

Table of Contents

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form	2
Appendix B: Participant Screening Call Script	4
Appendix C: Creative Self Questionnaire	6
Appendix D: Weekly Check-In Questionnaire	11
Appendix E: Coaching Intervention Design	19
Appendix F: Ethics Form	22
Appendix G: Permissions Letter	39
Appendix H: Thematic Analysis of Session Transcript Excerpts	40
Appendix I: Exit Interview Transcript Excerpts	82

Informed Consent: ACT and Flow

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study about the impacts of Acceptance and Commitment Training on experiences of creative flow among professional vocalists. Participation is voluntary and there are no negative consequences for declining. **To participate in this study you must be at least 18 years of age and perform as a professional vocalist.**

By agreeing to participate you acknowledge that you meet the above criteria for inclusion. **In addition, you are committing to doing the following to the best of your ability:**

1. Attend all six weekly coaching sessions.
2. Participate in a wrap-up session where you will be encouraged to give feedback about your experience. In this session we will also make sure you have the tools you need to keep moving forward with the goals we worked on together. This wrap-up may be part of the final coaching session, or it may be scheduled after the coaching sessions are complete.
3. Complete the 11-item Creative Self Questionnaire prior to the **first** coaching session.
4. Complete the 15-item Weekly Check-In Questionnaire prior to **every** coaching session.
5. Notify the principal researcher **as soon as possible** of any conflicts, scheduling or otherwise, that arise.

There is no monetary compensation for participation, though I hope that you will derive value from the coaching you receive. Your questionnaire responses and unique perspective may also lead to beneficial new approaches in the fields of coaching and voice pedagogy.

Confidentiality and Data Security

The principal researcher (May Oskan) is the only person who will have access to the data you provide. All data will be stored securely and will be deleted upon the completion of this project (February 21st, 2025). Your data will not be used or shared in any future research studies. Session transcripts will be de-identified before storage, and a pseudonym will be assigned to protect your identity. If your responses are shared in publications or presentations, your identity will remain undisclosed.

This study is being conducted by May Oskan, graduate student researcher in voice pedagogy at Voice Study Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

If you have questions about the research, complaints, or problems, please contact May Oskan at mvoskan@gmail.com

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, or problems, please contact UWTSD Research Ethics Committee Representative Louise Emanuel at L.Emanuel@uwtsd.ac.uk

Please give your informed consent by answering the questions below.

* Indicates required question

1. Your Name *

2. **Do you wish to participate? ***

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

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Screening Questions

Can you please describe your current professional capacities and responsibilities as a vocalist?

Can you please describe what an average week looks like for you, in terms of practice and performance?

When you think about the most aligned, meaningful moments of your career as a vocalist, what comes to mind?

When you think about the challenges, struggles, or stuck places in your current vocal practice, what comes to mind?

Have you ever worked with a coach before (for instance, a career coach, life coach, health coach, etc)?

If yes, how did it go?

Are you at all familiar with Acceptance and Commitment Coaching, Training, or Therapy (ACT)?

If you are familiar with this model in any of its forms, please describe your prior exposure to it.

Is there anything else you'd like me to know about your practice as a vocalist, your experience with coaching, or your experience with Acceptance and Commitment Training / Therapy?

Are there any accessibility concerns you'd like me to know about? (For instance, vision or hearing impairment, mobility challenges, sensory or social difficulties, cognitive processing differences, etc).

Orientation to the Study

Coaching:

Coaching is a relationship between the coach and the client that is created for the purpose of furthering the client's valued personal or professional goals, enabling the client to live and work at their full capacity and in alignment with their values.

Goals, values, and the definition of success in coaching are determined by the client. The coach acts as a facilitator, asking questions and making offers to help the client clarify these goals, values, and markers of success.

Compared with psychotherapy, coaching is usually a more short-term and granular approach that does not deal with diagnosis or treatment of mental illness or distress, and does not seek to extricate the past in order to make sense of the present. Emotions, of course, arise in the process of coaching, but exploring and managing emotional states is not the goal.

Designed alliance:

Coaching is, in essence, a way of being in relationship – and each relationship is different. As part of our first coaching session, we will take some time to design a way of working together that feels mutually safe, constructive, and supportive. This designed alliance is dynamic, so that either one of us is welcome to request a revision to this design at any time during the coaching relationship if something isn't working.

Do you have any questions about the nature of coaching?**Zoom / tech requirements:**

You will need a stable internet connection, the ability to have your camera and microphone enabled, and a quiet, private place from which to participate. During the coaching sessions, I will show images and exercises via the screen share function. We may also use the whiteboard function to collaborate on certain exercises. To ensure proper functionality, please be prepared to use a computer, rather than a phone or ipad, to join each session. I strongly recommend downloading and using the Zoom desktop app, rather than the web version.

Data management:

All sessions will be recorded and automatically transcribed. Prior to storing these transcriptions, I will review them for accuracy and remove all identifying information (such as names and places). You will be given a code name that all of your session data and questionnaire responses will be saved under.

This study is being conducted under the supervision of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and all of my actions as a researcher must adhere to the EU's GDPR, or the General Data Protection Regulation, which is a broader and more comprehensive framework for how data can be handled than the protections we have here in the US, which are state specific. When you sign the informed consent form, you will be provided with contact information for the ethics board of my university, in case you have questions or complaints about ethics or data security.

All data will be deleted at the end of the project, February 21st, 2025.

Read through the informed consent form and ask if they have any questions.**Any other questions for me, or is there anything I can clarify for you in more detail?**

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. As this is a short term project, I am limited as far as the number of participants I can include. For ethical reasons, I need to screen all of the potential participants before confirming the final sample.

If you are selected for the final sample, I will follow up with an electronic informed consent form and we'll schedule your six coaching sessions.

Creative Self Questionnaire

Below you will find eleven statements people may use to describe themselves. Please decide to what extent each of these statements describes you. There are no right or wrong answers.

* Indicates required question

1. Name *

2. Today's Date *

Example: January 7, 2019

3. 1. I think I am a creative person *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral / Not Sure

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree

4. 2. My creativity is important to who I am *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral / Not Sure
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

5. 3. I know I can efficiently solve even complicated problems *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral / Not Sure
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

6. 4. I trust my creative abilities *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral / Not Sure
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

7. 5. My imagination and ingenuity (inventiveness, cleverness) distinguish me from my friends *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral / Not Sure
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

8. 6. Many times I have proven that I can cope with difficult situations *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral / Not Sure
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

9. 7. Being a creative person is important to me *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral / Not Sure
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

10. 8. I am sure I can deal with problems that require creative thinking *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral / Not Sure
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

11. 9. I am good at proposing original solutions to problems *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral / Not Sure
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

12. 10. Creativity is an important part of myself *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral / Not Sure
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

13. 11. Ingenuity is a characteristic that is important to me *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral / Not Sure
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

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Weekly Check-In Questionnaire

This questionnaire is to be completed before each coaching session. The first set of questions refer to your general experiences **in the last seven days**. The second set of questions refer to a specific event you experienced, either in practice or performance, **in the last seven days**. There are no right or wrong answers.

* Indicates required question

1. Name *

2. Today's Date *

Example: January 7, 2019

Section A: General Experiences

These questions refer to your general experiences **in the last seven days**. Please indicate the frequency of each of these experiences in the past week.

3. 1. Being present: even if I am somewhere else with my thoughts, I can focus on what's going on in important moments. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Rarely
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Very Often

4. 2. Being open to experiences: if need be, I can let unpleasant thoughts and experiences happen, without having to get rid of them immediately. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Rarely
☐ Rarely
☐ Occasionally
☐ Often
☐ Very Often

5. 3. Leaving thoughts be: I can look at hindering thoughts from a distance without letting them control me. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Rarely
☐ Rarely
☐ Occasionally
☐ Often
☐ Very Often

6. 4. Feeling a steady self: even if thoughts and experiences are confusing me, I can notice something like a steady core inside of me. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Rarely
☐ Rarely
☐ Occasionally
☐ Often
☐ Very Often

7. 5. Having awareness of my own values: I determine what's important to me, and decide what I want to use my energy for. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Rarely
☐ Rarely
☐ Occasionally
☐ Often
☐ Very Often

8. 6. Being engaged: I engage thoroughly in things that are important, useful, or meaningful to me. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Rarely
☐ Rarely
☐ Occasionally
☐ Often
☐ Very Often

Section B: Experiences During a Single Task or Activity

These questions relate to thoughts and feelings you may have experienced while taking part in a **single specific task or activity**, either in practice or performance, **in the last seven days**. Think about the most intense, optimal moment you experienced during this event, and then answer the questions below.

9. 1. I was absorbed in the act/task. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

10. 2. I was highly focused on the task/activity. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

11. 3. All my attention was on the task/activity. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

12. 4. I felt like I could easily control what I was doing. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

13. 5. My actions flowed effortlessly. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

14. 6. There was a sense of fluidity to my actions. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

15. 7. I found the experience rewarding. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

16. 8. The experience felt satisfying. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

17. 9. I would like the feeling of that experience again. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

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Session 1: Assessment, formulation, and values-based goal setting.

Relationship building, direction setting, and information gathering.

- Designed alliance and agreements.
- General check-in about recent practice and performance experiences.
- Developing the vision: what would a 10 look like / feel like for you?
- Identifying values – orienting to the concept, introduce **Values List**. Values are not goals.
- We can always remain aligned with our values, regardless of outside influences, though external elements may sometimes prevent us from attaining a goal.
- Introduce **Adapted Bullseye Worksheet** with values list – work through it together.
- **Request:** this week, keep the bullseye diagram somewhere you can see it, and continue to refine the categories and values you want to focus on during coaching.
- Remember to fill out the questionnaires just before the next session.

Session 2: Offering a new, mindfully aware perspective: the ACT Matrix and Choice Point.

- Check in – review the refined bullseye worksheet and selected values for each.
- Select one quadrant to focus on today. Develop the “10” vision of this quadrant.
- What is getting in the way of this vision? We’re not always moving toward values, sometimes we’re moving away from unpleasant internal experiences instead.
- Introduce “towards moves” vs “away moves”, using the **ACT Matrix** and **Choice Point**.
- What are “away moves”? Introduce **Experiential Avoidance Strategies**.
- **Brainstorm:** What are my experiential avoidance “greatest hits”? What strategies do I use most often? What is the outcome? Do I feel relief? How long does it last? What would happen if I accepted that experience instead? Am I willing to have these thoughts and feelings in order to act in alignment with my values?
- **Inquiry:** this week, use the ACT matrix to help you identify one towards move and one away move per day. Don’t worry about making changes. When you notice an away move, try to remain curious and non-judgmental. Thank your mind, ask yourself if you’re willing to experience whatever it is, and move on. Develop a habit of mindful noticing.
- Remember to fill out the questionnaires just before the next session.

Session 3: Practicing mindful awareness and unhooking from thoughts.

- Check in – review the towards and away moves identified throughout the week.
- Did you notice any values that were easier to move towards than others?
- Did you notice any patterns or recurring avoidance strategies in your away moves?
- What are some of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that lead to away moves?
- **Practice** mindfully unhooking from thoughts: “I notice I’m having the thought that...”
- Introduce defusion techniques: **Defusion Questions and Metaphors**.
- **Inquiry:** This week, continue to mindfully notice towards moves and away moves. When thoughts hook you, practice using defusion tools to unhook.
- Remember to fill out the questionnaires just before the next session.

Session 4: Committing to valued action.

- Check in – review the inquiry (unhooking from thoughts) we set last week.
- What are your favorite defusion techniques? How do you like to stay present?
- Targeted review: are there any concepts or exercises you'd like to revisit?
- So far, we've used the Bullseye to identify areas in your performance / practice life that you'd like to work on, and you've chosen some values you'd like to magnify in those areas. We've used the ACT Matrix and Choice Point to identify whether a move is towards a value, or away from a negative internal experience. We have identified common avoidance strategies, and used defusion techniques to unhook from the thoughts that contribute to avoidance. Now it's time to put it all together!
- **Committed Action Worksheet** - introduce and fill it out together. Return to the bullseye, or the values list, as needed for clarity.
- **Request:** Choose one committed action from your worksheet to take this week. How do you want to be held accountable? Will you do this? Have you written down all of the barriers and saboteurs you might encounter? Will the strategies you've chosen work?
- Remember to fill out the questionnaires just before the next session.

Session 5: Developing resilience on the path of committed action.

- Check in – did you take the action you committed to last week?
- What happened? How did it feel to take (or not take) this action? What tools did you use to mindfully accept experiences, unhook from thoughts, and stay present?
- What worked for you, and what didn't?
- What would feel amazing to accomplish before our final meeting next week?
- **Choose the next committed action.** We can return to previous worksheets or select a new area to explore if needed. It's completely up to you, whatever feels most alive.
- **Set up final session:** next week we'll review the tools that are working for you. If you want, keep some notes this week or continue to refine your worksheets. But don't let this homework get in the way of actually taking your committed action!
- **Request:** Choose one committed action from your worksheet to take this week. How do you want to be held accountable? Will you do this? Have you written down all of the barriers and saboteurs you might encounter? Will the strategies you've chosen work?
- Remember to fill out the questionnaires just before the next session.

Session 6: Building the vision. Connecting skills development and valued action.

- Check in – did you take the action you committed to last week?
- What happened? How did it feel to take (or not take) this action? What tools did you use to mindfully accept experiences, unhook from thoughts, and stay present?
- What worked for you, and what didn't?
- Make clear, explicit links between skills development and valued actions. What skills have you gained in this process? How are these tools serving you?
- Celebrate everything you've learned and achieved!
- Build the vision – where do you want to go from here? Who do you need to be in order for this vision to happen?

- How do you want to spend our final session? What would be most useful to you? We can revisit a previous skill or worksheet, keep dreaming and scheming visions for the future, or just celebrate your progress so far.
- What do you need in order for this process to feel complete?
- Set up the exit interview / feedback session.

Exit Interview

Tools (in shared folders)

- Choice Point diagram
- Choice Point 2 – connecting this to experiential avoidance and valued actions
- ACT Matrix diagram
- Defusion Questions and Metaphors
- Experiential Avoidance Strategies
- Adapted Bullseye Worksheet
- Committed Action Worksheet
- Creative Values List

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

Delete the Guidance Notes at the end of the form BEFORE submitting your application

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	May Virginia Oskan			
2	Tick all boxes which apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
3	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student
4	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	WAPPAR			
5	Campus:	Carmarthen			
6	E-mail address:	mvoskan@gmail.com			
7	Contact Telephone Number:	1 (508) 360-5456			
For students:					
8	Student Number:	2129248			
9	Programme of Study:	MA Professional Practice (Voice Pedagogy)			
10	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Debbie Winter			

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	☒	NO	☐
				Date	
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
3		Institute Research Committee	☐		
4		Other (write in) WAPPAR Ethics Board Representative	☒		

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines.	
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3	The California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) and the California Privacy Rights Act (CPRA)	☒

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

1	Does the research activity involve collaborators outside of the University?	YES	☐	NO	☒	
2	If Yes, please provide the name of the external organisation and name and contact details for the main contact person and confirmation this person has consented to their personal data being shared as part of this collaboration.					
3	Institution					
4	Contact person name					
5	Contact person e-mail address					
6	Has this individual consented to sharing their details on this form?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
7	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
8	Is your research externally funded	YES	☐	NO	☐	
9	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	YES	☐	NO	☐
10		Employed	YES	☐	NO	☐
11	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa	If YES then the permission question	YES	☐	NO	☐

	Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)	below does not need to be answered.				
12	Permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	YES	☐	NO	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

13	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	☐	NO	☐
14	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	Acceptance and Commitment Coaching to Encourage Flow Experiences among Performing Vocalists			
2	Proposed start date:	July 03, 2024	Proposed end date:	January 27th, 2025	
3	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words) Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the three points below: • <i>Purpose of Research Activity</i> • <i>Proposed Research Question</i> • <i>Aims of Research Activity</i> • <i>Objectives of Research Activity</i> Demonstrate, briefly, how Existing Research has informed the proposed activity and explain • <i>What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge</i> • <i>How it addresses an area of importance.</i>				
4	Purpose of Research Activity The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of Acceptance and Commitment Training as a coaching intervention to encourage states of optimal performance and absorption among vocalists, an experience referred to as "flow". ACT has shown promise for the reduction of performance anxiety in a few pilot studies, but its efficacy as a catalyst for flow experience has not yet been researched. ACT uses acceptance, mindfulness, and commitment to valued action to encourage psychological flexibility. The foundational skills of ACT are similar to the proposed antecedents of flow, but the connection between psychological flexibility and flow has not yet been established. A framework to encourage flow would benefit vocal students in a number of ways, as an increase in flow experience can lead to more focused learning and deeper enjoyment and satisfaction as well as optimal performance.				
5	Research Question Can ACT-based coaching encourage flow experiences among adult performing vocalists? If so, how might voice teachers use ACT coaching skills to improve student experience, progress, and satisfaction? In addition, what is the potential relationship between psychological flexibility and flow?				
6	Aims of Research Activity • To assess frameworks for improving student practice and performance experience. • To expand the research on ACT as a music performance coaching intervention. • To investigate the connection between psychological flexibility and flow.				

	To inform future research into performance coaching in general, and ACT coaching in particular.
7	Objectives of Research Activity - To consolidate existing literature on ACT coaching, psychological flexibility, and flow. - To develop and deliver a one-to-one ACT coaching intervention. - To collect weekly questionnaire responses to measure psychological flexibility and flow. - To enrich questionnaire data and enhance understanding with coaching session transcripts.
8	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed.
9	ACT, and coaching in general, emphasizes the link between internal experience and external movement toward one's goals. I will use a mixed methods approach to capture both quantitative and rich narrative data. Literature Review This review will explore potential links between psychological flexibility as enhanced by ACT skills and the experience of flow. Research into ACT coaching and performance coaching in general will be included. The proposed factors contributing to flow and narrative experiences of flow among musicians will also be considered. Quantitative - Questionnaire Responses: I will collect responses using two separate questionnaires, as described below. All questionnaires use 5- or 7-point Likert scales. - Creative Self Questionnaire: based on Karwowski's (2011) Short Scale of Creative self, this questionnaire measures creative personal identity, creative self-concept, and creative self-efficacy. This questionnaire will be completed by each participant before and after the coaching intervention, to explore how self-perception may play a role in psychological flexibility, flow experience, and openness to coaching experience. Pre-test and post-test measurement will also allow an initial assessment of whether creative self-concept may also improve after the coaching intervention. - Weekly Check-In Questionnaire: a combination of the Psy-Flex, a scale designed to measure psychological flexibility as a set of changeable factors over time, and the Psychological Flow Scale (PFS) which measures the extent of flow experienced during a single performance task or event the preceding week. Qualitative - Reflective Journal: In my practice as a voice teacher and performance coach, teaching and coaching skills are frequently intertwined. In the months preceding the coaching intervention, I intend to develop my skills through intensive training in both general coaching and ACT. I will keep a reflective journal throughout this learning process, and continue to make entries in response to coaching sessions as I complete them. I intend to use Kolb's Learning Cycle to integrate my reflections into the sessions that follow, as both my coaching skills and learning are linked in an "ongoing and inseparable" process (Vince, 2022, p. 985). - Coaching Session Transcripts: Coaching sessions will be conducted via Zoom for accessibility and ease of transcription. Data from session transcripts will give depth to quantitative responses, as the weekly check-in questionnaire will serve as a launching point for the beginning of each subsequent session. Transcript data will also allow in-depth analysis of coaching tools and styles of delivery used with each participant.

	3. Semi-Structured Interview: I may conduct an interview as part of the final coaching session to collect participant feedback about the coaching intervention. 4. Feedback Form: I may also use an anonymous feedback form to give participants additional opportunities to express their experience.
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10	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
11	Questionnaires and feedback forms will be distributed electronically to participants in the United States. Coaching interventions and interviews will take place in the United States.
12	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants.
13	As all of my research activity will take place within the United States, I will abide by the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, as set forth by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. I will also abide by the codes of ethics of the two professional associations of which I am a member, the Association for Popular Music Education and the Pan American Vocology Association. The purpose of the study is to engage in pedagogical development within my own practice. Under current IRB regulations my study consists of PRACTICA. The purpose of the work based learning project is to engage in professional development, and it constitutes an educational exercise. The audience for the results of the activity is myself and my students. IRB approval is not required. If the data offers a scholarly contribution, US IRB application can be sought subsequently to enable dissemination.

14	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents NOT publicly available?	NO	☒
		YES	☐
15	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with prevailing data protection law of the country in question and England and Wales. N/A		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

1	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
2	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
3	Use of interviews?	☒	☐

4	Use of diaries?	☒	☐
5	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☒	☐
6	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
7	Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐
8	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
9	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
10	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
11	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
12	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
13	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
14	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
15	Other primary data collection methods, please explain in this box For example, 'focus groups'. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) in this box and tick the accompany box.	☐	☒
16	Details of any other primary data collection method:		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

1	Who are the intended participants:	YES	NO
2	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
3	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
4	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
5	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☒
6	Prisoners?	☐	☒
7	Young offenders?	☐	☒
8	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
9	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
10	Others (please identify specifically any group who may be unable to give consent) please indicate here and tick the appropriate box.	☐	☒
11	Other – please indicate here:		

12	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
13	How many participants are expected?	5-7 participants. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
14	Who will the participants be?	Adult professional or semi-professional performing vocalists. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
15	How will you identify the participants?	Participants will be identified via email outreach and online posts to various interest groups and professional communities, as well as flyers posted in rehearsal spaces and music venues. I will also reach out to my extended professional network to ask for referrals. I will determine participant qualifications and confirm interest with an initial screening call.

16	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
17	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
18	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
19	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
20	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
21	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☒	☐	☐
22	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
23	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐
24	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
25	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
26	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
27	N/A			

28	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
29	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
30	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☒	☐	☐
31	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
32	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
33	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
34	I will use video and audio recordings of online coaching sessions and interviews conducted on Zoom. I will transcribe audio and video recordings to text to collect rich narrative data.			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

1	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
2	Full risk assessment completed and appended?		Yes ☐ No ☒
3	Risks to participants For example: emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
4	Risk to Participant: There is a risk of the disclosure of personal data, as coaching sessions and interviews will be recorded.	How will you mitigate the Risk to Participant Transcripts will be deidentified to protect participant anonymity, and all identifying information will be removed.	

	recorded in audio and video formats. Text transcriptions of these recordings will also be made. Due to the personal nature of coaching, there is a risk of mental or emotional discomfort as participants engage with exercises aimed at improving their psychological flexibility. Examining or expressing negative thoughts or unpleasant internal experiences may result in emotional distress or embarrassment, especially if those thoughts and feelings are linked to painful memories of past performances or negative interpersonal interactions. In addition, participating in coaching may cause participants to feel nervous, or feel pressure to perform or behave in a certain way. Because of the conversational format of coaching, participants may accidentally divulge more personal information than they intended to share.	personal information will be removed. All data, including audio and video recordings, will be stored in password protected files and will be destroyed once the project is complete. Throughout the coaching process, participants will be encouraged to share in as much or as little detail as they wish, with the understanding that divulging personal details or relating sensitive content about their past experience is not necessary for coaching to be effective, and is not a requirement of the study. Adequate time will be taken to establish an open and positive working relationship where the comfort and emotional safety of the participant are prioritized. Participants will also be provided with a list of local support groups that can enable them to reach out if they feel it is necessary. Contact information for these groups is included at the end of this form. Participants will be assured that all transcripts will remain confidential. If an incident of accidental disclosure presents a distressing concern for the participant, this information will be redacted from the transcript entirely. In accordance with the DPA2018, CCPA and CPRA, respondents may request to have their responses deleted at any time before the study is complete.
5	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities	
	N/A	
6	Risks to investigator For example: personal safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to Investigator: There may be a risk of emotional distress as participants share emotional or psychological details of their performance history and experiences, especially if their experiences have a personal resonance with my own. As a coach, there is always a risk of becoming attached to particular client outcomes, rather than centering the changing needs and desires of the client.	<i>How will you mitigate the Risk to Investigator:</i> I acknowledge the risk of emotional discomfort, and will seek appropriate support as needed. My therapist, whom I meet with weekly, is trained in ACT and also works as a coach. If I have personal difficulties with session content or notice a problematic attachment to client outcomes, she is qualified to support my process.

	There is also a risk of conflict of interest and/or professional awkwardness, as participants may know of me through performance or professional circles. As the study intervention comprises several sessions and potential between-session homework, there is a risk of not getting enough participants to complete the entire study.	I will minimise this risk by working with vocalists who are not current students, and prioritizing participants with whom I am not personally acquainted. I will respect the time commitment required for participation by maintaining focus in coaching sessions and welcoming feedback from participants throughout the process. If only a small number of participants complete the entire study, I will pivot the design of my report accordingly and present a case study of each participant. Collecting narrative data through session and interview transcripts will provide adequate data to do so.		
7	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection			
	Risk to University: The risk to the University is data protection.	<i>How will you mitigate the Risk to University:</i> All data will be coded and stored under password protection to safeguard confidentiality. Data will be destroyed once the project is complete.		
8	Disclosure and Barring Service			
9	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
10	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☐	☒

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	The final coaching meeting will conclude with a brief wrap-up and feedback session where participants may ask questions about the coaching process and the nature of the study. I will provide a project specific email address to participants so that they may contact me for further details or to discuss the results of the study. I will also offer participants a copy of the final report if they express an interest in reading it.
2	Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	The initial Creative Self Questionnaire will be distributed electronically using Google Forms. A full explanation of what will be involved in participating in the entire study, including the Weekly Check-In Questionnaires, coaching sessions, between-session homework, feedback, and debriefing will appear on the first page, which will also act as a consent form. Participants will be

	informed that by clicking through to the questionnaire, they are providing consent for the entirety of the study as described.
3	Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	Due to the ongoing nature of this study, names will be included in questionnaire responses in order to organize participant information. Participant email addresses will only be used for the distribution of questionnaires and to manage session scheduling as needed. Participant names and email addresses will be confidential, and any potentially identifying information provided in the coaching and/or interview process will be excluded from the final report. All records of participant information will be password protected while stored, and permanently deleted once the final report is complete. All participants will be made aware of these protocols, and of the steps I will take to protect their information.

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

In completing this section refer to the University's Research Data Management Policy and the extensive resources on the University's Research Data Management web pages (<http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/>).

1	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	YES	NO
	<i>"Personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.</i>	☒	☐
2	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
	Audio and/or video recordings of coaching sessions and interviews, and text transcriptions of these audio and/or video recordings, to provide quantitative data for analysis. Names and email addresses of participants, to organize participant information, distribute questionnaires, and manage session scheduling as needed.		
3	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
	<i>"Special category data" means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' –</i> (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),	☐	☒
4	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
	N/A		

5	Will the research activity involve storing personal data and/or special category data on one of the following:	YES	NO
6	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
7	University computers?	☐	☒
8	Private company computers?	☐	☒
9	Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
10	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☒	☐
11	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☒	☐
12	Other – specify:	☐	☒
13	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	All data will be kept in password protected cloud storage on Google Drive and will not be shared. Audio/visual data will be transcribed and will be shown to participants to check accuracy of reporting. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. Participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality. The key matching identifiers to participant names and email addresses will be kept securely in a password protected folder on Google Drive.		
14	All Data Storage		
15	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
16	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
17	Sharing of data with others at the University?	☐	☒
18	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
19	Export of data outside the European Union or importing of data from outside the UK?	☒	☐
20	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☒	☐
21	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
22	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
23	Data archiving?	☐	☒
24	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and DPA (and/or any international equivalent):		
	All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on Google Drive which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All data transfers will be encrypted and password protected. Participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality. The key matching identifiers to participant names and email addresses will be kept securely in a password protected folder on Google Drive. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the DPA2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them, and this data will be deleted immediately if the participant requests this, in which case the data will not be used in the project. This protection also complies with the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) and the California Privacy Rights Act (CPRP).		

25	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	The principal researcher, May Oskan, will have sole access to the research data.		
26	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	The principal researcher, May Oskan, will control and act as custodian for the research data.		
27	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on Google Drive which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected, and will be reformatted at the end of the project in order to destroy the data. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted.		
28	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. <i>(Most relevant to academic staff)</i>		
	My data will not be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository.		
29	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	YES	☒
		NO	☐
30	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	YES	☒
		NO	☐

SECTION K: Declaration

31	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
	Signature of applicant:	May Virginia Oskan	Date: April 29, 2024

For STUDENT Submissions:

32	Director of Studies/Supervisor:		Date:
33	Signature:		

For STAFF Submissions:

34	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		Date:
35	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed ALL RELEVANT sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (and have NOT completed Section H of this form) (where appropriate) ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.
☒	I have deleted the guidance notes before submitting the PG2 for consideration

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk, with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name. You will be informed of the outcome of your claim by email; therefore it is important that you check your University and personal email accounts regularly.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

This form is available electronically from the Academic Office web pages:

<https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/academic-office/appendices-and-forms/>

Local and National Helplines for Mental Healthcare

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline:
1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Participants can dial 211 for non-emergency health and social service assistance information and referrals. California residents can also call or text 988 to be directed to one of twelve Lifeline crisis call centers.

Permissions Letter

May Oskan Voice
14th June 2024

Dear UWTSO,

RE: Using Acceptance and Commitment Coaching to Encourage Flow Experiences among Performing Vocalists.

I confirm that I approve of the research proposed regarding 'using Acceptance and Commitment Coaching to encourage flow experiences among performing vocalists' to be carried out by May Oskan of May Oskan Voice as a complement to their work with the company between July 2024 and February 2025.

Kind regards,



May Oskan

May Oskan Voice
14th June 2024

Dear UWTSD,

RE: Using Acceptance and Commitment Coaching to Encourage Flow Experiences among Performing Vocalists.

I confirm that I approve of the research proposed regarding 'using Acceptance and Commitment Coaching to encourage flow experiences among performing vocalists' to be carried out by May Oskan of May Oskan Voice as a complement to their work with the company between July 2024 and February 2025.

Kind regards,

May Oskan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'May Oskan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Coaching Sessions: Thematic Analysis

Feedback About Process

Yes, we're focusing on music practice. But it's amazing how all this stuff is just so applicable to all areas of life. (Shanna, 3).

It feels very nourishing, and there's so much depth to it. And I really appreciate the frame you set. And yeah, it's very interesting and inspiring. (Giulia, 1).

It's been really helpful, even though I mean I haven't had tons and tons of bandwidth to spend lots and lots of time. But even just a few minutes focusing on a few key things has been really helpful. (Giulia, 5).

I feel like a lot of people go into that kind of vortex of stress and worry, like it's almost like people think you're supposed to do that, or you're that's what makes you a serious artist, or that's the only way to do it. And that all that energy could actually be poured into the performance. (Giulia, 5).

Cool. That was an awesome. You're like, what should we do the last 5 min like, Oh, let's just have a little breakthrough moment. This has been such a gift. May. I'm like so appreciative of you and your wisdom, and sharing these practices with me. So thank you very much. (Shanna, 6).

I really feel like it's been like tremendously helpful to just starting to get this awareness, awareness that isn't harsh or judgmental and beating oneself down. but just kind of yeah, getting that distance to being like, oh, interesting. I also feel like realizing that it's possible to break these down, but also like it's good to have a tool at the ready. (Alice, 6).

being someone with Adhd, I have recognized now how my natural proclivity, to chase rabbits and to, on the positive side, form connections and see patterns where other people don't. But my insistence on addressing all those connections I'm seeing and teasing apart the patterns, and getting more and more into the granular, more into the subtlety, more into the nuance. having a more relaxed like, let's, you know, design this for you, John. Let's take this at your pace. (Matthew, 6).

I can see where more of a framework and more like, okay. And this week we're gonna look at this. Okay? So last week, that was, we were here now this week. We're gonna look at this. a more sort of like consciously procedural, having a sense of forward momentum really works for me, because it helps me to see where I tend to want to like chase a rabbit, or I tend to want to focus on this one thing that's like this for this one insight that's just occurred to me, and I think

like, Oh, it's bright and shiny. So that must be it. Let's chase that for a while, and it's having you going like, you know. we're gonna go back to the sheet. And you know. that process really fits me. As far as where and how I need to grow. So thank you. (Matthew, 6).

I'm really grateful that I responded to that call and. what I've received has been really powerful, and I've been hearing about act for years with friends that are therapists. But this application to coaching is. It's just such a good fit for me. It's how integrated it all is. And that it's not just like, do a bunch of stuff. You know. It's not just about the task, but it's like having the task connected to something real. (Matthew, 6).

Psychological Flexibility: 6 ACT Skills

Acceptance Skills

Defusion

I mean, above all, I'm definitely a ruminator. So my brain tends to do things like that grab onto things that aren't working, or things that are bothering me, and just kind of spin and spin on them. (Shanna, 1).

It was just a little more struggle to stay present, you know, because I was feeling a little panicked. And when that comes in it's like my mind's solutionizing constantly like skipping around like what I'm what am I gonna do? there was definitely that pace of mind, like moving really fast, and feeling anxious and unsettled. (Shanna, 2).

I think part of me has this tendency, or I'm used to a guilty feeling around that of like I need to be doing this more. I don't know if it comes from this like deep rooted attitude towards music practice from childhood. But I've had to shift it and morph it. So maybe there, maybe that's just a lot of story around it in my life. (Shanna, 2).

I just tend to ruminate so much. and then it's just hard to settle and focus so my mind will just be spinning on like solutions, or whatever, or conversations, or and I really have to work hard to like, bring myself back into the present moment... It's not a helpful process. I've got to stop doing this because this will drive me mad. You know it does highlight the need. I gotta take care of the need before I get to this headspace, because it gets really unproductive and cloudy and hard to focus. (Shanna, 2).

what really helps is starting the day with pen and paper and journaling. then I'm able to maybe identify what's on my mind, or you know, maybe what's spinning around. But then I can do values work. I can write down goals. my daily to dos like it's really centering. (Shanna, 2).

(After doing the first part of the "I notice..." exercise) Oh, it was interesting. It was very like a kind of a shutdown-inducing statement. It was like this kind of collapsing in, almost yeah. It didn't

leave any room for creativity or movement. I could see how this would lead to not doing anything. (Shanna, 4).

I'm just feeling my age, feeling like I'm getting old. And that leads to feelings of, like, my body's wearing out, or maybe I won't be able to accomplish things I want to in life, because time's running out. I felt that way at the end of the day Saturday. I knew I was probably gonna feel that way because I had three different giant events that day, and I just got to the end of the day and I was like, I feel too old to pull these kinds of days off anymore. Yeah, I mean it [a towards move] could be to acknowledge it. And like, take care of myself. An away move might be to ignore it and drink more coffee, and just try and power through. (Shanna, 5).

Putting so much pressure on yourself, maybe, and then completely checking out and just going to a place of like, I can't deal. So my brain's gonna protect me and keep me from having to do this hard thing. (Shanna, 5).

Yeah, the naming. It does give it a degree of separation. It gives you power, right? It allows you to step back and examine the thing. (Shanna, 5).

I mean, it's just like judgment and shame, you know. I guess it's trying to influence myself to do better underneath it all but like, in a shitty way. (Shanna, 5).

I mean, it could get morbid. I think that's the problem with my ruminating. It just gets so grandiose and out of hand. (Shanna, 5).

It feels like there's so much more awareness and agency rather than just feeling like being a victim to the avoidance strategies. (Giulia, 3).

[The Leviathan of Misery] I love that phrase. I mean, the art therapist in me would love to research leviathans and draw it. I think, even just kind of letting that image and phrase marinate kind of externalizes it a little bit, and when something becomes describable and externalized that alone can help release its grip a little bit. I probably can't go into a super deep process about it. But I would say, for now, even just imagining, even like a cartoon leviathan. And then it's kind of like, can I make it swim into the distance? You know, low key interact with it? I think even just playing with that could be useful instead of having it be this very powerful unnamed force. (Giulia, 4).

I think the feeling or the worry underneath is, what if I decide the wrong thing? What if I make the wrong decision and I regret it? (Giulia, 5).

Well, it's funny when you ask it like that. It feels kind of obvious that no, that thought isn't helpful, because if I did choose to bring it and work with it, and kind of mitigate that risk. It's sort of like, wow! This is a choice I made. I have to work with what I did, and I have to make the best of it. And maybe accentuate the pros of what that thing gives me, and lean into what I like about it. (Giulia, 5).

Some of this also feels like that innate negativity bias, to scan for what's wrong in the situation and fixate on it. I kind of like this idea of pulling the camera back a little bit and saying, Okay. There's a lot of other stuff that's gonna get missed if I hyper fixate on what could go wrong, or making the wrong decision. (Giulia, 5).

The thought that comes to mind is, that is kind of feeding that Leviathan of Misery. Buying into that thought feeds that unpleasant but more familiar and comfortable stressed out fight or flight way of being, rather than having the courage to allow for more happiness. And there's vulnerability in that, too. It's like it's easier to go with the known than to have that vulnerability. Feeding some other kind of happier beast that's not a leviathan, making more space for joy or peace or contentment. (Giulia, 5).

[After "I notice..."] It definitely feels more neutral, like it opens up for more options. Whereas the 1st one feels like such a statement, like the train has already left. Just putting that "I notice", I kind of get this feeling, this option of like, so what are we gonna, or what can I do about it? What are my options today? (Alice, 4).

[After third sentence] I feel like the 3rd one is, it's distancing, like distancing myself from the statement even more. And I feel like now it can even maybe start questioning, is this true? Like, if the 1st one is like, this day is ruined because I don't have the energy. The second one is kind of like, okay, today is gonna be hard. What can we do about it? And the 3rd one is almost like right now it feels like this, but this might not determine the whole day. (Alice, 4).

I feel like one thought it. It's almost like, is this all? Is this all of life? Is this actually the core of what life is? I guess one is like running out of time. (Alice, 5).

But the reality is sometimes there's just going to be tension, you know, when I have to sing a lot of high A's. There's just going to be accumulated muscular tension, you know, in this upper portion of my body, you know, in very notey passages, and Chopin or Rachmaninoff, or Liszt, or something. There's just going to be tension that accumulates, but I don't have to hold on to it, and it doesn't have to get bound up in any sort of anxiety and worry, anger and frustration. Those are the main ones that I used to struggle with when I was a younger player, like tons of anxiety, tons of anger and frustration that just manifested in all sorts of chronic pain for years. (Matthew, 1).

I mean, that holds back the generativity of my songwriting, because I get stuck on like this isn't good enough. This needs to be perfect. I'm going to hold this away until I can get it right. And then there's just, you know. So there are so many unfinished songs of mine because of that kind of thinking. (Matthew, 2).

It was interesting. I could feel the part of me that was going into a shame spiral. And that's partly why I did the writing, because it was like, I know this isn't true, and I'm not giving space to that part that's wanting to do that. (Matthew, 3).

[first "I feel..."] I thought that I would feel worse and worse and worse, and the longer the longer I kept repeating it. It was like the more false it started to sound. yeah, it's just sort of like an unnecessary worry or something like that. I've certainly fixated on an idea and made myself physically ill before, that's something that I have done in my life. So that's what I was expecting is like, Oh, no, I'm gonna feel terrible, but it was honestly like the more I sat with it, it was like, I'm gonna be fine. [Second, "I notice..."] Almost immediately I felt this sense of care for myself. And it coincided with me, starting to sit up straighter and take deeper breaths. And so the longer I stayed with it, I felt more, more a sense of strength and empowerment, like I'm going to take care of myself. [Third, I notice I'm having the thought...] That one felt more like a mindfulness kind of space. like a lot of distance between myself and a feeling or a belief. it's like the feeling or the thought of running out of energy just felt very, very distant, and just like any other thought. And, in fact, what was interesting was I noticed that I'm having the thought that I'm going to run out of energy was much more like it is whenever I do my meditation in the morning. It's like the objective is not really thinking about anything. There's just various thoughts that sort of wander through, and if I catch myself having latched onto one, I let it go. So that's why I say the sort of more mindful space like it. Just it started to feel very distant from me, no longer like reality, and sort of took its place with one of a bunch of other thoughts. (Matthew, 3).

the feeling or the experience that I was having internally was not like, I'm distancing myself from the thought, or the belief or the feeling. it just felt like it was further away from me. which to me, I think, is a helpful distinction, because, you know, I could just dissociate. you know, and just like I'm just gonna get very far away from this stuff that's bothering me. But it felt like I stayed present. But the I'm running out of energy thing just sort of started to drift away instead. (Matthew, 3).

Rationally, rationally. It sounds like a stupid thing for me to say that, like I think that other people's time is more valuable than mine, because I don't think that any person's time is more valuable than anybody else's. So like that's you know, that's BS to me on like a rational logical level. So, but what feels more honest like feels like a horrible thing to say or to believe about yourself, which is It's like my desires for how to spend my time, creativity, or my desires to devote myself to writing my own music are stupid, and aren't worth the attention. They're not going to amount anything. So why even try? That sounds like a horrible thing to say. I don't know, like I'm not able to access the emotion to that right now, because it just sounds so terrible that I don't even want to like believe it. (Matthew, 4).

[distressing thoughts] I think they were subliminal until I started typing in that document. Rational me would never see myself as somebody that feels inferior, that feels inadequate. That would be afraid to share a song. I know my songs are good. I know I'm a good piano player. I know I'm a good singer. So I think I instead say, I'm too busy. I'm too busy, or I can't commit, or I'm afraid of committing and then having to back out, because I don't like to break commitments. So I'm just not going to do it. Because committing means that there's 6 weeks of people seeing the real me. And what if the real me sucks? (Matthew, 4).

when it can't as be measured or confirmed like, black and white. So it becomes sticky. And the brain is like, Oh, I'm just gonna hold on to that. (Shanna, 6).

the thoughts around discomfort are so consuming that if I'm not taking care of that, it's hard to have the capacity to really wanna sing. (Shanna, 6).

The "that's just the way it is" kind of idea is so powerful it's making me emotional to think about it. I think that's a real trigger. What would you recommend as a good way to reframe that, maybe through defusion? [chooses the waterfall image] I think it's a good image, because it's like, I mean, it's intense. And if I get emotional, I also get teary. So it's like the wetness. I think it's really clear the intensity of it, like comparing the 2 feelings. [stepping back from the waterfall] Like definitely decreases the intensity. I like that exercise because I feel like so many exercises like that are asking you to put the thing out of your mind without recognizing the sheer intensity of it. Like the cloud drifting thing. I love the idea of that. It's never worked for me because it doesn't have that quality of intensity that the waterfall does. My thoughts are too intense to be a leaf floating in a stream like it's like it doesn't, doesn't have the same quality. I think that for me is what worked in this. And there was something about the quality of that intensity and then stepping away from it, I could feel it getting less and less, per the distance I was visually away. It was almost like tricking my brain, distancing myself from my own intensity. That was really interesting. (Shanna, 6).

I feel like I'm starting to somewhat be able to tune in to like, okay, when it's actually like my body is doing something, building a human, then I actually need to rest. And when is it more a perception of being tired? Kind of. (Alice, 6).

we're so sensitive to the environments we're in, even just acoustically, and then depending on how big the audience is and who's there? I was also kind of trying to intentionally filter. Okay, what of this is useful to my performance. and that I will let in. And what is not that I'm just gonna kind of not overly focused on. (Giulia, 6).

I was feeling the annoyance build when I just watched like this man kind of narcissistically handle things. And I did explicitly say to myself. Okay, yeah, we're noticing this. This is obnoxious. But I told myself, do not get hooked into this. This is not going to put you in the right mindset to perform like, yes, you noticed it. Okay. (Giulia, 6).

when I'm observing other people like, I do think there are at least 2 voices. Right? There's the one that's being really bitchy. And then there's the one that's like, okay. But like, maybe this isn't their best show. Or maybe they're struggling with something right now. I wish it wasn't this dialogue, of like like bitchy voice thinking something, and the other one being like, Okay, calm down. (Dana, 3).

[After thinking the phrase] I got body chills a couple of times. [After "I notice..."] the 1st thing that came through was compassion. I think it went from like, Oh, I'm noticing this thing. I feel compassion for this thing, and that compassion leading to like a concern of like, Why so? Why,

I'm noticing this thing. So why is that happening? I'm I'm worried about you, or like, I wanna know what can I do or say, or give you to shift this. and like what's going on underneath the faking. Why do you feel like you have to fake something? Can I help you feel safe enough to let down the armor? the visualization went from, Oh, I'm thinking about this show I saw, and then sort of imagining, like me watching me. And then, like the me that was watching me, became like, little me actually like child me, came up and hugged me, and was like. Why are you doing that? It's okay. You don't have to. You don't have to do that like. I'm not gonna judge you like, I think you're so cool. my child self could not have fathomed who I am right now, and to just have a moment with that inner child where they're like. Just remember, you're so fucking cool. (Dana, 3).

Acceptance

like maybe operating sometimes from feelings of lack of resources or or feeling desperate, or really needing something to be a different way. (Shanna, 1).

the fantasy is so different from what can actually happen in real life. And as a young person you don't really know that very well, you, you know, and and the more life you live, and the more you just realize what your needs are and practicalities, the more you have to balance real life with fantasy. (Shanna, 1).

(Accepting feelings of discomfort from chronic pain). That 3rd one is a hard one. Cause I don't think I am [willing to feel it]. The trickiest part about this pattern is it does require some kind of resolve or action. Usually, if I'm to a level of feeling that uncomfortable, I have to change something and not sit with it and not let it float by, but also not be consumed by it and start doing maladaptive things. So so I feel like in this instance, I feel like the physical discomfort does need a level of acknowledgement. I think this kind of phrasing could be useful in this situation, but I might change it up a little bit. (Then we separated the feeling itself from the thoughts of hopelessness or avoidant behaviors that might follow – that got easier.) (Shanna, 4).

It's an awareness and honesty without judgment. And I'm trying to practice that, because yeah, the judgment can get too rigid or shamey. (Shanna, 5).

I like that, like, "Thank you for the message". It's like, even discomfort is a message, you know? I think it's even reframing that sensation, so that my mind doesn't immediately go to "It's my fault that I've made all the decisions that have gotten me to this feeling". It's getting away from that, and more of an acknowledgement of like, oh, hello! You need something, and certainly being proactive in the future to try and keep myself out of that feeling, but also shifting away from the blamey guilt feelings around discomfort, I think, is a big one. (Shanna, 5).

I gravitate more to this one the acceptance one, I mean the "I'm willing to feel this". It still feels empowering, it still creates a sense of agency. That coupling of I'm willing to let myself feel this to act in alignment. That's an interesting coupling. I think it's often like, if I let myself fully feel this, it's going to be too much. Or it's just devastating to feel it, or I don't know how else to cope

with it. So this idea of like you can be willing to feel it, and that you can actually use that to act in alignment, which to me is like finding better ways to cope with it. (Giulia, 4).

I mean, I think those [severely disturbing intrusive thoughts], I might have more awareness to address those more proactively, or be a little bit more on top of them, but the ones that are pervasive, maybe to the point where it's just, I accept it on some level as part of my baseline and or they're not quite up here at a trauma level. I think those are the ones that I might not necessarily recognize as much, or might default to kind of being a victim of it, or default to "That's just how it is". If I handle it at all, I might handle it poorly, or handle it in a suboptimal way by an avoidance strategy. or ironically handle overwhelm by working more. (Giulia, 4).

yeah, it's not about decomplexifying something that is inherently complex and is probably not going to stop being complex anytime soon. but more about acknowledging that, and what do I do with that, in a way that's productive and healthy for me? (Giulia, 4).

And I'm sure you know, like the cardinal rule of live performance is, things always break. I'm convinced that the trickster energy comes out, almost like to test how badly you're committed. I had a looper short circuit and break on tour last year. A looper I've had for almost 10 years. I had to buy a new looper when I was in LA. So I think just being able to just make room for that or accept that. Acknowledge that, instead of like. It's almost like we try to control things so much, and it saps all the joy and energy. (Giulia, 5).

The more live performance I do, my setup is going to be changing and evolving and upgrading. You have to kind of road test things and accept a certain degree of like, each time I play out with a certain setup, there are going to be pros and cons and things that work and don't work, and that's just how it is. (Giulia, 5).

Usually people will not give you their best when they sense you're irritated. A lot of the time it just actually makes things worse. So I think the fluid thing also can be extended to the tech issues. And then the interpersonal issues, too, like you can hold people accountable. But you're probably not going to coax a good performance out of anybody, the more dysregulated you get. (Giulia, 5).

A little bit of worry can be productive, that keeps you on your toes and taking it seriously. But too much worry, it's like praying for what you don't want. That's not helpful either. I guess I keep coming back to this idea of surrender and softening and trust and recognition that this isn't about me controlling and strong arming. I have to maybe loosen the reins a little bit. (Giulia, 5).

I think that's liberating and helpful and kind of brings a little, it's a little scary, because I think the control is also like the defense, when things feel scary or out of control, maybe, is to tense up more. But that's also gonna lock you up vocally, lock you up creatively, and ensure you have the most miserable, anxious experience possible performing. (Giulia, 5).

Yeah, to me, healthy mindset right now would be managing my stress, which to me means really keeping an eye on the tendency to fixate on what's uncertain, what's wrong. And kind of this illusion of worrying or perseverating gives the illusion of control. (Giulia, 5).

There are certain things that are out of my control. But there are certain things that are in my control, and it's kind of like, I can either feed myself nutritiously the next few days, or I can eat mental junk food. (Giulia, 5).

I feel like it helps somehow to almost see mistakes or challenges or difficulties as sort of something interesting, like something to lean into, rather than like, pull away. (Alice, 2).

I think I've spent a large portion of my life that I've sort of like, almost used, avoiding discomfort as a drive forward. and again, coming up with these like, if I only get there, everything will be solved, and I will feel good. So I think maybe then the value of like actually staying present. maybe this is the time to just stay, don't run away. (Alice, 2).

Yeah, definitely, when performing or I also needed to record a self tape, and having that studio for myself for like an hour, just practicing, I had a lot of fun. Feeling very content. So now, I'm maybe almost starting to feel, or think, you can't escape the bad days. You are gonna have bad days. And it's almost like that discomfort is just part of life. But yeah, there's this kind of thinking trap, being like my career is not exciting enough. So I need to do something radical, oh, we need to change, or we need to find that next cool thing, because we cannot have this feeling. (Alice, 5).

it feels like when these intruders come in like it feels like they need to be met with something bigger, like I was thinking about like joy, but I don't know if, in the moment that's strong enough. (Alice, 5).

[Crushing paper exercise] That's definitely easier. I feel like it almost became a bit like anxiety inducing, to actively be like, go away, go away! Go away! (Alice, 5).

And I think, even like, I mean there. it's not in like the normal, like voice that I hear? You know that inner internal monologue, but it's like deeper, this sense of like. who do you think you are? Yeah, like, who do you think you are like? Try to be an artist, or try to be a substantial human being in any way, shape or form? I feel like shame is driving that bus. I don't know if it's every, if that's all of it. But when I think about being hooked or so, or like stuck, you know shame is the biggest one. like, how dare you? (Matthew, 2).

The 1st thing that came to mind is self-compassion. You know that, like the Kristen Neff, mindful self-compassion stuff of just like being there with yourself. (Matthew, 4).

I love that there's 1 formula, or whatever that she has up on the mindfulness, self-compassion website. I think she calls it a self compassion break. You start with bringing up the feeling, and then it's acknowledging it, like you would for somebody else. And just saying, that's really hard.

That's a difficult feeling to have. you think that your music, and maybe even yourself is not worth, you know, giving time to. That's a really hard feeling. The 3rd step, it's always about common humanity. It's about recognizing that you're not the only person that feels this way. so it's saying something like, there are probably a lot of people that feel like their desires are insignificant. There's probably a lot of other creative people that are also not making anything because of their self-worth or ((what? Oh, my God! I'm going to cry.)) It's like their self-worth is getting in the way of them just expressing themselves. And so you just like, hold that space for that common humanity and for me, whenever I've done that before, it does 2 things. It helps me to cultivate compassion for other people. So it's an empowering kind of thing as well as a thing to help me to feel more valued and validated myself. The 4th step is may I be gentle to myself, may I be kind to myself? I may not change the way that this feels but let me be kind to myself, no matter what. That's always really powerful for me. (Matthew, 4).

I would say that it's purely just like I stay busy, so I can avoid my bad feelings. But I think that tendency is enabled by, you know I'm not great at time management, and that allows me to stay distracted. So I don't have to deal with uncomfortable things. (Matthew, 4).

I think you labeling the priority thing as a cognitive thing, you know, that's an executive function behavior. And so it's like, there's all this other stuff underneath that is like run riot, so that we can't come in and do the prioritizing. Because underneath, it's saying, I don't matter. I don't matter, or my music doesn't matter, or maybe it's both. (Matthew, 4).

people are going to see that I'm needy. I'm gonna have to be vulnerable. And I'm gonna have to let people help me. (Matthew, 4).

Things are starting to fall into place in a really nice way. the timing of all this is really interesting, to have this extra support and perspective taking, as I'm building a new schedule and new habits. I'm just thinking about pacing myself in a different way because of a lot of these values and things that we've highlighted. I really focused this week on the experience of what it's like to be in my body just drives everything so much and honoring that. a lot of the ruminations and hang ups and things that have been getting in my way have to do with how how I feel about myself, or navigating discomfort, or dysfunction, or having hang ups around that that I tell myself. At the end of the day, it is what it is. I have to work with myself and honor myself and not get frustrated, or like I'm in my own way. So I think that that theme has just given a gentleness to how I'm looking at things now, which is really nice. That's also created some space for me to re-engage in my performing life in ways that I haven't in a minute. (Shanna, 6).

there's so many things that add up. It's incredible, and just have to kind of like moment by moment, like, release it. And just okay, I'm gonna let this go. Let this go. Yep, that's obnoxious. Let that go. It's quite a muscle to build, to be able to serve like the degree of chaos and uncertainty, and people being really obnoxious. there's chaos here, but I'm gonna kind of surf that chaos, and let that come out vocally in a way that feels artistic. (Giulia, 6).

I think part of it was just acknowledging that it feels daunting. But I'm just gonna do what I can and see what happens. And that felt pretty good. and then starting with the stuff that feels kind of manageable. (Matthew, 6).

whatever comfort seeking or connection seeking behaviors that we've been mentioning fall on that list of the 4 avoidance strategies. And so it's like they're not showing up at the beginning, like I'm getting the work done. But it sure sounds like all those examples that we've named, you know, doom scrolling, or, like, you know, eating too much candy, or whatever sound like avoidance strategies. So it's not a front-ended avoidance of the task. But maybe it's an avoidance of the emotions that are left over after I had to do the hard thing. I don't know. I'm just sort of speculating. or it's like there were emotions that I didn't have time to deal with, because I had to do the hard thing. And now the hard thing is over, and rather than like ramping down from the hard thing and then dealing with just the stress of the day or whatever the emotions are. Let's just not do that. Let's just carbs and Netflix. Yeah, and then if I'm getting habituated to that, the hard thing just goes out the window because it's like, Well, I'm already tired from the day. Let me just go straight to Carbs and Netflix. I mean, I'm starting to just piece together possibly why I go through these periods where I'm just not doing any real creative work for myself. (Matthew, 6).

I think it's an interesting thing to be aware of and like. I'm sure that it can be useful in a lot of ways. I mean, I think it was useful in the sense of like this practice to be able to feel like I'm having reflections while I'm in the practice. I mean, I think ideally, I would get to a place where I wasn't necessarily thinking those things. But at least you know at least the thoughts. The thoughts were not overwhelmingly negative or sort of overwhelmingly judgmental. You know, they were reflective, which was nice. so maybe this is like one a positive iteration towards a moment of like. in the future, where I can just be present with the action and the thoughts can feel more like and be like. We can have those reflections later. (Dana, 6).

I guess I often feel like that is the experience where it's like. I can't necessarily turn the radio off. But can I get some distance from it, or like allow it to be background noise and not something I'm super tuned into. (Dana, 6).

Contact with the Present Moment

trying to get my practice going and not really having a whole lot of clients come through and had some car expenses last week, and I'm just like things came to a point where I was pretty intensely worried about my like financial stuff. And of course, when that happens, it's like this isn't totally where my head's at, because I'm like worried about more base. You know, Maslow's hierarchy like. how am I gonna pay my bills? So when I'm going there, when you know if that's like where my headspace is in general, it's it's a little harder to be creative... when I'm in that ungrounded headspace. I need more of a cue to remember to be embodied. So that was a reflection. yeah, tend to flourish in that place in abundance. Times of abundance, I easily fall back into practice. and times of scarcity, I kind of detach from it a little bit. (Shanna, 2).

I'm gonna have to sit with that because I think I think I do that a lot. I think I skip ahead to check the box all over in my life... Which says to me, it's like. yeah, that just requires a slowing down and being mindful more often. (Shanna, 2).

I think that's a kind of a conflict between my headspace and my body. It's like my brain likes to be busy and do all the things and be out and about and be active. And that's not always what my body needs. So I'll start to physically feel uncomfortable because I'm not paying attention to my routine and what my body needs. physical feelings really are some of the first things to slow me down. (Shanna, 3).

spending lots of time outside helps me feel grounded alive, healthy, connected. out of my head. (Shanna, 3).

Closing my eyes, kind of turning inward, so that I get less heady about the experience, or the product, or the sound, or diving into the sense experience of it can help me just really center in the experience. (Shanna, 5).

And that's probably having dealt with chronic pain and stuff for most of my life. But that's like the strategy is like starting to feel overwhelmed by that, by sensation or like by discomfort or by tiredness, and just not wanting to deal. And so, yeah, that might be a moment that I, instead of like, for instance, taking a warm shower and then going to practice once I feel better. like I might just scroll on social media or eat junk food. Or you know, yeah, something totally. Just watch TV, or something to distract myself. (Shanna, 4).

I think that in general slowing down for me. so maybe I don't sit down at the piano right away. Maybe I close my eyes and work on humming and moving around, or do some vocalization while sitting on my exercise ball, or something that connects me with my body in a mindful way, so that I'm in that place of not rushing. not skipping ahead. (Shanna, 4).

Unfortunately it takes me away from the moment. You know I'm not present. The last gig I did, I just couldn't wait to leave, even though it was really cool. I have to kind of reassess what I'm able to do and pace myself differently. And somehow do it in a gentle way that doesn't feel like I'm judging myself. It's like, Well, yeah. I'm tired, and I'm checked out, and I kind of don't want to be here. Valid. But also I'm aligning my life to try and afford myself opportunities like this, and then I get there, and I'm not there. (Shanna, 5).

I'm noticing when I get stressed or just feel like there's more on my plate, I get hungrier. I might need different kinds of self-care. I tend towards more like scrolling and kind of like dissociating. And then it's late at night, but I'm like like, last time I'm looking at earrings on Etsy at 1130 at night. It's kinda like my checked out way of handling the stress. It's almost like I'm resisting the responsibility of helping myself downregulate from my day. And instead, I'm checking out on Etsy. I actually didn't buy anything. But I was looking way too long. That's not really the best way for me to be soothing. It's a really cheap way of soothing. I'm like avoiding a more nutritious way

of winding down that would require me being with myself instead, I'm kind of self-soothing, but also checking out and dissociating. So I don't really have to deal with myself or take myself through a down regulating, because I think in a lot of ways I'm kind of always operating on a little bit of fight or flight. Something about taking myself through a wind down feels like too much work in a weird way. Maybe I do need to do nothing. And part of the paralysis is that I'm having a hard time accepting that, or doing like a fruitful nothing. I think scrolling, especially when it's being used to band-aid uncomfortable feelings, is a less fruitful nothing. (Giulia, 3).

I think especially with older material, material that has been rehearsed quite a bit, it can lose its freshness. There are moments where I'll notice myself checking out, and the energy and the fun and the presence and the communication really got lost. And then that does start bringing up questions like, why am I even doing this? I have come to realize that, no, no, I don't have to succumb to that. That is a thing that can happen, but it doesn't mean it's inevitable and there's nothing you can do. It's just sort of like a gravitational pull, and you have to kind of do things so that it doesn't slide down that way. (Giulia, 4).

I'm getting a little too wrapped around the axle with perfection. and like getting all the technological things. I think that can be a real joy killer, too. (Giulia, 5).

I want to be more, What's it, submerged? or present, maybe. that feeling of I can be fully there. and I feel like that sort of goes up and down, obviously like, sometimes more, sometimes less. (Alice, 1).

But when it comes to my own practice, I'll work with the recordings from the lessons, which I think is maybe a good way to just get it done. But at the same time it feels like that kind of kills the curiosity. I mean, because then it's not authentically a matter of what's going on today. And where are we today? But it's like, No, we're using a tape from weeks ago. It maybe numbs the practice in a way. (Alice, 2).

I'm definitely an over-thinker. I'm six steps ahead before even doing anything. (Alice, 2).

I would probably benefit from having a plan for the day and stick to it. Don't think too much. Don't feel too like, don't start checking in with, how are we feeling? How are we? I feel like my self talk is not very positive. So it feels like that's a trap sort of. (Alice, 2).

when I really approach it, as like, this is self care. And this is like all this, like this will be explorative and almost like real. I almost want to call it a mindful practice. Tune in more to like, Okay, what do I really really need? And like very much like, Hmm, how does this feel? And like more in a way, a more analytical approach which I guess would very much benefit my like normal practice. (Alice, 5).

I'll take some conscious breaths and tap into myself, I feel like there maybe there's something there. It's definitely a new way of approaching singing. Kind of a radically new way of

approaching singing. Maybe, it makes sense that there is some attempt to talk myself out of it and being like, Oh, but it takes so much time. (Alice, 5).

As I was walking there in the park, and I was like, well, there's part of having a slower time in life, it feels like there's more, it feels like underneath that there is this more well-rounded, like more of a true artist. (Alice, 5).

Responsive feels like a good word to me. That's definitely when I'm on. That is how I am in a room. (Matthew, 1).

Wide awakeness. Yeah. And so she's her whole big thing was aesthetic education. It's really a sense of being being present in the moment to notice how I'm interacting with some sort of aesthetic experience, whether that's a sunrise, or a poem, or a song, or a painting, or something, and it's like a cultivation of a sense of like really being present, really being awake and aware in the moment. And so that sense of aliveness that I think goes hand in hand with being a dynamic performer. (Matthew, 2).

even though it was at the end of a really long day, only the Tuesday night of an extremely long Marathon week, It was very much a night where I could pause in the moment as well as at the end of the day and go like this is this is really good, like, I feel really aligned, like those quadrants that we looked at, you know. To begin with, like I feel like I'm there. (Matthew, 4).

really honoring my my body, and where it's at, and Recognizing that it does some pretty incredible things, despite the challenges that I have. kind of holding both of those things right? Like knowing that it it really can serve me and be powerful, but that I need to be gentle with it too. (Shanna, 6).

I realized that there's this impulse when things start to get personal, when it's like actually starting to tune into what is going on. I realize that there's almost this impulse of like pulling back and getting quiet, or like it feels scary to vocalize in those moments. But usually that goes away. I haven't fully figured out what it is. But I just thought that was a very interesting kind of realization, almost like my voice can start to feel intimidatingly intimate. It does feel a bit scary and sort of this like, oh, am I really in the mood to go this deep? I would just describe it as, it's very intimate. And it feels very authentic. it's so weird that there's kind of resistance to that. there's this clinging on to keeping that distance. (Alice, 6).

Another time then when I did it, I could really feel this impulse of like, oh, now I really want to sing like this, very joyful, the urge to sort of express myself vocally through singing. It's a very interesting warm up also, because I do feel like on a more objective level, I do feel like my whole body becomes more resonant, and it feels like it's more connected, it does become more of a somatic experience. it's something that I'll definitely wanna keep exploring. (Alice, 6).

that's like some like self care on the physical level. But I think like staying present and checking in with how I'm feeling emotionally like, Has this stopped being fun? Have I crossed the line over into just, you know, drudgery? (Matthew, 5).

last night was a very moderate approach, not an extreme. Lock myself away in a cabin for a week, and do this thing. It was pretty moderate at the beginning, you know, as far as the expectations go. 2 h is not really a lot a long time to write on anything. And I paid attention to my needs. I didn't like try to push through them, you know. I think there's something about what worked last night, it was pretty moderate. nothing really to the extreme. And so maybe that's something to consider is like, you know, maybe this working for 30 min to 2 h is actually optimal. It's not like what you're going to have to do, Matthew, because you're so busy. You're gonna have to just work in 30 min increments. It might actually be what's healthy for me? (Matthew, 6).

wanting to feel like I'm using my talents to the best possible service, and not necessarily just to entertain people. I want to show up with my voice just super present, like, I don't know, surrendering to be like a channel for something greater than I am. (Dana, 2).

I'm sure some of it is like connected to a larger thing around, like ugliness and like, how do I like? How am I looking like? What are what is my face or my body doing if I'm so in it that I'm unaware, you know, like not that I should be like unaware. But but yeah, I think that, you know, like sometimes I like, you know, you see, like a musician playing an instrument. And they're just like they're just like so in it, and they almost look like orgasmic in a way that's like so cool like when I see it. I'm like, Wow! I wish I could be that present with something, but it also, it's also like vulnerable. (Dana, 2).

I went in, and I had the best show of my life like I was. I remember, just looking at the set. And just being like our set is so beautiful. Wow, just like they just really created such a beautiful world for us to perform on. and yeah, I just remember feeling really present, not feeling at all worried about how I looked or how the audience was perceiving me. (Dana, 2).

Oh, when I actually get distracted on stage. I mean, I feel like I do. It might be like something that's going on in my life that I'm thinking about, or if I don't know. Sometimes my mind just wanders. but then there was like there was one moment, I remember, where I came in to a show, and like I was feeling really anxious about something. and one of my castmates was like, you only have to be here right now. Just be here. and he was like, let let Dr. Showbiz heal you up, or something like that. And that felt like true. It felt like I felt better after having done the show than I did when I came in. (Dana, 2).

And sometimes there are days where you're like a little bit like, Okay. here we go. But I still just I still always feel like it's gonna feel better to turn it on than to fully check out. (Dana, 2).

I remember a specific audition in Chicago that I had where, like I was seeing that happening. But I felt just so grounded. And I was just like sitting in a little seat like, and and just sort of like breathing and just being present with myself, and like witnessing what was happening, but

feeling such a healthy boundary with it, like just feeling like, Huh! That's not about me. being able to like, go into the audition with a lot of grounded energy and confidence, and booked it. (Dana, 3).

I need to teach my body. I guess it's a different kind of safety, right? That I'm safe to go there. I'm safe to go to a place of presence when I'm singing and performing that is vulnerable and like can be raw, and also that's beautiful and powerful. And if people don't like it, or if it doesn't always sound pretty or perfect, or whatever, that's their problem. you know, that's not my problem. I'm just doing what I'm doing. I'm just, my body is delivering what it has to give, and that's pretty much the simplest distillation of that right? So I think that if I can be practicing that and give my body chances to learn that truth and really and really feel that in my cells, whether there's an audience or not. (Dana, 3).

I do think that there are moments where I'm just like, You're in your head. You're in your head and like, now I'm now I'm anxious that I'm in my head, and now I don't know what's going on. I don't know what this even looks like from the outside. I'm like, I'm so like, and I'm just going through the motions. (Dana, 3).

these moments of being aware that I wasn't fully present with my scene partner, because I was like, Oh, is the audience gonna laugh at this thing that they usually laugh at or, I want this line to land. I want these things to land the way they've landed in other performances. And then I'm trying really hard to recreate the thing because I want the certain effect. And I'm not just, You know that I've lost sight of the most important thing which is my scene partner. (Dana, 3).

I remember there being an interesting sort of like meshing of the sort of like spiritual presence and awareness of, like what the sort of capabilities and limitations of my voice were in that moment given the level of exhaustion. I would let myself close my eyes sometimes while singing, just to sort of be able to feel like, feel and flow like, where are we, and and what can we do and like? What? What register should I maybe slide into here? I don't know. It was like a different kind of presence. (Dana, 5).

what's floating up right now is that it's coming back to like a self consciousness. I don't know, in the same way that I talked about during performance, what often takes me out of being present is a self-consciousness and a feeling of like, people are judging me. I'm judging me. so maybe I am avoiding. I don't want to feel embarrassed. And I'm self conscious about feeling embarrassed. So I just don't even wanna start. (Dana, 5).

some deep, deep, nourishing, grounding breaths Always help me feel more centered. And I think, like more connected to what's real. (Dana, 6).

Commitment Skills

Self-as-Context

(After doing the second sentence of the “I notice...” exercise) The notice was like the ability to step outside of myself, almost my experience, right? So almost like there were 2 of me, maybe, and like one of me, is like, it's okay. We see that you have this thing, you know. So there's like a sense of compassion that came from being able to step outside of oneself and see the state, kind of acknowledge. (Shanna, 4).

(After doing third sentence) I think that for me, added another layer of impermanence. Having the thought is like another level of removing yourself from it, it's like being reminded that it's a thought. It's fleeting. (Shanna, 4).

(after doing “I notice”) That one felt like it was more objective. You know, less identifying with me being overwhelmed, or that being a state that I'm a victim to, or something that's intertwined with my being, or something I don't have a lot of control over. To feeling more empowered around it, or having a little bit more distance from it. Introducing a sense of like that, I can notice it. I can notice, maybe even when it's on ramping, its fluctuations, because maybe it's not a constant thing. (Giulia, 4).

(after doing “I notice I'm having the thought”) I mean, it adds more distance, even more distance. And to me it also implies that the thinking is also a pattern. The thinking about being overwhelmed. It's not just the overwhelm. Like the feeling about the feeling or the judgment about the feeling that can just perpetuate it. Yeah. So I think that's interesting. (Giulia, 4).

It's almost like part of my idea of like, what does it mean to be a musician? A musician practices. I feel a little bit of an identity crisis. If it's those weeks when it's like, I have not sang this week at all. You cannot rely on it being there. So I guess it's maybe also a kind of a control or trust thing in a way, like something you can lose. Yeah, maybe like something you can lose if you don't keep it up. (Alice, 2).

In the large scheme, when it comes to identity, I very much identify as a singer. But that's the thing that I've been thinking. It feels so off when I'd identify as a singer. But I'm like, why is it still so low on the priority list when it comes to the day to day? (Alice, 2).

I did find it helpful. I remember 1st of all, having this sort of like “Oh, I notice I have the thought that I'm feeling tired or feeling whatever”, and yeah, just really experiencing how that helps to just distance myself from it a bit. And then still feel like I have the, I don't know, almost like autonomy to like, decide what to do. (Alice, 5).

I think it's very much like a self worth thing, almost because it's like very much sort of basing my self-worth on what I do and how I perform in life. I was in Central Park today, and it was so

beautiful. I felt really happy. And then I had this thought of like, what if being able to be in Central Park, sun is shining, feeling good. Almost like, if that could be enough? (Alice, 5).

There are certain, I guess these are beliefs, but I don't think about them. Unhelpful beliefs are like the most powerful right, the ones that we have that we don't think about. We don't recognize. They're operating in the background. Other people are so quick to lock you into what they think that you are. And when you're an artist it's like, who I am might change day to day, year to year. I might embrace all of these things. But you identifying me as the piano player, it's not all of who I am. So there's this. But there's this culture around that's like, Matthew's doing so well now that he's a music teacher. Look at him thriving. And so the people out here are really feeding that part of my identity, and there's less clamoring for Matthew, the singer, songwriter from the outside. And then on the inside, there's this. I'm 45. I've done this career change. It's going well. What am I even thinking that I'm doing? I'm not trying to be a rich and famous superstar, you know. There's not the same drive that I used to have when it was my main goal was to like, be out there and get recognition and get paid more. I wouldn't call it like a like a sense of defeat, because I don't feel defeated. I feel more successful than I ever have, in pretty much every area of my life. But there is a sense of like, what are you even doing? Is this even a productive use of your time? And so I think there is something there to look at. Yeah, just these sort of these beliefs that you can tell. I'm having a hard time even articulating. (Matthew, 1).

If I were reading about someone else or watching someone else on TV, I would be like, Oh, well, it's it's clear that you're taking all these extra gigs and staying busy because you don't know what you're doing with yourself creatively. And so you're keeping yourself distracted. So you don't have to face the reality that you don't know what you're really doing. You've sort of lost your sense of self when it comes to yourself as an artist. And you're also doing it as an opting out strategy, so that you're so busy that you don't have to do it. That's what I would say to somebody else. But either I'm very good at hiding this from myself, or I don't know that it's necessarily true, like, maybe I have like, maybe I'm that good at self-sabotage that I really don't see that I'm doing that. You've lost a sense of who you are as an artist, and so just staying busy to not have to deal with that, you know, sort of emptiness, or whatever confusion, sense of paralysis whatever. It kind of makes too much sense for it not to be right. It's just not connecting on an internal, I'm not feeling some sort of like, Aha! Oh, that's it. But maybe that's important. Maybe I have been keeping up smoke and mirrors for so long, that's why it doesn't feel right. (Matthew, 2).

If I were observing somebody else, I would say well, it doesn't matter what they say. This person is behaving as if they believe that their music is not good and there's no point in putting time into it, because it's going to suck, no matter what. That's how you're acting. (Matthew, 4).

Worrying about if I'm keeping up a good house or not, because that's also a reflection on my worth. If I'm a cluttery person, if I'm a sloppy person, if I'm a dirty person, then I don't deserve to have a creative life or creative fulfillment. If I'm not even taking care of my apartment. I think there is some like getting distracted in self flagellation and perfectionistic things really is a distraction, because it's easier to go "that toilet has to be cleaned" than to sit down and look at

the blinking cursor. also like my personal fitness. It's my diet. It's tons of other things, but you know I do tend to do that. I can fixate on one thing that's going wrong in my life, and that also ends up taking me away from the creative stuff. (Matthew, 4).

in that same spirit of working with myself rather than against myself, or we're starting to go into the woe is me story, you know, feeling feeling sorry for my plight. (Shanna, 6).

I feel like the decision is reflecting on, like who I am as a person. you know, like, am I gonna do the thing that that feels maybe, like more artistically aligned and radical, but is like half as long of a contract and a lower weekly pay and feeling like if I'm pragmatic and choose the thing that's the better contract that I'm like a sellout. But I do also like I do have to be realistic about the fact that I need to work a certain number of weeks to maintain my health insurance and like these things, you know. But I think it's when those when those decision moments come, I do procrastinate on them for as long as I possibly can. And often like, I can't get that clarity because I'm so busy stressing about the decision and what that decision means about who I am as a person. (Dana, 2).

I still was nervous that someone was gonna be like, Could you stop? coming from a very like annoyed, irritated place. and that sort of leading to feelings for me, of humiliation, embarrassment. And you know hurt and pain, the pain of like being considered annoying and irritating. Like I am fundamentally annoying. (Dana, 6).

Values

I actually write down, I try most days like a list of all my values. (Shanna, 1).

I value my singing ability like a musical instrument that needs to be taken care of. And yeah, I guess about valuing that the more I sing, the better I sound, the easier it is when I'm performing to share what I want to share. And also like valuing the depth of the music that I'm performing and wanting to really represent that well. (Shanna, 4).

I really like the practice of reminding myself of like, what's the desired feeling under the value? Like, what's the state of existence that I'm going for? And to get really clear on that. Yeah, I really like that exercise, especially putting words to feelings that maybe you weren't aware of. (Shanna, 5).

To be honest with you. I don't know if I've really thought about it in this granular of terms before, but it feels very needed. And one thing that I've been holding for a while, but especially now that I'm coming up on a year of doing my 1st really big album release and a label tour. All of that is trying to figure out what's my like short term and long term plan. And why am I doing this? When does it feel good? When does it not feel good? What is healthy and realistic? It's almost felt like there are different chapters where I'm forced by life circumstances to look at it from a different angle. So it's not the same throughout, like what it has looked like during grieving. It's really

different when I'm not grieving. Or so. Those are just some preliminary thoughts kind of around what I'm noticing around how I hold values, or even starting to think about values. (Giulia, 1).

what values we center can be flexible, and that there might, depending on the circumstances certain values that got prioritized over others. I'm you know, still trying to move towards healing and empowerment and being selective about who gets a front row seat in my life personally and professionally. I feel like that's moving toward a value of healing and integration and growth, and working my growing edges and becoming more conscious, becoming both more empowered, but also empowering of others. I'm not interested in my empowerment at necessarily the expense or oppression of other people. (Giulia, 3).

I'm again coming back to like some of these values. Then it's like, okay, what setup is really gonna set me up to embody those values or practice them as much as possible? (Giulia, 5).

I feel like in my early twenties that took me pretty far, to just find that sort of discipline of doing, doing, doing, practicing, practicing, practicing. But I feel like now, 10 years later, I feel like there's more of a need for the artist to step in. (Alice, 1).

It almost feels like I hold different values for myself as I hold for others [students]. like courage, curiosity. truth, like all of this generosity, like, I feel like all of that, is something that I can really push on as a coach for people. Coming back to the healing effect it can have on people to step into that sort of space. But I feel like for myself. It can be more like directness. I definitely think about discipline, like mastery. I feel hard, like hard and direct values that I hold for myself than I hold for others. I mean, definitely I feel like that's something I would love to feel. and I feel like, I see the word like lightness. I feel like that's like the feeling I would enter into whatever creative process. If it's singing or songwriting, or acting or dancing. But it definitely feels like it's scarier. (Alice, 1).

it feels like success is measured in a very specific way in our society. and yeah, in a musical theater, or I mean anywhere. But it's like book the next gig, book the next production, instead of really thinking like. But what? What is it? Actually. I want to do? Maybe it's also sort of like being in a new country, being in a new industry and like everything. I feel like that's maybe where I feel pretty lost right now, with sort of like. what's the vision like, what's the idea? (Alice, 1).

I don't know if it's a cultural thing. I can't speak for the rest of Europe, but like at least from Sweden and Finland, I don't feel like we talk very much about values. of course it's like, Be a decent person, and, like, you know, behave. (Alice, 2).

I remember how focused I was during undergrad. The goal was basically just, I want to become the best musical theater performer possible. And I was just thinking, how helpful would it have been to have someone who is like, Okay, But why? Like, why is that important? (Alice, 2).

If I'm being emotionally honest with what I'm doing, I'm likely going to be also in a more empathetic place towards my audience and towards people that I'm collaborating with on stage.

If I am in any way trying to be empathetic with my audience with other people, then that's gonna I feel like that's gonna engender some emotional honesty. (Matthew, 2).

But there is one thought that I've had especially over the last few years, since I've gotten more into this this music educator role that I that I love so much is that, Is it even worth it for me to put more time into myself as an artist? Is anybody even going to care? Is anybody even going to pay attention? Maybe that artistic thing is just on hiatus for a while. Maybe it's dormant. Maybe I've shifted. Maybe my calling is different now. And so I just heard myself just now to you say, like, would anybody care? Would it matter to anybody? And it's like. Am I anybody? Yeah. And now there's some actual feeling coming up. (Matthew, 2).

seeing my body as a divine, sacred spiritual vessel, rather than an expendable resource or mode of transportation, which sounds harsh. because if I look at it that way, and that's the driving energy behind my decision making, of course I'm gonna end up feeling uncomfortable and stuck. (Shanna, 6).

It's a story that moves me, and I feel like it's easy for me to almost want to jump to, I need to find something that resonates with other people and will change the world, kind of story. But it's true, I can't bypass me. (Alice, 6.)

something I think would be really helpful, wanting to look at why I do this and get clarity on why and what it adds to my life. (Giulia, 6).

Well, definitely the spontaneity I was able to plug into last night. For the 1st time in a long time. It felt like plugging into like relaxation, joy, play, fun. release. I'm kind of finding the joy again. joy, health, fun, play, being in the moment, allowing for imperfection and or even embracing imperfection. kind of coming back to almost like a childlike connection to music. (Giulia, 6).

I am noticing the different kinds of rewards, and I did make a point of it on the trip, to notice. Okay, what feels good or what of this am I enjoying? And the opportunities that come along the way through my music. So you never know what effect your music will have on people, and the way it can boomerang back positively. somebody thinks of you. That's a reward. When people come up to me after a performance, and I can tell they're very moved. and that's like one of the biggest highs, because music, especially my music, is like from my soul. So it feels like this very soul level exchange. That's rewarding. (Giulia, 6).

that takes guts to show up authentically, and that kind of high stakes situation where there would be pressure to kind of shut down or conform to his whatever. And it also took a risk to like. I shared a little bit with him about my roots, and it's a little bit of a vulnerable conversation. And so yeah, I mean, like, he can like me or not. But at least I didn't show up blandly. (Giulia, 6).

And so realizing that maybe some of the some of the ways that I've been going about some of this other stuff like finishing writing the musical and stuff. Maybe it's been stuck in an old

paradigm, and that's why that's a part of why, in addition to clearing space in the schedule, that I've had a struggle with getting some traction or momentum. (Matthew, 5).

I feel like I don't do anything just for fun anymore. Just for like free fun, it's like, I hang out with my friends whenever we're doing community organizing projects or volunteering. And it's like you just do something for fun. So I think the value there is. Yeah, I think it's fun, fun and joy, delight. (Matthew, 5).

I think it can possibly offer healing to folks in different ways, whether that's like seeing someone simply seeing someone like them on stage or something specific about the story like you know, I could. I could go on and on about that. And I think that like sometimes it's like some unhealed part of me. or healing in progress. Part of me is like I want. Well, I want to feel valuable, like, and then I do this very like public thing. (Dana, 2).

I do think that there is a part of me that likes the applause and likes the attention, and you know, and I don't know if that's something that I need to feel less shame about, I mean, probably, but also like it's also not the thing. It's not the thing I want to be focusing on. It's not the thing that I want to be. I feel like it's like that would be a nice side effect. But that's not. It's like not the thing that I want to be. I don't want it to be the why. (Dana, 2).

when young people like my performance. It means so much because a I think it feels like my inner child is connected to them in a really deep way. and also because I know that, like the things that matter to them, and that they are seeing, and the way that they're seeing me when I'm on stage is so different from critics and peers. (Dana, 3).

Committed Action

I romanticize the idea of just hearing something and having it fly out of my mouth sounding perfect. And that's just not how things work. It takes refining and refining and finding joy in that process. (Shanna, 1).

Oh, man, like, really. But you're right. It is an opportunity to engage and maybe create something interesting. You know that I want to share and not just like throw into an audition thing is a, well. I had to do this, you know. (Shanna, 2).

It just keeps coming back to me like, maybe this recording is an opportunity. Yes, that it's an opportunity for me to do something different, or to stretch myself, or to make a new, better impression. (Shanna, 3).

I perform really difficult stuff. when I have something coming up, it's almost like the fear of singing in front of people will shock me back into the rhythm of practice again. it's never good to move from that place of fear, like I mean, there's a reality with it. There's a reality that's gonna

keep you from totally making a fool of yourself, but like but then there's anxiety fueling your practice. (Shanna, 2).

What I have really enjoyed is leaning into producing my own concerts. because that eliminates all of that. I can perform Whatever the hell I want, I'm putting together my own repertoire like, great, and the those opportunities have been like super healing for me to not have to be like this is about me trying to stand apart. It's like, no, it's just about me enjoying the music. (Shanna, 2).

Coordinating with other professionals is motivating to me. I'm trying to have it not be like a fear-based thing of like, oh, I'm going to put this on my calendar, so I scare myself into practicing, so I don't sound like shit in front of the person. It's more like I am aligned with my goals and mastering my music, and it's more of an alliance viewpoint than accountability as much. (Shanna, 5).

And for a long time I have also been aware of this weird resistance I have. It sounds weird, but there's some kind of attraction repulsion I have to engaging with things that I'm really interested in. Almost like there's some not completely rational fear that if I engage too much in that, that it's going to further highlight the things about my current life setup that are not working. There's a certain amount of overriding I am doing right now in my life to hold down the fort quite literally. And if I go too far into my passions, then I might struggle to follow through on my responsibilities. I'm sure the writer in me can come up with some kind of clever shorthand like fulfillment resistance, or passion resistance. (Giulia, 3).

So there's like, almost like if I indulge too much in that part of myself. It's gonna make it even more unbearable to be in what I feel like is a city that has been hemorrhaging its soul and creativity for a long time. The life that is calling to me, I can't even completely picture it. I have a little bit of a sense of it. But it's almost like the life that I really need to be living is actually much more adventurous and much more centering of my authenticity. Not that I'm inauthentic now, but they're just all these concessions I've had to make. There's a mismatch happening. There's a lot of energy it takes to stay in things that aren't aligned, but are part of my survival right now. (Giulia, 3).

I even feel like exploring why I do art and music, in the 1st place, like that also needs that bird's eye view. I think it needs to be revisited, and especially as we age, or we have different circumstances pop up so that we're not just doing it out of a sense of pressure or well, I have this degree, so I should be doing this. Otherwise, it just becomes this thing where you're probably going to burn out, or you don't know why you're doing what you're doing, and it doesn't have that rudder, that connection. So I would love to explore that as well. (Giulia, 3).

I think the strongest thing I'm feeling. It's this weird, I don't even know exactly what it is or where it comes from, but there's like some force, some leviathan that wants to pull me into the undertow that says, this sounds horrible to say out loud, like no, we have to have things be hard and unfulfilling. It can't be easy, or fun, or pleasurable, or you can't just expect things to be good. No, we have to go back. (Giulia, 4).

It is important to pay attention to what's working and what's not with getting gear and set up and whatnot, and to reevaluate different things. But I think at this point, getting super fixated on that is gonna move me away from my goals and values, and honestly going to move me away from what I'm really needing this to be. I have a need to perform well, you know, professionally. But I'm also needing to have fun and enjoy being a musician and connect with people and have some release. And if I hyper fixate on this, I think that's going to diminish that, and this is going to be yet one more ring of fire to jump through. (Giulia, 5).

I don't know why it feels like hard work is like a safe haven. it feels more tangible. if someone would just be like Alice, you just need to go in and work hard for 2 hours, you'll be fine. I feel like part of me would be like. Yes, thank you. That's what I want to hear. Maybe the feeling of being stuck in old values that doesn't fully ring true, they're almost like ingrained. And this is how I've always done it. This has worked before, and maybe that's the feeling actually of banging my head against the wall. And like. But this has worked in the past. Why is it not working anymore? And maybe, you know, there's a part of my brain who's like, maybe that's not the way anymore. it's easier to stick to what is known. (Alice, 1).

Joy is a value that I'm sort of struggling with. I can find myself having almost a pragmatic approach, almost like we don't care if you like it like as long as it's good, or it's disciplined. but it feels like that approach makes it very easy to sort of run out of gas. (Alice, 2).

Another part of me is like, well, as long as I don't even reach out, I'm living in that world of the "no" already. My life is not drastically going to change because of it. But yeah, I guess it's the confirmation [that my work isn't good enough]. (Alice, 2).

this has been more of a week when I've been more creative when it comes to songwriting. And then maybe it's just a bit like split focus. in a way, I'm happy about having that inspiration hit to write something. But at the same time it's like, maybe I should be prepping that monologue so the next time the audition comes up. (Alice, 3).

Go all the way back to the start of this session, where it's kind of like. Maybe where it feels like there might be kind of gold in that sort of practice of more approaching it as self care, and what I can tap into through that that might actually have a bigger impact on the whole, because, yeah, it feels like I'm starting to reach a point where, almost like, good God, there needs to be something more grounded. (Alice, 5).

When we're not only getting the dopamine kicks like, what? What does it actually mean? The other things that we're kind of experiencing. I don't know, like now, it gets really good, but kind of like, what does it mean to be human? What does it actually mean? And it feels like, isn't that kind of what art should be exploring, instead of just like, when can I book the next gig? (Alice, 5).

I feel pretty strongly about all the things that I'm involved in. I feel like I'm in a really beautiful position of having too many good things in my life. But it's hard for me to know, of all these wonderful things, if I had to let one or two things go to prioritize this nurturing of my artist self. It's hard for me to know what that would be. (Matthew, 1).

I was gonna use a phrase that I don't want to use anymore. So I sell out my creativity to other things in my life, when I might be happier with myself if I focused it here. Like I made a really beautiful program for our upcoming fall concert, and maybe I could have put some of that time into some of my own music practice instead of making the fall concert program, as you know, picturesque as I've made it. (Matthew, 1).

I have a spiritual practice outside of my music practice. And I feel like that's going really well, it's just the music practice and the spiritual practice are not really talking to each other right now. (Matthew, 1).

Thankfully, I get booked a lot. It's wise to go where the money is if you live in this kind of society that we live in. But what so often happens is I book myself so fully that yes, I am continuing to live a life as a working musician. But I'm not currently putting the energy into booking gigs that are more creative, more artistic, that have more of a sense of collaboration to them. And also, if I'm spending the time working up my own material and my own arrangements of things, that will then give me more of an impetus to book more gigs that have that more artistic, curatorial kind of flavor. (Matthew, 2).

I for so long was a gigging musician that was very much hand to mouth. I mean over a decade. It literally was, just take whatever gigs are paying. I've identified for myself that conceptually I think I still sort of live in that mentality of Just take whatever comes. You don't know when the next gig is going to be. And yet there's sort of like a short sightedness that I think comes from that older way of being, just stay hustling. Just keep going. I think there's also, like a conceptual framework slash set of beliefs in there that might be keeping me stuck in an old paradigm. And that might also be impacting how I'm approaching this. (Matthew, 2).

high intention. meaningful messaging. I mean, everything had a message to it. It wasn't just a bunch of songs. And it's really, I mean and connected to like the core of what I feel like. You know, if I have a mission as a human being, you know, a big core of that is just to like, let people know that, like who you are is okay and that you belong. So I was really connected to like my sense of mission as a person. (Matthew, 2).

I've been so cautious about how busy I am, and how readily I commit to things without really consulting my my inner sense of authority and my own sense of artistry. In the end I said, No. So I kind of kept it open, but I feel like I honored that need to spend a little bit more time with myself as the artist, and not keep committing myself to other things that are great, but they're not aligned with this area that I'm really feeling like I need to focus on. (Matthew, 3).

the sort of main goal that we've been talking about in these sessions like it was a good crash course in what happens when I don't like. Take charge of, you know. Take the reins and go like, no matter what, like. Tuesday night is my date with myself, where I play the piano and maybe write some songs, or whatever whatever that's actually gonna look like. Like. This is what happens when I just let things be dictated by everything else, and don't honor that that time to be creative. (Matthew, 4).

I'll think like I need to be, you know, properly hydrated with 8 h of sleep and of a clear head and 10 pounds lighter or whatever, and then I can sit down and write this song the way it needs to be written. And so I have so many songs that just live as voice memos on my phone or in the cloud, or as like the beginnings of lyrics, either in my notes, app or in a journal, and they just live there forever, because it's like I haven't. I'm not in the space where I can write it. The way that it needs to be written. Maybe being vulnerable with myself, would be like, Okay. this may not be perfect. But I'm gonna give some attention to this song. (Matthew, 4).

committing to the adventure doesn't mean that I can't do it in a way that's sustainable and slow. And sometimes I might need to, especially like with grieving like you just really have to slow down. (Giulia, 6).

I think for those of us who make unconventional music and very authentic music, and who like me, I weave in and out of trained environments, and even trained styles of singing, and then very untrained styles of singing. Intentionally, the road is that much more uncertain and less paved and less understood and riskier. but like that's all part of that commitment to not just the adventure, but to the authenticity. And seeing it's so much more meaningful to see where the authenticity will take me rather than, well, I'm gonna do everything the way that this path has been charted by people before me, and play it safe. You have to take breaks and take good care of yourself, and keep the big picture in mind, because it can be exhausting and scary and uncertain, or the rewards look different. (Giulia, 6).

[committing to putting devices away and not answering messages after 7pm] I saw a notification pop up, and I went to open it, and then it was like, No. what are you doing? And so I just closed it. I didn't look at it. the biggest benefit was that It made me aware of how much energy and time there is available at night. when I don't have a device near me, when I'm not engaged in some sort of work, or scrolling, or or something like that, that, just like there is that space there. And I do have energy. I just sometimes forget, because I just get habituated to just keeping the hamster wheel going. (Matthew, 5).

I blocked off the time and maintained the time, and didn't let the time get filled up with other things, which is a very difficult thing. So there were some musical activities involved in that, for sure. And there was also just some healthy movement and walking around the block. just the fact that I can block off time and go. No, I'm not going to let anything fill this up. Feel like that was a good start, and proving that to myself. So maybe maybe now, maybe that was a baby step that I didn't anticipate needing. But maybe it's what I needed. (Matthew, 5).

Feels like making some progress. and that feels good. making some progress and making some more connection to myself, as I am authentically now. as an artist, as a music, creative or whatever. And that was a part of this shift in the concept of what to do for this birthday show in December. maybe the old concept of the show of like, me being the performer and everybody else being the audience. Maybe that belongs to an old paradigm. Maybe I've grown since then, you know, and we had that session. It was like 2 or 3 sessions ago, where it just hit me like in order for me to move more into alignment with these values, especially those more sort of spiritual values it's going to require me to change my relationship with myself, and even my concept of myself as an artist. And so when I started just like daydreaming about doing this [new concept] It's like I just got so much more filled And excited and vibrant with that idea. (Matthew, 5).

whatever you're telling people you're about, you actually need to like, live it, or you need to like, if the product should the process should reflect the product? And so that's I think, that comes to mind. Because if I'm gonna have this experience of the song. Then I need to approach it like this is going to be fun. There is joy here, there's delight, there's excitement not like Oh, God! I just have to finish this song because I keep telling people I'm writing a musical, and I'm not finishing it. And I don't want to feel bad about myself anymore. Like, that's not how to approach this. (Matthew, 5).

I think there's a tipping point or a or like a cumulative point where you're invested enough, There's enough positive energy and momentum in a project that you can go into, just like, take care of business drudgery mode to get it done. And it's like, Yeah, I'm not having fun. But like, I just gotta write these last 2 pages, or or whatever, and you can. I'm thinking back to grad school. There's so much value placed in something like that. And you know the stakes are pretty high. Looks like I am pulling an all-nighter, and I'm gonna get this done, and I'm gonna be proud of myself when I'm finished, but it's like, Starting that way is not healthy, especially for something like this, especially for me, where I am right now. I could probably develop a healthy relationship with that like, take care of business mode. (Matthew, 5).

There's there are previous iterations of me that go. And now I deserve XY. And Z. I deserve to like binge watch TV for four hours, I deserve to eat all the junk food in the house, or I deserve to order takeout. And it just wasn't that way. I just cooked myself a good little meal. It was just like, perfectly, you know, a really excellent night of self-care where it's like I wasn't overindulgent, but there was a little just enough special treatment to round off the night too. I feel like that night in particular, was just a real win that I can bring to mind in the future. (Matthew, 6).

oh, wow. it's a new paradigm, you know, like, when we did the bullseye thing, and I was like, what this looks like is it's I'm gonna have to have a new paradigm on myself as an artist. And so it's like, instead of I don't have time, so I can't do it. It's not just use the time that you have, but, like these shorter but consistent chunks of work time are actually likely what's going to be more healthy for me. and also may provide, a greater yield than looking for those magical weekends where I can just lock myself up and only work on music. (Matthew, 6).

just because I'm not on a contract doesn't mean I'm not still engaged in my creative practice. I think that there have been times where it felt like, oh, I don't know how to how to stay engaged creatively if I'm not on contract, especially without the accountability of a rehearsal schedule or a production schedule. (Dana, 1).

There is an insecurity in my own abilities that I'm trying to fill by like this affirmation from audience critics, whoever and like that. That is the thing that is ultimately like the big barrier, I think, between me being really in these values. (Dana, 2).

I have a hard time implementing changes and routines sometimes, and like. I think this is a big reason why I have never had a consistent vocal practice outside of when I'm on contract. I feel like I need some amount of community accountability. (Dana, 5).

I'm a big procrastinator, period. I think that is a personal struggle that I have. And I am interested actually in figuring out more what that is about for me. It occurs to me now that yeah, I'm not super clear on why I procrastinate. (Dana, 5).

I'm here and I'm still able to like, really, physically commit to the task at hand. And there are so many thoughts. so many thoughts running through. so many mornings, so many mornings when I wake up, I'm like, how am I already thinking about this many things? (Dana, 6).

what it would feel like to not even have thoughts like this occur, you know, to feel like. oh, yeah, like, I'm just, I'm just gonna go sing in the backyard. because that's a totally normal thing to do when you're a singer who has a backyard, and if somebody hears me and says something, to feel like I could, I could maybe even be surprised by that. It's not like I'm expecting anything, you know, but like to have gone in with a sort of like, Oh, yeah, I'm just here living my life, and just to not have these things that can kind of like psych us out. (Dana, 6).

I definitely think there is an old story that, like there's a specific context in which I'm supposed to be singing. and anything outside of that is inappropriate. obnoxious. out of place. And so I do think there's an old story that comes up like, If I'm not in rehearsal or on stage, and I'm singing, It's gonna be bothersome to somebody. (Dana, 6).

9 Dimensions of Flow

Three Pre-Conditions

Perceived Skill/Challenge Balance

A big one is feeling like I have to perform the absolute, hardest, most difficult thing I can think of that I could possibly attempt. I'm choosing repertoire that's so difficult that the planets have to be

aligned for me to pull it off, and I can sometimes. But when I put audition stuff like that on my list, then I'm really setting myself up with anxiety. So that's a practice that I'm trying to get out of. don't pick the thing that is the hardest or the flashiest. (Shanna, 2).

I don't have to go right into the hard stuff, especially when I'm getting back into things. I will sometimes dive into seriously difficult repertoire when I'm not ready, because I'm bored or feel like I need a shock to my system, right? (Shanna, 4).

Picking repertoire that's way too hard to be singing at an audition, or just not my best thing, you know, that's a great example of setting a goal that's not the right goal. I think that's around people pleasing or being really performative. (Shanna, 5).

Perfectionism, or just focusing too much on the technical aspects of things that will get in the way sometimes. That's also sometimes that's a mindset, and sometimes it's maybe I haven't learned the material well enough to be able to release, and be free for the more participatory empathetic type aspects of the performance. I know that right now most of the gigs that I'm getting, I get the material so quickly and have to learn it in a week, and then put it on. So that is a part of it. Yeah. So whether that's being focused on technical aspects, just because that's what I'm choosing to focus on, or because I don't have the repertoire internalized enough. Yeah, I think that's probably the biggest obstacle. (Matthew, 2).

she likes a big soprano. So basically, she gave me permission to like, do the thing. she wanted that sound, and there were some banging high notes. So I just, you know, blasted them out of the room like, Okay? I love that, when I can just like full force, like big, huge, high notes. (Shanna, 6).

Clear Goals

Today I'm kind of thinking about musical practice, because I have some auditions and performances coming up. So I'm like, Oh. I need to start doing that because I'm not super consistent with those things unless I do have a goal. (Shanna, 1).

But yeah, it felt good. I I did. I got all of the vocal lines in, except for the very final chorus, because I realize I have to make a couple of decisions about that. I got the piano added, for just the bridge. That's what I could. That's what I could accommodate. But yeah, it was really cool this week to just like be like, Okay, I've only got a little bit of time. And I'm just gonna sit down and work. (Matthew, 6).

Clear, Immediate Feedback

For this one self tape that I recorded I was very pleased. Especially the interpretation felt like it was, it felt really good. Also because it's an unlisted Youtube video. I can see that they've watched it like 10 times. So that I mean is usually a good sign. But that felt very in tune and sort

of like I could tap into something. Maybe it was a coincidence. Or maybe it was like, Yeah, it's actually something that is thanks to the practice. (Alice, 5).

I think it was really helpful to have broken things down into steps with you, like with another person present. But then also to have the accountability of like, I'm going to have to give a report on this on Friday, and so I'm going to have to do it at some point. Yeah, I was like, I gotta do it. So yeah, having that extra layer of accountability really helped. So I think in the future. Both of those measures, I want to make sure that those are in place. (Matthew, 6).

Ritual / Routine – possible other precursor

Well, again, I think it's like having it be part of a routine and almost like ritual. it's always cold down there. So I like to turn on the heater and light a candle and turn on the lights that need to be on, and if I have taken a shower and I am warm, and then I turn on the heater. making myself warm like a warm cup of something. When I sing, I always like to make a tea or something. (Shanna, 4).

Six Experiential Characteristics

Focused Concentration

singing. Certainly it feels so connected and expressive, and my mind can't do something else like it's very, it's very. Everything's working together. (Shanna, 1).

slowing down what I'm doing, and really listening and refining and trying to connect with what the composer was trying to evoke in this moment. So getting really just the minutiae of it. and oftentimes there's just a real slowing down and like hyper focus. That seems to help me tap into that. (Shanna, 4).

for the most part it was just moving through and being like, you know, this is amazing. Things are working out like I did feel very focused and like things were just kind of flowing. And even when there were some upsets, you know, some technical problems or something like that. (Matthew, 4).

I do realize how much quicker you can kind of align your mind. It doesn't take 5 min for the monkey mind to quiet down. I've been taking more regular tap classes, and there as well I had a moment when I was like, Hey, I can actually start relaxing my foot. It's not like I'm cramped and panicked. I've been aware of those small sort of glimpses of, Hey, we're actually making some progress. body and mind knowing where to go and what to do. (Alice, 6).

I mean focus can yield really great material. I'm always blown away even if I have a small chunk of time, showing up. Interesting things, and ideas will come up even in small chunks of time that would not otherwise have a chance to come through. If I didn't give that time, or if I felt like,

Well, I don't have 3 hours I only have a half an hour. What's that worth? Actually, it can be worth a lot. So often really good material comes out of a place of focus. My body of work comes out of focus. the other thing that comes to mind from focus is even like in the space of thinking about. What do I even want from this? Where where is this train heading. that helps me make decisions about who I connect with? Or do I go with this label again or another, one or. This helps me be an intentional business person about this, too. (Giulia, 6).

I've had this attitude of like, I'm just gonna work on music all Thanksgiving break, and the 1st 2 days at least I can remember both years just walking around my apartment listlessly going. What am I going to do? What am I going to do? And just almost to the level of existential crisis like this is my time to write, and I can't even like focus my mind. It's like, Yeah, if I'm already in the flow of doing these little like 30 min sessions, however often, during the week. Then, yeah, when Thanksgiving break rolls around, it's like cool. I got 6 hours, I mean, there might be. Who knows? (Matthew, 6).

Intrinsic Reward

I love performing, and I'm obsessed, and would just love to do more of it. So I'm always like Jonesing for the next like, what's the next thing? (Shanna, 1).

Probably only in the last couple years have I really practiced as much as I should. I'm still working on doing and making time for that, and not being bored with it, and really working on my musicality. (Shanna, 2).

the other time that I practice is, if I'm feeling extra good, and just like it comes to me. I'm like, oh, I just heard this song on the radio, and I just sang a little bit. That sounded good. And gosh! I should just go sing and work on my stuff right now. I've got the time, you know, it's like spontaneous motivation from wherever. Often I am waiting for spontaneous motivation for execution. (Shanna, 3).

Oh, I mean, I want to be good at something right away like, certainly I want to like hearing something that's exciting, and then wanting to duplicate it. so like, I guess, just being okay with the process and you know, just enjoying the process. (Shanna, 4).

I don't know what exactly brought me to that. But I would love to recapture that sense of being in the zone. Even though I'm very much an improviser, I think often on stage, unless it's explicitly an improvisation with another artist, usually I try to play it safe a little bit. But then, again, that can contribute to that sense of rigidity, or like, I'm not quite enjoying myself as much as I could. So I would love to recapture that sense of complete flow, and that sense of joy, and like riding that wave in the moment, and kind of feeding off the audience's energy, taking people into a magical space. I want it to be magical and to open doors for me. You know the best of making music for me is where you feel like you've shared a piece of your soul with the audience, and it's a mutually healing cathartic experience. (Giulia, 5).

Of course there's always going to be bullshit on a tour, and people who are cranky, or, you know, lugging crap around New York City. There's gonna be that. But I think even because of that, it's really important to find where the joy and the connection are. (Giulia, 5).

I've always loved taking voice lessons. but I think it's maybe also about cultivating some sort of independence, because it feels like I'm almost waiting around for a teacher to tell me what to do. Now for this past few years, even going to really good teachers, they give advice or a cue, or whatever that I'm kind of like. Oh, yeah, I know that. It's not these revelations in the same way. And then I can almost feel like at least giving it a try solving things on my own. (Alice, 2).

Yeah, keeping to your own deadlines or keeping to, you know, Alice's plan for us to sit down and write, is so much harder. (Alice, 3).

auditions, booking gigs, kind of like what was going on last week that I felt like, oh, it's so much great things are going on. It really feels like I can really get sucked into this like high of it. But it feels like also then, I guess that kind of the crash, or it's almost like there's a quite big crash. (Alice, 5).

being able to be a full time artist, playing these roles in these theater productions, and having gigs and all of these different things going on. But it's almost as if, like I get bored, like it's not enough popcorn popping like we're not getting like the next big hit of I don't know. Is it dopamine, or something. constantly like there needs to be the next exciting thing. (Alice, 5).

It's almost like I live more for the high of booking a gig than actually doing it. There's a kick booking it. And of course it's fun. But it's almost like I would say that yeah booking it is almost more fun than actually doing now, when I really think about it, which feels very wrong to say it. (Alice, 5).

What I've been thinking about during this week is kind of like, how to be rooted into something more, I almost want to say, wholesome or like something that feels more sustainable and less, maybe anxiety driven. In an industry where it's all auditions, or applying for grants or booking gigs. It feels like to a certain extent, your profession and career is partially dependent on that external validation. (Alice, 5).

And it was like, Oh, I'm only giving and I'm not receiving. There's more that could be happening here with these people that are sitting around at the piano bar that I'm not accessing, because I'm just focusing on keeping the music going. And that shifted things in a major way. I mean, it was an overnight shift in the way that I occupy the space when I'm performing most of the time. (Matthew, 2).

It would require a reorienting, a repositioning. Instead of being compelled by and driven by external factors of necessity, it would be much more of a standing in oneself. It would mean not just choosing the performances, but also stepping onto the stage from that kind of very centered place. (Matthew, 2).

There's this thought of like, if I'm engaged creatively and even more so if I'm engaged creatively in a way that feels like it's of service to other people in some way, then it provides this really deep sense of fulfillment and purpose. But I feel like that was a healthy thing for me, because, like just being able to say like, I can do this without even needing to get some sense of reward or payoff, like maybe just doing it is the thing. (Matthew, 3).

When I was younger, I did have these experiences of just bliss and devotion. And when I sing, I'm just merging with whatever the divine is. And I think that that experience of singing Thursday night was really good for me, because it was this very connecting spiritual kind of moment for everybody that was in the room. They were honoring the fact that they had built community that night, and they were doing it through song, and I got to be the instrument that led that. And so that is a very spiritually transcendent thing. But the transcendent experience for me was not elation and bliss and feeling like I'm one with the cosmos. It's actually transcending my need to be right, to be perfect, to know what I'm doing, to feel like I have a sense of mastery to get some sort of immediate personal gratification for it. The transcendence happened. It was just. I sort of transcended something different, if that makes any sense. (Matthew, 3).

The feeling of it. It's like pure joy and excitement, and just such a charge, you know. It's like, like no other feeling, singing like that. I almost liken it to sprinting. And the feeling you get. You know, it's kind of an adrenaline rush. I'm a pretty athletic singer. So I'm truly using my whole body. And the feeling of that, like my whole body just vibrating and being engaged, and making this joyful sound in community, with all these other people around me who are doing the same thing. It's just powerful. (Shanna, 6).

it's almost like there's this childlike kind of joy, sort of before we all got our professional musician educations and became cynical and all of that. I feel like I've experienced the same kind of feeling being a teenager and coming out of a very good singing class. Kind of that endorphin rush. almost like finding a way back to that. finding a way back to singing. That isn't only driven by, oh, I just need to get this song done, or whatever. (Alice, 6).

when I sit and think about actually like realizing that song, you know, 1st just seeing it on the score, and, you know, hitting playback and hearing all those parts together, instead of just hearing them in my head, which I have that kind of holistic brain where I can hear the whole orchestra in my head. but you know it's just a different thing. Whenever it's actually out. you know you hear it coming back to you? And then the idea that I could take the piano and vocal score, and hand it over to some of my friends and say like, Hey, will you work this up with me? Just makes me feel really. I don't know. Happy and excited. It taps me into the kind of energy that I feel the song has. (Matthew, 5).

I know that that's a lifelong experience for me, just like the let down of the end of a creative endeavor. And I think that probably being a 44 year old creative person, you know, there's the natural like, let down withdrawal, dopamine, reset thing that's happening. But then it also gets chained to other stuff. One of my narratives is like, finishing the creative endeavor that was so

successful, and then experiencing that like ramp down. Let down thing dopamine, you know, getting recalibrated, whatever. But then it's like I'm feeling down. I'm here by myself experiencing this down thing. Oh, I'm also lonely. And then so it sort of turns into other things, and then all of that becomes too much to handle. And so it's like carbs and Netflix, or load up a shopping queue or any number of things like, you know, these are. These are less harmful negative coping strategies. But but yeah, I think that there's there's something about the creative process that can kind of set me up for wanting to avoid the negative emotions. Because I forget. I have to be reminded that like, Oh, yeah, this sinking feeling is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, much of the time. It's just you coming back to your baseline. (Matthew, 6).

Merging of Action and Awareness

one of the biggest things for me is embodiment. because to me, that's like the mind working in unison with the body, with the energy, with the environment, with, you know, that's like that interconnectedness. Just kind of that flow. (Shanna, 1).

I think it was actually, during that run through on Monday, where I was able to become much more present and fluid in my body, and it really informed the music. so out of that came the idea of goals, of fluidity and presence being aware of my body. Not just technically. especially as singers. We're taught all these things, but that can also get so consuming. so really, just being aware of my body in other ways. and then kind of like what I did on Monday in my rehearsal, resetting my body throughout the performance, which can even look like this, or moving my hips or knees, staying loose in the joints. working with certain images, even like an image of a willow tree, kind of like not being too rigid. (Giulia, 5).

But when I felt almost this feeling of pushing up against a door, like there's something that needs to open. That is not a matter of technical practice or stuff like that. It's something sort of beyond that. I feel like there's a mindfulness there. But I also feel like there's a sort of self expression. And I guess, like, self love in a way, it's like singing that goes beyond pleasing someone else. (Alice, 4).

Let's call it vocal meditation. I feel like every time I do that, towards the end of it I do get kind of emotional from it. I remember, towards the end of it, like make a sound that expresses the here and now. I had this little motif. I can't remember it now. Oh, my God like this is something I'm expressing with my voice that is so uniquely, authentically, me. That is expressing what I'm experiencing or feeling in a way that maybe I might not even be able to put to words. Yeah, as much as it's a cool experience, I guess it's also that resistance almost of like, oh, now we need to tap into something deeper, it's easier to just stick with the scales kind of and the vocal exercises that we know. (Alice, 5).

I would sit down at the keyboard. I would discern, what am I feeling right now? Like what? What like? I like feelings, chart kind of stuff. and then I would play that feeling. and then I would notice if there was a change, and then I would record that I recorded audio of the piano playing, and

then I would record if there was any sort of change in a little note. And so that was that was really wonderful. And that really, that literally was like connecting that spiritual and creative thing. For me, it was a wonderful process. (Matthew, 2).

I also have had this experience and had it since college, probably, where I feel like, as soon as I'm approaching that really just super present, vulnerable, open space, like there's some other thing that's like. No, no, come back. I don't know about that, you know. Like it's like some sort of like protective something that that sort of comes in and pulls me back out of it. It's like this excited thing where I'm just like it's happening. And now I'm aware that it's happening. So now, I'm not in it anymore, you know. And yeah, I just feel like there's always a sort of like multiple consciousness thing happening. And like on the one hand, as an actor, I think, especially, or someone who's doing stage shows that have like moving set pieces and other bodies, you know, versus like a solo concert or something. There's just so much to be aware of for safety. I think my professors used to call like 10% actor awareness where you are like. Don't let yourself get so lost that you're unaware of what your body might be doing, or where you are in space. So I don't know if there's some worry about that that pulls me back. I think that. So I'm sure that some of it is just like the vulnerability of being in that space. (Dana, 2).

Sense of Control

There's this element, just like improvisation of like you set the sacred space. But there's also a trust like an invitation and a trust and flow, and the most important thing is that you create the foundation that allows that to happen. And then it's not just you strong arming or trying to control or make a spiritual experience happen. It's more something you set the space for and invite. There's this Greek word temenos. I don't know if you've heard that word. The idea is like creating a sacred space, the container, and then you just once that's there like you. You trust the alchemy is going to happen. And it's all about allowing and inviting and not forcing or controlling. So maybe like creating temenos. (Giulia, 3).

I had a rehearsal a couple days ago, where I just I don't know exactly even what it was, but I just felt really in the moment, and had a lot of creativity and ideas in the moment, and was able to just very organically capture that sense of freshness. And there's a certain flow because I'm a looper artist, and I do live mixing. So I'm multitasking. And there was a flow, even the way I was twisting knobs. I was just in the Zone. And that's really where it's magical, because the looping and the mixing, it's very much an art. It's not a thinky, jerky thing. It's actually part of the whole creative process, and what makes a live performance exciting and dynamic, and I was in the Zone. (Giulia, 5).

I remember at some point just the feeling of being able to go into an audition and feeling like there's not a note that I have to be worried about. (Alice, 2).

[why is it important to be consistent] I feel like it becomes more effortless, like, almost like you don't have to think about it. If it's like 10am, my singing practice starts. That's just how it is, you

don't question it. You don't think too much about it. And then, of course, like it feels like it's more likely to see improvement. If there's consistency. (Alice, 3).

I'm thinking about both playing and singing, that I am connected to my instrument in a way that feels creative rather than mechanical. That there's a sense of mastery to what I'm doing. That I'm not having to force myself to concentrate. But more that I'm just aware, you know, sort of presence, not concentration, even though that's a must when tension accumulates that I'm effectively letting it go. And this is true, whether I'm singing or I'm playing. The idea of playing with complete ease is a really nice idea. (Matthew, 1).

I've done effective work on the front end to not just warm up, but relax into what I'm doing that I'm staying hydrated, that I'm not just forcing myself to drill passages over and over and over and over again, but that I'm allowing myself times to break, so that my body can return to a more at ease place, and then, even in the moment, just learning how to cast off off tension. (Matthew, 1).

It's almost like coming into alignment with values. And I'm not just saying this because it's our last session. But it's like, because I realized that it's like, it's this like burst of joy. It feels effortless. It's very clearly that I'm exploring my voice in a way that is just for me and not for someone else's enjoyment. like stars aligned, kind of that feeling. (Alice, 6).

I think that like it feels hard to want to act on impulse. or, like, you know, try a new choice, try something if it seems like the container, for the whole creative process didn't really allow for that. (Dana, 2).

Lack of Self-Consciousness

this gets into kind of the spiritual realm. I had a friend come to one of my concerts, and he said, "you are a channel of the divine". I was like Whoa! That's really cool. But it can feel like that. It can feel like just this, yeah, like divine or celestial, or some kind of otherworldly energy being cultivated. (Shanna, 3).

I think a lot of people wrestle like, how does that integrate into daily life? like spirituality and mysticism and creativity? How do those integrate into daily life? Because sometimes those experiences are extraordinary and intense or consuming. (Giulia, 3).

I don't remember, and my guess is I'm not remembering, because I probably was not thinking much, and that's often when I am in the flow state. That's often my most powerful space when I'm improvising. It's happened in some of these rehearsals where I'll be in that flow space. I'll come up with something. And then I record it, because it's just amazing. And then I go back and try to recapture what I did. And it's hard, because there's a certain kind of magic that happens when you're in that flow. And anytime you try to recreate it, it's not quite the same. So for me,

the flow is actually the non-thinking. It's trusting. The word that came to me as I was listening to you is like softening, another word in addition to fluidity, softening. (Giulia, 5).

I think improvisers are mystics. And it's really channeling. And it's like plugging into something, because often the things that I, I call it downloading, are beyond my level of technical ability. Like, there's something else I'm plugging into. So if I can maybe let go of a little bit of control and effort and worry, and trust that the music is always there. I'm just the transmitter. (Giulia, 5).

I think there's some sort of fear when I'm acting through a song and interpreting something. I almost feel like I'm dipping my toes, but I'm not diving into it. I had one teacher who was like, I get this feeling that maybe there's so much emotion in you that it's a bit scary to really open up and dive in. So I can definitely feel myself sort of holding back. But once on stage, it's easier to open up. Maybe it's a self-awareness thing that sort of gets in the way. Something that also feels like it's a door that is not opening. And it's a bit like finding the key. (Alice, 1).

It almost gets a bit spiritual, I feel like, when talking about singing and self-care. It feels like it's a very somatic experience when it moves from just I don't know a technical craft or a performance, to starting to align sort of like your physical body, your heart and emotions. And like something way way deeper. (Alice, 4).

I guess that when the vulnerability kicks in, it feels like self-consciousness and perfection, those just enter, and the inner critic is very, very loud. (Alice, 4).

The idea of creative expression as devotion, as giving up my, you know my creative best to something bigger, you know, just even just the universe. That's something that means a lot to me. I don't know that that's ever found its way back into my life as a regular thing. Sometimes it just happens, sometimes I'm just in the moment in one of those sort of flow moments. And I do really feel like, you know, I'm part of something bigger. (Matthew, 1).

I love singing, you know, practicing, rehearsing, but doing that in public. Sure, there's the audience. But I think even more. It's my musicians around me whether it's instrumentalists or singers that are just. It makes everything so electric. (Shanna, 6).

That's definitely a high. it feels spiritual. It feels kind of awe inspiring. it feels powerful, it's invigorating, it's life giving, it's rewarding. It's exciting, and definitely the material that has that kind of magical quality to it. Other people respond to it. If there's something about it that, if I feel it intensely, most likely other people are going to as well. I've definitely noticed that. (Giulia, 6).

I think like that is the thing that pulls me out the most is like, do they like it? Do they like me, you know, like that sort of thing. Do they think I'm talented? Do they think that? Is there somebody out there who thinks that they should have been in this role and not me, you know, like I feel like a lot of those anxieties can creep in, especially just in my industry and in the way I was trained and like. are there critics? Are there award judges? Are there, you know, any of these people in

the audience? I try really hard not to think about that, and it's still like a work in progress to divorce. (Dana, 2).

something that I think has felt really clear in the last week and in having those moments of like prayer and practice, is like knowing what it feels like in my body to be doing it. not for the external validation or not impressing some professors who haven't even seen my work in over 10 years, you know, like. to just be able to let that go and feel what it feels like. That is because, yeah, when we are not under a gaze, we are very different, and we are. We are more ourselves. I think that some of us in various ways have gotten really good at being able to bring that part of us out into the open without having this armor. (Dana, 3).

Practicing. Yeah. Practicing for surrender, for presence, for pleasure. And for awe, maybe as well. (Dana, 3).

Distortion of Temporal Experience

[songwriting] I do feel like it's an activity where it's definitely this experience of like, time can disappear. and you're just in it. (Alice, 6).

The 30 or 40 min went by, and I kind of stood up and stretched, and I was like, no, I want to keep going. So I ended up working on this close to 2 hours. But it was really nice, like I I forget how quickly I can kind of get into the flow now, when I actually sit down to do it. (Matthew, 6).

sometimes when you get off stage, and you kind of don't remember what happened like it kind of feels like you blacked out because maybe you were just like so in the scene that like, then when you get off stage, and it's like you literally cross this threshold where your body is like. Oh, and I don't have to be in character anymore. Right like I am outside of the gaze of the audience. And so then and then it sort of hits them that they're like. do I actually have a like. Do I have a memory in this moment of like what I just did on stage like which you know is interesting. I I can understand how. Maybe that's like that's a satisfying feeling of like, oh, I was so in it, you know. and I'm also, I don't know. I'm thinking about like other, you know, drug induced blackouts, and how those don't feel good, because then you like Miss, out on the experience, you know. (Dana, 6).

Flow Properties Unique to Creative Arts

Exploration without Clear Goals or Feedback

the last album got some really good reviews and some noteworthy people paid attention which is awesome, but it's also I think it would feel incongruent to be like, okay, I found this thing that

people like. So I'm just gonna keep doing that. And like each project, it really has to be from the depths. I can't replicate where I was at 5 years ago. I'm a different person. I've been through some different things, and I for the art to be transformative and rewarding and vital. It has to reflect authentically what's happening now? (Giulia, 1).

Now that I'm in my mid forties, I have a deeper sense of my mortality, and time is of the essence. I have to like, really mean it and be more intentional. Not that there isn't room to explore anymore, but there really is that feeling of like, it's not a dress rehearsal anymore. And I've realized and I've had literally mystical experiences with music that drag me back, like this is not about your ego. Actually, this is your spiritual practice. This is actually a really integral part of your spirituality, and who you are. And if you're not honoring that, you're not going to feel right. (Giulia, 1).

It's really more about love, and kind of needs things to not be so serious and so fraught. And needs things to feel more exploratory. And in the moment. (Giulia, 5).

I feel like I've very much been relying on what my teachers have given me. Whereas now it's like, Yeah, I've maybe seen someone do something. And I'm kind of like creating my own exercise around it. (Alice, 6).

his arrangement was so much fun that I listened to it, and I sat down on my piano, and I was poking it out, and I, for some reason felt compelled to video myself. And then I watched, and I was like smiling, and it just felt so freeing to play this beloved, catchy song, and have 0 interest or desire to sound good or perfect, and more just for the joy of it in a really playful way. Afterward I listened to a few songs, and did like some dancing in my living room, which is how I used to be like that a few years ago. So some little spark was able to disrupt the pattern I mentioned earlier. (Giulia, 6).

Yeah, when I'm in the zone, it's definitely a place to focus energy and an outlet. I would say, up until a couple years ago. you know, and in the past years I've like had a death in the family. I've had a layoff. There have been some big changes, and I think some of my like depression. I hate that word. But like, yeah, like that lower motivation, less interest in things, that's definitely affected me creatively, and listening to a silly song and playing it on the piano, and that freeing up my playfulness and listening to some goofy music and dancing was so liberatory because it's like the. It's also the homeostatic balancing thing. After prepping and touring. It's just like the complete antithesis of like disciplinary art. It's just like being completely playful and goofy. Music is so good for that, because it just opens all of that up. And I think because of the state I've been in the past few years. There was something about like, I'm feeling the pressure to get back into the focus. But I'm not really allowing myself. or unwinding enough to be able to plug into that more like free, playful space that, it can serve the function of priming the pump to do more focused serious work, or it can just be a way to laugh steam at the end of the day that has nothing to do with anything. (Giulia, 6).

I felt like a rhythm coming through. And then I felt the sound coming through. And so, yeah. And so I I hit record on my little device, you know, on my little whatever voice, note, device, and app. and just sort of saying what came through. (Dana, 3).

we talked as a group about like, how can this show up in our Yoga practice as well as sort of in life in general. And where are we all trying to Maybe be more playful? so much is born of play like so much. I mean, I feel like so many inventions, you know things that we sort of take for granted, were a product of play, of divine play, of people kind of like fucking around and finding out. (Dana, 6).

Potential to Surprise Oneself

[provocativeness and risk-taking] I think that's an organic part of who I am. That's kind of part of the authenticity. I think David Bowie has that quote about like, you always have to be just a little out of your depth. and you can't play to the peanut gallery. That's kind of what makes it feel exciting and fresh to me, when I'm surprising myself. I'm surprising other people. I'm taking us all out of our comfort zone. (Giulia, 1).

One thing that I've done that actually comes from my theater background that can be really helpful, especially when you get closer to performing or recording is allowing yourself a run through where you give yourself complete permission to do whatever, and be completely wild. You give yourself permission to do bad acting, and doing that kind of run through frees people up a lot creatively, and often ideas will come out of it that you wouldn't normally get when you're in that kind of over rehearsed rut, or you're trying to be good rut, that can wind up being so confining creatively. I did a music rehearsal like that before recording with somebody a few years ago. And there were definitely ideas, legit ideas that came out of it that I used in the recording. There's that great saying by Clarisa Pinkola Estes, that in the creative process you have to be willing to let yourself stand on top of a jackass, and occasionally rubies will spill out of your mouth. You have to just kind of be willing to make an ass of yourself. And that's actually when you're open to channel. (Giulia, 4).

I have had a couple of songs that have just like come out of me like a download, and it's like, Well, I don't know where that came from, but it's great, and those happen to be the songs that are the most requested when I play. But you know I mean, nobody expects that that's going to happen every time. (Matthew, 4).

But I was like this performance. I was not thinking about any of that I was not thinking about any of that, and like was not at all worried about how I was coming off. I think I was just really present with my castmates and with the story, and I was like improvising musically, not like, not like out of time or anything like that. But I was just like doing new riffs and things that I had never done before. (Dana, 2).

Rapid Meaning-Making

With rehearsing songs, especially songs that are older, you can lose the emotional connection or the meaning. Things that I composed by improvising, in the moment it was very exciting. But then, like, okay, it's this recording now. And so I do different things creatively to make each performance feel fresh. But I also think that there's a way that my spirituality is wanting and needing to become much more integrated and explicit, especially with live performance. (Giulia, 1).

One thing that I do in live performances is, there's always some element of newness or reinterpretation that I try to do to keep it fresh. That keeps it fun and interesting. (Giulia, 3).

And so I had a moment in a recent rehearsal, where it was very subtle, but I just kind of recentered myself in my body, and I actually moved from my solar plexus. I try to intentionally give myself permission with new performances, to reinvent songs, and to allow them to take on a new meaning. Some of these I wrote a few years ago, and I'm in a different place right now. Both technically and emotionally, and meaning wise. I will allow reinterpretation. (Giulia, 4).

Billie Holiday, you know, it's been said about her that she never sang a song the same way twice, and I'd like that to be said of me, too. Not that I'm just doing something new just to be unique. But just that it's an alive, dynamic, creative thing. (Matthew, 1).

Guess it's like bouncing ideas and just like bouncing material, It's almost this feeling of like you don't need to figure everything out on your own. Staying connected to the subject feels important. (Alice, 6).

Collaborative Flow

There was just a sense of flow. and like, almost like an intuitive connection between us both. and that person seemed genuinely excited and interested, which also makes all the difference as opposed to when somebody is like you can tell, they're a little checked out, or or suddenly it becomes a paying gig, and then they somehow they start checking out once it's a paid gig. But this particular person didn't like. They. They seemed engaged and genuinely interested in the material. We had an intuitive connection. They were adding a lot to it, and a lot of their choices just enhanced what was happening. And made it better. Actually, I've had 2 collaborations like that. The negotiation seemed easeful. They didn't seem to resent the agreement. They seemed happy to be a part of the project, and when it was completed I could tell that they felt like, like it checked all their boxes, too. (Giulia, 2).

But I know at times I mean since my husband is also a singer, that there's been times when I've been practicing, and we can sort of get through it together. So almost like in that case, like, almost like inviting him in like, he's very supportive. But yeah, the vulnerability part is hard.

Because, yeah, I feel like it's again. It's like this, icky feeling of just like, Okay, stop, stop everything. (Alice, 4).

the woman who's on my label, who I performed with, who hosted me at her place, and the next morning after our show, we just had coffee at her place, and just talked for a good 2 h, and it was super nourishing. and meeting some of her artist friends, we went out for dinner after the show, and hearing the conversations that gave me vitamins that I just probably am not quite getting enough of right now. Here in the bay, as deeply and as regularly as I really need. It was just a good reminder of how important that is, and that kind of kinship and community and inspiration. Because we can't just do this all on our own. We're not islands. (Giulia, 6).

like an ensemble of people that are just like, really locked, locked in with each other like. it's yeah. I feel like That to me is like, where the magic happens. (Dana, 5).

Excerpts from Exit Interview Transcripts

Shanna

I think my headspace as a performer, and the journey of that has certainly been interesting, and not one rooted in practice. When I was young, and we did talk about that like piano lessons, and being forced to do the thing and the like negative reinforcement. but always like getting a lot of attention for my singing and kind of like overly relying on that for my confidence. And so when that went away, it was like, Where's my confidence? So what I really appreciated about this process is it kind of stripped everything away and helped you really ground and like, what is it about being a musician? Yeah, the value sort, right? Like, really, really honing in on that and it's just it's kind of like it. It brings you back to reality a little bit and bases things less on idealized goals or stuff that feels a little pie in the sky or out of reach like, but it grounds it in the here and now, and The resources you have to work with. so I really appreciated noticing some of those patterns of thinking. And the fact that, you know, like I've shared with you, that truly is, when I feel the most connected to my being, my power, my all of that. I found it really transformative and validating and really grounding.

the process and the order of it was really valuable. I definitely like the you know how it was presented the sequencing of it. Because it's kind of an unraveling. You have to do one thing before the other really to get a full understanding. I mean, I feel like I had so many Aha! Moments. One of the most powerful ones, though, is the diffusion exercise. and actually, like the whole waterfall standing under the waterfall standing outside of the waterfall, and that it's it's not a tornado. It's not a fire hose. It's like it's a what you know, and that image for me needed to match the intensity I was feeling for it to be useful.

I like the kind of degrees of separation. I like that because it's like the minutia of the delivery of it gives you an added level of separation and ability to observe. I think that's such a good learning as the more the more you understand something, or can notice it, or label it, the more power it gives you to be an observer in the moment for a second and not let it control you. So I find that really powerful, especially for like rumination, if you have a you know, an unhelpful thought. So

I like the hooked versus unhooked the visual, that's just a nice way of organizing. And see, like what are my patterns. Now that I've identified some of these things, how am I gonna put it into place? How am I gonna make this work?

I did notice sometimes that some of the patterns that were unearthed were very deeply rooted and brought up some emotions that maybe felt a little intense for a coaching session, so that I just kind of recognize. I just remind myself, like this isn't therapy. But stuff is gonna you know, it's it's a similar. There are similarities in the 2 processes. So I don't know why I mentioned that other than just knowing that the process can bring about some real sensitive things for folks.

I guess the hooked versus unhooked terminology doesn't totally resonate with me. I have to think about it another time to be like, Oh, yeah. I think it's just semantics like I could rename it. Something else. That means the same thing. And maybe it would make sense to me. (Towards values and away from discomfort – combining the two names for each leg of the choice point

into one concept – maybe towards could just be like aligned, and then, like away could be avoiding.)

I found you to be a very skilled coach. It doesn't feel like this is something new to you. You clearly have a really deep understanding of this. I appreciated your genuineness and your care, and I can just tell that you're going to be so supportive to a lot of folks continuing this work. So I'm just really appreciative. And it came at just such a great time when I was like in this big transition place and and needing some extra support. So I'm just, I'm really grateful. Yeah, so thank you. Very much. Awesome.

Alice

Energy levels go up and down. But definitely still feeling like focused and hopeful.

This has been a super positive experience. I have no experience of coaching before. And it's always been a bit like what? What is it? super super valuable and very inspiring, and something that I think, I mean, of course, like I'm so in the sort of musical theater bubble of everything. This whole focus on like, are you anchored into your values? I feel like, is very valuable. but I feel like something that is not talked about. It's so goal oriented, the world we live in. I I feel like as a whole, but also especially like the musical theater industry and world. I mean, just as I experienced at some point this feeling of like, almost like barely being out in the industry, but starting to feel run down, maybe because it's kind of like this hamster wheel. and you're just like chasing. But while you're like running and you're like, wait, what was this for? I'm almost like this is like an approach that should be implemented in like undergrad programs. Like way, like way earlier, because I think like a lot of people probably never get this. And then they kind of get like mad and frustrated and tired and feeling run down by the business, and they just quit when maybe they wouldn't have to quit.

I mean, coaching is not therapy, but I I think for a lot of artists it's, or at least like I can, of course, only speak for myself. But this you very strongly identify with your sort of professional self, and I feel like the lines can sometimes get blurry. And I feel like that's maybe where again, anchoring to values. I feel like it sort of spills into like the sort of personal life. for creatives like that, personal identity takes up so much space. So it's like, if that's kind of out of balance or not grounded into something that is actually sustainable, it's gonna affect a larger part of your life. And then again, like, if you start working on it, it like, yeah, spills over.

I keep coming back to these like values. Because again, it's such an external industry. It's definitely alright to be excited about getting that gig, getting that call back or booking a job, or whatever. but we kind of sucked into that, almost like placing your whole sort of artistry and happiness in the hands of forces that aren't in your control.

I feel like that's really been a big turning point. And I think that was also because my view of coaching, I expected it to be like, Okay, we're gonna set goals. And we're gonna set deadlines. And we're gonna sort of like, focus on actions. So I think, yeah, it's been extremely healthy to

get this other kind of approach to it. It doesn't make it less productive. Maybe on the contrary, but just that, it's grounded in something that feels a bit more sustainable and healthy.

I remember, I was still in grad school or in undergrad, starting to go to the 1st professional auditions, and I remember exactly where I was, and I remember stepping off the bus walking towards the theater and just being like Oh, God! now starts the rest of my life. I mean these creative industries, however exciting they might be, we have moments of excitement. but if you're in musical theater like, you're probably never going to get away from auditions. I think being so goal oriented, and then having the Luck privilege like, thanks to I guess I should also like hard work, but sort of booking principal roles like straight out of grad school. I guess it was almost like. Okay, so now what? getting into this feeling like everything felt a bit like, well, it's probably not enough. Perfectionism comes in because it's kind of like, well, you've got to have some goal, you know. I think my point is that probably like all these tasks or aspects of the industry will come over and over and over again, and it might be hard if it's only a goal that you're focused on. It might be hard to either be so creative to constantly come up with the next exciting goal. if you book that principal role in a Broadway show, where do you go from there?

currently as the world is, it's kind of like, what do you get the validation for? But it feels like, maybe because of the sessions we've had, I could sort of approach it with like, hmm, that's interesting. not feeling like I'm sucked into it. yeah, just like, Oh, that's really interesting to see that that's what, in this Imaginary world we've created of social media, That's what I get. that's where validation comes from. but it's like, what is that grounded into?

I feel like we're constantly told as artists. And today that it's like a social media presence is so important, for like a marketing point of view and brand and like whatnot. On the other hand, we hear how detrimental it is to our mental health. But again, it feels like if we can keep that distance, keep that sort of questioning, that maybe just like, "Oh, that's interesting, like, noted."

I'm curious about about what it's gonna be like to continue out on my own. 6 sessions feel like they're over so quickly. So it's like, yeah, it's gonna be interesting to see. Like, how does it feel? Like would more sessions have been useful.

I will definitely spread the word around the world.

Giulia

I really enjoyed the process. I found it really helpful. And I haven't. I mean, other than really informal conversations with friends or collaborators, I haven't really had a space before to dig into these topics specifically around my music and my singing and my creative life and my performance life. It came at a really good time, even though this is a little bit of a weird juncture in my life, for reasons that I shared recently. But it yeah, it was very timely, and a lot of the images and ideas that came out reminded me of the therapeutic process. I definitely saw parallels. But I thought that you held a really solid container, and there was a lot of clarity about what you are providing here. I never felt like it was wishy-washy, or like you were trying to

therapize me. I think, for me it was also a good glimpse into what this type of work looks like, both for my future reference as a coachee, but also because I've been interested in exploring creative coaching.

Between my experience with you and this book it gives me some good ideas, some fuel for my imagination, and I think, working with artists and other creatives, or even this idea of applying some concepts to those realms is also a nice counterpoint, because a lot of therapy is very. A lot of therapy is very trauma focused, which can get to be a bit much.

Sometimes therapists, especially if they're not artists themselves have kind of naive assumptions about the arts and artists that they're just innately healthy and life giving. And while there is that aspect to art, making and creativity. There are lots of aspects to the institutions, the training, sometimes the creative process that can be harrowing and very difficult. And so if you're going to a well intended but sort of under informed practitioner, whether it's a therapist or a coach, yeah, that can be really difficult. So it was really nice in our conversations. The way that I felt like the the container and the material that you shared allowed me to share very honest places of stuckness for me, and I didn't feel judged.

I felt like this was a nonjudgmental space to get very honest about what felt stuck. And I want to spend a lot more time with the materials you shared. But I feel like I've been given some insights and some tools that I didn't quite have before.

because I was getting ready for a show. On one hand it provided a lot of immediate issues and material to work with, but that was pulling on a lot of my time and energy, so I didn't quite have as much time as I would have liked to fully integrate or review things. And when we talked last week, and you reflected back to me, you were observing the ways that I had integrated what we talked about, maybe even without necessarily consciously realizing it. But I think I just on my end, having to do these shows and hold down 2 jobs at the same time, it usurps some of my energy to fully participate in this the way I would have liked.

just more of an observation about using act in a coaching context, I think it can be super powerful. some of the ideas and paradigms, and one observation is that sometimes it seems like heady, like like a more mentalized or intellectualized process, and from my vantage point, Some of these things that we're talking about are getting to like have pretty deep roots in the body, and the unconscious and trauma, or even like, the shit show that we're in right now, like politically and especially artists are so sensitive. And we're trying to function in a highly dysfunctional, dysregulated oppressive system right now, that is not hospitable to artists. so the concepts are powerful, and I definitely think they're worthwhile, And my sense is there's a lot under the surface that needs tending or acknowledgement. But that does start to get more therapeutic. And so I don't know in act coaching how you would address that or bridge that gap.

I know for me I'm a highly sensitive person. So I have depth of processing, so often less is more. going deeper, with fewer concepts.

they might be things that can be grasped mentally relatively quickly. But I think in the more somatic, unconscious way, yeah, it would take more time and practice and repetition. With all the therapeutic and theater and music training and even dance training I've had, I can't say that many of those concepts have been explicitly taught to me. I mean not to blame institutions for some of the less generative ways that I've held things. But yeah, I mean, I think that especially like going to theater school in the nineties. Now I'm looking back and uncovering a lot of the harm done, or the faulty ideas or practices or associations that were laid down decades ago in my arts practice that have been so ingrained that they're very unconscious. And so it takes time to unpack them and deconstruct them.

It's so complex. Yeah, it's really juicy and interesting to me. I mean, it's a little bittersweet, because I wish that there were more accountability in the culture when I was in theater school, and there was all kinds of inappropriate, harmful things happening. But it's nice finally, now, to get this opportunity to revisit things. or even to start amassing the knowledge and skills to be able to start to share this with others.

it's been maybe one of the 1st opportunities I've had to talk about and explore some of these things, or even to gain more of a sense of agency or empowerment around things that I felt stuck with. And I. And things are just happening so fast that I was kind of aware of some of these things. But I would just sort of like, I don't know, like improvise workarounds or power through.

I would love to stay in touch, and if and when you publish I'd love to read and learn about the study and your findings. And yeah, I would love to stay in touch. And you know, if it feels right at some point down the line to explore the possibility of working with you again, or even around something specific. I think it could be really helpful.

No just gratitude. Just thank you so much. This was such a cool opportunity. And I so appreciate being a part of it. And I so appreciate your presence and the solidness of the container created. I definitely feel like I got a lot out of this. It was really interesting and so much that it's gonna take me some time to sift through it and revisit. But that says something about what this container provided. So thank you. This is cool. I really enjoyed it, and I got a lot of it. So I'm so pleased.

Dana

the one session we had where you introduced me to the i'm noticing concept. I think the whole, the whole thing that you led me through of of like, let's think of the worst self judgmental, bitchy statement and then actually giving me time to to sit with those things in my body, and to really feel. Those sorts of active exercises for me are always really useful. Because it's like, it's somewhat of a somatic exercise. It really embeds itself in a different kind of way. I remember, you know, as I was seeing other shows, the week after that we did that, I was having that experience of, I'm noticing this, or I'm noticing that. I feel like I was able to be more present. And when I was watching something that was really resonant, like the the joy I felt in my body felt very full. that sort of felt like a new opening for me. I'm not getting so caught up in my head about critique or this or that. I could notice things and let them go, so that I could continue to be

present with what I was watching, and whether what I was noticing was something that was exciting to me, or something that was questionable. I just think I was able to be much more present. And then the things that were very exciting were, I felt at times just overwhelmed with pleasure, joy, emotion, just sharing this experience with the actors and the story and that was really beautiful and delightful. So I feel like that, for sure, is a standout session for me.

I remember, that there was kind of some inner child work that came up unexpectedly from that exercise, too. So that all of that that like visualization and having time to be with the body and with the emotions. That was all really powerful and impactful for me.

Obviously I struggled with the worksheets. I think ultimately I did them, and they were useful. It just was, you know, it was always easier to do them with you than to do them by myself. It was easy to get really in my head about. Am I doing this right when I was doing them by myself? Even though I had a conscious awareness that this is not about right and wrong. You're not going to get an A plus or an F minus based on how you fill out this bullseye worksheet. But I think probably something about that. Something about the conditioning of schooling as it has existed, It gives me some sort of blockage around the worksheet, and like a perfectionism that I want to approach it with. That is just not really useful. which might be more just more of a me thing.

I appreciated your flexibility. I did this worksheet, or I only added these other few things. you were really able to just meet me where I was at, and I still feel like we got a lot of really juicy things out of where we were. I feel like even talking about one value on the bullseye had a whole universe of possibility.

another thing I really appreciated was the value centered approach. And I mean, that was a pretty core thing throughout. But you know I feel like that is something. I remember, like a few years ago, when I 1st started listening to astrology podcasts and things like that. And there would be certain moments like Venus transits, or things where they would be like. This is a really good time to reflect on your values and like, think, clarify your values and think, and I would always be like I would hear that and be like. I don't even know where to start. What do I really value and like when I would, I feel like when I would 1st start to think about it. It felt basic. maybe even kind of Corny. Oh, like I don't know. I value kindness like, you know, generosity. And some of these things, I think, just felt unspecific, so I used to get really overwhelmed thinking about that. And I've done some other work on value clarification in the last few years, but it felt really good to be able to do that specifically in the context of my art making. You know what are the values I'm trying to live into when it comes to my performance and my practice.

I don't start rehearsals for my next show for another until mid January, but I'm getting really jazzed about being able to integrate a lot of the things we talked about into that time.

Once I sifted through those initial emotions I was like, as someone who believes that what's meant for me will not miss me, I'm like there's a reason. Alice is a professional musical theater performer from Europe, who had moved to New York just before the study began and was still

waiting for her work authorization. Though she had trained and performed extensively from a young age, her intrinsic motivation felt unclear to her. As she prepared to launch her American career, Alice wanted to “ignite new inspiration, motivation, find more joy and passion. I love singing, I love performing, but I do feel it's so much like going to the gym and working that muscle. Just like, get it done” (1). Without the external pressures of performances and auditions, Alice was finding it hard to commit to her practice and often found herself defaulting to the same uninspiring approaches. So yeah, I'm pretty stoked about it.

I'm thinking about what I need to be able to do my most courageous present and embodied work. I've been thinking about those more practical things that feel like something I can ask for from others to support me. I don't know what the rest of the cast will be. Maybe some people will be more of the critical kind, and I feel like being able to protect my energy and to be able to keep the framework of like, I'm noticing these things in my mind. When I feel the judgments starting to creep in, or that sort of that old voice, if it's getting loud.

I remember one day, maybe it was the second session, second or 3rd. But we were talking about performance. And then we talked about avoidance strategies. And I feel like that, maybe because we were specifically talking about performance. And like when I'm on stage, like some of those things, felt kind of difficult to apply, or like wrap my mind around. I think I had this sort of feeling that it's like, Oh, like this worksheet of strategies was made for something else. And now we're applying it to this very specific context, where I wasn't quite sure what to make of it. I definitely think if we had been talking about practice and then visited those, I think that probably would have would have been would have hit.

when it came to that sheet of avoidance strategies I like. I feel like I wish we had spent more time with them, maybe in a different way. I'm just seeing in my mind right now, like this sheet of text, you know, when I think about it, I'm visualizing the sheet of text and maybe remembering like one of them.

you gave me so much to think about and marinate on. If you have any other exercises or visualizations, or resources like that. I would be interested in checking them out. I also feel pretty complete with what we have done up to this point.

Matthew

I don't know that there were any misses at all. I mean, I found it all like really useful, and a lot of it really meaningful. I think the most revealing exercise of all of them that we did was the bullseye thing. Just identifying those the values in those 4 quadrants, and then measuring where I am, as far as like am I in alignment with or or further out, that was really useful to me.

But then, continuing along a progression of like, let's identify one of those. What's a goal we could set for it? How can we break that down? How could we anticipate the barriers and all of that? I think that the use of the avoidance strategies or the inclusion of those in the design of that segment of the process was really helpful. Just the inclusion period, but also where it fell, I think, was really intelligent, and I don't know if that's just a part of ACT that you just followed

along, or if that was a part of what you designed for your research, but I I thought that it was really useful. Especially to start to get some of that vocabulary.

And then implement it on one of the choice point things. Yeah, I found that really useful. In fact, I did like a mental choice point exercise the other night. I always do a nightly review, before I go to bed. I was like, I know that I got off track today, with the way that I spent my time and my energy, I just felt like I wasn't on. So I then just kind of walked, that was the template that I used to do that nightly inventory, or review, or whatever, and I found it really helpful.

I've gotten to this place where I just kind of feel kind of ugh! at the end of the day, and it's more like just kind of looking back and saying, Well, here's here are some things that I definitely did or did not do, that are things that I avoided doing that led me to feeling kind of like "ugh" towards the end of the day. And then you know how I would like to feel at this point, you know. And then how might I, in the future what might I do? So? But I I wasn't really like going back and figuring out where I went wrong or anything.

If we're talking about keeping it within the 6 week, 6 or 6 session timeframe, I felt like it was just you know, perfectly sequenced. If I were going to do this on a more like an ongoing thing, and there were phases or stages that we were going to move along. If there was time to stretch one, it would be the committed action worksheet. Identify some time during the week where you can work, identify some like some retreats that you could go on, that was a little bit longer term of a goal, not just like, can you spend some time working on one song this week, and then come back and talk about it next week. But to actually work with a coach towards completing the big goal. I think just like exploring this kind of work on a bigger, longer term kind of project or goal.

Thank you. Yeah, yeah, I do actually look forward to using these.

I thought, there's so many of these little nuggets that I'm getting that I feel like my especially my 11th and 12th graders would really benefit from doing some of these exercises. Like, even the bullseye thing would be so cool to do with them. So yeah, if there's anything that pops in your mind, as far as those kinds of resources go.

Yeah, well, thank you. May. I feel really honored to have gotten to work with you and I appreciate the help that I received as a part of you doing your research. So thank you for that.