7 Ghost on the Canvas

Glen Campbell's Musical Narratives of Ageing, Alzheimer's Disease, and Care

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In 1968, 32-year-old country-pop musician Glen Campbell released his chart-topping single “Wichita Lineman.” Its B-side, “Fate of Man,” told a sobering story about the life course: the naïveté of one’s 20s, the “creeping of old age” up the spine at 50, and, finally, being rheumatic, frail, and “ready for the wreath” at 80. “So, you can pity him as he goes up the line,” Campbell sings, “As he wobbles on the spindle and is almost blind.” In its veneration of “youth” and unease about ageing, Campbell’s self-penned song reflected prominent age narratives in US culture in the 1960s but takes on new meaning in light of Campbell’s diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease (AD) in 2011, at 75 years old. Between then and his death in 2017, Campbell opened up publicly about his illness, embarked on a “Goodbye Tour,” campaigned to raise awareness of AD, and generally resisted the kind of “pity” for older people articulated in “Fate of Man.” In 2012, his manager Stan Schneider told *Billboard*: “As long as the people are enjoying it and not coming out of pity, why not go out and say goodbye to the country?” (Graff). Yet Campbell’s music during this period, if occasionally evocative of relatively complex ideas about ageing, AD, and care, also reproduced a similar “decline” narrative to that found in “Fate of Man.”

This chapter examines these narratives in Campbell’s “late” music. It re-evaluates the career of one of the most popular anglophone musicians of the last six decades. Over Campbell’s lifetime, the six-time Grammy Award-winner sold over 45 million records; in 1968, Campbell sold more records than the Beatles (Jones 191). This study demonstrates how ageing pop musicians like Campbell have musically responded to, and contributed towards, the increasing politicisation of AD in the US, signified by federal government legislation such as the National Alzheimer’s Project Act (2011). In 2012, the Alzheimer’s Association hosted “An Evening with Glen Campbell” at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., to “raise awareness of AD among members of Congress” (Alzheimer’s Association). In 2013, Campbell’s daughter Ashley testified at a Senate hearing on the National Alzheimer’s Plan (Special Committee on Aging 3–10). Campbell’s media appearances raised consciousness about

AD and so arguably helped to put pressure on policy makers. Nearly 40 million viewers watched the visible effects of Campbell's dementia during his 2012 Grammy Awards performance. Campbell's story features in his daughter's and wife's bestselling autobiographies (D. Campbell and Bego 2014; K. Campbell 2020), other dementia-related memoirs (Sutton 60–63; O'Brien 37; Kapsambelis 4), advice manuals for caregivers (Snelling 456; Pulsford and Thompson 229–30), spiritual guides to dementia (Harrison 87), and textbooks on nursing (McCrae 509–10) and dying (Corr et al. 579–80). Campbell's music, similarly, both echoed dominant cultural ideas about ageing, illness, and care, and helped to *shape* discourses around these topics.

While increasing scholarly attention is paid to cultural narratives of ageing, illness, and care, musical narratives are often left out of this conversation, despite both the palpable influence of music on everyday life and growing scientific recognition of how “the quickening art” improves well-being (Basting 104–10; Bitenc 178–80; Baird et al. 2020). Some age studies scholars consider musical narrative, but usually only in passing (Gullette 113; Hartung 191) or in reference to other media (Chivers 89–91). This chapter maintains that music can conjure powerful ideas about ageing, dementia, and care in the minds of listeners. Songs, in Keith Negus' words, “mediate the human experience of time” (484) and so by their nature are narratological. Building on a Proustian understanding of age as “embodied time,” Richard Elliott argues that because music is capable of handling considerations of time and experience, it is also well equipped to deal with ageing (11–58). Put simply, these and other authors (Gardner and Jennings; Cohen and Kruschwitz; Bennett; Whiteley; Buck) draw attention to how singers, listeners, and songs all age, the latter across performers' and audiences' lifetimes but also within their own internal temporalities; songs have beginnings, middles, and ends and are a means to reflect upon pasts, presents, and futures. Likewise, medical humanities scholars have dissected how music might narrativise experiences of health. As Arthur W. Frank argues, music is one way for those with illnesses to escape “chaos narratives” surrounding “deviant” bodies in popular culture. “Bodies need voices,” Frank reminds us, and “music allows a direct connection to [the] body that speech can no longer provide,” whether because of physical or cognitive illness or the culture of “muteness” surrounding illness (109). There is also much debate in the philosophy of music over the proposition that “music is caring” (see Stige 273). Marcel Cobussen and Nanette Nielsen claim that music, because of its social function and affective nature, can bind people in meaningful, “caring” relationships (158). References to music in dementia-care memoirs (e.g., Magnusson 276) testify to these ties between music and care. This chapter enters this debate by exploring whether music can do the work of both representing and enacting care.

This chapter concentrates on Campbell's recorded music. More could be said about ageing, dementia, and care narratives in *Glen Campbell: I'll Be Me*, a 2014 documentary about his experiences living with dementia, and how it sits within a subgenre of music documentaries about dementia, including *Alive Inside: A Story of Music and Memory* (US, 2014). Scott Selberg's study of media representations of Campbell's dementia, including *I'll Be Me*, is a thoughtful deconstruction of celebrity selfhood discourse, but it nevertheless neglects to analyse Campbell's post-diagnosis music as a whole. By doing just that, some important thinking can be done about the historically problematic, but continuously evolving, relationship between the music industry and ageing and/or ill performers; the ability of music to articulate ideas about temporality, memory, loss, agency, dependence, and vulnerability; and how musical narratives might reinforce or challenge dominant scare/decline discourses surrounding dementia and ageing. This chapter begins by tracing the theme of age in Campbell's music back to his early career. It then charts how Campbell over time incorporated generational themes into his music and negotiated industry ageism, and finally it deconstructs the narratives about ageing, AD, and care in his post-diagnosis recordings.

Longhairs, Grey Hairs

"Fate of Man" exemplifies how Campbell had sung about ageing and illness long before the onset of AD. Assessing his earlier approaches to these topics helps to recontextualise his later music. Notions of "youth" were central to Campbell's start in showbusiness. He began his career as a child performer in his uncle's "hillbilly" band, before working as session musician in Los Angeles. Already in his 30s by the time he became a chart-topper in 1967, Campbell was nevertheless perceived as "young." Cover stories in "teen" magazines such as *'Teen* ("Glen Campbell's Road") and *Young Miss* (Saunders) (see Figure 7.1) solidified Campbell's status as a teenage pin-up. Alongside his distinctive voice, virtuosic guitar skills, and cross-over country-pop repertoire, Campbell's "youth" – embodied by his boyish good looks, perfect white teeth, blond locks, and wholesome personality – was a contributing factor to his popularity.

Unlike other 1960s musicians who propelled the era's "generation gap" discourse, however, Campbell used his fame to venerate "elders." This deference to age was born from a rural southern Baptist upbringing in Billstown, Arkansas. The self-described "Country Boy," if sporting longish hair in typical late-1960s youth fashion, nevertheless regularly invited his grey-haired parents as guests onto his CBS television series, *The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour*. Teenagers constituted a significant proportion of Campbell's fan base, but he also attracted older audiences. *Young Miss* conceded that "Glen closes the generation gap nicely. This is probably because his music really says something, and he's such a

Figure 7.1 Glen Campbell on the front cover of *Young Miss* magazine, 1969. Author's collection.

good-looking guy that parents approve of their daughters going slightly out of their minds over him" (Saunders 22). In 1969, *Florida Today* reported that a "long line of little old ladies" had taken to Campbell: "At his concerts you see gray hairs lined up with the longhairs" (Botwin 20). Campbell attributed his cross-generational appeal to his avoidance of "controversy and politics" (20), but politics were never far away. In his first cinematic role, as a Texan ranger in *True Grit* (1969), Campbell portrayed the young counterpart to the film's grouchy, old-fashioned, and old antihero, played by ageing western cinema veteran John Wayne. Although set in the Wild West, the film's depiction of gender roles, racial hierarchies, and vigilantism resonated with contemporary audiences,

who felt anxious about women's liberation, race riots, and the anti-war movement. Garry Wills describes how, by *True Grit*'s release, Wayne had garnered fans amongst conservative Americans for being a "living anachronism" (287). The politics that Wayne represented were yoked to his age. A reviewer for the Wisconsin *Janesville Daily Gazette* commented on the film's release: "In these critical days of constant turmoil, generation gaps, and panic in the streets, it is comforting to know that America still has John Wayne," even though the out-of-shape actor looked incapable of saving the "damsel in distress" and that most cinema-goers seemed more interested in seeing heartthrob Campbell on the big screen than they did Wayne ("True Grit").

Just as Campbell's repertoire drew from seemingly disparate musical wellsprings – from bluegrass to pop ballads – so too was his generational identity somewhat ambiguous. Another interpretation of Campbell's "middle-of-the-road" persona is as an "old man in a young man's body." As Dylan Jones argues, part of Campbell's appeal was the jarring idea that records such as "Wichita Lineman" and "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," with lyrics dealing in relatively complex, existential, or "mature" subjects such as time, memory, and loss, were sung by someone who looked like any other young pop star (23). This generational duality made it possible for Campbell to simultaneously appeal to both "youth" and "adult" audiences, much like how his twin rural–urban identity, captured in his 1976 song "Country Boy (You've Got Your Feet in L.A.)" (*Rhinestone Cowboy*), enabled him to straddle both "mainstream" and "country" music markets (Hemphill 223–34).

As his fame waned in the 1970s, Campbell increasingly had to deal with media perceptions of him as an ageing star but opted to take ownership of this narrative by including more "autumn songs" in his repertoire, including Charles Avenzoar's "Yesterday, When I Was Young" (*Houston (I'm Comin' to See You)*) and Stevie Nicks' "After the Glitter Fades" (*Letter to Home*), the latter of which implicitly criticised Hollywood and the recording industry for marginalising older performers. One of Campbell's most famous songs, "Rhinestone Cowboy," released as something of a "comeback" in 1975, reflects with ennui on the passing of time: "I've been walking these streets so long/Singing the same old song/I know every crack in these dirty sidewalks of Broadway" (*Rhinestone Cowboy*). The 1990s marked another transitional period. In 1994, after traversing alcoholism, drug addiction, and divorce, the 58-year-old enlisted a ghostwriter to co-write his autobiography (Campbell and Carter, *Rhinestone Cowboy*). Ironically, in his memoir Campbell lamented the industry ageism that had contributed to his initial fame: "That's a testament to the sad shape of country music today. A good-looking kid with an average voice can often get a record deal when a genuine legend cannot. The entertainment industry is like the athletic industry: Its youth will be served" (69). In the text, he also mourns his declining musical abilities,

such as his narrowing vocal range (67), thereby treading the waters of what G. Thomas Couser terms “autosomatography” (2), a literary tradition of first-person life writing about illness and disability. Campbell’s “late period” began in earnest with *Meet Glen Campbell* (2008), an album that featured material about ageing (John Lennon’s “Grow Old with Me”), songs by younger contemporary artists (Travis, Green Day, the Foo Fighters), and sparse acoustic arrangements that spotlight Campbell’s grainy yet recognisable voice. Campbell and his team likely hoped the record would recreate the success of Johnny Cash’s critically acclaimed “American Recordings” albums. The album title’s ironic “introduction” of the household Campbell name indicates how, by that point, he had attained that all-important yet difficult-to-negotiate industry label assigned to older acts: “legend.”

Rivers of My Memory

If age was a recurrent and progressively prominent motif in Campbell’s career up until this point, after his AD diagnosis in 2011 references to age in his music became more intimately entwined with illness narratives. Campbell released three age- and dementia-themed “concept albums” – *Ghost on the Canvas* (2011), *See You There* (2013), and *Adiós* (2017) – and one soundtrack album, *Glen Campbell: I’ll Be Me* (2015). The studio albums’ titles, like his “Goodbye Tour” (2011–2014), present each record as a kind of “farewell.” This sense of “departure” spoke to different, though overlapping, demographics of Campbell’s predominantly older fanbase: “veterans” of “the Sixties generation,” for whom Campbell’s music was the soundtrack to their youth, and older conservative audiences who resented younger generational trends, including millennial-orientated movements such as Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter. Like 1960s cinema-goers who enjoyed the elder, antihero protagonist of *True Grit*, many socially conservative listeners likely perceived these albums as reminders that “America still had Glen Campbell,” even if just for one “last” go-around. However, for many listeners and reviewers (e.g., Deusner), this “farewell” message was closely associated with Campbell’s AD. The albums’ titles are just one example of how any possible distinction between ageing and dementia on the albums tends to collapse entirely. Campbell’s “late” music thus reflects, and contributes to, what Paul Higgs and Chris Gilleard call the “Alzheimerisation” of old age in contemporary culture (176).

The backdrop to the albums’ illness narrative is the potential threat of AD to Campbell’s agency. Other famous musicians diagnosed with dementia, including Perry Como and AC/DC’s Malcolm Young, withdrew from the limelight following their diagnosis. Campbell broke two industry precedents by continuing to perform after an AD diagnosis was made public and recording songs about dementia while living with it. The

very act of making these albums offers the music industry and audiences a new, if still problematic, mode of thinking about dementia and popular music. Campbell's story is a model for advocates of a "positivist" narrative for dementia, one that envisions individuals living "happy" or "functioning" post-diagnosis lives. Whilst challenging hegemonic decline/scare narratives about ageing and AD, such counternarratives have nevertheless drawn criticism for marginalising care needs and responsibilities through a neoliberal idealisation of a "productive" later life (Latimer). Campbell's decision to continue performing may have contributed indirectly to these debates, but his reasons for doing so may have been more to do with his personal history and regional identity than any ambition to change perceptions of dementia. One reason for "going public" with the AD diagnosis was the fear that the media might assume that the alcoholic Campbell had fallen off the wagon (a drink-driving arrest in 2003 attracted unwelcome tabloid press). His wife Kim told *People* magazine, "if he flubs a lyric or gets confused on stage, I wouldn't want people to think, 'What's the matter with him? Is he drunk?'" (Champ, "Glen Campbell Has Alzheimer's Disease"). Longstanding cultural stereotypes about southerners and cognitive impairments may also have played a part. Dementia was one of the four D's (along with dermatitis, diarrhoea, and death) associated with pellagra, a niacin deficiency disease that for various socio-economic reasons became epidemic in the South when Campbell was still a child (Clay et al.). One etymology of "redneck," a derogatory label for white southerners, comes from pellagra's reddening of skin (Eisiminger 284). The fusing of pellagra to southern identity, one component of an enduring discourse about poor white southerners as imbecilic "hillbillies" (see Harkin 17), generated anxiety among southerners of Campbell's generation about being perceived as cognitively impaired.

The song-writing process behind *Ghost on the Canvas* (2011) confounds binary distinctions between music written *by* or *about* those with dementia and so, paradoxically, both challenges *and* conforms to stereotypical representations of dementia as a loss of agency. Only five of the album's 16 songs bear Campbell's name, and these are as co-writer with the album's producer Julian Raymond. Raymond drew inspiration for these songs from conversations with Campbell (Hattenstone). This "insider" perspective works to authenticate the album's narrative, even if Campbell did not claim sole authorship. Referencing Campbell's preceding album's title, one reviewer remarked that this process meant listeners "finally get to meet Glen Campbell" (Deusner). The rest of the album's songs were "tailor-made" for Campbell by famous songwriters: Paul Westerberg, Teddy Thompson, Jakob Dylan, and Robert Pollard. It is unlikely an explicit brief existed to encourage them to write dementia-themed material, but it is feasible that some informal guidance took place. Raymond told *USA Today* that all parties involved wanted

to “craft a record true to the singer’s personality and sound” but stressed that Campbell took an active role in the process: “Campbell doesn’t just go in and perform a song. He puts his stamp on it. He treats songs the way a producer does. He speeds up the tempo. He’s got cool guitar ideas. He makes changes in arrangements and lyrics” (Gundersen). Raymond’s deferential tone captures how the project’s marketing, if resisting cultural expectations about the loss of agency that accompanies dementia and, to a lesser degree, ageing, nevertheless deployed a defensive, somewhat patronising rhetoric in order to sell the album as a “genuine” Campbell record.

Relying on songs from other songwriters also alleviated the risk that singing too candidly or emotionally about ageing and dementia might pose to Campbell’s identity as the rustic, masculine “Rhinstone Cowboy.” A personal and vulnerable album like *Ghost on the Canvas*, like his ghost-written autobiography, was more palatable to audiences who bought into Campbell’s “down-home” persona *because* other contributors were involved in its making. As Pamela Fox argues, cultures of “rusticity” in country music force musicians to negotiate “hero” and “antihero” modes of authorship in autobiographical songs and memoirs: they must present themselves as “exceptional” celebrities in order to justify the telling (or singing) of their life story yet simultaneously emphasise their “rustic” (rural, working class, and uneducated) credentials. This tension, Fox explains, “*demands* a collaborator or ghostwriter to ensure the celebrity author’s rustic authenticity” (118; emphasis in original).

But Campbell’s only partial role as composer neither delegitimises the authenticity of *Ghost on the Canvas*’s story, nor indicates Campbell’s lack of agency in the album’s production. To the contrary, the writing process for the album is a continuation of a career characterised by collaboration. Campbell was adept at making other songwriters’ material his “own” through subtle adaptations to a song’s lyrics, arrangements, or “feel.” Jimmy Webb, who wrote many of Campbell’s hits, believed that these alterations helped make his songs commercially and critically successful (Webb 211–16). Drawing from his pre-fame occupation as a “hired-hand” session musician, Campbell possessed an extraordinary ability to *live within* the songs he performed, whether he had written them or not, and to attract songs that reflected his personality. The Larry Weiss song “Rhinstone Cowboy,” Campbell believed, was his “autobiography set to song” (Campbell and Carter 136), so much so that he named his actual autobiography after it.

The lyrics on *Ghost on the Canvas* correspond with cultural tropes about dementia as a transitory state between life and death. In “Ghost on the Canvas,” the “ghost” who cannot be seen but has “soul,” is revealed to be Campbell himself (“I am the ghost on the canvas”). This depiction of those with dementia as “spectres” resembles the gothic modes that Marlene Goldman finds scattered across dementia writing (22–3)

and the wider sense of “invisibility” associated with dementia and ageing. The opening line, “I know a place between life and death for you and me,” exploits related stereotypes of dementia as a “living death” (Behuniak). Conversely, Campbell hints in the song at a preserved feeling of futurity, “a place that we can grow,” within the liminal existence of life with dementia (“between here and there”). The self-explanatory “A Better Place” reinforces this sense of “inbetweenness” by reproducing a centuries-old Christian theology of old age as an important, if necessarily painful, stepping stone to life everlasting (see Cole).

Ghost on the Canvas represents AD as “fragmenting” Campbell’s memory and perception of time. In “A Better Place,” Campbell confesses: “Some days I’m so confused, Lord/My past gets in my way.” Like the use of literary techniques in AD life writing (Zimmermann 89), several musical techniques mimic this sensation of the past “disrupting” the present. Campbell performs a guitar break in “A Thousand Lifetimes” that evokes his iconic solo from “Wichita Lineman.” An electronic beeping sound in the opening measures of “Ghost on the Canvas” quotes the faux-telephone-line noise from “Wichita Lineman.” These are more than mere self-references: the blurring of past and present attempts to replicate the memory displacement experienced by those with AD. (More morbidly, the beeping recalls that of a life-support machine.) The insertion of six short instrumental interstitials between full-length songs interrupts the flow of the conventional long-play album format, thereby generating a narrative that AD “disrupts” the normative life course. The titles to these tracks reference places and moments from Campbell’s past – his birthplace of Billstown, the date *Goodtime Hour* debuted – and so pulls the listener between different episodes in his life and provides insight into his “phased” temporal perception. The use of synth strings, pedal slide guitar, and piano arpeggios alludes to the sound of running water, placing the album in what Pamela J. Mittlefehldt describes as a long discursive tradition of water as a metaphor for memory (141–42). The water-like sounds also evoke a newly poignant metaphor from Campbell’s 1967 hit “Gentle on My Mind:” “That you’re moving on the back roads/By the rivers of my memory/And for hours you’re just gentle on my mind.”

See You There (2013) employed a different approach to *Ghost on the Canvas* but yielded similar narrative themes. Description of later life as a “temporary stop” in “I’m Waiting on the Comin’ of My Lord” restates the central idea of “A Better Place.” Most of the songs, however, are stripped-down versions of Campbell’s hits. Reviving this old repertoire was an obvious choice, as Scott Selberg explains: “The tragic diagnosis of an older star with Alzheimer’s promotes nostalgia for the youth-oriented media texts that made the star famous in the first place” (“Rhinstone Cowboy” 883). More than just nostalgia, however, *See You There* invites listeners to rehear these songs with Campbell’s illness and care needs in mind. As well as the “rivers of my memory” line from “Gentle on My

Mind,” other older songs become heavy with dementia-related connotations: “The road of life is a long, long road when you walk alone” (“Hey Little One”); “I am so afraid of dying” (“Galveston”); “Cause I’ve left that girl so many times before” (“By The Time I Get To Phoenix”); and “One day, little girl, the sadness will leave your face” (“True Grit”). “Rhinstone Cowboy” takes on new metatextual meaning: “I’ve been walking these streets so long/Singing the same old song.”

The reinterpretation of well-known lyrics into a decline narrative of dementia is facilitated by musical effects. The removal of original musical features, paired uncomfortably alongside the faithful replications of other sounds, simulates the oscillating flashes of clarity and confusion associated with early-stage dementia. The string arrangements for “Wichita Lineman” are removed, opening space for Campbell’s ageing voice in the mix. The guitar solo, meanwhile, is reproduced note for note. In “Galveston,” drums are stripped back to minimalistic percussion, the emptying of the song’s “body” symbolising the challenges dementia presents to Campbell’s sense of “self.” On several songs, different slide guitars substitute for original instrumentation, with each serving a symbolic function: a dobro adds a “down-home” feel that anchors the listener to the rural Arkansas of Campbell’s youth; a pedal steel guitar, another staple of country music, revives the “ghostliness” of *Ghost on the Canvas*; an electric slide guitar shakes with a fragility that stands in for Campbell’s vulnerability. Tempos are slowed down, feeding into wider cultural narratives about the slower pace of later life. Campbell sings an octave lower than the original recordings, a lower frequency that signifies his age while also adding new gravitas to the songs. If Campbell impressively still reaches the high ends of the transposed melodies, there is less confidence in his voice in these reconfigured upper registers, causing him to perform some vocal “stretching.” This vocal strain, what Roland Barthes calls the “grain” of the voice (179–89), reinforces the album’s lump-in-the-throat “farewell” narrative.

Campbell’s final album, *Adiós* (2017), although consisting mostly of covers, features snatches of lyrics that are difficult to unmoor from the context of his dementia: “Maybe someday I really will forget” (“Just Like Always”); “the memory of her lingers everywhere” (“She Thinks I Still Care”); and “Have I lost your love, or have I lost my mind?” (“Am I All Alone (Or Is It Only Me)”). “Everybody’s Talkin’,” perhaps unintentionally, conjures a tragic image of a confused old man with dementia that chimes with wider cultural fears about AD:

Everybody’s talkin’ at me,
I don’t hear a word they’re saying,
Only the echoes of my mind.
People stopping, staring,
I can’t see their faces,
Only the shadows of their eyes.

“Funny How Time Slips Away,” although ostensibly about catching up with an ex-lover, when sung by Campbell (as a duet with the song’s composer, Willie Nelson) becomes an account of a temporal experience of AD, or what scholars call “dementia time” (see Yoshizaki-Gibbons 182; Kafer 25–46). The original sardonic opening dialogue between reacquainted sweethearts takes on a new tragic pathos: “How I’m doing?/I guess that I’m doing fine.” A “farewell” narrative consumes the song’s lyrics about lost love: “Gotta go now/Guess I’ll see you around/Don’t know when though/Never know when I’ll be back in town.” By contrast, the Carl Jackson composition “Arkansas Farmboy” (*Adiós*), inspired by conversations with Campbell, departs from a “decline” narrative of dementia and ageing. It instead harks back to Campbell’s early-career veneration of “elders.” In the song, Campbell recalls the valuable role of older men in his childhood: his father, “the old man” who “grew wiser with time;” and his grandfather, who taught him to play guitar and sing traditional ballads. The song idealises old age as a purposeful stage of life, with older patriarchs positioned as repositories of family and community traditions. By reminiscing about how “elders” served important social functions in the past, the octogenarian singer implicitly questions whether his generation will achieve such a noble status in a more modern nation with an increasingly ageing population.

The dementia themes in Campbell’s “late” music – that living with AD is a struggle for agency, authenticity, and selfhood; a state of “limbo” between life and death; and a fragmented encounter with time and memory – stitch together somewhat hackneyed dementia tropes, but they are nevertheless richly expressed using musical and lyrical techniques. An array of compositional and performative devices, including choice of repertoire, instrumentation, melody, and rhythm, and the revival and reinterpretation of songs, sounds, and stories from Campbell’s past, construct a sonic dementia imaginary. This audio world is composed more from musical mood-making than straight narrative storytelling but is nevertheless redolent of some dimensions of Campbell’s experience of AD.

I Need You More Than Want You

Campbell’s post-diagnosis music examines the topic of care from his own perspective, particularly as a religious, masculine celebrity, and from that of his familial caregivers (his wife and children). In the process, it also hints at the ethical ambiguities intrinsic to his “late” career. The most dominant care themes relate to his dependency and vulnerability. *People* magazine identified the lyric “I need the ones I love, Lord/More and more each day” from “A Better Place” (*Ghost on the Canvas*) as illustrative of Campbell’s dependence on his wife Kim (Champ, “Glen Campbell Has Alzheimer’s Disease”). On “Wichita Lineman” (*See You There*), the

AD context reimagines the lyric “I need you more than want you” as a confession of a different kind of “need.” “A Thing Called Love” (*Adiós*) discloses the gendered nature of Campbell’s unease about dependency. Ostensibly about the “power of love” to bring a “giant of a man” to his knees, the song also subtly infers that AD unsettles Campbell’s sense of his own rustic masculinity. In other songs, though, Campbell resists what Daniel Engster describes as the problematic tendency to treat vulnerability and dependency as synonymous (102). “Don’t go to any trouble,” Campbell sings on “No Trouble” (*Ghost on the Canvas*), “You know I won’t be here long.”

A Christian narrative about care, in which Jesus fulfils the role of caregiver, also features in Campbell’s music, and provides the devout, masculine “cowboy” a more spiritually cohesive and culturally acceptable framework to understand, and accept, his own vulnerability. “Jesus take my hand,” Campbell sings on “Waiting on the Comin’ of My Lord” (*See You There*), “Guide me through the promise land.” Campbell had long used spirituality to resist music industry ageism. In 1993, *Cash Box* asked the then-sexagenarian whether becoming an old, irrelevant “country relic” bothered him, to which Campbell replied, “I really don’t worry about it anymore. That’s what happens when you turn your life over to the Lord” (Wilson 18). His faith also helped neutralise the grief often associated with AD. In 2011, Campbell, who converted to Messianic Judaism two decades earlier, joked to *People* magazine that his AD was divinely ordained: “God just cleared a lot of things out” (Champ, “Glen Campbell: Living with Alzheimer’s”). Significantly, Campbell’s spiritual narrative about care has also made an impact with Christians: his story features in a 2019 self-help book on dementia caregiving from a “biblical perspective” (Gable 113).

In other songs, focus shifts from experiences of care to caregivers’ experiences. “I’m Not Gonna Miss You” (*I’ll Be Me*) posits that Kim, and not the forgetful Campbell, will deal with the memories and consequences of his dementia:

I’m never gonna hold you like I did,
Or say I love you to the kids.
You’re never gonna see it in my eyes,
It’s not gonna hurt me when you cry.
I’m never gonna know what you go through,
All the things I say or do.
All the hurt and all the pain,
One thing selfishly remains,
I’m not gonna miss you.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues that this Grammy Award-winning song reiterates “the standard ‘dementia’ trope” (the failure of memory

retrieval) (113), but its empathetic focus on Kim's challenges also reflects recent trends in AD narratives to centre caregivers' experiences (e.g., England 2017). If such narratives can risk sidelining the experiences of those with AD and disentangling "family caregiver-receiver mutuality" (Streck et al.), Campbell's songs instead stress the interconnectedness of caregivers' and care-receivers' experiences through a combination of lyrical content and emotive vocal performance. In "Am I All Alone (Or Is It Only Me)" (*Adiós*), the lyric "Do I hear you crying softly in your sleep?" communicates the emotional toll of Campbell's illness on Kim, while his sensitive vocalisation conveys his anguish at hearing her suffering. Similarly, the chorus to "All I Need Is You" (*I'll Be Me*) bluntly states Campbell's dependency, but its verses indicate how he reciprocates care: "I'm gonna hold you/Like there's no tomorrow."

While accounting for some of Kim's vulnerabilities as a caregiver, Campbell's music omits the emotional contexts that shaped her experience of providing care. Arguably, the real "ghost on the canvas" is Kim. None of the songs reference her philanthropic work raising awareness about caregiving, the care she provided her husband through his alcoholism and drug addiction (Campbell and Carter 188–202), or how their age gap affected her experience as a caregiver. Kim was 22 years younger than Campbell and dealt with the effects of his dementia while she herself was in reasonable health. If this made it "easier" for Kim to deliver everyday care, it nevertheless caused her emotional distress: first, by upsetting expectations about the "normal" age at which she might have expected to have become her spouse's carer (K. Campbell 191–201), and second, by deepening tensions around his care between her and Debby, Campbell's daughter from a previous marriage, who was older than Kim (see Campbell and Bego).

Three of Campbell's children – Cal, Shannon, and Ashley – joined their father as bandmates–caregivers for the "Goodbye Tour" and performed on his studio recordings. Their presence alone threaded notions of filial care and what Victoria Browne calls "generational time" (119–42) into his music, especially at live performances, where their practical care for their father on stage (reminding him of set lists, etc.) became part of the show's theatrics. The themes of filial care and generational time also translated to his recordings. Although "the caring female" archetype found in care narratives (Zimmermann 49–50) is a role primarily fulfilled by Kim in Campbell's lyrics, it is his daughter Ashley who embodies this role in his music. Ashley's banjo on "Gentle on My Mind" (*See You There*), if more or less similar to the original, sonically signifies both Campbell's rural genealogy and the care he receives from his daughter. Her quickfire picking establishes the tempo/pulse of the song and "carries" her father's voice along with the tune. Ashley's own composition, "Remembering," meanwhile, which she sings on *I'll Be Me*, describes the burden of memory as a caregiver's responsibility and joins

a growing tradition of songs written and performed by (grand)child-caregivers, including Elvis Costello's "Veronica" (*Spike* 1989), Jessie J's "I Miss Her" (*Alive* 2013), and David Gilmour's "Faces of Stone" (*Rattle That Lock* 2015). Testament to the wider reverence for "elders" in country music (Buck), "Remembering" sits alongside the Chicks' "Silent House" (*Taking the Long Way* 2006) and Kenny Chesney's "While He Still Knows Who I Am" (*Welcome to the Fishbowl* 2012) in what can be described as a burgeoning dementia-themed country songbook. There are self-evident differences between songs composed by care-receivers and those written by caregivers, but the inclusion of both kinds of songs on Campbell's albums constitutes a hitherto unheard musical dialogue between caregiver and care-receiver. In "It's Your Amazing Grace" (*Ghost on the Canvas*), for example, Campbell acknowledges the care work that Ashley sings of in "Remembering:" "Everything I see in this world/I see it through you."

The ethics surrounding Campbell's family's and management's decision-making about his career, especially after his AD had progressed significantly, are anything but clear cut. Kim was aware that audiences might be critical of her. Announcing the tour to *People* magazine, she hoped that "people realize it's fulfilling for Glen to do music and feel all the love he gets from his fans. It really keeps him going" (Champ, "Glen Campbell Has Alzheimer's Disease"). Kim's claim that touring or recording were forms of "music therapy" was at best misleading and at worst neglectful of care responsibilities. Nevertheless, Campbell's music itself reinforces this narrative of music *as* therapy. *I'll Be Me* experiments with the idea that live performance is a kind of "care work." The album's two live recordings, taken from the "Goodbye Tour," represent the interactive and less-mediated environment of live performance as a "community of care" in which Campbell and his fans can support one another. After singing the line "Some days I'm so confused, Lord" during a live version of "A Better Place," Campbell laughs knowingly to his audience, telling them, sarcastically, "sometimes." Similarly, the content of Campbell's old material speaks to him and his audience in new ways when performed in public. On "Wichita Lineman," Campbell sighs/chuckles to himself/his audience after the line "I know I need a small vacation." After ending with an elongated vocalisation on the final lyric, "And I'm doing fine," the bated breath of the audience erupts into almighty applause, awakening joyful yelps from Campbell. These affects recall a similar moment in the *I'll Be Me* documentary, when Campbell forgets the lyrics to "Galveston" during a concert and so the crowd sings them back to him. As Ashton Applewhite contends, spontaneous audience-performer interactions like these help us to imagine an ideal empathetic relationship between care-receiver and care-provider (66), wherein both parties engage with one another with openness, patience, and mutual appreciation.

Conversely, Campbell's final album, *Adiós*, recorded after his condition had progressed significantly, suggests that the controlled recording studio setting might be preferable to live performance in terms of care ethics. Campbell sang each song on the album line by line, as he was no longer able to complete entire takes (Dauphin). For the listener, the smoothness of modern digital editing masks these performance difficulties in a way that a live concert setting or documentary film cannot. This may explain why *I'll Be Me* received more critical attention than *Adiós*: audiences craved music that expressed the unvarnished "tragedy" of Campbell's illness. From a care ethics perspective, however, studio recording gave the increasingly cognitively impaired Campbell the ability to make music without the potential pressures, pitfalls, and indignities of live concerts. Many of Campbell's final gigs were dogged by moments of confusion, embarrassment, and anger that, if truthful to parts of his life with AD, did not do justice to the talented musician and performer that he had once been (and could still be). The ethics of care in Campbell's music are highly contextual and sit with the need to preserve his identity and legacy as a musical legend.

Taking this debate in new directions, Campbell's daughter interpreted his late performances as acts of "care" *towards* his listeners. At an Alzheimer's Association event in 2012, Ashley suggested that Campbell's music connected emotionally with those with AD and their caregivers: "We decided to go on a farewell tour with him to keep his struggle public. . . . We didn't want people to think they were going through this alone. This isn't a disease that just affects the person living with it – it affects their entire family" (Alzheimer's Association). Whether this was achieved at the expense of Campbell's dignity is questionable, but Campbell's songs, unsurprisingly perhaps, do not delve too deep into these more critical dimensions of the care ethics in his late career. Instead, his songs contemplate what Amelia DeFalco describes as the "ontological crisis" of care in contemporary Western societies (37): how care reconfigures his pre-established identity as a male head of the family.

Fate of Campbell

This chapter goes some way to re-evaluating how popular music reflects and shapes cultural attitudes towards ageing, AD, and care. The possibilities and limitations of musical narratives warrant further study, considering that increasingly ageing populations in the Global North mean more older acts will likely opt to musically narrate their own experiences of dementia in the future (although Ashley Campbell's successful solo career suggests the caregiver narrator continues to be the dominant subjectivity in dementia song). Charting Campbell's age-related music from "Fate of Man" to *Ghost on the Canvas* indicates that a life course approach might help scholars to de-exceptionalise older artists' "late"

careers. Campbell did not suddenly begin to sing about ageing once he entered his 80s. Throughout his career, Campbell at times resisted the ageist tendencies of wider popular culture but also reinforced “decline” narratives about ageing. Following his AD diagnosis, Campbell’s music expressed mostly stereotypical, although occasionally challenging, narratives about AD and care, particularly regarding notions of agency, fracture, mortality, (co-)dependency, and vulnerability.

Moderately successful record sales notwithstanding (Graff), it is unclear what most listeners made of Campbell’s age- and dementia-themed music. Clearly, the stories Campbell tells in his songs did not exactly correlate with his listeners’ lives. Although Campbell came from a poor community and remained attached to his rural, working-class roots, he was a white, male, mansion-owning celebrity with access to private care. This begs the question: did listeners in Campbell’s home state of Arkansas – a “stroke-belt” state that in 2015 had the fourth highest AD death rate in the nation, which in 2017 reported a total annual value of \$2.5 billion unpaid care – identify with his dementia- and age-themed music? For some audiences, it is likely that Campbell’s *songs* were less important than his *story*. A 2019 Alzheimer’s Society (UK) blog post written by British poet Tony Ward, who cared for his wife Sheila at home until her mild cognitive impairment progressed to AD in 2012, leading her to move into a care home, gives some insight into what Campbell’s story could mean for those dealing with the consequences of AD:

Glen Campbell was one of our favourite country music singers. When Glen was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, he was determined not to “give up on life.” He was also keen to share his Alzheimer’s journey in order to raise awareness of the condition. He did this, in part, through a series of “no-holds-barred” documentaries. His example strengthened our own resolve. We were determined that the diagnosis of dementia would not drown out the music.

(Ward)

Tellingly, it was not Campbell’s music about dementia, but his determination to continue playing music, and to tell his story in other ways, that inspired the Wards.

Music was just one of several narrative forms in Campbell’s multi-textual career. The *I’ll Be Me* documentary provides a different portrait of the “ghost on the canvas” than we find in *Ghost on the Canvas*. Campbell’s music videos and album artwork also visualised other kinds of AD narratives. Kim’s recent memoir deserves a critical literary analysis as Campbell’s music does a musical one. These “texts” contain nuanced, and potentially more influential, narratives about ageing, AD, and care than those in Campbell’s songs. If at times Campbell’s music portrayed complicated sentiments about these topics, it generally reproduced well-trodden

narratives and, revealing of the inherent limitations of popular musical narrative, omitted more uncomfortable topics relating to his condition. Apart from memory loss, no songs reference symptoms of Campbell's AD. More is revealed in Kim's memoir about Campbell's repetitive questioning, obsessive compulsions to complete domestic tasks, wandering away from home, snappy attitude, and sudden sexual desire (K. Campbell 183–265) than in his songs. No songs explore the later stages of Campbell's AD, after he entered a Nashville memory care community in 2014, when aphasia affected his ability to play (Gundersen). His music says nothing about his transition to institutional care; tensions between family members about his care and inheritance (legal disputes between Kim and children from his previous marriages continued until 2019); or the physical abuse Kim received from Campbell during the worst stages of his illness. Despite all this music, then, the “ageing,” “cognitively impaired,” and “vulnerable/dependent” Campbell still remains a “ghost on the canvas.”

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