

*The Stranger Meets Modern Pop*

A Creative Project

by

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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial  
fulfillment of requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

Spring 2020

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## Abstract

This creative project explores the question of whether the classic album *The Stranger* by Billy Joel can still keep its impact and relevance when converted into a modern pop genre. The production portion of this project consists of five tracks from the album that were re-interpreted and produced into today's pop standards featuring female vocalists. The written component of this creative project consists of a detailed analysis of the album *The Stranger* by Billy Joel and modern pop music's current market trends. This analysis includes background information on the album, an analysis of each track on the album, and information about the pop music trends of 2019 from research and critical listening. The application of the techniques and methods applied from the analysis to the creative project are cited and explored.

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## List of Terms

For the purpose of citing, it is important to understand the following terms:

**Arpeggio:** the notes of a chord played in succession, either ascending or descending

**Chord Structure:** in a musical composition, a chord structure or harmonic progression is a succession of chords

**Drum Machine:** a programmable electronic device to imitate sounds of a drum kit

**Harmony:** the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions having a pleasing effect

**Melody:** a sequence of single notes that is musically satisfying

**Measure:** a segment of time corresponding to a specific number of beats in which each beat is represented by a particular note value and the boundaries of the bar are indicated by vertical bar lines

**Mixing:** the processes of combining multitrack recordings into a final monaural, stereo or surround sound product

**Outro:** the concluding section of a piece of music or a radio or television program

**Reverb:** an effect whereby the sound produced by an amplifier or an amplified musical instrument is made to reverberate slightly

**Rhythm:** the systematic arrangement of musical sounds, principally according to duration and periodic stress

**Song Form:** structure of a song

## I. Introduction

### Project Overview

One of my favorite aspects about being part of the student-run radio station WMTS Murfreesboro at MTSU, is the opportunity to attend festivals and interview artists with media passes. In Spring 2018, I had the chance to attend Hangout Music Festival in Gulf Shores, Alabama, where I interviewed several artists including The Roots of Creation. In 2016, the band created a triple album titled *Livin Free*, which included an acoustic, studio, and dub style version of each song, with an overall influence of reggae (Bio). They also released an album called *The Grateful Dub* where they recreated several Grateful Dead tunes (Bio). After talking with the lead singer about his inspiration for the project, I was interested in experimenting with the idea of translating a successful album into a different genre.

Billy Joel is a rock musician, singer-songwriter, and composer from New York. Joel's first record with Columbia Records, *Piano Man*, included the title track that became Joel's first most successful single. In return, it earned Joel the nickname, "The Piano Man," and it is still the ending tune for his regular monthly shows at Madison Square Garden (Billy Joel Timeline). Joel's Grammy success began with *The Stranger* where he won two awards for both "Record of the Year" and "Song of the Year," and he continued to earn a total of six awards in his career (Billy Joel Timeline). Also, several songs from *The Stranger* are still played on radio stations today including "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)," "Only the Good Die Young," and "Just the Way You Are" (Billy Joel -TOP Songs). His number one album *52<sup>nd</sup> Street* also contains radio hits "My Life,"

“Honesty,” and “Big Shot” (Billy Joel Timeline). Many songs have appeared in the popular talent competition *American Idol*, including a night solely featuring Billy Joel songs in season eleven (Rutherford). However, after a tour with Elton John in the early 2000s, Joel focused on live shows, and started a residency at Madison Square Garden in January 2014 with over 63 sold out shows (Billy Joel Timeline; Gensler). In January 2019, he announced his first baseball stadium concert in July at Camden Gardens, the home of the Baltimore Orioles (Billy Joel First Ever Concert). Joel’s songs playing on radio waves today is evidence that his songwriting and compositions have and still resonate with many.

Growing up, I was always told that if I wanted to learn how to write songs then I needed to research Billy Joel. His music was constantly being played on the radio stations we listened to as a family, and my mother always seemed to play his albums on rainy days. His albums resonated with me even at a young age, for his works are about honesty. He does not hide or turn away from the ugliness of life, and he has a way of communicating stories that all walks of life can relate to at some point. Joel’s storytelling ability and openness fascinated me, and I began to realize how few artists in the industry are transparent in their works. After listening in depth to *The Stranger*, I found that the honesty of his work pierces through the album, particularly in the vulnerability Joel has when explaining his love for his wife Elizabeth. In my project, I wanted to capture the integrity and understanding Joel portrays that seems to be currently lacking in today’s pop artists’ songwriting. I realized that his producer’s ability to keep Joel’s storytelling

while making it commercially pleasing to audiences was the key factor in understanding this project, and it was the same mindset Brett Wilson had when changing the Grateful Dead into modern reggae.

As an Audio Production student in the college of Media and Entertainment and an aspiring music producer, I was intrigued by the challenge of transforming a successful album into a different genre while still maintaining the integrity of the original work. Phil Ramone, Joel's producer, had successfully taken Joel's unusual artistry and turned it into commercial success, and the Roots of Creation had successfully changed the Grateful Dead into reggae. For this project, I had a similar idea. Through academic research of the album and today's current trends, my goal was to convert selections from *The Stranger* into songs that could, in theory, compete in the modern pop market.

This project centered around a team of producers, overseen by an executive producer who worked to create new versions of the songs off Joel's *The Stranger* album. My role was the executive producer. My job was to oversee the producers and to help execute the vision we had for the album. This includes giving the programming producers examples for ideas to use, giving critiques to tracks and mixes to better them, and keeping all producers on schedule. Also, it was crucial to the project as the executive producer to know each programming producers' assigned songs, and to ensure that each programming producer was doing their job in a timely and efficient manner. If one programming producer fell behind or could not bring in good work, it was the job of the executive producer to find a solution or replacement. The job of the programming producers was to create the music tracks for the songs. It was the individual's job to

create new music tracks in the pop genre that were based off of the original album. Each programming producer had to program their tracks within the guidelines given by the executive producer.

To create a cohesive sound among the three different producers and vocalists, a separate mixing engineer was chosen to mix all the final audio tracks for the project. Therefore, getting all the programming tracks and recording vocal tracks ahead of time was crucial to give the mixing engineer enough time to complete final mixes before the due date. Due to the collaboration necessary to complete this project, I chose to use MTSU students or recent graduates that would be able to meet regularly on campus and could assist in areas where my expertise or skill level was lacking. All participants will be credited respectively.

This project was completed by a group of programming producers, three female vocalists, a recording engineer, and a mixing engineer based on guidelines from the executive producer that was determined from the academic research of the album and current pop market.

## II. History of the Stranger

Billy Joel's *The Stranger* was the fifth studio album released by Joel on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1977 under Columbia Records, and it was his first commercially and critically successful album that remains one of the best albums of all time (Billy Joel Timeline; Rolling Stone). After his previous four albums did not sell well, Joel was threatened to be dropped by Columbia Records before the release of *The Stranger* (Greene). His previous albums did not compete well on the market, for his previous producers did not understand how to make his music commercially viable (Greene). Joel's only hit song up to that point was "Piano Man" which landed in the Top 20 Billboard charts and became his first gold album; unfortunately, the song's success was not followed by successful albums (Billy Joel Timeline). *Streetlife Serenade* and *Turnstiles* reached their peak at platinum, but their limited success left Joel in danger of being dropped by Columbia (Billy Joel Timeline). However, when Phil Ramone was hired to produce the album, he provided the artistic vision to help Joel create an album that listeners and critics could appreciate. Ramone and Joel started recording in July of 1977 in the Sound Factory in Los Angeles, California, and after *The Stranger's* release, it became Columbia's best-selling album until 1985 (Billy Joel Timeline).

The album yielded successful singles, with "Movin' Out" reaching number 17, "She's Always a Woman" reaching number 17, and "Only the Good Die Young" reaching number 24 on the Billboard Hot 100 (Corpuz). The most successful single was "Just the Way You Are" which charted at number 3 and received Record of the Year and Song of the Year at the 1978 Grammy Awards (Entertainment). Other non-singles from

the album have also become staples of Joel's shows, including "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant" and "Vienna." Appearing on *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon*, Joel discussed his Madison Square Garden residency and played "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant" to close out the show. Overall, the four singles did well enough on the Hot 100 to all land in the Top 25, but the album as a whole was received well critically.

In 2003, *The Stranger* reached Diamond certification by the Recording Industry Association of America by selling over 10 million units total (Entertainment). In 2012, the album was named number 70 on Rolling Stone's 500 greatest albums of all time (Rolling Stone). Joel later went on to win The Grammy Legend Award in 1991 (Billy Joel Timeline). *The Stranger* was the start of the recognition Joel received from the music industry, and Ramone remained Joel's producer for five more albums until *Storm Front* was released in 1989 (Billy Joel Timeline).

Joel credits much of the album's success to Ramone's innovative production methods, which complemented Joel's writing. Ramone apparently convinced Joel to mainstream his arrangements and make the production more accessible for a commercial platform, such as radio (Billy Joel and Phil Ramone). During the recording of the album, Ramone worked with Joel to create "radio ready" material (Billy Joel and Phil Ramone). Ramone suggested embellishments to make pivotal moments that were used to create a central theme and unique characteristics for each song; for example, the car driving away at the end of "Movin' Out," or the iconic whistling at the beginning of "The Stranger," (Billy Joel and Phil Ramone). These moments combined Joel's storytelling with

Ramone's creative producing give each song a distinctive voice that creates an album with few weak moments. Through the use of production techniques, Ramone brings Joel's lyrics and stories to life.

"Movin' Out" includes similar themes found in "Piano Man," which refer to everyday life. "Piano Man" told from Joel's perspective describes people stuck in their daily routines. However, in "Movin' Out" Joel describes how Anthony and others try to escape their mundane lives by attempting to 'improve' them, such as trading in a Chevy for a Cadillac. The desire to escape and move out is symbolized in the outro by including the sound of a car driving away. This was recorded by using bassist Doug Stegmeyer's corvette, and it is one of the pivotal moments that make the song distinctive from others on the album (The 25 Best Billy Joel).

The title track "The Stranger" sets the tone for the rest of the album, including an intro that is used again at the end of the album in "Everybody Has a Dream" to tie the album together, an effective tool that is rarely found in current popular albums. The introduction of the song was not originally in the composition. After Joel was experimenting on the piano and whistling a simple tune intended for another instrument, Ramone had the idea to use Joel's whistling for the beginning of the piece (The Stranger). Joel's whistling captured the dark tone the lyrics portray, and the unconventional instrument revealed Joel's artistry outside of his piano playing. This simple tune was used at both the end and beginning of the album, effectively capturing the dark mood of the album, and therefore, made "The Stranger" the title track.

“Just the Way You Are” was the highest chart topper off the album, but if it were not for Ramone, the song might never have reached the final cut of the album. Joel thought the song sounded over-sentimental and claimed it reminded him of an old Stevie Wonder recording (Just the Way You Are). He originally did not want it on the album, for it did not capture the essence of rock n’ roll and instead created a romantic feeling that would not be received well (Just the Way You Are – Billy Joel). Part of the emotional vulnerability may be due to creating this work as a birthday present for his first wife Elizabeth. However, Joel was convinced by Ramone to include it on the album when Linda Ronstadt and Phoebe Snow expressed their enthusiasm for it (Just the Way You Are – Billy Joel). The record received two Grammy Awards and peaked at number 3 on the Billboard Hot 100 (Entertainment), thus proving that Ramone’s instincts were correct.

“Scenes from an Italian Restaurant” is the most complex song from the album due to its four-part structure and over seven-minute length. Joel received his inspiration for the song while sitting in an Italian restaurant where he began repeating the phrase “bottle of white, bottle of red.” Eventually his waiter approached him and asked, “Perhaps a bottle of rose instead” (Scenes from an Italian Restaurant). This first line is a recurring piece of the song that defines the beginning and ending of the work. Joel also combined other ideas that he had previously; for example, the second and third sections were both old songs Joel had written but never featured on albums. When attempting to figure out how to put all the pieces together, he looked to the Beatles for ideas. George Martin, the Beatles’ producer, would take several unfinished ideas from the band and would fit them

together almost like pieces of a puzzle (Scenes from an Italian Restaurant). This inspired Joel to do the same, and it ended up creating the seven-minute composition still played by Joel today.

“Vienna” is another career staple of Joel’s that was inspired by a visit he had with his father in Vienna, Austria. When Joel saw a woman sweeping the streets, he thought it was sad she was not spending time for herself (Greene). His perspective changed when his father claimed she was using her time wisely by contributing to the community instead of sitting at home (Greene). This inspired Joel to write how young people do not have to rush to start their careers or earn success, for a person does not have to have their life defined at a young age (Vienna).

“Only the Good Die Young” was a controversial song at the time of its release, and the inspiration behind the song was not meant to be demeaning towards the Catholic Church. Many Catholic churches had issues with lyrics that seemed to target the church and the behavior expectations of a church member, particularly when it comes to marriage. However, Joel wrote the song about a girl named Virginia Callaghan, who came to his shows when he first started playing in a band (The Story Behind). Soon after its release, the song was banned by both a radio station at a Catholic university in New Jersey and an archdiocese thus, creating controversy which made the song become popular (The Story Behind). Joel explained it as when one tells a kid not to do something, that is the very thing they wish to do (Only the Good Die Young). After being prohibited, the song went from doing poorly to charting at number 24 on the Billboard Hot 100 (Corpuz). The original song was written as a reggae groove, but drummer Liberty

DeVitto did not approve of the style (Greene). Joel changed it to an upbeat pop groove, and the song became a hit that is still played on the radio today.

“She’s Always a Woman” was a recurring favorite in Joel’s 1970’s set that was written about his first wife who was a manager in the music industry at a time when few women were recognized. The purpose of the song was about showcasing the harsh attitudes and unfair treatment Elizabeth often received from men in the industry, but Joel thought she was excellent at business and a great woman that deserved to be appreciated (She’s Always a Woman). Unfortunately, he only kept it on the setlist until his divorce in 1982, as he lacked passion in the performance afterwards (She’s Always a Woman). Joel only added the song back to his setlist in 2006, often adding at the end “and then we got divorced” (She’s Always a Woman by Billy Joel).

“Get it Right the First Time” is often not performed live, and it is one of the lesser known songs from the album. Joel has not performed the song since the 70s, but it was written as a break from the heavy lyrics on the other songs in the album (Get It Right the First Time). While “The Stranger” is written about the mysterious person one can be and “Just the Way You Are” is about the love Joel has for his first wife, “Get it Right the First Time” was written as an upbeat, easy-going song about asking a woman out. DeVitto explained that it was hard to record despite its laid-back nature, and it ended up being one of the last recorded songs on the album (Get it Right the First Time by Billy Joel). “Get it Right the First Time” is not Joel’s most known work from the album, but it does bring a relief to this heavy lyrical toned album.

“Everybody Has a Dream” was written as a gospel celebration to the end of the album according to Joel (Everybody Has a Dream). It was originally written with a folk influence, having a 4/4-time signature (Everybody Has a Dream). By the time the song was recorded, it had a 6/8-time signature and featured gospel style choir vocals from Phoebe Snow, Patti Austin, and Gwen Guthrie (Everybody Has a Dream). The song ties into the rest of the album by featuring the introduction of “The Stranger” as the outro of the composition, and it creates a book closing effect to make the album feel complete. The new arrangement of “Everybody Has a Dream” brought a new perspective to the original folk influenced piece. Between the gospel and “The Stranger” influence, the song sums up the light and dark concepts on the album, and it creates closure for the listener.

### III. The State of Pop Music in 2019

The goal of this project was to find what makes Joel's *The Stranger* successful and to find out what could make it competitive on today's market. The state of pop music is a relative, ever-changing genre in music by definition. After researching *The Stranger*, I decided to incorporate the trends on the market during 2019. The following is a detailed report for the year 2019 and what songs were topping the charts. This includes a look into the reports by Hit Songs Deconstructed from Quarter One, Two, and Three. My intent was to use the reports of current trends in order to build guidelines for the programming producers of this project, with the goal being to keep the theme of the original Joel work intact. This chapter is an overview of the changes and trends in popular music in 2019, followed by a summary of the guidelines for my programming producers which have been gathered from this research.

For quarter one and two, the songs in the top ten were as follows: "7 Rings" by Ariana Grande, "Old Town Road" by Billy Ray Cyrus and Lil Nas X, "Shallow" by Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga, "Sucker" by the Jonas Brothers, "Sunflower" by Post Malone and Swae Lee, "Thank U Next" by Grande, and "Without Me" by Halsey (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). Ariana Grande was named the top performing artist in the first half of 2019 with the most number one hits and the most top ten hits. Her single "7 Rings" stayed at number one for a total of nine weeks, and she was the only artist with two number ones on the Billboard Hot 100 (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). Grande was not the only female artist with success this year. Of the top five artists with the most top ten hits, three of the five were females. These artists include Grande, Halsey, and Taylor

Swift. Of the artists with the highest number of weeks in the top ten, Halsey had twenty-one weeks and Grande had twenty weeks (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). For quarter one, out of ten producers and production teams, Taylor Swift was the only named female, and she was the top performing Artist Producer during quarter one (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report).

Despite a prominence of female vocalists at the top of the charts, the overall average of vocals for the genre of popular music was male dominated for a majority of the year. In the category of lead vocal gender, an average of 60% of songs had a male lead vocalist whereas only 20% of songs were sung by a female lead (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). For non-hip-hop songs, the averages were 39% for a solo male vocalist and 30% for a solo female vocalist, yet in hip-hop songs, there was a 100% rate of songs sung by a solo male (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). For quarter three, the two breakout songs to enter into the top ten for the year both included female vocalists. The first was “Senorita” by Camila Cabello and Shawn Mendes, a female/male duo. The second was “Truth Hurts” by new artist Lizzo, featured in the Netflix film *Someone Great* (Q3 2019 Trend Report). By the end of quarter three, seven artists out of the featured top ten number one songs contained a female vocal as either a lead or as part of a duet (Q3 2019 Trend Report).

As the year progressed, the songs featured at number one showed similar trends in influences, composition, and lead vocals. For quarter one, the number one songs were as follows: “7 Rings” by Grande, “Shallow” by Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga, “Sucker” by the Jonas Brothers, “Sunflower” by Post Malone and Swae Lee, “Thank U Next” by Grande, and “Without Me” by Halsey (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). The top artist for

quarter one was Grande with three top ten hits with two at number one and a total of eight weeks at number one (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). Of the above featured number one songs, all had an average of 95 beats per minute and a length of around three minutes. 67% of the songs were in a minor key. The genre influences within the songs were almost evenly placed with 67% for hip-hop/rap, 50% for R&B/soul, 50% for electropop, and 50% for ballad/power ballad (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). Most of the number one songs were heavily influenced by the genre hip hop/rap; “7 Rings” by Grande is a prime example of this. Other genre influences such as electropop and R&B/soul were split evenly in their appearances in top songs for the first quarter. Within all genre influences used primarily during the first quarter, a similarity of instruments is found. The prominent instruments for quarter one included drums/percussion, synthesizer bass, electric guitar, non-bass synthesizer, electric bass, claps, acoustic guitar, acoustic piano, electric piano, and snaps (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). As the year progressed, songs began to show more instrumental diversity, but common trends in genre influence were still apparent in the top ten number one songs.

The songs released during quarter two, new arrival songs, varied in genre and genre influences used. The most popular used genre was still pop music with 53% while hip hop/rap only amounted to 27% of the genre in the new arrivals (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). For influences within the new arrivals, hip hop/rap topped with 60% while trap followed closely behind with 53%. Retro, electropop, and dance/club all tied for 40% (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). This shows a slight change from the soul/R&B and ballad/power ballad influences from the first quarter. With the additional genre influence of dance/club, an emphasis on producing using computer-based tracks was

showcased by having one of the four prominent instruments used overall be synthesizer bass. Also, while hip-hop was not the most popular genre, it was still an important factor by being an influencing genre in many pop music songs. This reveals that the influences of other genres are crossing over to create new standards of music in the market.

With the genre influence trends found in the new arrivals of quarter two, the analysis of the top ten for the first half of the year revealed differences in genre influences and instrumentation between the first and second quarter. Hip-hop/rap was the most popular genre influence with 71%, and the closest influence being R&B/Soul with 57%. Once again, ballad/power ballad and electropop were tied with 43%, but also trap tied at 43%, an influence previously left out of the first quarter trends (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). The prominent instruments for the top ten of the first half of the year included: drums/percussion, synthesizer bass, non-bass synthesizer, claps, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, acoustic piano, electric piano, snaps, and electric bass (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). Moreover, the compositional overall trends with the quarter one and two top ten included a tempo average of 91 beats per measure. 57% of songs also used a minor key instead of a major key, thus establishing one of the common trends found in every quarter of the year. Much like the use of the minor key, 57% of the songs were less than three minutes (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report).

In 2019, there were a few common factors in a majority of the featured top ten songs for the first half of the year. When viewed in comparison, 2018 and 2019 had major changes in trends of the type of music being released. In 2018, hip-hop was the dominating genre at 59%, but in 2019, hip hop was only at 31%, whereas pop went from 25% in 2018 to 53% in 2019 (2019 Mid-year Trend Report). The genres essentially

swapped places in 2019; however, hip-hop was the dominating influence for all songs, including pop orientated songs. This revealed how even though hip-hop was not the most popular genre in 2019 it was still a prominent factor in the music charting on the top ten. Furthermore, the most popular songs use of minor keys was 53% over 42% in major keys (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). Overall, the songs being released in 2019 were predominantly pop with a hip-hop influence in a minor key.

For quarter three, the top ten were as follows: “7 Rings” by Ariana Grande, “Bad Guy” by Billie Eilish, “Old Town Road” by Billy Ray Cyrus and Lil Nas X, “Senorita” by Camila Cabello and Shawn Mendes, “Shallow” by Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga, “Sucker” by the Jonas Brothers, “Sunflower” by Post Malone and Swae Lee, “Thank U Next” by Ariana Grande, “Truth Hurts” by Lizzo, and “Without Me” by Halsey (Q3 2019 Trend Report). Of the top ten, seven songs were either accompanied or sung solely by a female artist. For the top ten, the overall category was pop at 80%; this further proved pop was the dominating genre for 2019 (Q3 2019 Trend Report). 60% of the top ten used a minor key with a tempo of 97 beats per measure. However, there was a slight change from the first half of the year with a drop from 57% to 50% of songs under three minutes in the third quarter (Q3 2019 Trend Report). There was also an increase to 50% of strictly solo female vocalists which before was only at 43% during the first half of the year (Q3 2019 Trend Report). This could have been a result of new breakout artist Lizzo with her hit single “Truth Hurts” off of her album *Cuz I Love You*, and collaborations between female and male vocalists such as “Senorita” by Camila Cabello and Shawn Mendes. Therefore, for the third quarter the release trends were pop songs with a medium tempo and a length of around three minutes with either a solo female or group/duet.

With most of the songs being predominantly hip-hop/rap, electropop, trap, and dance/club influenced, the list of used instruments was relatively similar to previous quarters. The prominent instruments for the first half of the year were drums/percussion, synthesizer bass, non-bass synthesizer, claps, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, acoustic piano, electric piano, snaps, and electric bass (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). In the third quarter, this did not change much with the exception of the diminishing use of electric piano (Q3 2019 Trend Report). By using a synthesizer bass and non-bass synthesizer, this showcased how electronic music subgenres, such as electropop and trap, influenced the current standards in pop music for instrumentation and genre influence.

In the 2019 quarterly reports, analysis of song form revealed apparent trends in radio commercial ready music. Almost all songs began with an intro, but less than half of the songs had a pre-chorus. Also, an average of 31% of songs started their chorus in under a minute. Only 40% of songs had a post-chorus, but 77% of songs contained an outro with 49% ending abruptly (2019 Mid-Year Trend Report). By quarter three, about 50% of songs were under three minutes (Q3 2019 Trend Report). As Joel sings in ‘The Entertainer,’ “If you’re gonna have a hit, you gotta make it fit, so they cut it down to 3:05” (The Entertainer). This popular idea of having a chart-topping song under three minutes is not new to the music industry because it was a trend for song form in 2019.

After researching the common trends and top songs for the year of 2019, the next challenge was to find ways to incorporate these modern styles in the Joel works. Key common trends included the heavy bass synthesizer use, particularly in “Sunflower,” the use of a female artist, and the influence of electropop style. The influence of electropop style was utilized most by using computer-based tracks for the producing process. These

factors were used as a foundation for each producer's song, and it allowed room for additional influences and examples to be showcased in the final works by the producer. In the end, each producer combined a number of different modern influences to create unique works while still meeting the criteria for the Joel pieces.

## IV. Song Analysis and Approach

Since my goal for the project was to modernize selections from *The Stranger*, I chose to examine several songs from the album. The following section features an analysis of the original song, followed by an explanation of how current trends were incorporated into the new interpretations. My intent was to re-create Joel's original works utilizing modern technology and trends, while supporting the expression of the original themes. Additionally, it should offer a cohesive and consistent feel that the original album had.

### .01 "The Stranger"

The overall theme of "The Stranger" is about describing the inner personality one has that one does not project to society. Furthermore, Joel describes how there are secrets that one never admits to their significant other and the effect it can have on the relationship. This dark theme was centered around a halfhearted suicide attempt by Joel at the age of twenty-one, and he proclaimed it revealed a dark side of himself he had never experienced previously. The idea of having parts to oneself that they do not even reveal to themselves created the idea that there is a stranger trapped inside each person. This stranger may not be seen by themselves, significant others, or even family. This dark tone is enforced in Joel's vocals, instrumentation, and performance which emphasizes the heavy lyrical theme. Overall, this dark natured theme was used in the lyrical content, instrumentation, and vocal performance to emphasize the seriousness of the subject matter.

The lyrics give details about the different personalities one can have, and how a partner may never encounter all sides of their significant other. He describes it as, “Why were you so surprised that you never saw the stranger? Did you ever let your lover see the stranger in yourself?” A listener might interpret this as one cannot reveal all parts to themselves, and then expect their partner to share all their secrets. All people are at fault for not wanting to share their mistakes, failures, and secrets; this is what Joel attempts to point out in his lyrics. Furthermore, he explains in his first few lines that the “stranger” can take on a variety of faces. He writes, “Some are satin, some are steel, some are silk, and some are leather. They’re the faces of a stranger, but we love to try them on.” The listener might interpret this as we all have a person we want to be or pretend to be when no one else is looking. A part of everyone always wishes they were someone else, and therefore, this secret comes out when they are alone. The lyrical content is all about the secrets, personalities, and desires that we keep from others.

The instrumentation for the song is percussion/drums, bass guitar, Fender Rhodes electric piano, electric guitars, piano, lead and backing vocals. The song opens with the piano played by Joel, and then the drums enter followed by Joel’s own whistling. Originally Joel wanted a different instrument for the whistling portion, but Ramone convinced Joel that his whistling matched the tone of the song best. Joel’s whistling has a dark color in the tone that best accompanies the tonal quality of the rest of the instruments. The electric guitars create instrumental fills in between verses that are heavy rock influenced; this enforces the dark centered theme that Joel portrays. The song ends with the same piano and whistling combination that opens the song; closing the song with the same combination creates a sense of consistency and closure for the piece.

The form of the song is: intro, verse one, pre chorus, chorus, verse two, pre chorus, chorus, chorus, verse three, and outro. The introduction begins with a piano solo by Joel to set the melody for Joel's whistling tune that is played again at the outro. When the first verse begins, all other instruments are presented, and the guitars take a central role in the piece. By having a slow intro and outro, it allowed for the impact of the verses and choruses to be more prominent for the listener. Moreover, the choruses have more presence by the acoustic guitars, and this reflects the softer lyrics Joel is stating. During the choruses, Joel attempts to relate to his listeners, and by softening the instrumentation, it creates an intimate and comforting feeling. During the verses though, Joel reflects the staccato and short playing of the guitar in his singing, and he does this to showcase the intensity the verses have. As the plot of the song continues, Joel ends on a verse to close with an intense and harsh tone that leads into the soft jazz-like outro. Each of Joel's verses are played with darkness and harshness, but they are shortly followed by a chorus or an outro to ease the tension Joel creates. Overall, the song consists of a back and forth between the ease and tension of the piece to create contrast in the work to keep the listeners' attention.

Joel's vocal performance in this song reflects the dark theme of the piece that was inspired by Joel's own mental health. During the verses, Joel sings short to accompany the guitar, but he then extends his lines during the pre-chorus to lead into the chorus. This indicates the change in feeling during the chorus to create more comfort for the listener by singing with more ease and extended notes to appeal to the listener's ears. Furthermore, he uses his verses by adding emphasis on certain lines to catch the listener's attention to his lyrics and the different strangers he is describing.

The production techniques used in this song were ideas that originally came from Joel's playing in the studio. While Joel was in the studio, he was playing on the piano showing Ramone the idea he had for the introduction, and Joel started whistling the tune that he wanted another instrument to play. Ramone then told Joel that his whistling was the instrument he should play, for his out of tune whistling was a perfect dark tonal quality to match the rest of the ensemble. Joel's whistling was an unconventional instrument and idea used by Ramone but allowed Joel's artistry to extend beyond his piano playing abilities. Using this moment on *The Stranger* allows this album to stand out from others by Joel and gives an example to the defining moments on the album that made it succeed. Another technique chosen was the use of a small drum machine called the Rhythm Ace. Joel was playing a pattern on the machine and the team decided to use it for the "funky" rhythm in "The Stranger." This pattern created a texture on this particular piece that is not featured on the other works, and it still allowed for a consistent groove to be kept throughout the work.

### **The Approach**

When our producers approached combining "The Stranger" with current trends, there were several influences used to ensure the important parts of Joel's work were kept intact and trends on the current marketplace were both presented. The key factors that needed to be updated were the drums and synthesizers in order for these to properly reflect modern trends based on the analysis of the executive producer and the programming producer, Killian Devine. The influences for this song include "This Feeling" by The Chainsmokers featuring Kelsea Ballerini and "Fireflies" by Owl City.

The simple drum pattern used in “This Feeling” inspired the drum pattern used continuously in the modern version of “The Stranger.” “This Feeling” spent twenty weeks on the billboard Hot 100 chart, and it was one of the arguments for using a female artist in the proposal for this project. At the time of its release, it was part of the pattern in December of 2018 that included a female vocalist as the main vocalists in popular music at the time, and therefore, it was a reference track used as inspiration for the project. Within the song, “This Feeling” uses a simple kick drum on the first downbeat followed by a snare hit on count two, which is then repeated throughout the song. This pattern is used in the verses and choruses; the only difference in sound is often a filter to affect tonal quality. This idea of using a simple downbeat of the drum followed by a hit of the snare was a repetitive pattern used throughout most of the modern version of “The Stranger.” In the original version, the drums have a more complex pattern that are the center of the work, but when translating that into modern music it did not fit the trends found in many electropop inspired popular songs. Therefore, the executive and programming producer decided to keep the drum pattern relatively simple and allow more room for counter melodies. Using a simple drum pattern allowed Devine to include a consistent rhythm to the drums as the drum machine creates. It also gave room for embellishments to make the song more modern.

For the inspirations for counter melodies to create a more modern feel, “Fireflies” by Owl City was used specifically for the synthesizer counter melody that is played throughout most of the song. This idea became an influence for our programming producer to use a similar approach. When the song first opens, there is a synthesizer that plays an arpeggiated run, and is used throughout most of the song. It provides a counter

melody to the singer Adam Young, but it creates an additional texture to the song to keep the listener interested. After finishing the basic foundation to “The Stranger,” the tracking and executive producer decided to use this same idea during the sections where the vocalist is performing. This creates a clear distinction between when the vocalist is singing and when she is not. During the verses, a repetitive counter melody can be heard on top by a higher pitched synthesizer similar to the one in “Fireflies,” but there is an additional grit to the sound to reflect the dark theme in the other instruments in “The Stranger.” Furthermore, during the choruses a simple arpeggiated run is repeated to keep this idea of having a counter melody used by a synthesizer, but Devine reflected the change in feel in the choruses during Joel’s version by having the synthesizer sound less harsh than in the verses. Overall, Devine combined the tonal qualities and feel of Joel’s composition with the synthesizer lead counter melody inspired by “Fireflies.”

After determining how to include modern inspirations, the executive and programming producer had to decide what aspects of the original song were necessary. Based on analysis of the song and album, the most important part of the song that defined the album and other songs on the album was the introduction and outro. Therefore, it was crucial to keep as much of the same sound and feel as the original introduction and outro as possible. Also, the dark texture of all the instruments, composition, and tonal quality was essential in reflecting the same feeling for the heavy written lyrics. Therefore, by having a similar introduction and outro, as well as similar dark toned instrumentation, the crucial aspects of the work were kept, and it allowed the vocalist to keep a similar style to

Joel while also adding additional harmonies to create more texture throughout the work. When listening to the modern version, the dark texture and introduction allow the listener to easily identify the song as “The Stranger.”

The vocals were the last section of the song to be completed before being sent to the mixing engineer. The use of a female vocalist was preferred due to the top selling artist, Ariana Grande, being female. Due to the high notes in the introduction, a soprano singer was needed to successfully re-interpret the opening whistle tones. Due to the cancellation of other singers and lack of available soprano singers, the recording engineer and I chose to record my vocals on the track to meet those requirements. After completing a track in the lower register just as Joel does, I decided to include a harmony track to provide additional embellishments to the piece. The main quality to keep from the original was the intensity and impact of the performance. My performance in the lower register put emphasis on the verses particularly, and with the addition of the harmony track, it allowed for more impact to be created to capture the listener’s attention.

Another crucial piece of this song was the introduction and outro where Joel whistles. However, after all vocalists tried to replicate this, there was no vocalist that could match the same impact and quality that Joel had. Therefore, I had the inspired idea to approach the introduction similar to Ariana Grande in “Dangerous Woman.” In this song, Grande transitions to the bridge by singing without lyrics, and instead she provides a series of runs and high notes. This led us to recording the whistle melody with the same approach, by singing the line instead of whistling it. However, unlike other songs on this project, this required a soprano vocalist due to the high pitch of the notes. Luckily, due to Joel’s whistling being out of tune, the main goal was to record it with the same feeling,

clarity, and impact as the whistling even if the notes were not perfectly in tune. After comparing my singing to the whistling, the decision to keep the singing style was made, and in return added another modern trend onto this piece.

## **.02 “Just the Way You Are”**

The overall theme of “Just the Way You Are” is not about changing one’s personal aspects for love but instead being loved and accepted for one’s true self. This reveals how when a person truly loves another, one is accepted despite one’s flaws and mistakes. The idea is one that can stir emotions; therefore, this song creates a sentimental atmosphere in both the composition and the lyrics to emphasize the theme. Joel slows down this piece and purposefully opens with only vocals and a Fender Rhodes electric piano. By doing so, he brings attention to the lyrics and performance of the piece rather than the production. These elements used to showcase the performance enhance the overall theme by allowing Joel’s emotional appeal to reiterate the lyrical theme. Joel combines the composition and lyrics together in his vulnerable performance, and thus, creates a cohesive overall sentimental theme in the work.

The lyrics describe how a person should not change their personality or behavior based on the opinions of others, as the right person will appreciate them for who they truly are. He explains it as, “Don’t go changing to try and please me, you never let me down before.” Joel continues to elaborate on this situation by describing a person changing their fashion or hair color to please their significant other, but he promises his beloved that his love will not waiver. This song contains many examples of how we as people may try to change or adapt ourselves for the benefit of another, but Joel argues that one does not need to give in to this desire, for love is unconditional. His line, “I

wouldn't leave you in times of trouble. We never could have come this far," gives the listener the idea that love withstands both hard and pleasant times. By having such descriptive lyrics, the composition is kept relatively simple to use Joel's vocal performance as the driving feature of the work. Overall, the lyrics create a romantic, and sentimental theme for people who desire to be loved for being their true selves.

The instrumentation for this song is a Fender Rhodes electric piano, alto saxophone, electric guitars, acoustic guitars, bass, drums/percussion, vocals, and acoustic piano. The first instrument used in the song is the Rhodes piano for the introduction and first verse; however, when the chorus begins, the acoustic guitar, bass, and drums/percussion section enter to give a distinction between the first verse and chorus. The alto saxophone is featured between the chorus and second verse to create transition and dynamic contrast from the first section of the song. The use of the acoustic guitar and drums/percussion section provides a rhythmic feel that keeps the song steady while the piano plays to Joel's vocal performance. Furthermore, this steady rhythm allows the alto saxophone to improvise his solo while still remaining on time; Joel is also able to extend his lyrical phrases while still keeping in tempo and remaining with the other instruments. The instrumental playing showcases the vulnerable ability of the work by allowing the players to use improvisational techniques and dynamic contrast to create moments full of emotional intensity.

The form of the song is as follows: intro, verse one, chorus, verse two, chorus, bridge, chorus, instrumental solo, chorus, and instrumental solo/outro. The intro begins with the Fender Rhodes electric piano to present the main chords. The lyrical content is the centerpiece of the song and only defers from the lyrics and vocal performance when the

alto saxophone creates a transition or instrumental solo. The chorus is often similar to the verse prior to it; however, instruments are presented in the chorus that were not played in the verse to create a dynamic contrast and clarification between the verse and chorus. As the song progresses, the bridge slows down to feature only Joel and the Rhodes, much like the introduction. Joel then extends his final note in the bridge and the alto saxophone feature presents itself to embody an emotional cry for love alongside Joel. The song ends with an alto saxophone solo fading out. Overall, the song consists of romantic lyrics accompanied by a consistent rhythm section and basic piano chords with an alto saxophone feature to add an interesting quality to the simple song form structure.

Joel's vocal performance in this song reflects the romance and sentiment being portrayed in the overall theme. The performance has a calming and slow approach that continues to build in intensity. Based on the use of verbal hums after certain lines, listeners interpret the slow approach and unconventional hums as an emotional performance by Joel. These simple moments of extending certain lines or adding runs to the end of lines also factor into the emotional presentation. His ability to add more of these elements as the song progresses showcases his different feelings at the end as opposed to the beginning of the piece. During the final stages of production, the emotional performance was the key factor in making the song a success.

The production techniques used in this song emphasize the idea of having Joel's performance be the driving element in the work. This is showcased by having minimal instrumentation and large space atmosphere to allow the vocals to dominate over the other pieces. For example, the introduction only consists of Joel and a simple chord structure played on the Rhodes piano to establish the importance of the lyrical content

over the instrumentation. The featured alto saxophone provides an additional emotional output that Joel uses to keep the listener's feelings intact between sections of the song. However, the foundation of the song is kept in time and in key by the use of acoustic guitar, drums/percussion, and Rhodes piano which allows for featuring instruments room to improvise. Overall, "Just the Way You Are" enhances its lyrical theme by using the vocal performance and alto saxophone to portray the emotional content within the lyrics.

### **The Approach**

When our producers approached combining "Just the Way You Are" with current trends, there were several influences used to ensure the integrity of the work and current marketplace trends were both present. The idea the programming producer, Bryan Garside, and I had was to incorporate the open space atmosphere, particularly evident at the beginning of the song; this also included finding popular vocal-driven compositions in today's market to combine the old and the new production techniques. The influences for this song include "Lose You to Love Me" by Selena Gomez and "Delicate" by Taylor Swift. This song required performance-based works to match the emotional atmosphere of the original work.

The reverb saturated piano found in "Lose You to Love Me" inspired the application of the piano for the modern take of "Just the Way You Are." "Lose You to Love Me" was the first number one hit on the Billboard Hot 100 for Gomez because it showcased vulnerability in her performance combined with a simplistic piano composition that allowed Gomez's vocals to be the driving force (Lose You to Love Me). Before the work was released, Garside and I struggled to find a quality reference for "Just the Way You Are" that embodied the emotional performance and musical composition.

However, when “Lose You to Love Me” was released on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019, we finally found a current chart-topping work that matched the sentimentality of Joel’s work. When examining “Just the Way You Are,” the Fender Rhodes leads the song and is the instrumental main focal point. By using a piano composition as found in “Lose You to Love Me,” it allowed the tracking producer to make the song relevant in today’s market while still keeping the intent the Rhodes originally portrayed.

For the final inspirations, “Delicate” by Taylor Swift was used specifically for the drums/percussion elements to maintain the tempo of the song despite the improvisations of the other instruments. Within “Delicate,” there is an evident “heartbeat” quality to the drums presented by the kick and tom to represent the emotional heartache the song presents. In the modern version of “Just the Way You Are,” Swift’s drum inspired section was used to keep a consistent tempo while maintaining a “heartbeat” quality that allowed the piano to remain in an open atmosphere. Furthermore, another element of “Delicate” that inspired Garside was the use of the organic style synthesizer. This synthesizer fills in much of the empty space in “Delicate” during specific sections to provide dynamic contrast, which was then translated in the modern rendition. In the new take on “Just the Way You Are,” the producer kept an open atmosphere quality that allowed room for a synthesizer to fill in additional empty space to create dynamic contrast between the verses and choruses.

After determining how to include modern influences, my team had to decide which moments or instruments were necessary in order to keep the work’s original integrity intact. Joel’s main distinction in this particular work is his emotional factor that influenced both the lyrical theme and the performance. One distinctive feature in Joel’s

tunes is his piano playing, but he plays the Fender Rhodes in this particular piece. In the song “Lose You to Love Me” the piano is the main focal point, much like most of Joel’s discography. I as the executive producer decided to use the modern influences of Gomez’s piano-based track and used the piano as the main focal instrument instead of the Fender Rhodes; however, this change did not change the integrity due to still remaining true to Joel’s style. The main difference between the two songs is that the modern version is at a slower tempo than the original work, but this left more room for the vocalists to enhance their performance. Therefore, the producers believed it remained in character for the work. Furthermore, the programming producer contained the same chord structure and used similar melodies to effectively keep a similar style to Joel’s that would be distinguished. By keeping the piano, it easily identifies the work as a Joel tune, and the similar melody allows listeners to know its “Just the Way You Are” specifically.

After producing the track to meet both the necessary qualities of the original work and current trends, the vocals were the last section to be recorded for the tracks. An alto singer was preferred due to the lower range of the song, and Kate Cagginaelli was the featured female vocalist on this song that met that requirement. The production effects used on the vocals included a use of reverb to emphasize the open space feeling, much like Gomez’s track. Furthermore, Cagginelli had more room to add emphasis at the end of the piece with the slower tempo, and it allowed them to feel more of the emotion of the lyrics. Moreover, the performance of the vocalist was crucial to staying true to the original piece. Caggianelli needed portray the same or more emotion than Joel showcases to his wife in this song.

### **.03 “Only the Good Die Young”**

The overall theme of “Only the Good Die Young” is the pure lust young adults have for one another despite society or religion preaching otherwise. Therefore, Joel describes the work as being “pro-lust” instead of anti-religious. This theme reveals the human nature of young adults to have sexual tension, and the desires they can have for one another. Joel tackles this theme by describing a young Catholic woman he knew from his early days performing in high school at Long Island. He uses her as a representation of how a young woman should not necessarily listen to the advice of her elders, but she should instead give in to her natural temptations. These familiar feelings of desire, temptation, and lust are the main lyrical themes. This upbeat song creates a revolutionary anthem that encourages its listeners to follow human nature instead of socially acceptable behavior.

The lyrics describe Joel’s high school crush, Virginia Callahan, as he attempts to explain to her the opportunities and activities of a life outside of the Catholic Church. He explains it as, “They built you a temple and locked you away. But they never told you the price that you pay.” Listeners might interpret this as only hearing the good of a religion, but after joining, one learns the punishments of not following the rules. It was not meant to be an anti-Catholic song, but instead was meant to encourage human desire. As the song continues, Joel describes how his actions may result in eternal punishment in the end, but he believes that his sinful nature is more worthwhile. For many listeners, this is a controversial section of the song, for an eternal life in heaven is what many are raised to

aspire to. The upbeat melody is used to emphasize the “fun” nature of sin Joel is attempting to show to Virginia. Overall, the lyrics create a controversial statement that young adults should ignore faith and give in to their human nature for lust.

The instrumentation for the song includes vocals, piano, electric guitars, bass, drums, acoustic guitars, organ, saxophone, and horns. The first instrument introduced into the song is the piano which introduces the main melody, but after playing the introduction, the drums, acoustic guitar, and lead vocal enter to begin the first verse of the song. The remaining instrumentation enters when the chorus begins, and it creates a clear dynamic contrast between the verse and the chorus for the listener. The acoustic guitars are the most evident rhythm element of the song, but it is supported by the drums and allows room for drum fills. Additionally, the steady rhythm and chord progression given by the guitars allows for improvisation and fills by other instruments. This is evident by the saxophone that transitions into the bridge. By having the melody introduced early on, throughout the song an upbeat groove is kept that is reflected in the main melody and the rhythmic sections. This upbeat composition allowed Joel to emphasize the lyrical theme of giving in to temptation.

The form of the song is intro, verse one, pre-chorus, chorus, verse two, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge, verse three, pre-chorus, bridge, verse four, pre-chorus, chorus, and outro. The intro begins with the piano introducing the melody of the song. The lyrical content is the focal point of the song, and therefore, Joel’s vocals are the main instrument carrying the melody. All other instruments are purely used to keep rhythm, add emphasis to the lyrics, or create fills and transitions between lyrical content. This includes even the piano despite the piano introducing the main melody at the beginning of the piece. By

having Joel's vocals be the main melody, it allows room for the instruments to play off of the vocals and create emphasis, add dynamic contrast, and enforce the "fun" atmosphere of the lyrical theme. For example, as the song progresses the piano can be heard increasingly more by adding runs to accompany the saxophone or create layers to bring attention to such lyrics as "Come out Virginia don't let'em wait." By the end of the piece, Joel reduces lyrical content, and he allows the instruments to close off the song for almost a minute with added "Ohhhs" or "Only the good die young" occasionally. Overall, the song consists of prominent lyrical content and vocal melody accompanied by instruments to add texture, emphasis, and dynamic contrast.

Joel's vocal performance is the main focal point of the piece, and he uses his performance to create the idea that he is talking to Virginia specifically asking her to join him. Moreover, as the song continues, Joel's vocals increase in intensity. For example, when Joel begins, he presents an ease to his voice that seems to be inviting, but by the end, he starts to sound almost as if he is yelling at the listener. This is particularly evident at the phrase, "Well your mother told you all that I could give you was a reputation." This enhances the idea that Joel is talking to Virginia and trying to convince her to be with him; he goes from a warm inviting tone to an aggressive plead. These points of invitation create a story within the piece that is enhanced with the narrative of the lyrical content. Joel's performance creates the main focus of the piece, but he also reinforces the theme, leaves room for interpretation by other instruments, and tells a story within his performance. Therefore, the vocal performance is the most important aspect of this piece.

The production techniques used in this song were meant to reinforce the atmosphere Joel describes in his lyrics. However, when recording first began, Joel originally wrote the song in a reggae style, but Liberty DeVitto disagreed. Ramone then encouraged the band to play the song more rock n' roll, and therefore, the band came up with this jam style production. It contains the licks and runs of a jam session and a steady chord progression and rhythm to keep it commercially viable. For example, during the first chorus, the organ can be heard adding a simple line under Joel and, as the song progresses, more instruments begin adding lines or phrases to the chorus or end of the chorus. By approaching the song with a jam session in mind, it creates a feeling of ease and interest while still allowing the instruments to add their unique parts to create texture and flare. However, the simple chord progression, consistent tempo, and prominent vocals still allow the listeners to sing along and enjoy the piece. Overall, the production techniques consisted of Ramone letting the performers simply play as they please, and thus, he created a song that worked. Sometimes the best production advice is just to let the good players play off of one another and let them do most of the work; in this case, the end result was a chart-topping radio hit still played today.

### **The Approach**

When our producers approached “Only the Good Die Young” with current trends, there were several influences used to ensure the impact of the original song and current marketplace were both presented. After analysis of Joel’s piece, the executive producer and the programming producer, Charles Moffet, decided to incorporate the playful nature and maintain the upbeat rhythm to keep its original nature while adding modern trends of

performance and embellishment to make the songs relevant in today's market. The influences for this song include "White Island" by Peter Brown and "Can You Feel It" by Larry Heard aka Mr. Fingers.

The drum pattern was influenced by "White Island" which inspired our modern take of "Only the Good Die Young." "White Island" was released July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013, and its main genres are classified as dance and electronica. Therefore, it was used as a reference for a basic drum pattern to attempt to recreate for our project due to being in the genre and style our team was attempting to create. For the original, the groove was essential to making an atmosphere where all the instruments could play off of one another and stay in time. Henceforth, it was critical to our modern take that the drums stay apparent, clear, and precise throughout the piece to achieve the same goal. In "White Island," the kick hits on one and the snare hits on the and of one; this repeats for most of the song. Moffet decided to use a similar pattern in the modern take to create the consistent feel of the drums that our team needed for the song's success. By using a similar structure to "White Island," it gave Moffet the needed influence of electronica music while still approaching the effect of the drums on the instruments in the same way that the original did.

For the final inspirations, "Can you Feel It" by Larry Heard aka Mr. Fingers was used to bring more electropop influences into the mix, particularly in the bassline and piano solo. About forty percent of current trending music is electropop, so the producers looked into the influences of current trending songs to determine what key elements define an electropop category. After listening to electropop songs from both the 80s and today's market, the producers found that Larry Heard aka Mr. Fingers had a heavy influence in today's electropop, particularly in the category of house music. The

consistent hit of the synth bass along with the tone of the synth bass reflect “Can You Feel It” and allows the electropop influence to act as the same rhythmic element the drums/percussion section creates in the original. By having a consistent groove felt throughout the song, Moffet was able to still keep all the embellishments and improvisations that were featured in the original version.

After determining how to include modern influences, the producers had to decide which moments or instruments were necessary in order to keep the original nature of the piece. In this particular song, the vocals are the main distinctive melody, and therefore, the jam session arrangement of the original work left more room for interpretation for our producers. Furthermore, the main feeling in Joel’s composition to maintain was the upbeat tempo and good feeling atmosphere that the work presents in the instrumentation. Moffet kept this “fun” environment in mind, and also attempted to maintain the same beat structure and chord progression. After several drafts of the modern version, I as the executive producer requested having an instrument in the track that reflected the chord-based melody of the acoustic guitars in the original work. By doing so, it made the arrangement easier for the vocalists to sing to and it kept more of the original influence of “Only the Good Die Young” to make it easily indefinable for listeners.

After producing the track to meet both the integrity of the original work and current trends, the vocals were the last section to be recorded for the tracks. The idea of keeping the vocal more at ease during the first section and increase in intensity as the song progresses was the desired vocal performance. The production effects used on the vocals included using effects such as reverb to match the environment of the track produced by Moffet. Furthermore, the vocalist had more room to add interpretation at the

end of the piece due to the fade of the song. Joel goes into his upper register at the end of the piece; therefore, it was easier for a soprano singer to accomplish this same idea. The recording engineer and I once again decided to record my vocals on the track to successfully achieve the needed effect of the outro. However, the performance of the vocalist was crucial to staying true to the nature of the original work, for like many other songs off the album, the vocal performance was the key element in interpreting this song correctly.

#### **.04 “Get it Right the First Time”**

The overall theme of “Get It Right the First Time” is the desire a man has for a woman and the fear of approaching a woman for the first time. Therefore, Joel encourages his listeners to take charge of the situation and approach first. This theme shows how desperate a man can be to ask a woman out, and the desire one can have for another. The tension and awkwardness of asking someone out is daunting, but Joel tries to tackle this theme with an upbeat song to give confidence to men. He realizes how terrified one can be to approach a woman, but the chance can be lost quickly if the woman walks away. These common feelings of nervousness and fear of rejection are the main themes of the lyrics. It creates a lighthearted song to give men confidence and make an awkward situation more comfortable for all.

The lyrics describe how when a man meets the desired woman that the first meeting should be opportune moment to act, for he does not believe a second chance creates the same chemistry. He explains it as, “I’ve got it to get it right the first time-- that’s the main thing... You get it right the next time, that’s not the same thing.” Some listeners could interpret this as about getting a marriage correctly the first time, and for

others, the theme is about approaching a desired woman to enter a relationship that will last. Further in the song, Joel describes how he's worried about not having the right words and does not have the courage, but he cannot afford to let the moment pass. Many can relate to this lack of courage from fear of losing their own chance at love. The upbeat melody is a relief to the stress described in the lyrics, but Joel eases the tension in the uncomfortable situation by making the lyrics relatable and easy to understand farther along in the song. Overall, the lyrics create an understandable theme for men who seek to gain confidence when asking a woman out.

The instrumentation for the song is acoustic piano, vocals, electric guitars, acoustic guitar, bass, flute, and drums/percussion. The first instrument introduced into the song is the driving drums/percussion section, followed by most of the remaining instruments. The flute is added last to show a counter melody that later becomes a featured part in Joel's song at the end of every chorus. DeVitto's unique drum pattern settles the groove of the song, leaving space for Joel and the flute to include a counter melody during the chorus at the "la, la, la" sections. The drums, specifically the high hat, can be heard clearly throughout the song. By having the drums and flute work together to create a counter melody and groove, it creates controversy in the song that reflects the theme of tension that Joel is trying to portray.

The form of the song is as follows: intro, verse one, pre-chorus, chorus, verse two, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge, verse three, pre-chorus, chorus, and outro. The intro begins with DeVitto's drum pattern to create the groove of the song. Most of the lyrical content of the song is found in the verses and pre-chorus. The chorus consists of singing "la, la, la" with a flute accompanying Joel, symbolizing the ease and comfortability despite the

situation being awkward. During the bridge, the plot changes into finally mustering up the courage to ask the woman out despite being scared. His final pre-chorus and chorus sound as if Joel is using an abrasive tone in his vocal performance to convey his desperation to “get it right the first time.” The song ends with a final melody by the flute and a slow fade out of the drums, much like the beginning of the piece. Overall, the song consists of predominantly lyrical verses accompanied by a simple chorus with a similar intro and outro to create a cohesive and interesting song form.

Joel’s vocal performance in this song reflects the tension and stress being portrayed in the overall theme. The performance has a gritty and anxious feel during the verses to create the tension described in the lyrics. His desperate cry of not knowing how to say the first few words is an indicator of the despair he feels. Joel often uses scream-like vocal techniques towards the end of the verses to reflect his desperation. These techniques are a key piece in the final production techniques of the work.

The production techniques used in this song emphasize the idea of using the melody to relieve the tension of the lyrical theme. This is showcased by using a Latin based, disco influenced groove to provide an upbeat and easy-going atmosphere in the instrumentation to soften the uncomfortable lyrical theme. For example, the flute creates a breath like quality in its tone to showcase the laid-back nature; however, the electric guitars and the piano play a similar chord structure in the lower register to create the tension Joel describes in his lyrics. The emphasized backbeat provided by the bass and the drums keep the groove going while also adding momentum to the mix. DeVitto’s

unique drum pattern keeps the balance between tension and ease that creates the groove of the mix. Overall, “Get it Right the First Time” emphasizes its lyrical theme by assigning specific instruments to portray the emotions of the lyrics.

### **The Approach**

When our producers approached combining “Get it Right the First Time” with current trends, there were several influences used to ensure the nature of the work and current marketplace were both presented. The executive producer and the programming producer, Bryan Garside, had the idea to incorporate the heavy use of drums and upbeat feel of the original while using popular methods of embellishment to make the song relevant. The influences for this song include “Sunflower” by Post Malone and Swae Lee and “Truth Hurts” by Lizzo, for this song required upbeat influences to match the energy of the original work.

The heavy bass found in “Sunflower” inspired the bass section of the modern take of “Get it Right the First Time.” “Sunflower” was one of the top ten featured songs of the year by being a primarily electronic tune with filtered drums, reverb, and bass synthesizer to create a relaxing theme that distinguishes it from other works. When looking at the work’s success, it was featured for 33 weeks topping at number one on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018 (Sunflower). Given its stance on the market, it was a sound Garside aspired to use. When examining “Get it Right the First Time,” the rhythm section leads the song and is the main focal point. By using a similar bass as found in “Sunflower,” it allowed Garside to make the song relevant in today’s market while still keeping the focal point on the rhythm section.

For the final inspirations of the additional embellishments within the composition, “Truth Hurts” by Lizzo was used specifically for the kick, snare, and hi-hat sections to emphasize portions of the song such as the flute section. Within “Truth Hurts,” hi-hats are used to emphasize vocal phrases and are often placed at the beginning or end of the phrase. Hi-hats are often used as a distinctive feature because of the high frequency of the instrument which makes it easily heard in an arrangement. By using this concept on part of the arrangement, the hi-hat was utilized to apply emphasis on the flute as well as the vocals in “Get it Right the First Time.” This is often featured with a sixteenth note triplet to represent the beginning or ending of a phrase. In the original work, both the flute and vocals come together to showcase the melody in the chorus, and by having the hi-hat bring attention to the flute section in the new version, it allowed room for the vocals and flute to once again showcase the chorus.

After determining how to include modern influences, the producers had to decide what moments or instruments were necessary in order to keep the integrity of the work. Based on research of the album and others, Joel’s main distinction is his piano playing, and therefore, the piano still remains a key instrument within the tune. Furthermore, the track producer contained the same chord structure and used similar melodies to effectively keep a similar style to Joel’s distinct sound. By keeping the piano, it easily identifies the work as a Joel tune, and the similar melody allows listeners to know its “Get it Right the First Time” specifically.

The vocals were the last section to be recorded for the tracks. The use of a female alto vocalist was preferred, and Jessica Summitt was the featured vocalist on this track to meet those requirements. The production effects used on the vocals did include a use of

reverb during the chorus to bring out the breath-like quality. There were background vocals to provide the “Ohhhs” in the verses to give more texture to those sections. However, the performance of Summitt was crucial to staying true to the original work. Summitt had to provide an abrasive quality to her performance to keep the successful spirit of Joel’s performance intact.

#### **.05 “Everybody Has a Dream”**

The overall theme of “Everybody Has a Dream” is a celebration of the domestic bliss Joel felt with his first wife, Elizabeth. Therefore, Joel brings a serious tone in his verses to give details to his desires in a combination with a gospel choir style celebratory chorus that provides a reflection to his life with his wife. These light and dark themes showcased in the songs on the album, are summed up in this last piece by combining the heavy tones of the verses with a light spirited chorus; therefore, this song provides closure for the listener. The ode to the domestic happiness Joel felt with Elizabeth became a perfect way to sum up all varying themes on *The Stranger* and was one of the reasons the album was successful. By having closure for the listener, the album feels complete by the end after listening to the whole work.

The lyrics describe the different feelings and thoughts Joel had when reflecting on his marriage. At first, he describes the differences in his life, he explains, “As I wander through the world in which I live, I search everywhere, for new inspiration, but it’s more than cold reality can give.” The listener can interpret this as Joel’s description of his life before his marriage. He lacked inspiration for his songs, and he instead was met with harsh realizations that the world can often be a lonely, cruel place to live in. The listener can relate since many understand the difficulty of a single life and the frustrations that

can come with it. However, in his choruses, Joel paints a picture of a simple life and dream that could ease the cruel nature of the world. He states, "Everybody has a dream, and this is my dream, my own, just to be at home and to be all alone, with you." The listener can see Joel's simplistic desire to just find a wife to live his days with, and in turn, they also start to think of their own dreams. When Joel states "Everybody has a dream," it gives the listener an idea about what they may want out of life, and whether they want to live their dreams with another. Overall, Joel uses his marriage and single life to describe the thoughts and dreams he has to relate to the personal lives and feelings of his listeners.

The instrumentation for the song is as follows: piano, organ, electric guitars, acoustic guitars, bass, drums/percussion, background vocals, and vocals. The first instrument introduced is the piano played by Joel, and shortly after it is accompanied by the organ. The first verse only includes the organ, piano, and Joel's vocals to create a church atmosphere to foreshadow the large gospel impact later on. When the chorus hits and the rest of the instrumentation and vocalists are included, this reveals the gospel inspired theme that Joel and Ramone decided upon to showcase the sense of celebration that they desired. This idea is later enforced in the final chorus by allowing Joel to act more as a soloist by having the background vocals sing the main melody while he adds his own embellishments and runs. By doing so, it reflects the gospel and church atmosphere that Joel wanted.

The form of the song is intro, verse one, chorus, verse two, chorus, interlude, chorus, and outro. The introduction begins with Joel's piano playing to set the chord structure and melody of the song. When the chorus is played, all instruments are

introduced, and this showcases the importance Joel is emphasizing on the lyrics and feeling during this section. During all choruses, a sense of celebration and happiness is felt as Joel sings about his dream, and thus, it was essential to have all instruments create a full impact on the listener. This drastic dynamic contrast between the choruses and verses is an essential aspect of the song. By having limited instruments and simple melodies during the verses, the choruses have more room for complex instrumentation, structure, melodies, and additional embellishments without overwhelming the listener. However, the song ends with the same introduction as “The Stranger.” As mentioned earlier, this creates a book closure feeling for the listener that in turn was a defining moment on the album. By using this closing, it shows how the album is art as a whole, not just individual tracks put together, and this idea is often found missing in today’s albums. Overall, the form of the song is used to create clear differences between the verses and choruses and give a completed album to the listener with an outro.

Joel’s vocal performance in this song is used to reflect the gospel centered style. During the verses, he sings with an intimate quality, and in comparison, to other songs, it is quieter than his other performances on the album. However, when the chorus hits background vocals are added by Phoebe Snow, Patti Austin, and Gwen Guthrie. This adds a strong presence to the performance, and it emphasizes the uplifting atmosphere the choruses create. Moreover, the background vocals combine well with Joel’s vocal style, and they emphasize the gospel church style.

The production techniques used in this song were centered around ensuring the album felt complete. Originally, the song was written in a folk inspired style, but Ramone felt that it did not match well with the rest of the songs. After some thought, Joel and

Ramone decided to rewrite the song in a Joe Cooker style gospel. By doing so, it allowed the verses to have an intimate feel that brought attention to the dark feelings and thoughts Joel once had. Also, it revealed the dark nature in his thoughts that are showcased in other songs on the album, for example “The Stranger.” However, when the chorus hits, a sense of happiness and joy is revealed when all instruments create a large, full impact that combine with a choir style vocal performance. This allowed the lighter sides of the album to be reflected on, songs such as “Get it Right the First Time.” In short, the intimacy of the verses and the choir style choruses sum up all styles of the album, and with the closure of the outro, the listener is given a complete summary of the album by the end of the piece.

### **The Approach**

When our producers approached combining “Everybody Has a Dream” with current trends, there were several influences used to ensure the original work and current marketplace were represented. The executive producer and the programming producer, Killian Devine, decided the essential feeling of the original piece was the large impact of the chorus and to apply modern techniques to achieve this. The influences for this song include “Something Just Like This” by The Chainsmokers featuring Coldplay and “Fiji Water” by Owl City.

The heavy synthesizer used in the chorus of “Something Just Like This” inspired the chorus for the modern version of “Everybody Has a Dream.” “Something Just Like This” spent 39 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100 and peaked at number three in 2017, and The Chainsmokers are often associated with their heavy synthesizer influenced choruses. “Something Just Like This” featured a heavy synthesizer in the chorus that made it

distinctive from the other parts of the song, and it also gives the listener an enjoyable atmosphere dance to. Therefore, when looking for a modern way to create an uplifting and impactful chorus, this idea was used because it brings the listener's full attention to the chorus while also creating a celebration feeling. Devine applied this idea to the chorus of "Everybody Has a Dream," and he allowed for the synthesizers to have a prominent role in the melody of the chorus. By doing so, he created a full impact for the listener in both the instrumentation and the vocals. When using the heavy synthesizer style chorus, it gave the vocalist room for interpretation, but he also was able to achieve the same goal of the original which was to catch the listener's attention.

The final inspirations of the modern take of "Everybody Has a Dream" were found in "Fiji Water" by Owl City specifically for the drum pattern. There is a constant drumbeat performed mostly by the snare that is embellished by either snaps or a hi-hat at the end beat to add texture. In the original work, a very simple pattern was used, but the drums were kept relatively quiet during the verses. They were used to keep the tempo of the performers, but the focal points of the melodies were the piano and Joel's vocals. Therefore, when trying to create a modern interpretation it was critical that a consistent tempo was given for the performers to feel throughout the piece. In comparison to "Fiji Water," a similar pattern was used, and the snare was kept as the main drum instrument. The rhythm was used throughout most of the song, and it was created to make a consistent groove for the entire song. By using a similar pattern to the one in "Fiji Water," it allowed a constant tempo to be felt, just as DeVitto provides in the original, while also leaving room for other tracks to add texture and variety.

After determining how to include modern influence, the producers had to decide what was essential to staying true to the nature of the original piece. Based on research of the album, the essential quality was keeping a feeling of celebration and closure. The feeling of celebration was most apparent in the chorus, and thus, it was crucial for the chorus to feel impactful, upbeat, and dance worthy. Furthermore, the programming producer also had to ensure that the outro would keep the same type of closure feeling that the original had. This part of the piece was a pivotal moment on the album, and it was the most important to keep. Therefore, Killian Devine produced both “The Stranger” and “Everybody Has a Dream” to ensure that composition of the introduction to the “The Stranger” would replicate the outro of “Everybody Has a Dream.” This kept the feeling of closure and consistency on the album that was one of reasons that the original work was critically acclaimed.

The vocals were the last section to be recorded. Due to the key of this piece and the use of the outro from *The Stranger*, it was decided to use a soprano singer, and therefore, my vocals were once again used to complete the track. The intimate feeling of the verses was important to keep, and therefore, only one vocal track was used on those parts. There was talk of using background vocals for the verses, but it was decided that to keep the intimacy and seriousness of the original that only voice should be used. However, during the choruses, a harmony track was added to create more texture and keep a similar gospel style feeling that the original work had. While the melody style was changed during the chorus, it was still important for my vocals to have a light spirited performance to reflect Joel’s own celebratory performance. Finally, it was decided when recording “The Stranger” that I should sing the tune that Joel whistles. This was because

artists such as Ariana Grande and Coldplay have used their vocals almost as another instrument. At certain points, they will not sing any specific lyrics, but instead runs of “Oooo” during transitions. Therefore, this similar idea was used as the outro of “Everybody Has a Dream” since no vocalist was capable of whistling the tune. This allowed me to still perform the song while also adding an additional modern trend.

## V. Reflection

### Critical Assessment

While there were several complications, unfortunate situations, and unexpected realities I faced during the completion of my thesis project, I accomplished the main goals I set for myself. I gained a better understanding of what it takes to produce an album and record performers. Being the executive producer on this project helped me understand which of my skills needed improvement, how to communicate properly with people, how to schedule several different people together, and how to complete a project on time with unexpected complications. Also, analyzing *The Stranger* and modern trends helped me understand what makes a successful album in the music industry. Finally, the ultimate goal of this project was to see if a classic album can be re-interpreted successfully to convey the same emotions of the lyrics and see if the same initial impact was met.

Over the course of the programming portion of this project, I faced many complications that challenged my ability to produce the album. In the summer, I discovered how difficult it can be to keep my programming producers motivated and on track when they are not receiving pay for their work. In some cases, they walked away from the project when asked to do more work and were told that they would not be getting income in return. In other cases, programming producers I believed to have a good portfolio and work ethic had to be let go due to their inability to complete quality work. Moreover, during the school year it was hard for even the best producers to meet deadlines due to interference with schoolwork, and I also fell behind in some of my

responsibilities for the same reason. In the end, I learned how to make it work. I learned how to catch up when I fell behind, I learned how to replace a producer with another more skilled individual, and I learned how to meet the necessary deadlines in order to complete the project. I had to learn to be flexible, patient, and ask for help.

During the recording of this project, I learned more lessons on how to be an executive producer. One of the first lessons I learned was how to get an artist to relate to lyrics in order for them to express the emotions needed on the song. This often means highlighting a section that they can relate to and feel passionately. However, the most difficult part of being an executive producer is scheduling time together and getting artists to record. At the beginning of the project, I had three available vocalists, but after the project extended past the original date, all three had graduated and were no longer able to continue. I then found three other vocalists to record and three backups in case of cancellation, but all the vocalists became unavailable for various reasons. Despite many scheduled meetings over the course of a month, only two vocalists were able to complete one song each. This led me to find alternate solutions to get the project complete on time. With the deadline approaching, my recording engineer and I decided to record my own vocals on the project to ensure it would be complete. However, this led to more processing and criticism during the mixing process.

During the mixing process, I had to adjust my original plan, and I had to be open to the interpretation of my mixing engineer. With three different producers, I had to make sure that a cohesive sound was being met, and thus, I had to bring in a separate mixing engineer to make sure all the songs sounded consistent. Finding a mixing engineer was not what I originally had planned on doing, but after hearing how different each song

was, I knew the problem had to be solved in order to turn in quality work. Furthermore, during the final weeks of the project the mixing engineer had discovered that due to the electronic nature of the three tracks I sang on, the vocals naturally sounded out of tune even if I sang perfectly in tune. Therefore, after criticism from my advisor and advice from others with access to more advanced tools, the mixing engineer found a way to polish the vocals to keep them in tune, and to make the vocals sound more appropriate with the backing tracks. Having this additional tool created more professional and produced tracks that were closer to the standards of the industry. However, the tracks could still use additional work on the vocals to be complete. The recording and mixing process made me understand how crucial it is to have back-up plans, a schedule, and problem-solving skills as an executive producer.

During my role as executive producer, I learned areas that need improvement. While I experienced delays in the project due to other members involved, I did bring my own complications that led to issues and incomplete deadlines. My biggest problem was procrastination and underestimating how my mental health would affect my work ethic. Unfortunately, during the first four months of this project I was still recovering from medical issues found in mid-April, and I believe this was a big factor in my mental health. It led me to procrastinate more, to a lack of motivation, and to a poor work ethic. It was only until I could reflect on my own actions months later that I realized how severe my procrastination was and how it led to many issues at the beginning of the project. Also, another area that needs improvement is how to communicate effectively. There were times when the programming producers and I would not understand what the other wanted creatively. While reference tracks helped, it was often best to meet in person.

This allowed for both parties to hear one another clearly and to visually see when one party was not understanding a concept or idea. In general, I learned how impactful procrastination can be and how crucial communication is to the failure or success of a project. A project of this caliber is often time-consuming and challenging; with unexpected problems on all sides, it was essential to problem solve, be flexible, and receive guidance to finish.

The biggest lessons I learned from this project was the understanding of what makes a song successful. Success in a song can come from many different places. In Joel's case, part of the reason his music still resonates with people is the impeccable performances that give a narrative to his compositions and lyrics. His ability to tell a story in his music and make it relatable to listeners is one of the main reasons I found why his works are so popular. However, the current trends in popular music is the catchy, dance worthy tunes that create an impactful feeling and catch a listener's attention. After listening to the top featured songs of 2019, many catch the attention of their listener's instantly or surprise their listener. By learning how to combine these two ideas together, it left me with a better understanding of what makes a popular album in today's music industry.

On the other hand, creating a popular album is not as simple as recording a great performance, applying an easy popular trend, and writing catchy lyrics. While it may sound simple, the work it takes to achieve such a goal requires patience, scheduling, flexibility, creative thinking, and problem solving. The analysis itself was both rewarding and informative, but it was only part of the crucial nature of this project. This project required both an understanding of Joel's work and today's popular music, but the most

difficult part was applying the research. In some cases, the original ideas I had for tracks did not match with either current trends or the integrity of Joel's work. It is my belief that the strength in this project comes from the actual application of the research to the project and being creative enough to decide how to fix any application issues. However, in a project such as this, success is largely dictated by whether the goal is met or not.

When I listen to my tracks, I cannot say that I am fully proud of the final product. If I had more time to keep working on it, I believe I could improve the quality of the project. I believe that two of the tracks sound radio ready, for they kept Joel's original intent, added modern trends, and have quality vocals. Unfortunately, I do believe that on the three tracks I sang on could use more work to achieve a more polished and professional sound on the vocals to make them successful; therefore, I believe those three tracks are not radio ready. With the deadline approaching, the editing for those tracks required more work than the mixing engineer and I had time for due to falling behind on the project. However, an executive producer has to decide when the project is complete, and the goals are met, even if the project is not perfect. Based on discussion with other producers, it is often the deadline that dictates when a project is complete. Despite reaching my deadline, I do hope to continue to explore *The Stranger*, to produce more tracks, to record more, to improve my current tracks, and to release it in my own time.

After listening, can I still say my goal was met and that the work is successful? Overall, I would say yes. Upon reflection, I believe each track was re-interpreted in a way that still conveys the same emotions Joel's performance had, and therefore, the same initial impact for the listener is kept. I also believe that we did create two tracks that could compete on the market today, and with more additional work on the vocals, the

other three tracks could eventually be ready. When listening to each song in comparison to the original, I believe that the feeling that Joel portrays still resonates in the modern version despite the singer being female, the application of modern techniques, and the different instruments used. It is my belief that a classic album can in fact be re-interpreted in modern trends and still hold its power, for a good album is a good album no matter how it is interpreted.

### **Final Words**

I may not have a product with which I am completely satisfied, but I did prove the merit of applying today's music trends to a critically acclaimed album and seeing if it still stands. My research allowed me to thoroughly understand the differences between popular music then and now. Also, it gave me the opportunity to learn how to work with a creative team and apply techniques I never had the chance to use before. Finally, it allowed me to practice skills and research into a field of study that I otherwise would not have been able to do in the Department of Recording Industry.

I would also say that finishing a project of this magnitude is a success in and of itself. For academics and creatives alike, it is crucial to practice discipline, determination, and motivation to finish a project of this caliber. After completing this project, I now understand how much work goes into finishing an album. If Phil Ramone and Billy Joel had not worked hard to complete *The Stranger*, I would not have been inspired to create this project. Also, I could not have learned from this project if I did not take the time to reflect and finish the songs.

I am particularly proud of myself for being able to finish this thesis, and I hope this will continue to inspire me to create more works after I graduate. However, I could not have completed this project without my team. I would like to thank my programming producers Killian Devine and Charles Moffet for working hard, being flexible, and being patient with me. I would like to thank my vocalists Kate Caggianelli and Jessica Summitt for singing beautifully and with passion. I would like to thank my programming producer and recording engineer Bryan Garside for always asking me questions, always being flexible, and always working hard to create quality work. Finally, I would like to thank Nathan Longwell for mixing all the final products together, and for answering all my phone calls when I wanted even the slightest change.

This project pushed me in ways I never imagined, but I can honestly say I am proud of all that I accomplished. I learned more about what I want to do in my career, and I learned how to improve my skills to better myself at my career. Also, I now have a good understanding of what my job will entail in the music industry, and I now also know the consequences that can come with it. While it is creative work, it does not make it less hard, and it often means I can be more critical on myself for not having a perfect piece. My chosen career is one that will continue to push me. However, if I continue to learn how to improve myself, self-evaluate my weaknesses, and balance my work and stress, I believe I can handle the challenges I will face.

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