



FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION, ART AND TECHNOLOGY
School of Interactive Arts + Technology

Simon Fraser University TEL 604.754.1191
Surrey FAX 778.782.7478
250 – 13450 102nd Avenue,
Surrey, BC Canada V3T 0A3

nrajan@sfu.ca
<https://koboiproject.com/>

To the Jury of the Azrieli Composing Prize

8th May 2021

RE: Afraaz Mulji /Azrieli Composition Prize

Dear Jury members

I am writing to recommend Afraaz Mulji for the Azrieli Composition Prize. Afraaz is a young pianist, organist, improviser and composer with great talent and a dedication to innovation and excellence in his field. I first encountered Afraaz when he reached out to me in June of 2020 to engage in a discussion about my work as a performance oriented conceptual artist. While I initially entertained his call as a courtesy to an emerging artist, I quickly realized that Afraaz was a young man of great intellectual curiosity and aesthetic sensibility. I quickly found myself looking forward to his calls and we have, since, engaged in a developing discourse on the relationship of music to the visual arts, and of their collective place in society.

While Afraaz is a musician and I am a visual artist, what we seem to have in common is an interest in the underlying principles of the wider artistic domain. We have discursively explored the contiguity of the spatial and the temporal arts and have gone on to debate the formal, aesthetic and social implications of these commonalities. In terms of Afraaz's own practice, this paradigmatic concern manifests as the stretching of boundaries and the merging of the categories of music. Further, among his wide-ranging compositions, improvisations and interventions, there are many works that cross-over, via the sound art and performance art, into the realm of the visual arts.

Now, it cannot be emphasised enough that Afraaz is young. He is 22 years of age and in this regard, it must be said that Afraaz is a precocious musical talent with intelligence and ambition to match his prodigious technical abilities. He is an extremely articulate composer, with a demonstrated mastery over diverse musical traditions, which he is able to integrate into a personal idiom. Afraaz is a natural improviser with the capacity to sustain emergent forms over large cycles. In short he is a gifted artist, with enormous creative potential. His dedication to his craft is as deep, as his goals for its impact are lofty. He is an insistent advocate for the arts, and sees himself as practicing a kind of cultural diplomacy through his music, with the aim of uniting peoples.

I believe that in addition to talent, success in the arts demands a single-minded persistence or insistence to be heard. Afraaz displays such tenacity in his pursuit of new musical experience and expression. One anecdote that bodes well for future success, is that of his gaining access to the magnificent organ at the Basilica of Saint Joseph's Oratory, Montreal. This instrument, which is signed by Rudolf von Beckerath, is ranked among the top ten organs in the world. Afraaz was introduced by carilloner at St. Joseph, Andrée-Anne Doane, who wrote to Vincent Boucher, the organist. Afraaz was able to record his piece, *Experiments* (A sonic landscape marred with terraced fields of ideas...) which was recorded with a pair of stereo microphones in the organ loft.

My own dialogues with Afraaz lead to an installment of his Conceptualism podcast which is a series of dialogues with practitioners in various fields of practice ranging from music and the arts to technology and society. These dialogues are thoroughly engaged. Afraaz is always aware of his interviewee's subject and approach and able to serve as an interlocutor in a meaningful exchange. Once again, I am thoroughly impressed with his ability to reach out to significant actors in his area of interest, which he broadly defines as 'conceptualism.

As recent engagement of Afraaz's is his collaboration with the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), a public university in Tanzania. On the basis of his sustained contribution to arts education at the University, Afraaz is working with the institution to develop their mutual interests in developing programs of creative arts and artistic exchanges. A memorandum of understanding is being drafted and I have been invited to be an advisor on a scholarship

programme that Afraaz hopes to lead. Afaaz's musicianship is as broad as it is deep. He is as committed to the esoteric aspects of his art as he is to the quotidian social dimension of his vocation.

I will end on a lighter note. Afraaz has embarked on a lo-fi gramophone record publishing venture. Music recorded in Afraaz's studio in Toronto was produced by a niche record label in Brooklyn, NY, as a handmade lathe cut record. These unique records have been sold at \$25 each. The purchaser obtains a one-of-a-kind record, the sole master recording, albeit a lo-fi kitschy one. I am delighted to be the owner of one of these pressings, customized with a call out to one of my own art works, Koboï Dango!

I unreservedly recommend Afraaz Mulji for the Azrieli Composition Prize.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Niranjana Rajah". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Niranjana Rajah

Assistant Professor
School of Interactive Arts and Technology
Simon Fraser University

Appendix: Referee's Bio

Niranjan Rajah holds a BSC Economics from Queen Mary College, London, a Post-graduate Diploma in Law from the University of Westminster and an MFA from Goldsmiths College, London. Niranjan has served as associate dean of the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts at the University Malaysia Sarawak. He has been visiting faculty at the Cyberarts/Cyberculture Research Initiative (CCRI), National University of Singapore; Design Media Arts, UCLA; Ignite Programme, TCS, TATA Group of Companies and the International Art Gallery, Ismaili Jubilee Arts Festival, Lisbon. He is presently faculty at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University, Surrey, British Columbia.

Niranjan was a member of the Media Arts Advisory Committee for the Canada Council for the Arts, and a member of the Board of Directors of Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (Centre A), Vancouver. He was also a member of the advisory board for the BANFF New Media Institute (BNMI) and of the Board of Directors of the Inter Society for Electronic Art (ISEA). He was the convenor of two installments of the annual New Forms Festival Conference, Vancouver.

Niranjan's contribution to Southeast Asian New Media was acknowledged in a two-man retrospective, 'Relocations', at the ISEA, Singapore, 2008. Niranjan's ongoing Koboï Project (2015 – present) was exhibited at the Singapore Biennale 2016. His recent exhibitions include an installation at the University of Malaya as part of the inaugural KL Biennale, 2017; and an installation/performance as a part of 'Home in the Expanded Field' at Courtyard Hiroo, Tokyo, 2018.