

MA Commercial Music Producer

Creation Module

Element 1 – Written Proposal

Lorenzo Martelli – Student No.2005406

Introduction

For my MA Creation Project I decided to produce my first solo album. In the past few years, as a producer, I have been involved in different projects regarding films and documentaries as well as songs or albums for independent artists and songwriters.

Despite having enjoyed working on these projects, I always had to adapt myself to specific briefs and requests. All these experiences considerably helped me to progress as a musician and enabled me to become a more well-rounded individual. Nevertheless, during the first lockdown I started giving serious consideration to the idea of embarking on a solo project.

I wanted to create something that could represent myself, musically speaking, with no filters. I therefore decided to create a collection of demos, which I then published on SoundCloud, named “From Miracles”. I didn’t have big expectations, as this was supposed to be a very low-profile project. As I listened to the tracks again and again throughout the year, I understood which aspects of my music I should have developed and which elements I should have set aside. I tidied up all the ideas that I had in my head and I think that now I am ready to conceptualize them.

The goal I currently set myself is to create an album composed of 10 tracks, which will be entirely produced by myself, through which I aim to show my unique production style and idea of music. This module has enabled me to seize the opportunity to focus all my energy on a single project, which depends solely on me.

I will attempt to express my concept through music and the only question that I want to ask myself throughout the process will be: would I listen to this?

Expectations

I expect to be able to produce a unique and compact album in which every single aspect and decision will be coherent and in harmony. The sound design, the choice of the instruments and effects must speak the same language, while the melodies need to be connected to the sound itself as much as possible. In order to achieve this result, I will take more time to work on each sound before moving on, so that I can evaluate and ponder each of my decisions. This will be helpful in terms of mixing as well. I learnt from previous experiences that it is far from easy to mix something that you have previously composed and produced yourself: in fact, the more you listen to the track, the more you tend to lose a critical point of view, as your mind tends to get too attached to the demo version. Spending more time on each sound, fixing all the imperfections and making it sounds more cohesive with the other instruments is what will help to obtain a pre-mixed version of the track since the very beginning. I will thus make more conscious decisions during the production and composition process, which in turn will make finalising the mix of the track quicker and easier.

Moreover, I expect to be capable to create a connection between all of the tracks. I want to give the listener the experience of listening to a full album, as opposed to a single song. As such, every song must be coherent with the previous one and with the next one. I will start to figure out the tracklist since the early days, tuning my production approach to a new song to the other tracks.

Meanwhile, I also want to concentrate on the aesthetic aspect of the project, bringing my imagery into the design of the project as well as artworks and photoshoots. My hope is to further improve my mixing skills, as I believe that the type of sound which I have in mind will be a big test. I want to create a characteristic type of mix that will follow the same rules and logic for all of the tracks. In doing so, I hope that the listener will see a common thread between all the songs, not only for what concerns the genre and the production, but also for the general sound and tone of the full album.

Cases Studies and Influences

The following list features some of the artists which have a unique idea of music that has always been a strong inspiration for my songs. I studied their career paths in order to understand how they became so well known in the music industry without compromising their sound. All those artists have some peculiarities and some aspects from which I have learnt how to approach my music.

- JAMIE XX:

His career started as a member of the band The XX, in which he had the role of producer and DJ. He approached the industry with an indie project, in which he has been able to express his own sound juxtaposed to melodies which are very pop and radio friendly. He attracted the attention and the interest of listeners, and after only a couple of years, he started to release albums with his own solo project, which had nothing to envy to his previous works in terms of success. Not only the audience appreciated his own music as well as the XX's one, he has also managed to gain a bigger audience in introducing himself to the UK Garage/Dance Floor music scene. The Jamie XX's and The XX's music approach is based on simplicity: the arrangement usually consists of short melodies or chord progressions which are looped over and over throughout the duration of the song. The structure of the tracks is made by adding and removing loops, with no big changes in the harmony and melody. The result is a mixture of instrument loops and samples, which are all managed as samples even if some of those are real-played. This concept had a considerable influence on me, especially in the way I structure my tracks, creating my own loops by playing hardware instruments (guitar, bass, synthesizers) and combining those with rhythmic and vocal samples.

- THOM YORKE:

Thom Yorke is probably one of the most powerful and influential musicians of the last years. His works with Radiohead and his most recent solo albums have completely changed the mindset of the musicians of my generation. He has always been one of my favourite artists: his sound is deeply stuck in my head. Thom Yorke's unique sound has been, and will always be a huge inspiration for me, particularly concerning the creation of emotional soundscapes and atmospheres behind a song.

- BURIAL:

Burial can be considered an outsider to the music industry: he has rarely been interviewed and he is completely invisible on social media. The album "Untrue" and its characteristic dark sounds are what made me fall in love with the genre. He declared that all his tracks are made with Sound Forge using only samples and without the support of any sequence or midi technology. This interesting aspect characterizes a lot his music and his patterns, with the result of an immediate lo-fi effect. This workflow reminds me of how important it is to set boundaries to yourself in order to boost your creativity and to explore new ways of producing music.

- EX:RE:

The solo project of Elena Tonra evolves the indie rock vibe of her previous project "Daughter" by introducing ambient and electronic elements. The neatness of her songs always gives me great inputs for my production: when I'm stuck on a section of a song, I tend to add sounds in trying to convince myself that the track needs more, but most of the times I am simply not looking for the right sound. Ex:re teaches me how to make tracks with just three sounds: but those sounds work perfectly with one another. The mood of her songs and the genuineness with which she writes music is exceptionally overwhelming. Her evocative guitars are extremely influential on my composition process. Her latest album is an important inspiration for my final project, especially from a minimalistic point of view.

The Structure and Current Situation

My album consists of a Side A and a Side B, with five tracks for each side. On both sides there will be an interlude set as the third track: the intention is to create two breaks to release the tension and connect the different sections of the album.

With regards to the mood and genre of the project, I will look for a good compromise between emotional and rhythmic tracks. I want to fuse the post-rock/art rock sounds and melodies with more electronic/UK garage elements and arrangement. Most of the tracks will be made of loops and samples, and will be guitar based, with an accurate research on sounds and effects.

The majority of the songs will be instrumental with vocal samples but I'm planning to collaborate with songwriters to introduce some vocal tracks wherever I believe that there is the space and the necessity for that.

These collaborations with singers and songwriters will make the album more interesting commercially speaking, introducing Pop elements and expanding the potential audience as much as possible.

Taking inspiration from the cases previously mentioned, vocals are always present, even if they are not the central element. This aspect suggested me that vocals could be the carrier of my idea of music, despite the fact that the main focus of all the tracks will always be the instrumental aspects.

At the moment I have already produced and I am in the process of mixing four tracks and one interlude, two of which have a female voice featuring. Once the mixes are ready, they will be mastered by a professional mastering engineer.

Although I can already see a common thread between the tracks mentioned, I still have to figure out if these songs will form a full side of the album or if they will be split up on both sides. It will depend mostly on the mood of the future tracks and how they will match with what I have done so far.

Timeline and Goals

Creating a timeline and self-imposing some deadlines is extremely important in my workflow, as it helps me to keep under control the development process of my music.

For this project I decided to set the following timeline:

TIMELINE

- MAY:
 - ◆ Finishing all the mixes of the tracks already produced
 - ◆ Preparing the files for mastering
 - ◆ Starting at least one new production
- JUNE:
 - ◆ Intensive period focused exclusively on composing, producing and recording sessions wherever is needed
- EARLY JULY:
 - ◆ Choosing the five best tracks produced in June and starting the mix
- LATE JULY:
 - ◆ Finishing the mixes
 - ◆ Preparing the files for mastering
 - ◆ Submitting the project

One of the hardest goals, aside from what I already discussed above, will certainly be sticking to this timeline.

The time is pressing, and even wasting a couple of days due to a lack of inspiration could cause problems. It will be vital for me to open my mind to as many inputs as possible and build a very strict but exciting routine.

Despite this, I am confident that I will be able to respect all the deadlines; in case I should fail, I will be ready to rethink and restructure the album according to the number of tracks that I'm happy with. In fact, I'd rather slightly modify my project instead of inserting in my album a bunch of tracks that don't satisfy me at all.

I want to keep a hyper-critical mindset by constantly questioning myself and listening to the suggestions of trustworthy people, who will be involved since the early days of production.

From a psychological and social point of view, my goal is to find more self confidence in being able to get out of my comfort zone and effectively exposing myself through such an intimate solo project.

As of now, my biggest weakness is about self-confidence: the fact that I have never been a particularly sociable or friendly person has an enormous impact on the networking aspect of my career. With this project I would like to break down these barriers and show who I want to be without fearing judgements and rejections.

In concrete terms, this results in offering myself to record labels and distributors that I will consider the most suitable for my music, and ultimately presenting a complete project matching my imagery, not only musically speaking but also aesthetically.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am very confident with my final project and the music idea behind it. I am grateful to have the chance to concentrate my mind and my energies exclusively on this album for the next months. All the researches that I have done for this proposal, gave many suggestions about how to deliver my music in the most effective way.

It will be difficult to satisfy all the expectation and goals that I have set, as most of them do not relate strictly with the production process and require working hard more on myself than on my music. Overall, I am positive and confident that all these targets should not be seen as obstacles but rather as starting points from which I can learn and grow up as a musician and as a person.

I think that this proposal helped me a lot to organize the ideas and gave me a lot of point of reflection, especially for what concern the music concept and the audience to which I want to appeal. Dealing with these deadlines will be a big challenge for me and hopefully will also stimulate my creativity.

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