

It's Nice to Hear Your Voice Again

Evolving Personal Dialogues Through Music

Edited by Braydon deMattos-Burrows



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The medium of letter writing as a form of communication is all but lost to time as we continue to experience the exponential growth of technology and digital means of conversation. Long, sprawling pages of carefully composed written words have fallen out of humanity's favour. This can be attributed to convenience and a general lack of effort. As each and every little thing around us becomes easier to do, the very foundations of civilisation will start to see a reflection of our lack of effort. In an attempt to streamline our existence, we have lost our humanity. Human conversation continues to get worse and worse, not only in length, but also by means of content and complexity. Language grows evermore shallow, the meaning of words becoming more and more vague. The zone of our minds is always flooded, and we are left to our own devices to perceive what is genuine communication and what is being used to throw us off. As we see the value of language shrinking, we start to see the value in perception growing.

Humanity is unique in the way we adopt and change silent queues that are used to signal personality, belief, and mentality. The rise of social media today has given way to an onslaught of dogwhistles that can be used to signal the “type of person” you are without saying anything in specific. For example, subtle memes, fashion trends, and consumption practices now communicate a variety of ideas to “those in the know”. Regardless of what idea is being spread, the acknowledgement of these queues gives way to a means of communication that leaves certain people in the dark, while being loud and clear to others. This is the new value of perception. To know, you must know, but what happens when you do not know?

Dialogues have managed to slip completely under the noses of the public for millennia. In this comes the value of artistic medium as a beautifully vast means to have conversations without necessarily saying the exact thing that is intended to be communicated. The painter does not compose their art by accident. Each morsel of effort comes from a different source of motivation. The painting includes a tree that serves as a dialogue between them and their fellow artist, and it tells the story of their progression. The painting consists of a vast field that serves as a dialogue to itself, and it tells a story of its internal struggle. The painting consists of a lake that serves as a dialogue to the audience, and it tells a story that can only be deciphered by the public experiencing the painting. Finally, the painting includes a deer that serves as a dialogue directly to someone important to them, and it tells a story that only the two of them together could understand. These factors, in conjunction with each other, tell one cumulative narrative, while each factor on its own tells an individual story. This is the means of communication that makes humanity unique and what separates us from what we consider animals.

Music, while an audible medium, is no stranger to dialogues. These conversations tend to be notably more ‘in your face’, but it takes listening between the lines to understand the full story in a song. The goal may be to make something that sounds good, but each lyric, note, and instrument is placed with intention. The harmonic dialogue in each layer of a piece of music creates what we perceive as art. Music manages to unite people through generations, regardless of race, religion, social class, sexuality, or one of countless other factors.

It is incredibly common to see artists write a song with one person specifically in mind, but when those songs are released to the public, the dynamic of the dialogue between the composer and recipient completely changes. The audience is no longer a single person in mind,

but rather a wide array of countless individuals from countless backgrounds. Just the fact that a song was released to the public changes the story and intention of the song. It does not matter if the artist is niche, hyperpopular, or blatantly controversial; the choice to let the world see your work contributes directly to the message behind the art. Songs are, regardless of whether they are fictional or nonfictional, love letters to the art, the individual in mind, and the audience, but it is not always clear what the intention is for everyone. That is up for the audience to interpret. This collection will include the following songs, as well as several brief descriptions and the context behind several songs, broadening the path for interpretation:

Bless the Telephone - Labi Siffre

Claudius Afolabi "Labi" Siffre is a British singer, songwriter, and poet who had several prominent musical stints in the early 1970s and a decade of releases between 1988 and 1998. Siffre released several notable songs focusing on social justice, as well as being incredibly vocal in the anti-apartheid movement. In 2005, he entered into a civil partnership with his partner Peter Lloyd, which was the earliest date that the UK legally recognised homosexual partnerships. Today, he is most well-known for the use of his songs in hip-hop samples, where artists will take segments from his song and use them to fully realise their own vision.

“Bless the Telephone” is a song from Siffre’s 1971 album *The Singer and The Song*, which is written in the form of a personal phone call between him and someone he loves. The song is meant to praise the existence of the telephone as a device that can keep people connected over long distances. However, when digging into the lyrics, the song is written as a direct praise to the person on the other end of the phone line. The song tells a story of a man hastily motivated

to compose a song by his love for another. He makes constant reference to the way his love talks, which creates a broader image around the entire song, as a second person can be visualised despite there only being one speaker. “Bless the Telephone” is functionally the very song he mentions writing within it. Not only is Siffre bluntly speaking, but he also involves the words of the one he loves to create an atmosphere around the song. The dialogue is between him and his love, as well as pushing the audience to visualise the songwriting process. This song is a personal anecdote between two people, which has now been shared with a massive population of people, yet there is room for interpretation surrounding the personality and position of the song.

Stan - Eminem

Marshal Bruce Mathers III, otherwise known as Eminem, is an American rapper, songwriter, and record producer. His legacy precedes him as one of the most influential and well-known rap artists of all time. As a caucasian man from St. Joseph, Missouri, Mathers can be attributed to the softening of racial barriers, allowing for an increase in white artists creating and producing rap music. He has been an active figure in the rap scene dating back to 1988, wherein his persona was widely controversial. The rebellious nature of his position in music allowed him to adopt a particular angst into his music, where he used his platform to make targeted political and social commentary, as he experienced much of the tribulations that come with living in low-income America. He has grown into one of the best-selling music artists of all time and still participates in the music industry today.

“Stan” is a song released as a single by Mathers in 2000. The song utilises the motif of epistolary correspondence to create a story of the fictional Eminem superfan, Stanley “Stan”

Mitchell. The use of persistent personal fan mail written to Eminem himself tells the story of a man drawn to madness by his parasocial relationship with Mathers. The fan is obsessed with Eminem, so much so that his failure to acknowledge the letters results in the eventual death of Stan and his pregnant partner. The relentless letter writing from Stan goes unanswered until his death has already happened. This creates an unreciprocated dialogue coming from Stan himself, followed by a harsh and unempathetic response from Eminem. This song is just as much about the dialogue between Stan and Mathers, or lack thereof, as it is a dialogue between Mathers and his own hyper parasocial fans. The tale of Stan is not unrealistic, and this song serves as a warning about how negative an impact comes from involving your own emotions in people that you have no actual connection to.

Hey Mama - Kanye West

Only One - Kanye West

Ye, born Kanye Omari West, is an American rapper, songwriter, and record producer, known by his contemporaries as one of the most influential individuals across the entire hip-hop landscape. Today, he is a brutally controversial figure following public mental breaks, wherein he made several extremely polarising political and social statements. West began his music career following his dropping out of college, producing beats for artists throughout the Chicago area. He would go on to produce for several noteworthy artists, such as Jay-Z, before signing his own record deal with Roc-A-Fella Records. His library is known for covering a vast array of topics such as the music and fashion industries, U.S. politics, race, and slavery. He is still active today,

but lost much of his reputation in 2022 following his divorce from Kim Kardashian and a series of antisemitic comments on social media.

“Hey Mama” is a song off West’s 2005 record *Late Registration*. The song was produced by West himself and was used to speak praise of his mother, Donda West, who was largely his only positive role model in youth. Her support was what had gotten West to this point in 2005, and songs like this were his way of speaking positively to those within his life. The dialogue goes deeper than his direct comments and praise of his mother, as it must be recognised how much goes into creating a song in this industry. Rather than simply singing his praises in quiet, he went out of his way to produce an entire track on his album for his mother. It is just as much a call for his audience to praise their loved ones as it is an actual praise to his own loved one.

Similarly, “Only One” is a single released by West, alongside English musician Paul McCartney, in 2014. Rather than being a compliment to his mother, this song is a vow to his firstborn child. This song was released following the untimely passing of West’s mother, and serves as his vocal profession of love to his kid, as his own parent was now not around to care for him. This song is far more personal than “Hey Mama”, but serves as a sister piece, asking his fanbase to love their children while they are still here.

U - Kendrick Lamar

Kendrick Lamar Duckworth is an American rapper, singer, songwriter, and record producer born and raised in Compton, California. He is widely known as one of the most prolific rappers of all time, receiving countless awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for music, being the

first artist outside of the classical or jazz genres to receive the award. His music covers topics surrounding political criticism and social commentary concerning African-American culture.

“U” is a song released in 2014 off of Duckworth’s album *To Pimp A Butterfly*. The song tells a tale of pure hatred towards an unnamed individual, with countless anecdotes to support said hatred. It is later revealed within the song that the unnamed individual in question is Kendrick Lamar himself, in an internal dialogue of self-hatred. The song is a cathartic release of emotion for Lamar; he blames himself for countless negative aspects of his life and others’ lives around him. He is talking to himself, and everyone he mentions in the song, he shoulders the blame for it all. This, paired with its sister song “I”, tells a story of pride and ego, and how situations out of an individual’s control are constantly used to define the individual.

These songs are some of the many that can be used to perfectly describe the letter-like dialogue between artist and audience.



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*Music is one of the great
unifiers throughout
cultures and time. What
story is being said
beneath the surface of
what we hear?*