

Creation:

Element C1 – Written Proposal

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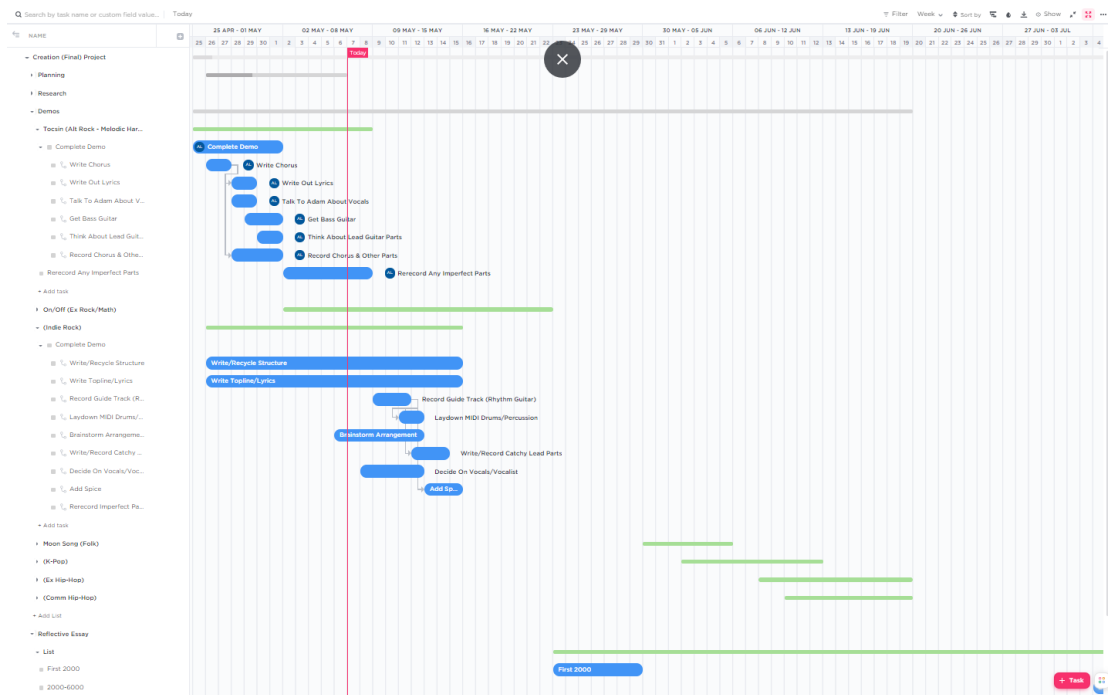
For my creation project I will be producing a portfolio of tracks from a diverse range of genres. This will include:

- An alternative rock track with melodic hardcore punk/noise rock production style and arrangement, influenced by artists like Basement or Highly Suspect.
- An experimental rock track that will take from several sub genres of rock including math, stoner and metalcore.
- A straightforward catchy indie rock track blending both acoustic and electronic elements.
- A minimalistic folk song produced to include atmospheric elements like Bon Iver.
- An experimental hip-hop track taking inspiration mainly from the industrial elements of bands like Death Grips or even the metal influenced Ghostemane.
- Another hip-hop track but focusing on commercial elements and collaboration between multiple artists.
- And finally, a K-Pop song with the 'teen crush' type pop sound signature to ITZY as well as less prominent alternative themes that BLACKPINK incorporate to huge success.

I am open to the possibility to add and remove tracks if something more interesting presents itself.

The inspiration behind the project was initially one of self-improvement, since each of the tracks have unique songwriting, production, mixing and mastering requirements. Delivering high quality tracks in the context of each genre will require me to study different approaches and allow me to hone genre specific skills that otherwise I wouldn't get to employ. This, in turn, calls for me to develop my organisational skills so I can predict problems that may arise between each track and how I can go about solving them. By integrating the challenges I'll likely face into a detailed but flexible Gantt Chart (see below), I aim to streamline my workflow since time management will be essential to the successful completion of my project. This should be a very valuable trial since usually

I'm someone 'who takes my sweet time' (FKA Twigs) i.e. chronically procrastinates and leaves things to the last minute.



My timeline begins with the “Planning” phase which includes tasks I have already completed, or at least undertaken, like brainstorming ideas for the project, the initial development of the timeline itself and this proposal. This coincides with the “Research” segment, much of which I intend to include within this essay, however some activities like listening to references and exploring new recording techniques will continue throughout the duration of the project.

Then I will include a long period (nearly a week for each piece) dedicated to completing high quality demos that only require some live instrumental parts to be rerecorded in the Tileyard Education Studios, an endeavour that I had booked specific weeks for, the first being after the completion of my live instrument-based tracks and the second being after my more electronic based demos are complete. I feel as though this gives me ample time to ensure that any experimentation or delay in the creation process can be navigated as soon as possible. I plan to begin my reflective essay on the weeks I have set aside to book studio time, giving me roughly three weeks altogether.

I have kept the periods “Final Mix” and “Mastering” towards the end of the deadline to prevent me from overthinking the mixing and mastering process, a habit I’ve fallen into since I’ve only recently had to start working to deadlines. Additionally, seeing as I agree with the “mix-as-you-go” methodology, apparently “one of the more influential changes to workflow in modern music”, I should already have made some significant headway toward my “Final Mix”.

Another motivation behind taking on this project was due to the range of songs I have already written but not recorded due to their diverse styles. Since I will have created each track from the ground up, I feel as though my emotional investment in each song will show in the final products. This is a similar approach to producers like Danger Mouse, who doesn’t, “like making someone else’s songs better” and needs to “be in control of the project” or Car Seat Headrest frontman, Will Toledo’s, need to “do as much as I can alone, but not shut other people out.” Whether these viewpoints are down to wanting full creative control over what one has written or finding it hard to use one’s “emotional intelligence” and act, “like a medium between them (the artist) and the sound” (Bailouni 2019), it’s clear to me that “shepherd(ing) a song from a germ of an idea to a finished product” is an approach that only producer-songwriters have the expertise to take (Berklee 2021).

The genres I have chosen to explore are those that I have a vested interest in working on in the future, so my portfolio should also act as a body of work that demonstrates my capabilities as a producer to future employers. Since I intend to use the project in this respect, it partially contributes to my benchmarks for success. I would say that I’m focusing on several factors: developing my production skills, developing my artistic voice/production style, and creating contemporary and commercially viable pieces. The potential balancing act required to infuse the songs with my personality and yet keep them mainstream within their respective genres is the most interesting dynamic, and it is primarily this factor that I will judge my success on.

I plan to achieve this balance by creating a playlist of several references per track of my portfolio. Once I have deeply analysed their structure, melodic content, and production style during the period

of research prior to recording, I can use the notes I create to give myself direction without having to listen to the references. Even though many producers like Rafa Sardina use references to “evaluate the integration of elements in a mix” and, more importantly, to listen “how much emotion a mix conveys to the listener”, I find that referencing tracks whilst producing can negatively impact upon my creativity and originality.

Whether features of my portfolio that I’ll contribute as a songwriter and artist will be distinctive enough that they are recognisable as my artistic voice is yet to be seen, especially since I am not confident enough in my ability as a vocalist to sing the majority of songs I’ve written. So, although the vocal is planned to be the only element of my tracks I will consistently not contribute to, it is undeniably the most important ingredient of modern music and is therefore fundamental to an artist’s signature sound. However, even if developing my artistic voice becomes an aspect of the project that isn’t obviously successful, to methodically set about learning from my experiences over the course of this module, I will employ the use of Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle as recommended in my Development essay’s feedback.

When looking at how I might go about approaching the project’s challenges, I was immediately aware that there were numerous well-respected producers that had applied their skillset across a multitude of genres. The most obvious candidate being Rick Rubin, who has not only worked in a range of styles, including rock, hip-hop, heavy metal, and country, but has also been able to combine genres within the records he has produced to critical acclaim. As much as I think this could be a valuable case study, I already have a fairly in depth understanding of Rubin’s approach to production, and as he isn’t a songwriter-producer I think there could be more relevant examples.

Another multi genre producer I considered investigating was Brian Eno, who having had a career as an “Ambient pioneer, glam rocker, hit producer, multimedia artist, technological innovator, worldbeat proponent, and self-described non-musician”, fits my criteria as an individual with a very broad and unique skillset (Ankeny 2021). He has released atmospheric instrumental and art rock

albums, established unconventional studio techniques in the mid-70s and produced massive rock and pop acts like U2, Coldplay, David Bowie and Talking Heads, thus is recognised as “one of popular music’s most important and influential figures” (Steadman 2012). My concerns with exploring Eno’s process is his lack of background in hip-hop, a genre that several of my tracks will either incorporate or be totally guided by. It also seems that in the last decade his production credits in contemporary works have dwindled, most likely due to his age.

Fortunately, I am a lover of alt-rock, so a self-produced artist who also has experience in several genres quickly came to mind – Beck. His distinctive experimental and lo-fi style has played a huge part in his recognition as “one of the most idiosyncratic and innovative artists in the world” (Mcgoran 2019). His discography has incorporated folk, funk, hip-hop, electronic, alt-rock, country, and psychedelia, with nearly all his releases having huge success, such that he is a four-time platinum selling artist, with two of his albums amongst Rolling Stone’s list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. Since he has achieved the highest standards of the criteria by which I am judging my portfolio, he is the perfect case study for me to analyse. It should be noted that even though he is credited as a producer on his albums, he collaborates with other producers on the majority of his albums.

To this day Beck’s 1994 breakout song ‘Loser’ is his most streamed and well-known song. Composed primarily around a repetitive slide guitar riff and sampled drumbeat, elements that are characteristic of blues and hip-hop receptively, stylistically it combines these features with the massively popular early 90s grunge sound, Beck’s signature ‘slacker’ attitude being the cherry on top. The song was written and recorded in six hours after its origins were discovered amongst Beck’s original folk songs by fluke. This may well speak to Beck’s spontaneity, particularly when the chorus top line came from his lack of confidence in his vocal delivery during the verse, birthing the lyrics, “I’m a loser, baby, so why don’t you kill me.” But Beck has also said he’s ‘done so many albums where...(he’s)

been in the studio for 14 hours a day for six months just trying to come up with things on my own”, which implies that more often than not, he has to work very hard to perfect his unique style.

‘Mellow Gold’, the subsequent album that featured ‘Loser’, follows in this same mish mash lo-fi vein, blending folk, blues, country, rap, and grunge into what Beck himself describes as ‘a satanic K-Tel record that’s been found in a trash dumpster’. “Odelay” built on Beck’s “ingenious combo of plucked guitars and scratchy hip-hop techniques” (Bobbitt 2017). What many consider his best album, “Sea Change” shows us a “maturing Beck taking on adulthood willingly yet somberly” (Bobbitt 2017), his trademark cynicism replaced with sincerity, the production moving away from hip-hop inspired sampling towards live instrumentation in accordance with the change from “sonically experimental work to emotionally charged balladry” (Wikipedia) and Nigel Godrich’s orientation to “capture a performance” (Beck 1998). Co-Produced with Danger Mouse “Modern Guilt” has been described as “an effective dosage of 21st century paranoia” in its psychedelic rock foundation.

Overall, I feel that the most extraordinary aspect to Beck’s art is how seamlessly he can combine sonic markers from such a diverse collection of genres, not only as part of a singular album, but over multiple albums in a constantly evolving manner. Askerøi dissects this as retronormality, the “appropriation and re-contextualisation of musical materials” to create the sonic markers that define Beck’s works. If I tried to apply this as a mantra to my work, it would likely be overkill. But if I were to, I would aim to make each track a different mix of several genres, with each subsequent song exploring new genres in place of the old ones, all in a fluid style that was uniquely my own. However, I believe that this would result in a much more experimental, and much less commercial feel to my portfolio, to the point where it would almost become a concept album. More recently Beck has brought his genre bending modus operandi to pop and synth pop with the albums Colors and Hyperspace respectively.

For me to ensure that my tracks are at a professional standard within the context of their genre, it might have been a better idea to explore the methodology of producers who work predominantly in

one genre, and then repeat this process for each song. Be that as it may, it would not replicate the dilemma of how a single producer might go about exploring multiple styles, a challenge that I feel is much more crucial to my success in the future than expertise in any single genre.

Therefore, my original proposal, a portfolio of tracks each with their own individual genre, produced to a high-quality standard and connected by my unique and distinctive production style, acts as a compromise between an experimental album that utilizes my personal take on Beck's evolution and a wholly lifeless project of generic genre clichés.

In conclusion, I've discovered that the way in which I want to tackle my creation portfolio is more complicated than I originally anticipated, albeit due to my research into more unorthodox perspectives on recording. Even though I don't plan on consciously implementing "retronormalisation" or purchasing Brian Eno's tarot like Oblique Strategies to inspire creativity, it was worth acknowledging that there are some weird and wonderful attitudes used by even the most successful producers. Going forward I feel that traversing my own creativity and thinking outside the box will now feel more natural, and in the event that it doesn't, there are ways in which I can force inspiration by diving headfirst into some bizarre approach without worrying that will be a waste of time.

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