

CREATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

“Fusing 1980’s pop-influenced Synth-wave with modern Drum & Bass production, in the creation of an original long-play record.”

Author: Iain Sumner

Student no: 2018939

Submission Code: ADAD7004_LON

Submission Date: 12th August 2021

Word count: 2,355

“I hereby declare that this my own work and does not use any materials other than the cited sources and tools. All explanations that I copied directly or in essence are marked as such. This work has not been previously submitted.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Iain Sumner', with a stylized, flowing script.

Iain Sumner

INTRODUCTION TO CONCEPT	3
RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE	3
PROPOSED TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
SUCCESS DETERMINATION	6
METHODOLOGY	6
RESOURCES	7
STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS (S.W.O.T)	8
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN	10
PROPOSED TIMELINE	11
REFERENCES	12

Introduction to Concept

This proposal is for my 'creation' project, the premise of which is to create a LP (long-play) Album of music, which will fuse the genres of 1980's-influenced Synth-wave with modern Drum & Bass. While both these genres are considerably synthesizer and sequencer-orientated types of music, it is my intention to significantly utilise live instrumentation and playing in the composition of these tracks. The goal for the practical element of this project is to create an 8-track LP, of 30-40 minutes play duration. Creative targets for this production include retention of a cohesive concept and auditory palate throughout, whilst also providing enough variation in composition to retain listening interest. The artistic and stylistic influences for this LP will draw considerably on the analysis of significant works, which will be presented within the academic element of the project; this will break down origins of both genres and discuss the relevant elements of works in each respective field, in order to determine their defining characteristics.

The academic element will also provide reflective analysis on the production of the LP, therefore determining if the results of production are successful in achieving the originally intended finished product. The essay for this project will look into Synth-wave and Drum & Bass music; its origins, cultural relevance, associated aesthetics, how their sub-genres differ from each other, and what are the primary factors driving their growth in popularity. While the practical element of this project seeks to musically fuse these two genres, the academic element will discuss their differences, and attempt to find similarities in the two musical styles. It is this theoretical basis which will provide the ground work for the practical element, with this written analysis determining which desirable musical features should retain prominence, additionally identifying which elements are not to be retained or replicated, and the reasoning for these decisions.

Rationale and Significance

Following a Tileyard Education mentoring session with Ayalah Bentovim aka. 'Sister Bliss' from Faithless, during which we discussed 'finding my niche', I gave some serious consideration as to what that niche might be; the factors considered in making this decision

were my own tastes, musical influences, what I felt would best play to my strengths as an artist, and the concept of a musical 'formula' that I could live with. The capacity for creative innovation, originality, the potential to draw on my own instrumental skill and wide range of musical tastes were all desired pre-requisites for defining the goals of this project; and it is my feeling that the concept of fusing Synth-wave with Drum & Bass offers the fulfilment of all these aspects. Among my primary reasons for choosing this concept for my project are the challenges that this largely uncharted musical territory presents, my enthusiasm for both genres, and a curiosity regarding how listenable (or 'good') the end result will be. It is also surprising to me that this is not a direction which has been explored more extensively by other producers, particularly since both genres are very popular with the online gaming community, and could be considered to 'enhance' the sensory stimulation of a video gaming experience.

Since 2016 I have performed as a Drum & Bass DJ under the pseudonym 'Freak Response', wearing a customised cyborg mask. Whilst the reception of this image has had mixed responses from both audiences and peer groups, it was my feeling that this concept should be retained and evolve due to the fact it grabs people's attention and ensures that I stand out from other artists on any given lineup. This pre-existing 'alter-ego' concept determined the necessity of a musical concept that was suitable for release under the 'Freak Response' brand, and since Synth-wave aesthetic also bleeds into 'retro-future' concepts such as 'Cyberpunk', it was deemed that taking my existing Drum & Bass brand in this direction could have great potential in terms of both sonic and visual aesthetic.

While there are not really any prominent long-play examples of artists combining Synth-wave with Drum & Bass at present, the market landscape for the combination of these two genres is actually very promising, and several well-known Drum & Bass producers have released tracks with a distinctively Synth-wave feel and sound. The academic element will take a more detailed look at these examples. Last year (2020) saw the highest ever year for Drum & Bass download sales across all music portals (Jenkins 2021), and surprisingly, despite the genres niche following, Synth-wave was listed as one of the top five genres of music that is most likely to reach millennials today (MRC Data & Billboard 2021). The LP would only need to be popular with a small amount of both genre's fans to be very

successful commercially, therefore if executed well the scope for potential success certainly exists within the current music industry market landscape.

Proposed Table of Contents

Abstract

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

1. Introduction

1.1) Project Intentions

1.2) Reflection on Project Conception

1.3) Methodology

2. Research into Synth-wave and Drum & Bass production

2.1) Origins of Synth-wave and Drum & Bass music

2.2) The development of music technology and its relationship to both genres

2.3) Modern vs. Classic production styles and techniques

4. Analysis of relevant Synth-wave and Drum & Bass Records

5. LP

5.1) Composition – methods and muses

5.2) Sleeve art & release

6. Reflective Analysis

6.1) Composition analysis

6.2) Production analysis

6.3) Learning Accomplishments

6.4) Personal development analysis

7. Conclusion

References

Appendices

Success Determination

The external benchmarks for success in this project are; how the LP is received by peer groups, such as DJ's, within the Synth-wave & Drum & Bass communities, in addition to my mentor and classmates at Tileyard Education. Interest from a label, or a deal to publish it, would of course also be desirable outcomes and define a successful execution of the project. Gig bookings at larger venues and an increased amount of online interest would also be measurable metrics for success. For the record to be reviewed by the music press would be a great indicator of how it may be received by the wider market, and positive reviews would assist in the promotion of the record. Should this record achieve all these goals, it would be among my most successful work to date.

Internal benchmarks include how close the outcomes are to my originally intended vision; this will be a significant factor in deciding whether or not individual tracks, or the record as a whole, has been a success. I can be my own harshest critic, so if my expectations are not met this will no doubt be detailed in the reflective report; however, I do hope to have all positive things to report, and that my creative ambitions are met successfully. Seeking to maintain balanced objectivity will be important when performing reflective analysis on my own work.

Methodology

While my own personal workflow for composing and producing music can vary, usually depending on the style being written, it is most likely that the following workflow will be adopted; first the synthesis of a bank of desirable drum sounds, then the creation of a unique and interesting drum groove on my electronic drum kit for a main beat. Then, using guitar-to-MIDI, a chorus progression and melody will be written, and synthesiser patches created for them. Then musical elements supporting this such as bass and atmospheric pads will be written, in addition to verse and bridge sections which are complimentary to the main chorus theme. Structural elements such as build-ups and effects would then be the last instruments addressed. Should the track require a vocal recording, this would be addressed last in order for the vocalist to have the best chance of representing any phrasing

that may result from the later stages of production. Following these creative phases of production, some structural refinement, mixing and mastering will take place; for a piece of work this size, this will normally be left until writing is complete for all tracks, so that the overall sound of the record is consistent.

An alternative approach to composition would be to work in the reverse of this; starting with a vocal or melody, then compositing musical elements, and writing rhythmical elements last; however, this would normally end up with there being 'guide' and 'final' vocal sessions, and therefore requiring more production time. Also, as a drummer, I find that my most innovative and unique beats come with no accompaniment, and that when writing rhythms first their nuances can usually drive phrasing within the melodic composition, which may not have been present if written without rhythmic accompaniment.

The academic element and the research within it will have significant influence on musically stylistic choices, by employing an interpretivist research paradigm, which will include researching the cultural and societal factors which have contributed to each respective genre and their musical evolution. This will also include practice-led research, with the goal of investigating related production styles and techniques, how these differ, which will or will not be employed within the production of this LP, and the reasoning behind this decision making.

Resources

In addition to the primary resource for producing the LP, my home studio, as a primary research source I shall utilise social media communities relevant to Synth-wave and Drum & Bass, who will be asked to provide feedback on tracks as they are completed, whilst also seeking feedback from my local peer group of DJs/Producers. The academic element of the project will of course require academic sources, and some primary research (likely in the form of a Google Forms quiz). For the LP production, the following specific resources will be required:

Hardware:

- Home studio: UAD Interface, Apple computer, Yamaha HS-8 & Fostex studio monitoring system.
- Microphones: Behringer B2 large diaphragm condenser.
- Instruments: E-drum kit, guitars, hardware synthesizers.
- Roland GR-55: Guitar-to-MIDI.

Software:

- DAW: Cubase Pro 10.5.
- Steinberg Backbone (Drum Synthesis) and Groove Agent (Sample Triggering).
- FabFilter bundle - Primary EQ and channel Limiter.
- Slate Digital bundle - For reverb, 'character' compression & EQ), and some synthesis.
- Native Instruments Kontakt (sampler) & Reaktor (instrument building tool).
- Sample libraries (such as freesound.org (2021), ghosthack.de (2021)).
- Arturia V Collection software synthesizers – software emulations of classic synths.

In addition to my own instrumentation, local vocalist Lizzie Lumen will also feature on the record. She lists her influences as Motown, blues & lounge singers; such as Frank Sinatra, Etta James, Nina Simone and Amy Winehouse. It is my hope that her soulful vocal style will be a great compliment to the musical concept for this record.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (S.W.O.T)

Strengths inherent within this project concept include my own drive to discover what Synth-wave fused with Drum & Bass will turn out like, and a desire to utilise my wide range of instrumental skills and influences in the production of a full-length concept LP. I'm also highly motivated to produce some fresh music that is applicable to the 'Freak Response' artist band. Also the high quality of reliable music hardware and instrumentation resources that I have at hand will be a huge asset to this project.

Weaknesses for this project are without doubt the deadline timeframe; there will be no time to wait for inspiration in order to progress with composition, that much is certain, therefore finding 'the zone' will be imperative to results seeming musically contrived and

formulaic. Also, the potential to be let down for vocal sessions, therefore delaying production. Another possible weakness for this project is that it does not presently exist as a sub-genre of either 'parent' genres.

The opportunity to focus solely on the production of a musical work of my choosing is unquestionably a great opportunity, and not one that I am likely to encounter in the average workplace, and it's therefore my intention to create something of significance that considerably contributes to the Drum & Bass genre for this project. Other opportunities which this concept presents is the potential for combining two enduringly lucrative marketplaces for music. The biggest creative opportunity is the development of my own practical music production skills, through trying new things musically and seeing what produces successful results.

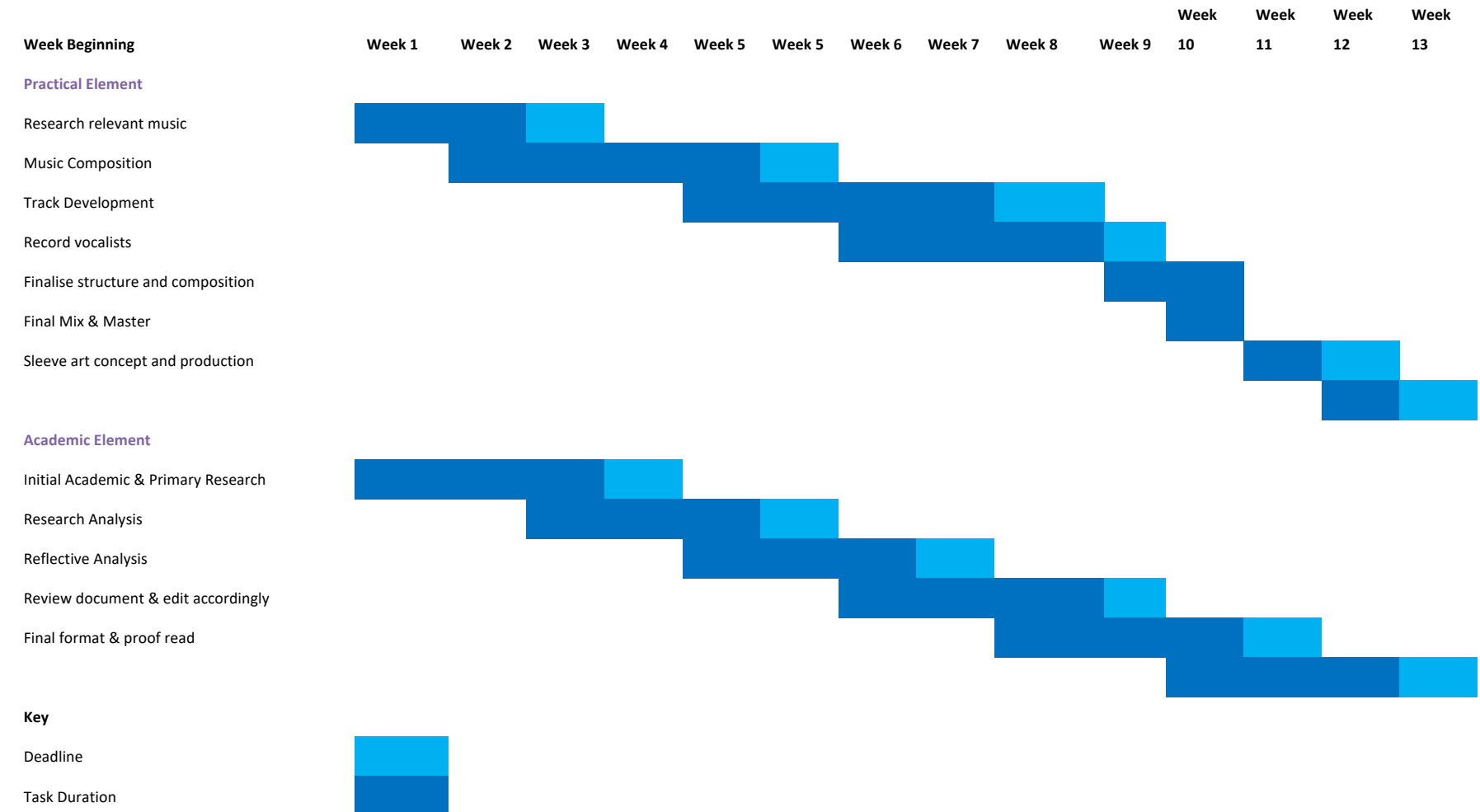
The biggest threat to this project is perhaps getting behind schedule with production or the academic element, possibly due to giving too much attention to a single particular track or concept. Becoming ill, or demotivated if results are not as desired, are also potential threats to the progress of this project, therefore continuing to focus on my own physical and mental wellbeing throughout will be important to ensure success. Ensuring that incremental deadlines are met early on will prevent any rushing at the last minute to cause the submission of work that is sub-standard.

Personal Development Plan

What are my big goals?	Which goals need to happen first?	When do I want to achieve this?	What obstacles might get in my way?	How can I improve my chances of meeting my goal?	Where can I go for support?
Completing Synth-Wave / D&B Fusion concept LP	• Musical concept refinement • Rhythmic and melodic composition • Vocal Recording • Mix/Master	Late September/Early October 2021	Lack of inspiration, personal health, collaborative sessions not working out well	Diligence and discipline in working on production consistently	Mentorship programme, Tileyard Education student services, peer group such as local DJ's
Completing academic element of project (essay)	• Planning • Research • Reporting • Reflection	Late October 2021 deadline	Shortage of relevant research materials	Starting the document at the beginning of the project and making relevant notes throughout	Tileyard Education student services, classmates

Proposed Timeline

Both the academic and practical elements of this project should take approximately 600 hours in combination to complete, which has been broken down in the Gannt chart below.



References

Freesound.org. 2021. *Freesound - Freesound*. [online] Available at: <<https://freesound.org/>> [Accessed 6 August 2021].

ghosthack.de. 2021. *Ghosthack | Samples, Vocals, Presets, MIDI and Loops for Music Producers*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ghosthack.de/>> [Accessed 6 August 2021].

Jenkins, D., 2021. *2020 Was The Highest Ever Year For D&B Download Sales*. [online] UKF. Available at: <<https://ukf.com/news/2020-was-the-highest-ever-year-for-db-download-sales/29360>> [Accessed 6 August 2021].

MRC Data & Billboard, 2021. *2020 Year End Report - MRC Data & Billboard*. [online] Musicbusinessworldwide.com. Available at: <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/files/2021/01/MRC_Billboard_YEAR_END_2020_US-Final.pdf> [Accessed 6 August 2021].