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Understanding Sound as a Language: The Link between Music and Narrative

Introduction:

This creative project will explore the question of whether there is a relationship between language and sound. Is there a way to tell a narrative primarily through music? Music has always been special to me, specifically for its ability to channel emotion, whether negative or positive. Even before I became a musician, I had music I would listen to when I was sad, or when I was happy, or feeling melancholic, or feeling exhausted. As I grew older and understood more of the inner workings of music and sound, I began to wonder how I could use these evocations in my own writing. Do specific combinations of sounds objectively elicit specific responses from people? This question is at the core of how this creative project came to be. I believe that language and sound are inherently linked together, and that music is meaningful. First, I will explore a theory that music is directly analogous to language, outlined by Deryck Cooke in his volume *The Language of Music*. Next, I will discuss how composers have utilized different musical devices such as theme, leitmotif, transformation and more in compositions ranging from Wagner to modern film composition to express both narrative. I will also explore the contention of the application of extra-musical meaning to music, discussing ideas of programmatic music versus absolute music, and enjoyment by a listener within both of these classifications. Next, I

will illustrate the importance of groove for narrative and how jazz improvisation is able to tell a story all its own. After this, I will discuss how I conceptualized and created my project, elaborating on how and why I came up with the story I did. Next I will analyze the music I have written, highlighting where I have utilized techniques such as leitmotif and more, analyzing for structure, use of extra-musical audio, and lyrical content. After that I will discuss my plans for publication and performance of the project, ranging from release schedule of singles, how liner/program notes can be incorporated into the story, album art, and more.

Music as a Language:

To begin, music is commonly referred to as a universal language, one that can communicate an understandable message across cultural and language barriers. It is easy to think this may be true, especially from a Western Classical perspective, that music may have universal communicative properties, but this is not necessarily accurate. Music may evoke the same emotional response in a group of like-minded individuals who share similar upbringings, culture and language, but a piece like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony may have zero of the same evocations to someone from Africa or Latin America, as the music does not share the same cultural identifiers. Music, in this way, is not a universal language by any means, but is it a language all the same? Deryck Cooke, in his book *The Language of Music*, believes music is a language in the sense that notes, intervals, chords and more all have an objective meaning that can be quantified and described. Cooke says, "The task facing us is to discover how music functions as a language, to establish the terms of its vocabulary and to explain how these terms may legitimately be said to express the emotions they appear to,"¹ Cooke has set about to create a dictionary of musical ideas, all generalized to explain what they mean and in what context.

This is all in an effort to explain how "music conveys the subjective experience of composers."² Tia DeNora, in her article, *How is Extra-Musical Meaning Possible? Music as a Place and Space for "Work"*, elaborates on Cooke's theory by saying that he "proceeds to define music's (and it is important to note, tonal music's) expressive framework as it is constituted through intervals...Cooke's method of analysis consists of toting-up intervals in order to arrive

¹ Cooke, Deryck. *The Language of Music*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 10

² Cooke 12

at a composite picture of the emotional content of any given piece.”³ Where, in language, words are used to represent meaning based upon a societal and cultural agreement, Cooke is attempting to do the same with music. A minor second interval means “spiritless anguish”, or a major second means “pleasurable longing”. Problems already begin to arise with assigning objective meaning to notes and intervals, as a lot of the emotional evocation of music on a listener has to do with the context of the idea; a minor second played by jazz pianist Thelonious Monk in an offbeat syncopated pattern in songs like “Green Chimneys” does not evoke “spiritless anguish” in any way. Groove, additional harmony, musician, instrument and more all matter and muddy any objective meaning that is thrown at music. Tia DeNora disagrees with Cooke, as well, stating “music does not signify the feeling of sudden-ness, quiet, confusion, etc., by telling the listener about an instance of any of these feelings; rather it recreates the feeling through the medium of sound.”⁴ This is one of the qualities of music that cannot be overlooked, its ability to communicate without the middleman of signs and signifiers; music simply is what it is communicating. It doesn’t have to explain to a listener why they should feel a certain way, that emotion is evoked simply by listening to music, or by singing and dancing along with it. DeNora continues to elaborate stating, “...in other words, that the musical tone as such does not necessarily have any definite a priori meaning but, given contiguous constraints and set in a cultural context (by which they mean, or seem to mean, a pre-existing set of shared meanings,

³ DeNora, Tia. "How Is Extra-Musical Meaning Possible? Music as a Place and Space for "Work"." *Sociological Theory* 4, no. 1 (1986): 85

⁴ DeNora 86

cognitive, moral and aesthetic) it comes to seem, for all practical purposes as if its meaning is intrinsic.”⁵

Music does not have an objective meaning, pre-determined by nature, a higher power, or anything, but music may develop what appears to be an intrinsic extra-musical meaning when set against context, whether that be cultural or societal. DeNora brings up the example of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” which has music by John Stafford Smith and lyrics by Francis Scott Key. Originally, the tune of the anthem was composed for the Anacreontic Society, a men’s social club in London. Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics after being witness to the siege of Fort McHenry by British naval ships, which were eventually set to music that Smith wrote. ⁶ The anthem has become associated with American patriotism, partly due to the lyrics, the context in which it was written, and how we interpret the harmonic material knowing those contexts. Even though it was originally not written for that purpose, it has taken on a new identity and new meaning as a result of the different cultural contexts it carries with it. As well, this will continue forward, any piece that sounds similar will carry the DNA of the anthem with it, even just pieces with similar instrumentation (brass instruments), can sound patriotic because of the associations with the anthem. This is how a society builds a musical vocabulary of intrinsic meaning; through cultural associations and intermusical transference of those associations. However, even these seemingly intrinsic meanings can be altered when put into a new cultural context. As an example, Jimi Hendrix’s fiery solo electric guitar version of the “Star Spangled Banner” may not communicate the same feeling of American patriotism as the original version, but instead adds

⁵ DeNora 86

⁶ Hixon, Tara. "The Rocket's Red Glare: Celebrating the History of the Star Spangled Banner." School Library Journal 61, no. 10 (2015): 47.

upon that by using the original material to create something new. In this case, Hendrix was using the anthem to comment on the state of America and the world at the time, making a political statement through his music. Going even further, all this begs the question of whether music should even mean anything at all, or rather should music be given a certain meaning outside of itself.

In her article, DeNora brings up the points of Edward Hanslick, a Viennese music critic, who rejected the idea that music could have any exact relationship with something external to itself. DeNora writes "...he [Edward Hanslick] thought it philistine to attempt to pin music to an interpretation since this ultimately destroyed the musical beauty which was not so much a product of intrinsically meaningful symbols mechanically strung together...".⁷ I think this is the ultimate contention about all of this, should an attempt even be made to give music a meaning? Does it destroy the beauty of music, as Hanslick proposes, or it can it complement its beauty, even strengthen it or complicate it? Going back to Jimi Hendrix's version of "The Star-Spangled Banner," if taken just at a surface level it sounds like he is just improvising over a well-known tune, adding in flourish and electric guitar effects to an already well-known melody. The spectacle of it all is exciting, and it is hauntingly beautiful all on its own. Now, adding in the knowledge that he was attempting to make a statement on war and America through his performance, adds a whole new layer of meaning and understanding that engages with the performance in a different way, it re-contextualizes the whole performance. To conclude, music should not be quantified down to any objective intrinsic meaning, as Cooke suggests, but rather

⁷ DeNora 87

it should be allowed to gather its own meaning through cultural context, whether that be meaning that the composer intends or meaning that the listener ascribes to it.

Techniques for Extra-Musical Composition:

Accompanying the assumption that music has the ability to carry with it extra-musical meaning, it is important to delve into what techniques and musical devices composers have used in the past to help communicate this meaning to a listener. In Western Classical music, the idea of linking narrative with music was not uncommon, appearing in works such as Hector Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*, Richard Wagner's *The Ring Cycle*, or in Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote*. These pieces of music were referred to as programmatic works or works of music that carried with it a narrative or extra-musical meaning. This narrative was often fleshed out with the help of program notes that would be given out to those in the audience, helping make the connections between narrative and music. Programmatic music also included music from opera, theater, and, more recently, has included music written for film and television.

Film music is the most common modern-day example of programmatic music, as one of the primary functions of the film score is to help bolster the narrative on screen. In her article, "Understanding the Score: Film Music Communicating to and Influencing the Audience," Jessica Green discusses how film music effectively communicates the narrative of film and even adds to the narrative already presented. To start, Green talks about the different musical conventions that composers use to shape their narratives to the screen. One of the first musical devices used was a leitmotif, which she defines as "a theme in a film that becomes associated with a character, a place, a situation, or an emotion."⁸ The leitmotif was heavily used by Wagner in *The Ring Cycle* and is common in opera as well as film. Leitmotifs are effective at

⁸ Green, Jessica. "Understanding the Score: Film Music Communicating to and Influencing the Audience." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 4 (2010): 81

communicating narrative precisely because they are repeated. This repetition allows an audience to make a connection between the piece of music, whether it be a melody, rhythm or harmony, giving contextual meaning to the music? and the action it seeks to represent? A leitmotif does not have to be stagnant within a narrative however, it can change and grow to reflect the growth of the character or theme it is attached to. As Green says, “The alteration can be a change of instrumentation, tempo, or harmony. Through these transformations, the changing mood or state of a character can be depicted.”⁹Not only does transforming a leitmotif continue to reinforce the connection between it and the narrative, it also allows the music to have a narrative of its own. As listeners, we can recognize a change in leitmotif; film composers often do it all the time as a way of creating many different sonorities from one or two pieces of thematic material. Often the harmony and rhythm change, but instrumentation, meter, and more can also change. All that is needed is the general shape of the leitmotif, because if it is changed too much to the point that it is unrecognizable then it will not function as a leitmotif anymore.

Furthermore, Green makes a point to highlight that film music has narrative potential even when standing alone, as she states “Current research points to the fact that audiences can understand the emotions or qualities that music is portraying even when the music is divorced from the image it was created to accompany.”¹⁰Green is referring to a study that was done in which researchers had people listen to various television themes and write down what words came to mind to describe them. In the case of the theme for *Miami Vice*, out of 105 different people, most correctly attributed a sense of “aggression, speed, and urban environments” to the theme, despite not having recognized it.

⁹ Green 88

¹⁰ Green 82

Green concludes with this study that, “it is significant that even without the visual images that would generally accompany such musical themes from television or film, diverse listeners were able to come up with similar responses to what the music represented to them.”¹¹ I think this conclusion is one that is interesting but operates without all the information.

As DeNora concluded, music does not have any intrinsic meaning inherently, that meaning is attached to it by culture and society. Most of the time music is in isolation, it is just sound by itself, though there are exceptions like lyric writing and poetry. Film music is unique in that it forces the person engaging with the music within a film to constantly be making connections between the music and the narrative on screen. This language has grown with the medium of film making, with various sonorities coming to call upon different thematic materials. For example, the triumphant horns of John Williams’ score to *Superman* in 1978 set a precedent in the wide cultural consciousness to include brassy scores accompanying heroic figures. *Superman* may not be the first or only instance of this, but it is a film that has a unique place in the American experience, with a character firmly rooted in American patriotic ideals of truth, justice, and the American way (pursuit of happiness) having a large presence in our society. Film music has built its own language over the years, and this is in part why audiences can correctly attribute certain qualifiers to unknown film or television music. Another large part of this ability is that Hollywood tends to repeat itself, utilizing temp music on many of their films causing certain motifs to be repeated. This repetition allows for the solidification in an

¹¹ Green 83

audience's mind over time, and also allows film composers to play with this expectation for dramatic effect by contradicting action on screen.

To conclude, each of these different techniques a composer may use all contribute to influencing how someone may perceive narrative. Through repetition and transformation of leitmotif, and a built-in societal vocabulary of pre-established connections, music can convey emotion and narrative to an audience.

Program and Absolute; Enjoyment vs Understanding:

However, it is important to keep in mind how an audience is going to perceive any piece of art, especially if you want to communicate a specific idea or evoke an emotion. Are audiences able to understand music more if it has a narrative that accompanies it? Does that understanding come at the cost of enjoying music?

To answer these questions, first programmatic music, and its opposite, absolute music needs to be defined. Programme music was a term coined by Franz Liszt, a great virtuosic pianist living in the nineteenth century. His definition of programme music was specifically tied to instrumental music and what he described as a “preface added to a piece of instrumental music, by means of which the composer intends to guard the listener against a wrong poetical interpretation, and to direct his attention to the poetical idea of the whole or to a particular part of it,”¹² While narrow in its scope, Liszt’s definition discusses an important touchstone of programme music as being a way for the composer to steer an audience or listener to a “correct” interpretation of the art. Correct in this instance refers not to a work of art having an objective meaning, but a meaning that a composer wishes an audience to take away, still within a subjective framework. Whether or not an audience resonates with this meaning is up to them. The definition of programmatic music has since widened to become more of a catchall term for describing any music with extra-musical expression, which could be as in depth as a narrative with plot and character, or just an expression of emotion or abstract idea. As defined by Grove

¹² Scruton, Roger. “*Programme music*.” Grove Music Online. January 01, 2001. Oxford University Press

Music Online, programmatic music (programme) is defined as being “distinguished by its attempt to depict objects and events...It does not merely echo or imitate things which have an independent reality; the development of programme music is determined by the development of its theme.”¹³ As DeNora said earlier, music is not a representational art form or language, it is expressionistic. What is of note here is that programmatic music develops as the narrative develops, or it is born out of the concepts of the extra-musical. The music reflects the narrative, as the narrative is also a reflection of the music. They work hand in hand with each other to complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Whereas a narrative can be more fleshed out and explain itself more directly to a reader, it is still a representational medium. Music can be more expressive, and recreate the emotional material of a text, but cannot explain anything completely in a direct manner.

On the other hand, absolute music does not need to explain anything, it is simply unfiltered abstract expression that is completely open for any interpretation. Grove Music Online defines absolute music as “an ideal of musical purity”, in the sense that purity frees music up from being tied down to any relationship; no extra-musical meaning, no lyrics, no visual accompanying from of storytelling like theater or film, just music by itself.¹⁴ Absolute music stands in stark contrast to programme music, being an expression of music that does not have any reason to exist other than to just be music. This raises the question, at what point does music become absolute? Is it possible to avoid all forms of expression when writing music? Grove elaborates by saying “No music can be absolute if it seeks to be understood in terms of an

¹³ Scruton, “*Programme music.*”

¹⁴ Scruton, Roger. “*Absolute music.*” Grove Music Online. January 01, 2001. Oxford University Press

extramusical meaning, whether that meaning lies in a reference to external objects or in expression of the human mind,”¹⁵ Absolute music becomes narrower and narrower, with the criteria for it being more specific for it to be qualified as “absolute”. This definition of absolute music can be quite limiting, so for the purposes I want to discuss it in absolute music will be defined as music without any objective meaning behind it from a composer. Whether it evokes a subjective emotional experience from a listener or not does not matter, all that matters is if there is an intent behind the music to create an experience that is objective.

The debate between programmatic music and absolute music boils down to musical expression, and whether to let music stand on its own or give it extra-musical meaning. In her article, “The Effects of Listening Instructions and Cognitive Style on Music Appreciation,” Annette H. Zalanowski reports her findings from a study involving sixty non-music majors listening to various pieces of programmatic music and absolute music and testing their understanding and enjoyment of the music with each. She suggests that “it is indeed possible that very little intervention can modify one’s responses to music,” meaning that participants would likely need not much direction to understand the music, thus increasing their enjoyment of it.¹⁶ The different variables she tested were listener characteristics, affective and associative responses, perceptual and learning processes, as well as the listener’s cognitive style determined by their preferred brain hemisphere. She wanted to see if the subjects were more left-brained in that they were more analytical, logical and mathematical, or more right-brained in that they were

¹⁵ Scruton, “*Absolute music*.”

¹⁶ Zalanowski, Annette H. “*The Effects of Listening Instructions and Cognitive Style on Music Appreciation*.” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 34, no. 1 (1986): 44

more creative-thinking, emotional and conceptual. As well, she notes that the right-brained people were “more associated with music perception” which might have an effect in how they respond to programmatic or absolute music.¹⁷ Participants listened specifically to three minutes of Hector Berlioz’ *Symphonie Fantastique* for programmatic, and Schubert’s *Symphony No. 8 in B Minor, Movement 2* for absolute. With the programmatic music, the sixty subjects were divided up into three sub-groups that had different instructions: pay attention to the music carefully, form mental images while listening to the music, and the third group was given the narrative to read before they listened. In the second session with absolute music, there were four different sub-groups: pay attention to the music carefully, form mental images, an abstract verbal description of the music describing emotions and mood, and the last group was given a very analytical score of the music detailing different thematic material on sheet music. After each session the groups were asked to “rate their attention to the music and their enjoyment and understanding on a scale of 1 to 10.”¹⁸ Zalanowski found that “simply instructing listeners of music to listen in different ways can alter aspects of their appreciation of the music.”¹⁹ This goes along with what DeNora said about contextualization; a new context can change the perception of music completely. She continues to note that “program...was most effective in enhancing understanding of the music...”²⁰ In both groups, they enjoyed the mental imagery the most, but when given a narrative people felt they were able to understand the music better. This leads Zalanowski to conclude that “a choice must be made between enjoyment and understanding.”

¹⁷ Zalanowski 44

¹⁸ Zalanowski 45-46

¹⁹ Zalanowski 49

²⁰ Zalanowski 50

Although there are other factors to consider, i.e. different pieces of music, different variables, this does lead to new questions regarding the debate between programme and absolute, and the role of music in society in the first place. Does music need to be enjoyable, or pleasurable, to be valid as art? I would say no, but I also think music needs to be communicative. Whether that is an enjoyable experience, or an emotional experience, or a negative experience, or even just a groove to dance to it doesn't matter. If music fails to communicate anything, then it has failed fundamentally as music and art.

Knowing the information that Zalanowski depicts in her study, it is important for programmatic composers to understand the limits of narrative and on what an audience will be able to take in without disrupting their experience of connection with the music. If a narrative takes away from that, then it has become too present. Seen in the reverse, if a piece of programmatic music does not communicate its narrative correctly through various compositional techniques, then it becomes superfluous and disconnected to the narrative and the audience. There needs to be a balance between understanding and connection, connection taking the place of enjoyment in this case. Overall, programmatic and absolute techniques are both equally valid ways of enjoying, creating, or experiencing music, but there needs to be a balance in the composer's intent between understanding of what music is attempting to communicate, and an emotional connection an audience experiences through that music for it to work well as an art form.

Groove and Jazz Improvisation as Related to Narrative:

In this section, I would like to explore the role of groove and jazz improvisation in creating meaning in music related to narrative. To start, in his article *Exploding the Narrative in Jazz Improvisation*, Vijay Iyer states that “Musical meaning is not conveyed only through motivic development, melodic contour, and other traditional musicological parameters; it is also *embodied* in improvisatory techniques.”²⁰ Jazz and other improvisational artforms have a unique opportunity for the performer to create, in real-time, a new piece of music and tell a new narrative that the performers and listeners have a hand in creating. Improvisation can tell a story all on its own, a story of how the performer interacts with different chord progressions in a piece or how they interact with other performers sharing the stage with them. We have already discussed that music can be analogous to language in many ways, but here Iyer defines it saying “Like speech, music has semiotic dimensions, which enable sonic symbols to refer actively to other parts of the same piece, to other music, or to contextual an extramusical phenomena—as with the rhythmic correspondences between finger motion and speech itself.”²¹ Music can interact with itself, performers, listeners, and “extramusical phenomena” just like language can, which is why many schools of jazz studies teach improvisation as if it was a new language to be taught. In this way, jazz improvisors learn vocabulary from old recordings of jazz masters, we learn grammar in the sense of how to apply that vocabulary to specific chord progressions, and we learn cadence or style just the same that a new speaker to a language might learn accents or

²⁰ Iyer, Vijay. "Exploding the Narrative in Jazz Improvisation." In *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, 393. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. 402

²¹ Iyer 399

colloquialisms. In that sense, jazz improvisations and speaking a language is incredibly similar, and also in the sense that both are a means of communication.

However, to separate jazz improvisation from standard language, Iyer states that, “Here one draws on a notion of communication as process, as a collective activity that harmonizes individuals rather than a telegraphic model of communication as mere transmission of literal, verbal meanings.”²² Communication is an activity in music that does not just represent meaning as a discussion, it is a means of synergizing with the audience and the performers around you. In Tiger C. Roholt’s book, *Groove: A Phenomenology of Rhythmic Nuance*, Roholt describes groove by stating, “In a musical groove, a musician, dancer, or an engaged listener has a similar feeling of being pulled into a musical ‘notch’, guided-onto a musical ‘track’” buoyed by a rhythm, being lifted up and carried along.”²³ This definition of groove is one that is similar to Iyer’s thoughts about musical communication; a groove is something that we align ourselves too in order to “harmonize”, as Iyer puts it. But what is possible once this alignment is achieved? In improvisation, there is almost unlimited narrative potential when a group is synergized and creating spontaneously. Iyer says that, “The story dwells not just in one solo at a time, but also in a single note, and equally in an entire lifetime of improvisations.”, meaning that narrative is not something that can be confined to a single person, or a single instrument, or a single song or note or work, narrative is about the interactions between all of the improvisations we ever had, or the interactions between a group in an improvisatory setting.²⁴ Roholt furthers this point by

²² Iyer 394

²³ Roholt, Tiger C. *Groove: A Phenomenology of Rhythmic Nuance*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2014.1

²⁴ Iyer 395

discussing musical nuance, stating “It is crucial to emphasize that a musician performs a nuance for a reason; namely, in order to alter the way the music sounds, to give rise to some quality or element in the music; call this the nuance’s objective.”²⁵ All actions as a jazz improviser have significance, whether they be micro or macro, and they all contribute to a telling of narrative.

But what story do improvisors tell? Is it one that comes from their own personalities, expressed through music? Is it more about the personality of the group, or the room that the improvisation is taking place in? In jazz, almost more than any other genre, the role of the audience is just as important as the role of the improvisor. Often audience members will make verbal affirmations based on an improvisor’s solo, steering the direction that the story takes. But, an improvisor is not limited to a certain range of emotions and ideas all the time, a good improvisor knows how to be flexible and adapt to the environment of the room and the style of the piece. If a piece is slow, ballad-like, and contains minor sonorities, an improvisor will act accordingly. If a piece is moving quickly and bouncy, the improvisor must match that style. In this way, improvisors are almost like actors on a stage, performing these narratives based on outside stimuli, but emoting them through utilizing inward knowledge on a technical level (knowing *how* to play over the music) and an emotional level (knowing *what* to play over the music). Iyer comments on this phenomenon, stating that “...one could also view ‘musical personality’ as a kind of *mask* that the performer wears on stage, signifying on his or her offstage identity as well as the performance itself.”²⁶ Music, especially jazz, is inherently a performative art form, and within that explosion of jazz improvisation, the aligning of groove between

²⁵ Roholt 30

²⁶ Iyer 400

performer, co-performers and listener, and past experience on a technical and emotional level, that performative nature lends itself to creating music that goes hand in hand with the narrative experience of storytelling.

Writing Life Story:

When I sat down to work out how to tackle combining a narrative into a conceptual suite of music, I was overwhelmed at first. Knowing where to start, or finding my way in was a difficult process, because the project itself seemed gargantuan in scope. I could write about anything I wanted, I could go anywhere I wanted, do anything I wanted. And because this is my first album, I wanted this to be something special. Something that marked who I was as a person, something that I could attribute part of my legacy as a human being too. I think every creative individual strives for that, to create something that captures any part of who you are as a person so that that part of you may live on. Looking at the process in that, admittedly cynical, way, it is a selfish endeavor. The act of creation always has slightly selfish roots, but I don't believe that to be a bad thing. I believe it to be human nature. We want to be remembered. We want to be understood. So when I set out to write this project, I wanted to write something that would capture the essence of who I was as a human being up to this point, almost like a creative time capsule that would always be there for me to revisit, a culmination of every victory, every failure, every experience I have had condensed down and bottled up to be reproduced in a piece of creative art. I thought a lot about that, my life experiences, and what my life had felt like up to this point. I knew I wanted to tell a narrative that I could personally relate to, but not one that I felt was necessarily auto-biographical or about me in any way. Amongst all this thinking, I found my way in. I was going to tell a story about life, a story focused on one family, one person, and tell the story of how they became the person they had become.

Though I had my way in, I still didn't know how to tell this story. Even though I've only been alive for twenty-one years, that's still a lot of time to cover. There is no way I could

chronicle an entire childhood accurately in one album, so I thought more about what I wanted to say with this story. I ultimately wanted to tell a story about growth, about change, about overcoming obstacles, because I knew that ultimately, I wanted to tell a positive story. A story that people could feel uplifted by, a story that people could enjoy in that capacity. A lot of my favorite story types are coming-of-age stories, maybe because I feel like I can relate to a lot of those stories, but also maybe because there is something truly special about the time in a kid's life between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. It's a time when you find out who you are going to be for the rest of your life, and it is almost never easy. Teenagers go through a lot of growing pains, are faced with a lot of real decisions, and deal with real emotional trauma to varying degrees as a part of growing up. It's a liminal space, and due to its liminality can be very stressful. I decided that I wanted to set my narrative in that time frame of a person's life, in the time that they would open to the most change and the time that would define who they were as a person going forward.

I decided to link this change to a trauma that my main character deals with. If this was going to be a story about overcoming obstacles and growth, then I needed an obstacle for my main character to deal with and overcome. I thought a while about what the right thematic obstacle would be, the right traumatic experience, and ultimately I settled on something to do with family. Family is important throughout the narrative of this album, and since the focus is on family, I thought I should make the main character's trauma linked to family, specifically linked to her mother. The trauma that I came up with is that her mother should pass away in childbirth; which would allow me to do multiple things with the narrative. One, it would allow me to narrow the focus even more on the two characters, the main character The Daughter, and her

father, who remains nameless as the Father. This trauma affects both characters in different ways, with the latter losing his wife and love, while the former losing a mother she will never get to know, and also gaining a feeling of responsibility for the situation that has happened. I felt this would ultimately give me the biggest potential for growth, as it was the lowest I felt I could sink with this character. Now that the central trauma was established, I had to decide how to tell the story I wanted to tell.

I knew that I wanted this to be introspective, but grand, personal yet with uncomplicated plot elements, so I looked towards the archetypal. As well, I had to keep in mind that this story would be told primarily through the medium of sound, with lyrics and poetry subsidiary to that. Keeping that in mind, looking at archetypes seemed the easiest bet to me, because they are easy and familiar to understand on the surface, but allow for more interpretation and complexity on closer examination if I chose to add any. I settled on loosely basing my narrative on the archetypal Hero's Journey, that Joseph Campbell popularized in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Finding an archetype allowed me a clear framework for how to structure my narrative, but also gave me room to innovate on top of it due to how ubiquitous the Hero's Journey is. As well, I felt it was thematically appropriate due to the character that the narrative is centered around. The main character is a lover of stories, very similar to how I felt when I was little. I used to believe, like most kids do, that I was a main character in a book, or a movie, and any second it would all be revealed to me. But as you grow up, you realize more that you are not the center of the world, but everyone else is living their own life equally valid to yours. So I decided to relate life to story, to narrative, and applying that metaphor to this story I'm creating. I also think it is empowering to use a Hero's Journey to tell a story about life, not about any

fantasy or about science-fiction space opera, we are all the heroes of our own stories. Keeping all that in mind, I took the basic elements of the Hero's Journey, and began to shape a narrative of my own. In the Hero's Journey, Joseph Campbell outlines different node points that the hero's arch will take them on, taking place in two different hemispheres of the cycle, the ordinary world and the special world. A lot of different stories use this framework, of a hero being taken or motivated to move out of their ordinary lives or worlds into something unknown, something foreign and something different. Campbell highlights that when a hero is tasked to go to this special world, that is the call to action part of the journey. When I decided I was going to use this archetype, I had to think about what the ordinary world and the special world would be and how the characters would exist in them. In the ordinary world, I wanted the Daughter's life to be portrayed as bleak, as stagnant, and as unmotivated. I wanted her to simultaneously feel stuck in this world but also give her enough agency for her to want out, specifically a desire to see her mother.

Keeping with my desire to root this hero's tale in a realistic environment, I decided that I wanted the special world to be introspective, something where she can go on a journey and be in a fantastical different place, but it all will relate to who she is as a character. For this purpose, I thought of using a dream world. I came up with the idea that she would fall asleep, and become trapped in her own dreams, a dreamscape, where she would have to go on a clear journey to escape this dream. Once she entered the dream, I came up with clear obstacles for her to overcome; the Monster, the River, and the Forest. Each of these obstacles come from an understandable place in literature; with the monster representing the dragon archetype of the hero fighting a clear and understandable physical threat. The River comes from a place in her

childhood where she had been too scared to cross a turbulent river while hiking with her father and represents a natural threat. The last obstacle represents neither a physical nor natural reality, but an emotional threat, as with this obstacle the Daughter must make her way into the heart of a storm, through a thickly wooded forest to reach the center. At the center, she finds the princess in the castle, which in this case would be her mother. I decided to take all these archetypes and have them represent something personal to the main character; with that being the best way for me to make the story approachable but still allow room for more complicated character development.

At a certain point, I had to decide how in-depth I wanted to go with the narrative. If I made it too complicated, then it would be impossible to communicate all of it effectively through just sound. Music is not as representational as words; I can't go as in-depth with all of the specifics. After reading Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* and researching into different levels of understanding and enjoyment an audience might feel from a piece of programmatic music, I came upon the idea of creating a narrative with many different layers to it. In *House of Leaves*, the narrative itself is networked, meaning that it cannot be contained specifically to the pages of the book; the narrative continues in forum posts, and in an accompanying concept album from Poe called *Haunted*. The narrative has many different levels of engagement, and a person engaging with it has many different choices they can make. With my narrative I wanted to take a similar approach but modified slightly. My approach is more tier-based, in the sense that I want a person engaging with what I created to be able to control the level of complexity they experience. If a person wants to listen to what I have created and ignore all elements of the narrative, they can do that. If a person wants to follow the thematic development and listen for

how the lyrics connect between each piece, they can also do that. If a person wants to read the program notes for each song and understand the story overview that way, they can do that. If a person wants the “complete” picture, they can go and read the accompanying novella I have created that is a more complicated story, but the main point is that none of that is necessary and the people control how much they want to engage with it. I ultimately wanted the experience to be satisfying, enjoyable, and carry emotional weight, and I understand that everybody engages with media in different ways. Because I’ve designed the narrative in this tiered approach, then I think I can achieve the maximum amount of enjoyment without sacrificing any narrative complexity I could include.

Overall, the narrative of the story was one I designed to ultimately be a story that I wanted to tell, something personal that I feel could be almost universally related to. I want an audience to be able to engage with the narrative on different levels, and feel satisfied on whichever level they choose to engage at, while also still designing a narrative that could be communicated easily through music through the use of archetypes and common story tropes that I have worked to subvert and add more complexity too beneath the surface.

Analysis of Music Linked with the Narrative: (themes, structure, non-diegetic material, lyrical content)

With the music itself, I set out to design the compositions in a way that would follow the narrative and thematic structures I had laid out. Before I started any major compositional work, I had a general understanding of the plot, characters and themes that I wanted to explore. I wanted to know the general arch of the whole story, but still be able to explore individual narrative components from each song. With this section I would like to go through each of the different compositional devices I utilized to help form a sense of narrative within the music.

Themes:

For the album, I originally came up with the concept of utilizing different pieces of thematic material that would be repeated, restated, or transformed as the album went on. From the beginning I wanted a sense of congruity, where every song fits together in a way that is pleasing and serves the narrative. The first step to making that happen was to establish different themes, or leitmotifs, that I could incorporate into this congruity. However, to make my themes different I worked to have them represent ideas, concepts, and emotions, rather than be tied specifically to one person or object. Also, this thematic material doesn't necessarily have to be melodic in nature, they can be rhythm based as well as harmony based. I want to go over the various major themes I have in the album, highlight where they start and where they end up.

The first major theme that appears in *Angel*. This theme occurs at a point in the album where the father is lamenting the loss of his wife, on the lyric, "I need you, my angel". This theme comes to represent a connection that the characters in the story feel to the mother, and to

the sense of family. This can either be a negative or a positive connection as I am able to use the theme in various contexts. Here, the father utilizes it to mourn the loss of his wife, and lament who his own identity will be without his wife at his side. This theme consists of a chord progression of b6 major 7, b7 major, minor 1, which is a progression that feels homely and comfortable, but at the same time strong and dramatic. This one starts on the major 7, as I reverse the order of the chords at various points throughout the album. As well, it is slow here and sung with lyrics. I take this theme and use it at other key moments in the album, with the next spot being slightly more than halfway through *Journey*. At this point in *Journey*, the main character of the daughter has grown to be about a teenager, and we have exited, mostly, the special world section of the piece where it is louder and more aggressive. At this point, I use this theme from *Angel* in a more triumphant and heroic way, highlighting the connection that the Daughter feels between her loss of her mother and the emotional liminal experience of being a teenager. This theme goes on to be represented in the main melody to *A Call to Dream*, albeit with different chords and a slightly different melodic shape, as well as represented in the final confrontation in *At the Center of it All*, where the Mother and the Daughter meet each other at the center of the storm. In both cases, this theme is strongly linked to the daughter's connection

Life Story Major Themes and Motives

Major Themes:

Alex Price

"Family Theme" (Angel)

Musical notation for "Family Theme" (Angel) in 4/4 time. The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are: "I need you My an-gel What will I do now? Who will I be?___". Chords are indicated above the staff: D^bmaj7, E^b6, Fm, and B^b/F.

"Family Theme" (Journey)

Musical notation for "Family Theme" (Journey) in 3/4 time. The melody is a continuous line of eighth and quarter notes. Chords are indicated above the staff: G^bmaj7 and A^b6/9. The piece concludes with a 4/4 time signature and a final chord of E^b.

"Family Theme Modified" (Call to Dream)

Musical notation for "Family Theme Modified" (Call to Dream) in 4/4 time. The melody features a mix of eighth and quarter notes. Chords are indicated above the staff: Dmaj7(add13) and F[#]m11. The piece concludes with a 3/4 time signature and a final chord of A⁺maj7.

"Family Theme Modified" (At The Center of It All)

Musical notation for "Family Theme Modified" (At The Center of It All) in 3/4 time. The melody includes a triplet of eighth notes. Chords are indicated above the staff: Fmaj7, G6/9, Am, and B^b. The piece concludes with a 4/4 time signature and a final chord of C.

An analysis of the "Family" Theme throughout *Life Story*.

to her mother, with *A Call to Dream* being about the Daughter lamenting the time she never had with her mother, and *At the Center of it All* being about the Daughter forgiving herself for her role in her mother's death, with the mother and daughter character singing different phrases of this theme back at each other, to emulate the conversation they have.

The second major theme of the album is the reflection of the first theme, with the chord progression starting on a minor chord, and moving down to b7 major and then to b6 major 7 (sometimes sharp 11). Melodically, this theme has a general arc of moving up, instead of down like the first theme. The top note stays constant, but the bottom note goes along with the motion of the chords. (find pic of theme). This theme first plays in *Angel*, at the moment that the Daughter character is born. I wanted this theme to be tied to loss and trauma, as perceived by her father and by her as she grows older. This theme is darker, and results in a more minor overall sound, and is played throughout the album at various points, either melodically or harmonically in some fashion. In *Journey*, I use a quick version of this theme before the song transitions into a darker section, crossing over from the ordinary world to the special one. In *Call to Dream*, I use this right before the Daughter yearns to see her mother again, someone she has lost and holds traumatic feelings over. In *At the Center of it All*, this theme returns to become a driving harmonic and rhythmic motif that is threaded most of the song, as the Daughter is closest to achieving her goal of reaching her mother. Overall, this theme was one that I wanted to be simple, in that I could place it into various parts of the album in small ways, even if it was just the harmonic information or a sequenced version of the main melody.

The last major theme of the album is the theme that is heard at the beginning of *Journey*, a theme I associate with birth, innocence, and childhood. This theme is in C major to start with, and is mostly diatonic to the key, calling upon folk chorale melodies and common cadences such as V to I or IV to I to evoke a sense of naivety, or innocence. I wanted this melody to be innocent as a contrast to the previous theme associated with loss; this theme primarily has to do with the Daughter's childhood and regaining her sense of childhood innocence as she continues further into the narrative and is able to let go of the traumatic feelings, she has surrounding the death of her mother. This theme deliberately bookends *Journey* to show that this theme represents the core of who the Daughter is, representing that child inside all of us that is always important to remember. Even after going through the progression that *Journey* takes the Daughter on (from birth to teenager), she still has that positive, uplifting melody defining who she is as a person, even if by the end of *Journey* she is a person haunted by the trauma of her mother's death. I think it is important to remember that trauma is something that can envelop us, it will never fundamentally change who we are if we let it, which is what I wanted to demonstrate by placing this theme at the beginning and end of *Journey*.

As well, at the end of *Journey* it is up a whole step key-wise, indicating positive change. This theme returns twice on the album; once in a more obvious way in *Crossing the River*, and in spirit in *Life Story* (the song). In *Crossing the River*, the theme returns when the Daughter is at her lowest point; she has failed to cross this river, this obstacle, and is about to ready to give up as she is pulled further and further underwater. At this point in the song, I instructed the band to play against me, while I play a slightly altered version of her original theme from *Journey*. The theme is altered to have the chord changes from the first theme, the theme about family, tying

the Daughter's desire to seek a return to her childhood innocence in her quest to unite her family by seeing her mother. As well, I instructed the band to play against me because I wanted it to seem like all the negative emotions, she was feeling were fighting against that positive thought about family from taking precedence. Eventually the positive melody wins out, and she is able to rise to the surface of the river and ultimately cross it.

This theme does return in *Life Story*, but as a much more mature and fleshed out version, only really represented in the three first intervals of each melody; a fourth up to the root followed by a half-step down. Because *Life Story* takes place after the main narrative, almost as an epilogue, most of the thematic material from earlier is not represented in the piece, but I figured it would be appropriate to continue the evolution of the original *Journey* theme into something that is more mature and representative of the Daughter as she is about to become a mother.

Though those are the three main themes, there are other moments on the album when I take smaller thematic materials and transform them. Each thematic callback is meant to link the different pieces together and create associations between those pieces almost subconsciously. For example, at the end of *Angel*, when the band is performing almost a funeral march, the piano is alternating between two chords on beats 1 and 3; those chords being Emaj7#11 and C#min6/9. These chords show up again in two different places, in *Journey* during the extended drum solo where the drums solo over the Emaj7#11 and release is on the C#min6/9, and in *At the Center of it All*, at the end of the piece as an extended coda. Both times I take the opportunity to take elements of the originally stated theme and use it to create a rhythmic motif, or a harmonic motif in *Journey* and *At the Center of it All* respectively. As well, in *Journey*, right before the drum

solo and after the piano solo, the horns and guitar play a melody in three that foreshadows the melody in seven heard in *Braving the Storm*. This is narratively significant because *Journey* is meant to foreshadow the arch of the whole album, with it being divided into different worlds of ordinary and special; like the Daughter's real world and dream world. *Braving the Storm* is the first time the Daughter enters the dream world, so I felt it would be fitting to foreshadow this melody in the section of *Journey* that represents the special world. As well, I intentionally made the melodies between *Call to Dream* and *On the Path Between* sound similar to show the character growth and journey that the Daughter is going on. In *Call to Dream* the melody is unsure of itself, quieter and in a more sorrowful texture. While in *On the Path Between*, the melody is confident and has direction, reflecting the Daughter's newfound confidence after defeating the first obstacle in *Braving the Storm*.

I went into writing the thematic material of the album in such a way that no song is in isolation; every piece feeds off the other. And not all of them are linear too; some foreshadow, others represent new growth, others just take different elements like rhythm, harmony, or snippets of melody and turn it into a new section, or piece, or chord progression. I wanted to make sure that the album was something to be taken as a whole at it's best, something where the narrative did not stop from piece to piece but existed as parts of the lines of flight and connection between all the pieces on the album.

Structure:

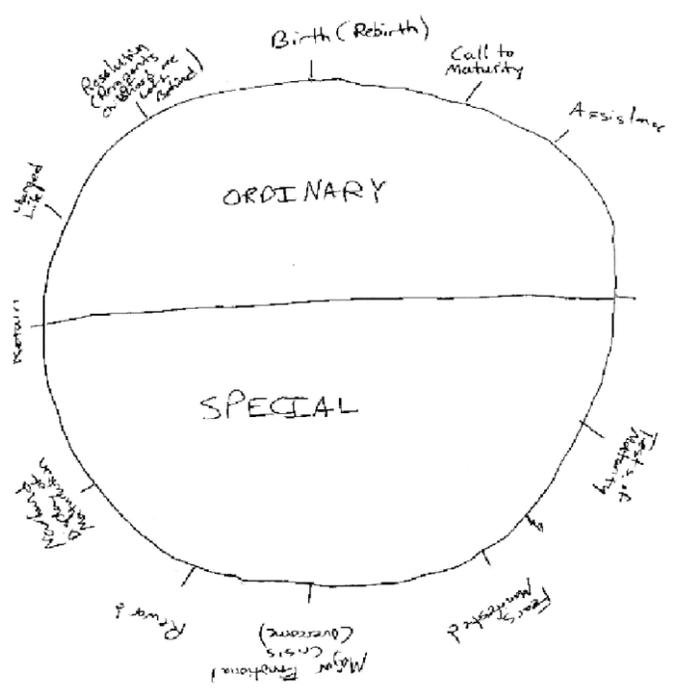
In addition to utilizing thematic material, I specifically designed the structure of each composition to represent the narrative, often before I even had written a single note of music. At first, this became counter-beneficial to my creative process; I found myself stumped much of the

time trying to actualize exactly what I had envisioned in my head, rather than letting creativity flow naturally. However, I felt it was appropriate to have a map planned out of each piece before I wrote it so it would fit into the narrative smoothly.

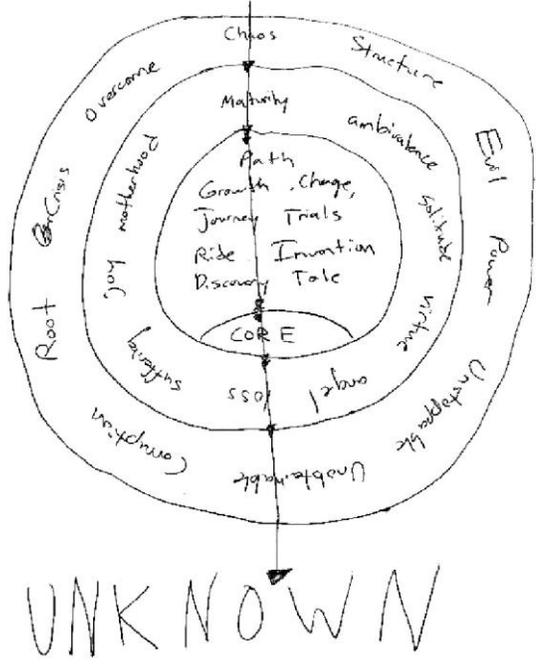
Some pieces were more in depth, while others I only had a vague descriptor of what I wanted. For example, for pieces like *On the Path Between*, I knew I wanted to create something that was rousing, uplifting, and adventurous sounding. I started in an odd time signature, 5/4, to create a unique rhythmic pulse to start with, and then kept the harmony fairly simple to allow the melody to float over the top of this bass and guitar ostinato I had created in 5/4. From there, the tune unfolded into a more triplet-based section in 12/8, which has the added feel of being buoyant due to triplet having more prominence, but also sharing many characteristics of adventure music with a common triplet based beat and soaring melodic melody. For other pieces, I used different narrative structures or events and built the composition around that. For *Journey*, as I stated before, I utilized the archetypal Hero's Journey outlined by Joseph Campbell as a basis for how I wrote the tune, starting and beginning in the same place with many different sections in the piece. This led to a jazz piece of music that was very abnormal in nature due to its multiple sections, through-composed style, and different solo parts for soloists with different chord progressions. For *At the Center of it All*, I used a combination of a frame narrative and visual imagery of a hurricane, trying to imagine a piece that is made up of concentric sections of music, with the middle section being calm and serene, like the eye of the storm, and the inner and outer sections being similar. This worked on a narrative level as it represents the journey that the Daughter goes through in the forest; working her way through the forest to her mother, and then back out again into the storm to escape the dream. This led me to having a piece of

music that was multi-section like *Journey* but did not have as many through-composed elements. Lastly, for pieces like *Crossing the River*, I decided to compose completely based on pre-planned structure and narrative, in this case utilizing a poem I had written as well as imagining the Daughter character as she crosses the river. The piece is divided into six sections, with the first section made to emulate the sound of waves and wind as the daughter is on the shores of the river. Sections two through four are representative of her experiences on the water in the boat, with the drums, piano and guitar playing a static pulse representing the boat she resides in, and the trumpet, saxophone and bass playing melodic lines counter to that that represent the violent pounding of the storm and the pushing down of negative thoughts the Daughter feels as she is crossing the river. These melodic lines by the trumpet, saxophone and bass get progressively more dissonant and turbulent, until section five where the whole band is playing free, at a section in the narrative where the Daughter falls into the water. This section only concludes when we hear the trumpet melody reprising the melody from *Journey*, representing the Daughter finding the will to rise out of the water and continue with her quest. Planning each piece with a unique structure or concept allowed me to create music I wouldn't normally create, going in directions I wouldn't normally go, and allowed me to more easily shape the narrative in the compositional process.

Structure for Journey



Structure for At the Center of it All



Use of Contextual Audio:

For this project, I determined that composition and lyrical content would be the primary means of communicating the narrative, but I wanted to play around with incorporating nondiegetic audio into the mix of the compositions to create a sense of place within the narrative. This contextualization of the music in this form allows for an audience to become associated with the place and setting that the music takes place in, giving just enough narrative information to inform the audience without going overboard and narrating what is happening in the narrative. Going back to Zalanowski's assessment of understanding and enjoyment, I figured the best way to clue the audience into the narrative would be giving them just enough information to picture the narrative in their heads, as Zalanowski concluded that audiences had the highest amount of enjoyment with music when asked or prompted to visualize imagery. The audio that would be added into the album could take the form of waves crashing on a shore, rain falling, wind howling, or more narrative specific moments like ambient noises of a hospital at the beginning of *Angel*. In *Angel* specifically, the contextual audio would blend together with the music, with the sound of the Mother's heart monitor flatlining transitioning into the first notes of the piano in *Angel*. Or another example, in *Journey*, I could have background conversations between the Father and the Daughter at various points in the piece, showing the passage of time and the change in their relationship as the Daughter grows older by using calmer conversation noise at the beginning with a younger female voice, and then age the female voice and use more aggressive or confrontational conversational audio as the piece progresses. This conversational audio does not even need to be understandable as language to an audience, as I believe that would cross the threshold from imagery to narration. It just needs to convey the passage of time

and change of relationship. This non-diegetic audio would ultimately help the audience or listener visualize the narrative of the album, while still leaving room for people to listen and enjoy the music on a surface level but contextualize the narrative at the same time.

Lyrical Content:

As for lyrics, at first, I thought that I wouldn't utilize lyrics except in the first and last songs; *Angel* and *Life Story* respectively. This was a decision at the start to highlight the similarities between the two different scenarios (in *Angel* the mother dies in child birth giving birth to the Daughter, and in *Life Story* the Daughter successfully gives birth to a son). As well, I thought it would be unique to not have any lyrics within the dream world (*Braving the Storm through At the Center of it All*) as I imagine talking in a dream to be blurry and unintelligible. However, as I got deeper into the compositional process, I realized that I needed more vocal pieces to effectively communicate all of the narrative elements I wanted, and that it would feel jarring if a major character like the Daughter only had one piece to sing at the end. With this in mind, I ultimately created five out of the eight pieces to have vocal elements, with four out of eight containing lyrics. For *Angel*, the lyrics were from the perspective of the Father character, mostly being about him coming to terms with the death of his wife and the simultaneous birth of his daughter, a truly emotionally ambivalent moment in his life. For example, one of the lyrics is

Any way I try
To preserve what's left of me
Right now these pieces are far and wide
An attempt that can't help but fail
With no angel standing by my side

Like you did

This lyric exemplifies the pain that the Father feels losing his wife (angel) and feeling like he won't be able to continue without her. In the next stanza, the Daughter is born, and he finds new purpose in protecting his Daughter the same way he felt protected and loved by his wife. In *Call to Dream*, the lyrics are from the perspective of the Daughter as a teenager, wishing that she could be with her mom and see her. She believes she can see her in her dreams, for example with the lyric:

I hear the call to dream
 A pull so strong
 Take me far away
 In hushed whispers

This lyric represents the call she feels pulling her towards seeing her mother again. It is also evocative of the hero's call to action, or in this case a call to dream, so she can begin her quest to see her mother. In *On the Path Between*, the lyrics are confident and forward, where the Daughter knows which path she should take to reach her mother. These lyrics were to help evoke the scene of nature that the Daughter is in (inside of her dream), relating the beautiful landscape to her mental state at the moment. For example:

Walking in this place
 The leaves of grass dance
 Sun up high
 In the sky above
 A warm embrace

Slow and steady
Is the tide of my mind
Clear and true
Is my path forward

At this point in the album she feels confident in her direction and in her quest, so I wanted the lyrics to reflect that. Lastly, in *Life Story* the lyrics take place again from the perspective of the Daughter, but this time as a middle-aged woman ready to give birth to her first child, a son. I wanted the lyrics to play around with the idea of stories and life being related, that all of us leave behind a certain story for those who care about us to have. This piece plays into the anxiety that the Daughter feels giving birth to a new child, as she doesn't want her child to go through what she went through as a teenager if she were to die in childbirth. I played around with all sorts of metanarrative ideas for her to communicate this message to her child, a couple of them being that the whole album, or the entire novel capturing her thoughts, was written from the perspective of her as a gift for her to give to her son in the case of her death, warning him not to follow the same path he did and blame himself for his mother's death. Ultimately, I felt that was overthinking it and was a decision that didn't leave much room for an audience to interpret if I explicitly did that, but a lot of those same seeds exist in the lyrics for *Life Story*. For example:

Line by line
See my life between the letters
Note by note
Who I am for you to uncover

I wanted to combine this idea of song and story, of life and story into the lyrics for the last piece, further cementing my ideas about narrative and music but also as an uplifting and positive message for the Daughter to leave her son in the case that she was to pass.

Overall, the use of lyrics was something that I knew I would have to take advantage of if I wanted to use all different avenues of storytelling and narrative available to me in this project. I wrote the lyrics with the same mindset as adding contextual audio; they would set the stage and context for the composition within the narrative, allowing for slightly more direct communication of what I want the narrative to be in the listener's mind without completely becoming the primary means of that narrative communication.

Publication and Performance:

My plans to publish this album and narrative resemble closely the networked novel of Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. In Danielewski's case, his novel is networked with the novel at the center of this web, with connections to his forums, to internet forums, to a concept album written by Poe called *Haunted* and more. I wanted to take this idea but place the music at the center and have the rest of the narrative be accessed through them, combining my tiered approach outlined before with the approach of the networked novel. In this way, I plan to have different narrative elements for each tier, and I would like to outline each of them and how I plan to release them. At the first tier is the album itself, which will be comprised of the compositions, album art, lyrics, and extra-musical audio. This tier has the most information, but the lowest barrier to entry. At this tier people can enjoy the music for what it is and not have to be burdened by the narrative elements if they choose not to, engaging just with visual imagery, auditory imagery, and lyrical imagery. The next tier will be program notes. The program notes will be included with the

album and will contain slightly more narrative and metanarrative information about each of the compositions on the album but will not go in as deeply as the short novella I have written. As well, program notes are an optional part of the experience, they are not necessary to have a narrative experience with the content on the album. The final tier will be the narrative, which I will publish on a separate website (at first), accessed via a link in the program notes on the album. This website will include the full narrative, with its three sub-narratives: The Story, The Journals, and The Logs. The story will be the main story of the album from the perspective of the Daughter in novel form, providing more in-depth details about her experiences on her quest. The Journals will provide more information about what is going on with her father in the outside world while she is in her coma, toeing the line between fantasy and reality as the doctor in charge of caring for the Daughter tries desperately to make sense of her situation. The last sub-narrative, the Logs, is a series of interviews conducted by a psychologist directly after the events of *At the Center of it All*, and before *Life Story*, where the Daughter has a chance to confront the experience she has had while in the coma, and make sense of whether it was a reality or fantasy, or whether that matters at all. These sub-narratives all link back to each other and link out to the rest of the album by providing more in-depth information and a greater understanding of the narrative itself, that may change the way a listener perceives the album on repeated listens. Overall, I believe this tiered approach the best way to publish the album, as it will allow different layers of engagement with different people for music and narrative.

As for live performance, I will be using the compositions, lyrics, and program notes to tell the story. This is due to logistical reasons for not using all the extra-musical audio that will appear on the album itself in a live performance, though I do believe the narrative will remain intact. I

had planned different ways for an audience to engage with the narrative live, by printing out the various pages of my short story and positing them around the room before the start of the performance. They would not be in a logical order and allow an audience to receive only snippets of information about the narrative before the performance begins, allowing for a non-linear engagement of the material. Overall, performing the album live I will do my best to preserve the narrative I have created and find creative ways to get an audience to engage with that narrative.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I have discussed both the analytical aspects of language relating to sound, and the metanarrative aspect of how I linked music composition with narrative in my concept album, *Life Story*. First, it was necessary to determine whether music can be a language in the literal sense, in that it is representational in a way that a language is representational. Through the work of Deryck Cooke and Tia DeNora, it was determined that music is not one to one representational, but it is more contextual and cultural in its pathways to meaning. Music is a recreation of meaning, not a representation of it. As well, it was important to discuss the societal ascribing of meaning to music, such as with the various performances of Francis Scott Key's American National Anthem, to illustrate how context and intent can change the meaning of a piece of music as with Jimi Hendrix's famous solo version at Woodstock. Next, I discussed the various, more common, methods of creating meaning in music, looking to programmatic works like Richard Wagner's *The Ring Cycle* and Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and film scoring as well. Thematic transformations via leitmotif was the main form of communication of meaning in all of these mediums, allowing for an audience to connect points of meaning from a theme in music to something extra-musical, be it a character, emotion, or object. After that I defined programmatic and absolute music, noting that the lines between these definitions is blurry at best and it has become more difficult to define both of them objectively. Next, I discussed understanding and enjoyment in programmatic music and absolute music through a study done by Annette Zalanowski in Miami, rating the enjoyment and understanding levels of different groups exposed to programmatic and absolute pieces of music. Zalanowski's findings involved determining that when exposed to high levels of information about programmatic

music, audiences' enjoyment went down while understanding went up, and vice versa. In both cases with programmatic and absolute, she determined that highest levels of enjoyment and understanding were when audiences were asked to participate in the narrative by visualizing imagery based off of what they heard, meaning that there is a certain threshold an audience can take before enjoyment falls off. Lastly, I discussed groove and jazz improvisation as related to narrative, primarily utilizing the works of Vijay Iyer and Tiger C. Roholt. Based on both understandings, I determined that jazz improvisation tells a particular kind of narrative, one in which the performer, the other performers on stage and the audience are all aligned together in a groove that creates that narrative experience. This narrative is one that is affected by the outside stimuli of the piece, chords, and audience members but is also driven by the character that the improviser chooses to play, drawing from inward experience on both a technical level and an emotional level.

For the second part, I discussed my thought process behind creating the story elements of *Life Story*, and an analysis of the music for thematic content, structure, extra-musical audio and lyrical content. For my thought process in the story drafting, I determined it would best to use archetypal narrative structures and build a narrative around that due to music being my primary means of communicating a narrative. I choose to use the Hero's Journey archetype from Joseph Campbell and built my story around that. For the music, I traced the different themes I had created throughout the album, discussed my approach to composition as structured and preplanned to account for the narrative, illustrating my ideas on incorporating contextual audio to help with telling the narrative, and analyzed the lyrical content of my music. Lastly, I discussed my tiered, networked, publication approach, and how it was important to have

different levels of engagement with the music and narrative to keep from going beyond the threshold of understanding and enjoyment.

I believe music to be an inherently meaningful art form, and this project is my testament to that belief. I believe music to be powerful; to have the power to sway people emotionally, to touch people, to resonate, to bring us closer together in harmony and allow us to leave our legacy on the universe. Music being inherently meaningful means that music is inherently linked to narrative in some way. Even absolute music, music that was created to express nothing other than the music itself, is a form of narrative in that the artist set out to purposefully create something without purpose. By linking music with narrative in the context of a jazz album of original music, I could tell a story that is not representational, but recreational. Something that emanates emotion, something that is a direct connection to our collective human experiences, concentrated and delivered in musical composition.

I believe therefore we as a people have latched so deeply onto narrative, because narrative is an invention that holds a mirror up to our society and informs us on our experience. It is how we make sense of our own lives, and the lives of those around us. That is not to say our own lives are any less valuable or valid than fiction. We are living our own great stories, we are living our own narratives, every second of every day. In this way, I am glad to have created something that links our own lives with narrative, something that reinforces the sacred power of stories in our own lives and remembering that each one of us has a life story that is worth being told.

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