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## 'The Power of a Suit' and Other Tools for the Modern Music Marketer

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*THE POWER OF A SUIT*  
AND OTHER TOOLS FOR THE MODERN MUSIC MARKETER

by  
Andrew Gardner

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford  
May 2022

Approved by

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Advisor: Professor Brad Conaway

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Reader: Professor Scott Fiene

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Reader: Professor R.J. Morgan

# Abstract

The following thesis records the creation of a new persona. Mr. Neptoon is a concept, a brand, and most importantly, an authentic musician. He is an artist who wants to make and spread his art as widely as possible. We document the career trajectory from September 2021 to March 2022. The high-stakes experiment: utilize big-picture marketing goals to inform an approach to crafting the art and commercial material. Research informs the artistic direction. Research informs the messaging and marketing direction. The artist is creating and selling a full-length, fourteen-track concept album—aided by the project's marketing research — to be completed by the presentation date of this thesis. Furthermore, the author describes the minutia of the successes and failures of his music marketing experiences through the social media platforms Instagram and TikTok and his experience promoting the brand in live music performances. Finally, this thesis examines the first Mr. Neptoon single release in conjunction with audience response and streaming metrics. What is the 'line in the sand' between art and business? How do modern marketers and artists challenge this separation to enhance the commercial and artistic validity of both — in other words, to enhance the artistic validity of music marketing and the commercial viability of an artistic endeavor.

# Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank the SMBHC for encouraging me to pursue such a creative and outrageous thesis. Additionally, I owe the world to Dr. Ken Thomas for going to bat for me countless times and defending this thesis before it had even begun. This certainly wouldn't have come together without his support and vision. I'd like to thank Professor Brad Conaway for assuming the role of my level-headed advisor and continually steering me towards land when I insisted on leading us to water. Thank you to my additional readers, Professors Scott Fiene and R.J. Morgan, who both have played tremendous impacts in their own ways to lead me to the field of storytelling and marketing. To the men and women that contributed their talents to the album — Sam Capps, Kelly McBride, Austin Brooks, Quayshun Shumpert, Brandon Mitchell, Evelyn Smith, Hannah Newsome, Emma Gregory, Dr. Robert Westmoreland, and Prof. Brad Conaway — I owe you all a great deal. Additionally, the album itself would've never been possible without Blake Mohler and his tremendous work at MidAmerican Records. I have to thank the countless fellow musicians and teachers that continually pushed me (whether they knew it or not) to excel in music. Notably, Andrew Newman for blazing this thesis trail before me and offering guidance, Bedon Lancaster for his unwavering support of my original work, and Irwin Bell...for teaching me my first notes on the violin at the age of seven. I could've never fathomed the tremendously positive impact your lessons would've meant for me. Finally, my parents, Kevin and Jill Gardner. They have always, always, always supported my endeavors regardless of the field. I owe them everything that I am.

Additionally, I have to thank my roommates (both current and former) — Reed Peets, August Boyd, Joshua McClurg, and Zack Smith — for putting up with my midnight recording sessions and never complaining. Sorry and thanks, fellas.

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# Preface

For as long as I can remember, I have viewed the empirical world and been baffled by it. I have sat in cushioned chairs for hours and pondered the cosmic gumbo that made up galaxies unfathomable distances away and the intricate channels of skin running through my fingertips held only inches from my face. I couldn't help but feel that things were related, connected somehow. I found myself looking for a single answer to all my questions (as many often do). Is the answer something easy: perhaps a tagline or slogan, something that could fit on a bumper sticker? Possibly a radio jingle to explain the mysteries of the universe?

I never found it. Still haven't. But, I did find music. At the age of seven, I began training as a classical violinist. Fast forward fifteen years, and I've held positions in just about every musical opportunity that has come my way: choirs, high school garage rock bands, musical theater, bluegrass/country/gospel groups, stomp-and-clap folk bands, even street busking. I found a love for instrumentation as well as a love for performance. It offered me an outlet to channel the frustration and confusion that I felt through trying to understand the natural order of things.

But there weren't just negative feelings — I could play the reverence, mysticism, even raw beauty that I had witnessed and put these feelings into sound. These emotions felt impossible to verbalize but just as easily came out of me with an instrument in my hand. The universe never made an effort to give me a straight answer, so why was it on me to come up with one? Why not embrace the ambiguity of it all, and answer the cosmos with a similarly ambiguous solo from my violin or freshly strewn-together line of lyrics? Instead of trying to explain God to myself, I've found it much more rewarding to enjoy a conversation with him.

Now, before we move on, I ask that you please forgive the unbridled pomposity of the preceding paragraphs. What I am trying to convey is (1) I feel a connectedness in all things around me, and (2) art has given me a way to express this connectedness. I'm sure this is why I fell in love with Integrated Marketing Communication.

During my first semester in my IMC 104 course, I remember thinking that these concepts seemed almost tailor-made to my interests and quickly-developing worldview. To me, the very concept of IMC is one of connectedness: a consumer-first approach to marketing that seeks to create a single, concentrated message through a variety of platforms and media. Professor Fiene told my classmates and me about the importance of the 'Four P's of Marketing: Price, Product, Placement, and Promotion.' Through the planning and controlling of these four tactics, marketers throughout history have been able to craft, shape, and change consumer perceptions and attitudes towards their companies' most vital resource: the ever-mystical 'brand.'

As I worked my way toward my degree, with each passing month and each passing test, I also came that much closer to my Senior Capstone Project. Like every HOCO student I know, this impending deadline resulted in a fair amount of knuckle-biting in an attempt to even come up with a compelling concept. As the deadline drew closer, my love for playing and composing music grew, and I wondered if I couldn't "two-birds" this whole thing. Inspired by my friend, Spotify-savant, and former SMBHC graduate Andrew Newman's thesis "The Making of When We Say Goodnight" (which outlined Newman's creation of his sophomore album under the name Lo Noom), I sought to make my own thesis-album combo.

However, as wonderful as this seemed to me, it became clear that many faculty members still felt as though the IMC angle was being neglected in my original concept. Through the

guidance of Dr. Ken Thomas, I began to push myself to find the IMC in this project. Originally, it felt like a burden — a box to check off. However, I began to wonder how far I could really take this over time. How “Integrated” could IMC really get? And then, it hit me.

Throughout recorded musical history, artists and music labels have crafted a music first priority system.

**Step One:** Create and record the songs.

**Step Two:** Create the marketing plan in response.

What I’m proposing is *the opposite*.

**Step One:** Create a marketing plan.

**Step Two:** Create the songs and recordings in response.

To art purists, this is absolute heresy. And...I can accept that. Corporate and business interests within the art world have gotten a bad rap for decades...and for a good reason. No exception to this rule, the music industry has been largely condemned by vinyl collectors and dime-a-dozen "music guys" everywhere as being vampiristic, soulless, and just pretty generally terrible. You get the picture. So, why would I take on an endeavor like this one? Put simply; I wonder if business and art can't coexist. I'll even take it a step further and propose that they could simultaneously elevate each other. *What if the business side of music became the art itself?*

So, for the past two years, I've been developing a brand, an album concept, songs, marketing materials, logos, you name it. I have dreamed ideas, forgotten some, remembered them weeks later, scrapped others, pondered, developed, and sharpened. I have given this much

thought to creating a wholly integrated campaign while meeting modern music consumer expectations. And at the center of all this is a simple marketing mission of four goals built for the modern music era:

1. An **Album Concept** that supports our marketing mission
2. Songs that are **Playlist-Centered**
3. A **Recognizable Visual Brand**
4. Focus on **Promotion**

1. An **Album Concept** that supports our marketing mission

Perhaps the most important goal in this experiment is creating an album concept in the first place that allows for the IMC side to come through — this is what the remaining goals will draw on. In order to create the connectedness that this thesis aspires to, it became clear that a single narrative would create a nice framework for the other goals to build upon. The narrative itself will be revealed in the following section.

2. Songs that are **Playlist-Centered**

It is no secret that streaming is king in the music industry. It seems as though streaming numbers have replaced record sales for good. Moreover, how do modern, independent artists attain streams? Playlists — separated by moods, genres, suggested environments, even daily tasks like doing the dishes or working out. This album concept allows for various traits to qualify for as many playlists as possible and thus be listened to and exposed to as many new consumers as possible.

3. A **Recognizable Visual Brand**

It has always been my goal to have this project's brand be as visually striking and compelling as its sonic components. Additionally, a memorable look will help make this artist stand out and be recognizable on social media platforms.

#### 4. Focus on **Promotion**

Recently, a professor told me that while traditional marketing focuses on all 'Four P's' (Price, Product, Placement, Promotion), the secret sauce in IMC is our focus specifically on that last 'P.' Throughout the album, there will be a present theme of promotion throughout, that will be reflected in heavy promotion happening through the use of social media.

So, we have our four goals to bring art and business together. Let's start by taking a look at the music to understand how our tactics will be utilized.

# The Music

## Introduction:

Welcome to the tight rope. This thesis has the unique pleasure of walking down it. Now that the music's marketing goals have been established, how can the art be crafted to meet them? Additionally, how can Mr. Nepton strike the perfect balance of meeting our art with our business goals without coming off as a total hack? First thing's first: the music has to be good. There is no getting around it. If people don't want to listen to it, there is no amount of clever branding or savvy media tips that will make our product successful (Cheers to you, 'New Coke!'). So, what kind of research can this paper undertake to understand what good music is in the context of a concept album? It is time for some serious binge-listening.

## Research:

If this thesis is going to create a stellar product to meet our marketing goals, Mr. Nepton will have to craft excellent music that pairs with an excellent concept. Because of this, Professor Conaway decided that the music-related research should consist of listening to the most influential concept albums ever created. In what turned out to be one of the coolest and simultaneously slightly nauseating elements of this project, the researcher listened to 28 albums, front to back, in a month. After listening, the researcher would collect his thoughts and examine what he felt the works' strengths and weaknesses were. The complete list has been compiled at the following link:

[CLICK HERE](#) to view the research and analysis of the thirty most influential concept albums of all time

The biggest lessons that learned from this research were:

- 1. The album concept is most effective when relatable and grounded*
- 2. Just as the narrative should flow seamlessly between songs, so should the listening experience flow*
- 3. The general mood/vibe/energy level of each song should match the emotional state of our characters and general narrative at that particular moment in the story*

**1. The album concept is most effective when relatable and (somewhat) grounded**

- While there are albums that accomplish compelling concepts while entertaining the absurd ('Mothership Connection,' 'Joe's Garage Acts I, II, & III,' etc.), layered characters with human emotions still drive them at their hearts.

**2. Just as the narrative should flow seamlessly between songs, so should the songs themselves flow into each other as well**

- Concept albums are unique because there is an overwhelming feeling that every song is linked. Successful concept albums accomplish this by creating a musical listening experience in which the songs 'flow' into the next. 'Dark Side of the Moon - Pink Floyd. 'What's Going

On - Marvin Gaye. It doesn't have to be excessive, but a little time spent on a few extra steps in the production process can be the difference between "cool" and "WOAH."

**3. The general mood/vibe/energy level of each song should match the emotional state of our characters and general narrative at that particular moment in the story**

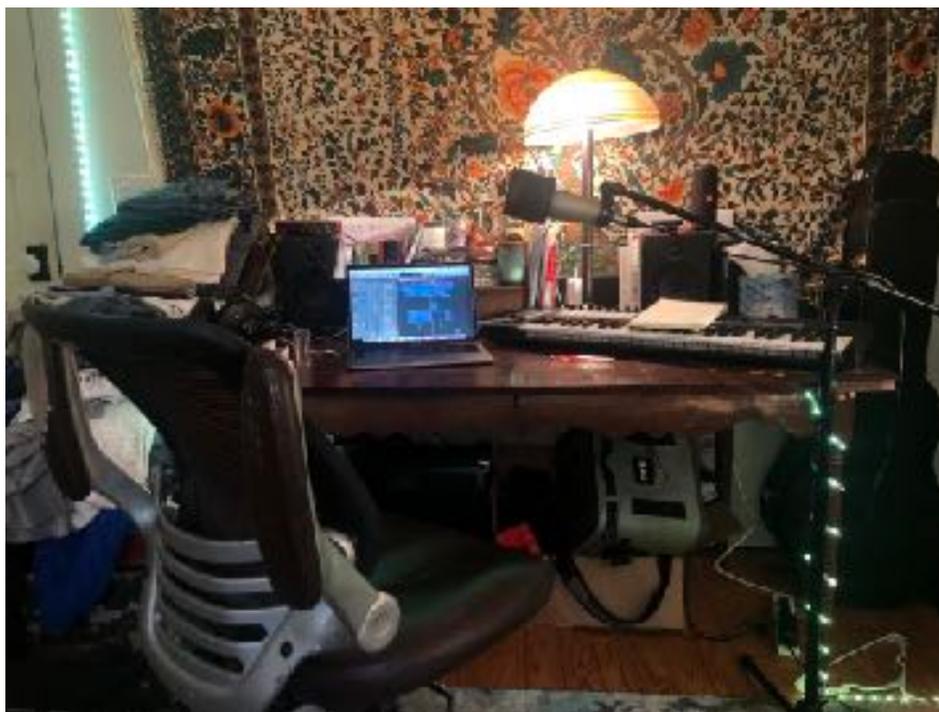
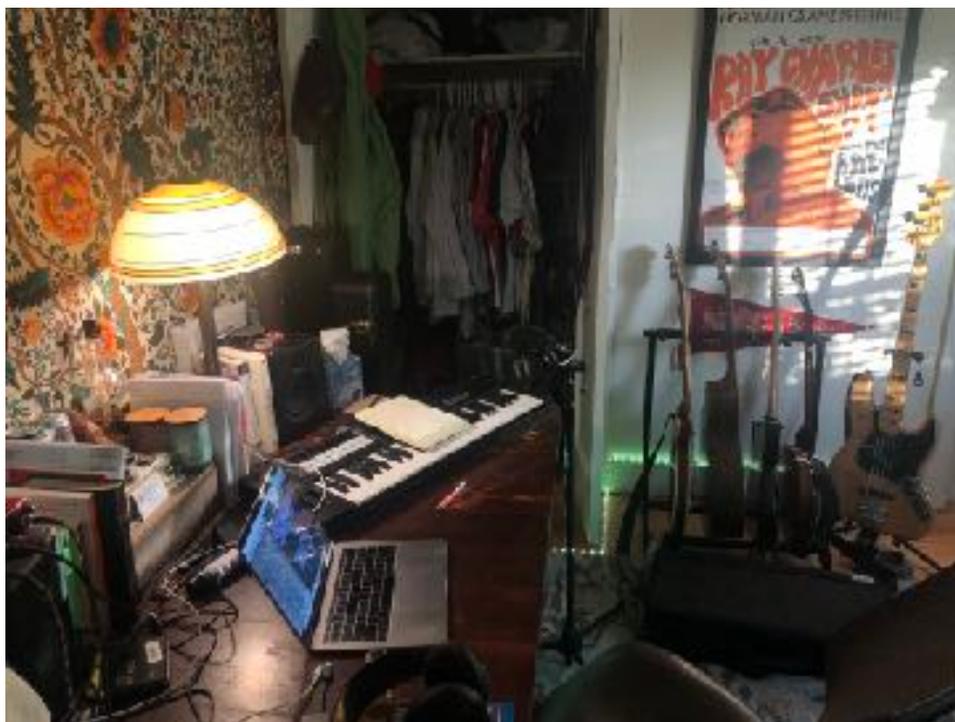
- This one seems obvious but can be quite hit or miss. In order to avoid the problem of getting attached to a certain newly-written song and perhaps sacrificing the storyline because of it, we'll save songwriting for last. This way, Mr. Nepton can create a song precisely to match a specific mood and, in a way, work backward.

Now that we have the steps to creating a masterful concept album let's get started.

### Album:

#### Music Production Process:

In late March of 2020, when Earth's rotation came to a grinding halt, just about every living creature with a set of opposable thumbs had a great deal of time on their hands. And, after completing the running list of movies that they'd been putting off watching or finally getting around to painting that menacing outdoor deck, they realized they needed a hobby to keep life interesting. I was no exception. It was about this time that I committed myself to learn the basics of music production and setting up a home studio. Two cheap studio monitors, a single condenser mic and accompanying stand, my continually growing pile of random instruments, a software license for Logic Pro X, and lots and lots of cables did the trick.



The early stages were, admittedly, rough. Layering sonic elements on top of each other to create a single song sounded simple enough, but I soon found that getting what I was hearing in my head felt near impossible. For every track that I finished, there were about fifteen that I'd scrapped. But I was getting better all the while. I began to notice details in music that I hadn't previously. Stylistic choices began to make sense; sonic storytelling became more and more recognizable. There is an entire technical world of music that often gets overlooked. The roles of sound engineers and mixing professionals held no allure over me, but I was beginning to appreciate and get quite good at songwriting and composition.

Luckily, I met a professional producer named Blake Mohler of Mid-American Records while working with another band. We came to an agreement that I would do the preliminary composition of each song on the album. Then I would send my files to Blake to get 'radio-ready,' including mixing, mastering, and small, additional production choices.

[CLICK HERE to listen to what one of the songs sound like before having it professionally mixed and mastered](#)

[CLICK HERE to listen to what one of the songs sound like after having it professionally mixed and mastered](#)

With this system in place, we began to tell the story of Mr. Neptoon.

### Album Concept:

Someone once said, "Write about what you know." In an effort to do just that, I wanted this album to portray the modern undergraduate upperclassman experience. In the past couple of years of my own experience, I have felt the extreme stress, joy, insight, sloth, grief, wonder, and self-discovery that strikes oneself when they are on the brink of adulthood — or at least a loss of childhood. My own experiences loosely inspire this concept, and I believe it captures the messy beauty of growing up.

### Plot Walkthrough

#### **Track 1:** “*Ad 1 of 2*”

- This is the first of two mock “ads” built to mimic YouTube ads. Advertising Lewis Wilson Outfitters, picture a radio spot for Men's Warehouse. A sultry, refined voice will list elegant, fashion-friendly words over a smooth, jazz-inspired backing track. "Come and visit Lewis Wilson Men-store on 215 East Capitol Street in Jackson and discover, for yourself, the power of a suit."

- *Plot Function:* This ad track holds quite a bit of background and personal significance. For years, my grandfather and his father-in-law ran a men's suit store in Jackson, MS. Both men died before I got the chance to meet them, so the store went with them. However, their impression of our family and friends lasts to this day. In a way, the theme of this album is an homage to those men and, perhaps, my family as a whole — a nod to my past right off the bat. A certain reverence towards the suit is

undoubtedly established here, and as our plot unfolds, the suit will come to symbolize the acceptance and responsibility of adulthood.

**Track 2:** “*Ad 2 of 2*”

- The second mock "ads" will be advertising a run-of-the-mill, mega cheesy/slightly sleazy billboard lawyer. With a backing track that sounds like the royalty-free version of a Law and Order: SVU soundtrack, a loud-mouthed voice actor will proclaim his protection over the little man and invite those seeking justice to 'call him now!' At which point, the phone number '276-094-0000' (set to a catchy jingle sung by a cheery quartet) will play the ad out.
  - *Plot Function: This second ad will function to symbolize another mega theme: true identity vs. the identity that we sell to ourselves and others. This will be elaborated later on in the track list. Additionally, the phone number is significant, because it is the approximate distance in miles from Neptune to Mercury and its melody will be the key melodic theme repeated several times throughout the tracks.*

**Track 3:** “*Drifting Off*”

- Our first isolated piece of music. A lone guitar riff slowly builds from an almost homey picture of the outdoors into its crescendo — an anxiety-inducing cacophony of more and more instruments, voices, and eclectic sounds joining in.
  - *Plot Function: With our next song profiling one of our protagonist’s daydreams, this song serves as the subway car that leads us into our protagonist’s head. Taking us deeper and deeper into his subconscious, we begin to hear his thoughts and voices as the cacophony builds. Despite his outward appearance displayed at the beginning of the track, the onion is pulled back layer by layer, and the listener is exposed to his true mental state — anxiety ridden, scared, and kept completely internal.*

**Track 4:** “*Tangerine Daydream*”

- Welcome Neptoon, our protagonist. He passively addresses his outside world with contempt and distances himself immediately. The song begins somber and turns dreamy and warm for

its second half. Neptoon feels at home here but admits that at times he would "jump right out" of his own head. As he begins to feel even more comfortable, he launches into a vocal solo and the track is cut untimely short.

- *Plot Function:* From an early impression, we learn that Neptoon feels isolated and prefers it that way — but not without mixed feelings. He's longing for something, but we're not sure what quite yet.

### **Track 5: "Zoom Class"**

- An abrupt ending to the preceding track makes way for our most precise picture of Neptoon's world. Over sub-par audio (taken directly from the Zoom app), Neptoon's instructor calls on his attention, forcing Neptoon out of what we learn was his mid-class daydream. The instructor orders him to stop eating his "orange" in class, to which Neptoon reminds him that this is a zoom class, and, he is, in fact, in his home. This no doubt frustrates the professor, and leads him to ask why his name on zoom is "Neptoon." Neptoon reassures him that that's what everyone has always called him — kids growing up used to say he was 'way out there...' and it "just kind of stuck." This starts a somewhat heated, albeit brief conversation between the two in which the instructor urges Neptoon to take charge of his life. He recommends engaging with an organization equipped to guide upcoming college graduates toward adult life — The University Society for Undergraduate Career Kickstarting. But, Neptoon can't get over the fact that their acronym is 'USUCK.' After wrapping up their conversation, his professor reminds him that it's 1:30 in the afternoon, so he should probably...

- *Plot Function:* This track serves as the audience's introduction to Neptoon's world, and gives us our first, concrete exposition for the album's storyline. Despite Neptoon's lack of current ambition, he clearly shows potential to all those around him. But, instead of meeting life head on, Neptoon chooses to approach things passively and chooses to believe that everything around him is against him. This is the mental state of our protagonist as we meet him.

### **Track 6: "GULA!"**

- The vocals immediately shout "GET UP!...witcha LAZY ASS!" as the next track bursts into a funky groove. Throughout the course of the song, Neptoon breaks down a day in his life. He

describes the loneliness he feels as the whole world starts their day without him. But, he admits that he isn't missing anything that "won't be here tomorrow." Towards the end of the song, we hear a knock on his front door, and the audience is taken out of the song (so to speak) as the final verse and pre-chorus is played through what sounds to be like Neptoon's own home speaker setup. The man at the door says he's looking for a 'Mr. Neptoon' and introduces himself as 'Merc.' Merc reveals that he is a representative from the USUCK, and implores Neptoon to take advantage of the program (after the quick mention of a minor, financial commitment through credit card). Neptoon starts to politely end the conversation, but finds himself fascinated by Merc's nickname as he's handed Merc's business card. Merc describes his mother labeling him as "mercurial" as a child, and the name sticking. Neptoon turns the speaker system off when Merc describes this nickname origin story. Merc wishes Neptoon a nice weekend, and tells him to think over his proposition.

- *Plot Function:* This song serves two roles: to give us a better picture of our protagonist and what he deals with on a daily basis, and also to introduce our supporting character Merc. Merc will soon act as a somewhat perverse mentor to Neptoon, and their instant established connection is vital to the plot moving forward. Although Neptoon was initially unimpressed with Merc, it's clear that Neptoon felt a sense of connection once learning about Merc's nickname. Also, wasn't it odd for Merc to include trivial information about financial payment in this? Hmm...

**Track 7:** *"American Holy Spirit"*

- One of our most catchy songs yet, this song finds Neptoon trying to get home after a night of partying. Likely in an attempt to clear his head after all this talk of ambition and potential, Neptoon asks for a ride and cigarette in the first verse. In our chorus, he reveals that he hears a voice speaking to him, pleading for him to come to his senses and not to "let go." This voice

visits him throughout the song, and as Neptoon confronts his own boredom and sanity with his current lifestyle in our bridge section, he begins to question if he really is giving himself over to his own apathy. As the track ends, we hear Neptoon exit the car and thank his driver while fumbling with the handshake/dap up/fist bump. As he begins walking to his door, he runs into an old friend and they reconnect.

- *Plot Function:* To me, this song is important because it wraps the attitudes of our protagonist and surrounding world that we've seen so far up in a nice bow. Neptoon is consistently unimpressed, unconvinced, and suspicious of his surroundings and isolates himself willingly in response — all the while taking advantage of the people around him for his own personal gain ("can I bum a ride", "can I bum a light"). And, rightly so. So far, it appears as if everyone that has reached out to Neptoon has had an ulterior motive. Neptoon doesn't know if he can trust anyone other than himself. And when all this culminates with a spiritual voice calling out to him from beyond the throes, Neptoon can't help but be confused as to what to believe. After all, is this just a consequence of his lack of sobriety — is he going crazy? Can he really even trust himself? And, as if right on time, Neptoon finds someone that he really can trust.

### **Track 8:** “*Blue Delta*”

- As Neptoon speaks to his old friend, a comfortable and understated groove plays. Neptoon sings that he thinks he's "having a revelation." We, the listeners, can almost hear the cogs turning in Neptoon's head. Because of the visitation of an old friend, Neptoon begins to self-reflect for the first time in his life and wonders if he is even the same person as the one that associated with this friend ("...is this even still me?"). Neptoon calls out to "Blue Delta" and admits that it's been "too long" since this feeling has gone from him. As the song concludes, Neptoon chants over and again "I know I gotta change...but I just don't wanna...I know I gotta change...but maybe I oughta." The song concludes with our protagonist and his old

friend finishing their conversation that has taken place while the song has played. Neptoon describes the voice he heard in the song prior, and his friend advises that he reach out to a professional that can help him. Neptoon agrees and realizes he knows exactly who to call.

This is the conclusion of the A-Side of 'The Power of a Suit.'

- *Plot Function:* This track functions as the most pivotal moment in the album so far. Because of a chance run-in with an old friend, Neptoon finally meets the power of self-reflection and ultimately admits to himself the truth of his lifestyle — and for this, he must change. This marks the first time our protagonist has taken a step forward in bettering himself, and shows a great deal of growth in our main character. Additionally, it sets up the foundation for the lessons he will learn as he develops his relationship with Merc.

### **Track 9: “New Perspective”**

- The first track on the B-side throws us right into the start of Neptoon and Merc’s friendship. Merc’s voicemail plays over the track — “This is Merc Johnson. You know what to do. \*automated voice\* Please leave a message after the tone.” More and more instruments are layered on top, and a groove breaks out as if to suggest that Neptoon is comfortably settling into a new friendship. Throughout this song, Neptoon struggles with his own desire to distance himself from others, but is helplessly overcome with emotion and wonder as he get exposed to Merc’s “perspective.” It’s in these moments that we start to see the self-awareness momentum of ‘Blue Delta’ ramped up even more so. Neptoon’s transition from child to adult is beginning to pick up steam.

- *Plot Function:* It’s unclear what “new perspective” Merc is actually showing Neptoon. That much is left ambiguous but the audience should have a better idea in the next track. This song, to me, shows a powerful juxtaposition between giving up control and directly taking it — or perhaps the control one inadvertently receives from giving it up in the first place. By slowly learning to trust and sit in

*the proverbial passenger seat, Neptoon opens himself up to a new way of thinking and seeing the world. Neptoon is overcome with epiphany... "the sky just opened."*

**Track 10: "Billboard"**

- This VO-dominated track finds Neptoon and Merc enjoying a car ride discussion. Their comfortability with each other is obvious, and the audience can see that some time has certainly passed to allow for this. We open with Neptoon still hung up on the handshake debacle from the end of 'American Holy Spirit.' Merc proposes a hypothetical social agreement in which society agrees on a final greeting and departing handshake of some kind. Neptoon totally agrees and chuckles, saying that Merc's in his head. Neptoon spots a billboard for a local lawyer and remarks that he has no respect for someone that advertises themselves that way. He finds it obtuse and tone-deaf. Merc immediately takes issue with this, and insists that the man is to be admired — he's created a career for himself, and likely has responsibilities like a family or mortgage that Neptoon knows nothing about. In short, Merc claims that the man knows himself and insinuates that Neptoon doesn't. "That's the power of a suit," he claims. "When you put it on for the first time...you learn more about yourself in that moment than you ever have in your whole life." Neptoon prods Merc, and expresses that he can't believe anyone would be so open to relinquishing all dignity by selling themselves on the side of the road. "We're all selling something, Nep," says Merc. "Even me. Even you." After a beat of thought, Neptoon does concede that the lawyer has a catchy jingle, and whistles the tune heard in our second ad track. Around this time, Neptoon receives a distressing call, and it's clear that someone close to him is having an emergency. The track concludes as Neptoon forcefully urges Merc to turn the car around.

- *Plot Function:* This conversation might be the most telling in the entire album. Our main characters' world views are put on full display. Neptoon's youthful fascination with his own self-dignity clashes with Merc's seasoned understanding of the real world. Soon, Neptoon will have his first taste of this real world as a result of the phone call he receives at the end of the track.

**Track 11:** "*The Dishes*"

- This track takes place during a truly bad day. A contemplative, mellow guitar line accompanies Neptoon as he describes the scene of a loved one's deathbed, and takes time to describe the reactions of the living members present. The loved one in question is never revealed. In these somber moments, Neptoon grapples with the reality of his current situation and accepts that despite our best wishes, "nothing we do is gonna fix this." But, furthermore, he accepts that life moves on from today ("somebody's gotta do those dishes"). The track ends with Neptoon walking into the kitchen and turning on the faucet to do the dishes himself.
- *Plot Function:* This song marks Neptoon at his most observant — his most present yet. His own self-awareness is becoming increasingly acute, and for good reason. Likely one of the hardest and most profound days of his life, Neptoon confronts the ultimate reality that we all face at one point or another: the finality of all things. This song will serve to pose the larger questions that Neptoon will seek to answer in the following song. On a personal note, this song means a great deal to me. The events described were taken directly from my own life — specifically, the day I lost my grandfather. Having also lost a friend very suddenly about six months prior, my exposure to death and mortality marked a definitive end (or at least a beginning of the end) to my youth as it has done for so many others.

**Track 12:** "*Amish Country*"

- A simplistic, reverent electric guitar line comes in to introduce the next song. Now that he has time to sit with his thoughts, Neptoon begins to process the day's events. As he grapples with his own mortality, the chorus functions to serve as his proverbial fist held to the heavens as he

proclaims he wishes “it was easier.” In a moment, he recounts a visit he took through “Amish country” in which he saw two young boys who looked just like him. He can’t seem to understand why they were destined for their life and he his. He concedes that it must, in fact, have been easy in comparison. Evidently, Neptoon doesn’t feel it. The song concludes with Neptoon wishing mournfully for “something easy.”

- *Plot Function:* Anyone that has experienced grief knows the multitude of questions and doubts that arise from a single mournful event. Neptoon is experiencing exactly that. Coupled with his conversation with Merc regarding identity and life as they know it, we get to watch Neptoon becoming an adult in real time. Even the simple act of doing the dishes in the previous song shows that he is finally taking responsibility and leaving a life of passivity behind him. The Neptoon we see now is not the same one we met at the top of this album.

**Track 13:** “*Collect Call from Yoknapatawpha County Prison*”

- This track, comprised entirely of the raw audio of a phone call between Merc and Neptoon, opens with the monotone, robotic voice associated with calls coming from a prison: "This is a prepaid call from Merc an inmate from Yoknapatawpha County Prison." Neptoon picks up, and Merc tries to smooth over the awkward situation with some small talk. Neptoon reveals that he is about to leave for the funeral. Merc puts the pieces together and innocently realizes out loud that Neptoon must have finally put on the suit. Merc reveals he's been charged with Identity Theft due to a credit card racket he's been running. Neptoon can't believe it, and starts to remember all the times Merc insisted on payment for his services. After all his big talk about knowing yourself and who you are, Merc's hypocrisy has finally shown through. Neptoon takes a minute to collect himself, and thanks Merc for making his decision easy — he's finally gotten the “something easy” that he longed for in the last song. Neptoon tells Merc

that he can't help him. Merc finally shows his mercurial nature and begins to curse Neptoon out. Neptoon remarks that he finally sees what Merc is selling. Merc isn't happy with this answer, and asks what he's supposed to do. Neptoon responds, "You want my advice? Get a good lawyer."

- *Plot Function:* Our final VO-dominated track serves as the final catharsis moment for Neptoon. He takes his final form in this piece, asserts himself, and fully realizes his own worldview and identity. His adulthood is now attained. Ironically, Merc now finds himself in the opposite position — lacking self-awareness, and in need of the lawyer whose self-awareness he actually admired earlier on in the album.

**Track 14:** "*We're All Selling Something*"

- Right as Neptoon hangs up the phone, a classic spaghetti western-style guitar creates a sonic landscape that feels like a moment out of 'Josey Wales.' A somber, yet confident whistle set to the tune of the lawyer's own jingle rings out as the intro for our final track. Soon, a jaunty beat seats in, and Neptoon lays out the lessons he's learned over the past hour or so. There's only so much time in this life, so spend it wisely. No one has the answers. Everyone's just "swimming in the deep end." But just because the "charm wears off," it doesn't mean that we have to lose our love of life. Our youth may be behind us, true...but "is it ever really?" Do we ever really grow up?
- *Plot Function:* One of my favorite moments in the album is the final callback to our lawyer from the second ad track. Just as Neptoon whistled his catchy jingle during the car conversation track, it comes back into play to close out our story. This song is one of acceptance, and hope, but is met with caution. Neptoon has faced betrayal and heartache, and while he still holds an optimistic view of the human condition, he is still wary of its dangers. But, that doesn't mean he can't admire the beauty in its flaws.

# The Marketing

## Introduction:

The beautiful thing about the music industry today is that anyone with a laptop can create and release recorded music. The frustrating thing about the music industry is also exactly that. How can Mr. Neptoon go about cutting through the clutter? Well, first, this thesis should seek to understand the clutter. For this research portion, this researcher has chosen fifteen artists who market themselves almost completely independently (or at least started that way) through social media. Let us take a look at the tactics and strategies of these artists and see we cannot use them to inform the messaging strategy for Mr. Neptoon.

[CLICK HERE to view the research and analysis of fifteen modern artists and musicians who are using social media to define their brand story and reach new audiences](#)

The biggest lessons learned from this research were:

- 1. Your content should highlight your own personal strengths above all else*
- 2. Collaborate with other artists and creators*
- 3. Innovation = clicks*
- 4. Inflect your own personality into each post and source of messaging*

### **1. Your content should highlight your own personal strengths above all else**

- As a commercial violinist, I have found this to be the case in music as well as music marketing. Those that are successful in this game are the ones that carve a niche out for themselves based on their strengths.

### **2. Collaborate with other artists and creators**

- Not only does collaboration create a network of professionals that could yield job opportunities down the road, but when a single creator collaborates with other creators in a digital space, they both reach a completely new audience. That is, the other artist's followers.

### **3. Innovation = clicks**

- The internet runs on fads and trends. There's an overwhelming belief online that new is always better than old. Creators have to find ways to innovate and draw eyes on the newest, coolest thing.

### **4. Inflect your own personality into each post and source of messaging**

- Social media has allowed for an unprecedented level of personal life accessibility for each user. Followers expect an accessibility and honesty in what creators are putting online. It's in their best interest to be authentic because users can smell disingenuous content from a mile away.

## **Social Media Marketing**

The two platforms that this thesis utilized to market the Mr. Neptoon brand were TikTok and Instagram. The latter always had the upper hand, as I had converted my old personal Instagram account into the Mr. Neptoon business account. We started with 1,659 followers. I

made the TikTok account from scratch and started with 0 followers. Here are some quick statistics and tips to properly utilize these platforms...

[CLICK HERE to view TikTok best practices — compiled from research](#)

[CLICK HERE to view Instagram best practices — compiled from research](#)

Additionally, this thesis focuses on music streaming metrics through the Spotify platform, the most prevalent of its kind. Here are some additional tips and statistics for this unique platform...

[CLICK HERE to view Spotify best practices — compiled from research](#)

### Visual Brand

One of our four main marketing goals was to create a visual brand associated with Mr. Nepton. Surely you can already guess what that visual look would be. The imagery of the suit is a powerful allegory within the album for adulthood, while the sunglasses represent Nepton's new perspective as well as the mask he hides behind. Additionally, these wardrobe choices hold a few added bonuses:

- It is extremely striking — maybe even a little odd. So, the key here is memorability.

Especially in the swiping/scrolling context. This thesis will be competing with many

creators in a very saturated space, so there is no need to shy away from something that might feel gimmicky in the real world to create an impression.

- The suit should serve as a blank slate of sorts. There are not too many feelings associated with the suit in terms of genre. Granted, there might be an expectation of something a little old school, but overall the ability to genre hop will definitely play in Mr. Neptoon's favor when it comes to creating playlist-forward music.
- In a live performance, a full band wearing suits will always look more professional than the other band on the bill that look like they just rolled out of bed.

So, our research has shown how other creators create their unique artist brands online. Now, it's time for Mr. Neptoon to do it himself.

### Announcement Post

Once my research was complete, I was ready for Mr. Neptoon to be introduced to the world. I gathered up all of the instruments that I owned, and laid them out on my front lawn. Underneath these and my newly-purchased black suit and tie, I laid out with them and snapped a few photos on a self-timer. After editing them together with a snippet from a song that I had been producing around that time, I sent it out into the world. My friends and family were ecstatic, and it sent this whole marketing journey into orbit. To this day, it is still the most engaged-with post.

[CLICK HERE to view Mr. Neptoon's debut Instagram post](#)

## The Admiration Sessions

My next mission was to give people a taste of the music to come without showing too much of my hand. Additionally, I wanted to expose myself to new audiences outside of my friends and family. However, most importantly to my friends and family specifically, I had established myself as somewhat of a background instrumentalist throughout my years of playing music around the Oxford scene. I needed a way to show that I could handle the frontman role.

In response, I came up with "The Admiration Sessions." The concept was simple: cover a series of original songs that my musical mentors had released. This way, I could pay genuine tribute to the people who had prepared me for this moment while flattering them into reposting the content and thus exposing me to their follower base. It was a win-win.

[CLICK HERE to view Mr. Nepton's Admiration Session post for fellow musical artist, Bedon](#)

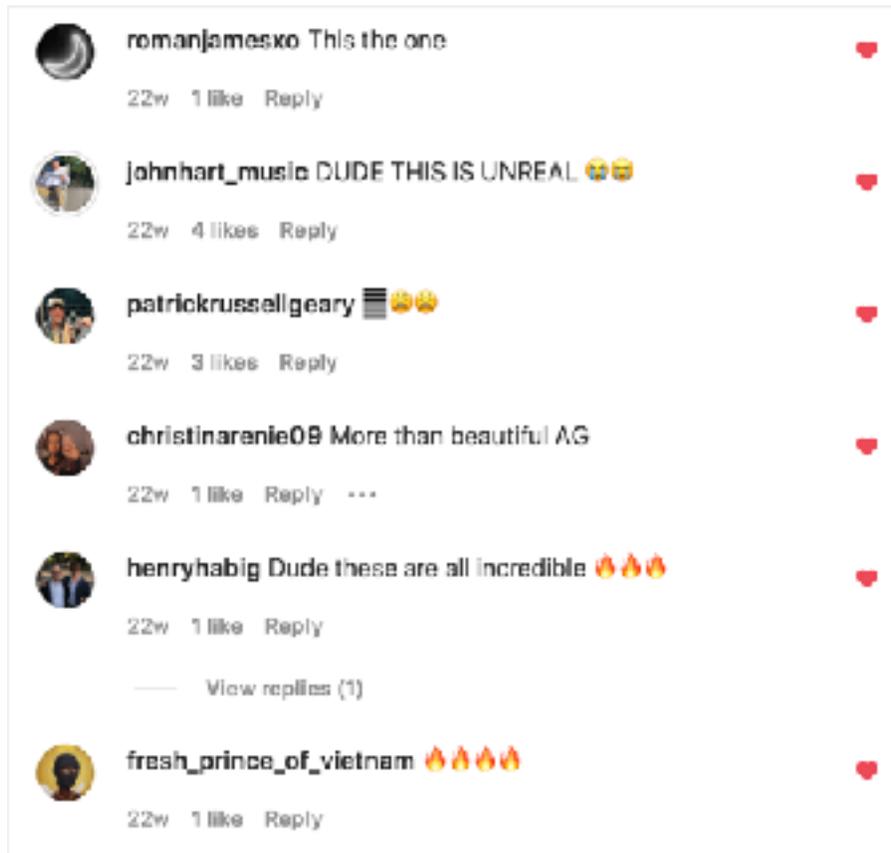
[CLICK HERE to view Mr. Nepton's Admiration Session post for fellow musical artist, Lo](#)

[Noom](#)

[CLICK HERE to view Mr. Nepton's Admiration Session post for fellow musical artist, John](#)

[Hart](#)

These posts performed right in line with what I was hoping for, and I was thrilled with how the production turned out. It seems as if our audience was too.



Additionally, the artists covered were indeed flattered and shared these posts. I did not expect this, but I created a demand for my originals by creating covers. It seemed like every time I ran into friends around this period, they complimented my recent posts but insisted that they

were holding out for the real thing. Moreover, I couldn't go anywhere without someone asking when my music was dropping. That was an unintended effect but undoubtedly useful. Additionally, I noticed a decline in viewership and engagement with each post. If I wanted to stay relevant, I had to follow the lesson I learned with our creator study: always keep innovating.

### Public Relations

After I began posting more and more frequently, this project began to gain serious traction. One day, I received a text message from a writer at the Daily Mississippian named Brittany Kohne. She had seen my Mr. Neptoon promotion and wanted to write a whole story on the process. I met with her after a few days, and she wrote a fantastic story that came out just a day before Mr. Neptoon's first live show (more on that to come).

[CLICK HERE to read the Daily Mississippian's profile on Mr. Neptoon](#)

Not long after, I got a text message from Hailey Layne with UM Square Magazine. Because they are a magazine with a visual and fashion emphasis, they took an interest in Mr. Neptoon's visual persona and wanted to write a profile about the project. This was the most advantageous interview because it came with a photographer and photoshoot. I asked to use their photos as promotional material, and they agreed. The shots and story turned out fantastic. Plus, the photo editor added some animations that have inspired me to rethink my art style. These photos will be extremely valuable promotional material for upcoming shows and music releases.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read UM Square Magazine's profile on Mr. Nepton



## TikTok

The Mr. Nepton effort on TikTok proved challenging. Finding the current key to the social media platform's specific algorithm is crucial. I experimented with releasing TikToks at

different recommended times of day, adopting hashtags, even leaving my content completely caption-less as well as hashtag-less to game the algorithm. Despite trying several strategies and experimenting with trends, there is still an element of luck to viral success on the platform.

The account did end up with a modest following, and some of the content was repurposed on other social media platforms. The videos hovered around 300-600/700 views with a few outliers in both directions.

Traditionally, the account would receive about 20-30 likes with a handful of comments. To emphasize what seemed to be Mr. Nepton's musical strengths, I found some time to go to Paris-Yates chapel after hours and record some spooky, reverb-laden performances in the empty sanctuary. The videos were well received but did not reach the hoped-for potential audience. When these same videos were posted to Mr. Nepton's Instagram, they received more attention and "traction." This is likely because the account's following on Instagram is more established than on TikTok. The same video got 37 likes, four comments on TikTok, 248 likes, and 29 comments on Instagram. Additionally, 662 views versus 7,080 views, respectively.

[CLICK HERE to view Mr. Nepton cover 'Ultralight Beam' by Kanye West](#)

I tried as many things as I could think of. I even went for laughs on a short, moody video displaying my violin playing. This once again got a modest response on TikTok (30 likes, 2 comments).

[CLICK HERE to view Mr. Neptoon's Tiktok humor](#)

### Name Confusion

When this project began, the original musician moniker and brand name of this thesis was 'Mr. Neptune'. The spelling has since changed to 'Mr. Neptoon'. This change took place around mid-January of this year as I realized (after making the initial announcement) that there were several artists out in the streaming-sphere already going by the name and spelling 'Mr. Neptune'. I realized that not a single person was going by 'Mr. Neptoon' — additionally, '@mr.neptoon' was always available on any social media platform. '@mr.neptune' was pretty usually taken. Plus, during the Admiration Sessions, the brand personality began to come off as slightly moody; perhaps that I was taking myself a bit too seriously. Although there's a big emphasis on self-reflection and introspection, this project was also about youthfulness and energy. Because of this, Mr. Neptune permanently changed his name to the more whimsical 'Mr. Neptoon'.

This proved to be the right decision, but didn't come without its costs. The 'Mr. Neptune' name and brand had already been established, and for a while, our audience had no idea which spelling was correct. It culminated with the advertising of the debut live show which I'll go into further depth in the section below. The headliner continually advertised me as 'Mr. Neptune' to the point that I had to send him a text and email the venue representative regarding the spelling. It was a mistake caught early in the marketing process, but it certainly led to confusion for our

audience. Releasing the music under ‘Mr. Nepton’ in early February was the ultimate way to have our new spelling written in stone. Thankfully, that confusion has since dissipated.

[CLICK HERE to view promotional material for Mr. Nepton’s first live show...notice the spelling of “Neptune”](#)

### **Releasing the Music**

#### Live Show

Bedon Lancaster is an established Nashville musical artist, former Ole Miss student, and subject of Mr. Nepton's first Admiration Session cover. This past January, Mr. Nepton faced his first real test. Bedon asked if Mr. Nepton would open for him at Proud Larry's. I was hesitant. A good amount of songwriting still had to be done, and I wasn't sure how the production I had finished would transfer over to a live performance. I reluctantly agreed...and it was hands down the most positive decision made for this thesis.

The beautiful thing about marketing a live show was that in addition to any self-promotion I did myself, the venue (in our case, thankfully exceedingly well established and respected) marketed for me as well. So, I had an established name going to bat for me and spreading my image to a new audience. Bedon would be the headliner, Drummingbird (another group from Nashville) would go second, and Mr. Nepton would open. After three weeks of

practice with three of my most trusted musician friends, we debuted Mr. Neptoon to the world and rocked the house on January 27, 2022.

The crowd was easily 200+, likely closer to 300, and a packed room. I asked a few friends in the audience to record some vertical videos for me and ended up with tons of footage with content potential. The timing played to our advantage as well. After securing album art and finishing post-production, I was set to release the first single, 'American Holy Spirit,' only a week after our performance. We closed our set with this song, announced as we finished that it would soon be dropping, and played it as loud as we could.

#### 'American Holy Spirit' — Debut Single Strategy

I knew I needed to make a splash with my first single. It needed to be fun, memorable, and party-friendly. 'American Holy Spirit' had that in spades. In fact, when I came up with the main guitar lick, I knew I'd found my debut single. Blake mixed the song three or four times before we found the perfect balance. We even went through multiple types of drum sounds before finding a lo-fi, crunchy kit that popped the way we needed.

[CLICK HERE to listen to Mr. Neptoon's debut single "American Holy Spirit"](#)

AHS was announced on the Mr. Neptoon Instagram account about two weeks before the Proud Larry's show with a little teaser of the artwork and song's intro. This garnered around 1,000 views and had a nice engagement tally of 24 excited comments.

[CLICK HERE to view the Instagram announcement post for “American Holy Spirit”](#)

A day or two after the live show, photos from the show were posted on Instagram with a thank-you to the friends and fans that had come out. Additionally, this allowed me to create a reminder of the upcoming single. This was met with a similar engagement tally as the post above, but with over 500 likes.

[CLICK HERE to listen to view Mr. Nepton’s post-show Instagram post](#)

Over the next two days, I compiled the live show footage that my friends had taken at my request to create some Instagram Reel and TikTok content. The first video portrayed the transition of our second to last song into our final song, 'American Holy Spirit.' The second was a guitar battle between myself and Kelly McBride during the same song. Both videos had promotional messaging to check out the song that Friday at midnight. However, they did not perform as well as expected. Only about 250 likes and 11 comments between the two. There was a bit of compression and loss of video quality after sending it over a few times and compiling the videos. Additionally, I feel I may have over-advertised in the week leading up. So, I gave my followers a bit of time to breathe before posting the final promotional video. Note: The decision to sacrifice a few promotion days was quite a quandary. I feared that I might be giving up

valuable time to remind my audience of the single, but the decision to take a step back before hammering the point home ended up being the right one.

[CLICK HERE to view Mr. Nepton's promotional Instagram reel for "American Holy Spirit"](#)

The morning before the release, as I was walking to my car upon finishing class, I knew I needed a heavy hitter promo after giving up several days. I came up with the idea to have a conversation with my car in which I would plead for permission to listen to the song early; one thousand five hundred views and 24 comments of pure excitement. It was a real hit with my followers and seemed to give people the reminder they needed.

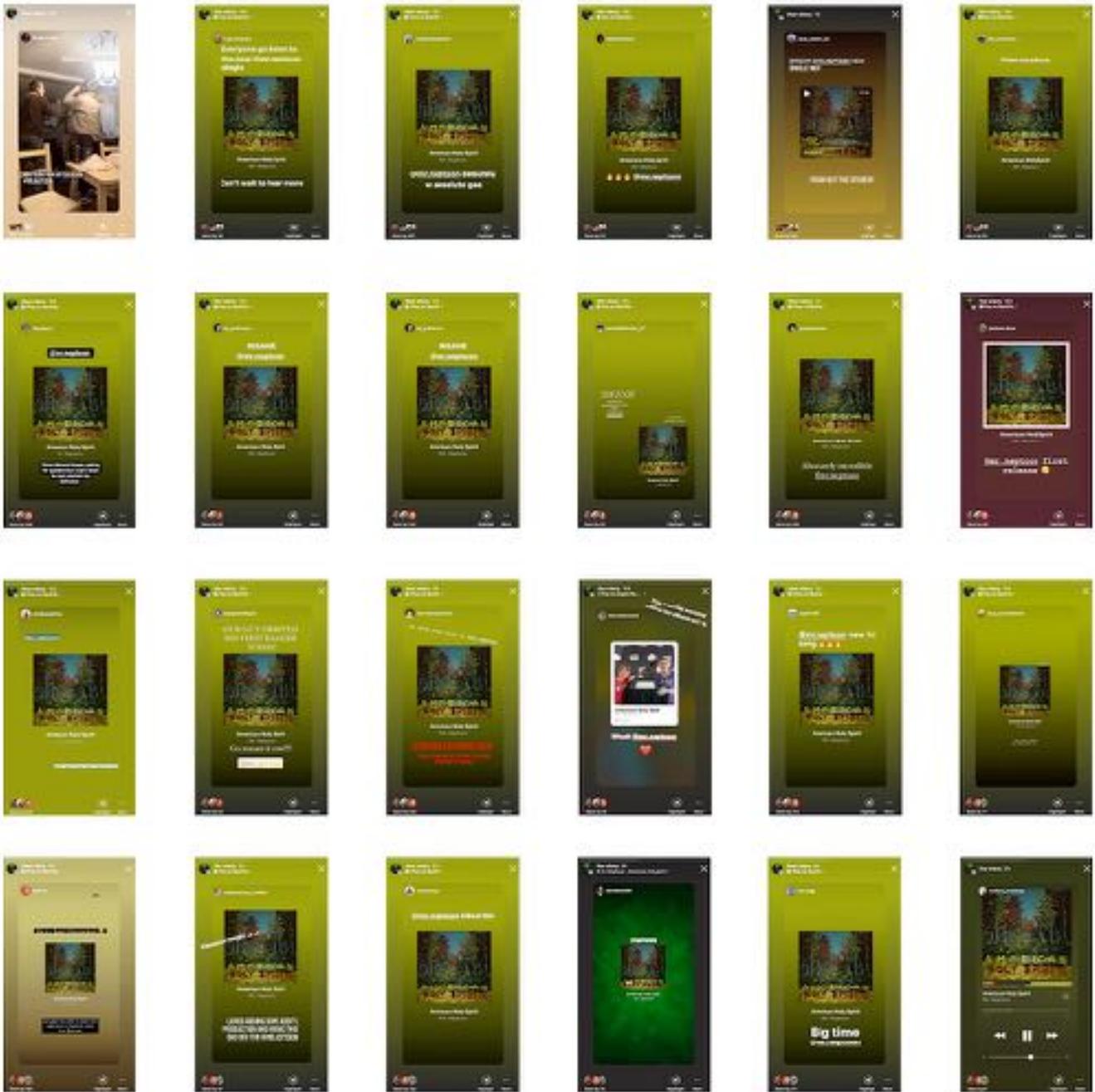
[CLICK HERE to view the final pre-drop Instagram promotion for "American Holy Spirit"](#)

I spent that night in Nashville. I had a gig in Knoxville with my other band. We stayed up until midnight to listen to the song, and played it on a speaker as we danced around in the living room. I watched as the total streams went from 0 to 1. It was a moment I'll never forget. I slept on the couch that night and woke up around 8:00 a.m. I checked my phone as fast as possible and prepared to have my heart broken. "It might be at ten or eleven streams...and you have to be okay with that. It is still early," I told myself. However, it was not at those streams at all. It was already over 200. I was shocked. I kept refreshing my phone that whole day, and the number never stopped rising. Before 6:00 p.m., not even 24 hours had passed before the song had already been listened to 1,000 times. In a week, it hit 2,000.

Truly, I owe it all to user-generated content. Because of my wonderful friends, fans, and supporters, the song was shared with over 40 individual Instagram account stories. This was an absolutely massive kickstart to the release. Additionally, this is a fun stat: it took me until January 27, the day of the Proud Larry's show, to gain 100 followers throughout the Mr. Neptoon campaign. That is over six months. Within two weeks after that, in conjunction with the release of 'American Holy Spirit,' the Mr. Neptoon Instagram account gained another 100 followers. I repeat six months... to two weeks. Things were starting to pick up.

### Playlist Adds

As I mentioned in the preface of this paper, modern independent musical artists rely upon playlisting more than any other streaming tool. Placement on the right playlist can turn a good song into a hit song. Let us focus on Spotify for a moment: on a meta-level, this platform houses two different types of playlists — those created by users and those by Spotify itself. While there are certainly some high-profile user-generated playlists out there with a respectable amount of followers, those playlists created by Spotify will be pushed more heavily on the app because the developers have more control over the content. Additionally, there are two types within this bracket of playlists: algorithmic and editorial. The first creates individual playlists for each user based on their previous likes and the genres they've spent the most time with. It is very cool to be on the good side of the algorithm, but because each playlist is specific to one user, this is not where the big bucks are made.



That's up entirely to the editorial playlists. These are playlists organized by music curators at the Spotify offices that are standard across all user interfaces. Want to listen to classic rock? Spotify has already organized all the classic songs you associate with that genre. Moreover, it has over 1.4M likes. This is the cremé de la cremé of opportunities for artists trying

to make the most of streaming. This is how modern acts make it — editorial playlists. This will be one of the first avenues their A&R and marketing teams will attack if a prestigious label represents you. However, if you're a lowly independent artist without professional representation, landing a high-end playlist can feel like a pipe dream.

After release day, in which I had garnered just over 1,000 total streams, the days that followed began to wind down in total stream count, and I accepted that the rush was over. That is what I thought until the morning of February 9 — five days after the single release. Time to watch the numbers slowly trickle in. Near 600, around 200, then 300, then back down to 200. Then, on the morning of the 9th, I noticed a small jump back up to 600+. While, at first, this did not seem like a significant difference, there still seemed to be some justification for the extra attention. And then it became clear what happened. The song had been chosen to be placed on a Spotify editorial playlist called 'Fresh Finds Rock.' It was an exciting development.

I was in the car with my parents, absolutely fist pounding the air all around me, trying my best to explain the gravity of the situation to my confused, albeit fascinated, mother and father. Their son had been added to one of the smaller editorial playlists that highlight unknown artists for a given genre. Every Wednesday, the editorial team adds about eight new songs and artists to the 100-song list. It is not exactly a science, so I'm not quite sure how long I'll have the luxury of staying on this list. However, I would imagine I'll be on for around ten or so weeks with other rising stars in the rock world.

Now, I am not foolish enough to think that this will be the big break that launches me into stardom and lands me in a McDonald's television commercial deal with Michael Jordan. However, this was certainly a relatively big break, and I will take those any day of the week.



101101  
American Holy Spirit

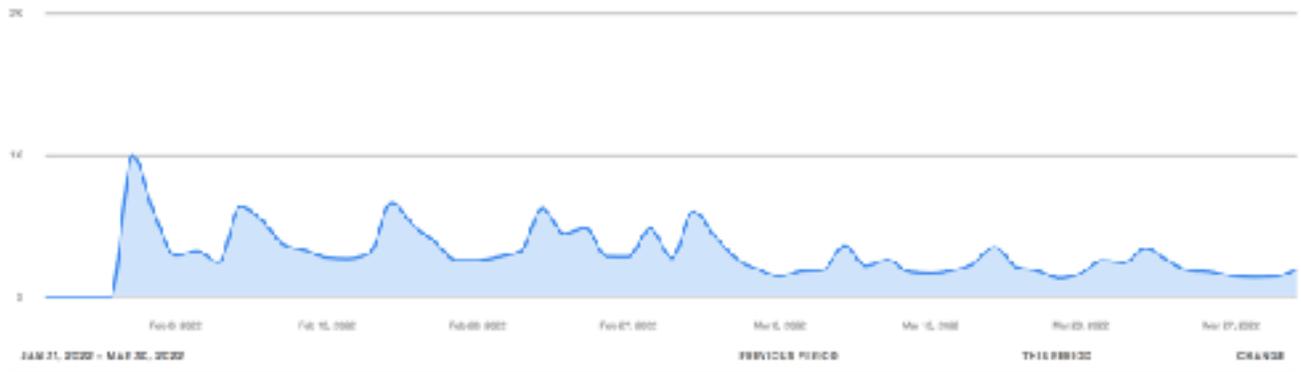
Add Cover

Stats Playlists

## Streams this period

Jan 31, 2022 - Mar 30, 2022

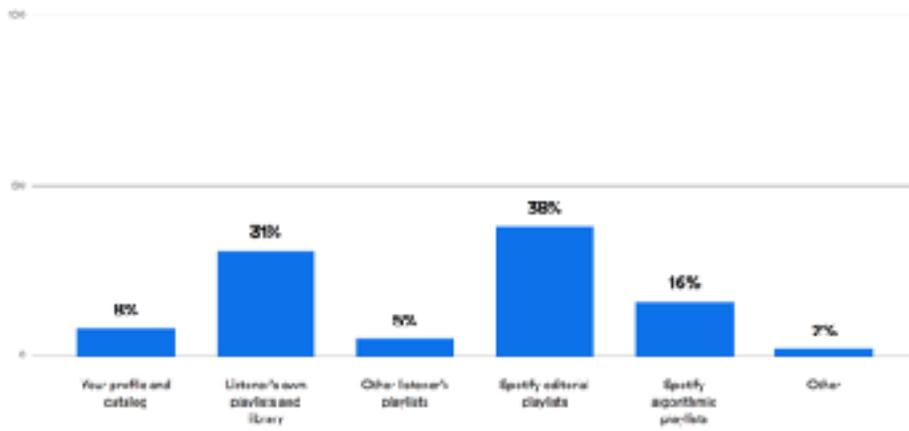
🔄 Custom ▾



JAN 31, 2022 - MAR 30, 2022	PREVIOUS PERIOD	THIS PERIOD	CHANGE
Worldwide	—	17,580	—

## Source of streams

Streams • Last 28 Days



When I am writing this, 'American Holy Spirit' has been released for less than a full month (three weeks and three days, to be exact) and has already been streamed 10,000 times. It has been listened to by over 4,000 individual users in 74 countries worldwide. In addition to 'Fresh Finds Rock,' it has been added to over 200 individual playlists.

### **Conclusion**

A few weeks ago, I got the chance to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Having to stand in a long line on the windy, Uptown street is enough to make anyone question if the museum is actually worth it. But, once you get yourself inside and past security, the museum drops you immediately into a cavernous, marble carved room designated to the classics. Surrounded by pottery, sculptures, and stonework thousands of years old, the sheer reverence of the space is enough to take your breath away.

Once you've thoroughly appreciated the beginnings and height of human artistic achievement, you're free to wander through the elegant halls of European oil paintings and gawk at the Impressionists like Monet, Van Gogh, and Matisse. Or, perhaps you'd be more interested in the spacious, minimalistic rooms housing modern works from Picasso and Pollack. If you're looking for something more adventurous, consider the brutish yet refined Arms and Armor wing and revel in the majesty of a full battalion's worth of knights' armor set up to mimic the foursome riding into battle.

The collections the museum has to offer is truly astounding, it's true. Art throughout the ages presented in ways to respect the time in which it came and the style it sought to evoke. And, as I worked further and further into the museum, deeper and deeper into its halls, it wasn't the art

that I found myself reveling in. At some point, it became the museum itself. To me, the precise decisions of overall building layout, space design in accordance with the art being displayed, even the respect and care shown in the tiny plaques next to each work, to me the greatest work of art on display was the *Met itself*— the vessel, not that which resided inside it.

This is precisely the balance that this thesis sought to achieve from its inception. As beautiful as the masterworks inside that museum were individually, they were nothing compared to the value they all held together as a collective. And at the center of it was, make no mistake, a commercial interest — a museum. Business, when conducted in the art world, doesn't inherently cheapen the art itself. When done properly, there's a symbiosis between the two. They can, in fact, elevate each other.

The thought of a world without a Wall Street or global economy in which we all sing songs in a circle, sing 'Kumbaya,' and paint each other's auras might sound nice in theory, but it's not the world we live in. We are organisms that need order, self-interest, and bargaining to sustain life as we know it (all the marks of a savvy business person). But, we are also undeniably clever and creative, passionate and hungry, curious and question-raising (all the marks of a true artist). To say we don't need both is to deny what makes us human. Who's to say there can't be an art to the way we do business and a business to the way we approach art?

So, did this thesis strike the right balance between art and business? Consider the four goals laid out in the preface.

1. An **Album Concept** that supports our marketing mission
2. Songs that are **Playlist-Centered**
3. A **Recognizable Visual Brand**
4. Focus on **Promotion**

First, the concept. 'The Power of a Suit' contains a powerful narrative of the transition from youth to adulthood; it features a protagonist wrapped up in finding his unique identity and sound. What could be more appropriate for a graduating senior taking his first step towards a career in the music business?

Secondly, the songs in the album range from alternative rock to bluegrass fusion to alternative country to bordering on dream pop. There are dozens of possibilities for playlist variety, and the varieties of new audiences that can result of this. Thirdly, did we create a recognizable visual brand? Throughout almost all visual content, Mr. Nepton was seen wearing a black suit, sunglasses, and sneakers. This look became synonymous with the Nepton brand. I even had a friend ask if they should wear a suit to the Proud Larry's show. Additionally, the adulthood of the suit, the mask and perspective of the glasses, and the childishness of the sneakers all work together to create an even deeper visual narrative that ties directly back to the album concept itself.

And, finally, was there an element of promotion in this thesis? Well, there was certainly in the art itself. The album opens with two run-of-the-mill advertisements and closes with a song entitled "Everybody's Selling Something." The overwhelming melody and musical theme of the album even appears most notably as one of the opening advertisement's phone number jingle. A theme of promotion was certainly present in the art itself. Additionally, Mr. Nepton utilized social media marketing to craft a unique brand through dozens of Instagram posts, stories and TikToks. As it stands at the end of this thesis, over the course of two semesters of research and two semesters of project execution, Mr. Nepton's final statistics are as follows:

Instagram:

- 10.4K accounts reached (+28,118% increase)
- 971 accounts engaged (+3,496% increase)
- +275 followers (1,934 total)

TikTok:

- 577 total likes
- 6,919 total views
- +106 followers (106 total)

Spotify:

- 23,904 total streams
- 382 saves/favorites
- Featured on 2,043 user generated playlists
- Featured on 1 Spotify editorial playlist
- 6,306 total listeners
- +172 total followers
- Listened to in 71 countries



And that, my friends, is the power of a suit.

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## Lyrics

### from *The Power of a Suit*

- *Ad 1 of 2*

Timeless.

Reliable.

Elegant.

Essential.

Reserved exclusively for the men who care.

Come and visit Lewis Wilson Men-store on 215 East Capitol Street in Jackson and discover, for yourself, the power of a suit.

- *Ad 2 of 2*

Have you been treated unfairly?

Think you might have a case in a court of law?

Then, what are you waiting for...give me a call!

Every single day, my law office helps little people just like you get *paid* while we put those white collar criminals *away!*

I don't care if they're guilty or not!

Call ~276-094-0000~ today!

- *Drifting Off*

(incoherent, cacophonous ramblings)

- *Tangerine Daydream*

I don't need another headache

Keep it down out there

I'll do the same in here

I've got enough to worry about

Another moment drifts away  
But I've got those in spades  
I'm at a ripe young age  
And I think I've got plenty of time to figure this out

Tangerine Daydream  
It's alright, it's okay  
Don't worry, you're safe here with me  
Float along to your bloodstream  
It's alright, it's okay  
Don't worry, take a break here with me

Can we stay here forever  
Sometimes I wanna close up my shop for good  
But then I check the weather  
And that's when blue skies turn to a stormy mind  
And I'd hop right out of this head of mine  
If I could  
So we just make do with a...

Tangerine Daydream  
It's alright, it's okay  
Don't worry, you're safe here with me  
Float along to your bloodstream  
It's alright, it's okay  
Don't worry, take a break here with me  
Tangerine Daydream  
It's alright, it's okay  
Don't worry, you're safe here with me

- *Zoom Class*

Teacher: *Excuse me.* Yes, you.

(beat)

Neptoon: I'm sorry...are you talking to me?

Teacher: Yes, I'm talking to you, Mr...uh...Neptoon.

Neptoon: Oh, um..okay, I —

Teacher: Is your name really Neptoon?

Neptoon: Well, kinda. It's what everyone calls me.

Teacher: And how on earth did you get that name?

Neptoon: They used to say I was 'way out there,' and, I don't know, I guess it just kinda stuck.

Teacher: Well Neptoon, there's no eating in my class. I'm afraid you're going to have to save your orange for later.

Neptoon: Okay it's a tangerine, um, and seriously?

Teacher: Yes, seriously. From day one, I've been very clear that eating is not permitted in my classroom and—

Neptoon: This is a zoom class. I mean, I'm in my home right now.

Teacher: I'm sorry, if I am teaching and there are students listening then I don't care if we're on campus or in tiny little boxes on a screen...we're in my classroom right now. And you are currently eating in it. Which is not permitted. Thank youuuuu. Sorry about that guys, where was I...

Neptoon: Wow, um...okay—

Teacher: Why are you here Neptoon?

Neptoon: What?

Teacher: Why are you in school?

Neptoon: (under his breath) Well, I'm not in school, I'm in my house...)

Teacher: Why are you enrolled in college? You certainly seem to have everything figured out.

Neptoon: Uh, it just kinda seemed like the natural thing to do.

Teacher: Ah. And how many years have you been here now?

Neptoon: I'm a senior this year. I'll be graduating in May.

Teacher: Hm. Neptoon, I'm going to sign you up for a service that I think could help you. Because, trust me, you *do* need help right now.

Neptoon: No, that's alright, I'm actually really fine—

Teacher: It's called the University Society for Undergraduate Career Kickstarting. You've probably heard it referred to as the U.S.U.C.K.

Neptoon: U.S.U.C.K. ?

Teacher: That's right.

Neptoon: USUCK??

Teacher: I'm afraid you really do, Neptoon. I'll get you set up with a representative right away.

Neptoon: You know, I just don't feel like that's necessary.

Teacher: I think it is. Trust me, this is gonna be good for you.

Neptoon: Uh, okay..I guess.

Teacher: Oh, and Neptoon?

Neptoon: Yeah?

Teacher: It's 1:30 in the afternoon. I can see that you're still in bed. Buddy, it's time to —

- *GULA!*

Get up!

With your lazy ass

Get up!

With your lazy ass

There's a beautiful day behind my window

Everybody's been moving for a while

My head is glued down to my pillow

I'm not missing anything that won't be here tomorrow

Sure feels like I'm on my own

Oh, home sweet home

These blankets must be made of lead

Cuz they keep pinning me to the bed

Get up!

With your lazy ass

Get up!

With your lazy ass

Get up, get up!

C'mon get up!

With your lazy ass

Somehow it's already midnight

This city has gone to sleep

But my freshly bought french fries

Keep me company

Sure feels like I'm on my own

Oh, home sweet home  
The birds will start singing any minute now  
And I'm right on schedule to wondering how  
How to...

Get up!  
With your lazy ass  
Get up!  
With your lazy ass  
Get up, get up!  
C'mon get up!  
With your lazy ass

\*knock on the door\*

Neptoon: Hey, can I help you?

Merc: Hey man, how you doing? I'm looking for a Mr...Neptoon.

Neptoon: That's me.

Merc: That you? Oh great man. I'm Merc, nice to meet you.

Neptoon: Hey, nice to meet ya.

Merc: Yeah man, I got a call down from the University. Professor said there was a student here that might need some guidance with their future. I work over at the U.S.U.C.K. you might've heard of us?

Neptoon: Yeah — I know what professor you're talking about, he told me a little bit about you guys.

Merc: Cool man, yeah. That sound like something you'd be interested in?

Neptoon: Um, you know man...probably not right now. I appreciate it though.

Merc: I get that, I get that. You know, sometimes it takes time. But, I tell you what, if you ever need anything, you got my number here — I'm gonna give you my card — and give me a holler, give me a shout. I'll get your financials, all your credit cards and stuff. We'll get you on the program, get you settled up and we'll get started, okay?

Neptoon: Okay. Cool man, I appreciate it.

Merc: Cool man. Well look, here's my card like I said. Give me a call any time. My name is Merc. Feel free to just hit me up whenever.

Neptoon: Wow, you weren't kidding...your name is really Merc?

Merc: Yeah, it's a funny name. It's a nickname. My momma called me that for a while.

Neptoon: No kidding

\*Neptoon switches off the background music\*

It just kinda stuck. She used to say I was mercurial. Whatever the hell that means I guess. Merc:  
Anyway, yeah man. Think over it the weekend. Give me a call if you wanna get serious and we'll  
get this thing started, okay?

Neptoon: Okay...

Merc: Alright brotha, have a good weekend. See you man.

Neptoon: You too man.

\*door close\*

- *American Holy Spirit*

Can I bum a ride  
My phone just went off and died  
But I'm feeling alright  
Yeah, it's that kinda night  
Let me know when you're trying to head soon

Can I bum a light  
I know I don't smoke  
But I think it'll get me feeling just right  
It's just that kinda night  
And it gives me time to think at the moon

And I hear...

Outta nowhere  
From the thin air  
"I just know that you know that you can't let go"  
It's just this  
American Holy Spirit  
Don't wanna hear it  
Won't you take me home?  
Can you roll this down?  
I wanna breathe in the passing town

Like I haven't seen it a million times before  
I'm tired of watching the rolling bottles on the car floor

When I hear...

Outta nowhere  
From the thin air  
"I just know that you know that you can't let go"  
It's just this  
American Holy Spirit  
Don't wanna hear it  
Won't you take me home?

Do I sound crazy?  
Or does this haziness just want to keep me down?

Then I heard...

Alright...  
Here we go...  
1, 2, 3, 4!

Outta nowhere  
From the thin air  
"I just know that you know that you can't let go"  
It's just this  
American Holy Spirit  
Don't wanna hear it  
Won't you take me home?

\*car approaches and stops\*

\*Neptoon hops out\*

Neptoon: Thanks for the ride man.

Driver: You bet.

\*They share an awkward fist bump handshake\*

Neptoon: Ah, you going fist bump? Ah, we'll get 'em next time. See you man.

\*car drives away\*

\*as Neptoon walks toward the front door of his house, he hears a voice\*

Old friend: Nep?

Neptoon: Yo! What? What are you doing here?

Old friend: Just out walking. Wow, it's been forever since I've seen you!

Neptoon: I know it's been ages, like three or four years? How have you been?

- *Blue Delta*

Well if you need me, reach me by the phone  
Leave a message please, cuz nobody's home  
My apologies, I think I'm having a revelation

My eyes are shining and the air is clear  
And it's been ages since there ain't been fog up here  
I gotta make the most of a revelatory situation

Blue Delta  
The last time I felt ya  
You were almost — Gone  
It's been too — Long  
Too long

Blue Delta (x4)

There's nothing like an old friend to remind you  
Of who you used to wanna be  
This ain't where I thought I'd end up  
Is this even still me

Blue Delta  
The last time I felt ya  
You were almost — Gone  
It's been too — Long  
Too long

Blue Delta (x4)

Blue Delta (I KNOW I GOTTA CHANGE)  
The last time I felt ya (BUT I JUST DON'T WANNA)

You were almost — Gone (I KNOW I GOTTA CHANGE)  
It's been too — Long (AND MAYBE I OUGHTA)  
Too long

Blue Delta (I KNOW I GOTTA CHANGE)  
Blue Delta (BUT I JUST DON'T WANNA)  
Blue Delta (I KNOW I GOTTA CHANGE)  
Blue Delta (AND MAYBE I OUGHTA)

\*back to Neptoon and Old Friend — it's obvious they've been talking for a while now\*

Old Friend: So, you're at a party, and you heard a voice?

Neptoon: That's right.

Old Friend: And it told you to "not let go?"

Neptoon: Yeah, just your general beyond the threes voice advice I guess.

Old Friend: Well, Nep, you want to know what I think?

Neptoon: Definitely.

Old Friend: It sounds like you're just a little lost right now. Maybe you need some help...from somebody who knows what they're doing. Do you have anybody you could call about this?

Neptoon: You know what, I think I actually might.

- *New Perspective*

\*phone call\*

You've reached Merc Johnson. You know what to do.  
Please leave a message after the tone.

What am I feeling  
What am I seeing

Have I finally woken up  
Is this when I'm supposed to open up

I'm at a redlight curbside shaking my leg  
With my blue eyed backslide rearing its head  
And the sky just opened

And I'm weighing the upsides of letting you in  
With the cosmic implications of starting again  
And I realize  
We're sitting in silence

It's a new perspective  
In a unified collective  
It's a new perspective  
It's a gift to the introspective

Is this happiness  
Well it's paying out in dividends

Take a deep breath, decompress  
Time is best spent with a good friend

I spent my first twenty years as fast as I could  
And I got sixty left and I gotta make 'em good and long

I'm tired of letting the world wash over me  
I've got things to say and places to see  
Thinking a new type of way

It's a new perspective  
In a unified collective  
It's a new perspective  
It's a gift to the introspective  
It's a new perspective  
In a unified collective  
It's a new perspective  
It's a gift to the introspective

- *Billbored*

\*Neptoon and Merc are sharing a conversation on a car ride\*

Neptoon: So, I go in for the dap-up. He goes in for a fist bump. I see that, I switch to the fist.  
Now, the problem is, he sees my dap-up as well — he does the same thing. He switches to dap. So, we've switched. Our hands are now doing the opposite of what they were doing, but we're in the same situation.

Merc: Sure.

Neptoon: This continues in this four second span to the point where we're just playing this awkward thumb wrestling jello match. And we just lock eyes and are like, "Okay, well that sucked. I guess I can never speak to you again."

Merc: Yeah, yeah...I know that.

Neptoon: I don't know, man. It just feels like ever since the pandemic, I guess, I just never know how to greet people anymore. Are handshakes still a thing? Are we dapping each other up still? I'm fine if it's fist bumps, if that's the new normal. You know, I don't care if we hug! I just need to know — what are we doing? What is the new thing? What's the standard now?

Merc: It's kind of like we need some kind of Geneva Convention for handshakes, you know what I mean?

Neptoon: Yesss. Yes man. That's exactly what I'm talking about. Let's just agree. Let's agree on one. It's the dap. It's the fist bump. It's the handshake — whatever it is, that's fine. But, let's set it in stone, and we can move on. This is what I'm talking about! It feels like you're in my head right now. I just wish it felt like that sometimes.

Merc: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah man, I've got real estate in there. I've got real estate in that head of yours.

Neptoon: Look at this guy. The greasy billboard lawyer himself. Dude, I can't imagine having that little respect for yourself, honestly.

Merc: You talking about that lawyer on that billboard? Nah, that guy's got it going on.

Neptoon: What? Literally how?

Merc: That guy knows exactly who he is. Alright? He's probably got kids. He's probably got a family. He's probably got a wife. He probably worked his ass off to get that billboard. Nah, man, I don't know what you're talking about. Frankly, that guy knows exactly who he is, and I don't really see that with you Nep. You got some stuff to figure out, but that guy...he's done the figuring out. He's done all that. Shoot man, I guess that's just the power of the suit. When you tighten that tie up, it's a different ballgame. It really is. Whatever you want to call it — responsibility or duty. There's a flip that switches. When you put that thing on for the first time, you know who you are. You know what you stand for and what you mean. Until you put that suit on, you can't know.

Neptoon: Wait, wait, hold on. Let me get this straight. So, you're fine with just selling yourself on the side of the street, right? Putting yourself on the same level as one of those inflatable guys at a used car lot. You're losing all dignity in the process to sell your soul and sell yourself on the side of the road. You're cool with that?

Merc: Everybody's selling something Nep. Even me. Even you.

Neptoon: Hmm. Well, he does have a catchy jingle. I can give you that. I will admit that.

\*Neptoon begins to whistle the lawyer jingle tune\*

Merc: Hey, I still need to get those finances squared away with the program. I can get your credit card info, and...

Neptoon: Sorry, can we talk about this in a second, I'm getting a call. Hey.

Merc: Yeah...we can talk about it later...

Neptoon: What's up? Sorry, slow down, I can't...what are you saying?

Merc: Is everything okay?

Neptoon: Okay...are you serious? Yeah. Where are you right now?

Merc: Nep?

Neptoon: Hey, go ahead and whip the car around. Yeah, yeah. Sorry, can you say that again? Where are you? Okay, I'm headed there right now. Turn around. Seriously, Turn the car around.

Merc: The guy — the guy in front of me, okay?

Neptoon: Yep, yep, we are on the way. I am coming. We'll be there in a minute. Uh, we're trying to — oh my god, can you please turn the car around! Seriously man, this not a joke!

Merc: I'm working on it! I'm working on it! Golly, c'mon now, move!

Neptoon: Yes! I'm sorry, yes! We are on the way, we are coming. Hold tight. We are on the way, we are coming.

- *The Dishes*

Here comes the preacher  
Thumbing down the way  
He ain't here to spread good news  
He must be having a funny Easter Sunday  
There ain't no life here to be renewed

When does a widow  
Look out the window  
And realize she needs a new plan  
What a waste of medicine  
Sprawled all over the kitchen  
Well, we could all use a bit of his Ativan

Because some folks just stand around  
While others can't help breaking down  
Some folks talk business with the funeral home  
Some folks place phone calls  
While others post to Facebook walls  
And at least one lies silently alone  
While we face the truth  
That nothing we do  
Is ever gonna fix this  
But still some folks do the dishes

Make small talk  
Do a little walk  
It won't be long now  
Think about the draining sands  
And think about where to put your hands  
And think about how —

How some folks just stand around  
While others can't help breaking down  
Some folks talk business with the funeral home  
Some folks place phone calls  
While others post to Facebook walls  
And at least one lies silently alone  
While we face the truth  
That nothing we do  
Is ever gonna fix this  
But still some folks do the dishes

These walls feel a little tighter  
Didn't that sunroof use to be wider?  
And let those boys through  
They've got a job to do  
Don't make this about you

Don't say a word  
Don't crack a joke  
As he glides through the wind  
Each man deserves  
From the family that he served  
A silent final forgiveness of all his sins

Yet still some folks just stand around  
While others can't help breaking down  
Some folks talk business with the funeral home  
Some folks place phone calls  
While others post to Facebook walls  
And at least one lies silently alone  
While we face the truth  
That nothing we do  
Is ever gonna fix this  
But still somebody's  
Gotta do those dishes

\*Neptoon makes his way to the sink, and begins doing the dishes\*

- *Amish Country*

It never really clicked until today  
You said this feeling doesn't ever go away  
So you might as well enjoy the good wine  
Cuz the finish line don't change its mind  
And neither do I

Maybe I'll go out and start a band  
Once I finish crumpling this napkin in my hand  
There's gotta be more out there than this  
Find your bliss  
And blow a kiss  
Into the abyss

I wish it was easier  
I wish it was easier  
I wish it was easier  
Oh, I wish this was easy

You're not your favorite drink at your favorite bar  
You're not the stickers on the back of your car  
It's something just a little more complicated  
But I'm too faded to explain it  
Too jaded to attain it  
And I just  
Oh, I wish  
That's right I wish  
Oh —

I wish it was easier  
I wish it was easier  
I wish it was easier  
Oh, I wish this was easy

I took a trip through Amish country  
Saw two boys who looked just like me  
We smiled and waved and I prolonged my stare  
Why are they out there  
And I'm in here  
Sitting in this chair  
In conditioned air?

I guess it was easy  
I guess it was easy  
I guess it was easy  
Oh, I guess this was easy

I guess it was easy  
I guess it was easy  
I guess it was easy  
Oh, I guess this was easy

Why is nothing easy?  
Can't you give me something easy?  
Is anything easy?  
I just need something easy

- *Collect Call from Yoknapatawpha County Prison*

This is a prepaid call from Merc an inmate from Yoknapatawpha County Prison. All phone calls are subject to monitoring and recording. To decline this call, press 9. To accept this call press 1. Thank you, your call has been accepted.

Neptoon: Hello?

Merc: Hey Nep. You got a second?

Neptoon: Not a ton of time, actually. I'm about to head to the funeral.

Merc: Oh, shoot. I forgot that was today. Well, I guess you finally put that suit on, huh?

Neptoon: (flatly) Merc, why are you calling me from prison.

Merc: Man, they got me on some BS. Calling it identity theft.

Neptoon: Identity theft?

Merc: Yeah, truth be told, I was running a little credit card racquet, and they're trying to make it a bigger deal than it is. You know how that goes. But, listen, I didn't really have anybody else to call, and I could really use some help with all this.

Neptoon: Credit card racquet, huh? Wow. You almost had me. Well, Merc, I have to thank you for everything. This is hard to say, but at least it's an an easy decision. I can't help you.

Merc: Can't help me, what the hell is that? Huh? After all I've done for you, you lousy, good for nothing brat. I can't believe I wasted my time with you, you're hopeless. You don't think about anybody but yourself. Never have. You haven't learned a thing this whole time.

Neptoon: No, that's not true Merc. I think I just learned what you're selling.

Merc: Well that's just great Nep. Just great. I guess you are all grown up you little turd. What the hell am I supposed to do then?

Neptoon: You want my advice? Get a good lawyer.

- *Everybody's Selling Something*

I'm moving out of my head  
I save my dreaming for bed

I could curse out this digital age  
And I skip to my last page  
And I could crush my world in the palm of my hands  
And I could fill my britches with a bucket of sand  
But why would I?  
I'm getting too old for that

Everybody's selling something  
And everyone of us  
Is doing the buying  
So don't turn your nose up at the rest  
Cuz nobody's ever at their best  
We're all just trying, you know?  
So go on, get on, and get along, whoo!

Everybody's got their secrets  
And every one of us  
Is swimming in the deep end  
And nobody's got the instructions  
We're all just out here hustling  
Treading water  
It's grade school then alma mater

And when the charm wears off  
You don't have to lose that shine in your eye  
And yes we've all got an end date  
That don't mean we can't appreciate  
Everything in the meantime

My youth is behind me (x20)  
My youth is behind me — but is it ever really?