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## New Horizons: A Folk Song Cycle

Chris Cresswell

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## Abstract

The purpose of the project was to create a piece of music that transcended musical genres and told the story of my coming of age in the first decade of the 21st century. The work featured both original text and original music and culminates in a live performance of the work.

I wanted to tell a story. More specifically, I wanted to tell my story. The story of coming of age in the 21st century. I was 11 in the year 2000, I was 21 in 2010. My formative years correlate directly with the formative years of the 21st century. In this time, we've seen world first teeming with hope and optimism at the turn of the century. This optimism was quickly overcome by fear in September 2001. Since then we've seen a world marred by terrorism, wars, Hurricane Katrina, and other disasters, man-made and otherwise. Along with this, is my journey in understanding my own personal development, learning to deal with these issues and grappling with personal issues, including religion and personal relationships.

The central theme of the project became "How do we find beauty in a broken world?" This question became the focal point for the entire work. Throughout the twelve movements of the work, I explored my own experiences with the previous decade using a loose narrative structure. I reflected on very specific events, 9/11, my trip to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and watching war on television and counter them with abstract reflections. As the text progresses we move from questioning the world around me "I need to find a place of quiet contemplation/to stop the darker parts of my imagination" to an understanding, "we are the beauty we've been looking for". To create the text, I worked closely with poet Linda Loomis, who helped me focus my thoughts and create a working framework for the project.

The music also represents a coming together of two sides of my musical personality. While at Syracuse University, I've studied the art of classical composition, writing music for string quartet, art songs, and various other chamber ensembles. This work has been strictly in the classical domain. Additionally, I've lived a secret double life as a singer/songwriter, a hobby of mine since my teenage years. This work allowed me to unify these split sides of my musical life, creating a work that challenges definition and moves beyond the limitations of genre. By moving beyond these predefined genres, I've pushed myself as a composer, forcing myself to think outside the predefined boxes of "classical" and "folk" and instead create a music that is true to myself and my influences. My advisor, James Welsch, was instrumental in helping me move beyond preconceived notions of what I thought the music "should" sound like and find a more unique style.

The final aspect of this project that really pushed my boundaries was the act of performing it myself. Since I began studying classical

music, I've stopped performing. This project forced me to become a performer again, approaching music from a completely different angle than I had become used to. As part of this, I studied with voice professor, Jon English, who provided me with lessons to help build my vocal technique.

Writing *New Horizons* has pushed my limits as a composer, performer, and all around musician. It has forced me to think outside of the box musically and helped me redefine what I think I can and can't do as an artist. Between collaboration with poets, professors, and fellow musicians, *New Horizons* has broadened my sensibilities as an artist, has introduced me to phenomenal artists in the Central New York area and has been an incredible learning experience.

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# **New Horizons: A Folk Song Cycle**

## **Creative Reflection Essay**

I wrote my first song when I was 13. I still remember it, though I will never share it with anyone, three chords and lyrics about my previous night's insomnia. That was the beginning of my musical life and I thought I would grow up to be a songwriter. Then when I was 18 I discovered Classical music and became obsessed. Instead of folk songs on the acoustic guitar, I began writing works for clarinets, bassoons, string quartets, and opera singers. Instead of performing my own works, I had friends perform them while I sat in the audience. The goal of *New Horizons* was to try and reconcile these two worlds, could I apply classical composition principals to a set of folk songs? Could I find common ground between my songwriting process and my compositional process? And finally, could I write music in a folk idiom, that respected the genre, while still attempting to move beyond it's limitations? The process of creating *New Horizons: A Folk Song Cycle* pushed me to explore these questions, the answers to which have dramatically altered my musical thinking.

After deciding that I wanted to write a folk song cycle, I knew I wanted to structure it around my own life story. I was 11 on January 1st, 2000 and 21 on January 1st, 2010. The formative years of my adolescent correlate directly with the formative years of the 21st

century. In this time, we've seen world first teeming with hope and optimism at the turn of the century. This optimism was quickly overcome by fear in September 2001. Since then we've seen a world marred by terrorism, wars, Hurricane Katrina, and other disasters, man-made and otherwise. Some of these events I have experienced first hand, others I have watched on television, but all of them have had an impact on me. Along with this, is my journey in understanding my own personal development, learning to deal with these issues and grappling with personal issues, including religion and personal relationships. I decided to create a work that had a loose narrative, beginning in 2000 and ending in present day. It was at this point I approached my honors advisor, James O. Welsch with my idea for the project.

After I proposed my project, Professor Welsch introduced me to local poet Linda Loomis. Ms. Loomis, who also teaches writing at SUNY Oswego, and I began meeting throughout the summer of 2010 to begin creating drafts for *New Horizons*. While I had experience writing song lyrics before, I'd never constructed a long form narrative. Also, my previous song lyric process was directly connected to the musical process itself. I would work out the music directly on the guitar while simultaneously working out the lyrics. The music and words would gradually develop together overtime. While this process

works when creating individual songs, it would be ineffective when trying to create a continuous narrative.

In my first meetings with Linda Loomis, we just started talking to each other. I was eager to begin the process of creation, but she slowed it down. Instead of starting immediately on creating a text, she had me free write on larger topics. These topics included religion, my experience living in New Orleans, and my feelings about September 11th and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I had never sat down and written in this way before. These free writes weren't goal oriented in the way that most of my writings had been up to that point. Instead I was encouraged simply explore my emotions. This process led me to revelations that I otherwise wouldn't have had. Some of these free writes I ended up using, some I didn't. After I had spent several weeks meeting with Ms. Loomis and working on the free writes, I began to construct poetic sections out of this text. Ms. Loomis then helped me to edit these sections and as she and I worked through this process, themes began to emerge.

The first theme that became central to the work was the idea of "horizons." I used the word horizon both in the physical sense, the opening image of the first song is "The smokestacks on the horizon look like a cigarette habit/the world can't bring itself to quit", but also in the philosophical sense of the word, "range or perception of experience." This idea of expanding one's experience is one of the

focal points of the work. In “Horizons (Part I)”, after beginning with the opening image of a the singer staring off towards the horizon, the singer is “left struggling with the questions/that would define our new horizons.” This imagery is revisited again in “Horizons (Part II)”:

An Indian summer breeze  
rustles the trees,  
Underneath the richest kind of deep blue sky,  
the kind where horizons extend into eternity.

Except now the images morph into that of September 11th. The horizons are being redefined in a much more violent and destructive way: “We were overwhelmed by the immediacy of redefined horizons”. Again the text ends with the same line, “we were left struggling with the questions/that would define our new horizons”. The theme of horizons returns in the final movement of the piece, “New Horizons”, in which the singer finally comes to terms with the new horizons:

When I’m finally able  
to quiet the cacophony around me  
Silence the world and it’s overwhelming din:  
I start to open myself to the new horizons.  
The endless possibilities  
the lines that extend into eternity.

Here the idea of horizons has come full circle, whereas in the beginning, the horizons were being expanded beyond the singer’s control, now the singer has come to terms with the world around him and is beginning to find ways of approaching that world.

In each of the aforementioned movements, there are three questions posed that also help define the piece. These questions are:



Where do we find the strength to move  
forward?  
Where do we find the courage to take  
our first steps out of this darkness?  
How do we find beauty in a broken  
world?

It took awhile for me to find these questions. I came into a meeting with Ms. Loomis, knowing I wanted a series of questions that would be repeated throughout the work, however, it took several meetings for Ms. Loomis and I to figure out questions that had a certain vagueness that would allow them to be used in several of the texts, while at the same time were specific to the piece itself. Early attempts at these questions included:

How do we make connections in this brand new world?  
How do we make beauty of this broken world?  
How do we find beauty in this broken world?

Eventually, with Ms. Loomis's help, we were able to refine the questions to the ones used in the piece. These questions provided a framework for the internal movements of the piece.

The other texts in the work fit into two categories: they were either stories or reflections on the previously told stories. There were three movements labeled *Interstice*. The word interstice means "a gap or break in something generally continuous"<sup>1</sup> and was derived from Terry Tempest William's book *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, a text that acted as a catalyst for my work. The three interstice movements were made up of short texts, no more than three lines long. The music was more reflective and pensive. The other movements

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary

within the work were more narrative nature, telling of specific events. These included *Watching War* and *Song for Little Boy Blue*, these texts told specific stories. Other texts, *A Single Blade of Grass* and *Evidence of Things Unseen* are examples of works that bridge the gap between abstract reflection and narrative stories.

Of all these songs, the one that means the most to me was *Song for Little Boy Blue*. It stems from the time when I spent three weeks living in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans. It's based on an actual photo I took while walking down the streets in New Orleans. New Orleans has become an important city in the development of my political awareness. I went there to help rebuild homes after Hurricane Katrina. Part of the reason I wanted to do this project was to explore aspects of my life, like visiting New Orleans, through music. Before becoming a music major, I was a political science major. Even though my interests shifted, I try to remain politically aware and politically active. This was a way of combining the two elements. The idea of tying in my own story and picture with the famous poem, *Little Boy Blue* by Eugene Field. She introduced me the poem. In it, Fields tells the story of two toys waiting for the return of their owner. When I read the poem for the first time, the photo above came immediately to mind and I knew I had to use the two together. The resulting combination of words and music ended up being one of the most powerful moments in the piece.

There are two parts of the text that come from an outside source. Both of these come from Terry Tempest William's book *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*. As I said before, her work became a catalyst my own and help me focus my ideas. There is one part of her work I quoted directly. She took quotes from various sources including *The Wasteland* and *The Four Quartets* by T.S. Eliot, *The Names of Things* by Katherine Standefer, and fragments by Heraclitus. She combined quotations from these individual works to create a new poem, *Interstices*. I quoted her poem to begin my work:

*These Fragments I have shored against my ruin-  
The cosmos works by harmony of tensions,  
like the lyre and the bow  
And so it was I entered the broken world  
Turning shadow into transient beauty-  
Once upon a time, we knew the world from birth*

The other text I adapted came from her was "I believe in the beauty of all things broken" in *Interstices #3*. By the end of Summer 2010, I had many of the texts in near finished form. I continued to edit the texts as I started to write the music, adding a syllable here, cutting out a line there, as the music required.

The biggest challenge I faced was trying to find the musical voice that would fit this project. While I'd spent years writing songs in a folk idiom, I'd also been developing a classical voice. This voice was a much harsher, dissonant language and would be inappropriate for this song cycle. This led me to struggle with the question, what aspect of folk music makes it folk music?

Folk music is largely an oral tradition, music is rarely written down. In addition it is based on largely diatonic scales, is relatively simplistic, and can be played by nonprofessional musicians. Music can be taught orally and is often times improvised. Classical music on the other hand is always written down, there is a wide variety of harmonic languages, and rarely has improvisation. I chose to take elements from both of these worlds to create a new language.

As I said before, I divided the texts into two groups, narrative and reflective. These different texts needed to be treated differently musically. Long narrative structures, such as *Horizons (Part I)*, needed relatively simplistic music so that the story in the text could be transmitted. Shorter texts, like *Interstice # 1*, allowed me to expand the musical profile, as there was less text to maneuver through.

The opening chord, Em<sup>13</sup>, of *Horizons* played an important role throughout the work. In the opening piece, I create an ostinato with this chord and C<sup>#13</sup>, these two chords were created by alternating a bass line on the guitar. This is a standard folk song trope and allowed me to sing large portions of text while still being understood. These two chords would reappear in the final movement, creating a musical cycle that correlated with the thematic cycle created in the text.

The second half of *Horizons* is an example of using a folk technique to create music. I had originally intended on setting the text to music, however the poetry was too metrically complex to set in a

folk style. Instead of changing the text and changing the text, which I didn't want to do, I decided to recite the text as spoken poetry.

However, I still needed music to speak the text over. In order to create unity between the two sections of the work, I had the players improvise music over the chord structure of the first movement. This allowed the performers to act as partners within the music and celebrates one of the most important aspects of folk music.

An example of the conflict between my classical language and the folk language I was trying to adopt can be seen in the settings of the *Interstice # 1* and *Interstice # 2*. The first is an example of a much more classically oriented technique. The first *Interstice* features tritones in the melody, a shifting meter, and counterpoint in the strings. These are all techniques that I've taken from my classical training. *Interstice #2* is actually an adaption of a folk song I'd written several years earlier. It stays purely in the key of G major, and while it does feature counterpoint in the strings, it is much simpler and retains a simple charm. The movements were meant to mirror each other in terms of instrumentation and formal structure, but they inadvertently showcased my biggest struggle with the project.

The third part of this project, and a part that pushed me in unexpected directions, was performing the work myself. As a classical musician, I've always had my pieces performed by others. I would give a few notes in rehearsals and then sit in the audience and watch

the work be performed. Performing my own work forced me to approach my music in a new way. I was no longer the all-knowing composer, but I was forced to interpret the notes on the page and act as a leader for a group of fellow musicians.

As part of my training for the performance, I started to take lessons with vocal professor Jon English. While I've been a singer since middle school, and have performed in audiences since I was a teenager, I'd never taken a vocal lesson. Professor English is someone I was familiar with, having written works for him in the past, so I was comfortable singing in front of him. Lessons turned out to be an extremely enjoyable experience. He showed me a few basic vocal techniques that helped me open up my vocals chords. This proved to be a valuable experience, not only for this project, but it also helped me understand vocal music from a singer's perspective. I had never realized the number of decisions that go into singing a piece of music. Decisions about pronunciation, vowel placement, and interpretation were all things that I had taken for granted before taking lessons.

Another aspect of rehearsing was organizing a series of performers. This was something that I had taken for granted before I started to schedule rehearsals. It ended being difficult and occasionally frustrating experience.

After we had our first rehearsal, I tried to schedule rehearsals by asking when the performers would be available. This became

problematic because the performers were never available at the same time. After a few weeks of trying, largely unsuccessfully, to schedule rehearsals around the performers schedules, I began to rehearse things in chunks. Not every piece featured every instrument. This allowed me to rehearse with certain people individually. This allowed forced me to perform certain songs by myself. *Song for Little Boy Blue* was originally going to be just me and my guitar simply because I was able to find time in rehearsals to work with performers and this allowed part me to have a whole movement that I could rehearse on my own. The same was true for *Watching War*.

I finally learned from my mistake and began scheduling rehearsals and informing the players when they would be, rather than asking them when they were free. Performers, who were previously unavailable, were able to make rehearsals. I still ran into problems with space inside Crouse College.

Crouse College is a small building with limited rehearsal space. I ran into trouble when fellow musicians and I were scheduled to use the same rehearsal space at the same time. In addition, I ran into problems when performers scheduled themselves to attend two rehearsals at the same time.

The concert itself was a successful experience. I scheduled the concert in the Jabberwocky Cafe. The work was one that didn't seem appropriate for Crouse College. However, I wanted space that offered

a quieter listening experience than a coffee house like Funk 'n' Waffles. The audience was small, but appreciative. As with any live performance, there were small mistakes here or there, made by both myself and the other musicians, but overall the project came off well. It was a unique and rewarding experience, performing my own work on stage again. This project has definitely encouraged me to pursue future projects in which I am not just the composer, but also one of the lead performers. Whether I'm the singer, conductor, tubist, or participate in some other way, I want to start performing my own works again.

There were two influences who provided me with the inspiration to pursue this project. The first was a group called *The Art of Time Ensemble* based out of Toronto. This is a collection of musicians who perform both classical and non-classical music. They did a collaboration with Steven Page, the former lead singer of the band the *Barenaked Ladies*. In this collaboration, Page picked a collection of songs that inspired him, had local composers arrange them for *The Art of Time Ensemble* and then performed them live on stage. By having these works arranged by composers, they both paid homage to the songwriters and created a new musical experience. I was also inspired by the ease with which the ensemble was able to move between genres and styles of performing. One night they performed works by Dmitri Shostakovich, the next they were



performing a set of music written by Philip Glass, Elvis Costello, and Radiohead.

The other influence that had a large impact on me was the composer/performer Laurie Anderson. Anderson has been creating large stage shows that involve music, storytelling, poetry, and staging. Her works are largely political and deal, both abstractly and directly, with America in the 20th and 21st century. Her most recent work, *Homeland*, was released on CD around the time I began my project, provided both inspiration and reassurance that this project was possible, and acted as a kindred spirit.

Receiving a Crown Award provided money to pay my performers, who went above and beyond to help create a work outside of any standard curriculum. In addition, it paid for my performance space. Aside from this immediate project, applying for and receiving a grant provided invaluable experience for the future. As a composer in the 21st century, I will be applying for many grants in the future, and having the chance to go through this process was extremely helpful.

Finally I would like to take a moment to thank those who helped me complete this project.

First and foremost, my advisor James O. Welsch was an amazing resource. Professor Welsch has been my professor, advisor, mentor and friend for a long time and I wouldn't be pursuing music without all the education and guidance he has provided me. He took a

chance on me my freshman year when I was a young student who wanted to write classical music and didn't know how. He was there to help me every step of the way with this project, providing guidance every step of the way and introducing me to others who could help me along my journey. This project, and indeed every note of music I've written since meeting him has been affected by his teaching. And for that, I am eternally grateful.

Linda Loomis was another invaluable resource on this project. Not only did she provide me guidance with this project specifically, but she has also become a good friend in the process. The work wouldn't have happened without her guidance, she helped me structure the work and find the poetry that was hidden inside me. She has also become a sort of kindred spirit in all of my artistic pursuits, providing me advice and inspiration in my other music endeavors.

Finally I'd like to thank all of the professors in the Setnor School of Music. There are too many excellent professors there to mention by name, but the entire composition department, Andrew Waggoner, Daniel S. Godfrey, and my reader Nicolas Scherzinger have provided me a tremendous education in my three years at Setnor. None of my project would have been possible without their help.

*New Horizons: A Folk Song Cycle* was and is a work that I still have a hard time defining. Is it folk music? No. Is it classical music? Also no. But I've become okay operating within this ambiguous world.

Creating this work, while at times frustrating, has been a tremendous learning experience. While there are always aspects of any composition that I'd like to change or revisit, I wouldn't change the experience of working this project, it has changed me for the better. It has pushed my boundaries as a musician, as a composer, and helped me to better understand myself as a person.

**New Horizons:  
A Folk Song Cycle**  
Lyrics\*

\*All lyrics written by Chris Cresswell unless otherwise noted

## **Interstices**

*Terry Tempest Williams*

These fragments I have shored against my ruin-  
The cosmos works by harmony of tensions, like the lyre and bow  
And so it was I entered the broken world  
Turning shadow into transient beauty-  
Once upon a time, we knew the world from birth.

## **Horizons (Part I)**

The smokestacks on the horizon  
look like a cigarette habit the world can't bring itself to quit.  
All these old habits,  
I can't bring myself to quit.

A new dawn.  
These old memories.  
They brings me back  
to an old beginning.  
A world of possibilities  
The dawn of the millennium.

From my sleeping bag  
I saw the world at a turning point.  
The year 2000.  
The international year of peace.  
Even the Y2K fears seemed innocent and naive.

The end of the world:  
An inside joke.  
An advertisement  
for novelty toys.

A funny story to tell the kids  
A funny story for all us kids.

And as we watched the ball drop in Times Square  
we counted slowly, the future seemed in our grasp  
Thunderous booms echoed in the man-made canyons  
The skyline lit up reflecting off the  
steel and glass

Then the celebration ended  
Smoke lingered in the air  
For a brief moment there was silence  
and we were left standing there  
Left struggling with the questions that would define our new horizons

Where do we find the strength to move forward?  
Where we find the courage to take our first steps?  
How do we find beauty in a brand new world?

## **Horizons (Part II)**

An Indian summer breeze  
rustles the trees,  
Underneath the richest kind of deep blue sky,  
the kind where horizons extend into eternity.

And the vacant smokestacks in the distance,  
fading into distant memory  
the shadows of the factories they used to be.

I can still see the smoke  
I can still hear the sirens  
I can still remember where i was sitting:

Suddenly we were extras  
in the worst kind of Hollywood film  
A barrage of cheap special effects,  
cliched characters reciting their lines as planned  
and a plot as predictable  
as it was impossible to understand.

We sat in stunned silence,  
astonished disbelief:  
Unaware of the lifetimes of consequences  
Unaware of the decade of wars  
Unaware of how thousands of lives could disappear.  
Unaware of the TSA, NSA, CIA, FBI  
Unable to separate the truth from reality  
and the reality from the lies.

No, we were overwhelmed  
by the immediacy of redefined horizons.

Thunder echoed in the man-made canyons  
The skyline lit up, reflecting off the steel and glass.

Smoke lingered in the air.  
For a brief moment there was silence  
and we were left standing there  
Left struggling with the questions that would define our new horizons

Where do we find the strength to move forward?  
Where do we find the courage to take our first steps out of the darkness?  
How do we find beauty in a broken world?

### **Interstice # 1**

I need to find a place of quiet contemplation  
to stop the darker parts of my imagination  
trying to redefine, what it means to find salvation.

## **Watching War**

ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN,  
we're always watching war.  
Video games and in the movies,  
we're always watching war.

It's always somewhere else.  
It's always some one else.  
It's always just a game we play

ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN,  
we're always watching war.  
We're only watching war.

## **Interstices # 2**

Please tell me that there is something more.  
This can't be all that we came here for.  
Please tell me that there is something more.  
Please tell me.

## **Song for Little Boy Blue**

Little boy blue  
their plastic sheen grows duller everyday  
all this broken glass  
covers the ground where you used to play  
your little toy dog is waiting for you  
where you told it to sit and stay  
Little boy blue  
their plastic sheen grows duller everyday.

These empty streets  
where children laughed and lovers walked.  
Once full of dreams,  
the water's washed away and time's forgot  
I still have faith in the ones  
who soldier on despite all they've lost.  
In these empty streets  
where children laughed and lovers walked.

Little boy blue  
when will you come home to your friends?  
We can rebuild,  
renew these city streets again.  
The rising tide is cyclical  
and will eventually descend.  
Little boy blue  
when will you come home to your friends?

Little boy blue  
when will you come home to your friends?

### **Single Blade of Grass**

A single blade of grass  
growing up through the sidewalk cracks  
I wonder if you know what you mean to me

A simple song in the back of my mind  
all these words I'm trying to find  
trying to write my own history

A single voice can drown out the din  
with just one phrase that gets under skin  
giving hope to the likes of you and me

A single leaf right after the storm  
to let you know that life carries on  
the wind and rain are only temporary

You know her face, I can't quite recall  
but i can still feel the dust and dry wall  
I wonder if she knows what she means to me

Miss Quintilla  
I wonder if you know what you mean to me

### **Interstice # 3**

Broken glass  
Broken spirit  
Broken soul

We live in fragmented world.  
I believe in the beauty  
of all things, broken.



### **Evidence of Things Not Seen**

The world outside is coming to an end  
Revelations, revolution, and the rising oceans  
Tragedy on every newsstand  
Preachers preaching hate in his name again

Still I believe in faith  
Still I believe

Now, in times of quiet contemplation  
I try to leave behind the desire for salvation  
To stop searching for beauty as it has been predefined  
and let the peace I yearn for come to me in time

Because I believe in faith  
Yes, I believe

I believe in faith  
Yes, I believe

The world inside is just starting to begin  
revelations, evolution and letting love in

### **New Horizons**

I want to wake up to the world around me  
I want to feel the barbed wire on my skin  
I want to take my first steps out of the darkness  
I want to shed myself of it's original sin.  
I want to taste the bitterness of adrenaline  
I want to feel the sweetness of love's first kiss  
because I've seen the world as it is,  
and I know there is more than this.

I know that there is more than this.

When I'm finally able  
to quiet the cacophony around me  
Silence the world and it's overwhelming din:

I start to open myself to the new horizons.  
The endless possibilities in the distance,  
the lines that extend into eternity.

Where do we find the strength to move forward?  
Where do we find the courage to take our first steps out of the darkness?  
How do we find beauty in the broken world?

I see it in the smile of a mother, holding her newborn son  
I hear it in the cries for freedom in the streets of Bhurma (and Birmingham)  
I feel it in the warm touch of a lover's embrace.  
the rich mahogany of the late Autumn leaves  
In the whispers and fragmented conversations,  
the mosaics of the humanity surrounding me.

We are the beauty we've been searching for.

## Summary of Capstone Project

This project provided me with the experience of writing text, music, and performing my own work. In order to accomplish this, I worked with professors both within and outside of Syracuse University. This included a poet, a composer, and a vocal professor. This expanded my reach as a musician, allowing me to get inside every aspect of musical composition and performance and expanded my musical knowledge.

In order to start the project, I met with poet Linda Loomis. She helped me to collect my thoughts on the project and create a long term narrative. We started by free writing on very large topics. These topics included war, religion, and my experience living and working in New Orleans. Linda Loomis helped me to coalesce my thoughts around these issues. In addition to guiding my writing process, she also acted as a sounding board. She provided encouragement and inspiration when I was unsure of whether or not the project was a good idea. As we continued throughout the summer, I brought in my first writing samples that were structured like lyrics and poetry. She helped me by editing them, both grammatical errors and helped me create stronger lines. As the summer ended she had helped me complete many of the lyrics. It was at this point that I started writing the music for the project.

Writing the music took longer than I had anticipated. I was unsure about my musical language as I went. Professor Welsch, my advisor, was

extremely helpful in this regard. I came into his office, concerned that the music that I had started writing was too simplistic to be acceptable. He told me that folk music is simplistic and therefore I shouldn't be concerned and should just write the music that I wanted. This was helpful in getting me out of my head and allowed me to start writing the music that became part of the final project.

I wrote music in several different ways. When composing classical music, I will often write at the piano. When I compose folk music, I would sit with a guitar and pick out the melody and chords together as I went along. For this project, I used both techniques to set these texts to music. An example of the first technique can be found in the opening movement, *Horizons (Part I)*. I picked out the chords on an acoustic guitar or piano and worked out the melody as I went along. When composing like this, I don't write the melody down, instead I sing it over and over again, gradually refining it as I continue to play the piece. When working on *Horizons (Part I)*, I would continually edit words as I went along, making them fit within the music that I was writing. I wrote several of the pieces this way, including *Interstice # 3*, *A Single Blade of Grass*, *New Horizons*, and *Song For Little Boy Blue*. All of them I worked out on the guitar and piano, playing the chord structures over and over again while I worked out the melody.

*Interstices # 1* is an example of a work that I used classical technique to create. I was looking over the words, sitting at the piano, and

spontaneously sang the melody that I set the opening line to. I then worked out the line on a piano and wrote it down. I worked out the rest of the piece at the piano. This helped me create more complicated chord structure and melodic invention in the piece. While this allowed to create interesting melodies that I otherwise wouldn't have discovered, it provided a challenge for me as the singer because I hadn't sung the melody in the writing process and had to sit and learn a more complicated melody.

For *Interstice # 2* and *Evidence of Things Unseen* I adopted works that I had previously written but hadn't used in other projects. *Interstice # 2* is based on a song I'd written a few years earlier called *Please Tell Me*. Originally that song had been written for guitar and voice. I took the melody and words and created a lush string arrangement. This string arrangement helped highlight the reflective nature of the text and fit the narrative structure of my work. *Evidence of Things Unseen* is a text that I had written a few years earlier but had no music for. I readopted the text, rewriting some of the verses, and then I set it to music.

There are two works from the cycle that don't fit into any of these categories. The first is *Watching War*. This was a movement that I struggled with for a long time. I originally had a much longer text that took the point of view of an impending news broadcast about the War in Iraq. However, as I tried to set it to music I kept getting stuck. I realized that the text was trying too hard to be clever and as a result was failing to capture any of the emotion I was trying to express. As I went over the text,

I started to spontaneously sing a melody and words that came to me. This text was much simpler and as a result the music was much simpler, the setting was more effective than the unnecessarily complex text I had been trying to set.

The other anomaly was *Horizons (Part II)*. I had originally intended on setting the text to be sung, however the meter was too complex to work out in a folk way. I didn't want to change to the text, because I was proud of it, so I came up with solution. I had the performers improvise over the chords and melody from *Horizons (Part I)* while I recited the text in the manner of spoken poetry. This connected my work to one of it's influences, Laurie Anderson. It also brought in the folk technique of performers improvising together.

The final aspect of this project was arranging rehearsals. We began rehearsals in March and continued them until the concert on May 8th, 2011. I rehearsed the group in sections, depending on their availability and what needed to be rehearsed, as every player didn't perform on every piece. While this was going on, I also took vocal lessons from Jon English, a vocal professor at Syracuse University.

The concert was on May 8th, 2011. As with all concerts, there were uncertainties on stage. One song ended abruptly when a performer forgot to come in, however we were able to recover and complete the piece.

Overall this project was a rewarding experience that taught me about many aspects of musical production, including composing, singing, performing, and the technical aspects of rehearsing an ensemble.