

MA Commercial Music Production Assignment

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Tilleyard Education,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

CREATION PROPOSAL C1 - Written Proposal

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For this final assignment I intend to create an album's worth of music, approximately half an hour in length. It will be composed in the original sense of what an album has become to be known by in the popular consciousness, established by bands such as *The Beatles* and *The Beach Boys* with works like *Rubber Soul* (McCartney, Lennon and Starr, 1965) and *Pet Sounds* (Wilson, Love, Asher and Sacher, 1966). Both these albums pushed the bar of what was achievable within the context of popular music by deciding upon using a concept to inform how each track was created which in turn provided a meaning to the album as an overall piece of work.

I intend to take this idea even further by making each track relate to each in a classical sense of a song cycle. The piece is a whole and each track should be played in order if performed like scenes in a film or play. Although each track could be played or performed individually all the music should make the most sense artistically or thematically when played in this specific order.

With this in mind I plan to use *Holst's The Planets* (Holst, 1981) as a framework to build my own work around conceptually. Not only does the subject matter appeal to me but it is also one of the clearest examples of a modern classical cycle construction. Differing from its origins, the modern classical cycle adds emphasis to the order that a set of songs have to explore the piece's theme (Tunbridge, n.d.).

In my opinion this is the genesis for what most artists came to use in order to create the idea of what we know as the album. Although it is worth noting that most major artists today are usually constructing their albums in a way to avoid tracks being skipped past on streaming services, aiming to achieve what is known as a low "*skip rate*" (Leight, 2019). My aim through using the cycle structure is to be both antithetical to this process, as it will potentially tests a listeners patience, but also in tune with this concept as it is my intent that the piece is engaging enough that the listener will want to see the album through to its conclusion as they are enamoured by its story.

Traditionally speaking the cycle is often informed thematically by organic or romantic convictions (Tunbridge, n.d.). However I want to modernise the cycle by using ideas that are arguably a man made conceit. Instead of using the seven planets that *Holst* used, I mean to find an equivalent to each planet with one of the top seven most advanced economies, also known as the G7 (G7 summit: What is it and why is it in Cornwall?, 2021).

Not only do I believe that the very notion of an economy is entirely man made but each of these countries, with specific significance on the United States, has had empires whose histories have coalesced and have had a pivotal role in defining the modern era as we know it. One that is slowly on the verge of globalisation and destroying the very borders that these numerous countries fought to define or claim.

This move is all taking place within the digital realm, supposedly world war iii is already taking place on the internet as seen with the 2015 *Sony Hack* (Smith, 2015) and here there is a similarity in how music is being made and distributed. According to a recent report 86% of music

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is consumed through streaming services such as *Spotify* with the most popular genre being electronically based *Pop* music (IFPI, 2018). This is not to mention the numerous artist uploading platforms such as *Soundcloud* and *Bandcamp* where “*bedroom produces*” and unsigned bands alike share their projects with the internet world. It is here that I see that the world itself has become as grand and mythical as outer space. There are no real boundaries or distinctions other than what we as a species have defined and labelled. The information age is making Earth seem as infinite as the realms of space.

With this in mind I have decided that the piece has to be created with a combination of traditional band instrumentation as electronic/digital synthesisers or plugins. It seems to strengthen the metaphor of the piece as the instrumentation spans the history of contemporary music. From its humble beginnings of the standard rock band four-piece to EDM DJ. Perhaps through their blend and combination one might be able to gain a sense of where popular music is heading and thematically where the world is too.

This approach of metaphor informing the entire construction of a project is akin to the methods implemented by the band *Public Service Broadcasting* on Albums such as *The Race for Space* (Willgoose Esq, 2015) and their EP *White Star Liner* (Willgoose Esq, 2018). The former use a historic event from the lead up to and including the Apollo 11 moon landing, using archival samples in place of actual lyrics for vocals to tell its story (Mongredien, 2015). The latter used the *Titanic*’s actual *Morse Code* distress signal as the inspiration for how the drum beats were formed as well as the sounds recorded of metal wreckage at the bottom of the ocean informing the guitar sounds (McLean, 2018). With this group as a source of inspiration I also intend to find either samples, or in the case of a country like Japan find electronic toys, and instruments that are representative of their specific country.

Not only does this band’s process reflect that of *Holst*’s attempts define an idiosyncratic sound for each planet in his choice of instrumentation and orchestration but the fact that they have created somewhat of a comparable cycle of songs thematically will strengthen my insights into how perception of that theme has changed over time. In turn I believe this will feed into how I wish to interpret each country musically as I may also include genres of past and new to define their character.

Interestingly, although they are a band most of the songwriting credits for each of their projects are usually attributed to a sole songwriter, John Willgoose Esq. Here a comparison of contemporary music being composed in the classic sense intrigues me and is something that I am keen to develop for myself. Normally I have written with other artists and a good majority of my own ideas have usually been basic chorus ideas or standard guitar riffs that are then completed with assistance. I want to urge myself to be as entirely responsible for the compositional elements as possible. I will still be using other artists to write but similar to a producer such as *Joe Meek* the written parts should be drawn from my own personal direction which then inspires the performer.

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It is here that I believe I am challenging myself most. Currently I have a full twelve piece band *Fake Turins* (2021), of which I am a key member, at my disposal. A setup that may have lent itself to larger orchestration of *The Planets*. The band's instrumentation also incorporates many of the previous elements that I described as desirable to my aims, both electronic and analogue, pieced together to form the overall sound. There is also already a wealth of material to draw upon that could then be formatted in a way that would achieve the intent of my piece. Potentially this is a great tool for me on this project. This is true in all but one way and that is for the compositions to have been primarily guided by my own direction. Most of the existing songs were either originally written by one person, which was then refined through rehearsals with the band or in jams with the all members present. Each track would also have their own original themes that placed together could become incongruent, something that I think would be in direct conflict with constructing a song cycle in the way that I have proposed.

There would be an ease in also using a vast variety of performers that I am already wholly familiar with having played with them all for a number of years. There is a shorthand that I have developed with each of them and that could inform. However, I think the time frame over which I aim to complete this piece, two months, the idea of pre-composing and then rehearsing a band of this size to a standard that would make a quality recording is wholly unrealistic. Not only would it be an administrative nightmare, having to organise the schedules of twelve people who all have other work and performance commitments, but it is also a recording challenge that would require a technical education for myself over a greater period of time than I have to complete this assignment.

I do not see myself as such a technical producer but more a creative one. I still intend to work with a wide variety of performers but in smaller more intimate sessions where the room for improvisation and ideas being created on the day are realistically under my control. Similarly the setup time required to mic and record one to two performers as opposed to a large group is substantially less. Arguably I could take the approach of some of *Fake Turins* former recordings where we divided the band into distinct groups, having a core group record the guide for other sections of the band to add overdubs to but in those instances the band were once again wholly familiar with the tracks where as these compositions will be created mainly on the day of recording.

I am also Interested to see how each individual performer reacts differently to the outlined concept and how my direction plays a role in both their performance and then composition of the piece. Selecting performers based on what I know to be their unique strengths, potentially choosing different formations of musicians depending on where I see these strengths playing to each specific track. A more powerful drummer, for instance, to represent the most powerful country. By sticking with a single group of musicians such *Fake Turins* limits the scope of this possibility. This is similar to the way artists like *David Bowie* and *Brian Eno* worked on a series of albums that came to be known as the *Berlin Trilogy*. Here *Bowie* and *Eno* would pull in a variety of performers from a vast array of styles to create a distinctive sound for each album in the trilogy.

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The construction of songs would also form in the studio through a series of long improvisations, having learnt lessons from the specifically German rock movement *Krautrock* (Galluci, 2017). Bands in this ilk such as *Neu!* and *Can* increased the length of sections adding minimal additional instrumentation over the same groove to indicate change. Over the course of recording *The Berlin Trilogy* artists would be guided through songs with rough chord charts and allowed to explore the emotions for a greater period of time than they would have writing traditional pop songs. All these would then be recorded and manually pieced together to then form each track and occasionally then played again to inspire the next jam session.

In this vein I personally want to act as a guiding voice through the process rather than entirely hands on, something that I don't believe would be achievable through working with the twelve piece in this time frame. Although a good majority of ideas for these songs will be somewhat previously constructed I am mainly aiming to guide my collaborators through discussion and exploration of the cycles themes. This will then continue after each take to see whether we feel that what was played best represents the country.

These sessions will have to be incredibly focused, I hope to get a bulk of loops from each performer to then later construct into the final piece over the course of the first month with mixing and arranging to take place in the second month. This is primarily a time saving device but I think it could also become integral to achieving the piece's aims. I potentially even see the performing, recording, mixing, and construction all taking place at the same time as each change in any area could inform the mood and therefore the interpretation of each country I am putting across to the listener. In part I see this better replicating, in a modern sense, the process that a composer would have gone through as they constructed their song cycle. Most full cycles would have seen smaller performances of individual movements played live to then be either re-written or better formatted to fit the structure of the entire cycle. I see this as very similar to the way a producer today will cut and paste elements within a DAW as they listen back over speakers.

To support this process I see myself editing and constructing the whole piece in one Logic project before then dividing it into its individual projects for submission. This will force me to constantly listen to the piece as a whole or at the very continually questioning the purpose of parts being added as the whole cycle is constructed. This is the exact opposite to how I would normally write, mainly having to create using a laptop and will push me to be creative through being more technically minded, having to make artist choices through what can be achieved by the software and programmes at my disposal. A perfect union in my opinion.

Ultimately, this project will be considered a success if all the individual recordings with separate artists in potentially a multitude of different recording environments and setups cohesively gel not only stylistically but also as movements from one to the other. A technical feat that will be incredibly testing on my own lack of ability in this area. As it is likely that I will make some mistakes in this regard for me the main success is more about whether I can take these errors and make them a strength in the aesthetic of the piece. There is potential that incongruent sounding recordings if handled well in my mix could become part of what gives its character and

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ultimately that is always the music I am setting out to create. Sound that is with character, emotive for a listener and could not have been produced by anyone else.

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