

***Body of Work: Physicality and the Electric Guitar***  
**Samantha Pollack, class of 2021**

*Body of Work* is a suite of etudes for solo electric guitar and effects. Falling somewhere between a method book and a concept album, *Body of Work* explores the intersections between the guitar and the body of the guitarist. Each piece in the collection focuses on a concept or question related to health and the physical body, while simultaneously helping the performer refine a particular technique or timbre on the guitar. The goal of the project is to discover connections between physical performance practice and extra-musical ideas about the body, using the language of the etude to access emotional and conceptual depth.

*Body of Work* consists of seven etudes, or teaching pieces. An etude focuses on instrumental technique, targeting the physical body of the performer in a literal way. Because of this connection between body and composition, the etude can become a space for exploring concepts difficult to express otherwise. The main idea behind *Body of Work* is to use etudes to express the body from two directions at once: the compositional, aesthetic, and thematic material, and the corporeal actions taken by the guitarist in performance. By linking these two registers together, *Body of Work* translates embodied experiences such as pain, comfort, sexuality, and death, into a musical language which is affective and visceral for performer and listener alike.

My compositional process for this music was experimental and experiential, focusing on the sonic and corporeal dimension of music-making. Each piece was composed on the guitar directly, using an organic blend of improvisation, practice, and refinement. Next, the pieces were recorded, and lastly, I used the finished recordings as a guide to transcribe each piece in music notation, as a performance and study aid.

The timbre of the guitar, shaped through playing technique and technology, is the main way I link physical and compositional registers in this music. Since music notation is poorly suited to capturing details of timbre, I chose to create a professional-quality album to showcase these sounds. I practiced the etudes extensively, recorded them using sound equipment purchased with the Grua-O'Connell Award, then edited them using digital audio software. With this hands-on approach to the sounds, I made the performer's body audible, and curated a rewarding listening experience which communicates the thematic considerations of the project.

Through composing, performing, and recording *Body of Work*, I have contributed to contemporary electric guitar repertoire, while also refining my voice as both a composer and performer. Creating an album helped me gain technical skills and experience which will be invaluable for my future career in music. By taking a performer's approach to composition and focusing on sounds and actions as the basic components of music, I used the language of the etude to express musical ideas about the body which would not be accessible otherwise.

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