A Musicology of Record Production - Research Creation, Gender, and Creative Reflective Practice in Project-Paradigm Music Production

Lydia Wilton,

Supervisor: Hodgson, Jay., The University of Western Ontario
Toft, Robert., The University of Western Ontario

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Music

© Lydia Wilton 2024

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd

Part of the Musicology Commons, and the Music Practice Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/9999

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlswadmin@uwo.ca.
Abstract

This research-creation project elucidates the “methodology” of producing records. As an artist-researcher, I investigate how a record producer uses the recording studio as a “musical instrument”. My primary research goal is to answer two fundamental questions about record producing that have yet to be addressed and which cannot be explored successfully by other means: “Does the record producer’s creative agency have musical consequences?”, and “If so, what are they?”. Through the creative practices I adopted for this project’s artefact - an album of nine tracks, called Blasphemy, that I produced for the London, Ontario-based rock band Nameless Friends - I establish a taxonomy of the creative agency of record producing, which considers the way producers musically influence the production process. This taxonomy confirms that the producer’s role in making records is a relational activity with straightforward musical consequences, a sort of performance practice in which the producer acts through musicians and recording engineers to execute a sonic vision for the finished product. Put simply, I contend that record-production practice is musical practice.

Further, I argue that the practice of record production is a unique, creative agency made manifest by the leadership role producers assume, exemplified by household names such as Rick Rubin, Sylvia Massey, and George Martin. While these producers have distinct approaches to production, they share a practice of using social power to achieve musical goals. The shared nature of this practice suggests that one producer’s creative agency offers knowledge relevant to the work of (many) others, even though a detailed investigation of these practices has yet to be undertaken. To fill this lacuna, the project focuses on my own record producing practices to provide new knowledge about the nature of record production that is transferable to the work of others. I demonstrate how the tangible outcomes of one producer’s creative agency can enhance understanding of artefacts generated by a diverse group of producers.
Keywords

Music/record production, music/record producer, sound recording, audio engineering, musicology, research creation, creative agency, creative reflective practice, gender, feminism.
Summary for Lay Audience

This project studies how record producers make music. Specifically, this dissertation is a case study of how I, a young female music producer, produced a nine track album called *Blasphemy* for London, Ontario-based rock band Nameless Friends from 2021-2023. This study is about leadership, gender, creative agency, and vision, and it offers an insider account of one of the most powerful, mysterious specialities in modern music.

There is a void of formal study about how music producers actually do their jobs, largely because it’s difficult to study music recording without *listening to recordings*. So this dissertation offers two contributions to that knowledge gap. First, this paper is the written guide for a long playlist of recordings, which survey my *Blasphemy* production process from demo to release. Readers can listen to the playlist to literally hear how I built the album, and this paper explains why I made the choices I did. Second, though I am a mere indie producer from Canada, I produce records with many of the same tools and approaches as big name producers. This project unpacks how I used those tools and approaches musically, and in doing so, offers insight into the practices of anyone else who also uses them.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank to my supervisors, Dr. Jay Hodgson and Dr. Robert Toft, for their invaluable expertise, advice, and copyedits. I would also like to thank Dr. Ruth Wright, my second reader, for her kindness, curiosity, and uncanny ability to spot typos.

Thanks to the Ontario government for the two OGS awards that made this project possible, and, given our current Premier, absolutely nothing else. Further thanks to my parents for supplying the project marketing budget and two commercial-sized containers of blue Laffy Taffy: I probably could have finished without them, but I would have suffered significantly more along the way.

Cheers to Nameless Friends’ lovely fans for your precocious support. I’m not calling this paper “Hysterical Pussy Shit - A How-To”, I’m sorry, but you knew about it before it was cool and no one can take that away from you.

All my love to Henry, I still want to be you when I grow up. And my biggest, baddest, weirdest gratitude to P, K, G, and the rest of the extended Nameless Friends universe - you’re the best teammates a captain could ask for.
# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................... ii

Summary for Lay Audience..............................................................................................................iv

Acknowledgments .........................................................................................................................v

Table of Contents .........................................................................................................................vi

List of Figures .....................................................................................................................................ix

List of Appendices ..........................................................................................................................x

1. Introduction.................................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1. Scholarly Significance .................................................................................................................. 3
   1.2. Relationship to Existing Literature ........................................................................................... 6
   1.3. Methodology .............................................................................................................................. 9
   1.4. Chapter Overviews ................................................................................................................... 11

2. Pre-Production ............................................................................................................................ 13
   2.1. Inventio part I - Nameless Friends ............................................................................................ 14
   2.2. Inventio part II - demo production .......................................................................................... 17
   2.3. Inventio part III - Nameless Friends implodes ......................................................................... 27
   2.4. Dispositio part I - Blasphemy .................................................................................................... 29
   2.5. Dispositio part II - the waterfall strategy .................................................................................. 34

3. Production ..................................................................................................................................... 39
   3.1. March 2022 .............................................................................................................................. 42
   3.2. April 2022 .............................................................................................................................. 47
   3.3. May 2022 .............................................................................................................................. 49
   3.4. June 2022 .............................................................................................................................. 60
   3.5. July 2022 .................................................................................................................................. 69
   3.6. August 2022 .......................................................................................................................... 72
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 2022</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2022</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2022</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2022</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January and February 2023</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March and April 2023</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June and July 2022</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2022</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2022</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2023</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2023</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2023</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April and May 2023</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2022</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2023</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2023</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2023</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2023</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“7 Years of Blood”, the single</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sympathy for Lilith”, the single</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3. “Need”, the single ........................................................................................................134

5.4. Blasphemy, the album ..................................................................................................135

Records Cited..................................................................................................................139

Videos Cited....................................................................................................................142

Works Cited ....................................................................................................................143

Appendices ......................................................................................................................150

Curriculum Vitae..............................................................................................................171
List of Figures

Figure 1: Lead guitar recording mic placement.................................................................88
Figure 2: Close up of the previous mic placement ..............................................................88
Figure 3: Rhythm guitar recording mic placement.............................................................89
Figure 4: Rhythm guitar tone settings ..............................................................................89
Figure 5: Piano-mounted room mic..................................................................................90
Figure 6: Dr. Z amp stack recording set up ......................................................................90
Figure 7: Lead guitars used on *Blasphemy* ..................................................................91
Figure 8: Rhythm guitars used on *Blasphemy* ...............................................................91
Figure 9: Outline of “Sympathy for Lilith” ......................................................................129
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Project Playlist Guide ................................................................. 150

Appendix B: Blasphemy Lyrics ........................................................................ 154

Appendix C: Recording Elements Checklist .................................................... 164

Appendix D: Blasphemy Gear List ................................................................... 168

Appendix E: Blasphemy Post-Production Reference Tracks ............................. 170
1. Introduction

In this research-creation project, I seek to elucidate the creative practice of record producing by offering both written and musical accounts of how I, an artist-researcher producer, make music through project-paradigm record production. Adam Bell, in his book *Dawn of the DAW*, defines record producers as musicians whose instrument is the recording studio\(^1\), but, as he acknowledges, a “methodology” of this musical activity has yet to be established\(^2\) – What do record producers do and what are the musical consequences of record production? These are the questions this project addresses.

“Record producing”, used interchangeably with “music producing”, is a distinct recordist specialty defined by leadership over the broader record production\(^3\) process. Music producers are solely responsible for the final form of the recordings being made, in both artistic and logistical senses, so they are accordingly empowered to influence all elements of music production\(^4\). Record producers can dictate a recording engineer’s technique, modify a musician’s performance, and tweak song arrangements and mixes alike, though they themselves may never touch the recording equipment or play a musical note throughout this process. The music producer’s specialty is a *relational* practice: they make referential connections between the work of others and their own, original ideas; blend these references in service of an imagined final recording, often characterized as a sort of mythic vision\(^5\); and then lead a team of musicians and other recordists to manifest that vision. Though no two records are the same, all music producers, including me, must make these kinds of forecasts and use leadership skills to bring the project to fruition. I call this practice the record producer’s *creative agency*\(^6\).

There are as many methodologies of music producing, that is, *expressions of the producer’s creative agency*, as there are styles of leadership, so the sheer volume of

\(^{1}\) Bell, 2018 (31-67).

\(^{2}\) Ibid (67).

\(^{3}\) “Record production”, used interchangeably with “music production”, is the making of musical records, that is, recorded music. I use this broad definition because it’s the term that industry professionals use, as much as academic parsing can struggle with it (Hepworth Sawyer, 2017 [xii-xiii]).

\(^{4}\) Burgess, 2013 (7-25, 60-90); Massey, 2016 (187-213); Hennion, 1983 (159-193).

\(^{5}\) Jones, 2018 (2).

\(^{6}\) This idea shares a resemblance with Sidsel Karlsen’s lens of “musical agency”, which holds that musical *process*, beyond a music product, is an integral dimension of learning worth study in music education and “ethnographically-inspired music education research” (Karlsen, 2011); and Christopher Small’s concept of “musicking”, which defines how ostensibly non-musical activities can have musical consequences and thus be wielded creatively (Small, 1998).
individual producing practices has challenged formal research. However, records of the same genre/type share significant sonic resemblances, and there are a fixed number of ways of arriving at such similar sounds with existing recording technology. I thus argue that record producers working in comparable genres/project paradigms have enough referential overlap that each of their respective practices has transferable insight from one to another. In other words, it is possible to establish what (certain types of) record producers do by studying the practices of a representative group.

In this project, I investigate my project questions by studying my own creative agency as a popular music record producer in the age of digital recording technology. I undertook this project under the research-creation umbrella as an artist-researcher, a creative professional whose work is equally comprised of both artistic practice and research, in my case, musicological research. Research-creation projects include creative artefacts as an essential component of the study, so artist-researchers have the privilege of studying creative practice from the inside, and in the following sections, I discuss, the scholarly significance of my work, its relationship to existing literature, and why this insider perspective is not just convenient, but arguably necessary, for tackling my questions.

I conducted this project by drawing on the traditional principles of rhetoric, as outlined below (Methodology). Broadly, I first produced a popular music album of nine tracks, and engaged in a reflective, note-taking practice to chart how I exercised my creative agency as the record producer. Then, I organized and analyzed those notes to compose this contextual exegesis, in which I discuss my production practice as a case study with transferable insights to the work of other producers. Consequently, this dissertation intertwines the finished album and the exegesis so that readers can place the conclusions drawn in this contextual document within an aural experience of the

---

7 Hepworth Sawyer, 2017 [xii-xiii].

8 Bell, 2018 (3-29); Burgess, 2013 (37-46, 60-90); Nardi, 2020 (33-46); Zagorski-Thomas, 2014 (1-19).

9 Burgess, 2013 (7-25, 37-46); Moorefield, 2005 (xii-xix).

10 Ibid.

11 The results of the creative practice in question.

12 Candy, 2006 (2-19).

13 A musical release generally including more than six songs, and longer than twenty minutes of playback.

14 To understand how the creative practice of a twenty-eight-year-old record producer working in London, Ontario could be remotely qualified to offer insight about some of the most iconic musical professionals of all time, please see the section, Scholarly Significance.
artefact\textsuperscript{15}, the main outcome of the project. As a whole, this project articulates the creative ideas that led to the artefact (in the exegesis) and provides new knowledge gained through my production practices and the outcomes of those practices (in the artefact).

To be clear, I am my only research subject. This project exclusively investigates the record producer’s role in production: I engaged other musicians and engineers in the recording sessions for this project because the record producer’s creative practice includes \textit{producing musicians and engineers}. But I did not question these participants about their creative practices, nor did I analyze their contributions. I conducted a study of how one practitioner, the record producer, led the making of a musical work. Other participants in that creative process were certainly artistic contributors, but their contributions are not within the scope of the project questions.

1.1. Scholarly Significance

Record producers wield powerful influence over contemporary music\textsuperscript{16}, and because of their unique leadership role in the music production process, they are the reason that records both sound the way they do and are even released (i.e., exist to the public\textsuperscript{17}) at all\textsuperscript{18}. The musical nature of record producing practice is not yet, however, well-understood\textsuperscript{19}, and I contend that scholarship in musicology cannot comprehensively consider recorded music without investigating the circumstances of its making\textsuperscript{20}.

This gap in the literature is largely a result of the tacit nature of creative agency. In \textit{The Reflective Practitioner}, Donald Schön finds that a significant amount of professional learning is retained as unarticulated, embodied knowledge, which his research subjects\textsuperscript{21} wield through a process of “reflection-in-action” that they can’t necessarily describe\textsuperscript{22}. Linda Candy builds on this notion to define “creative, reflective

---

\textsuperscript{15} I have curated a Project Playlist to host all the artefact assets (i.e. audio tracks) in this project, which this exegesis references. Appendix A is a comprehensive guide to the Playlist.

\textsuperscript{16} Burgess (7-25), 2013.

\textsuperscript{17} Peter Jackson’s 2021 Beatles docu-series, \textit{Get Back}, explores how even an experienced band can be prone to distraction, aimlessness, and infighting without a leader at the project helm.

\textsuperscript{18} Howlett, 2012; Massey, 2016 (187-213); Millington, 2011; Richardson, 2011; Hughes, \textit{Defiant Ones}, 2017.

\textsuperscript{19} Wolfe, 2020 (3-6).

\textsuperscript{20} Hennion, 1983 (159-193) and 1989 (400-424); Nardi, 2020 (33-46).

\textsuperscript{21} Including an engineer, architect, manager, psychotherapist, and urban planner.

\textsuperscript{22} Schön, 1983 (1-374).
practitioners”23, as people, like lawyers and artists, including record producers, for whom “continuous reflection is an integral part of the way they practice on a daily basis”24. Studies of music production must be able to mine and incorporate this intuition/internal monologue25, and Mine Dogantan-Dack surveys how musicologists have struggled to investigate similar reflections in other areas of musical performance practice26. I am leveraging a research-creation methodology for this project precisely because research-creation is one of few methodological approaches designed to accommodate the embodied nature of artistic self-study27, but even that has limits: there simply aren’t many record producers with the desire or research skills to articulate their professional experience beyond anecdotes28.

For this project, I use my own practice as a case study. I am a young professional record producer, working primarily in popular and vocal music. Producers/engineers in these sorts of project paradigms use many techniques that a professional ear can readily recognize without access to the bed tracks, and as a musicological artist-researcher, I leverage my production experience to uncover these techniques and explain their musical utility. This provides insight into the creative agency of other producers, and I make many connections to work by such producers, i.e. other records, in this exegesis.

My work on this dissertation not only fills a gap in the musicological understanding of record production, but it also offers additional insight into a rare, gendered leadership experience. I am a female producer, and only about 2% of record producers are women29. This minority position has been a burden during my production career; literature in both women’s studies and record production finds that the alarming

---

23 Candy, 2019 (44-72).

24 A real example from a fellow producer’s last project: “So if the drummer insists he must use this particular kick drum on the record because his late uncle left it to him, which I can’t overrule without looking like an inconsiderate leader to the rest of the band, while he’s grieving and emotionally fragile, and it sounds a bit like a jazz fusion kick drum, how do I make that work with the bluegrass vision of the mix that the label wants, when the singer announced yesterday that he hates bluegrass and wants to make a blues album, and I still think the song structures most resemble conventions in neo-country?” Repeat until the finished record is physically in your hand.

25 Candy, 2019 (44-95); Dogantan-Dack, 2012 (259-272); Nardi, 2020 (33-46).

26 In *Practice-as-Research in Music Performance*, Dogantan-Dack ultimately concludes that texts can never be comprehensive resources for studying performance practice, because musical performers embody a unique level of expertise that research must make room for: “One of the greatest challenges for contemporary performance studies is to recognise and theorise the situated expert knowledge live musical performance generates and to honour it as the epistemological foundation of the discipline … Towards this aim, the ever-expanding potentials for multimodal discourses offer unprecedented opportunities to expert performers, who wish to undertake practice-based research projects with the aim of producing dissertations and theses in academic contexts.” (Dogantan-Dack, 2012 [272]).

27 Ibid.

28 Bourbon, 2020 (1-3); Zagorski-Thomas, 2014 (1-19, 32-46); Wolfe, 2020 (27-35).

29 Smith, 2021 (3).
2% statistic is generally the result of pervasive, systemic sexism against female leaders\textsuperscript{30}, which aligns with my experience. That being said, my marginalized position has also been a source of professional strength: much of producing records is practicing nurturing forms of emotional labour\textsuperscript{31} and leadership\textsuperscript{32} that women are socialized to be better at than men\textsuperscript{33}, and this equally aligns with my experience.

This project recounts sexism\textsuperscript{34} and misogyny\textsuperscript{35} that I faced from external actors\textsuperscript{36}, internal self-talk\textsuperscript{37}, and institutional barriers intersecting with embodied illness\textsuperscript{38}. I discuss these incidents in chronological order, to faithfully represent how fickle, and yet powerful, gendered dynamics can be in the recording studio. As I once explained to a (male) supervisor, sometimes gender matters in record production and sometimes it doesn’t, and when it matters is not always predictable. How I cope with (and confront!) the uncertainty and volatility my gender inspires is an essential part of my production practice.

Discussions about my gender have had the unfortunate tendency to hijack and overshadow the primary research concerns in past projects, but I undertake them here anyway with senses of responsibility and (cautious) optimism. It is my hope that considering all aspects of my production practice in this dissertation, including my personal identity, will encourage other producers, particularly from marginalized backgrounds, to bring their own diverse experiences to this burgeoning field. Record production can be, I believe, a form of justice. Recordings can survey and concretize oral traditions, performance practices, and other forms of embodied knowledge that challenge the limitations of written language. In other words, record producers can decide what knowledge - that could be otherwise neglected, overlooked, or historically disenfranchised by ocularcentrism - becomes known. The potential contributions of this field are thus as great as the variety of people empowered to make those decisions.

\textsuperscript{30} Manne, 2017 (78-101); Marie, 2019 (311-327); Marrington, 2020 (11-34); Reddington, 2021 (1-193).

\textsuperscript{31} Millington, 2011.

\textsuperscript{32} Brown, 2018; Jagger, 2020 (251-267).

\textsuperscript{33} Regan, 2020 (191).

\textsuperscript{34} The naturalized beliefs that justify the oppression and exploitation of groups of people - usually women and queer folks, or “not men” - based on their sex/gender [Manne, 2017].

\textsuperscript{35} The behaviours that enforce sexist beliefs, carried out by individuals and institutions alike [Manne, 2017].

\textsuperscript{36} See Chapters 2, 4, and 5.

\textsuperscript{37} See Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

\textsuperscript{38} See Chapter 3.
1.2. Relationship to Existing Literature

Carlo Nardi and Antoine Hennion argue, thirty five years apart, that records are both cultural objects and musical acts, simultaneously a record and recorded music\(^{39}\). Existing literature reflects this duality, for published research generally aligns with either the broad relationships within the music production process or the technical details of record production\(^{40}\). A conspicuous absence of what Simon Zagorski-Thomas calls a “musicology” of record production lies between these perspectives, that is, the study of record production as a musical practice, in which researchers unpack the ways producers use their creative agency for musical ends\(^{41}\). In what follows, I will briefly discuss this lacuna, before surveying the existing literature in research creation that this dissertation leverages to address the gap.

Mike Howlett and Russ Hepworth-Sawyer offer two excellent examples of literature concerned with the cultural role of record producers, and this work demonstrates how music producers describe their responsibilities during interviews\(^{42}\). In *The Record Producer As Nexus*, Howlett surveys the music producer’s spheres of empowerment and influence to define their unique leadership, taking a broad, holistic view of the relational aspects of music production\(^{43}\). Hepworth-Sawyer and Craig Golding adopt a similar approach in *What is Music Production*, offering a sort of field guide for aspiring record producers that covers the general steps of the record production process, while emphasizing the importance of interpersonal facilitation and mediation\(^{44}\). These studies do not, however, offer many concrete examples of production practice.

Virgil Moorefield extends this type of work in *The Producer as Composer*, where he defines three historical types of producers and exemplifies each type by unpacking one or two significant element(s) of a popular record led by several such producers\(^{45}\). Adam Bell compiles similar case studies in *Dawn of the DAW*, but maintains that a

---

\(^{39}\) Nardi, 2020 (33-46); Hennion, 1983 (159-193) and 1989 (400-424).

\(^{40}\) Bourbon, 2020 (1-3); Zagorski-Thomas, 2020 (2-16).

\(^{41}\) Zagorski-Thomas, 2014 (32-46).

\(^{42}\) Millington, 2011; Richardson, 2011.

\(^{43}\) Howlett, 2012.

\(^{44}\) Hepworth-Sawyer, 2012 (3-56, 59-76).

\(^{45}\) Moorefield distinguishes between the facilitative producer (examples of which are George Martin and many Motown producers), the producer who plays the studio as a musical instrument (Brian Eno, Trent Reznor), and the auteur producer (Quincy Jones, Kraftwerk) (Moorefield, 2005). Simon Zagorski-Thomas parses out similar categories of “A+R men as producers”, “staff producers”, “entrepreneurial producers”, and “artist producers” in *The Musicology of Record Production* (Zagorski-Thomas, 2014 [238-244]), as does Richard Burgess with “artist”, “auteur”, “facilitative”, “collaborative”, and “consultative” producers in his *The Art of Music Production* (Burgess, 2013 [7-25]).
comprehensive “methodology” of the musical nature of music producing has yet to be established.

Paula Wolfe opens *Women in the Studio* with a fastidious survey of research on the technical side of record production, arguing that this literature tends to focus on the engineer’s perspective and takes a materialistic view of the music production process. She cites Paul Théberge’s *Any Sound You Can Imagine* and William Moylan’s *Understanding and Crafting the Mix* as prominent examples. Wolfe finds that much of this work either revolves around recording/post-production technique and equipment operation or charts the inherent relationship between the development of music production and the evolution of recording technology.

Wolfe also echoes Hennion, Hodgson, Nardi, and others by arguing that a significant amount of the existing literature in music production perpetuates the misunderstanding that records are “uncovered” in production, as if their final form was somehow a given that merely had to be deduced. Some engineers certainly characterize aspects of record production this way, particularly post-production, but the record producer’s “vision” is only rendered this succinctly in the rear-view mirror: creative, reflective practices, including music producing, are cumulative, not successive, pursuits. Antoine Hennion states,

“The equivalence between music and taste, between supply and demand, is what producers work together to achieve. Popular music has organized its production as the resolution of a multivariate equation: an equalization, not the discovery of a pre-established equality. In the studio, music is not on the one side with its laws, with which one learns how to compose, and the public with its taste which can be measured, on the other. The task is not just to fiddle the controls correctly so that correspondence is assured. This kind of equality does not exist: it must be produced. This is how we would translate what the music industry professionals

---

46 Bell, 2018 (31-67).

47 That is, is not concerned with artistic questions or music, in general.

48 Wolfe, 2020 (3-6).

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Hennion, 1983 (159-193) and 1989 (400-424); Hodgson, 2019 (1-8); Nardi, 2020 (33-46); Wolfe, 2020 (3-6).

52 Mix engineers often describe mixing records as a sort of reverse engineering. They begin by estimating the limitations of the anticipated playback technology (cellphone and laptop speakers, for instance, aren’t capable of producing true bass frequencies), and then divvy the resulting sonic space between the recorded instruments that the producer wants included (Hepworth-Sawyer, 2017).

53 Hennion, 1983 (159-193), 1989 (400-424); Hodgson, 2019 (1-8).

54 Candy, 2018 (63-68) and 2019; Hennion, 1983 (159-193) and 1989 (400-424).
say with complacency but with common sense on their side: ‘If there were a rule for making records, everyone could do it.’… With their collaborators, a few tools, and their experience, the producer has access to an incoherent mass of known or controlled elements. None of these serves to guarantee the success of the new disc… Any analysis of production that treats something as given that was not so for the producers is not pertinent to its object… Its very principle commits the anachronism of rationalization. It details in a learned way, as if known in advance, what the actor/operators had to fight long and hard for in their work, precisely because without this work, it could not be known.”

Literature in both research-creation and music production adopts Hennion’s conclusions to argue that in studying the creative agency of reflective practitioners, such as record producers, researchers must follow the practice in question as it unfolds. Candy and Edmonds further argue that creative agency is most tangible when it makes measurable change (in other words, it can be felt), and they go on to suggest that concretizing such tacit, artistic knowledge is the scholarly impetus of research-creation.

Research-creation literature to date has generally distinguished between “practice-based” and “practice-led” approaches. Practice-based research is “designed to answer specific questions about art and the practice of it, questions which could not be explored and answered successfully by other means”, and draws “on a range of methods and/or research processes within the framework of artistic practice”. Practice-led research is “concerned with the nature of practice”, and leads to both “new understandings of practice” and “new knowledge appropriate for practitioners.”

A single research-creation project can involve both of these approaches. For example, in this dissertation, I undertook a hybrid research-creation project, synthesized from both practice-based and practice-led approaches. My methodology is certainly “concerned with the nature of practice”, but it also is “designed to answer specific questions about art and the practice of it, questions which could not be explored and

55 Hennion, 1989 (419-420).
56 Candy, 2019 (44-95); Dogantan-Dack, 2012 (272); Hennion, 1983 (159-193) and 1989 (400-424); Loveless, 2015 (52-54); Nardi, 2020 (33-46).
57 Candy, 2018 (63-68).
58 Ibid.
59 A methodological umbrella under which projects regularly include both written and creative artefact components.
60 Candy, 2006 (1-19) and 2018 (63-68).
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
answered successfully by other means.” This methodological duality is necessary to study the musical nature of record producing: at an Art of Record Production conference, “Haydn Bendall, chief engineer at EMI’s Abbey Road studios for 15 years, asked what the point was of a musicology of record production. The answer that emerged from the panel was that it was two-fold: first, so that we can better understand human activity in a general sense through recorded music, but, second, to generate the kind of understanding that helps us to ‘do’ music more effectively.”

1.3. Methodology

In this project, I harnessed principles of rhetoric to craft two works. First, I engaged with rhetoric as a record producer, crafting an artefact to concretize my artistic practice. I produced an album of nine original tracks for my London-based rock band Nameless Friends, titled Blasphemy. As a creative, reflective practitioner, I made regular jottings and notes during the production process, which documented my “methodology” as Blasphemy’s producer. I also transferred regular copies of the album production to my laptop and redundant hard drives during production, to keep as both backup copies of the album-in-progress and tangible snapshots of my creative agency in progress. Then, in a consecutive rhetorical journey, I leveraged these tangible examples of my creative agency to compose this exegesis, which makes connections between my work and the practices of other producers.

I draw on the discipline of rhetoric, as known from the 16th to 18th centuries, to organize this research. Rhetoric has been broadly defined as the art of persuasive speech, and rhetoricians traditionally divided their practice into five areas: inventio, dispositio, elocutio or decoratio, memoria, and pronunciatio. “Inventio entailed finding the subject matter, and in dispositio, orators arranged or ordered the material to suit their purpose. Once the material had been arranged, elocutio involved amplifying and decorating the discourse with fine words and sentences. Speakers then memorised (memoria) and delivered the speech, pronunciatio being concerned with the techniques of delivery orators employed to move the passions of listeners.”

These principles guide and organize this research-creation project, because much like rhetoricians and orators, record producers tell persuasive stories that seek to move

64 Ibid.

65 Zagorski-Thomas, 2020 (2).

66 Using a physical notepad, voice memos on my cellphone, track sheets (standardized documents that all engineers in a session use to chart the particular recording needs of each song, similar to storyboards used in film), and the virtual notepad in my DAW (Digital Audio Workstation, that is, my recording software program).

67 Toft, 2014 (7).

68 Ibid.
audiences. Consciously or unconsciously, producers find the material with which they will work either in their own imaginations or in the work of other recordists (*inventio*). They then arrange these ideas in a logical order to establish the sequence of events on the recording (*dispositio*), after which they clothe these ideas (the recorded tracks) in auditory processing, using plugins and hardware to sculpt sonic gestures into things of persuasive beauty (*elocutio*). Producers fix their auditory sculptures into a completed record finite in form (something akin to *memoria*, that is, memorizing a speech for delivery), which is then released for distribution to the ears of the public. *Pronunciatio* is what the performers on the record do: it is their delivery that the producer captures, fine tunes, and chooses to distribute.

The traditional order of the rhetorical process needs to be altered somewhat to suit the recording process. Producers must forecast their desired articulation (*pronunciatio*) before recording (*dispositio*) even begins, and go on to make virtually all subsequent production decisions through the lens of anticipated reception of the recorded performance\(^{69}\). This forecasted *pronunciatio* is realized when the recording is released to the public. I distinguish “*pronunciatio* part I” from “*pronunciatio* part II” in this research to reflect production practice: the former is the expression that producers choose to release for audience consumption, and the latter is when and how that consumption actually happens. In other words, this research discusses the difference between *pronunciatio* decisions I made in studio, estimating public reception; and the public’s later, true reception of that *pronunciatio*.

Moreover, this project is exempt from ethics review. According to Article 2.6 of the latest Tri-Council Policy Statement, “creative practice activities, in and of themselves, do not require REB review. However, research that employs creative practice to obtain responses from participants that will be analyzed to answer a research question is subject to REB review.”\(^{70}\) The same policy defines “creative practice” as “a process through which an artist makes or interprets a work or works of art. It may also include a study of the process of how a work of art is generated.”\(^{71}\)

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, I am my only research subject. This project exclusively investigates the record producer’s creative practice. This practice certainly includes producing musicians and engineers, which means I engage musicians and engineers in the recording sessions, but I do not question any of these people about their practices nor do the participants in the recording sessions analyze the research results. This project is a study of how one practitioner, the record producer, leads the making of a musical work. All other participants in the production process are simply artistic contributors, which means their contributions are not within the scope of the project questions.

TCPS does specify that although “creative practice activities do not require REB review, … they may be governed by ethical practices established within the cultural

---

\(^{69}\) Hodgson, 2006.

\(^{70}\) TCPS, 2018.

\(^{71}\) Ibid.
sector”72, so I honoured the other artistic contributions accordingly: I protected the creative rights involved in Blasphemy73, registered the songwriting “splits” with SOCAN74, and have purposefully excluded from this exegesis any artistic contributors’ work that could be classified as trade secrets. I further discuss this - and the wider ethics clearance of this project - in Chapter 4.

1.4. Chapter Overviews

I have structured this exegesis according to the typical, broad phases of record production75, as discussed by Russ Hepworth-Sawyer76: first “pre-production”77, which is songwriting and workshopping with an eye on distribution and production design; then “production”78, recording the rehearsed material; “post-production”, which includes mixing79 and mastering80 the recorded tracks to prepare them for release; and finally, “distribution”81 of the album to the public according to marketing plans begun in pre-production.

Chapter 2, Pre-Production, surveys the broad artistic and aesthetic foundations from which I undertook producing the album Blasphemy. It contains minimal formal musical analysis, and references (many) other records to define my inventio and dispositio. This chapter introduces my band, Nameless Friends, and discusses how I produced demo recordings for the songs that became Blasphemy, which offers a microcosm of the dissertation methodology, including general production process, key terms, etc.

---

72 Ibid.

73 The affiliated musicians are all able to claim the album for their neighbouring rights catalogues, meaning that every musician who played on Blasphemy can collect royalties for their performance when the song is played in public or streamed online.

74 The Canadian organization responsible for collecting royalties on behalf of songwriters and music publishers. By registering each songwriter’s claim to the songs they wrote on Blasphemy, I empower SOCAN to collect royalties from those songs on their behalf.

75 I did consider structuring my chapters according to the divisions of rhetoric I use to conceptualize my research plans, but since music production professionals are not likely to be familiar with rhetorical processes, such an approach would undermine the accessibility (and thus professional utility!) of this research. This approach was approved in the project proposal.

76 Hepworth-Sawyer, 2012 (17-18).

77 This phase is directly correlated with the inventio phase of rhetoric.

78 This phase is directly correlated with the dispositio phase of rhetoric.

79 This phase is directly correlated with the elocutio phase of rhetoric.

80 This phase is directly correlated with the memoria phase of rhetoric.

81 This phase is directly correlated with the pronunciatio phase of rhetoric.
Chapter 3, Production, discusses my production practice recording the album. It analyzes dispositio and pronunciatio part I in chronological order, side by side, to demonstrate how record producers must oscillate between broad and detail-oriented decisions as part of regular practice. This chapter encourages readers to develop popular music listening skills, and uses some formal musical analysis to parse (many) sonic examples from my production practice.

Chapter 4, Post-Production, follows how I, the record producer, led a team of engineers to mix and master Blasphemy. It discusses elocutio and memoria in chronological order as mixing and mastering, and references examples from (many) consecutive mix revisions to demonstrate how the album evolved. This chapter establishes how producers wield their creative agency through technical specialists, and includes a longer discussion about the ethical considerations that these specialists pose for creative practice research.

Finally, Chapter 5, Release, surveys the feedback that Blasphemy received once it was distributed to the public. It discusses the relationship between my production vision - pronunciatio part I - and how listeners actually engaged with the album through social media, digital streaming platforms, PR/critical reviews, and word of mouth - pronunciatio part II. This chapter concludes that the relational specialty of the record producer does have musical consequences, and analyzes how producers approach their practice to generate desirable outcomes under a capitalist system.
2. Pre-Production

When does a production process start?

In the first phase of traditional rhetoric, practitioners begin with *inventio*, the gathering of material from available resources to find the subject matter from/about which they will produce an artefact, with the underlying expectation that indeed they are preparing to *make an artefact*. Many great albums - like *Exile on Main Street* by the Rolling Stones, *Machine Head* by Deep Purple, and Pup’s *THE UNRAVELLING OF PUPTHEBAND* - were made this way: an artist is directed/motivated to make an album, and so they decamp to a tax haven villa/an empty hotel/their producer’s home studio/a miscellaneous and often remote location to start virtually from scratch and scrounge around for creative inspiration.

But not all creative artefacts are so neatly summoned from first conception. The second phase of rhetorical practice, *dispositio*, involves ordering and arranging the gathered materials to suit a purpose. Many other great albums - like *Up To Here* by The Tragically Hip, *Use Your Illusion I + II* by Guns N’ Roses, and both Taylor Swift’s *Midnights* and *Evermore* - arguably began with *dispositio* instead: an artist, armed with a catalogue of music, gets signed to a label/meets a producer/has an epiphany/considers what they could undertake with their material and decides to record it. As an indie producer, *dispositio* is often where I begin my working relationship with other artists. My clients bring me the fruits of what they usually call songwriting, i.e. their *inventio*; and I begin our working relationship with a discussion about what kind of record we’re going to make from those raw materials, i.e. *dispositio*, organizing the ideas and materials into a coherent shape.

*Blasphemy* is an album that began production in *dispositio*. I didn’t agree to produce this album until Nameless Friends had exhausted other production options for it, and the songs that would make up the album were already written, and even partially recorded, before I was hired. However, as the primary songwriter and bandleader of Nameless Friends, I was privy to, indeed led!, the entire *inventio* phase of what would become *Blasphemy* before it ever crossed my mind to produce the results. As a practicing producer who can’t necessarily silo my professional instincts, hindsight reveals that I was making prescient, relevant decisions in the *inventio* phase of album production before this album, *Blasphemy*; or even an album; conceptually existed. So from a research perspective, I am delighted that this study can leverage my experience to analyze *Blasphemy* as, technically, an album that began in *inventio*.

This chapter will use the concepts of *inventio* and *dispositio* to explore what industry professionals generally call “Pre-Production”, meaning all the things that must happen prior to the artist entering the recording studio82. This will broadly include, how

---

82 Hepworth-Sawyer, 2012 (17-18).
the songs that became *Blasphemy* first came to me as a recording project; how and when I formally decided to produce that project, and thus brought *Blasphemy* into conceptual existence; and how I worked with the band and material in preparation for recording. Threads that I began spinning in these phases go on to have powerful influence in later parts of production, and I will do my best to faithfully analyze how these events unfolded in real time, resisting the urge to “rear-view mirror” within the formal structure of this chapter\(^83\).

I’ll present curated examples along the way to invite readers into my production practice and offer connections to the practices of other producers: demos of the album’s songs before they became *Blasphemy*; descriptions of other songs that never became part of the album, but were written at the same time, to illustrate creative context; records that informed my referential library; and records in which I identified similar practices in the work of other producers. The comparisons I draw in this chapter follow broad, artistic/aesthetic strokes, and eschew most traditional musical analysis. This is representative of the visionary, big-picture sort of thinking that guides my production practice in *inventio* and *dispositio*. The next chapters in this exegesis will leverage increasingly technical and specific examples to demonstrate how my thinking evolved during production.

Because my production practice is inherently intertwined with my personal experience, several details I discuss will be sensitive and gendered. While on the surface these details might not seem relevant to formal study, they certainly informed how I approached writing *Blasphemy*, decided to produce it, and finished it. I invite readers to heed the content warnings and accordingly take care\(^84\).

### 2.1. *Inventio* part I - Nameless Friends

*Inventio* for *Blasphemy* began in summer 2021. I am the lead vocalist, rhythm guitarist, and leader of a rock band called Nameless Friends. Like many other artists, Nameless Friends’ momentum had been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we, the band members, were trying to figure out how to adapt and move forward as a group. I was keeping the band’s social media presence active by producing a live album from one of our pre-pandemic festival performances\(^85\), but we couldn’t afford to market it, and it made little impact.

Nameless Friends had acquired a tentative management contract just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, but that management had primarily American contacts who insisted on meeting with artists in person. After two years of lockdowns and travel restrictions prevented us from attending any such meetings, the public health data in June 2021 supported international travel in fall 2021. Management contacted the band in June 2021 and directed me, the band’s primary songwriter, to write

---

\(^83\) Hennion, 1983 (159-193), 1989 (400-424); Hodgson, 2019 (1-8).

\(^84\) Parts of this chapter discuss experiences of misogyny and chronic illness.

\(^85\) *Live At Stranded Fest*, 2021.
and demo a portfolio of new material by fall 2021, at which point we would finally travel to pitch ourselves to the labels and well-known producers in their orbit.

I was hungry to prove that Nameless Friends was marketable enough to be worthy of an established label/producer, and I saw an unfulfilled demand in young, mainstream rock music that I believed we could fill. Streaming numbers indicated that rock was one of the most popular genres in the world at the time, second only to hip hop, but I couldn’t personally identify any current A-list, international rock artists who weren’t either long-established or even legacy acts. At the same time, I heard rock aesthetics creeping into major pop records: the soaring guitars on Lil Nas X’s “THATS WHAT I WANT”, and Billie Eilish’s “Happier Than Ever”; and the grungy, riff-based arrangement of Olivia Rodrigo’s “brutal”; all of which were received with enormous enthusiasm on social media and streaming platforms. I thought these examples were indicative of an untapped, perhaps even dormant, rock fanbase that could be found with the right rock record, and I was determined to write that record to garner Nameless Friends industry attention.

I started by pulling songs from my personal archives of unreleased material that I thought could suit the band: “Solidarity”, “Little God”, “Asking for a Friend”, and “Falsetto Song” from a seminar project that I conducted from February-April 2021; a song I wrote in March 2021 called “Five”; a song with the working title “Light ‘Em

---


87 Muse and Foo Fighters, respectively, came to mind. In honourable mentions, Greta Van Fleet had failed to escape the comparisons to Led Zeppelin, ending up with thoroughly respectable but not quite lofty tours and zero household-name singles; the English-speaking American press had no idea what to do with Måneskin, despite their powerful showing at Eurovision; and the lead singer of Imagine Dragons was gleefully agreeing with a Twitter storm that his band wasn’t rock “enough” to deserve their domination of the Billboard rock charts. Streaming demographics support this impression: the majority of rock streaming numbers were generated by classic rock albums in 2020 (ibid).

88 Songwriting is a constant part of my creative practice, album on the horizon or not. I record every one of my ideas on the voice recorder app on my phone in case one of them turns out to be useful to a project down the line. I wrote “Forth”’s lead guitar riff in approximately 2011, and kept track of it all this time through this system.

89 A song about the inherent necessity of having political solidarity with one’s peers when young, even if it can be difficult in practice.

90 A song about the simultaneous power and invisibility of unpaid labour (usually) performed by women, told through metaphor.

91 A song about the warring optimism and anxiety of uncertainty, examined through the lens of storytelling pedagogy.

92 A song about the collective emotional/mental/physical/social/political/etc. fragility that humanity was experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

93 A song about awakening from depression.
Up™, which I initially wrote in 2013 and the band adapted for an online performance in 2020; and pieces of a song that I had been toying with since 2016, which had already been through several titles in my own notes and would eventually become “Sympathy for Lilith”.

I envisioned that the latter, especially, had the potential to be widely successful if I could find its audience. In November 2016, notorious misogynist and sexual predator Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. As a dual American citizen, I watched the election results in disbelief and grief: Trump’s losing opponent, Hillary Clinton, was a far more qualified candidate, and the only real shot at a female president that the US had ever had. I spent most of the next day scrolling through messages of solidarity and courage that women around the world contributed to a Facebook group called “Pantsuit Nation”, named in Clinton’s honour, and wrote the A section of “Sympathy for Lilith” as I reflected on our collective experience. I went on to play snippets of the song in songwriter circles over the years, but was too insecure about its frank handling of gendered trauma - my gendered trauma - to commit to finishing or releasing it.

Then in 2021, I was captivated by the way the Canadian prog rock band Crown Lands leveraged a massive rock mix to examine proportionately powerful themes of colonial brutality against indigenous women in their 2020 release “End of the Road”. When Crown Lands did well at the Juno Awards - my social media was awash in congratulatory posts that celebrated their truth-telling - I started to mentally churn over doing something similar with my truth. Would Pantsuit Nation’s four million members enjoy “Sympathy for Lilith” if I finished it? How about a record label, if I could offer them the audience of Pantsuit Nation?

During this time, the bodies of thousands of murdered, indigenous children were uncovered in the grounds of former Residential Schools; the 2SLGBTQIA+ An ode to the courage and strength of trauma survivors.

A song about the ancientness of sexism against women, and the relationship between that sexism; its ancientness; and patriarchal, religious teachings.


Bump, 2016.

Kelly, 2016.

See Appendix B, and/or Figure 1 at the end of Chapter 4.

Austen, 2022.

Residential schools were colonial institutions run by the Catholic church and Canadian government in an attempt to eradicate indigenous peoples by kidnapping indigenous children from their cultures and communities. The Residential school program is considered by many experts to be part of an ongoing genocide against indigenous peoples in North America and Canada, and the estimated death toll from the program is in the tens of thousands. Every Child Matters. (Truth and Reconciliation, 2015).
community was being targeted with an unprecedented rise of hate crimes and prejudiced legislation\textsuperscript{102}; and preventable deaths continued to pile up as thousands of people, many of them vulnerable and/or immunocompromised, slipped through predictable cracks in public health policy and died from COVID-19\textsuperscript{103}. Watching the grief and horror among my bandmates, friends, family, and wider social media as this news circulated, I was convinced that the songs Nameless Friends put forward in this round of demos should take strong political stances and address civil rights issues. If we were going to solicit a major label platform, I wanted to use that platform for social justice. I wrote “94”\textsuperscript{104} and the first part of the B section in “Sympathy for Lilith”\textsuperscript{105} during this time.

This is the point at which I argue I was beginning to produce what would become \textit{Blasphemy}. Though I was still operating under the presumption that I was a songwriter writing songs to make demos to solicit other producers, I had begun forecasting distribution to what I thought Nameless Friends’ audience could be, and began to treat my own referential library of other artists, inspirations, etc. as a resource from which to make recording decisions.

\section*{2.2. \textit{Inventio} part II - demo production}

The band’s management wanted the demos finished and delivered by fall 2021. Without a budget or any other instructions - as the band’s frontman, primary songwriter, and producer of our last album - I assumed the role of demo producer. I am including a discussion of my demo production practice here because many of the reference tracks and inspirations that I used would later become part of the \textit{inventio} that I drew from to produce \textit{Blasphemy}. This section also offers a microcosm of the production practice that I later engage in to produce \textit{Blasphemy}, which I hope will help orient non-industry readers with the process and its norms before I discuss \textit{Blasphemy} in later chapters.

Throughout this section, I will broadly describe that I “created”, “programmed”, “recorded”, etc. various elements of the demos. I am intentionally using this language to describe how I was, as the producer, the authority who signed off on every creation, bit of programming, recording, etc. There were times when other people operated the equipment for these ends, but they did it under my guidance and to my specifications as an extension of my production practice. That being said, those other people did exist in the room while I was working, so I also regularly use the pronoun “we” throughout this

\textsuperscript{102} Ronan, 2021; HRC Foundation, 2021.

\textsuperscript{103} Rubin, 2022; Bozzo, 2021.

\textsuperscript{104} A song about Canadian genocide against indigenous peoples, and the truth and reconciliation that settler institutions in Canada (including the Canadian government) still owe the indigenous peoples of this land.

\textsuperscript{105} The B section of “Sympathy for Lilith” (See Track 6 around 3:05 on the Project Playlist) is the song’s first musical departure. The song begins to move out of a minor key into a more harmonically neutral, power chord-centred progression, communicating a sense of emerging agency as the narrator abruptly switches to using more forceful, first-person lyrics than in the first movement of the song.
section as a sign of respect for their presence and contributions, even if I was the final decision-maker who curated those contributions.

The *inventio* phase of demo production was the inspiration-gathering and songwriting just discussed above. Then in June 2021, when Nameless Friends’ management assigned a demo completion deadline, I began the *dispositio* phase of demo production: organizing the gathered material from which I would create my artefact. First, I opted to record the demos in my home studio to best navigate pandemic restrictions. I share that home studio with Nameless Friends’ guitar player, and the band’s then-bass player crashed on a futon in our spare room so that the three of us could maintain a covid-safe “bubble” while recording. The band’s drummer lived in another city at the time, and worked a high-risk contact job, so we were on our own to emulate his contributions somehow. I drew up a demo recording schedule for us to follow as I wrote the songs, and the process for each demo went generally like this:

First I would create a Logic ProX session for the song on my 2019 MacPro laptop. Next, I would establish the song’s BPM\(^6\), and program a digital metronome in Logic to exactly that BPM for the band members to follow while recording. Using digital metronomes like this\(^7\) is an industry standard performance practice\(^8\) in many strains of contemporary rock music, to the point that many bands play live with a programmed series of metronomes in their ears. There are a couple of reasons for this. Some is production housekeeping: programming digital instruments and adding samples/beat loops is infinitely easier if the song’s tempo is perfectly consistent, and it’s faster (and thus less expensive) to edit the timing of recorded performances with the visual guide of a grid\(^9\), which is something many recordists do for arguably more reasons\(^10\). There are also musical, and even superstitious, reasons to use a digital metronome: the gymnastic polyrhythms and time signature changes in hard rock and metal can be virtually impossible to coordinate across a many-membered band without a central rhythmic reference; and I have met many artists that believe their listeners have come to expect the inhuman rhythmic consistency resulting from metronomes as a general rule, as the technology gets more popular.

For Nameless Friends’ demos, I needed the digital metronome for two reasons. The first was drums. Without a drummer, the closest approximation I had was Logic’s

---

\(^6\) A tempo, musical speed, measured in beats-per-minute. Often used by studio musicians as a noun: “What BPM is this supposed to be?”

\(^7\) That is, to enforce a tempo dictated by digital production in advance of the piece being played, as opposed to a human player unspooling and even adjusting tempo while they play the piece.

\(^8\) Just as many rock records are still made, allegedly, without a digital metronome. The difference is generally distinguishable to a trained ear, but not always. Proclaiming that certain records were made with/without a metronome is an excellent way to start heated debate at recordist gatherings.

\(^9\) DAW sessions following a digital metronome can usually be set up to use the tempo as a visual grid that displays both unit groups and individual units across the duration of the song (i.e. beats, bars, and phrases).

\(^10\) I will discuss the value of editing recorded performances to grid later in this section.
MIDI piano roll\textsuperscript{111}, which could be used to trigger life-like drum samples. Logic’s MIDI tools use the same visual grid as the metronome, so I could draw the MIDI notes in alignment with the session grid and know that they would correspond exactly with certain parts of the song; I could also easily copy and paste repeatable sections of drumming.

The second reason I needed the digital metronome was COVID-19. I knew that, despite our best efforts, it was possible for any member of the band to get sick at any time, which meant they could suddenly be required to isolate for weeks at any time. So I decided that I would record each band member individually. That way, if anyone got sick, we had flexibility: every performance could be recorded, edited, mixed, re-recorded, etc. in an individual vacuum, in any order, around the programmed BPM. I also wanted this flexibility for compositional freedom. If every track was grounded by the same grid, I was free to experiment with the individual components of the musical arrangements without affecting any of the other performances I wanted to preserve.

Programming Nameless Friends’ demos to a digital metronome was not just a disposicio decision: it was also a decision about pronunciatio, the division of rhetoric in which practitioners articulate and deliver their work to the public. Dispositio and pronunciatio are inherently related in the record producer’s practice\textsuperscript{112}, because planning how to record something is also planning much of how the recording will sound. In other words, producers make engineering choices in disposicio that affect how their forecasted audience eventually hears the recording when delivered (pronunciatio).

For example, in August 2020, I attended a July Talk concert at a drive-in movie theatre. The band played several, un-released demos of their popular songs as exclusive interludes during the concert. One demo was an early version of their song “Guns and Ammunition”, and I was stunned to recognize that one of the lead guitar tracks in that early demo was the same lead guitar track on the publicly released single\textsuperscript{113}. July Talk is a popular band on a powerful indie label, and “Guns and Ammunition” was produced by an experienced producer, Alex Bonenfant. The band would have had the resources\textsuperscript{114} to record all sorts of guitars for the single recording, and yet they chose to re-use a demo track. I had an epiphany: perhaps July Talk had access to some special piece of equipment during the demo recording, or perhaps, and I thought more likely, the exact guitar performance in that demo was so magical that the guitarist couldn’t replicate it.

\\textsuperscript{111} A grid-like, visual structure in Logic’s DAW that places a piano keyboard on one axis, and the time duration of the session on the other. Values can be mapped on the piano roll like a scatterplot, so that sounds corresponding with certain pitches on the keyboard are programmed to play in certain places during the song.

\textsuperscript{112} I discuss this in detail in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{113} I can’t find a copy of the demo in the public domain for obvious reasons, but if you listen to the public Spotify release, it’s the lead guitar part best heard between 1:01 and 1:34: the ever-so-slightly out-of-beat sway of the part, indicating an either unedited or mostly unedited right hand performance, is what I recognized in the demo.

\textsuperscript{114} Both financially and functionally: it’s not like July Talk aren’t good enough musicians to just replay the part, and there are three guitar players in the band.
Whatever the reason, I resolved in June 2021 to future-proof Nameless Friends’ demo recordings accordingly. Who knew what our hypothetical Hollywood producer could want to use the demo tracks for? I reasoned that as long as the demo tracks were recorded to a metronome, they could be seamlessly dropped into any other project with the same BPM. So the digital metronome was also a sort of *pronunciatio* decision, made with the performances’ eventual articulation\(^{115}\) in mind\(^{116}\). I continued to jump between *dispositio* and *pronunciatio* decisions like this as I produced Nameless Friends’ demos.

Once I had established the Logic session BPM, I would label the session grid with the sections of the song as a guide for drum programming. Then I programmed the demo drums into Logic with a Korg MIDI keyboard, which triggered samples from a basic, Steven Slate sample pack of rock and metal drum sounds in Logic. I used Nameless Friends’ livestream performances as a guide to sketch the drummer’s style, and then used Logic’s MIDI editor to quantize\(^{117}\) the performance to the grid.

I chose to do this editing before recording the subsequent instruments: editing individual instruments before the next player records is a common workflow in many multi-track production practices, largely because it saves time. Without intermittent editing, any one player’s inevitable human variation from the grid can become copied/augmented across multiple tracks as the other players follow along, which would then demand more time spent editing the tracks in post-production to retrieve the tight, clean sound of the grid\(^{118}\).

Comparing the demo drums to a 2020 rehearsal performance of “Mezzanine” gives a good sense of what I’m describing here. The demo drums follow the same

\(^{115}\) A caveat to this decision, I harboured no delusions that such recycling would be possible with the demo drums. Nameless Friends’ drummer is a fastidious machine, and I had already had the (dis)pleasure of attempting to recreate one of his fast, complex drum performances when I produced the band’s 2021 release *Live At Stranded Fest* [I can be persuaded to tell a gripping, cautionary production tale about this record at parties, if plied with a cup of tea]. I reasoned that trying to replicate him with a MIDI keyboard would be a near-impossible time suck given our fall deadline. Whoever received our demos would just have to be experienced enough to imagine the songs with superior drumming, which I didn’t think would be a stretch for the contacts our management had.

\(^{116}\) This was a prescient decision, considering how I will discuss in the next chapter that the demo piano part in “Bitter Man”; the demo bass parts in “Sympathy for Lilith”, “Bitter Man”, and “Forth”; and the demo guitar part in “Need”; all make it onto the finished album.

\(^{117}\) The folks at Wikipedia define this one more concisely than any of the manuals on my studio bookcase: “In digital music processing technology, quantization is the studio-software process of transforming performed musical notes, which may have some imprecision due to expressive performance, to an underlying musical representation that eliminates the imprecision. The process results in notes being set on beats and on exact fractions of beats.[Childs, 2018] The purpose of quantization in music processing is to provide a more beat-accurate timing of sounds.[Media Collage] Quantization is frequently applied to a record of MIDI notes created by the use of a musical keyboard or drum machine.” Wikipedia, 2023.

\(^{118}\) This of course presumes that any performances on the record are going to be edited at all. Given that the demo drums were purposefully recorded as non-human, placeholder performances, this discussion is most relevant to the veridic recordings on the demos, which I will discuss in more detail shortly.
scaffold as the live performance, offering fills to punctuate the riff sections and using more cymbals in the choruses than the verses. But the first verse hi hat part in the demo (see Track 37 on the Project Playlist from 1:10 - 1:34) is a robotic shadow of the live performance (Track 102 from 1:10 - 1:33), because I was programming without a MIDI controller operated by the drummer to shade in all of the elements and velocity nuances. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the final album production offers an example of what MIDI data triggered by a drummer, using a MIDI trigger modelled after a drum kit and thus geared to record those nuances, sounds like. For our purposes now, further compare the two previous examples with the album recording of “Mezzanine” (Track 28), noticing how the album combines the detail and human feel of the live performance, while retaining the precise timing of the edited demo. That precise-ness is the difference a digital metronome, and then editing to its grid, makes; I hoped it would work like a dogwhistle in our demos, unobtrusively signalling our professionalism and attention-to-detail to any big producers listening.

Next, I recorded the band’s then-bass player playing along with the quantized drums. I used a two-channel Lexicon Lambda interface for all of the veridic recording on the demos because it was already in my arsenal, and had proved trustworthy for recording the overdubs on other, recent records. The interface connected to my laptop via USB cable through a USB-C adapter. Then on the other end of the signal chain, the bass player plugged his instrument into a Radial JDI box, and I ran the DI signal through a digital amp modelling plug-in in Logic.

119 MIDI instruments can measure and reflect different qualities about the instances of activity that are triggering the sampled sounds. The metric of Velocity, for instance, will translate the force with which the MIDI instrument is activated into proportionate volume of the triggered sample: hit a MIDI instrument built like a drum set harder, and the drum samples are programmed to play louder. MIDI instruments can also be built to emulate acoustic instruments, with many different triggers. So a drummer can really play a MIDI instrument built like a drum set, programming complex fills and minute nuances of dynamic expression that producers named Lydia can only clumsily estimate with a MIDI keyboard.

120 “… “nonveridic” applications… do not sound as though they were, or even like they could be, performed live [whereas “veridic” applications sound like they were, or could have been]. Of course, what sounds veridic and nonveridic varies from time to time and place to place… What ultimately matters, in an analytic sense, is that recordists continue to make a fundamental distinction between what they do in the studio and on stage, and that they deploy a variety of signal processing techniques to do so.” (Hodgson, Understanding Records, 72).

121 A mentor once told me that the best piece of gear for the job is the piece of gear that you have.

122 We were so non-committal to the demo bass tone that the digital plug-in was merely used as a gainstage on its default settings. A “gainstage” is a broad term used to describe when an audio processing tool is being used to bring an audio signal to a certain level of amplitude. In other words, the plug-in was not being used here for tone (i.e. colour or style), but just to get the bass signal appropriately loud relative to the rest of the demo tracks, so the bass player could hear himself while recording. Many audio processors can be used as gainstages, whether they were explicitly designed for it or not. Used in a sentence, “Can we throw something on that mic (signal path) to gainstage it please? The singer is way too (perception of loudness).”
I did contemplate using a real bass amplifier at this stage, by which I mean setting up a bass amp in the studio, having the bass player play through that, and then connecting a speaker cabinet to the amp and miking the speaker’s sound to capture the performance. But again, I wanted to record the demo tracks with as much flexibility for future use as possible. Recording an amplified signal would irreversibly intertwine the amp’s sonic colour with the bass performance, which would be committing to a sort of *musical perspective*, and at this time, Nameless Friends had no idea what perspective we wanted the bass to take. DI tracks, however, record only the imprint of the instrument, so the performance can be easily re-amp-ed\(^{123}\) at a later date if the band wants to take a different perspective without changing the performance. In other words, recording DI bass allowed Nameless Friends to postpone perspective-taking choices in the bass tone.

The demo bass tracks we recorded sounded something like this: (Track 100). Then I edited the bass parts, which sounded like this: (Track 101). You can hear how the subtle adjustments of the edited tracks cohere the bass to the inhumanly precise drums; this is the dog whistle sound of the metronome, the cleanliness and tightness I described above.

That being said, I didn’t slam the part to grid\(^{124}\). The sound of a human performance is an important authenticity value marker in rock\(^{125}\), and I wanted to these demos to walk a careful line between digital polish and a perception of artifice that marks perfectly-edited performances as pop, or even just pop-er\(^{126}\). This is the difference between, for example, the editing on Green Day’s “Know Your Enemy” and the editing on “Gives You Hell” by The All American Rejects\(^{127}\). While these songs share similar compositions, punk aesthetics, and cultural contexts (they were released within eighteen months of one another from mid-2009 to early 2008, respectively), the sonic slickness of

\(^{123}\) A processing technique where a recorded signal is fed through an instrument amplifier and speaker cabinet, then recorded, so that the amplifier can be used to colour/process/effect/etc. the recorded track without asking a musician to re-perform the track.

\(^{124}\) Slamming/shoving/forcing/“hard” editing/and other variations of describing forcefulness are slang for audio editing that ruthlessly coheres a track to an underlying, usually inhuman, metric. A drum part “slammed” to grid has had every single note edited exactly to set tempo denominations. A “hard tuned” vocal has had every single note edited exactly to a resonance-based measurement of pitch, human perception of in-tune-ness be damned.

\(^{125}\) Leach, 2001 (146); Negus 1996 (150).

\(^{126}\) Ibid.

\(^{127}\) The difference is easiest to hear in the guitar performances. Which one sounds more like a human playing guitar in your living room, and which one sounds like a disembodied guitar perfectly sounding along to the beat?
the latter - which editing constructs much of - is likely why Spotify classifies it as pop rock\textsuperscript{128}, as opposed to the former, which is classified as rock\textsuperscript{129}.

Detailed discussions of genre are beyond the bounds of this dissertation, but it bears briefly addressing that genre is one of the key metrics used by digital algorithms. How a piece of music’s genre appears to these algorithms determines where, when, how often, and if it ever reaches an audience, let alone its intended audience. In other words, perceived genre is of such importance in the digital age that I was already considering it and producing accordingly at the demo stage for an unknown band. I knew that if we wanted the ears of rock fans and commercial interests concerned with rock fans discussed in the last section, our music would need to be both polished enough for Billie Eilish fans, but still perceptively authentic, i.e. implicitly human, enough for diehard rock fans. Ergo, the demo bass parts would need to be edited carefully, but not too obviously.

I recorded and edited the demo lead guitar parts in a similar way. Instead of a DI, the guitarist plugged into a Kemper profiler\textsuperscript{130}, which recorded as a stereo track into my interface’s two channels. Amp profiles certainly colour the guitar tracks more than a DI would, meaning that the guitar tracks were more committed to a musical perspective and potentially less flexible for future use than the bass parts. But the guitar player needed to be able to interact with his amplified signal to execute some of the articulation in his parts in a way that the bass player didn’t. For example, the same driven signal can be manipulated, with changes in hand position, into both the pinch harmonics in the Demons solo (Track 31, 3:01 - 3:24) versus the chugs in the Demons verse (Track 31, 1:32 - 1:53). It’s difficult to deduce what will result in this difference without listening through a driven gainstage, so a mere DI signal wouldn’t do.

I did have other options that would have addressed both flexibility and performance practice, but the band’s guitar player strongly opposed how those other options sounded\textsuperscript{131}, and I didn’t think arguing with him was a worthwhile hill to die on

\textsuperscript{128} In November 2021, during research for this exegesis, I opened the desktop Spotify app and searched “pop rock”. “Gives You Hell” by the All American Rejects was the first algorithmic suggestion.

\textsuperscript{129} After researching when “Gives You Hell” was released, I searched Spotify for “rock” released between 2007 and 2009 (i.e. a year or so on either side of “Gives You Hell”’s release). “Know Your Enemy” was in the top ten suggestions, and has such a resemblance to “Gives You Hell”, compositionally, that it seemed like the perfect example for this discussion.

\textsuperscript{130} Amp profilers are computers that use algorithms to emulate the signal processing of amplifiers. They are usually designed to resemble amplifiers, with sophisticated converters that can intake instrument signal, convert it to digital data to process it through any number of amplifier “profiles” (i.e. algorithmic emulations), and then convert it back out to a speaker cabinet like an amplifier would. They can also record directly into DAWs as digital data.

\textsuperscript{131} I could have had the guitar player record through a DI into one channel of the interface, while simultaneously playing through an amplifier that was miked, which was recorded through the interface’s other channel. Unfortunately, he claimed to hate the sound of every speaker cabinet we had access to in lockdown. I also could have recorded the Kemper as one mono channel while simultaneously recording the other channel through the DI, but the stereo Kemper sounded better to us both than a mono sum.
given our time constraints. I directed that the profiles we used, at least, be popular profiles from Kemper’s user community, instead of anything too specific that we designed ourselves. Those tones would have the widest opportunity to be applicable to future productions, depending on what creative direction we took with the guitars, and indeed, the next chapter will discuss how the “Need” demo guitar tracks were ultimately re-used on *Blasphemy*.

My own rhythm guitar tracks, in contrast, I treated like an afterthought. My guitar parts generally serve the role of “glue” in Nameless Friends’ music, a slang term for describing a sonic voice/tool that is used to perceptively mesh the other voices in a mix together more than really contribute a discernible part of its own. I thought it was practical to spend our limited time refining the compositions/edits/etc. of other instruments that would be louder in the mix, especially since it would be hard to compose the rhythm guitar parts with any longevity: the rhythm guitar parts in Nameless Friends’ songwriting usually correspond to the drum performance. Since the demo drums were a simplified placeholder, so, essentially, were the rhythm guitar parts.

My guitar parts were the fastest phase of demo recording because of this lack of preciousness. I set up one of my combo tube amps in my living room, used its onboard tone, and slapped an SM57 next to one of the speakers. The individual guitar parts themselves aren’t particularly interesting to listen to, but you can hear the difference they make in a mix. Listen to the demos of “Demons” (Track 31) and “Sympathy for Lilith” (Track 32), which include my guitar parts, and then listen to Tracks 103 and 104, which are the same demo mixes, but with my guitar parts muted. The former feel more immersive, and compelling in their perceptive world-building, than the latter. I figured that if the rhythm guitar just helped immerse our listeners in the songs, that was all that mattered.

The keyboards were a novelty for me during demo production, and where I did much aesthetic experimentation that would shape the sound of *Blasphemy*. Nameless Friends had never had dedicated keyboard parts or a keyboard player in our original music. But I was inspired by *Live At Stranded Fest*: the band’s then-bass player was a multi-instrumentalist who did play piano, and he’d done a spectacular job of juggling bass and keyboards during the *Live At Stranded Fest* set, when the band covered Queen songs with iconic piano/organ parts. I loved how the keyboards added high frequency purity and height to the *Live At Stranded Fest* mixes - they feel grand to listen to - and I wanted to flex my compositional muscles in that dimension on the new, demo songs. I hooked up the bass player’s keyboard to the Lambda so that it recorded both an audio and MIDI track at the same time, and played around with these tracks over the course of demo production.

Some of this experimentation worked better than others. While transforming a MIDI keys version of the lead guitar riff in “Demons”, I zero’d in on Logic’s digital organ plugin, and I dialled into a saucy combination of classic Boston and traditional Catholic church organs that I thought suited the song (Track 31). “Five” was a less productive detour: as daylight dwindled after daylight savings time, I yearned to evoke the optimism of Billy Joel’s “Vienna”, and I wasted some time shoehorning a piano part
into the demo that bloated the mix into an awkward, genre-blend of rock and adult contemporary.

Last in each demo recording sequence were the vocals, and this was the most relaxed stage of each demo dispositio/pronunciatio. The vocal is the centrepiece of contemporary popular music, rock included\(^\text{132}\), to the point that I assumed any major label would refuse to re-use a demo vocal when a new one could be recorded with their superior resources. I knew from past records that my voice tended to sound the best through a medium-diaphragm condenser mic\(^\text{133}\), so I borrowed an NT1-A medium diaphragm condenser mic from Western’s recording studio because it was the best condenser mic of that size that I had access to at the time. Alleviated of the pressure to sing a timeless, release-worthy performance\(^\text{134}\), I did my best to sound like a nice, young singer with compelling promise. The “Forth” demo was a generally representative performance (Track 35). Compared to the grander, snarling performance of the same song that I finalized on Blasphemy (Track 8), and you can hear the earnest striving that defines the demo vocal pronunciatio.

I opted not to pitch adjust or time-adjust the demo vocals because of this pronunciatio. I worried that if the vocals sounded too slick, prospective investors would balk that I was trying to hide vocal deficiencies in the production. Better to deliver an unvarnished performance that illustrated my capacities, and invited investors to imagine my potential, than risk a rookie mix interfering with my perceived abilities or authenticity. There were gendered undertones to this decision: I was aware in summer 2021 that women in leadership positions are often distrusted for sexist reasons, and I didn’t want to give our forecasted listeners another opportunity to distrust me when I was already a band leader and producer. This would prove, unfortunately, to be a prescient consideration that I will discuss in the next section.

\(^{132}\) “Instrumental rock” is usually demarcated with that description, with the exception of some sub-genres of modern metal, which equally often include as exclude vocals and so are simply described under blanket terms. I was not producing Nameless Friends in any genre nearly so niche, however.

\(^{133}\) This is a bit like saying that I knew, from past experience, that children seem to like candy. Medium-diaphragm condenser mics are a standard for vocal production because they generally capture, by design, a well-balanced combination of the singer’s articulation (small mouth sounds) and power (the critical mass of reverberating air in the room). From these past records, I did happen to know exactly which candy my particular, metaphorical child preferred, but the fact that my voice sounded most clear and sonorous through a Neumann U87 was not relevant at this time, considering it’s a $5,000 CAD microphone that I couldn’t afford to rent, certainly didn’t own, and knew no one I could borrow from since all my peers were generally as poor as I was at the time. Hence the decision to scrounge around for whatever other mic of the same type I could get my hands on during a lockdown.

\(^{134}\) This is absolutely foreshadowing for the next chapter.
Overall, the *dispositio* and *pronunciatio* of demo production were a fruitful time where I was comfortable using Logic as an instrument\(^{135}\). I wrote both “Demons”\(^{136}\) and “Breakfast in a Record Store”\(^{137}\) during this time by assembling the session metronome and drums as discussed above, then guiding the other band members to perform the rest of the arrangement I envisioned and moving their tracks around in Logic to assemble the songs.

As we prepared to present the finished demos to our management in September 2021, I next undertook *elocutio*, the rhetorical phase where the practitioner fleshes out the bones of their artefact with fine detail. For the record producer, *elocutio* is mixing: processing and decorating the raw tracks with plugins and outboard gear. I conducted this phase in demo production by choosing to do very little mixing, a sort of anti-*elocutio*! Again, I was looking to earnestly and honestly portray our abilities, and leave room for the contacts we were soliciting to envision our potential with their more experienced imaginations. It also, frankly, wouldn’t have been possible to achieve a truly industry standard mix with the equipment that I owned at the time. I preferred that we sound like a young band with no mixing equipment than a young band with *subpar* mixing equipment.

The penultimate rhetorical phase is *memoria*, where the practitioner fixes the artefact for memorization and later *pronunciatio*. Mastering is the parallel stage of record production, offering the producer one last opportunity to intervene in the record’s *pronunciatio* before the final “masters” are rendered and slated for release to the public. Keeping with my minimalist, anti-processing ethos from demo mixing, I opted to merely compress/limit all the demo mixes as a sort of quasi-master: not enough processing to sound done or slick by professional standards, but enough that an unfamiliar ear could hear all the parts of the arrangements clearly. You can really hear this on the final “Demons” demo (Track 31); which is so much louder, brighter, and forward than a bounce of the same tracks raw (Track 32).

In hindsight, I think the minimalist mastering was still too much, and the final demos are so loud/bright/punchy that they verge on obnoxious\(^{138}\). But in terms of *pronunciatio*, the finished demos certainly communicate that Nameless Friends is committed, and eagerly so!, to their music and messages. My job as demo producer was to make the demos sound like exactly that. For better or worse, I had done my job.

---

\(^{135}\) Bell, 2018 (67).

\(^{136}\) A pro-2SLGBTQIA+ song about queerphobia, toxic positivity, and gaslighting in right-wing Christianity.

\(^{137}\) A love song, broadly written to invite interpretations of self love and communal love/solidarity.

\(^{138}\) I include this observation in the body of this paper because it occurred to me during *Blasphemy’s* production, and accordingly informed how loud I allowed our mastering engineer to make the album. I discuss this further in Chapter 4, Post-Production.
2.3. *Inventio* part III - Nameless Friends implodes

By September 2021, I had produced a list of eleven demos for Nameless Friends’ management, with the intention that management would use the demos to solicit industry investment in the band. Those demos were “Mezzanine”; “Demons”; “Sympathy for Lilith”; “Breakfast in a Record Store”; “94”; “Light ‘Em Up”; “Five”; “Asking for a Friend”; “Solidarity”; “Little God”; and “Falsetto Song”.

Shortly before the band met with management to hand over the demos, I remarked off-hand to my bandmates that I thought we had demo’d the critical masses of two different records. I heard “Solidarity”, “94”, “Five”, “Light ‘Em Up”, and “Breakfast in a Record Store” belonging to an album that was vaguely punk in sound and pop in aesthetic, with frank lyrics and topical themes, like Green Day’s *American Idiot*. In contrast, I heard “Mezzanine”, “Demons”, “Sympathy for Lilith”, “Little God” and “Falsetto Song” belonging to a record with darker energy, with metal-adjacent compositions that focused on virtuosity instead of accessibility, and more oblique/poetic lyrics, like Queen’s *Innuendo*. I wondered out loud which record we would go forward with, and was devastated in the coming weeks when the band’s management ultimately rejected all of these potential projects and cut ties with Nameless Friends. While the details are not within the scope of this research project, the broad strokes of that relationship breakdown are relevant context for my future production decisions, so I will recount them here within the limited context of my experience.

Shortly after the band met with their management and I presented the demos, a key figure on the management team appeared to go through a personal crisis and suddenly stopped communicating with the band and the rest of the team. This person voiced passionate, mixed feedback about the demo songs before disappearing, leaving the rest of the team and band at a loss. Without this key figure, and more concrete feedback, Nameless Friends’ management contract fell apart and the band was left with nothing.

The subsequent months, October 2021 through December 2021, were difficult for me. I felt that I had failed the band, and the songs themselves, by producing deniable demos. The idea of self-producing these songs had not occurred to me yet, but I did also believe that we “had something” management had missed. I wrote “Bitter Man” and “7

---

139 Most of the feedback seemed to be related to the personal challenges that this person was going through than the songs themselves, which is why it was hard to categorize. I did re-record vocals with an outside producer for “94” and “Self Care” at this person’s behest, and as far as I know, all that came of it is they posted a snippet of the new “94” - significantly sped up and without the band’s permission - on their social media pages about a week after disappearing. I don’t believe that snippet is live anymore. Stories like this are unfortunately common in both my circles and the wider music industry.

140 Industry slang, usually meant as a compliment, that communicates the speaker hears promise/potential success (usually of the popular, commercial variety) in the music in question.

141 A song about coping with the realization that even the most well-meaning authority figures can fail in their duty.
Years of Blood”142, “Forth”143, and “Need”144 during this emotional time, and recorded demos of them using the same process discussed above, because I didn’t know what else to do with Nameless Friends.

“Bitter Man” was particularly cathartic to work on. It lyrically reflects on a failed relationship between the singer and titular character, and while the details of the relationship and its breakdown are never specified, the song holds space for the conflicting emotions of graciousness, wistfulness, resentment, and condemnation. Adele’s “Hello” makes similar nuance out of an unspecified relationship breakdown, and its mix is anchored by a mid-heavy grand piano that I was inspired to emulate on the “Bitter Man” demo (Track 34).

A few things happened at once in late 2021/early 2022. First, I sent the “Demons” demo to an industry contact, who received it with such enthusiasm that the whole band was emboldened. Then, one of Nameless Friends’ other members offered to send some of the demos to an industry contact of theirs, a fairly famous figure and producer in Canadian rock and country music. I chose to send two of the new songs that I felt good about, “7 Years of Blood” and “Need”, and the most commercial song from the original demos, “Solidarity”, to cover our bases. Unfortunately, the contact was (apparently) horrified by these demos. A close source recounted that someone in the room during the demo listening asked if “7 Years of Blood” was a terrible joke.

The band was shocked, and met to discuss the feedback. I won’t pinpoint any speakers from these conversations for ethical reasons, but within the research scope of my personal experience, I was told that what Nameless Friends had produced under my leadership was essentially “hysterical pussy shit”. There was further concern that the band members’ individual careers would suffer from association with music that wasn’t “politically neutral”. My feminist songwriting perspective, in other words, was perceived to be inherently political and dangerously so. Accusations of betrayal and misogyny were made on my behalf in response to these allegations, and I felt equally angry and guilty as I watched the discussion escalate. I didn’t think the songs deserved the condemnation they were receiving because the topics were true; I recall sarcastically asking a friend in the know whether Rage Against the Machine had ever worried about being “politically neutral”. But I also felt responsible when several relationships between dear colleagues broke down over disputing exactly that, like I should have known better than to bring my female body and its experiences into the band’s music. Nameless Friends’ then-bass player left the band during this time.

At the same time, I was returning to graduate research after a period of serious illness. Though these details are quite personal, they are relevant to this research in terms of gender. I suffer from a chronic disease that is reproductive in nature, which has been a source of trauma for many of my teen years and all of my adult life. While I normally manage my condition well with medication, it does leave my immune system somewhat

---

142 A protest song in support of abortion rights.

143 A song about hope, and choosing hope even in dire, uncertain circumstances.

144 A song about economic inequality and the inherent cruelty of late-stage capitalism.
dysfunctional/vulnerable, which is likely how, despite the extensive precautions of our household, I contracted COVID-19 at the end of 2021. COVID-19 caused my underlying disease to flare up for months afterwards, and the physical pain was accompanied by destructive emotional and mental triggers. To add insult to injury, it also caused laryngitis, so I literally lost my voice while I was suffering. My dissertation committee was kind and patient with me while I recovered, but even after I had healed enough to resume my studies, I felt like my body had betrayed me. Nameless Friends’ demos about the trauma that can come from, and be put on, female and AFAB\textsuperscript{145} bodies resonated profoundly with me during this time.

As for those graduate studies, I had resolved, pre-illness, with my committee that my dissertation project would be a research creation project. We had agreed on the research goals and general structure of this project - that I was going to study my production practice of a record - but hadn’t yet decided what record. Collectively, these circumstances were galvanizing.

### 2.4. Dispositio part I - Blasphemy

In early 2022, Nameless Friends re-evaluated our goals as a band. After being dumped by our management and going through a lineup change, we wanted to take charge of our trajectory as independent artists and re-introduce ourselves to the public, post-pandemic, on our terms. We decided that, we were going to make our debut album out of the songs we had demo’d; we were going to record and release that album independently; I was going to produce the album; and the album production was going to be the case study that I used for this dissertation project. I officially began dispositio for Blasphemy by making these decisions.

The band was united in feminist outrage. We refused to throw away songs that we were proud of just because a handful of other people didn’t like them. And since most outside opposition to the demo songs seemed to stem from prejudice against/discomfort with the subject matter - particularly about feminism - rather than musical criticism, I thought that was more reason to proceed. Great concept albums that confront prejudice and injustice, like Liz Phair’s *Exile in Guyville* and Marvin Gaye’s *What’s Going On*, aren’t exactly concerned with making listeners comfortable, and using Nameless Friends’ music to confront injustice was precisely the goal I had begun inventio with in the first place.

If Nameless Friends wanted to make a feminist concept album, then the band agreed that I was its ideal producer. I am female, already held a band leadership role, had produced the band’s last record, and had written and produced the demos. I further reasoned that if I produced this album - an album largely written about my embodied, gendered struggles - it would make a great case study for my dissertation, because I could offer more insight about it than virtually any other record I have produced to date.

\textsuperscript{145} An acronym that stands for “Assigned Female At Birth”. AFAB is a gender-inclusive term used to note that people of many varying gender identities can have uteruses and estrogen-based bodies/ experiences, not just women.
As I described in the previous chapter, I view recording as a form of justice. I realized in early 2022 that, if I produced this album for Nameless Friends; and studied my production practice for this dissertation; that study could contribute a better understanding of music production and gendered production, and thus do justice on behalf of both my fellow practitioners and fellow women. I felt responsible to seize this opportunity, and thankfully, my committee and bandmates agreed: my dissertation would be a research creation project studying my production of Nameless Friends’ then unnamed album.

I made three production decisions in *dispositio* before recording the album, i.e. entering Production, which is the next chapter in this paper. My first production decision in *dispositio* was to name the album *Blasphemy*. Throughout the *inventio* phase, I contributed short ideas and bits of lyrics to a note-taking app on my phone, and among those notes was a list of titles that I’d dreamed up and kept in case they were useful for future projects. On that list, among others, were “Blasphemy” and “God Save the Millennials”. These two titles both reference the organized religion of Christianity, and they captured a shared perspective of the demo songs. Most of the injustices that I was ruminating on during *inventio* shared a common thread of Christianity, in that right-wing minorities of allegedly Christian faith were supporting or even directly driving much of the political movement terrorizing women and other groups of people that I loved and personally identified with. Members of Nameless Friends are immigrants, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, neurodivergent, people of colour, and female. And while several of those same members are spiritual and religious, even Christian, none of us felt represented or vindicated by these political forces. Instead, these movements inspired deep crises of faith: how could we hope to reach for our destinies and tell our truths through the restrictions and values dictated by someone else’s higher power? Especially when that higher power apparently condemned our existence?

Our questions reminded me of Janelle Monáe’s stunning concept album and accompanying “emotion picture” *Dirty Computer*, which celebrates and advocates for queer feminism and racial justice through afro-futurist allegory. The album tells the story of a dystopian, autocratic society where people are objectified as “computers”. Those that are “other” are threats to the state, branded “dirty”, and thus must attempt to escape an extermination called “cleaning”. I studied *Dirty Computer* during my Masters research,

---

146 To be very clear, while there are certainly other organized religions that persecute all sorts of groups of people worldwide, those groups do not have hegemonic political power in North America where I live and am watching/experiencing the bulk of this discrimination. These are not blandly “institutional” political movements, they are operated by a particular, non-representative minority of allegedly Christian “faith”. Followers of Judaism or Sikhism, for example, are not refusing to apologize for the residential schools or trying to make abortion a federal crime in the United States.

147 Including indigenous people, people of colour, immigrants, the queer community, disabled people, etc. The last is a community I was realizing I perhaps identified with more than not as I struggled to stay functional during the pandemic, amid my disease flare-ups and shifting public health policy.

148 Drawing parallels to Monáe’s own marginalizing experiences of blackness, femaleness, queerness in the North American music industry (Wortham, 2018).
and was struck anew in 2022 by Monáe’s courage to tell her truth so frankly: “I am not America’s nightmare, I am the American dream”\(^{149}\) is a mighty thesis.

I decided \textit{Blasphemy} must be the title of Nameless Friends’ album because I wanted the record to (try to!) be as audacious as \textit{Dirty Computer}. First, “blasphemy” made the conceptual parallels clear: if our inspiration and aspiration was, “what does it mean to be a \textit{dirty computer} in the eyes of the cleaners?”; then, “what does it mean to be \textit{blasphemy} in the eyes of the white nationalist, Christian right wing?” was a neat successor. \textit{Blasphemy} also seemed far easier to market than \textit{God Save the Millennials}, because it was a single word; more self-serious, which I thought would open it to a wider interpretation of rock\(^{150}\); and less likely to invoke tired tropes and memes about generational warfare that anything including the word “millennial” almost certainly would on the internet\(^{151}\). Invoking both Christian norms and their opposition in the album title also seemed to appropriately encapsulate the blend of rock\(^{152}\) and evangelical organs/orchestras/gospel choirs/etc. that I was experimenting with on “Demons” and “Forth”, and would go on to insert into almost every song on the record\(^{153}\).

My second production decision in \textit{dispositio} was to finalize the album’s tracklist. When I submitted my dissertation proposal in early 2022, the tentative tracklist included all of the songs that I thought might be even tangentially related to our concept: “7 Years of Blood”, “Demons”, “Sympathy for Lilith”, “Bitter Man”, “Forth”, “Solidarity”, “Mezzanine”, “Need”, “94”, “Standby Waltz”\(^{154}\), “Breakfast in a Record Store”, and “Light ‘Em Up”. Several songs demo’d during \textit{inventio} are already missing from this list. I didn’t think that “Five” was related to the album’s concept, and was put off by my failures with the demo piano. I also thought the arpeggiated lead guitar parts in “Asking for a Friend” and “Falsetto Song” sounded too similar to the opening lead guitar part of “Mezzanine” (Track 28) to include all three on the same record. “Mezzanine” won because I thought it was the strongest song of the three for reasons I will discuss shortly. And I thought “Little God” was too on-the-nose for the album concept. The lyrical imagery about the titular “little god” was intended to be metaphorical and poetic when I wrote the song, but I thought listeners would lose the nuance and only take it literally if I included it on an album called \textit{Blasphemy}. “7 Years of Blood” also includes several lyrics

\(^{149}\) Monáe, 2018.

\(^{150}\) “God Save the Millennials” sounds unequivocally like the name of a punk artefact to me. “God Save the Queen” by The Sex Pistols, anyone? Since the demo songs flirt with metal norms, discussed in the next chapter, I wanted to make sure the album title was open to that genre interpretation.

\(^{151}\) As it is, only one of the members of Nameless Friends is actually part of the Millennial generation. The others were born in cusp years that I have seen proclaimed to be varyingly Millennial, Zilennial, and Generation Z.

\(^{152}\) Lest we forget, rock was not long ago fodder for Satanic Panic.

\(^{153}\) I will discuss this in the next chapter.

\(^{154}\) Another song from my archives that I wrote with Nameless Friends’ guitar player in the early days of our working relationship, about our mutual college friendships.
about “being a god”, and I didn’t think there was room for both songs on the same album without it looking like the band wasn’t creative enough to avoid repeating ourselves.

As I explained in the project proposal for this dissertation, I planned to reduce the list even further. A twelve song album is too long for an unknown indie band in the digital streaming age, where most listeners consume music via singles and playlists. Since the band wanted to solicit a platform and build an audience in that environment, I thought twelve songs would be an overwhelming overshare that flew in the face of even the most patient prospective fans. These twelve songs also lacked focus. I admired Shania Twain’s *Come On Over* for being an album with “no skips”. I wanted to aim for no skips with *Blasphemy*, keep Nameless Friends’ work as curated and compelling as possible, to give the record a greater shot at punching through the noise in the digital marketplace.

So in spring 2022, I chose *Blasphemy*’s track list by studying other concept albums. Like *Dirty Computer*, Beyonce’s *Lemonade*, The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Pink Floyd’s *The Wall*, and too many other fabulous concept albums to name here, I wanted the tracklist to follow a contained, narrative arc. I also yearned to produce a rock opera after my work on *Live At Stranded Fest* and a healthy dose of Meatloaf’s *Bat Out of Hell*. Using my own personal experience of political awakening as a guide, I envisioned a classic, three act structure: a set-up, which would provide exposition and context of the political struggle the album was exploring; a confrontation, which would dig into the personal trauma that resulted from the separation between church and state fraying in North America; and a resolution, which would offer some sort of path forward, even if Nameless Friends couldn’t profess to singlehandedly solve these institutional problems. I thought “7 Years of Blood”; “Need”; and “Demons” belonged in the first act as necessary context. “Sympathy for Lilith” and “Bitter Man” then belonged in the second act as recounts of/reflections on trauma, respectively. And “Forth” straddled the second act into the third as a call for future progress.

---

155 See Appendix B.

156 While many respectfully short albums have twelve, even thirteen! songs, a major contributing factor to my decision about this album was song length. Half of the songs on this list are over six minutes long, and many others are between four and five minutes. Thinking of total album run time, all twelve songs gets close to ninety minutes, which is two to three times the 30-45 minutes that a Top 40-aspirational popular music album usually aims for.

157 A slang term describing the rare albums where every song, or nearly every song, is popular and single-worthy in its own right. Synonymous with lacking “filler” or “throwaway” songs. Of *Come On Over*’s sixteen tracks, twelve were commercially successful singles. Shania was allowed to have sixteen tracks because each one is barely 3-4 minutes long, and 90s listeners consumed music in a much more forgiving, album-based paradigm.

158 An estimated 100,000 songs are uploaded every single day to online streaming services as of fall 2022 (Ingham, 2022).

159 Another client requested that I reference Bat Out of Hell while mastering their record, and I take artist requests very seriously.
This left “Solidarity”, “94”, “Light ‘Em Up”, “Standby Waltz”, “Mezzanine”, and “Breakfast in a Record Store”. I cut “Solidarity” and “Standby Waltz”. I couldn’t shake the feeling that “Solidarity” belonged on a different record. It was too simple and pop-y, without a single ounce of the prog irony that tied the other songs together, and “Standby Waltz” is written in virtually the same style. “Light ‘Em Up” met a similar fate: I thought it was too earnestly hopeful for the record we were trying to make. The only place it would make sense in the narrative arc was after “Forth”, and I thought that offering such a lyrical balm would fundamentally undercut the tension that “Forth” leaves the listener on. Then as much as it pained me, I cut “94” because I foresaw production incompatibility. “94” could have been thematically shoehorned into either acts I or II, but I thought it demanded Canadiana, country-adjacent genre production that was at odds with the modern glam, metal-adjacent grandeur I heard in the album’s core six songs.

I did choose to keep “Breakfast in a Record Store”, despite thinking that it could also belong on another album. I was mindful that the core six songs of the album were grappling with heavy, harsh subjects, and “Forth” hardly offered closure. I felt responsible to safely deliver our listeners through potentially triggering material to a safe landing before they exited the album, and “Breakfast in a Record Store” had lyrics just poetic enough; and composition just grand enough; that I thought it could do that and still passably mesh with the other songs. After all the darkness on the record, “a love song” seemed like the right balance to end Blasphemy; I loved the titular sentiment of John Muirhead’s “Love Can Save Us (If We Let It)”, and thought ending with “Breakfast in a Record Store” would leave listeners with that sort of sentiment.

That left “Mezzanine”. I thought “Mezzanine” was one of the band’s most commercial songs. It coheres well with hard rock norms and I thought it would likely appeal to established rock fans. Between the chuggy interlude riffs (Track 28, 0:56 and 1:36), soaring and lyrically simple choruses (Ibid, 1:49 - 2:14, 2:40 - 3:05, and 3:56 - 4:22), and bridge breakdown (Ibid, 3:07 - 3:56); you can hear clear parallels to popular rock/metal records like Metallica’s “Enter Sandman”; Foo Fighters’ “All My Life”; and Avenged Sevenfold’s “Burn It Down”. However, “Mezzanine” only really fit in act I of the album, and I feared that if I put it there, the lyrical framing of the song would re-contextualize the rest of the album into a campier artefact that could overshadow its political messages - transform Blasphemy into something more like Marianas Trench’s Masterpiece Theatre than Rage Against the Machine’s self-titled debut. In other words, it was a perfect song to hold back for the deluxe version of the album.

---

160 I do enjoy and support this song, but context is everything. I may have remarked to another band member that, in contrast with the album’s darker songs, “Light ‘Em Up” was so blithely non-committal and yet sweeping that it sounded like an international sporting event theme song.

161 Think Nickelback’s *Dark Horse*.

162 As opposed to The Pineapple Thief’s *Magnolia*.

163 The lead vocalist sings as the narrator of a theatrical production who is describing a performance from the theatre mezzanine with fourth-wall-breaking dramatic irony.
2.5. *Dispositio* part II - the waterfall strategy

In 2020, minimalist UK pop duo Oh Wonder released an EP called *Home Tapes* to streaming platforms, one single at a time. I noticed that when each single was released, the tracklist for that single would also include all of the previous singles released for the EP. So when the first single and first song on the EP, “Lonely Star”, was released, it showed up on streaming platforms as a record called “Lonely Star - single”, with the track list “Lonely Star”. But when the next single, “Keep on Dancing”, was released, it appeared as a record called “Keep on Dancing - single” with the track list “1. Lonely Star, 2. Keep on Dancing”. And so one.

Intrigued, I did some internet research, and found that this is a release practice called “the waterfall strategy”\(^\text{164}\). The waterfall strategy exploits the design of streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music to maximize algorithmic and editorial attention, with the hope that this attention turns into more plays of a track. To explain how it works, let’s continue to use Oh Wonder and Spotify as an example. When Oh Wonder submits their music to Spotify for release, Spotify’s algorithms and curatorial team analyze the new release\(^\text{165}\) for playlist consideration. Playlists are how much of Spotify’s user base discovers and consumes music on the platform, so slots on popular playlists can offer considerable exposure and streams that an artist would otherwise spend thousands in marketing to achieve. The more curated and exclusive the playlist, the more coveted the slot. But some of the most popular playlists, like Spotify’s “Release Radar” or “New Music Fridays”, only showcase newly released music. So if “Lonely Star” isn’t picked up by those playlists on initial submission, it never will be. Unless, of course, Oh Wonder’s next single, “Keep On Dancing”, drags “Lonely Star” along with it. According to Spotify’s rules, as long as a release has at least one new ISRC code\(^\text{166}\), it counts as a new release, and is thus eligible for a fresh round of curation and playlist consideration. So when Oh Wonder releases “Keep On Dancing” (and its fresh ISRC code) on Spotify, they can still call the release “Keep on Dancing” to match with their marketing for that particular single, but they can also include “Lonely Star” on the same streaming release to give it another shot at precious attention from Spotify.

This strategy is further ingenious when you consider that Spotify largely allocates playlist slots based on how popular their algorithms anticipate the release to be. Artists with big follower counts are more likely to have their releases selected for the best playlists, as are artists with previously popular releases, high streaming numbers, and/or

\(^{164}\) Southworth, 2022; EmuBands, 2022.

\(^{165}\) Spotify doesn’t discriminate between singles, EPs, and albums. A record is a record, and they’re all called “releases”.

\(^{166}\) International Standard Recording Codes are pieces of data used to uniquely identify and differentiate sound recordings.
popular pre-release campaigns. This can be a double bind for indie/niche artists, who can’t necessarily find their audience without playlists, but need an established audience to get on those playlists. With the waterfall strategy, however, all streaming numbers registered to the ISRC codes on the release roll over. So if Oh Wonder releases “Lonely Star” and manages to get 100,000 streams on it from their own marketing, when they release “Keep On Dancing” with bonus “Lonely Star”, Spotify’s algorithms will treat the whole release like it already has 100,000 streams worth of anticipation. Now “Keep on Dancing” AND “Lonely Star” will both have a greater likelihood of landing a coveted playlist spot.

While artists like Phoebe Bridgers and Spiritbox had (at the time) used the waterfall strategy to release individual albums, I dug further to find that artists like 2022 Juno darling Charlotte Cardin have used it across multiple albums. Cardin released an album of thirteen tracks called Phoenix in 2021. Later in the same year, she released a “deluxe” version of the same album, which includes seven more songs, several of which are remixes/re-produced versions of the original album’s songs. By doing this, Cardin got to give her listeners both a perfectly curated vision (the original Phoenix) and a longer, expository cut of her material (the deluxe version). The extra songs on the latter offer added value/bonus material for listeners while giving the initial album’s songs a second shot at curation and playlists, and the initial album’s streaming numbers give everything a greater chance of actually securing valuable playlist slots.

So in spring 2022, I decided that I would use “Mezzanine” for a deluxe album waterfall strategy. Blasphemy would have my stringently conceptual tracklist with “7 Years of Blood”; “Need”; “Demons”; “Sympathy for Lilith”; “Bitter Man”; “Forth”; and “Breakfast in a Record Store”. Then I would take advantage of the waterfall strategy with a deluxe version of Blasphemy released at a later date, and “Mezzanine” would be held back to provide the fresh ISRC code for that release. What better to round out a deluxe version of Blasphemy than a commercially cogent song that narratively re-contextualizes the original album’s material?

Further, by spring 2022, I knew that Nameless Friends had secured a performance slot at a sizeable music festival in July 2022. Though the band couldn’t afford to widely disseminate the live album made at our last festival performance, Live At Stranded Fest was warmly and enthusiastically received by everyone in our circles that watched it. I

---

167 When there is a lag time between when new music is released to streaming services, and streaming services are instructed to release that music to the public, artists have the option of conducting pre-release campaigns. During a pre-release, fans can’t yet hear the music, but they can interact with it as data on streaming platforms (saving the song title to their personalized libraries, adding it to playlists, etc.). When the song is released and playable, all of this pre-release data counts towards release day statistics, offering artists the chance to pool months of fan pre-release interaction behind the song’s premiere.

168 I’m not suggesting, for the record, that Charlotte Cardin or any of her digital-era peers invented the idea of the deluxe/special edition/extended/what-have-you album that has existed in popular music for decades. I’m admiring how artists like Cardin have engineered the existing idea of the deluxe/special edition/extended/what-have-you album to negotiate the medium of streaming platforms.
thought live versions of *Blasphemy’s* songs would perfectly round out the deluxe version of *Blasphemy*, and the upcoming festival gig would be a great opportunity to perform and record those versions.

My third production decision (and final pre-production decision!) in *dispositio* was to hire a music video director. If Nameless Friends wanted *Blasphemy* to make an impact, I thought we needed to approach its marketing like the professional releases I worked on for outside clients instead of the haphazard, indie way that we had released our past records. A professional release in the digital age includes a formal marketing campaign with waterfall singles and visuals. Because the album was going to be the backbone of my dissertation, I could fund such a marketing plan with the $15,000 Ontario Graduate Scholarship that I was awarded in 2021, which I had been squirrelling away for exactly this sort of opportunity.

I decided that two singles seemed like a proportionate lead-up to an album of *Blasphemy’s* length, and for a band of Nameless Friends’ size. Which songs would be the album’s singles seemed obvious to me: “Sympathy for Lilith” and “7 Years of Blood” are perfect foils. The former is operatic, proggy, and six minutes long; with a cathartic, act II narrative; and the most aesthetically metal of the songs on the album. The latter is fast, boppy, and a radio-friendly three minutes long; with an irreverent act I narrative; and the most aesthetically pop-rock of the songs on the album. But lyrically, they are both feminist protest songs that speak to the heart of *Blasphemy’s* concept.

In spring 2022, the most successful single campaigns in my orbit had visuals, and those visuals were usually music videos. Visuals help singles circulate on social media platforms, which ultimately drives more attention to streaming platforms, where more numbers make for a more effective waterfall strategy. I was working part-time as a recording engineer on film projects during this time, so I offered to buy my favourite film director a coffee in exchange for her advice about producing two industry standard music videos within Nameless Friends’ budget. Let’s call this director “F”. I played the demos of “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith” for F in this meeting, and she was so taken with the songs that she offered to direct at least one video on the spot.

I won’t spend too much time on my music video production decisions in this dissertation because of their tangential relationship to the album production, but it bears mentioning the marketing decisions that this initial meeting set in motion. I described

---

169 The band called this “feminist rebar”, which I will unpack in the next chapter.

170 I co-directed both music videos as the album producer.

171 See Chapter 5, Distribution.
my relationship with Pantsuit Nation to F, and told her that I was inspired by Rage Against the Machine’s multi-media music video for their song “Testify”. I proposed combining these influences in the music video for “Sympathy for Lilith”, with the intention that I could eventually share it in Pantsuit Nation as both solidarity and marketing for Blasphemy. F embraced this idea, and helped me plan much of “7 Years of Blood”’s video as a foil in the same meeting. Where “Sympathy for Lilith”’s media collaging and evangelical visuals are dated, weighty, and sombre; “7 Years of Blood” is modern, shocking, and bright, referencing Billie Eilish’s “When the Party’s Over”, and the Callous Daoboys’ “Fake Dinosaur Bones”. The decisions that I made here go on to significantly effect the single releases discussed in Chapter 5.

With the structure, name, and contents of the album decided, Nameless Friends convened in March 2022 to rehearse the material for recording, finally including the band’s drummer in person. The band made major changes to “Demons” in this rehearsal: the band’s drummer contributed a bombastic tom groove to the bridge (Track 22, 3:31) instead of the tepid high-hat part that was on the demo (Track 31, 3:32); and the band unanimously agreed to scrap the demo’d keyboard solo, which paled in comparison to the energy of the new drums. As producer, I promised to solicit a session keyboardist to perform a better keyboard solo on the album. The band also decided that the demo version of “Demons” had too many tempo changes: the fast bridge (Track 31, 3:26 - 4:56), to half-time feel chorus (Ibid, 4:57 - 5:18), and then right back up to an even faster outro (Ibid, 5:19 - 5:40), felt like uncomfortable whiplash when played in person. We found both the bridge and outro too compelling to cut, so we axed the third chorus, the chief momentum interruption in between the two. As much as I enjoyed how the bridge section managed to change keys away from the beginning of the song and initial choruses, and then transpose itself back to the home key so that the third chorus hit harmoniously, I agreed. I pushed the band to extend the outro to compensate: without the third chorus as a stately anchor, the end of the song felt unmoored until we added two extra phrases to the outro. The whole song felt settled and intentional with that extra length, and I appropriated the last half of the second, added phrase to re-articulate a bridge motif for a neat ending.

The rest of that rehearsal went so smoothly that the band saw little point in rehearsing together further. I privately thought we had skated over several of the songs, but as producer, I also thought that a.) the performance did not sound particularly skated over, which was a testament to how intuitively and tightly the band played together; and b.) I knew each member was a fastidious, professional musician in the studio that I could count on to deliver, even if they had to work hard to refine casually-rehearsed parts. So I

---

In the six months that I stewed in inventio, I hadn’t let go of Pantsuit Nation. People from all over the world were still using the group to post support and education resources, messages of solidarity, and creative work. By the time of dispositio, the group was also watching as a legal case called Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health wound its way to the American Supreme Court. Right-wing forces were trying to use Dobbs as a vehicle to challenge abortion rights in the United States, and I shared Pantsuit Nation’s collective trepidation as the case progressed towards the Supreme Court’s newly-appointed conservative, Christian, majority. The timing seemed increasingly appropriate to make art about the feminist concerns that the group and I shared, and the group seemed increasingly open to exactly such art.
took the band’s confidence at face value and scheduled the first recording session for *Blasphemy* on March 25th, 2022.
3. Production

When applying the principles of rhetoric to music production, the order of those principles needs to be shifted somewhat. Historical documents that detail rhetorical practices normally treat the divisions of rhetoric sequentially: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *pronunciatio*, and *memoria*. But for the record producer, *dispositio* and *pronunciatio* are inherently intertwined.

As discussed in the last chapter, *dispositio* is when practitioners order and arrange their gathered *inventio* to suit their creative purpose. I had done much of this ordering and arranging for *Blasphemy* by March 2022:

1. I had formally committed to producing an original LP for the band Nameless Friends.
2. I had determined the album’s concept from my own inspirations, their demos, and wider cultural circumstances; and accordingly named it *Blasphemy*.
3. I had designed a rough release plan including a waterfall strategy, two singles, and a deluxe album re-issue.
4. I had selected the individual songs that would be featured on each of these releases: the two singles would be “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith”; *Blasphemy*’s tracklist would be “7 Years of Blood”, “Need”, “Demons”, “Sympathy for Lilith”, “Bitter Man”, “Forth”, and “Breakfast in a Record Store”; and a later deluxe version would re-use the *Blasphemy* tracklist, adding “Mezzanine” and live versions of several of the other songs that I planned to record during the band’s performance at Deep River Summerfest on July 31, 2022.
5. I had supervised a band rehearsal of the new songs, and agreed with Nameless Friends that the band knew the new songs well enough to begin recording them.

In rhetorical tradition, *elocutio* comes next, in which practitioners decorate their language with fine embellishments. But music producers don’t yet have an artefact to decorate at this stage of production; as described above, I had designed an album but not actually recorded an album.

The art of recording music - fixing aural art into an object format that can be disseminated to listeners without live performance - is a distinct creative process, and I argue best understood through the lens of the fifth and final rhetorical phase, *pronunciatio*, when practitioners articulate their work to the public. Recorded music is a musical performance: there are just a few more degrees of separation between musicians playing and their audience listening than there would be in a concert hall. The specialty

---

173 Toft, 2014 (7).


175 Ibid.
of producing is making performance practice decisions that essentially put the cart before the horse: producers must decide how performances on their records will be done (pronunciatio) before they ever sculpt and/or embellish those performances (elocutio), commit to their discrete and final form (memoria), and release them to the public (pronunciatio realized), because otherwise they have no performances to sculpt, embellish, commit to, or release. Producers offer themselves - their bodies, their ears - as a proxy for their separated listener, so that pronunciatio can be undertaken degrees away but still ultimately translate to listeners’ ears and bodies.

Dispositio and pronunciatio are thus at one another’s mercy in record production. Planned arrangements (dispositio) are only sacred until a contrary flash of performance brilliance happens in the studio (pronunciatio). Likewise, performers (pronunciatio) only have as much freedom as budgeted resources like time, money, and technological constraints can allow (dispositio). Producers must decide when to prioritize which one.

This chapter will discuss my producing practice during Blasphemy’s “Production” phase, which is simply everything done to physically record music. It follows the consecutive order of recording that I undertook: the project proposal for this dissertation purported to group like instruments together in this section (i.e. a discussion of all of the drums on the album, then all of the bass, then all of the guitars, etc.), but I have since concluded that would misleadingly privilege dispositio over pronunciatio. Despite my best laid plans, recording Blasphemy did not unfold as neatly as I proposed, and organizing this chapter any other way would flatten how spontaneous instances of pronunciatio had a profound impact on ongoing practice.

I invite you to read this chapter while referencing Appendix C - it’s a rendering of a large bulletin board that I made shortly before recording began in March 2022. Every song on Blasphemy had a corresponding sticky note pinned to the board. Each sticky note listed all the anticipated musical elements in its respective song’s arrangement with corresponding checkboxes labelled “recorded” and “edited”. I hung the bulletin board in

---

176 To be clear: the phrase “production process” describes the entire journey of a musical recording, from composition through public release. Recordists also use the term “production” to refer to the phase of the production process that is the literal recording - transducing acoustic phenomena into object format - of music. Everything that happens within “the production process” exists relative to “production”: this titular, central phase of recording [Hepworth-Sawyer, 2012 (17-18)].

177 The dreaded “rear-view mirroring” discussed in previous chapters [Hodgson, 2019 (1-8)].

178 If recording Blasphemy sounds chaotic, it was, but no more so than any other record I have recently worked on. I’m not sure just how leisurely and orderly the general public expects an indie record production to go when it’s helmed by a twenty-something simultaneously completing a PhD, but holiday conversations with family have nonetheless led to the inclusion of this disclaimer. On an arguably related note, the members of Nameless Friends have publicly associated me with the phrase “method to the madness”.
my home studio until production was complete, and tracked our progress (and tweaked dispositio accordingly) by checking off the recording and editing of the elements as we completed them. I encourage you to do the same as you progress through this chapter to get a sense of how production unfolded.

This chapter is informed by extensive notes that I took throughout the production process to counteract any rear-view mirror, recounting tendencies when writing this paper. While the entire text of this note-taking is beyond the bounds and ethics clearance of this research project, some sections are so illustrative that I have quoted them verbatim. In those cases, I have acquired the express permission of any contributors who could reasonably be identified within the excerpts.

Further, the way that I describe my production practice in my notes necessarily evolved throughout the production process, so the way that I recount my production practice also evolves during this chapter. This evolution should be interpreted as linguistic triage, and not a reflection of my attention to detail waning or relaxing during the production process. When I devote extensive detail to crafting guitar tone in earlier months, for example, and do not devote that same detail to guitar tone in later months, I have still undertaken the same guitar tone process in every month, on every guitar. But if I chronicled every guitar tone for every song with the same level of detail, I would spend all of my time taking notes instead of producing, and this chapter would be hundreds of pages long. In other words, I have done my best to structure this chapter with as little rearview mirror distortion as possible to address my project questions as efficiently as possible, and have referenced both the content and implications of my production notes to

As in the previous chapter, I will broadly describe that I “created”, “programmed”, “recorded”, etc. various elements of Blasphemy throughout this chapter. I am intentionally using this language to describe how I was, as the producer, the authority who signed off on every creation, bit of programming, recording, etc. There were times when other people operated the equipment for these ends, but they did it under my guidance and to my specifications as an extension of my production practice. That being said, those other people did exist in the room while I was working, so I also regularly use the pronoun “we” throughout this section as a sign of respect for their presence and contributions, even if I was the final decision-maker who curated those contributions.

I thought a tangible reference of our production process would be an important touchstone for organization and morale among the band and production team. I was correct. Checking off items on the board became a coveted privilege among the production team.

Engineers and artists alike tend to tell me quite personal things during recording projects that I note to better work with them going forward, and this record was no exception. As much as I’m sure some ethnographic purists would argue this information is of research significance and somehow governable by ethics clearance around my personal experience, producers are nothing without the ability to build trust. If every prospective client of mine feared that I would spend production unlocking their deepest neuroses and fears just so I could publicly broadcast them in a later publication, I wouldn’t be of much practical use to the field of music production for very long. Some things that happen in the studio must stay in the studio.

As I wrote on June 23rd, “It’s interesting to me how my notes taken immediately after/during sessions [towards the beginning of production] are much more matter-of-fact, laundry list of what was done, where the later notes [towards the end of production, written with larger intervals of time in between] become a story with time to reflect”; creative reflective practice, as practice, indeed!
guide that curation. Guitar tone hunting is one of many building blocks in production vocabulary that I will explain once when first relevant, and then expect the reader to assume I continue to do as I build Blasphemy.

Recording Blasphemy’s lead vocals was the most challenging part of production, because the pressures and details that I was necessarily aware of as producer became stressors that interfered with my embodied practice as a vocalist. While the details of this struggle are quite personal, I discuss them for diversity and inclusion purposes: I rarely encounter performance practice research in popular music that includes unvarnished descriptions of how institutional barriers - like chronic illness and gendered trauma - can affect musicians’ bodies. These triggers must be navigated in the studio, where the pressure of fixing an eternal, repeatable performance can intensify everything. I am grateful to feel safe enough to recount these experiences as a case study, and hope they contribute to greater understanding, empathy, and reparative action in gender equality and disability accommodations going forward.

3.1. March 2022

My production ethos is best summarized by the famous Dolly Parton quote, “Find out who you are and do it on purpose”183. I seek to find what is not just unique but identifying about the artists I work with, and then I aim to make their recordings not just representative of but evocative of, resonant with, their identifying features. In March 2022, I turned my mantra on Nameless Friends. I had spent inventio demo production trying to capture how the band’s new songs went, a “find out who you are” exercise. I now saw Blasphemy, a formal album production slated for public release, as both an invitation to investigate why the songs went like that and a challenge to make them sound more like that; the “do it on purpose” part.

First, I worked with the band to define the album’s genre, a dispositio decision. Blasphemy was going to be released in the digital streaming age, and we were hoping to grow Nameless Friends’ audience and solicit playlist slots on streaming platforms. As discussed in the previous chapter, granular understanding of the record’s genre would be crucial to strategizing success in this environment. We were aiming for rock, but what sub-genre? The members of the band had varying allegiances to metal, punk, and glam that would theoretically conflict with one another if we were trying to make a purist record in any one genre. But switching to making decisions about pronunciatio, I thought a sub-genre-bending record that appealed to a wider audience of rock fans was both possible and the best way forward: how effective is protest music if it perfectly conforms to existing norms at the expense of being accessible to more people? And how many more playlists would a genre-bending record eligible for?

Nameless Friends’ drummer was a groovy, churning machine, and the band’s lead guitar player had demoed many of the album’s catchiest riffs on a seven-string guitar. These qualities are often associated with metal. I thought if I complimented and bridged these metal-ish parts with matching bass, the album’s rhythmic foundation would sound

183 Parton, 2015.
distinctly heavier - and thus more powerful, authoritative, etc. - than the average rock record. This would help Nameless Friends stand out from their peers.

In contrast, the song lyrics were often frank and critical of injustice, and the rhythm guitar playing on the demos was splashy: the lack of production preciousness came across as confidently simple. These are hallmarks of punk, which I thought I could leverage to add excitement to the album and keep it from sounding too oblique or rigid.

The final piece of my genre puzzle was glam rock values of camp and grandeur. I wanted to channel this through the album’s organs, guitar solos, and other arrangement embellishments to give the whole record a cinematic scale and sparkle. I thought this drama would be memorable, so listeners would be not just moved, but intrigued by Nameless Friends.

The band took to calling my genre vision “feminist rebar”\(^{184}\): a core of metal, surrounded by aesthetic rock, led by a confident, distinctly female voice. This vision informed my entire production and post-production design for *Blasphemy*, as I will discuss throughout the remaining chapters of this exegesis.

Next, I returned to *dispositio* to assemble *Blasphemy*’s production team. I knew that I would produce and do much of the engineering. I also recruited the band’s guitar player to be a second recording engineer. Let’s called him P. P works professionally as an audio engineer, so I knew he would do industry standard work. Further, he and I had previously worked well together on other records and were close personally, so I knew I could trust him to engineer the parts of the record that I couldn’t\(^ {185}\) as well as I would.

Looking ahead to post-production, I hired a mixing engineer, W, which I will discuss further in the next chapter\(^ {186}\).

I also solicited an arranger for the orchestral accompaniment in “Forth”, because I had exhausted my arranging abilities with the demo. Let’s call him R. R and I discussed my *pronunciatio* goals for the song in purposefully broad terms before he got to work: I was concerned that my limited orchestral expertise could cause miscommunication in a detailed discussion, and didn’t want to put any unnecessary restrictions on his creativity. I described the concept of the album and “Forth”’s place in the narrative arc, gave him a copy of the demo Logic session, and then left R to his own devices, with the expectation that he would solicit my feedback as he progressed.

Like in demo production, I decided to record the members of the band individually. Threats of COVID and other illnesses still loomed, and individual recording gave me freedom to pivot and record something else if any one musician got sick. But

---

\(^{184}\) Like how rebar is metal inside concrete, which is made of rock, geddit? They were quite proud of themselves for this pun; equally proud of how embracing it implied their feminist allyship; and proceeded to loudly tell several people we knew about how “feminist rebar” their upcoming album was going to be.

\(^{185}\) Like my own performances, which I thought self-engineering could be a distraction and detraction from.

\(^{186}\) At this point in production, I was assuming that I would master *Blasphemy* myself. I would later decide differently, which I will also discuss in the next chapter.
more importantly, I knew the members of Nameless Friends were relentless perfectionists. Every anxiety they had about appearing professional and competent in their recordings would be amplified tenfold from demo production to album production - demos are implicitly first drafts, but the album was decidedly a final copy. Individual recording would give every member dedicated space and time to work out their neuroses without affecting any of the other performances, which would keep relations cordial and save time in the long run.

My decision to record the demos to a metronome proved prescient here. The band members would need some sort of reference to play along with while they recorded separately, and given the genres I had decided we were leveraging, editing to grid was mandatory. The demos, carefully recorded and edited to grid, were perfect reference tracks for the job.

Per rock recording norms, I started recording *Blasphemy* with the rhythmic foundation of drums. In terms of *pronunciatio*, metal drums in 2022 generally sounded mid-scooped and precise: crystal clear high frequency information, like cymbals; powerful low information with legible details, like toms and kick drums; and minimal mid-frequency information. Engineering this kind of sound is a fine balance that often requires particular equipment, so I gave Nameless Friends’ drummer a frank choice: we could either spend a significant portion of my OGS grant renting a recording studio with a proper live room to record industry standard, acoustic drums; or we could record digital drums in my home studio and spend the money on professional music videos. I privately thought the latter option was a smarter financial decision for the band’s age and stage, but I was prepared to do the former if it was sincerely important to my

---

187 And very much still are, if any readers have rosy ideas about swooping in to produce their next album! They’re nightmares! I dare you!

188 I was determined that *Blasphemy* sound just as professional, polished, and powerful under my leadership as under any of the Hollywood mirages the band envisioned hiring before our management dumped us.

189 Drums like this a.) cut through a mix, which helps to structure heavy music that can otherwise become unwieldy, and b.) reserve the middle frequencies of the mix for unobstructed guitars and bass, so the listener can hear the details of their intricate parts.

190 Specialized, expensive, and with few suitable substitutions.

191 Defiant Ones, 2017.

192 I.e. use a set of MIDI triggers shaped like a drum kit to record MIDI tracks that corresponded with drum samples, including all of the nuanced velocity information that the album demos lacked.

193 I knew that I would have to spend time contouring digital drums in post-production to make them sound as believable as acoustic drums, and perfectly engineered acoustic drums do have an organic magic that I personally believe digital drums have yet to fully compete with. But I also thought that the overall mixes were going to be so grand that I doubted even an educated listener would notice much of a difference between carefully sculpted digital drums and magical acoustic drums, and professional music videos would make a massive, competitive difference in Nameless Friends’ marketing.
bandmate. Wisely, he chose the latter option. Recording acoustic drums at an outside studio would have put pressure on him to perform - and perform to an exacting standard - within the limited time constraints we could afford. Recording digital drums in my home studio would give him more flexible time, so he could experiment with his playing, and more lenient performance expectations that would make his session experience less stressful\textsuperscript{194}.

A further pronunciation decision, I decided that I would not let the band’s drummer play with the metronome directly unless he explicitly asked for it. As an experienced, perfectionistic drummer, I knew he could follow a metronome with such fanatical precision that the resulting performance would lack groove and individuality. I thought his articulation was a.) interesting and b.) would add crucial humanity\textsuperscript{195} to an otherwise digital drum performance, so I didn’t want the metronome to iron it out. Thank goodness for reference tracks that could be used as a metronome proxy!

Nameless Friends’ drummer was juggling many personal commitments at this time, so we scheduled one long recording session on March 25th. Before the 25th, I made a Logic Pro X session and added all the demo reference tracks to it. I also created dedicated groups of drum tracks for each song in the session. I endeavoured to rent an eleven piece\textsuperscript{196} Alesis Strike Pro electric drum kit from our local music store, to represent the band’s drummer’s eleven-piece Tama acoustic kit, but there was a mix-up with reservations at the store and my reservation didn’t make it to London for the session date. Undeterred, and determined not to force the very busy drummer to reschedule, I applied

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Drum kits are usually recorded acoustically as ensemble instruments, where all of the separate elements (including toms, kick, snare, high hats, cymbals, etc.) are expected to sonically bleed into one another’s tracks. This means that, if the drum tracks are going to be edited, they must be edited together as a group. Further, some individual elements like cymbals have long decay times that the ear readily notices any interference with, so splice edits (where an engineer completely separates some hits from the rest of the track to move them around - either leaving gaps of silence between the bits of recorded track or removing bits of the recorded track and placing the incongruous ends together - usually with a smoothing fade) are difficult, if not entirely restricted to parts of the performance without audible cymbals. That often forces editing the drum tracks as a group through algorithmic programs like Logic’s Flextime, which perceptively manipulate/stretch/compress the performance time so engineers can move ranges of sounds from their original soundings without changing the placements of the rest of the tracks. But recorded sounds can only be stretched so far from their original soundings (e.g. a snare hit moved forward/back in time to better match a grid line) before they cause audible artefacts (clicks, pops, whines, etc.). So if the production plan calls for editing, drummers recording acoustic tracks must play close enough to perfection that their performances are editable within these quite limited constraints. Digital drums, however, are just a collection of samples being ordered in such a way that they collectively sound like one drum kit performance. Any individual hit can be moved in a vacuum of the other hits, and missed/flubbed/wrong hits can just be substituted with better samples.
\item Remember from the last chapter, authenticity and “grain” are important values in rock performance [Barthes, 1990 (294-299)].
\item Kick, snare, two rack toms, two floor toms, high hat, two crash cymbals, a ride cymbal, and a china cymbal.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the same budget to rent two Roland TD-17 kits. The TD-17 is only a nine piece kit\textsuperscript{197}, but it has two additional aux outputs that can receive data from other MIDI instruments. I set up one kit in my studio as the main kit, and then pilfered a cymbal trigger and floor tom trigger from the second TD-17, which I strapped on to the frame of the first TD-17 and hooked up through the aux outputs. I routed the modified TD-17 into my 2019 Macbook Pro using a MOTU Pre-ES 8-channel\textsuperscript{198} via thunderbolt, set to the Audio Interface preset. The drummer and I listened to the session through individual headphone outs from the MOTU.

I started the session by asking the drummer to play each element of the kit individually, so I could check that the MIDI data was translating properly. I discovered that the aux channel hosting my surrogate china trigger wasn’t reading cymbal velocity nuance. Switching to the other aux channel didn’t improve the situation, and neither did a solid troubleshooting campaign on my part. The drummer had done enough test takes by this point that he requested to play without actually hearing the triggered drum samples: he felt that the minute latency between hitting the trigger in the room and hearing the sample in his headphones was too much of a distraction to maintain his sense of rhythm. Undaunted, he was prepared to play from memory while listening to the reference tracks. I didn’t want to waste any more time on our set up, so I asked him to pick a crash trigger and also use it for his china hits. Then after every take, I wrote down which hits he intended to be china instead of crash so that I could modify the MIDI data in editing.

We recorded most of Blasphemy’s drum tracks during this session. The drummer and I generally agreed on what each song needed, so most of the parts he played were just fleshed out interpretations of my demos. The first take of each song was usually a throwaway where the drummer would half play and half listen to get acquainted with the composition. The second, third and occasionally fourth takes were then full-effort attempts at the entire song: I thought that the drummer’s performances were best when he was allowed to play longer sections and thus articulate longer musical thoughts in a flow. I kept a mental note of which sections weren’t quite nailed down as we went. Once we had a few solid run-throughs of the song, I would give the drummer feedback about the specific sections that I thought we could improve, and we would record a few more takes of those sections.

When we had captured each song with enough accuracy to make comping and editing fairly painless, I gave my bandmate the option to experiment. He suggested breaking up the blues-based monotony of “Sympathy for Lilith”’s A section by changing the syncopation in the third verse, which I loved and encouraged (see Track 24 in the Project Playlist, 1:30 - 1:48). I approved a similar suggestion in “7 Years of Blood”, where he adapted the second verse groove (which mirrors the guitar motif) to toms (Track 20, 1:17 - 1:42) instead of the cymbal and snare pattern from the first verse (Track 20, 0:17 - 0:41). I also asked him to do extra takes of the final sections of “Sympathy for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[197] Kick, snare, two rack toms, one floor tom, high hat, two crash cymbals, and a ride cymbal.
\item[198] I upgraded to this interface in winter 2021 to record drums for another band, since my Lambda could only record two channels at a time (recording this other band’s drum kit demanded more than two mics running simultaneously).
\end{footnotes}
Lilith” and “Forth”, with the instruction to fill as wildly as he could possibly conceive of. Several of those spontaneous fills turned out so fabulously that I chose to keep them in the final comps: (Track 24, 5:16 - 5:20, 5:21 - 5:23, 5:41 - 5:44 and 5:46 - 5:49), (Track 26, 2:59 - 3:01, 3:25 - 3:27, and 4:04 - 4:07).

Between all of these pieces, none of the songs took more than eight takes to complete except “Need”. I had strong instincts about how I wanted the rhythm to feel in “Need”’s verses, but I didn’t know how to articulate those instincts beyond the demo part I had already programmed. The band’s drummer laid down some powerful chorus drums that I loved, but he was not inspired by the demo in the verses. We recorded many different approaches across all three of the verses, between twelve and fifteen takes total, before I thought that our motivation and performance quality were flagging into diminishing returns. I chose to end the session there. We had completed the entire album’s drums save three verses, and I figured that I could just use MIDI to draw in those verses once we figured out how we wanted them to go. Better to let my bandmate go home, rest, and recharge, and then we could finish “Need” at another, more inspired time.

3.2. April 2022

It’s important to note that no member of the production team was working on Blasphemy full-time, so I was constantly re-scheduling dispositio based on other, less-negotiable life circumstances. For instance, on April 1st 2022, P and I moved houses. He was working full time during the day, so as the graduate student with more flexible hours, I packed up our whole house and home studio in the week between drum recording and moving. I had managed to carve out enough of the new home studio to access the main desk by April 2nd199, but it would be weeks until we had unpacked enough to resume recording in the space200. No matter, I spent the month comping and editing drums. It needed to be done before recording any bass or guitars anyway201, and I didn’t need more space than I had already dug out to do so.

Comp ing drums for Blasphemy, a pronunciatio endeav o ur, was straightforward. The drummer and I had determined most of the arrangements during recording, so I selected the most accurate takes of each performance and put them together to make up the bulk of the album’s drums. I converted the necessary MIDI crash notes to china notes, and cobbled together half-coherent placeholder verses for “Need”. Once I was finished comping, I handed the editing off to P: I didn’t think my ears would be objective enough to edit consistently after listening to the comps so much.

P created individual sessions for each song on the album, and populated them with the disparate MIDI comps and reference tracks from my drum tracking session.

199 Which hosts our speaker monitors, interface, recording computers, etc.

200 Flexible hours unfortunately don’t mean free hours. I was submitting several applications/proposals for other grants/projects at this point, and beginning pre-production work on another record. Between P and I, unpacking was a slow and steady endeavour.

201 As discussed in the last chapter.
Then he programmed each individual session metronome and grid, including tempo and time signature changes, and I labelled all of the song sections for him in the session headers.

P edited Blasphemy’s drum tracks in two steps. First, he used Logic’s algorithms to generally quantize each song’s drum MIDI data towards its respective grid. The algorithm couldn’t exactly pinpoint some of the album’s more complex/subtle grooves; like the first verse in “Mezzanine” (Track 28, 1:10 - 1:35), third verse in “Sympathy for Lilith” (Track 24, 1:30 - 1:47), the 2/2/3 accents in the first verse of “Breakfast in a Record Store” (Track 27, 1:08 - 1:34), or complex time refrains in “7 Years of Blood” (Track 20, 0:03 - 0:16 and repeated throughout), “Need” [Track 21, 0:19 - 0:32 and repeated throughout), and “Sympathy for Lilith” (Track 24, 4:58 - 5:12); but it could do a bulk of time-saving work on straightforward beats like the bridge of “7 Years of Blood” (Track 20, 2:11 - 2:37), the choruses in “Demons” (Track 22, 0:50 - 1:12 and 2:19 - 2:41), and most of “Bitter Man” and “Forth”. Then P grouped all the drum tracks in each session together so he could edit them simultaneously, and manually went through every song to make the more sensitive adjustments. He asked for my approval at this point, and I made a final pass of fine adjustments. As discussed in the last chapter, the difference between the recorded and edited drums isn’t huge, but it makes a significant difference in the perceived polish and coherence of all of the overall mixes.

I chose to leave one section of drums unedited: the keyboard solo in “Demons”. Without a finished solo, I had no idea how long that section would be, and I didn’t want to set a length arbitrarily before we brought in a session player and let them experiment. The drum part for this section is essentially a two bar loop, so during our drum session, I asked the band’s drummer to play it for a monstrously long time, literally until he got bored. Then in editing, P and I left that section alone and edited the rest of the song around it.

P and I also programmed a set of MIDI pads for each song at this stage. “Pads” are musical voices that follow the general contours of a song, but are meant to be unobtrusive or even illegible as distinct voices. Recordists use pads to literally “pad” out a mix with sympathetic resonance, which makes the song sound more saturated without perceptively changing the arrangement. Keyboards and synths (digital or otherwise) are the most common instrumental choice for pads because they mix down so lushly and humbly, but I chose not to commit to any particular samples at this stage of production. I thought that we needed a more complete picture of Blasphemy’s pronunciation to determine what would compliment it, writing in my notes, “I’m not sure exactly what

---

202 When multiple tracks/parameters in a DAW are digitally linked in a “group”, they can all be identically manipulated at once. It saves enormous amounts of time and assures fine details are multiplied exactly, where edits would otherwise have to be painstakingly replicated across multiple tracks/parameters.

203 Sometimes harmonically, and sometimes melodically, depending on what the priorities of a given mix are. In “7 Years of Blood”, for instance, the pads mostly follow the lead guitar melody (because it’s the focus of the song and thus the mix). But the pads in “Forth” mostly follow the harmony, because the song is polyphonic and has several melodic voices. Every pad in every song, though, without fail, has some sort of relationship with the lead vocal line in choruses.
tones I may or may not want to pad out the mix with yet, so we just programmed the harmonic structure of the song as triad chord MIDI data that we can apply to different samples in the mixing stage. I directed [P] that said pads should be transcendent glue and not follow rhythmic contours: a pad is supposed to add atmosphere. It’s not atmosphere if it chugs in and out with the band, that’s just a chug-thickener!”

With the drums (mostly) complete, I weighed the *dispositio* and *pronunciatio* of bass. I had produced the demo bass parts so carefully that most of them were reusable, which was convenient when Nameless Friends no longer had a permanent bass player! But P is also a capable bassist, other session musicians exist, and I didn’t want to limit us to old bass arrangements.

I decided that “Mezzanine” and “Breakfast in a Record Store” needed new bass: those demo bass performances are not particularly metal, and I thought that I could produce new performances that would deliver my genre vision better. On the other hand, I decided to keep the demo bass part for “Sympathy for Lilith”. I had micromanaged virtually every aspect of the demo performance, and didn’t see the point of micromanaging someone else to recreate it when the DI track was flexible to mix. I was otherwise ambivalent about the other songs, so I decided that we would use the demo bass parts as placeholders and proceed with recording the other instruments around them. Then when/if any of the bass parts jumped out at me as particularly fitting or not, I could either commit or re-record accordingly.

### 3.3. May 2022

This means the entire album had a passable rhythm section by May 2022. P and I had also finished unpacking, so I was ready to begin recording guitars. Where exactly to start guitar tracking was a daunting decision: larger-than-life walls of guitars are a mainstay of iconic rock records, and P and I had just a small home studio and ourselves to work with.

I opted to start guitar recording with “Sympathy for Lilith” for *dispositio* reasons. F had just received acceptance to a graduate program across the country that began in the fall. We wanted to shoot our planned music video before she left at the end of the summer, and the song would have to be recorded enough by the shoot date that the band could mime playing to it. The US Supreme Court was also due to hand down a decision about Roe v. Wade during the summer. I thought that if we got the song and video finished before the decision date, the band could use it for solidarity and protest.

---

204 P recorded all of the bass parts on Nameless Friends’ first record, the *Mezzanine* EP, when the band was just starting out and also did not have a permanent bass player.

205 See the previous chapter.
galvanization when the decision came down\textsuperscript{206}. No one had concrete plans for any of the other songs or music videos, so what better place to start?

Now from a \textit{pronunciatio} perspective, starting the bulk of the album’s recording with a six-minute, Act II, prog rock opera about disturbing, triggering trauma (much of it personal!) was not my wisest production decision. But it was a baptism by fire that ultimately worked to our advantage: we started with the hardest song on the record, and survived it, so everything that came after felt easier. I’m using sections from my tracking notes to recount this part of the production\textsuperscript{207} because they frankly capture the significant details in their equally gruelling and absurd glory better than a formal recount could.

“May 4

\textit{Tone-hunting for the lead guitar in “Sympathy for Lilith”}

- [I thought] The intro\textsuperscript{208} guitar tone needed to be perceptively *not masculine*, [so P and I] had to hunt around for a tone that didn’t have a mid glut\textsuperscript{209} that sounded like chunk or masculine weight; ended up [deciding] on neck + middle [pickup] combo that had a particular vulnerability (it gave me the same embodied feeling as back-of-throat sobs in a vocal line, like a true wail)
- Maintained the same driven tone that we used on the demo: we nailed that at the time by aiming for a Metallica-esque “a” vowel (open guitar notes with a wide, nasal “a” articulation like in grAnd or And, as opposed to Awe or pOnd)
- I rejected a lot of Kemper profiles for sounding square wave-y, i.e. having a lot of glut in the low mids and not much air or sustain/lushness/gold halo in the high mids; we’re not shooting for an aesthetically dark or heavy record. We’re shooting for intensity and dark subjects, but I want the whole thing to sound INDULGENT, not brutal

\textsuperscript{206} I was under no delusions that the decision would be on the side of human rights, women’s rights, or civil rights. The 2016 election made sure of that; fool me once…

\textsuperscript{207} Lightly edited for clarity and concise-ness.

\textsuperscript{208} Track 24, 0:09 - 0:33.

\textsuperscript{209} Many recordists, myself included, discuss tone relative to a sound’s profile on the frequency spectrum. While exact numbers will vary depending on the recordist, I generally describe 20-60hz as “sub bass” or “sub(s)”; “bass” or “lows” are roughly 60-250hz; “low mids”, short for “low midrange”, is around 250-500hz; “true mids”, “mids”, or simply “midrange” is between 500hz-2khz; “high mids” or “upper midrange” is 2-4khz; and anything beyond 4khz is “highs”. Collaborators I’ve worked with also distinguish between “presence”, which is the 4-6khz range; and “brilliance”, which is 6khz and up; in the highs. I personally also treat 8khz and above as “air”. So a guitar tone with a “mid glut” has so much information between 500hz-2khz that it’s perceived to be excessive or disproportionate.
- Ending up choosing an in-between profile (i.e., not soft but not hard) also from the demo: I’m not worried that I’m demo-chasing\(^{210}\) [so much as feeling] like I already made this series of decisions DURING demos
- This is glossing over probably twenty separate tests of the same profiles with different pickup configurations, including blind tests. I kept asking for blind A/B tests\(^{211}\) to confirm that I actually wanted the patches we chose (the first verse\(^{212}\) in particular), and wasn’t just preferring them in relation to the others we tested around them. [When I] chose based on embodied feeling, the palpable emotion they evoked in me, instead of perceived aesthetic (which my interpretation of DID relatively change), I picked the same ones every time
- I serendipitously wrote in the extra octave that [P] plays in the second half of the B section\(^{213}\); I felt like I recognized it as part of the song [when he was] noodling around while testing tones
- All the profiles we chose came with a [re]verb on them: we took it off, to allow [our mixing engineer] to put uniform verbs on everything at the mix level”

“May 9

[Recording lead guitar performance for “Sympathy for Lilith”]\(^{214}\)

- Bit of a difficult one today: we started in the consecutive order of the song, with the really wilting [intro] verse\(^{215}\), and [P] was touchy (to use his word, “difficult”) to produce because, in his words, he was “ready to chug” and not expecting to me to ask a “vulnerability thought exercise” of him
- I was searching for an almost pitiful guitar performance: the narrative of the beginning of the song is a rock bottom moment. Lilith has just been cast out, betrayed, by God

---

\(^{210}\) A slang term for when a recordist/artist becomes so pre-occupied with some dimension of the demo recording - for positive or negative reasons! - that they lose sight of the unique opportunities presented in the new production.

\(^{211}\) Self explanatory: an A/B test is where you choose between two options by toggling back and forth between them in direct contrast. Blind A/B tests - where you don’t watch the toggling and instead use your ears to find the contrast - are common in audio, when recordists want to make sure that the biases of their eyes aren’t swaying their perception of their ears. P did the toggling for me in these guitar tone comparisons, so I could just listen.

\(^{212}\) Track 24, 0:52 - 1:11.

\(^{213}\) Track 24, 3:37 - 3:56.

\(^{214}\) To give us wall-of-guitars options, P and I devised recording five tracks for the “Sympathy for Lilith” lead guitar part. A Kemper left and right for stereo options; an unprocessed signal from a JDI box; a Mesa Road King 412 cab miked with a Shure SM57 on the bottom right speaker [Figures 1 and 2] (that speaker is on the open-back side of the cab, and thus more richly resonant); and for fun, the built-in talkback mic from the MOTU interface. The MOTU lived in the same room as the cab while we were recording, and we set up the cab in the room such that the interface mic recorded a lovely, phase-y sort of room track to give the whole part some veridic atmosphere.

\(^{215}\) Track 24, 0:09 - 0:33
(her father!), and I’m adamant that the strength of her self-realization as the mother of
demons/villain origin story doesn’t hit as hard, or make sense, without the contrast of
the weakness and devastation that she begins from
-  [P]’s [initial, un-produced] imagining of the part felt textbook to me, as in you could
literally hear the “I am a guitar player, playing this guitar part, according to the rules of
guitar playing technique, like decisive picking and near-robotic articulation” in the first
few recordings we did. I tried to have him use a softer pick, and asked him to try
“embodying” the character, but he couldn’t do it until I took away the metronome and
directed him to play the part as if he was ashamed to be doing it. He was seriously
pissed off at me at this point, I think I was poking on a real load-bearing point of toxic
masculinity (embody weakness, play badly), but taking away the metronome did it.
Two takes and he’d given a performance with more human articulation (the odd
harmonic allowed to ring where it technically would be muted; some chords swept
instead of cleanly strummed; some notes not completely fingered, so the resulting
sound is a little choked, like a catch in the throat) that I felt in the pit of my stomach,
the diaphragmatic place you pull from when you cry, which is exactly what I wanted
-  It wasn’t a pain in the ass to edit, because for all taking away the metronome, he’s a
trained musician with a sense of internal rhythm: the part doesn’t perfectly subscribe to
the metronome, but it has its own internal flow/logic that manages to still begin and
end in the right places. [P] did try to edit the whole thing to grid, I think as a means of
reclaiming control over it (it’s a very vulnerable sounding part!), and I had to gently
point out after he was done that it sounded worse. To his credit, he agreed, and we
reverted it to a mostly raw rhythm with a few minor edits. I don’t regret letting him do
the editing, knowing that I was going to undo it, because I thought he needed to hear
the tangible difference that the humanity makes on the song’s storytelling, and he
seemed to agree: he’s normally irked when I ask to undo changes he’s worked on, but
this time seemed to agree and be [perhaps grateful] that I gave him permission to go
with the one that sounded better, and not the more [technically] accurate one
-  We had to stop recording for the day there, because the vibe was too emotionally
charged to switch gears and start doing heavier, more technical/domineering stuff, but
had a good de-brief conversation about the ways that this record is ultimately taking a
lot of risks. It’s one thing to say that we embrace a feminist perspective, and we want
to stick it to the patriarchy, but actually doing that is going to require us to be
courageous in practice: buck some norms, risk [narrow-minded] men we went to
school with thinking that our work is pathetic, and frankly, inviting misogynistic
response and backlash. It was a bit sobering and scary for me to confront that thought
on my own behalf, as a female leader. This might be a massive risk that people hate,
and [they could] use [it] against me as “proof” of how my gender undermines my
competence and corrupts my instincts…”
“May 10

[Recording lead guitar performance for “Sympathy for Lilith”]

- Another weird one: [P] was feeling tired and distracted (self-described, “weird and anxious”)… We nailed down the heavy intro\(^\text{216}\) first and it was smooth sailing: hella chug, tone worked great, sounded great, he had no problem hitting an expressive articulation that I thought was suitably compelling for the part

- Trying to get into the A section\(^\text{217}\) was a disaster: he was feeling rusty, and the demo verse one\(^\text{218}\) is a magical, sprightly little cowboy part that we both agree on the magical quality of. He recorded that much less self-consciously about a year ago, though, when we were fully into demo tracking and he was playing much more regularly

- I would [normally] just advocate for using the… demo track, but it’s a single, mono Kemper track with all of the distortion and verb printed\(^\text{219}\), and no corresponding DI: a veritable nightmare to mix when the guitars in the rest of the song are being tracked five-fold

- We did 20+ takes of the… thing, religiously referencing the demo, and he just couldn’t get it under his fingers… I called it a day… (both because it was late enough that I worried about pissing off the neighbours with a Mesa Road King cab at full blast, and because I thought [P] was at the end of his rope and not likely to have anything else in him worth our time tonight). [I] did advocate that we edit the riff he nailed though, to finalize it, and that made him smile and get back a shy sense of mastery. I’ve resolved to try again tomorrow by attacking the B\(^\text{220}\) + D\(^\text{221}\) sections first, because they’re dead easy and very gross motor skills; we can get back to the fine motor stuff on Thursday when there’s less of the song looming in front of us to be completed’

“May 11

[Recording lead guitar performance for “Sympathy for Lilith”]

- Got the entire B + D sections done, plus [P]’s half of the solo; took two hours tops, all the patches sounded great, and then we [begged] off and made stirfry, everyone feeling like great musicians”

---

\(^\text{216}\) Track 24, 0:34 - 0:52.

\(^\text{217}\) See Figure 9.

\(^\text{218}\) Track 33, 0:55 - 1:11.

\(^\text{219}\) Baked in, irrevocably so. Most DAWs allow you to audition effects on audio tracks without fundamentally altering the underlying information of that track. But once the effected track is exported from the DAW as an audio file, the effect becomes an integral part of the new audio that can no longer be separated from the original sound. In this case, as discussed in the last chapter, we recorded the demo guitar tracks through the Kemper’s effects: the guitar tracks were made effected. There was never an un-effected guitar performance to work with.

\(^\text{220}\) See Figure 9.

\(^\text{221}\) Ibid.
“May 12

[Recording lead guitar performance for “Sympathy for Lilith”]

- It was a... slog, but we got ‘er done: finished the entire A section of lead guitar
- It took a solid 60-90 minutes to do each of the second and third verses and their respective refrains: [P] recorded a nuanced little part for the first one in the original demo that only I could hear the intricacies of (but couldn’t play and thus be able to show him, very helpful of me), so we had to muddle through learning that, and then we got stuck on tone refining for a [long] age. I’m still not sure verse two222 ended up with the perfect tone, but the performance is great, so it’s [mixing engineer]’s problem now
- Verse three223 we had to write a new part on the spot to suit the drum swing that [drummer] + I wrote in during drum day, and [P] just couldn’t figure out how to articulate it once we solidified the part: we literally did 50+ takes of it, and they all sounded palpably like overthinking and not exactly musical (I’d give notes, and [P] would just apply the feedback blanket across the whole part, so we went round and round with takes that were too low energy + soft, then too high energy and harsh, etc. etc.)
- I finally said that I thought we were overthinking it to the point that it wasn’t going to improve, so we should go ahead to the next section and come back: he smashed out the rest of the section (and thus the song) in a single, first, perfect take; go figure!
- We fusssed with a couple more takes of verse four/the bridge224, concluded the magic take was better then all of them, and then returned back to verse three and he finally nailed a few decently expressive takes that I could cut together
- I comped everything, and we had a bit of a snark over the slightly sharp bend in verse four225: I pulled rank and insisted it be left alone, because I think the overwrought bend is essential ear candy for the awful, lyrical epiphany underneath (“whoever you think you are, blame/hate yourself...”)

With the lead guitar recorded and comped226, we moved on to recording the rhythm guitar and lead vocals simultaneously. Normally I would advocate for recording rhythm guitar as a member of the rhythm section and thus before lead guitar, but there were a few considerations, which effected both disposition and pronunciatio, that made me decide otherwise. First, I am both Nameless Friends’ rhythm guitar player and lead vocalist. Second, I know myself to be an anxious performer and impatient artist. Third, as a general production rule, I don’t let my vocalists record for more than an hour or so at a time: I find that the first few takes are usually the most expressive, the subsequent few takes are usually the most technically accurate, and continuing much beyond that in a

---

222 Track 24, 0:56 - 1:11.
223 Track 24, 1:30 - 1:47.
225 Track 24, 2:15.
226 I comped all of the lead guitar parts as we went, largely to reassure P that we didn’t need to do any more takes.
continuous session usually results in try-hard, overthought, overtired delivery. So rather than let me stew in my own anxieties about the vocal performance until the end of production, I reasoned I could start experimenting with the vocals now, and then use the remaining time in each session to track my guitars so that we were still recording in large, efficient blocks of time. Lastly, P didn’t care in what order he recorded his part in. Ergo, it didn’t matter what order I recorded my parts in!

This would turn out to be a poor decision in hindsight, setting off a long series of lead vocal struggles that I believe could have been avoided if I, as a producer, had been more clear-eyed about the underlying triggers that I, as a vocalist, would almost certainly face. I was firmly in denial about the pandemic context and thus inevitable bouts of illness that would make my vocal instrument more fragile to work with on this record than on past projects. Add in that the band had lost a member over heated conflict from the album’s gendered themes; and the personal, gendered nature of the lyrics themselves; and thinking that lead vocal recording could just fit in around the rhythm guitar was awfully naive. But such blindspots are an occupational hazard of self-producing, and thanks to my extensive note-taking throughout the process, I have a record of them that begins below and will continue throughout the rest of this chapter. Much of this description is dramatic in hindsight, but I resist the impulse to flatten or otherwise downplay the emotional intensity that I felt because it made sense in context of my gendered, chronically-ill experience. In other words, my unsuccessful producing attempts are worthwhile data for this study.

“May 13

[Tone-hunting for the rhythm guitar in “Sympathy for Lilith”]
- I had a[n]… off day, I woke up with awful vertigo that persisted throughout the day…
- [P and I] picked up the rental mic\textsuperscript{227} for doing vocals on the weekend, and I was feeling halfway stable when vertical [by the evening], [but] there wasn’t a ton of time left to record (I’ve instilled a 9pm cut off for guitar amps, so we don’t [annoy] the neighbours). I didn’t want to do nothing though, so we got my [guitar] set-up sorted: both of my beloved tube amps\textsuperscript{228} running “in stereo” [Figure 3] (through a line

\textsuperscript{227} A Neumann U87. I’ve had the privilege of using enough U87s on past projects and residencies to know that they suit my voice well, better than any other medium diaphragm condenser that I’ve tried. I set aside budget to rent one for the album production, reasoning that a pristine lead vocal was worth prioritizing if we wanted the record to compete online.

\textsuperscript{228} A vintage Fender Hotrod Deville 410 combo, and vintage Fender Hotrod Deville 212 combo, both first editions.
switcher from my pedalboard)\textsuperscript{229}, plus a DI\textsuperscript{230} and the MOTU talkback mic, for a neat 4 track package

- We dialled in both of the amp tones\textsuperscript{231} \textit{[Figure 4]}, and then got the Tumnus\textsuperscript{232} sorted for the solo boost in [“Sympathy for Lilith”]: it’s literally just acting as a lovely boost with the level all the way up and gain all the way down on top of the existing amp tones”

“May 14

[Recording lead vocal performance for “Sympathy for Lilith”]

- Today is vocal [mess]-around day, to give me some space to warm up and see where I’m at with the song after it’s been 9-12 months since recording the demo… I prefer to record vocals in the early afternoon, when I’m awake after the morning + don’t have a sleep-laden voice, but haven’t had a day to talk yet, so my tone is peak pure and fresh. This weekend gives us a couple of days to do that in a row, so I won’t be stressed by trying to hit the mark in just one day…

- We need the tracks in to [mix engineer] to mix very shortly, like within a week, if we’re meeting a start-of-June deadline with the master\textsuperscript{233}, so I’ll have to go ahead and do vocals without my guitar underneath…

- We did a solid couple of takes of the whole thing… Out of those couple of takes, the beginning verses went easier than I thought they would go. I completely balked at the B section on the first run-through… but gave myself a proper break to catch my breath in the second take (we paused, I gasped it out after the bridge, drank tea, than resumed!), and it was the most natural, solid take I’ve ever done of that section…

- I came up with some dedicated double parts for the ending (a very very high note I’m tickled to get to hit, and a down-octave double in the B section I’m describing as the

\textsuperscript{229} A routing tool that allows audio signal to be split and sent to multiple sources, with options for controlling which of those split signals are on at any given time. Through the switcher, I could control which amp was making sound at any given time without having to actually walk over and turn them on and off (which can be stressful for the tubes). This was useful for A/B tone tests where we wanted to rapidly cycle through one amp alone, amps together, the other amp alone, amps together, etc. and make adjustments.

\textsuperscript{230} The same Radial JDI from lead guitar tracking.

\textsuperscript{231} I chose one of my custom guitars to track the song with; affectionately known as Pink Lady; and played it through both of the amps simultaneously. We placed a Shure SM57 on the bottom speaker cone of the 212 (the top cone has a rattle that sounds great in the room, but is unsettling up close) and did a couple of test recordings to decide that we preferred the e609 on the bottom left speaker of the 410 for negligible perceived warmth. Mic positions decided, I spent a little time refining the onboard EQ of each amp to my particular taste, and adjusted the in-house drives on both amps so that they sounded pleasantly phase-y, but still clear, when their close-miked tracks were played in stereo.

\textsuperscript{232} A Wampler Tumnus Deluxe drive pedal, which I use as a gain boost for guitar solos.

\textsuperscript{233} This was presuming that the Supreme Court would hand down a decision about Roe v. Wade in mid June, which political journalists thought was likely at the time.
Catholic Tenor part…), because I knew we were going to need something [cadential and grand] there
- I have to conclude that I’m out of shape… my diaphragm was all fluttery and shaky by the end. This is a pretty brutal song… I’ve been in the kind of vocal shape that could nail [stuff] like this without breaks and just feel a[n energized] buzz inside [before], not trembly exhaustion, so I’m feeling suitably humbled about preparing for Deep River, where I’ll be expected to do this a.) live, b.) in one piece with nor breaks, and c.) in a set of other songs that also have to sound good”

“May 16
[Recording lead vocal performance, “Sympathy for Lilith”]
- …we tried to shoehorn in a few more takes of the A section when [P] got home from work (which is hours later than my preferred vocal tracking time…) which in hindsight was a mistake
- I was super tired vocally from the past two days, and not in good shape because I haven’t sung at this volume/level of athleticism for a while with any consistency. The resulting takes have a few ok notes in the bridge that I might steal for the final comp (namely the word “count”, because your voice almost has to be in a [wonky] alignment to nail that part, it’s SO high), but the rest of it sounds like shouting more than singing
- I may have [had] a wee breakdown and end[ed] up in tears about this while trying to comp said vocal… Note to self, next time do not start album production, when I am at my worst out-of-shape-ness, with the one song on the record that is both very hard and six minutes long (“Forth” is hard, but barely cracks 4 minutes, and “Demons” + “Breakfast in a Record Store” are long, but easy…)

“May 18
[Recording rhythm guitar performance, “Sympathy for Lilith”]
- Today is called fun with thirds. I don’t feel like typing this out again, so here’s exactly what I said to [a colleague]: “Got a random question for you: do any magic plugins exist that can turn major chords minor? We’ve got a particular guitar that is tonally superior for a part of the first single, but has developed a (completely bizarre) habit of producing the purest major third overtone you’ve ever heard over every single chord played on a particular string. It seems to be a body resonance thing that’s new, and we’ve tried… everything to fix it short of taking it to a tech to de/rehumidify [the guitar]. Th[is]… part is holding up the entire song, so I’m ready to say [screw] it and just, you know, use another guitar, but thought I’d ask first”
- Further explained to [the colleague I consulted]: “So the A section chord progression is D5, A5, G5, with a turnaround from C5 back to D5. It's being used as a pad over a D minor to A minor bassline. And I swear I know how to play a cleanly fretted 5 chord. But if you listen to the tracks, there's this unmistakable ghost/harmonic of a major third over the A5's. Makes it sound like an A major. Likewise, the C section is supposed to be A5, G5, D5, C5, and the A5 and G5 have a major glow that we haven't been able to get rid of. It is ridiculously pure in the room when you play the guitar unplugged,
actually, the distortion on the recordings masks it a bit. [P] hasn't been able to play the
part without causing the phantom third either…”

- “We’ve tried every variation of string/pickup/hardware muting/dampening and it keeps
coming up baked into the DI track. Every other guitar records clean…, and first
position/cowboy chords come out unscathed. It's just bar/power chords on the low E.
All we can figure is that we moved recently and the guitar’s adjusted to the new space
accordingly, because this is new. The demo was recorded with this guitar, and it turned
out perfect, so I’ll take it into a tech soon and hope we just missed something dumb.
We're definitely hallucinating how prominent it is after a day of listening + tracking,
but the A's are bizarre when you put them over the minor bassline.”

- This was obviously massively frustrating to deal with, because no amount of trouble-
shooting or trying to strategically re-record parts of the song seemed to make it… any
better. I have other guitars, the recording will live (I guess) if I’m forced to do the A +
C sections on my gold top [Figure 8] instead of my pink custom [Ibid]. But the pink
custom has that sweet railhammer articulation234 that makes this song, and I’ll be
[angry] if that guitar is out of commission… I have to be able to play power and minor
chords, for [expletive] sake

- We’ve left the problem [alone] for now [to see if the guitar improves overnight]…
Otherwise I will (completely ungraciously) re-record those bits tomorrow

“May 19
[Recording rhythm guitar performance, “Sympathy for Lilith”]

- We tried other guitars and they did not sound good. I made it through two takes with
the gold top before physically recoiling from the juxtaposition

- We decided to try and actually source out where the harmonic was coming from:
located a group of frets around the 11th that are some combination of teeny bit raised,
with a back bowed neck, low action, and all of this exacerbated by the newly humid
weather: it was enough that notes played between the 3rd and 6th frets (so *exactly*
where we need to be with the low A5 + G5) were causing a buzz on the raised frets,
which happened to be exactly the [physical] interval down the neck that produces a
major third

- We jacked up one side of the bridge, restrung the guitar, and adjusted the truss rod to
raise the action on that side, which helped significantly in reducing the span of the
ringing down to roughly the 5th + 6th frets only

- Then we compensated in the C section by re-working the chords: I played the A5 with
only the 5 + 8, hovering my index [finger] to mute the 1 (i.e. the problem string),

234 Straight from the experts at Guitar World magazine, “An electric guitar pickup is an inductive
sensor that consists, in its simplest form, of a coil wrapped around a permanently magnetic pole piece
or pole pieces… This inductive sensor sits below a string made out of a magnetic metal. When the
string vibrates, a signal is generated in the coil. It is this signal that gets amplified to create the sound
of an electric guitar.” [Lawing, 2022]. Traditional guitar pickups have six individual magnetic poles,
one under each guitar string. The Railhammer pickups in my pink custom guitar have a single,
magnetic rail that runs simultaneously under all the strings. Different recordists will evaluate the
sonic difference between these pickup types… differently, but I’ve found that the rails make for a
“hotter” sound: louder, more saturated, more easily driven/high gain, and more responsive.
before resolving to the G5 to imply that the A root had always been there. The bass takes the root in that section, so it worked like a charm in the mix.

- The A section just… refused to cooperate. No matter what we did, including the above trickery *and* literally taping down the low E string so it couldn’t ring, we still ended up with phantom 3rds over the A’s. We ended up just taking two particularly convincing root-less A5’s from the C section and editing them in, and by we I mean me, because Live At Stranded Fest molded me into a zealous little editing wizard who is afraid of nothing and loves weaponizing a good crossfade.

- Then we recorded my half of the solo. It took a couple of hours and 87… takes, but I learned the part on the spot, recorded it in pieces with overlapping seams, and it should sound [very] good once I comp it tomorrow.”

“May 20

[Recording rhythm guitar performance, ‘Sympathy for Lilith’]

- Compung my solo went [very] well, save for the opening lick which I felt doesn’t have enough 8 balance, relative to the 1, in the octaves. We’ll re-record that tomorrow: I want to feel like it sings, not that it just rings

- I came back to ‘this note later in the same day and literally had no idea what the [heck] I was on about. Sounds fine. Took down the amps, guitars are complete for this song”

For the sake of *dispositio*, I briefly pivoted my attention to “Forth” in the last week of May:

“May 25

- I had a Zoom meeting with [R] about the orchestral arrangement for “Forth”, and nearly end[ed] up in tears because it’s so good. He’s a militant perfectionist about filling in all the space in the song, so the arrangement never breaks the immersion or sounds amateurish; there’s always a little something going on, just like in a real orchestra

- I appreciate that he made sure every chorus in the song (it has four) has it’s own identity, so none feel extraneous or like a waste of time: each is a necessary part of the progression of the storytelling

- The horn line in C2235, which shares the lead vocal melody, moves me so much that I can’t describe it without getting legitimately emotional. It’s like he understood that, at a critical point in the song’s emotional climb to the big bridge, the lead vocalist needs support and legitimizing of their authority/authorship, and he underscored it with a horn line that literally sounds like a… cavalry of angels. It’s perfect for the themes of the album, perfect for the momentum of the song, and… it makes me feel like sky daddy himself has finally decided to come down and tell [the narrator] he’s proud of [them]…

- [R] wants my feedback for revisions, and I know I’ll need time to ruminate and really get into the details beyond my emotional first impression, so I got him to print me

235 Track 26, 2:26 - 2:46.
stems that I can play around with in my own Logic session: percussion, woodwinds, strings, keys/pads (including harpsichord and organ, a stroke of genius in the second verse that I love for harkening back to songs like “Demons” that will precede this one on the album), his rudimentary band mix, and horns”

And then, just as quickly, back to pronunciatio with “Sympathy for Lilith”:

“May 28
- The vocal rest [from the past few days] helped some… enough that I make it through a few takes that sound halfway refreshed today, but I’ve made peace with the fact that I’m just vocally too tired to get the lushness + flexibility I’m looking for. I haven’t had enough time to recover, and it’s forcing me to push harder in shout-ier way that isn’t the pronunciatio I’m looking for
- I’m attempting to quit while I’m ahead and declare the next week as a full vocal rest week. We can finish [tinkering] with the instrumental editing for this song, and complete the rhythm guitars for [“7 Years of Blood”], in the mean time. It’ll work out better if [the mix engineer] gets both [“Sympathy for Lilith”] and [“7 Years of Blood”] around the same time anyway…: between them is a pretty good representation of the album’s range, so he’ll be building the mix foundations with a better sense of the whole record than if he’d just started with… [“Sympathy for Lilith”] on its own”

3.4. June 2022

I struggled to consistently negotiate dispositio and pronunciatio as production continued into the summer months. On the one hand, “Sympathy for Lilith” was an informative experience for guitar tracking. I began June by recording the rhythm guitar for [“7 Years of Blood”], using exactly the same recording setup from “Sympathy for Lilith”, albeit with a different guitar237. I tweaked the onboard amp EQs to suit the new guitar238 and then recorded the whole song in a few short takes, reflecting in my notes239 that, “…the [“7 Years of Blood”] rhythm guitars, which despite not sounding nearly as

---

236 Raw, un-effected audio tracks are “multi-tracks”. Exported audio tracks, effects processing included, are “printed tracks” or “printed multis” etc. Exported groups of audio tracks - efficient bundles of related tracks + effects + printed tracks compiled into single audio files - are “stems”. Mix engineers usually do not want stems: too much is pre-determined and printed for them to manoeuvre freely in the mix. But stems are ideal for interested parties that want to play around a little in the mix without having to actually wrangle or radically change a mix, like experimenting producers; A+R reps; or savvy artists.

237 My custom gold top with Seymour Duncan Seth Lover pickups.

238 The gold top has a warmer, more mid-heavy sound than my pink custom, and I adjusted my amp rig to embrace it; the result is much more classic punk than metal.

239 Production began to move so quickly in June that I stopped taking dedicated notes after every single session, opting instead to write larger chunks at approximately weekly intervals that each covered several, itemized dates.
aesthetically slick and poppy as I intellectually anticipated they would somehow inevitably have to be, [sound] irrevocably Correct and resonant to my body. So I guess that song is meant to have halfway rough-around-the-edges, punk rhythm guitar tones on it!”.

The lead guitar part followed in quick succession, also mirroring the “Sympathy for Lilith” process. P and I set up the same speaker cab and microphones, refined his Kemper profiles to suit the new song, and a few hours later, we had a complete guitar part. Much of this ease was due to the composition of “7 Years of Blood” itself - a three minute song with only five chords and two harmonic progressions - but it boosted my confidence in our methods.

I found the “7 Years of Blood” guitars so compelling that I made arrangement changes in other songs: I worried about “Mezzanine” sounding sufficiently inspiring when it would be immediately next to “7 Years of Blood” on the deluxe album. The guitar parts in “Mezzanine” were all set in stone enough that I didn’t think changing their compositions was an option, so I doubled down on my resolution to upgrade the bass. Rather than ask P to play bass, I contacted one of the band’s former bass players, who I will call S. I knew S to be a fastidious metal player with an open mind for composition, and thought his work would sincerely elevate the album if he was willing to play. Thankfully, he was! I sent him the “Mezzanine” demo, and we scheduled a session in the first week of June.

Based on my description of the song, S brought a five string Dingwall D-ROC and a pedalboard with Darkglass Microtubes X7 and B7K Ultra pre-amps. I was immediately taken with the tone from this combination that S had already dialled in during his private rehearsals, so we opted to rout the bass through the desk speakers for monitoring and forgo a bass amp/cabinet entirely. I recorded the bass through the MOTU in two parallel channels: a pure JDI signal and a channel with the pre-amps baked in, both gain-staged to roughly equal level. I asked for the bass part to generally follow and support the lead guitar motif throughout the song, but in a way that was coherent with metal norms, and we came up with an arrangement that was exactly what I was looking for.

We chose a brighter patch this time, with a smoother distortion and more lively midrange to suit the upbeat, campy vibe of the song; and then P switched to a seven string, baritone Agile guitar that has a sizzly articulation, so every single note in the constant lead guitar motif can be individually heard.

The “Mezzanine” guitar parts are all either riffs that play specific melodies (which can’t be changed without altering the hooks of the song) or chord progressions that are necessary, functional pads under those riffs.

Part of producing Nameless Friends is understanding the literal extent of the band name and memorizing the group’s past and present roster. To date, four drummers; five bassists; two keyboardists; two guitarists; and four vocalists (one lead, three backing); have worn the Nameless Friends uniform as Numbers One through Seven. Only one has ever left the group on less than friendly terms, and that is the former bass player discussed in the previous chapter.
As I noted after, “…delighted to be right that [S] brought a clear, metal perspective to that song: the pre-choruses actually HIT now that the bass is appropriately aggressive…Adding driving V2 + C2s in the rhythm section as a form of like energy automating/stepping/gain-staging is apparently my technique of the week. I was legitimately delighted, giddy even, at how well the rhythm guitar strumming pattern in [“7 Years of Blood”] really elevates + progresses the song through V2 + C2 (aided by [drummer]’s switch to the toms, smart cookie), and then [S] walked in with exactly the same idea for the bass in V3 and C2 in “Mezzanine” (V1 and V2 both come before C1, V3 is directly before C2, for those readers who don’t live in my head), and… it work[s] like a charm. I had to tailor him a little bit in V2 and C1/C3 to make sure we kept *some* bluesiness, but that was as easy as just suggesting he follow the drum part more closely in those sections; [drummer] already laid the foundation, and it’s rock solid, per usual.”

One the other hand, the lead vocals were going poorly. While the instrumentation was progressing through multiple songs, I hadn’t moved on vocally from “Sympathy for Lilith”. I re-recorded the song several times during the first week of June, culminating in a furious and ultimately fruitless comping/editing day that I detailed in my notes:

“June 10
- … did a bunch more vocals for [“Sympathy for Lilith”] last weekend, and after spending this week [virtually] killing myself to comp, edit, and tune those vocals (I may have taught myself how to use Melodyne in a fit of… spite on Wednesday night…). I have learned another… lesson about not pushing things when they’re not working…
- Despite the tens of hours I’ve sunk into this… vocal, it doesn’t move me or hit right in my body. I like exactly two notes: the sustained “good”s at the end of the D section, and literally those alone give me the embodied feeling of Rightness, that they are indeed Correct and I am Finished recording them. Despite my efforts to gaslight myself through the wonders of technology, no amount of comping, tuning, or [editing] will otherwise stimulate a similar attachment to any other part of the entire rest of the vocal track, and faced with the prospect of sending it on to [mixing engineer] to mix yesterday, I finally owned up to hating it and thinking it sounds like the [awful patchwork] that it is

243 Track 28, 0:56 - 1:10 and 1:35 - 1:48

244 Track 28, 2:14 - 2:40.

245 Track 28, 2:40 - 3:05.

246 By which I mean, an amount of restraint and syncopation/groove that isn’t explicitly driving.


248 More on this in the next chapter.
[P] agreed that he could hear the patchwork vibes and inconsistency, and also validated that as the producer, I should be pumped about the lead vocal on my opus lead single, so I’m getting valuable practice at doing the right thing even when it’s… hard…

This revelation was validated by the [“7 Years of Blood”] rhythm guitars, which despite not sounding nearly as aesthetically slick and poppy as I intellectually anticipated they would somehow inevitably have to be, are irrevocably Correct… [implying that I have no problem recognizing what I envision to be proper pronunciation when I do hear it]”

Faced with either accepting the lacklustre lead vocal pronunciation as it was, or changing production dispositio to accommodate the lead vocalist’s struggles, I decided to change dispositio. As much as I wanted “Sympathy for Lilith” to be a useful work for social justice, I reasoned that it wouldn’t be able to do anything at all with a tortured lead vocal. I had done my best to force a workable performance out with enough buffer time to mix the song before the anticipated Supreme Court decision on Roe v. Wade, and it hadn’t panned out. I let go of that proposed release plan and moved on with recording other elements of the album.

In the second week of June, I recorded the crowd vocals that appear in the bridge of “7 Years of Blood”. As I recounted in my notes,

“Since the great [“Sympathy for Lilith”] vocal debacle is ongoing, the Neumann is permanently mounted on a stand that has been gaff taped (rather securely) to the centre of the studio floor, and I refuse to move it until the [explicative] track is done. This was perfectly workable for doing the [“7 Years of Blood”] crowd vocals on the 10th: it’s the best vocal mic currently in my arsenal, and it can go in omni249. I made a casual social media call out on… my personal accounts for people willing to come shout on the record (specifically framed as an informal call for “yelling”, instead of singing, because I don’t want trained singers who will sound too neat/precious), and got answers back from a nice gender250 split of six people - [a female friend], [a nonbinary friend], [two musicians from a band251 I produce, one male and one female], F, and [her partner, a male music video art director]. [Female friend] and [nonbinary friend] couldn’t make it at the last minute, which was just as well considering I [ran out of] headphone extension cables at four when running the set up on the day of.

For a full explainer on how microphones “listen”, Robert Toft’s book *Recording Classical Music* is a great resource [Toft, 2020]. For our purposes here, different microphones can be made to receive sound in different shapes, i.e. “listen” in different directions and scopes. Those shapes + scopes are called “polar patterns”. Most of the microphones described in this dissertation are cardioid microphones: they pick up sonic information happening within a small bloom directly in front of the mic. Omni-directional microphones, as the name suggests, pick up sonic information happening in all directions around the microphone. The Neumann U87 is a special beast that can be used in multiple polar patterns: cardioid for the lead vocals, omni directional for the gang vocals.

Different genders are generally correlated with different vocal qualities and frequency resonances. A well-rounded crowd will ideally sound like an even mix of all genders.

A punk band with a deliberately raw singing style; no need to worry about precious singing from these particular musicians.

---

249 For a full explainer on how microphones “listen”, Robert Toft’s book *Recording Classical Music* is a great resource [Toft, 2020]. For our purposes here, different microphones can be made to receive sound in different shapes, i.e. “listen” in different directions and scopes. Those shapes + scopes are called “polar patterns”. Most of the microphones described in this dissertation are cardioid microphones: they pick up sonic information happening within a small bloom directly in front of the mic. Omni-directional microphones, as the name suggests, pick up sonic information happening in all directions around the microphone. The Neumann U87 is a special beast that can be used in multiple polar patterns: cardioid for the lead vocals, omni directional for the gang vocals.

250 Different genders are generally correlated with different vocal qualities and frequency resonances. A well-rounded crowd will ideally sound like an even mix of all genders.

251 A punk band with a deliberately raw singing style; no need to worry about precious singing from these particular musicians.
I left the Neumann where it was and just popped it in omni-directional, and gave the group a run down of the concept of the song and where the crowd vocals fit into that. Everyone was already pumped by the implied chaotic nature of the session from the social media posts, and I embraced the joy and made them all a cup of tea like Real Singers before we got started. Concept explained, I had them all wander around the room making random noise while I set the mic level and monitors: it was a simple setup running one headphone amp (with four outs\textsuperscript{252}) from the MOTU phones 2, then my phones from the MOTU phones 1\textsuperscript{253}, and my laptop recording the Neumann U87 to a new mono track. I encouraged everyone to really vibe with the song\textsuperscript{254} as authentically as they felt, and feel free to move around during takes while they yelled; thankfully the song is (apparently) a banger, because they all loved it and seemingly had a grand old time… while bouncing around and chanting “BLOOD” at the top of their lungs. I encouraged them to spread out generally evenly around the mic, swapping places in between takes, and [I myself] occupied whatever corner they left open… We slammed through six takes this way, took a vocal break for 15-20 minutes, did it six more times, and it will never get old for me playing back a recording for people and watching their eyes go wide at the wizardry of production! The twelve tracks sound beastly together; even [P], when he got home after work, grinned and said “Oh that sounds [a profane synonym for “great”]” (high praise!).

While the other four yellers mostly used their own voices, as loudly as possible, throughout, I used my roaming fifth of space to interject one-off vocal oddities that helped believably broaden the crowd: a purely sibilant falsetto edge one time with a wide open mouth flanked by hands; my best deep-chest thrustued impersonation of Dog the Bounty Hunter another time; a really high-pitched-ass squeak; my normal voice; a bratty, nasal yell; my best take on an Authoritative, mid-Atlantic-accent mid range; and other oddities I forget because I was having too much fun…”

---

\textsuperscript{252} So each singer could wear their own pair of monitoring headphones (two pairs of Shure 840s, one pair of Shure 440s, and a pair of Bose quietcomfort 15s that I scrounged from P’s personal collection with permission) with an extension cable, freeing them to move around my home studio.

\textsuperscript{253} I wore the Shure 940s that I normally reserve for mastering, so that one of the group singers could borrow my usual Shure 840 tracking headphones. When faced with the choice, I never lend the 940s.

\textsuperscript{254} The group was listening to a rough levelling of the recorded (and by now comped) “7 Years of Blood” guitar, demo bass, and drum tracks. No reference tracks necessary, and no metronome or demo lead vocals to distract.
Next I tackled the keyboard solo in Demons\textsuperscript{255}, reasoning that it would need to be done before we could complete one of the only outstanding drum edits on the album. Per my notes,

“June 23
- [R\textsuperscript{256}] came in to do the Demons keyboard solo on the 16th… I was solidly worried about demo-chasing this one: the keyboard part that [former bassist] initially arranged as a placeholder is too simple to credibly put on the record, but so simple that I could still faithfully sing it to you almost a year after making the demo, so I’m trying to be extra flexible and openminded to make sure that I don’t inadvertently steer [R] towards the part that we’re trying to overhaul and replace
- I stopped worrying so much when he warmed up and plunked out a few fills that were already so ridiculously fast that [former bassist] could never, and re-assessed that my job would actually probably be more artistic guidance than I’d feared: getting a narrative out of his part instead of 32 bars of shred
- We spent a good bit of time defining the keyboard tone\textsuperscript{257}… The new drum part helped this enormously: [drummer] had such conviction about his drum part during the keyboard solo that I haven’t entertained altering it, and it speaks to a savage little Devil-Went-Down-to-Georgia [by the Charlie Daniels Band] [vibe]… So much of what makes this record [is] pushing comfort zone[s], so that’s the sensation I want the keyboard tone to match: it has to feel a little wild, not quite safe
- I was initially planning to scrap the timing of the demo guitars and re-write them around the new keyboard solo, but then the licks [keyboardist] came up with, that I liked, could so easily be tweaked to fit the old [guitar] parts that it seemed like the song had always been written that way and I [chose] to keep the guitars. We’re going to re-do them with better mics, but the arrangement feels solid and intentional now
- Writing this up, and I realize the adjective that I’m looking for the describe [this] bridge is wicked: the song sounds wicked now in a way that the demo was missing, both in the Merriam Webster and 80s slang senses of the word”.

\textsuperscript{255} R used his own Korg Kronos. I recorded it straight into the MOTU, and we monitored the part for recording and playback through the desk speakers. I routed the keyboard as two tracks that combined into a stereo LR pair, so we could hear some of the longer fills literally cascade from one side of the mix to the other. I entertained a simultaneous MIDI track for fun, and ran a cable for it, but Logic refused to consistently store corresponding MIDI takes for every audio take, overwriting and deleting several of them. After a few re-starts of the program and other troubleshooting, I gave up and recorded audio only. The tone we had sculpted was onboard the Korg anyway, and I couldn’t realistically see myself wanting to change it with different MIDI patches.

\textsuperscript{256} While working with R on the “Forth” orchestral arrangement, I discovered that he is also a talented keyboardist. Better yet, he’s a talented keyboardist with session experience. Hired!

\textsuperscript{257} Eventually settling on a mesh of classic, blues- and gospel-based metal; and modern metal; that a member of the production team would describe as “Jorden Rudess [from Dream Theatre], but winking”.
In the third week of June, I decided that we should embrace a bout of humid weather and record the album’s only acoustic guitar, the twelve-string guitar part on “Bitter Man”. I was trying to cultivate and evoke a rural, vaguely gothic sense of atmosphere when I chose to arrange the “Bitter Man” demo with a twelve-string guitar - reminiscent of Bon Jovi’s “ Wanted Dead or Alive” - and I remained steadfastly committed to this particular bit on Blasphemy. P owned exactly one twelve string guitar, which has a lovely, shimmery high end that I wanted on the record. But this guitar is also a recalcitrant old dame that buzzes awfully around the edges of notes in most weather, and vehemently resisted having its action changed to compensate. I thought humid weather might just engorge the wood enough, and yet keep it supple and thus flexible enough, for us to get some clean takes out of it, and was pleased to be right:

“June 23, continued
- [P] and I had a delightful, organic, puttering start with “Bitter Man” on the 19th. What started as a plan to ease into the song by [playing around with] the pads turned into a spontaneous organ composition of his, based on the “Bitter Man” chords, that I really love. It doesn’t fit will with the [“Hello”258-style] piano part at all, and as much as we both briefly entertained the idea of replacing the piano part with this new organ interpretation, I had to be the authority that [chose] the piano won out… [the piano] sounds timeless for the song in a way that the organ part never could; with the lyrics being as intense and dark as they are, the organ doesn’t sound appropriately grand, instead just rather trendy in the most pejorative sense
- Thankfully, it occurred to me five milliseconds after making that decision that this organ part would be a superb interlude… I put an empty sticky note simply called ‘Interlude’ between [“Demons”] + [“Sympathy for Lilith”] on the recording bulletin board… [at first] because it was the halfway point on the record, but the minute this idea occurred to me it was equally obvious that that is exactly the right place of where this interlude should go. [“Demons”] + [“Sympathy for Lilith”] are sister songs, both chaotic prog behemoths that have blues undertones and a bone to pick with the Bible, one light descending into mad darkness and one dark ascending into manic lightness. What better to put between them than a weightless interlude, pilfered from the record’s most honest, intimate song, like the portal between reality and the upside down in Stranger Things, vaguely glowing in between two mirror realms?
- The “Bitter Man” guitars took two rounds: the first (on the 20th? 21st?) was frustrating: we went through every… mic in the house searching for a nice acoustic guitar sound. The onboard DI in the twelve string is tinny [awfulness]259, and the onboard EQ doesn’t improve this… The Neumann sounds great as a room mic in omni, but has way too much low mid response up close260… a Rode NT1A was

258 By Adele, see the last chapter.
259 Track 106.
260 Track 105.
weirdly far-away-sounding and bulging in the mids; an SM58 just sounded like coffee house amateur hour; the AT2020 was ok, but with such a distinct tonal colour that it was distracting against everything else not recorded with an AT2020; and an SM7B was a marginal, less exciting improvement on the 58.

- My AKG C417 lav mic got close: I tried it in a fit of inspiration for something with a dry-sounding core and live edges, and it would do in a pinch, but didn’t sound intentional enough in the lows for me to commit to: I don’t want any part of this record to sound [cobbled together], even if it was. So a quick text to [my supervisor for permission] and grumbling trip to [Western’s recording studio], and an AKG C414 was perfectly delivering exactly what I was looking for.

- By the time we’d sorted the bloody miking it was late, and a few bash-throughs of the song left [P] irritable and me trying to soothe… We communicated well enough to get a rough version of the part recorded, and he came back for the second round on the 22nd and knocked out a final version of within an hour, in excellent humour, having had time to percolate”

Meanwhile, I was still struggling to make any vocal progress in the face of summer allergies. From the same week’s notes,

“June 23, continued
- The [“Sympathy for Lilith”] vocals have become a source of stress throughout this that I describe to [P] as like having the yips… I’m trying not to despair at being the person holding the song back when it’s our first single… This is not helped by [a gendered conflict with our mix engineer that I detail in the next chapter]
- This past week got halfway close: I resolved to treat myself like an athlete (body is a temple, etc.) on the 19th and did a full yoga, shower, tea routine, [which] lead to the first time I’ve ever sung the whole song solidly through. The whole thing isn’t [the final] take, but there are great moments, and it gave me enormous confidence…
- The 20th I took a vocal rest break to be safe; 21st found myself too worn out…; and became near despondent on the 22nd because my attempts went *that* poorly, until a

261 Track 107.
262 Track 108. This track is actually the sum of two different mic placements that P and I tried with the SM58, arranged on either side of a Jecklin disc [Toft, 2020]. A Jecklin disc is my go-to technique for uncooperative acoustic guitars, but alas, was no match for this particular 12 string.
263 Track 109.
264 Track 110.
265 Track 111.
266 Track 112. For stereo spread, the final “Bitter Man” mix uses the C414 as the primary mic, with doubles from the DI and Neumann.
267 A slang term for performance anxiety, usually in athletics, that takes on a near supernatural quality. Athletes with “the yips” can experience such profound anxiety about their ability to perform that they override their hard-won muscle memory and become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
quick Google unearthed that the allergy medication I’d started taking had almost
certainly dried me out beyond the point of falsetto articulation… Today, the 23rd, …
I’m taking vocal rest to prepare for our next attempt on Saturday by hydrating the
ever-loving [heck] out of myself, not speaking, contemplating buying a facial steamer,
and letting my nose run into a tissue tucked into my sweatshirt because I’ve stopped
taking the blasted allergy medication. My palate is itchy, [screw] trees and [screw] this… song”

I had a brief respite within a few days, later updating my notes:

“The US Supreme Court overturn[ed] Roe v. Wade on June 24th, and it was
galvanizing in a [messed] up way (roll credits for “7 Years of Blood”)… I took the 25th
to be despondent while [P] was at work, and then decided somewhere in the middle of the
afternoon that it was never going to get more raw than this.

In a dark way, this session was an enormous relief. It apparently took this level of
raw, awful trauma to get over how deeply ingrained my sense of self-restraint and female
training is (be good! don’t make ugly sounds with your body, that’s rude!! pretty sounds
only! masterful sounds are good manners!!)…

I sang… 4 full takes of the song and 30ish total for all the assorted other parts…
Despite shifting the evaluative focus from athleticism, treating me like an athlete did
work wonders: I did another long, steamy shower, quiet warm up in the shower, and
steamy tea to inhale during the session (while wearing very comfortable/non-restricting
clothes, which was for my complete sensory overload/intolerance that day as much as a
production choice).”

I comped this vocal over the remainder of the month, because the pain in my voice
was so palpable that I struggled to listen to the unmixed takes for more than a half hour or
so at a time. The comped track was so raw that I felt forced to pitch tune it, which didn’t
sit well with me. On one hand, I think that the current standards of vocal tuning in
popular music are inhuman and absurd; but on the other, I wanted our song to be able to
compete in the marketplace with all the absurd songs. This genre-abiding pronunciatio
won out, but I was dismayed every time that I listened to the lead vocal and heard the
telltale smoothing of Melodyne’s algorithm.

To close out the month of June, [P] and I kept the guitar recording rolling and
worked on “Demons”: “[P] + I pounded out the guitars for Demons over the week of June
26 - July 2, and it was smooth and dare I say fun to do. We… feel like we [are] really
hitting our stride with recording, finally, because there’s nothing really unique to note
about how the guitars for this song were recorded: it’s exactly how we’ve done the other
electric guitars for the record so far, only this time we knew what to expect, miked up the
amps as before and they sounded great, we were faster and more honed in when tone
hunting, and rehearsals with the Deep River band had us in better shape as players… The
V	extsuperscript{268} was admittedly a pain-in-the-[neck] for tuning: the floyd rose	extsuperscript{269} was doing a [poor] job of holding the strings in tune, and the locking nut didn’t seem to make it literally any better, so I had to do more, shorter takes with regular tuning breaks in between. But after the nonsense with my pink guitar and The Thirds during “Sympathy for Lilith”, I didn’t feel remotely phased as a producer, and [P] seemed much more relaxed as an engineer/guitar tech. Just like, ‘Of course, another one of those guitar things, ok bring it on’, so we rolled with it and cleared the guitar tracks in a pretty normal amount of time with good vibes…”

3.5. July 2022

Nameless Friends was scheduled to spend much of July 2022 preparing for their appearance (and live recording) at Deep River Summerfest, so naturally, I spent the first week of the month “felled by an awful, mysterious, non-COVID illness”!

I re-organized dispositio where I could: “While I’m recovering from [this] deeply unpleasant vacation, I [am] pondering… what to do about “Mezzanine” and “Breakfast in a Record Store”. The first half of the album is taking shape - we’re now done the rhythm section and guitars on “Sympathy for Lilith”, “7 Years of Blood”, “Bitter Man”, and “Demons”, plus the hardest/flagship vocals on “Sympathy for Lilith” - and [it’s] sounding pretty… spectacular, even just as raw tracks, [but] I’m cognizant that “Mezzanine” and [“Breakfast in a Record Store”] are distinctly more basic songs than the rest of the record. They have great moments, but are more conventional in structure, less flashy/prog moments/deviations than the other songs. I don’t want Blasphemy to end up being a concept album that punishes the straighter songs by making them forgettable in comparison to the other more high art, conceptual tunes. We’re already elevating them by bringing in [S] to play bass: my logic [is] that the other tunes have so much going on, the bass [on those songs] is an afterthought and can afford to be [more like the] paint-by-numbers bass lines from the demos… where sparser songs are going to need every part to be a really great, finessed execution of that part. But great bass can sound disproportionate, too low-heavy, if the rest of the mix isn’t also rising to the occasion…

[I’m] booked in for an artist residency at the Kingston Grand Theatre the week of July 11-15 (for another, separate project), and up to this point [have] been planning to abandon Blasphemy for that week… [but I think that] our production schedule at the Grand could be made to include some guitar recording for Blasphemy to keep us on track… and it seem[s] like a perfect alignment: record the guitars for “Mezzanine” and “Breakfast in a Record Store” in the Grand Theatre, so those tracks have the extra oomph, luxury, grandeur of the space of the room. I can keep the drum and vocal production the same across the record for consistency, which is important to me, but then the guitars +

	extsuperscript{268} The Jackson Rhoades X series V that I used to play the rhythm guitar on Demons.

	extsuperscript{269} A style of guitar bridge that is held in place by a careful tension between metal springs and the guitar strings themselves. Floyd Roses can be manipulated into all sorts of wild dives and effects because of this flexibility, usually with a lever like a whammy bar, but they also give the guitar a sort of tyranny over its own tuning: depending on how the wood of the guitar shifts, and passes that shift through the strings, guitars with Floyd Rose bridges can literally pull themselves out of tune.
bass on the simpler songs are proportionately jacked up in production to help those songs compete with all the #addkeyboard monstrosities on the rest of the record.”

Once I recovered physically, P and I travelled to Kingston and proceeded to do exactly that. We recorded the rhythm and lead guitar performances for “Mezzanine” and “Breakfast in a Record Store” on the main stage in the Regina Rosen auditorium. We used the same amp/cab/close-miking set up that had used for all of the other album guitars to date, with one notable addition. I knew that the Grand Theatre had a beautiful, full-size grand piano, and had requested that the piano be set up onstage for my residency. When we arrived, I discovered that the in-house engineers had indeed brought the piano onstage and opened up the top, and also mounted a matched pair of DPA mics inside (thoughtfully anticipating that I was a music producer and would want to record). On a hunch, I set up our guitar rig roughly 10-15 feet away from the piano, routed the DPA mics - still mounted inside the piano [Figure 6] - to the MOTU, and tried recording a take of P playing guitar. The result was awesome: the DPAs were far enough away from the amp to capture a gorgeous sense of room decay from the auditorium, and the piano they were mounted to added a little halo of sympathetic vibration to the tracks. Their placement in the piano obviously violated the rule of three, but I couldn’t detect any audible phase issues in the tracks; only a sense of grandeur, just like I was aiming for.

I returned to London a week later, and decided that, for the production team’s collective sanity, the remaining time before Deep River should be spent completing tasks rather than starting new ones. P and I comped and edited all of the guitar tracks recorded to date during the third week of July, and only then “…took a stab at the vocals for Bitter Man on the 24th of July: I’m embracing the shower/steam/comfy clothes routine as a production practice for vocal tracking, because it… really raises the quality of takes we get.” While this vocal routine didn’t yield any final tracks for the album, I was content to be building healthy habits and confidence in my vocal performance.

This fresh confidence pushed me to make a decision about pronunciation that also had dispositio and elocutio implications: I decided that I didn’t want to use tuning software on the lead vocal performances on Blasphemy. Any of them. Ever since I had tuned and thus supposedly finished the lead vocals on “Sympathy for Lilith”, I had become increasingly resentful of how normalized pitch tuning was on mainstream lead vocals. I heard the infinitesimal yet tell-tale signature of Melodyne’s algorithm everywhere, and - whether this was a real phenomenon or my own projection is debatable - most prominently on female vocals. Tuning began to feel like a gendered obligation that

270 Who was also engineering much of my work on the separate project taking place in Kingston.

271 Tracks 123 and 124.

272 If multiple microphones recording the same sound source are not at least three times further away from one another than said sound source, there can be phase issues between the tracks. This is called the “Rule of 3” [Toft, 2020].

273 Because it is by far the simplest, shortest, easiest song on the record for my artist, me, to sing. I hoped to start with baby steps and develop a sense of mastery and confidence, before moving on to harder songs.
I chafed at: why is it normalized to smooth the grain\textsuperscript{274} of lead vocal performances into pore-less perfection? Are female singers not allowed to sound like they have bodies? My anti-tuning sympathies crystallized into practice when I stumbled across a Pitchfork interview with Neko Case from the New Pornographers\textsuperscript{275}. Case rails against vocal tuning as an unmusical, objectifying, capitalist crutch in the interview, and I’m including her entire discussion here because it’s brilliant:

"Case: There’s some part about the craft of singing-- craft is too important of a word, I hate that word but I just used it anyway-- in a lot of places, it hasn't really made it. It's not to do with the people who are doing it as much as the people who are producing it. There's technology like auto tune and pitch shifting so you don't have to know how to sing. That shit sounds like shit! It's like that taste in diet soda, I can taste it-- and it makes me sick. When I hear auto tune on somebody's voice, I don't take them seriously… you hear somebody like Alicia Keys, who I know is pretty good, and you'll hear a little bit of auto tune and you're like, "You're too fucking good for that. Why would you let them do that to you? Don't you know what that means?" It's not an effect like people try to say, it's for people like Shania Twain who can't sing. Yet there they are, all over the radio, jizzing saccharine all over you. It's a horrible sound and it's like, "Shania, spend an extra hour in the studio and you'll hit the note and it'll sound fine. Just work on it, it's not like making a burger!"

Pitchfork: She's pretty busy making videos and shit though.

Case: It's rough, I know. She's so rich she could get somebody else to do the other stuff while she spends that extra hour in the studio. Or Madonna! Just hit the note! Don't pretend it's William Orbit being crafty-- we know you're not hitting the note because you have other shit to do. You can do it, I have faith in you. But don't leave the studio before you hit that fucking note. And you know what? When you do hit it you're going to feel so much more valid that it'll come through in all the other shit you're supposed to be doing later in the day. Seriously! And if Celine Dion is supposedly the great singer that she says she is why is there auto tune on every fucking word in her songs? Can't you just hit it, Celine? Do you have another baby book to shoot? You gotta paint your baby to look like a pot of peas? What are you doing that you can't be singing in the studio? It's your fucking job!"\textsuperscript{276}

I agreed with Case intuitively, and vowed that all of Blasphemy’s lead vocals would retain their raw pitch. I decided to continue with rhythmic tweaks to the lead

\textsuperscript{274} Barthes, 1990 (294-299).

\textsuperscript{275} Dumbal, 2006.

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid.
vocal, i.e. moving parts of the performance relative to time, but only to keep the lead vocal cohered with the band and grid. I was aware that this decision would put even further pressure on the lead vocal performance, but I embraced that pressure. I wanted to prove that I could, to quote Case, do “my fucking job”.

I considered the rest of the month to be productive when the band travelled to Deep River Summerfest and played a solid set that P and the FOH festival team recorded. I thought that the live versions of several songs from Blasphemy - including Need, “Mezzanine”, and an older Nameless Friends tune called “Classic Protagonist”, reimagined with Blasphemy-style organ - would be perfect fodder for the deluxe version of the album, and filed those thoughts away for future dispositio that is beyond the bounds of this project.

3.6. August 2022

In August 2022, I once again found myself navigating illness. P and I attended an event in Toronto at the beginning of the month, and a short incubation period later were struck down with cases of COVID-19 that took weeks to resolve. I struggled during this time with both the physical weakness and the constant reminder of my own human fallibility, and wasn’t well enough to recommence recording or work of any kind until the last week of the month. This was compounded by conflict with the album’s first mixing engineer, W, that became gendered and thus personally triggering for me, which I will discuss in the next chapter. I chose to remove W from the project during this time: as frail as I felt, I was firm in my convictions about how the record should sound.

I finished the rhythm guitar recording for “Forth” in the hours immediately proceeding the onslaught of my symptoms. I was so comfortable with guitar recording dispositio at this point; i.e. how to approach, refine tone, and set up to record/engineer the guitar recordings; that my conscious production practice, and thus my notes, began to focus more heavily on the nuances of pronunciatio. For example, in contrast to the tone-heavy trouble-shooting that dominated my decision-making around the “Sympathy for Lilith” rhythm guitar, by “Forth” I was more concise, serene, and detail-oriented: “…we stereo recorded [the rhythm guitar] exactly the same way as [the previously recorded rhythm guitar tracks on the album], and I spent time being a niggly little perfectionist about the chord transitions throughout the song. My usual technique is a little [up-down strum that creates a] “chick-a” [sound] to cut off the preceding chord with the right hand, so I can move the left hand to the following chord without noise or much effort to reduce noise/be smooth about it; this is the saving grace of keeping noise out of your guitar parts when you have to do a lot of strumming, but sing at the same time and can’t concentrate about moderating transitions, or even look down at them. But in “Forth”, there’s already SO much going on with the orchestral arrangement that I’m editing rather ruthlessly: I

Another level of inhumanity, which this epiphany did make me question! But I decided to keep the grid as a lesser of two evils. First, practically, we didn’t have the time to re-record the entire album without a grid. And second, unless Nameless Friends was going to torpedo their entire marketing budget to get the band to re-record in a single room together, the grid + editing were the only way to re-produce the tightness of band playing together when the members recorded separately.
want the song to maintain a level of mainstream, pop radio sensibility, and it can’t too
that if the mix is too ornate and polyphonic. So out go the chick-a’s for most of the song
(the rhythmic ornamentation was too much [on top of everything else in the mix]), and I
replaced them with a series of single strum-and-lift transitions that strategically
escalate\textsuperscript{278} to strummed-through transitions, that finally [escalated to] my auto-pilot
technique in the last choruses of the song.”

My production practice followed a similar focus shift with the lead guitar tracking
for “Forth”, when I was well enough to produce it three weeks later. I was wary about
recording this particular part at first, because it bears a striking resemblance to the lead
guitar part in AC/DC’s “Thunderstruck”: fast, detailed, and relentlessly enduring through
large swaths of the song. I anticipated that it would be difficult to cleanly record, and
privately steeled myself to support P through what I feared could become a discouraging
slog. Thankfully, “[P’s] guitar tracking for “Forth” was surprisingly painless. It likely
helped that I made him actually learn the parts during demo recording last summer, [so]
he was re-activating a muscle memory instead of having to… learn the thing for the first
time. We split it over a weekend: Saturday (August 27th?) we chose his tones and
reviewed the parts, letting him plink away at them on an unplugged guitar and get them
under his fingers for a couple of hours. Then we ran errands for a few hours, had dinner,
and came back to record a few takes of the song that night. The percolation paid off: his
first take of the solo was completely improvised and… exquisite, we’re keeping that
entire composition as the final solo for the song\textsuperscript{279} (albeit with a couple of single-note
swaps to really perfect it\textsuperscript{280}), and the rest was perfectly solid. He slept on it, then came
back on Sunday and really nailed the rest of the transitions in the fast parts.”

As I regained my strength, I asked P to spend a dedicated session working on the
lead vocal monitoring with me, “…so I could experiment without worrying about
preserving my voice for actual singing.” Recording the lead vocals for “Sympathy for
Lilith” had been so gruelling that I didn’t think that way of working was sustainable\textsuperscript{281}
(\textit{dispositio}) or conducive to good performances (\textit{pronunciatio}), and I wanted to try
something different for the other songs on the record. Per my notes, “The vocal
monitoring has been a bit of a challenge this whole time… ([I wanted a] D.W. Fearn\textsuperscript{282} or
bust, and they don’t seem to rent those), so we’ve been opting to send the Neumann into

\textsuperscript{278} Tracks 117 through 120.

\textsuperscript{279} Track 26, 3:05 - 3:26.

\textsuperscript{280} I replaced cleanly picked notes at (Track 26, 3:24) and (Track 26, 3:26) with wailing pinch
harmonics from other takes that really ratcheted up the perceived emotional intensity of the
performance.

\textsuperscript{281} Unless we wanted to finish recording the album in approximately 2026.

\textsuperscript{282} The only outboard pre-amp suitable for industry-standard vocals, that a.) I had had enough
experience with from other records to be confident renting at the time, and b.) liked enough to
everish using on our record, was a D.W. Fearn VT2. If you have one that I can rent for future
records, email me!
the MOTU raw, and [add sonic] colour in post. That’s posed a tightrope for the vocal monitoring to walk: when I’m loud, I’m really… loud, but I also need to be able to hear the articulation around the soft parts of the songs, and some of them have massive dynamic range. But compressing/limiting the monitors has [so far] been too disorienting for me, and I end up fighting the compressor when I can’t hear proportionate loudness by pushing my voice to the point of tiredness and over-singing. So to maintain a 1-to-1 ratio of my room loudness to recording loudness, but not record in too hot, we’re [going to try] no compression, gaining the [heck] out of the vocal track post-fader, and putting up with the inevitable output distortion that I create in the loud parts…” My confidence in my own body and vocal abilities was so low at this point that I earnestly concluded my production notes for the session with, “No one ended up in tears… go team.”

I rounded out the month of August with the bass guitar for “Breakfast in a Record Store”: “[S]… came in to record the “Breakfast in a Record Store” bass on the Sunday [August 28th] morning283, and nailed it. His bass parts sound so undeniably good that when he offered to replace more… demo bass on the record, I did decide to take him up on it. “7 Years of Blood” and “Demons” will really benefit from his tone, I think (I’ve since been recording the vocal for [“7 Years of Blood”] without the demo bass, because its tone is a black hole that masks everything bright around it284), as “Mezzanine” + “Breakfast in a Record Store” already do; they sound finished now. I’m pretty protective of the “Bitter Man” bass: I advised and comped that on the same night that I advised and comped the demo piano part, both of which are making it into the final recording, and I think there’s something special about it that shouldn’t be touched. [S’s] first reaction to hearing that demo was how perfect the bass line was for the song, so hopefully he’s not insulted! I’ve been trying to get [another friend] in to do the “Need” bass for months285… which leaves “Sympathy for Lilith” and “Forth”. I’ll have to decide in the next month or so if those are worth ripping up to re-do the bass, or if I want to leave them as-is…”

283 Using exactly the same recording set up from his previous contributions to the album.

284 The new “7 Years of Blood” guitar tracks that I loved so much turned out to be virtually incompatible, EQ-wise, with the demo bass, and I decided here that I wanted to save our next mix engineer the trouble of trying to make it not be the way that it was.

285 Nameless Friends is friends with a talented funk bassist who expressed interest in doing a guest feature on “Need”. Alas, we could never get the scheduling to work out to bring him in for a session. S did such a phenomenal job that I have no regrets.
3.7. September 2022

We began September with a very bloody music video shoot for “7 Years of Blood”. The video direction had changed hands in the summer\textsuperscript{286}, and Q brought on a talented crew of co-producers, camera operators, and film techs that transformed the video into a grand, professional-scale project despite our minuscule budget. The footage was striking to watch back, even in raw form, and the shoot environment was invigorating.

I was personally moved by how much everyone involved loved the song and the band’s visual approach. As a producer, I was motivated to re-evaluate our release plans to take advantage of this momentum: what if “7 Years of Blood” was the first single we released from 	extit{Blasphemy}? The more I considered it, the more it made sense. “7 Years of Blood” is fast, exciting, and barely three minutes in length; all perfect qualifications for an initial single that’s trying to grab the attention of unfamiliar listeners. Paired with a dramatic visual and some well-placed advertising, and I thought the song would make a much stronger first impression to a general audience than “Sympathy for Lilith”\textsuperscript{287}.

Mulling over this change inspired me to get back on track - get finished! - with 	extit{Blasphemy}, and I dove back in to production as soon as we returned to London. First, in \textit{dispositio}, I hired a new mixing engineer and hired an experienced mastering engineer; I will discuss these details in the next chapter.

Then, in \textit{pronunciatio}, I told P that it was time to edit guitar tracks. If you have been following along with the Appendix C checklist to this point, you’ll see that guitar recording for 	extit{Blasphemy} was almost finished\textsuperscript{288}. We spent much of September 2022 comping and editing all these guitar tracks: “I’m grateful to [P] for being a rock solid engineer during this month, and leading with curiosity and his own emotional labour

\footnote{It became apparent that between our recording schedule; the band’s festival appearance; and my long bouts of illness in August; F would not be able to shoot the “7 Years of Blood” music video before moving away for school. With her blessing, the project was passed off to the band’s Deep River videographer, henceforth referred to as Q, who was enthusiastic to rope in his connections.}

\footnote{No shade to “Sympathy for Lilith”, it’s my opus, but it’s also a six minute prog rock opera with heavy religious imagery. That combination isn’t exactly accessible to a wide variety of casual listeners, which is the market a first single would be attempting to draw in (and yes I know there is a giant, “Bohemian Rhapsody”-sized exception to that line of thinking, but I didn’t want to operate under the presumption that Nameless Friends had, on our first original album, equated one of the most popular songs of all time).}

\footnote{Save “Need”, which did not yet have finished drums to record the guitars to.}
when I was [struggling]. He’s been chipping away at all the guitar comping and editing: we discovered pretty quickly that he hears technique minutiae I don’t hear in his parts (“I didn’t do that pull-off with the right finger, and it shows in the next note” “[But] they are both clear, on pitch, appropriately articulated, well-timed notes” “Not like how I MEANT though”), and it’s aggravating for me to make + get attached to a comp that he wants to rip apart for fear of other guitar players thinking he doesn’t know How To Play. So he comps his parts now with me out of the room, I come in and review them for a producer’s once-over before he bounces them out (usually I just change his fills to more inspired takes that are harder to edit, but worth it for the soul!), and then he edits [using Logic’s Flextime software] with me IN the room, to make sure he’s not sucking the groove out of things in his pursuit of demonstrating that everyone knows How To Play *Together*.” The edits that I approved for the final album are, as in the demo recording, often subtle and never extreme, but they sound much more polished and competent relative to their raw counterparts.

Editing the guitars also revealed where the lead guitar pronunciation didn’t sit quite right. Further from my September notes, “[The] [“Breakfast in a Record Store”] [lead] guitar has been a bit challenging to pull together: [P and I] spent a decent chunk of time in Kingston recording it in the Grand, and while the aesthetic of some of those tracks (the bridge leads in particular) are dreamy, he hasn’t been thrilled with how the aesthetic engineering filtered out what he feels are compelling parts of the articulation, and just re-amping the DI tracks didn’t feel like enough of a fix to him. So I said [screw it], there’s no reason we can’t double track. The other songs have their individual production quirks, extra keys and choirs and [stuff], there’s no reason [“Breakfast in a Record Store”] can’t have extra guitar tracks to make it be what it needs to be. So [P] had a delightful time experimenting with his new Dr. Z stack last weekend, testing different mics on the two cab speaker cones (which are different models): boo to the C414 on both, it was too [much top-end clarity] to sculpt the amp’s warmth in a way it needed, but the SM7B and e609 came out stars, and made a delightful pair on top + bottom… [A quick guitar recording session later and] I intend for us to get ALL the [“Breakfast in a Record Store”]

Further from my notes, “Being forced to think about it as I write this down, having to go through a medical accommodation process to sort my [teaching assistant] duties for the semester [which are the source of the bulk of my income as a graduate student] has been taking up a huge amount of mental real estate (the paperwork, the trips to [my hometown] for a doctor’s appointment to fill out the paperwork, the nonsensical and unfeeling emails from both HR and the department chair, so many triggers for self-loathing around my chronic illness!), and I’m quite resentful of my department and school in general for forcing it into my time and priorities. Invisible illnesses already suck, Western, you could just… believe your employees instead of whatever… that was that stole three weeks of my peace and productivity, but ok.”

I did, after all, still have a vision that the guitars couldn’t sound too perfect, too slick, or the songs would lose credibility with rock listeners.

A Dr. Z Maz 18 Junior NR Head with matching Z Best 2x12 cabinet. Blonde.

A Celestion Vintage 30 on top and Celestion G12H30 on the bottom.
guitars comped now… and then we’ll put the perfected tracks together in the mix and play around with the proportions at different parts of the song, to get the soaring aesthetic I want in the bridge, and the compelling force [P] wants in the song proper.”

I scheduled another session with S at the end of this editing spree, and recorded him exactly as in previous songs: “[S] came by in the past week to lay down bass for [“7 Years of Blood”], and… if it doesn’t sound [as much] better [than the demo bass] as the others do. I comped both it and the [“Breakfast in a Record Store”] bass today, and while the latter is a swaggy force without even editing it (made by pairing it with the rhythm guitar, if I do say so myself), [“7 Years of Blood”] is going to need a pretty ruthless edit to whip it into shape, the part is just [so] dense. [S], [P] + I were all cratered and exhausted when [S] came in to do it… But there’s a flow and comprehension of the part in this comp that I like: I’m not sure I want to replace it with something cleaner that sounds like overthinking, which is what I could see happening if I ask [S] to do it again… the alternative is just making [P] edit it like everything other guitar part he’s been a [precise] engineer about [so let’s just do that]!”

I concluded the month by making another decision about lead vocals: “I’m determined that the music [on each song] will be finished before we put vocals on now, to give me every opportunity to succeed”. I thought that the full musical arrangements would free my producer’s instincts from thinking about (and thus becoming distracted by) any upcoming/unfinished part of the arrangement so that I could focus exclusively on singing.

3.8. October 2022

Production recovered some momentum in October. First on my pronunciatio agenda, “We took another stab at [the lead] guitars for “Demons” in the first week of October. [P] wasn’t a fan of the original guitar, and I agreed: the tone we chose was … fine, certainly contained some height/spread/perceptive room that I think I’ll want in the final mix, but it also didn’t feel like it was committing to an aesthetic enough: I want something ardently campy, classic-sounding with a nod to hair metal in an un-ironic way, and this was just pure modern metal-ish comfort zone. The biggest issue though [is] performance… [it’s missing] a levity and self-aware humour in… articulation that I *know* [P] is capable of [which I do hear in all the other, edited guitar parts]. [The] Dr. Z purchase seems [to have made him] self-conscious about how digital his rig [is], and it seems important to him to prove that he also knows how to handle analogue tones and lines on this record; I’m shooting for classic and a more potent, committed aesthetic, and the Dr. Z will certainly offer AN aesthetic, so we paired it up with Strymon Riverside… to get an appropriate grit out of the amp… [Figure 5]

[P]’s usual Ibanez$^293$ seven string [Figure 7] didn’t impress me with the new amp combo… we stumbled onto his PRS SVN, which gave me such embodied certainty of being The Exact Tone I Wanted… In a fit of inevitable Murphy’s Law that seems to follow this… record around, [P] declared that the strings on the PRS were throwaway

---

$^293$ Ibanez RG7, seven string.
Ernie Balls that he hated playing, and so changed them, only for us to discover that some important, vital part of the tone that had so moved me was lost with new strings (and of course he’d managed to completely destroy the magic strings in the removal process)... I actually made [us] go to [our local music store] and buy new sets of apparently unplayable strings in pursuit of The Tone, and then [he] gamely attacked a session of the song with them. After all that, I feel a little insecure about the guitar part we ended up with: there’s a real magic in his playing that I was looking for, the performance is pretty perfect, but the tone is SUCH an aesthetic I can’t quite put my finger on that I hope I haven’t made a terrible mistake and dragged the overall production of the song into an inappropriate direction with it…”

Deciding to be courageous with my guitar tone choices for “Demons” also had me thinking ahead to post-production. I began to note what would later become *elocutio* choices for my future reference.294

With the “Demons” guitars complete, I concluded that it was time to tackle the outstanding drums for “Need”, because they were holding up the only outstanding bass and guitar tracks (*dispositio*). No matter that I was forced to suddenly travel in the second week of October to help a close friend in crisis! I was determined, and produced accordingly:

“[P] and I managed to finally finish the “Need” drums with some creative use of cloud file sharing and Facebook messenger during [my travels]: I was impressed with [drummer]’s choruses, they were pretty perfect as usual, but [his] verses really didn’t seem to grasp the song… and to be fair to him, we only had one day of drum recording for him to bash out the entire album, so I wasn’t about to start grilling him for multiple hours over the “Need” composition when we had all the other songs to do… I figured it was all eventually fixable in MIDI, and now is that reckoning.

The delicate part of this is that I already know roughly what I want in the verses: a somewhat frenetic part that relies on cymbals and high hat work to really ratchet up the perceived pace of the song, a rhythmic gait led by an anticipating front foot, so that the choruses would feel like a palpable release when the drummer then settled into a more grounded, driving pocket that led from the back foot. Over the course of the song, this

294 “I’ve realized lately how much my inspiration for Demons comes from hard rock interpretations of “Devil Went Down to Georgia” that our friends’ bands used to play in undergrad: how the devil’s solo was always the one that really, for lack of a better word, [rocked], and yet the song’s message of righteousness insists on gaslighting you that Johnny’s bright’n’major ditty was the winner. Demons turns that dynamic on its head: yes, the song descends away from righteous, majestic order at the beginning into... chaotic madness by the end, but the song also gets distinctly more *lucid* along that journey, especially in the lyrics and overall band tightness... as the groove gets harder and faster, the arrangement slims down to keep everyone together, which sounds palpably more together because everyone is literally more on the same page than they were before. I’ve also got a vision of the bridge vocals being much harsher, dryer, and more upfront than the first half of the song, the lead really distinct from the choir instead of blending with chorus backing vocals, as if the narrator is literally breaking out of their atmospheric haze when they dare to [lyrically] confront God directly.”

295 Track 21, 1:33 - 2:01.

296 Track 21, 2:02 - 2:32.
push + pull combines with the truck driver modulation (up a key, up a key!) to really underscore the need, the desperation, of the lyrics, while still giving slamdance relief in the chorus. I outlined this in the demo drums, but [drummer] declared the high hat part I wrote for V2 in particular to be his least favourite thing I’ve ever written, and he instead recorded equally stately verses to choruses, which perceptively plodded and dragged down the momentum of the whole song. And so the impasse began. How to get what I think the song needs without making [the drummer] feel that I’m steamrollering his taste in favour of my own [half-baked] demo? I have thoughts about why he hates the demo [drum part that I like], most of them related to possible perception of punkness or effeminateness, but that’s completely my own speculation that isn’t important. I want him to like the… drum parts if his name is one them, even if I think they need to be different than what he initially laid down!

The answer, bless him, was [the band’s touring drummer]. [Touring drummer] had no choice but to use the [half-baked] demo to learn “Need” for Deep River, and managed, in his jazz-trained wisdom, to interpret the high hat part into something a little bit queer, little bit punk, and [quite] near what I was sketching for when I programmed the demo. Through inane videos that I sent [P] over Facebook messenger, I described how I wanted a MIDI interpretation of [touring drummer]’s part to be cut with some riff accents from [drummer’s work] (the one-two-THREE motif that’s everywhere in the song) to make it sound more like him…- [drummer] has a compositional restraint that [touring drummer] didn’t at Deep River that… sounds so damn purposeful and competent. [P] hopped into my files over the cloud to do it, sending me periodic updates for my refining comments, and then we sent a good enough version to [drummer] for his approval. Framing it as a “we borrowed from both you and [touring drummer!!]” is what sealed the deal for his blessing, because he respects [touring drummer] tremendously, and so I feel very clever as a producer for getting this perfect little blend of both of them on the record. It helped my confidence that [one of my friends at the centre of the crisis] [was intrigued] enough to peer over my shoulder during this process and remark unprompted that he thought the new drum part was iconic”.

The following week or so was dominated by a series of lead vocal attempts that I called “vocal purgatory” in my notes. Amid some personal challenges I revisited the lead vocal line, dialling in a new compressor in the monitoring chain that helped me hear myself better and thus push less on my voice. But I continued to struggle to balance the dispositio needs of the album and marketing plan with the pronunciatio of the lead vocal performance and my increasingly fragile body. The band had booked a few tour dates in November and December, which would have been an ideal time to launch “7 Years of Blood” as the first single. It was not to be. Despite many “valiant attempts” to finish the lead vocal for “7 Years of Blood”, no amount of “steaming.. hydrating… oil of

---

297 Which the drummer does not relate to as a musical identity, because he strongly relates to metal-ness, and the two are often presented as disparate, if not somewhat opposed, in drummer culture.

298 We travelled out of town for a week and came back to find our home, and home studio, infested with carpet beetles. Fumigation was required. Store your woollens in plastic, folks.
oregano… yawning could cajole my voice into delivering enough clean, strong takes to comp a full performance of the song; likely, as I bitterly noted, because “I’ve picked up something ELSE that’s determined to fill my sinuses with green [stuff]”. My notes chronicle increasingly emotional highs and lows during this time: I got my hopes up ahead of each session, and then plunged into self-loathing and despair when I inevitably failed to perform with the same vitality as past records. To make the best of a bad situation, I advised the band to announce the tour as an exclusive preview instead, and pretend that the plan all along had been to premiere the new songs live, only.

As a consolation prize, I did manage to complete the backing vocals for “7 Years of Blood”. We recorded each voice individually with the Neumann, but with much less preciousness than the lead vocal, because P had a vision of hard-tuning all of the backing tracks. I was “initially skeptical”, because this vision went against my no-tuning crusade, but I relented because it wasn’t lead vocals and let P try it. To his credit, it works: “…the individual tracks sound like completely robotic nonsense, but I’ll give him that they sound perfectly resonant and natural together…” The hyper-tuned lead vocals create an aura of melody that helps glue the mix around the lead vocal. It emphasizes the untuned humanity of the lead vocal in contrast, but also leverages the Haas effect to make the lead vocal sound more in-tune and musical by proximity. And practically, “…It was a breath of… fresh air to just envision [a vocal recording], execute it, and have it sound… great in a short… period of time without angst or fifteen thousand subsequent sessions”!

We finished the month on a high note: “We… recorded + comped the last guitars on the record this past week (!!!) After my hand-wringing about “Demons”, [P]’s lead actually turned out great. It took a pretty intense comp to get there, but I genuinely enjoyed combing through it all, finding the pieces we needed, and then the final performance [felt like it] suddenly appeared, and *hit*, when I was done. A+ exercise in satisfying production…

“Need” was a good song to end guitar tracking with. It wasn’t hard for [P] to do because he’s played the song before; he got to bust out one of his favourite guitars without having to do a whole bunch of envelope-pushing tone hunting or strings or

299 Fides Krucker’s *Reclaiming Calliope* is a wonderful resource for female and AFAB singers struggling with gendered trauma in their embodied practice [Krucker, 2022].

300 Ibid.

301 Track 113.

302 Track 114.

303 From the spatial experts at iZotope, “The Haas effect occurs when a listener experiences two sounds—often copies of one another—that are separated by a sufficiently short time as a single sound event. Moreover, even if they come from different directions, the perceived direction of origin will be dictated almost entirely by the sound that arrives first. The Haas effect is also known as the precedence effect.” [Stewart, 2022].

304 A six string Charvel Pro Mod SoCal with a Floyd Rose [Figure 7].
whatever; but it also wasn’t boring because I have a militant vision for exactly how the
guitar part in this song needs to be played, and I held him to it for a couple of hours to
make sure we got everything.

As the only single-guitar-arranged song on the record (at least for all the verses), I
decided… that the rhythm part was going to need a double to pad out the mix nicely [and]
I] refuse to use some plugin that gives uncanny-valley vibes: real doubles only. Major
thanks to past-me for my foresight, because I realized while we were tracking the “Need”
guitar (and mentally calculating how agonizingly long it might take [P] to replicate the
exact part a second time, if this is how long it was taking to get all the pieces so I could
ASSEMBLE the first in comps) that the original demo rhythm part is near perfect, and
sounds great. The only reason we [originally] opted not to [use the demo part] as the main
guitar part on the record is because it was only single tracked, so we wouldn’t be able to
do enough with it in the mix, but a double doesn’t need to be more than single tracked, so
[success]…

All that’s left now is to polish some final edits for “Demons” (both keys and
guitars), record… bass for “Need”, and then vocals. Vocals on vocals + found sound[s]…
I think I can see the light at the end of the tunnel, and it looks [very] inviting”.

3.9. November 2022

As productivity flows, it inevitably ebbs, and I hit a wall in early November. Faced
with yet another bout of illness that interfered with the lead vocal pronunciation, “I
combed back through all the vocal recording we’ve ever done for [“7 Years of
Blood”]…” in an attempt to get some lead vocal, any lead vocal, finished. Despite my
furious efforts, I “ultimately ended up with a patchy, [“Sympathy for Lilith”] 2.0 on my
hands as I tried to comp from less than ideal takes from early on in the [production]
process. There were tears, I called [a mentor], and she suggested that I take a [long] break
and remind myself that a.) singing is supposed to be joyful and fun, and b.) that I was not
singing with the responsibility of singing *for* all the girls in the world (including Deep
River) that need representation, I am singing *as* one of them, which I really
apparently needed to hear. I [decided] to leave the vocals alone for a bit to get some space
and perspective from them… [and also decided to]…not try to record any more of the
album until after our first show [on tour] is done… then [I] figured [that] if our deadlines
are shot already, I’ll do it the way I’m most comfortable and go in order: singles be
damned, “Mezzanine” first… this addresses my [artistic] desire to have stories go in

305 Mostly throwaway vocal takes that we used to set the vocal monitoring levels at the beginning of
sessions, when my voice was still passably fresh.

306 When Nameless Friends performed “7 Years of Blood” at Deep River Summerfest, I announced to
the crowd “This is a song about periods!” as we began. And the responding noise that came out of the
AFAB faction of that crowd was unholy. The band affectionately calls it “the roar”, and it was so loud
and impassioned that I struggled to hear myself through my in-ear monitors for a moment. Those
young people told me how seen the band made them feel (both screamed across the festival grounds
and at the merch table afterwards), and I’ve felt a responsibility to seeing and representing them ever
since.
order, which I think will be helpful for ~immersive~ reasons or whatever, but also I’ve sung “Mezzanine” [virtually a] billion times on tour and thus have a rock solid muscle memory for it; I’m hoping that memory is going to be the clincher I can rely on to get through the mental hurdle of Recording The First Song”.

I was also weighing my pronunciatio options in “Demons”. We had recorded the keyboard solo to unedited drums because the band hadn’t decided exactly how long the solo would be. Now that the finished solo was recorded, we had a determined length, and edited both the drums and keyboard performance to grid per the rest of the album. The problem was, per my notes, “We finished the “Demons” edits and they sound either [fine] or soul-less depending on my mood… I still don’t know if I like it edited to grid, and am sincerely debating about [changing it somehow]”.

After weeks of deliberation and some confidence-building time on tour, I returned to production on November 17th. Thankfully, my instincts finally panned out with the lead vocals: “… today, we did vocals for “Mezzanine” and I think they were good. I’m… operating under the presumption that they were good, and we’re leaving it, and we did one!!! go me!!! [so that] we can move on, success!!… knowing full well that “Mezzanine” is the track being held back for the deluxe album, and if I hate it in six months, we can re-do it then before it goes out… I took the entire day to mentally prepare (after I already spent yesterday doing a full oil of oregano routine), good shower routine was had, tea was drank, comfy clothes were worn, and counting on my muscle memory for the song I think did it. The first full take of the song, when I tentatively did a “I think that was maybe decent…?”, [P] looked relieved and honestly said he would just straight up use that take on the album, so I of course did several more takes until I felt I had beat the thing to death and hated it, and then we did backing vocals before calling it [finished]!”

I’m sure that the possibility of re-recording “Mezzanine” in the future was the pressure-relieving out that I needed to relax into my muscle memory and let my live performance experience with the song take over. Buoyed by this success, I militantly stuck to the same vocal routine and, “We did the [“7 Years of Blood”] vocals a few days later… and they were actually good; I felt good about them at the time, far better than anything else I had done so far, and [P] agrees, so I’ve mentally determined that that song is Done, full stop307”. Check off the first lead vocal recordings on your bulletin board, dear reader!

I didn’t want to push my luck after these successes, so I put myself on vocal rest for a few weeks following these sessions. I used this time to explore the interlude idea that I pinned to the bulletin board in June. I love when concept albums include tracks that aren’t explicitly songs and use them as mise-en-scene to set and/or contextualize the proper songs; Janelle Monae’s Dirty Computer and Bonnie Trash’s Malacchio have great, modern examples of this. I thought concept tracks were further interesting when they sampled outside media to situate the album in culture, not just its own narrative. Improper

307 Before you think that I was abruptly possessed by a confident doppelgänger here, the same note goes on to say, “Have I listened back to [the vocals] to comp them yet? No, because I am a coward, but it’s a start. [Also] I promptly got sick again and lost my voice after this, so no other vocal takes have been recorded yet”.
sampling is illegal, so I restricted my media search to fair use repositories like Internet Archive. There, I found a 1910 recording of Standard Quartette singing the traditional hymn, “Old Time Religion”.

I had never heard of “Old Time Religion” before, and I was moved by how uniquely slow and melancholy Standard Quartette’s version is; it sounds more like a funeral dirge than a hymn. It reminded me of another sample: I subscribe to the email list of folk duo Tragedy Ann, and as part of the marketing campaign for their 2022 album *Heirlooms*, they sent their subscribers a sample from the album as a sneak-peek. That sample is of an organ performance filtered through several effects, and it’s a perfect fifth in pitch above the key centre of Standard Quartette’s “Old Time Religion”. The two samples sounded striking together. The perfect fifth interval evokes a sense of adventure and away-from-home that I thought could masterfully open the album, and implicitly re-contextualizes the lyrics of “Old Time Religion” from complacent to questioning: is old time religion really good enough? The members of Tragedy Ann are also dear friends, so I started thinking about how to most respectfully ask for their blessing to use the organ sample.

In the final days of November, I made my final decisions about bass. I decided that I would keep the demo bass tracks from “Sympathy for Lilith”, “Bitter Man”, and “Forth”; and have S do the bass for “Need” to round out the album; because I wanted to use the bass pronunciatio to subtly underscore the narrative movements of *Blasphemy*. I loved the demo bass parts for “Sympathy for Lilith” and “Bitter Man”, and wanted to keep those. Meanwhile, S had done a fabulous job with “7 Years of Blood”, “Demons”, “Breakfast in a Record Store”, and “Mezzanine”. So I deduced that if I also used the demo bass for “Forth”, Act II of the album would have a unified bass performance that was distinct from Act I and Act III. And if S did the bass for “Need”, Act I and Act III would also have a consistent bass performance, distinct from Act II. Content with my scheme, “We recorded the bass for “Need” on the last weekend of November and [S] did a great job per usual, [as much as] I intervened on making it funkier and lower [than what he initially leaned towards].” With that, I had officially finished recording the instrumentation for *Blasphemy*.

3.10. December 2022

December 2022 was a necessarily slow production month while Nameless Friends toured and prepared for a large performance on New Year’s Eve. I briefly noted, “We tried other vocal stuff in December, it did not go well. I got sick and [got] laryngitis…, and had to reserve what was left of my voice for touring. Touring went great though, so

---

308 I dug up several more versions of the song, and it seems to traditionally be sung in a much more lively, upbeat way than this particular version.

309 As much as I adored the work of the friend-of-the-band funk bassist, his availability had been so sparse that I still had yet to nail down a session with him in the six months since we first discussed him recording the part.
perks”. [P] dutifully edited the “Need” bass part, and otherwise I was left to my own devices.

Without any instrumentation left to record, or audible vocals to record, I revisited the idea of interlude tracks. “Old Time Religion” still struck me so potently that I was convinced it should be album’s opening track, so I committed to it and downloaded it. Then, on an inspired hunch, I combed through Internet Archive’s huge repository of sermon recordings by searching based on the word “blasphemy”. One preacher stood out to me: Evangelist Rolfe Barnard was featured in several search results, and his powerful Southern drawl was exactly the kind of stylized voice I could envision complimenting the album. Three of his recordings had both legible speech and a vintage-sounding, scratchy production quality that I thought was appropriately potent - and sort of campy - to suit Blasphemy: “And There Few Be Saved”, “An Exhortation to Church Members”, and “A Man Who Is Known in Hell”.

I couldn’t find transcriptions for any of these sermons online, so I transcribed them myself. I was often moved by Reverend Barnard’s sincerity of faith, as much I couldn’t agree with or support the condemnation of innocent people - mostly women, queer folks, and people of colour - that he claimed were necessary parts of it. This tension - equal parts irony and bittersweet - felt like the right balance of truth and reconciliation that I was envisioning by including pieces of these sermons on Blasphemy. These three sermons are in the Project Playlist as Tracks 97, 98, and 99, respectively, so you can hear what raw materials I was compelled by during this part of production.

Then in the final weeks of December, Nameless Friends acquired new management. Under that management, the band’s potential exploded. Nameless Friends could now afford to market Blasphemy competitively and had a team of experienced advisors to help strategize their efforts. These changes were equally exciting and stressful for me as the album’s producer: “I am now producing a much bigger record than I thought I was, which is pressure. But it’s also in line with [the band]’s goals… [and] will hopefully help fast-track some of them, so it’s not like I’m going to say no. Our release timelines just got… serious though. No more [screwing] around with loose release timelines. Dispositio rules. Buckle up kids…”

Management and I came to agree that May 2023 was the best window to release Blasphemy. The summer would be too busy, with blockbuster movies, major “song of the summer” releases, and outdoor activities/festivals/cottages etc. competing for listeners’ attention; and I wanted a chance to see how the album performed in the marketplace before I defended this dissertation, which was then scheduled to happen at the end of August 2023. May 2023 honoured both of those conditions, while giving us as much remaining time to complete the album as possible.

With Blasphemy’s release date pencilled in, management and I filled in the gaps: they wanted three advance singles, based on their best results from past releases with other artists. I suggested “Need” to round out “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith”. The ear worm-y guitars in “Need”’s choruses are Y2K-reminiscent, which I

---

310 And combined with marketing funding my father pledged to our efforts, which I will discuss in the next chapter.
thought a) sounded a little younger than the other two singles and their more classic genre interpretations\textsuperscript{311}, and b) would appeal to young listeners currently in the throws of a massive early-2000s-nostalgia trend cycle\textsuperscript{312}. The band and their management agreed that “Need” was a dark horse song with perfect B-side potential, so it became \textit{Blasphemy}’s third single.

Management found that releasing one single a month was roughly the best timeline for digital marketing and listener engagement. If \textit{Blasphemy} was going to be released in May 2023, that meant releasing singles in April, March, and February 2023. I not only agreed with this train of logic but took it a step further: what if instead of releasing on regular Fridays, like the average artist did, Nameless Friends dropped significant singles on relevant international holidays related to each one? International Women’s Day, in March, was a perfect fit for “Sympathy for Lilith”. Either Earth Day or International Worker’s Rights Day in April was equally perfect for “Need”. And if we wanted to start with “7 Years of Blood”, what about Valentine’s Day? A red holiday, equally celebrated and condemned for the commodification of love and sex? Everyone in the meeting agreed unanimously. So I sent emails alerting our post-production team of this plan on December 23rd, comped the final vocal performance for “7 Years of Blood” on December 26th, and \textit{Blasphemy}’s first single moved on to post-production on December 27th.

\section*{3.11. January and February 2023}

With \textit{Blasphemy}’s first single off to mixing, I spent the first couple months of 2023 juggling \textit{dispositio}, \textit{pronunciatio}, \textit{elocutio}, and \textit{memoria}\textsuperscript{313} simultaneously! For the sake of clarity, I restrict this chapter’s discussion to \textit{dispositio} and \textit{pronunciatio} concerns as above, but I encourage you to literally hold up the “January 2023” and “February 2023” entries from Chapters 3 and 4 next to one another to get a sense of how fierce and furious the multi-tasking required of a producer can be during this stage in record production.

The band’s release plans called for “Sympathy for Lilith” as the second single. As a singer, I wanted to dive into re-recording its lead vocals as soon as possible, especially after “7 Years of Blood” had turned out so well (and without tuning!). But as a producer, I

\textsuperscript{311} For many arguable reasons - ethical, capitalist and otherwise - mainstream listeners and labels are often attracted to artists with perceptive youth. If Nameless Friends wanted to grow in mainstream popular music, their management and I agreed that a significant proportion of the band’s music needed to sound as young as they were (mid-twenties, in late 2022).

\textsuperscript{312} Young listeners are a covetable demographic for a host of reasons that are beyond the scope of this project.

\textsuperscript{313} As I will discuss in Chapter 5, it is also often a producer’s responsibility to oversee (if not at least contribute to and perhaps liaison during) release logistics and budgets that are not explicitly musical, especially on indie records. This can include commissioning album artwork; giving feedback on music video edits (or in my case, literally editing music videos); and assembling a release team of strategic consultants, PR agents, booking agents, and/or digital marketers as applicable.
held firm that we would continue vocal recording in the narrative order of the album. I was performing best that way as a singer; and I saw no reason, as a producer, to interfere with the delicate peace that we had finally achieved in my performance practice. So in the first week of January, I used the same steaming shower, tea, and warmup routine as the successful “Mezzanine” and “7 Years of Blood” sessions, adding a soft wool scarf tied loosely around the neck to keep my throat insulated as I moved from the shower to studio. Whether it was the routine or the momentum, I cleared the final lead and backing vocals for “Need” in a single session.

A few days of vocal rest later, and I applied the same routine to “Demons” for moderately successful results: I was completely physically exhausted from touring and filming music video content with Nameless Friends at this point, and you could hear that exhaustion seep into parts of the recorded tracks. Some parts were excellent and album-worthy, though, and that psychological sense of achievement was sufficient for me. I felt assured that I could finish “Demons” off at another time, but had recorded enough of a critical mass of it to feel allowed to move on to our pressing time concern, “Sympathy for Lilith.”

I rested up enough to approach “Sympathy for Lilith” in the second week of January. Despite my best efforts and thorough pre-session routine, two consecutive days of tracking yielded some technically fine but expressively forgettable performances. While I perused the recorded tracks on a third day, mining for anything comp-able and useable, something inside me snapped. Driven by some combination of the momentum from my recent vocal successes, the rapidly approaching deadlines for other aspects of the album, and a raging desire to rid myself of the albatross that this song had become, I was fed up. I barked at P that it was time to finish the song once and for all, and stalked off to the shower. Fuelled in no small part by adrenaline and spite, I ground out four in a row of the best takes I had ever done of the lead vocal part, plus all of the backing vocals, and then spent the next day furiously comping it all together. The final lead vocal for “Sympathy for Lilith” is exclusively composed of those four brilliant takes, save for one word: the first, long “good” (Track 24, 5:14 - 5:20) is the same take of the word that I singled out earlier in this chapter, many months previously. I couldn’t bear to replace the earnest, sparkling yearning around the edge of the vibrato with any later takes, though there were some good ones. With that, Blasphemy’s second single went on to post-production.

Finishing recording “Sympathy for Lilith” lifted an enormous weight off my shoulders. I luxuriated in my freedom by singing an effortless vocal session for “Bitter Man” a few days later. The luxury was short-lived, however, as the scheduling demands of other rhetorical phases would prevent me from doing any more dispositio or pronunciatio for the rest of this month and through the next. P and I did go through the motions of our vocal routine several times in February, attempting to make headway on both “Demons” and “Forth”, but the physical toll the band’s other commitments took on my body manifested in tight, strained performances. I felt foiled by my humanity once again, to some degree, but not nearly to the self-loathing extent that had consumed and overwhelmed so much of the earlier lead vocal production. I had crossed the halfway mark of the album with “Bitter Man”, and slayed the most difficult song with “Sympathy...
for Lilith”. In other words, I felt that I had proved my competence enough to trust that I could finish the record, and I was content to sort out my other obligations and bide my time until I was well enough to do it.

3.12. March and April 2023

In March 2023, that time finally came. I finished the remaining lead vocals for (in order) “Forth”, “Breakfast in a Record Store”, and “Demons” within a week.

Then in April 2023, Tragedy Ann graciously and enthusiastically gave Nameless Friends permission to sample the organ from their song “The Shield”, off their album Heirlooms. So for my final acts of “production”, I assembled Blasphemy’s concept tracks.

First, I put “Old Time Religion” and the organ sample together to open the album. Then in the interlude, I kept the organ part that P recorded so many months ago virtually unchanged: I thought the spontaneous pronunciation was perfect for our purposes.

Next, I surveyed the three sermons that I had sourced from Internet Archive. “An Exhortation to Church Members” had some phrasing about women that I could edit into a feminist, pro-choice speech, so I collaged that sermon over the interlude organ - which preceded “Sympathy for Lilith” - and ironically named it “An exhortation to church members”. “And There Few That Be Saved” likewise had some choice language about the growing influence of religion that I could re-assemble into a warning about the dangers of right-wing, religious influence. I juxtaposed it over my other samples as a perfect thesis to open Blasphemy, simply titled “Old Time Religion”.

That left one sermon, “A Man Who is Known in Hell”. I didn’t think Blasphemy needed yet another concept track: two felt like the right proportion for the size of the album. But I also thought that it would be appropriate to bring the Reverend back once more towards the end of the album, to both start and end the record with this concept. “Breakfast in a Record Store” has a long bridge that the band has taken to experimenting with on tour: usually they broke into an open jam, playing famous riffs by other musicians that fit over the existing four chord progression. I knew we didn’t have the budget on Blasphemy to obtain the relevant songwriting permissions to recreate that, and so necessity became the mother of invention. I edited “A Man Who is Known in Hell” into a closing argument about holding fast to intrinsic ethics in the face of extrinsic/institutional morals, and fit it neatly over the bridge of “Breakfast in a Record Store”.

With that, Blasphemy moved on to Post-Production.
Figure 1: the Mesa Road King cab used for lead guitar recording. P lurks in the background.

Figure 2: close up of the SM57 placement on the same cab.
Figure 3: the “stereo” recording set up for the rhythm guitars

Figure 4: the results of successful tone hunting for the rhythm guitar on “Sympathy for Lilith”. This is the 4x10 combo on the left side of the set up shown above. The sticky note denotes which guitar is being used to record.
Figure 5: the Dr. Z set up used to record lead guitars in “Demons” and “Breakfast in a Record Store”.

Figure 6: a “Grand” room mic set up. Piano-mounted DPA 1 in the foreground, DPA 2 just out of frame on the right, lead guitar rig in the background.
Figure 7: some of the lead guitars used on Blasphemy.

Figure 8: the rhythm guitars used on Blasphemy, featuring Dickens, the album’s executive producer.
4. Post-Production

The third and final phase of producing a record is “post production”, which is everything involved with converting all the disparate recorded tracks into one, distributable release. Post-production (commonly shortened to “post” in industry slang) is generally split into two specialities: mixing and mastering.

**Mixing** is often described as sonic painting, in which all the individual tracks are manipulated and processed to fit together on one canvas, i.e., play together as one composite track. How, exactly, the tracks will fit together is the question that this specialty must answer.

**Mastering** is an equal parts technical and artistic practice, where the composite track - the final mix - is optimized both aesthetically and logistically for distribution - the final master(s). The exact nature of “optimal” is a tension between format (is the track being released on vinyl, CD, radio, and/or DSP?) and musicality (should the track sound louder, edgier, or and/or brighter?) that this specialty must navigate.

As pre-production covers *inventio* + *dispositio*; and production covers *dispositio* + *pronunciatio*; post-production aligns with the next two rhetorical phases: *elocutio* - when the practitioner decorates and embellishes their organized materials, and *memoria* - when the practitioner commits to the final form of their artefact and fixes it for distribution to their audience. In the context of record producers, *elocutio* is mixing and *memoria* is mastering.

At this point in the record production process, producers commonly have the option - and are often expected to exercise that option, budget-allowing - of hiring other people. Mixing and mastering are specialties traditionally practiced by expert

---

314 New DAW-based project paradigms are blurring the practical lines between these specialties, especially on smaller/indie projects, leading to all sorts of wonderful workflows like dual mix + master engineers (who either conduct both, separate processes themselves, or do a version of both at the same time); mixing through a mastering line; stem mastering (where the mastering line deals with a multi-track, reduced version of the mix), etc. My production practice is old-school and follows big-budget convention in post. I like my mixes and masters as distinct steps; I think it gives the project (and production team) necessary milestones on the way to release.

315 Hepworth-Sawyer, 2017 (1-7, 8-23).

316 Hepworth-Sawyer, 2019 (1-3).
engineers, and it’s an industry norm for producers to wield their creative agency through these specialists without necessarily being mixing or mastering engineers themselves.

That norm poses ethical considerations for creative practice research endeavours, such as this dissertation. As discussed in Chapter One, this project does not require REB review, and even though I hired both a mixing engineer and a mastering engineer to complete post for Blasphemy, there still is no need for an REB review. The TCPS2’s ethical requirements for research using human participants defines “human participant(s)” as, “individuals whose data, biological materials, or responses to interventions, stimuli, or questions by the researcher, are relevant to answering the research question(s).” My project questions are exclusively concerned with the producer’s creative practice and I am Blasphemy’s producer. According to the definition published in TCPS2, I am the only human participant in this research project.

When I consulted Western’s Ethics Officers about this project, I explained, “Broadly, I am studying the musical practice of how record producers make albums. I am a record producer and I am making an album, with the intention that I engage in a typical representation of producing practice, so my project can be used as a case study to gain insight into other (more famous!) producers and their practices. To meet that threshold of typical, representative practice, I have to hire other specialized music professionals … to work within my guidance during the album process, as most producers do. These professionals are using their … skills under my direction: I am only writing about their work insofar as it facilitates music that I directed and brought about for my own artistic purposes.”

In other words, and here I’m quoting one of Western’s Ethics Officers’ response to my inquiry, “Given the engagement of these specialists in your creative practice [the album’s mixing engineer and mastering engineer] – as opposed to being participants (or subjects of inquiry to answer your research questions) … these individuals are not human participants in your research process, but instead resources in your creative practice … If you were conducting a research study on these specialists as participants (e.g., investigating their personal/professional experiences, inspirations, techniques, etc. to answer a research question to extend knowledge), then REB review would be needed. But, as it stands, their involvement in your project is providing technical support/direction in line with their professional expertise on a work of art.”

---

317 Again, with the caveat that DAW-based project paradigms are changing this in some contexts. Hill Kourkoutis, an award-winning female producer based out of Toronto, Ontario, mixes many of the records that she produces.


This aligns with the TCPS2 creative practice exemption quoted in Chapter One\textsuperscript{320},
and I went on to clarify with Western’s Ethics Officer that it applied equally to the post-
production engineers discussed in this chapter as much as the recording engineer and
orchestral arranger discussed in the last chapter\textsuperscript{321}.

That being said, while this project does not need REB review, it should abide by
the norms that govern the recording industry\textsuperscript{322}. The primary concern here is protecting
what are essentially trade secrets: exactly how a mix is put together, and exactly how a
master is made, are practices unique to individual engineers that give them a competitive
edge in the industry marketplace. As I argue above, the individual artistic practices of
Blasphemy’s mixing engineer and mastering engineer are not within the scope of this
research; I do not need to establish exactly how the mixes or masters were made to study
how I produced the mixing and mastering. Because of this, I will not offer any DAW
screenshots or detailed signal chain programming/processing breakdowns in this chapter.
To do so would be to reveal artistic practices that are not my own and risk financially
compromising Blasphemy’s contributors, which would be a breach of ethical norms in the
field. Instead, I will offer revision-by-revision audio examples of the mixes and masters
as they evolved, which was the information that informed my decisions as the album
producer. I will also quote the mix/master notes that I wrote and sent to my engineers
during revisions, so the reader can see how a record producer guides post-production
without ever having to physically intervene in a DAW.

\textsuperscript{320} “Creative practice activities, in and of themselves, do not require REB review. However, research
that employs creative practice to obtain responses from participants that will be analyzed to answer a
research question is subject to REB review… Creative practice is a process through which an artist
makes or interprets a work or works of art. It may also include a study of the process of how a work
of art is generated. Creative practice activities do not require REB review, but they may be governed
by ethical practices established within the cultural sector.” [Ibid.]

\textsuperscript{321} As I emailed the same Ethics Compliance Officer, “… As the album progressed, it became
necessary to hire two additional specialists, a mixing engineer and a mastering engineer, for exactly
the same reasons as the recording engineer [approved in the project proposal]. While I directed these
professionals within precisely the same research scope, I directed them on a technically different part
of the album process than the recording engineer, per their specialties. Music industry norms would
hold that this is covered under the logic of the project proposal, but I care deeply about the integrity
of this research and don't want to make any assumptions…In the case of the… mixing engineer and
mastering engineer, there is some… “back and forth” with the specialists, and it happens in the end
stages of the creative process. Mixing and mastering is essentially taking all of the recorded sounds
and finessing them into one sonic “picture” for playback. It's very similar to directing a film, where
recording engineers are equivalent to camera operators and mixing + mastering engineers are
equivalent to film editors and post-production effects technicians. I am again directing the engineers,
but because the project is in a more complex, later stage, there's necessarily multiple rounds of
feedback where I direct how the playback sound needs to be refined, and they do so accordingly.” Per
the ECO’s response, “Even with these additional details, I would say that these individuals are not
human participants in your research process, but instead resources in your creative practice –
therefore no REB oversight is needed.”

\textsuperscript{322} To further quote the same Ethics Compliance Officer, “As the TCPS2 indicates, there may still be
ethical considerations in your creative practice, but these would be governed by the cultural sector
(e.g., crediting their work?), rather than through research ethics guidelines outlined in the TCPS2.”
This chapter approaches production from a broader analytical lens than the last chapter, and that is a reflection of the practice I pursued when I hired specialists to determine, for example, the rate of compression on individual guitar tracks, so I could focus on making decisions about guitars. Beyond these considerations, this chapter will follow much the same structure as the previous chapter. It will discuss my post-production practice in chronological order through the rhetorical lenses of elocutio and memoria, with some references to pronunciatio where relevant. There will also be little formal musical analysis in this chapter.

4.1. Elocutio part I - mixing Blasphemy… or not

I hired Blasphemy’s first mixing engineer in spring 2022, and fired him later that summer. He didn’t complete any mixes for this project, and the final album doesn’t use any of his work. I’m including a discussion of my working relationship with him because it speaks to the unfortunately common - yet understudied and underreported - abuse and discrimination that female producers face in the workplace, and my experience here influenced future choices that I made in post-production.

This engineer, whom we’ll call W, was based near London in southern Ontario in spring 2022. At the time, W’s discography included several punk, rock, and metal records for moderately successful local/regional bands. One of Nameless Friends’ members had worked with well with W on another project, and was keen to work with him again. Many other musicians in the London music scene also associated with W on social media, and I generally trusted their endorsement. P and I listened through W’s portfolio, and while we didn’t love his guitar work, his rhythm sections were very clean. We thought that we could guide W through better guitar mixing, and that his drum work could bring life to our digital drums.

I reached out to W on social media, and over a series of messages and phone calls, we agreed on a budget and a general timeline for mixing Blasphemy and its singles. I didn’t want a repeat of the demo conflict, so I warned W about the explicitly feminist themes of the album and asked if he still wanted to work on the record knowing about those themes. He assured me that he was perfectly comfortable with the feminist themes, and excited to work on the album. To be extra cautious, I further summarized the sexist feedback that I had received about my demo production leadership, and asked if he was comfortable answering to me as a young, female producer. W again reassured me that gender wouldn’t be a problem in our working relationship, and invoked his longstanding, productive relationship with a female-fronted local band that he knew I knew and respected.

323 While I can’t speak for all producers in existence, my production mentors and I generally make decisions in post by ear and embodied knowledge, not by theory book.

324 And all associated singles.

325 Marie, 2019 (311-328); Wolfe, 2020 (27-55).
There were some early clues that W wasn’t the right fit for the project. He regularly and confidently interrupted me in our conversations, even though these discussions were essentially job interviews; he posted about mixing the album on social media without my permission, and before the band had publicly announced the existence of the album, which was a breach of professional discretion; and he was almost too prepared to list female character references, as if he’d needed them before. But these impulsive behaviours could be written off as enthusiasm about the project, selling himself! And many professionals who work with marginalized communities do proactively collect character references from those communities in good faith. I had a quiet, niggling feeling in my gut that W and I didn’t connect in some intangible way. But I chose to ignore my feeling and place a deposit on W’s services because he had such glowing references from people (I thought) I trusted, including my bandmate and the local female musician mentioned above. It wasn’t until after I fired him - and word presumably got around the local whisper network - that other people felt safe enough to tell me about their toxic, even abusive, experiences with W. Let this be a lesson to other female producers: if your embodied knowledge tells you that something isn’t quite right, listen to it.

4.2. June and July 2022

As discussed in the last chapter, I sent W the first version of “Sympathy for Lilith” for mixing in June 2022. I explained my vision for the mix, and asked if he would like reference tracks. W assured me that he understood the vision, and scoffed at the suggestion of reference tracks - another red flag. Unfortunately, as I recounted in my notes, the band “despised[ed]” his first mix\(^{326}\) and I agreed: “The spacing and tone… are such an awful [misinterpretation] of the raw tracks… that I’m legitimately concerned…”. I sent W diplomatic notes “addressing the squashed, overly-compressed vertical space”, while P sent firmer notes about the mixed guitars: the DI guitar tracks were loudly leveraged above all of the Kemper and amp tracks we had painstakingly crafted, and “[sound like they were] enthusiastically shoved through a Boss Metal Zone\(^{327}\).”

W called me and was audibly upset. He told me that P was unfairly persecuting him about the guitars, complained that he couldn’t be faulted for using the DI tracks as he saw fit\(^{328}\), and insinuated that my feedback about vertical space was nonsense and

---

\(^{326}\) While W was working for me and Nameless Friends; and the band paid for the few, incomplete mixes that he did do; it is generally considered unprofessional to share a recordist’s work without their permission. I have reasonable fear that W would retaliate against me and/or the band if I violated those norms and included tangible examples of his work here, so I have chosen not to. I invite you to imagine what’s being described here as best you can.

\(^{327}\) A harsh, nasal distortion pedal that invokes exactly the opposite aesthetic of the grand, timeless mixes I was envisioning. This is an inside joke for pedal-savvy readers.

\(^{328}\) I noted, “I would beg to differ that doing THIS with them was avoidable, but principle taken”.

therefore I didn’t know what I was talking about as a producer\textsuperscript{329}. I was not amused. Not only was W’s first attempt wildly off the mark, his response to basic mix notes was contentious. I reflected in my production notes, “[W] seems to feel entitled to having creative authority in the mixes that I don’t know how to nicely tell him he absolutely does not have… I’m pretty sure we’re in the awkward position of both thinking the other is a bit of an idiot, and I fear he’ll envision a “male”\textsuperscript{330} resolution (I, indeed an idiot, have my eyes opened to his genius and am grateful!) instead of [a] “female” resolution (45% of the problem is solvable communication error, and however much of the rest is his misunderstood genius doesn’t matter because he works for me)”. But the member of Nameless Friends who had worked with W previously insisted that W was just a big personality, who would settle as the project unfolded. Once again, I ignored my intuition for the sake of the male egos involved. I soothed W with “self-effacing humour”, pledged to improve our communication going forward, and bluntly wrote in my production notes, “figure out how to give [W] less rope to hang himself with”.

Unfortunately, as I noted in July: “Things did not improve after our first foray with [W]. [P and I] went to his studio in person… and it took three hours to get the [“Sympathy for Lilith”] guitars automated because he has no intuitive sense of where they’re supposed to sit relative to one another. Beyond that, he spent the session mansplaining my own bridge section to me (“I know you said you wanted it quiet here, but I put in an organ and made it loud because the LYRICS are like a SERMON here! It’s like CHURCH”), throwing shade at the new vocal [performance], and throwing a [temper tantrum] because I asked him to try a dry[er] [re]verb articulation on the vocal\textsuperscript{331}…”

The other members of Nameless Friends agreed that the situation was becoming untenable when W openly ridiculed some of my drum mix notes in our group chat; and proclaimed that if he couldn’t mix the lead vocals with very long, loud overlapping reverb tails (which I didn’t like) then he didn’t know how to mix the lead vocals at all. Instead, W declared that P and I should mix the vocals ourselves and then tell W how we did it\textsuperscript{332}.

On a hunch, I asked one of the male band members to reach out to W privately, and re-deliver my drum mix notes in their own words. W responded to my male

\textsuperscript{329} From my notes, “[W] just spent… twenty minutes… announce[ing] to me that he doesn’t understand the feedback about vertical space and mansplain[ing] my own reference tracks to me (though he supposedly does not understand the feedback they’re illustrating [and didn’t want the reference tracks in the first place])…”

\textsuperscript{330} I am being stereotypical and flippant here, and yet I think many female readers will understand the gendered dynamic I’m trying to illustrate.

\textsuperscript{331} From my notes, “I’m going to get a shirt made that says “I hate reverb”, because apparently that’s the only possible alternative to loving the giant, overlapping tails that [W] put everywhere.”

\textsuperscript{332} You read that correctly: “… if we don’t like the 2006-Three-Days-Grace[-style] record he [is] determined to get out of our songs, we must provide him the exact mix alternative we do want, plugins and all.” This man has won local awards for his mixing.
bandmate graciously and expediently. As the band debated what to do about this seemingly flagrant misogyny, W messaged the whole band, me included, and pushed to schedule another studio session with him to “finish” the mix: “Aiming to be truthful, I said I wasn’t sure [one] session would be enough to finish, but [that] we would certainly see how it went, and gave him the [next round of] notes. He was clearly put out by this and asked me to call him.”

On another hunch, “I waited until [P] was present, called [W], [put the call on speakerphone so P could witness it] and inadvertently unleashed the most gaslighting, coercive, conversation I have… ever had [in a professional environment]. [W] started defensive, and when I tried to frame [his firing] kindly, he [became enraged].” I knew that W had the band’s deposit and a significant amount of local clout, so I tried to de-escalate him for over an hour while he screamed at me and called me gendered slurs: “The thesis of his verbal assault was that [the band and I] were toxic, unprofessional people for thinking we could ever give feedback on his mixes, and we needed to sit down, shut up, and “make it up to [him]” by letting him do what he wanted… He threw in a bunch of other [accusations] [like] how we’re probably [awful] people to everyone else in our lives and he… is just the first [person] who has dared tell us [so]; every single one of our past records is trash; all the tracks for our current record are trash; an entire segue [listing] past clients who he doesn’t respect, which he named(!!); a separate segue trashing all of London’s other mixing engineers by name; summed up with a creepy, creepy attempt to reel us back in [by wheedling] how “moved” he was by our “awesome” songs, if only we would [submit] to his professional sense. I held firm the whole [phone call] that if [the band and I] were causing [W] so much distress, we couldn’t possibly continue to work with him in good conscience, because that wasn’t a safe work environment for anyone involved.”

After some de-escalation, I broached the matter of the band’s deposit. Despite failing to complete a single mix, W claimed he was unable to return Nameless Friends’

---

333 At this point, W had mixed the drum kit, bass, and guitar tracks in “Sympathy for Lilith”. The band was not happy with the guitar tracks; the vocals were missing; and W had refused to take feedback about the organ pads, so they were also unfinished.

334 From my notes, “[I said] “There seem to be some real communication issues here, and [the band and I] fear that working together like this isn’t sustainable. The last thing we would want to do is waste your time, so if we can’t figure out how to communicate better, we’re thinking it might be best to part ways on this project so we can preserve our relationship with you”.”

335 From my notes, “… the coercive undertones still make my skin crawl”.

336 Unsurprisingly, all of the artists on W’s do-not-respect list were female or female-inclusive bands. Nameless Friends has since made an effort to play live shows with many of them.

337 Out of a contractually obligated nine mixes.
money. I didn’t want to provoke another outburst\(^{338}\), so we ended the call with a tense agreement: W would keep the deposit, but owed the band further services to its value; and I privately planned that the band would never collect on those services. It was the best outcome that I could think of: the deposit was a significant financial loss for the band, but W would walk away quietly to avoid exposing why the debt existed. Personally, I was gutted that the band had lost something else because of my gender. But professionally, I chose to be pragmatic: P and I had mixed other records, and they turned out well. If that was the only alternative we could afford, so be it; our work would sound better than W’s!

Then I got very lucky. Nameless Friends played at Deep River Summerfest at the end of July, and my parents drove up to watch the show. My father was so impressed with the performance and new songs that he offered to cover *Blasphemy*’s marketing costs\(^{339}\). His investment allowed me to use our original marketing budget to hire a second mixing engineer. If I didn’t have access to that generational wealth, *Blasphemy* would not exist as it does, and I firmly believe it would be much less successful\(^{340}\).

This was not my first experience with gendered abuse in the recording industry. I include so much detail here because my experience is so common and representative. I reached out to several female peers and mentors to debrief W’s outburst, and none of them were surprised. All of them shared similar experiences with other men in the industry, some far more violent than mine. But when I told a male colleague what happened with W, he chided me for “being angry” when “it all worked out”, and insinuated that discussing W’s behaviour was irresponsible and vengeful on my part.

To be clear, it didn’t “all work out”. W stole from this project. This isn’t the first time he’s behaved abusively or stolen from artists. He remains popular in outwardly feminist circles, meaning many people do not have informed consent when they work with him. He bullied me and contributed to gendered trauma that I had to seek care for\(^{341}\). He has never apologized, never made reparations, and has been known to work unsupervised with underage female artists - female children. I don’t have a solution to this, outside of publicly torching my own reputation to expose him\(^{342}\). I report my

\(^{338}\) Not because I personally feared W or his feelings, but because I feared he would take his grievances public and slander the band. Nameless Friends was a very small indie band at this time, and I didn’t think that we could compete with W in the court of public opinion, especially not in the local London music scene.

\(^{339}\) We wouldn’t develop an informed plan for spending this money until December 2022, as discussed in the last chapter.

\(^{340}\) More on this in Chapter 5.

\(^{341}\) Producing *Blasphemy* through the demos (and subsequent “hysterical pussy conflict”); the fallout from my interactions with W; and the chronic illness struggles I discussed in the previous chapter; were essentially the reasons I sought therapy in winter 2022. Depression is a bear, and I hope any readers who experience it are able to get the care they deserve.

\(^{342}\) Considering that the colleague who reprimanded me for how I handled W is a self-identified radical leftist/feminist/ally etc., I don’t have high hopes for how the general population or wider music scene would react if I named W in this research, let alone W himself.
experience within the context of this research, in solidarity with the female producers who don’t have my privileges; and the female producers who can’t safely say anything at all.

4.3. *Elocutio* part II - mixing *Blasphemy*

For the sake of clarity and expedience, this chapter discusses my creative practice during *elocutio* and *memoria* as disparate, consecutive phases. But practically, I was often juggling both at the same time. I encourage readers to compare January 2023 through April 2023 from both *elocutio* and *memoria* to get a sense of how fiercely producers must multitask (and don’t forget that *dispositio* and *pronunciatio*, from the previous chapter, were also happening in January 2023 to March 2023!).

4.4. September 2022

Thanks to my father, I began September 2022 on the hunt for a new mixing engineer. I was unwilling to trust friends’ contacts after what happened with W, so I turned exclusively to my own network. One person stood out, we’ll call him K. K was a fellow artist who ran in similar circles, and he and I became friends on social media shortly before I began recording *Blasphemy*. I knew that K had mixed most of his own records: those records weren’t in the same genre as *Blasphemy*, but they shared an exquisite sense of schematic space that intrigued me.

As things often happen in the music industry, I ran into K in July 2022 at a mutual friends’ show. We had a wonderful discussion about production in the digital age, during which I felt profoundly safe and understood. So in September 2022, I asked K if he would meet with me to discuss mixing Nameless Friends’ new record. He accepted, and in our meeting, revealed an excellent portfolio of mixing work for other artists - much of which was a similar genre to what I envisioned for *Blasphemy*. K crafted schematic space just as beautifully in this portfolio, and I wanted that sonic signature for our album! In contrast to W’s hyper corporate mixes, I thought K would use our tracks faithfully and sympathetically. In other words, I thought that K would mix *Blasphemy* to sound like itself, on purpose.

---

*Slang that roughly equates to “meets common parameters of success/high production value, but in a soulless/cynical way”; used to describe artefacts that have been influenced by commercial motivation to the detriment of their artistry. Usually used pejoratively in my networks, and the pejorative intention behind “meets common parameters” is sometimes sarcastic: a “corporate” mix may or may not actively pretend/seek to be an original/interesting/competent mix, but it definitely isn’t one.*
Further, I knew that K could work with me as a female producer. I intuitively felt safe and respected every time we spoke, and he was sincerely curious about what the band and I wanted from our album mixes. This combination of embodied knowledge and lack of ego was sufficient vetting for me, and I hired K to mix Blasphemy and its singles. Once again, my embodied knowledge would prove prescient: K did such a superb job mixing Blasphemy and its singles - and I personally enjoyed working with him so much - that I later re-hired him to mix the deluxe version of the album.

4.5. December 2022

When I planned Blasphemy’s production process in dispositio, I envisioned mixing the whole album at once. I wanted to embellish and finalize all the tracks in parallel to keep pronunciatio consistent. This is a common production practice, because embodied decision-making can be influenced by changes in the environment in which the body is working. Post-production consistency is also particularly good practice for concept albums; the point of a concept album is that the songs sound inherently related, which mixing as a group certainly helps.

But as discussed in the previous chapter, lead vocal difficulties delayed post-production into the winter of 2022/2023. I kept K and my mastering engineer informed of production progress during this time, and they graciously re-organized their workloads to accommodate Blasphemy. Our release deadlines were not so flexible. By December 2022, it was obvious that the album wasn’t ready to move to post with the first single, “7 Years of Blood”, nor perhaps with subsequent singles “Sympathy for Lilith” and “Need”. It was my responsibility to make sure we met those release deadlines, so I decided that elocutio and memoria must bow to dispositio: the singles would go to mixing as soon as they were ready.

344 I am using the word “work” semantically and particularly here. For any “himpathetic” [Manne, 2017] W-apologists reading this chapter, I must be clear that W did not, and seemingly could not, work with me. His actions must not be minimized as “poorly” working with me, or some variation of: if I hired a gardener, and all they did was vigorously suffocate my flower beds with mulch and howl at me about landscapers they don’t respect, we would call them a fraud and perhaps unhinged, but certainly not a “poor gardener”.

345 A green flag and credit to K’s professionalism, he took the chain of production command seriously and went out of his way to demonstrate his respect for my leadership. In an early mix of “7 Years of Blood”, I compiled a list of the band’s notes and sent them to K; the band’s drummer requested a particularly strong mix choice in this list. Even though I had compiled the list and presumably approved sending off this particular note, K privately contacted me and asked how I felt about it. He knew that the note did not fit with my vision, and he wanted to make sure I wasn’t feeling obligated to pretend otherwise because of my bandmate relationship. I assured him that I included the note because I wanted him to apply it… to demonstrate to the drummer why it was a bad idea!

346 A further green flag and credit to his professionalism, K was happy to get started without the band placing a deposit. I was not about to make that mistake again!

347 The digital streaming age + waterfall strategy has made it an equally common practice to assemble albums out of mostly pre-existing singles. Hats off to the recordists that figure that one out.
ready, to make sure they were released on time, and it was my job to make the rest of the album match when production caught up.

The first part of Blasphemy to enter post was “7 Years of Blood”. I made the first elocutio decision myself: I chose to include a layer of pads. “7 Years of Blood” has great rhythmic momentum and drive, but I thought the recorded performances of the band alone weren’t sounding as grand or anthemic as I envisioned. I used the MIDI data that P and I had programmed to trigger an organ sample (see Track 115 on the Project Playlist). It’s subtle, but you can hear how it adds both high frequency sheen and low frequency richness to the arrangement without competing with the guitars or vocals in the mid range: (Track 20) versus (Track 116). I also thought it was appropriate to embellish a rock album called “blasphemy” with a veridic church and metal instrument like an organ, instead of something less veridic and more pop like a synth. I resolved to make virtually all of the pads on the album some sort of organ at this time.

I bounced the organ MIDI data into an audio track, and sent that track to K with the rest of the arrangement for “7 Years of Blood” in late December 2022. He began mixing shortly before the new year.

4.6. January 2023

Half of post-production in the digital age is file management. P, K and I worked out a system: P and I made Logic Pro X sessions for each song, imported all the tracks into the sessions (to make sure nothing was lost or corrupted), roughly levelled and panned all the tracks to show K our general visions, and then sent K the sessions.

It took some trial and error to foolproof this, and the first round of mixes for “7 Years of Blood” was one such adventure: our first file transfer only sent K the raw audio tracks, and none of the context we’d crafted! Nonetheless, “He winged it from scratch and it was [a] [very] good [demonstration of his] instincts already [which] massively relieved me”. That winging is Mix 1 of “7 Years of Blood”: (Track 40).

K emailed me Mix 1 with some of his thoughts. I listened to it and emailed back, “We are deeply impressed that you built this from scratch with no reference…! It feels fun and in the right direction already… The drums are banging, no notes. I don’t think we’ve ever had no drum notes right off the bat for anything…

I don’t know how I feel about the vocals either. The saturation is cool and not overly compressed, which I like, [but] they do feel a bit quiet/far back in the mix? I don’t

348 The raw tracks sounded like a great performance of the song, but not a timeless, canon version of the song that would endure for decades.

349 We quickly discovered that if the Logic Pro X session wasn’t packaged exactly so, otherwise reliable services like Google Drive would neglect to actually send the session and only send the audio tracks with no formatting or organization. Helpful!

350 K sent me his thoughts and notes alongside mix revisions when he thought prudent. I have not included the text of K’s notes in this paper to protect his privacy and trade secrets.
know if that’s… a wetness/processing issue or just a levelling issue though? I think I’ll have a better [sense] of tone direction once they’re more present.

That preceding note] is [also] related to guitar/pads spacing - again, I’m [very] impressed you built this without a reference and got as close to our intention as you did… Broadly, we’d like the lead guitar to be louder and more forward (… a consistent melody through the song), and the pads to be a bit less intense/more ducked under the lead vocals + guitars [for] support than an obvious voice of their own. Our rough balance does a better job of demonstrating [this] than I could… explain in words, BUT: the rough balance is already so lame and dry compared to this first pass you’ve just done, so please don’t take this as, “ah, gotta tone everything down to be like the rough balance”!!! This level of drama is awesome and I’m excited about it, just different things at the front [of the mix]…”

P + I then transferred K our proper mix session for “7 Years of Blood”. As discussed in the previous chapter, I decided that “7 Years of Blood” would be Nameless Friends’ first single from Blasphemy. I wanted it to reach as wide an audience as possible, and make a strong first impression that conveyed the band’s genre-bending savvy in our new era. I envisioned that the mix would have a vaguely classic sound, nod to older rock records in the guitars and drums, while maintaining a pop-coherent legibility around the vocals and metal-coherent low end for modern freshness.

While K worked on my notes, I began assembling a playlist of reference tracks for Blasphemy. I added tracks to this playlist throughout post-production: each track imports some quality that I wanted to be listening for in our mixes and masters. At this point in mixing, I added “Bombtrack” by Rage Against the Machine for “bass pop and cohesion on the low end to make it sound heavy… I’m listening… around the 0:50ish mark… but only the opening riff blooms; the song gets a little stark and empty after that”; and “Pomok naka Poktoinskwes” by Jeremy Dutcher “as a sort of vocal foil to Rage Against the Machine”.

Next, K sent me Mix 2: (Track 41). I listened and noted,

- “The vocals aren’t right yet, but we gave [K] a really dynamic performance that he’s avoided riding so far, so I’ll have to give him permission to do that…”

---

351 Reference tracks are outside recordings, usually made by other recordists/artists, that producers (and engineers, and all sorts of recordists) use to guide their ears when refining their own tracks. Reference tracks can be highly individualized to the recordists and/or the project, but there are a few that are widely agreed upon, like “Back in Black” by AC/DC (which is indeed on my reference track playlist).

352 The entire playlist is available as Appendix E, and includes the date that I added each track to the playlist so you can see how my reference sensibilities evolved during post.

353 “Riding” is slang for a particular, detail-intensive form of automating volume. If you ask an engineer to “ride” a vocal, you are asking them to follow that vocal through the song and program it for optimal volume at every possible moment. An aggressively “ridden” vocal performance appears to float through the mix at exactly the same level of clarity, no matter what changes within the performance or in the mix around it. This is the how mainstream pop vocals are always perfectly listenable.
• The ride cymbal in the bridge still sucks, I hate that sample, but we'll ask him to boost it and try to get some high ping out of it like I intended when arranging the part.
• Overall I'm impressed and relieved that he's reached for such lush, wet, high-heavy processing… I know if left to my own devices that I can make mixes overly dark and dry, and… [W]'s mixes were sterile and void of truly veridic highs in that awful early 2000s way, so I'm feeling good about my decision to bring [K] on for his sense of space and ambient work…"

To K, I responded, “This is a load better, we're all big fans. The only specific thing is the ride in the bridge could come up a bit so it rings harder through everything…

Otherwise we'd… like to refine everything a bit: automate the vocal in loud places so it can come up overall and be a bit less megaphone-y; sculpt out a small amount of the background so the guitars + bass pop forward a bit more; but only to like a small degree, this feels 80% of the way there already.

I'm wondering if it might be easier if P + I visited your studio to do some of this, so you're not stuck trying to estimate how much “a bit” is, or where to ride the vocal exactly? … it's easily arranged, just let me know.”

The other half of post-production in the digital age is workflow. Many mix engineers prefer to cap their process at a few rounds of revisions, and would expect to be nearly finished with “7 Years of Blood” at this point. But K and I worked so well together on Blasphemy because (among other reasons) he is also a creative, reflective practitioner who prefers to do many small, successive cycles of revisions and reflections.354 No working style is better than any other, but it’s important to know who you’re hiring and how they prefer to practice before you get into the weeds of a project: misaligned expectations can curdle into album-ruining resentment.

K and I agreed that listening together in person would be best for nuanced mix details, so we developed a mutual workflow: K began each mix alone, and set up the critical mass of spacing and sculpting by himself, based on the sessions that P + I sent him. Then when it was time to refine, I trekked out to [his] studio and guided revisions on the spot. We gave ourselves proportionate time after these mixing days to rest our ears, and then repeated the cycle until each mix was finished.

So after Mix 2, I visited K for the first time to advise tweaks on “7 Years of Blood”. The result was Mix 3: (Track 42). After K and I rested our ears for a day or so, I emailed him, “The band is still getting back to me with their notes…, but I sincerely doubt they’ll say something much different than what I’m thinking with fresh ears, so I’ll give you [mine] now… Exactly three notes:

1. Can the crowd vocals (the “blood” chant) be more prominent in the bridge? Not by a huge amount, by a … nice amount :)

---

354 It takes an enormous amount of patience and care to work this way, so compensate the folks you hire accordingly. I could already see how much extra time K was going to be devoting to us at this stage of mixing, so I budgeted to tip him 50-100% on the singles, and another 50% on the album. The exact numbers are his business.
2. Can the bass be a little more prominent, so the rumble underwrites the lead guitar a bit more? I don’t care about this as much in the verses, I’m mainly looking for another little edge of it in the choruses, but I suspect (based on what I know of the performance) that if you just apply the note to the overall part it will have the same effect

3. Lead vocals volume: can we make the lead vocal in the two verses and two choruses a bit louder, so that it sits about where the lead vocal in the bridge currently sits (those are the few “Oooh, seven years of blood”s [peeking] over the crowd chanting + ride cymbal bit)? And then make the lead vocal in the bridge a bit quieter, so that it sits where the lead vocal in the verses + choruses currently sits?

The course of mixing never runs smooth, though. Hours later, I emailed K again, “I spoke too soon and jinxed it, sorry! The rest of the band has notes neither [P] or I saw coming, because it would be too easy otherwise.

- I’m shocked I ever believed we could get away with no drum notes: they think the cymbals + hats are too washy, and the drums themselves need more weight + to be carved out from the atmosphere more
- They also want more bass in the mix, a good chunk more overall
- They want to wrangle the vocal reverb/delay tails a bit more in the choruses, say it’s feeling a bit muddy at times from that.

Reading between the lines, I’m wondering if they’re also asking for a cleaner mix in general, i.e. less wall of sound? But I leave you to experiment with that, because I also still think that we want it to sound potent and pop-competitive.”

K indulged the band’s notes accordingly, and sent back Mix 4: (Track 43). I responded, “We got what we asked for, thanks for committing to the bit so hard… Overall I think this is a step backward, but I’m glad we tried it for posterity. The boosted bass is mostly low bass, so it’s taking over on speakers with bass response, and… leaving the mix sounding empty on speakers with no bass response. I’m not letting them put this out like this and they can fight me…

I want to validate what the band is thinking though, see if we can find a middle ground between this and Mix 3. I do like the more powerful drums: can we prevent them from ringing as long, tighten them up? Maybe a light gate so they’re not stomping all over the mix in the low end, bit more crack on the snare? As for the bass, I think what the band was asking for was really the mid/high mid articulation of bass. This level of *feeling* the literal low bass is too much: it’s wubbing out and [messing] with both the guitars and drums. Can we tone that down, towards a mix three level, but boost *perception* of the bass in the mix? So the band can hear it mirroring the lead guitar, even on speakers without much actual low bass response?

I also think some of the wall of sound guitars need to come back. Not as intense as Mix 3, so the cymbals can stay crisp, but some of it. It’s important glue and vibe. All of this will definitely mess up the delicate vocal balance that you’ve achieved here, but we’ll deal with that next round”.

This led to Mix 5: (Track 44). The weather prevented me from driving to K’s studio at this time, so I emailed him my notes instead: “Now we’re cooking with gas! The
whole band is on board now save some small tweaks, thanks for humouring everyone today.

1. You’ve done so well with the kick + hi hats that both are a little *too* loud, if we could turn them down a touch

2. The crowd vocals (the “blood! blood!” chant) could come up a decent amount; the lead vocals in the same section can come down to accommodate.

3. This note is from our drummer, I’m printing it verbatim: “if snare can have just a little bit more attack...that PANG if you know what i mean. You know that i tune my snare higher to get that pang from the rim shot. You heard it million times. The snare thats flirting between hard rock and metal. Arejay Hale have that exact one on Back from the Dead355. Or maybe this one is close example too [the example is “Indoctrination” by AlterBridge]”. To be clear, the loudness of the snare is great. He means this as a tone thing, a sculpting thing at its current level.

4. The bass is doing weird things on our end that I don’t know how to describe. I think it’s loud enough because we can generally feel where it is (I think), but we’re still having a hard time actually hearing the part it plays. I’m wondering if it’s an EQ thing? When it goes really low in the choruses, it’s a little more legible, but the verses feel mostly like a space is being occupied by what we assume is the bass, I don’t think it’s anything else there, we just don’t hear the bass part? Let me know if that makes sense and I’ll try to explain another way. We’re hearing the low space where I assume the bass is more than the actual mid of the bass itself, and we’d like the latter as opposed to the former.”

K responded with Mix 6: (Track 45). I sent back, “I think this is our last set of notes, we’re officially getting into niggly automation territory and that’s it!

- Beginning lead vocal “wow” can come up, and I would enjoy if it sounded more chorus-effect-y between the two different tracks that happen there

- Three related notes: Lead vocals up in the verses; Lead vocals in chorus 1 up, though slightly less up than in the verses; Lead vocals in chorus 2 up, but less up than in chorus 1

- The “blood” chant in the bridge has a slight throatiness to it: I like it at this volume, can we just scoop some of that mud so it’s a little more shrill?

- P asks for the outro lead guitar (post “blood” chant, no vocals at all) to be a little more defined: it was recorded with a different patch than the rest of the song, and he says he can hear the difference.

Other than that, I’m noticing one or two spots in the lead vocal that I want to scoot the rhythm: I’ll do an edit tomorrow if not tonight and send you an updated track to swap into place. The end is in sight!!!”

Based on these notes, K sent back Mix 7: (Track 46). With the band’s blessing, I emailed, “This is the one!!!... Would you mind bouncing out two mixes... for mastering? One is our beloved Mix 7, no changes please and thank you. The other is the same mix,

355 He’s describing “Back From the Dead” by Halestorm.
but with the lead vocals (the entire lead vocal bus) boosted another 2db or so? [Our mastering engineer] warned me that a lot of bands end up finding they need a boosted vocal mix [Mix 7.1: (Track 47)] when she’s mastering, so I figure have both ready to go and it saves everyone’s time if we do end up needing it.” K obliged graciously and transferred me the files. With that, “7 Years of Blood” moved to mastering.

4.7. February 2023

In February 2023, K and I tackled the mix for Blasphemy’s second single, “Sympathy for Lilith”. It was the most complicated of the album’s mixes, by far, and K and I spent a furious couple of weeks wrangling it. “Sympathy for Lilith” was Nameless Friends’ second single, and I wanted it to serve essentially the opposite function of “7 Years of Blood”: where “7 Years of Blood” aimed to go wide, and announce Nameless Friends’ new era to as many people as possible, as palatably as possible; “Sympathy for Lilith” would go deep, and inspire rawer, less varnished responses, from a particular demographic. I thought that the mix should be harsher and darker than “7 Years of Blood”, but perhaps more beautiful in the vocals. Above all else, I wanted it to sound heavy.

P + I formatted a session with the multitracks and sent it to K. K began “Sympathy for Lilith” somewhat conservatively with Mix 1: (Track 68). I responded over email, “Overall I think a lot of the structure is already there in this mix: I generally like the drum treatment and lead vocal treatment. I’m listening on headphones that I don’t trust have to the most fabulous bass response right now, so I’ll withhold feedback on that until I get home with proper speakers… The biggest thing is guitars... I want walls of guitars on this one… (I think I once described the production approach to someone as Texas Metallica meets Pirates of the Caribbean…). I think you’ve done... really lovely tasteful guitars, and it doesn’t go far enough for me: I’d like the guitars to be informing the ups and downs of the song, to add or lose perceived level when they come in and out. That will obviously come at the sacrifice of some of the lovely spacey-ness you’ve got going on, but that’s ok for me within reason.

I’ll leave it there for now to see where you take it, no point in addressing any automation specifics until we have a better sense of where everything will sit with louder + richer guitars.”

Based on these notes, K came up with Mix 2: (Track 69). Listening to Mix 2, I could already hear that we were in for a complicated ride. “Sympathy for Lilith” is a six minute, mini rock opera, and I wanted the mix to convey that. I wrote back, “I’m wondering if next step should be to get together? Things are sounding close tonally now, but I’m realizing that [I’m] envisioning a bunch of spacing things for ~narrative reasons~ that I’m not sure will all fit in an email (like automating the level of perceptive backing vocals at certain parts, relationships between the two guitar parts throughout, etc.). I can

---

356 Primarily metal fans and women.
make you a chart of the song with timestamps and section labels, so [my] notes make more sense in that respect, but I think it would help to… just get started in person?”

Unfortunately, weather and life events intervened in our respective schedules at this point, which prevented me from travelling for a few days. So we could progress, I sent K a list of every mix nuance and automation that I knew I wanted:

“Ok, a chart and notes! I’ve attached a PDF of the parts of the song [Figure 1, see the end of this chapter], and colour coded for the sections (movements?) of the song, with the opening lyric of each part. Based on that chart, my mix notes are below.

I hope this isn’t an overwhelming amount of stuff to think about, my goal is that it gets the mix closer so… I can refine with you in-person…

Verse 1
- the guitar is overwhelming the lead vocal here. Can we make it less potent, a bit more wistful, and further back? Then the lead vocal can come right up to the listener’s ear… dry and intimate
- more of an exponential level automation from this section into the next please, where the guitar feedback is just barely there until it’s suddenly WALL of the whole band

Intro
- wider separation of the two guitars, want to hear their distinct voices at fairly equal levels
- [Rhythm guitar] can be tonally more grand and open
- [Lead guitar] tonally can be more djent, heavier in the palm-muted chugs
- Organ pad down

Rest of A section from Verse 2 onward
- Lead vocals can be similarly dry and intimate in Verse 2 as in Verse 1, becoming more wet and increasingly further back in the mix until the performance reaches peak volume and emotional intensity in Refrains 4 + 5 and the bridge; last line of this section “to be good” should be nearly back to Verse 1 level of dry and close, but not quite
- Better guitar separation, so when [my] guitar comes in there is a noticeable addition, and a noticeable absence when it leaves; if this makes the mix a bit lopsided at times, that’s ok
- Pads down a lot in the refrains, just a hint of them around the lead vocal (just for glow, not audible…)
- Less/no audible delay tails on the lead vocal

Refrain 3
- [Lead] guitar can have more meat on it, same djenty quality as the Intro
- Can’t hear [rhythm] guitar
Refrain 4 + 5, and Bridge
- Should be one of the emotional high points of the song; every note from the general A section notes applies here, and then some
- Backing vocals can be leveraged a bit more to really oomph the lead vocal in the bridge

Interlude
- No notes. Like this lots.

B section verse, p.1
- The lead vocal can get edgier now. We're in a new section of the song, it's still close to the listener's ear but sounds more “done”, polished, hinting at what's coming

B section verse, p.2
- When this hits, we want it to sound like a sudden WALL 2.0
- Between all the layers of vocals and the pads, I want this to sound like a choir! Think Bohemian Rhapsody, where the lead vocal is ever-so-slightly-louder than the others, but it sounds like many distinct voices glued together with like the voice-like wash of the pads
- Different approach than the rest of the song: the backing vocals can all be heard distinctly and prominently here

Riff section
- Amp up the drama and sense of wide space for this
- More guitar separation, pumpy choir pads around the drums, etc.
- Full blown rock lead vocal, soaring

Vocal couplet
- A smidge more intensity and saturation to the lead vocal here. This ain't your sad little A section vocal

Guitar solo
- Soloing guitars can come a solid bit more forward, essentially to a lead vocal level
- Organ pad down
- Rhythm guitar up a bit to cushion/glue the bass + drums under the solo

C section verse
- Same note as before on guitar separation, where the mix is allowed to have “holes” as [my] guitar comes in and out
- Lead vocal can be downright menacing here, bolstered by the low double
- Less/no audible reverb tail when this section cuts out in preparation for the outro
Outro
- Backing vocals don’t currently have a consistent space relationship to lead vocals throughout (I think because the volume of the lead vocal varies, sorry): first long “gooooooood” the lead vocal can come down a smidge to allow for an edge of backing vocal shimmer, second long “gooooooood” the backing vocal is too prominent and sounds audibly like a double instead of a shimmer
- Carve out space for the final “be good” to be more forward and dry, paralleling the rest of the song
- Pads down: should just be shimmer on top… can come way down to clear out mid space for the guitars
- Same note as before on guitar separation, want to hear the distinct guitar voices as they change articulations of the ending motif”

K tackled these notes alone, resulting in Mix 3: (Track 70). Later in the same week, we agreed that I needed to join him in studio to make further progress: “[I]’ve had a few days to do a lot of listening, and I’d like to do a bit of a re-set for the next mix if that’s ok with you. I’m finding that this already sounds a bit too forward and compressed, even before a master, that it’s missing a sense of acoustic, almost classical, breathing room in between all the elements. I’d like to get rid of the whole multi-pressor situation at the end of the chain, and a bunch of the processing that’s thickening up the sound in general, and then go from there. Since we do have a deadline… I can be at your place to give feedback every day to keep things moving… I swear this feels like important progress… even if it’s first making things messier. Thanks for your patience and willingness to experiment!”

Together, K and I finessed “Sympathy for Lilith” through a couple of rounds of revisions into Mix 6: (Track 71). From there, we were confident enough about our communication to go back to emailing revisions. Once I had a day or so to sit with our latest changes, I emailed K: “Like I texted half-comprehensibly, the biggest thing I’d like to change about Mix 6 is the guitar panning: let’s send [P]’s guitars as equally far to the right as my guitars are panned left. Then let’s pan my rhythm guitar under the solo to the centre… That will obviously leave [P]’s guitar alone on the right sometimes, and that’s ok…”

K responded with Mix 7: (Track 72), to which I said, “Oh my god what a difference. The panning makes things soo much better. I suspected that might happen, but I don’t know that I expected it to be this dramatic…

Three small things:
- the guitar tone at the very very beginning of the song isn’t quite doing it for me yet. I’m not sure if it’s too much talkback [mic]? It’s interfering with the lead vocal a smidge, they just don’t sound like they’ve blended yet to me. I like the vocal, so my temptation is to make the guitar move to the vocal, but let me know if you have any brighter ideas!
- my lead guitar tone isn’t quite there in the solo yet, and a bit quiet. Can we bring
it up, attempting the emphasize the sort of pure, soaring quality?
- a bit more choir in the choir bit if you don’t mind, I’d like to take advantage of
our lovely new space to hear a touch more articulation from the backing voices”

K interpreted these notes as **Mix 8**: (Track 73), which I kicked back to the band to
solicit their feedback. I translated their thoughts for him: “Ok, I’ve got a short list of
remaining notes for you. We’re this close; I may be ready to fight my band so we can be
done. But let’s try this last round before it comes to that!

First thing: I owe you this new lead vocal track, if you wouldn’t mind swapping it
in (there were a couple of lazy edits in the old one, this should be… cleaned up properly).

Second thing: little vocal automation, can we bring up the “be good” at the very
beginning of the song, around the 0:28 mark? I’d like to hear just a smidge more of the
vocal vowels on ‘bE’ and ‘gOOd’ over the guitar.

Third: a few niggly guitar automations in the front half of the song. [P’s guitar
can come up a bit from 1:07 - 1:43. [P]’s guitar can also come up the tiniest bit (less than
the previous one) from 1:43 - 1:50 (the slide from 1:50-1:52ish is great volume as is).
[P]’s lead guitar from 1:53 - 2:06 can come down just a touch, like half a db. Then from
2:08 - 3:04, it feels like [P]’s guitar is slighting edging out my guitar: we love the sense of
fullness around the vocal though and don’t want to change that, so could you perhaps split
the difference? Bring his down a touch and mine up a touch? Something small like that.

Fourth: My solo guitar hasn’t sat quite right since I asked you to mess with it the
other night when our ears were shot, so the persistence of this note is on me, sorry!! I’m
looking for more high-mid sustain and less crunch/drive on it. I don’t know if it helps, but
[P] took a pass at it in our rough session and exported this example (Track 125, *sent as
attachment*). That’s the sort of tone + relationship between the two leads that I’m looking
for. The only tracks we used were the 212 mic and talkback, if that could be affecting it?
[P] also took screenshots of his settings on my guitar tracks specifically, which are in the
folder too.

Fifth: I’ll admit this is a controversial one for me. I love how prominently the
drums are currently sitting in the mix, I think it makes everything sound compelling and
fresh. … our drummer doesn’t dispute that or want any of the drums quieter: but he does
think the snare sounds “too MIDI”, not enough “crack”; and that the toms are too round.
We fought to get those real-sounding, heavy toms and their nice ring out of this mix, so I
don’t know that I agree with him about this, but I wonder if you can touch it ever-so-
slightly so that the drums stay massive, but he’s happier? The kick and cymbals are fine,
it’s the literal drums that seem to be his issue.”

K admirably balanced these competing interests, and sent me **Mix 9** of
“Sympathy for Lilith”: (Track 74). I responded, “There’s something about this album… it
would be too easy if there were no little things to change after we thought we were
done…”

I sent you a text saying this, I’ve discovered exactly one thing that I’d like to fix, if
you don’t mind? I sent you a note before asking for the very first “be good” in the song to
be turned up a touch, and I think it accidentally got applied to the very LAST "be good" of the song (the literal final two words of the song) instead: can we turn down those final two words of the song? They're popping out of the mix in a way that almost sounds like a dub to me, it doesn't blend proportionately with the rest of the mix.

Then if you’re feeling generous, if we could automate up the "be good" at the very beginning, right before the band comes in, it's around the 28 second mark? Just so the vowels of 'bEE' and 'gOOd' can be heard ever so slightly more above the guitar. Another 0.2 - 0.5 adjustment, truly.

Then, then, we will be done. Touch wood.”

K responded with **Mix 10**: (Track 75). And for a moment\(^{357}\), we were indeed done mixing “Sympathy for Lilith”.

### 4.8. March 2023

In March 2022, post-production sped up. “Need” was the next single on our release timeline that needed to be completed, and “Bitter Man” had also successfully cleared production, so I sent K both songs at once. The following mix notes were happening concurrently, but for the sake of legibility, I’ll discuss them successively here,

I envisioned that “Need”, as Blasphemy’s third single, would have a sort of dark-horse irreverence when contrasted with “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith”. As discussed in the last chapter, “Need” had the greatest potential of Blasphemy’s singles to sound young. I thought that demanded a mix that was darker, and perceptively heavier in the rhythm section coherence, than Top 40 pop-rock records on the radio; but harsher and shriller in the high end. In other words, I wanted “Need” to sound a little wilder than classic rock, and a little less polished than pop, but balanced enough to seem intentional.

K sent over **Mix 1**: (Track 52). I responded, “Overall one note, this feels powerful but really dark (which fair, the last song you worked on for us was [“Sympathy for Lilith”]. [“Sympathy for Lilith”] is the darkest the record will go, “Need” could stand to be almost the opposite end of the spectrum: [more towards] obnoxious radio-rock brightness/wetness… The vocals are getting a bit buried too, same note about making them wetter and shriller and brighter. There’s nothing more specific than that, this song is much more straightforward than our last one…”

K sent **Mix 2** with his own notes, to test the bounds of the highs that I asked for: (Track 53). I indeed thought it overcorrected: “… the high end is so shrill that it’s overpowering the mids of the guitars, and there’s a bit of an ice-picky quality around the vocals/cymbals/guitars that I’d prefer smoother. I think the whole thing could use more wetness for spacing/glue/room, but less high shelf, if that makes sense?”.

So K countered with **Mix 3**: (Track 54). I was thrilled: “Fine line indeed, this feels a lot better to me… I think everything is in roughly the right place now, space-wise, like the literal room feels properly set to me now. I like the guitars, like the drums, not

\(^{357}\) For readers that can’t stand suspense, jump ahead to read about the mastering phase of this same single in the chapter section *Memoria*, sub-section “March 2023”.
sure if we want a touch more bass, but I’m checking on headphones right now… and will get you a better verdict about that tomorrow.

The vocals feel a bit mid-scooped/edgy somehow, and I can’t believe I’m about to say this, not pop-y and/or possibly compressed enough… Could you take a look at that with a… smoothing ear? I’m also thinking we might want to send you a pad of some sort; I had an anti-pad phase last week… I’m over [it] now.

But it’s just little stuff like that. If you could look at the vocals next, I’ll see about an organ pad tomorrow, and then we’re already good to solicit band feedback…

True to my word, the following morning I used the MIDI data that P and I had programmed to tailor an edgy organ pad for “Need”’s choruses. I sent it to K, and he sent back Mix 4: (Track 55). Within hours, I had notes: “The backing vocals + pads are all a bit loud to me, popping out as their own discernible parts where I’d like them to be sunk under the main parts harder. The drums, bass, and guitars definitely have more of that radio quality we asked for: is it possible to walk a line that re-introduces some low power and punch, so the whole band hits harder on the riffs? I’m missing the bass rumble on big speakers for sure. It’s a weirdness where the first mix had that powerful quality nailed down perfectly, but was dark, and this is definitely brighter but I miss some of the underbelly. The vocals are also feeling a bit too effected: there’s an audible halo and delay tails encroaching on other stuff that’s not my favourite… An important amendment [though]! The “who gets your billions” double in verse three, where the entire track is just that? Fire. I love hearing that as audibly as it is. Thank you for getting that and using it accordingly!”

Hours after my notes, K had finessed them into Mix 5: (Track 56). I responded even later in the same day, “… the new Need mix is YES. Perfect bloody balance of punch + radio. Can we now, on our tightrope of aesthetics, attempt to make everything *except the bass, bass is perfect* slightly wetter? It’s feeling a little dry. Vocals included.”

We were on a roll, and K sent Mix 6 the next morning: (Track 57). I thought we were nearly finished save for small, finishing value judgements, so K and I planned that I would drive out to his studio the next day to refine “Need” in person. In preparation for that session, I emailed him:

“I plan that we’ll tackle these tomorrow when I’m there, but just in case you’re curious or keen to look at anything before I show up, this is what I’m thinking…

- I’d like to go back Mix 5 for guitar/bass/drum treatment; the effort at slightly more wetness was valiant, but Mix 5 just hits better
- Let’s keep the Mix 6 treatment for vocals though, those are much better
- In the little feedback-y transition between the very beginning of the song (music box and vocals) and first riffy bits (guitars), we’re missing a [pad] riser that makes the transition more dramatic
- The toms could pop out more

358 Signing off from the same email, “Mix 3… amazing how quickly things can get done when they aren’t mini rock operas.”
- One just the lead guitars, [P]’s not a fan of the slapback, and wants to change up how we sum this sound; I have more details for how to do this that we can unpack when I get there
- I’d like the lead vocal doubles to be less loud in the choruses (bit less [audibly] double-y)
- Overall I think there’s a little mud scooping to be done, but I would rather deal with all the other stuff first before we tackle this, to avoid [messing] with my beloved Mix 5 guitars”.

We made these changes the next day over the course of Mixes 7 through 10 (Tracks 58 through 61). After our usual ear rest, Mix 10 (Track 61) still sounded great to me, so “Need” moved on to mastering.

For “Bitter Man”, I told K, “We want this one real vibey, embrace the twelve string and piano and let the rhythm section be less bombastic than it normally is. I don’t know if I love the organ pad tbh, but she’s in there to see what you would do with it.” He sent me Mix 1 of “Bitter Man” with his own notes: (Track 83). Amused, I emailed back, “[This] is indeed very vibey, I’m sorry to say perhaps too much vibe… I’m going to keep it as meditation music, it’s rad[!] But dryer and less washy overall please”.

K refined down to Mix 2: (Track 84), and I was forced to admit that I wanted less “vibey” still: “Let’s pan the guitar as much to the right as the keys are to the left, and take a bunch of processing off of it; I want a raw-er sound with less compressed decay times… What vibe-y pad/soup is the mix swimming in? The organ? I want to dial that back a lot, clean everything up more (sorry [heart emoji])… [and] Dial back/duck/automate out the audible tails on the vocals [please].”

At this point, I was in possession of roughly 40% of (what should have been) Blasphemy’s final mixes: “7 Years of Blood”, “Need”, and “Sympathy for Lilith” were finished, and “Bitter Man” was on its way. I thought that “Need” had turned out perfectly: it was cheeky, clean, a little heavy, and a little edgy; exactly what I wanted Blasphemy to sound like. And “Bitter Man” was coming along nicely. But as I feared, the single mixes for “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith” - mixed out of step with the other songs - had turned out so distinct and disparate that I didn’t think they fit on the same album359. I decided that K and I would re-mix “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith” for Blasphemy’s release360.

I didn’t want to waste the streaming numbers and algorithmic engagement that the single mixes could contribute to the album’s waterfall strategy, so I also decided to adjust dispositio: I would include the single mixes for “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith” on the deluxe version of Blasphemy with “Mezzanine”, and literally call them “7

---

359 Not without majorly undermining the coherence and consistency of the album, at least, which would be a pretty damning flaw for a concept album.

360 This is not a criticism of those single mixes: as I will discuss in the next chapter, they did exactly what I wanted them to do for the band. Frankly, in hindsight, I knew that I was producing the “7 Years of Blood” and “Sympathy for Lilith” single mixes to be so specialized in terms of their respective release campaigns that they would likely be incompatible with a larger album. I did it anyway because I thought they needed that oomph to maximize their potential in the DSP marketplace.
Years of Blood [single mix]” and “Sympathy for Lilith [single mix]”. That way, their waterfall utility wasn’t wasted, just postponed. And Nameless Friends could frame it as intentional, bonus content for their fans, which would add value and a sort of behind-the-scenes intimacy to the release cycle.

4.9. April and May 2023

By April 2022, the rest of Blasphemy had cleared production and moved on to K. He made his initial mixes alone, and then we completed the rest together in person, because it was far more efficient than sending massive emails of notes - about multiple songs - back and forth. I drove out to his studio several days a week, and each day, we did 2-3 successive rounds of mix notes and tweaks on every song, separated by ear breaks where we drank tea and commiserated about indie production gossip in his garden.

In the first week of in-person mixing, “Bitter Man” evolved to Mix 3 on April 11: (Track 85); Mix 4 on April 13: (Track 86); Mix 5 on April 17: (Track 87); and Mix 6 on April 17: (Track 88). K and I left it alone for a week, then auditioned two different options on April 25 (Mixes 7 and 8): (Tracks 89 and 90). Then after another week of space and reflection, we refined those down to two final-ish mix options on May 4 (Mixes 9 and 10): (Tracks 91 and 92).

I will spare readers this level of detail for the remaining mixes on the album. Instead, I invite you to hear the difference that my production practice made! These are the first mixes that K sculpted, unsupervised, for Blasphemy’s remaining tracks:

“Old Time Religion”, Mix 1: (Track 38)
“7 Years of Blood” [album version], Mix 1: (Track 50)
“Demons”, Mix 1: (Track 64)
“An exhortation to church members”, Mix 1: (Track 66)
“Sympathy for Lilith” [album version], Mix 1: (Track 81)
“Forth”, Mix 1: (Track 93)
“Breakfast in a Record Store”, Mix 1: (Track 95)

And here are the final-ish mixes of the same songs on May 4:

“Old Time Religion”, Mix 3: (Track 39)
“7 Years of Blood” [album version], Mix 7: (Track 51)
“Demons”, Mix 9: (Track 65)
“An exhortation to church members”, Mix 3: (Track 67)

I perused a bunch of fan forums to inform this plan, and discovered an entire online subculture devoted to exploring and ranking different mixes of popular songs. Many artists discussed in these forums weren’t even (openly) trying to give their listeners multiple versions of the same track: internet sleuths enthusiastically dedicated their time and energy to find small optimization and marketing differences between the versions released to different platforms/countries. The few artists that did advertise distinct mixes of the same song were beloved by these fans, especially if those artists publicly clarified which mix was which so that fans could pursue their preference.
“Sympathy for Lilith” [album version], **Mix 10**: (Track 82)
“Forth”, **Mix 8**: (Track 94)
“Breakfast in a Record Store”, **Mix 7**: (Track 96)

Nothing has changed in the arrangements of these tracks between these versions\(^{362}\): this is simply the difference that mixing makes. I say “final-ish” because, despite K and I’s best intentions, the course of mastering would not run quite as smooth as we envisioned!

### 4.10. **Memoria - mastering Blasphemy**

I endeavoured to master *Blasphemy* myself when I first proposed this project, and that proposal was sincere. I have had the privilege of studying in Dr. Jay Hodgson’s orbit, and thanks to both his tutelage and a proper amount of messing around, I have successfully mastered most of the records in my discography. As a producer, I enjoy tangibly reconnecting with my projects in their final stage. Mastering feels profound to me, because I am physically helping my artists fix the final forms of their artefacts before they are birthed\(^{363}\) - *memoria*.

However, as soon as I unlocked extra production budget for *Blasphemy*\(^ {364}\), I planned to hire an outside mastering engineer for several reasons. First, my lack of experience. Mastering is the final sonic polish that can make the difference between good, great, and iconic records; and while I have some inclination and/or talent for it\(^ {365}\), talent doesn’t equate the experience - and thus effectiveness - of seasoned professionals. Second, my lack of equipment. I have a small mastering line that serves me well, but it’s entirely digital and sounds both minimalist and modern. As *Blasphemy* evolved in production, I thought it would benefit from an analog touch in mastering that was a little smoother, warmer, and more involved than the raw-sounding masters I was used to making. Third and finally, I hired an outside mastering engineer because of my lack of objectivity. The lead vocals are a huge part of *Blasphemy*’s arrangements, and I knew that much of mastering would be concerned with getting them to sit just right. Recording

\(^{362}\) Well, *almost* nothing. K and I removed a set of pads programmed to sound like human choirs from the choruses in “Demons”, because I thought they sounded creepy (and they weren’t helpful in the way I envisioned). And we added a set of organ pads under the choruses of “Breakfast in a Record Store”, just like in “Need”.

\(^{363}\) This might also be a nice way of saying that I’m a control freak who likes to get the last word in the production process!

\(^{364}\) I.e. my father donated the project marketing budget, freeing me to spend the original marketing budget on other things.

\(^{365}\) A mastering engineer of great repute - unrelated to this project - was once impressed with how profoundly I heard subtle changes in a mastering line while I was shadowing them at an intensive, and said so. It took every shred of my self-control to look appropriately nonplussed about this feedback, and I have carried it around ever since like a shield against imposter syndrome.
those vocals was such an intense, triggering experience for me that I didn’t trust myself to handle them alone.

4.11. September 2022

In September 2022, I emailed a highly-decorated mastering engineer in my contacts, and asked if she would (virtually) meet with me to discuss mastering Blasphemy. We’ll call her G. G is a hero of mine, and I was intimidated to approach her about this project. But she had previously made clear that I could - even should - approach her with mastering questions, so off went my email.

In theory, G is the perfect mastering engineer for Blasphemy: she has experience mastering everything from major rock releases to historical classical re-masters, and I knew I could trust her to maintain the space and veridic-ness that K and I had sculpted in our mixes. But I was also aware that the gulf between G and I’s respective levels of production experience could feel like a power imbalance. She is so decorated that I was apprehensive about giving her feedback, i.e., doing my job.

In practice, there was nothing to worry about. G agreed to meet with me to discuss Blasphemy, and she was superlatively warm and professional in that meeting. When I described my vision to G, I felt truly competent in my role for the first time in Blasphemy’s production process. This is not a slight at P, K, or any of the other wonderful collaborators who were equally generous, kind, and professional during this project; but an observation that being seen by another woman was uniquely powerful and critical to my sense of accomplishment as a producer. Representation matters, and I sincerely thank G for her guidance as much as her work on Blasphemy.

G and I agreed on logistical details like budget and timeline, and then discussed our expectations of loudness. One of the primary concerns of mastering is how loud the

---

366 I historically have a tendency to bury my own vocal performances in a mix, out of some combination of performance anxiety and false modesty that is absolutely the result of sexism and self-policing/fears of taking up too much space and/or being “too loud”. K and I made gorgeous mixes that don’t have this problem, but a competent mastering engineer can easily upset that balance and bury the vocals under the guise of boosting some other quality of the mix - and I knew I could be that competent if triggered and/or motivated accordingly.

367 I am blessed to include G in my contacts because a mutual acquaintance thought I would benefit from connecting with experienced women in the recording industry, and made the introduction. She has been a wonderful influence, and dare I say mentor, ever since. Cheers to the (male) acquaintance who introduced us, that is allyship!

368 “Hello! If you’re not too busy winning Grammys, any chance you would like to work on this upstart, genre-mutt of an indie album that has already caused two spectacular falling outs? I have yet to successfully sing any of it, and if I don’t finish it I won’t graduate. Absolutely no pressure.”
master recordings will be, physically and perceptively. G was not interested in mastering to a “loudness war” level, and I heartily agreed. I wanted Blasphemy to have more dynamic range and headroom than big mainstream rock releases: I thought the lack of compression would make Nameless Friends’ songs sound young and intriguing in comparison to louder masters from bigger bands. This was the final piece of my genre vision. I wanted listeners to get to a Nameless Friends track on a playlist; feel compelled to turn it up a little; be rewarded with transients that were warmly processed, so they sounded expensive and carefully crafted; but not truncated, so they sounded un-varnished and a little irreverent; and think to themselves, “who is this?”.

Recordists often use “loudness” as a colloquial synonym for “amplitude”, the physical height of a sound wave. Amplitude is a technical and logistical concern at every stage of the production process: if recorded sound waves become too tall, they won’t physically fit through the recording/playback equipment unscathed (usually the outsized tops of the waves get chopped off). Increments of audible distortion occur when those peaks are truncated severely enough. Because mastering engineers are equally concerned with true “loudness” (see the next footnote), they must negotiate how and where to adjust amplitude accordingly.

Amplitude is not a consistent equivalent for how loud sounds seem to the human ear. While sound waves with a higher amplitude generally sound louder, mixes can offer such complex schematics of “sounds” that a human ear can find the “musical performance” in a high-amplitude mix to be “quiet”. For example, lets envision two mixes. Mix A contains a single acoustic guitar at amplitude X. Mix B contains an electric guitar, also at amplitude X, as well as a drum kit, bass, and vocalist at proportionate amplitudes. Mix B will have a much bigger, composite sound wave and thus a much bigger mix amplitude than Mix A. But many listeners will hear the acoustic guitar in Mix A to be “louder” than the electric guitar in Mix B, because it takes up so much more of its respective, proportionate mix space. Further, some listeners will contend that Mix A is “louder” than Mix B overall, because the central “performance” (the acoustic guitar) dominates its entire mix space; as opposed to the band members in Mix B who are perceived to be competing for/splitting the same mix space. Mastering engineers are tasked with evening out - or perhaps artistically embellishing - the disparate levels of both perceived and literal loudness between all the final mixes in a project, so that the listener will hear the record as homogeneously loud (or not!) as the artist intends.

“When all other variables are kept constant, listeners reliably prefer the sound of a piece of music when it is played back at a higher volume versus a lower volume (until it starts to actually hurt). [Technological advances in compression and limiting] Over the past several decades [have empowered engineers to cater to] this psychoacoustic phenomenon [and] led to the emergence of music production techniques driven by a “louder is better” mentality... a situation commonly referred to as The Loudness War...” [Wykes, 2021]. In other words, an infamous industry trend of making records as loud as possible for the sake of loudness as a commercial value, even if that loudness interferes with the artistic value of the artefact.
4.12. January 2023

My memoria workflow with G ended up involving more back and forth than I think either of us envisioned. G was working out of a studio in New York, and faced with the choice between hiring a different mastering engineer; travelling to New York at the beginning of a semester; or working together virtually; I was blissfully - and a touch naively - optimistic that the latter would be fine. G was generous and patient with me while we (read: I) learned how to communicate about audio exclusively over the phone and email, and I am grateful to her for it.

I sent G two versions of Mix 7 of “7 Years of Blood” in January 2023. One was the original that K and I settled on in elocutio, and the other was the same mix with the lead vocal slightly boosted: as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, G warned us that her style of mastering could bring out the instrumentation and/or sides of a mix in a way that overpowers vocals in the centre.

The first master she sent back was tasteful, thoughtful, and generally in the direction I was envisioning - no vocal boost necessary. We spent a couple of rounds sussing out a mutual language, and by Master 3, had sculpted some perfect highs, a marriage of vintage brightness with modern air. The lows, however, were proving less cooperative. I had restrained the bass and kick drum in the mix because I feared that mastering-level compression would somehow cause it to bloom and overpower the mids. But G’s gainstaging was so meticulous that the master remained faithfully representative of Mix 7, and thus sounded a bit thin to me. We toyed with the low end within the mastering line itself, trying to compensate, but that somewhat compromised our gorgeous highs. So I went back to K and asked him to re-open “7 Years of Blood” at the mix level.

K rose to the occasion as usual, and devised two challengers: More Bass (Track 48) and Extra Bass (Track 49). I thought that Extra Bass was hilariously “extra”: it shook the floors of my studio when played at a normal volume. But the tradeoff of all that low power was some muddiness and glut in the centre of our otherwise pristine mix, and I didn’t think it made sense to compromise lyrical legibility or perceived production value.

---

372 Experienced mastering engineers, G included, aren’t always (or usually, or ever) in the habit of doing several rounds of notes. There can be a (founded!) assumption that if an artist has the budget and access to such a mastering engineer, they have the budget and access to equally acclaimed producers and mixing engineers who don’t need something as pedestrian as tweaks to get it right. It’s humbling to be the flagrant, rookie exception to that norm.

373 I sent G several emails during the mastering process to insist (somewhat melodramatically) that she charge me for her extra time. She did, and it was a privilege to pay those invoices.

374 To get a sense of what I’m describing here, I highly recommend skimming through (or just watching) Mike Bozzi’s video for the Mix with the Masters Youtube channel. He demonstrates and discusses how he mastered Kendrick Lamar’s “HUMBLE” (one of my reference tracks!), step by step, and you can hear how the psycho-spatial relationship between the beat and lead vocal changes as he progresses. Psychoacoustics are neat. [Mix with the Masters, 2021]
(i.e. mix cleanliness) for pushing subs when we were mastering the album to be primarily accessed through digital streaming platforms; in other words, most of our forecasted audience would be listening on their smartphone or computer. So I chose More Bass to be the true final mix of “7 Years of Blood”.

G turned More Bass into Master 5 of “7 Years of Blood” (Track 121), and when I first listened to it, I was nearly overwhelmed by equal feelings of awe, vindication, and relief. Master 5 delivered the balance of highs and lows that I was looking for, and the band agreed. So I confirmed with G that we had found our final master for “7 Years of Blood”, thanked her profusely, and slated Blasphemy’s first single for release.

4.13. March 2023

Mastering the single version of “Sympathy for Lilith” progressed much the same way as mastering the single version of “7 Years of Blood”. I sent G Mix 10 in March 2023. Her initial master nailed the heaviness in the low end that I envisioned, but something in the high end wasn’t quite right, and I couldn’t put my finger on it. The band agreed, so I emailed G and asked her to adjust accordingly.

The next master was as excellent as everything G does - and the high end certainly sounded better - but it was so bright and punchy overall that I thought it was a step in the wrong direction. Rather than send G another email that essentially contradicted the first email I had just sent her, I asked if we could talk through our next steps on the phone. She agreed, and walked me through the mastering chain that she was using. Based on her description, I concluded that the lead vocal was under-processed in the mix. I realized that when K was mixing the lead vocals, I had obstructed many of his efforts out of possessiveness. That tunnel-vision was now playing out in the masters.

G offered to take another crack at the master based on our phone call, and sent back two options using two different limiters. One limiter gave the vocal a little harshness and boost that was an improvement, but otherwise curtailed the bottom expanse of the mix. The second limiter was the same limiter she used on the very first

---

375 “Subs” is short for “subwoofer”, which are massive, speciality speakers tasked with pumping out bass and sub bass frequencies. Subs are usually part of the sound design of immersive public spaces like clubs, movie theatres, and concert venues (and often cars!); not private homes.

376 The size of a speaker cone is loosely correlated with how capably it produces bass frequencies, because bass frequencies are physically LARGE sound waves. While smartphone, headphone, and small speaker technology is rapidly improving in so-called “bass response”, these speakers aren’t actually capable of generating true bass frequencies: they’re using increasingly clever EQing to imply the existence of bass frequencies. Mixes with lots of lows don’t necessarily translate well to small speakers for this reason, and can sound vaguely hollow and impotent.

377 The single version, anyway!

378 It took me so much time, effort, and pain to record the lead vocal performance that, in hindsight, I didn’t want him to change the fruits of my hard-won struggles.
master: it sounded smoother, and unhelpfully dulled the lead vocals, but made the bottom end powerful and luxurious again.

A/B testing between these two masters made the next step obvious to me. This was a mix issue, and I wasn’t going to have G spend time trying to compensate for it when I knew I could fix it at the source. I reached out to K, explained the situation, and he immediately shelved our other mix efforts so we could focus on finishing “Sympathy for Lilith” on time. I drove out to his studio on March 15th, and we spent the afternoon tweaking four more successive mixes that I felt very good about. I drove back to London in silence and rested my ears until the evening. Habit dictated that I should have waited until the next morning, or even next afternoon, to re-visit our mixes, but I felt we had been so close in the afternoon that I couldn’t resist.

I thought **Mix 11** (Track 76), the first of our new efforts, had a special quality: the vocals were beautiful in a way that **Mix 12** (Track 77), **Mix 13** (Track 78), and **Mix 14’s** (Track 79) respective vocals just… weren’t. I quickly realized this was because **Mix 11’s** vocals have a sizzly sibilance that K and I had progressively tried to tame in the subsequent mixes. That sibilance creates a halo around the lead vocals that is pleasant to listen to during 90% of the song, but snaps harshly through the mix in a few places that I knew the master would amplify. I texted K my findings, and an hour later, he sent me **Mix 15** (Track 80). **Mix 15** wasn’t perfect - the odd moment of sibilance still caught my attention - but I felt deeply in my body that it was right. The vocals were still beautiful, and the sibilance was mitigated in the worst places. After a ridiculous amount of pain and suffering, this was our final mix for “Sympathy for Lilith”.

I sent G **Mix 15** the next morning, and asked her to cover our bases: I wanted to A/B new masters from both her original mastering line and the harsher limiter from the previous round. I was fairly confident that the original line would be it; that K and I had buttressed the vocals enough that they could now thrive; but I was loathe to be wrong and then be forced to ask G to do a second, separate set. She obliged, and I could have thrown a parade: **Mix 15**, through the original “Sympathy for Lilith” mastering line, now sounded almost exactly like I envisioned.

“Almost” exactly like I envisioned because the master compression edged the vocal sibilance to an ever-so-slightly uncomfortable degree again. I decided that if I was in for a penny, I was in for a pound: everyone on the production team had put so much effort into this ridiculous song that I was going to see it through to the very end of its potential. I imported the master into my own Logic Pro X mastering session and identified what I wanted: a tiny EQ notch, less than 0.2 decibels, subtracted from a narrow window of the mix centre where the lead vocals live. I called G and threw myself on her mercy: would she be willing to make this last change for me? I’m not sure what possessed her to say yes, but she did, and a half hour later, I was listening to a master of “Sympathy for Lilith” that made me cry - from empowerment, relief, and recognition.

That emotion became bittersweet a few days later. The band, our team, and I uploaded my beloved “Sympathy for Lilith” master to a DSP emulation platform, to see

---

379 Ibid.
how it would perform through loudness normalization\textsuperscript{380}. While the loud parts of the song were certainly loud enough to be competitive with big budget rock records, the arrangement has such a huge dynamic range that the quiet parts of the song were feeling too quiet for much of the team - and band’s - comfort. As much as I ardently love(d) G’s master and its beautiful, uncompressed dynamic range, I was inclined to agree with the rest of the band and team that pronunciatio needed to prioritize DSP competitiveness over production value in this case. I reached out to G and explained our decision-making, and she graciously delivered a louder version of the master (Track 122), which I then put forward for release. I thought then and now that the louder, final master of “Sympathy for Lilith” gets a little “hashy” in the cymbals - a casualty of the extra compression. But the sides of the mix are certainly more persuasive when slotted next to major rock records on playlists, and G was able to preserve the vocal perfection in the centre, so I took it as a net win.

Blasphemy’s second single was complete. I paid K and G double for their trouble.

4.14. April 2023

By the time “Need” was ready for mastering in April 2023, I was convinced that G hated my guts and dreaded my emails. She was a consummate professional who never gave any indication that this was even remotely true, but I was hyper-aware that we had asked her for more than double her usual number of revisions on both singles so far. I was determined that “Need” would be downright low maintenance, and sent the rest of Nameless Friends a half-plea-half-warning email that we be model clients this time around.

K’s stellar mixing made my edict possible. I sent G two versions of “Need” in early April 2023: Mix 10 (Track 61), and the same mix with a 2db vocal boost (Track 62). G sent back two wicked masters for us to compare, one of each mix. The band and I agreed that the master based on the vocal boost mix was far more legible for the lyrics, but the vocals verged on too prominent, and threatened to break out of the immersion of the mix. The master based on the original Mix 10 had essentially the opposite problem: the vocals were compelling and musically enmeshed in the mix, but not always intelligible. I also heard the backing vocals in both masters fluttering a tad too

\textsuperscript{380}“Today, streaming services all automatically apply normalized volume levels, usually based on “Integrated Loudness,” a measurement of loudness for the entire audio file. Most streaming services normalize to -14 LUFs (the standard unit of loudness measurement for broadcasting). If a song is deemed to be -8 integrated LUFs, it will be turned down 6dB, for example” [Wykes, 2021]. Normalization aims to improve listener experience and make the Loudness War moot, but is also a relatively crude tool: “integrated” LUFs are a sort of average of a song’s amplitude. So in the case of “Sympathy for Lilith”, the loud parts of the song made its integrated LUFs level loud enough that normalization would turn the whole song down. But the quiet parts of the song were so quiet that if they were turned down that much, they were hard to hear. To help “Sympathy for Lilith” compete on normalized streaming platforms, we had to compress it harder to make the quiet parts louder, so they would survive the normalization that the loud parts were going to trigger. The cost of that extra compression was less space and fidelity around the loud parts of the song.
prominently under the surface. It wasn’t a problem at the mix level, but the otherwise awesome compression G used popped them out.

I mustered my courage and production knowledge: we were going to fix all of these problems in one more round of mastering notes, and only one! I had a hunch that if K dialled down the backing vocals to solve one problem, it would reduce the saturation of the lead vocal and - in the vocal boost mix-master, at least - blend it with the rest of the band enough to solve the other problem. K shouldered the pressure like a champion and reduced the backing vocals to what we both hoped was the sweet spot: Mix 11 (Track 12). I sent G both Mix 11 and a vocal-boost version of it (Track 63). She sent two corresponding masters back, and I took on the responsibility of choosing which one would be the canonical version of “Need”.

The vocal boost worked out more or less as I intended, and the master derived from that mix has a loud, fiery lead vocal that I thought could easily belong on rock radio anywhere. But the master derived from regular Mix 11 surprised me: reducing the vocal double actually brought clarity to the vocal performance without sacrificing volume. After G’s master, Mix 11’s lead vocal sits in an almost unreal cocoon in the middle of the mix. It’s perfectly legible, but sounds effortlessly veridic in a way that the vocal boost master doesn’t. This gives Mix 11’s master a dark horse, cool-girl effect that I thought was intoxicating, and almost too good to be true for how “Need” was supposed to fit into Nameless Friends’ release campaign. I dithered about the decision for a few days, and ultimately decided to go with my gut: the Mix 11 master (Track 3) isn’t the most obviously commercial-friendly of the two options, but it spoke to me, and I chose to trust my embodied knowledge. With that decision, Blasphemy’s third single was finished and moved on to public release.

4.15. May 2023

I concluded the elocutio section of this exegesis when K and I arrived at (what we thought were) Blasphemy’s final mixes on May 4th. But we actually began memoria for the rest of the album on May 1st: I chose to accept what seemed to be K and I’s inevitable workflow, and sent G an entire round of album mixes to quasi-“master” before those mixes were finalized. G obliged us with a round of masters and notes, which K and I used to inform the May 4th mixes.

On May 5th, I sent G those updated mixes for “Old Time Religion”, “7 Years of Blood” (the album version), “Demons”, “An exhortation to church members”, “Sympathy for Lilith” (the album version), “Bitter Man”, “Forth”, and “Breakfast in a Record Store”; I judged the “Need” single master perfect\(^\text{381}\) and planned to reuse it. I warned G that we would still likely make mix tweaks after this round\(^\text{382}\) so she didn’t spend too much of her valuable time here. She sent us a set of masters based on “Need” to inform those tweaks, and one notable addition: G had a hunch that “Old Time

\(^{381}\) One waterfall single out of three isn’t… the worst.

\(^{382}\) Work with the bleed, not against the bleed!
Religion” could be impactful in mono, so she sent both mono and stereo versions of it for me to evaluate.

K was preparing for some travel, so we communicated over email during this final stretch of post-production. In response to G’s first set of masters, I sent him: “In no particular order, could you tweak these things for us please?

[“7 Years of Blood”]
- there’s a low mid thing taking up space/swallowing the high end in the middle of the mix, I think around 150hz-ish, that seems like it’s from the bass
- bit more kick punching through, a la “Need”

[“Breakfast in a Record Store”]
- vocal up a bit, it’s struggling to cut over the rhythm guitar ([my] guitar)
- G said something about the last mix of this song being limited, so she couldn’t process it properly: did we leave some mix bus processing on or something accidentally on the April 25th version?
- otherwise this sounds fabulous

[“Demons”]
- more cymbals up until outro, outro level of cymbals is mostly good (still maybe a bit more though? don’t want the outro to become comparatively cymbal-deficient)
- vox need to be a ridden a bit harder: a little poky and edgy in earlier verses, a bit buried in the second chorus (last sung section before the keyboard solo/bridge), doesn’t entirely blend with guitars in post-solo bridge, mostly fine in the outro
- teensy more high edge to guitars + keyboard solo until the outro: outro guitars are good
- the lead vocal double needs to come down by a good chunk, “Need”-style. [G]’s mastering has a knack for popping them right out of the mix

[“Sympathy for Lilith”]
- same weird, low halo in the middle of the mix as 7YoB, it’s mudding out all of the crispness that I’m pretty sure is there otherwise

[“Forth”]
- Orchestra percussion is a little loud
- Lead vocal is missing a tiny bit of sparkle/shiny edgy that other vocals on the record have, mainly in the verses (this may be a reality of the different way this is sung, fair enough if it is, it’s a negligible difference)
- Bass can defer to the kick more (or tiny bit less bass, bit more kick punch)"

K sent back a round of dutifully adjusted mixes. I forwarded them to G, noting, “[Here is the] new set of mixes for the entire album now. The “Need” single master is in there again just for reference, since we’d like to reuse the single master + ISRC. The first round of masters did exactly the sort of clarifying the highs that we expected, but we
found the mids were sounding a bit sapped on a few tracks, and it seemed to be a mix issue: “Need” hit a sweet spot, especially in the guitars, that we spent the last couple of days sorting out in the other songs. Otherwise I don’t think there was anything wrong with the first round of masters that you sent us: the mono [“Old Time Religion”] is rad, and everything generally seemed to have that [limiter\(^{383}\)], low-richness-enhancing sort of quality that we loved about both the “Need” and “Sympathy for Lilith” single masters; I’m hoping these mixes just give you more to work with in that area!”

The masters that G sent back, known since to the band and production team as “the Revisions 2s”, were/are glorious. For the first time in Blasphemy’s production process, I didn’t hunch over the studio desk and scrub through the tracks, cataloguing flaws and testing relationships. Instead, I felt like I was properly listening to the songs for the first time. I didn’t just think, but deeply felt, that we were close to being finished.

Some small flaws nagged at me, and I thought they would be best fixed in the mix - I didn’t want to modify the overall clarity of the Revisions 2s with any of these notes. So in the hours before he was due to fly out, K made the following mix adjustments for me:

““7 Years of Blood”, we need a lead vocals up version please… “Demons”, same thing, lead vocals up… (Both of those ever so slightly, like in past vocals up versions, you know what I mean)… “An exhortation to church members”, the last chord got cut off in the export, the final chord on beat one? Just need an export that includes that… “Bitter Man” a version with the guitar + keys up slightly… [“Breakfast in a Record Store”] there’s a “cha” in the lead vocal that we’re missing around the 3:15 mark: can we add that back in? Everything else is the same… And “Forth”: vocal up the same touch as the rest, guitar solo (just the solo) up a touch… Finally, “Sympathy for Lilith”: the a capella couplet before the guitar solo, can we dry that vocal out a bit? Just in that section, and not completely, but the delays are swirling weirdly in the master at their current level… Ah one final one: [P]’s lead guitars (on the right) in “Demons” + “Forth” can come up *ever so slightly*."

The results of these notes are Blasphemy’s true final mixes, exported on May 8th (Tracks 10-17). I sent G the final mixes, and a few mastering notes based on the Revision 2s\(^{384}\). She sent back a subsequent round of masters that were exactly what I asked for, but simply didn’t feel as “correct” as the Revision 2s. I was reassured by this embodied knowledge: it meant we were so very close to finished that we had toed a touch too far. I sent G back the following notes: “We’re foolish musicians who know not what we ask for, thank you for indulging us with this latest round… we would essentially like to go back to Revision 2, with a couple of amendments noted below:

\(^{383}\) A particular limiter that G used to great effect on the single masters for “Sympathy for Lilith” and “Need”. I don’t know if she advertises this part of her chain to the public, so I’m not including its model to protect her trade secrets.

\(^{384}\) To be clear: all subsequent masters in this chapter are made from the final mixes exported on May 8th. When I ask to go “back” to Revision 2s, G is sending the May 8th mixes through the exact same mastering line she used to produce the original Revision 2s, which were made from the May 4th mixes. Every final master is a May 8th mix: I had/have no regrets about the final mix changes!
[“Old Time Religion”]
- Revision 2 please, that's still great

“7 Years of Blood”
- Revision 2
- This master feels like it's missing a certain grounded, low underbelly: [I] played with it in Logic, and think it's about 92.5hz that we'd like to boost, but we're talking like 0.5-1.0 db max, with a q value of at least 5. A miniscule touch, just so the bottom of the mix rests down about where “Need”/“Forth”/“Bitter Man”/etc. do
- The left side guitar on this one still feels a little spiky and harsh in proportion to the rest of the mix: can it be tamed ever so slightly more, just on that side?

“Need”
- Remains the single master, continues to be great

“Demons”
- Also revert to revision 2 please, but with the vocal processing from revision 3: the revision 3 vocal was less de-essed and sat a little nicer, though we regret all other changes
- This master also feels like it's missing the bottom described in 7YoB, but to an even lesser degree: we ballparked a 0.3 db boost around 92.5hz

“An exhortation to church members”
- Revision 2 please, also still great

“Sympathy for Lilith”
- Revision 2
- We can't consistently decide whether or not we feel the 92.5hz-ish quality is missing from this master: would you be willing to make us a version with a miniscule boost, plus the unchanged revision 2 (at both standard sample rates), so we can fuss about that on our own time? This one needs this quality the least of all of them, we're probably talking a 0.2-0.3 DB boost or something similarly ridiculous…

“Bitter Man”
- Revision 2, including the longer fade in as it was; the quick fade in didn't do what we thought it was going to do, alas

---

385 I feared that “Bitter Man”’s long fade in would undercut the song’s perceptive authenticity/veridic glow, because you can clearly hear where the low organ pad begins before the rest of the band kicks in. But a shorter fade-in - so the song essentially began with the pad - somehow sounded more artificial; go figure!
“Forth”
- Revision 2, no notes. This one still moves us to tears and we’re [daft] for asking you to mess with it

“Breakfast in a Record Store”
- Revision 2, including the old fade-in, we’re 0 for 2 with fancy fade suggestions\textsuperscript{386}
- The same low, grounded note as the others, to a similarly molecular degree as
“Demons” + [“Sympathy for Lilith”]…

We’re deeply grateful for your patience and expertise throughout this process, thank you for doing such wonderful work on our record…”

Before G could respond, I amended my notes the next morning: “I thought [my] EQ calculations last night were too restrictive and similar to be accurate, so I took another crack at it with fresh ears this morning. Fussing with Logic’s basic EQ, I would peg the low, underbelly/bottom we’re looking to add somewhere around:

“7 Years of Blood”
- 90hz, q of 1.10, +2.26 db

“Demons”
- 90.5hz, q of 1.20, +1.0 db

“Sympathy for Lilith” (we’re officially committing to adding a low smidgen/sliver/something, I think it needs it)
- Truly 92.5hz, q of 0.93, +0.5 db

“Breakfast in a Record Store”
- 88.5hz, q of 0.60, +1.0 db

These are not directives, as-is I’m sure some of them will add weird mud and give you a good chuckle. But hopefully it's a slightly more tailored guide for what we think we're looking for in this final round.”

G responded with another phenomenal set of masters, known since to the band and production team as the “Revision 4s”. I had already decided that the final masters for “Old Time Religion”, “An exhortation to church members”, “Bitter Man”, and “Forth” would be their respective Revision 2s\textsuperscript{387}; and the final master for “Need” would be the

\textsuperscript{386} I feared listeners would check out during the meandering fade in in this song, but a shorter fade-in failed to build the same, potent atmosphere.

\textsuperscript{387} Tracks 1, 5, 7, and 8, respectively.
single master\textsuperscript{388}. Now I had to decide which would be the final masters for “7 Years of Blood” (the album version), “Demons”, “Sympathy for Lilith” (the album version), and “Breakfast in a Record Store”: Revision 2 or Revision 4?

I asked P to join me in a thorough A/B testing, to make sure that my exposure to all the various masters wasn’t clouding my judgement. We listened to the contenders on a wide variety of speakers\textsuperscript{389}, and wrote which masters of which songs sounded best on which speakers. The Revision 2s won across the board. The Revision 4s offered low depth that was arguably more compelling on our studio monitors and laptop speakers, but the unbridled high end of the Revision 2s outshone the competition on everything else\textsuperscript{390}. I also thought and felt, simply, that the Revision 2s sounded iconic. They sounded so fresh and like themselves somehow, where I thought the Revision 4s were (successfully!) splitting the difference between the Revision 2s and some sort of unnamed production conservatism. The band agreed on the Revision 2s for two out of the four songs, and deferred to me on the other two songs: they thought the differences between Revision 2 and Revision 4 were so small that if I felt strongly either way, we should follow my instincts.

The Revision 2 versions of “7 Years of Blood” (the album version)\textsuperscript{391}, “Sympathy for Lilith” (the album version)\textsuperscript{392}, and “Breakfast in a Record Store”\textsuperscript{393} joined my folder of completed masters. I asked G to export me one last version of “Demons”: a Revision 2 with “the vocal processing from revision 3”, but without the EQ work of Revision 4\textsuperscript{394}. With that last export, I completed memoria, post-production, and the entire production process of Blasphemy.

\textsuperscript{388} Track 3.

\textsuperscript{389} Our Yamaha HS-80 studio monitors; iPhone speakers; Android phone speakers; 2019 Macbook speakers; SUV speakers; car speakers; earbuds; both Shure 840 and 940 headphones; and a summed mono mix on an EV PA speaker

\textsuperscript{390} The Revision 2s also sounded just fine on the studio monitors and laptop speakers, if a little harsh in the “7 Years of Blood” lead guitar.

\textsuperscript{391} Track 2.

\textsuperscript{392} Track 6.

\textsuperscript{393} Track 9.

\textsuperscript{394} Track 4.
Sympathy for Lilith - Nameless Friends

Sorry this song is so long that it needs a page of contents!

A section
0:00 - 0:32 Intro verse/Verse 1 “It’s not cool...”
0:32 - 0:47 Intro (instrumental)
0:48 - 1:07 Verse Two “It’s not safe to be kind...”
1:07 - 1:16 Refrain 1 “Whoever you think you are, contain...”
1:16 - 1:25 Refrain 2 “Whoever you think you are, behave...”
1:26 - 1:43 Verse 3 “Angry, is not a good colour...”
1:43 - 1:52 Refrain 3 “Whoever you think you are, shame...”
1:52 - 2:09 Verse 4 “Second place, is where the gracious...”
2:10 - 2:18 Refrain 4 “Whoever you think you are, blame...”
2:18 - 2:27 Refrain 5 “Whoever you think you are, hate...”
2:28 - 3:04 Bridge “And I don’t know, I don’t know...”

B section
3:05 - 3:13 Interlude (instrumental)
3:14 - 3:32 B Section verse, p. 1 “Take me home safely when I wander...”
3:33 - 3:52 B Section verse, p.2 “Take me home safely when I falter...”
3:52 - 4:08 Riff section pickup from “No longer will I...”
4:09 - 4:17 Acapella vocal couplet “Behold the grand diplomat...”
4:18 - 4:54 Guitar solo (instrumental)

C section
4:54 - 5:07 C section verse “Whoever you think you are, no longer...”
5:08 - end Outro “deep breath in gooooOOOOOOOD, no longer will I...”

Figure 9: the outline of “Sympathy for Lilith” that I sent K to guide mixing.
5. Release

I began this project with two questions, “Does the relational specialty of the record producer have musical consequences?” and “And if so, what are they?”. To answer these questions, let’s re-listen to the demos that I produced for Nameless Friends in Chapter 2 (see Tracks 29-37 on the Project Playlist), the raw multi-tracks that I produced in Chapter 3 (Tracks 19-28), and the finished album Blasphemy (Tracks 1-9) - including the separate single versions of “7 Years of Blood” (Track 121) and “Sympathy for Lilith” (122) - recounted in Chapter 4. These recordings are drastically different from one another, even though they are ostensibly the same songs. Their differences stem from decisions that I, their producer, was uniquely empowered to make. Therefore, yes, the relational specialty of the record producer has musical consequences. And in this particular case study, the chapters of this exegesis explore what those musical consequences are.

To conclude this project, I want to address an implicit qualifier lurking under my project questions: does the record producer’s creative agency have musical consequences that matter in a capitalist marketplace, which is the primary metric for measuring success at the time of writing this paper? Professional producers make records for a livelihood, not just for pleasure. Their survival - financially, and thus under capitalism, literally - depends on how successfully their records translate engagement into capital. Artists, labels, and other investors hire producers to forecast distribution and to deliver releases that generate engagement accordingly.

Producers endeavour to meet their investors’ goals when they commit recordings for release - pronunciatio, part I. But they don’t learn if their efforts were successful until those releases are consumed by the public and thus realized - pronunciatio, part II. This exegesis has discussed my vision for Blasphemy - let’s evaluate how much of it became reality.

In this chapter, I will summarize the reviews and reception that Blasphemy and its singles generated from Nameless Friends’ social media, DSP metrics, traditional PR, and word of mouth. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the band wanted the album to take charge of their (feminist) brand and messaging; find and grow their audience, particularly on digital streaming platforms; use their platform for social/political justice; and prove to a certain outside record producer that “hysterical pussy shit” was a viable, valuable musical perspective in 2023. This chapter is being written in December 2023, six months after Blasphemy was released (May 2023) and halfway through a year-long marketing

---

395 Be it financial capital, like physical copies/merch sales/concert tickets/sync placements/etc.; or social capital, like critical acclaim/awards/“buzz” (word of mouth popularity among coveted audience demographics, usually young people and respected critics)/etc.

396 Hepworth-Sawyer, 2012 (101-118).

397 Discussed in Chapter 2.
campaign (which will be followed by another year-long deluxe album campaign). These six months have generated such promising feedback that I already deem my production efforts successful.

*Blasphemy* is only one piece of Nameless Friends’s marketing campaign. Much of the feedback cited in this chapter was solicited through digital advertising, traditional PR, and the band’s own social media efforts, with the overall campaign often being guided by a management consultant. But that (formidable) team can only reel listeners in: Nameless Friends is achieving their goals because listeners like what they hear.

### 5.1. “7 Years of Blood”, the single

As discussed in earlier chapters, I envisioned that “7 Years of Blood” would be the most aesthetically commercial single on *Blasphemy*. I produced it to be an upbeat, accessible, song, less than three minutes long. The mix abides by pop and rock norms - dominant lead vocals, and a guitar/kick/bass relationship reminiscent of classic rock records - with a slightly shrill midrange and developed low end for modern edge. The accompanying music video provides shock value to grab attention, but also cloaks frank lyrics about menstrual and abortion rights in metal norms of gore and violence, which I thought would make the entire single deceptively non-confrontational and thus more widely appealing.

Did my efforts translate into capital? Did my producing “do” anything? Immediately following its release, “7 Years of Blood” collected Facebook and Youtube comments praising the “classic sound” and lead vocal performance. Nameless Friends only had about 30-50 monthly Spotify listeners before “7 Years of Blood”: the single racked up 2,000 streams in the first 72 hours, raised the band’s monthly listener count to around 600 listeners, and is the band’s most played song (and most played mix of the song) on Spotify. At the time of writing (December 2023), the official music video has the most likes-to-views ratio of all of the band’s music videos. “7 Years of Blood” also secured Nameless Friends an experienced, traditional PR agent who was attracted to the political subject matter, yet accessible production.

Before the single was released, Nameless Friends had sold a few hundred dollars of merchandise. The band used “7 Years of Blood” to fund a menstrual product donation drive that raised several hundred dollars in six weeks for a local charity. Part of this

---

398 A three minute (or less) runtime is a norm for Top 40-competitive pop songs.

399 The band performs the song in a white room, while becoming progressively soaked in obviously fake blood.


401 Where it has remained ever since.

402 Equal to about 80% of the band’s all-time merch sales from the previous four years.
total was donated by an enthusiastic corporate partner, Joni menstrual products: fans of “7 Years of Blood” took the initiative to contact Joni about the band’s efforts.

“7 Years of Blood” generated buzz that secured Nameless Friends a handful of gigs in regional cities with bands of similar size\textsuperscript{403}. It was also an integral part of the band’s press kit while booking the first leg of the \textit{Blasphemy} release tour\textsuperscript{404}. On a personal note, “7 Years of Blood” also seemed to get the band and me some street credibility: one local producer\textsuperscript{405} sought me out at a show in May 2023 to confess that the song’s chorus was still stuck in the person’s head, three months post-release.

In other words, my production efforts for “7 Years of Blood” successfully translated into the capital I envisioned. The single reintroduced Nameless Friends to a wider\textsuperscript{406}, enthusiastic audience, who were happy to invest in charitable efforts and promote the band. It secured some industry investment and notice, and inspired local buzz that laid a foundation for future singles and tours.

5.2. “Sympathy for Lilith”, the single

As discussed in earlier chapters, I envisioned that “Sympathy for Lilith” would be a foil to “7 Years of Blood”. I produced it to be a heavy, epic rock opera that sacrificed commercial accessibility for controversy and catharsis. The lead vocal is slightly buried for the sake of the overall mix heaviness, the cymbals are hashy so the master can be dark and loud, and the accompanying music video is a six-minute contemplation on female trauma that features a long content warning and hundreds of real-world headlines about violence against women. I thought that “Sympathy for Lilith” would be the least accessible of \textit{Blasphemy}’s singles, and was likely to alienate traditional, masculine media. But I also thought it could trigger intense feelings in underserved, female listeners and prove Nameless Friends could go deep with their messaging, not just wide.

Did my efforts translate into capital?

“Sympathy for Lilith” was, and continues to be, massively controversial on Nameless Friends' social media. It’s the only part of \textit{Blasphemy}’s marketing campaign to receive both regular hate comments, and hateful engagement at similar proportions to positive engagement\textsuperscript{407}. Virtually all of this vitriol comes from white men between their

\textsuperscript{403} I’m using “size” as industry slang here, which roughly means (a combination of) popularity, power, and/or market share; eg. Taylor Swift and Beyoncé are artists of a similar size.

\textsuperscript{404} Mostly small rooms in ten Ontario/Quebec cities, half of which the band had never played before.

\textsuperscript{405} This producer is, to be frank, a frenemy of mine. That their feedback was begrudging makes it feel extra deserved!

\textsuperscript{406} Wider than Nameless Friends’ previous audience, is what I mean to say here.

\textsuperscript{407} I will not cite particular examples of this because Nameless Friends removes most of the hateful engagement from public view, to spare viewers who could be disturbed and/or triggered.
late teens and mid fifties, and the vitriol continues long after the initial single release: any time the band uses parts of “Sympathy for Lilith’s” mix or music video - even for unrelated content - new hate comments emerge. This single also received a small amount of production criticism: two separate comments on the official music video read, “Hello! The singer! Are you in the toilet? I can't hear you!”, and “… I wish the vocals were a bit more out front…”.

On the other hand, the positive feedback for this single is deeply personal, often intimate. At the time of writing (December 2023), “Sympathy for Lilith’s” official music video has the most views-to-comments ratio of the band’s music videos, and many of those comments are affirmations from survivors of gendered violence: “This is one of the most moving and powerful videos/songs I have ever seen. BRAVO.”; “This was so fucking beautiful and powerful, thank you so much”; “Wow!! Powerful truths being told through amazing music… I’m a fan”. Many women also commented on the band’s Facebook and Instagram posts to share their experiences with sexism and misogyny, and directly messaged Nameless Friends and me to share their stories and thank us for our testimony.

“Sympathy for Lilith” received no traditional PR/media coverage, but acquired critical acclaim in activist and high art circles. The official music video inspired retweets from feminist advocates and a shoutout from the Canadian Femicide Observatory on Twitter; and was an Official Selection at the 2023 Forest City Film Festival in the Experimental category, alongside critically-lauded peers like Zoon. Despite the controversy, the song’s single mix is among Nameless Friends’ top five songs on Spotify, and it seemed to generate street credibility of its own: several production peers reached out to me after the release to gush over the scale of the mix. And while “Sympathy for Lilith” generated less overall DSP engagement than “7 Years of Blood”, more of that engagement, proportionately, was/is from the metal community.

In other words, my production efforts for “Sympathy for Lilith” successfully translated into the capital I envisioned. The single generated powerful social media

---

408 This data is based on analytics from Nameless Friends’ internal “Meta Business” reports, which I am not at liberty to share outside their team. Readers will have to trust me on this!

409 As part of the band’s social media efforts, I made a Tiktok video about this dynamic in May 2022, and thousands of women “liked” and commented on that Tiktok video to affirm that “misogynists are particularly weird, fragile bigots… it’s giving “pick me”, hater edition” [“Side bar…”, 2023].


411 Ibid.

412 On my personal social media accounts, which are publicly visible.

413 “Such a powerful song with equally powerful imagery pulled from headlines around the world, including #Canada re #femicide. Thank you @namelessfriendz…” [Twitter, 2023].

414 This statistic is based on listenership data from Nameless Friends’ internal “Spotify for Artists” reports, which I am not at liberty to share outside their team. Readers will have to trust me on this!
engagement and critical endorsement, and helped legitimize Nameless Friends in the genre of metal. It starkly contrasted its predecessor, “7 Years of Blood”, which highlights the band’s compositional and conceptual range, and contributed a sense of intrigue to their growing buzz.

5.3. “Need”, the single

As discussed in earlier chapters, I envisioned that “Need” would be a dark horse single. I produced it to walk the same ear worm-y, commercial line as “7 Years of Blood”, but with two tweaks. First, the mix is darker and heavier, especially in the low end, which makes it sound more authentic than Top 40 rock releases, and less pop-coherent. Second, the narrative styling of the mix and music video is more blunt than “7 Years of Blood” and less embellished (even less feminine-coded). This single was, and is, one of my favourite mixes from Blasphemy. It perfectly illustrates all the parts of the arrangement, and sounds great on many types and sizes of speakers. I thought “Need’s” climate change subject matter, Y2K-reminiscent guitar leads, and deeply silly music video, made it a potent B side that would do well with Nameless Friends’ younger audience.

Did my efforts translate into capital?

Before “Need” was publicly released, a local film student listened to the raw multitracks and loved them so much that the person approached the band to direct a music video. The crew which ultimately made that video were exclusively young film students who (enthusiastically) donated their time. The finished “Need” music video is of the moment and hilarious, and while it’s the least viewed of Blasphemy’s music videos at the time of writing (December 2023), Tiktok and Youtube commenters found it “damn entertaining” and wrote “YAY”.

“Need” is the second most popular of Nameless Friends’ songs on Spotify, second only to “7 Years of Blood”, and it maintained this supremacy even when the band’s social media efforts around “Demons” went semi-viral in October 2023. Though “Need” received no digital ad support during its single release, it solicited a significant uptick in traditional PR. Several national and international publications - such as Canadian

415 This film student was a PA on the “7 Years of Blood” set. I played them the rough recording of “Need” during one of our breaks.

416 The official “Need” music video’s low production quality and general irreverence were based loosely on the style of Pup’s official music video for “Totally Fine”, a massively popular single from their critically acclaimed (and equally popular) 2022 album, THE UNRAVELLING OF PUPTHEBAND.


418 More on this in the next section.

419 Due to budgeting/scheduling restrictions.
Beats, Tinnitist, Record World International, Maximum Volume, and Cashbox Canada - praised Nameless Friends’ “ferocious” sound, irreverent humour, and relatable political concerns: “Nameless Friends Know What You Need”.

“Need” generated the most social media engagement of Blasphemy’s singles, primarily on Instagram and Tiktok, which have statistically younger user bases than other major platforms. It was also the first single to be picked up for radio play, on both a handful of online radio stations, and CJSR FM college radio in Alberta, Canada.

In other words, my production efforts for “Need” successfully translated into the capital I envisioned. The single spoke to Nameless Friends’ younger audience, and inspired critical sympathy with its perceptive authenticity and sense of humour. It helped the band break into radio, and cemented expectation and excitement for Blasphemy’s impending release.

5.4. Blasphemy, the album

As discussed in previous chapters, my vision for Blasphemy was lofty. I produced this album to re-build Nameless Friends’ brand and to solicit commercial and critical attention beyond the scope of their previous releases. The album mixes thread a careful needle between the metal, punk, and glam sub-genres of rock, while simultaneously using feminist lyrics and female vocals to confront masculine norms in rock. I thought that if I made Blasphemy conceptual enough - made it sound like itself - it could be a truly iconic debut that launched Nameless Friends to the next level.

Did my efforts translate into capital?

Blasphemy attracted industry buy-in before it was released. Nameless Friends acquired new management in the fall of 2022, using my production vision and raw multitracks, and a PR agent within a week of the first single’s release in February 2023. As the album’s singles rolled out, they generated cumulative momentum: “7 Years of Blood” accumulated DSP growth, a new team member, and a corporate partner. “Sympathy for Lilith” garnered social media engagement, activist shout outs, and an Official Selection from a film festival. “Need” secured PR placement and radio plays.

---

426 Measured in likes, comments, shares, and views, from Nameless Friends internal data reports.
And aided by some clever social media marketing from the band, “Demons” has spawned nearly one million views - and proportionate comments, plays, and engagement on social media.

Upon Blasphemy’s release, a selection of national and international PR covered both the album and “Demons”. Canadian Beats called “Demons” a “blistering”, “relentless”, “scathing critique” of “2SLGBTQIA+ discrimination”, and Cashbox Canada described it as a “wicked,” “Boston meets Dream Theatre,” “gospel-prog epic.” Record World International, The Tinnitist, and Next Wave Magazine praised the band’s conceptual approach, writing respectively, “Unapologetic Rockers … Nameless Friends pull no punches;” “The rebellious rockers … raise holy hell;” and “Nameless Friends: Spite-fueled Chaotic Do-Gooders with Electric Guitars … While the topic itself is far from trivial, there is just something so … amusingly petty (not to mention marketing genius-y) about the approach … none of Number One’s bandmates share in the uterus-based life experience. The way they stand with her in addressing these topics, though – heads up, shoulders back – exemplifies the solidarity they share as a group, a solidarity that is also an essential quality of the music that they make.”

Prior to Blasphemy’s release campaign, Nameless Friends’ music videos averaged 1-200 views a year. The official music videos for the “7 Years of Blood”, “Sympathy for Lilith”, and “Need” singles averaged 1,000 views within the first month of their respective releases, and 2,000 views within the first six months. “Demons”, the first music video to be released after the launch of the full album, catapulted to 13,000 views within the first month of its release.

The band’s DSP metrics improved similarly. Between February 2023 and the time of writing (December 2023), Nameless Friends grew on Spotify from roughly 75 to 1,200 subscribers; 130 to 2,500 playlist adds; 65 to 4,800 saves; and 50 to 600 average monthly listeners, peaking around 2,000 monthly listeners during release months.

Nameless Friends’ social media accounts have also grown exponentially during Blasphemy’s release campaign. Between February 2023 and the time of writing (December 2023), the band grew from roughly 700 to 1,700 followers on Facebook; 900 to 4,400 followers on Instagram; 30 to 9,100 followers on Tiktok; 80 to 600 followers on Twitter; 180 to 3,080 subscribers on Youtube; and 50 to 4,500 email list subscribers.

428 Which I chose to be the feature track of the full album release.


434 Which is all the time that has passed at the time of writing (December 2023).
This online engagement has driven parallel demand for Nameless Friends’ live performance. On the first leg of the *Blasphemy* release tour in spring 2023, the band played small rooms in Ontario and Quebec, and filled those rooms to, on average, 30% capacity. On the second leg of the *Blasphemy* release tour in fall 2023, the band booked and played small-to-midsize rooms in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and filled those rooms to, on average, 70% of capacity. Nameless Friends has also booked several forthcoming live performance opportunities based on *Blasphemy*’s success: our first tour to Canada’s east coast in winter 2024, consisting of small-to-midsize rooms in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland; showcase slots at Canadian festivals in spring 2024; and our first international tour in summer 2024, to the United Kingdom and Germany.

Nameless Friends has found increasing visibility and buzz since *Blasphemy*’s release. Friends and acquaintances have begun sending us our own social media content with breathless captions; journalists and booking agents have attended our shows in major cities, particularly Toronto; small labels are beginning to reciprocate feelers from our management; and our team members have found that peers at networking events already know who we are. On a personal note, P and I were recognized by a very excited (female!) fan in November 2023 when we were mailing merchandise in a London, Ontario post office.

I can personally attest that *Blasphemy* has improved Nameless Friends’ merchandise sales, too. After our run-in with the major Canadian record producer, the band and I decided to make two new t-shirts to sell during the album release campaign. One features the cover artwork, which I co-designed. The other is a stylized drawing of an irritated cat, dubbed the “hysterical pussy shi(r)t”. Both are bestsellers at shows. I will not recount online merchandising efforts in this chapter because they would be skewed: the band released a line of shirts during the “Demons” campaign whose profits go to charity, and they have sold dramatically well. That being said, while these shirts do not contribute directly to Nameless Friends’ financial success, they demonstrate the kind of conscientious, politically active audience that the band is cultivating during the album release campaign.

Finally, I invite readers to conclude this chapter with a final listening exercise. *Blasphemy* sounds, to me, similar to both Pup’s self-titled debut album, and Metallica’s self-titled “black” album. It’s fresh and sort of punk, but also classic and kind of metal, and yet there’s something about the organs, and female vocal performance, and scale of

435 With the support of local bands.

436 Ibid.

437 Several of which are repeat Ontario/Quebec venues that were keen to have the band back, and several of which reached out to Nameless Friends themselves, unprompted.

438 “Is this you + your band??? Instagram just showed it to me!!!”

439 “You work with that band?? I follow that band on Tiktok, I love them!!!”
the mixes that is equally glam and perhaps, some day, iconic. I’m not the only one who thinks so: Youtube comments on “Demons” include, “That was so fun, and what a VOICE!”, and “… that keyboard solo [awestruck emoji]”. Social media reviews describe Blasphemy as, “a pretty ambitious concept album”, “holy gleeful exultation”, “[for fans of] Halestorm… and Dio”, “(this shit’s) amazing” and “a genre-bending masterpiece”.

In other words, my production efforts for Blasphemy are successfully translating into the capital I envisioned. Nameless Friends has significantly grown their audience, both online and live; built a feminist, activist brand that is quickly becoming recognizable; and turned “hysterical pussy shit” into almost a million views, a profitable t-shirt, and critically-applauded ethos: “The London, Ontario-based band does seem to have a certain knack for turning spite into rocket fuel … there’s the time a major Canadian record producer told the band that they’d ruin their careers by continuing with the “hysterical pussy shit.” One member took heed of the producer’s warnings and decided to leave the band, but “the rest of us just sort of said wow, now we’re gonna do it harder”… [the results are] a satisfying middle finger to the aforementioned producer …”.

---

440 “Today’s under-known artist are from London Ontario and will blow your mind…”, 2023.

441 “No. 22 fave album of the year…”, 2023.

139

Records Cited

- Nameless Friends. *Live At Stranded Fest*. Produced by Lydia Wilton, 2021
Videos Cited


“Mastering Kendrick Lamar’s “HUMBLE” with Mike Bozzi”. YouTube, uploaded by Mix with the Masters, May 20, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBcAwVrX5GQ.


Works Cited


Canadian Femicide Observatory (@CAN_Femicide). “Such a powerful song with equally powerful imagery pulled from headlines around the world, including #Canada re #femicide. Thank you @namelessfriendz”. April 20, 2023, 10:20am. Tweet.


Hodgson, Jay. *Navigating the Network of Recording Practice - Towards an Ecology of The Record Medium*. University of Alberta, 2006


Ingham, Tim. (2022, October 6). “It’s Happened: 100,000 tracks are now being uploaded to streaming services like Spotify each day”. *Music Business Worldwide*, https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/its-happened-100000-tracks-are-now-being-uploaded/.


Parton, Dolly (@DollyParton). “Find out who you are and do it on purpose. #Dollyism”. April 8, 2015, 3:40pm. Tweet.


Appendices

Appendix A: Project Playlist Guide

Unless specified otherwise (see the public domain sermons by Reverend Rolfe Barnard), the tracks on this playlist are the legal property of Nameless Friends, and licensed exclusively to this project, within this playlist, for educational purposes. All rights reserved ©

Final Blasphemy masters (public release)
Track 1 - “Old Time Religion”
Track 2 - “7 Years of Blood”
Track 3 - “Need”
Track 4 - “Demons”
Track 5 - “An exhortation to church members”
Track 6 - “Sympathy for Lilith”
Track 7 - “Bitter Man”
Track 8 - “Forth”
Track 9 - “Breakfast in a Record Store”

Final Blasphemy mixes
Track 10 - “Old Time Religion”
Track 11 - “7 Years of Blood”
Track 12 - “Need”
Track 13 - “Demons”
Track 14 - “An exhortation to church members”
Track 15 - “Sympathy for Lilith”
Track 16 - “Bitter Man”
Track 17 - “Forth”
Track 18 - “Breakfast in a Record Store”

Final Blasphemy multitracks, raw and roughly levelled
Track 19 - “Old Time Religion”
Track 20 - “7 Years of Blood”
Track 21 - “Need”
Track 22 - “Demons”
Track 23 - “An exhortation to church members”
Track 24 - “Sympathy for Lilith”
Track 25 - “Bitter Man”
Track 26 - “Forth”
Track 27 - “Breakfast in a Record Store”
Track 28 - “Mezzanine”
Demos
Track 29 - “7 Years of Blood”
Track 30 - “Need”
Track 31 - “Demons”
Track 32 - “Demons”, raw multi-tracks only (no mixing or mastering)
Track 33 - “Sympathy for Lilith”
Track 34 - “Bitter Man”
Track 35 - “Forth”
Track 36 - “Breakfast in a Record Store”
Track 37 - “Mezzanine”

Mixes
Track 38 - “Old Time Religion” Mix 1
Track 39 - “Old Time Religion” Mix 3
Track 40 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 1
Track 41 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 2
Track 42 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 3
Track 43 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 4
Track 44 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 5
Track 45 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 6
Track 46 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 7
Track 47 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix 7.1 (vocal boost)
Track 48 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix “more bass”
Track 49 - “7 Years of Blood” single version, Mix “extra bass”
Track 50 - “7 Years of Blood” album version, Mix 1
Track 51 - “7 Years of Blood” album version, Mix 7
Track 52 - “Need” Mix 1
Track 53 - “Need” Mix 2
Track 54 - “Need” Mix 3
Track 55 - “Need” Mix 4
Track 56 - “Need” Mix 5
Track 57 - “Need” Mix 6
Track 58 - “Need” Mix 7
Track 59 - “Need” Mix 8
Track 60 - “Need” Mix 9
Track 61 - “Need” Mix 10
Track 62 - “Need” Mix 10, vocal boost
Track 63 - “Need” Mix 11, vocal boost
Track 64 - “Demons” Mix 1
Track 65 - “Demons” Mix 9
Track 66 - “An exhortation to church members” Mix 1
Track 67 - “An exhortation to church members” Mix 3
Track 68 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 1
Track 69 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 2
Track 70 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 3
Track 71 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 6
Track 72 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 7
Track 73 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 8
Track 74 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 9
Track 75 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 10
Track 76 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 11
Track 77 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 12
Track 78 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 13
Track 79 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 14
Track 80 - “Sympathy for Lilith” single version, Mix 15
Track 81 - “Sympathy for Lilith” album version, Mix 1
Track 82 - “Sympathy for Lilith” album version, Mix 10
Track 83 - “Bitter Man” Mix 1
Track 84 - “Bitter Man” Mix 2
Track 85 - “Bitter Man” Mix 3
Track 86 - “Bitter Man” Mix 4
Track 87 - “Bitter Man” Mix 5
Track 88 - “Bitter Man” Mix 6
Track 89 - “Bitter Man” Mix 7
Track 90 - “Bitter Man” Mix 8
Track 91 - “Bitter Man” Mix 9
Track 92 - “Bitter Man” Mix 10
Track 93 - “Forth” Mix 1
Track 94 - “Forth” Mix 8
Track 95 - “Breakfast in a Record Store” Mix 1
Track 96 - “Breakfast in a Record Store” Mix 7

Raw, public domain sermons by Reverend Rolfe Barnard
Track 97 - “A Man Who Is Known In Hell”
Track 98 - “An Exhortation to Church Members”
Track 99 - “And There Few That Be Saved”

A/B Testing
Track 100 - demo bass, unedited
Track 101 - demo bass, edited
Track 102 - “Mezzanine” rehearsal recording, live off the floor
Track 103 - “Demons” demo with rhythm guitar muted
Track 104 - “Sympathy for Lilith” demo with rhythm guitar muted
Track 105 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, Neumann U87
Track 106 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, DI
Track 107 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, Rhode NT1-A
Track 108 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, Shure SM58
Track 109 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, Audio Technica AT2020
Track 110 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, Shure SM7B
Track 111 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, AKG C417
Track 112 - “Bitter Man” guitar mic test, AKG C414
Track 113 - “7 Years of Blood” hard-tuned backing vocals, played in individual sequence
Track 114 - “7 Years of Blood” hard-tuned backing vocals, played as simultaneous choir
Track 115 - “7 Years of Blood” organ pad
Track 116 - “7 Years of Blood” raw multitracks without organ pad
Track 117 - “Forth” rhythm guitar, verse 2
Track 118 - “Forth” rhythm guitar, chorus 2
Track 119 - “Forth” rhythm guitar, guitar solo
Track 120 - “Forth” rhythm guitar, chorus 3
Track 121 - Final master of “7 Years of Blood” (single release)
Track 122 - Final master of “Sympathy for Lilith” (single release)

Other
Track 123 - DPA room mic example 1 (“Breakfast in a Record Store”, guitar, verse 2)
Track 124 - DPA room mic example 2 (“Breakfast in a Record Store”, guitar, bridge)
Track 125 - “Sympathy for Lilith” solo guitars mix reference track
Appendix B: Blasphemy Lyrics

“Old Time Religion” by Nameless Friends

It’s the old time religion
It’s the old time religion
It’s the old time religion
And it’s good enough for me

Makes me love everybody
Makes me love everybody
Makes me love everybody
And it’s good enough for me

It’s the old time religion
It’s the old time religion
It’s the old time religion
And it’s good enough for me

It was good for our mothers
It was good for our mothers
It was good for our mothers
And it’s good enough for me

It’s the old time religion
It’s the old time religion
It’s the old time religion
And it’s good enough for me

It will do when I’m dying
It will do when I’m dying
It will do when I’m dying
And it’s good enough for me

If we look at the world
There is a fast-growing interest in
And revival of
What we call religion
Although there is much interest in religion
There are many that are not being saved
I think god’s not showing much mercy
This newest brand of religion has literally stripped
One half of the world’s population
In your day and mine
No mercy
But I believe
And I couldn’t explain it
But I’ve seen it happen all over America
The day’ll come when the patient and long-suffering human being
Has risen up against the wave of power
And tell that so and so
So and so just up there
I believe
That you can’t break down the human heart
“7 Years of Blood” by Nameless Friends

It's such a burden to be a god
This body builds worlds
And raptures through rings of fire

They test my patience with oppression instead of awe
Take my benevolence for granted
And I'm tired

Can you bleed gracefully
Speaking truth to power in the mud
Can you bleed faithfully
Galvanized by iron in the flood

By seven years of blood

It's such a privilege to be a god
This body makes your life
And I can take it away

Tread with respect, not legislation my flock
I can't be stopped
And you'll just provoke a plague

Can you bleed patiently
Lucid in a fever dream from above
Can you bleed faithfully
Galvanized by iron in the flood

By seven years of blood
Oh whoa oh
By seven years of blood
Oh oh
Seven years of blood
Oh whoa oh
By seven years of blood
“Need” by Nameless Friends

I’m a sad girl who writes mad songs
About the weight of the world that I take on
So dramatic, but I’m not wrong
I won’t be satisfied until the money’s all gone

I am the envious
A privileged ghost
I’m a good citizen
A natural host
So why am I begging
Doing the most
God, it’s so upsetting
Paying to live this broke

Everybody needs just a little more free dope
Everybody needs just a little more green to cope
My anxiety needs me to be alone
Everybody needs just a little more free hope

I am essential
The working man
I hold our potential
In my underpaid, hostage hands
I’m the hungry majority’s silent mouth
And who can I vote for?
Well let’s see, there’s fascism, or
Some sanctimonious handout?

Everybody needs just a little more free blow
Everybody needs just a little more seed to sow
High society needs me to be alone
Everybody needs just a little more free hope

I am your children
Roasting alive
Who gets your billions
When the ocean fries?
I am the needy
I made you rich
So pay up and feed me
Or I’ll eat you, you son of a bitch

Everybody needs just a little more free show
Everybody needs just a little less greed to grow
My sobriety won’t leave me alone
Everybody needs just a little more free hope
“Demons” by Nameless Friends

Would you still love me if I gave up tomorrow
Would you still love me if my dreams didn’t come true
Stuffed up the hole where my heart should be
Said thanks so much for believing in me
But, turns out, you didn’t have to

Would you still love me if I failed tomorrow
If I tried but couldn’t follow through
You can want something bad when you’re not very good
And the world’s so sad
Why would I think I should
Be special enough to play too?

But then I said no
Demons inside don’t drive
I’m in control
Demons inside don’t decide
Out of the hole
Demons won’t bury me alive
Not this time

Forgive me mama, I’m ashamed
Little cold drips down the back of the throat
Do I desire, what if I don’t
Forgive me father, is this sin?
I’ve dared, bared my soul, been scared
And must insist on getting in again

I can feeling something coming
I just don’t know what
Yeah, I can feel something coming
Like a siren in my gut
Oh I hear silence and nothing
With a pregnant pause after ‘but’
Oh forgive me baby I’m on fire
I can feel it coming up

We can say no
Demons inside don’t drive
We’re in control
Demons inside don’t decide
Out of the hole
Demons won’t bury me alive
Not this time

Oh good lord, sky daddy above
Won’t you bless me please
I can’t be baptized if it’s not holy on my knees
It’s so loud inside my head so
So dark and depraved
Yeah my little bad soul’s on a goddamn roll
And I can’t wait to be saved

Can’t wait (can't wait can't wait)
Can’t wait (can't wait can't wait)
Can’t wait (can't wait can't wait can't)
One more time
“An exhortation to church members” by Nameless Friends

All I got to say is
We’ve been in pain
And the doctor said
“You oughta be mighty thankful you’re hurting
That’s a warning something’s wrong”
He could have lied about it and let her die
But he told her the truth
The pain was a warning something dead wrong
So I went through clinics
And they picked me, and they did this
And they did everything medical science could do
And I had people lay hands on me
I was anointed with oil
I believe in those things, don’t know ‘bout you
But it didn’t do me any good
They could not correct my troubles
What I’m saying, ladies and gentlemen
Is that the pain signals are everywhere now
And I think that we must recognize them
As acts of god’s mercy
Saying there’s something desperately wrong with our churches
You and I are living in a generation that has torn itself to pieces
Everything of value is being stripped now
Inside and outside
Government, home, and school
We must not ignore the flashing signals of pain
If women are not their own
That is blasphemous and disgraceful
I’m constantly trying to help people hear me
‘Cause I got sense enough to know
I’m going against years of tradition
Years of custom
And I’m just a little peanut preacher
And so I appreciate you listening to me
“Sympathy for Lilith” by Nameless Friends

It’s not cool to be afraid of the dark
Follow the rules with disdain in your heart
Whoever you think you are
Tame yourself and be good

It’s not safe to be kind when they fetishize your skin
Good luck to your pride, your hide’s depreciating
Whoever you think you are
Contain yourself and be good
Whoever you think are
Behave yourself and be good

Angry is not a good colour on me
Frankly is a luxury for other bodies to be
Whoever you think you are
Shame yourself and be good

Second place is where the gracious go
It’s not fair, not ok
But you can’t say no
Whoever you think you are
Blame yourself and be good
Whoever you think you are
Hate yourself
Whatever it takes to be good

And I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know why
Secrets are so loud
I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know if
They can hear us so far down
I don’t know why must I lie?
Why don’t I count?
I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know how
To be good

Take me home safely when I wander
Like father like
My brain is made in the image of my father
Like daughter like
Take me home safely when I falter
To the water
My body is not made for slaughter on your altar
No longer will I
No longer will I
No longer

Behold the grand diplomat bled out of grace
She became the dark to stop being afraid

Whoever you think you are
No longer will I
Whoever you think I am
No longer will I be
Whoever you think I am
No longer will I be good
No longer will I be good
No longer will I be good
Oh no, oh no—
No longer will I be good
Oh no, oh no—
No longer will I be good
“Bitter Man” by Nameless Friends

Dear bitter man
I’ve come home
My parents both seem smaller
It can’t be that I’ve grown

Dear bitter man
Won’t you take me upstream
I don’t fit under this skin
But a new one hasn’t found me

I don’t think she meant to lie
But I know she did
I don’t think you meant to betray me in kind
But you did

Dear bitter man
What’s it like to rest
It’s been four years of starving
So much for my best

Oh bitter man
Is there hope for me
I’m not attached to my likeness
Which way would they like me to be

I don’t think she meant to lie
But I know she did
I don’t think you meant to let me slip your mind
But you did
I don’t think she meant to lie
She was just a kid
I don’t think you meant to betray me in kind
But you did
“Forth” by Nameless Friends

Farewell London
I’ve learned I don’t belong
Farewell lover
I accept we were both wrong
Farewell mother
I can’t go back, only on
Godspeed inner child
I’m sorry I’m taking so long

Take me home, take me home
I’m not made for this life
Take me home
Take me home, take me home
I was made for the lights and the highs
Take me home

Farewell my mentors
Thank you for your advice
I’m bound to ignore it
This is my only life
Farewell to the wings
I’ve paid my dues to the dark
Yeah, I am my father’s dreams
And goddamn I’m ready to star

Take me home, take me home
I was made for the lights
Take me home
Take me home, take me home
I was made for the highs
Take me home

They call me Number One
Light me up
See what I’ve become

Take me home, take me home
I was made for the lights
Take me home
Take me home, take me home
I was made for the highs
Take me home
Take me home
I was made for the highs
Take me home
“Breakfast in a Record Store” by Nameless Friends

Hold my hand
Tell me you need me
Tell me you see me
That I’m not alone
When I break down every November
Make me remember
Kneel at my throne

I wish you could see yourself like I do
Tell your wretched brain to lay off your case
Your honour I’ve made mine and you’re lovely

Who knew you could soothe my pathetic wounds
You hate the sight of blood
But you stay while they stitch me up like you love me

This is a love song for people who need
Somebody and some butterflies to believe
Is it you?
Oh this is a love song for people who seek
Somebody imperfect but sweet
Sounds like you

I wish you could feel how you’re motivating
You make me wanna be somebody some day
Who takes your breath away
Plays so silly

Who knew I’m not doomed to compensating
For some shallow crooked-
I didn’t dodge a bullet it just didn’t kill me

This is a love song for people who need
Somebody to hold for a life, hell a week
Is it you?
This is a love song for people who seek
Somebody to make ‘em fucking weak in the knees
Oh you
And oh, oh-oh

La, la la, la la la
La la, la la la, la
La la, la

Ooo la, la la, la la la
La la, la la la, la
La la, la

I’d rather be on fire
Than to have some conception of truth
And to make that truth an excuse for my cold heart
And in far too many places
A wrong conception of the gospel has done exactly that thing
I wanna be known in hell
I’d rather be known in hell than by the powers that be here on this earth
Who are you?
Why should we pay attention to what you say?
And that’s what it means to be saved
“Breakfast in a Record Store” by Nameless Friends [continued]

Bring it home

La, la la, la la la
La la, la la la, la
La la, la

Ooo la, la la, la la la
La la, la la la, la
La la, la

Would you eat breakfast with me on the floor
Of an old record store
In the morning?
Would you meet our heroes with me just before
They get bored
And tell me I’m yours?
Appendix C: Recording Elements Checklist

Each chart represents an individual sticky note.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prelude (later named “Old Time Religion”)</th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tragedy Ann pad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Time Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 Years of Blood</th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowd vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

443 Slang for short-lived mix elements that pop up periodically to capture a listener’s ear and maintain their fresh interest in the song. None of Blasphemy’s songs have disparate ear candy tracks outside the veridic arrangements + pads: I included this line item on each sticky note as a reminder to leverage the existing elements for this purpose, somewhere, in songs that I thought needed a little intrigue. What do you think the ear candy are, dear reader?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demons</th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interlude (later named “An exhortation to church members”)</th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sympathy for Lilith</th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar solo 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar solo 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy (hint: I crossed out this one, declaring the arrangement to be enough on its own)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Bitter Man

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy (a rare exception: I crossed this out, too)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Forth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDI orchestra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar solo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakbeat in a Record Store</td>
<td>Recorded</td>
<td>Edited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mezzanine</th>
<th>Recorded</th>
<th>Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead vocals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal doubles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear candy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Blasphemy Gear List

Interface - MOTU 8Pre-es interface

Computer - 2019 16” Macbook Pro, 16GB RAM

Studio monitors - Yamaha HS80Ms, matched pair

Microphones
- Neumann U87
- [2x] DPA d:vote 4099
- AKG C414
- Sennheiser e609
- Shure SM57
- Shure SM7B
- MOTU 8Pre-es talkback mic

Drum kit
- [2x] Roland TD-17 drum kit

Keyboards
- Korg Kronos
- 9' Steinway D9 concert grand piano
- Korg MicroKey

Guitars
- Custom gold top (alder and purple heart, Seth Lover Seymour Duncan pickups)
- Custom pink (alder and maple, Railhammer Anvil bridge, Hyper Vintage neck pickups)
- Jackson Rhoads V X series with Floyd Rose
- Ibanez RG7
- PRS SVN
- Charvel Pro Mod SoCal with Floyd Rose
- Supro 2030BM Hampton Island Series
- Takamine EG345C
- Dingwall D-ROC
- Schecter Stiletto 5 with EMG pickups

Amplifiers / speaker cabinets / profilers
- Fender Hotrod Deville combo, 2x12, first edition
- Fender Hotrod Deville combo, 4x10, first edition
- Kemper Profiler Powerrack (with foot switch)
- Mesa Boogie Road King, 4x12 cab
- Dr. Z Maz 18 Junior NR head
- Dr. Z Z-Best cab, 2x12 (Celestion Vintage 30 on top, Celestion G12H30 on bottom)
**Pedals + boxes**
- Radial JDI box
- Boss LS-2 line switcher
- Wampler Tumnus deluxe, first edition
- Strymon Riverside
- [2x] TC Electronic Polytune
- Darkglass Microtubes X7
- B7K Ultra

**Headphones**
- Shure SRH940s
- [2x] Shure SRH840s
- Shure SRH440s
- Bose QuietComfort 15s
Appendix E: Blasphemy Reference Tracks

*An iconic, loud, classic rock mix. Colloquially considered some of the best guitar production of all time.*

*Modern, Canadian, socially conscious prog rock. Aspirational peers for Nameless Friends.*

*A vocal foil to dryer mixes like Rage Against the Machine. Gorgeous, wet, dense, schematic spaces.*

*Contemporary, Top 40, female-fronted radio rock. An aspirational playlist mate.*

*An iconic mix of an iconic song. Speaks to the metal side of my genre vision.*

PUP. “Dark Days”. Produced by Dave Schiffman, 2013.
*A fresh, phenomenal debut. Speaks to the young, punk side of my genre vision.*

PUP. “DVP”. Produced by David Schiffman, 2016.
*As above, with better developed low end.*

*An iconic mix of an iconic song. Speaks to the glam side of my genre vision.*

*A genre-bending, political record, radical for both its cultural and mix precedents. Dry, punchy, and less compressed than other rock-umbrella contemporaries.*

*Contemporary, Top 40, radio rock, if a little more alt than JJ Wilde. Banging bass, and a deceptively dark mix, to balance out the shrill, mid-heavy classic rock references.*


*Critically acclaimed, prog-ish, metal-ish rock, also mastered by Darcy Proper.*
Curriculum Vitae

Lydia Claire Wilton
Musician, Music/Record Producer, PhD candidate in Musicology and Record Production.

Post-Secondary Education
2019-present  Ph.D. candidate, Musicology
University of Western Ontario · London, Ontario, Canada
2019  M.A., Music and Popular Culture
University of Western Ontario · London, Ontario, Canada
2017  B.A., Major in Popular Music
University of Western Ontario · London, Ontario, Canada

Honours & Awards
2023  Official Selection, Forest City Film Festival
Co-director + producer, “Sympathy for Lilith”
2022-2023  Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2021-2022  Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2018  Nomination
University of Western Ontario Teaching Assistant Awards
2017  Gold Medalist, Major in Popular Music
University of Western Ontario

Publications
2023  *Blasphemy*, Nameless Friends - Producer
2023  “Need”, Nameless Friends - Producer
2023  “Sympathy for Lilith”, Nameless Friends - Producer
2023  “7 Years of Blood”, Nameless Friends - Producer
2023  *The Culling*, Tom Sinclair - Mastering engineer
2022  *Unfinished Basement*, Older Siblings - Producer
2021  *Live At Stranded Fest*, Nameless Friends - Producer

Notable Press
2023  “Nameless Friends: Spite-fueled Chaotic Do-Gooders with Electric Guitars”
Next Wave Magazine
2023  “Nameless Friends shares new single, “Need” (Interview)”
Canadian Beats
2021  “Taylor to Ariana to Olivia Rodrigo: why we love their breakup songs”
CBC Kids
2018  “Mezzanine EP review”
Helly Cherry [Serbia]
Conferences & Residencies
2023  Local Arts Residency, The Grand Theatre Kingston
      Artist in residence
2021  WUGSOM, University of Western Ontario
      Gender in Performance chair
2020  WUGSOM, University of Western Ontario
      Programming committee, Engaging In and Through Popular Music chair
2020  Contingencies of Care virtual residency, OCADU/UBC Okanagan/Bush Gallery
      Participant

Teaching Experience
2019-2023  Teaching Assistant
          Don Wright Faculty of Music, University of Western Ontario
2017-2019  Teaching Assistant
          Faculty of Information and Media Studies, University of Western Ontario