VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

Dmytro Kostiuk

A CONCEPT ALBUM FOR THE STREAMING AGE: CREATING A NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE IN THE MUSIC ALBUM "NEW DAYS CHRONICLE"

Bachelor final diploma work

Music Production, 6121PX033

Music

Supervisor: ...Prof. Dr. Georgios Sakellariou..... ....

(Academic degree and padegogical name, Name, Surname) (signature) (date)

Defended:

(Dean of the Faculty, Name, Surname) (signature)

Kaunas, 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY 3

SANTRAUKA 4

INTRODUCTION 5

BACKGROUND 7

Music and Narrative 7

Non-linear Storytelling 9

METHODOLOGY 10

Preparation 10

Production 11

Conceptuality 12

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS 13

CONCLUSIONS 14

BIBLIOGRAPHY 15

LYRICS 18

“Behold, a Wonder Awaits” 18

“Down the Trail” 19

“Mindfalling” 21

“Ordinary Stoicism” 22

“Someday” 23

“The Link” 24

Dmytro Kostiuk. A CONCEPT ALBUM FOR THE STREAMING AGE: CREATING A NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE IN THE MUSIC ALBUM “NEW DAYS CHRONICLE”: Music Production final diploma work / Georgios Sakellariou / Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Contemporary Arts. – Kaunas, 2023. – 25 p.

SUMMARY

This thesis describes the contextual background and creative process behind the production of the album *New Days Chronicle*. The aim of the work is to find ways of preserving the narrative integrity of story-driven concept albums in the modern online listening environment, where random sequencing of tracks is becoming increasingly widespread.

The main hypothesis presented in the project is that focusing on non-linear narratives during the creation of conceptual records could be a helpful way of adapting the medium to the listening habits of music streaming platforms users. In the theoretical part of the research, various storytelling techniques used by musicians in the past are examined, and some of the approaches to writing less chronologically dependent storylines are analyzed. In the practical part, the process of creating a narrative concept album that could be played in any order is detailed. The results of the research suggest that while switching to making fully non-linear narrative albums may not be the best option for contemporary musicians, the practice showcases several strategies that could be employed to draw listeners’ attention to longer conceptual works.

Keywords: concept album, contemporary music, music streaming, non-linear narrative, randomization

Dmytro Kostiuk. KONCEPCINIS ALBUMAS SRAUTINIO MUZIKOS SIUNTIMO AMŽIUJE: NELINIJINĖS ISTORIJOS KŪRIMAS MUZIKOS ALBUME “NAUJŲ DIENŲ KRONIKA”: Muzikos produkcija baigiamasis darbas / Georgios Sakellariou / Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Menų fakultetas, Šiuolaikinių menų katedra. – Kaunas, 2023. – 25 p.

SANTRAUKA

Šiame darbe aprašomas albumo *Naujų dienų kronika* kūrimo kontekstas ir kūrybinis procesas. Darbo tikslas – rasti būdus, kaip išsaugoti pasakojimo vientisumą istorija varomuose koncepciniuose albumuose šiuolaikinėje internetinėje klausymosi aplinkoje, kur vis labiau plinta atsitiktinė takelių seka.

Pagrindinė projekte iškelta hipotezė yra ta, kad dėmesys nelinijiniams pasakojimams kuriant konceptualius albumus gali būti geras būdas įpratinti mediją prie srautinių muzikos perdavimo platformų vartotojų klausymosi įpročių. Teorinėje tyrimo dalyje nagrinėjamos įvairios praeityje muzikantų naudotos pasakojimų technikos, analizuojami kai kurie mažiau chronologiškai priklausomi siužetinių linijų rašymo požiūriai. Praktinėje dalyje detaliai aprašomas istorija varomas koncepcinis albumas, kurį galima groti bet kokia tvarka, kūrimo procesas. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad nors perėjimas prie visiškai nelinijinių pasakojimo albumų kūrimo gali būti ne pats geriausias pasirinkimas šiuolaikiniams muzikantams, praktika demonstruoja keletą strategijų, kurias būtų galima panaudoti norint atkreipti klausytojų dėmesį į ilgesnius konceptualius kūrinius.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: atsitiktinė atranka, koncepcinis albumas, nelinijinis pasakojimas, srautinis muzikos siuntimas, šiuolaikinė muzika

INTRODUCTION

On January 11, 2005, Apple unveiled the first iPod Shuffle, a miniature device only capable of playing music in a single linear playlist or, what was at the time advertised as the central feature of the new apparatus, jumping from one composition to another in a random order.[1] While the ability to sequence music randomly has already existed long before (CD changers could do that since the beginning of the 1990s), it was the arrival of the device that is often credited with starting to push this way of listening into the mainstream. Seventeen years later, shuffling is a huge part of interacting with music for many people around the globe. The rise of online streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music has taken the popularity of listening to songs on shuffle to new heights – with playlisting becoming a widespread practice, more and more users began randomizing their music in order to create a unique listening experience each time they open their library.

When dealing with playlists (which tend to contain a selection of unrelated compositions assembled by a certain idea or mood), shuffling is often encouraged, as it allows listeners to let go of some of the control in their listening experience in favor of being "surprised" by the upcoming songs, thus promoting a more attentive form of music listening.[2] However, when it comes to albums, the effect that the shuffling feature has had on the medium frequently becomes a subject of sharp criticism. Unlike playlists, track sequences on albums are often a product of a well-thought-out process. The individual compositions are usually arranged with a particular intention, ranging from simply suggesting the optimal succession of songs for experiencing the album to revealing a complex musical narrative with specifically determined beginning and end points. In the case of the latter, listening to an album in a randomized order can potentially have serious detrimental effects on understanding and contextualization of the work, resulting in an inability of the listener to fully appreciate the record. Yet with the contemporary listening habits of many streaming platform users, it is not uncommon to see people shuffling albums – sometimes even before having listened to the record in its proposed order.[3] Perhaps the type of media that suffers the most from such an approach is concept album, which is a kind of record that features compositions unified by a common theme and oftentimes (although not obligatory) containing a shared narrative. As for such albums going through the tracklist in a particular succession set by the author is often not merely a recommendation,

[1] Shira Feder, "A Brief History of Shuffling Your Songs, from Apple to Adele," *Popular Science*, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.popsci.com/technology/shuffle-play-history.
[2] Marta García Quiñones, "Listening in Shuffle Mode," *Song and Popular Culture* 52 (2007): 15-17.
[3] Clarah Grossman, "Finding Answers to the Great Debate of Album Shuffling," *Five Cent Sound*, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.fivecentsound.com/blog/the-great-debate-of-album-shuffling.

but a necessity for experiencing the work as intended, conceptual records today must face a real danger of being overlooked by the majority of listeners.

Of course, musicians themselves are perfectly aware of modern trends in media consumption and have been trying different approaches to convey their more sophisticated ideas to the listeners. In November 2021, Spotify exchanged its default album playing mode from shuffling to linear sequencing following a special request from Adele, who had just released her fourth studio album, *30*,[4] and was frustrated that listeners would not be able to follow the story of the record should it be put on shuffle.[5] This was deemed as a significant move on the side of the company, giving some hope for the future to many artists who prefer releasing their work in the album format, as opposed to singles. However, it is obvious that prompting a multi-billion-dollar company to change its user interface is a privilege available only to a select few. Since the majority of today's consumers discover new music through streaming platforms[6] – a trend that has been on the increase for the last several years – the rest of musicians are compelled to constantly try to convince new listeners to sit through the entirety of their records from start to finish.

As an artist and avid music listener, I have a long list of concept albums that are of great importance to me both as a person and musician, and I am concerned that a lot of people may not get to appreciate the conceptual unity that those records offer, as well as the fact that the future of the entire format is presently an open question. Therefore, this project will attempt to find new ways to preserve the narrative consistency of story-driven albums while also promoting a more conscious attitude towards music listening in the current shuffle-ubiquitous environment. As a part of the project, I will create a "streaming-friendly" concept album; it will focus on the idea of a non-linear narrative, meaning that each time the record is put on shuffle, it would deliver a unique and coherent variation of the story. The album will not have a pre-defined listening order, inviting the listener to experience the work by randomizing the sequence in which the tracks on the record are played. This would allow the album to take advantage of the unpredictability element present when listening to playlists to keep the audience's attention on the music while providing conceptual and narrative unity. In order to successfully implement the project, first, the phenomenon of narrative in music is going to be analyzed; then, the already existing examples of artistic works that make use of non-linear

[4] Adele, *30*, Columbia Records, 2021, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/30/1590035691.
[5] Hazel Cills, "Adele Asked Spotify to Remove the Default Shuffle Button for Albums, and They Obliged," *NPR*, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2021/11/21/1057783216/adele-spotify-shuffle-30.
[6] Graeme Bruce, "How Are Global Consumers Finding New Music?," *YouGov*, accessed December 29, 2022, https://yougov.co.uk/topics/technology/articles-reports/2022/01/04/how-are-global-consumers-finding-new-music.

storytelling are going to be considered; finally, the newly gathered insights are going to be put into practice by writing and producing the record while documenting the process.

BACKGROUND

Music and Narrative

Although it may seem like music is capable of possessing narrative elements only in certain limited cases, various research indicates a much stronger bond between the two. In a recent study led by Elizabeth H. Margulis[7] it was discovered that instrumental music alone can evoke distinct narrative patterns in listeners' minds, and – what is even more important – those patterns tend to be shared by other people within the same culture. However, this trend does not seem to be universal, as people from other cultural backgrounds tend to have different narrative interpretations of the same composition. Such observations also raise the question of whether any of the interpretations coincide with the message or story envisioned by the author of the piece – if there was anything envisioned by the author at all. Therefore, one can suppose that in order for a composition to be understood equally well across different cultures – something that is becoming increasingly important in the modern globalized and interconnected age – additional context beyond an audio recording of the piece is required.

Perhaps the most commonly used method of music contextualization is the addition of lyrical content. Lyrics are a valuable tool in helping the listener better understand and relate to the musical work, as even the smallest number of words can often provide vital insights into the composer's intentions. The art of lyrical storytelling is something that many songwriters across the globe strive to perfect, as it is known that due to the psychology of humans as species, people love hearing stories.[8] Yet typically, the amount of information conveyed through words in a song is not nearly enough to allow the listener to confidently picture every aspect of the narrative. This has led some researchers to speculate that music is incapable of being a self-sufficient narrative medium, as it supposedly can only convey limited meanings that are largely metaphorical.[9] However, if the model proposed by Byron Almén[10] is considered, where musical narrative exists not as a subdivision of literary narrative, but rather as its sibling with its own set of rules and ways of constructing meaning, the potential of music to convey complex stories becomes more evident. To understand how exactly narrative in

[7] Elizabeth H. Margulis et al., "Narratives Imagined in Response to Instrumental Music Reveal Culture-Bounded Intersubjectivity," *PNAS* 119, no. 4 (2022), doi: 10.1073/pnas.2110406119.
[8] Greg J. Stephens, Lauren J. Silbert, and Uri Hasson, "Speaker–Listener Neural Coupling Underlies Successful Communication," *PNAS* 107, no. 32 (2010), doi: 10.1073/pnas.1008662107.
[9] Carolyn Abbate, "What the Sorcerer Said," *19th-Century Music* 12, no. 3 (1989): 227-228.
[10] Byron Almén, "Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Music Theory* 47, no. 1 (2003): 2-3.

music functions, it is helpful to analyze several notable examples of musical works that rely heavily on storytelling.

In order to stay within the scope of the project's topic, only pieces of music written and published in the album format are going to be considered. There are plenty of remarkable records that strive to tell a story to the listener: Pink Floyd's *The Wall*,[11] Green Day's *American Idiot*,[12] Kendrick Lamar's *Good Kid, M.A.A.d City*[13] are among some of the most well-known such works. However, it seems fitting to start with one of the earliest and most influential examples of narrative concept albums – *Tommy*[14] by The Who. Released in 1969 among the first rock operas, the record tells the story of a "deaf, dumb and blind boy" who eventually regains his senses. As the narrative progresses, the album deals with a plethora of themes, including mental health, family relationships, drug use, religion, and the idea of a "messiah."[15] The lyrical content plays an essential role in contextualizing *Tommy* for the listener: each song (except for three instrumental compositions) is sung from the perspective of one or several characters of the story, occasionally featuring numerous vocalists to reinforce the idea of in-character delivery. Certain lyrics appear throughout the record repeatedly (like the "See me, feel me, touch me, heal me" refrain), creating a sense of interconnectivity between the individual compositions. In terms of the arrangement, the Who mostly stick to the standard rock band setup of acoustic and electric guitars, piano, bass guitar, and drums, with some songs featuring additional instruments such as French horn, harmonica, electric organ, etc. Besides, some non-musical sounds (such as the breaking of a mirror on "Smash the Mirror") are also central to the arrangement. The music is written in a way that enhances the emotional message delivered through the lyrics via the use of melodic, harmonic, rhythmical, or instrumentational variation, offering further contextualization of the events for the listener. Some instrumental portions of the album can be heard on more than one song (for example, "Sparks" and "Underture" feature a similar melodic segment). Much like the previously discussed repetition of lyrical elements, this introduces an additional layer of interconnectivity to the record.

Naturally, *Tommy* is not the only narrative concept album suitable for such a detailed analysis; however, many of the techniques employed on it are to this day frequently utilized on many

[11] Pink Floyd, *The Wall*, Harvest Records, 1979, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/the-wall/1065975633.
[12] Green Day, *American Idiot*, Reprise Records, 2004, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/american-idiot/1161539183.
[13] Kendrick Lamar, *Good Kid, M.A.A.d City*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2012, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/good-kid-m-a-a-d-city/1471277623.
[14] The Who, *Tommy*, Track Record, 1969, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/tommy/1461210985.
[15] Mawr Gorshin, "Analysis of 'Tommy,'" *Infinite Ocean*, accessed December 29, 2022, https://mawrgorshin.com/2021/11/25/analysis-of-tommy.

other story-driven records, including the one created for this project. The lyrical content is prevailingly responsible for the direct explanation of the events in the story; at the same time, the music does not simply act as a background soundtrack, but is used to provide further contextualization of the narrative, often depicting things that were not mentioned in the lyrics. Repetition of both lyrical and instrumental sections is utilized to create a sense of interconnectivity between the individual tracks**.** On top of conventional instrumentation, various additional sounds can be used for a more straightforward representation of the story's events. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it provides a good overview of techniques employed by musicians who seek to create prolonged narrative lines within the album format. However, since the aim of this project is to produce a record that would feature a non-linear story, it is also important to analyze pieces of media that make use of that concept.

Non-linear Storytelling

Among writers, non-linear storytelling is a well-known technique used in literature, film, video games, and virtually any medium where some sort of narration is present. It offers several advantages over traditional chronological storytelling, most prominently – the possibility to keep the audience interested by withholding key information about the events in the story and their exact sequence.[16] At the same time, such narratives are more likely to leave the audience confused, which is why non-linear storytelling usually can be encountered as a part of a conventional linear narrative (for example, in the form of flashbacks),[17] rather than on its own**.** However, examples of the latter exist as well.

Milorad Pavić's novel *Dictionary of the Khazars*[18] is a (mostly fictional) chronicle describing the history of the Khazar people. The book does not rely on a plot in its typical sense, but instead consists of three miniature encyclopedias, each depicting the story from a different perspective. The reader's task is to get acquainted with the available lexicon and discern the events implied by the novel. Fittingly, there is no set order in which the encyclopedias are meant to be read.

It is possible to find examples of works based on partially non-linear storytelling across all kinds of media (*The Prisoner*,[19] a 1967 British TV series; *Live A Live*,[20] a 1994 SNES video game). However, full non-linearity is a much less frequent occurrence, and music is no exception. Tim

[16] Nam Wook Kim et al., "Visualizing Nonlinear Narratives with Story Curves," *IEEE* 24, no. 1 (2018), doi: 10.1109/TVCG.2017.2744118.
[17] Max Green, "How the Brain Reacts to Scrambled Stories," *The Atlantic*, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/01/linear-storytelling-psychology/431529.
[18] Milorad Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, trans. Christina Pribicevic-Zoric (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).
[19] *The Prisoner*, executive produced by Patrick McGoohan, aired December 29, 2022, on Shout! Factory TV, https://www.shoutfactorytv.com/series/the-prisoner.
[20] Square Co., Ltd., *Live a Live*, Square Co., Ltd., SNES, 1994.

Parkinson's composition *Cello Piece*,[21] released on CD in 2006, offers what is likely the best implementation of full non-linearity in music available today: the record consists of 12 individual tracks that, according to the author, are meant to be played in random order. While this is certainly an example of a non-linear approach to album sequencing, it is hard to say that *Cello Piece* has a story-driven structure – no narrative context is given for the instrumental composition.

Still, it is possible to establish some criteria that would help in creating a fully non-linear narrative record. Mainly, it is important to consider that any track may become a beginning or end point of the story, so no strongly chronologically-dependent events should take place in the album's narrative. Therefore, it is likely necessary to convey a story by describing several unrelated events that would be somehow interconnected with one another, as opposed to having a specific predetermined causal relationship. Moreover, it would probably be beneficial to put small cues about the story in every song, so that the listener would be able to "complete the puzzle."

METHODOLOGY

Preparation

As storytelling was set to be the main focus of the project, it seemed appropriate to start developing the album by writing a rough script of the narrative. Ideas for six songs were outlined, as well as several main themes for the entire record. The story is set around the protagonist moving into a new town, and every composition describes a particular event in his recent life, with their chronology and causal relationship being dependent on the order in which the tracks are played. The songs' ideas could be summarized as follows (in alphabetical order): "Behold, a Wonder Awaits" describes the protagonist's fascination with photography; "Down the Trail" details his retreat to nature filled with various self-reflections; "Mindfalling" is about his consultation with a psychologist; "Ordinary Stoicism" depicts an important encounter with a homeless person; "Someday" describes the protagonist's past and his motivation behind the move; "The Link" is about the protagonist's attempts at making friends in the new town. Particular attention was paid to how the story would be concluded in each composition, making sure that none of the endings would be perceived as definitive, instead being a variation of the possible outcome.

After the script was finalized, the process of music production could begin. It was established that the album is going to be created in the style of electronic rock; such a decision was based on my interest and previous experience in combining the genres of rock and electronic music. A lot of inspiration came from the 2009 album *Masked Dancers: Concern in So Many Things You Forget*

[21] Tim Parkinson, Stefan Thut, *Cello Piece*, Edition Wandelweiser Records, 2006, compact disc.

Where You Are[22] by The Brave Little Abacus. On the record, the band employs a number of techniques that emphasize the storytelling aspect of their music: complex song structures, frequent time signature and tempo changes, and the use of electronic sounds and samples alongside typical rock instruments are some of the key elements that make the album sound adventurous. All these techniques were incorporated in the process of producing original compositions for the project. However, while The Brave Little Abacus used electronic instrumentation, their music still remained mostly guitar-based, so to successfully realize the stylistic direction of the album, it was necessary to consider other artists who mainly work in the electronic domain. The aesthetic preference was set to utilizing airy and spacious synthesized sounds, so the work of Whitearmor, a Swedish music producer known for his signature "dreamy" production style prominent in the cloud rap scene, has been used as a reference for the record's sound design. Namely, the 2016 album *Eversince*[23] by rapper Bladee, which was largely produced by Whitearmor, had a strong influence on the character of the compositions created for the project. Nonetheless, it also seemed beneficial to have a way to add extra energy and aggression to the songs when necessary; for this reason, the production style of Death Grips, an industrial hip-hop group, was examined. The distorted electronic sounds frequently utilized by the band (like on their 2012 record *The Money Store*[24]) were a major reference point when working on the more intense parts of the album.

Production

All compositions share similarities in how their production process was approached. Because of this, a general overview of the steps taken for the implementation of the project will be given, with further discussion of the techniques used on the individual songs when necessary.

The bassline was typically the starting point for production due to my preference for using musical instruments as principal tools for composing. The drums usually were added next; the kits were assembled from various electronic and acoustic samples, which were sometimes layered together, and their playing patterns were manually programmed. Instead of having a fully robotic sound or trying to meticulously emulate acoustic drum playing, it was decided to go for a hybrid feel, using timing and velocity humanization of MIDI notes to create less mechanical, but still quite obviously programmed drum patterns. For synthesized sounds, several plugins available in Bitwig Studio (the digital audio workstation used for producing the album), such as Polymer and Polysynth,

[22] The Brave Little Abacus, *Masked Dancers: Concern in So Many Things You Forget Where You Are*, self-released, 2009, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/masked-dancers-concern-in-so-many-things-you-forget/1587591799.
[23] Bladee, *Eversince*, Year0001, 2016, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/eversince/1616551614.
[24] Death Grips, *The Money Store*, Epic Records, 2012, streaming audio, accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music, https://music.apple.com/us/album/the-money-store/515449028.

were utilized, as well as Vital, an external synthesizer plugin. Some of the patches were created by modifying existing presets, while others were designed from scratch. In many cases, different effects were added to achieve the desired sound character, with flanger, phaser, chorus, and distortion being used most frequently. In order to preserve sonic consistency, many drum samples and synthesizer patches were reused across the entire record. Other plugins occasionally appearing on the album were Piano V and VOX Continental V by Arturia.

Several compositions also contained some distinct instrumentation. On "Someday," a sound of a celeste, coming from Spitfire Audio's BBC Symphony Orchestra plugin, was utilized. "Down the Trail" featured field recordings captured with a Zoom H1n recorder. The song that used the most standout instrumentation on the album is "Ordinary Stoicism": the arrangement includes an acoustic guitar, which was recorded live, both conventionally and as a percussive instrument by drumming on its body, and tambourine and shaker loops, which were taken from a percussion sample pack.

The album was recorded in two stages. First, the bass guitar sections were recorded by sending the instrument's direct signal into the Focusrite Scarlett 4i4 audio interface and processing it with an AmpliTube 5 amplifier simulation software by IK Multimedia. Then, the vocals and guitar were captured in the university studio using the Rode NT2000 microphone. Some of the vocal takes were eventually pitched an octave up to create an impression of mixed choral singing**.**

During the mixing process, a couple of noteworthy techniques were employed. On "Mindfalling," the double-tracked bass guitar on the right had its low end removed entirely, and the instrument on the left had its low end panned to the center. The spoken vocals on the song were made barely discernible to the listener, acting somewhat like a background sound. It was decided that the intelligibility of the words was not a concern, since, with most albums, listeners have the ability to read songs' lyrics if necessary. Additionally, throughout the record, there are cases when the vocals are panned to one side of the stereo panorama; this was a creative decision, meant to indicate the separation either between the protagonist's conscious and subconscious, or the characters who deliver the lines (like on "Ordinary Stoicism").

Conceptuality

Producing six songs that could be seamlessly played in any order was not an easy task. One technique that has proven to be especially helpful when dealing with such an unconventional challenge was energy management: it was important for each composition to be roughly on the same energy level as all other tracks, so that no matter which song comes next, the album's sequencing would feel balanced for the listener. The one exception to this rule – "Ordinary Stoicism," which is

much more relaxed in comparison with other tracks - was made to introduce a bit of variety to the roster of mostly high-energy songs on the record.

As for the storytelling aspect of the project, several steps were taken to ensure that the narrative elements in the album could be easily recognized. The lyrics (which are available at the bottom of the document) are cross-referenced between the songs on numerous occasions, reinforcing the idea of interconnectivity on the album. Some topics are brought up repeatedly on the record, like the subject of photography – the protagonist's favorite hobby. To add extra interest and thematic unity to the narrative, the biography of the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh is also referenced a few times: for example, in the song "Behold, a Wonder Awaits" a message sent by the protagonist's brother, encouraging him to keep pursuing his passion, is mentioned. This is an allusion to Theo van Gogh, the painter's brother, who supported Vincent's artistic journey throughout his life.[25] Music-wise, the interconnectivity is supported by the repetition of a melodic segment that can be heard on four different songs (for instance, at 1:41 on "Mindfalling" and 3:20 on "The Link"). It also contributes to the conceptuality of the album, as this melody plays whenever the protagonist's drug abuse and mental health issues are mentioned in the story.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The album created for the project appears to successfully fulfill its designated purpose: the combination of various narrative unification techniques ensures that the listeners are able to follow the story regardless of the order in which the songs are sequenced. As an example, the causal relationship between the events in "Down the Trail" and "Mindfalling" can be examined: if "Down the Trail" is played right before "Mindfalling," it may be concluded that the protagonist's mental breakdown at the end of the song was his reason to have a consultation with a psychologist; conversely, should the tracks' places be exchanged, the protagonist's self-reflective mood on "Down the Trail" seems to be induced by his conversation with the psychologist on "Mindfalling." The rest of the songs on the album work in a similar way. It is likely that the possibility to experience a new chain of events each time the record is played would encourage streaming platform users to come back to the album more often and listen to the music more attentively.

Nonetheless, certain limitations of such an approach were observed as well. By keeping nearly all compositions on the same energy level, the use of energy contrasts between tracks as a storytelling tool, which is another technique frequently utilized on narrative records, was significantly restricted. Additionally, from a purely practical perspective, it is probable that the fully non-linear

[25] "The Brothers Vincent and Theo," *Van Gogh Museum*, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/art-and-stories/stories/the-brothers-vincent-and-theo.

approach to storytelling taken for this project may seem too unconventional for the majority of musicians and would gain limited popularity among them. However**,** it verified the effectiveness of several techniques that can be employed for strengthening the conceptual integrity of any narrative musical works. Moreover, creating an album from a story script caused me to try numerous new production and composing strategies, remarkably expanding my musical skillset, which is why I would also highly suggest doing so as an exercise to other music producers.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, the practical outcome of the project, while likely being too maximalist in nature, showcases several techniques that can be utilized for creating narrative integrity in music: basing compositions on a common theme, repeating sections of the arrangement and lyrics on different songs, and linking lyrical and musical events together are some of the practices that can be used to draw listeners' attention to story-driven conceptual works. The issue with releasing such records on streaming platforms will almost certainly persist in the coming years, but the results of this research suggest that the creators of concept albums are not powerless, and there are ways to keep listeners invested in hearing stories told through music even in the current digital environment.

In order to keep building on the groundwork laid by the research, in the future, it would be fitting to analyze some of the most recent examples of successful narrative concept albums (for instance, released within the last five years) to find even more such strategies employed by contemporary musicians. Additionally, it could be beneficial to consider any specific marketing methods that are being used effectively for promoting conceptual music.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbate, Carolyn. “What the Sorcerer Said.” *19th-Century Music* 12, no. 3 (1989): 221-230.

Adele. *30*. Columbia Records, 2021, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/30/1590035691.

Almén, Byron. “Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis.” *Journal of Music Theory* 47, no. 1 (2003): 1-39.

Bladee. *Eversince*. Year0001, 2016, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/eversince/1616551614.

Bruce, Graeme. “How Are Global Consumers Finding New Music?” *YouGov*. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://yougov.co.uk/topics/technology/articles-reports/2022/01/04/how-are-global-consumers-finding-new-music.

Cills, Hazel. “Adele Asked Spotify to Remove the Default Shuffle Button for Albums, and They Obliged.” *NPR*. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2021/11/21/1057783216/adele-spotify-shuffle-30.

Death Grips. *The Money Store*. Epic Records, 2012, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/the-money-store/515449028.

Feder, Shira. “A Brief History of Shuffling Your Songs, from Apple to Adele.” *Popular Science*. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://www.popsci.com/technology/shuffle-play-history.

Gorshin, Mawr. “Analysis of ‘Tommy.’” *Infinite Ocean*. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://mawrgorshin.com/2021/11/25/analysis-of-tommy.

Green Day. *American Idiot*. Reprise Records, 2004, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/american-idiot/1161539183.

Green, Max. “How the Brain Reacts to Scrambled Stories.” *The Atlantic*. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/01/linear-storytelling-psychology/431529.

Grossman, Clarah. “Finding Answers to the Great Debate of Album Shuffling.” *Five Cent Sound*. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://www.fivecentsound.com/blog/the-great-debate-of-album-shuffling.

Kendrick Lamar. *Good Kid, M.A.A.d City*. Top Dawg Entertainment, 2012, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/good-kid-m-a-a-d-city/1471277623.

Margulis, Elizabeth H., Patrick C. M. Wong, Cara Turnbull, Benjamin M. Kubit, and J. Devin McAuley. “Narratives Imagined in Response to Instrumental Music Reveal Culture-Bounded Intersubjectivity.” *PNAS* 119, no. 4 (2022). doi: 10.1073/pnas.2110406119.

McGoohan, Patrick, executive producer. *The Prisoner*. Aired December 29, 2022, on Shout! Factory TV. https://www.shoutfactorytv.com/series/the-prisoner.

Nam Wook Kim, Benjamin Bach, Hyejin Im, Sasha Schriber, Markus Gross, and Hanspeter Pfister. “Visualizing Nonlinear Narratives with Story Curves.” *IEEE* 24, no. 1 (2018). doi: 10.1109/TVCG.2017.2744118.

Pavić, Milorad. *Dictionary of the Khazars*. Translated by Christina Pribicevic-Zoric. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

Pink Floyd. *The Wall*. Harvest Records, 1979, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/the-wall/1065975633.

Quiñones, Marta García. “Listening in Shuffle Mode.” *Song and Popular Culture* 52 (2007): 11-22.

Square Co., Ltd. *Live a Live*. Square Co., Ltd., SNES, 1994.

Stephens, Greg J., Lauren J. Silbert, and Uri Hasson. “Speaker–Listener Neural Coupling Underlies Successful Communication.” *PNAS* 107, no. 32 (2010). doi: 10.1073/pnas.1008662107.

The Brave Little Abacus. *Masked Dancers: Concern in So Many Things You Forget Where You Are*. Self-released, 2009, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/masked-dancers-concern-in-so-many-things-you-forget/1587591799.

“The Brothers Vincent and Theo.” *Van Gogh Museum*. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/art-and-stories/stories/the-brothers-vincent-and-theo.

The Who. *Tommy*. Track Record, 1969, streaming audio. Accessed December 29, 2022, on Apple Music. https://music.apple.com/us/album/tommy/1461210985.

Tim Parkinson, Stefan Thut. *Cello Piece*. Edition Wandelweiser Records, 2006, compact disc.

LYRICS

The lyrics are given according to the songs' alphabetical order:

"Behold, a Wonder Awaits"

So many things around

I let them all remain tranquil as visions

And what for?

Don't ask me, don't ask me

Not sure what I found

It feels like an emotional reaction, a sort of

Purity, purity

Standing still

Witnessing

Blend of realities

Unfolding timidly

Breathing in

Questioning

Is this the clarity

I was wishing for since day one?

Not that simple, is it?

Not that simple, huh?

Got too many questions

Got too many thoughts

Don't wanna bury it

Deep beneath the ground

But is there a chance?

I don't know

Come on, come on

This is what I wish I'd hear them all say

Come on, come on

Something that I need my heart to tell me

But how hard is it?

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

Don't ask me

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

Don’t

Forgotten that he’s lost

A man standing in awe before the openness he found

So pretty, so pretty

All blurred as the time stops

Waiting to take a picture of the moment nearly gone

Already, already

Eyes are still

Witnessing

Blend of realities

Unfolding timidly

Messaged me

Questioning

Brother, have you just found

Something that will make you feel alive?

“Down the Trail”

Tenderly

Step by step by step

Dragging my body into the fog

The trail is lost for sure

Don’t want to sound too ignorant

But the ideals in my head are crumbling too much

Letting a cry out, been putting it off

Too many times

Got the fire

From the spark that

I'm trying to, trying to, keep in-

Side of me

Once again, again

I'm asking myself is it normal

To feel the things I'm feeling now

Don't want to come off as insecure

There is some stuff that I've done I'm not proud of too much

Lost in the history, now keep coming back

Too many times

(I can feel it, the gust of wind… the air is sweet… it's all coming together… if there's a place, I'll keep looking for it… I'll keep looking… for such a place)

Hopefully

Guess I guess I guess

This status quo will stay for a while

Though my hands aren't really tied

It's hard to sound too coherent

When you can't even feel firmly the ground beneath

No sense of belonging, trying to cope

With everything

Got the fire

From the spark, it's

Still burning and burning and only

It can see

All the things, the things

That've brought me to where I am now

Things even I don't know about

It's hard to feel that confident

I am not sure at all whether I'm doing alright

Letting the time pass, don't overthink

Too many…

Ahhh

I'm back, back at it

Losing it

Not now, not ever

Please

You ain't getting me

“Mindfalling”

Hi there, you know

Hi there, you know

I’m at a loss

I’m at a loss

Oh god, don’t know

Oh god, don’t know

Where my life goes

Where my life goes

Doc, you had it right last time

So tell me what should I do

I’ve got nothing to hide

From the family or you

Last time I went outside it was just like… a fever dream…

Like I didn’t feel like I belong in this place, at all…

Perhaps it’s normal for now

I’m still trying to find at least something familiar

Make my life easier

The bugs, the glares,

The leaves, all stare

The beach, the square

They’re here, I’m burning

The shouts, the screams

The witch they see

The stars, their gleam

Tells me to fight back

The days, they roll

The days, they roll

It’s harder now

It’s harder now

Need self-control

Need self-control

But I’ll get all done

I’ll get shit done

Yeah

Trying not to make things worse

While I’m doing what I do

Thanks for the advice, of course

Not sure if I’ll follow through

The head, the mess

The mind, obsessed

So, I was thinking of going to the park… hopefully to relax a bit…

I'm just done with dealing with all this chaos around… it sucks terribly

Still looking for what to do, I mean a job

Yeah, in general, like, I'm good, I'm fine

"Ordinary Stoicism"

I was sitting, minding my business, when this old guy came up

Asked if I had some cash to spare, looked into my eyes

Thought it's probably not the case

He said: "the young man is having a bad day, I'm guessing?

Then bear with me for a second, take a deep breath, and think

Do

You

Know

How many times we've all cried

Before?

Did

You

Count

Each and every step taken

By you so far?

You think people didn't suffer before?

Even you, or your friends?

You think life should've been easier?

Well, your calculations were off, by a lot

You've already learned about sudden hardships

The fate was showing

But what about surprise blessings?

That's what keeps me going

Do

You

Know

How many times we've all cried

Before?

Did

You

Stand

Each and every step taken

By you so far?

“Someday”

(I’m keeping all those memories in check)

Can’t hear the rails anymore

A warm welcome

Station to station

I hope no more

I hope no more

And this is the right destination

Settle down, I’ll settle down

Work it, work it and make it

Better than in back my hometown

Happier, it’ll be better and happier

Someday

No friends, nor anyone closer

It wasn’t much better before

I close my eyes

Yeah, I close my eyes

I see the things that don’t exist anymore

The houses, the streets

The church where I briefly stayed

Near the field, next to the mines

Living, dreaming, and seeing things all day

Oh, it was that easy back then

With those illusions by my side

And I wasn’t the only one

I keep asking

Where are you now?

Where are you now?

I know, I know I shouldn’t keep searching

Not now

This place

This place is unlike

Anything I’ve ever seen

I’d better be right

Yeah, I’d better be right

When I chose to come here

My aspirations: wanna find my clique

Enough being a clerk in the local art shop

Wanna find a job with a good paycheck

And live with a purpose, find my direction

Settle down, I'll settle down

I'm praying for all the expectations

I'll find my way around this town

Here I'll be better and happier

Someday

Someday

"The Link"

This room is like a pot

This room is like a pot

Always check your surroundings

Always check your surrounding faces

I greet them with a smile

But then it can't help but fade away

Don't shoot the messenger, bring the icebreaker

Eyes looking, eyes looking, sit down for a minute

Drowning inside, hang in there everybody

Leave it alone, don't leave me alone, no, not just yet

Laughing and laughing and somehow it feels like

I'm never never never coming back here again

Soaked from head to toes in malicious serenity

Just let it, let it, let it, let it all be in vain

Huh, interesting… You know, last week I went there and it was totally nuts, like holy shit… you'd think you can meet everyone in the town in there, and that's just a market… They got vintage cameras too… Not much to do though…

Trial, the link is lost

Trial, the link is lost

Error, missing connection

Error, missing connection again

I ask for their stories to share

But all I get is their cold gaze

Should I yield?

Or should keep my heart open

Is it simply a lack of skill?

Can't find my friend,

Give a signal, anything

Don’t shoot the messenger, bring the icebreaker

Eyes looking, eyes looking, sit down for a minute

Drowning inside, hang in there everybody

Leave it alone, don’t leave me alone, no, not just yet

Laughing and laughing and somehow it feels like

I’m never never never coming back here again

Soaked from head to toes in malicious serenity

Just let it, let it, let it, let it all be in vain

Yeah… I mean… They got weed and other shit too… Depends on how much you want it to hit… Just to chill or drop dead on the floor… I’m, I’m not a huge fan, you know… You guys got anything else going on, any bands in town?

(Is this the only way?

Is this really the only way?

How… is this the only way?)

I’ll make sure to catch up with you later…

All roads lead to uncertainty

Still, you have to navigate with those

Eyes looking, eyes looking, hang in there everybody

Leave it alone, don’t leave me alone, no, not just yet

Laughing and laughing and somehow it feels like

I’ll never never never never come back again

Soaked from head to toes in malicious serenity

Oh, let it, let it, let it, let it not be in vain