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Creation Module

Element 1 – Written Proposal

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ARGUMENT:

The traditional studio environment still has its place in modern music production, and produces better results for certain types of music, such as acoustic based music. However, electronic music does not require a traditional recording studio, and can be produced to a professional level in a bedroom/home studio. Due to the prohibitive cost involved in hiring a traditional studio, more music is now being produced using home/bedroom studios, which is why we are seeing electronic music dominating the radio and charts.

AIMS:

My intention is to show that I am a versatile music producer who can operate at a high level in both the new world of electronic music production, and the old world of analogue acoustic production.

My aim is to produce two collections of work that contrast the differences between the styles and techniques involved in producing both electronic music and organic/acoustic music. I will produce the electronic music collection in my home studio, and the acoustic music collection in a traditional studio.

I also aim to explore whether there is still a benefit to using a traditional studio vs using a home studio, and whether different genres are better suited to either of those environments. To compare and contrast the two environments, I will produce one song from each collection in the other studio environment to see if it produces any noticeably different results.

KEY POINTS:

- * The traditional recording studio still has its place for certain types and styles of instruments
- * Electronic music has benefitted from developments in digital recording technology
- * Due to ease, accessibility, and cheaper cost, bedroom produced music is dominating the charts and radio

POINT 1: THE TRADITIONAL RECORDING STUDIO STILL HAS ITS PLACE FOR CERTAIN TYPES AND STYLES OF INSTRUMENTS

With all the advancements in digital recording in the last 10 years, it's easy to assume that traditional recording studios, full of analogue gear and equipment, are becoming a thing of the past. Given the affordability of home recording equipment, most musicians and producers now have the ability to own a computer and an audio interface, along with a slew of virtual instruments and plugins. This has led to the

rise of, what's known in the music industry as, 'Bedroom Producers' (Deahl, 2018) - this term essentially refers to producers and musicians who make music at home using a laptop. Does this mean that traditional studios are irrelevant in the digital age? Although their dominance has certainly declined, there is still life left in the recording studio, and this is down to the persistence of acoustic instruments such as the acoustic guitar, drums, and vocals in modern music.

According to research done in 2018, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 'the number of U.S. recording studios has been growing since 2009, and there are more studios today than there were in 2006 or any year before that.' (Young, 2018)

In my own experience of over 20 years of making and recording music, I've seen my own journey from recording exclusively with analogue equipment in studios, to now primarily producing and recording music in my own home studio. Over that period I've witnessed the improvement of virtual instruments and plugins, so much so that it can often be difficult to distinguish between the real versions and the virtual versions. However, in my opinion, there are still a few instruments that have not been as successfully translated into digital versions - namely drums, acoustic guitars, strings, and, for obvious reasons, vocals.

A huge part of making music comes down to the authenticity of the music and how it sounds. Even in the digital age, there is still a certain aura around an artist who plays and writes their own music. Ed Sheeran's dominance on the pop charts is as much down to his authenticity as a guitar-playing troubadour as it is his ability to write insanely catchy pop songs. (Brame, 2019) Nobody wants to hear music that sounds fake, and this is why drums, strings, and acoustic guitars have not transitioned as well into the digital age, because their digital versions often sound identifiably fake.

Probably the most difficult instrument to capture outside of a professional studio environment is acoustic drums - this is down to both space and equipment constraints. Generally, recording drums in a larger room gives a better sound, and this is not something that most bedroom studios can offer. It also requires good microphones and outboard analogue gear to capture live drums well, which is another thing that most bedroom studios don't have.

Paul Burton, owner of the Old Chapel Studios in Chichester, noticed a sharp decline in business over a 5 year period from 2010 to 2015. "Artists, and record labels don't have the budget anymore to book weeks in the studio like they used to." However, Burton did notice that there was one thing that people kept wanting to use his studio for: drum tracking. "I noticed that people were booking the studio for 1-2 days in order to just get all the drum tracking done, as it was something they couldn't do well by themselves." To capitalise on this, Burton decided to reconfigure his studio, and set it up with drum tracking as a priority. "I invested in a really good drum kit, mics, and acoustics for the room to try and get the best live drum sound possible in my studio." Burton now estimates that 75% of his business comes from drum tracking alone. (Read, 2019)

When it comes to recording string instruments, it's a similar story. Virtual midi strings are notorious for not sounding realistic, and recording strings as a quartet produces more realistic results than recording each instrument individually. This therefore requires a space large enough to fit all the musicians along with providing the natural acoustics needed for a good recording.

In order to test my assertion that the traditional studio environment still yields better results when it comes to recording acoustic instruments, I intend to record an acoustic EP in a traditional studio, where I will record drums, strings, piano, and vocals. I will then compare those recordings with what I am able to achieve in my own studio using samples and sound libraries.

POINT 2: ELECTRONIC MUSIC HAS BENEFITTED FROM DEVELOPMENTS IN DIGITAL RECORDING TECHNOLOGY

The advent of the first Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) back in the late 1970s (Vaughn, 2014) was arguably the most significant thing to happen in music production since Edison's phonograph, however it would be another 30 years before the impact of the DAW would begin to really manifest itself in the music industry.

Electronic music is not a new invention. Simon Crab, in his project *120 Years of Electronic Music* (Crab, 2016) outlines the history and development of electronic musical instruments from around 1880 onwards. If electronic music and the ability to digitally record them via DAWs has been around for so long, what has changed in the last 30 years that has allowed it to become so influential? Two things: technological advancements in computers and affordability.

The improvements in personal computing power have meant that anyone who owns a Mac or PC has the potential to make professional music. It's not just computing power that has changed things though, but also the ability to digitally model instruments such as analogue synthesizers and drum machines. In the early days of DAWs, physical electronic instruments, such as a Moog analogue synth, or a Roland 808 drum machine, were still required to create electronic music. Since these instruments were (and still are) expensive and took up space they were mainly found in the traditional studio environment.

In the late 90s, Steinberg added VST (Virtual Studio Technology) instruments to the popular DAW, Cubase, which allowed synthesizers and samplers to be controlled from inside the sequencer. (Twells, 2016)

Along with VST instruments, plugins have also played a huge part in the development of electronic music and the bedroom producer. In 1992, Israeli company Waves release the first ever audio plugin, called the Q10 Paragraphic Equalizer. (Twells, 2016) The plugin simulated an outboard equalizer and allowed the user to apply EQ directly within the DAW without having to use any outboard gear.

The final piece of the puzzle has come in the form of Audio Interfaces. In 1991, Creative Labs released their hugely successful Sound Blaster Pro sound cards which allowed for 44.1kHz stereo recording on a PC. (Computer Music Specials, 2008). From there the technology has developed to the point that Digital Audio Interfaces now rival the big sound desks found in traditional studios, in both sound and component quality. Well-known British producer Jon Kelly (Kate Bush, Paul McCartney, Chris Rea), who is based at Tileyard Studios in London, recently remarked to me that he was in the process of starting to sell off much of his outboard studio gear after buying a Universal Audio Apollo audio interface and was moving more towards producing "in the box". (Kelly, 2018)

This combination of personal computing, DAW, VST, plugin and audio interface technology, have culminated and grown together to the point where anyone can own these things (to varying degrees) for under £1500. This amount would barely get you a week in many professional studios.

So why has this specifically helped electronic music, rather than all music in general? It would be fair to say it has helped all music in general because it has removed two of the largest barriers to music making (cost and access to equipment), however there is still the question of whether you can get better results from using a traditional studio vs a home studio, as outlined above. Whilst I have mentioned some cases

where I believe a traditional studio will yield a better result (in terms of sound quality) than home studios, it is my assertion that electronic music, in particular pop and EDM, does not benefit from being produced in a traditional studio.

I intended to prove this theory by producing electronic music in both environment and comparing the following:

- * Overall sound quality - is there any noticeable difference between the two?
- * Ease of creating and producing a song. Is it easier/quicker/more effective in either environment?
- * Cost? What is the cost breakdown between the two?

POINT 3: DUE TO EASE, ACCESSIBILITY, AND CHEAPER COST, BEDROOM PRODUCED MUSIC IS DOMINATING THE CHARTS AND RADIO

There is a common question asked by music writers and critics - will guitar-based music make a comeback and become a dominant force in mainstream pop music again? A look at the Billboard top 10 singles chart for the week of June 1st, 2019, (Billboard, 2019) does not feature a single song where guitar is the primary instrument driving the song. Even the songs on the list by Ed Sheeran (*I Don't Care*) and Jonas Brothers (*Sucker*) - artists that you might normally associate with guitar-based music, do not heavily feature the guitar, if at all.

A more pertinent question to ask may be: why has the guitar fallen so out of favour in modern pop music? And why has hip-hop, EDM, and trap music seen a huge rise in popularity, while rock music has taken a back seat? My hypothesis is that, because it is easier and cheaper to make electronic based music, more of it is being made, which is having an overall influence on the type of music being made. This has also combined with the streaming age that levels the playing field for artists by providing them with a platform for their music without the need for a record label. Another part of the equation is that there are so many resources available online for producers now. Websites like Splice offer thousands of professional samples and beats that can be downloaded in an instant and used in songs. So now, instead of setting up a drum kit to find and record that perfect snare sound, you can simply browse Splice and find something suitable in seconds.

Billie Eilish and Post Malone are two of the most successful artists of the past three years. Seemingly coming out of nowhere, their debut albums both hit the #1 spot of the Billboard album charts. However, these two artists both have something in common - they both made their names on the popular music streaming website, SoundCloud.

SoundCloud started back in 2007 as a way for musicians and artists to share music online. It has since become home to over 100 million songs, and in particular has found a niche in the rap world. The term 'SoundCloud rapper' refers to artists like Post Malone and Chance The Rapper who initially got their

breaks through the music sharing site. In an interview with the New York Times, Joe Coscarelli talks to SoundCloud rapper Sheck Wes about his track *Mo Bamba* and how it went viral.

In many ways, the story of how *Mo Bamba* came into being is typical of how so many songs, including songs in the charts, are created these days. A beat is created by one set of producers, then a piano melody line is created by another producer (who incidentally does not play piano), and finally a rap is sung over the top. The whole song was created in a day, and the rap was done in one take and took only 20 minutes. The song was uploaded to SoundCloud and became a viral sensation, even garnering praise from hip-hop heavyweights like Drake. (Coscarelli, 2018)

Billie Eilish and Post Malone both started by uploading songs to SoundCloud, which eventually led them to mainstream success. What is remarkable is that the music they've created was done almost entirely in bedroom studios with bedroom producers. The impact these artists have had on the music industry is huge, especially since it was done without the input or creative control of a record label or A&R managers.

In a research survey conducted among upcoming producers studying at London's Tileyard studios, I asked the following question (Read, 2019):

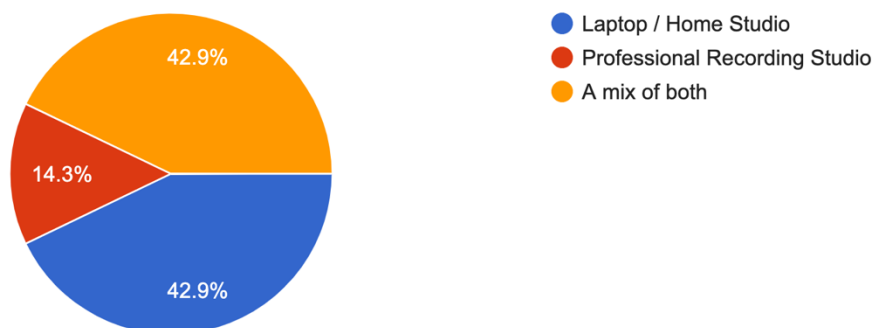
When you record music do you prefer to use

- * Home studio
- * Professional Recording studio
- * A Mix of both

Only 14.3% of respondents chose 'Professional Recording Studio' for their answer, compared with 42.9% for both 'Home Studio' and 'A Mix of both'. The survey suggests that even those who are training to become the next generation of professional producers prefer to use a home studio for the majority of their work.

When you record music do you prefer to use...

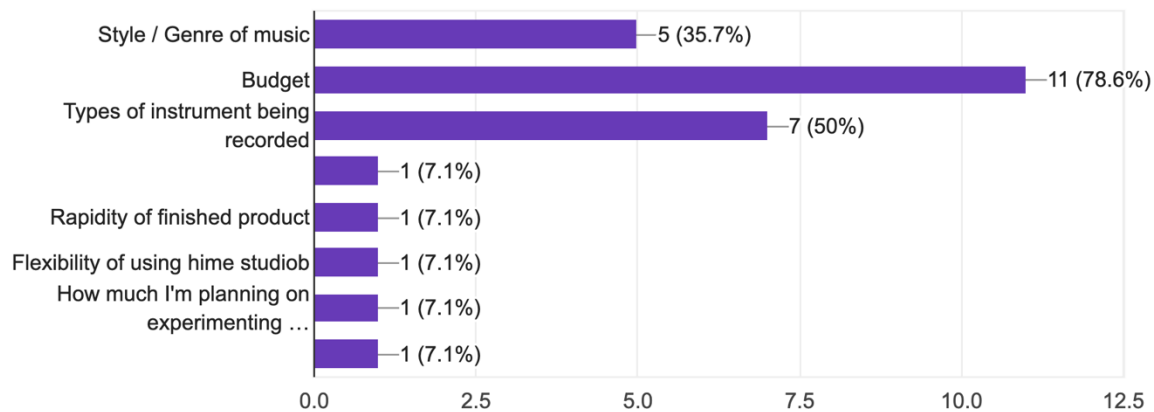
14 responses



In the same survey, when the respondents were asked what influences their decision to use a professional recording studio vs a home studio, the number one factor was budget (78.6%).

What influences your decision to use a professional recording studio vs a home studio? (choose as many as you want)

14 responses



Given the current state of the charts, and the ease and affordability of recording music at home, it is fair to presume that bedroom produced music will continue to dominate music for the foreseeable future. It will be interesting to see how advancements in technology continue to affect the traditional recording studio in years to come.

SUMMARY:

In summary, I intend to create two collections of work, produced in two different recording environments; a professional studio and a home studio.

Through this process I will attempt to answer the following questions:

- Does the professional recording studio still have its place in modern day recording?
- Does a professional recording studio produce better results for recording acoustic instruments?
- Can electronic music be produced to a professional standard entirely in a home studio?
- Is there a noticeable difference between music recorded in a professional studio vs a home studio?

I will analyze the results of my work and reflect on the outcomes.

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