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Creation
Element 1

Introduction

This essay outlines a research based project proposal for a portfolio of work to be submitted in answer to the Creation Module brief. The portfolio needs to reflect work that would be considered commercially viable music production that would satisfy a brief or could be successfully pitched to different markets within the commercial music industry. This in turn will enable my existing business to access new income streams, making it more robust and able to survive the inevitable economic and industry changes to come.

The current economic uncertainty due to the coronavirus pandemic, Brexit and the measures that may need to be taken to rebuild the economy starting 2021 have had to be taken into account. This portfolio will therefore mainly target markets within the music industry where the work can be delivered remotely and self-sufficiently, relying primarily on computer based 'In the Box' production.

Tracks will still be included that showcase my existing experience with 'live' musicians for which there is still a call for, even in commercial circles. ie – In an interview between Ollie Raphael of Delicious Digital and Jay Mistry of JM Consulting on the Music Gurus website (2020, 07:00) Ollie states that the company positions itself in a niche that still uses musicians playing live together where appropriate with a focus on authentic production techniques to stand out from 'In the Box' productions. So while it's important to source work that can be delivered without the need for session musicians in the short term, in the long term the existing business is in a good position to utilise it's network of local musicians, practice rooms and recording\production studio in the future to a similar end. Paid work on behalf of independent artists is generally paid up front or on completion, so continuing this line of work even to a diminished client base will also help the business survive until royalties from other forms of work begin to pay. In time, the two markets will be complimentary and if successful could generate work for associates.

The portfolio therefore considers a longer career view, targeting work that maximises current strengths and resources while building skills that can later access other avenues of income. In the short to medium term, the means by which producers and writers\composers are paid and the terms of agreement needs to be considered. Work which can command upfront fees rather than solely by future royalty payments will need to be targeted initially. Over time, a balance of both can ensure a steadier flow of income once royalties begin to be paid by PRO's (Performing Rights Organisations). It may take 1-3 years for the administration cycle of publishers and PRO's to lead to a royalty payment once usage activity has been reported, so this needs to be factored in.

As a final note, this portfolio won't represent the entirety of the work that can be conducted by the business, the focus is on accessing new income streams to complement existing ones that may later need to replace those most at risk of disappearing.

Research

Music Industry Changes – A decline in live performance and independent bands

The existing business, Piggyback Studios, is based in the Midlands, UK. It has managed to profit for over 8 years working with local musicians, primarily bands. In that time, traditional venues hosting bands have seen a decline with many closing. In addition, pubs which have acted as an important performance space have also seen a decline in trade leading to fees for bands being drastically reduced or cut altogether with bands being asked to play for free or in return for drinks or expenses. The DCMS Live Music Report (Ninth Session) states 'Yet recent years have seen widespread venue closures. Between 2007 and 2016, London experienced a net loss of 35% of its

grassroots music venues, and evidence suggests that experience has been reflected across the country.' (DCMS, 2019, p.23).

With less opportunities to recoup costs through performance fees and opportunities to sell CDs and merchandise directly to fans at gigs, this has led to independent artists cutting costs by opting to record from home as technology becomes cheaper and more accessible. For those bands with a budget, they are often seeking out top flight studios and producers who in some cases in the midlands and the north have reduced their own prices for bands. Studios such as Rockfield Studios in Wales are one example of a business seeing a resurgence in recent years with emerging bands booking in as much for the experience due to its history of working with acts such as Queen and Oasis. A similar observation was made by the producer of the Tileyard Ed studio Sean Hargreaves. In a talk to students in Sept 2020, he observed that the 'middle ground' of studios is disappearing as a result. (Hargreaves, 2020).

There are examples of such 'middle ground' studios re-structuring to become more of an all-round hub by hosting music lessons, workshops and incorporating a shop and cafe/bar to remain a viable business. This requires a suitable space with low enough overheads, suitable planning permission and a location that won't be seen as a nuisance to neighbouring properties while also being accessible. Such properties are few and far between in smaller towns and cities when renting or require a large capital investment if buying outright. The additional overheads and staffing requirements also put additional strain on such businesses relying on audiences that have been in decline. They are much needed grassroots venues which in time can lead to regeneration of audiences and bands, but only those studios with significant capital and the networks and customer base that comes with trading for 15-20 years can successfully make this change, especially within the current economic climate which has worsened due to the pandemic.

Opportunities

Alongside this decline in the band scene, there has been a large increase in demand for music for digital and multimedia. Traditional TV and radio broadcast and even cinema is being replaced by online, on-demand and streaming services such as YouTube, Netflix and Spotify. There is therefore demand for writers, composers, and producers to provide music for sync (sound to image).

There are also more performance opportunities for solo artists and singer songwriters than bands as these can perform in more intimate, low volume settings such as cafe bars. They are also not constrained by the style of the musicians in their band and can choose a producer who can interpret their songs in a style of their choosing using computer based music production and/or session musicians. Economically, a solo artist has less outgoings and is easier to manage than a group of musicians.

Technological development has also made realistic orchestral sample libraries more affordable meaning that composers starting out in TV or Film where such music is common can put together a competitive sounding audioreel using such sound sets.

There is also a market for producing demos to Creative brief issued by music publishers and labels including majors. In particular, Asian markets have been booming with acts such as BTS recently becoming the first K-Pop group to be nominated for a Grammy (Metro.co.uk, 2020). The Korean Pop industry currently relies heavily on demos produced in the UK due to its global music reputation, a brand in itself.

All these markets can be much more lucrative than the independent music scene alone, enabling smaller businesses to survive short term upheaval and go on to continue to support the indie scene

at a grassroots level in the long term if they choose. UKMusic reported that 'The UK music industry contributed £5.8 billion to the UK economy in 2019 - up 11% from £5.2 billion in 2018.' (UKMusic.org 2020)

It could be argued that the Indie scene needs that support as it's creativity often feeds the commercial music industry with fresh ideas. If it dies and commercial music accelerates towards generative music such as virtual drummers and AI driven composition, it could become static and the UK music scene could see itself overtaken by international industries in terms of creativity.

Proposal

An audioreel will be produced to showcase existing strengths and new lines of work as part of the restructuring and rebranding of Piggyback Studios. The term audioreel has been used instead of showreel as it will include some 'Rescores' of existing film trailers and also music suitable for sync libraries. ie – music that hasn't been produced to an actual brief but that demonstrates the capabilities of the business. The restructuring is the culmination of changes in the business that began before the 2020 pandemic of which the MA at Tileyard was intended as part of the research and upskilling in preparation. The pandemic served as a catalyst while further highlighting the need.

The audio reel will be between 30-45mins long consisting of:

- Re-scores of film trailers
- Songs produced for independent artists
- A song produced for a commercial brief with publisher interest
- A selection of instrumental, electronic music for submission to sync libraries

Rationale

Film trailers

Film trailers are generally produced separately from the film score by 'Trailer Houses'. The deadlines aren't usually as tight as for advertising, with perhaps a month or more instead of potentially days to turnaround. This is more achievable in the early days of starting a new line of work for the business until experience and new workflows are developed and honed. Film trailers often command a fee on delivery, possibly with a sync fee ahead of any royalties generated (if offered by agreement). In an interview with Harry Leckstein of Tileyard Education, Jay Mistry gives the advice of treating film trailers ('promos') as 3 part pieces with beginning, middle and end. It's also common in film music to re-use themes and motifs with different instrumentation and in different styles and or tempo, so this will be considered in the process. (Mistry, J. 2020)

Songs for independent artists and commercial briefs

As discussed earlier, a song for a solo artist can be taken in different directions stylistically using computer based, 'In the Box' production techniques without need for session musicians in some cases, which is ideal during the pandemic.

One song produced during a Tileyard Songwriting Camp already has publisher interest, though there is outstanding feedback that can be acted on to develop the production further to make it more saleable. This will involve developing the piano in the verses and possibly adding some other orchestral lines in the choruses.

A second song is a cover by an existing client that needs the underlying instrumental reproduced. This will raise his profile with promoters with a view to him obtaining more work and potentially producing an EP of covers in the future for sale. The genre is soul ballad which has longevity and the skills gained could be re-used in other markets and to other briefs. Discussing this with Tileyard

Mentor James Collins, he suggested referencing music by Amy Winehouse produced by Mark Ronson where sounds of the era were re-created using filtering and tape style saturation to try and emulate the production techniques of the day.

The third will be for local song writer Roz Bruce and will enable me to keep my profile up during lockdown in my local music scene and show the business is still operating. Roz's influences include Leonard Cohen, Nick Cave and Musical/theatrical productions. Her original output reminds me in some small ways of Kate Bush and I will request feedback from Tileyard based producer Jon Kelly relating to that track.

Note that these solo artist tracks above all have a similar theme regarding use of ballad style production and instrumentation with influences from musical theatre. The skill set required here is also in demand in other markets such as sync including film and tv promos.

Sync Library Music

A selection of music suitable for submission to sync libraries will be produced of an instrumental, electronica style. This utilises an existing skillset pushed towards a different market. While the other markets targeted can generate payment on delivery (essential in the short to medium term), developing a sync library can lead to a smaller but recurring income stream over time through royalty payments.

Sync music is often packaged as albums by concept ie – Tropical pop, 2am moods, Tech House etc Instrumental music is common for beds and stings. Sometimes there will be versions of the same track ie 1 min, 30 secs, 20 secs, 10 secs (sting). This package will be an electronic sampler, with a variety of electronic, EDM and ambient pieces. It will be branded as 'Electric Fields' which is the name of Piggyback Studios second site installed as a recording and production space. 'Electric Fields – Library Music Vol.1 – Electronic Sampler'

Measures

Client feedback will be the first measure for music produced for solo artists. Peer review by industry practitioners in my existing network will also be sought. In the case of one song with publisher interest, I can request feedback as to whether the developed version is more saleable than the existing one. If it is placed in the future, that will also be a firm indicator of its success. The film trailers and sync library music will be sent to trailer houses and sync agencies/publishers for feedback. Utilising Tileyard contacts, they will be sent to JM Consulting and Dov Waterman (producer specialising in Film Trailers) for feedback and potential contacts for work if the feedback is positive, along with a Onesheet illustrating experience to date. As the sync library music isn't for an existing brief, any interest in representing it from these contacts will be another measure of their success. I will also reflect on my own work.

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