

ROOTS

Becca Mahon
2022



statement

Roots is a magazine made by and for Ann Arbor's local music scene, made through community-based visual storytelling. Roots features several artists, events, places, and stories throughout the 48-page print magazine.

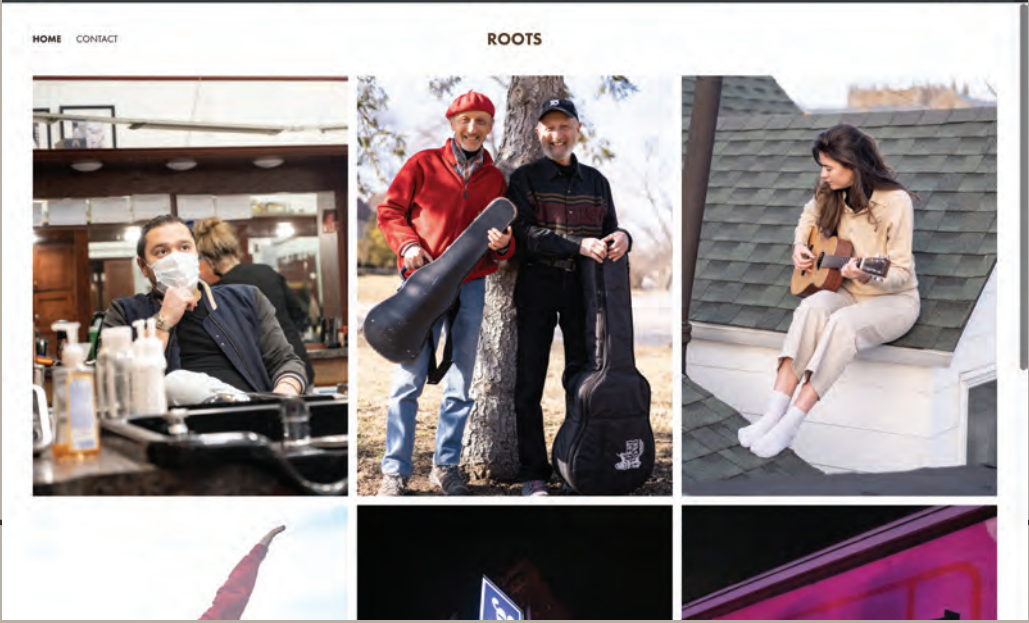
Interactive digital content can be accessed via QR codes throughout the magazine. The content is driven by my collaboration with local artists and conversations with the community over the course of several months.

Musicians were genuinely excited to share their love for the scene, and finding ways to share their contagious enthusiasm has been one of the most rewarding parts of the process.

Using documentary photography, portraits, and interviews, I aim to visually tell the story of music culture within one specific community, Ann Arbor.

Roots engages with the long history of printed and digital music media, and each volume will bring visibility to one part of the Ann Arbor music scene.

Roots is about connections—exploring what it means to be connected, and what it means to be local.



CONTEXT



Icon: Music Through the Lens- PBS

Icon: Music Through the Lens is a one-season docuseries released by PBS in 2020, featuring over 100 interviews with music photographers about their experiences and the history of photography in music as a whole. For me, this series has served as a fantastic resource and inspiration for how I approach my practice as a whole.



Rolling Stone Magazine

Rolling Stone Magazine is one of the earliest and most prominent major music publications— In Rolling Stone's collection, I see several great examples of interviews with artists that are done as truly candid one on one conversations. It also gives a great example of digital archiving and how photographic work can be organized in a visually appealing way to be displayed

Jerome Brunet

Brunet highlights a wide range of techniques and compositions, all varying in terms of color, format, aspect ratio, and more. One thing that stuck out to me about Brunet's approach was his writing about growing up as a musician first and how that shaped his later work behind the lens. That is also a background that I share and something that I believe has shaped my work in ways that I did not necessarily pay much attention to before.

Strategies for Qualitative Interviews - Harvard Sociology

This document was developed for Harvard sociology students as a guide to interview strategies and how to get the most out of questions and conversations. The approach taken by this document is clear and even scientific, making for a good, objective set of parameters to follow when planning how to carry out an interview. Conversations played a key role in the development of my project, and this guide gave a solid base to develop on.

Photojournalism- Time-Life Library of Photography

In this book by the Time-Life staff, the history of photojournalism and its end products is explored through multiple chapters. The role of layout design and sequencing are explored in-depth, as well as the potential formats for photo collections. At its core, my work draws on the styles and ethos of photojournalism more than anything else, and the content of this book made me more intentional in terms of design.



PROCESS

•The main bulk of the process in making Roots involved seeking out and collaborating with local artists. At first, this was a relatively research heavy step, but as the project progressed I found that introductions and connections were appearing naturally within the community.

•A vast majority of the text used in the project comes directly from interviews with featured artist. Interview questions were rewritten with the individual artist in mind and developed through research on their content. From these questions, I transcribed about twenty minutes worth of conversations with each artist and distilled them into formats that best suited each section.

•The technical aspects of low-light, fast-action photography involved a degree of trial and error, including a different kind of familiarity with my physical tools than I had before. Eventually, I embraced less traditional ways of shooting and incorporated things like blur and grain into the aesthetic of the piece.

•Initially, the final outcome of this project was meant to be a hardcover, single-edition book. Over time, I found that the content I was generating lent itself better to a magazine format.

•After making the switch to a zine style outcome, I was able to explore more creative options in layout design and visual branding that suited the source photos well and allowed me to incorporate the interview texts in a more interesting way.

•With input from critiques, I implemented interactive multimedia aspects hosted on a dedicated website, which are accessible via QR codes in the print product. Materials such as video and audio are found on pages corresponding to print sections.

•The final print was a twelve-copy run of a 48 page magazine, 8.5x11 inches, featuring seven scannable codes linking to digital materials.



What's your favorite thing about performing?
 The thrill of seeing how something that you felt and something that you wrote in the solitude of your room can make people that you don't know vibrate, and sort of see, (the crowd really is something that I really feed off of in a good way. You know when you feel like you're being listened to? It's awesome. So performing, as much as it's something for me, I think what I love is it being something for someone else.

Your performances have a lot of audience interaction and audience participation, what's that like from your side?
 Yeah, it's always, it's always cool to make them a part of it, you know, because then, you know, if you're on a stage you're already on a physical pedestal, and I hate that. And so I'm like, I want this to be something that is just me, you know, being there for people in the way that they need me to be. But I also want them to have fun, and it's like, my music is sort of sad. But I always find a way to break the ice and, you know, make people comfortable with me sort of comfortable with, with, with them feeling things. I think, naturally. Because I've been in concerts where I've like, felt things I never even thought I felt and like have people words, put words to feelings I knew and know how to do. And that's kind of like what I want to be to people, a way to come to terms with thoughts they might not be able to reconcile themselves with. That was nothing out of the question.

Would you describe your music without using genre-specific words?
 I think it is quintessential to human experience in the same way that it's personal, and that it's





reflection

During the making of Roots, I found myself drawn to the ongoing process of making this project and the connections formed throughout it. As somebody who draws on journalistic practices often in my work, interviewing and making images of live events as they unfold was a rewarding process that I found clicked into place for me relatively quickly. After some early setbacks and reconfigurations, I found that the format of a zine fit the DIY, storytelling-centric content that I was envisioning from the start.

The element of collaboration was something that I found particularly rewarding and inspiring throughout the entire process. I was able to work with people to create something that we both felt represented their passions to the best of our respective abilities. The love that these artists expressed for their community and their work improved the way that I approached my end of the exchange, and definitely impacted the course of my process.

As the process went on, I enjoyed applying myself to the aspects of print publication that I had not previously experienced or particularly looked forward to. Elements like page design and content planning provided a new perspective on the process of making media, which I am excited to develop throughout my future work.