

**Sound and Soul:**  
**Exploring Music Collecting and Identity**  
By Lana Nyuli

A thesis exhibition, *Collected Identity*,  
presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This curatorial thesis positions music collecting in relation to gift-giving, identity, and personal perception. Collecting is used to examine what people keep, how it relates to their self-construction, and what effect material passed down from others has on their identity. The exhibition, *Collected Identity*, comprises seven artists' audio compositions that navigate family, love, heartbreak, and self-assurance through the exploration of music collections. Gift-giving is a multi-faceted tradition that imbues reciprocity and obligation into every collection—and is present despite the recent shift from physical to digital collecting practices. By commissioning audio works that use collected music, the exhibition demonstrates how influence can be exerted upon the self. The result is a conceptually-driven project that underscores music collections as both personal and cultural repositories of reflection and identification.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Collected Identity was not a labour of love, but rather the expression of a compulsion—a need to collect, to criticise, and to complain.

Thank you to my primary advisor Jim Drobnick for your thoughtful edits and constant encouragement, and to my secondary advisor Adam Tindale for wonderfully endless conversations—whether constructive or not. I owe additional gratitude to my parents for being two of the smartest, most interesting people I know. I hope to be half as cool as them one day.

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Each of the seven tracks corresponds to a different speaker.

## CURATORIAL ESSAY

In 2022, I received a surprising gift—a 45-item trove of CDs, vinyl records, and cassette tapes from my father, a devoted musician and music collector. Amidst his sprawling archive of over 1000 items, he handpicked an assortment of music he believed would resonate with me: a mix of childhood classics from my brother's and my early years, alongside an eclectic array that I simply had no interest in. This was particularly perplexing to me, because I moved that box of music across the country before opening it up. Unwrapping vinyl relics like Alice Cooper's *Welcome to My Nightmare*, Elvis Costello and the Attractions' *'Get Happy!!*, plus seven Carlos Santana cassettes, and one labelled 'Party 2' along with a few other wild cards were not what I had expected to find. Though our shared love for jazz and blues usually guides our musical exchanges, this curated box felt uniquely spontaneous and unusual. "Careless" is not the right word, but something about it felt unconsidered and random, but at the same time, he had packed up this small collection and driven it all the way from Kamloops, where I am from, to Victoria, where I was living at the time. This six-hour drive includes an hour and a half on the ferry, which is not an inconsequential amount of time or effort. Given the information that I had, I was left to consider that there could be more to the items that I was given. By framing the music as gifts, each piece becomes more than just a collection of songs—it becomes a reflection of identity, relationships, and personal histories.

A room filled with black speakers greets viewers entering the gallery. Each stands alone on its own podium, replicating people, identity, music, and memory. *Collected Identity* is a series of audio pieces from seven artists who invite listeners to hear an aspect of who they are and possibly who they thought they would never be. One artist uses cassette tapes as a literal medium, while another reflects on music shared and love lost. Each responds to a prompt: what

does the music one collects say about identity, and more importantly, what influence is exerted by the music one receives as a gift? From collections of CDs to streaming playlists, everyone has a music collection that has been carefully curated, but inevitably people are sent songs from friends, accept passed-down vinyl records from family members, or are added to shared playlists. The story of my own gifted music collection was used to commission artists to connect with the music that had been gifted to them and to meditate on the idea that the truest form of themselves could be fragmented by everyone they know. Each of these relationships is constructed by history and memory and may or may not adapt with change. How one chooses to nourish these other identities depends on where they come from and what effect they have on the identity that they hold closest.

By taking a philosophical approach to autobiography, *Collected Identity* confronts the view of self-representation as narcissistic work and embraces the idea that thinking about ourselves is necessary in order to better understand and learn about each other.<sup>1</sup> This expansion of self-identity is an impulsive and convoluted approach to answering the question of “why do you feel that way about me?” Yet, this exhibition deems it necessary to accurately find affirmation in any conclusion. The approach each artist has taken in answering the question is wildly different. Some are stubborn in their interpretation and have reached an answer that they deem to be true, while others respond with more questions of their own. Each audio piece stands alone, emitting from one speaker at a time while overlapping in conversation with the others. This timed overlap connects strangers in a room, offering an introduction to the audience as much as they are revealing themselves to each other. The seven artists featured in this show are

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2021), 73.

Esha-Lee Dalwood, H.E. Casson, Raymond Nyuli, Étienne, Daniela O'Fee, Angelic Goldsky, and Ezra Neto.

Showcasing the compositional techniques that have been learned and adapted from others, Esha-Lee Dalwood reflects on her own musical and personal identity through a five-and-a-half-minute feature-film-type score. Dalwood dedicates her creative endeavours to mastering the art of music composition for visual media. Her work is driven by a deep desire to evoke and inspire a wide range of emotions within her audience, aiming to create immersive and impactful auditory experiences. Dalwood's work for the exhibition, *Butterfly's Wings*, references her transformative musical journey from adolescence into adulthood. Both in performance and composition, she has been influenced by various creators and musicians. The piece opens with violins, their light and airy notes twinkling and bouncing as strings are plucked. The music builds to a crescendo, weaving from one instrument to another, evoking the sensation of taking a deep breath. It exhales softly with flutes and the rumble of a distant drum. Finally, it settles into the depth of melodies from when the piece began, but this time richer and more complex. Dalwood's journey is a testament to her dedication and potential to leave a lasting mark on the world of film music—informed by and allowed to prosper through the contribution of others.

Drifting away from the fantasy of a movie screen, the hum of a subway, drips from an eavestrough, and organically found sounds ground the listener back in reality with H.E. Casson's exploration of history and memory using found audio. By including their own vocals, recorded on a cassette tape in 1987, the queer and disabled poet, singer, voice actor, and multimedia artist created *Noise Cancelling* to examine their unique ways of hearing through a neurodivergent lens. This track features a series of found sounds, including frogs in the Don Valley, a chipmunk, local bird calls, a laugh at a party, and the pop and sizzle of popcorn cooking. These sounds represent



the hyperalertness they feel to the life circling around them. Overlaid is a spoken word piece about their first pair of headphones, which allowed Casson to curate the audio they took in and block out excess noise. The complexity, chaos, and overstimulation exemplified in this track help the listener understand the beauty and challenges of everyday listening. It implies that any situation can create music that is free of obligation, requiring only that it be heard.

While individuals are usually subjected to the sounds of everyday life with limited intervention—imagine if one could manipulate them individually. Raymond Nyuli created *FM Ringtone* as a direct response to the sound of his ringing cell phone. Inspired by the funky wah-wah sounds of the theme song from *Shaft* by Isaac Hayes, this short composition was meticulously crafted with a blend of approximately a dozen guitar tracks, each performed and recorded by the artist. These tracks were then mixed into a tune that was tailored specifically to be used as a ringtone—adding individuality to his daily routine. By reverberating the spirit of its musical inspiration, this tune evokes a sense of satisfaction and an outward expression of the artist's self.

Speaking with the cool, calm, charisma of an evening radio host, Étienne composes a musical journey from his childhood where he grew up singing Acadian folk songs, to present day, living in Toronto and working as a musician. Layering storytelling with singing covers, Étienne's musical essay is a carefully crafted, heartfelt love letter to his own personal history. *Pieces of Me in Melody* is a relatable, quirky way to think about how the music listened to while growing up can impact adult identities.

In her piece *Transmissions*, O'Fee reflects on new ways of using her own forgotten media such as mixed tapes, audition reels, and an obsolete cassette machine combined with sounds from the direct contact of the strings inside her old piano. As an ageing musician, O'Fee has seen

the ways that recording and transmitting music have adapted from one decade to the next. This piece retells her past through the reinvention of recollected sonic material as a way to bend time and space. This literal approach to reflecting on collected audio material metamorphosizes the ways that identity can be interpreted by the physical manipulation of the medium at the hands of the artist. As the tape is altered, oneself is as well.

The sound of the Shofar, a ram's horn trumpet used as a traditional Jewish battle cry (now often sounded during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), can be heard signalling *More than Death* as a call to action against the threat on trans lives, rights, spirits and futures. Angelic Goldsky created this piece as a musical poem written in collaboration with a meditation on Trans Day of Remembrance. It features a collection of sounds that the artist had saved over the course of many years, which serve as points of healing and contemplation. The poem is a personal reflection on self-identity and family ties—particularly when those ties begin to wear down and what that could mean for the future. It is an impetuous output of raw feelings, backed by a collection of memories and audio recordings.

The feelings of longing and intimacy reverberate through the voice of Ezra Neto, who relishes in the heavy sadness of lost love. *Sweet Melancholy* is a spoken word poem about a literal seven-hour playlist, thoughtfully picked by an unreliable prospect. A metaphorical mirror is crafted by the other person, reflecting Neto's own feelings back at them but not reciprocating any feelings of their own. The mirror, mounted on the bedroom ceiling, symbolises introspection and self-discovery. The speaker finds solace and pain in this reflection, deeply affected by the emotional intensity of the relationship and the intimacy shared through music. There's a poignant realisation of the impermanence of this connection, leading to feelings of loss and uncertainty about how they will be seen or understood in the absence of the other person. The poem captures

a complex emotional journey of self-awareness, vulnerability, and the struggle to reconcile conflicting feelings of attachment and separation.

Analysing these works together reveals a diverse tapestry of artistic expressions, each deeply rooted in personal and cultural identities. Between challenging conventional auditory experiences by blending found sounds with personal narratives, celebrating collaborative and evolving approaches to composition, and repurposing musical inspiration to serve as functional sounds, these artists demonstrate the transformative potential for audio work to redefine personal and collective identities. The audience is invited to engage with diverse perspectives and experiences that provoke introspection and dialogue on issues ranging from cultural heritage to social justice, all while honouring creativity and entertainment.

Through the eclectic and introspective works showcased in *Collected Identity*, audiences encounter a unique listening experience that showcases the profound intersection of personal narratives and the transformative power of sound. As each artist navigates their relationship with music—whether through stories of inherited collections, found sounds, or personal compositions—they reconsider how music shapes identities and perceptions. From the intimate reflections on lost love and shared memories to the innovative use of obsolete media and found audio, these pieces illuminate the complexities of self-discovery amidst the influences of others. Ultimately, *Collected Identity* emerges not only as an exploration of musical expression but also as a poignant reminder of the profound connections that music fosters between individuals and communities, urging contemplation about the roles music plays in shaping who we are and who we aspire to be.

## **EXHIBITION REPORT**

In the age of music streaming and social media, collecting and sharing music is easier than ever. The days of space-consuming record collections and stacks of CDs and cassette tapes are over, replaced by concise lists of favourite songs, new artists, and AI-generated recommendations available at the tap of a finger. This shift makes becoming a music curator almost second nature. But does this mean that all those analogue archives sitting in boxes and basements should be forgotten? What is their future?

This thesis examines an inherited collection of vinyl records, cassettes, and CDs in collaboration with musicians and sound artists to explore how collections can transcend their static nature to become tools for continuous self-exploration and connection. By challenging traditional notions of fixity in collections, this study aims to reveal new possibilities for understanding and animating personal and collective identities through music.

### **Themes**

The catalyst for this entire project was the simple gift of a small music collection. The theory of gift giving—extensively explored in various disciplines—highlights the intricate interplay between social obligation, cultural transmission, and personal identity. Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* explores the economical and societal implications behind gift giving across a variety of cultures and class systems.<sup>2</sup> *The Gift* was foundational to introducing discourse surrounding the complexities behind the practice of giving. My gifted music collection can be used as an example of James Carrier's link between objects and cultural structures of status bleeding into identity and

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<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (1925; repr., Routledge, 2002).

personal perspective as discovered throughout the process of working through this project.<sup>3</sup> I have spun this simple gesture, a box of music traveling from my childhood home and into my adult apartment, into something much larger than what I believe was the original intention. This is often how gift giving is received.

I have considered the possibility that this gift meant very little, and that giving me this collection was a way to save it from the fate of the thrift store. Russell W. Belk discusses gift giving in terms of the ways that it defines both giver and recipient, based on the social weight of the object given. There are three main components when it comes to Belk's approach: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to repay.<sup>4</sup> In this case, there was a perceived obligation to pass on the music that was felt should belong to me, and my subsequent duty was to acknowledge and accept such a thoughtful gesture. Repayment is the tricky part. In order to determine an adequate gift to return, it is important to explore the total weight of this keepsake. Repayment is socially understood as needing to be of at least equal or greater value, and if equal—it must be unique in some way. This creates a never-ending snowball effect where one is, in perpetuity, indebted to another individual within the cycle of gift-giving and receiving. It is understood that the first person to break the cycle must care less about the relationship than the other—which forever changes their interpersonal dynamic. Pamela Shurmer positions this idea well in *The Gift Game* where she introduces the idea that the weight of a relationship can at least somewhat be reflected in the value of the gift, and that to change the value of a gift would inevitably change the relationship.<sup>5</sup> My case is not immune to this, but it is unique because the

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<sup>3</sup> James Carrier, "GIFTS in a WORLD of COMMODITIES: The Ideology of the Perfect Gift in American Society," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 29, no. 29 (1990): 19–37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23163021>.

<sup>4</sup> Russell W. Belk, "It's the Thought That Counts: A Signed Digraph Analysis of Gift-Giving," *Journal of Consumer Research* 3, no. 3 (December 1976): 155, <https://doi.org/10.1086/208662>.

<sup>5</sup> Pamela Shurmer, "The Gift Game." *New society* 18, no. 482 (1971): 1243.

giver is a parent. Generally, children receive more gifts from their parents than vice versa, with the understanding that these gifts do not need to be repaid in the same way. So, while I cannot accept this gift in passing, my repayment is coming in the form of consideration and exploration of the meaning behind the gift.

Reciprocity is the acknowledgement that one box of music does not encapsulate the complete gift, and that there are intangible items that have been given and received that may be silently symbolized by this token. Having been passed down education and cultural interests is a privilege that does not go unnoticed to me. Generational knowledge has provided me with a rich inherited repository of insight, skills, and wisdom that have led me to where I am at today. This transmission of culture has informed everything from what I study in school, to who I socialize with in my free time. Alice Schlegel discusses the vertical (parent to child), horizontal (individual to individual) and one to many (teacher/leader to audience) models of cultural transmission from early childhood to late adolescence, and outlines how each age and stage is affected by who is disseminating the information—and how it is received.<sup>6</sup> Evidently, this has an extreme impact on how an individual develops their interests and identity into adulthood. Each work shown in *Collected Identity* can be viewed through Schlegel's lens in terms of how gifts of music or musical knowledge and education ultimately shape the way an individual sees themselves.

The seven artists featured in *Collected Identity* were tasked to look at their own collection of music and recognize what elements have leaked in from an outside influence, then demonstrate how that has informed their own self-perception. For myself, I was unable to see the individual the music was chosen for, without considering how I may appear to my father.

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<sup>6</sup> Alice Schlegel, "Human Development and Cultural Transmission," *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* 68, no. 4 (September 1, 2011): 458-60, <https://doi.org/10.1127/0003-5548/2011/0155>.

Featured artists Esha-Lee Dalwood and Étienne both recognized that their music careers could have been significantly altered, or even non-existent, without adolescent influence and the demands of studying performance and composition in a post-secondary capacity. While their pieces each vary widely in style and subject, the through line is this desire to validate the persuasion and guidance of peers, mentors, and family members on their own music practices.

In opposition to this desire to accept others through themselves, Angelic Goldsky and H.E. Casson implemented poetry and spoken word to divert the attention away from the positive influence of others, and towards the negative effect that outside influence has had on each of them. Their works are dedications of care towards themselves and introductions of adversity faced—but most importantly their works use collected audio to support the ways that they have worked through challenges. These pieces address gendered views of self-reflective work by overturning the narrative that they are “narcissistic” and introducing the idea that self-imagining and personal experience is a valuable source of knowledge and insight. Lauren Fournier discusses Adrian Piper’s *Food for the Spirit* as a precursor for present-day autotheoretical works of conceptualism and performance.<sup>7</sup> Exploring these ideas, both Casson and Goldsky use self-imagining as a necessary part of their practice in order for their audience to understand how they see themselves. Casson introduces an overwhelming cacophony of found sounds that they had recorded from everyday life or pulled out of audio recordings from their past. As a neurodivergent individual, they are often mentally bombarded by day-to-day life. This piece exemplifies the way that a pair of headphones can be used as a filter to navigate the inescapable playlist of background noise that many of us never take notice of. In a similar way, Goldsky uses their ongoing collection of what they consider to be *healing sounds*, to support a tragic poem of

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<sup>7</sup> Fournier, 71-97.

coming out as transgender to a family that is unsupportive and unwilling to see them as the person they are becoming. Fournier suggests that these types of performative pieces in contemporary art use autotheory as a type of self-preservation by being “philosophically generative and politically healing.”<sup>8</sup> These artists were not discovering what made them who they are through the music they collected but used their collections as an unwavering support system to who they had always been.

The care of collections is a connecting thread to these pieces wherein each individual expresses a deep love towards their own personal history with sound and music. Notably, artist Raymond Nyuli, who happens to be my father, was the gifter of the music collection that started this project. I included his work not only because it was a thoughtfully considered original piece, but because it lends itself well to opening the discussion around the typically gendered nature of record collecting. Rather than answering the question of “why did you pick this out for me” he responded by looking towards his own collection and coming up with a short tune inspired by the theme song from *Shaft* by Isaac Hayes—this act of intergenerational transmission layers not only the physical goods received, but the knowledge and values associated with passing down music and the hobby of collecting. Historically, record collecting has often been perceived as a predominantly male activity, with stereotypes portraying male collectors as more knowledgeable and serious about their collections.<sup>9</sup> By passing a collection down to his daughter, and subsequently creating a piece of audio in response to a song I had no knowledge of or history with, I argue that this is a representation of “male tastes” being the driving force behind cultural history and musical heritage. As seen, the music genres and artists selected for the collection

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>9</sup> Sophia Maalsen and Jessica McLean, “Record Collections as Musical Archives: Gender, Record Collecting, and Whose Music Is Heard,” *Journal of Material Culture* 23, no. 1 (August 11, 2017): 39–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183517725101>.



may reflect the father's tastes, so my challenge became trying to balance my own musical tastes with the inherited legacy. This dynamic highlights how gender roles and expectations can shape the practices and perceptions within the realm of record collecting.

Materiality remains a primary point of pride for music collectors who may often value vinyl over CD and exclude digital music all together. The gendered idea is that men may pick up a vinyl record because of their seriousness and intention to the craft, while a woman chooses a CD as an informal, consumerist purchase.<sup>10</sup> There is an emotional gratification attached to browsing through collections of vinyl records, for their sheer physicality lends itself well to detailed jacket covers and extended liner notes, whereas CDs and cassette tapes are limited in their visual appeal and tactile sensation. It is not nearly as satisfying to flip through a stack of CDs as it is to see the wear and tear on vinyl record covers that show marked signs of provenance.<sup>11</sup> Artist Daniela O'Fee considers the history of collecting in her work *Transmissions* that features new ways to use forgotten media such as mix tapes, audition reels, and a rarely used cassette player. O'Fee suggests in her work that the physical manipulation of past sonic media can be used as a way to reinvent collected material—in this case breaking the gendered barriers that surround the practice of collecting. This piece retells her past as a musician, integrating contemporary experimentation with obsolete media. In this way, all physical recordings are considered to have equal value and importance—just as much as they are unimportant. *Transmissions* highlights the physical interaction involved with older media, like having to flip a cassette tape, while producing a sort of ambient sound, which is reminiscent of the fluidity and ease of digital streaming. Music played on digital platforms has the ability to blend into the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Tom McCourt, "Collecting Music in the Digital Realm," *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 2 (May 2005): 249–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760500045394>.

background, because there is no need for the listener to be involved aside from pressing play.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, O'Fee's work serves as a reminder that the value of music lies not in its format—but in the experience it provides. Challenging the traditional gendered notions of collecting and engaging with music.

Digital streaming has transformed how people collect and consume music, making it increasingly intangible and readily accessible. While it allows the opportunity for everyone to be a collector without the financial and storage related barriers usually associated with collecting, it is not without rules. A collection without order is simply a mass of stuff in the same place, and there is a clear distinction between collection and accumulation as outlined by Belk.<sup>13</sup> The practice of ordering, selecting, or omitting songs from playlists and digital collections relies on a series of selective (and possibly arbitrary) choices by the collector.<sup>14</sup> Each choice adds meaning to playlists, reflecting the collector's personal associations. Ezra Neto's poem *Sweet Melancholy* was inspired by a seven-hour playlist that was gifted to them, only to be told later that it meant nothing at all. How could this playlist mean nothing if the creator of it was infused into every song? Neto suggests through their work that it is impossible for the playlist to be insignificant to their relationship with the gifter, yet they have no choice but to take it at face value, with the fear that reality might taint a love that could come true in the future. Lee Marshall writes that “[o]bjects acquire meaning through their entry into the collection, but that collection is always a reflection of the collector’s subjectivity.”<sup>15</sup> Subjectivity can be extended past the playlist in this

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Belk, 67.

<sup>14</sup> Lee Marshall and Dave Laing, “W(H)ither Now? Music Collecting in the Age of the Cloud,” in *Popular Music Matters* (Routledge, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 64.

case to conclude that both Neto and the playlist-maker have interpreted deceptive ideas about their relationship to each other—and neither can decide which is the closest to the truth.

Throughout this project, the intricate dynamics of gift giving, cultural transmission, and personal identity have emerged as the primary themes. The simple act of receiving a music collection has unfolded into a profound examination of how objects carry social and cultural weight, influencing both the giver and recipient in complex ways. Drawing on theories from Mauss, Belk, Shurmer, and Schlegal, the act of gift-giving can be laced with obligation and meaning that reaches far beyond the physical gift itself. This project underscores how music is a form of cultural capital and passing it down between generations helps to frame personal identities and relationships. The diverse works of the seven featured artists cover topics ranging from the positive acknowledgement of outside influence, as in Dalwood and Étienne, to Goldsky and Casson's focus on individual identity as a way to highlight the multi-faceted effect that audio has on personal perception. The gendered nuances of music collecting are outlined by R. Nyuli's work and challenged by O'Fee's through opening up new understandings of collected music. Neto's work furthers the exploration of digital collecting and reflects on how streaming has transformed the landscape of music curation, making it more accessible while changing the ways we interact and assign meaning to our collections. The gift of a music collection has become a lens in which one can better understand the interplay between materiality, identity, and cultural legacy.

## **Methodology**

Research for this project began with an emphasis on how small live music venues impact communities, and how social and cultural capital are driven by both individuals and the venues

themselves. An early influence was Samuel Whiting's dissertation for RMIT University titled "You're Not Strangers if You Like the Same Band": Small Venues, Music Scenes, and the Live Music Ecology which featured a case study conducted by Whiting where face to face interviews with active participants in the music scene, participant observation, along with cultural and historical research about local communities were used to build a comparison between two small venues in Melbourne, Australia.<sup>16</sup> This work highlighted non-economic forms of capital and the role of music venues in community building, and ultimately led me down several paths that broadened the scope of my research to include budget breakdowns and city planning, which was beyond what I had sought out to do.<sup>17</sup>

Recognizing the need for practical engagement, I conducted a series of site visits around the city of Toronto at small live music venues such as: The Emmet Ray, DROM Taberna, Horseshoe Tavern, The Rex, The Cameron House, Velvet Underground, The Baby G, Danforth Music Hall, Tapestry, The Dakota Tavern, Reposado Bar & Lounge, Monarch Tavern, The Great Hall, Handlebar, Rivoli Toronto, and Supermarket. My previous work experience with the Victoria Jazz Society and the Kensington Market Jazz Festival provided a foundation for connecting with artists and musicians, enriching my research with firsthand insights. Music, particularly in its live format, informs identity, structures memories, and builds connections to broader communities—which could be seen in action at each one of these venues.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Samuel Whiting. "You're Not Strangers If You Like the Same Band': Small Venues, Music Scenes, and the Live Music Ecology," 2019.

<sup>17</sup> For more on live music scenes and cultural capital see: Dave Carter and P. Muller, *Understanding Small Music Venues*: a report by the Music Venue Trust 2015; and Arno van der Hoeven and Erik Hitters, *The social and cultural values of live music: Sustaining urban live music ecologies*, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Dave Carter and P. Muller, "Research on Australia's Live Music Sector — The Economic and Cultural Value of Live Music in Australia 2014," Live Music Office, 2015, <https://livemusicoffice.com.au/research/>.

During the site visits, my research interests expanded to include home music listening and the potential for social networks formed through sharing recorded material. This aspect is less studied—but it highlighted the unique connections fostered by live music versus shared recordings. This is where I began to look at the connection between the collection that I had been given, and my own connection to the music.

At first, the collection seemed reminiscent of Andy Warhol's *Time Capsules*, as in an organically accumulated archive of process, accumulation, and desire.<sup>19</sup> Though over the course of researching collections, I have understood it (or at least decided it) to be conscious, considered, and organized for the sake of evaluating it as a formal collection.<sup>20</sup> When it became the focal point for the project, I was hoping that artists would be able to look at my music collection and make works that would help me finally understand why it had been given to me. After several unproductive weeks of asking around, a musician friend of mine finally admitted that it is unlikely that anyone is interested enough to worry about me and my problems. As it turned out, the search was much more fruitful when I suggested that artists should think about themselves and their own collections. This was the turning point that drove me towards the final exhibition. I wanted to develop a convenient way for potential participants to read about the project, see the original collection as an example, and have the written call to artists in front of them, so I built a website called *collectedidentity.ca*. This website became an easily shareable way to reach out to a large number of people in a short amount of time. I sent it out to my contact list, shared it on my personal Instagram and in music related Facebook groups that I am a part of, and posted it across about a dozen Reddit forums. Each one of these avenues brought me towards

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Goldsmith. "UbuWeb: An Accidental Archive." *OnCurating Curating Contemporary Music*, no. 44 (January 2020). 7.

<sup>20</sup> Marshall and Laing, 64.

unique individuals, and they are the reason that I received such diverse submissions from all around the world. Artists were able to get in contact with me and submit work directly through the website which made it extremely convenient to chat with them about their background and work, discuss potential submissions, and weed out the pieces that were not quite appropriate for the project.

The final selection of seven works was guided by thematic relevance to the project, with submissions coming from personal connections, social media, and professional networks. This process underscored themes such as gift giving and music curation, inspired by Simon Chambers *The Curation of Music Discovery: The Presentation of Unfamiliar Classical Music on Radio, Digital Playlists and Concert Programmes*.<sup>21</sup> After considering the ways that new music was introduced to the public, I expanded my scope to consider how sound art may be presented to audiences. The case studies outlined in Ameera Nimjee's "*Exhibiting Music: Case Studies in Imagining, Performing, and Collecting Sound*" introduced a more abstract look at the use of aural experiences through the Amsterdam Museum's presentation of the simulated sound of Dam Square between 1895 and 1935.<sup>22</sup> The research framework was further convinced by Lauren Fournier's *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, as it integrates personal experience and theoretical exploration.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Simon Chambers, "The Curation of Music Discovery: The Presentation of Unfamiliar Classical Music on Radio, Digital Playlists and Concert Programmes," *Empirical Studies of the Arts* 41, no. 1 (2022): 304–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02762374221128729>.

<sup>22</sup> Karin Bijsterveld, "Ears-on Exhibitions," *The Public Historian* 37, no. 4 (2015): 73–90, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2015.37.4.73>.

<sup>23</sup> Fournier (2021).

## Exhibition Review

*Collected Identity* explores the interplay between exhibiting collections and sound art, drawing inspiration from past exhibitions with similar themes and aesthetics. *The Murder of Crows* (2008); *The Instrument of Troubled Dreams* (2018); and *The Forty Part Motet* (2001) are all installation works by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller that served as thematic influence but were particularly impactful when it came to the design of the final exhibition.<sup>24</sup> Each encapsulates complex, layered sound environments that create an immersive experience. *The Murder of Crows* features a ninety-eight speaker setup that surrounds audiences in a haunting, dream-like narrative, while *The Instrument of Troubled Dreams* presents a 24-channel sound piece that creates an enveloping, cinematic audio experience. As a reworking of Thomas Tallis's *Spem in alium*, *The Forty Part Motet* uses 40 speakers that each present a single voice from the chorus. These installations helped to format the structure of *Collected Identity* that utilized seven speakers on seven different channels, each representing one of the artists featured in the show. The final result was an immersive experience that changed as you moved around the room, getting closer to one speaker and farther away from the others. The audio loop that played was just over 30 minutes and would move from speaker to speaker that made it so that one could stand still and be able to hear each piece as it jumped to the surrounding speakers.

Conceptually, this exhibition draws similarities to *Soundscapes*, at the National Gallery in London, England (2015), which uniquely combined visual art and sound by commissioning artists to choose a painting from their collection and create a new composition or piece of sound art in response.<sup>25</sup> While this exhibition encouraged viewers to “hear” the paintings and “see” the

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<sup>24</sup> Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, “Installations,” Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, n.d., <https://cardiffmiller.com/installations/>.

<sup>25</sup> “Soundscapes | Past Exhibitions | National Gallery, London,” www.nationalgallery.org.uk, n.d., <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past/soundscapes>.

sound—*Collected Identity* searches between the lines of what can be seen and heard, and taps into the aspects of identity and collections that are intangible. While *Soundscapes* invited an auditory and visual dialogue between paintings and music, *Collected Identity* delves deeper into the subtle, often unseen and unheard dimensions of existence. It seeks to uncover and articulate the elusive qualities of personal histories and the meanings ascribed to the objects being collected—offering a profound exploration of how identities are perceived and expressed beyond the tangible and the audible.

Other projects that explore collection, memory, and cultural commentary include Christian Marclay, *Christmas Tales*; Theaster Gates, *How to Build a House Museum*; and Rutherford Chang, *We Buy White Albums*. Marclay's work engages with the nostalgia and collective memory associated with Christmas, using sound and visual elements to evoke and reconstruct personal and communal histories.<sup>26</sup> Gates transforms a house into a museum, preserving and reinterpreting African American cultural and historical narratives. It explores the preservation of memory and the role of space in cultural history.<sup>27</sup> Chang's project focuses on collecting multiple copies of The Beatles' White Album, highlighting the wear and unique markings on each record. This serves as a commentary on the passage of time and the personal histories embedded in physical objects.<sup>28</sup> These projects explore how collections can tell stories, preserve memories, and challenge conventional notions of art and cultural heritage. A key aspect of each is the display and manipulation of the collections themselves, illustrating new ways for

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<sup>26</sup> Adeena Mey, "Christian Marclay's Christmas Tales," UAL Research Online, December 25, 2008, <https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/17833/>.

<sup>27</sup> Treva Michelle Pullen, "Theaster Gates: How to Build a House Museum," *The Senses and Society* 12, no. 1 (2017): 123–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2016.1268444>.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Drobnick, "Rutherford Chang. the Record Collector as Artist-Curator," *Revue Musicale OICRM* 10, no. 1 (June 2023): 16–35, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1101786ar>.



them to be re-interpreted. *Collected Identity* differs in that it shows new works that emerged as a result of analysing and reimagining personal identity through the use of existing collections.

### **Installation Concept and Design**

The size of the exhibition space was fully utilized by spacing out the seven speakers around the room. Four of the seven speakers were placed on top of side tables of various heights, while two were on the ground. One speaker sat on a three-and-a-half-foot tall, narrow wooden bookshelf that housed the original music collection that served as the motivation for the project. The audio interface that the speakers connected to was positioned on top of a white plinth that had shelves in the back to tuck away the laptop and cables. The speakers ran on battery power, so the only cables required were the ones that plugged into the interface, and they were secured with brown paper tape that ran the same direction as the hardwood floor as much as possible. To the left of the room when visitors first entered was a 36 x 48” wall text with black writing on white paper, and the title *COLLECTED IDENTITY* in yellow text. Beside that sat a white plinth that held the exhibition brochures. There were two yellow benches on each side of the entrance to the room that faced the exhibition, and two sets of two white chairs on the outside of the room that faced inwards to the centre.

The practical function behind the design of the layout was that each speaker needed to be heard individually and not overwhelmed by the other audio playing around it—but the challenge was that all speakers needed to connect to the same central place. Several iterations of the speaker configuration were tested to find the most aesthetically pleasing and balanced audio experience.



*Figure 1: Gallery interior with speaker and audio interface placement.*

Up until two days before the exhibition opened, I was unsure about displaying my original collection at all. In a way, it had become almost obsolete to the works that were being shown in the gallery, but at the same time it was pivotal to my research. I decided to find a low impact spot to display all 45 CDs, cassettes, and vinyl records, and I included a QR code on the exhibition wall text that would take you to *collectedidentity.ca* to view detailed photos of the collection along with the original call to artists and a description of the project conception. Viewers were encouraged to pick up the collection items and take a look at the handwritten cassette tape labels, find concert stubs tucked into CD cases, and read the recorded dates to get a sense of how long ago some of these items were acquired.



*Figure 2: Shelf and music collection placement.*



*Figure 3: Gallery wall text with plinth holding exhibition brochures.*



*Figure 4: Gallery attendees crouching on the floor to listen to a speaker closely while reading an audio description of the work.*

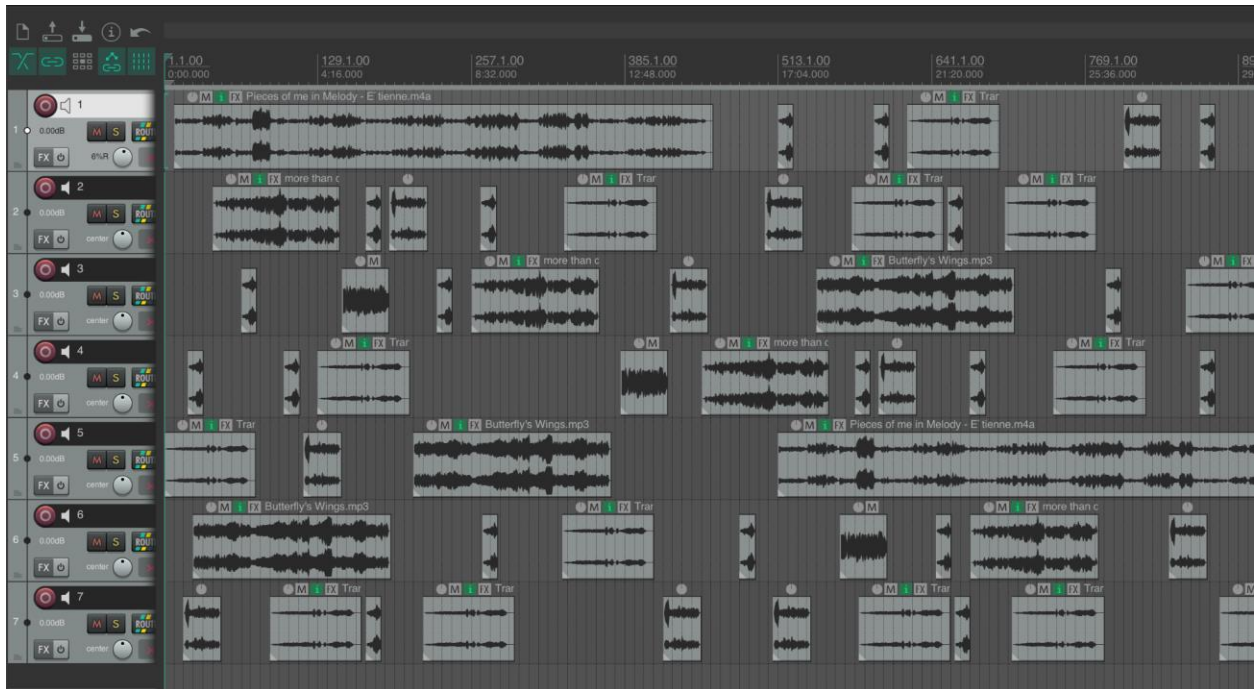


*Figure 5: View from the back of the gallery, people used in comparison for scale.*

For an early concept of the exhibition design, I considered recreating a home listening space to mirror where we might listen to the original collections. As that idea became less optimal, I wanted to retain some of the familiar, homely feelings that version foregrounded. This was achieved through the use of household furniture to lift the speakers off the ground in replacement of classic plinths, wall shelves, or speaker stands. While listening to such contemporary, conceptual audio pieces, I wanted the audience to feel a sense of ease throughout the exhibition.

The actual programming of the audio files was done through Reaper and split into seven tracks. Each track was routed to a different speaker so that only one audio played out of each at a time. Through this, I was able to control how often pieces were playing, when they overlapped, and how they moved throughout the room. I kept the overlapping of the audio as organic as possible because I wanted it to feel like people in the room were talking, performing, or listening to music—without becoming too overwhelming or chaotic. The longest audio (*Pieces of Me in Melody*, 14:59 mins) played twice within the loop, while the rest jumped between the speakers and played 3-20 times depending on their length. It became somewhat of a scavenger hunt where viewers would pace around the room, getting close to the speakers trying to determine which audio was which. While I think this was effective in encouraging movement throughout the gallery and engagement with the works and the audio descriptions, at times it became admittedly confusing to follow. Another issue is that when several people were in the room all at once, if there was any talking at all the volume of the speakers had to be raised to a point where it became muddled. With only a small handful of quiet attendees, the audio setup was successful.





*Figure 6: Screenshot of Reaper file setup to show the ways the audio moved around the room.*

*Each of the seven tracks corresponds to a different speaker.*

Despite some challenges in distinguishing the individual audio pieces, the overall setup effectively invited visitors to explore and connect with the works on a deeper level, achieving the desired blend of contemporary, conceptual audio within a comforting, accessible setting. If this exhibition were to take place again, in this same space or a different one, I would reconsider some of the audio equipment used and the coordination of the audio files themselves.

## Literature Review

With the practice of gift giving dating back to early civilizations, it is no surprise that a wide range of social and theoretical perspectives have emerged to form a deep understanding of this multifaceted tradition. For something so universal, there are countless nuances that surround gifting that change with age, gender, culture, and status. Marcel Mauss's 1925 *The Gift*, remains

foundational to the study of gift giving.<sup>29</sup> Mauss suggests that gifts are never free, but part of a larger system of reciprocity and obligation. He argues that the act of giving ties together both the giver and the receiver in an endless cycle of giving, receiving, and reciprocation that is part of what sustains social connections. Mauss's work was so formative to the study of gifting, that it is referenced in almost all work that follows it.

Worldwide, there are extreme variations in the practice of gifting from one culture to another. James Carrier focuses on the interplay between gifts and commodities in American society and suggests that gifts are embedded with a commercial value that often influences their selection and reciprocation.<sup>30</sup> To further this idea, he delves into how the culture of choosing gifts has impacted consumer culture in a way that reflects broader societal values and norms. This text does not highlight how handmade gifts or ones that are passed down no longer have a commercial value to support this argument.

Carrier does introduce the idea that gifts "bear the identity of the giver," which is enthusiastically supported by Annette B. Weiner.<sup>31</sup> Objects that are so intrinsically tied to the giver that they can never be fully transferred to another person are what Weiner considers to be "inalienable possessions."<sup>32</sup> Even after the gift is exchanged, part of the original giver's identity will forever be trapped within the object. This helps to underscore the emotional and symbolic nature of gifting. Russell W. Belk's study *It's the Thought that Counts: A Signed Digraph Analysis of Gift-Giving* reinforces the emotional nature of gifting by emphasizing how the

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<sup>29</sup> Mauss (1925; repr., Routledge, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Carrier (1990).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

intention and thought behind a gift changes the way that it is received.<sup>33</sup> Belk's ideas place the value of material goods below the context in which they are given.

John F. Sherry Jr. and Pamela Shurmer both separately discuss gift giving as it pertains to social hierarchies, cultural practices, and ritualized exchanges.<sup>34</sup> While Sherry explores the meanings and functions of gifts as they change between context and culture, Shurmer highlights the playful nature of gifting. Her analysis sheds light on the tactical nature of exchange where gifts can be used to identify hierarchies, create or dissolve social bonds, and reveals complex motivations behind this seemingly selfless act.<sup>35</sup>

Although Mauss's theory is pivotal to understanding the complex practice of gifting, the study has adapted and changed over the past century since he first published *The Gift*. Carrier, Belk, and Sherry have made strides in adapting the theory of gifting to encompass emotional impact and the presence of identity in gifts, while Shurmer suggests that not all gifting needs to be serious. Weiner introduces the idea that intangible artifacts are passed alongside gifts, that can be strengthened by Alice Schlegel's *Human Development and Cultural Transmission* that posits the ways that cultural knowledge, practices, and values are imparted on one individual to another or others.<sup>36</sup> Applying her theory directly is tricky, however, as it suggests that cultural transmission is an active process, rather than a passive one—where gifting or collecting propose the opposite.

Sharing the personal and cultural significance attached to objects and collections, Lee Marshall and Dave Laing turn towards collecting in the digital realm where identity is intangible

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<sup>33</sup> Belk (1976).

<sup>34</sup> John F. Sherry, Jr., "Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research* 10, no. 2 (September 1983): 157, <https://doi.org/10.1086/208956>.

Pamela Shurmer, "The Gift Game." *New society* 18, no. 482 (1971): 1243.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Shurmer, 1244.

<sup>36</sup> Schlegel (2011).

to the collection—but can be felt throughout it.<sup>37</sup> Marshall and Laing aim to change the perception of ownership when it comes to music collections where the traditional notion of acquiring physical objects is removed. There is a sense of instant gratification that comes along with clicking between songs, albums, and artists, but undoubtedly these spaces encourage interaction and community building—highlighting personal identity and cultural transmission. More on digital collecting, media studies, and cultural consumption supported by Tom McCourt *Collecting Music in the Digital Realm*.<sup>38</sup>

Music collecting as a type of personal archive was investigated through Maalsen and McLean who examined the role of gender in record collecting, consumption, and preservation.<sup>39</sup> While not exclusively on collecting, David Hesmondhalgh follows the same path in discussing music consumption and the role of culture in shaping identity—which ultimately impacts how and what music is collected and archived.<sup>40</sup>

Personal identity and self-reflection are emphasized throughout by tangling together the production of knowledge with lived experience, as introduced by Lauren Fournier in *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*.<sup>41</sup> Fournier's thinking is deeply rooted in feminist theory, where personal narrative is used to study broader socio-political issues, articulate experiences in a way that challenge dominant narratives, and foster a nuanced, intersectional understanding of art within a theoretical framework.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Marshall and Laing (2016).

<sup>38</sup> McCourt (2005).

<sup>39</sup> Maalsen and McLean (2011).

<sup>40</sup> David Hesmondhalgh, "Subcultures, Scenes or Tribes? None of the Above," *Journal of Youth Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 2005): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260500063652>.

<sup>41</sup> Fournier (2021).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Gift giving as a multifaceted tradition is researched through various social and theoretical perspectives, which have been supported over the past one hundred years. As culture and society continue to develop—these theories are required to as well. The introduction of intersectionality and intangible cultural transmission are integral to the expansion and evolution of the field of study. Collecting functions as an inclusive example for the ways that gifting, cultural transmission, and personal identity can converge.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond the exploration of a gifted music collection, the exhibition *Collected Identity* began to unravel the intricate web of gift-giving, cultural transmission, and personal identity. This project has illuminated how objects (whether material or intangible) that are passed down between people come imbued with personal and cultural significance, and collections emerge as a melting pot of those who have contributed. The seven artists involved in the exhibition served as examples of how music and material possessions intersect with identity and relationships. This investigation into the study of music collecting underscores the dual relationship of music collections as both personal and cultural repositories. The responses to this project highlight the diverse connections between audio and self-perception, and the ways in which individual identity is shaped by others.

As music collecting shifts into the digital age, artists and collectors are adapting their practices to continually build communities and retain the humanity behind collecting. As meanings attached to music are altered, the interactions and implications begin to change in response. This evolution invites further research into how our collecting practices and associated connections with the materials may impact future collecting practices.

In conclusion, this project has shown how the simple act of receiving a small gift can open up a wider conversation related to materiality, cultural legacy, and identity. Future research could delve into the ways that digital and physical musical collections interact, the role of gender and socio-economic or social status in collecting practices, and further exploration could be made in the ways that music can function as cultural capital. By continuing to examine these dynamics, greater contributions could be made in the field of music collecting to gain understanding in how music, both as an object and a concept, influences and reflects our lives.

## APPENDIX A: Artists' Biographies

**Esha-Lee Dalwood** is a first-year music composition student at the University of Sydney in Sydney, Australia. Dalwood is specifically focused on creating music for films, and dives deep into building and inspiring emotion in her work. While it is still early in her post-secondary education, Dalwood is eager and focused to build a professional career in music composition.

**H.E. Casson** has an ongoing list of creative undertakings, but most recently they were the Al Purdy A-Frame Writer in Residence, and served as the editor of a short story collection called: *There's No Place: Tales of Home by Storytellers Who Have Experienced Homelessness*. Casson lives and works in Toronto, ON, and is a self-described queer/mad/disabled/dad-joke telling poet, singer, and voice actor who never shies away from a new creative endeavor.

**Raymond Nyuli** is a former concert producer renowned for curating intimate performances in small venues, focusing on jazz, blues, world, and folk styles—music that resonated deeply with his own eclectic tastes. As a semi-professional guitarist living in Kamloops, BC, he brings his passion for these same genres to life, both in his practice and through his performances. Currently, Nyuli is an active member of a vibrant big band, where he contributes his skills to interpreting a repertoire that spans from classic big band era compositions to innovative modern arrangements, showcasing his versatility and dedication to musical exploration.

**Étienne** a singer/songwriter who fuses alternative, pop, and folk music together, and has emerged as a prominent new figure in the soft music scene. Since debuting his first album “Gas Station Nostalgia” in the fall of 2022, Étienne has continued to record and play new music live

around the city of Toronto, ON, where he lives and works. Growing up in New Brunswick, Étienne has a deep connection to his Acadian heritage that he infuses into the spirit of his music. Recently, he graduated from the music program at Centennial College, and looks forward to further developing his unique style, and taking on new projects.

*Étienne can be found on all streaming platforms under his name. Stream his most recent single 'Angel Affair' today.*

**Daniela O'Fee** is a composer, visual artist, instructor, and performer on the traditional and unceded lands of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwepemcúlecw in Kamloops, BC. In her quest for relevant approaches to democratic public art engagement, Daniela redirects her music performance practice to the outdoor amphitheatre. Her work addresses issues such as resource extraction, settler colonialism, cultural dynamics, ecology, immigration, and diversity. By exploring the interaction between acoustic and visual realms, she employs field recordings, graphic and nature scores, soundwalking, wood bending, deconstructed instruments, obsolete media materials, and extended piano techniques.

*<https://www.danielaofee.com/home>*

**Angelic Goldsky** is a poet, media artist, community builder, and performer rooted in the intersectionality of a diasporic Post-Soviet Jewish heritage and queer/trans identity. Their work is primarily expressed through poetry, music, and magic to liberate themselves from trauma by way of rhythm and release. Formerly the Poet in Residence at the Roundhouse Community Centre (2021), the Canadian representation in the LGBTQ+ showcase at the World Poetry Championship in Brussels (2022), Goldsky was most recently shortlisted for the Canadian




League of Poets Canadian Spoken Word Award (2024). On their journey to becoming a Somatic EDMR Practitioner and a trans Mikveh (Jewish water ritual guide), Goldsky uses poetry for the transmission of lineage repair work. Currently, Goldsky is studying at NYU, working on a Masters of Arts in Art Politics, but is based in Toronto, ON.

*<https://www.angelicgoldsky.net/>*

**Ezra Neto** is a multi-talented artist known primarily for their poetry in conjunction with visual art, and a deep passion for studying music and languages. Raised in the vibrant cultural landscape of Toronto, ON, Neto's work is heavily influenced by the diverse experiences and surroundings of the city—particularly from working and playing in the bar and restaurant scene. Neto's artistic journey is characterised by a unique blend of introspection and social commentary, exploring themes that resonate with the human experience. Their works often delve into the complexities of identity, community, and the human condition, inviting viewers and listeners alike to engage deeply with their personal narratives.

## APPENDIX B: Exhibition Didactics



Through the eclectic and introspective works showcased in *Collected Identity*, audiences are invited into a unique listening experience that showcases the profound intersection of personal narratives and the transformative power of sound. As each artist navigates their relationship with music—whether through stories of inherited collections, found sounds, or personal compositions—they challenge us to reconsider how music shapes our identities and perceptions. From the intimate reflections on lost love and shared memories, to the innovative use of obsolete media and found audio; these pieces illuminate the complexities of self-discovery amidst the influences of others. Ultimately, *Collected Identity* emerges not only as an exploration of musical expression, but also as a poignant reminder of the profound connections that music fosters between individuals and communities. This new repository highlights moments in time and memory, and urges us to contemplate the role that music plays in shaping who we are, and who we may become.

# COLLECTED IDENTITY

GRAD GALLERY  
205 RICHMOND ST. WEST  
OCAD UNIVERSITY  
JULY 12 - 16, 2024

Special thanks to my advisors Jim Drobnick and Adam Tindale, as well as the rest of the supporting faculty from OCAD U who have helped me along the way.

Exhibition Brochure — Front and back page.

**FEATURING AUDIO WORKS BY:**

**ESHA-LEE DALWOOD**  
**H.E. CASSON**  
**RAYMOND NYULI**  
**ANGELIC GOLDSKY**  
**EZRA NETO**  
**DANIELA O'FEE**  
**ÉTIENNE**

**CURATED BY LANA NYULI**

**CRITICISM & CURATORIAL PRACTICE MFA | OCAD UNIVERSITY**

***Butterfly's Wings*, Esha-Lee Dalwood 5:29 mins, 2023**

With a profound passion for film scores, first-year composition student at the University of Sydney Australia, Dalwood dedicates her studies and creative endeavours to mastering the art of music composition for visual media. Her work is driven by a deep desire to evoke and inspire a wide range of emotions within her audience, aiming to create immersive and impactful auditory experiences. *Butterfly's Wings* references her transformative musical journey from adolescence into adulthood. This piece (recorded using Logic Pro), highlights compositional techniques that have been taught to her during her formal education, along with personal experimentation and peer influence.

***Noise Cancelling*, H.E. Casson 1:02 mins, 2024**

Featuring a series of found sounds including frogs in the Don Valley, a chipmunk, local bird calls, a laugh at a party, and the pop and sizzle of popcorn cooking, this work suggests that organically found sounds can serve as music in their own right. Casson explores history and memory using found audio, including their own vocals, recorded on a cassette tape in 1987. The queer and disabled poet, singer, voice actor, and multimedia artist created *Noise Cancelling* to examine their unique ways of hearing through a neurodivergent lens—representing the hyper alertness they feel to life circling around them. Overlaid is a spoken word poem about their first pair of headphones, which allowed Casson to curate the audio they took in and block out excess noise.

***FM Ringtone*, Raymond Nyuli 0:25 mins, 2022**

Inspired by Isaac Hayes' 1971 theme from "Shaft", *FM Ringtone* features a dozen meticulously crafted guitar tracks, played and mixed by Nyuli into a unique ringtone. A former concert producer known for intimate performances in jazz, blues, world, and folk music—Nyuli is a longtime generator of work which serves his eclectic tastes. This bespoke tune is no exception; resonating with its funky groove, the ringtone adds joy and individuality to daily routines—showcasing Nyuli's creativity and dedication to musical exploration.

***More than Death*, Angelic Goldsky 3:32 mins, 2022**

The sound of the Shofar, a traditional Jewish ram's horn, signals this work as a call to action against threats to trans lives, rights, and identities. Written in collaboration for Trans Day of Remembrance, this musical poem features a collection of healing sounds saved over many years. It reflects on self-identity and family ties—especially as they begin to fray—and explores the possibility of future implications. This piece is an impetuous output of raw emotions, backed by memories and audio recordings which serve as a form of meditation contemplation.

***Sweet Melancholy*, Ezra Neto 1:18 mins, 2024**

Relishing the heavy sadness of lost love, *Sweet Melancholy* is a spoken word poem about a literal seven-hour playlist, thoughtfully picked by an unreliable prospect. The feelings of longing and intimacy reverberate through the voice of the narrator as they find solace and pain in this reflection. There is a poignant realisation of the impermanence of their connection, leading to feelings of loss and uncertainty about how they will be seen or understood in the absence of the other person. The poem captures a complex emotional journey of self-awareness, vulnerability, and the struggle to reconcile conflicting feelings of attachment and separation.

***Transmissions*, Daniela O'Fee 2:32 mins, 2023**

In her quest for relevant approaches to democratic public art engagement, O'Fee redirects her music performance practice to the outdoor amphitheatre. *Transmissions* combines mixtapes, audition reels, and an obsolete cassette machine with direct contact sounds from her piano strings. Reflecting on the evolution of music recording and distribution, O'Fee reinvents her past through recollected sonic material, bending time and space. This approach metamorphosizes identity by physically manipulating the medium, suggesting that altering the tape may become an alteration of oneself.

***Pieces of Me in Melody*, Étienne 14:59 mins, 2024**

Speaking with the cool character and charisma of an evening radio host, Étienne takes us on a musical journey from singing Acadian folk songs in the blueberry fields where he grew up, to the big city music he makes today. Channelling Fleetwood Mac, Leonard Cohen, and Lana Del Rey—this musical essay contextualises the artist's own practice through a series of covers, sung by Étienne himself. Dripping with inescapable nostalgia, *Pieces of Me in Melody* is a familiar story with a surprising outcome that defines the complexities of individual taste.

the poetry of Leonard Cohen. That was something new to me. It was poetry, but in music form. It wasn't pop-y, it wasn't mainstream, but it was somehow beautiful, almost spoken. His song, Chelsea Hotel, was the first song that I ever recorded.

[Étienne sings *Chelsea Hotel* by Leonard Cohen]

Now there are always songs that whenever you listen to them, it brings you right back to the moment that you first heard them, or a vivid memory of when you were listening to them. And, This song, Bad Timing, by Blue Rodeo, brings me right back to when I was young. I can see my mother closing her eyes and smiling every time this song would come on, and my aunts and uncles all singing it and being so happy. It was marvelous.

[Étienne sings *Bad Timing* by Blue Rodeo]

How beautiful is music truly? And you know, there are always songs that come and go. There are songs that you forget and then you listen again and you're like, Oh, I remember, but there are also songs that will always be your favorite. And this song, Landslide by Fleetwood Mac, I remember very young, and it will always be one of my favorite songs.

[Étienne sings *Landslide* by Fleetwood Mac]

The chance to go see Stevie Nicks live with my dad a couple years ago. When she sang this song, I just knew that it was always going to be so special to me. Now all these songs brought me somewhere, you know? I decided at 19 years old to move to Toronto and pursue my dream to become a musician. I studied in college, I met a bunch of friends, my girlfriend who is also a musician, and I'm now making music.

And that's huge, but it's because of these songs that I make the music that I do today. They are a piece of me. And through them, I learn to tell my story in my own words.

[Étienne sings his original song *Lilacs*]

Why do I feel like these songs represent me? The thing that's so interesting is that I could be a completely different person had the circumstances been different. It's because of the music that I've been shown that I am able to identify myself in this wicked, crazy, cool, multicultural society. And I know that if I ever lose myself, I can always go back to the music.

So, take a listen. Go back to what you grew up with and figure out what's your story

#### **Audio Descriptions:**

***Butterfly's Wings*, Esha-Lee Dalwood 5:29 mins, 2023**

*The soft sound of low string instruments opens up to a harp plunking a twinkling melody. The rest of the string section joins in before the drums and flutes. The music swells as a low drum rumbles in the background, passing back to the soft place where we began—this time with the whole string section dancing around together in short, staccato notes. The melody exchanges back and forth between loud streams of emotion, and softer more contemplative notes—each time building on the past section. Two thirds of the way through the composition, both the plunking strings and the swells of the full orchestra come together harmoniously, finally ending with long, bowed string notes, and the harp playing a tune from high to low. The composition is reminiscent of a movie soundtrack.*

***Noise Cancelling*, H.E. Casson 1:02 mins, 2024**

*This piece opens with the sound of crickets, birds, and a young child speaking. The sound is distorted and haunting, overlaid with the following dialogue:*

In 1989, I bought my first set of Surplus Air Park Daughter Star Red Foam Headphones.

It's an awful lot of ambient, quaking, goosebump making, hearty shaking every day. Of every day. The whole world has stopped to say. Every Saturday, the passive curation, the massive dilation, the crashes, and the orchestration of everything. So I could hear myself think.

***FM Ringtone*, Raymond Nyuli 0:25 mins, 2022**

*A few guitar strings are played at the opening of the tune, which are then layered on top of and mixed together with other guitar tracks. The final result is a funky blend that ends shortly after reaching the max volume.*

***More than Death*, Angelic Goldsky 3:32 mins, 2022**

*Between each line of spoken word are sounds that the artist has collected and mixed together to become the backing track to this poem.*

I saw an angel turn into a siren, another trans person was dying. Have you ever seen a lion turn into a ghost? God doesn't know how to mourn the loss of a rose. A rose falls onto a grave and how grave is it? The loss of not knowing your own kid. I rose. How grave is it?

I Rose.

All of us that were dead named in the afterlife

made ghosts while still in the living room.

Exhibition Brochure Insert (Described Audio) — Front and back page.

Teach me something more beautiful than death then. Teach me something more than this cosmic rotting flesh then. Teach me something unknown to the heavens then. Not God's atoms, not my personal why, not the course of creation, not the makeup of extraterrestrial life, not the shape of time, teach me only this.

Why love seems to grow its teeth in a hungered fist.

Why will abandons families in the greatest hunt, playing an undignified game. How nuclear Earth revolts against this greed. Unwound. Unmenstruated. Unbled. Unate. Under the earth, a hostile gruel is desperate to be cradled. In all religions in which we prayed ourselves to blood in the name of worship, sing the cry of mercy.

We have falsified what spirit is again and again.

Praying to false gods who waged real wars against a trans future worth living. We mistook the magic as crucifixion, where resurrection is the giving room, and yet to scapegoated bodies, those who hold the blame. For those who cannot fathom, that really God has changed. And the volatile has never been God's plan.

Singing back down to the truth, that really God is trans.

Cow's bone, seems to parade. It's redless fruit, deep in my faith. Dug and dressing, dress and dug, the release of the sweet nectar of survival. Our infliction of pain is not innate. But really, it is our life.

Love me then, from ruined to ripe, from crusaded to conceived, from dead to alive, from prune to pulp, from miscary to undrowned. Love me then, not when I die. Love me now, whole.

**Sweet Melancholy, Ezra Neto 1:18 mins, 2024**

*The narrator sounds as if they are in a quiet room alone, no other sounds can be heard in the background. They read out the following poem:*

I told you I wanted to feel sad and you knew exactly what it meant to be what you are and feel what you must. So you crafted me a mirror and mounted it on my bedroom ceiling. Each night it sings to me while I cry myself to sleep and dream of what I meant to you. Seven hours later when I wake up it ends.

So I started all over again and my reflection stares back at me in 108 shades of blue. It feels like being seen in colour for the very first time and it's got me addicted. I haven't left my bed in weeks because I'm obsessed with what you saw in me. And for someone so afraid of intimacy, you touched me so intensely and so intentionally with each and every song.

But I wish I knew it was a parting gift and that you'd never touch me again. Now I can't stop crying and I can't stop the music because then you'll be gone and who will see me? Not the mask I wear, but the sweet melancholy within me, fighting to feel

something rather than nothing at all. Maybe I can cover the mirror, fight for bitter happiness, or fall into an apathetic trap.

But I don't think I can ever take it down. Not when I feel you with every song, looking back at me, as you tell me, I see you.

**Transmissions, Daniela O'Fee 2:32 mins, 2023**

*Sounds for this audio were made by using a piano, magnetic tape, rubber gloves, cassette tape machine, and then recorded and mixed together. The sound is dissonant and sometimes melodic.*

**Pieces of Me in Melody, Étienne 14:59 mins, 2024**

*Étienne speaks slowly and clearly, and between each short story he sings a snippet of a song.*

This is Pieces of Me in Melody, music shown to me during my upbringing that helped define who I am, what I like, and who I want to be as a person and a musician. Let's dive right in, shall we? The first recollection I have of music being shown to me is a band called The Eagles. My dad had this live video of The Eagles playing their greatest hits, and I remember coming home from school, When I was very young and grabbing two pencils and going on the couch, putting in that DVD and listening to it from top to bottom and using those pencils as drumsticks on the couch.

[Étienne sings *Peaceful Easy Feeling* by The Eagles]

And when there were parties, there was music. And being an Acadian in a small French New Brunswick town, there was certainly a big amount of Acadian music being played. I still remember my aunts and my cousins all rallying up together and singing these traditional Acadian tunes. And it brings me right back to that.

[Étienne sings an Acadian folk song]

Ah, the sweet sound of Acadian music. It brings me right back to when I was 16 and my dad sent me into a concert of the nostalgic Acadian 1755, where I got to celebrate with all my friends and family on Acadian Day. It was incredible. Now moving into my teenage years, I remember coming home from school and my brother, who was four years older than me, was on his new music wave and he introduced me to Lana Del Rey.

Now she would go on to become one of the most influential artists of my life. As a songwriter, a poet, an artist. She was just cool and different and it made me want to be cool and different.

[Étienne sings *Video Games* by Lana Del Rey]

I remember walking down to my Aunt Claudette's house when I was young. And she would introduce me to some new music, old new music. And she introduced me to

Exhibition Brochure Insert (Described Audio) — Inside pages.



Exhibition Brochures in the gallery

# COLLECTED IDENTITY

Gift giving is rarely a one-sided transaction or merely a display of wealth. More importantly, it is an intricate interplay between social obligation, cultural transmission, and personal identity. This exhibition began with the gift of a small music collection consisting of 45 items. As gifting often tends to do, this has spiraled into a consideration of exchange and reciprocity. Why this music? What made you feel this way? How do the things we collect become parts of our identity, and how important are they to the maintenance of our relationships with others?

The seven artists featured in this exhibition were invited to look at their own collections of music, recognize what elements have been influenced by external sources, and demonstrate how these elements have shaped their self-perception. What does the music you collect say about who you are? More importantly, how can the music gifted to you influence who you become? One artist uses cassette tapes as a literal medium, while another reflects on music shared and love lost. How someone else sees us is no less true than how we see ourselves, but how can we reconcile a version of ourselves that we do not know? In this way, music that is gifted to us becomes a passive reflection of our identity. This exhibition explores the many questions that arise in the process of figuring out who we are.

**Featured artists:** Esha-Lee Dalwood, H.E. Casson, Raymond Nyuli, Étienne, Daniela O'Fee, Angelic Goldsky, and Ezra Neto.

**Curated by:** Lana Nyuli

*To see photos of the original collection or the call to artists, scan the QR code.*





Wall Text and plinth holding Gallery Brochures



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