

Portfolio of Writing - Leah Dougherty

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BA Creative Music Technology

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Robert Jones

Portfolio of Writing – Identity

Introduction

I am going to be writing about identity and how this links into my practice, music. I will be discussing the importance of identity and power, as well as defeat and rejection through my own experiences and influences. My practice sits comfortably yet deeply within my heart, and through years of unveiling my passion and determination, I have uncovered some ugly truths. Not everyone is here to help you, and you never quite grasp who you are. Music carries great weight, and for most of us, an escape into a world that means we no longer have to sit inside our own minds, yet we get to dive into someone else's. This brings comfort, and sometimes clarity that seeps through into our own experiences within our own lives. This can be helpful, and is the reason music embodies so much power and emotion. "Music has the power to stimulate strong emotions within us, to the extent that it is probably rare not to be somehow emotionally affected by music" (Ahtisaari and Akaranam, 2015, <http://syncproject.co/blog/2015/7/21/music-and-emotion.>)

I have been influenced by many great artists and their artwork. Electra Heart by Marina and the Diamonds has been a pivotal album looking back through my teenage years. I learnt a lot through her perspective and personal development. Her lyrics highlight the condition of her mental health alongside her views surrounding identity and love, as well as the role of women within society and music. "It is an album about love and the nature of female identity" (Young, 2012, <https://www.musicomh.com/features/interviews/interview-marina-and-the-diamonds.>)

Marina collaborated with various other artists to create the album, which is something that she had previously, fiercely rejected. This resulted in an album that carries a new tone, sound and experience, which along with her alter-ego, 'Electra Heart' opened up a whole new world for Marina in terms of her lyrical and vocal capability.

My personal connection with the album stems from my difficulty in uncovering my true ambitions as a person and as an artist. Growing up I found myself in many traumatic situations, resulting in a steep decline in my mental health, as well as a positive, growing fight for women's rights.

I closely followed Marina's work and consistently related to the album throughout my teenage years, and as I progressed into adulthood.

My work is heavily influenced by Marina's honesty and transparency when it comes to negative emotion and rejection.

Effect of Appearance

Marina created an alter-ego, 'Electra Heart', and wrote the whole album through her eyes. Electra Heart was blonde, slim, always made up and wore pink most of the time. There are four main stereo-types that make up Electra's personality, and it depends on the emotion carried out throughout the track as to which one is used.

The notion that one's appearance can alter the way we are perceived by others not only portrays how deeply humans judge, but how we work to create an image of ourselves, and continue to attempt to live up to that every single day. No one enjoys this process, yet it is something we all do to ensure our place in social circles and to guarantee our eligibility for society. This process makes it incredibly difficult to discover and celebrate your authentic self. "The need to belong is a basic human condition" (Fritscher, 2019, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-fear-of-rejection-2671841#:~:text=The%20fear%20of%20rejection%20is,can%20have%20many%20underlying%20causes.>)

For some musicians, it's easy to get caught up in the drama and appearances of their identity. The world expects certain things from people who make music, and in turn, we give the world what they expect of us. The problem is that an artist's image and the music they create are two completely separate things. (Rebecca, 2018, <https://blog.reverbnation.com/2018/08/07/honesty-important-songwriting/>).

Identity Through Collaboration

Collaboration is an important part of self-discovery. Working with others, especially creatively, provides a deeper understanding of ourselves and how we fit within both social and professional settings.

Through art we can develop a deeper level of knowledge when it comes to finding out who we are, and when sharing these ideas with others, we gain a power that allows us to widen our perspectives, improve our skills, and develop our confidence within our practice.

During the process, you will also identify your strengths and weaknesses. Your strengths will drive your music, and your weaknesses will allow you to take your music to the next level. Collaboration can encourage you to address limitations and push the boundaries of what you're capable of musically. (Levin, 2019, <https://iconcollective.edu/music-collaboration-tips/#:~:text=Collaboration%20can%20encourage%20you%20to,makes%20music%20outside%20your%20genre.>)

Honesty in Song Writing

The initial step I take when beginning a new creative exploration is honesty. This seems obvious, but through the influence of Electra Heart, I understand the importance of honesty within lyric writing and tonal relatability within both vocal and instrumental components of a song.

It becomes easy to hide behind what you want to say, with fear of rejection or humiliation, which is one of the most difficult emotions to deal with. Rejection as an artist creates anxiety and tends to make a person look into their work with fierce, negative pain. This can result in making an artist withdraw from their practice all together, and even make it feel impossible to get back up and try again.

Brainard Carrey (2018) suggest that rejection doesn't have to stop an artist, and that rather than desperately trying to avoid the pain of rejection, artists should take a closer look at it. Within this they may find strong emotions that can be channelled into their art.

Topics that become 'taboo' or embarrassing find their way to the top of most of our troubles. When creating a spoken word piece of mine, I was sure to carry out this technique and put aside any fears I had of rejection. My determination stems from helping others through art, and that can't happen

when dishonesty is involved. Relatable art is often art that sits uncomfortably to those who don't understand it. Not everyone finds peace in the same form or place.

Creative Collaboration

Collaboration with other artists and art forms is a vital step I have taken. Using film and pictures to develop a creative idea has allowed me to be much more expressive with what I am trying to say. Working with other people, who's practices are based in Film and Set Design, means that my ability to share my work without the concern of judgment is imperative.

Each of us come to our professional lives carrying different histories, a unique set of tools, skill sets, and our inherent gifts. As experience designers, this is what feeds our creativity and sets us apart as individuals. (Hill, 2018, <https://www.mediacurrent.com/blog/5-advantages-creative-collaboration-virtual-office/>).

As a result of my research, I have been involved in a collaborative process surrounding identity within both the music industry and my personal life. This process has taught me a lot about what the key factors are when it comes to developing myself as an artist and as a person.

I am able to look forward to collaborative journeys and experience my practice with a different outlook. This has meant that I am more confident within my abilities and moving forward, I am able to express myself through honesty when working with others.

I have learnt the importance of working across art forms, including film and set design and am now aware of how using different art forms opens up many more doors for expression and creative freedom.

As a summary, my creative journey has been very successful and my research into identity and the factors that come with it has enabled me to widen my perspective when it comes to creating music. I appreciate the process of self-discovery and am more emotionally and sonically aware of the effects of relatability, emotional honesty and the importance of collaboration.

My research has informed my work in many ways. I am now confident in the success of collaboration and how it benefits not only my creative journey, but my progress as a person, too.

Conclusion

To conclude, I now think about my work differently as a result of the research I have carried out. As a creative practitioner, I am much more aware of what is needed to fulfil my creative desires. The development of my work has meant that I have studied different sources from different people, who all have their own perspectives and opinions.

This has helped me to develop an understanding of what is important and what is not when it comes to identity and the way we perceive others and the art around us.

As a musician, and as a person, my research has helped me to begin my creative ventures with an open mind and a changed perspective. I am now, as a result of my research, able to develop my collaborative skills as well as my song writing ones.

I undertake new creative challenges in an honest, fear-free way, meaning that I can express and celebrate my complete and authentic self personally, and within my creative practice.

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