

Let It Fall // The Bath: Artist Statements

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Emma Nicole Houton

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

Let it Fall

“Let it Fall” was a senior concert in jazz voice and electronics comprised of original work and arrangements of jazz standards and pop songs. Inspired by the films of David Lynch, it was a work embracing disintegration and the unsettling. This concert was intended to combine my two academic focuses, jazz voice and electronic music, and evolved from a project in which I attempted to produce dream-pop covers of jazz standards.

The concert took place in the Old Gym, which I designed to look like an amalgamation of venues featured in Lynch’s films, with eerie red and blue lighting and a red curtain. The band was a traditional jazz rhythm section consisting of piano, bass, drums, and guitar. Over the course of the concert, the music became increasingly distorted, as virtual synthesizers specially designed for this project, modeled after those used by Angelo Badalamenti in *Twin Peaks*, replaced the acoustic piano, and the effects on the guitar and voice built, becoming increasingly large and distorted.

The final piece in the concert, and the culmination of the disintegration, was a solo electronic piece for voice, loop pedal, and Max. It used a quad speaker setup, filling the room with low frequencies from behind the audience, while the vocal loops I built with my loop pedal and in Max were presented in the front two speakers. This piece was intended to serve as the pivot point between my two senior projects, and the moment in the arc of my senior projects in which I stepped out of the traditional jazz singer role.

The Bath

“The Bath” is a work in eight parts for eight voices and electronics. It was originally intended to be a live performance, but this was not possible due to the pandemic. In lieu of the originally intended performance, I produced a recording of the piece, singing six out of the eight parts myself and using a synthesized organ for the bass parts.

The piece was inspired by my practice of writing by constructing layered loops of my voice using a loop pedal, and then singing a melody line over them. This project was an effort to translate that practice into a live performance in which each “loop” is sung and repeated, creating the effect of looping without actually recording loops. I wanted to write a piece for non-classically trained singers that would use the voice as a serious and essential instrument, which I have not seen very often in jazz. This piece is, for me, an exploration of the voice: experimentation with extended vocal technique, playing with how voices can blend and separate, and diving into the unique ways in which the human voice interacts with audio effects.

“The Bath” draws source material from hymns and folk songs. It is formed primarily around the idea of being a form of live vocal looping. The lyrical themes of the piece center around water: drowning, baptism, purification. These are themes I find myself continually drawn to in my writing, and have tried to reflect in the sonic environment of the piece through enveloping delays, cavernous reverb, and a general sense of being completely immersed in sound.

I would like to keep working on this score, and eventually have it be performed live. In its live form, it will utilize a quad setup and Max. The vocalists will be in a circle in the center

of the room, with the audience around them, and the speakers around them. I would also like to continue working on the recordings I made of this score for this senior project, and release the album as the solo form of this work.

Thank you to:

My advisor, Matt Sargent

My voice teacher, Pamela Pentony

My board members: John Esposito, Sarah Dunphey-Lelii, Sarah Hennies, and Whitney Slaten

James Mongan

My family & friends

I couldn't have done any of this without you.

References for “The Bath”:

Seeger, Peggy. *The Two Sisters*. YouTube, uploaded by Gary Larson, 15 Oct. 2016,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1v4NGcfKXw.

Wesley, Charles. *And Am I Born to Die?* 1875. Hymnary.org,

hymnary.org/text/and_am_i_born_to_die.

Wyvern Lingo. *Used*. Digital file, 2014.