

William Hendry
Commercial Music Producer
(online blended)
F2 - Essay
2783

The task consisted of making three tracks which were our own interpretation of the tracks based on sonic quality, structure and key. I also looked into the background work of the Artists/Producers, to see more into their back catalogue and see if there was a defining trait they have in their music. Some I knew more about than the others, e.g. Subfocus and Dimension and Scott Storch. Scott Storch is personally one of my favourite producers outside of drum and bass his output and notoriety in 90's/2000 era hip hop is just untouchable. I have also followed Subfocus's career since his first single "Down The Drain" on Ram Records Sister label Frequency.

One thing I did notice is on the more club oriented tracks Ready to Fly and Candy Shop both being in keys which would work well on a sound system due to the way the scale works. In my experience the lowest scale you really want to write music for the club is Eflat minor, I find from B to D tricky as the notes in the scale don't lend well to give optimum bass weight and also doesn't align well sonically with the sonic aesthetic of the drums. With the keys between B to D they just fit in the same pockets of frequency as the drums. Anti Hero is completely different kettle of fish though and is a complete out and out pop record, although Candy shop does have pop roots but is more centric to the club world.

Track one // Subfocus, Dimension - Ready To Fly / VIV4CE - ZipWire

With the essence of the track being a Dance floor Drum and Bass track which switched up to a hardcore second drop. My DAW of choice for this one was Ableton Live 11, precisely for the reason is I find it more geared towards the creative output. I imported Ready to Fly into my DAW found out it was at 174 bpm and worked out it was in GSharp Minor. Following this I then worked out the structure of the track and

proceeded to make my own version of it while still retaining its aesthetic. I also wanted to move away from the hardcore drop and made more of a piano house vibe.

For the intro, quite a few impacts were used in the track, with the arp I made in the start which was just a serum with sawtooth wave low sustain, short decay, and detuned, I used a arp midi plug in and played in a chord, at first it was too static so I imparted some groove by adding some swing to it. I then added a pad to the track to fill out the frequency spectrum and also to give it some tension. Also at the end of the phrase I added a filtered chord to add some spice to the track and signify the end of the phrase in the intro this only runs on the intro.

Next I introduce the soon to come in piano line with a serum playing a detuned saw wave in the same midi I played in for the piano line but mixed at a lower level so that when the piano comes in it has impact to it. The piano is a lovely sound set running of nexus 3 which is running of the midi I played in with a touch of delay and reverb. There is also some incidental noises I added and also a build up sound and fill.

Moving to the drop there's a rather standardised thing going on with Sub, mid bass, lead, pad and arp which is typical for dance floor Drum and Bass. For the Sub I thought I would lean towards a very Subfocus thing to do which is use 808ish sounding bass tone which is then playing 1/8th dotted notes to give a nice roll against the 2 step drums. He uses this technique on a lot of his earlier releases namely Sound Guy and Stomp. The mid bass I tried to keep it in keeping with ready to fly but was in my own spin by playing each note in octaves, This mid bass is the hook, one of the many hooks in the track and when using the sound I designed. By the way I should add I did the sound design for all sounds bar the impacts and piano. I think the mid bass mimics the ready to fly nicely although its a much tighter filter sweep in my version leading to a bit more of a minimal feel overall.

The lead I wanted to add in a lead which is becoming one of my signature sounds in tracks of mine which is as I would like to think is it as that 90s west coast synth lead you had in hiphop tracks of old. Basically is just a sawtooth detuned fine not to much then mono voices and legato applied on glide set moderately so you get that nice pitch bent lines when you play in your midi line. I wish I made the drop a little bit harder hitting although it was made more with commercial viability in mind, I did try to get some vocals on it although the people I knew who were available it wouldn't have worked sonically. I do understand that it would have made a already commercial track even more accessible with them, but I didn't want to loose quality by not having the right vocals on it. I did try my own but I'm no vocalist and couldn't bare having anyone listen to that. I do think that the track has good commercial viability without them.

Drums were a simple dance floor style 2 step pattern then the drums fed into a drum buss and some buss compression adding some light compression to glue them together. I did try some New York compression but thought it didn't work and just some simple compression was all that it needed.

Here is the breakdown, looking back one thing I would change is the first 16 bars and have it a proper breakdown instead of copying the build straight from the beginning and have a more unique uplifting breakdown before the piano kicks back in.

For the second drop the drums pattern goes into a more four to the floor house vibe, with a jungle break high passed. I keep the piano going over the whole of this second drop its just a vibe, I think this is something that should have been in the sub focus track in my opinion. During this section you can really hear the side chain I have on the compressor on the sub layer from the kick which gives more groove to the bassline.

The art in the tracks beauty is the key its made in which sonically all the notes fit in there own pockets and sound stage this makes mixing easier and enables you to make everything louder and its clearer without the need for loads of EQ as all sounds fill nicely and their harmonics around their prospective frequency spectrums. Personally I love this track and its sonic qualities from the piano line to the second drop where it gets ravey with its piano house four to the floor style. If I was to go back to it I would change the mid bass sound to something bit heavier but for all intents and purposes it works well more minimal, but a club mix with a more aggressive mid bass like the original would work really well. This I feel has more legs as a radio / home listening track and would definitely need a club mix unless people were to using it in liquid sets due to its more minimal approach.

Track Two / / 50 Cent - Candy Shop / VIV4CE - CS FLIP

After spending a while listening to Candy shop and getting a feel for the track which Scott Storch produced, I worked out it was 98 Bpm and in the key of F Sharp Phrygian. You basically just flatten the the second of the minor scale. This is a typical Scott Storch record, were he uses middle eastern sounds to his advantage, lots of wood winds etc.

“When I was in Miami I was into the whole middle eastern thing, we created some waves” (Scott Storch On His Sounds 2022).

I put the Candy shop into the Daw this time, I used logic pro and went through and added markers to the whole track in place of for the structure of the track.

I then zoomed in and analysed the drum groove, used a kit in battery and recreated the beat I felt I needed to keep this groove as this was the underpinning of the track but I didn't want it to be a copy so I recorded in some hand claps using a Rode NT1 to give it more groove and a more natural feel and that crunky vibe mix wise I bussed all drum parts to a drum group then added some buss compression and saturation to get a harder hitting sound. Moving on I used a Brass sound as a stab at the beginning of each 4 bar loop to give it some weight and impact, with this switching up on the chorus to 3 notes in succession. For the bassline I used some tuned 808s which I have saturated quite a bit, I wanted that dance floor hardness but with some funk. There is a woodwind I played, this reflects the middle eastern vibe in the original this runs all the way through the track. I wish I could pitch bend the notes as well as Storch. I didn't even try to although the notes I played in I think work well as a hook for the track and it's something that would keep in people's minds or sing along to. Being that the original track was probably and still is hammered in clubs across the world.

For the second chorus I introduce more strings but I add some tremolo to add some dynamics. This is pretty much it for mixing decisions I wanted hard hitting drums and bass. This made all the other elements have their own place and there is a nice pocket left for vocals but like the other track I didn't have much luck. I was going to go to Bristol and record a old friend but our schedules clashed, I was going to book Pirate Studios for a few hours to record him, but alas couldn't be done. I did give myself a recording session in my home studio but it will never see the light of day it's that bad. If you listen to Scott Storch's catalogue he has a massive middle eastern flavour to his track which is probably why he used the Phrygian scale. Candy shop is about 20bpm faster than a lot of standard hip hop tracks. I wanted quite a similar flavour but with my spin on it, I channeled my energy into the vibe of the track it was pretty fun to make, I picked a set of sounds out that I thought would work best then went to town and just vibed out for a few hours. All in all successful I would like to hear it with some vocals in future that would be great, I think I will get my friend to add his flavour to it at some point.

Track Three // Taylor Swift - Anti Hero / VIV4CE - Track Three

For this track I made it in logic pro.. This I found the hardest of the three as it is something completely different to what I'm used to but gave it ago regardless of how hard it was not just to write but aesthetically. As you notice on the original it has a certain feel to it where it sounds like the whole mix might have been fed into tape and it has a lot of wow and flutter to it or that might just be me. Anyway its quite a simple song with not really too much going on, it really just a place holder for Taylor Swifts vocals. But with that it works well and has generated a lot of success in both the billboard chart and uk chart. The track was produced by Jack Antonoff who is the lead singer of rock band Bleachers. This track Anti Hero is a unconventional pop song about anxiety and personal demons.

I started by placing the track into logic and working out the bpm, which is 97 bpm and adding markers to work out the structure of the track.

It follows a structure i'm not really used to, from mostly making dance music i'm used to strict 4x4 with no added bars or exertions, this track has verse then chorus then an extension, which is then rinsed and repeated to the end of the track.

From there I loaded up a kit in battery which had the sonic characteristics I wanted, then proceeded to make a drum groove similar but not to mimic the original. From here I chose to add a pad sound as I thought this underpinned the whole track. I made a simple pad sound in serum then used a tremolo to great some groove to it and try to recreate the sonic aesthetic of the original which was hard work, this track just has a unbelievably wonderful aesthetic to it which was hard to go for.

I hope I managed to at least recreate it as best as I could with out plagiarising the track. To play in the chords for this track as it was in a scale which I wasn't used to I used the midi chord FX and picked pop left hand and played one note chords but also recorded the midi to midi channel so I could go in and edit the chords. The bassline for this was a simple sine wave in serum with a touch of tube saturation. During the chorus I've added a detuned saw wave with a low pass filter slightly filtering the harsh top end its playing the same midi as the pads. For the extension I've added a lead sound reminiscent of 90s west coast g funk era hiphop which is fast becoming a signature VIV4CE thing to do. As with the other tracks I wanted to have some form of vocals on it but I really didn't feel I had anyone that would have done it justice to hand. For the mix to try and mimic that wow and flutter in the original, I added the built in delay in logic which has the tube saturation in it, I put it into ms, added a very small delay and mixed in the wet also I added a lot of tube saturation to it to give it that slightly smashed sound. This track I found the hardest to make as it was completely out of my comfort zone but I think I come out with a good back bone to a pop track in this style and aesthetic.

Taking in what I have taken away from doing the three tracks has been that I need to work on my issues with odd structures and time signatures when working in the pop world, as I'm naturally a DJ and Producer, so Im used to my music with a very strict 4x4 time signature and structure. Also mixing for smaller systems e.g. having more upper harmonics to have perceived bass when playing on small sound systems on Alexa's etc.. Track one I feel is the most complete and at above demo quality, second track needs vocals to finish it off but the mix and bones of the track are there. Track three would need a vocal then some finishing touches you can only really do once a top line is in. Track one and two I had the most fun with, although its not about fun, its nice to have it.

I would not have vocals in the first one thinking about it now maybe just a few phrases in before the piano line but I did try this and it just didn't work, although if my friend was on it I'm sure I would be surprised. All in all I have enjoyed this assignment and look forward to more.

Biography

Scott Storch On His Sounds (2022) *YouTube*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/3opD7US0qd0> (Accessed: April 6, 2023).

