



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
WOODSWORTH COLLEGE

Dear Prince Aryn and Princess Zahra Agakhan,

I am a professor at the University of Toronto that teaches in the Academic Bridging Program, which acts as a 'bridge' into undergraduate studies for people from diverse academic backgrounds and personal circumstances. As an instructor in this program, I have the opportunity to work closely with many exceptional students that are not only bright and passionate, but bring a wealth of life experience and talents to their studies. Even among this group, Afraaz Mulji stands out as exceptional.

I first met Afraaz in September 2020, as his instructor for a part time Academic Bridging course (WDW 101 'Decentring Canada') that eschews the dominant state narratives of Canadian history and instead highlight the perspectives, stories, and histories of marginalized peoples and groups in Canada, particularly Black, Asian, and Indigenous peoples. In this course, Afraaz is a frequent and valuable contributor to class-wide and small group discussions, often contributing thoughtful insights that push discussion into interesting and productive directions that enhance the discussion experience for the entire class. Afraaz is very well-regarded by other students in the course for his ability to contribute insightful and creative perspectives on the course materials and he has often acted as a leader in these class discussions.

I have also had the opportunity to converse with Afraaz several times outside of class and from these conversations I've learned more about some of the ways Afraaz has exemplified leadership through several arts-focused initiatives of his own design. In addition to his own podcast series, 'An Exploration of Noise', which features some of his personal engagements with sound, Afraaz maintains a YouTube series, 'Conceptualism', which features thought-provoking critical discussions with a variety of guest speakers on a variety of arts-based and other topics. The sheer breadth of these conversations attests to Afraaz's wide-ranging interest and facility in matters of music, art, culture, and politics. He also recently created his own Facebook group, 'The Critical Participant', which he very quickly expanded to almost 200 members composed of artists, educators, and other professionals interesting in an ongoing critical conversation on diverse matters of philosophy, politics, and the arts.

Afraaz is an exceptionally talented and prodigious musician and artist in his own right, and has frequently been able to showcase his multi-instrument talents in many public events and fora. I've also observed a strong experimental curiosity in his approach to music which pushed boundaries of 'the canon' in interesting new directions. But his ability to bring diverse cultural and intellectual leaders together into respectful and productive conversations really exemplifies, quite beyond his individual artist talents, that he is already doing the work of a cultural ambassador that is capable of building capacity and invigorating talent in the fields of arts and culture.

His unbridled passion and curiosity in the interdisciplinary fields of arts and culture, his demonstrated ability innovate and initiate projects that bring artists, educators, and community leaders into beneficial, thought-provoking, and sustained conversations, and his own prodigious talents as an artist strongly indicate to me that Afraaz possesses the ability and commitment to act as competent advisor and cultural ambassador to the United Nations for the Agakhan Trust for Culture. He is well-positioned to initiate and further important work in this area.

Sincerely,

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Johnson".

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