

Arts Scholar Fourth-Year Award Outcome Report

Narrative Report

This grant is embedded in the most grandiose, sensational failure of my career so far.

I dreamt up an exploration via written thesis and performance regarding embodiment in narratives that are as old as time but continually adapted, focusing particularly on the musical *Hadestown* and its presentation of the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus. I wanted to know what it means for a Queer Person of Color to portray one of the most famous stories of all time nearly always been shown by and for elite, wealthy, socially-dominant men. In my mind, the most appropriate way to explore how one's identity impacts story-telling (and vice versa) is to use one's body. I intended to pursue a performative aspect in this exploration, not for the purpose of displaying virtuosity, but rather as the vehicle for these arguments.

Because the framework of this project revolved more around constructing arguments than presenting an impressive performance, I did not expect to audition alongside the talented folks of the Music Department's Performance Concentration who had been preparing for months – perhaps years. However, on March 1, 2024, a few weeks after submitting my application, I was requested to audition on March 15 with repertoire similar to what I might perform. I was caught completely unprepared in the midst of a hectic midterm season, neither stricken by clear repertoire choices nor confident that I could find an accompanist. Further, I had been scheduled for a midterm during the audition slot, and even after multiple requests, it was determined I could not find a different time — I am indebted to my kind Professor who allowed me to take their midterm outside of class. I scrambled to prepare two to three songs with Professor William Ferguson, my vocal coach, and, after six tries, found someone willing to learn all of my repertoire and perform it for the audition. Unfortunately, she was not equipped to learn as quickly yet carefully as I needed, and the audition went somewhat awry. I had unfavorable conditions going into the audition, and I was not filled with hope as I left the room.

I was accepted as a candidate for the Distinguished Major Program (DMP) March 22, 2024. The acceptance message was a little unclear as to what exactly the approval entailed (writing, performance, or both). After more back-and-forth, I learned that my audition was not determined to be of a high enough quality for the DMP, but I could still be permitted to do some sort of performance that would not be evaluated.

This left me rather confused: how am I to effectively argue about embodiment without having embodied performances received as central to this communication?

Over the following nine months, I attempted to find a solution to this dilemma while becoming familiar with musical adaptations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth throughout time. Research was building upon itself, but the project's form and scope remained stagnant. I knew I needed more guidance to finalize its shape, but unfortunately, my mentors were not readily available. I chewed it over in my mind and with my friends, other professors, and almost anyone I could find; however, I could not find a solution to ease my form-based discontentment.

On Friday, December 20, I received a message from Music Department administrators sharing that I was missing core requirements of the Music major and warning that, if I did not adjust my path, I would not graduate with a B.A. in Music in May. Born thus were 22 messages and many in-person meetings negotiating credits, requirements, and what I would have to change to earn my degree on time. In this conversation, I proposed withdrawing from the DMP to address specific credit concerns. I initially proposed this as an unfavorable contingency plan.

However, the more discussions I conducted, the more clearly I recognized that I could complete my time at the University of Virginia without the DMP, and that could still include productive creativity. I had avoided examining the relief I felt when imagining a future without the project, but anxieties had only continued to grow as I faced struggles of form and agential inability. Weeks wore on, conversations grew more urgent, and eventually, I collapsed. I admitted that I could cultivate creative fertile terrain even if I withdrew from the program.

After months of long, difficult, draining, and emotional work and conversations, I knew that this was simultaneously the correct and most complex decision I have ever made. As I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel, I realized that I could use the time I had originally budgeted for this project to finish personal works in progress and invest in collaborative creation. In this dreamland, I could also create a professional website, compiling my recent years into a navigable format for potential employers to study. I need not leave the University scattered across more projects—I could emerge as a coherent artist ready to enter the professional world.

The only unresolved factors were the grants which the Miller Arts Scholars initially gifted on the agreement that I would complete my DMP project. Because I no longer needed to use these funds on research, I found fruitful applications elsewhere: I could recover from expenses incurred for class projects, voice lessons, and other artistic creations that have and will occur in the void of the DMP.

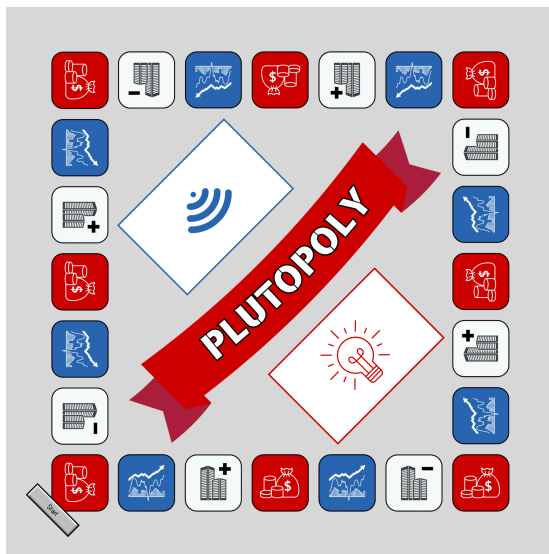
Accomplishments and Budget Breakdown

With the combined funding of this Fourth-Year Award, a Spring 2024 Minigrant, and a partial Reider-Otis Prize, I have accomplished the following:

- I. Two semesters of **voice lessons** with Professor William Ferguson
 - Each semester of MUPF 3110 costs \$432.50 after a half scholarship from the Music Department. I will have completed two semesters of lessons post-grant reception, so this totals to \$865.00
 - This semester, I am also paying for a rehearsal accompanist. Her rate is \$25 per hour; we work together for a half-hour during lessons and a half-hour elsewhen. If current lesson plans are not altered, I will owe her for seven weeks, totaling to \$175 for the semester. I expect an increased rate for my final jury accompaniment, but this exact figure has not been established yet.
 - My Fall 2024 jury scores reflected growth only possible through the dedication of Professor Ferguson and the financial support of the Miller Arts Scholars and Music Department. Without the both of you, I could not have completed multiple semesters of lessons and reached the vocal comfort I now have.
- II. Prototyping a **board game**
 - For my final project of “The Black Voice” (MUSI 4065) with Dr. Carson, I created a board game engaging with the media assigned throughout the semester. Dr. Carson has been incredibly encouraging about the concept and design, and he continues to motivate me to print a more professional version and share it.
 - The initial print-and-play version cost \$50.00 in color printing and tape.
 - The final copy to be printed by The Game Crafter charges different amounts for different quantities. The range of bulk prices are shown below.
 - I want to purchase 10 copies of this game. This will cost \$472.90 before shipping.

Total Copies	MSRP	1	10	20	30	40	50
Price per Copy	\$62.99	\$57.14	\$47.29	\$46.42	\$45.54	\$44.67	\$43.80

Total Copies	60	70	80	90	100	500	1000+
Price per Copy	\$42.92	\$42.05	\$41.18	\$40.30	\$39.43	\$32.87	\$29.30



- III. Creating a **professional website** portfolio
- I have been curating an online portfolio with Wix. I received a free year after attending a Wix/UVA event, and I paid \$7.66 for a year of the domain alexburijon.org.
 - In the future, this subscription will cost \$29 per month to hold all of my portfolio data. One year costs \$348, so with the remainder of these funds, I can afford to host this website for almost 4 years.
- IV. **Notability** subscription
- My parents generously gifted me an iPad this past December to hold my school notes, sheet music, and more content than can exist on my Mac and iPhone. It has been incredibly helpful with voice lessons and school notes, allowing me to stay organized online and in-person.
 - Notability is an app which stores documents and media, and it is highly compatible with Google Drive, Dropbox, OneDrive, Box, and WebDAV. I am able to create and curate documents and share them with ease.
 - I purchased a Notability Lite subscription, costing \$14.99 per year.
 - Other monthly subscriptions I pay include YouTube Premium, Spotify, and Dropout, costing \$7.99, \$5.99, and \$5.99, respectively. This totals \$19.97 per month, summing

to \$239.64 per year. Because these are clearly not relevant to this project, I cover them with personal funds.

- Including Notability Lite and Wix, a year of subscriptions sums to \$610.29.
- I include these costs to show that, thanks to Miller Arts' support, I can engage with artists' content at a higher quality *and* work to present myself to such a quality; I do not exist as a viewer or creator alone.

The screenshot shows a music library interface. On the left, there is a sidebar with navigation options: Welcome, Scheduling, Careers, and course filters for Spring '25 (AAS 3500, LATI 3150, LATI 4559, MUPF 3110 with 23 items, MUSI 4523, MUSI 4993) and JTerm '25: STAT 1601 (Final notes, Raw notes). The main content area is titled 'MUPF 3110' and lists several items with their titles and dates:

- CMIN, Vagabond, Vaughn-Williams (Mar 20, 2025)
- FMIN Amarilli, mia Bella (Caccini) (Mar 18, 2025)
- GbMAJ Ganymed, Schubert (Mar 20, 2025)
- MUPF 3110 Notes (Mar 18, 2025)
- AbMAJ Dioskuren, Schubert (Jan 28, 2025)
- AbMAJ Ganymed, Schubert (Jan 28, 2025)
- BbMAJ Dog-Star, Purcell (Jan 28, 2025)
- BbMIN Vagabond (Vaughan Williams) (Feb 2, 2025)

Budget Overview

Item	Unit Price	Unit	Quantity	Total
Voice lessons	\$432.50	semester	2	\$865.00
Piano accompaniment	\$25.00	week	7	\$175.00
Board game draft	\$50.00	draft	1	\$50.00
Board game final	\$47.29	copy	10	\$472.90
Wix subscription	\$29.00	month	48	\$1392.00
Domain renewal	\$7.66	year	4	\$30.64
Notability Lite	\$14.99	year	1	\$14.99
SUM				\$3,000.53

Faculty Mentor

Dr. A.D. Carson, the Music Department's Associate Professor of Hip Hop and the Global South, has served as my Miller Arts Scholar Mentor. He is richly-versed in adaptation across media formats, making him an excellent guide for my initial project. After withdrawing from the DMP, he has continued to be crucial to my efforts, steering my studies and creative energies with sagacity.

Having taken classes with him for four consecutive semesters, I've gotten to know him quite well. He provides as much intellectual background and foundational knowledge as he does creative innovation and personal encouragement. Without him, my UVA experience would have been much duller. His involvement in these specific endeavors has included:

- Much time in conversation around the DMP
- Coursework requiring the game's first draft
- Suggestions to and how to transform the project from exhibit to board game
- Exposure to profound thinkers and creators
- Connections with virtuosic artists around Grounds with whom I've been lucky enough to collaborate
- Opulent payment for live-streaming his recent album release

The ways in which he has bettered my life and artistry—as well as that of those around me—are too many to enumerate! I bother him incessantly ... may he find peace after May 2025.

Reflection and Future Plans

This has been an intense process through which I've learned much about myself, the University, and artistic creation and research. Though intertwined with my inglorious self-defenestration from academia, I am grateful for the experiences this grant opened up to me. Without the support of the Miller Arts Scholars, I could not have afforded voice lessons, vocal accompaniment, board game creation, artistic portfolio curation, or subscriptions to helpful homework and sheet music softwares. Most notably, the Miller Arts Scholars have provided a safety net for me to pursue personal, academic, and professional exploration without risk of falling into debt or facing other threatening consequences.

After graduation, I will spend the summer as an Artistic Administrative Apprentice for the Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, New York. After August's end, I do not have any confirmed commitments. I plan to use this spring and summer to search and apply for long-term employment, ideally booking an artistic position in New York City. I've only been able to pursue professional arts because of the Miller Arts Scholars – I can guarantee they will not soon be forgotten!