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SCLERA: UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

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SCLERA: UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors

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ABSTRACT

Grief is a natural response to the passing of a loved one or someone who has had a significant effect on one's life. As the process of grieving is rather personal, there lies this unexplainable barrier that withholds people from uniting together, but rather seeking isolation as a way to internally cope with these negative experiences. One way to cope can be to channel or express those internal feelings through forms of music and art. Our focus will be concentrating on providing a musical and visual experience through a music record titled Sclera, which will be accompanied with an art composition detailing the journey that the listeners will experience. The tracklist features a combination of lyrical and instrumental songs, primarily inspired by varying genres such as cinematic, jazz, and classical. When listening to these forms of music, we analyze the methodology, what inspired them to compose their own songs. Through this research process, we can gain a better understanding of the artists' thought process or creative vision. Through this musical journey of an album, we hope that listeners are able to process their own experiences of grief and gain a more defined perspective on accepting the passing of life.

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James Son, Fellow Honors Student, Co-producer, and Album Cover Artist

David Kim, Group Member and Featured Artist and Vocalist

Grief is a sacred moment of time, magical yet apprehensive; it speaks to all of us as the transcendent bridge between the passing of life and newness in death...

In all walks of life, everyone experiences grief, whether it be in the form of the loss of a loved one or the loss of something treasured or cared for deeply. The proposed capstone project will be revolving around the grief experienced through the loss of a loved one and how to find acceptance of death and acknowledging the change it can bring to oneself. As the experiences of grief are intensely introspective and singular in its nature, the project presented will be a music concept album that details on a personal story of the loss of a father and the corresponding internal struggles that were faced. This project will be titled Sclera: Understanding Grief. This capstone project is a joint project with my brother James Son, a fellow capstone student, and my cousin David Kim who will also be contributing to the work on this project under our music group Sclera.

The title Sclera was conceived through a double meaning. Sclera in its very base definition is the protective layering that covers the human eye and shields it from the outside environment. We brought that idea to symbolize the barrier that people hold up when they have experienced loss. As with our own experiences, people who have experienced deep loss naturally want to protect themselves and to keep their emotions withheld or secret from others. There is a certain shame or awkwardness that arises when people talk of loss; a sense of pity that looms over the person like a sore thumb. In this manner, the sclera shields our eyes from being perceived in that light and thus others would not have to unnecessarily feel pity on us. This facade that we put up cannot last forever, however, and the supposed pity that we would feel from others is only our own perception of ourselves. We are trying to break that notion of secrecy or shame and being vulnerable to others by introducing them to what we experienced

through the loss of a father, to have the outside world understand our grieving process. In this regard, Sclera no longer defines this inexplicable barrier that we put up ourselves, but rather symbolizes the mirror or reflections of our sight or vision that invites others to see what we have seen. We take this as an educational opportunity to tell others who have grieved that they too can tell a story about their personal journeys through grief. We are bringing more awareness about death, as this is a difficult topic or theme to express or discuss, by showing the audience that death does not always have to feel taboo or closed off but rather an opportunity to understand more on your inner emotions or conscience to become a new person through the experience of grief. As our group name suggests, we hope to create a medium in which listeners who have experienced grief find solace in that they are not alone and that through grief they too can have a vivid or true experience of recognizing and processing their emotions, thoughts, and resolve.

As our story for our concept album revolves around the loss of a father, I believe it is important in exploring the concept of grief and its repercussions on the human psyche. In her journal, *Death as Transformation: Examining Grief Under the Perspective of the Kubler-Ross in the Selected Movies*, Saman Salah explores the various stages of grief and the effects of such on the human mind. By harnessing Kubler Ross's various stages of grief (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance), Salah explains how there are no definite beginnings or ends to each stage but all stages can be experienced at different points of time through the grieving process. Salah rationalizes that grief as the catalyst for change and how acceptance of death imbues those who have experienced loss with the courage to move on and find newfound appreciation with their own lives. As Kubler Ross defines grief as rather "spiritual, a religious journey", our album will paint a spatial out of world experience to provide audiences a sense of

freeness which will help in immersing themselves in an audiovisual journey of our story through grief (Salah).

When exploring the origins of concept albums in music, some of the earliest notions of a concept album dates back to the late 1960s through rock music. According to Alon Schab in his journal, *The Concept Album and the early Music Revival*, concept albums began with a defined unity throughout the entire soundtrack through a narrative that has repeated musical motifs and lyrical themes that seem to bridge the album as a whole from beginning to an end. Famous examples of albums such as the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's* and Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. Over time, however, artists like David Munrow would compose his concept albums through unifying various melodies and techniques throughout each of his separate songs in order to create a narrative that does not rely on a singular idea. This allowed other artists to explore greater options of sounds and ideas to tell their story across many songs that sound widely different from one another if heard separately yet seem to all fit under a common narrative taken as an album as a whole. Other composers like Pedro Memelsdorff introduced the idea of expressing music as a metaphysical concept through the trilogy of his work *Mala Punica* where he explains the two of his songs "Dame [giving] rise to a centrifugal expansion to the furthest possible boundaries of instrumental improvisation and of the feverish diminution techniques of the late 14th century; in contrast, the intent of Beauté is rather that of a serene but unrelenting reflection upon its own structure" (Schab). Through these efforts, composers were able to bend the structure of composition and sounds and tell a story or melody with varying complexity and tones. This inspires us in our efforts in creating music where we utilize a general mix of sound techniques from orchestral, soulful, experimental, ambience music, and various percussion instruments in order to weave a story that paints the imagery and feelings of every song to the listener. Some of

the instrumentation that will be used will be a mix of live instrumentation as well as digitally produced sounds from LogicPro, a software music making program.

While some concept albums utilize sounds to explore a poetic narrative or to describe a certain emotion or feeling, others developed entire stories or explored greater social or political narratives. A notable example is from Fumio Hayasaka's Music for 'Sanshō the Bailiff' as studied in the journal *A Score Full of Grief: Fumio Hayasaka's Music for "Sanshō the Bailiff" (1954)* by Michael W. Harris. Although "*Sanshō the Bailiff*" was a film adaptation of a traditional Japanese tale, Hayasaka utilized this medium to tell a separate story about the postwar struggles Japan had to endure after World War 2 due to the consequences of their past ideals of imperialism and political drive of conquest. He weaves traditional Japanese percussive and wind instruments to symbolize the traditional ideals that many Japanese nationalists held onto and to critique their stubbornness that led to Japan's demise. He then juxtaposes this with Western orchestral sections to introduce the change that the West is bringing to Japan, but ultimately leaves both instrumental styles inconclusive as a way for listeners to determine for themselves which culture they will identify with amidst the political and social turmoil Japan was facing. Although our story will revolve around our inner thoughts and experiences about grief and the loss of a father, we wanted to tell that story in a manner that touches more on the spiritual aspects of death and the acceptance of that. The challenge is that the story becomes incredibly abstract in imagery and audio-sounds. We would want to create music that not only defines our emotions and feelings, but also paints for the listeners a world that revolves around a magical and fantastical journey. In this way our story becomes two-fold. One of our interpersonal and emotional journeys through grief and the other the spiritual and out of body experience of death and life itself.

Our approach to our project will be done through a music album for a variety of reasons. As our message is about allowing oneself to be vulnerable to tell a story on their journey through grief, I found music to be the perfect medium that everyone can access. Through streaming platforms like Spotify, people can easily listen to our project and thus provide us a greater net of listeners who can potentially find our music album helpful to their grieving process as well. The music making process will be done through LogicPro and Audio Spitfire. These are audio and music software applications that will be utilized to compose and record our soundtrack. Some special accessories needed for our project include speakers, adaptors, keyboards, a laptop for our software program, soundproofing equipment, and recording microphone setup. As a lot of these appliances are vital to the realization of our project, my brother and I will be applying to various scholarships and grants to collect potential funding. As this is a group collective Capstone project, there are a lot of logistical problems that need to be solved. The biggest of these problematic factors are timing. I am planning on meeting with my faculty mentor around once or twice a month for the spring quarter and future quarters, and for the summer, we will be meeting through Zoom. As for the album making itself, I am planning to create 10 sketches or short samples of songs for the spring quarter. This will give me time to not only practice developing and learning how to use the software, but also explore various sounds and instruments to help plan out my project as a whole. The summer schedule will be to have complete songs recorded and complete so that the creation of our album can be realized and we will be ready to finalize our project once fall quarter begins. The fall quarter will be time for us to finalize the sound and overall tone for the project, as well as start writing the draft for our capstone report. Subsequently, the winter schedule will look similar in finalizing our music project, but also incorporating art (James' part) with our album. Hopefully through the next winter quarter, we

will be able to create a complete vinyl for our album. The spring quarter of next year will be to present our work for our Capstone presentation. This will come in the form of a small music concert where we will first talk about the Capstone project itself and our respective roles in our project, and then we will be releasing our album for the first public listen. After this point, the album will be released on media platforms such as Youtube and Spotify so that the broader audience will be able to access the music as well. In conclusion, we hope that through Sclera, listeners will too be able to find solace in their grief and know that they are not alone in this journey of life. Through this project, our Sclera music group wishes to spread hope and love for the ones who grieve.

SCLERA ALBUM

1. Wake (intro)
2. Dedication (Interpretation of Chopin Prelude Op. 28 No. 16)
3. Lethe (feat. David Kim)
4. 11.17.23
5. 민들레 (Dandelion)

ALBUM LINK

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yClAsOu0YEeygjWht-bVT3jWGFHAz7h?usp=drive_1

[ink](#)

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