# LAVENDER VALLEY

GEORGIA RECTOR THESIS DEFENSE FALL 2025

# ORAL PRESENTATION OUTLINE



## INTRODUCTION

- thank you for all coming to my thesis defense, I'm Georgia, I'm an illustration major, I'm excited to tell you about one of my favorite forgotten bands that hardly anyone has heard of these days, you've hopefully already explored their albums in this installation, but if not that's okay, I'll tell you their story now

- it started with two childhood friends named Frances Hamilton and Beth Bailey, they were teenagers living here in Portland in the late 60s, with help from local newspaper owner Stanley Davis they recorded first album in 1969, not super complete/professional, just tinkering around with Beth on drums and Frances singing and recording most of the other instruments, named themselves Lavender Valley after the expansive lavender fields they loved to visit in Hood River, people of Portland didn't seem to get it, so the enterprising and optimistic Mr. Davis paid for them to travel across the pond to promote it, thinking maybe Europe would be more accepting of the pair of eccentric young women, F+B just took it as free vacation, in 1970 in the city of Montpellier, France they met a young lady working in her family friend's craft shop, it was Corinne Deschamps

- with Beth acting as translator, her and Frances learned that Corinne was actually from a small rural village where she was known as the girl always in her own world always wandering around with a guitar, F+B eventually traveled back home but never forgot about their new friend or how much they connected with the arts/culture of Europe, late the next year they sold many belongings and packed up the rest to move to Montpellier proper, soon meeting back up with Corinne, started making more demos in both English and French, sent them to labels and eventually caught the ears of an executive at the label Disques Vogue

- and that was it, after their debut in 1972, they spent much of the 70s earning their reputation across mainland Europe as the cultish weird girls with complicated global origins and bold art rock sound

- fast forward to a few decades later in the late 90s, its the early Internet era and rudimentary music fan sites are popping up everywhere, and a middle-aged writer named Leon Davis decides to create the Lavender Valley Archive in order to preserve the memory of the band started by his wife and her childhood best friend, he would upload any archival materials he could find, newspaper clippings, magazine features, and candid snapshots taken by the band/those close to them

- strangely this website was the only one of its kind that made reference to LV, and as Wikipedia and YouTube came onto the scene in the early 00s, no further information seemed to pop up about the band

- eventually Leon appeared to cease maintaining the archive, and now it sits there as a relic of both the early Internet and a 70s band long forgotten

- now you may have gathered that LV is not actually a real band, but my overall goal is to make them feel as real as I can

## OVERVIEW

- I first came up with LV back in high school, I was already drawing the musicians I liked over and over again, I came up with these characters so I could draw some cool Black girls instead of the same couple of white men, soon learned about a genre of storytelling that I found very interesting

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- unfiction: telling fictional stories through the medium of reality, similar to:

    - transmedia: stories disseminated through multiple outlets aided by technology, requiring the audience to engage with multiple in order to understand the full scope, really broad and could encapsulate something like the MCU, which has comics/movies/tv shows/merchandise/theme park rides...

    - ARGs: alternate reality games, transmedia narratives that present not just story, but interactive game elements that make use of the Internet and often require players to collaborate, popular example is The Beast, ARG that accompanied the Spielberg movie AI from 2001, involved clues hidden in movie posters/trailers/physical mail that all tasked the audience with solving a murder-mystery

- all these categories are really hazy, pretty much every source you can find presents multiple terms/definitions, but I like the term unfiction since the word encapsulates telling a fictional story through nonfictional means, which is exactly what I'm trying to do

- audiences for unfiction overlap with the lost media community, people on the Internet dedicated to discussing and archiving lost video/audio etc, also general Internet mysteries, fiction or nonfiction, think dark/disturbing Reddit stories that are probably fake but intriguing nonetheless, essentially there are lots of people out there primed to search and solve, and I'd like to give them something to search for

- but overall, the audience as a whole is divided into two main camps, there are the people who come to the installation, learn about LV and enjoy the project here, but it doesn't go beyond that, if that's you I'm certainly not judging, I think it's just the reality of the project/unfiction, on the other hand there's only a subset of the audience who will actually go to the website, see what I've written there, and continue to follow along, I have to make sure the experience is compelling/complete for both audiences

## INFLUENCES

- main influence from world of unfiction is iDKHOW, real band/project with fictional backstory involving time travel and an evil corp, story told over the course of years through hidden clues in music vids/social media/physical packages themselves, with each album era bringing new depth to the imagined world, this is the only work of unfiction I've experienced in real time so it continues to be a touchpoint for me as far as methods to deliver story and the importance of time in unfiction

- another conceptual influence is the band Sparks, partially because of their incredible album story, their first album was in 1971 and their 28th was released earlier this year, when I first became a Sparks fan, I had to take in this immense album story by going through these records one by one, it just kinda cemented in my brain as a was of storytelling that just makes sense

# ORAL PRESENTATION OUTLINE



- Sparks also influences me in that the feelings I felt while first learning about Sparks are exactly what I want to replicate with LV, the intrigue and piqued curiosity in finding something new and interesting, it's a thrill that I wish I could relive, but there is another side to it, there's something sad about knowing you've missed out on most of your favorite band's career and can only experience it as a thing of the past discovering their decades-old live performances on YouTube and using the Wayback Machine to explore their defunct websites, it's really bittersweet, because at least you can see you're here for it now

- I've gotten the comparison to Gorillaz a few times, a band with fictional characters but real music made by real people, but LV has no music associated with it, main goal is to make LV feel real by unfictional means alone, to instill the same curiosity and bittersweet thrill that I felt learning about old bands

- leads to what I've kinda labeled as my ultimate unfiction question/ conflict, all pieces of unfiction have this tension between the creator and the story, since the most seamless pieces of unfiction have the audience questioning if what they're experiencing is truly real, while the creator pulls the strings from backstage like a puppetmaster, if I want to really instill those feelings and really make LV feel real, I'd rather not get up here and just bare my soul to you all about this project as its creator, I want you to have to discover it yourselves through the installation/website, so if I ever seem vague, that's why, the very act of thesis defense where I have to explain every aspect of my process is pretty contradictory to what I want to do, so that being said, it's time to take you through my process

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION / PROCESS OF MAKING

- since I came up with LV in high school, I had lots to build on in this extended project, pretty much everything you're seeing on the walls was made before 2025, some of the albums concepts are several years old, so it was a bit of a challenge to decide which of those ideas I wanted to keep, evolve, or throw out entirely

- this year I really thought about what I wanted their career story to be, beat by beat, how I can show that though album covers, LV has their origin in nature with the first self-titled album, then they travel to France and have this big bold debut with *Orange*, they take on themes of flying and escaping in *I Wish I Was a Butterfly* until they're actually depicted in space among the stars in *Atmospheric* as far as they can be from their grounded origin, but they then return to earth and return to nature in *A Tree So Tall*, with their career quietly ending with one final album that due to issues with the record label, had a very limited release, again I know some of this is vague, but there are specific things I want the audience to wonder, so if you're questioning what happened to LV between the 70s and Leon creating the website, I've got you right where I want you

- this framework came about along the way and acted as a guidepost when I was stuck on not only visuals, but the song titles as well

- for example, I was struggling to come up with a design layout for the back of *Atmospheric*, the scale of the characters was a lot bigger, until I saw a specific reference image that used a lot of empty space and I realized that was the perfect way to illustrate the spacey, liminal feeling I was going for

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- I also focused on all the little details in order to make LV feel more real and authentic:

    - already had main LV logo from last year, so I created a “less developed” variation to use for their earlier years before F+B moved to France, and also a more streamlined version to match their evolution over the course of the 70s

    - I used one real record label which no longer exists as a way to directly insert LV into reality, and I also created my own fictional label called Electro-Magnet, by doing this I put something real right next to something fictional and creating confusion as to which is which

    - I even used French capitalization which you may have noticed, their capitalization rules are totally different where only the first letter of a song title needs to be capitalized and not the other words, I do see my audience as primarily English-speaking but I still wish for those details to be accurate

- even though they’re small, these details are things I have to consider carefully since even the smallest additions/changes to the lore need to be addressed thoroughly, for example if I wanted to change the date of an album release or even just a plot point, I have to make sure that the dates on all of my other materials (newspapers/magazines) don’t conflict the new timeline

- visual **INFLUENCES** evidently help both with authenticity/being period-appropriate, but I’m able to use those visual codes to convince/deceive the audience:

    - vintage print media like newspapers/magazines, bold 70s visual style, color and texture

    - looking at 70s album design systems, where info is located/ hierarchy, big shapes and iconic imagery which any good album cover has from any era

    - fashion/music photography: poses, facial expressions, tone

    - nature itself, the inspiration behind lots of 70s illustration, and also a key symbol in the story of LV

- visually focusing on big shapes also made the actual illustration process a lot smoother for the most part, simple compositions and poses helped combat procrastination, which I no doubt experienced a lot of

- sketch process became totally digital because of time, custom type done by hand, raster then clean up in vector, since that’s what I find most familiar, for the most part achieved the look I wanted since I’ve been doing a lot of psychedelic type this semester, I think it turned out especially good in *Orange* since it really matched the vision I’ve had for years, the only one I don’t love is the script type I’ve done (*Atmospheric*), makes sense since I’m less familiar with that writing system

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- scope of project didn't change much since I proposed 5-6 albums, although I found that the back covers actually needed more attention than the front for the most part, since they contain more of the details I'm using to tell the story, luckily I found myself only having to tweak a couple of sketches because of time

- just last week I printed all 6 covers on one of the big rolls of matte photo paper, cut them carefully and then folded them together and glued with a bookbinding adhesive, the most difficult part of fabrication was folding the spines, it was tough to get two creases 1/8th of an inch apart, so they're all a bit crumpled, I don't mind since I originally proposed to experiment in distressing the album covers but since I was gonna be printing on nice paper, that was an easy no, instead Zack graciously gave me some plastic sleeves which kinda hide it, also I think is just the cherry on top in terms of authenticity

- for the installation I wished to create a space akin to a stall in a vintage/antique store, mismatched wooden furniture and cozy lighting, got help from family members and neighbors to source the records, and also help from my Grandma with the tables I'm using so thanks to all of them again, I was definitely concerned with how filled up the walls would look, but looking at it now I think it turned out nicely

## PROJECT IN CULTURE

- I mentioned this earlier, it's something I've come to realize this year, it's that time is key in unfiction, creators build plotlines over days/weeks/years and there are no standards in place to archive them for future audience members

- LV has slowly grown and changed over the years, but I know I want it to live as unfiction only, I'm not sure if something like a graphic novel or TV show could achieve the immersion that I want

- that being said, I have many ways in mind to expand this project in the future:

    - interactive elements: Leon's email, planting physical objects in real-world locations, which also would act as marketing, also adding a present-tense narrative/characters

    - elements of mystery: hidden webpages, steganography which is hiding secret information in an innocuous medium, like an image or physical object, and also cryptography which is encoded language that needs to be decoded in some way, like ciphers where certain letters actually represent other letters, these are both ways that more sophisticated pieces of unfiction use to gamify their stories, making them more similar to ARGs

    - transmedia elements: photography, intermediate web design

- but now the website has all its main images done so its in a completed state, I can focus on other illo/supplementary LV work

- I'm going into editorial/publishing illustration, also expanding my custom type portfolio, I certainly would like to make album covers for real musical artists, but these images I've made for this project won't be going in my professional portfolio

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- this brings us back to my ultimate unfiction conflict, where if I wish to make LV feel real and cause that little bit of doubt, I can't just post it on my website and say "Look what I made!"

- I've certainly pondered the idea of playing a character within the LV universe, it was brought up in my midterm review, but that's not something I was confident crafting in that amount of time, for now I just use attention-grabbing and mysterious language when I describe their story as myself, the creator, in order to push the immersion as far as I can

## CONCLUSION

- to sum up, LV started with just a few character designs, until I learned about the world of unfiction and knew that was a format I wanted to explore with this band, I was inspired by real bands in crafting a story where LV travels to europe and becomes much more well known there than in their home country, only for them to be all but forgotten decades later

- I've worn a lot of hats in this project: not just illustrator, but designer, writer, hands-on maker, beginner web designer, and even apparel designer, but to me all of these roles fall under one umbrella, and that is storyteller, the transmedia nature of unfiction is critical in making these narratives immersive, all the other hats are just means to bolster the illusion of LV, which again is my overall goal as this project continues to grow and change in the coming years

- if I can cause that doubt in someone's mind, even for a few moments, I consider that a success, first I want to entice people with pleasing, colorful visuals and a trio of people who are underrepresented in rock music, then make people question the existence of LV

- for the biggest fans of both music and Internet mysteries, I want the curiosity to be so strong that they feel compelled to visit the Lavender Valley Archive, motivated by the desire for answers and the thrill of discovering a new old band, and for those who dive the deepest, I want them to experience the same bittersweet feeling that I've felt knowing that my favorite bands can only be experienced as a thing of the past

- because even in the absence of any actual music, LV can still be a real band. thank you

## IMAGES UPLOADED

*Rector_Georgia_LavenderValley_Installation1.jpg*
Title: Lavender Valley Installation View #1

*Rector_Georgia_LavenderValley_Installation2.jpg*
Title: Lavender Valley Installation View #2

*Rector_Georgia_LavenderValley_InstallationDetail.jpg*
Title: Lavender Valley Installation Detail