that we have very good seconds in the band. I think they support our lead players very well. Like, I think Gio supports Marcus really well, and Gio solos super well, but he isn't out there like, "let me steal this solo." That's what we get to hear a lot of in the band, is the 'beef' coming from the saxophones about how one of them will have a solo and it'll be appointed by Bowen, and then the other person will be like, "I want that solo," and the other person will be like, "sorry, I'm going to take this solo," and they like, *yell* at each other about it...That doesn't happen in the rhythm section, just because I feel like we're...our personalities are—I feel like in the rhythm section, we're less...pushy, maybe? Yeah, I think that definitely because the saxophones are such a *front* row section that play out in front of the band, [...] that that maybe comes out as like, maybe a bit of arrogance?

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Importantly, being bossy or pushy is not necessarily a direct display of egoism; as with all other prosocial and antisocial acts, motivations must be inferred. In cases where such behaviors *were* interpreted as egoism, impulses were seen as originating from self-oriented desires to demonstrate personal superiority. Alternatively, in cases where bossiness and pushiness were *not* interpreted as egoistically-fueled acts, they were viewed as originating from well-intentioned efforts to propel the group forward. The complexity of understanding the motivations for bossy and pushy behaviors became quite evident in the case of baritone sax player Benji, whose assertive personality and impassioned dedication to the band's success was similarly interpreted as both aggressive egoism and well-intentioned ardor by various band members.

Unfortunately, only three of the eight saxophonists in the band were willing to participate in interviews, so it was difficult to obtain a fully-inclusive perspective of Benji's leadership role within the section. Nonetheless, Benji seemed to have established a reputation (whether positive or negative) for his stalwart firmness well beyond the saxophone section. Within the rhythm section, Benji was known to be quite brazen—and usually not invitingly so. Pianist Jeremy nicknamed Benji “the enforcer” of the band, stating the following:

[Laughs] I don't think anyone *needs* to welcome Benji. I think everyone's just accepted [inaudible]. I think people haven't accepted Marley's (drummer's) [leadership] as much because he's not quite as...blunt as Benji is. Benji's like, “you guys need to get your...whatever together. You need to start getting into sectionals.”



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Bassist Micah similarly saw Benji as particularly audacious in his approach. He offered his perspectives on how his apparently well-meaning efforts came off as conceitedly criticizing of his peers, and were ultimately unwanted within the group:

I think the worry is that we're not trying to be mean, we're trying to give everyone the opportunity as well. I think Benji's less like that. He definitely is *very* opinionated, like *very very*, and gets in other people's business rather than his own. Which is like—he's part of the band, that's great. But like, when we were working on "Chinoiserie," and weren't ready to play it in front of the band, Benji came up to us and was like, "you guys better practice that," and like, "you guys, that sounds like crap." And we're like, "yeah, we played it once." And it's not...it's the kind of assumption that we aren't dedicated, which is insulting to some.

Indeed, given Grant Jazz Band's status as an elite band, Micah's point is well-taken, since members are generally performing at their highest level and are capable of self-criticizing their own musical progress. Ultimately, however, beliefs regarding whether assertive and adamant behaviors should be welcomed within the group or are ultimately damaging to the collectivistic ethos of the group was individually perceived. When regarded as the latter, demonstrations of bossiness and pushiness became interpreted as self-oriented modes of self-aggrandizement which ultimately detracted from the establishment of a collaborative ensemble identity.

**Poor ensemble balance.** When self-important beliefs manifested themselves directly within the music, the result was often individual musicians playing with a

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disproportionately self-oriented approach. That is, they tended to play with the perspective of “how much can *I* be heard?” rather than, “how well am I balancing with the rest of the band?” As a result, the Grant Jazz Band occasionally struggled to establish a consistent balance of sound across all sections. The balance issues within the group usually stemmed from the lower instrumental parts consistently playing out of balance with the lead players. From an egoistic lens, it is plausible that such issues may have originated from desires to self-aggrandize among the lower instrumental parts (i.e., 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> wind parts).

Playing with a poor ensemble balance was particularly an issue within the trumpet section, especially with third trumpet player Theo (most commonly) playing out of balance with his peers. Recalling the duet during the *Jazz Nutcracker* performance in which Theo overplayed in reference to Simon’s second trumpet part, it is possible that Theo decided to ‘take charge’ of the situation even as the supporting trumpet player during the section. While it is also possible that, given his occasional conflicts with Simon, Theo possessed a desire to self-promote over Simon’s playing, he did the same while playing a harmon-muted duet with Kyle on the tune, “Every Day I Have the Blues.” Interestingly, Theo’s overplaying did not become particularly noticeable until it came time for performances. Given the context, it is perhaps more likely that Theo’s overplaying was actually motivated by his commitment to boosting the band’s sound (even if this attempt was ultimately misguided) rather than fueled by egoistic motivations.

While issues of ensemble balance were clearly a common issue within the band, Mr. Bowen typically elected to allow the section leaders to address these issues for themselves. Only on a handful of occasions did he address these issues directly. When he did address the balance issues, he usually expressed his understanding of the students’ excitement to

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play their part with eagerness. For example, addressing the trumpets' overplaying, he commented:

Right there, trumpets had been sounding great until the last note. And then somebody in the lower parts is holding that note too long and playing that note too loud. 'Cause you like it so much! *BOOO-DAHT!!!* But wait, you're not lead trumpet! So, don't hang over longer than the lead trumpet. Never ever.

**Name-dropping.** Another way in which the musicians and Mr. Bowen self-aggrandized their superior status in the band was to make mention of the various professional musicians with whom they've played and the various prestigious musical opportunities they've been offered. Name-dropping did not occur on a regular basis, and so no pattern of name-dropping behavior made itself evident throughout fieldwork. However, when it was present, it was clearly indicative of self-promotive and self-important attitudes. When taken together with other forms of self-oriented behaviors, then, name-dropping became one striking method through which certain musicians communicated individual superiority. For instance, recall the trumpet's first sectional in which the group discussed which clinicians they might want to invite to the school, during which Simon proudly suggested his own teacher, a well-known jazz musician. His suggestion came off as strategic, communicating that he was privileged enough to have such a personal relationship with such a revered musician.

The act of name-dropping was not practiced by the students alone; Mr. Bowen would often make passing mention of his own Seattle-based big band, which on one occasion

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performed with renowned trombonist Wycliffe Gordon. Dropping this special opportunity, he casually commented that he was looking forward to “getting [his] butt kicked” by the experience. Yet, given that the customary apprentice model of jazz education (pre-dating institutional jazz education) venerated a tradition of learning through performances with more highly-skilled musicians (Berliner, 1994), it might not be surprising that name-dropping is not viewed arrogantly at all by jazz musicians, but functions as a necessary and valid way of proving that they have ‘paid their dues.’ Indeed, dropping the names of the masters with whom musicians have played seems to be central to the culture of jazz music generally (Berliner, 1994; Crowe, 2005). This was evidenced during the first month of school, when a professional jazz trio visited to offer a master class for the jazz program. As if to communicate to the students that the members of his trio had adequately ‘earned’ their status among the jazz ‘greats,’ the trio leader constantly name-dropped the various musicians with whom he, his bassist, and his drummer had played. In effect, listing these names seemed to represent a way to verbally communicate one’s musical resume.

Like other ego-fueled behaviors, name-dropping usually seemed to thread the line between innocently communicating one’s pedigree and distastefully boasting one’s superiority over others. For example, Mr. Bowen’s name-dropping of Wycliffe Gordon was likely some combination of both motivations, but ultimately communicated to his students that he was still actively (and successfully) performing within the art form. Alternatively, Simon’s name-dropping of his teacher might have had innocuous intentions, but the passive aloofness with which he made the statement (at least to my interpretation) came off as self-promotive.

**False humility and humblebragging.** Closely related to the act of name-dropping is the embodiment of false humility, in which a person knowingly asserts a low self-view while holding an appropriate (or excessive) internal view. The paradox behind the person's internal and external incompatibility is usually evident with false humility, such as when the person is clearly knowledgeable about his or her accolades and achievements but acts as if they are irrelevant or unwarranted. Usually, these behaviors are ultimately read as haughty because of the actor's knowledgeable manipulation of seemingly-humble behaviors to passively express personal greatness. A more specific form of false humility known as *humblebragging* was coined by comedian Harris Wittels (2012), who defined it as

a specific type of brag that masks the boasting part of a statement in a faux-humble guise. The false humility allows the offender to boast about their 'achievements' without any sense of shame or guilt. Humblebrags are usually self-deprecating in nature, but there are a few exceptions.

The exact characterizations of false humility and humblebragging can be made clearer through specific examples of these behaviors. As it were, there were many instances of such behaviors throughout my fieldwork, practiced by both the students and the director.

Starting with the director, Mr. Bowen's reference to his performance with Wycliffe Gordon arguably represented a form of humblebragging. His demure comment about getting his "butt kicked" served as a façade behind the larger proclamation of his privilege to play in such an esteemed band. On another occasion, Mr. Bowen falsely reproached a student for not playing his part properly, only to find out that the cues were missing from

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his part. In his apology, he stated with a disarming air of quasi-false humility, “I apologize, I don’t mean to lay it on you. I just know it intuitively because I’ve done it so many times. Um...not that I played it that well.”

Humblebrags and displays of false humility were far more common among the student musicians, who not surprisingly struggled between the need to carry oneself humbly and the desire to self-promote. When acts of false humility were recognized, they were always identified within the context of a student attempting to ‘cover up’ personal boasting through deferent commentary. For example, at the start of a rehearsal in mid-November, Mr. Bowen asked the group if anyone had any upcoming gigs. Filling in an uncomfortable silence, pianist Craig and guitarist Paul finally shared that they were playing together at a restaurant, but immediately followed up that it was in a “really small space.”

Finally, pianist Jeremy seemed to wear a mask of false humility when he shared that he wasn’t upset by the fact that he was selected as the third-string pianist (rather than earning a higher spot in the band). Through his tone-of-voice, he communicated a self-assured position that through his self-proclaimed exceptional audition, he *should* have been chosen above the second-string player, but he ultimately made peace with the decision:

Um, I’m definitely not the strongest link, I’m not going to say I am. Um, I was a little bit upset when Kim was put at two, and me at three. ‘Cause I feel like I went to more of the jam sessions and stuff like that, and I had a better audition, but I mean, it’s Bowen’s decision, and I’m just grateful to be in the band, so I don’t dwell on that [...] And I’m sure that if I show I’m playing better than Kim, then I’ll get to play on the [*Essentially Ellington*] recordings, if I work hard enough.

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Interestingly, the above quote could be interpreted as either a true statement of humility (of genuine gratefulness to be in the band) or an expression of false humility (of passive aggressive frustration with ultimately not being selected to a higher seat).

However, the aloof, self-assured tone through which Jeremy communicated these feelings, combined with his general sense of pompousness throughout his interview provided further evidence that his commentary was ultimately a cloaked avowal of his superiority over Kim.

### **Inflated Self-View**

Leary (2004) primarily describes egotistic behaviors as deriving from an incongruence between one's internal and external self-images. Egoism, he argues, results when someone possesses an internal view that is disproportionately more favorable than his or her external (social) view. To be sure, many of the egoistic behaviors discussed previously result from or are connected to such incongruences; however, this section intends to deal specifically with those behaviors in which a participant more-or-less explicitly expressed an inflated view of self.

As with all instances of egoism previously discussed, it is not the presence of these characteristics alone that is necessarily problematic. After all, someone may possess an inflated self-view but never express it outwardly, practicing a sense of 'quiet egoism' (Bauer & Wayment, 2008). This is something that Sebastian touched upon in his interview, when he acknowledged that people in the band may often think they're better than others,

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but “it’s expressing [it] that’s the problem.” As he discerned, “If you just keep [it] to yourself and then just try to work on what you need to improve, then that’s fine.”

Additionally, the harmfulness of an inflated self-view ultimately comes down to function and purpose. If a person self-aggrandizes for the sake of inflating oneself beyond the dangers of a low self-esteem, its function is not to publicly communicate superiority, but to privately motivate confidence. For example, a diffident musician participating in a high-stakes competition may feel inferior to all of his or her competitors. As such, the musician may recognize a personal need to self-aggrandize in order to ‘pump oneself up,’ so to speak, and maximize his or her potential for success within further competitive efforts. Because this act is arguably aiding in eschewing self-destructive feelings of inadequacy, few would argue that this form of self-inflation is problematic. On the other hand, if a musician expresses a disproportionately more favorable self-view for the sake of intimidating competitors, the behavior then becomes arguably conniving in function.

The first two characteristics of a musical ego (*seeking and desiring superiority and elitism; displays of self-promotion, self-importance, and self-orientation*) are more-or-less straightforward in terms of the recognition of their presence (even if their interpretations and motivations may still be quite confounded). However, the third characteristic—*possessing an inflated self-view*—appears to be particularly more complicated to recognize and interpret. This is ultimately because interpreting an inflated-self view involves a more purposeful recognition of what the egoist’s appropriate sense-of-self *should* be. Common disagreements in colloquial discourse thus become ubiquitous concerning whether a person is ‘cocky’ and ‘arrogant,’ or merely ‘confident’ and ‘self-assured.’ Some are seemingly-sensitive to a person’s boasted ego, while others are more easily capable of



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shrugging it off. Additionally, some seem to believe that as long as someone can ‘walk the walk’ in addition to ‘talking the talk,’ the ego may be more-or-less ‘earned’ (recall Sebastian’s ceding that Simon’s overplaying was not particularly harmful because “he can live up to it,” at least). That such disagreements are pervasive in discourse provides meaningful evidence that our interpretations of matters of egoism and humility are socially-constructed and highly subjective.

To most profoundly exemplify the presence of an inflated self-view, I again turn to third-string pianist, Jeremy. Given a noticeable dissonance between his self-expressed internal view as a member of the band, and the band’s external view of him, Jeremy represented the most discernable form of an inflated self-view. During interviews, several members of the band communicated that they didn’t think Jeremy should have been accepted into the band, and only earned a spot because one of their top players apparently suffered from a poor audition and was not offered a spot in the band. There seemed to be a consensus from the band, in fact, that this other pianist should have been selected over Jeremy (and Kim) in the first place. Yet during his interview, Jeremy consistently spoke with an air of exceptional self-importance, which he communicated with a self-assured tone from the very start of the interview, boasting the success of his audition:

**Jeremy:** The audition piece that I’m just gonna say got me in the band was “Prelude [to a Kiss].” We all had an individual piece we could play, and I probably had the best individual tune prepared.

**WJC:** According to somebody else, or you?

**Jeremy:** Um, people have said that...*I* knew it was really good. I spent *months* preparing that piece. I anticipated he was gonna let us...even before he announced we all had time for a separate piece, I was preparing it.

**WJC:** That's a mature piece, too. You can't just play that if you—

**Jeremy:** Yeah, I transcribed the Oscar Peterson part, transposed it [...] I listened to like, five or six versions just to kind of put it together, do my own thing with it.

The clear dissonance between Jeremy's self-view and the band's perception of him was profound. However, given the fact that Jeremy regularly practiced a highly demure persona during rehearsals (and especially in Mr. Bowen's presence), it is possible that his self-inflated persona as communicated to me during interviews functioned as a sort of defense mechanism against more deeply-rooted issues concerning a potentially low self-esteem. The implications of this 'protective' ego will be discussed in the next section.

### **Ramifications & Consequences of Musical Egoism**

The possession of egoistic tendencies, viewpoints, and behaviors alone is certainly disagreeable from a social standpoint; indeed, in one study, the words 'arrogant,' 'conceited,' and 'boastful'—all words synonymous with egoism—were identified among the most unfavorable adjectives to describe people (Leary et al., 1997). However, the true threat of egoism comes not from its mere unattractiveness, but from its ramifications on interpersonal and intrapersonal relations. While some consequences have positive upshots (such as the ego that boosts one's self-confidence), most illustrations of musical egoism were regarded either ambivalently or as socially undesirable. In this section, I identified

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five possible ramifications of egoism: (a) hubris, (b) poor ensemble cohesion, (c) poor ensemble cohesion, (d) ego fragility/envy.

### Hubris

Through multiple interviews, it became apparent that the impressive work ethic and professionalism I observed among the 2017–18 Grant Jazz Band was not always the normative status quo for the band. Instead, because the previous iteration of the band was the first in fourteen years to not be extended an invitation to participate in Jazz at Lincoln Center's *Essentially Ellington* competition, the band's identity during the current year was conveyed as decisive and calculated during interviews. The students and Mr. Bowen were confident that their rejection from the nation's most exclusive competition was not the result of diminished ability the previous year; in fact, many expressed the incredible talent of many individual players from the previous year's band. Instead, while few identified it explicitly by name, many attributed the fallacy of the previous year's band to a common culpability: *egoistic hubris*.

Hubris involves excessive pride or egoism that ultimately leads to an ultimate punishment or downfall. Indeed, when asked about what factors the students attributed to their rejection the previous year, the vast majority of them conjectured that the previous band simply didn't work as hard and got a bit too comfortable with their champion status. As Micah recalled:

I think that was a big thing...the thought that we were *going* to get in, rather than being like, "oh, we'll be *lucky* if we get in," you know? Even if we play super well, and

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we're the best band, it's still like...I think it's very naïve and arrogant to think you'll just get in.

While Micah was more willing to ostracize the efforts of the previous year's band, trumpeter Sebastian was more diplomatic in his assessment of the situation but nonetheless expressed a similar sentiment of hubristic self-pride. He believed that the band was good enough to be accepted, and acknowledged that their audition submission did not necessarily represent their best work, but perhaps their over-confidence led to their downfall:

**WJC:** Why do you think [the band] didn't get in last year?

**Sebastian:** Mmm, I don't think people realized how much it takes to get into *Ellington*, I guess. I don't think we worked hard enough—especially the trumpets, we didn't have a single sectional until after that.

**WJC:** Until after you got rejected?

**Sebastian:** Yeah. And the band—it definitely had a bunch of good people in it. We could have definitely gotten in, but the recordings just weren't good enough.

**WJC:** Mmhmm. Do you think you knew that when you submitted the recordings?

**Sebastian:** I thought we would get in, but I didn't think the recordings were especially good. 'Cause I mean, we've gotten in every single year, so...

He further recalled the shock he felt when they heard of their rejection:

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We won the Hawthorne College Festival against Chester, and...was it Riverside or River Gorge [High Schools], or it might've been both. I can't remember. But they got a bunch of solo awards and then we won the entire competition, so it was like, "oh man, all of our hard work paid off! We're finally—we're going to make *Ellington* this year." And we did *not* make *Ellington* [laughs].

Needless to say, of course, it was not just the *belief* that they would be accepted that led to their failure, but the way in which that belief was manifested into their work ethic that seemed to have caused their ultimate letdown. In other words, the band could have handled the rejection with repudiation (refusing to learn from the experience), or with humility (accepting their shortcomings as an ensemble). Regarding the former, Myers (1995) and Leary (2004) suggest that egoists might tend to blame this unfortunate situation on external factors beyond their control. Trumpeter Theo, for example, spoke of the rejection as if it were an unfair "slight" against the program (and the equally-competitive Chester Jazz Band program), conjecturing that the decision was either a mistake or a purposeful choice by the judges:

This also might just be sort of the entitlement of being at Grant...but understanding that you're better than River Gorge, even though River Gorge, Stone Pass, and Zion [High Schools] went [to *Essentially Ellington*] last year, there's sort of, like, "yeah, they went, but something's not right about that." [...] There seemed to be a sense that like, the judges got something wrong. Like, we could understand if Grant or Chester didn't go, because maybe they were just having an off year, but the *both* of them, it seemed

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like, it wasn't very blind. It was like...And you had to understand that after 30 years of the same director, they probably have a sound, and Wynton [Marsalis] can put the headphones on and say, "oh, this is Grant, this is Chester." And it might've been, "okay, it's time to get some new blood and just to keep the festival going."

Of course, it is not the failures that define the group, but rather their resilience and flexibility to overcome phases of struggle and prevail once again. Indeed, this seemed to be the path that the newest iteration of the Grant Jazz Band adopted: to acknowledge the role of their own hubris, to learn from their mistakes, and to purposefully 'double down' on their efforts during the following school year to regain their notoriety once again. In short, their hubristic loss seemed to have fueled the reinvigorated work ethic that I was privy to observing during my fieldwork. As Micah explained:

**Micah:** I think after we didn't get into *Ellington*, there was a little bit of a shocker to a lot of the people that were pretty arrogant, and I think that definitely helped us in the end.

**WJC:** How so?

**Micah:** It made a lot of the guys work harder. They thought it was a sure bet. They were like, "oh, Grant's gone for 18 years, there's no way. Like, we win a lot of years, it's not a big deal."

Having been a member of Jazz Band 1 since her freshman year, trombonist Angie recognized a similar change in the band's work ethic since their rejection. She commented:

Even the second that [the rejection] happened, we were like, “okay, we need to work on this.” Because you know, before that it was like, “oh yeah, *Essentially Ellington*, of course we’re gonna get in. We’re Grant, oh yeah!” But then it was kind of a wake-up call, so what now? So, we were just like, “okay, we’re going to kill it at Reno [Jazz Festival]” this year, and then next year we’re going to work *really* hard on it.

Finally, recall trumpeter Kyle’s recognition that the previous year’s rejection “...kind of broke everything, kind of shattered the whole world,” which provided the necessary impetus for the band to recognize that, “now we need to really work.” It is apparent, then, that while the band clearly suffered from hubristic defeat the previous year, there was always a sense that they could ‘correct the course’ and find success again the following year.

### **Interpersonal Conflict**

Beyond hubris emerging as the most striking upshot of egoistic musical tendencies, evidence from the field suggested that interpersonal conflicts could arise from egoistic dispositions as well. These conflicts may manifest from two possible sources: from the egoist him or herself, whose self-righteousness makes him defensive against criticism, or from the egoist’s ‘victim,’ whose self-esteem becomes threatened as a result of the egoist’s self-promotion (Leary et al., 1997). Often, disputes result when both the egoist and his or her subject experience a threatened loss-of-self: the egoist engages in conflict in order to prove his or her righteousness, and the egoist’s subject engages to protect his or her

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identity from the egoist's actions. However, interpersonal conflicts may be one-sided as well, with the subject remaining unengaged with the egoist's conduct but nevertheless troubled by it. The latter instance characterized the more typical form of interpersonal conflict throughout my fieldwork, with students quietly ignoring arrogant behaviors but nonetheless expressing frustration toward them. Trombonist Angie best articulated how these one-sided displays of egoism resulted in conflicts (even if those conflicts never 'came to a head' with explicit clashes). As she verbalized, "[arrogance] just kind of annoys me. It just kind of taints what I think of them. Because I just *don't* like when people act egotistical."

Additionally, and as described in the previous chapter, Theo seemed to experience small, passing conflicts with section-mate Simon. Usually displayed only through a 'butting of heads' during sectionals, both Theo and Simon were able to maintain a mostly professional relationship during rehearsals and most performances. From my observations, these conflicts usually originated from their strong work ethic, with Theo seemingly taking it personally whenever Simon would make a musical suggestion that diverged from Theo's desired approach.

Despite these occasional conflicts between members, it should be reminded that these conflicts were apparently negligible compared to the conflicts of the previous year's band. According to multiple perspectives, which were either shared through personal experiences (from those who were in the band the previous year) or recalled anecdotes (from those who were in Jazz Band 2 and only heard reports of these interactions), there were regular conflicts within the rhythm section (specifically the guitarists), the saxophone section, and the trombone section. First, according to trumpeter Sebastian, the two



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guitarists the previous year often struggled through conflicts stemming from a lack of cooperation:

**Sebastian:** Um, last year the guitars were quite a mess. There was one person that wasn't really gelling well with the rest of the band. And that was a lot of passive aggressiveness, and Bowen had to step in multiple times and help solve the issue just because people were not cooperating well.

**WJC:** Socially or musically?

**Sebastian:** Both.

**WJC:** Okay, can you give examples of what that looked like?

**Sebastian:** Um, well some people would just play more songs than other people and not give everyone a fair chance. They'd say, "oh, I'm playing this solo now." And that just created bad relationships.

Finally, tenor saxophonist Neil shared his thoughts regarding how these conflicts emanating from egoism led to conflicted interpersonal relationships:

I mean, obviously people just don't like to be bossed around, especially by people who are of the same social status as them. Like, if they're the same age, obviously you don't want to be bossed around. Especially now people will cooperate, especially as long as it's in the best interest of the band. Um, but if it's coming from just like a "well I improvise so much better than you, so listen to what I say," that kind of thing is like,

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“why would you want to listen to that?” It just creates really bad vibes and interactions with the band.

### Poor Ensemble Cohesion

When musicians possessed self-oriented dispositions within the ensemble, evidence of poor ensemble cohesion often resulted. While poor cohesion can be both difficult to evaluate and its causes challenging to speculate, it is easily identifiable among musicians who fail to pay attention to how their playing fits within the context of their peers’ (especially as patterns of behavior emerge over time). Wind musicians playing out of balance with their peers and collective improvisations in which certain musicians dominated the sonic space were some embodied examples of how a lacking sense of cohesion became clear among the trumpets, trombones, and saxophones. But perhaps more saliently, rhythm section musicians who played in a showy, flashy manner tended to value their individual musical contributions ahead of their shared collaborations, resulting in four disconnected rhythm section musicians (pianist, guitarist, bassist, and drummer) playing *at the same time* rather than establishing and negotiating a collective groove *together in time* (see Keil & Feld, 1994).

A deprived ensemble cohesion was arguably evident from the start of the school year, and was articulated by trumpeter Kyle after a masterclass, when he shared that he “...thought there was a lot of individual talent, but the thing we need to work on is our communication.” The resounding head nods indicated that the rest of the band agreed with his assessment. Indeed, at the start of the school year, musicians would rarely interact with one another musically. It was only after a number of weeks that they would begin to

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purposely play together during the opening moments of class. When these spontaneous grooves would occur, they would usually be initiated by pianist Craig picking something out on the piano (these spontaneous warm-up ‘jams’ rarely involved the other two pianists), followed by one of the drummers with a swing (or at times, a hip-hop) groove, and finally by the guitarist and bassist. Often, Neil, Gio, or Oscar would walk over to the group and play a few choruses of a solo, figuring out the changes by ear. All of this would occur non-verbally, without much verbal communication between them, but nonetheless reacting to each other’s musical ideas with rhythmic and melodic responses of their own. Intriguingly, it often seemed to me that these spontaneous jams demonstrated more salient examples of shared interaction, collaboration, and group cohesion than when they occurred within the context of the musical repertoire during rehearsals and performances.

Nonetheless, the group’s ensemble cohesion clearly improved over the school year, which indicated that they were ultimately successful in reducing their self-interest in order to establish more other-oriented and collectivistic musical grooves. Alternatively, it could be argued that this simply resulted from the band’s added experience and comfort with playing together over time—but in either scenario, it seemed that assuaged individual egos (as demonstrated through more other-orientedness and less self-aggrandizement) became central to allowing these collectivistic grooves to ultimately emerge.

### **Ego Fragility & Envy**

As interpreted through my time in the field, a final ramification of a noisy ego could be the unwanted development of envy resulting from one’s bruised sense of self-worth.

Simply put, when someone with a fragile ego ‘puffs themselves up’ protectively but then

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experiences an event that challenges their self-view, they run the risk of developing interpersonal envy. Building upon Leary and colleagues' (1997) notion of *defensive egotism*, I call this *ego fragility* because the out-of-touch ego contributes to a defensive sense of social agitation due to its sensitivity to others' abilities.

On the one hand, ego fragility may only be harmful to the egoist, resulting in a quiet but introspectively-experienced loss-of-self. This sort of ego fragility is intrapersonally damaging and may contribute to further internal manifestations of low self-esteem. This internal manifestation of ego fragility was seen commonly with Jeremy, whose facial expressions reflected a bruised ego whenever Mr. Bowen would criticize his playing, and with Simon, whose facial expression would appear invidious whenever Sebastian received positive feedback during his solos. Beyond the music room, trombonist Angie commented on Simon's fragile ego when he apparently could not handle the fact that she received a higher score than him on a math test:

Oh my God, and this one time...so we were having a test in math, and we were in the same group for the group quiz, but I got a higher score on the quiz because I actually showed my work, and he was just like [in a nasal and whiny tone], "oh my God, what the heck is going on? We did the exact same test and I got the exact same answers as you. How come you got more than me?" And then we got the test back, and I got 32 out of 30, and he got like 27, and he was *sooo* 'salty' about it. He was just—oh my God.

On the other hand, a fragile ego can become interpersonally harmful as well, affecting both the egoist and the 'victim' because the egoist feels the need to externally 'correct' this

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perceived loss-of-self publicly. This may result in the egoist asserting his or her righteousness in the moment (either verbally or musically), which may lead to either interpersonal conflict or poor ensemble cohesion.

### Complications of Musical Egoism

#### Interpreting Musical Egoism

The most common argument challenging the objective evaluation of a person's ego stems from the acknowledgement that differing conceptions of arrogance and confidence are entirely possible. Indeed, the 'line' between confidence and arrogance seems to be quite moveable and particular to the person judging the behavior. It is precisely because of this subjectivity that Davis's (2010; Davis et al., 2011) concept of relational humility has been advocated as a valid compromise to the desire to objectively measure the construct (see Chapter 2). In this respect, Simon argued that an ego which hinges on confidence (but not *overconfidence*) can become powerful for the group's development. As he explained when describing the confidence of the lead trumpet player in the community college band that he plays with:

**Simon:** ...[the lead trumpet player] definitely has a lot of confidence, is very decisive, and those are good things in a leader.

**WJC:** But an ego is usually thought of as a bad thing, right?

**Simon:** Not necessarily. I mean, I guess it *could* be, if you're like, arrogant about it.

Maybe ego isn't the right word. But he's, you know, decisive and confident, and clearly knows he has a lot of ability—because he does.

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The establishment of healthy confidence that avoids the social snag of arrogance will be debated in much greater detail during the following chapter (see Healthy Pride in Chapter 6).

Considering the difficulties of interpreting egoism becomes further confounded when one considers how social identity characteristics may inform how someone interprets or judges arrogance or humility. Kochman (1981), for example, has demonstrated evidence through qualitative investigation that African Americans are judged for arrogance more readily than Whites for behaving in the same manner. He posits that in an Western-centric American society, ideals of humility and egoism perhaps struggle to come to terms with African ideals of more promotive self-pride. He argues that African American displays of so-called egoism perhaps originate from cultural differences in which African conceptions of self-glorification appear unfitting compared to European ideals of quieted self-pride. Granted, while there may not be any African American musicians represented within the 2017–18 Grant Jazz Band, the point is nonetheless extremely well-taken because it precisely points to how egoism can be so highly sensitive to the politics of social identity. I will return to these considerations of social identity politics near the conclusion of Chapter 7.

### **Is Musical Egoism Actually Harmful?**

Few would refute that egoism is undesirable, but when pressed further, it seems that many people struggle to explain specifically why it touches a nerve with them. As many members admitted, a bit of egoism is to be expected when playing in one of the nation's

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most competitive jazz programs. Theo shrugged it off during his interview, conceding, “you sort of set yourself up to expect [arrogance].” Particularly in the context of Simon (with whom he seemed to experience the most interpersonal conflict), Theo seemed to adopt an ambivalent tone with regard to their interactions:

At this point, I’ve dealt with characters like [Simon], or even more extreme than him, that it doesn’t really bother me. I remember when I was a freshman there was this most arrogant person ever. He only really cared about how other people perceived him. He needed—he couldn’t play the first parts, but he wanted to stand in the first trumpet spot, so everyone knew he was the best. And eventually it’s just enough for me to just laugh it off.

During our interview, I continued to press Theo to explain, from his perspective, if and how egoism was truly problematic within the group or to him personally. He struggled to express any readily-identifiable ramifications of arrogance (beyond possible damage to social relationships), partly because he understood that the egoism was contextually-situated. That is, it was *only* found on the bandstand, and thus was more readily tolerated:

**WJC:** ...it seemed harder for you to think of reasons why having an ego is bad in the band. Like, it seems like it’s kind of a good thing, but it kind of hurts social relationships.

**Theo:** It *can* hurt social relationships, yeah...

**WJC:** But do you care about that?

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**Theo:** I mean, to an extent, no. Like, if you've already built up the social relationships, then you are able to put the ego past it. Like, I know this person's a bit of a jerk when he gets up on the bandstand, but once he comes down, it's like, as long as I can keep the conversation away from music, then we're fine. Because some people are really competitive, and the ego is *only* there. And that's kind of what I feel like for this band.

Sebastian corroborated this notion, also referring to Simon's perceived arrogance:

**WJC:** Does that kind of thing, a big ego, do you think that bothers—that it gets in the way of making music at all?

**Sebastian:** ...Mmmm, yeah, I think it does a little bit. But in this case, I think it's fine. Like, it's not a super big problem that anyone has to worry about. It's just, kind of the nature of the music. Like, [Simon's] playing second [trumpet], and obviously you want to play the lead part or you want to play the solo part, so there's gonna be kind of like, "oh, I can do this better than this person," kind of competitive attitude.

With respect to the saxophones, Oscar and Neil supported a similar belief, expressing that Liam's occasional showy behaviors are only harmful because they "waste time," but ultimately his behaviors were just something that they "came to terms with" and were able to accept within the wider scheme of their section dynamic:



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**Neil:** Sometimes [Liam's showing off] wastes time, is the only thing. We'll sit there and he's playing through like — ...our figure ends, and a solo begins, and he just starts playing.

**Oscar:** Yeah, I guess I'm also just partially coming to terms with....he does that [laughs].

**Neil:** Yeah [sighs]. I just, don't *want* to come to terms with that...

**WJC:** So really, it's a personality trait that's a turn-off, but it doesn't *really* hurt the band.

**Neil:** Not really, no.

**Oscar:** Not enough for me, no.

Finally, a theme emerged among the interviewed musicians supporting the notion that “little bit of arrogance” can actually be a good thing, because not only can it contribute to one's self-confidence, but it can arguably add to the overall skill of the band as well. Theo expressed this point first, raising the point that in such a context, the development of an ego becomes a sort-of ‘chicken and egg’ situation in which belonging to the top band both fuels *and* is fueled *by* the ego. He explained:

**Theo:** I think your ego helps you get into the top band, but your ego can be inflated by *being* in the top band.

**WJC:** Okay, so why is the ego important or not important?

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**Theo:** Um, I mean, it...baseline, it's a confidence level. If I have enough—If I'm arrogant enough, I think I'm the best. So, then I'm more likely to maybe take what others will perceive as a risk, but it just seems normal to me.

In the end, however, the harm of an out-of-control ego might be a moot point—at least in the context of this particular group—because as multiple members shared, it won't be allowed to go 'unchecked' by the students and Mr. Bowen (at least, not for long). In his interview, Oscar explained:

**Oscar:** I think if someone started to get too arrogant, people would shoot it down. Like, "just stop doing that. We're really not going to have that here."

**WJC:** Why do you think they'd shoot it down?

**Oscar:** Because [inaudible] we all have a common interest, we want to cooperate, we want to sound good, and we want to get into *Ellington*.

Promisingly, the band seemed to agree that excessive self-importance made its way into the ensemble climate to some degree but would never persist over the band's more highly-valued sense of prosociality and comradery. As Neil brashly confirmed, "...I know [Mr. Bowen's] not gonna put some arrogant piece of shit in the band, right?"

## Conclusions

Synthesized through extended participation in the field and ongoing analysis of the social dynamics within the band, I identified three broad themes of egoistic behavior within

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this particular competitive musical environment: (a) seeking and desiring superiority and elitism, (b) displays of self-promotion, self-importance, and self-orientation, and (c) and possessing an inflated self-view. Within each of these themes exist a number of sub-themes which describe more specific manifestations of these broader behaviors. Particularly as ascribed by the highly-situational nature of ethnographic research which does not seek to generalize one case to an entire population (of jazz bands, high school musicians, or musicians broadly), I certainly do not attempt to suggest that these findings are comprehensive or exhaustive. Given other settings and contexts, it is entirely plausible that other manifestations of egoism may make themselves evident. These other displays could reflect further examples relevant to the three emergent themes of musical egoism presented here or may suggest entirely new and/or additional themes.

It seems apparent that egoism of a musical variety (but which includes both musical and social manifestations) leads to a number of undesirable ramifications for the ensemble's social identity. While many participants felt challenged to explicitly pinpoint how and why egoism bothered them, it seemed overwhelmingly evident that at the very least, it placed relationships within the band under some degree of social duress. And certainly, if it can be agreed that the social benefits associated with musical participation are worthwhile pursuits of music education, it must follow that egoism becomes a threat to this broader goal. And for that reason alone, it demands consideration.

After all, while potentially harmed interpersonal relationships are a valid and genuine concern for ego-imbued ensembles, this appears to merely be the *least* striking detriment. Indeed, a quiet ego can effectively produce such undesirable social consequences (as evidenced through envy, ego fragility, and poor ensemble balance); however, a noisy, out-

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of-control ego may plausibly produce much more harmful results. While none of the participants within this study appeared to possess an acutely out-of-control ego, it is clear that within another context, a musician (or director) with a highly embellished ego could instigate a number of interpersonal conflicts. Pointing to this possibility, Angie recalled that in the previous year's jazz band, two trombonists with highly out-of-control egos led to so much interpersonal conflict that it ultimately led to a physical altercation.

The point, then, is not to ostracize egoistic tendencies altogether—after all, all humans have a natural penchant for behaving in a self-interested manner (Leary, 2004), making the full elimination of egoism an impossible pursuit. Rather, as psychologists have suggested (Wayment & Bauer, 2008), the goal ought to be reducing the *noisiness* of the ego such that it becomes capable of acquiescing to more desirable and functional calls for prosociality and ultimately, humility.

**CHAPTER 6**

**MUSICAL HUMILITY**

Now that I have conceptualized a thorough analysis of the egoistic, self-focused, and antisocial behaviors occurring among the members of the Grant Jazz Band, a call for humbler and more prosocially empowering comportments becomes clear. Approaching all musical experiences with humility, as this chapter will argue, sets the sociomusical tone for an atmosphere of true collaboration, collectivism, and parity to be realized. To be sure, the rationale for musical humility does not stem from an avoidance of musical egoism alone; rather, it seems apparent that all its own, musical humility carries with it an abundance of benefits that espouse the potentials for musical transcendence and social transformation to be realistically fulfilled.

Returning to the impetus for this study, the central focus of this investigation was to theorize through observations in the field (and with support from literature), how humility was exhibited within the context of this musical group. The objectives thus became twofold: on the one hand, to understand if and how humility was *distinctively* manifested within musical contexts (compared to humility generally), and on the other, to understand if and how humility promoted desirable sociomusical relationships within and beyond the ensemble.

Given my research questions, through the first half of this chapter I will seek to conceptualize a definition of musical humility as developed through the ethnographic accounts of this particular high school jazz band. Through fieldwork and interviews, a five-part definition of musical humility emerged: (a) purposeful musical engagement and collaboration, (b) lack of superiority, (c) other-orientedness, (d) acknowledgement of

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shortcomings and learnability, and (e) healthy pride. After an analysis of each of these components, I will discuss the sociomusical upshots of an ensemble culture rooted in musical humility through second half of the chapter.

### **Musical Humility: Establishing a Definition**

If the nascent concept of musical humility can hold sufficient evidence of its distinctiveness from other forms of humility, but with appropriate connections to more universal notions of the construct, it may effectively be offered as a standalone contribution to the growing ontology of humility research. Specifically, for the construct to be empirically evidenced, it will subsist as closely related to *general humility* but sufficiently unique from *cultural humility*, *intellectual humility*, *relational humility*, *organizational humility*, and other forms that emerge from particular environments and contexts. The five-part definition of musical humility that will be presently introduced establishes precisely these requirements.

Before continuing, recall from Chapter 2 that an examination of humility originated from a broader study of the prosocial dynamics occurring within the Grant Jazz Band. From that perspective, I interpreted displays of humility first as actions which promoted or enacted prosocial behavior (given that prosociality and humility are highly aligned; see Allgaier et al., 2015; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016). Of course, not all prosocial acts are humble acts, and so the extant literature on humility aided in analyzing these behaviors more closely. However, zooming out slightly and looking at prosocial behavior generally allowed for the distinctions of musical humility to make themselves known. Had the corpus of data been analyzed through existing frameworks of humility research alone, the narrowness of

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that strategy would have insufficiently exposed how *musical* humility is distinguishable from general humility.

### **Purposeful Musical Engagement and Collaboration**

Emerging vividly from my fieldwork, it became extraordinarily clear that the enactment of humility in musical settings included the *active* efforts of all musicians committed to a collaborative musical experience. Immediately, this realization seemed to contradict the very nature of general humility, which is often nicknamed the ‘quiet virtue.’ Indeed, as Worthington (2007) writes, “[h]umility doesn’t shout its characteristics. It is the quiet virtue. We must approach it in reverence. Because it is quiet, we must listen, look, and feel to discern its character” (p. x). Author Helen Nielsen humorously furthers this point, bantering that “[h]umility is like underwear: Essential, but indecent if it shows” (as cited in Worthington, 2007, p. 10).

Nonetheless, the emergent findings spoke for themselves, and when framed against existing humility literature, it revealed that musical humility need not be quiet at all. In a way, just as Christopher Small (1998) challenged the nature of music from a noun to a *verb*, arguing that it is “...not a thing at all but an activity, a thing that people do” (p. 16), musical humility appears to be similarly verb-like. In effect, it is not merely a thing that musicians *possess*, but also a collective behavior in which musicians *engage*.

When examined alongside extant humility literature, this first component of musical humility adapts closely from several of Tangney’s (2000, 2002) meanings of humility, including an (1) openness to new ideas, (2) a low self-focus and “...‘forgetting of the self’ while recognizing that one is but one part of the larger universe”; and (3) “an appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can

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contribute to the world” (pp. 73–74). These components are further supported by others, including Krumrei-Mancuso (2016), Owens and colleagues (2013), and Templeton (1997).

**Director modeled.** More than anyone else, Mr. Bowen was a strong proponent of promoting active displays of musical engagement among his students. As early as the first week of rehearsals, it became clear that the collaborative efforts about which he commonly spoke were closely tied to musicians who approached musical experiences with humility. Recall the second rehearsal, when Mr. Bowen played the early jazz recording of “Yellow Dog Blues” with Bessie Smith. With his pointed questioning regarding how the musicians would have worked together to create such a masterful recording (“just think: how would’ve it been done?”), Mr. Bowen endorsed the collaborative character of the group from the very start. Of course, a willingness to collaborate does not make one humble alone, but when combined with a disposition of openness to alternative ideas and an appreciation of others’ contributions (i.e., a disposition of musical other-orientedness), musical humility assuredly begins to peek through the process.

Mr. Bowen continued to motivate this sense of musical other-orientedness during jam sessions as well—an opportunity in which, given the more open-ended goals of the environment, such efforts could be truly maximized. Recall that Mr. Bowen set the parameters not only for how long solos should last, but also how communication should occur on the bandstand so that everyone had an opportunity to take a solo (including the drummer).

But while the jam sessions may have been the most appropriate setting to promote active musical engagement, by far the most prominent setting in which these efforts actually occurred was during the Matt Wilson concert in October. Knowing Wilson’s



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musical approach beforehand, Mr. Bowen was prepared for what to expect well before the students truly knew what they were getting themselves into. Preparing the band mentally for Wilson's arrival, Mr. Bowen stated,

I just want you guys to be ready to engage. If you're just expecting him to bring it all, then he'll bring plenty, but if we all engage in the creative process, then it could be something really great. So, a lot has to happen tomorrow. Ok, you've laid the groundwork for, yes, we can play his pieces, but can we really get at the *essence* of what he wants musically? Some of that will come from his playing. You know, you will immediately be energized by that, but you have to be ready to step and maybe do some things that are maybe a stretch for you. In order for this to come to *his* level.

Without fail, Matt Wilson's presence alone catapulted the band's collaborative temperament almost immediately, although not without initial hesitation and confusion (see Chapter 4). But as Wilson seemed to understand best, initiating this collective environment first meant promoting and empowering the musicians to feel emboldened to participate actively in the musical process. Thus, this first component of musical humility is insufficient on its own but must be combined with other components to be most robustly realized. At the end of the experience—arguably because Matt Wilson had so masterfully developed an environment of empowerment and collaboration—Mr. Bowen shared with his students, “I found myself with the urge to create!”

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As the year went on, however, the rousing spirit that Matt Wilson's presence had promoted began to naturally dwindle as the band prepared for more 'closed forms' (Allsup, 2016) of performance (i.e., competition music, *Essentially Ellington* audition recordings). But as Mr. Bowen realized, just because they were 'reading the ink' more purposefully again did not mean that they were precluded from the opportunity to engage meaningfully within the parameters of the pre-composed music. In several attempts to promote this sense of musical other-orientedness, Mr. Bowen occasionally reminded the rhythm section musicians to rotate their stands and bodies so that a line-of-sight could be established between each musician. During another rehearsal, apparently noticing that the band wasn't 'gelling' properly during Ellington's "Harlem Congo," he sat the entire 28-piece group claustrophobically around the rhythm section, telling them that "the purpose of this is for you to connect with the rhythm section." Finally, when the rhythm section had the opportunity to develop their own musical ideas for the "Chinoiserie" movement of Ellington's *Jazz Nutcracker* in December (an open-ended tradition that Mr. Bowen had encouraged for several years of this annual performance), they seemed to have found their cooperative musical spirit once again. After their performance, Mr. Bowen excitedly shared his thoughts:

What I really noticed was how well you all interacted in that thing. You know, especially when it got into the solos and the two different times feel. Um, like I actually noticed the guitarist physically *turning* and looking at Kim. And there was just a lot better—it seemed more free. And of course, you didn't have ink, right? You're not tied to a page, and I just want to encourage you guys to interact in that

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way when there *is* ink. Like, in other words, as quick as possible, and just get off the page as soon as possible, and just have that kind of eye contact and communication, ‘cause that was really, really cool.

**Student expressed.** Whether in rehearsal or during performance, the members of the Grant Jazz Band consistently demonstrated a superior ability to actively engage and interact with one another. These moments, at least to my interpretation, were often accompanied with heightened states of musical creativity as students made meaningful eye contact and communicated more evocatively through their playing. To be sure, however, learning to actively engage with fellow musicians was a learned behavior, and something that many students actively sought to improve upon. For example, before a September masterclass, lead pianist Craig noted that he was looking to observe how the visiting trio interacted with one another while performing: “I would want them...just to play with our horn players and...see how they interact, and [how] the horn players would take solos and stuff, just so I can see the dynamic between the bass and piano.” As he later noted during a separate sectional, “a lot of this relies on good communication”—“this” of course referring to the cultivation of a strong and interactive rhythm section dynamic.

Indeed, Craig worked particularly hard during sectionals to establish this purposeful connection among the rhythm section. During the year’s first sectional, he suggested that the rhythm section conduct a mini jam-session over the tune “Shiny Stockings” in order to establish a degree of interaction from the start:

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**Craig:** We should play a song, but then have people trade. Like, loop a chorus and have people trade soloing for each other just so [we] can get used to communicating within the rhythm section.

**Others:** Yeah.

**Marley (drums):** Should we have just the guitar and the piano do that, so the bass and the drums can always, like, focus on their part?

**Others:** No!

**Paul (guitar):** Bad idea! Everyone's getting exposed! [Laughter]

First-string drummer Seth contributed to these efforts as well, instructing second-string bassist Ed and second-string drummer Marley to look at each other during the exercise. This led to an apparent discomfort between Ed and Marley, who locked eyes awkwardly, but after a moment caused Ed to instead stare at Marley's right hand keeping time on the ride cymbal. The resulting enhancement of the collective groove was discernable not only to my ears, but to the rhythm section as a whole. After playing through a few choruses, Paul noted that their interactive dynamic seemed to naturally improve after some time:

**Paul:** What I got from that is, you guys sort of like, naturally sort of started locking in more after we...I guess like, did more dynamic things together.

**[Unrecalled] Rhythm Section Musician:** So, it like, started to lock in?

**Paul:** Yeah, yeah.

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Although Paul understood the importance of actively engaging with others, he also instinctively understood when *not* to do so for the collective efforts of the group. While preparing one of their Matt Wilson arrangements, “New Waltz,” Mr. Bowen noted that he couldn’t hear the blending of the guitar with the rest of rhythm section. Paul responded that he was purposely laying low on his comping patterns because, as he noted, “I’m just not sure what role I’m supposed to play in this, because Jeremy has some stuff going on that I don’t want like...there to be too much.” As Paul instinctively identified, knowing when *not* to engage was every bit as important to the musician possessing musical humility, because it subsumes the other-oriented disposition of ‘it’s not always about me.’

While it may be argued that the rhythm section possesses the primary responsibility to enact this spirit of active musical engagement, this responsibility obviously extends into the band as a whole. Truly, Craig seemed to recognize this responsibility as he one day lowered his left ear close to the keyboard and shifted his line of sight directly to the saxophones while comping behind their soli in “Asphalt Jungle.” It was evidenced again when the full band—directed by the drums—responded instinctively to Seth’s sudden change in tempo at the climax of “Autumn Leaves,” leading to a rousing half-time finish with the full ensemble. That every musician miraculously locked in immediately, even without any metronomic tip-off, showed that each member of the group responded unswervingly in their ‘oneness.’

It is not surprising that a commitment to active musical engagement became reinvigorated during performance, given the presence of a live audience. I observed a most emphatic example of this renewed vigor during performance through the interaction between Neil (who was a featured vocalist) and Liam (the tenor sax soloist) during their

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rendition of “Every Day I Have the Blues” at the *Hot Java Cool Jazz* Festival. Every time the band would perform (or rehearse) this piece, Liam would lock his eyes with Neil while he sang, directly responding to Neil’s phrases with supportive interjections of his own. That Liam held eye contact with Neil throughout their interaction indicated, at least visually, that Liam was committing himself to responding interactively with Neil rather than interjecting imposingly. They were in it together.

Auspiciously, many of the musicians conveyed that actively engaging with one another during performances led to more gratifying musical experiences—supporting the notion that enacting musical humility in this fashion was not merely the ‘right thing to do,’ musically speaking, but actually led to identifiable improvements in the band’s sociomusical dynamic. Bassist Micah reflected that engaging meaningfully with one another develops the collectivistic ethos of the band, wherein all members feel equally responsible for the cultivation of a gregarious musical experience. As he explained:

when everyone just plays their part—and of course we do different things [...]—but the soloists aren’t overly into themselves, and it’s more of a group effort, I think we play the best then, by *far*. I think it’s *such* a big difference because then other people *feel* like they’re part of the band, rather than just the *background*. And that’s definitely—especially in high school, kids don’t want to be left behind, and [they want to] be a part of it. And Grant Jazz Band’s kind of a big deal for a lot of people, so it’s—I think it definitely affects the way that a lot of people play.

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Besides Micah, saxophonist Neil was perhaps one of the members most committed to curating highly-developed experiences in which all members felt equally valued and contributing. He did this not only through supportive head nods and gestures (during both rehearsals and performances) that endorsed the active efforts of the band, but he reinforced his supportiveness by unfailingly performing with an animated fervor that communicated to onlookers that something very special was occurring on the bandstand. As Kyle recalled,

[Neil] definitely feels the music and I think he takes it on his shoulders to elevate the level of the band by feeling the music and getting everyone else into the groove. So, I think if we could have, you know, seventeen Neil's on stage all at once, the band would sound really good. And everybody watching in the audience would be like, "they're having a really good time!" So, if everybody could be like Neil and just kind of, you know...some people on stage look like they're not having any fun, you know? Just kind of sitting there and counting in their head. And Neil just—he exemplifies what jazz *should* be, you know? Having fun, just in the moment, you know?

**The definition.** Emerging directly from the data, and further supported by humility research, the first essential component of musical humility now becomes clear. Specifically involving the musical interactions of participants on an interpersonal level, the first element of musical humility is characterized by *purposeful musical engagement and collaboration*. I define this component as *a commitment toward shared musical collaboration in which the efforts of each participant are actively sought*. It includes within it

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any and all purposeful displays of ensemble collectivism, egalitarianism, communication, and groove.

### **Other-Orientedness**

Through my fieldwork, I identified a social disposition of other-orientedness as a second central component of musical humility, which reflected a temperament in which members minimized their self-focus in favor of a more selfless character. Other-orientedness was highly evident through fieldwork but was not an unexpected constituent to the musical humility construct given that most humility literature has identified other-orientedness as central to various forms of humility generally (e.g., Tangney, 2000; Davis et al., 2010; Worthington et al., 2017). Furthermore, it seems apparent that this domain and the first are closely tied to one another. Both are centered around interpersonal behaviors, but other-orientedness represents a more *social* embodiment of these attitudes, whereas the first component is specifically interested in resulting *musical* manifestations. Again, and as reflected in Figure 6.2, the boundaries between social and musical domains tended to blur in the context of a robust ensemble culture; the students' social lives were imbued with musical exchanges just as their musical collaborations were inextricably affected by social relations as well.

Whether it was actively encouraging the younger students to improvise during jam sessions or taking valuable time out of rehearsal to lead simple improvisation exercises for the less experienced players, Mr. Bowen's other-oriented approach as director of the ensemble appropriately modeled the ensuing behaviors that he expected from his students. As such, it could be argued that the ensemble's other-oriented spirit was largely a direct product of Mr. Bowen's efforts. Consequently, enacted manifestations of other-



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orientedness materialized in three manners: (a) open-mindedness, (b) valuing all contributions, and (c) possessing a ‘village mentality.’

**Open-mindedness.** Open-mindedness can take many forms, from being amenable to new ideas, having a willingness to consider alternative suggestions, and possessing the ability to negotiate held assumptions against others’ altering viewpoints and expertise. Baritone sax player Benji recognized the importance of open-mindedness in establishing a disposition of learnability, when he recognized before the year’s first master class, “[y]ou have to come willing to learn, and like, accept everything that they tell you.”

An open-mindedness not only seems to contribute to a perception of learnability (which will be discussed further as the next domain of musical humility), but also leads to a social willingness to engage in more cooperative musical exchanges as well. Bassist Micah pointed this out when he commented on how drummer Seth’s social disposition led to more meaningful musical potentials:

**Micah:** Honestly, I think it’s just a...[laughs], it’s gonna sound weird, but just *chill*.

Like, Seth is super chill, and he’s like, very open for everything.

**WJC:** Open-minded, you mean?

**Micah:** Yeah, and he can be like, “yeah!” to anything. If we try something new, he can be open to anything. I think that’s a big quality that makes everyone in the band a lot more at ease and able to just play.

Trombonist Angie articulated this as well, but in reference to the Matt Wilson performance in October:

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[Matt Wilson]’s got such this, kind of like, free-flowing personality kind of thing, just a “whatever goes, goes” kind of thing. But a lot of people in this band are like, “okay, we have to do it like *this*.” He just kind of brought it out really, like the fun, the excitement, the joy of it, really. And it was really fun.

Taken this way, open-mindedness seems to become a sort-of precursor to enacting the first component of musical humility. Of course, a free-spirited personality—at least to the degree in which Matt Wilson was able to embody it—is not necessarily required for a successful development of musical humility. But an ability and willingness to set aside one’s predispositions and engage openly with others seems to enable the more musical manifestations of musical humility to come to light.

**Valuing all contributions.** Once an environment of open-mindedness has been established, musicians must make further efforts to address, appreciate, and acknowledge the contributions of their peers. This requires a reducing of one’s self-focus (Tangney, 2000; Davis et al., 2010; Worthington et al., 2017) in a way that results in a social inclination toward others’ contributions over one’s own. Again, Mr. Bowen first modeled this temperament, and was in an optimal position to demonstrate how he might actively seek the contributions of his students in a democratic fashion rather than dictating his preferences in an authoritative way.

Mr. Bowen first demonstrated a valuation of others’ contributions by delivering specific compliments to those responsible for playing the inner voices, whose sound is perhaps most easily overlooked in a full ensemble setting. Importantly, his comments were

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not disingenuous to simply establish an illusion of open-mindedness; instead, he seemed to genuinely value the contributions of each student, regardless of their position in the band. Second, he actively developed a climate of openness to his students' creative ideas by establishing a relatively uninhibited environment where students could feel comfortable offering their creative suggestions as desired. Establishing this sort of dynamic surely required Mr. Bowen to develop a considerable degree of trust toward his students—a trust which likely emanated first from confidence in his students' musical expertise (see Kumar, 2018). For example, he demonstrated his trust and openness by listening unreservedly to Neil's suggestion to change the articulation of a phrase in the "Overture" movement of Ellington's *Jazz Nutcracker* for dramatic effect. Responding with, "I like that idea!" Mr. Bowen grabbed his pencil off his stand and marked in Neil's suggestion immediately. He modeled the same open-minded behavior to the brass after suggesting that a particular quarter note should be marked short on the Thad Jones tune "Tip Toe," but not before pleasantly telling the brass, "if you guys want to disagree with me, I'm fine with that."

The students successfully embodied Mr. Bowen's other-oriented behaviors as well (although it can't be known for sure from where the students' impetus for behaving in such a prosocial manner originated). Nonetheless, the interviewed band members seemed to agree that there was a sense that every member adequately valued each other's contributions in an other-oriented manner. As discussed, the lead players demonstrated this consistently through democratic leadership styles during sectionals, actively seeking the feedback of their peers and acknowledging their complementary strengths (e.g., section playing, improvisational ability). But a similar character was embodied by the "lower parts" as well, who Micah believed "support[ed] the lead players very well." For the most part, the

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members playing these less prominent parts (i.e., 2nds, 3rds, and 4ths) were able to eschew envy (an argued contributor to musical egoism, see Chapter 5) in favor of a more cooperative spirit. Even Simon, whose behavior was sometimes interpreted as reflecting envy, seemed to ultimately acknowledge the importance of such a prosocial outlook (even if the pull of envy was at times more powerful for him). After asking him what advantages he identified in cooperative environments (as opposed to a more authoritative atmosphere) during his loosely structured interview, he stated, “I guess more people get their voices heard. And our section sound is more like, a combination of our personalities, all of our playing styles, rather than one person’s playing style kind of printed on the rest.”

The same other-oriented dynamic existed among the trombone section. Angie shared during her interview that while Peyton is the lead trombonist, he willingly accepted input from the full section as well:

anyone can put any input in really. I mean, most of the time Peyton will have the final word, but you can always just be like—maybe he’ll suggest something and we’ll be like, “hey, actually, I think we should do a turn on that part instead of a shake” or something.

Especially when compared to the far more dramatic social dynamics within the trombone section the previous year, Angie saw the current section’s more egalitarian approach—in which Peyton never relinquished his leadership role but promoted a more horizontal hierarchy—as ultimately more favorable not only to the section’s success, but their social dynamic as well.

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Certainly, there can be a potential obstacle to each musician possessing such other-oriented attitudes as well: namely, that a ‘too many cooks in the kitchen’ scenario can undesirably occur because the decentralized leadership roles empower everyone to speak their mind equally. Of course, musicians can mindfully circumnavigate such tendencies through a prosocial spirit of cooperativeness; nonetheless it became a concern for many sections within the band who struggled with productivity because of an occasional stalemate of ideas. This was especially prevalent in the saxophone section, with Marcus possessing the ‘true’ leadership role as lead alto, but with Benji, Neil, Liam, Gio, and others speaking their minds equally as well. The climate developed in these situations was usually convivial and democratic; however, that social geniality occasionally led to diminished musical productivity because it sometimes made it difficult for the group to arrive at a final consensus. During my few observations of their sectionals, the saxophones were often able to overcome this issue by refocusing their ideas back to the ‘official’ section leader, Marcus. Nonetheless, their perpetual struggles were identified by many band members consistently throughout the year.

**Possessing a ‘village mentality.’** When it comes to one of the nation’s top jazz programs, who takes credit where credit is due? Certainly, determining what existed at the core of the Grant Jazz Band’s success was not a core consideration for this particular study, but it was something that has puzzled me since my interest in the Grant Jazz Band (and Mr. Bowen’s teaching) originated. Indeed, it is a question that has stymied many before me as well, including Wynton Marsalis himself, together with Jazz at Lincoln Center’s past Education Director Erika Floreska, who noted in the documentary *Chops*, “There’s

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definitely something up in the Seattle area—in the water—that just *breeds* great jazz ensembles” (Broder, 2007).

As I tried to understand (at least informally) what *was* going on at Grant that attributed to so much of their success, it became clear that musical humility radiated from the responses of all who were invested in the jazz program. Mr. Bowen, the students, the parents, and even the community at-large (who I would informally engage in conversation) all attributed the band’s success not to a single factor, but to several interrelated elements which provided an ultimate setting for achievement. Their responses represented a particular form of other-orientedness in which they supplanted a conceited or vain attribution of success with an acknowledgement in the multiplicity of contributions toward the band’s ultimate prosperity. In short, it was not Mr. Bowen’s musical prowess alone that the participants identified as singularly contributing to the band’s status, but rather some complex combination of support from parents and the booster club, socioeconomic privilege (which allowed students to purchase high quality instruments and take private lessons), the existing jazz scene within the Seattle area, the availability of high quality jazz teachers (thanks to the aforementioned jazz scene), and—facetiously perhaps—even the rainy climate that gave students nothing better to do than stay indoors and practice. In the end, it may be impossible to fully understand exactly how Grant High School (and several other high-performing high schools in the area) perform so well year after year; however, of the utmost importance to this study was *how* and *to what* the stakeholders of the program attributed their renown.

I refer to this specific type of expressed other-orientedness as the ‘village mentality,’ which references both some participants’ original words, as well as an African proverb (“it

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takes a village to raise a child”; Goldberg, 2016). From the beginning of fieldwork, Mr. Bowen made it very clear that much of the band’s reputation came from the existence of a feeder program within the school district, which enabled students to begin their studies from as early as sixth grade. Most of his students came from Peabody Middle School (and a few others from Jefferson), and Mr. Bowen mentioned the Peabody band director by name often, as if indebted to his role in the longitudinal success of the students. For example, during a performance of the *Jazz Nutcracker* performance in December, Mr. Bowen took a moment after the intermission to thank the Peabody director, stating that without him, “[he] may not have a jazz band.”

The students seemed to possess this other-oriented village mentality as well. Theo expressed that their achievements likely originated from some combination of Mr. Bowen’s high expectations, the middle school directors, and the lower band directors (JB2, and JB3, JB4), so that “by the time [the students] get to Mr. Bowen,” he posited, “they’ve already been cultured and built as a really good jazz musician with lots of exposure.” Greg agreed, but insisted more pointedly that the middle school directors probably don’t receive as much credit as they should for the GJB’s success:

I honestly think it starts with the middle school level, and I don’t know if they get enough credit. ‘Cause [the middle school director], he tries to do pretty much everything Bowen does with middle schoolers. He was throwing pretty much the hardest songs at us. And I think all the other middle schools like Jefferson do that too. And they really challenge you. And even if you can’t play it very well, you’ve

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tried, and you've already learned a little bit of what the next level is like, so you're ready when you get there....and all that just comes together in high school.

Most provocatively, Simon conjectured that he probably wouldn't even be a jazz musician whatsoever if it weren't for the environment that living and playing in the Seattle area had afforded him:

I don't think I'd *be* a jazz musician, probably. Well, getting into jazz was hearing it and deciding I liked it, but if I was in a program that didn't have the structure of this, and didn't have the resources available to really excel, that...I mean, it's hard to say for sure, but I don't think I would be doing...I don't think I'd be playing an instrument, honestly.

Because musical humility is obviously concerned with understanding how humility can become beneficial to musical experiences and conducive to the goals of music education wholly, possessing a 'village mentality' is a necessary—and seemingly distinct—form of other-orientedness that is particularly evident in music participation. Surely, Mr. Bowen and the students could have easily attributed their success solely to their hard work and exemplary teaching, which would have been an acutely self-focused assessment. However, they instead chose to humbly offer credit where they thought it was due—to the many factors that existed beyond their control. And in the process, they acknowledged their explicit privilege of being students at Grant High School as contributive to their success.



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**The definition.** The second component of musical humility is distinguished by an interpersonal temperament of other-orientedness and open-mindedness within social contexts. It requires an interpersonal stance in which musicians actively value the contributions of their peers and supervisors. Collectively, enactments of other-orientedness within the context of musical humility (at least as far as current fieldwork suggests) are identified by displays of (a) musical open-mindedness, (b) valuing others' contributions to musical activities and engagements, and (c) possessing a 'village mentality,' or acknowledgement of others' roles in one's musical success. The *other-orientedness* domain of musical humility is thus defined as *a general disposition of other-orientedness and open-mindedness in musical contexts, including an acknowledgement of others' roles in musical successes.*

### Lack of Superiority

The first two domains thus far have depicted the interpersonal manifestations of musical humility through musical and social spheres, respectively. They represent the ways in which musicians must interact with one another through the pursuit of decisive shared musical encounters and the practice of other-orientedness. The next two domains of musical humility will reflect the more intrapersonal side of the construct—that is, the more internal and personal processes of behaving humbly within a musical context. Though it may be obvious, it is important to note that intrapersonal behaviors are often difficult to observe because of their more internalized nature. While interpersonal domains are easily viewed within a rehearsal or performance context (because they are externally displayed by nature), intrapersonal characteristics can usually only be ascertained through inference (in the case of observation) or personal expression (in the case of interviews).

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Again, actively engaging oneself with the collective energies and efforts of the group does not alone make one musically humble. After all, one could plausibly possess the musical disposition to engage others in a musical collaboration but may selfishly take ultimate responsibility for the resulting creation. For a historical illustration, the great Art Blakey would certainly not take full responsibility for the creative output of his famous combo, The Jazz Messengers, even as the bandleader of the group. Although Blakey may have personally selected the personnel and written some arrangements, he would surely concede that the eminence of the group came not from him alone, but from the collective efforts of Lee Morgan, Benny Golson, Bobby Timmons, and Jymie Merrit together (to use one manifestation of the group as an example) (Gourse, 2002). What is additionally required beyond actively collaborating with others, then, is a social temperament of non-superiority with others.

Coming primarily from Davis' (2010; Davis et al., 2010, 2011, 2015) work on relational humility (which views the construct from an interpersonal lens), fieldwork further supported the notion that embodying a lack of superiority contributed to the development of a prosocial musical environment. Accordingly, I argue that the quieting of such dispositions is advantageous to the resulting prosocial relations within any musical context. Through fieldwork and interviews, it became evident that possessing a lack of superiority involved three subcomponents: (a) practicing non-attention-seeking behavior, (b) possessing an appropriate self-view, and (c) venerating the 'masters.' Presently, I will discuss each subcomponent to aid in defining the third component of musical humility.

**Non-attention-seeking behavior.** There is an important distinction between a musician who possesses a deferential, acquiescent disposition, and one who acknowledges

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his or her own skill without self-aggrandizing to others. The former represents an undesirable manifestation of non-attention-seeking behavior, where a lack of self-promotion reflects low self-esteem (whether real or performed). The latter disposition is one which contributes to a more positive portrayal of musical humility—one in which the musician's self-view is appropriate but not socially intrusive. Needless to say, it is this disposition which is most desirable within a music ensemble.

An exemplar of such a social temperament was characterized by lead trumpeter Greg. With his sound emblematically rising above all others in the band, one might imagine the likelihood of a lead trumpet player exulting his musical importance (and in following, his superiority). However, Greg carried himself with a charmingly unpretentious disposition through both his playing and his social interactions. Truly, he played with an airy posture and balanced tone which made it difficult for me to identify him as the lead trumpet player during the first rehearsal. But as I will further discuss in the next section, Greg did not accept a submissive social character at all, and instead acknowledged his skill appropriately while neglecting to turn attention toward himself. Especially when compared to Simon, Greg's non-attention-seeking behaviors became more clearly evident: Greg would warm up more purposefully by playing into his mouthpiece and performing long tones, while Simon would screech almost immediately in his high range. Furthermore, while Simon would sometimes look around the room to read reactions in response to his screeching (during warm-ups) or solo improvisations (during rehearsals), Greg consistently maintained a laser-like focus on Mr. Bowen and the music in front of him while playing.

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Although this subcomponent of musical humility is primarily concerned with social relations, manifestations inevitably found their way into musical domains as well. This is relatively unsurprising, given that with such a rich ensemble culture existing within and beyond the bandstand, musical and social manifestations of behaviors begin to meld together almost seamlessly. Nonetheless, during performances, the degree to which some musicians embodied their engagement with the music was occasionally interpreted as attention-seeking by some. Bassist Micah, for example, believed that tenor saxophonist Neil's constant engagement with the music seemed fake at times, as if he was trying to direct the spotlight toward himself. As he stated,

[his engagement is] just so much that it like, almost tunes everyone *down*, 'cause they're like, "ugh, okay, stop." Because it doesn't feel like it's genuine. [...] If it's always there, then it's like...I mean, it's great that there's energy there, but it's not building up the band, it's more of everyone looking at this one person.

Micah seemed to believe that a more appropriate enactment of in-performance engagement was personified by trumpeter Sebastian, because he uplifted the band without bringing attention toward himself. Thus, Sebastian's efforts were prosocial and other-oriented, never becoming self-aggrandizing or self-proclaiming. As Micah assessed,

Sebastian is into it, but he doesn't *overdo* it, but he also doesn't talk all the time. I think Sebastian a really good example of someone who really contributes to the

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band and really contributes to what we play—and how we play it, and energy—but he also doesn't like, overdo it.

Given the above examples of non-attention-seeking behavior in sum, they simply represent prosocial manifestations of ensemble participation, but not necessarily musical humility in full. Yet seemingly, when musicians reject the impulse to attract attention socially or musically, they enable and empower a more collaborative, other-oriented, and collectivistic ensemble culture to follow. By not bringing attention to himself, for example, Greg arguably empowered the rest of the trumpet section to take on individual leadership roles—which resulted in Sebastian and Theo openly making suggestions during sectionals instead of persistently yielding to Greg's final judgment. But to drive the point home most pointedly, Matt Wilson's non-attention-seeking disposition during his brief residency—starting with his dismissive “nah, no introductions necessary” comment at the start of the dress rehearsal and continuing with his unassuming entrance to the stage during the performance—arguably provided the scaffolding for the ensuing musical experience that the band experienced later that evening.

**Appropriate self-view.** Somewhat self-explanatorily, holding oneself in appropriate perspective has been seen as contributing notably to a humble character (Davis et al., 2010, 2011; Tangney, 2000; Worthington, 2017). Most members of the band seemed to hold such an appropriate self-view (at least as expressed during rehearsals), and this perspective not only contributed in a resulting sense of non-superiority, but an acknowledgement of others' complementary strengths as well. Trumpeter Kyle, for

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example, voiced his personal strengths, but within the context of his section (and ensemble) broadly, stating

I'm just a really good section player, that's kind of what my thing is. I'm not a soloist, I'm not really a lead player, but I'm very good at balancing my part well and style and whatever. So, that's kind of what I put everything on to get into this band. Last year I did play lead a bit in Jazz 2, but mostly I got into this band on my section playing.

The same sentiment was echoed by Theo, who similarly believed that his strengths as a section player was most important to the band. As he expressed, "I've understood I can't always play the high notes. I'm a decent soloist, but probably like second or third string kind of guy. So, it's my job is to be a really strong section player."

Within the same section, Sebastian also possessed an appropriate self-view, believing that his skill came not from some sort of natural ability, but was developed over time through hard work and dedication:

I think [I] just work really hard, and I'm really motivated. I don't really know—I don't think I have any like, really extra music talents, like perfect pitch or something. [...] Just kind of—I just work at it a whole lot. 'Cause all throughout middle school I was one of the top people. In concert band, I was like... first chair basically the entire year.

Notably, the above responses here are not at all submissive or self-defacing. Folded within Sebastian's commentary, for instance, is the healthy acknowledgement of how hard

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work led to his success. It is within this healthy understanding of personal achievement that an appropriate valuation of one's self-view exists. Greg's interview reflected a similar mindset, in which an acknowledgement of personal achievement was not deflated for the acquisition of humility (which outdated associations of humility to modesty may falsely promote), but instead was acknowledged proudly within an appropriate self-evaluation. After asking about how he developed as a trumpet player, Greg humbly explained:

**Greg:** I think literally just [the] amount of playing. I've actually figured this out, 'cause in sixth grade, we all came in pretty even, nobody could play better than anyone else. Then [...] I was playing 3<sup>rd</sup> [trumpet] in the jazz band for a while [...] and then we had one song that had a D in it, a high D—

**WJC:** In middle school?

**Greg:** In sixth grade! [Laughs]. [...] And then I was the one person who was able to play that. And then instantly I had more time playing since sixth grade. And that just put me more and more ahead, I think.

Of even greater interest here is that Greg seemed to attribute quite confidently his position as lead trumpet not to general musical ability, but to the fact that he was simply able to perform one particular task (playing a high D) better than others. The rest, he recognized, was history. As such, his self-view seemed to originate from acknowledging the apparent role that luck played in his musical 'fortune'—a mindset that according to Murphy (2017), is preferred by humble people. As Greg went on to say, "playing high was pretty much the only thing I could do that was better. And I was probably worse than everybody

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else at some of the lower stuff back then.” Favorably for the section, this understanding of Greg’s more-or-less singular ability contributing to the acquisition of his lead role was shared supportively by others in the section as well. Theo recognized,

**Theo:** [Greg’s] just...like ever since 6th grade when our junior jazz band—he’s just been able to play ridiculously high. So, he’s just sort of gotten the parts, and he’s sort of just been, for seven years, he’s been molded into a lead trumpet player.

**WJC:** Mmhmm. And never became arrogant about it.

**Theo:** Never became arrogant about it. [He] just was like, “I guess this part has more ledger lines than yours.” It’s just sort of, “okay! I’ll do my job.”

Finally, considering the egoistic pull of envy that seems to interrupt a healthy self-evaluation, it was notable that neither Kyle, Sebastian, nor Theo expressed any sort of envy toward Greg (Simon did so gesturally, but not verbally; see Chapter 5). They all understood that each had their own strengths—whether that was playing high or playing exceptionally well within the section—and none of these strengths superseded the others. That is, it did not matter to them that Greg earned the lead spot because of his high range abilities, because they all had complementary strengths as well that contributed holistically to the section’s strength. As Kyle put it, “...I think it’s more than just playing first trumpet and playing the high part. It’s...taking the responsibility of improving the section and...you know, boosting everyone around you.”

**Venerating ‘the masters.’** Adopting a disposition of non-superiority often meant reminding the students of their relative inferiority to the ‘masters’ within the jazz canon.



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Certainly, this emergent subtheme seemed to represent a double-edged sword that I needed critically analyze in order to understand whether it was used to promote musical humility (by helping students recognize their self-view in reference to more experienced professionals) or musical egoism (by reminding students of their ultimate inferiority in comparison to the exalted pioneers of the art form). Occasions where referencing jazz masters reflected the promotion of musical humility were seen when students channeled the playing style and tradition of the historical big bands and musicians they were attempting to emulate. In these occasions, students did not fall into the trap of considering themselves valueless in comparison to the ‘masters’ (which would reflect a deflated, non-empowering disposition), but rather adopted the masters’ musical models as devices for unpretentiously improving their own playing. This more uplifting approach was commonly endorsed by Mr. Bowen (as well as the master class clinicians and Matt Wilson), who would regularly make reference to the historical greats of the art form as a way of empowering students to work toward their own personal definitions of musical greatness.

On the other hand, comparisons to the ‘masters’ reflected a more problematic gesture of elitism when it resulted in students ‘losing face’ from such comparisons. For example, during a mid-September master class when a clinician asked second-string bassist Ed which professional bassists he listens to, Ed struggled to name anyone in particular, leading to a momentary ‘loss of face.’ The next day, Mr. Bowen empathically admitted that it is like a “kiss of death” in the field to not know the ‘greats’ offhand. In this way, having a strong knowledge of the ‘masters’ endorses a sort-of elitism which separates the ‘well-educated’ jazz musician from those who lack such contextual knowledge. Another prime example of this occurred when Mr. Bowen asked Simon if he could identify from what

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famous jazz tune a closing lick originated at the end of Ellington's trumpet/saxophone soli in "Asphalt Jungle." That Simon could not recognize the direct quote from Ellington's familiar "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo" melody led Mr. Bowen to vocalize a disappointed "hmmm," and Simon to slightly lose face as a result.

The educative and problematic considerations behind making perpetual references to musical masters of the past is ultimately a discussion best saved for future discourse. Unquestionably, students must recognize the historical lineage within which they perform. Yet it seems evident that the degree to which a reverence toward past musical icons can be used as a tool to remind students of their inadequacy has significant implications for how successfully a climate of musical humility can be sustained and cultivated within such an environment. Simply put, reference to the masters promotes musical humility when utilized as a device to uplift and empower, but promotes elitism when used to debase one's abilities and efforts.

By and large however, acclaiming the genius of the masters is generally celebrated within the jazz tradition, with young musicians spending much of their early years studying the history of the music, listening to famous recordings, and transcribing their heroes' solos (Berliner, 1994). Indeed, assuring in a sense a reverence for the preeminent musicians in the field, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) selects a handful of jazz musicians each year to be named to a growing list of *NEA Jazz Masters*. As the NEA Jazz Masters website states,

the NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship is the highest honor that our nation bestows on jazz artists. Each year since 1982, the program has elevated to its ranks a select

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number of living legends who have made exceptional contributions to the advancement of jazz (National Endowment for the Arts, n.d.).

At the time of this writing, 152 jazz musicians have been inducted into this prestigious program. It cannot be understated by any means, then, how substantial the custom of revering the masters is within the jazz tradition, and how it has been historically utilized as one of the most original forms of jazz education—long before the music entered the academic institution (Berliner, 1994).

**The definition.** The third component of musical humility is concerned with a disposition of non-superiority with others through primarily social interactions. Again, these social interactions will blend into musical manifestations as well, but the establishment of a musical humility rooted in a non-superior standpoint first seeks that musicians consider their lack of superiority over others from a relational perspective. As such, the *lack of superiority* component of musical humility is defined by *a dispositional lack of superiority over others based on one's perceived musical strengths and abilities*. It includes within it (a) any departments in which musicians decline to bring attention toward themselves, (b) a capacity for musicians to view themselves appropriately in the context of others, and when carefully interpreted, (c) an appropriate celebration of the revered 'masters' within a given musical tradition.

### **Acknowledgements of Shortcomings & Learnability**

When a musician intrapersonally showed humility through a musical exchange, it most commonly reflected the musician's acknowledgement of his or her deficiencies and room for growth. Appropriately, plentiful humility research supports this mindset as well

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(Tangney, 2000; Templeton, 1997; Worthington, 2017). Furthermore, this acknowledgement was necessarily accompanied by a subsequent sense of personal learnability (Davis et al., 2011; Owens et al., 2013). Crucially, learnability is central to the domain because without it, one's understanding of their shortcomings could be handled with derision and denial (to the egoist) or helplessness (to the meek). Instead, learnability accepts the understanding that the musician has identifiable shortcomings but nonetheless possess the potential to overcome them through effort and practice.

**Director-promoted.** Mr. Bowen typically helped students realize their shortcomings in one of two ways: either in an uplifting and empowering style, or in a slightly more squelching manner. With regard to the former, when students encountered their own shortcomings, he paternally offered words of encouragement to help them understand that growth was a necessary part of the journey toward becoming a jazz musician. For example, after the November jam session, Mr. Bowen complimented lead trombonist Peyton for making his first appearance at the Grass Fed Café, acknowledging his desire to develop his improvisational skills after so many years of being too fearful to participate in the monthly jams. Mr. Bowen supported Peyton's insecurities positively, saying, "We tend to think you get four years to get good. Well no! We get our *lives* to get good!" His comment served to communicate to Peyton—a senior—that although it took him four years of high school to find his way to the jam session bandstand, it is never too late for him to develop musically, and that his participation perhaps initiated the start of his continued growth as an improviser. Propitiously, Peyton would later perform a trombone solo during the *Hot Java Cool Jazz* festival in a packed house at the Paramount Theatre just four months later.

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On the other side of the coin, Mr. Bowen additionally sought to help his students recognize their own shortcomings by civilly chiding the higher-performing and more self-assured members as he deemed necessary. For example, at the final dress rehearsal of the *Jazz Nutcracker* concert (which they had played for elementary students the day before), Mr. Bowen was keen to address some of the soloists' more brazen, showboating playing, which he thought reflected some self-assured, risk-taking decisions, but which did not always take their own musical limitations into consideration. The wording of his criticisms was always tactful and supportive, but nevertheless encouraged them to play within their known limitations:

All of you soloists! You are the only one who knows how far you can push yourself, whether that's in terms of range or volume, or number of notes [...] or whatever it is. You're the only one who knows kind of where your limit is, as far as when it starts to become unmusical. I would just encourage you guys to just be more aware of where you're starting to stretch yourself beyond where it sounds musical. And I don't in any way mean that I don't want you to be exciting. I think a great example of the perfect edge was Simon yesterday in the second assembly. You came out with a *burning* solo—you came in high, and you burned through the whole thing, but I never felt like you were out of control of what you were doing. So that's—to me, that's the edge you want to ride. And if you're going for high notes and they don't sound like actual notes, then maybe you want to just back off on that idea a little bit and create something that sounds more musical.

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Moreover, knowing that the students were constantly seeking his approval, Mr. Bowen seemed to believe that in order to promote their sense of learnability, he at times needed to withhold his validation of their efforts. Of course, he shared his excitement for the band's exceptional sound consistently and openly, but would nevertheless strategically keep the students vying for his approval even when he truly thought they were already performing at or near their highest level. I became aware of his shrewd tactic after a late-November rehearsal when I elatedly expressed that the band had been "swinging hard" over the past several rehearsals. He agreed, but with a sideways smile added that he could not (yet) let his students know that he thought so. He followed the same strategy after reporting to the students that he had attended the winter concert of one of the 'rival' bands, and that there were a number of ways in which that band was surpassing the Grant Jazz Band. To the end of his warning he added, "we can't get complacent!" It was only later, when he and I spoke one-on-one that Mr. Bowen shared that he actually thought Grant sounded better than the other school on-the-whole, but that he wanted to keep the group from becoming too self-satisfied.

**Student-expressed.** Generally, the student-musicians of the Grant Jazz Band seemed to have possessed an exceptionally accurate view of themselves throughout the year. Perhaps this perspective was fueled by their rejection from the *Essentially Ellington* competition the previous year, but in one way or another, each of the interviewed students expressed their relative need to continue aspiring toward growth as a necessary step in their musical progress. In its simplest form, this acknowledgement contributed to the students' growth simply because it led them to be more welcoming and open-minded of criticism. Third-string drummer Jeff embodied this mindset when he was placed in the 'hot

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seat' for nearly fifteen minutes during the year's first masterclass in September. The clinicians critiqued his playing extensively in front of the entire band (as well as a handful of visitors and parents), which Jeff handled professionally despite the emotional toll it was clearly having on him in-the-moment (as evidenced by his unconfident responses and uncomfortable nods in response to the clinicians' questions). The next day, when Mr. Bowen asked him how it felt to be put on the spot, Jeff smiled awkwardly and said, "you get the sense that there is something that you need to work on." Nodding approvingly, Mr. Bowen replied, "Appreciate how you handled that. We all have to go through those uncomfortable moments."

Fortunately, most of the students' sense of learnability was not tested publicly as it was for Jeff. Nonetheless, the interviewed students all seemed to recognize some degree of shortcoming to their own ability—to varying degrees, of course. While some musicians were somewhat flippant about what they have yet to learn (for example, third-string pianist Jeremy somewhat apathetically saying "I'm definitely not the strongest link, I'm not going to say I am..."), most seemed to adequately acknowledge their strengths in relation to their limitations.

Trumpeter Theo, for example, seemed to understand his shortcomings (in comparison to a lead player), but carried them with a proud and empowering outlook, because he believed his shortcomings were complemented by his relevant strengths—strengths which made him an integral member of the jazz band: "I've understood I can't always play the high notes. I'm a decent soloist, but probably like second or third string kind of guy. So, it's my job to be a really strong section player."

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A similar sentiment was expressed by trumpeter Sebastian, who carried a slightly less confident assessment of his importance to the band. Sebastian recognized himself adequately as one of the band's top soloists (especially during the previous year), but with Simon being accepted into the band this year, he seemed to see his soloing ability as no longer being a matchless contribution. Knowing that only twenty-five of the twenty-eight members of the band would be allowed to participate in *Essentially Ellington* (as per the official competition rules), Sebastian weighed his expendability to the band:

The way I see it this year is that if you cut me, you'd be fine with Simon. If you cut Simon, you'd be fine with me. But I think Simon is a bit more proficient at playing trumpet than I am.

While Sebastian's words here may sound slightly disparaging, his continued commentary was reflective of a mature musician with a keen sense of his personal strengths as well as an understanding of how valuable those strengths are in particular settings. He went on to say,

He has a higher range than me, and I think he's more proficient technically than I am at this point. I think where I'm stronger is more in my ideas and jazz understanding of creating solos, but I don't know if that's *as* important in a big band setting.

Sebastian uncovered a crucial element of acknowledging one's shortcomings in this statement: he did not meekly measure himself as 'not as good as' Simon broadly, but rather



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considered whether his genuine soloing strengths are equally as applicable *in the particular setting* as Simon's high-range strengths. Sebastian's acknowledgement, then, does not result in the deprecating loss of one's self-view, but rather a healthy and mature acknowledgement of personal ability. According to these words, Sebastian would likely see himself as confidently capable during a jam session or small combo performance, but merely questioned the utility of his improvisational skill in the particular setting of a jazz band.

Promisingly, Simon would likely hold a similar assessment as Sebastian. Where Sebastian believed he fell short in comparison to Simon's overall musical proficiency (which he largely attributed to a recent embouchure change), Simon conversely self-identified a weakness in his improvisational ability:

I just think I need more experience soloing, especially. They've [speaking of Sebastian, Liam, and Jeff] all had more experience soloing than I have and more vocabulary than I have. But I'm working hard, and I hope that in a few years I'll be in that upper level rather than *close* to upper level.

Of further significance, note that Simon's final words here reflected the subsequent identification of *learnability* which prevents his acknowledgement of shortcomings from becoming subsequently subjected to derisive self-thoughts. Rather, Simon viewed his so-conceived 'deficits' as only temporary and surmountable through time and practice.

This pervasive sense of learnability seems to coincide (at least anecdotally for now), with a resultant sense of motivation among the students. If a student is capable of

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identifying his or her shortcomings but is unable or reluctant to recognize personal learnability within that task, it will likely cease progress because the student will recognize no ability to overcome these self-perceived weaknesses. This aligns strongly with notions of self-efficacy, as championed by Bandura (1986), which is chiefly concerned with the interaction between one's evaluation of a task and their self-perceived ability to complete it. As such, a sense of learnability is crucial for enacting the motivational impetus for students to continue working toward their goals. For example, Theo willingly recognized his limitations in the band (which was countered by his strengths as a section player) but recognized a self-motivation to continue working hard for the opportunity to perform at the *Essentially Ellington* competition. Because (at least) three musicians would need to be cut from this 25-member group, Theo knew that he could minimize his chances of being cut through diligent practice:

You're self-motivated because you're saying, "okay, I'm not good enough." It might also help that you have in the back of your mind, "yeah, I'm trying to get to *Ellington*, but I also know that we're three people over." So, three people are going to stay home and you're like, "I don't want to be staying home, I want to go to that festival..."

Positively, it seemed to be this sense of learnability that pervasively changed the attitude of the musicians toward more productive ends. Rather than wallowing in their rejection from *Essentially Ellington* the previous year, they knew that they could earn their championship status once again if they committed themselves to personal and collective

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regrowth. Indeed, lead trumpeter Greg expressed that the rejection gave them the renewed drive to work harder the following year: “...it was like, ‘ok, maybe we just need to up our level a lot just to get into the festival.’ Mostly, I’d say it was a push from behind instead of a slap in the face.”

Finally, synthesizing one’s acknowledgement of shortcomings and motivation to learn with an overall appropriate self-view, Simon expressed that even when ‘losing’ a competition (to him, failing to earn 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> place), a humble mindset will acknowledge that sometimes, certain bands will simply be more high-performing than theirs, and as long as they put forth their best effort, the outcome should not detract from how successful they view themselves:

I mean, usually there’s no *losing* a competition [...] If your idea of losing is not getting into the top three, I guess it kind of depends on the competition, ‘cause it’s like, you hear a bunch of other bands and it’s like, “wow, these other bands are really good, really talented, we can’t really match them,” then I guess it’s not that bad. But if it’s a competition where you know...like, we didn’t play our best, and we could’ve won but we didn’t? Then it’s disappointing. But it’s motivation to improve.

**The definition.** The fourth domain of musical humility surrounds an intrapersonal disposition in which musicians possess an understanding of their own musical limitations and shortcomings. As intrapersonal behaviors, enacted displays of these behavior were most typically addressed through interviews as students reflected upon their musical strengths and abilities. Mr. Bowen promoted a mindset reflective of this component either

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by supportively reminding students of the ‘lifelong journey’ of learning jazz music, or through slightly more sobering reminders of their need to acknowledge their room for growth. The students prominently recognized their own shortcomings, and more importantly, their personal ability to overcome these shortcomings through an empowering and motivating sense of learnability. In effect, the *acknowledgement of shortcomings / learnability* component of musical humility is defined as *an accurate assessment of one’s musical abilities and an acknowledgement of one’s continued potential for musical growth and development.*

### Healthy Pride

The emergence of musical humility appears to comprise of both interpersonal and intrapersonal domains, as well as seemingly distinguishable social and musical domains (although these domains appear to be rather unfixed). However, the four components of musical humility still seem to leave a number of issues unresolved. First, how could musical humility be explained in a way that would appropriately endorse the venerable efforts of the musical ‘elites’ (such as the high-achieving program at Grant High School)? Through what lens would musical humility adequately reflect the quest for ‘greatness’ in a way that would not effectively reject the legitimacy of its pursuit? And conversely, what kept musical humility from simply becoming a music-specific form of deference and modesty which would promote a diminished self-esteem and self-view?

It seemed, after all, that the members of the Grant Jazz program were, on the whole, able to convincingly embody the ethos of musical humility but without sacrificing their elite identity or succumbing to a deferent mindset. As a result, it became apparent that more was in play here than a mere four-part structure of interpersonal/intrapersonal and

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musical/social domains. Indeed, it became clear that there was an empowering spirit within the band that seemingly imbued the overarching presence of musical humility: a correspondingly enabling spirit of *healthy pride*.

I purposefully include the word ‘healthy’ in this final component because obviously, pride on its own carries a looming threat of turning into egoistic vanity. Recall Tucker’s (2016) assessment that pride may both live auspiciously within the humble person but disparagingly within the egoist. Therefore, healthy pride is neither deferential nor excessively proud; it is maintained within a level of social acceptability. That is, the pride that one possesses neither falls dramatically short nor surpasses what might be considered acceptable within a given society or group<sup>27</sup>. To use Tucker’s (2016) words, pride is simply the “confidence that comes from humility” (p. 11).

Despite the resounding need for an appropriately ‘prideful’ element to the musical humility definition, empirical humility research at-large has generally neglected to acknowledge its importance to the humble person (Tucker’s argument is purely theoretical). Nevertheless, upon deeper consideration it might make perfect sense for musical humility to be the most appropriate form of humility to require a component of pride, given the degree to which performativity is central to the construct. Truly, the humility of a performing musician is frequently put on display and is publicly observable—something that makes it characteristically unique from other forms of humility.

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<sup>27</sup> In line with the now outdated but nevertheless relevant research of Hofstede (1980), what behaviors might be considered ‘acceptable’ within a given society will differ dramatically, especially in regard to the culture and society’s treatment of authority (hierarchical versus egalitarian), degree of individualism and collectivism, and so on. Knowing what constitutes ‘acceptably’ healthy pride within a society, then, is often subjective and can usually be ascertained by social cues.

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From such a standpoint, possessing healthy pride not only allows for musicians to practice the courage and conviction to proclaim their most authentic artistic being for others to view (and possibly judge), but as we have seen, it allows for unforeseen potentials of creative energy and collaborative vigor to come to life. While musical egoism may produce similar results (albeit undesirably), the cost is arguably the loss of a truly collectivistic experience (as seen repeatedly in Chapter 5). On the other side of the coin, however, musical deference perhaps leads artists to fail to make bold and impressionable creative choices. Meek musicians will be less likely to take musical risks which would otherwise carry the potentials for audaciously emboldening musical results. This was the sentiment to which Wynton Marsalis referred during his one-on-one Q&A session at the 2011 *Essentially Ellington* festival (see Chapter 1).

**Director modeled.** To Mr. Bowen, the development of healthy pride started with the cultivation of an empowering ensemble environment. Indeed, from my perspective, student empowerment seemingly became central to his teaching approach by constantly encouraging students to speak their minds and advocate for themselves both musically and socially. As he apparently understood, cultivating empowerment enabled for the collaborative goals of the group to become realized. Otherwise, without feeling empowered, young musicians would likely feel unauthorized to make such bold musical choices to confidently enact the *purposeful musical engagement and collaboration* component of musical humility. On multiple occasions, for example, Mr. Bowen was keen to remind the musicians that if they were unhappy with something in the music, it was their job to speak up about it.

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In addition to cultivating an empowering musical atmosphere, the musicians all carried an individual responsibility to play at their highest level in order to further enable a collaborative spirit to come to fruition. After all, engaging with one another musically may promote the collectivistic spirit of the band, but those efforts become unsettled unless each member is committed to maximizing their personal musicianship as well. As Mr. Bowen encouraged early on in the year, “it takes pride in your section!” Expanding upon this notion, he further expounded the sense of pride and work ethic that ought to be embodied by all musicians in the group, rather than just the leads and/or soloists:

I mean, you could have great lead players, but then if there’s not a support beneath that—with the same level of execution, and intensity, style, that the lead players have, well the band will sound very good. It’ll sound like three, four individuals, and then a bunch of...players that aren’t really contributing. So, everybody has to have the concept[s], and everybody has to have the *ability* to address the concepts. And how do you get the ability? [Student: Practice!]. You gotta work at it! There has to be some kind of a work ethic. It’s not just gonna come to you without doing anything. It’s easier for some, but if it’s really going to be done at the highest level, everybody has to work at it. Then there’s that sense of *pride*: “oh man, we were really—really *everybody* was on top of it.” In the case of where we have players doubled on parts, it should be as if one person could step out and the other person could plug in—and although it would be different because they’re different people, there would be no lowering of the level of playing.

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Of course, it should go without saying that the development of healthy pride begins with the development of healthy self-confidence. Surely, confidence did not need to be further fostered among all of the musicians, many of whom already carried themselves quite confidently (but not necessarily arrogantly) to begin with. But on one occasion, after discussing the Matt Wilson concert, Liam raised the issue of how some musicians' lacking sense of confidence became noticeable in the first half of their concert. He suggested that their solos were "not bad, necessarily, but tentative"—which trombonist Angie seemed to take as a personal affront (according to her facial reaction), being one of self-identified unconfident soloists of the concert. Mr. Bowen responded affirmatively, stating that "we need to continue to foster confidence."

Mr. Bowen actively seemed to work on developing the students' confidence levels during rehearsals and after performances by delivering specific compliments to individuals (as well as the band generally) in a gregarious fashion. It is no secret, of course, that the students are constantly working toward the approval of Mr. Bowen (which many students explicitly confirmed during interviews). Likely aware of this, Mr. Bowen's delivery of uplifting compliments was employed discriminatingly (indeed, recall the occasions when he felt like he could not yet let his students know how positively he felt about their playing). In effect, whenever he did offer a meaningful compliment, the true weight of it fully landed. To offer one particularly heartfelt interaction as an example, Mr. Bowen was apparently so impressed with the band's playing after the *Jazz Nutcracker* performance that he could only express his pride through an earnest childhood memory with his father:



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Really great job of stepping and playing some solos that were, you know, I would say on a *spectacular* level. [...] I just throw that word out there—my dad, we would go up to what we called the [inaudible] Recreation Center. So, we had a cemetery right next to our house. And we wanted to be respectful of the people who were buried down under, so you don't want to step on that six-foot-by-two-foot section of grass where there's a headstone. But we would go up there and we would either throw a football, or we would throw an Airbee, or we'd throw a Frisbee, or whatever we had [...] And he would give me extra points for spectacular catches. And a *spectacular* catch—I mean, you're expected to catch it—but a *spectacular* catch would be, for instance, if you're diving over the gravestone and you make the catch but you don't actually drag your feet on the grave and disrespect the person who's buried there. So, to me, spectacular catches—that's something that's above and beyond just catching [...], but in a spectacular way. Maybe it's one-handed, maybe it's behind the back, maybe it's under the leg, maybe you're falling over backwards. [...] We all know what those things are in basketball—somebody makes a great dunk [...], or football—we see it all the time, too. All kinds of sports, we recognize what is spectacular. I think there should be the same kind of recognition for what goes on with a jazz solo, or with the playing of a part in a jazz band. It's more than just doing a job. It's actually taking something to a point of artistry and expression and personality that becomes *really impactful* for those of us who get to hear it, whether that's the audience or just us in the band. I think there were a lot of really spectacular things that went on.

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Furthermore, naming students individually, Mr. Bowen's compliments would always be specifically curated to the musician and often pinpointed something particular that he thought elevated the playing of the band on-the-whole. For example, immediately following his story of what constituted a 'spectacular' solo, Mr. Bowen singled out lead drummer Seth:

Seth, I would give you a "Nutcracker Kudos" as well. [...] You really took the band to another level—a heightened level—of excitement when you played. And that's *really* what we need, especially from that drum chair. When you kicked off "Peanut Brittle [Brigade]" yesterday, that was *slammin'*. I told you yesterday—because it went *right* from a burning solo, right into the kickoff, and then the brass came in, and the brass came in with such authority because you had set up all that excitement. That was really awesome.

In perhaps the most striking display of actively cultivating the students' pride, Mr. Bowen sought to often remind students of their pedigree within one of the nation's top bands through constant reminders of the legacy that the band carries. This is clearly evidenced by the accumulation of trophies around the band room and music wing, as well as posters from notable jazz concerts and festivals (including prestigious international jazz festivals and many *Essentially Ellington* posters), but Mr. Bowen additionally promoted the legacy of the group in his teaching as well. Especially earlier in the year, he often used past recordings of the Grant Jazz Band as models for the present band and would wax nostalgically about the alumni. For example, after one occasion in which he played a 1999

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recording of “Autumn Leaves,” he listed off the names of the soloists (from memory) on the recording. He explained why he chose to do so:

Those names, they don’t mean a thing to you. What I’m trying to build for you is a connection to the history of great players at Grant High School. Maybe in the future, some director will be here, and he’ll hear a recording of you [points to Gio]. And he’ll speak to his band in twenty years, say, “Man, Gio Hoang played this solo back in 2017 and it set the bar for all the other alto players from then on. I’m trying to help you build that connection that’s been a thread in our program.

Notably, Mr. Bowen’s purposeful ‘lionizing’ of Grant alums in order to develop a healthy dose of pride is the practice of many successful music teachers. Borrowing from language that Kingsbury’s used in his ethnography of a music conservatory, Montemayor (2008) refers to this seemingly characteristic behavior of high-performing groups as the “perpetualization of the cult” (to use the term amiably). Indeed, Mr. Bowen’s comments uplifted the group’s pride to pursue the greatness that their predecessors had already attained and upheld.

**Student expressed.** The healthy pride component of musical humility accepts that students are worthy of their accolades and emboldens them to take appropriate satisfaction in their personal achievements. Studying students’ faces in response to Mr. Bowen’s compliments during rehearsals, it seemed that this was often a struggle for many students, who often wore blank, expressionless faces as they would stoically nod in response to Mr. Bowen’s praise. From the perspective of musical humility, this struck me as

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problematic—surely, no definition of musical humility would willingly assess such deferential behaviors as desirable or necessary. After all, it was clear that the students' stoic faces reflected a purposeful attempt to not respond arrogantly or cockily to compliments, but the result was a clearly uncomfortable display of modesty that did not appear to be empowering to the social dynamics of the group. As such, further support for the need to embolden students' sense of personal pride was identified as inextricable from musical humility.

While the recognized deficiency of healthy pride influenced its interpreted need within the musical humility definition, there were occasional displays of pride that promisingly demonstrated how it might be compellingly possessed. Third trombonist Arnold embodied such an individual balance of self-pride earnestly, nodding his head spiritedly in response to compliments offered by Mr. Bowen and giving high-fives or bumping fists to his peers after electrifying solos—yet never appearing to be arrogant or pompous. Similarly healthy responses to praise were practiced by lead trumpeter Greg, third trumpeter Kyle, lead pianist Craig, and alto saxophonists Marcus and Gio, and others.

Healthy self-pride was also evident with trumpeter Sebastian, who would close his eyes and quietly nod to himself after a stirring solo with a small, sideways smirk—a self-acknowledging gesture that no one could else in the band could see (besides Mr. Bowen and myself), given his physical location on the bandstand. As he expressed during his interview, Sebastian even preferred to view competitions not as opportunities to establish bragging rights, but as an opportunity to receive personal validation for the hard work that he put into his musical development: “I mean, it’s not like, ‘we won this festival, so we’re

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better than you' kind of thing. I guess [it's about] pride and just knowing that all the practice you put in paid off."

Finally, and as discussed in the context of Mr. Bowen, the possession of pride arguably became essential to the band's pursuit of championship status because it elicited a work ethic rooted in empowered collective responsibility. Importantly, this possession of pride must avoid becoming excessive and hubristic, which is identified as a core threat of musical egoism. To capture this student-practiced enactment of empowered pride powerfully, consider lead pianist Craig's comment when the band debated whether or not they should give up another weekend to re-record some of their audition recordings for the *Essentially Ellington* competition. After listening to the recordings produced the previous weekend, the group considered whether they would be sufficient to earn them a spot as one of the fifteen finalist bands. After a few moments of silence to consider their options, Craig finally spoke up:

I think it's just, like, bottom line, if we think we can do better, then we have to do it.

Because if we don't think we can get a better take of that, then you know...that's it. But you know, if there's room, where we know we can do it, like, why wouldn't we do it?

**The definition.** The fifth and final component of musical humility exists as an encompassing possession of appropriate pride, which embraces the four other components of the definition holistically. It dispels the potential for behaviors to become either deferent and self-effacing, or overly conceited and vain. Displays of a healthy self-esteem were enacted by both the director and the student musicians but seemed to be actively

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cultivated through Mr. Bowen's efforts to establish an ensemble culture rooted in pride (even if it occasionally slipped into elitist pride; see Chapter 5). As a result, the *healthy pride* component of musical humility is defined as *the possession of an appropriate degree of self- and ensemble-pride, including self-confidence, which enables musicians to engage meaningfully and confidently in musical collaborations.*

### Musical Humility: An Emergent Definition

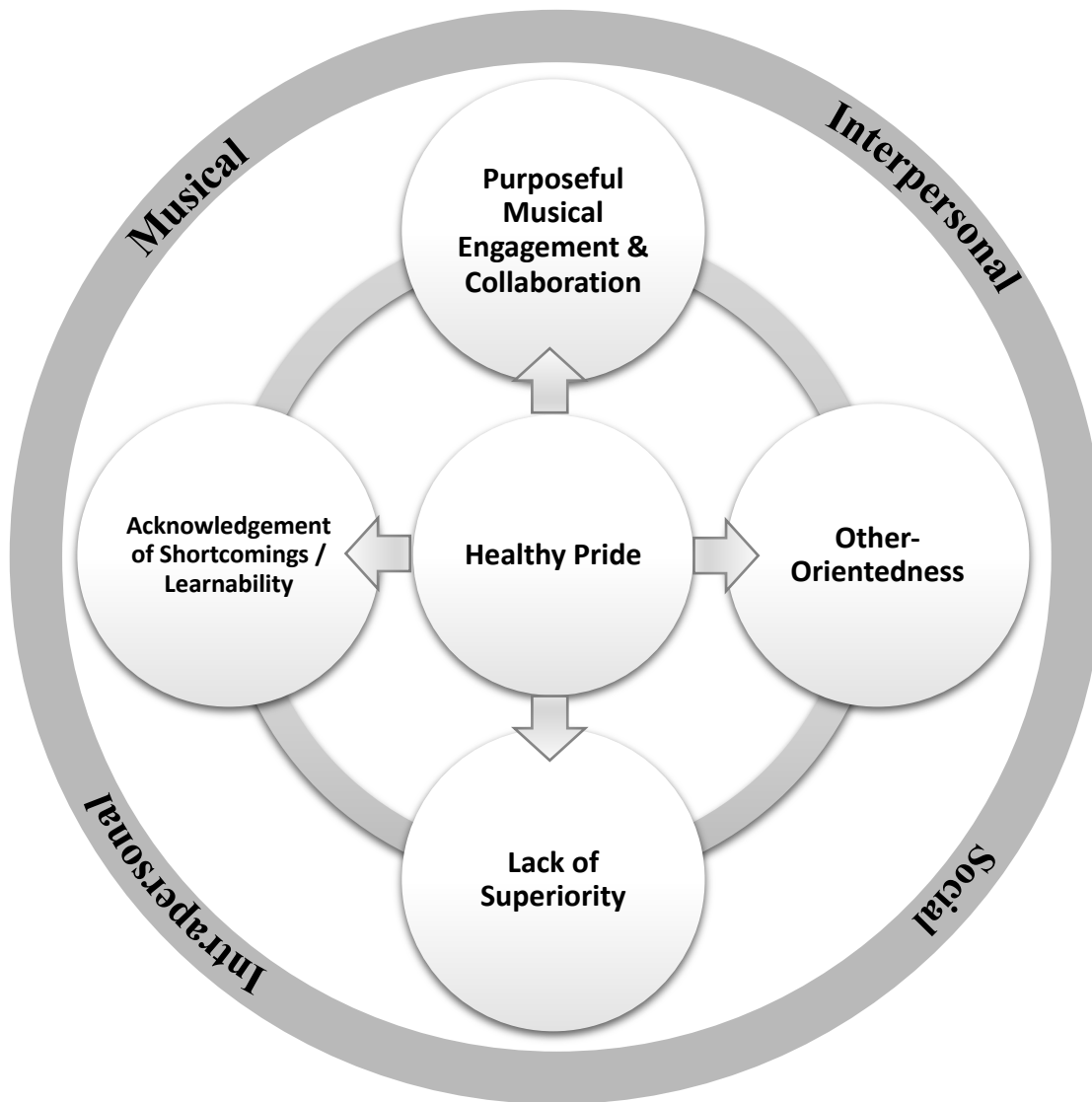
Comprehensively, musical humility emerged to comprise of five separate components which seemingly interact fluidly with one another. Involving both interpersonal and intrapersonal domains as well as musical and social domains, the first four parts of the construct include (a) *purposeful musical engagement and collaboration*, (b) *other-orientedness*, (c) *lack of superiority*, and (d) *the acknowledgement of shortcomings and learnability*. Finally, overseeing these essential components includes the fifth and final component of the definition, (e) *healthy pride*. Figure 6.1 outlines the definitions of each of the five components:

Component	Domains	Definition
<b>Purposeful Musical Engagement &amp; Collaboration</b>	Interpersonal / Musical	<i>A commitment toward shared musical collaboration in which the efforts of each participant are actively sought</i>
<b>Other-Orientedness</b>	Interpersonal / Social	<i>A general disposition of other-orientedness and open-mindedness in musical contexts, including an acknowledgement of others' roles in musical successes.</i>
<b>Lack of Superiority</b>	Intrapersonal / Social	<i>A dispositional lack of superiority over others based on one's perceived musical strengths and abilities.</i>
<b>Acknowledgement of Shortcomings / Learnability</b>	Intrapersonal / Musical	<i>An accurate assessment of one's musical abilities and an acknowledgement of one's continued potential for musical growth and development.</i>
<b>Healthy Pride</b>	All-Inclusive	<i>the possession of an appropriate degree of self- and ensemble-pride, including self-confidence, which enables musicians to engage meaningfully and confidently in musical collaborations.</i>

**Figure 6.1.** A five-part definition of musical humility.

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Finally, outlining the interactions of each component, an emergent model of musical humility can thus be constructed as follows:



**Figure 6.2.** An emergent model of musical humility.

The above model depicts a number of important characteristics that require further explanation. First, the five components of musical humility are housed within an arrangement of interpersonal/intrapersonal and social/musical domains. The first four

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musical humility components are conceptualized as the *interaction* between these domains, such that *purposeful musical engagements & collaborations* is established by the interaction of musical and interpersonal domains, *other-orientedness* is established by the interaction of social and interpersonal domains, and so on. Notably, each of these domains are reflected with no distinct boundaries between them in order to denote the fluidity of their interactions on the final embodiment of the components. For example, *lack of superiority* was generally viewed from a social domain (identified more commonly through social conversations), but it could also be manifested musically as well. Similarly, *other-orientedness* was identified as a largely interpersonal behavior, but it might originate from an intrapersonal stance as well (depending on its origin). However, by situating each of the four domains fluidly around a circle, expressions of musical humility are not forced into predefined structures, but instead allow themselves to be manifested according to the natural (and blended) sociomusical interactions of the musicians.

Second, note that the outside four domains are connected to one another, but without any semblance of a hierarchy. This reflects the notion that each of the components of musical humility are more-or-less equally important, and that none is weighted or valued over any other. Importantly, while not any more important than the other components, *healthy pride* is purposefully situated at the center of the model. This is not intended to create a reflection of its dominance, but rather to illustrate its *reach*. As argued previously, healthy pride is central to all enactments of musical humility and mitigates behaviors from being esteemed either too supremely or too deferentially. Put another way, healthy pride helps keep the other four components of musical humility in equilibrium. Furthermore, it is held at the center of the model because within an environment of



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musical humility, healthy pride will imbue the interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, and social domains comprehensively.

To reiterate, this emergent model is specific to the context in which it was observed and identified. Because the Grant Jazz Band in many ways represents an extreme case (Jahnukainen, 2012) of a potentially-egoistic musical environment, it was my hope that the most profound identifications of egoism—and the most salient demands for humility—would become strikingly clear within such a socially charged environment. However, it is certainly possible that musical humility will look notably different throughout various musical settings (i.e., instrumental, vocal, solo/chamber), genres (classical, jazz, popular, global), age groups (i.e., early childhood, adolescence, adult/professional), and contexts (i.e., competitive, community-based, non-formal). More research will be necessary in order to establish an understanding of musical humility across a broad range of such musical settings (see Chapter 7); however, in the meantime, the five components of the definition (as uncovered within this particular case) have established powerful evidence for the existence and social utility of musical humility as a demonstrable construct.

### **The Emergent Benefits of Musical Humility**

The mechanisms operating within this competitive jazz band culture which reflected a musical commitment to humility seem to have suggested several sociomusical benefits for the group. Some of these benefits were observable directly through rehearsals and performances, and others were recognized only in hindsight through interviews. Nonetheless, the most prominent upshot of an ensemble culture rooted in musical humility was seen through the social relationships that were developed over the course of the

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school year. Remarkably, the cultivation of social relationships through musical humility revealed a seemingly bidirectional interaction: as a musically humble climate ostensibly enriched social relationships, these strengthened bonds were likewise reflected within subsequent musical interactions. And cyclically, as these musical interactions became more empowering, the social relationships within the group became further strengthened as well.

Of course, it is difficult to make direct causal arguments regarding the role of musical humility on these strengthened sociomusical relationships. Certainly, one could easily argue that social bonds would be fortified over the course of the year regardless of whether musical humility was at play. But findings suggested that musical humility actually aided in dispelling the likelihood of egoism emerging deeply within the ensemble culture. And as recognized by multiple participants through interviews, an environment in which egoism and arrogance ran rampantly (a near memory for many of them, considering the previous year's band) was not conducive to building strong social relationships. As such, by eschewing egoism, musical humility enabled the more collectivistic characteristics of the group to shine through.

This is not particularly surprising, given the research supporting that humility is correlated positively with social relationship quality (Peters et al., 2011) and social desirability (Exline & Hill, 2012). But support for the *lack* of strong social relationships the previous year and its expressed result on the band's struggling cohesion suggested that there was perhaps a veritable association between social relationships (established through humility) and the resulting experience of shared musical interactions within this

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climate as well. For example, bassist Micah expressed how he thought the current band's stronger social cohesion led to a better ensemble overall:

**Micah:** I feel like as a band we're definitely closer than last year. I mean, we hang outside of school, we have tons of group chats where we talk all the time, I think people are a lot more comfortable this year, definitely.

**WJC:** Do you think that contributes to the quality of the band this year?

**Micah:** Yeah, definitely.

**WJC:** How so?

**Micah:** There are a lot more—people are a lot more open to...a lot less insecure, a lot more confident to play.

**WJC:** Because of their relationships?

**Micah:** Yeah. I think also last year was a lot more arrogant than this year. That's just a big deal with me.

Trombonist Angie upheld a similar sentiment when she compared the previous year's trombone section to the current section. "Oh my gosh, it's *so* great!" she exclaimed after I asked her about the current social dynamics of the trombone section. She then proceeded to dive into an extended diatribe of the previous year's section dynamics, lamenting that very little got done because of the self-absorption and lack of leadership within the section.

Again, I avoid making causal claims that musical humility is the variable which directly led to the group's improved social dynamic. However, there is certainly evidence

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that at the very least, its presence facilitated more prosocial and constructive interactions to be realized. Micah speculated about this likelihood after he personally identified humility as important to the band's identity and success. Pressing him further, I asked him to what degree he already saw humility present within the ensemble, and how he thought it might be further developed:

**Micah:** I think that many of the people in the band *are* very good at being humble. I think that there are some outliers that make the whole thing look worse, maybe, and I think it's one attitude change that could change the band substantially. I think that'll really work itself out. I think we need to spend more time together.

**WJC:** So, you think that humility will come through people just interacting with one another?

**Micah:** Yes. I think that's a big thing. I think we need to do more rehearsals, maybe *without* Mr. Bowen. And like, and [be] able to put each other in check.

Fortunately, the task of establishing strong relationships within the ensemble was not a wholly difficult task, given that a majority of the band had played together since middle school (most students graduated from Peabody's music program). This was an important consideration that Mr. Bowen identified in his interview—that perhaps the band was more naturally capable of behaving prosocially with one another, given their existing long-term relationships. Endorsing this possibility, trumpeter Sebastian stated in his interview that he believed the amount of time the musicians have played together directly contributed to how “tight” they were both musically and socially within the current band.

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Regardless of whether musical humility directly led to an increased proclivity for these social relationships to be fostered, or whether it played a more implicit and facilitative role in their development, the social bonding within the group was palpably recognizable throughout their dealings and interactions. In effect, rehearsals never felt burdensome or monotonous, because each was treated as a fresh opportunity for the musicians to interact genuinely with one another. While some high school students may socialize in front of lockers or in the cafeteria (and these musicians did as well, to be sure), the members of the Grant Jazz Band held a privileged opportunity to socialize through their *music*. In effect, every improvisation performed during rehearsals was manifested as if it were the soloists' daily anecdote—his or her latest piece of gossip, imaginably—which the rest of the group listened and responded to ardently. In following fieldnote from a rehearsal on December 6, I attempted to capture the energy that sprouted from the room during one particularly powerful musical interaction:

*There's suddenly a palpable, shared excitement when the music feels good and the band really gels. Craig, sitting to the side, is nodding his head in agreement of the groove. At the half-speed part at the end [of "Harlem Congo"], Oscar scrunches his nose forward and pulls his head back, wearing a face that says, "listen to that groove!" He shifts excitedly in his chair, looking over at me briefly as he furrows his brow and opens his mouth aggressively. We make eye contact and I smile, nodding my head and mirroring his expression as my feet tap along with the groove.*

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Could this interaction have occurred without a climate of musical humility? Most certainly. But there was something unique about this interaction that I was unable to communicate through my fieldnotes, yet something that I recall feeling on multiple occasions throughout my time with the band. It was here that I fully understood how fieldnotes can be such an essential research tool, yet be ultimately insufficient—especially when it comes to capturing the power of a musical moment. The audio recording captured the groove, but likewise fell short in capturing the profound energy in the room. And while this interaction could have assuredly been incited within a setting devoid of musical humility, it was clear that there was an underlying feeling of convivial affection that emanated throughout the room. Indeed, it was a sentiment that appeared to be cultivated, at least partially, through a welcoming and hospitable climate rooted in humility: a deep affection from Mr. Bowen for his students, from the students for each other—and given my brief moment of eye contact with Oscar, perhaps a bit for me as well, as a mere bystander of the experience.

Furthermore, when these feelings entered into the performance space—like it did palpably during the Matt Wilson concert—a similar impression was maintained. Simon, for example, pointed out that the second half of the Matt Wilson show (where the band played Wilson’s original charts) felt more like a *performance* than a *concert*—his use of the word ‘performance’ apparently denoting a more organic, open-ended experience rather than a more fixed ‘concert.’ Adding to Simon’s assessment, several other band members chimed in on what they gained from the performance. Benji reflected that his “nervous vibes” were gone. Kyle stated that instead of focusing on his parts, he was able to have fun and not worry about “nailing each note.” And Craig stated, “I played stuff I wouldn’t normally play.”

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Ultimately, the presence of musical humility seemed to infiltrate deeply within the Grant Jazz Band culture (even if only identified post-hoc), which was especially evident when compared to the social dynamics of the previous year's band. As argued throughout this chapter, the presence of musical humility seemed to foster a stronger sense of community and cohesiveness, given that so much of its presence relies on purposeful and active musical contributions and a spirit of other-orientedness. Because the previous year served as a compelling comparison against which to measure the current band's social dynamics, the presence of more prosocial attitudes was far more perceptible this year. Again, comparing to the previous year's band, trumpeter Kyle ventured,

I mean, I just think the personalities of everybody last year didn't help anything at all. And this year, I think everybody gets along a lot better. And it's partly because we've been playing together since—I mean, I've known most of these people since first grade, so I'm very comfortable with them, very comfortable with critiquing how they're playing, or congratulating them, or whatever, so I think there's definitely a sense of community that wasn't there last year. I can't *really* speak for the band, but there's definitely a sense of community that wasn't there.

The emergent sentiments of 'hospitality' and 'welcoming' that established this aforementioned feeling of community will be further expounded in Chapter 7 as a central reverberation of a climate imbued with musical humility. But it is at this nexus of musical humility and its resulting cultivation of community that the grander, more emboldening and transformative effects of musical humility begin to take shape.

### **Musical Humility as Interventional to Musical Egoism**

Beyond the ostensible social upshots discussed above, it appears that musical humility may additionally serve the benefit of eschewing some undesirable antisocial behaviors as well. Given the various manifestations of musical egoism, it seems reasonable that purposefully embodying particular facets of musical humility might lead to the mitigation of certain egoistic behaviors. Of course, musical humility should not be simply viewed as an antidote to egoism alone (which is an overly simplistic and parochial view of the construct); rather, it should be viewed as a necessary and desirable state regardless of the social dynamics at play. While there is evidence that humility can be ‘taught’ or promoted through interventions (Lavelock et al., 2014, 2017), it has yet to be explored whether developing humility can be used as a direct and viable response to diminishing egoism specifically. Yet, since humility and egoism are so inversely correlated, it seems likely that the increase of one would result in the decrease of the other (and vice versa). Nonetheless, each of the ways in which musically humble efforts are posited to contribute to a reduction of the consequences of musical egoism will be presently described.

In this case, the most pronounced detriment of an egoistic mindset—hubristic defeat (as evidenced by their self-identified overconfidence and subsequent rejection from the 2017 *Essentially Ellington* Competition)—was reconciled before my own eyes through a more resolute commitment toward non-elitist and non-superior dispositions and efforts. Unsurprisingly, few students named humility by name as playing a role in these efforts (except Micah: “...I do think it’s a big thing to, like, be humble...”), but when students demonstrated their new-and-improved social identities in response to their self-identified



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hubris, they were in effect practicing (at least) three of the central domains of musical humility: *acknowledgement of shortcomings / learnability*, *lack of superiority*, and *healthy self-pride*. For example, their response to their rejection from *Essentially Ellington* the previous year seemed to be the collective acknowledgement of their shortcomings and an acceptance of their own fallibility. After realizing their shortcomings, the group needed to subsequently work to change their mindsets by diminishing their previously-held assumption of superiority and elitism, which in turn opened them up to possibilities of renewed growth. Finally—and perhaps most importantly—the group had to maintain a healthy sense of pride so that their rejection would not perilously lead to a complete collapse of the group's esteem but would instead serve as an empowering incentive through which they could find a renewed vigor to work harder the following year.

While the adoption of a humbler mindset was clearly evidenced as a sort-of remedy to egoistic hubris, it was less straightforward to make causal claims of humility's deployment in response to other ramifications of musical egoism—mainly because they were not explicitly expressed by the participants. Nonetheless, given the thick descriptions and analyses of humility and egoism occurring over the course of six months at Grant High School, it is possible to tentatively stipulate which domains of musical humility may function remedially against certain forms of musical egoism. For example, when interpersonal conflicts arise from clashing self-promotive or self-interested views, it seems possible that a renewed focus on promoting *purposeful musical engagement and collaboration*, developing *other-orientedness*, and endorsing a *lack of superiority* could work to minimize these conflicts.

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Similarly, poor ensemble cohesion was noticeably alleviated when students focused more resolutely on maintaining *purposeful musical engagements and collaborations*. By encouraging students to really listen and hone in on each other's playing (*purposeful musical engagement and collaboration*), which was plausibly bolstered by prompting a disposition of *other-orientedness*, students increased their proclivity for blending, balancing, and establishing a more formidable groove. To an extent, these efforts could hypothetically be further supported by motivating students (and teachers) to carry themselves with a general sense of non-superiority and non-elitism, because that enables the open-minded outlook for students to overcome their self-interest for the benefit of the collective group.

Finally, diminishing one's ego fragility and penchant for envy could putatively be accomplished through a renewed sense of other-orientedness, an acknowledgement of one's shortcomings, the possession of a healthy self-pride, and to an extent, the adoption of a non-superior position. Since envy is so heavily rooted in feelings of personal inferiority and resentment (Parrott & Smith, 1993), it seems possible that calculated efforts toward increasing one's self-pride first-and-foremost would contribute to stronger feelings of self-worth. The same may hold true through the attenuation of one's sense of superiority, but perhaps not as effectively as promoting healthy self-pride. Additionally, fostering a sense of other-orientedness in which musicians displace attention away from themselves may contribute to lessened feelings of envy because the desire to self-compare has been supplanted with more other-oriented feelings. Finally, by helping musicians become aware of their learnability and musical shortcomings, they may be prompted to see others' successes not as threatening to the self, but perhaps as complementary to one's own

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contrasting strengths. To reiterate, these possibilities are not yet backed by empirical evidence, but are nonetheless hypothetically presented for meaningful consideration (and ripe territory for future interventional research as well).

### Challenges of Musical Humility

#### How Much Musical Humility is ‘Enough?’

Looking at the emergent model of musical humility, questions will logically arise regarding the salience and proportion to which a so-called ‘musically humble’ person must embody each of the five components in order to be judged as such. Must a person practicing musical humility possess an equal proportion of each component? May he or she possess some components and not others? Can a musically humble person ‘get by’ with just one or two of the five components? Empirically speaking, these questions remain largely unanswered, at least until further research can establish a better understanding of their independence and interactions comprehensively. However, evidence from the field suggests that there is in fact an apparent complexity to this question.

Trumpeter Simon, for example, willingly acknowledged his shortcomings and learnability during interviews, but nonetheless seemingly possessed a sense of superiority in the eyes of his peers. Consequently, Simon was ultimately perceived as being arrogant by a strong proportion of the interviewed students. It appears logical, then, that the interpersonal domains of musical humility—*purposeful musical engagements & collaboration* and *other-orientedness*—became a sort-of external ‘measuring stick’ for assessing and judging musical humility, given that they are outwardly expressed. The more internalized, intrapersonal domains, on the other hand (*acknowledgment of*

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*shortcomings/learnability* and *lack of superiority*) are more difficult to identify in practice and so they may not contribute as strongly to someone's assessment of the construct.

However, when these more intrapersonal components become actualized outwardly—say for example, one's lack of superiority translating externally into the way they receive and acknowledge praise—the behaviors then may become more identifiable and subjectable to judgement.

Likewise, tenor saxophonist Liam was masterful in his abilities to purposefully engage and collaborate with others but lacked a sense of other-orientedness in sectionals and rehearsals. Perhaps as a result, bassist Micah identified Liam as humble during his interview—likely given his prowess in the *purposeful musical engagements & collaboration* component during rehearsals—but some of the other saxophonists (particularly Oscar and Neil) thought he was arrogant because of his social aloofness during sectionals.

Although interpersonal manifestations of musical humility are more readily seen, it is important to keep in mind that the 'authentic' possession of musical humility must possess intrapersonal behaviors as well. Otherwise, the externally enacted behaviors risk becoming selfishly-fueled and may plausibly reflect deceitfulness (and perhaps even suggesting Machiavellianism) or false humility. In other words, because the musician does not appropriately possess the internal characteristics of humility, external displays arguably become interpreted as manipulative or instrumental in a self-interested fashion. For example, someone with a superior mindset may appear to be other-oriented in musical engagements, but possibly only because it serves some more self-interested purpose for the musician. Responding actively to improvised solos by quoting peers, for instance, may appear to be a purposeful act of collaboration, but may actually be fueled by the musician's

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desire to ‘grandstand’ his or her superior aural skills. Indeed, this complication was precisely what made it difficult to judge Liam’s humility (or lack thereof) in performance: depending on the context, I at times interpreted his persistent quoting of other musicians’ licks during solos as salient forms of *purposeful musical engagement and collaboration*. However, on other occasions I viewed them as pretentious attempts to show off his improvisational skills.

Finally, the possession of healthy pride must be sensibly held in proper proportion to the other four components in order to remain ‘healthy.’ Specifically, if a person possesses low levels of the first four components, yet strongly embodies pride, this level of pride will likely appear out of proportion and not reinforced by truly observable humility—the result will be the perception of prideful arrogance. Conversely, if a person possesses strong degrees of the first four musical humility components but lacks a comparable degree of pride, low self-esteem or deferent modesty will be reflected.

On the whole, it is difficult to make claims regarding the prevalence of each component necessary for the musician to be ultimately judged as ‘musically humble’ (and given the subjective nature of personality judgments, this would likely be impossible anyway; see Davis’s (2010) discussion of relational humility). However, I would argue that the first component, *purposeful musical engagements and collaboration*, may be the most important constituent of musical humility. Precisely because if it this component is not practiced within a musical setting the empowering ethos of a collaborative musical ensemble may never be realized and the presence of the other four components will essentially be moot. Indeed, the eventual point of the construct is to lend itself to more powerful musical experiences. And because the first component’s specific focus on active

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modes of collaborative musical participation is the most distinguishing factor of musical humility from other ‘humilities,’ its presence is seen as essential to the integrity of the construct.

### **Associations with Modesty and Deference**

Throughout my six months at Grant High School, I was struck by the commonly submissive means through which many of the students responded to compliments and praise from Mr. Bowen (or each other). Fortunately, some musicians—like trombonist Arnold and trumpeter Kyle—responded consistently with an appreciative smile and a head nod of grateful acknowledgment. But many students accepted praise with a noticeable degree of deference—a lowering of the head, downcast eyes, sometimes a slight frown—all of which gesturally suggested a feeling of unworthiness to be the recipients of praise. Alternatively, other students would respond quite stoically to adulation—a perceptible hardening of the face and what I interpreted as considerable effort placed on trying to freeze their facial gestures. It seemed like this reaction sought to gesturally communicate that the musician was merely doing his or her job and as such felt that the compliment was unnecessary. Indeed, when I asked trumpeter Kyle about these confusing gestures, he immediately recognized its presence in the band and was quick to explain (from his perspective) how the receiver of praise might internally receive the compliment. Fascinatingly, he revealed a much more complex negotiation of these seemingly deferent behaviors (at least as far as he was concerned):

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**Kyle:** I think there definitely is a sense of like, when you get a compliment, you kind of have to act like—when *I* get a compliment, I’m like, “yes!” But on the outside, I have to be like, “I know. I know I’m playing well, because I’m a good musician.” You know?

**WJC:** So, you pretend to be expecting it? Like, you’re not surprised by it?

**Kyle:** I mean not...yes, not surprised by it, but also kind of...when he gives you a compliment, you’re expecting it and it’s not a new thing, you know?

**WJC:** Got it. So, you’re like, feigning a little bit of cockiness?

**Kyle:** I guess so, yes. Because everybody—if you look like you’re like [mimicking submissiveness] “yes, *thank you* Mr. Bowen for—” Well also, when Bowen thinks you’re being, you know—if you start celebrating or something, he’s gonna be like, “you have *so* much other stuff you need to work on.” So...there’s that, and there’s also you want everybody else to be like, “dang, I need to elevate *my* level of playing to get where he is.” And it’s not just kind of an interpersonal, social, like...we’re all just trying to be the best one [...] Like, if I get a compliment and I’m like, “oh yeah, *obviously*,” then everybody else needs to be like, “okay, I need to get to that level, too.” Like I know *I* do that. If Bowen says, “oh Theo, you’re playing this really nicely,” I need to be like, “I need to play like Theo’s playing,” so...

**WJC:** So, it’s not just about being humble or whatever...

**Kyle:** It’s mostly about...it’s always a calculated thing. For me, at least.

Reflecting a sense of false humility in many ways (see Chapter 5), this behavior of deferent submissiveness was clearly adopted by the students as a way to show a lack of arrogance or cockiness, but tended to go too far in the direction of low self-esteem and

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lowliness. Driving this point home, one interaction between trumpeter Simon and Mr. Bowen led to a particularly awkward moment after Simon downcast his eyes and stood silently as Mr. Bowen said, “Simon, outstanding job reading the solo!” After an uncomfortable silence, Mr. Bowen finally looked up from his score expectantly, prompting Simon to nod awkwardly and mouth a “thank you” that barely broke from his voice.

Finally, I consistently observed this problematic sense of meekness being enacted where prideful humility should live from third-string pianist Jeremy. Recalling that part of Jeremy’s interview was included in Chapter 5 during a discussion of an inflated self-view, it might be seen as ironic that his behaviors during rehearsals were altogether meek and acquiescent. Granted, Jeremy appeared to be somewhat socially awkward, but his brilliance was disputed by no one (including Mr. Bowen, who occasionally asked him to communicate music theory matters to the band, such as how to play over *alt* chords<sup>28</sup>). Yet Jeremy clearly exhibited insecurities in his playing ability (even if he expressed the opposite sentiment during his interview). His self-doubt was evidenced by an anxious behavior in which he would regularly turn around immediately after the conclusion of each piece and look to Mr. Bowen with a raised brow and uneasy smile—as if seeking his approval above anything else, and preemptively apologizing for any small mistakes he may have made along the way. In fact, at one point during his interview, bassist Micah made reference to Jeremy’s meek character:

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Alt’, or ‘altered dominant’ chords contain extensions (i.e., 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths) that are constructed with both chromatically altered fifths and ninths, as in Root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, ♭5 and/or #5, ♭7, ♭9 and/or #9, and ♭13.



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Jeremy's a very timid guy. He doesn't want to be out of place, and he's very worried about that all the time. I think that's something that's not gonna disappear in high school. But, I mean, he's *such* a smart guy, and he knows his stuff. He just doesn't always play it.

From an educational standpoint, then, I argue that a pressing matter of developing musical humility—or any humility, for that matter—should be to start with the eschewing of unwarranted modesty and meekness. As demonstrated throughout my fieldwork, carrying such timid dispositions prevented students from recognizing and taking appropriate pride in their own accomplishments, approaching musical tasks with confidence, and (at least as expressed by Theo), taking musical risks. This is precisely why healthy pride is viewed as so central to the musical humility construct: because in the absence of pride, coy acquiescence threatens to suppress musical experiences from becoming empowering and worthwhile.

### **Reduced Leadership Roles**

A further manifestation of the above challenge was occasionally evident in the resulting decline of prominent leadership roles within some sections. On the whole, I found the level of leadership in the band to be quite robust. However, students seeking to avoid becoming too pushy or bossy with their peers occasionally fell into the trap of being overly acquiescent in response. The arguable upshot of this was that it allowed other section musicians to rise to the occasion when the official section leaders failed to practice strong leadership skills themselves. But on the other hand, it sometimes led to a general scarcity

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of leadership within some sections (like the trombone section) or led to a ‘too many cooks in the kitchen’ situation (like in the saxophone section) with everyone trying to assert their own leadership.

Lead trumpeter Greg was identified by many throughout the band to be a strong leader-by-example, which he demonstrated through his confident musicianship skills and unwavering sound. However, he typically yielded decisions during sectionals to one of the other trumpet players (usually Theo or Sebastian). The trumpet section appreciated Greg’s gesture, seeing his leadership style as a way of other-orientedly seeking others’ contributions within the section. However, some musicians beyond the section thought his acquiescence was sometimes troublesome because strong leadership, they thought, was part of his job. While acclaiming Greg’s apparently humble approach to leadership, Micah also expressed what he perceived to be an associated downside to such a tactic:

**Micah:** I think [humble leadership is] very, very good, but I also think there’s a bad effect to that, which is that other people then who shouldn’t be trying to take lead are [...]

**WJC:** Okay. Do you think that happens?

**Micah:** I do think that happens, and I think that’s, um... [lowers his voice as Mr. Bowen re-enters]. I mean, I think Greg is like, I think the way that he leads is amazing. I also think that gives other people the opportunity to maybe *not* be...to be kind of be out of their place. Because [Greg’s] not being up in front of the band, being like, “alright, guys, let’s do this.” He plays his part, and he plays it really well, but he also doesn’t tell other people when they’re out of place.

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**WJC:** And you think he should more?

**Micah:** I—I definitely think that’s one of the jobs.

Micah clearly admired Greg’s humility in the band, but also seemed conflicted that perhaps the way it was manifested in his leadership style was sometimes less desirable. I was able to empathize closely with Micah’s difficulties here, as I myself struggled to determine the role that humility should play in leadership through these observations. In the end, the *healthy pride* component of musical humility once again reveals its advantage, because it avoids students from submissively yielding their leadership roles, and instead prompts them to embrace their responsibilities with a sense of egalitarian cooperation. In fact, it becomes clear that with many of the perceptible challenges to musical humility—most prevalently, the tendency for it to delve into meek deference and modesty—the enactment of healthy pride can help bolster musicians so that they may practice humility without either becoming submissive or prideful.

### Challenging the Importance of Musical Humility

Of considerable relevance to this setting of a competitive high school jazz band is the apparent interplay between one musician’s social character and its comparative significance to another musician’s sheer ‘talent’ or ability. Specifically, Mr. Bowen expressed that an unfortunate impediment of a competitive environment is that talent will ultimately trump one’s interpersonal strengths when it comes to being selected for the band. As he explained:

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Well ultimately—and this is the Catch 22 of it—that it *is* the way they play that gets them into the band. And I could have a student who is not a very good communicator, isn't really great at relating to their fellow students, and maybe is that kind of player that is so self-obsessed that they're really all about themselves. And if they play at a high level, and there aren't any other students who play at that level, well...they're going to be the ones that get into the band. So, the challenge is, how do you develop leaders and also get the values across to those *really* talented kids that it's not just about them, but it's about trying to build a good band and a good culture? [...] And, you know, the ones that hurt me is when a kid is like, everything you could ask for in terms of—they're on time, they're positive, they relate well with you and they relate well with the other students, they're encouraging, they come out to the jam sessions—they're doing everything you could ask, but then some asshole plays way better than they do, and you have to take the asshole! [Laughs] You know? It's a balance! And you know, I will *always* lean in favor of those kids who are putting in the effort and have the best attitudes. I want those kinds of people in the band. You don't always have that luxury.

Importantly, musical humility represents a *process*. It is not something that a musician either does or does not possess downright, but something that is arguably developed throughout his or her musical lifetime. And because it is arguably distinct according to the context and participants, it is constantly subjected to refinement and renegotiation in-the-moment. It encourages musicians to take stock of their environment and consider to what degree self-interest may be predominant, and to what degree

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humility might promote a more positive dynamic. From this perspective, then, musical humility gains traction through long-term effectiveness. Ultimately, while Mr. Bowen reasoned that prosociality was not the most critical factor for acceptance into the band (although he certainly thought it was important to practice), he could not deny its power in the ensuing cultivation of an interconnected and unified ensemble identity. In this regard, after sharing my findings with him at a neighborhood pub in late April, Mr. Bowen thought momentarily to himself about the prospect of musical humility being central to his ensemble environment (especially without his explicit acknowledgement of its presence). He considered if the environment he so carefully cultivated throughout the year actually seemed to reflect an environment rooted in humility (and supported importantly by healthy pride). Finally, he nodded and stated, “I love that [...] that ties in very much with what I would like to see in young people.”

## Conclusions

Robust evidence for the emergent construct of musical humility was well-established within the culture of the Grant Jazz Band. Admittedly, few students identified humility by name, but its lack of explicit recognition does not necessarily denote its nonexistence. I identified five components of musical humility through the processes of open and closed coding (Saldaña, 2013) and encompassed an interaction of interpersonal/intrapersonal and social/musical domains. Consequently, the five emergent components of musical humility are (a) *purposeful musical engagement & collaboration*, (b) *other-orientedness*, (c) *lack of superiority*, (d) *acknowledgements of shortcomings and learnability*, and (e) *healthy pride*. These components each interact fluidly with one other,

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with no component being any more or less important than another (at least as far as current interpretations can ascertain). However, interpersonal domains were recognized more readily than intrapersonal domains, given their more outward manifestations. The fifth component, *healthy pride*, is conceptualized as being central to the construct, permeating outwardly into the other four components in order to eschew them each from reflecting either demure or conceited behaviors.

Given my presence in the field, the most striking benefit of an ensemble climate rooted in musical humility was observed through the enhanced social dynamics of the group. Specifically, through active collaborative efforts, other-orientedness, the lack of a superior mindset, a disposition of learnability fueled by one's shortcomings, and a healthy dose of self-pride, musical humility appeared to contribute meaningfully to a climate in which hospitable, welcoming, and egalitarian comportments of musical participation were made possible. These findings contribute to the growing body of empirical evidence regarding the benefits of humility broadly. As such, espousing humility within musical contexts will plausibly trigger a number of social advantages supported by humility research generally, including improved capacities for forgiveness (Powers et al., 2007), generosity (Exline & Hill, 2012), and helpfulness (LaBouff et al., 2012). In addition, it is plausible that given supported correlations, humility can additionally contribute to academic performance (Owens, 2009), organizational leadership (Owens et al., 2013), social desirability (Exline & Hill, 2012), social relationship quality (Peters et al., 2013), and the strength of social bonds (Davis et al., 2013, 2017). While it is currently uncertain to what degrees *musical* humility might specifically contribute to these established associations, the construct nevertheless suggests a number of worthwhile benefits to an

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ensemble's broader sociomusical culture, and thus seemingly possesses integrity as a standalone artistic virtue.

Finally, it is essential for the construct of musical humility to distance itself from antiquated notions of modesty, diffidence, and low self-esteem. Given that musical humility is centrally concerned with a highly performative enactment of a musician's social identity, associations with a demure character are ultimately undesirable and unproductive to the social image that a confident musician ought to possess. Musicians arguably place the entirety of their social identities on the line in the name of a convincing musical performance. This was certainly the case among the members of the Grant Jazz Band, who consistently laid everything on the line as they pursued collective musical greatness. To embark upon such a pursuit without a fortified sense of confidence would mean neglecting the very powers that made the Grant Jazz Band preeminent in their own right.

Taken together, I acknowledge willingly that the interactions and reflections considered in this research are not wholly unique or special to the Grant Jazz Band. Indeed, many might argue that such a collectivistic culture should be easily found in *any* jazz band—and even perhaps within any music ensemble, to varying degrees. Fortuitously, this hopefully speaks to the relative straightforwardness of imbuing all musical experiences with musical humility; it is simply something that we should already be (or perhaps already are) incorporating into our everyday musical efforts. But by denoting our pursuits in the specific name of musical humility, we arguably satisfy two sociomusical desires: on the one hand, we justify the importance of humility within music ensembles and throughout artistic interactions broadly—and are able to demonstrate support for its effectiveness and value. On the other hand, we model humility as a natural byproduct of

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egalitarian participation in music ensembles generally. In other words, almost in a cyclical fashion, we both show how humility can improve musical experiences, and how musical participation can be harnessed to promote humility in turn.



**CHAPTER 7**

**DISTINCTIONS, TAKEAWAYS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The impetus of the present study was fueled by a particular bemusement surrounding the stark scarcity of conversation regarding the pervasive role of egoism—and the subsequent appeal of humility—within musical participation. In following, the purpose of this investigation reflected a relatively straightforward structure: to richly describe the presence of humility and egoism as they were witnessed, developed, and negotiated within the context of a competitive high school jazz band, and to understand their ramifications on the group's sociomusical identity. While humility and egoism are surely worthy of exploration throughout *all* facets of musical participation, I deemed their investigation within the specific medium of a competitive jazz ensemble as an appropriate starting point for three primary reasons.

First, given the aforementioned individualism–collectivism dualism that is inextricable from the jazz idiom (Rinzler, 2008), it was reasoned that this musical setting would deeply reveal the inner negotiations of self-interested versus other-oriented behaviors; negotiations which are certainly prevalent in several musical contexts, but arguably intensified within an art form that celebrates both ensemble playing and individual improvisation uniformly. Second, high school students represented a reasonable age group with whom to conduct this research, given their social, emotional, and biological development (Erickson, 1959/1980) as well as their greater capacity to engage in moral and ethical reasoning (Kohlberg, 1976). Finally, it is logically asserted that egoistic

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behaviors and mindsets are emboldened within competitive environments, as supported widely by motivational theories and research (Ames, 1984; Nicholls, 1984; Kohn, 1993).

As the members of the Grant Jazz Band revealed, the journey toward musical humility was riddled with struggles and triumphs which reflected the very nature of human imperfection. For as long as philosophical inquiry has gripped us with questions surrounding virtue and vice, the negotiation of self-interest and collective obligation, and moral contracts toward our fellow human, the path toward humility has been correspondingly elusive—and the linger of egoism always enticing. Indeed, the utility of humility among this competitive musical group was not always clear, and at times the lure of self-interest seemed to be most befitting. Yet, the possible short-term benefits provided by such self-interested comportments are maintained as ancillary next to the long-term, enduring, and potentially transformative benefits that are apparently granted through a musical environment rooted in humility. By the conclusion of this chapter, I hope to have argued not only that musical humility is a unique and distinctive sociomusical construct worthy of individual investigation, but that its existence within any musical ensemble is worthwhile and advantageous to the musicians, audience and community members, and even to the music itself.

In this chapter, I will seek resolutions for several currently-unresolved matters raised thus far and will ultimately seek to clarify considerations that warrant future investigation. The study's second research question, regarding the sociomusical ramifications of humility and egoism within the ensemble, has been adequately explicated through the previous chapters. However, it now becomes necessary to address the unique nature of musical humility as a *distinctive* construct. Currently, I have conceived of musical

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humility as a construct that is specific to music participation, but which may be further considered among the growing ontology of ‘humilities’ recognized throughout the psychology community. This will be the first and most pressing question to address. From there, it will become necessary to wrap up the discussion of this nascent sociomusical construct by exploring the various distinctions that are central to the findings of this study, followed by the essential implications that this burgeoning research ought to address. This will ultimately allow for the future of musical humility research to become logical and clear, which I will discuss toward the conclusion of the chapter.

Up to this point, I have sought to establish an empirically-based understanding of humility and egoism occurring within a competitive high school jazz band, as uncovered through emergent patterns of behavior over the course of a single academic school year. Through rehearsals, performances, competitions, and festivals, the behaviors, rituals, and negotiation of power relations within the ensemble has provided a holistic view of the prosocial (and at times antisocial) behaviors existing within the group. From this vantage point, I sought to develop inferential understandings of the role of egoism and humility within the ensemble culture. In following, I identified a three-part characterization of so-called ‘musical egoism’ (named as such only to differentiate from more general displays of egoism), which included (a) seeking and desiring superiority, (b) displays of self-promotion, self-importance, and self-orientation, and (c) demonstrations of an inflated self-view.

When framed comparatively against these egoistic behaviors and analyzed through a broader prosocial lens, a five-part definition of musical humility emerged, which included: (a) purposeful musical engagement & collaboration, (b) other-orientedness, (c)

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lack of superiority, (d) acknowledgment of shortcomings and learnability, and (e) healthy pride. As far as the current research method could ascertain, each component of musical humility was equally valuable to the ultimate acquiring of the ‘virtue,’ although more interpersonal manifestations were more clearly recognized. Through the first component of the construct, I suggested that musical humility is distinctive from other forms of humility because it must be actively practiced and pursued in order to promote more meaningful and empowering musical experiences. Additionally, musical humility posits that a healthy sense of pride is integral to musical humility—and humility generally—in order to avoid becoming either demure or boastful in practice.

### **Theoretical Considerations of Musical Humility**

#### **Musical Humility as a Distinctive Construct**

Setting aside an advocacy for musical humility momentarily, I decisively sought to understand if the manifestations of humility as enacted and interpreted within the context of this competitive high school jazz band were distinctly unique from manifestations of humility *generally*. This represented the study’s first research question, from which forthcoming questions about musical humility’s utility, benefit, and worthiness could be further explored. Immediately, it became glaringly clear that while *general* displays of humility are intended to be quietly (or silently) exhibited (Worthington, 2007), humility of the musical sort ought to be anything but quiet. This is not to say that musicians should hypocritically proclaim their own humility aloud, but rather that their humble efforts must be actively cultivated with the intentional effort of uplifting the musical experience of the collective group.

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On its own, this first component of musical humility seems reasonably sufficient to classify the construct as unique and idiosyncratic. Considering the forms of humility that are necessary when recognizing one's accolades in the workplace (organizational humility), acquiescing oneself to conflicting opinions and viewpoints (intellectual humility), or understanding how cultural considerations may affect one's social identity and perspectives in the world (cultural humility), each can be accomplished quietly and in private. They do not necessarily require that an active response occurs; in order for humility to be activated in these contexts, the person must simply avoid boasting about their accolades, or reflect quietly upon their own assumptions and biases. Their ensuing actions, of course, will (hopefully) reflect a humble mindset, but they do not seem to *require* further action in order to establish some embodiment of humility.

With musical humility, however, I argue that the purposeful interactive processes which result from a musically humble mindset *must* be activated in order for the concept to come to full fruition. Otherwise, simply possessing a mindset of low superiority, other-orientedness, and learnability will simply reflect *general* humility—a humble person who happens to be making music, perhaps. A generally humble person who engages in a musical activity will always be desirable, of course (i.e., general humility in a musical context); but a musician who decisively practices the art of *musical* humility will both experience and facilitate empowering, musically transformative experiences for both him or herself, for his or her fellow musicians, and for all listeners who have gathered to experience the musical happening.

The final distinction of musical humility from other 'humilities' lies in my assessment that healthy pride is inextricable from the construct. By and large, a discussion

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of pride has been left out of the humility literature; yet in his book *Pride and Humility*, Tucker (2016) pays close attention to how its embodiment can either damage or uplift one's penchant for humility. However, I recognize that particularly in music, a healthy degree of self-pride is not only desirable, but fully necessary for the empowering comportments of musical humility to be realized. This was discussed at the conclusion of the previous chapter and is reiterated here to drive home the importance of emboldening musicians'—especially *growing* musicians'—sense of pride. However, I would like to further submit that healthy self-pride ought to be inextricable from all forms of humility, simply because of its power in eschewing a human inclination for self-disparagement. Put another way, as long as it is mitigated appropriately, pride can be a powerful tool that can encourage the drive toward a humble mindset of any kind.

### **Performing Humbleness and Haughtiness: A Dramaturgical Perspective**

A further discrepancy of my fieldwork that until now has gone largely unresolved lies in the apparent incongruence between the humility (and general prosociality) I keenly observed during rehearsals, performances, and festivals, and the conflicting declarations of egoistic behaviors expressed commonly during interviews. Indeed, this dissonance struck me substantially during my six months of fieldwork simply because I was privy to so few displays of explicit arrogance. To be sure, I witnessed the occasional innocuous display of musical 'peacocking' here and there (Simon's trumpet screeching is the most prevailing example), but I found it difficult to identify many displays of antisocial behavior otherwise. Especially given both the competitive nature of the program as well as the negotiation of self and other within the jazz tradition (Rinzler, 2008), I expected to observe an abundance

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of supercilious and self-promotive behaviors among the students. I expected to find musicians vying for solos and seating placements, showing off through virtuosic solos and brazen showboating. I expected that the director might cunningly promote an environment of aggressive competitiveness among his students. Essentially, I expected to see a slightly less Hollywood-ized manifestation of the film *Whiplash* (Chazelle, 2014), with young jazz musicians fighting to earn (and keep) their spots in the top band, and a well-meaning but indomitable director overseeing their journey to greatness. But once Mr. Bowen initiated the start of rehearsal each day, a spirit of egalitarianism, prosociality, and comradery seemed to replace most apparent displays of self-interestedness. What could possibly explain this disconnect between the egoism that the students so heavily reported, and the more prosocial comportments to which I was privy at rehearsals, concerts, and festivals?

Through the discovery of Erving Goffman's (1959) notable work on dramaturgical theory, I was drawn to the theoretical possibility that what I was observing during my six months of fieldwork was not necessarily a full 'reality' of the situation, but rather a manufactured presentation of the group. In other words, it is plausible that the band was purposefully presenting a particular image of their internal culture, altered and presented as necessary (for me and for other 'outsiders,' i.e., non-band members) to fulfill some greater utilitarian need.

**Motivations for impression management.** Surely, all humans practice some degree of what one could call 'public deception' as individuals alter their identities according to the context of a given interaction (Goffman, 1959; Mitchell, 1978). However, the degree to which the members of the Grant Jazz Band presumably dramatized their actions seemed to have served a greater functional purpose. Through interviews, it became

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apparent that the impetus for their constructed self-assured image may have actually laid in the hubristic disappointment experienced from not being invited to the *Essentially Ellington* competition during the 2016–17 school year. Encountering the sobering realization that their status of greatness was not guaranteed, many members explicitly expressed a newfound commitment toward collectivism, diligence, and pride within the ensemble the following year. Opportunely, I happened to initiate my study just as the band was embarking upon this new supposed identity.

Taken into account, this perspective would hold that the group's self-identified need for a reinvigorated identity would not necessarily need to be authentically actualized by all members of the group. Instead, through a dramaturgical lens, the band would need only create the *appearance* of a more humble and prosocial identity, but without necessarily requiring the full adoption of a humbler mindset from all members. After all, it seems unlikely that all members of the band, suddenly faced with defeat, would entirely and authentically change their collective identities to be less proud and conceited<sup>29</sup>. For these reasons, it seems plausible that the Grant Jazz Band recognized (whether explicitly or tacitly) that in order to reclaim their championship status, they must adopt at least a *façade* of cohesiveness and collaboration, because those are among the very extramusical characteristics that are valued for the *Essentially Ellington* competition. Thus, through their efforts they were able to properly depict the collectivistic ethos of jazz music for onlookers and listeners—even without authentically changing their internal personalities. It thus becomes plausible that a 'presentation' of humility during rehearsals and performances

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<sup>29</sup> And indeed, recall from Chapter 5 that Theo believed that their rejection was a more-or-less purposeful "slight" against the band by the judges—a hubris-denying perspective which would not motivate the need for a humbler and more prosocial identity.



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could explain the lack of observed egoistic behaviors that were so heavily reported during interviews.

**Dramaturgy as performed social behavior.** According to his dramaturgical theory of social behavior, Goffman (1959) offers that:

Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who co-operate to present to an audience of a given definition of the situation. This will include the conception of own team and of audience and assumptions concerning the ethos that is to be maintained by rules of politeness and decorum" (p. 238).

For a high school jazz environment, an 'audience' may comprise several potential social contexts through which musicians will expectantly manage and modify their external presentations to varying degrees. For example, they may act one way when performing for their parents, and another way when playing for judges. They may demonstrate a particular work ethic in Mr. Bowen's presence that is altogether different than the one fostered when working alone as a section. In effect, every performer, whether alone or in cooperation with others, negotiates a careful balance between his or her performed 'front' identity and a more naturalistic 'backstage' identity. In the process, the performer offers his or her performance and "...puts on a show 'for the benefit of other people'" (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). The performer will thus knowingly don a 'mask' of varying likenesses as it suits the needs of a particular situation. To most prominently elucidate the musical discrepancies between performers' front and back behaviors, we can consider lead trumpet player Greg more closely. He was acknowledged by all to be a quiet and meek offstage, but his trumpet

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sound was anything but this in practice. As Oscar excitedly offered (while talking about the leadership in the band), Greg's lead player 'performance' resulted in the necessary image of unwavering confidence (but certainly not arrogance):

**Oscar:** Greg's not a confident person, but his playing is so insanely confident.

**WJC:** So, you think his musical self is different from his—

**Oscar:** Hundred percent, hundred percent.

**Neil:** Oh yeah, *oh yeah*.

**WJC:** How so?

**Oscar:** I mean, he's just a much more reserved person. Like, he's a very funny guy and if you get to know him, he's much more open, but generally he comes off as a quiet person. But his lead playing is nowhere near that.

On the whole, performers committed to maintaining their definition of a situation (whether that be prosociality, humility, friendly competitiveness, or otherwise) work convincingly to maintain control of the audience's view, often adopting and practicing their definition of the situation diligently even when an audience is not present. It is not merely the music itself that they must rehearse, then, but the donning of their masks as well. In a sense, by wearing the masks they know they will need for the performance, they begin to treat every rehearsal like a kind-of dress rehearsal. Indeed, this perspective could help explain why the interpreted performance of humility was enacted even with no audience present (beyond myself). It could be that the musicians were performing musical humility just for me, but that seems unlikely. It is more probable that they presented a degree of

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musical humility in Mr. Bowen's presence in order to remain favorable in his view. After all, as Neil cheekily suggested, "I know he's not gonna put some arrogant piece of shit in the band, right?" Yet what seems most explicable is that the musicians seemed to be exercising some degree of *visualization* during rehearsals, attempting to place themselves into the mindset of some future performance context. Visualizing oneself in a higher stakes context (i.e., competitions or festivals) allowed the musicians to prepare their 'characters' so that they would become confident and readied when the time called for them to be displayed. As Goffman (1959) rationalizes, through this commitment to their 'future' character,

[t]he performer may privately maintain standards of behavior...because of a lively belief that an unseen audience is present who will punish deviations from these standards. In other words, an individual may be his own audience or may imagine an audience to be present. (pp. 81-82)

While he did not use the term 'visualization,' and certainly did not make reference to the theoretical idea of dramaturgy, Mr. Bowen indirectly promoted this approach among his students by encouraging them to treat each rehearsal like a performance, such that performances would not feel particularly different from the environment they established during rehearsals. As Mr. Bowen explains,

One of the things that I guess *I* pride myself on is having them do their best on a day-to-day basis during rehearsal, and then have performances just be a natural outgrowth of that. You know, so that there's a consistency to it. It's not like we're

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slacking off at rehearsal and then all of a sudden you have to ramp it way up for a performance. That rarely has good results. But there's a certain amount of showmanship—would be a good way to put it, or posturing would be another way to put it—that happens on stage.

**'Performing haughtiness.'** While the utility of performing humbleness could make logical sense for ensuring the future success of the group (especially if humble and other-oriented behaviors are necessary for such success), it also seems likely that occasional displays of egoism were desirable at times as well. Indeed, the Grant Jazz Band is ultimately a competitive environment—competitive in a friendly way, surely, but competitive nonetheless. As such, it became essential for musicians to occasionally self-promote in order to maximize their perceived standing in the band (and among other top-performing groups). Here was where the individualism component of the individualism-collectivism dualism became particularly prevalent, and appropriately so. Humility is important, of course, but even with a refined view of musical humility in which healthy pride and self-promotion are perfectly acceptable components (as opposed to more antiquated associations of humility to deference), the appeal of haughtiness constantly brimmed at the service for many, waiting to be expressed by those who sought to show their superiority or prove their belonging to the elite group. As Goffman (1959) acknowledges,

a professional man may be willing to take a very modest role in the street, in a shop, or in his home, but, in the social sphere which encompasses his display of

professional competency, he will be much concerned to make an effective showing.  
(p. 33)

The initial possibility that I was observing some sort of dramatized egoism became conceivable after my interview with Theo. As a marching band drum major who self-identified as rather introverted, Theo acknowledged a need to adopt a more self-confident identity in order to passably appear as a leader among his peers. Although he might speak of a different musical context here (marching band), his point reveals the plausibility of the performed ego in other musical contexts as well:

**Theo:** ...it might be sort of a caricature, like I know I have to do that when I'm drum major. Like, I'm certainly an introverted person. Then to just go out and have to lead a hundred people onto a field, you have to project confidence, and you have to show everyone that like, "yeah, I'm the best person on this field, I know everything better than everyone." And that ego is absolutely an act. Like, you have to...and of course everyone has their own ego to varying degrees, but I know the one I put on on the field is purely a caricature.

**WJC:** It's a mask.

**Theo:** It's absolutely a mask. And some people have said, "dude, you look so arrogant when you're out there." I'm like, "I know! That means I'm doing it right!"

**WJC:** Interesting. And are they cool with that?

**Theo:** And they're cool—they know me. They're like, "that's so weird—," people have said, "it's really weird to see you on the field versus in person, 'cause you're like,

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you're really scary on the field!" And like, I have to convey my facial—it's like acting—I have to convey my facial expressions across a football field, which means they have to be more intense and bigger.

Beyond these more apparent functional purposes, it appears as if there was simply an element of pure entertainment resulting from 'peacocking' one's showiness. After all, a musician who performs with a sense of personal pride and a deep commitment to the music—in addition to a charismatic and entertaining temperament—arguably gains the faith of his or her audience by demonstrating that his or her playing is worthy of their time. Such committed displays of personal ability were evident during virtually every solo performed by Neil, for example. By consistently closing his eyes, raising his eyebrows, and swaying his saxophone in a fluid, Coleman Hawkins-like manner, he performed a degree of self-confidence that might be viewed by some as pompous but certainly interpreted by all as highly capable. Sensibly, this display would likely be more desirable than a performer playing with an uncertain posture, unassuming tone, and unassertive body language. This performer, choosing to 'play it safe,' might have a successful performance, but perhaps not a particularly evocative one (cf. Davidson, 2017 for an in-depth discussion of the "performance of identity," in which musicians may overdramatize their gestures and emotions in order to contribute to a more evocative performance).

Whether a musician presents a particular proclivity for acting humbly or arrogantly, considering their actions through a dramaturgical perspective helps explain how these behaviors can be performed and embodied for some functional purpose—even if they are ultimately inauthentic. Dramaturgy, then, provides an appropriate explanation for how

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musicians can change behaviors without necessarily changing their internal identities altogether—a task which is perhaps possible, but far more complicated and time-consuming than the mere decision to do so (see Hudson & Fraley, 2015).

### **Musical Humility, Community Music, and Hospitality**

It should come as no surprise that the very mannerisms that musical humility seeks to develop among musicians are not necessarily innovative or unique on their own. Within many musical spheres, of course, the components of musical humility are already deeply embodied within the practice, even if they are not named as such. As I will explicate throughout this section, the behaviors of musical humility appear to be convincingly reflected within the practices and attitudes of the Community Music movement (Higgins, 2012). Indeed, the participatory ‘flavor’ of community music is already deeply imbued within many facets of school-based musical participation (Veblen, 2007).

Some of the core tenets of community musicians include (a) a commitment to the idea that everybody has the right and ability to make, create, and enjoy their own music, (b) the facilitation of accessible music-making opportunities for members of the community, (c) the fostering of confidence in participants’ creativity, and (d) an openness to flexible facilitation modes and a commitment to multiple participant/facilitator relationships and processes (Higgins, 2012, p. 5). Likewise, the musician who embodies musical humility adopts a philosophy in which everyone has the right to create music on their own impulse and seeks accessible opportunities to do so (*purposeful musical engagement & collaboration, low superiority, other orientedness*). In addition, the musically humble musician fosters confidence among fellow musicians (*healthy self-pride, other-*

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*orientedness*), and works persistently to promote facilitative and non-hierarchical modes of participation (*lack of superiority, other-orientedness*). Through a ‘community music spirit,’ participants invested in the efforts of group music-making processes develop an empathic understanding of others and learn the significance of their relationships as central to the process.

**Aligning musical humility and community music.** The five-part definition of musical humility corresponds exceptionally well with the philosophy of community music, particularly insofar as the *purposeful musical engagements & collaborations* and *other-orientedness* components are concerned. By their very nature, community musicians are collaborators. They seek to engage meaningfully with one another—both musically and socially—and willingly and openly value each other’s contributions with sincerity. As Higgins (2012) writes, “... general use of the term *community* is a ratification of community music's participatory ethos—an emphasis on creative endeavors toward music making through workable agreements and conversation” (p. 136). Here, Higgins reinforces the idea that even in musical contexts that are not ‘community-based’ per-se, the *ethos* of community music can be meaningfully established and effectively utilized. Precisely, this investigation is about a school-based competitive group (which in some ways, might be viewed as polar opposite from a typical community music ensemble); nevertheless, an analogous set of ethos are bolstered robustly within both community music-like settings and environments centered around musical humility.

Corresponding powerfully with the core tenet of social and musical participation through other-orientedness is the Community Music movement’s devotion to deconstructing notions of elitism and superiority. Because community musicians believe



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that everyone has the right to make the music of their choosing, they believe categorically that elitist notions of music are not only problematic but arguably promote inaccessibility as well. Within the Community Music movement, according to Higgins, “[t]here was a call to erode the status of the individual artist as genius, instead committing to the idea of collaborations...” (p. 29). Similarly, musicians embodying musical humility will possess a lack of superiority and a general sense of other-orientedness, as well which together will diminish the potentials for such perniciously elitist beliefs. Thus, the musically humble musician would decline to assert any musical practice as being more legitimate, worthwhile, or valuable than any other.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, central to the development of such a democratic environment is the establishment of non-hierarchical, facilitation-based modes of leadership. Championed particularly by educational philosopher Paulo Freire (1970/2010), musician-teachers who oblige a facilitative spirit are, by definition, non-superior and non-elitist. In a clearly other-oriented manner, they necessitate “...trust in the ability of others as well as submission to the inventiveness of others” (Higgins, 2012, p. 148). Importantly, facilitation does not necessarily need to denote the loss of centralized leadership or expertise. Rather, facilitation acknowledges the need to relinquish *control* in order for more empowering experiences to become possible:

Facilitation does not mean that the community musician surrenders responsibility for music leadership, only that the control is relinquished. Within any group setting, there is a fine line between leading and controlling, but the two processes are very different and therefore provide contrasting results to the group experience. (p. 148)

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From the view of the musically humble director, promoting a non-authoritative, student-centered learning environment assuredly looks different from the more non-formal processes enacted in community music contexts. This is supported both by the shared theoretical foundations of community music and musical humility, but was further witnessed in-the-flesh through Mr. Bowen's commitment to non-authoritative teaching approaches. However, as Mr. Bowen understood well, the cultivation of a facilitative learning environment is not analogous to an *equal* environment. Higgins insists that equality between teacher and student is not only undesirable, but impossible. As he writes,

the relationship between facilitator and participation is *not* an equal one. It is built upon inequality and structured through (1) the facilitator's responsibility as leader of the process, and (2) the participant's call that reaches beyond the capacity of those who lead. (p. 160)

Truly, Mr. Bowen never attempted to indicate that he was equal to the students; surely, he democratically and non-superiorly solicited their opinions and insights, but never let them forget of his expertise within the learning environment. In line with this tactic, he declined the opportunity to point out every mistake or issue during rehearsals, and instead elected to have the students fix them on their own during sectionals and individual practice. He held his own notions of how the music should sound, but ultimately left it up to the students (whenever appropriate) to decide the tempo, the groove, and the soloing personnel as necessary. As early as the first week of rehearsals, for example, he

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allowed pianist Craig the opportunity to decide the tempo of Frank Foster’s “Shiny Stockings” through the iconic Basie introduction. Importantly, and as mentioned in Chapter 6, this temperament of confidence in his students’ expertise emanated from a resilient sense of trust in his students’ capabilities and musicianship. But again, the students were not to be fooled: Mr. Bowen was the *de facto* director of the group, and while they felt empowered enough to freely make musical suggestions and speak their minds, they understood precisely where their privilege began and ended. This reflects the spirit of community music to be sure, but it is also the embodiment of a musically humble director—whose other-orientedness and non-superiority (despite his heightened position) guides his teaching role such that the process no longer becomes about *him*, but about the efforts of the *students collectively*.

This balance is crucial to keep in mind, given that community music settings have the distinct ability to be more open-ended, process-based, and self-governing, whereas formalized, competitive (or even non-competitive) school-based ensembles are often subjected to more institutional restrictions (e.g., teacher accountability structures and benchmarks, administrative expectations). In effect, community-based musical events are usually process-based (with the focus on the holistic experience of making music collectively), whereas school-based—and especially *competitive* school-based—settings tend to be more product-based (with the focus on a particular end goal, such as a formal performance). For precisely these reasons, I do not attempt to align musical humility with community music explicitly; to do so would necessitate that the very mechanisms that create formalized musical instruction become needlessly deconstructed. Instead, I argue

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that the *ethos* of community music ‘culture’ is of core concern for any music program which seeks the social welfare associated with a musical culture rooted in humility.

**Promoting musical humility through hospitality.** At the center of any community music culture is the *welcome*—the open-door, non-judgmental reception in which participants and future participants enter a physical or metaphorical space for participating in a forthcoming musical ‘happening.’ As Higgins (2012) articulates powerfully, the ‘welcome’ is characterized by “...a gesture toward another,” where it “...becomes a preparation for the incoming of the potential participant, generating a porous, permeable, open-ended affirmation of and for those who wish to experience creative music making” (p. 137). As it pertains to musical humility, this welcome is charged with ethical responsibility for the teacher-facilitator to diminish his or her ego; without some humbling effort, the welcome can easily become selfish and self-serving. As Higgins explicitly claims, the teacher-facilitator must “put their ego aside” (ibid) in order for hospitality to be effectively realized.

With a reduced ego, the welcome carries no reservations, no expectations, and no requirements. It is not offered only to those who can serve the needs of the director or his/her program<sup>30</sup>. Through the welcome, Higgins asserts, a climate of hospitality can thus be established. In turn, hospitality “...suggests unconditionality, a welcome without reservation, without previous calculation, and, in the process of community music, an unlimited display of reception toward a potential music participant” (p. 139). Most importantly, this hospitable environment is developed in such a way that musical

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, from this perspective, one could posit that the very nature of an auditioned ensemble is antithetical to this grand ‘welcome’ because it creates parameters which define who is worthy of receiving the welcome and who is not.

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happenings promote musical humility through other-oriented musical and social exchanges (i.e., active collaborations, collective labors). In a way, non-elitist and non-superior dispositions allow for this non-judgmental and unconditional welcome to be enacted, which in turn facilitates open, creative, and accessible musical experiences to be realized.

Finally, it must be recognized that what likely seems like idealistic, utopian views of musical humility and community music is not maintained either by myself (with respect to musical humility) or by Higgins (with respect to community music). Higgins willingly accepts the imperfection that naturally arises from such non-hierarchical settings, which I likewise uphold with respect to musical humility. When such clashes inevitably occur, Higgins places them powerfully within the scope of a “community without unity,” which “recognizes that community is as much about struggle as it is about unity” (p. 137). This distinction is highly discernable within the negotiation of musical humility as well. In effect, the entire discussion of musical egoism (Chapter 5) might be similarly viewed as the embodiment of a “community without unity”—the selfish, individually-fueled desire to self-aggrandize *despite* a resounding commitment to the collective ensemble. Therefore, the at-times antisocial, selfish, or arrogant behaviors of certain members of the Grant Jazz Band does not necessarily denote that these members fully lacked the prosocial capacity or commitment to practice musical humility. Instead, the development of musical humility, hospitality, and the unconditional welcome are developed—in fact, *learned*—from a commitment to personal and collective growth.

### **Directions for Future Research**

My commitment to using qualitative inquiry to investigate humility and egoism in musical participation was purposeful, despite the lack of models utilizing a similar research tactic. I believe that given the relational, subjective, and inferential complexities of judging such a socially-contingent trait, a qualitative strategy was the most practical, methodologically rigorous, and socially conscious approach. I continue to place trust in the strengths of qualitative methods to adequately study musical humility and am hopeful that the current study can serve as an acceptable model for approaching similar investigations across the broad scope of musical participation. This may include (but is not limited to) the presence of musical humility in various types of ensembles (i.e., bands, choirs, orchestras, general music classrooms), age groups (i.e., elementary school, professional groups), contexts (i.e., school-based, community-based, informal settings), and so on. However, depending on the research question at-hand, I identify meaningful potentials for musical humility to work its way into quantitative realms of inquiry as well.

### **Quantitative Avenues: Development of a Psychometric Scale**

Given the nascent nature of musical humility, it seems apparent that aligning this strand of research with other ontological forms of humility research within positive psychology will bode well for its future applicability to both the fields of music education and psychology broadly (recall that to-date, nearly all humility research within psychology is quantitative in nature). While the distinctiveness of musical humility has been conceptually established in this study through qualitative inquiry, it would be of further advantage to classify musical humility as a validly and reliably measureable construct

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through the development of a psychometric scale. The development of such a “Musical Humility Scale” would allow musical humility to be statistically compared to other forms of humility (including general humility). To be explicit, developing a quantitative measure of musical humility would not be intended to abandon the highly valuable efforts of qualitative inquiry, but rather to open the construct to a wider range of investigative possibilities. For example, with a Musical Humility Scale, it would be possible to systematically (a) compare and contrast the embodiment of musical humility across a broad range of music ensembles (e.g., wind band, orchestra, chorus, general music, solo performance), (b) determine possible correlations of musical humility to the development of various cognitive processes (e.g., motivation, skill development, performance anxiety), (c) explore the salience of musical humility within various performance contexts (e.g., formal/informal/non-formal, school-based/community-based, participatory/presentational contexts), and (d) explore whether musical humility can be longitudinally developed through interventions.

### **Philosophical Avenues for Musical Humility Research**

Beyond empirical investigations, musical humility research also opens doors to questions of larger philosophical inquiry, particularly regarding the role of musical humility in the cultivation of artistic citizenship (Elliott, Silverman, & Bowman, 2016) and the pursuit of transformative [music] education (Freire, 1970/2010; 1998). First regarding artistic citizenship, musical humility is a natural constituent to the argument that music serves an essential, arguably evolutionary role in the development of humans’ moral and

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ethical comportments and the resulting embodiment of one's 'personhood'<sup>31</sup>. Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016) write that

music was vital to early humans' survival because musical practices promote constructive, prosocial, in-group behavior; bonding; and group cohesion.

Humans...are social beings who have an innate desire and survival need to live in groups where individuality and competition are balanced with cooperation and bonding (p. 4).

These beliefs regarding the evolutionary role that music played in human survival have been evidenced and articulated by numerous musicologists, including Blacking (1995), Dissanayake (2000), Cross (2001), and Malloch and Trevarthen (2009). Indeed, these very same tenets of human survival and sustainability are found within many practices of participatory musical engagements, including jazz. Furthermore, Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman go on to say that "[w]hile every individual is unique, everyone is also a member of a vast, multidimensional, ecological human network. Our intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of the arts...stem from our status as beings who possess, undergo, enact, and 'perform' our individual and collective personhood(s)" (p. 5). Supportively, within these words lies a well-defined appropriateness of musical humility as integral to the negotiation of individualism within the context of the larger 'collective.' It is here—at the intersection of one's moral and ethical responsibility, and one's commitment

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<sup>31</sup> Elliott and Silverman (2014) reference to 'personhood' is reflective of Aristotle's and other philosophers' conception of the 'good life,' or the attainment of the highest human values.



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toward humble, non-elitist modes of musical participation—that the philosophical significance of musical humility endures.

Beyond musical humility's approachability to notions of artistic citizenship, it can further play an integral role in the pursuit of transformative [music] education. One of the preeminent trailblazers of progressive education, Paulo Freire (1970/2010) was the first philosopher to explicitly acknowledge the importance of humility in the process of reducing oppressive mechanisms within societies. Without humility, Freire argued, humans are ultimately doomed to perpetuate the authoritative structures of domination through a tenacity for ignorance and a refusal to empathically enter into the process of learning and becoming *together*. Freire writes, "...dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance" (p. 90). Given this basis, the usefulness of musical humility within the concerted conversation surrounding transformative education becomes evident. Specifically, by demonstrating how the personification of musical humility can contribute to seemingly cathartic musical experiences, a compelling argument can be made for how humility (broadly) may contribute to the development of a transformative society at-large.

### **Recognizing Social Identity in Musical Humility**

I conclude this discussion by asserting that in whichever directions scholars may choose to lead the future of musical humility research, I strongly contend that we must crucially consider the construct from a socially-conscious standpoint. At the time of this writing, few studies explicitly work to consider the complexities of social identity characteristics with respect to investigations of humility. Fortunately, the research of

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prosocial behavior maintains a stronger track record of cogitating relevant social characteristics, particularly with respect to culture, status and power, economics and class, and individualism/collectivism (see Feygina & Henry, 2015). Humility research ought to similarly consider such social identity characteristics in order to maintain a more socially conscious perspective of the construct.

I believe that buttressing the important work of positive psychologists with more sociological perspectives is one way to develop a deeper understanding of how humility is experienced, personified, and judged by people of varying social backgrounds. Granted, the members of the Grant Jazz Band were relatively homogeneous (i.e., White, male, middle class), but social politics will consistently play an unequivocal role in how people think about humility, as well as how humbly or arrogantly we will expect certain people to act. As such, whether studying a homogeneous body of White, middle class male musicians, or an ensemble representing a broad range of races/ethnicities, genders, and culture groups, considering the role that social identity plays in resulting enactments of musical humility becomes essential.

**Race, ethnicity, & culture.** As discussed briefly in Chapter 5, evidence of a double standard for perceiving arrogance—and a lack of humility—according to race and ethnicity has been documented by several scholars. Kochman (1981) posits that African Americans are judged for arrogance more readily than Whites for behaving in the same manner. This troubling trend further emanates deeply into classrooms through unexamined and implicit biases, which arguably contribute to greater rates of suspension and expulsion for Black males (see Howard, 2010). Especially given the increasing diversity of students in American schools, it becomes crucial for any future research to consider these factors

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closely. Again, while the 2017–18 iteration of the GJB did not reflect a strong representation of ethnic or racial diversity (at least in terms of Black representation), matters of race, ethnicity, and culture nonetheless offer important implications for musical participation broadly.

Especially in regard to any future studies within jazz settings, considerations of Blackness are essential given the direct ties of jazz music to the African diaspora (Ake, 2002; Gioia, 1997; Williams, 1993). Indeed, jazz music is simply not intended to be consumed in the same manner as Western classical music, for example, whose European origins have prompted traditionally more ‘muted’ listening habits—particularly in terms of gestural and celebratory response (Small, 1998). These behaviors are incongruous to more participatory ways of listening within various African cultures. Referencing African music scholar J. H. K. Nketia, Small (1977) writes

[e]ven when listening to a performance the [African] listeners will react loudly and actively to the music without inhibitions, since...not only does motor response increase enjoyment of the music, but it also provides opportunity for social interaction in a musical context. (p. 50)

Taken along with Kochman’s (1981) and Howard’s (2010) problematization that African Americans are more readily judged for their so-called arrogance, it may come as no surprise that given the highly participatory tradition of jazz participation—in which ostentatious self-expression is truly celebrated—such displays may be more readily judged

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as acts of ‘grandstanding’ through the eyes of those who view musical participation from a more quieted, European perspective.

Expanding on the power of individual expression within the context of the group in African American culture, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) writes:

African-derived communication patterns maintain the integrity of the individual and his or her personal voice, but do so in the context of group activity. In music one effect of this oral mode of discourse is that individuality...actually flourishes in a group context. (pp. 115–116)

**Gender.** Some empirical studies, such as Peters et al. (2011), note that women are generally regarded more humbly than men. Furthermore, Haga and Olson (2016) offered that women tend to display less confidence than men, which has been referred to as the ‘confidence gap’ (see Kay & Shipman, 2014). However, empirical studies have overwhelmingly failed to address how humility can be a thorny subject with respect to gender politics. As Black feminist Collins (2000) historically notes, “deference mattered, and those women who were submissive or who successfully played the role of obedient servant were more highly valued by their employers” (p. 63). Further, Code (1991) argues that the submissiveness desired from women was a constructed act of social control—indeed, of oppression—that served the needs of the male population: “Essential masculine aggressiveness, sexual needs, and ego-enhancing requirements are often added...to reasons why women should remain subservient” (p. 18).

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With respect to gender, then, cultivating musical humility may require a more emboldening approach among female musicians by seeking to celebrate the empowering role that women have historically held—and continue to exercise—in music. For jazz music, this might include acclaiming the musical accolades of notable female musicians—including composers such as Mary Lou Williams (piano) and Sherrie Maricle (drums), as well as instrumentalists such as Lil Hardin (piano), Clara Bryant (trumpet), and Erika von Kleist (saxophone). Especially since jazz composition and instrumental jazz are heavily male-dominated fields, musical humility from an empowered feminist's view might attach more importance to developing healthy pride and slightly less importance to reducing feelings of superiority (although the *lack of superiority* component is still highly relevant, albeit held in empowered esteem).

### Closing Words

This dissertation represents nearly seven years of personal contemplation, marked by seemingly-endless reading and reflecting within the areas of social psychology, sociology, philosophy, and social justice. I have been long enamored by the potentials of humility in what appears to be an increasingly individualized and self-interested society and have long considered how humility might be reflected meaningfully within the artistic medium to which I have devoted my professional life. I commit myself to viewing humility as a lifelong process, and therefore something that can (and should) be taught and developed as part of a human's holistic social development. For a musician to commit him or herself to a personal quest for moral and ethical integrity, a collective responsibility toward his or her fellow human, and an artistic obligation toward a provocative musical

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tradition, musicians become further capable of transcending self-interest and pursuing more collaborative musical journeys.

A constant challenge of this dissertation was to avoid the risk of embarking on this nascent discussion of musical humility through a broad-based discussion that emanated into every possible facet of musical participation. Indeed, these perspectives will be necessary and are anticipated for future research, but at the current time they risk evolving into an unkempt and disorganized treatise of humility throughout all musical activities. Instead, the purpose of the current study was to establish a solid initial grounding for the rational importance and relevance of musical humility within a singular musical tradition. Now that the groundwork has been laid carefully and systematically, I eagerly seek to further understand what musical humility looks like across the *full* scope of musical participation—in all contexts, in all facets, and in all cultures.

As a natural byproduct of such a budding discussion, more questions are likely to be raised than answers provided. Certainly, while no scholar prefers to leave questions unanswered, these unsettled queries nonetheless leave me optimistic for the future of musical humility research. But in considering the implications of musical humility as a topic of continued systematic research, I consider its impact on both micro- and macro-levels. On the micro-level, it seems apparent that musical humility can serve as a model not only for prosocial and egalitarian modes of participation within our music ensembles, but additionally throughout our social interactions within the school and community. Second, I strongly believe that musical humility can be harnessed to eschew personal and collective notions of elitism and superiority in music—a problem which arguably runs rampantly within Western society, with elitist notions of ‘high art’ and ‘low brow’ music (Small, 1998).

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Third, on a more tangible level, musical humility appears to promote students' abilities to identify and acknowledge their personal room for musical growth, which serves as a source of self-motivation for their continued musical development.

On a macro-level, it appears that musical humility may serve as a model not only for desirable comportments within school communities but could arguably emanate into society more broadly as well. This includes more collectivistic attitudes associated with a humble mindset (which have been discussed throughout this study), but potentially extends further beyond to include the many social qualities correlative with humility, including forgiveness (Powers et al., 2007), generosity (Exline & Hill, 2012), helpfulness (LaBouff et al., 2012), social desirability (Exline & Hill, 2012), social relationship quality (Peters et al., 2013), and the strength of social bonds (Davis et al., 2013, 2017).

Finally, perhaps most the conceptual (but also the most socially formidable) implication posits that musical humility may potentially serve as a vehicle for transformative ends through the pursuit of social justice. As discussed previously in this chapter, educational philosopher Paulo Freire (1970/2010) viewed humility (in a decidedly empowered sense) at the very center of overcoming systemic oppression. As he saw it, an educational climate rooted in humility establishes the mechanisms for teachers and students to transcend artificial statutes of power and pursue humanistic ends together. Freire writes, "[t]he pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity" (p. 85). Grippingly, he further writes, "[r]evolutionary leaders cannot think *without* the people, nor *for* the people, but only *with* the people" (p. 131, italics original). Truly, what a powerful notion: musical humility

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serving as a potential exemplar for the means through which artistic participation and negotiation can radiate into the equitable pursuits of the broader society.

Throughout this process, I myself have never sought to represent a perfect figure of humility and have personally witnessed the many ways in which I may work toward a humbler identity as a musician, scholar, and human being. By recognizing personal room for development through the practices of musical humility, I became further hardened in my belief that this musical virtue (if I may venture to refer to it as such) is far more than just some sociomusical 'advantage,' but an indispensable quality for all practicing musicians. Humans will always be servants to self-interest, and likely, egoistic behaviors will continue to naturally pervade our musical instincts. But with a bolstered commitment to imbuing an ethos of musical humility within all of our human-centered musical interactions, the floodgates are opened for socially-and musically-transformative artistic experiences to be more fully realized.



**EPILOGUE**

At the southern tip of one of New York City's wealthiest neighborhoods, the oversized windows of Jazz at Lincoln Center's admirably-named "House of Swing" peer over a vertical split-screen of concrete and foliage. Both appear to depict the stunning results of competition—one created by humans, the other by nature. To the right, newly-constructed buildings bout for grandeur through loftiness and architectural nuance. And to the left, rows of greenery outline the perimeter of Central Park South—each tree seeking the lushest vegetation by reaching upward toward an expansive sun-basked canopy. Looking over the fountains of Columbus Circle, the image communicates an implicit message: whether by nature or by nurture, the fight for preeminence is pervasive, and ostensibly inspires progress.

Inside Frederick P. Rose Hall, Jazz at Lincoln Center's recently-renovated performance venue ostentatiously voices the importance of the music to be heard inside. Zebra wood-paneled walls contrast with red carpets, tapestries, and modern art, all accented by dramatic lighting in golds, reds, and pinks. From somewhere upstairs, cowbells, noisemakers, and the acoustic cheers of volunteers overwhelm the ambient jazz music playing in the hall, while a jazz quintet warms up at the bottom of a grand staircase. Suddenly, an over-amped microphone sounds, announcing the official start to the 23<sup>rd</sup> *Annual Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival*.

Echoing off the walls, the emcee's voice resonates with his introduction of the third band: "From Seattle, Washington, the Grant High School Jazz Band!" Mr. Bowen and the twenty-five members of the GJB appear at the top of a grand frosted-glass staircase, and as they descend, the lighting behind each stair rung projects upward, placing a white glow

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under the students' feet. The jazz quintet strikes up a rousing New Orleans second line, and the students skip down the stairs. Paul pumps his fists into the air, yelling "YEAH!" as he descends. Along with him, Kim, Theo, Neil, Oscar, and others offer high-fives to the line of outstretched hands proceeding down the hallway. From a volunteer in the crowd, Theo grabs a pair of purple Mardi Gras beads and dons them with a chuckle. Like celebrities advancing down the Red Carpet, this is their welcome to the nation's most prestigious high school jazz band competition. The Grant Jazz Band has returned, and after a one-year hiatus, they have something to prove.

The band enters Rose Theater immediately and is greeted by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra conducting an open rehearsal. Once all fifteen bands have arrived, Wynton Marsalis enters to deafening applause. In his tailored *Brooks Brothers* suit and distinguished spectacles, he walks toward to the microphone with a slow, self-assured gait. "Thank you all very, very much," and like a priest at a church service, he signals the congregation to sit from their ovation. Marsalis welcomes the bands warmly, reminding them of their exceptional privilege to be seated where they are, given the increasing difficulty of selecting the finalists each year.

\* \* \*

Following immediately after their colleagues from a few miles up the road in Seattle, the Grant Jazz Band takes the stage on the first day of the competition to thunderous applause<sup>32</sup>. Dressed in their finest black tuxedos, they take their seats and make minor adjustments from the previous band's setup. And like every band before them so far, they

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<sup>32</sup> Because permissions were not acquired by the other fourteen bands, descriptions of their performances will not be presently discussed, except when referring to broad and general discussions of the performances on-the-whole.

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turn their stands perpendicularly to show that there is, in fact, no sheet music in sight. A handful of years ago, one of the bands sought to impress the judges by taking the stage without music—dramatically turning their music stands 180-degrees to show that the music resided completely within their heads. Soon, this audacious display of mastery (and perhaps elitist superiority?) would be adopted by every band; no one wanted to be the *one* band that didn't have their music fully memorized, after all.

With the cheering now settled, Mr. Bowen takes the stage to a separate round of applause. He clasps his hands forward and bows toward the audience, never breaking stride as he walks straight to the rhythm section and counts off the “Theme from ‘The Asphalt Jungle.’” The band settles into their groove immediately, and even after the sound of Simon's first cracked note, the band stoically powers through. Sounding as the top voice eight bars before Greg's lead entrance, Simon's initial nervousness is evident but seemingly under control. But as Greg enters into the music, the power of his sound convincingly translates from the boxy walls of the GHS band room to the acoustically-sound space of Rose Theater.

Soon, like hundreds of times before, Greg and the band catapults Liam into his tenor sax solo. At the solo mic, Liam closes his eyes and begins playing a sequence of licks which is thematically perceptible from rehearsals a few days prior, but soon develops into extemporaneous ideas that—judging by the authentic reactions in the band—no one had yet before heard. Drummer Jeff and bassist Micah lock eyes during Craig's piano solo that follows, and Jeff smiles widely as he punctuates Craig's rising syncopated quarter note licks on the snare drum. At the conclusion of the tune, Mr. Bowen cues the final fermata with one of his signature gestures: an outstretched, open-fingered hand, which, responding to the

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weight and resonance of the band's final chord, hangs and throbs pregnantly in the air until an aggressive cut-off.

Lead alto Marcus brings in the second tune, "Banquet Scene" with a cadenza solo that spins out into a virtuosic excursion around various tonal areas before an introspective resolution. When the rhythm section enters, bassist Edward and pianist Kim appear to be slightly out of tune from each other—Ed likely not having had an opportunity to explore the pitch tendency of the house piano before taking the stage with his bass. The rest of the tune is trickled with small cracks in the trumpets (who enter with a highly vulnerable unison/octave figure in their upper register), but the band's warmhearted support underneath Marcus's ardent playing ultimately grabs the attention of the listeners, and much like the original Duke Ellington Orchestra, minor mistakes are seemingly forgiven for the sake of a more humanistic expression (as is evidenced by the audience's sincere response). At the conclusion of the piece, I wonder to myself how these mistakes are interpreted by the judges, and to what extent they are pardoned for the sake of a poignant overall performance.

As with their previous competitions earlier in the year, the Grant Jazz Band finishes their set with Chick Webb's up-tempo dance tune, "Harlem Congo." Mr. Bowen's counted-off tempo is noticeably slower than many other bands', but where other groups' tempos tend to drop off considerably by the end, the GJB maintains a tight, 'in the pocket' feel throughout. As Simon and Sebastian make their way to the solo mics after the head melody, I briefly recall their experience at the UW Jazz Festival, where Simon's trumpet valve had jammed during the middle of his solo. I notice my heart rate rise slightly as I recall the incident, but it seems to be the furthest thing from Simon's mind at the moment.

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As he leans back, he lifts his horn and precisely plays the written trumpet interlude originally recorded by the Chick Webb Orchestra—an interlude that he had cracked several times before. Following an appreciative applause from the audience, he enters straight into a solo of his own making, now (three months after the UW Festival) playing with a noticeably-improved attention to the harmonic progression of the music. Still, the tension in his body can be read from the back of the room, and his trumpet shakes are echoed by the tension throughout his body. But like a palliative parent, Sebastian appears next to him and plays in a calm-but-confident tone during the bridge (B section). He maneuvers around the chord changes with a still-impressive agility and expands upon a sequence of descending licks in response to the harmonic shifts in the music, playing fully in his mid-range with blue note-inflected scoops and bends. At the start of their second chorus, Simon and Sebastian begin to ‘trade fours’—Sebastian not breaking his classroom character in the slightest as he glissandos into his high range. The audience responds with a concerted “ohhh!” but as Sebastian finishes Simon’s thought an octave lower, Simon sticks his tongue out to express his apparent fatigue and slight frustration with hitting a ‘high-but-not-as-high-as-he-wanted’ pitch.

Given a brief rest through another short interlude, Simon and Sebastian look to each other and nod with prideful glances and smiles. But they’re soon back at it, ‘duking it out’ at the same time. Simon is immediately in his high range again while Sebastian still resides in his mid-range (where he plays best), but his licks are somewhat obscured by Simon’s brash playing. I recognize that their exchange might be read as grandstanding in the band room, yet it fails to read as arrogance here in the *House of Swing*, where neither Simon nor Sebastian want to leave anything unsaid during this high-stakes moment.

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The trumpet battle resolves into a series of further solos—including Neil on tenor sax, Arnold on trombone, and Benji on the bari sax (whose solo includes a rousing stop-time figure that forces yet another outcry of approval from the audience). The music is nearly on-the-edge by now, dangerously threading the line between controlled chaos and over-boiling disorder—the rhythm section pushing the soloists to their limits by playing slightly ahead of the beat. The pressure cooker-like solo section escalates into Seth’s drum solo, and channeling Chick Webb himself, he opens with a cadential snare drum figure reminiscent of the early military bands of the 1930s. After a moment, Seth reaches for the highest tom-tom drum, but perhaps lubricated by sweat on his palms, his right stick flies straight out in front of him, landing near the feet of trombonist Kim.

A wave of fear noticeably crosses Kim’s eyes, who glances down at the dropped stick and back up to Seth. But Seth routinely passes his remaining stick into his other hand, reaches casually into his drum bag, and grabs another without dropping a beat—continuing with his solo as if it were all planned and perfectly executed. He plays over the deafening cheers in the hall, and Kim smiles broadly and slaps her knee in utter disbelief. Energized by his recovery, his solo takes on a new life and Neil can be seen on the sidelines, shaking his head to every landed syncopation. In his excitement, Seth then accidentally hits the microphone stand at the end of his solo, which rocks precariously in place. Finally, taking a quick breath, he pauses and shrugs before bringing in the band with the half-time tempo. The band’s climax can barely be heard over the audience’s uproar in response to Seth’s playing—but soon the band strikes their final downbeat and swells upon it proudly. With a single fluid motion, Mr. Bowen gives both the cut-off and stand-up cue to the band. They rise along with the house in a standing ovation. After a series of bows, Mr. Bowen

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turns around and aggressively ushers them toward the off-stage door, as if to say, “let’s get out of here, because you’ve left everything you possibly could on that stage!”

\* \* \*

The excitement in Rose Theater is now replaced with a palpable tension as the fifteen finalist bands reconvene and await the arrival of the judge’s final decisions. The bands talk animatedly amongst each other, likely discussing the chances of being selected as one of the top three bands and having the opportunity to perform at the final concert later in the evening (which includes the distinct privilege of performing with a member of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (JLCO) as a guest soloist). Now that all fifteen bands have been heard, it is evident that multiple approaches to Ellington’s music were practiced. On the one hand were those bands who sought to present a perfectly-presented rendition of the music. And even if the music was creatively imbued with personal touches of the bands’ own doing, many of the solos sounded rehearsed and pre-planned (including some calculated reactions from the band—a frustration which Mr. Bowen expressed during his final interview when he acknowledged that dramaturgy was certainly at play during these competitions). On the other hand, however, were those bands who seemed to approach the music more organically; that despite the high-stakes environment, they adopted a “let’s just see what happens” mentality. This was clearly the approach of Mr. Bowen and the Grant Jazz Band. And while this strategy clearly exposes the musicians to the increased potentials of mistakes and inconsistencies, this tactic—as far as my nearly 10-year experience with the *Essentially Ellington* program could ascertain—lent itself to more rewarding and spontaneous moments. It was evident in Marcus’s alto solo during “Banquet Scene,” for example, with his differently-placed scoops and prolonged notes that were once glossed

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over during previous performances. As a result, the performance felt special, as if tied to a particular time and place. It was not reflective of a calculated decision constructed in advance of the emotional moment, but rather fashioned in-the-moment as the musicians, judges, and audience members all shared equally in the experience.

After a dramatic postponement, Wynton Marsalis and the competition judges enter the stage and share their personal thoughts before announcing the final winners.

Auspiciously, I recognize their words of advice as cogently residing within the newly-established ethos of musical humility—and their comments reinforce the particular importance of each band committing itself to more prosocial, egalitarian, and cooperative demeanors. One of the judges—the only female among them—focuses on the soloists, and her words of advice touch upon the very priorities that are promoted through several of musical humility's components:

It's not necessarily about what you want to play in that moment, it's about what the music *needs* in that moment. And some of the most profound moments in your solos happened when you *didn't* play. And don't take that the wrong way! [Laughs]. It means that...take your time and listen more to each other. [...] But when you're performing, just remember to take your time and listen and communicate in your soloing. [...] Take a breath, and let the music tell you what it needs.

Her comment resonated throughout the room through audible “mmm”s and nods of affirmation. Indeed, she was asking each soloist to employ the very same behaviors as those who would commit themselves to *purposeful musical engagements and collaborations*,



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along with a disposition of *other-orientedness* and a *lack of superiority*. Furthermore, it echoed Marsalis's gregarious comment at the start of the festival (during the Q&A session) when he asserted that musicians within an ensemble setting must prioritize others over themselves, avowing that "instead of showing how *you* are in a big band, you have to show how *we* are." Perhaps understandably, this sense of other-orientedness (and non-superiority) was often the first prosocial quality to disappear during the competition, as soloists occasionally sought to impress judges through their own musical prowess rather than humbly relinquishing an egomaniacal mindset for the greater good of the ensemble's unity.

Marsalis takes the mic last to share his final thoughts before announcing the winners. His message is largely in regard to a jazz musician's lifelong acceptance of learnability. In his distinctive cool, deep-voiced manner, he challenges American society's current view of competition by asserting that the jazz musician's sense of learnability ought to be central to any competitive environment:

a competitor is *not* an enemy. The world is based on collaboration. People play a certain thing better than you, you're gonna learn as much from students who are like you than you are gonna learn from teachers. Don't hate it; congratulate it.

His message was recapitulated from the Q&A session from the first day of the festival, after avowing that when it comes to learning to play jazz in an ensemble setting, knowing one's personal limitations yields a more efficacious ensemble dynamic. To drive his point home during that opening session, he recounted an anecdote of a rehearsal with

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the JLCO, where third trumpeter Marcus Printup was given a solo originally intended for Marsalis:

One time, we were in a rehearsal. And [someone] had written a piece for the trumpet to play a solo and he gave the solo to me, but it was a solo that Marcus [Printup] would've been much better playing. So, I was kind of playing it but we all knew Marcus would play it better. [...] So I said, "hey, Marcus should play this part—he's gonna play it much better than I'mma play it. He knows how to play this style." Marcus took the solo, so everybody started teasin' me: "ohh, you had to give the part to Marcus, ohhh you can't play, come on Marcus! Marcus, Marcus, Marcus...." And then Marcus said, "well I don't know about any *one* of us, but if you put the *four* of us together, you have one hell of a trumpet player." Like, think of all of the trumpet we can now play with each other *if* we can *not* have to hog the ball.

As I continue to sit in one of Rose Theater's box seats awaiting the final announcement, Marsalis's message further ruminates in my mind, and I briefly recall another powerful moment during the same Q&A in which a nineteen-year alum of *Essentially Ellington*—now sitting in the fourth trumpet chair of the venerated JLCO—grabbed the mic to expand upon Marsalis's thoughts on the jazz musician's penchant for learnability. Pulling his hand through his jet-black hair and adjusting his thick-rimmed glasses, the trumpeter chose his words carefully and spoke articulately:

When I was your age, I had the distinct feeling that if only I got to "here," then I'd make it. Right? Got into *Essentially Ellington*, I met Wynton Marsalis, I'm good! No... [...] If I just got a scholarship to college, then I'm in! Move to New York, then I'm in!

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Get the call from so-and-so, then I'm in! And every level that that actually ended up happening, I realized, "No! Now you're just *here*." There's never a point where you feel like you've *got it*. You know, I mean you go back to Socrates: 'the more you know, the more you realize you don't know.' The thing that develops is your ability to deal with the parts of yourself, your playing, your life, that you want to improve. For me personally, it was a matter of getting better at accepting the things I couldn't do. That's what I had to deal with—it was really hard for me at seventeen to accept that I sucked at something. [...] But you're always going to feel like there's something you're trying to get to, right?

With this clear message of the jazz musician's acceptance of shortcomings and learnability, I wondered to what degree the members of the Grant Jazz Band truly adopted this mindset. Surely they would to some degree, I reasoned. After all, the theme of *acknowledgement of shortcomings and learnability* emerged directly from my work with them, but I wondered if it was something they simply regurgitated as learners within the art form, or if it was something they truly believed. I wondered: if the Grant Jazz Band was not chosen as one of the top three bands, would they accept their defeat with grace and humility? Would they maintain their sense of empowered self-pride and just accept that others simply performed better than them in this particular competition? Or would they become disparaged and angry, blaming the decision on biased subjectivity or an unlevelled playing field with the rise of the community bands entered into the festival?

Finally, as Marsalis finishes his closing thoughts, his left hand reaches over to the white piece of paper sitting casually on a small side table. The three bands appear to be written on that paper, and as his fingertips touch the paper, the entire space seems to

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constrict inward with a sharp collected inhale. As he announces the three winning bands, small pockets of jubilation erupt from around the space while the rest of the theater maintains its pregnant silence. With three distinct explosions of elation, all three bands are now announced. And sitting together in the front two rows, the members of the Grant Jazz Band stare directly ahead, unmoving, perhaps baffled as to why they did not hear their name called. As the hall empties, a winning band from Florida begins their boisterous, testosterone-fueled school chant while Mr. Bowen rises and calls his students to gather around him.

Huddled against the wall of the stage, the twenty-five members of the Grant Jazz Band circle around their leader, all holding hands. I stand just beyond the cluster along with some parent chaperones. We cannot hear a word that Mr. Bowen is speaking to his students, and I do not try to. This is a moment that is not intended for me. But judging from the emergent flow of tears around the huddle, this is Mr. Bowen's intimate message to his students. I imagine him telling them how proud he is of them, and how he wouldn't change a note or a decision or a musician for any other. As the huddle breaks, more than half the band has tears streaming down their faces—Simon, Kyle, Greg, Micah, and Kim to name just a few. But they are not angry. They are disappointed, but they know they have given it their all on that stage. And just because their efforts were not enough for the judges, it *was* enough to earn Mr. Bowen's utmost pride and respect.

\* \* \*

At the final concert and award ceremony, the band is still visibly disheartened, but they laugh and joke as they await the start of the concert. I want to interview the students to understand just how they are feeling, but I realize that the moment is inappropriate. And

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when the top three bands perform for the sold-out crowd, Grant Jazz Band's engagement exhibits their great respect for the exceptional abilities of the three winning bands. They react to every evocative moment and stand in ovation at each band's final cut-off.

With the awards ceremony following, their disappointment is replaced with bittersweet elation as several soloists receive awards, including drummers Seth, Marley, and Jeff (Honorable Mention), Craig (Outstanding Piano), and saxophonists Marcus (Honorable Mention), Neil, Liam, and Benji (Outstanding Saxophones). The joyfulness continues as the entire GJB saxophone section receives an Outstanding Sectional Award, and before long, the twelve non-placing bands have seemingly forgotten about their disappointments as the focus shifts toward the fifteen band directors. As Marsalis brings the directors to the stage for a moment of recognition, Rose Theater erupts like I had never before heard it. The applause, whistles, and cheers are earsplitting, with a standing ovation that continues for several minutes. Wynton stands at the podium, periodically leaning into the microphone and opening his mouth to speak, but finally shrugs and steps back, realizing that he won't be getting another word in for some time now. The directors stand stoically, receiving the applause with proud smiles and waves of appreciation toward their students. The applause goes on for about five minutes before cellphone flashlights emulate cigarette lighters swaying in unison, and still after seven minutes the cheering shows no signs of waning. Parents have long gone back to sitting by now, but the students refuse to stop pouring their love out for their leaders. Standing in the center orchestra section, the Grant Jazz Band continues chanting for Mr. Bowen and Grant High, even as other schools have sat back down again. Mr. Bowen captures the moment on his cellphone, and his pursed smile indicates that he may be holding back a tear or two. Finally, having regained

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control of the room once again, Wynton Marsalis announces that the Grant Jazz Band (along with another public school in the Midwest) has earned Honorable Mention (the equivalent of fourth place). And if I hadn't known any better, judging from their pure and authentic reaction, I would've thought that Grant took home the top prize.

Presumably soon after the band begins making their way back to their hotel rooms for the night, the Grant Jazz Band's Facebook page is already exulting the news to family and friends back home in Seattle:

We have stories to tell and more to share, but for now let's just say 'this' is about as close to perfection as we can get. As one of our clinicians [...] said: 'Better is [b]etter than [b]est.' These kids gave their best performance and they handled themselves with grace, joy and the very best of humanity.

And I might further add, humility.

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**APPENDIX 1: WELCOME LETTER TO FAMILIES**

September 11, 2017

Dear Students and Parents:

My name is Will Coppola, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the Music Education program at the University of Washington. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree, I have chosen to conduct a study of the social dynamics occurring within a competitive high school jazz band. This study is being conducted with the intent of contributing to a new body of research within the field of music education. Specifically, I hope to provide both music teachers and musicians with a better understanding of how the social dynamics of a competitive music ensemble may affect musical and social outcomes. This research may additionally assist teachers with developing these important skills among young musicians.

This study has been specifically designed to allow your students to engage in their musical activities in exactly the same manner as before. The only difference will be that I will be observing by taking notes and recording rehearsals and performances, and I will informally interact with your child before and after rehearsals. Your child will also have the optional opportunity to be interviewed at various points during the study as well (please see consent forms for more information).

Attached is a combined consent/assent form for participation in this study. These forms will provide you with the information you will need to help you decide whether you would like to be involved with this study. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a participant, and anything else about the research at any time.

If you and your child are willing to participate in this study, please complete and return the attached consent (parent) and assent (child) forms. I very much appreciate your willingness to participate, and I hope you will feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



William J. Coppola  
Doctoral Candidate, Music Education  
University of Washington  
[wcoppola@uw.edu](mailto:wcoppola@uw.edu)  
914.456.9561

**APPENDIX 2: STUDENT CONSENT/ASSENT/PARENT PERMISSION FORM**

***The Social Dynamics of a Competitive High School Jazz Band***

**Researcher:**

William J. Coppola, Doctoral Candidate, School of Music, 914.456.9561, [wcoppola@uw.edu](mailto:wcoppola@uw.edu)\*  
Dr. Patricia Campbell, Professor, UW School of Music, 206.543.4768, [pcamp@uw.edu](mailto:pcamp@uw.edu)\*

*\*Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent by e-mail.*

This consent form is asking you or your child who is under the age of 18 to be in a research study. If you are reading this because your child has been asked to participate in the research, any “you” statement in this form is referring to your child.

The purpose of this consent/assent/parental permission form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

**What is this study about?**

This study is researching the social dynamics of people who participate in a competitive high school jazz ensemble. The study of social dynamics is the study of how people are influenced by one another's behavior. Your participation will help us to understand how the social dynamics that take place in the band may affect the musical and social outcomes of the group.

**What will I do?**

Participation in this study will last approximately six (6) months. If you decide to participate in this study, you will:

- (1) Participate normally in jazz band rehearsals. What is different is that rehearsals and performances will sometimes be audio recorded, but this will have no effect on your daily interactions in the band.
- (2) Occasionally, we may ask to interview you about jazz band rehearsals. These interviews are optional, and may occur before or after rehearsals (depending on your availability), so that they will not interfere with your participation in the ensemble. Interviews will be approximately 30-60 minutes each, scheduled periodically throughout the six-month study (three interviews at a maximum). You will be asked a few demographic questions, but interviews will mostly ask questions about how you interact socially and musically

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with your fellow bandmates.

You do not have to participate in the interviews to participate in the rest of the study; by choosing not to be interviewed, you can still be included in observations. You will have the option to be interviewed alone, or with another student in the ensemble. I would like to audio record the interviews. If you would like, you can listen to the recordings, and you can ask me to change or erase anything that you said. You can also choose to not answer any questions you'd like. Talking about your experiences may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.

### Other information:

You can choose if you want to be part of this study. If you are under the age of 18, you will have to have your parent sign on the parent/guardian signature line below. You can ask questions at any time, and you can change your mind about participating in this study at any time. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you choose not to participate in the study, you will still take part in all rehearsals with the rest of your classmates, but your voice will be scrambled in the recordings so no one can tell who you are.

If you participate in this research, the information that you tell the researcher will be coded with a pseudonym so that it will not be tied back to you. With your permission, I may use samples from recordings for presentations at educational audiences, such as at professional conferences and in teacher education courses. I would like your permission to keep the recordings forever in order to use them for these purposes. I will not use your child's name or the name of the school/music program in any presentation.

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### **Student's Statement:**

This research study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

**I give you permission to audio and video record my participation during rehearsals and performances.**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**I give you permission to interview to me about my social interactions during rehearsals. I understand that you will record what we talk about.**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

---

Printed name of researcher

Signature of researcher

Date

---

Printed name of student

Signature of student

Date of Birth

Today's Date

---

Parent/guardian signature (if student is under the age of 18)

Date

**APPENDIX 3: ADMINISTRATOR/MUSIC TEACHER CONSENT FORM**

***The Social Dynamics of a Competitive High School Jazz Band***

**Researcher:**

William J. Coppola, Doctoral Candidate, School of Music, 914.456.9561, [wcoppola@uw.edu](mailto:wcoppola@uw.edu)\*

Dr. Patricia Campbell, Professor, UW School of Music, 206.543.4768, [pcamp@uw.edu](mailto:pcamp@uw.edu)\*

*\*Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent by e-mail.*

**Researcher's statement**

I am seeking to conduct research at your school. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether you and your school would like to be involved with this study. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a participant, and anything else about the research or this form that is unclear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you would like to participate in this study. This process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study is researching the social dynamics of people who participate in a competitive high school jazz ensemble. The study of social dynamics is the study of how people are influenced by one another's behavior. Your participation will help us to understand how the social dynamics that take place in the band may affect the musical and social outcomes of the group. I will be observing students as they naturally participate in rehearsals, performances, competitions, and festivals over the course of the 2017-18 school year.

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

As part of the study, I will be observing your normal jazz band rehearsals and performances. Participation in this study will last approximately six (6) months.

Participation in the study will include the following activities:

- (1) Students will participate normally in jazz band rehearsals. What is different is that rehearsals and performances will sometimes be audio recorded, but this will have no effect on students' daily interactions in the band.
- (2) Occasionally, we may ask to interview you (the director) about jazz band rehearsals. These interviews are optional, and may occur before or after rehearsals (depending on your availability), so that they will not interfere with your directing responsibilities. Interviews will be approximately 30-60 minutes each, scheduled periodically throughout the six-month study (three interviews at a maximum). You will be asked a few demographic questions, but interviews will mostly ask questions about how you interact socially and musically with your fellow bandmates.

You do not have to participate in the interviews to participate in the rest of the

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study; by choosing not to be interviewed, you can still be included in observations. You will have the option to be interviewed alone, or with another student in the ensemble. I would like to audio record the interviews. If you would like, you can listen to the recordings, and you can ask me to change or erase anything that you said. You can also choose to not answer any questions you'd like. Talking about your experiences may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.

### **OTHER INFORMATION**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Any information collected about the school or faculty will remain confidential, and the link between the study information and your name will be destroyed immediately after it has been collected. I will code all of the study information using pseudonyms for you, your students, and your school. You are welcome to review the audio recordings or the transcripts at any time and make changes or delete any comments.

With your permission, I may use samples from tapes for presentations at educational audiences, such as at professional conferences and in teacher education courses. I would like your permission to keep the recordings forever in order to use them for these purposes. I will not use your name, students' names, or the name of the school/music program in any presentation.

### **Participant's Statement**

This research study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. I give the researcher permission to observe jazz band rehearsals and interview me/the jazz band director, as outlined above. Below, I will indicate whether I will allow these interactions to be audio recorded, and whether I volunteer to be interviewed. If I have questions later about this research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I choose to contact the researcher by e-mail, I understand that confidentiality of any information cannot be assured.

If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.



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**Please INITIAL next to EITHER YES or NO for each of the items below:**

I give my permission for the researcher to audio record my rehearsals.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I give my permission for the researcher to observe my class instruction.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I volunteer to be a part of the interview portion of this study.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I give my permission for the researcher to audio record my interviews.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

---

Administrator/Teacher Name

Signature

Date

---

Printed name of researcher

Signature of researcher

Date

## APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDES

### *The Social Dynamics of a Competitive High School Jazz Band*

#### **Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews (Students)**

- *Questions will first be about you and your involvement in jazz, and then I'll ask a few questions about your social interactions in the band.*
- *Remember that everything you say will stay private. I will change your name (and instrument if necessary) so what you say is not tied back to you. I will not discuss anything that we say to anyone—not Mr. Bowen, not other students, not anyone.*
- *You can choose to not answer any question you want, and you can change your answer to anything you say, after the interview.*

#### **ABOUT YOU:**

1. How long have you been in the band? How long have you been in the GHS jazz program in total?
2. What kinds of activities do you engage in with other members of the band, either formally (jam sessions, picnics) or informally (hanging out, eating lunch together, etc.)
3. How do you think you got into this band? What makes you such a good musician?
4. Who do you think are the leaders in the band?
5. What are some personality traits that stand out to you with certain members of the band?

#### **ABOUT GHS JAZZ**

1. What do you think the image is of GHS Jazz Band within the school? Within the music department? How about within the Seattle area and beyond?
2. Who would you consider to be your closest friends in the band? Any enemies, or 'frenemies,' or people you just don't get along with? How are your relationships with your friends/frenemies/etc. different inside and outside the jazz band?
3. Are there any relationships that seem strained in person, but really productive when playing? Or the opposite?

#### **ABOUT COMPETITIVENESS**

1. How competitive do you feel with other high performing schools in the area? Are there any rivalries, friendly or unfriendly?
2. How do you generally feel about competitive environments? Has competitiveness affected any of your relationships within the band?

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3. When you're competing against other jazz bands, how important is it to prove that your band is better than every other band that's competing? Does that ever carry over into non-competitive settings, you think?
4. Try to think of a really positive musical experience that you shared with other people while performing. Tell me about your interactions with the other people in the group. What do you think made that experience such a positive one?
5. Now, try to think of a really negative musical experience that you shared with other people while performing. Tell me about your interactions with the other people in the group. What do you think made that experience such a negative one?

When you see your bandmates acting a certain way—good or bad—do you feel like they act that way all the time, or is there something about performing or competing that makes them different?

### **Interview Guide for Mr. Bowen (Director)**

#### **ABOUT GHS JAZZ**

1. How does this year's iteration of the band differ from last year? How were the personalities different?
2. Why do you think the group didn't get invited to EE last year?
3. What do you think the image of the GHS jazz band is in the music department, school, Seattle area, nation?
4. What do you think are some of the most important characteristics/traits for a member of the band to possess? What are some characteristics or personality traits that you think are detrimental?
5. Tell me about some of the salient personalities in the group, either positive or negative
6. Do you think you or the band changes their behavior at all between rehearsals and the performance? Is there any sense of 'acting' or performance?
7. How do you feel about the competitive jazz band culture, generally?
8. Has competitiveness affected any of the student relationships within the band?