



West Virginia University
College of Creative Arts
1436 Evansdale Drive
Morgantown, WV 26506

February 28, 2024

Dear Selection Committee for the College of Creative Arts Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award,

We are writing as the faculty mentors for Clayton Heath, who has submitted his research for consideration for the 2023–24 College of Creative Arts Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award. Clayton is a doctoral student in bass trombone performance and is a University Provost fellow; he also has a demonstrated a deep knowledge of and interest in researching and performing in the shape note tradition. Clayton approached us at the end of the fall 2023 semester following the death of Travis Stimeling, the project's original mentor. We began working collaboratively on this project in January 2024 and will continue through the end of the project.

Clayton has undertaken an extensive research project on the Appalachian shape note singing tradition in which he has undertaken the transcription of collections of certain pieces into partbooks for voice and instruments. Clayton's combination of instrumental and vocal performance in this tradition is significant for numerous reasons, not the least of which is the fact that the use of instruments in this repertory, for some, is highly controversial. Clayton's research has been conducted in a highly sensitive manner and has forged new paths in this performative tradition that is, to put it frankly, remarkable for a first-year graduate student. Clayton has also committed to creating a project that is as public-facing as possible; the reach of his work will extend far beyond academic texts. To date, and with our guidance, Clayton has given a presentation and led a shape-note sing/play session for Music Convocation. He is also in the process of curating a public event at which he will share his research and lead the community in a performance of his transcriptions. With a remarkable initiative, he has created promotional materials, secured performance spaces, and managed complex logistics in the planning of this large event; he has also contacted numerous local and regional experts in this tradition and has invited them to participate. His long-term goal is to broaden the public's access to this tradition by expanding its performative options. By creating and transcribing instrumental part books and through the crafting of a new orthographic system of notation and printing, Clayton hopes to make the music of this important tradition more accessible to students in schools of music (and in general music classes) while always working to preserve those musical elements that make shape-note singing what it is.

We have certainly watched Clayton grow as a researcher during the short time that we have worked together on this project, but it would be disingenuous to claim that we are solely responsible as mentors for this work's success. Dr. Stimeling's mentorship laid the bulk of the groundwork for Clayton's project, and we are honored that Clayton asked us to help him see it through to its completion. Clayton is most certainly deserving of this award and, should he be chosen as the winner, we would like to respectfully request that the monetary portion of our faculty award be spent on a memorial project for Dr. Stimeling in recognition of his tireless mentorship of this project and many others like it.

We are grateful for your consideration of Clayton's project for this award; certainly few students are as deserving as Clayton. Please be in contact if there is anything further that you need from us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jennifer Walker'.

Jennifer Walker, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Musicology/Area Coordinator, Musicology

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Katelyn E Best'.

Katelyn Best, Ph.D.
Teaching Assistant Professor of Musicology

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