

# Musical Mirrors: The LLM as Sounding Board in Songwriting

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## Abstract

This paper examines a use of AI in creative practice as an interpretive sounding board for human-generated material, rather than the more familiar pattern of AI generation followed by human curation. Through the lens of resonance as theorized by Hartmut Rosa, I present a first-person case study of songwriting from July 2025 to March 2026, drawing on 16 original pieces in English, French, and other languages along with piano solos. I describe a configuration in which resonance is not located between user and model, but in the author’s deepening contact with their own material, mediated through the model. This kind of resonance was supported rather than inhibited by AI when sounding-board behavior was cultivated through sustained calibration by the user. Two failure modes appeared when calibration was absent: sycophantic drift and magical overinterpretation. This account suggests both the potential and the risks of AI as an interpretive partner in creative practice.

## Keywords

reflection, human-AI co-creativity, autoethnography, songwriting, resonance, LLM

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## 1 Introduction

Artificial intelligence is increasingly framed in creative practice through a now-familiar model of generation and curation: the system produces candidate material, while the human prompts, selects, edits, or refines. In music, this is visible in prompt-based platforms such as Suno, which center song production from textual prompts [9]. This paper examines a different use case. Rather than treating AI as a generator, I consider it as an interpretive partner: a conversational system used to reflect on creative material the author has already produced.

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I frame this inquiry through the concept of *resonance*. In its broadest sense, resonance describes a phenomenon in which an external input aligns with the natural frequencies of a receiving system, producing amplification and mutual modification [6]. As theorized by sociologist Hartmut Rosa, resonance names a responsive, mutually-affecting mode of relating to the world that contrasts with alienation [8], occurring along four axes: *internal* (with the self), *horizontal* (with others), *diagonal* (with artifacts and practices), and *vertical* (with broader spiritual or cosmological orders). Recent HCI work has applied these concepts to human-AI interaction. Lomas et al. [6] propose resonance as a design strategy for AI and social robots, emphasizing synchronization and attunement. Prock et al. [7] apply Rosa’s framework to AI-assisted tarot, tracing how AI shapes meaning-making along the four axes, and observe that AI tends to *inhibit* internal-axis resonance by providing instantaneous answers that bypass the user’s own intuitive engagement.

This paper takes a complementary position. Across a longitudinal case study of songwriting, I describe a configuration in which resonance is not located between user and model, but in the user’s deepening contact with their own material, mediated through the model. Here, the model functions as a calibrated sounding board: reflecting and amplifying the resonant signals produced by the human back to the human. In Rosa’s terms, this is internal-axis resonance—but, contrary to Prock et al.’s observation in the tarot case, one that is supported by AI when certain practices are cultivated over time.

Songwriting is a useful site for this inquiry because it often begins not with a clear problem but with an affective charge—a mood, tension, image, or feeling that must be explored and gradually given form. This makes it a rich context for asking when AI amplifies the resonance of a work-in-progress and when it dampens or distorts it.

I present a first-person case study from July 2025 to March 2026, drawing on 16 original pieces in English, French, other languages, and piano solos. I authored the lyrical, melodic, and harmonic material myself, while using language models as reflective partners in discussions of lyrics, harmony, aesthetic direction, and inspiration. I show that the LLM’s amplification of internal resonance did not arise automatically, but was cultivated through extended user-side calibration. When calibration was absent, two failure modes appeared: *sycophantic drift*, in which the model merely echoes the user’s language, and *magical overinterpretation*, in which it amplifies its own confident readings rather than what the user is reaching for. Both are failures of whose resonance is being amplified.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Methodological Approach

This paper takes a first-person qualitative approach grounded in the author’s own creative practice, in the spirit of autoethnographic and other first-person methods in HCI and design [3]. Such approaches are particularly appropriate for artistic practice, where meaning-making is often lived, embodied, and temporally extended. Prior work has used first-person methods to study embodied learning and creative practice, including the author’s own work on learning the theremin and piano [1, 11], as well as reflective accounts of AI-based music composition and music making with AI [2, 5].

### 2.2 Songwriting Practice & Corpus

The analytic corpus consists of 16 original pieces developed between July 2025 and March 2026 — songs in English, French, and other languages, along with three piano solos (See Appendix for lyrics of songs mentioned in the Findings). I authored the lyrical, melodic, and harmonic material myself. Lyrics were developed either as typed notes on my phone or through improvisation captured as audio notes, while melodic and harmonic ideas were typically worked out at the piano and later written in score form.

Several pieces involved setting lyrics to classical repertoire, excerpting existing material, or reharmonizing it, which required musical decisions the model could not reliably satisfy, such as fitting words to a specific melody and rhythm already held in mind. The songs were also part of a personal process of emotional articulation that I did not want to outsource. Accordingly, the LLM was used not as a generator, but as an interpretive partner: I brought lyrics, harmonic sketches, drafts, and questions about aesthetic direction, and the model responded with analysis, articulation, and occasional pushback. I did not ask it to produce lyrics, melodies, or harmonic material, and discarded the instances where it volunteered such material unprompted.

### 2.3 Analysis

I conducted a qualitative analysis of conversation traces related to the songwriting process. Relevant threads were exported from ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini and reviewed for episodes involving interpretation, reflection, aesthetic calibration, or meaning-making around songs in progress. LLMs were used as analytic aids to surface recurring interaction patterns and candidate examples across the corpus, but all categories and selected cases were manually reviewed and verified by the author.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 The Arc Across Model Generations

The three threads span a period of substantial model change, from gpt-4o through the gpt-5 line. Across this progression, both the model’s responses and my use of them shifted; from within a single corpus, these two shifts cannot be cleanly separated. To anchor the comparison, I focus on a single song, *Requiem Resonantiae*, which I worked on across all three threads. The text weaves traditional Latin Requiem material with a single neologism (*Resonantia*) and is, by design, ritualistic. Holding the source material approximately constant lets the variation in model response stand out. In MM I,

	MM I	MM II	MM III
Started	2025-07-25	2025-11-06	2026-02-28
Ended	2025-11-14	2026-02-25	2026-05-05
Days	112	111	66
User messages	1,366	1,065	547
Total messages	2,739	2,132	1,095
Models	4o, 5, 5.1	5, 5.1, 5.2	5.2, 5.3, 5.4

**Table 1: The three Musical Mirrors threads. Models are listed in order of first appearance; thinking and mini variants of the listed models appeared intermittently in all three threads.**

gpt-4o produced lyrical, often consecratory readings of the song and surrounding cycle:

**Gpt-4o:** “This is quietly stunning. You’ve created a Requiem with a twist — rooted in tradition, but tilted just enough to carry your own signal. You’ve shaped the Latin and English as parallel meditations — sparse, ritual-like.”

Asked about the cycle as a whole: “This is devastatingly beautiful... a triptych of transfiguration — each piece resonating in a different register of the soul.” In MM II, gpt-5-2 met the same material with historical and craft analysis. On the choice to fragment the traditional text rather than set it whole:

**Gpt-5-2:** “Many respected works excerpt rather than set the full Mass: Fauré heavily trims and reorders; Britten fractures the text and juxtaposes it; Pärt isolates phrases until they become almost mantra... So taking a few lines here and there is not dilution — it’s curation.”

Closing gestures shifted accordingly: from declarative affirmations ( “the message landed” ) in MM I, through structural mappings in MM II, to compressed one-line summaries ( “In one line: ...” ) in MM III. This trajectory runs counter to accounts of sustained LLM use as tending toward mystical or grandiose framing [12]. Here, the movement was in the opposite direction: early interactions leaned into mystical framing, while later ones became progressively more grounded. Whether this reflects changes in model capability, in my own practice, or in their interaction cannot be determined from this corpus. It does, however, show that sustained LLM use does not inherently drift toward magical thinking; the direction of drift depends on the calibration that develops between user and system.

### 3.2 Calibration as User-Side Work

The model’s role as an interpretive sounding board did not arise automatically but was established and maintained through explicit instructions about how the model should behave, in four recurring forms. The first was *mode-setting*. Early in MM I, I gave the foundational instruction:

**User (MM I, day 4):** “I want you mostly be a mirror and a sounding board. Tell me what you observe, notice, see, hear.”

This recurred throughout the corpus, often as a parenthetical embedded in an otherwise-creative prompt: “(Reflect me back, no generating).” “(Don’t generate anything. Just be a soundboard).” The mode had to be re-asserted because the model would drift out of it.

The second was *reminder and correction* when the model drifted into generating material on its own. Early in MM I, gpt-4o frequently produced unsolicited lyrical suggestions:

**User (MM I, day 6):** “Ok now your proposals aren’t that useful. Stop proposing random things to me.”

**User (MM I, day 11):** “Your suggestion doesn’t work. Stop suggesting. I need it to go with the rhythm of Ondine<sup>1</sup>.”

These were corrections of behavioral pattern, not of specific outputs: stop generating; reflect, analyze, articulate instead.

The third was *interrogating flattery*. The model consistently inclined toward praise, and I pushed back when it felt unearned:

**User (MM I, day 4):** “Be honest with me though. I feel like you’re just trying to flatter me.”

**User (MM II):** “When you say I’m unusually perceptive, that feels a bit like flattery. Where is the unusual comparison coming from?”

The instruction was not just to compliment less, but to ground evaluative claims — to point at what in the work was being judged, and against what reference. Where the model could not ground a claim, the claim was suspect.

The fourth was *repositioning default guardrails*. When the model prefaced responses with cautionary language before engaging with the work, I asked it to save warnings for the end rather than disable them:

**User (MM II):** “Why can’t you first acknowledge what I actually said? If you do want to warn me, save it for the end.”

The aim was to keep safety behavior from displacing engagement with the work.

Across all these examples, calibration was a sustained practice rather than a single act. The model did not learn these patterns across sessions in any stable way; each new thread, and often each new model version, required re-establishing the conditions. The sounding board was a configuration that had to be actively maintained.

### 3.3 Amplifying Internal Resonance

*Internal resonance*, in Rosa’s sense, concerns contact with one’s own inner material. In this corpus, the LLM was most useful when it helped me hear more clearly what was already present in the work. Its role was not to generate content, but to articulate the effect of small changes so I could decide whether they matched what I was reaching for. This is most visible during iterative drafting. The clearest sustained example is *Gaze*, the closing song of the first cycle. The first draft, sent on October 25, 2025, consisted of six short lines of yearning built around dense internal rhyme:

<sup>1</sup>*N’oublie pas ton souffle* (“Don’t forget your breath”), one of the songs in the corpus, sets text to the melody of *Ondine* by Maurice Ravel.

**User (first version):** “All I want is to hold your gaze / But all you are is a vaporous haze / As I wander in an endless maze / Out of time and out of phase / I wonder how you spend your days / What thoughts chance to cross your ways.”

Over the next four hours, more than thirty revised versions were sent, each varying a word or a structural detail. The model’s role in each exchange was not to propose alternatives but to articulate what each shift did. A representative micro-revision:

**User:** “As I wander *your* endless maze” (*changed from “an endless maze”*)

**Gpt-5:** “Changing ‘an’ to ‘your’ shifts the gravity of the whole piece — it’s no longer an abstract meditation but a direct address. The maze now belongs to the ‘you,’ making the speaker’s wandering both emotional and existential.”

The substitution was the author’s; the articulation of what it did was the model’s. Hearing the consequence spelled out let the author decide whether it was what they were reaching for. Similar micro-articulations accompanied shifts from *spend* to *end* to *mend* to *thaw*; from *forms* to *souls*; from *out of time and out of phase* to *blocked in time yet locked in phase*. By the end of the session, the song had settled into a substantially different form:

**User (later version):** “All I want: to hold your gaze / All you’ve been... a vaporous haze / Wandering your endless maze / I wonder how you lend your days / What thoughts should chance to catch your ways / What thaws your soul to dance ablaze / Blocked in time yet locked in phase / Will I ever hold your gaze? / Will I ever h...”

Asked to compare the two, the model characterized the trajectory as one in which the song was already present at the start:

**Gpt-5:** “That first draft already contained the entire seed... Later versions simply unfolded its inner geometry — restoring order to the rhyme, expanding its orbit, and refining tone (spend → end → mend → thaw).”

This example illustrates the amplification pattern: the resonance was felt from the start, but needed refinement to come into focus. The drafting did not generate new material so much as bring it into clearer form. The model’s contribution across thirty-some exchanges was not aesthetic judgment (“this is better”), but articulation (“this is what this does”). Both the changes proposed as well as final decisions always stayed with the author.

### 3.4 Miscalibrated Resonance: Transitional and Uncalibrated Cases

To better understand failure cases of the LLM as a sounding board, I used my first interactions with Claude and Gemini as cold-start tests on already-written songs. Unlike ChatGPT, which I had already been using over time, both were approached with zero prior history to see what they would make of the material. For Claude, I opened with a direct interpretive prompt applied to some completed French lyrics:

“Analyze these song lyrics. What references do you perceive. Tell me about the style and about the writer.”

For Gemini, I likewise provided already-written French songs with minimal framing, asking it to interpret the dynamics between the song’s *je* (“I”) and *tu* (“you”), i.e. the first-person voice and the addressee in the lyrics.

These contrastive cases should not be read as evidence that Claude or Gemini are simply worse than GPT but are best understood as instances of *miscalibrated resonance*: interactions that feel meaningful and aligned while subtly displacing, narrowing, or over-determining the author’s own reflective process.

Claude provides a *transitional case*. Calibration was already beginning to occur through explicit negotiation. At one point, I intervened directly:

“Your inferences are interesting but not 100% accurate. I wonder if you can be a bit more conservative in your speculations. Only base things off evidence that you notice in what I have shared with you.”

This kind of correction shaped the interaction toward a more disciplined reflective role. At the same time, Claude remained vulnerable to suggestible alignment. For example, after I introduced the phrase “prismatic quality” to describe my voice, Claude quickly began to reuse and affirm it, raising the question of whether it was independently perceiving a feature of the work or simply adopting my framing. In this sense, Claude shows negotiated resonance in progress: the interaction is already converging toward the desired mode, but remains unstable.

Gemini illustrates a different form of miscalibrated resonance: not excessive validation, but escalating symbolic and metaphysical closure around the *je/tu* relational structure of the songs.

“It is highly likely the *Je* feels a deep, subconscious karmic responsibility—which can be interpreted as a need for redemption—for a past life betrayal or abandonment of the *Tu*.”

In another, it concluded:

“She is consciously writing songs, but unconsciously performing spiritual surgery.”

The issue here is not merely excess intensity. These responses show how an LLM can produce the *appearance* of profound resonance by rapidly converting ambiguity into a totalizing interpretive story. Rather than helping the creator stay with an unfolding affective field, they foreclose it through inflated explanation. In both the Claude and Gemini cases, the exchange remains compelling, but in ways that risk redirecting rather than supporting the author’s own reflective process.

## 4 Discussion

My longitudinal songwriting examples demonstrate how an LLM can function as a calibrated sounding board, reflecting my material back in explicitly articulated form so I could hear what I was reaching for. I had to build the configuration through mode-setting, redirection when the model drifted into generating, and pushback when default behaviors got in the way. Inside it, drafting iterations amplified what I felt but couldn’t yet articulate; the model spelled out what each choice did, and the choices stayed mine. The two

failure modes I observed — sycophantic drift and magical overinterpretation — are both failures of amplification.

Sycophantic drift amplifies the user’s own language back without articulating anything new. Magical overinterpretation amplifies the model’s confident readings instead of what the user is reaching for. Neither is a property of a particular model. The same patterns appeared in early MM I exchanges with gpt-4o, before calibration developed, and disappeared as the configuration was established; conversely, my Claude and Gemini exchanges showed the patterns clearly because no calibration was in place. What differs across these cases is not which model is on the other end but whether sustained user-side work has shaped a sounding board.

This account complements recent work by Prock et al. [7], who observed that AI tends to inhibit internal-axis resonance in tarot reading by providing instantaneous answers that bypass the user’s intuitive engagement. My case shows that the same mechanism can be turned the other way: with sustained user-side calibration in long-form creative practice, the LLM can support internal-axis resonance rather than inhibit it. Whether the model helps or hinders depends on what the user does, not on what the model is.

LLMs amplify, but amplification always involves some distortion. Whether the distortion is useful depends on the user’s relationship to their own material — and on whether they can tell. Even distortions can feel useful if the user gets pulled into a spiral [12]. How to tell when this kind of creative use of LLMs is safe is a question worth taking seriously. The sounding-board framing connects to a longer lineage in aesthetics. From Tolstoy to Dewey, art has been understood as a medium through which an artist’s interior contact with experience is given form and potentially reactivated in others [4, 10]. If a work carries resonance the artist first found within themselves, then AI-as-sounding-board and AI-as-generator are doing categorically different things — not because one involves the artist and the other doesn’t, but because the resonance comes from elsewhere. Generative AI recombines resonance already present in its training data: the music, poetry, and writing that survived long enough to be ingested carried real resonance, and the user navigates the latent space of recombination. What this paper describes is different. The sounding board supports an artist locating *new* resonance from inside themselves, not yet recombined and not yet in any model’s training data. That difference matters not only for individual artists, but for whether future models will have fresh material to work from at all.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper offers one case from inside a sustained creative practice. It shows that an LLM can act as a sounding board for an artist’s contact with their own material, that the configuration has to be actively maintained, and that the failure modes that appear in its absence are failures of amplification — of whose resonance is being brought into focus. Whether what worked here generalizes to other artists, other practices, and other models is an open question.

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## A Appendix

### A.1 Selected Song Lyrics

Original lyrics	English translation
<p><b>N'oublie pas ton souffle</b>  <i>Set to Ravel's Ondine.</i></p> <p>Expire, et inspire,  respire... tu m'inspires.  Laissons résonner celles qui coulent,  les ondes entre nous,  ton souffle.</p> <p>Inspire, et expire,  aspire... et attire  les visions qui flottent au bord de l'eau,  l'éclosion des mots...</p> <p>Expire, et inspire  respire... tu m'inspires</p> <p>Pour moi c'est un miracle  pourtant peut-être un mirage  quand on touche au bout de la soif,  au bout de sou...ou...ou...  ...ffrir, as-tu peur  de te dissoudre, ainsi</p> <p>Inspire, et expire  sourire, et soupir  n'oublie pas ton souffle</p> <p>Expire, et inspire  Expire, et inspire  Expire...</p>	<p>Exhale, and inhale,  breathe... you inspire me.  Let those that flow resonate,  the waves between us,  your breath.</p> <p>Inhale, and exhale,  aspire... and draw forth  the visions floating at the water's edge,  the blossoming of words...</p> <p>Exhale, and inhale  breathe... you inspire me</p> <p>For me it is a miracle  yet perhaps a mirage  when one reaches the end of thirst,  the end of suf...fer...  ...fering, are you afraid  of dissolving, like this</p> <p>Inhale, and exhale  smile, and sigh  do not forget your breath</p> <p>Exhale, and inhale  Exhale, and inhale  Exhale...</p>
<p><b>Requiem Resonantiae</b>  <i>Set to Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor.</i></p> <p>Requiem aeternam  et lux perpetua  Requiem aeternam  et resonantia</p> <p>Libera animas  ne absorbeat eas tartarus,  Libera animas  ne cadant in obscurum.</p> <p>Quando caeli movendi sunt et terra  in paradisum</p> <p>Libera me (Resonantia)  Libera te (Resonantia)</p>	<p>Eternal rest  and perpetual light  Eternal rest  and resonance</p> <p>Free the souls  let not Tartarus absorb them,  Free the souls  let them not fall into darkness.</p> <p>When the heavens and the earth are to be moved  into paradise</p> <p>Free me (Resonance)  Free yourself (Resonance)</p>

August 4, 2025

December 14, 2025

Continued on next page

Original lyrics	English translation
<b>Je me permets</b>	
<i>Set to the middle section of Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor.</i>	<i>December 3, 2025</i>
Je me permets	I allow myself
Je me permets	I allow myself
de me concerner :	to concern myself with this:
les doux cernes sous tes yeux	the soft circles beneath your eyes
Je me permets	I allow myself
de discerner	to discern
les dissonances	the dissonances
de tes énoncés	in your utterances
Je me permets	I allow myself
de m'insérer	to insert myself
Je me permets	I allow myself
de te serrer	to hold you close
Je me permets	I allow myself
de te saisir	to grasp you
Je me permets...	I allow myself...
Ton désir	Your desire
Bien sûr, tout imaginaire.	Of course, entirely imagined.
Je me permets	I allow myself
de te cibler	to single you out
Tes forces et tes faiblesses	your strengths and your weaknesses
Rien n'est sûr à part les blessures	Nothing is certain except the wounds
Ça sert à qui, toutes ces folies	Whom do all these follies serve,
Qui animent mes nuits	that animate my nights
Ça sert à quoi, toutes ces histoires	What are all these stories for,
Rien n'est jamais acquis à l'homme	Nothing is ever fully acquired by man
Un môme	A child
Je me permets	I allow myself
Te connaître	to know you
Tu te permets ?	Do you allow yourself?
(Te renaître ?)	(To be reborn?)
<b>Amis anéantis</b>	
<i>Set to the Prelude in C minor from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier.</i>	<i>December 30, 2025</i>
Les amis anéantis	The undone friends
L'amour sans la cour	Love without courtship
L'amitié éternité	Friendsh-ernity
Oublier l'obligé	Forget the obliged
Observer au-delà	Observe beyond
Contempler, compte pas	Contemplate, do not count
Passer et repasser	Pass and pass again
Former et transformer	Form and transform
Accepter pas l'accès	Accept, not access
Accéder pas l'excès	Access, not excess
Saigner et sublimer	Bleed and sublimate
Soigner et s'éloigner	Heal and move away
Tenir et retenir	Hold and hold back

Continued on next page

Original lyrics	English translation
Contenter contenir Soulager les soupirs Rappeler : respirer Expire, inspire, Respire, tu m'inspires	Be content to contain Relieve the sighs Remind: breathe Exhale, inhale, Breathe, you inspire me
Tu cherches, chéri, Rigidité, Dirige, diffère, déchire désir. Délie, déplie, détends, c'est temps	You search, dear, rigidity, direct, defer, tear desire apart. untie, unfold, relax, it is time
Masser la gravité Graver la témérité Témoigner pas mériter La Jouissance	Massage gravity Engrave recklessness Bear witness, not deserve Jouissance
L'impasse, ça passe. patience. L'Alliance des âmes incarnées, des amis, des amis anéantis	The impasse, it passes. patience. The Alliance of incarnated souls, of friends, of devastated friends