

COPING SKILLS: A SENIOR RECITAL & HONORS THESIS

BY, SAMANTHA BLOSSER

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One year ago, almost exactly, I stumbled out of the mental hospital. Branded with an ugly diagnosis, I was certain I could not return to music school.

Today, I present a sculpture molded by a year of resilience, crafted with the corpses of all of my 'nevers' and 'cannots.'

Here. This is the clay I have used to cope, hardened and made whole.

DOLPHY'S DANCE, BY GERI ALLEN

This is not only a tribute to the great Eric Dolphy, but to the incomparable Geri Allen. Not only has her playing and compositional style influenced me, but her mentorship has greatly impacted my life. A few years ago, she founded the All-Female Jazz Residency, a week-long summer camp exclusively for young women in the jazz world. I attended this camp and had the life-changing opportunity to work with her as well as some of my other heroes. The raw positive energy at this camp was like nothing I'd ever experienced.

Like the melody of this tune, it's true that the road to being successful in this field, especially as a woman, is long, turbulent, and challenging. But with the right attitude and mentorship, success is more than possible.

HIDE AND SEEK, BY SAMANTHA BLOSSER

While creating this tune, my idea was to write something only for myself- whether I chose to share it was unimportant. This song deals with one of the less talked about mental health phenomena- dissociation. I've found myself sitting catatonic, staring at the wall for hours at a time, completely separated from reality. This has caused me to

forget days, weeks, even better parts of an entire month. Here, I try to capture the wistful yet insidious and unsettling nature of this subtly intrusive beast.

Lyrics as follow:

*Disappointed hands and empty eyes
Pace the hall, erase my mind
Gone to some other land
Drive off aimlessly to kill the time
Cannot run, sure can hide
Leaving a ghost outside
Close my eyes on Monday
Come to on Sunday
Dissociate
Oh, isn't it great?
Teeth are falling out, my hair's in knots
Bite my lip, cross my heart
Tell me there's something more
Oh, cut it out, cut it out, cut it out, cut it out, cut it-
Please wake up now, wake up now, wake up now, wake up now, wake up-
Close my eyes on Monday
Come to on Sunday
Dissociate
Oh, isn't it great?
Broken promises made to myself
Collect dust up on the shelf
Too high for me to reach
To reach...*

SMASHIN' THE PATRIARCHY, BY SAMANTHA BLOSSER

This tune juxtaposes an aggressive title with a playful melody and straightforward harmony. It represents the common misconception that feminism is a threatening beast that needs to be "toned down." In reality, this misconception is merely a reaction from those with privilege having their sense of reality challenged. Hence, feminism is seen as a destructive force. Any force or movement in this society that challenges

those with privilege automatically challenges the core identity and sense of reality under which those individuals operate.

Feminism is bent on equality. Built to empower, uplift, and give voice to the marginalized. My experience attending the Women's March in Washington D.C. last January was pivotal, and inspired this piece. Rather than an angry mob of 500,000 people, that anger was channeled into action, hope, and problem solving through strength in community. I'll never forget walking past the Washington Monument and looking over to my companions, a wave of emotion flooding over us as we linked arms, half laughing and half crying, finally realizing—*this* is what it feels like to be empowered.

CASTLES, BY SAMANTHA BLOSSER

I began writing this song a few years ago in an attempt to express the strange sensations I was experiencing. I had all of these brilliant, beautiful ideas in my head—everything from epic poetry to theories about astrophysics. However, this flood of ideas seemed to lead to nothing but false inspiration without fruition. I continually felt like I was wandering through an enormous castle—sparkling on the outside, but filled with nothing but millions of trap doors.

I tried to create this feeling with a flowing, obsessive ostinato. Putting it in odd meter adds an underlying sense that something isn't quite right. When the ostinato finally breaks and the tune goes into 4/4, there's a sigh of relief, as if seeing the outside world for the first time. But soon enough, the dark bass clarinet and guitar line that counters the climactic vocals shows an underlying pain— the pain of realizing many of the things you cherished and thought were real were actually manic delusions. Finally, the wordless rubato vocal and piano recapitulation of the beginning melody is like saying goodbye to an old friend, leaving behind an entire castle of what you thought was sheer brilliance.

Lyrics as follow:

*Fragile stone, frozen flame
Flightless bird, forgotten name
Whisper, but no one can hear you
Stumbling through the hallways of your mind*

*Keyless door, knotted mane
Kindred soul, kindhearted pain
Scour every cranny and corner
Struggle to ease the weight of turning time
Oh, I've been haunting myself
I've been losing myself
Scraps of what was once a mountain of life
Casting shadows on this castle of mine*

CREEPY CRAWLIES, BY SAMANTHA BLOSSER

This final tune deals with another lesser-known symptom—tactile hallucinations. Sometimes they're not so bad and manifest in a way that mimics synesthesia. But in their most volatile form, they've made me feel as if there are bugs crawling under my skin, trying to claw their way out. Of all the bipolar-related things I've experienced, this is the worst.

Another odd-meter bass line sets the tone for this dark and high-energy piece. The tinkling piano/guitar intro personifies the invisible bugs, and the ending ensemble hits represent the universal panic, desperation, and urgency to make the creepy crawlies stop.