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Creation Assignment
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Element 2b - Reflective Commentary

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Introduction

Ever since I started my path as a musician my aim was to create an album, a piece of music that reflects on my journeys through life. With the opportunity of creating a portfolio of songs for my final assignment at university, I decided to take this chance and finally create a long-form musical piece. The aim of this reflective commentary will be to analyze two main aspects of my studies at Tileyard Education. Firstly, it will map out how I created my portfolio of music, and secondly, critically analyze the knowledge and skill I developed while doing so. These two pillars of my paper are also categorized in its own aims and objectives that I will reflect on in depth. They will be laid out in a SWOT analysis, accompanied by other forms of strategic planning techniques. Additionally, I will go into technical features of the album, more specifically recording and mixing techniques. I will also raise the question how macroeconomic changes influenced the creation of the project. Lastly, I will concentrate my analysis on ways of how to market the project within our current music industry. All of these points will be put into context to external factors that influenced the outcome of the musical production. Altogether a holistic experience will be outlined in this paper from my time at my educational facility.

1. The Project

1.1. Summary

As the whole paper will be centered, and will be connected to my experience around the creation process of my portfolio of music, I will give a brief summary of the project and outline its main features.

The album consists of ten songs, with a full play length of 33 minutes and 30 seconds and is called “The Beach House”. The tracklist is as follows: “You Give Me Something”, “Beach House”, “end of summer”, “Brothers”, “Your Lullaby”, “Zagreb Blues”, “Home”, “Fallin’ 4 Ya 4 Real”, “You Bring Me Down”, and “Forrest On The Hills”. The main characteristics of the

music is its usage of acoustic guitars mixed with electronic music elements; hip hop and house drums; and female and male vocals.

The aim was to create a well rounded, consistent piece of music that also features songs that are intended to be published as singles. The writing of the album spanned within a time frame of four weeks, and first demos were started in my home studio in Croatia during the summer of 2019. Part of the writing process was my colleague, songwriter and mentor Christoph Ritz. The production, recording of vocals, re-recording of acoustic guitars, mixing, and mastering of the entire project was done in London and Austria.

1.2. Overview of Musical Elements

In this section I will give a brief overview of the elements used in the creation of the project.

Vocals

The recording of vocals was done in London and started in December 2019. On five of the ten songs (“You Give Me Something”, “Your Lullaby”, “Home”, “Fallin’ 4 Ya 4 Real”, “You Bring Me Down”) I featured Katharina Emendoerfer’s vocals, also known under the artist name Harina. On two of the songs I featured two of my university colleagues Gabriel Matos (“Beach House”) and Garry Keane (“Brothers”). On one of the songs I featured Californian rapper Jacob Christopher Lanz, also known under the artist name Lanz. This specific recording, for the song “Beach House”, was done remotely, as I was unable to meet J.C. Lanz in person due to the distance between our countries. On the songs “end of summer”, “Zagreb Blues” and “Forrest On The Hills” I recorded vocals myself. The songs “end of summer” and “Home” include vocals from Christoph Ritz, also known under the artist name Ben Attic.

Instrumentation

As the main characteristic sound of the album I used an acoustic guitar. The decision to use a guitar has on the one hand a sentimental reason as most of the initial guitars were recorded with my fathers acoustic guitar that I found in our home in Croatia. On the other hand, it was a

deliberate choice as the instrument carries a warm, melancholic and somewhat nostalgic feeling with it, which I wanted to trigger in the listeners. In a later process of the project, more specifically from March 2020 to May 2020 I re-recorded all of the acoustic guitars in Graz, Austria with session guitarist Georg Neureiter, using different kinds of guitars that he provided.

Other instruments used were a violin (electronic and acoustic), electric guitars, as well as VST-instruments such as Xfer Serum and PhasePlant. Pianos and basses were played through the VST's Native Instruments Kontakt and Spectrasonics Trillian.

Drums

In all cases the drums were programmed in the digital audio workstation Ableton Live 10. In fact all of the projects were created in the same program. For the programming of the drums either Native Instruments' Battery 4 was used, or they were put together through individual samples from sample packs. Only in one case I recorded the drums myself, which is in the song "Forrest On the Hills". Here I used kitchen utensils, and a violin to create the percussion sounds of the song.

2. Aims and Objectives

In this section of my reflective commentary I will outline my aims for the musical project, and lay down the objectives to achieve the goals that I set. I will differentiate between my hopes, what I tried to achieve, and the actions I had to take in order to reach these.

2.1. Desired Outcome

Ever since I started making music my desire was to create an album. Thus, one of my aims when I decided to come to London and study music production, was to put together a portfolio of music that eventually can be published as an LP record. During my studies my goals for the project got clearer and the possibilities on where I could take my ideas expanded as I was faced with countless new opportunities. Already one month into my studies I recognized that there are

many more ways in which I could elevate my goal of an album and not minimize my expectations. Thus, my initial desired outcome of simply creating a long-form piece of music developed further and further until I had a clear vision of where I wanted to take the project musically. This new aim was to have an album of ten songs, out of which I will have three singles, every song connecting to the next one smoothly; highly professional sounding masters that I want to create in the studios that are provided to me at Tileyard; a clear marketing plan for the project, which includes a release schedule, artworks for the singles, as well as an album cover. Especially into the promotional aspect I wanted to dig in deeper and potentially even find a music label to sign the project to.

2.1.1. Measurement

In order to not lose sight of my intentions, and also keep a somewhat quality control on the songs, I kept my mentor Patrick Spincks, who I got set into contact with by Tileyard Education, up to date on my creation process and marketing ideas. We organized a monthly meeting, where Patrick questioned me about my working process, and asked important questions on what the next steps are towards finishing the portfolio of music. Another mentor, Sean Heargreaves, who was also my recording and mixing professor during my studies, was essential in the finalisation of the songs. We had two meetings, one in June and one in July, which were well timed, as during this time I already had my songs fully recorded, arranged and mixed. Sean was able to give me detailed feedback on the songs, he specifically gave me input on the mixing and arrangement of the tracks. For feedback on the general feel of the album I kept Katharina Emendoerfer and Christoph Ritz in the loop on whatever changes I did. This combination of people who have different skills, made it possible for me to keep the quality of the songs on a high professional standard.

At the last stage of my project, my intention was to send the project to record labels and see their opinion on the album. I will go into detail in the marketing section of the paper about this process. Positive feedback during this stage would be the final stamp of approval that the project

is of high musical quality and also has the potential to be a commercial success in the music industry.

2.2. Strategic Planning

Different to the rather broad ideas mentioned in my desired outcomes, I had to put together specific steps that made it possible for me to achieve these aims (Thomson 2014). The idea of strategic planning with clear objectives had always been pushed by my professors, hence I started using my own tactics as well as newly learned abilities to make the project come into fruition. These strategies included creating a SWOT analysis and a personal development plan early on. For the former I will go into depth in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1. Swot Analysis

The acronym SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and although the origin of this form of strategic planning is unknown, it is set to have emerged in the 1960s (Humphrey 2005). It was initially created for businesses to increase their profitability through analyzing their company, and has developed over the years into a tool for almost any decision making situation. Therefore, I decided to use this categorization method for my personal character traits and evaluated the positive and negative outcomes of my decision to study at Tileyard, as well as evaluate my goal of creating an album. Additionally, the aim of this type of analysis was to provide me with a deeper understanding of things that I should pursue more intensively, and also show me the potential of undesired outcomes, which can form if deficits are not being worked on, or if they are even completely avoided. By connecting the strengths with the opportunities, it became clear that certain things can be acted on immediately, and also unfold in an incredible beneficiary manner. The same approach can be seen when there is a strong interaction between specific weaknesses and threats, showing me certain potential warnings and even spiraling in a highly unsatisfactory future (Ifediora 2014). In consequence, the analysis was supposed to show me, not only how to structure my time advantageously, but also tell me if I should aggressively pursue my opportunities or rather act defensively due to the high correlation of weaknesses and threats (Ifediora 2014). Further, a SWOT analysis is usually

compiled in a list, such an approach can be seen in the appendix of this paper. In the following paragraphs however, I will go into depth and summarize the main points seen in graph 1 in the appendix.

When looking at table 1, it shows that the number of points in my weaknesses table were outweighing my strengths, however, my opportunities were significantly higher than my threats. This correlation was quite interesting to me, showing me that, when looking at it retrospectively, although I feared that my weaknesses might overshadow my strengths, the number of opportunities was so high, that no matter what might happen I could come out of this with much more knowledge, and maybe even with the possibility to create monetary success if I create a connection between my strengths and opportunities cleverly. This thought alone gave me more confidence in my decision making in regards to moving from my home in Austria and studying at Tileyard Education in London. Therefore, I decided to go for an aggressive strategy in pursuing my goals.

One of the main correlations that came into fruition in a highly beneficiary way was my strength of using “pre-existing knowledge of mixing” and connecting it to my opportunity of “working in state of the art studios”. This aspect was the most essential one to my goal of creating a professionally sounding album. With the possibility to work in studios with ATC SCM 45 ASL Pro’s, Amphion One 18’s, Yamaha NS10’s and a variety of other speakers, the quality of my music increased ten fold. Not only did it increase my mixing and mastering abilities but through time, more specifically from December 2019 onwards, I started to be approached by songwriters to mix their music in return for a fee. In a sense I was able to tick off two opportunities at once, namely creating a well-mixed album, and also find a job as a mixing engineer in the music industry.

Looking at the amount of interactions between weaknesses and threats, it became clear that one aspect was an underlying factor in a number of them, which is the lack of organisation skills. Here I am going to differentiate between my daily, weekly and monthly management. On the one hand, I am able to create quite productive daily routines, however, because I want to work with a lot of people I tend to overcrowd the amount of sessions within a week and month. When

looking at it retrospectively this initial fear of mine was actually not solved. It happened so that I booked a large amount of writing sessions every week, sometimes even multiple a day. This led to quite a lot of stress, and frustration, especially in the first months of my studies, which went on until December 2019. My lack of ability to prioritize certain projects, played a high role in this problem. At one point I even started prioritizing projects that could have waited for quite a while. In the months from January onwards, I changed this habit as I became aware of it. My focus switched completely to working on the album, and finish paid opportunities that started to intensify at that time. During this period my internship with Ultra Music's artist SONDR started, which meant that I barely did any new writing sessions anymore, but rather focused on their projects. It was also at this time that my work for my own artist project "Ninski" got a new spark to life due to the signing of tracks to dance labels.

A third and final aspect that caught my awareness was my concern on health problems. Unfortunately this factor played quite a significant role in my entire process to achieve my initially recognized aims. Two issues became clear here, my weekly migraines that could stop my working routine for several hours, maybe even a whole day; and the fear of falling into bad eating habits. I am going to look at this in a reflective manner again. Due to my overbooking of sessions I barely ever had the time to go for lunch or make food for myself, and after time this became a slight problem. Personally I felt like it did not affect my work, I would even argue that at times my hunger made me more focused and work faster. However, I am very aware that if I had continued a bad eating cycle, this issue would have spiraled out of proportion. Luckily I recognized this and acted on it, especially from January onwards, basically the beginning of term two at Tileyard, I created new routines and was able to partially solve this issue. On the remark of my migraines, this issue I have not been able to resolve fully, which led to some unproductive days. Still, I kept the number of these days in good check and they did not affect any important sessions. This threat is an ongoing weakness that I am constantly in the process of finding a solution for. Nevertheless, as I am a driven and positive person, I tend to see the advantages in these situations, which is that it led me to create a strict daily routine. To some extent it guides me into a healthier living habit altogether.

Concluding the, SWOT analysis, provided me with a clear understanding of what I should be aware of if I want to keep a sustainable and productive working routine. It was essential for me to use this strategic technique at the beginning of my studies. It showed me my opportunities and threats in a clear way, and made it possible for me to reflect on it months afterwards. This also made it easier for me to adjust, as I was significantly more aware of my chances of creating something incredible during my time in London, but it also laid out a potential dangerous pathway that could come to reality if I do not act upon my deficiencies.

2.2.2. Personal Development Plan

As part of my studies it was important not only to fixate myself on one analytical technique, but also expand my vision and goals further with a personal development plan. Different to the SWOT Analysis, a PDP is divided into three sections: an overall vision for my career; my short term to medium goals, which are separated into six and 12 months; and my long-term goals, which expand from two to three years. In the following section I will lay out a summary of my personal development plan and expand on my main goals for my career, which are not necessarily centred around the creation of my album, but rather concentrate on broader aspects.

The development plan shown in graph 2 was written at the beginning of my master studies and starts out by stating my vision for my career, which is creating a music production company with several studios around the world. This goal ties also into my short term to medium aims, which concentrate on creating a network of producers, singers and songwriters. Looking at it retrospectively this goal was met, and through the networking possibilities at Tileyard I was able to create an incredible group of people that I to this day work with extensively. During my time in London I was also able to connect with one of my fellow student colleagues Jordan Thomas Round, and we were able to create an incredible bond. This gave me confidence that my ultimate vision of owning several studios and work with a group of talented musicians, was reachable.

This leads me to my second goal, which states reaching ten million plays on a single for my artist project “Ninski”. During the songwriting camps conducted by my university I was able to work with Jordan Round and a number of other songwriters on several musical briefs provided to us

by labels from all around the world. This constant creation of new songs led to the shaping of several songs that fit the musical direction of my own artist project. Through some networking possibilities I was able to publish several of these songs with dance labels, and to this date getting me closer to the aim of reaching millions of streams.

The setting of new medium and long term goals for the ultimate attainment is something that I have to continue, and the development of a personal plan is an ever growing cycle that leads me to understand my vision and aims better.

3. Skill

The acquiring of new skills is a never ending process and is one of the pillars in life that will accompany a person forever. This endless want to strive for new knowledge, I personally hold as one of the highest virtues of our human nature. Its consistent acquisition is essential for any profession, and needed in every working environment, especially when thriving for a fruitful career. Thus, in the following section, I will go into detail on what skills I acquired during the creation of my portfolio of music. I will be dividing the gained knowledge into soft - and hard skills, and explain their significant differentiation.

3.1. Soft Skills

Although the importance of soft skills has been controversial, in recent years it has gained recognition in the scientific community, especially after studies have shown its importance in our ever changing economy, which is influenced immensely by new technological inventions (Whitmore 1974). The main feature of soft skills includes “social intelligence” and often refers to the “emotional side of human beings”, which can include “communication, courtesy, flexibility, teamwork or work ethic” (Robles 2012). Hence, when used in tandem with “hard skills” or technical knowledge, it can heighten a person's possibilities at the working place.

Two soft skills that changed the way I work, and immensely increased my capabilities as a producer and recording engineer, is teamwork and communication. These two can be used to a certain extent interchangeably as communication is an essential aspect of teamwork. This communicative improvement showed its biggest advantage in the studio environment. As a producer it is essential to be able to lead the writing or recording session, and for that reason it is extremely important to be able to communicate with the artists, singers and instrumentalists in an open way. Through the high amount of writing sessions I have been a part of during my studies, I was able to learn how to create a comfortable environment for everybody that is included in the studio. Here communication is key, being open to any ideas put out by any party in the room, and being able to act on them, was something fundamental to learn. This ability to be able to work much more freely in a studio also taught me to not be nervous anymore during or before a session. I was able to completely overcome this flaw, which made my time in the studio much more comfortable. Thus, concluding that due to my improvement in communication my teamwork capabilities increased, which essentially always led to a better end product altogether.

3.2. Hard Skills

Unlike soft skills, hard skills are more easily measurable, as they reveal immediate competence of a person in a subject and mainly consist of technical knowledge. In the following paragraphs I will outline two aspects that I got aware of during the creation of my portfolio, which can be defined as an attainment of hard skills.

The usage of acoustic guitars was a centrepiece of my album, thus, I had to try out different recording techniques to see which one would give me the most creative control. After one of my “Recording Techniques” classes with professor Johan Englund, where he went into detail on Mid/Side recording, I decided to try this method out myself. I used an AKG C414 XL N2 microphone for the recording of the side signal as it has the function to record in a figure-8 mode, and a CAD VSM-1 microphone for the mid recording. Already after the first recording it became clear to me that I want to use this technique on all of the future recordings for the acoustic guitars on the project. The control over the mid - and side signal was an important factor for me as I can do significant changes even after my recording (Keller 2018). During the whole

process of the creation of the album I made changes in the mix of the recordings, tweaking volumes and using EQ's on each signal, which provided me with much more control over the sound of the acoustic guitar than regular recording techniques.

Another technical aspect that got to my attention at the mixing and mastering stage of the project, was the difference between zero latency, natural phase and linear phase modes in EQ plugins. The equaliser Fab-Filter Pro-Q 3 has the option within its plugin to switch between these three modes. When using the zero latency mode on the acoustic guitars I realised that phasing is going to become a problem, especially when using this EQ mode on each signal. This same issue happened when using the natural phase mode, or analog mode. At a later point in the mixing stage I decided to move away from the Pro-Q 3 plugin and move to the Ozone 9 Equaliser, which provides the option to switch between analog and digital settings, whereas with the latter I had no phasing at all (graph 5). This is due to the fact that Ozone uses linear phasing in this mode, and although Fab-Filter has the same option, the Izotope plugin has less of a pre-ring that occurs when using linear phasing. Concluding this aspect, did not change the overall sound to a high degree, but when comparing mixes when using Fab-Filter Pro Q 3's zero latency - or linear phase mode, versus the Ozone 9 Equaliser Digital mode, there were differences in the overall clarity of the song.

4. Inspirations

Before I started creating the portfolio of music, I conducted research to see where I want to take the project musically. Here I divided my process into two stages, the songwriting, and the mixing of the album. In my songwriting stage I took inspiration from artists such as Jack Johnson, Jon Bellion, Flume and Milky Chance. The mixture of acoustic guitars, which is drawn from albums such as "In Between Dreams" (Jack Johnson), mixed with electronic elements, inspired by "Flume" and "Skin" (Flume), can be heard quite clearly in my project. The commercial pop

arrangements, vocal melodies and lyrics were inspired by the albums “Mind The Moon” (Milky Chance), “The Human Condition” and “Glory Sound Prep” (Jon Bellion).

From these same artists I also drew my mixing inspirations and dug deeper into who was behind the creation of these masterpieces. Here I concentrated my research on finding interviews from the respective producers and mixing engineers to find out how they approached certain songs. My main analysis was around Mario Caldato Jr., Mark Williams, Raul “Volta” Kubina, Tobias Kuhn, Manny Marroquin, Louis Bell and Dave Pensado.

5. Marketing

Marketing is an essential aspect of music and oftentimes even influences the writing of songs. Although “business” and “promotion” should not be words that an artist should be using all too often, it is the pillar in the music industry that upholds everything. Due to the fact that many musicians do not have a company backing up their music endeavors, they have to make the tough decision that nowadays the majority of artists have to take, which is creating a marketing plan on their own. My project is not different from that, so I made the decision to create my own strategy for releasing the album.

The visualisation of a project plays an extremely significant role no matter who the artist is. Therefore creating a visual concept for the portfolio of music is important and essential when sending it to labels and promoters. This procedure I divided into creating an artwork for the album (graph 6), and also creating videos for the singles. For the latter I still have to figure out how I am going to approach this, but I am planning into creating audio visualizers for each song, as well as lyric videos for the singles of the project.

The most important step will be finding a label that wants to sign either the whole album or simply one or two tracks. During my time at Tileyard, and through my song releases with my artist project, I was fortunate enough to get into contact with major labels, which means that one step will include sending out emails to these A&R’s with the album. If this will not be successful

I am planning on sending out mass emails to independent labels, managers and promoters, in the hopes that somebody might be interested in helping out with the project. This stage can be quite frustrating but as I had experiences with releasing independently in the past I believe that the outcome will be positive.

6. Macroeconomic Changes and Its Influences

Unfortunately, it is impossible for me to not include the macroeconomic changes that occurred in the months from March 2020 to July 2020, and mention its influences on the finalisation of my portfolio of music. Due to the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which created a pandemic that globally influenced all aspects of human life, I was forced to leave London and return to my hometown in Austria. Luckily I was provided there with a professional recording studio by Christoph Ritz, from where I was able to keep my work at a high standard and finish my project. Even more than influencing the final portfolio of music, it changed my writing sessions with artists and songwriters. However, I was quickly able to adapt, and within a week of my return to Austria, I was able to schedule writing sessions using applications such as Zoom and Audiomovers. Nevertheless, this circumstance had an influence on the writing of the project, as I would have loved to record more live instruments in the studios provided by Tileyard.

Conclusion

The practicing and creation of music has continuously shaped and accompanied my life. The decision to study at Tileyard Education and move to London has changed the direction of my music career immensely. Confidence in the studio and networking were not new concepts to me, however, my studies have made it possible to not see them only as abstract ideas and unattainable goals but rather practice them on a daily basis. The vibrant community that I had the chance to be a part of has influenced my life in many ways and I am ever grateful for the infrastructure that I have been provided with. The creation of an album has shown me that the

process to finalisation is a long road, and without organisation it will not be reached. Analytical techniques of one's own skills are essential for this matter. To conclude, my studies in London have provided me with new possibilities and have created a new future for myself within the music industry.

(word count: 5035)

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Appendix

Graph 1:

SWOT Analysis

(Internal origin)	Strengths: - Good daily organization skills - Highly driven and easily motivated - Good at production, mixing and mastering; I can do a lot by myself - Open minded - Flexible - I can set goals quickly and pursue them - Leadership characteristics	Weaknesses: - Health issues, migraines - Knowledge in only one DAW - Limited music theory knowledge - Limited experience in writing lyrics - Unable to find work beside music as it makes me too unmotivated and steals my creativity - Bad food habits when working - Lack of organisation in overall weekly, or monthly schedule - Ability to not know what to prioritize
(External origin)	Opportunities: - Work with amazing musicians - Find a management and find a record label to work with - Get an internship - Create amazing music - Finally have the opportunity to work in state of the art studios - Get to know myself better - Gain confidence in myself, my skills, and my music - Take risks - Find music jobs	Threats: - Taking on too many projects and thereby losing focus on more important things - Creating a lot of music on the expense of my health - Frequent migraines making it unable to work/or work as much as I want to - Not using my time productive while i am studying in London - Making the wrong decisions; getting caught up in senseless projects and work

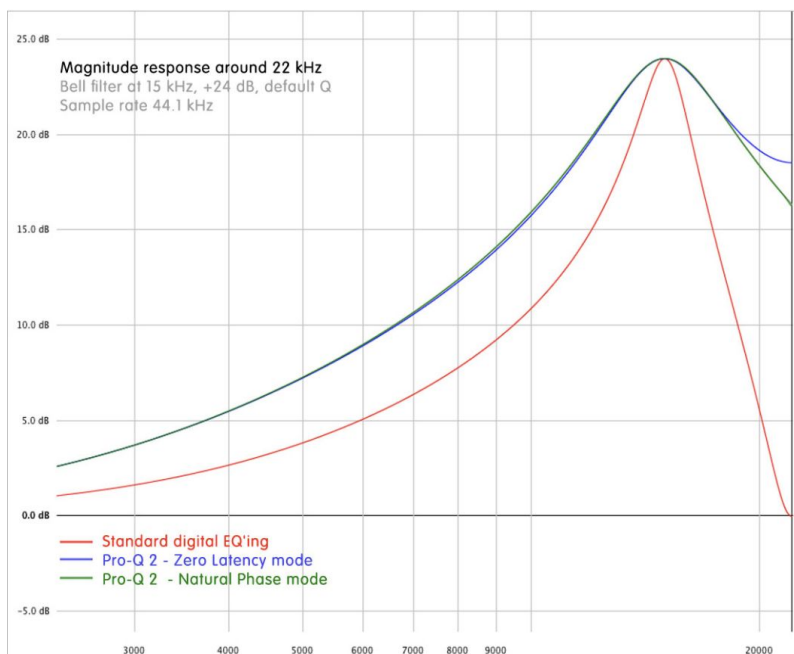
Graph 2:

Personal Development Plan (PDP)

My Vision
Create a music production company with studios in several cities around Europe and the United States. Reach ten million clicks on one song from my artist project Ninski.
My Short/Medium Term Goals (next 6/12 months)
Attain my masters degree in music production. To start an internship as an assistant for a producer. To develop my skills in recording, and feel more comfortable working in a big studio. To release several songs on my artist project, as well as help one artist I work with develop their music. To start living more healthy again. To create a circle of songwriters and singers I can work with in a fast way.
My Long-Term Goals (next 2 - 3 years)
To create a base of producers, singers and songwriters in London. To record, produce and develop an artist from my home-town. To create a base of producers, singers and songwriters in Berlin. To record in Los Angeles and create a base of producers, singers and songwriters. To reach ten million clicks on a single from my artist page. To create a large catalogue of songs that I have worked on, and have been published. To be able to live financially independent and earn my living with music. To have my own recording studio.

Graph 3:

Zero Latency vs. Natural Phase in Fab-Filter Pro-Q3



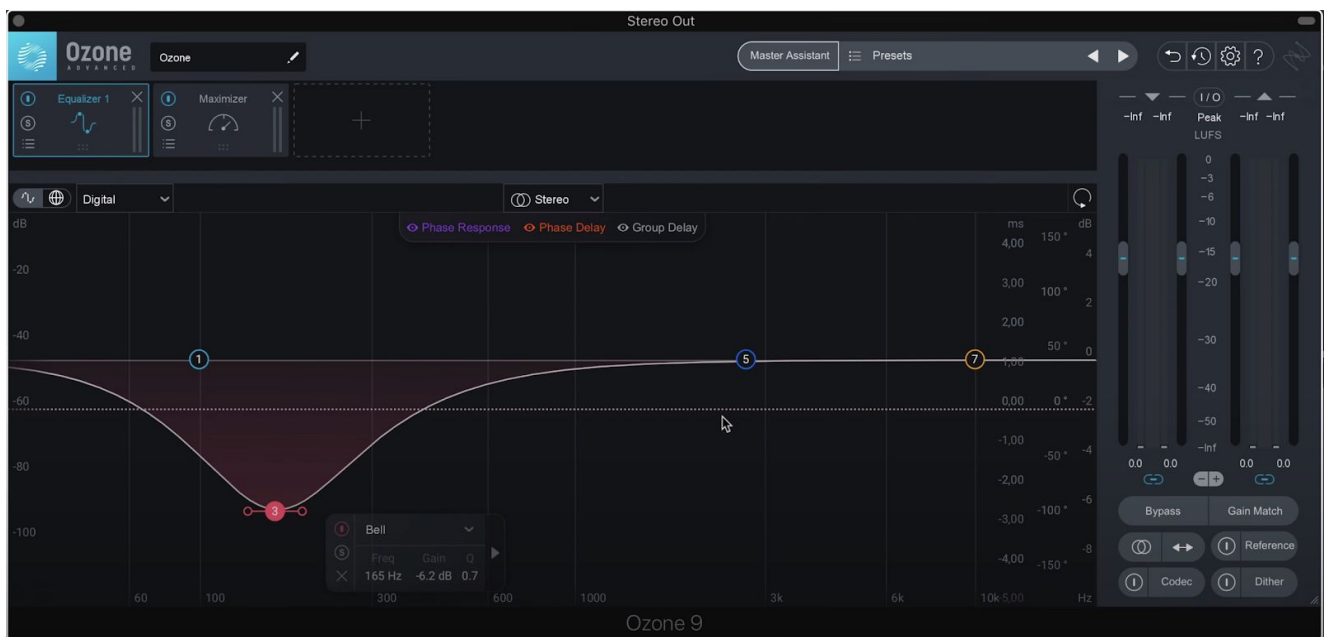
Graph 4:

Ozone 9 Equaliser in analog mode, depicting phasing issues.



Graph 5:

Ozone 9 Equaliser in digital mode, showing no phasing issues.



Graph 6:

