

A Collection of Original Songs

by
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ABSTRACT

When I signed up to study jazz in college, it was with the intent to absorb all the musical information I could so I could write my own music. I began writing songs my sophomore year of college, and since then it's been a steady pursuit in tandem with my collegiate studies. I've primarily learned how to write songs by analyzing the works of my favorite songwriters: Ben Folds, Billy Joel, James Taylor, Eric Hutchinson, Randy Newman, Becca Stevens, and more. The knowledge I've gleaned from them and the experience I've gained in music school have formed my identity as a songwriter. The following are eleven of my original songs, with recordings, charts, and analysis. I chose some notable moments from each to discuss in detail.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since I started singing and playing the piano together around twelve years old, I knew I wanted to write my own music one day. It took me a long time to start because I didn't feel I had the musical vocabulary yet to write anything good. Shortly after I started college I saw an interview with Ben Folds, in which he said he wrote his first real song "Emaline" when he was nineteen. If it worked for Ben, it would work for me. I decided to write my first song at nineteen. What followed has been a three-year process of writing the best song I can, loving it for about a month, eventually hating it, and hopefully learning from the experience. This thesis is a collection of what I think are the eleven best songs I've written.

The growth process has been interesting. When I started, I wrote words first, focusing closely on the rhyme scheme and other phonetic devices. Once I had lyrics that sounded good (usually resembling iambic pentameter), I'd sit at the piano and try to come up with a melody and chords that served the lyrics. What I like about that approach is it leads to musical ideas that I might not come up with otherwise. By limiting my musical options to a certain number of syllables and ideally reflecting the natural cadence of the lyrics with the melody, my melodic ideas tend to be unconventional. The drawback of this approach, though, is that all my lyrics began to sound the same. I was getting trapped in iambic pentameter.

So I decided to try it the other way around. I wrote music first: melody, harmony, and arrangement. Then I'd mark out how many syllables I had to work with and write lyrics within those parameters. Similar to the other approach, this created new limitations

and led to new ideas. Because I only had so many syllables to work with, I was forced to economize my words and create new rhyme schemes to accommodate the existing melody. It gave me musical freedom, which I was missing in the other approach, and lyrical constraint, which actually made my lyrics better. This is still the approach I primarily use.

The biggest battle most artistic writers fight is the battle for inspiration. People imagine songwriters in a coffee shop getting hit with a brilliant idea, scribbling it on a napkin, rushing home to record it, and in an hour they have a song. That sort of “bolt of lightning” inspiration is incredibly rare. I don’t think I’ve ever experienced it. For me, the process is slow and labor-intensive. I have to decide to go write without even the seed of an idea. I’ll sit down and stare into space for about half an hour, then brainstorm any topics I could feasibly write about. I end up jotting down mostly bad ideas (sometimes only bad ideas), but hidden among them will occasionally be a good idea. I’ll then repeat the process and write every angle I can think of from which to articulate that idea, and if I’m lucky among those will be something smart and effective.

I’ve heard this process described as turning on a faucet in an area with a questionable water supply. At first, the water that comes out will be full of dirt and general nastiness. But after letting it run for awhile, it will begin to run clear. That’s the only reliable path to consistent creativity and good ideas: you have to pour out a lot of worthless nonsense first. My friend put it succinctly once: don’t write when you’re inspired. Write until you’re inspired.

The biggest lesson I've learned from the experience of putting together this thesis is that to have the level of creative output I want, it is going to take an extraordinary amount of time, most of which will be spent on ideas that will never see the light of day. That is something I've come to accept as just part of the process and part of the life I've chosen. I am thankful to have learned that lesson while still in college.

The oldest song in this collection is "The Artist," which is about two years old. It's one of the few from that early on that I still play. There's an odd cognitive dissonance about being this young in my journey as a songwriter. I know that most of what I have written and am writing now is not very good, at least compared to what I will be writing years from now. I'll likely never share many of the songs I write with anyone other than close friends and family. I've already thrown out close to half of the music I've written. Still, I have to do the very best I can with each new song. Each one has to be as honest, clever, musical, and meaningful as I can possibly make it. Even if that doesn't lead to a song I remain proud of for years, it's part of the process. I still have to give my all to each new song and be confident that new ideas and experiences will lead to even better music in the future.

In light of that, I'm thinking of this thesis as a sort of timestamp. It's a document marking my progress at this stage, three years into my journey as a songwriter. In the future I'll be able to look at this and observe my growth, not just in the music but in how I was thinking about the music.

swing 6/8
♩ = 180

Bonehead

Austin Ford

F

so give your-self a break, and learn from your mis - take.

Bb F/Bb Ab/Bb Eb/Bb F/Bb Bb

Interlude

F/Bb Ab/Bb Eb/Bb F/Bb

Bb F/Bb Ab/Bb

Verse 2 Yes, it's eas - i - er to say than to live out eve-ry day,

Eb^{sus}/Bb Eb/Bb F/Bb Bb

when you're nat - ural - ly in - clined to beat up on your self in your mind.

F/Bb Ab/Bb

But it does - n't help at all to kick your - self when you fall.

Eb^{sus}/Bb F/A /G# G-7

Just ex-tend a help-ing hand, and stand.

Eb^Δ F^{sus2}/Bb F/AG-7

Chorus 2 I know you're feel - in' down. It's quite a bur den, and you're hurtin'.

Eb^Δ F^{sus} F F#°G-7

But you've got-ta know by now, you're bound to make mis - takes.

F- F F#° G-7

them. They learned and grew, and so can you.

E^bΔ F_{sus}²/B^b F/AG-7

Chorus 3 I know you're feel - in' down. It's quite a burden, and you're hurtin'.

E^bΔ F_{sus} F F#° G-7

But you've got-ta know by now, you're bound to make mis - takes.

/F E^bΔ B^b F/A G- F-7 E^b2

Next time you will know bet - ter. You'll know down to the letter what you ought - ta do,

F

so give your-self a break, and learn from your mis - take.

B^b F/B^b A^b/B^b E^b/B^b F/B^b B^b

Outro

F/B^b A^b/B^b E^b/B^b F/B^b B^b

The main idea for “Bonehead” came from Elton John’s “I’m Still Standing.” That song features a tonic pedal ostinato throughout most of the song. The chords move around in triads over the pedal. Toward the end of the verse and in the chorus, it breaks from the pedal, and the bass finally moves from root to root and grooves. What inspired me to try my hand at that idea was how effective the moment is when it finally breaks from the pedal. It’s like running with a weighted vest, then taking it off.

While the central musical idea and feel are the same in my song, one key difference is that mine is primarily major, while “I’m Still Standing” is primarily minor. Most of “Bonehead” is over a Bb pedal. The most interesting part of the chords that happen over the pedal is the tension between Ab/Bb and F/Bb. The Ab in the former and the A in the latter each point to a different mode because they’re each a different kind of seventh in the key of Bb. Ab is the lowered seventh in the key of Bb, so the Ab/Bb chord points to a Bb Mixolydian sound. On the other hand, A is the major seventh in Bb, so F/Bb points to an Ionian sound.

I tend to get a little nervous when I use harmonic devices that are too cliché. Such was the case for the bridge of this song. I just went to the minor tonic, which is the one of the most overused ways to write a bridge, second only to the relative minor. I did it as an homage to “I’m Still Standing,” which is primarily in Bb minor, but goes to Bb major on the verses. Even so, I was worried it would be too obvious, so I hid it behind a series of suspensions, followed by another Bb pedal.

Swing 8ths
♩ = 175

Know It All

Austin Ford

Intro

D- Bb7 A7

Verse 1

Did it, not a - gain. Beat it, had to win.

Said it, just the right thing. Nailed it, now she's cry -

ing. Ad -

mit it, you know I'm right. It wasn't a fair fight.

Had it in the poc - ket. Wind it back and sock it.

So im - pressive. I'm the best, I know it all.

Chorus 1

I don't care who gets the pop,

long as I come out on top.

B \flat **A-7** **G-7** **F Δ ⁷**
 Changing ze-ro minds, but who cares a-bout them?
E \flat Δ ⁹ **A7 \flat ⁹** **D-** **B \flat 7 A7**
 I just know I have to win.
D-6 **D-6**
Verse 2 What if I just lost? How much would it cost?
F-7 **D-6**
 Would it be that bad if I just sat and laughed it
D- **B \flat 7 A7**
 off?
D-6 **D-6**
 What if I just hung my head and held my tongue?
F-7 **D-6**
 I can't bear the thought. I'd feel like four feet tall. I'm
B \flat 7 **A7** **D-** **B \flat 7 A7**
 so im-pressive. I'm the best I know it all.
G7 **D-** **B \flat 7 A7**
Chorus 2 I don't care who gets the pop,

G⁷ D-

long as I come out on top.

B^b A-⁷ G-⁷ F Δ ⁷

Changing ze-ro minds, but who cares a-bout them?

E^b Δ ⁹ A⁷^{b9} D- B^b7 A⁷

I just know I have to win.

A^b Δ ⁹ E^b Δ ⁹ A^b Δ ⁹ E^b Δ ⁹

Interlude

A^b Δ ⁹ B^b/E^b

Trash - ing my re - la - tion - ships.

A^b Δ ⁹ B^b A^b Δ ⁹

At the end I'm left with all the

E^b Δ ⁹ A⁷^{#9} A⁷^{b9} D- B^b7 A⁷

chips, a - lone.

G⁷ D- B^b7 A⁷

Chorus 3

I don't care who gets the pop,

G⁷ D-

long as I come out on top.

B \flat A-7 G-7 F Δ ⁷

Changing ze-ro minds, but who cares a-bout_ them?

E \flat Δ ⁹ A⁷ \flat ⁹ D- B \flat ⁷ A⁷ D-²

I just know I have to win.

The musical seed for “Know It All” came from a Brad Mehldau solo piano recording of “My Favorite Things.” At some point in the Mehldau’s improvising, he got away from the changes of “My Favorite Things,” and it became a completely free improvisation. An improvised chord change he played that lit my ears up with this: he played a minor seven chord, then transposed it up a minor third. It created a subversive sound. It wasn’t where I thought it was going, but it made sense.

I began playing around with a different ways to use that idea, and I stumbled upon an almost funk groove in 5/4. I played descending diatonic thirds in D Dorian, which is a fairly typically funk figure. Then I transposed that groove up to F Dorian, and I knew I was onto something. I ended up essentially using a minor blues form on the verses, but I substituted the F-7 in place of what would have typically been G-7.

When writing in odd time signatures, one challenge is not to let your brain supersede your ear. For example, when I first wrote the melody for the bridge, I had each note as a half note tied to an eighth note, or two and a half beats. That would effectively create a 2 against 5 polyrhythm, which is a very cool sound and would disarm the heavy 5/4 feel. It was a smart idea, but when I went to record it, it just didn’t sound nearly as good as alternating dotted half and half notes. I ultimately went with the idea that sounded better. Another example is the two bars of 4/4 at the end of each verse. When I was writing the melody, that’s just the rhythm I heard for that line. I wasn’t intentionally cutting out a beat. I actually didn’t realize right away that that’s what I was doing. Once I realized, I could have tried to add it back in to stay in 5/4, but once again I decided to go with what sounded good.

Swing 8th
♩ = 120

Such A Friend

Austin Ford

B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁰

Intro

Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat _{sus} B \flat B⁰

Verse 1

It's hard to be-lieve we've come this far.

Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat _{sus} B \flat Am⁷

I couldn't conceive how from the start, you've been there.

Gm⁷ C¹³ F A⁷ Dm⁷ D \flat ⁷

And through the years, through all the joy and tears, you've

Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁰

been such a friend to me.

Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat _{sus} B \flat B⁰

Verse 2

I don't re-mem-ber a time be-fore you and me.

Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat _{sus} B \flat Am⁷

I guess that fig-ures cause I was on - ly three. You were two.

Gm⁷ C¹³ F A⁷ Dm⁷ D \flat ⁷

From then to now, there's a thou - sand ex - am - ples of how you've

Cm⁷ F⁷

been such a friend to me.

B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁷

And though the

Cm⁷ F_{sus} F B \flat D_m/A G_m⁷ B \flat /F

Chorus 1 quan - ti - ty of time spent with you grows far too slim, and ³as we

E \flat F_{sus} F B \flat D⁺ E \flat ² G_m⁷/D

live our separate lives, I still have your voice with - in. Who

A^o D⁷ G_m⁷ F \sharp ^o G_{sus}/F B \flat ²(no³)

knows if ge - o - gra - phi - cally we'll e - ver be that close a - gain? I

Cm⁷ F⁷

hope you know I'm with you till the end.

B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ^o

Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat _{sus} B \flat B^o

Verse 3 Do you re - member that time in se - cond grade? We

Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat ⁶ B \flat Δ ⁷ B \flat B \flat _{sus} B \flat A_m⁷

ducked un - der the ta - ble to hide. We were a - fraid of the vac - cum.

G_m⁷ C¹³ F A⁷ D_m⁷ D \flat ⁷

And as our fears have e - volved a bit through the years, you've

Cm⁷ **F⁷**
 been such a friend to me.
B^b **B^bΔ⁷** **B^b6** **B^bΔ⁷** **B^b** **B^bΔ⁷** **B^b7**

Cm⁷ **F^{sus}** **F** **B^b** **Dm/A** **Gm⁷** **B^b/F**
 Chorus 2 And though the
 quan - ti - ty of time spent with you grows far too slim, and as we
E^b **F^{sus}** **F** **B^b** **D⁺** **E^b2** **Gm⁷/D**
 live our separate lives, I still have your voice with - in. Who
A^o **D⁷** **Gm⁷** **F^{#o}** **G^{sus}/F** **B^b2(no³)**
 knows if ge - o - gra - phi - cally we'll e - ver be that close a - gain? I
Cm⁷ **F⁷** **C⁷**
 hope you know I'm with you till the end.

E^b2 **C²** **B^b/E^b** **C²** **A^b7** **Gm⁷**
 Bridge I don't have to wor - ry. It could be months be - fore we
E^b6 **F²** **D/C** **C** **C/D**
 talk, and I know you'll be there
E^b2 **C²** **B^b/E^b** **C²** **A^b7** **Gm⁷**
 If e - ver you need me, with - out a de - lay, no time at

Eb6 F2 D/C C D/C C Dm Ebm C/E Dm/F
 all, you know I'll be there _____ And though the

Cm7 Fsus F Bb Dm/A Gm7 Bb/F
 Chorus 3 quan - ti - ty of time spent with you grows far too slim, and as we

Eb Fsus F Bb D+ Eb2 Gm7/D
 live our separate lives, I still have your voice with-in. _____ Who

A° D7 Gm7 F#° Gsus/F Bb2(no3)
 knows if ge-o - gra - phi - cally we'll e - ver be that close a - gain? I

Cm7 F7 Gm7
 hope you know I'm with you till the end. _____ I

Cm F7 Gm7 Dm/F Eb2 /D
 hope you know I'm with you till the end. _____ I

Cm2 F7 Eb/Bb Bb
 hope you know I'm with you till the end.

I wrote “Such a Friend” after writing a string of unnecessarily complex songs. It was an attempt to write something much simpler. While it didn’t exactly turn out to be simple, at least the intro did (that’s about how long I lasted). I liked the idea of repeating a major chord, where the root walks down to the seventh, down to the sixth, back up to the seventh, and back up to the tonic. I voiced it in the middle of the chord to make it a little more subtle. Since I move around the key center and the melody is all over the place the rest of the song, returning to this figure helps ground the song with something simple and catchy.

A harmonic device I use all the time in my writing is making the tonic dominant (I7) to go to the subdominant (IV), especially to transition from a verse to a chorus or from a chorus to a bridge. I used it in “What It Takes to Get Ahead,” “Here’s The Door,” “How Long,” and “Think It Through.” It’s a great sound that people don’t use often in pop anymore for some reason. In “Such a Friend,” I pretend to use this device, but it’s a bit of a fake out. In the pickups to the first two choruses, I play a Bb7 (I7) chord. This would ordinarily lead to an Eb or the IV in the key. Instead, it leads to the ii or C-7, which occurs on the downbeat of the chorus. If I were to play both options (Bb7 → Eb; Bb7 → C-7) for you in the context of the key of Bb, you would hardly be able to tell the difference, because each chord is serving the function of a pre-dominant (both are leading to the same place). However, if I were to play both options for you in the context of the key of Eb, you’d notice a drastic difference. Bb7 → Eb is an authentic cadence while Bb7 → C-7 is a deceptive cadence. I’m essentially borrowing that deceptive cadence from Eb and masquerading it as any old secondary dominant.

♩ = 120

Think It Through

Austin Ford

Intro

FΔ⁷ F-⁶ C G/B A-⁷ D⁷ G⁷_{sus} C F/G

You bet-ter

Chorus 1

C F G C D⁷ G⁷

stop, take stock_ and look a-round. Take a deep breath and don't make a sound. Rewind the

C F F#^o A-⁷/G Ab⁷ G⁷ C C⁷

clock. De-cide what you wan - na do. Use that brain, think it through.

Verse 1

FΔ⁷ F-⁶ C G/B A-⁷ G C C⁷

I know you wan - na go, take it out, throw the fi - nal blow.

FΔ⁷ F-⁶ C/E E⁷/G# A-⁷ D⁷ G⁷

But you know you'll feel re - gret when to - mor - row you must pay for it. You better

Chorus 2

C F G C D⁷ G⁷

stop, take stock_ and look a-round. Take a deep breath and don't make a sound. Rewind the

C F F#^o A-⁷/G Ab⁷ G⁷ E⁺7 E⁷

clock. De-cide what you wan - na do. Use that brain, think it through.

Interlude

A-² A-²/G# A-⁹/G F#^o7

FΔ⁷ C/E Eb D^o G⁷b⁹

Bridge

A-2 A-2/G# A-9/G F#07

It takes a toll to take con-trol, yes I know.

FΔ7 C/E Eb D∅ G7b9

It's hard to find your head when all you see is red.

A-2 A-2/G# A-9/G F#07

It takes a lot to make a thought - ful cal-cu-la - tion.

FΔ7 C/E Eb D-7 C/GD/F#FΔ9

Some peace and cla - ri - ty of mind is such a ra - ri - ty to find.

F-6 C G/B A-7 G C C7

Verse 2

I know you wan - na show you're a big boy, you're in con-trol.

FΔ7 F-6 C/E E7/G# A-7 D7 G7

And you know you're at your best when you slow it down and take a rest. You better

C F G C D7 G7

Chorus 3

stop, take stock and look a-round. Take a deep breath and don't make a sound. Rewind the

C F F#0 A-7/G Ab7 G7 A7#9 A7b9

clock. De-cide what you wan - na do. Use that brain, think it through. Use

D7b9 G7b9

that ne - an - der - tal brain, and think it through.

FΔ7 F-6 C G/B A-7 D7 G7sus C7

Outro

rit.

I got the feel for “Think It Through” from “I Wish I Knew (How It Would Feel to Be Free)” by Billy Taylor. It’s a classic straight eighths gospel groove. I used some gospel chords, too. In particular, the IV/V (in my case, F/G) chord as a turnaround to the chorus is a ubiquitous gospel sound. I used that at the end of the intro, leading into the chorus. Also, IV → III7/#5 → vi (in my case, F → E7/G# → A-) is another prevalent gospel figure. It’s prominent in “I Wish I Knew” as well. I used it in the verses.

I have a tendency to overuse the same song structures over and over again. The one I use the most is *Intro, V1, V2, C, V3, C, B, C, Outro*. I went into this one with the intent to use an unconventional structure. It ended up being *Intro, C, V1, B, V2, C, Outro*. I’d started with the chorus before (“Here’s The Door”), but I’d never put the second verse after the bridge. I love the way that pushed the momentum of the song along. I think the reason it works is that I play the verse melody as the intro, so when I get to the second verse, it doesn’t feel like only the second time that material is presented.

The bridge has an interesting set of chords. The bass part descends in steps while the top voice remains the same. I had to be creative with my voicings to make that work. The additional layer of complication is that I decided during the interlude before the bridge to play all those chords and bass part with just my left hand. That’s a very Brad Mehldau approach to solo piano: playing two-part textures with just the left hand, leaving the right hand free to improvise. I don’t improvise in this song, but I do play a written melody in octaves in during that section. I like to imagine it comes as a surprise to the listener, like a third hand appears.

Stranded

Austin Ford

Intro

$C7_{sus}$ Cm^6 Gm^7 F^2 Eb^2 Bb^2 Cm^9 Gm^7 $G7^{b9}$

$C7_{sus}$ Cm^6 Gm^7 F^2 Eb^2 Bb^2 Cm^9 Gm^7 $G7^{b9}$

Cm^9

Verse 1

Cm^7_{add11} Bb^2 $Ab\Delta^7$ Gm^7

What a time to be a - live.

Cm^7_{add11} Bb^2 $Ab\Delta^7$ Gm^7

What a shame to live on - y to sur - vive. That

Fm^7 G_{sus} G Cm^7_{add11}

day will ar - rive

Fm^9 $Eb\Delta^7$ Bb^2 Cm^9_{no3} When the

Chorus 1

Fm^9 $Eb\Delta^7$ $D\Delta^7$

life that you know must end, the u - ni - verse keeps go - in' and the

Bb_{sus} Bb

pride that you're show - in' will fade a - way

Interlude

$C7_{sus}$ Cm^6 Gm^7 F^2 E^b2 B^b2 Cm^9 Gm^7 $G7^b9$

$C7_{sus}$ Cm^6 Gm^7 F^2 E^b2 B^b2 Cm^9 Gm^7 $G7^b9$

Cm^9

Cm^7_{add11} B^b2 $A^b\Delta^7$ Gm^7

Verse 2 All your self - im - por - tant dreams.

Cm^7_{add11} B^b2 $A^b\Delta^7$ Gm^7

All your mo - ney won't mean a damn_thing. That

F^7 G_{sus} G Cm^7_{add11}

mo - ment is near_ ing. When the

Fm^9 $E^b\Delta^7$ B^b2 Cm^9_{no3}

Chorus 2 life that you know must end, the u - ni - verse keeps go - in' and the

Fm^9 $E^b\Delta^7$ $D^b\Delta^7$

pride that you're show - in' will fade_ a - way_

B^b_{sus} B^b

Interlude

$E\flat\Delta^7$ $A\flat\Delta^{7\#11}$

$E\flat\Delta^7$ $A\flat\Delta^{7\#11}$

Bridge

$E\flat\Delta^7$ $A\flat\Delta^{7\#11}$

You don't have to be a-lone.

$E\flat\Delta^7$ $A\flat\Delta^{7\#11}$

We're all strand - ed on this ri-cket - y boat.

$E\flat\Delta^7$ $A\flat\Delta^{7\#11}$

And as the waves toss to and fro,

$E\flat\Delta^7$ $A\flat\Delta^{7\#11}$

we band to - ge - ther. We can stay a - float

$E\flat m/C$ F/C $E\flat/C$ Dm/C Cm

When the

Chorus 3 Fm^9 $E\flat\Delta^7$ $B\flat^2$ Cm^9no^3

life that you know must end, the u - ni - verse keeps go - in' and the

Fm^9 $E\flat\Delta^7$ $D\flat\Delta^7$

pride that you're show - in' will fade_____ Gi - ven

Fm⁹ **E^bΔ⁷** **B^b2**

time, you will learn to spend your days with those you've cho -

Cm^{9no3} **Fm⁹** **E^bΔ⁷** **D^bΔ⁷**

- sen. Till then I'll be here hop - in' it's not too late.

B^b_{sus} **B^b**

C⁷_{sus} **Cm⁶** **Gm⁷** **F²** **E^b2** **B^b2/D** **G⁷_{sus}** **C**

Outro

The opening of “Stranded” consists of a steady quarter note figure in the right hand and a syncopated bass part in octaves in the left hand. That idea came from “All For Leyna” by Billy Joel. It’s common in Billy Joel’s music to have a written bass line that’s really more of a countermelody than just a bass part. He also does it in “Movin’ Out,” “Captain Jack,” and “Los Angelenos” to name a few. In “Stranded,” I made all the chords in the right hand diatonic (in C Dorian) so the left hand melody would have the focus.

I’m always looking for ways to differentiate repeated sections to maintain a sense of direction. In this case, one chord is different between the first and second verses. In the first verse, on “That day will arrive,” the chord is F-7. In the same place in the second verse, it’s F7. It works because the melody doesn’t affect whether the chord is major or minor. Therefore, making it minor the first time and major the second time more strongly propels it into the chorus the second time, reinforcing the sense of direction.

The bridge draws the metaphor that “We’re all stranded on this rickety boat” (life). Musically it’s the simplest section of the song. It’s a vamp between two chords: Eb Δ and Ab Δ . The effect is the swaying back and forth of a rickety boat stranded at sea. At the end of the bridge, the ascending melody on the Ab Δ chord followed by the descending triads over a C pedal illustrate a giant wave building and crashing down.

On first listen, the lyrics may seem darker than is typical of my songs. I don’t actually think that’s true. I wrote them after observing some friends who often got worked up over completely asinine inconveniences. I imagined a little perspective, a reminder of their mortality, would dwarf those minor inconveniences and make them generally happier day to day.

♩ = 90

What It Takes to Get Ahead

Austin Ford

Intro

Verse 1

Tattered clothes and stain on his face. Nowhere to go, no home, no place, and a shard
as he tries to climb out, he's pushed right to the ground

Interlude

Verse 2

Dapper suit and Italian shoes, the doors swing open, a hundred to choose, and he knows
pre - cise - ly how to find away to com - plain ev - erytime.

Interlude

Pre-chorus

I get it, to make it, you've got-ta look like you're al-read-y there.
Peo-ple judge ev - ery smudge, ev - ery wrin- kle ev - ery stray hair.

D7 G7 C C7

F G A \emptyset D7 F G E7^{#9} A \flat 7 G-7 G \flat 7 ^{So}

Chorus *bemy* guest, *se-cure* a tie *a-round* your neck, *and paint some lines* on your for - head.

F G E-7 C7 F D7 G7 C

By all means, do what it takes to get a - head.

D7 G7 C C7

What it takes to get a - head.

D7 G7 C A7 D7 G7 C A7 \flat 9

Solo

D7 G7 C A7 D7 G7 C C7

F-6 C F-6 A \emptyset C7 G \flat 7

Bridge *But don't you dare* fool your self. *Don't you dare* think you are the ve-neer.

F-6 C A7 D7 G+7

Don't you dare lose your self or who you know your self to be.

F-6 C F-6 A \emptyset C7 G \flat 7

Don't you dare fool your self. *Don't you dare* think you are the ve-neer.

F-6 C A7 D7
 Don't you dare lose your-self or who you know your-self to be,

Out of time G G+7
 cause I'd sure hate to lose a friend. So

F G A \emptyset D7 F G E7#9 Ab7 G-7 Gb7
 Chorus 2 *be my guest,* se- cure a tie a-round your neck, and paint some lines on your for - head.

A tempo F G E-7 C7 F D7 G7 C
 By all means, do what it takes to get a - head. So

F G A \emptyset D7 F G E7#9 Ab7 G-7 Gb7
 Chorus 3 *be my guest,* se- cure a tie a-round your neck, and paint some lines on your for - head.

F G E-7 C7 F D7 G7 C
 By all means, do what it takes to get a - head.

D7 G7 C C7 D7 G7
 Tag What it takes to get a - head. I said now what it takes to get a - head.

D7 G7 C
 I said I said I said what it takes to get a - head.

$\text{♩} = 90$ C-2 Bb G- C-2 Bb G
 Interlude

Verse 3

C-7 Bb G- C-7 Bb G

But you can't pull the wool over my eyes. Behind the disguise I can see, you're just

C-7 Bb G- C-7 Dø D°/G

a lit - tle fright - ened child, just like me, but hey, so are they.

Dr. Parkinson (Director of the School of Music) described “What It Takes to Get Ahead” as three songs in one. It made me happy to hear him say that, because that was my intent. For years I’ve been obsessed with Billy Joel’s “Scenes From an Italian Restaurant,” which is essentially three songs in one. It’s what I call an epic song. It begins with a slow and pretty section (“A bottle of red, a bottle of white...”), transitions into a uptempo section (“Things are ok with me these days...”), transitions to another uptempo section with a different feel (“Brenda and Eddie were the popular steadies...”), then back to the original section, tying everything together. While my song doesn’t come close to the epicness of Billy Joel’s greatest song (he actually set it was the best song he’d ever written), I copied that structure.

In the verse, I use the most obvious, cliché harmonic device imaginable: make the sad part minor and the happy part major. “Tattered clothes and stains on his face” is sad, so it’s minor. “Dapper suit and Italian shoes” is happy, so it’s major! Then “He knows precisely how to find a way to complain every time” is sad again, so guess what? Minor again! If it ain’t broke...

The bridge was inspired by one of my favorite bridges in a pop song, “Take It Easy” by Eric Hutchinson. In the bridge to “Take It Easy,” the full band plays three consecutive staccato eighth note hits, then leaves space while the vocals go to town. This happens several times. It’s easy to see the influence because I literally did the same thing.

Because the verses alternate between major and minor, I didn’t want to end on one or the other, so the final chord of the song is actually just open fifths. It’s ambiguous about the quality of the chord.

Swing 8ths
♩ = 115

The Tyrant

Austin Ford

A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F# A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F#



Intro

A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F#



Verse 1

A-2 What's that hid - ing in your eyes? Look at your work -

A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F#

- ing. All those fun - da - men - tal lies you be - lieve.

A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F#

Got the ans - wers mem - or - ized. Feel the truth lurk -

A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F#

- ing some - where in the stif - led cries you ne - ver re - lease.

A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F#



Interlude

FΔ⁹ G² E⁷/G#



Chorus 1

A-7 Stuck in a world you cre - ate, you can't tell up from down

A-2 G²/B C² D-7 E sus E

now, whit - ing out eve - ry mistake you know you've made.

A-2 A-2/G# FΔ⁹ D²/F#



Verse 2

Do you have to ad - ver - tise how per - fect your life

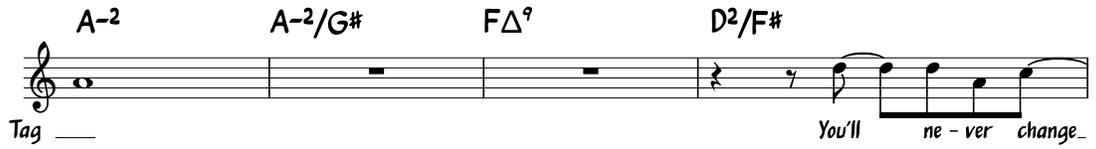
$F\Delta^7$ $D-7$ E_{sus} $E7_{alt}$



we've no choice but to leave cause you'll ne - ver change you'll ne - ver change_

$A-2$ $A-2/G\#$ $F\Delta^9$ $D^2/F\#$

Tag _____ You'll ne - ver change_



$A-2$ $A-2/G\#$ $F\Delta^9$ $D^2/F\#$

_____ You'll _____ ne - ver change.

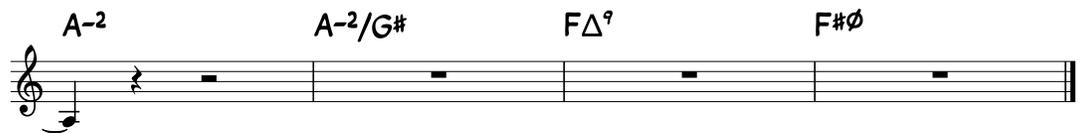


$A-2$ $A-2/G\#$ $F\Delta^9$ $D^2/F\#$

When will you change, when will you change? You'll ne-ver change_



$A-2$ $A-2/G\#$ $F\Delta^9$ $F\#\emptyset$



When I was a freshman, Dr. Parkinson (Director of the School of Music) sent me home with a CD of Brad Mehldau's *Highway Rider*. It quickly became one of my favorite jazz albums, and it has extensively informed my playing and writing. The main figure in "The Tryant" is based on a two-part texture that recurs throughout *Highway Rider*. The most obvious example is in the intro to "Sky Turning Grey."

I discovered a device in writing the chorus of this tune that I cannot wait to use more often. I basically doubled the harmonic rhythm multiple times, and the space between changes in harmonic rhythm got shorter each time. It creates a feeling of exponential acceleration without changing the tempo. It's supported by stepwise ascending root movement and a contrasting descending melody. To me, all these devices come together to form a very effective moment.

One temptation I have sometimes in writing music is to throw the kitchen sink at every section. I'll have complicated lyrics, melodies, harmonies, and rhythm all at once. That sort of writing can have its place, but it usually detracts from the potential effectiveness of a song. In order for a moment of a song to be effective, there has to be one focal point, one most important element that the rest of the elements are supporting. In the verses of "The Tyrant," that element is the lyrics. The lyrics paint a picture of a tragic character, and they communicate both empathy and disdain for that character. That's a lot to interpret, so I had to make all the other elements simple. The melody, harmony, and rhythm all set the stage for the lyrics.

♩ = 140

How Long?

Austin Ford

Intro

Verse 1

A new de - vel - op - ment - in me.

If you look close - ly you may see, I che - rish you.

Is it just a trace? Am I wear - ing it all o - ver my face?

Should I try to act a - loof?

Verse 2

In - ad - ver - tant - ly you see

how I feel and to my glee, you don't pull a - way.

I find the will to ask, could we be a per - fect pair that will last?

F² DbΔ^{7#11} C C⁷
 I'd ra-ther be friends is what you say.

F² G² C² G²/B A^{sus}⁷ G²
 Chorus 1 How long will it take un-til you change your mind?

F² G² C² E^{sus}/B A^m⁷ G²
 How long should I wait un-til you're with me all the time?

F² G^(add4) E⁷⁺ A^m
 And how ma-ny days till you re-a-lize the truth that I

F D^m G^{7b9}
 love you and you love me too?

DbΔ^{7#11} CΔ⁷

Interlude
 DbΔ^{7#11} CΔ⁷

DbΔ^{7#11} CΔ⁷
 Verse 3 I know I ought to re-cog-nize,

DbΔ^{7#11} C² G²/B A^m⁷
 our friendship's worth pre-ser-ving. I should be sa-tis-fied.

F² G² E^{sus}/B E A^{sus}⁷ G²

And truly I believe, we'll be best of friends and happy as can be,

F² D^bΔ⁷#¹¹ C C⁷

and still these pes-ter-ing ques - tions just won't leave, Oh

F² G² C² G²/B A^{sus}⁷ G²

Chorus 3 How long will it take un - til you change your mind?

F² G² C² E^{sus}/B A^m⁷ G²

How long should I wait un - til you're with me all the time?

F² G^(add4) E⁷+ A^m

And how ma - ny days till you re - a - lize the truth that I

F D^m G⁷^{b9}

love you and you love me too _____ ?

A^b² B^b² CΔ⁷

Interlude

A^b² B^b⁷ CΔ⁷#¹¹

A^bΔ⁷#¹¹ B^b⁷ CΔ⁷#¹¹

AbΔ7#11 Bb7 C7#11

AbΔ7#11 Bb7 CΔ7

Bridge I knew just how our paths would in - ter - twine. But

AbΔ7#11 Bb7 CΔ7#11

your i - dea is much dif - ferent than mine. The

AbΔ7#11 Bb7 C7

sto - ry of my life brought to a stand - still. And if

Db#11 Eb E

e - ven you don't love me, who will?

F2 G2 C2 G2/B Asus7 G2

Chorus 3 How long will it take un - til you change your mind?

F2 G2 C2 Esus/B Am7 G2

How long should I wait un - til you're with me all the time?

F2 G(add4) E7+ Am

And how ma - ny days till you re - a - lize the truth that I

F Dm G7b9 F#7

love you and you love me too _____ ?

Chorus 4

F² G² C² G²/B A^{sus}7 G²

How long will it take un-til you change your mind? I think I'm los- ing mine.

F² G² C² E^{sus}/B A^m7 G²

How long should I wait un- til you're with me all the time?

F² G^(add4) E7+ A^m

And how ma-ny days till you re- a - lize the truth that I

F D^m G7^{b9}

love you and you love me too? It's

F F^m G7^{b9} C2^(no3)

clear to me. Why can't you see it too?

I wrote “How Long” after working in my lessons on playing latin tunes solo piano. We talked about the “three zones,” which are the bass, the comping, and the melody. In solo piano playing, the left hand usually covers the bass, the right hand usually covers the melody, and both hands share the role of comping. Using this strategy in a latin tune gave me the texture I used for the opening vamp of “How Long.”

The main chord change in the intro and verses is DbΔ#11 to CΔ. This works so well because both chords share C, F, and G as common tones. The melody lives mostly in those common tones, so despite the potentially disorienting odd chord change, the melody reins it back in to what is ultimately still a pop sound. The rest of the changes in the verses and chorus mostly revolve around I, IV, and V, which also helps to bring the balance back from jazz to pop.

There’s one notable difference between the first and second verses other than the lyrics. It’s the spot that in the first verse falls on “Am I wearing it all over my face?” and in the second verse falls on “Can we be a perfect pair that will last?” The first time the chords are C, G/B, A-7, G. This is a typical, diatonic walkdown. It’s recognizable as the verse to “Piano Man” by Billy Joel. The second time, I changed it to Bø, E7, A-7, G. I’m adding a secondary dominant (E7 → A-7). By playing it diatonic the first time, it provides the context to make the second time more effective.

The idea for the bridge came from a Brad Mehldau solo piano performance of “And I Love Her” by the Beatles. He repeats the same few chords over and over, beginning quiet and sparse, and gradually builds until he’s playing full chords every sixteenth note. It’s incredibly dramatic, so I used the same idea here.

♩ = 120

Act Your Age

Austin Ford

Intro

Verse 1

Hey man, I want you to know you're
put-tin' on quite the show. And we can
see what a man you're gon - na be and how hard you're work-in' to grow.

Verse 2

Hey man, we're all ver - y im - pressed. It
seems like you've aced the test. And eve-ry
time you pass we stand and clap cause you damn sure let us know.

Chords: Eb7, Ab7, A7 Bb7, Gb7, Db, Eb, Ab7, Gb7, Eb7, Ab7, Db, Eb, Ab7, Gb7, Eb7, Ab7, A7 Bb7.

Ab7 G7 Gb7 F7 B7 Bb7
 I get you're try-in' to be
 Eb Ab7 Bb7 Eb Ab7 Bb7
 Chorus 1 quite the sight to see. And I've no doubt you'll suc-
 Eb Ab7 Bb7 F7 Bb7
 ceed. Hell, you're way a-head of me. Just lis-ten for you're
 Eb Ab7 Bb7 Eb G/D C-7 F7
 own sake. I know I'm not some sort-a sage. Just re-mem-ber when you
 Eb Eb/Db Ab/C B B7 Bb7 Db
 can't quite fit in your old man's britches it's o-kay to act your age.
 Db D Eb7 Eb7 Ab7 A7 Bb7

Interlude

Ab7 Gb7
 Verse 3 Hey man, I don't mean to con - de - scend. Your'e a
 Ab7 Eb7
 good man and you're my friend. And I'm
 Db Eb Ab7 A7 Bb7
 sor-ry if I'm bein' a drag, but do you al-ways have to brag? What do I know?

Ab7 G7 Gb7 F7 B7 Bb7
 I get you're try-in' to be
Eb Ab7 Bb7 Eb Ab7 Bb7
 Chorus 2 quite the sight to see. And I've no doubt you'll suc-
Eb Ab7 Bb7 F7 Bb7
 ceed. Hell, you're way a-head of me. Just lis-ten for you're
Eb Ab7 Bb7 Eb G/D C-7 F7
 own sake. I know I'm not some sort-a sage. Just re-mem-ber when you
Eb Eb/Db Ab/C B B7 Bb7
 can't quite fit in your old man's britches it's o-kay to act your age.
Db Bb

AbΔ GbΔ
 Bridge I really hope it turns out great. It must be tough to car-ry all that weight.
Eb7 AbΔ GbΔ
 If e-ver you can't stop it and you slip
B B#11
 and drop it, I'm sin-cere and true when I say I'll be

Db

here for you if you need a break.

Eb7 **Ab7** **A7** **Bb7** **Bb7**

I get you're try-in' to be

Eb **Ab7 Bb7** **Eb** **Ab7 Bb7**

Chorus 3

quite the sight to see. And I've no doubt you'll suc -

Eb **Ab7 Bb7** **F7** **Bb7**

ceed. Hell, you're way a-head of me. Just lis-ten for you're

Eb **Ab7 Bb7** **Eb** **G/D** **C-7** **F7**

own sake. I know I'm not some sort-a sage. Just re-mem-ber when you

Eb **Eb/Db** **Ab/C** **B** **B7** **Bb7** **B7** **Bb7**

can't quite fit in your old man's britches it's o - kay to act, you know it's o - kay to act,

B7 **Bb7** **Db** **Db** **D** **Eb7**

you can act your age. Rit.

The opening and recurring vamp of “Act Your Age” is an adaptation of the vamp from Herbie Hancock’s “Cantaloupe Island.” The tonic stays in the top voice, and the lower two voices move stepwise in thirds, diatonic with each chord change. It’s a classic blues lick. My choice was to use it as an intro to establish the groove and return to it periodically throughout the song. One challenge of solo piano pop playing is it’s easy to lose the groove. I’ve found that having a recurring rhythmic figure like this one is a great way to check back in with the groove often enough that the audience continues to feel it even when I’m not playing it.

Another device I used in “Act Your Age” is space. Before each verse, there’s a full measure of silence. Moments of silence in music trick the audience into paying attention. Our attention detects changes in sensation, so when one’s auditory experience suddenly shifts from lots of sound to no sound, it forces even inattentive listeners to check back in with the music. I learned this trick from Little Tybee’s song “The Alchemist.” The moment I remember most vividly from seeing them in concert is after the intro to that song, there was a long moment of silence. The audience and band were frozen, and when the band came back in with a full sound, it was incredibly exciting.

I liked the idea of turning the cliché “act your age” around. Usually it’s said to chastise people for behaving like children. My song is about a super ambitious young person who can’t quite live up to his own standards and compensates by making sure everyone else knows how successful he is. In this case, “act your age” is reminding him that he’s young and doesn’t have to have everything figured out. As with many of my songs, it’s primarily addressed to myself.

The Artist

Austin Ford

Intro

C G F F-6

Verse 1

G/B C F G An
or di - na - ry street cor - ner
G/B C F Gsus G
on an - y - o - ther day,
E A-7 F E-7 D-7 G7b9
but to - night he's its own - ner, and to him it's a stage.
C G F F-6 C G F G

Interlude

G/B C F G

Verse 2

G/B C F Gsus G
Most don't give him a chance, but
E A-7 F E-7 D-7 G7b9
some stop to lis - ten a - while.
One cou - ple be - gins to dance, and he can't hold back a smile.

C G F F-6 C G F G

Interlude

C CΔ7 FΔ7 F-6

Chorus 1 Day in, day out, he cre-ates.

C G F G

C CΔ7 FΔ7 F-6

His heart and soul, he re-lates.

C G F G

A- F

Most will ne-ver e-ver be touched by his

D G

song, but e-ven a few is all he needs to

C CΔ7 FΔ7 F-6

feed the dream and keep him go-ing

C G F F-6 C G F G

Interlude strong.

G/B C F G G/B C F G^{sus} G

Solo

E A-7 F E-7 D-7 G7^{b9} C G

F F-6 C G F G

G/B C F G

Verse 3 four year old stum - bles up, a

G/B C F G^{sus} G

grin spread a - cross her face,

E A-7 F E-7 D-7 G7^{b9}

and with the bless - ing of her mom drops a dol - lar in his

C G F G C G F G

case.

C CΔ⁷ FΔ⁷ F-6

Chorus 2 Day in, day out, he cre-ates.

C G F G

I wrote the lyrics for “The Artist” in with my friend Zach Tyler. I had been busking (street performing) frequently that summer and drew from those experiences to paint a picture of the sort of artist I admire and aspire to be, one who devotes everything to his art with intent to share it, but with no aspiration for fame or popularity.

Since I knew I wanted the music to be warm and heartfelt, I went in search of that sort of very sincere sound. Two songs that stuck out to me were “Gracie” by Ben Folds and “Tapestry” by The Reign of Kindo. Both were primarily comprised of I, IV, and V chords, yet somehow didn’t feel boring or predictable. In “Tapestry,” I noticed this progression toward the end of the chorus: C, CΔ7, FΔ7, F-6. What make this progression work is the voice leading. The top voice begins on C. Then it descends a half step to B for the CΔ7 chord. It descends a whole step to A for FΔ7 and another half step to Ab for F-6. I describe that progression as warm, warm, warm, WARM. It’s just approaching the line of too chromatic for pop, but it’s still safe. Even to pop listeners, it’s four beautifully warm sounds in a row that lead perfectly to each other because of the stepwise voice leading. I stole that progression for the chorus of “The Artist.”

The other reason that progression is ultra warm is the F-6 chord, or the minor iv chord in the key of C. This began my fascination with utilizing the lowered sixth as the most powerful color note in a major key. In this case, it’s Ab, and it’s the note that makes the F-6 chord minor. It’s also the third in the E chord in the verses. And it’s the lowered ninth in the G7b9 chord at the end of the verses. All these uses stand in direct contrast with the rest of the mostly diatonic harmonies of the song. It’s beautiful color that isn’t at all jarring. It doesn’t take the listener out of the story. It enhances it.

♩ = 100

Here's The Door

Austin Ford and Cody Lavelle

Chorus 1
It hurts me to say, you're not welcome. You've over - stayed.
So if you'd please, here's the door. I don't want you in my heart a - ny-more.

Interlude

Verse 1
know pre - cise - ly who you are, and I just wan-na be a part, but you made it
cry - tal clear I'm bound to fail before I e - ven start.

Chorus 2
And it hurts me to say, you're not welcome. You've over - stayed.
So if you'd please, here's the door. I don't want you in my heart a - ny-more.

Interlude

Verse 2
shortage of rea - sons we ought to be to-ge - ther. It's clear to see that we are the

F Δ E7#9 A-7 D7 G13 G+7 D-7

per - fect pair, like lock to key, but it's doubtful you'll e - ver leave.

G7 C Δ D-7 G7 C Δ C#^o

Chorus 3 And it hurts me to say, you're not wel-come. You've o-ver - stayed.

D-7 G7 C Δ A7 D-7 G7 C Δ C7

So if you'd please, here's the door. I don't want you in my heart a - ny-more.

F-6 C Δ F-6 C Δ A \flat 7 G-7 F-6

Bridge It's not that you're out of reach. You ac-tual-ly seem to like me fine.

C Δ A-7 D7 G13 E \flat 7

But why does he have to be first in line?

D-7 G7 C Δ D-7 G7 C Δ C#^o

Chorus 4 And it hurts me to say, you're not wel-come. You've o-ver - stayed.

D-7 G7 C7 B \flat 7 A7 D-7 G7

So if you'd please, here's the door. I don't want you in my heart a - ny-more.

C7 B \flat 7 A7 D-7 G+7 F7 C7

Get on out! I don't want you in my life a - ny - more.
Rit.

I haven't had much success with cowriting music. I think the primary reason is I have a very particular style when it comes to writing lyrics, and as a result it often takes me hours to complete a set of lyrics. Cowriting is all about moving quickly, and in what little cowriting I've attempted, I'm not usually ready to move on yet, so I get frustrated. My friend Cody Lavalle, who graduated from MTSU last year, is the only person I've written with successfully and actually gotten songs I liked out of it.

"Here's The Door" is my favorite song we've written together. We used an approach which was new to me at the time, but since has become the main way I write songs. We sat at the piano (he had his guitar) and played around with different ideas until we found a melody we liked. Then we fleshed that out until we had the musical skeleton (harmony, melody, and form). Then we went away from our instruments and wrote the lyrics with the tune we had written in our heads. Once we had all the lyrics, we returned to the piano and put them together with the music we'd written, and we had a song! Cody challenges me to work fast, but he doesn't settle for mediocre ideas, so it's always a good experience writing with him.

One neat device we used in "Here's The Door" goes all the way back to the Classic Era of music (or possibly before). That device is elision. Elision occurs when the final measure of one section also functions as the first measure of the next section, effectively cutting one bar from an otherwise symmetrical form. We did that in each transition from a chorus to a verse. The C Δ chord functions as the last bar of the chorus and the first bar of the interlude that leads into the verse.

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND TERMINOLOGY

- Δ indicates a Major 7 chord
- - indicates a minor chord
- o indicates a diminished chord
- \emptyset indicates a half diminished chord
- + indicates an augmented chord

- Changes - the chords in a song
- Chromatic - comprised of notes outside the key
- Comping - playing chords behind a melody
- Diatonic - comprised of notes in the key
- Feel - a synonym for groove
- Ostinato - an extended repeated note with a steady rhythm
- Pedal - a repeated bass note that does not change, even when the chords change above it.
- Vamp - a section of a song with few repeated chords, a steady groove, and no vocal melody

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