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### From Michigan With Love

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# FROM MICHIGAN WITH LOVE

BY EMMA KRUG

DePauw University Honor Scholar Program, Class of 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

*May 18, 2018*

emmakrug: “will you congratulate my friend on graduating this weekend? i’ll screenshot and put it on my story!!”

*May 20, 2018*

emmakrug: “odds you say hey”

quinnxcii: “What’s up emma  I appreciate the love! Tell ur friend I say congratulations!”

So, you might say that Quinn XCII and I are best friends. Just notice his reply to me over direct message on Instagram 2 years ago. Now, this wasn’t my first attempt at trying to get his attention. If you had my phone, you would be able to scroll up and see that I had sent him half a dozen messages prior to this one but received no reply. After showing my friend Reilly and listening to her make fun of me and tell me I would never get an answer from our mutual favorite artist, I tried to prove her wrong by messaging him again on May 18th. While I probably should have taken the hint after two days with no answer, I decided to annoy him one last time. And I’m glad I did, because not only did I prove Reilly wrong, but I also felt more connected to my favorite singer.

Now, if you’re reading this and have absolutely no idea who Quinn XCII is, you’re probably wondering why I tried so hard to talk to him over social media. So let me rewind a little. I discovered Quinn’s music in 2017, a moment I will talk more about later. However, he’s been producing music since 2011. Quinn XCII, also known as Mikael Temrowski offstage, is a 27-year-old singer and rapper from Detroit, Michigan. He combines pop, rap, hip-hop, EDM (electronic dance music), and reggae into his sound. In a “Sidewalk Talk” interview with Lauren

Engel, Quinn recounts listening to Motown and soul music throughout his childhood in his parents' home. He went to Michigan State University, and based upon the music he created during his four years there, he was able to launch his music career soon after graduation in 2014. He released his first EP *Change of Scenery* in 2015. Since then, he has gone on to release *Bloom* in 2016, *The Story of Us* in 2017, and finally, *From Michigan With Love* in 2019. Sprinkled throughout his career, he has also released a multitude of singles and has collaborated with other artists, including Ayokay, MAX, Louis the Child, Gryffin, and Chelsea Cutler.

Quinn has a dynamic musical voice, and in his songs he often alternates between rapping and singing. When he raps, he puts an emphasis on enunciation and clarity, so it feels more personal, as if he's talking to you in person. However, he does not like to consider himself as just a rapper. Quinn even says himself in an interview with Capitol Sound DC, "I will say I'm a singer for sure but with rap inflections mixed in." A few weeks ago on his social media, Quinn even pointed out that when he googled his own name, "Rapper" appeared underneath his name in the bio section. Not wanting to be boxed into this singular label, he drew enough attention to it that it now more broadly reads "Singer" on Google. In an interview with Zach Sang in February, Quinn wore a sweatshirt that simply stated, "I'm not a rapper." Quinn does not wish to be labeled as a rapper and instead wants the freedom of being a multifaceted singer. He expresses to Zach that rapping was something he did more frequently at the beginning of his career, but his sound has since evolved and goes past that now. A slight degree of rasp appears in Quinn's voice that makes him distinguishable from other artists. I would argue that his Michigan accent also comes through when he sings, including a nasally aspect to his voice and a noticeable pronunciation of certain letters. For instance, in his song "Panama," Quinn emphasizes the long "e" sound, especially in words like "memories," "gently," and "plenty."

You might be thinking: who cares? Who cares about this young singer with a Michigan accent? Why choose such a recent album to unpack and evaluate? Or, why am I, a 21-year-old college student with an English and Psychology background, qualified to write this? Some of the motivation I have comes from the way that I have noticed pop music is often perceived and practically considered a genre for children. Carl Wilson is a Canadian music critic who wrote for the *Bloomsbury 33 and 1/3* series and produced *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste*. He did a close analysis of Celine Dion's work, and as stated in an *NPR* article, his book "has become a cornerstone text in the school of criticism known as 'poptimism,' because it treats seemingly disposable pop music as worthy of serious thought." The *NPR* article called "Why We Fight About Pop Music" came out in 2014, seven years after Wilson's book was released, and Ann Powers engages in further conversation with Wilson about pop music's bad reputation and their efforts to reverse it. As Wilson did with his *33 and 1/3* book, I hope to prove to my readers that by labeling something as pop, it doesn't mean that it is automatically devoid of any real value or artistic worth. Wilson tells Powers in their back-and-forth how people hear the word "poptimism" and "assume it means unthinking approval of all things pop, rather than just being open-minded and critically engaged." I would like to be clear that I'm not arguing that pop is superior and trumps every other genre. Rather, I hope I can convince readers to forsake their prejudices and not immediately roll their eyes in disdain at pop music but instead be willing to have an open-mind.

One of the biggest issues Wilson and Powers discuss together is how pop music is stigmatized for being too mainstream. Due to new technologies and streaming services in the music industry, older generations worry that the process of making music has lost value. Rather than spending hours in a recording studio mixing tracks, more people are able to create music at

home on a computer and use various social media platforms to immediately share their work with the world. Musical achievement is less meaningful when more people have the same tools. Powers comments about working in the industry and admits, “Writers like us, who've devoted years to becoming culturally knowledgeable, are losing jobs to unpaid bloggers, and peer-to-peer recommendation on streaming services eliminates the need for radio disc jockeys and record clerks.” The music industry is changing and when more people have access to the same information right at their fingertips, fewer experts are needed in the field. Rather, people can become their own experts, teach themselves the information, and go on to share their opinions freely. But we can't just blame pop music for this. This is the way society works and evolves. Just like newspapers have started to become obsolete due to digital versions and e-books, the music industry has started to become more accessible to all types of people. It's the advancements in technology and social media services, not the mere existence of pop music, that has led us to a point of music being more mainstream and changing in the way it is produced. Considering the naysayers, Wilson poses her own question: “Does the dexterity involved in surfing the huge waves of available sounds make going deep obsolete?” She follows up with her own optimistic answer and sees new technology as a sign of progress and potential:

This is a moment of great empowerment for music lovers. So much is available.

Technology constantly offers new tools to enable and organize musical appreciation. And everyone can be a critic, after all, posting playlists and YouTube responses, blogging and Tumbling, telling the world that this is my jam.

New technology does not mean that the songs themselves will lack substance; rather, more music lovers can join the conversation, and music appreciation can be experienced more widely. Some critics see the production of music, especially with pop, as mechanical and believe that less hard

work goes into the making of a good song. People worry today that pop music relies too heavily on auto-tune or heavy production, when really this is another aspect of instrumentation. As electronic music has gained popularity recently, DJs produce more songs and remixes with numerous synths and electronic sounds. It requires a certain expertise to utilize this technology, and I think this kind of production can be paralleled in other fields. A young artist can create a piece by hand, either drawing or painting, and they can also produce work through graphic design and digital media platforms. The reliance on technology does not take away from the value of the work, it is just a different means to an end. I would argue that hard work hasn't been lost over time, but the work that is being done now with music is more experimental and innovative. It's a different kind of hard work.

Quinn XCII is therefore a perfect artist to showcase due to his intimate music production process and the music label he is affiliated with. His discovery and transition into the music industry was self-driven yet rather gradual. While Quinn is a solo artist, he grew up in Grosse Pointe with his long-time friend Alex O'Neill, who is known as the music producer and DJ, Ayokay. They have been featured in joint interviews and comment on how they grew up six blocks away from each other, went to high school together, and eventually attended rival colleges, with Ayokay being at University of Michigan. They had played around with music mixing together during high school, but picked it back up after their first year of college and worked together to find their respective sounds. They mention their process working together, and Quinn knows that his strength lies in writing melodies and lyrics, while Ayokay focuses on production and orchestration. They tend to downplay their partnership. On the contrary, they don't really acknowledge themselves as a team at all. They have released records together and know they can be successful, but still see themselves as separate artists who often collaborate



with each other. Quinn and Ayokay talk about how they fight like brothers but still respect each other's independent work and only agree to partner on a record when the song fits both of them.

Quinn shows his gratitude for their relationship by saying,

It's good to have somebody behind your corner because in the industry that doesn't really happen, most of the time that does not happen, so it's cool to come up with somebody that you can trust and has your back but still is like a musical influence and you can work with.

Prior to being discovered, Quinn and Ayokay's passion for music drove them together. Quinn would typically rap over tracks they found on YouTube. They taught themselves how to produce and create entire songs, and like entrepreneurs, they uploaded their work onto open access sites like SoundCloud and Spotify before gradually getting attention from music labels. Their status began to change when their song "Kings of Summer" became baseball player Ian Desmond's walk-up song, which quickly led to them being signed by Columbia Records in 2016.

Both artists appear on the Visionary Music Group label which was founded by 29-year-old Chris Zarou. Zarou himself is an entrepreneur who, at first, pursued soccer in college rather than music, and yet, he started his own label by taking on rapper Logic as a client in 2010. In order to ensure success, he worked hard to publicize Logic over social media platforms and also organized a 27-date Visionary Music Group Tour in order to allow Logic to connect with his fans. Zarou and Logic wanted to gain the trust and respect of the fans on tour, so when Def Jam wanted to become a distributor of Logic's music, Logic's team kept this big corporate name hidden for a while. They didn't want "any misgivings from fans that the rapper had compromised his creativity." Zarou worked to maintain the connection between Logic and his fans rather than let it be blurred by record deals and endorsements. As Logic's popularity grew and Zarou's work

paid off, he later signed Jon Bellion, Chelsea Cutler, Jeremy Zucker, Ayokay, Quinn, and 6IX to Visionary. This collectively rather young music label has now gotten the attention of *Forbes* magazine and received backing from Sony Music. Quinn, Ayokay, and Zarou all used the resources in front of them to their advantage. Whether it was online music sites or social media platforms, they found a way to make themselves relevant in the music industry through their own merit and determination.

While pop music may seem more mainstream, we cannot deny the fact that current artists are dedicated to their craft, have the attitudes of entrepreneurs, and use the technology to stay relevant as times progress. Worries about technology and production are not the only things that feed into the stigma around pop music, however. Wilson and Powers also comment on the generational difference in music that can be polarizing and gives pop music a bad reputation. Even outside of music, older generations will often turn their nose up at younger generations, confused by their behavior, new trends, or even the new slang words they use. Some adults might be jealous and strive to feel hip or in-the-know, while others simply turn the other way and see the younger generations as immature and clueless. The same attitudes arise with pop music as it is often associated with younger audiences. In his essay titled "Popular Culture," John Fiske points out,

In a patriarchy women are lower in the hierarchy than men, so the cultural forms that appeal to them are judged to be aesthetically inferior to those that appeal to men...the pop music that appeals to teenage or pre-teen girls, who are subordinated by both age and gender, is commonly considered the lowest musical form.

Pop music is tied to a specific audience, gender, and identity, and automatically it gets stigmatized and considered less than. Looking at age alone, tension constantly exists between the

old and the young, and the older generations feel they are witnessing a decline in music taste.

Wilson calls out the older group for being too headstrong:

We still have this spectacle of people (mostly straight white men of a certain age) angry that we treat music made with drum machines, or for dance floors, or with rapping (unless it's "political"), or by Beyoncé with the same respect and depth of thought we'd devote to anthems sung by bands of guys with guitars. It seems like this month we're gonna ponder like it's 1999.

Wilson concedes that he too once had the same attitude, but it was short-sighted. People like this are so protective of their own music taste that they are unwilling to accept something new or outside of their comfort zone. After doing his own research and changing his opinion of pop music, Wilson encourages others to do the same and be more welcoming. He brings up the fact that “Pro-pop forces dominate,” an idea that comes from the *Times Magazine* writer Saul Austerlitz. Wilson points to places where he has seen pop music invade the world of music-criticism, and *NPR*, *New York Times*, *Vulture*, *Slate*, *Pitchfork*, *The New Yorker*, and more all make room for the discussion of this particular genre. More people are willing to speak about it as a serious contender. Wilson also makes the point that there might be a misconception that younger generations have no idea what good music sounds like because they are only exposed to the new, poppy trash being made today rather than older rock albums. In reality, because of the current technology and various streaming services, younger generations have access to all sorts of music. Wilson hypothesizes:

Not to say there aren't still hip-hop heads, rockers, folkies, metalheads, noise freaks, ravers and indie introverts alongside the BeyHive, Beliebers and Bangerz, each with their

own niche sites and networks. But I bet most of them are more aware of other styles and genres than their likes would've been a decade ago.

Music-sharing websites allow listeners today to have so much more exposure to music from a range of genres, artists, and time periods. The sharing of music has gotten faster and more cost-efficient than in years past. Younger generations are not deprived of hearing the music that preceded them; on the contrary, they can listen to it instantaneously and practically on any device. Wilson is sympathetic to the polarization and otherness that happens within music and how it can create feelings of defensiveness or insecurity for both parties: “It undercuts any fantasy that your own lifestyle, traits and priorities might be universal — it tells you that you're specifically bounded by your own context, while other realms may be indifferent to your existence.” We want our music taste and opinions to feel validated and important, and when someone disagrees with us, we might react by rejecting their opinions. Thinking of artists specifically and listeners’ perception of them, Wilson suggests:

It often takes us the longest to stop punishing the merely good artists for not being geniuses, but eventually we do — Hall & Oates just got into the Rock Hall of Fame, for instance, but a decade ago people were still snickering at their 1980s blue-eyed soul-pop, no doubt in shame over having liked it for a while. I wonder if we can learn to skip that middle step?

Even if Quinn never receives the title of a “musical genius,” I hope people can stop snickering or thinking that the association with pop music automatically limits an artist from being taken seriously. Rather than making assumptions or immediately judging something because it’s new, different, or labeled as pop, I wish more people would give things a chance. If they end up still

not loving the music, that's fine, but at least we can all try to leave our biases behind and accept the fact that the music we love might not be someone else's favorite and vice versa.

In an essay by David Riesman called "Listening to Popular Music," he criticizes the popular music audience and how

The functions of music for the group are *social* - the music gives them something to talk or kid about with friends; an opportunity for competitiveness in judging which tunes will become hits, coupled with a lack of concern about how hits are actually made; an opportunity for identification with star singers or band leaders as "personalities," with little interest in or understanding of the technologies of performance or of the radio medium itself.

Riesman paints a picture where music is merely a conversation starter, and younger audiences do not actually care about the production or the value that a song holds. The *NPR* article also touches on the assumption that pop music is merely for social purposes and less about actual music appreciation. In some sense, I agree. There are moments we've all experienced where we worry someone won't appreciate our individual taste in music, and we get defensive. But, I think Riesman is making a sweeping generalization about all pop music listeners. Take me, for example, I'm dedicating a year-long project to seeing how Quinn's album was made, and Riesman thinks none of the behind-the-scenes of the album concerns me? Not all music listeners will pay close attention to the makeup and production of a song. That's true. But, I think that today's younger generations are more invested in and intrigued by the music-making process than one might think.

There also isn't anything wrong with music being a social tool. What's so bad about it being something to connect with friends over? Is Riesman sitting around listening to music in

solitary confinement, never discussing any of his opinions or taste in music with anyone? Music has always been a form of entertainment and centers on the coming together of a performer and his or her audience. The evolution of music occurs as musicians are influenced by each other, collaborate, or invent new sounds based on previous ones they've heard. The audience also has an influence on how music evolves, and listeners' opinions or level of acceptance of songs affects what artists produce and share. I think there's value in the social component of music--sharing ideas and considering other perspectives--as a way for it to grow and inspire each other.

It should not be looked down upon to use music as a way to relate to one another and engage in thoughtful conversation. Therefore, Riesman also shouldn't be criticizing the way fans wish to connect or identify with the artists they listen to. By relating or identifying with the musician, I believe there's increased likelihood that the listener will want to know more about the artist's inspirations, influences, and music-making process. If the listener can break the wall and see the artist as less of a "personality" and more as an individual, music appreciation can go a longer way. Quinn especially cares a lot about how he can use his various social media platforms to reach out to fans and give them insight into his world. In the interview with Capital Sound he tells how "I don't feel that I am any different from my fans, I kind of turned a hobby into a career and that was the goal in all of this." If you didn't know he was a singer or performer, you might look at his sarcastic Twitter feed or Instagram stories of his dog Nelson and think he's just an everyday 27-year-old guy from Detroit, Michigan. With this approachable social media presence, he does a good job of connecting with his fan base, as he did with me, and still remaining humble. While he does sometimes make announcements about upcoming performances or merchandise to buy online, his Instagram for the most part does not seem contrived or as if someone else is posting on his behalf. When he got married this past May, he

posted photos of himself and his new wife at the ceremony and throughout the honeymoon. Sometimes he'll simply re-post tweets or memes that he thinks are funny for his followers to comment on.

With this specific album *From Michigan With Love*, he drove a tour bus to various cities and surprised fans with a sneak preview listening party. He would sit in his fans' living rooms or dorm rooms, listen to the new album with them, and record their reaction on his Instagram. He valued these moments so much that he turned these "home videos" into a music video for one of the songs off the album "Life Must Go On." And while it all may seem like a promotional ruse, Quinn even admits, "I did this in the hopes of helping people, but at the end of the day I thought I got more out of it than anyone else...it validates why I struggled for a year and a half making this album...it's refreshing, you know?" The fan encounters helped him promote the new song and album, but they also were a way for him to feel validated and proud of the body of work he created. Yes, this experience and the video helped with publicity. But we should consider a point that Powers makes and how she encourages people to "Understand that selling records is the point." Current artists and past artists are all concerned with making music people will listen to and buy. At the end of the day, the music industry revolves around people making a profit. Being a musician is Quinn's full-time job, and he makes a living off of producing new songs and albums. Every musician lives by the same dream: to support themselves while doing something they are passionate about. Rather than doing everything over social media, Quinn goes the extra mile of traveling to multiple fans' houses and taking the time to sit with them and engage in face-to-face conversation. While he might be helping to increase the sales for his album, in-person interaction with his listeners and human connection motivates him the most. He used the opportunity to thank these fans who have allowed him to progress this far in his career. By

coming off as personable and not arrogant, Quinn attracts fans who are more empowered to reach out to him directly or, specifically in the “Life Must Go On” video, ask Quinn questions about the making of his new songs. I’m a firm believer that when you see someone else showing passion for what they do, you become more intrigued, feel more inclined to cheer them on, and want to know more of the details. While Quinn does a good job of balancing his private and public life, he opens the door and is willing to show fans what goes on when he’s not on stage.

I chose to look into Quinn as an artist due to my own personal obsession with his music, his journey into the music industry, and my own admiration for him as a person. I realize I may never truly know my favorite musician, as most of us won’t. However, based on the music he puts out and his presence on stage and on social media, I am hopeful that I have done an accurate assessment of his personality and intentions as an artist. I chose this particular album, because I thought it would be the most momentous album of his to evaluate. It focuses on mental health and more specifically his own personal struggles with it. While in previous phases of his career when Quinn’s lyrics were not particularly personal, this album emphasizes his own battle with depression and anxiety. Again, on Zach Sang’s talk show, Quinn opens up about this and the album and says, “My goal for this album is to show people like, look, you can have the courage to speak up and talk about this stuff, because, chances are there’s a lot more people like you who are going through the same stuff as you.” He grew up in Michigan struggling with anxiety which continued on in combination with some bouts of depression when he moved to L.A. He recalls how for a while he didn’t want to admit he had anxiety or any mental health struggles and would put on the facade that everything was okay. He hopes this album will model a way out of this feeling of avoidance and helplessness by depicting his own growth and progress in managing his mental health.



In her final response to Wilson in the *NPR* article, Powers makes a comment about the simplicity of good music:

I know that on one level, music is abstract - like a thought, as you say. But it's also like a feeling, a real sensual and emotional pull. Music can make you feel like a room without a roof. When that's happening, all the categories we build as thinkers recede, and whatever sound made it happen is glorious.

I like what Powers is saying here, and I completely agree with her. Sometimes it might be difficult to put into words, but music can be cathartic. Some music resonates with more people than others, but I like to think everyone has experienced what Powers is describing at least at one point in their lives. Listening to a song can pull at specific memories or emotions for people, whether it's through the lyrics or the instrumentation or both. Quinn's music always captivates me, makes me feel comforted, and simply reminds me of good memories with my friends. So, I could say that Quinn's music pulls at certain emotions for me and is considered quality music in my opinion, and that's that--no further explanation needed. But in terms of my own research, I won't stop here. I want to prove how Quinn's music is valuable beyond my own personal ties to it. However, I will say that by dedicating an entire album to a mental health journey and his personal experiences, Quinn makes the emotional pull in his music even more prominent.

Throughout the following chapters, I plan to pinpoint how Quinn takes his listener through the rollercoaster of mental health battles, capturing the highs and lows and the jumble of emotions. I will delve into this overall theme by unpacking the album song by song. My main focus, as a literary critic, will be on the lyrics of Quinn's songs, but I will also consider the ways voice and instrumentation help to emphasize his messages. Interspersed throughout my chapters, I will incorporate biographical information, Quinn's collaborations with other artists, and his use

of music videos and social media to supplement the songs. I am also grateful that I will be able to consider his presence on stage. *From Michigan With Love* was released on February 15, 2019, and his tour spanned from February to April of 2019. On February 19, 2019 in Indianapolis, Indiana, I was able to watch Quinn perform the album live. Almost a year after the first time we met over Instagram, I was able to meet my friend Quinn XCII live and in concert. Hopefully, in my rendition of a *33 and 1/3* book, I will not only be able to share some fun trivia about an artist you might not know much about, but I can also reiterate the importance of having open conversations about mental health. Additionally, by showing you my own passion and admiration for Quinn XCII and his music, I hope to help give the genre of pop music a better name and keep it from being underestimated.

## CHAPTER 1

Four years ago, I remember watching a YouTube video, hearing a song in the background, looking up the lyrics to find the name of the song, and immediately saving it to my Spotify. That song was “Another Day in Paradise” by Quinn XCII. This experience led me to a new artist and to the other songs on his 2015 album *Change of Scenery*. As one of Quinn’s most popular songs, “Another Day in Paradise” has 61,884,482 listens on Spotify which means the song has been streamed over 60 million times for at least 30 seconds each. The song reached this number over a 4-year span, but Quinn’s newest 2019 summer release “Stacy” already has 17,003,276 listens in 5 months. Since the start of his career, Quinn has quickly gained popularity and acquired more followers.

The success of “Another Day in Paradise” can be credited to the way it is lively, upbeat, and adventurous, yet consistently mellow and calming--an ambiance with which to identify with. Listeners may wish to live vicariously through the lifestyle Quinn illustrates within his lyrics. The speaker reflects on his relationship with a romantic partner while simultaneously realizing the need to live spontaneously and not feel held back by obstacles along the way, as we can see in the following excerpt:

And I be running 'cause I figured out  
The more I slow down the less I get out  
And if we fall let's be strong now  
Moving along we don't mind we don't mind

He endorses the idea of looking forwards and never backwards. He encourages his listeners to keep moving along, and indicates in the second line of the stanza that from personal experience, he knows slowing down and overthinking things doesn't do any good. Faltering or failing doesn't concern him; he lives by the mentality of being resilient and not taking things personally.

The refrain uses a metaphor that compares life to a beach paradise: "All the good / Comes in waves / I bide my time by the ocean" and "No need to leave spend our whole lives / Another day in paradise." While waves may not always be present or can come in various magnitudes, there will always be some on the horizon. In short, the song provides an uplifting outlook on life. I'll admit the premise of the song and the ideas behind the lyrics seem a little cliché or cheesy. Comparing life to ocean waves is not necessarily the most original idea and we've seen it before, but for me, in this instance, stating the obvious somehow works. I think Quinn sells the idea of "going with the flow," if you will, by keeping the lyrics just vague enough. He alludes to a potential romance, struggles he's faced in life, and goals of where he wants to go in the future. But by not describing these things in detail, he leaves the lyrics up for interpretation and makes room for more people to find his ideas relatable. I also believe that the combination of his lyrics with his relaxing tone of voice and instrumentation all work together to make an undeniably feel-good sound. This is the sound that Quinn XCII is known for. Especially for me as an avid listener of his music, I recognize the upbeat, feel-good, uplifting pop songs as the "classic Quinn songs," and it's these songs that got me hooked from the start.

The positive attitude seeps from the lyrics into the production and instrumentation of "Another Day in Paradise." Quinn's voice comes in gradually and not until the 25-second mark. The song begins with the piano and then slowly adds in the vocals of an unidentified female. She

does not sing any actual words but compliments the piano with her vocals and creates an ethereal hook. These factors build up until there is a downbeat and Quinn's voice emerges. The swell at the refrain is another characteristic of a classic Quinn song, and he likes to show a contrast in volume and instrumentation between the verse and the chorus. When Quinn's voice is introduced, the underlying piano melody is layered with a consistent drum beat and a synthetic clapping sound. There seems to be subtle notes of a saxophone, additional snapping of fingers, and a female back-up singer's voice comes and goes in the segments between verses and refrain. Numerous components are at play, but Quinn's voice and the drum beat are emphasized in the mix at an increased volume, emphasizing his lyrics and the idea that life in paradise moves at a consistent pace.

If the lyrics and the music weren't enough, the song's claims of "paradise" are highlighted by the album cover. Far in the distance, the sun sets over a body of water. Above, a small red car drives down a road up in the mountains that overlooks the ocean. The car seems to be headed in the direction of the water and further shows the speaker's desire to be close to the sea and identify with it. The album cover practically suggests to its audience that the best way to experience the song is by playing it on the stereo while driving, letting the prominent base of the song fill the entire vehicle. Personally, this is my favorite way to listen to the song. My friend Paige (who was my sidekick and fellow fan at Quinn's concert) and I consider this to be the best song to listen to in the summer. I know, I'm sounding cheesy again, but I can't lie to you. My friends and I love going on drives, and I have such good memories around this song and listening to it in the car with them. The video I discovered the song in was from an Australian vlogger I really like, and the song played in the background while she was walking outside near the beach. Maybe that association is forever stored in my brain, and that's why I think of the outdoors and

summer when I hear the song. Regardless, since that day, “Another Day in Paradise,” has become my all-time favorite song.

I start here, on a completely different album, to show you where my love for Quinn began. I also offer up an idea of where Quinn’s career started out. Quinn and Ayokay released *Change of Scenery* five years ago, and each of the five songs on the EP resembles “Another Day in Paradise” in its upbeat, pop instrumentation. In only five songs, his lyrics remain rather vague, and it was difficult for me to become really familiar with Quinn as an artist. This EP was only a glimpse or preview into Quinn’s life. He alludes to some of his relationships and the highs and lows he might have experienced, but still puts up a barrier and keeps himself from giving too much away. However, if we look to *From Michigan With Love*, we can see the growth Quinn has made since 2015 and how he has become much more open with talking about his personal life in his music.

*From Michigan With Love* contains 12 songs and is structured in a narrative form. From the first song, Quinn hooks his listener in and takes them through his own mental health journey. He comments on his own struggles with anxiety and depression, the days when he feels most like himself, and the days when he feels the most defeated by mental illness. Some of these experiences are also associated with experiences he has in his relationship with his now wife Macy. As he did in *Change of Scenery*, Quinn opens up about his relationships, but this time he is not shy about telling who many of the songs are about, and he describes how his current relationship affects his mental health. Sometimes certain events can send him spiraling into a pit of pain, but he also credits his wife for being a support system for him and helping him through his tougher days. By having “Holding Hands” as the first song on *From Michigan With Love*,

Quinn does not sugarcoat the truth about mental health. Instead, we start out in a rocky place with Quinn, and we keep listening hoping he eventually finds some solace.

Quinn released “Holding Hands” as a single on February 8, 2019, one week before the release of his entire album *From Michigan With Love*. The overall premise of the song involves a male and female speaker on the verge of an inevitable breakup. They reflect back together on their relationship and how it has come to a depressing end. Quinn collaborated with Elohim on this song, and she embodies the voice of the female speaker. While Elohim’s voice disappears after this track, Quinn’s voice continues on and tells his side of the story after the fact throughout the rest of the album. By placing this song at the beginning, Quinn encourages his audience to keep listening in order to find out what ensues post-breakup.

Elohim is a songwriter and vocalist who produces more electronic and pop music as an artist. She lives in Los Angeles and broke into the music industry in 2015. While she has made more of an appearance in recent years, she has had the reputation of being very private in the media; in years past, she would often disguise her voice or wear masks in interviews. Like Quinn, Elohim also channels her battles with mental health into her music, and her 2019 EP *Braindead* especially is a testament to her experiences. It was the perfect decision for Quinn to feature Elohim on this single as she not only tackles similar subject matter in her own music, but she is also elusive enough that she helps add intrigue to Quinn’s album. Her voice is soft, almost like a whisper, and she has a relatively high range that contrasts well with Quinn’s voice. Also, by being a rather new artist who keeps a low profile in the media, Elohim may be a new voice that Quinn’s audience is unfamiliar with. As the first feature on Quinn’s album, Elohim adds depth to Quinn’s first song and sparks curiosity in his audience. Just as Elohim is mysterious as an artist, she is quickly introduced on Quinn’s album and disappears immediately after.

In all honesty, when I first heard “Holding Hands” as a single, I was surprised. This track was much slower and melancholic than the classic Quinn songs we know and love. I was also surprised when this was listed as Track #1 on his album. At first, it seemed out of place to me, and I wondered why he didn’t start the album with a more catchy, sing-songy hit to increase his fans’ excitement when they first tune in. However, when I look over the whole album now, I recognize the chronology behind the album and how the order helps to tell a broader story. I also think Quinn holds off from putting his “hits” right at the start of the album in order to reel his audience in and show that he is capable of versatility. While we know most of Quinn’s hits have a steady drum beat or mellow, light-hearted tone throughout, “Holding Hands” is on the opposite end of the spectrum. In the verses of the song, Quinn and Elohim isolate each word they sing with slight pauses in between. The emphasis on each individual word is chilling. In the opening verse, Quinn sings:

Crazy, stupid lovebirds  
Cupid struck us, now we're falling out  
Drove in silence, put on, mileage  
Five years wasted, I let you down

Lyrics like “stupid,” “struck us,” and “wasted” set the tone for the speaker who feels fed up with the circumstance of the relationship and regrets the last five years. The beat of the synthesizer that loops throughout the entire song precedes Quinn’s voice at first. The beat is simple yet echoes, reminding me of the sound you hear when a water droplet falls. By having this imagery come to mind, I then think of tear drops or of a leaking faucet that drips over and



over again in an empty or quiet house. Again, the sadness is reiterated and provokes more sympathy from the listener.

Following the first verse, Elohim joins Quinn on the chorus and harmonizes with him:

'Cause we don't talk about what we know

Holding on to our egos

'Til we both agree we've had enough

Since we've stopped

I can't help but eavesdrop

Holding hands in treetops

Used to be our thing 'til we had enough

Both speakers immediately admit, “we don’t talk about what we know,” and recognize that their inevitable separation is the elephant in the room. They avoid the topic, and when they argue, they are narrow-sighted. Both speakers feel that they are right and stubbornly won’t let go of their individual egos. However, the irony arises after the line: “’Til we both agree we've had enough.” While the speakers claim to be done and want to move on, they can’t resist thinking about better times they had as a couple. The song itself is a testament to how they can’t get the relationship out of their minds. But, almost as a way to remind themselves to stop thinking like this, the chorus ends with, “Used to be our thing 'til we had enough.” Before they spiral into a complete reevaluation of their relationship, they stop to remind themselves that their relationship ended because they both had had enough and reached their limit.

While the chorus brings up the (slightly cheesy) imagery “Holding hands in treetops,” the second verse continues the holding hands imagery but in a contrasting way. The refrain acknowledges a happier time for the couple when they were at their best, but Elohim’s verse shows how this has slowly faded away with, “Our hands slipping out of reach / My bed's empty, I've said plenty / My words just fall from the peaks.” Their hands come apart as their relationship deteriorates. The title at first glance can be deceiving, leading a listener to believe that the song will be about a couple and their current, close-knit relationship. Instead, the “holding hands” is a mere memory that the former couple holds on to. Additionally, the imagery of nature also contrasts between refrain and verse, and while “treetops” are mentioned in the chorus, peaks appear in this particular verse. During the relationship, the couple associated their relationship with trees, and they sat together in a treetop looking out at the potential they thought they once had. But once the relationship has come to a close, the female speaker’s “words just fall from the peaks.” As mountain peaks are rougher and more dangerous than trees, Elohim’s character finds herself in a cold place without the person she once loved, and he no longer hears her words.

Before the last chorus, Quinn and Elohim sing the last verse together:

There's rain that's falling down

I hate these silent sounds

When I go days without hearing you speak out loud

So I get why this is hard, the end is never far

I'll tape my wounds and hopefully find someone new

The first three lines of this verse are contradictory and center on the paradoxical phrase “silent sounds.” Quinn and Elohim point out the heartbreaking feeling that comes with silence and the fact that because the couple is now estranged, they don’t have any form of communication. While they chose to end their relationship, the comfort of talking and spending time together has now been lost. The paradox extends back to the rain in the first line of this verse, and even though rain is something that can be heard aloud, the pathetic fallacy of the rain adds to the sadness and makes the silence feel even more inescapable. The somber tone of the song is consistent through to the end, but the slight moment of hope for the man and the woman is that they will one day move on from this expired relationship and “hopefully find someone new.”

Even with this glimpse of hope, Quinn acknowledges the challenges that come with a breakup and his own tendency to fall into a depression when change occurs in his life. Fittingly named “Autopilot,” this second song on the album revolves around the speaker feeling like he lives his daily life going through the motions and feeling desensitized to the experiences occurring around him. The chorus, while ambiguous in some ways, gives the best description of this “autopilot” emotion:

Why's my mind on autopilot all the time?  
I'm feeling like the world's back on rewind  
I can't seem to find the words to define  
The way I feel when I go through this  
My mind's on autopilot all the time  
My window pane is as grey as the sky

Just can't get one single word to define  
The way I feel when I go through this, ayy

When Quinn says, “My window pane is as grey as the sky,” he describes how the colors in his life are monochromatic and lack depth or variation. He implies how the “autopilot” mode makes him feel numb to situations and less likely to fully experience emotions like happiness or joy. He notes how this is a feeling he experiences constantly and with “the world's back on rewind,” he struggles to move forward or find clarity.

Quinn also admits in this refrain that he’s at a loss for words and sometimes cannot articulate his exact feelings. However, by attempting to describe his emotions, Quinn advocates for the effort in trying to say how you feel and acknowledge you are struggling. Quinn mentions his trouble with this twice: “I can’t seem to find the words to define” and “Just can’t get one single word to define.” I appreciate Quinn for admitting his inability to put things perfectly into words rather than force himself to write a line that might not be accurate or fully encompass his emotions. Quinn offers hope for someone who may not have the courage to seek help yet because they have not found a way to articulate their struggles. This feeds into the idea of “autopilot” as the speaker goes through this recurring cycle of not being able to express his emotions yet still struggles. The speaker is used to this mindset and automatically goes into autopilot mode; without talking to someone or dealing with it, the cycle is perpetuated and autopilot mode stays switched on.

Looking more into specific symptoms of mental illness, “autopilot” is a word often associated with depression. In an article on *Huffington Post* by Tayana Simons, she talks

about her own depression and some of the symptoms she went through at the time. The fourth symptom she points out is called “Your mind has hit stand-by,” and she says,

When I was depressed I could go for days, often up to a week, and not remember what had happened. It's like my brain was on standby, and although technically functioning and alive, it was not absorbing or remembering information. To those around you, you could even appear 'normal'. This is because you are functioning on autopilot, saying and doing the right things, but not really present.

While Quinn may not be able to describe his feelings in his chorus, Tayana fills in the gaps for him. As Quinn mentions that “My mind's on autopilot all the time,” he then implies that even during daily activities and conversations, the autopilot mindset doesn't go away. It is something that others may not be perceptive to, but the person experiencing these feelings knows that something isn't right.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America reports that “Nearly one-half of those diagnosed with depression are also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.” Because both disorders are often linked, it makes sense that in “Autopilot” Quinn alternates between symptoms of anxiety and depression in his verses and refrain. The second verse goes into a fit of anxiety with:

On myself, I am sleeping  
All my thoughts are misleading  
That shit gets my heart beating  
Way too fast, I'm needing  
Sanity or some reason

Can't blame this on the season

Rain or shine, I still feel them

Hold me back from freedom

He feels physical symptoms of anxiety as his heart rate increases. And when he says “Hold me back from freedom,” he also alludes to feelings of confinement. He feels held back by his mental illness and gets overwhelmed. Similarly to the refrain with “Rain or shine, I still feel them,” Quinn reiterates that mental health is something that he constantly deals with and manages and does not disappear. Additionally, in the first verse at the beginning of the song, Quinn sings, “Open windows to breathe again / There's no way it's holy / So baby, just hold me.” The anxiety surfaces in this verse as well, and Quinn feels like he is suffocating in the confines of his own life. As he calls out for his “baby,” he acknowledges his need for help and comfort. By making the verses contrast with the depressive refrain, Quinn portrays the possibility of a double diagnosis and how some disorders can overlap. Disorders are not black and white, and even with the descriptions in the DSM-5, each person can have different symptoms or ways that their mental illness manifests itself in their life.

Not only does Quinn describe his autopilot feelings within his lyrics, but it is also apparent in the instrumentation of the song itself. In fact, as Quinn sings this particular song, there are synths and a drum beat present in the background. In order to make the refrain more dramatic and prominent, more layers of Quinn’s vocals and harmonies are added to the chorus as opposed to the verses that only have one layer. However, regardless of this difference, the tempo of the song is consistent throughout the entire song, and the drum beat continues at the same pace during the verses and refrain. To me, this is another dimension of Quinn emphasizing the idea of

autopilot. When you're in autopilot, there are few ups and downs; rather, everything is steady and plain. So as Quinn goes into autopilot, his song imitates the repetitive and unchanging nature of this disheartening mindset as the drum beat monotonously carries on.

But before Quinn makes the album seem like it's going to be depressing from start to finish, he moves to the third song on the album that changes the pace and encourages his listeners to continue listening. We can infer just from the title that "Life Must Go On" is the moment where Quinn picks himself up from his feelings in the last two songs and keeps himself from losing all hope entirely.

Multiple individuals had a hand in creating this particular song, and one of the most prominent artists working behind the scenes was Jon Bellion. In an interview, Quinn tells how John Bellion brought the song to him and asked if he wanted to help bring what he wrote to life. This pop artist is also on the Visionary Music Group, and Quinn considers him one of his musical "heroes." Jon has two albums of his own and has written for artists like Eminem and Jason Derulo. Quinn tells how he felt in awe of Jon when they worked together for this album and was surprised how much he could learn from a fellow artist. Quinn considers Jon and him to fall into an unusual subgenre that Quinn coined himself called "melting pop" in which their music incorporates various sounds and aspects of pop music, yet creates a cohesive, original-sounding song. Even though "Life Must Go On" started out as Jon's creation, Quinn collaborated with him, changed some lyrics, and worked with production in order to create a song that met their main goal. Quinn told Zach Sang, "We wanted to make a song that wasn't like, 'Hey, listen to this music and tomorrow you're gonna feel great!' ...Because that's not realistic, that's not mental health,...you can't just shake things in 24 hours, I say, and this song was more of a realist perspective." The song doesn't argue that life must go on and guarantee that each day gets better

and better, but instead, shows that life goes on whether it's good or bad. Quinn speaks matter-of-factly and refrains from sugarcoating the truth. I would argue that this is more comforting--hearing an artist's honest opinion and not imagining an unattainable reality.

In most instances, repetition of lyrics in a song would normally drive me crazy. A repeated phrase or word becomes overkill, and once an artist goes over the threshold for repetition, I lose interest and the song as a whole loses value. But the way Quinn used repetition in this case created a different effect on me. Repeating the title and refrain multiple times, didn't seem lazy or unoriginal, but was his way of trying to get his listeners to really hear his plea.

This particular song is just what you would guess it would be about - encouraging people to keep their head up in tough times, realize that life has its ups and downs, but still find the courage to stay positive and know that time moves in forward motion. And while, yes, these ideas are cliché and may seem rather obvious, I don't think they should be written off as invaluable. According to a 2019 *TIME* article, it was found in a 2017 study in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* that "more than one in eight Americans ages 12 to 25 experienced a major depressive episode." Additionally, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reports that there were 47,173 suicides in America in 2017. Depression and suicide are undeniable issues facing our society today. Quinn may be addressing the issue in an indirect, non-descriptive manner, but nonetheless, he is addressing it. And maybe, this is the way people who are struggling need to hear the message--straightforward and clear. On the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline website, advice can be found on how to speak to someone who may be suicidal, and it literally says in the first bullet point, "Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide." Let's look closely at how Quinn achieves exactly that:



And yeah, I know my world's burning down

Where to run? Who to call?

Even though my world's burning down

I know I can get through the fall

'Cause life must go on (Go, go on)

One blink, then it's all gone

I said life must go on (Go, go on)

Even when you know it's all wrong

Whether you're high, whether you're low

Gotta keep on, be a part of the show

I said life must go on (Go, go on)

Go on, and you know I got you

In the pre-chorus, Quinn recognizes his inner turmoil and struggles, but goes into the chorus encouraging himself and trying to pull himself out of depressive thoughts. “One blink, then it’s all gone”--calling out the seriousness of suicide and how in one moment, someone’s whole life can be gone. Not only is the individual robbed of a full life, but the friends and family around them are left with a gaping hole in their lives. “Gotta keep on, be a part of the show” alludes to how suicide does not affect only the individual but creates waves; each individual is a part of a much broader “show” and web of people. The last line of the verse, “Go on, and you know I got you,” not only is a moment of Quinn telling himself that he can find the inner strength to go on but is also an instance where Quinn is saying “I got you” to his listeners. He

uses his platform as a singer and songwriter to create songs that give support and refuge to himself and others.

You don't believe me? Do I sound biased and just sound hopeful that my favorite artist has been able to touch the lives of others? Well then let me prove it. As I've said before, Quinn is active on social media and uses it consistently to connect with fans. And a lot of Quinn's audience will use social media, more specifically Twitter, to tell him about how his songs have personally resonated with them:

@PlanetGleeks

I want to be strong like Quinn. No matter how many problems in your life, life must go on.

@ledfordshyenne

When Quinn XCII said "Cause life must go on.. one blink, then it's all gone" I felt that

@Bird17Birdie

Honest to God this is what I needed in my life, this past month has kicked me straight on my ass... Life Must Go On by Quinn XCII

Thank you @QuinnXCII 🌟❤️❤️

@BeaKyleRevilla

I cried at the Quinn XCII concert bc I realize that life will throw you curveballs and people come & go but life must go on and you will thrive :-) here's to improving my mental health and finding the good in goodbyes afterall Thank u @QuinnXCII

These people are hearing the lyrics Quinn wrote and feel understood. And these aren't the only people who feel this way. Paige and I both gravitated to these lyrics, especially after hearing Quinn recite them to us in person at his concert.

In the album version, after the bridge, Quinn repeats the chorus twice and then ends the song by repeating the last four lines of the chorus again:

Whether you're high, whether you're low

Gotta keep on, be a part of the show

I said life must go on

Go on, and you know I got you

At the start of the first chorus after the bridge, Quinn sings along to the electric guitar in the background, but the drum beat drops out. It is slowly reintroduced when he starts the line "Whether you're high, whether you're low." Then, during the outro (when he sings the four lines above for the last time), the drum beat is taken out again, leaving only Quinn's vocals and the guitar. The guitar chords are also very faint, and Quinn's voice is the most prominent aspect of the segment. The repetition in addition to the isolation of his voice practically forces the audience to hear what he is saying, loud and clear. There aren't any other distractions from his words.

This tactic is emphasized even further in concert. As he performed and came to the end of the song, he did not just sing the outro once. Instead, he sang it 5 times in a row, the same four lines over and over again. And before he began singing it for the last time, under his breath he said, "One more time for someone who wants to hear this." Throughout the repetition of these lines, there were moments when Quinn wouldn't sing at all. He would lower the mic and look out at the audience as they filled in for him. And yes, this is something practically every artist does in concert. But Quinn wasn't letting his audience sing for him as a way to prove how devoted his fans were or how well they knew the lyrics. He was giving his audience the chance to repeat the lines themselves and feel the message more personally. And when Quinn did sing, sometimes the lines wouldn't come out smoothly, but rather with rasp and in pain. As if he was shouting, Quinn would push the words out at the top of his lungs, and you could feel the passion he had for the meaning behind his lyrics. He strained his voice hoping that someone who may be at a low point or feeling hopeless could hear these words as a sign and alter their thinking to know that life will get better and go on.

## CHAPTER 2

About a month before *From Michigan With Love* came out, Quinn took to Twitter in order to get his fans excited about the release date. On January 24th, 2019, he tweeted, “if your valentines day sucks this year just wait till midnight for my album to come out and crack open a bag of doritos.” His sense of humor shines through here as he suggests that his album would be the perfect solution for curing a heartbreak or a bad Valentine’s Day date. He also randomly gives Doritos a shout-out. Is this his favorite food? Does Quinn eat Doritos regularly? Who knows, but he jokes with his fans about the “ideal” way to listen to the album for the first time. Or, is it really a joke? Because, personally, I took Quinn’s words to heart. Of course, I was already so excited for the release of the new album, and I made all my friends aware. But I decided I had to really prove my loyalty to Quinn. I thought I’d take Quinn’s joke and run with it. So, when Valentine’s Day rolled around, I went to Walmart, bought a big variety pack of individual Doritos bags, and stayed up until midnight waiting for the album to come out. I made my roommate stay awake with me, and I offered Doritos to anyone that came by our room, telling them to go listen to *From Michigan With Love*. Looking back on it now, I realize Quinn should be paying me for all the publicity I brought him that day, but I’ll be humble and let him have all the glory for now. Regardless, when the time came, and the album was finally available for me to listen on Spotify, I connected my computer to my speaker and listened to the album from start to finish before I let myself fall asleep.

In the previously discussed song, “Life Must Go On,” Quinn sings, “Whether you're high, whether you're low / Gotta keep on, be a part of the show.” As we already discussed, Quinn wanted that song to be uplifting for his listeners and be upfront about the fact that there will always be highs and lows. You can’t predict tomorrow, but ups and downs are both a part of the

process of life. With that being said, as Quinn acknowledges that there is no guarantee that tomorrow will be great, it is fitting for him to place “U & Us” after “Life Must Go On.” This song is centered around the speaker who is on the verge of a breakup and addresses the person he loves. He does not want her to go and ultimately end their relationship, so he expresses his feelings for her within the lyrics. This specific track would be considered more of a low and portrays the speaker grasping for something that is about to slip away from him. Therefore, Quinn’s honesty in “Life Must Go On” is even more apparent as he follows that song up with a sadder and more painful one.

Quinn talks in interviews about how he enjoys engaging with fans whether it’s through social media or travelling the country to surprise people in their homes. He also admits that winning an award, like a Grammy, would be an amazing way to feel validated in the music industry. However, awards and recognition aren’t the things that motivate him to create or produce music. He feels more empowered by connecting with other people and having an impact with his music. Which is why I like thinking about the music video when I hear this particular song. Whenever I listen to “U & Us,” right away I’m reminded of the music video not only because I’ve watched it so many times, but because it strays from the music videos we normally see today. Rather than featuring live actors and panning between shots of the artist and extras as they lip sync along to the song, this music video is more of a digital and graphic art form.

When the music video came out, Quinn took to Instagram in order to tell all of his fans to go check it out: “I had this vision for “U & Us” to tell a short story through an animated visual and my friend @schmittyc couldn’t have done better job bringing that to life. The official video is out now.” The caption is accompanied with a small clip of the beginning of the music video. Quinn also directs his audience to the creator of the video Claire Schmitt’s Instagram page.

While she only has a small following, Claire has her own website showcasing some of her work, and she focuses on both design and creative direction. She includes links to the work she's done with Quinn in addition to musician Ryan Pulford. Regardless of her said "fame" and recognition as an artist, Quinn sees her as a friend who had a talent that could help bring his music to life. So, Quinn enlisted Claire to make his vision a reality. Not only does the choice to seek help from a friend fit with Quinn's "image" of being down-to-earth and relaxed, but it also shows his integrity as an artist. He didn't sell out and try to get a well-known music video producer to work with him as a way to gain followers and attention. Quinn trusted Claire and wanted the help of someone he knew who could get the job done properly.

The music video itself seems simple at first glance. On a solid color background, sketches of stick figures appear on the screen in black ink as the song progresses. However, there is a level of detail and movement that goes beyond just someone drawing on a blank background. The graphics are animated and move in a life-like manner. The focus of the screen also zooms in and out frequently as if a camera is taking live action shots in a movie.

As these figures and drawings appear on the screen, they are placed strategically and, like Quinn said, tell a short story. Quickly, at the start, we see a woman walking to a gravestone in the rain, and as she looks at the grave, our view pans upward to a thought bubble that appears overhead. We can assume that the music video started at the end of the story, and we are now flashing back to the woman's life beforehand. Then, there are small snippets of scenes in which we see a man and a woman dancing together, getting engaged, riding their bikes together, and more. The music video goes through touching moments between the couple as they seemingly fall in love.

In the second verse, we find out that the male character in the video is Quinn himself. The moments the couple shares become memories and photographs that rest on a mantel in a living room--the same general living room design that is used as the album cover for both Quinn's *The Story of Us* and *From Michigan With Love*. While this song is from the latter, the furniture in the music video resembles that of the former more closely. Therefore, Quinn may be suggesting that while this song is new to his audience, it may be a work that encompasses a past memory for Quinn that he is just now coming to terms with and accepting. Nonetheless, in both album covers, Quinn sits in the center of the living room with a baseball hat on. So, when the living room scene is reproduced in this music video, we can only assume that the male figure sitting on the furniture represents Quinn.

Quinn's figure is then seen running as if he's looking for something. We skip to more close-ups of the couple. It's as if Quinn is chasing after these moments and watches as the couple has a child and raises it together. Again, the moments he witnesses are turned into photographs on a wall that he looks closely at.

During the bridge, something different happens. Quinn's lyrics are:

Oh, I don't wanna be lonely

Oh, I just want you to hold me down

Oh, I don't wanna be lonely

Oh, I just wanna be alone with you

And as the song plays, Quinn's character floats around the space on the screen in various directions, while the female character is not present. Quinn hangs upside down and has no one to



grab on to. At the bridge of the song, we enter into a new scene where the couple drives together in a car. They hold hands until the husband loses control of the wheel and the scene abruptly stops, insinuating that there was a car accident. The woman hunches over and cries. There is a morbid irony in the way that the bridge starts with “Oh, I don’t wanna be lonely,” and then this portion of the music video ends with the woman by herself. The irony adds to the pain the woman feels in losing her husband. This moment in the video gets heavier when you realize that the speaker’s exact fear came true. There is an inkling of hope when the male figure returns and dances with her and gives her a rose, but after they embrace, the woman disappears. Quinn’s character walks into the living room scene again, sits on the couch, and poses for a photo. Does this mean he survived? Instead, this photo floats over to the gravesite, the same gravesite that the woman stood in front of at the start of the video. She looks at her husband’s tombstone with the picture of him and grieves.

Even though we can infer from the start that the woman’s husband is going to be the person whose tombstone she’s visiting, the death at the end of the music video is still shocking and emotional. If you consider the song in isolation from the video, you would probably assume that the song is about a guy not wanting his girlfriend to leave him or break up with him:

I'm begging, begging, begging

You to please don't go

I don't wanna see you

Be with someone else

Don't make me drive at

Night in Hollywood as evenings go

I don't wanna put we had on the shelf

With words like “begging” and phrases like “see you / Be with someone else,” it makes it seem like the woman leaving is a choice, not an accidental and uncontrollable death. So when the music video portrays a more dramatic and tragic story, the pain of the speaker in the song becomes more compelling and heart-breaking. When Quinn ends with “I only want you, and us / And us, and us,” it is devastating to think that in the case of the video, U & Us is something unattainable for the speaker, and all that’s left are the photographs and memories the couple had together. The low Quinn portrays in the song feels even lower when the scenario of a woman becoming a widow is offered up. While “U & Us” initially seems to be about one thing, Quinn uses his music video to reimagine the story and demonstrate the track’s versatility.

Even though Quinn took an unconventional route with this music video and was more artistic and sentimental, he still has fun with more traditional music videos and likes having the chance to act out his own songs. In the following track “Werewolf,” Quinn went the opposite direction and worked to make a video that was more light-hearted and comical. As one of the three singles that came out before the entire album, “Werewolf” made me the most excited for *From Michigan With Love*. In the spirit of Halloween, Quinn released this track on October 26, 2018 along with the music video in which he, in fact, was dressed up as a werewolf. Currently with 10,505,978 listens on Spotify and as the fourth most popular song on the 12-song album, “Werewolf” clearly was not just well-liked by me. He also collaborated with Yoshi Flower on this song. Like Quinn, Yoshi is known by his stage name, and his real name is Josh Smith. As Quinn comes from Michigan, prior to breaking out on his own, Yoshi used to be a part of Gosh Pith which was a duo from Detroit. Like Quinn, Yoshi has also worked with Elohim, and Elohim

and Yoshi collaborated on the song “Panic Attacks” which came out in 2018. Overall, Yoshi Flower is known for his indie rock and EDM sound. He does not appear in the music video with Quinn, but he helped increase popularity for the song by engaging his fan base, and adding his own vocals to the second verse.

One of the reasons I know this song did so well is because it is another classic Quinn song. Ayokay once referred to Quinn’s music as “the ear-candy” that has a catchy, “fresh” pop sound. Ayokay notes how as a music producer, he works hard to make sure the song he is producing fits well with the artist or vocalist he chooses to collaborate with. The sound of a Quinn song is very distinctive for Ayokay, as he remarks “I kinda know when I come up with a beat, if it’s a Quinn beat” and “when I write something, I know like, okay, Mike, this is his bread and butter so I give it to him.” And while Ayokay was not a part of the production for “Werewolf,” the song still emulates the same characteristics of what he refers to as a “Quinn song.” “Werewolf” features overlapping synths, piano chords, and a prominent drum beat throughout the song, giving it the upbeat, fast-paced, pop qualities. Additionally, in Quinn style, the verses slowly build up to a refrain with heightened volume and intensity. I’m sure Quinn knew instantly that this song was the “ear-candy” Ayokay was talking about, so he strategically chose this song as a featured single hoping to increase anticipation for the album. Why mess with something that’s worked well in the past?

Not only does Quinn create a song that represents him well as an artist, but he also uses the music video for “Werewolf” to let his personality and sense of humor come through. The music video opens with an introductory bit where Quinn is back in high school and in love. He buys a necklace for the girl he is dating, and they hang out in the school courtyard. But the next day, Quinn finds the girl cheating on him with a jock, and he feels devastated. Quinn and his

friend Robert stand there dumbfounded, watching as everything unfolds, and they see Quinn's girl and the jock making out in the courtyard. Robert hilariously tries to make Quinn feel better by saying, "Well maybe he's an aspiring dermatologist." But Quinn replies, "I mean I've seen dermatologists, and they don't do that to me." The two friends desperately try not to accept the reality in front of them. They are painted as outcasts, and Quinn has classically lost the pretty girl to the macho jock rival. With this set up, the rest of the music video takes place five years in the future at a high school reunion where Quinn and his ex see each other again for the first time. Quinn tells how the song itself is about "someone who can't be around another person because of past feelings." Thus, he makes the comparison of someone in this position feeling like a werewolf when it sees moonlight:

I need to be careful  
You're moonlight, I'm werewolf  
And when you come full  
Everything gets teared up

The sight of the girl he once loved causes such intense emotions to surface, that Quinn feels uncontrollable, animalistic, and overwhelmed. While the analogy works, Quinn also acknowledges the drama and over-exaggeration within it and uses the music video to poke fun at his own song. He teamed up with Jason Lester, the director of the video, who tells in a behind-the-scenes clip, "When Quinn sent me the track and then came to me with the concept, I was super excited, because the first time I listened to it, I said, 'The only thing that we can do for this song is a short film or a comedy about a werewolf attacking a party.' And that's exactly what he

wanted to do, too.” The extended metaphor in the song is performed in the video as Quinn arrives at the reunion normally, but after seeing his ex, he slowly morphs into a werewolf who ultimately attacks her.

At first, Quinn’s character wears a brown turtleneck, an orange blazer, a yellow baseball hat, and has a full beard. He looks a little dorky, and when his friend asks who he’s dressed as for the Halloween-themed party, Quinn says, “Myself, Robert. I’m being myself!” He’s frustrated not only that he can’t win back the girl, but also that his costume isn’t obvious. As the music video progresses and Quinn runs into the girl, first his eyes gleam red, and he slowly evolves into a werewolf: claws, pointy ears, more fur on his face and hands, and canine-like teeth. Quinn claws at the screen trying to look intimidating, and the extras at the party scream hysterically as if they’re in a badly made horror film. Everything is over the top and cheesy, completely eradicating any possibility of “Quinn the Werewolf” actually seeming scary. And even when scary Quinn goes to attack his ex in the school hallway, she pulls out the silver necklace he gave her five years prior. This scene plays into the idea that a silver bullet will kill a werewolf. The fact that Quinn gave her this necklace in the first place is ironic as it eventually would lead to his downfall. She stabs Quinn with the necklace, and even though he pleads, “Does that mean things can go back to the way they were five years ago?”, she finishes Quinn off by fatally biting him like a vampire. The video or short film ends with her bizarrely betraying Quinn yet again. Poor Quinn, still unable to get the girl.

Quinn had fun with this song and allowed it to become an entertaining short film for his fans. Whether or not it’s an award-winning music video, Quinn gave his input, collaborated with the director, and made it true to who he is as an artist and an individual. Fans are able to laugh alongside him while watching the music video, and if they look closer at the behind-the-scenes

footage, Quinn’s friendliness and gratitude also stand out. When talking about his experience on set for the video, he says, “Robert, my side-kick best friend in the video was just a hilarious dude. Anyone from lead actors to the extras had really good positive energy.” And in the footage, you can see Quinn laughing and interacting with everyone on set, enjoying the whole experience. Rather than having someone else set up the video and only appearing last minute to quickly lip-sync the song and leave, Quinn was fully immersed in the ideas and the process of producing the video.

The same goes for the third music video I want to highlight from this album. Quinn was also able to put his acting skills to the test in the video for “Tough.” But before I delve into those details, I first want to tell you a story about how not just me but my whole family first perceived the song. Growing up in my household, I was surrounded by a lot of testosterone. My parents have four children, and of those four, I am the only girl. I have two older brothers who are both 23 years old and one younger brother who is 19 years old. Because of our ages, we are all pretty close with one another, but my brothers do like to remind me from time to time that I’m a girl and they are “men.” They’re strong, athletic, unemotional, and most importantly, tough. So naturally, one day when we were in the car and I was playing my music, Quinn’s “Tough” came on the stereo.

“Tough” is an acoustic record and the third single off of Quinn’s *From Michigan With Love* album. It is also one of the four songs on the album with a featured artist, in this case Noah Kahan, a 22-year-old pop and alternative singer-songwriter. Not only did Quinn and Noah collaborate together on “Tough,” but Chelsea Cutler and Scott Harris are also featured writers. Quinn and Drew Kirsch, the director of the “Tough” music video, sit down in a behind-the-scenes interview, and Quinn explains, “I wanted to write a song that touched on tough guys who

aren't in touch with their feelings; it kind of took on this interesting role being, you know, anti-bullying." While there are minimal elements used in the song's production, its lyrics tackle a heavier topic and take on the perspective of someone who is calling out a bully, a bully who deals with his insecurities by putting down others:

You're not so tough  
I know that nightlight's on when you sleep  
You're not so tough  
Yeah, you watch Eat Pray Love on repeat  
And I'm sure you'd win in an altercation  
But you're still insecure to me  
Oh, so mess me up  
I know you're not so tough

With the repetition of the first and last lines of the chorus in addition to the obvious title reference, Quinn as the speaker knows that his bully hides behind the facade of being "tough" and intimidating. In actuality, the bully struggles with his own self-doubt and uses aggression and unkindness as a shield.

Now, when my brothers heard this song for the first time, they mocked it. Right away, they started to make fun of me for liking such a song. Our conversation went a little something like this:

George: "This song is weird."

Me: “Oh really, why?”

George: “Because it’s about a grown man bullying another grown man.”

As I rolled my eyes at George, I knew he didn’t understand the entire message of the song and instead simplified it down to a single judgmental sentence. The song isn’t necessarily about two men pushing each other into lockers or getting into fist fights. It’s more about the way people act stand-offish around each other, post on social media to make their lives seem more exciting than they actually are, and hide behind expensive clothes and accessories. Most likely, my brother’s disapproving comment was his way of refusing to admit that he’s sometimes felt insecure when comparing himself to other guys his age.

Regardless, Quinn is especially good at placing the issue in the context of today’s society. Not only does he reference the 2010 movie *Eat Pray Love*, but he also alludes to the current health craze and people’s urge to constantly work out and feel fit. He mentions this idea across three different lines within the song. In the first verse, he sings, “If you ever cried, you'd wipe with muscle tissue / You bench pressing more than me's not the issue.” And then later, in the pre-chorus: “Like why, why are you only vulnerable when no-one's around? / Your gym membership is not a crown.” The stereotype of men being masculine and strong is emphasized heavily in his lyrics. Some of the lines, like with “bench pressing” and “gym membership,” are more explicit, as is the title itself. But Quinn also sprinkles more subtle instances into the song, especially with the play on words “muscle tissue.” By calling out this concept of physical strength in three different places, Quinn implies how relevant this is in his own life and within male culture. He makes the astute observation that while the bully may be stronger and physically powerful than Quinn, it doesn’t hide the fact that mentally and emotionally he isn’t tough at all.



While the track is at a slower tempo and relies heavily on the playing of an acoustic guitar, Quinn is still able to incorporate his rap background. The first verse flows at a steady rhythm as he practically speaks the words and follows the lead of the bass drum in the background. The music production takes a minimalist approach. It feels more intimate and vulnerable, especially as you can clearly hear the guitarist's fingers slide across the neck of the guitar as he moves between chords. Within this space, Quinn calls out to the target of his lyrics by inviting him to open up and figure out the root of his actions with "I know you're actually weaker than that / Let's open up and get deeper than that" and later "But I still acknowledge those feelings inside / Let's work on your habit to run or to hide." He creates a calm and safe environment to acknowledge the bully's own personal turmoil.

As Quinn leads into the chorus, he switches into a falsetto during the two-line pre-chorus: "Like why, why are you only vulnerable when no-one's around? / Your gym membership is not a crown." At this point, he pulls out the bass drum, leaving only the acoustic guitar and his voice-- a vulnerable moment in which he pleads with the bully to listen. And then when the refrain begins, the bass drum is reintroduced in addition to harmonizing vocals and snapping. The most amount of musical elements are present at this point in the song, but cleverly, the last word of the refrain "tough" is isolated on its own with only the echo of a guitar strum in the background. The bulk of the refrain, like the bully, is strong and steady. But like the last fading word, the speaker is able to stop for a moment and see right through the bully, realizing that the word "tough" is practically meaningless and empty.

In an interview with Noah Kahan and Zach Sang, Noah recalls how Quinn originally asked him to be featured on the song by direct messaging him on Twitter. Quinn gave him a slot

in the song to write the lyrics for a verse, and Noah, after enjoying the concept of the song and the material Quinn already had, played around with some ideas and produced his five-line verse:

Are you insecure that the steroids are causing hair loss?  
That your Lulu shorts don't quite vibe with your camo AirPods  
And if I ran into you past sunset, I'd probably be scared, oh  
I know you're honestly weaker than that  
I bet you know that you need to relax

He too comments on the trends of the day with the lululemon gym shorts and the Apple AirPods. The last line calls out the “insecure tough guy” even more for manifesting his personal struggles into hate, but also points out that the bully certainly must experience some cognitive dissonance in the situation. As Noah continues to tell Zach about the process of creating the song, he also comments on the fact that a lot of the work doesn’t need to happen in person and in the recording studio. He was able to record background vocals and his own verse separately before sending it back to Quinn for the final cut. He laughs and admits that today collaborating with another artist has become so much faster and requires less studio time: “It’s like, oh, I just got an email, and now that song is done.” Although there’s less intimate time with another artist, song-making like this allows him and other artists to collaborate more frequently and efficiently.

Noah’s verse follows the chorus, yet it precedes another verse by Quinn. In comparison to Quinn, Noah’s voice is softer and more reserved. Putting their two verses back-to-back without another refrain in between allows us to hear the contrasts in their voices more clearly. The lyrics and instrumentation amplify the contrast even more. Noah’s last line consists of “you

need to relax.” Then, Quinn comes in with “And I don't mean to come at you like it's Watergate.” As he does this, the volume of his voice is higher than Noah's, and a tambourine sound effect is added in with the bass drum. Quinn's verse is slightly more elevated, and he points out to the bully that while his words may seem firm, it doesn't mean that he needs to feel uncomfortable or get defensive.

This song is an unexpected take on the issue of mental health. Instead of choosing to talk about his own feelings and struggles, Quinn looks at it from a different lens and tries to consider why a bully chooses to act a certain way. Why does he feel inadequate or insecure? Not only is the song itself unique and original, but the music video for the song is also unexpected in ways. Scott Kirsch comments how the song and video demonstrate that “tough guys can have a sensitive side too, so we didn't wanna do it in like a dark, bullying kind of way, so we added all this color.” The video with over 3 million views, starts out on a close-up of Quinn's face upside-down. The camera zooms out and reveals to us that he is dangling above a toilet bowl by two unknown people. Throughout the first half of the video, Quinn and Noah are seen getting bullied in various ways, including getting eggs cracked over them or being pushed around in the park. But later, we see other males smiling in front of the camera, watching romantic movies and crying, knitting, playing chess, or doing yoga. We see the sensitive side of these men, and eventually we even see Quinn and Noah's bullies making amends. There is a positive twist to the video, and the coloring of it helps to lighten the mood. There are splashes of colors within the different sets. For example the chess set is pastel pink, or Quinn's pants are bright yellow when he does yoga, or a yellow-ish green moss tree stands behind Noah when he strolls in the park. The sets are simple but eye-catching. The video illustrates that someone might think the guys in

the video are tough, but if you stop and look closely, you can see signs that it's almost never the case--a lesson all three of my brothers wouldn't hurt from learning.

## CHAPTER 3

In the introduction, I mentioned how Quinn XCII's real name is Mike. But I didn't explain Mike's choice to call himself Quinn. It isn't just a catchy name he liked and nicknamed himself with; instead, it's the acronym for a saying that he borrows from a professor he once had in college. Quinn stands for: Quit Unless Instincts are Never Neglected. When I first found this fact out, I struggled to wrap my head around the saying and its meaning. But I've thought about it a lot and also explained it to a handful of my friends at this point, and I have a better grasp on it. Quinn lives by the notion that unless you are constantly living by your instincts and the things that inspire or motivate you, then it's not worth doing. With this stage name, he encourages his fans to let their passions and interests drive them and determine their decisions and goals. The message fits in with the ideas of recognizing that life is short and that it's a shame to waste your time doing things that aren't fulfilling. Quinn adds the Roman numeral to his name for an added flare, and it simply signifies the year he was born: 1992. The name stuck and a lot of people don't even realize that Quinn isn't his real name. Regardless, Mike embodies the name and its message and builds his brand as an artist around "Quinn."

The seventh song on the album "Matches" still falls under Quinn's brand, but veers away from the sound of a classic Quinn song or his roots as a rapper. In all honesty, this song seemed so out of character for him that it took me a while to warm up to it. The first few times I would listen to the album, I would often skip over "Matches." It's a slower-paced song, and the acapella vocals in the first 20 seconds of the track almost seem too sad and discomfoting. Quinn and Cautious Clay, a 27-year-old singer, songwriter, and producer, sing together:

Why am I obsessed with self-destructiveness?

Say I need you less

Cycle through refresh and fear of loneliness

Seems I'll never learn

Multiple layers of Quinn and Cautious Clay's voices are used at once. One layer is Quinn singing the melody, and the others are used to create a harmony. The two voices are prominent but not at a full belt. Rather, they almost whisper or exhale the lyrics, and the rasp in Cautious Clay's voice adds to the rawness of the intro. Here, we are given a taste of Quinn's true singing voice. Not only is he fully singing rather than rapping the lyrics, but his voice isn't drowned out by any instruments or synths at this point. We hear Quinn talking and reflecting with himself about how he tends to self-destruct. As the speaker, he is aware of his inclination to do so but cannot figure out why. He knows he is caught in a vicious cycle of feeling lonely and powerless and questions if he'll ever be able to break out of it.

"Matches" follows "Tough," so overall in the mental health journey of the album, Quinn may be commenting on how sometimes he can't help but let his insecurities take over. In "Tough," he calls out those who hide behind hateful comments and behaviors and encourages himself to refuse to be phased by these kinds of people. However, some days he might not be able to resist comparing himself to others or internalizing hateful words, and instead, he finds himself in a pit of self-destruction. This pattern is not only something that Quinn experiences in his daily life. Actually, the feeling of helplessness is frequently tied to anxiety and mental health disorders. An article discussing the specific Generalized Anxiety Disorder talks about the meaning of learned helplessness and how "If you continually feel helpless due to your anxiety, you may give up looking for a solution, accepting the current state as inevitable and unchanging.

Continued inaction can cause you to refuse therapy or medication, even when those things could make a considerable difference.” As someone who suffers with his own anxiety, Quinn acknowledges the concept of learned helplessness in his music. This song captures what it’s like to be directly in the center of it and wanting to give up, thinking nothing can be done to change it. However, in light of the entire album and Quinn’s advocacy for mental health and seeking treatment, Quinn recognizes that anxiety might cause someone to feel trapped and alone, but there is something to be done. There are solutions, and he is living proof of this.

At the beginning of both verses of this particular song, a siren noise goes off and fades out slowly in the background. It is surprising and alarming and puts the listener on high alert. It also distinguishes when Quinn as the speaker is about to spiral into a confession of his anxieties and feelings of struggle. The first verse does this while simultaneously referencing the title:

Matches on a table, striking every angle  
Recognize the past tense, knowing nothing's stable  
If you didn't show me the light is moving slowly  
Having trouble coping with the fire in your stare

With the match essentially being lit in the first line of this verse, Quinn carries the flame imagery into the following lines with “light” and “fire.” His anxiety is present as he feels that “nothing’s stable” and nothing can be controlled or guaranteed. During the song, Quinn speaks to an unidentified individual, most likely someone he loves. He looks to them for help on how to cope with his anxiety, and addresses them directly. Here, in Quinn’s distorted mind, he is paranoid and worried that he can see a fire or anger in this person’s eyes. In reality, the person tries to

inform Quinn that this isn't the case, and the flicker he sees as rapid and chaotic is actually "moving slowly." Two people can be looking at the same thing, like a match, but anxiety can cause one individual's perception of it to be completely warped.

The imagery of fire and the disjointed perspectives continue into the pre-chorus:

All I see is cloudy smoke above me  
And you keep saying it's lovely, but I, but I  
Find myself kneeling from all these caving ceilings  
Yeah, something seems appealing to me, to me

The match that was lit has caused a cloud of smoke to appear, and for the other individual it isn't anything to worry about, rather "it's lovely." However, in Quinn's mind, the smoke is overwhelming and suffocating. Cautious Clay adds his vocals into the refrain in addition to the pre-chorus. Like smoke thickens as a fire burns, the vocals at this point in the song are also more heavily layered. When he says "something seems appealing to me," Quinn is alluding to his tendency to self-destruct. He cannot explain why, but rather than try to see the smoke a different way, he feels it's more likely that he surrender and let the smoke overtake him.

The lines Quinn sings at the beginning of the song are the same lyrics used in the refrain. In the introduction of the song, the last line Quinn sings before going into the first verse is "Seems I'll never learn." But when Quinn repeats the chorus later on, the line turns into "Seems I'll never learn *that bridges always burn.*" And as I replay the song and consider the lyrics, I can't completely figure out why he chose to make this variation. Chronologically, it might make sense that at the beginning of the song, the figurative match hasn't been lit yet. This doesn't



occur until the first verse. So, once the flame is actually present, then the “bridges” can catch fire and are left to burn. Or, by adding this phrase to the end of the line, Quinn might be making a rather bleak yet realistic comment about life. He expresses as the speaker how he constantly feels defeated and stressed out by the looming cloud of smoke in his life. His anxiety makes him feel things too deeply and tears him up inside. He then says, “Seems I’ll never learn that bridges always burn.” First, he acknowledges the cycle he can’t seem to break out of, and then he goes on to remind himself that “bridges always burn.” As pessimistic as it might sound, it is a natural part of human life for bridges to burn, for people to come in and out of your life, and for things to change. Whether Quinn has anxiety or not and no matter how hard he tries, this will always be a reality. By repeatedly reminding himself of this, he tries to comfort and talk himself down from overreacting or getting too worked up about life. Again, this is a moment where he tries to differentiate between two types of perspectives or reactions and bring himself out of a self-destructive cycle.

Quinn has a conversation with himself as he transitions from “Matches” to “When I Die.” He goes from feeling lost and trapped by the anxiety cycle in “Matches” and arrives at a place of resolution in “When I Die.” This song captures how Quinn comes up for air and reflects on life from the opposite end of the spectrum. Rather than feeling defeated, he recognizes what he is grateful for and the moments he wants to cherish. Both songs address a specific individual, and I imagine that not only is it the same person, but it’s Quinn’s wife Macy. The memories he thinks of in “When I Die” are loving memories the two of them share. Quinn reverts back to his usual self in this song. His lyrics come out sounding more like a rap as he sing-talks to the beat of the drum which dominates the song. The track starts out with Quinn’s vocals and a keyboard, echoing like a church organ. As Quinn sings the first verse, the sound of two drumsticks tap

together, electronic synths are added, and voice harmonies arise. Eventually, in Quinn style, the drum beat drops, and the song surges at the refrain.

Quinn titled the song “When I Die,” and he alludes to the idea that when he dies, it’s the memories he has with Macy that will stay with him forever and be the highlights he looks back on. Therefore, throughout the verses, he alludes to these moments:

Baby, I'm a little faded  
But I need to tell you lately  
I wouldn't change a thing, oh no, no  
My favorite times are being lazy  
On your Tempur-Pedic laying  
We're quiet, listening, yeah

Reading the lyrics of this first verse without any music might make them seem a little odd. Not necessarily odd, but maybe immature. I can see my parents smirking as they hear “faded” or the line about the Tempur-Pedic mattress. It seems silly that this is the first memory Quinn decides to talk about. It hardly seems like an actual memory or any real milestone in their relationship, but Quinn makes the argument in this song that it’s the small, uneventful moments that mean the most to him. Also, in Quinn’s defense, him and Macy are a young married couple and haven’t even been married for an entire year yet. So who cares if he’s “a little faded?” They’re young, and at least he’s being honest about it, right?

Regardless, the lazy moments of being alone with his wife are increased in value when Quinn sings the chorus:

When I die, it's this I'll remember  
The wind moving the curtains in your room  
This moment's too good, I surrender  
'Cause there's no space in time  
That compares to how I feel like right now

These moments might seem trivial to us as outsiders, but because Quinn labels them as the moments he will remember until he dies, we realize how cherished and important they actually are. Quinn sets the scene of a room where the window is open, wind is coming in, and it gently moves the curtains. The tone of the lyrics is relaxed which matches perfectly with the tone of the instrumentation. The drum beat is persistent and steady and allows Quinn's voice to seem calm yet assured. This contrasts well with the feeling of turmoil he alluded to in the previous song.

The language used in the lyrics of "Matches" reappears in various moments of "When I Die" but in a new light. More specifically, if we look back to "Matches," Quinn says:

All I see is cloudy smoke above me  
And you keep saying it's lovely, but I, but I  
Find myself kneeling from all these caving ceilings

But then in "When I Die," he describes a different circumstance in which:

When I die, it's this I'll remember

The wind moving the curtains in your room

This moment's too good, I surrender

Instead of smoke, there is a wind that comes through Quinn's life. While you cannot see through smoke, and smoke is an indicator of looming danger, wind is colorless and is simply a part of everyday nature. Wind is less threatening than smoke. Also, in "Matches," the stress causes Quinn to shut down and surrender involuntarily. But in "When I Die," Quinn is not experiencing any stress, and he chooses to "surrender." He is in control and wants to fully embrace the life he has with Macy.

The idea of Macy helping to save Quinn from himself also arises in both songs, and in "Matches" we saw how it was difficult for him to accept the help even though he acknowledged it was present: "Recognize the past tense, knowing nothing's stable / If you didn't show me the light is moving slowly / Having trouble coping with the fire in your stare." Macy may have tried to show Quinn the light for what it is and pull him out of his anxiety, but something was still pulling him deeper into the cycle of self-destruction. But when Quinn comes out of this pit of pain, he is finally able to acknowledge in addition to accept Macy's undying support: "It's not easy loving life when I'm pissed off / That's why you came in and saved me, saved me / Life is only just a daydream." The first line here is Quinn looking back on how he felt in "Matches" and recognizing how his emotions can sometimes be blinding and get in the way. But, he goes on to say how Macy saved him and created a "daydream." Quinn knows that when his anxiety is at its worst, it's hard for him to see things from this perspective. But in retrospect and in the grand scheme of things, he is able to stop and give proper credit and gratitude to his wife. Quinn says in the pre-chorus, "Cause we're both here, keeping our breath under control / It's calm, no fear, I

don't ever wanna let go.” His anguish in the previous song has disappeared, he sees Macy by his side, and all the smoke is gone, allowing him to breath.

By cleverly making parallels between these two songs and practically making them a pair, Quinn gives a more wholesome picture of what mental health can look like. As he said in “Life Must Go On” about how there are highs and lows and there is no guarantee that every day will only get better and better, he shows what a low can feel like in one song and immediately follows it up with a high in the next song. Mental health is unpredictable and can manifest itself in different ways depending upon the individual. Some people who need help dealing with their mental health might not take action because they are able to compartmentalize. Because their mental health issues do not prevent them from doing daily tasks or completely paralyze them from leaving their house, they do not think they have a legitimate problem. An article by *Very Well Mind* talks more about this and about what high-functioning anxiety looks like. A lot of people with anxiety are able to mask it in front of friends and family. I like to imagine a person with high-functioning anxiety listening to Quinn’s album. Maybe they listen to “Matches” and feel they can relate to some of his emotions, yet don’t feel that this is how they are all the time, so they can’t claim to have anxiety like he does. However, let’s say they listen to “When I Die” next. Because Quinn gives both sides of what his anxiety looks like, the individual listening might be taken aback. They might hear Quinn admitting that there are some days when he feels perfectly fine, yet he is still diagnosed with anxiety and is medicated for it. With this clarity, I hope the individual would reconsider, realize that they too are struggling, and feel more empowered to do something about it due to the example Quinn has set. The article even mentions the value of what Quinn is doing here with:

It's helpful sometimes to identify famous people who are coping with the same struggles that we face. In the case of high functioning anxiety, we can think of stars such as Barbra Streisand and Donny Osmond, and athletes like Zack Greinke and Ricky

Williams...These individuals have found their way through their anxiety to succeed.

Quinn and others are able to use their platforms to show their followers that anxiety and other disorders do not have to be crippling or indicate a life-sentence of pain and uphill battles. A lot of people have been able to use their struggles to their advantage and rather than be shut down by them, they feel inspired to take momentous strides.

In the following track on the album, Quinn continues to sing specifically about Macy and how their relationship propels him forward. The gratitude he demonstrates in “When I Die” is also apparent in “Abel & Cain,” and he uses the biblical allusion to further describe the dynamic of their marriage and how he places her on a pedestal. However, before I go any further, I have to admit something first. I was introduced into the Catholic Church when I was born 21 years ago. My parents had my brothers and I baptized before we could talk, and from preschool to high school, I went to Catholic school. I went to church regularly, took religion classes, sang in the choir, went to Sunday school; I was very familiar with Catholicism by the time I reached college. So, when I first heard Quinn’s song “Abel & Cain,” I definitely knew that he was making a biblical allusion to the story about Cain and Abel. However, as embarrassing as this may be, this allusion practically meant nothing to me. All those years of religious education, and yet if someone asked me to tell them the story of Cain and Abel, I wouldn’t have been able to. And to make it even worse, I know Cain and Abel is a famous story that people know about even if they aren’t Catholic! This still somehow slipped through the cracks for me, and hearing Quinn’s song required me to do a bit of a Google search for some context. I’m glad I looked into it and gave

myself a bit of a refresher course on the story (which, don't worry, I started to remember as I read about it), because now Quinn's comparison makes a lot more sense to me. So, if you're anything like me, I suggest looking into the background of Cain and Abel to gain some clarity. Or, just simply keep reading...

When Quinn performed "Abel & Cain" live, he started the song off bent over with his head down. He stood on the highest point of the stage platforms, in front of the projector screen. For the first half of the first verse, Quinn had his hands at his knees and sang as if he was in great physical pain. He slowly rose up and sang the rest of the song looking out at the audience. He stayed on the same platform for the duration of the song, and the colors that switched along the projector screen were green and blue. By beginning his performance in a distressed state, Quinn demonstrates the pain he expresses in his lyrics.

In an interview with *Detroit Free Press*, Quinn tells how the song "Abel & Cain" is about him and Macy, his then fiancé. The couple is now married, but their paths crossed originally when they both attended MSU. During the interview, Quinn gushes: "'She centers me in a way most people can't,' he said. 'She takes me off the ledge when it comes to certain decisions.'" In the context of the song, Quinn is Cain, while Macy is Abel. Through his lyrics, Quinn talks about their relationship and the undying support he receives from Macy. Quinn's anguish comes into play when he makes the parallel between them and Cain and Abel, and Quinn characterizes himself as the undeserving villain.

The original Cain and Abel story is adapted in this song as Quinn takes on the role of Cain who killed his brother Abel out of jealousy and was ultimately punished by God. On the other hand, Macy is depicted as Abel who was unfairly killed by Cain. Abel had been revered by God for giving a generous sacrifice, but Cain acted out of rage and cut his brother's life short.

Although Quinn and Macy obviously aren't brothers, Quinn feels that their relationship as a couple has some parallels:

Innocent, you're standing all alone  
So how do I have the nerve to  
Call you out in front of my friends?  
Smiling wide, but these lies are set in stone  
Relatives rolling in their graves  
If that's where our story ends  
But it's not my dear cause  
You're lying here  
In bed next to me  
And I'm really the luckiest  
You came and bailed me out  
Innocent, you stood there all alone  
So who the hell am I to say those things that I said?

Quinn chastises himself within his lyrics, and he is frustrated with himself for the way he treats his "innocent" fiancé. He repeats in variation, "Innocent, you stood there all alone." Like Abel, Macy is innocent and has not done any wrongdoing to deserve revenge. Regardless, by his use of rhetorical questions, we can see how Quinn has unfairly called Macy out or said horrible things to her in the past. He feels torn and distraught as he's not only ashamed of his behavior, knowing that his relatives would roll over in their graves if they knew how he acted, but he also knows



how lucky he is to have Macy in his life. Quinn speaks in the interview about Macy talking him down off the ledge at times, and we can see this sentiment come through in the line, “You came and bailed me out.” Quinn’s version of the biblical story uses another twist in the sense that, in the original story, Abel dies and does not come back. However, Macy is still alive and present in Quinn’s life. He uses the allusion to reimagine how the story would have gone if Abel remained alive. Quinn offers the hypothesis that he probably would have been gracious and understanding if Cain had explained his feelings of jealousy and resentment towards him rather than act rashly. Because Abel was pure of heart and dedicated to God, he would have forgiven his brother and unconditionally loved him. Quinn sees Macy as his Abel and as the person who accepts him in any state.

As Quinn sings about his relationship with Macy, the theme of mental health and his own personal journey is further embedded within it:

There's not a day, there's not a day  
That I think I deserve you, maybe  
I'm not as strong as it seems  
And you figured me out  
You're Abel, I'm Cain, I fell in the rain  
Without you, I'd feel like I'm Hades  
Can't understand how  
I could have had all of these doubts

Here in the chorus, Quinn continues to acknowledge his own imbalances and unpredictability and the way Macy brings order to his life. As an individual diagnosed with anxiety, Quinn alludes to his mental health struggles and the battle to feel like himself. He does not feel strong and at times feels doubtful. His anxiety is something that not only affects him individually but also has an effect on his relationship. Nonetheless, Macy stands by Quinn, brings a completeness to his life, and does not punish him for the emotions he can't control. As he says, "There's not a day, there's not a day / That I think I deserve you, maybe," Quinn acknowledges how grateful he is to have Macy in his life. Quinn later repeats this line over and over again, and his Michigan accent comes through when "There's not a" starts to sound like "There's naughty" instead. Accent aside, by singing this line multiple times, Quinn deals with his own guilt of feeling like his mental health struggles can be detrimental to his relationship and can lead him to act unfairly towards Macy. Additionally, Quinn also repeats the line in order to reiterate to his wife that there isn't a day that he goes without thinking about her and everything she does for him.

## CHAPTER 4

When I approach the next song on the album, I can't help but really look back on the day in February when Paige and I drove to Indianapolis to see Quinn live. I remember being so giddy and excited while Paige and I waited in the crowd. It felt as if I was the one about to perform on stage. Let me do my best to paint you a picture of what it felt like waiting for Quinn to come on:

Two dark figures walk out on stage from opposite directions. Paige and I tense up and lean closer together, craning our necks to try and see more clearly. The crowd lets out a collective squeal of excitement. Just for a second, we think that one of the people in front of us at the Old National Centre has to be Quinn XCII. We realize our error quickly because neither person has a microphone in their hand; instead, we watch them find their instruments and hover over them as they check the tuning. The drummer sits on a stool on the left side of the stage, and the keyboard player is on the right. They riff with each other for a while as the audience starts to cheer them on. Paige and I know now that Quinn must not be too far behind.

"0:10" flashes in white bold letters on the black projector screen at the back of the stage. As the time starts to decrease to zero, fans in the crowd yell out the numbers of the countdown. The lights slowly increase in brightness, and smoke pools appear in a thin layer on the stage floor. From house right, he finally emerges and walks up to centerstage. Quinn stands on top of a raised platform that is located between his band members and positioned in front of the projector screen. The drummer eases into the beginning beat of "Sad Still," and the keyboard player eventually joins her. Quinn pauses and for a moment just looks out at the audience. He's wearing a baseball cap and sneakers (something you will never see him in photos without) and an orange outfit resembling that of a prison jumpsuit.

The beginning of the song has a very distinctive sound. Any regular listener of Quinn will hear the first four notes of the song and immediately recognize it as “Sad Still.” Before the vocals begin, it is just the synthesizer, and these notes sound like the blend of a xylophone and a steel drum. The first 10 seconds of the song are the four notes played in variation, and then Quinn comes in with the refrain:

We don't wanna feel this bad  
Rather sweep it under the mat  
We take this red pill, green pill, black pill  
I know deep down we're sad still.

When I think about this song, I tend to compartmentalize it into two parts--the refrain and the verses. While this is typical for most songs, Quinn does something unusual in the way that these two pieces are stark contrasts of each other, almost as if they are two entirely different songs. The refrain is more sing-songy. It's simple with Quinn's voice laying over the xylophone, and snapping is added in the background. The sound is calming and Quinn's voice is relaxed. Even as he performs, he holds the mic in his hand, hunches over slightly getting closer to his audience, and bounces along to the melody. The projector screen is split in half: one side is solid red, and the other side is solid blue, like a Rothko turned on its side. They are constant and unwavering during the course of the refrain.

However, the moment the refrain comes to a close, the song does a complete 180. The tempo immediately picks up, and Quinn shifts from singing to rapping. The xylophone disappears for a moment and is replaced with the frustration in Quinn's voice and a rapid drum

beat. The intensity of the song swells; the swift crash of a symbol is incorporated irregularly, and yet softly in the background the chords from the xylophone are still repeated.

The lyrics of “Sad Still” centers around Quinn’s anxiety. In the refrain, he expresses how mental health is often considered a taboo subject. People tend to “Rather sweep it under the mat.” Thus, when the song escalates into the verse, Quinn begins with an angry rhetorical question: “We don’t ever gotta talk about it, / What do you mean?” The first line seems sarcastic, as if he’s putting air quotes around it when he sings. He’s calling out the people who might think mental health is something that is better left hidden or is too personal to have open conversations about. He doesn’t understand this tendency and is angry because it is an issue he has to come face-to-face with daily. How can we go on ignoring something that inflicts so many people in our society today? When you listen to this track online, Quinn raps his lyrics with heart and gradually increases the volume of his vocals. But live and on stage, you experience even more strain in his voice. His words turn more into a scream, begging for someone to listen. At the ends of lines when he starts to run out of breath, his voice cracks ever so slightly. He’s anxious, exhausted, and unsure.

In an interview with Zach Sang, Quinn comments that he wanted the song to be “what an anxiety attack sounds like” and have “stampedes of drums...like a heartbeat.” Quinn brings his personal experiences into music and creates a simulation for his audience members. With the complex layers within the song and the contrasting sound of the verses and refrain, he effectively creates chaos by overstimulating the listener. For someone listening at home on their headphones, the verse feels like the sudden onset of an anxiety attack. Quinn spits out the lyrics without stopping, until the verse comes to an end; he releases a noise that resembles both a scream and a gasp for air and then transitions back into the refrain. For an audience member in

the crowd, not only is the bass shaking the entire room, but the red and blue colors on the projector flash rapidly. Other images also appear but only for seconds at a time. Each switch of an image compliments the beat the drummer creates. An image of a pile of pills appears and quickly goes away. When Quinn sings “Wanna treat the term anxiety / Like it's taboo,” a screen with the word anxiety repeated on it multiple times appears. Other ambiguous visuals like blue flames or water droplets or purple smoke all flash quickly across the screen. As the end of the verse approaches, Quinn’s voice gets louder, and the speed of the images going by increases. As I stood in the crowd, it was hard for me to keep track of everything that was going on at once, and as the song progressed, I could practically feel the room getting hotter.

Not only does Quinn comment on mental health, but he also references pop culture figures and trends seen among younger generations today:

Yeah this year's like  
3000 & Andre.  
Flood my head with vloggers,  
Go throw on that Kanye.

He creates a play on words with the “3000 & Andre” line. He references the artist Andre 3000 who has a solo career but was also once a part of the group OutKast. The peak of his career was in the late 90s and early 2000s. So, when Quinn alludes to him, he cleverly argues that today no longer feels like the times when Andre 3000 was highly popular; instead, it feels like we have projected much farther into the future. It feels like 3000 & Andre. By mentioning Kanye West, Quinn points out another artist who was successful in the early 2000s. However, Kanye has been

able to maintain his popularity and continue to produce relevant content, such as his new gospel album *JESUS IS KING*. Even today, he is still an influencer and currently has been focused on pushing a Christian initiative with his Sunday services.

In the same way, “vlogging” and being an influencer has become a type of career in the past ten years. People document their lives and post it online for everyone to watch. The vloggers have found a way to make an income off of making their everyday lives public. With this kind of culture, it has become harder and harder for people to keep their blinders on and refrain from comparing themselves to others. The prison jumpsuit Quinn wears during his performance, is a symbol of the restriction he feels. There are days when he feels trapped and controlled by his own mental illness. It dictates his emotions and his daily life: “We take this red pill, / Green pill, black pill.” And even though he’s learning to cope with it, talk openly about his struggles, and ask for help, he repeatedly admits, “I know deep down / We're sad still.”

“Sad Still” is situated at the end of Quinn’s album, and yet he chooses it as the first song in his tour setlist. I see it as his way of introducing himself to his fans and right away being upfront about his personal struggles. He brings his audience into his world and what his anxiety feels like. Then, throughout the duration of his show, he guides his audience towards managing these feelings and arriving at a place of comfort and assurance. But by placing “Sad Still” at the end of the album, Quinn also shows the unpredictability of a panic attack. It can happen at any time and when you least expect it. A listener might think the album is heading towards a revelation or a feeling of peace, but Quinn throws a curveball and inserts this song. It can be discouraging for someone on a mental health journey to believe they are making progress but then be hit by a wave of panic and anxiety. However, Quinn argues with the placement of this

track that even if this obstacle does arise, it does not mean the individual has to go back to square one.

We have already seen Quinn turn to Macy when he is emotionally overwhelmed or exhausted, and she has a way of making him feel comforted and safe. He brings her up directly in “Sad Still” with “I need to breathe, need religion, need fiancé on phone.” Thus, the placement of “Good Thing Go” after “Sad Still” makes sense. We’ve just heard a song that is chaotic, loud, over-stimulating, and focuses on some of Quinn’s worst moments. By placing “Good Thing Go” next in the track-list, he is demonstrating how his wife has helped diminish some of that anxiety and allows him to be resilient after harder moments.

Quinn’s wording in “Good Thing Go” indicates how he felt earlier on in his relationship with Macy when things were still relatively new:

Maybe I'm saying it too early, maybe I'm moving fast  
I may not be the first to love you, but I wanna be the last  
When you know, then you know, and I can't let a good thing go  
I know I'm rough around the edges, not as smooth as the rest  
But I can promise you, when I'm with you, I'll love you the best  
When you know, then you know, and we can't let a good thing go

Here in the chorus, he admits how completely infatuated he is with her and how he can’t imagine letting her go. He recognizes that his feelings might seem rushed, but he has a gut feeling telling him that he has found the woman he wants to marry. In the lines “I know I'm rough around the edges, not as smooth as the rest / But I can promise you, when I'm with you, I'll love you the



best,” he hints at his own faults that likely include his struggles mentally, but he acknowledges that their relationship trumps everything. He implies that their bond can withstand the worst and that his feelings for her help to overpower his anxiety.

With “Sad Still” utilizing a lot of instrumental components, the simplicity of “Good Thing Go” provides a good contrast and pulls back as a simpler song. An acoustic guitar, the drums, and added harmonies accompany Quinn’s voice. The song relies on fewer synths, and the tone is relaxed and warm as if he’s having an actual conversation with Macy. While Quinn uses his love for her to help him deal with his mental health, and he thanks her often for her moral support, it’s important to point out that mental health cannot be fixed by an outside person on behalf of the struggling individual. Family and friends can form a good support system and offer advice, but at the end of the day, the individual must accept help and actively seek out counseling, treatment, or other solutions to their issues. Quinn demonstrates his awareness of this when he mentions in an interview with Isabel Ravenna what he hopes to do with the album in terms of mental health: “My goal is to speak up on it and show people that it’s okay now to be brave and seek help if you haven’t already, and if you don’t want to seek help, at least tell a friend, or tell a parent or something and just be more vocal about it in general.” He puts most of the control in the individual's hands yet sees the value in having others to lean on during troubling times. Quinn does not make Macy or anyone else in his life the sole person to bear his battle with anxiety and depression but turns to Macy as a confidant. And with his album as a whole, Quinn doesn’t write about these issues as a way to gain sympathy or as a cry for help. He has learned to manage his own demons and uses his songs to be an example for his listeners. He hopes to inspire other people struggling with mental health to feel more inspired to make changes in their life or seek help.

Specifically in “Good Thing Go,” Quinn also touches on the mental health stigma in terms of gender. Ideas about societal norms and expression of emotion arise in the pre-chorus:

And I don't deserve you, I'll never hurt you

If I ever lost you, I'd die

If I couldn't hold you, I would be so blue

And I'm not supposed to cry

He is aware of how devastated and broken he would feel if Macy was no longer in his life, but he ends the stanza with “I’m not supposed to cry.” He knows he would be overcome with emotions if something like this ever happened, but according to society, as a male, he shouldn’t publicly grieve or outwardly show his feelings. In the same interview, he went on to tell about his mental health in earlier stages in his life when he lived at home as a teen: “I think guys in particular, like me and my stuff, I was always taught, just like, ‘Suck it up, you’re fine,’ if I complained to my mom or my dad.” His parents were not as supportive or understanding as Quinn had hoped when he was younger, and they did not fully grasp the extent of his anxiety. As men are often pressured in society to live by the stereotype of being tough, reserved with their emotions, and strong, Quinn and others are more hesitant at first to be forthcoming about their struggles. However, Quinn remains hopeful and sees this stigma starting to be erased. He believes now that when someone admits to a friend that they’re having a difficult time “people are more sensitive to when you say that to them, and they want to know what’s going on, and therapy’s more popular now, and I think the whole world is becoming more accepting of this conversation.” This topic is becoming less gendered, and it is more acceptable for both men and women to have open

discussions, look for warning signs in each other, and use the available resources to overcome mental health obstacles.

Quinn especially emphasizes the possibility of overcoming mental health battles when he closes out his album on the twelfth track. At this point, we've arrived at my hands-down favorite song on the album: "Right Where You Should Be." I remember last year sitting in my room at school listening to the whole album on the day it came out. If I'm being completely honest, when I listened to the album for the first time, I was so excited that I skipped through and listened to each one for about 30 seconds. I wanted to get a taste of what all was on the album, and I was too impatient to listen to every song in full yet. I eagerly wanted to know everything that Quinn had included on the album. However, when I got to the last song, rather than listen to just 30 seconds of it, I knew right away that I loved it, so I let myself listen to it in its entirety. I think it's the perfect end to Quinn's album as it's a feel-good song with a reassuring message about accepting the mental health journey as a whole, including all its peaks and valleys.

My junior and senior years at DePauw were arguably two of my toughest years. My first two years away from home were exciting for me, and I loved meeting new people and overall feeling more independent as an individual. However, the following two years were much more difficult for me as academics intensified, I worried more about my life post-college, and I saw myself regularly pull back from social situations. Part of me knew I was struggling, but by keeping myself busy with classes and extracurriculars, it was easy for me to push my feelings aside and avoid dealing with them. The biggest revelation for me happened at the end of the first semester of this year. I work as a Peer Mentor on campus, and after the first semester, we are given feedback from the mentors that we supervise about how effectively we've done our job and guided the group. I remember reading over the responses on the survey and getting a pit in

my stomach. Some of the comments I read were: “Emma was super helpful when it came to dealing with difficult situations with mentees, she would respond quickly and efficiently. She always followed up and consistently made herself available for further help.” Or, the one that struck me the most: “Very friendly and always smiling and you can tell she's happy being a peer mentor.” An outsider reading these comments would think this is great feedback, and I am glad that I received such kind words and that my group saw me as reliable and friendly. However, there was more going on than what they observed. The hardest phrase for me to read over was “always smiling and you can tell she’s happy.” This is true. I consider myself to be outgoing, bubbly, and welcoming. I joined the mentor program because I really do love meeting new people and stepping outside of my comfort zone. My goal from the start of the school year was to keep the enthusiasm going from orientation and continuing to be upbeat and positive when leading my group. So, reading this feedback validated my intentions, but they also really scared me. I managed to keep a smile on my face and look happy even though some days I felt scattered and alone. It was interesting to read that the mentors in my group commented on my ability to help with crises or difficult situations when I refused to deal with my own issues. I was unable to pinpoint the exact reasons for why I would get upset, but there were moments in the past two years where I would have random anxiety attacks. I could feel my emotions building up, and I wouldn’t want anyone to see me, so sometimes I would lock myself in the bathroom or in my car. My heart would race, I would feel shaky, and it was difficult to get a full breath of air. Most of the time I could calm myself down within 15 minutes, but in that time period, my mind would race about a million other things, and I would feel really alone. I knew I had family and friends who supported me, but I was also able to convince myself that no one would understand how I felt or be able to comfort me. Reflecting on it now, I realize that it was easier for me to stay busy

so I wouldn't have to be alone with my thoughts. But eventually those things would catch up to me, and I would be overwhelmed by everything I had on my plate. I felt pressured to stay caught up with everything I was involved in but criticized myself when I felt like I was drowning in all the work I had to accomplish. My friends would get upset with me when I chose to stay in by myself and work on schoolwork rather than go out with them. Sometimes, to avoid any backlash, I would disappear without telling anyone and spend the day working somewhere on campus by myself with my phone off. The truth is, I know my friends wanted the best for me and simply just wanted me to be present and not miss out on any fun, but what they didn't know was that I was constantly feeling anxious or numb to the things going on around me. In general, I wanted to maintain the exterior that everything was okay and fulfill the idea of what people saw me as-- friendly, happy, and put together. So, when I heard "Right Where You Should Be" for the first time, it came at a time when I was in the middle of feeling this way. It was easy for me to immediately make my own personal connection to the message and reflect deeper. Ashe sings the first verse:

Life is running a race while you're smoking, falling apart  
You can fall, you can fail as long as it comes from your heart  
If you're down on your face, it's okay, you can look up  
You are what you say, no, you are not where you're from

Right away, the first line resonated with me. I felt like I was falling apart when everyone else was doing well and getting things done. Of course, this is never actually the case, and just hearing these first couple lines made me feel less alone in that sentiment. I was also really

intrigued by the last line of this verse and the idea that you can essentially control your own narrative. You don't have to be tied to one thing or identity, but you can define it for yourself. In terms of my own life, this line meant more to me that I shouldn't let my own struggles determine my life, but really the way that I deal with my own issues or obstacles is what is really telling of my character. How could I still be myself but also manage my anxiety? How could I make people's perception of me match the views I had of myself?

As the song progresses, the chorus reassures the listener that whatever stage the person may be at in their own journey is acceptable:

You are right where you should be  
You are right here next to me  
What do you need when you have everything?  
'Cause you are right where you should be


I've heard before that it can be comforting to have a mantra or a phrase that you can repeat to yourself during stressful times as a way to feel comforted. This song, especially the refrain, immediately reminded me of this idea. An article in *Thrive Global* goes into more detail about how mantras can be used as a tool and how:

...when someone repeats a mantra, it causes a major shift in their brain activity — specifically in the part responsible for internal evaluation, rumination, and mind-wandering. When researchers compared results between participants in a resting state who used a mantra against those that didn't, the ones utilizing the mantra reached a more advanced state of psychological calm.

In a way, Quinn's lyrics can be used as a mantra to listeners. The phrase "you are right where you should be" is repeated frequently from the start of the song to the end and becomes rhythmic and meditative. Like I've said before, most of the time, repetition in songs is a red flag for me and makes me like a song much less. But when I heard "Right Where You Should Be," the repetition of the line was comforting and reassuring. Quinn, Ashe (vocalist), and Louis (producer) collectively are calling out to their listeners and begging them to realize that they are right where they need to be. People shouldn't feel like they need to constantly be one step ahead but instead should feel proud of wherever they currently are in life. No matter what path someone is on or what goals they have, everything takes time and progress, so it's useless to get down on yourself or convince yourself that you are insufficient.

Ashe, who is the other vocalist on the track, not only collaborated with Quinn on this particular song, but she was also one of the openers on Quinn's tour for this album. Unfortunately, on the day that I saw Quinn in concert, Ashe tweeted that she was unable to perform because she had pneumonia. While I was of course understanding and did not expect her to still perform while sick, I am still sad that I never got to see her perform live. I would have loved to not only hear some of her own songs but also see her perform this specific song with Quinn. I especially felt bad for the two young girls that Paige and I stood next to during the concert, because they informed us that the main reason they bought tickets was to see Ashe. They didn't really know who Quinn was (which made me wince a little) and were disappointed that Ashe would not be performing. And while they didn't know Quinn, I admittedly wasn't too familiar with Ashe at the time. I have since learned that she is a young musician who goes by the name of Ashe, but her real name is Ashlyn Willson. She is a singer/songwriter who once studied Contemporary Writing and Production at Berklee College of Music. Other musicians like Louis

the Child and Whethan have collaborated with her, and she has produced 3 EPs thus far in her music career. She is increasing in popularity especially right now, because, in the recent Netflix original movie *To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You*, Ashe's song "Moral of the Story" is used in a pivotal scene. Because of their work on "Right Where You Should Be" and their time on tour together, Quinn and Ashe have become good friends, and they talk openly about it on social media. On March 26, 2019, Ashe tweeted a video of her and Quinn joking around and singing together off-stage along with the caption:

after having written together, ugly cry laughed together, and now a major tour, ive never looked up to or appreciated another artist more. im daily inspired by u @quinnxcii. u r intentional, intelligent, raw and have lungs of steel. thank u for bringing me along ur journey, i  u

It makes me happy to see that Ashe and Quinn didn't just work together but genuinely support each other and have found a friendship through their music. As we know that since a lot of music today can be produced digitally and does not even have to happen in person at a recording studio anymore, a lot of artists who work together might not actually form a bond with each other outside of the collaboration. But because of their song and Quinn's tour, Ashe and Quinn go beyond this and truly respect each other as individuals. That's why I wish Ashe hadn't been sick on the day of the concert, because I would have been able to see their chemistry on-stage and get more out of the song as two good friends sang it together live.

Luckily, I am not completely deprived, because on March 26th, Quinn and Ashe also released a video on YouTube of them performing an acoustic version of the song. They appear in



a warehouse that is dimly lit but with small glimpses of light shining in from the windows above, and the camera does a 360 pan of the entire room. There is Quinn and Ashe sitting at a piano together in addition to several backup singers, a cellist, a violinist, an acoustic guitarist, and two bass guitar players. They are all positioned in a circle, and the camera rotates positions throughout the performance in order for the viewer to get an idea of the arrangement as a whole. Ashe plays the piano which allows Quinn to get up halfway through the song and stand in the center of the circle as he sings. While the original version of the song includes more electronic synths, vocal layering, and clapping in the background, the acoustic version strips these components away and relies more heavily on the piano and strings. The acoustic version also slows down and draws out the length of the song slightly. In this video, we are able to see both vocalists as they recite the lyrics, so more emotion comes through as we see their body language, subtle dance moves, and hear any small variations to the melody of the original track. The live performance is more raw, and, even over the computer, it seems more intimate and special.

When it comes to my absolute favorite songs, I do something that I don't think many other people do. Rather than listen to it over and over again, I like to limit myself on how often I can play it. It's the worst when I think I love a song and then once it gets overplayed, the magic of the song starts to fade, and I ultimately get sick of it. So, learning from experience, with songs like this one, I try to be careful. Because Quinn is my favorite artist, I do this with a lot of his songs, not just "Right Where You Should Be." I listen to his music often but not too much. My favorite time to listen is honestly, and as cheesy as it sounds, during the times when I'm at my best. When I feel pretty content in a given moment or just grateful for some of the things in my life, this is my favorite time to play my favorite music. I am one of those people who believes that a song can easily affect my mood, so I like being able to supplement some of my best

moments with what I consider to be some of the best songs. Then, I get to associate the two with each other and somehow make the songs even better.

## CONCLUSION

On July 20, 2017, Quinn tweeted:

R.I.P. Chester Bennington. Terrible shame. Linkin Park was such a major part of mine and so many other childhoods.

Chester Bennington was a member of the famous rock band Linkin Park and was 41 years old when he took his own life on July 20th. His death followed the suicide of Chris Cornell, member of Soundgarden, on May 18th. Chester had a history of alcohol and substance abuse throughout his lifetime. He went through the divorce of his parents at a young age, and an older friend also sexually abused him for years starting at age 7. He suffered a lot of trauma which in turn was channeled into his music. He talked publicly about his depression and addiction, something he battled with every single day. Some of his songs that spoke directly to his mental anguish were songs like “Heavy” and “Crawling.” He once talked about “Heavy” saying, “Even when it’s good, I just am uncomfortable all the time. . . . The opening line, ‘I don’t like my mind right now’ – like, that is me 24 hours a day. And if I get stuck in here, like, I just find life really hard. It doesn’t have to be.” Or, with “Crawling,” he admitted, “That’s about feeling like I had no control over myself in terms of drugs and alcohol.” His music got to the core of his own emotions and explicitly addressed the personal thoughts he’s had in his life:

There's something inside me that pulls beneath the surface

Consuming, confusing

This lack of self control I fear is never ending

Controlling  
I can't seem  
To find myself again  
My walls are closing in  
(Without a sense of confidence I'm convinced  
That there's just too much pressure to take)  
I've felt this way before  
So insecure

This verse from “Crawling” can be used to draw parallels to Quinn’s music. As we saw in “Sad Still” when he sings about an anxiety attack, he describes his experience with:

My floor with pillows then stand  
Cuz all this vertigo is making  
Me unsure where I'll land.  
I need to breathe, need religion,  
Need fiancé on phone,  
Since our last conversation  
I don't trust being alone.

Even though Bennington addresses alcohol and drugs and Quinn focuses on depression and anxiety, there are still obvious connections and ways that Quinn has been influenced by Linkin Park. Both artists describe a feeling of not being in control of their own emotions. With Quinn

not being able to control the onset of his anxiety and Bennington not feeling in control of his addiction at times, they both seem to feel trapped and unequipped to pull themselves out of the dark places they've found themselves in. You can also hear in Quinn and Linkin Park's respective songs the strain in their voices as if it's a cry for help. Both artists are very honest and transparent in their work and use music to describe their negative emotions.

Not only was Chester in Linkin Park, but he was also a member of other bands including Grey Daze and Stone Temple Pilots. He had also been married twice and had six children of his own. His wife Talinda tweeted a video on September 16, 2017 along with:

This is what depression looked like to us just 36 hrs b4 his death. He loved us SO much & we loved him. #fuckdepression #MakeChesterProud

In the video, Chester and his family play a game together and are laughing and enjoying each other's company. In this social media post, Talinda called attention to how depression is not something that can always be detected on the surface but was something Chester endured internally. Because of this, and because depression and mental health in general can be so quiet and personal, I commend him, Quinn, and other artists who bravely take their inner thoughts and offer their mental health journey to be viewed in the public eye.

If we consider other artists and other works centered around mental health, it's interesting to see who has been affected, chosen to join the conversation, and allowed it to become more prevalent in our everyday life and culture. So many artists and songs today, have taken on mental health issues explicitly and have gained a lot of attention. For example, artists like Ariana Grande, Michael Angelakos, Shirley Manson, James Blake, Demi Lovato, Lady Gaga, JP

Cooper, and many more address mental health. While it isn't an easy one, it has become a hot topic, and musicians have tried to draw more attention to it in order to express themselves and be supportive of listeners who may be struggling and do not know what to do.

One artist especially who has done this is actually an artist on the same label as Quinn: Logic. His 2017 song "1-800-273-8255" with Alessia Cara and Khalid currently has 889,760,849 listens on Spotify, and the music video has 366,202,178 views on YouTube. Not only is the title simply the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number, but the lyrics also take the listener on a journey in which the speaker starts off feeling distraught and hopeless:

I've been on the low  
I been taking my time  
I feel like I'm out of my mind  
It feel like my life ain't mine  
Who can relate?

But he then comes to plead with himself and others like him to push forward and understand how valuable a life is:

I want you to be alive  
I want you to be alive  
You don't gotta die  
Now lemme tell you why

The song directly advocates for suicide prevention and arrives at a place where the speaker does not feel like he's drowning anymore but instead states "I don't wanna cry anymore / I wanna feel alive." In the same manner, the music video goes through a similar narrative structure and portrays a young man who struggles with his sexuality and experiences shame and guilt as a result. However, he ends up using the hotline, the same hotline used for the title, in order to take back control of his life, find self-acceptance, and later in a flash-forward, have his family's support at his wedding ceremony to his future husband.

Logic expressed in an interview how he was surprised by the response of the song and how much of an effect it had on people:

I was like, 'Man I wasn't even trying to save nobody's life.'

And then it hit me, the power that I have as an artist with a voice. I wasn't even trying to save your life. Now what can happened if I actually did?

Just by writing a song that came from a place of personal struggle, he was able to capture a feeling or sentiment that someone else could relate to. I once had a creative writing professor who told us that in order for your work to be relatable, you shouldn't try to be broad, hoping that more people can relate to you. Instead, be specific to your own life experiences, and more times than not, someone will be able to find an aspect of your story that they can latch on to. Logic used his lyrics to discuss his own anxiety, and Quinn told a story with his song about what one of his panic attacks felt like. By being honest about their specific cases of mental health issues, these artists have been able to resonate with listeners they have never even met.

If we consider the increase in songs today directly tackling these topics, it isn't surprising when you look also at the statistics regarding mental health within the music industry. More specifically, Record Union conducted a study in 2019 which resulted in "The 73% Report" in which they found that "More than seven out of ten (73%) independent music makers said that they have experienced negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and/or depression in relation to their music creation." Quinn, Chester, and Logic are most definitely not the only ones to have battled with their mental health throughout their careers. It is something that numerous artists seem to identify with, thus more light is now being shed upon it. While I would have predicted that our younger generations would be more forthcoming with their mental health struggles and feel more accepted when discussing it publicly, the study reveals that only 58% of artists age 18 to 25 were willing to talk to someone in their life about what they were going through, while 74% of artists age 36 or older were willing to have the same conversation. Based on the study, musicians who are younger keep more to themselves and are hesitant to verbalize their feelings.

Quinn XCII falls between these two age groups as a 27-year-old musician, but he is more in line with the 36+ age group in the way he admits to his own depression and anxiety and channels those feelings into his music. He strives to help end the stigma around admitting you have a problem or need help managing negative emotions. In a *BBC* article, Radio 1's Dr. Radha discusses how "When someone in the public eye talks about their challenges with mental health then it helps the feeling of isolation reduce and also helps us realise that anyone can experience them - however rich, seemingly-happy or successful." Through Quinn, we can see how Chester and the rest of Linkin Park gave him some sort of solace as a child and was an artist he looked up to. Now, Quinn is using his platform to do the same and join the team of artists who are choosing to make mental health the topic of their songs and albums and help make it less taboo. And



because Quinn's age links him closely to the 18-25 age group, he can act as an example not just for his listeners but for other artists who hesitate from having open and vulnerable conversations.

Some people believe that mental health issues are more common among artists and that a more creative mind leads to higher risk of developing mental illness. However, an article by *Insider* argues that, "Rather than one definitely leading to the other, it's probably more valuable to look into the lifestyles of creative people, and what leads them there." Furthermore, the environment that a creative person works in may have more of an impact than the actual functioning of their brain. This 2018 article by Dodgson discusses how people who enter into creative fields (ex. musicians) may engage in certain lifestyle habits that can lead to mental illness. For example, sleep deprivation, drug use, and publicity in the media are often linked to the lifestyle of an artist and could ultimately cause someone to suffer more stress and anxiety. As musicians go on tour to promote their albums or spend hours on end in a recording studio, their bodies are not being given adequate time to rest. Without a healthy sleep schedule, a toll is taken on an individual's mental health. "The 73% Report" also found that "Those who said that they have self-medicated were most likely to have done so through the use of alcohol (54%) and drugs (50%)." This unhealthy outlet for dealing with mental health could potentially lead to a cycle of increased mental illness and an individual not discussing their underlying emotions. Thus, the behavior and choice to engage in the consumption of alcohol and drugs would persist, and the individual would never find a solution to their sole issue. So instead of assuming that creativity is attached to mental illness, we should really be considering the ways in which the environments within the music-making industry may increase someone's chances of developing mental issues or disorders. I think that as more artists like Quinn draw attention to their own struggles, there would be more of an urgency for people within the industry to work to change

the current conditions or find a way to provide resources for these people who feel trapped and lost.

Since Chester's death, his wife has taken the tragedy as an opportunity to "launch the Campaign to Change Direction — which highlights the signs of depression and encourages people to 'lend a hand' to those suffering." This campaign is meant to be proactive and preventative and give people signs of when to step in to help a family member or friend who may be struggling. In an interview, Talinda tells that the five signs of depression are change in personality, agitation, withdrawal, hopelessness, and decline in personal care. By creating this movement and actively broadcasting it on social media, Talinda, in honor of Chester, has been able to raise awareness and create a tool for others to use in similar situations. While Chester lost his battle to mental health, there is still hope that others can find help and live healthy and stable lives. This campaign not only can have an impact on the music industry as Chester was a significant figure within it, but it can also have an impact on anyone in the general public who faces mental health troubles.

With Quinn, he was able to take his appreciation and love for Chester as a fan and continue the conversation even after Chester's death, doing exactly what Talinda wanted to do. Like Chester, Quinn allows mental health to become the subject matter of his songs, and with this album in particular, every song is tied to mental health in some capacity. A listener could choose any song off *From Michigan With Love* and take away some message or sentiment about mental health. Quinn does not dedicate a portion of his music to mental health, instead he dedicates the whole album. Just as mental health infringes on his personal life every day, it is a topic that infringes on every track in his 2019 album. Mental health isn't a small issue with small consequences; it's a massive issue that if not addressed properly can be life-threatening.

I end our evaluation of the album here and situate Quinn in conversation with Chester and other artists who advocate for mental health in order to truly show the work Quinn is doing with his album. He only represents one individual artist, but he adds to the conversation that so many others have started to engage in. With his album and his platform, Quinn has the ability to help affect change within the music industry and for those outside of it. Quinn, like Chester, leads by example and chooses to be vulnerable in *From Michigan With Love* in hopes that he can help someone else with their own inner struggles. He comments on his intentions with discussing mental health in his music in an interview with Z100 New York. He admits,

I was actually a little nervous, because I didn't want people to think I was sort of taking advantage of this time we're living in with pop culture and mental health and it being such a prominent conversation. So I really wanted to make sure I spoke about it and told my story, and I wasn't just someone trying to capitalize off of the time we're in right now.

He recognizes that today mental health awareness is not a novel idea, so he did not want to come off as disingenuous. By opening up about his own experience with anxiety and depression, Quinn gains credibility. I do believe that someone who might not necessarily struggle with mental health can still help spread awareness, but I think Quinn's empathy allows his words to be more powerful.

Quinn's songs from this particular album have given hope and comfort to his listeners who might be going through similar battles. And even if there was never any proof of this, I can speak to my own experience. When the album came out last year, I connected with some of the messages Quinn puts forth in his songs, but I was also still in denial that my own anxiety and inner turmoil was anything but normal, temporary, or manageable. By unpacking Quinn's album

and doing more research on mental health, I further realize how applicable a lot of Quinn's lyrics are to my life. As I've studied this album, I've taken away the idea that mental health is a constant journey and is something I will always need to work at. I have also learned the importance of being honest and asking for help. This year was difficult for me, but I have also made small strides for myself. I have opened up to more of my close friends about how I'm feeling day-to-day, and I try to check myself when I resort to bottling up my emotions. I hadn't really realized the impact this album and project has had on my life, but as I reflect now, I can see how dedicating an entire thesis to the importance of mental health conversations has empowered me to practice what I preach.

With that being said, I think it would be a shame to overlook Quinn XCII as an artist and immediately assume that a pop album could never hold any true value or craftsmanship. Quinn relied on personal experience, collaboration with other artists, and modern music technology to put out a full album with a narrative arc and a message about a prevalent issue. The technology helped Quinn with production but also works in his favor as a way for people to share his album with each other, listen instantly on music-streaming services, and reflect together. It can be used as a conversation starter and a tool for someone to look inward before trying to voice how they feel to a family member or friend. *From Michigan With Love* exists as an entertaining album with catchy songs, but more importantly acts as a springboard for essential conversations.

Realistically, and especially in terms of pop music, I don't imagine that people will unanimously agree that all music is valuable or that every artist should be inducted into the Hall of Fame. I think music will always be somewhat polarizing as people have their own interests, favorite genres and artists, and their own taste of music. Older and younger generations might always feel disconnected from each other especially as music continues to evolve. However, I

hope that we can continue to see an increased respect of each genre and a willingness to be more open-minded. I would like to conclude by offering up a belief that I've always tried to live by. As a big music fan myself, I am always listening to something, yet I still have my own likes and dislikes. I realize that not everyone will appreciate the music that I enjoy. However, when someone comments on the music I listen to and says I have bad taste in music or wonders how I listen to "this garbage," I take personal offense to it. Ann Powers's earlier comment about how music can move someone emotionally made me think of how I see music taste as a highly personal thing. Because music is emotional and reflective, different songs can have different effects on people. Something in a song might resonate with me while it does absolutely nothing for someone else. I try not to ever tell someone that the music they like is bad or that they have bad taste, because for them, it could be very meaningful and evoke certain memories or emotions. With this project, I was happy to write an entire book about Quinn XCII and his 2019 album because it falls under my music taste, and I am passionate about it. Even though no one has really dedicated this much research to Quinn yet in another publication, I enjoyed doing the groundwork. While the quest to defend pop music is extensive and ongoing, Quinn XCII can be included as another case study of how music goes much deeper than the label it's initially given.



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