

Not for You:

a visual album by **Gracie Hays**

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Abstract

This visual, spoken word, three-track EP was born out of an experience that Gracie Hays had in her own personal life. She went through a manipulative and emotionally abusive relationship, and in the time after it when she came to Berklee Valencia, she decided to make an EP about it. Since many women go through the same thing, Gracie's main goal with this project was to help and unite these people, and tell people who haven't gone through something similar, what it's like. Writing and composing these three songs, and three spoken word pieces was truly a challenge for her. In order to write the songs, Gracie had to relive her own past, and it proved harder than she originally thought. However, she was able to overcome her writer's block and continue on to recording, mixing, mastering, storyboarding, filming, and editing the entire project. Gracie did 100% of the work for this entire album, from start to finish. This is what truly makes this project innovative. Gracie was able to fill every single role in the process, and create this album within a period of 9 months. She plans to release her EP second track, "Gone," as a single on June 22, 2018, and the entire album, *Not for You*, with accompanying video on July 27, 2018. Gracie is extremely proud of the final product, and can't wait to share it with the world.

I. Introduction

The main purpose of this project, is to help and unite people (especially women) who have been through an abusive relationship, and to offer an insight into what it's like for people who haven't gone through something similar. Gracie also wanted to do this project 100% on her own. This decision was made because she wanted not only to use this project to heal from her own bad experience, but also because she wanted to prove to herself that she could carry out the vision of her album from start to finish. When Gracie's malevolent relationship ended in 2017, she was subjected to stalking and harassment by her ex-boyfriend. It was during this time that she was able to reflect back on the relationship, and see all of the flaws within it. Hindsight was 20/20, and she finally saw all of the manipulation and abuse she had endured. Through this project, she wants to find peace in herself, and offer that to people who have been through the same thing. This is an extremely relevant topic in our current world, since women (especially in the entertainment industry) recently have been coming forward and speaking out about men who have abused and/or assaulted them. Gracie believes that she has a place in the conversation, and would like to share her story with the world, as well.

II. Review of the State of the Art

The one crucial visual album that inspired the creation of this visual EP is Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. This was an album that when watched, can change what one believes is possible in the music and entertainment industry. The quality of the production, from collaboration to writing to filming and editing, to mixing and mastering, was unlike anything before its time. Beyoncé was able to tell a story in a way that had never been available before a listener / viewer. *Lemonade* truly inspired Gracie Hays to become better as a singer, songwriter, and artist. The

production quality also inspired her technological side, as a film maker, and producer / audio engineer. However, she realized something of the same caliber as Beyoncé's *Lemonade* was obviously not quite possible for someone with a smaller fan base, and an even smaller budget; but that did not deter her. Gracie had skills as a singer, songwriter, musician, arranger, producer, audio engineer, director, and video producer. They are her biggest talents and her greatest assets as an artist, and she believed that she could create her own type of *Lemonade*.

But first, a little bit more about Beyoncé's album. *Lemonade* is an incredible production with hundreds of collaborators, a seemingly unlimited budget, and a serious spread of genres in the mix. Beyoncé was able to put together one of the most complex, planned out, and perfectly executed albums that the music industry had ever seen. With eleven chapters (Intuition, Denial, Anger, Apathy, Emptiness, Accountability, Reformation, Forgiveness, Resurrection, Hope, and Redemption), she told a very personal story of race, infidelity, and marital struggles.¹ The album features stunning visuals, fashion, poetry, and music to tell that story. Musicians, spoken-word artists, songwriters, and rappers including Jack White, Kendrick Lamar, and Malik Yusef worked with Beyoncé to compose a lyrically beautiful story.^{2 3} All of these aspects went into creating an hour long visual album for Beyoncé, but it's clear that our artist, Gracie Hays didn't exactly have the access to pick up the phone and call the best music industry professionals in the world to

¹ Wikipedia. "*Lemonade* (Beyoncé's Album)." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemonade_\(Beyonc%C3%A9_album\)#Background](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemonade_(Beyonc%C3%A9_album)#Background) (accessed November 22, 2017).

² Peisner, David. "Making 'Lemonade': Inside Beyoncé's Collaborative Masterpiece." *Rolling Stone*. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/making-lemonade-inside-beyonces-collaborative-masterpiece-20160428> (accessed November 22, 2017).

³ Aswad, Jem. "Beyoncé's 'Lemonade': A Deep Dive Into the Star-Studded Album's Credits." *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/7341787/beyonce-lemonade-album-features-the-weeknd-diplo-kendrick-lamar-more> (accessed November 22, 2017).

make a visual album, so she did it the best way she knew how. She modified it to what she knew she was capable, and started doing it herself.

The project is a similar concept to *Lemonade*. Like *Lemonade*, it will contain a storyline about a toxic relationship, visuals for each song and interlude, and narrative voiceovers for the interludes. However, this is about where it ends as far as similarities to Beyoncé's album.

Unlike Beyoncé's album, Gracie's is about half the length, and is compacted into three tracks, and three spoken word pieces. The subject matter covered is also more focused on the abusive relationship and the effects caused by it, with no additional topics. This is to provide a sense of how immersed one can become in a manipulative relationship, and how it can take over your world. Gracie believes that this project is innovative because through artistic visuals and music, it will show the devastation that relationships like this can cause on someone who has been subjected to mental abuse. This is something that is commonly talked about in the current music and entertainment industry, and meant that Gracie would have to relive each moment in her own past relationship to start a conversation, but this did not deter her. She truly believes in this project and in its importance, and has a personal mission to make more people aware of mental health issues. She wants to share her story so that those who have experienced similar things will have a piece of art to truly connect with, and that those who haven't experienced an abusive relationship learn what one is like from her own point of view.

Also unlike *Lemonade*, Gracie created the entire album herself. From songwriting and playing instruments, to mixing and mastering, to storyboarding and video production, she took on

the challenge to do *all* of the work to create this EP. She decided to create the EP this way to enable herself to heal, as well as prove to herself that she could see her vision through from start to finish, with no help from others, since she may have to do this in the future when starting out in a new place after her graduation this July.

In addition to Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, Gracie is also drawing inspiration from a few of her favorite film-makers. The main inspirations for Gracie's cinematography for her music style are Wes Anderson and Alfred Hitchcock. The framing and colorization of both of these film-makers' work are truly artful, and evoke emotion that supports the storyline of the film. Gracie believes the kitschy feel and coloring of Wes Anderson films suits the style of her music. However, since this album will be on a very serious topic, she will not be making the colors quite as vibrant and cheery as a Wes Anderson film. Her album is more similar to the framing of Alfred Hitchcock's shots, using cinematographic techniques to enhance the emotional content of the piece.

III. Description

Not for You is a three track, visual EP with spoken word that was born out of an experience that Gracie Hays had in her personal life. She went through a manipulative and emotionally abusive relationship and after it ended and she was reflecting back on it, she came to Berklee Valencia and decided to make an EP about it. Since many women go through the same thing, Gracie's main goal with this project was to help and unite these people, and tell people who haven't gone through something similar what it's like. Gracie also incorporated more electronic elements and sound design than in her previous EP, *Guidelines*. She wanted to find more of her

own sound, rather than just playing and recording acoustic instruments. This elevated her tracks to a more exciting and modern sound. Along with the addition of sound design, Gracie chose to make this a visual EP, because she wanted to relate to people on a deeper level. It's one thing to hear a song, but another to be fully immersed in an audio-visual experience that allows you to connect further with the artist. Video accompanying each song and spoken word piece really plays to the artist's advantage, especially when discussing a sensitive topic such as this. Gracie believes that she executed all aspects of this project to the best of her abilities, and is excited to share it with everyone.

IV. Innovative Aspects

Not for You was built from scratch by one person, and one person only...Gracie Hays. She did every ounce of the work required to make this visual EP, from start to finish. The magnitude of what she has accomplished, and the quality of the work truly speak to how determined and hardworking Gracie is. She had to learn new skills she was uncomfortable with before, and brush up on others that weren't quite up to par, but she managed to pull through and create something truly remarkable, to herself and others, all on her own. Gracie ended up even surprising herself with the quality of the final product, but is extremely excited and elated to share it with the world.

V. New Skills Acquired

This project presented a myriad of challenges for Gracie to step up to. She had to write, play, record, mix, master, storyboard, film, and edit the entire piece on her own. As most people say, "you can't be good at everything," and Gracie was no exception. She realized very quickly that

she would have to either delegate the work to other people, or figure out how to do it all herself. However, Gracie still wanted to do this project on her own, to heal and prove to herself that she could, so she started taking classes and reaching out to faculty and friends to teach her their expertise in the things she needed to learn to do herself. So, she started learning more about her weakest skills: video editing, sound design, and mastering; and brushed up on her stronger skills: writing, recording, mixing, and graphic design / branding. Gracie also learned to do things she had never done before, namely storyboarding. The entire process of making this album was really one grand experiment, to which the creator was dedicated to making it the best it could possibly be, and she believes that it turned out better than expected.

VI. Challenges Faced

The process of creating *Not for You* was undeniably more challenging than Gracie originally expected. Unexpectedly, most of her challenges were faced early on in the process during the writing phase. Writing an album from personal experience means facing your inner demons, and reliving the experiences that your piece will be about. For Gracie, this meant reliving her abusive relationship, which proved much harder than she ever anticipated. She had to release her emotions, and look inward to create something truly authentic. Once she was able to do this, the creation of the album quickly picked up speed in the recording, mixing and mastering, and video production processes. In these later stages, she tackled minor challenges here and there in programs she wasn't familiar with, and techniques she hadn't used before. However, she expected these from the beginning, and knew she would need to do some more learning in these areas to become efficient with her time.

VII. Future Plans

Gracie plans to release the second track of *Not for You* as a single on June 22, 2018 and the full EP with the accompanying video on July 27, 2018. She will distribute the songs on all major streaming platforms, as well as selling digital copies of it on iTunes, Amazon, and Bandcamp. Gracie will also be pitching the EP to labels, sync licensing libraries, blogs, and Spotify playlists to gain exposure as an artist. In addition to this, she will be using her EP as a part of her Audio Production and Engineering Portfolio on her website, graciehaysmusic.com, for potential clients to see and listen to.

VIII. Conclusion

Gracie Hays created the entirety of this project to heal, and to prove that she could actually create an entire visual album from start to finish all on her own. This EP is an innovative feat for her, as it was truly a difficult project to embark on, let alone finish, in nine months. She believes that it will be a light in the dark for survivors of manipulative and abusive relationships, and hopes it will unite both those who have and haven't experienced situations like hers. She will be releasing her single "Gone" on June 22, 2018, and the entire visual EP *Not for You* on July 27, 2018.

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