

# *MA Commercial Music Producer*

*-Tileyard Education, London,  
2021-2022*

Thomas Benjamin Marlow

*Student ID: 2005496*

*Creation Module- Element C1- Written Proposal*

*Module Code: ADAD7004\_LON*

*Word Count: 2500 +- 10% (2713)*

## Introduction

Through the process of completing the Foundation and Development modules of this course, I have been allowed to push myself creatively in many directions I previously had not. As a result of this, I have experienced the process of producing music for a wide range of artists in a variety of genres. This has enabled me to attain clarity with regards to my personal stylistic preferences, and ultimately realise my future career aspirations and goals.

Upon receiving the briefing for this assignment, it was evident that this would be an excellent opportunity to put my newly found realisations into practice. Knowing that I want to build a career as a successful producer working with pop artists, this would be a chance to produce a significant body of work for my portfolio to help me navigate the early stages of my career. Alongside this, it was clear that I could use this assessment as an opportunity to grow other areas of my brand to prepare for ultimately appealing to future clients.

## Defining the Project

The core of my project is to produce eight commercially viable, high-quality master recordings to build my portfolio. In addition to this, my project aims to showcase my portfolio through the process of brand development and integration into the music industry. I will create a website on which I can advertise my services, display contact details and provide information about my background as a producer. Profiles will be created on curated musician marketplace sites such as SoundBetter (SoundBetter, 2022) and Fiver (Fiver, 2022) to display my services and become visible to future clients. I will also build a clear brand and develop my social media sites- specifically Instagram and Linked In, with the view to achieving professional looking profiles to attract followers and potential clients. Finally, an EPK will be created to package all of these elements into one clear sharable document.

With the aim of the portfolio being to portray my abilities and music style to future clients, all eight tracks created will be based in the pop, alternative-pop, pop-punk and indie-pop genres. Whilst I have shown in previous assessments my ability to produce music in a variety of styles, my passion lies in the aforementioned genres, and they are where I would like to specialise moving forward in my career. Although being a jack-of-all-trades is a useful trait in life and helpful towards being a music producer, 'having more in-depth knowledge of a specific field or trade enables you to communicate your ideas more clearly' (Creative Market, 2021). Personally, I resonate with the latter thought process, believing that being the best at one style of music is beneficial to becoming credible and sought after in the music industry. Building a reputation in a specific genre means becoming the go-to person for a song in that style, therefore never being short of work.

In the creation of my tracks, I plan to record a live string quartet, a live drum kit, a live piano and live guitars. With the help of *Sean Hargreaves* allowing the use of his studio and equipment in the Tileyard Education building, these ideas can be realised. Also, using my existing network of musician friends spanning back to when I first joined a band ten years ago, help is available to make this possible. Where suitable and applicable, I will choose to

use hardware synthesizers instead of VST's to ensure the most organic and human feel possible in my music.

In order to achieve these goals, I will have to: Organise and execute studio writing and recording sessions with artists and musicians; produce, mix and master eight tracks; research web hosting sites leading to the creation of my own website; create profiles on SoundBetter and Fiver to promote my services; build my brand aesthetic and ensure this runs through my website and social media sites; develop my Instagram and Linked In profiles; compose a biography; and finally package everything into an EPK.

## **Project Motivation**

Having now realised a clear path for my career to follow, embarking on this project will be invaluable towards giving me a positive start to my journey. Choosing to create a portfolio of pop music is extremely exciting to me, and this will help to push me to achieve an outcome to the best of my ability. Being a guitarist, fortunately 'pop-punk is finally back' (Badia-Aylin, 2021) in 2022, which also means my portfolio will be relevant and up to date upon completion. Hopefully this will result in attracting more clients in the initial stages of my career. On a Zoom call with *Jamie Searls* on 24/03/22, *Searls* recognised that my ability to play the guitar on tracks I produce will be advantageous in the future and it sets me apart from other producers. For this reason, it simply makes no sense to neglect my guitar playing in music I create, so it will be a core element in most of the music I produce.

In completing this project, I wish to hone my skills as a producer and ensure I can perform at the best of my ability in the future. Working with artists and musicians on my project will provide me with further experience and improved communication skills which is vital to being a producer. Organising sessions and balancing all elements of the project with my personal life will be crucial and invaluable experience to prepare me for my career. In order to be efficient with completing tasks, I must find ways to increase workflow without compromising on quality. The use of plug-ins such as VocAlign (Synchroarts, 2022) can not only speed up the process of aligning the timing of backing vocals with the lead vocal, but the software could actually produce a better outcome than doing it manually. This is to be tested and confirmed, but it is one of many tools on offer that are used daily by professional producers to speed up their workflow enabling them to meet deadlines. In a similar vein, to ensure my project runs smoothly, all tasks will be recorded and checked off in an Excel document using colour coding for visual purposes. I could create a physical chart on a whiteboard for example, however keeping all the information in a digital document means that it can be accessed from anywhere and can always be updated to make sure nothing is missed. A Gantt chart for my project has been created, and can be found in Appendix A. This lays out a timeline of tasks to complete in order to succeed with my project.

Another motivation to carry out this project is to push myself creatively and discover exactly where my strengths and weaknesses lie. Choosing to mix all of my tracks, it is the hope that I will be able to improve my technical and aural skills. For one chosen track I plan to ask my mentor *Tom Fuller* to complete a mix so that I will be able to directly compare the quality of my mix with a professional mix. This will allow me to realise if mixing work is something I

could viably do for clients, or if it is something I should hand to more experienced engineers until my skills have developed further later on in my career.

Considering the aspect of mastering my tracks, I have decided that I will have them mastered by a dedicated mastering engineer. Although I could master them myself using the mastering tools I have at my disposal, I believe it is important to have somebody experienced listen with fresh ears to ensure the highest quality outcome. A mastering engineer's 'reference point of what constitutes a good-sounding mix is finely honed' (Owsinski, 2017) which is something that is learnt with experience I have not yet had.

## **Project Integration with Current Industry**

In order to decide how to approach my project, it is important to research current artists and producers in the music industry competing in the area where my project focuses. *Olivia Rodrigo* with producer *Daniel Negro*; *Taylor Swift* with producer *Jack Antonoff*; *Tom Grennan* with producer *Joe Rubel* who is based at Tileyard London; and *Maisie Peters* also with producer *Joe Rubel* are popular artists whom fall under the genres in which my project is aimed. As well as being artists and producers to take inspiration from for my project, I personally admire and respect their music. In order to ensure my music can compete with the aforementioned artists, I must research their approach to creating the music they do and use this as guidance. It is clear that they all push the boundaries of modern pop in different ways, making them exciting and appealing to their audiences.

To understand where in the market my project should be aimed, it is useful to understand the type of audience listening to these artists. Regarding *Swift*, 55.28% of her audience are female, with the majority at 40.19% being between the ages of 18-24 (Serra, 2022). I should bear this knowledge in mind, ensuring the music I produce is aimed towards teenagers and young adults with regards to lyrics and overall song aesthetic. Pop-punk is linked with teenage angst, however *Rodrigo's* debut album '*Sour*' (Rodrigo, 2021) 'has been well-received and critically acclaimed by audiences of all ages' (Retta, 2021). Following lyrical themes and specific production techniques used by *Rodrigo* and *Negro*, I can increase the likelihood of my music appealing to a wide audience.

A large name in pop music is of course *Billie Eilish* with producer *Finneas*. Although I could steer my project in this direction and produce dark-pop tracks, I personally want to produce lighter and more upbeat tracks akin to *Rodrigo* and *Grennan*. This is where my musical preferences lie and is where I want my career to head.

I must ensure that my tracks are commercially viable and on par with my competitors in terms of quality. I must also consider the way that people listen to music in 2022 and tailor my music to suit their needs. With pop music being the choice of the majority of radio stations across the world, clearly, I need to ensure my tracks are radio friendly in terms of being short in length and able to keep the listener engaged through the entirety of the track. It has been found that Spotify listeners have a very short attention span, with a '24.14% likelihood of skipping to the next song in the first 5 seconds' (Owsinski, 2018). With

this in mind, I must ensure my tracks pique the interest of my audience within five seconds. To do this, I will create interesting and unique intro's and keep them short.

## Methods to Achieve Success

In order to achieve a portfolio of music which fits within the mentioned pop genres and is competitive, I must follow closely specific production and recording techniques used in the current pop music industry. The majority of drum sounds heard in *Rodrigo's* music, and pop-punk in general, are live recordings featuring a gritty and roomy sound. In order to produce similar sounds, I must research modern drum micing and mixing techniques used before planning my live drum recording session. Although I could simply set up a drum kit and position microphones in a tried and tested fashion such as the 'Glyn Johns' method (What is Glyn Johns technique? - DRUM! Magazine, 2022) and produce a satisfactory drum recording; this is not helpful towards my end goal. Taking care and patience in the recording stages is crucial to creating a high-quality end product to be proud of. Even thinking about smaller details such as drum tuning can make or break a production.

When recording live guitars, thought must be given to the guitar, amp and microphone selection to achieve the desired sound. For pop music, it is likely that single coil guitars are popular due to their brighter tone, however this is something that needs to be investigated. Although I could simplify this process and record the guitars using DI and using amplifier emulation software, the result will not be as powerful or dramatic as recording with a real amplifier. Having said this, recording DI and reamping through an amplifier is beneficial if it is decided during the mixing stage that the tone of the guitar needs to change.

*Antonoff* works with hardware and software instruments with a 'capture the magic in the moment and move on' mentality, reducing the option or need to endlessly tweak plugin settings. This workflow mentality is inspiring and evident in the music he creates, and something I will achieve by finding a sound I like and then printing with plugins active to audio immediately and moving on.

In the mentioned artists music, the vocals are clearly a focal point. In the studio, it is my responsibility as the producer to make the artist feel comfortable and capture their best performance. A method used by *Rodrigo* is to act out each word, which 'makes the performance on the eventual record so much more impactful' (Savage, 2021).

In a conversation with *Martyn Ware*, he told me that when he worked with artists such as *Tina Turner*, he would make the magic happen by making them try things they didn't think was possible. This should be kept in mind to achieve convincing and exciting vocal deliveries, in addition to technical choices such as which microphone to use for each singer.

Keeping in-line with my competitors, I will use a combination of software and hardware instruments, use outboard equipment during the recording process and finally work 'in the box' for the mixing stage.

## Building A Professional Brand

As a producer, to ensure I appeal to the appropriate target market of clients, I must build a suitable brand aesthetic. I must discover which colour schemes are best associated with pop music to attract the intended clients. I must also research which website host company will allow me to easily create a professional looking site, whilst offering interesting and modern features to make sure the site doesn't feel outdated and put off potential clients.

The websites of producers *Andrew Kingslow* (Kingslow, 2022) and *Larp* (Hustwit, 2022) are inspiring to me as they have an appealing layout and are easy to navigate. Whilst I could reduce the complexity of my project and create a more simplistic site as seen from *Lostchild* (Lostchild, 2022), it does not come across as professional nor is it easy to navigate. For this reason, extra time will be invested into producing a quality website.

## Measuring Success

My project will be a success if I create a high-quality body of work which accurately represents who I am as a producer, with the support of a professional website and consistent brand aesthetic to start me on my career path. Ongoing feedback on my music throughout the project will be received from my mentor *Fuller*, which will indicate the quality of my project. Upon completion of my website, I will create a questionnaire for fellow music students to complete in order to help me improve my site. Success could be seen in the form of receiving work from SoundBetter and gaining Instagram followers. However, realistically this might take a while to happen and depends on many factors, so it cannot be used as a measure of my project's success.

There may be failures in my project such as musicians not showing up to recording sessions or finding sounds to not fit with a track properly during the mixing stages. However, I will find solutions to these problems as they occur such as using VST's instead, but ultimately encountering these problems will make me a better producer.

## Conclusion

I look forward to challenging myself with this project with regards to creating commercially competitive songs at a high standard and improving my skills in problem solving and project management. I am excited to discover my tendencies as a producer, finding out if I stamp my signature on the music I work on, or if I produce much more closely to what the client is asking for. Knowing this in future will ensure clients and I are on the same page in terms of expectations. Finally, revealing my strengths and weaknesses as a producer means I can actively improve as my career progresses.

## Bibliography

Badia-Aylin, G., 2021. *Cycles of revival: the return of pop-punk*. [online] Varsity Online. Available at: <<https://www.varsity.co.uk/music/21958>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Creative Market., 2021. [online] Available at: <<https://creativemarket.com/blog/should-you-be-good-at-everything-or-great-at-one-thing>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

DRUM! Magazine. 2022. *What is Glyn Johns technique? - DRUM! Magazine*. [online] Available at: <<https://drummagazine.com/glyn-johns-technique/>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Fiver. 2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.fiverr.com>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Jim Hustwit - Music Producer & Film Composer London. 2022. *Music Producer in London / Jim Hustwit - Music Producer & Film Composer London*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.larpmusic.com/music-producer-in-london/>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Kingslow, A., 2022. *Andrew Kingslow Music | Andrew Kingslow composes and produces soundtracks for award winning film, television and advertising..* [online] Andrewkingslow.co.uk. Available at: <<http://andrewkingslow.co.uk>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Lostchild.co.uk. 2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.lostchild.co.uk/>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Owsinski, B., 2017. *The mastering engineer's handbook*. 4th ed. CENGAGE Learning, p.22.

Owsinski, B., 2018. *Spotify Song Skip Rates Tell Us A Lot About Our Attention Span*. [online] Forbes. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bobbyowsinski/2018/11/17/song-skip-rates/?sh=102bd7791c42>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Retta, M., 2021. *Olivia Rodrigo's Teenage Angst Is Not Just for Teenagers*. [online] Vice.com. Available at: <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7bzmm/olivia-rodrigis-teenage-angst-is-not-just-for-teenagers-sour>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Rodrigo, O., 2021. Geffen Records. Available at: <<https://open.spotify.com/album/6s84u2TUpR3wdUv4NgKA2j?si=DtEYPxkmT6CAdGQbd8F-4w>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Savage, M., 2021. *Olivia Rodrigo has become pop's brightest new star - here's how*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-57174471>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Serra, C., 2022. *Inside The Audience of Taylor Swift: A Deep Dive Into the Success of the Album 'Red (Taylor's Version)'*. [online] Resources.audiense.com. Available at: <<https://resources.audiense.com/blog/taylor-swift-red-album-success-what-you-can-learn>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

SoundBetter. 2022. *Mixing & Mastering Engineers, Producers, Singers & Songwriters for Hire* / *SoundBetter*. [online] Available at: <<https://soundbetter.com>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

Synchroarts. 2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.synchroarts.com/products/vocalign-project-5/overview>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

## Appendix A

[illegible]