

Dexter Birk (Birkenbeuel)
Artist Statement
CINTAS Foundation

I was born in Chicago March 1, 2004. Since I was three I had a natural attraction to the piano. I first started with notes and sounds but gradually came to a point where my mother decided to put me into lessons. I began classical piano lessons under the tutelage of Elizabeth Newkirk at Sherwood music school in Chicago where I studied numerous classical pieces. At the time (which I didn't know) I would be improvising pieces by accident. I would be playing pieces by ear, learning whole songs based off of my lessons. I always had trouble staying on the page because I felt it could not contain my creativity. Nevertheless, I continued classical lessons throughout middle school and high school. I started studying under Ann Birman at Merit School of Music after receiving the tuition free scholarship award. At this time, my father started pressure for me to begin playing Jazz piano. The program had a Jazz band and I decided to take part and attend some of the classes/big band. I started to enjoy this and after a while, I eventually started studying Jazz Piano with Steve Million. I was currently in high school at Whitney M. Young magnet high school during this time. I decided to join the Jazz big band. To my surprise I wasn't as good as I thought. My technique was all over the place, my harmonic understanding, everything was a mess. I decided to lock in.

After a few months of practicing and working, I was the second piano chair in the Whitney M. Young Magnet HS Jazz band but suddenly COVID hit the states. I was then thrown into full virtual learning where I started to struggle with the workflow. Virtual learning was an ideal learning situation due to the fact that I mostly learn hands on. After a year and half of this I was approaching my senior year of high school. My family and I decided that my last year would be best spent in-person learning. I then transferred to the Chicago Academy for the Arts (which was in person learning). The Academy was a smaller school with an artistic focus. I was given the blessing of free time. At this point my career changed forever. I would spend significantly more time practicing as well as refining my repertoire for my college. It was here that I finally decided to pursue music as my career. Eventually the end of the year approached and I had applied to colleges for Jazz Performance. After applying to many prestigious schools I was presented with a choice between Manhattan School of Music or Peabody (John Hopkins University). The main factor of these two for me was location. As a musician, my scene/musical community is one of the biggest things I factor into the living environment. After weighing all the Pros/Cons I decided on Manhattan School of Music.

Going into my first year I was thrown into a world of music which was extremely unexpected and challenging but reminded me of exactly what I needed. Similar to my development through high school, I was put in a position where I was behind in many musical areas. I became incredibly motivated to learn and reach the level of my peers. Throughout freshman and sophomore year I spent hours learning more and more about the tradition/roots of the music I loved to play and listen to. Results continued to show throughout these years as I became a present musician in more difficult and in demand musical roles. These roles were the ones I would look up to upon coming to New York. This continued development and networking ability was the exact reason I came to the city. It was during my later Sophomore year and current Junior year I have reached yet another pivotal point in my music career. The goal is to build my musical voice.

In the later months of Sophomore year I started to write more original music. My theory class at the time resented me with an assignment to write a song based on harmony from past music. It was during this class that I realized that I could not only take advantage of the teachers, but take advantage of the assignments to write beautiful music. I composed my first composition called "Moonbeams." This song carried through to my current year. I met a vocalist not too long ago and decided to write lyrics to the song. I decided to put my energy and effort to start building the foundation of my career based off this first release. I polished up the song and recorded it for the first time at the Manhattan School of Music recording studio. I was unsatisfied with the song recording so decided to put it away temporarily. After this I took a detour to write another song called "Everything reminds you of a heartbreak (when you're heartbroken)." Writing this I then realized that I had music reflective of all my development. I then took yet another detour and went back to Moonbeams.

During this time I was also pursuing a side career in modeling. I had the goal of building an image in ties with me as a musician as well as me as a model. I realized that as a musician, a lot of us are faceless and in the background. In a world of social media and online marketing, professional image is one of the most important things which puts you to the front of the musical curve. I applied to modeling agencies and instantly signed. I started portfolio development and modeling ability. I then booked NYFW shows and received an incredible boost to online presence as well as my portfolio. I still continue to pursue this aspect of my career to this day.

Back to the music, at this time my school hosted a Black Student Union concert where I worked with my vocalist to perform the song live. With weeks of development and preparation we performed the song live and received incredibly positive feedback. Hearing this we decided to record it officially to be released. A month later we started the process. I booked a recording studio, started website production, as well as photography direction for the single album cover. Eventually the time came to go into the studio and record. We recorded "Moonbeams" and "Everything reminds you of a heartbreak (when you're heartbroken)." Both takes turned out next

to perfect. I am currently in post recording production of both the songs as I write this artist statement.

For the future I plan to pursue my artistry to the fullest building my image as an artist/model/sideman. Being flexible to play any gig to near perfection. I want to learn everything I possibly can about the piano and the music which I love to play. Being able to work constantly as a musician in all routes is the dream, ultimately with the goal of opening the hearts of listeners as well as discussions about how our emotions impact our daily lives.