

PLAYBILL®

A vintage television set is shown from a front-three-quarter view. The screen displays a marquee sign with the text "MOVED BY THE MUSIC" in large, red, illuminated letters. The sign is set against a dark background with red curtains on either side. The television has a silver and black finish with several control knobs and buttons on the right side.

MOVED
BY THE
MUSIC

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A MUSICAL IN SIX ACTS: DIRECTED BY MELISSA PHILLIPS, IAN SALINAS, & SOPHIE THOMPSON

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A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTORS...

Welcome one and all to our unique take on a new classic Broadway Musical, *Moved by the Music*. Our esteemed writers have turned out to be the best cast of characters we could have ever dreamed of, and we hope their acting careers will be long and prosperous. It should be noted that this musical is currently performed in the written form, as our characters have been put on vocal rest after rigorous rounds of rehearsals, yet we still hope for a day where everyone can sing their parts and perform this live.

This magnum opus has been edited in 2019 by Melissa Phillips, Ian Salinas, and Sophie Thompson. Each photo included in this program is used with permission. This work is licensed with a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License:



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With that being said, we invite you to sit back in your cushiony red velvet theatre chair and look to the stage, as the lights dim overhead and the curtain is pulled aside to reveal our narrator, sitting center stage, who goes by the name of Lance Talbot.

GOING LIVE IN

3

2

1

ACTION!

Lance Talbot swivels in his chair, displaying a dazzling grin as he faces the cameras trained on his face. He stares straight into the center camera, winking as he begins his segment.

“Welcome back to *Listen Up with Lance Talbot!*” he exclaims. “On today’s show, I have an exciting announcement to share.” He leans forward conspiratorially. “I have decided to hold a contest where the winner gets to appear on my show, and discuss a topic of their choice!”

Music plays in the background and Lance pauses for a moment, letting out a chuckle.

“Now, who wouldn’t want a chance to talk to me?” he continues. “This could be your time to shine on national television. I can see us now...” He trails off and looks expectantly at the camera.

“Of course a competition can’t happen without rules, so here’s the deal, folks. My team and I will be holding auditions for all of you young hopefuls to come on the show. These will take place very soon, so be on the lookout for details on the where and when on my social media. All you need to do is show up, tell us a bit about why you chose to discuss your chosen topic, and then give us a performance. Talk to us as if you yourself were on the show. Present it to us, show it to us, place us in the moment, people!” Lance gestures wildly for emphasis.

“There is a catch, however.” He lowers his voice a notch, drawing in viewers from homes around the country. “*Listen Up* is all about discussing topics of every nature, and we talk about something new every time on this show, which you all know. For the segment on which you appear, we will be discussing...Can I have a drum-roll, please?” he quips, and a sound overlay of drums abruptly plays for a few seconds, then fades.

“Sound!” Lance declares. “That’s right, folks. We will be discussing sounds. Any type of sound, music or otherwise. Pick one type of sound and give us a demonstration of some kind revolving around the sound you choose. The winning audition receives the coveted spot on *Listen Up*, where we spend an hour on the show talking about the sounds you personally love and why everyone should know more about them.

“So good luck to all of you! May the best audition win. I will see all of you very, very soon.” And with that, Lance launches into the main segment of his broadcast, barely able to contain his excitement of meeting all the new contestants who would soon vie to appear on his talk show.

ACT I: THE CLASSICS



Lance Talbot sits in an empty theatre chair, holding a clipboard and flipping through several forms. It's the first day of auditions and the first contestant should be here any minute. He regards the first few forms, noting the brief synopses of what each audition will contain.

It appears as if the first few contestants wrote about traditional sounds with classical roots. He nods to himself, curious to see how they will differ from each other.

The sound of footsteps echos softly across the stage, and Lance looks up to see the first contestant standing nervously in front of him.

“Hello!” Lance says cheerfully. “Please tell us your name, what sound you’re discussing, and why you chose this sound specifically.”

He settles back into his chair, putting a pen behind his ear, and watches in anticipation as the contestant opens her mouth to speak...

SCENE I: PAS DE DEUX

Sophie Thompson

I chose to write to the song “Pas de Deux” from The Nutcracker Suite, Op. 71a by Tchaikovsky because I love the whimsical sound and emotional tones that occur throughout the track. It immediately whisks me into another world or place where the ballet dancers performing to this song are more than their titular characters appear to be, and it's my job to uncover their secrets. Instrumental soundtracks like those found in The Nutcracker are truly unique, capturing the hearts and imaginations of listeners around the world.

At the sound of the first harp string thrumming delicately through the air, Celine could feel the music in her bones.

She stood alone on the floor, empty space around her, the candles flickering within their golden candelabras on the tables from afar. Her body was folded neatly in her opening position, bent at the waist, arms folded down towards the ground, head bowed. Her eyes were closed, rimmed in gold around her lash-line, waiting for the right moment to open. One leg stood straight, the other stretched out behind her at a slight angle, toe pointed, the tips of her glossy satin shoe catching the dim light of the room.

The violin began to weave a mellow harmony from thin but tenacious strings, and she obediently rose from her stance, standing on her toes, balancing her weight. Her arms fluttered above her head, and she turned, gliding into an arabesque. The music swayed around her. A smile graced her lips, and she shifted back to relevé to face her audience.

Celine bowed once to her left while on her toes, one arm making a broad sweeping gesture, acknowledging the sea of faces before her. She did the same to her right. Then, the real dance began.

She turned and spun across the floor, her skirt fanning out around her. Her feet moved on their own accord, their movements instinctive by now, the music leading her onwards through the dance. She paid no mind to the people who saw her, to the sheer number of them, let alone the caliber of status they brought with them. Tonight, she was the principal dancer, and she would give them a show.

Light as air, quick as a fox, she flitted about the room, arms aloft, performing a series of jumps and pirouettes. Her body sang with every movement she made, every breath she took. This was what she was meant to do.

Celine danced and danced and danced, twirling every which way, then gracefully stretching towards the ceiling, beyond which the midnight sky darkened to signal the coming of night. Her steps were swift, precise; she completed elegant, slow circles en pointe and jumped into assemblés so high she felt like she was flying.

The music swarmed around her, building into the main part of the dance. Her movements echoed the chords. A countdown began in her mind as she lifted a leg into a high arabesque once more and waited, holding her stance in a display of strength and grandeur.

A light touch at her waist was her only warning before she allowed herself to be lifted high into the air, shifting to meet the face of her partner, Gustave, who at last joined the dance. They allowed one another a brief smile before she was whisked about and set down on the floor, rapidly switching into a series of moves that vaguely resembled a waltz. They walked the length of the floor, his body perfectly in sync with hers, engaging in quick-fire maneuvers that had the crowd around them gasping in awe.

Gustave took her hand and twirled her so her outfit could be showcased at every angle. Celine's bodice was a pale pink, lined in white trim with tiny pearls stitched into the paneled front. Her skirt flared out in alternating layers of tulle and chiffon, soft and dainty to match the sprightly, whimsical tone of the music. She rose on her toes and extended herself into a croisé, letting him then take the opportunity to dance around her and display his outfit in turn. Gustave gave into a full tour en l'air, exhibiting the brocade doublet in white with gold buttons, and matching fine white pants that fit snugly to the leg to allow full range of movement.

They came together at the sound of the drums, falling smoothly into each other's arms, joined together in the final, rousing sequence that would bring the audience to its knees. Their steps quickened, their arms a flurry of refined, graceful gestures, turning and turning until at last the ending chords sounded, and they struck their final pose: Gustave's arm wrapped around Celine's waist, holding her steady as she balanced on the top of her right toe, her left leg extended fully behind her.

For a moment, silence reigned.

Then the thunderous applause rang out from somewhere deep within the shadows of the massive ballroom, and her heart swelled with pride and happiness. Face flushed, Celine sank into a curtsy, beaming at Gustave, who, grinning, grabbed her hand to lead her off the dance floor and into the crowd, eager to introduce her to the many noble faces at court.

She hesitated for only a moment, darting a glance out the closest window, eyes searching for something—or perhaps someone—far in the distance. She bit her lip, then let herself be tugged into the adoring masses, lost in a tangle of jeweled throats and polished boots.

Marshall could hear the music from the palace.

One of the famed dances composed by the legendary musician in residence at court, no doubt.

He glanced up at the hall renowned for its balls, its food and drink, its lush interior, and its myriad of people inside it. He wanted no part of it now. Didn't see a need to pay it any sort of attention.

Except..

Except. He could barely form the thought in his mind. *She* was up there. Somewhere in that crowded ballroom she was up there, likely lost in the music and dancing her heart out, dressed like a queen.

Marshall wished he could see her, for all the good it would do him. Wished to see her dance under the diamond chandeliers like a fallen star on the wayside, a dream, a vision come to life. He had never felt so alone before.

He turned his gaze away, back to the horse he led by the halter. The creature blinked slowly at him, fog curling from its nostrils as it breathed in the cold night air. He shook his head. It was time he did what he was supposed to do—what he should've been grateful to be doing.

A warm blanket, a bucket of grain and an apple, and the task of bedding down the other horses awaited him.

“Come on, boy,” he said softly, and tugged gently on the lead rope, walking the gelding back to the stables.

Back to where he himself belonged.

The horse followed obediently, his soft nicker the only other sound accompanying his hooves plodding across the street.

SCENE II: MUSICAL LORE

Paris Taylor

I wrote about violins because I have always loved the deep sounds that they make and how they can inspire the musician to create a versatile performance however they choose. I think that the violin is a fun instrument to play, and though I haven't played the violin (I played the flute in middle school band), I think that the violin is an instrument where creativity can be sparked and the musician is free to create both music and performance based off their personalities or vision.

The bell tower outside of Jainey's bedroom window chimed, signaling three o'clock in the morning. It was almost as if her body responded to the sound and pulled itself out of the bed, putting one foot in front of the other. Her hand instinctively opened the door to her bedroom and she walked out into the corridor of the palace. Her legs moved quietly and swiftly, eager to reach their destination. By the time her mind caught up with her, Jainey was standing in front of a silver door with a silver handle. Her eyes shot open when her hand met the coolness of the metal handle.

How did I get here? What is this door?

She could vaguely remember the rules about this door given to her from her father. She wasn't allowed to go near this door, but was never given a reason why. Before she could think to remove her hand, it turned on its own and her legs forced her to go into the forbidden room.

The room was dimly lit with a small lamp on a stand in the corner of the room. But what stood in the middle of the room is what captured Jainey's attention. Sitting in a showcase was a chestnut colored violin and bow. She moved closer to the glass to get a better look at the violin.

Is this why father didn't want me here? All because of a violin?

Her hands itched to touch the violin, while her fingers longed to understand why they were missing something they'd never felt. Almost robotically, Jainey slid the door of the showcase open and took out the violin and its bow. The weight of the violin felt familiar in her hands, as if she's held it before. Innately, she placed it underneath her chin, drew her bow, and began to play. With her fingers and wrist moving on their own accord, a dull, thick, syrupy sound slowly filled the room. As she played, Jainey noticed something glowing on the

left wall. When she stopped playing to get a better look at it, it disappeared. Placing the violin back underneath her chin, her fingers picked up where they left off.

The left wall began to glow again. She continued to play and the light coming from the wall had grown brighter and started to spread out across the room. Writing on the walls had slowly started to show itself, glowing in an unfamiliar language. The more she played, the more words would reveal themselves.

Jainey continued to play the song her fingers were playing, picking up the tempo and playing higher notes. It wasn't before long that the room was almost completely filled with glowing characters. When her fingers began to slow down and her wrist began to turn slightly one last time, the room shone in white light, revealing all the writing that was there. Untucking the violin from her chin, she stared at the writing that trailed along the walls and onto the ceiling. Inching closer to the walls, she scanned each character. Her brain worked quick to decipher each word, formulating them into sentences that she could understand.

"A warrior will rise when the tides of the kingdom are low. They will unlock the door and bring an era of peace and prosperity."

What could that mean?

"The warrior that you seek is one amongst you. They will come to your aid when the bow meets the violin."

It doesn't really mean this violin, does it?

"The true heir to the kingdom will be the only one who will know the secret song to summon the warrior."

When Jainey read this sentence, a hidden door panel began to appear.

What did I just do?

"The final song will reveal itself when the time is right."

Wait, what does this mean?

Jainey stood away from the wall and eyed the door that appeared in the room. For a minute nothing happened. Then the words on the walls shifted into musical notes, forming a melody of a song. This song is one that Jainey knew. Her mother used to play it on the piano when she was little.

When she raised the violin once more to play, it felt heavier. She attempted to glide the bow over the copper colored string, but her wrist would not move, nor would her fingers form the chords that were shown before her.

Now I can't play? I've been playing all morning.

She tried again, slow and careful to move her fingers to the correct positions. She was only able to play one note correctly. That single note reverberated throughout the room. She could feel the note's breath lingering in the air around her. It made her hands shake with anticipation. She could feel it giving her a small kiss on her cheek. She'd never heard anything like it.

The new door that had appeared creaked open. Jainey nearly dropped the violin at the sound. Taking a step back, she waited for the "warrior" to possibly come through. Still, there was nothing. Jainey carefully placed the violin on the floor, mustering up some courage to inch closer to the mysterious door.

She forced her legs to move, but she didn't have to try as hard. The tune of her mother's song floated from that door. It pulled her forward, closing the gap. Her hand reached up and pushed on the panel. Behind it was a mirror displaying an image of her mother playing the piano, and her adolescent self was sitting next to her, memorizing her mother's hands striking each key with a soothing grace. When the song stopped, her mother turned to the smaller Jainey.

"One day, Jainey, you will hear this song in search for someone who will aid this country in keeping harmony amongst the people and other nations."

"I thought father said we were in a time of stability?"

Her mother sighed. "That is true for now, but something is still lurking in the shadows. I know this will be hard to understand, especially since your father refuses to listen to reason, but you hold the key to saving this kingdom. Don't let your father stand in the way of that."

The image in the mirror dissolved, showing Jainey's reflection. A small sentence was scrawled across the top.

"Needn't look too far for the one that will bring hope."

A different image of Jainey danced across the mirror. This time she was sitting on a throne with a crown on her head with a bow and arrow flanking her side.

SCENE III: MASQUE IN FOUR PARTS

Erin Adelman

As I listened to Claude Debussy's Suite Bergamasque, a four-part piano suite, two characters and their story came to my mind. When I wrote these poems in response to the suite, I wanted to leave some ambiguity surrounding the concrete details of the characters and story. The four poems are intended to work together to tell one story, while leaving room for readers to bring their individual experiences and interpretations to the piece.

I. "Prelude"

like orange notes atop
piano keys we
Drop. your burgundy timbre reverberates, a
Nameless molten
rise and
Fall. my fingers retrace their
steps across
the path in quick trickle.

we leave for the countryside kindness,
for whispered wildflower perfume that sticks in
the wind like
cycling thoughts. all i wish we
Were

"not right now"
we are autumn leaves
swayed by today's
sighs, assured by yesterday's semblance. will we
always circle
the conversation, distracted by our prism
show of color?

you stride
through the sprawling field, the unseen
underneath crushed by your
step. bejeweled light in June is
August's enjambed heat.

when you return i hope you
walk on new Crescendos.
my attention draws
inward to dawning
revelations: our city is faraway
when i see
my thought-sculpted self
as another. against the blue of noon
you slow and
stand
what did you find?

the sun glints warning gold
for me like lightning
for the bird. you return and we are impressionable
grass. you smile as though you
Found Something.

II. Minuet Andantino

the ballroom swings
a convincing twist
and under sleeves of glassy silk. our footsteps
flit, our hands reach for
Steadiness, hope for an easy andantino.
we are more Gilded

than the walls. they glow when our backs
are turned. we are a room of organdy smiles yet
no one can
hear. i twirl with
you but i wonder which
ghost's secrets are
concealed
in the sheen of the floor.
your glance—spring breeze's
Light tone—
skips across my
eyes and
the silver keys sing.
we spin dizzy, wandering inside
and between mind's iron fences.
i watch starlight
 spill onto
pomegranate-stained mahogany.

III. "Clair de Lune"

can we speak release if we can't
See?
what yellow dawning
streak sleeps
beneath our night veneer?
we Slip in staccato
unseen
something spaced
between our notes. Daylight hangs
like a tangent from your

lip.

no one not you
sees the fountain stream
beneath a beautiful disguise. easy words
leap only to
sink into
my skin again.

IV. Pass Through

i have not returned to the city we shared. not until today. we learned an allegretto in green
spring, a creative masquerade. i yearn to wade in beginner's kindness.
Alone with unwelcome company, the you i knew walks with me, rushing like wind through
lace curtains. which you was the you Most you? what is my rawest me? moments linger
orange in window corners and sing within walls. i hope this is where my memories live once
they leave me. we were fooled by illusions but was it not beautiful? Happy is a strange mask
but Sad is a transparent face. which one do you prefer?
a man stands at the corner of Bright and First, hands out ads for apartments.
no thanks, i say, i am only passing through.
cross First street and gaze anew, May memories will
drop to December somber and there too i will only be passing through.

ACT II: HIP-HOP



Lance Talbot leans back in his chair, reflecting on the performances he just witnessed. So far he'd heard classical music, ranging from selections of piano and violins. All great stuff, really. He was quite impressed. The competition was in full swing now. He wondered what would come next, flipping to the next candidate's submission form. *Ah*, he thinks, grinning as he catches sight of the new musical category: hip-hop. The complete opposite of what he'd heard so far today. He nods in satisfaction.

"Next!" Lance calls. The fourth contestant walks confidently onto the stage. "Very well," Lance says. "Show me what you got."

SCENE I: SOUND OF HIP-HOP MUSIC

Ian Salinas

I chose to write about the genre of hip-hop music because the sound of it gets me hyped up, and brings me up whenever I am feeling down. The beats in every song get me going, whether it be before playing sports or just driving in my car. It also puts me in a good mood. When I am in a bad mood, I listen to it because it gets me motivated and allows me to return to a happy place. It also allows me to listen to other people's stories and brings me into their world.

Introduction:

The sound of hip-hop has evolved throughout the years, from its humble beginnings in a New York apartment complex to now being played at sold out arenas across the world. Hip-hop's origins started in 1973 at a party hosted by an MC named DJ Kool Herc. An emcee or "MC" is someone who hosts a party, or raps over the beat. He hosted a party and played certain percussive breaks of popular songs from that time period, like jazz and blues. The sound of hip-hop then took off within the inner cities of America. The sound of the genre has taken many forms over the years, but there is an underlying pattern that every song or beat has and the audience can hear it in the songs.

Beginning Sound:

Early depictions of hip-hop sound came from the urban streets, where people used many influences to create music. During the 70s, disco and jazz were huge parts of the American scene and especially in black culture. DJs used these records to create a style of turning tables where they would "scratch" the record they would play, which would then create a new sound effect that made the record sound like it was stuttering. This created baselines for hip-hop music as the structure of each record. Even today, every hip-hop song has a baseline that can more or less sound similar if you listen closely. In the 70s, the sound was very similar to disco music, just with added-in breaks by the DJs playing the music. It was not until the late 70s where "rapping" was added to the sound. Rapping or MC'ing was introduced and created a sound over the beat where it would have the elements of lyrics and

rhyiming with rhythm. Verses can incorporate rhymes more so than singing with added rhythm so it was not generic. It was also around this time where people would start creating their own beats to these verses or “sampling” other songs to mix it up. However, as these new forms were being created, the same baseline and even disco and jazz influences stayed with the beats. While disco music kept declining, hip-hop started to become mainstream and a less underground genre with groups like Run DMC and Public Enemy had started to gain popularity. Hip-hop was referred to as the better version of disco as early beats had used disco loops.

Adapting Sound:

Like everything, things adapt and change over time. Through the 80s, hip-hop became mainstream and everyone from all types of backgrounds were listening to it. The sound itself stayed mostly the same, with baselines and record scratching even put into the song recordings. The genre also tried to stay mainstream with guitar additions to songs, like in Run DMC’s “It’s Tricky.” However, producers and rappers wanted to add something else to it. Instead of rapping about things the public as a whole can relate to, they wanted to show their lives and the struggles that came with that. While rap was mainly just a New York thing until the mid 80s, it spread to the West Coast starting in the early 90s. This period was a time of struggle for the inner cities and the minorities in them. Racism and inequalities created struggles for black people, and they wanted to show that in their music. The sound of the beat slowed down, emphasizing the lyrics and rhyme sound they intended. This is because they wanted to spread a message. It created the sub-genre called “Gangsta Rap,” which was to show the struggles of the streets and urban life. Artists like Ice Cube and Dr. Dre were the founders of this. Their sound showed people the struggles and inequalities of minorities in the United States. Songs like “Fuck the Police” by N.W.A. showed how the police target people of color. They wanted the West Coast to emphasize lyrics and not as much the beat they were rapping over, but the beat was similar to the early beats and the rap sound always showed rhythm and rhymes. Rap continued to gain popularity but also critiques over these songs. As more popularity garnered, more rappers began to shine. Arguably the two greatest rappers to date, Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G., took the stage in the early 90s. Their sounds were the same but also entirely different. Tupac embodied the West Coast sound, with slow drawn-out rhymes that embodied the street culture and to raise awareness

for those being oppressed. Biggie embodied the East Coast sound, emphasizing the sound of the beat with an aggressive lyrical approach. This evolved into a feud as to who produces the greatest rappers between LA and New York. But, between the two, both coasts stood up against inequalities and even challenged the government through their music, which was seen as frowned upon and even dangerous. This age of rap was referred to as the “Golden Age,” where many of the greats were in their primes and showed an updated sound of politics and rhymes that have never been surpassed.

Current Sound:

Current times of hip-hop have made the genre worldwide, not just an American scene. As of today, hip-hop has become the biggest genre in America and has spread all throughout the world. Latin countries have embraced the culture and even all the way to Asia there are rappers and hip-hop songs being created. The sound has evolved as well because of technology. Record players are no longer a thing. With everything being digital, you can make a song in almost any way. The baseline still occurs within the same realm as it does from the early stages, but with other influences. Hip-hop has artists from all over and the biggest ones aren't even from LA or New York. Drake, Migos, etc. are artists that come from all over. Sound now consists of better production with beats using chimes and jazz-esque noises that show the similarities from before. Production matters more in this rap age because lyrics aren't emphasized as much. However, there is still the same rhythm and flow over beats that have been there for years. Hip-hop has come a long way from its beginnings in New York to now being shown all over the world, but there is still the baseline and rhyming that everyone can recognize through the generations.

SCENE II: *HAMILTON*: A WRITER TO LISTEN TO

Phoebe Campbell

I wrote this piece because I love Hamilton. My sister introduced me to the musical a few years ago, and we got matching tattoos of our favorite lyrics last January. I recommend that writers listen to it while doing their writing because it works so well for me! Lin-Manuel Miranda has such a way with lyrics and rhythm that I can listen to the soundtrack again and again without ever growing bored of it. Although a hip-hop musical may sound strange to some, I find it to be one of my favorite things to listen to, no matter what I'm doing or writing.

Introduction

Hamilton is a hip-hop musical about the life of Alexander Hamilton. The musical was written by Lin-Manuel Miranda after he read a biography about America's first secretary of the treasury (Murray 2019). *Hamilton* premiered Off-Broadway in January 2015, with a diverse cast and Miranda playing the leading role. Despite the fact that the concept of a hip-hop musical about the life of one of America's founding fathers sounds rather strange, the musical was nearly an instant success and moved to Broadway later in 2015. Since then, the musical has begun its circulation not just across America, but has made the journey to London as well. *Hamilton* has won numerous awards and continues to garner acclaim even though it opened almost half a decade ago. Miranda has explained that Hamilton's rise from being a poor, self-educated boy from the Caribbean to one of George Washington's most trusted advisors resembles the lives of many successful rappers and embodies the spirit of hip-hop (Murray 2019).

Hamilton is arguably one of the best lyrical works of our time and deals with a wide array of subjects—from war and politics to love and scandal. Additionally, another major topic reflected throughout the musical is writing. Alexander Hamilton was an accomplished writer following the Revolutionary War, and people with a passion for writing will likely find it to be even more delightful than the typical listener for this reason. Writers might even consider listening to the music of *Hamilton* while doing their own writing. Miranda's *Hamilton* could easily provide the soundtrack to any field of writing; however, it is particularly useful for authors writing argumentative and romantic works, and for those experiencing writer's block as well.

Argumentative Works

Much of *Hamilton* is centered around the political climate of the United States' beginnings, seeing as how Alexander Hamilton was a prominent political figure of the time. The quick, witty lines of Miranda's songs, typically focused on political issues, contain the power to inspire writers of argumentative works. "Cabinet Battle #1," for example, is a debate between Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson in which Jefferson argues, "In Virginia, we plant seeds in the ground / We create. You just wanna move our money around / This financial plan is an outrageous demand / And it's too many damn pages for any man to understand" ("The Official Page" n.d.). Although this line is a particularly hard-hitter, the song in its entirety could fuel any argumentative-style work. Additionally, "Your Obedient Servant" maintains argumentative prowess throughout, yet here we see a more covert style utilized by Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Hamilton states, "Hey, I have not been shy / I am just a guy in the public eye / Tryin' to do my best for our republic / I don't wanna fight / But I won't apologize for doing what's right" ("The Official Page" n.d.). While there are many songs from the musical that display strong argumentative characteristics, "Cabinet Battle #1" and "Your Obedient Servant" stand out amongst the crowd as two of the best songs for disputatious writers.

Romantic Works

Although politics make up a generous portion of *Hamilton's* content, love is another major topic of the musical. Some of Miranda's love songs pertain to platonic love, either for friends or family, however, the romantic songs are particularly impactful. The chorus of "Helpless," for instance, maintains, "Look into your eyes, and the sky's the limit I'm helpless! / Down for the count, and I'm drownin' in 'em" ("The Official Page" n.d.). Eliza Schuyler's blind love for Alexander Hamilton as it is displayed here could never fail to strike up a love streak in a writer. "Burn," on the other hand, comes just after Eliza learns of Hamilton's affair and has a much different tone than "Helpless." Eliza proclaims, "You forfeit all rights to my heart / You forfeit the place in our bed / You sleep in your office instead / With only the memories / Of when you were mine / I hope that you burn" ("The Official Page" n.d.). All great love stories have some level of turmoil and "Burn," the foil of "Helpless," provides the perfect provocation for the writer of a romantic work.

Writer's Block

All writers experience writer's block at some point in their career for a number of reasons. Alexander Hamilton, however, may have been the exception. As Miranda describes throughout the musical, Hamilton never lacked the motivation to write, especially when it came to *The Federalist Papers*. In "Non-Stop," Burr queries of Hamilton, "How do you write like tomorrow won't arrive? / How do you write like you need it to survive? / How do you write ev'ry second you're alive? / Ev'ry second you're alive? Ev'ry second you're alive?" ("The Official Page" n.d.). While this is indicative of Hamilton's unique ability to write even when it didn't seem as urgently necessary to outsiders, it also provides much needed inspiration for those that see the urgency, but simply cannot find the words. A song that serves a similar purpose is "My Shot," in which Hamilton states, "I'm a diamond in the rough, a shiny piece of coal / Tryin' to reach my goal. My power of speech: unimpeachable" ("The Official Page" n.d.). Although this song is less directly applicable to writer's block, it does have the potential to incite confidence in those who are doubting their writing abilities. The entire musical, in fact, is centered around Hamilton's obsession with his own perceived legacy, which carries the promise of encouraging one to write.

Conclusion

Although Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical, *Hamilton*, could easily provide the soundtrack to any field of writing, it is particularly useful for authors writing argumentative and romantic works, in addition to those experiencing writer's block. "Cabinet Battle #1" and "Your Obedient Servant" are perfect for argumentative writing, "Helpless" and "Burn" are applicable for romantic writing, and "My Shot" and "Non-Stop" are effective cures for writer's block. With almost fifty songs, however, the musical contains numerous tunes that are great for other genres of writing. Due to its universalism, *Hamilton* transcends not only musical genre, but literary genre as well.

SCENE III: IT GETS THE PEOPLE GOIN'

Izzy Schwarze

I wrote this piece because I find Kanye West to be very motivational, and I love this sound!

Writing, and writing well, is an exhaustive process. The pen, mightier than the sword, rides on the forefront of social and cultural change. People use writing to communicate their unique perspective to the world. These perspectives and experiences can shake the stability of society.

An ability to harness these perspectives and put these complicated ideas into words is the root of our superpower, but finding the precise words to formulate complicated ideas fatigues even the most experienced writer. Many try to fix these complexities by listening to soothing music or relaxing sounds; however, these times are trying. With more social and political upheaval, writers must be pushed far beyond the comfort of classical music.

They must use provocative music in order to produce outspoken pieces; Kanye West is the man for the job. With over fifty Grammy nominations, Kanye West, or *Ye*, writes, performs, and lives an obscure form of music and expression. His nine albums provide ideal grenade-like one-liners. Kanye West's music is the ideal soundtrack for radical and provocative thought and writing. But being provocative does not always intend sexual desire. It also means to cause anger or a strong reaction deliberately.

Famous writings in history have always been provocative. It intentionally provokes uncomfortable thoughts in order to implement important social change. Martin Luther nailed his "95 Theses" to the door of a Catholic church. His words sparked the Protestant Reformation. When Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, she tipped the world into the second-wave of feminism.

Today with such wide accessibility to music, writers can arm themselves with an ideal soundtrack while they march off to change the world. Thinking outside the box, not compromising for the norm, and simply being provocative gets the people going (*Ye* literally sings this in a song). *Ye's* music does this, as does the "95 Theses" and *The Feminine Mystique*.

Long, wild stretches of chaos extend over *Ye's* collection of music. Many find his lyrics confusing, but no one can argue the Kanye West show is irresistibly entertaining and all together provocative. For most artists, youthful exuberance reeks throughout their first

few albums but not for Ye. He has been a bull in every China shop since his *The College Dropout*. His outspokenness, self-appraisal, and ridiculously brash persona has long attracted media attention and affection. Yet, West rises in popularity.

Controversial lyrics from the 2005 hit “Gold Digger” or the album *Ye* are what consistently puts West at the top of the charts. West knows that these immense displays of ego succeed. Writers can take note. In his own way, his songs verge on beatific. He deliberately preaches in “Violent Crimes” about his own failures as a man and his hopes for his own daughter.

From the most popular songs like “Stronger” to hidden gems like “Jesus Walks,” West’s music has the hit-making ability to make even the faintest of fans bob their heads along. The rhythm and rhyme of his music motivates. Think about EDM music. Even without lyrics, the electricity and pulse of the music moves people to dance along. Even if the lyrics from West’s music were gone, the raw music alone is enough to push writers.

While trapped behind a computer, just the writer and the screen, it is imperative to feel inspired to continue with the mission, especially if the piece comes from a place of anger or concern. Words get jumbled and ideas get lost, but tunes like “Black Skinhead” keep the fire lit in the belly of the writer. The fire burns and rages. If a writer wishes to highlight a positive, light-hearted idea, Kanye does that too.

Recently, Kanye West released his newest album: *Jesus is King*. He traveled around the country premiering this album with his gospel concerts on Sunday mornings which he calls Sunday Services. It seems he’s discovered a newfound zeal as he sings about God and his religion.

His album pushes musical boundaries. The rap genre—typically soiled with music about drugs and sex— sees bits of undeniable beauty in *Jesus is King*: sweeping epics sprinkled with organ introductions and ballads with lyrics about Chick-fil-A.

From this album, writers can continue to push their provocative writing, as West does. This album, one of the first of its kind, addresses deeper issues that are not usually discussed in hip-hop. It has made listeners dance; it has inspired listeners; it has led to conversations about faith and hip-hop; but most importantly, it has made listeners *think*.

Today, Kanye’s music makes people put their phones away, tuck their beliefs away, and listen to new ideas. Many people have reacted negatively to his album. They believe hip-hop artists should stick to hip-hop rather than dabbling in faith. He has provoked them with

his album, but from this, people have risen and defended his ideals: there is a place for faith in hip-hop.

All good writing inspires these conversations. Whether you agree with Kanye or not, we should inspire and provoke each other with our writing. Writing for a social change should push readers out of their comfort zones, should excel new conversations, and should be provocative.

Love him or hate him, Kanye can teach us all an important lesson: your writing should get the people goin' if you want to make a change. Listen to Kanye, go forth, and change the world.

ACT III: INNER PEACE



Holding his chin in his hand, Lance consults the next audition forms, slightly concerned about what might happen next. The last contestants had outdone themselves, certainly, but their selections were significantly louder and more intense than the first bout of auditions had been. He wasn't sure he could handle much more of the rhythmic beats and rapid-fire lyrics that were staples of hip-hop in the span of such a short timeframe.

Spotting the next few types of sounds, Lance sighs in relief. Sounds of inner peace—that he can get used to. All he has to do is sit back and relax, and let the contestants work their magic.

“Jewels Savage!”

Lance glances expectantly towards the stage, ready to be serenaded by the concept of serenity.

SCENE I: PEACE IN THIS MADNESS: LO-FI AND ITS SOOTHING BEATS

Jewels Savage

Lo-Fi offers a wide variety of sounds and beats that allow for a relaxing, yet not dreadful, atmosphere. Most Lo-Fi tracks intertwine nostalgia-feels with samples from movies and shows, offering the chance to ponder the significance of the small, familiar bits that were included. The relaxing and nostalgic feelings Lo-Fi offers helps me to write on, without the distraction of silence. It also offers small sparks of inspiration; the way reels of tape sound against slow beats might make one wonder what kind of scene would this track be in? Is it a sad scene or maybe is it a scene where the main character is thinking about their life, getting ready to make a big decision? Lo-Fi urges me to write; it gets my thoughts flowing and prevents them from straying away from the task at hand, whatever the piece might be.

Writing has been, and most likely always will be, my escape.

From the time I could form words into coherent sentences to now, stories would flow out of my brain, fictional or not. I used to get lost in the silence I so desperately searched for, always trying to find some peace in an over-crowded house. The silence was welcoming, comforting, warm, and it offered open sound waves for my thoughts to flow. I used to crave this silence, often becoming unnaturally frustrated when I couldn't find it, causing myself to give up and hope that the next day would be better.

Silence no longer offers comfort.

Instead, it coaxes the darkest parts of my mind to come out, distracting me to the point where I can do nothing but sit and feel my mind ooze away. Thoughts don't connect. Unwanted emotions become apparent. The need for nicotine increases.

Music often helps more times than not when my mind becomes this way—it pulls it all back into my skull, allowing it to once more become a somewhat functioning brain. If I find myself needing to clean, the country comes on: Tim McGraw, Dixie Chicks, Jo Dee Messina. If I find myself needing to release anger, the alternative rap comes on: Witt Lowry, Pettros, Ski Mask the Slump God. If I find myself in a rare moment of bliss, the oldies come on: The Four Seasons, Fleetwood Mac, Billy Joel. Yet, where all these tunes drive out the negatives, they also allow for distraction when I'm attempting to pour my creativeness onto paper.

It wasn't that long ago, probably less than six months, did I come across *ChilledCow* and their YouTube channel "lofi hip hop music- beats to relax study to" and I was introduced to this newer music genre of Lo-Fi. I was originally taken aback by the name,

expecting some sort of foreign pop music with words I wouldn't be able to understand. Instead, I found myself relaxing to a strand of calming beats playing against the instrumental soundtrack to *My Neighbor Totoro*, a Studio Ghibli film I had grown up with. The familiar music had shot a wave of nostalgia through me, calming my arm hairs to lay flat again and my hands to stop twitching, yet the repetitive beats overlapping this music held me as if on a rope, hanging close to this nostalgia, but far enough away where my mind wouldn't be overcome by it. It offered comfort and a reassuring route, pulling me up towards a new sense of open mindedness, where my thoughts felt free to roam within this area of comfort. I found my attention focusing, using this comfort spot to sort through my thoughts with the negative thoughts being thrown off me, allowing me to climb closer to my goals, whatever they might be.

Of course, *ChilledCow* isn't the only source of Lo-Fi, nor does all of the Lo-Fi genre inhibit nostalgic senses. *Quiet Hours* on Spotify offers random noises paired with simple, soothing notes, relaxing enough to ease the nerves but not relaxing enough to put you to sleep. These random noises range from the sounds of nature to the crinkling of paper to reels of tape spinning on a continuous loop. Where these noises may often be tuned out and even annoying at times, the overlapping music offers a whole new perspective, offering a chance for my mind to slow down and appreciate these sounds in ways I can utilize them.

When I write, I write straight through, beginning to end. Distraction angers me, for I know the moment I find my mind wandering to something else, I am lost. I waste time, reading and rereading what I had written, trying to get back into the same mindspace, the same tone, the same pace. I typically find myself staring at the screen for hours, my hair a mess from constantly flipping it out of my eyes. My back aches from hunching over the keyboard in long intervals and my fingers start to cramp from typing like a madman. Sometimes, when I finish writing, I like to picture myself from another person's perspective, wondering what they might think if they happened to venture into this empty room—would they see a writer gone mad? Just another Edgar Allan Poe type? How on Earth does she continue to write so?

I would tell them it's the sounds my phone produces, sitting an arms length away—this oddly termed strand of simple, yet complex notes. I use them to fuel this peaceful madness as they bring comfort. They bring ease. They bring the opening of doors of inspiration when I can't seek them out myself. They bring me back down to reality, yet, at the same time, they create new realities—realities that fill my brain with endless possibilities.

This collaboration of emotions and thoughts drives me to indulge in this madness, writing to my heart's content, pushing me to express my feelings, ideas, and hopes, all while blocking out any negatives that may be trying to work against me.

SCENE II: THE POWER OF YOGA MUSIC

Elizabeth Bolland

I did my piece on yoga because it is something that I have been practicing for many years and benefitted from the breathing dramatically. It calms me down and the music is very soothing.



The sun rises and my feet sink deeper and deeper into the small grains of wet sand. I breathe in and out of consciousness, cleansing my inner soul. Hints of red and orange reflect over the glass-like water, calming the space around me. My legs cross and my hands come to heart center, preparing my chest for the upcoming yoga movements. “In through your nose and out with your mouth,” the instructor repeats.

As a group, we move into more fluid and rapid movements in correlation with the instructor’s music. The beat speeds up and I flow my hands over my head, grounding my toes and heels into the tough sand. “If you control your breathing, your body will stimulate a more purifying and cleansing experience,” the instructor calmly mentioned. My breath finds steadiness and I begin to escape from reality. My eyelids close and I feel stillness in a space with so much energy. How is that possible?

Breathing consciously is the essence of yoga, connecting us to the subtle energy within. Our breath is what allows us to navigate through our levels of consciousness, affecting our mental, emotional, and physical state. As the music and tension speeds up, your breath naturally speeds up, making it more difficult to control your consciousness. It is important to understand that connecting your breath is a method for being present.

My towel shifts as I make my first flow into downward dog. Letting go of the past, current, and future thoughts, I breathe into the deepest part of my lungs. My muscles calm and I begin to focus on the moment inside the breath. Air circulates around each and every yogi participating, giving them the freshest and most desirable inhales. My mind subconsciously blocks out the chitter-chatter of the birds, allowing me to connect deep within my inner thoughts. “Now move into warrior two,” the instructor calmly suggests. How do I keep my breath steady throughout this more advanced flow?

Your breathing pattern is one of the most important things to focus on while practicing yoga. Slowing down the breath has an impact on your emotional state, due to the activation of the cerebral cortex. It sends inhibitory impulses to the respiratory center in the midbrain and eventually overflows into the hypothalamus, connecting oneself with their emotions. The soothing effect on your emotional state is activated through this process.

My breath relaxes as I settle into warrior two. I reach up and touch the sky, stretching the right side of my physique. My breath remains steady and my inner thoughts begin to wisp away into the slow movements of the wind. “Find your balance and press your right foot into your inner thigh to create tree pose,” the instructor quietly encourages. My breath quivers, but I quickly remember that with every sound, there is a vibration.

Breath is a vibration that is said to only be heard at a particular level of consciousness. Once you withdraw your senses from the outside world, your internal sound will take over, allowing you to hear the breath. It is very common to use the sounds “so” and “ham” during the practice. Some may encourage their yogis to inhale and exhale with these exact sounds, manifesting audible sound in the inner ear.

My eyes flutter open and I revisit the external sounds surrounding my environment. The smell of fresh air and salt water fills my nostrils, bringing happiness into my practice. Tucked behind the noise of the waves crashing onto the shore, a quiet violin moves between loud and soft pitches, creating a variety of sounds. Nothing is more calming than the combination of nature and exterior sounds. “Flow into your space and link your breath to the beat,” the instructor says.

Practicing yoga is a very different hobby than listening to music, but when you combine the two it creates something incredibly special. Recent studies have shown that music can allow a person to enter a “flow state”, which is known as an “optimal state of consciousness when we feel and perform our best” (“What Happens to the Brain on Music and Yoga (Hint: It’s Good).” Yoga and music both share the universal language of love,

which is an interesting concept to think about. Self-love is well associated with yoga and music is determined to bring excitement and passion to the listener through words and notes. Together, they create a powerful dynamic duo for meditation, yoga, and many other practices.

The color shining through my eyelids begins to turn light blue, exposing the sky's magnificent color palette. As the breeze quickens, my muscles relax and allow my body to flow from left to right to left. I sway to the pace of the music, letting myself go. My concentration narrows in to sturdy my balance, but my toes sink deeper and deeper. The sand softens and makes it difficult to ground my stance, but I manage to do so through steady breaths and a clear mind.

Meditative music manages to influence our minds through rhythm and melody to benefit all aspects of one's life. Our nerves become calm and collected, leaving room for love and an open mind. It is common for our noisy thoughts to outweigh our calm and collected thoughts, but that is only if we allow them to. Introducing music into your yoga practice can benefit you in more ways than not, which is why it is common in most practices.

I glance up at the sky, hands overhead, and notice the small movements that nature brings to my practice each and every morning. It is a blessing to practice in such a space that brings clarity and self-awareness to my overwhelmed soul. My hands meet my third eye center as I bow forward in peace and relaxation. The music fades off and the only sound present is from within my breath. "May the rest of your day and your week ahead be filled with laughter and filled with love," our instructor added.

SCENE III: RAINFALL: IS IT REALLY SUCH A BAD THING?

Brandon Shaer

I decided to write about rain because it is a sound I'm very familiar with and use constantly. I mostly use the sound of rain to sleep, but I thought it would be interesting to use the sound of rain in the context of writing.

Introduction

I know that rain is not everyone's cup of tea. It ruins plans. It makes it harder to drive. Sometimes it gives off that weird rain smell. In general, rain seems to have a less-than-ideal effect on people's days. However, I think the context surrounding the rain is important. For the guy who has to walk to work that day, a torrential downpour screams "Today is going to suck!" But the same torrential downpour is one of life's biggest blessings for the farmer that hasn't seen rain in weeks. It's important to look at everything from both sides, otherwise you might miss important details, but that's not entirely what this essay is about. By the end of this paper, my goal is to make you a fan of the rain. Specifically, I'm going to focus on the sound of rain and how it can affect one's mood and ability to write.

Before beginning my unorthodox sales pitch, it is important to note that "rain" is an umbrella term (how ironic is that?). There are countless types of rain sounds, ranging from the mellow drizzle to the aforementioned torrential downpour, and even then, those too are umbrella terms! What's the difference between the sound of a drizzle in a grassy park versus the same on concrete sidewalks? How different are the sounds of thunderstorms in cities compared to the Amazon rainforest? Most importantly, how do the differences in those sounds affect a person's writing? By the end of this paper, you will learn what I believe to be the three major rain sounds and how the differences in those sounds affect the writing process.

Thunderstorm

While I enjoy listening to them during my drift into a deep slumber, thunderstorms are not the most ideal background noise for writing; they're obnoxious. The rain is loud, the wind is loud, the lightning is distracting, and sometimes the thunder feels so close it'll shoot you right out of your chair. Now, if it was just heavy rain, a topic I'll touch more on later, I

could understand the appeal, but have you ever tried to write in the presence of a loud television with a bright screen while someone blows in your ear? That's what writing during a thunderstorm is like. Furthermore, thunderstorms always seem like a bearer of bad news, making a writer more inclined to wait for a better headspace. No one wants to write while all that gloom and doom happens only a window pane away. In all, the only thing thunderstorms can offer writers is a gateway to procrastination, and as they say in the writing business, "You're already five days over the deadline."

Cats & Dogs

Although it is similar to thunderstorms in volume and sound of rain alone, "Cats & Dogs" offers a much more readily available headspace for writing. Subtracting wind, thunder, and lightning from the equation produces a sound similar to white noise, clearing a reader's thoughts and blazing a path for creativity. Now, there's nothing potentially exciting behind that window pane dying for your attention because it's just rain! The TV is turned off, that weird guy who was blowing in your ear is gone, and the only thing you can hear now is the Earth playing its favorite radio station. In my experience, the sound of heavy rain has been great for helping me to regain focus after feeling burned out. In fact, I'm listening to it right now as I write this sentence, hoping to avoid picking up my phone for the fifth time in the last hour and finish writing my paper. And the best part is that it's working!

Drizzle

They always say to save the best for last, right? The light drizzle is like no other when creating a proper headspace for writing because it possesses the best qualities of the other two major sounds, as well as new qualities that make it even better. First, like "Cats & Dogs," the sound of a drizzle creates the same white noise effect at a lower rate, increasing a writer's focus and diminishing potential distraction. Second, it brings the same calming effect of thunderstorms, helping a writer to mellow out after a long day and inviting him or her to confide in his or her writing. Finally, the drizzle is light enough that a writer can pick up on patterns in the sounds it makes. Unlike those of a thunderstorm or heavy rain, individual raindrops can be heard hitting the surface of the Earth, and it can produce a variety of different creations. The musician can use the sounds of rain to develop a new beat or

melody. The author with “writer’s block” can get lost in the sounds, developing a new story along the way. The possibilities are endless!

Now, “drizzle” is an umbrella term, and one of the types of rain sounds it encompasses produces what I believe to be a fantastic writing aid. While it may be cheating in terms of the context of this paper, the added visuals provided by a sunshower convert writing from a chore to a delight. I can’t help but get that warm, fuzzy feeling inside when I see the sunshine, and the added qualities of a drizzle make it that much better. On top of having increased focus, a calm demeanor, and a plug for new ideas while you write, a sunshower invites you to smile while you do it.

Conclusion

So, are you a fan of the rain yet? Was I convincing enough in my analysis of the different sounds it can make? I hope the answer to both questions is “Yes.” Both the drizzle and “Cats & Dogs” make for great writing aids. The added focus and drive they bestow on a writer is invaluable, and the sounds they make play a key role in just about every paper I write. Sure, the thunderstorm may not make for a great writing aid, but wow is it killer for helping you sleep. Skeptical of anything I’ve said? Try it on your own time, and you can thank me later.

ACT IV: OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Feeling dangerously drowsy and completely at ease, Lance thinks that he should probably listen to some more lively auditions to keep him from accidentally dozing in his seat. Apparently inner peace was a topic he followed a little bit *too* closely. The last contenders were rather splendid, he thought, but there were still so many more to sift through.

He notes the new music division coming up: sounds within the public domain, and feels his curiosity spike. What sorts of public sounds would the contestants choose to demonstrate? There was only one way to find out.

Lance sits upright in his chair and calls Rachel Berry to the stage.

SCENE I: THE SOUNDS OF 3018 ARMSTRONG

Rachel Berry

When thinking about the project, I was at a loss for what to write. Then I thought of the age-old writers' advice: write what you know. So I chose to write about the newsroom, the place where I spend a large portion of my time.

4:45 p.m.

The door beeps as the red light turns to green, and I swing the door open, turning on the lights and making my way to the corner to put my things down.

I pull my computer out of my backpack and begin typing, my fingers flying across the keyboard as I compose one email after another. The sound of my fingers hitting the keys fills the empty room.

After just a few minutes, I see someone fumbling in their pockets for their ID before the familiar beep of the door lets in another editor.

Her backpack thumps against the floor, as she sits down and begins to work.

We sit in silence, the only sound being the muffled conversations of those walking by outside the newsroom.

Soon, more people trickle in, ready to begin the long night ahead.

The Miami Student, Miami University's school newspaper, publishes once a week on Tuesdays. This means that every Monday night, the editors all gather in our small room on the third floor of Armstrong Student Center to edit articles and put together the next day's paper.

6:12 p.m.

The room becomes crowded, as we all squeeze into 3018 Armstrong, made up of two glass panels for walls and overlooking the Seal down below.

There's maybe thirty of us, gradually taking over more and more of the upstairs of Armstrong. The copy editors sit at a round table right outside the newsroom, working on homework and chatting together before they're needed to check for grammar errors on the page.

If someone is stressed trying to write a late-night article, they'll oftentimes go sit around the corner, the quiet being so much more conducive to writing.

As we work, the room is loud. Very loud. People shout across the room, asking questions about certain articles.

"Is Caroline's good for me to look at?" the managing editor asks.

Loud sighs can be heard over articles that aren't finished yet. Although we try to enforce deadlines, Mondays inevitably become crunch time to finish last-minute interviews and get pressing questions answered before we go to print.

Sometimes we have to push them until the next week when something we thought would be ok turns out not to be salvageable in time for print.

7:35 p.m.

People stumble into the newsroom looking lost, ready to get their photo taken for headshots we're running this week. The photo editor ushers them out into the hallway, and the click of the camera can be heard as he poses them.

7:56 p.m.

Food crunches as one editor bites into a hamburger from Pulley Diner downstairs. Another eats chips she brought in earlier. Another slurps a milkshake in the corner, also from Pulley. We must keep that place in business on production nights.

8:42 p.m.

There's a lot of shouting, but this Monday night in particular draws more than usual. Shouting over each other to be heard on song suggestions. Shouting across the room to the photography editor to ask if we have pictures for a certain story. Shouting between news editors on how mad we are at a certain writer. Shouting excited conversations between friends or asking someone to confirm an opinion that two other editors disagreed on.

This is how we work. This is the atmosphere we write and edit in.

10:21 p.m.

Computers beep as they wake up, as we use more and more of the desktop computers, all of us looking over different pages.

The keyboard clicks become more furious, the sighs louder and more pronounced.

Sticky notes can be heard peeling off the white board, where we keep track of what pages have been looked at.

A sharpie screeches, the sound of it moving across the paper, adding more names to the wall of shame for those who missed glaring errors.

10:49 p.m.

The culture section, always the first to finish, shuffles their papers as they pack up for the night.

Our sports editor sits in the corner, throwing a football up and down. It smacks his hand, the sound of the foam hitting his skin repeatedly as he waits for his pages to be ready to be looked at. As the night progresses, he'll play catch with various members of the staff, trying to teach an uncoordinated group of journalists about sports.

The music choice varies, ranging from pop to alternative to rap. People shout out suggestions of their favorite songs to be added to the queue. Sometimes, they physically get up and change an unattended Spotify playlist when they don't like the song.

12:19 a.m.

As the clock ticks further past midnight, more and more people head out, as their sections are finished. Soon, only news, sports and opinion are left.

1:13 a.m.

The design editor's phone rings with a call from the printer, asking if we have any pages to send. While we would be annoyed, the design editor sounds calm and collected. Even if we're behind schedule, he assures the printer everything will be fine, and we'll give her more pages soon.

1:34 a.m.

The zippers on the design editor's backpack swish together as he finally starts cleaning up for the night. We play a closing song, sometimes "Closing Time" by Semisonic, sometimes something else with the same sentiment.

The chairs bump into the tables, plastic hitting plastic as we clean up our humble abode for the night, picking up trash on the way out.

The door slams behind us, clicking into place as we all shuffle outside for the long walk home, talking about the homework we have to finish and the long night that still lays ahead of us.

SCENE II: COFFEE SHOP MIXTAPE

Melissa Phillips

I chose to write Coffee Shop Mixtape because I absolutely love the environment and atmosphere of coffee shops. No matter what I am working on, I enjoy sitting at a table with a rich cup of coffee, taking in all of the different sights, sounds, and smells while I write.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Jordan Baker says, “I like large parties. They’re so intimate. Small parties, there isn’t any privacy.” I feel the same way about a busy coffee shop. Sitting at a table in the middle of the hustle and bustle and listening to the natural sounds around me is the perfect atmosphere to sit down in and become immersed in whatever I am writing. I don’t write in a quiet environment like a library; the silence causes me to get lost in my tangled thoughts. The sounds that swirl around me in a coffee shop keep me distracted from my own thoughts. The ambience is different at various points during the day, so walking into a coffee shop is a gamble—I never know what sounds I will experience. The busy morning hours are accompanied by the continuous screeching of steam from the espresso machines and the grinding of coffee beans amongst the chatter of people waiting on a rich, bold cup of coffee to get them through their work day. The overall compilation of noise morphs together like a soundtrack, creating the perfect mixtape to accompany my writing.

As I sit at my corner table by the window, with a rich cup of coffee nestled next to my computer, I can hear the faint sound of music in the background. Sometimes it’s upbeat pop music. Other times it’s smooth jazz. Maybe it’s classical. It doesn’t matter to me; I’m not listening to it anyway. The combination of the music paired with the natural sounds of the coffee shop, and the chattering lips of the patrons around me makes me tune everything out into background noise and escape into my own world—well, most of the time.

Afternoon rolls around, and as I mentioned, sometimes it is a gamble walking into a coffee shop. When it’s not busy, the music really stands out, and I’m focused on the song that’s playing. Next thing I know, my fingers are dancing across my computer keys, typing to the beat of the music. Other times I arrive at a coffee shop and it’s not busy. In fact, I am the only one there, staring at a blank, white screen. It’s mocking my writer’s block, but I have the upper hand: people watching. During slower hours, I am forced to listen to the conversations and gossip the baristas are having with one another. I can hear them gossiping about their coworkers and their cackling laughter pierces my ears. As more people begin to trickle in

throughout the day, I am exposed to more conversations. At busy times, when tables are close together and I am up close and personal with the people next to me, I am forced to listen to their conversation and gossip as well. Annoying? Yes. Inspirational? Also, yes. Their conversations do one of two things: it either buys me some time to think about what words are going to spew out onto my page, or maybe their demeanor and disposition will become an inspiration for a character in the story I am writing—sometimes ideas just fall into my hands. I mean, what do you expect when you decide to have a business meeting with your counterpart, discussing everything you hate about each other, in an effort to work better as a team? Or what about making a phone call, discussing your medical conditions with your doctor? And my personal favorite—overhearing a gossip session approximately two feet away from a stranger.

Writers are often portrayed writing in a coffee shop in a sophisticated manner, daintily sipping their coffee and diving into their piece of writing as if they have no distractions. I see many people take advantage of the coffee shop to write, whether it is a high school or college student writing a paper, a businessman stopping in after work to get some things done, or even someone with a stack of books scribbling down some notes. A coffee shop is more than a haven for writers, going to a coffee shop is a social activity, as people go in for a variety of reasons. I've seen people conduct job interviews, have business meetings, catch up with an old friend, work on homework, go on dates, a mother, grandmother, and granddaughter do some wedding planning, and the list goes on and on.

Everyone has a different reason for entering the social scene that is a coffee shop, and personally, I love being surprised with different outcomes of the coffee shop's atmosphere. Some people might get irritated by that gossip going on at the table within earshot, but I'm an optimistic person—I take advantage of it and use it to fuel my writing. Once I grasp an idea, I can return to my own world, escaping into that "Gatsby-esque" mindset and get lost in the music, the screeching of the espresso machine, grinding of the coffee beans, and the chatter of the people around me. Of course, it's all tied together with a cup of rich, bold coffee to get me through.

ACT V: TOUR DE JAPAN



These contestants are too creative for their own good, Lance thinks to himself as Melissa exits stage left. He would never have thought to focus on sounds that weren't strictly music related. *How in the world am I supposed to decide the winner?* He frowns in dismay at all the positive remarks he has left so far on all the audition forms. *They're all so talented.*

He runs a hand through his hair and puts Melissa's form to the side, raising an eyebrow at the next category in the running. *Japanese music,* he muses. *Now that's interesting. This has got to be good.*

Raising a hand, he beckons the next hopeful performer to step front and center under the stage lights.

SCENE I: CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE PUNK: A REVIEW SAMPLER

Clayton Tarantino

I chose to write about J-Punk, as I find it is a great genre for writing. As a non-Japanese speaker, the lyrics do not interfere with my written work and focus, yet the raw energy of the vocals and backing track still carry over. This energy helps keep me activated when I am feeling sleepy or uninspired.

Japanese punk music, or “J-Punk,” has been developing for a long time, thanks to its early roots. Starting in the 60s, early J-Punk grew out of a psychedelic Tokyo genre known as “Group Sounds.” With help from the rising punk scenes in major cities from the UK and the United States, Group Sounds formed into J-Punk. By the 80s, J-Punk had grown into two polarized forms: the archetypical punk sound in Tokyo, and the genre-bending Osaka scene (Curtis).

Contemporary J-Punk appears to take more from its Osaka ancestors. Modern J-Punk is a blend of alternative punk forms, with each band curating a different genre depending on their given taste. Some of the many genres which are now incorporated into J-Punk include: pop, metal, garage, nu-metal, indie, EDM, noise, and grindcore.

Below, I review two J-Punk albums from the current decade: *Fetch* by Melt-Banana and *Punk* by Chai. Both bands vary greatly in their sound, build, and thematic focus. Melt-Banana, a duo of vocalist YAKO and guitarist AGATA, is built around a hard-hitting grindcore and metal influence (“Here is FAQ about MELT-BANANA”). Chai, made up of an all-female foursome, has a sound based predominantly in pop. Despite their great differences, both bands stand firmly as vanguards of contemporary J-Punk. They enliven J-Punk, a genre that takes many forms but refuses to die.

***Fetch* by Melt-Banana**

In an ever-increasing cacophony of drum fills, guitar waves, and shrill vocal leads, *Fetch* is a dramatic J-Punk record. The drama does not come from impassioned vocals or lyrics recounting emotional themes, but from the nearly cinematic use of sound in every single track. Melt-Banana seemed to see every beat as a proving ground, taking with open arms the unasked challenge of “How much sound can you fill into a second?” In the rare

moments that the vocals and guitars do go silent, such as in the enigmatic “Zero+,” the silence plays like its own set of chords. This onslaught of sound makes for a powerful J-Punk record, yet, it becomes only a matter of time before the guitars start to grate against the listening experience.

Fetch exhibits its strengths when band members YAKO and AGATA offer a new twist to their formula. Here, the formula exists plainly in “Red Data, Red Stage.” In a song like this one, YAKO provides shrill vocals over AGATA’s wall of guitar sound. Suddenly, a drum loop will be introduced, and the tempo will seem to kick up a beat. The ending will pick up further, with a climatic pitch and speed boost from YAKO, and we will be flushed out in the drone of a closing heavy metal chord. As “Red Data, Red Stage” is the generic mold of what a Melt-Banana song could be, it plays off on *Fetch* as one of the album’s worst tracks.

With opener “Candy Gun,” Melt-Banana taps into something new. AGATA runs the track, covering multiple lines with impermeable guitar riffs. YAKO’s vocals feel almost like an addition to the drum fill, as her shrill cries staccato right along with the cymbal crashes. The song builds and builds into a kind of dubstep “drop,” releasing a satisfying punch of ending energy. Using a kind of call and response style, Melt-Banana delivers a high energy narrative in “Vertigo Game.” YAKO, as a rule, is hard to understand; even though she sings in English, her voice is shrill to a point of imperceptibly. In “Vertigo Game,” AGATA mutes his instrument just long enough to give YAKO the chance to shine with perceptible, enigmatic vocals: “May-be not?” and “May-be yes?”

Listening to *Fetch* clean through can cause even the most hardcore punk fan a bit of a headache. Tracks like “My Missing Link” and “Red Data, Red Stage” come to mind. Luckily, the headache tracks tend to be the exception, rather than the rule. The majority of the album is energetically consistent and experimentally pervasive, with influences of EDM, metal, and even some softer pop tracks. The album concludes with the beautifully restrained “Zero.” A balanced, rhythm-driven track, Melt-Banana turns down the noise just a bit, resulting in the most satisfying song on the album. “Zero” is a gamble that pays off, tying the album together in a taut bow.

Punk by Chai

Punk is as fun as it is varied. At its heart, *Punk* is a resume, professionally presenting all that Chai is able to create. From the album's opening with "Choose Go!," we see what the all-female foursome is capable of. "Choose Go!" starts as a carefree femme-pop track, a kind of Japanese Cheetah Girls fight song. Midway through, the production cracks and frizzles, and the song shifts into an EDM grindcore mosher. Seconds later, segued by a heavy drum break beat, the track switches back to its femme-pop outer layer. "Choose Go!" acts as the perfect thesis for *Punk*: these girls may sound cute, but they can play punk music with the best of them.

The album contains no blemishes. In fact, even the few tracks that don't quite hit their marks only look that way in comparison to the tracks that hit the bullseye just right. Three tracks stand out in particular, and they play back to back to back in the middle of the record. If you are listening on a time crunch, check out "I'm Me," "Wintime," and "This is Chai." Each track is so varied and so important to defining Chai's sounds as a whole.

"I'm Me" is a soul-affirming, feminist pop song that celebrates a love for individuality and uniqueness. It is extremely modern in its message, but its delivery is quite classic. Quiet, almost shy verses lead into a breakout, group-led chorus; the song feels like the narrative trope of a shy student singing at a school talent show to thunderous applause.

In "Wintime," the members of Chai mix the multi-layered vocalizations of a gospel choir with the unflinching movement of a patriotic anthem. The entire song feels like a bridge leading to a chorus; if there are verses, they transition quickly to the meat of the track. Despite the track being a J-Punk song, it is very American in both its build and feel.

The trilogy ends with "This is Chai." A rambly, EDM-fueled, breakbeat punk track plays as the only identifiable vocals assert proudly, "This is Chai." The girls relax into a sea of discordance, thumping horns, and blown-out synthesizer leads in a track that has no genre equivalent. The most experimental moment in *Punk*, "This is Chai" shows listeners just what Chai is capable of.

Of course, other tracks shine. "Fashionista" and "Feel the Beat" further Chai's genre reach and comfortable stance as a femme-J-Punk group. The album, as a whole, is a fantastic genre-bender, radiating so much experimentality and positive energy. For the more orthodox punk fans, it is a must-listen to see where the genre can go. For the pop fan, it is a must-listen to show how pop can bend with a little punk influence.

SCENE II: MUSIC AND INSPIRATION ~ VIGNETTES

Aja McFarland

I decided to write about Touhou music because I feel like it helps me stay focused while writing, and I want to share this tool with others. Additionally, I want to expose a new audience to ZUN's music, which would encourage people to listen to music made outside of the US. ZUN's works have inspired many music remixes, games, and animations, so I wanted to bring this inspiration to writers as well.

While sometimes it is best to write in silence with the text as your only companion, other times it may be prudent to match the music to what it is that you're writing. Conversely, using music as a font of inspiration is a useful tool to get warmed up or work through writer's block. For new music this is doubly so, as there are no fingerprints of past works lingering around to smudge the creativity of new pieces—though new songs may certainly remind you of old times. To this end, I have created a small setlist of songs from one of my favorite artists, a Japanese game designer and composer that goes by the alias ZUN. Most likely, these songs will be unfamiliar to you, even to those more familiar with general genre conventions of video game soundtracks. Though I prefaced this section by describing the ability of music to help us overcome writer's block, you are of course free to do with these recommendations as you see fit. Beneath each song I included some freewriting I did to each song, which could be used as an extended prompt to generate ideas or a starter to practice various skills and techniques. Please listen with great care and enjoy.

永夜抄 ~ Eastern Night — Eternal Night Vignette ~ Eastern Night (“Touhou 8: Imperishable Night [OST]”)

A young woman sits in her room. It is dark with the moon hidden out of view of her window and the lights of her dorm shut off. She stares vacantly at the blank document where her paper is supposed to take form and thinks back to the novella that she had to write in high school. It was hasty and ill-planned and certainly not very good, and yet she wants to rewrite it all the same.

幻視の夜 ~ Ghostly Eyes — Illusionary Night ~ Ghostly Eyes (“Touhou 8: Imperishable Night [OST]”)

An anxious man bumps into a couple. He gets up from where he tripped and apologizes to them but is only met with a harsh glare from the pretty thing on his arm. His apologetic demeanor changes as quickly as a thief in the night, and he crosses his arms instead of walking away. People around them walk by with the furtive glances of those who want so desperately to ogle and stare but have the restraint not to watch.

蠢々秋月 ～ Mooned Insect — Stirring an Autumn Moon ~ Mooned Insect (“Touhou 8: Imperishable Night [OST]”)

A cat skitters from side to side, chasing the headlights that flit by outside. The lace curtains have already been punctured and ripped, falling in small shreds on the old wood below. The last car goes by and the cat sits and watches and waits, but nothing else breaks the dark night.

故郷の星が映る海 — The Sea Where One's Home Planet Reflects (“Touhou 15: Legacy of Lunatic Kingdom [OST] v01”)

Somewhere far away, a student blinks in and out of sleep, ebbing like the night tide. Her eyes hurt to close, but she still looks at the notes in front of her with the determination of someone putting in too much, too late. The light from the lamp is as bright as could be, and she's shorn her covers in an effort to make herself too uncomfortable to rest, but soon enough the pen slips from her hand and clatters to the messy floor.

魔法少女達の百年祭 — The Centennial Festival for Magical Girls (“Touhou 6: Embodiment of Scarlet Devil [OST]”)

A child grabs her sister's hands and spins her around their small playroom. For a second it looks almost like they could dance—and then they trip and fall, unharmed, onto the cushions that litter the floor, landing in a giggling heap. Spry as ever, they both get up and begin again like nothing ever happened, twirling around the room in an imitation of the ribbon dancers they've grown obsessed with watching. The sun sets in the gold-pink of the evening, lighting the little patterns in the curtains and making golden halos around their hair. They laugh, and they are happy.

少女さとり ～ 3rd eye — Satori Maiden ~ 3rd Eye (“Touhou 11: Subterranean Animism [OST] v01”)

A group of young boys push aside the simple wood slats covering the hole in the chain link fence, then slip through with barely a clink. Not that it matters—no one would keep an eye on an abandoned mall or the youths sneaking into it, not even in the middle of the day. They tread the vague path through the overgrown grass and avoid the potholes in the cracking concrete and pick the lock on the employees’ only door with ease. It opens with a creak to reveal a nest of mice tucked into the rotting floorboards and graffiti covering the walls. They all dare each other to press forward while hiding their own fear with false bravado, and all return home without ever setting a foot inside.

永遠の巫女 — Eternal Shrine Maiden (“Touhou 1: Highly Responsive to Prayers [OST]”)

A young woman sits in her room and writes for what, to her, feels like the first time in forever. The keys click and clack and make line after line, but her inspiration doesn’t fade. It lingers and burns within her, fueling her in a way others simply haven’t. Maybe it’s because she’s finally able to talk about something she’s always wanted to without fear of being stifled, or maybe it’s because she’s afraid she will soon be stifled again. She writes like tonight will be the last night she can—and maybe she’s right.

神々が恋した幻想郷 — The Gensokyo the Gods Loved (“Touhou 10: Mountain of Faith [OST] v01”)

Atop a fence a maiden stands, illuminated by the rising sun behind her. The breeze blows gently, billowing her sleeves and carrying the light tune she plays on her bamboo flute to places unknown. Her eyes don’t open to face the passersby that stare, nor does she move when her name is called, for she is just as enchanted by her own song as everyone around her. Under her, the night frost turns to bright dew, warmed by a brilliance brighter than the sun.

ACT VI: FOOD FOR THOUGHT



Bobbing his head to the tunes now stuck in his head, Lance checks his watch and blinks in surprise. It's the end of the day, and only a few contestants are left. How did time fly by so quickly? He has so much to think about, so many people to consider.

He glances at the last remaining forms on his clipboard, all falling under the idea of inspiration and the feelings that sound can create. A fitting way to end the auditions, he thinks, and smiles to himself.

“Right,” he says. “It’s down to the final five. Let’s go out with a bang!”

SCENE I: REVIEW OF SUFJAN STEVENS'S "CASIMIR PULASKI DAY"

Maddie Clegg

I wrote this piece to talk about one of my favorite artists and give a review of the song, "Casimir Pulaski Day."

Intro

It would be accurate to classify one of my favorite music genres under the title: sad, emotional, depressing, tender music. I am an outwardly happy person, and love all genres of music from Britney Spears, "Oops!... I Did It Again" to 2Pac's, "Changes." But there is just something about the soft acoustic guitar strumming along to the lyrics of a girl diagnosed with bone cancer that makes me want to comfortably sit in a dark room and listen for hours. Sufjan Stevens's release of "Casimir Pulaski Day," is a wonderful example of how thoughtfully written lyrics and beautiful acoustics harmonize to create a perfect somber mood.

History of Sufjan Stevens

Sufjan Stevens hails from Detroit, Michigan, and first dipped his feet into the world of music while attending Hope College. He started his solo career in the beginning of 1999, with his first album release of *A Sun Came* debuting in 2000. He was immediately recognized for his "superior musical command, complex instrumentation, and sparkling melodies" (Borges, Mario Mesquita). Stevens has released several albums varying in genre, but his music is prominently classified under indie folk, indie rock, and alternative rock. One of his largest projects, the "50 States Project," attempted to create an album for every state in the US. However, after the completion of his second state album, Stevens commented, "The whole premise was such a joke, and I think maybe I took it too seriously. I started to feel like I was becoming a cliché of myself." (Breihan). Even with the failure of this project, his music has won several awards and has appeared in numerous movies. Stevens's "Mystery of Love" won the David di Donatello for Best Original Song in 2019. His music has appeared most notably in movies such as *Call Me by Your Name*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Veronica Mars*, and *Demolition*.

Casimir Pulaski Day

Your first question upon hearing the name of this song title may quite possibly be: what is Casimir Pulaski Day? Well, it is defined as, “a legal holiday in Illinois, in the United States, on the first Monday of March. It celebrates the birthday of Casimir Pulaski, a Polish born soldier who contributed to the United States' independence” (“Casimir Pulaski Day in the United States.”). Stevens wrote “Casimir Pulaski Day” for his album, *Illinois*, in 2005. Stevens used “Casimir Pulaski Day” to remember the holiday. But he also used it as an opportunity to write about his friend who had been battling bone cancer.

The Song

I remember the first time I heard “Casimir Pulaski Day.” I was sitting in my dorm room sophomore year of college. I just got back from class, enduring the cold December weather and the encroachment of finals season. I pulled out my phone, logged on to Spotify, and started stalking the music playlist of a boy I liked, as one does. That’s where I stumbled across Stevens’s “Casimir Pulaski Day.” Without knowing the name of the song or who was singing, I had an immediate reaction to it. The slow guitar strumming and soft melancholy modulation from Stevens’s voice captured me. The song does not wait to build up to a climax of sadness, but instead begins with, “Goldenrod and the 4H stone / The things I brought you / When I found out you had cancer of the bone / Your father cried on the telephone / And he drove his car into the navy yard / Just to prove that he was sorry” (Sufjan Stevens). The immediate imagery and emotional ties of family, friends, and death creates an overwhelming bout of sadness within the first twenty seconds of the song. The song continues to tell the tale of a young boy who loses his friend to cancer. The song sprinkles small memories, never fully developed, about Stevens’s friend. Intimate moments of playful childhood romance are shared, “I remember at Michael's house / In the living room when / you kissed my neck / And I almost touched your blouse.” With the only other accompanying instrument being a banjo and the flutter of a background singer, Stevens sings about the slow atrophy of his childhood love. The song reaches its peak sadness, in my opinion, with the utterance of, “In the morning when you finally go / And the nurse runs in with her head hung low / And the cardinal hits the window.” After hearing this stanza for the first time, I

was completely obsessed with Sufjan Stevens. I was also incredibly bummed out, but in a good way. The way songs of this genre have the power to make death and sadness feel beautiful and captivating. After this verse, interestingly enough, is the first and last time there is a reference made to the title of the song. Stevens sings, “In the morning in the winter shade / On the 1st of March on the holiday / I thought I saw you breathing.” The first of March refers to the day that Casimir Pulaski Day was celebrated in 2005. Although extreme Casimir Pulaski fans might be disappointed with the lack of history and pertinence the song has to the Polish general, its mentioning mended with a vision of Stevens’s deceased friend is powerful and unique.

Why the Sad Song Genre?

I could not recommend this song, or the artist, more to fans of the “sad, emotional, depressing, tender” music genre. It’s important to remember that sad music can reach far beyond people wanting to be sad and do nothing all day (although this a totally valid reason to listen to sad music). Songs that deal with topics of pain, loss, death, grief, etc. allow us to share memories and feelings. In *Psychology Today*, Dr. Paul Thagarad writes about the power of sad music and why people like it, “Sometimes sad songs do make you feel bad if they revive memories of your own tragic times, but more often they engage your interest because they describe or convey important events in the lives of others.” (Thagard). So basically, if you are a human that conveys emotion, sad music is the perfect way to express these emotions. Whether you listen to it softly in the background while doing homework, or crank it up on a roadtrip and pretend you’re the star of a sad indie movie, Sufjan Stevens’s “Casimir Pulaski Day” is a perfect companion.

SCENE II: STUPID DEEP

Emma Kalucki

I chose to write about "Stupid Deep" by Jon Bellion because he is one of my favorite artists, and this song, one of his newer ones, makes me stop and think about everything he is singing about. The instrumental and the vocals are amazing, and they inspired me to write this piece.

There are days in all of our lives when we find ourselves searching for more. Searching for something else to do outside of our mundane lives. Searching for someone else to bring us joy, love, happiness. Searching for something, anything, to bring us out of the darkness and reignite the fire in our souls that encourages us to continue on and allow ourselves to feel that passion for writing.

As writers, it becomes draining and tiring to continually imagine scenarios and worlds in which we can pour our imaginations and allow audiences to get lost in our creations. There's a feeling unlike any other after having a book published, riding on the subway and seeing a stranger so engrossed in your novel, seemingly unwilling to put it down to catch their stop. It became a high that I would chase. My characters came to life on those pages, and I was unstoppable in my writing. I hadn't minded that I would go home to an empty apartment because I would go home to write, or reread my writing from the day or previous week. It wasn't until I was finally stuck in a case of writer's block so horrible I couldn't overcome it that I understood what was wrong with me.

There was a day that I was on the subway, about to get off to walk to my apartment. It was the sixth week of my writer's block, and I had tried every method I could imagine, when a song started to play in my headphones that I had never heard. My phone must have saved this song accidentally so I went to switch it. But then I stopped. The lyrics spoke so perfectly to me that I realized what I needed to do to fix my life and find that passion again. I needed to fix the hole in my heart, and in my life, that was so stupid deep.

As I stepped off the subway, I really started to dive deep into the lyrics, relating them back to every decision I had made in my life up until that point. The books that have my name printed on the jacket cover, the countless hours filled with writing and editing and rereading, the launch parties and all the successes in the world—these could never amount to what this song was telling me about my entire career in those three minutes of song. The

passion that the singer had, who I later discovered was Jon Bellion, opened my eyes to the lack of passion for writing that I had developed over the past month and a half. There was something that inspired me to understand what I needed to get myself out of the stupid deep funk I was submerged in.

Writers have a task that is so completely unique that the outside world cannot understand how their brains work or how they can imagine such new and exciting worlds. The answer is honestly quite simple—their own lives and music. The depth and inspiration in the work of other artists, songwriters, singers, bands, and more awakens the part of a writer that has an urge to sit and write something that invokes excitement out of an audience of eager readers. The problem being a writer is that your “fans” or audience, as I prefer to call my loyal readers, are constantly expecting more writing and a story that is new and exciting. However, there are times when that inspiration wants to take a vacation, and it can be awhile before it bothers to come home after lounging on the beach for awhile. But every once in a blue moon, a writer will hear a song that reignites that passion, which is what happened with me and “Stupid Deep.”

“Stupid Deep” allowed me to look at my work from a new angle, and discover a way to address my writer’s block while bringing a new type of fiction into my work. Jon Bellion and his lyrics brought me to the realization that my writing had filled a hole inside of my heart. I had never realized how much of my life I had dedicated to my work or how I used my characters’ love stories to fill the void that I was pushing down inside my own life. My friends and sisters had all found their passions as well as the loves of their lives, but I could only ever find one. I’m not claiming that everyone has to find a love or a person to spend their lives with to find joy, but I finally realized that my love was embedded in my writing.

Because of the lyrics that so deeply spoke to me in “Stupid Deep,” I finally understood why I was in such bad writer’s block. I had been searching for love and happiness through my writing. As I listened to the song, I couldn’t help but grasp onto a line that described me so perfectly: “All the things I’ve done were just attempts at earning love, ‘cause the hole inside my heart is stupid deep.” I have fought for many years to fill my heart and life with my words and characters, but all along I didn’t realize that if I wrote with what I knew in my heart, and lived each day, that my writing could inspire others and myself to live the life that was meant for each of us individually.

There’s inspiration and creativity in every part of the world; it all just depends on what we choose to listen to and how we decide to use it. For me, it was realizing how much

music spoke to me and inspired my creative work and everyday life. “Stupid Deep” allowed me to finally understand the meaning behind my work and the future ahead.

SCENE III: WRITER WANTED: SEDATEPHOBES NEED NOT APPLY

Jenn Hood

I wrote this piece about silence because often times I find myself overstimulated by sound. There's so much sound pollution in our world today that sometimes it's hard to hear ourselves think. But that's what we're used to. I feel the need to write to silence because it lets me know how I'm feeling and what I'm thinking in a way I don't when I'm around sound. In this piece I encourage others to join me in the silence in order to produce better writing that is more in line with the author's true thoughts and feelings.

Have you ever been in a conversation where you just keep talking to fill space? Have you ever put music on in the car when you're alone? Have you ever left the TV on at night, even if you aren't watching it, for background noise? All of these behaviors are driven by one singular truth: we, as Americans in 2019, are afraid of silence.

Why We Are Afraid Of Silence

Most people are uncomfortable with silence. But, why? What is it about the absence of sound that makes people feel so uneasy? For starters, people are surrounded by an abundance of sound. The TV in the living room playing. A door closing. Conversations overheard at a subway stop. A phone ringing. The laundry machine spin cycle. Wind in the trees. Birds chirping. One person could hear all of these things at the same time, and more. Our lives are overpopulated with sounds—both intentional and unintentional—that we feel uneasy when sound is not present.

I think the fear of silence is also driven by the fear of being alone. Silence can make people feel like they aren't connected to those around them, and that's a scary feeling. One of the most important concepts for human emotional health is feeling a sense of love and belonging. We strive to be connected and we need to feel love. Silence breaks that connection with others and instead connects us with ourselves.

Following that path, we don't like to be stuck with our own thoughts. Sitting in silence forces us to listen to our automatic thoughts; they are uncontrollable, and usually uncomfortable. When we give ourselves the space for these uncomfortable thoughts to be heard, we are often forced to reflect. We have to think deeper about how a thought made us

feel or why a thought made us feel a certain way. Reflecting on automatic thoughts inherently requires discomfort and takes work to accomplish. People prefer to be comfortable and are afraid to be uncomfortable, yet silence requires discomfort. So because we are afraid of being uncomfortable, we are also afraid of silence. Also, sometimes automatic thoughts are more than just uncomfortable. Sometimes automatic thoughts are so distressing that we question our sense of self and our beliefs.

I also think we are afraid of silence because we are afraid of what we might learn about ourselves. Silence opens up an empty space for an internal dialogue to occur. With no conversation partner, you have to focus on your own thoughts and what you think. In a conversation, it's so easy to ignore your own thoughts and to deflect by jumping on to what the other person said; that option is removed in an internal dialogue and you are forced to recognize and confront your emotions and positions. Sometimes an automatic thought will challenge how you think you feel. Then you have to reevaluate what you thought you knew about yourself. We like to believe we know ourselves well. But, when we start an internal dialogue, we often learn new information about ourselves and are forced to confront that most of us are insecure in our sense of self. We can mask our insecurity by using sound as a distractor, but when we are afraid to face our insecurity, we are afraid of silence.

Writers Should Embrace The Silence

Silence is a necessary soundtrack for writers to be able to listen to and use to their advantage. Silence focuses the mind. With no auditory stimulation, which is by far the most distracting type of stimulation, the mind is free to focus on the writing and the writing alone. On a similar note, writing to a background of silence allows you to think deeper about the topic at hand. Distracting environments pull focus off of the writing; when the writer's attention is broken, the likelihood the writer will ask deep probing questions related to the piece is reduced. By eliminating audio distractions, you allow yourself to create a more complete or analytical work than you would be able to in a sound-filled environment.

In addition, some of the most frightening aspects of silence make for the most compelling writing. In the presence of silence I am left alone with my thoughts. I am able to reflect on my automatic uncontrolled thoughts and discern how I truly feel about a topic as I write. I admit that my automatic thoughts are uncomfortable. But in order to create compelling writing, I propose that we have to lean into the discomfort. I am able to know

where I stand and what I think because silence forces me to become intimately familiar with what I know and how I feel. The reflective process that makes us all so uncomfortable becomes a tool to help me figure out what I really want to say.

Silence is also a gateway to creativity. Silence has the unique ability to be both a productive and an utterly boring space. I often find myself getting bored when I write in silence because silence is a void of stimulation where people are typically overstimulated. Since there are no distractions, I have to use my own thoughts to entertain myself. By using silence as a gateway to self entertainment, I find myself thinking about my writing in new and unconventional ways that I may not have thought of in an environment with sound. In this way, writing in silence allows me to consider alternate perspectives and pull new original thoughts from my existing knowledge to create a more original and holistic piece of writing.

Yes, silence makes people uncomfortable. It's unnaturally quiet, it forces us to reflect on what we think, it encourages us to have conversations with ourselves, and it makes us confront who we are. But each of these traits that make people so afraid of silence are the same traits that make for analytical or complete writing. So, next time you write, I encourage you to shut the door, turn the TV off, and hang up the phone. Don't be afraid to write in complete silence. Lean in to the discomfort; you might be surprised at what you have to say.

SCENE IV: FIND YOUR STORY IN SOUND

Grace Nehls

Before I chose the music to focus on, writer's block became my concept of inspiration. I felt it relevant to any writer's situation, and relatable. Because I've experienced this type of block in the past, the music that helped me during that time naturally accompanied it. By writing this piece, I hoped to provide an alternative toward breaking writer's block, for those who are experiencing (or have experienced) it, and advise a new way to take in music. In a sense, my writing developed into a self-help piece, or a possible guide toward reaching one's full potential with the type of music I cite.

There is an abundant group of people out there who believe there is no such thing as writer's block. The notion that, for other career paths, there are only themselves to blame for the lack of creative stimulus is hilarious to this group and merely more frustrating to me. Wandering around the room with a self-pitying expression on my face, or clutching my computer and then my head in agony becomes a process of dissolution; I start to hate myself. And just like that, the wall is up. No one except those who have gone through it seem to understand it's not necessarily about the words or the story at this point—it's the powerlessness.

This was me, one year out of high school. Years of consistent inspiration and natural confidence fell through. I didn't think much of it for a long time; essays, projects, and exams filled the time I once spent writing chapters for a novel or short stories for contests. But months passed when I wrote nothing, and no urge to write came up. I began to sit myself down and stare at the screen until I wrote a sentence or two. Other times I'd read a book and try to mimic the author's style in hopes of making something I'd be proud of. In a stage of despair I found a deep passion for J.R.R. Tolkien and the world of Middle Earth and obsessively read all three Lord of the Rings (LOTR) books, *The Silmarillion*, and watched the extended editions of each movie in the space of a month. I might have told myself it was the genius of the plot and the passion I'd experienced with its characters that slowly pulled me out of my stupor over the course of the next year. But now I know better. At Gandalf's fall or the irrefutable bravery Faramir exhibited when taking back Osgiliath I would find myself ugly-sobbing, touched to the core by something that surpassed the scene, so deeply

felt, it startled my subconscious. It was the soundtrack that finally made me feel something again for the story.

It took me a while to understand my relationship with music. It wasn't until this revelation with the LOTR soundtrack that I finally recognized I had affinity toward rhythm and sound that made me physically feel something. Lyrics suddenly felt unimportant and suffocating. I began obsessively making playlists based off soundtracks from favorite movies I'd seen; my music taste grew, evolved. It wasn't until I encountered the albums created by Two Steps from Hell, however, that I truly felt myself returning, as if the very expression of this type of music were coaxing the words and ideas from some hidden corner of my mind.

Based in California, Two Steps from Hell is a production group that came together when Nick Phoenix and Thomas Bergersen combined their talent for movie trailer music. Epic and heart-wrenching, their sounds have made an appearance in films like *The Dark Knight*, *Harry Potter*, and *Avatar*. Their original music has additionally been used in hundreds of movie ads, and thousands of TV programs. As of their most recent album release, they have also made public eighteen different albums. Unlike many other soundtrack artists, Two Steps from Hell specializes in original trailer music for any film and TV production and in this way their focus and their sound is unique. Solely instrumental and lacking a specific topic, each track's generality leaves room for the listener to fill in the gaps that a topic or lyrics in other songs might not typically invoke. Using your imagination becomes the ultimate experience.

Some part of my mind had put these puzzle pieces together when crying to an epic fantasy movie before the rest of my conscious had. The choice to sit down to a piece of music, close my eyes and let the sounds invoke their own images was all but foreign to me. In fact, I think it is to many people, who allow lyrics to rule their music choice and their mood. Regardless, Two Steps from Hell gave me the opportunity to start thinking again with my imagination—build a story, it seemed to tell me. Start asking questions. So I did. Scrolling through their series of albums I paused on a particularly enticing album cover called *Archangel*—complete with half the body of a fierce-looking woman zooming on wings through the clouds, spears zipping past her lithe form, and a spatter of blood adorning the corners of her lips—and I listened.

This album is one of my favorites for several reasons. Like its name, the music content suggests the journey of an archangel (or many) in a series of contrasting songs, ranging from graceful melodies to those of an epic battle. When and where have the

archangels come from? Are they descending from heaven to confront an enemy? Are they trying to make peace? My mind is left in knots singling out any one possible storyline. But the beauty of this particular album lies in its streamlined quality—it literally invokes the physical representation of an angel, from the fantastical rendering of their flying, to the more dangerous powers of their character.

“Nero” for example, is a piece whose fluid and tranquil undertones—recreated by the descending keys of a piano—develop into an uplifting crescendo of bells and a violin reminiscent of flight. There is something sublime about the sound that leaves you vulnerable to its beauty; you feel as if you’re at the edge of some precipice, the land laid out before you. It holds you there, stricken with awe and fear, until the climax crashes over every sense in tumultuous celebration. You spread your wings. You leap. And then you fall.

“What’s Happening to Me” escalates more quickly into a theme that is bolder, more threatening, and has a wider blend of orchestrated sounds. Think of the most stressful part of any movie you’ve ever watched—the protagonist trying to escape a masked killer while dragging a broken leg, the final stand-off between two armies—times four. Between the odd ticking of a clock, the haunting female vocals, and the deep thrum of drums, this track invokes a different attention to danger and beauty, and thus an entirely unique story.

Even then, “Mountains From Water” takes you on its own path. Leading with a quick, consistent pacing, both drum and violin leave you thirsting after a clue, a journey, an answer. You know what you have to do to survive and come out on top and you’re hell-bent on succeeding. Between the urgency of the drum and the intense marching of the flute, it is the ultimate sound of drive and determination, the heat of an inevitable battle.

There is no right or wrong to interpreting this kind of music. It’s the kind of sound that reminds us that human beings are universally wired to positively react to the external stimuli of sound. Since the presence of civilization, music has been an integral part of our identity and has become our purest form of expression. Technology has even provided us with the ability to interact with music daily—listening to the radio in the car on your way to work, plugging into apps like Spotify or Apple Music for the ultimate experience without interruption. Its frequency and pacing even changes with our mood.

The next time you watch a movie or watch a trailer, close your eyes. Forget about the physical images or the dialogue and focus instead on the sound. The swell and projection of sounds in tandem with the change of scenes, the crescendo that leaves a chill running down your spine...this is what we feel when listening or participating in the National Anthem—the

internal swell of pride, patriotism, and a bone-deep sense of unity. Whether this is Two Steps from Hell or another soundtrack artist like Howard Shore or John Williams, be sure to find the rhythm and sound that shocks your soul and renders you inspired. Ask for nothing less. Perhaps it will help you find the path out of writer's block, like it did for me. Or perhaps it will simply fill that part of you that has always been searching for something greater than yourself.

SCENE V: WHY IS NOSTALGIA SO AWFUL?

Anonymous

*When it comes to writing on my own time, I prefer to write as a sort of conversation with myself in order to figure out why I approach topics a certain way. This is what inspired me to write *Why is Nostalgia So Awful?**



In general, I try to avoid music that I listened to when I was in my first few years of high school. Not because it's bad from a musical standpoint—the majority of it is, in my opinion, actually really good—it's just that it usually makes me feel Really Bad (like, emotionally). I even made a playlist on Spotify to consolidate all of my high school music that I listened to heavily from 2011 to 2013, and appropriately titled it "i'm depressed!" 2011 through 2013 were some really difficult years for me for a lot of reasons, but they were also good in a lot of ways too. So, I don't necessarily long for those times or to relive them (well, maybe I do), but I do mourn them in a way because, as we know, the passage of time is awful and quite frankly should be illegal.

Now, unfortunately, I can't help but associate a lot of the music I discovered at that time with feeling Really Bad. It's not all bad though—some songs don't make me feel awful! I have a lot of positive memories associated with those songs, it's just that they're tinged with

a little bit of sadness. But I guess that's what nostalgia is, right? Mixing the good and the bad of the past and longing for it, but also being saddened by it.

Background

After begging for an entire year, I finally got my own laptop in the Christmas of 2010. I was truly in love with that laptop (R.I.P. 2010–2014), and as a result, I spent a lot of time online. In particular, I spent a lot of time on a website for a book series that I had read a few years before, and I made a lot of online friends through that website. Although I didn't know it at the time, this was really the groundwork for what later shaped my music tastes and a lot of other personal aspects of myself in a positive way.

Prior to the summer before my freshman year of high school, I really didn't listen to a lot of my own music. By that I mean I really only listened to what was on the radio or what my friends showed me. My musical tastes up to 2011 really just consisted of pop, hip-hop/rap, and R&B, with probably all of it being mainstream. However, since I was talking to so many different people around the country and world through that book website, I got exposed to a lot of new music. I was introduced to genres that I had never even known about: house, trip hop, various psychedelic genres, and indie rock and indie pop, among so many others. It was also summertime and I was out of school, so I would stay up a lot later than I usually did. They don't do it anymore, but MTV used to play music videos early in the morning, starting at three a.m., and this was also a place where I was able to discover new music. I remember being pretty traumatized by Die Antwoord's "I Fink U Freeky" music video playing at four in the morning one day, and although that's a story for another time, it was good exposure to music that I would never have listened to otherwise.

All of this time spent online and talking to people who were outside of my little bubble in Middletown, Ohio, really helped me not just branch out with my musical tastes, but also develop as a person. I'll try to just focus on the musical aspects of my development, though. This isn't a motivational story about personal growth—it's just about feeling Sad and also a little bit Wistful and Nostalgic because some songs remind me of my first few years of high school. At twenty-two, I really thought my angsty teen years were over, but I guess not.

Okay, so what am I getting at?

- Existence is painful.
- The passage of time is evil.
- Songs that you listened to in your formative years are bound to make you at least a little bit miserable (because of nostalgia) and if they don't, then who are you? Some kind of sociopath?
- I'm dramatic.

“Electric Feel” by MGMT is one of the songs that I discovered when I was fifteen, when I was lonely and confused and insecure, but it was also a song that connected me to other people, and, in a roundabout way, helped me gain a better sense of identity. Not to be fake deep, but when I first saw the above meme, well, first I laughed because of its accuracy, but then I felt really connected to the idea of that song just absolutely blasting serotonin into my brain, because it really does! And so do the other songs that I listened to when I was younger. Listening to those songs makes me miss being fifteen and miss my friends and my family members that I've lost since then. But they also remind me of a time where I was profoundly sad and lonely, which is something that I've since moved past. That's why it's sometimes better to just avoid listening to those songs altogether—sometimes the good does not outweigh the bad.

So, for me at least, I feel like a more accurate version of the meme would be serotonin mixed with a little bit of sadness because that's what nostalgia is, and nostalgia is exactly what I feel when I listen to “Electric Feel.” It's both longing and aversion. Nostalgia's something I simultaneously want to avoid and also crave because of the negative and positive emotions it brings. But ultimately, if you're serotonin deficient, you really just have to take what you can get.

ENCORE



Back in his studio dressing room, Lance Talbot sits alone in front of the mirror, drumming his fingers on the vanity. It's about three weeks since the auditions and his decision on the winner is due later this evening.

Yet Lance just doesn't know who to choose. Every audition was so unique and well performed that it's impossible for him to pick just one winner. He can't imagine disappointing all of the contestants who worked so hard and who all desperately wanted the chance to be on his TV show.

Perhaps Lance can bypass the problem of picking just one winner. He is, after all, the contest creator, and creators can do whatever they want, right? An idea forms inside his head. His manager will probably hate him later, but for now...

Lance knows just what to do.

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Presenting the winners of the 2019 contest to appear on future episodes of *Listen Up with Lance Talbot*.

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PARIS TAYLOR is a writer from Dallas, Texas. She enjoys writing fantasy and fiction stories with a strong female protagonist. Paris loves drinking coffee and reading a good book, especially on a rainy day. When she isn't writing, she can be found in local bookstores or playing the flute or guitar. Paris also enjoys spending time with family and friends, as well as her dog, Leo. Paris is currently an undergraduate student at Miami University.

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CLAYTON TARANTINO is a senior at Miami University majoring in psychology and professional writing. Clayton has been a Music Director for Miami's Redhawk Radio since his junior year, and is also a co-host on the WMSR radio show "MUsick Countdown." When not at the station, Clayton enjoys reading books solely for the Accelerated Reader reading points and playing high-intensity collegiate quidditch.

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GRACE NEHLS is a senior creative writing major and management minor studying at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Grace has also been involved with the on-campus literary magazine, *Happy Captive Magazine*, since her sophomore year and is currently its Marketing Director. While she is pursuing a career in publishing, her interests mainly lie in novel-writing, particularly epic fantasy. In her spare time she loves buying books she can't afford and spending time with friends.

Please check your local TV listings to catch your favorite contestant talking live with Lance Talbot.

The directors would also like to thank production manager TIM LOCKRIDGE for his guidance in bringing this Broadway musical to life.

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