

# *Your Life is Better as a Musical*

## *Mental health during COVID*

### *By Forest Ho-Chen '22*

One of the first things that I did at George School after meeting all the technology requirements was to listen to a song about how the human brain works. It is very unlikely that this song was made by the speakers in the video. The song maker auto-tuned the speeches and combined them to make the song. Other YouTube channels have done similar things, such as using the words of one song to fit the tune of another song.

Similarly, the YouTube channel Schmoyoho, run by the Gregory Brothers, has been repurposing media into music, a process they call “Songify.” They have songified many different things, including Star Wars, encouraging interviews, and Kanye West talking about Wreck-It Ralph. However, Schmoyoho’s largest project is Songify the News. In this series, the Gregory Brothers take news clips and turn them into song form. Many of these songs have included the two main candidates for the 2020 presidential election.

In fact, Joe Biden has been named the “Best Unintentional Singer” three times, which is the most times out of anyone that Schmoyoho has songified: in “Muffins in Congress” by talking about how “if you harm America, we will follow you to the end of the Earth and [redacted] you up,” in “Flying Robots” for his segment “Buy a Shotgun,” and in “Naked Men.”

Donald Trump has been named the “Best Unintentional Singer” twice: in “Trump Vs. Macron” for singing about how he will leave the Paris Climate Agreement (tied with Emmanuel Macron and Bernie Sanders) and in “Wind Cancer, Dumps, and Babies” for arguing that windmills can cause cancer (and then immediately getting countered). Donald Trump has also gotten the “Trememdousest Bars” award for his rapping skills in “Trump vs. Comey” for rapping about a letter.

One concern about changing the news into a song form is that the information might be inaccurate. In the 2020 race for the presidency, information should be as accurate as possible to reduce the chance of misleading people. However, most changes made during the Songify process are minor, and the major changes are usually obvious and involve events that the audience would know would be abnormal for the situation, such as a singer dancing on stage during a debate, partying, or having an actor. Looking at one of the more recent songs, which was about how President Donald Trump has the ability to remember five words for 25 minutes, we can see that there are some minor changes.

In both versions, Trump mentions that a leader has to be sharp. In the original version, he mentions the detail that the order of the words can matter for the test. Possibly the biggest change is that in the songified version, Trump says that remembering five words is “not an easy question, not for me,” (Schmoyoho, 2020), but in the original version, he says, “It’s actually not that easy, but for me it was easy,” (Trump, 2020).

This is a very important detail that changes the message from “Trump’s memory is good” in the original version to “Trump can perform difficult tasks” in the songified version. As the 2020 election happens right now, Schmoyoho will make song versions of the presidential and vice-presidential debates. Less than 24 hours after the first presidential debate, Schmoyoho released their songified version.

This video got 25 thousand views within the first 33 minutes, and it later became number 5 on trending. Notably missing from the song version are some of the most memorable lines from the debate: “Will you shut up, man?” (Biden, 2020), “Don’t ever use the word smart with me” (Trump, 2020), and “It’s hard to get any word in with this clown” (Biden, 2020). However, it would be extremely difficult for Schmoyoho to include these lines because there were multiple voices speaking at the same time. The Gregory Brothers posted the behind-the-scenes video for this song, and in the video, Evan Gregory talks about how even though the two candidates are great for Songify, they spoke over each other so often that salvaging usable material from the debate was more difficult than one might expect; songified versions can only include parts of the debate where only one candidate is talking. This debate did not include much of that, to say the least. In fact, Weird Al allegedly texted the Gregory Brothers and said, “Holy Cow, what a trainwreck. Good luck guys!”

The songified version of the debate discussed COVID-19, the economy, and the supreme court, followed by a “freestyle” section, where the topic was allowed to be anything. These topics align with those of the actual debate. At the end of all the songified debate videos, the brothers say that “Whoever sings best gets four years to run the show.” Some YouTuber’s have supported Songify or have collaborated with Schmoyoho. For example, RoomieOfficial actually likes the songified version of the debate more than the original.

The George School Community has a wide range of opinions regarding this topic. Approximately 75% of people surveyed said that they enjoyed the debate song, and more than 80% of people surveyed believed that the song was an accurate representation of the debate. Since Schmoyoho says that the better singer will likely win, I also asked about who the better singer was. The George School Community is pretty evenly split on who the better singer is. However, the average margin of victory for Biden was much higher than the average margin for Trump. An anonymous student said that Trump was the better singer in the debate, but the arguments were about the same.

They said, “I shall say that this actually covers all the topics.” Ellen Zhang ’21 said, “I’m not very [in- formed] on politics but it felt like a good way to spread news cause it seemed a ton of [people] watched it.” On the topic of memorable quotes being excluded, Angel Gomez ’22 said,

"I don't care that those quotes weren't included, in fact I'm glad that they weren't. Trendy quotes from U.S. political debates usually become low-hanging fruit for content creators to use in their political content, so I'm glad they maintained their integrity and didn't try to capitalize on the lines' popularity." Other students said that it didn't really matter if the quotes were left in or not. However, some students did feel that the song would have been better with the quotes. For example, Sam Gorby '23 said, "I think it would've been more impactful if it had included those quotes. And funnier, obviously." Most students surveyed said that they enjoyed the debate song. For example, Dean Mullin '23 said, "The creators really did a wonderful job capturing the major points of the debate from both candidates."

Weird Al, who was phenomenal as always, did a good job asking the appropriate questions, along with reacting with the appropriate reactions to each candidate's response. The rhythm matches perfectly with the lyrics, which makes this song a great learning video for people who didn't watch the debate, and it puts a creative and comical spin on it.

I also love how all of the responses were completely real. Everything that each candidate said in the video, they said on stage, which makes it amazing." On the other hand, Angel Gomez '22 said, "In summation, the song, as catchy as it is, is bogged down by the video's cringy attempts at humor. The end product is something so mediocre that not even Weird Al could save it."

There are, of course, other YouTube channels that also convert media into songs. Other YouTube channels have also made song versions of the debate. Other YouTube channels have made remixes of Trump memorizing five words. This remix actually got more views than the Songify version. These other channels might not use autotune as much as Schmoyoho, so they are able to use more footage from the news at the cost of not having complex melodies. There are also channels that take Trump's words and put them over existing songs. These channels do not really count as news in any form as they aren't giving people information. And finally, there are all the Trump bing bong build a wall China remixes, though all these do is emphasize the fact that Trump talks about building a wall and China a lot. Therefore, most song versions of the news give true information, but the information might not have the context needed to understand the information and be misleading. In conclusion, although Songify is a good way to get introduced to what is happening in the news, it is still important to check the original sources of their songs as well as there might be some differences.

Since life and the election have been troubling for most people recently, just remember: "It has been and still is a hard time, but tonight, we get it like it's 1999" (Schmoyoho, 2016).