A Critical Application of Communicative Concepts Concerning Creative (Songwriting) Processes

Alfred J. Wright III
A CRITICAL APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATIVE CONCEPTS CONCERNING
CREATIVE (SONGWRITING) PROCESSES

by

Alfred J. Wright III

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Communication)

The Honors College
University of Maine
May 2023

Advisory Committee:
Liliana Herakova, Assistant Professor of Communication, Advisor
Dr. Dan Barrett, Lecturer in Music, Low Brass and Music Theory
Ellie Markovitch, Lecturer in Journalism
ABSTRACT

*New Doors* is a creative project consisting of a series of songs and poems reflecting music as an effective communicative practice that opens opportunities for creative processing and problem-solving, improving the human condition and experience. Throughout these works, the audience will observe a narrative of an individual who learns to become a better writer and communicator through songwriting techniques as he works through a transformative period in his life. As a result of these songwriting and poetic techniques, this collection of pieces explores themes of reflexivity, solitude and isolation, and self-discovery utilizing a creative process, presenting music and poetry as a meaningful presentation of one’s life experiences and inner thoughts.
To my mother, father, brother, and Lil’ Joe,
who have supported me through everything,
this would not have happened without you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s Biography</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

I hardly remember when my love for music began. Growing up, my father was a DJ on a local radio station, my mother played the guitar, and music was constantly surrounding my life, whether on car rides, being outside, or sitting in the living room with my parents, watching concert videos. I remember celebrities like the kids on Nickelodeon and Disney Channel, wanting to be like them because they could sing and act, a foot in both worlds I wanted to be in. They were young, but the world idolized them.

My passion for performing only increased as the years passed. From ages 5 to 17, I participated in a few dozen musicals and plays through a local youth theater company and our school performances. Spending hours and hours at rehearsals practicing different scenes, choreography, and songs, as well as the time put into costumes and the set, showed me the intense work that goes into the performing arts. While this is an aspect that often not many acknowledge in a performance, it was one that I sincerely appreciated and always strived to be a part of, whether it was performing on stage or setting props and set pieces with the crew. However, I most often found myself on stage as a performer surrounded by my friends with a deeply-found passion for the craft.

I remember the gut-wrenching feeling of waiting for my cue as I stand backstage, hiding from the audience. The actors onstage exchange their lines, immersing themselves and the audience in the scene. As I walk on stage, the feeling dissipates as the colored lights shine on my body, hiding the seated faces from my vision. To me, there was always a fundamental difference between a musical and a play. A play allows an actor to become someone else in the time of being their character. While a musical also does this, it also enables actors or performers to truly express themselves on stage, experiencing the
raw emotion of their character through dialogue and music. Such a performance not only moves the performer to feel these deeply interpersonal emotions but also creates an opportunity for the audience to do so.

I recall the summer of 2017 as one when I worked on an especially emotionally engaging piece. I was performing in Titanic the Musical with Stages Youth Theater Company in Portland, Maine. This story of Titanic was not the same as the infamous James Cameron movie, but rather an opera-based musical a la Les Miserables. I played the character of Thomas Andrews, who was the head of building the Titanic in the musical and in real life. Throughout the musical, Andrews maintains a personable attitude as he interacts with first-class to third-class passengers, striving to create a comfortable environment for all aboard the ship.

As disaster strikes and the ship begins to submerge, Andrews descends into madness as his life's creation sinks beneath his feet. In the last of his three solo songs, Andrews contemplates how such a disaster could have occurred. He wonders through all of the possibilities, from screws being loose to human failure, eventually preaching about how the ship will refuse to sink and grow wings to fly to New York.

The last performance of the musical struck a deep chord within me, as I had begun to deeply resonate with the character over the few weeks I had rehearsed and immersed myself in his personality. On our way home, my mom and dad talked to me about the performance, what they noticed about it, and asked me how I felt about its conclusion. On this car ride home, my parents told me that during my final rendition of this song, the grown man sitting in front of them was bawling his eyes out, seemingly feeling the raw emotion of this character. It was this night when I realized that I had the
ability to make my audience feel such deep emotions and connect with a deep part of themself that they would not have otherwise. I loved being on stage and all its benefits, empowering the talented performers around me to tell a story to our audience and immersing ourselves in the process. However, I strongly disagreed with the competitive structure of auditioning and outperforming other like-minded individuals. But since that night, I've always wanted to recreate this experience with my own work, whether performance-based or project-based.

After graduating high school in 2019, it was time to grow up and create something for myself with my tools. In the places where I had the capability and the essential tools to start this process, I lacked the experience and mindset. I needed more time. I always knew I had an unyielding passion for playing an instrument and performing as myself rather than pretending to be someone else. Like many others, my first favorite band was *The Beatles*. I would spend hours listening to their music, entranced by the energy they created as they explored realms of musical creativity I had never experienced anywhere else, pioneering them along the way. It was magic, and, along with a powerful performance, it was something I strived to recreate. Even as my music tastes have changed and fluctuated over the years, I will continue to credit the four boys from Liverpool as my biggest inspiration. Their music guided me through my grandfather’s death, breakups, moving away from home, and dealing with isolation.

Before beginning my work, I knew I wanted to do something creative and stray away from the typical research paper format commonly seen in the Honors College. This project began with an extensive image in mind, as I wanted to create something truly unique and powerful for a listener or reader. I wished for my audience to experience
emotion throughout this overarching story, finding elements they could relate to as they embark on my protagonist’s journey and connect with the character on an interpersonal level, similar to how I did with Thomas Andrews.

Whether I like it or not, I have always wanted to make people feel joy, laughter, and deep emotion through my musical endeavors, whether it was through writing my own song or performing for others. I have always strived to keep the audience on the edge of their seat, such as performing in jazz bands from middle school through college, in the local bands that I am involved with, and even with this project. With this creative thesis, I will present music as a means of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication, exploring themes of reflexivity, solitude and isolation, and self-discovery through this collection of songs and poems and the process it took to make them.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the process of creating and formulating my creative thesis project, I looked to various collections of texts and music alike that communicate the importance and power of songwriting as a communicative and therapeutic practice. Although I began by observing and analyzing texts from my years in the Honors Civilization Sequence, since many of them communicate the importance of creative processes problem-solving, I found that need for material more relevant to the songwriting topic and the utilization of music as a tool for reflection and inquiry rather than entertainment. Although some of these pieces of literature may be limited in terms of a global scope on the matter, they nonetheless share the power of songwriting as a transformative practice and were influential throughout my creative process.

Music as Therapeutic Communication

Research suggests that music has many benefits for mental health, whether creating and arranging songs or simply listening to music in a live setting or privately (Schäfer et al., 2013) and can create a meaningful experience for an individual (Wright, 2017). Many researchers worldwide have studied the psychological functions of creating and listening to music, typically to aid individuals who struggle with neurodegenerative disorders such as dementia and other psychosocial medical conditions (Mantie-Kozlowski et al., 2020). Such scholarship supports the notions of music and songwriting as a tool to drive productive communicative practices (Harwood, 2017), cope with emotions of isolation in a productive manner (Carlson et al., 2021; Tibau et al., 2019), and discover one’s inner-self through expressing their emotions in music and songwriting (Beech, 2014; Mantie-Kozlowski et al., 2020; Fadel et al., 2023).
In general, singing, playing, and listening to music have been known to ease human anxiety and unite populations throughout history, as seen in national anthems and working songs, and have served as a coping mechanism for entire communities and to single individuals throughout the tribulations (Harwood, 2017; Wright, 2017). In their case study *The Psychological Functions of Music Listening*, Thomas Schäfer and colleagues write, “People listen to music to regulate *arousal and mood*, to achieve *self-awareness*, and as an expression of *social relatedness*” (Schäfer et al., 2013, p. 1). The researchers emphasize these three functional dimensions as a product of a sort of musical evolution to maintain social cohesion and communication, presenting the authentic influence music has had on populations and movements throughout history.

As shown in their study, Schäfer et al. (2013) present a decline in listening to music as a social device due to its increased accessibility to smartphones and streaming platforms. Instead, the researchers analyze an increase in listening to music to create a comfortable atmosphere for a singular individual, reflecting the Western mindset of individuality and the priority of self-acknowledgment over relationships with others (Schäfer et al., 2013). While the social importance of listening to music may have been, as they put it, “overvalued,” there is no doubt that listening to music encourages the creation of a comfortable atmosphere suited for an individual or group of individuals, as seen in concert settings. On the other hand, Harwood (2017) offers a more encompassing picture with regard to the uses and impacts of music on social relations. As an essential part of our identity, Harwood highlights the significant role music has played for generations and how it has influenced individuals to develop a sense of belonging within a group context through work songs, national anthems, etc. With direct impacts on
intergroup dynamics, he found that music has the potential to increase or decrease intergroup prejudice and intolerance, presenting music’s “implicit messages about its own group-related origins in the musical code, and more explicit messages about groups and intergroup relations in its lyrics” (Harwood, 2017, p. 25).

This idea of using music and songwriting for therapeutic purposes is explored further in Mantie-Kozlowski et al. (2020), which primarily revolved around the use of therapeutic songwriting as a means to treat psychological conditions with a focus on Primary Progressive Aphasia, or PPA. As described by the authors, this neurodegenerative syndrome is most often identified by an individual's decline in language abilities. Throughout a series of behavioral treatments, the individuals in the study utilize therapeutic songwriting (TSW) to merge language and music, encouraging “conversation, collaboration, creativity, and problem solving, and can serve as a vehicle for the communication and meaningful self-expression” (Mantie-Kozlowski et al., 2020, p. 1435). In their studies, the researchers presented their participants with two types of therapeutic songwriting, SPT (song parody technique) and SCT (song collage technique), and the task of writing a song using each technique. SPT was characterized by using the structure of a popular song (i.e. The Beatles’ *Yesterday*) and having individuals change the words to their own, while SCT was known for creating new compositions based on the combination of many others. As a result of these techniques, the participants found these approaches to therapeutic songwriting meaningful, enjoyable, and satisfactory. Using TSW as a means of communication therapy allowed the individuals to feel more confident in their ability to communicate and allowed songwriting practices to be
“identified as a strategy to address connectedness and to maintain interpersonal relationships” (Mantie-Kozlowski et al., 2020, p. 1444).

**Music and Social Connectivity**

Utilizing music and songwriting as a means of communication and self-presentation is also displayed in Hillary Francis Beech's 2014 study with songwriters. Throughout her work, Beech analyzes the responses of songwriters who “described their experience of songwriting and discussed 1 song whose composition and sharing had had a significant personal impact” (Beech, 2014, iii). She found that music and songwriting are commonly used to impact how individuals perceive and interpret themselves, others, and their surroundings. As Beech interviewed the participants, she noted songwriting's many purposes for an individual, such as connecting with other creators and listeners, exploring the connection between music and spirituality, and sharing oneself through various themes.

As a tool of connectivity, music allows individuals to create spaces of learning in which they can build and maintain relationships, welcoming “shared expressive, intimate, minimal everyday experiences between loved ones” even if hundreds of miles separate these individuals (Tibau et al., 2019, p. 1). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, music was utilized telematically, drastically changing the landscape for performers and audiences alike and requiring them to adapt to these new conditions (Bell, 2021, p. 180). Due to the necessary procedures undergone by billions to avoid the pandemic, music began to profoundly influence the psychological health and well-being of individuals across the globe, with many utilizing it to achieve a particular effect on their mind and regulate mood (Carlson et al., 2021, p. 11). Although there were some reports of music
not listening not providing the desired effect (Carlson et al.), listening and creating music still served as a means of social connectivity and coping efficacy during such a transformative time for the entire world, increasing well-being and a sense of togetherness (Hansen, 2021, p. 4).

Even during periods of intense isolation, which can impact our perception of listening and creating music, music also has the potential to shape how we approach situations like these and help us overcome them (Carlson et al., 2021, p. 11). Utilizing songwriting as a means of coping and expressing emotion is present in the process of many songwriters and creators (Burkholder et al., 2019). While it is essential to analyze these practices in a formal manner via case studies and academic research, it is also extremely valuable to see these practices at play in the hands of established musicians. Kate Davis, a songwriter and performer active for over a decade, recently released her new album Fish Bowl and was welcomed on NPR music news to discuss the release (Fadel et al., 2023). In this interview, Davis reflects on her writing process from the perspective of a fictional character she named FiBo, drawing inspiration from stories like Alice in Wonderland: "The truth of it is, I was in a lot of pain and it was hard to be comfortable on Earth," she says. "It became very liberating and comfortable to just build a different world." In this different world, she created a character she didn't have to identify with but could instead undergo this experience with, finding a way to cope with experiences of isolation and solitude through songwriting practices. In the interview, Davis highlights the moral of removing oneself from the expectations of others and looking for answers within, rather than in the world without.
Throughout the interview, Davis notes that her audience began responding most to the content she did not feel was authentic or unique to her as an artist. She describes feeling like a caricature of herself, yearning for a true sense of self that she could only acquire through the perspective of this fictional character. She reflects upon these moments of pain throughout *Fish Bowl*, as she wrote in her song *Consequences*, “I forgot my wallet and my keys in a cab in the city/ So I got down on my knees, crying out to a corporate deity./ A black hole was tearing into me where my heart had/ forgotten about fragility and tenderness and your absentee” (Davis, 2023). In the interview, Davis expressed her difficulty in finding a sense of self and her voice, causing moments of pain to arise because she had constantly been searching for herself externally rather than looking within. Creating FiBo allowed Kate to channel a part of herself that had not yet been fully realized, resulting in an experience of learning and self-discovery in her process.

From this understanding, it is evident that creators and songwriters alike gain insight into outside-the-box approaches to problem-solving and coping mechanisms through their creative processes. As discussed in James Nacy’s TED Talk, “The Heart of a Musician,” music enables an individual to approach and overcome obstacles in an effective way and maintain persistence and determination in achieving their goals. Throughout his discussion, Nacy reflects on his experiences in traveling to Iraq to teach music to individuals from 10 years old to adults on the cello. Although many of his colleagues told him this would be challenging, Nacy remained persistent and brought two suitcases worth of sheet music, strings, and other materials for cello players to use.
When Nacy arrived to work in the two 10-day institutes, he found the needs far greater than what he could provide but desired as a musician to spread the music his students deeply sought. Nacy was the first cello teacher at the institutes he participated in, creating a profoundly beneficial environment for the students and immediately grasping their interest. During times of war in chaos in Iraq, Nacy's students faced significant challenges, with one student to whom Nacy grew close having been sent to the hospital for glass removal from his face due to a nearby bombing. However, when Nacy received a message from the student just two days after asking for a particular piece of music to learn as soon as possible, he laughed out loud and truly realized the heart of a musician would stop beating no matter the obstacle. Throughout his discussion of this experience, I found Nacy's words reflective of my own creative process in that I would often refuse to stop trying new ideas and continue to write a song or poem even if was a challenge. Doing so created new opportunities for learning and improved my approaches to songwriting and music composition, allowing me to reflect on my work and process while making my way through it.

Overall, while the search for topics that related to these themes within a musical context may have been a challenge at times, these resources present a perceptive insight into the process of songwriting and the ways in which music and composition can serve as tools to create a meaningful presentation of one's life experiences. Be it empirical research on the benefits of music for individuals with disabilities and medical conditions (Mantie-Kozlowski et al., 2020) or the shared thoughts of a critically acclaimed songwriter and musician (Fadel et al., 2023), these pieces of literature highlight the ways in which music fosters human survival, thriving and connection beyond serving as
entertainment. Each piece of literature presented various ways that music can serve as a therapeutic resource and communicative practice that allows individuals to discover parts of themselves they had not only realized. As a result of this self-discovery process, musicians and songwriters are able to develop interpersonal connections with each other, their audiences, and their own content.

A musician’s interpersonal connection with their creations welcomes learning opportunities that allow an individual to approach emotional tribulations and problem-solving more efficiently and productively (Mantie-Kozlowski et al., 2020). With practices such as therapeutic songwriting (Beech, 2014; Mantie-Kozlowski et al., 2020), utilizing music composition and lyrics allows individuals to cope with feelings of isolation and solitude while also reflecting on them (Bell, 2021; Carlson et al., 2021; Fadel et al., 2023). Using music as a tool of reflection and inquiry rather than a simple source of entertainment can drive effective communicative practices. Utilizing music in this way while progressing through my project has allowed me to reflect upon my years in the Honors College and the CMJ Department, and how my experiences within these contexts have shaped my thinking and approach to group contexts and communication.
METHODOLOGY

My creative thesis journey began during my time as a third-year student in the Honors College, enrolled in the HON 391: Thesis Tutorial course and HON 180: A Cultural Odyssey. Although I completed the latter later than most Honors students, my simultaneous enrollment in these two courses was highly beneficial and influential to the approach of my creative thesis project.

In HON 180, we were introduced to many creative projects and art pieces each week, from a scavenger hunt in the Hudson and Page Farm Museums to viewing a play at the Penobscot Theater Company based out of Bangor. I found each of these art-based experiences exceptionally insightful as they were physical manifestations of concepts we had learned and analyzed during my first two years in the Civilizations Sequence. One notable experience from this course was attending a concert in the Collins Center for the Arts by a group called Nobuntu, an all-women’s singing group, with each member representing a different part of Africa via clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles unique to their region. During this performance, each group member briefly spoke to the audience about how grateful they were to be there and the significance this tour possessed, shining a light on the theme of perspective-taking commonly seen throughout the Honors College curriculum.

Being a member of choir groups throughout high school and even my first semester at UMaine, the magic of their voices captured my attention for the entirety of their performance. The women’s ability to harmonize with restraint and subtlety to create multiple layers of music through only their voices was a display of true musical intonation and connection with group members on an interpersonal level through music
performance. Having never seen an acapella group like this before, the performance inspired me, and I was eager to create music of my own.

As I approached the focus of this creative project, I had many different ideas for songs and a narrative that I could shape through a combination of music and language. Throughout the Summer of 2022, I began to create various pieces of content, such as short poems and chord progressions and attempted to connect these seemingly disconnected pieces to formulate an overarching story. When I began combining these different elements, the possibilities for what I could create seemed endless; there was potential to reach limits I had never considered, but time always plays a factor. As I progressed, I began to understand better the scope I should aim for in creating this project, so I began to re-evaluate what I wanted to make, who it would be for, and what I and my audience could gain from it.

Like many artists and creators, my creative process was long, complicated, and filled with edits and changes. However, as my ideas evolved and I set more reasonable goals for myself within the timeframe I had available, I looked for inspiration in the topics commonly observed throughout the Honors College courses, such as a hero’s journey, self-discovery, and perspective-taking. With such an extensive catalog of texts that I had read for either academic purposes or out of personal interests, I wanted to create something original that related to these themes and portray the human experience as a result of one’s trials and tribulations in a significant way.

When I began writing, I knew a strong starting point would be topics I was familiar with, including experiences inside and outside of my college career. I reflected upon my years in the Honors College and the Communication and Journalism
Department (CMJ) and how my experiences within these have shaped my thinking and approach to different contexts, from group leadership to understanding individuals on an interpersonal level. As I reflected upon these experiences via writing, a narrative started to develop reminiscent of my personal experiences throughout the COVID-19 quarantine period and my feelings of isolation and solitude as an individual and musician who thrives on interactions with others. At this time, a narrative of an artist/performer began to emerge as I had written in an autobiographical manner without attaching myself to the story.

While I attempted different approaches to direct the narrative, I needed substance to ground the story and make it feel relevant to the reader/listener and myself as its creator. Through a process of experimentation, I realized that my main character needed to undergo a process of becoming a better writer and find the ability to truly express themselves as an artist, much like my own experience through this creative process. As I worked through the entirety of this project, I underwent my own process of self-discovery as I wrote about a protagonist moving through a transformative experience in their life, much like myself.

When I began thinking about the main character for this project, I wanted to create a person I could relate to and that my audience would find compelling. The protagonist, named Sam Poole, has been a performer and musician for a number of years and has made a career of his talents with his best friend and co-writer, Rodney R. The narrative starts roughly 15 years into Poole’s career, a time in which he has grown unsure of himself and his future, feeling like a relic of a past time. Rodney, who has supported Sam and his decisions, even if they put his life or relationships with others at risk, has
begun to reduce his presence in Sam’s life due to his struggle to maintain healthy relationships. Each piece I’ve created, whether a song or poem, represents a different chapter of Sam’s transformation through his self-discovery and rebuilding his relationship with his best friend. This is reminiscent of my own self-discovery process throughout the last 3.5 years at UMaine.

As I formulated the narrative and direction of my story on paper, next came writing and composing the subsequent musical pieces. I initially approached the music in compositional sections utterly separate from the words and lyrics in an attempt to push myself to create something truly unique, a strict goal I had set for myself to achieve in this project. Although I followed this goal to the best of my ability, I found that I had far more written content than I could create musically during this period. While I would have deemed the state of the project unfinished at the start of my process because of this, I found that a combination of songs and poems would convey the narrative in an effective manner and would allow the protagonist to reflect via short poems as the narrative progresses.

This musical endeavor was indeed a process of experimentation and learning as I attempted different genres and styles of music to accompany the different lyrics I had written previously. However, there were many moments in which I would attempt to lay out a simple chord progression for a new song but would get stuck and grow frustrated because I could not find the particular series of notes that would best align with the lyrics. So, to combat this, I began stepping away from my work during moments like these to reflect and re-approach the piece with a fresh start and a clear mind. While this was indeed a time-consuming and frustrating process on more than one occasion, the bliss of
achieving the combination of music and lyrics I yearned for was incredibly powerful. Although it may not be a physically tangible item, this work was nonetheless a deeply meaningful manifestation of my experience in college and what I was thinking while writing these songs.

Although these approaches to songwriting may appear foolishly straightforward on the surface, the ability of an individual to create original content within a songwriting context may be more of a challenge than some may think. Upon finding the 2020 therapeutic songwriting study by Mantie-Kozlowski et al. while progressing through my work, I experimented with different songwriting strategies for fun. In hopes of creating something intriguing and enjoyable, the experiment resulted in a light-hearted song about a boy who loses his pet goldfish, which I later adapted to fit into the context of the narrative. Based on their findings, the researchers presented the therapeutic benefits of songwriting and merging language and music to create a meaningful presentation and/or image of oneself. Although I did not practice these techniques in a therapeutic setting, which would have likely concluded in similar results, I nonetheless found this experience to be a highly encouraging and satisfactory process of creativity and problem-solving.

I began approaching the musical aspect of this project by first looking at the lyrics and words I had already written and forming a song or poem structure around them. For songs that dwell on more somber topics, for example, I tend to use more minor scales and harmonics to accompany the song’s themes. Utilizing different chord voicings, scales, and harmonies allowed the story’s mood and tone to be conveyed through the music, accurately accompanying the song’s context. For example, Sam reflects on the departure of his best friend in a seemingly light-hearted manner in the song *Goldfish Named*
Stephen, in which I used a mixture of major and minor harmonies to communicate this feeling of uncertainty, both positive and negative feelings and the weight the situation has on Sam, as he sings:

(D)   (Em)
My goldfish named Stephen
(F#m) (G)
He told me he was leavin’
(D)   (Em)
and if I wanted to say
(F#m) (G)
Goodbye, I lost my day

As seen in the lyrics and the subsequent chord changes in the verse, I utilized an equal amount of major and minor chords to musically communicate Sam’s acceptance of Rodney’s departure while also expressing the sadness it caused. Sam felt like he began to grow out of his need for Rodney, but he did not think it would cause this much pain to no longer work with him, resulting in a bittersweet reflection of the events from Sam’s perspective. To convey the emotional weight of this narrative, however, I would need more than the use of simple chords, even if they take a level of music theory experience and education to understand. I aimed to build tension within the music and utilize a particular chord progression to create a sense of movement throughout the piece. To do so, I arranged the chords so the end of the chorus leaves audible tension with the use of a diminished C sharp, just a half step down from the song’s key signature and starting chord. By using this method, the tension is resolved at the start of the following verse, as seen here:

(G)   (A)
I’ve lost my Stephen, oh, where have you gone?
(Bm)   (D)
I went to the mall, and I looked in Bonton
(G) (A)
Stephen come home, you’ve been gone for so long
(Bm) (C# dim.)
Stephen, I love you

(D) (Em)
My goldfish named Stephen,
(F#m) (G)
He’s gone, now I’m grievin’...

As seen in the chord changes, I created movement by following rising and falling chord patterns, creating a sense of building energy, and releasing it. Doing so results in a compelling presentation of this chapter, as the musical composition creates an extra sense of depth in the narrative’s tone. Going into the process of arranging the music, I knew that exploring Sam’s story through a series of songs and poems would require a strong understanding of storytelling and music theory, but I had not anticipated the meaning it would hold as I created and underwent these experiences with the character.

When I got stuck, I often asked myself, “What would Sam do in this situation? Would he give up and never return, or would he stick through and find the sound he was looking for?” Whenever I asked this question, my only answer was: “Simplify,” just as many of the world’s wisest musicians have said, “because less is more.” I carried this mantra with me throughout the entirety of recording and arranging the musical components of my creative thesis. I felt that the best way to communicate the weight and significance of this story was to strip the components down to their very core, just as I did with the writing. As a result, most of the tunes I recorded are composed of drums, bass, and piano/keys tracks behind the lyrics, with some overdubbing as I sought fit. As a result of this “less is more” mindset, I interpersonally communicated these themes of reflexivity, solitude and isolation, and self-discovery through music in a creative format.
Doing so allowed the content to express the raw emotion of the narrative and Sam’s experiences as a performer who has fallen to troubling times and has made regrettable decisions, allowing for a transformative experience and site of learning for Sam to grow as an artist and writer, rather than a performer who seeks the spotlight.

Although I had all of this content before me, the question remained unanswered. How does an individual deal with isolation through means of writing and music? I began looking back at my own experience. While writing, I remembered the times I would spend alone in my room after a 10-hour work shift at the height of the pandemic, reflecting on my day, my interactions with customers, and how long it would all last. I recall the long walks I would go on with my beagle late at night, the smells of spring and summer in the air, and my dog and I - the only ones in sight. I was constantly reminded of the strangeness of this time, and the music I listened to started to change meaning as my perspective on the world began to shift. I would ask myself, why am I here? It was nights alone like these where I grew closer to myself, asking myself questions and discovering parts of my personality I hadn’t quite been aware of. I would hum melodies of songs that hadn’t yet existed, only to create them myself.

As I approach my college graduation, I’ve realized how genuinely defining these years are in my life. Although I don’t yet know where I’ll go and what my future may hold, I am undeniably excited to have the potential of all these possibilities of where life can go. I have channeled this ongoing aspect of my life through Sam and his struggles as a writer and musician, drawing upon personal experiences to set up the character's circumstances throughout their transformation and self-discovery.
CONCLUSION

The time is now, and it is certain/That all you give and all you take
Will be forgiven/But you have something, you must be sure/
You don’t have to look far for much more.

As I reflect on this project, I cannot help but include an excerpt from my piece, *Mirrors*, in which Sam reflects on this transformative period in his life and his newest creation, the first time he’s doing so without his lifelong friend and co-writer, Rodney. Although this collection of songs and poems may not be my first attempt at this art form, I found this overall experience of experimentation, writing, composing, and recording to be highly beneficial in understanding the creative process of artists, musicians, and performers. While I do not typically undergo this process in an academic context, doing so created an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the creative process and allowed me to channel a certain part of myself through both Sam and Rodney and their relationship as friends and co-workers.

As I worked through this project and reflected on transformative experiences in my life and my involvement with music, I began attaching this project to the theme of reflexivity. I wanted to take this as an opportunity to branch out and make a creative learning experience within itself through the creative process. Throughout the writing process, I constantly reflected upon my experiences of isolation and solitude during the COVID-19 quarantine period and my experiences over the last three and a half years. By writing about and reflecting upon my familiar experiences, I was able to dig deeper into this creative process and develop a deeply meaningful narrative around those experiences.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bell, G. (2021). Profound connectivity: A social life of music during the pandemic. *TDR: The Drama Review*, 65(1), 180-188. https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/122/article/787646/pdf?casa_token=IraYVPZxYUYAAAAA:WbT9nC2zJS9-gHHhAQdhnj-LOnCWLxdZdjVFl0XQ5zMLv5yf0OMCrpE4F9z0QbztvNCRw3A8a7w


https://doi.org/10.1145/3322276.3322279


APPENDIX

Link to SoundCloud Page: https://soundcloud.com/treywright77

Songs and Poems of *New Doors*
Goldfish Named Stephen

My goldfish named Stephen
He told me he was leavin’
and if I wanted to say
Goodbye, I lost my day

Don’t worry, little one he said
Or else I’ll wack you over the head
But when I saw his face on the street
I could only trip over my feet

I’ve lost my Stephen, oh, where have you gone
I went to the mall and I looked in Bonton
Stephen come home; you've been gone for so long
Stephen, I love you

My goldfish named Stephen
He’s gone, now I’m grievin’
But even when he’s miles away
I can feel his presence every day

I’ve lost my Stephen
Oh where have you gone
I went to the mall
And I looked in bonton
Stephen come home
You've been gone for so long
Stephen I love you

My goldfish named Steve
Said he was going to leave
And when I gave him my last piece of bread
He accidentally called me Ted

I Walk Inside Myself (Poem)

I walk inside myself to see a vast landscape
full of green trees, golden sand, and bright blue water
Shimmering under the bright sun.
The air surrounds my body, providing a sense of warmth.
The sun settles over the mountain creating an orange glow in the sky overhead,
Steam rises from the water as the sun touches the horizon beyond.

I inhale through my nose, smelling the vast flower beds
Presenting the full spectrum of a brightly dense rainbow.

Here is where I am at peace, observing the landscape
Stretching for eternity without moving a single part of my body.

I walk inside myself to hear the sounds of music
From all walks of life, familiar and unfamiliar.
Syncopated drums occupy the auditory landscape,
Breaking the barrier of what our Western world understands as time signatures.

Stacks of pianos and keyboards line the endless corridor,
Welcoming the opportunity to create new melodic phrases of music.

Up and down, side to side,
The circular structure inside my mind
Creates new possibilities, new stories of me and you,
Patterns of song and word, recycling ideas old and new.

The Radio

All day long, the radio sits and sings its tunes.
Songs of old and new.
Artists of all times, never too few
To sing and laugh and cry through the afternoons.

But what does it mean to write a song?
To find something right,
and those who sing along.

I need something of substance
To ground this line
Wait, take a breath. It’ll all be fine.

Just calm down.
It’s here. Right now.

Remember the lessons you learned,
the knowledge you yearned.
You’ll find the words you never thought you had.
Don’t be too hard on yourself, they’re not all bad
Music, like a flower,  
Can grow and change its power.  
To guide you, you naïve lad  
Still, a lot to learn after the lectures you’ve had.  
Stories of heroes, false and true,  
How much does it all mean to you? 

Take a look inside you’ll see  
There is no difference between you and me  
The moon and sun and sky and stars  
You don’t have to look very far

Audible from miles away.

Howard W. Middleton (Poem)

At the end of the Earth remain  
Structures from a time long forgotten  
Some I cannot explain.

Along the sandy coastline  
of the land’s northeast corner,  
Hinges strong, grand in design,  

Buried deep, the lost Howard Middleton.

An impending force, yet mobile.  
Middleton once stood strong and tall,  
As he would seamlessly glide, noble and all.

How he sailed, through these waters he prevailed.

A knife through glass, lay out his mast.  
Dense yet weightless, no stopping his path.

Who knew it could all end in an hour?  
This force once charged with power.

The night was foggy, not a light in sight  
The crew lay groggy, Howey put up a fight  
BOOM! Came the crash, a surprise to all those near  
Poor Howey’s fate came, hit the sand like a spear
Said and Done: Did I Do it Right?

I need a change to come my way,
If it keeps up like this, I don’t want to stay.
But that day, I knew it was coming.
I can hear it in the wind, it’s humming.

A new day, my mind is in fear
For what is coming, I couldn’t hear
You speaking, I never find
That things are changing, but I don’t mind.

Like the wind that blows down this river
Let us flow down together as one.
The feeling is there, with no desires
Oh how I remember those lights and fires

A new day, a new direction
The path to perfection
I must find it, so I can move on
From this place I’ve been for so long.

As we carry on and see the light
In all we meet we find a life
In how we’ve changed and what’s to come
When everything is said and done

A new day, and it’s all mine.
Right about now I’d expect to find
The words to get me through the day
But that’s not what I wanted to say.

A new day, my mind is clear
The sun is here and you are near.
If I can find you with me in this new place
I can now rest, it’s the end of the race

Mirrors (Poem)

It was an honest attempt, a decent try.
But I want to make a picture,
Something you can hear, like birds in the sky.
I know I can, I just need a why.
Mere statements can only do so much,  
Words, phrases, and mantras to live by.  
Where’s the depth, the story, something true?  
Don’t you know it can happen to you?  
Create something new, make it your own.  
Those days stuck in your childhood home  
Are over, all that’s left is what you make.  
The time is now, and it is certain  
That all you give and all you take  
Will be forgiven.  
But you have something, you must be sure  
You don’t have to look far for much more.  
Look within, not what came before,  
No longer waiting for you to come through that door.

AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Alfred “Trey” Wright III was born in Portland, Maine, on April 30, 2001. He was raised in Scarborough, Maine, and graduated from Scarborough High School in 2019. Trey has a major in communication with a minor in music studies. Throughout his undergraduate career, he has been involved with UMaine’s jazz combos and on-campus radio station, WMEB 91.9, as well as
off-campus bands and music communities in the greater Bangor area. Upon graduation, Trey plans to continue his music efforts with his bands and closest friends, playing live shows and recording original songs throughout Maine.