

Berklee College of Music

## **Conversations With Myself**

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Master of Music in Music Production, Technology, and Innovation

Supervisor: Liz Teutsch

**By Mariah Elyse Moore**

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## **Abstract**

This purpose of this project was to grow and evolve as a storyteller. It is of great importance of the author to be able to communicate her ideas effectively while being able to affect the emotions of those around her. It explores the process of taking words from a piece of paper and turning them into a living breathing sonic environment, in the hopes of developing the voice and music production process for the author. Interestingly enough, it resulted in a full length spoken word album. Each track (or piece) consists of an original prose or poem, musical composition, and sound design. Major challenges, originating from mental illness, greatly impacted the project execution and its contents both positively and negatively. The resulting album will be released on all digital platforms in September of 2019. This entire process allowed the author to realize her artistry and grow not only as an artist, but as a person as well.

*Keywords:* poetry, spoken word, composition, recording, mixing, sound design, storytelling

## 1. Introduction

This project consists of four phases: story and concept creation, recording, composition and sound design, and mixing. Each area highlights an interest that has been studied academically and will ultimately be pursued professionally. It started with detailed examinations and analysis of similar content by select artists, continued onto: the writing of the poems, recording the vocal performance, creating a sonic environment, and ended in the mixing of each piece. Most of the poems came from specific kind of sadness, the kind when the only thing left to do is to write in the hopes that it would ease the pain. The motivation lied in wanting to combine all the skills that were previously acquired (and then improved upon here at Berklee) to create a clear and defined voice as an artist. The most important part was to not only finish a big project, but to leave this program with tangible product and an accurate representation of work that can be produced in the near future and to test whether the artist could properly convey a message though these tracks without the meaning getting misconstrued. Multiple roles were played during the duration of this CE, including that of composer, musician, sound designer, recording engineer, and mix engineer. It relevance lies in trying to keep alive the spirit and authenticity of spoken word in a day and age where it is often overlooked by more popular genres.

## 2. Review of the State Of The Art

In regards to words, compositions and sound design, the influences draw from myriad of artists in various genres. For this project specifically, lyrical and/or harmonic influences came from: *Geography* by Tom Misch (instrumentals, groove, audio recordings),<sup>1</sup> *The Year of*

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<sup>1</sup> Misch, Tom, Poppy Ajudha, Loyle Carner, and GoldLink, writers. *Geography*. Beyond the Groove, 6 April 2018, CD.

*Hibernation* by Youth Lagoon (atmosphere and ambience),<sup>2</sup> *Strange Desire* and *Gone Now* by Bleachers (atmosphere and use of audio recordings),<sup>3</sup> *Oh Wonder* by Oh Wonder (lyrics, atmosphere, and production)<sup>4</sup>, *Atlas* by Sleeping At Last (instrumentals and arrangement),<sup>5</sup> *How to Be a Human Being* by Glass Animals (sonic landscape, electronic production, sound design, and lyrics),<sup>6</sup> *Tear Drops and Balloons* and *A Real Good Kid* by Mike Posner (poetry, sound design, vocal production, mixing, and world building),<sup>7</sup> and *Cardboard Castles* by Watsky (sound design, vocal production, mixing, and story).<sup>8</sup> An in depth analysis (which looked at form, arrangements, sound design, and production) was completed on the following songs: “Agnes” and “Season 3 Episode 2” by Glass Animals<sup>9</sup>, “Champagne” and “Slow March” by K.Flay<sup>10</sup>, “All My Heros” and “Goodbye” by Bleachers<sup>11</sup>, “The Truth”, “How It’s Supposed To Be”, “January 11th, 2017” and “Drip” by Mike Posner<sup>12</sup> and “The Legend of Hardhead Ned” and “Tiny Glowing Screens, Part 2” by Watsky.<sup>13</sup>

While an album is not groundbreaking in theory and all of the aforementioned mention artists and countless others have done it before, this project acts as a vessel to evolve personal and artistic style and work through some repressed emotions. This album was inspired most by

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<sup>2</sup> Youth Lagoon, writer. *Year Of Hibernation*. 27 September 2011, CD.

<sup>3</sup> Antonoff, Jack. *Gone Now*. Bleachers. RCA, 2 June 2017, CD; Antonoff, Jack. *Strange Desire*. Bleachers. RCA, 10 July 2014, CD.

<sup>4</sup> Vander Gucht, Josephine, and Anthony West. *Oh Wonder*. Oh Wonder. Universal Music, 4 September 2015, CD.

<sup>5</sup> O’Neal, Ryan. *Atlas: Year One*. Sleeping At Last. Self Released, 8 July 2014, CD.

<sup>6</sup> Glass Animals. *How to Be a Human Being*. Wolf Tone, 26 August 2016, CD.

<sup>7</sup> Posner, Mike. *Tear Drops and Balloons*. Monster Mountain Records, 7 March 2018, CD; Posner, Mike. *A Real Good Kid*. Universal Island Records, 18 January 2019, CD.

<sup>8</sup> Watsky, George, *Cardboard Castles*. Steel Wool Media, 12 March 2013, CD.

<sup>9</sup> Glass Animals. “Agnes.” In *How to Be a Human Being*. 2016, CD; Glass Animals. “Season 2 Episode 3.” In *How to Be a Human Being*. 2016, CD.

<sup>10</sup> K.Flay. “Champagne.” In *Every Where Is Some Where*. 2017, CD; K.Flay. “Slow March.” In *Every Where Is Some Where*. 2017, CD.

<sup>11</sup> Bleachers. “All My Heros.” In *Gone Now*. 2017, CD; Bleachers. “Goodbye.” In *Gone Now*. 2017, CD.

<sup>12</sup> Posner, Mike. “The Truth.” In *Tear Drops and Balloons*. 2018, CD.

<sup>13</sup> Watsky, George, *Cardboard Castles*. Steel Wool Media, 12 March 2013, CD.

the work of Mike Posner and George Watsky and how they both work in their poetry and prose into their respective albums, in turn creating their own unique audio identities.

### 3. Description

This thesis is a spoken word album entitled *Conversations With Myself*. The album consists of ten tracks that were written while the artist lived here in Valencia, Spain and document some of her experiences and emotions that she dealt with during her time here. The purpose of each track is to create a vignette of what was currently going on in the artist life, specifically, in her head. This is portrayed using poems, newly composed music, sound design, and silence all to further establish the narrative being told. While the tracks are voice/word heavily, the music that surrounds the helps further serve the purpose of each piece. The album deals with feelings of fear, lust, isolation, depression, loneliness, identity, absence, and hypersensitivities all through the guise of inner monologue. The entire album was created within Pro Tools, using field recordings from various parts of Spain, VSTs from Native Instruments, and a variety of filter, distortion, and reverb plugins to create and shape unique sounds. Each track started with the vocal recording which insured the sonic environment was serving the words and not the other way around. This is how “Space”<sup>14</sup> became light and airy while still remaining dense in meaning and how “Alone”<sup>15</sup> was treated just lightly enough where the isolation being experienced is palatable. Each choice was made carefully in the hope that it would serve its piece in the best way possible which is why the origin of every piece is the words themselves, to create a uniformed cohesiveness.

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<sup>14</sup> Moore, Mariah. “Space.” In *Conversations With Myself*. 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Moore, Mariah. “Alone.” In *Conversations With Myself*. 2019.

#### **4. Innovative Aspects**

Despite not being the only album to come out of the program this year, it was unique in its genre: spoken word. A genre that the artist herself has never attempted before. This album took aspects not only from the spoken word genre itself, but also from the world of hip-hop, rap, storied podcasts and sound design for film. It's also a different take on spoken word as a whole, especially when considered to current popular albums in the same category. As a whole, it steps outside of a single genre, style, and process which allows for a multitude of different outcomes - allowing for a true understanding of sense of self. Understanding one's self is in itself a way of innovation - as each and every human is unique and to gain an understanding of one's personal style is rare in a world of social media and "influencers." Finally, this will be the first release of this artist.

#### **5. New Skills Acquired**

The new skills that were acquired during this process include the new ability to produce an album from start to finish, delegate tasks to other colleagues, composing, sound design specified for music, improved confidence, oral communication, enhanced recording ability, and poetry delivery. The aforementioned skills add not only to professionalism, but also competency. They are character building and musicianship building skills. When used in tandem with each other, they create a well rounded producer and artist who can make informed decisions during each part of the process when creating music. They also allow for work to not only be done solo, but also as a part of a team. The most impactful skills that were acquired were learning when to ask for help and how to keep composure and professionalism high while receiving critiques both of which are essential for a successful career in the music industry.

## **6. Challenges, both expected & unanticipated**

The biggest challenge of this thesis was the artist herself and her ever changing mental state. It proposed many hurdles and, at times, made the artist thoroughly feel incapable and unmotivated. This is still an ongoing challenge, but it is tamed with introspection, friends, writing, and meditation. Another big challenge is the history of the artist being an idea-oriented person which made finishing the nitty gritty details of the album quite difficult. This challenge was conquered this asking for help from friends who are skilled in the areas where the artist is weak so that everyone's time was being used efficiently. A final (unexpected) challenge was not getting enough ears to listen to the project early on, it wasn't detrimental by any means but the timeline could have been expedited.

## **7. Future Ramifications**

The release of the album is projected to be in early September of 2019. The release is intended to be available for purchase on digital platforms (Itunes, Amazon Music, BandCamp, etc.) in addition to being available on streaming services (Spotify, Apple Music, etc.). Select pieces will also be performed live over the next year. In addition to what was previously mentioned, this album will also be a launching pad for a new social media engagement strategy which will include the creation of text based visuals for each song on the album.

## **8. Conclusion**

This project will stretch beyond what was previously thought possible (by the author). It will utilize techniques learned from Berklee courses, prior knowledge about the subject, and



additional research into the art of songwriting. It was challenging in scope, but doable. By adapting the processes of songwriters who are currently succeeding in the industry, this CE will teach modern songwriting practices which is highly compatible with a program that focuses on producing and technology.

This project changed in scope over the course of the past few months due to fears, limitations, a new-found voice, and courage. What once started out as an elaborate exercise in songwriting and analysis of others' music has turned into a journey of self-discovery and the ability to turn one's thoughts and words into specially curated pieces that evoke emotion from it's listener. This body of work not only asks a lot of the artist herself (to be vulnerable and brave while sharing personal experiences), but also a lot of the audience (to be willing to set aside fifteen minutes devoid of distractions to fully immerse themselves in what they are hearing).

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