

For my project, I chose the medium of a song in order to explore the applied imagination. This choice stems from songs' exemplification of the power of interdisciplinarity, blending language, sound and psychology to evoke specific imaginative responses. Interestingly, in undertaking this project and engaging with systems of imaginative creation, such as Csikszentmihalyi's *Systems Model*, I have come to change the way I think about songwriting. I learnt that "what we call creative is never the result of individual action alone" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2015: 47), but a deeply collaborative endeavour involving the 'Individual,' the 'Domain' and the 'Field.' I will be interpreting this structure in a minimal scope where, respectively, the songwriter calculatedly engages with music to enable the listener's imagination. It is thus that my intended audience narrowed down to songwriters who wish to craft more purposeful songs with the audience's experience in mind. For, though my song is widely accessible to any listener, those who could learn most from it are exactly those artists who view their works as tools to guide and ground others' imagination. As such, my project seeks to explore and instruct on interdisciplinary techniques to engineer these imaginative frameworks, so that I and other songwriters like me can gain more self-awareness and thoughtfulness in such craft.

The variety of approaches explained below will be numbered, corresponding to the respective numbered sections in the song video. These are only a selection of the choices within the 'Domain' that I, the 'Individual,' made to tell the evolving story of a long-distance relationship. As "imagined experiences tend to be emotion-laden" (Cocquyt & Palombo, 2023: 1), these choices are meant to instinctively indicate the plot's direction to the 'Field' through the emotions they evoke. In listing techniques and intended emotional responses below I will, therefore, be identifying the affective cues that serve as the guidelines within which the imaginative "poetic [work] of translation" (Fryer & Conroy, 2021: 124) of the listener occurs. However, these 'perceived emotions' about the story are detached from 'felt

emotions', and as such do not invoke major ethical considerations, such as distress to the audience (Kawakami et al., 2014).

(1) These cues appear from the first note, as the song begins softly, with a reduced tempo and a low volume level due to the finger-picking style, all elements experimentally associated with both tenderness and sadness (Juslin & Lindström, 2010). This ambivalence is amplified by a monotonous repetition of the C major chord, which through harmonic stasis' lack of modulation creates a state of ambiguous valence, a deliberate 'tabula rasa' for the audience's imaginative projection, as prompted in the preceding sentence.

(2) The song then increases in volume, in tempo and, (3) after the sudden transition of a key change, combines with a musically cliché upward chord progression to represent the untainted, stereotypical joy of the first meeting after time apart. (4) However, the meeting soon ends and sorrow retakes the stage, displayed by a new progression's ending in a minor chord, which research shows to convey negative emotional valence (Zhang et al., 2025), and (5) the later addition of Major 7 chords, known to induce feelings of longing (Lahdelma & Eerola, 2015).

(6) When the lovers meet again, chromatic mediants are employed, often used in film-scoring to display heroism, which here portray an evolved joy (Dennis, 2018). (7) Because of this new-found maturity, the couple no longer grows demoralised and the song remains stable. (8) A stability which, however, stumbles upon a harrowing section, seminal to my interdisciplinary inquiry as it exemplifies a blend of evolutionary psychology and music theory to guide the listener's imaginative work: the tempo remains high, simulating stress, and is marked by the minor second interval (8*), a biological signature for distress as it mirrors the acoustic profile of human infant cries (Zeloni & Pavani, 2022). These techniques trigger a negative emotional response, aiding the imaginative interpretation of a surprising and distressing period of uncertainty.

(9) This crisis thankfully ends in the familiarity of a chromatic walk-down, which makes use of processing fluency, a psychological phenomenon where the brain finds comfort in predictable patterns (Van den Bosch et al., 2013). (10) The tension then mounts again but the mood is mostly unaffected, and the previously negative chords are no longer distressing. These chords, much like the lovers, have undertaken a journey of discovery and contextual framing, and through it have gained new meanings. (11) Finally, the song ends in a resounding C major tonic chord, shown to provide emotional resolution (Zhang et al., 2025). This final point is particularly important because it epitomizes a critical concern this entire investigation shares, its cultural reliance. Indeed, many of the aforementioned approaches are tied to a Western ‘Domain,’ such as cultural ideas of tonal familiarity, also predominantly tested on a Western ‘Field’ of researched participants. Therefore, though for practical reasons these will not be significantly addressed, it is important to acknowledge the potentially restricted scope of this project.

Overall, the song demonstrates how integrating psychology with music theory in my artistic choices revealed the advantage of adapting interdisciplinary thinking when exploring how to guide and apply the imagination. Indeed, though its specific plot may have been ambiguous, the techniques employed aimed to lead the audience to imagine the narrative as undulating, hampered, but eventually resolved. As illustrated throughout, this outcome can be best understood and shaped through Csikszentmihalyi’s system which, formulated for widespread and revolutionary creative achievements, has here been constructively applied to humbler artistic work. As a theoretical backbone for analysis, indeed, it allows us to see purposeful songwriting as a process of co-creation, where the imaginative end-product comes from a collaboration between the artist and the listener. The forenamed techniques are thus tools employed by the ‘Individual’ songwriter to set frameworks, cues, and implicit expectations that put the ‘Field’ of the audience in a position where they can extract specific

imaginative potential from the 'Domain' of the song and its underpinnings. Operating within the rigour of the *Systems Model* also allows for intentionality in the interplay between the co-creators, wherein the listener's imagination will contribute to the story "with its own particular history of experience" (Iser, 1978: 284) but, if the artist is successful, will remain within the provided boundaries.

It is so that language, which would require a separate exploration, acts as the indispensable but secondary role of the blank canvas upon which to play with the imagination through auditive contexts. The limitations of this approach are obvious, as no language can be wholly blank. Yet, in order to cloud the lyrics into the best imaginative canvas, I tried to exclude emotionally charged words, created enigmatic verses, and added a recurring chorus line which added a steady linguistic reference. Most importantly, however, this limitation is mitigated by my choice of the song medium whereby, instead of choosing an experimental design, I celebrated the unique meeting point, in songs, between language and sound. Similarly, though the melody, whose effect is mitigated by its adherence to the underlying chord structure, may play a factor in the emotions the song conveys, it is ultimately not about isolating disciplines, but welcoming their interplay that allows a project such as mine to be cohesive and instructive.

Awareness of these issues, of the power of songs as imaginative guides, and of the role of the artist as a co-creator of an imaginative product with the audience, will allow me to be a better songwriter. For, though artistic meaning is a dialogue, those who know they are in one will be most persuasive.

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