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Jazz and Innovation: The Art of Covers

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Jazz and Innovation: The Art of Covers

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Table of Contents

The Introduction 1

Everyone's Connection to Music 1

Imitation as a Stepping Stone 3

The Cover Song.....5

Musical Identity 8

Jazz Standards 10

A Spotlight on Laufey 12

The Process 19

"Fragile" Analysis 19

Selective Artist Analysis 25

Jazz Standards Analysis 28

The Conclusion 36

Connection to Laufey 36

Maturity as a Musician 39

Reflection of Innovated Works 42

Bibliography 45

The Introduction

Everyone's Connected to Music

Think about the music you've heard over the course of your life. The lullabies your parents sang, your favorite band from middle school, that random earworm that teleports you back to the days of infinite possibility that were the first days of college. It's no secret that you remember these songs because they are emotionally significant to you. Music is an art, an expression of human creativity and imagination. By nature of depending on the imagination of the artist as well as the listener, music has a knack for situating itself somewhere between the structured practice of remembering a song's lyrics and the inexplicable phenomena of remembering how you felt the first time you sang along.

With that in mind, a few fundamental steps were taken before you could successfully yell along to your favorites at a concert or in your car with the windows down. You needed to reach and pass developmental milestones mentally, emotionally, and cognitively beforehand. The hippocampus, the brain region most implicated in learning and memory, needed years after birth before it could retain the words and their correct sequence within your favorite party song. You needed to experience the music world and engage with different sounds before reaching the conclusion that you prefer the live version over the studio recording. Your first relationship, and subsequent breakup, equipped you with the experience to hurt when hearing a song your ex introduced you to. Put simply, the neurological and psychological growth that took place over the course of decades inadvertently shaped you into more than just a listener, but a capable music enjoyer.

There is more to music than can simply be listened to. It is an experience. A medium of art that requires the passage of the time in order to exist, necessitating the 'pause' and 'play' feature. The dimension of time also has longevity, as the strength of music and its ability to impact the listener can increase as the song ages. The artist gets older, their audience matures, and the meaning of the work changes as a result. Music is fundamentally dynamic and grants the listener an opportunity to be moved by it, both emotionally and literally if you are a concert goer.

A great deal of this essay will be dedicated to the functional components of music. Chord progressions, instrument choice, and compositional arrangements will be analyzed for their significance in a song. However, critiques will span between the objective and subjective, fact and opinion. Above all else, I intend to show reverence to music as an art, craft, and safe haven for all people willing to embrace it.

Imitation as a Stepping Stone

A requirement of learning music, after developing a familiarity with the instrument itself, is practicing it. From the famous 'Hot Cross Buns' learned during recorder lessons in elementary school to the mandatory recitals for doctoral music programs, students learn how to play their instruments by practicing pre-existing compositions. It seems implied, like learning the alphabet and how to read before writing your first story, but it creates a crucial relationship between student and teacher; teacher, in this instance, refers to anyone or anything that helps a musician develop skill on their instrument. Musicians enrolled in music courses at school are instructed by their formal educators on the fundamentals, such as how to hold a bow or take proper breaths before singing a phrase, while also learning pieces in a classroom environment. For the garageband musicians and bedroom songwriters, freelance teachers, family

friends, and even YouTube provide more laid back, student-centered conditions. The focus is put on what the student wants to learn and, depending on the circumstance, the pace at which the student is willing to work.

Over the course of my musical career, I experienced the different styles, and the success rates, of each. I learned to play the violin alongside twenty other students in fourth grade with a qualified and incredibly patient educator. That same year, I would receive an electric guitar, an amp, and a promise of guitar lessons for the summer. My guitar teacher, a graduated high school senior making a little cash before going off to college, would meet with me once a week to practice chords, reading sheet music, and any songs I requested to learn. Sadly, the lessons wouldn't stick. My teacher would head off to school in August and, without a replacement, I would effectively forget what we practiced. In middle school, I would move to the viola and receive one-on-one lessons from a different orchestra teacher during class. She insisted on spending private time with me after school as well, giving me the opportunity to practice music I wanted to learn rather than just the pieces we were given during the day. Eighth grade would be the time I started playing guitar. An exceptionally captivating song about chasing your dreams, rather than waiting for them, inspired me to dust off my then too small and badly damaged guitar and look up tutorials online. Between YouTube and guitar tablature websites, the world was my oyster and there was no limit to the lessons I could learn online. As an aside, I have a vast soft spot for musicians who post tutorials of their own songs for their audience online, they aided me greatly.

All of this to say learning an instrument requires starting with things you haven't written and playing them as closely to how they were intended to be played as possible. From this point forward, this practice will be referred to as imitation, "the quotation of riffs and rhythms or other musical devices into a new setting" (Chapman, 2007, p. 88).

The important differentiator from this kind of imitation and how it is used colloquially is context. The frame in which Chapman's imitation exists is one dependent on a 'new setting', taking the source material and placing it into a different environment. Being more than mere copying or parroting, this kind of imitation requires aspects of the music to be interpreted differently from how it was created. "Canon in D" is imitated every single time it is played. The original setting for Pachelbel's canon took place in the seventeenth or eighteenth century and, as such, every subsequent performance or recording is a product of imitation; there can only be one originator and once it is made, the position as originator is final.

The same for learning to speak or playing make-believe goes for imitation: it begets a world of expansive possibility. The sooner a child develops a grasp on spoken language, the sooner his interactions with his surroundings gain a depth beyond non-verbal communication. Before this tyke can conquer the unknown with his limitless imagination, he starts simple and plays pretend as a race car driver or a baker. He will imitate tasks that he has seen before until he has learned enough to widen his horizons. The sections The Cover Song, Musical Identity, and Reflection of Standards and the Cover are rooted in this very idea, imitation being the first step in the process of becoming something more. Though it has a negative connotation, the title of imitator within music is salient. Every musician is an imitator or, at the very least, every musician begins as one. Imitation is where the path towards musical artistry starts. Singing along to the radio, following instruction from the professor in a college symphonic band, posting a personal rendition of "Here Comes the Sun" on Tiktok are all various avenues through which a musician encounters imitation.

The Cover Song

For many musicians, the appeal of covering songs is where their artistry shines. There are songwriters who double as cover artists, but there is an entire world of musicians that excel in putting their own spin on the work of others. A cover, as defined by J.L. Ortega (2021), is “a new recording of a piece of music originally written or performed by another musician.” A cover is not simply practicing songs a musician has learned before, nor is it playing these songs around the campfire amongst friends; a cover requires recording and release.

Covers have a rich and complex history in American music. Carl Wilson (2018), in posing the question “is cover music making a recovery?”, acknowledges that “Well into the 1950s, [the cover song] barely even needed a name: It was just the routine way of doing business.” J. L. Ortega created a network of covers including 855,650 cover songs across 106,095 artists, creating a bank from which deductions about genre popularity, music culture behaviors, and pure quantity of versions can be made. In studying the evolution of the network, 4,983 artists were removed from the analysis as they lacked necessary information for comparison. The evolution results suggested that the number of covers released grew substantially from the 1910s through the 1950s, but the 1960s would bring about a sharp and consistent decline as artists joining the music industry covered fewer songs than years prior. In the modern music world, the cultural attachment to covers has lessened, leading to sparse covers from artists. It has also shifted towards the present, with new artists covering songs from the generation in which they start in more often than was seen in other decades (Ortega, 2021). Another scale weighed the time an artist began their music career against the number of covers they released. The resulting data showed that artists of the 1920s were musical trendsetters, leading artists within that decade into the 1950s to cover their work the

most frequently. The 1950s would be the next decade to yield high numbers of covers, "suggesting a generational in the preferences of the artists." When discussing the relevance of covers within specific genres and artists, it is found that 24% of Vocal singers covered Jazz musicians and 20% of Jazz musicians covered Vocal singers. "The reason could be," Ortega (2021) goes on to say, "that these genres were very popular from the 1910s-1940s, when many Jazz bands…included singers or crooners…who interpreted their pieces."

These results show that, over the last one hundred years, the spotlight covers once held in the mainstream music scene has dimmed tremendously and what was once the cultural standard has become a sign of respect through the occasional tribute or a grand reinterpretation of the song entirely. "By the 1980s," Wilson (2018) explains, "covers were more often like special events…[covers] might be about paying tribute to an influence or a peer, giving a song a radical stylistic reinterpretation and contorting it into new meanings…or bringing an obscurity to light." The palate for covers changed and, because of this, the circumstances needed to release one did the same. At the time Wilson wrote his article, Weezer's then recently released cover of "Africa" by Toto was on Billboard's Hot Rock Songs chart Top 10 . A point Wilson makes that will be revisited in the section dedicated to the artist spotlight is the shift in opinion listeners have towards recorded music. "A [Jazz] standard is something that happens when you're busy making other plans…The challenge is that we're now less accustomed to thinking of a song separately from its defining recording" (Wilson, 2021). I would argue that there is a correlation between the predisposition to meld the original recording of a song to the song itself and the diminished presence of the cover song. In the wake of a public disinterest or even apathy towards covered songs, there would be more pressure on an artist to create an original work that tightly bound the recording to the song. The

recording an artist releases of his song must be so impactful to the audience that other renditions from cover artists fall flat. The reverse can also be posed; if the association between a song and its main recording grew strong and unwavering, covers from other artists would lack luster to listeners preferring the original. This idea is speculative and used analogically to emphasize the specific circumstances from which covers are released. Public opinion is mercurial and changes in it can happen seemingly at random, but the hypothetical scenarios isolate two distinct variables within the recording industry and tie them to each other. Whether it is by means of innovation or a heartfelt desire to say 'thank you' to a certain artist or genre, covers are accessories to a musician's career instead of the main ensemble they were in decades past.

Musical Identity

As touched upon above, it is of the utmost importance for an artist to clearly present themselves as a brand upon entering the music industry. The music world has never been bigger. There are more people on the planet and releasing music is as simple as a few keystrokes on a nearby computer. The digital age, and the wide nets of connections it casts, created a terrain in which listeners are likely to engage with a new artist by indirect means. Underground concerts and park jam sessions are still alive and well, but the typical new fan has far higher chances of encountering an artist through television, film, social media, or her music streaming service of choice making algorithmic suggestions on her behalf. Without a clear cut direction, a niche to fill or a need to satisfy, a budding artist will merely get lost amongst the noise of new TV shows and here-one-day-and-gone-the-next social media trends.

With that in mind, the difficulty artists have in curating their fanbase is oftentimes due to limited funds or pure misfortune more often than a lack of personal

direction. Developing a musical identity is an innate process any musician goes through, usually doing so without the conscious awareness of it. As opposed to curating a social media presence or establishing a financially stable career, the fingerprint that an artist holds for herself comes about naturally as she deepens her relationship with music. Most non-classical musicians, especially of the self-taught variety, can name the one artist that kickstarted the relationship with their instrument. Mine, for one, is Tori Kelly. That keystone artist, the artist that is studied in depth by other musicians drawing stylistic inspiration, is the compass used for self-identification. A new artist will meander through the sonic world, learning their instrument and how they best connect to it, with help from the keystone artist, who provides a sense of direction and focus. Multiple keystone artists will be added as the budding musician grows stronger, finding elements of themselves in others. Over time, they slowly become a conglomerate of styles they enjoy because they widened their horizon to include different outlets of inspiration. While any well-rounded musician believes learning and adapting never really stops, our metaphorical traveler will someday leave behind their well-used tools to venture out on their own and blaze a new trail. A trail that, given enough time and serendipitous circumstances, will guide someone else.

Dirk Terrill of Griffith University in South East Queensland, Australia wrote his Master of Music dissertation on innovation and the development of a personal musical style. The research component consisted of Terrill's album of original works and the creative process that led to the final product. Records of the creative process included tangible elements, such as chord progressions and rhythm, and intangible elements, like habit or personal preference. He used his artistic process and final product to assert that "a strong musical identity can be developed by transforming pre-existing musical ideas into new works using theoretical approaches, the recordings of our pre-cursors and

other intangible practices" (Terrill, 2014). He quotes trumpeter Clark Terry for simplifying a musician's journey from copying to original creation into three steps: imitation, assimilation, and innovation. Jim Chapman, a researcher Terrill sources throughout his paper, contextualizes these definitions within the music world. Imitation, as previously defined, is "the quotation of riffs and rhythms or other musical devices into a new setting" (Chapman, 2007). Stringent denotations in medical or psychological jargon properly provide guidelines for word use and misuse, and the same can be said for music. What can be perceived from the outside as semantic most often bears much weight within its appropriate context. Assimilation is the "use of a musical element, structure or relationship, which has been translated into the new context" (Chapman, 2007). There is still a force moving towards similarity, but the direction is shifted towards something new. Lastly, there is innovation, which is never given a reinterpreted definition by Terrill or Chapman. The Oxford dictionary defines innovate as "make changes in something established, especially by introducing new methods, ideas, or products" (Oxford, 2024).

Musical identity, in its entirety, is a product of trial and error. Finding an artist that you deem worth listening to, worth imitating, takes time, dedication, and study. Assimilation requires creating an expansive map of different artists in order to begin blending them together. The last step, to innovate, pushes the envelope past simply acquiring and connecting new ideas and introducing, whether the creator's aware of it or not, something entirely their own.

Jazz Standards

Jazz holds a quirk that separates it from every other genre: the existence of Jazz standards. Standards are a critical component of a Jazz musician's career, representing

both an outward sign of respect for the genre's rich history and an inward dedication to the artist's vision. There are multiple angles from which the Jazz standard can be interpreted, so, in favor of simplicity, the basic definition of a standard is "a composition that is held in continuing esteem and is commonly used as the basis of Jazz arrangements and improvisations" (What Is a Jazz Standard, N.D.). Wikipedia expands upon this by including that "[standard] are widely known, performed, and recorded by Jazz musicians, and widely known by listeners. (Jazz standard, N.D.)" The working list of standards, as well as what counts as a standard, is in constant flux, but they act as a foundational repertoire from which Jazz musicians build their careers, and a platform of familiarity that audiences can rely on.

It is important to note that standards act as a home base, not a leash. There is structure within Jazz, as is the case for every genre, but within the structure is room for expansion and adaptation. "Jazz allows for maximum personal interpretation, however it does have form, rules," writes Jeff Perry on AllAboutJazz.com. "Songs have themes, structured forms, and harmonic frameworks" (Perry, 2004). The confines Jazz has allow for a conceptual definition and criteria for proper categorization. However, there is pliability woven into its existence. "These themes, forms, and frameworks," he continues, "allow individuals to operate with a freedom paralleled in no other music." Perry makes a comparison to European music, acknowledging that "European musical tradition requires musicians follow the instruction of the composer…there is no room for personal interpretation. It's quite the opposite in Jazz."

By nature of the genre building off of pre-existing works, there is a need for innovation. Source material being taken into hundreds of pairs of hands over the course of almost a century will yield interpretations molded by the identity of every individual. Innovation, as stated prior, is a matter of introducing new methods or ideas to

something previously established, creating something new altogether. The three Jazz standards under analysis for this essay were chosen due to their proximity to the case study artist, Laufey (pronounced 'lay-vay'). On each of her three most popular multi-song releases, she has her rendition of a Jazz standard. *Typical of Me*, her debut EP, has a modern Pop version of "I Wish You Love", a Charles Trenet original from the 1940s. *Everything I Know About Love* is her first full-length album and it includes "I've Never Been in Love Before" from *Guys and Dolls*. Lastly, Laufey's rendition of Erroll Garner's "Misty" was included on her Grammy award-winning album, *Bewitched*. Laufey's official recordings of these songs will be held alongside two other versions of the standard: the original recording, or the closest possible version available, and a recording that stylistically opposes Laufey's. "Que reste-t-il de nos amours" by Charles Trenet and "I Wish You Love" by Natalie Cole, daughter of Jazz star and crooner, Nat King Cole, will complete the first standard; "I've Never Been in Love Before" from the 1992 cast recording of *Guys and Dolls* and "I've Never Been in Love Before" by Caity Gyorgy (pronounced 'George') will represent the second, and; Erroll Garner's "Misty" and Leslie Gore's "Misty" will complete the third. Each of the nine songs will be dissected in the Jazz Standards Comparisons section, but the objective is to address crucial elements of cover music as they exist within Jazz. The subsequent elements will then be superimposed onto my cover of Laufey's original song, "Fragile", essentially using the artist as a bridge between Jazz and Bedroom Pop.

A Spotlight on Laufey

"As a musician, my goal is to bring jazz and classical music to my generation through a more accessible road" (Get to Know Laufey, N.D.) is the opening quote Laufey uses for her blurb on her website, as well as the About page on her Spotify. The

mononymous Laufey found inspirations spanning from classical, beginning with her violinist mother and her own classical piano and cello training, to jazz, with a father that kept Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday records around the house. Her interwoven love for the two worlds would grow to include Pop and elements of Musical Theatre over time. She explored her musical ability further during her time at the Reykjavik College of Music, a music conservatory in her hometown.

Before finding herself at Berklee College of Music, she performed as a cellist with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra at fifteen years old, the orchestra she would release a full-length concert album with roughly ten years later. She would also participate in *Ísland Got Talent*, the Icelandic version of *America's Got Talent*, and *The Voice Iceland*. She graduated from the Reykjavik College of Music in 2018 and began her degree in Boston at Berklee the following fall. During her college years, she honed her craft as she mixed elements of Classical, Jazz, and Pop into her work, never losing sight of the artists her parents introduced her to.

Laufey has shown little hesitancy when releasing her music, her debut single, "Street by Street", becoming available a year before her graduation from Berklee. Since this first release, she has amassed 7.2 million followers between Tiktok and Instagram and 26 million likes total on all official music videos on YouTube. "From the Start", her Pop-Bossa Nova anthem of unrequited love, went Platinum in the U.S. and it, plus the smitten "Valentine" and inconsolable "Let You Break My Heart Again", have more than half a billion streams on Spotify. Established artists such as Adam Melchor, dodie, beabadoobee, and, most recently, Norah Jones, appear on her discography. Extending past the world of Bedroom Pop and Alternative, the Icelandic vocalist has also recorded with the Philharmonia Orchestra twice, on the single "Let You Break My Heart Again" and *Bewitched*"s "California and Me", and released a full-length live album titled *A*

Night At The Symphony with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. Most recently, the Recording Academy of the United States awarded Laufey her first Grammy for Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album in 2024.

A traditional pop vocal album "contains at least 51% or more playing time of vocal tracks, with 'traditional' referring to the composition, vocal styling, and the instrumental arrangement' of the body of music known as the Great American Songbook" (Grammy Winners, N.D.) For reference, the Great American Songbook is comprised of influential Pop songs and Jazz standards of the early and mid twentieth century, creating a structured repertoire from which musicians within the genre can pull. Earning an award in this category aligns her outside of the genre she claims, shifting the lens to include components of Pop and mid-century show tunes. In other words, the Academy recognized Laufey for holding hearts the way Michael Bublé and Tony Bennett have in the past, as opposed to that of Esperanza Spalding and Etta James.

Now, earning a Grammy nomination and proceeding to win an award for best album within your category is a major accomplishment, especially for an artist's second full-length release. Laufey walked away with a Grammy before celebrating her twentieth birthday. It is also important to note that the Recording Academy is neither a lawmaker nor a keeper of a universal standard when it comes to music. It is used as a means to darken the line between Laufey and Jazz, which will contribute to my musical component to the project. The Academy has come a long way since its inception in 1959 to better include and support all artists, but no institution is perfect. The Academy and its rulings are to be held as second opinions in favor of a central argument, rather than the sole decider on the matter.

In the midst of her rise to stardom, a great deal of conversation has occurred around Laufey's place in music. She has repeatedly been hailed as the 'savior of Jazz',

the young woman single-handedly bringing Jazz off its dust-covered shelf and into the twenty-first century. Music review and commentary articles, including the Rolling Stone, feed into the narrative that Laufey bears the burden of protecting the genre and exposing it to the younger generations. For the sake of the wider cover music conversation, I must echo the voices that push back against these claims.The relevance of my cover relies on Laufey not being a part of Jazz and instead being a stepping stool between that world and mine.

Informed opinions never detract from her musical skill or cultural significance amongst younger generations. Ann Powers of National Public Radio insists that Laufey earns the attention she deserves and the respect that appropriately acknowledges her work. She speaks highly of Laufey's singing style, applauding "its subtle vibrato, up-close mic technique and warm, fluid tone" (Power, 2024). While Laufey's work often tugs at the heartstrings of an earlier American music style, Powers also acknowledges that "careful indeterminacy, her measured invocations of scatting or blue notes while she stays mostly in a cleanly lyrical vocal lane, that marks her as so very 2024." Adam Neely, a Jazz Fusion bassist and Youtuber, dedicated a thirty-minute video in September of 2023 to analyze and thoughtfully critique Laufey and those that review her. The fellow Berkeley graduate praises the appeal the former Tiktok star has to young people. "Laufey writes earnest lyrics about her experiences as a young woman in the vernacular of Gen-Z…she has garnered a large fan base of people who would not normally be a part of the Jazz community" (Neely, 2023). Giovanni Russonello from the New York Times attended a concert of Laufey's in November of 2023, shortly after the release of her Grammy-winning album, *Bewitched*. He succinctly blends the stances Powers and Neely hold into a single sentence: "Laufey's vibe is somehow both hopelessly nostalgic and ideally suited to our extremely online world, where huge feelings are best

delivered in Pop Tart-size bites" (Russonello, 2023). Conveniently, both Russonello and Powers reference Neely's video in their article. Russonello goes on to say that her "amalgam of bossa nova, romantic pop and show tunes is here to reassure us that, yes, some old standards do still apply."

The three of them waste no time giving the "From the Start" singer her flowers for her musical, social media, and PR skill. They also ensure that a concrete line is drawn between Laufey and Jazz. Russonello discerned that she plays her songs more or less as they were recorded, allowing a very small margin for improvisation or adjustments. "What's known of you is also what's expected, and that becomes what you make," he says. "When your followers are dictating what you make next, then you're trapped in a loop of familiarity" (Russonello, 2023). This observation mirrors the hypothetical I posed in The Cover Song section, suggesting the possibility that the relationship a listener has to the original recording is stronger than his openness to change. While Neely provides a far more in depth explanation of Laufey that spans past the conversation around live performance, he frowns when Laufey says she feels out of place in Jazz clubs. "There is a living, breathing [Jazz] culture that's worth talking about," he concludes, "and the world's most famous, living Jazz musician isn't really part of it" (Neely, 2023). Rather than taking a staunch opinion against Laufey's membership to Jazz, Powers sets out to encourage an allegiance to another genre instead. "[Traditional pop]'s been viewed as a complementary yet inferior and even opposing force to jazz, inauthentic and perhaps threatening," she acknowledges. "Laufey sings for the…voices [who] formed the American Songbook, but whose artistry has always been treated as "number two"…compared to the innovators within the jazz canon" (Powers, 2024).

These critiques frame Laufey as an artist that has earned a Grammy for melting different genres and styles together. She writes songs that are not exclusively Jazz and the standards she covers are not limited to Jazz alone. “I Wish You Love”, “I’ve Never Been in Love Before”, and “Misty” are Jazz standards Laufey has officially released, one for each major body of work thus far. While “I Wish You Love” embraces an airy Pop sound with a Bossa Nova bounce, the other two take more stylistic inspiration from the Jazz singers that came before her. Adam Neely went into great detail analyzing her arrangements of these songs, and his deductions include more music theory than I can commit to for the scope of this paper, but I want to emphasize that he credits Laufey for the respect she pays to other singers. She introduces vocal lines and chord structures from vocalists like Chet Baker and Sara Vaughn to audiences that otherwise ingest modern Pop almost exclusively. While noteworthy, the frames she uses for her compositions are more commonly sourced from Bedroom Pop and Teary Soul, sharing more similarity to artists like Faye Webster and Mitski. Laufey is a multi-dimensional artist that, while perhaps encouraging an overuse of a musical genre label, pushes for innovation and personalization within her work.

“Fragile”, a soft lament about a lost flame with a former love, is the song I chose to cover for my project. As the first song on her debut album, *Everything I Know About Love*, Fragile sets the pace for the body of work, emphasizing her emotional awareness and compositional skill. She uses guitar chords that have Bossa Nova elements, a progression that also appears in “From the Start”, “Haunted”, and “A Night to Remember”, and the minimalistic percussiveness from the guitar prevents the song from dragging behind. The string section and backup vocals intertwine themselves naturally, weaving through the main vocals and adding another harmonic element to the subtle twinkles of piano. The main harmony that floats just under the lead vocal is the

lower of the two, creating an intervallic anchor in the lower register of the singer's voice. Wave-like orchestral strings and the guitar end the song, carrying a sense of blurry longing to the fade-out. Lyrically, Laufey spares no expense on bearing her heart to her audience. "Will you let me come closer to you, I know that you're older but what can I do" is the opening lyric (0:25-37). She is vulnerable, almost bashful, in her request for closeness, but not without experiencing some distress along the way. "I leave in the morning, I'll forget that I am surely falling" rounds out the first stanza (0:38-50). It becomes clear that nothing keeps these two people together and their reconnecting is a product of some semi-destructive happenstance.

I could dedicate hours breaking down her lyricism and unfolding the emotional content within them, especially when relating "Fragile" to my experience with her entire discography. *Everything I Knew About Love* established my attachment to Laufey's music and "Fragile", situated at the top of its tracklist, bewitched me in a way that I hadn't predicted. It was an intentional decision to choose a song that not only affected me emotionally, but fulfilled a compositional purpose as well. Laufey takes elements of Jazz without fully binding herself to the genre and I did a similar thing with her style in return. In a way, I am treating "Fragile" as my Jazz standard and maintaining some elements of its original structure without staying true to it completely. I will go into further detail in the My Musical Process section, but my cover is a product of the music I listened to. My "Fragile" is intended to balance my musicality with Laufey's, inadvertently balancing Laufey's musicality with those of the musicians who inspired her. I hope to represent another link in the chain of innovation through covers.

The Process

“Fragile” Analysis

As is commonplace for most of my projects, the skeleton of the cover came from simply loving the song. “Fragile”, in all its haunting, reminiscent sorrow, resonated with me and I wanted to capture that feeling. After a few weeks of tinkering during winter break in 2022, the idea morphed into more than a personal project. There was a motivation to represent myself as more than just a fan, and to present Laufey as more than an artist that makes good music; she told a story that echoed elements of my own life and such a profound impact does not occur often.

Foundationally, the cover is very similar to the original. The chords, including the F minor nine (Fm9) that anchors the song F minor, are borrowed from Bossa Nova, a genre that blends American Jazz with Brazilian Samba. The instrumental lines are broken into an A section and a B section, as the differentiator between the intro, verses, choruses, and outro lies in the vocal line because the chords are the same. The A section is a four measure phrase that switches between two chords every bar, the Fm9 and an F minor sixth over nine (Fm6/9). The B section is another four-measure phrase, dedicating one bar each to Fm9, B flat thirteen (Bb13), E flat major seven (Ebmaj7), and E diminished seven (Edim7). As an aside, the additional intervals tacked onto the triads, the sixth, ninth, seventh, or thirteenth, add color to the chords. Fm6/9 and Bb13 build the chord out wider than an octave, a technique that allows for greater variation in harmony than having chords in their ‘closed’ position, especially when mingling instruments with the voice and its far more limited range. To refocus, both the A section and the B section are integrated into the verse in an ABAB fashion, the intro consists

only of A, and the chorus is BB with an abridged A to make room for the transition back into the verse. A slight difference in structure between the versions is that the original uses the A section as the outro before holding on the Fm9 until the end, letting the string section create a bobbing-in-the-ocean sensation. Conversely, the cover plays the B section one last time for its inconclusive Ebdim7, letting the song float in the realm of unresolved. Laufey most likely uses a hollow-bodied Gibson electric guitar for the original recording, as this is the type of guitar she uses for her concert performance of "Fragile" with the Iceland Symphony orchestra, but there is a possibility she used an acoustic guitar with a pickup and fine-tuned the pickups during recording. The cover consists of both an acoustic guitar with a pickup and a semi-hollow G&L electric guitar, though that was not by design; the acoustic guitar unexpectedly fell in need of repair during the last few weeks of recording and there was too little time to record all the guitar parts again with the electric replacement. With that in mind, the change in guitars goes unnoticed in the composition. Both the original and the cover float around 75 bpm, with room for the tempo to flex, and make use of slight ritardandos on the beat beginning and ending the chorus. The pulse of Bossa Nova, as borrowed from Samba, puts an emphasis on the second beat and "Fragile" maintains that same practice. Laufey's instrumental expertise is with chordophones, instruments that produce sound by vibrating strings, and the guitar, rather than a percussion section, maintains the rhythm. The last major similarity worth noting is the lyrical content, as none of the words were changed in the cover. Laufey is a phenomenal storyteller that seamlessly marries her own experiences with metaphor, creating a holistic experience that is neither a replicated diary entry nor a completely fictional 'once upon a time' fairytale. The lyrics are perfectly fine as they are and no change I made would make the song better.

Nonetheless, I am not Laufey. If I didn't accept the explicitly outlined limitations that separate us, I would spend my time upset that I could never perfectly replicate the original. What I expected or hoped for with the cover needed to stand outside of what the song already was and intentionally be innovated into something else. This insistence to turn weaknesses or shortcomings into strengths unexpectedly bred the curiosity to articulate different melodic and emotional ideas.

The main hurdle that needed to be overcome was the difference in voice. Laufey and I vary not only in vocal skill, as her stamina and agility are far stronger than mine, but also in range. Laufey, as an alto, speaks openly about her attachment to female Jazz vocalists like Etta James and Ella Fitzgerald because they remained mainly their lower registers. I was categorized as a soprano by voice professors during my studies with the distinct concession that my chest voice was stronger than my head voice, a case that is backwards from typical soprano voice development. One of the most challenging phrases of the piece is the octave jump in the chorus on lines "soft candle glow/the music so slow/your skin on my skin" and the respective second stanza lines (Laufey, 1:15-24). The two skills I listed above, stamina and agility, were considerably lacking for those sections. Conquering them was a matter of repetition and trial-and-error, a common practice I embraced for most of the cover. In other instances, the attempt at recreation yielded a negative outcome and pushed for a need to articulate a fresh idea. The middle eight between the first chorus and the second verse has a different arpeggio. While the original intention of the change was an adaptation to compensate for lackluster harmonic voicing, the result more closely resembled my style of singing. The original middle eight section is a main vocal line accompanied by two descending lines that create a countermelody of lightness, and a chorus of reverb voices close the section. It's hard to say how many different lines of voices were put into this section without

looking at the raw stims, but the completed effect creates the illusion of ten to fifteen voices at a time. Without the time or expertise to successfully achieve this effect, I needed to adapt. In the cover, the lead vocal has a simplified arpeggio and, rather than each line chasing after the other and starting where another ends, the high and low harmony tack directly onto the main line. The three parts then finish the middle eight together, making room for the two-part backup line to blend into the verse. Unlike the lead harmony that sings underneath the lead melody throughout the song, backup vocals in the original are sparse and leave room for strings to fill the melodic gap. The type of vocalizing that comes after "I'm surely falling" in the A section of the first verse will end the middle eight and the first B section of the second verse, then it is never seen again (Laufey, 0:44-49). I assume this was a stylistic choice to lean more heavily into the string section because Laufey shows no trouble building a soundscape on voices alone, but that's merely speculation.

Another major hurdle in need of conquering was the access to instrumentation. Outside of voices, "Fragile" uses a prominent string section that spans the range of an orchestra. The strings appear first in the second verse, building off the harmonic foundation of the guitar. Pizzicato is the playing style for the first A section of the second verse, the phrase consisting of three plucked eighth notes during the first beat and a half of the two measures. In the B section of the verse, the strings are bowed instead of plucked and act as a responsive sigh to the longful "I wanted to run with you/into the midnight sun with you" (2:15-26). The second A section of the second verse lengthens the pizz phrase to five notes, filling the first two and a half beats of the measure. In the second chorus, the strings accentuate the lead vocal by restating musical ideas in a different timbre, acting as the kind of backup vocals that appear during the middle eight section. At the end of the second chorus, Laufey sings "I've never been so fragile, fragile"

(3:21-35) one last time as the original Fm9 to Fm9/6 progression is heard from a lone guitar, one that is engulfed by the strings at the very end in a fog similar to the one Laufey sings in for the “Fragile” music video.

With almost ten years of experience in classical viola, I am deeply attached to the versatility and emotionality that stringed instruments evoke. I extend great thanks to my orchestra teacher throughout middle and high school, Ms. Twinda Murry, for nurturing an environment for my love of music composition and performance to grow. While I understood the emotion from the strings section and could appreciate their complexity, that is a far task from replicating them. I hold my aural skills in great regard, but that does not mean I have the same consistency or reliability when it comes to recreating works; my compositional skills for classical strings are still very much lacking and so is my access to instruments. In other words, there was no way for me to write string parts that would embody the same effect and, even if there was, I didn’t have the instruments to make the idea come to life. From this came the need to mold my voice into an instrument full enough to replace the substance that string sections have. Luckily, I already had a longing for more prominent vocals and accepted the challenge of creating new harmonic material. Instead of pizzicato appearing in the first A section of the second verse, reverberated vocalizations fill the space. The first B section has a swelling of voices that have a similar sighing effect that original strings have, though I find the cover to achieve the feeling more successfully as voices actually breathe. The second B section, comparatively, has a smaller backup vocal contribution, aside from the chorus of “just wait’s” that lead into the last few lines of the verse. Rather than loading a wide expanse of voices onto the end of the verse, thus creating the contour of building up to the big final chorus, the spotlight is put onto the lead vocal line. Six different tracks sing the lead line, splitting into a three-part harmony beginning with “for

someone to hold me like" and picking up where the "just wait" (2:26-:39) left off. The chord built from the lead line, especially with the final "still remember" (2:36-:39) breaking into four parts, is strong enough to stand on its own with limited structural support from other instruments. Between the unwavering guitars and the soft 'oohs' that float just above the threshold of attention, the audience can focus on the never-ending lines of longing for what once was and will never be again. An echoed voice sings back to the lead voice in the second chorus, turning the otherwise monologic lyric into a kind of call-and-response. In a group of four, the backup vocals widen the chord when the lower harmony of the lead enters on the line "the room kept spinning" (2:48-:52), reinforcing a mild sense of panic as the dissonant Edim7 rings in. After this, there are three different vocal ideas working together: the lead vocal melody, the lead vocal harmony, and the call-and-response backup vocals. The middle eight and second verse also have this structure, but the second chorus is unique because all three vocal parts have lyrical content. The backup vocals usually bear close similarities to instruments like the violin because they were created in place of a string section. However, the backup vocals of the second chorus are designed to represent a new, rather than altered, musical idea. Another musical idea comes about during the outro, the last eight bars of the cover. Like the original, the lead vocal confesses one last "I've never been so fragile/fragile" (3:08-:16) alongside the guitars, but the cover includes the low and high part harmonies that were present in the middle eight. Throughout the cover, there are few instances when there is one sole singer amidst the guitars. The three-part harmony vocalize a descending arpeggio, bringing the high energy from the end of the second chorus down slowly. The guitars play the B section one last time as a duet repeats the line "your hands on my skin/the room is spinning" (3:22-3:30) once more before a two-part harmony

sings out against the Edim7 that hangs in the air, leaving the piece, and the feelings associated with it, unresolved.

Selective Artist Analysis

Not all of my study came about in this metaphorical studio, as most of my recording is done in my bedroom or the basement of my parents' house. I committed to an analysis of Laufey's full discography as well. By all means, I intended to do so out of curiosity at first, as is the case whenever I fall in love with a new artist, but the attention I paid her in years prior proved beneficial as I neared the end of my cover.

One of my favorite components of this project entailed analyzing her work from an almost microscopic perspective. The essence of who an artist is lies in her music and how she presents her completed works. Once a song leaves the private safety of the artist's bedroom or recording app and enters the public view, it grows into more than what she originally intended. This idea will be revisited in the last section, but a song morphs into an experience for the audience once it's released. The Lauvers, pronounced 'lovers' and the name Laufey affectionately gave to her fanbase, are then granted the freedom to interpret the songs in ways outside of how Laufey intended. "Street by Street", Laufey's first ever release and "Goddess", her most recent single to announce the deluxe version of *Bewitched*, show the timelessness of her storytelling and the evolutions she underwent during the four years between songs. "Street by Street" is an optimistic, springy Pop song Laufey sings to an ex, speaking confidently about reclaiming the city she lives in 'street by street' after feeling as though every corner belonged to this failed love. She reflects on the time they spent together at various locations around town, from the coffee shop to the bookstore, and admits she's grown tired of giving away the entire city to someone who didn't deserve it, ending both

choruses with “I’m taking back my city/I’m taking back my life” (1:33-42, 3:18-27) Her most recent single speaks again about a boy that wasn’t worth his weight or the trouble, but it does so painfully and with matured anger. “Goddess” tells the story of a former partner loving her more when she’s in Pop star mode than when she’s simply herself. “You took a star to bed/woke up with me instead/you must have felt so damn deceived” (1:42-56) summarizes the resigned annoyance she feels in realizing she isn’t enough unless she is a “goddess on stage” (2:52-57). I found myself drawn to these two songs because they currently act as bookends for her career. *Bewitched: The Goddess Edition* was released on April 26, 2024, a mere four days after I finished this paper and, while serendipitous, it is a relief to focus so closely on her first single and her most recent one instead of having to pick between four songs for commentating.

In the wake of the release of *Bewitched*, I grew attached to Laufey’s approach to her musicality. Her public musical journey started on social media, which creates a narrowed perspective that her fanbase will have on her music. New York Times writer Giovanni Russonello is previously quoted in saying that, at a live show, Laufey closely replicates the recorded versions of her songs on stage. Music theory YouTuber and Jazz Fusion bassist Adam Neely builds onto this idea, speaking on her production style for live shows. “When she performs live,” he explains, “she often performs solo…or with a band of L.A. Pop musicians…everybody is on in-ear monitors. When the band members communicate with one another, they do so through talkback mics that are fed through the in-ear” (Neely, 2023). Neely’s point, as it connects to Russonello’s, is that her performance process yields itself to the world of Pop more than it does Jazz. To quote Neely, the differentiation between the two genres as it pertains to Laufey is significant because “there’s interesting things that can be learned by contrasting what she does with what…Ella Fitzgerald did because…that speaks something truer to her music and why

she is so popular right now." The conversation around where Laufey does or doesn't fit within a genre is designed, for the sake of my essay, to reinforce the idea that she is a bridge between two worlds: mine, the secluded sliver of the music industry that I currently claim as residence, and the greater historical plane of musical greats, Jazz greats in particular. As was stated in A Spotlight on Laufey and will be extrapolated further in the last section of this work, there was benefit in having an artist that herself seemed willing to straddle a line of genres and styles in the name of fully embracing her musical identity. The time I spent studying Laufey's discography, scrubbing through almost four hours of music, painted a clearer picture of why her music resonates so deeply with so many people, myself included. She is, almost above all else, a storyteller that uses her lyricism and compositional ability to bring her audience along for a guided tour into her heart.

Jazz Standards Analysis

Across Laufey's discography, she has released renditions of three different Jazz standards, one for each of her three most popular projects. *Typical of Me*, her first EP, was released independently by Laufey on April 30, 2021 and has a springy Pop version of "I Wish You Love". Originally titled "Que reste-t-il de nos amours?", "I Wish You Love" was written by Charles Trenet and released on his album *Disque d'or*, or "Disc of Gold", in 1943. *Everything I Know About Love* was Laufey's first full-length studio album and it was released under AWAL Records first on August 26, 2022, with the deluxe edition of the album coming out October 22 of the same year. On this album is "I've Never Been in Love Before", a song taken from the musical *Guys and Dolls* written by lyricist Frank Loesser. From the Grammy award-winning album *Bewitched,* Laufey's most recent studio album that was released with AWAL Records on September 8, 2023,

has her version of “Misty”. The instrumental of “Misty” was written by Erroll Garner in 1954 and appeared on his album *Contrasts* in 1955; the lyrics were added by Johnny Burke a few years later, though the exact date is unknown.

The three standards represent Laufey’s ability to embrace the music she knows and transform it into something uniquely her own. While new standards in the twenty-first century are hard to come by, the standards she chose saw varied levels of success and popularity as they aged. “Misty” was covered by Ella Fitzgerald, an artist Laufey mentions multiple as being a source of inspiration and admiration, in 1960. At the same time, neither “I’ve Never Been in Love Before” nor “I Wish You Love” are listed as official songs of *The Great American Songbook*, unlike “Misty”. A comparative analysis of the standards draws a line around one piece at a time, creating a space for deductions about the artist and their stylistic preferences. Completing a comparison of multiple versions of the same song allows for a greater understanding of the song itself and the artist. I will analyze three versions of each standard: the earliest available recording of the standard, Laufey’s rendition, and a version that strongly opposes Laufey’s. By creating a three-point perspective of each standard, the piece outgrows the limitations of the writer’s intentions or, in this case, the case study artist’s wishes. What the piece becomes will be extrapolated in the last section. Charles Trenet’s original recording and “I Wish You Love” by Natalie Cole will be held alongside Laufey’s rendition. The cast recording of “I’ve Never Been in Love Before” from the 1992 New Broadway cast of *Guys and Dolls* and Caity Gyorgy’s version will complete the second standard. Erroll Garner original instrumental recording of “Misty” and Lesley Gore’s teen pop take on “Misty” will round out the third standard.

“Que-reste-t-il de nos amours” translates to ‘what remains of love’ and was one of fourteen songs on Trenet’s *Disque D’or*. Trenet wasn’t the first to release a version of the

song, such credit goes to Lucienne Boyer in 1942, but he is the original lyricist and musician with Léo Chauliac. Trenet's tenor voice is the star of this version and the piano, strings, and a light acoustic guitar surround it softly. The fidelity of the recording, while beautiful and adding to the general feel, makes it difficult to tell which instruments, and to what capacity, appear in the recording. Of three that will be analyzed for this standard, it has quite a few differentiators: it is the only one led by a male singer, there is no percussion accompaniment, and it has the greatest variability in tempo, to list a few. Trenet sings with a youthful bounce fitting his then thirty year-old stature, his voice lacking any sorrowful dragging or apathy. It is during the second chorus, or second B section, that the song takes on an ease that is carried through to the end of the song. Compositionally, the verses are darker and more brooding in tone than the choruses, creating the harmonic contour of a minor key brightening into a major one during choruses. Natalie Cole's "I Wish You Love" is far more representative of the Jazz style than Trenet's Lyrical version. Cole's version begins with a freehanded tempo, giving the song its space to breathe before locking into an easy swing of sixty-five beats per minute. The instrumentation consists of a piano, a unified string section, a double bass that plays outside of the other strings, an electric guitar, a small set of horns, and a drum set with small wisps of a harp, chimes, and even a glockenspiel. As an alto voice, Cole rarely ventures out of her chest voice and most of her head voice singing happens during the intro. A major vocal difference between Natalie Cole and Laufey is that Cole sprinkles in her vibrato sparingly at the end of long phrases, while Laufey typically engages her vibrato soon after the onset of every phrase. I took a particular liking to Natalie's version once I noticed the slight echo of her voice, an effect most likely accomplished by recording her part in a large hall instead of a confined studio space; the dragged 'keep' in the second verse from the line "a cozy fire to keep you warm" (Cole,

2:31-37) always gives me chills. Unlike Trenet, both Cole and Laufey allow a space during the middle eight for an instrument spotlight. Cole swells the strings while Laufey lets the cellos and backup vocals shine. Lastly, there is Laufey's version, an upbeat and cello-centered adaptation. The song is given a modern twist, the artist using digitized claps on top of a quiet drum set and a backup vocal section consisting of herself. This version is the only one of the three to have an unwavering tempo, a common fixture in Pop. A group of cellos, a semi-hollow electric guitar, a bass guitar, and a shaker round out the instrument section, melding perfectly during the bridge when the lead vocal drops out. Much like Trenet's recording, Laufey embraces a youthful breeziness that reflects the opening line "I wish you bluebirds in the spring" (Laufey, 0:00-:04); the lyrics sound more like peaceful resignation than heartbroken longing.

For "I've Never Been In Love Before", Laufey takes on the introspective Jazz attitude and leaves behind Pop's natural skip. Her intro is acapella and without a tempo, only the slight whisper of microphone status filling the empty space. As an alto, she spends little time in her upper register in favor of the low notes of her voice, a tendency she found attractive in Jazz artists from the 1950s. The composition soon builds to include a piano, a glockenspiel or piano with a digitized brightness, a double bass, and a drum set played with brushes. Most notably, "so please forgive this helpless haze I'm in" (Laufey, 1:20-:32, 2:44-:57) is a point of reprieve in both instances of its use, allowing the song to relax before exploring a new idea. During the first time, the cymbal plays on each beat, the bass plays on every first and third, and the piano plays only the first note of every measure. This pattern is a simplified rhythm structure than earlier sections, building anticipation for the piano solo to come. During the second time, all instruments drop out except the piano, which plays on the first beat of every measure. There's one last swell from the instruments on the next line as the song closes out, ending with

Laufey acapella again. “I’ve Never Been in Love Before” is taken from *Guys and Dolls*, a musical originally written in 1950. There is no official recording of the original cast, so the New Broadway cast recording of 1992 will be used for analysis. This is the only musical theater version of any standard and the song carries the grandiosity in instrumentation and vocal ability that matches its medium. This version outweighs Laufey’s substantially on the basis of complexity, though such is to be expected. As a duet between baritone Peter Gallagher and soprano Josie de Guzman, the pit orchestra is expansive and accentuates the range, timbre, and intensity of the voices. Gallagher begins the first verse with harmonic assistance from woodwinds and higher strings, the double bass growing in importance during the middle of his section. He ends his verse with a surge from all instruments with a particular blare of horns leading up to his last ‘before’. Guzman takes on the second verse with the cellos to start, the higher strings joining after the first stanza of lyrics. Her middle section consists of more drama, the horns and strings playing different themes at the same time. Gallagher joins her in singing the last section, the instruments blending together as they build to the big finish at the end of the song. Caity Gyorgy puts an energetic spin on the song. Where Laufey opts for the understated, a version for slow dancing around the kitchen, Gyorgy brings “I’ve Never Really Been in Love Before” onto the ballroom floor. Her version is more than twice the playtime as *Guys and Dolls*, but has the same amount of lyric content. This is because Gyorgy’s version is the only standard on my list to bring the band to center stage for a solo and push the voice to the back. The band consists of a saxophone, a piano, a double bass, and a drum set, and all except for the drummer have their solo. As the lead vocalist, Gyorgy is only heard during the first fifty seconds and the last minute and ten seconds of the song, seeming to disappear during the interim. What’s most noteworthy about the instrumental section is the near complete departure from

the original melody by all of the soloists. Gyorgy introduces the idea originally, but, as is the prerogative for Jazz improvisers, the band takes their personal sections in different directions. Because of this, the written melody goes unheard until Gyorgy reenters the picture at the end.

"Misty" by Lesley Gore spent some time on Tiktok as a popular audio, though it lacked the popularity that "It's My Party" garnered. Compositionally and emotionally, Laufey's "I Wish You Love" bears a strong resemblance to Gore's "Misty". Gore's version of the standard is also 'Popified'. It has a simplified chord structure from the original and a straight tempo, the beginning of the song and the line "you can say that you're leading me on" (Gore, 0:57-1:04) having the most rhythmic flex. She makes use of background vocals, an element only occurring with Laufey's "I Wish You Love", though Gore has other people to sing with her. She made use of a double bass, electric guitar, drumset, and an organ. Another element of Lesley's version that stands out is the use of stereo sound. Her voice remains central, but the instruments and backup vocals have opposite balances; the instruments are mainly on the right side and the singers are on the left. The difference is slight when listening on headphones to one ear or the other, but listening to them together adds depth to the recording. Gore was younger than Laufey at the time of her "I Wish You Love" release, being seventeen instead of the Gen-Z singer's twenty-two, but both women sang about the plights of falling in love with the openness matching their age. Much like Laufey, Gore put the emotional complexity of an established Jazz standard into a musical context that could be understood by her young audience. Laufey's approach to"Misty" almost opposes the one Gore took, choicefully opting out of the Pop influence in favor of a more traditional interpretation. "Misty", from certain angles, represents the growth she underwent since her days of "I Wish You Love". The harmonic structure lends itself to Jazz more than it does Pop,

expanding simple triads into chords like the G minor major seventh and F sharp minor seventh flat five. There is also harmonic similarity to Fragile with the use of the Bb13 and diminished seventh chord. A piano, double bass, and drum set played with brushes complete the ensemble to accompany the alto vocalist. I would argue that "Misty" most completely represents Laufey's vocal versatility, pertaining to her vocal range and agility in particular. In the instance when she incorporates a vocal scoop upwards, such as on the line "a thousand violins begin to play" (Laufey, 1:02-:10), it feels more like a stylistic choice than a vocal tendency. She sings runs that are swift and complex without muddling notes together, making use of Ella Fitzgerald's descending chromatic arpeggio on the first time she sings "too much in love" (2:45-:51). Her head voice is stronger and less breathy than it was in "I've Never Been in Love Before", reflecting a strengthened connection to her upper register. Her vibrato is consistent and appropriately widens or shrinks when phrases necessitate a change in emotion, comparing the change from the 'near' in "I get misty the moment you're near" to the 'you' from "that's why I'm following you" (1:21-:30, 1:59-2:06) Of the three covers she released, I am most fond of "Misty." Credit is due to "Misty"'s creator, Erroll Garner, and his original version. The most obvious difference of his version is that, of the nine total covers chosen for analysis, his is the only exclusively instrumental song. Garner is the composer of the piece, but the lyrics were written by Johnny Burke sometime after Garner finished the composition. Of all the songs I analyzed, Garner's version also has the fewest number of performers with Garner on piano playing alongside a double bass and a drummer. The piano Garner plays in the recording has keys that are out of tune, creating a secondary layer of dissonance outside of the chords themselves. I watched a video of Garner's trio playing "Misty" to understand how many instruments were involved, but I also developed a deep respect for his ability to lead his band. The recording of "Misty" that I analyzed has a

tempo that bubbles just around fifty two beats per minute and drops as low as forty beats, but the video showed him playing without regard for any kind of tempo at all; Garner played as though the song existed outside the realm of any metronome. In listening to Garner, you can hear the melody that Laufey or Leslie Gore would sing, but not without an added layer of improvisation. On the long list of differences between these three, Garner's "Misty" has a piano that acts as both the harmony, as the same goes for Laufey's piano, and the melody. The flares of improvisation blend over between the harmony section played on the left hand and the melody played on the right, creating a more unified blend of the two from the matched timbre.

In dissecting the standards into crucial segments I could discuss, the challenge of active listening to the same nine songs became apparent. For one, sensory adaptation takes place naturally after repeated exposure to a stimulus. Sensory adaptation is the reason the constant drone of a lawnmower or the smell of your house go unnoticed over time and it frees up brain space to notice new, and thus important, information. After listening to three songs in a constant rotation, which is how I grouped each of the standards, for hours at a time, I grew accustomed to the sounds and unknowingly let minutes pass without making an observation. On top of this, fatigue set in with its own hurdles. Long hours of sitting under the fluorescent library lighting and staring at a computer screen is draining, especially when the time is spent on a cognitively challenging task. Active listening takes focus, intention, and present-mindedness, three things I fought to maintain while nearing the end of my analysis. As an added hindrance, years have passed since my last formal analysis of a musical composition and I was out of practice. I no longer take music classes, those courses being front-loaded at the beginning of my college career, and the aural practice I have done since then is far more conceptual than concrete. I needed to relearn how to write informed musical

commentary, something I was only doing for my own leisure in casual terms otherwise. Comparing instrument choices, vocal skill, and other variables hardly comes naturally, but there was longing for such detailed analysis that was satiated by this task. Amidst the various struggles that made themselves known, I adored the time I spent on the nine standards. I could better understand the distinct approach each artist took to their song and my appreciation for Laufey's own direction grew more informed. Most importantly, I gained perspective into the decisions I made for "Fragile", learning about myself through the lens of other artists that cover. Choosing to keep some elements of the song the same, like lyrics and chords, while changing others, like the emphasis on the guitar and the altered outro, gained structure because I learned to explain my intentions using the vernacular of other artists.

The Conclusion

Connecting to Laufey

The first song I hear from a new artist is typically the one that goes under the most revision when I want to make a cover. From Lizzy McAlpine and her "Confetti" to Sara Bareilles and the ever-elusive perfect version of "Love Song", I develop an unwavering dedication to turn the song that started it all into something properly representative of what it means to me; my cover, if/when it is finally finished, should be a reflection of the love I have for the original. "Fragile" clarified this commitment I have to projects. Outside of my own vested interest, both academically and musically, I found myself wanting to make Laufey proud and would unintentionally make decisions based on the possibility of her encountering my work. While the odds are low, and continue to

shrink as her fanbase gains Lauvers by the day, I wanted to be prepared for the very real possibility of Laufey learning my name.

Her storytelling leads the audience to not quite tell where her personal experience ends and fiction begins again; “Fragile” immerses you in a different reality and separates Laufey into the narrator and also the main character living the song. Her strength with lyrics shines when you acknowledge that “Night Light”, a bittersweet farewell to her childhood home and the person she was before she left it, exists on the same album as “Beautiful Stranger”, an adorably mundane love letter to an attractive man she saw, but never spoke to, on the train. Studying not just “Fragile” but all of Laufey’s discography made it clear that I limit my songs to real things I went through, and only the emotionally significant ones at that. My aptitude for storytelling only reaches so far and it is from study and life itself that I can build upon natural ability. I have sixteen months more of knowledge, memories, and experiences than I did when I began my cover and there’s no doubt in my mind that, while some credit goes to other artists and the people I’ve encountered between then and now, my lyricism has a greater sense of realism as a product of Laufey.

A great deal of intentional effort went not only into the cover itself, but my emotional response to conquering the task. Laufey changed from an artist I was fond of into an inspiration from which I integrate parts of her work into myself. It has been a dream of mine since my early orchestra days to compose a piece with a string section as the focus, such as “California and Me” and “Promise”. Laufey acted as proof that string compositions can exist and be well-received outside of the musical theater world, an idea that Pop artists like Cody Fry and JVKE have also toyed with. I saw a woman of color make a name for herself doing what only seemed like a fantasy to me and I wouldn’t dare take that for granted. At the same time, imposter syndrome was a

debilitating beast in need of constant taming. A Berklee College of Music graduate and Grammy award winner that played with the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra as a teenager before doing a live concert album with the orchestra as an adult makes nothing if not a prestigious and accomplished artist. Laufey was freshly twenty-two when she released her first EP and was only a year older when *Everything I Know About Love* came out, an album I listened to on repeat while studying in my university library. Our trajectories in life were strikingly different, from where we grew up to the kind of music we heard as kids around the house, and an innumerable list of variables separate who I am today from who she was at twenty-one. Quickly, I felt like nothing I produced would ever be good enough because I could never compare to such a decorated act. Still, very few emotional or mental hurdles are open to reason and imposter syndrome was no exception. I am not Laufey. That's not a bad thing, of course; most would argue, myself included, that such a fact was a good thing because I deserve reverence for my own musical identity. However, the struggle of separating myself from Laufey became almost sisyphean as, without much notice, reasons I loved her music doubled as reasons to dislike my own. My voice isn't hers, my harmonies don't meld like hers, I can't hear music like she does. I deified Laufey as an artist to such an extent that working on the cover began to feel like punishment for not living up to her successes. It took accountability and focus to pick apart my perfectionism, my innate desire to please and be perceived as exemplary, in order to make any progress. If I hated every part of my cover that wasn't Laufey, lacked the trust in my musical IQ, I was never going to get anything done. Admittedly, the cover still isn't where I want it to be, but I am proud of what I have today.

I have previously mentioned Tori Kelly and Sara Bareilles because they are, within their own rights, just as much stepping stones in my musical journey as Laufey.

Tori Kelly's "Confetti" is the reason I decided to pick up a guitar almost ten years ago. Sara Bareilles, through her albums *Little Voice* and *What's Inside: Songs from Waitress,* taught me about my voice and my relationship with the piano. Artists like Jill Scott, Alicia Keys, Sammy Rae & the Friends, and more deserve their deserved credit for boosting me in whatever capacity they did, but Laufey was the first artist who was studied in academia. Prior to my honors thesis, there was never a time or need to treat one of my favorites as a case study that went under strenuous analysis. Because of this distinction, I'm unsure if I will ever be able to fully express how much I learned and grew to love about Laufey's music.

Maturity as a Musician

More captivating than any part of the project was the satisfaction that came from slowly watching the cover gain shape. Such is the case with any task of creation that starts without a clear road map, the sensation that you have no direction nor ability to reach the objectives you have vaguely defined for yourself ahead of time. While unconventional and usually advised against, there was liberation in walking into a cover with no final product sound in mind; the song was free to change in ways that could have been stifled by the preconceived concept in mind. Either that or I don't have a middle ground between a stifling static plan for a project and an absolute lack of foresight, but I digress.

"Fragile" is the first song on *Everything I Know About Love,* as if to say 'everything I know about love is fragile', and it was my hope to represent such an idea in my own version.The cover tested my limits of arranging, recording, and producing far past what I had initially expected. At its conception, I leaned on Laufey's original work and relied very little on my own intuition. Over time, the call of pure, unfiltered

imitation grew drone-like and undesirable. Simply copying what Laufey wrote left me with most of my creative and emotional potential unexplored and I wanted to push past that. Every sonic component of my cover, from the snaps sprinkled throughout to the subtle sounds of rain in the chorus, is mine, a component I recorded myself. An unwavering musical technique I use is building a piece around the guitar. It's my strongest instrument and one that, with my current ability, yields the greatest variability in sound and style. There is no making up for the lack of a string section, but the trio of guitars, possibly a quartet if the bass guitar is included, embody something different. The timbre of the guitar varies greatly from any classical stringed instrument and its flexibility within a digital audio workstation far surpasses anything I can currently accomplish with my own cello or viola. Admittedly, part of my investment in exploring the versatility of the guitar comes from my personal attachment to the instrument. Laufey's classical musical training instilled in her a relationship with composition that directly shaped what "Fragile", the first song of her first album while on a record deal, became. My musical education during primary school granted me the foundation that I built upon alone, spending hours developing my musical skill through YouTube guitar tutorials and brute force. As a result of this, the cover clearly reflects a handmade, deconstructed approach to the elegantly constructed original. Not to be synonymous with amateur or poorly done, 'handmade' is used endearingly; the cover came about from my own hands and no one else's.

Given six months, I would spend more time flushing out the harmonies within the song. The backup vocals leave so much to be explored because there is rarely more than a three-part harmony between the lead vocals and the backup, and those chords could be expanded. There is little harmonic competition between the guitars as they all play some variation of the same chords: there is the lead guitar that plays the entire

chord, the left-ear guitar plays the two lowest notes in rhythm, the right-ear guitar does the same with two high notes of the chord, and the bass outlines the chord. An untapped mine of tension and complexity could be explored if there was more time to make the guitar parts richer in harmony. Weeks were spent toying with different kinds of percussion and the current version has none, relying on the percussive plucking of the guitars to maintain the pulse. With more time, I would revisit the idea with the understanding of Laufey's use of percussion, which walks a line between Pop, Jazz, and Soul. I can see myself playing around with different effects on the vocals to create a warmer tone overall. All recording for the cover took place either in my bedroom or the basement of parent's house and both spaces are well-furnished with carpeting and sound-absorbent upholstery, so all voice parts are intrinsically warmer and more compressed than they would be while recording on hardwood floors. There is still a great deal of digital work I could do to accentuate the baseline quality.

The learning curve of arranging a cover was steep, but I am satisfied with my work. I was in early high school the last time I deconstructed a song to such an extent when I attempted to capture all the grandness of Tori Kelly's "Paper Hearts" with just my acoustic guitar and a microphone. What a relief it is to know my strength in musical segmentation has since stretched so much that I could achieve my "Fragile". Almost all of my compositional skill is aural, I rely heavily on my ear, rather than the predictory rules of music theory, to direct musical decisions. It was through honing this skill that my cover gained the little nuggets that differentiate it from the original. My production, most of which is done with trial-and-error-like gracelessness, improved substantially after feeling haunted by the phrase "it feels like it's missing substance or something 'extra' that's supposed to happen", one of the first notes I left for myself while editing months ago. I puzzled over a solution for the cover's incomplete hollowness in Logic

Pro's editing software as much as I did with a guitar in my hands. Refusing to rely on my recordings alone, I blindly ventured into the depths of words I didn't know and effects I couldn't explain until the vision came back into focus. Teaching myself music, teaching myself anything for that matter, takes far more time than having a formal instructor, but there is pride in knowing I accomplished all that I did on my own.

Reflection on Innovated Works

It's uncommon for Jazz standards to be labeled as covers, though that's fundamentally what they are. The distinction between the two labels can seem semantic at a glance, hinging more on the history of the song that is being reworked than the artist who reworks it or the style the artist chooses, but both types of innovated works have their place within my essay. "Misty", "I've Never Been in Love Before", and "I Wish You Love" are songs that, through analysis, reach beyond the first recording or sheet music from their composers, and such is the case with all Jazz standards. Writers like Erroll Garner, whose influence was brought more blatantly into the twenty-first century through Adele's "All Night Parking", and Charles Trenet are originators of beautiful works that are admired by their audiences, but their pieces can't become anything more until they are covered. In this sense, Natalie Cole and Caity Gyorgy, alongside all other Jazz artists, are augmenters that build songs into more than what the original writers could have intended. It is because of these renditions from other artists that a song can become a standard, a piece that has an identity and reputation independent of its originator. While less sequential, the same concept of reinterpretation exists within the world of cover music; a cover expands the original song beyond its writer's confines. Laufey, with her versions of the three standards, is an admirable addition to this expansion.

While I wouldn't dare make a clumsy comparison to such a musical and historical icon, my cover of "Fragile" and Beyoncé's version of "BLACKBIIRD", originally a hit from The Beatles, accomplish the same expansion of a song's identity. "Blackbird" was already a staple amongst many acoustic artists, but the piece has since been reinvented after the release of *COWBOY CARTER*. A type of love song for black women during the Civil Rights Movement, "Blackbird", put plainly, becomes something new entirely once it is covered and named "BLACKBIIRD". My cover accomplishes this same task on a near microscopic level comparatively, but accomplishes it nonetheless. I broaden "Fragile" into something more than what Laufey created it to be. There are three different versions of "Fragile" in Laufey's discography, including a live recording in her hometown of Reykjavik, yet I still bring new variables into the hypothetical personality of the song. The story is told by a voice that is mine, not Laufey's, after being reshaped by my thoughts and feelings and is ever so slightly bigger than how the artist made it as a result. Such an effect was the basis of my entire thesis, using Laufey as a medium to show the rich and almost cyclical nature of innovation in cover music. From this contextualization, the Icelandic artist becomes a bridge that connects me, a Pop singer-songwriter and college student with little more than a dream and determination, to Jazz as a world with its ever-present push for innovation. The relationship I have with Laufey can then mirror the one she has with Frank Leosser, Erroll Garner, and Charles Trenet. The hope is that, given enough time and fruitful circumstances, this chain of reinterpreted works will continue once one of my original songs is covered.

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