

3 cheers for liberty! detailed citations, behind-the-scenes information, and (perhaps unnecessary) self-analysis

    Naomi Ull

1.1.24 5:55 am how do i avoid resenting the world for making me talk to other people

find your own way of talking to people that's more fun, yet still compatible with the way other people talk. i know this sounds impossible, but the great secret is that it totally is possible and i've been very excited to tell you the news of this

1.1.24 3:57 am what's your favorite joke

the truth

Fig. 1 screenshot of <https://billwurtz.com/questions/questions.html>

Abstract

Hello. I just made a piece of music. It's called **3 cheers for liberty!** and I spent four or so months, starting in September 2023, working on it. It feels nice to have made something. In this paper, I want to talk about why and how I made it, what it means to me, and what it could mean to you. We will start with a broad statement of goals, then talk about each cheer for liberty on its own, and then have some concluding remarks. It will be fun.

1 Goals

I had a couple different goals and things and ideas swimming through my head when I decided to commit to making **3 cheers**.

1.1 creation

The first was simply to create something. Anything. My previous two new things, **but i don't regret anything!** and **Partner Dancing / A Song About A Circle Constant** were created in May 2023 and October 2022, respectively.¹

1.2 contemplate bottom surgery and general bodily stuff

In case any of you out there didn't know, I am trans. It's weird, ain't it. On the one hand, I don't really think it's that important to know. On the other hand, I know that feeling of finding a really cool artist, then figuring out that they're queer too. It's nice. It's a nice feeling when you expand your sense of community a little bit.

Anyways, every once in a while I consider getting bottom surgery. Not super often, but often enough. Sometimes I speculate what it might cost to get that surgery. Sometimes I actually research it.

Early in September 2023, I was looking at options overseas, in Thailand. It was... cheaper than I would've expected. About 18,000USD, by my rough, extremely optimistic calculations. Do-able enough that I started to get a little excited about the prospect of actually going and getting this thing done. It was that day that I started making playlists about it. Those playlists would soon become the source material for everything you hear in **3 cheers for liberty!**. Ain't that something?

¹ There are some other things I released in that timeframe, sure, but those were just things that I had already made, sitting around in my file explorer. Ignored, but not forgotten.

1.3 do jla to the big loud city

This goal, i guess, was the most conscious one. The one most present in my mind.

“jla” stands for John Luther Adams. John Luther Adams is one of my favorite composers out there. The patience and love for the natural world and its silences on display throughout his body of work is beyond admirable. His music is so beautiful. One fine day, I may find that I've listened to everything he's ever made.

Anyways, since Adams' work is so often about the wilderness and stuff, it attracts thoughts about just sorta, y'know, getting away from it all. Leaving all this noise and all this processed garbage music and just living in a shack out on the prairies without a care in the world.

And that thought annoys me whenever I have it. For a couple reasons, mainly that "processed garbage music" thing I just said. When people say that sort of thing, they're almost always referring to whatever's popular. Popular music, if you will.

But I *like* pop music! Whenever anybody (usually me) asks me who my biggest influences are, I will always reply, "John Luther Adams and Lorde." Lorde is amazing. Her music is amazing. I refuse to accept any Lorde slander! If I ever move out of the city and into some windswept, icy landscape, I'm bringing Lorde and Carly Rae Jepsen and Vanessa Carlton and Paul Williams (the Kiwi one) with me.

I will probably never live anywhere outside a city. The city is my home, and its convenience and ease of access are higher on my list of things that I want to have in a place that I live in than any kind of open sky, vibrant wildlife, scenic vista, or funny-looking rock formation ever could be. But I still do find myself thinking about getting real out there an awful lot.

What if we could do John Luther Adams to the city? Employ patience, redefine silence, and give love to this place and its people and its culture. Become familiar with the concrete,

asphalt, and steel. Learn to be alone when surrounded by others. Listen deeper and deeper and deeper, until everything else fades away. *That's* what I want.

2 Saddlin' up (for the new cowgirl)

Artist	Title	Album
Paul Williams	Braces	Surf Music
Luc Le Masne	Cis Trans	Œuvres pour orchestre
Dieter Reith	Sunbeam	Power Plant
Gary Shearston	The Cyprus Brig	Bolters, Bushrangers & Duffers
Alan Hawkshaw / Brian Bennett	On The Nile	Full Circle
Sean & Dean Kiner	Farewell to Greta	
SambaSunda Quintet	Paddy Pergi Ke Bandung	Java
Brian Bennett	Capital City	Hot Wax
Paul Williams (feat. Lili Bayliss)	Bond Themes From The Early 80s	Surf Music
Manfred Hölzel / Peter Fürmetz	Poppy	Jingle Box 1
Shota Kageyama	Crossing the Sea	Pokémon Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire OST
Go Ichinose	Surf	Pokémon HeartGold & SoulSilver OST
Hitomi Sato	Surf	Pokémon Diamond & Pearl OST
Shota Kageyama	Surf	Pokémon X & Y OST
Shota Kageyama	Surf	Pokémon Black & White OST

Fig. 2 The source playlist for **Saddlin' up (for the new cowgirl)**

I'm pretty holistic about how I work. I have a project I want to do, and then I go out and do

some of it. Then I go out and do some more. If you go out and do enough, and be sure to keep yourself healthy and able to continue on, eventually, you will have finished whatever it is you started.

The closest thing I have to a methodology is "work from beginning to end." That's how I made **Saddlin' up**, and it's how I wrote this paper, too.

That's not to say I didn't have a plan or anything, though. My basic outline for this cheer was to move through the playlist semi-linearly, from **Braces** to **Bond Themes From The Early 80s**, and then have a fun little coda with the softer section of **Bond Themes**, as well as **Poppy**, **Crossing The Sea**, **Surf**, **Surf**, **Surf**, and **Surf**.

Part of the playlist-making process is listening to stuff over and over again, familiarizing yourself with the narrative you're creating, before adding on more. In this spirit, I decided I would go from **Braces** to **Bond Themes** 3 times before moving on to the coda.

Over the course of making **Saddlin' up**, 3, uh, "main characters", i guess, started to emerge. They were the much aforementioned **Braces** and **Bond Themes From The Early 80s**, as well as Gary Shearston's rendition of **The Cyprus Brig**. The Aussie folk song started to become the main narrative of the piece, with long diversions marked by **On The Nile**, **Farewell to Greta**, and **Paddy Pergi Ke Bandung**, telling its story. **Braces** and **Bond Themes** became accents, little colorations, while Shearston took the piece out to sea.

Once the coda came, it was time for **Bond Themes** to take this cheer for liberty over the waves and into the great beyond. And I think it does that job beautifully.

Once I was done making **Saddlin' up** I decided to take all the piece of source material I hadn't used and put them all together into an intro thing, which became **Scraps**^{1/3}. **Scraps**^{1/3} is literally just all those pieces of detritus played

back one after another at 4x speed. That's all there is to it

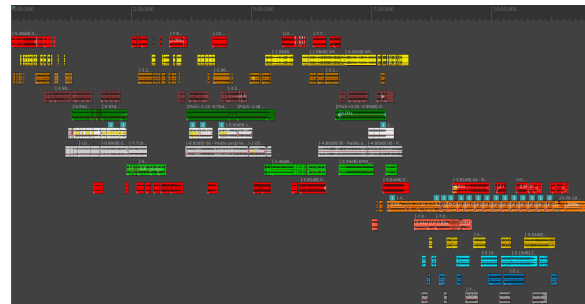


Fig. 3 screenshot of **Saddlin' up** in REAPER

2.1 But what does it *mean*?

Braces is a weird song. It's essentially a body positivity anthem, but from the perspective of NOT the person who's having issues. In this way, it almost dares you to disagree with it, to say, "actually, no, my body is NOT perfect just the way it is." And so you set out to make yourself better. To liberate yourself from the bonds of this flesh gaol, mates by your side, steering you, finding the North Star when you are unable to see.

3 Become Ribs

Artist	Title	Album
Matthias	Backwards	
Lorde	Writer In The Dark	Melodrama
Gabriel Kahane	Linda & Stuart	MAGNIFICENT BIRD
Lorde	Ribs	Pure Heroine
Lorde	Buzzcut Season ²	Pure Heroine
Hitomi Sato / Go Ichinose	Battle! (Colress)	Pokémon Black 2 & White 2 OST
John Luther Adams / Seattle Symphony	Become Ocean	Become Ocean

² Just the studio acapella, which i purchased from 1acapella.com [1] for 10 euros

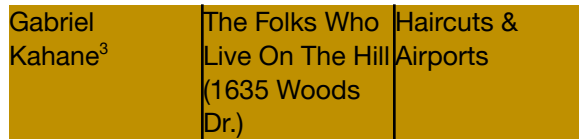


Fig. 4 The source playlist for **Become Ribs**⁴

At some point near the end of my 2nd listen to **Become Ocean**, I had a wild idea. "What if this was a mashup with **Ribs**?" And thus, playlist became plunderphonics. Listening became creating. **3 cheers for liberty!** was born.

Since this cheer was first and foremost a mashup, and one between a pop song and deeply layered hour-long multitemporal orchestral texture at that, I decided it would probably be a good idea to figure out just how I was going to fit these two things together before I did anything else.

Ribs has drums. Those drums cluttered up the soundscape, so I elected to just do all the vocals for **Ribs** myself. This freed me up to slow things down without any distortion, and it allowed me to create some really fun and complex choral textures I wouldn't have had otherwise. One of the best creative decisions I've ever made.

³ Remember back in section 1.3 of this paper I said that my two biggest influences are JLA and Lorde? well, I lied. kinda. I left out Gabriel Kahane. I've been listening to Gabriel's music for a lot longer than I've been listening to those other two. It's just that if I say "Gabriel Kahane" in my answer to that question my answer is suddenly a lot more complicated. but just know that he is there. always :)

⁴ This playlist is mostly just an excerpt from a different, longer playlist I had made in early 2023, which was just **Melodrama** interwoven with a couple other albums and songs. **Become Ocean** and **The Folks Who Live On The Hill** are the new additions.

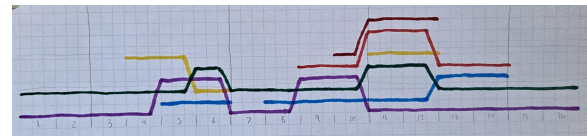


Fig. 5 The score I used for basically any part of **Become Ribs** where I'm just singing "ah"

I decided to only use the middle section of **Become Ocean**.⁵ That way I could go from that piece's quietest point to its loudest and back in only 14 minutes or so. The loudest point in **Become Ocean**⁶ needed to be matched with the biggest impact in **Ribs**, which I decided was the lyric "You're the only friend I need". The rest of the mashup fell into place from there. I decided against trying to squeeze in more songs as main characters, so the rest of the source playlist appears as tiny, quiet, colorful soundbites and creatures swimming past. Only **The Folks Who Live On The Hill** is there for any extended period of time (in fact it's literally just allowed to play through in its entirety), but it's so quiet that at any given moment it is half-underwater, somewhere between half-remembered dream and half-forgotten memory.

I think this cheer is the one that I'm most proud of. And not just because I recorded good vocals (something I have never done before) either! The effect this piece has on the listener is profound no matter how you listen. If you're the kind of person who uses music as ambience, who likes to let it wash over you, there's plenty of ambience here. But there's also these tiny little soundbites, non-Ribs and non-JLA, that will grab your attention every once in a while and invite you to listen a little more closely, a little more deeply. If you're the kind of person who likes to listen super focused-like, there are choral things and little clips of songs to keep

⁵ The fundamental structure of **Become Ocean** is a series of staggered crescendos. There are two moments in the piece where all of the crescendos fade out together. When I say "middle section", I am referring to the space between those two moments.

⁶ In the exact middle of the piece, all of the crescendos line up, and the listener is drowned in apocalyptic beauty (more on this later).

you fed. But the larger structure, the **Become Ocean** and the **Ribs** of it all, beckon you to take a step back, to listen with a wider lens, to listen more deeply. I'm really proud of that effect.

3.1 But what does it mean?

Become Ocean is about climate change. The rising sea level threatens to erase so much of what we hold dear. And yet, our most important cities line up along the coast like moths to a flame, buzzing with excitement to share what they have with the world. Houses on the shoreline, often occupied by the very same people bringing about the world's destruction, sell for millions and millions of dollars. We go to the beach to relax and to romp around in the sunlight before we have to go back to our lives made miserable under capitalism.

despite all of this, the two of us are married, for better and for worse. the ocean never gets any less beautiful, or less of a shoulder to cry on.

Ribs is about (get this) getting old. Leaving childhood behind. Trying to figure out what to keep and what to throw away, and how much.

Part of getting older, for me, was quitting high-school band and eventually dropping out of school altogether. But I still love music. In fact, a lot of the time it's all I think about. The one thing I will never leave. Polaris. My guiding light.

sometimes i fear my dedication to my art is impeding whatever social life i could be having. but fuck that fear. i love my art shit! i love it more than anything!

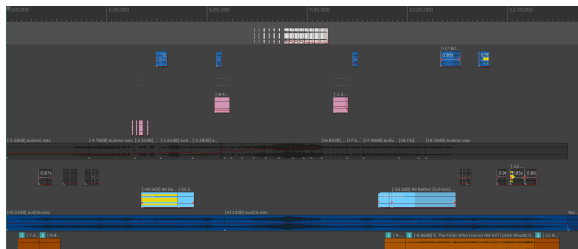


Fig. 6 screenshot of **Become Ribs** in REAPER

4 Skin smooth as silk: a love letter to the future

Artist	Title	Album
Lin-Manuel Miranda ⁷	The Story of Tonight (Reprise)	Hamilton (2020 film version)
Paul Shapera ⁸	Building A Show	The Posthuman War Act 3: A New Dream
Backstreet Boys	I Want It That Way	Millenium
Roland Kovac	Black Rose	King Size
Claudio Fabi	New Horizons	Industry
Nicolo Bardoni / Stephen Warr	The Men In Suits	Music Beds
"Weird Al" Yankovic	Hardware Store	Poodle Hat
Bill Cole's Untempered Ensemble ⁹	A Scar Is Never So Smooth As Natural Skin: "I have many scars on my body, none are tattoos"	Sunsum
Francis Monkman / Malcolm Ironton	Slow Wave	Pictures In The Mind
Roland Kovac	Silk	Matrix

Fig. 7 The source playlist for **Skin smooth as silk**¹⁰

In between making **Become Ribs** and this, I went on vacation. It was nice. I had a good time. [\[2\]](#)

⁷ feat. Leslie Odom Jr. as Aaron Burr, Daveed Diggs as Lafayette, Anthony Ramos as John Laurens, and Okieriete Onaodowan as Hercules Mulligan

⁸ feat. Lux Mortenson as Sarah

⁹ euphonium solo by Joseph Daley

¹⁰ If you decide to replicate this playlist in whatever music player you use, I suggest putting **Silk** at both the start *and* end for the best time

At some point I decided that I wanted this cheer to be about appreciating the world as is. Recognizing the things you cannot change alone, i guess.

In that spirit, **Skin smooth as silk** features a lot less short soundbites and a lot more layering long sections of song on top of each other.

But it also has a distinct narrative. Using **The Story of Tonight**, **I Want It That Way**, and **Building A Show**, I made a little play. I can summarize it here:

"The world sucks" "No it doesn't"
"oh yeah? why" "
vaguely talks about how hope is a good thing

Faith can be tricky to keep. I think it's worth the trouble, though.

4.1 anxiety

Speaking of keeping the faith, this was the cheer I had the most anxiety about. Partly because I was starting to get a little antsy to finish the piece as a whole (i promised myself i would go to arches national park once all of this was said and done¹¹), but mostly because of **silk's** more laid back production.

In April 2022, I made the plunderphonic compositions **Zero-Point 62123688** and **zero-point 249246241**. These were the basic rules behind their creation:

1. You must use the entirety of the source materials you choose
2. Those source materials must be played straight-through, from beginning to end (or end to beginning), with no artificially inserted silences
3. No, via copy and paste, lengthening or shortening the source material (time stretching, however, *is* allowed)

¹¹ this is another photography project, akin to it's a blue day [2].

as a sidenote: Honestly, I think anybody looking to get into making plunderphonics should try their hand at making a Zero-Point composition or two. They get you thinking about how songs can overlap in interesting and unexpected way without all the hassle of cutting everything up and rearranging and painstakingly making stuff like **Saddlin' up** or Plexure [4]

Skin smooth as silk at times felt like a de-evolution of the Zero-Point composition. All the ease of creation of with none of the hard work of making sure you don't break the rules.

But **Skin smooth as silk** is fundamentally NOT a Zero-Point. Zero-Points almost always end up as ambient works. **Skin smooth as silk** is a piece of theater. Very strange theater with a weirdly simple libretto.

I don't know. After the very specific and controlled composition of **Saddlin' up** and **Become Ribs**, I almost felt lazy.

almost

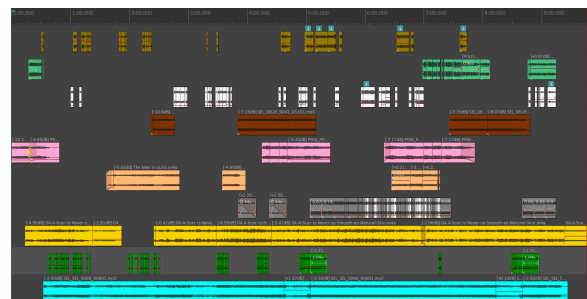


Fig. 8 screenshot of **Skin smooth as silk** in REAPER

4.2 But what does it mean?

If **Saddlin' up** is all about rejecting the positivity of strangers in favor of finding your own, **Skin smooth as silk** is the moment we finally find that positivity.

It is January 2nd, 2024. I no longer crave bottom surgery like I did in September of last year, when I set out to make all of this. It's not like I ever had dysphoria about it. it's just kinda

impractical sometimes. In the end, surgery is just too expensive and I would much rather spend that money fuckin' around traveling places. I am 19 years old. Gotta enjoy my 20s in case something crazy happens and I die before I'm 30. Once I *am* 30, planning for the far future will be a way better use of my time.

The things that inform my decisions are not about my body. They are about my art and my music and who I want to be as a person. Those are my mountaintops, those are the stars in the sky by which every idea that sets sail in the sea of my mind navigates. Those are the things I want.

5 Final thoughts

Overall, I'm really proud of **3 cheers for liberty!**. It's a lot denser and more involved than anything else I've ever made before, especially when you consider this paper that I'm writing for it right now.

I enjoy this piece. One of the many, many things I love about Alice Goodman's librettos for Nixon in China and The Death of Klinghoffer is just how much they naturally encourage exploration. Nothing is given to you straight off that bat. But you have enough to connect some dots, and then some more dots, and then some more. Her writing is like a playground for the mind. I hope I was able to do something similar in **3 cheers**.¹²

6 Wrapping up

Okay, fine. I'll talk about John Oswald. Plunderphonics existed before John Oswald, but John Oswald is the guy who invented the word "plunderphonics". And now he and it are forever linked. It is his brand. My opinion on this is neutral. **3 cheers for liberty!**, while it is a plunderphonic work, has almost nothing to do with Oswald, my beloved.

It is instead more about John Luther Adams and Lorde. Combining patience and silence and ambience with precisely created, perfectly stacked houses of cards of songs. I think both of these people's music is perfect. I really do.

Did I succeed in this goal of doing jla to the big loud city? idk

7 idk

one of the funny things about mother nature is just how *total* she is. if she doesn't care, she *doesn't care*. if she wants revenge, she *wants revenge*. if she wants to show you something pretty, she shows you the prettiest damn thing you've ever seen in your entire life. if she wants to talk, you get birdsong and running water and blowing wind and so on. if she doesn't want to talk, she gives you the deepest silence you will ever experience.

compare this to the city. the city is amorphous, the city is made of of the actions of thousands and thousands, sometimes millions, of individuals. it is everybody's voices all at once. it is chaos incarnate. from a bird's-eye view, at least. to you or me or any other single individual in the city, things make a lot more sense. and they make whatever sense they do because we choose elements of the city to tune out. we choose who we spend time with. we decide what's background music and what isn't. we redefine silence. we only encounter so much in a day.

when i think about plunderphonics, and as a result, **3 cheers for liberty!**, i think of the latter. i think of amalgamations of things. i think of voices spread across time and space harmonizing. i think of the picking and choosing what to take in from a seemingly infinite pool of source material. where is the totality in this music?

nowhere, if that's the only thing you're considering. but here's another idea for you to chew on:

¹² I think I did, at least a little

to me, the actual enticing part of plunderphonics is the idea of working directly with your influences and inspirations. the entire basis for **3 cheers for liberty!**, its source playlists, were made by just sorta putting together songs i liked. i am really moved by Lorde and John Luther Adams. so i made **Become Ribs**, a thing made out of a Lorde song and John Luther Adams piece.

in general, rather than taking elements of one thing and synthesizing them with another thing, i try to take the *whole* thing and combine it with the *whole* other thing (or things).

and
THAT'S
the totality!

this idea that a finished song is not amorphous, not made up of disparate voices, but, in fact, a *whole thing*. a finished plunderphonic piece, despite being literally made up of pieces of other stuff, is still a *whole thing*. it's just that it's made out of other *whole things*.

in being completed, an artwork becomes *total*. it, and all its baggage and inner voices, enter nature...

...ok.

bye.

-Naomi Ull

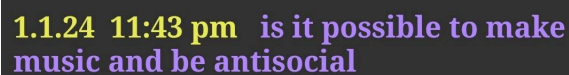


Fig. 9 screenshot of <https://billwurtz.com/questions/questions.html>. i'm the one who asked bill this question, and the moment i asked it i already knew the answer¹³

¹³ kinda. i thought he was gonna say "yes", but he went with "sure" instead

8 References

- [1] <https://1acapella.com/product/lorde-buzzcut-season-studio-acapella-instrumental/>
- [2] [❄️🌸☀️🍁 Naomi Ull - it's a blue day \(new york city, philadelphia, englewood cliffs, fire island, ives trail, the meadowlands, chicago. 23-11-12 to 23-11-27\)](#)
- [3] https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_k_r7RxYv6-WMonzb_NWfL-OC8j0ShpTRk