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Development (ADAD7004_LON)
Creation Assessment
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Element 1 - Written Proposal

Ever since I started making music I have been enchanted by the idea of creating an album. A piece of music that represents the artist that created it. An album reveals its creator's position in this world, it shows their deepest emotions on personal topics and unveils their true colors. Apart from this arbitrary and emotional approach to the creation of a playlist of songs, which without a doubt is of high importance to the layman and the professional, there is a variety of technical and analytical aspects that are as essential. The attention to these technical components differs between the members who are creating the album. My function in creating this playlist of compositions is the one of a producer. This role has changed over the last two decades, especially in the recent years. More specifically a producer is nowadays seen as someone who has knowledge of many elements and has their hands involved in the whole process of the creation of the songs; from the initial songwriting to the creation of the masters. Although my written project will be focusing on my analysis of songs and the techniques used to achieve certain sounds, I will not disregard the songwriting element to each song. On the contrary the initial writing of the song, where there is not too much focus on technical aspects, but rather trying to trigger certain emotions and using technology to recreate these feelings, created the foundation of this project. Without the emotions put into the writing of these songs, and without the technology used to put these emotions onto an MP3 file, there would be no album. These two aspects live in symbiosis, so it is impossible for me to disregard one of them completely. Nevertheless, tangible elements will be the focus of my report and the role of a modern producer will be laid out.

The Project

The album will consist of about 15 songs, depending on if I will exceed the 45 minutes which are the cap of the assignment. The demos of these songs were written in three weeks during my time in Croatia in the summer of 2019. Part of the team was a singer, and partner, Katharina Emendoerfer and my long time friend, songwriter and instrumentalist Christoph Ritz. In this constellation it is already apparent that the songs consist of a high emotional connection. This connection eventually became a problem and lead to me putting the project to the side, and made it unable for me to finish these demos. This was partly due to my

inexperience as a producer as well as my emotional dependence on certain sounds. I needed ten months to be able to take on the project again.

The demos created in Croatia, were all written and recorded with an acoustic guitar from my father that to that day has not been played for over 30 years. The sound of the guitar was unique in its own way and it did the job during my the songwriting phase of this project. A lot of the song ideas included vocals by myself, Christoph and Katharina. None of them were final recordings but rather short snippets of ideas, which I am at the moment replacing with singers from my university course and other musicians from the United Kingdom, and United States of America. I will go into further detail on this process in a later section. Additionally this replacement procedure was also used on the acoustic guitars, which I replaced on all of the songs and used a professional guitarist, recorded in a commercial studio in Austria. Due to the current situation with travel restrictions and lockdowns apposed on humans because of a virus, I was unable to record in London and the facilities provided by my university. Luckily Christoph Ritz, who did the songwriting with me on this album, provided me with a studio in Graz, Austria where I am able to record, re-record and mix the music.

Inspiration and Influences

The decision to write the songs on an acoustic guitar was not only an emotional one, due to the fact that it was from my father, but also inspired by songs and albums from a variety of musicians. The main inspirations for this album are the artists Jack Johnson, Jon Bellion, Milky Chance, Flume, Kanye West and Post Malone. These inspirations were used for songwriting, drum programming, the usage of specific instruments, mixing and mastering referencing. Of course there are individual and unique decisions in every song I created but when listening to the record, a listener can hear the inspirations of each artist on my album. These inspirations were used consciously, in general the album is produced with other songs in mind to achieve similar sounds and mixes.

Mixing engineers of high influence on this project are Louis Bell, Dave Pensado, Mario Caldato Jr., Jordan Young and Manny Marroquin. Producers of certain songs that I used as

inspiration were Mark Williams, Raul “Volta” Cubina, Tobias Kuhn, Harley Edward Streten and Kanye West.

Methodology

One of the main section in my final reflective commentary will be the techniques used how I created this album, and how my experience at Tileyard Education influenced my work process. These techniques will be divided into four sections: recording techniques, mixing techniques, drum programming, and sound design.

Recording

The main microphone practice that I applied on the recordings of the acoustic guitars was a mid/side technique. This practice was first introduced to me by Christoph Ritz who showed me on several occasions how to set everything up. During my time at Tileyard, especially during the class Recording Techniques with Johan Englund, I went in depth with learning this technique myself and eventually started applying during my current process of replacing all acoustic guitars on the songs. The decision of using M/S recordings is because it offers flexibility and a wide stereo image that I am able to control well (Huber 2013). I have a mid recording, and a side recording which makes it possible for me to control the sound of the guitar extremely well. This is due to the fact that I can mix the mid recording of the guitar separately from the side recording. Of course this would have also been able by using an EQ with a mid/side function, so being able to switch between the mid stereo spectrum and the side spectrum. A lot of the flexibility of the the mid/side recording can possibly be recreated with a plugins that split the stereo image, however, it will never be as clean as actually recording both sections with two microphones and having them as separate audio files in the project. Another feature of the sometimes called Blumlein technique is that it gives me the possibility to turn off either the mid or the side of the guitar. The decisions to turn one on or off depends on the function of the acoustic guitar in the song. For instance in certain songs where the guitar serves as the lead instrument I used both the mid and the side signal. In other

songs I used the guitar only as a room filler, or playing a short riff, where in turn I only used the mid recording, so it does not take up too much space in the mix.

One problem that I encountered after my first listening session with Sean Hargreaves, that he pointed out, is that a lot of the guitar sounds sound very similar. He suggested that I should be playing around more with the mixes of the guitars and maybe try more radical approaches. There can be several reasons why the guitars may not seem to have a distinct sound on each record, and this can be exactly due to this reason of using the mid/side practice on all recordings. Probably even more so is the fact that I used only two different guitarists on the project, so their playing style influenced the whole project and certainly made a few songs have a similar guitar sound. In the next few weeks I will be focusing more in depth on this issue and I will try to find creative ways to mask this issue. One idea that came to mind was potentially using the plugin Guitar Rig by Native Instruments, which is used for electric guitars and provides a large variety of amplifiers, reverbs, delays, compressors and other effects. Although it is unorthodox on using it on acoustic guitars, it would be interesting to see what kind of sounds I could create with this approach.

Recording vocals was one of the main things that my creation process was focused on. My time at Tileyard Education has taught me a lot about vocal recording and mixing. On nearly all of the songs that I am presenting for the creation assignment is based on vocals. As mentioned already in an above paragraph, a lot of the vocals that I replaced and that I am still replacing, are based on recordings and that I did with my own voice. This pre-recording is part of my writing process and that I developed over the years. It is on the one hand a great way to check if melodies and lyrics work on the instrumental that I created on the spot, and on the other hand it provides the professional singers with a guidance vocal. Microphone selection and placement were aspects that I went into depth during my studies in term one and two. Trying out different setups and testing the microphone distance are essential features that I am looking at with much more detail now. Here again Johan Englund sparked the interest in detail on these aspects.

As unpredictable and restrictive as the virus was and still is while I am writing this, it has opened doors that I probably would not have entered if I was not forced to find creative ways

to overcome certain issues. These problems are very apparent when trying to record certain singers and rappers. As I am unable to directly be in the studio with the artists I decided to do a lot of vocal recordings via online sessions. Although I am unable to take the singer the job of having to operate their programs while recording, I have found that the guidance that a producer can provide during these sessions is essential. The lack of quality of recordings due to the fact that the rooms where the artists record are acoustically untreated, can be compensated through proper guidance and making the artist feel comfortable even hundreds and thousand miles away. Additionally, the room that is often on the vocals that I got sent to can be cut out with plugins such as Izotope RX-7 De-Reverb, or transient shapers. The quality is reduced, however, it is possible through mixing and adding your own rooms to compensate this problem.

Mixing

I am currently still in the recording, drum programming and sound design stage of the album. I have not reached yet the phase where I am sitting down and starting my final mixing process. However, a number of the songs I have mixed to a certain extent, as I usually mix on-the-go. Meaning, that I EQ, compress, and choose reverbs, delays and other effects while I write the songs. I am planning on going in depth on this section in the final reflective commentary.

Drum Programming

Most of the songs use drums that I created through samples from sample packs. There are also certain drum groups that I created with Native Instruments Battery 4. A lot of the drums have electronic and hip-hop elements in them, and are a mixture of electronically and organically sounding. This combination is also used in other aspects of the songs, in the mixing and sound design most specifically. As mentioned in the introductory paragraph the whole playlist of songs is mixing electronic and organic elements together to create a unique sound.

Sound Design

As an Ableton Live user and someone who comes from the electronic side of music, I am playing around a lot with creating new sounds with VST instruments such as Serum or Pigments. I used especially Serum extensively in the creation of these songs, these include sounds that can be categorized as Future Bass specific. The artists Flume and Louis The Child were big inspirations for these kind of sounds. I am planning on going into detail on the creation of these synths in the final reflective commentary.

Marketing

An aspect that I cannot go without, and everyone in the music industry cannot neglect, is the importance of marketing in selling music to its consumers. Although these songs are meant to be for my creation assignment, I am creating them as I would create a commercial album that I want to sell to people. Therefore, my goal is to create visual content for this project as well. We have seen over the years, that visualizing music is extremely important, it can basically make or break a record. A compelling artwork or a video that has some edge to it, can elevate a song to new heights. I am planning on creating artworks for each song and custom lyric videos or audio visualizers. This visual aspect I want to go into depth as well in my final paper.

Apart from the visualization of the music, I am going to try to get the song out to promoters, A&R's and label heads, and document this process.

Conclusion

This album that will be between 40 and 45 minutes long will be a project where I go into depth on everything I have learned over the last year at Tileyard Education. It will show what is musically possible and also marketing wise. It will reflect on the role of producer during our

new age and show the many things that is needed to create a whole body of work. I am extremely excited to go towards the finalisation of this project and hopefully have the chance to record again at Tileyard Studios.

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