

EVOKING SOUND THROUGH SIGHT: EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN
VISUAL MEDIA AND MUSIC

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

EVOKING SOUND THROUGH SIGHT: EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN VISUAL MEDIA AND MUSIC

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How do visuals effect what we hear? How does music paint the mood and color a scene in a film? How does one create music that matches a visual component, and can music truly ever have a narrative? The goal of this project was to research and explore the relationship between visual media and music, how one influences the other in both the creative process, and the final product/performance – how the combination of the two affects the perspective of the audience, by creating a film.

A distinction must be made here – instead of a film pre-existing and a track of music being made to merely accompany it – i.e., “scoring”, the goal here is to shape the media to the music; and conversely, shape the music to the media, affecting each other in a push and pull relationship where one is not subservient to the other.

Various parameters and processes are discussed, such as the concept behind the project, the initial stages, challenges, technical aspects, and influences. Then, the approximately eleven-minute film is broken down into three sections where both musical and visual aspects are analyzed and discussed in detail. Finally, a section is dedicated to reflection.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Concept	1
Initial Stages	5
Challenges	6
Technical Aspects:	8
Musical and Film Influences:	9
Construction of Film:	12
First Section:	13
Second Section:	15
Third Section:	18
Introspective and Conclusion:	21
Bibliography:	24
Vita:	25

Concept

The underlying concept behind this project was to explore the relationship between music and visual media. It is not primarily film; meaning, a film with music used as merely a tool to enhance story and dialogue. Instead, music and the visual media are meant to be of equal importance. Although footage was edited first before the accompanying music was composed, the reverse process also occurred – certain scenes were re-edited in order to match the music that was already created. Furthermore, the other aspect to this project was to determine if music could “color” a scene or a moment, associating a feeling or mood or tone or timbre that the listener may not otherwise have associated with the visual presented.

Part of my compositional process includes poses questions that do not necessarily have answers – the piece itself is my response to such ambiguous questions. For this project, my thought process was as follows: Is a piece of music meant to express emotion, a narrative? Is it *meant* to have a narrative – can anything truly be stated or conveyed through music?¹ More importantly, does a piece of music need to have a narrative or an emotion or an image associated with it, either in program notes or the compositional process, in order to be effective? If the composer does not adequately express what they have set out to express, does that mean the work they have made is a failure? Much research has been already done on this topic – Klein states in his article, “*Chopin’s Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative*”:

On the poietic level, a composer may wish to write music that narrates, focusing on musical attributes that signal narration. On the immanent level, the music may have such attributes, regardless of whether the composer intends to write narrative music. On the esthetic level, a listener may want to hear music as a narration, regardless of the composer’s intent.²

¹ This excludes music with text or lyrics such as songs, and musical numbers in theater and opera, which clearly are meant to advance plot or otherwise tell a story through music.

² Michael Klein, “Chopin’s Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative,” *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring 2004): 24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/mts.2004.26.1.23>

Thus, it appears in Klein's view that the aspect of narration cannot be avoided, as long as music can be perceived by an audience outside of a composer's control.

I have found, in my personal experience, that composing with the intent to express a specific emotion to be complicated. Emotions and feelings are abstract nature, complex, and rarely one-dimensional. The challenge then becomes how to translate such a feeling into musical elements such as pitch, rhythm, timbre, and articulation. The inherent nature of translating the abstract into another abstract form, music, presents a challenge: Why do we associate certain musical characteristics with certain emotions and phenomena? For example, what if I wanted to use pizzicato to symbolize rain, but, I made the pizzicato "uniform" – homorhythmic, using simple rhythms, to lower the difficulty of the piece and make it easier for performers to play accurately and together. Rain, however, is a "pitter-patter" motion - it is constant, but chaotic. Can I no longer say the pizzicato is "rain", even when rain is what inspired those measures in the first place? The vision one starts with may not align with the finished project. Have I failed as a composer if I cannot show what I wanted to tell? This question becomes more complicated when viewed from a programmatic view of music that does contain extra-musical material that influences and is essential to the final synthesis of the project, such as, in this case, film. How does one accurately portray events on screen through music? Klein also addresses this conflict in the same article, stating that music lies somewhere between "showing" and "telling".³

The writing process I use most often to compose is highly intuitive. The closest way to describe this process is to describe it as improvisation, or "gut-feeling". A composition will be based on written or aural sketches of melodic, timbral, textural, or harmonic ideas.

³Ibid.

“Improvisation” is a term most often associated with composing or playing directly on an instrument, such as a keyboard. In some cases, I do compose that way, with a mood in mind and just play until something sounds “right”. However, sometimes, I may not start with the aural component, but rather the audiation of pitches⁴ and will merely write down an idea first before moving towards a sonic representation.⁵ For this kind of process, it makes less sense to start with a specific idea in mind, such as an image – because of the high probability it might morph into something else by the end. As I write more and more music, I tend to find the appeal of “absolute music”, as opposed to “programmatic music” – I might have swatches of ideas or images, even when listening to the final product, but the pressure to accurately represent, create, express, or say something profound is a challenge I find I cannot meet.

These questions and thought processes become even more challenging when presented in combination with visual media – because there is an implicit assumption that you must represent the work in some way. Both elements – visual and aural components – must work together, after all. How does one accomplish that?

Keeping these thoughts in mind, the loose, narrative structure of the film is as follows: a person stands in the woods. We then move to images of other landscapes – sand, water, desert. We are out of the woods. But then we see flashes of that person – and another – standing in the woods once more.

The structure of this poses certain questions: Are these images the thoughts of the person in the woods? Is this person thinking of other places while still being in the woods? From the audience perspective, does the audience, watching what is unfolding, ever leave the

⁴ By “audiation”, I mean a melody one “hears” in one’s head.

⁵ Not counting humming or singing.

person in the woods? Is there even a person standing there, or even two? Where is this person, really? The audience is meant to pose many paradoxical ideas/questions.

As stated previously, my personal compositional process often involves asking complex philosophical questions to which answers may or may not exist. The point is not to answer these questions definitively, as in an article or research paper. Rather, the point *is* to ask questions, and my internal thought process as I wrestle with these questions informs the nature of a given piece. Thus, it is a reasonable request for the audience to be challenged to ask of themselves the nature of which they are hearing and seeing.

Initial Stages

The first task undertaken in this project was capturing film. In the initial stages of this project, there was no sense of direction or narrative. I had a vague concept of what I wanted – visuals of nature and an overall creepy and introspective mood. Although I wanted a focus on landscape instead of, for example, actors acting out specific scenes, this is not to say a nature documentary was the intended final outcome. I needed strong, interesting visuals that I could easily capture on my own, and thus an emphasis on visuals of nature seemed a reasonable choice.

Music deals with contrasts to build tension – consonance and dissonance, loud and soft, fast and slow. The visuals used needed to reflect that contrast as well. The difference between a forest and grass versus desert and sand seemed to fit that contrast. The other obvious answer to this question is the fact that these are the two places I had access to, New Mexico and North Carolina. I also have more familiarity with locations in New Mexico due to living there for roughly 17 years.

There were four primary film locations: White Sands National Park, a hiking trail in Cloudcroft, a neighborhood and surrounding desert at night, and Bosque de Apache Wildlife Refuge. The third item on this list, a neighborhood at night, did not make it into the final cut, as these visuals did not fit into the final product. Moreover, the footage was incredibly grainy due to not having access to the appropriate lens, although it will become apparent that “grainy” and “professional quality” were not major concerns during this project.

Challenges

As with working with any software, there were many technical challenges, such as crashing, freezing, RAM and insufficient space for memory.

Other challenges included the initial phases of the project, such as deciding how exactly to compose to video. At first, the video was rendered out separately, and then played in another tab, while I improvised a melodic line in a digital audio workstation, known as a DAW. This, eventually, did not work out, as then the timings of musical attacks and cues were not accurate. Everything became “approximate”. I then decided to see if there were features that would let me work with the video directly in the DAW. While this created ease of access, this in turn, presented new difficulties, such as the inability to export both the video and audio directly from the DAW. Eventually, I decided to split the video into three different sections, to be connected later in the video editor, fading each section out into the next, instead of one continuous track. Although one reason for this approach was the technical difficulties, I believe the sectional approach fits in with the overall concept of the project. The project had to be at least a 10-minute piece, which is a long span of time, with various “scenes” – why would the sound world not “change” and evolve over the course of the video?

All applications used in this project, such as the video editing software, require a steep learning curve in order to gain mastery, a learning curve that could not possibly be surmounted in the short period of time given to assemble this project. All audio production was on a trial-by-error basis.

Another aspect that was challenging was working without using notation. Everything written was written directly into the DAW using a midi controller. This is a challenge

because there was no pre-planning what I was to play, aside for some general guidelines. As mentioned before, my normal compositional process is highly notated. At some point, whether on a scrap piece of paper or in a notation software, notation is used. It is normally very integral to my process, in order to translate the sounds, I hear in my head into something more tangible. Even when I do use aural sketches, it is a matter of translating those sounds into something “concrete” – i.e., notation. Instead, this time, it is pure sound. Because there are so many layers of noise, it can be hard at certain points to pick out underlying harmonic motions, or to pinpoint the thought process behind my split-second decisions.

Technical Aspects:

Most footage was taken using a Canon PowerShot G15. The lens has a half-inch scratch on the left side – this can be seen in the footage if one knows where to look. Other footage was taken using the camera of a smartphone. Only a select number of scenes were taken with a professional camera and lens. Most of the footage was taken by the author of this paper – the only scenes not taken are the ones where the author is featured. These were taken by Haley Turner.

The digital audio workstation used is Cakewalk by Bandlab, which is a free application. Virtual instruments used in the audio are Cobalt, a free synthesizer, and various free virtual instruments through LABS. LABS is a project by Spitfire that offers free experimental virtual instruments for musicians and composers to use. A midi keyboard was used for input.

Adobe Premiere Pro was used for video editing. A monopod was used at first before being discarded.

Musical and Film Influences:

Before even thinking about anything so concrete as a narrative or an idea, I started to think about what the end product of the film should be like – what is the general sound world? What sort of visuals should be included? How should these visuals be edited?

The easiest way to tackle this aspect was to think about influences, in order to get a general sense of my end goal. I try to be very careful in this particular aspect as well – I never of course, want to “steal” or borrow without permission or credit. I want to be “inspired” rather than be “a carbon copy”. In art, this becomes a prevalent matter as copyright issues and lawsuits are common occurrences; even aside from legal issues, it can be distressing for an artist to hear, “Your work reminds me of X”. It is a strange paradox – artists want to be thought of as original, as “originality” is so prized in our field, and yet, at the same time, so much of art and music is derivative – influenced and inspired by those that came before us (techniques that have historical context). We also learn by studying the scores of other composers, to see how they tackled challenges or problems, or how they invented new techniques, so that we might learn from them. Artists are also inspired by each other, and it is often hard to distance oneself from any outside influence entirely, unless one becomes an experimental or avant garde composer. Even then, there is a rich history in both of those fields.

All that being said, there were a number of musical and film influences inspired this project, intentionally or unintentionally, in the initial stages of planning.

One would be the ambient composer, Harold Budd. He was most well-known for his albums which are marketed under “ambient”.

Harold Budd wrote an album titled *Jane 1-11*, which was a collaborative effort with visual artist Jane Maru. Each track has a corresponding visual with it. However, although these are videos, the footage is static (or rather, very slow in movement – if you scrub through the video for *Jane 3*⁶, one can see that, in fact, the clouds are moving across the sky, but at such a slow rate as to be imperceptible. Only the water moves can be seen to be constantly moving. Moreover, most of the tracks are approximately only 4-5 minutes or so. While my idea might have been partially inspired by *Jane 3*, I realized dynamic movement would suit my project better than a single scene or image. This is partly why the monopod was discarded in the early stages, to achieve a “shaky camera” aesthetic. The movement needed to be visceral.

The sound worlds that Budd created are very similar – slow moving, melodic piano lines, and heavy use of synth pads to create a wash of sound. In tracks worked on with Robin Guthrie, distorted guitar is used in combination with piano, to create alternating melodic lines. Reverb and sustain are used heavily. Movement is created with melodic lines, not rapidly moving harmonic rhythm. These techniques in combination create an almost meditative experience, pulling one into this sound world completely. Even shorter tracks seem to create a suspended state for just two minutes. This sound world is what inspired “scene 3” in this project. “Scene 3” is taken from the backseat of a moving car. The foreground, shrubs, dirt, road signs and railroad tracks are a blur, while the mountains and clouds in the background move in comparison, very slowly. This visual, combined with the wandering melodic line, created a meditative trance.

⁶ Harold Budd and Jane Maru, “Harold Budd - Jane 3,” Darla Records, October 6, 2013, YouTube video, 5:08, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww_FWnchDnI

Other visuals that were captured and edited are strange, perhaps even slightly bizarre, or intended to be, inspired by the visual world of filmmaker David Lynch, who excels at creating a world and an experience that perhaps cannot be fully explained by the rules of reality, instead, having a dream-logic like quality, with a focus on images and dialogue rather than pure narrative, in my opinion. Specifically, episode 3 of the TV show *Twin Peaks*⁷ demonstrates this dream-like quality that I had hoped to emulate.

This last visual inspiration for this project was the dream-like sequences and lush use of nature in Andrei Tarkovsky's films *Mirror* and *Solaris*. There is also a scene in *Mirror*⁸ where a character's face is obscured by hair, dripping wet with water, giving the figure a ghost like presence.

⁷ *Twin Peaks*, season 1, episode 3, "Zen, or the Skill to Catch a Killer," directed by David Lynch, written by Mark Frost and David Lynch, aired April 19, 1990, on ABC.

⁸ *Mirror*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, (1975; New York City, NY: Criterion Collection, 2021), streaming.

Construction of Film:

The video has in effect, three main sections, bookended by two shots of a figure standing in a wooded area. The first section is scenes consisting of sand. This transitions into the second section, which is composed of fast cuts of various images, such as birds, an eye, a lamppost, a manmade lake at sunset, and several blurry shots of the moon. The third section is the view of sky, clouds, mountains, and vast plains of desert from the viewpoint of a moving car. This section also contains some intercut images, including those used before and some of figures standing in a wooded area. Some of these are meant to be so fast as to be “subliminal” (though in reality, not that fast; this is just the idea behind it) and some cuts linger on these passing images. The entire film is bookended by two hosts of a figure standing in a wooded area. The figure’s face is obscured at all times. Each section in effect has its own track, the one exception be the second section, which has in effect, two tracks.

First Section:

The first section was the last part to be written in the music making process. Perhaps this is because it is hard to start writing a piece linearly, from beginning to end. It can be easier to start with the end product and work backwards, allowing one to gain a better idea of what the project as a whole should be. By leaving the beginning for last, it is also easier to implement techniques such as foreshadowing, allowing material presented at the beginning of the piece to be connected to material presented at the end. Furthermore, a more concrete imagining of the sonic world to be expanded upon over the course of eleven minutes was able to be established this way. For example, I noticed that the third section centers around the pitch A⁹. Keeping that in mind, A and E were used in octaves as a drone over the opening sequence, which can be heard at 0:21. The instruments/timbre were also matched with those of the third section - the wave-like synths present at 0:29-0:40 - in order to provide coherence between sections.

The opening 15 seconds consists of bird calls recorded at a wildlife preserve. After removing the sound of wind and other background noise, the trilling bird sounds are initially less recognizable as such, although the calls of geese are clearly heard as such. The almost indistinguishable sounds combined with the image of a forest and quick cut into nothingness match the mood and tone of glimpsing something unknown. The other reason behind featuring only “sounds” and not pitches at first is to establish that the first actual image, a person covering their face at 0:08, is significant to the narrative of the film. Similar visuals of a figure standing and covering their face come back several times throughout the course of the film. By having this image be the first to appear, along with very distinct sounds

⁹ I hesitate to use terminology such as a definitive key area, such as in this case, A minor.

accompanying it sets it apart. The film starts and ends with the figure in the woods – the following scenes are meant to be all in their head, and so, it makes sense that the music the audience is hearing might be a figment of the figure’s imagination too.

The trickiest part of this section was the transition between the first and second sections. This is because the second section is immediately fast, loud, and intense with barely any buildup. It is a very sudden transition. This lack of buildup needed to make sense in the context of the film.

To make the transition smoother, the arpeggiating line was taken from the second section and slowed down to approximately half-speed. The “data” was taken from the second section and given to a synth with a “softer” quality and a lowered dynamic, before being placed within the first section. This soft arpeggiation then fades into the faster, louder version of that same arpeggiation. This way, the softer arpeggiation is still in character within the first section, while also functioning as a way for the first section to transition into the second section.

In terms of harmony, the second section had less planning involved than the first section. The one rule was to not use any accidentals, meaning any sharps or flats. As in the third section, the primary tonal centers are A, E, and C. One of the synths, the “wave-like” one, sounded up a third – meaning, the pitch pressed did not match the sounding pitch, making it difficult to improvise – for example, an “F sharp” can be heard at 0:32, meaning that “key” cannot be that of a minor, unless explained as a raised 6th scale degree.

Second Section:

It took more than one attempt to create audio that matched the footage in this section. In the first attempt, the intensity was matched, but not the “rhythm” and pace of the fast cuts. The audio was a wash of heavy, gritty sound, with no pulse or meter, aided by the use of heavy reverb and synth pads. The unmatched tone is most likely because this section was composed based solely on the “mood” of the section alone, and not the video itself – meaning, no time markings or cues were used at first. Not wanting to scrap what had already been created, another track that would be placed on top of it was created. By cutting up both audio tracks from 1:13-2:30 and alternating between them, the desired “rhythm” is created, each “beat” matching the rhythm of the cuts.

For this second layer, an “opposite” approach was used. This layer needed to be “angular” compared to the one underneath it. However, this initial pass did not work. Again, the initial intention betrayed the actual product. I had a mass of sound, more intense than the last. However, in retrospect, this might have worked out for the best. I was able to cut up this track without the worry of interrupting a melody or a progression, and thus, losing all coherency.

Composing this second layer ended up being the most freeing and enjoyable aspect of this piece. The focus was placed mainly on timbre. The settings of the virtual instruments were adjusted and experimented with, with timbre in mind. In an attempt to create a cacophony, as soon as I recorded one instrument, I muted the track and began working on the next, trying to forget what I had just played. This way, the improvisation would not be based on or matched with one instrument or tone with another – each one would have its own identity. Only on the last track a way to provide cohesion was made, with a drone of drone

with the most prominent pitch underneath (B and G sharp) sounding, just to tie everything together. I also tried to improvise on the “black keys” on one track, just so that the tonal pallet would be different from the opposite track, in an attempt to create stark contrast. For example, both G and G sharp are used, creating a dissonance of a 2nd. Some percussion was initially inserted, but not wanting to make a rhythmic ostinato, it is instead a faint heartbeat, heard occasionally in the background. Specifically, this can be heard at time mark 3:25, matching the sound of the drum with the opening of an eyelid. This is an instance of matching the music with the film, instead of film with music.

As stated before, the main focus on this section was timbre. Since most of the instruments sustain, and because an “unplanned” cacophony was created, less attention was given to planning out harmony, other than trying to stay away from pitches I had used before. One of the tracks, I played an E minor 7 and a C major 7, trying to bring out the B natural and C natural. On another, I tried to bring out an F sharp. The virtual instruments that use cello tremolo, cello glissando, and trumpet tremolo help to create a sense of movement within the mass of sound.

What is the reason behind the fast cuts in the second section seen at 1:13-2:30? The intention was to create a section that contrasted sharply with the third section (the meditative mountains) and the first section (slow moving sand). This is best executed with angular, sharp, quick cuts. The other reason behind the inclusion of the quick cut section was to mimic fast memory montages in seen numerous popular films, where the protagonist’s life is flashing by. It certainly helps create a certain mood. The eye does not have a chance to settle too long on just one image before the next one starts, leaving impressions rather than information – the brain trying to piece together the story the images are trying to tell.

Although it did not match the fast pace of the section, the overuse of synths created a heavy sound, which, in turn, created a heavy intensity. The slip from D to E¹⁰, the end result of which can be heard at time mark 3:27, was an accident. However, the mistake threw off the flow, creating a dissonance that added to eerie mood, and so it was left in and not re-recorded. The volume of the instruments was raised in waves to increase intensity even more. A constant, repeating E, heard first at 3:33, was also added to create a sense of anxiety as the wash of synths fade out – it is a movement, a constant pulse that wavers in tempo, suspended in a wash of sound. Its presence is also overbearing, constant, unchanging – the listener should ask themselves, will it last forever? The E however, fades with the last bit of sand, which fades into the next section.

¹⁰ Upon listening to the piece again, I believe most of the “mistake”, which was prominent in an early draft, ended being covered up after the second layer track was inserted. Nevertheless, this is a moment that in the composing process I deemed important and thus it is included in this paper.

Third Section:

The prevailing mood and tone of this section is “calm and meditative”. The audience should be lured into a lull. The sound is sparse – just a guitar synth for the majority of the time. The Pattern A, F natural, and E is repeated. This “do le sol” relationship was intentionally repeated a few times to add some connection between sections. Some synth pads are used to bring a cold, eerie feeling – like being submerged in cold water. These moments are matched by footage of slowed-down birds, such as at time mark 5:04. Another example of footage set to these interrupting synths would be the footage of red reeds in the sunset that occurs at time mark 7:41. As stated before, one of the main focuses for the piece was timbre, and the artificial, hollow sound of the synths really brought out the dream-like quality that was desired.

The wobbly guitar was also a timbre that worked well with the overall theme. Although there was some initial hesitation to make this section so sparse, when more instruments and parts were added to the initial draft of the track for this section – more instruments, more moving lines – the sound became muddied. As soon as instruments and tracks were removed, the sonic sound of this section became more coherent. “Less is more” became a mantra particularly for this section. Even though the car is moving fast, and the scenery is whizzing by, in this case, the contrast between audio and visual works. Working with visual media is not always about matching exact cues. It is also about “coloring” the visual – influencing the viewer and listener, changing the mood, changing the way birds or mountains appear and what emotions¹¹ they evoke. And on that line of thought, creating a

¹¹ Though what specific emotions, I am hesitant to define.

sparse, wandering guitar line worked perfectly in creating a softer, more meditative mood in contrast with the previous section.

The very end of the third section is from the initial draft, which I liked so much and could not hope to recreate accurately on a second attempt. A spoken part was also added at the very end of the film. Initially, the spoken part was to play a bigger role in the entire film – an entire script was written, and I began to experiment with reading the lines themselves backwards, then reversing them. This is how Lynch directed the dialogue for the dream sequences in the TV series *Twin Peaks*.¹² This vocal experiment, unfortunately, did not work out. It was already embarrassing enough to take the video footage, write the music, be featured in some shots, but also speaking a script I wrote? It was too much. It also did not fit into the music that was already written, and, if done wrong, spoken lines on top of music can have a cheesy effective, which would not have fit the spooky, creepy vibe that was the end goal. Most of these spoken lines were deleted, but one last bit of dialogue was kept for the very end of the video. I have always been fascinated by mumbled words in songs and soundtracks, barely imperceptible, undistinguishable words, sometimes with distorted effects on top, like from a radio. I have tried many times to make it work, and I have yet to succeed. This is a future challenge I hope to tackle in the future.

The one instance of audible dialogue at 10:53 are the words “I am nowhere,” which fits in with the narrative of the film. The reversed spoken one was not used, as it stood out too much amidst the texture of the track. Moreover, however how “cool” the reversed spoken track was, it just sounded like a voice saying “I am nowhere”, but with a heavy accent. This

¹² David Lynch, dir. “Bonus Features.” Disk 7. *Twin Peaks: A Limited Event Series*. Hollywood, CA: Paramount, 2017. Blu ray. Accessed through YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idyQKdc8G8M>

sound effect ended up being very present and “ear-catching” and did not blend with the other vocal tracks. This is because it is less about the words than it is about the overall effect.¹³

¹³ The dialogue written happens to be relevant only because I thought I would be criticized if I had chosen to say “banana bread” or “potatoes” instead.

Introspective and Conclusion:

Because most of the abilities needed for the project were learned as problems were encountered, I knew that both the visual and audio components needed to be lo-fi and gritty, and made that conscious decision. The ultimate idea behind this project, on the technical aspect side, was to use what I had access to, to have complete creative control, and to embrace any “unpolished” or “uncomfortable” aspects. This was the hardest part of the project as I began to work further and further on it. The project started to become very personal, and this can have a two-pronged effect. A personal piece of media can either have a higher emotional quality and thus can connect with audience more, or, the material can be so personal as to be pretentious – any honesty or raw-ness becomes embarrassing and crosses the line into “too personal”.

Because my compositional process is concerned with posing large-scale, philosophical questions that do not necessarily have a concrete answer, through my project, I tried to grasp at some of personal ponderings I believe apply to humanity at large. For example, when asked to come up with a narrative or a focus or a theme, I began to think of loneliness, isolation, and how to portray those concepts in visual and aural media. Some of these questions were as follows: what do we, as people, have to say about anything? Why do our individual thoughts or feelings matter? What do we know about anything? What right do we have to say or think or feel anything? Has anyone experienced true loneliness? Have we ever been truly isolated, even if we have “felt” like we have?

Moreover, on speaking of emotions and personal content, anything personal can be used against oneself. One can be placed into a box against one’s will. An audience wants authenticity, but is anything truly authentic? Even as I looked at my own project objectively,

trying to discern what I was trying to say, I struggled to determine if I was being genuine. Or if I was putting on a mask, wearing and changing emotions like fashionable items, like clothes, to be worn and then discarded, exchanged, thrown away.

To make something personal is to invite oneself to be scrutinized and judged by an unforgiving public. One might argue that this is the case for all art, but it is not so. One can make art that is impersonal or detached. One can make art using a persona, effectively playing a role or a character.

There are several changes I would like to make if I were to start from the beginning, or if I were to make another project like this one. First, I would have invested in hired actors. Or at least, invited more friends and “amateur” actors, instead of relying on myself for every aspect of the film. Although I was successful in creating a film mostly on my own with little outside help, it has less of a “self-reliant” effect, and more of a “self-absorbed” effect. It makes more sense to rely on others who have more skill and expertise than myself, instead of handling the filming, acting, editing, and composing myself.

Another aspect I would adjust would be the exclusion of moments of silence or pause. Looking back on my compositions as a whole, I find that silence and space has been underutilized. Like the opening 15 seconds of this project, there could have been more use of silence, recorded sounds, and white noise.

I would deem the overall project a success. I have a little bit more practice working with an extra-musical component, coming to a deeper understanding of how audio and visual can come to work together. While I am still less than an amateur in filmmaking and terminology, I have learned more about editing software and digital audio workstations.

Moreover, I also have more insight into my compositional process and how I view my work and myself in relationship to my work.

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Vita:

Sophie Rymarowicz was born in Florida but raised in New Mexico. She earned a Bachelor of Music with a concentration in violin performance from the University of New Mexico in 2019. From 2020 to 2022, she attended Appalachian State University, where she received her Master of Music in Composition and a Music Theory Pedagogy Certificate in May 2022. While at Appalachian State University, she served as vice-president of the student chapter of the College Music Society for a year, and she was invited to join Pi Kappa Lambda.