

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Anthony King

Dec 10, 2020

Honoring Our ‘Library of Dreams’

Music students release album featuring a floor-by-floor look at Geisel Library



Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Communications

As response to the pandemic moved a majority of courses online, two undergraduates found themselves missing their friends...and missing campus. So, they did what any creative UC San Diego student would do: they recorded an eight-track album as an homage to the heart of campus, Geisel Library.

“Library of Dreams” by Donald Liang and Terry Feng was released during fall quarter, though the project started months before, as class hours turned into long days sitting in front of their computers.

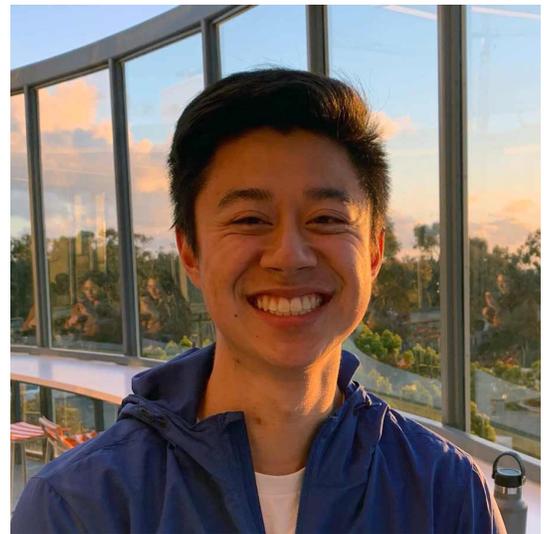
“I think the idea really hit more during spring quarter, when we were all just at home and it was just hours and hours of Zoom lectures,” Feng, a computer science and music double major, said. “I missed so much of just being able to hang out with people, even just study together. That’s what college students do: spend long hours at the library.”

Each of the album’s tracks represents a different floor of Geisel Library, and each floor—both literally and figuratively—has a different feel: an experience that is special to that one location. The building’s main entrance on floor two is bustling, while floor eight, titled “Nap Time” on the album and one of Liang’s favorites, makes it easier to “get away from all the noise,” he said.

But it’s not just their own memories that make up the chill, lo-fi tracks. The pair took to social media to survey classmates, asking for individual stories or impressions of each of the eight floors. They then sorted and incorporated these responses into an outline for the album together, ending by each taking four floors or tracks that they would then produce solo. Weekends over the summer were given to working on their “floors,” and they came together periodically over the computer to listen and give feedback, ultimately resulting in one seamless album.

“It was nice to have those answers to further inform how we wanted to characterize each floor, and to give a little more information about how other people perceived the library,” said Liang, a music major with an emphasis in composition. “Something that I’m particularly interested about is how the music inside our...heads gets shifted onto either pieces of paper or onto a computer program. I just love seeing people tinker around with different programs, different sounds [and] different instruments to create different pieces.”

Unknown to the students at the time, “Library of Dreams” comes at the start of a special year for the UC San Diego Library. Beginning September 2020, the university is observing the 50th anniversary of the iconic Geisel Library as the intellectual heart of campus, having first opened



Donald Liang

its doors to the public in September 1970. A yearlong celebration is now underway.

“I recently contacted Donald and Terry to congratulate them and let them know how much I enjoyed listening to the album; it’s really interesting and enjoyable work,” said Erik Mitchell, the Audrey Geisel University Librarian. “I continue to be amazed by the innovation and collaboration exhibited by our campus scholars, and its projects like this that tell the story of how the UC San Diego Library has remained a source of inspiration to our academic community for the last 50 years.”



Terry Feng

Beginning Dec. 18, the Library will be encouraging more creative interpretations of the beloved Geisel Library with its “Create Your Own Geisel” contest. As part of the Library’s 50th anniversary celebration, the campus community is invited to tap into their creativity to construct an original expression of the building using any medium that speaks to contest participants: from baking or building to painting or composing, all artistic forms are welcome.

With one focused on composition and the other on performance, Liang and Feng balanced each other well and credit specific classes in the Department of Music as impetus for their collaboration. Assistant professor Sarah Hankins, whose own research interests include sound studies and the history of technology in music, taught both students separately, but each mentioned her courses as particularly impactful.

“I remember vividly one of the weeks, we were...going out and recording different sounds, trying to make sound effects [and] recreate a space from just recordings,” Feng said about a music technology seminar he took his first year. “I think that idea of an audio montage, recreating a space with just sound, [helped to] connect the things I learned in Music 176 into this album.”

Hankins said she was thrilled to see how Liang and Feng built upon the tools and concepts explored in the classroom to create a “truly original” album.

Floor Two: Welcome Home

UC San Diego students Donald Liang and Terry Feng said there are Easter Eggs hidden throughout “Library of Dreams,” including opening the album with the track “Floor Two: Welcome Home” instead of the first floor—just like the building’s main entrance. Can you find the others? As Feng jokingly says, “If you know, you know.”

“Their work brings the dynamic effects of site-specific sound art together with digital-electronic groove music of the slickest, chill-est quality,” she said. “‘Library of Dreams’ isn’t just a major artistic achievement, it’s also a labor of love, and a gift to the whole UC San Diego community. Donald and Terry take us ‘home’ even during this moment when we’re all feeling out of place.”

The album is available on all the usual platforms, the two said, including Spotify, SoundCloud and Apple Music. Feng said he even had interest to hear it from family and friends outside of the United States, and the pair have floated the idea of an installation or musical experience at the Library once the UC San Diego community can safely be on campus in larger groups.

Until then, the two said they were grateful for the response and encouraged by how well “Library of Dreams” has resonated with students, faculty and staff alike.

“I think for me it would be cool to continue to see how this kind of music really gives people a space to step back and take a breather from the day-to-day work that we’re all doing,” Liang said. “It’s OK to take a breather every once in a while. I’m hoping a lot of college students can find some sort of comfort in that.”



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