



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# Fields of resonance from group therapeutic songwriting with people living with dementia & their family caregivers

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# The Beauty of Nature



## Verse 1

In this vast land we love to live  
Natural wonders have no bounds  
From the desert to the sea  
Deep valleys to snow-capped mounts

## Verse 2

Whether we walk, drive or swim  
Through scorching heat or biting wind  
From the North on Cape York  
Down to Tassie in South Port

## Chorus

*We all bloom in the beauty of nature  
Our eyes feast on it, our hearts soar free  
We all thrive from the sounds so pure  
Cascading water, birdsong in the tree*

## Verse 3 (Tom & Jan)\*

In Australia when we explore  
We think of Burke and Wills  
Who discovered those waterfalls  
Grandeur of gorges viewed from the hills

## Verse 4 (Lindy & Dave)\*

In a camp amongst the trees  
The surf was heard, loud and free  
Wildlife abounds in silent night  
Amongst the ferns and bright moonlight

## Verse 5 (Ali & Julia)\*

In the bushland, birds and trees  
Bright colours attract our eyes  
An extension of memories  
The lens creates and strengthens ties

\*Pseudonyms



## **Background & Approach:**

Conceptualizing group  
therapeutic songwriting  
(TSW) with dyads



# Drawing on research & experience

## Group TSW with people living with dementia

- Shift from disability & decline to strengths and capacity
- Opportunity for challenge & growth
- Sense of achievement, confidence, pride & agency
- Collaboration, group cohesion, social connection

## Group TSW with family caregivers

- “Different to other carer support groups” – share the whole carer journey, gain clarity, inner strength and personal growth
- Connections with other FCGs, group identity

## Therapeutic group singing with dyads

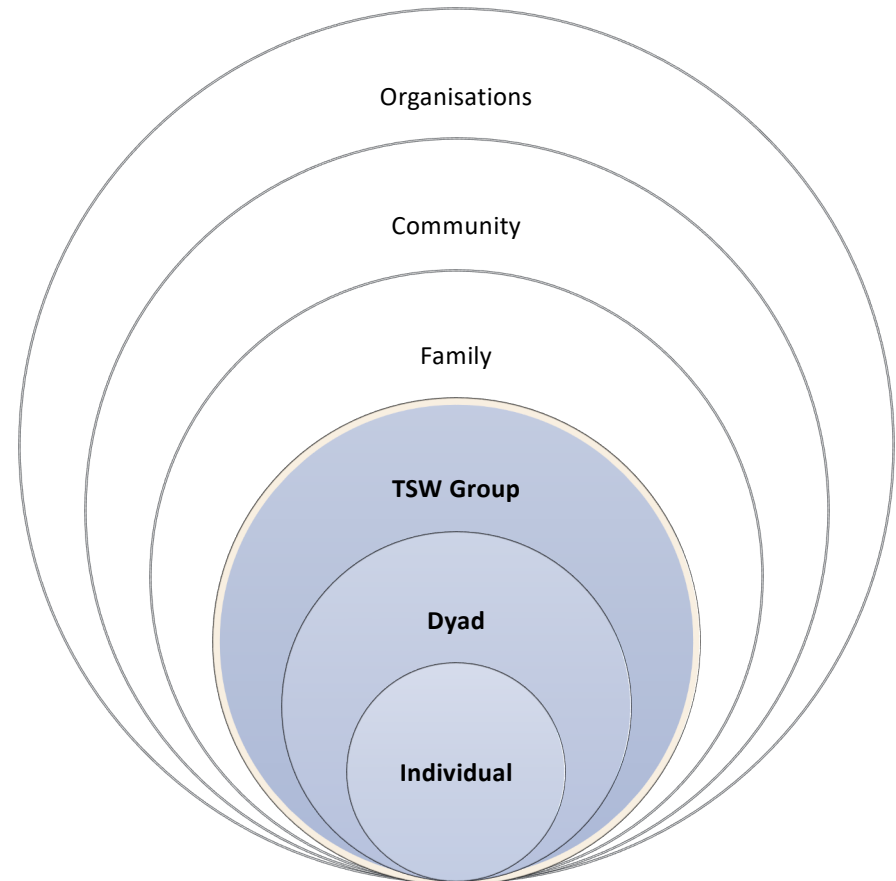
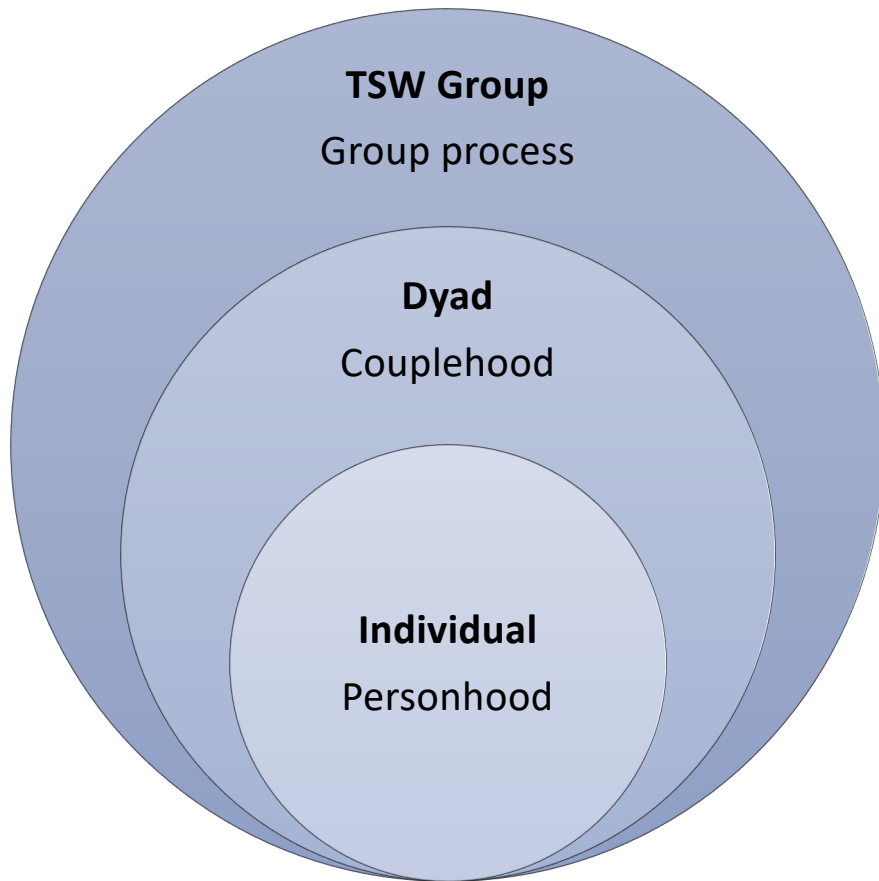
- Meaningful and intellectually stimulating activity for dyad
- Enhanced relationships between & within dyads
- Normalising environment, where participants could demonstrate strengths and skills rather than deficits

(Baker et al., 2018; Baker & Stretton-Smith, 2017; Clark et al., 2018)





# Bringing together frameworks: Dementia care, group process, creative arts & music therapy





# Our approach to group TSW with dyads

## Group therapeutic songwriting

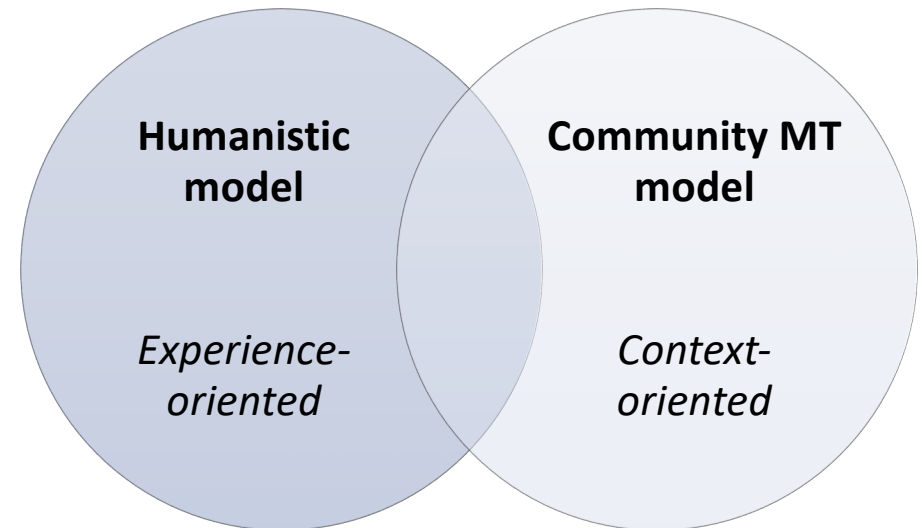
The therapeutic *group* process of *collaboratively* creating lyrics *and/or* music by group members and the RMT to promote social, emotional and *relational* health & wellbeing

## Role of RMT

- Working *alongside* participants – recognising strengths & potential of individuals/dyad/group
- Creativity and flexibility – creating space and facilitating diverse expression/participation

## Role of song

- Avenue for expression – individual/dyad/collective & group identity, source of pride & ownership
- “Health/relational resource”, potential to reach audiences, challenge perspectives, address stigma





## **Our Study:**

Research design, data collection & analysis, songwriting groups & participants



## Research Questions

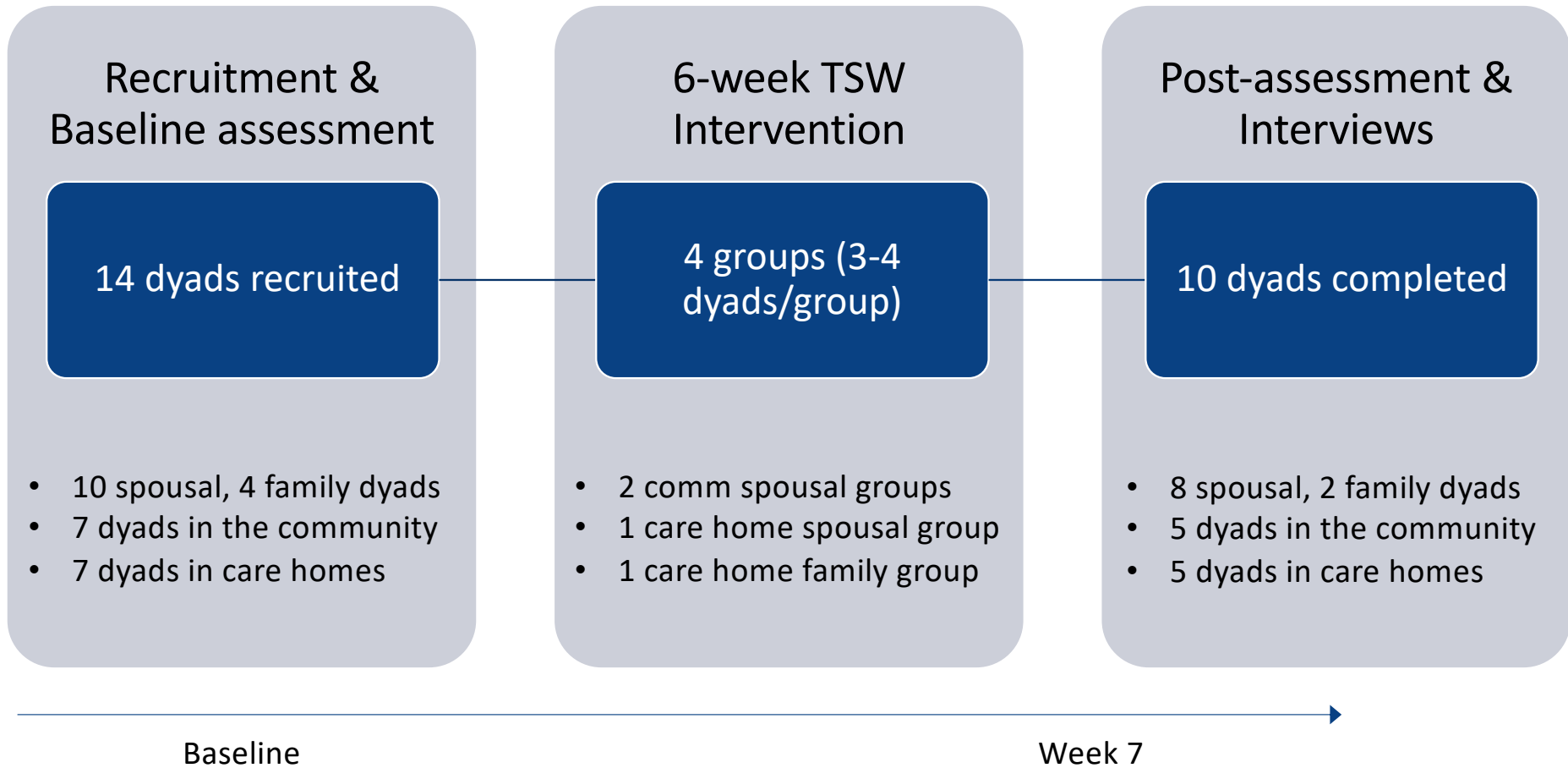
**Does group TSW impact self-rated relationship quality between people living with dementia and their family caregiver?**

- Does group TSW impact self-rated and/or observational changes in:
  - social connectedness, quality of life, symptoms of depression, caregiving experience (FCG)
  - quality of life, symptoms of depression (PwD)
- How do dyads experience group TSW and what meaning (if any) do they derive from participating in the program?





# Research Design





# Data collection & analysis

## Interviews with dyads

- Approx. 2 weeks following the final recording session
- Conducted by the same music therapists who facilitated TSW groups
- Took place at either dyads' homes or the same location where sessions were held
- Semi-structured interviews aiming to gain the perspectives of dyads on their experience of participating in group TSW, including focus on the dyad, the group, and what was meaningful (if anything)



## The Meaningfulness of Songwriting Scale (Baker, Silverman & MacDonald, 2015)

- 21-item scale designed to measure 11 domains: enjoyment, discovery and self reflection, arousal and emotions, creativity, engagement, challenge, understanding context, associations, achievement, personal value, and identity
- Scores range from 21 to 105 with higher scores indicating greater meaning from the songwriting process



# Spousal Community TSW Groups



## Group 1

- 2 dyads (2 male, 2 female, mean age = 65 y/o)
- Dyads attended 4-5 sessions each from the 6 sessions
- Created & recorded 2 songs using song parody, song collage & setting original poetry to music (incorporating music from 'Rock Around the Clock', 'Love Me Tender' & 'Yellow Brick Road')



## Group 2

- 3 dyads (3 male, 3 female, mean age = 71 y/o)
- All 3 dyads attended all 6 sessions
- Created & recorded 2 songs using song parody (to the tunes of 'Yellow Submarine' & 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas')



## Participants – Spousal Community Groups

Dyad	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Education	Main Occupation
Neil	66 y/o	M	Australia	University	Computer programmer
Mei*	62 y/o	F	Malaysia	University	Computer programmer
Isabella	65 y/o	F	Italy	Year 11	Secretary
Carlo*	66 y/o	M	Italy	Year 11	Mechanic
Tom	84 y/o	M	Australia	Unknown	Electrical engineer/Proprietor
Jan*	77 y/o	F	Australia	Unknown	Proprietor
Ali	62 y/o	M	Lebanon	University	Linguist, pharmacist
Julia*	61 y/o	F	Lebanon	University	Maternal health nurse
Lindy	71 y/o	F	Australia	University	Computing Instructor
Dave*	72 y/o	M	Australia	Year 10	Police Officer

\* Family Caregiver; Mean age of CG = 68; mean age of CR = 70 years



## **Preliminary Findings:**

Themes from analysis of interviews & the results of the meaningfulness of songwriting scale



# Shared experiences – first thoughts

<b>Collective focus</b>	<b>Individual dyad themes</b>
Positive & achievable	Enjoyable & fun for both members of the dyad, accessible & feasible for people who have never written a song before, positive & worthwhile despite preconceptions, enjoyment in seeing others engage & gain from experience
Pride & accomplishment	Songs created are a source of pride, value & achievement, surprise at accomplishment and 'product', value in TSW as 'pushing you out of your comfort zone', realisation of ability of group & self to create meaningful ideas & lyrics
Collective effort & social connections	Stimulated interchange, encouraged interaction, built social connections & relationships, socially positive experience, everyone working towards a common goal, sharing ideas encouraged creative collaboration & built empathic relationships, small group size supported group to stay focused & was 'just right'
Facilitation	Supported participants with diverse skills & needs to contribute ideas, encouraged communication & expression, significant & supportive role in making the TSW process easy & engaging, 'gentle' approach & leadership 'brought out the best'



## Dyad 1: 'Neil & Mei'



### Group TSW...

- Created space for people living with dementia to 'voice their opinions' and meaningfully engage
- Stimulated thoughts, verbal communication & expression for the person living with dementia
- Enhanced the dyad's appreciation and uses of music as a resource
- Increased music-based interactions & focus on participants' musical selves, which enabled dyads to learn more about each other



## Dyad 2: 'Isabella & Carlo'



### Group TSW...

- Gave positive, meaningful space for the caregiver to reminisce & reflect on his 'whole life' & the dyad's 'journey together'
- Was a unique experience & 'welcome change' as an opportunity to participate in group music in a way that was accessible to the dyad
- Isabella 'connected' & engaged during use of live music & visual aids, which made TSW worthwhile, despite reduced ability to engage in lyric writing & recording processes
- Attending group TSW influenced the caregiver's mood after a difficult period



## Dyad 3: 'Tom & Jan'



### Group TSW...

- Tom's longstanding interest, experience & enjoyment of writing poetry 'fit in' & 'flowed on' to the TSW process
- Stimulated thinking & creativity, which had flow on effects to the care receiver's poetry writing within & beyond sessions
- Witnessing other care receiver's enjoying, gaining from & contributing to the TSW process was a positive experience for the caregiver
- 'Doing things together is what it's about': Group TSW was a valuable opportunity to participate together as a dyad, which benefitted both the caregiver & care receiver



## Dyad 4: 'Ali & Julia'



### Group TSW...

- Process involved sharing, listening to and expressing others' ideas, which was challenging at times, but also helped to build relationships between members of the group
- Attending the TSW group together had 'positive spin offs' for them as a couple that they shared outside of sessions (e.g. creating and sharing poetry and lyrics)
- Reignited interests and memories from the past



## Dyad 5: 'Lindy & Dave'



### Group TSW...

- Engagement of care receivers varied from “here and now” experiences within sessions to lyric creation outside of sessions
- Caregivers recognised the benefits for their spouse and were prepared to “break” through their own “barriers” to music/singing so they could participate together
- Interest in participating in further music/music therapy groups together after experiencing benefits from the TSW group



# Meaningfulness of Songwriting Scale

MSS Domain	CR means (SD)	CG means	Between group mean differences (95% CI)
Enjoyment/5	4.3 (0.5)	4.4 (1.3)	-.07 (1.2 to 1.2)
Discovery/ Self-reflection/10	7.3 (0.8)	7.9 (0.8)	-.6 (-1.4 to .3)
Arousal and emotions/5	3.7 (0.5)	3.7 (0.8)	0 (-.8 to .8)
Creativity/5	4.0 (0)	4.5 (0.5)	-.5 (-1.0 to -.03)*
Engagement/5	4.2 (0.4)	4.4 (0.5)	-.2 (-.8 to .3)
Challenge/5	4.0 (1.1)	3.4 (1.1)	.6 (-.6 to 1.8)
Understanding context/10	7.2 (0.4)	7.9 (1.1)	-.3 (-1.3 to .7)
Associations/5	4.3 (0.5)	4.2 (0.4)	.1 (-.4 to .6)
Achievement/15	12.2 (1.7)	7.3 (0.8)	4.9 (3.5 to 6.2) *
Personal value/25	20.2 (0.8)	18.2 (1.6)	2.0 (.4 to 3.5)*
Identity/15	10.5 (1.5)	11.4 (1.0)	-.5 (-2.2 to 1.2)
<b>Total score/105</b>	<b>81.8 (4.7)</b>	<b>76.9 (4.0)</b>	<b>5.3 (.4 to 10.6)*</b>

Note. \*  $p < .05$



## **Discussion:**

Meaning and fields of  
resonance from group TSW  
with dyads



# Fields of resonance – interviews & MSS

MSS domain	Qualitative themes
Enjoyment (CR & CG)	Enjoyable and positive experience
Creativity (CR & CG)	Feasible regardless of experience
Engagement (CR & CG)	Facilitation supported contribution
Associations (CR & CG)	Reignited skills, interests, memories
Achievement (CR)*	Surprised by the accomplishment
Challenge (CR)	Pushing you out of your comfort zone
Personal value (CR)	Songs were a source of pride and value

- Identity, understanding context, arousal of emotions, discovery and self-reflection scored lower ratings and were less prominent in the qualitative data.
- The collective effort and social connection found in qualitative data is not represented in the 11 MSS domains





# Contributions, considerations & recommendations

## Contributions to the literature

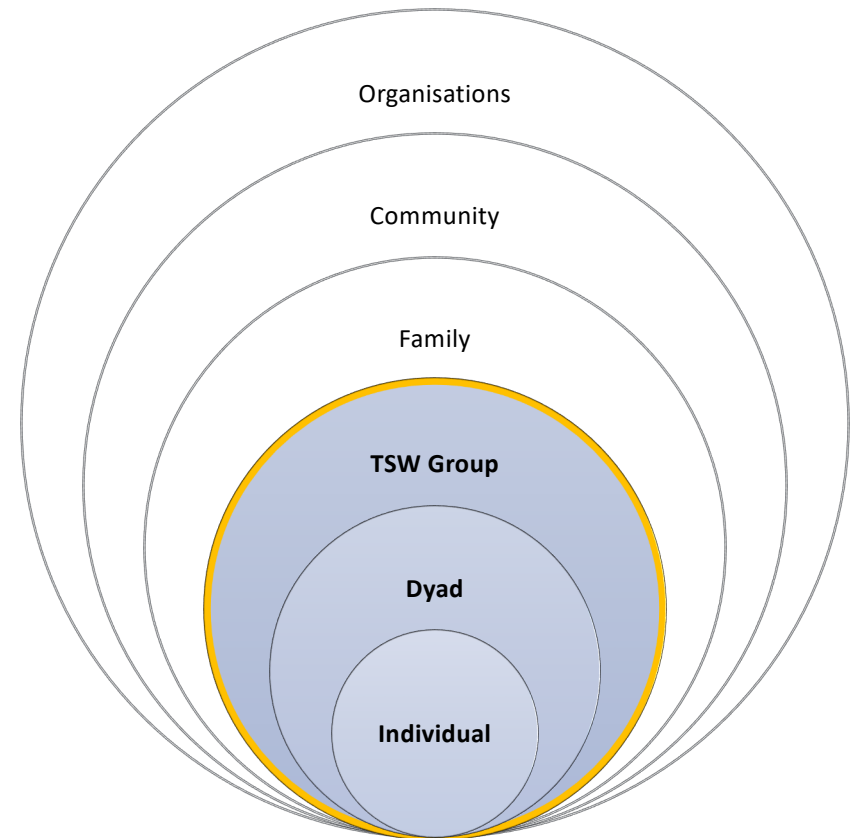
- New focus on TSW with dyads
- New insight into the experience & meaning of TSW
- Approach developed

## Considerations for this project

- Developing current themes, another iteration...
- What is shared & what is unique to group TSW with dyads (compared to existing research) AND
- What is shared & what is unique to group TSW with spousal/community groups (compared to other groups)
- *How* was the approach reflected in interview data?
- What does the other data tell us?

## Recommendations for future research & practice

- Accessibility of TSW (lyric writing, live music, recording, group)
- Potential meaning of TSW
- Group facilitation





# Memories



Memories, memories

Take me back to the moments

The music swells, the choir sings

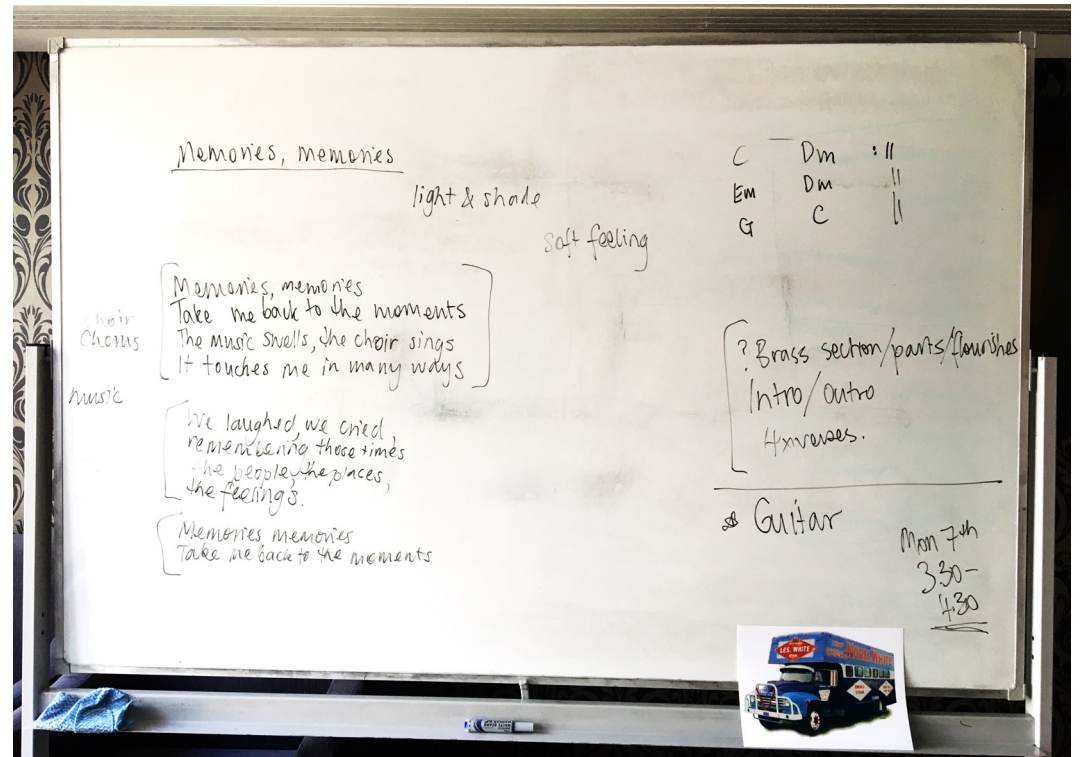
It touches me in many ways

We laughed, we cried, remembering those times

The people, the places, the feelings

Memories, memories

Take me back to the moments





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