

BEN FOLDS FIVE, THE UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF REINHOLD  
MESSNER: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TEXT  
AS A MODERN SONG CYCLE

by

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*To Stephen Hendricks, who introduced me to the music of Ben Folds and to Kaley Szucz  
(née Vargo), who one April night in 2005, stood me up and with my free evening bought  
my first Ben Folds album Rockin' the Suburbs*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Ben Folds Five was formed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 1993. The band consists of front man and pianist Ben Folds, bassist Robert Sledge, and drummer Darren Jessee. Over the course of the 1990s, the band released three albums. Their self-titled debut album, *Ben Folds Five*, was released in 1995. Their subsequent two albums, *Whatever and Ever Amen* and *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner* were released in 1997 and 1999 respectively. At the point before *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner*, the band was known as a piano rock band that was known for playing up-tempo songs with ironic lyrics. *Whatever and Ever Amen* gave the band its biggest hit and most well known song in “Brick,” which was a crucial song for the band in many ways. Ben Folds has stated that the song provided a financial security that the band had never had. Folds said, “it was a relief when that song was a hit. It wasn’t something to celebrate, it was relief, because we had been working so hard and we were becoming as a band in debt over things like moving the piano and playing small clubs and working all the time. And yeah, it was getting us some notoriety, but it was getting scary, like you can’t keep moving a real piano and keep this front up for nothing, it has to pan out.”<sup>1</sup> Aside from the financial relief, the song also ushered in a different kind of songwriting in the band. As Folds stated, it was a “coming of age maturity on my part that used my skill that I had come to in my songwriting that was subtle and wasn’t about flips and twists and bells and buzzers and not about making things overly smart.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Ben Folds - The Best Imitation Of Myself: BRICK, “ YouTube video, 3:38, posted by “BenFoldsVEVO,” September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhcRGoNJrxA>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



Throughout the first album and most of the second album, it is clear that the overarching theme of the band was a “wise-guy” mentality, with most songs containing a tongue-in-cheek attitude to them. However, with the release of “Brick” the band seemed to take on a new direction. As each member of the band has stated, the group as a whole was becoming tired of playing hard-hitting up-tempo numbers. This led to a different direction for the next album, *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner*, one difference being that the album being one continuous song. Folds said in an interview for a MySpace reunion concert about the nature of his songwriting on the album and his personal state at the time, “I think it's just I had certain, especially, chord movement, some voice leading that I was really into and that kept presenting itself in other forms and it seemed like it would be one song. And I was a little tired of writing pop songs so I thought this was a good chance to do something different.”<sup>3</sup> Bassist Robert Sledge had similar feelings about the direction of the band and in the same concert interview stated, “I just was really fatigued with like being this bombastic, kind of like ‘punk-rock for sissies,’ like down your throat, in your face band, and I think everybody got a little tired of it and so we started, we were naturally playing lighter.”<sup>4</sup> In a separate part of the interview Robert Sledge continued, “I know for one thing I was really stressed out and tired. If you look at pictures, I was at a friend's house who works with all these bands, she had a picture of us and a picture of like Matchbox Twenty and someone else. All those bands just looked fresh and happy, and we had bags under our eyes and we, like, looked

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<sup>3</sup> “Ben Folds Five – Reinhold Messner – Cover to Cover Part 1,” YouTube video, 10:00, posted by “dmbondemand,” May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53BKgR3INOQ>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

really unhealthy. And I think all of us looked really stressed out and tired.”<sup>5</sup> Folds later went on to say in the same interview, “ I remember reading REM saying all their records were absolutely directionless and sounded like complete crap until the moment they were finished and I think this one was like that. This was written as one song and it had to be split into parts.”<sup>6</sup> As the song was being recorded, the idea that the album would be one continuous song had raised eyebrows among with those outside the band, notably Caleb Southern and Ben Goldman, who were the manager and A&R Representative for the band, respectively. While they loved the music on the record, there was concern over how the album would function as a commercial record. Darren Jessee stated about this issue, “I think they had some songs they were pretty excited about and then I think overall, maybe it was the same kind of piano rock that they had had success with on the other records, so maybe there was a little concern as well.”<sup>7</sup> The album was also not successful in any way. Folds said, “The album was kind of a flop. But it was a flop in some ways I didn’t anticipate, like, I always thought that our touring business was going to always be solid. That record came out and we played to about 50% of the capacity suddenly that we had been playing to, I guess the ‘Brick’ people left, I don’t know.”<sup>8</sup> The lack of success for the band's third album contributed to many of their problems, notably their fatigue with the process. A&R Representative Ben Goldman stated, “I think, yeah, they were burned. I think they were burnt on the whole process. Touring and making

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<sup>5</sup> “Ben Folds Five – Reinhold Messner – Cover to Cover Part 4,” YouTube video, 8:44, posted by “dmbondemand,” May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HZd1v2FB\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HZd1v2FB_w)

<sup>6</sup> “Ben Folds Five – Reinhold Messner – Cover to Cover Part 1,” YouTube video, 10:00, posted by “dmbondemand,” May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53BKgR3lNOQ>

<sup>7</sup> “Ben Folds Five – Reinhold Messner – Cover to Cover Part 3,” YouTube video, 8:09, posted by “dmbondemand,” May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4X2GZlpTg0>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

records, and getting records made on time and everything that came with it... During the success of *Whatever and Ever Amen*, you know, I would remember they would go on all these interviews and it would always be a joke, like, one would pretend he was the other guy and screw around with the person interviewing them. Those are the things that kept them going, that keep it light-hearted, and I agree I think they just burned out on it.”<sup>9</sup>

The group disbanded in early 2000 shortly after the album was released and is generally considered to be an amicable break up. Ben Folds continued on to a solo career, and Darren Jessee and Robert Sledge continued playing in small time bands. The band reunited in 2008 to perform a reunion show where they played *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner* in its entirety. After the 2008 concert, the band reunited officially in 2013 and have released their fourth album, *The Sound of the Life of the Mind* as well as a live album of their concerts.

In its discussion of this album as a modern song cycle, the document is divided into two sections. The first is an overview of all the songs of the album as separate entities, and the second section is an essay on how they function together to tell a cohesive story. I will cite examples in each song of how the music illustrates and underscores the meaning of the text, and the journey of Reinhold Messner. We will also see how the union of music and text in the album works much like the song cycles of the German Romantic period. The character portrayed in the album is named Reinhold Messner and will be referred to as such in the document.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2: Narcolepsy

“Narcolepsy” is the first song of the album and has the distinction of having the longest introduction of any Ben Folds Five song the band had previously released. It is also the first opening track on a Ben Folds Five album that starts at a piano dynamic rather than the fortissimo dynamics of the previous two albums. “Narcolepsy” is about emotional distancing in the male psyche when dealing with intimacy. Ben Folds has stated, “I wrote this song... when I was a kid I used to write lots of songs, like when I was nine, ten years old, I was very frustrated because people would take them really literally, like I had one song about getting sick on a merry-go-round, but the point was not that I had actually did that, but that... it was a metaphor. The adults didn’t seem to understand and thought it was really cute, and I was like this is serious shit and I failed. So this song is actually not about narcolepsy, it’s about the tendency, especially of males to go to sleep when having to talk about difficult emotional issues. It’s also about depression, and then it’s also about narcolepsy, although I don’t know anything about narcolepsy.”<sup>10</sup>

The song is in C major and is in 6/8 time. The text is divided into two large verses and one large bridge.

Verse I:  
I should warn you  
I go to sleep  
I know you don't  
Know what I mean

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<sup>10</sup> “Ben Folds - "Narcolepsy" - Live at Bardot” YouTube video, 3:55, posted by “OtterFreak,” October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SILhLhPHKaA>

Yet  
I get upset or happy  
I go to sleep  
Nothing hurts when, I go to sleep  
But I'm not tired  
I'm not tired

Bridge:  
I know it seems that I don't care  
But something in me does I swear  
I don't remember all last year  
I left you awake to cry the tears  
While I was dreaming in streams  
Flowing between the shores  
Of joy and sadness  
I'm drowning  
Save me  
Wake me up

Verse II:  
I should warn you  
I go to sleep  
You won't know when I go to sleep  
Because I'm not tired  
I'm not tired  
I just sleep

The introduction which lays out the musical material in full before any text has been introduced, we will see how this musical material supports the text and sets the tone of the song. This long introduction can be viewed as not only the opening of a singular song, but as an opening to the entire album in which the struggles of Reinhold Messner play out as much in the musical material as it does in the text.

The song is about the struggle to be emotionally vulnerable and the struggle not to fall into an emotionally crippled place. Folds uses the condition of narcolepsy as the metaphor for the beginning of the journey of Reinhold Messner. The song is divided into

two distinct sections, the verses that begin and end the song, and the bridge in the middle of the song. The chord progression of the first verse is I-V-I, in which case the chord changes only occur once. The first section of the first verse is an extended I chord. The text at Ex. 1.1 is “I should warn you, I go to sleep, I know you don’t know what I mean.” The music does not accent the words precisely, but does reflect Reinhold’s internal struggle with his emotional vulnerability. The left hand addresses Reinhold’s desire to stay awake and present within his life and relationships. Musically this is represented by the left hand playing an open fifth I chord. The Cs are played on the strong beats of the measures while the Gs are played on the weak beats. This gives a sense of an incessant tapping motion that paints the internal desire to emotionally present. This is counterbalanced to the right hand which doubles the voice line melody. Each note of the melody lasts for the duration of the entire measure.

The melody is a succession of falling fourths that represents the impending emotional sleep. The melody changing notes on every measure gives a lulling feeling that pulls against the active left hand line. On an emotional level, the left hand acts as the conscious mind trying to stay present in the moment of dealing with emotional issues Reinhold is repressing, while the right hand emulates the subconscious desire to escape and not deal with those issues because their resolutions threaten the status quo of Reinhold’s ego. Folds decides that this musical conflict does not need to be resolved. Both sides of the emotional argument are always present throughout the song. Folds uses the same musical motive throughout the entire song for the conscious desire to stay awake. The pulsating eighth note motives can be found in every measure of the song. This seems to represent the strong desire of Reinhold Messner to stay emotionally

present.

Musical score for the first system, measures 1-6. The score includes parts for Voice (Vo.), Piano (Pf.), Keyboard I (Kb.-I), Keyboard II (Kb.-II), Bass (Ba.), and Drums (Dr.). The key signature is C major, and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: (1, 2x) i should warn you i go to. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The bass part has a melodic line with triplets marked '2x' and '3x'. The drums play a simple pattern.

Musical score for the second system, measures 7-12. The score continues with the same parts as the first system. The lyrics are: sleep (1x) i know you don't (2x) you won't know when. The piano part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. The bass part has a melodic line with triplets marked '2x' and '3x'. The drums play a simple pattern.

### Ex. 2.1 Narcolepsy

Folds counterbalances the unchanging rhythmic motives of the left with evolving rhythmic motives in the right hand. In this discussion, we will focus on the second section of the first verse, which, while relatively short, paints a sleeping motive as well. This section of the verse is in a large V section in G major, at which point the right hand uses 16<sup>th</sup> note sequences that fall down a scale from D to A in which the descending ostinato pattern gives the impression of the eyelids becoming heavy before returning the a repeated first section of the first verse. This also exposes a narrative tension. As the right hand settles on an A and with the duration that it is held, creates a dissonance with the repeating G octaves in the bass that pulls the music back to the C major section.

I would argue that these infrequent chord changes represent a musical and textual inability to move forward within the theme of narcolepsy and sleep as the inability to break free of the pattern. These chord changes do not allow for new musical material to emerge, but rather repeat the same musical patterns with slight variations. This inability to move on from the narcoleptic emotional state is carried over into the bridge of the song. There is a short transition from the verse to the bridge by an alternating I7-IV7



where the sevenths of those chords are given prominence by the repeating pulsating chords on every beat of the 6/8 time which lasts for eight measures. After this, Folds lands on a striking Ab diminished chord in the bass. This unexpected turn also brings back the separation between the left and right hand present in the verses. While the chord progression in the left hand changes from the C major section to biv-iv-V-I, the right hand uses octaves like in the second section of the first verse. The melodic content of the right hand line of the bridge is nearly identical to the verses. With the change in the chord progression, the musical tone of the section sounds entirely different from the verse. Even though the text clearly states Reinhold's desire to break free of the emotionally narcoleptic state, the right hand suggests that these pleas will go in vain; even though the chordal terminology has changed, he is still very much bound to the sleeping motive set up back in verse I.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece in 6/8 time. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the top staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the bottom staves. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the vocal line and the piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "I know it seems that I don't care but". The piano accompaniment features a repeating pulsating chord in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment includes a bass line with a prominent Ab diminished chord in the first measure of the second system. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with treble and bass clefs, and various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and chords.

The musical score is arranged in a system with six staves. The vocal part (Vo.) is in treble clef and includes lyrics: "some thing (in) me does i swear i don't re". Chord markings above the vocal staff are G7(onB), C, and A4dim. The piano part (Pf) consists of two staves (treble and bass) with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The keyboard part (Kb.-I and Kb.-II) is in bass clef, with Kb.-I playing a simple harmonic line and Kb.-II providing a more complex bass line. The bass part (Ba.) is in bass clef and features a melodic line with some rests. The drum part (Dr.) is in bass clef and shows a rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests.

## Ex. 2.2 Narcolepsy

### Chapter 3: Don't Change Your Plans

“Don’t Change Your Plans” is the second track on the album. It is unique in that its construction and function in the album underwent considerable changes. The song originally had a lengthy instrumental intro, but was cut by producer of the album, Caleb Southern. Folds comments, “just cut it away and then all of a sudden it was this pop song. And then it was like ‘Oh okay. I see what you’re talking about.’ Cause I didn’t hear it like that at all. I just heard it as this little masterpiece thing.”<sup>11</sup> The song is about Reinhold Messner feeling that he needs to leave a current relationship in order to pursue his true purpose. The song is in the key of A major and in 4/4 time. The text consists of three verses and four choruses:

Verse I:

Sometimes I get the feeling  
That I won't be on this planet for very long  
I really like it here, I'm quite attached to it  
I hope I'm wrong

Chorus I:

All I really wanna say  
You're the reason I wanna stay  
I loved you before I met you  
And I met you just in time  
'cause there was nothing left

Verse II:

I sat here on my suitcase  
In our empty new apartment

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<sup>11</sup> Folds, Ben, Darren Jessee, and Robert Sledge. “A: How did you create ‘Don’t Change your plans’?” In *Truth and Rumors*. Ben Folds Five. Sony Music Entertainment BSK 41993, 1999. CD.

Until the sun went down  
Then I walked back down the stairs  
With all my bags and drove away  
You must be freaking out

Chorus II:  
All I know is I've gotta be  
Where my heart says I oughta be  
It often makes no sense  
In fact I never understand these things I feel

Don't change your plans for me  
I won't move to L.A.  
The leaves are falling back east  
That's where I'm gonna stay

Verse III:  
You have made me smile again  
In fact I might be sore from it, it's been a while  
I know we've been together many times before  
I'll see you on the other side  
But don't change your plans for me  
I won't move to L.A.  
The leaves are falling back east  
That's where I'm gonna stay

Chorus III:  
All I really wanna say  
You're the reason I wanna stay  
But destiny is calling and won't hold  
And when my time is up I'm outta here

Chorus IV:  
All I know is I've gotta be  
Where my heart says I oughta be  
It often makes no sense  
In fact I never understand these things I feel

I love you, goodbye  
I love you, goodbye

### Ex. 3.1 Don't Change Your Plans

The chord progression of the verses is I-vi7-IV/3-Vsus4-3, all of which surround a pedal-tone A in the middle voice. The spacing of the chord spelling will reveal the internal conflict Reinhold feels towards the relationship depicted in the song. The tight spacing within the chords of the right hand plays an A major chord for the entirety of the first two measures, while the bass line plays an A and F# for the first two and second two beats of the measure respectively. The second measure of the chord progression adds a suspended note in the right hand of a B and the left hand plays a G and E in half notes. This spacing mirrors the claustrophobic nature of the text. There is a feeling that the notes of the right hand are continually encroaching into the space of each other, while the notes of the left hand seem to want to create space within the spacing as the measures pass.

In the text, Reinhold expresses a desire to go out and experience the world free from the bonds of the relationship as well as his own internal hesitation to do so. As the

measures pass and the music is held so close together, there is a sense of how he views the relationship. Within the relationship Reinhold feels stuck and unable to move. With the left hand falling thirds, Reinhold is trying to create not only space from the relationship but is also trying to leave it. This act of trying to leave is mirrored in the inability of the music to truly move away from an A major chord. Even though the second chord in the progression is a vi7 chord, the only thing that changes in the chord is the bass. As the chord changes from the I-vi7, the vi7 chord absorbs the bass note from the I chord as can be seen in Ex. 2.2

### Ex. 3.2 Don't Change Your Plans

In the second measure of the chord progression the desire to move away from the A major chord fares somewhat better, but is still never truly able to get away from it. The I4/3 chord's G in the bass line as well as the suspended B in the right hand gives the first sense that perhaps the chord progression is moving away from A major. This is further helped by the following chord that is truly a move away from A major, although the

move is not strong. The chord is an Esus chord, which pulls very strongly towards a true V chord in the key only a half step away and the natural progression of a suspended chord. However, a resolution to the V is never achieved and the chord progression is repeated from the beginning.

In the discussion of how verse I is tied to the musical material, the inability to move away from the home A major chord will be seen as a true service towards the text. In the first part of the first the text reads, “Sometimes I get the feeling that I won’t be on this planet for every long” and the “won’t be on this planet for very long” is placed over the I4/3-Vsus 4-3. It is clear that placing this text at this point gives a wondering feeling in the music as it searches to settle somewhere, whether with the anticipated move to the V chord or back to the A major. In the second part of the verse over the same music we are given the reason why the music never settles on a true V chord. The text reads “I really like it here, I’m quite attached to it, I hope I’m wrong” with the word "attached" placed directly on the uneasy suspended chord. It is here that we realize why Reinhold has such hesitation in leaving the relationship. It has become his comfortable home and moving away from it would require an uncertain future, both in terms of the music as well as the text. The suspension within the chords continuously attempts to pull away from the tonality which fits the text in a distinct way. Within the music, the suspensions are constantly pulling away while the chord progression remains unchanged. This unresolved suspension underlines Reinhold’s dilemma. As the relationship continues, Reinhold feels that, no matter how he tries to pull away from the relationship. The G natural, representing Reinhold, while present never pulls the tonality away from the relationship home of A major. This gives interesting insight into Reinhold’s personality.

Reinhold, throughout the album, does not have a problem with intention. His intentions are consistent, namely through the use of the G natural in this song, and G flat in subsequent songs act as Reinhold's desire to move away from where he is. Reinhold's problem is his inability to follow through. As in this example, the intention to move away from A major is there in the G natural pulling towards D minor, however, this modulation is not accomplished because Reinhold as a character does not have the conviction to act on his intentions. This is seen in Ex. 2.3, the chord progression moving to an F major seven chord instead of the desired D minor chord.

### Ex. 3.3 Don't Change Your Plans

There is, however, a successful tonicization, not modulation, to another key in the choruses. The tonality of the choruses, signifies Reinhold's true desire about the fate of the relationship. On each of the occurrences of chorus there is a tonicization of D minor.



Each time the text is “Don’t change your plans for me” there is a strong A major 7 chord to a D minor. The addition of the seventh to the A major chord as well as the bass line octave C# that pulls directly to a root position D minor chord suggests that this is not a manipulation of the A major the song has previously been in. It is not a modulation, however, as the tonality shifts to C major right after this tonicization occurs. This C major tonicization follows a similar pull experienced in the D minor tonicization, where in both cases the tonicization is lead by a passive V6 chord into the new key area. In this case, the tonicization of C gives a softer feeling as opposed to the tonality of D minor. For Reinhold this signifies that while he no longer wants to be a part of the relationship, he is not leaving coldly; it is merely what he feels he needs to do. The text at this point is pointed towards this desire. “Don’t change your plans for me, the leaves are falling back east, that’s where I’m going to stay.”

There is another interpretation of this tonal shift. Reinhold has shown his indecisiveness consistently throughout this song. It plays to the fact of Reinhold’s character that even in his most decisive moments he is soft and ineffectual. His declamatory change to D minor is immediately softened to C major, which gives a sense that Reinhold could easily be pulled back into the relationship. In a second consideration, the text of the choruses gives double meaning to music of the verses. As has been previously stated, the claustrophobia of the music is mirrored perfectly to the text at the point, but it also mirrors Reinhold’s desire to stay where he is, even though the relationship is moving somewhere else. As he states, “That’s where I’m going to stay” there is an immediate return to the A major chord progression. It is interesting to note the

double meaning of the musical material, on the one hand signifying the feeling of being trapped in the relationship, but it also paints Reinhold's stubbornness about his desires.

The musical score is for a song in G major, 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line (Vo.), keyboard I (Kb.-I), piano (Pf), keyboard II (Kb.-II), keyboard III (Kb.-III), bass (Ba.), and drums (Dr.). The vocal line has lyrics: "don't i change won't your move". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes (i) and a melody line with a triplet of eighth notes (i). The second system includes the same instruments. The vocal line has lyrics: "plans to for me L A". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes (i) and a melody line with a triplet of eighth notes (i). The score includes various musical notations such as chords (G, A, Dm, G, C, F#7), accidentals, and performance markings like "1.", "2.", "3.", "4.", "5.", "6.", "7.", "8.", "9.", "10.", "11.", "12.", "13.", "14.", "15.", "16.", "17.", "18.", "19.", "20.", "21.", "22.", "23.", "24.", "25.", "26.", "27.", "28.", "29.", "30.", "31.", "32.", "33.", "34.", "35.", "36.", "37.", "38.", "39.", "40.", "41.", "42.", "43.", "44.", "45.", "46.", "47.", "48.", "49.", "50.", "51.", "52.", "53.", "54.", "55.", "56.", "57.", "58.", "59.", "60.", "61.", "62.", "63.", "64.", "65.", "66.", "67.", "68.", "69.", "70.", "71.", "72.", "73.", "74.", "75.", "76.", "77.", "78.", "79.", "80.", "81.", "82.", "83.", "84.", "85.", "86.", "87.", "88.", "89.", "90.", "91.", "92.", "93.", "94.", "95.", "96.", "97.", "98.", "99.", "100."

Ex. 3.4 Don't Change Your Plans

## Chapter 4: Mess

The third track on the album “Mess” along with the next track “Magic” are the only songs on the album that do not directly connect musically with the rest of the album. The song is in the key of Bb major and is in 4/4 time. The chord progression is iv- V/V- V- IV- I- III. The song is about having so much emotional baggage that the ability to tell your story from the beginning is not possible. Ben Folds said of the song, “the song is about just realizing you’ve hit the point in your life where you’ve... it’s a loss of innocence song for sure, that you’ve made a mess. It’s like at this point there’s really... the next person I meet, I thought when I wrote this song, the next person I’m with I can now no longer completely explain my history. I have enough baggage to where that’s not possible anymore and they are just going to have to take it from, you know as, this is a new clean slate.”<sup>12</sup> The text is separated into three verses and three choruses.

### Verse I:

There was a time when I had nothing to explain  
Oh, this mess I have made  
But then things got complicated  
My innocence has all but faded  
Oh, this mess I have made

### Chorus I:

And I don't believe in God  
So I can't be saved  
All alone, as I've learned to be  
In this mess I have made

### Verse II:

All the untested virtue  
The things I said I'd never do

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<sup>12</sup> “Ben Folds – A New Clean Slate (Interview),” YouTube video, 1:12,

Least of all to you  
 I know he's kind and true  
 I know that he is good to you  
 He'll never care for you more than I do

Chorus II:

But I don't believe in love  
 And I can't be changed  
 All alone as I've learned to be  
 In this mess  
 I have made the same mistakes  
 Over and over again

Verse III:

There are rooms in this house that I don't open anymore  
 Dusty books and pictures on the floor  
 That she will never see  
 She'll never see that part of me  
 I want to be for her  
 What I could never be for you

Chorus III:

But I don't believe in God  
 So I can't be saved  
 All alone as I've learned to be  
 In this mess I have made

The musical score is written for a band and includes the following parts:

- Vo. (Vocal):** The main melody line, starting with a Gm chord and a 2x repeat sign. The lyrics are: "when i had noth ing to ex plain oh this mess got com pli-cated my in no - cence has all but faded oh this mess".
- Cho. (Choir):** A second vocal line, currently silent.
- Pf. (Piano):** Accompanying piano part with chords and melodic lines.
- Kb. (Keyboard):** Accompanying keyboard part, currently silent.
- Ba. (Bass):** Bass line with various notes and rests, including a 2x repeat sign.
- Dr. (Drums):** Drum part with a steady rhythm, including a 2x repeat sign.

The musical score is for a piece titled "Ex. 4.1 Mess". It features six staves: Voice (Vo.), Chorus (Cho.), Piano (Pf.), Keyboard (Kb.), Bass (Ba.), and Drums (Dr.). The key signature is G minor (two flats). The chord progression is indicated above the vocal staff: B<sup>b</sup>, D, Gm, p(onG), Gm, and p(onG). The lyrics for the vocal part are: "I have made", "I have made", and "I have made". The piano part includes a melodic line with a 2x repeat sign. The keyboard part has a bass line with a 2x repeat sign. The drums part has a rhythmic pattern with a 2x repeat sign.

#### Ex. 4.1 Mess

The chord progression of the song in G minor is i-IV7-bVII-VI-III-V-i and is interesting in that there is not a true sense of being in G minor until the second half of the chord progression. With the II and V being outside the confines of G minor, there is a sense of being somewhere else tonally, without modulating or tonicizing. In the text of all the verses, the text that appears on the IV and bVII chords have something to do with a more positive past. In the first verse the text at that point reads, “had nothing to explain,” and “my innocence has all but faded,” the third verse, “the things I said I’d never do,” and “I know that he is good to you,” and the third verse the text is “that I don’t open anymore,” and “she’ll never see that part of me.” All of this text has to do with the time before the mess has been made with the exception of the ends of the second and third verses, which has to do with time after the mess. Within G minor progression, the IV7

briefly tonicizes the following bVII allowing for a slightly warmer sense of F major counterbalancing the melancholic G minor. The feeling of F major will be repeated in the choruses, but here it is only a slight turn towards F major as Reinhold remembers happier times when life wasn't as bleak. After the slight F major feeling the chord progression sharply turns back to G minor, using the major chords of the minor scale to heighten the expectation to G minor. The chord progression at this point continues as VI-III-V-i.

The musical score for 'Ex. 4.2 Mess' is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for the vocal line (Vo.), which includes lyrics: 'i have made' and 'i have made'. Above the vocal staff, chord symbols are written: Bb, D, Gm, F(onG), Gm, and F(onG). Below the vocal staff is a staff for the choir (Cho.), which is currently empty. The piano (Pf.) part is shown in a grand staff with both treble and bass clefs, featuring complex rhythmic patterns and some repeated sections marked with '2x'. Below the piano part is a keyboard (Kb.) staff, which is also empty. The bass (Ba.) part is shown in a single staff with a bass clef, featuring a simple bass line with some repeated sections marked with '(5)'. The drum (Dr.) part is shown in a single staff with a bass clef, featuring a complex rhythmic pattern with many 'x' marks indicating hits. The score is set in G minor, as indicated by the key signature (two flats) and the chord symbols.

#### Ex. 4.2 Mess

When the tonality is firmly back in G minor, the text shows Reinhold's melancholy as he reflects on his current state. In the first verse the words are, “Oh, this mess I have made.” In the second verse the words are, “least of all to you” and “he’ll never care for you more than I do” and in the third verse, “dusty books and pictures on the floor” and “I want to be for her what I could never be for you.” In the truly G minor sections of the verses, the text is overtly melancholic, even in the lines that aren’t necessarily negative statements, such as the promise “I want to be for her what I could

never be for you.” Its placement on top of the G minor chord progression gives the impression of being more a statement of self-loathing than self-improvement.

The choruses of the song also borrow major tonalities as in the verses. The hint of Bb major will further paint the melancholic state of Reinhold Messner. In the chorus of the song, the chord progression moves away from the strong G minor felt in the verses. The chord progression is, in Bb major, V-IV-vi -V. Without a strong I it is hard to suggest that a true modulation or tonicization has taken place, but the chord progression no longer suggests G minor. The text in the first chorus, “And I don’t believe in god, so I can’t be saved, all alone as I’ve learned to be in this mess I have made.” In the second chorus, the text is, “But I don’t believe in love, and I can’t be changed, all alone as I’ve learned to be in this mess. I have made the same mistakes over and over again.” The text of the third chorus repeats the first verse. The reasons why the choruses were written in Bb major as opposed to G minor is that the text gives the reasons why he is leaving in this mess, “I don’t believe in god,” and “I don’t believe in love” are both things that can be changed or were at one point different in Reinhold’s life. In each of the choruses the word “mess” is in the last word of the text. This is also the place in the text where the music returns to G minor, firmly cementing Reinhold in the mess and leaving doubt as to whether he will emerge from it. No matter how the song strays from G minor, any tonicization always leads back to the G minor home.





## Chapter 5: Magic

“Magic” is unique to the album in that it is the only song in which neither the text or the music was written by Ben Folds. The band’s drummer, Darren Jessee, who was a prominent songwriter in Chapel Hill, North Carolina where the band was formed, wrote the text and music. In the case of “Magic” it is hard to say what the song is about entirely, but is most likely about the death of someone close to the writer. In terms of the biography of Reinhold Messner, how this song works into the story will be discussed later. Jessee himself, later said of the song, “That song is kind of a composite of people that I’ve known that have died and it’s also a love song so that’s pretty much it.”<sup>13</sup> The song is in the key of F major and in 4/4 time and the chord progression of the song vi-V-I-vi-V-I-IV-V-I6-IV-V. The text is divided into two verses and two choruses. The text reads:

### Verse I:

From the back of your big brown eyes  
I knew you'd be gone as soon as you could  
And I hoped you would  
We could see that you weren't yourself  
And the lines on your face did tell  
It's just as well  
You'd never be yourself again

### Chorus I:

Saw you last night,  
Dance by the light of the moon  
Stars in your eyes,  
Free from the life that you knew

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<sup>13</sup> Folds, Ben, Darren Jessee, and Robert Sledge. “A: Darren, what was the inspiration for ‘Magic’?” In *Truth and Rumors*. Ben Folds Five. Sony Music Entertainment BSK 41993, 1999. CD.

Verse II:

You're the magic that holds the sky up from the ground  
You're the breath that blows these cool winds 'round  
Trading places with an angel now

Chorus II:

Saw you last night,  
Dance by the light of the moon  
Stars in your eyes,  
Free from the life that you knew  
Saw you last night  
Stars in your eyes  
Smiled in my room

Both Darren Jessee and Ben Folds were session musicians who had continued their respective song writing careers while appearing with several other bands in various instrumental roles. Darren Jessee is credited with playing piano, guitar, as well as drums, which was his instrument within Ben Folds Five. Jessee had a secondary songwriting role in the band, however, he contributed tremendously to "Brick," which is considered the most famous song in the Ben Folds Five catalogue. Other songs he contributed to are "Song for the Dumped," "Kate," and "Brick" from the album *Whatever and Ever Amen*, "Amelia Bright," "Wandering," and "Stumbling Home Winter Blues" all appearing on *Ben Folds: Best Imitation of Myself: A Retrospective*. "Sky High" and "Magic" are the only two songs in the Ben Folds Five catalogue that are solely Jessee compositions. Folds has stated, "It was probably the first notable collaboration because Darren had that chorus 'She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly.' That was his contribution, and though that's a small contribution to the song, it happens to be probably the bar of music that most people remember about of everything that we did and I've done. That's it and that's his contribution and that's not bad... it's like a home run... I knew that that was something,

and when he showed that to me a couple years before we actually did, ‘I’ve been sitting around with this song, my friends think it sucks, what do you think?’ And of course they think it sucks, everyone is trying to be too damn cool all the time... I thought this is something but I don’t know what it is, and I had been trying to express this whole thing about the high school abortion and I’d been trying to do it too literally and I tried several versions of songs and when he did that I was like ‘wow, that’s just like abstract enough if you paste that on suddenly there is something there.’”<sup>14</sup>

Musically, “Magic” begins not on its I chord but rather starts on the vi. It could be tempting to label the song in D minor, but there is nothing in the tonality to suggest that this is the case. The biggest hints to this is that there is no V in D minor anywhere in the song, save for a large A played on the fourth beat of every measure before each entrance of the chorus. The other big indication for F major is that the chord progression functions around vi V I IV V I6/5 IV V. The repeated IV-V progressions in particular point strongly towards an F major tonic, even if it is sometimes unexpressed. The reason for the lack of tonic on any cadences is mirrored in the text. Within the text there is a constant sense of something that is fleeting. If we use the idea of someone who has recently died, the lack of tonic cadences represent the idea of feeling that the deceased is still around while knowing that they are gone.

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<sup>14</sup> “Ben Folds - The Best Imitation Of Myself: BRICK, “ YouTube video, 3:38, posted by “BenFoldsVEVO,” September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhcRGoNJrxA>

### Ex. 5.1 Magic

The song comes to two striking cadences before the choruses of the song that use a stark D major 7 b9 chord which occurs before the verse that begins, “saw you last night.” What is so abrupt about this chord is the chromatic shift that is unseen anywhere else in the song. Musically, it halts everything that comes before. The piano line is built upon continuing arpeggiations through the chord progressions. As seen in the fifth measure of Ex. 4.1, a strong D major 7 b9 block chord which brings the verse to a close. This highlights the G minor 7 chord occurring right after it, giving it a much warmer and inviting sound. It is unsurprising that the text at this moment is well suited to this musical

break. This section of the song occurs twice with two different endings based on the text. The music at the first flat 9 chord ushers in a dream-like affect to the music and the text that follows suits this well. While the chorus of the song is devoid of any text and only uses a repeated “la” over a iv, V, I chord progression the text of the section before each chorus is mysterious. The text reads at this moment, “saw you last night/ dance by the light of the moon/ stars in your eyes/ free from the life that you knew.” At the end of this line, we are returned to a D minor (vi) chord, calling attention to the melancholy of the life of the person that Reinhold is talking about. However, in the second time we see this musical section, the text is slightly longer: “saw you last night/ dance by the light of the moon/ stars in your eyes/ free from the life that you knew/ saw you last night/ stars in your eyes/ smiled in my room.” On the second occurrence of “free from the light that you knew,” instead of returning to our darker vi chord, we are given a I 6/5 chord that propels us to the IV chord continuing the musical material farther. This gives the impression that whereas the first occurrence of the text is more hopeless and pessimistic, the major sonority at this moment changes that idea. The text is now altered to, “saw you last night, stars in your eyes, smiled in my room.” This can be seen as signifying that Reinhold has come to accept the death of the person he has lost. The chord progression is also altered to a firm declaration of F major in which the chords progress at this text as, IV, ii7, V7, I.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Voice (Vo.), Piano (Pf.), Keyboard I (Kb.-I), Keyboard II (Kb.-II), Bass (Ba.), and Drums (Dr.). The lyrics for the first system are "that you knew" and "sha la la la la la la la". The second system includes staves for Voice (Vo.), Piano (Pf.), Keyboard I (Kb.-I), Keyboard II (Kb.-II), Bass (Ba.), and Drums (Dr.). The lyrics for the second system are "night stars in your eyes smiled in my room" and "sha la la la la la la la". The score includes various musical notations such as chords (C, Dm, Gm7, C7, F), dynamics (rit., a tempo), and performance instructions (1x only, 2x).

**System 1:**

- Vo.:** Chords: C, Dm, C, Dm. Lyrics: "that you knew" and "sha la la la la la la la".
- Pf.:** Piano accompaniment.
- Kb.-I:** Keyboard I part.
- Kb.-II:** Keyboard II part.
- Ba.:** Bass part.
- Dr.:** Drums part, including (Tambourine).

**System 2:**

- Vo.:** Chords: Gm7 *rit.*, C7, F, Dm *a tempo*. Lyrics: "night stars in your eyes smiled in my room" and "sha la la la la la la la".
- Pf.:** Piano accompaniment, including 2x.
- Kb.-I:** Keyboard I part, including (Strings) and 2x.
- Kb.-II:** Keyboard II part, including (Timpani).
- Ba.:** Bass part, including 1x only and 2x.
- Dr.:** Drums part, including 1x only and 2x.

### Ex. 5.2 Magic

## Chapter 6: Hospital Song

“Hospital Song” is the first song in a three-song suite of musically related thematic material. Folds originally envisioned this song to be a part of a suite that included “Army” and “Regrets,” both of which will be discussed later. It should be noted that almost all of the songs on the album are unified by thematic musical and textual material, these songs stand together by virtue of being written to be played as one full song in its original conception, however on the album “Regrets” is not placed directly after “Army” but later on in the album.

“Hospital Song” is about Reinhold Messner being stuck in the hospital either because of a physical injury or sickness and being confined to his room. The song is in Ab major, which is the key for the entire suite, and in 6/8. This is the only song in the suite that has a unique time signature, as the other two are in 4/4 time. The song also has the shortest text of the entire album:

Lying awake in my hospital room  
Silas Creek Parkway is my only view  
And the doctor just came by and told me the news  
I need a second opinion  
I don't believe that it's true

“Hospital Song” is one of the two shortest songs on the album, the other being “Your Most Valuable Possession.” What is most remarkable about this song is that the second half of the song is solely instrumental. Ben Folds Five as a band were known to elongate songs with instrumental flair. For the majority of the songs the instrumental solos were in the same style as the song proper, while in other songs, such as

“Underground”<sup>15</sup> off of the band’s first album *Ben Folds Five*, a short tag in the last few bars of the song has a very distinct and unmistakable jazz sound, where the rest of the song is clearly in a piano rock style. In a band where each member is not only proficient, but virtuosic on their respective instrument, it is not surprising that the band would take an opportunity to showcase their skills. However, “Hospital Song” shows instrumental skill as a function of the songwriting rather than it being separate from the song itself. The function of the instrumental section of this song is to connect this song to its partner song in the next track, “Army.”

**Ex. 6.1 Hospital Song**

<sup>15</sup> “Ben Folds Five – Underground,” YouTube video, 4:14, posted by “saaritahh,” April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPgtMCg7ftU>



In this song, Reinhold is confined to a hospital bed and receiving bad news from the doctor. The text is short and blatant about the events of the song. The piano music is adept at painting the claustrophobia and the movement of time that the subject of the song feels through the use of eighth notes within the 6/8 time. Each measure begins with an Ab seventh chord where the first note in the right hand is the seventh and the left hand is the tonic. The left rests on the tonic note for the entire bar, while the right hand plays up the chord beginning on the seventh of the odd measures and beginning on the sixth on the even measures. The music gives a rocking motion as the music in the right hand moves about the chord, while the left hand keeps it anchored to Ab major. In the even measures the music gives a hint of F minor with the F being heard on the first beat of those measures, but the strong feeling of Ab major never leaves due to the strong bass lines never fading from the tonic home.

It is with this music that Folds gives us the confinement to the hospital bed and the F on the even measures being the only view of the outside world beyond the Ab major, which represents the hospital room. It is tempting perhaps to view this as a chord change to F minor, especially in regard to the spelling of the chord in the first two beats (Ab, F, C). However, the melodic contour of the phrase negates this chord change. While the F in the right hand does alter the chord, it is merely a color change to highlight a textual truth.

In these opening phrases, Folds musically depicts what confinement feels like. With the overall melodic structure of these phrases remaining steady, the half step shift from Gb to F represents the desire to move and the inability to accomplish that. By starting the song on a very strong 7<sup>th</sup> chord, the song instinctively wants to resolve itself

but is not able to; all the while the shift from Gb to F from the first measure to the second measure does not provide any real resolution. Beginning on an Ab dominant 7 chord allows Folds to paint the idea of being in limbo. This is something that can be imagined in thinking what it would be like to not be able to move: Reinhold's mind remains active while his body is confined. The natural instinct would be to want to move and continue, but whatever ailment has occurred is preventing that, which is represented by this 7<sup>th</sup> chord having no resolution in the opening measures. The coloring of the chord with the F in the right hand paints looking out the window of the hospital room. It is this slight melodic change that breaks up the Ab7 chord to reflect what the text will say in the coming measures. The music returns immediately back to the Ab7 in the following measure, making it clear that the music really never left the Ab7, which is reflected in the character viewing outside of the room without actually leaving the room. The story of the song is also told rhythmically. The song is in 6/8 time and the right hand plays a steady stream of eighths, which supplies the song with a ticking feeling, like a clock. We can imagine a clock on the wall of the hospital room continually moving and time continually passing, represented by the rhythm and the paralysis of the character in the melodic material.

After the opening measures, the addition of accidental notes colors the texture but never strays far from the Ab major tonality. In addition to the shift from Gb to F, this section extends this farther by adding another note. Here there is an addition of an E to this mix. The E takes its place does come at a chord shift. There are two shifts where the Es occur. The first is at the line "Silas Creek Parkway is my only view." The chord is turned from an Ab7 chord to an Ab augmented chord by the addition, with this Folds

could be painting the image that Reinhold is now seeing the world through skewed eyes due to his confinement. However, the section chordal shift is more striking and more interesting. It occurs under the text, “the doctor just came by and told me the news.” It is the darkest point of the song melodically. We are treated to a Db minor 7 chord. It is the first time in this song that we are taken away from our tonic home completely by the bass note changing to a Db from Ab. It is also the first time in the song that a chord is played longer than one measure. This chord lasts for two measures, which is longer than anything this song has seen before, and provides it with greater weight. After the Db minor measures we return immediately back to the music of the opening of the song.

Throughout this song so far there has been a sense that the music is building and changing to create different feelings within itself, but the return to the opening measures is a shockingly easy return to the original material. The text on the return of the original music reads as, “I need a second opinion, I don’t believe that it’s true.” The text clearly shows what is seemingly common and natural response to receiving bad medical news, which is denial and rejection. What the character at this point has experienced throughout the song is the feeling of claustrophobia and restlessness, which turns to denial and unwillingness to received and accept unwanted news. The melodic change of the song reflects that story line. By returning to the original music reflects Reinhold’s desire to return to the place before receiving that news which then melodically shifts to the instrumental section of the song. The Ab7 with the added F turns to an Eb minor 9 chord.

Vo. hos - pi-tal room si-las creek park-way is my on-ly view and the doc-tor just came-by and told me the news i need a

Pf.

Kb.-I

Kb.-II

Ba.

Dr.

sec-ond o-pin-ion i don't be-lieve that it's true

A<sup>7</sup> Fm<sup>7</sup>(onA<sup>b</sup>) E<sup>b</sup>m9 B<sup>m</sup>9

## Ex. 6.2 Hospital Song

The interpretation of the instrumental section in the dramatic context of song is too vague to speculate, as there is not enough material to inform this section with meaning in any concrete way. What can be said about it is found in the original construction of the song. This aspect of the album will be discussed further in a different section, but merits a brief mention here. Ben Folds stated in a 1999 interview with the band on the album that (about “Army”), “that was actually written as a second

movement to this suite, which “Hospital Song” was the first. “Hospital Song” used to be longer and my idea of going into “Army” was much more abrupt then we ended up doing. In fact, we, for a while, we changed the first chord of... (singing) “Well I thought about the army,”... to match the “Hospital Song,” it was this kind of nasty, abrupt sort of chord that was ... I don’t know what kind of chord, a 7, 12, 13 backwards chord...flat 5... I don’t know, I was just thinking once I got on the hospital kick, lyrically, I was just going, ‘okay, what do you think about when, if you’re just laying in the hospital, just kind of be a writer for a second, and then I was thinking, you just think about stuff, what did I think about, well I remember I was going to join the army to get through school. I told my father that, and he said, ‘you’re fucking high,’ the way, that’s exactly what he said.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Folds, Ben, Darren Jessee, and Robert Sledge. “A: How did ‘Army’ come about?” In *Truth and Rumors*. Ben Folds Five. Sony Music Entertainment BSK 41993, 1999. CD.

## Chapter 7: Army

“Army” is the second piece in the three-song Ab major suite in the album dealing with immobilization. While “Hospital Song,” deals with physical immobilization, “Army” is about a sort of immobilization that comes from aimlessness. The song catalogues the many rejections and setbacks Reinhold Messner has been through and how he plans to topple them such as joining the army. While the song's title gives the impression it is solely about joining the army, Folds explains that the central idea behind the conception of the song is “you just think about things” when you are aimless and this is mirrored in Reinhold's journey. Referring back to the quote previously stated in the last song, it becomes clear that the genesis of this song comes from the idea of thoughts that will not come to fruition on the basis of their outlandish character, such as writing a screenplay and moving to Los Angeles. How this fits into the theme of immobilization is more subtle however. Through this aimlessness, Reinhold is constantly dreaming of what he could do with his life, however the central irony being that this daydreaming actually prevents him from moving forward creating internal immobilization. The song is in the key of Ab major and is in 4/4. The text consists of three verses, a chorus, and one bridge. The text reads as follows:

Verse I:  
Well I thought about the army  
Dad said, "Son you're fuckin' high"  
And I thought, yeah there's a first for everything  
So I took my old man's advice  
Three sad semesters  
It was only 15 grand spent in bed  
I thought about the army  
I dropped out and joined a band instead

Verse II:

Grew a mustache and a mullet  
Got a job at Chick-Fil-A  
Citing artistic differences  
The band broke up in May  
And in June reformed without me  
And they'd got a different name  
I nuked another grandma's apple pie  
And hung my head in shame

Chorus I:

I've been thinkin' a lot today  
I've been thinkin' a lot today

Bridge I:

Oh, I think I'll write a screenplay  
Oh, I think I'll take it to L A  
Oh, I think I'll get it done yesterday, ah, shit

Verse III:

In this time of introspection  
On the eve of my election  
I say to my reflection  
God please spare me more rejection  
'Cause my peers they criticize me  
And my ex-wives all despise me  
Try to put it all behind me  
But my redneck past is nipping at my heels

Chorus II:

I've been thinking a lot today  
I've been thinking a lot today  
I've been thinking a lot today  
I thought about the army

“Army” is the most popular song from the Ben Folds Five catalogue that frequently appears in Ben Folds solo career, second only to “Brick” or “One Angry Dwarf.” With the immense popularity of the song in Ben Folds solo career, one would imagine it was extremely popular when it was released as a single. However, the opposite is the case.

Ben Folds' said during a reunion concert with Ben Folds Five in 2008, "a little tidbit, the song "Army" which people seem to like pretty much now, was pretty much the beginning of the end of the commercial success of Reinhold Messner. We were rehearsing in London, cause we were... we had big budgets and so we were carrying horn players and buying them champagne, and I got a phone call from Allen Walmark our manager and I said, 'how's it going?' and he goes, 'it's bad.' And I was learning a little bit about how the music business works, they do this thing called research. So far, everything had been good, like every year better and better research. So I sort of expected it was going to be okay and he said, 'Well no, we got something very rare called negative research.' Research is something where they call people and say, 'do you recognize this song?' and they go, 'yeah, it makes me happy.' Or they say, 'I don't know...I don't know about that song.' And that's normal. People were calling the radio station in Atlanta, Georgia asking them not to play the song [Army]... the record was not an immediate gratification record in any sense of the word."<sup>17</sup> In spite of the negative response to the song, this song is perhaps the most autobiographical of Folds himself. Folds has explained, "This one's about my really horrible experience trying to get through college. And I got a scholarship and then I lost a scholarship... after a semester cause I flunked a class because I flunked one test. The class was based on one test. The one I flunked. I flunked the test because I got delivered to the test in a police car at six o'clock in the morning with stitches in my nose and stitches in my mouth. And I was still drunk. And I had a broken hand, presumably because I had clocked that ass. I hit the wall. So I threw my drum set, which

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<sup>17</sup> "Ben Folds Five Reunion Concert," YouTube video, 9:21, posted by "mrgnbost," September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exKewsAntiA>



is the instrument that I flunked on, into Lake Osceola in the middle of University of Miami and I took a Greyhound bus, I don't shit you, it was a Greyhound bus back home and I worked with a bunch of old ladies in a grocery store for about 18 months. It was at that time that I decided in my bedroom I decided while listening to Elvis Costello in 1986 that maybe I shouldn't wait tables and do this old lady job anymore, maybe... I should join the Army.”<sup>18</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the song "Army" by The Roots. The score is written for a band and includes the following parts:

- Vo. (Vocal):** The lead vocal line with lyrics: "well i thought a - bout the ar - my dad said, son you're fuck - ing high and i thought, three sad se - mes - ters it was on - ly fif - teen grand spent in bed".
- Kb.-I (Keyboard I):** A keyboard part, mostly consisting of rests.
- Pf. (Piano):** A piano accompaniment part with chords and melodic lines.
- Kb.-II (Keyboard II) (Brass):** A brass section part, mostly consisting of rests.
- Ba. (Bass):** A bass line with notes and rests.
- Dr. (Drums):** A drum part with various rhythms and patterns.

The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "2x only" and "cho. C.D." (cho. C.D. stands for choir C.D.).

<sup>18</sup> This quote is comes from an explanation of "Army" during a performance at Enmore in 2005. This quote is a summation of an often told story of Folds that can be hear in any number of incarnations.

Vo. D#7 Ab 1. 2. Fm7

— yeah there's a first for ev - ery - thing — so i took my old man's ad - vice —  
 — i thought a - bout the ar - my — i dropped out — and joined — — a band — in —

Kb.-I

Pf

Kb.-II

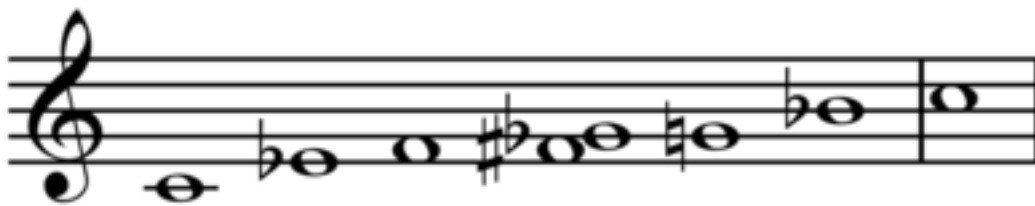
Ba. C.D. a 2 (2x only)

Dr. C.D. a 2 (2x only)

### Ex. 7.1 Army

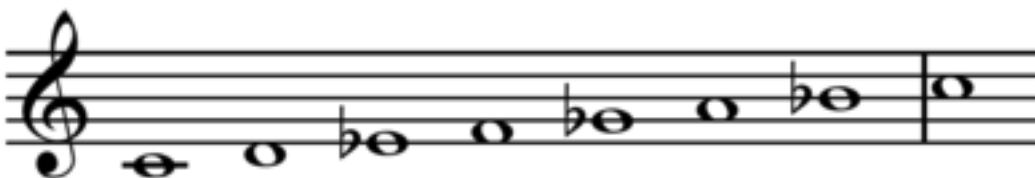
The chordal structure of the song seems to break one of the most fundamental rules of Western music in its use of a minor V chord. The song is in the key of Ab with a chord progression I-v7-IV7-I-vi7. The use of an Ab major and Db major 7 chords being placed adjacent to the Ebm7 as well as the Fm7 functioning as a minor vi chord suggests sufficient enough evidence to approach this song in Ab major. If this is to be the case, then there has to be an explanation for the use of a minor v chord to fill out what would otherwise spell out the most popular chord progression in popular music, I, V, IV, I. The issue comes down to the use of a Gb rather than a G natural and how and why this half step change functions within the framework of the song. I will show that the Gb is used is as a representation of Reinhold Messner himself. In this sense, the Gb in both “Army” and “Hospital Song” acts as a note that does not quite fit. It acts as a pivot note in both songs that never truly leads to any new place. This is mirrored in the character of Reinhold who is drifting through life without anywhere to settle.

The question of why this is used and how it function, can be grounded in jazz and blues theory. The blues scale is a collection of various scales that alter the major scale by flattening certain scale degrees, depending on which blues scale is being played. There are three prominent blues scales in jazz theory, the hexatonic, the heptatonic, and the nonatonic. The basic form of the blues scale is the hexatonic scale, being a six-note scale with a half-step lowered 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> (or augmented 4<sup>th</sup>), and 7<sup>th</sup>. The heptatonic scale and the nonatonic scale are elongations of the basic blues scale incorporating both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> scale degrees to the former and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, natural 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and natural 7<sup>th</sup> to the latter. There is also a distinction between the major and minor blues scales, for example the major blues scale would consist of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, major 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and the tonic at the top of the scale. The minor scale consists of the same formation as the hexatonic blues scale explained above. If the chord progression to “Army” is viewed as through the lens of the blues scale, then the Gb in the minor v chord can be attributed to the hexatonic blues scale, in which it would function as a lowered 7<sup>th</sup> in the Ab major scale. The hexatonic scale is formed in C major as:



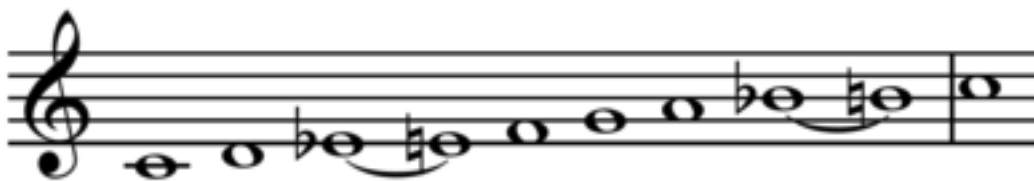
**Figure 7.1**

The heptatonic scale is formed in C major as:



**Figure 7.2**

The Nonatonic scale is formed in C major as:



**Figure 7.3**

While the use of Gb in the greater part of the song is part of the hexatonic blues scale, it also functions as a point of tonicization for the bridge of the song. At the point of the song under the text “oh, I think I’ll write a screenplay/ oh, think I’ll take it to L.A./ oh, think I’ll get it done yesterday...” Gb is used as a pivot point between the subdominant and the tonic with the key of Db major and Ab major. The Gb functioning as the 7<sup>th</sup> of Ab major at this point allows the modulation to the subdominant Db major in the bridge of the song with the chord progression of Gb, Db, Ab (IV, I, V). This Gb acting as a problem note at this point in the song connects itself to the same chordal language in “Hospital Song” where the Gb kept the song anchored in a dreamy state. The connection of the Gb in Ab major in both songs also suggests that the song “Army” takes place entirely in Reinhold’s head as he lies in the hospital room of the previous song. The change is abrupt and could not be viewed as the most elegant modulation between related keys, as the shift is accomplished with a glissando rolling down the already established Ab major 7 chord being played and is immediately followed by a Gb major chord instead of going to a Db major chord. While the modulation is abrupt, it is not jarring. In the penultimate measure before the modulation, the right hand of the piano is playing four sets of eighth note triplets of an Ab major chord in root position. At the point the Gb

major chord progression ushers in the modulation, the chord in the right hand is in section inversion and the left hand an octave Gb filled in with the Db as the fifth. While looking at both hands the chord is in root position. The right hand is isolated in the measure, which has the Ab major triplets and connects directly to the second inversion Gb major chord of the next measure. The Gb note in the second inversion chord functions as the connection and pivot to the modulation to subdominant Db major.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Army" by Ben Folds. It includes staves for Vocals (V.), Piano (P), and Drums (Dr.). The vocal line features lyrics: "oh i think i'll write a screen - play". Above the vocal staff, chord symbols are provided:  $A^b\Delta 7$ ,  $E^b G^b$ ,  $D^b$ , and  $A^b$ . The piano part shows a complex arrangement with triplets and other rhythmic patterns. The drum part includes a bass drum line with a "8va" marking and a snare drum line with a "6" marking. The score is written in a key with two flats (Bb major or Db minor) and a 4/4 time signature.

### Ex. 7.2 Army

There is a second modulation in this section of the song. During the instrumental break in which the piano plays a solo in a ragtime style, very reminiscent of a Scott Joplin piece. Over the years, Ben Folds has mentioned his affection for Scott Joplin at many of his live shows, which puts this solo in context with Folds' own influences. However, what is more interesting than the style in which it is played is the modulation itself. In the penultimate section of the song, the bridge briefly modulated to Db major, in which the new chord progression positioned the V chord as the final in the progression before it is replayed, essentially putting the home key tonic chord in another pivot point for

modulation. This time, however, instead of modulating to another key within the scale Folds uses the submediant of F minor. Folds tonicizes this movement to the submediant with the use of a C7 chord, which is V in the new key. There are four measures of build-up before the piano solo section begins on an Fm7 chord where the C7 chord is played. This allows for the ear to begin to hear the song in the new modulated key. The harmony of the section uses two measures per chord change between Fm7 and C7. The right hand of the piano solo uses the first three scale degrees of F minor and then uses the hexatonic blues scale in C major over the C7 measures.

## Chapter 8: Your Redneck Past

In the last verse of “Army” the last line reads, “try to put it all behind me, but my redneck past is nipping at my heels” and true to his word the next song is entitled “Your Redneck Past.” “Your Redneck Past” has been described by Folds as, “the only song on the album without a heart felt point.”<sup>19</sup> This song is about choosing an identity that transcends where someone comes from, and the struggles with the identity that is not chosen. The song is in 4/4 and in the key of F# major. The text is divided into three verses, three choruses, and one bridge. The text as it appears is as follows:

Verse I:

Choose from any number of magazines  
Who do you want to be?  
Billy Idol or Kool Moe Dee?

Chorus I:

If you're afraid they might discover  
Your redneck past  
There are a hundred ways to cover  
Your redneck past  
They'll never send you home.

Verse II:

Roots! The funny limbs that grow underground  
That keep you from falling down  
Don't you think that you need them now?

Chorus II:

Just find a place where no one knows of  
Your redneck past  
Yeah, you can easily dispose of  
Your redneck past  
You'll show them all back home

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<sup>19</sup> Folds, Ben, Darren Jessee, and Robert Sledge. “A: Is ‘Your Redneck Past’ about your redneck past? Are you a redneck, Ben?” In *Truth and Rumors*. Ben Folds Five. Sony Music Entertainment BSK 41993, 1999. CD.

Bridge:  
 Desolé  
 Je suis american  
 Please cook my steak again  
 Je suis american  
 Desolé  
 Je ne parle pas français

Verse III:  
 Laws vary from state to state  
 Getcha some books on tape  
 Learn about holes in space

Chorus III:  
 If you're afraid they might discover  
 Your redneck past  
 There are a hundred ways to cover  
 Your redneck past  
 It's good to be back home.

The musical score is for the song 'Your Redneck Past'. It features the following parts:

- Vocals (Vo.):** The vocal line starts with an 'Intro. B' section marked '1x only'. The melody is in F# major, with notes corresponding to the lyrics 'oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh'. The key signature changes to D major for the chorus, indicated by a '1.' marking.
- Keyboard (Kb.-I):** The keyboard part includes a '(Synth.+Port.)' section marked '1x only'.
- Piano (Pf):** The piano part features a '2x' marking and a first ending bracket labeled '1'.
- Organ (Kb.-II):** The organ part includes a '(Organ)' section and a '2x' marking.
- Synth Bass (Ba.):** The synth bass part includes a '(Synth.Bass)' section and a '2x' marking.
- Percussion (Perc.):** The percussion part includes a '1x tacet' marking and a '2x' marking.
- Drums (Dr.):** The drum part includes a '2x' marking.

### Ex. 8.1 Your Redneck Past

The chord progression for the intro and choruses of the song is IV-V7/V-V-I in the key of F#. The chord progression of the verses in the song is V-IV after a key change



to Ab major. However, there is no tonic played in the verses so a true key change to Ab major is debatable. One can argue that this tonal ambiguity reflects the text. The text describes Reinhold Messner's decision to leave his redneck past behind, because it is the direct cause of his unhappiness and lack of success, and his hesitance and indecision about what his new identity should be. Tonally the song is trying to find its new identity away from its home key.

In the discussion of the shifting tonality of the song it is important to consider that in the journey of Reinhold Messner the lack of strong tonal feelings in either the verses or chorus signifies the hesitation of the character. This is apparent first in the music of the chorus and introduction. Reinhold's ambivalence towards his own redneck past can be seen in Folds' decision to begin the chord progression on the IV, rather than the tonic. This ambivalence is further supported by the following V7/V. This hint of a modulation reflects Reinhold Messner's hesitant desire for change, but as the V7/V does not lead the song to a new key, Messner's desires go unanswered. As this desire has no plan of action in the world of Reinhold Messner, musically the hint of modulation is quickly redirected back to a firm V-I in the home key of F# major. This leaves the sense that Reinhold is not only tethered to his redneck past due to his lack of a plan, but seemingly also fated to always return to it as it is his natural state. Throughout the song, the only clear cadences are in the "redneck" key of F# indicating that Reinhold Messner's nature will far outweigh his attempts to change himself.

The text of the same musical section reveals other clues to Messner's desires. Looking at the choruses of each verse there are text settings in which the music is moving in tandem with Reinhold. In the first and second chorus, the second line of each repetition

reads, “there are a hundred ways to cover your redneck past” and “yeah you can easily dispose of your redneck past” respectively. Where the chord progression sits as those lines are being sung is telling. The chord played underneath those words are the V7/V (G# maj 7) chord which mirrors the covering or disposing of the home tonic key as seen in the introduction of the song. Also seen in this chorus is the same tethering to the redneck past musically and textually as the line ends. It reads, “your redneck past” being sung over a very firm and definite V-I in the home key of F# major.

The musical score is for a song in F# major. The chorus lyrics are: "if you're a fraid they might dis-cov-er your red-neck past / just find a place where no one knows of your red-neck past". The score includes a vocal melody line, a piano accompaniment with a bass line, and a guitar part. Chords D#, B, G#, C#, and F# are indicated above the vocal line. The piano part features a bass line with "8va bassa" markings and a guitar part with "2x" and "8va" markings.

### Ex. 8.2 Your Redneck Past

In my discussion of the obscuring of the tonality while not ever really leaving said tonality, I will show how Folds illustrates Reinhold Messner's attempts to change his identity. This is seen in the verses of the songs, where a modulation from Ab to F# major has occurred from the completion of the introduction with a chord progression of IV-V7/V-V-I in F#, after which we return to the V/V in F#. It functions as the pivot to the new key by leading to the V. As has been stated earlier, this is a definite modulation to the key of Ab major and this section does not use any tonic chord. If we look at the first verse of the song it reads, "Choose from any number of magazines, who do you want to be? Billy Idol or Kool Moe Dee?" These lines are played over an oscillation of V-IV chord progression. Perhaps the reason that we never achieve a cadence is due to the nature of the text. The verse is written in the form of a question as if Reinhold is unable to make a decision on which way to take his life. Just as the text reflects doubt about what direction Reinhold will go in, tonally this section is also left unanswered. As this

tonally unanswered section ends on a Db major chord, it also serves as the V in the home key of F# major leading back to the chorus. The enharmonic spelling of the chords as well as the tonal ambiguity of the verses make the transition back to the home key very smooth and uninterrupted as the vocal line ascends to the chorus. The line is written in the score as Ab major ascending Db, Eb, F under the words “if you’re a” and “just find a” at the beginning of choruses I and II respectively. While it is written in Ab, by changing the enharmonic spelling to the key of F# major, the line is a perfect ascension of V-I where the Db chord serves as a C# major chord and the vocal line can be viewed as C#, D#, E leading to an F# over a B major chord (IV) in F# (I).

The musical score is written for a song. The vocal line (Vo.) is in the key of Ab major, with lyrics: "who do you want to be bil - ly I - dol or kool moe dee that keep you from fall - ing down don't you think that you'll need them now". The instrumental parts include Cb-I, Pf, Db-II, Ba., Perc., and Dr. The score is marked with "2x" for repeated sections.

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### Ex. 8.3 Your Redneck Past

The bridge shows that in Reinhold Messner's journey he is at a point of pretending to be something he is not. This is reflected in the text as well as the music. First discussing the text, Folds has written broken French lines and sung on the album with no attempt at an accent.. The text reads as follows:

desolé  
 Je suis american  
 Please cook my steak again  
 Je suis american  
 Desolé  
 Je ne parle pas français

Vo.  $E^b$   $E^b\Delta 7$   $D^b\Delta 7$   
 dé - so - lé je suis a - mer - i - can

(Pf.-II) gliss. 6 7

Pf. -8va bassa -8va bassa

Kb.-II

Ba.

Perc. (Metal)

Dr. 7

please cook my steak a - gain je suis a - mer - i - can

### Ex. 8.4 Your Redneck Past

If we consider that this is an attempt by Reinhold appear cultured, it explains such elementary understanding and execution of the language. The mixing of English and French words within the bridge further paints Reinhold as quite inexperienced in the language. This inexperience coupled with the next and final verse reverting to English again shows Reinhold's inability or unwillingness to commit to a new future away from



the redneck past. The music also mirrors Reinhold's attempts to make himself more sophisticated by his attempts to use the French language. Over the course of the song, there have been very few prominently featured seventh chords in the song, save for the V7/V in the intro/choruses, yet in the bridge of the song every chord has a major seventh attached, giving the section a jazzy feel. The chord progression of this section is the same as the verses with the added major seventh to each chord. There is also an addition of a Cb major 7 chord played under the second "desolé" which then turns back to a Eb major 7 over "je ne parle pas français" which adds an extra layer of chromaticism and complexity to the bridge. This again mirrors Reinhold's desire to be more complex and dynamic himself.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Your Redneck Past". The score is written for a vocal line (Vo.), keyboard (Kb.-I), piano (Pf.), keyboard (Kb.-II), bass (Ba.), percussion (Perc.), and drums (Dr.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo is marked "A". The vocal line includes the lyrics "dé - so - lé" and "je ne parle pas fran - çais". The piano part features a complex, syncopated rhythm. The keyboard parts provide harmonic support with chords and arpeggios. The percussion and drums provide a steady, rhythmic foundation.

**Ex. 8.5 Your Redneck Past**

## Chapter 9: Your Most Valuable Possession

“Your Most Valuable Possession” is the most difficult song on the album to classify not only in the meaning of the song, placement in the album, but also its inclusion on the album. The song is an instrumental piece that plays underneath the recording of an answering machine message Folds’ father left him in the early morning in late November of an unspecified year. The message is a musing on the loss of body mass during space travel and to what extent the physical toll would be. A transcription of the message reads:

6:49 a.m, Friday, November 20th  
Good morning, Mr. Ben. It's about 6:30  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina.  
Um, just laying here in the bed,  
Half awake, half asleep,  
Thinking about you.

I was wondering if you were looking after your  
Most valuable possession,  
Your mind.

I was thinking about John Glenn,  
His space journey and all.  
They said that when you're in space you lose  
Muscle mass and the body mass  
And I wondered if there was any  
End to it.

Or whether,  
If you didn't exercise in space,  
How long it would be before you were just  
A head, or a mind,  
And have no body or arms.  
You'd have them but you couldn't use them.

I was wondering if  
If your body mass would drop to a certain level,  
And then it would stop right there.



And keep whatever you needed to  
Use your mind  
Because it would still be working.

30 seconds remaining

Anyway, I was just pondering that.  
What do you think about that?

I hope everything is going alright.  
I may wake up here in a little while  
And forget what I was thinking about.

The song has three flats, although gives little indication of being either in Eb major or C minor. The musical foundation is an oscillating chord progression of Ab major 7 and G minor 7. The piano solo line plays a melody that is played once through then repeated an octave above, followed by quickly played 16<sup>th</sup> note triplets in chromatic scales.

Obvious problematic elements arise with a piece like this on the album. First, its placement on the album over half way through the album is worth mentioning. It is not uncommon for bands to include non-traditional tracks on their albums that serve as introductory or story-telling pieces, which would not be considered songs. However, this piece following “Your Redneck Past” is a stark mood contrast in the album. With the heavy jazz influence of the music in “Your Most Valuable Possession” juxtaposed against the more traditional pop feeling of “Your Redneck Past” as well as that of “Army” is puzzling. There is seemingly little connection between these songs, feeling like puzzle pieces that don’t quite fit together. In terms of mood in both music and text, its closest partner is “Hospital Song” and “Regrets.” “Regrets” immediately follows “Your Most Valuable Possession” in a very smooth and eerie transition, almost as if

Reinhold had just awoken from a dream in between “Your Most Valuable Possessions” and “Regrets.” Its placement behind “Your Redneck Past” can be viewed in two distinct ways. On one hand calms the excitement of the previous song, grounding Reinhold back to reality. The second is that it is the beginning of a new act in Reinhold Messner’s story. Any attempts to definitely prove either one will be an exercise in speculation. There is not enough to the song to say which is a better interpretation. One interpretation of the song is that it is a reflection of Reinhold’s redneck past as told through an event of Folds’ own past. In previous songs, we have seen Reinhold Messner’s subconscious revealed in musical structure and gestures, but in this song, the words of Folds’ father and the instrumental accompaniment does not follow that pattern.

This track grounds the listener in the world of Reinhold in a way that no other track on the album does. It does this by linking the poetic world with the world of the composer. Since the track uses a real phone message from Ben Folds’ father to him, we are able to imagine Reinhold as an extension of Folds himself. All of the other tracks on the album exist in a poetic world created by Folds in which only influences from Folds’ life are highlighted, such as Folds’ brief flirtation with joining the army in the song, “Army,” the emotional realizations of “Mess,” and his wife/collaborator’s experiences in “Lullabye.” The rest of the tracks on the album are completely within the world of Reinhold Messner. “Your Most Valuable Possession” is the actual voice of Folds’ redneck past. In this song, the listener is no longer a passive listener to a musical story. Ironically, the message is not “redneck” at all, but a musing on the metaphysical and abstract musing about the mind and body.

## Chapter 10: Regrets

“Regrets” is the ninth track on the album and the finale of the aforementioned “suite” centered around Ab major, with the previous two movements “Hospital Song” and “Army.” The suite as a whole has a theme of unrealized dreams and potential due to immobilization and the regrets that follow. While “Hospital Song” deals with physical immobilization and “Army” is about the feelings of being so down on your luck that the mind just begins to think about other options, “Regrets” is about mental immobilization and the regrets that have followed Reinhold Messner through his life. The song is in Ab major in 4/4 time. The text is divided into three large verses with virtually no chorus except for the word "regrets," repeated twice after each verse.

### Verse I:

I thought about sitting on the floor in second grade  
I couldn't keep the pace  
I thought I was the only one moving in slow motion  
While the other kids knew something I did not  
But if I acted like a clown  
I thought it'd get me through, it did  
But that don't work no more  
You're not a kid no more  
I thought I'd do some traveling  
Never did

### Chorus I:

Regrets, regrets

### Verse II:

I thought about the hours wasted  
Watching TV, drinking beer  
I thought about the things I thought about  
Until immobilized with fear  
And all the great ideas I had  
And how we just made fun  
Of those who had the guts to try and fail  
And then I ended up in jail

Chorus II:  
Regrets, regrets

Verse III:  
...But just for a day  
Seems the police had made a computer mistake  
Said there must be thousands like me with the same name  
Anyway, I thought about the things I settled for or never tried  
I never visited my grandma even once  
When she was sick before she died  
So I don't blame you if you never come to see me here again

Chorus III:  
Regrets, regrets

The image shows a musical score for a song titled "Regrets". The score is written for a vocal soloist (Vo.), a choir (Cho.), piano (Pf.), keyboard (Kb.), bass (Ba.), and drums (Dr.). The key signature is three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The tempo is marked "Tempo-I". The score includes a first ending bracketed with a "1." and a second ending marked "2x". The lyrics are: "i thought a - bout sit - ting on the floor in sec - ond grade i could - n't keep the pace i thought i was the on - ly one mov - ing in". The score includes various musical notations such as chords (Ebm9, Bbm7, Ab7), accidentals, and performance instructions like "with (Cello): unison" and "BASS LI".

### Ex. 10.1 Regrets

In this discussion of "Regrets" I will show the textual and musical connections that the song has to its penultimate partner in the Ab major suite, "Army." The primary musical aspect of the song to note is that the chords that make up the entire chord progression are taken directly from the final measures of "Army." The text under

the chord progression in “Army” reads, “I’ve been thinking a lot today” which are sung through two repeats. Interestingly, “Regrets” begins its text in the first verse with “I thought about...” Since the ending of “Army” and “Regrets” are identical, they could be played as one continuous song by taking out the final “I thought about the army” from “Army” and begin “Regrets” at “I thought about sitting on the floor in second grade.” For whatever reason the remnants of the continuous suite were not changed between “Army” and “Regrets.” The first movement “Hospital Song” concludes on a firm F minor chord and “Army” begins on an Ab major chord. The chord progression of the song uses the same minor v as its dominant chord as did “Army.” The chord progression during the verses is v-ii7-I7 and for the section of the chorus under the text, “regrets, regrets” is transitions to full B major seven chord, D major seven chord, F major seven chord.

The musical score for "Regrets" is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for the Vocalist (Vo.), with lyrics "re-grets" and "re-grets" written below the notes. Above the staff, chord symbols are indicated:  $2. \text{Ab}\Delta 7$ ,  $\text{B}\Delta 7$ , and  $\text{D}\Delta 7$ . The second staff is for the Choir (Cho.). The third staff is for the Piano (Pt.), showing complex chordal textures. The fourth staff is for the Keyboard (Kb.), with a section marked (S.E.). The fifth staff is for the Bass (Ba.), featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and a sequence of numbers (4, 6, 3, 4, 6, 4, 6, 7) below the notes. The sixth staff is for the Drums (Dr.), with a section marked (Bell) and a circled cross symbol. The score is written in a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb) and a common time signature (C).

**Ex. 10.2 Regrets**

In the discussion of how the music functions as a means of furthering the story, I will show how the text is supported by the way Folds has distributed the musical parts to the other members of the band. The way the instrumentation is distributed gives the listener a view into how the world is moving around Reinhold Messner. As has been seen in many of the previous songs on this album, the right hand and left hand of the piano show the internal struggle that Messner is experiencing. “Narcolepsy” and “Don’t Change your Plans” are prime examples of how the right and left hand function as different emotional forces in Messner’s journey. In “Regrets” however, Folds has divided Messner’s subconscious between the piano and the bass and drums. The piano line of the song is playing in steady chords that last the duration for entire measures on average and as long as two measures. The bass and drums, however, are in constant movement.

The musical score for "Regrets" is presented in a standard staff format. The top staff is for the voice (V.), with lyrics written below the notes. The second staff is for the piano (Pf.), showing both right and left hand parts. The third staff is for the bass (Cb.), and the fourth staff is for the drums (Dr.). The piano part consists of steady chords in the right hand and a more active line in the left hand. The bass and drums provide a constant rhythmic foundation. The lyrics are: "slow mo - tion while the oth - er kids knew some - thing i did not but you're not a kid no more i thought i'd do some trav".

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Regrets". The score is written for a vocal line (Vo.), a choir (Cho.), piano (Pn.), keyboard (Kb.), bass (Ba.), and drums (Dr.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo is marked "1.". The vocal line has lyrics: "if i elling act - ed like a clown i thought it'd get me through it did but that don't work no more...". The piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The bass line is filled with eighth and quarter notes, creating a steady motion. The drums provide a consistent rhythmic pattern.

### Ex. 10.3 Regrets

The bass line is often filled with eighth and quarter note movement while the drums fill every beat in their measures down to the sixteenth note with no beat unplayed. This perpetual motion represents the world and time moving by while the piano represents Reinhold Messner's stagnant state. As has been seen in the majority of the album, Reinhold has shown himself to be a character of hesitation and non-commitment, and in "Regrets" we see those character attributes as seen against the back drop of the rest of the band. In stark contrast the bass and drum parts are exciting and quick. The bass line not only plays quick eighth note passages as stated above, but also makes use of chromaticism to further give the impression of the music always moving forward, a clear example of which can be seen in the opening measures of the part. Under the Bb major seven chord, the bass line plays a quick eighth note A natural one beat before settling into the Ab major seven chord on the next measure. In this part the chromaticism seems to pull the song forward in a steady motion, which of course cannot be achieved by the

piano line. The drum part of the song is also a strong force in pulling the song forward. There are very few measures where the drums are not playing and for the majority of its part it uses eighth and sixteenth notes. This gives the impression along with the bass that the song is moving very quickly. As this works against the piano part in terms of reflecting the character of Reinhold Messner, we get a sense that his non-commitment and hesitation has given way to laziness. The bass and drum line represent the world around Reinhold Messner, the piano part represents Reinhold, and the world is quickly passing Reinhold by as he is unwilling or unable to keep up. Messner's vocal line is restricted to the interval of a fourth in the verses, another depiction of his inability to move, take action, or be free.

This is also reflected in the text. Folds makes no secret of what the song is about. The opening line of the song sets the thematic tone, "I thought about sitting on the floor in second grade, I couldn't keep the pace, I thought I was the only one moving in slow motion." It is also interesting to note that during the opening line, it is the only section where the drums are not playing its normal material. This allows for the line "moving in slow motion" to appear as though it, too, is in slow motion. As soon as that line is over the drums take off, showing that Reinhold cannot keep up with the world around him.



## Chapter 11: Jane

"Jane" along with "Your Most Valuable Possession," are the only songs on the album that are not centered around the internal feelings of the protagonist. "Jane" is a girl who is given the advice to just be herself and not worry about what others think. The album is much kinder to Jane than it previously has been towards Reinhold. "Jane" is in 4/4 and is in the key of B flat. The text of "Jane" does not have the same themes of immobilization and self-loathing, but of understanding and encouragement. The text is separated into three verses and two choruses. The entire text reads as:

### Verse I:

Jane be Jane  
Better that way, not when you're trying  
Imitating something you think you saw

### Verse II:

So Jane be Jane  
And if sometimes that might drive them away  
Let them stay there,  
you don't need them anyway

### Chorus I:

You're worried there might not be  
Anything at all inside but that you're worried  
I should tell you that's not right  
Don't try to see yourself  
The way that others do  
It's no use

### Chorus II:

You're worried there might not be  
Anything at all inside but that you're worried  
I should tell you that's not right  
You've had it harder  
Than anyone could know  
So hard to let it go

Verse III:  
But it's your life and you can decorate it  
As you like, beneath the paint and armor  
In your eyes the truth still shines  
Jane be Jane  
Jane be Jane

The chord progression of the verses of the song is I7-bIII7-bVII7-bII7. In the discussion of how the chord spelling reflects the text, it will be shown that the musical conversation between Reinhold Messner and Jane are displayed by Reinhold acting as the text while Jane's personality is shown by the musical language. The chord progression in and of itself is unorthodox and with the added sevenths to each chord gives the song an overall jazz quality. It is important to note the role of these sevenths in the story of the song. Without the sevenths, there is merely the unusual chord progression, however the color the sevenths provide in the song gives clues to the mindset of "Jane." As indicated in Verse I, the character of Jane is dealing with the insecurities of being truly herself, "Jane, be Jane. You're better that way, not when you're trying. Imitating something you think you saw." Folds' choice of the name Jane invites us to think of "plain Jane," being "just Jane. The text of the song is from the perspective of Reinhold Messner, giving the advice to Jane, while the music is Jane. We are given clues to where the roots of Jane's insecurities lie. The unusual chord structure serves as Jane in her true state with a succession of chords that are not usually related to one another. The added sevenths serve as her attempts to cover these insecurities with colorful accents, in essence acting as a musical make-up. This musical make-up is present throughout the vast majority of the song, except in one area, which will be discussed later. With this exception taken into account, Jane is never fully freed from the burden of trying to cover her imperfections but

grows steadily at peace with them. Reinhold gives Jane the advice that he is unable to give himself. She is encouraged to be natural, not take criticism to heart, and to live her life the way she would like to.

The musical score for "Jane" is written for a vocal soloist and a band. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Voice (Vo.), Piano (Pf.), Electric Piano (E.Piano), Keyboard I (Kb.-I), Keyboard II (Kb.-II), Baritone (Ba.), and Drums (Dr.). The vocal melody begins with the lyrics "jane be jane" and continues with "and if you're bet-ter that way not when you're trying". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The electric piano and baritone provide harmonic support with chords and single notes. The drums play a consistent pattern of eighth notes. The second system continues the vocal melody with lyrics "im-i-tat-ing some-thing you think you saw" and "let them stay there you don't need them an-y-way". The piano accompaniment includes a section marked "(2x only)". The electric piano and baritone continue their harmonic roles, and the drums maintain their pattern. The score concludes with a final chord and a double bar line.

Ex. 11.1 Jane

The choruses of the song are identical in their musical framework and virtually identical in regard to their respective texts. In the discussion of the music vs. text relationship in the chorus, it will become clear how Reinhold is able to comfort Jane as Ben Folds has written the music. The chord progression in the chorus under the text of “You’re worried there might not be anything at all inside, but that you’re worried, I should tell you that’s not right,” is IV7-iii7-ii7-vi7. As the text shows, Reinhold is allowing Jane to feel that she no longer has to be consumed by the fear that she is not valuable. This is reflected in the abrupt change from the unusual verse chord progression to a more linear chord progression that does not use any flat chords. For the first time in the song, we can strongly feel as though we are in Bb major. This is therefore reflected in “Jane” feeling that she can be more at home within herself.

The musical score for the chorus of "Jane" by Ben Folds is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line (Vo.) in Bb major, with lyrics: "you're wor-ried there...might not...be an - y-thing at all in-side (but) that you're wor - ried should tell...". Above the vocal staff, the chord progression is indicated: BbΔ7, EbΔ7, Dm7, and Cm7. The piano (Pf) part features a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes. The piano (Piano) part includes a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The keyboard (Kb.-I) part features a "Strings Pad" texture. The keyboard (Kb.-II) part features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The bass (Ba.) part features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The drums (Dr.) part features a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled 'Ex. 11.2 Jane'. The score is written for a vocal part (Vo.), piano (Pf.), and drums (Dr.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The vocal line includes lyrics: '—you that's not right—don't try to see—your-self—the way that oth-ers do it's no use—'. Above the vocal staff, chord annotations are provided: Gm7, A<sup>b</sup>, E<sup>b</sup>(onG), E<sup>b</sup>m(onG<sup>b</sup>), and D<sup>b</sup>(onF). The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand. The drum part includes a bass drum line and a snare drum line. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

### Ex. 11.2 Jane

As the first section of the choruses show Jane growing more comfortable within her own musical skin, the second section of the chorus shows Reinhold stripping away the previous musical make up. At the end of the first section we are left with a vi<sup>7</sup> (Gm7), and the chord progression is not in the same tonal pattern following as bVII-IV6-iv6-bIII6. Notably, there is a musical blending of the verse and chorus at this point, borrowing key chords from both sections namely the bVII and the IV (although now in first inversion). The text at this point provides answers as to why this musical borrowing has occurred. This is also the section of the chorus where the text deviates from chorus I to chorus II which follows respectively as, “Don’t try to see yourself the way that others do, its no use” and “You’ve had it harder than anyone could know, so hard to let it go.” Both of these iterations of the chorus show a step forward and backwards in Jane’s perception. In the first chorus, we see her being told to resist thinking of how others see her, but ultimately giving her comfort that she does not have to be burdened by this way

of thinking, giving us the IV6 chord, its root position first heard in the chorus. In the second chorus we see that she is acknowledging the hardships she has endured reminding her of her troubled past bringing forth her desire to hide as she has done in the verses. Hence the return of the bVII and bIII prominently featured in the verses. What is more interesting to note is for the first time in the song in this brief section there is no use of a seventh which accounts for Reinhold's ability to strip away her need to use her musical make-up. The idea of this make-up being stripped away is further propped up by the chromatic shift through these chords, through the use of the iv6 chord.

It is at this point that Reinhold leaves the decision up to Jane as to whether or not she will move forward or backwards. The variation in the chord progression from verse I and II to verse III will show a textual shift in the perception of Jane. The following text in verse III reads, "but its your life, and you can decorate it as you like. Beneath the paint and armor in your eyes the truth still shines, Jane be Jane." The beginning of this text is musically exactly the same and verses I and II through "beneath the paint and armor," as Reinhold decides to let Jane choose how to proceed, in essence leaving her where she started at the beginning of the song. As Reinhold says, "In your eyes the truth still shines, Jane be Jane," the song abandons the I7-bIII7-bVII7-bII7 and merely shifts contemplatively between the I7 and bVII7 leaving Jane's fate ambiguous. The song ends on the bVII7 as a musical question mark. While verses I and II are unusual in its construction, it nevertheless recycles itself always returning to the tonic I7 or proceeding to the IV7 of the chorus. However, the meandering between the I7 and bVII7 slows down the tonal momentum of the song down as if to quietly reflect upon Jane's choices.

Vo.  $D^{\flat}\Delta 7$   $A^{\flat}\Delta 7$   $C^{\flat}\Delta 7$   $[F] B^{\flat}\Delta 7$   $A^{\flat}\Delta 7$   
 (and) you can dec - o - rate \_\_\_ it as you like \_\_\_ be - neath the paint \_\_\_ and ar - mour in your eyes \_\_\_ the truth still \_\_\_ shines jane \_\_\_

Pf. 7

ano.

tb.-I. (Pulse Tone)

b.-II.

Ba. (4) (6) (7) (6) (4)

Dr. simile ~ -(Perc.)-

Vo.  $B^{\flat}\Delta 7$   $A^{\flat}\Delta 7$   $B^{\flat}\Delta 7$   $A^{\flat}\Delta 7$   
 \_\_\_ be jane \_\_\_ jane be jane \_\_\_

Pf.

ano.

tb.-I.

b.-II.

Ba. (6) (4) (6) (4)

Dr. 10

Vo.  $A^b$   $E^b(\text{on } G)$   $G^b6$   $D^b(\text{on } F)$   $E$   $B^b\Delta 7$

- er than \_\_\_\_ an - y - one could know so hard \_\_\_\_ to let it go \_\_\_\_ but it's you're life \_\_\_\_

Pf.

.Piano

Kb.-I

Kb.-II (Distortion Gt.) (S.E.)

Ba.

Dr.

(Perc.)

**Ex. 11.3 Jane**



## Chapter 12: Lullabye

The final song on the album, “Lullabye” is a fitting end to the album, wrapping up the story as well as tying back to the beginning of the album. Both this song and “Narcolepsy” share thematically similar elements. They both are titled with words associated with sleep, while both are not particularly about that subject, narcolepsy is not the subject of “Narcolepsy” and “Lullabye” is not truly a lullabye. They are also both in the key of C major as well as in 6/8 time. The song is written with a 12 bar blues chord progression in C major. However, it is not a traditional 12 bar blues in that there are no 7<sup>th</sup>s on any of the chords and more correctly the chord progression would be written I-IV-V-IV-I. It is difficult to say with any certainty what this song is about, as it is most likely that this song was written as part of a previous theme discussed by the band rather than having a narrative to it. Ben Folds stated in an interview that, “... there was this kind of dream, kind of sleeping theme for a while. In fact there were probably three or four songs cut off the record that were all related to things that happen at night and those kind of either didn’t get recorded or they got recorded and cut off.”<sup>20</sup> There are three verses, two bridges and two choruses. The choruses occur at the beginning of the song and the end of the song, with the verses playing one after another only interrupted once by the first bridge. The second bridge is the only text that occurs where it would be expected from a traditional songwriting standpoint. The text reads:

Chorus I:

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<sup>20</sup> Folds, Ben, Darren Jessee, and Robert Sledge. “A: Is there a theme to this record?” In *Truth and Rumors*. Ben Folds Five. Sony Music Entertainment BSK 41993, 1999. CD.

Goodnight, goodnight, sweet baby  
The world has more for you  
Than it seems  
Goodnight, goodnight  
Let the moonlight take the lid off your dreams.

Verse I:  
We took a small flight  
In the middle of the night  
From one tiny place to another

Verse II:  
And my parents, they remained  
At the shack with Lorraine  
And my aunt and my grandpa and brother

Bridge I:  
We walked past the tarmac  
and boarded the craft  
The rain had me chilled to the bone

Verse III:  
Just the three of us  
Took the flight that night  
Uncle Richard, me and James Earl Jones

Bridge II:  
And the pilot, he gave me a blanket  
And the tall dark man  
Sang to me in deep, rich tones

Chorus II:  
Goodnight, goodnight, sweet baby  
The world has more for you  
Than it seems  
Goodnight, goodnight  
Let the moonlight take the lid off your dreams.

His infrequent writing partner and ex-wife Anna Goodman wrote the lyrics to the song. Anna Goodman had contributed to a few of Ben Folds Five's song over the course of their first three albums, such as "Alice Childress", "Kate", and "The Last Polka." The song is about experience Goodman had being on a charter flight where she and actor

James Earl Jones were the only passengers on the flight. At a live performance of the song Folds stated, “I eventually asked her what this one is about and she said it was about taking a small charter plane and the only other person on it was James Earl Jones, and it was raining, so I read all this symbolism into it and apparently its exactly what she said.”<sup>21</sup> Since the perspective of the song is obviously from Goodman’s experience, making a direct correlation to the Reinhold Messner story will be tenuous at best. However, the symbolism Folds read into the song is what connects it to the story of the album. The first connection to the album is the key and subject matter. As previously stated, the key of this song and the first track “Narcolepsy” are both in C major and both deal with aspects of sleep. This supports Folds’ statements about the origins of the concept of the album involving sleep and night. What differentiates these two songs is how the music serves their respective themes. As seen in “Narcolepsy” the unending C major was used to paint the incessant inability to sleep. Without the song really moving on from where it is tonally, there is an inordinate feeling of agitation even within the confines of a normally comfortable C major. In “Lullabye,” however, Folds gives us a very common and simple chord progression I-IV-V-IV-I in the verses, which gives an overwhelming sense of being settled. By using one of the most fundamental chord progressions, it seems that Reinhold’s story is able to come to a close with acceptance.

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<sup>21</sup> “16 Lullabye,” YouTube video, 4:50, posted by “pryan,” March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqQokAiM9ac>

Vo.  $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{F}$   $\text{F}\Delta 7(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$   
 good - night good - night sweet ba - by the world has more for you than it seems.

Pf.  $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{F}$   $\text{F}\Delta 7(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$

Kb.  $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{F}$   $\text{F}\Delta 7(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$

Ba.  $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{F}$   $\text{F}\Delta 7(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$

Dr.  $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{F}$   $\text{F}\Delta 7(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$

Vo.  $\text{G}$   $\text{G7sus4}(\text{onF})$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{F}(\text{onG})\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{B}$   $\text{C}$   
 good - night good - night let the moon - light take the lid off your dreams

Pf.  $\text{G}$   $\text{G7sus4}(\text{onF})$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{F}(\text{onG})\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{B}$   $\text{C}$

Kb.  $\text{G}$   $\text{G7sus4}(\text{onF})$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{F}(\text{onG})\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{B}$   $\text{C}$

Ba.  $\text{G}$   $\text{G7sus4}(\text{onF})$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{F}(\text{onG})\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{B}$   $\text{C}$

Dr.  $\text{G}$   $\text{G7sus4}(\text{onF})$   $\text{C}(\text{onE})$   $\text{Dm7}$   $\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{G}$   $\text{F}(\text{onG})\text{C}$   $\text{F}$   $\text{B}$   $\text{C}$

(R) = Rim Shot

### Ex. 12.1 Lullabye

The placement of the choruses at the bookends of the song serves to heighten the final song in the album as well as act as Reinhold's ability to finally move forward. The song begins with a firm yet gentle I-IV-V-I under the text "Goodnight, goodnight sweet baby" and then proceeds with a falling bass line from IV to ii7 and finally resting on a firm V7- I before repeating the opening I-IV-V-I. The text over this section is both tender and hopeful. The text reads, "the world has more for you than it seems, goodnight,

goodnight, let the moonlight take the lid off your dreams.” It is this text that spurs Reinhold into his decision to move forward. In this sense, Reinhold is the “sweet baby” and tells himself that there is indeed more for him. The last line of the chorus, “let the moonlight take the lid off your dreams,” is both an illusion to the comfort and security of sleep, but is also in Reinhold’s case, the release of mental state he was in from the previous song “Narcolepsy” as well as throughout the entire album. As “Narcolepsy” was shown to keep Reinhold in an emotionally stagnant place and unable to rest from it, the comfort of the I-IV-V-I has allowed him to finally rest from his toxic, narcoleptic emotional state opening the lid of his mind to the creation of new dreams. The placement of the choruses at the beginning and end of the song mirror the bookending of the album, albeit in a more positive tone. A concept for the album itself, the theme of the interconnectedness of Reinhold Messner’s consciousness is shown at the beginning and end of the album as well as this song.

The air travel imagery within Anna Goodman’s lyrics indicate that Reinhold is moving on from his past to a brighter future. In verse I of the song the words, “flight,” “night,” and “place” all occur over the V of the chord progression, showing Reinhold’s willingness to take himself away from where he has been. The end of the first verse the word “another” ends on the conclusion of the chord progression back on I. We can take this to mean that wherever Reinhold is going, will become his new home, whether an emotional home within himself, or a literal new location to start his new journey. In verse II, the word “parents” is placed over the I chord and the word “remained” is placed over the V of the beginning of the second verse. If we see the word “parents” as the place from where Reinhold has come representing his past, and where he was when he started his

journey, it can be argued that placing it over a I chord is Reinhold's recognition that he did in fact come from a less desirable past acting as his old home. As the word "remained" is placed over the V, Reinhold has chosen to not only move away from this past but to also let it remain where it is without taking it with him.

The image displays a musical score for a song, featuring five staves: Vocal (Vo.), Piano (Pf.), Keyboard (Kb.), Bass (Ba.), and Drums (Dr.). The score is written in 4/4 time and includes lyrics. The key signature is C major, with chords C, F, and G indicated above the vocal staff. The lyrics are: "we took a small flight in the middle of the night from one... par - ents they re - mained at the shack with lor - raine and my". The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, dynamic markings like (PF) 2x, and drum notation with a 2x marking. The score is divided into two systems, with a double bar line and repeat signs indicating the end of the first system.

### Ex. 12.2 Lullaby

The bridges of the song are the transitioning moments for initiating Reinhold's movement forward. In the first iteration of the bridge, the lyrics show the physical movement to the tarmac and onto the plane through the rain. If we allow the imagery of the tarmac and plane to be the symbols of Reinhold moving on, we can surmise that the rain that is being walked through is fear of moving on. As this occurs textually, musically there is a change from the comfort of the I-IV-V-IV-I to a tonicization of the iv (A minor). This utilizes a iv-III7-vi- V7/V- V-V7-I6-ii7-I in C major. Even as the tonic is slightly pulled from C major to A minor, the music is pulled quickly back to its home of C major. In Reinhold's story, this section suggests that whatever fears and trepidations he has about his ability to move on, it will nevertheless happen. Folds is ending the album on an optimistic note. For many tracks on the album the idea that Reinhold has become emotionally immobilized has been well represented, i.e. "Hospital Song," "Army," "Regrets," "Narcolepsy," and "Your Redneck Past." The declarative nature of the chord

progression of “Lullabye” shows the Reinhold freely able to experience and express his emotions. It ends the album on a healthy and positive C major.



## Chapter 13: Album as Song Cycle

Now that the songs have been discussed as individual pieces, I will now discuss how the album can be viewed as a proper song cycle. In order for a clear and concise argument in the matter, there must be parameters to judge what constitutes a song cycle. According to the Oxford Music Online article written by Susan Youens, there is not one clear defining answer. She writes that a song cycle is, “A group of individually complete songs designed as a unit (aptly described in German as ‘zusammenhangender Complex’), for solo or ensemble voices with or without instrumental accompaniment. Song cycles can be difficult to distinguish from song collections, which were frequently presented in a planned design. They may be as brief as two songs (dyad-cycles) or as long as thirty or more (e.g. Schoeck’s *Das holde Bescheiden* op. 62).”<sup>22</sup> While there are many musical works that can fit into the definition of a song cycle or song collection, I will be using the criteria set by Youens in the same article: “The coherence regarded as a necessary attribute of song cycles may derive from the text (a single poet, a story line, a central theme or topic such as love or nature, a unifying mood, poetic form or genre, as in a sonnet or ballad cycle) or from musical procedures (tonal schemes, recurring motifs, passages or entire songs, formal structures) these features may appear singly or in combination. Because the elements that provide cohesiveness are so many and variable, however, exceptions abound.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Susan Youens, “Song Cycle.” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed February 17, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26208>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

*The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner* adheres to the Youens definition by a combination of unifying factors, but however does deviate in fundamental ways. First, the album has three poets instead of one and more than one composer. While the majority of the text of the album was written by Ben Folds, as already discussed, the text of the song “Magic” was written by Darren Jessee and in a more liberal interpretation of poetry, the text of “Your Most Valuable Possession” was written by Folds’ father, Dean Folds. Both songs create interesting problems in viewing the album as a song cycle. In “Your Most Valuable Possession,” the text is taken from a spoken conversation with a man who had not intended that his words would be used as a song or any artistic endeavor. In the tradition of German Romantic song composers such as Schubert, Schumann, Loewe, Wolf, and so on used poems that were written for an artistic purpose. In Brahms’ *Vier ernste Gesänge* the text is taken from the bible, whose authors likely did not intend for it to be set to music. In 20<sup>th</sup> century song cycles, however prose texts such as diaries and letters have been selected by composers for cycles such as Argento's *The Andrée Expedition* and *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*.

In the case of “Magic” there are two issues that must be addressed. One is that the poet of the song is not Ben Folds, but Darren Jessee. While traditionally, as Youens describes, there is only one poet whose words are being set to music, there are exceptions. The second issue is that someone other than Ben Folds composed the music. This is the one aspect of the album that truly breaks out of the fundamental rules of the song cycle. However, this can be overlooked if there is evidence that the addition of a song by a separate composer is anchored to the cycle in other ways, such as poetry or in the overall story line. The overwhelming connections to the structure of a proper song cycle will be

enough to view the song “Magic” as an unconventional addition to a song cycle rather than placing it outside of the genre entirely.

My argument for the album’s place as a modern song cycle in the German Romantic tradition will have three parts. The first is the comparison of the German Romantic aesthetics as described in the book *Poetry Into Song* by Deborah Stein and Robert Spillman. The second will be a discussion of how the text is used within two themes of the cycle as unifying moods and the themes of sleep and immobilization, which are manifested in the songs, “Narcolepsy” and “Lullaby” for sleep, and “Hospital Song” “Army” and “Regrets” for the theme of immobilization. The third and final argument will concern musical procedures. I will focus on three tonal phenomena in particular: 1.) the use of A flat major as the unifying key for all the songs dealing with immobilization, 2.) the use of C major as the unifying key for sleep (as well as bookending the cycle as a whole), and 3.) the use of a flat seventh in many songs represent the character of Reinhold Messner himself.

In the book *Poetry Into Song*, Stein and Spillman make clear that the idea of German Romanticism can easily be over simplified and is too vast to be quickly explained. They write, “We begin by making the same disclaimer found in every other introduction to German Romanticism, that the jumble of ideas and passions called German Romanticism is too complex to be easily described and that any attempt to catagorize or explain this historical period risks oversimplification and even misinformation.”<sup>24</sup> What does this mean in the case of the Reinhold Messner album? It creates some breathing room to compare the album to the German Romantic aesthetics of

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<sup>24</sup> Deborah Stein and Robert Spillman, “Poetry Into Song” New York NY. Oxford University Press. 1996

the song cycle without having to adhere to an arbitrary checklist of what does and does not constitute a true German Romantic cycle. The first hallmark of the German romantic cycle is evidence of a continuous musical story line of the life of the album's protagonist.

The theme of the journey connects to the Miller in Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin*, the unnamed wanderer in Schubert's *Winterreise*, Mahler's self-portrait in *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, and even perhaps the wanderer in Ralph Vaughan-Williams *Songs of Travel*. Throughout the album Reinhold Messner goes on a journey of personal awakening and acceptance. His journey begins in an emotionally stunted place in the song "Narcolepsy," and ends in the song "Lullaby," where his burdens are finally laid down. These two songs that open and close the song cycle are in C major, and are the only songs on the album in that key. The key of C major is the home key for Reinhold's emotional state. In this interpretation, "Narcolepsy" is Reinhold's inability to express himself which is shown in the song's large sections over a C major chord. The verse of the song only has one chord and does not move to another chord until a new section. This shows that Reinhold is stuck within his own depression and inability to express himself freely. He is stuck in a C major purgatory where the key is awake but unmoving, paralleling his emotional narcoleptic state.

Vo. A C  
(1, 2x) i should warn you i go to

Pf. (Pf-I)  
(Pf-II)

Kb.-I

Kb.-II

Ba. 2x  
(3) (3)

Dr. 2x  
(3) (3)

C  
Vo. sleep (1x) i (2x) you know won't you know don't when

Pf.

Kb.-I

Kb.-II

Ba.

Dr.

### Ex. 13.1 Narcolepsy

At the end of the album, Reinhold has found some emotional peace. It is not surprising that as the beginning of the album is about inability to sleep, the end of the album is about being able to sleep, hence the title “Lullaby.” “Lullaby” is about

Reinhold's finally being able to put his emotional past to sleep. As "Narcolepsy" uses large sections of I-V-I, giving the song a feeling of Reinhold's inability to either accept his emotions as well as the inability to move on from them. "Lullabye," however, has a very free and easy chord progression of I-IV-V-IV-I. This paints Reinhold as finally being able to complete his emotional journey by the freedom of the chord progression in "Lullabye." Every phrase in "Lullabye" has a musical feeling of starting and finishing as well as moving on to the next musical phrase, which was not present in "Narcolepsy." The phrases begin and end on declamatory cadences in C major as well as being played with a swinging nature of the rhythm of the song, this shows the emotional freedom of Reinhold that "Narcolepsy" lacks in the fixed rhythmic and melodic structure of that song.

### Ex. 13.2 Lullabye

The final phrase of the song is a definite ending of not only the song, but also the album. The final line of the album, "Let the moonlight take the lid off your dreams," is

the final sentiment for Reinhold's journey. As Reinhold is able to finally get some emotional sleep, he is able to dream and look forward to a new life. Musically Folds provides a strong I-IV-V-IV-I to declare not only that the story is over, but that Reinhold's struggles are over. Comparing this song to Schubert's final song of *Die schöne Müllerin* "Des Baches Wiegenlied" and Edvard Greig's *Haugtussa*, themes of rest applies to the songs that conclude the cycles. While the Miller's rest in Schubert's cycle is death, and Greig's female protagonist is being comforted and then lulled to sleep by the brook, Reinhold's rest is an acceptance.

The image shows a musical score for a song titled "Lullaby". The score is written for voice (Vo.) and piano (Pf.). The vocal part includes lyrics: "you than it seems good-night good -night let the moon-light take the lid off your dreams". The piano part features a melody with triplets and a bass line. The score is marked with various chords (Dm7, Em7F, G, F, C(onE), Dm7, C, F, G, F(onG), C) and includes a "rit." (ritardando) marking. The score is arranged in a standard musical notation format with staves for voice, piano, and bass.

### Ex. 13.3 Lullabye

Over the course of the album the text makes clear that Reinhold is a misfit in his own life continually trying to escape from his responsibilities. This is expressed clearly in the songs "Don't change your plans," which deals with his desire to escape from his relationships, and "Hospital Song," where we find Reinhold confined to a hospital bed longingly looking out his hospital room window to the world passing by. In the song

“Army” while reflecting on his numerous failures, he fantasizes about joining the army to escape from his past. “Regrets” shows Reinhold realizing the depth of his personal failures as well as understanding how insignificant he has become and in “Your Redneck Past” Reinhold tries to escape his past by finding a new identity for the future. Both the text and the music in each of the songs expresses Reinhold’s desire to escape. Each of these songs, with the exception of “Your Redneck Past,” shares a lowered seventh pulling away from the key of each respective song. We can view this notational representation as both Reinhold’s escapism and also Reinhold’s inability to fit into the world he inhabits.

In “Don’t change your plans” the 7<sup>th</sup> is placed in the bass line of the opening chord progression and progression of the verses.

The musical score for "Don't Change Your Plans" is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for the vocal line (Vo.), which begins with a melodic phrase in A major, followed by a rest, then an "Intro." marked "in tempo". The chord progression for the intro is: A, F#m7(onA), G6(onA), E(4)(onA), A, F#m7(onA), G6(onA), and E(4)(onA). The subsequent staves are for keyboard (Kb.-I, Kb.-II, Kb.-III), piano (Pf.), strings (Strings), bass (Ba.), and drums (Dr.). The piano part features a bass line that emphasizes the lowered seventh (G natural) in the chords. The strings part provides harmonic support with sustained notes. The bass part features a prominent bass line with the lowered seventh (G natural) in the chords. The drums part includes a cymbal and cup (Cym.Cup) pattern. The score is written in 4/4 time and the key signature is one sharp (F#).

### Ex. 13.4 Don't Change Your Plans

This is also the only case in which the lowered 7<sup>th</sup> is a G natural instead of a G flat. In this song, the G natural is the only accidental note of the chord progression and functions



as a pull towards a new key, most likely D minor, before being pulled to a light V in the original key of A major. As the song expresses, Reinhold is trying to explain how he must leave the relationship to find what he really wants. This lowered 7<sup>th</sup> acts as Reinhold trying to pull himself away and not being able to as the tonality never really changes until the music under the text, “Don’t change your plans,” which is a very clear D minor tonicization that Reinhold had been pulling towards in the opening progression.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Don't Change Your Plans". The score includes parts for Voice (Vo.), Keyboard I (Kb.-I), Piano (Pf.), Keyboard II (Kb.-II), Keyboard III (Kb.-III), Bass (Ba.), and Drums (Dr.). The key signature is A major (three sharps). The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal melody with lyrics "i don't change your" and the piano accompaniment. The second system shows the vocal melody with lyrics "move" and the piano accompaniment. Above the vocal staff, there are harmonic annotations: "1. G", "2. G", "A (on C#)", "Dm", and "G (on B)". The piano part features a complex harmonic structure with many accidentals and ties. The bass part includes a sequence of notes with fingerings: (10), (3), (4), (5), (5), (2). The drum part shows a simple rhythmic pattern with a snare drum (S) and a bass drum (B).

### Ex. 13.5 Don't Change Your Plans

In “Hospital Song” the notational Reinhold is a G flat again found in the opening progression that pulls towards a new key without ever being able to accomplish the

modulation.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Hospital Song'. The score is written for a vocal part (Vo.) and a piano accompaniment (Pf-I, Pf-II, Kb-I, Kb-II, Ba., Dr.). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature is 8/8. The score begins with an 'Intro.' section. The vocal part has the lyrics 'lying a-wake in my'. The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand, with a '1x tacet' section in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as chords (A<sup>b</sup>7, Fm7(onA<sup>b</sup>), A<sup>b</sup>7, Fm7(onA<sup>b</sup>), A<sup>b</sup>7), dynamics (p, f), and articulation marks (accents, slurs). The score is divided into measures by bar lines, and there are repeat signs and first/second endings indicated.

### Ex. 13.6 Hospital Song

Beginning the song on a strong 7<sup>th</sup> chord with no modulation gives the song the correct affect of Reinhold's desire to leave the hospital but unable, because of being confined to the hospital bed. This is another example in both music and text that illustrates Reinhold's constant pulling away from the situations he finds himself in. As the chord progression is played there is a strong sense of impatience in the music. As the 7<sup>th</sup> is trying to pull the tonality to an authentic cadence, the music is only pulled to an F natural that keeps the tonality of the progression ambiguous.

"Army" details the list of Reinhold's disappointments and his plan to put them behind him by joining the army. In this song, Reinhold's Gb is found in the minor mode

of the V chord of the song.

The musical score for "Army" is written in G-flat major (three flats) and 4/4 time. The key signature is G-flat major, with a G-flat symbol placed over the key signature to indicate a lowered third. The score includes a vocal line with lyrics, piano accompaniment, brass, baritone, and drums. The lyrics are: "well i thought a - bout the ar - my dad said, son - you're fuck - ing high and i thought, three sad se - mes - ters it was on - ly fif - teen grand spent in bed". The score includes a bridge section with a modulation to D-flat major. The lyrics are: "Oh, I think I'll write a screenplay/ Oh, I think I'll take it to L.A./ Oh, I think I'll get it done yesterday." The previously misplaced lowered third has become the root of a submediant chord is that the text shows Reinhold lost in day dreams about how he will turn his life around by writing a screenplay, but "I think I'll get it done yesterday" shows that through waiting, it is already

### Ex. 13.7 Army

The G flat placed in the V chord symbolizes the disruption in the natural order of the music as well as in his own life. As the song describes Reinhold's aimlessness through his life, the text shows that he has not fit into his own life and is musically represented by the V chord having a lowered third (Gb) throughout the song. At the bridge of the song the G flat becomes a tonal center with a modulation to D flat major, where the G flat becomes the IV. The text at this point in the song is, "Oh, I think I'll write a screenplay/ Oh, I think I'll take it to L.A./ Oh, I think I'll get it done yesterday." The previously misplaced lowered third has become the root of a submediant chord is that the text shows Reinhold lost in day dreams about how he will turn his life around by writing a screenplay, but "I think I'll get it done yesterday" shows that through waiting, it is already

2. A<sup>b</sup>Δ7

Vo. E<sup>b</sup>G<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

oh i think i'll write a screen - play

Kb.-I *sva*

Pf

Kb.-II

Ba.

Dr.

8

Vo. *G<sup>b</sup>* *D<sup>b</sup>* *A<sup>b</sup>* *G<sup>b</sup>*  
oh i think i'll take it to L A oh

Kb.-I

Pf

Kb.-II

Ba.

Dr.

Vo. D<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> C7

i think i'll get it done yes - ter-day yeah oh shit

Kb.-I

Pf

8va bassa

Kb.-II

Ba.

Dr.

### Ex. 13.8 Army

In “Your Redneck Past” is interesting in that the entire song is in the key of Reinhold’s notational identity, G flat disguised as F# major. This shows Reinhold’s attempt to hide and disguise his identity. The fluid tonality of the song is his attempt to

change his identity through new keys.

The musical score is for a song titled "Your Redneck Past" by Reinhold. It features a vocal line (Vo.) and instrumental parts for Keyboard I (Kb.-I), Piano (Pf), Keyboard II (Kb.-II), Bass (Ba.), Percussion (Perc.), and Drums (Dr.). The score is in 4/4 time and consists of an Intro, a main section, and a first ending (1.). The key signature changes from B major (two sharps) to G# major (three sharps) and then to C# major (four sharps). The vocal line includes the lyrics "oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh". The instrumental parts include a piano introduction (Pf) with a 2x repeat, a keyboard II part (Kb.-II) with a 2x repeat, a bass part (Ba.) with a 2x repeat, and a drum part (Dr.) with a 2x repeat. The percussion part (Perc.) has a 1x tacet instruction. The score is written for a band and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and repeat signs.

### Ex. 13.9 Your Redneck Past

The verses of the song use alternating chords of an E flat major chord and D flat major chord suggesting perhaps the song is going towards A flat major (Reinhold's immobilization key). However, there is no cadence on an A flat major chord and the verse is quickly back to the F sharp major section. This suggests that Reinhold can try to hide his past, but his redneck nature will always return.





immersed in his own rumination of his disappointment.

Tempo-I

Vo. i thought a - bout sit - ting on the floor in sec - ond grade i could - n't keep the pace

Cho.

Pf.

Kb.

Ba. with(Cello):unison

Dr. (Bongo) 2x

BASS LINE

### Ex. 13.11 Your Redneck Past

At this point in the album, Reinhold is unable to pull away from his situation because there is nowhere for him to go, because the text shows he has alienated all other relationships. Since Reinhold has cut all previous ties, the G flat that represents Reinhold is no longer in a 7<sup>th</sup> position in the chord, but has now become the third. This paints the idea that Reinhold is fully immersed in his own misery, and that as much as he has tried to escape from his pain, that pain has now placed itself in the center of his identity.



## Chapter 14: Conclusion

In the conclusion of this study I will address the similarities between the album and the song cycle structures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic composers. The album is structured as an internal-plot cycle. Ruth O. Bingham explains, “Internal-plot cycles—that is, cycles in which the poetry relates a narrative—began to appear shortly after the Liederspiel, developing concurrently with external-plot cycles.”<sup>25</sup> She explains external-plot cycles as, “Liederspiel’s awkward relationship between published songs and complete work pertained to a large number of early nineteenth-century song works that have been virtually ignored: sets of songs excerpted from a narrative context, i.e. external-plot cycles... These cycles helped reveal the dramatic possibilities in juxtaposed poems, but they also reflected the turbulent times and remain difficult to analyze. Their structures vary widely, from quasi-dramatic settings of every poem in the novel to a few lyrical moments excerpted haphazardly. Their text-music relationship also run the gamut: some are independent works whose coherence enhanced or created by the composer; others adhere closely to the original relying on its coherence to reconcile disjunctions.”<sup>26</sup>

We can surmise that comparison to 21<sup>st</sup>-century rock music and the 19<sup>th</sup> century lieder conventions can be seen as external-plot cycles being akin to traditional rock albums where as the internal-plot cycles can be aligned with the concept album. A good comparison would be The Beatles’ *White Album* as having similarities with the external-plot cycle and *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* having similarities to the internal-

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<sup>25</sup> Ruth O. Bingham. “The Nineteenth Century Song Cycle” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pg. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pg. 108-109.

plot cycle. Some other famous concept albums are The Who's *Tommy*, and perhaps most famously Pink Floyd's four concept albums *The Dark Side of the Moon*, *Wish You Were Here*, *Animals*, and *The Wall*. If we use a working definition of the concept album as an album as analogous to the song cycle, where the musical and textual material relay the drama of a unified theme or storyline, we can see how the Reinhold Messner album can be argued as a modern song cycle. *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner* certainly fits the bill of being a concept album in both musical and textual respects.

We must draw further conclusions as to how the album is linked to the German Romantic song cycle first by establishing concrete examples in the tradition of the internal-plot cycle. Bingham goes on to state, "Perhaps most importantly, Berlin society revolved around intellectual and cultural salons, which not only brought together craftspeople from different arts, but also fostered the exchange of ideas, collaboration, and experimentation."<sup>27</sup> This is an important point of comparison, as Folds' collaborated with two lyricists and two other instrumentalists in creating the cycle as well as involvement of his recording department, this can be compared to 19<sup>th</sup> century composers like Schumann, who famously reduced the number of songs in *Dichterliebe* from 20 to 16 when it was published.

The Reinhold Messner album was released in the late 1990s, which was a decade of interesting change in popular music.<sup>28</sup> The 1990s was the beginning of the Internet age, where free exchange of ideas was rapidly becoming universally accessible (for better or worse). One negative impact on the popular music scene and the internet was the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that the points made about the cultural context of the 1990s music scene will only serve as a reference to the argument and not a pillar of the argument.

Napster scandal of the late 90s. Napster operated between June 1999 and July 2001 which runs concurrently with the album release. Another interesting change in the popular music scene of the 90s was the sudden popularity of “grunge” music in the early 90s, most notably the band Nirvana. The popular music shift from corporately sponsored and funded bands to smaller independent bands becoming mainstream was if not unheard of, a dramatic shift. It is in this alternative/independent music movement that Ben Folds Five belonged. Their professional journey was made not through the promotion of corporate backing, but of nights at indie rock clubs. Interestingly, the Beatles had a similar training ground during their Hamburg days. In the liner notes of the special edition of *Whatever and Ever Amen*, Ben Folds wrote about the indie scene at that time and their place within it, this being the mid 1990s, a few years before Reinhold Messner. “ I think Robert, Darren, and I were chronic contrarians. We fully intended to do everything backwards, and we had put our poverty where are mouths were and had moved my baby grand all by ourselves for three years into every punk rock club in America that didn’t want us there. Singing Broadway harmonies and playing pretty chords to upset all of the indie kids, trashing our craft with runaway tempos and distorted bass to upset the parents of the indie kids, alienating everyone but the million or so people who would buy our record.”<sup>29</sup> While the lied composers most likely felt acceptance to some degree in their respective salons, Ben Folds Five had a modern salon to play in as well. It is commonly understood that the composer of 19<sup>th</sup> century German Lieder first played their works not in the concert halls, but in small salons for peers and admirers of the genre. This is not unlike what the alternative music scene was for Ben

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<sup>29</sup> Ben Folds, “Whatever and Ever Amen” Epic Records 1997.

Folds Five. As an alternative band without corporate support or radio airplay, their music was brought to their fans through the underground rock clubs of the 1990s. There is an interesting parallel between the 19<sup>th</sup> century salon and the rock club of the 1990s as a place where composers could play their works for small groups and receive positive or negative reviews from a more intimate and invested public before any far-reaching exposure was gained.

Bingham says about the construction and performance of the internal-plot cycles, “One of the hurdles to creating narrative song cycles was how to relate a narrative in music, which vastly stretches performance time, without losing the intimacy and scale associated with *Lieder*.”<sup>30</sup> This applies to what the concept album also struggles with. While performance time of a concept album versus a conventional album is roughly the same, there is another type of fatigue that can come to the listener. In modern popular music, the listener's attention span has been shown to be an ever-receding resource. With traditional albums listeners can pick and choose which songs they wish to hear and which they would prefer to skip. A concept album, however, does not offer that luxury. In the Reinhold Messner album, there are one or two tracks that can be excerpted and retain their textual and musical independence. Songs like “Your most valuable possession,” “Regrets,” and “Hospital song” only work within the context of the album. “Army” certainly has the advantage of its own “catchy-iness” as musical independence, but textually it is bound to the album as the story of the song begins and ends in the middle of Reinhold’s journey. “Narcolepsy,” “Don’t Change your plans,” “Mess,” “Magic,” “Your

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<sup>30</sup> Ruth O. Bingham. “The Nineteenth Century Song Cycle” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.pg. 111.

redneck past,” and “Lullaby” all have an opaqueness that requires the album as a whole to completely understand. The only track on album that might stand alone would be “Jane.” It is the most independent of the story line in that Reinhold is not the protagonist of the poetry; he is speaking to Jane about her point of view.

If we look at Müller’s *Die schöne Müllerin* as an example of musical setting, in the text we can see other similarities. Speaking of the poet, Bingham states, “In the process, he virtually recreated the work: he narrowed the tale’s focus to the miller’s inner turmoil and death; he highlighted the tension between miller and hunter; he rearranged, revised, and juxtaposed the poetry into a clear dramatic structure; and he employed numerous musical techniques to connect disparate lyrical moments.”<sup>31</sup> Folds, as poet, rearranged the lyrical content of the album as well, as has been seen in many quotes from the *Truth and Rumors* supplementary CD accompanying the album. One excerpt from that CD bears repeating in this argument. Folds responds to a question about the theme of the album stating, “We all kind of felt like it was going to be kind of concept record-ish...but then what’s your concept? And there was a lot of, kind of, themes that were floating around. There was this kind of ‘dream’ kind of ‘sleeping’ theme for a while, in fact there were three or four songs cut off the record that were all related to things that happen at night and those either didn’t get recorded or recorded and cut off and kept on going around until it started to begin to sound like a life story after a while. And that’s why we came up with the idea of autobiography, I mean biography of Reinhold.”<sup>32</sup> As we have seen throughout this entire study of the Reinhold Messner album and confirmed by

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<sup>31</sup> Ruth O. Bingham. “The Nineteenth Century Song Cycle” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.pg.113.

<sup>32</sup> Truth and Rumors, track 19, Epic records 1999.

Folds is that the story of the album shifted from the “sleeping” theme, where both “Narcolepsy” and “Lullaby” survived to be adapted to Reinhold’s story to the biography of Reinhold Messner. This shares striking similarities to the journey Müller’s *Die schöne Müllerin* went through in terms of the poetry.

The music journey of Reinhold Messer also shares with Schubert’s work on Müller’s *Die schöne Müllerin*. Schubert set the cycle in 1824 thus, as Bingham states, “creating the most popular and accessible song cycle ever.”<sup>33</sup> She also states that, “Schubert omitted Müller’s iconic framework, which ever since has been included or omitted in performances according to the prevailing fashions for either irony or earnestness, as well as three internal poems, which remain virtually unknown, leaving a total of twenty songs. Without those three poems, the structure of the poetic cycle became less clear, but Schubert compensated with a stronger musical coherence. What he created was a musical work, not the setting for a poetic work.”<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that the songbook for the album includes additional songs that were not on the album but came from the same time as the album, much like Schubert’s own omission of the poet’s other poems. It is also common for bands, and especially Ben Folds and Ben Folds Five to put out EPs that feature songs cut from the album that are often played in live concerts.

Some of the most interesting comparisons, however, come from Schumann. Bingham notes that, “Schumann used nearly identical techniques to foster coherence in both: thematic recall, tonal structuring, weak or incomplete closure between songs,

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<sup>33</sup> Ruth O. Bingham. “The Nineteenth Century Song Cycle” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.pg.113.

<sup>34</sup> Ruth O. Bingham. “The Nineteenth Century Song Cycle” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.pg.113-114.

melodies derived from basic motives, delayed resolutions, and so on. Musical connections such as those compensated for and thus allowed Schumann's rapid shifts in mood without losing coherence; they also may explain why his piano accompaniments carry greater weight than those of other lied composers."<sup>35</sup> If we take some of these key techniques Schumann employed we can connect them to a technique used in the Messner album. Schumann's use of tonal structuring is seen in the aforementioned A flat major suite of "Hospital Song," "Army," and "Regrets" grounding the album in musical attribution of Reinhold's emotional state. "Narcolepsy" and "Lullaby" are also grounded in a common key that reflects the diametrically opposed emotional places Reinhold finds himself at the beginning and ending of the album. Weak or incomplete closure between songs can be found between the A flat major "Hospital Song" finishing on an incomplete F minor and "Army" quickly starting in our A flat major again; and also in the ending of "Army" where we do not get the conclusion of the A flat major suite until "Regrets," which finishes the suite, begins where "Army" ends. Also Schumann's famous innovation of long preludes and postludes makes an appearance in the opening of the album in which "Narcolepsy" has an extended prelude.

What is perhaps most noteworthy of *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner* is that its place as a song cycle continues in the long tradition of song cycle composers before Ben Folds Five as well as distancing from other concept albums. While in traditional popular music an album like this is referred to as a concept album. The insistence on musical continuity separates it from other concept albums where the textual

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<sup>35</sup> Ruth O. Bingham. "The Nineteenth Century Song Cycle" In *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.pg.118-119.

unity is paramount. *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner* belongs in the song cycle tradition because of this very insistence of textual and musical unity. Ruth O. Bingham concludes her article “The Early Nineteenth Century Song Cycle,” with this, “After Schumann, the song cycle became a recognized genre that followed Romanticism’s flow, spreading to other countries, adopting a loftier, more serious approach, and expanding into orchestral song cycles near the end of the century. Musically constructed cycles varied widely in style and structure, but their composers remained focused on that tantalizingly unattainable ideal of a perfect melding between words, music, and meaning.”<sup>36</sup> With the completion of *The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner*, we can add to Schumann’s legacy of the song cycle, not just stylistic, national, and orchestral contributions, but also a legacy that goes beyond the genre of classical music and into the world of rock music, where the same artistic aim of creating a truly coherent and meaningful musical and poetic story continues.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 119.



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