

**A Proposal for Sarah Carton's 'Raw' EP and Three
Subsequent Single Releases, 'Rise', '2050' &
'Lemon'**

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Creation Module

Element 1 – Written Proposal

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In this proposal I will introduce the 'Raw' EP, exploring its inspirations, aims & objectives and set out how I plan on measuring the success of the project. I'll also be discussing the aims of the additional three stand-alone singles 'Rise', '2050' & 'Lemon'; which will be released as singles following the EP release in 2021.

For this project, I will be writing and producing seven songs and two interludes in total. Four of the songs and the two interludes will take the shape of an experimental indie-alternative EP, titled 'Raw', then the three other tracks will be single releases. There will also be a short interlude, or '*hidden track*' (Cannon, J. 2020 p. 414), added to the end of one of the EP tracks. The 'Raw' EP will be my debut EP as an artist under my own name, Sarah Carton, set for release in February 2021. The six-track EP will blend electronic based music production, my own vocals, experimental sound design, sound bites from daily life & spoken word. Elements from the EP's production style will be used within three additional singles, though these are each contrasting in genre and stand alone as more commercial single releases.

There has been an evident shift in the music industry landscape this year; from major artists such as Kanye West launching a public '*war against record contracts*' (Ingham, T. 2020) over social media, to up-and-coming artists such as Connie Constance releasing through her own label '*Jump the Fence*' to '*truly embrace her tastes*' (Wright, L. 2020). Charli XCX developed a Mercury Prize nominated DIY '*lockdown*' album, '*How I'm Feeling Now*', created with input from her fans over Zoom calls, in an environment that inspired her to take the lead in the albums recording and production (Siregar, C. 2020). The 'Raw' EP has been

inspired by these DIY projects and the celebration of independent artists and music released over the first national lockdown in 2020, triggered by COVID-19. At the time of writing this proposal, it has just been announced that the UK will be heading into to a second national lockdown for November 2020, the time in which I plan on recording and producing the tracks for this project (Young, S. 2020). This has impacted my plans to collaborate with other artists on this EP and work with musicians such as guitarists and drummers, meaning I will be creating the tracks with just the resources available to me at home. Though these restrictions may seem limiting, I plan on welcoming the *'anxiety, escapism and noise complaints from neighbours'* (Cragg, M. 2020) this challenge may bring and will use these restrictions as an opportunity to create a fully DIY debut EP that I can self-release as an independent artist in the new year.

As an artist, I first released an alternative-R&B single in collaboration with an electronic music producer last year named *'No Slave'* (Carton, S. 2019). This year I released my debut solo single, *'Beaches on the Thames'*, which I recorded at home during the first UK lockdown in April (Carton, S. 2020). *'Beaches on the Thames'* has had great success, from being featured on Radio One's BBC Introducing programming, to being added to the Spotify Editorial playlist *'Your Office Stereo'*. It's gained press attention, with When the Horn Blow's describing me as having found my *'own alternative R&B sound, while mixing it with spoken word and bedroom beats'* (Adams, A. 2020). This description of my sound aligns with my aims as an artist and desire to blend different mediums, such as spoken word and DIY music production. While there is a heightened level of press attention on my work and the Spotify algorithm is seemingly in my favour, I wish to continue to release work that reflects this production style and that can benefit from my DIY *'bedroom beats'* approach, that has been both critically praised and heightened in my work due to lockdown.

I've decided to create an EP that can showcase this '*bedroom beats*' production style through a selection of songs I wrote in 2020, which explore the early stages of a complicated relationship. I have two collaborative single releases already planned for before Christmas 2020, so I would be scheduling the release of this EP for February 2021, with its announcement and marketing campaign to start in January. I feel that a self-produced EP is the natural next step following the release of 4 singles and I want to give my fans a piece of work similar to a concept album (Reisch, G. 2007 p.144). I have written these tracks to work together in a narrative sense, in addition to their similar musical themes, use of overlapping sounds, hidden tracks, merging intro's, outro's and interludes.

EP's aren't famous for the inclusion of interludes, and the idea of the '*conceptually unified*' and artistic '*concept album*' seems very much grounded in that word, '*album*' (Reisch, G. 2007 p.144). When beginning my research for this project, I started by deconstructing albums and EP's by my musical influences. As suggested in Jesse Cannon's '*DIY Guide to the New Music Business*', I asked myself '*how many minutes long are these records*'? '*What do these records consist of*'? And most importantly, '*are there interludes*'? (Cannon, J. 2020 pg. 183). There was a consistency in that all the albums and EP's I looked at included interludes, extended tracks or hidden song elements. I feel it is an experimental and non-confirmative choice to include interludes and hidden tracks in a debut EP, which may result in tracks seeming less pitch-able for labels and radio. However, I am not looking to be signed by a label and am more focused on building my fanbase through engagement with the EP, merchandise and a marketing campaign, than I am with radio success. The '*Raw*' EP will be an artistically free, experimental and less commercially targeted project, with the aims being to develop my influences as an artist, establish my production style, gain press attention and

increase audience engagement. However, I believe it is still in my interest to release tracks that are more radio friendly, which is why I will be including three stand-alone singles in this project that I can use as single releases after the EP, for potential tracks to use in a future album, or to pitch to other producers for collaborations.

A central aim for the EP is to create a body of work that feels artistically unique and personal and which transforms the government's '*stay at home*' (Young, S. 2020) message into a fully DIY approach to creating; with home-recorded vocals, spoken word written during lockdown, home studio production and experimental sound design, using voice notes and foley recording. The tracks will explore the early in-between stage of a relationship and the heartbreak that can come from not knowing where you stand. I wish to make it feel like a personal insight into a small chapter of my life; a body of work that seems raw and almost un-finished. This intimate approach is based on my aim of using the EP to connect with my audience on a personal level, increasing my following and engagement on social media and streaming platforms. Another aim for the EP is to improve my technical production skills and mixing abilities when working on my own vocals. I feel that by blending spoken word, harmonies and singing with different levels and proximities, this will test my mixing skills and allow me to experiment with a range of different vocal styles. A way I will measure success in this area will be by conducting listening sessions, where I compare the EP tracks with my reference tracks. I will also send the tracks to a friend that works as a mix engineer and ask for his feedback.

As the EP will be my first major project as an artist, I'm planning on developing a marketing campaign, press release, album artwork, press images and merchandise to promote the EP and myself as an artist. The EP's main purpose is to build on and develop my fanbase, so I

feel these elements will be an essential part of its creation. In line with the DIY style of the EP, I will be creating all these elements myself from home and incorporating personal touches, such as creating a home video of me producing the project during lockdown. I have created mood boards on Pinterest for these elements and one way I plan on monitoring the success of this campaign is by comparing my final assets with these. I also plan on monitoring success by the interactions with the assets on social media, EP pre-saves and merchandise sales.

For the 3 singles, my aims vary for each track. For *'Rise'*, I wish to create a track that is of high production quality and sounds like a radio-worthy single, or potential hit single for an album. I will measure the success of this track by sending the song to potential mixers and co-producers. If they like the track and can understand the musical direction and my desired sound, then I feel I will have achieved my goal. For *'2050'*, I wish to produce a track responding to the climate emergency. My aims for this track are to experiment with more stripped back instrumental elements than the layered electronic instrumentals I usually work with. I plan on entering this track for the British Music Collection's new initiative, *'providing grants for artists to create new works with sound and music that respond to the climate emergency'* (Unsigned Guide. 2020). I will measure my achievements for the track by its success in this grant application and if not chosen, I will use feedback from the application to further develop it. The aim for *'Lemon'* is to create a more alt-pop track that incorporates spoken word and would work as a summer release for 2021. I aim to use a more commercial pop production style with hooks, standard song form and distinctive chord sequences, leaning on influences from up-and-coming Josie Man's *'Just Me'*, which has been described as a *'bubblegum daydream'* by Wonderland magazine (Byers, R. 2020). The ways I will determine I've achieved my aims with *'Lemon'* is by comparing it with my reference tracks

and seeing if it gets featured in any Spotify editorial playlists alongside, or mentioned in articles alongside, these influences.

Following in the footsteps of Charli XCX, I will be recording all of my vocals from home. Though this is now also necessary due to the current COVID-19 restrictions, the main reason for this choice is that I wanted to experiment with a close, raw and intimate vocal delivery. Recording from home alone inspires this from me, in contrast to a more standard and polished delivery in the studio, caused by spectators and time sensitivity due to studio costs. I plan to sing and speak with a gentle and intimate vocal delivery for the interludes, at close proximity to the microphone to *'increase bass frequencies'* (Shure. 2019) and pick up more detail in the vocal. The aim here is to create an intimate vocal that sounds like someone singing alone late at night or to serenade. I feel this will bring the idea of the DIY bedroom producer to life and influence the intimacy of the EP. This project will be similar to Charli XCX's *'snapshot of her life in the time of Covid-19 - entirely written and recorded out of her own Los Angeles home'* (Siregar, C. 2020) and I feel the recording techniques chosen will build on the DIY nature of the project.

I plan to use original sound bites that I have recorded on my phone during lockdown, such as voice notes, recordings of conversations, foley recordings & other sounds such as nature and transport; then blending these into the EP intro's, outro's and interludes. These sounds aim to act as a reflection of everyday life and build a sense of intimacy and closeness during an extremely distant period. One challenge with this is the quality of the recording and how the voice notes will sit in the mix. To overcome this challenge, I will make all background noise, handling noises and clipping of tracks sound prominent and purposely DIY, then blend them with un-natural electronic samples to heighten the contrast and bring them out in the mix.

I have attempted to eliminate many risks for this project by relying on my own home studio setup and taking the lead on all producing, song-writing and campaign aspects; therefore, not relying on any external musicians or recording studio bookings. A main reason for this is health and safety, as restrictions in the UK currently state there should be no unnecessary travel (Young, S. 2020). Though I had considered booking a recording session with a guitarist for the backing track of '2050', I have now decided not to, as there is a risk the current guidance on recording studio bookings could change (Rugoff, L. 2019). I plan on leaning into my strengths of *'bedroom beat'* production and electronic music production. One of the major challenges for both the EP and the singles will be mixing the tracks at home without monitor speakers. The way I plan on overcoming this will be to use three different pairs of headphones when reviewing the mix; a high-end pair of headphones, a middle of the range pair and a cheap pair, in an attempt to get the most varied and accurate reference available. Though this is not perfect, I feel this will be a good starting point for the mix, that I can then continue to develop based on project feedback and once the restrictions have eased in December, when I can travel to a studio with monitors for a final mix pre-release.

Another way I plan on overcoming the lack of availability for live musicians is to invest in purchasing and creating new sample instruments. I plan on developing a pallet of my own sample instruments with Logic's *'EXS24'* that I can use throughout the EP to help distinguish my own sound and bring a consistency to the EP (Kahn, J. 2015). I will create a juxtaposition between the natural sound bites and un-natural samples through an electronic based production, mimicking the *'experimental and exploratory nature'* (Padin, M. 2019) of artists such as Kelsey Lu in her album, *'Blood'* and DIY foley elements similar to that of Richard Russel's *'generated percussion on "10:51PM/The Night" by banging on the floor and*

banister of his recording studio’ (Cliff, A. 2020). These artists are two key influences for the ‘*Raw*’ EP, as they both push the boundaries in their approach to experimental music production, whilst also using interludes and hidden tracks to create an ‘*evocative moodboard*’ of sounds in their work (Padin, M. 2019).

To conclude, I believe my project aims strongly align with my career goals and that this project will solidify my role as a self-producing artist. I wish to celebrate being an independent artist through my EP by including unconventional interludes and hidden tracks, taking inspiration from other young female artists such as Connie Constance and Kelsey Lu, whilst acknowledging that in 2020, ‘*while major labels are getting weaker, DIY musicians are growing stronger*’ (Cannon, J. 2020 pg. 12). I plan to use the new lockdown restrictions to my advantage, turning them into strengths by purposefully including raw sound bites and making my own DIY palette of sounds; thus, mimicking the transitional themes of the songs through a juxtaposition of electronic and natural sounds. The three singles have varying genre influences with ‘*Rise*’ being an R&B ballad, ‘*Lemon*’ leaning more towards alt-pop and ‘*2050*’ acting as a political and alt-indie release. The challenge here will be to balance each contrasting genre with the DIY production style I have developed over the last year and through the ‘*Raw*’ EP work. I’m hopeful that with the combination of the experimental EP and slightly more commercial singles; the tracks developed in this project will propel me into the next stage of my career and solidify my identity as a self-producing artist to my fans and the wider music industry community.

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