

Music Therapy Techniques in the Commercial Music Industry

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Abstract

Despite the fact that music is commonly described as free therapy with easily accessible content in the modern age of streaming, most people do not realize that music they already listen to contains many legitimate, psychologically tested therapy. This creative artistic research study examines the role that music therapy processes and techniques play in affecting the form, songwriting and creative processes of the modern music industry. These foundational aspects of songs elicit neurological responses, the emotional effect of which is discussed and incorporated through creative research and implementation through a creative artifact. This study explores songwriting techniques found in various music therapy approaches like group-write, improvisation, and chord progression analyses. Each of these techniques uniquely impact songs and how they shape the music industry and creative connection with audiences. Songwriting styles and modern industry trends are discussed, as well as their popularity and impact on audiences over the last several years. The project culminates in a creative artifact of a six-song album in singer-songwriter-demo-style utilizing various aspects of the music therapy processes analyzed in this study as well as popular music styles that have proven popular and impactful in the modern industry. This artifact demonstrates the effects and influence these techniques have on the modern music industry.

Music Therapy Techniques in the Commercial Music Industry

Despite the fact that music is commonly described as *free therapy* with easily accessible content in the modern age of streaming, most people do not realize that music they already listen to contains many legitimates, psychologically tested therapy. In an effort to better understand the benefits of songwriting with a therapeutic application the following research question will be addressed: What role do music therapy processes and the musical techniques that form them play in affecting the creative processes and songwriting of the modern music industry? This study is designed to prove and explore the following hypothesis: “Music therapy techniques are incorporated into the processes of the modern commercial music industry to shape the specific effects on and responses of various audiences with narrative songwriting, group writing and collaboration, and chord progressions.” According to the American Music Therapy Association, music therapy is the “clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program.”¹ Music can be beneficial in uniquely treating a wide variety of struggles as it promotes both physical and emotional wellness, improves communication and emotional expression, and enhances memory and healthy stress-coping.²

Background

Music therapy techniques such as narrative songwriting, group co-writing, preparatory material, and chord structure have been incorporated into the commercial music industry standard practices because of their positive effects on listeners. Many studies have proven the benefits of musical therapy in comparison to other treatment methods. According to Hohmann,

¹ “What is Music Therapy?” What is Music Therapy, American Music Therapy Association, last modified 2006, para. 1, <https://www.musictherapy.org/about/musictherapy/>.

² Ibid., para. 2.

“compared to commonly used verbal psychological therapies, music therapy and music-based intervention [where unclear or no participation of music therapists was involved] provide different opportunities for self-expression, cooperative group activity, imagination, and synchronized sensorimotor experience.”³ Hohmann’s study results indicate that, “Patients with non-organic mental disorders and low treatment motivation positive effects of an individual three month music therapy program on negative symptoms, global functioning, clinical global impressions, social avoidance, and vitality were reported.”⁴ Music in a therapeutic context clearly has a positive impact, but implementations of music therapy techniques in the modern commercial industry creates similar effects outside of a therapy setting.

Music can create connection and passion between people. Herbert Marcuse suggests that “art has the power to change, not necessarily because of its content, but rather through its creative nature...”⁵ The techniques and practices that shape and form this creative nature into therapeutic, participatory, or marketable music are building blocks of the modern music industry. Observing the effects of music on participants in a therapeutic and nontherapeutic context, Hohmann asserts, “There is evidence for the direct impact of listening to music on emotions and craving without application of music therapy or music-based interventions.”⁶ Therefore, with the musical techniques found in music therapy being applied in some capacity to passive listening music in all genres of the commercial music industry, similar positive and negative effects on

³ L. Hohmann et al., “Effects of Music Therapy and Music-Based Interventions in the Treatment of Substance Use Disorders: A Systematic Review,” *PloS One* 12, no. 11 (2017): 2, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5687713/>.

⁴ Hohmann et al., “Effects of Music Therapy,” 2.

⁵ Matt Connor and Matt Menger, “Strengthening Christian Identity Through Scripture Songwriting in Indonesia,” *Religions* 12, no. 10 (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100873>.

⁶ Hohmann et al., “Effects of Music Therapy,” 25.

listeners are evident regardless of musical or psychological background. These lyrical and musical techniques and the emotional responses they elicit allow musical works, be it a single song or full album, to foster a deep connection between listeners, artists, and writers, almost similar to that of therapist and patient.⁷ This connection is created by a shared passion for growth and understanding. Long explains, “Passion is performed, understood and articulated as something that defines the value of good songwriting, a mode of creation caught between economic and aesthetic demands.”⁸ Passion is the underlying link that connects each of these techniques and makes them effective in whatever musical setting to which they are applied.

Method

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. Despite common misperceptions about the place and value of the arts in education, Eisner holds that “the arts have far greater utility to learning than simply being a tool to teach other subjects.”⁹ According to Cerveny, “Not only should we teach, with professional expertise, disciplines of music, dance, theater, and the visual arts to our children, but also we should change the ways of teaching and learning math, science, history and other core subjects to more closely resemble the way teaching and learning take place in the arts.”¹⁰ Taking creative approaches to research and practical study employs the aspects of the human mind that bring the most joy out of pursuing

⁷ Imre Lahdelma and Tuomas Eerola, “Single Chords Convey Distinct Emotional Qualities to Both Naïve and Expert Listeners,” *Psychology of Music* 44, no. 1 (2014): 51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735614552006>.

⁸ Paul Long and Simon Barber, “Voicing Passion: the Emotional Economy of Songwriting,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (2014): 145, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549414563298>.

⁹ Kathleen Cerveny, “Elliot W. Eisner, The Role of the Arts in Educating the Whole Child,” *GIA Reader*, 12, no. 2 (2001): para. 5, <https://www.giarts.org/article/elliott-w-eisner-role-arts-educating-whole-child>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 6.

deeper knowledge. Cervený describes Eisner's claims that "Surprise is the reward of imagination at work. Experiment and discovery are the rich pathways to ownership of learning. Measurement (as in "outcome measures" and "proficiency testing") measures little real learning."¹¹ Creativity invites humanity into the honest pursuit of knowledge through rediscovering wonder through research and applying oneself personally to the research and exploration process.

The artistic method of research allows fresh ideas and perspectives to permeate and build upon previous studies in a variety of personal and academic ways. Eisner holds, "The constructs *spontaneous*, *divergent*, and *academic* have proved useful for analyzing the artistic process, and significant personality correlates have been found for individuals displaying these process-strategies."¹² One of the approaches to creative artistic research applied in this study is, "the identification of process characteristics through examination of the completed product."¹³ Developed by Beittel and Burkhart, this approach explores the artistic methods and actions as evident through different characteristics seen in the product of study.¹⁴ 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 second approach taken in this creative artistic research is known as practice-based research, in which "the product of making – i.e. the artefact created in art and design practice – is

¹¹ Cervený, "The Role of the Arts," para. 16.

¹² Elliot W. Eisner, "Children's Creativity in Art: A Study of Types," *American Educational Research Journal* 2, no. 3 (1965): 126, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1161672>.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

conceived to have a central position in the research process.”¹⁵ Mäkelä asserts, “Within the frame of practice-based approach, artefacts have been conceived both as answers to particular research questions and as argumentation on the topic concerned... In this sense we are facing the idea of knowing through making.”¹⁶ Artifacts produced through creative artistic research offer a new means of discovery. According to Mäkelä, “It has been argued that practice-based research is characterized by a focus on issues, concerns and interests that are explored and manifested through the production of creative artefacts. This implies that, as an object of experience, the creative product is as important as any knowledge embodied in it.”¹⁷ The benefit of practice-based research is that it offers the opportunity to study and explore in ways that other research approaches cannot. Research through designing and creating an artifact bridges the distance between “concrete objects and abstract requirements... facilitate[ing] the constructive, solution-focused thinking of the artist or the designer – in the same way other, for example verbal and numerical communication and thinking facilitates analytic, problem-focused thinking.”¹⁸ This is the purpose behind the *Confetti* song cycle artifact with this study, as the writing process behind it applies the studied music therapy techniques in an individual and collaborative commercial music setting, thus walking the listener through a musical narrative of wrestling, healing, and restoration from a Christian perspective.

¹⁵ Maarit Anna Mäkelä, “Knowing Through Making: The Role of the Artefact in Practice-led Research,” *Knowledge, Technology & Policy* 20, no. 3 (2007): 157, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12130-007-9028-2>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

Literature Review

Many studies done on music therapy practices proved positive results in patients from all ages and backgrounds. While there is a large body of work concerning music therapy, these studies are not specifically tied to the process of songwriting; however, the findings stated in the literature point to this creative process as beneficial in a therapeutic setting. After seeing success in many group songwriting studies led by health professionals, Baker et al. conducted a group songwriting project in 2017 called the Musomagic program that was led by industry artists, interested to see how the industry style of co-writing influenced results comparatively. In a similar manner, in the high school music program, The SongMakers, students are given the opportunity to be “co-creators and producers of popular music... by employing high-profile songwriters and producers with international recording experience in schools for two-day workshops to write and produce new music with students.”¹⁹ These programs yielded very positive results, including practical skill development, further understanding of themselves and confidence in their ability to engage, learn, and apply the things they had been taught.²⁰

In another study, a program called “Mechanisms of Change” explored the connection between music and memory, to discover if the emotional response elicited in musical contexts are because of a memory of an emotion as opposed to a direct neurological reaction to the music. Baker holds that, “...songwriting accommodates for memory impairments typical in people with [Acquired Brain Injury] because of the strong links between music, memory, and emotions, which enable exploration of the self to be consolidated more effectively in memory and stimulate

¹⁹ Felicity A. Baker, Neryl Jeanneret, and Anna Clarkson, “Contextual Factors and Wellbeing Outcomes: Ethnographic Analysis of an Artist-led Group Songwriting Program with Young People,” *Psychology of Music* 46, no. 2 (2017): 268, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617709520>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

autobiographical memories that are important in raising awareness of the residual self.”²¹

Because of this connection to memory, music activates the neural pathways related to pleasure, giving songwriting “the potential to enhance mood and coping and decrease or prevent depression and anxiety.”²² Songwriting opens a door to communication and processing in a way that simply speaking cannot:

When clients have experienced physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse, they often have a story to share, but may have difficulty articulating this within the normal context of verbal therapy. Placing the client’s story within the context of a song may be experienced as less threatening and a more appropriate medium to share their story with significant others.²³

These memories and stories are often linked to the response elicited by the chord progressions or pitches the ear and brain receive while songwriting or listening to music, causing the strong emotional reaction, regardless of the setting.

Music is found in many settings, with almost all public places playing some sort of background music from streaming platforms or radio stations for their guests.²⁴ An in-school study showed that students were very receptive to musical influence, due to how popular the medium has become through media and technological advancements: According to Baker and Krout, “Given the appreciation of popular music by children and adolescents, songwriting has become a mode of self-expression which is attractive to school-aged students and has been

²¹ Felicity A. Baker, Nikki Rickard, Jeanette Tamplin, and Chantal Roddy, “Flow and Meaningfulness as Mechanisms of Change in Self-Concept and Well-Being Following a Songwriting Intervention for People in the Early Phase of Neurorehabilitation,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9, (2015): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00299>.

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

²³ Felicity A. Baker, Tony Wigram, David Stott, and Katrina McFerran, “Therapeutic Songwriting in Music Therapy,” *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* 17, no. 2 (2008): 118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08098130809478203>.

²⁴ Soo-Hyun Cho, Young-Hak Kim, and Jae-Bum Park, “Music Recommendation System for Public Places Based on Sensor Network,” *IJCSNS International Journal of Computer Science and Network Security* 7, no. 8 (2007): 172, <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=44cdb1363bd301d660fc1c8a8355b8c11744fc57>.

shown to be effective in reducing anxiety, anger, and tension, developing a sense of self, validating experiences and enhancing social skills.”²⁵ These kinds of results are the reasons why songwriting is becoming such a central aspect of music therapy as well as growing in popularity in lower educational settings. Songwriting offers the opportunity to develop social and communication skills as well through language, speech, and conversation, which is why co-writing with peers is extremely beneficial as well to supplement solo writing. Many music therapy techniques, like songwriting, have proven to be beneficial in various therapeutic settings and styles.

Core Concepts

There are foundational concepts that deal with music therapy as well as the songwriting process that should be taken into consideration for the purposes of this study. Core concepts in the field of music therapy include narrative songwriting, group writing and collaboration, and chord progressions. Because of how effectively these core concepts form connection and influence with audiences when implemented in songs, they have gradually been incorporated, intentionally and unintentionally, into the modern commercial music industry and its standard practices.

Music Therapy Techniques

In the music therapy setting, techniques such as songwriting, group co-writing, preparatory material, and chord progressions are employed to connect clients with themselves and others in a new way as they pursue healing together. Long holds, “An attention to the technicalities of song craft maintains a practical sensibility that derives from an invitation to

²⁵ Felicity A. Baker and Robert Krout, “Turning Experience into Learning: Educational Contributions of Collaborative Peer Songwriting During Music Therapy Training,” *International Journal of Music Education* 30, no. 2 (2012): 134, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761411427103>.

autobiographical reflection, thus prompting much memory work on the part of [songwriters].”²⁶

By processing their lives to create something authentic and beautiful, clients are able to heal and connect with others, boosting self-esteem and lessening feelings of isolation. Long also explains the effectiveness of this process, writing, in that, “The creative experience is something which is intensely felt. It often seems to defy language as if words are incapable of fully capturing the sensation involved or of explaining what went into the making of a particular artistic form. While we must keep this in mind, it remains the case that the creative experience requires a will to expression, and to communication with others.”²⁷ Songwriting, co-writing, preparing material, and strategic chord progressions each play a role in this experience.

The Songwriting Process

When it comes to commercial music industry songwriting, certain practices have been accepted as the standard for a successful process. Tough lists some of these practices as including writing about relationships, using the song’s title as a hook that appropriately fits the chord progression, and co-writing with peers.²⁸ When approaching writing about relationships in a commercial setting, narrative songwriting is a popular style to choose, particularly in the country music genre. Neal holds that in this style, “...the form of the song and its compositional craft become functioning parts of its storyline...”²⁹ Narrative songwriting requires careful

²⁶ Long and Barber, “Voicing Passion,” 145.

²⁷ Long and Barber, “Voicing Passion,” 146.

²⁸ David T. Tough, “An Analysis of Common Songwriting and Production Practices in 2014-2015 Billboard Hot 100 Songs,” *MEIEA Journal* 17, no. 1 (2017): 79, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1971740429/fulltextPDF/DC127842E0224923PQ/1?accountid=12085&source=Scholarly%20Journals>.

²⁹ Jocelyn R. Neal, “Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 29, no. 1 (2007): 41, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/222700148/fulltextPDF/3D9649C5C44F4F91PQ/1?accountid=12085&source=Scholarly%20Journals>.

selection of lyric, melody, and accompaniment style, as every piece of the composition contributes to the story being told. Perricone holds, “You should know what your song is about and choose to write it in an original way with language that is evocative, that makes your listener feel what you are feeling. The materials of your song, as they emerge, often lead in interesting and sometimes surprising directions, just as a character in a novel can lead the author to interesting dialogue or plot development.”³⁰ The song, “She’s In Love With The Boy,” written by Jon Ims and performed by Trisha Yearwood is a prime example of the narrative style of songwriting, as it unfolds a story through its verses, creates an atmosphere for the listener to see the setting and experience the plot with the narrator through the stylistic choice in accompaniment, and reiterates the central emotion in the chorus.³¹ Neal asserts, “For the astute listener, an intuitive grasp of a song’s meaning arises not only from text and melody but also from the specific presentation of that story through the song’s form.”³² Form can be chosen based on many factors, but is often influenced by a song’s chord progression.

Chord progressions contribute greatly to the songwriting process, whether or not the session is following a narrative model. Perricone holds, “Chord progressions can be evocative and provide a tonal environment in which other more vital elements of the songwriting process – melody and lyrics – can thrive.”³³ Chord progressions determine where a melody can go, thus determining how the writer can incorporate the title of the song into the melody as the hook: a popular writing practice. The chord progressions chosen should reflect the central emotion of the

³⁰ Jack Perricone, *Great Songwriting Techniques*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11, ProQuest Ebrary.

³¹ Trisha Yearwood, vocalist, “She’s In Love With The Boy,” by Jon Ims, recorded 1991, track 1 on *Trisha Yearwood*, MCA Records Inc. and UMG Recordings, Inc.

³² Neal, “Narrative Paradigms,” 42.

³³ Perricone, *Great Songwriting Techniques*, 14.

song, further the storyline or message of the song, and fall in line with the melody to which the lyrics are set. The progression of a song is often a “*precompositional decision*,” something determined before beginning the in-depth writing process.³⁴ Perricone claims this to be because, “many songs exist in just one tonal environment, but some mix environments to good effect. It is up to you to decide which tonal environment best suits the concept and type of song you are envisioning.”³⁵ These tonal environments are what determine how audiences react to songs emotionally. *Functional Harmony*, described by Perricone as “the grouping of like-sounding chords, chords that can function as substitutes for one another,” was the foundation of musical development from 1600-1900, and is still prominent in modern music because how successfully it elicits positive audience reaction.³⁶ Chord progressions play a large role in a song’s successful connection to its commercial audience.

Not every writer has the musical ear for finding the best tonal modulations, and not every writer has the best lyrical concepts. Collaborating and co-writing is currently a prominent songwriting practice in the commercial music industry because it allows writers to use their strengths to their advantage and play to others’ strengths to cover their weaknesses. Henley and Gooderson hold, “...many contemporary artists use ‘back-room co-writers,’” due to “songwriting creativity being largely collaborative in nature.”³⁷ Perricone agrees, “Many of today’s hits are written by groups of people, four or five writers per song, each an expert in one

³⁴ Perricone, *Great Songwriting Techniques*, 105.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁷ Jennie Henley and Matt Gooderson, “Professional Songwriting: Creativity, the Creative Process and Tensions Between Higher Education Songwriting and Industry Practice in the UK,” *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Music Education* no. 1 (2017), <https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGlibGU6NDgzNDk5MQ==>.

part of the whole mix of elements and skills involved in making a hit.”³⁸ It is by relying on one another’s individual strengths as writers and creatives that the best song product can be formed. Tough holds, “Co-writers may have one primary expertise (lyrics or melody) and rely on their counterparts for the other element to draw out each other’s creative strengths.”³⁹ Only 53 songs out of the 958 songs on the Billboard Hot 100 charts from the years 2014 to 2015 were not co-written.⁴⁰ Co-writes are seeing great success in the commercial industry, because they create and take advantage of the opportunity to use collaboration to strengthen the chosen style of songwriting as well as the chosen chord progression.

Songwriting and Music Therapy

Narrative songwriting offers the invitation for the client to tell their story through music. Wigram and Baker define *therapeutic songwriting* as “the process of creating, notating and/or recording lyrics and music by the client or clients and therapist within a therapeutic relationship to address psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, and communication needs of the client.”⁴¹ An international survey showed that telling stories and life experiences through narrative songwriting, in therapeutic contexts strongly supported “experiencing mastery, developing self-confidence, enhancing self-esteem; choice and decision making; developing a sense of self; externalizing thoughts, fantasies, and emotions, telling the client’s story; and gaining insight or clarifying thoughts and feelings.”⁴² Myers-Coffman points out that “songwriting has been the most commonly documented music therapy intervention with adolescents who are grieving...

³⁸ Perricone, *Great Songwriting Techniques*, 16.

³⁹ Tough, “An Analysis of Common Songwriting,” 105.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴¹ Baker, Wigram, Stott, and McFerran, “Therapeutic Songwriting,” 106.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 105.

indicating songwriting alone may improve grief processing.”⁴³ This is likely due to the process of telling the story of what is being grieved in narrative songwriting form, and the healing process of talking about the pain and the loss in a therapeutic writing context. Baker holds that “Therapeutic songwriting is a method that has been extensively used across a range of clinical and non-clinical populations as a medium for people to tell their stories.”⁴⁴ It is through writing about their stories and life experiences, positive or negative, that clients can find meaning from their past in the songwriting process and the songs themselves.⁴⁵

Songwriting can have a strong impact on the client’s self-esteem and self-concept. Baker et al. holds, “Songwriting can be a safe means of self-expression and identity formation for young people as it typically employs a structured, organized process, promoting security and containment.”⁴⁶ She supports this by further explaining that “through achieving this positive-affect shift, people may access the inner strength needed to face the challenges associated with processing and revising their self-concept...”⁴⁷ Baker also describes the self-concept as being “derived from an integration of self-schemas constructed by temporal frameworks that encompass the past, present, and future selves and is multidimensional, comprising the personal, physical, family, social, academic/vocational, and spiritual/moral self domains.”⁴⁸ This self-

⁴³ Katherine Myers-Coffman et al., “The Resilience Songwriting Program for Adolescent Bereavement: A Mixed Methods Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Music Therapy* 56, no. 4 (2019): 352, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmt/thz011>.

⁴⁴ Baker, Rickard, Tamplin, and Roddy, “Flow and Meaningfulness,” 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁶ Baker et al., “Contextual Factors and Wellbeing Outcomes,” 267.

⁴⁷ Baker, Rickard, Tamplin, and Roddy, “Flow and Meaningfulness,” 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

expression offers a grounding experience for patients as well as mental, physical, and emotional healing.

These physical improvements were revealed in a study done through musical exercises with those having Acquired Brain Injury and Spinal Cord Injury. Through working with ABI and SCI patients, Baker concludes that this process is so effective because “engaging people... in a narrative process that explores the residual self alongside the disabled self enables them to grieve the lost self and construct a new and healthy present and future self.”⁴⁹ This conclusion can be applied to anyone who has undergone a traumatic event in their life and seeks healing through music therapy, and could even be applied to those outside of a therapeutic setting seeking emotional connection through listening and experiencing music on their own, or when writing with others.

Group Writing and Collaboration

Co-writing or group writing is a practice implemented in music therapy that allows multiple people to communicate and connect through writing a song together. Sloan describes the process of co-writing as the way “intimate collaboration becomes a vehicle for establishing an identity within a collective, finding mutual joy by fumbling toward something ineffable, together.”⁵⁰ One of the beauties of co-writing is the way in which it can bring people of all different backgrounds together to create. Baker asserts, “The versatility of songwriting means both musical and non-musical skills, such as writing lyrics can be practiced.”⁵¹ This is part of what makes group writing so effective in a therapy setting, regardless of how musically

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁰ Nate Sloan, “Taylor Swift and the Work of Songwriting,” *Contemporary Music Review* 40, no. 1 (2021): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2021.1945226>.

⁵¹ Baker, Jeanneret, and Clarkson, “Contextual Factors and Wellbeing Outcomes,” 267.

experienced the clients are. There is a role and an opportunity for everyone involved. Even simply contributing a phrase or concept involves a level of reflection or internal contemplation, which connects with everyone, and could set off the chain of events within a session to write a song that connects deeply with people in and out of the room.

Co-writing is a particularly beneficial method of music therapy with younger clients. Baker holds, “Furthermore, group songwriting offers young people opportunities to practice teamwork skills, and specific group-based wellbeing measures such as connectedness can be enhanced.”⁵² Songwriting requires people to look inward and realize the things they have to offer the world, which is one way that the practice boosts self-confidence as well as satisfaction in life. In a day and age where connection is found more through social media than through interpersonal interaction, co-writing offers a glimpse into each other’s humanity, heart, and struggles, some of which might be found in common. Baker claims this is also beneficial for young people, as, “in sharing knowledge, ideas, and experience between students, there is a move from independent learning to interdependent learning whereby students learn a great deal by explaining their ideas to others and in participating in activities which involve their peers.”⁵³ People can learn a lot from each other, not solely about music, but about life, and therapeutic co-writing opens the door for that to happen.

Because songwriting and co-writing are so effective in self-reflection and community building, they offer the opportunity for spiritual localization in community as well. Industry-style songwriting workshops in Indonesia are helping unite communities while also spreading the gospel: “In our workshops we tried to spark the process of localization by asking the participants

⁵² Ibid., 267.

⁵³ Baker and Krout, “Turning Experience into Learning,” 135.

to evaluate their musical milieu, including the variety of genres that are considered indigenous, adapted, or imported...⁵⁴ taking them “through important conversations about what they considered to be local and authentic.”⁵⁵ Because communicating as a group through songwriting and other creative methods is so unique and powerful, “the arts hold the power to integrate [the gospel] more holistically into cultures.”⁵⁶ John de Gruchy describes it as, “Through discovering their creative abilities, people are enabled to rise above their circumstances and contribute not only to their own well-being but also to the healing of their communities and keeping hope alive... Hope is, in fact, part of the creative human capacity of imagination that brings past and future into the present.”⁵⁷ With guidance from workshop leaders, the industry model of therapeutic co-writing is providing the opportunity for communities and churches to understand the “needs, hopes, underlying forces, scripture resource, and appropriate genres for songwriting.”⁵⁸ Music therapy techniques are not only personally beneficial, but spiritually beneficial, which is why it is extremely important to enter these workshops and sessions with even the most basic of an understanding of the people around you and, when possible, with material prepared.

When entering any kind of co-write, therapeutic or commercial, someone in the room must have some kind of material prepared, be it lyrics for a chorus, a melody clip, or a chord progression. In a commercial co-write it does not matter as much who brings in material, but in a

⁵⁴ Connor and Menger, “Strengthening Christian Identity,” 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁷ John W. de Gruchy, “Art, Morality, and Justice,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, ed. Frank Burch Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) 428.

⁵⁸ Connor and Menger, “Strengthening Christian Identity,” 5.

therapeutic setting it is the therapist or professional who brings the prompt or starting point for the session, sometimes random and sometimes based off of something from a previous discussion with one or more of the clients involved. Preparing chord progressions or melodies is also extremely helpful when working with clients with little to no musical background. For example, the Musomagic program employed a songwriting technique involving preparing a portion of the song before meeting with the cowriter to give the session direction and somewhere to start. By entering the writing room with lyrics and music for a chorus pre-set, the therapist or session leader can determine the theme or concept of the song. For a program of this kind, an example would be addiction: phone, drug, personal, etc.⁵⁹ This creates an opportunity for the client or student to write about something specific they may be struggling with.⁶⁰ Baker describes the emotional impact of this effective writing method, writing, “The program is inherently resource-oriented, encouraging participants to become consciously aware of their own resources that they bring to the songwriting experience.”⁶¹ Prepared material also plays a large role in the Indonesian Songwriting Programs and their mission, as Bible translation teams translate Biblical passages specifically for use in the songwriting sessions, and Ambonese Malay translators translate the verses featured in liturgical songs that the nearby churches request.⁶² Without this kind of textual and musical prepared material to enter co-writes with, localizing and integrating the gospel would not be as effective in the therapeutic and church settings of these programs.

⁵⁹ Baker, Jeanneret, and Clarkson, “Contextual Factors and Wellbeing Outcomes,” 269.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁶² Connor and Menger, “Strengthening Christian Identity,” 5.

Chord Progressions

Chord progressions are the basis of a song, the foundational aspect at the root of all musical form and its emotional response. According to Recek et al., “the most common chord order in traditional western music is a tonic – tonic in the first inversion – subdominant – dominant – tonic... specifically, a typical chord progression begins and ends with a tonic chord, whose keynote matches the scale.”⁶³ The chordal sound received by the ear is translated as emotional context, as Bakker and Martin hold, “Abstract musical chords are arguably the smallest building blocks of music that retain emotional information. Major chords are generally perceived as positive- and minor chords as negative-sounding...”⁶⁴ It is often assumed that lyrics remind and relate to people, causing an emotional reaction, but “musical chords are arguably the most basic musical constructions that can be played alone, absent of musical structural context, and still retain communicative information.”⁶⁵ This communication is related to the basic harmonic build of chords as well as the human brain and body’s neurological processing.

The human brain processes a chord progression’s harmonic build and intonation similarly to how it processes facial expressions and tone of voice. Bakker and Martin hold that, “Major chords are constructed out of aligned and balanced harmonic combinations, resulting in sensory consonance and positive emotional perception, whereas the harmonic combinations of minor chords are unbalanced and result in sensory dissonance, triggering perceptions of negativity.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Žiga Mekiš Recek et al., “Which Chord Progressions Satisfy Us the Most? The Effect of Expectancy, Music Education, and Pitch Height,” *Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems* 19, no. 4 (2021): 581, <https://doi.org/10.7906/indecs.19.4.9>.

⁶⁴ David Radford Bakker and Frances Heritage Martin, “Musical Chords and Emotion: Major and Minor Triads are Processed for Emotion,” *Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Neuroscience* 15 (2014): 15, <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-014-0309-4>.

⁶⁵ Bakker and Martin, “Musical Chords and Emotion,” 15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

Minor chords strongly activate areas of the brain involving the experience and processing of emotions, such as the amygdala, cerebellum, brain stem, and retrosplenial cortex.⁶⁷ With study results showing consistency in both musicians and non-musicians, it is clear that something about how chord progressions are mentally processed and emotionally experienced varies depending on the type of chords being heard.⁶⁸ Regardless of their backgrounds, “listeners’ behavioral responses vary significantly, revealing different contributions of harmonic/tonal- and pitch/melody related aspects.”⁶⁹ In the same way the brain picks up on changes in tone or facial expression when others are speaking, the brain recognizes the difference in tonality of the musical chords and interprets the same emotional connotations.⁷⁰ In answer to the theory that emotional responses elicited by music are simply caused by learned associations, Bakker and Martin’s study found that, “...Musically elicited emotions originate from a deeper level of communication than the superficial learned associations that are commonly thought to be their origin as well as...large innate, biological, and psychoacoustic components are involved in the emotional perception of major and minor harmonic structures.”⁷¹ Music causes an emotional response from the most basic element of a song’s structure, which is why chord progressions are extremely important when writing a song in a therapeutic or commercial setting to communicate something specific.

⁶⁷ Bakker and Martin, “Musical Chords and Emotion,” 16.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁹ Irene Sturm, Benjamin Blankertz, and Gabriel Curio, “Multivariate EEG Analysis Reveals Neural Correlates for the Differential Perception of Chord Progressions,” *Psychomusicology* 27, no. 4 (2017): 294, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pmu0000196>.

⁷⁰ Bakker and Martin, “Musical Chords and Emotion,” 28.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

Music Industry Incorporation

A large part of music is connection, which is why music therapy is so effective, and why music therapy techniques are incorporated into the commercial industry. For a commercial project to be successful, a key component is how well it connects to the audience for which it is intended or marketed. Shi asserts, “Producers pay attention to audience expectations because audiences define the value of their offerings.”⁷² Because music holds such power over people’s emotions, particularly when music therapy techniques are involved, listeners are drawn to different genres and different sounds based on the emotions they feel connected to. This is what shapes the different aspects of the music industry, as well as what determines which techniques are employed in which genres. As Christians entering an industry dominated by secularism, it is essential to understand the inner workings of the musical content people are constantly consuming nowadays through social media and streaming platforms in order to understand how to use them to further the gospel through intentionally crafted music. With chord progressions being the foundational block of most commercial music, the chords chosen are key to the specific sound of a song and the emotion it evokes.

Songwriting and Chord Progressions in the Commercial Music Industry

Christian artists are responsible for how they design their music to affect their audience, making it extremely important for them to be aware of the techniques they employ as they write and create music for the modern commercial industry. Romans 12:15-16 (ESV) states, “For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as

⁷² Yuan Shi, “A Change of Tune: The Democratization of Market Mediation and Crossover Production in the U.S. Commercial Music Industry,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2022): 320, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00018392221143779>.

evil.” Christians are called to personal responsibility of the stewardship of their testimony and how they influence others in how they reflect it. In the same way, Christian musicians must recognize how their art affects their listeners and whether their work is emotionally and contextually leading others to God or to false idols. As a songwriter and artist, Chris Tomlin set the example for the writing pattern and stylistic choices of the Commercial Christian Music Industry existing today. Commercial Christian Music is often repetitive and simple, as exhibited in Tomlin’s hit song, “Good Good Father,” the chorus of which is simply made up of the progression of the subdominant, the tonic in first inversion, the submediant, and the dominant, repeated twice.⁷³ This simple chord progression resolves very nicely to the tonic, eliciting the positive neurological response as a result and, when paired with the thematic content of the lyrics, creates a comforting and positive effect on its audience, contributing to what makes it such a popular song. Parts of the verses of this song also follow the progression Recek et al. (2021) used as an example of a commonly recognized and commonly pleasing progression: tonic, subdominant, tonic in first inversion, submediant, and dominant.⁷⁴ These straightforward progressions are predictable to the trained and untrained ear, providing a sense of satisfaction as they resolve, and producing positive emotional responses, which is why they are so common in CCM.

Movie and theatrical companies like Walt Disney Studios also incorporate this attention to detail in the progressions chosen for musical projects. When writing a song for a hero, major chords are favored to evoke positive emotions, while minor chords are favored for villain songs to evoke fear and negative emotions. The song, “Go the Distance” from *Hercules*, for example,

⁷³ Chris Tomlin, vocalist, “Good Good Father,” by Pat Barrett and Tony Brown, recorded 2015, track 1 on *Good Good Father*, Six Steps Records and Capitol CMG Inc.

⁷⁴ Recek et al., “Which Chord Progressions Satisfy,” 581.

was written for the protagonist of the film, *Hercules*, and features a series of subdominant, dominant, tonic progressions in the verses and tonic, subdominant, dominant, and submediant progressions in the choruses, all in a major key signature.⁷⁵ Another song, “Mother Knows Best (Reprise)” from *Tangled* was written for the antagonist of the film, and incorporates progressions involving minor tonics, tonics raised a half step, dominants with a dominant seventh, minor dominants and even some minor subdominants.⁷⁶ These songs use chord progressions to affect audiences’ interpretations and feelings about different characters, and the same effect occurs when pieces are written to communicate about a specific topic as opposed to moving a story along.

CCM seldom addresses the complexities and heaviness of mental illness, but when it does allude to it, it does so in a very broad, light manner as reflected by the chord progressions chosen. “God Only Knows” by for KING & COUNTRY was the first song to come to mind when thinking of a Christian-perspective commercial piece about struggling with trauma, which follows a very typical pop chord progression of subdominant, submediant, dominant, for almost the entire song.⁷⁷ Now this progression is not uncommon, nor does it elicit any particularly negative emotions because of it. The only aspect of the progression that could spark any of the unease being written about in the lyrics is the lack of the tonic. The tonic only appears once in each pass of the chorus progression, and then again at the very end of the piece. This tonic absence may offer a slight change in the emotions elicited by the progression, but overall, it

⁷⁵ Roger Bart, vocalist, “Go the Distance,” by Alan Menken and David Zippel, recorded 1997, track 5 on *Hercules (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, Walt Disney Records.

⁷⁶ Donna Murphy, vocalist, “Mother Knows Best (Reprise),” by Alan Menken and Glenn Slater, recorded 2010, track 6 on *Tangled (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, Walt Disney Records.

⁷⁷ for KING & COUNTRY, performing band, “God Only Knows,” by Federico Vindver et al., recorded 2018, track 3 on *Burn The Ships*, Curb | Word Entertainment.

follows a typical pop progression that could be found in any song of any thematic content, so as to remain uplifting and not become “too depressing.” This is common in CCM songs communicating about difficult topics, and can be a beneficial thing, but it can also be detrimental as it can sometimes give off the impression of inauthenticity and brushing over people’s pain.

When compared to “8 Hours” by Abby Holliday, a secular artist, there is actually a similar progression, but uses the tonic much more. She centers her song around a tonic, submediant, subdominant, dominant progression, but adds in lots of extensions and minor sevenths to give it the darker stylistic tone even with the brighter undertone of the major chords and popular progression.⁷⁸ The sevenths create the feeling of never quite landing back into the tonic, even though it is played several times. Chord progressions and the form of a song work together to create various effects on the audience when trying to communicate. Song form is impacted by chord progressions, which is often determined based on genre and the intention behind the song. Therapeutic and commercial songs can center around telling a story over the course of the song or holding onto a moment in time, usually surrounding self-awareness. This is a difference seen in CCM versus secular commercial music, as CCM seeks to uplift and move forward, while secular music does not always share those same goals. This conflict of interest varies across secular genres as well, with Sloan asserting, “If this country convention aims to capture the passing of time over each success chorus, the pop paradigm hinges on prolonging the present.”⁷⁹ Songwriting and strategically choosing chord progressions and song form are the building blocks of the commercial industry, because without them there would be no music to

⁷⁸ Abby Holliday, vocalist, “8 Hours,” by Abby Holliday, track 2 on *WHEN WE’RE FAR APART I FALL APART*, recorded 2021, Abby Holliday.

⁷⁹ Sloan, “Taylor Swift,” 16.

market, and they are often matters that get worked through when first entering a co-writing session.

Co-Writing in the Commercial Music Industry

Co-writing and group writes have become increasingly popular in the modern commercial music industries, both secular and Christian. Out of the 283 songs to top the Billboard Hot 100 chart from the year 2000 to 2020, only 13 of them were written solo.⁸⁰ Every other song to top the chart in the last twenty years was co-written by a pair or group of people.⁸¹ Group writing fosters connection: the more people involved, the more opportunity for someone to connect with the story and perspectives, which is likely why the products of these sessions have become so popular; however, when working with multiple people in a commercial setting, it is extremely important to have material prepared in advance, just like it is in the therapeutic setting.

Many popular commercial artists use pre-prepared material entering co-writes, particularly with the track-and-hook method. Taylor Swift employed this approach when writing her hit track “Out of the Woods,” with Jack Antonoff who, before their session, sent her a recording of a musical production track.⁸² Upon hearing that track, Swift wrote a melody, verse, and chorus in about half an hour, giving them a springboard to complete the song from.⁸³

Professional songwriter and lecturer Aaron Rice holds that, “An amateur writes when they’re

⁸⁰ Sloan, “Taylor Swift,” 13.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 19.

inspired; a professional writes until they're inspired."⁸⁴ This means songwriters should always have some sort of material prepared, even if they do not believe it to be "good," because bringing it to other people can open the door to all kinds of possibilities for the song to shape into.

Knowing the audience is essential to writing a song in a commercial co-write session, even more so than knowing the other co-writers. For Christian writers, prayer and preparation before a co-write go hand in hand; they are cyclical.⁸⁵ By preparing material and then praying over the session and the material, the writers are offering their work to the Lord, giving the Holy Spirit room to guide and inspire creativity, as is their responsibility as stewards of the Word and of their gifts. In a therapeutic setting, music therapists know who they are writing or preparing for, and it is not for themselves. The content they prepare is centered around the client, and what the client needs. Workshops done in schools, communities, and churches are not writing for the leaders, they are writing for the students and the people around them. Commercial writers must go into the writing room with the same mindset: of whether they are writing for themselves, someone else in the room, a not-yet-determined artist, or a specific established artist. This changes how they prepare, what they write, and the style in which they write. This is key when writing music for a church, particularly a congregational setting. Writing Christian music for church is not enough, composers must "write in a way they believe will be accessible for Christians from diverse denominations and demographics."⁸⁶ In the commercial setting, the audience determines a song's success, making connection, communication, and authenticity so

⁸⁴ Aaron Rice, (lecture in Fall Songwriting Retreat at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, September 29, 2023).

⁸⁵ Rice, (Fall Songwriting Retreat)

⁸⁶ D. Thornton, *Meaning-Making in the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 59.

important, which are all built through implementing music therapy techniques into the music and writing process.

Findings

Upon review of the literature concerning music therapy and songwriting, the hypothesis has been upheld. Informed by the findings, an artifact of a six-piece song cycle was written and recorded in the style of an industry-standard demo. The core concepts concerning music therapy were integral in the creation process. The song cycle is called, “Confetti.”

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

In the *Confetti* song cycle, each of these studied music therapy techniques were implemented into one or more of the songs, putting them into practice in a commercial setting and style. The central concept of *Confetti* is that at parties, people throw confetti up into the air and act surprised and excited when it falls, even though that was what they obviously knew was going to happen. This album describes how when operating out of uncertainty and an insecure foundation, people are really just throwing their trust around like they do confetti, but then self-sabotage and act surprised when their identity and relationships fail. As difficult as something like that is to process and experience as individuals, it is often through reaching low points like this that a greater hope, identity, and fulfillment is found. Technically, this album features the specific method of narrative songwriting incorporated into five of the six songs. Chord progressions were chosen strategically in four of the songs, 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 of material preliminarily created, similarly to how two other songs were created by branching off of a piece of melody or lyric that was 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, failing and 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 while in treatment for mental illness and trauma in February 2023. After struggling with clinical mental illness and 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, almost reminiscent of a Disney-style ballad. 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 look back on life personally, and decide individually what to look forward to and how to choose to live, bringing an honest opening to the *Confetti* EP.

“Apologies.” “Apologies” is the second track on this album, and it tells a story of regret and looking at broken relationships through a music therapy writing prompt, a haunting chord progression, and introspective-narrative therapeutic songwriting. The first verse of this song came from a free-write creative writing exercise while in a music therapy workshop, where the prompt was the dword “heartbreak,” and participants were encouraged to write a poem or stanza with whatever came to mind, and the lyrics of verse one was the text that came to mind. This

exercise is common in therapeutic settings as it allows the therapist to give the participant a certain context or category, but the participant can write about what is true to them and their life experience. When putting it to music, it was important that the chords sound stretchy and have a push and pull to them, which was created through adding major ninth extensions without the seventh, and many, many suspensions. Odd overlapping chords like a 5/4 were also incorporated to give a sense of unease, while also allowing major seventh extensions to offer some relief from all the dissonance. These chord progression choices demonstrate the music therapy technique of using strategic chord structures and patterns to influence the listener's emotions and thought process. The therapeutic songwriting style of this song is not quite as narrative as some of the others, but is very reflective and introspective, implementing the style of therapeutic writing processes describing a life experience through imagery, description, and hindsight's perspective.

“If Only I Could.” The third track, “If Only I Could,” was written about facing someone that was once a close friend, but due to less-than-ideal circumstances no longer holds that position. It 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 a personal experience and 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, and even minutes, following an experience of this sort along with the narrator. It is written almost like 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 through that familiar story-telling tone, which connects 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 trying to reconcile with someone who is no longer physically there in that moment. 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.

“1,000 (and 1).” “1,000 (and 1),” a co-written track, expresses the wrestling that comes with growing up, leaving home, and learning how to shape things that were once such a large part of a young person’s life and identity into becoming an individual. Topics like this are extremely common in music therapy writing sessions because they allow the writer to process traumas and life experiences while also spurring the listener to process and connect as well. There is not anything that is extremely noticeable in or about the chord progression, but that is actually an intentional technical choice for this song as a music therapy technique, as it allows the listener to really fall into the lull of the 6/8 time signature and picture the images the lyrics are describing through lines like “pulled in the drive,” and “empty chair on the side.” This kind of mental imagery is encouraged in therapeutic contexts when processing trauma, and it is an additional therapy effect produced by incorporating the musical techniques of a repetitive rhythm and popular chord progression into both therapeutic and commercial contexts. It is difficult to find a balance as young people grow up and begin to create a home in other places, as life changes shift and they find love, marriage, and new jobs to replace the things of earlier times. This whirlwind of emotions is what the bridge is designed to describe melodically, using a more complicated melody, and having some vocal lines overlapping with one another, before finding a

special place and bringing both parts together for a united refrain and chorus. This intentional “chaos to calm” ending allows the listener to connect to and feel the grief they themselves have experienced along with that which the text conveys, before moving through it to the peace and acceptance that lies on the other side. This rise and fall in the song form mimics the similar pattern of a talk therapy session, which is why the multiple music therapy techniques implemented in this track are so effective.

“You’re Not Done.” “You’re not Done” is the turning point of the album and, as the second to last track, it is lyrically designed to grab the listener’s attention. With no introduction, the first verse literally begins by announcing, “Hey, I’ve got something to say.” Simple, casual phrasing like this can be helpful in music therapy writing contexts because it gives the participating writer somewhere to start from through the question it implies of them: “Okay, so what do I have to say?” This song stylistically sounds a bit different from the other songs on the album because it leads with a minor chord while being written in a major key, but this chordal therapy technique creates the opportunity to reflect the darkness and struggle being addressed in the text, while still being able to shape a positive message in the chorus and bridge as the progression features more of the major chords of the key. This track retains the conversational lyric-writing of the song cycle, however, with a much more direct approach to the listener. The lyrics address the listener head-on, saying, “You’re not done,” and “I know you’ve waited for so long.”

This track is designed to contrast with the previous songs in the cycle, as the critical moment of the healing process has been reached, and the narrator is choosing to overcome their pain and look to use it for something greater, thus encouraging the listener to do the same through its lyrics and the emotional pull of the chord progression. The struggle and distress that

the previous songs describe gets turned into an opportunity through this song, as the simpler melody and chord progression allow the focus to be on the central message of the song, “You’re not done,” which, though simply phrased, is powerful in itself. The *Confetti* song cycle was designed to strategically allude to the hope of Christ without mentioning Jesus or God explicitly, allowing wider audiences and nonbelievers to connect with the song as well as Christians, while subtly pointing each individual to the One who provides the deeper healing they are seeking.

“Confetti.” “Confetti” is the title track and closing track of this EP and was written with an intentional chord progression and was based off pre-conceived 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 is 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 throughout 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 also 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 also 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 part of the song that was actually written over the summer of 2022, but didn’t fit into any song or projected at the time, so it was saved and pulled back out for the session in which “Confetti” was written. 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.

Conclusion

Music therapy is a part of most people's daily lives whether they realize it or not because of the way it is incorporated into the commercial music industry. Songwriting, co-writing, chord progressions, and prepared material are foundational aspects of how the commercial music industry functions, and they impact the quality and effect of modern music as it connects with audiences and consumers from all genres. New Christian artists have the power to shape modern culture and impact the hearts of audiences in a way that musicians have never been able to before through social media and technological advancements. It is easier than ever to create and produce music to release to the public, and that is a power that should be wielded wisely and intentionally to draw the people of God near to Him, and to encourage and inspire those who do not know Him to seek Him and process their lives in a positive, biblical way. This is why it is important to recognize how the techniques used in music therapy to shift people's mindsets and emotional responses are incorporated in modern music because they have the same effects on commercial audiences, not just therapeutic patients. Though some might not expect it, music holds great influence, particularly when music therapy techniques are involved. The commercial music industry subtly directs lives and not-so-subtly guides the perspectives and worldviews of its listeners because of the implementation of these techniques. Music therapy techniques create connection and passion as the key components of the commercial music industry.

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Link to Sarah Heath's Honors Thesis *Confetti* Song Cycle Artifact:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8Wmq0W-owDjUyAt4dckJGFv18vkUJQx5>

Up in the Air

Music and Lyrics by Sarah Heath

Andante (♩ = 70)

Intro E Esus E Esus **Verse** E Esus

mp

Walk - ing through the pa - ges of

E Esus C#m Bsus

child-hood fan - ta - sies, Fol - low - ing a feel - ing of a lost

E/G# A2 C#m Bsus

fa - mil - i - ar - i - ty. Fac - ing who I used to be and

E/G# A **Chorus** E

find - ing some - one new Up in the air, the "may - be's", the "could be's" are

C#m A E

where a life is found Up in the air, the time took for grant - ed can change

C#m A C#m Bsus

the tide a - round No - bo - dy's per - fect, and no - thing's for cer - tain, and I

Up in the Air

14 E/G# A F#m 7

— know life's not fair, — but may-be it's worth — it to live — e-ven when e -

16 B E Esus E Esus

- very-thing's up — in the air —

Verse

19 E Esus E Esus

If the fu - ture's o - pen and real-ly up to me, —

21 C#m Bsus E/G# A2

how to re - con-cile — all — the good and the bro - ken things — Fac -

23 C#m Bsus E/G# A

- ing who I used to be — and find - ing some - one new Up in the air,

Chorus

25 E C#m A

— the "may - be's", the "could be's" are where a life — is found Up in the air,

27 E C#m A

— the time took for grant - ed can change — the tide — a - round No-bo-dy's per -

29 C#m B sus E/G# A

- fect, and no-thing's for cer - tain, and I ____ know life's not fair, ____ but may-be it's worth

31 F#m7 B E E **Bridge**

____ it to live ____ e-ven when e - very-thing's up ____ in the air ____ Could it be

34 B sus C#m7 A2 C#m7

that we don't have to fi - gure it out ____ be-fore we can find beau - ty ____ here? ____ Could it be

36 B sus C#m7 A2 C#m7

that the wait - ing and self - pro-pi-ti-a-ting are how we face our fear? Could it be

38 B sus C#m7 A2 C#m7

that we don't have to fi - gure it out ____ be-fore we can find beau - ty ____ here? ____ Could it be

40 B sus C#m7 A2

that the wait - ing and self - pro-pi-ti-a-ting are how we face our fear? Up in the air,

Chorus
42 E C#m A

____ the "may - be's", the "could be's" are where a life ____ is found Up in the air,

Up in the Air

44

E C#m A

— the time took for grant - ed can change — the tide — a - round No - bo - dy's per -

46

C#m B sus E/G# A

- fect, and no - thing's for cer - tain, and I — know life's not fair, — but may - be it's worth

48

F#m 7 B sus E

— it to live — e - ven when e - very - thing's up — in the air — And I know

50

F#m7 B sus E

mp it's worth it — e - ven when e - very - thing's up — in the air —

53

E sus E E sus E

Apologies

Music and Lyrics by Sarah Heath

Intro **Melancholy, Reflective** (♩ = 70)

Verse

mp

Emaj9(no7) A2(add6) Emaj9(no7)

Bro - ken _ pic - ces,

6 C#m7

bro - ken _ dreams Some - thing's rip - ping at _ the seams _ _ _ _ _

9 A2 B sus Emaj9(no7) Emaj9(no7)

And I don't quite know why. Scat - tered hopes of

14 C#m7 A2

what could be Chang - ing _ sea - sons, fall - ing leaves _ _ _ _ _

18 B sus Emaj9(no7) **Refrain** C#m

Can't say last good - byes Am I sor - ry for the things we had?

Apologies

22 B/A A 2 C#m

Sor - ry that I can't take back all the words? All the hurt? _____ Am I

25 B/A B sus C#m F#m7

sor - ry for how you re-act? War - ran-ted coun-ter - at - tack; no more words,

28 B sus Emaj9(no7)

on - ly hurt _____ from you _____ A - pol -

31 A 2(add6) Emaj9(no7)

- o - gies are swa - llow - ing me _____

34 A 2(add6)

I'm drown - ing _____ in all _____ these a - pol - o - gies. _____

Verse

37 Emaj9(no7) C#m7

I hope that you're do-ing _____ well You seem o - kay, far _____ as I _____ can

41 A2 B sus Emaj9(no7) Emaj9(no7)

tell, _____ Pass - ing ships at night. I hope one day

46 C#m7

things will _____ change ____ I won't freeze up when I hear ____ your

49 A2 B sus Emaj9(no7)

name _____ May - be we'll need time Am I

Refrain

53 B sus C#m B/A A2

sor - ry for the things we had? Sor - ry that I can't take back all the words?

56 C#m B/A B sus C#m

All the hurt? _____ Am I sor - ry for how you re - act? War - ran - ted coun - ter - at - tack;

59 F#m7 B sus Emaj9(no7)

no more words, on - ly hurt _____ from you _____ A - pol -

63 A2(add6) Emaj9(no7)

- o - gies are swa - llow - ing me _____

66 A2(add6) Emaj9(no7)

I'm drown - ing ___ in all ___ these a - pol - o - gies. _____

70 A2(add6) **Bridge** Emaj7

I don't know what else ___ to say, ___

74 A2

made no dif - ference a - ny - way ___ but may - be there will come a day ___ where

76 A - pol - o - gies are Emaj7

we'll be in ___ a dif - ferent place I don't know what else ___ to say, ___

78

swal - low - ing me I'm drown - ning in all

A2

made no dif - ference a - ny - way — but may - be there — will come a day — where

80

these a - pol - o - gies. **Refrain**

B sus C#m

I'm sor - ry for the things we had.

we'll be in — a dif - ferent place

82

B/A A2 C#m

Sor - ry that I can't take back all the words, All the hurt, — Am I

85

B/A B sus C#m F#m7

sor - ry for how you re - act? War - ran - ted coun - ter - at - tack; no more words,

88

B sus Emaj9(no7)

on - ly hurt — from you — A - pol -

91 A2(add6) Emaj9(no7)

- o - gies are swa - llow - ing me

94 A2(add6)

I'm drown - ing in all these a - pol - o - gies.

Outro Emaj7

97

I don't know what else to say, made no dif - ference a - ny - way but

99 A2 Emaj9

may - be there will come a day where we'll be in a dif - ferent place

If Only I Could

Words and Music by Sarah Heath

Andante (♩ = 93)

Intro

C C/E F2 G sus Am G sus

Verse

C

Oh I saw you yes - ter - day I

6

Am

pan - icked run - ning past you e - ven though you still said "hey"

8

F2

G sus

Af - ter all we've been through how could I not mu - ster up a "hi"

11

When I heard your voice It all came flood - ing back e - ven though We both had no choice

14

F2

G sus

When things end - ed bad - ly but I still just wish it was - n't real When it

Chorus

17

F2 C G sus Am G sus F2 C

fades, I pro - mise I'll re - mem - ber all the ways You

If Only I Could

20 G sus Am G sus F2 C G sus Am G sus

changed my life for-ev - er and I swear I would go back and change the end-ing if I

23 F2 G sus C C/E F2 G sus Am G sus

Turn

could ____ Oh, __ if on - ly I could.

Verse

29 C Am

Soon you're leav - ing town Leav-ing me __ un - sure of how I'm feel - ing now

32 F2 G sus

Door - way crash - es be-ing all __ that's left if we ne-ver meet a - gain ____

35 C Am

I can't help but hope that when you told me "ne-ver" we just need-ed time to cope,

38 F2 G sus

time to grow and ga-ther fur - ther still, ____ I wish this was - n't real ____ When it

Chorus

41 F2 C Gsus Am Gsus F2 C

fades, _____ I pro - mise I'll re - mem - ber all the ways _____ You

44 Gsus Am Gsus F2 C Gsus Am Gsus

changed my life for - ev - er and I swear that I would go back and change the end - ing if I

Bridge

47 F2 Gsus F2 Building

could _____ Oh, if on - ly I could *f* Change the past, take it back

50 Gsus C/E F2

tell you all _____ the things we had _____ were real to me, _____ and help you see _____ that

52 Gsus C/E F2 Gsus

I'm not who I used to be, _____ we'd move on and I'd be strong, and not be stuck with feel - ing like I

55 Am Gsus F2 Am Gsus F2 Gsus G

ru - in ev - ery good thing. Did I ru - in ev - ery good thing? *mp* When it

Half Chorus

60 F2 C Gsus F2 Gsus G

fades, I promise I'll remember all the ways When it

Chorus

64 F2 C Gsus Am Gsus F2 C

fades, I promise I'll remember all the ways You

67 Gsus Am Gsus F2 C Gsus Am Gsus

changed my life forever and I swear I would go back and change the ending if I

Outro

70 F2 Gsus F2 C Gsus

could if only I could. if I could.

74 F2 C Gsus C

mf if only I could.

1,000 (and 1)

Music and Words by Sarah Heath and Chloe Hostetler

Intro **Andante** (♩ = 74)

Bm7 A G2 Bm7 A G2

mf

Verse

8 D A G2

Pull in the drive like I have a thou - sand times

13 D A G2

Met at the door by the scent of be - fore__ The

17 Bm7 A sus G2

ta - ble, the chairs, the cou - ches, the stairs All of it's__ there, but

Chorus

21 D A Bm7

It's so strange be - ing back in this__ place and yet,

24 G2 D A Bm7

no - thing has changed but I'm not the same, As I get__ old - er the fi -

28 G2 Bm7 A sus G2

- re gets cold - er, but I need - ed to burn these old walls down__

31 **Bm7** **A** **G2** **Bm7** **A sus**

In-stead they get tall - er some - how. With all I've out - grown, is it wrong

34 **D/F#** **G2** **A sus** **Bm7** **A sus** **G2**

to let go? What used to be home.

39 **Bm7** **A sus** **G2**

What used to be home.

Verse

45 **D** **A** **G2** **D**

Din-ner's at five, ex - tra chair on the side. Con - ver - sa - tion

50 **A** **G2** **Bm7**

tastes of a sec-ond too late. The laughs and the cries, the

Chorus

54 **A sus** **G2** **A sus** **D**

hugs and good - byes, but I'm left in - side. It's so

58 **A** **Bm7**

strange be - ing back in this place and yet,

60 G2 D A Bm7

no - thing has changed but I'm not the same, As I get old - er the fi -

64 G2 Bm7 A sus G2

- re gets cold - er, but I need - ed to burn these old walls down

67 Bm7 A G2 Bm7 A sus

In - stead they get tall - er some - how. With all I've out - grown, is it wrong

70 D/F# G2 A sus Bm7 A sus G2

to let go? What used to be home. What

Bridge

76 Bm7 A sus G2 Bm7

used to be home. I

81 A sus G2 A sus Bm7

need a new per - spec - tive Life's al - ways chang - ing Why

113

A sus G2 Bm7 A sus G2

What used to be home.

Outro

119

D A G2

mp

Pull out the drive for a thousand first time

You're Not Done

Words and Music by Sarah Heath

Andante (♩ = 78)

Verse

3

Hey, I've got some - thing ___ to say ___ These

3

e - choes in ___ my mind won't seem to go ___ a - way ___ Wait,

5

just look me in ___ the face. ___ I'm beg -

7

- ging for ___ a sign ___ to see ___ a - no - ther day ___

10

Verse

Hey, I've got ___ some - thing ___ to say. ___ I'm rest -

13

- less in ___ the night ad - dict - ed to ___ the same ___ weight. I'm trying to keep

16 F#2 C#

— my faith — that e - ven in — the dark a storm has got -

18 G#sus F#2 G#sus

- ta break 'Cause — I've been wait - ing for so long Has

21 F# G#sus Chorus 1 C#

des - per - a - tion claimed my song? I'm not — done, —

24 F# C# F#

I'm not — done —

27 A#m7 G#sus A#m7 F# C#

Joy is wait-ing with the dawn, I'm not done. — I'm not done. —

Verse

32 G#sus A#m7 F#2 C#

Hey, I've got some-thing — to say. — The e-choes in — your mind are gon - na go

36 G#sus A#m7

— a - way ————— They don't have — the fi -

38 F#2 C#

- nal say ————— I've been ————— where you are, — the choice was mine

40 G#sus F#2 Fm F#

— to make I — know you've wait - ed for so long But — des - per - a - tion

Chorus 2a

44 G#sus C# F#

has not won You're not — done, ————— you're not

47 C# F# A#m7 G#sus

— done. ————— Joy is wait - ing with the dawn. You're not

Chorus 2b

51 A#m7 F# C# G#sus

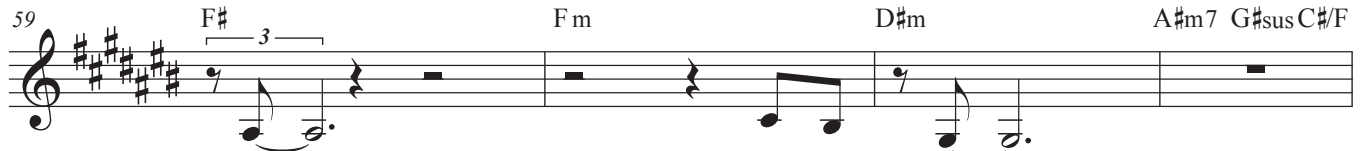
done, ————— you're not — done. —————

55 A#m7 G#sus F# G#sus



Joy is wait-ing with the dawn. There's so much more that's still to come. You're not

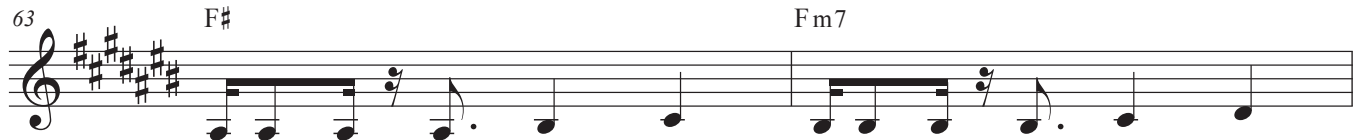
59 F# Fm D#m A#m7 G#sus C#/F



done, — You're not done, —

Bridge

63 F# Fm7



May-be all that's bro - ken is a door that's o - pen

65 D#m7 A#m7 G#sus C#/F D#m7



Off-er - ing a life like you've ne-ver seen be - fore. Dar - ing to be - lieve in

68 Fm7 F# A#m7 G#sus **Chorus 2a**



Hope that you've been seek - ing May - be that's a rea - son to live for some - thing more You're not

71 C# F# C#



done, — you're not — done, —

Chorus 2b

74 F# A#m7 G#sus A#m7

Joy is wait-ing with the dawn. You're not done, _____

78 F# C# G#sus

you're not _____ done. _____ There's _____

81 F# G#sus

so much more that's still to come. You're not _____

Outro

83 A#m7 F# C#

done _____ You're not done, _____

Tag

86 G#sus A#m7 F#

Hey, I've got some - thing _____ to say. _____

89 C# G#sus F#2

Here's _____ your sign, the choice is yours _____ to make. _____

Confetti

Words and Music by Sarah Heath

Andante (♩ = 80)

Intro C# F#2 C# F#2

mf

Verse C# F#2 C# F#2

5

Thought I knew my own sto - ry Read the books, learned the ____ plays.

A#m7 G#sus F# A#m7 G#sus

9

All this time pre-tend - ing for ____ a so - called "hap - py end -

F#2 Fm F# A#m7 G#sus

12

- ing." But that's not ____ the case. The pa - ges all run ____ to - get - her and

Fm F# G#sus **Chorus** A#m7 G#sus

15

we can't e - rase what we've done ____ I did - n't see ____ this co - ming, I

C#/F F# A#m7 G#sus

18

guess I run ____ in blind. Throw trust like ____ Con - fett - i, when it falls

20 F#2 G# F#

I act sur - prised. I tell my - self, "It gets bet - ter,"

22 A#m7 G#sus Fm F#

Wait - ing on an ev - er af - ter to fin - lly let go and to

24 A#m7 G#sus Fm F#

fin - all - y say, "I fin - all - y know I'm

26 A#m7 G#sus C# F#2

fin - all - y in the right place.

Verse

29 C# F#2

How do I solve a pro - blem

31 C# F#2 A#m7 G#sus

that ne - ver quite had a cause? How do I a - pol -

34

F# A#m7 G#sus F#2

- o - gize ___ for i - dent - i - ty ___ built on ___ lies? ___ It's

37

Fm F# A#m7 G#sus

hard to save face ___ when the re - runs all blur ___ to - get - her and

39

Fm F# G#sus **Chorus** A#m7 G#sus

we can't e - rase what we've done ___ I did - n't see ___ this co - ming, I

42

C#/F F# A#m7 G#sus

guess I run ___ in blind. Throw trust like ___ Con - fett - i, when it falls

44

F#2 G# F#

I act ___ sur - prised. I tell my - self, "It ___ gets bet - ter,"

46

A#m7 G#sus Fm F#

Wait - ing on an ev - er af - ter to fin - lly let ___ go ___ and to

48

A#m7 G#sus Fm F#

fin - all - y say, "I fin - all - y know I'm

50

A#m7 G#sus **Bridge** F#

fin - all - y in the right place. All these dreams, all these plans Con -

52

G#sus A#m7

fett - i slip - ping through my hands, I'm beg - ging for more.

54

G#sus C#/F F#

The par - ties al - ways have to end

56

G#sus C#/F F# G#sus

Leav - ing me a - lone a - gain in pie - ces on the floor I

Chorus

59

A#m7 G#sus C#/F F#

did - n't see this co - ming, I guess I run in blind. Throw

61 A#m7 G#sus F#2 G#

trust like__ Con - fett - i, when it falls I act__ sur - prised. I

63 F# A#m7 G#sus

tell my-self, "It__ gets bet - ter," Wait-ing on an ev - er af - ter to

65 Fm F# A#m7 G#sus

fin - lly let__ go__ and to fin - all - y__ say, "I

Outro

67 Fm F# A#m7 G#sus F#

fin - all - y__ know I'm fin - all - y in__ the right place.____

70 A#m7 G#sus F# A#m7 G#sus

73 F# A#m7 G#sus