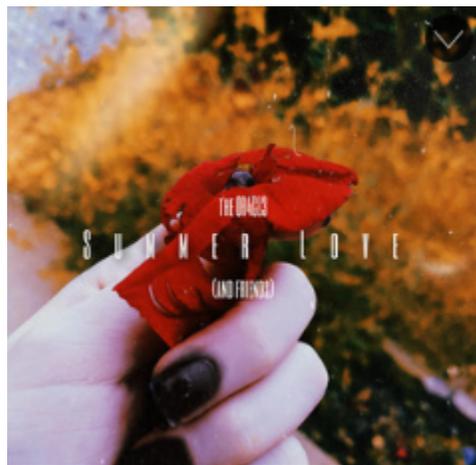


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International Collaboration & Symposium Reflection

Abstract

Music is temporal in its nature, having the power to bring an entire audience of a performance or a recording into a common rhythm. This gives music a certain universal character when compared to visual and literary arts where an individual builds their relationship with a piece of art rather internally at their own pace. However it is very much like other arts insofar as an artist's craft develops in relation to the sounds, styles, and motifs that came before them. I was so excited by the unique opportunity to relate students from different cultures about the music they listened to, and the importance it had in their lives. As we became familiar with one another's musical tastes it started to seem like an obvious goal for members of our work group to contribute musical perspectives which could be worked into a single song. We presented both samples of work group members' favorite songs, and our finished collaborative song at the symposium, after which we were delighted by the praise of our combined effort and wonderful taste.



I first chose to join the music working group because of everything music has meant to me in my life. While I'm not a musician myself, since childhood music has been such a large part of how I interacted with family and friends. Be it singing "The Gambler" around a campfire, or listening to Metallica with my father while we drove around in his truck it always felt like such a deep and enthralling way to be in communion with those around you. Additionally, I've always had an interest in the history of music. My father with a bit of pride in his voice tells stories constantly of how the music scene in Seattle changed throughout his young life, how the hardcore punk scene of his teenage years grew into the thrash metal vibes of the early '80s that gradually gave way to the iconic Pacific Northwest grunge of the late '80s and early '90s. Moreover, beyond just the music he was around in his life, as a very young child my father would from time to time put on music like Elvis, Johnny Cash, Hank Williams and Frank Sinatra. He'd explain how these musicians set a tone for post-war American music, and the influence they had on the contemporary music we enjoy today.

At our first meeting as a group at the end of winter quarter, I was greeted by many kind faces from Wuyi University, Amity University, and my own school the Evergreen State College. We quickly built a rapport with one another about being a student during the pandemic, and of course how none of us could imagine our lives without music. Learning a bit more every time we had the privilege of meeting, we talked about our own relationships with music, whether we had similar or vastly different tastes to our parents, what we enjoy doing while listening to music, how popular music was different in the region we grew up compared to where we go to school, and at which age we discovered or abandoned certain interests. So quickly it became clear how much we had in common despite being separated by thousands of miles.

The group unfortunately got a little smaller as time went on, the pandemic forced some students to take a step back from school and others switched working groups. However, we were able to maintain a cadre of devoted and engaged members including myself, Saz Jackson, Meenakshi Menon, Sparkles B, Arwa Sabir, Catherine Straley, as well as some Chinese students whose names I unfortunately do not have access to.

When we began to postulate what we'd like to present at the cross-cultural symposium, inspired by my interest in how music has changed over time, I recall proposing that we each choose one song that was meaningful for us and give a brief history of that musician's inspirations. I believe it was Saz who proposed that we pick a theme for a song which we could

all relate to, and with input and influence from everyone in the group, create a song which each of us could connect to. After input from everyone and some deliberation, we decided that these two ideas would work quite well in tandem with one another.

We began to select favorite songs of ours which had a vibe that we wanted represented in the song. These songs would be sampled as a kind of mixtape in our final presentation, along with a brief note about why we selected that song. I recall choosing the song "Doomsday" by MF Doom, because there was something about the particularly funky beat of the song paired with its incredibly personable chorus which begins with a sample of a woman singing about falling in love, but also knowing someday, no matter what grave he is buried in, will be reunited with his brother in heaven. This theme of the duality in life is mirrored in the verses, which talk about struggling, succeeding, messing around and also doing what you have to do. This nuanced tone which seeks to explore how complicated and consistently bitter-sweet life really is was something I wanted to share with my peers given the context of everything we're going through as a global society.

Sparkle B sent in a song called Jocie 郭美美 by a Singaporean pop group that was just so wonderfully contrasted to my pick in terms of its upbeat nature. I remember Sparkles saying that the lyrics in Mandarin more or less translate to overcoming whatever one is afraid of, and that as happy songs they make you want to stand up and dance through your struggles.

Arwa was kind enough to submit several of her favorite songs, but I believe the one they chose was Surface's Keep it Gold. A Texas band, they mix a rather "traditional" pop-beat with much more contemporary distortion effects that become more and less intense around the song to give an impression of the song coming in and out of focus. The distortion is the most limited when he goes into the chorus of "So let's keep it gold, Darling we don't ever have to grow old...", before the distortion is increased as the singer returns to the verse and describes daily life. Arwa wrote about how the upbeat and chill mood of the song had gotten her through some particularly difficult times in her life.

Catherine was kind enough to share her own music she'd made. Particularly the song "Pandaelephant" which "tells us a story of a baby panda and a baby elephant playing and racing through the jungle in hopes to reach the edge to catch the sunset. The slow part is once they reach the edge and they're watching the night sky".

From there, we began to discuss specifically what kind of vibe we would like in our song. I distinctly remember the moment one of our Chinese peers shared the phrase “Summer Love”, and we all agreed that amidst everything happening in the world right now, what we all really desired was summer love. Saz was our fearless leader driving the project forward. Saz was constantly taking in input and requests from everyone when it came to composing the song. Saz also was making sure necessary communications were effective, and everyone was being informed of what they were needing to be informed of. Catherine and Saz both contributed significantly to composing “Summer Love” and they did an excellent job of taking input from the collective and turning it into a beautiful amalgamation of what we were all feeling. I tried to check in during their production process a couple times to listen to what they had so far and offer feedback, but both times what they had so far sounded totally inline with what I think the whole collective had in mind.

I was incredibly proud watching our presentation during the symposium, seeing me and my peers hard work pay off in such a smooth presentation that I could see each of us represented as individuals in the slideshow, and all of us as a collective in the form of the song. Everyone there was so incredibly supportive as we presented, I knew that both myself and the entire music group felt vindicated. I know some of us were nervous to go first, because if there had been any technical difficulties it would have felt especially embarrassing, however I think the success and upbeat nature of our presentation set an incredibly positive tone for the rest of the symposium.

In watching the rest of the symposium, I remember realizing how incredibly little I knew about tea during the tea group’s presentation. The ancient traditions involved in tea cultivation as well as the many differences in tea culture struck me. It’s amazing to think about how strongly the little rituals of life, like drinking tea, are both a product of our society and our own tastes. I especially appreciated the recognition of American iced tea.

The group whose presentation seemed to show just how well these groups had come to know each other during this process was definitely the storytelling group. The way their project seemed to bring together themes, ideas, and characters they all contributed was incredibly reminiscent of my own group, and seeing that energy applied to a different medium was an enjoyable contrast.

One of the funniest moments in the entire class to me occurred in our very last meeting with Chinese and Indian students after the symposium when we were placed into breakout

groups with different students to talk to one another about what we thought. As soon as I joined, an Indian woman whose name I do not forget now said “Oh are you the Patrick that picked the MF Doom song?”, to which I excitedly responded “yes!”. She said “Oh I’m so happy to put a face to such a wonderful pick. You have a mustache! That’s perfect!” Everyone on the call chuckled. I was so delighted to meet someone who was such an enthusiastic fan of the same music as myself, and someone with such a funny thing to say about it as well. We went back and forth discussing both Tea. She mentioned that she prefers her black tea with lemon, to which I said that my favorite summer drink was an Arnold Palmer, lemonade and iced tea. She said that some friends of hers who had been to America had tried that and that she’d be interested in it for a while, so I jokingly said that lemonade was easy enough to make.

I am incredibly grateful for the chance I was given to come into a community with students from around the world to create something which resonated with all of us, and it made me realize how incredibly unfortunate it is that this sort of academic exchange isn’t far more routine at the under-graduate level. I think it would be really advantageous for Evergreen to expand on programs which bring students from around the world into collaboration with one another. In the absence of class related socializing in the last year, I do believe that having such regular meetings with students across the world, made the limited socializing so much more impactful. This project was something that I do not think the conclusion of my education at Evergreen would have been complete without.