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Reflective Commentary

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Introduction

As the coronavirus was spreading and crashing the world, a lot of people scared and worried about the situation. I feel my family and friends are nervous and anxious about the life and future and I believe everyone has the same feeling. Therefore, I create this album and I hope my audience can get encouraged from my music and strengthen themselves and face the life again.

My album is "Be Valiant". The idea is the first letter of the nine songs combined to the album name. These nine songs are "Befuddled Day", "Eccentric enemy", "Vulnerable Me", "Abysmal Days", "Languish", "Immune", "Alacrity", "New Day" and "Time has gone". It represents 9 different situations and different music styles. As I want my album has more possibilities, my music style was not limited in one or two music genres. I composed my songs with Trance music, Electronic Dance Music (EDM), Trap music, Classical music, Soft music, Orchestral music, Chill music and experimental music etc.

My Development Plan

To make a completed and high standard music album is not easy. It needs a lot of time, knowledge, inspiration, techniques and cooperation. Through this album, I know my weakness and I could improve and strengthen myself a lot.

Time Management

Its only twenty-four hours in every day. Everyone wants more time because we always find that we don't have enough time to work or achieve our target. So, time management is an essential subject that how to control and distribute our time. "Effective time management reduce in wasted time, mitigation of work overloads and higher levels of personal productivity." (Review, 2014)

As I got a regular job in daily life, I have limited time for producing my album. Mostly, I only have two days to doing my music every week. So, I need to distribute my time properly. In every weekend, I forced my self to do three hours of music in the morning because I had more inspiration after I waked up. After lunch, I listened to some music that related to my music for one hour.

Then, work on music again until dinner. Of course, I need to do some physical exercises and movement in every hour which prevent facing to the monitor for a long time.

I think this time management improve my ability to work. The time wasn't wasted and I got more effective processing capacity.

Knowledge

Knowledge is never outdated. Everything we learned can be used in somewhere in the future. Therefore, we need to keep learning new knowledge and apply it to our works.

During producing my album, I forced myself to watch and read some tutorials and skill lessons from some famous producers. I read a book called "Ableton Live 101: An Introduction to Ableton Live 10" (Kuehnl, Haak and Cook, n.d.) which is a tool book that helps me to use Ableton Live 10 effectively. In the other hand, I like to watch some YouTube videos because I can see the results directly. For example, there is a YouTube channel called [mau5 freaks] ([mau5 freaks], 2020) and its owned by a famous music producer, Deadmau5. Although it is not a very formal tutorial lesson video, I found a lot of little tricks and how the great music producer creates their music.

Inspiration

Music is art. A piece of good music can affect people's emotion and feeling. It should be no formula to limit music. However, the music market is full of "formula music" which means there is a lot of similar music nowadays. Therefore, the producer needs many fresh and unique inspiration that makes the audience shocked and surprise.

To improve my inspiration and ideas, I listened to a wide range of music genre, from Classical to experimental music, from the Eastern world to the Western World, from Relax music to high energy trance music. I think it enlarges my vision of music and I absorb and understand more about different genre elements.

On the other hand, I was not only listening to music. I think music is a part of art and art is creativity. Therefore, I travelled some gallery and read a book

called Music in Art by Alberto Ausoni. This book introduced me to a different music world. Many paintings have musical elements and it shows how the drawer feel. For example, there is a drawing style called Vanitas. "In art history, vanitas refers to iconography in still-life painting characterized by the presence of objects expressing the fleeting nature of the human experience and the things of the world." (P.56 Ausoni, 2009) In vanitas painting, we always found some skulls music instrument and music scores in the painting. In this position, music may mean as a vain pleasure and useless passions or despair of life.

Through the painting and film, I got more inspiration and assimilate to my music which I think is another method to improve my creativity.

Techniques

The music technology is changing with each passing day. The artist should get more techniques and use music technology effectively.

Before the inventing of the computer, the musician composed music with staves on the paper and play the music with the classical instrument. It was limited and the musician couldn't put all his ideas on a sheet of paper. When more Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) and Plug-ins were invented, the artist can do whatever they want. Music is not limited to dynamic, sustain and playable melody again, the artist can use the filter to adjust the frequency. Using the reverb to changing the sense of space. Using synthesizer to create unique sounds.

To improve my music techniques, my method is practice and practice. There is no shortcut to knowing all the techniques without practising.

Cooperation

Cooperation is an essential part of the music community. One artist can make a good song but two artists can make a better song. When I have no idea and inspiration, I will send my song to my friends and ask for an opinion. Other's artist has their inspiration and it gives more possibility.

A simple cooperation that I am using is talk and discuss with my artist friends regularly every week. We have our group chat and Zoom chatroom. I found that when a few people have the same goal direction and cooperate with

each other, it makes the goal happen earlier and better. According to the book “Cooperation: A Philosophical Study” by R. Tuomela. It said, “Cooperation in its fullest sense requires in addition that the participants participate willingly.” So, the same target and goals are good for a team.

Digital Audio Workstation (DAW)

In my album, I used Logic Pro X. Reason and Ableton Live 10 Suite for producing. They two are professional and helpful DAW software that I rely on.

Logic Pro X

I used Logic Pro X to create this song. Logic Pro X is a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) which launched in Apple OS system only. Logic Pro X is developed by Apple company in 2013. Logic Pro X has a bunch of good plug-ins, instruments and effects. It becomes one of the most successful and famous DAW software nowadays.

The advantage of using Logic Pro X is it has a great and large instrument library and drummer system. It supports Apple Loops which is a royalty-free and professional audio loop. It is a very helpful function that allows the artist to find suitable resources quickly. Logic Pro X has a good mixing function. The mixer shows all the effects and functions that are working and the artist can directly change the parameter easily and quickly. The third thing that I like is the mid sequencer and piano roll. It is the best midi sequence editor. The artist can quantize, changing scales, adding velocity and moving midi easily.

Also, I think Logic Pro X has the best interface in all of the DAW software. It is user friendly and it has a well-designed colour and function.

Ableton Live 10 Suite

Ableton Live 10 Suite is invented by Ableton Company in 2001. I used it mostly on PC and I like to use it for producing Electronic music. Many successful DJs and producer like Ableton because it can connect with the Push and other controllers. Ableton Live is good for live performing. The performer can change the parameter and mix with Ableton Mixer window.

Ableton Live 10 is good at automation. The producer can copy and paste the automation envelope directly. It also allows modifying the effects and automation with Ableton devices in realtime.

Max for Live provides huge Ableton plug-ins and effects that for Ableton Live only. In the last assignment, I created an Ableton synthesiser which called C1 Synthesiser which means the producer can create their own synthesiser apply it in Ableton.

Reason 11

Reason 11 was developed by Reason Studio in 2019. It emulates a rack of mixers, samples, and hardware synthesisers. Reason shows how the plug-ins and hardware connect each other. Different setting and position make different sounds.

I learned Reason DAW just a few months but I was surprised about with its own instrument and plug-ins. The Reason Rack Plugins is helpful for artists such as Scales and Chords, Dual Arpeggio and Klang etc.

My Album

1, Befuddled Day (2 minutes 26 seconds)

Befuddled Day is the first song of my album. It is an introduction song of my album. So, I try to keep it simple and easy to enrol in my album.

It is a piece of soft music. This song was inspired by a Korean musician called July. All his work contains piano, string and percussion. I like his music style and mood. I was attracted by his beautiful and quiet piano melody.

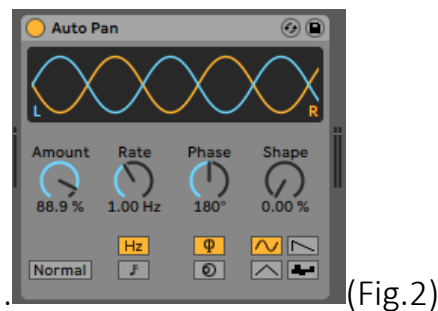
It starts with a beautiful piano melody and stable cello section. I designed a unique sound with a Logic Pro X plug-in called Alchemy. It is a powerful instrument. I used it to create the Lead sound. The modulation function allows all setting are changing which give the sound unique and moving.

I added the delay effect in some notes which gives the befuddled feeling. The delayed notes were automated by the Stereo Delay plug-in. The stereo

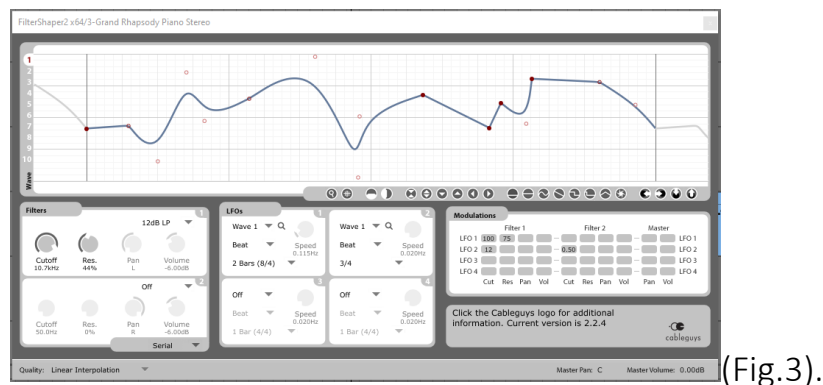
feeling comes from Left Delay and Right Delay. A slight delay time gap provides more 3D and stereo feeling.

2, Eccentric enemy (3 minutes 54 seconds)

This song sounds like the background music of a horror movie. As the meaning of the name, it sounds like facing something that we don't know. It starts with long chaos and mystery pad. I put Auto Pan (Fig.2) on the pad which increases the mystery feeling.



In the Piano section. I modulate the piano sound with Filter Shaper (Fig.3). I can draw the envelop that keep the pianos sounds changing with the filter. I also add some distortion which increases the reality. “The creative use of distortion and other effects can result in spectrally rich and textured sound.” (Daniel J. Levitin., Petri Laukka. and Anjali Bhatara., 2014) Therefore, a fairish distortion is benefited for building atmosphere.



The kick drum represents the heartbeats and it is full of nervous feeling. I cut off the 364Hz Frequency increase 5.5 dB resonance with Filter.

There is a loud roaring at the end of this end. It represents an expression of the nightmare and horror in the heart.

3, Vulnerable Me (3 minutes 43 seconds)

This is a Lo-fi chill song. Lo-fi music begins popular recently. The definition of Lo-fi means the opposite of Hi-fi music. “Often spelt 'low-fi' before the The 1990s, the term originally functioned simply as an abbreviation of 'low fidelity,'

being the negative of the older term 'high fidelity.'” (Harper,2014)

In the 1990s, Lo-fi music also called DIY music which means that the producer makes the music with limited situation and devices, the music quality was not as high as the music produced by the studio or educated musician. When the time is changed, Lo-fi music doesn’t mean it is bad production bad quality again. In now a day, the audience enjoys the Lo-fi mood and old school feeling and that’s the purpose of making Lo-fi music. (Spencer, 2015)

The main structure of the song is the piano part. It repeated from the beginning until the end. It is usual in Lo-fi music because the rapper needs a stable melody and rhythm for lyrics. I added a lot of reverb on the piano. “Reverb is a common sound in nature and architectural structure.” (P.53 Hurtig and Sharp, 1988) In this situation, large reverb provides bad recording feeling in the song which is what I want in Lo-fi music. (Fig.4)



(Fig.4)

In Drum section, I resample and distort the drum with filter and distortion plugin. Also, I added tiny white noise in hi-hat and kick drum which makes it sounds old.

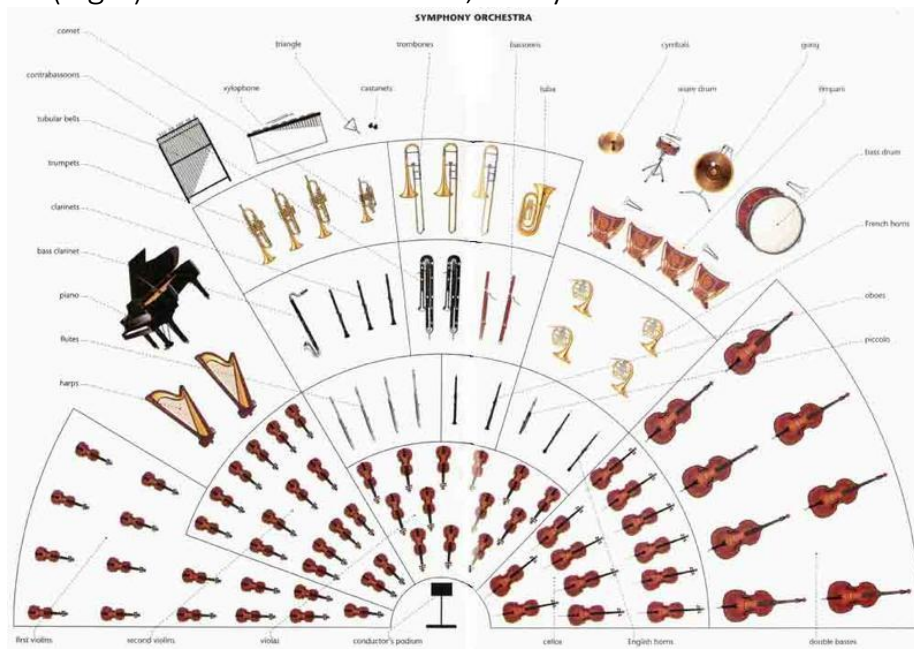
4, Abysmal Days (3 minutes 27 seconds)

It is a piece of orchestral music. Orchestral music is played by a large instrumental ensemble. It always includes string ensemble, woodwind ensemble, horn ensemble, bass drum, timpani, triangle and other percussion section etc.

There is a Japanese musician called Hiroyuki Sawano. He is a great musician that writing orchestral music for animation and film. His music is full of epic, battle elements and energy. Therefore, he inspired me to write a piece of orchestral music that is powerful and epic. Also, Hiroyuki's one significant point is he always add human choir sounds into his music which increase the 'epic' feeling.

The song that inspired me is called UNICORN - Gundam Unicorn OST. (Sawano, 2020) The horn section, percussion and string section build an epic and powerful sense that into ears.

Before I was writing orchestral music, I read a lot of information and books that are about the orchestra. One thing that I learned is about the instrument position. (Fig.5) In a formal orchestra, every instrument has its own position.



(Fig.5)

In the beginning, a sadness piano opens the introduction of the song. After that, an epic orchestral

Drum

I reference and listen to a lot of orchestral music. The drum section is important in orchestral music. It needs to be powerful and rich with tiny percussion elements. I panned the drum section slight the right which is similar to a formal orchestra.

I added Timpani as the impact sound and triangle as the decoration sound. The kick drum is solid and stable.

Strings

“The String body occupies a primary position in the constitution of the orchestra.” (P.29 Del Mar 2009) I panned the cello to the right and violin to the left. I divided the strings ensemble to violin section, cello section and viola section. Three strings sections give a rich layer of sounds.

Flutes

I used two different flutes, one is a normal flute and another one is called Di Zi which is a Chinese flute instrument. Di Zi is made of bamboo or wood. It sounds shaper and higher. The reason is I want some unique and special sound to strengthen the melody

5, Languish (4 minutes 37 seconds)

Languish is a piece of Trance music. Trance music is a kind of Electronic dance music. It was very popular in the late 80s till 90s because of clubbing and dancing culture. The word “Trance” represents some emotions such as euphoria, feeling high and uplifting.

Languish is inspired by a piece of trance music called Adagio for Strings which mixing by DJ Tiesto. (Tiesto.2020) DJ Tiesto is one of the best trance musician and DJ in the world. The range of tempo is 120-150 bpm.

I think the introduction is important in Trance music. A good introduction attracts the audience’s emotion. Therefore, I created a rising chord progression at the beginning which is full of effects such as filter, automation, reverb, distortion and LFO envelop. The kick should be solid. I colour the kick drum with the compressor LA2A.

After that, the chord progression is kept changing in a different style to keep the sound different.

I created the lead sound with the Plug-in Spire. Spire is a powerful synthesizer plug-in that invented by reveal sound company. It allows me to draw the envelop and step sequence. High sound quality is another selling point for me.



(Fig.6)

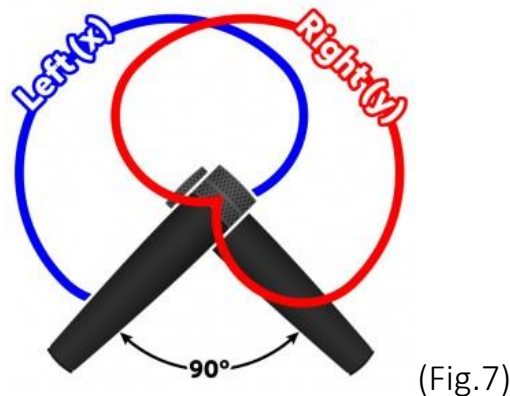
Also, I put a lot of effort into creating good white noise in this. A suitable and smooth white noise could do a great job in impact sound and transposition role. I produced it with my C1 Synthesizer and Spire. C1 Synthesizer was created by me in the last assignment. I created it with Max 8 which is creating plugins for Ableton. I mixed the white noise and pink noise together and the final sound is great.

6, Immune (2 minutes 40 seconds)

Immune is a piece of experimental music. There is no proper definition of experimental music but John Cage said, "Experimental music was a phrase used in the mid-twentieth-century to describe a range of ultramodernist compositional techniques as being a form of quasi-scientific research." (What Does "Experimental Music" Even Mean Anymore? 2015) Experimental music can be anything. The most popular experiment music is 4"33 and water walk.

In my song, I can't do something as extreme as John Cage, but I recorded and modulated a lot of sounds and put it to the song.

Besides, I will be talking about the method of how I recorded the sounds. Basically, I have two dynamic microphones Shure SM57 and one cardioid condenser microphone Rode NT1-A. I put two SM57 to XY mode (Fig.7) for catching the room sounds and increase the stereo feeling. The advantage of using XY recording is to increase the stereo width and decreases the centre. For recording other sounds, I would use Rode NT1-A which the condenser microphone can cap more detailed sounds.



I capture the water falling sounds, pressing bubble paper, cutting hair with scissors, slide the Tom, drinking water, turning the lighter etc. All the sounds are not related but it's all in one song. Sounds wired but I can imagine a story with this song. It is my first time to do something like this but I think music is limitless and experimental music has its own charm and fascination. I learned that any sound can be a part of the music.

7, Alacrity (4 minutes 43 seconds)

In my opinion, Alacrity means energy and speed. The powerful chord progression sounds like running. I imagine that there is someone who is running somewhere.

In this song, I used an instrument called Koto. Koto is a Japanese string instrument. It is developed from a Chinese instrument called Zheng but it sounds darker. I like to add some Eastern Instrument to my music because the result always surprises me a lot. Sometimes, I get the sound I want only from eastern music instruments.



(Fig.8)

8, New Day (3 minutes 30 seconds)

In this song, the scale is changing between Ab major and Ab minor. It is a scale modulation. When the scale change, the feeling is also changing. There is a song called “My Girl” by The Temptations which inspired me a lot. (My Girl) “My Girl” change the scale from C major to D major and it is whole step scale modulation. Therefore, I tried to create the song with Ab major and Ab minor which brings two feelings in one song.

9, Time has gone (6 minutes 10 seconds)

To imitating the time, I EQ and put the filter on the snare sound and it sounds like clock sound. Also, Double bass kick emphasizes the speed and time.

In this song, I used two eastern instruments, one is called Chinese Zheng and one is called Japanese Shakuhachi. They two have very strong Eastern instrument colour. Moreover, I used the Chinese scale also named a pentatonic scale. Pentatonic only have 5 notes per octave.

This song is the best mix of eastern elements and western elements together.

Target audience

My album has a few genres and styles. The reason is I want to explore more genres. I don't want to limit myself in a comfort zone. That's why I tried from Orchestral music to experimental music.

In my opinion, my main target audience is the youngsters and students. The teenagers accept new things quickly and they are easier to buy music. When they are studying or working, I hope my music can help with relaxing.

The coffee shop is a good place for playing my music. Most of my music is soft and used for relaxing.

Video maker is my target too. In many YouTube videos, the video makers need the background music or sound effects to build up or represents the emotions. I think my music is suitable for any kind of YouTube videos.

Lastly, as I am not a good lyricist, I didn't write any lyrics for my music. Therefore, the singer and rapper are also in my target. I hope that I can cooperate more with the singer and rapper that can put lyrics for my music.

Marketing

In 2020, the global music production market size is 31 billion US dollars. (IBISWorld - Industry Market Research, Reports, and Statistics, 2020) However, how to get a piece of cake in this industry is not easy.

Promoting

As I am not a popular musician, I need to promote my album to people. Promoting is a very important part before selling my album.

YouTube

YouTube is the biggest and most popular video streaming website in the world. All the biggest record label and famous musician would upload their music to YouTube and get views and popularity. For example, in 2012, there

was a Korean video called “Gangnam Style”. This is the most popular music that year and it made the K-pop popular in the world.

Therefore, I created my YouTube Channel and upload all my music to YouTube which to share my music with others.

Bilibili

Bilibili is a Chinese “YouTube” website in China. Almost all Chinese teenagers use Bilibili for watching videos and listening to music. The advantage of using Bilibili is the audience can reward the creator directly. The views and collection can be changed to the income too. It is because the users are teenagers, they are easier to buy the music.

Sound Cloud

Sound Cloud is a music sharing website. All the musician can upload them to Sound Cloud and see how the listener feels. It is good to know the audience and taste and get the feedback directly on the time bar.

Social Medias

Social medias are the good tools to promoting myself to the public. The most successful example is Justin Bieber. Before Justin Bieber become popular, he uploaded his singing video to YouTube and communicate with his fans in Twitter. The Twitter helps Justin Bieber build a huge number of followers and fans.

Therefore, I created accounts for all the popular social media that covered China and Western Countries, such as Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, Instagram etc.

Royalties

PRS (Performing Right Society) for Music is a British music copyright collective. It is to protect the musician can get the royalties income. Protecting the copyright is important for a musician because making a piece of good music is though and the royalties are the income resources to the musician.

Join PRS is a good way to protect my work’s copyright.

Tik Tok

Tik Tok is a fashion smart phone software. It allows the user upload 15 seconds video with music. Teenagers like to using Tik Tok for recoding their life or sharing their funny moment so I think I should put my music to Tik Tok and let other users use it as the background music.

Selling Method

First of all, I would not sell physical CD album because I don't have enough money for burning CD and promote it to the CD shop. Therefore, I need to sell my album in a virtual way. Thanks for the Internet and Technology development, every musician has many methods to sell their music.

iTunes

Apple iPhone has the greatest mobile phone music app store in the world. I would sell it in iTunes and get a part of the income from Apple.

Spotify

Spotify is a Swedish music streaming software. There are around 300 million users which is a huge amount of audience. One good thing to selling music on Spotify is the software will pick some similar music that the audience like and transfer to the audience.

Digital Music Distribution

Tunecore

Tunecore is a New York company that helps for licensing service, digital music distribution and publishing services. If someone uses the music from any online retailers such as iTunes, YouTube or Tidal etc., the musician can get the profit from it. Tunecore is a good tool to monitor what the musician earning from.

Conclusion

As the final album is not as same as what I planned in the proposal, I think I did a lot of attempt in different music genres. During working on my album “Be Valient” , I got encouraged by my family and friends and I got energy from my music.

I put a lot of effort on this album and I am satisfying about the result what I created. In my opinion, marketing and promoting is important as making music too because everyone can be the star now easily. I will keep fighting in the music industry and create more and more good music album to audiences.

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