Like all research projects, my summer research went through a process of trial and error. Originally, I began the summer attempting to write for full orchestra. I tried to blend my interest in jazz harmonies, world rhythms, and modern minimalist electronic music in this classical medium, but quickly faced numerous problems. As much as I wanted to write for bassoons, oboes, flutes, and strings, I had no functional idea of how these instruments operated. These instruments were completely foreign to me and in addition I had a difficult time enjoying listening to the repertoire required in order to understand them. Listening to the music of Ravel, Beethoven, or Mozart did nothing to stimulate my creativity nor provide me with any idea on how to begin orchestrating and writing my own music in such a medium. I realized I did not appreciate many pieces (if any at all) that were written for full orchestra and thus writing one myself would be an exercise in futility.

Therefore I took it upon myself to change my project entirely. In professor Robbie Greenlee’s A Cappella class I learned the basics of writing for an a cappella choir and decided to use those skills towards my summer research project. I also decided to take advantage of my summer roommate situation. Noah Galvin, an upcoming senior, was not only my roommate but a member in Ursus Versus, an on-campus Bowdoin A Capella group. He thus agreed to accept anything I wrote this summer and present it to Ursus Versus for them to perform as they pleased.

I wrote the two pieces I chose to arrange in the same spirit as my initial orchestration intent. However, instead of writing for full orchestra with non-traditional rhythms, harmonies, and forms, I decided to take pop tunes and apply non-traditional pop harmonies, rhythms, and forms. For example then, I arranged “Besame Mucho,” a popular Mexican bolero written by Consuelo Velazquez, by incorporating various world rhythms and harmonies. I thought I could merge this Mexican song with a more globalized understanding of Latin America dominated by Catholic musical liturgy, Latin American rhythms, and Spain’s history with Moorish conquest. For instance, the beginning sounds like a traditional vocal chorale, while the middle incorporates the rhythms of a Cuban salsa. The final third of the song incorporates many flamenco harmonies from the Andalusia region and Middle Eastern rhythms. My second piece operated under the same idea. However instead of merging a popular Mexican song with more broader Latin American characteristics, I took a modern Indie Rock song, “Step” by Vampire Weekend, and merged it with traditional baroque harmonies and melodies. I thought a song whose lyrics dealt with nostalgia would benefit from ironically being paired with Johann Pachelbel’s “Canon in D.” I am particularly interested in these unorthodox pairings of various styles together to make a more cohesive whole. Hopefully my two a cappella arrangements achieved this goal.

Faculty Mentor: Robert Greenlee

Funded by the Patterson/Baird Family Research Fellowship