

FORWARD: INVESTIGATING THE *TELOS* AND *TECHNE*
OF A MUSICALLY VOCATED LIFE

by

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A THESIS

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Juan Eduardo Wolf, Ph.D.

Forward is a collection of tunes in the Celtic idiom, comprised mostly of my own original compositions, arranged alongside a number of traditional pieces from the repertoire of folk music from Scotland and Ireland. Many of the original compositions included on the album came from the set of tunes I composed at the end of my Summer 2015 study abroad program; others were written during the recording process. I recorded and produced my debut solo album, *Forward*, as the primary component of my Clark Honors College Thesis project. I will bring the music of this album to life for friends, fellow students, interested peers, and professors in a Senior Recital in the Spring 2017 term. The final element of my thesis will be, of course, an accompanying paper. The primary objective of my thesis paper component will be to dive into the process of how I produced *Forward* and to examine why I made specific compositional and sonic/aesthetic decisions throughout the work. Beyond this, the paper will act as a kind of “extended program” to the album itself, with detailed writings on the stories behind each composition. The paper will include recollections of major moments and memorable stories from the recording period. The music of *Forward* is instrumental, and its stories are usually unheard unless listeners can meet me in person and receive

them directly from the source. This paper, then, will be a way for the stories of these tunes and the story of this album to be collected and presented in one place. This project has been an incredibly personal endeavor, and one of great professional importance at the onset of my career. This portion of the thesis will be composed in the style of a facsimile, a collection of short written materials, arranged in synthesis to present a multilayered story. By presenting these materials in such a light, accessible format, I hope to make these documents relevant and meaningful to as wide an interested audience as possible, whether they might be attending a formal defense of my thesis, or discovering my work online.

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Introduction

My name is Adam Hendey. I am a 22-year old, who grew up in California, and I am a student at the University of Oregon's Clark Honors College. I am graduating with degrees in Music and Philosophy, and I will be pursuing a Master's degree in Traditional Music next year at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. I perform traditional music from Scotland, Ireland, and the Celtic diaspora, and I compose and arrange new music in this style. I love traditional music: I love playing this music; I love sharing it with other people; I love talking about it and thinking about it; I love being around musicians, and I love being a part of the global community that cherishes this tradition. And I have loved exploring this little world of traditional music for about a decade now.

Almost two years ago, I decided that I wanted to find a way to turn this passion into a career somehow – or, at least, to try. I had spent the first two years of my undergraduate education hopping between different departments at the University of Oregon, first studying jazz and music history in the School of Music and Dance, before exploring degree programs in the English and Philosophy departments while pursuing Honors College requirements. I finally settled in the University's Philosophy department, but I still felt dissatisfied. I left the Music department because I felt like I was not focusing enough on the music I wanted to be playing, traditional music. In the Philosophy department, I found that I was being intellectually challenged in a more meaningful way, but I missed the sense of camaraderie and purpose that I had enjoyed in my early days in the Music program. I wanted to be “musicking” in that holistic

sense that musicologist Christopher Small described in his 1998 book, “Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening.”¹ It seemed to me that musical pursuits and passions *dominated* my intellectual life, but I was always afraid of what it might mean to try pursuing a career in music. Perhaps more bluntly put, I was afraid of failure.

By the end of my second year at the University of Oregon, I was experiencing a profound sense of *aporia* – I was at an impasse.² I was set to embark on a study abroad program with Professor Barbara Mossberg through the Honors College to spend time in London, Oxford, and Paris and complete a project of my own design. I had no idea what I was going to do. After long conversations with my father, my friends, and some of my professors, I decided to take a leap of faith – I would focus on writing music and meeting traditional musicians from the cities I would be visiting, and see what might come of it. As so many students my age will say, study abroad changed my life.

I made some amazing connections in Europe. I was lucky enough to see some incredible sights, make new friends, meet new collaborators, and write and make music that was really personally satisfying for me. The most important outcome of this program, however, was a firm resolution: when I returned to the United States, I would record and produce a professional debut album of contemporary Celtic music.

This decision did not exactly come out of the blue. For about three years I had been loosely thinking about the abstract possibility of putting together a debut solo album, and various trusted figures in my life were recommending such a project with

¹ Christopher Small, “Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening.” University Press of New England. Hanover: 1998

² I am thinking about *aporia* in the Platonic/Socratic sense as an impassible obstruction in a process of inquiry. Socrates, throughout Plato’s dialogues, insists that experiencing and overcoming the *aporetic* obstacle is the key moment in a philosophical inquiry or investigation.

increased frequency. By the summer of 2015, recommendations had become questions – “You know, you should think about making an album sometime,” was, more and more, becoming, “Hey, so when are you going to make an album?” Musicians around me saw that I took music seriously, and were wondering when (or if) I would take the next step and produce a full-length debut album. Indeed, I had been asking myself this, and other questions too. Would recording an album even be a fulfilling project for me? Would people listen to it? Would people pay money for it? Would the product be something that I would be able to be proud of? My time in Europe gave me a new determination to see if I could answer these questions for myself. So when I emerged from my program abroad with a freshly composed repertoire of new tunes, and a heart full of fresh hope for the future, I decided to just do it. In my final weeks abroad, I began planning in earnest – I developed a budget for the project, accounting for studio time, engineering costs, graphic design, a promotional photo shoot, and physical production and distribution costs. I started sending out emails and making calls to connections across my network to gauge early response.

I returned from Paris to my hometown Fresno, California on August 5, 2015. By August 7, I had scripted, filmed, edited, and uploaded a video to the popular crowd-funding platform Indiegogo to launch a one-month campaign to raise the funds I needed to produce my debut solo album. After setting up the campaign, I spent the next thirty days intensively promoting my project, spreading the word with the help of a supportive network online and in “the real world” too. Musical friendships that I had made over the course of eight years of travel were extremely helpful to this end. I was extremely honored to have my campaign shared by friends and fellow musicians across the West

Coast, but also in New York, in Boston, in Chicago, and in London. I ended the Indiegogo campaign with a small “virtual performance” on Concertwindow, a concert-live-streaming platform founded and developed by a friend and fellow traditional musician, Dan Gurney. I had managed to raise enough money in one month to fund a professional debut album – now all I had to do was actually make the thing.

In my first year at the University of Oregon I met Dr. Eliot Grasso, who introduced me to a well-known essay by T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.”³ I had often returned to this piece (and indeed still do), because I find the paper’s message so broadly applicable to people of all creative disciplines. Eliot wrote his essay in regards to the institution of Western poetry, but he could have just as easily been talking about traditional music. Eliot outlines a notion of “tradition” as an artistic institution that I find very resonant to the state of Celtic music. He writes about tradition’s character of a “simultaneous order,” a juxtaposition of tangible historicity or perceived timelessness and an immediate sense of contemporaneity. “Tradition” for Eliot is the canonical body of all work in a creative field from its historicized past through to its present environment and attitude. Eliot famously says in this essay that a poet must embody “the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer.”⁴ This kind of attitude is certainly prevalent in Celtic music circles. Celtic musicians are not “taken seriously” by their elder peers without first demonstrating clear knowledge and familiarity with the music’s accepted stylistic conventions (repertoire, ornamentation,

³ T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” from “The Sacred Wood,” Dover Publications. New York: 1920

⁴ Ibid.

perhaps familiarity with certain notable musicians either living or dead).⁵ Creatives have to demonstrate an ability to emulate the work of their predecessors for critics to accept their product as part of an established “tradition.” But poets and musicians can’t just copy their predecessors – they have to showcase individual contribution too in order to stand out as new marks on the timelines of a tradition.

This leads Eliot to develop his “Impersonal Theory” of creative output. Eliot writes that a poet always undergoes a “continual surrender of himself” as part of the artistic process, and that a mature poet really becomes a medium for his “tradition.”⁶ Creative output becomes depersonalized when a creator fully embodies a tradition. Again, I think that many musicians in the Celtic diaspora think in similar terms. The world of competitive piping and fiddling in Scottish music prizes attention to precise replication of historical, conventional stylistic ornaments, and Irish music critics often pay similar attention to players’ “musical genealogy” – who taught the person who taught you to play? Viewed through this lens of the “impersonal” creative, a “successful” traditional musician is one who is able to achieve a kind of artistic ego-death. The musician who ceases to speak for himself becomes, instead, a mouthpiece for all.

I think there is a lot of descriptive truth to the way that Eliot talks about tradition and individual creativity within tradition, even a century later. But I do not completely buy the “Impersonal Theory” that he outlines in his essay. I think Eliot is right insofar as to say that an artist, poet, musician, or creative *can* be a “medium for tradition,” but I

⁵ Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. University of Wisconsin Press. Madison: 1997.

⁶ T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” from “The Sacred Wood,” Dover Publications. New York: 1920

do not think this sort of creative aspiration to become “artist as channel” is *necessarily* the case. And I do not think that complete self-dissolution into a tradition should be the absolute, teleological aim of a creative working within a tradition.⁷ So, when I started thinking about how I would put my first album together, I spent a lot of time considering how I could produce something that fits firmly and authoritatively into the tradition of Celtic music but still maintain my own distinct musical personality throughout the work. At first, I thought that the album’s repertoire would be mostly comprised of traditional tunes from Ireland and Scotland, with some of my own original compositions arranged alongside them. But as thoughts and ideas began to crystallize into opinions, I determined that I wanted my first album to feature my own original music. That said, I also knew that I wanted to present my tunes as falling naturally into the tradition of music that I had been in love with for so many years already. I spent a lot of time thinking about how I could make my album sound “traditional,” but still “different” and “individual” too – even though my tunes are contemporary, they’re composed with traditional vocabulary. Phrasing and melodic idioms from my music fit comfortably into the broader repertoire of traditional Irish and Scottish tunes. In this way, I think the composition of my tunes often reflects the Eliotian impulse to “impersonal” tradition channeling. Where the album becomes more sonically distinct is in accompaniment, orchestration, and arrangement. I talk about this in greater detail in a short essay called “What Makes an Album Sound Like an Album?”

⁷ There are plenty of traditional musicians who I admire deeply who would vehemently disagree with me about this. The example of my friend Joey Abarta comes to mind. Joey is an amazingly skilled uilleann piper who collects tunes from wax cylinder recordings and wears almost exclusively early 20th century period-accurate clothing – for Joey, mastery of his craft seems to be the act of becoming one of the pipers whose playing he studies in such great detail. I wouldn’t presume to say that Joey is wrong, even though his objective might remind me a bit of Jay Gatsby at times.

I recorded my first album at Redwood Island Studios in Boulder Creek, California, with the help of David Brewer, a longtime friend and musical mentor, who worked on the project as lead producer and engineer. I spent the month of September living in Boulder Creek, spending each day working on the record with David. Most of the music listeners hear on the album is the product of “multi-track recording,” a technique in which the engineers layers multiple “tracks,” or recordings, on top of each other to create a cohesive, whole song. So, on any given track on the album, you’ll hear multiple instruments being played at the same time, all performed by me. Multi-track recording has advantages and disadvantages. Multi-track recordings are often accused of sounding too “sterile,” or not “live” enough.⁸⁹ Many listeners, particularly in the world of acoustic music, recognize a certain, distinctive quality found in recordings of multiple musicians playing together, and they find this aspect appealing. Musicians like myself who use multi-tracking techniques to produce an album must, therefore, be thoughtful and deliberate in how the various layers of a track are put together to help make the track sound a little more “live.” Multi-tracking has some pragmatic advantages – the technique requires fewer people to do the same amount of work, so it is obviously “cheaper” – but I was most attracted to this method of recording because it facilitates precision in arranging material. Because I was the musician performing most of the parts on the album, I was really able to fine-tune the playing of each instrumental line to best fit my own tastes and judgment. This enabled me to create arrangements on

⁸ Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*. Duke University Press. Durham and London: 2003.

⁹ Scholars of recorded music have, for a while now, discussed the phenomenon of “participatory discrepancies,” or the micro-variations that result from performance by multiple, individual human players, as a critical component in what gives recorded music a “live” sound. Multi-track recordings and music composed electronically have long been accused of lacking this crucial ingredient.

several tracks that are really quite complex.¹⁰ Even though there are several tracks on the album that feature my playing exclusively, I am joined on many tracks by one or two guests – I was excited to be able to feature the brilliant fiddlers Rebecca Lomnicky and John Weed, harpist Jesse Autumn, and David Brewer on bodhrán, the traditional Irish frame drum.

Recording was a transcendent process for me. I woke up each morning in the beautiful Santa Cruz mountains, surrounded by towering redwoods, and would head to the studio to spend anywhere from ten to (on one particularly productive day) sixteen hours recording parts. Each day, I would focus on a different instrument, and David and I slowly heard the album begin to take shape as new instruments appeared in each track. First, we recorded “rough takes” of the melodies in each track. Next, I would lay down the foundations of accompaniment in each track, playing guitar and bouzouki along with the rough takes. Next, we’d record the “final” takes of the tunes on tin whistles or melodic instruments. After these “essential layers” were recorded and arranged, I turned my focus to “auxiliary layers” – bass guitar, percussion, and “secondary” whistle parts or harmonies. By the end of the month, I could hear a really rough, unpolished version of what the album would sound like. During the final week of recording I played a concert in nearby Aptos to promote the coming album, and had a photo shoot in Santa Cruz after the final day of recording. Two days later, I was back in Eugene for my first day of classes in my Junior year at the University of Oregon. Over the course of the

¹⁰ Musicians in other genres really take this to the extreme – for a trendy, contemporary example, simply look to the work of jazz wunderkind Jacob Collier, who puts together YouTube videos of *ridiculously* complicated arrangements of pop song covers. But American pop music has seen several notorious “overdubbers” and multi-instrumentalists – Paul McCartney, Ian Anderson, Stevie Wonder, Prince, and Dave Grohl (of Nirvana and Foo Fighters), among others, developed reputations throughout their careers for employing this technique in the studio.

academic year, I would collaborate with David and my guest artists to arrange their individual recording sessions, work on mixes of various tracks, and schedule album mastering. I also worked with Stuart Mason, another close friend and talented musician who does graphic design work for other artists, to design my album artwork and liner note layout designs. Finally, I contracted a production and distribution company in California to order a run of one thousand physical copies of my album, which were shipped to my residence in Eugene, a little green house on 18th Avenue across the street from the School of Music – the final tune on the album is named after this place.

Recording and producing this first, full-length album was, microcosmically, a project in reflecting on the influences that musically made me who I am, and it was also a declaration of my own individual style at the onset of a serious musical career. Recording *Forward* was important to me, both in the experience of the lived process of creating the album, and in the finished product rendered at the end of that process. I saw the project as a rite of passage, a means of setting myself apart. By producing this album, I thought, I would separate myself from other participant Celtic music enthusiasts and distinguish myself as a serious, aspiring professional. To consider my album's place in the broader context of contemporary Celtic music, I conceived of the project as doing similar work – the album venerates a proud musical tradition, but is not afraid to venture into some new territory as well. The experience of creating this album filled my life with a bright hope and a renewed sense of optimism that has not faded since I first set down this path two years ago. Just as I foster this hope for my own personal artistic ambitions, I am sincerely hopeful that this album will bring joy to those who find it and listen, and that this larger tradition of music still has room to grow, just

like me. I'm a bit of a sap. I think albums can tell powerful stories and carry heavy symbolic significances, and I love the way that these narratives, usually left unsaid in any explicit way, are often distilled into an album's name. I did not know what my debut album's name would be until after the entire project was recorded, mixed, and mastered. Once I heard the album as a complete work, however, I knew what its title had to be.

I named my debut solo album *Forward*. In the pages that follow, I will talk a little bit about this project that has been so dear to me, about the tunes that fill its sixty-seven minutes and two seconds of run time, and about how this album changed my life. With this document I hope to provide to listeners of *Forward* and to other interested parties a portfolio of reflections on the recording process and the ramifications of producing this work, as well as some of my collected thoughts on the elements and influences interacting in this project, and on my own developing identity as a musician. I will also provide an extended set of traditional "liner notes," explaining the program of each track on the album, before finally assessing the outcomes of this momentous project.



Adam Henley, *Forward* cover art

Stuart Mason, March 2016.

What Makes an Album Sound Like an Album?

When I set about the initial process of organizing, composing, and arranging material for *Forward*, I was not just thinking about repertoire. In fact, I was constantly more concerned with aesthetic decisions about “the album as a whole.” I knew that I wanted the recording to have a “unified” sound across all the tracks, and I wanted the album to develop a conceptual “signature sound.” So how does one achieve this end? In trying to answer this question for myself, I thought primarily about two important concepts: voice and structure.

Voice

First, I strove for consistency in what I call “voice,” or instrumentation and arrangement. There are a few ways we can think about timbre and this sense of consistent “voice” in the context of a recording. Speaking of my own playing on the record, across the album’s track list, listeners will hear the same instruments appearing again and again, and they’re doing “the same job.” So, for instance, a recurring sound throughout *Forward* is that of tin whistle duos playing in close harmony. I introduced this distinctive timbre on the first track of *Forward*, and I consistently featured this sound prominently across the album’s sonic landscape. I used one guitar for almost all of the guitar parts on the album, opting for a different instrument only on the third track, where guitar also plays a lead melodic role, in addition to its more usual accompanying function. Using the same guitar throughout the album, to my ear, is another way that all

the tracks are tied together at the timbral level. Guitar provides the primary rhythmic and harmonic backdrop for all the music on the album, so using the same instrument as the basis of every track helps contextualize each in relation to the others, situating each track as a part of a cohesive whole. “Signature sounds” were timbres that I tried to bring out pretty deliberately throughout *Forward*. The sound of my Martin guitar, as I have mentioned, was very important – and I discuss my thoughts on guitar accompaniment at length in an essay titled “Notes on Guitar Accompaniment in Contemporary Celtic Music and Beyond.”

Perhaps the most important “sound” of *Forward*, in my mind is the sound of whistle harmony, which features prominently in five of the album’s thirteen tracks. The concept of close harmony as a tool to develop emphasis is an idea I decided to explore in *Forward*, and I have come to think of it as a part of what could be called a nascent “Adam Henney style.”¹¹ There are few other players exploring this territory thoroughly, but I find the sound quite compelling. I wouldn’t mislead anyone, however – the impulse to harmonize tunes is, of course, not an original idea.¹²¹³ There are a few critically important influences on this pillar of my own developing style around Celtic music arrangement. Brian Finnegan, a whistle and flute player from County Armagh in Northern Ireland, is a legend in the contemporary Celtic music world for his prolific

¹¹ Although I formulated *Forward* as a sort of “Adam Henney plays the tin whistle and writes tunes” album, I would not firmly say that a developing “Adam Henney brand” is that of the whistle player. The image of myself that I market is still very much an evolving entity, and even within the next few years I could see ways in which my brand could have changed quite dramatically. I discuss this uncertainty elsewhere.

¹² Thomas Turino discusses the concept of “cosmopolitan identity” as a socially determined factor affecting music-making practices and aesthetics in his book “Music in the Andes,” among other works. Simply put, cosmopolitan aesthetics could be described as a kind of taste with regard to folk musics flavored by a training in Western classical music practice. In my own case, my cosmopolitan tendencies show through in my own preferences for harmony, and in some of my choices in instrumentation.

¹³ Thomas Turino, “Music in the Andes,” Oxford University Press. Oxford: 2007.

composition, virtuosic and distinctive playing, and his work with the band Flook (as well as his own solo output). Finnegan, through some of Flook’s music, also explores use of harmony in Celtic music as an aesthetic device.¹⁴ The great Irish band Lúnasa, currently led by the whistle and flute player Kevin Crawford has also tinkered with some harmony between multiple whistles.¹⁵ I also was deeply inspired by the playing and arranging of tenor banjo virtuoso Damien O’Kane, particularly on his duo album with guitarist David Kosky, *The Mystery Inch*. O’Kane’s use of harmony is uniquely dynamic – rather than harmonizing full tunes, O’Kane often uses overdubbed harmonies at specific moments to highlight particular melodic passages in Celtic tunes.¹⁶ Though there is some precedent for harmonization in Celtic music, it is not a common enough practice to be considered convention at this time. And right now, I am one of the few Celtic musicians in America seriously exploring the affective possibilities of harmonization in this music. Traditionally, players do not harmonize tunes – musicians conventionally perform just “the tune” and the accompaniment. I studied classical music theory throughout my high school and college education, and I have always had a real fondness and affinity for early styles of Western counterpoint. When I started composing tunes of my own and arranging those tunes, I had a unique ability among my peers to think of compelling harmonies to stand alongside my tunes. Among the community of musicians I collaborate with, this knack for writing harmonies to traditional tunes has become something of a hallmark of mine, and I have already had a

¹⁴ Flook, *Rubai*, Flatfish Records, 2002
Flook, *Haven*, Flatfish Records, 2005

¹⁵ Lúnasa, *Lúnasa*, Compass Records, 1998
Lúnasa, *Otherworld*, Compass Records, 1999
Lúnasa, *Sé*, Compass Records, 2006

¹⁶ Damien O’Kane and David Kosky, *The Mystery Inch*, Pure Records, 2011

bit of professional work arranging these kinds of harmonies in the past year since I released *Forward*.

I have found that certain sounds can be quite polarizing to audiences of Celtic music – the most divisive of these, in my experience, must be that of the electric bass guitar. When I began arranging material for *Forward*, I decided that I wanted to play bass throughout the record, and really had to work to convince my producer, David Brewer, that this would be a good idea.¹⁷ Even though there are plenty of traditionalist who are skeptical of the efficacy or the appropriateness of bass in Celtic music, I knew from the onset of the process of arranging and orchestrating *Forward* that I was making this album for myself and my own sense of what sounds “right.” Often times, that sense is very much informed by conventional, “traditional” aesthetics around taste in this music, but when I have a difference of opinion, I try to trust my instincts. For every occasional critic of this part of my album, I get so many positive comments from other listeners who reach out to tell me that they find my music more accessible than other examples of Celtic music they’ve heard before – and that’s a trade I am more than happy to make.

Another recurring sound throughout the album is the character of what I called during the recording process the “pop percussion kit.” Percussion is fairly uncommon in “traditional” Celtic music, with the exception of the bodhran frame drum, or sometimes a brief feature of percussive step-dance techniques. My musical style, however, owes just as much to American and Western pop music influences as it does to the canon of

¹⁷ This is certainly another of my, as Turino would say, “cosmopolitan” preferences. I cannot deny that my musical tastes were deeply affected from a young age by immersion in Western classical and pop music, and I simply feel that bass is often lacking from Celtic musical traditions, which mostly feature treble instruments.

traditional Irish and Scottish music conventions, and I played drum set in pop and jazz bands from an early age. Now, if the inclusion of bass in Celtic is considered faux pas, use of a drum kit in this setting is seen as an intentional falling upon one's own sword.¹⁸ I did not want to involve a drum kit in my album for a variety of reasons, and the expectation of disproportionate outrage was certainly a part of this, but I mostly just thought that the drum set doesn't provide exactly the right sound for my purposes. Instead, I opted for an approach that may have been a little more reminiscent of "world music" arrangement (very much a problematic genre construction in its own right) – I developed a sort of "composite" drum set on several tracks by layering several shakers and other small acoustic percussion instruments. Throughout its thirteen tracks, *Forward* features triangle, congas, guiro, a Tibetan "meditation bell," a pair of rattles from Ghana, a set of finger cymbals taken from a toy monkey, percussive hand clapping, and eight different shakers all alongside the traditional Irish bodhran that coalesce to create an overall sound that at times mimics the playing style of a pop drum kit. Extensive layering of percussive elements is a trick I learned from pop music producers like Alex Sacco, who visited the University of Oregon recently as a part of an intensive popular music production workshop I was invited to participate in. I was quite pleased with the product in this album, and I think it's a technique I would explore further in future recording projects.

¹⁸ There's one *very* specific exception to this line in the sand among traditional music critics – ceilidh bands. Ceilidh bands, the medium-to-large ensembles that perform for large social dance events, conventionally include a drum set, and this is a common, even beloved sound in circles of traditional music appreciation. You'll hear a quiet reference to this in track 11, where a snare drum can be heard low in the mix on the final tune of the set.

Listeners also hear a variety of “voices” beside my own on *Forward*. David Brewer plays bodhran throughout the album, and I also feature singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Jesse Autumn on harp, as well as Rebecca Lomnicky and John Weed on fiddles. Rebecca and John’s voices on their instruments are immediately distinct – even if listeners do not know *why* they can tell that there are two different fiddlers on my album, they know that there are. I asked these two brilliant musicians to join me on this project as representatives of two different styles of fiddling, and I love everything about their unique approaches to music. Rebecca Lomnicky is a winner of the prestigious, International Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship, the highest level of competitive Scottish style fiddling. John Weed is an amazingly talented fiddler in the Donegal, Northern Irish tradition of fiddling, and he lived and gigged in Ireland for years before returning to America to play and teach this recognizable Irish style. Rebecca’s playing encapsulates the precision and soulfulness of Scottish fiddle music, while John’s style is marked at times by ease and intensity, but always characterized by a lyrical quality that is instantly indexed with Irish-style fiddling. By featuring these individual voices throughout *Forward*, I was able to use the unique qualities of each player’s style to develop my own “voice” as an arranger and recording artist. The fact that these voices appear and reappear throughout the album contributes to the cohesiveness of the album as a “unified” whole by reinforcing the second aspect of what I think makes an album “sound like an album.”

Structure

When I first sat down to arrange material for *Forward*, I was really only certain about one thing: I wanted my album to have what I thought of as “classic album structure” with an “A-side” and “B-side.” Although these terms carry only symbolic meaning in the digital era of music, where track listing and length is no longer limited by the medium of recording (as in the days of 78 and 45 rpm vinyl records), I still wanted to produce an album with the recognizable structure, form, and dynamic flow of the great rock and pop albums from the era of vinyl primacy.¹⁹ Call it “nostalgia,” or maybe even “force of habit.” Just as I see my music falling into a broader tradition of Celtic music, I can’t help but see the canon of the American recording industry as a tradition all its own.

My grandparents listened to albums with “A-sides” and “B-sides,” and my parents listened to albums following this structure too. Even though the music of my own childhood came in a new medium – the CD, rather than the vinyl album – this familiar structure persisted. All our lives, we’ve listened to albums that have two halves, which are often recognizably distinct from each other. So, I programmed *Forward* to follow a similarly familiar “A-side/B-side” format, with a symmetrical 6 tracks to each half – I also included one track on the album to serve as an “intermission.” The first half of *Forward* plays much like the A-side of a standard pop record, and I loaded the first four tracks with sets that I thought would be most immediately appealing to listeners. The end of track 6 bleeds into track 7, “Kami,” which I thought of as a kind of interlude right at the exact middle of the album. Then, the second half of the album, which I

¹⁹ Peter Martland, “Since Records Began: EMI – The First 100 Years,” Batsford Ltd. London. 1997.

thought of as the B-side to *Forward*, begins. This second suite of sets is, to my ear, really classic B-side material because it's really made up of what you could only call "other stuff." Among the six tracks of the B side, there is a mix of two "traditional sets" made up entirely of traditional tunes not composed by myself (one set of tunes from Ireland, and another from Scotland), and a really wacky, short tune composed in an unusual mode. I named this strange composition in reference to a particular moment from the mid-2000s American comedy classic, *Napoleon Dynamite*.

When I started arranging material for *Forward*, I wanted the album to fit comfortably into the tradition of conventional Celtic music, but I wanted to try to explore some new territory too. This is not a new impulse, of course. Plenty of Celtic "fusion" albums see fiddles accompanied by Indian tabla drumming, or traditional tunes played on distorted, electric guitars. Even when issued from trusted sources of "pure drop" playing, projects like these are often met with mixed response – tepid at best, caustically critical at worst. Michael McGoldrick is a Manchester-born flute, whistle, and uilleann bagpipe player widely celebrated for his collaborations with traditional Irish musicians like accompanist Donal Lunny and fellow piper John McSherry. In contrast, he has produced several solo albums featuring synthesized, electronic drum machine beats that have essentially flopped in terms of critical reception.²⁰ As I mentioned above, there are certainly "fusion" elements at play in *Forward*, but I wanted to experiment with structure more than sound.

²⁰ McGoldrick's collaboration with John McSherry, *At First Light*, became an instant touchstone in contemporary Celtic music after its release in 2002, but solo releases of McGoldrick's that work with more sonically adventurous ideas like 2006's *Wired*, or *Aurora* from 2010, have been much more poorly received.

The canon of Celtic music is comprised of thousands of instrumental “tunes,” short melodies composed and performed in binary form, which are often strung together in groups of two, three, or four to build what traditional musicians call “sets.” Usually, sets are built to match tunes by rhythmic type or key. So, for instance, a group of traditional musicians might play a set of three jigs in the keys of D major, E minor, and G major, or a set of four reels, all in the key of A major.²¹ Instead of introducing contrast in sets by changing keys, I found that I was interested more in varying tune types within a set, and particularly in working with tunes in odd time signatures.²² For instance, track 3 is a set of three tunes (composed by me), all in D major, but the set is made up of a march in 5/4 time, a reel, and a slip jig. Track 6 is another set of tunes I composed, a medley of a tune in 7/8 and two jigs, all in the key of E minor. Sets are an important part of Celtic music arrangement conventions, so I spent a lot of time thinking about how I would put sets of tunes together for this first album. I also took this concept a step further, however, and experimented with an idea that I called the “macro-set” during the recording process. If a set is an arrangement of several tunes strung together, a macro-set is a medley of sets that could stand alone as individual tracks, but could also be listened to as larger, complete arrangements. There are two of these macro-sets on *Forward*, and both can be heard on the album’s A-side. The first includes tracks 4 and 5, and the second is comprised of tracks 6 and 7. Both of these large-scale arrangements are made up of original compositions, and are marked by what

²¹ A notable exception to this convention can be found in the Scottish pipe band tradition and its various derivatives, which have what I would call “set archetypes,” formulas of specific types of tunes being grouped together, the most well-known being the “march, strathspey, and reel” medley. My own thoughts on crafting sets have been very much influenced by this tradition.

²² I make exceptions to this statement too, of course – several of my sets include tunes of varying keys, but the broader emphasis stands on metric variation rather than shift in tonal center.

I would call “transitional sounds.” A recording of a ticking clock can be heard at the end of track 4, setting the tempo for the first tune in track 5. The end of track 6 features a drone, and an accordion (which momentarily adds to the texture of this musical pause) marks the beginning of track 7. The “macro-set” concept was another experiment I conducted in the making of this album that I was quite pleased with, and I think I would explore the idea further in future projects.

I studied music history and theory for four years throughout high school.²³ I was always fascinated by medieval, baroque, and classical composers’ near obsession with structural concepts like symmetry, repetition, and contrast. As I thought out the orders of tracks for the arrangement of *Forward* as a full album, and considered whom I wanted to feature on the album as guests, I tried to think about this time-honored tradition of creating structural symmetry or a sense of balance. My choice to follow the “A side / B side” format helped me to this end – I developed a loose kind of symmetry across the broad structure of *Forward* through the appearance of guests. John and Rebecca both appear on Side A and Side B, while Jesse is featured on only one track, track 7, at the exact midpoint of the album. Jesse’s harp serves as a kind of sonic demarcation that one half of the album has ended, and another is about to begin.

Perhaps the most important, but least immediately recognized, aspect of what makes an album “sound like an album” is the mix. This term, “the mix,” mostly refers the engineered dynamic balance of instruments in a recording, but it also encompasses

²³ Beginning with early medieval chant music, I studied the works of Josquin Des Prez and Giovanni Palestrina, moving through the baroque, classical, and romantic periods, to the music of the French impressionists. I also examined the work of the German modernists and atonal composers, into the diverse music of the 20th Century in America, from Aaron Copland’s sonorous symphonies to the wildly experimental music of Charles Ives and John Cage, as well as the rich tradition of jazz and its derivatives, rock and pop.

work done on the sonic characteristics of each instrument to emphasize or reduce certain ranges of frequencies to enhance their natural character, as well as “panning,” the way in which sounds are distributed from left to right in stereo across a listener’s speakers. When we were producing *Forward*, David (who also worked as the engineer of this album) and I developed what we called “mix templates,” basic profiles of relationships between instruments that we would use as the basis for mixing each track. These structural frameworks, in my mind, formed the basis for “the sound” of *Forward*.

For instance, the album’s distinctive whistle harmonies are always mixed the same way – panned very near to the center, but not quite on top of each other, so as to create the distinct sound of two separate instruments playing together, and mixed at very similar dynamic levels, with the lead whistle only slightly higher in volume. On the rhythm guitar tracks, we often used an engineering very common in pop music mixing called “sample delay,” where the guitar track is replicated, delayed by just a few milliseconds, and then panned to the extreme left and right, to make the guitar sound much bigger and create a wide open texture. Mixing was used to create sonic hierarchies. On tracks with bass guitar, we kept the bass fairly low in the overall mix, to give the instrument a “felt, heard, but not seen” role in the balance of the overall track. Percussion was often handled similarly, mixed fairly low to sound almost like a natural, rhythmic extension of the guitar rather than a separate, distinct component of equivalent importance.

David’s work on *Forward* as both lead producer and engineer was completely invaluable. His skill and sensitivity as a player of traditional music made him, in my mind, a really ideal partner to work with on this project, and I owe so much to him for

making this album a reality. David's musicianship was a great source of inspiration to me as a young musician, and my sound is certainly a descendent of his in many ways. It was a real privilege to produce this debut solo album with him, and I am incredibly pleased that we now work together in The Fire Scottish Band. My composition and playing are what made *Forward* sound like *Forward* in the most immediate sense, but David's work behind the engineering desk was just as important to make this album sound like an album.

Influences

Thinking about what makes an album "sound like an album" was a significant part of the creative process for me in producing this work. Although *Forward* was my first essay into the vast world of recording and production, I like to think that this debut album was a great success. I would flatter myself to think that some part of that success is due to some good intuition on my own part about sonic aesthetics and taste, but I would be incredibly remiss not to give credit to a decade of listening to Celtic music albums that inspired me, and to a lifetime of listening to music in general, either recorded or live, in a variety of genres. One of the lessons I have distilled from my path through music over the past decade is that listening really is learning. Though I did not specifically mention their work elsewhere in this brief essay, I would like to acknowledge a few albums that taught me about how great albums are put together, recordings that I have listened to over and over again with passion and academic obsession.

Barrule's self-titled release from 2014 was a musical thunderbolt of inspiration to me – I listened to this album almost every day during the month or so that I was recording *Forward*, and I'll be studying bouzouki with the trio's accompanist, Adam Rhodes, next year during my Master's studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow.

The music of Altan was massively influential to me during my earliest explorations of traditional Irish music, and people aware of the nuances of regional styles of Irish fiddling often tell me that this early love of a Donegal band shows pretty clearly in my phrasing and articulation on the tin whistle.²⁴ In particular, Altan's 1992 release *Harvest Storm*, their 1996 album *Blackwater*, and especially 2002's *The Blue Idol* have all been fairly regular listening for me over the past ten or so years.

In 1976, Andy Irvine and Paul Brady released a duo album, simply titled, *Andy Irvine/Paul Brady*. This collection of 10 tracks is at the top of many Celtic musicians' "favorites" lists, and I am very much a part of that bandwagon. This album taught me so much about song arrangement, harmony singing, and what a bouzouki is.

Even though I am not a serious singer myself, I love singers, and playing with singers. If I could play with any one in particular, it would *have* to be Kate Rusby. I think Rusby has the most beautiful voice I have ever heard, and her arrangements of traditional English songs on her album *Sleepless* from 1999 are still as stunning to my ears today as they were when I first heard the album six years ago.

²⁴ Donegal is a county in Northern Ireland, and the ornamental style of this particular region is generally associated with bold, "aggressive" playing and rhythmic precision. Fiddlers from this area often say that they "ornament with the bow, not the fingers." Translated to the whistle, you might say that I "ornament with the tongue, not the fingers."

I was first exposed to Scottish traditional music by two amazingly talented musicians based out of my home state, California. Scottish fiddler Alasdair Fraser and Californian cellist Natalie Haas are perhaps the best-known duo in contemporary Celtic music today, and though they've now released four albums together, their first record *Fire and Grace*, from 2004, will always hold a place dear to my heart. I have always found Natalie's playing to be an open textbook on innovative accompaniment, and I can still remember how the novelty I found in the intensity and power of Scottish fiddle music. Alasdair Fraser and Natalie Haas' music gave me a real excitement for playing and arranging traditional tunes, an excitement that has since carried me to a different continent for graduate study.

Perhaps the reason I have never thought bass in Celtic music is such a bad idea is because I have had the distinct pleasure of absorbing the wonderful album *Singing Sands*, released in 2005 by fingerstyle guitarist Tony McManus and fretless bassist Alain Genty. This collaboration between two virtuosos could convince anyone that this pairing of instruments was simply meant to be. Although this album has been a regular feature in my listening repertoire throughout my musical journey, I have started to realize over the past few years that fewer people are familiar with this amazing record than should be.

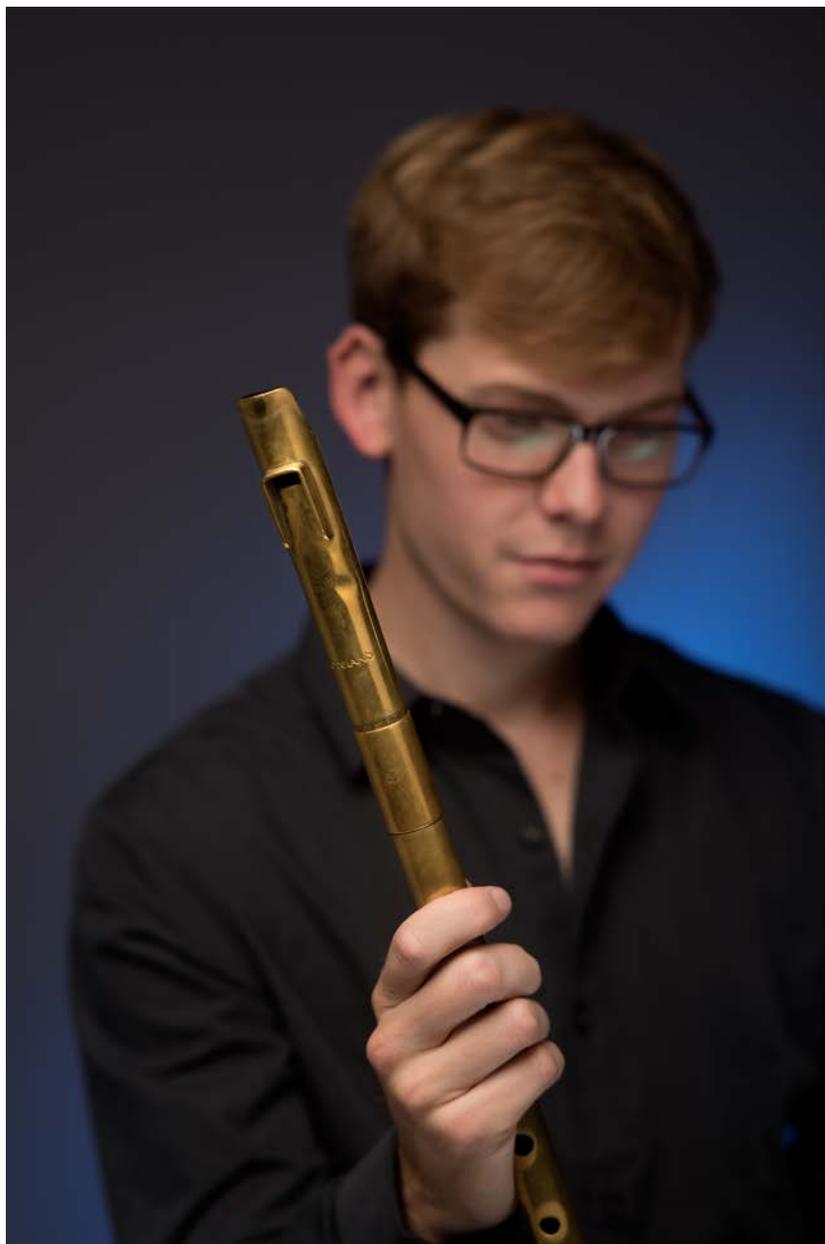
I think my own favorite duo making music in the Celtic diaspora today has to be the partnership of fiddler Martin Hayes and guitarist Dennis Cahill. Dennis Cahill is the most creative accompanist I have ever encountered in this style of music, and I have learned so much about chording and reharmonization from studying his playing. Cahill came to Celtic music later in life, after a successful early career in jazz performance.

His stark, minimalist style of accompaniment provides a unique foundation for Hayes' sweet, simple, lyrical fiddling. The duo's 1997 album, *The Lonesome Touch*, has been a long favorite of mine, as well as their 2007 release, *Welcome Here Again*, but their most influential work for me has actually been their most recent project as the founding members and backbone of an incredible band called The Gloaming. The group's self-titled debut from 2014 quickly became one of the consistently most-listened to in my music library. I remember first seeing these two musicians performing together on my fifteenth birthday at the Sebastopol Celtic World Music Festival in 2009, which turned out to be the festival's final year in a run of sixteen. It was at this same festival that I first heard the group that has since been, basically, my favorite band in the world, Väsen.

How do you describe them? I have always pitched their music to friends and strangers as "Swedish acoustic folk power-trio," and I think that is honestly the best-fit description for this ensemble of literally larger-than-life musicians – seriously, all three members of the group are well over six and a half feet tall. Väsen has toured together since 1990, bringing their unique combination of Swedish nyckelharpa, 12 string guitar, and 5 string viola all over the world. In that time, they've released seventeen albums, but one in particular has been incredibly important to me: *Live in Japan*, from 2005. I have gone through several extended periods in my life of listening to this album everyday, and I have no regrets. The technical skill, the dynamic range, and the perfection of this band's arrangements has always been a constant source of inspiration to me. The group's innovative guitarist, Roger Tallroth, is an icon in my own personal

pantheon of “great accompanists and composers,” and studying his playing has deeply informed my own style of accompaniment on both guitar and bouzouki over the years.

As a guitarist and accompanist in the contemporary Celtic tradition, I think it would essentially be a form of plagiarism for me not to cite the influence of John Doyle on my playing. Doyle’s instantly recognizable style of muted, percussive accompaniment was an immediate source of inspiration for me from my first attempts in approaching the guitar. John Doyle played on several albums that were huge for me as a young musician: his 2005 solo albums, *Evening Comes Early*, and *Wayward Son*, his duo album from the same year with fiddler Liz Carroll, *In Play*, and the great Solas album *Sunny Spells and Scattered Showers* of 1997. John Doyle is what we’d probably call “the guy” for Celtic accompaniment today – he’s played with just about everybody else I have listed above. In fact, I find this aspect of his musical career most inspiring, even beyond his stunning abilities as a technician. I hope to someday have the same privilege to work with as many amazing musicians as this great guitarist has throughout his own career. I have always admired Doyle’s immense musicality, and I started playing guitar myself in my first year at the University of Oregon. Even though I have not been playing guitar for such a long time, I have increasingly come to see myself as more of an accompanist – I think this is where I really shine musically, and I have developed some opinions about the instrument and its role in this music.



Promotional photo from *Forward* pre-release photo shoot
Paul Schraub, September 2015.

Notes on Guitar Accompaniment in Contemporary Celtic Music and Beyond: A Defense of DADGAD Tuning

The acoustic guitar is one of the most ubiquitous instruments in the world, having found a place in almost every modern musical tradition today. Celtic music is no exception to this trend. Though it has become the dominant accompanying instrument in contemporary Celtic music, the acoustic guitar has only been a presence in the landscape of Celtic music since the late 1960s, when Ireland and Scotland saw a traditional folk music revival that introduced new accompanying instruments to the music, like guitar and bouzouki, a large member of the mandolin family from Greece.



Promotional photo from *Forward* pre-release photo shoot
Paul Schraub, September 2015.

Standard tuning on the acoustic guitar is, from lowest to highest, EADGBE. The prevalence of fourths in the intervallic makeup of this tuning facilitates easy melodic play, and tends to render voicing of chords that are harmonically dense, with close

intervals stacked in fairly tight harmonies – the frequent use of “barre chords” as a technical necessity can emphasize this quality as well.

I, like many other Celtic music accompanists today, prefer to use an altered tuning – DADGAD. Although melodic playability is not as immediately intuitive in this tuning, I believe that DADGAD is the superior tuning system for accompanying Celtic music.²⁵ Celtic music is predominantly centered on the tonic key of D Major and many of its related modes. DADGAD also appeals to my own cosmopolitan sensibilities – the tuning’s low D string makes playing in the key of D much more harmonically compelling than playing in the same key in “standard tuning,” where the next nearest D would be a full octave higher, neutralizing the instrument’s capability to provide satisfying bass accompaniments in this important tonal center. DADGAD tuning is uniquely well suited to accompanying traditional music.²⁶

The symmetry between the low and middle D strings, and the relationship between the low A and G strings creates a unique setup that facilitates easy formation of movable chord shapes that players can easily modify, making only slight changes to alter chord qualities, remove voices, or add extensions. Meanwhile, the top A and D

²⁵ The critique that “melodic playability is limited in DADGAD tuning” is a common charge often leveled against this tuning system by proponents of standard tuning. I actually disagree with this sentiment as well. There are plenty of talented melodists even in the brief history of DADGAD guitar playing thus far. Míchéal Ó Domhnaill, known for his work in The Bothy Band as well as with fiddlers Kevin Burke and Paddy Glackin, was noted as a skilled melody player in addition to being a compelling accompanist. Guitarist Arty McGlynn pursued a successful solo career and developed a reputation as one of the first master tune players on his instrument. The contemporary guitarist John Doyle carries on this tradition as well, accompanying soloists like Liz Carroll and working in bands like Solas, but maintaining an active solo career as well.

²⁶ The relationship of different keys in the sonic world of Celtic music is complicated, but I (and many other traditional musicians) think of D Major as a sort of “ultra-tonic.” Even when a tune is in another key, traditional musicians still think of D Major as a “home key” from which all tunes and scales arise. A music theorist more skilled than me could probably draw interesting connections to the practice of Schenkerian harmonic analysis, and I am convinced that a comprehensive “methodology for alternative/derivative music theory syntax of contemporary Celtic music” essay needs to be written at some point in the future. Maybe I’ll get to it if no one else does.

strings can be left alone to form a set of drones that I refer to as a “tonic reinforcement.” Over any chord, I can leave these two drone notes ringing out in the texture to stand as a kind of reminder of the ultimate tonality. In a more traditional theoretical analysis, a musicologist might label these two drones as chordal extensions – so, for instance, what I call a “G Major” chord in this tuning might be more properly analyzed as a “G Major add 9” chord, because of the open A string’s presence in the texture. Chords in traditional tunes always lead back to the tonic chord (which is very often D major), so these drone strings reinforce that tonality. Another way of viewing DADGAD is as a compelling emulation of uilleann bagpipe style accompaniment.

Before guitars and pianos became the accompanying instruments in Irish traditional music, the uilleann bagpipes served the primary accompaniment role, in addition to performing melodically. Like their Scottish cousins, these Irish bagpipes have a set of drones that can maintain a constant tonic. Uilleann bagpipes, however, also have a set of extra, keyed pipes called “regulators” that are played with the wrist to form chords over these drones. Chords played on regulators have a sort of impressionistic quality – they often seem to smear together, with diatonic tone clusters that can suggest dualities of harmony. Voicings of chords in DADGAD tuning can render a similar feeling of adjacency and suspension quite similar to uilleann bagpipe regulator chords, and can create a similar harmonic backdrop for melodies to play over. When approached from this perspective, DADGAD tuning offers an approach to accompaniment and harmonic theory immediately idiomatic to Celtic music, and makes the instrument an ideal choice for accompaniment.

DADGAD is a “semi-open” tuning, and critics often frame it as being “limited” – “You can only play in the key of D Major.” It is true that this tuning is most compelling when playing an accompaniment role in a tonic key, and many beginning players find themselves chained to a capo, a device that allows players to quickly barre across the fretboard of a guitar to raise its tuning chromatically. Guitarists and accompanists who take the time to explore this tuning with sincerity, however, will discover that, just like any other tuning, DADGAD can handle a variety of related keys, functions, or styles quite convincingly. Playing in the key of G Major, for instance, *without* a capo can render a classic “standard tuning” sound, easily suitable for the type of close, tight voicings commonly found in pop and country music. I have also found DADGAD to be an effective tuning for playing French “gypsy jazz” style accompaniments, with “closed position,” dense, muted chords that accentuate rhythm above harmony.

Many guitarists are aware of DADGAD for a reason completely separate from its prevalence in the rather closed community of Celtic music – guitarist Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin famously used the tuning on the recording of the band’s song “Kashmir.” The lower, “heavier” tuning has since become quite popular for electric guitar in the diaspora of metal music and its various subgenres, and some musicians in these spheres even jokingly refer to DADGAD as “second standard tuning.” Since then, some acoustic guitarists of note have taken the tuning as a standard of their own – most of fingerstyle virtuoso Andy McKee’s work is played in DADGAD, and Marcus Mumford of Mumford and Sons uses the tuning consistently throughout much of the band’s repertoire. Pop singer-songwriter Hans York plays exclusively in this tuning.

DADGAD also presents guitarists with a unique challenge. The relative niche popularity of this tuning is not long established – musicians have only been using it since the late 1970s. Because DADGAD is not a generally widespread tuning, there is not a plurality of method books, instruction manuals, or courses (online or in-person) that guitarists can seek out for expert advice and guidance. When I first began to explore this tuning, I never found any easy access to a common core trajectory of “learning to play DADGAD guitar.” In most cases, like my own, this means that the guitarist has to take a radical responsibility for learning on their own *how* to construct chords, and learning about *why* they might use the chord voicings and shapes they do. Learning standard tuning can be quite easy – “put your fingers here, here, and here, and that’s a G Major chord” – but it can allow musicians to play guitar for years without ever investigating *why* putting their fingers in certain places actually produces a chord. For me, playing in DADGAD with fluency demanded exploration, experimentation, and personal investment of time and intellectual effort from the very start of the learning process. Although this immediate difficulty can dissuade some at first, I think that learning to play in this tuning system is truly beneficial for any guitarist to try – even if the end of that process is a reinforced commitment to standard tuning. In my own case, the intellectual rigor demanded at the onset of the process of learning to use this tuning rewarded me by yielding a logical, intuitive system for chord construction that allows me to “see” music theory enacted on the fret board of my instrument in a way that standard tuning simply does not offer.

Tunings are tools. Musicians need to find the system that speaks to them and works for them, the tuning that will best facilitate expressing their creative product. In

my own music, and in the process of producing *Forward* specifically, I have found that DADGAD is the best tool for the incredibly important job of accompaniment.²⁷

When I first started playing guitar in DADGAD tuning, I approached the instrument from the perspective of a drum set player. I thought, and continue to think, of the guitar as a percussion instrument first – I often tell people half-jokingly that I play guitar as a sort of “frustrated drummer and bassist,” and think of myself as standing in for an entire rhythm section contained within this one particular instrument. My experience emphasizes this fact in that, in most of the Celtic ensemble settings in which I play, I am the only accompanying instrumentalist. There are no percussionists; there are no bassists, and so I have had to develop a style of playing guitar that fills all these orchestral duties. I could summarize my distilled method for accompaniment by noting two techniques: use of right-hand palm muting to emphasize the percussive quality of pick against strings, almost like the wires of a snare drum, and careful choice of passing chords in inversions to mimic the presence of a bass player. To this end, I think I have been quite successful. In fact, I increasingly see a future career for myself in this genre as an accompanist. I am doing interesting things with accompaniment – at least, I would like to think I am – and other musicians have noticed this. Since the release of *Forward*, I have joined a professional ensemble, and other musicians have offered me three high-level recording gigs. I expected that recording and releasing a debut solo album would be an impetus to a new period of prolific development in my progress as a musician, but I did not anticipate that the trajectory of this progress would

²⁷ I would be remiss not to mention that playing in DADGAD also gives me a kind of cultural capital within this community. By using this tuning with a clear familiarity to its particular nuances, I send the signal to other Celtic musicians that I have spent serious time delving into the particular idiosyncrasies of accompaniment in this tradition.

be increasingly toward presenting and promoting myself professionally as an accompanist.

ADAM HENDEY
presents
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a senior recital
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Miya Saito-Beckman
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David Brewer
THURSDAY MAY 25
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Recital poster from Senior Recital in support of the *Forward* thesis project
Adam Hendey, April 2017.

Track Notes: The Tales Behind the Tunes

Side A

1. The Victoria Fountain / The Mark of the Tristero / The Rolling Waves: I

named “The Victoria Fountain” for a monument to Queen Victoria, an old, weathered stone fountain surrounded by a traffic circle outside of Magdalene College at the University of Oxford. When I traveled to England for a study abroad program, we spent about two weeks in Oxford. I wrote this tune sitting next to the Victoria Fountain on our first night in town, when I could not sleep. “The Mark of the Tristero” is a nod to Thomas Pynchon’s 1965 novella, “The Crying of Lot 49,” which tells the story of Oedipa Maas, a woman in who inherits the estate of a deceased billionaire.²⁸ When she travels to execute his will, Oedipa is sent on a wild goose chase on the trail of a shadowy organization, allegedly hundreds of years old, called “the Tristero,” whose symbol, a muted post-horn, mysteriously pops up repeatedly around her. I read this book during my first year at the University of Oregon and the story always stuck with me. “The Rolling Waves” is one of my favorite traditional Irish tunes, and one of the first tunes I ever learned. I have always loved the lilt and flow of the melody, and always thought to myself, “If I ever record an album, I want this tune to be a part of it.” Here it is.

²⁸ Thomas Pynchon, “The Crying of Lot 49.” J. B. Lippincott and Co., Philadelphia: 1965.

2. L'As Du Falafel / Shakespeare and Company / John Doherty's: When my fellow students and I first arrived in Paris, people kept saying to us, "Oh, and there is this falafel place, you HAVE to go there! I don't remember its name, but you've gotta try it! You'll recognize it when you see the long lines..." After days of searching, I visited the Pablo Picasso Museum, walked about two blocks, and suddenly saw it: "L'as Du Falafel," or "The Ace of Falafel" in English, is the name of Europe's premier destination for Kosher food, located in the "Pletzl" Jewish quarter of Paris's Le Marais neighborhood. During the span of my month-long stay in Paris, my friends and I spent a lot of time getting to know the wait staff of this fine establishment, who often told us in perfect English of their dreams to visit New York someday and meet Lenny Kravitz, whose celebrity is honored in the restaurant with a life-sized cardboard cutout. "Shakespeare and Company" is the name of Paris's oldest and most famous English bookstore, across the canal from Notre Dame in the city's Latin Quarter. The shop celebrated its hundredth birthday while I was in Paris, and I spent a lot of time during my stay busking out in front of the shop next to magicians and caricature artists from all over Europe. "John Doherty's" is a great Irish tune with distinctive, uneven phrasing, named for John Doherty, the famous travelling fiddler from County Donegal. I learned this tune from the lovely playing of fiddler John Weed, a member of the California Celtic band Molly's Revenge, who also joins me on this track. John's playing really brings the attitude of this melody to life, and I had a lot of fun arranging variations on the chord progressions that can accompany this awesome tune.

3. The Ice Wharf / Robertito's Horchata / The Sun Goddess: I named “The Ice Wharf” in honor of a pub in London’s Camden Town, a famous neighborhood in the northern part of the city. Home to a distinctive flea market in an abandoned horse stable and a raging canal, pop music historians often point to Camden as the birthplace of the 1970s Brit-punk movement. Every day, I showed up at the Ice Wharf in the early afternoon to meet up with newly acquainted musician friends for a cider, and then we would all launch off to play at local traditional music sessions, parties, and gigs all night, arriving back around 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning – just in time for last call. In many ways, the Ice Wharf became my home in London. “Robertito’s Horchata” refers to my favorite order from Robertito’s, a 24-hour Mexican/fast-food chain native to my hometown, Fresno, California. Horchata is a delicious “agua fresca,” made of rice, cinnamon, and milk, and Robertito’s offers a particularly appealing example of the beverage. My best friend Josh Constable and I were notorious night owls throughout high school and often visited Robertito’s late at night for this sweet treat. “The Sun Goddess” is a nickname for an old friend of mine. Rebecca Lomnicky, an incredibly talented Scottish fiddler from Oregon and winner of the Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship and with whom I currently play alongside as a fellow member in The Fire Scottish Band, honored me by playing with me on this tune.

4. The Bridge over Boulder Creek: The story behind this tune is a little unusual. Melody often defines traditional music, and accompaniment is often little more than a side note. One night, after about nine hours of recording whistle tracks, I was strumming some chords on a guitar, and my producer, David Brewer, came into the

room from his control booth and said, “Is that a thing? You should write something to go with that!” So, I spent the evening coming up with a melody to fit this chord progression, and then we recorded the tune the next day. I spent exactly 28 days living in beautiful Boulder Creek, California, while making this album. Every morning, I drove across a scenic river to get to Redwood Island Studios, and I always assumed that this was the “Boulder Creek” for which the town, spread out along Highway 9, took its name. Wrong! In my last week of recording, I learned that this river is, in fact, the San Lorenzo. Apparently, there is no Boulder Creek in Boulder Creek. I had been trying to come up with a name for this tune, and thought that this fun little poke at my own ignorance would be a neat way of paying homage to this wonderful town. Most people know David Brewer as piper and tin whistle player, but David is also a fine bodhrán player and I was excited to feature some of his unique, drum kit-inspired style on this track. Rebecca Lomnicky (again) joined us.

5. Tune for Frannie / The Departure from Paris / The Happy Return: I

usually write tunes without names, and it can often take me weeks or even months to come up with a name that I think fits the tune well. “Tune for Frannie” is one of the only tunes I have composed that departs from this usual method – I decided that I wanted to write a tune for my best friend, Franziska Monahan (or, “Frannie,” as I have known her), so I sat down to compose and this tune is what came out. The tune also features a sample of a beautiful grandfather clock in Aptos, California, which ticks away each day in the parlor of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, a small, lovely church community that hosts a Celtic music concert series which I have been fortunate to be

featured in several times. “Tune for Frannie” is a simple melody, and the friend for whom it is named has always been a stabilizing presence in my life, much like this familiar clock has been for its parishioners. “The Departure from Paris” is the final tune I composed on my study abroad trip to Europe, and I wrote this tune sitting in a Parisian apartment just hours before flying home to America. I loved my time in Paris, but after a month in the city, and almost two months in Europe, I was ready to go home, and I think some of that excitement may have come across. “The Happy Return” is a funny tune to me. It began life as the very first tune I had ever written, about seven years prior to the recording of *Forward*, and it was absolutely awful. Because it was awful, I did not play it for years and years and forgot about the melody, until I happened across the old journal where I had written it down and rediscovered the tune while I was preparing to produce the album. It was still awful, so I edited the tune a bit, added some new parts, and was a little more satisfied with the result. The name of the tune can therefore be a reference to the story of my time in Europe that summer, signifying the gladness with which I came home, and can also be symbolic of a “happy return” to the tune itself, which was lost for years.

6. Tiger Spice Chai / Gregor MacGregor, Prince of Poyais / The Sly Dog:

“Tiger Spice Chai” is a tune in 7/8 that I composed in honor of my favorite drink at Teazer’s, a Fresno teahouse where I spent a lot of time during high school. 7/8 tunes are not exactly native to Celtic music, they are better known in the Bulgarian tradition of folk music. The singer, songwriter, and bouzouki player Andy Irvine popularized 7/8 and other “odd time” tunes in Celtic music in the Irish traditional music revival in the

1970s and 1980s, and his music has always been a source of inspiration to me. The danger of a 7/8 tune is that they can sometimes say nothing more than, “I am in a weird time signature!” and sacrifice melody for rhythmic diversity. This tune was my attempt to compose in an “odd meter” without throwing it in a listener’s face. “Gregor MacGregor, Prince of Poyais” is a jig that I wrote for Gregor MacGregor, a man remembered by history as one of the most famous confidence tricksters of the 19th Century.²⁹ MacGregor was a Scottish adventurer who traveled to London with a used military uniform bought in a charity shop and convinced the upper strata of fine society for fifteen years that he had been named “Cazique of Poyais,” an island nation he invented. MacGregor sold hundreds of savings bonds to English aristocrats, some of whom emigrated to his fictional nation. Those who arrived found nothing but jungle. “The Sly Dog” is another jig I wrote, and it had no name for months. Ultimately, I named the tune in honor of a phrase of David Brewer’s – much like Gatsby’s “old sport,” David frequently calls people “sly dog,” and it was a name I heard a lot as I recorded the album.

7. Kami: I was fascinated by the history of Japan’s feudal era, and spent countless middle school afternoons reading accounts of the “Age of the Warring States,” the *samurai* and *shogun*, the “Three Unifiers,” and the sociopolitical landscape of the period. In my readings, I started to encounter bits of Shinto and Buddhist philosophies and mythoses, and one facet of Shinto always stuck with me: the occurrence of *kami*. *Kami* are “diving beings” or “phenomena” in Shinto, spirits said to

²⁹ Charles Bennett, “General MacGregor: Hero or Rogue?” River City Press. Jacksonville: 2001.

personify or represent elements of landscapes, natural forces of features, or the souls of revered, dead persons.³⁰ *Kami* are found in nature and in places of great beauty – you can find them in a standing stone, a naturally occurring waterfall, a tree with a distinctive twist in its trunk, or in a striking doorway, or at the intersection of two country roads. People erect small, informal shrines to these spirits across the countryside of Japan, and passing pilgrims mark these places with slips of paper.³¹ A traveler might see a tree with a string tied around its trunk, adorning it with many of these slips of paper, each with a wish of goodwill to the spirit of that tree. “*Kami*” is a slow air, a melody with no metronomic rhythm, a tune that I hope would be inviting to one of these spirits. The tune has little melodic variations and some crooked, uneven phrasing that reminded me of the kinds of natural or geologic features that might attract *kami*. I have never been to Japan, but ever since I learned about this part of Shinto belief, I have always wanted to travel to one of these shrines and leave a piece of paper for a spirit who might live nearby. I am very fortunate to be joined on this track by the beautiful playing of Jesse Autumn, an amazingly talented harpist from Santa Cruz who is also a singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist.

Side B

8. The Ditcher / The Taco Trucks of Fresno / The Limestone Rock: I thought of tracks 1 through 6 as “Side A” of *Forward*, and “*Kami*” is a sort of intermission for

³⁰ James Boyd and Ron Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2005.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the album. This set thus marks the beginning of “Side B.” “The Ditcher” is a tune I wrote when I skipped a choir class one day at the Community Music School of Santa Cruz’s Teen Celtic Camp. John Weed, who teaches fiddle at the camp, loved this tune and named it “The Ditcher” – I am delighted to feature his playing on this track. “The Ditcher” is written in the style of a “highland,” a type of tune distinctive to County Donegal in the north of Ireland. Donegal’s music embodies a unique blending of the “sweeter” sounding music of the other Irish counties to its south with the rhythmically distinctive music of Scotland. The quintessential Scottish tune form is that of the strathspey, which features characteristic rhythmic “snaps.” A “highland” can be thought of as a kind of “Irish-ized” strathspey, where these snaps are softened and rounded to sound a bit more like the easy, gentle swing of Irish hornpipes. I have always been drawn to the music of Donegal, and I have been told many times that this formative influence shows clearly in my style. My style of rhythmic articulation on the whistle closely emulates the style of Donegal fiddlers, who embellish their tunes with their bows more than their fingers. My early listening in Celtic music led me quickly to the recorded works of Altan, a now world famous Donegal band, and Tommy Peoples, a legendary tune writer from the county, Paddy Glackin, and Liz Doherty, other respected Donegal fiddlers. I have always been attracted to John’s playing because he, too, is an enthusiast of this particular stylistic instantiation of the music of Ireland. He lived and gigged in Donegal for several years when he was younger, often citing the time as one of the most musically formative periods of his life. “The Taco Trucks of Fresno” is a reel I wrote in honor of one of my hometown’s most celebrated culinary traditions. When you go downtown, or journey to the city’s creative and artistic center, the Tower

District, you'll see pods of taco trucks, clustered together. The families who run these small businesses are institutions in the Fresno community, and many have been cooking out of these trucks across decades. The taco trucks of Fresno gave me a taste for *lengua*, and that's a gift that can never be taken for granted.³² "The Limestone Rock," is a classic, traditional Irish tune, and a favorite at sessions. Almost anywhere in the world, you can walk into a pub session, start this tune, and leave with a new friend you did not know before. John Weed joins me throughout this track, contributing his lovely, unique fiddling style to these tunes.

9. Lala the Queen / Calum Bruach / The Eel in the Sink / Jenny Tied the

Bonnet Tight: Though the elevator pitch of what I do musically is to say, "I play traditional Celtic music," most of the tunes on this album are my own original compositions, sometimes arranged in congress with a traditional tune or two. Yet I wanted this album to showcase my knowledge of thoroughly traditional repertoire as well, and this set of four Scottish tunes serves to this end. "Lala the Queen" is an old strathspey from the sixteenth century and is said to commemorate Mary Queen of Scots. The tune shows up in several old collections of traditional Scottish fiddle tunes, under such varying names as "Lala the Queen," "Lala, the Queen Has Come," "Sing Lala at the Queen's Arrival," and "Sing Lala, the Queen Comes Today." David and I gave up on hopes of finding this tune's "original name," so I chose the succinct title. "Calum Bruach" is a well-loved traditional strathspey, and you can often hear it played at sessions in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The tune has four parts, the second and fourth of

³² *Lengua* is a preparation of beef tongue, usually seasoned with onion and other spices, popular in Mexican cuisine.

which feature an amazingly difficult passage with notes ascending a scale in alternating octaves. “The Eel in the Sink” is a tune I have known for many years, but I only learned its name after recording it. Another traditional Scottish reel, this tune is a little lesser known – but it is still a great melody. It sets up the final tune in this set fantastically. “Jenny Tied the Bonnet Tight” is a beloved Scottish reel, and people play differently all over the world. There is widespread, contentious disagreement about whether this tune ought to be played in the key of A minor or A Mixolydian, so my solution was to play both versions, with the first section in the firmly minor key, and the second section introducing the major third. Rebecca Lomnicky again joins me on this track, and we often perform this set of tunes together as The Fire Scottish Band.

10. Sweet Babby Doge / Searching for Tony / Sir Tucker Beauregard of Elks Grove: “Sweet Babby Doge” is a tune that could be specifically called a “swung reel,” or more simply a “hornpipe.” It is one of the first tunes I wrote that received widely positive feedback from friends and mentors, and one of the first exercises in composition that convinced me I wanted to write tunes. My Teen Celtic Camp friends and I all love dogs and their associated internet memes, and, at Celtic Camp 2015, my friend Ryland Gordon said of a passing puppy, “look at that sweet baby doge!” I immortalized his phrase with this tune – you’re welcome, buddy. A lot of the stories of these tunes and the people in my life come from this camp, and “Searching for Tony” is another example of this fact. When my friends and I worked as counselors one summer, we had to arrive a day early for an orientation session. We arrived for the orientation, and were gathered in the main meeting hall of the campgrounds, when in through the

double doors of the hall burst a stranger, who interrupted our gathering to announce, “I am looking for Tony’s house?!” None of us knew what this guy was talking about, so I just said, “Oh yeah, sure, Tony! If you just keep driving down the highway, you’ll find Tony’s house on the left!” The man ran back out the door, and we never heard from him again. I hope he found what he was looking for. In Scotland, there was a tradition in the 18th and 19th centuries of naming tunes after nobles, and you can find lots of old tunes named “Miss So and So of Somewhere,” “Sir Such and Such of This Place,” or “Doctor Zip of Zap,” and so on. The title of the last tune in this set, “Sir Tucker Beauregard of Elksgrove,” pokes a bit of fun at this practice – it’s named after my friend’s dog. Sir Tucker Beauregard of Elksgrove, or “Beau” as most of his friends call him, is the best-behaved Golden Retriever I have ever encountered. I first met him accompanying his owner, Joe Dion, to a philosophy class on the writings of Descartes, Locke, and Rousseau, and over the next two years during Joe’s and my time together in the Philosophy Department, the three of us probably took six or seven courses together. Beau and his favorite tennis ball became an image indexed with philosophy for me in the way that Rodin’s statue of The Thinker must be for many people.

11. Youghal Quay / Mayor Harrison’s Fedora / On the Road: This is another set of traditional tunes, all three coming from the Irish tradition. “Youghal Quay,” pronounced like “Y’all Key,” is a wonderful sample of how the Gaelic language can often look different on paper from how it sounds aurally to speakers trained in English orthography. Irish musicians love to say that this tune is in the key of “G Major-ish,” because it features so many fun, chromatic accidental notes that color the melody in

subtle ways. I learned this tune from David Brewer, who learned it from John Weed, whose playing opens the track. I learned the second tune, “Mayor Harrison’s Fedora,” from a brilliant tenor banjo playing scholastic luthier from the San Francisco Bay area named Dave Cory, who also told me the story behind this tune’s unique name. Carter Harrison, Jr. was Mayor of Chicago from 1897 to 1905. During the mayoral race in 1906, Harrison uttered something that has since seeped into the American phrasebook, a promise that we all remember, but generally could not cite a source for. The incumbent and heir to a Chicago mayoral dynasty, Harrison was favored to win reelection, but a reporter asked what he would do if he lost. “If I lose, I’ll eat my hat!” the mayor declared. Harrison lost. “On the Road” is a bit of an obscure tune, but a favorite among some heavy-hitting traditional Irish musicians. I learned this tune from Kevin Crawford, a virtuoso flute and tin whistle player born in England to Irish parents from County Clare, a hotbed of “pure drop” traditional Irish music. There is a tradition in Clare fiddling of playing tunes with crazy, wild variations on the melody, and I thought it would be fun to arrange this tune with some of these kinds of thematic variations. I am joined throughout this track, once again, by John Weed.

12. A Dang Quesadilla: The greatest question and answer in the history of American comedic cinema? “Well, what’s there to eat?” “Knock it off, Napoleon – make yourself a dang quesadilla!” It is one of my closest secrets that my favorite movie is *Napoleon Dynamite*, and the bizarre mispronunciation of the word “quesadilla” that occurs in this scene is iconic of this movie masterpiece. This line is so funny because that’s just *not how you say that word*. The tin whistle is often conceived of as a limited

instrument – without the Boehm system keywork that allows concert flutes, clarinets, oboes, bassoons, and other orchestral wind instruments to play chromatically with ease, the idiomatically playable range of the tin whistle is restricted to two octaves of notes in a diatonic major scale. It is actually possible to play chromatically on a tin whistle through the difficult technique of “half-hole fingerings,” covering half of a tone hole to produce a chromatic pitch between the notes produced by covering tone holes completely. I wrote “A Dang Quesadilla” as a weird technical exercise to practice this technique and demonstrate that this kind of playing is, in fact, possible. When people listen to this tune, they might very easily think that that’s just *not how you play the tin whistle*. I originally recorded this tune intending to bury inside the last track of the album as a sort of “hidden tune,” but David and I liked it so much that we thought it deserved its own spot on the track list, where it could be more naturally discovered.

13. The House on 18th Avenue: I wrote “The House on 18th Avenue” in honor of the house I lived in during my sophomore and Junior years at the University of Oregon. 964 E 18th Avenue is a cozy little green house with a beautiful tree out in the front, right across the street from the University’s Frohnmyer Music Building. A lot of music was played in that house. The house on 18th Avenue saw the rise and fall of three different bands, and it was host to countless late-night jam sessions with friends and musicians. I wrote many of the tunes on this album in this house, and it felt right that this place that became such an important setting of my life should have a tune dedicated to it. “The House on 18th Avenue” is written in the style of a traditional Scottish “march air,” a tuneful, lyrical melody that takes the form of a march. This is one of my favorite

tunes, and Rebecca Lomnicky made me happy by joining me on this track to close out my debut album.



Inner album artwork from *Forward* physical copy packaging
Paul Schraub, September 2015.

Conclusion

When I first began the process of organizing, networking, composing, and arranging material for my first album, I set some specific goals for what I wanted this project to do for me. When I first organized my crowd funding campaign, I wanted to see if there were other people out in the world who believed I could make a valuable musical contribution and felt supportive enough to give me money for an album that did not exist yet. Once I entered the actual recording stage of making the album, I hoped that the process would show me whether this was a part of a musical career that I could enjoy or if it was something I had overly romanticized. After *Forward* was finished in production, I wanted the album to help break down doors for me, both professional and postgraduate.

I had more esoteric ambitions for the album as well. Would the immense project of recording and producing a debut solo album finally be the endeavor that would make me feel like I was doing the existentially “right thing?” Perhaps more reasonably, would it feel like something close to that, closer than anything else I had done in my life? Would the invention of this album reveal to me the viability of a professional career in music, would it show me promise in the possibility of pursuing this track further? In short, *Forward* did all these things, and more, for me.

I had spent *years* dreaming about recording an album, and one of the first and foremost obstacles to break past in order to pursue this project was a primary fear – did anybody else even want to hear what I had to say musically? By the summer of 2015, the rise and popularity of crowd funding presented to me a clear means of gauging real interest in this question. My Indiegogo campaign had 55 backers

contributing \$2,800, and I had about two dozen other patrons contributing to my album offline who helped me pass my budget goal of \$5,000.³³ It was not until about a week before the end of my campaign, when I crossed the threshold of certainty that I would be able to fund the recording, that it really hit me – I would be doing this. I would be recording and producing my own full-length album. I would be doing it directly because I had tangible support from a surprising number of people: from friends, and family, and strangers.

But would I even *like* recording an album? I hoped that I would love the finished product, of course, and I had a good feeling that I would find the recording process enjoyable, or at least tolerable, but I was cautious. Plenty of musicians had warned me about the grueling nature of recording in a studio, doing take after take of a challenging part in a track, spending hours or even days to get a musical moment *just right*. I am happy to say that the month of September 2015 showed me that I absolutely loved the lived experience of recording. My deep satisfaction with this experience may have been amplified by the circumstances in which it took place – the Santa Cruz mountains are a beautiful setting, and I could spend every day in this incredible locale. I loved the practical component of the recording process, too. Recording *Forward* showed me that spending anywhere from six to twelve (or even sixteen) hours in a studio laying down tracks for a project is a task that I find truly gratifying. Whereas some musicians seem to think of the studio as a kind of Sisyphusian hill, I see it as a space of a kind of geological, divine creation – change occurring slowly, but surely, over time. You can

³³ Celtic music is a bit of a niche genre, and its audience on the West coast includes a number of listeners and patrons who prefer to do fiscal business offline and retain a certain level of privacy. Several sizable venture contributions were made at concerts and other “in-person” fundraising events.

see it and hear it happening right in front of you, all within your control! In the end, you have made art. What is not to like about that? I found myself thinking often on Plato's depiction of Socrates, the wily Athenian philosopher who spent his days locked in dialogue with anyone who could keep up.³⁴ Throughout the Platonic dialogues (*Republic* and *Laws* in particular), Socrates grapples with the ideas of *telos* and *techne*.³⁵ Summed up simply, *telos* encompasses the concept of an end, or a purpose. *Techne*, meanwhile, is a kind of soft contrast to *telos*, and concerns the method of producing something or the process of accomplishing an objective. Musicians generally love the teleological product of a recording process, the finished album itself, but feelings seem to be more often mixed on the technical ontology of these projects. Creating *Forward* taught me that I really enjoy the *techne* of the recording process, not just its *telos*. There is something I find deeply comfortable about inhabiting the recording space – both physically and mentally – and the simple work of recording that can be some times daunting and monolithic, and at others instantaneous in its gratifications. That I am attracted to recording work perhaps speaks to a potentially broader capacity of mine to thrive in the indeterminacy often observed of the creative professional world. From what I have been able to glean from mentors, muses, and

³⁴ Plato's Socrates is a character I, like many others, find extremely compelling. Socrates often describes himself in the Platonic dialogues as being "trapped in the *logos*," unable to tear himself from the grip of a philosophically engaging conversation. I find this sentiment so relatable – and I think many other creatives do, too. At this point, I live with the reality that I am just always thinking about music on the side of whatever else it is that I am doing in the moment. If I am in a class, I am engaging with that course, but I might also be thinking about how I might reharmonize the melody of a traditional Irish tune. My latest mental quandary has been the question of how one might incorporate the distinctive Scottish "snap" (a rhythmic ornament) into an odd-metered tune, like something in 7/8. I do not have a lot of time to devote exclusively to questions like these, but it does not matter because they nag at me whether I like it or not.

³⁵ Plato, *Republic* and *Laws* from *Complete Works*, John M. Cooper (ed.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997.

other professionals or sources of inspiration, successful creative careers often rely more on dedication to and love for the *techne* of a craft beyond the inspiration of its *telos*. I love what professionals so often call “the grind.” I embrace it.

When I released *Forward* in June 2016, I did so with the hope that it would open new opportunities to pursue in my nascent career. It is in this aspect that I think *Forward* has done the most work for me. Releasing this album gave me an important credential to work as a full faculty member at seven different music camps, arranged by three different organizations. Having this album as the first serious entry on my discography opened doors to future recording projects for me, too. Since releasing *Forward*, I have been invited to work on three separate recording projects, one of which has already gone on to receive widespread critical acclaim.³⁶ Their positive experience of working with me on *Forward* led David Brewer and Rebecca Lomnicky to invite me to become the third full-time member of their professional touring and recording group, The Fire Scottish Band. The Fire performs at large scale world music festivals, at Scottish Highland Games festivals, in performing arts centers, as featured guests of university and community center acoustic music series, and at intimate house concerts as well. Being a member of The Fire has been one of the most challenging musical experiences of my life, and I grow as a musician with each performance with this amazing ensemble. I am also honored to have been accepted to a Master’s in Traditional Music program at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, a competitive degree that only accepts two applicants per year. In subsequent conversations with Dr. Joshua Dickson,

³⁶ I was honored to be a part of the West Kerry singer and Tradconnect Featured Artist Éilís Kennedy’s newest album, “Westward,” playing bouzouki on two tracks. Éilís became aware of my playing after listening to *Forward* at a music camp where we worked together as fellow faculty instructors.

the director of the program, my album was cited as a strong piece of evidence in favor of my acceptance. It seems that a good album can often stand and be received as a kind of business card, a watermark of serious dedication to craft for the person releasing it. People see that I have recorded and produced a full album, and they see that I am serious about what I am doing.³⁷ Making an album has had real, practical ramifications for me – I now have a product I can sell at performances, of course. I also treat the album as a kind of “insider’s business card,” a preview of, musically, who I am and what I do that I can point to when working with potential collaborators or clients. By creating *Forward*, I have created a formal documentation of what my skills and tastes looked like in Summer 2015. Solo albums show my audiences and collaborators what I am capable of doing, but also what I *like* to do. One of the ramifications of releasing a debut record is that I have created a starting point to a biographical, musical timeline, a plot as yet unpopulated with other points. Now that this first record of my music is out in the world, I think constantly about what my next solo project might look like, or when I might reenter the creative space of arranging a new collection of my music.

I spent most of high school and my first two years of college trying to figure out what I wanted to do with myself. I was always playing music, practicing for hours a day, playing gigs, and organizing band projects, and I always assumed that, at some

³⁷ By no means am I trying to say that musicians cannot be taken seriously if they have not recorded themselves professionally – *especially* in Celtic music. Many of the great stalwarts of these traditions were not recorded, or did not ever lead productions of their own solo work. I think immediately of my friend George Grasso, a truly incredible multi-instrumentalist from California who has lived in Galway for the past seven or eight years. George is easily one of the most sensitive and skilled traditional Irish music players I’ve ever met. He’s performed with all the pantheon of great Irish musicians in our time, but he has never recorded a solo album of his own music. George is a rare breed – he makes his living entirely from performing traditional Irish music, and he does not even have an album of his own. Despite that, it would be idiotic for me to even suggest that he is not a serious musician. And there are plenty of other, similar examples. Nevertheless, I still affirm that having an album is an instant marker of serious intent for a professional musician, or aspiring professional.

point, a non-musical endeavor would just capture my attention in a way that would make it apparent to me that this new, more practical fascination would be “what I was supposed to do.” I declared a Music major when I entered my freshman year at the University of Oregon, but left the School after two terms because I felt like I was not getting quite what I needed. A year and a half in other departments did not give me a sense that I was making the right decision, either. I made my way through a Philosophy major thinking that at some point a switch would flip in my brain and I would actually *want* to go to law school, instead of just dispassionately planning to do so – that point in time just never arrived. By the end of my sophomore year, halfway through my undergraduate program, I felt like I needed to do something big to make sure I was on the right course. The project of recording and releasing *Forward* was, for me, a huge leap of faith. It is a leap that I am glad I made, and every day that I spent working on this project was a day where I felt more and more like I was doing the right thing with my life. It was this experience of recording and producing my first album that helped me to see what I needed to do: commit to being my truest self, the musician.

Recording *Forward* finally made me feel like I was wearing the right hat. Did it show me that I could viably pursue a career in music? I think so. It has only been just under a year. I am not going directly into the professional market next year, so I cannot yet say anything firmly. But I can cite some numbers. When the mastering process for *Forward* was finished, I ordered a production run of 1000 physical copies of the album. I hoped to sell 200 over the course of the next year. Since I released *Forward*, I have sold 287 copies of the album in person at shows and other events, and I have made 36 digital sales as well. Qualitatively, I have received comments from listeners as far away

as Siberia (Novosibirsk, to be exact), but I have also heard encouraging, positive feedback from listeners across the United States, Ireland, and Scotland. My experience of the aftermath of releasing this album has been that the project opened a lot of opportunities for me – it feels like the first step of what could certainly be a long, satisfying chain of professional prospects. I do not know exactly what the future holds for me. After I finish my Master’s program next year, I plan to return to the United States and focus on performing and recording more, both with The Fire and with any other professional collaborators that might incidentally arise from the woodwork. I could easily see pursuing an academically-based composite career at some point, and going back to school once more to complete a doctoral program, if I would be so lucky as to be accepted somewhere.

Last year I released my first album, and it seems to have been a success. The album has met with positive reception, I have already seen a respectable profit in sales at performances and elsewhere, and the project clearly opened professional doors for me, most explicitly and some perhaps implicitly. I spent the first two months of my Winter Term flying in and out of Eugene on weekends to perform with my new band at shows in California, Washington, and Utah, rushing back on red-eye flights to be available for my classes during the school week. Now, sitting on the edge of graduation and an exit from the academic world that has arguably “barred” me from pursuing a professional performing and recording career at a higher level, I have made the decision to remove myself from the professional market for yet another year. Why am I going to school for a Master’s degree? And why am I removing myself to a completely different continent to do so? These are fair questions, and my decision to pursue a higher

education next year may seem at odds with the position I have laid out thus far with respect to my own professional aspirations.

While it is true that pursuing a Master's degree in Traditional Music at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland will "keep me out of the game" for another academic cycle, I feel that I will be able to make radical progress as a musician, technician, teacher, and performer at this premiere institution. I see this coming year as a serious investment in my overall commitment to a professional career, rather than a sort paradoxical back step from it. I will be studying guitar at the Conservatoire at an intensively high level with contemporary tradition-bearers playing and teaching at the highest levels of our craft. I hope that my time in Glasgow next year will mark a period of dramatic musical growth, after which time I can return an immensely better-skilled player, but also a musician marked by the distinctive prestige associated with this institution, better equipped to pursue new and more distinguished opportunities as well. It is true that I will be out of America for another year, away from the professional arena. However, it is also true that I am serious in my commitment to a lifetime pursuit of music as a professional trade – next year will just be a drop in the bucket, and I think it will be a year very well spent.

One-word synopses are often times so trite, but if I had to offer one to encapsulate my own life, I would offer one simple adjective: "lucky." I have been so incredibly blessed in my life. I am a child of remarkable privilege – socioeconomically, demographically, with respect to my gender and sexual identity, with respect to my religious heritage. I am educated. And I have an incredible family – a wise, compassionate older brother who has been one of the great mentors of my life, and one

of my truest friends, a mother who loves me absolutely and taught me to see the light in others always, and a father who has always believed in me, even when I myself did not. Without these three people, I could never have achieved even the small feats that I can claim as my own. When I was in Paris during my study abroad trip, I rediscovered an old favorite book at Shakespeare and Company, the famous English bookstore on the Left Bank of the Seine in the city's Latin Quarter. That book was Marcus Aurelius' posthumously published *Meditations*, the intimate journal of a Roman emperor, a true philosopher king. Aurelius' book is astounding in its scope, but my favorite section has always been the text's first chapter. "Book One" is a catalogue from the emperor of all the most important gifts he received throughout his life. He gives a list and cites traits inherited, "From my grandfather Verus... From what I remember of my natural father... From my mother... From my tutors... From Diognetus, Rusticus, Apollonius, Alexander the grammarian... From the gods..."³⁸ It's an inspiring display of self-awareness. "To grasp the idea of wanting correction for my character... a kindly disposition... not to leap on the mistakes of others... self-mastery... love of family."³⁹ Aurelius asserts that all these best parts of himself are gifts from the cast of characters who populated the play of his life. I actually modeled the form of the "Acknowledgements" in the liner notes of my own album after this first chapter of Aurelius' famous text. I see my own good fortune in life as a real gift to be cherished. For so many years, I thought of my passion for music as a distraction from some practical passion as yet undiscovered, or as an obstacle to be overcome in order to "be a grown-up," but going through the process of recording *Forward* showed me that my

³⁸ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Martin Hammond (trans.). London: Penguin Classics, 2006.

³⁹ Ibid.

music was a part of that gift too. I could not ignore it anymore. *Forward* was the mirror I needed to help me see myself as an unapologetic musician.

I truly see the experience of recording, producing, completing, and releasing *Forward*, my debut solo album, as one of the landmark, defining milestone moments of my life so far. There is still so much ahead of me that is wildly uncertain. But what this album taught me is that, for the first time, I have a tangible feeling that there is something I must do, that I have to try to do. Following a dream is hard. Following a dream is scary. To follow a dream, you have to find the strength to face fears and take first steps. Recording and producing my first full-length album helped me find that strength – it helped me take that first step. And now that I am moving forward, I am not looking back.

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