

Henry Boland
Miller Arts Scholar, Music
March 23rd 2025
Arts Scholar Fourth-Year Award Application

Self-Produced Pop Album

Summary:

I plan to write, record, and produce a pop album, and release it on all streaming platforms in Spring 2026. Additionally, I'll be traveling to Nashville, Tennessee, to network and meet with professionals in the music industry. The two main goals of this project are: 1) to refine my songwriting and composition skills, and 2) to gain insight into the realities of pursuing music professionally. I am requesting \$3,000 to cover living expenses in Nashville and purchase a new electric guitar.

Background:

I have been making self-produced pop music for the last seven years, and I was extremely fortunate to receive funding for a third-year Miller Arts Award with the goal of creating a collection of 4-6 songs. Throughout the process of making these songs I significantly improved as both a producer and musician, and learned a great deal during my audio production independent study with my faculty mentor Michael Rasbury. Ultimately, I exceeded my original goal and released 10 songs throughout the year.

For that project, the main focus was improving as a producer, which included mixing, mastering, and learning different recording techniques. For this next project, I will still record and produce all the music from an at home studio, but the main focus will be improving my songwriting skills. The final product will be an album, which presents a challenge as all the songs must be cohesive and explore common themes. However, after refining my recording and production process over the past year, I feel more prepared than ever to create an authentic, musically engaging, and well-produced album.

With this in mind, I will work with Ted Coffey as my faculty advisor. He has extensive experience with songwriting and composition, and although I have not yet taken any classes with him, we have met and discussed my music, and I have found his insights to be incredibly valuable. He offers a fresh perspective and often points out things that may seem obvious but that I don't always recognize on my own. For example, after reviewing a few of my songs, we identified writing bridges as an area for improvement. Until then, I had never considered it, but when I presented him with all my songs that included bridges, I realized they were all my least favorites. I'm much more comfortable writing songs without them. Working as a solo artist and producer, it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture, and having Ted Coffey as my advisor will help me maintain perspective.

Additionally, as I aim to learn more about building a career in music, he will be an invaluable resource. He has worked with other students who have gone on to pursue careers in music and has experience working with an independent record label.

While his experimental electronic music differs from the pop music I usually create, I'm always looking for new influences to shape my sound, and I'm excited to explore how his knowledge of electronic music could inform my own compositions. I'm also excited to take Composition I with Leah Reid next semester and receive feedback from her, as she has a different but equally valuable background in composition and will bring fresh insights to my work.

I also want to become a better lyricist. For my project last year, I met with Stephen Hager from the English department to discuss crafting authentic, relatable narratives in songs. Our conversations were incredibly insightful, and I know there's still much I can learn from him as a storyteller and songwriter. I plan to share my ongoing lyrics with him for feedback, ensuring that I continue to develop and sharpen my skills.

I will use part of the funds to purchase a new electric guitar. The guitar is my main instrument and essential to my songwriting process, as I often start with a chord or riff before building the rest of the song around it. My current guitar has several issues, including poor tuning stability, intonation problems due to fret wear, and stripped screw holes, which make it harder to play and often in need of repair. I'd like to invest in a new guitar, which will allow me to focus more on making music and less on fixing my instrument. I don't have an exact model in mind yet, because I plan to choose the one that feels best to play in the store. I'm budgeting around \$1,400 based on the models I've looked at thus far.

The remaining funding will be used to cover living and travel expenses for my trip to Nashville, Tennessee, from August 10-19. The purpose of this trip is to connect with professionals in the music industry, whether they are mix engineers, producers, or independent artists, and gain a more realistic understanding of the work environment and what is required to pursue a career in music. Over the last six years, I have been refining my skills as a musician and producer, and now I want to learn more about the industry and how to best make use of the skills I have developed.

To ensure the trip will be worthwhile, I spoke with Miller Arts alumnus Elie Bashkow, who undertook a similar project and spent two months in Nashville as a rising fourth-year. He now works professionally as a producer in Brooklyn, and he emphasized that his experience in Nashville provided invaluable insight into what a music career actually looks like and helped him better understand his own path forward. While my trip will be considerably shorter, as I'll be working in Charlottesville for most of the summer, I feel confident it will still be extremely valuable. Given Nashville's high concentration of music professionals, it's much easier to make connections than in other cities, and I'm preparing in advance by compiling a list of contacts who work in Nashville and reaching out to as many people as possible to maximize the trip's potential.

For my outcome presentation I will share the full track list, cover art/promotional media, and play a few songs depending on how much time is allotted. I will also share stories and key lessons I learned from my trip to Nashville.

Project Timeline:

May - July 2025:

- Write songs, make demos, and email my work to Dr. Coffey for feedback
- Experiment with a wide variety of songwriting structures and production methods
- Continue to contact music professionals in Nashville and prepare for my trip

August 2025:

- Go to Nashville, immerse myself in the music scene, and make connections

September - November 2025:

- Identify potential themes and songwriting choices that will act as a common ground between all the songs on the album to make it cohesive
- Meet with Dr. Coffey for feedback on the album regularly throughout the semester in addition to discussing my insights from Nashville and potential career trajectory

December 2025:

- Finalize tracklist and submit masters to streaming services by December 21st
- Start creation of promotional materials (cover art and promotional video teasers for the album)

February 2025:

- Release album to all streaming services

Budget:

Item:	Cost	Description:
Guitar	~\$1400	It will need to be a guitar that is versatile and suitable for both my discography of pop/rock and for playing with the chamber jazz ensemble at UVA. I have not decided the exact model yet, as I will need to try out many in hand first, but it will likely be a Fender American Professional model which costs around \$1400.
Housing	\$1,122.76	Airbnb for 10 nights - reasonably priced compared to other options at \$74/night, and it's conveniently located near downtown, where much of the music scene is centered.
Gas	\$120	Trip in total is ~1,200 mi Car averages 30mpg Gas cost is \$3/Galon
Food	\$550	Assuming \$55 a day for ten full days of meals
Total After Tax:	\$3,192.76 (I will pay the remainder out of pocket)	

Participation in the Arts at UVA:

Over the past two and a half years, I've been deeply involved in the arts at the University in various capacities. As a music major, I have taken Musicianship I and II, Theory I and II, Jazz Improvisation, Music and Discourse, Creative Strategies for Indie Artists, an Audio Production Independent Study, and I'm currently enrolled in 20th/21st Century Music. Additionally, I'm in my fifth semester studying vocal performance with Stephanie Nakasian and guitar with Michael Rosensky, both at the 3000 level. This is also my third semester playing guitar in a Chamber Jazz ensemble.

I perform at local venues in Charlottesville, including The Graduate, Crozet Pizza, Ellie's, and the Fralin Museum of Art, both as a solo act and with the band Almost Nothing. I also serve as the Audio Engineering Director for University Records, where I help organize performance opportunities for musicians at the University.

I took CAS 1010 in the fall and I'm currently taking CAS 1011. I'm currently working on a radio show featuring entirely student-made music, which will be played on the speakers in UVA dining halls and meal exchange spots to give student artists more exposure.

Portfolio

- “The 7th of July”
 - https://soundcloud.com/bolandd/the-7th-of-july?si=a0791f5f486344cf962ea3c51ec6a6ff&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing
 - I wrote, recorded, produced, mixed, and mastered this song from my home studio in Charlottesville during July 2024. I played all the instrumentation except for the drums which are a loop I found online.

- “Lame and Sentimental”
 - https://soundcloud.com/bolandd/lame-and-sentimental?si=4997c70d7c2b43d2967b70e11a8cdbc9&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing
 - The awesome cover art is a painting by fellow Miller Arts Scholar Helen Sparling! This song is based on a demo I originally created during my audio production independent study with Michael Rabsury last fall. In crafting this track, I focused on simplicity, and tried to limit the number of layers in the instrumental. By limiting the number of tracks I could use, I was encouraged to make each part of the instrumentation (bass line, synths, etc.) as compelling and musically strong as possible.