

Research Discussion Transcription 11/11/23
Names are changed for anonymity to Composer 1-9.

Emma: Okay, so for this I'd just like to say thank you again now that everyone is here for participating in this research. It's really awesome to get feedback on what's happening and you are some of my favorite musicians and people and composers and songwriters so it's really valuable to get your feedback on this and I appreciate it. I also picked a group discussion for this feedback because I thought it would be really interesting to have all of you in the same area the same talking about the same things and kind of hoping that the discussion can grow a bit organically in that way. So, looking forward to that. There's going to be a couple of different topics to go through so we'll just start now with Part One: discussing the different methods from the Composition Workbook. So, I'll just ask a general question to begin but it can kind of go wherever it needs to go and feel free to just jump in we'll see if that works but if it's weird with lagging then I can also ask people what they think. So maybe we can start with the question of in general for all of the methods, how was the exercise itself incorporated into your composition or the theme of the exercise itself incorporated into what you ended up making?

Composer 1: I wrote a song about a spider. I don't know if that counts as an animal but yeah I used the animal time write. Yeah, I guess that's not really an animal but so I kind of didn't follow your instructions a little bit but yeah. I've done a lot of free writing and a lot of like you know writing to get ideas out like surrounding like places and like stuff like that but I'd never actually done like an animal or in my case a bug. So it got a lot of ideas that I wouldn't have otherwise explored. Yeah, that was fun.

Emma: And maybe you can talk about, is there anything specific in your song at the end that demonstrates that it was about a spider or like what parts of it kind of came through to the end?

Composer 1: Well it was like I was writing about a spider literally being on a windowsill and then kind of like pretending to be the perspective of a spider. It kind of evolved into a song about loneliness and gazing out windows as many songs do but it was fun because it was kind of like obviously a very playful perspective that ended up being kind of like very like introspective and taking very literal things of like a spider doing things, making a web, sitting on a windowsill and like trying to make something meaningful out of that was fun. So that did end up in the final song and just like different things that spiders do but then trying to make it like a story I guess.

Emma: Yeah, that's great! Thanks for sharing. Does anyone else have any experiences, similar or different?

Composer 2: I think [Composer 1] said it really well with the literal aspect of it but I like that the animal one for me got my brain in a different place like I started thinking about how my cat walks or the pacing of the footsteps or when she prances or it was really putting my brain in a completely different spot that I don't usually write from which I think can lend itself to writing different things if you're not thinking so much about what you usually think about when you're writing. I liked that it broke my usual mindset like I'd never thought from that headspace before.

Emma: Thank you.

Composer 3: So I find a lot that when I am you know when I'm writing I tried really hard- I'm very big picture oriented- so I like you know planning things in terms of writing. So, I find that when I write, I like to do bigger concepts, you know really kind of large ideas that are sometimes not very easy to write about because there are so many things that you can pull from but shrinking it down to something as small as like an animal like this this project or like this particular exercise did was super helpful because it almost kind of limits you into what you know what the plan should be. You know like I wrote about a penguin and there's really only a couple of things that you know you can picture when you see a penguin. You know, I wrote about the little waddling and all of that. And it would be different if I was like I wanted to write about a penguin who was dealing with some existential thing you know but it was small enough that it was super easy and it really flowed naturally.

Composer 4: Yeah, I was just going to say it's interesting [Composer 2] that you bring that up because I found it like I totally agree like the animal-themed write and the timed write, I was I totally shifted like my whole perspective of like how I approached anything but with the improv recording I found that like that was maybe less that was more of me and just like playing like stuff that I like it wasn't as extensive or I didn't come up with anything crazily new just because I was like- it just I don't know... I was just it didn't I'm struggling to put this into words but like- I think it was just a perspective that I usually would write from and so to think about different angles was really helpful so.

Emma: Definitely, thanks for sharing. Does anyone else have anything to say on this question?

Composer 5: I have similar things to everyone else but I wrote a song about an otter. And I usually go with songwriting specifically like I usually end up in some sort of introspective sphere of things and so it was really nice sort of like [Composer 3] was saying to have something specific to sort of narrow it down. It felt like a vacation to go into something else that someone else chose for me. I tried to sort of get the playfulness in there. I see a lot of videos on Instagram of them so and then they're also really cute and they're sleeping so at the end it sort of slows down. And then the haiku one was really great too because sometimes when I'm writing lyrics I tend to just write a lot of stuff and then it's sort of hard to narrow it down and pick which things actually belong in the song and which things don't so it was nice to have already a format that someone else picked for me to sort of put that into a format that isn't just a rhyme scheme, you know the syllable count and stuff. I found that really helpful.

Composer 6: I can provide a little bit of a counterargument about the animal one. So I do most of my writing with [a writing partner] so we did all this stuff together. The way that we usually come up with the music that we will later write lyrics to is like imagining some kind of setting or scene or like past experience and with the animal thing we found it pretty difficult to break away from kind of like tropes that were written for certain animals and like cartoons or something like that which maybe is more on us. Still, we found it a lot easier with the haiku that was a lot more easily to interpret in different ways to be like oh like this could mean this. It makes sense that music would go this way as opposed like "oh it's about a monkey, I'm going to think about some Donkey Kong thing that I saw sometime", something like that. And then like the improv one it was kind of just like okay here's 10 ideas that we normally come up with but now they're on recordings we can just choose which one works the best. So I feel like the haiku was the easiest to come up with something that we wouldn't have come up with otherwise because we could easily throw in different directions the animal one kind of ended up like something we had heard before and the improv one was stuff that we would have already come up with but we have it.

Emma: Thanks.

Composer 3: Can I add something to that? I was gonna say that I also felt like what I was writing was super cartoony and like fell into the trope category but I sort of forced myself to be okay with not writing something that I would have normally written and that made it

okay for me to write something kind of silly and you know maybe a little bit like done before you know a little tired but I will say also that starting with the the animal one kind of made the rest of them flow a lot better for me because it's sort of put me in like a creative, no judgment flow-oriented mindset so that when I did the improvisation and then when I did the haiku there wasn't really anything saying well what if this isn't technically jazz or like what if this isn't you know authentic to yourself like I was just I was writing so being able to break myself of that judgment first with the animal thing was actually super helpful I don't know if that was what you intended, Emma, but I thought it was cool regardless.

Composer 7: I guess I will finally chime in. The last animal song I wrote, it was definitely like a children's vibe, children's song vibe and I think I just played into that even more like "I have friends and the animals have friends and we're all friends and we're happy and we're gonna..." it turned into like an environmentally aware like climate change song but in the sense that we're all working together as a family of animals. Humans being animals and animals being animals. So, I think I played into that larger picture but like trying to sell it as like a children's song. It is cartoony it's very playful but still has this underlying morality thing. Also, I really like the timed situation I don't think anyone talked about that but I usually don't time myself so it's nice to have like okay these are the parameters I need at least like eight measures. So I started with big idea: how I wanted to do that and then okay let me try to get something on the page.

Composer 1: Yeah I was gonna say because the initial timer was- I like a lot of timed stuff because it does give you a little bit of like you just you do what you can do in the amount of time. With this one, I think I was surprised because I did end up coming back to it and making it this little introspective thing so I thought that was really like 'cause I was setting out to write something kind of silly and then I think just because I started from this perspective that I wouldn't have explored otherwise I kind of came back to it and was like "wait this could be like very deep and like fascinating". So like just getting the initial kind of idea, it felt very playful in like the, you know, the timed part of it and then kind of like coming back to it and just expanding on the perspective from like the lyric standpoint was really fun because I didn't I was able to go into this kind of like a little introspective space but I didn't have any initial pressure to do that. It was just like this is gonna be a spider's day on a window sill so, I thought that was interesting and like not not what has happened before for me when I have done kind of like prompts like this where I've like felt compelled to like come back to it later. So that was cool. I liked that.

Emma: So, [Composer 1], would you say that... it was you mentioned kind of like the fact that it was timed and also like just the theme of it that made you want to continue what you wrote. Is there a specific part of that that you would say or is it just chance that it happened this one time?

Composer 1: I think, Was there a specific part of the it being timed do you mean?

Facilitator: Timed or just like the nature of the theme itself. You said that you've tried other kind of methods like this like prompts, ideas...

Composer 1: I think the what kind of what a lot of people have already said just like the lack of pressure is really freeing because you're not like setting to write the best song you've ever you know the most introspective like deep song. So you don't so in a way it's like when I was kind of like thinking of revisiting it and exploring the lyrics more I wasn't like "okay I have to make this work you know like I gotta deadline or I got a performance where I have to like give this heartbreaking story of a spider". It was just kind of like oh this was a cool like thing to explore and I think also because I've done other exercises where I didn't really like the result or like didn't feel inspired, I wasn't putting any yeah I just wasn't putting any pressure on it and it was kind of just like this was fun let me explore that funness a little more. But yeah, just because it kind of... I think I tried almost like I don't know if I'm kind of was kind of breaking the rules by doing this but when I came back to it kind of doing making the exercise like okay, "how can I take this really playful thing and interject some more meaning into it and treating it still like a fun exercise and not like this is paramount that this spider has really deep feelings?" Yeah so it's kind of it was I think I'm saying the same thing like five times in a row but just like it was freeing that it was like a playful prompt so it made me wanna come back to it.

Emma: Yeah, thank you.

Composer 8: I can add on on the side of (also I'm sorry is it like really loud right now or is it okay? Awesome). So I can add in the timed part. Whenever I compose usually, it's like okay I'm gonna sit down and write something and then you can sit there for like three hours and then you realize like I just spent three hours like judging one measure and then you're like it's like frustrating I mean that could happen to me every now then but like with a 10-minute thing I think it's like super cool because on some level it's like whatever comes out that's what you get and if it sucks it sucks and if it's good then maybe you can use it but I don't know I thought that it's a nice change it's not being in the usual process of sit down

and like maybe something will happen you know but to like have something tangible that comes out of it within 10 minutes, I think that's cool. That's very different than what I usually do so. And then for the improv thing, I don't know more and more as I found that like that's what I like to do the most. For some reason, that's what really works for me but it's like the opposite of the time thing I guess is what I'm saying but be able to just sit there and I kind of get in the zone and I don't expect anything but for me that's that's like the when judgment is released the most so things flow and I don't care what comes out and then when I listen back, it tends to be like for lack of better words it's like kind of like a treasure chest of like motifs and compositional fragments and things like that more than in any other way because I don't know it's like it's like just judgment free when it's a lot of the other ways that I write like I need to develop this it's very I mean it just is more judgmental because you're thinking about how to develop it so I don't know I just find myself developing things much more naturally and sometimes different than I might ever do it I don't know that's opposite of what everyone else has said but that's what I think. That's all.

Emma: Thanks, [Composer 9]?

Composer 9: I can share too. So, I think for me the- it's kind of interesting I- so for the timed stuff I didn't do the haiku one because I got intimidated by the up to a half an hour and I was like 'I don't want to write a haiku for a half an hour so' I was like I had and it kind of felt like if "you can do it for up to a half an hour" I was like "well it's got to be pretty close then". So I didn't do that one but I kind of wish I would have done that one and I wish I maybe would have I didn't approach any of these in like a lyrical way I just wrote music and I kind of wish I hadn't because I'm actually feeling like a little blocked right now writing lyrics and so I wish I would have just approached these as like lyric writing things like at least initially or something because that actually would have been really cool for where I'm at right now. But the initial one is great. I love the short amount of time thing it's just like a nice, it's easy to kind of get started on it. I had to remind myself halfway through that I was like writing something about an orca whale. It was like set it was like five minutes six minutes and I was like "I gotta get back to thinking about this whale like what's going on?" and so that was kind of funny but the improvisation thing like that's how I normally write like improvising and doing stuff. but it's... Actually, I found it much more I found it kind of slightly annoying to like record it and then like go back and try to transcribe things. I like to just kind of transcribe things in the process like I kind of play a thing and then I like play it again and I kind of refine it. I write it down. That's what has been always comfortable for me and so anytime that I've tried this recording the improvisation thing and then listening back I just mostly just I was like I'm not even gonna listen to all of that stuff like if I had liked anything I

did I would have just like played it again or I would have played it a bunch or written it down or something and that's probably more of a hangup.

Emma's computer and iPad feedback interrupt and cause commotion. An unrelated conversation that happens because of this is cut out for clarity.

Composer 6: I have another thing about the Haiku.

Emma: Yes, please.

Composer 6: Since we're doing this as a duo. One thing that might be useful to mention is I think that we would have been less willing to commit to getting something out of the Haiku if we'd written it together, because I wrote the Haiku, gave it to [my writing partner], and I was like, "come up with something from this", and it was kind of stupid, like bad, a probably pretty bad, Haiku and but he was like, "well, this is what I've been given". So then he'd look at the line and be like, "Okay, what can I get from this?" And one thing he ended up doing was he just looked at what letters were there, and just used those as prompts for which chords to use 'cause the Haiku line just like didn't bring anything to his imagination, and it seems like overly literal but they came up with something pretty good. So I guess, just like when you're forced to find something and you can't like second-guess yourself. That can be helpful. And I feel like if you wrote the poem yourself. You might be like, "well, actually, it was dumb, we should just change this line of the poem", and then you might end up working on the poem instead of your composition.

Composer 7: I think I feel similarly, I kind of dismissed the entire haiku and just kind of wrote something that had 7 syllables I couldn't come up with anything interesting for haiku plus doesn't a haiku have to be nature themed? And I was like, I write too many songs about trees. So how can I? So I just kind of was like, how can I still use this exercise? And I was like, Okay, 7 syllables, ish and at that I barely committed to that, because then I got too excited using 7 syllables so I think... it ended up like 6, 7, 6 was like the verses were 6, 7, 6, which is definitely not Haiku, and it definitely was not nature themed but I did put spring in there. I said spring yeah, I don't know what else. Yeah, I think, but similarly with [Composer 9] and and [Composer 6]. Well, it's more similarly with [Composer 9]. I was very intimidated to write a Haiku cause I don't know how many songs I can worry about trees but 5, 7, 5. I was like, 6, 7, 6.

Emma: Yeah, [Composer 1]?

Composer 1: I did not know it had to be, or that there's supposed to be nature-themed. But I was just looking at mine, and I did not write a good haiku at all. But one thing that it-like It's really bad but one thing that I really liked about this exercise, and that, I think, was really applicable to lyric writing for me was just like what I was. I kind of just set out with, like an idea of like vaguely what it could be about. And then I just tried to say the same thing but with different syllables, or just trying to get what is the most efficient way to say this thought, when I only have 5 syllables, or when I only have 7 syllables, and does it sound better if this thought is 7 and the other one is 5. So kind of making it mathematical was helpful and kind of applicable to similarly, how, when we're when we've written the melody before we've written lyrics, or we've written one verse and not the next yet it kind of helped that part of my brain just like I don't know. Yeah, I just felt like a good exercise for that part of my brain to be like, how can I take what I'm trying to say, even if it didn't turn out to be a good haiku and like try and fit it into this amount of time? and still make it not sound like I'm trying to fit it into this amount of syllables? So I liked the structure of this kind of writing, because that's something I think about a lot, and that I find myself getting trapped in and just having permission to just like try to get it to the exact 5, 7, 5 it was helpful, because it made me just write everything until one of them was okay. And then I put it in. So that was nice. I like those kind of exercises.

Emma: Great. Yeah. So maybe one last question in this kind of area about the methods and I think some people have already answered this a bit but if there's anything anyone else wants to say, Were there any unexpected musical results? So it sounds like there's been a lot of discussion of new perspectives, or different lyrics or different topics. But was there anything, maybe more specifically in the music, or in the style of lyrics or something that that anyone experienced? [Composer 3]?

Composer 3: Yeah, I so I have a really hard time writing lyrics sometimes because I sort of see myself as someone who's just stronger at at writing music. And so a lot of times I will write a musical idea that I like, and then, if I want lyrics on it, I'll try to impose, you know, some sort of idea onto the thing that's already there. And so I did the Haiku not planning on writing music to it. I just wanted to write the words, which is what I never do. I never start with words, but sort of like what [Composer 1] was saying, allowing myself permission to start with that didn't have the expectation of it has to fit into this musical setting. Oddly enough, a musical setting sprouted from the words that I had had, which I thought was really cool. Something that I'm definitely very, not used to, but I did not expect to have an idea from just words. You do. Normally, it's the other way around for me so.

Emma: Great. Thanks. Anyone else? Yes.

Composer 9: I'll go really quick, I mean, I agree with like, I think, having such a specific like for the animal timed writing thing like having such a specific- and I think [Composer 3] said this before, too,-not having this really wishy-washy sort of emotional idea, or bigger sort of vibe, but just having a really specific idea, I think, that led me to some musical things that would not be normally kind of where I would go so directly, or something like that, and so that was kind of cool. That actually kept me, pretty focused on a thing. So I thought that was helpful.

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Name is changed for anonymity to Composer 10.

Emma Hedrick: Okay, so hopefully, this won't die. Okay. So basically, I have it in. Oh, well, first of all, thank you for participating and for helping out with your thoughts and feedback. I really appreciate it.

Composer 10: Thank you for the amazing opportunity, Em

Emma: So I have 4 different parts kind of to go through. The first part is just talking about the methods themselves in the workbook. A first question would be, how were the prompts or the exercises, methods, whatever you want to call them incorporated into your final song or composition that you came up with.

Composer 10: I think a lot of it started organically. And there's especially there's this one tune that came out of the improvised recording, prompt. It was just, I think it was coming out of class or something, and I was just sitting at piano, kinda noodling and then I found a motif from the improv that I just stuck with and I ended up writing a whole tune based off of it. And I think just like being able to just, yeah, just have something, have a motive that was able to grow was extremely helpful. And just like being able to, yeah, have a range of ideas and pick one thing to focus on, to develop was extremely helpful.

Emma: Great. Okay, let's see. How did you apply the Haiku method into-, what was your approach for doing that method?

Composer 10: So I actually, I wrote the Haiku first and then I was able to just and then I did a lot of listening of just like I don't know. Just like really simple melodic tunes. And then was inspired, based on that, and then like transcribed the progression and substituted some things and then wrote a melody over it from the lyric first. And I even would just, yeah, just play the chords and just try to sing the Haiku, or even just speak the Haiku first, and then like whatever felt naturally spoken, and then it just turned into a melody.

Emma: Great. Did the time limit affect your experience in completing any of these methods?

Composer 10: I think so, yeah, I think it, It allowed my thoughts to be very focused and to be decisive and to like go with instinctual gut reactions and it just it and allowed me to like, really act on something that I felt that resonated and to really, go forth on that impulse.

Emma: Yeah. yeah. Were there any unexpected results from these?

Composer 10: Yes. Actually, I ended up writing a tune and especially I think it was like I was thinking about- no, it wasn't on the Haiku oh, it was on the animal timed write. And I was thinking about the steps and different paces that animals moved at. And it actually ended up turning into a tune in like 12, 8, with like 3 over 4. And it's switching to like 4 over 3 to kind of like, be up, pick the different like, either like the footsteps, or actually no it was a bird soaring in the sky, while there was like a turtle on the ground, and the turtle was looking up at the bird being like, "oh, I wish I could fly! But I can only be so slow".

Emma: that's great. So what about this- Was it the theme of the method that kind of inspired this idea for you like animals got you thinking in a different way than usual, or

Composer 10: Absolutely.

Emma okay. And I guess, I in this, you said it was kind of going through switching time signatures a bit, and then reversing kind of the feel. Is this something that you've done before? Or this is just specific in the song?

Composer 10: It was just. I've never done it before. It was just specific to the song and be like, Oh, wait! All animals don't move at the same pace. So if there's going to be more than one, the relationship shouldn't have to line up and be perfectly in sync the whole time.

Emma: Yeah. Great.