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CMP0121 Creation Assignment

Element C1

What are you intending to create?

For my creation assignment I will create a body of work that explores different ways of working in a collaborative environment. I will be working across a range of genres, and in a range of guises to develop my skills as a musician and producer while expanding my creative network.

In an initial Tileyard lecture Harry Leckstein said “be prolific,” and to that end, I have identified 4 streams I would like to develop in my final project and subsequent professional practice. I intend to produce about three times as much music as required by the assignment, giving me the opportunity to shortlist music to create the highest quality submission while pushing myself into producing a significantly-sized body of work.

1. I have been working on a Punk Rock project named “Slow Mackenzie” which currently has about fifteen demos. I’ll be booking the studio for a few days to record drums, guitar and vocals then mix and master to finish an EP. My role in this project is primarily as the “Producer” (with a capital P, we’ll discuss this later.) While not playing any of the instruments, I will be responsible for mixing and mastering for the purposes of the demo and this assignment.

2. I am working on a Drum and Bass project named “Phunk Phenom” with the specific goal of getting signed to either Hospital Records or Ram Records. I will be working with a number of vocalists and some production collaborators, producing, mixing and mastering myself.

3. I will be working on music with the specific aim of getting this music synced for TV and film. For this stream i will be looking to work with session musicians both locally and remotely to bring this part of the project to life.

4. I will be writing to commercial briefs, working with a number of singer-songwriters to produce ballads and pop bangers primarily to get signed for other acts, but failing that for the artist to release on their own artist projects.

By developing such a wide array of music with different release paradigms and in different genres, I will be developing my portfolio of music assets for monetisation, and by working with as many people as possible I can harness their networks into my own to facilitate the exploitation of that music.

Why are you taking on this project?

The song camp process; getting a number of people into a room for a day with a clear brief, has been a new way of working for me. The discussed direction for a session gives a focus and drive to the creativity that open-ended jamming or production has not. I have taken this idea into my other musical work, by setting clear goals and timelines.

Due to the pandemic, unfortunately my first two song camps were done via Zoom. It was not until The Big One that the true inspiration struck - I had 4 days of wonderful days of interaction with peers that resulted in music that was written, recorded and mixed on the day. (Not all of the professional producers on the camp finished the project in a single day, but it's certainly an attainable goal for me.) It was an interesting experiment in collaboration, being able to A/B the two distinct workflows over multiple days, and has provided a great deal of inspiration towards further exploration.

With regards to networking, I had an empirically successful career as a DJ back in Australia which I can equally attribute to two things - my skills and my vast personal network. The latter became starkly apparent when I moved to London to further my DJ career with only a minimal number of contacts. My primary school headmaster, Mr Maffey, described moving from primary school to high school as "Going from being a big fish in a small pond to a small fish in a big pond" - this saying perfectly applies to my situation 25 years later.

My music production career had generally been me, by myself, for hours on end tweaking hi-hat compression and other minutiae, rather than focusing on what I am best at - creating ideas and inspiring others. One important idea that I've developed during the process of studying my Masters is the distinction between a producer, and a Producer - with a capital "P". A producer a person running a DAW, while a Producer gets the people in a room sharing a vision. My personal exemplars of Producers are Mark Ronson and Rick Rubin. While there is certainly some overlap in these two roles, I want to think bigger about my music and the projects I tackle.

My hypothesis is that I am better working with people, than by myself. I understand that I have limitations in my skill set, for example no one should hear me sing or play guitar, and recordings of me doing either will never be to a professional standard. Gardiner (2020) says, "Creativity is enhanced by collaboration" and elsewhere "Creativity is a social rather than individual phenomenon", both which is in line with my thesis here, and looks to be a rich vein of exploration. I would like to explore different techniques to enhance collaboration and creativity.

This project will allow me to deep-dive into a number of different workflows, using different skill-sets depending on the music, and the team making it. This personal musical development will be the culmination of everything I

have been working towards this year during my Masters, and indeed the culmination of moving from Sydney to London in the first place.

What are the benchmarks for success

The ultimate benchmark for success will be having music signed to labels or publishers from these collaborations, however in the context of this assignment, the short time-frame may not be realistic. With the timeline given below, I have allowed a minimum of 2 weeks before the assignment is due in to garner interest from labels and publishers. As such, any interest in releasing this music will be a positive benchmark, however no interest before the deadline will not be a negative.

Given the collaborative nature of the writing, a peer review will be a good way to benchmark. This will take two forms, feedback about the session from the people involved, and after the whole project has finished the recording phase, feedback from all peers on each other's music.

In an attempt to systematise the process, I have will have a process at the end of each session for collaborators that includes the following questions:

How would you rate today's experience? 1-5

How would you rate today's tune? 1-5

How likely are you to work with this group again? 1-5

How likely are you to work with Will again? 1-5

How do you feel about the collaboration techniques discussed in today's session?

Which ones do you feel are useful in your practice?

I will also be asking my peers for feedback on tunes they have not worked on, here are some of those questions:

How would you rate this tune? 1-5

Is it a banger? Yes/No

What did you like?

What did you dislike?

What could be improved?

Finally, the most important benchmark for success will be in terms of how much I learn from this process, it's the final project of a Masters, after all. I have purposely set myself ambitious goals in terms of the amount of work I will be taking on, and also the wide array of different skills required to finish the projects. I intend to be able to oversee production from conception to release in as many different genres as possible, utilising whatever resources required.

How you intend to approach this project (case studies can be useful)

I would like to compare and contrast working with some of these groups and individuals again in different environments; in person, on-line, on-Zoom and hybrid. I will revisit some of the online sessions in the studio, while also working online with some people I have worked with in person. By systematically analysing my work, and how I work, I intend to further refine the principles by which I can make music.

Levin (2019) argues, among other things, that “music collaboration increases productivity” through specialising and delegating, and also that “collaborating with another artist can also connect you with their industry contacts.”

I intend to re-create a personal version of The Big One song-writing camp by staging my own personal song camp, aptly and unfortunately named “Will Camp”. This will be 4 days each week over 3 weeks of writing to briefs sourced from Tileyard’s A&R department, and through other contacts. The exercise with these days is to write, record, mix and master in one day. These will then be submitted to the respective labels by 27 September. I absolutely work better when there is a deadline, so by stacking so many sessions in quick succession it will force me to work in a manner that makes me economical with time - another benefit to this process.

I will also be aiming to take different roles in the production process. This might mean being a lyricist, topliner, producer, keyboardist, mixer and/or masterer in any given session, however there is another way I have been thinking about roles that I would like to explore further. Mike Monday (Momentum Mondays, 2021) talks about making music in the context of the scientific method - where, simplified, there is a hypothesis, and experiment to test that hypothesis, then a review of the experiment which leads to a new hypothesis. Monday assigns each of these three steps to a role in the music making process, which can be fluid, but given the various group dynamics I have witnessed can often be adequately and easily applied. The hypothesis comes from the group's Dreamer, the experiment is performed by the group's Creator, and the review comes from the group's Editor; this review is then fed back to the Dreamer in a circular fashion. Since learning this creative framework, it has helped me identify what is lacking in a session, and helped me put on a different creative hat to facilitate the session. Similar frameworks for describing the creative process are also provided by Fischer et al (2005), talking particularly about the social aspects to creativity, and The Deming Cycle - Plan, Do, Study, Act (Deming, 2021)

Bishop (2018) elaborates on another way of conceptualising the creative process:

“Creative collaboration between people can be (1) serial, if an individual creates something in isolation, then presents their creation to others who can build on it, (2) parallel, if group members create things separately, then bring them together to combine them into something new, or (3) simultaneous, if group members create something together, at the same time.”

I am eager to compare and contrast these collaboration paradigms and see which suits my way of working the best. I acknowledge a hybrid approach may be the optimum, and that this may vary depending on the genre and the group's dynamics. In fact, Hayden et al (2007), through their compositional case studies, talk about the relationship between composer and performer on a sliding scale from directive, through interactive, to collaborative before concluding that, “the roles of participants are often predetermined by their ‘separate’ artistic disciplines and can be a real hindrance to the success of the collaborative artistic situation.”

Alternative approaches that you could have taken, and why you decided against these

The approach outlined above has been crafted with a single question in mind; “What is going to be best for my musical career?” With that in mind, there are a couple of avenues that have been closed, so allow me to discuss those now.

One clear alternative would be to continue down the path of online collaboration. Koszolko (2017) writes about online musical collaboration, and how it ultimately “helped to achieve the desired musical outcomes,” however given my previous experience with working with people not in the room, at most a hybrid set-up will be researched, and only with previous collaborators unable to make it to London. He used Ohm Studio as his collaborative DAW, however there are a plethora of software solutions dedicated to real-time remote collaboration, some of which I have used, however I know I’m better in a room with someone.

Another approach would be to work with people I haven’t worked with previously, however given the people I have to opportunity to work with and the relatively short time-frame for the assignment, I will be focusing mainly on people I have worked with, without ruling out other collaborators if the opportunity arises.

Ultimately I am convinced that the methods discussed previously will provide the shortest path to a music career that I am passionate about.

Timeline of your project

August	Ad hoc writing days
7-10 September	Will Camp 1
14-17 September	Will Camp 2
21-24 September	Will Camp 3
27 September	Will Camp tunes submitted
28-30 September	Slow Mackenzie recording session
1 October	Peer feedback
3 October	Narrow assignment shortlist to 15 tunes
8 October	Shortlist tunes completed
12 October	Tutorial booked for feedback
15 October	Mixing and mastering completed
17 October	Submission to publishers
29 October	Hand in tunes and essay

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