

“Gratitude”:

In preparing music for “Gratitude”, I wanted to create a recording that captured an honest representation of who I currently am as a trumpet player, composer, and arranger. While reflecting on this idea and on my intent to unify the work I have been doing under a single message, my thoughts gravitated to the people who have shaped my playing the most. I thought about the teachers who sparked my interests in music, the musicians whose recordings and performances served as continual inspiration, and the mentors who have invested time and energy into helping me chase those inspirations. With these thoughts in mind, I decided the theme of this recital would be “Gratitude: Mentors and Inspirations”. This program of music is an attempt at a ‘thank you’ letter to the musicians who have been my most important mentors and inspirations for studying music.

Groove

When I arrived at Ohio University to start my undergraduate degree, I had a bit of a problem. I really wanted to learn to improvise but I had not been able to find any consistent mentors. I was extremely frustrated and desperate to learn.

Enter Sean Parsons.

Sean Parsons is a pianist, arranger, composer and Associate Professor at Ohio University. When I met him, he had an extremely busy schedule directing ensembles and teaching theory and aural skills classes. Despite already being stretched too thin, Dr. Parsons agreed to meet with me once a week to work on improvisation.

Dr. Parsons nurtured my love of sound. He helped me learn the basics of playing chord changes, but he also encouraged my interest in a variety of styles. If I was interested in listening to and discussing hip-hop, R&B, bop, swing, or Brazilian music he took me seriously encouraged me to think deeply about the sound of the music and what it signifies in a broad context of life. Dr. Parsons sacrificed a lot of unpaid time to help me learn how to play and understand the music I found inspiring. Because of this, “Groove” is dedicated to him.

Trying to Keep Up

Though I originally composed and performed this song in my junior year at Ohio University, I never felt like it was fully realized. At the time I was attempting to channel the influence of Wynton Marsalis’s music of the 80’s, exemplified on albums like *Black Codes from The Underground* and *J Mood*. I still rarely tire of listening to these albums due to their gritty attitude, impeccable clarity and swinging conviction.

Though this selection captures musical impression of Wynton’s music of the 80s, I associate the feeling of the music very closely with my time at UM. I remember telling Professor Lynch during my audition that I wanted to learn by trying to keep up with other UM students. Since I arrived in 2019, I have spent almost all of my time doing just that. Trying to keep up with my peers has been an extremely challenging experience that has prompted extensive personal

and musical reflection. I have been forced to overcome a lot of shortcomings as in my approach to music and to life in general. However as a result, I have experienced more personal and musical growth over the last two years than I ever would have predicted. In that spirit, I would like to dedicate this piece to Professor Lynch and the studio he has cultivated for the seemingly endless inspiration they have given me during my time at Frost.

Swing Song

“Swing Song” represents an intentional shift in my writing style. At the end of my undergraduate studies and throughout my first year at the University of Miami, I was writing almost entirely by feel. I would noodle on the keyboard until I found something I liked. For obvious reasons, this approach was starting to hit a wall. My writing was unreliable, sporadic, and prone to unsolvable ruts. In particular, I found almost everything I was writing was medium tempo, straight eighth-note feel, with singable, diatonic melodies full of long sustains which connected non-functional chord changes.

Besides being redundant and eventually uninspiring, composing in this way was frustrating to me because it did not reflect my roots as a jazz musician from Morgantown, West Virginia. Though we didn’t have a lot of jazz music in the immediate area, the influence of the Pittsburgh scene loomed large over everything I heard after I became interested in music. The players that inspired me all valued swing. Whether I was hearing musicians like Sean Jones with the Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra or James Moore playing at jam sessions with Roger Humphries, it became clear to me that Pittsburgh jazz has an agenda: it’s going to feel good and be firmly rooted in the hard-bop tradition.

I learned later that this agenda was not a coincidence. The history of hard bop was deeply impacted by Pittsburgh jazz musicians. Pittsburgh was once home to such imminent and influential musicians as Stanley and Tommy Turrentine, Paul Chambers, Ray Brown, and Art Blakey among many others. I began to realize the roots of so many of my favorite records were drawn from a city just over an hour from where I grew up. This is my tribute to the sounds of these musicians which have been a continual source of inspiration throughout my study.

Springtime is for Saying Goodbye

I originally conceived of the source material immediately after the completion of my degree at Ohio University, and my sketches sat in my “New Compositions” folder for roughly 2 years. During my time in Athens, I developed a deep love for the mentors and peers I encountered that influenced my development. In Athens, I felt I had established a sense of place and personhood that gave me great comfort. After two years of studying at the University of Miami, I have come to have these same feelings.

This piece documents the internal conflict that arises when we develop this feeling of attachment and are forced to move on as soon as we start to become comfortable. It’s a musical representation of a cycle many students come to terms with at the end of their program of study: If I am to grow, I must leave behind those things which I love (friends, places, feelings) in

service to self-development, and exchange them for deliberate discomfort and new challenges. It is a simple realization that is difficult to un-see.

“Springtime is for Saying Goodbye” can be seen as having four distinct sections. These are the opening melody statement, the guitar solo, the trombone solo, and the trumpet solo/closing melody statement. In the same way that the different solo sections of Schneider’s “Hang Gliding” represent a particular sequence of feelings during her hang-gliding experience in Brazil, the sections of my piece have come to represent the different moods and stages associated with the cycle of comfort and discomfort of being a student.

- **The melody statement** represents the sense of optimism, excitement, and anticipations we have when we begin our programs
- **The guitar solo** represents the inevitable challenge and discomfort that are thrust upon us
- **The trombone solo** represents the contemplative feeling that arises when we step back and develop awareness of this cycle
- **The trumpet solo/closing melody statement** represents the commitment to making the most of it all

Special Thanks:

This project would not have been possible without the help of many of my friends. Thank you to many of my favorite musicians, Kenton Luck, Alex Mann, Travis Hunter, Josh Bermudez, Max Schwartz, and Connor Rohrer, for offering their incredible talent and time to this project. Thank you to Jenna Getty and Jered Byford, who helped save the recording session, and Max Schwartz who patiently worked with me editing and mixing the recordings. Thank you to Eric Opalite and Andrew Diemer for their incredible photography and art direction, which added the finishing touch to this work. And finally, special thanks to Brian Lynch for his dedicated mentorship during my master's degree at the University of Miami.

Credits:

Recording Engineer: Jenna Getty

Mixing Engineer: Max Schwartz

Photography: Eric Opalite

Art Direction: Andrew Diemer

Trumpet: Ryan Kerwin

Trombone: Kenton Luck

Saxophones: Alex Mann

Guitar: Josh Bermudez

Piano: Connor Rohrer

Drums: Travis Hunter

Bass: Max Schwartz

All compositions by: Ryan Kerwin

