LISTAHÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS
Iceland University of the Arts

# Trauma, Poetry, Fuck The Jante Law
# Creativity as a Means of Survival

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# Abstract

Over the last sixty years, I have discovered many different aspects of my creativity. My two-year studies, Master's in Music in the NAIP program, at Iceland University of the Arts have led me on a path of self-discovery and self-knowledge from a turbulent past to this present reflective time. Through an autoethnographic recollection, I will share and explore my creative research, writing poetry to songwriting to poetry with electronics. In this self-analysis, I will dive into my research question: How might creative expression in writing and music become a means of survival?

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## Early Life

The name I was given is Anna Iachino, an Italian born in the French part of Canada, Montreal, Quebec. In the late fifties, my Roman Catholic parents emigrated on a ship from Reggio di Calabria, Italy to Canada. They brought positive and negative aspects of their Italian culture and mentality. The positive included the traditional and lively music and dance of southern Italy called the Tarantella. Negative aspects included being brought up in their 17th century belief systems that were indoctrinated in their consciousness.

An example of this century was explained to me by my professors at Skálholt Cathedral in Iceland when they recounted the true and tragic love story of Ragnheiður, the bishop's daughter of Skálholt, a scandal that took place in the 17th century. Female sexuality was very repressed. Women had to be untouched by all men before marriage. It was a father's duty at that time that his daughter, for the sake of marriage opportunities, had to be a virgin. This rigid structure of thought came at a high price, costing the life of Ragnheiður, all because of religion. I was brought up with the same doctrine. Breaking away from the system of oppression caused by the patriarchal figure of Brynjólfur Sveinsson, the Bishop of Skálholt and my father, resulted in Ragnheiður's death and my inner death, saved by my creative expression in writing.

In contrast to my parents, I was born in a country known to have a progressive and liberal mentality, unlike their conservative, religious, and backward upbringing. All signs pointed to a malefic crossing of two ships, a karmic knot between the old and new worlds. Trauma ensued at the hands of both parents, a double whammy that I endured, both times wanting to die. From dancing the Tarantella as a child, then embracing Funk as a teenager with dreams of becoming a professional dancer, my dream ended with the deadly sound of silence. Violence reared its prickly crown of thorns, a common practice for denying an Italian father's authority. This is when I started to write poetry. Words became my salvation. Living in fear of being found out, I hid, swallowed, and flushed down my poems.

Only one poem, "The Child," survived. It was read at my mother, Anna Diano's funeral in 2020. At the end of her life with dementia, she became like a loving child, free to sing and clap for all to hear —a performer until the very end. On March 17th, 2022, it was released as a single sung by Anna Sofía Skoradal, from the Faroe Islands. "The Child" is dedicated to my mother.

At the age of twenty-five, wishing I was someone else other than myself, I decided to move out of my parents' home. I enrolled in acting classes, a scandalous move for an unwed

good Italian woman. It was not enough to write words which laid dormant, silenced, on paper. I needed to express them, speak them, hear them, feel them, be other characters where for a brief moment, I would inhabit someone else's life. Acting became a catalyst for my emotions.

Hélène Cixous, French feminist writer, philosopher, playwriter, poet, and professor, is best known for her work, "The Laugh of The Medusa." In this work, Cixous encourages women to write and reclaim their power and bodies.

> Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a ... divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble.[1]

This quote resonates with me for it explains the turmoil I felt inside. Writing poetry is how I resisted death. The social structure and power struggle in which I was raised did not allow or appreciate the freedom of artistic expression for my gender as a woman. Breaking away from tradition meant trouble and, by doing so, I made trouble.

Fast forward to 2004. I moved to the Faroe Islands, a very conservative and religious country—Protestant with its oppressive nature where, at that time, it was legal to assault homosexuals, because according to religion, they were all going to hell anyways. Being different, standing out was a liability. After three years, my smile was gone; I was depressed and was feeling suicidal. This was all because of the jante law. It is not a religious law, but it is oppressive, very much like the Roman Catholic religion that I grew up in and the more extreme Protestant religions in the Faroe Islands. The jante law is basically a set of rules, unspoken social norms that everyone must abide by. The origins of the term, jante law dates back to 1933, from the most famous work of Danish-Norwegian writer, Axel Sandemose. His fictional novel, "En flyktning krysser sitt spor," later translated to English in 1936, "A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks," by Alfred A. Knopf, is a satirical look at the fictional small town of Jante in Denmark. Its people lived in a stifled small society held in a stranglehold of restrainment and a tightly imposed narrowmindedness where no one was anonymous.

[1] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4, 1976: 875–93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239

There are actually ten laws in the jante law, including: Do not think that you are good at anything, Do not think that anybody cares about you, Do not think you are anything special. Worried, after I told my mother how I was feeling, she exclaimed, "Don't get sad, get mad—fuck this jante law!" This prompted the shortest poem to date expressing what I felt inside: "Filled with anger and rage, a tsunami of words erupted onto a blank page, a powerful force broke my inner cage." That's when my band MonkeyRat was born. I was 45 years old.

My song-writing, spoken word, and vocalist career with MonkeyRat was created out of necessity to deal with this jante law and its cruel decalogue. I quickly realized that it was not enough to simply write down words. Words that were once my salvation started choking me, like the papers of poetry that I once swallowed in secrecy materialized and became tangibly unbearable. I had something to say. I had to say those words out loud for all to hear, expressing what I thought about those who practiced this insidious edict, but I was not a singer.

Little did I know that when Faroese rock singer turned opera singer, Herfinnur Árnafjall, brought me burnt CDs of Rage Against the Machine, a band I never heard of, it foreshadowed what was to come. The active emotion of anger, fighting back with words, again saved my life: creativity became a means of survival. However, this time they were no longer on paper; they became alive and kicking as I kicked on the stage at G! Festival in 2012 performing my song, "Fuck The Jante Law." Once again, I made trouble in a repressive society, much like the trouble I made in mine as an oppressed Roman Catholic woman.


Fuck The Jante Law live performance of Anna Iachino's kick @ G! Festival 2012

# 1.Lively Tarantella to Inner Death

My relationship with the performance of Calabrian Tarantella dance and music in relation to my own performative practice is that they are both cures, healers for my body and emotions. In my research to find a light description of the Tarantella dance, Delicious Italy's website explains it well:

> The 'viddaneddha' is the Reggio Calabria version of the mysterious tarantella dance. It originates in ancient Greece and involves different rituals and symbolic performances. In the past, the tarantella offered the possibility for a man and a woman to court in a very rigid society.[2]

The time signature is in 6/8, making it a fast upbeat tempo danced by both the young and old alike. The feeling of joy is the best way I can describe how this dance feels in my body. The music and dance are so fast that it is literally impossible to think of anything else. It forces you to be present, feeling happy to be alive and free to express yourself with your body as part of the music, like an instrument, not sexualised in any way.

However, if one digs deeper into the origins of Tarantella dance, the meaning, and its significance, we discover that it was also a form of exorcism.[3] When one hears of the word exorcism, one is apt to think that it only refers to the expulsion of an evil spirit.[4]

> In ancient times, in the Apulia region of southern Italy, a type of spider known as Lycosa Tarantula was prevalent. It is believed that the poisonous venom induced a hysterical condition. The symptoms were also accompanied by an irresistible urge to dance in a wild and rapid whirling motion, to the point of exhaustion. This condition could only be suppressed and cured by very rhythmic and fast music. Rites were performed to cleanse the body from demonic possession, a type of exorcism performed with music and dance. The music played for the cure became known as Tarantella.[5]

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[2] "Calabrian Tarantella Dance," Not a dance just for women, Calabria itineraries, November 29, 2010, https://www.deliciousitaly.com/calabria-itineraries/calabrian-tarantella-dance

[3] Erik H.C. Midelfort, A History of Madness in Sixteenth-century Germany, 1999: 47

[4] S.A. Diamond, Possession, Exorcism, and Psychotherapy, In: Leeming D.A., Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion, Springer, Boston, MA, 2004, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6086-2_224

[5] John La Barbera, Traditional Southern Italian Mandolin and Fiddle, Tarantella and Pizzica, Mel Bay Publications, 2015: 10-11, https://www.worldcat.org/title/traditional-southern-italian-mandolin-and-fiddle-tunes/oclc/1100938655

In my reflection on why this ancient dance became a magnet to me as a child, I realised that it was a way for me to shake off the poisonous venom by the demonic entity that would inhabit my sweet mother when she would become *The Monster*—a different personality. On many occasions, I would wrap my rosary praying for death from the hell I endured when she would try to kill me, abusing me terribly on all imaginable levels. The Tarantella would allow me to escape this earthly plane into another dimension. The rhythm and hypnotic effect freed my battered little body, heart, body, mind, and soul into a trance and a feeling of ecstasy. This socially accepted outlet and musical custom reverently rendered creativity as a means of survival.


Calabrese couple dancing the Calabrian Tarantella


Calabrian Tarantella musicians playing the quick pulsating 6/8 beat

## 1.1 Telling Tales of Trauma

What is trauma? How does it affect the brain? Is there a correlation between trauma and creativity? Trauma can be described as any shocking event, something that can break one's spirit. Trauma affects the wiring of the brain; in other words, it literally changes the brain.

> Brain areas implicated in the stress response include the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex. Traumatic stress can be associated with lasting changes in these brain areas. Traumatic stress is associated with increased cortisol and norepinephrine responses to subsequent stressors.[6]

Its long-term effects are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I still struggle to this very day with mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. However, for those like myself that "experienced repeated childhood abuse and violence, the effects are Complex PTSD, which is thought to be more severe if caused by a parent."[7]

Scientists have found that there is indeed a link between trauma and creativity. Long-term studies have found that performing artists that have lived through childhood trauma experience the process of creativity more profoundly. "Studies performed on those who reported a high level of childhood adversity identified greater appreciation for the transformational quality of creativity."[8]

Even as I sit and write these words, these memories bring tears to my eyes. All my life, creativity has been like therapy. The mechanisms of how my embodied experiences found relief from childhood trauma to adulthood as a survivor is through the process of creative outlets that started with dancing, music, poetry, and song-writing.

When I think about my art, I don't shy away from expressing what I think when I have something to say. However, if I must be honest, I never had the guts to openly write a poem,

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[6] James Douglas Bremner, "Traumatic stress: effects on the brain," *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience* vol. 8,4 2006: 445-61, doi:10.31887/DCNS.2006.8.4/jbremner

[7] "Complex PTSD - Post-traumatic stress disorder," Last reviewed September 27, 2018, https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/complex/

[8] Michelle Star, "Scientists Have Found a Strong Link Between a Terrible Childhood And Being Intensely Creative," May 8, 2018, https://www.sciencealert.com/childhood-adversity-linked-to-intense-creative-process

or a song called “Trauma.” The subject was always hidden between the lines. Take my poem “Showers of Arrows.” On the surface, one might think it’s a poem about warfare in ancient times, where arrows were the main instruments used in battle. The battle I described was a war zone in the discomfort of my own childhood home—a place that is normally reserved for the protection and care of a child. The arrows represent abuse. I use analogy, a poetic technique, to make an important comparison of two different objects that have a shared quality.

It was only when my creative writing teacher, Angela Rawlings asked, “Where’s the trauma?”—a question that kept pounding in my head—that I was able to write a poem called “Trauma.” I applied repetition to accentuate the repeated blows that I endured. The use of repetition in a creative work mirrors words and thoughts that play over and over in my head, an outlet from overthinking that leads to full blown anxiety attacks.


Inspiration for “Where’s The Trauma?”

## 1.2 Poetry

Poetry can be a written work expressing one's feelings, imagination, or ideas felt more intensely by the rhythm and rhyme of words**.** It can also be a piece of music that stirs emotions, or it can be something tangible like a painting or architecture where one is touched by its beauty and aesthetic sensibility.

At Literary Terms website, they define it as, "Poetry is a type of literature based on the interplay of words and rhythm. It often employs rhyme and meter.[9]

In 1756, Voltaire, poet, and philosopher, declared that [poetry is the music of the soul, and, above all, of great and feeling souls.][10]

To feel something in relation to poetry or music is to be moved by words and sounds that express emotion. Poetry intensifies a range of emotions such as trauma and is a representation of my emotions that symbolizes my humanity. I feel the meaning of words in my body. The sounds that words produce in poetry and music accompany feelings. Poetry and music are a language, a desire to express and communicate feelings beyond ourselves. It is a way to connect to one another in our humanity. From the trauma I experienced, my body is wrought by feeling. Poetry and music have helped me process my feelings and trauma for my survival and how my body also heals through the creative expression of others through their poetry and music. Poetry like music stirs and touches my deepest emotions and at times moves me to tears. After all, pain is what propelled me to write poetry and poetry is what helped me to process the suffering into art.

Shanee Stepakoff, a clinical psychologist, and poetry therapist with extensive training in trauma studies, is referenced in Johnson, David Read's 2009, Commentary: Examining underlying paradigms in the creative arts therapies of trauma. PTSD and coping mechanisms are explained in "Stepakoff's article on poetry and bibliotherapy and the 'breaking the silence' element of creative-expressive work and proceeds to contextualise this paradigm in terms of psychoanalytic and sociocultural paradigms, and the rise of neuroscience."[11] Johnson suggests that expressing deeply held thoughts and feelings like writing, speaking or moving as a form

[9] "Literary Terms," Literary Terms, June 1, 2015, accessed May 15, 2022, https://literaryterms.net/

[10] "Voltaire quote on Poetry", Vocabulary Dictionary, accessed May 4, 2022, https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/poetry

[11] Owen Bullock, "Creative Arts Therapies and PTSD," University of Canberra Website, March 2017, https://www.academia.edu/40171277/Creative_Arts_Therapies_and_PTSD

of communicating how one is feeling, helps to unburden the self from negative or stressful experiences.[12]

Creative expression saved my life; I instinctively found a coping mechanism to deal with trauma for my survival.

Poetry symbolized freedom to express the pain. My genetrix and genitor might have my body to do as they will, I thought, but they do not own my mind. I fought back with the magic of poetry; I was defiant. Voltaire's quote, "To hold a pen is to be at war" was my way of challenging authority and developing my inner voice. It made me feel powerful in my powerless circumstance that I could wield words from my own free will. I was taught that God gave man free will, but I discovered that these human beings, known as parents, did not. Poetry became my divine private property, the fire, the force of my strong will. It was only forced out into the public through song-writing when I moved to the Faroe Islands and wrote "Fuck the Jante Law," the fork in the road that birthed MonkeyRat.

However, there would be no poems, songs, or projects if it wasn't for the most important thing of all – inspiration! My hyper-sensitivity, a product of my trauma, perhaps, but because of it, my body goes into fight or flight mode. I see my creativity and sensitivity as gifts, tools given to me to survive. For these reasons, when I do get inspired, the words and images floating in my head suspended in mid-air come tumbling down ready to be caught on paper. When this happens, once I start writing and I don't know what I'm going to write, I just write what I feel, what I hear in my head like music. I hear music too.

For years, I would sing the bassline, guitar, bang on a table, or stomp on the floor to imitate the sound of the drums. This was my process with MonkeyRat. With my new artistic practice, however, I was not interested in a rhythmical beat. What I heard in my head were sounds, soundscapes, a mood, a vibe, like in a movie, setting the tone, the feeling of what is to come next—melancholy, love, joy, suspense, and so on. I focused on how soundscapes and colours would be the backdrop of my poems. I never thought I had a reference point when it came to poetry or poets until it just dawned on me that the old movies of the 60's with actor Vincent Price based on the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, poet and writer of the 1890's, must have indeed had an influence on me. Many of Poe's poems dealt with the macabre, something I knew far too well.

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[12] David Read Johnson, Commentary: Examining underlying paradigms in the creative arts therapies of trauma, The Arts in Psychotherapy, Volume 36, Issue 2, 2009: 114-120, ISSN 0197-4556, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2009.01.011, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0197455609000264

## 1.3 Creativity as a Conduit to Healing and Freedom

What is creativity? According to Oxford English Dictionary, "creativity is the use of the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work."[13] When I'm buried in my thoughts and receive a spark of inspiration, I quickly put these thoughts down on paper in the form of words for a poem or lyric. Albert Einstein eloquently describes the thought process that goes on in one's mind, "Creativity is what others see and thinking what no one else has ever thought".[14] Others see the result of my creativity in the form of an artistic work, but they don't see my imagination or how my mind receives inspiration, nor can they hear my thoughts or music and see the creative process in my mind.

What is healing? There are many different dictionary meanings for the word healing. The word, *free*, is in the definition for healing in Meriam Webster Dictionary and the reason why I chose it: "to make free from injury; to make sound or whole; heal a wound."[15] Interestingly enough, the origin of the word wound is Greek, and it means trauma. To me, healing means to be free from the wounds caused by trauma, the healing of my inner scars that began decades ago with the saving grace of creativity.

What is freedom? "The condition or right of being able to do, say, think, etc. whatever you want to, without being controlled or limited" is the definition from Cambridge Dictionary.[16] The above meaning are all the human rights that I did not have access to because of the cultural and religious conditioning brought down from generation to generation until my independent streak broke the cycle to my creative freedom and survival as an artist. I did not become a product of my environment. I broke the chains of systemic dogmatism.

I see us all as creators and co-creators with opportunities to create. Creative writing, as a tool for expression, gave me the means to comprehend what I witnessed around me, such as a human being denied an education. By not having the capacity to write and not being able to use writing as a creative outlet, my mother's childhood trauma developed into a dissociative

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[13] Oxforddictionaries.com, Oxford University Press, 2016, Web, accessed May 16, 2022, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/creativity

[14] Albert Einstein, AZQuotes.com, Wind and Fly LTD 2022, accessed May 4, 2022, https://www.azquotes.com/quote/617018

[15] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, "heal," accessed May 16, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heal

[16] Cambridge Dictionary.org, "freedom", accessed May 16, 2022, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/freedom

identity disorder. Trauma often causes this condition, particularly during childhood.[17] This occurs when a person's subconscious develops another personality to handle their trauma. The trauma causes their minds to repress painful memories, because without it, they cannot cope.

I wanted to live in my truth; poetry was the conduit to my freedom and creativity was the process to my healing. In my life, truth as my authentic self, became the basis for my freedom and freedom became the basis for my creativity. As artists, we are the messengers of truth, the truth-seekers; our poems, paintings, music are social commentaries on society and the world around us. To me creativity is a healer; it improves my mood, boosts my self-esteem, and alleviates stress and anxiety.

In my research, I discovered many artists that posit creativity as a healing and emotional coping mechanism. An example of such an artist is Melissa Milton, an attorney who became disabled with Dysautonomia. She cannot stand on land for more than five minutes. However, Milton can stand in water for many hours and takes photos of people in her therapy pool. She creates art by later painting them. Her disability has become the reason for her arts existence. Water is her freedom. Milton is yet another artist among many who experienced her own healing process through art.

> In order not to spill wet paint while lying down, she paints with conductive paint brushes and styluses on a touchscreen tablet. Milton later prints her creations out on canvas, varnishing, wrapping, and wiring the giclée canvases herself. The neurological disorder, Dysautonomia heavily influenced her art. Melissa begins most of her paintings with either a story or a question she would like to visually depict.[18]

Although her creative practice is very different from mine, Milton's art is visual and mine is auditive, they are similar in other ways. We both use our artistic expression to tell a story or a question, we just use different tools to express ourselves creatively.

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[17] Jon Johnson, "Split Personality disorder: Signs, symptons, causes, diagnosis, and more," July 14, 2020, https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/split-personality

[18] Renee, Phillips, "Artists Who Experience Their Own Healing Process Through Art," The Healing Power of ART, accessed May 16, 2022, https://www.healing-power-of-art.org/artists-who-experience-their-own-healing-process-through-art/

## 2. Influences

Whether we're aware of it or not, everyone is influenced by someone or something that came before us. When I think of the world of dance, the artist that influenced me the most was Carmen Amaya. To me she was an exaltation of poetry in motion. Then there are artists like Laurie Anderson who is perhaps not very well known in the mainstream world, but to those who are well versed in the field of experimental and avant-garde art world, Anderson is an international giant and genius whose career spans four decades.

In the field of poetry, writing, and music, Sheri-D Wilson's sense of humour and her electrifying live performances makes her a favourite act in festivals around the world.

## 2.1 Carmen Amaya

Standing at only four feet and nine inches tall, Carmen Amaya is a legendary international Roma flamenco dancer who was born in Barcelona in 1913 and died in 1963.

> Carmen Amaya's dancing is actually above art, for she herself is an expression of art; her style has no rules, no technique and its aesthetics cannot be compared to anything else.[19]

Amaya was a cultural icon who suffered from a severe kidney disease; it was the cause of her untimely death. Amaya healed herself with the medicine of dance; it was by sweating while dancing so hard that she was able to rid herself of the toxins caused by a kidney failure from her birth. Amaya was such a ferocious dancer; dancing literally helped extend her life.

Like Amaya's sweating, healing through flamenco dancing, sweating while dancing the tarantella was how the afflicted women eliminated the venomous poison caused by the spider and how I healed my body from the bile and hatred of the being that would possess my mother.

Flamenco shoes worn by women have nails in the heels and toes; flamenco dancers use their feet as percussive instruments to create a rhythm with the music. These shoes are usually black and always high-heeled with straps above the feet. However, the shoes worn for the

[19] Gonzalo Montaño Peña, Flamenco, Carmen Amaya, RomArchive, https://www.romarchive.eu/en/flamenco/carmen-amaya/.

Calabrian Tarantella are simple, comfortable, and always black. They are lightweight and flexible, because the steps of the Tarantella demand quick and light movements for the very fast tempo music. The tap shoes that I wear in my new artistic practice, Storytelling + Poetry w/ electronics is a testament to the trauma of not being able to dance and my love for Carmen Amaya as an inspirational, powerful, passionate woman and artist.  In “Fuck The Jante Law,” there’s a line where I say, “Why u let The Jante Law, rule your life.” Amaya’s style had no rules; as a fiery creative genius she was unique and above art.


Carmen Amaya

To this day there has never been a dancer to match her ferocious style of dance.

## 2.2 Laurie Anderson

Laurie Anderson is a superstar in the music genres of Avant-pop, art-pop, and electronics. However, to only mention her musical styles would be too limiting, for Anderson is much more than just her music. “Anderson is one of America’s most renowned and daring creative pioneers. “O Superman” launched Anderson’s recording career in 1980, rising to number two on the British pop charts.”[20]

Always on the lookout to create something new, she refused to do a retrospective of her 50-year career at Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. They had to contend with Anderson creating new work. She is 74 years old, a Buddhist, and according to Kurt Uenala, who has worked with Anderson in New York, very kind and down to earth. “She has this really nice, steady, clear energy”, says Iggy Pop.[21] What I love about her the most is her storytelling, poetry, and the soothing sound of her warm voice.

I have always told stories and wrote poetry, seeing images in my head, especially cartoons and pop art living in my fantasy world as a child. The output of Anderson’s tremendous body of work inspired me to create a video with pop art images, videos, and paintings to a live recording of my dark poem “Blade,” about how words can wound. When I encountered Anderson’s video for her “Home of The Brave” live performance,


Lauri Anderson “Drum Dance & Smoke Rings,” live performance

[20] Laurie Anderson, Website, accessed on April 22, 2022, https://laurieanderson.com/about/

[21] “Laurie Anderson Has a Message for us Humans”, Derna Chrichten Chanel, October 6, 2021, https://dernachrichtenchannel.com/magazine/laurie-anderson-has-a-message-for-us-humans/3089/

it influenced me to place sensors underneath the tap of my tap shoes as I perform my poetry.[22] In "Drum Dance & Smoke Rings," Anderson hits her body with sensors underneath her white jumpsuit producing different sounds of a drum kit. In one of my pieces, "Homage to Ragnheiður," I also produce drums sounds with sensors underneath the taps of my tap shoes as I move my feet and recite my poem.

When one thinks of climate change and the future survival of our planet, technology can greatly help mankind ween from the use of fossil fuels that is destroying our planet. Thomas Schneider, head of International Relations Service and vice-director at the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) in Switzerland, said, "AI will help mankind to be more efficient, live safer and healthier, and manage resources like energy, transport, etc., more efficiently."[23]

If technology is the future for our survival, I vowed to learn this tool for my relevance in the contemporary use of electronics in music. That was the start and the birth of my new artistic practice to combine poetry with music created with sensors and electronics. From being computer illiterate when using a DAW to incorporating buttons in my new creative practice became a focal point.

[22] Laurie Anderson, "Drum Dance & Smoke Rings - Home of The Brave", 1986, video, 8:19, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mRq1xgKykM

[23] Janna Anderson and Lee Ranie, Pew Research Center, Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humans, Concerns of Human Agency, Evolution and Survival, December 10, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/12/10/artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-humans/

## 2.3 Sheri-D Wilson

There is much for me to learn about the world of poetry with music and I was eager to read about such artists practicing this art form in Canada. Through guidance and suggestions on this subject by Rawlings, I discovered Sheri-D Wilson, a female Canadian poet whose works consist of fighting for equality and social justice, something I can relate to when I think of some of the titles of my poems like "Equality" and "Fuck The Jante Law." I've been fighting back all my life and I can certainly appreciate the plight of a female poet like Wilson who has done so for so long and has been honoured for it as well.

> Sheri-D Wilson, CM, D. Litt, is the poet laureate emeritus of Calgary from 2018-2020. Sheri-D Wilson (aka Mama of Dada) is also the award-winning author of 13 books, creator of 4 short films, and 4 albums, which combine music and poetry. In 2019, Sheri-D was appointed one of the country's highest honours, The Order of Canada, for her contributions as a Spoken Word Poet.[24]

Wilson's live performance, "Ode to my Microscopic Life,"[25] uses humour to deal with the topic of ageism and the lack of importance women experience in society, coupled with the sound of mainstream music. In her rebuttal of being demeaned when asked by a female magazine editor if she wouldn't mind being on the cover of micro celebrities, her response was to "stick it to the man," in this case woman, by fighting back with spoken word and upbeat rhythmical music with a full band. I identify with her response, because it is what launched me to transform my poem "Fuck The Jante Law" into a protest song with my band.

Sheri D. Wilson

[24] Sheri-D Wilson, Website, accessed April 22, 2022, https://sheridwilson.com/about/
[25] Sheri-D Wilson, Ode to my Microscopic Life, 2015, video, 6:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOFwavN1428

## 3. Past and Present Projects

At Skálholt Cathedral during my NAIP studies, I first performed my poem, "Isolation," to improvised music by musicians and teachers, Berglind María Tómasdóttir on flute and Sigurður Halldórsson on cello, as well as with classically trained classmates. This encouraged me to seek a wider audience and experiment in my approach to combine poetry with electronics and the rhythmical music of my band MonkeyRat. The subsequent reaction to our improvised performances by audiences in the Faroe Islands on October 23rd, 2021, and Denmark on February 26th, 2022, was so positive that I decided to perform it live in the studio under my direction with my musicians. I applied the teachings of the NAIP program to try a different approach with new audiences in an innovative musical genre.

As artists, we always take a risk when we try something new, and one never knows how it is going to be received. To my delight, this spoken word/psychedelic rock version of "Isolation" has been released on April 15th to great reviews: Alessandro Iglesias of Roadie Music wrote, *"*GREAT JOB the EP "Isolation", one of the great releases of recent times!" Kartik Sundar of Find No Enemy wrote**,** *"*Isolation" is an overwhelming piece. It's a full journey necessitating you to hear the first five minutes of narrative poetry before the pounding psychedelic rock sounds come crashing down." Lastly, Chris Mariotti of Edgar Allan Poets wrote, "A beautiful discovery that I recommend to everyone – 10 minutes of pure art!"

In my new artistic practice, Storytelling + Poetry with Electronics, I took the lead role as the musical director, normally reserved by my musical partner and husband, Arnold Ludvig. I imagined and heard everything in my head and set out a plan to guide him in the soundscapes I wanted him to create on the guitar, bass, and mini midi keyboard. Once I had sounds in place on Ableton Live for every poem in my new set list, I felt confident to give Ludvig the cues signalling when and what I wanted him to play. The tables had turned, and this was exciting for my musical growth; he now had to follow my lead.

As artists, it is important for our survival to apply for artistic grants for our projects to come to fruition. In 2021, I successfully raised enough funds to perform three concerts at three festivals, in three different countries for Storytelling + Poetry with Electronics. After my first debut concert went well in April 2021 for VetraJazz in the Faroe Islands, I was ready to embark on the big project—the Tours: June at Skálholt Summer Concert Series Festival in Iceland; July at Copenhagen Jazz Festival, in Denmark; and lastly, August at Summartónar Festival in

the Faroe Islands. It was a wonderful feeling to prepare, plan, and finally perform all of the above projects.

The idea of sensors, samples, tap shoes, and electronics regarding creativity as a means of survival never entered my mind, nor did the thought of furthering my education. I only started to ponder other possibilities to make music and the tools to learn how when we all experienced the global pandemic. In March of 2020, at the height of the pandemic, everything got cancelled: tours, concerts, and Ludvig and I's weekly Open Mic event, which we hosted for five years. I realized that I had to reinvent myself again. Always out of necessity, I find a new outlet for my creative expression with poetry, song-writing, and writing.

During the pandemic, many musicians found another way to create music by making music on their computers. At one point, many musicians were dying in the Faroe Islands, one after the other, all in their fifties. It gave me reason for concern. I realized that if I don't want to be left behind, then I must expand my creative process and learn new tools to find a way to express myself creatively in the 21st century with technology, the way to the future. To stay current in the music trend, be up to date, I needed to stay in touch with modern technology and consider electronics with the use of samples to create music and sounds for my poetry.

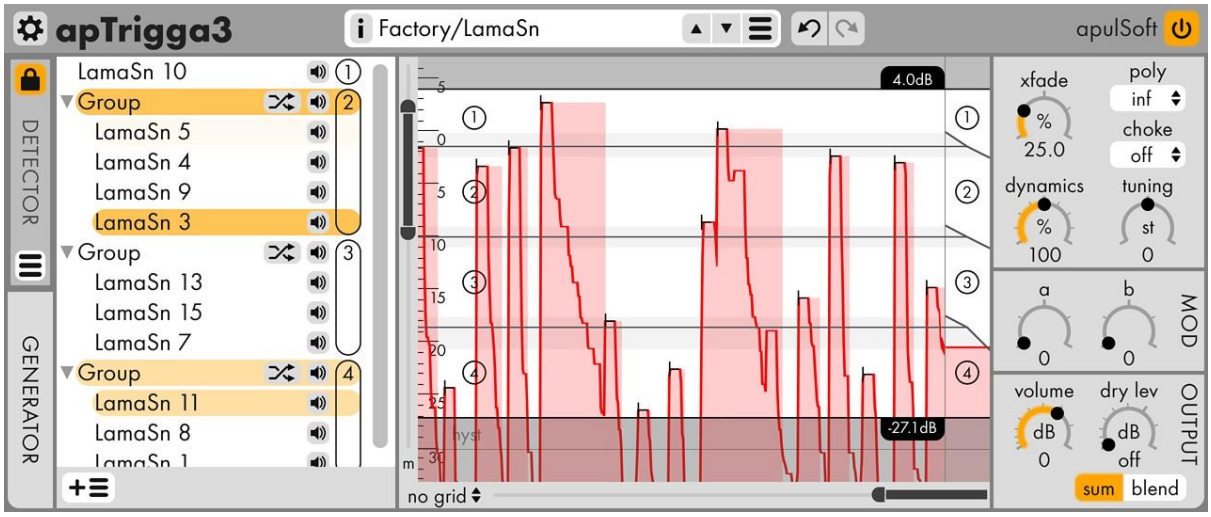
In 2017, I had bought tap shoes in New York and took tap lessons there, in Montreal, and recently in Iceland. I also had a secret desire to one day incorporate tap shoes with music. The tap-dancing musicals of the thirties and forties that I saw as a child were a form of escape. The tap shoes that I wear in Storytelling + Poetry with Electronics is an attestation to the trauma of not being allowed to dance as a child, along with my love for Amaya and the tap dancing stars during the Golden Age of Hollywood.

Like flamenco dancing and tap dancing, sensors enable me to produce sounds and create music with my feet. For many years, due to my C-PTSD, I have experienced emotional triggers from written or spoken comments. For my healing through art, I discovered a proactive tool through sensors with apTrigger 3 plugin, where I, can trigger instead of being triggered and create sounds and music that produces a positive effect.

> ApTrigga3 is an audio insert effect plugin that detects trigger events on its input signal, which are used to add or replace sounds. ApTrigga3 features an input filter section with built-in frequency analyzer and configurable filter bands to shape the input signal.[26]

[26] "apTrigger 3", Apulsoft, Website, accessed on April 22, 2022, https://www.apulsoft.ch/aptrigga3/

It is this technology that makes it possible for me to trigger the sounds with the movement of my feet and the speaking of my voice. However, I discovered that after each performance, the input signal changed. When this happened, no sound was released or heard from my tap shoes or voice. To fix this, I clicked on the wrench icon of ApTrigger3 plugin and readjusted the trigger signal for the assigned sounds to be securely produced during my performances. Welcome to the world of technology. After all, my initials are AI; how ironic that I would befriend this artificial intelligence world.




apTrigga3 triggers events on its input signal

## 4. Reflections on my New Artistic Project

As I reflect on all that I have learned since August 2020 during the height of the pandemic and now the war in Ukraine, I often wonder why the search for signs of intelligent life is always beyond our planet and not here on earth starting with humans. On the other hand, I thank the intelligent inventors of Ableton Live, Gerhard Behles and Robert Henke, for creating this intelligent device. Their invention enabled me to create sounds and music without playing any instruments in the traditional sense, key to developing my artistic practice Storytelling + Poetry with Electronics.

While a person's voice may be considered an instrument, I never identified myself as a musician because I did not speak, read, or understand the lingo. G Minor, what's that? When I was given a task in my Ableton Live class to create music in G Minor, everyone but I knew what the teacher was talking about. That's when Kurt strongly emphasized the necessity to expand my horizons in music by learning music theory and learning the keys, the key to unlocking my highest potential as a music maker for words. Music theory as a newly acquired language, where I can read and write notes, helps with the communication and understanding of music on a deeper level. Music theory is basically the words and grammar of music, tools that can serve me well in the creative process of making my own music.

My first brush with creativity via poetry as a child was born out of the necessity to serve my first project called survival. The same goes for the birth of MonkeyRat transforming my poems to lyrics and learning how to sing at forty-five years old. I had to find a new way for my silent, private practice of poetry to be transformed with the use of my voice for not only a new audience, but the first audience ever. With every challenge, I fought back with the pen. I used it as a sword to cut through the shackles of conformity, be they religious, cultural, or societal.

My growth and development for Storytelling + Poetry with Electronics happened in several stages. All I had when I embarked in my new musical journey were two poems: "Isolation," and the beautiful sound of water burbling in the woods of Skálholt for my "Equality" poem. How apropos I thought, these two titles pretty much sum up my life. The fight for freedom and equality is a recurring thread in my life for my survival.

The first stage was to apply all that I learned in my Ableton Live class. The second stage was to take private lessons with Uenala specifically for my project. The third was to find, create, record, and manipulate sounds and music for the two poems. Wet, dry, reverb, delay, echo were all words I had to learn and apply for my new project with Ableton Live. Wet simply

means with effects and dry means with no effects. *Of course*, I thought, *it's very much like the use of a microphone in my live performances*. Sound technicians always tend to put an effect called reverb on the mics for singers. Delay produces an echo, which is a great effect on certain words in my live performance for my new artistic practice. Echo produces a reflection of sound which I used in the recording of my new song "Isolation." With all this new information, I felt like I was taking a crash course in the confines of a cockpit determined to make my plane fly, to make the sounds and music take off to my point of destination—the soundscapes with which to land my poems.

I needed six more poems for a total of eight poems though to make a set long enough for a concert. This all took place in the second semester, the most creative and productive semester of all. *Inspiration, I'm ready for you*, I thought and, when nothing inspired me, I read, I watched, I listened, I looked, until suddenly ideas started popping in my head—a word, a sentence—until a whole poem appeared like clouds slowly moving and forming a picture in the sky. With each poem, I had to find the sounds that resonated with me the most for the feeling and meaning of the words. I spent hours, days, weeks, months, listening to all the available sounds and music in the categories of sounds, drums, instruments, audio effects, midi effects, plugins, samples, etc. in Ableton Live. The possibilities were endless, and eventually I had to land this plane from its lysergic dizzying heights. I needed to make choices, pluck the sensorial goods, break the speed of sound, and fly them back to earth.

Once I had all three sounds and music in place for each poem with the creation of a pad, I had to try them out and see if they blended well together for the bow of soundscapes and atmospheric layers that I created. Some sounds and music clashed, so it was back to the drawing board. With each trial and error, I recalled sounds in my search on Ableton Live. After many attempts, I finally reached a point where I was happy with my soundscapes. I rehearsed the set with my musical partner on his many instruments—bass, guitar, midi mini keyboard, and pedals. Some soundscapes flowed better with the guitar and others with the bass. I was aiming for a fuller sound with the addition of traditional instruments and a master improviser.

What I presented in my Mentor classes was a live recording of impeccable quality from my Summartónar concerts with Ludvig on guitar from Composers.fo YouTube channel. The reaction of the first-and second-year NAIP students, including my professors, was very positive and I was pleased. My PIP concert was a beneficial experience for me, and I received positive comments as a strong and confident performer for my passion and power in my delivery. However, to some the bass seemed to overpower my soundscapes. Ludvig recently shared that he got so inspired when he improvised and tended to overplay a little. What I gained from the

experience of not having the choice of the guitar on certain poems was that my monster virtuoso bass player overshadowed my soundscapes and layers. Perhaps the guitar was a better choice I thought, because it is not his first instrument and less overpowering.

In the future, I would like to incorporate the modern approaches to poetry that I learned in my creative writing classes in both my third and fourth semesters. Lastly, my goal for my new artistic practice that I would like to develop further is to go solo with a larger soundcard. This way, I can put sensors in gloves where I can go crazy banging on anything and everything around me. I can also place sensors underneath a mat to have the freedom to move around with my feet as I please, speaking, acting, and dancing to stories and poems with visuals to create my own world. I have even started getting inspired to write a book, another new practice that I have never considered before. For my survival as a thriving human being and artist, I must live in a world of creativity, a world that has kept me alive for all these years—a creative escape hatch from this crazy world.


Session view of poem, “Where’s The Trauma” Live Set in Ableton Live

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# Appendix

**The Child**

I saw you again
Your smile was gone
I saw you in pain
Your time was drawn
You shed a tear
I wiped it off your cheek
You touched me
I trembled, I felt weak
A burning sensation
Entered my heart
I looked away
You tore me apart
For the first time I cried
I wanted to stop - I swear I tried
You fell into my arms
Like a child would
I kissed you twice
As best as I could
I closed your eyes
You opened mine
I saw how a lovely person dies

**Fuck The Jante Law**

Fuck The Jante Law – ya
Fuck The Jante Law - ya

No God, no Buda, no Allah
Could embrace, the disgrace
Of the hurt, I alert
The lost cause, that you cause
To
Your own brother
Your own sister
Your own people
Your own kind
You're so mean
So unkind
You can't see
You're so blind
You're so jealous
You're so envious
So envy me
So envy us
So dishonest
What a lie
This concept
I'm upset
I have cried
I can't lie
You can try
You can better
You can find
In yourself
In your kind
In mankind
To
Free your mind, free your mind
It's time, it's time
To
Break the chains, break the chains
Break the law, break the law

Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya

My spirit
Will tell it
And mean it
And give it
With such grit
What I think
Of bullshit
It just stinks
I'm fed up
Take a stand
I'll stand up
Do my rap, do my rap
Do my cause, do my cause
Take a - pause
Stop what was
Start anew
What can be
With a few
Start with me
Then with you

It's time, it's time
To
Free your mind, free your mind
Time to
Break the chains, break the chains
Break the law, break the law
Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante law
Ya ya ya ya ya

A just cause from a rap rocker
And I'm tired of you crap cockers
Pricks dicks pickin' on my heart
Cut plot cancel what I start
Spit spot spattin' on my feelings
Shit drip droppin' on my dealings

Why you let the Jante Law – ya
Why you let the Jante Law - ya
Rule your life, cause such strife
How can you allow
How can you allow
A law
How can you allow

The bla, bla, bla - ya
Recommence
Makes no sense
Or common sense
For innocence
To
Get infected
Get injected
Get rejected
Get affected
With
The same pattern
The same downturn
Is this
What you'll teach them
What they'll learn
What they'll thirst
From their first
Goo goo goo, ga ga ga
ha ha ha ha
Goo goo goo, ga ga ga
ha ha ha ha
Goo goo goo, ga ga ga
ha ha ha ha
Goo goo goo, ga ga ga
ha ha ha ha

It's time
People I tell you
it's time
To
Free your mind, free your mind
Time to
Break the chains, break the chains
Break the law, break the law

Break the Jante Law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante Law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Break the Jante Law
Ya ya ya ya ya
Fuck The Jante Law
ya ya ya ya ya
Break, break, break, break
The
Jante
Law!

Ya!!!

**Showers**
**of Arrows**

And there they came at me
Like showers of arrows
Showers of arrows
Certain that thy path laid before me was too narrow
I fought in their God's hell for heaven's tomorrow
I fought for justice with all the pain and sorrow
That they bestowed upon me
Rumors spread of my ill health
Certain of my end and death
I fought until my last breath
Pleading my Lord to help me
Broken, I broke off every arrow
Healed my young body from their violent blows
Saved my old soul from their shocks and throws
And rose for all to see
The life - that was still in me

**T r a u m a**

W here's the trau ma?
Where's The trauMa?
W here's the Trau ma?
Where's The Trauma?
W hErE's tHe TrAu Ma?
WHERE'S tHe TrAuMa?
W HERE'S THE tRaU ma?
WHERE'S THE TRAUMA?
M a m a
S ave the dr ama for your ma Ma
Save the drama for your mamA
S ave the dr ama for your maM a
Save the drama for your mamA
S ave the dr ama for your Ma ma
Save the drama for your mAma
S ave the dra ma for your Ma mA
Save the DRAMA for your MAMA

*ave: used to express good wishes on meeting or parting
*ama (Italian): to love, love, like, be fond of; tua madre ti ama; your mother loves you; ama e sii amato; love and be loved.

When u were born, I should have let u die on the table!

Label
What label r u wearing?

Christian Die OR
Christian what for?
Christian not sure
Christian your chore
Christian not whore
Christian before
Christian I'm sore
Christian no more
Floor
Knees on little arms
Knees & lucky charms
Knees & Sunday psalms
Knees & all that harms
Knees & no alarms
Knees & funny farms
Knees & healing balms

WHERE'S THE TRAUMA?

**Isolation**

Isolation forces beings become a whole as an entire One
Here’s a chance to get to know oneself, meet a stranger that happens to be u
I know, it’s hard, I once lived on a rock, in the middle of the ocean
Was forced to face myself, meet someone I hardly knew
´Twas the best and worst thing that ever happened to me
The knowledge of self was the gift and opportunity
Isolation - time to live as One, as One nation, Isolation to Humanation
Distractions are now hard to come by
Be a magnet to yourself in your mind's eye
There’s so much gold in them there inner chills
Light the light inside your soul, be quiet, be still
No matter how small the man made structure in this juncture has reduced our flame
My flame was reduced to a gas stove’s pilot light
Uncharted territory, unmapped, unseen was such a fright
I know it can be so dark in isolation when u don’t know who u are
How can u love someone u don’t even know, so close and yet so far
But that’s the beauty of it, it’s all about getting to know one with love
As u finally are faced with four walls, let them burst the flames of your creation

Isolation to creation
No more indignation
No more mass incarceration
No more divided nations
Divide and conquer
Divide and con me and u and him and her
Indoctrination and separation

As they rule
Made us all out to be fools
Define and take your own space
Let no one and no thing interfere
There is only love and fear
As we face ourselves, face to face
Know that we are One, the human race
Forget the lines, the man made maps
Look at all the man-made crap
All them man-made facts
The generational gaps and man-made mishaps

Oil spills
As man kills everything in sight
Short sighted
Wars ignited
Set all aflame
Like Hitler's and Nero's man-made fires
The USA, all man-made empires
What a crazy world
Isolation - the only way out is within

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Her creations were refreshing and wild and I am happy to have seen her grow at LHI.”