

**‘SUMMER DREAMS’ A CONCEPT ALBUM  
OF WESTERN POP MUSIC  
INSPIRED BY LOVE**

**SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

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‘SUMMER DREAMS’ A CONCEPT ALBUM  
OF WESTERN POP MUSIC  
INSPIRED BY LOVE

FENG YI

DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER OF MUSIC  
(COMPOSITION)  
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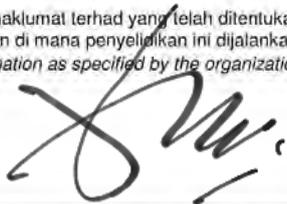
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## ABSTRACT

This concept album is a recording of compositions which consists of stories with a specific theme, various genres and styles that connect one song to another. The main aim of the research is to organise, revise and orchestrate a collection of her existing songs, and write new songs which fit the idea to be put into a concept album. In this research, the concept album title, 'Summer Dreams', contains ten songs, and they are inspired by a man. The researcher places 'Love' as the subject and life experiences as starting points in the creation of this concept album and utilised practice-led, practice-based and autoethnography as the methodologies of the creative process in this research. The challenges faced in the production of this concept album was to preserve the quality of each song that was created in the process of recording and post-production and, at the same time, ensure the connectivity of each song in it. The creation of this concept album details the process of constructing using software such as Sibelius, Logic Pro X, Word, and Pro Tools and produces the analysis of how each song is connected in terms of its emotion and theme. Besides, the intention to share the sentiments from a psychological approach is to allow people to grief when facing a similar situation because it is the process of being reborn. Assuredly, the researcher shares new knowledge in her compositional process by producing unique sounds using synthesisers and soundscapes. Next, in lyric creation techniques, she demonstrates that there can be less or no repetition in a song, to depict that composing is boundless.



## ‘SUMMER DREAMS’ KONSEP ALBUM MUZIK POPBARAT HASIL INSPIRASI CINTA

### ABSTRAK

Konsep Album ialah rakaman komposisi yang terdiri dari cerita, dengan tema tertentu yang menghubungkan setiap lagu di dalamnya. Tujuan utama penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengatur, menyemak dan mengatur koleksi lagu-lagunya yang sedia ada, dan menulis lagu-lagu baru yang bersesuaian dengan idea untuk dimasukkan ke dalam satu album konsep. Dalam penyelidikan ini, judul album konsep, *'Summer Dreams'* (Khayalan Musim Panas) mengandungi sepuluh lagu, dan mereka diilhamkan oleh seorang lelaki. Pengkaji meletakkan *'Love'* (cinta) sebagai subjek dan pengalaman hidup sebagai titik permulaan dalam penciptaan album konsep ini dan seterusnya menggunakan perkaedahan berteraskan amalan dan berasaskan amalan serta auto-etnografi sebagai metodologi proses kreatif dalam penyelidikan ini. Cabaran yang dihadapi dalam penghasilan album konsep ini adalah menjaga kualiti setiap lagu yang dihasilkan dalam proses rakaman dan pasca produksi dan pada masa yang sama; memastikan kesinambungan setiap lagu di dalamnya. Penciptaan album konsep ini memperincikan proses pembinaan menggunakan perisian seperti *Sibelius*, *Logic Pro X*, *Word*, dan *Pro Tools* dan juga menghasilkan analisis bagaimana setiap lagu dihubungkan dari segi emosi dan tema. Selain itu, niat untuk berkongsi sentimen dari pendekatan psikologi adalah untuk membiarkan orang bersedih apabila menghadapi situasi yang sama, kerana perbuatan itu merupakan proses kelahiran semula. Sudah tentunya, penyelidik berkongsi pengetahuan baru dalam proses pengarangannya: dengan menghasilkan beberapa bunyi unik menggunakan *synthesizers* dan *soundscapes*. Selanjutnya, dalam teknik penciptaan lirik, dia menunjukkan bahawa terdapat sedikit atau tidak ada pengulangan dalam sebuah lagu, untuk menggambarkan bahawa proses penggubahan itu tidak terbatas.

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## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND



#### 1.1 Inspiration/ Motivation

Most of my musical inspirations and ideas are from four years prior to the research period and are related to the memories of someone who left me. The “someone” is the ‘Protagonist’, I considered him my first love, best friend, my date, my lover. However, to him, I was no more than a friend or best friend, according to him. Nonetheless, for certain reasons, such as him meeting up with his ex-girlfriend during the semester break, then this relationship never developed to a fully committed partnership, which is how I would have liked it to end up. The wide range of unforgettable and intense emotions (good and bad, sweet, and bitter) I experienced during this time to the present, inspired many potential songs for this research. My primary reason and motivation for



turning ideas about this life experience into music is so I can share and express my inner feelings with others, such as hope, confusion/madness, sadness, heartache, expectation, fantasy, reminiscing, forgiveness, nostalgia/acceptance and dreaming/moving on.

## 1.2 Compositional Objectives

- a. To create a concept album inspired by personal experiences of love.
- b. To use Western pop music techniques such as changeable chord progressions, a mixture of multiple instrument techniques, varied singing styles, and mixing styles to represent the musical theme of ‘Summer Dreams’.

## 1.3 Singer-songwriter

“*Singer-songwriter*’ is a term that has been used since the 1960s to describe a category of popular musician who composes and performs his or her own songs. Typically, the singer is accompanied by acoustic guitar or piano, most often as a solo act but also with backing musicians, especially in recordings. Though widespread in the English-speaking world, the term appears to have originated in the United States, where singer-songwriters have had a particularly important role in popular music. Beyond Anglophone western countries, there are parallels (and differences) between the category and music of singer-songwriters and those of several other countries, for

example chansonnier in France and Quebec and cantautore in Italy”. (Horn, D., & Shepherd, J. 2012. p. 430).

I started to write songs when I bought my first guitar at age 20. I commenced guitar lessons, and when my guitar teacher had a performance, he invited me to be his singer and collaborate with him on his song writing. He taught me some chord progressions and said, "Go back and write the lyrics and melody". I did not believe in myself at the time, because I had never written a song before. I played the chords in my bedroom every day, started to write lyrics and kept singing them to a melody and with chords. It took almost a week for me to finish the song. I did it and I told myself, "Songwriting is like this!"

More recently, I became secretly infatuated with a man and completed writing an entire song about him on my own. That was my first songwriting experience. I later performed this song in a bar. Since then, I have fallen in love with songwriting. When I have time, I write songs in my room. Even though it is the weekend, I am not willing to go out to spend time with my friends but prefer to think about ideas for writing songs.

This project began with the song ‘In Our Most Beautiful Year’ and ended up with the song ‘On the Beach’. ‘In Our Most Beautiful Year’ is the first song I wrote for him and performed to him personally in the end middle of June 2015, when I was in my final year of university. I have written more than 20 songs about this man over these

four years. However, due to time constraints, I was only able to put ten songs in this research.

I used to create songs through my guitar, however, after I started my master's degree, I found more ways to create songs. Now I prefer to use my MIDI keyboard and Sibelius to create songs. During these four years, I performed my own original song with my guitar in bars, events, and friends' weddings.

I usually write lyrics first, then find the appropriate chords to create the melody and match the lyrics to the song, or sometimes I find the chords I like on the guitar and write the lyrics. I used to write lyrics, then name the title of the song, however now I prefer to have the song title first then write lyrics.

The purpose of the 'Singer-Songwriter' is to sing, perform and record the voice section of these ten compositions by the author instead of using other singers. The justifications are I started to write and perform my own songs in 2010 and I have never given my songs to other singers to sing. As a singer and songwriter, the songs came from my own personal experiences, therefore I do not think anyone can express the feelings or the themes of the songs more clearly than myself. Those songs are like my babies; I created them with my time and energy. Thus, these are the reasons I insist on singing my own songs instead of giving them to other singers to sing.



## 1.4 Context

In a concept album, the genre is not limited but can vary as long as the creator focuses on a central theme. Like a song cycle, the theme can be about people, emotions, or nature. A well-known recent concept album is Beyoncé's *Lemonade* (released on April 23, 2016). The album uses a one-hour film of storytelling to express a series of feelings associated with each song. Each feeling was displayed at the beginning of each song, and the album included many types of musical styles. The songs had an emotional connection to me. *Arranging Songs: How to put the parts together* (Rooksby, 2007) teaches the basic concepts of song arranging. In this research, I have specifically applied the material in the book which discusses the practice of taking a song and arranging it in the style of popular songwriting.



## 1.5 Imaginative Composition Ideas

As my song lyrics are all about the same person, the ideas for the music were developed in relation to the emotions of each song. My songs are optimistic at the beginning, but following our breakup were mostly sad and angry. The songs toward the end of the album focus on good memories and forgiveness. In the process of continuous creation, there are many new ideas, including nature sounds such as birdsong, the sound of the wind, the sound of raindrops and some new electronic sounds. The rationale for this is that these concepts are tied to the song titles, lyrics, and themes. Undoubtedly, the





author's distinctive sound that she conceived and constructed in her head for each song of the sound should be delivered in the future as a factor.

### 1.5.1 Musical Ideas

The musical ideas are based on American and British pop music, which I grew up listening to and inspired me to create a similar kind of music. The lyrics are translated into English, and the songs are arranged using American and British pop instrumentation, such as piano, guitar, ukulele, synthesizer, string, brass, woodwind, percussion instruments, bass, and drums to interpret different music genres, such as R&B, ballad, pop-rock, dance-pop, synth-pop, dream pop and tropical house. Furthermore, there are several of soundscapes mixed in the songs.

### 1.5.2 Performance Ideas

If it had been possible, I would have liked to have presented my music in a forest, or at the seaside, as this would directly link to the theme of my album 'Summer Dreams' and allow the audience to better understand the content of my music in which nature was an essential element. However, this was not practical, therefore I will share my musical thoughts indoors, and decorate the interior so that it resembles a forest or the seaside, with the surroundings and vibes of summer.

