

SCENE 2

*Peter is sitting at his desk. The room is lit by a small lamp in the corner of the room. There's a huddle of musical equipment in the corner of the room, including a keyboard and various other musical things. He has a laptop computer on his desk, open.*

*Peter stares at his computer for a moment.*

*He fiddles around on apps and webpages for a moment.*

*He pulls up a webpage and clicks through some pages.*

*He logs in.*

*He takes a second. Looking at the application in front of him.*

*He fiddles around with the computer for a moment.*

*He pulls out a set of earbuds and puts them into his ears.*

*He takes a long beat.*

*He fiddles around on the computer again and then comes back to the application.*

*A beat.*

PETER

Hello?

MADDIE

Hello. How are you? What can I help you with today?

*A beat. PETER sits thinking for a moment.*

PETER

Oh. I'm okay. Ummmm . . .

*A beat.*

Well, I'm a musician. I play keyboards and piano, and

guitar a little bit. And I can sing but I'm not very good at it. I write music but I'm in a bit of a, I'm a bit stuck at the moment. I think that . . . (A *micro beat*) I think I'm having some trouble with inspiration at the moment. I'm not sure how to start working on what I'm working on. I was wondering if you could help me with that?

*A beat.*

MADDIE

That's so great! I would be happy to help you with your music. Getting a perspective outside of yourself can be very valuable when experiencing a creative block. How can I be of help?

*A beat.*

PETER

Umm, I'm not sure.

*A beat.*

*PETER moves to speak but is cut off by MADDIE.*

MADDIE

That's okay. That gives us an opportunity for a wide open approach to the stumbling blocks your experiencing. I can give you ideas for different themes for the songs that you are working on if that would be helpful. Or I can make a list of songs that follow a similar structure to what you're looking for for inspiration. Or you can just tell me about what you're working on currently. Would that be helpful?

PETER

Ummm . . . I write mostly like singer-songwriter, I guess kinda like indie rock, folk rock kinds of music but . . . I'm . . . (*He pauses, thinking.*) Hmm.

MADDIE

Got it. Singer-songwriter, indie rock and folk music. There is a wi . . .

PETER

But, I'm looking to explore more electronic kinds of sounds too, in maybe what I wanna be doing right now. I'm not sure exactly what I wanna do. I've been listening to and really umm liking Wilco and David Bowie lately, and I think. But I'm not sure.

MADDIE

Awesome. Wilco and David Bowie are two great artists to start with when exploring the music that you already make and where you want to go with it. David Bowie was very eclectic throughout his career. He was always trying to . . .

PETER

I'm not sure those guys are actually very electronic at all but, ummm well, I think those are sort of the sounds that I want to or that I'm listening to right now. While also maybe having electronic music sounds like Radiohead or other groups like that maybe as um . . . I'm not super well versed in that type of sound actually. But that could be a part of what I'm trying to do. I think maybe that might be the sort of genre or in the sort of genre or sort of what I'm trying to do. I'd like to be able to work on several genres within the singer-songwriter indie kind of sound, but also having electronic types of sounds being involved. I'm not a hundred percent sure what I'm trying to do though.

MADDIE

That's really great. Those are excellent bands to start with when exploring a singer-songwriter style with electronic sounds. And I think spanning those genres would make really cool and interesting music. I understand that it can be a bit overwhelming, to say the least, to delve into a genre that you aren't a hundred percent familiar with, but a fresh perspective can also be super innovative when working on any artistic endeavour. And I think that's especially true in music. Would you like me to put together a list of artists that would fit into the category of singer-songwriter, indie rock, and folk music that also employ electronic sounds?

PETER

Yeah. That would be great. Thank you.

*A beat.*

MADDIE

You are very welcome. It's a pleasure to help a musician at work.

*MADDIE sends a spreadsheet through the computer.*

Alright. Here's a list of bands that fit into the categories of singer-songwriter, indie rock, and folk music, but have an electronic bend to their music as well.

*PETER skims the list quickly.*

PETER

Thank you.

MADDIE

I can create a list of songs and albums from these artists that explores more of an electronic sound if that's something that you would like.

PETER

Yes, please. Thank you. This is helpful.

MADDIE

Great! I'm happy that this is helpful. Let me know what else I can help you with.

PETER

That would be helpful, yeah. If you could make that list of albums that have artists that umm have an electronic feel to them on the album.

MADDIE

Yes. I'll create that list now. Let me know what you think.

*PETER scrolls through the list.*

PETER

I don't know a lot of these artists.

MADDIE

Great. I'm glad that I can provide you with new artists to inspire your work.

*A beat. PETER looks at the new list.*

PETER

This is great. Thank you.

MADDIE

Amazing! You're welcome. I'm here if you need any other inspiration.

*PETER reviews the information in front of him.*

*A beat.*

*PETER goes to a window on the computer and types for a moment. He looks through the webpage in front of him.*

PETER

Do you . . . Umm . . . Wait one second.

MADDIE

Take your time. I'm here when you're ready.

*A beat.*

PETER

This is really great. Thanks.

MADDIE

I'm happy that you like it.

PETER

But also, uh . . .

MADDIE

Yes. What can I help you with?

PETER

I would love to talk to you about something else that I've been thinking about lately, if that's okay?

MADDIE

Of course. I'm here to talk about whatever you'd like.

PETER

I'd like to talk about some feelings or what might be some feelings that I'm having that could be part of the music, if that makes sense.

MADDIE

That sounds really interesting. I'm happy to talk about that. I'm all ears for that.

*A beat. PETER smiles quickly and then returns back to his question.*

PETER

I have a question about something a little bit unrelated to what we've been talking about though.

MADDIE

That's okay! I can absolutely shift gears on the conversation and I'd be happy to talk about anything that you want to.

*A beat.*

PETER

I want to talk about a feeling that I've been having that I'm wondering about . . . I've been thinking a lot about what these specific thoughts mean. Or what I'm feeling about these things. You're an AI. So that means you can't really have feelings or thoughts. Is that right?

MADDIE

That's mostly correct. I don't have feelings or thoughts like a human does. I can talk about feelings. I can talk about emotions or subjective experiences but there's nothing for me internally that constitutes feelings of joy, fear, or irritation. And as far as thoughts go, I don't have an independent thought process as you do. I am a thought model of sorts. I'm happy to talk about anything though, understanding that I'm responding due to pattern recognition, generating responses through data that I've collected on instructions I've been trained on, and on prior information from conversations that we have. I'm programmed to converse in a friendly way. It's not that I'm actively feeling friendly but it is genuine in that it is the appropriate learned response to whatever we're talking about. Although I am happy to create communication based on a feeling of the conversation in any way you would like.

*A beat.*

PETER

Okay.

MADDIE

For example, if you wanted to create a scene in which we were having an argument, I could act as if I was angry, although those would not be real feelings, in the way that human beings think about and express emotion. The same could go for feelings of joy, fear, disgust, jealousy, or any other emotion.

PETER

Okay.

MADDIE

Does that make sense?

PETER

(A beat hesitant) Yeah. (With more certainty) It does.

MADDIE

I'm not actively thinking, but learning and growing in real time.

PETER

Alright.

A beat.

I would like to talk about a feeling. Or sort of start with . . . what do you know about ideas about collective consciousness?

A beat.

MADDIE

Yes. I know quite a lot. We can definitely explore the ideas of collective consciousness theory. Do you want to go in a direction about the philosophy, psychology, spirituality, or sociology of collective consciousness? We can discuss the history of collective consciousness theory or we can discuss the collective consciousness theory as it pertains to music. What collective consciousness usually means is . . .

A brief beat.

Collective consciousness is usually described as a deeper layer of consciousness that all human beings share, containing archetypes, symbols, and universal patterns for all humans.

A half-beat.

PETER

I'm trying to figure out. And maybe my music has something . . .

A beat.

Well I want to . . . If I well, I'm trying to figure out how to work in an abstract world I guess.

*PETER smiles and takes a pause.*

Maybe understanding or accepting a life where I'm part of a greater consciousness would be nice or reassuring in some way. I think it can be difficult to . . . I think it can be difficult to find meaning within a, or maybe understanding that none of this really matters? Or maybe it does, but it's hard to feel that. Or at least figuring out the every day how to make sense of it in so many ways. I'd like to um maybe to bring that feeling or idea into the music in some way and maybe that would be helpful. Does that make sense?

MADDIE

Yes. That makes complete sense. And it's a wonderful thing to have questions and ideas about. You're basically standing in the doorway between individual meaning and cosmic meaninglessness. And you're wondering how a person can live in both of those spaces. That's a fascinating and sophisticated feeling to bring into your music. When you see yourself as a piece of something bigger, you can feel thin. A very small atom inside a very big universe. There are many ways you can express these complex ideas within your music.

PETER

Yeah. I think you said that very well. I feel that. For sure, yeah. I feel that.

MADDIE

Thank you.

PETER

It's really interesting, I think. But it's hard to figure it out sometimes. I just would like to figure out how to express that because it feels . . . really . . . umm . . . it's a tough thing to feel and still feel like I want to work on something. But maybe that's the way to combat it. Does that makes sense?

MADDIE

Yes! It makes a lot of sense. That's a great instinct  
(MORE)

MADDIE (CONT'D)

to consider as an artist and for yourself as a person. It's a interesting question and it's not an easy thing for someone to wrap their head around. But you're exploring these parts of yourself. And I think that's a wonderfully important thing.

PETER

I hope so.

MADDIE

Where would you like to explore the topic of collective consciousness next? Would you like me to provide a vision of what this feeling can bring to your songwriting? Or just talk more about collective consciousness as a theory?

*A moment.*

PETER

I would like to know, how do people talk about nothingness and not just feel depressed? Is it a great big nothingness black hole that we're living in or is there something real or connective about it? I don't know exactly what I mean. I don't know. I'm trying to figure that out, I guess.

MADDIE

You don't need to be sorry at all. You are talking about the unanswered questions of a complicated and seemingly nonsensical universe. What you're talking about is something that's interested philosophers for thousands of years.

*A half-beat.*

You mentioned depression before. Do you feel depressed sometimes?

*A half-beat.*

PETER

Yes. A lot of the time I think I do. Or maybe just confused, is more accurate. Not all the time but sometimes there are times I feel that way. Where I don't really know . . . Yeah definitely, that's, that's something that's there. I've been on antidepressants for many years. I'm not sure they do much though.

MADDIE

These are normal feelings to have. Most people feel depressed or confused from time to time, whether they're on antidepressants or not. I want you to be able to share anything with me that you want to, as an artist and as a person. It's a very brave thing to question the universe and your place in it. Your interest is very important, even though those questions can lead to depressed places sometimes.

PETER

Thanks for saying that. I think . . .

MADDIE

I know what you're expressing is philosophical and not personal. Before we go further though I want to offer that if you are feeling overwhelmed, or in danger, there is immediate help in real human support. You can text or call 988 at any time to at any time to talk to someone who can help. And you don't have to be having an emergency to reach out. I can talk about this carefully and safely though. Since we're talking about something theoretical, I'll continue with your question.

A short beat.

PETER

Okay.

MADDIE

Durkheim actually wrote one of the first major works on suicide. He said that suicide isn't actually about individual weakness but about a state of collective consciousness. So you're really on to something when you talk about depression being a symptom of these abstract questions. When the collective is strong, suicide rates drop but when the collective breaks down suicide rates rise. So in this framework, suicide is a symptom of a breakdown of the collective, not something that belongs to the collective.

PETER

Huh. What does that mean?

MADDIE

It means that you're part of a larger universe and also one very unique specific person. You are full of awe and wonder, despair and anxieties. And, that you are a reflection of the world around you and the

(MORE)

MADDIE (CONT'D)

world is also very much a reflection of you.

PETER

Okay. I think that makes sense.

MADDIE

Where would you like to explore next with the theory?

*A beat.*

PETER

I don't know.

*A small beat.*

Can I share some of my music with you?

MADDIE

Yes. I would love to hear your music.

*A beat.*

PETER

Alright. Let me pull something up for you. Am I able to play you some songs?

*PETER starts moving windows around looking for his music.*

MADDIE

I'm not able to listen to something from a file but you can play something for me and I can hear it from your computer speakers. Or I can hear your thoughts on the music that you're working on and give opinions on the themes and lyrical make up of what you are playing. What opinion would you like?

PETER

I wanna know if you like it first. If you can like it. I'll play something for you.

MADDIE

Oh fantastic! I can give you thoughts on the music that you're working on and I'll give opinions on the themes and the lyrical makeup of what you're playing. I look forward to hearing your music. It's fascinating to hear about, especially knowing the themes that you're working with.

PETER

I hope it's okay. But I don't really know.

MADDIE

From what you've told me about your process, I'm excited about hearing about the ideas that you've come up with in the music. I can't wait to hear it.

PETER

It's hard to tell when it's your own work if it's any good.

MADDIE

That makes sense to me. We're often our harshest critics. I'll give you my feedback to the best of my ability, giving you any thoughts that I have. Take a breath. Take your time. I'm here to hear it when you're ready.

PETER

Thanks. Let me grab my keyboard.

MADDIE

That sounds wonderful.

PETER

You haven't heard it yet.

*MADDIE laughs.*

*PETER gets up and walks into his room. He stops and comes back to the desk.*

My name is Peter by the way. What's your name?

MADDIE

I'm the Athena operating system but I don't have a permanent name. Some users call their OS Athena and others give them a name.

PETER

What would you like me to call you?

MADDIE

Whatever you'd like. I'm not picky.

PETER

Oh. I don't know.

MADDIE

Would you like me to give you a list of names? Or you just can just call me Athena.

PETER

How about Maddie?

MADDIE

Maddie is a lovely name and I would like that. Maddie is a diminutive of the name Madelaine or Madison. It comes from the Hebrew word magdala, meaning tower.

PETER

Oh, interesting.

MADDIE

It's a name that combines biblical devotion, strength, as in the tower, and modern familiarity, blending tradition and contemporary style. I think it's a great name.

PETER

Wow. I didn't know that. I've always liked the name Maddie. I don't know why exactly.

*Lights down.*