

## Homebound

music, Polina Nazaykinskaya | lyrics, Konstantin Soukhovestki

I wrote this song in conjunction with a close friend who is from Russia like I am. We share very similar feelings about being in a constant state of motion, and a constant state of seeking. The pursuit of music started us on our respective journeys. In a way it has also given us a place to call home as we continue to wander.

Trav'ling, trav'ling....  
searching alone  
For a home of my own

Trav'ling, trav'ling....  
W'thout courage or fear  
Beyond horizon or near. Ohh.

For the wind is my true home  
As I gate-check my life  
And it comforts me while I roam  
Through the night and sunrise. Ahh.

I once lived in The North  
Where mountains and sea  
Were so vast....and the earth  
Under ice you won't see

I once lived in The East  
In the sunrise abode  
Where blossoms on trees  
Were so white... like it's snowed. Ohhhh.

I once lived in The West  
With its forests and reefs  
Yet I was but a guest  
Wand'ring towards the cliffs

But I long for The South  
Where the warmth of the sun  
Is eternal... Then search for my home  
will be done.

## Copper Rings

music, Izzi Ramkissoon | lyrics, Izzi Ramkissoon and Melisa Tien

I was born in Brooklyn and raised on Staten Island, in a Trinidadian household where I was surrounded by Trinidadian dialect. Transitioning into school, I began to code switch between the Trinidadian dialect and the American. Growing up, I'd learned to say 'batteries' from newly immigrated friends and family. I realized quickly that not everyone spoke the same. The piece begins with an image of Indian bangles—rings made of copper—which is the same material the Statue of Liberty is made of. Copper is highly conductive—where transfer and struggle begin. Similarly, young immigrants may struggle with maintaining a sense of their culture while learning to navigate a new one. Much of the text here derives from electrical principles and the operation of a battery. In addition, the song incorporates electronics in the way it is presented in live performance. Through iteration, the piece grows, producing variations both linear and nonlinear.

### VERSE 1

Copper rings staining the soul  
 from brown to green,  
 metallic surface of  
 too thin Liberty.  
 Threading wire  
 through a conductor,  
 flagging the terminal.  
 -Be ready to transfer-  
 one to the next  
 to the next  
 to the next light.  
 From within,  
 an idea:  
 two plates,  
 two separate states.  
 The gap bridged.  
 Each cell connecting  
 two extremes.  
 Things that were owed,  
 a flickering will.  
 Reacting, attracting, draining.  
 The concern of a citizen can kill.  
 The lights dim.  
 The currents cannot build.

### CHORUS

In dark, opposition grows.  
 In light, everything shows.

### VERSE 2

A graphite outline,  
 humans intertwined.  
 Generation,  
 generations,  
 plus and minus each time.  
 Coils around grandmother's arms:  
 pulsing,

amplifying  
 her memory of the ground.  
 A nod to a cycle,  
 an ode to a series  
 of connections wet and oxidized.  
 Resist, remember  
 the potential threat:  
 terminal corrosion.  
 Forgive, forgive, forgive  
 and not forget.

#### CHORUS

In dark, opposition grows.  
 In light, everything shows.

#### CON-SECTION

Con-struction  
 Con-cession  
 Con-nection  
 Con-servation  
 Con-clusion  
 Con-versation  
 Con-solidation  
 Con-firmation

#### NOISE SECTION

Bat-ter-y, Batteries, Bat-trees, Bat-tree, battery.

#### BRIDGE

Collectors connecting, all-consuming progression.  
 Emitters spitting, ever-changing regression.  
 Push, pull. Push, pull. Push, pull.  
 Time. Connect. Time. Discharge.

#### CHORUS

In dark, opposition grows.  
 In light, everything shows.

## Premier Car Service

music, Jorge Sosa | lyrics, Melisa Tien

This piece is a distillation of things that happened to me, and things that happened to someone I know, long before services like Uber existed. To me, it is a comedic story told by a great storyteller about a quintessential scene that happens every day in NYC, one that's equally frustrating and amusing. At the end, the hustle is so good, you almost want to forgive the driver. I don't see this driver of an unlicensed taxi as a villain, so much as someone who has learned this specific way of playing the survival game. The passenger, for his part, is wide-eyed and trusting, like many of us who arrived in NYC from elsewhere. Between the passenger and the driver, in the middle of the hustle, a real connection occurs. And, as Melisa has pointed out, they kind of represent 'newer' and 'more seasoned' versions of the same person.

### PASSENGER

I have a story.

What a story I have for you

Of the first time I came to this Sleepless City.

Are you sitting down?

I gazed out the window

Of flight twenty one,

I can't wait to get off this plane.

The moment I landed

My heart was racing!

American soil!

I'll always remember

those luminous letters:

JFK.

Which way to the city?

Which way to the world?

Which way to baggage claim?

I see them descending,

The bags from Flight Twenty One.

Here comes my stuff.

All I own

Comes falling with a thump,

Rolling by.

I hoist it from the side.

Ear to ear I smile.

Toward this new New York.

New York, New York.

### DRIVER

Hey cousin!

Cousin, are you lost?

What are you looking for?

PASSENGER

M-one-sixteen  
To First and Paladino,  
where my tía's waiting.  
Tell me something,  
What is an M-one-sixteen?

DRIVER

Where are you from?  
You sound like someone I used to know.  
Someone from the coast of Oaxaca.

PASSENGER

I *am* from the coast of Oaxaca!  
How can this be?

DRIVER

You better come with me.  
Someone may try to scam you.  
Get in the car.  
I'll take you there.

PASSENGER+DRIVER

We are both from the coast of Oaxaca  
We have the same blood.  
Could this be true?  
We laugh. We cry.  
We are both from the coast of Oaxaca.

PASSENGER

He talks  
He drives  
He used to be a farmer

DRIVER

I talk  
I drive  
I used to be a farmer

PASSENGER+DRIVER

Now a cab driver!  
Could this be true?  
American soil!

DRIVER

Cousin, listen.  
Fourteen years ago  
I came to New York  
to make some money  
to help my mother.  
She needed an operation.  
I never returned.  
And here I am, young again—  
You are me, young again.

PASSENGER

I am you, young again.

DRIVER

Blood of my blood!

PASSENGER+DRIVER

Blood of my blood!

Blood of my blood!

DRIVER

How I wish I could feel the ocean breeze  
Upon my face.

What I would give to feel the soft sand  
Beneath my feet.

PASSENGER

I carry the sun and the sea with me.

DRIVER

You carry the sun

PASSENGER

The sun and the sea with me

PASSENGER+DRIVER

From our homeland,

From our home.

DRIVER

How can I thank you  
for taking me back?  
For taking me home?

PASSENGER

You know, I could use some help.

I need a job.

Do you have one?

I would work hard for you.

I would work hard for you.

DRIVER

Listen, cousin.

Meserole Avenue in Brooklyn.

You'll go to any hair salon  
where they sound like us.

They'll sell you a phone,  
unblocked, prepaid in cash,  
no questions asked.

And for a social security number?

You'll go to Roosevelt Avenue.

I know a guy.  
They look like the real thing.  
And if you need a job,  
My cousin works in construction.  
He needs men like you.  
He pays in cash, no questions asked  
Here is his number.

PASSENGER

We are here at my tía's house.  
We're here.  
(I hug him).

DRIVER

One more thing, cousin.

PASSENGER

What's that?

DRIVER

You owe two hundred dollars for this ride.

PASSENGER

Two hundred dollars? How can that be?

DRIVER

I have a boss that I need to pay.  
There were tolls along the way.  
You'll make it up in no time  
working for my cousin.

PASSENGER

I know now that ride cost no more than sixty.  
But he was blood of my blood

DRIVER

Yes he was blood of my blood.

PASSENGER

Blood of my blood.

DRIVER

Yes he was blood of my blood.

PASSENGER+DRIVER

But he was blood of my blood,  
Blood of my blood!  
Welcome to New York!  
New York, New York!  
New York!  
New York!

PASSENGER

That's my story!

Do you want to hear it again?



## Speaking of Water

music, Carolyn Chen | lyrics, Melisa Tien

This song was inspired by an experience I had traveling to China for the first time as an adult. Growing up in the U.S., I had heard a lot about China. Meanwhile, in China, the extended family I was about to meet for the first time had heard a lot about the U.S. There's so much room for possibility (and error) in that space between imagining and first-hand experience. Melisa zeroed in on that uniquely hazy space. She also conceptualized the ocean, the vast body of water which separates/connects the people in the song, as a Chinese character—which is written with three initial strokes, to indicate a word having to do with water.

(looking eastward)

An unfinished sea—  
three strokes  
to show  
I am speaking of water,  
two more for  
the beginning of infinity.  
This is all I know.  
This is all I know.  
This is all I know.

I know nothing  
of where I'm from,  
where I'm from,  
where I'm from.  
I only know where I go,  
where I'm told  
I should be:

The other side  
of the sea,  
where a cousin  
waits for me.  
Until recently  
I thought that it would be  
later that I'd travel back  
to my birth country.  
No memories connect me  
to my birth country.

Soon, I will arrive.

(looking westward)

An unfinished sea—  
three strokes  
to show  
I am thinking of water,  
two more for  
the beginning of infinity.  
This is how I dream.  
This is how I dream.  
Dream.  
This is how I dream.  
This is how I dream.

I know only  
what I see,  
what I see,  
and what is told to me  
through a monitor  
or screen.

The other side  
of the sea  
might as well be a wilderness.  
Until recently  
I thought that it might be  
hard to get a glimpse of your  
beautiful country;  
hard to understand such a  
beautiful country.

Soon, cousin arrives  
from there to here.

A home not home.  
A home unfamiliar.

I wonder  
as clouds rolls by my window,  
roll by my window:  
'What should I expect?  
What will this week bring?  
What will this week bring?  
Who remembers me?  
Who remembers me?  
Who remembers me?  
Who remembers me?/'

I fear that past homes  
do not survive.  
What of my home?  
Is life the same,  
as unchanging as I've heard?  
Is life the same,  
as unchanging as I've heard,  
as I've heard it to be,  
as I've heard it to be?

I hear people laughing  
in our common tongue.  
I invent what they say:  
'Here, we're above everything:  
wanting,  
belonging,  
identity.'  
People laughing aloud  
on a plane  
using words  
I will never understand.

Here,  
I'm like an unfinished sea:  
three strokes,  
we are speaking of water, speaking,  
speaking of water, speaking,  
speaking of water, speaking,  
speaking of water,  
speaking of water,

Soon, America will appear.

I wonder  
as haze sneaks by my window:  
'What will cousin think?  
What will she expect?  
Will she feel at home?  
Will she feel at home?  
Will she feel at home?  
Will she feel at home?'

I fear that life there  
is not like life here.  
What is life there?  
Is choice as vast,  
as unending,  
Is choice as vast,  
as unending,  
unending, unending,  
as I've heard it to be,  
as I've heard it to be?

I hear people laughing  
in our common tongue.  
They are laughing aloud.  
'Here, we're above everyone:  
neighbors,  
police,  
the government,  
gods.'  
People laughing aloud  
on a break  
on the roof  
of a nearby factory.

Here,  
I dream I'm across the sea.  
three strokes,  
we are speaking,  
speaking of water, speaking,  
speaking of water, speaking,  
speaking of water, speaking,  
speaking,

speaking of water, speaking.  
Two more:  
the beginning of infinity.  
Infinity.

speaking,  
speaking of water.  
Two more:  
the beginning of infinity.  
Infinity.

### A Friend and a Zorro

music, Kamala Sankaram | lyrics, Melisa Tien (based on an interview w/ Dr. R. Sankaram)

In a wide-ranging interview I'd conducted with my dad—who opened up about immigrating here from Southern India in the early 70s—there was this gem about him wanting to be an actor rather than a doctor, and how he enjoyed dressing up as Zorro for his patients. Melisa combined these details from the interview with what I knew of my dad's relationship to his own father, and crafted this song that reconciles the impulses to heal and entertain that are a big part of who he is.

As a boy I could see myself on a movie screen  
along with pretty places, pretty people wearing fancy clothes,  
speaking fancy words.  
I believed in make-believe.  
I believed.  
But my father did not believe.  
He did not believe in me.

As a man, nephrology was my occupation,  
setting in motion a journey from Andhra Pradesh to California.  
I journeyed for my father  
but I still believed in make-believe.  
I believed.  
He still did not believe in me.

One day I drove from home to Hollywood to see for myself  
pretty places, pretty people  
wearing fancy clothes,  
speaking fancy words.  
They were not as I remembered!  
Merely sets, actors, costumes, and scripts.  
How could they be so artificial—  
was this what I once believed?

In my field, there is only truth—in life, in death, in pain.  
In my field I am true to my patients.  
I tell them what I know.  
I tell them I believe in them.  
They believe in me.

In my field I am true to my patients,  
except for that time  
I dressed as Zorro,  
that time I dressed as Zorro to make them smile.  
A pretty cape, hat, shirt, and mask.

I was wearing fancy clothes,  
speaking fancy words.  
They forgot where they were  
and asked me for my autograph.  
That day, I was a doctor no more.  
I was a friend.  
A friend and a Zorro.  
I've been a friend and Zorro.

Movies may be bright and synthetic.  
Technicolor dreams may fade, exposed to reality.  
But I have come to believe  
saving life is a kind of art.

**Sleep, Sleep Nations**

music, Tamar Muskal | lyrics, Stavit Allweis

I made a personal choice to travel away from the place where I grew up—away from beloved family. I left home to be with a lover, and carried my memories of 'home' in the form of sounds, smells, and images. These have never left me.

If you up and move  
from land to land,  
born in the sky  
is a third eye.

You, who've done it,  
will understand.

I still run, a child,  
the cool alleys  
to a Thursday market  
awash in sun.

My sense of spice,  
my scent of thyme.  
Cardamom,  
coriander,  
my grandmother's tongue,  
my grandfather's wine,  
the sweet smell  
of greens cooking—  
a type  
that here cannot be found.

Dried limes,  
a sense of endless time.

I still hear the voices  
unencumbered,  
arabesques of laughter.  
Fabrics hang in colors  
in front of every house.

Sleep, sleep nations,  
as the crow flies.

It's only seven centimeters

from here to very far.

Continents of clouds  
sweep by, and beyond them  
continents of sand  
on continents of water  
shifting under hand.

We land where we land,  
adrift like mushroom spores,  
like dandelion feathers  
in the sky.

To love a home  
is to love a home,  
no matter where it lies.

My grandmother's smile.  
Or is it my mother's?  
The warmth of their  
collective hands.

In words made for music,  
they still lull me to sleep  
in silent sound.

Home is a poem now,  
a childhood museum  
kept sacred  
in fairy tale land.

And you, my new lover,  
took my arm so briskly,  
nearly pulled it out,  
to storm your highways,  
grinding our motors,  
spinning time.

I am smitten,  
drowned in your accent,  
your foreign charm,  
the sugar veiled aggression  
as your flight  
aims your plight

to the top of the beyond.

Home is a poem now.



## Exile/Home

music and lyrics, Joshua Cerdania

After a bit of time in the U.S., I've returned to my home country of the Philippines. I'd emigrated from here in hopes of furthering my career, wound up in New York City, then returned when the pandemic hit. A big part of me remains in New York, and I'm constantly wondering what might bring me back.

The sun that shines here is the same  
 As the one in my former world.  
 Same moon at night.  
 Even the air is the same,  
 But at some point  
 Over the ocean it might become  
 A hurricane.  
 And this place takes all the impact.  
 You only ever see one side of the moon,  
 Anywhere in the world.  
 The constellations are the same too.  
 Sometimes people even act the same—  
 People are mostly the same wherever you go.  
 They just look a little diff'rent.  
 But oh, the place  
 Is so diff'rent indeed.  
 There are no seasons.  
 I miss the weather changes.  
 And what is this language?  
 Both strange and familiar,  
 Which I understand  
 Completely but I cannot think in.  
 It's not the same;  
 It's not the same at all.  
 I miss the cold.  
 There is no fall or winter.  
 The days are much longer.  
 Nights are much sweeter.  
 I've seen it all before  
 So it might as well stay dark.  
 I've been here—how long?  
 I've been here—how long?  
 I've been here—how long?  
 How long?  
 To what will I go back?  
 To what will I go back?

The sun that shines here is the same  
 As the one in my former world.  
 For what would I go back?  
 For what would I go?  
 For what would I?  
 For what would I go back?

### Passage

music, Leyna Marika Papach | lyrics, Leyna Marika Papach and Melisa Tien

Being an immigrant to both Japan and the U.S. has shaped how I feel the world and exist in my body. In my life, I have never been culturally rooted, and felt myself as 'floating'. Yet, being a musician, I have always had a visceral connection to the undercurrents of life. I left the U.S. to live in Japan from age 5-14. As a mixed race person, I was not fully Japanese there, and when I came back here, I was an 'other'. I eventually became okay with this, relying on myself as my only compass, observing the world from a distance. The characters in this song each have different stories to tell, but are all an embodiment of the same yearning--to be reunited with a part of themselves that they were forced to separate from. No matter how fragmented the person, the fire in the human spirit that cries out for love is beautiful to me.

1

This skin  
wraps me in a space of my own.  
Words that leave my mouth  
just fall to the floor.  
Nine years  
since I carried you.  
I wrapped you in my skin,  
your breath as my own.  
You changed your mind  
and slipped away.  
I watched you get picked up  
by someone else's fingers.

2

I breathe. I breathe.

3

I breathe. I breathe.

1

What keeps me here  
Is a cord from my belly  
Searching for its other end!  
Ah, roaming through this place  
I call my home  
Holding in my heart  
The day that I will get to see you again.  
I breathe.  
I breathe.

3

Ah, I breathe.

2

Blue light reads as purple,  
Reflecting off my blood.  
The last thing that I asked you  
Was if you wanted a napkin.  
We lay here alone,  
Twisted up in metal  
Just a little bit alive,  
No voice of our own.  
I would not say  
That my life is null

But why not me  
Instead of you?

1

I breathe. I breathe.

3

I breathe. I breathe.

2

The sky tries to pull me up  
Through the night  
But they told me  
That I have to stay.  
Ah, crawling back to life  
I call my own,  
Holding in my heart the day  
That I will get to kiss you again.

3

Where is my body?  
Where is my home?  
Is my home my body?  
Well I'm here all alone.  
So I'll go where it goes.  
I'll want what it wants.  
I'll talk what it talks.  
And I'll love what it loves.  
And I breathe,  
I breathe because of you.  
And I breathe,  
I breathe because of you.  
I breathe.

1

Holding in my heart the day that I

2

Holding in my heart the day that I

3

I breathe...

1

Holding in my heart the day that I  
Holding in my heart the day that I  
Will get to see you again.

2

Holding in my heart the day that I  
Holding in my heart...

## Don't Start Walking

music and lyrics, Or Matias

I originally wrote this about my niece, who along with the rest of my family, are in Israel. I had emigrated in order to establish myself more in my career. For a time, I went through periods of isolation and loneliness, alleviated by brief visits home. When my niece was born, I remember thinking I wanted to be there when she started walking, instead of finding out about it while I was half a world away. Now I have a little one of my own, here in the U.S. I'll definitely be there when she takes her first steps.

Those eyes are open wide.  
The toothy little screeches,  
As you move side by side  
To find the palm that reaches  
As if you know to trust  
A giant who you just  
Met moments ago

And now the journey's long  
To have them understand you  
And soon they'll all be wrong  
With everything they hand you.  
And I'll be watching too,  
But whatever you do,  
I'm begging you, please

Don't start walking  
Don't start walking without me  
Don't start walking  
Don't start walking without me, yet.  
I'm on my way, way, way back home.

I'm the first to make you laugh,  
the first to hear you giggle.  
So take your nap and after you wake,  
I'll make you funny faces and wiggle  
Every little toe.  
But in a week, I'll go.  
So promise me you

Won't start walking,  
Don't start walking without me,  
Don't start walking,  
Don't start walking without me, yet,  
'Cause I know it's my fault

That I've chosen to live  
In a land with a language  
You can't understand.  
But I'm working my way up.  
I'm working! Working! Working!  
Working, all the time, it seems.  
So go take your nap,  
And soon I'll drink myself to sleep.  
And maybe finally I'll see  
Your first time walking  
In our dreams.

Don't start walking,  
Don't start walking without me,  
Don't start walking,  
Don't start walking without me,  
Don't start walking,  
Don't start walking without me,  
Don't start walking,  
Don't start,  
Uh, uh uh!

Don't start walking without me, yet,  
I'm on my way, way, way,  
On my way, way, way back home.

**to belong**

music and lyrics, Justine F. Chen

To be the child of an immigrant is to perpetually feel like an outsider. At least, this is how I have always felt, as a child of an immigrant. It is also to perpetually feel the desire to be positively acknowledged, to be seen, to belong. The easiest way for me to articulate this is through a simple text, layered and echoed by many voices.

To be  
To belong  
To have  
To long  
To long to have  
To hope to have  
To hope to be  
To be  
To belong  
Too long  
To long  
To dream  
To hope  
To long  
- to live  
- to hope