TEAR MY STILLHOUSE DOWN:
AN EXPLORATION OF COLLABORATIVE
STUDIO PRACTICE IN RECORD PRODUCTION

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The creative production of recorded contemporary music is often attributed to the widely recognised, but deeply problematic concept of the lone genius. This myth corresponds with the invocation of the inspired individual artist engaged in a process of sublime creative production. The reality of record production is however rarely so individualised, nor spontaneous. The music that many contemporary recording artists make is the result of collaboration, often in company with comparatively unknown musicians and technicians working out of the spotlight, in the recording studio. This practice-led research explores how the creative and technical dimensions of the collaborative dynamic influences the production of recorded music, and proposes that through a consideration of creative method and the interpersonal and physical environment shaped by the artist/producer in the context of the contemporary recording studio, creativity and the resulting creative outcomes can be enriched. Specific attention is given to the studio environment and the ways that collaboration proceeds as negotiated, interactive and dialogic. It is with the translation of the initial ideas of the artist/producer in collaboration with other musicians and technicians that transforms the initial musical concept into the recorded musical artefact. While the idea of collaboration as a component in record production has been relatively well documented in books, magazines articles, and documentary films, at the time of this project's inception in 2017, the majority of these deliberations were non-academic in form, making this a somewhat understudied topic in academic terms. This project responds to this lacuna by theorising–in context of the production of a recorded album of music–the intricacies of collaborative creative production. To question and theorise this process, this project takes the form of a qualitative case study, capturing and analysing a range of qualitative data including, participant interviews, observations, and the resulting recorded work. Via empirical research undertaken during the production of the album *Twilight on the Trail*, a collection of pre-existing cowboy songs from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, this study explores the processes of musical creativity and collaboration. The findings presented will inform understandings of creative practice and the role of musical collaboration in the production of recorded music.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS WITH CREATIVE WORK

I, Mark Scholtes, declare that the PhD thesis with creative work entitled, *Tear My Stillhouse Down: An exploration of collaborative studio practice in record production,* consists of the specified word length of 37,000 words including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. My creative component consists of 70% of the overall practice-led research. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged. I have acknowledged any key collaborators and their level and type of contribution, where deemed appropriate in the statement of contribution.

Date: July 2023

Endorsed by:

Professor Andrew Hickey

Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Beata Batorowicz

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION

Where published papers and creative works have joint authorship, I have made the majority contribution to the conduct of the research and authorship of the papers and/or creative works. I acknowledge the collective contribution of other authors/creative researchers below.

Creative research output 1:

Scholtes, M., Mize, J., Parker, J., Hall, A.J, Widdicombe, D., Woodward, B., Sherlock, J., Seiler, N., Hannah, G., Radford, B, McGahan, D, Swanson, B, Souter, J., McGahan, G., Carfoot, G., & Roberts, A. (2019). *Twilight on the Trail*. [Album of recorded music]

Scholtes, M., contributed 50% to this work. Collectively, Mize, J. (musician and co-producer), Parker, J. (musician), Hall, AJ (musician), Widdicombe, D. (musician), Woodward, B. (musician), Sherlock, J. (musician), Seiler, N. (musician), Hannah, G. (musician), Radford, B (musician), McGahan, D (musician), Swanson, B (musician), Souter, J. (musician), McGahan, G. (technical personnel), Carfoot, G. (technical personnel), and Roberts, A. (technical personnel), contributed the remainder.

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I would like to acknowledge the assistance received while undertaking this project. Without the contribution of others, this project would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The work, and success of the contemporary recording artist is often attributed to the *lone genius* (Sawyer, 2012). The idea of the lone genius corresponds with the notion of the inspired individual artist: an individual engaged in a process of creative production, within which the genius artist, through intuitive creative practice, functions as a font of creative output (Boden, 2004; McIntyre, 2008; Pope, 2005; Sawyer, 2012, 2017; Weisberg, 2006; Williams, 2010). The reality of producing music is however rarely so singular, with the music that artists often make the result of collaboration, created by comparatively "unknown, unidentified musicians, hired collaborators who work out of the public eye in the recording studio" (Williams, 2010, p. 59). It is within this recording studio space that new music is developed "out of the co-workings of various experts" (Lefford, 2015, Introduction section, para. 1). These studio productions commonly include input from a range of other artists and technicians, including producers, session musicians, recording engineers, co-writers, record company artist and repertoire representatives, and more. This often makes the creative process a more complicated and more collaborative undertaking than romanticised myths of the lone genius would otherwise suggest (Campelo, 2015; DeZutter & Sawyer, 2009; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Lashua & Thompson, 2016; McIntyre, 2008, 2012; Sawyer, 2017; Williams, 2010).

In one such example, Williams (2010) discusses the role of the hired studio musician, noting that "hired musicians make vital contributions to the projects they work on. They are often responsible for prominent musical features that lead to the success of a recording" (p. 60). These musicians for hire are regularly called upon to contribute more than *just* a note-perfect performance. In-demand studio musicians often make distinctive and unexpected musical contributions from simple melodic and rhythmic embellishments, to riffs and solos that can often define a particular musical arrangement. These individuals are "prized for their unique musical and social personalities, not merely for their instrumental skill" (Williams, 2010, p. 59). Musicians working in this studio environment "exercise their own aesthetic criteria with each musical choice they make, and they apply their sensibilities freely and consciously" (Williams, 2010, p. 70). Campelo (2015) adds that in addition to the requisite technical expertise, these musicians are called upon to "add something of

their own to the recordings: new musical ideas emerging from their own creativity" (Artistry, Composition and Authorship section, para. 4).

Sawyer (2012) extends this consideration of the collaborative nature of music production, and notably identifies that "these songs aren't composed by solitary artists … they're created as a work in progress by the entire band, working collaboratively in the studio" (p. 339). Collaboration in the recording studio functions as a collectively realised "creative activity" that culminates in the negotiated "created product" (Sawyer, 2012, p. 344): that is, the album or recording. In this regard, the collaboration is best understood in terms of the "creative process rather than the created product" (Sawyer, 2012, p. 344). This mix of collaboration and the negotiation of the creative process is crucial to considerations of music production. This project in its design, responds to these concerns by exploring how the creative process progresses in the studio environment and in the practices of negotiation, interaction and dialogue that followed in the making of music (Dean & Smith, 2011; Schippers, 2007).

1.1. Collaboration as creative practice

In this formulation of collaboration, the creative process is bound to not only the interpersonal connections formed between human subjects, but also to the context of the production; which is the spatial confines of the studio. Lubart (2018) defines creative process as "a sequence of thoughts and actions that comprise the production of work that is original and valuable" (p. 3), and in this project, this formulation of creativity corresponds with the ways that the thoughts and actions of participating musicians and technical personnel emerge as part of the process of making music within the setting of the recording studio.

A further, central, conceptual motif for this project positions collaboration as an enactment of creative practice. Gray (1984) defines collaboration as being a "process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (p. 5). Together, Wood and Gray (1991) broaden this initial definition in order to more explicitly address the activities that participants engage in, the methods they employ, and the outcomes that transpire, stating that "collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a

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problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain" (p. 146). These definitions are particularly useful in understanding the collaborative dynamic of music making–where collaborative principles are often intuitively developed over time–and the ways in which musicians collectively and individually contribute their unique expertise in the creation of the created artefact–a musical work that often transcends the sum of its parts.

This practice-led research explored how the creative and technical dynamic of collaboration influenced the production and recording of music in the studio environment. The project investigated the role of collaboration as negotiated, interactive and dialogic and how the negotiations, interactions and dialogues between the artist-researcher, a group of musicians and associated technical personnel proceeded. Of specific interest were the processes of translation that transformed the initial ideas of the artist-researcher into new musical artefacts. Collaboration functioned under the guise of a negotiated, interactive and dialogic encounter between the artist-researcher, musicians, and technicians, all set within the context of the studio. Under these conditions of the encounter, a variety of musical add-ons including melodic embellishments, phrasing variations, reharmonisation, counter-melodies, rhythmic variations, variations in timbre and dynamics, and considerations of instrumentation were overlaid to build on the artist-researchers original conceptions of the pieces. In this regard, collaboration corresponds with the ways in which individuals involved in the process of making music navigated and experienced these processes of negotiation, interaction and dialogue, with the final form of the musical artefact–the album–providing a record of these practices. This project's specific focus lay in understanding how the collaboration proceeded as a fundamental component of the creative process of making music.

It was from this process that the production of the album, *Twilight on the Trail*, emerges as a record of these collaborative practices. The exegesis that follows corresponds with this creative output, and as part of the analysis that I offer here, I utilise the album and its constituent tracks as a tangible marker of the collaborative processes that occurred during its production. In combination with participant interviews and my own observations and reflections of the recording sessions, this

thesis positions the album as a heuristic, against which conceptualisations of what constitutes the collaborative creative process will be offered.

1.2. About the artist-researcher

My name is Mark Scholtes. I am an ARIA nominated and APRA award winning songwriter and recording artist, writing and releasing music under the name Mark Sholtez. I was the first Australian artist to record for the legendary Verve record label in New York, was a recording artist with Warner Music Australia, and am currently signed as a songwriter to EMI Music Publishing Australia (2005–current).

My career to date has included collaborations with music industry icon Tommy LiPuma (Barbra Streisand, George Benson, Miles Davis), Grammy Life Time Achievement recipient and noted veteran engineer Al Schmitt (Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson), multiple Grammy winning producer Larry Klein (Joni Mitchel, Herbie Hancock, Tracy Chapman), as well as countless internationally renowned artists, songwriters, and musicians.

In addition to my professional creative practice, I have a Master's degree from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music – Griffith University, am a lecturer in Contemporary Music – Songwriting and Music Production at the University of Southern Queensland where I have worked since 2013, and have been engaged as an online course facilitator for the internationally renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA since 2019.

1.3. Provocation for this project

To conceptualise the nature of collaborative, creative practice in the production of recorded music, the project draws on my own experiences as a recording artist, musician, and co-creator in the production of albums. Through my recording career to date, as outlined in the section above, collaboration has been a consistent and key feature of my experiences. In these instances–even those where I have entered the studio with a fixed collection of self-penned original songs and a clear musical direction–the resulting work always emerged as highly influenced by those musicians and technical personnel with whom I collaborated. The interactions with those necessary others who contribute to the production of an album invariably inflect and shape the material. They provide context to the studio environment, and

to the practice of making and recording music in these moments. This often-unrecognised element of creative practice defines the production process (Campelo, 2015; Dean & Smith, 2011; Lashua & Thompson, 2016; McIntyre, 2012; Sawyer, 2012; Schippers, 2007; Williams, 2010). Hence, how these collaborations proceed, and what defines their nature and form, is a vital area for inquiry.

The idea of collaboration as a component in the production of recorded contemporary music has been relatively well documented in books, magazine articles, and documentary films, at the time of this project's inception in 2017 however, the majority were "non-academic sources", making this a largely "understudied topic" in academic terms (Campelo, 2015, Introduction section, para. 6). This project therefore offers opportunity to theorise the intricacies of collaborative creative production via empirical research, adding to this emerging field of academic research, as well as offering a potential mode of practice that other practitioners might draw from to inform their own collaborative methods for working in the recording studio in the creation of new musical works. Significantly, this study also contributes to understandings of practice-led research, with the methods established to conduct this inquiry into my own practice offering strategic approaches for enacting this mode of inquiry.

It's important to acknowledge that in recent years there has been a positive shift towards academic research in the field of contemporary record production, adding valuable context to this field. However, this project responds to the state of the field at the time of its conception and execution in 2017. This qualitative case study is bound to that particular moment in time. While more recent literature was drawn on in the explanation of how the project's data analysis was undertaken, and to add context to some of the project's findings, retrofitting sources that did not exist and therefore were not considered as part of the provocation for this case study would be highly problematic.

Participant observation undertaken during the production of a commercially released studio album informs the inquiry undertaken in this project. Close analysis of practice enacted during the recording of this album, and interviews with key personnel involved in the recording and production of the album were undertaken to capture a sense of how music professionals both considered and encountered this phenomenon of creative collaboration.

For some artists, the act of songwriting is also a highly collaborative process and can occur as an extension of the recording itself, or entirely independent of the recording studio. In my own practice, songwriting and recording have remained almost entirely exclusive of one another, with any considerations for the songs to be recorded taking place well in advance of entering the studio. In regard to providing a clarity of scope, this project will not deal with the songwriting or compositional aspects of the creative process but will instead concentrate on the recording studio as the site of the music making. This focus becomes particularly useful when considering record production that is not reliant on original repertoire–which was the case in this project–or where the artist in focus is not necessarily the songwriter, broadening the potential application of the outcomes of the study.

As a project focused on the nature of the collaborative process within the recording studio, and its role in creative production, it is with the negotiations, interactions and dialogues that occur as part of this creative process that the project proceeded. Framing this practice-led inquiry, the following research questions were applied:

1. How does collaboration, as central to my creative process, proceed in a recording studio context?
2. What factors define the nature of collaboration in the recording studio?
3. In the context of the creative work undertaken for of this project, what musical outcomes occurred?

These questions correspond with this project's concern to understand the nature of collaborative creative practice in music recording. Accordingly, these questions are focused on uncovering the processes of creativity and collaboration, how they inform the understanding and conceptualisation of creative method, and finally, to outline the musical markers of collaboration as seen in the album, *Twilight on the Trail*.

Undertaken as part of the Doctor of Philosophy program, this practice-led research project seeks to unpack this creative collaborative process by way of a *Thesis with Creative Works*. Underpinning this entire project is an ongoing commitment to high level professional creative practice, and it is within this practice that the research occurs (Candy, 2006). The outcomes of this practice-led project

are presented in the form of a portfolio containing a commercially released album of music as an expression of this collaborative process, additional excerpts of recorded creative work taken from various stages of the production to further highlight the creative processes undertaken, and an exegesis. The creative work constitutes 70% of the overall research project, with the written exegesis making up the remaining 30%.

1.4. Presentation of creative work

The major creative outcome for this practice-led research project is *Twilight on the Trail*, an album of recorded music featuring artist Jen Mize and myself. Production for the album took place between December 2017 and February 2018 and *Twilight on the Trail* had its initial independent release in April 2018, attracting notable industry and media attention, including reviews, editorials, and national radio play. In late 2018, the album was licensed to Australian record label Fanfare, with full commercial release–digital and physical–via Sony Music Australia from 1st March, 2019.

Engaging with this primary creative work will provide the necessary context for understanding this exegesis as a whole and is recommended before proceeding to the subsequent chapters of this exegesis. *Twilight on the Trail* can be accessed online at www.marksholtez.com/portfolio.

More details around the inspiration for *Twilight on the Trail*, including its planning and production, are offered in the description of the case presented in Chapter 4, where the reader will also be directed to additional audio material as a way of further contextualising the observations made in the research. Finally, in its findings and conclusions, this exegesis will highlight how this creative work serves as material evidence of the collaboration that underpins the research undertaken as part of this doctoral study.

1.4.1. Album cover art

Created by graphic artist Jasper Shelton Hollis, in consultation with Jen Mize and myself, Figure 1 details the album cover artwork created as part of the packaging for the commercial release of *Twilight on the Trail*.

1.4.2. Production credits

- Produced by Mark Sholtez and Jen Mize

- Recorded at QUT Skyline recording studios (Brisbane, QLD), and Misty Mountain Sound (Toowoomba, QLD)

- Recorded by Geoff McGahan, Mark Sholtez, and Gavin Carfoot

- Post-production editing by Mark Sholtez

- Mixed by Mark Sholtez and Geoff McGahan

- Mastered by Geoff McGahan

- Cover art by Jasper Shelton Hollis

- Production assistant: Ayden Roberts

- Jen Mize – Lead and background vocals

- Mark Sholtez – Lead and background vocals, acoustic guitar, Wurlitzer electric piano, percussion

- John Parker – Drums, percussion

- AJ Hall – Double bass

- Danny Widdicombe – Acoustic, resonator, and electric guitar, pedal steel guitar

- Bruce Woodward – Acoustic and electric guitar

- James Sherlock – Electric guitar

- Glen Hannah – Electric guitar

- Nathan Seiler – Piano, organ

- Brendan Radford – Harmonica, background vocals

- Daniel McGahan – Background vocals

- Brad Lee Swanson – Background vocals

- Justin Souter – Background vocals

1.4.3. Track listing

1. *Home on the Range (*D. Kelley / B. Higley)

2. *Ridin' Down the Canyon* (G. Autry / S. Burnette)

3. *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (J. Elliot)

4. *Black Hills of Dakota* (S. Fain / P. Webster)

5. *There's a New Moon Over My Shoulder* (J. Davis / L. Blastic / E. Whelan)

6. *Cool Water* (B. Nolan)

7. *My Rifle, My Pony, and Me* (D. Tiomkin / P. Webster)

8. *Cow-Cow Boogie* (B. Carter /G. Pail /D. Raye)

9. *Twilight on the Trail* (L. ALTER / S. MITCHELL)

10. *Wand'rin' Star* (F. Loewe / A. Lerner)

11. *Piensa En Mi* (A. Lara)

12. *Ridin' Down the Canyon* - reprise (G. Autry / S. Burnette)

13. *Red River Valley* (Traditional)

1.4.4. Intellectual property considerations

Due to the author's and collaborator's existing contractual obligations for recording and publishing, with various rights in the written and recorded works assigned to third party companies, the accessibility of the recorded outcome for this project is to be restricted to examiners and UniSQ archive purposes only. Any included recorded work shall not be made publicly available under any circumstances without the permission of the author.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL REVIEW AND METHODS

This chapter outlines the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological orientation that drives this research. While this is perhaps a departure from the typical thesis structure where a review of existing literature and a detailed research methodology would occupy their own unique moment, when conducting a practice-led study of this nature, these ideas arguably cannot be so conveniently and meaningfully separated.

As a project primarily concerned with the methods of practice utilised within a studio environment to encourage collaboration in the production and recording of music, this project sought to identify a collaborative model of creating music. Although collaboration in the recording studio has been key to the success of countless recording artists and record labels throughout the history of recorded contemporary music, when compared to other areas of existing music research, significantly less scholarly attention has been paid to the processes that enable musical collaboration and enhance creative production in the recording studio context. By observing the nuances of musical collaboration as it occurs in my own creative practice, this project draws inspiration from a long list of existing work including, Campelo (2015), DeZutter & Sawyer(2009), Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding (2011), Howlett (2012), Lashua & Thompson (2016), Lefford (2015), Sawyer (2012, 2017), Taylor (2016), Thompson & McIntyre (2013), Williams (2010), and Zagorski-Thomas (2010, 2014), building on, and adding valuable context to the current discourse around collaborative creativity in the recording studio environment. Specifically, this research aims to explore how these phenomena of collaboration and creativity are experienced and intuited by the participating musicians themselves, and by me, operating as artist and producer, in the making of new recorded musical works. The following section of this exegesis seeks to:

i)   outline a brief history of collaborative practice in the recording studio,

ii)   define key terms including *creativity* and *collaboration* as conceptual prompts for considering the practice enacted in this project,

iii)   discuss the paradigmatic positioning and methodological design of this research project, including research methods and methods of practice.

2.1.   A brief history

While a discussion around the diverse methods employed in contemporary record production will be offered later in this chapter, the below historical examples have been chosen for their relevance to the author's own professional experience in the studio, and to the specific creative methods employed by this project in the creation of new recorded work. This brief history is indicative of one particular approach to contemporary record production, where the bulk of the musical decisions are negotiated in-the-moment by a group of collaborating session musicians performing live in the studio. As argued by Zagorski-Thomas (2014), while there are no absolutes, "musicians often favour working in the same space, at the same time" (p. 185). While this method of working in the studio was once commonplace, it has become notably less common in many popular music genres, especially since the advent of the digital audio workstation, and the rise of the DIY home studio.

From the mid-1950s, and the advent of rock and roll, many of the prominent record labels, producers, and recording studios employed carefully curated house bands–groups of highly skilled session musicians–that collaboratively contributed to the production of records. This mode of production was especially popular throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the more notable and conspicuous examples can be observed in the recordings featuring Motown's *Funk Brothers*, Stax Records' *Booker T. & the M.G.'s*, Nashville's *A-Team*, the rhythm section from Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, and working in the studios in and around Los Angeles, the *Wrecking Crew* (Blaine & Goggin, 2010; Bowman, 1997; Bronson, 2003; Covach, & Flory, 2006; George, 2007; Gordon, 2013; Gordy, 2013; Hartman, 2012; Reali, 2015; Whitley, 2014). Artists as diverse as Paul Simon, Elton John, Aretha Franklin, Willy Nelson, The Beach Boys, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, The Supremes, The Temptations, Otis Redding, Ike and Tina Turner, and The Carpenters all benefited from these collaborative studio environments in the making of some of contemporary music's most celebrated albums (Bronson, 2003).

These talented musicians often operated as "conduits for artists' ideas", while concurrently offering the artist "enough space to retain their own musical identity" (Reali, 2015, p. 54). Muscle Shoals session musician David Hood (as cited in Reali,

2015) recalls, "with the different artists that we would work with, we always tried to sound like we were *that* particular artist's band" (p. 54).

Recording under the self-appointed moniker, the Funk Brothers, the Motown house band contributed to "more number one hits than the Beach Boys, the Rolling Stones, Elvis, and the Beatles combined", arguably making them "the greatest hit machine in the history of pop music" (Justman, 2002, 0:56). Motown percussionist, Jack Ashford (as cited in Justman, 2002), remembers, "We felt as though it was our job to lay the groundwork for the kids to have a place to really develop their careers … They had the talent; we had the experience" (25:20). Ashford goes on to explain that many of the artists and producers were very young and relied heavily on the combined creative wisdom and experience of the musicians employed at the Motown studios (Justman, 2002, 25:33).

Wrecking Crew guitarist, Tommy Tedesco (2008), explains, "They put notes on paper, but that's not music. You make the music. [It's] what do you do with the notes, what do you do with the charts, what do you do with the chords" (10:15). Bass player Carol Kay (as cited in Tedesco, 2008) recalls, "It was our job to come up with riffs" (9:45), and Wrecking Crew drummer, Earl Palmer (as cited in Tedesco, 2008), states, "We injected a lot of ourselves into it … a guy would give us a lead sheet or something and we'd know what the song was. We made up a lot of arrangements ourselves" (9:12).

With this project's aim of leveraging the collaborative creative process in the creation of new work, specifically with the researcher situated as artist *and* producer, and ultimately as the creative benefactor of the musical collaboration, it is especially interesting to consider how the contribution of these various house bands benefited the recordings that they worked on.

Writer, producer and Motown founder, Berry Gordy, was so cognisant of the value of his house band, The Funk Brothers, and how central they were to Motown's extraordinary success, Gordy supposedly insisted these musicians were not permitted to work for any other label (John, 2019).

Producer and owner of the iconic FAME studios in Muscle Shoals, Rick Hall, states, "you went into the studio every day with the same pickers and same players, and they became a team, and it was hard to beat that" (as cited in Camalier, 2013, 20:45).

Atlantic Records executive and producer Jerry Wexler (as cited in Camalier, 2013), describes his first experience working with the Muscle Shoals rhythm section by saying,

> There's just something that leaps out of a record … It's the way the sound of the record impacts on the ear instantly. To me that's the magic ingredient in a phonograph record. The Rolling Stones had it, the Beatles had it, and they had it. So, from then on Muscle Shoals became the place that I preferred to go. (34:28)

As collectives of artists themselves, it is clear to see the impact that these collaborative teams had on helping artists to find and/or define their own artistic fingerprint. When reflecting on his experiences recording with the musicians in Muscle Shoals, recording artist Percy Sledge (as cited in Camalier, 2013) recalls, "All I had was a voice … All of this was new to me, and these guys made me feel like, Amen, you can do it … I used to call them my family" (24:12).

Highlighting the immeasurable impact that collaboration played in the work and career of legendary soul singer Aretha Franklin, Franklin (as cited in Camalier, 2013) states, "Coming to Muscle Shoals was the turning point. That's where I recorded, I Never Loved a Man, which became my first million selling record. So absolutely it was a milestone, and THE turning point in my career" (40:25). With respect to the specific contribution of the Muscle Shoals rhythm section, and their collaborative, creative process, Franklin adds, "There was no real music written for it. The musicians would just listen to what it was that I was doing, and they would decide what they were gonna do around that" (38:38).

Recording artist Clarence Carter (as cited in Camalier, 2013), yet another successful product of this profoundly creative production team states, "each time a person went to Muscle Shoals, they came out of there with a hit record. You had to know there was something magic in Muscle Shoals" (48:09).

Experiences in Los Angeles, this time with the Wrecking Crew, were similar, again with the collaborative input from the studio musicians making a lasting impression on the music they worked on and the artists they worked with. Nancy Sinatra (as cited in Tedesco, 2008) sums it up it perfectly when she says, "The musician were really the unsung heroes of all those hit records" (2:54). While Brian

Wilson (as cited in Tedesco, 2008) of the Beach Boys declares, "The wrecking Crew were the focal point of the music. They were the ones with all the spirit and all the know-how" (1:33), acknowledging the collective experience of these studio musicians and what the value Wilson saw in their contribution to his initial creative vision.

In more recent times, it has become noticeably less common to find similar clusters of session musicians contributing to the same volume of work, and to the work of so many artists. This model of collaborative creative production is however still a common feature of the practices of many well-known music producers working today, including T-Bone Burnett (Alison Krauss, Robert Plant, Sarah Bareilles), Don Was (John Mayer, Lucinda Williams, Ringo Star), Ethan Johns (Crosby, Stills and Nash, Ray La Montagne, Laura Marling), and Jacquire King (Tom Waits, Norah Jones, Buddy Guy). This has also been a feature of my own experiences as a recording artist working with prominent music industry producers, Tommy Li Puma (Barbra Streisand, George Benson, Miles Davis, Diana Krall) and Larry Klein (Joni Mitchel, Herbie Hancock, Tracy Chapman), whose highly collaborative approaches to record production have shaped my own collaborative methods of practice, and in turn have inspired this project at a paradigmatic level.

2.2.   Notions of practice

This project considers creativity as the foundational modality in artistic production, and extends a conceptual framework built upon theorisations of collaboration to underpin the analysis of the project's case study. I now turn to outline these conceptual markers of creativity and collaboration, positioning individual, cultural, and social factors as integral to the creative process, alongside the negotiated, interactive and dialogic nature of collaboration as crucial to contemporary record production.

Typically, popular beliefs draw a predominantly romanticised view of creativity (Boden, 2004), suggesting that "creativity bubbles up from an irrational unconscious, and that rational deliberation interferes with the creative process" (Sawyer, 2012, p. 23). Such visions of creativity commonly position the artist as fundamentally undisciplined, and reliant on moments of divine inspiration, or the use of "innate gifts of intuitive talent" (McIntyre, 2008, p. 40). Under these conditions, "creative

individuals [possess] a set of powers peculiar to them that are beyond the grasp of mere mortals" (McIntyre, 2008, p. 40), with art in these inflections, corresponding with something beyond human cognition and capacity–something almost divine.

Such viewpoints, albeit with a long history in considerations of art and creative practice (Sawyer, 2012), demonstrate the discourse that circulates around creativity in general. While particularly prevalent in the attitudes surrounding much of the contemporary music industry, these positions belie the collaborative practice that is crucial to successful music production (McIntyre, 2012). Lashua and Thompson (2016) for instance identify that "music documentaries in particular often represent an incomplete view of the recording studio and its processes" (p. 71). The theme of the inspired individual artist, and the enactment of a singular "creative force" (Lashua & Thompson, 2016, p. 71), perpetuate a genius model of creativity (Weisberg, 1993), while equally marginalising the contributions of producers, technical personnel, and session musicians (Lashua & Thompson, 2016). These misrepresentations are often further reinforced by the popular music media in their re-telling of the "myths that both the industry and the performers build around themselves" (McIntyre, 2008, p. 41). As stated by Bennett (2013), "the attendant romanticising of creativity makes a better press story than would be found in an exhaustively accurate description of how a song is actually created" (The Interview section, para.10).

A more critical inflection of creativity challenges these otherwise romanticised beliefs (Batey & Furnham, 2006; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Rickards, Runco, & Moger, 2009; Sawyer, 2012; Weisberg, 2006), and instead points to the far more collaborative nature of music production. Without diminishing the role of the individual artist/musician as a key factor in the creative process, the view outlined in this literature considers the wider influence of "cultural and social factors" as "necessary components of a creative system at work" (Thompson & McIntyre, 2013, Introduction section, para. 3). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggests that creativity results from the intersection of three fundamental components: the individual, the culture, and the social organisation. Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) systems model of creativity further proposes that:

> for creativity to occur, a set of rules and practices must be transmitted from
> the domain to the individual. The individual must then produce a novel

variation in the content of the domain. The variation then must be selected by the field for inclusion in the domain. (p.315)

This system model of creativity "demonstrates that creative practices occur at the confluence of an individual (musician, engineer or record producer), a knowledge system (domain), and a social organisation that understands and applies this knowledge system (field)" (Lashua & Thompson, 2016, p. 75). Thompson and McIntyre (2013) contextualise this further by suggesting,

for an individual to be creative in the field of record production and studio recording the rules and conventions that govern it must first be learnt and the individual must also be able to interact with the field to output their idea or product to this field for validation, acceptance or rejection. (Conclusions section, para. 1)

Of particular interest to this project are the ways in which collaboration might feature in this creative model. Research shows the creative act of music making is often a highly collaborative process (Howlett, 2012; Lefford, 2015; Sawyer, 2017; Williams, 2010, Zagorski-Thomas, 2014). Leeford (2015) states, "music production involves a coordinated collaboration among specialized experts" (Conclusions section, para. 1). As explained by Zagorski-Thomas (2014), "when musicians are engaged in co-present performance, despite the fact that one person may be leading and the others following or that one may be a soloist to others' accompaniment, there is always an element of mutual attention and accommodation" (p. 181).

This project seeks to look beyond the contributions of individuals to consider how creativity might be viewed and understood through the lens of the ensemble. More specifically, it is looking at the ways that the negotiations, interactions, and dialogues inherent to this process produce this climate of creativity. How do the creative contributions of the individuals involved in the production of the musical artefact intersect and intertwine? What processes of negotiation, interaction and dialogue demarcate this?

When contemplating a definition for collaboration as it relates to this project, I refer to Taylor (2016) who highlights the need to consider the differing working relationships

in "shared artistic creation" (p. 566), and to acknowledge that co-operation and collaboration need to be considered separately. Jon-Steiner (1997) suggests co-operative relationships occur when participants "each make specific contributions to a shared task" (p. 12), while collaborative relationships involve participants "engaged in a joint task" (p. 13) (as cited in Taylor, 2016, p. 567). Additionally, Taylor (2016), emphases the importance of considering the presence of a "decision-making hierarchy" and suggests further restricting the term collaboration to "relationships where decision-making is shared" (p. 567).

In the context of this project, a point of focus during the studio sessions involved the exploration of how the relationships between participants shifted and merged during the recording processes. Observations were focused on where participants playing different instruments with differing musical functions constituted co-operation, and when the in-the-moment, collective nature of musical performance–all participants contributing to the joint task of making music–clearly constituted collaboration. The same considerations applied when observing the decision-making processes. How and when were decisions being made collectively, and/or how and when were those processes influenced by the relationship structures at play in the studio, or by the actual recording studio context? For example, Zagorski-Thomas (2014) suggests, "judgement calls and decision-making in the studio are complex phenomena. Musicians will often judge a take by how it felt rather than by how it sounded" and that "the performer is not always the right person to be making the judgement call about which takes should be used, at least in the immediate aftermath of the performance" (p. 194). Zagorski-Thomas (2014) further contends that in response to changes in workflow and necessary personnel, "the complexities of communal creative practice are different in the studio than in the rehearsal room or the concert hall", noting differences in decision making protocols, especially when dealing with the evaluation of multiple performances of the same song or a specific part of a song (p. 195). In light of these considerations, this project considers how the presence of the artist/producer might play a role in facilitating and/or impeding collaboration as defined above, and how these negotiations, interactions and dialogues proceed within the studio environment in the context of this particular project.

2.3.   The personal, the collaborative, and the creative

Fritz (1994) explains the creative process as being a practice of both "composition and improvisation … a balance of the intuitive and the rational", with individuals each having "his or her own personal rhythms" (p. xx). This personal and individual process is "tailored to take into account such variables as temperament, personality, idiosyncrasies, strengths, weaknesses, tastes, aspirations, and interests" (p. 8–9). In the context of the group however, it is important to further consider how individuals respond to and build on the contributions of one another. In particular, how creativity is negotiated among participants, in "situations where collaborating groups of individuals collectively generate a shared creative product" (DeZutter & Sawyer 2009, p. 82).

The recording studio context regularly calls for groups of session musicians to make "vital contributions to the projects they work on" (Williams, 2010, p. 60). In these instances, while each individual musician is being creative in their own right, there are also "social and interactional processes among the musicians" (Sawyer, 2012, p. 231) that are in play. In certain circumstances, these interactions can be facilitated to access what Sawyer (2017) describes as group genius; a phenomenon within which something larger than the individual participants emerges from the collective, via this collaborative creative practice. "Ideas emerge from the interaction of the participants in the recording process" (Howlett, 2012, p. 37), where the collaborative group produces something outside of the scope of possibility of the individual participants. This collaborative outcome is commonly referred to by researchers as the third entity. It is the very reason for engaging in collaboration. Separate from the egos of individuals, this immaterial, extra thing emerges as a result of the shared creative process, embodying the identity of the group (Pullen, 2009). Sawyer contends that empowering collaborators to improvise together in ways that are "guided and planned" can engender these "unexpected insights" (Sawyer, 2017, p. xi). Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi (1997), describes this optimal experience, regardless of the activity, as Flow State: a state where one loses sense of time, operating unselfconsciously, experiencing periods of heightened control and deep concertation (Biasutti & Frezza, 2009; Wrigley & Emmerson, 2013).

While much of the research into group genius and music has been focused on the live performance of improvised jazz (Sawyer, 2017), this model of creative collaboration can certainly be translated for the production of new music in the recording studio context, to foster and potentially even generate creative innovation. In practice, jazz performance often involves an in-the-moment musical realisation built on a pre-existing musical frame. Starting with an existing composition–jazz standard–musicians create new musical material through the process of real time musical negotiation. While much of these live performance practices proceed similarly in the recording studio, the significant shift in performance context and creative outcome calls for adaptations to live performance practices (Chanan, 1995; Katz, 2004; Zagorski-Thomas, 2010), offering further opportunity to add context to existing research.

The craft of contemporary record production, and more specifically the modern recording studio environment provides the scope to harness the potential of Sawyer's group genius as a key method in the production of new musical works. As producer, a group of musicians and technicians can be selected for a project according to their particular expertise, experience, or even personality, where they are enabled and encouraged to influence the shape of the music as both individuals and as a collective. As described by Leeford (2015), producers are "explicitly tasked with coordinating contributions and collaboration among participating experts" (Coordination and Communication section, para. 2), making this a key aspect of the projects design and focus. These ideas were already informally at play in my existing studio practice, and consideration of this phenomenon has underpinned this particular practice-led research project.

In my experience as a recording artist, I have found that there is something especially stimulating and creatively rewarding about capturing a song as it comes to life for the very first time. Assembling a cast of musicians who you admire, and in turn allowing them the freedom to contribute not only their technical expertise, but also their individual aesthetic sensibilities, provides a case-point for considering the nature of collaborative creative production and the processes of negotiation, interaction and dialogue that mark the studio encounter. Presenting the material to be performed in as rudimentary a way as possible–often just a basic chord chart– giving only the subtlest of cues, and simply surrendering to the collaborative creative process, where musicians negotiate the details of the musical arrangements in-the-

moment, offers the capacity to empirically examine the nature of collaborative creative production.

This project drew from this in-the-moment method of music making, and via the experiences captured as part of a studio recording project that took place over several concentrated days in December 2017, with a group of musicians from a variety of musical backgrounds. Musicians were curated for their experience, technical ability, artistic sensibilities and personalities, and recording proceeded without any rehearsal or specific preparation by the musicians prior to entering the studio space. While it is worth noting that the artist/producer will typically assume a leadership role within this collaborative unit, this relationship dynamic shifts throughout the production process and will form part of the discussion resulting from the data analysis when considering the negotiations, interactions and dialogues that take place in the studio. The analysis of the creative production outlined for this project will derive from the experience of producing this album.

Like the methods employed in the production of music, the role of the record producer is similarly diverse. As observed by Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding (2011), prior to mid 1960's the producer could be seen primarily as a *fixer*. In addition to their contribution to the selection of repertoire, the producer was tasked with scheduling artists and musicians, booking studios, and managing the available time and resources (P. 3). In addition to their many administrative responsibilities, Hennion, (1989) proposes that producers also "play the role of the public" (P. 414) as they help to guide and shape the musical and technical direction of the production. The music producer will typically possess the ability to "identify, rate, and modify the different parameters of music performance, composition, and arrangement, as well as sound quality (including the acoustics of the instruments, the room, and audio settings)" (Pras & Guastavino, 2011, P. 74). While all these tasks are still typically part of the producer's concern, the role of the producer has evolved considerably over the years. As identified by Pras & Guastavino (2011), often in modern record production, "the role of the producer tends to be confused with the role of the sound engineer. Although the two professions traditionally required different skills and competencies, the distinction between the two has become less obvious" (P. 74) with many modern-day producers taking a hands-on approach to the technical aspects of the production. In addition to the hybrid engineer producer, this amalgamation of traditionally distinct roles can also be seen in the songwriter producer, or the

musician/artist producer (Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding, 2011). The modern-day producer is often writing lyrics, making beats, playing a variety of instruments, engaging in sound design, singing, etc., as well guiding the overall musical, technical, and administrative progress of the project. In these examples, one individual, as producer, is combining a range of diverse skills and knowledge in the realisation of the resulting creative work.

In the context of this project, the role of producer is shared between me and Jen Mize, with both of us also the feature artists on the album. Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding (2011) propose, "the type of producer you are, if you can indeed categorize, will of course suggest areas of concern for your work" (P. 8). Based on observations and insights gained through this research, this certainly rings true for both Jen and I, with our focus as co-producers of this project fixed squarely on the musical and interpersonal aspects of the collaboration. "The producer's function in this context is to encourage, cajole, inspire, but most of all, to understand" (Howlett, 2012, p. 30) what is required to elicit an exceptional musical performance from the participating musicians.

A review of the production credits will also reveal that I engineered aspects of the project (specifically the additional recording at Misty Mountain Sound) as well as mixing the album. However, for the sake of clarity, when looking at the initial collaborative recording sessions–the primary focus of this research–neither Jen or I were engaged in facilitating any of the technical aspects of the recording session, nor were we overly prescriptive about the approach to these aspects of the project, instead allowing the technical personnel to make the majority of these decisions on our behalf.

2.4. Methodology

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world". Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that qualitative research involves a "set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible … Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). This project worked from this basis. By situating the

inquiry into creative and imaginative practices within a studio setting, this research was interested in understanding the situated activity of recording music and producing an album. But more specifically, this project sought to uncover how each of the participating musicians came to this process of creative production. In this regard, it was the collaboration itself that formed the phenomenon of the inquiry, with the studio and the encounters the participating musicians shared providing the context.

When considering the paradigmatic positioning and methodological design of this research project, it has been useful to first consider some of the historical milestones in the development of qualitative research and what these mean for this project and its practice-led design. For the creative researcher, it is especially useful to contemplate the origins and development of qualitative research, starting from the traditional period of ethnography that Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identify, where the lone researcher would return from the field with objective interpretations of the alien other and their culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). More recently, there has been increasing recognition of an emerging ninth qualitative research moment, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) see this, that includes "more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and inter-textual representation", and where "messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental work" are being explored (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 26). The growing recognition of practice-led research (Dean & Smith, 2011; Gray, 1996; Schippers, 2007) is a demonstration of this ninth moment and provides a useful methodological cue for this project.

Candy (2006) suggests that practice-led research methodology is "concerned with the nature of practice", and that "the primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice" (p. 1). Haseman (2006), in his *Manifesto for Performative Research*, extends this definition by stating, "the 'practice' in 'practice-led research' is primary–it is not an optional extra" (p. 60). This is especially important in the way it acknowledges my own positionality as both practitioner and researcher, and the role that I play as an active participant in this setting; and not as an 'external' other, as per Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) observations.

When thinking about practice-led research methodology in music, some compelling parallels between the process of music making, and the methods of more traditional research fields can be easily made. A musician preparing for a

performance will need to formalise a concept, select material, listen, and decide on a technical approach. Schippers (2007) suggests that this process can easily be defined in terms of the development of a research question, undertaking a review of relevant literature, and selecting an appropriate methodology. The tension, however, arises from the idea that while performance constitutes outcome, it does not automatically explain the process. For this reason, it is important to consider how to present practice-led research in order to not only showcase creative outcomes, but to make visible the methods and processes involved (Dean & Smith, 2011; Schippers, 2007). This has been an important consideration in the design of this research project, resulting in work ultimately being presented via a combination of channels, including both written exegesis, and creative portfolio.

While exploring the interplay between creative practice and research, it has also been valuable to consider *research-led practice* as a complimentary term to *practice-led research* (Dean & Smith, 2011). There are numerous ways in which scholarly research might actually stimulate creative work, so while much of the discourse around practice-led research methodology is focused on the insights practice can generate; the impact of academic research on practice is quite often underplayed (Dean & Smith, 2011). In the context of my own project however, the intention has been to not impose the agenda of the research project *on* the creative process, but for the creative process to exist as autonomously as possible, albeit given the inherent challenges faced by situating the researcher within the creative process (Gray, 1996). It would however be remiss of me not to acknowledge the impact this study might have on my future work, how this research might flow back into the record making process, and the extent to which my artistic practice has been afforded further insight (and, indeed, has shifted in practice because of this research).

2.5.   Research methods and methods of practice

This research project proposes that through a consideration of creative method and the interpersonal and physical environment shaped by the artist/producer in the context of the contemporary recording studio, creativity and the resulting creative outcomes can be enriched. Through the practice of recording an album of music, this research project focused specifically on the collaborative act
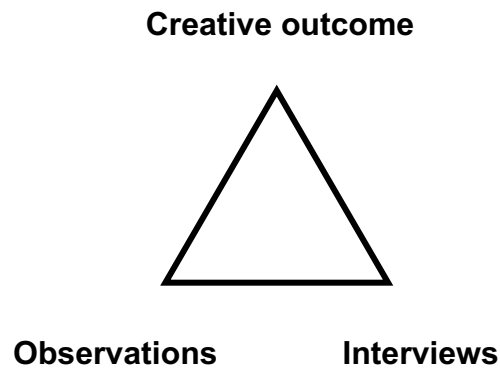
inherent to the record making process. Beyond questions around the intentions of the artist/producer, and the technical proficiencies and aesthetic sensibilities maintained by the musicians and technical personnel, the collaborative approach pursued in this process of record making brought with it considerable unknowns. When working in the recording studio, regardless of the preparedness of the individual, the reflexive nature of human interaction when engaged in the collaborative creative process often means that an artist really cannot be sure what kind of a record they are making until it is made.

To question and theorise these unknowns, this project took the form of a qualitative case study. The essence of the case study is that it seeks to interrogate phenomena, including decisions made and enactments taken. Questions around why certain enactments were activated and why certain decisions were made (including their application, and their result) framed the inquiry into the collaboration witnessed during the recording and production of the album (Yin, 2009). In the context of producing the record, the project sought to unpack the collaborative creative process as it was witnessed, in terms of the decisions and creative choices that were made by the collaborators in that moment. The recording process, in this regard, stands as an ideal case study, as outlined by Yin (2009).

Gillham (2000a) and Yin (2009) suggest when undertaking a case study, in order to create an accurate description of a particular case, multiple sources of evidence need to be collected, analysed and triangulated. It is then through the analysis and triangulation of collected data that the researcher is able to bring meaning to what was witnessed; to what was 'going on' in a particular case.

To enable the interrogation of the collaborative creative process as witnessed in this project, Figure 2 illustrates the multiple methods for generating data that were employed.

Figure 2
Research data triangle

Creative outcome

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Observations   **Interviews**

Firstly, as a practice-led methodology, the musical result of this studio collaboration has served not only as a significant research outcome in its own right, but also as an important source of data. The inherent nature of modern recording studio technology enables the researcher to not only review the finished recordings, but to move between different elements in the work, both in isolation and in context. It also allows the researcher to easily trace the development of certain musical ideas through the capture of multiple takes of a given song, making this a rich resource. This is also a crucial hallmark of the practice-led approach deployed in this study.

With the researcher strategically situated as a participant in the creative collaboration, in addition to the creative outcome, the project utilised observations and interviews for further evidence of the collaborative, creative process at play in the studio. deMunck and Sobo (1998), suggest that one of the advantages of participant observations is that they allow the researcher to experience the "backstage culture" (p. 43). This is particularly relevant to the music making process, where there is a tendency for the contemporary musician to perpetuate an overly romantic notion of the creative process when discussing their work publicly (Bennett, 2013).

Angrosino and DePerez (2000), stress the importance of using a systematic observation process to improve the researcher's effectiveness in the field. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002), suggest focusing on the specifics of particular interactions, who's talking to whom, who is being listened to, and how those interactions inform the decision-making process. For this study, in order to record those interactive

nuances, observations have been captured using several methods, including a detailed reflective journal, field notes, audio recording, and videography.

Of particular interest throughout the preparation and production phases of recording have been the many naturally occurring conversations between musicians and technical personnel. While there is a propensity to categorise conversation as inconsequential, from childhood learning to the way the world conducts business, these exchanges can in fact be "central to making the social world the way it is" (Silverman, 2006, p. 203). In the recording studio, these off-the-cuff conversations often offer genuine insight into the process, decisions, and the conscious and intuitive creative choices made, and so capturing these data for analysis has been of particular importance to the design of this project. In order to maximise the value of these naturally occurring conversations, it has been important to try and capture this data by way of audio and/or video recording, preserving the sequence of dialogue, and to not simply rely on field notes or recollections. As suggested by Silverman (2006), "it is within these sequences, rather than in single turns of talk, that we make sense of conversation" (p. 205).

In addition to setting up fixed audio and video recorders in various parts of the studio during recording, I also maintained ready access to a personal voice recorder for any unexpected opportunities to discuss practice with the musicians. These conversational exchanges were also supplemented with more formal, focused interviews on the completion of the recording process, where themes that had begun to emerge in conversation were teased out further. These interviews were conducted following formal requests of the musicians, and were convened in the week following the recording sessions. The individual interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted according to Fontana and Frey's (2005) approach for unstructured interviewing. Fontana and Frey (2005) suggest, "unstructured interviewing can provide greater breadth than do other types given its qualitative nature" (p. 705). This method sees structured questions replaced by a "negotiated text" (p. 716). Within this approach, the interviewer is viewed as an "active participant" (p. 716) in the interaction, with the resulting interview existing as a "negotiated accomplishment" (p. 716). This approach recognises that the resulting data of any interview cannot be removed from the context in which it was recorded, and that the interviewer is "part of the interaction they seek to study" (p. 716).

The recruitment of participants for this study was based on a variety of pragmatic and creative considerations, including the level and scope of their experience, their technical capacity, location, affordability, availability, and access. A detailed description of the recruitment criteria appears as part of the description of the case in Chapter 3.

Before discussing strategies for transcribing and analysing data, it is worth noting some important considerations that were made in balancing the differing creative and research agendas in the studio. As researcher, it was important to identify opportunities to pause the recording process in order to investigate particular instances as they happened so not to lose them, and their context, to time. I also needed to initiate conversations to draw out insights at significant times throughout the recording process. While the collection of data was integral to the research, some consideration however needed to be given to how the collection of various data might have impacted the creative workflow, and how to best manage the studio workflow so as to minimise the potential disruption caused by these research interventions. One strategy for this was to consider the studio as two separate spaces. The *performance space* and the *control room* space. It is within the control room space, during playback of recorded takes, where conversations between researcher and participants were particularly encouraged and captured. As the musicians listened back to the performance they had just recorded, becoming critical and reflective, formulating strategies to improve or focus their contribution to the work, there was consistent opportunity to capture the interaction between participants, minimising the interruption to the production and creative workflow happening in the performance space.

Observational data, including naturally occurring dialogues, offered a play-by-play record of the negotiations, interactions and dialogues of participants as they navigated the recording process, while formal interviews tended to offer more insight into how the participants themselves perceived these negotiations, interactions and dialogues. This, in addition to the album itself, by way of analysis, offers a detailed and multi-layered picture of this case.

It's also important to consider how the presence of cameras and other recording devises might impact on participant behaviour and how the research design sought to minimise these effects. To mitigate the potential intrusive nature of video cameras, the research utilised several small static cameras placed in the

control room space. The absence of camera operators, and the inconspicuous nature of the devices themselves ensured that the physical presence of these recording devices was a non-issue for participants. The participants of this study were also all experienced studio practitioners accustomed to being recorded (both audio and video) in the studio context, and the recording process was derived from current industry practices, where participants simply undertook this process as they would in any professional recording context.

Regarding issues of privacy and consent, observations were conducted by the artist/researcher in an overt manner. All participants were made aware of the location of cameras, the extent to which data was being collected, and the intended use of any collected data. Participation in this project was entirely voluntary, participants were free to withdraw from the research project at any stage, and a participant's professional involvement in the creative work was not dependent on their participation in the research aspects of this project. Prior to gaining formal consent from participants, it was also made expressly clear that because their contributions to the creative work would be credited as part of the packaging for the work itself, it was expected that interview data would be individually identifiable. Finally, prior to proceeding with the collection of any research data, the project was subject to a review by the university's ethics committee and approvals were granted for all proposed research activities.

Before commencing any detailed analysis, all audio and video data was first transcribed. In addition to transcribing dialogue, particular attention was given to the identification of any non-verbal signals, including "coughs, laughs, sighs, pauses, outside noises, telephone rings, and interruptions, that [were] recorded on the tape" (Seidman, 1998, p. 98) that shaped the conversation and/or inflected its meaning. Although a 'naturalistic' (Seidman, 1998) transcription protocol was not conducted, that is, a protocol that seeks to record all non-verbal signifiers observable in the process of conducting the interview, only those non-verbal acts that emphasise or inflect the meaning of the speech acts recorded were noted. Within this project, square brackets […] designated these transcription inclusions. In the case of video recordings, transcription of selected moments were undertaken to extend the interview data and provide visual cues for the dataset. These were also accompanied by traditional musical analysis of selected moments form the

development of the album itself, so that the musical outcomes of collaboration could be identified and discussed.

Before undertaking data analysis, Yin (2009) recommends developing a clear analytical strategy. He adds that a good starting point is for the researcher to allow themselves to be guided by the theoretical propositions that have inspired the study, and that in turn have informed the development of the research questions, literature review, and any new assumptions (p. 130).

As discussed earlier, this project was driven by a desire to shift the existing popular narrative away from problematic conceptions of the inspired individual artist, and to build on the work of researchers such as Howlett (2012), McIntyre (2008), Pope, (2005), Sawyer (2012, 2017), Weisberg (2006), Williams (2010), and Zagorski-Thomas (2014), making visible the reality of collaborative creative practice as it occurs in the record studio. This project sought to consider how creativity exists at the core of collaboration, and to highlight its reliance on the necessary and extremely valuable contributions of producers, technical personnel, and session musicians (Lashua & Thompson, 2016). Beyond the acknowledgement of these necessary others, the project also sought to highlight practical considerations for how to facilitate genuine musical collaboration in the recording studio context. Specifically, this project was concerned with acts of creative negotiation by its participants, and a consideration of creative method from the artist/producers in the facilitation of the recording (DeZutter & Sawyer, 2009; Leeford, 2015).

For this project, analysis of the collected data–including interviews and observational and reflective notes–was undertaken using a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2019) suggest reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges and emphasizes the active role taken by the researcher in the production of knowledge. This approach, as demonstrated by Byrne (2021) involves six key phases:

1. *Familiarisation with the data*. For this project the familiarisation phase involved reading and re-reading interview and observation transcriptions, as well as watching and re-watching audio-visual data to ensure there was a deep and detailed understanding of the contents of all available data prior to undertaking any analysis.

2. *Initial code generation*. While the researcher may take a deductive approach to data analysis, beginning the process with some predefined codes, for this project, data analysis proceeded without any preconceived assumptions,

allowing for codes and themes to emerge organically from the data itself. This inductive, data-driven approach (Byrne, D. 2021) allowed for analysis to occur "free from any pre-conceived theory or conceptual framework" (Byrne, 202, P. 1396), and instead revealing an array of initial codes, including, Creativity, Collaboration, Physical and Interpersonal Environment, Time, Relationships, Skills and Experience, Sensibility, Creative Intentions, and Creative Stimuli.

3. *Generating themes*, 4. *Reviewing potential themes,* and 5. *Defining and naming themes*. Though these three phases, initial codes were grouped, critically evaluated, and regrouped in relation to both the data and the proposed research questions until the following three key themes were identified: Notions of Creativity and Collaboration, Enabling and Empowering Creative Collaboration, and Shaping the Music.

6. *Producing the report*. As suggested by Byrne (2021), while presenting the findings of the analysis is the logical final step, it is important to note that the analysis process undertaken here was in no way a linier one, requiring considerable back and forth between the various phases until all the data had been thoroughly considered.

For the sake of clarity, it is also worth noting that this data analysis was undertaken manually, without the use of any specific data analysis software, through a process of colour coding relevant related excerpts from the data as a way of tracking and sorting the various codes and themes.

Findings from the above analysis have been further considered in the context of the music itself, with traditional musical analysis allowing the researcher to locate and discuss selected musical outcomes resulting from the negotiations, interactions and dialogues occurring during the collaborative creative process. The goal then has been to build an explanation of the case (Yin, 2009). Finally, in keeping with the typical case study framework, research findings have been presented as a general description of the case, along with themes and/or issues that have emerged throughout the course of the study (Creswell, 2013). These findings are offered alongside the creative work–consisting of both the finished album and recorded excerpts of key moments in the development of the work–in order to present a complete picture of the project, with each outcome giving context to the other.

Data collected during this study was managed according to the Universities Data Management Plan. All digital files have been stored utilising the University's

secure system. Any physical documents have been stored securely within a locked and monitored UniSQ office.

2.6.   Limitations

This project did not seek to investigate all the possible alternatives for producing music, nor did it suggest one model is superior to another. The project's interests resided specifically with the negotiation, interaction and dialogue that was central to the studio practice employed for this particular production. The methods involved in the production of recorded music can be diverse. In addition to the practices employed for this project–collaborative performances negotiated in the studio without prior rehearsal or predetermined musical arrangements–there are countless ways to approach record production. Some common collaborative examples include a band writing, arranging, and rehearsing their music until it is exactly the way they want it, and only then venturing into the recording studio to archive their creative work. An artist or group might make a series of low-quality demo recordings before moving to a more professional facility with the aim to recreate/re-record those demos at a commercially acceptable sonic and musical standard. Alternatively, one individual might hire studio musicians to perform specific, predetermined musical arrangements. In these examples, a significant amount of the creative decision-making process will predominately occur in the preparation stages, prior to entering the studio.

It could also be argued that studio time with a live band can be cost prohibitive. The pre-production stage allows for these musicians to prepare without incurring unnecessary studio costs, and through preparation, reduce the time and financial investment required to capture the actual final recording. However, in contexts where the artist/producer is working with hired session musicians, as was the case for this project, engaging those same musicians in both the pre-production process and the final recording would prove to be even more costly, while removing the studio musicians from the arranging and demo recording stages of the production would significantly limit their ability to contribute in a genuinely collaborative way come time to record the final versions.

It is also important to clarify that this project does not involve an extensive investigation into how these creative processes work on a cognitive level. Instead,

this research explores ways in which these processes of creativity and collaboration influence my own creative practice to inform the creative methods of music making in the context of the recording studio, and in turn discusses the ways in which the participants of this particular project experience and intuit these methods of working.

The actual technical aspects of recording audio employed in modern record production, along with the mixing and mastering of the recorded audio can also be highly creative and collaborative acts in and of themselves. While it is important to acknowledge the contributions to this project made by the participating technical personnel, it is also important to note that these technical considerations were never intended as part of this project's research focus. While the description of the case and participant experience include some ancillary discussions about certain technical aspects of the studio encounter, a comprehensive discussion on this topic would be beyond the scope of available data.

As outlined in section 1.3 of the introduction, it is also important to remind the reader that this research is not concerned with the songwriting or compositional aspects of record production. While the majority of new popular music releases contain original songs, signwriting does not necessarily occur in the recording studio. For some creatives, it would be difficult to separate songwriting from production with the studio serving as a key compositional tool (Albiez & Dockwray, 2016; Nevels, 2013; Marrington, 2017). Conversely, for many artists, myself included, songwriting will take place as an entirely independent creative act, with the recording of those songs undertaken as a separate process altogether. In these instances, the musicians engaged to contribute to the recording process are typically not the songwriters.

Removing the conversation of songwriting entirely form the equation, the songs recorded for this project were covers, previously recorded and released by other artists. This was not a deliberate decision made to limit the scope of the research. As a practice-led research project, this was the creative project in development by the artists/researcher at the time, with the research designed in response to the creative intentions of the work, as expected when conducting a practice-led enquiry.

Finally, the choice to record the bulk of this album live, with hired musicians attending the session without demos or prescribed arrangements, and tracking their parts while playing together, is drawn directly from my existing professional practice.

While I also regularly work in a myriad of other ways in the studio, the methods utilised here have, over time, have become my preferred way of working. This is especially true with respect to recording where I am both the producer and the artist. Therefore, in the spirit of genuine practice-led research, it is these methods of production that I have chosen to investigate through this research project.

CHAPTER 3: DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

The below account was compiled from a detailed transcription of video recordings taken during the making of the album, *Twilight on the Trail*, and further supplemented by observations and insights documented by way of a research journal maintained by me throughout the planning and recording of the project. These data have enabled the presentation of a detailed and accurate account of the key aspects of this project.

To add context to the actual recording studio encounter, this chapter will first detail the various decisions made throughout the project's conception and initial development, including considerations for the selection of repertoire, the recruitment of key personnel, the studio location, and the approach to preproduction. In addition, this chapter offers a detailed production timeline, along with a rationale for the focus and scope of the description of the actual studio encounter that follows.

3.1.   Why *Twilight on the Trail*?

As an artist, I have always struggled with settling into a definable creative identity, always drawing from diverse sources of musical inspiration. In fact, I have always been expressly curious about music that holds an element of dichotomy. For me the music of the iconic cowboy crooners always seemed like a collision of worlds. A sound forged at the intersection of jazz and country music.

As a young boy, I came to know the old west through a Hollywood lens, and in the form of the singing cowboy. Ultimately, it was the ongoing fascination with these lonesome cowboy chronicles, underscored by a perfect Hollywood soundtrack, that inspired the recording of *Twilight on the Trail*–the idea that the late-night call of the cowboy crooner was not all that different from the music emerging from the big city jazz clubs of the time.

In the spirit of collaboration, I decided to invite my long-time friend and collaborator Jen Mize to contribute to the project as co-artist and co-producer. Jen has a vastly different musical background to mine, and a distinctly personal connection to this music. She grew up in a ranch house in the heart of the Mojave Desert with dreams of being a rodeo queen. As a descendant of the Native American Lumbee people, for Jen the stories captured in these old cowboy songs often run

parallel to her own story, and her childhood experiences exploring the rugged terrain of the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains.

Through the recording of *Twilight on the Trail,* Jen and I aimed to take a fresh look at the music of these great cowboy crooners as we sought to bring new life and new meaning to this timeless material.

3.2.   Song choice and preproduction

To outline the concept, I had made some preliminary song choices prior to inviting Jen to collaborate, but ultimately this process was a shared one. A selection criterion was never formally articulated; however, we had identified that we were looking for songs that would allow us to traverse a variety of musical and lyrical terrain. We were also interested in opportunities to recontextualise some of the better-known material with an aim to bring new meaning to the work. For example, approaching *Black Hills of Dakota* from the perspective of a Native American woman drastically shifts what it means to sing, *"Take me back to the black hills …"* and opened the door to a drastically different musical reading. Similarly, we discovered a lesser-known verse for *Home on the Range* that dealt with driving the Native Americans from their land. We further played into that narrative by shifting the harmony at the top of the chorus from major to minor to support the change in lyrical mood.

We were also interested in exploring the influence of Latin American music on the cowboy sound through the choice of *Piensa En Mi,* as well as challenging the traditional gender roles present in the original recordings, where men sang about life in the saddle while women pined for their safe return to the ranch house, with Jen stating early in the song selection process, "girls can be cowboys too".

Once a definitive list of songs was compiled, the remainder of the planning process was dedicated to deciding on how we intended to divide the vocal duties, selecting appropriate keys, and then me producing very simple chord charts and/or lead sheets. For the most part these documents contained only the most basic road map of the song's form and harmonic structure, leaving musical details open to negotiation by the musicians at the time of recording (see Appendix A).

3.3. Recruiting the personnel

Criteria for the selection of participating musicians was relatively simple. All of the participating musicians were required to possess extensive experience working in the studio, a history of working collaboratively, and technical expertise on their chosen instrument. This would ensure the participants would be comfortable and confident in the studio environment and would be able to contribute collaborative performances of a professional level without requiring excessive preparation or rehearsal time. Given the musical focus of the project, as discussed in section 3.1 of this chapter, a connection to country or jazz music traditions (or both) was also a consideration, as was the desire for participating musicians to possess an idiosyncratic musical aesthetic that we felt would complement the material chosen for the project. For the sake of the research, I was also interested in musicians with differences in experience and creative approach as a way of broadening the possibilities for the resulting creative process and outcomes. In addition to the musicians, the project also included two recording engineers and a production assistant, all chosen for their technical expertise and experience.

It is important to also acknowledge pragmatic considerations for recruitment such as location, affordability, availability, and access. Without the financial means to transport and accommodate musicians and technicians, participants were chosen according to their proximity to Brisbane city, and for their willingness to work for the available financial remuneration offered. Recruitment was also limited to musicians that were in our existing professional networks and were available to participate on the scheduled recoding dates.

3.4. Location

The selection of QUT Skyline Studios was more practical than creative. The studio simply needed to be large enough to allow all participants to perform together, with good monitoring and clear sightlines, while still offering sonic isolation for each individual musician. This would allow for the possibility of manipulating individual and group performances in post-production where necessary. To enable this postproduction editing, the album was captured digitally, and the studio's industry standard Avid Pro Tools software was utilised for all recording and editing tasks. This

also allowed for ease of transfer of recorded audio to other recording facilities for postproduction editing, additional recording, and mixing of the album.

When discussing the criteria for studio selection, it is also important to acknowledge that given the amount of space and equipment required to record an entire band playing together in the studio, this particular approach to record production is unlikely to be easily achievable in a DIY home studio recording environment. Nor would a DIY space offer the necessary level of acoustic isolation required to meet the objectives of this methodology.

Given the steady decline of the large format recording studio as a direct consequence of available DIY recoding technology, and the costs often involved in accessing these facilities (Goold & Graham, 2019), this project's reliance on the large format recording studio environment might for some, be a potential obstacle for employing this specific method of practice. Removing the desire to edit individual musical contributions, independent of the larger group would however remove the need to acoustically isolate individual musicians and in turn greatly increase the number of suitable recording spaces with only a minor compromise to the method of practice.

3.5.   Seeding the band

With this project focused on in-the-moment collaboration, making creative decisions together in real time in the studio, it was important not to give the participating musician time to consider their specific musical contributions prior to the recording session. For that reason, there were no rehearsals, nor were the band aware of the repertoire ahead of time.

The only exception here was providing a copy of the chord charts the evening prior to the recording session. While most of the band regularly utilise charts when performing and improvising, this was something not central to one specific participant's existing professional practice, and so the charts were provided to allow time for a cursory look with an aim to alleviate any potential pressure, but not offering enough time to formulate a specific individual musical approach.

To enable drummer John to decide what particular drums and cymbals to bring to the studio, several reference tracks were provided to him the evening prior. This was more about the sonic pallet, rather than giving any musical or stylistic cues.

Both guitarists, Bruce and Danny, were given a general overview of what instruments and amplifiers they should aim to bring (nylon and steel string acoustic guitars, arch top jazz guitars, solid and hollow body electric guitars, resonator and pedal steel guitars, various guitar amplifiers and effects, etc.). This would allow for a multitude of sonic and creative options. Bass player AJ was simply asked to bring his double bass.

3.6.   Personnel and production timeline

Production for the album took place between December 2017 and February 2018, with the majority of the album having been recorded at QUT Skyline recording studios (Brisbane, QLD) over three days, and involving the following participants:

- Mark Sholtez – Artist/producer, vocals, acoustic guitar

- Jen Mize – Artist/producer, vocals

- John Parker – Drums, percussion

- AJ Hall – Double bass

- Danny Widdicombe – Acoustic and electric guitar, pedal steel

- Bruce Woodward – Acoustic and electric guitar

- Geoff McGahan – Recording engineer

- Gavin Carfoot - Recording engineer

- Ayden Roberts - Production assistant

Final lead and background vocals, additional electric guitars, keyboards, and percussion tracks were then recorded at Misty Mountain Sound (Toowoomba, QLD) featuring the below personnel:

- Mark Sholtez – Artist/producer, recording engineer, lead and background vocals, Wurlitzer electric piano, percussion

- Jen Mize – Artist/producer, lead and background vocals

- James Sherlock – Electric guitar

- Nathan Seiler – Piano, organ

Additionally, several other musicians asynchronously contributed to the final album, recording remotely in their own home studios, including:

- Glen Hannah – Electric guitar

- Brendan Radford – Harmonica, background vocals

- Daniel McGahan – Background vocals

- Brad Lee Swanson – Background vocals

- Justin Souter – Background vocals

Finally, the album was mixed at Misty Mountain Sound (Toowoomba, QLD) by Mark Sholtez with ancillary input from Geoff McGahan who also mastered the album.

While this list of collaborators is significant, with all the above-named people making important and highly valuable contributions to the final creative output, it is critical to note that it is the synchronous, in-the-moment aspects of the production that are the subject of this research. Therefore the discussion below will focus primarily on the initial recording sessions at QUT Skyline recording studios (Brisbane, QLD) and the planning leading up to those recording dates.

3.7. Narrowing the scope: The importance of the first song

During the planning of my album *The Distance Between Two Truths* (2010), recorded in Sunset Sound Studios on Los Angeles CA in November 2009, one of the key considerations for the recording dates was to decide on which song to record first. Larry Klein, the album's producer, noted that when working with a group of studio musicians that are coming into a project without any prior engagement with the material to be recorded, the first song can often define the creative direction of the project, establishing a creative DNA from which everything that follows is intrinsically related. It is in those very first moments of a band playing together that they begin to make decisions about what the project is, and of equal importance, what it isn't. These first moments can define a record's sound and feel, as well as establishing the musical and social roles of the participants.

For this project, I managed those 'first moments' by carefully considering the repertoire and selecting an initial song that I was confident would be unfamiliar to the participants. This would allow the musicians to establish their own intention for the work, free from the influence of any previous recordings or arrangements. It was in

this initial stage of collaboration that the assembled band and production personnel established a tenor for the collaboration *and* the music.

To manage the scope of the analysis, ensuring that this exegesis stayed within the inherent scope of the doctoral research in which it is situated, the case description presented here will focus primarily on one single track taken from the larger body of work created as part of this project. The first track recorded for the album, *Lights of Old Santa Fe*, will act as an exemplar for the processes and outcomes experienced across the entire project. This sharpening of focus also allowed for a far more detailed and nuanced discussion than would have been possible if the entire musical work, including all processes involved in the making of, were to be discussed here.

3.8.   The studio encounter

The following description of the studio encounter is divided into two distinct modes of presentation. For the benefit of the reader, the literal transcription of events and dialogue is intermittently punctuated by a variety of shaded text boxes containing additional observations, analysis, and contextual detail. The information and insights that appear in these text boxes are derived from the synthesis of field notes taken throughout this project, audio visual recording of the actual recording studio encounter, and tacit knowledge acquired throughout my 30+ years' experience as a studio practitioner.

3.8.1. *Setting up*

It's approaching 10am and the moment the musicians begin arriving at the studio, the space comes to life. Old friends and acquaintances are catching up, and where necessary, new introductions are being made. Within minutes there are instrument cases everywhere as each individual bumps in an array of drums, upright and electric basses, guitars, and amplifiers.

Once all the equipment has been loaded in, there is a brief exchange regarding who will be setting up where, and again the studio is buzzing with activity. While John begins setting up his drums in the large live room, Bruce, Mark, and Danny are opening guitar cases in the back of the control room, discussing the pedigree of various instruments and guitar makers. At this point the studio is rife with

vintage and boutique acoustic guitars, classic Fender and Gretsch electric guitars, several handmade Archtops, a National resonator, and various oddities including Danny's pedal steel guitar. Every available surface of the control room appears to be home to a guitar of some description. The plan is to have as many options set up and ready to go as possible. The recording engineers, Geoff and Gavin, are preparing multiple microphones and lines for each musician to allow for maximum flexibility and minimum changeover times so we are able to change creative tack at will, should inspiration strike.

As soon as John has the bones of his drums in place, Geoff and Gavin are placing microphones around the kit. Similarly, AJ is now set up and warming up, with several microphones already in position to capture his double bass. Amid all the preparatory activity the studio is full of chatter. In the control room, Jen and Danny are discussing upcoming gigs, while Gavin, Bruce, and Mark are sharing experiences of playing vintage acoustic guitars, and the inherent playability challenges that come with older instruments. In the live room, John and Geoff continue to navigate the drum setup.

Danny: [To Bruce, as he sits in the rear of the control room playing an old Martin nylon string acoustic guitar] That guitar sounds nice Bruce.

Bruce: It does, its Mark's sadly.

Danny: Where's it from?

Bruce: It's an old Martin.

Mark: [Interjecting] Yeah, early '60s.

Jen: [Jokingly to Danny] Yeah, Mark has, you'll get to know this Danny, Mark has a thing with super f#%king nice gear. And then I have a thing with being jealous of the nice gear.

These conversations continue for some time as various members come and go, continuing to organise their individual spaces, and tending to technical requests from Geoff and Gavin. All the while, Bruce is systematically checking and tuning

guitars. Progressively, these instruments make their way into the various recording booths or are strategically placed around the control room.

> **Danny:** [To Geoff, both of them standing in the booth Danny will be occupying throughout the session] Can you mic me in here as well when I'm playing resonator?

> **Geoff:** Yeah, what I said to Mark, hopefully any changeover we want to do will be fairly quick. Even if you go, I want to put another track down, we'll have a couple of mics handy for each of the guitars ready to go.

In a rare moment, Mark finds himself sitting in the control room by himself and begins to quietly play and sing through *Lights of Old Santa Fe* until he is inevitably distracted by other members of the group entering the room.

3.8.2. Outlining the plan

With everyone now mostly set and ready to start to making sounds, Mark and Jen assemble the team to talk about their intention for the project, and to outline the anticipated workflow for the coming days. The conversation starts with Mark briefly reminding participants that in addition to the anticipated musical outcomes, this project will also involve a research component, as detailed in the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Forms that were provided to musicians and technical staff in the weeks leading up the actual recording session. From there the conversation moves to the creative aspects of the project. Here, Mark and Jen explain their relationship to the material selected for the recording, and their overall hopes for the project.

> **Mark:** For this project, Jen and I are really interested in exploring the collision of jazz and country music that exists at the heart of these songs. We also feel like there is a nice collision of sensibilities between all of you and your history of music making.

> We are not going for an authentic read on anything. We're also not going for an overly modernised thing. We're just looking for something that perhaps sits nicely in between those extremes. The things that Jen and I have been talking

about are that it will be nostalgic, but not kitsch, if that makes sense. And just by the nature of the way this music works, I guess it automatically feels a bit nostalgic.

Jen: Yeah.

Mark: But we want you guys to feel like you can bring your own sensibilities to the project too.

As if we were recording original tunes, Jen and I will play the songs down acoustically to give you a basic sense of form and structure, and then we'll all jump in.

I have a few possible jumping off points, but from there we will just get in the room and play together.

Feel free, if you have ideas, or you've got your own agenda that you want to prosecute, feel free to drive those things if you want.

Mark: [To Jen] Have you got anything you want to add?

Jen: Yeah, I would say more than feel free, we encourage you to bring your ideas. Everyone has been chosen by us. We know you all so well and know your musical history, and you are here because you are you. So more than feel free, just say it. We brought you here for that reason. It will be this group of people together that make this thing happen.

Mark: Yeah. I'm interested creatively in those conversations, and what we actually make out of this collaboration so let's see where it goes.

Jen: The rabbit hole is what we want.

Mark: If at any point if we need to reel it back in, we can, but let's just stay open, have fun, and have a really nice musical conversation.

Jen: FYI: We've put these songs in a tracking order that if we don't get through everything, they are in order of importance.

Mark: There's probably one that we could let fall off the end, but ideally, we'll get through three songs today and then four tomorrow and Friday. That's the goal, so we will have to be banging through them.

Jen: And Danny, you said Friday you might have to leave early?

Danny: Ah, we'll see.

Geoff interjects to let us know he is about half an hour away from having everything set up and ready to record, which prompts some movement from the band to ensure they are also on track.

Danny: Just with what guitars you want, is it totally up to us? Like, I feel like playing resonator on this one.

Mark: We've made some notes about jumping off points, but if you are hearing something, I want to hear it. Especially with respect to guitar choices.

Jen: A lot of that we haven't said because we don't want to colour your take on it.

Danny: Yeah, yeah, sure. Cool.

Mark: I've kind of mentally gone through all the tunes and come up with a way that I think we could approach them, but we don't intend to impose that on the process and are much more interested in seeing what evolves collaboratively.

Keeping our creative options open:

When preparing for a recording, I will typically formulate specific arrangement ideas for certain songs, but then will rarely share those with the band unless necessary. By sharing your ideas too early in the process, you potentially limit the opportunity for something unexpected to occur. Something better than the original plan. Once you play a demo version, or give the musicians overly

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prescriptive musical directions, it can be difficult to move away from that. Every creative choice that is made will be informed by those directions.

Mark: [To Jen] Should we just play through the first song?

Jen: Yeah, that'd be cool.

3.8.3. *Lights of Old Santa Fe*

Mark grabs an acoustic guitar and he and Jen position themselves together in the rear of the control room, ready to play the first song, *Lights of Old Santa Fe*, acoustically for the band. With Mark seated and Jen leaning against the window beside him, without introduction, Mark begins to play and sing.

Mark: *See that purple mountain…*

The rest of the band are positioned around Mark and Jen, each with a copy of the chord chart, following along as the song progresses. Mark's guitar accompaniment is somewhat artless, playing simple chord voicing with a basic, unwavering, quarter note rhythmic pulse throughout, offering minimal clues to the possible direction the band might take. Jen enters in verse two and the two singers trade the remainder of the vocal duties, coming together in the chorus for the occasional harmony. The last chord is followed by a moment of silence before Bruce interjects with a question about the chart and the overall form of the song.

Bruce: So, B's an instrumental the second time through? [Referring to figure B on the chord chart]

Mark: Yep, correct.

John: I might start with brushes, some chains on the cymbals for a couple of sizzley things, and then whatever AJ is doing will likely denote where I go.

Bruce suggests we run through it again acoustically, this time with him playing guitar, and John grabs his brushes from the other room. As the song plays through again, Bruce maintains the same basic rhythm as Mark played originally, but with

some strategically placed embellishments. Bruce's approach to the chord voicings adds some additional complexity to the sound. John adds some simple rhythmic figures playing brushes on the chart balancing on his knees. Danny is now holding his unplugged Telecaster and plays along silently, while AJ listens, eyes fixed on the chat in his hand.

An unexpected start:

Having the band initiate a second acoustic run through in the control room, this time with them driving the performance, was an unexpected but welcome surprise. Straight away there seemed to be a sense of agency and ownership from the musicians that I have not previously seen this early in a project. I can only assume that this came as a direct result of Jen and my initial invitation to the musicians to contribute fully and authentically.

Danny: [To Mark and Jen as the performance comes to an end] What do you think about slide on *Old Santa Fe*? On the resonator? He [referring to Bruce's approach to the rhythm guitar] has it all covered so I don't really need to do much, just slide over the occasional chord, and maybe I can do a slide solo.

Mark: [To Bruce] Bruce, Danny was just suggesting reso on *Santa Fe*, playing some slide fills and then a little slide solo.

Bruce: Yeah, yeah, let's do that.

Danny: Ok, cool. I'll go tune her up.

Geoff indicates he's ready to start working on individual sounds, starting with drums, and so the band all begin to head back to their stations.

John is now sitting at the drum kit and he and Geoff begin working on solidifying the drum sound, with Geoff tweaking EQ and compression settings from behind the mixing console.

As Geoff continues to work on the drums, Mark leaves a copy of the charts and tracking sheets for any relevant note taking during the recording.

Mark: [To Geoff] Whenever you get to it, I've made a copy of everything for you. Feel free to write on those as needed. There are also charts there, because I know you can read them, and it might help with punch ins and locations.

Geoff systematically works his way through each instrument until everything appears to be in place and sounding good.

It's now just after 12:30pm and the musicians, John (drum kit)*,* AJ (upright bass), Bruce (acoustic archtop guitar), and Danny (resonator guitar), are all in place in the live rooms, with everyone preparing themselves for recording Take 1 of the first song, *Lights of Old Santa Fe.*

Geoff, the project's head recording engineer is sitting at the mixing console, while Jen and Mark are set up to sing guide vocals from the rear of the control room. Both Gavin (assistant engineer) and Ayden (production assistant) are moving about the control room attending to cameras and other technical equipment.

Vocal tracking:

The roles of artist and producer often require very different areas of focus. Becoming immersed in one's own performance often comes at the expense of the broader oversight needed by a producer to ensure all elements of the performance and production are working cohesively and meeting the expectations of the project. The producer also has the added responsibility of managing time and other resources necessary to deliver the finished project. For me, as artist-researcher, I was also tasked with the responsibility of managing the project's substantial research agenda throughout these recording sessions. For that reason, it was decided that while both Mize and I would sing live with the band, these vocal performances would only serve as a guide for the final vocal performances that would be recorded at a later date. There were however times where I was also tasked with playing guitar as part of the larger band, and like the contributions from the rest of the musicians, these guitar

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performances would be captured and treated as final takes to be featured in the completed album.

As the engineer is making some final tweaks to individual instruments, unprompted, the band starts to feel their way through the chart. Starting with the guitar, the rest of the band quickly falls in one after another. Remarkably, even during this first impromptu (and regrettably not captured as part of the studio recordings) reading of the first song, and with very little dialogue between players about the actual musical approach, the general sound and feel of the record emerges almost immediately.

Mark: [Jokingly to everyone] That's it. Next song.

Jen: [Laughing] Next song!

Mark: [In response to Danny experimenting with melodic and textural ideas on the resonator] That's lovely Danny, all that stuff.

Mark: [Privately to Jen] Everyone's right on the money.

Geoff takes a few moments to check in with the band, ensuring they can hear each other, making various adjustments to the headphone sends, and responding to several requests including troubleshooting some technical issues with the drum setup.

John has a particular request regarding how he wants to hear his drums in the headphones, and the way the drums are being captured, with particular attention being paid to the sound of the bass drum.

Mark: [To Geoff] It already sounds mixed.

Geoff now turns his attention to Jen and Mark, ensuring they both are happy with their headphone sends.

Geoff: [To Mark] What do you want to do with the click?

Click track:

It is worth noting that while some musicians find it challenging to play in time with a click track, rarely is this an issue when working with professional musicians. While recording free of the constraints of a click track can offer some added freedom to a performance–allowing the tempo to naturally ebb and flow–there are lots of positives to using a click track in the studio. By ensuring that every recorded take is locked to the same tempo, it is possible to combine elements from different takes in post-production. This process of 'comping' can be helpful in patching minor mistakes in an otherwise perfect take, or by thinking more artistically, combining aspects of different takes for creative reasons. This is especially valuable when working without a predetermined musical arrangement, where a certain musician may contribute different musical material with each take of a particular song, allowing for the producer to later construct a collage of the most desirable ideas. However, for this to be achievable, the individual musicians needed to be acoustically isolated from one another to avoid the microphones capturing unwanted spill from surrounding instruments. These considerations played a large part when selecting a studio facility for this project, ensuring each musician could be acoustically isolated, while always retaining sight lines to one another, guaranteeing a degree of connectedness for the collaborating musicians.

This song offers a unique challenge for utilising a click track. Because the song starts with a *colla voce* intro, voice and guitar only, where the accompanying guitar takes its tempo and rhythmic cues from the voice, this section needed to be recorded without the click, with the click needing to be turned on after the intro, and any excess gap to be edited out later*.*

Mark: [To the band] We are going to do the *rubato*, Bruce and I ... and then the click is going to start … and we'll marry them together later.

Geoff checks with the band to see if there is a preference for the actual click sound and reminds the band to be wary of the click bleeding into the microphones from the headphones.

Danny: Mark, are you are going to count us in with the click?

Mark: That's correct.

Danny: I don't need to hear it then.

Mark: No, you probably don't Danny.

Jen nods privately to Mark, approving of Danny's decision not to have the click in his headphones.

Personal preference:

Where possible, it is important to recognise the various requirements and preferences of each musician, and to facilitate opportunities for individuals to engage with the process differently. For example, if the core rhythm section is hearing the click track, a musician with a predominantly non-rhythmic role, chiefly providing fills and comments, may feel more at home taking their rhythmic cues from the rest of the rhythm section, rendering the click an unnecessary distraction. In the modern recording studio, it is not uncommon for each individual to be able to control what they monitor via their headphone during a performance, as was the case for this project, and so musicians will often make these choices on a song-by-song basis, with little need to make their preferences known to the larger group.

Geoff, the engineer plays the click for the band to ensure everyone is comfortable with the sound and level. Preferring to hear a more organic click, I suggest a change from the digital tick to a more natural sounding woodblock, so taking control of the studio computer, I make the suggested change myself. The

engineer checks with me regarding the tempo and by this stage the band appear to be in place and ready to proceed.

Tempo:

Many of the tempos for this project were considered prior to the recording dates. This was to ensure that there was an immediate jumping off point on the day. This forward planning can often help to save time while recording. While the goal isn't necessarily to work fast, time is a finite resource, and to capture the core band tracks for an entire album of music in as little as three days requires significant planning and time management. Considering tempos in advance of the recording dates can also be useful in ensuring that factors like mood or fatigue do not adversely impact the end result. For example, it is not unusual to lean towards slower tempos at the end of a long day of recording, when the band is starting to feel tired or lose focus, or for elevated nerves or excitement to cause musicians to want to play faster. It is however still often useful to let the band find a tempo organically in the initial stages of setting up for a take, or to remain open to changes in tempo depending on the direction a particular performance take. These variations in the plan often result in unexpected yet welcome musical outcomes.

Mark and Jen are sitting in the back of the control room while Geoff deals with some technical issues with Danny's headphones, reminding everyone to adjust the limiter setting on their headphone mixer to avoid hearing unnecessary distortion.

Geoff: [To everyone] Ok, are we ready to have a crack? We'll take this one and then get everyone in to have a listen.

Geoff: [To Mark and Jen, referring to the overall placement of microphones, and audio processing that is being done prior to the tracks being recorded] I'm happy to just run one and see what needs to be fixed.

Geoff makes one final comment regarding headphones and Bruce and Mark negotiate how to start the song without a click.

Bruce: [To Mark] What if I just give you one of those [plays a chord on guitar]? What's your first line?

Mark: [Singing] "*See that purple mountain…*"

Bruce recites the line back playing a guitar chord under *"See"* to confirm the melodic rhythm of the line.

Mark: [To Bruce] You play the chord and then I'll sing it.

That's all the initial negotiation needed, and everyone now appears to be settled and ready to record the first take of *Lights of Old Santa Fe.*

At approximately 1:05pm the band begins to play, only to stop after several bars. Bruce then confirms the count in for the band as being two bars.

Mark: [To everyone] 1, 2, a 1, 2, 3, *"In the dusk…"*

Bruce: Are we doing the front again?

Mark: Yes.

Bruce and Mark perform the intro, Geoff restarts the click, and this time everyone manages to make it through the entire song. As the final chord rings out Mark and Jen are looking at one another smiling.

Please refer to Portfolio of Creative Work: www.marksholtez.com/portfolio – Take 1 – *Lights of Old Santa Fe (*raw recording)

Mark: [Enthusiastically to the band] Come in guys and let's have a listen to make sure everyone digs what we're hearing, and then we can chase down THE ONE.

Mark: [Smiling to the band as they enter the control room] That's a good start.

John: [To Geoff] Suddenly I was more aware of my snare drum than I have been before. Nothing would have changed from earlier?

Geoff: No, I don't think so.

Bruce: [To everyone] This was the first time I'd heard my headphone mix with the band and I was thinking, oh what an awful mix I've made.

The room fills with laughter.

Geoff: [To Bruce, gesturing towards the computer] When you get back to your station, we can play this [alluding to the recorded first take] and you can have another tweak while you're not playing.

Once everyone is settled, Geoff plays back the recording of Take 1. John stands at the rear of the room. Mark crouches at the console, positioned between the

monitors, critically listening to both the performance and the technical aspects of the recording. The rest of the band are seated along the rear wall of the studio, facing the console. There's absolutely no talking during playback, and as the final chord fades out, the room stays surprisingly quiet for several seconds before anyone moves or speaks. Mark stands up and turns to face the band inviting reflection and input on what they have just heard.

> **John:** [To Mark, referring to his snare drum part] I'm thinking less swish. Like, it just seems like it's too much throughout the whole thing. When I started just playing brushes, it seems, yeah, to open it up more. Cause there's a lot going on with everyone.
>
> **Mark:** Sure
>
> **John** [to Jen]: I don't know, what did you think?
>
> **Jen:** Yeah, I'm pro less swish.
>
> **John:** Less swish.
>
> **Jen:** I'm always pro more space. So …
>
> **John:** I might try …
>
> **Jen:** but I like how lazy it is … a lot
>
> **John:** Yeah
>
> **Mark:** [To everyone] Anything else?
>
> **John:** I'm just wondering, maybe I'll chuck a blob of paper on the snare to make it, it could even be like a lower sound [Miming hitting the snare drum].
>
> **Geoff:** Yeah sure.
>
> **John:** That's what I was thinking yeah.
>
> **Mark:** Ok.

> **Non-traditional approaches:**
>
> One of the influencing factors for including John as a collaborator in this project is his propensity for sonic exploration, often resulting in non-traditional approaches to the drum kit. Here we see him altering the sound of the snare drum using paper, and later in the project he can be heard dropping coins into a metal salad bowl to add a unique sonic colour to the rhythm section of *Piensa En Mi*.

Bruce: [To Mark] Do you want those altered chord kicks after the little pause thing. The little breakdown, the G7 just about to turn around. I've been doing like a sharp 5 or something. Do you want me to lay out of that and let the lyric be itself?

Mark: [Indecisively to Bruce]: Yeah maybe. Yeah maybe.

Bruce: Ok cool. Also, the end, do you want us all in, all out, do you want us all to kind of figure it out?

Mark: At the very end?

Bruce: Yeah, right at the end on those last chords, it's the last two really, but last three potentially.

Mark: I think everybody needs to be in.

Bruce: Ah ha.

Mark: Essentially what happened there in the first take.

Bruce: [Creating a flowing gesture with his hands] You're ok for it to just kinda…

Mark: I think so.

Bruce: Ok, cool.

Mize: Yeah, I think the languid lazy thing is the right feel. Not perfection. Yes?

Danny: But we sort of need to time it.

Bruce: [Acknowledging Danny's comment] There's a certain amount of synchronicity that needs to occur even in a messy thing, but we can work on that.

Mark: [Gesturing to the studio speakers to indicate what was just recorded] That's not far from it already.

Bruce: Ok, it might have been our immense skill, or dumb luck, or a combo of both.

Mark: Well, let's find out.

Bruce: If your happy to go with it then sure.

Jen: Your immense skill, with dumb luck.

Bruce: My immense dumb skill.

Everyone is now laughing out loud, and the overall vibe appears to be extremely positive.

Bruce: Ok, I don't think there was anything else.

Mark: [To Bruce] Can we just go in now and go for the bed and then we'll deal the *rubato* section after?

Bruce: Yeah, yeah of course.

Mark: That'll be the go.

John: The beginning or the end?

Mark: Yeah, the beginning.

John: Ok

John: [To Mark and Jen] While you're in here and listening, I'll just try a couple of drum sounds and just see if they tickle your fancy or not.

Danny: [Privately to Bruce] So Bruce, I'm gonna finish on that 6th ok [Referring to colouring the final chord with the added 6th degree of the scale]

Bruce: Great, I can play a 6 if you want.

Danny: [Again to Bruce] How did you get through Am to D9 [handing Bruce a guitar]?

Bruce: [Demonstrating chord voicings] I'm playing that Am, and D7/A.

Danny: [Taking the guitar back] Sounds like um, what's his name, Barny Kessel.

Geoff: [To Mark, at the same time as Bruce and Danny are talking in the rear of the room] Mark, with all these different takes, do you want me to use different playlists or? Different playlists might be better. At least they'll sort of line up if you want to do a comp.

Mark: for the ones …

Geoff: I mean I can help with any comping you need.

Mark: I've got that covered.

Geoff: If we're not starting in the same spot …

Mark: Just linear maybe, unless were responding to something, cause some of the songs will have a detailed tempo map. We'll do those in playlists.

Geoff: Yeah, yeah, sure.

…

Geoff: [To anyone still in the control room] Who doesn't use keyboard shortcuts in Pro Tools? You can tell 'cause they don't change this stupid keyboard setting. I've got all sorts of things going on.

…

Mark: [To Bruce, who is now preparing to return to his booth] You cool Bruce?

Bruce: Yeah, we doing it again?

Mark: We're getting there. John's just getting…

Mize: John's gonna figure out something.

Bruce: As much time as I can spend out of the poky room, I'm in to.

Mark: [Nodding to Bruce in agreement] Yeah of course

…

Mark: [To Danny as he sits quietly at the rear of the control room] Are you comfortable Danny?

Danny: Yeah, I'm good. I'm just fading, so I'm just having a breather.

Mark [To Ayden]: Maybe we should organise some food? Ayden, do you want to make a pizza run?

Ayden: Sure can.

Danny: You know there is Turkish pizza down the road.

Food:

As a producer, it's important to keep an eye on the overall energy levels of the musicians, and make sure you look for appropriate times to break. I also like to use these breaks as a chance for the band to socialise together. Especially at the beginning of a project, where it can help to accelerate the sense of comraderie and the emergence of a shared creative intention. It is also worth noting that Danny has a long history of health issues that can impact his stamina and so an awareness of the varying needs and capacities of all participants is important.

The food conversation continues in the background, while John begins to play drums, testing out drum sounds. As John hits the snare drum, Mark makes eye contact with him through the glass, giving him a thumbs up.

Geoff: [To John] That's just sheets of A4 is it?

John: Oh mate, It's how many sheets of A4.

Geoff: [laughing] Right, that's what I'm going for. I want to know.

John: If I revel it to you…

Geoff: Is there a difference between folded and ...

John: Yeah!

Geoff: What about 80gsf or 90gsf?

John: Now you're talking

Geoff: What about origami paper?

Peer to peer learning:

One of the great things to observe in these collaborative environments is the exchange of ideas and information that regularly happens between participants. Underpinning this playful exchange, we see a genuine interest from the engineer to acquire the practical details of the paper on snare technique that John is experimenting with. There have also been similar exchanges between Bruce and Danny around chord voicings, as well as more general conversations throughout the setup about approaches to microphone placement, room acoustics, guitar construction, amplifier preferences, etc. Even without the resulting musical outcome, this collaborative, creative environment provides a range of benefits to its participants.

John: I've just loosened off the snare wires too, so they've got like a …

Geoff: Ah right, it sounds really detuned. Its good.

Time management:

The band are taking quite a while between this first and second take, and while it might be tempting to try to speed this process up, in the early stages of the process I want to ensure there is enough space for individuals to explore different sounds and ideas. It is important to recognise that there is significant

> progress to be made in the moments between takes when musicians have the time to try new things. Time spent here getting everything to sound and feel right will also help to make the rest of the session run more smoothly and efficiently.

Bruce and AJ are now back in the live room, and both are playing different parts of the song, experimenting with chord voicings, melodic lines, and various rhythmic figures.

Danny and Jen, still seated at the rear of the control room, chat about the origins of Danny's National guitar, however the conversation is somewhat masked by the sound of the band working on parts and sounds.

Mark: [To Danny and Jen, as the rest of the band appear to be ready] Shall we go hit it?

Danny: OK

Danny re-joins the rest of the band in the live room, and everyone prepares themselves to record another take.

Geoff plays the recorded first take so the band can adjust their individual headphone mixes, while privately, Mark and Jen briefly discuss considerations for workflow to save time and in turn provide some additional creative options during post-production.

As the band continues to adjust their headphone mixes, Mark and Jen discuss using a click and how it will allow them to use multiple takes of Danny's dobro to curate a master track that includes the best of the various ideas across multiple takes of the songs. Mark explains that it will ultimately mean they don't need a perfect take from Danny and that the goal will be to get a cohesive performance from the drums and bass (and maybe Bruce's rhythm guitar) and then deal with the rest in post-production.

Geoff: [To the band] We've got click track on straight away, so I guess Mark will count us in once we're rolling. Are we good to go? Alright. Here it comes.

Geoff starts the click track and the band records the entire song for the second time, excluding the *colla voce* introduction.

Please refer to Portfolio of Creative Work: www.marksholtez.com/portfolio – Take 2 – *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (raw recording)

Mark: [To everyone, as Geoff stops recording] Can we just jump in and do another one straight on the back of that? It's feeling really good.

Staying in the moment:

While Take 2 was problematic in places, the overall shape and intention was good. Immediately following this with another take will ensure the band do not lose their focus, in turn preserving the creative flow.

Geoff: [To Mark, referring to stopping the click track a few bars before the end of the song] Do you want it off at the C chord, the click track, on the last time?

Mark: Ah yeah.

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Technical considerations:

Stopping the click here will allow for the last couple of chords to be played more freely, slowing down from the established tempo.

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The band begins to play a few bars of the first verse.

Mark: [To everyone] Cool. Gee that's feeling great guys.

Geoff: Ok, here we go [Starting the click once more].

The band plays another full take, Take 3, and on completion, AJ says something that is not quite audible.

Please refer to Portfolio of Creative Work: www.marksholtez.com/portfolio
– Take 3 – *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (raw recording)

Mark: [To AJ] What did you say then AJ?

AJ: I just felt like I was having a tendency to push a little bit.

Mark: [To everyone] Is it worth a listen, or do you want to just do one more?

Bruce: One more.

Danny: I'm happy to do another one.

John: Yeah.

Mark: Ok, great.

Geoff: Are we good to go?

Mark: [To the Band] The flavour is lovely though.

Mark: [To Geoff] Ok, let's do it.

Geoff: Ok, here it comes.

The start of Take 4 is abandoned after only four bars because AJ hadn't begun to play.

AJ: I thought I'd turned the vocals down a bit, but I'd actually turned them down a lot.

Geoff: Right, good to go? Alright, here we go.

Mark counts in Take 4 again, but again the band stops after several bars.

Bruce: Sorry, something weird happened in that first couple of beats.

Geoff: [Starting the track again] Here we go.

The band finally plays another full take and there is a faint creaking sound being picked up in the microphones as the last chord rings.

Please refer to Portfolio of Creative Work: www.marksholtez.com/portfolio –Take 4 – *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (raw recording)

Mark: [Vocalising the unwanted creaking sound] Creaky creak.

Jen giggles.

Mark: [To the band] Worth a listen?

John: Yeah.

Mark: Come on in.

Mark: [To Geoff] What is that, Take 4?

Geoff: Take 4, yeah.

It's approximately 1:15pm and things appear to be progressing quite quickly now.

Danny: [To Mark and Jen, as he enters the control room] That was my worst one that last one.

Jen: [To Danny] Well the beauty of the click track is we can go and comp.

Mark: [to Danny] We can always put you in over that pass if you want to do another take with that same rhythm track

Jen: Do another pass with just you.

…

Bruce: [As he enters the room, to Mark] Did you find one that you liked?

Mark: Well, the last one felt the best I thought.

John: Yeah.

Mark: But Danny was just saying that it was his least favourite.

Bruce: Oh yeah, just have another crack.

Danny: Yeah.

John: Just take an earlier one [miming the physical act of cutting and pasting]

Danny: That's it, yeah just steal another one [laughing].

Geoff starts playback without any further discussion and the band falls quiet as they reflect on the previous take. As the last chord is played, Danny begins to laugh.

John: Did you get the memo?

Bruce: [To Mark and Jen] That's fine for me.

Mark: Everyone happy there?

AJ: [Unconvincingly] I think it's fine. I don't know. I think do another one and see what happens.

Mark: [To AJ] Well Danny was going to play over that again anyway so everyone else might as well be in there playing.

Geoff: [To everyone] It's the same form, we can always grab the whole thing.

…

Danny: I was just being too wary. You know, I'm really noisy. I'm tapping my foot and I'm hitting the thing. It's this really quiet delicate song, so I was just being too cautious. You know what I mean.

Geoff: [To Danny] We might be able to find a carpet mat to tap your foot on if you want … or take your shoes off.

Danny: Or I could just not tap my foot.

Geoff: No, take your shoes off.

Bruce: [Confidently] I was happy enough with that one but…

John: I'm happy enough to go and do it again.

Mark: One thought from me if we do another one. The second B section; maybe we don't make the last ii V I as empty. Maybe we play through that.

Bruce: Danny, put Danny doing something in there.

Danny: I could play slide through it.

Bruce: I mean, if you wanna do another one, I'm happy to play more shit.

Mark. Let's just go in and do one more.

AJ: Maybe it's just my part. Maybe it's getting to me. It's getting quite stale.

Bruce: Oh really

AJ: I don't know, maybe I need a couple of bent notes or something?

Bruce: I like what it sounds like

Mark: Let's just do one.

Bruce: It's meant to be that thing you know. To me at least.

Danny: I think it sounds really nice. Yeah.

AJ: It sounds great, I just need to put in a couple a little colours.

Mark: [As the band start moving back to the live room] Ok let's go.

…

Danny: [To Mark and Jen, after the rest of the musicians have left the room] Am I being too busy through it? Should I just stay out and just come in every now and then? Are you noticing anything?

Mark: I reckon you could be more sparse in the intro and more present as it goes on?

Danny: Later, yeah. Cool. Ok.

…

Geoff: [To Danny] One thing that I'm thinking of changing is I don't have a compressor on you. Not that I'm compressing everything hard, but just a titch, and it really feels like there's a wide dynamic between your verse stuff and your solo.

Danny: I'm doing that on purpose.

Geoff: I know but bringing the compressor in might help with that slight colour change as well, just to give it a bit more…

Danny: If I don't do that…

Geoff: No, if I give it just some slight compression, it won't hit it in your verse, and the solo will just touch it, so it might be worth just spending 30 seconds putting that on, but it will change the sound quality compared to the other takes.

Mark: Let's not do it then.

Keeping options open:

I want to ensure there is a consistent sound across all takes in the event I need to combine ideas from multiple takes. For that reason, it will be better to wait until the next song to alter the sound of any individual instruments.

Geoff: Ok, we'll do it for the next one.

The band are now all in place again and are starting to make some noise.

Geoff: [Referring to the woodblocks that I brough to the session, made from coconuts, and often used to approximate the sound of a horse clip clopping] I thought you were getting the coconuts John.

Jen: There's plenty of time for coconuts.

…

John: Can you hear me Mark?

Mark: Yep.

John: What I might to do in the B section is this [playing a slight alteration to the drum feel].

Mark: Yep, that's hip.

Thought:

Even though we have a take that is usable, and recording subsequent takes is largely going to be about Danny and AJ landing on something they are more comfortable with, offering an opportunity to try again with the entire band

Mark: [To everyone] Alright kiddies!

Geoff checks with each individual musician to see if they are ready before starting the click for Take 5 and again the band plays though the song in its entirety. This time however, Geoff leaves the click playing through the last few bars where the band deviates from the strict tempo. Geoff had been turning off the click track to allow the last couple of bars to be more rhythmically free, however forgot to do that during this most recent take.

Please refer to Portfolio of Creative Work: www.marksholtez.com/portfolio – Take 5 – *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (raw recording)

Mark: [To the band] We weren't too thrown by the click in the end?

Geoff: Sorry I was getting into it.

Bruce: I preferred the last one anyway.

No pressure:

At this point I am hearing lots of usable ideas from Danny but still considering doing just one more to give me a few extra options to compile together.

Like Bruce, I am also still leaning towards Take 4 as the core rhythm track, but with everyone feeling there is already a solid usable take in the can, I am eager to see if this removal of pressure has an impact on the overall feel of one more full take.

Mark: Anyone else?

AJ: I though there were a couple of bits of mine that were better.

Danny: I had a better one then.

Jen: Yeah, your solo was great there Danny.

John: I tried some different things that time.

Bruce: I just played some dumb shit.

Mark: I liked what was going on with John.

Bruce: We should just do another one like that then.

Mark: Let's just do that then, yeah.

Jen: Yep.

Mark: Yep, thanks guys. Then we'll break for lunch.

…

Geoff: [To Mark and Jen] Sorry about the click. I was transfixed.

Geoff: [To the band] Right here we go.

Geoff starts the click track for Take 6 and the band plays the most together version of the song so far.

Please refer to Portfolio of Creative Work: www.marksholtez.com/portfolio – Take 6 – *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (raw recording)

Mark: Groovy! Does everyone feel good about that?

Bruce: Yeah, I'm done

Mark: Can you stay put Bruce and we'll grab the front [referring to the guitar and vocal intro section of the song]? Maybe just let AJ out.

Bruce: How busy do you want it? Do you want it just real minimal?

Mark: Yeah, really minimal. Nothing too spicy in the harmony either.

Chord colours:

I'm mindful of the line that this project will draw between jazz and country and for this tune I like the idea of it not leaning too far in either direction, so thinking about chord colours and voicing in the intro will be important. Keeping the majority of the harmony simple will maintain a more stylistically neutral sound and feel.

Mark: Is AJ through?

Bruce: Not quite.

Bruce: Do you just want to sing it one time Mark?

Mark: [Singing] *"See that purple mountain…"*

Bruce: "Purple" is one [referring to the word "purple" falling on beat one of the bar]?

Mark: "See" is one, but if you play the chord, I'll back phrase the first line.

Mark and Bruce rehearse the opening and solidify a few additional areas of the melodic and harmonic rhythm.

Bruce: Is that the sort of thing you're looking for?

Mark: Yep, that's it.

Bruce: Alright, you wanna do it?

Mark: Yep.

Geoff signals to Mark that he is rolling.

Bruce: Are we going?

Mark: Yep.

Mark and Bruce successfully perform the intro.

Bruce: You want another one?

Mark: Yeah, let's do one more.

Jen: [Enthusiastically] Do one more, but that one was pretty damn good.

Bruce: Ok, here we go.

Mark and Bruce perform the intro again.

Jen: I like that one better.

Mark: Ok, we've got it Bruce.

Mark: [To everyone] Lets have some lunch!

Jen: Well done fellas. Everybody!

Executive decision:

Interestingly, prior to recording the final vocals and adding organ and additional electric guitar at Misty Mountain Sound studios, Mark and Jen reviewed all six takes and decided to use Take 5 as the core rhythm section bed. Some very minor edits were made to the bass, drums and acoustic guitars from Take 5,

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while several takes of the resonator guitar tracks were compiled together to create one master track.

3.9.   Where to from here?

The remainder of the session proceeded similarly, with only a few moments sitting outside the workflow described above. *Cool Water* saw the band adding to an *a capella* vocal arrangement that Jen and I had pre-recorded. There were also three songs, *My Rifle My Pony and Me*, *Red River Valley*, and *The Black Hills of Dakota*, that when performing acoustically for the musicians, it was suggested that my guitar parts should sit central to the arrangement, and so I joined the rest of the musicians during the live tracking. This was especially key to the recording of *The Black Hills of Dakota*, where Jen's vocal performance and my guitar dominate the musical arrangement.

Final lead and background vocals, additional electric guitars, keyboards, and percussion tracks were later recorded at Misty Mountain Sound (Toowoomba, QLD). Additionally, several other musicians asynchronously contributed to the final album, recording remotely in their own home studios.

The artist/producers' intentions were to preserve the integrity of the musical performances as much as possible, however, while no editing occurred as part of the initial band tracking sessions, as outlined above, the resulting recordings underwent some minor editing in post-production.

While there were no instances where edits were made at a whole band level, i.e., changing the form of a song by repositioning entire sections of a particular take, or creating an arrangement by comping together entire sections from multiple takes of the same song, some very minor editing occurred at an individual instrument level on most songs. For bass, drums, and rhythm guitars, this was simply to address any inconsequential rhythmic inconsistencies. Where guitars were playing more of a melodic role, contributing a solo or melodic fills, some comping between multiple takes of the same song were made to build a definitive composite performance. At times, this also included the removal of certain musical contributions to create more space in the arrangement. This was especially true for the resonator guitar and pedal

steel performances, where Danny deliberately contributed more than required with this editing process in mind. With respect to the song *Home on the Range*, Danny's entire acoustic guitar track was ultimately edited out of the arrangement in post-production to create space for an alternate guitar performance by James Sherlock. For any overdubbed musical material, including vocals, performances were rendered as whole takes with musicians performing the song in its entirety as if part of the original live band. Again, edits were made to those performances only to address minor inconsistencies in rhythm and/or pitch where necessary, with an aim to preserve the integrity and feel of the performance. For the sake of clarity, limiting the amount of post-production editing done to the recorded musical performances was purely an aesthetic production choice made by Jen and I, based on personal preference, and is in no way a superior approach to any of the conceivable alternatives. Where this project was concerned, edits were made where required.

The manipulation of recorded material in post-production is a feature of most modern music productions, and as described earlier in this paper, was a consideration in this projects design from the outset, informing the projects use of Avid Pro Tools, and the selection of a studio space that would provide the necessary levels of isolation for the musicians. For this project, as exemplified in the above description of the case, having the capacity to edit individual musical contributions independently of the group was extremely important in managing time, cost, and ultimately maintaining a creative flow.

Finally, for the sake of clarity, this post-production editing process is most definitely a creative and collaborative one, and while important to the realisation of the final creative work, sits outside of the focus of the research undertaken for this project, with this project instead concentrated on the in-the-moment aspects of musical collaboration between the participating musicians.

CHAPTER 4: THE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

Drawing from the analysis of interview data, the following discussion aims to help contextualise the recording processes discussed above and the experiences of the participating musicians. While the preceding description of the case focused primarily on offering detail and insight into the *what* and *when* of the recording process, based on insights offered by the participating musicians themselves, the goal here is to consider *why* the recording proceeded the way it did, *how* this collaborative creative process was experienced by each of the musicians, and in turn, consider the factors that informed and influenced their creative decisions and their overall impression of this method of practice.

Interviews were undertaken with all five of the musicians present during the initial band recording at QUT Skyline Recording Studios (Brisbane, QLD), along with one additional musician, Nathan Seiler, who later contributed piano and organ to several tracks on the album at Misty Mountain Sound (Toowoomba, QLD). Interviews were conducted in the week following the recording sessions. Jen Mize and Bruce Woodward were interviewed in person, while the remainder of the participant interviews were undertaken via online video conferencing. The recorded audio from these interviews was transcribed in its entirety. Analysis of the collected interview data was then undertaken using a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021) with the key themes and insights presented in the ensuing narrative.

4.1. Notions of creativity and collaboration

Chapter 1 of this thesis highlights some fundamentally problematic ideas around the nature of creativity and the tendency for many artists and musicians to favour an overly romantic view of the creative act and what influences it (Campelo, 2015; DeZutter & Sawyer, 2009; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Lashua & Thompson, 2016; McIntyre, 2008, 2012; Sawyer, 2017; Williams, 2010). While participants in this study had different ways of describing that initial act of creative generation, from instinctive and intuitive, to improvised and mysterious, there was an important and rather conspicuous second layer to these explanations where all participants converged in a shared acknowledgment of what they felt informed those in-the-moment creative choices. In their own way, all participants acknowledge what Fritz

(1994) referred to as a "balance of the intuitive and the rational" (p. xx), with notions of "intuitive talent" (McIntyre, 2008, p. 40) ultimately giving way to a more critical inflection of creativity (Batey & Furnham, 2006; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Rickards, Runco, & Moger, 2009; Sawyer, 2012; Weisberg, 2006).

While Danny states, "I'm just going completely off my instincts" he also adds, "straight off the cuff, when they press record and we've counted in, how free can you be in that moment? That takes a lot of practice." Similarly, Nathan suggests, "It's mysterious, it's exciting, it's scary, it's frustrating, it's everything all at the same time", but also acknowledges that "it's an intuitive process based on decades of study and practice" and when you are called to contribute to a particular musical scenario, "you just access all of those past experiences." Comparably, Jen describes creativity as an informed intuitive act, supported by "what you've done, what you've heard, what you've taken in" while AJ simply states, "You practice to develop your intuition." In all of these examples we see an acknowledgement of the ongoing practice and experience that informs the intuitive aspects of music making.

Interestingly, Bruce takes the notion of creativity's reliance on practice and experience even further, proposing, "for myself it's listening to music but not casually listening to music. It's deeply trying to understand how music might work, what each part of the music does and how it serves the function of the whole. Having ideas about music and the way music might sound good, because there are lots of different ways for music to sound good," and that while "everybody listens to lots of music … For me it's what you do after that … Do you have any ideas about music? Have you made any decisions about what you think might work and might not work? Do you have anything to offer as a result of your listening?" These insights from Bruce exemplify Lashua & Thompson's (2016) proposition that "creative practices occur at the confluence of an individual (musician, engineer or record producer), a knowledge system (domain), and a social organisation that understands and applies this knowledge system (field)" (p. 75) and how for Bruce, this model of creativity might be practically actioned by the professional musician through something as seemingly rudimental as listening to music .

Now, if the creative process, as described by the participants of this study, is directly powered by the skill and experience of the musicians themselves–what they have listened to, practiced, and lived–then through this lens we can perhaps begin to

challenge other commonly-held ideas around the creative act and what it means to be creative.

Is creativity an act of invention–making something out of nothing–where through a succession of creative choices, the creative artefact materialises? Or does the creative act move in the opposite direction? Do we begin the process with everything, then by way of negotiation, transform what started out as open and infinite, into something fixed and potent?

4.2.   Enabling and empowering collaborative creativity

As Lefford (2015) submits, new ideas and new music are co-developed within the recording studio space out of the collaborative efforts of the assembled experts. Then, if a base level of skill and experience provides a foundation from which to perform, further experience and skill then opens the sonic palette of possibilities, providing new avenues and ways to move in collaboration. More skill and more experience leads to greater creative potential, therefore we can amplify the creative potential of a particular project by way of collaboration. By inviting the contribution of others, we can vastly influence the breadth and depth of creative possibilities. This alone serves to highlight the potential value that collaboration can bring to a project. In consideration of this value, John submits, "I can play multiple different instruments, and I do, but it's not the same as playing with a bunch of really amazing musicians and creating something with other people … coming at it from their unique perspective."

Maximising the potential of collaboration in the context of the recording studio requires careful planning and guidance (Sawyer, 2007). To allow for genuine collaboration to occur, as indicated by the findings of this investigation, there are a number of important factors that need to be present. "First of all, there's the environment", suggests Bruce. "I mean if you go in and it's a nice, relaxed environment, in terms of everybody's mood or the feeling in the room, you can get the tone. It can either be a comfortable or uncomfortable place right from walking into the space." While this touches on the importance of the interpersonal environment, it also prompts us to consider how physical space also plays an important part, as noted by Danny, saying, "the studios are so well appointed, I think that kind of adds to the concentration levels, the excitement of it all, the inspiration." Jen ties these two

ideas together affirming, "I'm as finicky about recording spaces as I am about choosing the people I work with … So much of it is based on vibe, if a room is sterile and cold, you're going to get sterile and cold music." Goold & Graham (2019) propose that the "quality of space and creativity are commonly linked" and that it is fair to assume "the more comfortable an artist is, the better they will perform" (P. 1).

While environment plays some part in establishing the "vibe", as suggested by Jen, the interpersonal aspects of collaboration run far deeper. For Gibson (2005), it is the physical space that facilitates the coming together of the recording environment, the creative potential of the musicians, and the producer's capacity to inspire, suggesting that creativity can be enhanced by meaningfully altering certain environmental conditions (Csikszentmihalyi,1997; Goold & Graham, 2019).

Looking beyond the producer's capacity to inspire, as indicated by Csikszentmihalyi (1997), Gibson (2005), and Goold & Graham (2019), insights obtained through the making of *Twilight on the Trail* suggest successful collaboration requires a willingness from the artist/producer to provide a space where the musicians feel supported and encouraged to contribute openly and fully. As Jen notes, "You as the artist or producer have to make it a really safe space for [the musicians] to give their ideas and to be able to execute ideas". On this AJ adds, "It's a balancing act of egos. It's creating a good environment to let everybody do what they do," and "pretty early on you said that you wanted everyone to go in and do their thing, everyone was here for a reason, and that was comforting … that enables me to focus on what I think the music needs rather than what I think the artist wants."

On the inclusion of guitarist Danny Widdicombe in the project, Jen recalls, "it was important to (a) have him on the project, but (b) make him aware that he's being asked to do this project because I trust and believe in what he can do." Danny in turn states, "It was made clear at the start that we were all chosen to be a part of the project because of what we do outside of this project. So that made me feel comfortable to just do what I do." This is reiterated by AJ, saying, "Like you said when we walked in … each individual is there for a reason and their input is valued as much as their playing is." These insights exemplify the importance of considering what Taylor (2016) described as the "decision making hierarchy", and collaborations reliance on "relationships where decision-making is shared" (p. 567), reminding the artist/producer of the significance of inviting and empowering musicians to participate in those shared creative decisions.

Beyond the participating musicians having permission to contribute freely and authentically, and for the artist/producer to possess the capacity and willingness to facilitate these considerations, this research indicates that it is also important to ensure the musicians have the time to explore ideas. To expect things will always happen fast, and that ideas will arrive fully formed, undermines the creative process and the resulting creative product. "For me it's about when to speak, when not to speak, when to encourage, when to let people go down the rabbit hole", says Jen. On this, John recalls, "It was really good having that give and take, so first of all, the time and space to be able to go, okay, I'm just going to try a couple of things on this … It definitely felt like a safe space to try things". Additionally, John noted that as a consequence of budget and availability he often had to work much more quickly when in the studio, so for him, this project "felt like a luxury, being able to spend that amount of time on the tunes." AJ in turn reflects on the value of time, but more specifically being afforded time to continue to peruse an idea even after the band has already captured a suitable full take, offering, "I think that's where you discover things. There's a level of comfort when you've got a take, so trying to beat the take, I think there's good music to be discovered in that head space."

When thinking about how to facilitate an environment that promotes collaboration and creativity, it is also important to consider the "social and interactional processes among the musicians" (Sawyer, 2012, p. 231) and the impact relationships between participants have on the processes and outcomes. In the case of this project, the level of familiarity between participants, personally and professionally, was greatly varied. While the project included musicians I have known and worked with consistently for over a decade, it also included Danny, whom I had never met prior to the first day of recording. The relationships among the musicians themselves were similarly varied, offering several interesting and practical insights.

"It's about choosing the right people, it's about knowing the people you've chosen and how they can be and how comfortable they are with you, with each other. Sometimes throwing a new person into that mix … That can spark something different out of someone you've been working with for a long time.", says Jen. When considering her pre-existing personal and professional relationship with me, Jen also notes, "Because you and I have a long history of writing together, and we've been friends for a long time, I feel I'm able to be very frank and honest with you about my

opinions on things." While Jen's comment here deals with the impact of pre-existing relationships on interpersonal communication, John extends this consideration into the musical decision-making process, adding, "having worked with you in the past was a really helpful thing, because at least it gave me a benchmark of where you're at [musically]."

Danny, previously unknown to all the other musicians on this project apart from Jen recalls, "Normally with my bands, I'd be the first one to pipe up and throw ideas around … [but for this project] I wanted to just listen to what everyone else said and then just think about how I can fit in with what all these other people can do." Research suggests, for Danny, there was time needed to establish a place in the project, both interpersonally and musically. Time was needed to consider how and where his unique set of skills and experience might fit into the larger collaborative landscape.

Conversely, on starting from a point of familiarity, Bruce suggests, "You can start from a more readily accessed common starting point if you like, which could be advantageous or detrimental depending on what you're trying to achieve. But I think you do bring a shared sort of personal language or interpersonal language with other people to a project. Now how much that needs to be negotiated away in favour of something new just depends on what you're trying to achieve." AJ similarly considers both sides of this equation, adding, "Being familiar with people can be helpful, but also being unfamiliar can be a good thing at the same time. There's a comfort zone in knowing how somebody plays, but there's also a real beauty in discovering what somebody does at the same time."

It is impossible to remove the relational aspect from collaborative music making, and the dynamic of those relationships will inevitably impact the creative decision-making that occurs in and around a performance. While observations made throughout this project indicate pre-existing relationships have the potential to shortcut those initial moments of creative orientation, there is perhaps a greater opportunity for the unknown and unexpected to occur when relationships are new. Even the addition of one unfamiliar collaborator has the potential to disrupt existing relationship structures and lead the group in an unexpected creative direction. When considering the musicians for a particular project it can be useful to consider whether the goal is to start from an established musical base, or to explore the potential of an entirely new musical recipe.

It is also interesting to look at how relationships might change over the course of a project and how that can influence the creative decision-making process. As Muscle Shoals' producer and owner studio Rick Hall (as cited in Camalier, 2013) surmised, working with the same group of musicians over time promotes a sense of familiarity and comradery that positively impacts the quality of their work. As seen in this project, all the interviewed participants noted some increase in comfort and a sense of 'opening up' creatively as they became more familiar with each other and the music. In consideration of this, the artist/producer might think carefully about the order in which they approach the repertoire for a project, or even consider returning to a particular creative problem at different times throughout a project in search of differing creative solutions.

When discussing creativity more generally, participants of this study all talked about their reliance on skills and experience. As stated by Bruce, these are the things we bring with us to the studio "that aren't guitars and amplifiers". Danny extends this consideration beyond the strictly musical skills and experiences, adding, "it's about your character as well, it's about your life experience. The whole person is involved."

Danny's consideration of "the whole person" exemplifies Williams (2010) definition of the hired studio musician, and the importance of considering not only a musician's particular instrumental skill, but their "unique musical and social personalities" (p. 59). Campello (2015) adds to this idea, proposing, musicians are not only contributing technical expertise, but adding something of themselves to the music. According to the participants of this study, considering who the musicians are–their individual creative practices, technical strengths and limitations, musical educations, personalities–all have an impact on the collaborative dynamic and the resulting musical artefacts. As AJ suggests, "Everything is a factor, even my personality, that's a big thing as a musician. I think people tend to play who they are". For the artist/producer, "being familiar with the capabilities of your personnel, who you have on the project, is massively important" insists Jen. Be it musically or interpersonally, "whether they lighten the mood or darken the mood, all of that is relevant because that is part of the creative process."

Nathan likens his role as musician and artist to that of a collector: "Not somebody who hoards indiscriminately. But the job of an artist is to collect those things that they love and bring them all together. Then that's where you create the

art." Approaching this proposition of the collector from the perspective of the artist/producer, the practice of collecting becomes a particularly useful consideration for the recording studio context. When curating the personnel for a project, we are in essence, assembling an assortment of musicians that we love, and in turn inviting them to bring their own unique, individual collections of ideas, skills, and experiences.

In the context of this project, participants were recruited based on their unique skills, experiences, and particular musical sensibilities. For example, the two guitar players, Bruce and Danny, come from very different musical backgrounds, with Bruce's practice grounded in the traditions of early jazz guitar, and Danny's in country and Americana music. When selecting a drummer for the project, John's commitment to improvised music, along with a tendency to favour a somewhat non-traditional approach to playing drums, were both key in Jen's and my decision-making. AJ in turn was employed for his ability to work across genres, and his tendency to favour simplicity. Unsurprisingly, most of these particular attributes are conspicuously present in the final creative work. While it would be impossible to predict the specific musical details that an individual might bring, this highlights the importance of the recruitment process and the role it plays in defining the overall musical flavour of a project. The reflections highlighted here add important context to Williams (2010) proposition that the creative choices made by studio musicians are highly informed by "their own aesthetic criteria" (p. 70), and an open and deliberate application of their personal and musical sensibilities. For the producer, when considering personnel for a particular project, it is therefore important to not only ask the question, can this musician do the job, but when given the freedom to contribute fully and authentically, will they do the job?

When discussing how the skills, experiences, and sensibilities of the individual impacted on the music made for this project, Bruce notes, "I drew on that [jazz] skillset for 80% of what I did. It was far more craft than it was artistry at that point. I made choices about what to play but the role, in that context, I drew very much on that experience." John's experimentation with drum sounds, as highlighted in the description of the actual recording session earlier in this thesis, and/or Danny's Chet Atkins inspired guitar playing on tracks like *Ridin' Down the Canyon* and *There's a New Moon Over My Shoulder,* further evidence this observation.

Throughout these conversations, it was also made expressly clear by all participants that the technical capacity to realise creative ideas was not to be underestimated. As indicated by John, "You have to have some amount of technical proficiency for an idea to come out sonically how you're imagining it in your head". Bruce builds on this observation by drawing on his education experience, adding, "Well, we've all met folks in our jobs as teachers who have great ideas about music but can't translate them and can't communicate them via their instrument". Jen neatly ties this point back to the notion of creativity's reliance on options, suggesting, "Being technically proficient at something just gives you more available choices, more ways of doing and executing things."

Interestingly, Danny highlights that while he brings a certain level of expertise on the guitar, he was also contributing pedal steel guitar to the recordings, an instrument he had only recently begun to explore, conceding, "Musicality for me comes from my abilities. So, my lack of ability might actually dictate some of the [musical choices]," and that "my limited ability on the pedal steel definitely dictates what music I'm making on the pedal steel."

Depending on the context, technical limitations may yield interesting and welcome musical results, however, it is worth noting that simply placing unfamiliar instruments in the hands of non-musicians is not likely to result in anything productive. It's also important to recognise that an expert musician, even when playing a relatively unfamiliar instrument, still approaches that instrument with a highly nuanced understanding of the music itself and what is required more broadly to serve that music.

When discussing the strengths and weaknesses of individual participants, it's also important to consider how different musicians might favour distinct methods of practice. For collaboration to proceed, one needs to consider different ways of working in order to enable and capture the best of all participating musicians. For example, some musicians rely largely on their aural skills, therefore working from detailed charts may not be ideal. Some musicians are able to immediately locate their ideas on their instrument, while other require time to work out exactly how to best articulate those musical contributions. The most obvious comparison here might be the two guitar players engaged in this project, Bruce and Danny, as outlined earlier in this discussion. To this, Bruce explains, "I think that [Danny] worked differently, but not because it was any better or any worse, he just plays differently–

he plays music in a different way". When asked if these differences in approach between participants had an impact on the overall creative workflow, Jen explains, "It could have if we hadn't been aware that was going to be the process, if we hadn't been open to that." When working collaboratively, the artist/producer is tasked with the responsibility to plan for and respond to these different ways of working, and where possible, to allow a variety of different approaches to co-exist as part of the creative process. This aligns with Sawyer's (2017) inference that it is important to plan and guide these collaborative moments in order to maximise the likelihood of a successful outcome.

When discussing skills, experience, and sensibilities, it is also important to look beyond the musicians as individuals, and consider what is required at a group level for collaboration to proceed. Successful collaborative music making requires its participants to possess an ability and willingness to negotiate. This ability to consider personal contributions in the context of the larger collective work, and the willingness and capacity to change, refine, or even retract one's own input is key to collaborative success. It is through the act of negotiation that creativity is collectively realised (Sawyer, 2012).

As indicated by Bruce, "no matter what you say about what you want to do, you've got to negotiate with these people that are making noise with you." As Bruce outlines, the collaborating musician is not only looking for ways to make music that "the leader is okay to accept", but they are actively negotiating their place in the music. "If you're in a position where people want to hear what you're playing on their record you've got to find a place." Bruce's reflection here adds important music specific context and insight into what Wood and Gray (1991) outline as an engagement in the necessary "interactive" processes required for collaboration, informed by a shared understanding of the problem, its "rules, norms, and structures" (p. 146). To this, Bruce adds, "Sometimes you've got to negotiate between what the charts says, what you think it could be, and what your other [musicians] want to do, and that can be a little dance." Additionally, John explains that even when you have clear ideas about your intended role in the music, once you begin playing as a group, "the stimulus changes", requiring the musicians to respond accordingly. Similarly, AJ proposes, "I might be thinking something and then well go in and start playing, getting a vibe, and it will call for something different. Or the same might happen in reverse. I might play something that requires someone else to rethink what they're

doing." Bruce reinforces these observations, adding, "I try to be considerate of other people's voices in the music, which is to say leaving space for conversation and communication."

While some of this musical negotiation plays out in-the-moment, as the musicians play together, once a general creative direction has begun to emerge, individuals are also practicing a significant amount of pre-emptive self-editing. "I certainly heard things in the music that I had to stop and say well that's not for today and leave that space to someone else" states Bruce. Similarly, John recalls, "There were actually a lot of things that I wanted to try, or at least they came into my mind for a moment, and I thought, hey, that'd be–no, actually, that's not going to make anything better. So, I had already auditioned those things in my mind."

For Danny and Bruce, often both playing guitar, the process of negotiation was frequently concerned with finding distinct roles for each individual–negotiating their function in the music. As Danny recalls, given Bruce's existing expertise as a jazz guitarist, and his considerable knowledge of harmonic theory, Danny often found himself gravitating towards more of a melodic role. As stated by Danny, "Bruce had such a strong hold on that sort of stuff, sometimes I felt like just pulling out and letting him cover that part." Nathan similarly addresses the role his contribution plays in the music, saying, "I suppose I immediately go to a supporting role … My playing in that sense is subservient. It's not about sticking out; it's about trying to fit into a mechanism." In the context of this collaboration, Nathan was adding to the arrangements after the core rhythm section had already been recorded.

While much of the discussion around negotiation was centred around distilling the possibilities and creating space, especially when thinking about the core rhythm section, observations suggest that certain musical contributions can also be compounding in nature, with musicians starting conservatively, and then finding and utilising more musical space as the collaboration develops. As Danny recalls, "For me I felt that I made some pretty safe choices just to make sure I got through it, especially at the start. You know the first take? I'd keep it pretty safe, so I knew where I was going, especially if there were some complicated bits. Then I'd take more chances the more takes we'd do." This perhaps also speaks to the differences in the way various musicians like to work. In this instance, Danny is the one participant who does not consistently play improvised music as part of his regular professional practice.

As evidenced by the observations and experiences of the participants in this project, this process of musical negotiation appears tied to a shared creative intention for the group and the resulting musical work. As asserted by Pullen (2009), separate from the egos of individuals, something extra emerges as a result of this shared creative process, embodying the identity of the group. It seems that here, from out of what Pullen (2009) describes as group identity, we see the emergence of the shared creative intention which then serves as a filter for all subsequent creative choices. While it is important to also acknowledge that the musicians as individuals may have their own personal intentions, it is the commitment to finding that shared intention that seems to allow for genuine collaboration. For the musicians participating in this study, their shared intention was, in its simplest form, a commitment to serving the song and each other. "I try to keep asking what's best for the song," states John. As individuals working as part of a larger collaborative group, maintaining a commitment to serving the music also means "serving the other people who are making the music with you," adds Bruce. "For me the principal–the most important aspect is the song itself … How does it make you feel? What's the emotion and what's the aesthetic?" explains Nathan, and "I think in a great song and a great performance, arrangement, production et cetera, there's a singularity of purpose– one idea and one emotion … It's undeniable when everything comes together to support that."

It may be useful to pause here for a moment and consider that creativity is in no way a linear process. As witnessed in this project, the formulation of creative intentions and the negotiation required to realise them is occurring and reoccurring constantly as the work changes shape in the hands of the various collaborators. This in turn requires musicians to remain open and responsive throughout the creative process. On this, Jen proposes, "Having a clear set of intentions is incredibly important, but I also think that while you may have a clear set of intentions, being rigid in your approach to getting those things is probably death to creativity."

For Danny, there was also a comfort in feeling a sense of clarity around what the group were seeking to achieve, even in the absence of any specific set of musical directions, saying "I think when projects have a clear intention … everyone feels kind of safe within the boundaries."

Interestingly, while both Jen and I, as the project's artists and producers, harboured commercial intentions for the project, ultimately driving some decision-

making around recording budgets and time management, etc., during the actual recording session, these concerns appeared to be absent in the thought processes of the musicians. While Jen contends, "you have to figure out ways to make it the best it can be within the parameters of time and money", AJ states, "It wasn't really something I considered while I was in the studio." Similarly, Danny recalls, "I didn't have to think about any of that stuff with you … I just wanted to make good music." To this, John further adds, "if that was an underlying agenda from you, then I didn't know about it … I didn't think about that at all during the process, and I think if I had to think about that, it wouldn't have been very enjoyable." The reality of being in the recording studio carries a significant financial investment, as was the case for this project. For the individuals responsible for managing that investment, typically the producer, and/or artist, it is not possible to remove budgetary consideration from one's mind when facilitating a project like this. Conversely, for the professional session musician, working in the studio is a source of income, significantly changing the focus. As indicated by the examples above, this offers those participants a greater sense of freedom to simply engage with the task of making the music.

4.3.   On shaping the music

In addition to the various factors that participants identified as enablers for collaboration, several other insights have emerged from the interview data. Of interest to this study are the range of factors that influenced many of the musical decisions made in the studio throughout this project.

Firstly, given that the repertoire selected for this project was comprised of cover songs, songs that were previously written, recorded, and released by other artists, it was interesting to hear the participant's thoughts on whether this influenced their thinking when compared to working with all new original material. Personally, I had initially wondered if musicians would feel that working with existing repertoire somehow limited the creative scope of the project, however, this did not seem to be the case according to the musicians themselves. "I think if our approach had been to just sing the songs down, it could have felt a whole lot less creative," explains Jen. "I think it's highly creative, if not as creative as writing a song from scratch … taking material that's already been done in a certain fashion and then reshaping and remoulding it" adds Nathan. Danny reiterates these sentiments, saying, "It's just

music … I don't care if it's just been written or it's really old music … That had no impact on me whatsoever." Finally, AJ states, "I suppose I didn't really know these songs", but when thinking about the project as whole, adds, "we sort of found a line of being authentic to the music, while making something new at the same time."

A key part of the workflow for this project, and one of the most discussed influences on the musical decision-making for the project was the initial acoustic performances of each song. This is where Jen and I would perform each song in the studio's control room, with a single acoustic guitar and vocals, outlining the general shape and feel of a particular song directly prior to recording it.

From my perspective as artist and producer, the primary rationale for this approach is to eliminate the need for any demo recordings which might unnecessarily influence the creative direction, or in the case of this project, to remove the need to play the original recordings of the songs. For the studio musician working in this fashion, the opportunity for creativity lies primarily in the synchronous co-creation of the musical arrangement. By undertaking that work in pre-production, making demo recordings and in turn asking musician to simply replicate those demos, the opportunity for creative input from the studio musicians is greatly undermined.

Noting again that the material recorded for this project were not new original songs, it was expected that the musicians engaged for this project would be relatively unfamiliar with the bulk of the material selected, or given the vintage of this material, if there were any familiar songs, that they would not be intimately acquainted with the details of the original arrangements, nor would they likely have heard any of these songs for some time.

On the subject of listening to a pre-existing recording, a demo or the original release, Nathan suggests, "You can't unhear it, and you end up trying to replicate it every time." Utilising the original recording or an elaborate demo recording can undermine the group's ability to bring something new to the music. It would however be naive to think that the performance of live acoustic renditions in the studio are not in some way influential. As suggested by the musicians, these initial performances are full of clues that a musician might use to inform where to start. As Jen suggests, "this is a key moment in the process, it's your shortcut … where you don't have to put things into words, because they get it." From the perspective of artist and producer, it is a way of "guiding without someone feeling the hand of the guide on

them," adds Jen. To this, AJ concludes, "You didn't say too much, which was a trust thing I suppose … You just led us to do what we all do naturally."

When considering the absence of these acoustic playthroughs, Bruce proposes, "Well then there'd be a proper bit of negotiation … I mean it would be a shambles I can only assume, for a while." So, in what ways might these acoustic playthroughs actually influence the creative decision-making process? "I think mainly it makes me want to play the song," suggests Danny. Bruce takes a more pragmatic approach here stating, "I think the DNA of what you want from the music pretty strongly exists in those play throughs … you get a sense of the tempo, obviously the rhythmic subdivision–all of those mechanical parts of the music." Interestingly, Bruce also contends that 'those things potentially [give] more away about performance direction" than might be necessary in some circumstances.

For John the absence of a detailed demo, or more specifically, the absence of drums and/or percussion, allows him to lean into his existing practice as an improvisor, saying, "Well, I think it's a fresh way of approaching the song, as though you're hearing it with virgin ears, hearing it for the first time. So just like when you're improvising and someone plays something and you react to that, if you try and replicate that again, it always sounds fake." John however adds that the complexity of the material also plays a part here, adding "If it was something really complicated, then yeah, I'd be probably stressing out if I hadn't heard it before or hadn't seen a chart."

Building on Bruce's idea that the DNA of the music often exists in these initial acoustic performances, John considers the influence of the guitar on his approach to the drums, saying, "I'm listening to that on a microscopic level, whether I like it or not, and just trying to think how I can create a part that's going to work well with what's going on." Similarly, AJ recalls, "There are certain aspects in the way you play a tune, because you are playing solo … there's a beat and there's a groove, and then obviously there's melody. I think your playing sets the scene pretty easily for me. My job is not completely laid out, but the vibe is laid out."

On reflection, the musicians in this project also discussed various ways in which they drew inspiration from the form and structure of the songs themselves. Many of these old cowboy songs share similar musical structures to the typical 32 bar jazz standard. As noted by Bruce, "The songs have a predictable architecture … built around familiar forms with the same sorts of cadential movements that songs

have had throughout the 20th century - familiar in the sense that it's an early mid-20th century popular song". To this Nathan adds, "There's certain chord sequences two-five-ones and things where you think, oh yeah, I see what that is". For John, it was the "inherent simplicity and space built into the tunes, that really lent themselves to a variety of interpretations … having some sort of subject matter that was simple enough to shape."

When discussing the various creative triggers at play during the recording, the musicians also identified different ways their musical choices may have been influenced by a particular song's lyrical content. "I've had a lot to do with instrumental music and trying to portray certain emotions in music, but they're never really specific, because you can't really achieve that with instrumental music … so I find working with lyrics actually really refreshing, because they can be portraying something in a specific realm. So when I hear the tune for the first time and I hear the lyrics for the first time, if something really sticks out, I'll go, ah, I really want to try this on the drums, or I really want this timbre out of the cymbals," says John, adding that when playing instrumental music, "it's so easy to play anything, just because you can, whereas music with lyrics can guide you."

On the topic of responding to a song's lyrics, Nathan confirms, "It's definitely important to me and I've become more aware of it. When I was younger and I just wanted to play and I only listened to instrumentalists like Miles Davis et cetera, I just wanted to play the changes and play great sounding notes. But once you live some life and you start to hear lyrics jump out, you think, oh I can identify with that because I've lived some life, I've had some pain, all of a sudden you can't help but ignore the lyrics because it's the fabric of life."

When considering the importance of understanding what a song is about, taking cues from the lyrics of a songs, AJ submits, "I think that's really important. Not necessarily as important for every instrument, every job … but knowing what a song is about is massively important as a collective."

In light of the examples above, in addition to the chord chart, offering studio musicians a copy of a song's lyrics may enhance opportunities for lyrical narrative to influence musical choice. For the artist/producer, this opens up further avenues to more easily discuss the intentions for a particular performance from a variety of angles, and to explore ways in which these differing considerations might intersect and intertwine in support of one another.

When discussing creative triggers, the participating musicians also commented on the different ways that ideas are communicated in the studio, with personnel exchanging musical ideas in a range of ways, including both abstract and specific musical direction. "When you express things in terms of, oh everything gets a little bit dark and quiet here. Well, I'd much prefer to hear that. That inspires me to try to create feelings and moods," suggests Nathan. While Danny contends, "I also don't mind the, can you play it a bit lazy … But that can get a bit convoluted," and that direction "needs to have a form, there needs to be something there."

Preferences for different modes of communication are also often dependant on the individual, their experience, and their practical knowledge of traditional music theory, as highlighted by Danny, saying, "things like, can you play a six on the top, I know how to do that, I can do all that stuff, but I don't read music every day, so, can you play crotchets and semiquavers here, I have to think about it."

Musical direction also often comes in the form of a specific historical reference. In the case of recording the song *Wand'rin' Star*, Jen made specific reference to another artist as a way of leading the group towards a particular musical outcome. As Jen recalls, "We got to *Wand'rin' Star* and I seeded the band before they went into the room. I said this is Mark's Chet Baker moment, and to me even though it's all in the charts and it's all in the way you sing it, that allows them to go yeah, great, Chet Baker moment, this is probably the most jazz and super, super understated … The thing is, is everyone knows the original version of *Wand'rin' Star* and this is so just the polar opposite of that, but it allows them to do that …That allows them to take on that sensibility, they've listened to those records, they've listened to enough to go oh yeah. Everyone in there, everyone we have in that recording, including Danny who wasn't even a part of that track, he's got a Chet Baker record." Considering this multi modal approach to offering musical direction in the studio gives the artist/producer, and the participating musician, a variety of ways of discussing ideas and shaping the collaboration. From the abstract all the way to specific prescribed musical direction, by considering what and how we communicate in the studio we can ensure there is an appropriate level of scope for interpretation from musicians and that opportunity for genuine collaboration is maintained where appropriate.

Given that the musicians involved in this project all have creative practices that are more heavily anchored in live performance than studio recording–a common

trait of most working musicians–it is also worth touching on the way individual musicians discuss the influence of modern recording technology. Most notably, modern recording technology offers an incredibly powerful set of tools that can be utilised to edit recorded audio. This, together with the fact that each musician was acoustically isolated from one another, afforded me, as producer, the ability to draw from multiple performances of the same song, and where appropriate, to build a definitive version containing the most desirable moments. For this project, the bass, drums, and primary rhythm guitar parts were all taken from a single performance, however, various other contributions often involved some post-production editing. There were also several tracks where one musician might have played several different instruments or contributed multiple parts to a single song from the one instrument.

Reflecting on his experiences working in the studio, and how they compare to working live, John states, "I really loved the recording space, the recording process, because it is so different to live playing. Even if you have your drum set miked up in an amazing way, live, you can't really capture that nuance that you can capture in a recording studio". As for utilising the ability to overdub parts, or to compile parts from different takes, John adds, "I think about that as just another tool. So, I might be playing a certain groove, and I will deliberately leave some space in it, because I know–or at least I think I know that if I overdub some brush swirl action, which will give more of the subdivision, it's going to sound really good." To this Danny adds, "if I know that I've got the verse and the chorus down for example, and then all I have to do is really just get a good solo, then I'm just fluffing around in the chorus and the verse, just in case something different and cool comes up and then I really just want to nail the solo for example. Obviously, you just want to get the whole song in one beautiful take. But because I know that it can be stitched together, it actually frees you up to play different stuff in different places." Here we see practical evidence of how live performance practices have shifted in consideration of the differing performance context, the expected creative outcome, and the affordance of specific technology (Chanan, 1995; Katz, 2004; Zagorski-Thomas, 2010).

4.4. Technical personnel

Finally, after analysing all of the available interview data, I wanted to note the conspicuous absence of any significant reflection from participating musicians about the projects' reliance on the physical equipment–microphones, compressors, equalisers, mixing consoles–used in the studio, or the available digital tools afforded by the use of Avid Pro Tools. As outlined in the project's methodology, the technical aspects of the recording were not a focus for this research, however, when discussing record production with other musicians, the conversation is frequently dominated by *gear talk,* rather than the broader and arguably more important conceptual considerations involved in the creative process. Admittedly, we were working in an extremely well-equipped professional studio, requiring little to no technical compromise. But even when dealing with ideal circumstances, based on my own personal experience, it is not uncommon for the physical equipment to get in the way of the music. Technical hiccups can often disrupt the creative flow. The placement of microphones can feel intrusive, or even impede a musician's physical freedom to play in a way that feels natural to them. Having a bounty of different microphones and signal chains, instruments and amplifiers, can also cause key personnel to become side-tracked by options. Options that while having the capacity to make things sound different, will often ultimately make little to no material difference to the actual creative outcome. For these reasons, as artists and producers, it is important to have technical personnel in the studio that can make the technology disappear. This was certainly the case for this project, with all three technical personnel serving to create a nexus between musician and artist where the mechanism for capturing the musical performances for the most part becomes invisible. A space where the musician's only real concern is for the music.

CHAPTER 5: MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Like the description of the case detailed earlier in Chapter 3, the musical analysis undertaken here will again focus on the first song recorded for the project, *Lights of Old Santa Fe.* This aims to further highlight some of the musical outcomes from this studio collaboration as they appear in the accompanying portfolio of recorded creative work.

To help illustrate the musical details of this discussion, and to allow the reader to investigate further should they wish, two transcriptions are provided as part of the appendices. The first is the chord chart produced for and used during the actual recording session (see Appendix A). The second is a detailed transcription of the final recorded version of the song as it appears on the finished album, *Twilight on the Trail* (see Appendix B).

While it was never the intention of this study to undertake a full musical analysis of the finished recorded work, the work itself is arguably the primary outcome of this project, and perhaps the most conspicuous evidence of the success of this studio collaboration. These resulting recorded musical arrangements embody the countless original contributions made by the collaborating musicians. While they do not make visible the methods of practice employed in the creation of this work, they do serve to materially highlight the creative benefits of the collaboration.

The following discussion will identify several key examples of the musical contributions made by the participants of this study, as seen in the song, *Lights of Old Santa Fe*, including rhythm, texture, harmony, and melody. While this analysis is only concerned with one out of the twelve tracks recorded for the album, these observations are indicative of the album as a whole and serve to illustrate the breadth of collaborative creative outcomes that occurred as a result of this recording project.

5.1. Stating the obvious

For the sake of the analysis, it's worth noting that *Lights of Old Santa Fe* is written using an extended AABA form. The song starts with a short four bar introduction, followed by the typical AABA (Verse - Verse - Bridge - Verse), an instrumental section played over an additional A section, and then finally one last B and A section to finish.

Beat 1 of bar 5, the beginning of the first A section sees the entry of drums, upright bass, Hammond organ, and electric guitar, as well as the continuation of the acoustic guitar from the introduction. Then in bar 13, the start of the second A section, the resonator guitar enters. This instrumentation can then be heard in all subsequent sections of the song until the end of the piece at bar 60.

As previously discussed, prior to making any musical contribution to the recording, the studio musicians were presented with a chord chart containing only the form of the song, the basic harmonic structure, and a couple of very nonspecific indicators of where the band should enter, and where they might play a specific rhythmic figure (see Appendix A). The song was then demonstrated by way of a rudimentary acoustic performance from myself and Jen Mize, acting in the shared roles of artist and producer.

Taking this chord chart and acoustic performance as the point of origin for the collaboration, it goes without saying that simply adding musicians and broadening the instrumentation is immediately going to offer something more. Approaching the material as an ensemble brings with it the potential for an array of musical artefacts that can add to the rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, and textural landscape. This is immediately evident the moment the full band enters the arrangement at bar 5, directly following the four bar *colla voce* introduction, consisting only of acoustic guitar and voice.

5.2.   Rhythm

In the case of this track, while the overall rhythmic feel is quite simple throughout, and not dissimilar to what was presented in the original acoustic performance at the start of the recording session, the way the various rhythmic subdivisions are organised across the core rhythm section serves to highlight the various ways individuals have negotiated their place in the arrangement, each contributing differently to the song's collective underlying rhythmic architecture. For example, as illustrated in Figure 3, from bar 5 on we hear a consistent quarter note rhythm from the acoustic guitar, swung eighth notes from the drums, and a half note–or two feel–coming from the upright bass, with the occasional additional passing bass note.

Figure 3
Excerpt 1 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

5.3.   Texture

While the overall texture remains relatively consistent throughout, subtle textural changes can still be heard as various instruments share the available musical space.

In the case of *Lights of Old Santa Fe,* the organ can be heard throughout the piece, playing sustained chords that with the exception of the occasional quaver rest, and one whole bar rest at bar 58, creates a constant pad of harmony from its entry at bar 5 until the very end of the song.

On closer investigation we can also hear subtle variations in the tone of the organ coming from the use of the rotating Leslie speaker, whereby toggling between the slow and fast Leslie speeds, the texture of the organ itself shifts to provide sonic interest.

The organ can additionally be heard shifting in range at key moments in the track. When playing in a lower range, the organ provides a type of sonic glue. Low sustained chords support the harmonic structure while still allowing space for the electric and resonator guitars to play a more dominant role. When playing in a slightly higher range, the organ becomes far more conspicuous, and consequently the arrangement sounds texturally fuller. This contrast can be clearly observed when comparing the second verse to the first of the bridge sections, with the last two bars of the verse serving as a transition point between the two. When looking at the

transcription in Figure 4, it is also worth noting that the musician can alter the organ's perceived range by changing drawbar setting, even when the actual notes played go unchanged.

Figure 4
Excerpt 2 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

5.4.   Harmony

Looking at the original chord chart used during the recording session (see Appendix A), the harmonic structure of *Lights of Old Santa Fe* is relatively simple. The chords seen throughout the chart are predominantly limited to simple triads, sixth, and seventh chords.

In contrast, when listening to the finished recording of the same song, we hear various musicians modifying the written harmony as one might expect to encounter from improvising jazz musicians reinterpreting a jazz standard. Most notably, we see the C major chord regularly substituted for a C6 or a Cmaj7. Similarly, the G7 is often substituted for a G7(b9), G9, G9(sus), G13(b9), and G7(#5). These substitutions modify a chord's overall sound without shifting its function in the context of the larger harmonic structure. This allows the musician to add complexity, colour, and interest, without altering the underlying harmonic structure of the piece.

These subtle harmonic changes can be observed consistently throughout the organ part. By comparing Figure 5 and Figure 6 below you will notice the C major triad in first and third bars are replaced with C6 and Cmaj7 respectively, while the G7 chords that appear on beat 3 of the second and fourth bars are substituted for G7(b9) which includes the non-diatonic chord tone Ab.

Please note that due to the use of repeats in the original chord chart, the bar numbers in these excepts do not always directly correlate when comparing the original chord chart to the full transcription. Figure 5 and Figure 6 do however represent the exact same section of the work in question.

Figure 5
Excerpt 1 from chord chart: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

Figure 6
Excerpt 3 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

Example 2, as illustrated by Figure 7 and Figure 8, looks at the acoustic guitar as heard in bar 52 of the recording–the last bar of the second B section. Here, rather than playing an entire bar of G7 as indicated by Figure 7, the addition of the ii chord (Dm9 in the key of C) is heard on beat one of the bar, preceding the expected V chord (G7) on beat 3. This creates a ii V I progression, one of the primary building blocks of jazz harmony. In this example, we also see the G7 substituted for the altered chord G7(#5). The raised 5th creates a leading tone to the third of the tonic chord (C major) heard on beat one of in the following bar, adding to the feeling of resolution we hear in bar one of the final verse section.

Figure 7
Excerpt 2 from chord chart: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

Figure 8
Excerpt 4 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

5.5. Melody

In addition to the original, composed vocal melody, both the electric and resonator guitars make significant melodic contributions throughout the recorded arrangement. Most notable is the eight-bar instrumental section starting at bar 37, as seen in Figure 9, where we encounter these two instruments trading lines in a call and response fashion, creating an entirely new eight-bar melody on top of the typical verse structure.

Figure 9
Excerpt 5 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

Both the electric guitar and resonator can also be heard contributing new melodic material in the way of melodic fills between vocal phrases throughout the song. A prominent example of this can be heard from the resonator, playing two complimentary melodic lines between the vocal phrases of the first bridge section, starting at bar 21, as illustrated by Figure 10.

Figure 10
Excerpt 6 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

For the duration of verse 3, as highlighted by Figure 11, we also hear the electric guitar introduce an entirely new musical element to the arrangement–a combination of chords and single note lines that provide a counter melody of sorts, underscoring and complimenting the main vocal melody.

Figure 11
Excerpt 7 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

This same example serves to again highlight the various harmonic contributions made by collaborators in this project. In fact, much of what drives the melodic contribution from the electric guitar, as heard in the first four bars, are the extensions, suspensions, and alterations the electric guitar makes to the original chord progression, as illustrated by comparing Figure 12 and Figure 13.

Figure 12

Excerpt 3 from chord: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

Figure 13

Excerpt 8 from transcription of final recording: Lights of Old Santa Fe (J. Elliot)

Again, due to the use of repeats in the original chord chart, the bar numbers in these excepts do not directly correlate when comparing the original chord chart to the full transcription.

When we consider the details of these musical outcomes in combination with the how and why of the production process, as presented in the preceding description of the case and participant experience, we can move well beyond a simple appreciation for the ascetic aspects of the creative work produced. By engaging with this multi-dimensional picture, we are able to bring meaning to what was witnessed and to harness this new knowledge in the future creation of original creative work.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Before returning to the research questions proposed at the beginning of this exegesis, it is important to reiterate that this project was conceived first and foremost as a way of contextualising and advancing my own creative practice. As suggested by Haseman (2006), it is the practice itself that is the primary feature of practice-led research. By situating myself, and my work as producer and recording artist at the centre of this study, I sought to uncover new insights and knowledge deriving from my own creative practice, and through that practice, increase my capacity to realise my creative ideas (Candy, 2006). As demonstrated in this exegesis and accompanying portfolio of creative work, this remit has been met. In addition, this study sought to highlight the value of collaboration in the recording studio, and in turn acknowledge the contribution of those necessary others.

It would however be remiss of me not to acknowledge the limitations of the findings presented in this study. Firstly, the data presented here was derived from the production of one album, *Twilight on the Trail*, and contains observations and insights drawn only from the experiences of the participants of this recording project. It is also important to reiterate that there is more than one way to make a record. What is offered here is not a model designed to be followed step by step, but rather insights drawn from in-the-moment collaboration that others might consider in the context of their own existing creative practice. There is no right or wrong way to make an album. Great music has been and continues to be made in ways that differ greatly from the methods of practice presented here. Innovation is driven through a diversity of creative ideas and creative methods. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the outcome of this study in no way suggests that effective and/or successful collaboration guarantees a successful creative product. *Twilight on the Trail*, like any creative production was contextually contingent on the moment and conditions of its creation. It is, as I have argued throughout, a product of my own intentions, the musicians and technicians, and the moments we shared in its production. This dynamic, too, has bearing on the sort of creative practice we enacted and the product of the album.

But these points aside, it remains that there is something to be said about creativity and collaboration as drawn from the experiences of recording this album and the theorisations recounted here. That creativity is at the core of collaboration

(and that collaboration affects creativity) is a first significant finding to be realised. While this has been discussed elsewhere (Campelo, 2015; DeZutter & Sawyer, 2009; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Lashua & Thompson, 2016; McIntyre, 2008, 2012; Sawyer, 2017; Williams, 2010), it occurs that a contribution from this research relates to the ways creativity and collaboration might be understood in relation to each other; as two elements that work in tandem.

In these closing sections of this exegesis, I consider what it means to collaborate on the production of a creative product. To respond to this, I will draw out consideration of the mutuality that collaboration and creativity share, and how it is that each might be understood in terms of the production of recorded music.

It is important to take this opportunity to remind the reader that this thesis acknowledges that there are a variety of collaborative creative processes that sit outside of the specific focus of this research project that regularly occur as part of the production of recorded contemporary music. For example, the majority of new popular music releases contain original songs, and so an album based entirely on cover versions–songs previously recorded and released by other artists–limits the potential for this research to offer any specific insight into the collaborative creative act of songwriting. As outlined earlier, this research project also strategically chose not to investigate the technical aspects of record production, including audio engineering, mixing and mastering. This arguably precludes the entirety of the two-track master (the final recorded album) from being considered as the creative outcome of the in-the-moment musical collaboration observed for this project, although the master recording still contains the creative outcomes resulting from this collaboration. Consequently, looking at this particular creative moment in isolation, it would be useful to pose the question, what do these collaborating session musicians actually create? In simple terms, the session musicians, in collaboration with the artist/producers, created an album of collaboratively negotiated musical arrangements. As highlighted by the musical analysis in Chapter 5, these musicians collaboratively negotiated the actual musical building blocks–rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, dynamics–in order to bring the chosen songs to life for the listener. This in turn raises the question: are all, or some of these musicians actually acting as composers in this process, and if so, what are the potential implications for copyright or moral rights that need to be considered?

In basic terms, if we understand arranging to mean allocating the instruments to an existing piece of music, and composing as writing an original piece of music, then for this project, it is relatively simple. The compositions recorded for this project were pre-existing, and therefore all contributions can easily be categorised as part of a musical arrangement of that composition. When working with previously unreleased work, especially when the recording and songwriting both occur in the studio as part of the one collaborative creative process, these contributions can be a more difficult to define. When working with session musicians, it is therefore important to clarify the terms of engagement prior to recording. As was the case for this project, this is typically accomplished by way of a release agreement between the musician and artist/producer/label outlining the scope of the project, the session fee, and the transfer of any rights, including rights to further compensation that the musician may have in relation to the recording. For experienced session musicians, these agreements are commonplace, and if presented to participants in advance of the recording session, are unlikely to negatively colour the studio experience or resulting creative outcome. In fact, in my own professional experience, the clarity that these agreements offer for musicians will typically allow the session to proceed more freely.

It is also important to note that this project required a substantial financial investment from the artists to enable access to the facilities and personnel used in the production of this album. Without the financial means to be creative, this creative project would not exist. This project would also not be possible without access to facilities like QUT Skyline Studios and Misty Mountain Sound, and to an array of highly experienced session musicians and technicians. In what is arguably a fast-disappearing industrial recording model, both professional facilities and experienced personnel are becoming more and more rare, and so I would like to acknowledge the privileged position I find myself in, having both the means and the access to make this project a reality.

6.1. Returning to the research questions

At the outset of this exegesis the below research questions were proposed:

1. How does collaboration, as central to my creative process, proceed in a recording studio context?

2. What factors define the nature of collaboration in the recording studio?

3. In the context of the creative work undertaken for of this project, what musical outcomes occurred?

As outlined in Chapter 1, these questions correspond with this project's concern to understand the nature of collaborative creative practice in contemporary music recording. Accordingly, these questions were focused on uncovering the processes of creativity and collaboration in the context of the recording studio, how creativity and collaboration might inform my understanding and conceptualisation of creative method, and finally, to outline the musical markers of collaboration as seen in the album, *Twilight on the Trail*.

Question 3, concerned solely with the musical outcomes that resulted from the project, is perhaps the simplest to answer and a good place to start this final phase of the discussion.

The most logical response here is to simply refer back to the portfolio of creative work that accompanies this thesis, and in particular, the finished album, *Twilight on the Trail*. This work exists as material evidence of the success of the collaboration that occurred in the recording studio over the course of this research project. Listening to this work now, with a detailed understanding of the creative methods employed in the studio, the musical outcomes are unmistakable. The musicians engaged in this project made "vital contributions" (Williams, 2010, p. 60) to the work that include melodic embellishments, phrasing variations, reharmonisation, counter-melodies, rhythmic variations, variations in timbre, dynamics, and instrumentation, resulting in a creative product that is unequivocally larger than the contributions made by the individual participants (Sawyer, 2017).

When assessing the project's creative outcomes through the lens of collaboration, it is also worth noting that as a musician, a significant portion of the creative process is about recontextualising existing musical building blocks (Beamish, 2019). From simply recolouring a melody by way of reharmonisation, to the collision of different musical genres, new sounds colliding with existing musical traditions, or the collision of varying creative intentions, as can be heard in Jen's unique take on *Black Hills of Dakota*, even if the individual participants are only doing

what they could already do, it's the combination of participants and their differing flavours that make for a novel recipe.

In consideration of the non-musical outcomes experienced through this research, the remaining two questions are concerned with the theory and practice of collaboration in the context of the recording studio and will expectedly require a more detailed discussion. By design, these questions require looking beyond the work itself, and instead make visible the methods and processes employed within the recording studio (Dean & Smith, 2011; Schippers, 2007). In answer to these questions, the discussion will first consider collaboration as it relates directly to this project, followed then by insights and observations about creativity itself.

6.2. Collaboration

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Sawyer (2012) suggests that to best understand collaboration, one needs to look not at the resulting creative product, but at the processes that occur in the making of that product. Part of the aim of this study was to identify the factors that define the nature of collaboration as it occurred in the making of *Twilight on the Trail,* and to highlight how collaboration informed the enactment of creativity within the studio environment.

As detailed throughout this thesis, it is the in-the-moment musical collaboration that occurred in the recording studio during the initial band tracking dates that is the central focus of this project. When discussing collaboration here, and the knowledge gained through this research, while some aspects of the findings may be more broadly applicable, it is important that we understand the collaborative context in which the research took place. While the creative work produced and presented here involved a number of other collaborations, including additional recording dates, asynchronous contributions from various other musicians working remotely, as well as technical aspect like recording, editing, mixing and mastering, in the simplest of terms, the findings presented here relate specifically to musicians performing together, live in the studio, during the initial stages of recording the album *Twilight on the Trail.*

It goes without saying that collaboration cannot proceed without the presence of collaborators. However, one cannot simply engage a variety of participants and expect collaboration to materialise, let alone to succeed. Looking closely at the

experiences of the musicians captured through this example, this shared creative act of making music appeared to be explicitly reliant on its participants possessing two fundamental attributes: *ability*, and the capacity to *negotiate*.

For collaboration to successfully occur within the context of the recording studio, this first attribute, ability, represents the basic competencies required to produce music. This physical facility to make music is drawn from a foundation of skill and experience, typically the result of practice, leading to a mastery of the instrument and knowledge of musical form and structure.

The second attribute, the capacity to negotiate*,* is just as vital. Playing an instrument and demonstrating musical mastery collectively is without value if musicians are unable to collaborate. As part of this, the capacity to negotiate and share ideas is crucial to the formation of ensemble music. In the words of the participants themselves, this process of negotiation occurred on numerous levels simultaneously. For each musician, negotiation occurred between what was written on the chart, where they as individuals wanted to take the music, and how that direction might have differed between individuals. There was also the consideration of personal expectations verses the expectations–stated or imagined–of the artist/producers. This was further mediated by the creative negotiating of ideas discussed and shared, and the negotiation of the technical capacity each musician possessed to translate these ideas into performance. To further complicate matters, much of this negotiation occurred in-the-moment, such was the nature of the recording of *Twilight in the Trail*. As highlighted in Chapter 4, drummer John Parker notes that even when a musician has clear ideas about their intended role in the music, as soon as the musicians begin playing as a group, "the stimulus changes".

This necessary ability to negotiate is an affective-discursive concern; it required the musicians to sense and read the other musicians, while interpreting the ideas they relayed, whether verbally, through description, or demonstration, via playing. This capacity to negotiate hence required a very specific set of skills. Fundamentally, participants require a knowledge of the field and the requisite ability to operate their instrument. But perhaps more important was the capacity to be able to read each other–to maintain an affective sensibility and capacity to intuit the ideas each musician was attempting to convey. For this project, this meant that each musician merged their history of practice and technical competence on their instrument/s with a sensibility to read each other and empathetically engage ideas.

What this reveals, is that it is not enough to simply possess the ability to operate an instrument. For collaboration to occur successfully, one also requires a willingness to negotiate which in turn requires the affective awareness of one's collaborators. As witnessed throughout the recording of *Twilight on the Trail*, the participants were considerate of the musical voices of others; they committed to leaving *space*; they shifted from taking the lead to playing a supporting role; they asked what was best for the song; what was best for the project. They sought to contribute not only to the music–its performance and production–but to each other. It was through this willingness to forgo individual agendas and egos that a shared creative intention emerged, with all participants contributing to the joint task of making music.

For the artist/producer, this notion of willingness is further extended to include a willingness to allow the collaboration to occur. In the case of *Twilight on the Trail*, this required Jen and I to remain cognisant of finding ways to enable the collaboration to occur. If it is the goal of the artist/producer to fully harness the potential of collaboration in the studio, the artist/producer is responsible for curating an environment, both physical and social, that encourages and supports collaboration; that allows for the empathetic recognition of other musicians and the emergence of collaborative creativity.

The artist/producer is tasked with curating a team according to their particular expertise, experience, and personalities. But beyond this, it is the artist/producer's job to ensure an environment exists that will enable these musicians to contribute fully and authentically. By being overly prescriptive, the opportunity for musicians to work cooperatively, "each [making] specific contributions to a shared task" (Jon-Steiner, 1997, p. 12), may persist, but it remains that an engaged and participatory collaboration requires something more than simply sharing the task of playing music. For a collaboration to transpire it is important that the artist/producer addresses any inherent "decision-making hierarchy" (Taylor, 2016, p. 567) and fosters a culture of genuine shared decision-making.

Examples of this can be found consistently throughout the data captured and presented in this study, including instances where musicians were directly invited to contribute and comment; moments where the dissemination of information and instruction to musicians via headphones was deliberately limited; where the control room was carefully considered and treated as a shared space for musicians to

assemble between takes and where conversations and decisions could be had and made collectively. There were also numerous instances where artist/producers purposefully refrained from commenting too early in the song development process to avoid the establishment of an imagined approval procedure for musicians. Musicians were also regularly afforded the requisite time and space to explore ideas, to suggest additional takes, to make decisions about instrumentation and approach, and where workflows were deliberately altered to best reflect the ideas and approaches of individuals.

6.3.   Rethinking creativity: An unexpected outcome

At the outset of this study, the title, *Tear My Stillhouse Down*, borrowed from a song by American singer/songwriter Gillian Welch, was intended to serve as a simple metaphor for deconstructing the methods of my existing studio practice. However, through this research, perhaps the most unexpected outcome for me has been the shift in my own thinking around creativity itself. As the project progressed, it was the process of distillation derived from Welch's *stillhouse* that became key to my thinking, prompting me to consider how *distillation* might serve as a way of understanding what I observed occurring in the studio.

While I have always been wary of the tendency to romanticise creativity, for the most part, I still viewed it as an act of construction. As a songwriter, over the course of hours, days, or even weeks, I am effectively seeking to fill the blank page. When observing art in the making, regardless of the discipline, there is an obvious, visible transition from nothing into something; from blank canvas to finished painting; from silence to symphony. Creative intention prompts us to make relevant creative choices that result in the construction of the creative product. In the context of this project, simply comparing the basic original chord chart of *Lights of Old Santa Fe* used by the band during the recording session (see Appendix A) with the detailed transcription of the final recorded version (see Appendix B) exemplifies this progression. Here the initial chord chart represents the unrefined intention of the artist, with the full transcription documenting the various building blocks that have been assembled to make the final recorded work.

It was not until I reflected critically on the observations and experiences of the participants captured in the study, my own included, that a different picture of

creativity began to emerge. While creative intentions were still informing creative choices, leading to the realisation of a creative product, rather than viewing this as an act of construction, creativity for me began to appear more like a practice in distillation. This creative distillation enables the separation of personal pretence and ego, and of the countless superfluous musical possibilities. Rather than making something out of nothing, we start with everything, and then through the act of making, reveal the critical essence of the work.

Perhaps the key to this thinking lies in the notion of creative choice. Creative choice implies the artist has options to choose from. When creating, we are considering what it is we are seeking to make, and in turn, deciding what materials to use, based on the creative options we have available to us. It is through this decision-making that we eliminate unwanted possibilities and incrementally move inward, towards the finished work.

To further appreciate this concept, it may also be useful to distinguish distillation from the act of deconstruction. While deconstruction implies a process of dismantling or undoing, distillation on the other hand infers refinement and concentration. Through the act of creative distillation, ideas and intentions increase in purity and potency.

To extend this metaphor further, perhaps the stillhouse itself–the context in which distillation occurs–might serve as a useful way to consider the studio space. However, unlike in chemistry, where these processes are often controllable and repeatable, creativity is prone to its moment. Renowned record producer, Rick Rubin (2023) suggests, "the person who makes something today isn't the same person who returns to the work tomorrow" (p. 57). As artists, there is comfort in the idea that even when concerned with the same creative problem, every single moment we spend in the act of making art offers the potential for a unique creative solution.

6.4.   Considerations for future work

After the release of *Twilight on the Trail*, as a direct consequence of the social restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, I began to undertake a new recording project. Unlike the approach outlined in this study, this time I was required to be the sole contributor, working in my home studio, writing, performing, engineering, and mixing entirely on my own.

Over the course of a week, I recorded the music for several new original songs, and while I felt that this music was *good*, or at the very least of a professional, commercial standard, I couldn't help but to feel like there was something missing. Listening back to the work I had produced felt like I was simply looking in the mirror. When I waved, the figure in the mirror waved back. There was absolutely no possibility for surprise, and surprise was the one thing that I was craving.

While throughout this exegesis I paint quite a pragmatic view of the creative process, outside of this study, when listening to the music of other artists and musicians, I am constantly surprised. For me, other people's music is full of magic. Through this most recent experience of working alone in the studio, in the wake of a run of highly collaborative creative projects, including *Twilight on the Trail*, I realised that if I wanted to experience that same magic in the music that I make, I had to relinquish my role as the magician. The coin would never disappear for me if I were the only one tasked with moving it from one hand to the other.

When working collaboratively, there are so many opportunities to be surprised. At every turn you are engaging with things that you can't do yourself, would never have thought to do, or would have dismissed without ever trying. There is also the constant collision of distinct ideas and influences that lead to surprising new musical outcomes. The magic in some of these musical moments may become obvious on reflection, while others–sounds, chords, melodies, rhythms–can remain a mystery if you are prepared to let them. As described by Sawyer (2017), the collaborative group, given the right environment, has the potential to produce something outside of the scope of possibility of the individual participants. In the case of *Twilight on the Trail*, empowering collaborators to improvise together through careful planning and guidance, has produced new knowledge and insights into what is creatively possible in those moments.

Making music with others allows you to live in two worlds; to be the magician, and to experience the magic. Collaboration allows you to create moments in your own music where you can be both the artist and the audience. As proposed by Rubin (2023), "In the end, you are the only one who has to love it. This work is for you" (p. 194) and "you are the only audience that matters" (p. 192).

6.5.   Concluding solicitation

I have known few things as gratifying as inviting the voices of others into the music I make or being invited to contribute my own voice to the work of another artist. There is something truly special in the collective feeling of knowing that you have arrived at an outcome that is out of the creative reach of the individual.

It is my hope that the ideas and outcomes presented here in this exegesis might serve as a provocation to others to open their creative practices to the input and influence of collaboration, be it via the methods described here, or something entirely distinctive.

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APPENDIX A

Chord Chart: *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (J. Elliot)

This appendix contains a copy of the basic chord chart of *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (J. Elliot), produced for and used during the recording sessions undertaken for this project.

The Lights of Old Santa Fe

APPENDIX B

Transcription of final recording: *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (J. Elliot)

This appendix contains a transcription of the final recording of *Lights of Old Santa Fe* (J. Elliot) as it appears on the *Twilight on the Trail* album.

LIGHTS OF OLD SANTA FE

J. ELLIOT