
Senior Projects Spring 2020

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2020

Bottled Letter

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Recommended Citation

Guzman, Edgar, "Bottled Letter" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 224.
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Bottled Letter

A Senior Project Album submitted to the Music Department
Of
Bard College

by Edgar Guzman

May 4, 2020

This project was originally intended to be a concert that explored the harmonic and performing skills I learned in college. Naturally, like any project, all my expectations had to be thrown out the window. The ensuing chaos after the pandemic tested a lot of things; creativity, discipline, friendships, and our ability to maintain sanity without structure. Bard has a funny way of challenging your preconceived notions, and I found that the chaos of being a student here for four years left me surprisingly prepared for this pandemic.

The album you will listen to is the culmination of the things I've loved, learned, and feared here at Bard. These songs feature my closest friends, themes that explore mental health, and the aftermath of a toxic relationship. I tried to capitalize on my available resources to tell a harmonic and lyrical story while utilizing the technical skills I've acquired in Bard's Jazz department.

I was armed with only my computer and an iPhone. With these limits, I emphasized the electronic and "lo-fi" elements that poor microphones and computers are so strong at producing. I used vocal processing, electronic instrumentation, and specific harmonic choices to tailor the songs into a lonely and distant aesthetic. This album represents the progress I've made as a musician at Bard, and marries the emotions I was feeling in the midst of chaos with the artistic drawbacks of being in a pandemic.

In addition, the album's structure functions as a part of the story. Each song's emotion is meant to lead into the next one, leading you through an journey of despair, anger, resentment, and eventually bittersweet resolution. What I do on the album is simultaneously wildly experimental for me and also incredibly comfortable. I tried to use my strengths: percussion, classical training, electronic production, and jazz harmony, but also left my comfort zone and delved into rapping, singing, vocal synthesis, and abnormal mixing styles.

Part of this album was also recognizing my own technical limits and reaching out to those who could fulfill the roles I could not. Life is a complicated thing that hinges on one's ability to balance

overwhelming situations. I used the vocal help of my friend Madeline Money Penny, who is deeply involved with my artistic process and has been a large collaborator since I met her last year. Our work-flow and visions coincide, which is something I used to help create the cohesion this album was lacking without her. She performed the lyrics and melodies I could not, and added vocal backdrops where I was unable to. I think that it's almost impossible to be an artist and not collaborate, so having someone there to help execute this vision was also a big part of realizing the year.

This album is intended to be listened to as a concept work- it's a story as much as it is a demonstration of my academic life at Bard. I hope that this experience will bring you into my mind, and give you a sense of what any artist wants: friendship, chaos, love, loss, pain, and the happiness that can't exist without it.

Song Order:

Bottled Letter

Rays

Bloody Knees

Match

Nerve

Cracked Glass

Illusive Dreams

Broken Message