

## ABSTRACT

*Fantasies and Delusions:*  
Billy Joel's Turn and Return to Classical Music

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In 2001, the release of *Fantasies and Delusions* officially announced Billy Joel's remarkable career transition from popular songwriting to classical instrumental music composition. Representing Joel's eclectic aesthetic that transcends genre, this album features a series of ten solo piano pieces that evoke a variety of musical styles, especially those coming from the Romantic tradition. A collaborative effort with classical pianist Hyung-ki Joo, Joel has mentioned that *Fantasies and Delusions* is the album closest to his heart and spirit. However, compared to Joel's popular works, it has barely received any scholarly attention. Given this gap in musicological work on the album, this thesis focuses on the album's content, creative process, and connection with Billy Joel's life, career, and artistic identity. Through this thesis, I argue that *Fantasies and Delusions* is reflective of Joel's artistic identity as an eclectic composer, a melodist, a Romantic, and a Piano Man.

*Fantasies and Delusions: Billy Joel's Turn and Return to Classical Music*

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I want to make clear that the undertaking and completion of a project of this magnitude would never, in any imaginable way, be possible through my efforts alone. Therefore, I wish to take this opportunity to thank various individuals for their valuable contributions throughout the different stages of this research. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank my dearest mentor and friend, Dr. Jean A. Boyd, for her unconditional love, belief, and support throughout my academic career here at Baylor University. My deepest appreciation also goes to Dr. Alfredo Colman, Dr. Horace J. Maxile, Jr., and Dr. Robin Wallace for their generous insights, guidance, and patience throughout the formative and editing stages of the document. Mr. Clayton Crenshaw, the university's Music Liaison Librarian, also deserves special recognition for his tremendous expertise and assistance in helping me to collect numerous source materials which have proved crucial to my research. To Ms. Sandra Harman, the graduate school dissertation and thesis coordinator, I am particularly appreciative of her generous assistance on navigating me through the formatting intricacies of the document. I also want to thank theory professors Dr. Timothy McKinney and Dr. Edward Taylor for sharing their insights on Baroque counterpoint practices, which helped me in the analysis of Joel's "Invention in C minor." Moreover, I am also grateful to Bryce Reed, a fellow graduate student and colleague in music theory, for his assistance and theoretical input on the structural analyses of the pieces and the preparation of the formal tables. I owe my sincerest gratitude to my best friends, Alexander Kostadinov and Bonnie Wang, for their

constant emotional support and care for my well-being. I cannot thank them enough for always being there in my time of need, especially during the most grueling moments of the writing process. A special mention also goes to Sam Boocker, who had encouraged me to pursue this topic for my thesis. I also reserve personal gratitude and appreciation to the artists and creators of *Fantasies and Delusions*, Billy Joel and Hyung-ki Joo, whose passion and love for music have been, and will always be, an inspiration to me in my music career. Additionally, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Joo, who has so kindly entrusted me with his personal recollections and thoughts on the *Fantasies and Delusions* project. His care, friendliness, and candidness throughout our correspondence has made my first interview attempt a warm and wonderful experience that will go down as one of the most treasured moments in my life. Finally, none of this would be possible without the support of my parents, Goh Ching See and Chin Chow Lin, to whom I am greatly indebted for bringing me up with love and encouragement to this stage.

## DEDICATION

To my loving family, mentors, friends, Hyung-ki Joo, and Billy Joel who helped make this project a reality.

The best expression of my life and its ups and downs has been and remains my music.  
—Billy Joel

I am actually the closest to this recording of any of the recordings I have done, this is more me than anything right now.  
—Billy Joel on *Fantasies and Delusions*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In 2001, the release of *Fantasies and Delusions* officially announced Billy Joel's remarkable career transition from popular songwriting to classical instrumental music composition. Representing Joel's eclectic aesthetic that transcends genre, his thirteenth studio album features a series of ten solo piano pieces that evoke a variety of musical styles, especially those coming from the Romantic tradition. A collaborative effort with classical pianist Hyung-ki Joo, Joel has mentioned on several occasions that *Fantasies and Delusions* is the studio album closest to his heart and spirit. However, compared to Joel's popular works, the album has barely received any scholarly attention. Scattered anecdotes from different biographers and reviewers and brief accounts in a few musicological studies constitute all that has been written on the album. Given this gap in musicological work on the album, this thesis focuses on the album's content, creative process, and connection with Billy Joel's life, career, and artistic identity.

In 2016, I bought *Fantasies and Delusions* from a Half Price Books outlet in Dallas for \$4.99. With this being my very first Billy Joel album, its title captured my imagination and I found the music in it to be genuinely heartfelt and interesting. Contrary to most people, I was introduced to Joel's sound world first through this set of classical piano pieces instead of his popular works. "Piano Man" was the only popular song by Joel that I knew before I set out to write this document; therefore, this research project not only gave me the chance to delve deeper into *Fantasies and Delusions*, but also

opened a window of opportunity for me to study Joel's life and his popular music. In this thesis, I focus on answering the following question: what are the different factors and contexts (personal, cultural, and musical) that culminated in the final recording of *Fantasies and Delusions*? Although *Fantasies and Delusions* was Joel's first official attempt at instrumental classical composition, I discovered that the album nonetheless preserved several traits that have characterized Joel as an individual and a popular artist. In contrast to the way *Fantasies and Delusions* was publicized and reviewed through the years, I propose that there is a strong continuity between Joel's only classical album and the remainder of his work, and that evaluating the album in that manner is more profitable than viewing it as a detour into classical music after a lifetime of doing something different. Therefore, in this thesis, I argue that Joel stayed true to his artistic identity as an eclectic composer, a melodist, a Romantic, and a Piano Man by precisely emphasizing these qualities and aesthetics in *Fantasies and Delusions*.

The remainder of this chapter offers a review of preexisting literature on Joel's life, career, and music. Chapter Two presents a chronological account of Joel's music career, depicting the various life events, personal motivations, and stylistic influences that led to the creation of each of his studio albums. The last section of the chapter provides an additional overview of Joel's achievements and his efforts on giving back to society, especially in the education sector. Chapter three discusses Joel's eclectic musical style, compositional process, and his classical music experience. Chapter Four is divided into two main sections. The first section offers an insight into Joel's personal and pedagogical motivations for composing the music in *Fantasies and Delusions*. The second section

details the creative process behind the making of this classical album.<sup>1</sup> Chapter Five offers a general description on the content of *Fantasies and Delusions* by bringing attention to the stylistic variety, sectional design, melodic/thematic approach, and extra-musical underpinnings of the pieces. The chapter also features closer examinations of three contrasting pieces that illustrates the elements cited above.

### A Billy Joel Literature Review

With a career spanning over fifty years, Billy Joel (b. 1949) is one of the most celebrated and influential popular music artists in the United States and around the world. Curiously enough, Joel never received the level of “sustained scholarly attention” from the music academy or coverage from popular music textbook authors as did other contemporary and equally popular musicians such as Bruce Springsteen (b. 1949) and Elton John (b. 1947).<sup>2</sup> Many still find Joel “underappreciated for his indelible mark that

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of editing the final version of this thesis, I received feedback from Hyung-Ki Joo, Joel’s main collaborator on the album. Recollecting his experiences of working on the *Fantasies and Delusions* project, Joo’s account provides fascinating anecdotes and valuable insider-information regarding the creative process of the album, especially on the recording and arranging aspects as well as his working relationship with Joel. The full transcript of Joo’s answers to my questionnaire is attached to this thesis as Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> Joshua S. Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, Tempo: A Rowman & Littlefield Music Series on Rock, Pop, and Culture (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2017), xxvii. I performed a survey on numerous American popular music textbooks and compared the level of attention given to Billy Joel compared to contemporary top-selling artists such as Bruce Springsteen and Elton John that started their careers at around the same time. An accurate and effective way to determine this is to do a quick look up in the respective textbook indexes and compare the amount of coverage (by number of pages or amount of relevant material in the pages specified) assigned to each artist. The result, which fits Duchan’s description accurately, shows that Joel was referenced “mostly in passing” or completely neglected in all the consulted textbooks. These consulted textbooks include Michael Campbell’s *Popular Music in*

has enriched American popular music.”<sup>3</sup> The sentiment reverberates strongly in music theorist Walter Everett’s impassioned statement in his 2000 article on Joel’s music:

Even in his most commercial product, Joel has always felt free to express himself with a far more diverse array of materials than the rock press has been qualified to review. And perhaps just as disappointing, Joel’s music has not received attention from more enlightened or broad-minded commentators – certainly not from the academy. Perhaps his works fall into a cultural divide, perhaps his audience is unjustifiably large, perhaps he is ultimately a talented dabbler, an imitator and a failure. But his strong musicianship and expressive intent deserve close examination before such gross judgement should be pronounced, and this has yet to take place. We have only the space here for the beginnings of such an investigation.<sup>4</sup>

Everett’s plea certainly did not go unheard for long. A little over ten years later, research into Billy Joel’s musical life and his music began to flourish. Musicologists such as Ken Bielen (2011), Thomas MacFarlane (2016), and most recently, Joshua S. Duchan (2017) published monographs featuring in-depth musicological analyses of Joel’s works

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*America: The Beat Goes On*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (2013), Larry Starr’s and Christopher Waterman’s *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3* (2007) and *The Rock Years* (2006), Thomas E. Larson’s *History of Rock and Roll* (2004), Glenn Appell’s and David Hemphill’s *American Popular Music: A Multicultural History* (2006), Prince Dorrough’s *Popular Music Culture in America* (1992), Daniel Kingman’s *American Music: A Panorama* (2003), and Richard Crawford’s and Larry Hamberlin’s *An Introduction to America’s Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Editor’s foreword by Scott Calhoun in Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, ix.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Everett, “The Learned Vs. the Vernacular in the Songs of Billy Joel,” *Contemporary Music Review* 18, no. 4 (2000), 108, accessed December 1, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460000640051>.



and how they relate to his life experience and musical sensibility.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this chapter is dedicated to a general survey of the existing body of studies and publications (biographies, monographs, ethnographies, and articles) on Billy Joel's life, career, and his music.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Biography Quartet*

To date, there are four biographies on Billy Joel. These include *Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography* by Fred Schruers (2014), *Billy Joel: The Life and Times of an Angry Young Man* by Hank Bordowitz (2005, revised 2011), *I Go to Extremes: The Billy Joel Story* by Bill Smith (2007), and *Billy Joel: The Biography* by Mark Bego (2007).<sup>7</sup> The following paragraphs will provide a brief overview on each of these biographies.

*Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography* by Fred Schruers is the only biography authorized by Joel. A direct result of an active collaboration between Joel and Schruers,

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas MacFarlane, *Experiencing Billy Joel, A Listener's Companion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Ken Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, The Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011); Joshua S. Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, Tempo: A Rowman & Littlefield Music Series on Rock, Pop, and Culture (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2017).

<sup>6</sup> I do not intend to provide an exhaustive catalogue of all the literary works written about Joel, but rather to indicate the more relevant ones.

<sup>7</sup> Fred Schruers, *Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography* (NY: Crown Archetype, 2014); Hank Bordowitz, *Billy Joel: The Life and Times of an Angry Young Man* (NY: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2011); Bill Smith, *I Go to Extremes: The Billy Joel Story* (London: Robson Books, 2007); Mark Bego, *Billy Joel: The Biography* (NY: Thunder Mouth's Press, 2007). There is also a German biography on Joel with a special focus on his family history in Germany. See Steffen Radlmaier, *Billy & The Joels: Der amerikanische Rockstar und seine deutsche Familiengeschichte* (Cadolzburg, Germany: ars Vivendi verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2015).

*The Definitive Biography* features the most complete and in-depth chronicling of Joel's life to date. This publication could be seen, in a sense, as an autobiography, since the pages are filled with direct quotes from "more than one hundred hours of exclusive interviews" with Joel himself.<sup>8</sup> However, in writing the book, Schruers also drew upon his own extensive research and different voices from interviews with Joel's crew, past and present acquaintances, and his inner circle of family, friends, lovers, and band members.

Published on October 28, 2014 by Crown Archetype, *The Definitive Biography* is the revival and continuation of a three-million-dollar memoir project (*The Book of Joel*) with HarperCollins that started in 2008. At that time, Joel commissioned Schruers, then a high-profile veteran writer at *Rolling Stone* magazine, to be the co-author; however, the memoir, touted as an "emotional ride" by the publisher and different news outlets, was cancelled by Joel a little more than two months before its June 2011 release. Joel felt that HarperCollins was missing the point of his memoir when he learned from Schruers that the editors were only interested in marketing and drumming up the darker, gossip-inducing aspect of his personal life:

Then I saw this marketing campaign - 'Divorce, Depression and Drinking.' We talked about some of those things, but that's not the essence of the book. I realized that was going to be the nature of the campaign. They wanted more sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and there's not that much in my life.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> As indicated by Schruers in *The Definitive Biography*, front flap.

<sup>9</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Andrew Goldman, "Billy Joel on Not Working and Not Giving Up Drinking," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 24, 2013, accessed November 26, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/magazine/billy-joel-on-not-working-and-not-giving-up-drinking.html>.

Joel was dissatisfied and uncomfortable with the expectations that the memoir would be a “revealing tell-all” that would whet and feed the sensationalist needs of modern media and society. In the wake of the termination, Joel released a statement to the *Associated Press* in March 2011, announcing that he was not interested in talking about the past and that his music would always be “the best expression of [his] life and its ups and downs.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, he also refrained from attracting more attention and publicity to himself since he was struggling with “enough troubles and woes in [his] life” at that moment.<sup>11</sup>

However, in 2012, Joel changed his mind and asked Schruers to revive the manuscript during an impromptu backstage meeting at a Los Angeles concert, and it became *The Definitive Biography* in 2014. Given his previous aversion to the idea, one is tempted to ask why he decided to resuscitate the project. Aside from being in a better

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<sup>10</sup> Billy Joel, “Billy Joel Cancels ‘Book Of Joel,’” *Billy Joel Official Site*, 31 March 2011, accessed November 26, 2017, <http://www.billyjoel.com/news/billy-joel-cancels-book-joel/>. In correlation to the statement, it is not surprising that many of the singer-songwriter’s most enduring songs, such as “New York State of Mind”, “Piano Man,” and “Only the Good Die Young,” are sonic autobiographies that describe his feelings and circumstances at different points of his life. The reader could read more on the relationship between Joel’s biography and his music in the first chapter of Duchan’s musicological monograph. See Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 1-13.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Schruers and Tom Teicholz, Google Hangout conversation in “The Book On Billy Joel with Fred Schruers,” *Forbes*, 23 January, 2015, accessed November 26, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomteicholz/2015/01/23/the-book-on-billy-joel-with-fred-schruers/#3fdee50121bf>. Around that time, coming out from his failed third marriage with Katie Lee in 2009, Joel received news of the death of his father in 2011. Suffering from intense pain, he underwent a double-hip replacement surgery and withdrew from a joint tour with Elton John in 2011, much to the latter’s frustration. He also struggled with a deep post-9/11 depression and was dealing with negative press coverages and rumors on his alcohol rehabilitation and allegedly D.U.I.-related car accidents.

emotional place, there was also a vindictive aspect to Joel's decision. Despite being a superstar, Joel is also a private man who consciously guards his emotions and avoids intrusions from outsiders and journalists. This generates plenty of speculation and rumors revolving around his personal life. Furthermore, Joel is also aware of, and feels unfairly represented by, what he calls the "ersatz biographies." He thinks the biographies' main source was from "someone [he] knows for five minutes or some disgruntled members of the band" (It is safe to infer that Joel is specifically referring to Bego's version of his biography given its content).<sup>12</sup> Because of the negative coverage he had received throughout his lifetime, the desire to "clear the air" and "right the wrong" clearly weighed on the mind of a then 63-year-old Joel. "There's so much misinformation about me," he mentioned in an interview, while expressing his desire to "have a book that set the record straight."<sup>13</sup> Given the title of the 2014 biography, Joel's ambition to provide a definitive chronicling of his life and career is plain for all to see.

Before the publication of the *The Definitive Biography*, the other three biographies written independently by Bego, Smith, and Bordowitz filled the gap. They derived much of their source information from preexisting media accounts, news, reviews, previous Joel interviews, and articles along with the authors' interviews with a selected pool of Joel's acquaintances. The pool of interviewees varied among the biographies, consisting of a different combination of Joel's old-time and former friends, lovers, ex-wives, managers, producers, and band members. All three provided a detailed,

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<sup>12</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Andrew Goldman, "Billy Joel on Not Working and Not Giving Up Drinking," May 24, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

though not flawless account of Joel's upbringing and his musical career and achievements. Bordowitz's book is particularly strong in that regard, as noted by Duchan and other online reviewers.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the content on Joel's recent activities is generally thin, more speculative, and error-prone. There might also be an element of bias in the depictions of his relationships with people. The issues mentioned above might be a result of a lack of information (since Joel and his inner circles rarely divulge his recent personal information) and the authors' choice to interview a selected group of people made up mostly of former acquaintances.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to Schruers, these authors were forced to rely solely on secondary sources without having the privilege of directly interviewing Joel himself extensively or gaining access to Joel's personal archives and its director, Jeff Schock. All the authors provided a bibliography, but only Schruers dedicated a section in the book providing detailed explanation of the origin of the sources and how they were obtained, used, and managed.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, these inadequacies do not render the three less authoritative biographies irrelevant. Looking past the issues and inaccuracies, they will still make for an interesting read and offer a unique, outsider perspective on Joel's life and his music. As Schruers mentioned in his work, "no such

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<sup>14</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, 160.

<sup>15</sup> Aside from the flaws mentioned above, these three biographies generally draw two main criticisms from their reviewers: poor editing (Bego) and poor writing style (all three in varying degrees). These reviews are derived from different book selling websites such as Amazon and book review websites such as Goodreads.

<sup>16</sup> See Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 361-363.

book of any heft is easier to write. Each effort inevitably adds to a broader and hopefully deeper tale.”<sup>17</sup>

Determining the quality and authenticity of a biographical work, especially that of a popular figure, requires tactful and careful handling. Unauthorized biographies might contain information or anecdotes that are revealing or enlightening, but might also emphasize or exaggerate the “dirt.” Such a maneuver stirs interest and makes the biography more marketable. On the other hand, authorized biographies might try to portray the protagonist in a better light or “beautify” facts rather than being honest and truthful. Therefore, the reader must rely on careful critical judgement in reading biographies and take everything written with a healthy dose of skepticism instead of passively accepting them as factual.

These four biographies on Billy Joel provide crucial source material and background information for the writing of this thesis and towards my understanding of the *Fantasies and Delusions* album. I want to uncover the reasons and circumstances that prompted a 52-year old Joel to embrace such a drastic change to his musical career and kick start a new chapter in his life.

### *The Rise of Billy Joel Scholarship*

Immediately following the appearance of the first Billy Joel biographies, music academics began to voice their opinions about Billy Joel’s life and his music through writings, discussions, and conferences. The phenomenon is wittily described in the title of an article from the *New York Times*: “Billy Joel-Loving Academics get in a Piano Man

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<sup>17</sup> See Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 362.

State of Mind.”<sup>18</sup> A growing number of music professionals and scholars have recognized the long-time neglect of Joel’s music in academic circles and have determined that it deserves more serious scholarly attention. This new interest culminated in an academic conference in 2016 that was dedicated to Billy Joel and his music. This will be discussed later in the chapter. Ryan Bañagale, the conference founder and assistant professor in the Colorado College Music Department, stated that “despite such popularity... Joel’s music and live performance have been accompanied by a somewhat uneasy relationship with the critics, while scholarship on his extensive output remains scant.”<sup>19</sup> Joshua Duchan, a co-organizer of the event and the author of a recently released monograph on Billy Joel, mentioned that “there’s a sense among all of us here, certainly among the presenters, that there is a real lack of academic study of Billy Joel’s music... we thought this could be a really good way to start to fill that gap.”<sup>20</sup> Considering all the above, the following pages will review existing scholarship on Billy Joel and the 2016 conference dedicated to him.

Currently, there are three published musicological monographs focusing on the impact and significance of Billy Joel’s music and his musical career. These include Ken Bielen’s *The Words and Music of Billy Joel* (2011), Thomas MacFarlane’s *Experiencing Billy Joel: A Listener’s Companion* (2016), and finally, Joshua S. Duchan’s *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man* (2017).

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<sup>18</sup> Jack Buehrer, “Billy Joel-Loving Academics Get in a Piano Man State of Mind,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2016, accessed November 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/11/arts/music/billy-joel-conference.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Ryan Bañagale, “A Billy Joel Conference This Fall,” *Musicology Now*, March 9, 2016, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2016/03/a-billy-joel-conference-this-fall.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Buehrer, “Billy Joel-Loving Academics Get in a Piano Man State of Mind.”

Ken Bielen's *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, was the earliest published monograph on Billy Joel's music. It is a part of *The Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection*, a series that includes musicians active from the 1960s to the present. A specialist in American Culture Studies, Bielen provides rich contextual information and thorough analyses on Billy Joel's first twelve solo studio albums, from his debut album *Cold Spring Harbor* to his last lyric-based album *River of Dreams*. The sections on each album preface with a background story of the album's creation, which is then followed by a commentary on each song in the album, describing its significance, subject matter, and musical content. Less emphasis is placed on biographical information but more on sound and lyrical meaning. The book also examines Joel's live recordings, his fledgling career prior to chart success, his documentaries and video collections, and variations between different recordings of the same song. A brief two-page examination of the *Fantasies and Delusions* album is also included.

Thomas MacFarlane's *Experiencing Billy Joel* is a part of the *The Listener's Companion* series. Written for non-specialist readers in an accessible, jargon-free writing style, each volume helps them listen actively to compositions from different artists, composers, and genres of Western music.<sup>21</sup> Both MacFarlane's and Bielen's monographs progress in similar ways, beginning with a portrait of the artist followed by a chronological discussion of the albums. Compared to the relatively technical and matter-of-fact language of Bielen's monograph, MacFarlane's rhetoric is more relaxed and the discourse unfolds like a story. The narrative-like approach works in tandem with the

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<sup>21</sup> Editor's foreword by Gregg Akkermann in MacFarlane, *Experiencing Billy Joel*, ix.



series' aspiration of creating a deeper appreciation of the music by immersing the readers in the context and environment of the music's creation. MacFarlane also adds personal stories and snippets of anecdotes that involve Billy Joel and other musicians, which makes the monograph an enjoyable read.

The latest addition to the growing body of Billy Joel academic literature is Joshua S. Duchan's *Billy Joel, America's Piano Man*, which was recently published in June 2017. An ethnomusicologist and specialist in American popular music from Wayne State University, Duchan has embarked on an ambitious project to decipher the dynamic and complex relationship between different aspects of Joel: the man, the musician, his music, and his milieu. This book is not organized chronologically like the previous two. Each of its chapters features a social, cultural, and musical commentary on a selection of songs that were grouped based on an overarching theme. For example, chapter one discusses the biographical influence of Joel's own life on his career and music; chapter two deals with the geographical elements in his music; chapter three analyzes Joel's songs that relate to domestic and international politics; and other chapters explore topics such as history, gender, stylistic authenticity, and American culture. There are eight chapters in the book: with the first seven focusing on a unique theme and the conclusive eighth commenting on the lasting significance of Joel's music. Duchan's first goal in writing the book was to help readers understand and appreciate how Billy Joel identifies and translates large and complex post-World-War-Two sociopolitical trends, as well as their emotional impact, into concise, powerful musical statements.<sup>22</sup> His second aim was to

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<sup>22</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, xxv.

build on the small library of Joel academic scholarship and put his music on the map of twentieth-century American and popular music history.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Joel himself has also spoken directly to Duchan about his music, inspiration, and compositional process, which certainly lends more weight to the perspectives discussed in his book. Duchan also lists a limited number of academic writings on Billy Joel that he came across while he was writing his book. These include Scott Allsop's 2009 article on the educational use of "We Didn't Start the Fire," Michael Borshuck's 2016 essay in the *Cambridge Companion* that depicts Joel as a "professional singer-songwriter," Walter Everett's 2000 study of learned and vernacular styles in Joel's works, A. Morgan Jones's 2011 dissertation on six songs that reveal Joel's multiple identities as a sociologist, balladeer, and historian, and Christian Klein's 1991 sociological study of *Good Night Saigon*.<sup>24</sup>

On October 7 and 8, 2016, the Department of Music at Colorado College hosted a two-day public musicological conference on its campus. Titled "*It's Still Rock and Roll to Me*," this symposium capped a milestone for being the first academic conference dedicated solely to the lyrics and music of Billy Joel. It featured paper presentations, roundtables, workshops, a documentary screening of Joel's historic tour to the Soviet Union, and a final concert dedicated to the singer-songwriter.<sup>25</sup> Co-sponsored by the

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<sup>23</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, xxvii.

<sup>24</sup> The listing of works above is extracted from Duchan's introduction in his book. See Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, xxvii.

<sup>25</sup> This 75-minute Showtime documentary, directed by four-time Emmy winner Jim Brown, was first aired on 31 January 2014. Titled *A Matter of Trust: The Bridge to Russia*, this documentary looks back on Billy Joel's legendary tour to Moscow and Leningrad in 1987, in which he introduced six fully-staged Western rock shows to the

American Musicological Society (AMS), the event was an effort to promote the vision of "public musicology," in which the goal is to "engage general audiences in intellectually-oriented considerations of music, and to do so in a way that is approachable and understandable by non-specialists."<sup>26</sup> The challenge for Bañagale, Duchan, and the presenters, was to ensure that the conference remained accessible, entertaining, and engaging, yet at the same time as stimulating and thought-provoking as Billy Joel's music. Below is a statement on the Colorado College website:

Past conferences on the subject of public musicology have thoughtfully engaged with ways that such work can be carried out. With the Billy Joel Conference, we take such approaches and apply them to a single subject with strong public appeal. We have included scholars from musicology, ethnomusicology, music theory, history, comparative literature, and related fields to reassess and reconsider the music and lyrics of Billy Joel. And we invite an intellectually curious audience from Colorado College, the greater Colorado Springs and Front Range community, and further afield.<sup>27</sup>

Judging from a report in the *New York Times* and reactions from presenters and audiences alike, this public conference was successful in generating interest for academic studies of Billy Joel's music and was well-received by the attending public.

Approximately four hundred of Joel's fans and music scholars attended the presentations of about thirty academic papers written by musicologists and educators from nearby

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Russian people. The documentary can now be purchased as part of a DVD box set on Amazon. See <https://www.amazon.com/Matter-Trust-Bridge-Russia-Deluxe/dp/B00IL0GLTA>.

<sup>26</sup> Colorado College Department of Music, "Public Musicology?" *Colorado College Department of Music Website*, accessed November 27, 2017, <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/dept/music/newsevents/billyjoel/public-musicology.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

regions and abroad.<sup>28</sup> Several audience members expressed their amazement and described the exposure to such diverse and sophisticated interpretations and analysis of Joel's music as an eye-opening experience.<sup>29</sup> Among the presenters, Jonathan Bellman, a musicologist and pianist from the University of Northern Colorado, called the conference "an exercise in Public Musicology that was a huge success by any measure."<sup>30</sup> In the keynote event "Take the Phone off the Hook," Bañagale and Duchan conducted a live phone interview with Joel. The singer-songwriter told the audience that he was humbled by the scholarship and thought of himself as "just a songwriter."<sup>31</sup>

The conference offered diverse topics and events that guaranteed there was something for everyone.<sup>32</sup> For example, there were panels focusing on the artistic and cultural impact of Billy Joel's life and work. Some discussed how Joel's music, lyrics, and performances influenced other non-music careers and professions such as business, medicine, and law. Others revealed how Joel's music had affected individual lives, exploring realms such as class, gender, taste, and even theology. On the other hand, certain panels analyzed Joel's creative process to gain a deeper understanding of his

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<sup>28</sup> Buehrer, "Billy Joel-Loving Academics Get in a Piano Man State of Mind."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Bellman, "Billy Joel, Piano Culture, and Rock's Road not Taken," *Dial "m" for musicology*, October 9, 2016, accessed August 20, 2017, <https://dialmformusicology.com/2016/10/09/billy-joel-piano-culture-and-rocks-road-not-taken/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> For information on conference proceedings and specific paper titles, see the full program available on this webpage: <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/dept/music/newsevents/billyjoel/program.html> (accessed 27 November 2017).

music. Some focused on how he turned lyrical ideas and life experiences into finished songs, while others compared his music to other musicians and genres such as Bruce Springsteen, The Beatles, and folk music.

The next two chapters provide an introduction to Billy Joel's music career and his musical style.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Billy Joel's Music Career and Achievements

#### *Music Career*

Born May 9, 1949, in the Bronx to first-generation Jewish immigrant parents that were seeking a new life in the United States, William Martin “Billy” Joel is a living testament to the American Dream. Despite his working-class origins, difficult upbringing, and life struggles, Joel’s hard work, determination, and dedication to his craft eventually made him a household name and an American popular music figure. With a musical career spanning more than five decades, beginning from the time he joined his first band in 1963 until his current status as an internationally-renowned popular artist, much has happened and changed in Joel’s life. While at the height of his performing career, he retired from popular songwriting and began to compose classical instrumental music. To deepen our understanding of the man and his development as an artist, this chapter will provide a chronological account of Joel’s music career, depicting the various life events, personal motivations, and stylistic influences that led to the creation of each of his studio albums. Joel’s career could be roughly divided into five phases, beginning with his formative training as a musician, then his professional career as a solo artist (which could additionally be divided into three stages), and finally the most recent phase beginning after 1993, when he ventured into classical music composition.

According to Ken Bielen, Joel's professional solo musical career can be divided into three periods.<sup>1</sup> The first period, beginning with his first solo album *Cold Spring Harbor* (1971) and ending in his fourth, *Turnstiles* (1976), marked a time of musical exploration and experimentation as the young, inexperienced Joel was still finding his way in the music business. The release of *The Stranger* in 1977 heralded the second period of Joel's career and his breakthrough into the national limelight as a major artist on the American popular music scene. The third period of Joel's artistry began with the release of *The Bridge* (1986) album. In contrast to the previous two periods in which Joel released albums at a rate averaging almost one per year, this latest period has been defined by "carefully-crafted popular music that Joel created in an unhurried manner."<sup>2</sup> The next two albums, *Storm Front* and *River of Dreams*, would not appear until 1989 and 1993. Framing each side of Bielen's scope for Joel's professional musical career are an additional two periods. These include Joel's formative years before he embarked on a solo career, and the time period after *River of Dreams*, when he decided to step away from popular music-writing and focused on writing classical music instead. This creative period eventually bore fruit in his last album *Fantasies and Delusions*, which consists of a series of solo piano compositions largely vested in the Romantic style.

The following section provides a detailed summary of Joel's development as a man, a musician, and an artist. The five subsections will trace his formative years, his venture into popular music, and his eventual return to classical composition.

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, The Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 20.

### *Formative Years in Long Island (1949-1970)*

Joel came from a family that cared deeply about culture and music. His parents, Howard and Rosalind Joel, first met each other while performing in the City College of New York Glee Club's production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*. While Howard was an accomplished classical pianist, it was Rosalind who pushed Joel to study piano. She also took care of Joel after Howard left the family when Joel was only eight. Shortly after Joel's birth in 1949, the Joel family moved and settled in a new suburb called Hicksville, Long Island in 1950. Joel spent his formative years there receiving his first formal musical training. At a very young age, Joel had already begun an enriching lifestyle by reading widely and listening to various kinds of music from the family's music library, the radio, and the records that Howard collected from work overseas as an engineer.<sup>3</sup> When Howard eventually left the family for Europe, Joel's maternal grandfather, Philip Nyman, made up for Howard's emotional absence and cared for his grandson's upbringing. Besides introducing the young Joel to great books and musical works, he also took him to theater performances, recitals and concerts even though "he did not have a lot of money."<sup>4</sup> Joel's strong musical and cultural background served him well and shaped his future career.

From a very early age, Joel demonstrated an unusual aptitude for music. His ear and love for music did not go unnoticed by his parents when the young Joel played the old, family-owned Lester upright piano, trying to create musical impressions from his imagination or the sounds he had heard. Joel's mother Rosalind recalled: "By the age of

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<sup>3</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



three, Billy was on the piano bench picking out Mozart, and a year later I made him put on his coat on a cold day in the fall and took him to get his first lesson from a Mrs. Frances down the block in Hicksville.”<sup>5</sup> In 1953, at the age of four, Joel began classical piano studies under the tutelage of Julliard School of Music graduate Frances Neiman, who taught both piano and ballet in a studio at the rear end of her house. Joel’s music education became a source of teasing and bullying in his early years, since neighborhood kids mistakenly thought he was taking dance lessons. Twelve years of piano lessons ensued, perhaps due more to Rosalind’s insistence than to Joel’s eagerness: the young boy would often grow tired of practicing and would cheat his way through by improvising on the classical pieces that he was playing. However, Joel would be eternally grateful for the experience and “continues to rely on that training every day of [his] life.”<sup>6</sup>

Although beginning his formal musical training with classical music, similar to many young people of his age, Joel could not resist the temptation of Rock ‘n’ Roll when it became a phenomenon of the 1950s. He first recognized the power of Rock ‘n’ Roll when girls swooned over an Elvis Presley-impersonation routine he did when he was in third grade. The freedom, coolness, and rebelliousness that characterized Rock music and the powerful stage presence and adulation associated with its stars strongly appealed to him. Joel’s musical taste and keyboard style inevitably gravitated towards rock music. He would not return to his classical roots until after the release of his last popular music album *River of Dreams* in 1993:

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Bego, *Billy Joel: The Biography* (NY: Thunder Mouth’s Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 31.

Let's call classical the girl next door. When I was a teenager and the hormones kicked in I was seduced by rock – a chick in fishnet stockings and high heels... she seduced me and we ran away and had a torrid affair for the last 35 years. That love has cooled down for me and I rediscovered the girl next door.”<sup>7</sup>

Two performances in particular had a profound effect on Joel the teenager. The first happened during a famous show at the Apollo Theater in 1963 when a fourteen-year-old Joel witnessed the power of soul music through “The Godfather of Soul” James Brown and his entourage. However, the pivotal moment came when The Beatles made their first live appearance before a U.S. television audience on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964. The performance left an indelible impression on Joel and galvanized his decision to pursue a full-time musical career in Rock ‘n’ Roll:

I knew I was gonna be a musician since I was four, but I didn't know what form it would take. Then I saw that there were all these white artists that TV and Hollywood was trying to promote on us who were awful... and then I saw the Beatles... these were working-class guys, they played their own instruments, they wrote their own songs, they grew their hair long – they didn't look like Hollywood stars, they looked like you and me, and I thought ‘Well, why can't I do that?’<sup>8</sup>

In the previous year of 1963, Joel had joined his first band, The Echoes, in which the other band members consisted of classmates Jim Bosse, Bill Zampino, and Howie Blauvelt. Later, the band was renamed The Lost Souls and played in local gigs as well as appearing in a few regional band competitions. However, Joel joined another Long Island

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<sup>7</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Dan Aquilante, “Move Over, Beethoven – Billy Joel, Classical Composer? Believe It!” *New York Post*, October 2, 2001, accessed January 25, 2018, <https://nypost.com/2001/10/02/move-over-beethoven-billy-joel-classical-composer-believe-it/>.

<sup>8</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Eric Teplitz, “An Interview with Billy Joel – March 25, 1996,” *Eric's Inspired Living Blog*, March 25, 2011, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://inspiredlivingblog.wordpress.com/tag/billy-joel/>.

band, The Hassles, after discovering his Lost Souls bandmates were not as serious in pursuing a musical career.<sup>9</sup> Joel never graduated from Hicksville High School, because music was the priority for him and his late-night musician lifestyle hindered his progress in school. At the age of 18, when he decided to forsake his high school diploma, a bullish Joel famously tried to appease his worried mother with the following words: “I am not going to go to Columbia University, I am going to Columbia Records.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Joel did sign with Columbia Records five years later, but the path to success was not as smooth as he perhaps would have expected.

Joel and Jon Smalls eventually broke away from The Hassles and formed the heavy-metal duo group, Attila, in 1969. Joel’s well-known historical literacy was apparent when he named the band after Attila the Hun, a fearsome ruler of the Huns in the fifth century. Similar to the ruler who struck fear in his enemies by plundering much of Eastern Europe and Italy during his reign, Joel planned to assault the rock scene and make his mark through all the shouting, aggressiveness, and highly distorted, amplified sounds of the Hammond B-3 organ and drums. However, contrary to what Joel had hoped, this moment in his career, where “absurdity ruled,” resulted in abject failure.<sup>11</sup> The *Attila* album (1970), with its cover photo of Joel and Smalls in barbarian armor standing in a meat-locker surrounded by animal carcasses, was both a commercial and critical disaster. In retrospect, it was even labeled by a music critic as “undoubtedly the

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<sup>9</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

worst album released in the history of Rock ‘n’ Roll – hell, the history of recorded music itself.”<sup>12</sup> The crippling fiasco, along with the terrible guilt that came with Small’s discovery of Joel’s affair with his wife Elizabeth Weber, culminated in the lowest point of Joel’s life and caused him to attempt suicide at home by drinking furniture polish. The subsequent three-week experience in the hospital ward along with other less-fortunate patients had a profound impact on Joel and taught him not to wallow in self-pity.

*First Period (1971-1976): A Budding Artist Fighting for a Career*

Recovered from his suicide attempt, Joel decided to give another try for a music career in the early 1970s. It was a period characterized by an unprecedented flourishing of different popular music styles. “The depth of the challenge to be heard was clear,” as both new and old artists were vying for prominence.<sup>13</sup> This was also an era when the singer-songwriters began to take center stage in the popular music scene of the United States. Lyric-centered balladeers – such as Bob Dylan, Neil Young, John Lennon, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Leonard Cohen, Carole King, to name a few – were among the most influential musicians during those times, rivalling their more rock-oriented counterparts.<sup>14</sup> *Cold Spring Harbor* (1971), Joel’s debut album as a solo artist, was a product of such circumstances. Barely surviving the chastening experience of *Attila*, Joel originally intended to shy away from the limelight by only composing the music and leaving the performing to others. Fortunately for him (and for us), his manager Irwin

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Thomas Erlewine, “Attila,” *Allmusic*, accessed January 21, 2018. <https://www.allmusic.com/album/attila-mw0000815795>.

<sup>13</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 76-77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

Mazur convinced him otherwise and found him a producer, Artie Ripp. Opening with the lyrical ballad “She’s Got a Way” and closing with the piano instrumental track “Nocturne,” this intimate, heartfelt album was the complete antithesis of the heavy-metal *Attila*. The tracks within the album already offer early glimpses of the melodic and lyrical gifts as well as the pianistic prowess and sensitivity that characterized the musical persona of the singer-songwriter that we know today. A bizarre production error on the recording caused the album to languish on the market, but Joel began to establish his reputation as a solid performer through touring and guest appearances.<sup>15</sup>

Disheartened by the unfavorable working relationship and contract situation with Ripp, Joel and Elizabeth decided to relocate to California. Performing under the alias William Martin, Joel did a six-month gig as a piano player and lounge singer at the Executive Room bar in Los Angeles in order to pay the bills. This experience was eventually retold countless times fictionally through the song “Piano Man,” which was Joel’s first major hit and a signature tune. In fact, the experience of journeying westward with Elizabeth through the vast expanse of the United States provided much of the inspiration for Joel’s eponymous second album, *Piano Man* (1973). Duchan described this succinctly: “In several tracks on *Piano Man*, Joel uses both lyrical and musical devices to convey a sense of travel, escape, and optimism associated with geographic

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<sup>15</sup> An error in the album’s mixing process caused the songs to be slightly sped up and made Joel’s voice sound unnaturally high and pitchy. In an album-listening party, an angry and embarrassed Joel reportedly ripped the record out from the turntable, ran out of the house, and threw it down the street. It was not until 1983 that Columbia released a remastered record of the album. However, Joel is still not entirely happy with the product and remarked that he sounded like a chipmunk. See Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, 21.

distance and the West, as well as rather different places and spaces from New York.” Growing up in the vicinity of New York, Joel had never been exposed to the sounds of country-western music but hearing them fascinated him: “It was a different kind of instrumentation, a different kind of songwriting. And I kind of dove into that for a while. I wanted to see what it was like to write like that.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, a number of songs in *Piano Man*, such as “Travellin’ Prayer” and “Ballad of Billy the Kid,” evoke the frontier spirit and country-Western music styles. Different styles of folk music such as bluegrass, cowboy music, fiddling, and even sections reminiscent of Aaron Copland’s orchestral evocations of the Old West are present in the music on this album.<sup>17</sup>

Joel eventually ended his underground act and fulfilled his wish when he signed with Columbia Records before the release of the *Piano Man* album. Their successful partnership has remained strong to this day. However, the subsequent two albums released by Columbia, *Streetlife Serenade* (1974) and *Turnstiles* (1976), yielded lukewarm results in sales and drew mixed reviews. Under pressure to quickly follow up the success of *Piano Man*, *Streetlife Serenade* was a rushed project. In fact, it was Joel’s

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<sup>16</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Calling “Ballad of Billy the Kid” the “most interesting song on the album,” Hank Bordowitz observed that the song featured heavy orchestration that recalls elements of Aaron Copland’s compositional style. He also noted that the cinematic effect created through the lyrics and music is also reminiscent of Ennio Morricone’s film music. Coincidentally, Copland also had a similarly-titled ballet suite called “Billy the Kid.” Intentional or not, Joel’s version certainly evokes traits that parallel those of Copland’s through his fictionalization of the classic American story of an Old West cowboy named Billy the Kid, the evocation of the American folk through the instrumentation, melody, and rhythm, and the utilization of unisons, seconds, and open fifths harmonies on the strings and the piano. See Hank Bordowitz, *Billy Joel: The Life and Times of an Angry Young Man* (NY: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2011), 74.

“least favorite work.”<sup>18</sup> *Turnstiles*, on the other hand, was a maiden, self-produced product by a newly-formed band and support team that was based in Long Island. The band toured and recorded with him well into the late 80s. With a few minor changes over the years, the classic lineup featured Joel on lead vocals and keyboard, Liberty DeVitto on drums, Doug Stegmeyer on bass, Richie Cannata on saxophones and organ, and Russell Javors on guitar. Even though *Turnstiles* garnered mixed reviews, it marked “a turning point in Joel’s career and songwriting” as he was finally able to dictate his musical work on his own terms and fully utilize his own compositional voice.<sup>19</sup>

Similar to *Piano Man*, *Streetlife Serenade* and *Turnstiles* evoke geographic associations of the places Joel was residing and his life experiences in those places at the time each album was created. The song “Los Angelenos” in *Streetlife Serenade* features Joel’s descriptive, at times sarcastic portrait of the lifestyle and diversity in Los Angeles. When Joel grew tired and alienated from the Californian lifestyle and music industry, he decided to return home, even though the New York City of 1975 was a deeply-troubled city teetering on bankruptcy, hardly resembling the thriving metropolis it is today. The album cover of *Turnstiles* was taken at an abandoned New York City subway station, featuring Joel and all the characters from the lyrics in the album. Deliberately evoking the Wall of Sound production style developed by Californian record producer Phil Spector, the opening track “Say Goodbye to Hollywood” was Joel’s celebration of a new beginning that left behind both the Californian lifestyle and the Western-American-soft-rock, singer-songwriter-oriented musical style. The moving and transitional experience of

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<sup>18</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

returning to New York City yielded classic tracks such as the definitive “New York State of Mind,” the apocalyptic “Miami 2017,” and the deeply personal “Summer, Highland Falls.”

Much like *Piano Man*, *Streetlife Serenade* showcases an image of the singer-songwriter expressing himself vocally while playing his instrument. The album also features the piano as the main instrument. On the other hand, the musical style of *Turnstiles* features the band and Rock ‘n’ Roll influences. Both albums also highlights virtuosic showpieces for the piano: the ragtime piece “Root Beer Rag” in *Streetlife Serenade* and “Prelude/ Angry Young Man” in *Turnstiles*.<sup>20</sup> Pianistically, both pieces are perhaps the most technically demanding from the singer-songwriter’s entire oeuvre, characterized by spellbinding figurations played at a breakneck tempo.

#### *Second Period (1977-1983): The Leap to Greatness*

The release of Joel’s fifth album *The Stranger* (1977) marked a watershed moment in Joel’s career that propelled him to national recognition as a major recording artist. A true critical and commercial breakthrough, the album spent six weeks at second place on the US albums chart, ranked No. 70 on Rolling Stone’s list of 500 greatest albums of all time, and boasted four charted singles. The love ballad “Just the Way You Are” won both Grammy’s Song of the Year and Recording of the Year (Joel’s first career Grammys). A major factor in this success could be attributed to Joel’s first collaboration with veteran producer Phil Ramone (1934-2013). Early in his career, Joel recognized that

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<sup>20</sup> For more details regarding the two pieces, see section on Joel’s keyboard technique in Chapter Three.



“his best-selling point wasn’t the recordings; it was the live shows.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, for Joel, the musical camaraderie of a rock-solid band that could provide tight and strong support was just as important as being a charismatic presence on the stage. Upon hearing Joel’s band perform in Carnegie Hall in 1976, Ramone loved the energy and musicianship and became the first major producer that permitted Joel to record with his band. Having been embroiled in numerous disputes over personnel for the studio recordings of his previous albums, Joel was happy to finally find a professional producer who understood the standout quality and personal flavor that could be derived from utilizing a well-seasoned band that had been on the road together for years instead of hiring ad hoc session musicians.<sup>22</sup>

Renowned for his successful collaborations with luminaries of different temperaments such as Frank Sinatra, Ray Charles, Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, and Barbra Streisand, Ramone was able to successfully capture and showcase the unique qualities of Joel’s voice. The songs in the album showcase a singing quality that is “evocative, versatile, and effective,” which are vital assets for a singer-songwriter in that period.<sup>23</sup> The convivial and fruitful partnership of Joel and Ramone would continue for another decade, producing a string of hit albums well into the 80s up to *The Bridge* (1986). *The*

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<sup>21</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, Joel even audaciously turned down The Beatles’ producer George Martin when the latter opted against selecting Joel’s band for the recording of *The Strangers*. See Billy Joel, “Billy Joel on The Stranger,” *The Complete Albums Collection*, accessed January 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm5-oQNEEnM>.

<sup>23</sup> Matt LaMotte, “Billy Joel & Phil Ramone: An Examination,” *Billy Joel Official Site*, April 11, 2013, accessed February 16, 2018, <http://www.billyjoel.com/news/billy-joel-phil-ramone-examination/>.

*Stranger*'s success also saw a remarkable upturn of fortunes for Joel and his road band: "All of a sudden we went from a club act, a theater act, and a college act to headliners, arenas, and coliseums."<sup>24</sup> The music drew rave reviews. Timothy White, an eminent American Rock journalist and editor, commented on Joel's impressive literateness in utilizing a kaleidoscopic array of musical styles and stressed that the creative process of harnessing and morphing them together is precisely what makes his music unique (However, on the other hand, Joel's music has also long been criticized for being derivative or inauthentic because of this very sophistication):

*The Stranger* accentuated Joel's uniqueness in rock and roll – he'd successfully merged the vernaculars of Hollywood sound stages with those of Schubert and Tin Pan Alley, along with the warm ambiance of Sinatra saloon albums, 1950 car-radio pop, the sound of the Beatles-led British Invasion, and the rich melodicism of post-New Wave rock. It was a remarkable feat, making his piss-off, polyglot music the most widely accepted since the Beatles, yet completely his own.<sup>25</sup>

Riding the successful wave of *The Stranger*, *52<sup>nd</sup> Street* (1978) was released in the subsequent year. Expanding on the multi-style formula, Joel went further to utilize jazz influences for the music in this album. The cover photo featured Joel holding a trumpet standing in front of Ramone's A&R production studio at 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, which was once the "Swing Street" where old New York City jazz clubs were located. The address is also the longtime base of Columbia Records. Named after the street, the album is a tribute to the musical heritage of that part of New York City, Columbia Records, and the renowned

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<sup>24</sup> Joel, "Billy Joel on The Stranger," *The Complete Albums Collection*.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy White, *Rock Lives: Profiles and Interviews* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 561-562.

recording artists who were associated with the record company.<sup>26</sup> Songs such as “Zanzibar,” “52<sup>nd</sup> Street,” and “Rosalinda Eyes” all display groovy rhythms, jazzy harmonies, and tight ensemble instrumentation punctuated by occasional solos. There are also certain hits in the album, such as “My Life,” “Honesty,” and “Until the Night,” that showcase Joel’s trademark melodic craftsmanship, vocal prowess, and ability as a lyric balladeer to speak to the common issues of listeners. On numerous occasions, Joel stressed that he never tried to write hits – he only wrote music for himself in the way he saw fit and never tried to cater or pander to an audience group. This self-centered way of writing, coupled with the fact that millions relate to his music, may seem paradoxical at first, but perhaps might be what makes Joel’s music great. Joel’s biographer Schruers shared a similar sentiment when he observed that “a hallmark of Billy’s work has been his ability to take his own deeply-rooted emotions and universalize them.”<sup>27</sup>

A reaction to punk and New Wave music in the late 70s, Joel’s next musical venture in *Glass Houses* (1980) was a revisiting of rock music fundamentals, going back to the kind of music Joel played during his high school years without all the excesses and pretensions that crept into late 60s and early 70s rock: “I thought I’d do an album of that breed of mid-sixties rock. That was the whole point of it: it was guitar-based, driving, had a lot of punch to it.”<sup>28</sup> This new approach facilitated the need to add a new guitar player, David Brown, to the band. A compliment to Joel’s rise to stardom, the album also

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<sup>26</sup> Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 118.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

fulfilled the need to have harder-edged, fuller-sounding materials that he and his band could deliver effectively to larger audiences and in larger venues.<sup>29</sup> Both the cover photo and the first track (“You May Be Right”) of the album employed a tamer metaphor than that of *Attila*, but with a message no less direct: With a rock in his hand, Joel was ready to shatter the pretentiousness surrounding the rock music scene with his “rockiest” album to date, yet also freeing himself from the image of being just a “samba-playing pianist.”<sup>30</sup> After the album’s release, Joel won the 1980 Grammy for best rock vocal performance. Perhaps nothing embodied the rebellious spirit and no-nonsense attitude of the album better than the track “It’s Still Rock and Roll to Me.” The song was a satirical take on the music industry’s pandering to public taste and a stinging response to the music critics who were giving him a hard time during the period before *Glass Houses* was released. Joel also remarked pointedly that trendy new music genres such as punk and New Wave music were actually nothing new and not much different fundamentally from Rock ‘n’ Roll in the 60s. Unsurprisingly, the track drew a raft of criticisms but still ascended the charts to become Joel’s first number one hit.

The subsequent release, *The Nylon Curtain* (1982), ranks as one of Joel’s most ambitious projects. Widely regarded as one of Joel’s most complex and mature albums, it is also among the ones of which he is most proud, along with *River of Dreams* and *Fantasies and Delusions*. The album’s making was motivated by the core aspiration to extend a short-living musical lineage established by The Beatles during their creative

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<sup>29</sup> Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, 52

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 52.

period from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band* (1967) to *Abbey Road* (1969): the exploration of different possibilities in the studio to create a concept album that features extended, richly-textured numbers that are unified through a larger purpose or meaning.<sup>31</sup> John Lennon's untimely death in 1980 also had a profound effect on Joel, and some of the music in the album would channel Lennon's vocal and musical styles (the process seemed subconscious, as Joel only came to realize this after he finished the album).<sup>32</sup> Real-life sound effects (such as the sounds of a factory whistle, helicopter rotor, pile-driver, jet engine, boarding announcement, and so on) also made up part of the aural landscape of the album. To live up to The Beatles, Joel embarked on a lengthy, arduous creative process that was markedly different in procedure from that of his previous albums:

Rather than starting with just the basic song and adding to it. We started with the songs from the outside and worked our way in. We did not really know what we had until we were getting close to the final mix. There was so much recorded... different instruments, sound effects, orchestral things, percussion instruments, vocals, synthesizers... there is so much going on in this recording. It is very, very rich. Almost like I was trying to go for a *Sgt. Pepper* kind of thing where I was experimenting playing the studio as an instrument. It was a labor, a labor of love, but it was exhausting. I think by the end of making the album I had almost died. It was a great, great deal of work.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Joel also lamented the brief lifespan of the musical style and "felt cheated" when it was swiftly replaced by an era characterized by the more readily accessible (and technically less challenging to produce) music of the California Sound and the singer-songwriters. For more details, see Billy Joel, interview by Anthony De Curtis, "Billy Joel: The Rolling Stone Interview," *RollingStone*, November 6, 1986, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/billy-joel-the-rolling-stone-interview-19861106>.

<sup>32</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 150.

<sup>33</sup> Billy Joel, "Billy Joel on The Nylon Curtain," *The Complete Albums Collection*, October 18, 2011, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pqc4U8uWTRU>.

The overall emotional content of the album is dark and heavy. *The Nylon Curtain* is about the American dilemma, speaking specifically of the awkward life experiences of the Baby Boomers generation that were closely tied to the diminishing horizons of America in the post-Vietnam War era. A word play on the Iron Curtain, the title of the album, “The Nylon Curtain,” reflects the barriers and obstacles facing Americans on an individual and societal level as they pursued their dreams and desires (similar to people in the Soviet Union). Joel explains, “Things were really changing, and I wanted to tackle the issues that were important then. I did not want to get up on a soapbox and become a sociopolitical songwriter, but I wanted to talk about people going through hard times.”<sup>34</sup> A sense of desolation and struggle is clearly shown through songs such as “Allentown,” “Goodnight Saigon,” and “Pressure.” “Allentown” talks about the plight of marginalized, unemployed steelworkers. “Goodnight Saigon” is a story of American veterans in the Vietnam War that were underappreciated upon returning. “Pressure” depicts the state of struggling under pressure from the demands of work and life. In songs such as “Laura,” “A Room of Our Own,” and “She’s Right On Time,” Joel delivers a nuanced reality check on the complexity of modern relationships. The metaphorical and philosophical “Where’s the Orchestra?” provides a fitting close to the album as Joel continues to ponder on the meaning of a life full of discontent and unfulfilled expectations. At the end of the song, the opening melody of “Allentown” (first album track) reappears instrumentally, bringing the album to a full circle much like what The Beatles did with *Sgt. Pepper*.

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<sup>34</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 151.

The subsequent album, *An Innocent Man* (1983), is the polar opposite from *The Nylon Curtain* in every way possible. Unlike the painful labor in the making of the preceding album, the creative process of *An Innocent Man* happened quickly and naturally – Joel claimed to have written most of the material in the studio within six weeks, and did so with “so much fun.”<sup>35</sup> It is perhaps the most entertaining and uplifting album Joel ever created, characterized by loads of positive energy, youthful vigor, and carefree impishness – a direct contrast to the solemn, dark tone and weighty sophistication of *The Nylon Curtain*. Described by reviewers as a valentine, the seed of the album was planted during a time Joel was freshly divorced and found himself in the joy of being an “innocent man” again with a youthful, renewed interest in dating and romance – his feelings and budding relationship with supermodel Christie Brinkley (soon to be second wife) would become the focal point of the album. Heavily influenced by late 50s/early 60s Rock ‘n’ Roll, R&B, Soul, Motown, and Doo-Wop genres, the music in *An Innocent Man* is a throwback and celebration of the popular music styles of Joel’s teenage years. A self-professed atheist, Joel once said “Rock ‘n’ Roll was about the closest thing to religion [he] ever got.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, in the production of the album, Joel was reliving his youth musically and emotionally and, as stated in the last album track, “keeping the faith” to the music of his childhood.

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<sup>35</sup> Billy Joel, “Billy Joel on An Innocent Man,” *The Complete Albums Collection*, November 14, 2011, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cf0s-YfTpW4>.

<sup>36</sup> Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, 68.

### *Third Period (1983-1993): Maturation*

The period between *An Innocent Man* and the next album *The Bridge* (1986) marks Joel's first hiatus that lasted longer than three years. The title of the album reflected a transitory period in Joel's personal and working life. Not long after his second marriage with Christie Brinkley in 1985, Joel began preparing for a new phase in his life. The birth of their daughter, whom they named Alexa "Ray" Joel, was expected at the end of the same year. Joel had missed a fatherly presence since the age of eight, so Alexa quickly became the center of his life and everything else became secondary, including the recording of *The Bridge* and touring. To fill in the gap, Columbia released *Greatest Hits*, volumes one and two in June 1985. The compositional process of *The Bridge* was difficult. During that period, Joel struggled to find his creative muse while his working relationship with the band and the producer also became increasingly strained. *The Bridge* anticipated a major shakeup in Joel's long-standing crew: it was the last album involving producer Phil Ramone, drummer Liberty DeVitto, and bassist Doug Stegmeyer. Joel would later express his dissatisfaction with the overall result.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, there are a few highlights, including a heart-warming duet with his musical idol Ray Charles on the love ballad "Baby Grand." In certain tracks of the album, Joel also collaborated with other artists such as Steve Winwood on "Getting Closer" and Cyndi Lauper on "Code of Silence."

The music in subsequent albums since *The Bridge* shows a general trend of becoming increasingly edgy and heavy while Joel's role on the keyboard grows more secondary in the band. His general approach on the instrument also seemed to become

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<sup>37</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 182-183



more direct with less of the delicate passagework that characterized his playing in his earlier albums. Perhaps this was a conscious choice by the singer-songwriter since a serious motor accident in April 1982 damaged both his hands badly and he never fully recovered.<sup>38</sup>

After *The Bridge* was released, Joel self-financed a historic tour to the Soviet Union, performing six rock concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, which made him “the first American rock musician to perform in the Red Empire.”<sup>39</sup> The shows were later filmed into a documentary *Kohuept* (1987) and some of Joel’s experiences in Russia eventually found their way into the next album *Storm Front* (1989), such as the song “Leningrad,” which offers a comparison of the lives of the people in the Soviet Union and the United States through the character Viktor the Clown (whom Joel befriended in Russia). The menacing title of the album also reflected an extremely difficult period in Joel’s life. At the time of the album’s recording, he was hospitalized for kidney-stones surgery and embroiled in a series of bitter lawsuits with his longtime close friend and financial manager Frank Weber after Weber betrayed and swindled him. To complicate matters further, Joel also rebooted the band and hired a new producer, Mick Jones to find a fresh sound for the album. Joel wanted his album to move in a hard rock direction, and

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<sup>38</sup> For more information, see Mary Campbell, “Billy Joel Uses Seven Fingers At Piano,” *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, October 30, 1982, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1873&dat=19821030&id=ROwwAAAAIBAJ&Sjid=398FAAAAIBA&pg=2285,7152035&hl=en>. The accident is also part of the reason why Joel hired classical pianist Hyung-ki Joo to perform and record the works in his classical piano album *Fantasies and Delusions* (Further discussion in Chapter Four).

<sup>39</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 11.

many of the songs are vigorous and lively, capturing “a new, raw energy.”<sup>40</sup> The biggest hit of the album “We Didn’t Start the Fire” was a rapid-fire, five-minute retelling of important world events from 1949 (Joel’s birthdate) to 1989 (the year of *Storm Front*). The song became Joel’s second number-one hit and “became one of the most commonly heard pieces of music in history classrooms around the world” (the phenomenon and its educational effect even became the subject of journal articles).<sup>41</sup> In dramatic fashion, all the turbulent energy and emotion in *Storm Front* eventually gave way to a wistful vocal and piano ballad “And So It Goes,” perhaps an indication of Joel’s resignation as he ruminated about the fragility of relationships.

It would be four years (the longest interval between Joel’s popular music studio albums) until the release of Joel’s last popular music album *River of Dreams* in August 1993. Similar to *Storm Front*, Joel brought in new musicians and also hired famous session guitarist Danny Kortchmar to oversee the production of the album. According to Bielen, *Rivers of Dreams* was Joel’s “most personal album” since *Cold Spring Harbor*.<sup>42</sup> It was Joel’s longest popular music album (around 49 minutes) and also one of his most serious, contemplative, and philosophical efforts. *River of Dreams* was a concept album,

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<sup>40</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> For further reading, see Scott Allsop, “We Didn’t Start the Fire: Using 1980s Popular Music to Explore Historical Significance by Stealth,” *Teaching History*, No. 137 (December 2009): 52-59, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/432594> 20, James R. Moore, “Popular Music Helps Students Focus on Important Social Issues,” *Middle School Journal* 38, No. 4 (March 2007): 21-29, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23048054>, and Michael Longrie, “Billy Joel’s History Lesson,” *College Teaching* 54, No. 4 (Fall 1997): 147-149, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27558859>.

<sup>42</sup> Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, 84.

which “traces a path from anger and disillusionment towards redemption and serenity.”<sup>43</sup>

It details the spiritual journey of a protagonist in psychological crisis towards regaining his faith in humanity. In an interview with the Philadelphia Daily News in 1993, Joel remarked on the semi-deliberate creative process of organizing the album tracks thematically in a manner akin to a “song cycle:”

It begins with a crisis of faith, a search for justice. In the end, the guy realizes there's no justice, only faith. Mozart, Brahms, Liszt and Schumann all had their rough days, but they didn't deny the rest of humanity their art just because they had the blues. In fact, some of the most eloquent expressions of 'Sturm und Drang' came out of their despair. Not that I set this situation up to write, but in the end, I think the inspiration did work for me.”<sup>44</sup>

The album opens with two guitar-heavy, power rock tracks, “No Man’s Land” and “The Great Wall of China,” which reflected Joel’s vitriol towards the materialistic corruption of contemporary society and the betrayal of his former manager Frank Weber. The generally dark and angry, yet at times gray, emotional content of the first side of the album eventually gave way to a more hopeful and positive second side.<sup>45</sup> In between the simple, soothing utterances of love in “Lullaby (Goodnight, My Angel)” and the optimistic, visionary take on the future of mankind in “Two Thousand Years,” the spiritual height of the album is reached at “The River of Dreams,” the title song. Backed

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<sup>43</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Philadelphia Daily News, quoted in Jeff Giles, “The Story of Billy Joel’s Final Rock Album,” *Ultimate Classic Rock*, accessed January 27, 2018, <http://ultimateclassicrock.com/billy-joel-river-of-dreams/>.

<sup>45</sup> With the exception of *Fantasies and Delusions*, Joel had released vinyl records for each of his previous studio albums. The first- and second-side terminology is used here to facilitate the discussion.

by lilting world music percussion (an ensemble of jangly guitars, maracas, and Congo drums) and Gospel-styled vocals, the buoyant title track “takes the listener to a spiritual plane where the singer searches for meaning in life.”<sup>46</sup> The lyrics of the song, replete with biblical imagery (valley of fear, river so deep, desert of truth, and so on), captures the ongoing journey of a lost wanderer “looking for something” and finding his place in the world. Eventually, the album closes with the prophetic “Famous Last Words,” as Joel felt he had given his all to popular music and said farewell to the chapter of his life as a popular music songwriter:

And these are the last words I have to say  
It's always hard to say goodbye  
But now it's time to put this book away  
And that's the story of my life

*Recent Phase (1993-present): Joel's Turn and Return to Classical Music*

Even though Joel stopped writing popular music in 1993 (he only published two more singles in 2007), he is still an active and formidable performer, touring with his band to different venues and doing numerous Face-to-Face tours with Elton John around the world. However, at the same time, he also developed a renewed interest in classical music composition. The release of *Fantasies and Delusions* in 2001 marks his turn as an artist to classical music, yet also his return to the classical music experience of his formative years. This result of a near-decade effort is a set of ten solo piano compositions, largely established in the musical idioms of the Romantic era and encompassing a wide range of moods. To date, Joel also composed a 40-minute

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<sup>46</sup> Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, 84.

orchestral suite “The Scrimshaw Pieces,” which consists of a series of tone poems that evoke a loose history of his native Long Island.<sup>47</sup> Here is journalist Nick Paumgarten’s vivid account from his encounter with Joel as the singer-songwriter explains what the project is all about:

As he moved from one song to the next, he referred a couple of times to something called “The Scrimshaw Pieces,” and it emerged that he had already imagined all of these as a cycle of songs— “tone poems,” he called them. The playing, now and then halting as he tried to remember certain passages, was mostly prodigious and lush, evocative of familiar things. In between pieces, he began to explain that these were variations on a motif and that they were telling the story of the history of Long Island, from its pastoral beginnings to the arrival of the Europeans— “I’m imagining the prow of a ship, and a Puritan hymn”— and then the bustle of the nineteenth century. Farming, fishing, the railroad. “Getting busy on Long Island,” he said. “This one’s almost Coplandesque, with big open fifths.”

Unfortunately, Joel never recorded the suite, claiming that he had no plans to get involved in another recording project and “do not feel like he has anything to prove anymore.”<sup>48</sup> Only one seven-minute movement (“Elegy: The Great Peconic”) from the suite made it into the compilation album *My Lives* (2005), which featured a mixed collection of Joel’s “demos, outtakes, B-sides, soundtrack cuts, and live recordings, mixed in with studio versions of Billy songs.”<sup>49</sup> However, the heavy string orchestration, lush melodies, and evocative program that characterizes the piece clearly demonstrates Joel’s strong predilection for the compositional techniques of Romantic music.

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<sup>47</sup> Nick Paumgarten, “Thirty-Three Hit Wonder,” *The New Yorker*, October 27, 2014, accessed February 16, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/27/thirty-three-hit-wonder>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> For more information on the album, see “My Lives (2005),” accessed February 16, 2018, <https://www.onefinalserenade.com/my-lives-2005.html>.

### *Musical Achievements and Accolades*

Billy Joel certainly went a long way to reach the heights he enjoys today. After the 1973 release of his first hit “Piano Man,” the musical son of New York City has since become the sixth best-selling recording artist and the third best-selling solo artist in the United States, with most of his albums going multiplatinum and more than 150 million records sold worldwide. During his career, Joel also received numerous accolades recognizing his achievements as a popular artist. A few highlights include six Grammy Awards (in 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1991, from 23 nominations), a Tony award (2003) for *Movin’ Out*, his Broadway collaboration with Twyla Tharp, and his inductions into the Songwriters Hall of Fame (1992), the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1999), and the Long Island Music Hall of Fame (2006). In 2013, Joel received the ultimate recognition for his work when he was granted the Kennedy Center Honors by President Barack Obama, honoring his enduring contributions to American culture as a performing artist. In 2014, he received the prestigious Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, an award created in 2007 to honor composers or performers for their lifetime contributions to popular music. Prolific even by today’s standards, Joel’s impressive catalog of works include thirteen studio albums that feature thirty-three Top 40 hits with four number one singles.<sup>50</sup> In the longer breaks after the release of certain albums, recording companies capitalized on Joel’s clout to further produce five live albums, fifteen compilation albums, and ten video albums. Some of these became chart-toppers and brought certain

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<sup>50</sup> The most comprehensive and accurate information on Joel’s discography, including chart positions of his hit albums and singles in various areas around the world, is currently located in Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy\\_Joel\\_discography#Singles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Joel_discography#Singles).

previously less-known studio-album tracks into prominence. For example, Joel's classic ballad "She's Got A Way" from his first album became a hit after the release of *Songs in the Attic* (1981), Joel's first live album.

After retiring from writing popular music, Joel still maintains an active performing career and continues to set precedents. From 1994 to 2010, Joel embarked on a series of Face-to-Face tours with Elton John, making them the longest-running and most successful concert collaboration in popular music history. In 2008, Joel played to more than 110,000 fans when he performed the final concerts at Shea Stadium (where The Beatles famously performed), a two-night event featured in the 2010 documentary film "The Last Play At Shea." He became the first artist to begin a residency at New York City's Madison Square Garden in 2014 and set an unprecedented record of 51 sold-out shows since (the record is still ongoing at the time of this writing). The performance on July 28, 2018, would mark his 100<sup>th</sup> overall appearance at the Garden. In 2011, Joel was honored with a painted portrait that hangs in Steinway Hall in Manhattan, making him the first non-classical pianist to be immortalized in the collection.

### *Giving Back to Society*

Joel also played an active role in philanthropy and education.<sup>51</sup> He has performed at charity concerts such as the post-9/11 *Concert for New York City* and the *12.12.12: The Concert for Sandy Relief*, joining other music icons to raise awareness and money to help

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<sup>51</sup> In the conclusive chapter of his dissertation, A. Morgan Jones provided an exhaustive commentary detailing Joel's philanthropic and educational activities from the early eighties to recent times. See A. Morgan Jones, "The Other Sides of Billy Joel: Six Case Studies Revealing the Sociologist, the Balladeer, and the Historian," (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2011), 203-210, accessed August 15, 2017, <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1454&context=etd>.

those affected by these tragedies. Today, Joel still gives lectures and masterclasses at schools, colleges, and universities (some of which have been recorded for viewing online), sharing his experience and insights with audiences from all across the world. Having never graduated from high school, Joel finds the experience amusing as he has visited some of the most prestigious institutions in the world including Harvard, Oxford, Columbia, Princeton, Dartmouth, and Berklee School of Music, to name a few. Joel's efforts in education also give young musicians an opportunity to shine. Michael Pollack, a student from Vanderbilt University, became an internet sensation after he was given the chance by Joel to showcase his impressive rendition of "New York State of Mind."<sup>52</sup> Joel also made generous donations to schools either monetarily or by supplying them with some of his own instruments. In an interview with Stony Brook University, Joel laid out his reasons for caring about education:

I like to do masterclasses. I like to be a teacher when I can be... I have been doing it for years and I quite enjoy it. There is a lot that I have up here that I like to pass along, just to help people avoid making the same mistakes I made because there is no book, there is no course on how to be in the music business. There is all kinds of traps and difficulties you can run into and I managed to survive a lot of that ... I always wanted to be able to help people to avoid the same pitfalls. That is why I do masterclasses and I still to this day do it ... I think it is very important to have arts education in schools and public education. The first thing that goes when the budget gets tight are the art classes and the music classes ... but who is going to nurture all the younger musicians who have no other recourse to education? Who is going to nurture artistic people? I think it is necessary to reach down and start from a very young age. So, to me, that is probably one of my most important interests.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See "Billy Joel - Q&A: Can I Play On "New York State Of Mind"? (Vanderbilt 2013)," accessed February 16, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxLjtx8wukQ> (accessed January 27, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Stony Brook University, transcribed by Jie Fang Goh, "Five Questions with Billy Joel," *Stony Brook University*, November 3, 2016, accessed January 27, 2018, <http://www.stonybrook.edu/5questions/people/billy-joel>.



In fact, one of the main aspirations behind the creation of *Fantasies and Delusions* is Joel's desire to write his own classical pieces that will generate more popular interest in playing and listening to classical music. He also wants to provide piano teachers with something different but worthwhile to assign to their students to play.

The following chapter focuses on the musical style of Billy Joel, featuring a discussion on Joel's stylistic eclecticism and songwriting style, while also providing an in-depth examination of his classical music education and how that training influenced his artistic decision and musical presentation throughout the course of his career.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Billy Joel's Musical Style, Songwriting Process, and Classical Music Experience

#### *Musical Style*

Through a brief survey of Joel's life experiences and of all his studio albums in the previous chapter, we have observed that stylistic eclecticism has always been a defining aspect of Joel's upbringing, career, and music. His impressive ability to creatively fuse and rework a diverse array of materials from different musical genres to cater to his expressive needs has not gone unnoticed by critics and scholars. Joel's biographer, Fred Schruers made the bold claim that Joel's musical style is "perhaps the most broadly eclectic of any major pop star inhabiting the half-century he was working in."<sup>1</sup> Echoing similar sentiments in his monograph, musicologist Thomas McFarlane also made the following statement on Joel's versatility:

As a composer, Billy Joel has always tended toward a kind of musical alchemy. He has a unique talent that enables him to move easily through a variety of genres, for example, pop, jazz, classical, folk, rock, blues, country, and western, and more. In his recorded works, he has consistently attempted to weave these seemingly discrete influences into a tapestry of sound and style.<sup>2</sup>

Joel once remarked that his music "is a synthesis of all the music that [he] likes," and the decision to live in a "stylistic no-man's land" is clearly a conscious choice for the

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<sup>1</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 79.

<sup>2</sup> MacFarlane, *Experiencing Billy Joel*, 97.

singer-songwriter.<sup>3</sup> He even justified his efforts as representative of a long-standing, quintessential American culture: “I have always believed that the beauty of American music was its ability to transcend and cross lines.”<sup>4</sup>

A similar sense of versatility inevitably comes to mind when one hears Joel sing. Possessing a wide four-octave range from C2 to C6, Joel was described by Schruers as having “a youthful, vigorous vocal instrument to deploy, a high, full baritone that could readily shade into tenor and even access a falsetto.”<sup>5</sup> A hallmark of the singer-songwriter’s vocal style is his effortless manipulation of his vocal timbre to suit his expressive needs and the character of the musical style in which he is singing. “I don’t think of myself as a singer really.” Joel says. “I think of myself as a writer and I’m able to write all over the place, so I’ll change my voice depending on the mood of the music.”<sup>6</sup> At times, he even uses his voice as an instrument, such as the vocal mimicry of the sound of horse steps in “Ballad of Billy the Kid.” It is noteworthy that the singer-songwriter never had any formal vocal lessons and was largely a self-taught singer. Joel’s vocal prowess enables him to produce evocative, yet effective, renditions of the sensitive lyricism in ballads such as “She’s Got A Way” and “Lullaby (Goodnight, My Angel),”

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<sup>3</sup> Billy Joel, quoted in “Discussion of the Album River of Dreams,” *One Final Serenade: Songs of Billy Joel*, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.onefinalserenade.com/river-of-dreams-article.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 78. For a detailed list of songs that cover the extremes of Joel’s vocal range, see “Billy Joel,” *the range place*, August 21, 2016, accessed February 1, 2018, <http://therangeplace.boards.net/thread/11/billy-joel>.

<sup>6</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, “Scenes From A Musical Life,” *Performing Songwriter* 9, (November 2001): 47.

the impassioned declamations in the mold of “New York State of Mind” and “Honesty,” the jaunty exuberance in “Uptown Girl” and “Leave a Tender Moment Alone,” or the grittiness and energy in his rock songs such as “You May Be Right” and “No Man’s Land.” Perhaps a good starting point to acquaint oneself with Joel’s vocal flexibility is through his *An Innocent Man* album. The pop-rock album’s catchy doo-wop single “The Longest Time,” demonstrates Joel’s incredible range as he recorded each of the five contrapuntal voices (lead vocal and four backing vocals) in the song. The soulful single, “Leave a Tender Moment Alone,” features large leaps, frequent dynamic changes, and showcases Joel’s dexterity of weaving in and out of different vocal registers and timbres effortlessly. As he has aged, Joel’s voice has mellowed and added a richer and thicker timbre in the lower range. When Joel lost the ability to hit the higher notes, he began to sing most of his songs in a lower key.

A singer that had a profound influence on Joel was Ray Charles (1930-2004), a blind African-American singer-songwriter who pioneered soul music in the 1950s. As a tribute to his musical hero, Joel named his daughter Alexa “Ray” Joel and wrote the soulful ballad “Baby Grand” in 1986, featuring him and Charles on piano and vocals. Reciprocating the gesture, Charles also facilitated the induction of Joel into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1999. Joel said the following about Charles:

From the moment I first heard him, I wanted to sing like him. There’s something going on inside the larynx with Ray that creates almost the sound you’d get out of a speaker if you hooked up a Leslie Tone cabinet to a Hammond B3 organ: he’s got a slow swirl that sounds growly but always so musical ... It was clear he was getting such a kick out of what he was doing, and his joy was infectious ... He took the yelp, the whoop, the grunt, the groan and made them music ... The soulfulness that shone

through him was harder to place. I'd sit there just marveling, how the hell does he do that... He shows you this humanity, the spontaneity is evident.<sup>7</sup>

Joel has strived throughout his career to preserve the very same life and spontaneity exemplified by Charles in his music-making. Known to dislike excessive rehearsing when going on tour, Joel believes in keeping the freshness of interpretation while leaving room for spontaneity and improvisation.<sup>8</sup> His long-time production manager, Phil Ramone enjoyed a successful working relationship with him because, unlike previous production managers such as Artie Ripp, Ramone understood Joel's working habits and strived to keep the recording process fresh and fun:

Phil perceived that recording hadn't been fun for me for a very long time. The process was like pulling teeth. I don't want to do 15 to 20 takes. I start to hate the song. If I got to do more than a half a dozen takes, I'm ready to leave. I don't want to beat something to death. I just want to be as spontaneous and improvisational and free-wheeling and then I can walk away. I don't think it's a matter of laziness, it's a matter of being in love. You got to love what you're doing. If you love what you're doing, you're going to do a great job. If you're starting to dislike the process, you're going to hear it on the recording.<sup>9</sup>

Another distinct characteristic of Joel's style is his ability to impersonate. In Chapter Two, we witnessed a glimpse of Joel's budding talent when he attempted an eye-catching Elvis Presley impersonation during third grade. Widely acquainted with the music and performances of older or contemporary popular artists, Joel was able to pull

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<sup>7</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 34-35.

<sup>8</sup> Billy Joel, "Q&A: How Much Do You Rehearse On Tour?" *Worcester Polytechnic Institute*, 1996, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LiOISED9Vk>.

<sup>9</sup> Billy Joel, "Billy Joel Pays Tribute to Phil Ramone: 'He was the King'," *Rollingstone*, April 3, 2013, accessed February 2, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/billy-joel-pays-tribute-to-phil-ramone-he-was-the-king-20130403>.

off realistic impressions or caricatures of their styles and mannerisms from time to time in different settings, including his live stage performances or interactive masterclasses in educational institutions. In his monograph, Duchan observed that “impersonation has always been part of [Joel’s] act” and noted his extraordinary ability to engage his audiences through it.<sup>10</sup>

Coupled with his broad knowledge and keen awareness of the musical styles and artists during and prior to his time, Joel’s enthusiasm for both cultural and musical history also made him a historically conscious popular artist. Described succinctly by Duchan, Joel “incorporates into his songs the sounds and histories of American geography and places, national and international political and social history, social class, relationships in his personal history and historically changing gender roles, as well as compositional styles from across the continuum of music history.”<sup>11</sup> However, according to Duchan, what distinguishes Joel from other popular songwriters such as Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen (who also write on particular events in history) is his ability to provide a more comprehensive, big-picture overview “about history itself,” raising questions about historical trends, such as what should be remembered and what lessons could be learned from such material.<sup>12</sup> Duchan then exemplifies Joel’s historical

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<sup>10</sup> On a dull, rainy day during the 1972 Mar Y Sol Festival in Puerto Rico, during his turn to perform, a relatively less-known Joel single-handedly rescued the show by drawing back an initially unenthusiastic audience by delivering a remarkably convincing impression of Joe Cocker. After that, he even performed his remaining songs and did a few more impersonations. See Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 138.

consciousness by examining the different historical approaches in three of Joel's songs, including "The Ballad of Billy the Kid," "We Didn't Start the Fire," and "Two Thousand Years."<sup>13</sup> These songs demonstrate a progressive development of Joel's career as a songwriter, as in each he gradually widens his scope from writing about particular events to commenting on history itself.

The "learnedness," sophistication, and diversity that has so-often characterized Joel's music also has proved, however, to be a double-edged sword and a source of criticism from popular music critics, who have labeled his music inauthentic and lacking a uniqueness of style. His chameleonic musical identity has also caused issues and situates him in an awkward position, since it is difficult to pinpoint or contain him with a definitive image. For example, the cerebral, multifaceted, suit-and-tie-clad Joel is too "cool" to be an authentic Rock Star.<sup>14</sup> The lyrics of his songs, which largely featured poetic utterances of "self-examination, narrative, and nostalgia," also defied the norms of a typical Rock 'n' Roll song.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Joel's multidimensionality also explains cursory references or virtual exclusion of his music from popular music textbooks. It is difficult to precisely define where he belongs in a swath of popular music styles. From a stylistic

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<sup>13</sup> See Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, 139-152.

<sup>14</sup> The nineteenth century Romantic composer Franz Liszt, who had projected diverse identities throughout his musical career, also faced similar criticism from contemporary and later critics or scholars who reviewed his life and music. See Joanne Cormac, "Liszt, Language, and Identity: A Multinational Chameleon," *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 36, No. 3 (Spring 2013), 231-247, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.baylor.edu/stable/pdf/10.1525/ncm.2013.36.3.231.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Bellman, "Billy Joel, Piano Culture, and Rock's Road not Taken."

and theoretical perspective, music theorist Walter Everett delivers an insightful take on the issue:

Joel has kept the faith with all strands of music that had ever become important to him, and his exposure to – and life-long interest in – such diverse models as Bach and Hendrix make for a complex mix of stylistic markers. Too complex, in fact, for the rock press. For, given all his experience in Rock ‘n’ Roll, sophisticated interests ultimately place his music on a very different plane from that of most of his fellow artists and his critics. His strong sense of melodic fluency in both vocal and bass lines, his preference of a balanced ensemble over individual virtuosity, his persistent election of the major diatonic scale over the minor pentatonic, his unifying command of both diatonic and chromatic harmonic direction, his taste for varied rhythms and tempos, and his often inquisitive nature in exploring poetic themes – all sharply distinct from rock norms – have led to a judgmental pegging of his work as an overly crafted pop that (for that reason alone) lacks the direct “sincerity” of good ol’ physical Rock ‘n’ Roll.<sup>16</sup>

Such critiques have accompanied Joel throughout his career and we will see similar ones in relation to Joel’s classical album, *Fantasies and Delusions*.<sup>17</sup> However, taking The Beatles as a model, Joel became an artist who found every new project to be a challenge and opportunity for growth.<sup>18</sup> He was never content with being comfortable

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Everett, “The Learned Vs. the Vernacular,” 107.

<sup>17</sup> The topic of artistic originality is important and will be revisited in the conclusion.

<sup>18</sup> On The Beatles, Joel remarked: “The main thing that hit me was that they played their own instruments. That made them legitimate musicians, whereas a lot of pop stars were just singers. They wrote their own songs. They wrote their own lyrics, they did their own arrangements, and they sang their own harmonies. For me, they were the rock & roll band that showed the most growth of any band I have heard before or since. It was almost like seeing into them. Every time there was a record, there was an incredible amount of progression.” See Billy Joel, interview by Anthony De Curtis, “Billy Joel: The Rolling Stone Interview,” *RollingStone*, November 6, 1986, accessed January 24, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/billy-joel-the-rolling-stone-interview-19861106>.



within a certain label and has never been afraid of taking risks and experimenting in his musical compositions. Joel once explained:

As for the rocker-versus-pop-singer thing, I'm just a musician. I grew up listening to my dad playing classical music at home on a beat-up ole upright; my mom took me to see Gilbert and Sullivan, and my grandfather took me to the symphony; I've had formal training in jazz improvisation [with Morton Estrin at Hofstra University] and once made noise in a super-loud psychedelic band [Atilla]. It's better to fail at different things and build up the lessons that result than to stop taking risks. I want to keep this whole business interesting for me, too. I don't want to limit my diet, sampling only one vegetable in the garden."<sup>19</sup>

From the above statement, it comes as no surprise that stylistic eclecticism is an integral component to Joel's musical identity that results from his fearless and inquisitive disposition.

### *Songwriting Process*

Contrary to numerous popular artists, composing pure music without lyrics has never been a foreign concept to Joel. Since the beginning of his career, Joel's writing approach has been the reverse of that of most singer-songwriters. He would set out to compose the music first based on what he felt at the moment before setting the lyrics.

Reflecting on his compositional style, Joel remarked:

"I start with a melody, a chord pattern, and a rhythm, and then I try to decode what is in the music. What is it saying? What was my motivation for writing it? What is the emotion? ... It's really the backward way to write songs; most songwriters begin with words, lyrics, poetry, and then set it to music."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Timothy White, *Rock Lives: Profiles and Interviews* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 580.

<sup>20</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 128.

Downplaying the importance of lyrics in popular music, Joel even called his own lyrics “coloring” to the melodies.<sup>21</sup> For Joel, music always takes precedence, setting the foundation and boundaries for the song. “There’s where it all starts,” Joel said. “Even before there is a song, there is music.”<sup>22</sup> The singer-songwriter always “begins with musical ideas that reach maturity before lyrics are composed” and works out those ideas at the piano:<sup>23</sup>

Joel writes at the keyboard, always beginning the process after the end of whatever world tour had promoted the previous album. He concentrates on the bass line (in octaves for cadences and other points of emphasis), right-hand chords and vocal melody, completing the musical structure before lyrics are contemplated.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, the written lyrics are akin to afterthoughts that seek to “describe” and “interpret” the inherent meaning and emotional quality of the music. Joel even mentioned that he feels a kinship with George Gershwin for taking a similar reverse approach to songwriting, contrary to other songwriters from Stephen Foster to Elton John that have typically written music to interpret pre-existing poetry.<sup>25</sup> The singer-songwriter also claims that “with his best work, he feels that he has finished something before the lyrics

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<sup>21</sup> Bill DeMain, *In Their Own Words: Songwriters Talk about the Creative Process* (CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 116.

<sup>22</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Charlie Rose, “Billy Joel Opens Up about Writing Music, His Career, Who Inspires Him,” *CBS News*, December 23, 2013, accessed February 10, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/billy-joel-opens-up-about-writing-music-his-career-who-inspires-him/>.

<sup>23</sup> Everett, “The Learned Vs. the Vernacular,” 108.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy White, “Billy Joel – 1994 Recipient of the Century Award,” *Billboard* 106 (3 December 1994), quoted in *ibid.*, 115.

are written” and that his better material can be played as a “classical piece” without words.<sup>26</sup> According to Everett, words for Joel seem to come out of duty more than out of artistic integrity.<sup>27</sup> However, this does not diminish his prowess as a writer as many of his song lyrics turned out to be remarkably sensitive, poetic, and stimulating.

At times Joel might decide to slightly revise the musical framework to compromise for the lyrical devices. In an interview, Joel further explained his working process:

I have this tortured process of here’s the mold, it’s all shaped already, and I have to look through my vocabulary, my pitiful words, and jam them onto this musical phrase and make it match the emotional feeling that the music has. Now if you listen to a piece of music, how does that make me feel? What was I thinking when I wrote that? What was going through my mind? Why did that music get written? That’s where you start to look for the words, and then I find “Oh, it makes me feel [certain emotions and meanings].” So there’s something encoded in the music and I have to figure out what that is and then drop the right words in. It’s like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle and the pieces aren’t premade. You have to cut them yourself. Sometimes you have to smush the board a little bit and bend the frame and make up your rules as you’re going along.<sup>28</sup>

It is not surprising then that Joel’s listening process also follows a similar pattern that moves from music to words when he starts listening to a new piece of popular music.

Schruers observed that Joel “has always listened to songs with the music as the essential

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<sup>26</sup> White, “Billy Joel – 1994 Recipient of the Century Award, quoted in Everett, “The Learned Vs. the Vernacular,” 114-115.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>28</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 116.

tableau and has tended to discover the words more gradually.”<sup>29</sup> In an interview, Joel explained that he had developed this mode of listening from a very young age:

I remember my first exposure to popular music was probably at a beach listening to a portable radio or at a party listening to somebody’s little dinky record player where they played the 45s... and you really couldn’t hear the lyrics. What you heard was a melody, some chords, a rhythm. The drums were always prevalent in Rock ‘n’ Roll and pop music. You heard the sound of the singer’s voice and you heard the production of the recording. One of the last things you ever heard was what the hell they were saying. Maybe you could catch something, and as a matter of fact, a lot of the songs that were popular, teenagers, especially in my era, made up dirty lyrics for them anyway, which we always liked better than the original [laughs].<sup>30</sup>

According to numerous accounts and interviews of Joel, songwriting has always been an obsessive, deliberate, and at times even torturous undertaking for him: “I must be extremely compelled to write because I find it to be a difficult process, excruciating sometimes.”<sup>31</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Joel went through highly difficult spells during the making of *The Bridge* and *The Nylon Curtain*. However, there are also moments of hypercreativity, such as when most of the songs for *An Innocent Man* were written in six weeks. This all purely depended on how he felt at the moment and what he wanted to create. Joel did not compose on a regular, consistent basis, but only wrote when he felt the compulsion to write. By his own account, Joel said, “I basically write for myself – for my own amusement, and with the thought, what do I want to hear?”<sup>32</sup> His

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<sup>29</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 128.

<sup>30</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 116.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>32</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 129.

inspirations and motivations for composing music vary, but they all largely stem from something personal:

When I begin to write, the process starts in a lot of different ways. Sometimes I am writing to a particular person and I want to convey an emotion. Usually it is a woman. For all my life, you know, writing for woman... I don't think a lot of the other composers throughout history are any different than I am. I think Mozart did it for the same reasons, so did Beethoven. He was in love with some countess and he wrote this piece because that's how he was feeling about her but he could not express it to her. So that is a lot of times what motivates the composition beginning. Or sometimes something that is troubling me that I have to work out. Or sometimes something for a friend. But it's usually a personal, based on a personal relationship or personal thoughts. I am not trying to make any grand, eloquent socio-economic statements with these things.<sup>33</sup>

Joel also acknowledges the amount of luck and chance that goes into producing hits and is thankful for the crowd that has supported him.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the works that Joel holds in the least regard, such as *Streetlife Serenade* and *The Bridge*, were products resulting from yielding to scheduling pressures from his recording company and the failure of meeting his own expectations.

Clearly, music-making is a deeply personal activity to Billy Joel. The singer-songwriter describes his working process in the simplest of terms: "I write when I feel like I have something to write."<sup>35</sup> In doing so, he is never afraid to speak his mind and follow through with his beliefs and ideals, like his childhood idols such as The Beatles

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<sup>33</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg (audio recording), *NPR*, December 10, 2001, accessed October 3, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/ramfiles/me/20011210.bjoel.interview.ram>.

<sup>34</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 129.

<sup>35</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 115.

and Ray Charles. As a popular artist, these traits are reflected through Joel's stylistic eclecticism, lyrical content, versatile stagecraft, and songwriting style.

The remainder of the chapter delves into a particular facet of Joel's eclecticism, classical music, and how this music has affected his popular music composition and the maturation of his keyboard technique.

### *Joel's Classical Experience*

#### *Joel's Education in Classical Music*

From a young age, Joel was exposed to classical music and nurtured in a conducive environment that fostered his knowledge and love for the genre. He came from a musical family that supported his musical growth. Besides listening to the radio and records available at home, Joel's maternal grandfather would also regularly take him to theater productions, classical recitals, and symphonic concerts during his childhood years. Upon discovering his musical talent, Joel's mother also encouraged the young Joel to begin formal classical piano training with Julliard graduate Frances Neiman. Later, Joel would also study under the tutelage of Morton Estrin (1923-2017), a world-renowned concert pianist and distinguished interpreter of Romantic music who had taught prominent artists such as singer-songwriter Deborah Gibson, conductor John Mauceri, and concert pianist Jeffrey Biegel.<sup>36</sup> Joel's father, despite being a distant figure for most of Joel's life, also connected with his son mainly through classical music and instilled in him a lifelong affection and passion for the genre:

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Estrin, "Morton Estrin – Celebration of Life – 1923-2017," *Living Pianos*, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://livingpianos.com/general/morton-estrin-celebration-of-life-1923-2017/>.

My father was my idol as a pianist as a kid, because he was classically trained and could read music. He would come home from work at General Electric, and take Chopin and Bartok pieces and work through them laboriously; this was his entertainment. He could interpret them and make them sound as good as anything that was being played on WXQR radio or the records, but he thought he was never good enough; he never gave himself any slack.<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Joel began his classical music studies in 1953 and attended piano lessons for the next twelve years. Even though Joel loved the music and acquired a solid piano technique through his training, he never quite developed the patience nor the temperament for the structure and discipline associated with classical music and a concert pianist career.<sup>38</sup> Unlike most of his fellow aspiring students, he did not enjoy practicing for long hours and especially disliked the strict regimen of reading and learning the notes from notation, of which he once claimed: “I found reading to be intrusive to the musical process.”<sup>39</sup> However, his solution of “faking” through the music by ear has helped him hone his listening and improvisational skills and introduced him to the rudiments of composition, as he once explained in a masterclass:

I actually started writing when I was taking piano lessons; I was supposed to be learning Beethoven, you know, and I got tired of reading the music, so I used to go out and buy the record instead of reading the music ... and then I got tired of doing that, I couldn't go out and buy the record anymore so I would make it up like Beethoven is, very, you know [plays the opening of the F minor sonata, Op. 2, No. 1], so I learned that and then I figured my mother's listening in the next room, she knows how Beethoven should sound, so I would go [plays an imitation on Beethoven's style], she'd go “wow, you learned that one pretty quick;” “well, it's easy,” and the next day I wouldn't remember what the hell I played the day before so the next day I'd be [plays a different example]; she'd go “what's that;” I'd

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Bego, *Billy Joel: The Biography* (NY: Thunder Mouth's Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 114.

say “it’s the second movement.” But actually, that’s when I started writing – I wasn’t really songwriting, I was making up classical music to fake out my mother ... But I developed my ear and I developed my imagination just to save my mother from yelling at me to practice.<sup>40</sup>

Joel’s development as a musician and composer through his improvisational prowess was not always looked on with approval. A serious pianist brought up through the strict, disciplined regimen of classical training with little regard for popular music, Joel’s father Howard was less appreciative of the young Joel’s gifts and gave him a stern lesson when he “defamed” the works of the great classical masters through his improvisatory “misbehavior.”<sup>41</sup> Even though Joel did not necessarily conform to all the practices, traditions, and values associated with classical music, he nevertheless integrated ideas and influences from the genre into his popular music works.

#### *Classical Influence in Billy Joel’s Popular Music*

Unlike the general trend of present-day popular music which is geared toward the primacy of rhythm, beats, and stage production, Joel places crucial emphasis on melodic composition and has been consistently strong in turning out irresistible, strong melodies

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<sup>40</sup> Billy Joel, masterclass speech and musical example transcribed by Everett in “The Learned Vs. the Vernacular,” 109. There is also a video of Joel doing a similar explanation and demonstration to another audience group at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in 1996. See “Billy Joel - Q&A: Remember First Piano Teacher? (Hobart & William 1996),” accessed February 8, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuwNWe6hmYY>.

<sup>41</sup> In an interview, Joel vividly recounts the experience: “I had a Beethoven piece, one of the sonatas, and I started boogie-woogieing to it. And my old man came downstairs and smacked the hell outta me. It was the only time I ever remember getting beat up as a kid.” See Billy Joel, interview by Dave Marsh, “Billy Joel: The Miracle of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street,” *Rollingstone*, December 14, 1978, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/billy-joel-19781214>.



through his songs.<sup>42</sup> When quizzed about what are the elements that make a song great, Joel made the following remark:

Melody. A song is meant to be sung. You can have all these great technical components, but if it can't be sung, you ain't got nothing. You know, it ain't an airplane until it flies.<sup>43</sup>

Subsequently, he voiced the following opinion on rap, which focuses more on rhythm and speech patterns: "To be technically correct, rap is not music. A singer is somebody who sings notes. A rapper is somebody who talks."<sup>44</sup> He also regarded the genre as "a definite breaking of a tradition" of melodic pop that, in his opinion, follows a musical lineage that could be traced back to nineteenth-century melodic and thematic

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<sup>42</sup> Joel once lamented in an interview about the gradually diminishing role or absence of melody in modern popular songwriting and performance: "So there's been kind of a rift, a schism I guess, in what twentieth century popular songwriting was when I was a kid and now, when melody is not valued. Melody almost disappeared. As a matter of fact, when you have singers like Mariah Carey and Christina Aguilera; they really don't hit notes, they go all over the place, sort of acrobatic [sings pitches], and then sometimes you feel "can you just rest on a note, just sit still first for a second." There are all over the place and is sort of acrobatic singing and they have very good voices, but they are not really singing songs... the melodies are not thematically memorable melodies. They are not written in the same tradition as the other pop songwriting was before that." See Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Billy Joel, "Pop Quiz with Billy Joel," *People* 55, no. 25 (June 25, 2001): 22, accessed February 24, 2018, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=29b11bf1-ce22-42dd-ad85-645083b1b976%40sessionmgr102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=4606599&db=a9h>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. Even though "We Didn't Start the Fire" became a number one hit, Joel never had a high regard for the song because of its speech-like delivery and lack of melodic interest. "It's terrible musically," Joel said. "It's like a mosquito buzzing around your head." See Billy Joel, "Q&A: Billy Joel at 60," April 30, 2009, accessed February 24, 2018, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/268750/qa-billy-joel-at-60>.

music.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Joel clearly placed a high regard on melodic composition and took it very seriously. In fact, the paramount importance of melodic and thematic writing in music is a defining characteristic of the Romantic period of Western music, as Romantic composers often sought to utilize these musical elements to express deep, personal emotions and evoke certain imagery and narratives. Joel's understanding of the expressive and evocative qualities of melody closely parallels the Romantic approach above:

Melody is a sensual thing, just as the sounds of a child's laughter or a marching band, a church hymn or someone in sexual transport, are highly evocative... I had the music to match my mood; the emotion of the language was already encoded in the music. And the words came with relative ease.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, Joel himself held classical music from the Romantic period in the highest regard: "I don't think you can really beat classical music, especially the romantic era, for melodic composition. For the use of chords in conjunction with melody, I think composition reached its height."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising to see that during his recent creative phase of classical music composition, Joel listened "mostly to the romantics," to Germanic composers such as Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, Brahms, or others who also wrote in the Romantic idiom such as Chopin and Rachmaninoff.<sup>48</sup> The

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<sup>45</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," *Performing Songwriter* 9, (November 2001): 61.

<sup>46</sup> Schruers, *A Definitive Biography*, 117-118.

<sup>47</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 116.

<sup>48</sup> Bryan Wawzenek, "15 Years Ago: Billy Joel Gets Classical on 'Fantasies and Delusions,'" last modified September 27, 2016, Accessed August 15, 2017, <http://ultimateclassicrock.com/billy-joel-fantasies-delusions/?trackback=tsmclip>.

singer-songwriter even theorized that the practices of twentieth century popular song-writing harken back to nineteenth century melodic and thematic music (with more emphasis on lyricism and well-developed melodies than other style periods) and derive their inspirations from the traditions left behind by the likes of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert:

My theory about classical music is that it – especially the melodic ultra-romantic music of the nineteenth century – evolved into the popular music of the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. I don’t know how much of it is left in the 90s. Not necessarily the blues-based hard rock, but melodic songwriting. Even before the 50s, with composers like Richard Rodgers, all the way back to Gershwin, Cole Porter. These people get lumped into Tin Pan Alley. I don’t think that’s a fair comparison or analogy. I feel that classical music became popular songs. Take a song like “I Will Always Love You,” by Dolly Parton. If you play it as a classical music piece, it could be something by Schumann.<sup>49</sup>

Some of Joel’s songs certainly follow a classical-music-to-popular-song process. Taking inspiration from the vocal group The Tymes, who took the opening theme of Mozart’s *Piano Sonata No. 16 in C major*, K. 545 and turned it into the *a capella* number “Somewhere,” Joel took the first three notes from the same sonata and improvised on it in the classical style (a simple, *cantabile* melodic line with transparent, Alberti-bass accompaniment) before transforming it into the catchy, doo-wop-styled song “The Longest Time.”<sup>50</sup> To harmonize the melody (which Joel interestingly dubbed an

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<sup>49</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 116.

<sup>50</sup> To listen to Joel describing the compositional process of “The Longest Time” and watch his demonstration of the process on the piano, see “Billy Joel – Words and Music 3” (audio recording), accessed February 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUUqd9XBioA&index=14&list=PL7yzAAp3V3yM07Zq2HsoQ-o9glNJdFJ50>.

“obviously Romantic” melody), he even set the music in part-writing for five voices and then he recorded all the parts by himself.

In his article *The Learned vs. the Vernacular in the Songs of Billy Joel*, Everett discussed Joel’s ability to “alternate between the learned and the vernacular worlds of counterpoint and harmony depending upon what he is hoping to express with his poetic text.”<sup>51</sup> To demonstrate his point, Everett analyzed Joel’s compositional process and stylistic eclecticism, including a section titled “Billy Joel, aspirant to the classics,” that described Joel’s exposure to classical music, his attitude towards classical practices, and the use of classical style traits in his popular songs.<sup>52</sup> With a broad knowledge of different musical influences, Joel was adept at incorporating different musical styles, freely borrowing from the popular or classical sound worlds to fit the context of what he was trying to say: “Billy Joel has impersonated a wide variety of other popular artists. But the learned style of common-practice harmony, counterpoint, and rhythm is as important to Joel as the vernacular.”<sup>53</sup> At the end of the article, Everett compared two of Joel’s songs “James” and “Laura,” in which the first was “more learned and conservative” in its tonal language while the latter “more freely vernacular.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Everett, “The Learned Vs. the Vernacular,” 105.

<sup>52</sup> For more details on Joel’s connection with classical music, see Ibid., 108-114.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>54</sup> Using the term “vernacular,” Everett is referring to the popular music styles and practices that has become the norm of modern society, distinguishing them from the “learned” styles of classical music. Ibid., 105.

According to Everett, there are four Joel songs which “contain actual quotations or paraphrases of classical models,” of which two are overt borrowings while the other two “perhaps questionable.”<sup>55</sup> The most readily recognizable quotation can be found the chorus of “This Night,” in which Joel seamlessly blends the lyrical main theme of the slow second movement of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata Op. 8, No. 13 “Pathetique”* with smooth “doo-wop” rhythm, background vocals, and instrumentation to reflect a readiness to love after a period of suppression and hesitation. In the introduction to “Leningrad,” Joel adapted the second theme of the first movement of Schumann’s Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54 and set it in D major with dotted-rhythm. For the other two less explicit borrowings, Everett noted that the descending, dotted-rhythm triad of mi-do-sol along with the harmonic changes over a tonic pedal point in the opening of “Souvenir” might be inspired by Chopin’s D-flat major prelude, Op. 28, No. 15, which opens similarly but a whole-step lower. The stacked open fifths (G-D-E-B-F-sharp-B) played by the strings in the opening and “the instrumental break that features piano and horns with countermelody in strings” in “Ballad of Billy the Kid” also evoked textural styles reminiscent of Copland’s “Appalachian Springs,” “Rodeo,” “and “Billy the Kid.”<sup>56</sup>

The process of writing in extended forms or transcending the formal limits of a single song is a prominent trait of the classical music genre. This is not a foreign concept to Joel. Some of his songs demonstrate a formal complexity and expansiveness that is different from the commonplace, three to four-minute verse-chorus popular song form. Perhaps the most illustrative example is his “Scenes From An Italian Restaurant,” a

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<sup>55</sup> Everett, “The Learned Vs. the Vernacular,” 110.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 110-111.

multi-sectional, seven-minute and-a-half epic with four distinct sections – a lyrical ballad, a jazzy section featuring wind and brass instrumental solos, an energetic Rock ‘n’ Roll section, and a return to the ballad. These sections are merged together seamlessly to tell the story of two adults recollecting their memorable, yet distant teenage lives and past hopes and aspirations.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, early in his career, the singer-songwriter was inspired by the idea of designing a collection of songs that was unified through a particular theme:

Album as artistic format and concept- the process fascinated Billy... Having grown up in the era of concept albums, he would stick by the ethic of linking songs to a theme, however understated, throughout his recording career: “When I was writing music, there was that opportunity – sometimes it felt like a burden – to have a coherent feel and message across nine or ten cuts. Right through *River of Dreams*, that was the discipline.”<sup>58</sup>

For some time, there has been no clear definition of what constitutes a concept album and scholars have grappled with the issue for years. Taking preexisting views into consideration and synthesizing them, semiotics expert Martina Elicker proposed the following definition for the concept album: “a concept album in popular music is an album by either one artist or a group which contains a unifying thread throughout the songs – be it musical, thematic, or both.”<sup>59</sup> As we observed from the discussion on Joel’s

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<sup>57</sup> For lyrics and song description, see “Scenes From An Italian Restaurant,” accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.onefinalserenade.com/scenes-from-an-italian-restaurant.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 75-76.

<sup>59</sup> Martina Elicker, “Concept Albums: Song Cycles in Popular Music,” in *Words and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and Defining the Field: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Word and Music Studies at Ann Arbor, MI, 1999*, ed.

popular albums in Chapter Two, the songs within most albums exhibit a thematic coherence between them, achieved through lyrical or musical means or a combination of both.<sup>60</sup> Some of the most prominent highlights are *The Nylon Curtain* and *River Of Dreams* albums. In an interview, Joel even explicitly referenced the *River of Dreams* album as “a song cycle” which was “written and recorded pretty much in the order it is presented in the album.”<sup>61</sup>

Joel’s attitude towards recent trends in Classical music is also worth mentioning. He admitted he is still learning and getting to terms with the music of the twentieth century and its qualities that are starkly different from the Romantic period: “Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Boulez, Copland, Gershwin, Stockhausen, John Cage, Samuel Barber. I am not afraid of the twentieth century... I don’t dread it, I am just beginning to understand its dissonances, its tonality.”<sup>62</sup> However, a Romantic at heart, he also lamented the fact that melody was reduced to a less important role in twentieth-century classical music while

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Walter Bernhart, Werner Wolf, and David L. Mosley (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2001), 229.

<sup>60</sup> Even though Joel largely owed his introduction to the concept-album idea through the popular artists of his time (especially The Beatles), nevertheless, the notion of a unified set of songs expressing a theme or narrative has its precedent in Western music history, especially during the Romantic period in the form of “song cycle.” The art of the song cycle was popularized through the sets of German lieder compiled by composers such as Beethoven, Schumann, and Schubert.

<sup>61</sup> Billy Joel, interview with Daily Mail quoted in Jeff Giles, “The Story of Billy Joel’s Final Rock Album,” *Ultimate Classic Rock*, accessed January 27, 2018, <http://ultimateclassicrock.com/billy-joel-river-of-dreams/>.

<sup>62</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Greg Sandow, “A Piano Man Turns from Pop to Classical,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2001, accessed February 15, 2018, <http://www.gregsandow.com/old/billyjoel.htm>.

composers and academia emphasized new compositional systems that made classical music less accessible to audiences, thereby directly contributing to its marginalization in modern society:

I think we have lost the whole baby boomer generation in terms of classical music. The classical world is kind of running out of an audience now. They are dying off. They did not reach out enough to the boomers. The powers that be were pretty much promoting late twentieth century dissonant, atonal, modern twelve-tone compositions. They were scoffing at melodic composition.<sup>63</sup>

Joel's first classical album *Fantasies and Delusions* represents an effort to bring audiences back to classical music and clearly reflects his predilection for the musical idiom and conventions of pre-twentieth century Western music. A majority of the pieces in the album strongly reflect stylistic traits and musical perspectives of music in the nineteenth century, with a clear grounding in the period's harmonic practices and melodic approach.

#### *The Keyboard Technique of Billy Joel*

Joel's classical training background is readily apparent through his distinct keyboard technique. Everett noted that "Joel's early exposure to the classics likely contributed to his wide range (for a rock pianist) of dynamics, register, texture, rhythmic placement, touch and technique on the piano."<sup>64</sup> Besides comfortable and efficient execution, there is also a smoothness and sensitivity of touch, phrasing, and pedaling that makes Joel's playing style markedly different from other contemporary Rock artists who sought to stamp their authenticity and dynamism through a direct, showy, and forceful

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<sup>63</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 123.

<sup>64</sup> Everett, "The Learned Vs. the Vernacular," 109.



playing style. Growing up during the era of Rock ‘n’ Roll, Joel was certainly well-aware of the trend:

Thanks to the magical era in radio, even beyond Elvis, what was really striking to a fledgling rock piano player like me was how Little Richard had completely upset the convention that the piano was a secondary, static element in rock music. And you turn and look at Jerry Lee Lewis and Fats Domino, it was plain to see that the insurgent energy of rock was well represented by guys pounding on keyboards. After all it is a percussion instrument. You strike the keys, literally pounding on the instrument. It was meant to be play hard, like the drums.<sup>65</sup>

As demonstrated through a number of his songs, Joel showcased the virtuosic and percussive aspects of piano playing that were characteristic of the Rock pianists cited above. However, as noted by Jonathan Bellman, what sets Joel apart is the fact that “aside from brute speed itself, there is a *relaxed* sound, a smoothness caused by economy of physical motion... as opposed to the showmanship-first aesthetic of a Jerry Lee Lewis.”<sup>66</sup> Joel himself was also conscious of the nature of his technique: “I grew up playing classical piano, so I have tension and release philosophy from that training. I hate boogie for the sake of boogie; it's got to be tension and release. I hate to beat an idea to death.”<sup>67</sup> The efficiency of movement and regulated relaxedness (even in quick tempos or high-stress situations) that typifies Joel’s piano playing is a defining result of years of classical training. Bellman then cites the rollicking, toccata-like prelude of the song “Angry Young Man” to support his argument, claiming that its execution “is beyond the usual ability of

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<sup>65</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 34.

<sup>66</sup> Bellman, “Billy Joel, Piano Culture, and Rock’s Road not Taken.”

<sup>67</sup> Joel, interview by Dave Marsh, “Billy Joel: The Miracle of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street,” December 14, 1978.

a functional pianist-songwriter.”<sup>68</sup> The rapid-fire repeated-note passages which are played alongside the melody require “an advanced hand-coordination combined with sufficient relaxation so as not to overtax the pianist’s stamina.” Other instances of Joel’s “understated facility” on the keyboard can be found in instrumental piano tracks such as the *perpetuum mobile* ragtime showpiece “Root Beer Rag” or challenging piano solos in songs such as “Travellin’ Prayer,” “The Entertainer,” and others.

Aside from the flashy playing style, there is also a sense of finesse, lyricism, and expressiveness to Joel’s piano playing. The sensitivity and poetic aspect of Joel’s classical music training are apparent through his wistful solo piano instrumental track “Nocturne,” the concluding piece of his first album *Cold Spring Harbor*. A three-minute-long song without words written in AABA form, Joel convincingly paces the flow of the music as it builds steadily towards the climatic B section before relenting back to the wistful A section. Here, Joel’s phrasing unfolds naturally, with a soaring melody always standing out in relief above a rolling accompaniment. According to Bellman, the pianism in “Nocturne” demonstrates “controlled, classical legato and careful pedaling... which does not come with lots of lessons and practice.”<sup>69</sup> The sensitive and poetic aspects of Joel’s piano playing are also stand-out features in many of his other songs, such as the lyrical, rolling-arpeggio accompaniment in “Summer Highland Falls,” the quasi-improvisatory, jazz-influenced rhetoric in “New York State of Mind,” the nuanced, delicate opening in “Vienna,” the stylistic medley in “Scenes From An Italian Restaurant,” and many more.

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<sup>68</sup> Bellman, “Billy Joel, Piano Culture, and Rock’s Road not Taken.”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.”

In the essay *Billy Joel, Piano Culture, and Rock's Road Not Taken*, aside from explaining the different aspects of Joel's keyboard technique that owed much to his classical training, Bellman also pointed out that the "choice of instrument, particularly for a young Billy Joel, establishes much about the artist's reception and cultural profile from the outset."<sup>70</sup> By choosing piano as his main instrument and performing in the "learned" way he does, Joel simultaneously creates a complex profile for himself that critics have found difficult to evaluate and classify (a similar problem of multidimensionality is also raised in the earlier sections of the chapter). In the essay, Bellman raised the issue of the piano's retreat to a clear secondary role in Rock music as compared to the guitar, which since the late 1950s completely displaced the piano as *the* instrument culturally definitive of Rock 'n' Roll. He explained that piano in the United States, with its strong classical traditions, has become culturally associated with discipline and class, while Rock has built on opposite values such as freedom, excessiveness, and rebelliousness. The emphasis on relaxedness, elegance, and economy in movement in performing the piano is almost anti-Rock. Furthermore, the piano is too multifaceted an instrument, capable of many different roles and new directions, to be an essential Rock instrument like the guitar. Joel, who had a strong classical piano training background (which Bellman called his "piano culture"), channeled the influence through his compositional process and stage performance. With the above ideas in mind, Bellman argues that Joel's piano roots are equally, if not more important, than the Rock influence that defines his songwriting and career, even though he was widely considered a Rock artist and criticized through a pure Rock music frame of reference.

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<sup>70</sup> Bellman, "Billy Joel, Piano Culture, and Rock's Road not Taken."

### *The Next Step: Fantasies and Delusions*

Even though Joel has journeyed through a diversity of musical realms, he has always considered his classical upbringing his musical origin. It is the one that he saw fit to return to at the end of his recording career, which ultimately led to the production of his last, and only classical album: *Fantasies and Delusions*.

The following chapter details Joel's recent phase of venturing into instrumental classical composition and the making of the *Fantasies and Delusions* album.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Fantasies and Delusions: Motivation and Creative Process*

#### *A New Beginning*

As discussed in the previous chapters, Billy Joel has carved a stellar popular music career through his charismatic stage presence, heartfelt lyrics, and rich musical style that freely crosses the lines between diverse music genres. However, following the 1993 release of his twelfth studio album, *River of Dreams*, Joel refused to record new popular music (except for two singles in 2007 and covers on preexisting songs).<sup>1</sup> The near-decade recording hiatus from 1993 to 2001 ended with the release of *Fantasies and Delusions* on October 2, 2001.

Taking eight years from conception to completion (more than any of his previous recording projects), the album is clearly a serious effort from Joel. With a total runtime of 76 minutes and 17 seconds, it stands unlike any other musical project by Joel and is the longest album he has ever produced. To date, it is still the project that represents a major turn in Joel's career. The album marked Joel's return to his classical-music roots, which is signified through the use of his original name "William Joel" in the credits page of the

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<sup>1</sup> The two singles are "All My Life" (2007), the first new song with lyrics that Joel has written since the *River of Dreams* album to honor the second anniversary with his then third wife Katie Lee, and "Christmas at Fallujah" (2007), a single criticizing the war in Iraq. The proceeds from the single were donated to Homes for Our Troops, a non-profit organization that support American veterans that returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. After 1993, Joel also made covers on the Beatles' "Hard Day's Night" (1994), Bob Dylan's "To Make You Feel My Love" (1997), and Gerry Goffin's and Carole King's "Hey Girl" (1997).

album's liner notes and the title page of each of the pieces within the musical score. There is little in *Fantasies and Delusions* that resembles Joel's popular music albums; there are no lyrics, no guitar or drums, nor the familiar sounds of Billy Joel singing and playing the piano. The album is a result of the collaboration between Joel and classical pianist Hyung-Ki Joo.<sup>2</sup> Representing Joel's eclectic aesthetic that transcends genre, the album features a series of ten solo piano pieces that evoke a variety of classical music styles. Most of them are character pieces that exhibit many nineteenth-century romantic features. Joel himself describes the album as "stylistically very much middle-to-late nineteenth century Romantic into the Impressionistic and early twentieth century."<sup>3</sup> Having worked closely with Joel on the project for two years from 1999 to 2001, Joo observed the following about Joel the man and the classical composer:

Billy is a very modest man. Of course, he is known as the Piano Man around the world. But he is now writing music in a very different direction and his music is very much inspired by nineteenth century music. And it's

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<sup>2</sup> Born in the United Kingdom to South Korean parents, Hyung-Ki Joo started classical piano training at the age of eight and began his formal training at the Yehudi Menuhin School (founded by the famous violinist himself) with Peter Norris and Seta Tanyel. Later, he acquired his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Manhattan School of Music. A formidable virtuoso pianist, Joo is also a grand prize-winner of the International Stravinsky Piano Competition. In 2004, Joo teamed up with former classmate and violinist Aleksey Igudesman to found Igudesman & Joo, a comedic duo that had since become a sensation around the world. With the motto of bringing the fun back to classical music-making, they garnered a massive online following and often-packed live performances. Their impressive feat of blending virtuosic, high-quality performances of classical music with witty, deftly-conceived humor and stagecraft have been well-recognized by the public and even by classical music connoisseurs. Renowned classical performers such as Emanuel Ax, Janice Jansen, Julian Rachlin, Viktoria Mullova, Gidon Kramer, and Mischa Maisky have collaborated with them in their musical sketches.

<sup>3</sup> Billy Joel, "Billy Joel & Hyung-Ki Joo: The Making of *Fantasies and Delusions*" (Documentary video), posted May 4, 2017, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR-qwFP1N38&t=184s>.

very sophisticated music, very intricate...this is not a Rock star, this is a guy who is so passionate about classical music.<sup>4</sup>

For a classically-rooted project, *Fantasies and Delusions* was commercially successful, ranking eighty-third on the Billboard 200 chart and remaining number one on the classical chart for sixty weeks in 2001. In 2006, American pianist-composer Jeffrey Biegel and music arranger Philip Keveren were inspired by the album and co-wrote a piano concerto entitled *Symphonic Fantasies for Piano and Orchestra*.<sup>5</sup> According to Joo, Joel also wanted to have the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions* orchestrated and Austrian composer Tristan Schulze is currently working on the project.<sup>6</sup> To this day, *Fantasies and Delusions* remains the only classical album and the final recording project featuring any original material by Joel. “I am actually the closest to this recording of any

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<sup>4</sup> Hyung-Ki Joo, “Billy Joel & Hyung-Ki Joo: The Making of *Fantasies and Delusions*.”

<sup>5</sup> Biegel initially requested Joel to write him a concerto, however, due to scheduling constraints, Joel was unable to fulfil that request and suggested that the pianist rework his solo piano pieces into a concerto instead, which resulted in the *Symphonic Fantasies for Piano and Orchestra*. In the writing of the concerto, Biegel created virtuosic piano transcriptions from Joel’s piano pieces and was assisted by Keveren in the orchestration. The concerto calls for a large orchestra, which includes a full range of woodwind, brass, percussion, and string instruments. With an approximate performance duration of 27 minutes, the concerto consists of four movements: “Fantasy,” “Sorbetto,” “Reverie,” and “Nunley’s Carousel Waltz” – each based on a similarly titled piece from the *Fantasies and Delusions* album. In a statement on his website, Biegel said: “in utilizing the music already published as *Fantasies and Delusions*, the selections chosen came to my mind as a conception for a cohesive concerto in four movements of various styles and moods.” The world premiere of the concerto took place in the 2006 Eastern Music Festival in Greensboro, North Carolina with Stuart Malina conducting. See Vivien Schweitzer, “Billy Joel Piano Concerto to premiere at Eastern Music Festival,” *Playbill*, April 26, 2006, accessed February 15, 2018, <http://www.playbill.com/article/billy-joel-piano-concerto-to-premiere-at-eastern-music-festival>.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B, no. 9.

of the recordings I have done,” he said in a 2011 interview for his *Complete Albums Collection*. Reflecting on his venture into classical music composition and the impact of the resulting project, Joel also added: “This is more me than anything right now.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Motivation*

#### *Personal*

On Joel’s motivation to compose music in the classical style, biographer Hank Bordowitz wrote the following: “As for the reasons, that was open to question, and [Joel] really didn’t deal with it in a very direct way except to say that it was what he wanted to do.”<sup>8</sup> However, through my research on preexisting sources and interviews of Joel, I propose that there are at least two major reasons, one personal and the other pedagogical, that stimulated Joel to create and publish *Fantasies and Delusions*.

After the release of the highly successful *River of Dreams* in 1993, Joel no longer felt the compulsion to create new popular music and gave a statement of intent in the last song of the album: “These are the last words I have to say.” Obviously taking the declaration with a grain of salt, critics at the time “did not read the signs of Joel’s imminent retirement from popular music” and some even called “Famous Last Words” “an untroubled symbol of approaching middle age.”<sup>9</sup> However, in fact, Joel had already

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<sup>7</sup> Billy Joel, “Billy Joel on Fantasies and Delusions,” *The Complete Albums Collection*, accessed August 16, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pZhUMT3mdQ&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>8</sup> Hank Bordowitz, *Billy Joel: The Life and Times of an Angry Young Man* (NY: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2011), 203.

<sup>9</sup> A. Morgan Jones, “The Other Sides of Billy Joel,” 199.



shown signals of wanting to bring the rock-star phase of his career to a close as early as 1989. In the closing chapter of his dissertation, A. Morgan Jones gave a detailed presentation of Joel's deteriorating relationship with popular music throughout the late 80s and the 90s. During an interview for *Storm Front* in 1989, Joel explained:

You don't necessarily have to be on the cutting edge, or a celebrity, or a rock star to be a musician. This is just one phase of it. Maybe I'll look back and say, this was a blue period. But I intend to be an artist all my life. I don't intend to stop making music just because I'm not a commercial recording artist.<sup>10</sup>

In an interview a year later, he said that he had more pressing concerns at that moment in his life than living out the career of a Rock star:

My priorities right now are family, music, then everything else. I need substance in my life. And the world needs substance. The world doesn't need any more *hip*... The world doesn't need more *cool*, more *clever*. The world needs substantial things. The world needs more greatness. We need more Picassos, more Mozarts, more John Singer Sargents, not more *Milli Vanilli*. Not more haircuts.<sup>11</sup>

At that time, his relationship with his second wife Christie Brinkley was already showing signs of strain and the couple eventually broke up in 1994. In fact, the painful experience of being separated from his only daughter Alexa (who for a while was in Brinkley's custody) eventually found its way into the expressive character piece, "Soliloquy (On a Separation)," in *Fantasies and Delusions*.

Through the 90s, Joel also became progressively more frustrated and disillusioned with popular music and the workings of its industry. In a particularly blunt interview, he said:

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<sup>10</sup> A. Morgan Jones, "The Other Sides of Billy Joel," 195.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

I'm translating the music so people can understand what I did. Then I've got to translate it into a video so the dumbos can get an idea of what it's all about. I'm a pissed off musician... 'I am the Entertainer?' ... I don't want to be 'The Entertainer.' Not anymore.

As Joel was nearing his fifties, Jones claimed that the singer-songwriter also “began to feel irrelevant, and his usual on-stage antics were taking their toll; the exhaustion that accompanied touring, playing his catalogue to aging audiences around the world, caused a change in his musical focus.”<sup>12</sup> Reflecting on that watershed moment in his life, Joel remarked in 2000: “If you are not re-inventing yourself, then you are on the edge of decrepitude. You begin to fossilize if you do not renew.”<sup>13</sup> Given the aforementioned factors, composing popular music had become a stale and sterile undertaking for Joel. Even though he did not completely shut the door to popular music writing, Joel felt his artistic obligation to the genre had run its course and it was unlikely that he would revisit popular songwriting in the future:

I'm just not in the mood for that right now... if I forced myself to write a rock record, it would flat-out suck. I have absolutely nothing to say in that medium at the moment—which is important for me as an artist to acknowledge. I'm sure that I'll revisit Rock 'n' Roll somewhere down the line. But I honestly don't know when. I can't imagine that this is music to the ears of people at my label. But there's nothing I can do about that right now.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A. Morgan Jones, “The Other Sides of Billy Joel,” 203.

<sup>13</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Kieran Crowley, “Joel A Classic Case at 50 with his New Music Comes New Romance,” April 30, 2000, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://nypost.com/2000/04/30/joel-a-classic-case-at-50-with-his-new-music-comes-new-romance/>.

<sup>14</sup> Billy Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in “Still Rock 'n' Roll to Billy Joel?” *Billboard Magazine*, September 15, 2001, 92, accessed 15 February 2018, <https://books.google.com/books/about/Billboard.html?id=EhEEAAAAMBAJ>. Columbia Records turned out to be highly supportive of Joel's classical ventures. Don Ienner, then-president of Columbia, stated that “Billy Joel has given us some of the most memorable

Even though he appreciated the craft and ingenuity involved in making short, memorable popular hits, Joel was simply not up for performing the same, limiting routine of popular songwriting over and over again. He grew weary of the restrictive orthodoxy and parameters that accompanied the practice and felt that it was time for him to move on as an artist to search for other means of expression. In multiple interviews, he likened the constricting experience to a “box,” or in stronger terms, a “coffin:”

I got bored with writing popular music... I just got tired of writing in the same format: it can't be too long, it's got to be played on the radio. It's a box, and after a while that box becomes a coffin.<sup>15</sup>

Going into more detail from the musical and technical perspective, Joel explained:

I really feel that now would be a time to try my hand at a different kind of writing. I want to be able to do expositions. I want to be able to do variations. I don't want to have to repeat a motif over and over. I don't want to work in song form. I don't want to have to create within that box... it can't be too long. You can't extend a thematic melody too long without returning to it because then people start to lose the thread. There needs to be a chorus. There needs to be a small bridge. And it all has to be done within a certain time frame. There's a vernacular with the instruments that are used on a lot of popular-music records – a rhythm section with drums, bass and guitar. The rhythms that we're used to in this day and age, whether they be hip-hop or rock or pop, are part of it. I found it all very confining. You know, I was approaching 50 when I started to do this – eight years ago – and I said, “It's time for me to write like a grownup.” Not that grownups can't write mature popular music, because

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and meaningful pop music of the past three decades... having mastered the world of pop and rock in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Billy is following his artistic vision into the classical realm. It's inspiring to see a musician of his caliber opening up to the world of classical music to his fans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Greg Linn, then-marketing vice president of the label, also added that “we're proud of him for making this record on his own terms, and we're committed to making it succeed on a commercial level.”

<sup>15</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Sarfraz Manzoor, “Billy Joel: ‘I opened up my soul. What else do you want?’ October 24, 2013, accessed 17 February 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpop/features/10401809/Billy-Joel-I-Opened-up-my-soul.-What-else-do-you-want.html>.

they can, but I felt like it was time for me to move on as an artist and stretch myself and grow and expand and take a chance.<sup>16</sup>

Joel's attraction to a freer, more abstract form of expression naturally led him back to his classical music background. In fact, two or three years before the release of *River of Dreams* (1993), he had already begun "homework preparations" by listening voraciously and almost exclusively to classical music:

I started with Beethoven. I rediscovered all the 19th century music that really songwriters all hearken back to, 20th century songwriters. And I delved into Brahms and Schumann and Chopin and Debussy and Rachmaninoff... Really inspired music, which I miss so much now, at this point in my life. I need substance now. I need depth... and I feel like a lot of people in my age group, which is the Boomers... need not just to listen to classic rock or to turn to, I don't know, country or whatever it is.<sup>17</sup>

"What I was really trying to do was to break their codes," Joel says. "If you listen to something often enough, you begin to know instinctively why it goes in a particular direction."<sup>18</sup> His rediscovery of the classics first through the Beethoven symphonies, which galvanized a new-found motivation to compose classical music is well-documented:

Yes. I was, well, I guess, 42, 43 years old. I started listening to the Beethoven symphonies, and I had a really good, you know, high-fidelity system... It was an amazing sensation. I listened to this stuff in a way that I'd never listened to it before because I'd always been told to listen to it or forced to listen to it or made to listen to it. And I listened to it on my own, and all of a sudden, I went, "This stuff is unbelievable. This stuff is

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<sup>16</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," *Performing Songwriter* 9, (November 2001): 60.

<sup>17</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Charlie Rose, "Billy Joel," *Charlie Rose*, October 19, 2001, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://charlierose.com/videos/18874>.

<sup>18</sup> Billy Joel, quoted in "Discussion of the Album *River of Dreams*," *One Final Serenade: Songs of Billy Joel*, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.onefinalserenade.com/river-of-dreams-article.html>.

great. You mean this stuff has always been here?"... And it— it inspired me and motivated me and changed my life. It was an epiphany... I began to write instrumental music that was not pop music. I knew I wanted to do something different after that album, *River of Dreams*, which was '93.<sup>19</sup>

[It is an experience akin to] getting stoned. The rush in hearing his work reminded me of how I felt when I first discovered Rock 'n' Roll, It was like a door was unlocked to a world full of possibilities... the deeper I got as a listener, the more I want to try to create a similar kind of music. In retrospect, it was ballsy and somewhat intimidating. But it was also exhilarating.<sup>20</sup>

The experience also humbled Joel and reminded him that he still had much to learn and aspire to. Joel said, "I let these symphonies pound over me... last time I felt like this was the first time I listened to Led Zeppelin. I felt puny. I am nothing, I am insignificant."<sup>21</sup> Although he marveled at Mozart's genius, Joel found a closer affinity with Beethoven because he felt that they shared a similar experience in writing music, which to him seemed more human:<sup>22</sup>

I relate to him more than anyone... like him, I write in fits and starts. If you see his original notations, you see nothing but gouges and scratches. He struggled with and labored over every note of his music. He was very much a human being. To me, that's what makes his music so wonderful.

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<sup>19</sup> Joel, interview by Charlie Rose, "Billy Joel," October 19, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in "Still Rock 'n' Roll to Billy Joel?" 92.

<sup>21</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Greg Sandow, "A Piano Man Turns From Pop to Classical," *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2001, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://www.gregsandow.com/old/billyjoel.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," 61. On his reverence of Mozart, Joel said the following: "When I listen to the music of Mozart, he really makes me kind of angry, in a way, because he was such a natural, gifted composer. He was touched by God. His music – it seems like it was all written in one sitting. There's this beautiful, unbroken arc of composition when you listen to Mozart, as if it all just sprang from his forehead in one great Promethean moment, and I hate him for that. I love his music, but excuse me, Mr. Goody-Two-Shoes, we can't all be Wolfgang Mozart. This is almost an unearthly form of composing."

He explored all of the turmoil in his heart and soul as he made music. It didn't just flow up out of him like water.<sup>23</sup>

The switch to classical composition liberated Joel from the shackles and conventions of popular music, allowing him to freely exercise his creative vision without having to tend to popular music's inherent structural/formulaic constraints, priority for attentional immediacy, and marketing demands and machinery. Similar to numerous composers in the early twentieth century who moved forward from past experiences and found themselves embracing a world full of new possibilities, in shedding his popular music identity, Joel also discovered a new freshness and freedom to express himself like never before:

I realized that writing pop music is like creating art inside a box... the parameters are specific, and they can be frustrating and confining. In writing the pieces that became this project [*Fantasies and Delusions*], I allowed the music to take me further than I had done previously. I kicked out the sides of the box. Instead of finding a theme or a point and repeating it over and over, I let the music unfold and follow a natural conclusion. In many ways, it was like being freed from prison. There were no boundaries.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, *Fantasies and Delusions* turned out to be Joel's most ambitious and complex album in terms of length and musical structure. More than half of the pieces in the album went over the five-minute mark – well over the average popular song duration. The lengthiest pieces, such as “Soliloquy (On a Separation),” “Aria (Grand Canal),” and “Suite For Piano (Star-Crossed)” amounted to more than eleven-minutes-long apiece and featured formal architectures that are much more elaborate than the normal popular song forms. The sheer length of the album (almost twice as long compared to *River of Dreams*,

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<sup>23</sup> Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in “Still Rock ‘n’ Roll to Billy Joel?” 92.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 92.

his longest popular album) coupled with its purely instrumental presentation also requires a high degree of patience and concentration from the average uninitiated listener.

The fact that Joel would choose the piano as the first stop for his venture into classical composition is hardly surprising, given that it is the medium that he is most familiar with and understands the best. He has been identified as the Piano Man throughout his career. As we observe from the previous chapters, making music on the piano defined Joel's musical origins and has continued to be a necessity throughout his life:

You know, piano, for me in all my life has been a constant companion. I play piano every day. It's like food, or air, or water. I have to have it. I even wrote a song about my relationship to the piano called "Baby Grand," which is about friends can come and go, and relationships with women will sometimes not work out, and the money comes and the money goes, and life has its vicissitudes, its up and downs... but the piano has always been there.<sup>25</sup>

Through composing purely instrumental music, Joel also freed himself from the constraints of the English language and its literary devices, which he referred to as "a release from the restricting confines of the old 'Elizabethan' structure."<sup>26</sup> In composing in

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<sup>25</sup> Joel, "Billy Joel & Hyung-Ki Joo: The Making of Fantasies and Delusions."

<sup>26</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Jeffrey Obser, "Billy Joel: Crossing a New Threshold," December 23, 1999, accessed February 26, 2018, <http://easthamptonstar.com/Archive/1/Billy-Joel-Crossing-New-Threshold>. In another interview, Joel also went into detail on the challenges that he faced when he had to work within the limits of linguistic devices: "It's this tortured process of having a melodic phrase with a pentameter to it, with a definite conclusion on each phrase where an actual rhyme would have to go. I hate the tyranny of rhyme too. But if you're going to be musical and you're going to make something work, nine times out of ten you do have to rhyme because it would be as if you ended a musical phrase in a different key with no relation to anything else that had happened before. It needs to have a harmony. So I have this tortured process of here's the mold, it's all shaped already, and I have to look through my vocabulary, my pitiful words, and jam them onto this musical phrase and make it match the emotional feeling

a “lyricless” medium, Joel could freely express himself without the necessity of being literal, leaving more room for imagination and abstraction. As Joel aged, instrumental music also became a natural conduit for him to channel subtler and more ambiguous feelings and ideas that he learned from life:

They are not necessarily based all on words. A lot of them are based on emotions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas which aren’t necessarily literal. A lot of them are abstract, surreal... I am not sure how to put some of these things into words, which is why I am writing in the instrumental vernacular. I find it much more difficult to express the way I think now at my age than I did when I was young. When I was younger, I was so much more sure of things. Black and white. I am right, you are wrong. And the arrogance of youth is unbelievable. You get older you go, well, on the other hand that becomes somewhat rabbinical... So, things aren’t as black and white, things aren’t as cut and dry, they are grayer.<sup>27</sup>

I just don’t feel like being so damned literal anymore... It’s extremely liberating because I don’t really have to paint a mustache on my own painting now... To me the music was always the message in the first place. I’ve broken away from the tyranny of the lyric.”<sup>28</sup>

In an interview in 1999, he even professed that being literal is missing the point: “At this point in my life, words don’t necessarily represent the substance of my emotions and feelings.”<sup>29</sup> In his commentary on Joel’s decision to turn his back on popular music, biographer Schruers also echoed all the claims outlined above:

While Billy’s decision to stop writing for a pop audience roughly coincided with the Christie breakup, it wasn’t only about that – or Billy’s

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that the music has.” See Bill DeMain, *In Their Own Words: Songwriters Talk about the Creative Process* (CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 116-117.

<sup>27</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Joel, interview by Kieran Crowley, “Joel A Classic Case at 50 with his New Music Comes New Romance,” April 30, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Joel, interview by Jeffrey Obser, “Billy Joel: Crossing a New Threshold,” December 23, 1999.



fatigue with the music business. It was largely because he felt he could continue to express himself musically without having to struggle to find the right words, and without grinding on as part of the machine that was engineered to create and distribute pop music... by stepping off the pop music treadmill, he could create music without subjecting himself to his emotional up and downs. Also, the meanings of the songs would not be scrutinized under the sometimes-blinding spotlight he'd worked under four decades.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike classical music composers such as Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) and Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904), who experimented with popular music forms or idioms and were handsomely rewarded (in terms of both popularity and financial gain) for their efforts, the history of popular musicians venturing into the realm of classical composition is not a glamorous one. On the phenomenon, popular music critic Erik Tarloff commented that “it isn’t completely clear why an enterprise of this sort invites that kind of sneering, but it does, frequently and almost irresistibly... But overall, only Gershwin seems to have found the means to travel uptown with dignity and talent intact.”<sup>31</sup> Several popular artists who bravely attempted were lampooned and brought into disrepute while their efforts slid into insignificance (such as Paul McCartney’s “Liverpool Oratorio” in 1991).<sup>32</sup> Whether or not such efforts were able to measure up to the classical

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<sup>30</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 246 and 248.

<sup>31</sup> Erik Tarloff, “Billy Joel’s Classical Crossover,” *Slate*, October 31, 2001, accessed February 21, 2018, [http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2001/10/billy\\_joels\\_classical\\_crossover.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2001/10/billy_joels_classical_crossover.html).

<sup>32</sup> Many have questioned McCartney’s lofty ambition to create a work of such gigantic proportions (the oratorio is about an-hour-a-half long) for his first venture into classical music given his lack of experience in writing large musical forms in the classical idiom. Some also took issue with the fact that the oratorio resulted from a collaborative effort between McCartney and Carl Davis. Several reviewers found the oratorio itself to be dull, awkwardly constructed, and too simplistic to handle the intricacies of the narrative and its character. For a critical review, see Edward Rothstein, “Review/Music;

masterworks, one of the main reasons for their plight was cultural: in the Western world, popular music has often been looked down on as a lower, less sophisticated form of music-making when compared to the art music counterpart. For popular musicians who wish to be taken seriously by attempting classical composition, they have to fight an uphill battle and brace themselves for being dismissed as a vanity act by critics or connoisseurs. Despite unfavorable circumstances, Joel still pursued his interests in composing serious concert music.

With characteristic self-deprecating humor, and perhaps out of apprehension or humility, Joel even inserted a “disclaimer” in the album title by labelling his efforts “delusions” – as if he was “crazy enough to do something that nobody thought [he] could or should do” by seeking to compose in the styles of notable Western European Classical music figures.<sup>33</sup> He was well-aware that the enterprise would automatically invite an unpleasant, yet intimidating comparison to the works of these masters: “to allow my name to be mentioned in the same breath as the masters is not something I’m comfortable with.”<sup>34</sup> “Billy Joel’s Classical Crossover: is it a bold adventure or a grand delusion?” a critic asked provokingly in his article on *Fantasies and Delusions*.<sup>35</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “delusion” is defined as “an idiosyncratic belief or

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McCartney’s ‘Liverpool Oratorio’,” November 20, 1991, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.nytime.com/1991/11/20/arts/review-music-mccartney-s-liverpool-oratorio.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in “Still Rock ‘n’ Roll to Billy Joel?” 92.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>35</sup> Tarloff, “Billy Joel’s Classical Crossover.”

impression maintained despite being contradicted by reality or rational argument, typically as a symptom of mental disorder.”<sup>36</sup> Since most music in *Fantasies and Delusions* is conceived in the Romantic style, perhaps the term “delusions” is also a statement by Joel to validate his decision to stand by past traditions, despite having to disregard recent compositional and aesthetical developments in classical music. The term can be understood as Joel’s affirmation of his “deluded” belief in pre-twentieth century musical idioms, which is less appreciated by modern-day critics or academics:

That period of music is viewed as being too sweet, too melodic, and too romantic... it’s been looked at with disdain for a long time. With that in mind, I am trying to find the irony and humor in the fact that it’s the first kind of music I gravitated toward as a writer.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising to see many of the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions* exhibit a flowing lyricism that was a hallmark of the Romantic style. Furthermore, Joel’s identity as a melodist is a crucial element in defining him as an individual and a musician:

I don’t think I’m ever going to be completely non-melodic. I don’t think what I write is ever going to be not singable in some way. I spent so much of my life as a songwriter – to throw that away would be stupid, a terrible waste of a great deal of knowledge. I think the fact that a lot of these pieces are infused with a certain song-ness is good.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “delusions,” accessed February 17, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/delusion>.

<sup>37</sup> Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in “Still Rock ‘n’ Roll to Billy Joel?” 92.

<sup>38</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, “Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind,” 61.

The melodic and thematic highlighting in *Fantasies and Delusions* will be examined in more detail in Chapter Five. What follows is a discussion on the pedagogical reasons that inspired Joel to create the album.

### *Pedagogical*

As indicated in Chapter Two, there is also a strong educational component in Joel's motivation to write *Fantasies and Delusions*. He wanted to create pure classical music that has so far been missing from his catalogue of works. By composing the works in *Fantasies and Delusions*, he also hoped to provide piano teachers with pieces that are fitting, challenging, and rewarding enough to be assigned to their students. For Billy Joel fans who also happened to be pianists or piano students that loved classical music, this could only be music to their ears:

I wanted it to be recognized as, "Oh, he is trying to write classical piano pieces... like, for students." I am picturing a piano teacher with a student and the student goes, "I want to play a Billy Joel song." Well if he tries to go out and get "Piano Man" or "Still Rock and Roll to Me," it sounds like crap on the piano. No matter how it is arranged, it does not sound right on the piano. I wanted a piano teacher to be able to go, "You want to play a Billy Joel piece? Here, take this book home." And there is a music book, with the notes in it and learn Opus 1 or Opus 2 or Opus 3," and these kids would be "This... this is hard, you know?" and cursing me out, but the piano teacher would have something that they could learn with. That is what the point of this was.<sup>39</sup>

Barring the more accessible pieces such as "Invention in C minor" and "Air (Dublinesque)," the rest of the pieces in the album call for a high level of technical proficiency and musicianship from the pianist. The nineteenth century in Western music saw the flourishing of the piano virtuoso while composers such as Franz Liszt (1811-

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<sup>39</sup> Billy Joel, "Billy Joel on *Fantasies and Delusions*," *The Complete Albums Collection*.

1886) and Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) attained new heights by developing performance techniques and innovative pianistic figurations that thoroughly exploited the piano's expressive and virtuosic potential. Most of the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions* exhibit this nineteenth century approach to pianistic writing. These are advanced, difficult compositions that utilize many pianistic devices that were never seen in Joel's popular keyboard writings, although these popular works also proved to be anything but easy (as discussed in Chapter Three). From a technical standpoint, the score of *Fantasies and Delusions* is replete with virtuosic passages and figurations. These technical undertakings are taxing on the pianist mentally and physically, especially when played for a long stretch of time, which makes the longer pieces in the album such as "Soliloquy (On a Separation)," "Aria (Grand Canal)," and "Fantasy (Film Noir)" draining for the performer's stamina – not mentioning the colossal challenge of playing the entire set in one sitting. From my study of the score, several pieces in the album also present a great memorization challenge, as Joel seldom repeats a passage exactly as when it was first presented, with changes (at times minute) in texture, harmony, figuration, register, and so on. Certain passageworks that would take time for many pianists to master include arpeggios, octaves, chords, double notes, repeated notes, and complex scales that are usually played at a rapid pace. There are also plenty of large leaps, stretches, and dense, constantly-changing textures that call for a constant readjustment of the torso and hand positions relative to the keyboard. In addition, although the left hand plays an accompanimental role in a majority of the pieces, it is never purely accompanimental.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In our correspondence, Joo highlighted the important role of the left hand in piano playing. See Appendix B, no. 4 (paragraph 2).

The pianist needs to pay close attention in bringing out the various countermelodies, inner voicings, and movements of harmony in the left hand, much like one would do when playing pieces by composers such as Chopin and Liszt.<sup>41</sup> Within a section in “Soliloquy (On a Separation),” Joel’s writing even resembles the three-hand technique that was made popular by Thalberg and Liszt through pitting the melody against arpeggio figures that sweep above and below it on the keyboard (Figure 4.1). The obvious challenge here is to make the melody sing and soar above a busy, at times enveloping, accompanimental texture. In fact, I also posit that the issue of bringing out and shaping the melody – perhaps the most important musical element in Romantic music and Joel’s music – amidst all the textural sophistication and technical “heavylifting” would be a challenge for aspiring pianists while they are learning the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions*.



Figure 4.1. Joel, “Soliloquy (On a Separation),” ms. 19-22, three-hand technique<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix B, no. 4 (paragraph 2).

<sup>42</sup> All score figures in this thesis are excerpted from Billy Joel and Hyung-Ki Joo, *Fantasies and Delusions: Music for Solo Piano* (New York: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2001).

The following examples demonstrate a multitude of technical and musical challenges (which are usually interrelated) presented in *Fantasies and Delusions*. The cadenza-like coda in “Fantasy (Film Noir)” (Figure 4.2) requires both nimble fingerwork and breathtaking virtuosity for an effective, dramatic presentation of the soft, scampering figures and the contrasting, swelling octave passage that immediately follows. The virtuosic Tempo di “Tango” section in “Reverie (Villa D’Este)” (Figure 4.3) requires the performer to navigate through a series of complex rhythmic patterns, large leaps, ornamental flourishes, chordal passages, and rapid double-note runs. To complicate matters further, the pianist also must be sensitive and incisive in his or her articulation and pacing to bring out the spicy, sensuous, and energetic flavor of the tango. The second longest piece in the album, “Aria (Grand Canal),” poses a different set of problems (Figure 4.4). Given its title and effusive Chopinesque melodies, the piece is Joel’s most overt call to pianists to sing beautifully on their instrument. A sizable portion of the piece’s melodies are presented in octaves or chords in the right hand (a common trait in much Romantic piano music), which makes it difficult to execute them in a smooth, *legato* manner. Since one would not be able to connect the notes physically most of the time, the solution is to listen carefully and play the passage by staying close to the keys, with the help of supple hand/wrist/arm/body movement and judicious use of the pedal. The drawn-out nature of the melodies and structure of the piece also require much thought from the performer in terms of pacing and presentation in order to render an effective performance.



Figure 4.2. Joel, “Fantasy (Film Noir),” ms. 252-265, cadenza-like coda



Figure 4.3. Joel, “Reverie (Villa D’Este),” ms. 85-96, virtuosic tango section





Figure 4.4. Joel, “Aria (Grand Canal),” ms. 37-50, aria-like melody and its various presentations

Given the examples above, it is apparent that most pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions* are not written with the amateur in mind. They require serious effort and time from the average piano student to handle the technical difficulties and achieve interpretive mastery of the styles and nuances within the music. Steinway artist and piano pedagogue Robert Wyatt even observed that “every pianistic device invented during the

classical through the impressionistic stylistic periods is contained within [the album].”<sup>43</sup>

Along with the two easier pieces, this collection of solo piano music presents a wealth of educational material for aspiring pianists to improve not just their technical facility but also their musicality.

Another noteworthy element that points to the pedagogical intent of *Fantasies and Delusions* is that both the album and the later release of its musical score were clothed with the familiar cover design (with the company’s permission) by G. Schirmer Inc., a notable, New York-based classical music publishing company founded in 1861 by German immigrant Gustav Schirmer. The iconic template with the “green border and lettering against a khaki background” is used as the front cover of numerous classical music scores published by the company and points to the common experience of countless aspiring piano students in North America even today.<sup>44</sup> The use of the Schirmer cover template is a conscious yet clever statement of intent by Joel declaring the pedagogical aspirations of *Fantasies and Delusions*: “anybody who has ever been a piano student or knows somebody who was practicing piano would know this [the Schirmer design]... I want people to recognize this as music for piano students.”<sup>45</sup>

At various points in his career, Joel has pushed back against criticisms that characterized him as a commercial songwriter, emphasizing that he only writes when he felt compelled to do so. On his classical compositions, Joel said:

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Wyatt, ““Fantasies & Delusions,” by Billy Joel” *American Music Teacher* 51, no. 5 (April 2002): 83, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/936769?accountid=7014>.

<sup>44</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man*, 124.

<sup>45</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

I don't know if this stuff is going to be commercially viable or critically accepted. Frankly, I don't give a damn. I'm just doing it for me, which is the same way I wrote pop music... I'm just doing it to keep myself amused.

Since the release of *Fantasies and Delusions*, Joel has still actively composed music but has never released another studio album. In a 2013 interview, he commented, “just because I can put out albums and the record company would release them and people would buy them, that doesn't mean I should.”<sup>46</sup> By his own account, he did not compose *Fantasies and Delusions* as a money-spinner, but rather as a noble aspiration to educate the general public by drawing more attention and recognition to classical music through his influence as a popular artist:

Obviously, I am not doing this for the money. This is purely a labor of love. I am not expecting it to be a huge commercial success. What I wanted to do was open people's ears and maybe open their minds to listening to a music that they might not have listened to before. A lot of people are intimidated by what is called Classical music...but if they are in any way interested because of the work I have done before, maybe they will give it a listen. Perhaps they might be motivated to go to the classical section in a music shop to pick up some of the works of Chopin or maybe give Beethoven a listen. I think that it will open up an amazing world that they have kind of shut themselves off from. I think we have lost the whole baby boomer generation in terms of classical music. The classical world is kind of running out of an audience now. They are dying off.<sup>47</sup>

*Fantasies and Delusions* also represents Joel's efforts to dissolve the musical barrier between classical and popular audiences. As a popular artist, Joel had been active in promoting Classical music, sponsoring youth groups, workshops, scholarships, and musical instruments to numerous institutions. He even considered writing a book to urge

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<sup>46</sup> Joel, interview by Sarfraz Manzoor, “Billy Joel: ‘I opened up my soul. What else do you want?’ October 24, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 123.

both factions to overcome their fear of each other's music.<sup>48</sup> In his opinion, the perceived great divide between classical (referring to tonal music) and popular music is actually not that great of a divide because they are two sides of the same art:

It's not all that different from well-written popular songs. There are themes, there are melodies, counterpoint. There are bridges, choruses. It's just a different way of doing them. I'm hoping that people will recognize that this kind of music has been around for a while. They might find some of it familiar and they might enjoy it.<sup>49</sup>

We use the same notes, the same scales, lots of the same harmonies...give the other guy a listen!<sup>50</sup>

When asked in an interview if he cared for the album's commercial success, Joel revealed that he prefers to measure success with a different criterion:

No, not at all. I'm doing [*Fantasies and Delusions*] for the love of the music and that's the best motivator of all. I'm not expecting a commercial success, but if someone who was interested in my music is inspired to check out a recording of Schumann, Chopin, or Beethoven then I've succeeded.<sup>51</sup>

The educational value of creating the album, however, applies not merely to outsiders but also to Joel himself. In a 2001 interview, a then 52-year-old Joel revealed that writing the music in *Fantasies and Delusions* would be only the beginning of a larger learning process:

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<sup>48</sup> Fred Child, "Classical Keeping Score," *Billboard Magazine*, May 15, 1999, 47, accessed February 23, 2018, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=1893758&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>49</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," 56.

<sup>50</sup> Child, "Classical Keeping Score," 47.

<sup>51</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Dan Aquilante, "Move Over, Beethoven – Billy Joel, Classical Composer? Believe It!" October 2, 2001.

With my instrumental music, I will probably be expanding from solo piano to piano with a solo instrument, like piano with violin, piano with cello, piano with clarinet, and from there moving into ensemble arrangements, possibly quartets, and then maybe on to chamber size, and then maybe onto full orchestral-size works. It is going to take a while, and I am going to do this slowly, so I feel like I am comfortable with the idiom. I am still learning.<sup>52</sup>

Given the above, Joel clearly views himself as a student and has challenged himself with a progressive plan towards the compositional mastery of different classical instrumental genres. From this perspective, *Fantasies and Delusions* could also be understood as a “student work,” in which Joel pays homage to the classical masters while still trying to find his own voice by experimenting with classical music idioms and applying what he has learned to practice. An exponent of life-long learning, Joel definitely found the process enriching and amusing:

I’m still at a point where I feel like a student discovering a treasure trove of goodies that will make me better and smarter... ain’t that a kick in the ass? An old guy like me feeling like a kid again.<sup>53</sup>

I just let the music take me wherever it’s going to go. It’s always a voyage of discovery. I am having a blast doing it. I am really enjoying myself.<sup>54</sup>

While Joel still continues to compose instrumental music for his own edification, he has not felt compelled to record any new works after *Fantasies and Delusions*.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> DeMain, *In Their Own Words*, 124.

<sup>53</sup> Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in “Still Rock ‘n’ Roll to Billy Joel?” 92.

<sup>54</sup> Joel, interview by Kieran Crowley, “Joel A Classic Case at 50 with his New Music Comes New Romance.” April 30, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> In multiple interviews, Joel has stressed that he still continues to compose instrumental and thematic music even though he is not motivated to publish any of his more recent compositions. For a videotaped interview on the subject, see Joel, “Billy Joel on *Fantasies and Delusions*,” *The Complete Albums Collection*.

Therefore, it is difficult to find out how he has developed as a classical composer. We are, however, offered a glimpse of Joel's progress through "Elegy: The Great Peconic" – a seven-minute snapshot of his unpublished orchestral suite "The Scrimshaw Pieces" – which was released in 2005 as a part of the *My Lives* compilation album. A moving, string-heavy evocation of the history of his native Long Island, the piece clearly demonstrates the high value Joel places on nineteenth-century musical practices, principles, and aesthetics. After all these years, it is clear that he is still a romantic at heart.

### *Creative Process*

One striking feature of album is that several aspects of the creative process are not individual efforts, but rather collaborative ones. As we will see, this stemmed largely from Joel's personal limitations and relative inexperience in classical composition. In his previous albums, Joel wrote his own music and performed it himself. Showcasing Billy Joel as an artist and personality was as important as showcasing his music. However, in *Fantasies and Delusions*, individualism was clearly not the focus. Although Joel composed the music for this album, he decided to take no part in the performance at all. When he announced his ideas for a classical music project, it was understandably greeted with initial skepticism by those around him: "You're gonna do what? You're gonna do an album of piano pieces in the Romantic era, with no lyrics – and you're not even playing them yourself?"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 248.

Still, Joel had his reasons. He conceded that his lopsided, deficient piano technique was not up to the standards required for the type of repertoire he was composing. The situation was further complicated by a serious accident in 1982 which badly damaged his hands, affecting his facility on the instrument.<sup>57</sup>

Because of the damage to my hand, there's no subtlety to my playing, no real nuance at all. For Rock 'n' Roll, I can hold my own, but in classical or Jazz terms, I stink. I mostly use two fingers on my left hand; I play octaves. Most people are right-handed, like me, so to be able to manipulate the fingers in your left hand, to do the stuff that greats like Bill Evans could do, is a real gift. Bach teaches you that both hands are equally important because they are both playing melody. I never really studied enough to emulate that.<sup>58</sup>

Well-aware of his pianistic limitations, Joel began his search for a professional classical pianist to relay the artistic vision of his works. "That's what I wanted to do." He confessed. "I absolutely had to have another pianist play them – I'm not nearly good enough to perform those pieces. I can write them, but I can't play them."<sup>59</sup> Going into more detail in an interview, Joel said, "I can play one section of a piece, but I just can't blend it into the next part with the kind of bravura playing that is required. I need a

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<sup>57</sup> In 1982, while heading through an intersection, Joel drove his motorcycle into the side of car of a woman driver who ran a red light. Reflecting on the incident, Joel said: "My right wrist was totally broken and dislocated. My left thumb was crushed." As a result, he never fully recovered from the accident. See Mary Campbell, "Billy Joel Uses Seven Fingers At Piano," *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, October 30, 1982, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1873&dat=19821030&id=ROwwAAAIAIAJ&Sjid=398FAAAIAIAJ&pg=2285,7152035&hl=en>.

<sup>58</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 161.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

pianist who was trained.”<sup>60</sup> Joel fulfilled his wish when he was introduced to British-Korean pianist Hyung-Ki Joo (b. 1973) in Vienna in 1994 through his half-brother Alexander Joel (b. 1971), who was also an established classical musician and acclaimed conductor in Europe. Joel’s decision to finally get Joo on-board to the *Fantasies and Delusions* project in 1999 turned out to be a shrewd move, as listeners were left mesmerized by Joo’s charismatic playing and critics praised the pianist’s presentation, even though their reviews of the music were comparatively less enthusiastic. In Joo, Joel finally found a true specialist capable of delivering all the interpretive details and nuances required for the kind of music that Joel is writing: “Hyung-Ki gave the sounds and ideas in my mind [a] beautiful earthly, physicality.”<sup>61</sup> In addition, enlisting Joo also liberated Joel from performance limitations and concerns, allowing him to fully focus on composing and listening critically to his own music:

A lot of people may not understand that. I am the Piano Man. But my left hand is really not good. I didn’t study to be a concert pianist. I got to a certain point in my piano lessons and I realized I wasn’t gonna be Ashkenazy, I wasn’t gonna be Vladimir Horowitz. I didn’t even want to be those guys. I wanted to compose. And it’s not unusual for a composer to not perform his own work. I wrote a symphony and obviously I couldn’t play all the symphonic instruments. I wouldn’t even conduct necessarily. The composing is its own art, its own creativity, its own type of musicianship. So I wanted to find a real virtuoso pianist who could bring out all the nuance, all the dynamics, who wasn’t necessarily just worried about playing the right notes. Because when I play this stuff, that’s what I am worried about: “Please God, don’t let me make any mistakes.” I am hanging on for dear life so I don’t hit wrong notes. That’s not the way you’re supposed to play. You’re supposed to have an arc from beginning

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<sup>60</sup> Joel, interview by Dan Aquilante, “Move Over, Beethoven – Billy Joel, Classical Composer? Believe It!” October 2, 2001.

<sup>61</sup> Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in “Still Rock ‘n’ Roll to Billy Joel?” 92.



to end and just be a real *pistolero*, you know, when it comes to playing the instrument.<sup>62</sup>

Joel's dislike and limited knowledge for notation is well-documented.<sup>63</sup> In composing the songs for his albums, he was known to formulate musical ideas in his head as he was working at the piano and then record them through a tape recorder instead of writing them down in a visual manner. Then, he would play them on a synthesizer that input the materials into a computer. The notes were then printed out the way it was played and Joel would work on the printed score with a copyist to deal with specific notation issues.<sup>64</sup>

Well I'll play it, I'll play the notes. Sometimes I play it on a synthesizer which goes into a computer...which transcribes it onto notation. Then I work with a copyist, who will go over it note-by-note and goes "do you mean this, do you mean that?" And I said "No, that's supposed to flat; no, that has to be tied; no there has to be a rest here..." So I go over it note-by-note-by-note. But to sit down and write notation, it's just too long. It stops me. And I don't want to stop and start and stop and start.<sup>65</sup>

A similar process occurred when Joel was putting together the music in *Fantasies and Delusions* in notation form. Here, he looked for additional input (primarily from Joo) for the arrangement and transcription process. Joel's sharing of his creative license is

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<sup>62</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

<sup>63</sup> See "Joel's Classical Experience," Chapter Three.

<sup>64</sup> Joel, quoted in Stephen Holden, "Pop Music; Adrift From Pop, Billy Joel Takes A Classical Turn," September 14, 1997. Schruers also described a similar working process of Joel composing the song "Summer, Highland Falls:" "when he was working that way, he'd push the "record" button on his little Sony cassette deck. In this case the process was happening upstairs in the location that lent its name to the song, at a Baldwin baby grand that Elizabeth had arranged for." See Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 118.

<sup>65</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

understandable, since the music at hand (which he called “music without borders”) had to be written down in a more intricate and at times unfamiliar way compared to the popular works in his previous albums.<sup>66</sup> In fact, with the exception of “Invention in C minor,” Joel credited Joo as the arranger at the top right-hand inscription in the title pages of each piece in the album’s score. At the first page of the score, Yuliya Gorenman and Christopheles Bresnahan were also credited for “additional arrangement contributions” for “Soliloquy” and “Reverie.”<sup>67</sup> However, in the liner notes, in addition to crediting Joo, Gorenman, and Bresnahan for “additional arrangements,” Anthony Newman is also added to the list.<sup>68</sup> An online “background check” revealed that Joo, Gorenman, and Newman are all professional classical musicians.<sup>69</sup> American conductor and composer Glen Cortese was cited for “music preparation,” while Steven Epstein was credited as producer of the album. Unfortunately, given the vague descriptions and lack of insider-information, it is extremely difficult to determine the precise extent of arranging or alterations performed by these individuals.<sup>70</sup> However, there is no doubt that Joo was Joel’s main collaborator given the fact that his name is the only one that appeared in all

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<sup>66</sup> Joel, quoted by Larry Flick in “Still Rock ‘n’ Roll to Billy Joel?” 92.

<sup>67</sup> Billy Joel, *Fantasies and Delusions: Music for Solo Piano* (New York: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2001), 1.

<sup>68</sup> See liner notes on Billy Joel and Hyung-Ki Joo, *Fantasies & Delusions, Op. 1-10: Music for Solo Piano*, Sony Music Entertainment CK 85397, 2001, CD.

<sup>69</sup> No information is currently available on Christopheles Bresnahan.

<sup>70</sup> Joo’s recent response was able to clarify the roles of most of these individuals, except for Anthony Newman and Christopheles Bresnahan. See Appendix B, nos. 3 and 4.

the title pages of the pieces. Joel's authorized biographer Schruers apparently thought the same and claimed that Joo "would take [Joel's] compositions, which mostly existed only in his head, notate them, and undertake the actual piano playing."<sup>71</sup> Even though Joo clearly helped to notate the score, the extent of his input as to the notes on the page is unclear.<sup>72</sup> Still, it would be safe to say that the main thematic and harmonic ideas as well as the artistic vision for the pieces are from Joel himself. In a 2001 interview, Joel explained his working process with Joo:

My method of working with Hyung-Ki was one phrase at a time, one line at a time. We went through everything. All the notes that were there are pretty much directed by me.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 247.

<sup>72</sup> Joo's recent response clarified the issue. He said, "[Joel] had a very clear, wonderful sense of melodic design and melodic shape; and his harmonies are very natural and organic. And I kind of just had to be the right kind of glue and editor, really. Very often he would have pieces of puzzles and some puzzles would be more intricately worked out and some would be more kind of vague ideas." The arrangement process of the pieces was highly organic, flexible, and free-flowing. When both artists are working, Joel would play for Joo (or vice versa) in person or through a speakerphone or recording. Joo would take notes on Joel's visions and intentions for the music and transcribed the ideas into notation, since Joel is handicapped in that aspect. After the musical ideas are laid out on paper, both artists would undertake further revisions on the manuscript before deciding on the final product. By Joo's own account, he brought in what he thought was relevant to Joel's vision and contributed his knowledge of classical harmony, rhythm, organization, and form when arranging the music. Another major contribution by Joo to the arrangement process is the left-hand figuration and accompaniment, since Joel was less knowledgeable with what the left hand could bring in piano writing. See Appendix B, no. 4 and no. 7 for more details.

<sup>73</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," 56.

Although it is uncertain from the context of the interview whether Joel was referring specifically to the notation or recording process, it is clear that all the notes within the music have been carefully reviewed and approved by him.

The quest for acoustical excellence also played a prominent role in the creation of the *Fantasies and Delusions* album. Joel and Joo originally recorded the music at Cove City Sound Studios in Glen Cove, New York, with help from Joel's longtime bandmates Bill Zampino and Richie Cannata. The results "proved to be unsatisfactory," and Joel and Joo went to Vienna to re-record the music.<sup>74</sup> Steven Epstein, a veteran Sony Classical producer who had worked with numerous major classical artists was chosen to supervise the process.<sup>75</sup> Joo claimed it was originally his idea to record in Vienna, which was approved enthusiastically by Joel and Epstein.<sup>76</sup> For the recording venue, they managed to temporarily lease the Mozartsaal, a famous recital hall located in the historical Wiener Konzerthaus. With the convenience of the hall's direct link to a recording studio and technical control room, the space was also touted for its "world-wide acclaim on account of its unique acoustics [which] makes it a top favorite with leading ensembles and

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<sup>74</sup> Bryan Wawzenek, "15 Years Ago: Billy Joel Gets Classical on 'Fantasies and Delusions,'" September 27, 2016, accessed August 15, 2017, <http://ultimateclassicrock.com/billy-joel-fantasies-delusions/?trackback=tsmclip>.

<sup>75</sup> In his distinguished career, Epstein had worked with major classical orchestras (Vienna, Berlin, New York Philharmonic orchestras) and some of the biggest names in the modern classical music world, including Yo-Yo Ma, Plácido Domingo, Itzhak Perlman, Isaac Stern, Joshua Bell, just to name a few. The list also included iconic classical pianists such as Murray Perahia, Emanuel Ax, Lang Lang, Anderson & Roe Piano Duo, and so on. For more information on the specific albums and artists that Epstein produced, see <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/steven-epstein-mn0001724355/credits>.

<sup>76</sup> See Appendix B, no. 8.

soloists – as well as a popular venue for recordings.”<sup>77</sup> In an interview, Joo also remarked that the space is “just perfect for [Joel’s] music and perfect for all classical music and all recordings.”<sup>78</sup> The duo also chose the best instrument available for the recording: a Steinway Model D concert grand (the flagship model from the piano company) provided by the Steinway Haus in Vienna.<sup>79</sup> In fact, there is a behind-the-scenes footage of one of the recording sessions in the Mozartsaal showing Joel and Joo working closely together on the piano to achieve the musical affects desired by Joel.<sup>80</sup> There was a notated score on the piano rack, while Joel and Joo were engaged in a step-by-step, stop-and-start process of Joel listening intently and providing feedback to Joo’s playing. Sometimes, Joel would also play the piano, demonstrating to Joo what he was looking for in the music. In his recollection of the five-day recording session in Vienna, Joo remembered fondly of working in a “dream team” that is largely responsible for delivering the incredible sound quality on the CD. These individuals include Billy Joel the composer, Steven Epstein the producer, Stefan Knüpfer the piano technician, Richard King the recording engineer, and himself as the pianist.<sup>81</sup>

Given Vienna’s illuminating, centuries-long history as one of the leading centers of classical music, Joo thought that recording there would bestow Joel’s album “an extra

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<sup>77</sup> For a detailed description and view of the hall, see “Mozart Hall (Mozart-Saal),” accessed February 21, 2018, <https://konzerthaus.at/mozart-hall>.

<sup>78</sup> Joo, “Billy Joel & Hyung-Ki Joo: The Making of *Fantasies and Delusions*.”

<sup>79</sup> See liner notes on the *Fantasies and Delusions* album.

<sup>80</sup> See “Billy Joel & Hyung-Ki Joo: The Making of *Fantasies and Delusions*.”

<sup>81</sup> See Appendix B, no. 3 (paragraphs 3 and 4).

classical spirit and credibility” and “continue that tradition that [Joel] so much wanted to pay homage to.”<sup>82</sup> For Joel, Austria’s capital also held a unique, inspirational appeal:

There are a lot of reasons to record at Vienna. All the great composers spent a great deal of time in Vienna. It just felt like the right place to come to... to pay respects. And we were able to lease the Mozartsaal at the Vienna Konzerthaus, which is a great room for piano... and I even wrote a song called “Vienna Waits For You.” So that’s another tie-in. There’s just so many connections to this place and it just seemed like the right place to do it.<sup>83</sup>

Given all the above, it is evident that Joel’s understanding about making an “authentic” classical album extended beyond his musical compositions to other dynamics that were reflective of his classical aspirations. These include the pursuit of premium sound quality, the meticulous recording process, the recording venue, the recruitment of a strong team of professionals experienced in classical music, and even the Schirmer cover art on the album. The evocative titles, such as waltz, aria, suite, and invention, and opus numbers assigned to the pieces also reflect a conscious choice by Joel to evoke practices of the classical music tradition.

Similar to most of his popular songs, the process of composing the music in *Fantasies and Delusions* certainly did not come easily for Joel. Compared to his previous albums, it took him much longer – about eight years – to learn to write in a new musical idiom. Unlike McCartney, whose first effort in classical composition was a massive

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<sup>82</sup> See Appendix B, no. 8 (paragraph 3).

<sup>83</sup> Joel, “Billy Joel & Hyung-Ki Joo: The Making of *Fantasies and Delusions*.”

eight-movement oratorio, Joel's starting point was more modest. He compared it to "put[ting] a toe into the small end of the pool."<sup>84</sup>

It's all about taking baby steps for me... I look at what Paul [McCartney] did, and I marvel at his bravery and ambition. He did full orchestrations and symphonies. He dove into the deep end of the pool. Personally, I prefer to keep it small and be certain of what I'm doing every step of the way.

A critic credited the album's success and its overall higher quality compared to other similar projects to the fact that Joel "kept his ambitions reasonable and was smart about presentation."<sup>85</sup> Unlike many other popular musicians who delved into the ensemble medium for their maiden classical work, Joel restricted himself to only writing for the piano. When he first began to compose classical music, Joel labored on small parts at a time before joining them together to form a coherent whole. "These are just small pieces, small attempts," he said. "Hopefully once I sit down and listen to it end to end, it'll be a cohesive recording."<sup>86</sup> He toiled through experiments and explorations before eventually coming up with the finished product:

There was a long learning curve. I'm still at the beginning of it, because a lot of the stuff that I first started to write, I haven't even used. That's ended up in the spare parts pile. "Opus 1" actually came after a lot of fits and starts. "The Soliloquy" [Op. 1] was written after a series of failed attempts. I did a lot of studying of the forms of composition, and they make sense. They really do work. I don't feel that I'm restricted by them. I

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<sup>84</sup> Joel, interview by Jeffrey Obser, "Billy Joel: Crossing a New Threshold," December 23, 1999.

<sup>85</sup> Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Billy Joel: Fantasies and Delusions (Music for Solo Piano) [SACD]" *Allmusic*, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://www.allmusic.com/album/release/billy-joel-fantasies-delusions-music-for-solo-piano-sacd-mr0002665422>.

<sup>86</sup> Joel, interview by Jeffrey Obser, "Billy Joel: Crossing a New Threshold," December 23, 1999.

actually feel like I'm liberated by them. They help me to explore where this music can go. I learn a great deal about the original motif and the theme that I started to write because of the forms that kind of guide the composition of classical music. I'm having a blast doing it.<sup>87</sup>

Prior to the recording of *Fantasies and Delusions*, Joel visited Vienna in 1994 and his brother Alexander Joel introduced him to a community of classical musicians that included Joo and many "wild and crazy" Eastern Europeans such as violinists Aleksey Igudesman and Julian Rachlin.<sup>88</sup> Despite his status as a popular musician, Joel immediately struck a rapport with the group because of their bohemian lifestyle, openness for new possibilities, and sheer dedication to music that closely paralleled Joel's experience as a Rock 'n' Roll musician in the 60s:

They don't make a lot of money. The work is hard to come by, but they're very, very dedicated to being musicians. They remind me of how musicians were when I was starting out in Rock 'n' Roll back in the 60s. We were all kind of bohemian guys. Nobody had money, nobody had any prospects of making a living, but we were very dedicated to the music. We ate, breathed, slept, dreamt, and made love, and it was all about music. It was all we talked about. These guys are like that. It was very inspiring and spiritually nourishing to hang out with all these guys.<sup>89</sup>

Joel's acquaintance with these individuals proved to be instrumental for what would become the *Fantasies and Delusions* project – he met Joo, who would then become his main collaborator in 1999, while the group also became a valuable source for

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61. <sup>87</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind,"

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



advice and guidance in the early stages of his creative process.<sup>90</sup> During their first meeting, Joel's inquisitiveness for classical music left a strong impression on Joo: "[he was] asking lots of questions about Beethoven, Schubert, and classical harmony. He wasn't like a rock star at all. He was just so passionate about music, wherever it came from."<sup>91</sup> Initially hesitant to admit his recent undertakings in writing classical music, Joel was convinced by his brother to share the news to the group during their second get-together at a Viennese Coffeehouse:

I took advice from my brother. There was a lot I had to learn, and I had to ask a lot of questions. I wanted to ask the right people. I needed some instruction and guidance.<sup>92</sup>

It was a spontaneous kind of thing in a Vienna coffeehouse... everyone else was testing ideas, so I figured I'd try it. And these guys are brutally honest. They would tear up anything; they don't care where it comes from. And I wanted to know, 'is this legit? Not just good for a rock guy, give me the real truth.'<sup>93</sup>

The group was welcoming and encouraging of Joel's efforts, but they were also direct in their criticism. Joo recalled: "Billy might have been shell-shocked by my honesty, but in the end, he liked it [laughs]."<sup>94</sup> Joel would then go back and rework his compositions before bringing them back for the next round of feedbacks. Through Joo's

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<sup>90</sup> See Appendix B, no. 5 for Joo's recollection of Joel's relationship with the group of musicians in Vienna.

<sup>91</sup> Child, "Classical Keeping Score," 48.

<sup>92</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," 62.

<sup>93</sup> Child, "Classical Keeping Score," 48.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

account, around that time, Joel had also started doing counterpoint exercises and “[wrote] little fugues.”<sup>95</sup> He observed that Joel’s evolution as a classical composer during the creative period of *Fantasies and Delusions* “has been tremendous” and his more recent pieces are “much more sophisticated works.”<sup>96</sup> The group’s expertise in classical music also helped Joel avoid the potential landmines of unintentional plagiarism:

Not that anyone wrote the notes for me, but a lot of times it was pointed out to me, “You can’t do that, you’re quoting Chopin.” Or Hyung-Ki would say, “You shouldn’t play that, because that’s Ravel.” And I wasn’t even aware that it was Ravel. I don’t even know if I unconsciously knew it was Ravel. Part of me was saying to myself, “Hey, I must be pretty good if I’m writing Ravel [laughs].” But they did help me to avoid making too many quotes.<sup>97</sup>

Writing at the piano had always been Joel’s preferred working method in the songwriting process of his previous popular albums. However, by spending time with the group, Joel also discovered the benefits of working away from the piano by letting his muse come naturally to him and not forcing the issue too much:

I learned this from a friend of mine... he is a Russian violinist. His name is Aleksey. I was stuck writing a certain piece. He goes “you know what? Go away from the piano. Don’t try to figure it out on the piano. Just go away.” And it will occur to you when you are not trying to working out what the solution to where you should go with these pieces and he was right. Sometimes it’s good to not be with the piano, to all of a sudden just have it occur to you in your mind like I am whistling, my inner radio will figure it out.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Child, “Classical Keeping Score,” 48.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, “Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind,” 62.

<sup>98</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

Two years before the release of *Fantasies and Delusions* in 1999, Joo even included Joel's "Soliloquy (On a Separation)" – the only piece from the album that has been realized in notation during that time – in his classical recital program in the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. As a classical pianist, Joo had no issues lining Joel up along with the greats such as Beethoven, Prokofiev, Borodin, and Ravel: "I like to play music by living composers, not just 'de-composers'...I believe Billy's music is legitimate classical music, and I want to put it next to the greats."<sup>99</sup> Joel was present on the day of the recital. From Joo's recollection, a few weeks after the performance, Joel contacted him and said:

I love the way you play my music and I think you understand exactly what I mean and how I wanted it to be expressed, all the nuances. You get the essence of what I am trying to say, and would you be interested in helping me arrange and finish the other pieces that are in my head, or get them down and realize them?<sup>100</sup>

Thus, Joel's and Joo's creative partnership officially began as a result of the 1999 performance and both artists' mutual admiration for each other, which eventually culminated in the release of *Fantasies and Delusions* in 2001.

The next chapter provides a general survey of the important musical and stylistic features of the album and a closer examination on three contrasting pieces.

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<sup>99</sup> Child, "Classical Keeping Score," 48.

<sup>100</sup> See Appendix B, no. 3.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Fantasies and Delusions: Formal and Stylistic Considerations*

#### *Overview of Musical Content*

The descriptive details of the album and its musical score readily reveals Billy Joel's classical aspirations. In order to designate the titles of most of the pieces within the album, Joel deliberately borrowed generic classical style terms such as the waltz, suite, invention, aria, air, and fantasy. Several of these terms have been used to label classical keyboard compositions from the past centuries. Looking back to the practices of numerous classical music composers such as Beethoven, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff, Joel also catalogued each of his pieces with an Opus number.<sup>1</sup>

Joel also utilized traditional classical notation and paid careful attention to detail. Most of the time, the tempo and performance directions in the music are presented in commonly-used Italian terms (*a tempo, allegro, adagio, crescendo, ritardando, agitato, maestoso, espressivo, rubato*). Occasionally, Joel also brings in Spanish (*murmurando, improvisado*) or English terms (freely, dreamy, steadily, much faster) to depict the character that he portrays in the music. Other points of reference such as tempo, dynamics, articulation, ornamental placement, rhythm, note groupings, breath marks, and layers of lines/voicings are laid out scrupulously in the score. However, unlike the

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<sup>1</sup> Although the pieces are lined up chronologically from Opus one to Opus ten in the musical score, they are presented in a specific, out-of-order fashion in the album. The ordering of the pieces in the album was a deliberate decision by Joel that was approved by Joel. See Appendix B, no. 11 for more details.

extraordinarily complex and systematic notational practices that characterized certain modern pieces from the twentieth century, Joel has allowed freedom and flexibility for the interpretation of his music.

Discussing the musical content of *Fantasies and Delusions*, Joshua Duchan states:

Certainly the styles of the Romantic era strongly influence *Fantasies and Delusions*. That period in the history of Western classical music is remarkable for the explosion in compositional activity focusing on the piano. No wonder, then, that many of the composers of the day ranked among Joel's favorites, whom critics often name in their reviews.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the constantly unfolding lyricism, rich chromatic harmonies, and evocative program that characterizes the music on the album demonstrates Joel's close affinity and taste for the music and aesthetical perspectives of the nineteenth century. The various writing styles in certain compositions evoke the piano music of Romantic composers such as Chopin, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff. Although *Fantasies and Delusions* has been strongly influenced in spirit and style by the Romantic period, a deeper examination of the album also reveals stylistic influences that are outside the typical Romantic idiom, such as those that evoke the Baroque, early twentieth century, and folk/popular styles (see Table 5.1).

The stylistic makeup of the album as a whole reflects a sense of "pastiche," where Joel freely imitates and blends different styles of preexisting works and artists from different periods.<sup>3</sup> The borrowing and mixing of preexisting styles also occur on a smaller

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<sup>2</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, 124.

<sup>3</sup> To demonstrate my point, I included a column in Table 5.1 outlining the multiplicity of stylistic influences that informed the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions*.

level as well as in most individual pieces. For example, the piece “Fantasy (Film Noir)” exhibits stylistic traits and compositional techniques from Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and film music. The sum of my study of the works through my own listening and evaluations of writings about the work indicate that most pieces demonstrate two, if not more, stylistic traits from different genres or composers.

Table 5.1. Solo piano pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions* arranged in the order presented in the album

Opus	Title (subtitle)	Suggested Stylistic Influences
Op. 3	Reverie (Villa D’Este)	Impressionism, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Tango
Op. 2	Waltz No. 1 (Nunley’s Carousel)	Schumann, Chopin, Americana
Op. 7	Aria (Grand Canal)	Romantic opera, Chopin, Liszt
Op. 6	Invention in C minor	Baroque counterpoint, J. S. Bach
Op. 1	Soliloquy (On a Separation)	Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, Impressionism
Op. 8	Suite For Piano (Star-Crossed) I. Innamorato II. Sorbetto III. Delusions	Chopin, Beethoven Ravel, Toccata, Schumann, Chopin Chopin, Liszt
Op. 5	Waltz No. 2 (Steinway Hall)	Chopin
Op. 9	Waltz No. 3 (For Lola)	Chopin, Brahms
Op. 4	Fantasy (Film Noir)	Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Film music
Op. 10	Air (Dublinesque)	Irish folk/dance music, Percy Grainger, Joel’s popular style, Americana (Copland, Bernstein)

With the exception of the “Invention in C minor,” a composition heavily influenced by the Baroque tradition, the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions* are akin to character pieces that carry programmatic implications.<sup>4</sup> Joel added subtitles in the pieces that point to particular moods or ideas that he is trying to convey through his music. Regarding the subtitles, Joel said, “it was a kind of shorthand for me to remember what it was I was writing, what I wanted the piece to be, the mood I wanted to stay in.”<sup>5</sup> He also intended these short subtitles as imaginative signposts or memory aids to bridge the gap for uninitiated listeners, who are not accustomed to the less-descriptive way that classical composers often label their music.<sup>6</sup> However, in *Fantasies and Delusions*, Joel did not construct detailed plots or program notes for his pieces in a manner akin to Berlioz’s approach to the programmatic aspect of *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14. Not wanting to

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<sup>4</sup> Program music, or a type of art music that conveys an extra-musical narrative or imagery, was highly popular during the Romantic era. Accurately observed by Duchan in his monograph, actual programs from this time period “ranged in specificity from detailed plots to mere impressions or suggestions.” Piano works in the nineteenth century that bear programmatic elements are known as “character pieces.” These character pieces are a staple of Romantic music and form a large body of the piano works by many important Romantic composers such as Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, and Mendelssohn. They come in numerous shapes and forms, bearing various designations such as nocturne, ballade, impromptu, intermezzo, bagatelle, rhapsody, and songs without words. In general, these pieces place a clear emphasis on melodic and harmonic expression, and are generally set in a relatively brief length and less rigid structure compared to other keyboard genres such as the sonata. Customarily, composers would also add a descriptive title that was expressive of the character or mood intended in the piece, usually citing personal experience or inspiration from literature (such as Schumann’s set of character pieces in *Carnaval*, Op. 9 and *Kreisleriana*, Op. 16).

<sup>5</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, “Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind,” 61.

<sup>6</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001. For example, Shostakovich, *Prelude and Fugue No. 12 in G-sharp Minor*, Op. 87.

be excessively literal, Joel conceived his pieces much like the pieces in Schumann's *Carnaval*, Op. 9 by being suggestive in the titles and leaving most of the narrative work to the music. It is completely up to the listener's imagination to interpret the remaining descriptive or plot details. The resulting interpretation may not exactly match with what Joel had in mind when he was writing the piece. In an interview, Joel even encouraged his listeners to fantasize and come up with their own version and interpretation of the story that he is telling through his music:

So, if you put your own words in it, and you make up your own story, which is what really should be done with instrumental music. You can imagine what was the composer thinking. I am letting people into my mind by writing this stuff.<sup>7</sup>

Still, on different occasions, Joel did provide additional information on the inspirations and sentiments that led to the subtitles for certain pieces. These insights would certainly help the listener to better understand what Joel was trying to paint musically. For example, when composing "Aria (Grand Canal)," Joel pictured "a big tenor on a balcony in Venice just singing" and said that "a large section within [the] piece sounds as if it could be sung by a tenor from an Italian opera."<sup>8</sup> For "Fantasy (Film Noir)," Joel said he was thinking of "these black-and-white movies from the '40s, these private eye movies" and conceived the piece "in terms of a film score, almost orchestral in scope."<sup>9</sup> In "Soliloquy (On a Separation)," Joel used a gradually descending melody

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<sup>7</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," 61.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



and an accompaniment that is “getting more and more minor and sadder and darker” to depict the sorrow he felt when he was forced to separate from his daughter Alexa.<sup>10</sup> The “Suite for Piano (Star-Crossed)” is about a “doomed love affair,” in which the three distinct movements (I. “Innamorato,” II. “Sorbetto,” and III. “Delusion”) traced the different stages of the affair.<sup>11</sup> Through the slowly unfolding Romantic melody and descending chromatic harmony in “Innamorato” (“In love” in Italian), Joel wanted to describe the initial stage of love that is “all about longing, wanting, desire, needing, missing.”<sup>12</sup> The title for the second movement, “Sorbetto,” was inspired by a classic Italian frozen dessert of the same name, which Joel explained as “the thing that cleanses the palette, the thing that happens in the middle of the meal when you want to change courses.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the movement and its title signifies an upturn in a love affair that is complimented by a complete shift in musical character and style. Contrary to the brooding “Innamorato,” the “Sorbetto” is a quick, lively toccata that Joel humorously described as when “things get physical” in a relationship.<sup>14</sup> The third movement, “Delusions,” as suggested through its title, illustrates the state of denial of the character upon realizing that the affair is not going to last. The protagonist’s mood swings and a “drunken state of mind” is characterized vividly through the constant fluctuation in

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<sup>10</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Billy Joel. “Billy Joel: In His Own Words” (Video of masterclass, University of Pennsylvania, November 6, 2001). Directed by Lawrence Jordan. DVD.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

tempo, dynamics, and mood in the music. “Waltz No. 1 (Nunley’s Carousel)” is named after “a carousel that was located in a former amusement park in Nassau County, New York, Joel’s native county.”<sup>15</sup> In the music, Joel implemented the graceful, flowing triple rhythm of the waltz to characterize the revolving motion of a carousel. Intriguingly, composers from different eras and cultures have utilized the same musical procedure to depict the same musical subject. Some famous examples include Rodger’s and Hammerstein’s “Carousel Waltz” from the musical *Carousel* (1945) and Joe Hisaishi’s “Merry-go-Round of Life,” the theme song of Studio Ghibli’s *Howl’s Moving Castle* (2004).

On a broader scale, Joel referred to pieces in the album collectively as “Fantasies” and “Delusions.” While Joel’s reasons to label his efforts “delusions” have been examined in Chapter Four, the usage of the term “fantasy” also deserves special attention. The term “fantasy” originated from the Greek word “phantasia,” and was adapted in major European languages from the late Middle Ages to generally mean “imagination,” “product of the imagination,” or “caprice.”<sup>16</sup> In classical music, since the Renaissance period, the term “fantasy” and its many iterations in different languages (such as *fantasia*, *fantaisie*, and *phantasie*) have also been used to denote an instrumental compositions that exhibit a similar freedom and invention in its compositional approach.<sup>17</sup> In the Romantic

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<sup>15</sup> Bielen, *The Words and Music of Billy Joel*, 89.

<sup>16</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Fantasia,” accessed March 7, 2018. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.baylor.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40048>.

<sup>17</sup> According to the *New Grove Music Dictionary*, fantasy is “a term adopted in the Renaissance for an instrumental composition whose form and invention spring ‘solely from the fantasy and skill of the author who created it’ (Luis de Milán, 1535–6). From the

period, the fantasy also found a close parallel in the rhapsody genre. Both were one-movement works that integrated different themes, but were also relatively free-flowing in structure. In addition, these compositions demonstrated a wide variety of contrasting moods, colors, and tonalities. At times, this inventive and unrestricted approach to composition also gave the music a spontaneous and improvisatory quality.

In terms of formal structure, most of the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions*, especially the large works such as “Soliloquy (On a Separation)” and “Fantasy (Film Noir),” certainly reflect the fantasy- or rhapsodic-like qualities mentioned above. These pieces are sectional, featuring a block-to-block construction of loosely-connected, stylistically-contrasting parts that do not fit neatly to any standard musical form. However, none of the pieces in the album are through-composed. In each piece, Joel introduces a number of melodies or themes, some of which may return at irregular intervals in the later sections. When a certain theme reappears in the later sections of a piece, it is usually presented under a different musical style or altered through certain changes in its musical elements such the melody, rhythm, register, texture and/or phrase structure. Some pieces such as “Soliloquy (On a Separation),” “Fantasy (Film Noir),” and “Waltz No. 1 (Nunley’s Carousel)” also feature a coda that concludes the piece in a

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16th century to the 19th the fantasia tended to retain this subjective license, and its formal and stylistic characteristics may consequently vary widely from free, improvisatory types to strictly contrapuntal and more or less standard sectional forms.” See Ibid. In the realm of keyboard music, European composers through the years have utilized the term “Fantasy” to designate some of their most adventurous compositional efforts. A few examples include Bach’s *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*, BWV 903; Mozart’s *Fantasia in C minor*, K. 475; Schubert’s *Wanderer Fantasy*, D. 760 and *Fantasia in F minor for Four Hands*, D. 940; Schumann’s *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12 and *Fantasia in C*, Op. 17, Liszt’s *Hungarian Fantasy*; Chopin’s *Fantaisie in F minor*, Op. 49, *Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major*, Op. 61, and *Fantaisie Impromptu*, Op. 66, and Szymanowski’s *Fantasy in C major*, Op. 14.

dramatic fashion. However, shorter pieces such as “Invention in C minor” and “Air (Dublinesque)” exhibit a more defined structure compared to the longer ones.

In the previous chapters, I have emphasized the significance of melodic composition in Joel’s music. Both melody and Joel the songwriter are virtually inseparable entities. Joel’s success and identity as a popular artist are closely tied to his consistently strong melodic writing. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that Joel carried his melodic sensibilities into his classical efforts. One of the most prominent aspects of *Fantasies and Delusions* is its well-crafted melodies and themes. When asked about what he thinks is most reflective of him in *Fantasies and Delusions*, Joel replied, “Well it’s in the melody, it’s in the themes.”<sup>18</sup> Like the popular songs in his previous albums, the music in *Fantasies and Delusions* showcase Joel’s ability to craft different kinds of melodies to suit the variety of musical styles and affects with which he is writing. Since most of the music on the album exhibits a pastiche quality, one hears different melodic styles juxtaposed within a single piece, while traits from two different melodic styles are sometimes merged in a single melodic section.

The Romantic melodic style is perhaps the most common in *Fantasies and Delusions*. This approach to melody features flowing, extended lines covering an expansive range. To intensify the drama and expression of the music, this particular melodic style also freely incorporates a mixture of diatonicism/chromaticism, conjunct/disjunct motion, and occasional ornamental flourishes, while also allowing room for rhythmic flexibility and tasteful *rubato*. In most of these melodies, the lyrical quality is significant – they have to be “sung” and expressed in a sensitive and refined

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<sup>18</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

manner on the instrument. The close attention given to this lyrical quality is suggestive of the *bel canto* (“beautiful singing”) operatic style, which was popularized in the nineteenth century through the operas of Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini and other Italian composers. Elements of the *bel canto* approach were also incorporated by nineteenth century composers, such as Chopin, into their melodic writing for the keyboard.

In *Fantasies and Delusions*, this type of melodic approach is most commonly found in the overtly Romantic works such as “Soliloquy (On a Separation),” “Fantasy (Film Noir),” “Aria (Grand Canal),” and “Suite For Piano (Star-Crossed).” The characteristics of the Romantic melodic style is best exemplified in the beginning of “Innamorato,” the first movement of Joel’s “Suite for Piano” (Figure 5.1):

The musical score for the first movement of Joel's "Suite for Piano (Star-Crossed)", Op. 8, measures 1-12, is presented in a four-staff format. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins with a "First Section" label. The first staff shows the piano introduction with a "Motif A" marked "mp sempre legato". The second staff continues the melody with "Motif B" marked "mf". The third staff shows the piano introduction with "Motif C" marked "mf". The fourth staff shows the piano introduction with a "Classical gesture" circled in measure 10. The score includes dynamic markings like "mp", "mf", and "f".

Figure 5.1. Joel, “I. Innamorato, Suite For Piano (Star-Crossed), Op. 8,” ms. 1-12, Romantic *bel canto* melodic style

With the explicit marking of *sempre legato* at the beginning of “Innamorato” and *molto cantabile* in the subsequent section when the second theme appears (m. 32, Figure 5.2), Joel wants the melody performed in a flowing, singing manner facilitated by a smooth transition between the notes. In the first section, Joel utilizes gestural and rhythmic motifs (such as the octave leap, dotted eighth-sixteenth pattern, and mordent-like figure) to spin out melodic material, while the initial melody only reappears once in a more embellished form in measure 17. The passionate, undulating melody seems to unfold endlessly, at times lingering at certain pitches and decorated by ornamental embellishments (as seen in ms. 6-7). The writing bears a resemblance to Chopin’s Prelude in E minor, Op. 28, no. 4, which also features a slow, brooding melody that is set above a descending chromatic harmonic progression. However, at times, certain melodic figurations display characteristics outside of the style in which Joel is writing. For example, the scalar thirty-second note passage in measure 11 sounds more like a Classical gesture in the manner of Mozart or Beethoven than a Romantic *fioritura* passage.<sup>19</sup> The slowly-increasing tension eventually culminates in a *fortississimo* G minor chord in measure 29, before dissipating away through a cascading stream of notes that leads into the relatively uplifting second section in the dominant key of D major (Figure 5.2).

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<sup>19</sup> The figuration reminds me of a similar arch-like scalar passage in the introduction of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor “Pathétique”*, Op. 13.



Figure 5.2. Joel, “I. Innamorato, Suite For Piano (Star-Crossed), Op. 8,” ms. 26-34, Culmination of the first section and lead-in to second section in D major

There are other melodic styles that are more rhythmic, suggestive of different dance styles. This type of melodic writing is prevalent in pieces that showcase dance forms or dance-like characteristics, such as the three Chopinesque waltzes (Figure 5.3), the tango section in “Reverie (Villa D’Este)” (Figure 5.4), and the jaunty, dance-like B section in “Air (Dublinesque)” (Figure 5.5). In a manner similar to that found in Romantic solo piano works, Joel’s piece dance by way of stylized treatments of texture, harmony, form, and pianistic writing. They are also generally more flexible in tempo changes and *rubato* compared to the original dance forms. When compared to the Romantic melodies, the beat placement and articulation are more pronounced in these rhythmic melodies, while ornamentation is also used in a more measured manner (none of the unrestrained, drawn-out *fioritura* passages) to emphasize the lilt of the music.



Figure 5.3. Joel, "Waltz No. 1 (Nunley's Carousel), Op. 2," ms. 27-30, waltz melodic style



Figure 5.4. Joel, "Reverie (Villa D'Este), Op. 3," ms. 86-87, tango melodic style

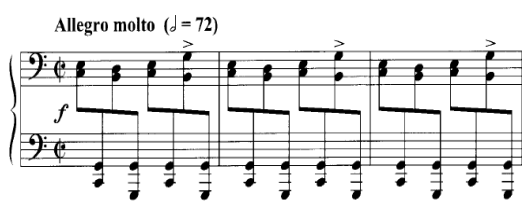



Figure 5.5. Joel, "Air (Dublinesque), Op. 10," ms. 19-20, dance-like melody



Aside from the dance melodies, Joel also utilized a more motoric form of melody in the “Sorbetto,” the short second movement from the Suite For Piano “(Star-Crossed).” The rapid alternation between the two hands resembles the opening passage in the third movement of Ravel’s *Concerto in G major* (Table 5.2). However, there is also a difference: Joel’s version is more accessible and easier to play since he outlines his melody only through the right hand while the melodic interest in Ravel’s version lies within the middle voices and has to be brought out by both hands.

Table 5.2. A comparison of the opening toccata-like passages of Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G major*, third movement and Joel’s “Sorbetto”

Joel, Sorbetto	Ravel, Piano Concerto in G major
<p><i>Allegro molto</i> (<math>\text{♩} = 72</math>)</p> 	

The following analyses demonstrate Joel’s stylistic eclecticism and the multiplicity of styles that inform the composition of *Fantasies and Delusions*. I will examine three contrasting pieces that show variation in stylistic content, formal structure, melodic approach, and possible extra-musical/programmatic underpinnings. They are “Reverie (Villa D’Este),” “Invention in C minor,” and “Air (Dublinesque).” Since the structure of these pieces features a sectional design, I use tables to delineate the important formal articulations in each of these works. To highlight Joel’s emphasis on thematic composition, the thematic materials and their returns are labelled in the tables.

*Reverie (Villa D'Este), Op. 3*

As the introductory piece to *Fantasies and Delusions*, the “Reverie” sets the tone for the fantasy-like nature of the album. Given the reference to dreams in its title, “Reverie” is perhaps the most unpredictable piece in the entire album in terms of musical material and mood changes. The subtitle refers to Villa D’Este, a Renaissance garden in Tivoli, Italy.<sup>20</sup> In an interview, Joel described how his experience at the villa inspired him to write the piece:

I actually started writing that while I was staying in the Villa D’Este on Lake Como. I remember going into a reverie, just standing there looking out at the lake. I had a little bit of red wine, a little bit of nice Italian shellfish and I was feeling kind of in an amorous mood. I wanted to capture this whole imaginary, passionate interlude.<sup>21</sup>

To capture the dream-like experience of his time at the villa, Joel juxtaposed different musical styles and set them in a free-flowing form. The series of successive visions, images, and feelings that Joel experienced is reflected in the music through a series of contrasting sections that closely follow one another (see Table 5.3). The composer journeys through a variety of styles, textures, tone colors, and figurations to depict the mood changes. The abrupt switches between contrasting themes in “Reverie” matches Joo’s description of Joel sometimes having “a galaxy of ideas” to fit into one piece, in which certain pieces “could in some way actually be two or three pieces” based on the

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<sup>20</sup> Famous for its water features, terraced gardens, and elaborate architecture, Villa D’Este had not only been a summer residence for royalties and aristocrats, but has also provided creative inspiration for several artists, musicians, and writers for centuries. In fact, the composition of Liszt’s quasi-impressionistic *Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este* was inspired by the villa’s impressive water fountains.

<sup>21</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, “Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind,” 61.

wide array of materials presented by Joel.<sup>22</sup> The piece visits several keys and many sections do not end in the key in which they start.<sup>23</sup> However, most sections end on the dominant chord (could be in different inversions) of the following section's starting key, thus unifying the sections with harmonic continuation. An improvisatory aura is suggested in the stylistic, formal, and thematic makeup of the piece, but one also notices a distinctive expressive trajectory where Joel gradually builds up in intensity and tension until the apex in measure 110 (Figure 5.11), after which the music slowly subsides to calmness at the end.

The piece opens with a charming A section, in which the passages are to be played in a rather free, expressive, and *legato* manner (Figure 5.6). The mood is languid yet tender, consisting of a series of two-measure, at times elided, phrases that progress in an unhurried manner through mostly eighth-note rhythms and gentle melodic gestures that are punctuated by momentary pauses. The harmony in this section aids the sense of uncertainty by featuring various chromatic chords and excursions from the opening key of F major. The thin and relatively passive accompaniment loosely imitates the rhythm and contour of the main melody and sometimes introduces brief countermelodies that answer the preceding line in the right hand.

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix B, no. 4 (paragraph 2).

<sup>23</sup> For Joel, key is important in setting the mood: "It is very important to me what key a piece is in because I have feelings about different keys. They connote about different things. They connote different colors, different emotions, cooler, warmer, more passionate, more philosophical." See Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.



Figure 5.6. Joel, “Reverie (Villa D’Este), Op. 3,” ms. 1-9, section A excerpt

After momentarily lingering on an E pedal tone in measures 17-18, the music shifts to a quasi-impressionistic B<sup>1</sup> section in A minor with more movement in the melody and the accompaniment. Here, a haunting, dreamy melody enters in *pianissimo* and is set above a steady pulsation of syncopated, slightly dissonant accompaniment chords (Figure 5.7). Set above subtle shifts in harmony, the melody is relatively static, consisting of fragmented phrases that revolve around central pitches of E and A. A deep, gong-like bass provides harmonic anchors for the section and offers a characteristic suggestive of Debussy’s piano writing. The overall coloristic effect perhaps reflects Joel’s enchantment when he was looking out to the lake as it shimmered and shined under the moonlight.



Figure 5.7. Joel, “Reverie (Villa D’Este), Op. 3,” ms. 19-24, subsection B<sup>1</sup> excerpt

The music then segues subtly into a slightly more active section (B<sup>2</sup> in Figure 5.8) that is no less coloristic than B<sup>1</sup>. In this section, a chromatic, stepwise, chordal melody is complemented by an accompaniment that contains a countermelody vested in its continuous stream of sixteenth-note figurations. Although set in the key of B-flat major (a semitone higher than the previous key), the key center of the section is highly unstable due to dense chromaticism. Joel modulates back to A minor at the end and returns to B<sup>1</sup>, although this time the thematic material is more decorated and agitated than its first appearance.



Figure 5.8. Joel, “Reverie (Villa D’Este), Op. 3,” ms. 43-46, subsection B<sup>2</sup> excerpt

A pronounced lyrical section (C) features sweeping melodic lines covering a wide range and dynamics (Figure 5.9). In these long, elaborate phrases, Joel utilizes a variety of ascending and descending figurations, turn patterns, angular leaps, and chromatic inflections that are highly reminiscent of Chopin’s florid melodic writing. The accompaniment largely retains the continuous, syncopated rhythm pattern of the previous section. However, to generate momentum, Joel sometimes slightly displaces the accompaniment rhythm through “dotting” or shortening parts of the original rhythm or adding brief fragments of countermelodies in the left hand to answer the main melodic lines.



Figure 5.9. Joel, “Reverie (Villa D’Este), Op. 3,” ms. 70-74, section C excerpt

After a strong arrival in a D major chord, the music shifts abruptly to an energetic tango section set in key of G minor (Figure 5.10). Perhaps Joel's "amorous mood" is most clear in this section since the tango is well-known for being one of the most passionate, romantic, and sensual of ballroom dances. This section is the most articulated compared to the others, with the lively, dance-like melody and accompaniment briefly punctuated by sharp, biting ornamentations. In contrast to the smooth lyricism and lush sonorities that characterized the previous sections, the passages in the "tempo di tango" section are to be performed in a detached manner with slight use of the sustain pedal to achieve a dry, incisive sound. For the rhythmic grounding of the section, Joel also utilized the Habanera rhythm (dotted-eighth note, sixteenth note, followed by a pair of eighth notes) and its variations.<sup>24</sup> The section is also the most dense and varied in texture, featuring a combination of complex rhythmic patterns, large leaps, ornamental flourishes, blocked chords, and rapid single- or double-note runs. The active accompaniment also heightens the drama through short bursts of scalar interjections and repeated accentuations of the deep, powerful sonorities of the lower ranges of the piano on the strong beats.

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<sup>24</sup> A Latin-American dance rhythm that is popularized since the nineteenth-century and is also adapted into classical music compositions. Perhaps the most celebrated example of the Habanera's usage in classical music is the famous aria "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" ("Love is a Rebellious Bird," or simply known through its popular title as "Habanera") sung by the title character herself in Bizet's opera *Carmen*.



Figure 5.10. Joel, “Reverie (Villa D’Este), Op. 3,” ms. 85-96, section D excerpt

Immediately following the tango is a relentless transitional passage (TR) which consist of nine measures of incessant build-up in tempo, dynamics, and intensity that eventually culminates in a climatic A major chord in measure 110 (Figure 5.11). The section’s rocking melody and accompaniment figures is perhaps suggestive of the stormy and turbulent aspects of relationships. Here, the melody progresses above tumultuous waves of sixteenth notes in the accompaniment that sweep up and down the keyboard. Compared to the other sections, the transition features the most concentrated use of dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythms in the melody, adding to its urgency and sense of direction. The undulating melody journeys through a quick series of ascending sequences



before reaching its climax that is about two octaves higher than the starting pitch that begins the transition.

The image shows a musical score excerpt for Joel's "Reverie (Villa D'Este), Op. 3," measures 102-110. The score is written for piano and features a melodic line in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. Measure 102 is marked "mp sub." and measure 106 is marked "cresc. e accel. poco a poco". The piece ends at measure 110 with a "Climax" marking and a final chord in the right hand.

Figure 5.11. Joel, "Reverie (Villa D'Este), Op. 3," ms. 102-110, TR excerpt

After the transitional episode, the composer revisits previous themes in the subsequent sections. These themes are presented in an out-of-order fashion: B<sup>2</sup>, A, Coda (TR, B<sup>1</sup>), perhaps illustrating the flashbacks that came to mind as Joel's relived previous feelings and experiences. After alternating moments of excitement and calmness in the remaining sections, the music fades out through the dream-like accompaniment figure that characterized the B section.

Table 5.3. Formal analysis of Joel, “Reverie (Villa D’Este), Op. 3”

Section	Subsection	Key	Measures	Description
A		F	1-18	Charming, languid theme; sense of uncertainty generated through momentary pauses and chromatic chords/excursions
B	B <sup>1</sup>	a	19-42	Quasi-Impressionistic section; haunting, dreamy melody draped over syncopated, lightly dissonant accompaniment chords
	B <sup>2</sup>	Bb	43-51	Chromatic, stepwise melody set to accompaniment featuring continuous stream of 16 <sup>th</sup> notes
	B <sup>1</sup>	a	52-65	Decorated and more agitated version of the B <sup>1</sup> melody
C		g	66-85	Florid, Chopinesque melody based on long 16 <sup>th</sup> note patterns partially derived from B <sup>1</sup> , preserve syncopated accompaniment of B <sup>1</sup> with minor alterations
D		g	86-101	Virtuosic tango section, use of habanera rhythm
	TR	--	102-113	Relentless build-up through short sequences; no clear key is established in this active section; most concentrated use of dotted 8 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> rhythm; culminates dramatically in an A major chord in m. 110
B	B <sup>2</sup>	Bb	114-123	This section leads back to A instead of B <sup>1</sup>
A		F	124-141	Theme A reappears. However, this time the second repetition of the theme is much more eloquent and impassioned in character
Coda	TR	--	142-154	Transposed version of TR returns
	B <sup>1</sup>	a	155-165	“missing” B <sup>1</sup> placed in the coda

*Invention in C minor, Op. 6*

The “Invention in C minor” is distinguished from the rest of the pieces in four different ways. First, it is the only piece in the album that was fully composed by Joel without any arrangement by Joo. Second, it is the shortest piece in the album, with only twenty-three measures of music and lasting barely a minute when performed up to the prescribed tempo. The placement of this piece in the album seems intentional: it is inserted in between “Soliloquy (On a Separation)” and “Aria (Grand Canal),” the two longest Romantic pieces in the set. Third, it is the only piece in the album that lacks a descriptive subtitle, with no particular references to any extra-musical content. Lastly and most distinctively, Joel did not utilize the melody-and-accompaniment texture that is featured in the other pieces. Rather, the piece appears to be Joel’s attempt at writing a contrapuntal work – an art of setting one or more melodies against one another in a way that is harmonically, rhythmically, and/or thematically related, yet preserves a certain degree of independence for each line.<sup>25</sup> Joel’s experiments with counterpoint writing are modest, as he chose to write a piece in two voices (see Figure 5.12). By placing the piece within the context of Joel’s other works, Duchan even claimed “Invention in C minor” to be one of the most unique and daring compositions ever produced by Joel:

Unlike the rest of the album’s compositions, “Invention in C minor,” features no chords, no harmonic moments when three or more piano keys are played simultaneously. Instead, all one hears are the two complementary melodic lines. In addition to being a staple of much Romantic piano composition, chords also underpin nearly all of Joel’s popular style songs. So although “James” [a song in the *Turnstiles* album]

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<sup>25</sup> While one can easily trace instances of countermelodies in the Romantic pieces of *Fantasies and Delusions* (a common practice by Romantic composers to generate more interest in their music), they are not the main features nor the main compositional focus for those pieces.

bear some moments of Baroque-style counterpoint, “Invention in C minor” marks the furthest Joel ever ventures from his more common and comfortable melody-and-accompaniment compositional style.<sup>26</sup>

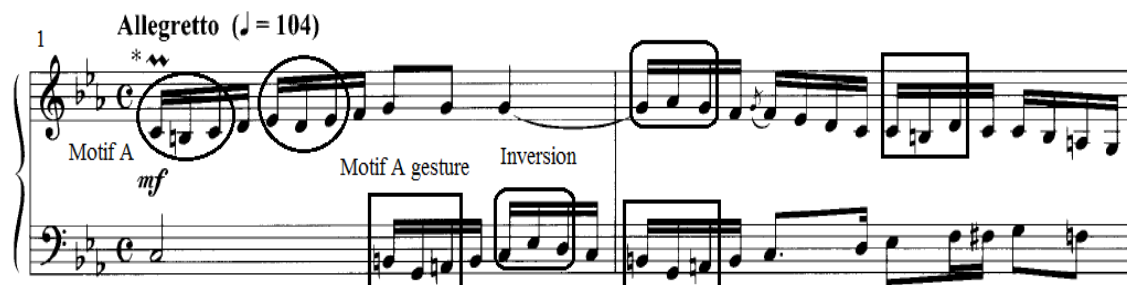


Figure 5.12. Joel, “Invention in C minor,” ms. 1-2, first thematic area (A)

In the “Invention in C minor,” the two rhythmically dense lines are always set in constant dialogue with one another. Even though the two voices are not set in strict imitative counterpoint, with the left imitating the right only on occasion, certain motivic gestures are still perceived and serve as unifying elements. For example, motive A, as highlighted in measure 1, returns numerous times throughout the composition. Certain figurations in the piece also mirrored the down-and-up gesture between three adjacent notes even though the intervallic relationship between the pitches is not exact. At times, inversion of the motivic figure is also utilized. All these motivic cells can already be seen through the opening measures of the piece (Figure 5.12).

In terms of formal structure, the piece can be further divided into four smaller sections in the form of ABA'B' based on its overall thematic content and key areas (see Table 5.4). Moreover, strong cadential arrivals creates a momentary pause between the sections. For example, in measure 6 (Figure 5.13), Joel closes the first A section through

<sup>26</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, 125.

an authentic cadence progression before moving into a sequential section that ultimately returns to C minor.

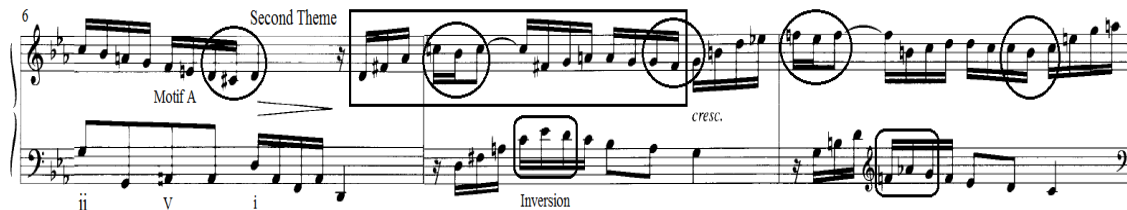


Figure 5.13. Joel, “Invention in C minor,” ms. 6-8, strong arrival in D minor that leads to the B section

There are certain features of the piece that are not typical of Baroque musical practices. Harmonically, Joel modulates to distantly-related keys (such as C minor to D minor at the end of the A section) at strong cadential arrivals. This differs from the conventions of the Baroque era. To dramatize the closing of the piece, Joel ends on the lowest C of the modern piano – a pitch clearly not available on the keyboard instruments during the Baroque period. The formal approach in the “Invention in C minor” is also distinct from Bach’s contrapuntal works. In his inventions, sinfonias, and fugues, Bach’s method of composition resembled more of a “sustained argument,” in which musical ideas are developed consistently until the end of the piece with no clear breaks in the musical progress. In contrast, Joel’s piece can be broken down into distinct sections through the momentary pauses created by the strong harmonic arrivals that occur at the end of each section. Stylistically, Joel also took more liberty in his counterpoint procedures. In certain instances, especially near the end of phrases, the left hand clearly switches to a secondary, accompanimental role by providing harmonic support to the right-hand melody. This approach is different from Bach’s inventions, in which the

relative independence of melodic lines is carefully preserved throughout the composition.

In an interview, Joel admitted he would have done things differently in that regard:

Now I'd do it differently... the left hand... It's just a fast-moving accompaniment. It starts to imitate the melody in the other voice, but it doesn't finish.<sup>27</sup>

Even though not a perfect specimen of Bach's style and less rigorous in terms of imitative procedures, the piece is a veritable example of contrapuntal composition in the twentieth century. Still, it captures the aesthetics and sensibilities of Baroque counterpoint writing, which calls for "the adroit combination of several melodies sounding simultaneously, whereby manifold euphony arises conjointly."<sup>28</sup> Joel's ability to sustain melodic interest is clear as the two voices complement each other in a carefully articulated manner, utilizing all four types of contrapuntal motion (parallel, similar, contrary, and oblique). From a pedagogical perspective, the "Invention in C minor" could serve as a quality introductory piece for the novice pianist before studying the more challenging contrapuntal compositions by Bach.

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<sup>27</sup> Billy Joel, interview by Greg Sandow, November 6, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Wendy Heller, *Music in the Baroque: Western Music in Context* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014), 268.

Table 5.4. Formal analysis of Joel, “Invention in C minor, Op. 6”

Section	Key	Measures	Description
A	c -> d	1-6	Introduction of first theme with motif A, strong cadence in D minor
B	-> c	7-11	Introduction of second theme in D major with motif A; modulates to G major through sequence; diminished sonorities above a tonic pedal on C; strong cadence in C minor
A'	g -> d	12-16	First theme introduced again in the dominant key of G minor; new melodic episode (based on motif A) introduced and set in sequence, before strong cadence in d minor
B'	-> c	17-23	Similar in construction to B, except for phrase extension through deceptive cadence in m. 20, in which previous melodic material is repeated an octave lower, before strong cadence in C minor ending in lowest C of the piano

#### *Air (Dublinesque), Op. 10*

The album concludes with “Air (Dublinesque),” a piece that is most reflective of Joel’s popular and folk inspirations. The piece’s placement as the last track of the album was certainly intentional, as it reflects stylistic features that are not just different, but also more “modern” than the preceding pieces:

Just from the language point of view, I felt that it deserved pride of place for being last. It has more feet in the 20th century or the early 21st century. The rest of the pieces are more influenced by the 19th century and of course the “Invention” harkens back to the Baroque era or at least Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach.<sup>29</sup>

The subtitle, “Dublinesque,” also suggests that the piece could be understood as an evocation or celebration of the folk music of Ireland. The structure of the piece is relatively straightforward compared to the other pieces in the album. It is constructed in quasi-rounded binary form (see Table 5.5), beginning with a slow, ballad-like A section

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix B, no. 11.

that is contrasted with a dance-like B section before the opening material is briefly recapitulated at the end. In my correspondence with Joo, he described the stylistic influences that inform the piece:

Well, the “Air (Dublinesque)” is probably the piece that’s closest to Billy’s original, personal voice. It has that Celtic, Irish thing. Although he is not Irish, he has an affinity for that kind of “Welt” [“world” in German], shall we say. You hear that kind of similar tonal language in several of his pop songs. So, in a way the air, or at least the melody of the air, could very well have been one of his ballads. And of course, it has the American touch in the faster middle sections. You can hear influences of Copland, Bernstein – it’s very American-inspired music and as you say, folk-influence.<sup>30</sup>

The popular and folk influences in the composition of “Air (Dublinesque)” undoubtedly make this piece more accessible to a wider audience than the other pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions*. Compared to other forms of melodic writing in the album, the melodic characteristics of this piece makes it easier for a wider audience to sing, follow, and remember. The simple, mostly stepwise, arch-like melody in the A section (Figure 5.14) is complimented by a rhythm that is relatively straightforward and uncomplicated. The phrases are also shorter (most are two to four measures in length) while the range is generally contained within an octave with brief, sporadic ventures outside those limits for expressive purposes. A critic even described the piece’s opening melody as a wordless song that is “crying out for a lyric.”<sup>31</sup> Intriguingly, I also found the style of the opening section strikingly reminiscent of the ballad “And So It Goes” from Joel’s *Storm Front* album (Figure 5.15). Both pieces are set in C major, but also exude a wistful character

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix B, no. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Adrian Edwards, “Joel Fantasies and Delusions,” *Gramophone: The World’s Best Classical Music Reviews*, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/joel-fantasies-and-delusions>.



through the punctuation of minor harmonies. An example will be the strong resting points in A minor in the second measure of both pieces. Other similarities include the free, melancholic melodic style, offbeat entrances, short phrases, moderate range, simple rhythms, gentle undulations in melodic contour, and profusion of lightly dissonant harmonies (added seconds and fourths).



Figure 5.14. Joel, “Air (Dublinesque), Op. 10,” ms. 1-4, folk/pop melodic style

Slow Ballad, with much rubato

♩ = 75

*mf*

Chord symbols: C, F(add9), A<sup>sus</sup>, Am, C, Fmaj<sup>9</sup>, G, C, F(add9), A<sup>sus</sup>, Am, C, Fmaj<sup>9</sup>, F/G.

Figure 5.15 shows the opening section (measures 1-7) of Joel's "And So it Goes." The score is in 3/4 time, marked "Slow Ballad, with much rubato" and "♩ = 75". It features a piano introduction with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The melody starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a series of eighth notes. The bass line consists of a single half note G3 in the first measure, followed by a series of eighth notes. The score includes dynamic markings "mf" and "mp".

Figure 5.15. Joel, “And So it Goes,” ms. 1-7, opening section

Features of the melody in “Air (Dublinesque)” also resemble those of an Irish air, a genre within the traditional Irish folk repertory. Airs are slow instrumental melodies

that are often performed with a sense of freedom in tempo, beat, or rhythm.<sup>32</sup> Joel's writing and performance directions ("very freely at first" in a largo tempo) and Joo's sensitive interpretation reflect the character and certain rhythmic peculiarities of the Irish air. The melodic contour (four ascending notes that traces a perfect fourth and is followed by a mostly stepwise descent, with subsequent gentle ascents and descents), the frequent resting points on a strong beat, and the lightly-dissonant, major-minor-inflected harmony also evoke the chorus of Percy Grainger's "Londonderry Air" (Figure 5.16).<sup>33</sup>



Figure 5.16. Grainger, "Londonderry Air," ms. 10-17, melodic transcription of chorus

After a V-I cadence followed by a plagal decoration in the ending tonic chord (a typical harmonic maneuver in folk music) (Figure 5.17), the wistful A section eventually leads to an invigorating, dance-like B section.

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<sup>32</sup> Michael B. Bakan, *World Music: Traditions and Transformations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Mc-Graw Hill, 2012), 162.

<sup>33</sup> Percy Grainger (1882-1961) was an Australian-born composer, pianist, and researcher who was deeply interested in folk music and played a prominent role in the British folk music revival. His "Londonderry Air" was an instrumental setting of an old Irish tune from the northern Irish county of Derry. While the tune had a rich history of lyric settings, it is most commonly associated with "O' Danny Boy," a set of lyrics written by Englishman Frederick Weatherly in 1910. See Andy Pease, "Irish Tune from County Derry by Percy Grainger," *Wind Band Literature: A Conductor's Perspective* by Andy Pease, October 16, 2010, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://windliterature.org/2010/10/16/irish-tune-from-county-derry-by-percy-grainger/>.

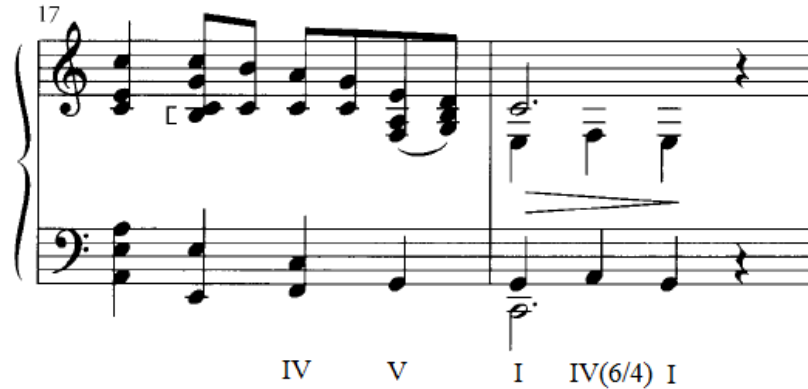


Figure 5.17. “Air (Dublinesque), Op. 10,” ms. 17-18, ending of A section with plagal decoration

The B section can be further divided into three subsections ( $B^1$ ,  $B^2$ , and  $B^3$ ) based on their thematic and stylistic content before the recapitulation of A at the end (see Table 5.5). However, there are general features that characterize each of these subsections. Certain pitches in the diatonic scale are lowered and raised to provide a distinct modal flavor to each of the dance-like parts (see Table 5.5). Western composers often used modal melody and harmony to suggest a folk quality in their music. It appears this is what Joel is trying to achieve here. All the melodies within the B section are also made up of paired phrases (see Table 5.5). Other notable folk elements include the prominent use of thirds and sixths to double the melody along with the abundance of open sonorities such as fifths, sixths, or octaves in the accompaniment (as exemplified through the musical examples below). These open sonorities also appear frequently in Copland’s music as well. In addition, contrary to the lyrical, connected lines of the A section, the melodies in the B section are more articulated, with *staccato* or *portato* passages alternating with short slur gestures.

Certain aspects of Irish dance music could also be perceived in the B section of “Air (Dublinesque).” In  $B^1$ , the melodies evoke the Irish reel through the eight-bar

phrases, emphasis on the first and third beat, and lively, lightly decorated straight eighth-note rhythms (Figure 5.18). Echoing the melodic contour of the opening air melody, the melodies in B<sup>1</sup> also begin with a rising, stepwise perfect fourth figure that is accompanied by a subsequent fall. In this subsection, each melodic phrase begins on an offbeat while the melody moves largely in thirds and stepwise motion above long stretches of harmonic pedal points in the accompaniment. The repeating paired phrases (b and b2) in the subsection clearly suggests an alternation of F Lydian (b) and C Lydian (b2) modes.





Figure 5.19. Joel, “Air (Dublinesque),” ms. 49-56, B<sup>2</sup> section with angular melody and fast-moving harmonic progression

After a short transitional vamp passage, the music enters the B<sup>3</sup> subsection. The melodic profile in B<sup>3</sup> becomes more soloistic compared to the previous sections. Certain characteristics of the melody, such as the ornate and rapidly-changing figurations, evokes virtuosic fiddle playing, while the rhythmic pattern of alternating pairs of sixteenth and single eighth notes is typical of Irish dance rhythms (Figure 5.20). The accompaniment in B<sup>3</sup> juxtaposes the linear, quickly-changing chord progressions from the B<sup>2</sup> section with the relatively drawn-out and functional harmonic movement that characterized the B<sup>1</sup> subsection. The harmonic content and melodic passages in certain areas of B<sup>3</sup> are also suggestive of C or G Lydian-Mixolydian modes (see Table 5.5).



Figure 5.20 Joel, “Air (Dublinesque),” ms. 66-73, soloistic B<sup>3</sup> melody

The final variation of the melody evokes an Irish jig featuring dancing triplets (Figure 5.21). The sustained open fifths in the bass with their chromatic inflections also suggests the drone-like sound of an Irish bagpipe. The relatively straightforward melody could easily be played by a tin-whistle flute, which is commonly featured with the bagpipe in Irish music. After a brief interlude, the piece ends with a four-measure restatement of the air-like melody from the A section.



Figure 5.21. Joel, “Air (Dublinesque),” ms. 82-85, jig-like melody above sustained, bagpipe-like bass

Table 5.5. Formal analysis of Joel, “Air (Dublinesque), Op. 10”

Section	Subsection	Melodic phrase	Key/Mode	Measures	Description
A	a		C	1-8	Lyrical, air-like melody; pop-like added note chords
	a'			9-18	Same melody with expanded phrase; cadences in C major
B	B <sup>1</sup>	b	F Lydian	19-26	Dance-like melody; evoke ascending fourth motif of opening melody, hints at F Lydian, cadences in C major
		b2	C Lydian	27-34	Transposition of b with new material introduced, hints at C Lydian, cadences in C major
		b'	F Lydian	35-42	Reiteration of b with slightly different rhythmic profile; more active bass part
		b2'	C Lydian	43-48	Reiteration of b2 an octave higher

Section	Subsection	Melodic phrase	Key/Mode	Measures	Description
	B <sup>2</sup>	c	C major	49-53	Angular, emphatic melody; chromatic voice-leading harmonies accompanied by mostly stepwise bass progressions
		c'		53-58	Reiteration of c with rhythmic and harmonic alterations
	TR			58-61	Brief four-measure transitional vamp with mostly stepwise bass pattern and open voicings
	B <sup>3</sup>	d	C Lydian-Mixolydian	62-65	Introduction of new melodic material
		d'		66-69	Variation of d; featuring single-line, soloistic melody in the RH suggestive of fiddle playing; alternating pairs of sixteenth and single eighth notes
		e	G Lydian-Mixolydian	70-73	Alternating pairs of sixteenth and single eighth notes
		e'		74-78	Same melody doubled with fourths and thirds below
		d'	C Lydian-Mixolydian	78-82	d' returns, accompanied by single-voice bass (missing tenor voice)
		d''		82-86	Triplet variation of d melody that evokes an Irish jig; played above sustained bass chords that sound like drones
		a	C	87-90	Shortened version of A theme in coda-like ending.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

A survey of preexisting reviews on *Fantasies and Delusions* reveals a general recognition of Joel's ability as a melodist and Joo's strong presentation of the musical material in the album. While faring better in terms of reception than other popular artists' classical efforts, *Fantasies and Delusions* has been labelled by numerous critics as inauthentic, too close to its sources of inspiration, or lacking a unique compositional voice. Through his study on the critical reception of the album, Duchan presented similar findings by stating that "reviews of the work frequently fall back on the familiar trope of authenticity, sometimes dressed up in terms of originality, or a lack thereof."<sup>1</sup>

Although *Fantasies and Delusions* is largely considered a "throwback" album, Joel had no issues with being derivative and openly acknowledged his influences from earlier traditions. He viewed himself as someone who appreciated the values of the past and chose to preserve them while being generally resistant to the trends of modernism:

Some designs at the time [late 40/early 50s] were so beautiful and functional, I often wonder why they have to stop. Why did they have to change? Why all this emphasis on new, and cutting-edge, and experimental, and innovative? Why not explore the nuances of what was already there and improve on that? I feel the same way about music. I love to play around with genres – blues, doo-wop, a waltz – and because of that, I've often been accused of being derivative. You know what? Hell yes, I'm derivative. Nobody grows up in a test tube. We're all influenced by what's come before us. But what is it that you're always drawn back to? What is it that speaks to your soul?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Duchan, *Billy Joel: America's Piano Man*, 126.

<sup>2</sup> Schruers, *The Definitive Biography*, 326.



From my study of the album's connection with Joel's personal life in Chapter Four, composing instrumental classical music indeed became what a middle-age Joel was "drawn back to" and it clearly "spoke to his soul" as he was searching for a new mode of expression that could free him from the confines of popular song form conventions, lyrical contexts, and industry machinery. The fact that Joel would choose the piano as the first stop for his venture into classical composition is hardly surprising, given that the instrument has been a constant companion throughout his life and defined his musical origins and career. Eight years of serious study resulted in *Fantasies and Delusions*, which Joel claimed, "I am actually the closest to this recording of any of the recordings I have done, this is more me than anything right now."<sup>3</sup> However, unlike Beethoven's successors, who felt compelled to respond in their own terms to his overwhelming prestige (especially in symphonic composition), Joel certainly did not feel the "anxiety of influence" to outdo, transcend, or distinguish himself from his predecessors in the *Fantasies and Delusions* project. For him, the ideals of measuring up to the great masters might have well been more a "fantasy" and a "delusion." Already proven in the popular music industry, he simply returned to his classical roots and clearly did not care if he was viewed as a second-rate Classical composer. He saw himself as a humble musician paying homage to the classical masters he has always admired and viewed the process as an opportunity for personal growth and enrichment. The project is a labor of love from a man who loved classical music and finally decided to write some with the hope of drawing potential audiences to the declining genre. Since Joel was expressing himself

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<sup>3</sup> Billy Joel, "Billy Joel on *Fantasies and Delusions*," *The Complete Albums Collection*.

through a different language, to achieve the best results out of his ideas and to transcend his limitations, he was not afraid to invite Joo to help arrange, notate, and perform the pieces, even though these actions could be construed as suspect in terms of his originality. Furthermore, Joel did not see the criticism leveled against his close alignment with the styles of nineteenth-century composers as a problem, but more of a compliment:

There are references to other classical composers. I think that's normal. But the notes are mine, the melodies are mine. If the harmonies are reminiscent of Chopin, that's okay. I love Chopin. That's what I was hoping for. If the counterpoint and the overall feeling of the thing is 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romantic in style, that's okay. If you listen to early Beethoven, he sounds like late Mozart. We all came from somewhere. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as it's your own music. I've never really been a stylist per se, anyway. I always found having to be a stylist very confining. I don't really give a damn about my individual style. What I care about is the composition getting done, and not being confined by either my own limitations as either a performer, singer, or pianist. The important thing is the idea.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Joel's popular music is well-known for deliberate borrowings and evocations of certain styles and sounds from other artists' previous musical efforts. Chapters Two and Three made the case that stylistic eclecticism has always been Joel's musical trademark since the beginning of his career. Joel's past efforts indicate that he did not consider the imitative or "pastiche" character in his music, both in a macro or a micro scale, an issue or a deficiency. Rather, he thought of paying homage to past artists through emulating and channeling their influences as something noble and exciting. A multiplicity of influences can be found in each of his popular albums. For example, numerous songs in the *Piano Man* album evoke a variety of country-Western musical styles. *An Innocent Man* is a "throwback" to the doo-wop music of the 60s that Joel loved. In *The Nylon*

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<sup>4</sup> Joel, interview by Bill DeMain, "Billy Joel in a New Romantic State of Mind," 61.

*Curtain*, Joel tried to recreate a certain style and sound that was clearly inspired by The Beatles. His breakthrough album, *The Stranger*, featured a colorful spectrum of genres ranging from tender, romantic ballads and gospel-influenced songs to Latin American music styles and rock ‘n’ roll. Stylistic pluralism can even be found within single tracks, such as the medley of distinct styles evoked in the seven-minute “Scenes From an Italian Restaurant.” Being Joel’s only classical album, *Fantasies and Delusions* features the same eclecticism as his popular music and makes evident his eclectic aesthetic that transcends genre. In Chapter Five, I delineated the kaleidoscopic array of musical styles that informed the composition of *Fantasies and Delusions* both as a whole and within specific pieces. A closer examination on three contrasting pieces in the album also supported the above statement by revealing a rich variety of stylistic content, formal design, thematic approach, programmatic ideas, and contrasts in mood/character in these pieces. Like the popular songs in his previous albums, Joel’s career-long embracing of melodic writing is also strongly reflected in all the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions*, regardless of the styles or forms in which he is writing. Both melody and Joel the songwriter are virtually inseparable entities, and the same could be said about melody and Joel the classical composer.

Joel cited piano students as one of his motivations for writing *Fantasies and Delusions*. Therefore, I also examined the possible pedagogical value to be gleaned from learning and playing the music in the album. As discussed in Chapter Four, the wide range of classical music styles and pianistic challenges embodied within the pieces in *Fantasies and Delusions* offer great opportunity for technical and musical growth. As a classically-trained pianist, I believe these pieces qualify as quality introductory materials

or stepping stones for aspiring piano students; pieces to study and motivate them before more advanced and sophisticated keyboard works by Bach, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and other composers. Given the pedagogical intent behind the album, Joel also considered *Fantasies and Delusions* a success if the pieces in the album could draw the interest of an uninitiated listener to the classical models of these pieces:

So, if somebody reads a review that says he's too reminiscent of those composers, they might actually be intrigued to go out and get a recording by Chopin or Debussy or Rachmaninoff. What's wrong with that?<sup>5</sup>

By considering *Fantasies and Delusions* from an angle that engages aspects of Joel's entire career and creative inspirations, the album offers a compelling insight into his life, his artistic sensibility, and his aesthetics and attitudes toward music and modern society in general. Being an eclectic composer, a melodist, a Romantic, and a Piano Man throughout his career, Joel stayed true to his artistic identity by precisely emphasizing those qualities and aesthetics in *Fantasies and Delusions*.

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<sup>5</sup> Joel, interview by Susan Stamberg, December 10, 2001.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

Table A.1. Discography of Billy Joel's Thirteen Studio Albums<sup>1</sup>

Album	Tracks	Chart Position (Billboard 100/ Adult Contemporary) Re-release (in *)
Cold Spring Harbor  Released: November 1, 1971 Producer: Artie Ripp Label: Family Productions Peak U.S. Chart Position: 158	1. She's Got A Way 2. You Can Make Me Free 3. Everybody Loves You Now 4. Why Judy Why 5. Falling of the Rain 6. Turn Around [Side 2] 7. You Look So Good To Me 8. Tomorrow is Today 9. Nocturne 10. Got to Begin Again	23/4*
Piano Man  Released: November 9, 1973 Producer: Michael Stewart Label: Columbia Peak U.S. Chart Position: 27	1. Travelin' Prayer 2. Piano Man 3. Ain't No Crime 4. You're My Home 5. The Ballad of Billy the Kid 6. Worst Comes to Worst [Side 2] 7. Stop in Nevada 8. If I Only Had the Words (to Tell You) 9. Somewhere Along the Line 10. Captain Jack	77/31 25/4      80/-

Album	Tracks	Chart Position (Billboard 100/ Adult Contemporary) Re-release (in *)
Streetlife Serenade  Released: October 11, 1973 Producer: Michael Stewart Label: Columbia Peak U.S. Chart Position: 35	1. Streetlife Serenader 2. Los Angelenos 3. The Great Suburban Showdown 4. Root Beer Rag (Instrumental) 5. Roberta 6. The Entertainer [Side 2] 7. Last of the Big Time Spenders 8. Weekend Song 9. Souvenir 10. The Mexican Connection (Instrumental)	34/30
Turnstiles  Released: May 19, 1976 Producer: Billy Joel Label: Columbia Peak U.S. Chart Position: 122	1. Say Goodbye to Hollywood 2. Summer, Highland Falls 3. All You Wanna Do is Dance 4. New York State of Mind 5. James [Side 2] 6. Prelude/Angry Young Man 7. I've Loved These Days 8. Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)	17/35*
The Stranger  Released: September 29, 1977 Producer: Phil Ramone Label: Columbia Peak U.S. Chart Position: 2	1. Movin' Out (Anthony's Song) 2. The Stranger 3. Just the Way You Are 4. Scenes from an Italian Restaurant 5. Vienna [Side 2] 6. Only the Good Die Young 7. She's Always a Woman 8. Get it Right the First Time 9. Everybody has a Dream	17/40  3/1  24/- 17/2
52 <sup>nd</sup> Street  Released: October 13, 1978 Producer: Phil Ramone Label: Columbia Peak U.S. Chart Position: 1	1. Big Shot 2. Honesty 3. My Life 4. Zanzibar 5. Stiletto [Side 2] 6. Rosalinda's Eyes 7. Half a Mile Away 8. Until the Night 9. 52 <sup>nd</sup> Street	14/- 24/9 3/2

Album	Tracks	Chart Position (Billboard 100/ Adult Contemporary) Re-release (in *)
Glass House	1. You May Be Right	7/48
	2. Sometimes a Fantasy	36/-
Released: March 10, 1980	3. Don't Ask Me Why	19/1
Producer: Phil Ramone	4. It's Still Rock and Roll to Me	1/45
Label: Columbia	5. All for Leyna	
Peak U.S. Chart Position: 1	6. I Don't Want to Be Alone [Side 2]	
	7. Sleeping with the Television On	
	8. C'était Toi (You Were the One)	
	9. Close to the Borderline	
	10. Through the Long Night	
The Nylon Curtain	1. Allentown	17/19
	2. Laura	
Released: September 23, 1982	3. Pressure	20/-
	4. Goodnight Saigon	56/-
Producer: Phil Ramone	5. She's Right on Time [Side 2]	
Label: Columbia	6. A Room of Our Own	
Peak U.S. Chart Position: 7	7. Surprises	
	8. Scandinavian Skies	
	9. Where's the Orchestra?	
An Innocent Man	1. Easy Money	
	2. An Innocent Man	10/1
Released: August 8, 1983	3. The Longest Time	14/1
Producer: Phil Ramone	4. This Night	
Label: Columbia	5. Tell Her About It	1/1
Peak U.S. Chart Position: 4	6. Uptown Girl [Side 2]	3/2
	7. Careless Talk	
	8. Christie Lee	
	9. Leave a Tender Moment Alone	27/1
	10. Keeping the Faith	18/3
The Bridge	1. Running on Ice	
	2. This is the Time	18/1
Released: July 29, 1986	3. A Matter of Trust	10/17
Producer: Phil Ramone	4. Modern Woman	10/7
Label: Columbia	5. Baby Grand	75/3
Peak U.S. Chart Position: 7	6. Big Band on Mulberry Street [Side 2]	
	7. Temptation	
	8. Code of Silence	
	9. Getting Closer	



Album	Tracks	Chart Position (Billboard 100/ Adult Contemporary) Re-release (in *)
Storm Front	1. That's Not Her Style	77/-
	2. We Didn't Start the Fire	1/5
Released: October 17, 1989	3. The Downeaster Alexa	57/18
Producer: Mick Jones	4. I Go to Extremes	6/4
Label: Columbia	5. Shameless	-/40
Peak U.S. Chart Position: 1	6. Storm Front [Side 2]	
	7. Leningrad	
	8. State of Grace	
	9. When in Rome	
	10. And So It Goes	37/5
River of Dreams	1. No Man's Land	
	2. The Great Wall of China	
Released: August 10, 1993	3. Blonde Over Blue	
Producer: Danny Kortchmar	4. A Minor Variation	
Label: Columbia	5. Shades of Grey	
Peak U.S. Chart Position: 1	6. All About Soul [Side 2]	29/6
	7. Lullabye (Goodnight, My Angel)	77/18
	8. The River of Dreams	3/1
	9. Two Thousand Years	
	10. Famous Last Words	
Fantasies and Delusions	1. Opus 3. Reverie (Villa d'Este)	
	2. Opus 2. Waltz #1 (Nunley's Carousel)	
Released: October 2, 2001	3. Opus 7. Aria (Grand Canal)	
Producer: Steve Epstein	4. Opus 6. Invention in C Minor	
Label: Columbia, Sony Classical	5. Opus 1. Soliloquy (On a Separation)	
Peak U.S. Chart Position: 83	Opus 8. Suite for Piano (Star-Crossed)	
	6. I. Innamorato	
	7. II. Sorbetto	
	8. III. Delusion	
	9. Opus 5. Waltz #2 (Steinway Hall)	
	10. Opus 9. Waltz #3 (For Lola)	
	11. Opus 4. Fantasy (Film Noir)	
	12. Opus 10. Air (Dublinesque)	

<sup>1</sup>. The information in this table is derived from Wikipedia, which to this date contains the most comprehensive and accurate information on Joel's discography:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy\\_Joel\\_discography#Singles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Joel_discography#Singles).

## APPENDIX B

### Interview with Hyung-ki Joo: Recollections and Insights on *Fantasies and Delusions*

Interviewer	: Jie Fang Goh
Interviewee	: Hyung-ki Joo
Mode of interview	: Answering of questionnaire through voice recordings
Voice Recordings	: Recollections on working with Billy Joel Part 1 (8:29) Recollections on working with Billy Joel Part 2 (20:00) Recollections on working with Billy Joel Part 3 (8:51) Recollections on working with Billy Joel Part 4 (17:18)
Date received	: 21 March 2018
Transcribed	: 22 March 2018 by Jie Fang Goh

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*1. Goh: What are the aspects of working with Mr. Joel that you most enjoy or cherish? How was working with a popular artist different from working with your classical colleagues? What motivated your decision to work with Mr. Joel on the project?*

Joo: Working with Billy Joel is and was in no way particularly different from working with my usual classical colleagues. In a way, working with Billy was something that could be more open because he didn't have that training. In some ways he was restricted but in other ways he was freer and not bound by what he had studied and what he knew. He has an incredibly strong and imaginative ear. As you know, he grew up with the classics and started off taking classical piano lessons. His father was a huge classical music aficionado and played the piano. So, this is his world. Billy has even said many times himself that this album *Fantasies and Delusions* is the closest album to his heart and to his spirit. When I first met him, what I was stunned by was his love and knowledge of classical music, which in my opinion, put a lot of classical colleagues to shame because he knew so much and, more than knowledge, it was his passion for it, which I find sometimes missing in the professional classical world. He was very open, very open to try things, very open to all kinds of suggestions. He had a very strong idea of what he wanted, yet he understood that someone like me had a much deeper knowledge of classical harmony, counterpoint, and piano writing. So, he wanted his ideas to be translated, or to be an homage, or to have that stylistic equivalent/translation of the music around the time of Chopin and Schumann, so that these pieces might have flow naturally anyway from him like if he were living during their time.

2. Goh: *What were your main takeaways from the process of making *Fantasies and Delusions*? Did the experience influence or change your life in some way?*

Joo: Obviously, the whole process of *Fantasies and Delusions* and working with Billy was one of the biggest things in my life and still is today, not just from the point of view of its impact on my professional career. Back then, I was still a student doing my master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music and didn't really have many means to support myself. So, this was one of my first jobs. In that sense, it was also a godsend that I could contribute a little towards my rent and New York student life. The fact of starting to realize that everything that I have been taught was starting to have a use for someone else also made me feel very useful. It made me feel very good that all these years of study, being a composer, my desire to delve deeper into harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, and things like this could be brought to this project.

I think one of reasons why Billy elected me was that he saw that I was not really fettered by his stardom. I didn't really give a shit that he was this rock star. I mean, I knew who he was, but that has never really fazed me anyway. What I was inspired by so much was his passion for music in general and especially classical music. As a result of that, I took my job very seriously and I was also very candid and honest, which I think was what he valued – the fact that I wasn't there to just “Yes sir, Yes sir” him and just do what he please just to please him, but to really come out with something that I thought was the best realization of his ideas. If he came out with something that I thought was too close to bad plagiarism... I mean, he was aware that he was borrowing and stealing, but he wanted that. He wanted to write an album of pieces that paid homage to the composers and the music that he loved. And he of course never expected that he would be considered on the same level as these classical composers. But I really think that there are many moments in those pieces which are absolutely beautiful. I really think that some pieces could stand alone and could almost have been written during that time. Or, let's say it's like Marty McFly [protagonist in *Back to the Future* movie] flying back in time and then coming back and writing something. But I was always very honest with him and I would tell him what I thought, and I think that's what he appreciated. Of course, there's no question that the project brought a level of credibility to me and certainly, once the recording was done, I had a toenail in the door as a pianist. There are so many pianists in this world. Every pianist is looking for some kind of break by trying to stand out from the usual run-of-the-mill, competition-winning, conservatoire-graduating pianist. I landed on the scene through working with some Rock legend, singer-songwriter who was writing classical music.

3. Goh: *From the liner notes of the album, I noticed that Mr. Joel had credited you and three other individuals for “additional arrangements” and Mr. Cortese for “music preparation.” Would you be able to clarify what were the roles and specific assignments for each of these individuals towards the making of the final product? What kind of role did producer, Mr. Epstein play during the recording process?*

Joo: Well, when I came on to the project, that was already one piece, “Soliloquy,” which had already been notated in some way, and there was already a performance of that by a

lady called Yuliya Gorenman, who unfortunately still I have never met today. But, besides Billy's renditions of his ideas at the piano, which of course were the first versions of all the pieces that I heard, and I heard them in bits and pieces along the years whenever we would we meet. He would say, "Oh, I am working on this idea" and played it to me. But the first whole piece that I had was "Soliloquy." So, Yuliya Gorenman, was from my recollection, the first person who had notated one of his pieces. And it's really thanks to that sheet music and recording that I was able to perform the piece myself for my New York debut recital at the Carnegie Weill Recital Hall in 1999. I thought it would be fun to program the piece sandwiched between these heavyweights such as Beethoven, Prokofiev, Ravel, and Borodin. And, of course, there's the novelty of a Billy Joel world premiere, or New York premiere, or whatever it was. But I wanted to give his piece a proper launch, a proper venue, and a proper setting. So, I asked him whether he wanted to have his piece performed and whether I could do it. He had known my playing for many years, and so he agreed to it and that's how I would say our working process began. I would learn it and play it for him and then he would make some comments. It's thanks to that performance that a few weeks later he called me up and said "I love the way you play my music and I think you understand exactly what I mean and how I wanted it to be expressed, all the nuances. You get the essence of what I am trying to say, and would you be interested in helping me arrange and finish the other pieces that are in my head, or get them down and realize them?" So, this was of course, a chance of a lifetime. I am very happy and proud that I was a part of that.

I don't really know who the other individuals are that are credited for additional arrangements. I don't know what that would have been. However, Glen Cortese was involved in the music preparation part. While I had pretty good handwriting and had to make clean versions at least for myself to play from as all the pieces were finished, it got to the time when, after all the music was recorded, Schirmer wanted to actually publish the sheet music. So, for that they hired Glen Cortese, who I did know not very well, but was suddenly familiar with him. We saw each other at the corridors for years in the Manhattan School of Music because he was the orchestral conductor there. But this was the first time that he and I sat down and worked together. He was wonderful and meticulous. Now that I am more experienced with music preparing, publishing sheet music, and working on Sibelius, I still find it amazing that, even with the help of computer programs, how many errors can occur and how many important details can be left out. And back then, it was really still pen to paper. Glen Cortese obviously had a much more experienced knack for that. So, I went through the entire process of preparing the sheet music with him, and we spent hours and hours. I wish that they had sent me the draft one more time before printing it because there are many errors in the present published sheet music. But at that point, it was beyond my control so that was not much I could do about that. But I do think it's a shame because there was really nobody else who knew exactly what it should be. Also, I am very meticulous myself, so I would have made sure that the music was as perfect as it could have been.

Steven Epstein was the producer that I had actually met a few years prior to 2001, which is when we recorded the album. I met him in Pittsburgh because one of my dearest friends, Julian Rachlin, was recording the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the Pittsburgh

Symphony. As I was studying in New York at the time, I came down to join Julian for that recording session and sat in the booth for all of it. So, even though I was just a fly in the wall, I observed this incredible man, Steven Epstein. I had some experience of seeing what the production, recording experience was like, so I had an idea. But this was like meeting the Michael Jordan of producing, and I realized that he was the one of the big icons of classical music production. I always said to myself after that time in Pittsburgh, if I ever get to record an album, I want it to be with Steven Epstein. So, when the time actually came to record *Fantasies and Delusions*, one of the clinchers for me, one of the things that really got me excited was that when I heard that Steven Epstein was going to be the producer. I remember calling him and saying, “I don’t know if you remember me, but I always dreamt that I would be working with you.” His recording engineer, I call him the dream team, is a guy called Richard King. He is largely responsible for the incredible sound on that CD. I say that as objectively as possible, but I know that so many people in the sound business – people in the recording and sound production – have heard that CD and said it’s one of the best solo piano sounds.

It was just one of those magical constellations, where the hall, the Mozartsaal in Vienna Konzerthaus, great producer, great recording engineer, fantastic piano technician all came together. I cannot stress enough how wonderful it was to work with Stefan Knüpfer the piano technician, who’s like the equivalent of a horse whisperer for the piano. He’s like the piano whisperer, he’s like Yoda. My current duo partner, Aleksey Igudesman and I, called him “Q,” like the character from James Bond, because he had often come up with wonderful innovations for our shows. Of course, this was many years after *Fantasies and Delusions*. Stefan really enjoyed what we did and his genius lent itself to our madness and so many of the things that we did, from Rachmaninoff and Big Hands – those big pieces of wood that smash the piano keys without hurting them – to things like Do You Believe in Gravity, where we take off the piano leg, and it’s still floating without gravity. I owe a lot to Stefan Knüpfer for his inventions and help and on that recording [*Fantasies and Delusions*], he was instrumental, no pun intended, in making the piano sound amazing. So, I just had to do my bit, and not fuck up [laughs]. So, I was really in the middle of a dream team.

*4. Goh: In the sheet music, I noticed that only you were credited for the arrangement of all the pieces in the album except for the “Invention in C minor.” Would you be able to shed more light on the arrangement process? On which aspects of the music notation/arrangement process (melody, harmony, rhythm, form, figuration, etc.) did you help Mr. Joel the most?*

I didn’t feel that it was right to give myself arrangement credit for the “Invention in C minor” because really all I did there was just notate it note-for-note. Maybe I changed one note or suggested one small thing, but basically that is hundred-percent Billy. So, the tweaking of a few notes is not enough to qualify for an arrangement credit. I would never want to claim credit for something that I didn’t do.

The arrangement process was a very interesting and flexible one. I lived in New York, but he lived in Long Island, which is next door but it’s still a bit of a trick to commute.

Sometimes I would go over to his place and sometimes he would stay at my place a few days, and he would just play things to me and then I would start making notes like an amanuensis. I had a little recorder at the time so I would record everything. Sometimes he'd go into a studio and just play things, and then I get a recording. Sometimes he'd send me a recording or sometimes we'd be there together. We didn't have Skype back then, so we would just have calls. I'll call him up and I play him stuff over the speakerphone. So, the working process was very versatile and flexible.

He had a very clear, wonderful sense of melodic design, of melodic shape; and his harmonies are very natural and organic. And I kind of just had to be the right kind of glue and editor, really. Very often, he would have pieces of puzzles and some puzzles would be more intricately worked out while some would be more vague ideas. But, especially after starting to work with him more and more, I better understood what he wanted. I would come to him and play something and say, "Is this what you mean?" Then, he either said yes or no or we would tweak it there and then. So, I started to understand what he would mean if he played something a certain way. Obviously, I helped him with the notation because he can't notate. He can still read a few notes, but his reading skills are rusty because he stopped doing that when he decided to give up classical music and go into Rock. But I certainly brought all my knowledge of classical harmony, rhythm, organization, and form. I put things into a form. For me, structure is very important in any type of music. I tried my best to fit Billy's ideas – sometimes he had a galaxy of ideas. If you think about someone like Beethoven, classic fifth symphony, he is just working with four notes, but Billy is a different type of composer. He would have these long, grand melodies and many ideas to put into one piece. In some ways, some of the pieces could actually be two or three pieces. With the figuration and the accompaniment, he had very little idea of what the left hand could bring in piano writing. I always had wonderful teachers who told me about the importance of the left hand and, when you study what people like Chopin and Liszt do with the left hand, even if they are in an accompaniment role, they are never just in an accompaniment role. There's counter melodies, inner voicings, and movements of harmony. So, I tried to bring all of that where I thought it was relevant.

*5. Goh: From a handful of preexisting interviews, Mr. Joel said he was very thankful to a selected group of musicians in Vienna for offering him guidance and advice during the early stages of his classical compositions. Since you are part of the group, would you be able to share more details on the encounter, and also shed more light on Mr. Joel's compositional process and growth as a composer from the time you first met him until the release of the album in 2001?*

Joo: Billy does often say that he is thankful to a selected group of musicians in Vienna. And the handful he is referring to is my peeps, my cohorts. I met him through his brother, Alexander Joel, who is a phenomenal conductor, who is these days conducting in Covent Garden. His main thing is opera, but he is a wonderful conductor. Alex and I are best friends with Aleksey Igudesman, my duo partner right now (Igudesman and Joo), violinist Julian Rachlin, and a few others. We were kind of the Vienna gang. Billy would come to Vienna quite often, either because of the shows or because his father was still

alive at the time. We would just hang out. He always said we were more Rock musicians than all the Rock musicians that he knew, because we knew how to party hard and we would jam, not in a way that jazz or rock musicians would jam. We would just read through quartets, quintets, and sextets until five or six in the morning, in a wonderful place called Broadway Bar in Vienna. He would just sit there and listen to us and loved it. So, he had this other group of musicians that he could draw inspiration from, ask advice of, and for whom he could play some of his stuff and see how they would react.

I would say that I don't really know the order of those ten pieces. I'd have to really go back and check. I am not even sure if he knows the ordering in which he wrote each piece. I think the fragments of "Soliloquy" are definitely among the first ideas that he had for writing this type of music. But I would say that certainly he got better, and I think I got better, and I think together as a team we got better. So, for the pieces that we worked on towards the end of that two-year process, I feel they are maybe are more successful than the first ones. I didn't interfere too much in "Soliloquy" because a lot of that notation had been done. I just made the changes to "Soliloquy" that I thought made sense to me, which he approved. So, the version you hear on the album is the version that we worked on. But I remember the piece "Delusions," for example, which is part of the suite, was quite a late piece in the process. If you listen to those harmonies, they are a little more early 20th century/late 19th century rather than the more early 19th century style that he has throughout most of the album.

*6. Did Mr. Joel originally envision these compositions as study pieces or did he conceive them as works to be performed in a concert hall or an intimate/private setting?*

Joo: I am not sure whether Billy Joel originally envisioned these compositions as works to be performed in a concert or an intimate private setting. I mean in a way the true nature of that style, if one thinks about a lot the pieces written in the time of Schubert and Chopin, a lot of them were just to be played at those salons, Schubertiads, and those evenings where all the artists would gather and share ideas and play things for each other in a more intimate setting. I of course have performed these works in large concert halls as well as intimate settings, and I think that any piece of good music belongs anywhere: belongs on the street, belongs in Carnegie Hall, belongs in the living room, belongs in the stadium. There is no rule or category for where a certain piece of music can and should be played. I think Joel is primarily a composer. He is a maker of music. And I think it's more important for him to get these ideas down and get this music out - out in some way, out on paper, out on sound documents. So that he could release it from himself, the creator that he is. I don't know actually how much thought he put into whether these pieces would be a huge success, or they would be played by many pianists. I don't think that was on his agenda at all. He loved this music and he wanted to write it, he wanted to get it out. If he had the training that I had, he obviously wouldn't have needed someone like me, he would have just done it himself.

*7. How long did you and Mr. Joel worked together on the pieces? Were the musical details all laid out in a notated score before the recording take place or was it more of a real-time process of editing and arranging the music during the recording sessions?*

Joo: The process altogether for all ten pieces, when I came in, was about two years. It's really hard to say how long some pieces took. Some pieces were realized quite fast either because of the strength of his vision or because what he wanted for that piece was already clearly laid out. Or, I was just on an "inspiration-roll" and was just free-flowing and could understand what he wanted, so when I played it to him he was like, "that's it, that's great," and very little comment. So, where some things require more work, in some cases I think my bringing of a version of a musical idea then triggered his inspiration to then go and rework the piece, so then he'd come back and say, "you know what, I think that section doesn't need to be here. Well, I have come up with a new idea for that." So, it was a very organic and free-flowing process. Nothing was ever really set in stone, like no music was ever really set in stone. We have these "stone tablatures" of Beethoven and Bach, but we also know from documents that these composers themselves improvised massively when they performed their pieces. I am sure if Beethoven were alive, he would be making changes to his pieces, as would Mozart, Chopin, and everybody else.

*8. Goh: How long did the recording process take? Are there significant issues or interesting anecdotes that happened during the recording process? Why did you and Mr. Joel decided to re-record the pieces in Vienna?*

Joo: The recording process, the actual recording of the album, took five days. We had ten pieces to record and like I said, it was with the dream team of Steven Epstein and Richard King. It was such a wonderful atmosphere for anybody that visited that booth, including Stefan Knüpfer, the piano technician who worked on that project, and was involved in many recordings. I just spoke to him a few weeks ago. We are recollecting that time and he still remembers the incredible atmosphere in the work environment and the studio. But the recording process takes time. I am not one of those artists that can get it in one take. Maybe now I can come closer to just one take, but back then I certainly needed three or four takes, and to do several inserts. So, very often the overall takes that we chose were usually around Take Three. So, it takes time. But fortunately, we had a generous support and budget from Columbia Records (Sony Classical), and Don DeVito was there endorsing the project. So, we had a very decent amount of time to work on the pieces, and to just get them right, get the sound right, get everything right. I am well-aware that that was a luxury – not a setting that many people have today.

Well, then of course comes the editing process, which I did a little bit of with Steven a few days right after the last take. But then, we didn't finish, and he had to leave. He entrusted me with the DAT tapes and so I pretty much made all the edits for the pieces. Then they came out with a first draft, which is customary. Then I was back in New York and I went to the studio in New York and we just worked our way through it, I think maybe like two long, late nights seeing the sun rise. We worked on getting the edits right, so that it was a beautiful-sounding album. So, the overall recording process, from setting



up the mikes, to Take One, to the final edit, I would say maybe, from my recollection, took at least four weeks.

It was my idea to record in Vienna. I had spent two of the most personal years of my life, and very special years, from 93' to 95' in Vienna. There I formed very strong friendships and met Billy for the first time in 94' when he was on his *River of Dreams* tour. There's also where his father lived before he passed away. It was also during 94' to 95' that I was studying with someone called Oleg Maisenberg. It was his 50th birthday. He played a series of twelve concerts to commemorate his birthday at the Mozartsaal at the Konzerthaus. These concerts made a really strong impression on me as did the hall. The hall has become synonymous with amazing piano recital sound and atmosphere. I also thought that, to give Billy's album that extra classical spirit and credibility, and to continue that tradition that he so much wanted to pay homage to, well, there was no place better than to record in Vienna. He wrote a song called "Vienna Waits For You." There were just so many connections why. His brother was still studying and working in Vienna. So, it just made sense to record in Vienna – one of the best concert halls in the world, there's where we met, there's where Beethoven, Schubert, and all of those guys were from or spent most of their years. So that was really the reason. When I mentioned that I'd like to do it there, of course Billy said "yeah, that makes sense." So, I was very lucky and very happy that he agreed to my suggestion.

*9. Goh: Do you and Mr. Joel have plans to collaborate again sometime in the near future? Since Fantasies and Delusions is Mr. Joel's first classical album, I was wondering if you were aware of any future plans or directions that Mr. Joel would like to take for his classical music ventures.*

Joo: Well, certainly over the years, Billy and I stayed in touch. We are constantly in touch, either by e-mail, or when I am over in the States I go to see him either in his home in Long Island or wherever he is. Sometimes he comes over to Europe, so I'll bump into him or go to see him in London. I know that this summer he will be around Europe so we will definitely meet up.

I don't know... I don't think he has any plans to record another album. I mean, with that being said, he could decide at any point to do otherwise. But for almost 17 years he hasn't recorded anything. But I know that recently a very good friend of mine, Tristan Schulze, who is a composer, arranger, and lives in Vienna as well, has orchestrated one of his pieces. I think it's "Waltz No. 3 (For Lola)." I think Billy wants to have his pieces orchestrated. So, Tristan is going to do that. Thus, *Fantasies and Delusions* will have another life in the form of an orchestrated version, which is again, in keeping with the tradition. I mean, so many Liszt pieces and Ravel pieces were orchestrated, even Brahms's. So, there will be some kind of process continuing with *Fantasies and Delusions*. I just heard the orchestration of Waltz No. 3 and I thought it was fantastic. It needs the right touch, and I think Tristan has that.

But what we collaborated on though was with my duo, Igudesman and Joo. Billy jumped on stage in Carnegie Hall and that was it. He knew that we had a concert there. He's been

to several of our shows and is a big fan. Actually, he's seen me doing my comedy-theatrical side since the time we started working together. I was doing little gigs in a place called Cornelia Street Cafe and he came to quite a few of those. So that was of course very special and he saw this different side of me while we were working together. And he's followed my career and all my different steps. So, when we had our Carnegie concert he said, "hey guys, you know, I'd love to jump on stage with you and do something." So, we created a version of his song, "Baby Grand," which he wrote for Ray Charles. We do all kind of I&J mock mashups of his song, "Baby Grand." Recently, the violinist in my duo, Aleksey Igudesman, jumped on stage when he performed in the Madison Square Garden. There is talk about us doing that again as a duo, jumping on stage, or him jumping on stage with us.

Another instance when our duo collaborated with Billy was Music Traveler, a mobile app and platform we founded to make rehearsal spaces more accessible, anytime and anywhere in the world. Billy is a special ambassador for that project and it's a project that he's endorsed and there have been talks about his foundation being involved somehow with Music Traveler. So, when we explained what Music Traveler was, he totally got it, he totally understood it. Even the Piano Man himself has struggled with finding places where he could play and I remembered when we were working, even for the legend that he is, it was still logistically challenging to find pianos where we could rehearse. So, he is a true supporter of that. He knows that the app is not just to help people play piano or rehearse music, but it's gonna bring the world of music closer together. That's what we all want.

*10. Goh: What aspects of Mr. Joel's classical compositions did you find most innovative and refreshing (form, melody, rhythm, harmony, program, etc.)? In your opinion, what are the characteristics that are unique about these pieces that makes them different/stand out from similarly-styled music of the previous times? What are the qualities in the music that you feel really showcased Mr. Joel's compositional voice? Please feel free to cite any specific examples that comes to your mind.*

Joo: I think what makes those ten pieces special is that they are very earnest, they are unashamed, they are sincere. This is a man who deeply loves music, who doesn't claim to be any kind of connoisseur, any expert. He's well-aware of his limitations and yet has a phenomenal ear and musical imagination, fantastic sense for melody and line, and for a certain dramatic sort of narrative. He is a music man. And so, he could write anything, as he has, whether it be pop song, or classical homage, or pastiche, or so on. Whatever he would write would have a personal touch, and moreover an unabashed, sincere, honest touch. And I personally think, regardless of my relationship with Billy, anybody that writes that kind of music deserves to be heard.

There's way too much fake and artificial music out there, even when the music is well-crafted. Even sometimes there is music that you can analyze and say, "wow, what a perfect composition," "what a well-crafted piece," "what a genius who wrote this," but in my opinion doesn't make the grade. An example would be for me someone like Stravinsky; of course, it's a very personal taste. I happen to like Stravinsky, I happen to

think he is a genius, yet not everything he touched, actually almost nothing he touched moves me, although I recognized his genius. *Rite of Spring* is one of my favorite pieces... I don't know if that example makes any sense at all. What I find endearing about the pieces on *Fantasies and Delusions* is that Billy is not pretending to be anything else but someone who just loves this music and has an imagination for it.

*11. Goh: One of my favorite pieces from the album is "Air (Dublinesque)." In fact, it is the very first piece that I heard from the album. I am wondering if you could share some insights on the folk influences in the music. I am also interested about Mr. Joel's and your intentions behind the writing of the piece and its placement as the last track in the album.*

Joo: Well, the "Air (Dublinesque)" is probably the piece that's closest to Billy's original, personal voice. It has that Celtic, Irish thing. Although he is not Irish, he has an affinity for that kind of "Welt" ["world" in German], shall we say. You hear that kind of similar tonal language in several of his pop songs. So, in a way the air, or at least the melody of the air, could very well have been one of his ballads. And of course, it has the American touch in the faster middle sections. You can hear influences of Copland, Bernstein – it's very American-inspired music and as you say, folk-influence.

The placement of it as the last track... well, I do know that I was the one that came up with the order, of course everything again would be with Billy's and Steven Epstein's approval as he was the designated producer. But I have very specific ideas. I was very adamant that it should start with "Reverie" and I was very specific that it should end with air. The air was one of the last pieces that he wrote in that series. I don't know if it was number ten but it's certainly close. And just from the language point of view, I felt that it deserved pride of place for being last. It has more feet in the 20th century or the early 21st century. The rest of the pieces are more influenced by the 19th century and of course the "Invention" harkens back to the Baroque era or at least Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach.

Actually, I don't know what his intention was in writing "Air (Dublinesque)." I could be very wrong about this, but I am assuming it was inspired by a woman who either was Irish or looked Irish. But then again, I could just be making this up. So probably not the best source to go by [laughs].

*12. Goh: As you are probably aware, many music critics and academics seem to take issue with the musical originality of the album and many view the compositions as inferior versions of the works of Chopin, Rachmaninoff, etc. I am curious to hear your opinion and insight on the issue.*

Joo: Music critics and academics says it all. The critic is there to criticize. Academics are only there to see what's formulaic, what's being done, what's scholarly. None of those things have to do with emotion. Academia is important and a reference point, but any true original was never academic. So, I don't really give a damn what music critics and academics think and I am pretty sure Billy doesn't care. He knew that he'd be entering a

very vulnerable position by going into a language and medium of music that he was not well-versed in. But he didn't care. And I think they are very beautiful pieces. They are pieces that have brought many to pay closer attention to the music of Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Schumann, and so on. Just the fact that a figure such as Billy is an ambassador who endorses and loves classical music has brought many people to wonder, "Hey, what are these pieces? Where does it come from? Where does it originate? Do these harken back to the time of Schumann?" I think that's already great. No disrespect to people like Hummel or Meyerbeer, but you know, if I listen to Hummel or Meyerbeer, I am not really psyched to listen to more classical music, but I would want to know more about classical music when I listen to Billy Joel, although I could be very biased because I am the one playing it. Even when it's not me playing, other people have recorded these pieces, and some have played them very well. I think the proof of the pudding is once you have that music in the hands of various people, you can see what stands against the test of quality.

*Fantasies and Delusions* is a beautiful-sounding album – best dream team, recording engineer, producer, fantastic piano technician, wonderful composer, singer-songwriter – great team behind it. I did my very, very best to bring all my knowledge and sense of quality to the arrangements and to the playing on the day of the recording. It's something I am very proud of and I am very happy that this album continues to stimulate people's ears, hearts, and minds.

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