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The Last Time

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Recommended Citation

Chapin, McCall, "The Last Time" (2022). *Honors Theses*. 58.

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HONORS THESIS – REFLECTION “The Last Time” – McCall Chapin

OVERVIEW

Writing and recording “The Last Time” has been an incredibly challenging yet rewarding process. From exploring and understanding the 7 stages of grief, using that research to write these songs, recording them in the studio, and getting to know the financial and business aspects of a release – it has been such a learning experience that has made me a better songwriter and musician. In the process, I realized how important it is to lean on those around me when working on a creative project like this. Collaboration is a beautiful thing, but I also learned to trust my instincts when it’s my music on the line. There were moments along the way where I felt discouraged and frustrated, but now I am thrilled with the product and this is a project that I’m very proud of. Here is a reflection on each part of the process – what I learned, what I struggled with, what I would change if I could do it all again, etc.

WRITING

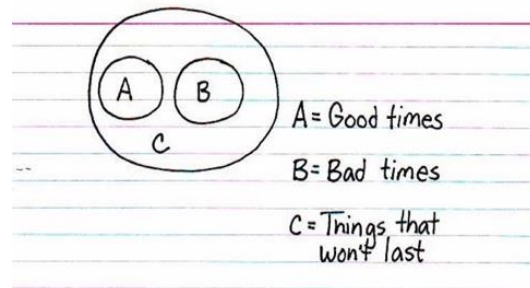
Going into writing my thesis I knew I wanted to incorporate the beauty within sadness. I’ve always been drawn to feelings of loss and pain in my music, because I think that is where we find the most connection with others. I knew, though, that I needed to frame this project around a more concrete and developed understanding of hard feelings, so I did some research and stumbled upon the 5 stages of grief as determined by Swiss-American psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* in 1969. While she initially deemed 5 steps of grief, over time those 5 stages have been expanded upon to 7. This arch and journey of sadness was one she wrote about from her experience with terminally ill patients.

As I approached this project, I knew I have not had enough experience with the loss of loved ones to fully understand grief through that lens. I have, though, experienced much heartache through my own relationships and those of my loved ones. Grief is a universal experience, and it comes in many forms. With this album, I wanted to explore it from the perspective of romantic heartbreak. For the sake of this project, the 7 stages I focused on are as listed below with the corresponding track title next to it.

1. Shock/ Confusion – “What Do I Do With That?”
2. Pain/ Guilt – “Got Me Good”
3. Anger/ Bargaining “Expectations”
4. Depression and Loneliness – “Thought of You”
5. The Upward Turn – “Somebody Will”
6. Reconstruction / Working Through – “Pray for You”
7. Acceptance / Hope – “Supposed To”
8. “The Last Time”

The title track, “The Last Time,” does not go with a specific stage of grief, but rather encompasses the main idea that inspired this project. Both joy and heartache are temporary – nothing lasts forever. This song was the first I wrote for the album, and it was inspired by the

Venn-diagram below. My mom showed this to me when she was going through her divorce, and it served as a voice of comfort and reason while everything in our lives felt so complicated. It wasn't going to last forever.



I think one of the biggest struggles I had at the beginning of the writing process was being forced to write alone. Co-writing has been a huge part of my experience at Belmont and in Nashville, however the Honors Council wanted this to be a solo-written thesis. It was difficult to have no one to bounce ideas off of and build ideas with. I enjoyed being able to reconnect with the part of myself that does write alone, after all that's how I started out, but it definitely took a lot of work and time. When looking at the credits, you will see Liam Chapin (my younger brother), credited on a few of the songs. He helped me originate the ideas behind them and built tracks for me when the songs were in the earliest stages. I believe he deserves co-writing credit, though I did write this project by myself like the council wanted.

Below are the liner notes for each track that were available as a “reward” from my Kickstarter Campaign:

“What Do I Do With That?”

Funny enough, "What Do I Do with That" was the last song I wrote for this project. I had explored every other aspect of grief, but the "initial shock and sting" was harder for me to access. In conversation one day I heard the phrase "What Do I Do with That?" and it immediately struck me as a song title. As I started writing it, I realized how well it would work as track 1 on the album. Every song on this project is written *after* the moment of heartbreak, but this song captured those most initial feelings after someone hurts you. When someone is trying to excuse their behavior or explain it, there's a moment of “What am I supposed to say? How do I respond? What do I do with that?”

“Got Me Good”

This song represents the second stage of grief – “pain,” and in complete honesty, was written in a very painful time of my life. I was going through my first big kid, real world heartbreak and damn, it hurt. Break up songs started making a little more sense, and I was feeling things I had only really heard about before. It was a very dark and low time in my life, but one of my most prolific. It was an opportunity to experience the emotions I had only been mimicking and trying to understand before. I truly believe I'm a better songwriter because of that period of time. The first line came from a text message I got from my ex after we had broken up. I started the "what went wrong?" conversation (which was my first mistake) and got a response that said, "I'm doing tequila shots right now, talk later." I immediately took to my room, grabbed my guitar, and this song spilled out.

“Expectations”

My younger brother, Liam and I started on this song while we were home quarantined after Covid-19 hit. As a writer, I'm typically inspired by a title or a concept. "Expectations" was a word that I've always thought would make a great song. The word by itself is rhythmic and holds a lot of meaning. We started writing the song to a pop/R&B track and got a solid verse and chorus down, but quickly, we forgot about it. When it came time to put this project together, I found our old demo and thought that it captured "anger" quite nicely. Lyrically, it's immature, but that's what I loved about it. In the grieving process, anger shows itself in irrational and childish ways, which I wanted to capture with this song.

“Thought of You”

“Thought of You” was another song I wrote before I knew it was going to be a part of any project. From the moment I wrote it, I loved it because it was simply sad. There was no optimism buried in the lines or some twist in the story – it was just sad. This person is walking through their home that used to be full of life and love. The memories are haunting them, keeping them stuck in the past. I think a home is so powerful in representing a relationship. Life stages and family, foundation and growth, love and loss - it all exists within those four walls. So, to feel trapped somewhere that holds your best memories is heartbreaking. There is no feeling worse than being stuck in your sadness.

“Somebody Will”

"Somebody Will" represents the upward turn in the 7 stages of grief. It is where optimism begins to creep in and overtake the immense sadness. This song serves as a reminder that there is someone out there meant to love you right. In the saddest moments of my life, I would turn back to the sentiment that the good and the bad don't last forever. There is happiness after sadness, love after heartbreak, and good after bad. There are people in this world that will love you for everything that you are, whether it be your friends, family, or partner. And I think it's just as important to be that somebody for yourself.

“Pray for You”

I sat with this title in my notes app for a while. I would try to write it and it never came out quite right, so I'd scrap it. It's important to me to never force a song out, because it always feels ingenuine. Finally, on a trip home, I sat in the dining room at my mom's house and the song spilled out in under 30 minutes. It basically wrote itself. I don't claim to be a particularly religious person, and in all honesty, I don't pray all that often. But, the concept behind this song of wishing someone well even after they have done the worst - hoping to the God above that they heal and do well in life - was one that I felt could only come across written this way.

“Supposed To”

I will let you in on a secret - "Supposed To" is my favorite song on the record. This album focuses on so much sadness, and while I love that about it, this song is a nice optimistic and feel good way to end things. I truly believe we are meant to love people at specific moments in our lives. Perhaps they are meant to be a lesson or a growing experience or our greatest love - either way we are all better for these moments. This song has always felt like the end of the "Last Time" movie in my brain. The song that plays as you get in the car and drive away - windows down, tears in your eyes - knowing that everything was worth it. Love is worth it even when it crashes and burns.

“Last Time”

“Last Time” was actually the first song I wrote for this album before I knew this was my thesis project. I was assigned to write a “Big Idea” song in one of my songwriting classes, which was challenging because I typically write very specific, storytelling songs about a moment or a feeling. I was inspired by the idea that our worst moments and our best moments are simply that – moments. We experience these feelings and these heartaches and these highs in waves – nothing lasts forever, which is so sad, yet so comforting at the same time. When I got to thinking about my own life, this concept was so applicable. Playing outside as a child, my parent’s relationship, my first experiences falling in and out of love, etc. – those moments were fleeting without me knowing it. This album is about the most beautiful and tragic feelings in life, and I hope you will find your own stories within this song.

RECORDING

The recording process taught me the most, I think. It was my first time being in charge of a large-scale session like this, and that gave me a lot of anxiety at first. After finding a band, I created charts and recordings so that they could be prepared. I decided I wanted the full band on “What Do I Do with That,” “Expectations,” “Somebody Will” and “Supposed To.” At the time, I felt only those songs would be enhanced by the full band. The rest of the songs needed space to breathe and seemed to benefit from being less busy.

We recorded at Oceanway on Music Row in Studio B and spent 9am – 4pm tracking the band and scratch vocals. I walked into the studio that day very nervous that I wouldn’t be able to convey to the musicians what I wanted to hear. The band came in ready to go, knowing what needed to be done, which was extremely helpful. As I got more comfortable, I was able to get my ideas across in the session, and by the end I was very happy with the way it turned out. I’m so grateful to the band for coming ready to go and making these songs sound great.

A few weeks later, I went into track vocals in Studio C at Oceanway. I didn’t expect this process to be as fun as it was. “Got Me Good” and “Pray for You” are two songs we decided to leave the band off of, but still wanted to keep the songs interesting, so we used harmonies to give them some texture. Building out the harmonies was so much fun, and I am so thrilled with the way they came out.

About a week later, my best friend and former duo partner, Katareen Mohammed, came in to do harmonies on the other songs. These vocal parts made the songs sound so much fuller and rounded out.

I got the first mixes back in the beginning of 2022 and they sounded great, however there were a few things that felt off with “Expectations” and “Supposed To.” The guitar parts were good, but they didn’t seem to match the song the way I had hoped. This was a roadblock I was not expecting, and I was not sure how to handle it at all. I didn’t want to hurt my guitarist’s feelings, but I knew this wasn’t the sound I needed on this project. I talked with my producer, Katelyn, and she encouraged me to fight for the sound that I felt belonged on this album, so we roped in a different guitarist to lay down some guitar that felt much more fitting. Finally, I started getting final mixes back that felt *right*.

The recording process was a taxing one, for sure. I learned lessons in patience and persistence. We go into this industry because we love music, but, like any job, it’s not always

fun. Looking back on the recording process as a whole, I would have loved for it to have happened quicker. From day one tracking to getting the final masters a total of 5 months passed. I know this isn't unusual, but for a student project, I wish I had been more on top of moving the project along. I also would probably add the band on "Got Me Good," "Thought of You," and "Pray for You." I didn't want to overcomplicate the songs with a full band, but I don't think that would have happened. If we had had more time and an endless budget, I think I would have gone back and added the band in.

FUNDING

After we tracked the band and initial vocals, I wanted to get ahead on funding this project. I've had past experiences with Kickstarter to fund musical projects, so I felt comfortable using it again to reach my \$2750 goal.

With a Kickstarter campaign, friends, fans and family are able to pledge money in exchange for "Rewards" at different tiers. It is an all or nothing platform, so if you don't reach your goal, you don't get any of the money. Below is the link to my Kickstarter project, so you can explore the different rewards I had available, as well as the video / explanation people were able to see when they were pledging money.

https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/mccallchapin/the-last-time?ref=user_menu

This process can be a draining one. Being an artist comes with constant self-promotion that I have come to find exhausting. During the Kickstarter, I posted to Facebook multiple times a week, I created the "Bathroom Floor Sessions," where I'd play acoustic versions of songs off of the project in my bathroom, and I tried to get the campaign in front of as many people as possible. This was another portion of my project that taught me patience and persistence. It was nerve-wrecking to feel like I may not be able to raise the money, and the \$2750 that I needed would fall on my shoulders alone. It is scary not having a "sure thing" financially when you go into creating a project independently.

After a full 30 days, my project was fully funded by 26 backers who believed in the music and wanted to see this album come to life. I am so grateful for these people.

PROMOTING

As I mentioned above, promotion is not my favorite part of being a musician. That is why I'm grateful for Kate Cacopardo, a fellow Belmont student who for her Senior Thesis, is handling the marketing of "The Last Time." Her thesis is still in progress, so we are still in the process of promoting but have already seen mini successes.

One of our first marketing tactics was posting to TikTok. In our first week of posting, the video for "Expectations" reached 38.3k views, which for TikTok isn't anything crazy, but for me felt like a big deal! This was exciting to see these songs already connecting with people who heard it.

Kate is currently working on lyric videos, a music video, Instagram posts, etc. We are finally set on April 8th as the album release date. I am excited to see how far we can get this project to go.

CONCLUSION

In this process, I think I came to the conclusion that I prefer being a writer over an artist. I love writing my story in songs and feeling people relate to them. However, I find so much more purpose and joy in writing for other artists and with other writers. I love the spirit of collaboration in cowriting, I love the word puzzle that songwriting is, and *I love* getting to go home at the end of the day and not have to make TikTok videos promoting the songs.

Overall, this project was a huge learning process for me. I feel that I grew in ways I hadn't initially expected. When I began my thesis, I assumed that maybe I would grow as a songwriter and learn some new marketing techniques. I didn't know that I would become a musician who is capable of leading a recording session or the hard lessons in funding a project independently and how exhausting that can feel. And I truly didn't know that I would have a product I am proud of and excited to share with everyone.

CREDITS

“What Do I Do With That?”

Written by McCall Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals/Acoustic Guitar – McCall Chapin

Lead Guitar – Carver Partin

Guitar – Thomas Jutz

Drums – Cooper McCord

Bass – Max Baker

“Got Me Good”

Written by McCall Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals/Acoustic Guitar – McCall Chapin

Pads – Rocco Fiorentino

“Expectations”

Written by McCall Chapin, Liam Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals/Acoustic Guitar – McCall Chapin

Lead Guitar – Carver Partin, Christian Manuel

Guitar – Thomas Jutz

Drums – Cooper McCord

Bass – Max Baker

“Thought of You”

Written by McCall Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals/Acoustic Guitar – McCall Chapin

Piano - Rocco Fiorentino

“Somebody Will”

Written by McCall Chapin, Liam Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals/Acoustic Guitar – McCall Chapin

Lead Guitar – Carver Partin

Guitar – Thomas Jutz

Drums – Cooper McCord

Bass – Max Baker

“Pray for You”

Written by McCall Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals/Acoustic Guitar – McCall Chapin

Guitar – Thomas Jutz

“Supposed To”

Written by McCall Chapin, Liam Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals/Acoustic Guitar – McCall Chapin

Lead Guitar – Carver Partin, Christian Manuel

Guitar – Thomas Jutz

Drums – Cooper McCord

Bass – Max Baker

Organ - Rocco Fiorentino

“Last Time”

Written by McCall Chapin

Producing/Mixing/Mastering – Katelyn Prieboy

Vocals – McCall Chapin

Piano - Rocco Fiorentino