

“Songbird”

Tirelessly and exhausted
Work burrow tend
Pour the hot wax in her ears
Soothe the day being told who and what to fear
(Endorse her own riches out of reach)
Making us informed
Doesn't make them a quid right now

*Oh mother
My raven, my dove
You've given so much love
Don't we all deserve to sleep a full night*

But she swears there is no other way
This is the best things can get
No time to think for herself today
She must put the kids off to bed

Convinced of glorious sacrifice
But what for?

Pushed to only want to disengage
Get sold escape at half off
Learn to close your eyes at sunsets
So the ghost of dusk can haunt you after dawn

(We're told human nature's in the way
Are we not blocking its path?)

Ensuring there's a tomorrow
Doesn't make them a quid right now

*The face of the nation is far from reflection
The mirror is cracked and it's lost in refraction
Expected to trust disembodied hands looming
While they, disconnected, are left to
Assuming they know*

Still we swear there is no other way
This is the best things can get
But can we pass the world away
Onto the next without regrets?

I almost didn't write this song (or every song of mine, really). Almost fully drowned in the torrential dread of trying to run up a waterfall; one that is ceaselessly pouring into a bottom that fell out long before memory. I feel like my thoughts are futile, swallowed and regurgitated continuously to the point of being rinsed clean of any true meaning. I feel like a pit is waiting under me for the right time to open its mouth and devour everything.

My words are empty on their own.

I think of the songbirds
Singing
As the forest is burning
Barely out-roaring the flame
Can't you hear them sing?
If just letting them live
Is letting them die
There has to be more we can do
Can't we
Learn the songs
Bring them orchestras
Let them conduct

Learn the songs
Then teach them to sing more

“Songbird” Writeup

“Songbird” is the title of the audiovisual piece I composed for the International Youth Think Tank “Expressions of Empowerment” competition. The piece consists of a collage-like indie-rock song alongside visuals displaying the lyrics, as well as depicting me building and eventually playing a cassette tape loop arranged in the shape of a mockingbird. All components of “Songbird” were executed by myself.

Musically and lyrically, the piece is meant to express the crossroads of internal and external conflict, how each feeds the other. The collaged nature of the piece, including recordings from a variety of mediums and fidelity (including sections solely recorded on cassette and microcassette), is meant to align with the cacophony of thoughts and emotions which are internalized and externalized to varying degrees, but nonetheless everpresent.

Throughout the piece, I explore a series of vignettes with the common theme being how people are conditioned into a state of capitalist realism, believing that even though they are suffering, there is no solution outside of the system. Through a busy mother figure falling victim to the current truth crisis, to people feeling alienated by politicians yet internalizing the dread of social and political issues (among other vignettes), I wanted to express the absurdity of how our economy is not centered around the wellbeing of people or even ensuring there’s a tomorrow (especially with environmental concerns). Of course, currently it is centered around “making a quid” (profit). My emphasis is on people requiring accurate media coverage and effective education/critical thinking skills (or through political workshops) to actually recognize that there is in fact another way, this is far from the best that things can get, there are practical solutions that can target the roots of problems.

The final section of the piece depicts me trying to find out how to overcome the societal push to disengage and escape, and how to look for answers amidst the overwhelming complexity of modern life, especially as a young adult. Though initially filled with immense self-doubt and dread, I conclude that I am trapped only listening to my own voice and I should search for voices elsewhere. Using songbirds as a metaphor, I try to express that there are countless people of all walks of life, and through a combination of dedicated listening (amplification of oppressed voices, encouragement to participate) and effective education that promotes critical thinking, a true democracy with an empowered society can emerge. The tape loop that is built throughout and is played near the end of the video (and is heard in the song) has a sampled instrument of around one thousand human voices from around the world recorded onto it.

Although I tried to touch on most of the proposals put forth by the IYTT throughout the piece, my main intention was to be creative, evocative, personal, and honest to myself (I apologize if any unorthodoxy in the music or slight surrealism/abstraction/overpersonalisation in the lyrics is not as direct as was expected for the competition). I am hoping that “Songbird” invites interpretation and creates unique experiences with each person who listens/watches.

Even if this is not what you (whoever it may concern) is looking for for this competition, I would just like to express that I greatly appreciate this opportunity. I believe in the aims of the IYTT immensely. Thank you so much for your time.