

## **Sarah Heath, Research Week Program Notes**

### **Music Therapy Technique Demonstration in the *Confetti* EP (Original Song Cycle)**

This study employs a Creative Artistic Research method by exploring previous works to inform the songwriting process, resulting in the artifact of an original song cycle. As informed by a review of pertinent literature, various songs and chord progressions were used in this study to determine the music therapy techniques involved in the writing process. Similarly, the resulting artifact, the *Confetti* song cycle, can be broken down into the same therapeutic writing process within a commercial setting. The benefit of practice-based creative research is that it offers the opportunity to study and explore in ways that other research approaches cannot. The central concept of *Confetti* is that at parties, people throw confetti up into the air and act surprised when it falls, even though that was what they obviously knew was going to happen. Trust is often treated the same way, leaving people broken and hurting. The incorporated techniques walk the listener through a musical narrative of wrestling, healing, and restoration from a Christian perspective. Technically, this album features the specific method of narrative songwriting incorporated into five of the six songs. Chord progressions were chosen strategically, either to reflect the lyrics and allow the listener to direct focus there, or to draw the listener's emotions toward a specific feeling. One of the songs on the album was co-written with a peer based off material preliminarily created, similarly to how two other songs were created by branching off material written long before beginning the *Confetti* project. Each of these songs were crafted to, as a part of one larger work, tell a story of searching for belonging, making mistakes, wrestling with regret and transitions, and choosing to hope for something more in Christ.

**“Up in the Air.”** The opening song on the album, “Up in the Air,” was written after struggling with suicidality for a few years. This song conveys the thought process and documents

the decision to believe that there is a future to hope for, and it was written as a promise to everyone who hears it that life is worth living, even when things are not all figured out. The narrative style of the lyrics gives the feeling of the narrator taking the listener by the hand and walking with them out of the heaviness of what they have been through and leading them into the light of the present. The mental image of this literal action partially inspired the song and is a meditation technique used in trauma therapy settings, simply put to music in this context. This song melodically has mixed moments of floating and intentionality, while also building in intensity. By following the music therapy technique of incorporating a popular and pleasing chord progression: 1, 4, 6-, 5, 1/3, 4, this piece creates an instrumental atmosphere of reflection and hope to accompany the therapeutic healing of the text, inviting the listener to decide individually that life is worth living, bringing an honest opening to the *Confetti* EP.

**“If Only I Could.”** The third track, “If Only I Could,” uses the therapeutic practice of narrative songwriting to clearly outline and process a life experience in a very literal and conversational way. “If Only I Could” narrates an encounter with someone that was extremely unexpected, and the therapeutic writing style allows the listener to process wrestling with the emotions, questions, pain, love, and regrets that come up in the days following an experience of this sort along with the narrator. It is written almost as if it were a storybook being read aloud, as it shifts from the actual event in verse one, to trying to process in the present and move on in verse two. This keeps the listener engaged, connecting with them similarly to how familiar chord progressions do, bringing comfort and security into the uncomfortable scenario being described and processed in the lyrics. The bridge picks up and melodically mimics the racing thoughts of regret and reconciliation attempts. The constant fourths in the accompaniment mimic the pounding heart of interactions like this, and the conversational style of the lyric invites the

listener into the story, as if they were simply hearing it from a friend. It is a song anyone who has gone through any kind of relational break up can relate to, because of how the music therapy-style writing, chord progression, and melody painting encourage the listener to look back on things that they are grateful for, but wish had ended differently.

**“Confetti”** The title track, “Confetti,” was written with an intentional chord progression and was based on preconceived material, both of which are music therapy techniques. The chord progression of this piece is very simple, following a typical pattern of, in the Nashville Number system: 1, 4, 6-, 5, 4. The progression remaining simple and predictable allows the focus to be directed to the lyrics, as the text simultaneously introduces and summarizes the album by expressing a longing to “finally know I’m finally in the right place,” but also describing some regret and surprise in the past tense of “I didn’t see this coming,” alluding to the events described later in the project’s narrative. These internal-dialogue style lyrics paired with such a simple chord progression is often found in reflective songwriting in a music therapy setting. Some 3-‘s are mixed into the progression to add emphasis to the major chord resolutions, offering the pleasing resolution the ear is waiting for: another therapeutic technique. This intentionality is incorporated in the melody of the chorus, as the melody jumps up and walks down in the chorus specifically over the lines “I didn’t see this coming,” and “Throw trust like confetti.” This jump and fall mimics the action of tossing confetti into the air and watching it fall, a melody written in 2022, but not used until now. These chorus lines were the launching point for this song, and without that prepared material the write would not have been nearly as successful, and the song would not have been crafted in the same way with its chord progression as well. The music therapy techniques of reflective songwriting, intentional chord progression, and prepared material are the foundations of this song.