

C2b: Creation, Reflective Comentary

ADAD7004_LON - sem2_CWoo3

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Introduction

For our final term we are set the task to produce 6-8 tracks and expand in detail on the process and decision making behind the completion of this 30-45 minutes piece of music, which is recorded, mixed and mastered to a high quality standard. In this research project I will elaborate on the process and creative decision making that took place in the songwriting, the arrangement and composition of the tracks as well as the pre- and post-production to the recorded music. I will academically support the research I did prior to starting the project and the hurdles I came across throughout it as reflection on how to better the final result for this body of work. I have decided to complete an 8 track studio recorded album which I recorded live with my full band in Sean Hargreaves' studio at Tileyard as well as an additional sync brief as final submission for my C2 Portfolio Element.

During our time studying at Tileyard we have been advised to challenge ourselves on all our different skills and define where our strengths lie specifically. I have therefore made a SWOT analysis, see table 1 (Leckstein, 2023) which shows where my strengths and weaknesses lie within my set of skills. Based on my skills I've made an analysis, elaborating which of my specific skills are my strongest and how I've navigated this year to accompany my strengths. I will elaborate on this later in this research project. We have been taught throughout this year that we should aim to be as deployable as possible within our skill set and I will therefore elaborate on how I've used my strengths to grow as a songwriter, top-liner, artist and music producer in this body of work. Whilst being so versatile, we've also been advised to simultaneously recognise and define our own creative niche and work alongside our talents to create our own trademark/sound. This is so whenever someone is in need of a certain mood/feeling or element in the music they are looking for and you are in that bracket, they will think directly of you for the job (Bliss, 2023). I will expand on what crafts my sound and niche in this research paper.

For the 8-track studio album I ended up deciding to go for the challenge and take a totally new approach, where I'm taking my production out of the box into a full-band studio set-up. I have recorded my band in one take to capture the nature and 'alive' feeling of the music. We recorded live drums, bass, guitars, piano and

vocals for my artist project's debut album, with the main goal to create the real live feel in the room. We played all the songs off grid without a click simultaneously. Besides the studio album I have also submitted one sync brief for a podcast. Earlier this year I had been briefed to create a jingle and music for the podcast 'Show Me Your Bits' a podcast by author Josie Lloyd and the jewellery maker for Posh Totty Designs. I created some simple music to accompany their chat.

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1. Personal and Professional Development

a. SWOT analysis

To make the decision on the sound of this project and to truly understand where my strengths lie I started with arranging a SWOT analysis. (Leckstein 2022) this allowed me to understand my skill set better and start my project with the right approach. Throughout the project I was also able to always fall back on this whenever I was in doubt or felt stuck in the process.

Table 1

Strengths - Advanced piano player and singer - Very strong vocal that is trained to remain healthy for a long time - Great live band and recording musicians around me - Access to top tier mentoring and guidance at Tileyard - Defined a strong sound and niche for my music - Professional understanding of guiding a band	Weaknesses - Busy with live shows to promote recent release of EP 'flourish' and social life - Family abroad and therefore quickly out of the loop - Gets anxious when not in control of the project and time
Opportunities - Delve in to practicing guitar playing - Learn a new way of recording through getting the whole band in the studio together. - I'm mentored by Jon Kelly (Kate Bush, Paul McCartney) who has advised me a lot and will help me with the studio engineering for the album - Interest from various record labels on the album (Gearbox Records, The Other Songs)	Threats - Time Management - Full calendar with live shows - Losing touch of momentum on social media - Falling out of the loop due to stress and anxiety - Getting distracted by social media because of keeping up-to-date with my releases

b. Analysis of SWOT

Analysing this SWOT assists and reminds me to choose focus points in my weeks and to maintain and stick to a well planned schedule. An overly full calendar results in me sometimes losing track of time and getting stressed and anxious, which is something I should always remember to keep in line. I had arranged the rehearsals in a studio close to my home (Super Unison), where most of the band is staying. This made it easy for us to get there and allowed for easy access practice. I made sure we had packed lunches to save money and time for the recording as well as rehearsal days.

2. What is my project?

a. Breakdown, why album and sync?

For my final project I'll be submitting 30-45 minutes of recorded music. Consisting of an 8 track commercial album for my artist project 'Liza Lo' and 1 sync brief, mixed and mastered to a high standard. I decided to work on the sync briefs to challenge myself in doing something different. The Sync world is rather new to me and I wanted to challenge myself and diversify my work and potentially expand my sources of income by opening up the world of sync.

During lectures like 'Making Music Work' at Tileyard (Bliss, 2023), the first thing we were taught was to diversify our skill set according to our musical palette. During the tasks set in this lecture by Sister Bliss I learnt that I have an ear for classical arrangement because of playing and listening to it whilst growing up. I listened to a lot of classical music like Bach and Beethoven on Sundays at home with my parents and studied classical piano from a young age. When approaching a film score for the first time, I initially went to my piano. To elaborate on my piano arrangements I grabbed Spitfire Audio's Symphony Orchestra plugin and found a real joy and excitement in arranging a musical project with close to real classical instrumentation. I've always had a passion for including atmosphere in my compositions and as Sister Bliss taught us, Atmosphere is like the underscoring in film, it sets the mood of the movie (Bliss, 2023). I found this is something I can invest my passion in and also delved deeper into producing foley sounds.

I had a Patreon account and had a membership on Jordan Rakei's page, who is a real hero for me. I learnt that adding various layers of atmosphere to your recordings, created depth in your sound. Since learning this I've included various layers of foley in all my recordings, created an environment for my music to relate to. I had two mentors during this course, one of them was Veronika Hanl, an experienced music producer for various Netflix films and BBC shows. She has guided me throughout the creation of the piece of music for the podcast 'Show me your bits'. Her key advice for me was to fruit towards becoming a pioneer in my specific

sound. This way, in the future, when a music supervisor would be looking for a specific sound and I fit the brief, my defined sound would benefit my chances.

The main part of this project is the live recording of a studio album for my artist project 'Liza Lo'. I have released two EP's and some singles so far for the project, which I produced myself. Some of the tracks streamed very well, like the track Empty Room which streamed over 1 million times and Breathe In which streamed over 100K times (Spotify, 2023). For that reason I wanted to focus on my artist project and record an album for my final project. I wanted to take a different approach to my arranging and recording process this time. After creating the demo's, which were already to a pretty high standard, I decided to record my full band live in the studio, all together in a room. After discussing the project and demo's with my other mentor Jon Kelly, we came to the conclusion that recording with live drums, bass and guitars, the songs would really have the space to come to life. By making one space for the songs, the record has its own universe and can really come out as a whole. The only risk I had with this, was that the timeframe I had left to make this happen was quite short. Therefore the quality of my recordings ended up being very high, but the mixes are still to be done with some more care.

b. Liza Lo & Sound

After researching the artists that inspire me a lot, like Billie Marten, Ben Howard and MARO, I found that the common denominator was the recording of live instruments and that not a lot of midi or digital instrumentation is present in their recordings. The songs on the albums vary between tracks with a full band and more stripped back songs with guitars and vocals only. For this reason I wanted to really stick with only recording real instruments and not going for software instruments directly, which is something I'm more used to and have done in previous recordings. I always used a lot of midi instruments and samples. This is easily accessible and comfortable for me as these sounds all come out of my plugin and sample collection. However, this time I wanted to really push myself. I will still add some atmospheric layers, as to remain close to the Liza Lo sound, but the main approach is to create an album that roots from live instrumentation.

c. Defining my niche and approach to the project further

The songwriting, my vocal tone and intimacy in my music are what characterize my music. Therefore I will be focussing especially on these three aspects during the arrangement and preparations for my recordings. I have written some of the songs alone and others with other songwriters. From experience, I found that if I don't have to focus on playing an instrument, my songwriting is generally a lot stronger. "Collaboration is a great way to power up your songwriting efforts" writes Willie Weeks in an interview with *I sing Mag* (Weeks, 2019). It can really spark up a song.

3. Timeline

-May

- | 15 - 20 - writing camp Helsinki.
- | 22nd - Session Nype to continue working on the album and specifically on our track 'angel eyed'.
- | 23 - 27 - developing 'Without You' and 'Losing Touch'
- | 29 - 2 - developing 'it's simple, love' and 'live in the moment'

-June

- | 6- 11 - developing 'a messenger' and 'I waited' - Spanish guitarists
- | 12 - Writing new songs, 'Wanders Weep' started.
- | 13 - 18 - deciding which tracks go on the final cut and developing them further
- | 19 & 20 - recorded guitars in studio for high quality demo's for the band
- | 21 - Wrote music for 'Show me Your Bits'
- | 22 - Mixed music and added it to the podcast throughout the whole take
- | 26 - 27 - prepped and discussed live recording set-up with Sean Hargreaves and Jon Kelly.
- | 28 - 1 - additional production demo's songs (BV's, Synths), things that make Liza Lo, Liza Lo.

-July

- | 3 - Recorded Cello in studio with Julianne for 'I waited'
- | 6 & 7 - Finalise production 'It's simple, love' and 'I waited'
- | 8 -12 - Mixing 'It's simple, love' and 'I waited'
- | 13 - stripped back songs out for mastering
- | 15 & 16 - final prep band recordings
- | 18 & 19 - recording full band in studio
- | 20 - 21 - Rough mixing and finalising full band recordings

4. The Album: Songwriting, Arrangement and Recording

a. Analysis of the writing process

This Spring (May 3rd) I released my second EP 'flourish' an EP that I produced, mixed and mastered during my time studying at Tileyard Education. I made a deal with myself that I always wanted to be 2 steps ahead when it came to releasing music, the goal being: I wanted to have written the songs for my next project by the time I'd released 'flourish'. 'Flourish' had great success, it got added to multiple Spotify playlists including New Music Friday UK, NL and BE and 'the most beautiful songs in the world' which have over 3 million monthly listeners in total. This definitely motivated me to work hard on this next project.

I started writing songs again whilst 'flourish' was going through mixing around November last year. I first wrote 'I waited' and 'live in the moment'. Both songs were written on my guitar. I then decided to pick 'it's simple, love' back up, a song I wrote together with Danny Marland about 1.5 years ago. A simple song, with only piano and vocals, just like how I started writing songs when I was little. I then had a session with my friend Peter, an ex-Tileyard student and we wrote the interesting, different track 'open eyes'. This song came out of the love from my family and especially my mother. Writing with someone else allows me the space to really focus on the lyrics and melodies, something I truly love. I then wrote 'losing touch' with my bassist Freek Mulder when he was in England for some of our live shows. I wrote the guitar part and Freek took over the piano and bass. This again allowed me to focus on melody and lyrics. Then I wrote 'Without You' and 'A messenger' in the same week. I was feeling particularly inspired around spring this year. I also wrote 'Wanders Weep' a couple of weeks after these two songs and they had to be put on the new project. All of these songs were initiated on guitar and I went into production for them around the same time. I was highly inspired by Billie Marten, Bon Iver and Ben Howard around this time and they definitely left their imprint on my project. I decided to call the album 'Everee, for now'. This is as it resembles a play of words for me. Everything is passing, time especially. The meaning I found for the name Everee was as follows and I believed it corresponded perfectly with what I am trying to say with my artist project in general: "Embraced in nature,

god's blessing, unique or strange in a good way, cute and attractive(But not too), ready for adventure, always casts light to lead the way".

I decided to keep two of the songs on the album stripped back, without drums. I wanted 'it's simple, love' to have a real demo feel. This is inspired by artists like Olivia Dean (Spotify, 2019) who often release 'demo' versions of songs in their EP's or albums as a more intimate part to a project. I worked on 'I waited' with my cellist and fellow master degree student, Julianne Quirke. I had arranged the cello part with midi and finished the entire song including final guitar and vocal takes before sending it across to her. We went into my studio together and recorded the cello with a Neumann TLM 103. To say it gave me real goosebumps is an understatement. It adds a complete new depth to 'I waited' and I couldn't be happier with how my first time recording strings turned out.

Mixing the cello into my project was a bit more challenging. I made sure to create a great sound in the room when we were recording, which meant moving around the mic a few times. I used the digital Universal Audio 610 pre-amp which sounded great on the cello. I cut out about 4.5 db around 10K Hertz and added about 4.5db around 200 Hertz. I wanted the cello to sound as low and warm as possible and therefore decided to cut so much of the higher frequency and add so much of the lower frequencies. We trialled different types of stroking techniques for Julianne to make sure the sound wasn't too wooly. We layered the cello with a harmony going into the second chorus to make an extra dramatic change over, it turned out to sound very powerful.

b. Arrangement Decisions

After writing the songs I took them into my computer and got into some production. I started almost all the songs with guitar parts and melody. After I had this down, I started adding dreamy motif's that define the Liza Lo sound and link in with my previous record 'flourish'. The sounds I went for vary from flutes and string arrangements to pianos, processed rhodes and delicate synthesizers. Besides adding motif's I wanted there to be a constant feeling in all of the songs, to build a warming atmosphere (Bliss, 2022). I was highly inspired by Maro, who is a

portuguese artist and her latest album 'Hortela' includes a lot of layered guitar parts (Spotify, 2023). I allowed this to inspire this new body of work and played with harmony by adding different layers of guitar parts to my demo's, resulting in a very dreamy feeling.

I arranged some drums for 'wanders weep' for the first time using samples. I quickly found all the songs could use the rhythm element, which has always kind of been missing in my recordings. However, my production skills are quite limited when it gets to producing drums. From references like Radiohead, Billie Marten and Bon Iver I quickly found that the best way to probably bring the drums into my music would be by recording my drummer Tom Blunt live (Spotify, 2008).

Another reason I came to this conclusion was that I had discussed my demo's with Jon Kelly, my mentor. He advised me to speak to my band and consider recording with all of them, together in the room, live. I spoke to my band members and they were all very excited to do it. My demo's were already set to a high standard, that the feeling and vibe was very much defined already. It was easy for my band to understand what I wanted to gauge with the recordings because of their experience playing with me and the inspiration playlist I provided them with (Spotify, 2023).

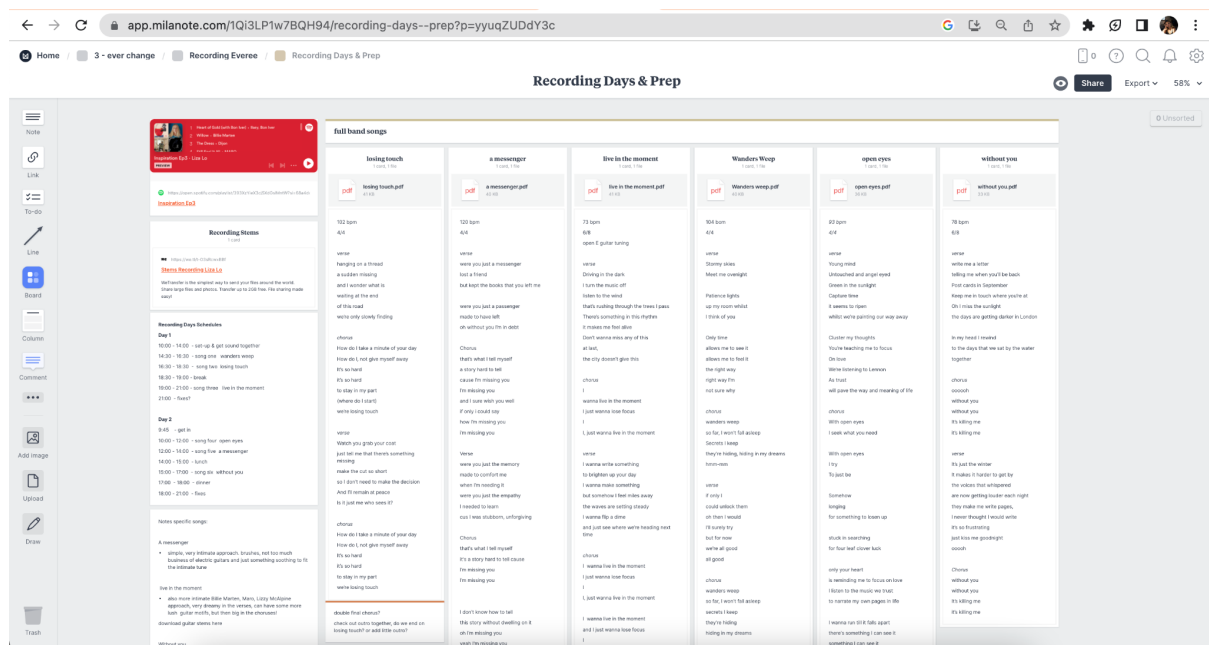
In mid June I figured out the availability of the band members and decided that we'd do the recordings with the full band. The only risk for this was the deadline for my assessment would already be creeping up. The earliest we could get everyone together was the week of the 17th of July, which is our due week for the assessment. I spoke to Steve about this, and we decided that as a producer this would be a great learning opportunity and we decided on going with the option and therefore I started moving things forward to make this happen. I cleaned up all the demo's by recording the guitars and vocals to a high standard for my band. Jon Kelly (Kelly, 2023) is a highly renowned producer and mixing engineer and offered to help me prepare for the sessions and assisted us during the recording days as well. This meant I had a very experienced couple of hands involved in the recording process which has resulted in the tracks sounding very balanced and qualitatively high, even prior to mixing. I prioritised arranging the right players and engineers

in for the recoding session, which has resulted in the mixes not being to as high of a standard for this assessment as I'd like, but this does leave room for improvement for me to focus on in the coming months.

Preparations

I had prepared lyric sheets, bpm's and timings, an inspiration playlist for the album, high quality demo's and schedules for the recording and rehearsal days on Milanote for the band to make the days move as swiftly as possible, see image 1 for a preview of this or [follow this link](#). You can also listen to the demo's I made [here](#).

Image 1



I found that good preparation has really helped everyone to be on the same page and to know what kind of sound we were going to create. My band consisted of myself playing acoustic and spanish guitar, my bassist Freek Mulder, my electric guitarist Maarten Cima and my drummer Tom Blunt. Maarten and I decided he should bring his rubber bridge guitar as well as his electric guitar, as this is often used in the inspirational tracks I sent across.

I learnt quickly that a big part of recording an album is organising a bunch of things. From rehearsal spaces, to amps and instruments, which I also got taught by

Sean Hargreaves in our lectures at the start of this year (Hargreaves, 2023). My bass player and guitarist both live in Amsterdam, which meant I had to arrange for them to come to England by car, luckily they could stay at my house with me. I applied for funding from the Dutch government to support me in this and made sure they didn't bring too much of their gear so we didn't have to pay for a carnet. I have played with my band members many times in the past and was confident they would deliver exactly what I wanted and trusted them and their skills entirely, this was a must for me and that's why I decided to go the extra mile and bring my players from Amsterdam.

c. Analysis of the recording process, hurdles and advantages.

After everything was organised and we'd rehearsed well for the recording days, the real work started. We had two days to record 6 songs. We decided to rent a Fender Reverb Deluxe to recreate the guitar sound my guitarist is used to and is slightly less bright sounding than the Vox amp that was available at the studio. We initially wanted to record with myself, the bassist and the drummer in one room. After some advice by Jon Kelly and Sean Hargreaves we ended up moving things around on the set-up day. We decided I should be playing in the vocal booth, so we can overdub my guitar parts and lead vocals accordingly, seeing these are the two main elements to all my songs and this way the band would also sound very much together, which is what we were aiming for anyway.

We used an Elam Soundelux E251c to record my lead vocal and one pencil Neumann KM 184 and the DI of my guitar to capture my acoustic guitar. We didn't prioritise a good guitar sound as we knew we'd definitely have to retake the acoustic guitar due to vocal bleed on the guitar takes. As mentioned previously, we brought a Fender Deluxe Reverb amplifier for the electric and rubber bridge guitar. The amp was mic'd up with one shure SM57 and a Neumann U87. Both microphones deliver a very different sound, the 57 being slightly less bright and the 87 more defining, offering a perfect blend. My Bassist brought his Universal Audio 610 solo pre-amp and we recorded his bass through a DI. We decided not to use an amp for him, as this would cause too much bass spill on the drum overhead microphones and the guitar was already giving some bleed too. The drumkit was the biggest challenge.

We used a Sennheiser MD 421 to capture the snare top and a Neumann KM184 for the bottom of the snare. We then used the Schoeps CMC6 Stereo Pair Condensers to capture the room, another Sennheiser MD 421 to capture the tom's, an AKG D112 to capture the outside of the kick drum and a AKG D12 to capture the inside of the kick drum. We then captured the overheads with two Coles 4038. We decided between what beater to use for the kick drum for a while and ended up going for a softer beater to get a warmer, deeper kick drum sound. The collaboration between Ned and I allowed us to advance quickly and we made the drums sound good in a short time. All the drum microphones went through a heritage audio DMA-73 pre-amp.

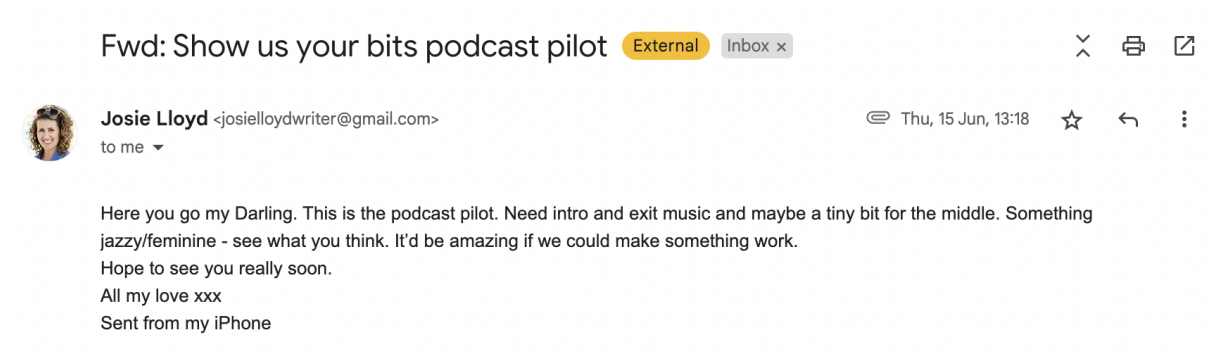
We did some run-throughs once we were all set-up. Jon Kelly and Sean Hargreaves were in the room during our first takes and advised us to try and record all the songs freely, without a click to create a free connected dynamic to the recording. This came with its challenges, as it meant that I will need to re-record all the additional production I'd done for the tracks with my synthesister at home, as we decided not to always stick to a click. Many legendary musical pieces were recorded without click, like a lot of the Beatles work for example. After some discussion I decided to go ahead with it and the result is great. All the songs have a real alive feeling to them. My voice was very fragile during the recording days, I'd prepped everything and the stress had kind of gotten to my voice. However, I have access to a studio so I can still re-take some of the vocals where necessary.

As the recording process ended up being later than hoped, the mixes aren't perfect just yet but I've made rough mixes and mastered the projects with Landr, a professional AI mastering tool. Even though this is still work in progress, the sound is of top quality and the recording and engineering has been executed with real care. I'm very happy with how the album is sounding already.

5. Sync: Chosen Briefs and Future Projects

In June I was contacted by my friend Josie Lloyd as she told me she was working on a podcast with the jewellery maker for Posh Totty Designs, see image 2 for email reference. She told me they were looking for music for the intro of their podcast as well as some sound between transitions throughout the podcast to keep it interesting sonically. She asked me if I could create something for them and I did.

Table 2



They wanted something feminine and jazzy, so I stuck with a dreamy, cute rhodes sound and tried to keep the chords as major as possible. A little shaker added to the quirky topics the ladies were talking about.

This was my first time creating music for a podcast, I had some experience in arranging music for video but that was a very different approach. I tried to enhance the excitement in the vocal by arpeggiating when they were nearing the ending of a section and included little motifs in between topics.

With the two ladies being successful in their professions, being able to use this piece of music for my portfolio is very helpful for future work. I will be looking further into platforms where podcasts seek for original musical compositions like fiverr.

6. Conclusion and Improvements

During my time at Tileyard I had the opportunity to be introduced to some incredible, very inspiring producers, engineers and songwriters. As well as this, we had access to the highest quality studio gear, ranging from microphones, instruments and pre-amps. I learnt which microphone works best to make my vocal come out as perfect as possible. For this assessment I took a last minute turn and decided to use the studio together with my band. I collaborated with some of the contacts I have made during my studies and this resulted in me having the confidence to record my first studio album with a live band. This was an incredible learning curve for me, not only as a producer, but also as a band leader, manager and recording artist. I have learnt so incredibly much from this. Varying from time management, to analysis of sound and decision making depending on taste. However, the risk in this was that my submitted music is not sounding as properly mixed and mastered as I would like it to be. I will be focussing on this the coming months together with my mentor Jon Kelly, as we are trying to get the album signed. I will be advancing the demo-like songs, by overdubbing the lead vocal, the acoustic guitar and recording more atmospheric synths and backing vocals.

7.. Reading list

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