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MA Commercial Music Production

Module Code : ADAD4004_LON

Creation Element C1 - Written Proposal

What am I intending to create?

My creation project will primarily focus around producing an EP inspired by the sound of UK Garage, and more specifically an evolution and revival of the late 90s and early 2000s R&B influenced garage sound which dominated the clubs during that period of time (Moll 2019). The project will look at artists such as Craig David and Artful Dodger and their respective works and attempt to evolve on the sound that was popularized in the early 2000s by the aforementioned artists. However the project in question will not stay exclusive to this genre as such a project gives ample opportunity to create music with a similar feel in genres which were popular alongside garage at the time. These genres include the likes of R&B, Jungle, Drum & Bass, Dubstep and Hip Hop (Rephlex 2018).

The project will be a collaborative effort between myself and Elliot Alexson. The intention of this collaboration is to ensure we can produce an EP of consistent quality where I can focus my efforts on production meanwhile Elliot can focus on the singing and songwriting aspect of the project. The decision was made for this to be a collaborative effort based on not only our chemistry as musicians or our shared interest in Garage but the fact that our talents and skill sets seemed to match up and pair together well. Elliot not only has a background in singing and songwriting but as well as MCing. These skills paired with my knowledge in production and my ability to DJ shows great promise in a long lasting project which has great potential for live performances as Elliot has the freedom to switch between singing and freestyle MCing as he so chooses during a live performance.

Why am I creating it?

Garage music has been part of my upbringing and it has inspired my music taste all the way through education and even now I still find myself inspired by the sounds of the genre. My deep love and understanding of not only Garage but Dubstep and Drum & Bass can help me bring ingenuity and a unique flavour to the project. This paired with Elliot's fondness for R&B and Soul will result in a unique blend which will allow us to experiment within these genres to create exciting songs which will hopefully stand out amongst the current Garage scene.

The reason for dedicating the project's main focus on Garage is due to its wider appeal and ability to crossover easily into the commercial market compared to the aforementioned genres, with the only other genre coming close to the same level of market crossover being Drum & Bass. If we look at some of the Garage records in the past 5 years that have broken through to the mainstream market we come across artists who do not necessarily commit their artistry to Garage but more so crossover into the space with singles. Tracks such as "Ladbroke Grove" by AJ Tracey peaked at number 3 and remained in the top 100 for 59 weeks (Official Charts 2019) meanwhile "On My Mind" by Jorja Smith made it to 54 and remained in the top 100 for 10 weeks (Official Charts 2017). Looking at these tracks and their influences outside of Garage it is clear they take elements from Grime and R&B respectively. It is interesting to note that

“Ladbroke Grove” contains a sample from some of Jorja Smith’s earlier works (WhoSampled 2019). Analyzing this there seems to be a pattern of R&B influences being the driving factor which brings these tracks to the commercial market which is why this is the main influence we want to capitalize on within our own project.

Following this we can look into up to date Spotify playlists such as “New UK Garage” (Spotify 2022) to analyze the current output of Garage and understand better what kind of sound is prevalent within the Garage scene at the moment. When looking through this playlist at the time of writing we can see that a large majority, if not all the tracks included in this playlist are absent of the R&B sound which myself and Elliot want to capture. A lot of the tracks on the playlist seem to take inspiration from Ambient, Liquid, Bassline, Speed Garage and Grime. The reasons for this can be various but looking at the featured artists on this playlist it can be surmised that a lot of them are solo acts and features. There does not seem to be any collaborative artist projects which focus on a more commercial Garage sound.

Further research into this has shown there is a desire for that kind of sound to return into the modern music soundscape especially within the demographic of people in their late 20s and 30s. We can look at the comments section of a wide range of old school Garage tracks on Youtube to understand this. We can see that this desire is made more prevalent when focusing attention on a music event called “Garage Brunch”. Studying this event we can see that the constant sell out status as well as feedback from the event shows an active fanbase who love the early 2000s and 90s style of Garage. This event also presents a great opportunity to showcase the project with fans of the genre and would be a great way to potentially gain exposure for the music and could be a substantial pillar in building a fanbase.

When analyzing the Garage scene there seem to be 3 artists who consistently produce and crossover into Garage with regular success and have the ability to create commercial tracks which gain regular attention. Those acts being Disclosure, Rudimental and Krupt FM. Disclosure being the biggest competition as their tracks consistently garner mass exposure. That being said I feel what myself and Elliot want to create will result in a fairly different style as our R&B influences shall focus us more on organic instrumentation rather than the synthesizer / Deep House sound Disclosure are known for.

Rudimental are the next look into similar acts and competition as their recent album titled “Ground Control” is heavily inspired by Garage and genres of a similar nature (Hutchinson 2021). The album contains a plethora of features which is why I feel myself and Elliot have the ability to stand out amongst this competition as our act will allow us to not only maintain a consistent sound but will also allow us to perform with consistent appearances from both members.

When judging the competition it is clear that Kurupt FM is the act which most closely resembles what we want to achieve from a live performance. Kurupt FM contains multiple core members who write, produce, and perform their own music as well as interchange their live sets with other Garage tracks which achieves similar goals to what myself and Elliot have set out. This being said Kurupt FM have a focus on their sound being influenced more from Speed Garage, Grime and Jungle (Becket 2021). This focus allows our project to still maintain a unique selling point as our main influences will stem from R&B and Soul.

What are the benchmarks for success?

It will be important to evaluate how myself and Elliot will view the success of such a project and should realistically set out benchmarks and targets to achieve during the creation of the project. This method should include targets such as studying each other's writing process and creating a process in which we can both write comfortably with as little conflict as possible. I feel this will be the most important benchmark to set as it will influence the entire outcome of the proposed project.

Following this additional benchmarks should be composed of how often our music is credited with references to artists such as Artful Dodger or Craig David. Since the aforementioned artists are the primary influence in our music any comparison to the artists shall be seen as success towards our project goals.

The benchmarks mentioned all take place during the writing process and while it could be suggested this is the most important aspect towards achieving the goals it is also relevant to set targets involving the live aspect of the project and understanding how the music can be performed live. Ways in which we can measure this benchmark could be through livestreaming any finished material with performances from myself and Elliot and gauging how viewers react towards the performed material alongside classic Garage tracks as well as how well the tracks mix into DJ sets.

How will I approach the project?

My approach towards the project will be through focusing primarily on production and helping out with songwriting and hooks when needed. Since this project will be a collaboration between a producer and a songwriter it allows me to maintain my focus on my skill set and make sure each track sounds authentic to the genre and sound we want to achieve.

To achieve this authentic sound I will make sure that the instrumentation and drums used are either influenced or taken directly from tracks we find inspiring towards our target. In this process I feel that a VST of the Korg M1 will be vital towards achieving the desired sound as during the time period of the height of Garage the Korg M1 was one of the best selling synthesizers of all time (Veil 2002). This achievement led the M1 to be used in a large majority

of the tracks from that time and upon scanning through presets I discovered many sounds that are now famous for how they were used in various compositions. These included but not limited to the bell sound in “Around The World” by ATC, the main organ synth in “Show Me Love” by Robin S and the pizzicato strings in “Crazy Love” by MJ Cole. These references only support my decision to use a Korg M1 VST as this will bring the sound of our instrumentals closer to what we want to achieve. When programming drums I will instead avoid the use of Garage sample packs but more so use one shots of drums more prevalent in genres such as R&B. Doing this will give the music a more dominant feel towards R&B rather than Garage and should help our sound be lighter than other Garage tracks.

When recording the EP myself and Elliot have planned to travel to a remote location for a private songwriting camp where we can spend a week writing basic instrumentals for the EP as well as recording scratch vocals to topline. This will allow me to work on the production in the weeks leading up to the deadline as well as allowing Elliot the freedom to work on other projects that I am not involved in. This method will make effective use of both of our time and allow us to focus on our individual talents without overbearing each other. Following the clean up and polish of the production we shall record the vocals professionally in the main studio at Tileyard. This includes main vocals, adlibs and harmonies. It is important that this part of the process requires both members present as we both need to understand how the vocals sit on the tracks as well as recording any bonus material we could use or might need. Elliot has said he shall take it upon himself to composite his vocals as he knows how his voice should sound and what he is looking for in the recordings to bring out his voice in the tracks.

Mixing should be performed with both members present as this is important in managing how the final track will sound before mastering as past this point we cannot make any changes to the sound and so both need to be happy with the result.

Any other approaches I could have taken?

When planning the project and looking at ways in which I can tackle my approach I considered the possibility of working as a solo act and working with various singers to create a Garage EP which would feature different artists all getting a chance to perform separately on their own tracks. This approach would allow each track to not only feel unique but would also allow different angles of creativity to shine through on tracks creating a more varied body of work. This would also allow for a larger audience base as each song would then reach out to each of the featuring artists fanbase which could then in return boost any promotion towards myself more so than the now planned collaborative project. This being said the end result of a solo act would mean I would end up in the same pool of solo acts making garage without any unified vision, any live performances would be subject to the availability of any featured artists on my tracks as well as any base shows just being myself DJing my songs with little no no unique selling point in the project.

The creation project also gave me the opportunity to focus on my solo project named “Kaspian”. This would have allowed me to continue work solely on my rave music and build up my discography in preparation for any future releases under that moniker. The reasons I decided against this were down to the decisions including my uncertainty to put all my efforts into one project as I enjoy making various different kinds of music and do not feel it would be good for me creatively to pigeonhole myself into one genre. Following on from this decision I have enough material as “Kaspian” to elicit a creation project by itself so I thought it would be a good idea to challenge myself with something new which I would have to build from the ground up. Since I primarily write music by myself I also found it more engaging and different to write music with someone else in the process. Due to the fact I have enough material as Kaspian to submit for the project I feel comfortable keeping it as a backup in case anything does go wrong with the current proposed project.

Closing Thoughts

When analyzing the proposed project I feel confident in myself and Elliot’s ability to create something which can stand out amongst not only the garage scene but as well amongst our peers. We both seem to have a very similar vision and have made conscious efforts to keep each other in check with songwriting and production. We still have a ways to go to figure out our writing process but I feel confident about the end result. The fact I also have enough solo material to submit in case anything goes wrong with the proposed project will allow me to throw myself headfirst into the writing process as I know regardless of the outcome I will have a back up project I can submit.

Proposed Timeline



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