

# THE THINGS WE DO TO EACH OTHER: SONGS

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Music and Dance  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Music

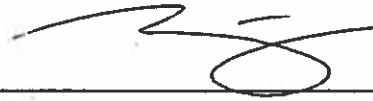
December 2014

## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

Mitchell Rivet for the degree of Bachelor of Music  
in the Department of Jazz Studies to be taken December 2014

Title: The Things We Do to Each Other: Songs

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_



Toby Koenigsberg

This thesis is a collection of original compositions designed to exemplify an understanding of popular music forms and the compositional potential they possess. The intent is not to journey into a specific genre, but rather blend elements from multiple styles to create something else. Hopefully, it presents a model upon which other classically trained musicians can use to converse with popular forms and styles in their own compositions.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Ocean Howell and Professor Loren Kajikawa for taking to the time to help guide me through this process. I would especially like to thank Professor Toby Koenigsberg for being a noble musician and giving infallible guidance over the past four years. Thanks to Connor Martin for helping me through the recording process and being a homie. Thanks to my mother, whom without I am nothing. Thanks to my father, for the gravel in my guts and the spit in my eye. Thanks to Lucy Ohlsen for putting a roof over my fat head. Special thanks to Lauren Beauchemin, Will Wittenbrock, Veronika Johnsson, Jeffrey Schaefer, and everybody else who entertains my twisted version of reality.

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## **The Things We Do to Each Other**

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All songs written and performed by Mitchell Rivet.

## **Introduction: Why I am doing what I am doing**

If someone ever wanted to make me a subject of study, perhaps the most fruitful way to evaluate my psychological development would be to track the various musical phases I continue to go through. When it comes to music, everybody seems to go in and out of different listening habits, often comically so. I define large chunks of my life by what I was actively listening to at the time, such as in the sixth grade when I discovered the rock band Pink Floyd and became disillusioned and angry in light of their often anti-authoritarian lyrics (or maybe it was just puberty). Another significant moment was in the eighth grade, when I was exposed to the jazz pianist Thelonious Monk, who opened my ears to some of the complexities of harmony and inspired me to pursue the piano seriously. This became a major catalyst in my life as it inspired me to strive to become a professional musician.

Perhaps the most discomfited phase in my relationship with music has come in recent years in college. My musical fluency had reached a point where I could understand complex scores of symphonies and aurally grasp chord substitutions in jazz music. The issue was that I was not necessarily enjoying music anymore the more complex it got and began to wonder if the complexity and abstractness of much academic music caused it to become mundane. In my experience, some of my professors had very little interest in anything dubbed “pop” music while others I met or heard about treated it just as seriously as any other type of “art” music. This passage from *Singer Songwriters and Musical Open Mics* by Marcus Aldredge quoting Andrew

Keen describes some of the more negative attitudes toward the current music culture:

the internet and more accessible musical technologies are contributing to menacing artistic amateurism and philistinism ...lowering standards has spawned an unimaginable and disproportionate growth of cultural creators; therefore, mediocrity has trumped a higher standard of quality (123).

While some desire highly refined and traditional art music, which I mostly consider to be jazz and classical music, the majority of the music industry is tilted away from these traditions and towards highly commercialized pop music. As I further progressed as a jazz musician, some of these realities hit closer to home, as I realized that the audiences I played too were primarily consisting of people over the age of fifty and other jazz musicians. This does not invalidate jazz as excellent art at all, but does raise serious questions about how one can make a living playing jazz, and how can jazz musicians better connect with people of younger generations. These questions of the quality and differences between “high” and “low” music and the aesthetics of our current musical landscape for the impetus for this thesis, which is to analyze various piano and song traditions and blend them into my own collection of songs.

In other words, I intend to take my knowledge of classical and jazz piano as well as popular song and create my first solo record.

## **1. Method**

In short, I seek to ask several questions: how can academically trained musicians create music based on popular forms? While I am not necessarily presenting a centralized argument, my thesis will be an exploration into my capabilities as a composer and a chance to create music that is more personally revealing than the type

of jazz I am used to playing. I hope this thesis can be a guide for other music school students who have interest in creating popular music or want there music to be in dialogue with contemporary songwriting practices.

For the first part of this thesis, I analyzed six different songs, selected on the basis of my personal affinity for them. These songs in some sense formed models on which to base my work, although I did not force myself to stick to these models when my own work went in another direction. The point of this exercise was to possibly conclude with some generalized principles for my songwriting considering I have been trained in jazz composition as opposed to traditional songwriting. In particular, I focused solely on the lyrical structures of these songs, since again my training is lacking in this regard, making the focus on lyrics most practical. These analyses deal mainly in the Rock genre and are not meant to be taken as objective fact, but are my own interpretations. The reader is meant to see these as personal reactions, rather than formal and precise explanations. These observations are highly subjective and do not necessarily reflect the intentions of the songwriters themselves.

After some theoretical sense is gained, this paper will move into analyses of my own lyrics and accompaniment patterns and hopefully clarify my intentions to the listener. I will then conclude with a brief discussion of the successes and failures of my process and hopefully give a sense of where I am heading next musically.



## 2. Analyses

Neutral Milk Hotel: "The King of Carrot Flowers, pt. 1"

“When you were young  
You were the king of carrot flowers  
And how you built a tower tumbling through the trees  
In holy rattlesnakes that fell all around your feet

And your mom would stick a fork right into daddy's shoulder  
And dad would throw the garbage all across the floor  
As we would lay and learn what each other's bodies were for

And this is the room  
One afternoon I knew I could love you  
And from above you how I sank into your soul  
Into that secret place where no one dares to go

And your mom would drink until she was no longer speaking  
And dad would dream of all the different ways to die  
Each one a little more than he could dare to try”

Clearly, the lyrics evoke a level of nostalgia due to the use of past-tense as well as playful, child-like imagery. The first verse sounds like a child’s game: what is a “king of carrot flowers?” It is beside the point, considering it is part of an invented game between the two characters, which also involves building a large tower- perhaps a tree house. What’s more is that all of the images of the first verse are based in nature, which in our culture is often described as having a certain simplicity and innocence commonly associated with childhood. For example, in 19<sup>th</sup> century German lieder I believe the woods are commonly referred to as a place where darkness and mystery occur).

The second verse is a depiction of a violent and frustrated couple. The two characters then seem to escape this troubled household through the exploration of each

other's physical forms, undoubtedly referring to sex or some type of intimate act. The use of the verb "learn" relates back to the feelings of innocence and curiosity of the first verse, again generating nostalgia (people often refer to their first sexual experiences as important times in their life). Also, note that the narrator implies the characters are half siblings based on the referral to "your mom" opposed to the use of simply "dad." The result is a somewhat comfortable realization, but adds a new dimension to the relationship of the characters in that their living situation was not a chosen or natural one; i.e. their respective parents got together maybe later in life and the children are forced to deal with it somehow. Growing up can perhaps be surmised by a set of circumstances one is forced to deal with rather than actively choose.

The third verse shows the only use of the present tense, implying the narrator is currently inside the place where some of these events happened. Clearly, he is referring to a sexual act, heightened with a spiritual dimension with "sank into your soul." This verse harkens back to the first in its innocent and compassionate tone. Both offer visions of childhood experience in contrast to the second and fourth verses, which deal with the depressing state of this dysfunctional family. With the fourth verse, this dysfunction is further highlighted to alluding to the mother's problems with alcohol and the father's contemplation of suicide. This depiction of suicidal thoughts is in fact playful given that the dad is dreaming "of all the different ways to die." Dreams and imaginary stories are staples of the childhood experience and referencing suicidal dreams solidifies the connection between childhood innocence and the terrors and the terrors of modern life. This seemingly incompatible connection is what gives the song a

dimension that allows the listener to reconcile the beauty and simplicity of growing up along with its pain and sorrow.

Radiohead: "House of Cards" from *In Rainbows*

"I don't wanna be your friend  
I just wanna be your lover  
No matter how it ends  
No matter how it starts

Forget about your house of cards  
And I'll do mine  
Forget about your house of cards  
And I'll do mine

And fall off the table, get swept under

Denial, denial

The infrastructure will collapse  
Voltage spikes  
Throw your keys in the bowl  
Kiss your husband goodnight

Forget about your house of cards  
And I'll do mine  
Forget about your house of cards  
And I'll do mine

Fall off the table, get swept under

Denial, denial  
Denial, denial

Your ears should be burning  
Denial, denial  
Your ears should be burning"

In contrast to "The King of Carrot Flowers," "House of Cards" does not specifically tell a story or emphasize a strong set of *physical imagery*. I define *physical imagery* as imagery which depicts something that may have physically happened

whereas the *abstract imagery* in this song is imagery that does not rely on the idea that literally happened. Now, this does not dismiss the surreal elements of the previous example. Obviously the children did not build “a tower tumbling through the trees,” but it is still a depiction of a memory, where as the imagery in “House of Cards” is purely abstract. The “house of cards,” metaphor is meant to describe a feeling- in particular, the feeling of stability and safety within a romantic relationship. The lyricist assigns this feeling to a “house of cards” to suggest that in modern life, this feeling is not in fact secure, but more of an invented idea that could collapse in any moment. The action of this song boils down to a character who wants to be the lover of a person who is already in another relationship. “The infrastructure will collapse,” is another image of how the structure of the marriage will be destroyed. Images like these are paired with the emphasis of the phrase “denial, denial,” which reveals the lyricists belief that the other person wants to love him or her, but will not let him or herself do so because of their marriage.

What is particularly striking about this song is its use of economy in its lyrics. This song uses a lot of *literal repetition*, which is when a line is sung exactly the same way multiple times. This differs from the previous example, where the writer utilizes *structural repetition*, a device where images and phrases change from line to line but are describing the same thing. In “The King of Carrot Flowers,” the *structural repetition* is between each stanza where the lyricist continually comes back to different childhood memories. Not only is the repetition of “House of Cards” extremely clean, but the specific images it employs are to the point. Not a single adjective is used inside

this song, which gives each metaphor enough space to be fully understood and visualized by the listener.

Dave Bazan “Lost my Shape”

“You used to feel like a smoker  
Shivering in the cold  
Waiting outside the bar  
Til the opener's over

But now you feel like a drinker  
Twenty days off the sauce  
Down at the liquor store  
Trying to call your sponsor

You used to feel like the forest fire burning  
But now you feel like a child  
Throwing tantrums for your turn

You used to sound like a prophet  
And everyone wanted to know  
How you could tell the truth  
Without losing that soft glow

But now you feel like a salesman  
Closing another deal  
Or some drunk ship captain  
Raging after the white whale

You used to feel like the forest fire burning  
But now you feel like a child  
Throwing tantrums and then some

You used to feel like the prodigal returning  
But now you hate what you've made  
And you want to watch it burn”

Similar to “The King of Carrot Flowers,” “Lost My Shape” employs a *structural repetition* in which each stanza is a different approach to describing the changing attitudes of the artist’s subject. What is significant about these verses is how the varying images clash together and accentuate the difference between how this person used to be

and how they are now. For example, the opposition of the fourth and fifth stanzas creates a clash between spiritual and capitalist realms. This character “used to sound like a prophet,” and was adored by others for their integrity and modesty. Apparently, this character is now “a salesman, closing another deal,” implying that the things they say are for direct personal gain, as opposed to the expression of a prophet who presumably wants the best for all people. In the chorus, this character “used to feel like a forest fire burning,” which gives the impression of something powerful, natural, and uncontrollable, while “now you feel like a child, throwing tantrums for your turn,” gives the impression that this power has turned into something completely immature and selfish. Both the “forest fire” and the “tantrum” are descriptions of events that do not want to be controlled and contain large amounts of energy, but clearly differ in their intention to do something that is simply in its nature or part of a much more human construct of greed or frustration. This last line adds another dimension to the song- that this character is self-aware of the changes they have made and looks upon whom they have become with disdain. “Fire,” is an extremely common image in songwriting and thus should be used in a clear and appropriate fashion. This artist uses “fire” in a very pure and interesting way, by recognizing it as a humbling force within nature, with the power to create and destroy on a whim. By watching what he or she has made “burn,” the lyricist suggests that this character hopes for fire to be used in a transformative and redemptive manner, which justifies the use of “fire” as a symbol which adds to the depth of the song.

Bright Eyes "First day of my life"

"This is the first day of my life  
Swear I was born right in the doorway  
I went out in the rain suddenly everything changed  
They're spreading blankets on the beach

Yours is the first face that I saw  
I think I was blind before I met you  
Now I don't know where I am  
I don't know where I've been  
But I know where I want to go

And so I thought I'd let you know  
That these things take forever  
I especially am slow  
But I realize that I need you  
And I wondered if I could come home

Remember the time you drove all night  
Just to meet me in the morning  
And I thought it was strange you said everything changed  
You felt as if you'd just woke up  
And you said "this is the first day of my life  
I'm glad I didn't die before I met you  
But now I don't care I could go anywhere with you  
And I'd probably be happy"

So if you want to be with me  
With these things there's no telling  
We just have to wait and see  
But I'd rather be working for a paycheck  
Than waiting to win the lottery  
Besides maybe this time is different  
I mean I really think you like me"

Much like "lost my shape," "first day of my life" employs very bold imagery. The difference is that much of "first day of my life" is based on hyperbole. While the metaphors of "Lost my shape" are meant to be taken mostly in the imagination or the abstract, whereas this song takes very simple and ordinary events and exaggerates details of them in order to emphasize the significant feeling behind these seemingly

mundane events. The lyricist equates meeting this romantic interest as “the first day of my life” which is not meant to be literal but rather states that all else that happened before meeting this person is insignificant compared to the moment they met. “Yours is the first face that I saw/ I think I was blind before I met you” enforces how little the artist knew about life until he met this person. “I don’t know where I am/ I don’t know where I’ve been/ but I know where I want to go” continues to further the notion of this sudden moment of clarity the artist is experiencing. Really, very plain things are happening in this song compared to the “forest fire burning” of “Lost my shape,” but they are given a huge sense of person when they are considered to be the “first” time anything important has happened to the lyricist. This song also differs from the others in terms of its intent. Everything I have dealt with already either is about the flaws of another person or a nostalgic look at some of the varying traumas and beauties in life. This song however, is sympathetic and compassionate in nature, giving a nice contrast to the possible range of expression of the song as a medium.

#### The Tallest Man on Earth, “Love is all”

Well I walk upon the river like it's easier than land  
Evil's in my pocket and your will is in my hand  
Oh, your will is in my hand

And I'll throw it in the current that I stand upon so still  
Love is all, from what I've heard, but my heart's learned to kill  
Oh, mine has learned to kill

Oh, I said I could rise  
From the harness of our goals  
Here come the tears  
But like always, I let them go  
Just let them go

And now spikes will keep on falling from the heavens to the floor



The future was our skin and now we don't dream anymore  
No, we don't dream anymore

Like a house made from spider webs and the clouds rolling in  
I bet this mighty river's both my savior and my sin  
Oh, my savior and my sin

Oh, I said I could rise  
From the harness of our goals  
Here come the tears  
But like always, I let them go  
Just let them go

Well I walk upon the river like it's easier than land  
Evil's in my pocket and your strength is in my hand  
Your strength is in my hand

And I'll throw you in the current that I stand upon so still  
Love is all, from what I've heard, but my heart's learned to kill  
Oh, mine has learned to kill

Oh, I said I could rise  
From the harness of our goals  
Here come the tears  
But like always, I let them go  
Just let them go

The Tallest Man on Earth was a large source of inspiration for the approach of this project, so it is important for me to include some of his work as part of my analysis. Of all the songs I have approached thus far, this one is perhaps the most cryptic. Clearly, the natural imagery is important here, such as “the river” and “the current.” The narrator seems indifferent to this “current,” as he can “walk upon the river like it’s easier than land.” A rivers current is much like “fire,” in that it is a force of nature not easily controlled and while the narrator is indifferent to its power, he seems indifferent to throwing the will and the body of this other character into it because his “heart has learned to kill.” These lyrics seem to be reaching towards the narrator’s capacity to manipulate different aspects of the character he is addressing, but alas there are many

possible interpretations due to the vague and abstract nature of some of these objects, such as “the harness of our goals,” and “evil’s in my pocket and your strength is in my hand.” This certainly does not make the song unsuccessful. The fact this song is somewhat hard to decipher brings us to the notion that songs do not necessarily need to mean anything literal to be enjoyed. The performance of this song demonstrates a certain sensitivity to its meaning that allows the listener to not have to completely understand what is happening in the song but still enjoy it. In fact, this song contains many dream-like elements that allow us to detach from the idea that it has to make perfect sense. This is despite the claim within the song that the characters “don’t dream anymore,” but is still a valid interpretation. Another important element to this song is the interaction between the finger picking of the guitar and the singer’s melody. The guitar line echoes the singers melody after the phrases “will is in my hand” and “I let them go.” This interaction between the vocal line and the accompaniment is different than any of the other songs noted here and is an element that will make a significant part in my work.

Pink Floyd, “Wish you were here”

“So, so you think you can tell Heaven from Hell, blue skies from pain.  
Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail?  
A smile from a veil?  
Do you think you can tell?

Did they get you to trade your heroes for ghosts?  
Hot ashes for trees?  
Hot air for a cool breeze?  
Cold comfort for change?  
Did you exchange a walk on part in the war for a lead role in a cage?

How I wish, how I wish you were here.  
We're just two lost souls swimming in a fish bowl, year after year,

Running over the same old ground.  
What have we found?  
The same old fears.  
Wish you were here.”

While “Lost my shape” contains important examples of dichotomy, this Pink Floyd classic is almost completely based on even more brash dichotomies. There are two sides formulated in opposition in this song, the first of which being “heaven, blue skies, a smile, heroes, trees, a cool breeze...” while the other, negative side contains “hell, pain, a cold steel rail, a veil, ghosts, hot ashes, cold comfort...” These make clear distinctions between things that are peaceful and liberating with things that are mechanical and non-human. The questions of the second stanza make direct reference to war and consider the reward for taking part in such an affair “a lead role in a cage.” The band has admitted that this song is in direct reference to friend and former bandmate, Syd Barrett, slowly being lost to mental illness, although the song can be seen as an expression of disillusionment in a much more general way. This song is a good example for such specific use of dichotomy and is artifact to the struggle of the human spirit in a modern, mechanized economy. The struggle between what we deem natural and what we see as lifeless is a theme that surfaces at least somewhat in all of the songs I have described which makes the case that it is an important part of our culture and modern society.

In summary, these analyses have offered up some fundamental principals for modern songwriting. The first and perhaps most important is the songwriter’s use of repetition. Although these songs vary in their use of *literal* and *structural repetition*, the way they repeat themselves and continually refer back to themselves is extremely

significant in the construction of a successful song. What I also found important within all of these lyrics is their use of irony and in some cases dichotomy. Every one of the songs contained some element of irony, or in other words, the opposition of something that is expected from the reality of a situation. Examples of this are “dream of all the different ways to die,” “I don’t wanna be your friend/ I just wanna be your lover,” “you used to sound like a prophet... now you feel like a salesman” etc. It seems that in order for a song to express some amount of truth, it is necessary to attack the subject from contradictory points of view, in order to appreciate the many sides of its nature. This could just be an aesthetic preference of my own-- I know that I tend to enjoy things that make surprising comparisons or contain brash juxtapositions. Nonetheless, it is inherent in these songs and is an important aesthetic value to highlight in the context of my project. Finally, through these analyses I realized the importance of the songwriter’s use of the natural world. Nature-based imagery, for better or worse, is a massive part of modern songwriting, and for that matter the history of poetry. Because of this, it is extremely important to proceed with caution when writing with images of fire or water, considering the amount of historical baggage that comes with them. In my examples, it is almost always used as an advantage, but clearly these types of phrases can be over employed and disrupt whatever uniqueness the rest of the song might be generating.

### 3. Analyses: The Things We Do to Each Other

Score

## Drained

Mitchell Rivet

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a Voice staff containing four whole rests and a Piano staff with a complex accompaniment of chords and a bass line. The second system starts at measure 5 and includes the lyrics "Those eyes beat down a - cross my face". The third system starts at measure 9 and includes the lyrics "my bones shake and re - fuse to stop". The piano accompaniment continues throughout, featuring a consistent bass line and chordal accompaniment in the right hand.

5  
Those eyes beat down a - cross my face

9  
my bones shake and re - fuse to stop

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13

I smell the blood be - gin to burn

Pno.

17

the cen - ter of my con - cern

Pno.

21

please take my an - swer dar - ling

Pno.

25

come back down to the ground I don't want no - thing ba - by

Pno.

29

just kill that aw - ful sound let it go!- ad lib.

Pno.

33

Pno.

37

I poured my an - ger down the drain

Pno.

41

I poured my an - ger down the drain

Pno.

45

Pno.



49

Pno.

53

Pno.

57

Pno.

61

we stand and smile and nod and wave

Pno.

65

time stops in - side your vio - lent gaze

Pno.

69

no chance to e - ver get a-way

Pno.

73

I'll drown be - fore I drain

Pno.

77

I'll ne - ver hate you dar - ling

Pno.

81

we'll ne - ver break new ground don't wor - ry bout it ho - ney

Pno.

85

just kill that aw - ful sound improvise out

Pno.

“Drained” is loosely based on a combination of a Kurt Rosenwinkel song entitled “kurt1” and Radiohead’s “House of Cards.” Both of these songs center around repetitive rhythmic structures and the rhythm was unknowingly borrowed from “kurt1.” The piano accompaniment is meant to experiment with placing non-triadic voicings over a moving bass line in the left hand that generates the harmonic momentum of the song. This momentum is unorthodox in that there is no standard tonic to dominant relationship taking place. I wanted to see if I could create diatonic harmonies without this relationship while still maintaining some sense of pull. In a general sense, the right hand emphasizes a C suspended sound, while the left hand goes between an F major and a C suspended sound. There is also the contrasting 8 bars of Gmin9 that texturally shifts the music from a dry and percussive sound to a very wet and legato sound. The vocal melody actually contradicts the piano harmonies slightly by including an E flat, which adds a dominant edge to the references to F major underneath it.

The lyrics are meant to signify a moment of contempt between two people; perhaps a chance encounter of someone you would rather not see. The title, “Drain,” is taken from the expression “emotionally drained.” Since this is a commonly used phrase, I wanted to play with the notion of literally draining one’s emotions with “I poured my anger down the drain.” Another phrase in need of explanation is the multiple references to “that awful sound,” which can be taken to be somebody’s voice but is a phrase I intentionally left ambiguous. This was inspired by a line from the poem “memory” by Charles Bukowski, which reads: “finding everything smeared with the color of forgotten love...”

In essence, “that awful sound is an attempt to blend a physical sense with an emotional feeling not commonly associated with that particular sense.

## Collateral

Mitchell Rivet

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a Voice staff containing three whole rests and a Piano staff with a complex accompaniment. The second system, starting at measure 4, includes lyrics: "I used to walk you home at three / Always stayed up way too late". The third system, starting at measure 7, includes lyrics: "af - ter tri - go - no - me - try / met the mor - ning light with hate" and "you're mom was al - ways gonat / drank till we fell on the floor". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the bass and chords in the treble.

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10

work \_\_\_\_\_ your step-dad was a fu-cking jerk  
drank till our thick heads were sore \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

13

got sent to school and wenin-sane built brick walls in side our brain  
star-ted wor-king o - ver time \_\_\_\_\_ for a check that was-n't mine

Pno.

16

\_\_\_\_\_ pro-mised we'd ne - ver go back \_\_\_\_\_  
ro - bbing all those li - quor stores \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

19

gro - wing up had us en - trapped  
made sure we were ne - ver bored

Our neigh - bor - hood  
so we rolled the dice

Pno. C#min

22

was a middle aged void  
took our on - ly shot

tried to get a - way  
did what we could

but had no clue that  
but it's a game that

Pno. B $\flat$  A

25

no - thing  
no one

no - thing  
no one

Pno. C#min B $\flat$  A



28

Pno.

no - thing is free  
no - bo - dy wins

The lyrics of “Collateral” are a recollection of time spent with an old friend. I was trying to get to the level of nostalgia felt in “The King of Carrot Flowers” example, by setting everything in the past tense and focusing on memories of various trials of growing up, such as feeling out of place at school, experimenting with alcohol, and wanting to move away from the neighborhood you grew up in. The line “growing up had us entrapped” gives insight to the title in that I attempted to describe the painful experiences of teenagers as things that they owe to growing up. In other words, we owe these painful experiences to life simply for being alive. That last phrase also adds to this metaphor with “so we rolled the dice/ took our only shot.” These devices emphasize ways in which we figuratively gamble when searching for life experience. In this song, the experiences of these characters were not based on their autonomy but the sentiment that life is a game of chance.

The accompaniment again features some unorthodox elements, such as the jarring rhythmic figures that continually resurface in the left hand and the jazz-based four part harmonies during the verses, including a tri-tone substitution in measure 19. The majority of the harmony rests in E major, there are a few secondary dominants that move to A major and F# minor, which is not harmonically adventurous but nonetheless significant.

# Motivational Pornography

Mitchell Rivet

Voice

Piano

Emin

improvise

5

Pno.

9

Pno.

locked in-side my best friends

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13

couch asked my mind if I could get let out she said I had to stay un-til I

Pno.

17

felt like earth was rea-lly go-na be o - kay

Pno.

21

pleasemamwon'tyou tell us what to do we're desper-ate to try-something new been

Pno.

25

chained in side this comfort it's no fun I'd kill for just one taste of that sweet sun

Pno.

29

I want to be the egg a-bout to hatch I want to be the wolf who runs the

Pno.

33

pack cause we were born in - to a sick - ness - nointed by the buiss-ness a man - u - factured disease

Pno.

37

Pno.

all you kids should try and do your best

cursh the com-pe-ti-tion burn the

41

Pno.

rest

clockstickdownlike cute-lit-tle bombs

make love to yourhomeworkall night

45

Pno.

long

we want to be

num-ber one

we'll

49

co-py-right all the fun a gui-ded me-di-ta - tion wri-thing des-per-at - tion

Pno.

53

mo-ti - va-tion-al porn-o-gra-phy

Pno.

57

Pno.

The accompaniment to “Motivational Pornography” partially came from a Haydn piano sonata no. 23 in F major, which I studied several years ago. While the Haydn contains more scalar ideas, I wanted to maintain some of its lightness and delicate feeling in this composition. The only deviation from D major in this piece is the use of C natural during the verses at specific phrases. The use of C modifies the D major tonic to a D dominant sound, which gives an unsettling edge to the phrase. The E minor improvisation was designed to begin the piece a sad moment to begin, considering some of the disillusionment contained in the lyrics.

These lyrics are meant to deal with attitudes towards work ethic in our culture. My goal was to create a jarring effect by comparing things that are not necessarily related, such as the comparison of indulgence and hard work in the title “Motivational Pornography.” Some other phrases that emphasize these brash comparisons include “a manufactured disease,” “make love to your homework all night long,” and “copyright all the fun.” This song is a reflection of the self-help industry as well as the desire to squeeze more productivity out of the day. These are also tied into images of big business and environmental catastrophe, which hopefully emphasize the craziness and fast paced nature of the way we live. With this mind, the question becomes what it means for us to be our best selves in a culture that is obsessed with self-improvement.



Score

# Roleplaying

Mitch Rivet

A

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (E-flat major/C minor). It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a piano introduction. The second system starts at measure 5 and includes the first line of lyrics. The third system starts at measure 10 and includes the second line of lyrics. The piano part features a consistent eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line with chords and single notes in the left hand.

Improvise freely in Eb

5

Me ————— and my friends

10

Wear face-less masks in so - li - dar - i -

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15

ty my cult is ranked

Pno.

20

num-ber one on-line five-star re-views ev-ery sin-gle time

Pno.

23

I am a wi-zard and co-dy is a thief we'll kill these go-blins if you

Pno.

26

get us dru-nk for free \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

29

We're \_\_\_\_\_ a live-ly

Pno.

33

bunch with no place to go to

Pno.

38

lay our heads to rest

Pno.

43

We play all night and meet our fate at dawn we fight our troubles till

Pno.

46

they are all gone the wine stains my blood shot tired eyes

Pno.

49

a sac - cri - fice — for my fav - or - ite guys —

Pno.

53

You can't com - pare — to a - ny thing be - fore

Pno.

57

so don't pre - tend — to know what's in store there's no test that — can

Pno.

60

tell you what to do — no right no wrong so go a-head-and choose —

Pno.

63

ev-ery smile

Pno.

68

— hides a sin just like all those emp-ty cups

Pno.

Roleplaying

72

in those crow-ded and lone-ly rooms

Pno.

76

Pno.

81

Pno.

To be honest, “Roleplaying” is in direct reference to my first experience playing Dungeons and Dragons, a game entirely predicated upon the imagination of the participating group. Inside of the story, my group was a band of mercenaries that named ourselves “the faceless,” which explains the beginning reference to “faceless masks.” These first two verses are in very direct reference to things that have happened in game, while the rest of the lyrics shoot for larger themes. “You can’t compare to anything before/ so don’t pretend to know what’s in store,” was inspired by a passage in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera that applies to the decision making mechanics of Dungeons and Dragons as well as a broader, existential dilemmas life presents. In some sense, I think that we are different masks and assume many different roles, not unlike Shakespeare’s “All the World’s a Stage.”

The piano part in this song features my attempt at two-part counterpoint beginning in measure 19. I have not necessarily studied any specific counterpoint rules, but merely wanted to imitate the feel of a Bach invention as well as mimic some of the playing of Brad Mehldau. I realized that the use of counterpoint in a singing context such as this is actually extremely difficult, although this situation is made easier by the fact that the vocal melody mimics the right hand line.



Score

# The Unbearable Lightness

Mitch Rivet

The musical score is written for Voice and Piano. It begins with an 'Intro' section. The piano part features a steady bass line with chords in the right hand. The voice part starts with a melodic line on the fifth measure, marked with a '5' above the staff. The lyrics are: 'I don't have a car — come pick me up — save the last spot — for me —'. The piano accompaniment continues with a consistent harmonic pattern throughout the lyrics.

Other verses:

Let's, go to the show, let the night go, time to feel good again

First, eat all my pride, with that red wine, nothing tastes good alone

first, reconcile me, from my own hand, save us from this regime

here, here's where I had, in this dark hole, that I call home for me

open all the blinds, let the light in, chase the darkness away

if you don't return, I will go on, it will not bother me

not knowing what you want from your life, is quite natural

As previously mentioned, I have been heavily influenced by Milan Kundera's 1984 novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which is clearly where the title of this song comes from. Within the first twenty pages of the novel, the author addresses Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence, which is the notion that all events in the universe have already occurred and will infinitely continue to reoccur, by suggesting that things happen only once and never again. Thus, the "heavy" notion of eternal recurrence is challenged by the "lightness" of existentialism. The actions with this song boil down to some of the cognitive dissonance when we want to do something we think is bad but will make us "feel good again." References to "let the night go" and "red wine" emphasize the songs focus on pleasure-based activities and the complicated relationship people have with them. Ultimately, the character in this song is someone who is indecisive and perhaps feels lost in seeking amusement and diversion.

Hopefully, most will recognize the similarities to the piano part of Bill Withers's classic "Lean on Me," and will realize the irony in this considering the songs lyrics deal with not having anything to "lean on." Again, the idea of "lightness" in the title contradicts having solid emotional structures holding us down. With this song, I wanted to take something that was well known, such as the piano part in "Lean on Me," and twist it in a way that gave the song a different symbolic meaning. There is little chance that this would cross the mind of a listener, but it was the logical justification for my compositional decision.

# The Fight

Mitchell Rivet

$\text{♩} = 104$

Vocals

Piano

Solo until you want to come in with the verse

5

Vox.

Pno.

9

Vox.

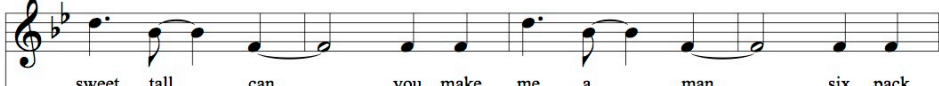
Pno.


af - ter work I go to my church where the

prea - cher pours en - ough to quench my thirst and that

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13

Vox.  sweet tall can you make me a man six pack


Pno. 


17

Vox.  pro - phe - cy helps me un - der stand

Pno. 

21


Vox.  cause I ne-ver seem to think I on-ly start to drink and when you come a-round my heart be-gins to


Pno. 

The Fight

3

25

Vox.  sink and when you start to yell I al-ways start to laugh you try to rep-ri-mand but I'll ne-ver it

Pno. 

29

Vox.  back

Pno. 

33

Vox.  Take me down to the pro - mised land please just

Pno. 

37

Vox.  make it — ea - sy help me un - der — stand — and come


Pno. 


41

Vox.  fill my — cup — come make one more buck — this was


Pno. 

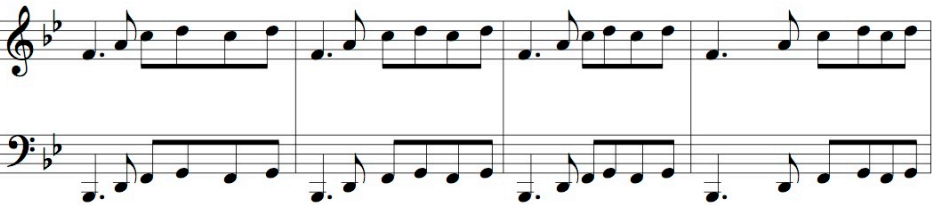
45

Vox.  not my — plan — it was plain dumb luck —


Pno. 


49

Vox.  so, it's al-ways come and go and they re-fuse to show it's a-ny-bo-dy's guess but we might not e-ver

Pno. 

53

Vox.  know, and then they start to yell and then I start to cry I di-dn't want to leave but I guess this good

Pno. 

57

Vox.  bye (riff to the end)

Pno. 

“The Fight” was written as a depiction of a bar scene in which the emotional tensions between friends are exacerbated by alcohol consumption. Yet another example of uncomfortable comparisons is found with relating the ritualization of alcohol consumption with religious symbols. Equating a bartender with a preacher suggests that alcohol has some sort of inherent wisdom or perspective shifting property. Whatever beauty comes from this practice is expressed in “when you start to yell/ I always start to laugh,” which can be generalized to represent the meeting of a negative force with a positive one. The benefit of alcohol, then, could be seen as the user not being angered by things that would normally upset them and able to laugh in the face of worry or despair. “The Fight” then does not need to refer to a literal fight but an internal fight one has between forces in the world designed to make he or she feel bad and a sense of hope and optimism. While alcohol can help with this “fight,” its unpredictability is emphasized by the changing of the narrator’s reaction to yelling in the last verse with “then they start to yell/ and then I start to cry.” This is designed to show how quickly moods can change when one is drinking.

The accompaniment to this song is the only thing I wrote that is truly blues influenced and is thus the most Jazz influenced song I wrote. The song centers on a Bb flat major harmony that is designed to give a feeling of ease and coolness. The use of the blues scale adds an element of humor and lightness to the subject. The chromaticism of the bebop lines after the second verse also plays into the humor and unpredictability of the situation.



# goodbye

Mitchell Rivet

Voice

Piano

Musical notation for the first system, showing a voice staff with rests and a piano accompaniment with chords.

5 (lyrics sung rhythmically free)

Broken face in the moonlight, shattered glass in the street Thought we won this time, but we danced with defeat

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Pno. Improvised accompaniment

Musical notation for the second system, including lyrics and piano accompaniment.

9

Nobody seemed to notice, the trees didn't care You cut my stomach open, with a sharp chiseled stare

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Pno.

Musical notation for the third system, including lyrics and piano accompaniment.

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13

That night wrapped all my worries, in a cardboard box then mailed them back to me, two months later

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Pno.

17

and now the leaves are falling, those trees must hurt a lot but they'll come back and so will you, if you haven't forgot

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Pno.

21

I grew up inside your arms, and died in your embrace you taught me what a man is, and you showed me my place

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Pno.

25

and now we talk from time to time and that's alright with me I've heard some day we fly away, someday we'll all be free

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Pno.

29

It was the end of an era, two long fat years the death of hope and the birth of fear

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Pno.

33

A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>- A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>- D<sup>b</sup>-

Piano solo to the end

Pno.

The accompaniment of goodbye is another example of one of my more simple songs. The harmony is not complex. The chords are the same throughout the whole song and with the exception of the borrowed minor iv chord are not particularly interesting. The minor iv chord was used because it is often used as a dramatic color, which was fitting for the lyrics of the song. The piano part gains momentum as the song progresses by slowly lowering the inversions of the chords towards the low end of the piano and beginning to take a quarter note rhythm as opposed to whole notes. This gradually builds until the solo at the end, which eventually comes back down to give a drawn out ending that is thought of to conclude the whole album.

These lyrics again deal with one particular scene between two characters. The narrator is recalling a night in which a lover left him, who is presumably going to come back. This song is not necessarily as philosophic in its aims as the others but is a more simple, yearning type of song. I wanted to end the entire album with something that was heartfelt and not overly intellectual or demanding. Much of this songs inspiration came from “New York, I Love You” by LCD Soundsystem which uses a similar progression and also features a narrator talking to a specific individual.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In many ways, this process was terrifying for me. I have never tried to record myself singing and the process was humbling to say the least. After recording the whole thing on my own, I also have a new respect for the recording process and what it takes to make a clean sounding recording. I think the way this project could have improved the most was in my singing voice, which admittedly I have spent less time learning than the piano or writing lyrics. Part of the reason I chose to write solo, acoustic compositions was so that I would have no other band members or digital instruments to hide behind. Mostly, I am proud of what I wrote and am very happy with the piano sound on the recordings. This project has provided me fertile ground from which to move forward as an artist and hopefully it can provide other music students with different ways to approach songwriting and combine classical, jazz, and other elements into a more pop-focused style.

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