



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

March 4, 2025

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

I am writing as the faculty mentor for Claire Weydt, who has submitted her research for consideration for the 2024–25 College of Creative Arts and Media Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award. Claire is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Musicology and is writing her thesis; I serve as her research advisor. We began working collaboratively on this project in August 2023 and will continue through Claire’s graduation this spring.

Claire’s thesis, entitled “*La Valse* and the Parisian Salon: Nostalgic Continuities and Sonorous Modernisms,” focuses on the composer Maurice Ravel, his well-known composition *La Valse*, and the aesthetic underpinnings of the work’s life in Parisian salons. This project is an ambitious undertaking for Master’s level research as it intervenes in long-standing historiographical discourse in multiple ways. On the one hand, Claire’s research shows that the French salon, an artistic enterprise that has frequently been cast as small-scale, amateur, domestic, feminine, and private in opposition to the concert hall, was a crucial space for Ravel’s creation of a musical aesthetic that has not yet been fully explored by scholars working in this area. On the other hand, her research situates *La Valse*, a work commonly portrayed as thoroughly modernist, as a counterpoint to narratives of wartime rupture: World War I and the following interwar period is frequently cited as the point at which French musical aesthetics became allied more closely with “modernism,” but Claire’s research shows that Ravel used *La Valse* to create important aesthetic continuities that push against ideas of rupture, separation, and irreconcilable ideological differences. Ravel is not usually a composer identified with such continuity, and Claire’s work is key in changing this narrative. Her chapters explore the work in its salon setting through various theoretical lenses; nostalgia, Symbolism, gender studies, and modernism each figure prominently in the text.

Claire’s work is consistently insightful and thought-provoking—she not only navigates the waters of critical thinking with ease, but she encourages her peers to do the same. Claire quickly distinguished herself among her peers as an excellent student who was and undoubtedly remains capable of drawing connections between seemingly unrelated areas and who seeks complex answers to complex problems. As both a writer and a public speaker, she also demonstrated a degree of sophistication that is atypical among the students that I normally encounter in my work with music students. She consistently submits top-notch work, and her probing interest in her research is a welcome surprise. To date, and with my guidance, Claire has presented parts of her work at regional and international conferences. In March 2025, she presented papers based on her thesis at the meeting of the Allegheny Chapter of the American Musicological Society and at the virtual meeting of the international network France: Musiques, Cultures, 1789–1918. She was awarded the Deane L. Root Student Paper Presentation Prize by the AMS-A for her work. In my experience, it is unusual for a Master’s-level student to win this award—this only speaks to the quality of Claire’s work.

I am grateful for your consideration of Claire’s project for this award. Please be in contact if there is anything further that you need from me.

Sincerely,

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

Jennifer Walker, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Musicology | Area Coordinator, Musicology