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### Exploring Eclectic Styles and Original Compositions in Bluegrass and Acoustic Music

Justin Alexander

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Exploring Eclectic Styles and Original Compositions in Bluegrass and Acoustic Music

By

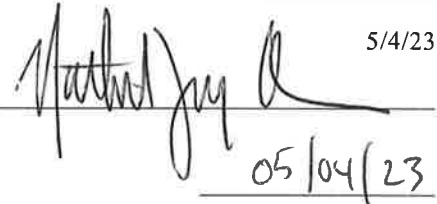
Justin Ross Cole Alexander

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Fine and Performing Arts Scholars Program  
Honors College  
and the  
Bluegrass, Old-Time and Roots Music Studies Program  
East Tennessee State University



Justin Alexander

5/4/23



Dr. Nathaniel J. Olson, Thesis Mentor

5/4/23



05/04/23

Benjamin D. Bateson, Reader

5/4/23

## **Abstract**

In the creation of my thesis project, I aimed to record a collection of music that highlights my influences and creative voice as an artist within the bluegrass/acoustic music genres. In collaboration with friends and colleagues that I have met during my time at East Tennessee State University, I have successfully recorded a project that surveys my current influences and creative voice as an artist, instrumentalist and composer. One goal I had for this project was to highlight compositions that I have written on acoustic guitar. Before attending ETSU, I did play some acoustic guitar, though I was primarily a banjo player. Since then, I have developed a passion for the guitar and have worked to advance my skills as a guitarist. My project includes two pieces that I composed on the guitar, and these compositions are examples of my exploration of harmony and rhythm. I feel that these pieces fit into the “New Acoustic” subgenre of bluegrass and bluegrass-adjacent music. I also chose to include two songs that fit more into the “progressive bluegrass” subgenre. On these two selections, one cover and one original, I played five-string banjo. These two pieces highlight my current interests and influences from genres like Jazz, Indie, and Pop music. The last two pieces included are songs that come from the bluegrass genre, and represent my progress as both an instrumentalist and vocalist. Also on this project, I experimented with different audio recording techniques. I have been studying audio production as my concentration within the Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies major. This project allowed me to be creative as an audio engineer as well as a musician.

## **Acknowledging My Professors**

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis mentor and East Tennessee State University Bluegrass, Old-Time and Roots Music Studies Academic Director,

Dr. Nathaniel Olson. Dr. Olson has been instrumental in my success not only in the process of creating this project, but in my entire college career. Dr. Olson has always been encouraging to me and has inspired me to be creative and intentional in everything I set out to accomplish. Dr. Olson has helped me to grow as an artist, musician, student and as an individual, and I cannot overstate his centrality to my professional and personal development during my time at East Tennessee State University.

I would like to express my gratitude as well to my musical mentor and guitar instructor, Mr. Wyatt Rice. Mr. Rice is a constant source of inspiration for me in my pursuit of learning more about the guitar, New Acoustic and Jazz music, and life in general. The lessons I have learned from him have been essential to the creation of this project. It has been an honor and a privilege to study under him the past few years.

I would like to thank Mr. Benjamin Bateson, East Tennessee State University Bluegrass, Old-Time and Roots Music Studies Recording Lab Manager. Mr. Bateson has helped to foster my creativity and passion for audio engineering during my studies at ETSU. He has been a wealth of knowledge and an indispensable resource for me as I have sought to learn more about the field of audio engineering.

I would also like to thank Bluegrass, Old-Time and Roots Music Studies Program Director Dan Boner. Mr. Boner has been a continual resource for me and is always a great source of professional and musical advice and has been important to my professional and musical growth.

I would also like to thank my banjo instructors Alex Genova and Jerry Keys. They have been essential to my growth as a banjo player and served as a constant source of inspiration for

me. Hearing them play the banjo encourages me to work hard and be the best player that I can be. The new ideas they have presented me with have shaped my style as a banjo player. They have been invaluable in my progression as a banjo player, and I thank them for their encouragement and the knowledge that they have shared with me.

### **Acknowledging My Musical Collaborators**

During the creation of this project, I was overjoyed to work with an exceptional cast of musicians. This project features Holger Olesen on upright bass, Josiah Nelson on mandolin and fiddle, Nick Weitzenfeld on acoustic guitar and mandolin, Troy Boone as assistant producer and audio engineer and Sage Palser on vocals. Firstly, Holger and Josiah have been my most frequent musical collaborators throughout my time as a student at ETSU. I met them both while I was a freshman student in the Bluegrass, Old-Time and Roots Music Studies Program and we quickly became great friends and have played an unquantifiable amount of music together. These two individuals have been instrumental in my growth as a musician and composer. I believe that they have been included in almost every piece of instrumental music that I have written during my college career, and it has been my privilege to learn and grow as a musician alongside them for the last four years. Nick Weitzenfeld is an inspiring instrumentalist and songwriter. Nick and I have been friends and collaborators since 2022 and have played and written a lot of music together along with Josiah and Holger. These musicians make up the core group of performers featured on this project. Troy Boone is also a fantastic musician and audio engineer. Troy has been very helpful to me in learning more about audio engineering and also contributed to this project as an assistant producer and engineer. Sage Palser is an exceptional vocalist and musician and when I decided to record Lynn Morris' "It Rains Everywhere I Go" for this project I

immediately knew that I wanted to feature Sage as the lead vocalist on this song. I am proud to have worked with each of these individuals in the process of creating this project.

### **Survey of Influences**

I drew from a vast range of influences in the creation of this project. I found myself expanding the catalogue of artists and styles I was listening to in a way that was unprecedented in my musical career. Outside of bluegrass music, the other major genre that influenced me in creating this project was what is often referred to as “New Acoustic.” I was introduced to this genre when beginning to work with my mentor Wyatt Rice. The genre, popularized by artists like David Grisman, and The Tony Rice Unit has been very influential to me. While studying this music on the guitar, I found that not only was I learning more about the guitar but also about harmony, rhythm and improvisation. This music draws heavily from jazz music, often employing jazz-oriented chords and harmony in its compositions. My original pieces “The Great Room” and “Urgency?” featured in this project come directly from the study of this music. While my original compositions do differ stylistically from selections by Grisman and The Tony Rice Unit, the study of their style prepared me to write these pieces. The harmonic and melodic vocabulary and rhythms of Jazz music have also been influential to me in this process. I began listening more and more to jazz music after becoming interested in New Acoustic music, including artists like Julian Lage, Pat Metheny, Hank Garland, Billy Bauer, Bill Evans, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, George Benson, and Oscar Peterson. Listening to these artists had a strong impact on harmonic and improvisational ideas featured on this project. Another style of music that I had not listened to with much frequency is indie music. The influence of this music can be heard on this project on songs, “Cavalier Queen” and “Angelina.” Some indie artists influential to me in the creation of this project include Pinegrove, Faye Webster, Alex Siegel, and Mac Demarco.

Listening to these artists prompted new ideas for composition and gave me a new style to explore through the lens of an acoustic band. Other progressive bluegrass and bluegrass-adjacent artists that have been a consistent source of inspiration for me are Punch Brothers, Hawktail, Edgar Meyer, Béla Fleck, Noam Pikelny, Wes Corbett, The Nashville Bluegrass Band, and Nickel Creek.

## **Analysis of Creative Work**

### Original Pieces

#### “The Great Room”

The beginning track from my project is an instrumental I wrote on acoustic guitar. The piece is performed by Holger Olesen on upright bass and Josiah Nelson on mandolin and myself on acoustic guitar. When writing this piece, the A part melody came first, and I also had in mind the direction I wanted to go in for the B part chord progression. Next, I wrote the chord progression for the A part and the melody for the B part. As for the arrangement, I thought of the emotions I wanted to convey throughout this piece. When considering these emotions, I also decided on the name for the piece. I chose to title this piece, “The Great Room.” In my arrangement of this piece, I wanted to capture the essence of my experience as a freshman student in the Fine and Performing Arts Honors Scholars program. During my first semester at ETSU, I attended Honors Artistic Vision taught by Dr. Scott Contreras-Koterbay and Dr. Nathaniel Olson. This course was held each Wednesday night in the Yoakley Hall Great Room. I wanted to capture the essence of how I felt as a freshman FPA student and my experience navigating new ideas and literature while taking this course. I wanted the intro to feel abstract,



unsure and even a bit jarring for the listener – the way I felt when we discussed things like existentialism and Camus’s “The Stranger.” The piece begins with Holger using false harmonics and playing long tones with the bow. Josiah and I create an abstract soundscape by scraping along the strings and tapping on the instruments. Throughout the intro, there are times when we begin to establish rhythmic and harmonic patterns that are interspersed within the seemingly chaotic soundscape. Towards the end of intro, I establish a bit of the melody before the intro ends with Josiah’s sequence of rhythmic mandolin chops. The next section begins the A part melody that I play on guitar, I also play the B part melody and A part melody once more before improvising a solo over the B part chord progression. Next, Josiah improvises a solo over the A and B part form twice, referencing the melody throughout. Next, we build dynamically at the end of Josiah’s solo and enter the next section which serves as a bridge of sorts. This bridge section is another way of highlighting my vision for the piece. In this section, I wanted it to have a feeling of surprise, but also with certainty and continuity. To accomplish this, we begin the bridge in 5/4 as opposed to the 6/8 meter we have been in since the first melody. We establish this by playing an ascending pattern in harmony before I begin improvising a solo that juxtaposes the new 5/4 meter with the 6/8 meter that we began in. The rhythm section then modulates back to 6/8 for the large dynamic build up, while I still improvise on the guitar. In my improvisation, I wanted to bring in these feelings of certainty and of uncertainty. At the dynamic pinnacle of the bridge section, I wanted to bring back some of the emotions from the intro this time using repeating rhythmic patterns and harmonic dissonance to achieve this. After returning to jarring themes of the intro I wanted the piece to come down dynamically and resolve into something that felt comfortable and certain, similar to the melody being introduced after the intro, though I did not want to bring the melody back just yet. I wanted the listener to feel as if

this moment represents a sigh of relief or a breath of fresh air. At the end of this section the mandolin and guitar seem to have a call and response dialogue. This section could remind the listener of everyday life, enjoying the scenery and having a conversation with a friend. Next, the piece starts to wind down with a series of rhythmic hits. The timing for these hits was methodical and definite but also unconventional in that we didn't play in a consistent time signature. Neither in 6/8 or 5/4, the meters in which we were operating throughout the piece, the hits maintain the tempo but occur in this pattern: five hits, five beats of rest, four hits, four beats of rest, three hits, three beats of rest, two hits, two beats of rest and then the final hit. This section references the 5/4 meter at the beginning of the bridge but also departs from it, I wanted these hits to feel strong as if something has been achieved or understood throughout the course of the piece and that the listener has picked up the tools along the way that make this section make sense. Next, we finally return to the A part melody, first on solo guitar and then once more with the full band. This return to the melody ties the piece together before one last bit of harmonic dissonance on the guitar builds anticipation for the final chord. With the final chord we have arrived at the end. With this piece I wanted to explore the feeling of unfamiliarity and uncertainty with moments of clarity and certainty being included after new ideas are presented. I wanted to convey to listeners that the uncertain can become familiar and that some experiences that seem daunting at first can lead to learning and growth.

“Urgency?”

This is another piece that I composed on the guitar. With this piece, I wrote the A section as a sort of chord melody originally intended to be completed as an arrangement for solo guitar. Later after composing the chords for the B section, I began to think that this piece might be suited for a four-piece acoustic band consisting of acoustic guitar, fiddle, mandolin and upright

bass. The recording features Holger Olesen on upright bass, Nick Weitzenfeld on mandolin, Josiah Nelson on fiddle and myself on acoustic guitar. In my opinion this was the perfect group of musicians to perform this with and to see that this piece was realized to its fullest potential. After writing the melody and chords, Holger, Nick and I got together to work through the arrangement. After this, we recorded a demo recording of the song before going back to the studio and recording the final version. The piece begins as I play an excerpt of one of the recurring themes throughout the piece. The band then swells in with Josiah playing plucked fiddle that creates a sense of anticipation before I begin the melody on the guitar. The melody of this piece was interesting to write as the A part melody changes key signatures. The melody essentially begins in the key of D major while simultaneously borrowing from the key of E major. Midway through the A section, Abmaj7 is used as a pivot chord that shifts the melody to the key of Eb major. The melody remains in Eb major until the repeat of the A section. The B section of the piece can be viewed in a few different ways. The B section begins with a B chord that is suspended. Since this chord lacks the third scale degree, it is difficult to define the quality of the chord as being major or minor. Being that the quality of this chord is ambiguous, it could belong either the key of D as the diatonic VI chord or to the key of E major as the V chord. I view this chord as another pivot point that takes the A section from the key of Eb to the key of D again by using the diatonic VI chord from the key of D. To me, the beginning of the B section feels more like the key of B major as it features the chords Bsus, Bsus/G, Esus2. In the context of the full B section, I feel that it is more correct to view the B section in the key of D using the ambiguity of the suspended chords to suggest their diatonic minor counterparts from the key of D. The B section melody comes from a line that Josiah played when improvising a solo over the B section chord progression. We all agreed that this line was perfect for the B part melody and

that is the melody that is heard on the recording. The second half of the B section is a repeat of the second half of the A section with the chords and melody moving in the same way though this time, a half-step lower. After the A part melody is initially stated, we enter into the B section with Josiah taking the lead on the melody. After the fiddle B section melody, we play a series of improvised solos over an AAB form. I take the first solo over the A section on guitar, next, Josiah plays a fiddle solo over the A section before we make a swift dynamic and texture change at the end of the fiddle solo. Nick plays a mandolin solo over the B section, but this time we have changed the dynamic level and intensity of the B section to very soft with small swells at the ends of phrases. When compared to the dynamics of the first B section, this is an unexpected change. At the end of this section, I begin the A section melody once more. This time however, we see another change in that we go to a bridge section. The bridge section of the piece was arranged by Nick, Holger and I and I think that it goes along with the theme of surprising harmonic choices found elsewhere in the piece. The bridge section of the piece happens in a way that we encompass the bridge inside of the A part chord progression. This change happens when we reach the Fmaj7 chord in the A section. At this point the bridge begins with solo mandolin before the entry of the guitar to twin the line that serves as the bridge theme. The bridge begins on Fmaj7 and then changes to F#m7. I thought this was a surprising change and when paired with the theme I thought this bridge introduces a sense of curiosity to the piece. When paired with the easy-going mood of the A section and the driving B section I think the bridge section bridges the gap between these two seemingly disparate moods of the A and B sections. As for the naming of this piece, I was unsure of what a fitting title might be. One day during literature class we were discussing poetry and the instructor had written, “urgency?” on the board as a talking point about a work of poetry. I thought this would make a fitting title for this piece of music as

we have a more laid-back A section that reminds me of going for a drive or taking a walk and the driving movement of the B section that I feel does lend itself to a feeling of urgency.

“Cavalier Queen”

This is a song that was collectively written by Josiah, Nick and I. Josiah had come up with a chord progression similar to the one heard on this piece. I thought that it would be ideal for adding vocal melody and lyrics. I used the chords and instrumental theme that Josiah had written and started writing some lyrics and a vocal melody. Nick helped to finish the lyrics of the song and we arranged it for a band setting. The recording features Josiah on mandolin, Holger on bass, Nick on acoustic guitar and myself on five-string banjo. As for the lyrics of the song, I wouldn't say that they are necessarily personal or based on any of our experiences, I think we were mostly writing lyrics that suited the mood of the instrumental arrangement. The lyrics serve mostly to aid in the delivery of the instrumental performance and suit the songs upbeat and not so serious nature. My goal was that this piece would be both fun and interesting for the listener. The character in the song is reflecting on a current relationship with someone who has a “Cavalier” attitude. “Cavalier,” meaning “marked by or given to offhand and often disdainful dismissal of important matters” as noted in Merriam- Webster dictionary, describes the attitude of this person, and this is also where we get the title for the piece. Throughout the song we find that though the main character recognizes this, they are seemingly content with their situation. This song is a bit of a departure from the bluegrass and New Acoustic music that I play most often, but it highlights some of the influences that are less obvious in my playing of those styles. Around the time of arranging this song, I was listening to a lot of indie music and jazz, and these influences come across well in the arrangement, performance, and style of this song. As for the instrumental arrangement, the piece begins with the whole band coming in right at the beginning.

The bass is playing steadily on the root note of each chord while the mandolin is playing a repeating arpeggio that is a theme throughout the piece. The guitar plays rhythm while the banjo plays sparsely outlining the chords. The band builds dynamically before a sudden rest for one beat before returning back to the groove established from the beginning. This time though, I began playing the back beat on the banjo since the mandolin has the repeating arpeggio. This establishes the overall feel that is found throughout the song. We bring down the dynamics again and begin the first verse bringing the groove back again. This remains the same for the first verse before we all play the theme lick that happens throughout the song. Then after the theme we are back in for verse two. After verse two the theme returns but this time it leads to a bridge section. The bridge starts with solo guitar playing a syncopated rhythmic pattern. Next the banjo and bass enter with the banjo playing the vocal melody and the bass is bowed. Next enters the mandolin which introduces a pattern of 7 over the 4/4 meter. The banjo joins the mandolin in playing the repeating pattern of 7 over 4/4 and interspersing moments of improvisation in 4/4. Next, I began playing repeated patterns of 5 over 4/4 while the mandolin plays patterns of 7 and the guitar remains in 4/4 with the bass entering on a 4/4 groove as well. I thought this section was a lot of fun to arrange by experimenting with rhythmic juxtaposition. The bridge ends with the band playing a series of hits followed by a measure of rest and then comes back in with a direct quote of the intro. This begins the final verse which is similar to the other verses though at the end there is a dynamic change where we each play a repeating arpeggio before ending the song with the hook from the verses. Overall, this song was a fun way to experiment with new ideas and influences and to create something new that was different from a lot of the music I play most often.

### Cover Pieces

## “Angelina”

In addition to the original material featured in this project, I also wanted to include new versions of songs that have already been recorded. When deciding on material to cover for this project, I had a few songs in mind. One of these pieces was “Angelina” by the band Pinegrove. I thought this song would be well suited for arrangement for performance by an acoustic group. The version for my project was again recorded by Holger on upright bass, Josiah on mandolin, Nick on acoustic guitar, and myself on five-string banjo. Arranging this song in an acoustic setting did present some challenges. We wanted to retain the groove from Pinegrove’s rendition on their album, *Skylight* from 2018, but this was a bit challenging in that Pinegrove’s version features drums and electric guitars that provide the basis for the groove of the song. Our acoustic version has a mellower presentation due to the inherent nature of the instrumentation. I chose this song as I thought that its mood was well suited to be included among the other selections on my project. This song highlights my influences in listening to a wide range of music including indie, rock and progressive bluegrass. Our interpretation highlights both Pinegrove’s version as well as each of our own creative voices as acoustic musicians. The arrangement is fairly similar to the Pinegrove recording with the addition of a more defined intro section as well as an instrumental solo section. The Pinegrove version is rather short; only one minute and thirty-eight seconds. I think this arrangement choice was intentional by Pinegrove, and that was something that we were sure to be mindful of in this recording. Though adding the instrumental section did make the song longer, our arrangement strikes a balance between the Pinegrove recording while allowing us more opportunities to take creative liberty and showcase originality within the context of a cover song.

## “It Rains Everywhere I Go”

When thinking about the material I wanted to include in this project I knew that while I wanted to explore different styles and sounds, I also knew that I wanted to include bluegrass songs as well. This is a song that I first heard from Lynn Morris on her 1995 album *Mama's Hand*. I thought this song was unique and I knew I wanted to include it on this project. I was fascinated by the banjo playing featured on Morris' version as well as the excellent vocal performance from Morris and Marshall Wilborn. As far as the arrangement goes, I would say that we stayed true to the original recording for the most part. We included a guitar solo instead of a mandolin solo during an instrumental break as can be heard on Morris' recording. While we were not necessarily aiming to copy Morris' arrangement, we did strongly reference it in our performance. The recording for my project features Sage Palser on lead vocals, Holger Olesen on upright bass, Nick Weitzenfeld on mandolin, and myself on acoustic guitar, five-string banjo, and harmony vocals.

## “When the Fields Are White with Daisies”

Since the beginning of my musical career, I have always preferred playing in a band setting as opposed to playing solo. While playing solo may not seem explorative in nature, I find that for me, it is. When performing I have always felt most comfortable playing with other musicians, and rarely have I performed as a soloist. At home however, I often enjoy playing the guitar and singing and I wanted to capture that in some way on this project. Most of the music featured on this project was recorded in the ETSU Recording Lab with the exception of a few overdubs. For this selection, I recorded at home, playing the guitar and singing just as I would if I were practicing or learning a new song. Being that many of the songs on this project feature a full band performing in a studio, I thought this song and its presentation would be an interesting



change. With this song, I invite the listener into an experience that feels more personal. This recording is me in my living room with a guitar and two microphones, singing a Norman Blake song. This song is a favorite that I have been singing at home for a little while now. I was first introduced to this song when I heard Andrew Marlin of the band Watchhouse singing it in an Instagram video. After hearing his version, I learned the song immediately and have been singing it ever since, though never in a performative setting. I did not want this recording to feel like a performance either, instead I hope that the listener feels as if they are there with me in the living room.

### **Audio Engineering and Technical Details**

The making of this project not only gave me the opportunity to be creative musically but also, be creative as an audio engineer. I have a string passion for audio engineering, and it was rewarding to be able to experiment with choosing the appropriate microphone placement, microphone choice and gear choices for each of these songs. I will include a brief technical summary of each song below.

“The Great Room”

For this piece I wanted to capture Holger, Josiah and I all playing live, all together in the same room and using no overdubs. To facilitate this, I set up a stereo pair of Earthworks M30 omnidirectional condenser microphones and employed the use of the Schneider disk. The Schneider disk simulates the acoustic shadow of a human head, and the capsules of the microphones are placed where one’s ears might be. The microphones are then panned to the left and right channel creating a spatial environment similar to listening to the musicians play in a

room around you. To supplement the Schneider disk set up, I used a pair of AKG C414XIS condenser microphones positioned above us to capture the sound of the room. I also used three spot microphones for this recording. On the bass I used a Neumann U87ai condenser microphone and on the guitar and mandolin I positioned a Sennheiser MKH 8040 small diaphragm condenser microphone in front of each instrument.

The signal chain for each input is as follows:

Earthworks M30 – API 1608 Console preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

Neumann U87ai – Vintech 473 preamplifier – Avid HD I/O - Pro Tools

Sennheiser MKH 8040 – Vintech 473 preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

AKG C414XIS – API 1608 Console preamplifier – Avid HD I/O - Pro Tools

“Urgency?”

For this piece I used a similar approach to “The Great Room” though with a few changes. Rather than the Schneider disk approach I opted for a pair of AKG C414XLS condenser microphones in a Blumlein configuration to capture the instruments. The guitar, bass and mandolin were recorded live in one room using no overdubs. I supplemented the Blumlein pair with a Neumann U87ai condenser microphone on the bass. The fiddle was overdubbed separately using an AEA R84 ribbon microphone, and a Neumann U87ai to capture the pizzicato sections.

The signal chain for each input is as follows:

AKG C414XLS – Vintech 473 preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

Neumann U87ai (bass) - API 1608 Console preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

Neumann U87ai (pizzicato fiddle) - Vintech 473 preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

AEA R84 - Vintech 473 preamplifier – Pultec EQP-1A style equalizer – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

“Cavalier Queen”

The recording of this track was different than the approach of the two instrumental pieces. For “Cavalier Queen” we still played all live in one room though separate microphones were used to capture each instrument. While the recording maintained the live feel, this approach lends itself to more choices for panning instruments in the stereo field. On the bass I used a Cascade Fat Head II ribbon microphone on the body of the instrument and an AKG C451B small diaphragm condenser microphone on the neck. For banjo I used a Neumann U87ai condenser microphone on the body and an AEA R84 ribbon microphone on the neck. For guitar I used a spaced pair of Sennheiser MKH 8040 small diaphragm condenser microphones. For the mandolin I used a pair of Neumann KM184 small diaphragm condenser microphones, one pointing at each F-hole. I recorded the lead vocal at home using the Cascade Fat Head II ribbon microphone.

The signal path for each input is as follows:

AKG C451B – API 1608 Console preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

Cascade Fat Head II (Bass) - API 1608 Console preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

Neumann U87ai – Vintech 473 preamplifier - Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

AEA R84 - Vintech 473 preamplifier - Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

Sennheiser MKH 8040 – API 1608 Console preamplifier – Avid HD I/O - Pro Tools

Sennheiser MKH 8040 – Vintech 473 preamplifier – Avid HD I/O – Pro Tools

Neumann KM184 – API 1608 Console preamplifier – Avid HD I/O –  
Pro Tools

Neumann KM184 – Vintech 473 preamplifier – Avid HD I/O –  
Pro Tools

Cascade Fat Head II (vocals) – Scarlett 2i2 audio interface – Pro Tools

“Angelina”

The approach to recording “Angelina” was nearly identical “Cavalier Queen,” except that the banjo was overdubbed in an isolation booth. The microphone and preamp selections were the same except for the vocal microphone which is as follows:

Neumann TLM193 – Vintech 473 preamplifier – Burl B16 Mothership – Pro Tools

“It Rains Everywhere I Go”

This also recorded similar to “Angelina” and “Cavalier Queen.” The bass, guitar and mandolin were tracked live, and I overdubbed the banjo at home. The microphone and preamp selections were the same except instead of the Cascade Fat Head II on the body of the bass, the AEA R84 ribbon microphone was used. The banjo was recorded using a pair of Line Audio CM4 small diaphragm condenser microphones into an Audient Evo 16 audio interface then into Pro Tools.

“When the Fields Are White With Daisies”

This song was recorded in my living room using a Cascade Fat Head II ribbon microphone on the vocals and a Line Audio CM4 on the guitar into an Audient Evo 16 audio interface then into Pro Tools. The vocals and guitar were recorded simultaneously, as I sang and played live.

## **Results**

This thesis project gave me the opportunity to explore my artistry in a different capacity than ever before. While I have done a number of recordings as a musical accompanist and as an audio engineer, this is essentially the first time that I have recorded a project of my own. My goal was to record a variety of songs in various styles, and to write and select material that, while different, would fit into a cohesive project. The result not only highlights my creative voice but also the creative voices of each person included in this project. This project also afforded me the opportunity to broaden my skills as an audio engineer. I was excited to hear how the recordings turned out. Through experimentation of recording techniques, I believe we were able to get an accurate capture of each instrument that suited the tonality and performance of each song. Overall, I felt that the making of this body of work was very successful.

## **Conclusion**

This project pushed me to be creative as an instrumentalist, vocalist, composer, arranger, songwriter and audio engineer. The experience of creating this project is not one I will soon forget. The music we created will always be a milestone in my musical career and I will look back on this project fondly. Before this project, I knew that I wanted to make an album but many times I never felt ready to record one. At some points in this project as well, I felt I was not ready to record a project of my own. This thesis project encouraged me to get into the studio and try things out, be creative, and finally record my own project. I know that I will take the lessons I

have learned from this process with me into all projects I am involved with in the future. Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to each person that aided me in making this project a success. Without each of these individuals, this project would be nothing more than a group of songs.