

THE AMHERST COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC  
PRESENTS

# Reasons to Leave

*A senior thesis in composition  
by Sebastian Son '22*

Saturday, February 5, 2022 at 7 PM

Buckley Recital Hall

# Reasons to Leave

*Written, arranged conducted and directed by Sebastian Son*

- I. Things Look Better From a Distance
- II. If I Had a Rocket Ship
- III. I'll Never See Them Again
- IV. Have Faith
- V. Never Gonna Go Back
- VI. Translation
- VII. Shall I Die
- VIII. Song of the Mad Scientist
- IX. If I Had a Rocket Ship (Reprise)
- X. A Star
- XI. The Botanist

## Performers:

Annika Paylor '24, Character 1  
Anika Grimsrud '24, Character 2  
Alfred Kibowen '23, Character 3  
Scott Romeyn '22, Character 4  
Cassandra Jin '24, violin  
Yeju Kang '24, cello  
Daniel Flores García '24, guitar  
Quentin Jeyaretnam '23, bass  
Miles Garcia '25, drums  
Sebastian Son '22, piano

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*Please silence your mobile phone, pager, watch, or any other electronic noise-makers during the concert. Please refrain from using electronic devices with light-producing screens, as they are distracting to your fellow audience members.*

**Cameras and recording devices are strictly prohibited.**

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

*Reasons to Leave* is about a rocketship, in theory. There is a rocketship leaving the Earth for a distant planet, and different people find different reasons to board it and leave forever. That was the concept I presented to my advisor over a Zoom call in 2020, and it served as my focus as I wrote these songs. The show is, still, about a rocketship leaving the Earth. But after two years of writing and three weeks of rehearsal, I think it's come to be less about rockets and more about choices. There's something universal in the choice to leave - it's never a decision without impunity. When you make the choice to leave, you leave people behind. I hope that this show makes that choice a very difficult one.

*Reasons to Leave* is a musical song cycle that draws its inspiration from folk, pop, rock, and Broadway tunes. It is composed of eleven songs, sung by four actors and played by a band of piano, violin, cello, bass, guitar, and drums. The characters that appear do not necessarily all belong to the same universe, but there is something that they share: a choice, and a distant call that only they can hear.

As a writer, what I'm interested in are stories; many little vignettes about people whose stories may appear over and over again through the course of history. My characters have numbers, not names, because I think of their journeys as fables - more about the lesson to be learned than the person involved. Without costumes or a set, this show lacks some of the aspects of a full blown musical, but let that not be a hindrance - I invite you to let the actors take you on a journey, and have your mind fill in the surroundings.

## ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Sebastian Son has held various musical roles, including singing in county and regional choirs, conducting his high school marching band, and working as a part-time organist in his hometown of Fort Lee, New Jersey.

He began his music studies at the age of ten, when the organist of his local church heard his siblings singing in the pews and promptly decided to form a children's choir. Sebastian taught himself to play the piano at the age of 16, and acted in various school musicals as a high schooler. He began acting more extensively in college, performing in shows like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Bare: A Pop Opera*, *Urinetown*, *Little Women: The Musical*, and *Faustus*. In 2019, he performed in a reunion show of Jim Steinman '69s senior thesis, with the Off-Broadway cast of *Bat Out of Hell: The Musical* - an experience that convinced him to write his own show.

Nowadays, Sebastian is hard at work completing his English and his Music major. In his free time, he sings with the DQ, performs with the improv group Mr. Gads, gives his little cousin guitar lessons, writes creatively with the Asian-American Writers Group, takes jiu-jitsu classes with Amherst MMA, and gigs with an acoustic guitar around the Pioneer Valley. You can find him hunched over a computer as he works on self-releasing an album of original songs (*A Summer in Quarantine*) to be released on all major streaming platforms later this year. Follow him @singsebastianson on Instagram to stay up to date on his latest endeavors.

## NOTES ON THE SONGS

**Things Look Better From a Distance** is an ensemble number that introduces us to one of the main themes of the show. We hear different voices calling out, but we aren't sure of who they are. They remark that 'things look better from a distance', implying that they are willing to partake in a faraway journey. Some voices respond, saying 'please don't leave / without a means / come back to me', but they are drowned out in the countdown of the rocket as it takes off into the night.

**If I Had a Rocket Ship** is an icy rock ballad that introduces the voices of the Billionaire (Characters 1, 2, 3) - a wealthy captain of industry who has used his immense resources to craft a rocket ship in secret. He believes the Earth is dying and intends to save only those who feel alone. The song outlines the source of his bitterness - a longstanding frustration to fulfill the expectations of his absent father.

**I'll Never See Them Again** is an uptempo pop/rock ballad about a young Nurse (Character 2) who is frustrated with the people in her life who have abandoned her. She tells the story of her missing stepfather and her early marriage, and upon hearing the call of the Billionaire, resolves that 'I'll never see them again'.

**Have Faith** is an acapella spiritual number, sung by the entire cast. The voices sing to 'have faith', a signal to resist the call of the rocketship, and trust that things will be okay. We hear of some of the disasters that have struck their world, like 'swollen toad[s]', 'broken roads', and 'sunburned skies', yet the voices insist that the listener 'have faith'.

**Never Gonna Go Back** is a fast pop number about a recently-escaped Convict (Character 1), driving at reckless speeds down the road. She tells her partner and unwilling partner-in-crime to 'get your fingers intertwined inside my hand as we drive / cause I'm never gonna go back in' as they outmaneuver pursuing police cars.

**Translation** is a contemporary musical theater number about a college-aged Student (Character 3) dealing with the sudden death of his grandmother. As he attends her funeral, he realizes that he never knew her because of the language barrier between them. The song ends with Arirang, a traditional Korean folk song, played between the piano and strings.

**Shall I Die** is a recitative, sung in the secco (dry) style. In it, we see three previous voices emerge: the Nurse, the Convict, and the Student. The Nurse is firm in her decision to leave and tries to convince the Convict to join her, while the Student reminds them to 'have faith'. The Convict, dying from her injuries, has a grand vision of a tree.

**Song of the Mad Scientist** is a contemporary musical theater number about a villainous mad scientist (Character 4) who struggles to come to terms with his hair loss. He insists that it is just 'thinning' and bemoans the lack of respect he gets from other criminals and the Evil League. This song is inspired in part by the character of Dr. Horrible from Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog.

**If I Had a Rocket Ship (Reprise)** is a continuation of the story of If I Had a Rocket Ship. The Billionaire's father (Character 4) returns after a long hiatus, saying 'son / oh my son / that's my son'. The Billionaire refuses the attempts to reconnect, and the two voices clash. The father sings 'we could do such things / like ride until the Spring / and carry autumn leaves beneath our wings' while the voices of the Billionaire sing 'goodbye'.

**A Star** is a lyrical piano ballad sung between a young couple. Boy (Character 4) tries to convince his partner to sit and watch the stars with him, while Girl (Character 1) refuses. She asks him 'can we talk', and the true nature of their relationship is revealed. At the end, Boy asks Girl if she would leave, and voices join in, telling her to choose.

**The Botanist** is a modern American folk song, drawing upon the bluegrass tradition. It tells the story of a group of Botanists, who reveal to their loved ones they must embark on a dangerous space voyage in order to save their species from extinction. They leave for 'the trees', symbols of new life; whose branches hold their worlds, and the universe, together.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

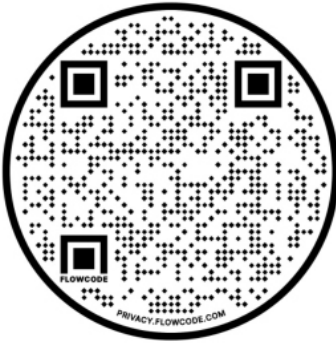
Can I count the number of people I have to thank? My friends, the people who I've sent things to and who gave me valuable feedback while assuring me I wasn't bothersome: Eli Quastler, Sienna McCulley, Julian Brown, and a very special Michelle Han. My professors, Amy Coddington, David Schneider in particular. My esteemed advisor, Eric Sawyer, for letting me bring in half-built, leaking contraptions of songs and helping me see the light inside them. My teachers: Ron Bashford, for building me up as an actor and giving me the performance vocabulary to direct this show. Carine Montbertrand, for an acting workshop that quite literally changed my life. Tom Oesterling, for telling me I sounded like a kazoo my freshman year, and then teaching me to do better.

The list goes on. Ellen Parks, for meeting me in an NYC cafe, sharing her story, and telling me to keep a box of dreams. Andrew Polec, for hearing my slim idea in the Kirby Theater and telling me immediately "you must". Mr. Joey, for giving me a life in music with his choir, and for getting me my first paycheck as an organist. Michael Kopelman, for taking me to my first Broadway show and being my biggest fan. Wesley Guimarães and Anna Plummer, for casting me in their theses and making me believe my own was possible. Jude Sandy, for asking me the questions I needed to hear, and agreeing to meet with me out of the blue.

Alisa Pearson and Ted Keyes, for their support in making this dream of mine possible. My acapella group, the DQ, my improv group, Gads, my writing group, AAWG - for being my creative outlets, and coming to my performances to shower me with love. My band, for being so incredibly talented and dispelling all my worries from the first rehearsal. My cast, for taking a chance on me, and for making this show what it is.

Finally I'd like to thank my family. My mother and father, for sacrificing so much to take care of me, for all the hours spent driving me to rehearsals, for listening to me play the same lick over and over again on the piano, for trusting I had things under control and giving me the space to create. My siblings, who I love: Christopher, Gabriella, Lea and William. The songs in this show are very personal. Without my family, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

Scan this QR code to view the full lyrics!



Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TsAj4Z4JyjRN5uodS205AuG8MI2R7389/view?usp=drivesdk>

Want to let us know how we did? Send a telegram to your favorite cast member, or leave a comment about the show for Sebastian!



Link: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScm6r3vLp1yBPv353c5IF7kjkMks9C5eLNzC7WDjiaurnR\\_mA/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScm6r3vLp1yBPv353c5IF7kjkMks9C5eLNzC7WDjiaurnR_mA/viewform)

## Amherst College Music Department Upcoming Events

### February 2022

- 18 Adjunct Recital: Jean Jeffries, Horn, with the Wistaria Quartet.** Buckley Recital Hall. 7 PM.
- 19 Adjunct Recital: Stephen Page Quartet.**  
Buckley Recital Hall. 7 PM.

### March 2022

- 3 Jazz@Friedmann Room.** Keefe. 9 PM.
- 5 Amherst Symphony Orchestra Concert: “Drama & Dance: Sibelius & Beethoven”.** Buckley Recital Hall. 8 PM.
- 9 M@A, the CHI, and Amherst Cinema Co-present: Heartbeat Opera’s “Breathing Free, a visual album” Screening and Talkback.** Amherst Cinema. 4:30 PM. \$
- 10 Jazz@Friedmann Room.** Keefe Campus Center. 9 PM.
- 24 M@A, Bombyx, and Valley Jazz Shares Co-present: “Upper West Side Love Story, A Song Cycle by Freddie Bryant”** Bombyx Center for Arts and Equity, Florence, MA. Tickets at [www.bombyx.live](http://www.bombyx.live). 7 PM \$
- 25 M@A Presents: Stewart Goodyear, Piano.**  
Buckley Recital Hall. 8 PM.
- 26 M@A Goodyear piano masterclass.**  
Buckley Recital Hall. 10 AM.
- 31 Jazz@ Friedmann Room.** Keefe. 9 PM.

All events are free and held in Buckley Recital Hall unless otherwise noted. 413.542.2195 / [concerts@amherst.edu](mailto:concerts@amherst.edu) Alisa Pearson, Manager of Concert Programming, Production and Publicity