

Hutt, Samantha

### Artist Statement

Music and image have always gone hand in hand for me. My sound-color synesthesia, a neurological condition where my senses sometimes cross and create involuntary reactions when triggered by external stimuli, helps me compose music for visuals. A good score can make or break any time-based piece. I create music digitally and am mostly self taught, though I do like to bring in what I learned from my previous experience of being a violinist as a young teenager. As an emerging artist in a world engulfed in a technical revolution, I want to experiment with and combine new techniques with old technology and vice versa.

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis project is titled “Eva and the Troll” and consists of two animated videos and two soundtracks composed by myself. This project is a two-part visual EP that serves as a culmination of what I have learned during my time at PNCA. The focus of this project is music composition and the role it plays in storytelling when combined with mediums like animation.

The story is about a young girl named Eva and the strange world she happens upon and the new friend she meets within. These animated videos represent two chapters of this story, respectively titled “The Door” and “The Troll”. Each has digitally painted backgrounds, 2D animation, and a music score of my own composition.

Included within this project are themes of childhood, curiosity, friendship, and the magic of the natural world around us.

## HUTT THESIS DEFENSE SPEECH

Hello everyone and welcome to my thesis defense for my project titled “Eva and the Troll”. If you don’t already know me, I’m Sam, an animated arts major who focuses on 2-D animation, realism based illustration, and more recently, music composition. It is through animation and my education here at PNCA that I was brought to the art of composing for moving images. This project has many reasonings behind it, but the main goal for me was to use what I have learned about animation and sound design and translate that into a cohesive musical score driven by a linear narrative inspired by my favorite types of stories.

This thesis project is made of two animated videos with corresponding scores that work together to create a narrative. The story is about a young girl named Eva and the strange world she happens upon and the new friend she meets. These animated videos represent two chapters of this story, respectively titled “The Door” and “The Troll”. Each has digitally painted backgrounds, 2D animation, and a music score of my own composition.

It’s important to note that these are chapters– not the full story. Over this semester, I realized that if I wanted to create a story to the best of my ability with all the pieces I wanted– i.e. full rendered backgrounds, personally composed soundtracks, well executed animation– then I would not be able to do the entire story arc that I had initially planned. Eva’s journey is meant to continue on outside of this thesis. Her characterization and story are based on a multitude of inspirations, but the common thread between them is the concept of fantasy, magic, and friendship.

### BACKGROUND

As far back as I can remember, I have been interested in the concept of storytelling and fiction. I have always been a voracious reader starting from the time when my mom used to read the newest *Harry Potter* books aloud to my brothers and me. I read anything and everything I could get my hands on and my favorite thing to do in school was to go to the library to have unrestricted reading time. I loved books about adventure and magic, especially when the protagonists were my age. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Lightning Thief*, and *Gregor the Overlander* were some of my favorites.

Fantasy and magic appealed to me because of escapism and the idea that there is something else out there in the world that we don’t know about. It also served as inspiration to push past the confines of what I was familiar with, both in my environment and within myself. Growing up in the desert surrounding Las Vegas, I was particularly enamored by stories centered around magic forests and strange oceans. This early interest in other biomes grew stronger and was even a factor in my decision to attend PNCA. Even now, after years of living here, I am just blown away by how green and lush everything is all year round. I knew that this project would have to involve forests somehow because of the beauty and mystery surrounding it. The

background illustrations I created directly reference areas of Pacific Northwest forests with a touch of magic and mystery added in.

This love of reading also spawned a love of writing my own adventure stories and, eventually, led to me creating and drawing my own characters. Eva, a ten year old girl living somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, is based on all of those characters that I wanted to be, going on adventures that I wanted to experience. She is optimistic, friendly, persistent, and unwaveringly curious just like I was when I was her age.

A big part of Eva is her ability to make friends with just about anyone. I have always ached for a protagonist who doesn't conquer monsters but befriends them instead. The scarier the monster, the more I wanted the main character to befriend it. So often we are presented with a reality that can be harsh and terrifying, full of people and animals that care only for themselves and survival, but it doesn't have to be that way for everyone. Humans are really good at making friends with other beings and even inanimate objects— just think of the multitude of cute pet videos and people who name their roomba machines. I wanted to highlight this trait in Eva and show that anyone, no matter what age, is capable of conquering their own fear with friendship and open mindedness.

The strange world that Eva stumbles into is directly inspired by Scandinavian folklore. I fell into quite the rabbit hole while researching various myths and creatures and initially wanted to change the direction of my inquiry to reflect this sudden fascination, but in the end it didn't make sense within the confines of two pieces. Trolls in Scandinavian folklore are numerous and vary as a species, but they are typically ambivalent and can swing from kind or evil depending on the story. I chose the troll to be Eva's friend and eventual companion because of this dual nature and to emphasize how the choices we make alter our own personal stories: had Eva lashed out and decided to not trust or hurt the troll, then there would've been negative consequences.

Humans are also good at something else: telling stories. When I first began the thesis process, I was mainly interested in *why* humans tell stories. I ended up finding the answer pretty quickly in a book titled *The Storytelling Animal* by Johnathan Gottschall. The author posits a unified theory about why we tell stories: simply put, stories help us navigate life's complex social problems. As we evolve, so too do our stories and our storytelling techniques.

## INQUIRY

So, how are stories told? How do visual and aural techniques affect the nature of storytelling? The true drive behind this project was about combining everything I learned here at PNCA to tell a story that I wanted to see in the world using music and animation.

Over the past few years I was introduced to a storytelling medium I hadn't explored much before: serialized fiction podcasts. Like old radio dramas, these stories were told entirely in an audio format, something that I really enjoyed because it allowed me to work on art while being immersed in a story that I didn't need to watch. There was a small problem, though: if I had to write something for class or was distracted, I missed part of the story or had to turn it off

to concentrate. TV and films had a similar problem: if I couldn't watch the visuals because I was working on something else, I missed vital information because those stories are heavily reliant on visuals.

Musical scores offer resolution. They don't have distracting lyrics or visuals that must be watched in order to make sense of what's happening, yet there is a clear narrative happening there. Scores are also open to various levels of interpretation like any storytelling medium, especially if you haven't seen the film or show that the score was composed for. I often find myself listening to the soundtracks of films I've never seen before because I like to imagine for myself what's going on. This is the beauty of composing scores: it enhances whatever visual media it's for, but it can also stand on its own.

## SOUND

I began composing back in February. I started because one night I watched a video about how one of my biggest creative inspirations, Griffin McElroy, got started composing music for the podcast *The Adventure Zone*. His music was amazing, but his process was deceptively simple: he just opened GarageBand and began experimenting with the virtual instruments. Well, I thought, I have that too. If he can do it, why can't I?

As a disclaimer, I do have some musical training. I played violin for five years in middle and high school. I also danced on and off again as a child and in Color Guard as a freshman in high school. To top it off, I also have synesthesia: a neurological condition where my senses are crossed. Every number and letter has its own color, music produces colors, and other stuff like that. I had some basic knowledge of how to read music, keys, and musicality. However, I can confidently say that even with this background in formal music knowledge, my first attempts at composing were just pure garbage. I didn't expect anything more, honestly, but it was fun! It was really fun! So, I continued on experimenting and tinkering with the program.

I challenged myself to keep making music by making scores for my friend Christin Engelberth's thesis project; a children's book called Haven. Unlike those who produce music videos, I like to have visuals first to compose music for. This helps my synesthesia and creates less conflict in my process as it is far easier to make music that matches the colors of an established visual than it is to match visual colors to the colors a piece of music creates in my mind's eye. I learned a lot from this self imposed project, but I still felt like I was missing a key part of a good score.

My breakthrough came while crafting my initial proposal back in April. If I applied what I knew about animation— i.e. holds, pacing, emphasizing gestures— to composing. I wanted to use music as a storytelling medium that would run parallel to my animation, something that would stand on its own but also compliment my visuals. It was a very intuitive process for me, based on feeling and the depths of color I saw, and I continued to refine my composing process through the two finished pieces here today. It's been frustrating and definitely difficult, but it's incredibly rewarding to see it all come together.

My work for this project was inspired by many different kinds of music and music videos; the limited background animations were inspired by the music video for the song *Dirty Car* by the band Studio Killers as well as the lyric videos for the songs on the album *My Head is an Animal* by the band Of Monsters and Men. The music itself was inspired by musicians like Eivør, Griffin McElroy, Hozier, and Fleet Foxes. During the composition process, I found interviews from some professional composers like Hans Zimmer and Brad Breeck, both of whom have written music for animation and live action. I found their interviews helpful and inspiring, mainly because I got to see for myself that you don't have to know how to play seven different instruments to compose a good score.

The Door is the first chapter in the narrative arc behind Eva's exploration of a strange new world. We see her first as she exists in the familiar forest of her home, where all seems normal, and then she happens upon a strange doorway in the middle of the trees. The idea of adventure is too appealing to a curious girl like her so she goes through the doorway with little hesitation. The video as a piece lasts one minute and fifteen seconds. The music of this piece is light, playful, and represents Eva as a character. She has the energy of the tambourine and the curiosity of the melodic harp. I wanted to focus on orchestral instruments to ground this piece of the story in the real world, punctuated only by the sudden appearance of the portal and its affiliated high bell noise.

Entitled "The Troll", the second chapter serves as an introduction to the troll character and the strange new world that Eva has stumbled into. This world is unknown, even scary, and I reflected that with both the colors and musically via synths and reverb, a direct contrast from the more orchestral and staccato score used in the first chapter. The deep drone of the bass represents potential danger and Eva's own uncertainty. The melody is melancholic, slightly off but peaceful in its own way. This piece became longer than the first because I realized the viewer needs more time to understand where they are since it is a landscape removed from reality. Eva also needed time to adjust, both to the landscape and to the appearance of the troll. Their interaction was one of the most challenging parts of this entire project for me because of the subtleties in body language and pacing that I needed to get right to get the relationship to read as intended.

## SOUND RESEARCH

Part of my attraction to music and sound design is its ability to amplify the visual aspects of a piece while also being its own structure. While researching the theories behind sound design for animation and film, this unique trait of sound was explained thoroughly by Michel Chion in their book *Audio-Vision* and by Robin Beauchamp in *Designing Sound for Animation*. Sound is processed faster by the brain than visual information and because of this sound is able to increase an audience's understanding of an animated scene, especially if there are quick cuts or edits that could disorientate the viewers. Sound can make visuals fade into the background or emphasize them and make them pop out. A good music score provides an emotional tether to the scene, allowing the audience to feel what the artist intended, and a bad score makes the viewers

unintentionally confused or feel manipulated. Sometimes the best scores are never even noticed at all since they mesh so well with the visuals, but that can also be a problem for this specific project.

When explaining this project I am often met with people asking if these are music videos. It's difficult to explain, but these pieces lay somewhere in between music videos and short films. The music is the most important aspect and the source of my research, but the term "music video" conflicts with the process behind how I created my pieces. A music video implies that I had the music first and then created visuals, when really my process was the opposite. I don't consider them short films or "episodes" either because those terms feel like they put heavy emphasis on the visuals. In reality, the visuals are there both for the sake of my composing process and engage my audience by providing an extra layer of sensory stimulation.

In his article "Is Music Becoming More Visual? Online Video Content in the Music Industry", Fabian Holt tells us that, "Video extends the range of communication, adding another element of sensuous stimulation, information and entertainment. Video stimulates the visual sense and creates a narrative and imaginary around sound, which itself is neither indexical nor referential. Video provides information and indexes cultural style, thus affecting the consumer who is looking for new music or making buying decisions." In short, the video aspect of a music video is used to pull in a wider audience than a soundtrack does by itself. I wanted to use that thinking for my project: my visuals and the character of Eva serve as a bridge between my audience and my music.

## AUDIENCE

My audience is primarily kids aged ten and up as well as young adults who enjoy a good soundtrack like me. The visuals are primarily geared towards children, specifically the small isolated bits in the beginning of the videos like the butterflies and ghosts. Kids are smart but often have small attention spans so my goal with the animation was to keep their focus on what was happening on screen. The sound work and detailed backgrounds offer something for an older audience who enjoys rewatching videos to find details they may have missed before or for those who just want the music to be played in the background while they focus on something else.

I want to make stories for kids who were like me when I was young. I want to give them a character they can relate to and aspire to be; someone curious and adventurous and kind. Fans of animated shows like *Gravity Falls* and *Hilda* will be especially interested in my work. I want to inspire in them a sense of magic and wonder about the world outside and hopefully a sense of preservation for the natural landscapes that are quickly disappearing. Now more than ever I think we need these kinds of stories in all our media, especially after the Global Climate Strike back in September. If kids are concerned, there's a good chance they'll be able to inspire action within their families and communities, too.

My reach towards a large audience was included in my character design choices. Eva is specifically not white because of a realization I had during the design process: all of my visual influences, like the main characters from the animated shows *Gravity Falls*, *Hilda*, and *Twelve Forever*, are white. I am a cisgendered white woman so I've never not been able to see myself represented positively in media. That's probably why it took me so long to realize that most of my characters in previous projects are also white and cis.

Now more than ever, kids are growing up with technology and are exposed to media almost relentlessly. Young children have iPads, smart phones, portable game consoles, and all kinds of other tech that I didn't have until I was at least a teenager.

In the article "An Ecological Perspective on the Media and Youth Development" by Susan McHale, Aryn Dotterer, and Ji-Yeon Kim, the authors say that, "In their media use, youth are exposed to models of behavior, attitudes and lifestyles with which they may identify." They also indicate that what children do every day (i.e. watch tv, read, play video games) form the building blocks in their identity development. The more positive figures in media that children are able to relate to, the more they are able to visualize themselves positively. I want to be part of a positive change for children's media landscape in this way. I want to learn more about how I can do and be better.

### WHERE

To reach this aforementioned audience, my videos will be hosted on YouTube first and the music will be subsequently uploaded to audio platforms like SoundCloud and Bandcamp. The videos will also be uploaded to Vimeo as part of my portfolio. I will also be sharing links to the specific YouTube videos across my social media accounts with stills of the animation as a way to catch the viewer's attention.

I am choosing to use YouTube because it is one of the top five most used websites in the US according to data captured by Joshua Hardwick. It is also a unique tool for discovering new music and artists. Unlike other social media sites like Twitter and Instagram, YouTube's video-based structure means that there is no limit to how long or short a video can be, making it an ideal place for my work to live. It is also free and widely accessible, with work in multiple languages from multiple countries. YouTube also provides a community of other music makers and animators like me as well as features to show videos related to the one currently being watched. These tools are powerful and I will take advantage of them to the best of my ability in order to grow my audience and provoke interest in my art practice.

Christopher Cayari's article "The YouTube Effect: How YouTube Has Provided New Ways to Consume, Create, and Share Music" was also helpful in my decision of where to put my work. Cayari makes helpful points about how YouTube and its social atmosphere makes finding new music easy because "one can access YouTube on any computer that is linked to the internet, whether it is played on a desktop, laptop, or hand held device. YouTube also increases the availability of music. The digital revolution exploded a plethora of ways to access mp3s, wavs,



and other digital audio files. However, YouTube allows listeners to hear music for free unlike pay services such as iTunes and Napster.” It seemed like a natural choice for me.

### ROLE & CHANGE

I played a lot of roles in the development of this project. I was the director, producer, character designer, storyboard artist, background painter, composer, editor, and promoter. Part of my struggle with this project was figuring out which, if any, of the roles I could delegate. I was keen on doing everything by myself, but it became evident very quickly that I did not have the time or energy to do so. I ended up having a friend color my animation for me and my roommate edited my early concept art to make it suitable for printing and displaying. I’m very grateful to both of them for their help in getting everything done on time.

The hardest part of thesis was how much had to change between the project I proposed and what I am presenting here today. As an artist I had big, ambitious dreams of what I wanted to accomplish here but I had to scale back almost immediately. My original proposal called for ten videos and songs which was then edited down to four at the urging of my midterm thesis panel back in April. After my midterm review in October, that number was whittled to two. It was a harsh reality that I faced, but in the end I am glad for it. I believe I was able to put more effort into the animation and the music for these two videos than I would’ve been able to do for four.

The amount of videos changing also affected my investigation into my line of inquiry and the overall story. I wasn’t going to cram an entire narrative arc into two short videos because I knew it would feel rushed and it would also place way too much stress on myself and shift the emphasis of the project back to the visuals. I made the decision with the help of my mentor and the advice of my midterm panelists to not complete the story instead of having something rushed. This decision did not change the content of the videos but it did allow me to slow down and put more detail into my decisions and it also allowed me more time to research.

It was difficult to realize that I couldn’t do all the big things I had envisioned, but in the end I made something that I am proud of and that I can put into my portfolio without hesitation.

For now, this project is complete. I definitely need to take a step back from it for a little bit to catch my breath, reorientate myself, and maybe get a massage. When I do come back to this project, I want to continue Eva’s story. I have kept the storyboards and concept art from my original ten-video plan and I would love to revisit them. With more time and no institutional deadline, I will be able to bring more folklore figures into the story to continue on with the theme of friendship and finding beauty within everyone. I even have ideas for new projects that follow similar themes as this one; young characters journeying through strange worlds of myth and exploring different biomes. It would be nice to pay homage to my home in the desert with music and some lovingly rendered landscapes.

I will continue to make music in earnest. Through an e-mail exchange with Brad Breeck I gained some extremely helpful advice about how to cultivate a career as a music composer for animation and live action media. Like any art medium, it'll take lots and lots of practice for me to find my own voice and style, but I am confident because I have found that I really love composing for animation, both my own work and the work of others. I thoroughly look forward to continuing to develop my skills by collaborating with and composing for animators and filmmakers in the PNCA community. I want to create a solid portfolio to help me further pursue work in this field.

I want to thank everyone who came today to support me, I really appreciate it. I would like to give special thanks to my mentor, Lori Damiano, for guiding me along this terrifying journey and also bonding with me over dumb injuries we've both had. I also want to thank Mackenzie Cochran for volunteering to be my colorist and Christin Engelberth for editing my concept art as well and providing the lovely chapter banners. Thank you also to my family, my classmates, and the PNCA faculty who have turned me into someone ready to be an independent artist out in the wide, weird world.

## Bibliography

### Literature

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

- This book provides a detailed description of the hero's journey and the idea of the monomyth as found in myths and legends around the world. The monomyth isn't foolproof as a concept, but it does provide a framework to work with for my own storytelling. Eva is the hero of her story and it helps to have a sense of narrative timing for when she should encounter certain obstacles.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. S.I.: WORDSWORTH EDITIONS, 2018.

- This book is a huge inspiration for me and always has been since I was young. The idea of a young girl just like me going off into a strange place and encountering wonderfully strange things is incredibly appealing to me. I have always wanted to be an adventurer just like Alice and I enjoy making stories that emulate the idea of a girl who is strong and fearless on her own. Eva's story is directly inspired by Carroll's work.

Cayari, C. "The YouTube effect: How YouTube has provided new ways to consume, create, and share music." *International Journal of Education & the Arts* 12, no. 6 (2011).

<http://www.ijea.org/v12n6/>.

- This article was one of the key components behind my decision to display my finished work on YouTube. The author talks about how musicians without a professional label are able to find success through a social media-based video service like YouTube. Cayari also states that the accessibility of YouTube plays a key role in the success of the creators who use. YouTube is one of the most popular websites in the world and can be used on just about any device connected to the internet.

Collins, Suzanne. *Gregor the Overlander*. New York: Scholastic, 2005.

- This book serves as another integral part of my childhood reading experience. I enjoyed the idea of running away to a fantasy world in order to escape the reality I felt trapped in. I related to the protagonist because of our shared ages and his need to save his family. I

also enjoyed the themes of escapism that were presented in a way very similar to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Gottschall, J. *The Storytelling Animal*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2013.

- My line of inquiry is directly discussed in this book and it has been a great help to me. If it weren't for me stumbling upon this book during a trip to Powell's, this project might not have occurred to me at all. Gottschall's witty writing has helped me figure out what exactly I want to know about storytelling and the way it has affected us as human beings.

Holt, Fabian. "Is music becoming more visual? Online video content in the music industry."

*Visual Studies* 26: no. 1 (2011): 50 — 61

- Holt's article was the main reason why I chose YouTube as the main platform for my work instead of Vimeo. Holt describes how music has taken a video turn and becoming more visual in order to provide multiple avenues of sensory stimulation. This article was critical for me because it led to different avenues for me to investigate the pros and cons of using web platforms as my main way to reach my audience.

McHale, Susan, Ji-Yeon Kim, and Aryn Dotterer. "An Ecological Perspective on the Media and Youth Development." PubMed Central (PMC). Europe PMC, January 12, 2012.

<https://europepmc.org/articles/pmc3257056>.

- I used this article to explore the way media representation affects the way children see themselves and the formation of their self identity. I had to explore that because Eva is specifically a non-white character in a media landscape that tends to be dominated by white, cisgendered protagonists. Children who are unable to see positive representations of themselves while growing up tend to become adolescents who feel ostracized, are bullied, or worse. I want to make sure that my work provides positive role models for kids.

Riordan, Rick. *The Lightning Thief*. New York: Miramax Books, 2005.

- This series has been in my life since I first discovered it in the fifth grade. I projected strongly onto the protagonist because he was the same age that I was and was able to go on adventures like I yearned to. It also had elements of Greek Mythology and fantasy which is what began my fascination with mythology in general.

Thorpe, Benjamin. *Northern Mythology: Comprising the principal popular traditions and superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and the Netherlands*. London: E. Lumley, 1852.

- This book acts as a compendium of knowledge about Scandinavian folklore that is specific to types of creatures and superstitions found in the area. The author is biased against non-Christian rituals and creatures, but it is still very informative. A lot of this information I can't find elsewhere in such a compiled form.

### Animation

*Gravity Falls*. Disney Channel. June 15, 2012.

- This show has been hugely influential in the way I watch children's media as well as how I view exploring and nature. *Gravity Falls* takes place in the Pacific Northwest and includes all kinds of cryptids like bigfoot, the hidebehind, aliens, and more. I found this show during a low point in my life and it helped me immensely. Every summer I try to rewatch it to capture the feeling of how it felt to meet these characters the first time. The crazy antics of the young main characters is one of the main inspirations for Eva's adventurous personality.

*Hilda*. Directed by Andy Coyle. Netflix. September 21, 2018.

<https://www.netflix.com/title/80115346>.

- Like *Gravity Falls*, this show has an adventurous protagonist who is young and not bogged down by the woes of puberty and adulthood. Hilda's personality is refreshing for me because she is exactly who I wanted to be as a kid. She is brave, fearless, and wants to be friends with all the creatures she comes across. Eva is heavily inspired by Hilda's willingness to fight for what's right while also having fun in the process.

### Podcasts

McElroy, Griffin et al. Produced by Maximum Fun. *The Adventure Zone*. Podcast, MP3 audio,

<https://www.maximumfun.org/shows/adventure-zone>.

- Griffin McElroy is one of my own personal heroes and the main reason this project exists at all. It was while listening to this podcast and hearing how the McElroys talked about the concept of storytelling and the process of making lovable characters that my line of inquiry occurred to me: *why* do humans tell stories? Immediately after this thought I went to Powell's to search for an answer. I owe a lot to this podcast and the weird family who runs it.

Miles, Terry and Nic Silver. Produced by the Public Radio Alliance and Minnow Beats Whale.

*Tanis*. Podcast, MP3 audio. <http://tanispodcast.com>.

- *Tanis* is a horror/adventure narrative centered in the Pacific Northwest. It follows the journey of Nic Silver as he seeks to find out what, exactly, this mysterious place called Tanis is. It is engrossing, mysterious, and provides a wonderful auditory backdrop for when I work on projects. This method of auditory storytelling and the ambience created by Nic Silver is a driving force behind the aesthetic feel of the music I will be creating.

### Music

CLANN. *Seelie*. Seb McKinnon and Chloe Picard. House of Youth. MP3 audio.

- This album serves as my introduction to the music genre "neofolk". It is instrumental and has helped me find a specific type of sound that I want to pursue and use for my project. This album provides a narrative construct that evokes a dark, dreary land full of mystical forces. I'm also interested in the concept of including fae legends in Eva's story in some manner.

Hozier. "In The Woods Somewhere." Recorded September 2014. Island Records, Columbia Records & Rubyworks, track 14 on *Hozier*, mp3 audio file.

- Hozier's music is particularly influential for helping me define what I like about music. Hozier has a particular way of instigating my synesthesia and allowing me to hone it into making work that is accurate to the colors I see when listening.

István, Csarnogurszky, performer. *Tales of the Night Forest*. Black Hill & Silent Island. 2018.

<https://blackhill1.bandcamp.com/>.

- This album has a beautiful, ethereal melody that evokes the feeling of being in a forest overnight. It is one of the main driving forces behind my process for composing a melody to fit with the magical forest Eva travels through. The acoustic nature of the album provides a haunting but very real feeling to the music. It is a feeling that I will be trying to emulate for the more intense parts of Eva's journey.

ODESZA. *A Moment Apart*. Harrison Mills and Clayton Knight. Ninja Tune. MP3 audio.

- While searching for music that I wanted to emulate, I came across this album and was absolutely entranced from the first song. The melody is haunting but driving and calls to mind a journey waiting to happen. I appreciate the synth chords and beats and have used them as inspiration in my own music making process.

Of Monsters and Men. "Of Monsters And Men - Yellow Light (Official Lyric Video)". YouTube video, 4:47. Posted [August 2014]. [https://youtu.be/aBlKPLeLU\\_s.C](https://youtu.be/aBlKPLeLU_s.C)

- The lyric videos for this album are a clear example of the project I am going to do. I will not have any lyrics in my project but the concept is the same as the videos for the album "My Head is an Animal". The videos consist of repetitive animations that tell a vague narrative alongside the music. My project will have more animated pieces but it is very helpful both for me and for others to see this album as an example for the work I will be creating.

Studio Killers. "Dirty Car". YouTube video, 4:00. Posted [November 2018].

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyAigHilpo4&ab\\_channel=StudioKillers](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyAigHilpo4&ab_channel=StudioKillers)

- This video was an inspiration to how I wanted to go about the animation style for my videos. Not only is the music good but the limited animation was part of a look I wanted to use in my own project. It provides two levels of sensory stimulation to create a story that is a chapter of a much larger narrative, exactly like my goal for my project.

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Living Stories  
Spring, 2019

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Mentor: Lori Damiano



For my thesis I will make a visual narrative album composed of four songs and four looping animations with each pair used to represent one major beat of a story about a young girl who happens upon a portal to a supernatural world.

Why do humans tell stories? Storytelling is an integral part to being a human being— it's impossible to go a day without seeing some example of it. There is a universal call to escape reality, enhance it, or change it in some other way. Imagination is humanity's most powerful tool.

Joseph Campbell tells us in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, that there is power in the monomyth: a single story structure that makes up hundreds of thousands of heroic tales. Campbell's outline of what he calls the "hero's journey" is a narrative structure I enjoy putting into my own work because it allows me to imagine myself as a hero. This is the power of storytelling. Our imaginations are the strongest forces we possess and I believe that the answer to what is beyond life lies in the power of the stories we tell each other. Jonathan Gottschall, author of *The Storytelling Animal*, says that the ability to tell stories is what makes us human in the first place.

I am drawn to media that involves character driven narratives, magic, interesting character designs, and a good mix of humor and otherworldly themes. I like creating while listening to podcasts like *The Adventure Zone* and *Tanis* because they not only help me focus but they also inspire me endlessly with their narrative twists and great sound design. My own project draws a lot of inspiration from the lyric videos by the band *Of Monsters And Men*, directed by *We Were Monkeys*. The animations are looped and very simple, yet oddly hypnotizing; I find myself watching them over and over again to find things I might've missed the first time around. My project also draws inspiration from *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.

When I have an idea for a story and characters I use Pinterest to start curating aesthetic posts. I then sketch the character many, many times in my sketchbooks. It is important that I let myself make mistakes and let the characters take shape without having guidelines that are too rigid.

Although composing music is a new process for me, I have played violin for several years in my school orchestra. I get a lot of inspiration from artists like Griffin McElroy, ODESZA, John Powell, and William Ryan Fritch. It helps me to have a narrative to respond to before I go to GarageBand, where I compose everything. It is easier for me to create music that follows an existing story than it is to do the reverse. If the story is broken into chapters or specific beats, I will try to compose a new track for those instead of the entire piece, as I did for the project *Haven OST*. I collaborated with illustrator Christin Engelberth and composed a soundtrack for her children's book, *Haven: Tala and the Three Spirits*. The story is split into several chapters with key characters and events in each so I gave each its own unique sound.

I will be composing an album of four songs and four looping animations that tells the story of a young girl who happens upon a portal leading to a strange new world. In the first beat, Aoife encounters and travels through a portal in the forest; the second beat is where she meets a friendly creature who becomes her companion; the third beat is where the pair are accosted by a malicious beast and must flee; the fourth and last beat is where Aoife and her friend must find the original portal so Aoife can get home before the sun sets. My intent is to experiment with how stories are told and to utilize the audience's imagination to change the narrative. Each song will last between one-to-three minutes so the album will be a maximum of twelve minutes long. I will work on the individual beats in a linear fashion, doing first the animated visuals and then the music before I move onto the next beat, though there will be room for overlap in case I get stuck on a section. The music will be composed and mixed in GarageBand and Audition. There will be some samples of recorded noises but the majority of the music will be created using digital instruments.

The short looping animations will be done digitally in 2D using TV Paint and After Effects. They will loop for the entirety of their associated track. The purpose of these looping animations is to combine with the music to create a comprehensive narrative that the audience can understand while also being visually interesting on their own. The work will exist on YouTube primarily, though I will also be posting the art and music separately to sites like Soundcloud and Instagram to experiment with how the story changes when the visual and audio cues are singled out. The greatest tool humanity has is imagination, after all. I want to utilize the

audience's imagination while also making the story accessible to people who are hearing or vision impaired.

I will create a story that is told through a visual album composed of four music tracks and four looping animations. Being able to tell stories is an extraordinary power to have and I want to exercise it to the fullest extent I can.

## Bibliography

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

- This book provides a detailed description of the hero's journey and the idea of the monomyth as found in myths and legends around the world. The monomyth isn't foolproof as a concept, but it does provide a framework to work with for my own storytelling. Aoife is the hero of her story and it helps to have a sense of narrative timing for when she should encounter certain obstacles.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. S.I.: WORDSWORTH EDITIONS, 2018.

- This book is a huge inspiration for me and always has been since I was young. The idea of a young girl just like me going off into a strange place and encountering wonderfully strange things is incredibly appealing to me. I have always wanted to be an adventurer just like Alice and I enjoy making stories that emulate the idea of a girl who is strong and fearless on her own. Aoife's story is directly inspired by Carroll's work.

CLANN. *Seelie*. Seb McKinnon and Chloe Picard. House of Youth. MP3 audio.

- This album serves as my introduction to the music genre "neofolk". It is instrumental and has helped me find a specific type of sound that I want to pursue and use for my project. This album provides a narrative construct that evokes a dark, dreary land full of mystical forces. I'm interested also in the concept of including fae legends in Aoife's story in some manner.

*Gravity Falls*. Disney Channel. June 15, 2012.

- This show has been hugely influential in the way I watch children's media as well as how I view exploring and nature. *Gravity Falls* takes place in the Pacific Northwest and includes all kinds of cryptids like bigfoot, the hide behind, aliens, and more. I found this show during a low point in my life and it helped me immensely. Every summer I try to rewatch it to capture the feeling of how it felt to meet these characters the first time. The crazy antics of the young main characters is one of the main inspirations for Aoife's adventurous personality.

Gottschall, J. (2013). *The Storytelling Animal*. Boston: Mariner Books.

- My line of inquiry is directly discussed in this book and it has been a great help to me. If it weren't for me stumbling upon this book during a trip to Powell's, this project might not have occurred to me at all. Gottschall's witty writing has helped me figure out what exactly I want to know about storytelling and the way it has affected us as human beings.

*Hilda*. Directed by Andy Coyle. Netflix. September 21, 2018.

<https://www.netflix.com/title/80115346>.

- Like *Gravity Falls*, this show has an adventurous protagonist who is young and not bogged down by the woes of puberty and adulthood. Hilda's personality is refreshing for me because she is exactly who I wanted to be as a kid. She is brave, fearless, and wants to be friends with all the creatures she comes across. Aoife is heavily inspired by Hilda's willingness to fight for what's right while also having fun in the process.

István, Csarnogurszky, performer. *Tales of the Night Forest*. Black Hill & Silent Island. 2018.

<https://blackhill1.bandcamp.com/>.

- This album has a beautiful, ethereal melody that evokes the feeling of being in a forest overnight. It is one of the main driving forces behind my process for composing a melody to fit with the magical forest Aoife travels through. The acoustic nature of the album provides a haunting but very real feeling to the music. It is a feeling that I will be trying to emulate for the more intense parts of Aoife's journey.

McElroy, Griffin et al. Produced by Maximum Fun. *The Adventure Zone*. Podcast, MP3 audio,

<https://www.maximumfun.org/shows/adventure-zone>.

- Griffin McElroy is one of my own personal heroes and the main reason this project exists at all. It was while listening to this podcast and hearing how the McElroys talked about the concept of storytelling and the process of making lovable characters that my line of inquiry occurred to me: *why* do humans tell stories? Immediately after this thought I went to Powell's to search for an answer. I owe a lot to this podcast and the weird family who runs it.

Miles, Terry and Nic Silver. Produced by the Public Radio Alliance and Minnow Beats Whale.

*Tanis*. Podcast, MP3 audio. <http://tanispodcast.com>.

- *Tanis* is a horror/adventure narrative centered in the Pacific Northwest. It follows the journey of Nic Silver as he seeks to find out what, exactly, this mysterious place called Tanis is. It is engrossing, mysterious, and provides a wonderful auditory backdrop for when I work on projects. This method of auditory storytelling and the ambience created by Nic Silver is a driving force behind the aesthetic feel of the music I will be creating.

ODESZA. *A Moment Apart*. Harrison Mills and Clayton Knight. Ninja Tune. MP3 audio.

- While searching for music that I wanted to emulate, I came across this album and was absolutely entranced from the first song. The melody is haunting but driving and calls to mind a journey waiting to happen. I appreciate the synth chords and beats and have used them as inspiration in my own music making process.

Of Monsters and Men. "Of Monsters And Men - Yellow Light (Official Lyric Video)". YouTube video, 4:47. Posted [August 2014]. [https://youtu.be/aBIKPLeLU\\_s.C](https://youtu.be/aBIKPLeLU_s.C)

- The lyric videos for this album are a clear example of the project I am going to do. I will not have any lyrics in my project but the concept is the same as the videos for the album "My Head is an Animal". The videos consist of repetitive animations that tell a vague narrative alongside the music. My project will have more animated pieces but it is very helpful both for me and for others to see this album as an example for the work I will be creating.