

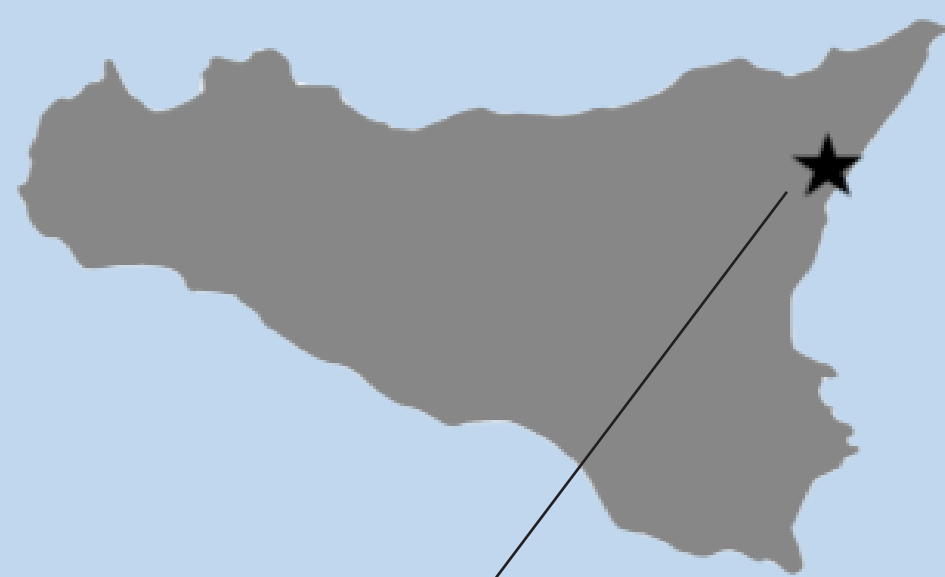
Alex Polydoroff



**Class of 2018
Berkely, CA**

I spent three months in Syracuse, Sicily recording a CD and organizing performances with young African migrants and local Sicilian musicians. The politically and socially engaged music that we recorded and performed was geared toward generating intercultural dialogue and supporting the youths' process of cultural integration. The final album includes music of many genres and languages: from Nigerian dance music fused with funk and Western instrumentation, to globally inspired reggae, to traditional Tunisian music whose Arabic poetry recounted solemn stories of migrant sea crossings. The music united people of

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Syracuse, Sicily

MUSIC AND MIGRATIONS

AFRICAN YOUTH COMING OF AGE IN SICILY

different cultures, who spoke different languages to make music - a deep passion we all share — which made us recognize, then subsequently express, our collectivities as human beings. Throughout the summer, I led six recording sessions in which we recorded



ten original songs. The experience culminated in two final concerts in live performance venues in the historic center of Syracuse with the migrant kids accompanied by a band of professional Sicilian musicians. During the first two months, I would go to various migrant camps every day on the public bus with my bass, amplifier, and auxiliary equipment to lead music workshops. In these workshops, I would create jam sessions, composition sessions, and lead rehearsals of our original music. During these workshops, the youth practiced singing and percussion and throughout the summer, and greatly improved their



musicianship and ability to improvise. Once we had songs composed after the first month, we began using the time for rehearsals in preparation for the concerts and studio sessions. I

would spend long hours at these boys' camps, and between the music-making we would talk about our life experiences, play games, and socialize with camp staff and local community members. At night, I would play gigs and with local jam sessions where I organized and met local musicians who would record on the album and accompany us at concerts.

I worked in conjunction and with the support of the Intercultural Studies Center, where I completed their internship program in Migration and Social Justice. The ISC assists local migrants and organizes experiential learning in the fields of migration, social justice, intercultural mediation, and performance and visual arts. A few days a week, I would assist the center's director, Ramzi Harrabi, in his art and educational activities in migrant camps and concerts and exhibitions in the historic center of Syracuse. Ramzi stresses the necessity of one-on-one interaction among people of diverse origins with emphasis on art, culture, education, and social justice. He

also taught me the value of using art as a medium for dialogue and to engage with social justice issues. This experience of recording and performing with youth refugees

and professional Sicilian musicians has deeply affected me and made my future goals possible. First, this experience gave me the opportunity to make



socially and politically engaged music with global musicians for the betterment of society. I feel uplifted knowing the live and recorded music will continue raise empathetic awareness in the wider communities of the struggles and aspirations of unaccompanied kids amid migration crises — an issue near and dear to my heart. I feel satisfied that the music



promoted constructive self-expression for the youth, mutual understanding with Sicilian musicians and listeners, and cross-cultural cooperation which counteracted the separative narratives of politics and mass media in Italy. I am humbled to have been a living example of how music can be a powerful tool to connect people, and how music can express the benefits of cross-cultural collaboration and deep interconnectedness of humanity.

