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# Honey Tree: A Neo-Soul Album, Artist & Musical Development Through the Electronic Press Kit

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Honey Tree: A Neo-Soul Album

Artist & Musical Development Through the Electronic Press Kit

by

Raine Welterlen

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

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and

Music Performance

Thesis Adviser

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## **Introduction**

Throughout my academic career I have become increasingly involved in the jazz idiom and realized early on that all the music I love is heavily influenced by Black American music. The goal of my education has been to understand jazz well enough for these influences to become apparent in my original music. This is the creative challenge I set before myself; to write and arrange a Neo-Soul album I have decided to call, *Honey Tree*. Writing and recording an album is not enough to make a finished product by music industry standards. It is no longer a realistic plan to continue to play in dive bars, hoping to be discovered by an A&R person and get signed to their label. These days a musician is expected to be able to market themselves in order to grow an audience before a record label will even look their way. The purpose of this creative thesis is to assemble a comprehensive Electronic Press Kit (EPK) that will help kickstart my career as a musician. In my artist's statement I discuss the methodology of monetizing my music, setting up marketing, producing and recording the music, and how this process has helped me grow.

## **Copyrighting Music**

While producing this album and developing my Electronic Press Kit, I obtained the legal rights to the music as well as access to the money it might generate. There are two important steps to this: copyrighting the music, and registering with a Performance Rights Organization (PRO). Copyrighting music is a relatively simple process, but requires a written or recorded transcription of the music. I chose to make sheet music that included the chord progressions, melody, and lyrics. Once completed I filled out an online form with the U.S. Copyright office,

paid an \$80 processing fee, and waited for their verdict. It only took a couple of months to receive confirmation and certificate in the mail.

### **Performance Rights Organization**

Deciding what PRO to register with is one that needs some deliberation, as it is an arduous process to switch from one to another. A PRO is a non-profit organization that collects royalties on behalf of songwriters and publishers when their music is performed or broadcasted publicly. Because the profits are split evenly between the two entities and distributed, many songwriters form their own publishing company so that they receive one hundred percent of the profits. This process only requires registering as both entities with the PRO.

There are three different PROs in the U.S.: ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC. SESAC is by invitation alone, but the other two only require a one time fee to join. To decide between the two I took multiple things into consideration, such as price, potential benefits, and ease of use. I decided to go with ASCAP as they charge fifty dollars to join as each entity, but BMI charges fifty dollars to register as a writer and an additional one hundred dollars to register as a publishing company. ASCAP also offers more benefits and is more equipped to receive royalties from PRO companies overseas. The process of joining ASCAP was just as easy as getting the music copyrighted, but the work of doing research and coming to a decision took some time.

### **Electronic Press Kit**

While registering with a PRO is important, it will operate in the background now that it is set up. However, the Electronic Press Kit I have been developing will be put to use everytime I try to get a job as a performer. The higher quality the materials, the more likely I will be to get

work. To break it down, an EPK is a pre-packaged set of materials meant to promote a person or company, and it can be used for promotional material for the media. In the music industry it is usually used to show a venue or event planner what your musical performance is like, and provide the materials needed to promote your show through websites and social media. The components of an EPK are a biography, footage of performances, branding, headshots, and studio recordings (Beeching 142).

My EPK materials are presented on a website I built at the beginning of spring term. My biography was the last page to be published, as it is challenging to write about yourself in the third person, especially when trying to sell something. With some help from friends and family I found ways to describe my music and my sound in a complementary way. On my website I have a few YouTube videos of me singing and playing in my room, but I am lacking high quality footage of my past performances. So, I am going to live stream my senior recital at the end of the term. I work for Left Door Streaming Company as an audio engineer, and most of the work I get is at The 1905, a jazz club in North Portland. This is where I'll be having my senior recital. There I will perform seven jazz compositions and five original songs. Having videos of these performances will make it easier to get work at other venues with both my jazz sets and my original neo-soul songs.

## **Branding**

All of the elements in an EPK should also convey the branding developed by the business entity; this includes certain colors, fonts, and editing style for photos and videos. It is more sustainable to use branding that I already like, so I chose the colors plum and golden yellow for the theme of my website. I also commissioned my roommate, Em Rochlin, who is also

presenting their thesis this term, to design a logo for me that encapsulates my most recognizable features. I based the fonts on my website and on my business cards off of their handwriting in the logo and I based my domain name off of my social media usernames and currently own reginarainemusic.com. Having these branding choices already made will streamline the process of building promotional materials like posters, stickers, and social media posts. My advisor and I also discussed how to go about using these materials effectively. Physical posters and social media are not the most effective way to reach an audience as both of these platforms are highly competitive. The best way to reach people is through their email. My advisor suggested that I email all my friends, family, colleagues and professors inviting them to either the live-stream, or the in-person show, so I can start building my email list now.

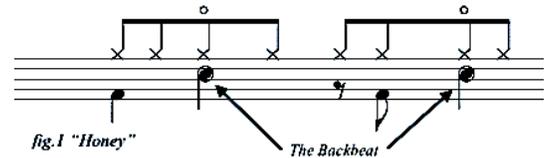
### **Influences & Inspiration**

Now that I have these structures in place to market my music, I need to turn my music into a product. The first step of this process is to share the music with other musicians and start collaborating towards a full arrangement. This stage of the process is a very vulnerable one because it is as if you are letting someone else hold your baby for the very first time. I chose to give myself some protection from this by writing out most of the arrangement on my own. I want my songs to be included in the neo-soul genre, so I did some research on its influences and development using the book, *Popular Music in America: The Beat Goes On* by Michael Campbell. In this book he tells the history of popular music and how different genres influenced one another, developing into the music we listen to today.

This genre is heavily influenced by jazz vocalists like Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Nat King Cole, and Frank Sinatra, who were singing jazz standards from the Great American

Songbook, starting in the 1930s up until the 1960s. They interpreted the music with a conversational style that would focus on conveying emotion rather than displaying virtuosity (Campbell, 73). These crooners were influenced by Black gospel singers who used blues and expressive melismas to add more expression to their impassioned spiritual music (Campbell, 103). Musical artists originating from the U.K., Rex Orange County, Lianne La Havas, and Eloise are singer-songwriters I listen to regularly who are also inspired by the crooners of the 60's, and use the same style of storytelling and personalization in their music.

They also use similar arrangement choices as soul singers from the 60s, such as Sam Cooke and Aretha Franklin who would write songs with more open, syncopated rhythms over a strong backbeat, which is identified by a snare hit on beats two and four (Cambell,103). In figure 1 you can see an example from my song “Honey” where the kick drum (bottom note) hits on beat one, and the snare (middle note) hits on beats two and



four. Rex Orange County and the American indie rock band, Hellogoodbye, also use this genre’s more active

bass line. In the example seen in figure 2 from my composition “Persephone,” you can see the bass line has bigger intervals over a shorter amount of time in the last measure.



Another genre that heavily influences Neo-Soul is the Detroit born Motown Sound. Artists and producers did not limit the melody to just the lead vocals and made arrangements that gave horn players melodic riffs as well (Campbell, 215). Rex Orange County and the instrumental band, The Olympians, utilize Motown-style melodies in the lead and supporting horns sections. The



melody of “Persephone,” in figure 3, is briefly taken over by the trumpet. In “Car Radio,” the horn section fills in breaks in the lead vocals during the chorus and verse with harmonized melodic content (figure 4).

Background vocalists have always been an important part of Black American music and are used by artists in many genres. One of my earlier musical influences, Hozier, a solo artist

car rad-io we can take it slow Don't kr

fig.4 “Car Radio” *p*

from Ireland, uses blues forms and style as well as gospel influenced background vocals. There are background vocals in all of my arrangements. As seen in figure 5 the backup vocals in my song “Within Your Reach” are independent from the lead vocals, providing harmonic and

**D** (♩ = 126) (♩ = 142) on D.S. fig.5 “Within Your Reach”

1, 2, 3. 4.

**Chorus** *f* Pull me in your gra - vi - ty with - in your reach  
 I prom - ise there's no sira - te - gy  
 There's some things you just can't teach  
 I wan - na be with - in your

In your gra - vi - ty with - in your reach  
 There's no sira - te - gy  
 Things you just can't teach

rhythmic accents.

In “Persephone,” you can see in

figure 6 how the back up vocals

echo the lead, and

then switch to haunting “oohs” during the verse that resemble background vocals used by Hozier.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Persephone". It features two systems of music. The first system is the Chorus, marked with a box containing "4X" and "fig. 6 'Persephone'", and the Verse, marked with a box containing "2X". The lyrics are written below the notes. The second system includes a "tacet 2nd & 3rd times until 3rd pass" instruction and a "Per-se-pho-ne do to me" label. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a common time signature.

**Chorus** 4X *fig. 6 "Persephone"* **Verse** 2X

Oh oh Per se - pho - ne You 1. I first saw you I knew what I want - ed to  
 don't know what you do to me Oh 1. How could I ev - er com - pare you had ev - ry - on  
 Oh oh Per - se - pho - ne You 2. I 've got too man - y scars I've spent my time on  
 don't know what you mean to me When/In 2. There's some - thing bro - ken in - side its why I'm forced to  
 3. my heart your gar - den has grown I'd give you my thi  
 3. It feels like home in your arms I can't say no to yo

*tacet 2nd & 3rd times until 3rd pass*

Per - se - pho - ne  
 do to me

ooh

## Demos

To create the sheet music, I worked from my home studio setup, switching back and forth between two computer programs: Logic Pro and Finale. I started with Logic Pro, which is a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), to create a basic recording of the song using the piano or ukulele. From there the process was slightly different with each song. For example, when I started working on "Car Radio," I wrote the bass line of each section first. But when I started writing "Honey," I had a specific idea for background vocals I wanted to use. I would move section by section, building in each instrument, experimenting with new ideas and fine tuning existing ones. If I felt stuck I would listen to a playlist of songs to find inspiration, that included music by the artists mentioned above. The composition "Pluto" by The Olympians, helped inspire my song, "Persephone," so I used a small riff from its bassline. It is a three eighth note chromatic motion leading to the root of the first chord, as seen in the pick-up measure in figure 2. However, my song is in a different key and time signature so it isn't similar enough to be considered copyright infringement.

## Notation

As the demos started to come together I would start using the music notation software, Finale, to begin the most tedious part of this project. This was making sheet music for a band to

read. Using the notation tool Logic Pro provides, I would copy the notes into Finale and fine tune the rhythm. However, the formatting needed to make sheet music readable and clear, takes much more trial and error. Rehearsal marks, dynamics, spacing, fonts, and notation style are all big components of this. Even with computer software, notating music can be finicky at best, and straight up infuriating at worst. My advisor and I went through three rounds of review, but there were still mistakes to be found when I first brought it to my band.

## **Rehearsal**

I met both my bass player and keyboardist through a jazz ensemble at PSU. The bassist, John Blewster, is a Sophomore earning a degree in Computer Science; and Marvin Maderang, also a Sophomore, plays piano part-time in the Jazz Studies Department. I asked PSU jazz department alumni, and old co-worker at Left Door Streaming, Kyle Owens, to play drums. I started out rehearsals with just Marvin and John, as I had trouble finding a drummer at first. The time it took to find a drummer ended up being beneficial, as the students got some extra time to practice the songs before I brought the professional drummer in.

The first few rehearsals were reading sessions where we would talk over the form and the general vibe of each song. We played each song twice and there was measurable improvement between each runthrough. As we went along I would hear my mistakes in the chart and I would stop them and have them write in corrections. In the next few rehearsals, details of the arrangements started to change as they brought new rhythmic and harmonic ideas, as well as their own virtuosity to the music. Despite the amount of work I put into the sheet music I knew that the right musicians would use them as a starting point, rather than settle for playing them

perfectly. I don't play these instruments, so as they learned the music they interpreted and improved the individual parts, making the overall arrangement stronger.

## **Recording**

For the recording process I asked another co-worker from Left Door Streaming, Scott Stanley, to be the engineer for the album. He owns and operates The Studio of the Woodland Realm in Northeast Portland near the Lloyd district. We decided to do a live recording where the musicians play at the same time and are able to interact with one another, rather than record each instrument individually. We reserved two full days in the Hallowed Halls, a studio in South East Portland that has enough room for everyone to record in the same room. Much of the first day was eaten up by set-up, and despite some technical issues with our headphone mixes, we had a few takes of each song done by that evening. However, the takes from the next day were much higher energy, as everyone was more comfortable with the space and had plenty of time to get in the right head space. The result is that most of the takes we are using moving forward are from the second day of recording.

There were a lot of scheduling conflicts so we weren't able to book the studio at Hallowed Halls until week seven of spring term of this year. It was great to have extra time to rehearse before going into the studio. Given how early the symposium is this term and how busy I am preparing for my senior recital and graduation, I decided to take my time on the project. Rushing through the overdubs and mixing process while I am in the most stressful time of my life so far would damage the quality of the end product. So once things have settled down I will finish lead and background vocals as well as any trumpet or ukulele overdubs I want to do in Scott's studio. Then, he can start the process of editing and mastering the music, which gives the

album consistency and prepares it for public platforms. Once it is ready, I will release it using a distribution company like CDbaby, to get it on apps like Spotify, Apple Music, and TikTok. At the same time, I will be putting my EPK to work getting jobs at local music venues, posting to social media and possibly even getting coverage in local music magazines like *Willamette Week* and *Vortex*.

## **Conclusion**

While in the midst of this creative thesis I realized that I will not need to transcribe such extensive arrangements in the future. When working with the right musicians they will know how to emulate the style you want if you trust them and your ability to communicate.

Micromanaging the arrangement has helped me improve my confidence and communication skills in relation to music, and has shown me the parts of my musicianship I want to improve. I have also discovered some things about the management role. Waiting for everyone to confirm their availability will take too long and the opportunity to book a space will pass. I had also planned to start curating my social media presence during this year, but it is difficult to get started and be consistent when juggling so many other things.

The plan for my honors thesis changed many times over this past year because I wanted it to resemble the work I will do in my professional career. I couldn't see the purpose of writing a research paper when it is unlikely that I will ever need those skills. I wanted to learn about the process of recording an album, and once I started, I knew the project would not feel complete without setting up the business side of things as well. Now, as I enter a new chapter of my career, I have already built a website, designed marketing materials, obtained the copyrights to my

music, made musical arrangements, and collaborated with other musicians towards the foundations of my first album. All of this will result in a senior recital and live stream that will be held at a reputable jazz club on June 8th, 2022 at 5:00 PM PST. While there is still more to learn and do, I have a strong foundation to push off from as I end my formal education, and begin a professional career in the music industry.

## Appendix

Link to Album: [To be added in 7/22]

Live Stream: [To be added in 6/22]

Link to Website: <https://www.reginarainemusic.com/>

Car Radio Rehearsal Example: [https://youtu.be/WqLlhUYtg\\_g](https://youtu.be/WqLlhUYtg_g)

Car Radio Demo: <https://soundcloud.com/raine-regina/car-radio>

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