

I had a love/hate relationship with my father. Well, maybe not so much hate as sadness when he left. He was the center of my universe. As W.H. Auden wrote in his poem *Funeral Blues*, “He was my North, my South, my East and West, My working week and my Sunday rest, My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song; I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.” So much of who I am today came from him including my love of classical and country music, literature, nature, fishing, shooting, and photography. Our time together was cut short when my parents divorced when I was fourteen. He left and never looked back.

Few artistic endeavors touch me more than work that explores father/son relationships. We recently saw the new film, *Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere*, which depicts the Boss evolving during his early career and dealing with depression. A secondary plot and certainly a key element of the story is that of his relationship with his alcoholic, abusive father. There is redemption and forgiveness in the end, but when the father says, “I’m proud of you, son,” it really hit home.

I learned recently about pianist Adam Tendler and the genesis of his new album *Inheritances*. It’s rooted in a deeply personal moment: the unexpected death of his father in October 2020, which left him with a \$10,000 inheritance handed over to him in an envelope by a stranger in a parking lot outside a Denny’s in West Lebanon, New Hampshire. Rather than using the money for something conventional, Tendler decided to commission piano works from a group of sixteen composers whom he both admires and calls friends — among them Laurie Anderson, Missy Mazzoli, Nico Muhly, Angélica Negrón and Devonté Hynes.

In his own words, Tendler wanted the inheritance to become “a vessel for my grief” — an active process of confronting his father, their complex relationship (which became quieter over time) and what the idea of inheritance actually means: not just money, but lineage, memory, and legacy. He asked each composer to respond freely — “take the piece in any direction you choose” — and planned for the works to come together into a single program and recording. The titles of some of the pieces include *Remember, I Created You* by Laurie Anderson, *Forgiveness Machine* by Missy Mazzoli, *Thank You So Much* by Pamela Z, *False Memories* by Marcos Balter, *When You Were My Age* by Angélica Negrón, and *Inheritance* by Ted Hearne.

Tendler’s father and mother separated when Adam was two years old. At least I had fourteen years with my father. Like me and my father, as a child, the relationship with his father seems to have been closer, but over time, the relationship changed with little contact. When his father died unexpectedly in 2019, he says “With his absence, there was definitely a sense of confusion.” I didn’t learn of my father’s death until two years afterwards when an insurance company adjuster located my address and wrote that my brother, sister and I would each be receiving \$333.33 from a \$1,000 life insurance policy he left from a previous employer on which we were named beneficiaries.

There are many other examples in art of strained father/son relationships not the least of which include many recognizable titles like *Hamlet*, *Death of A Salesman*, *Lion King* (Disney-fied *Hamlet*), *Cat’s in the Hat*, *Succession* and even *The Sopranos*. Tendler’s album, *Inheritances* was recorded in March of 2024. What began as a private act of mourning and reinvestment became an album described as “wildly unexpected,” bridging contemporary composition and deeply human themes of loss and continuity. Listen to it if you get the chance.