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# BUMPERS

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## Making the Album

by Dan Zlotnick

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Introduction	3
Creating the Album	4
Ballad of Dreamers	6
Bumpers	8
She's A Little Bit	10
Hide and Seek	13
Along the Pier	16
Creatures	19
Power Lines	22
Last Train	25
Naming the Album	28
Acknowledgments	29

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# INTRODUCTION

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I remember opening the The Wallflower's album *Red Letter Days* in 2002 and ravenously flipping through the booklet tucked inside the jewel CD case. I was consumed by the images of the band recording the album and the list of band members — I loved learning who played what instruments on each track. I remember pouring over Pink Floyd's handwritten lyrics from *The Wall*; studying Bruce Springsteen's behind-the-scenes photos for his demo-heavy album, *18 Tracks*; and peering through every window in Led Zeppelin's *Physical Graffiti* booklet.

It occurred to me that those who downloaded my debut EP via iTunes, Spotify, or DanZlotnick.com did not even get to see the back cover, much less learn about the songs and the process of creating the album. In the world of streams, downloads, and minimalist CD cases, we miss the joy of delving into the album as a collective work of art, reading the lyrics like poems, and stealing a glimpse into the musician's process, this liberating artistic expression — an album. This is my booklet. Happy flipping.

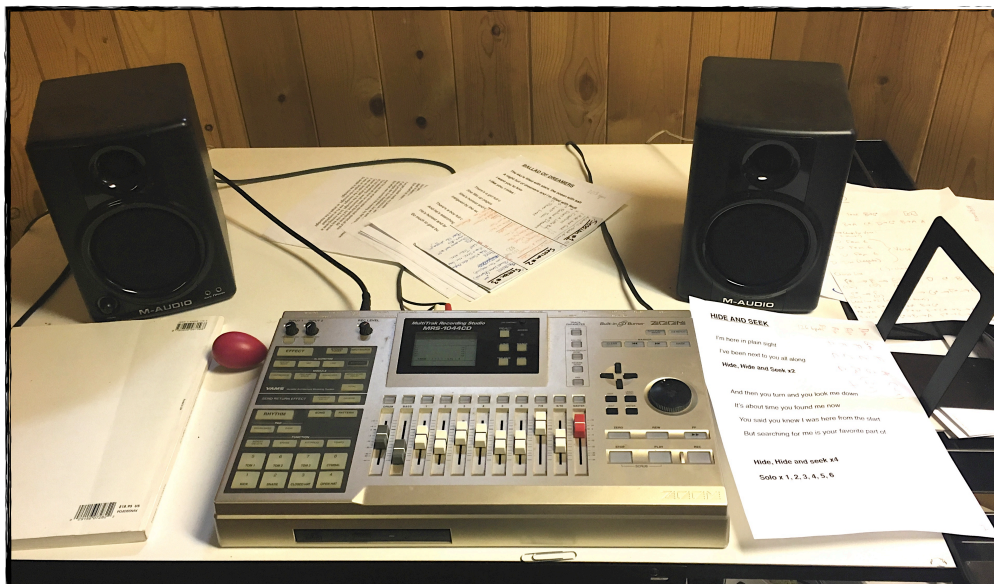
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# CREATING THE ALBUM

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I had no idea what I was doing when I recorded my debut EP. James Marchionno (drummer) and I rehearsed for a month or two then went to The Loft Recording Studios to record with Al Hemberger (bassist, engineer) one afternoon. I came back for some overdubs and mixing edits, and that was my EP. I was (am) extremely proud to have my songs professionally recorded, and I thought they sounded great. After a few months of playing those songs and more at any gig I could find, I began choosing and arranging songs for the next album. I spent the summer of 2016 recording demos in my basement so I could hear how the pieces fit together. I felt like a baseball manager arranging his team's lineup. I saw how they played together, switched up the arrangement the next day, and repeated this process hundreds of times.

My ZOOM MultiTrack Recording Studio (below), which I bought off eBay circa 2005, allowed me to add layers of instruments, test out different sound effects, and most importantly, add drums via a drum machine. They are incredibly rough recordings, but having a “full band” track allowed me to figure out what sounded good. These rough demos are also what I sent to James and Al to introduce them to the songs.

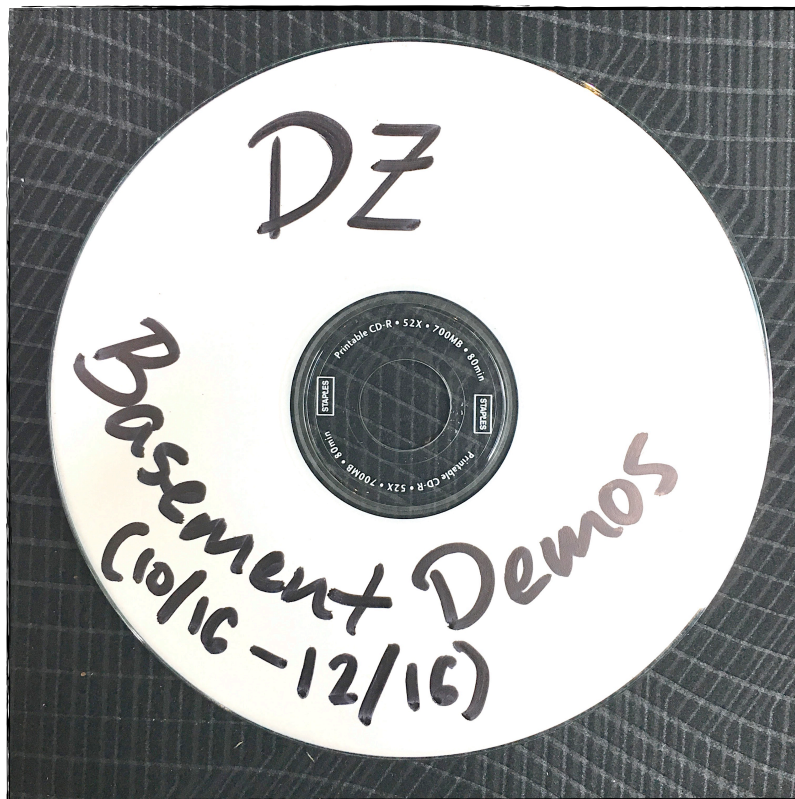




After I had recorded 20-25 demos, I cut it down to a 16-track CD that I would leave in my car and listen to critically for the next few months. I realized that 12 of these songs in a certain order told a complete story. I am a huge fan of Pink Floyd, so the idea of having my own concept album/rock opera was exciting. I tested out the song order in my live gigs, too, and it became abundantly clear that this “album” was a terrible idea.

Back to the drawing board, I shuffled the songs around and finally had eight songs that actually worked well together. Not quite a concept album, but an album nonetheless.

With a well-defined vision for the aesthetic of this album, I went back into the studio. Over five months, I recorded, re-recorded, mixed, re-mixed, mastered, re-mastered, got frustrated, recovered, lost all hope, recovered all hope, lost my mind and found it again, and finally, produced a collection I am proud to call *Bumpers*.



## TRACK ONE

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# BALLAD OF DREAMERS

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*The sky's filled with stars, the ocean with salt  
A night full of dreamers and I'm filled with fault  
I thought you should know you fill up my thoughts  
See I like you, I miss you, that's all*

*There's a girl full of love who lives by the sea  
She fills up pages with words about me  
She's honest and brave and also afraid  
Intrigued by the world but she cries for the hate*

*And there's a boy full of love who lives inside me  
He's searching to find what it is that he needs  
He's honest and brave and also afraid  
So much to give but not one to take*

*The sky's filled with stars, the ocean with salt  
A night full of dreamers, and I'm filled with fault  
I thought you should know you fill up my thoughts  
See I like you, I miss you, that's all*

*She tells me her secrets, I sing her my songs  
She thinks that I'm handsome, I think that she's strong  
I know she's been sad ever since I've been gone  
Tell her I miss you too but I'm where I belong*

*The sky's filled with stars, the ocean with salt  
A night full of dreamers and I'm filled with fault  
I thought you should know you fill up my thoughts  
See I like you, I miss you, that's all  
And I'll see you again in the fall  
See I like you, I miss you, that's all*

## *Writing "Ballad of Dreamers"*

When I was living in Tampa in 2015, a stranger named Valerie added me as a Facebook friend. She explained that she came across a YouTube [video](#) of a cover I did. She was teaching herself how to play the song on her guitar, and she saw my University of Tampa shirt and reached out. Within a couple weeks, we started to collaborate on songs. I was having a really tough time writing lyrics that I didn't immediately want to set ablaze, and she wasn't confident enough to write chord progressions and melodies. So she started sending me lyrics for which I would write music, and one told a story about a boy and a girl. The boy was leaving town indefinitely, and he and the girl each wanted the other person to know that they cared.

I sat down, started singing it, and I almost immediately had an upbeat tune that fit. I recorded a [voice memo](#) in my bedroom and sent it back to Valerie. She liked it. I tweaked some of the lyrics to fit my music, and we had a song.

## *Recording "Ballad of Dreamers"*

For "Ballad of Dreamers," we recorded the drums, bass, acoustic guitar, and vocals simultaneously, or, as we call it, live. I left the studio with three different takes. I thought Take Three was the best despite James's "late" drum fill going into the final chorus, since my ears only heard the vocals and guitar.

James thought Take One was the best drumming he had ever done, so we obviously had to use the drums from that take. Al was able to keep my Take Three vocals and guitar and even that beautifully late drum fill, to which I had grown accustomed. Everyone was happy.

We added the banjo part I had recorded at PREP Sound Studios in Queens, New York with Lefteri Koutsoulidakis, but I still thought the song needed a little more "umph." My dad's mid-1970s Fender Telecaster Custom joined the party when I added some electric support behind the acoustic guitar and some twangy guitar solos. The song finally felt complete.

# TRACK TWO

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# BUMPERS

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*Driving eastbound on I-4 on my way to see a show  
Bumper to bumper, moving so damn slow  
Girl pulls up in a beat up Ford, tears pouring down like rain  
Don't know what has her but I wish I could wish away the pain  
Traffic clears up and she's gone off through another lane  
Oh...*

*Get to the show, got plenty of time  
I grab a beer before my seat  
Get in line and I see my sad girl, she's waiting in front of me  
I said I hope you don't mind darling but this round's on me  
Oh...*

*I pay the man, she says I owe you one  
I said you don't owe me a thing  
And all you owe yourself is to be happy, breathing, free  
'Cause nothing bad here lasts forever and there ain't no other way to be  
And she said you enjoy the show, thanks for the smile, and thanks for talking to me  
Oh...*

*Driving westbound on I-4 on my way home from a show  
Bumper to bumper, moving so damn slow*

## *Writing "Bumpers"*

Driving from New York to Tampa, I was in massive traffic, and when I looked to my right, I saw a young woman crying in the car next to me. She was completely alone, and her crying was raw, exhausting, and painful. I initially looked away out of my own discomfort and guilt, and when I thought to look back, it was too late. The traffic moved along, and I never saw her again. I worried about what was making her so emotional, and it was especially frustrating to not be able to comfort her in any way.

I wrote a song called "Bumpers" about that feeling of hopelessness that comes with the inability to help someone in need. I thought it was just okay. It wasn't a light-the-lyrics-on-fire song, but I didn't feel like I could sing it thousands of times. I raised my concerns to Valerie, who suggested I remove the hopelessness. We had tickets to see The Avett Brothers, who always inspire me, so I changed the setting of the story to I-4 in Florida, on my way to see a show. What was left was a story about an opportunity I wished I'd had to improve someone else's life.

## *Recording "Bumpers"*

I recorded the guitar, banjo, and vocals for "Bumpers" at PREP Sound Studios. I knew I wanted to add the upright bass in the song, but recording the upright bass gets tricky when you need Al, your sound engineer, to record and play at the same time. So, I decided to play the bass myself. The only problem was that I had exactly zero experience with the upright bass. One day when I had a free period working as a substitute teacher, I walked by the orchestra room and asked the teacher, Deb Sautner, if I could mess around on an upright bass for a few minutes. Probably hearing how much practice I needed, Mrs. Sautner gave me carte blanche with the basses in her room and anytime I worked in the school, so my free periods were dedicated to practicing the bass part for "Bumpers."

When I was ready to record, I used Al's upright bass to lay down a few decent tracks at The Loft. While it isn't perfect, I don't think music needs to be.

I toyed with the idea of adding some other instruments to the mix, but I only had so many free periods. I decided to leave it as is: a three-piece folk band, on a quiet stage, telling a story.



## TRACK THREE

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# SHE'S A LITTLE BIT

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*She's a little bit just a second  
She's a little bit all day long  
She's a little bit always right  
She's a little bit never wrong  
She's a little bit conversation  
She's a little don't talk to me  
She's a little bit who I dream of  
And she's the only one I see*

*She's a little bit hard to read  
She's a little bit of a picture book  
She's a little bit close your eyes  
She's a little okay now look  
She's a rooftop dance at twilight  
She's a kiss 'neath the rain  
She's glowing in the sunlight  
But she's brighter in the shade*

*She's turning what I wanted  
Into everything I need  
She's a little bit just herself  
And I love her totally*

*She's a rooftop dance at twilight  
She's a kiss 'neath the rain  
She's glowing in the sunlight  
But she's brighter in the shade  
I said she's turning what I wanted  
Into everything I need  
She's a little bit just herself  
And I love her totally*

## *Writing "She's A Little Bit"*

Often, messing around with some new chord and melody ideas, I improvise lyrics to help me find some footing for a new song. I had this chord progression that was half "The Joker" by Steve Miller Band and half something I had written years ago. When I started improvising, out came the first few lines of "She's A Little Bit." I added a few more lines, trying to stay away as far as I could from strict "this and that" songs like "Hot and Cold" by Katy Perry and "What Do You Mean?" by Justin Bieber. This is the [voice memo](#) I recorded.

I listened to it and thought the music did very little for the emotion I felt behind the words. I scrapped the music completely and started fresh with a pretty standard, upbeat country-blues chord progression that fit snugly with the words I had written. When I played it, the song as a whole made much more sense to me. And most importantly, Melissa ("I love her totally") liked it.

## *Recording "She's A Little Bit"*

This was the most challenging arrangement to bring together because of how much I wanted to throw into the mix. After James, Al, and I recorded the meat-and-potatoes tracks live at The Loft, I recorded the banjo track and guitar solo at PREP Sound Studios.

My friend and former high school baseball teammate, Ron Stenz, was set to play piano and organ on the track, and the fact that he lives in North Dakota would be no match for our 21st-century, internet-savvy minds. It would be simple. I told him what I wanted him to play for each part of the song, he recorded it on his computer, emailed the files to me, and Al dropped it into the mix seamlessly. It was much harder than we anticipated to make adjustments to the piano part via email, so we only kept Ron's organ track for the end of the song.

I texted Simon O'Keefe, the keyboardist from the local jammy, funk, and rock 'n' roll outfit, Ronald Reggae. He said his former piano teacher, Susan Cody, would let us work together on her baby grand piano that was charmingly out-of-tune, which was exciting. I really wanted something more authentic than a digital piano sound. While Mrs. Cody's lesson room was no professional recording studio,

it was located conveniently in our hometown of Somers, New York, and it was quiet enough for Simon and me to record. After two sessions, we had the piano track on my laptop, ready to be sent to Al to weave into the final mix. I wanted the track to sound like a party, and it took more than a few villages to make that happen.



Simon O'Keefe records in Susan Cody's piano room in Somers, NY.

## TRACK FOUR

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# HIDE AND SEEK

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*Stand in the corner, cover your face  
You'll never find me as long as you chase  
I'll run and find a good place to hide  
Count up to thirty and open your eyes*

*You'll never find me  
As long as you're looking outside  
Hide, hide and seek  
Hide, hide and seek*

*Sitting here waiting  
Keep my breaths low  
I see you walk past me  
Just out the door  
Can't believe I've  
Been waiting so long  
You've played this before  
But you're doing it wrong*

*I'm here in plain sight  
I've been next to you all along  
Hide, hide and seek  
Hide, hide and seek*

*And then you turn and you look me down  
It's about time you find me now  
You said you knew I was here from the start  
But searching for me is your favorite part of  
Hide, hide and seek  
Hide, hide and seek  
Hide, hide and seek  
Hide, hide and seek*

## *Writing "Hide and Seek"*

One morning, I was sitting on the floor next to my bed in Tampa, and I had the thought that my relationship, or lack thereof, with Melissa had been like a game of hide-and-seek. We met in Mrs. DeBellis' fifth grade class and remained great friends (ugh) ever since. Our relationship was platonic, except once during our freshman year of high school when I walked her to her locker. After a painfully awkward hug, we decided it was best to call it quits and just go back to instant-messaging after school. We finished high school and went our separate ways for college, but eventually I realized that Melissa and I had been hiding in plain sight from each other. This song was relatively easy to write, given my expertise concerning the rules and regulations of the game, hide-and-seek.

Years ago, I was learning how to play "The Wind Cries Mary" by Jimi Hendrix on the electric guitar. I loved the sound of those bluesy riffs, so I decided to write my own Hendrix-style riff. It developed slowly, through several cocoons of style, tempo, and tone before realizing its current form. I added in extra pieces like the sudden stop after the first chorus, subtle melody changes, and the guitar solo. I put the guitar solo together lick-by-lick until I had the whole thing written out. The rock 'n' roll crescendo in the song is something I am extremely proud of, and I thank David Gilmour and Jimmy Page for their inspiration on this one.





## *Recording "Hide and Seek"*

After months of preparation, James and I decided we would record "Hide and Seek" before the other songs since we were the most comfortable with it. We got into The Loft, set up our gear, and proceeded to take almost an entire hour to get a take we actually liked. Ironically, we ended up using the first take.

I wanted to use my dad's Fender Telecaster Custom for the rhythm electric guitar because of its edge and ability to cut through a heavy song. Unfortunately, there were several electrical issues with the guitar that made it unplayable. I used another Telecaster and recorded a track that just wasn't right. We were able to repair my dad's guitar, and I was elated to be able to use it for the rhythm part. I used my Gibson SG and Line 6 amplifier for the solo to get a beefier, more sustained sound. Since I had the entire solo mapped out, I played it a few times through until we had one that captured the emotion of the song.

## TRACK FIVE

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# ALONG THE PIER

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*Egg shells crack beneath our feet  
Foam forms the lips of the sea  
What did you say?  
Tell me what you really mean*

*Feet move mountains in the sand  
Along the pier you take my hand  
Put your bag down  
Hold me like you never planned*

*Build a castle, moats surround  
We're the only souls around  
Tell me what you want  
But please don't make a sound*

*In our chamber we will lay  
Castle's ashes here to stay  
Give me all you have  
And I will do the same*

## *Writing "Along the Pier"*

Melissa surprised me with a visit to Tampa just before Christmas in 2015. She was in New York during a short break from her Peace Corps service in Guatemala and decided to fly down with the help of my hopelessly romantic roommate, Mike Adams. By this point in our relationship, we had essentially professed our love for each other and knew that when she came back from Guatemala, we would be tip-toeing out of the friend-zone. I was completely shocked and scared and excited to see her. When she arrived, we immediately took off for Clearwater Beach because that's what people in Florida do during Christmastime.

There were several milestones during this short beach trip. It was the first time we saw each other after sharing how we felt. It was the first time we ever held hands. And of course, walking out onto the pier through a tunnel of seagulls, tourists, and fishermen, Melissa told me to put my bag down, and we had our first kiss.

The next spring, after we had been dating for over six months, I was back in Tampa training for another baseball season. After a long and grueling build-up, I decided to retire from baseball and focus on music. Feeling very emotional, I took a day and drove to Clearwater Beach by myself. I sat on the beach listening to a [voice memo](#) of a guitar lick I had worked on when I was living on my friend's couch in Tampa. (Thanks, Chris.) It was reminiscent of the guitar in two songs I had been learning and studying: Hozier's "Like Real People Do" and



Houndmouth's "Sedona." With the sound of the Gulf of Mexico in the background, I took out a legal pad and wrote the lyrics to "Along the Pier." Under the lyrics, I doodled a picture of Melissa and me sitting on the beach that day we stopped hiding from each other.

Then I went to a beachside bar and ate an insane number of crab legs by myself.

### *Recording "Along the Pier"*

I recorded this song entirely at PREP Sound, using my Martin OMCPA4 acoustic guitar for the main part and Taylor 410CE acoustic guitar for the strums in the background. Because of its warmth and fullness, I knew I wanted to use my Martin for most of the songs on this album. I had used my Taylor for my first EP, and I loved its sound, but these songs needed a little more body and punch.

For "Along the Pier," I didn't want to use the same guitar for both lead and rhythm, so this was the perfect time for the Taylor to get involved. I felt guilty, like I'd been cheating on it. The original mix of this track had lots of reverb to fill in the empty space. I didn't really like this. I wanted the music to reflect the intimacy and nervousness I felt on the beach that day with Melissa; the more raw the sound, the better.

Later on, I decided to have "Along the Pier" start playing before the end of "Hide and Seek" for two reasons: it is the sequel to the story, and both songs are in the key of E.

# TRACK SIX

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# CREATURES

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*Pack your bag, lace up your boots  
Follow me, you've got nothing to lose  
Look around, what will you really miss?*

*There's no guard, no ball and chain  
The walls are the only things causing you pain  
Open your eyes, there's so much more than this*

*Come be a creature with me  
We can set ourselves free  
Let's ride the current down the stream  
Let your life and your love be with me*

*Choose a path, see where it leads  
Do the math, we've got all that we need  
It's alright, you're allowed to exist*

*Let the dirt cover your skin  
I'd rather the earth than the world that we're in  
Look around, what could be better than this?*

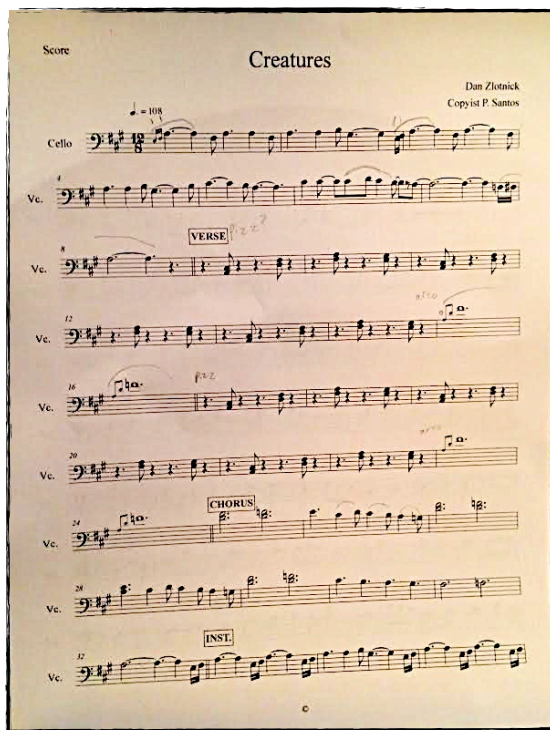
*Come be a creature with me  
We can set ourselves free  
Let's ride the current down the stream  
Let your life and your love be with me*

*Come be a creature with me  
We can set ourselves free  
Let's ride the current down the stream  
Let your life and your love be with me  
Let your life and your love be with me  
Let your life and your love be with me*



## Writing "Creatures"

As a musician with several part-time jobs, I sometimes find myself with plenty of time on my hands. I spend much of my free time productively by booking shows, writing songs, and connecting with other musicians. I also spend too much time on unproductive things like watching *King Of Queens* reruns, mindlessly scrolling through social media, and worrying about the future. "Creatures" is a letter to myself about needing to get out of the house, out of my own way, and letting certain things be what they are.



The music for "Creatures" was much different when I first wrote it and recorded a demo. It had a really bluesy verse, and the verse you hear now was the interlude. I decided to pare it down to be more direct in driving the point home. I had a cool little melody that I played on the acoustic guitar between sections of the song, but it lacked the fullness I wanted. I didn't want to use the electric guitar since it had such a pure folk-rock sound, and when I saw Patricia Santos play the cello at The Towne Crier's Open Mic Invitational in Beacon, New York, I knew that she could add the depth that I was looking for. And she did.

## Recording "Creatures"

James, Al, and I recorded our basic parts live at The Loft, and we added in the banjo from my session at PREP Sound later. After Patricia agreed to work with me, I sent her a recording of me playing her cello part on the guitar. She transcribed the music and laid down some amazing cello tracks at The Loft. She was a lot of fun to work with, and her playing speaks for itself.

Like with “Ballad of Dreamers,” James and I thought we could add more punch with a stronger drum track. However, none of the other takes from the first “Creatures” session had the punch we were looking for, so James went back into the studio alone and [re-recorded the drums](#), adding more energy, more fills, and more attitude.

Standing in the control room during this recording session, I was sure of two things: this was the drum track “Creatures” needed, and it’s a song that should be cranked up when the car windows get rolled down.



James Marchionno records drums for “Creatures” during a late night session at The Loft Recording Studios in Bronxville, NY.

# TRACK SEVEN

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# POWER LINES

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*Power lines dance like waves  
Lungs fill with the breath they save  
Hand on the letter that you gave  
Eyes on the road that you paved*

*Power lines send me through  
Teleport me to you  
Not the same way we knew  
But faster than this train could ever move*

*'Cause nothing compares  
To your face and your hair  
Laying on my chest  
As we lay to rest*

*Heart race I try to fight  
Cold sweat in the city light  
I can't wait to see you tonight  
Face to face, let's make this right*

*'Cause nothing can stand  
To your hand in my hand  
Legs intertwine  
Like an Amazon vine*

*We don't need power lines  
Our light shines just fine  
Slow the world, stop the time  
We don't need power lines*



## *Writing "Power Lines"*

For a long time, I had a chord progression in the key of A minor that I really liked. I recorded a voice memo called [Am climbing](#), cleverly named for the key and ascending bass notes of the chords. I had written some lyrics for it, but I wanted to torch them immediately, as per usual. Also, I couldn't really sing such a high-pitched melody. I decided to play the song a whole step lower so that I could sing it fairly comfortably, but singing horrible lyrics comfortably isn't all that much fun either.

I was sitting on a Metro-North train, headed into New York City to see Melissa, when I noticed the telephone lines going up and down and up and down between the poles along the train tracks. I took out my phone, opened a brand new Notes page, and typed, "The power lines are dancing like waves." I had no idea where I was going with it, but it struck me as important enough to write down.

On the way home from New York City, I thought of pairing the "power lines" theme with "Am climbing," since the song almost sounded like a train chugging along. I had to trim my original lyric to "Power lines dance like waves" to fit the music, and I started thinking about how great it is to be with someone who brings you so deep into the moment that you don't need your phones, or social media, or any external source of energy to thrive. I wrote most of the lyrics within that hour and ten minute train ride home, and by the next time I made it into the city for a show, I had "Power Lines" in my setlist.



Al Hemberger gets Patricia Santos set up to record at The Loft Recording Studios in Bronxville, NY.

## *Recording "Power Lines"*

The recording of "Power Lines" was probably the most frustrating of all the songs on the album. James, Al, and I did it live, and they both sounded great, but I sounded terrible. My energy on the vocals was low, and the guitar just didn't have the force behind it that I felt when I played it live. I went back in and re-recorded the vocals, which made it even worse. They were forced, over-enunciated, and off-pitch. I ended up going back to The Loft for a third take, which was better, but I went back for a fourth try to clean up some lines here and there. The guitar also took a few (thousand) attempts because I had a really difficult time sticking with the band during the slow-down towards the end of the song. We finally got a track I was happy with, added in the flat-picked banjo I recorded at PREP Sound, and brought Patricia in to do her thing.

We had the same process for writing the cello part with "Power Lines" as we did with "Creatures." I played her part on the guitar and sent her that recording for her to transcribe to sheet music. When she was warming up in the studio, I got chills listening to her practice her lines. I had this vision of how the song would unfold theatrically, and her playing provided the drama it needed.

Al and I spent a ton of time working on the sound of the acoustic guitar to give it the punchiness for each strum but also enough brightness to cut through a full band. We ended up using that sound as a template for many of the other songs on the album. I am thrilled with how "Power Lines" sounds, and I'm so glad I took the extra time to get it right.



# TRACK EIGHT

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# LAST TRAIN

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*Got my guitar standing up in between my knees  
Spent all day underground begging people, "Please,  
could you float a dollar down into my open case?  
Help me get on home tonight and buy another day."*

*And I'm on the last train heading home  
The only way I've ever known  
And I know I'm not alone*

*Dirty blonde in an apron, tattoo on her wrist  
It reads "Randy" but I hear her say, "It's just me and my kids."  
To the man in the sport coat who slides a ring off his hand  
Amazes me how a woman can turn an honest man  
When they're on the last train heading home  
The only way they've ever known  
And they know they're not alone*

*Bearded drifter with a backpack stumbles through the door  
Change jingles in his pocket and he's looking for more  
He eyes the man in sport coat and knows it won't be hard  
Slides by, slips his wallet out, and steps off of the car*

*Of the last train heading home  
The only way he's ever known  
And he knows he's not alone*

*A young boy taps his daddy, "I think that man just stole."  
He's already long gone. "Daddy, where did he go?"  
"I don't know, son, but what'd you think of the game tonight?"  
"The greenest grass I'd ever seen, the brightest lights."*

*And they're on the last train heading home  
The only way they'll ever know  
And they know they're not alone*

*And we're on the last train heading home  
The only way we've ever known  
And we know we're not alone*

## *Writing "Last Train"*

In the summer of 2015, I was living and playing baseball in Toronto, Ontario. I had a regular gig at a really cool Irish bar called The Cloak and Dagger. The only issue with this gig was that it was the Monday night slot from 10:00 pm to 1:00 am. I took a lot of this time to work on my raw material, some of which became "Girl on the TTC," "Not Yet," and "[Wildest Dream](#)," songs on my first EP.

One Monday night, instead of driving downtown to The Cloak and Dagger, I took the subway. When I tried to come home, I learned that Toronto's subways don't run 24/7 like New York City's do, and I had to catch an uptown bus. When I finally got aboard, I looked around and saw about fifteen people who seemed to be on that bus for fifteen different reasons. When I got home at about 2:30 am, I started working on "Last Train," only because "last bus" doesn't exactly roll off the tongue.

I wrote about people I had seen that night on the bus home from The Cloak and Dagger, feeling oddly connected to them, never expecting that connection. Even with seven billion people in the world, it's awfully easy to feel lonely, but that night, I felt like all seven billion of us were on that bus together.

I bounced my first draft off Valerie, and she suggested I nix the last two verses since she wasn't really interested in listening to a ten-minute song.

## *Recording "Last Train"*

After recording the acoustic guitar, vocals, and drums, I had to go back to the studio to re-do the guitar. While recording, we listened to the click of a metronome to keep us on beat. It's a very helpful tool, but I had the metronome playing so loudly in my headphones that the clicking leaked into the highly sensitive recording microphones and, annoyingly, onto the track. After re-recording the acoustic, the electric guitar and backup vocals were the only layers left to add.

I was searching for a nasty, exploding garage-rock amplifier to use with my dad's Fender Telecaster Custom. I went to The Loft to test out some of Al's old tube amps that he had lying around the studio. After a few hours of messing around, I had found nothing that did the job. All of his amps sounded too good.

I came home and took out a small practice amp that was given to me by my friend and former high school teacher, Joe Moore, who passed away in 2014 from ALS. This 15-watt Fender Frontman that barely clears a foot in height is far from the stacks of speakers lining the stage behind The Who. What this amp lacks in size and power, it makes up in personality, overall nastiness, and its connection to one of my favorite teachers. I cranked up the volume, Al pointed a Shure SM-57 microphone at the speaker, and I [played](#) like I was in a middle school garage band ruining the eighth grade dance (not that I ever did this, of course).

A few passes of background vocals filled out the chorus, and “Last Train” was complete.



My dad's Fender Telecaster Custom guitar and Joe Moore's 15-watt Fender Frontman amp.

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# NAMING THE ALBUM

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Naming this album was probably the most torturous decision I had to make for it. I brainstormed a list of more than 40 potential album names, some coming from other song titles, others from lyrics clipped from these eight songs. I kept coming back to *Bumpers* time after time. I am fascinated by the way we come into contact with the people around us, and all of the songs on this album relate to that in some way. This album deals with our friendships, romantic relationships, interactions with strangers. Our bumpers mark the spot where all of our lives intersect.

I played with some designs and photographs for the cover art, but nothing really matched the theme, the title, or the feel of the album. It was extremely challenging to find something that was both meaningful and relevant, but not cliché.

After more than a few weeks of complaining to Melissa that I didn't have an album cover, she suggested I take my phone exploring and capture pictures of things that inspire me. This reminded me of a time in 2008, when I took an actual camera with actual film to New York City to complete a project for my high school photography class. Luckily, I still had many of my prints from that class, including one from Times Square when I tried to photograph as many people in the frame as possible. The image seemed to capture what I was trying to say in my lyrics.

I edited the picture on my phone and used a separate section of the photograph for the back cover. When I arranged the writing and the song titles, it all made sense to me: the album title, the album art, the font, and most importantly, the songs.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Even as a solo artist, I had an inordinate amount of help from friends and family to make this record what it is.

I would like to thank the following people for their direct contributions to the music on this album: **James Marchionno** (drums), **Al Hemberger** (bass, engineering, mixing), **Lefteri Koutsoulidakis** (engineering), **Ryan Brennan** (mastering), **Valerie Scafoglio** (lyrics for “Ballad of Dreamers”), **Patricia Santos** (cello), **Simon O’Keefe** (piano), **Ron Stenz** (organ).

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I would like to thank **Joe Moore** for his friendship, mentorship, encouragement, and for his gritty underdog amplifier that made its way onto this record.

I would like to thank **Dan Azzari** for his help with this book and promotional and social media, his video footage, and his website design.

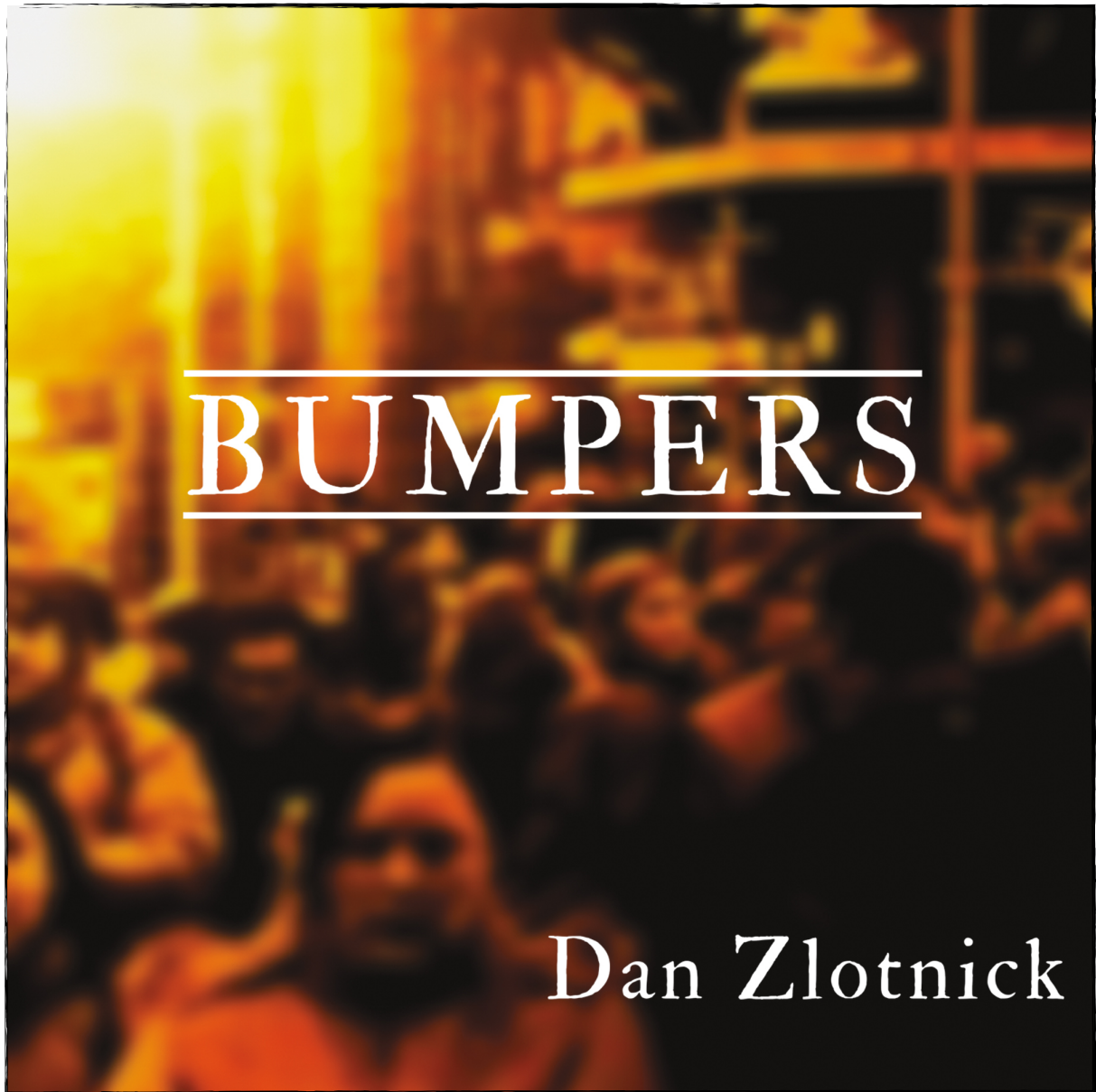
I would like to thank everyone who allows me to play my songs in public over and over again, knowingly or unknowingly giving me feedback for each one. Thank you for your ears and your encouragement.

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For more information about me and my upcoming shows and music, visit [www.DanZlotnick.com](http://www.DanZlotnick.com). Thank you for reading, and I hope to see you soon!