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Element 2B – Instrument 4000 Word Essay

Commercial Music Producer

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Development (ADAD7005_LON)

The ‘Sleazy Lyre’

‘Sleazy Lyre’

Introduction:

This essay will outline the approach and creation of my instrument called ‘Sleazy Lyre’, a sampler software which provides the user with access to a synthesiser of pre-recorded sound, produced from an original acoustic instrument. I will discuss how the instrument works, comment on issues encountered and how they were dealt with, reflect on the first attempt at the product and subsequent improvements which were made, compare and contrast with other instruments commercially available and finally - feedback. In addition, throughout the essay I shall include reference to the concept of the medieval Lyre as a usable 21st C artefact; also revisiting the modern Lyre, with regard to the instrument’s historical origins.

The task for this project was to create an instrument which could be either an analogue electronic instrument, a plug-in software created in a programming environment such as Max MSP, a sample instrument or alternatively a playable game or audio middleware project. The project itself can be based on an existing creation but must be an original concept. Behr *et al* (2017) say ‘Sampling is part of a wide range of musical practices that involve prior works’ (p. 224). However, they also say it is largely inconceivable for new music to be created without citing similarities to original materials.

Discussion of your approach to creating the instrument:

The decision was taken to create a sample instrument which was made using a free online sampler software called the TX16Wx. This software sampler is advertised as a ‘plug-in for the creative musician, inspired and modelled after the best hardware samplers’ (Free VST Plugins, 2021). VST free plug-ins promotes the evolution of the product as having been inspired by one of the industry-termed ‘super samplers’ (Geary, 2018), the Yamaha TX16W sampler, as used with the Typhoon operating system (Free VST Plugins, 2021). TX16Wx sampler is promoted as easy to use and is said to likely provide awesome results (TX16Wx, 2021). One of the

impressive attractions of the TX16Wx sampler is that it is a *free* download and has many features; the not exhaustible list includes: VST micro tuning support; Built-in sample editor; Automatic Loop Slicing + Slice mapping; Automatic pitch detection; Loop tools; Loop cross fading; Multiple loop definitions per wave; Trim, cut, duplicate; Pitch detection; Normalize; Reverse (Free VST Plugins, 2021). The TX16Wx is a lesser known sampler when compared to the largely popular and widely used Kontakt 6, which in comparison ranks higher, being the ‘industry standard’ (Native Instruments, 2021). Bob Weston, a Kontakt 6 sampler user, says ‘mastering is a collaboration’ (Weston, B. NI, 2021, para. 18). Geary (2018) agrees that the versatility of Native Instruments’ Kontakt is, he says, the most popular of the stand-alone or plug-in products in recent years. He cites the Kontakt samplers success is due to their...

massive ready-made library of sampled instruments and vast assortment of filters, modulators, and effects that support complex routings’ (Geary, 2018, p. 2).

Geary (2018) says the complicated synthesis and integrated design functions allow the new generation samplers to emulate microphone set-ups; the products proven reputation makes the Kontakt’s ‘popularity with sound developers unavoidable’ (Geary, 2018, p. 5). The system of sampling can be traced back as far as the 1940s, when mavericks of the time included Pierre Schaffer, who used a method of speeding-up, splicing and reversing recorded sound, in order to manipulate the effects. This almost unnatural process was deemed at the time to be incredibly experimental and judged as not ‘real music’ (Fintoni, 2021, para. 4).

By comparison, the TX16Wx sampler not only offers very similar product advantages and versatility, but is also free to download – clearly this provides the user with potentially more purchasing possibilities, or the ability to access software which might not otherwise be possible. For example, allowing the user to play with ideas and not feel the pressure of needing to create something in order to defend the price of purchase. The sample for the instrument was recorded using a real acoustic Lyre, in order to harness the most authentic sound possible before utilising the tone. The recording was made by playing the entire scale of C Major, before adding the recording onto the DAW Ableton Live 9 and splitting each note to have eight separate notes; then gating them to remove any white noise. The plug-in was then dragged into an audio track within the Ableton session with the previously recorded samples, which were stored in a folder and each named accordingly. They were then individually pulled onto the software’s naked piano. The waves were individually re-assigned a start, in order to play the moment they are played, with each note then being pitch detected in order to be pulled onto their followed

black notes and naturally be in key. The reason behind recording more than just one note was to give the scale itself *feel* and have a more human and realistic performance when used. The adopted concept of calling the new instrument ‘Sleazy Lyre’ was to create an instrument associated with an old fashioned or Middle Aged sound. The Urban Dictionary definition of the word ‘sleazy’ is ‘Not quite slutty, but not classy either. Kind of trashy in a good way’ (p. 5). The idea of calling the new instrument the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ is to attract a diverse audience, thereby distancing the more traditional or elitist view of a traditional medieval Lyre. Holzman (2016) discusses King Midas (circa 740–696 B.C.E., Ankara), infamous for his greed of gold and having the ears of a donkey ‘... which Apollo cursed him with as a sign of his poor taste in music’ (p. 538). It was from the early reign of King Midas that two Lyres were excavated and conserved between 1951-1997. The excavated and conserved fragments were reconstructed in 2013, when it was established that they were made from five tortoise carapaces, with alterations to make them into musical instruments. The sound of the ancient Greek Lyre made from the shell of a tortoise is simply not known. However, the simple reproduction of the new acoustic wooden hand-made instrument used for the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ is one of beauty, and for this instrument the intention was to harness a more modern and young feel, thereby utilising the tone of a traditional Lyre, but adding some EQ-ing, distortion and reverberation for it to still sound authentic, yet exciting within a current commercial song in 2021.

An overview of the principles behind how your instrument works:

Clarke (2018) says there is a snobbery surrounding the concept emulating and the imitation of the classical guitar; this is inflamed between guitarists and non-guitarist musicians and non-musical genres such as film and gaming. He talks more specifically about the natural harmonious sounds produced by the classical guitar, and the popular belief that this is a particular sound that cannot be reproduced artificially. Software in the form of Ionic Nylon a (VST) sampler allows the user to experience exactly what the classical guitarist wants the user to enjoy when listening to the artificially produced real sound; an engaging and emotional gaming experience (Clarke, 2018). Sandvik (2016) states that technology changes not at the rate of technological change, but for historical and social reasons, and that ‘new technology itself has no real significance to social value, unless it has been adapted to existing social and economic conditions’ (p. 15). Access to free downloads could be seen as of interest historically

as well as socially, highlighting a positive and commendable change in the face of new technology.

The instrument ‘Sleazy Lyre’ itself was initially created twice. At first, it was made using Kontakt. Kontakt 6 is available to buy as a download, and retails at approximately three hundred pounds for the latest version. However, you can also download a free trial demo version. Unfortunately, with it only being a trial demo, it had a time limit and the software crashed after around two hours of the creation process. Therefore, and not being in a position to purchase the full Kontakt 6 version, this prompted the discovery of TX16Wx, which although lacked a large amount of features when compared to the ‘top dog’ in sampling software that is Kontakt, also allowed excitement in the challenge. The idea of creating the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ was thought of before downloading any software, which always gave a bottom line objective, with the plug-ins becoming a means-to-an-end from the thought of product. When creating the full sampler instrument, the services of the resident Bard (my brother Morgan Black) at the Celtic Iron-age reconstruction village called Castell Henllys, in Eglwysrwrw, West Wales was exploited, by him playing one of his many Lyres, and recorded using Ableton Live 9. Morgan played the scale of C Major, arpeggios and chords. All these recordings were then utilised and dragged into TX16Wx and treated adding gain, sustain and EQ. The reasoning behind the limited amount of change to the original sound of the samplers was to keep the basic tonal qualities and authenticity of the original instrument. Therefore, ‘Sleazy Lyre’ is an easy instrument to learn and master. The target audience would be up and coming producers who are on a budget, yet want to access good quality software, but are perhaps overwhelmed when attempting to access more obvious brands which they are not at the level to use i.e. the regular industry standards. The ‘Sleazy Lyre’ along with many other sampler instruments that will be created by the brand Bran(d) Studios, pride themselves on being the easiest and least complex instrument to master. When a producer opens the plug-in, they will have at their disposal three alternate sounds which will be named on the IN software keyboard as: Chord, Arpeggio and the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B - the latter being a new sounding tone for each scale, to add a creative and less restrictive tonal quality. The innovative feature to the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ is that these three options are all on one keyboard and can be dragged to fit the whole keyboard if only one is desired. This option was created to remove anxiety for beginner producers, as it is basically saying: *it's OK, it is all there for you – and in one spot.*

Details of issues you encountered while creating the instrument, and how you overcame or/and adapted to these issues:

Basaran, Cemgil & Anarim (2018) draw attention to the massive amount of recording devices available to anyone who has an interest in making a recording of any event they please, and then posting the sounds ‘in a disorganised form’ (p. 33) on social media platforms. This not only allows even more people to hear the said event, which could be anything at all, not just the music and the arts, but sports events, working factory noise, motorway traffic and nature; for example, birdsong - the list being inexhaustible, if data protection and privacy is not inhibited. The recording of live sound and the reproduction of it will differ as each person is likely to capture a different perspective. The quality of the recording will not only be affected by the device used, but also the funding available to the sound recorder. Smart phones are the most prolific, easy and lightweight device on the market, being utilised by both the novice and, because of ever improving samplers, also the professional. Creating an instrument which could be used with a smart phone meant the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ needed to be easy to install and not complicated to use.

Reflection upon the results of your instrument:

Before reflecting on the modern sound reproduced from a Lyre of the 21stC and the subsequent sound of the instrument named ‘Sleazy Lyre’, it is interesting to revisit ancient Greece and understand where the idea of a plucked stringed instrument originated from. The Lyre was a real and reliable musical instrument; made and sourced from materials found in the local environment, a form of entertainment at family gatherings such as weddings and it was also to educate children (Bakarezos *et al*, 2012). Bakarezos *et al*, (2012) explain that the belief in Greece, in the late 8th C. B.C, was that mythological God Hermes was thought to have crafted the ‘Chelys’ or what is termed the Lyre. Hermes’ Lyre does not really resemble the elegant carved wooden lyre more popular in medieval times. His was a strange looking instrument with Ox leather stretched over the concave side of the shell of a large tortoise. This acted as a sound box, with two arms of oak wood attached to either side of the shell and stretched forwards to the connecting oak cross bar. At least seven strings made from dried sheep intestine were fastened to the crossbar and drawn back to an attachment fastened to the shell, ‘they were placed with ascending order, in terms of frequency, with the lower pitched string being the

closest to the player' (Bakarezos *et al*, 2012, p. 478). The instrument would be plucked using a walnut wood plectrum with a metal tip (Bakarezos *et al*, 2012).

Upon reflection on the results of the sampled instrument, the approach proved restrictive, the objective being not to completely change the original sound of the Lyre, as the idea was to utilise the instrument for its actual sound and not to take away from it. The need was to create a synthetic alternative in which modern producers and songwriters may notice it and use it for their commercial music. There is a constant *want* to progress in sound and production, with seemingly not many asking *what is being left behind?* The making of this instrument should also warrant the *need* for reflection as to why the Lyre itself has not been used. When compared to its predecessor the harp, which is a far more difficult and unconventional instrument to play, the Lyre is still considered a less known - as well as less utilised instrument - in its involvement to modern day pop music.

The idea of creating the 'sleazy Lyre' as an instrument, was to in fact imitate the sound and not to re-invent the sound of an acoustic Lyre. The original acoustic Lyre can perhaps be considered an 'old fashioned' and possibly typecast instrument, being associated largely with medieval interpretation and folk song. This masked promotional strategy is bringing a fresh face to what is a niche instrument, and introduce it to a new generation of modern day producers, who can create pop songs without worrying whether its sound is commercial. By using the 'Sleazy Lyre', new producers can promote the sound of an almost forgotten instrument, one which a youthful audience is unlikely to have previously heard used in a modern way and may also be enlightened by.

Discussion of improvements that could be made to your instrument, and how these could be applied:

In this section, the introduction of improvements or tinkering shall be developed. Waksman (2004) discusses names such as the Heavy Metal guitarist Eddy Van Halen, well-known for his 'incredible speed and precision' (p. 2), who designed his own instrument from dismembered parts of other guitars he owned. He also mentions the 'calculated imprecision' (p. 2) of lesser known punk guitarist Greg Ginn, who tinkered with transistor radio parts in his shop before eventually naming his own independent record label Solid State Transistors or SST. Improving formed instruments or tinkering with instruments as a form of musicians technological

enthusiasm was given the term of Do-It-Yourself (DIY). Using DIY within the genre of Punk was seen as fighting back, taking back control and resisting the establishment or the structure of the music industry (Hebdige, 1991/Waksman, 2004). In addition, DIY was also a physical discipline, this giving the ability for men to manipulate a masculine artform to recover a manual labour activity. Waksman (2004) describes this trend, which, he says was popularised in 1967 by *Guitar Player* magazine as ‘the desire to carve out a distinctly masculine sphere within the increasingly isolated, feminized space of the late Victorian suburban home’ (p. 4).

Once the instrument had reached a certain review stage, it became apparent that the limitations in the downloaded software gave a clear yet more narrow direction to go in. This allowed a comfortable work environment, as it set a tone in aiming at a goal for the final product. But retrospectively, it would for example, be far more interesting to see how this idea may evolve when using Kontakt or HISE. As this free version allowed the groundworks - when using more advanced technology - it could become something far greater and innovative. The original concept of the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ was of course, simply - more simple. Firstly, many notes were recorded, to have scales that interpreted a very authentic reproduction of a person playing an acoustic Lyre. Although this proved very realistic, it also merely reinterpreted what a Lyre already was. The sound, although pleasing, gave no additional meaning to the need for a new wave sampled Lyre. In adding pitched detection to the notes, which were now added to the first note of each octave, this also added electronic and modernized realisation of the Lyre. With this being a basic creation, the idea of then using Morgan’s arpeggio and chord forms came into fruition. This tinkering of the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ Sampler increased the overall potential and value of the product.

Comparison and contrast of your instrument to existing commercial instruments:

Finitoni (2021) reminds us that by the late 1940s, Harry Chamberlain had developed *The Chamberlain*, the original tape-based playback, multi sounding keyboard instrument. Subsequently over the following decades various tape-based instruments evolved, for example the Birotron and Optigan which enhanced and adapted the earlier instrument. Although it was the Mellotron which was the ultimate winner, used successively by The Beatles, The Moody Blues, King Crimson and Tangerine Dream; also being considered a useful tool by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop as a sound effect generator (Finitoni, 2021).

In comparing the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ to other sampled instruments such as the 8Dio Productions’ ‘Lyre’, which is very much a true to form sounding tone to that of an actual Lyre, the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ is in-fact far more *bendable* within the musical genres, other than medieval plagal pieces for instance. The marketing scheme behind the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ is to make it appeal to a wider audience and to secretly bring the beauty of the instrument back into fashion. The ‘Sleazy Lyre’ will be marketed using the marketing mix (Fifield, 2012), five key marketing elements being used to strategically position the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ in the marketplace: Product, Price, Promotion, Place, and People. In brief, the Product is the ‘Sleazy Lyre’, the Price is below that of its competitor (free - income will be via sponsorship), Promotion is via the use of Social Media, using ‘uplifting’ 1980s stylised advertising, Place is the internet marketplace and People are young (in ability) entrants to the recording/production process.

User feedback and beta testing of your instrument, and details on how you responded to this:

Foer (2015) interviewed historical and medieval Lyre maker Christopher Nagy about why the Medieval Lyre was still held in high esteem and why feedback was important. Nagy explained Music came in two forms: pentatonic for everyone and diatonic: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, which he called Church Music. Music was played on anything available at the time, a little stringed thing or little pipe, to give the player something to do whilst they waited for a chore to end. If you worked in a job as a traditional medieval artisan, you may have to wait for something to cool down or heat up. This meant you were obliged to while away your time entertaining yourself, and perhaps others, with a little music. This would be fashioned by how it sounded and if it sounded good to *the ear* or pentatonic. Nagy says playing music in the 21st C is no longer for enjoyment or entertainment; he feels it is not honourable in the same way, ‘... music today is your fame-maker’ (Foer, 2015, p.18). He elaborates, in the Middle Ages people made an instrument just to listen to themselves; or they would play to communal groups of people where the feedback was immediate (Foer, 2015). Nagy may relay a nostalgic view of traditional and old fashioned music, but the fact that he feels music in the 21st C is recorded and played in a vacuum and delivered and consumed in a sanitised fashion, is a startling reality hit and a very long way away from the origins, and purpose of the musical Lyre.

My brother and fellow singer and musician Morgan Black was eager to use the ‘Sleazy Lyre’ sample. When given the plug-in, and following a test drive, he said ‘Wow! that’s actually really

impressive and sounds much better than I thought it would'. This is good news, as he was worried the changes may tamper with the original tonal qualities of the Lyre (he played the Lyre at the 2019 Celtic Music Festival in Bretagne, France and is likely to in 2022 also). Ion *et al* (2019) acknowledge that when students receive feedback, they have a more positive learning experience; the process helps them to self-regulate their learning. Peer group feedback can also be important, not just to the recipient, but the effect it has on the individual providing the feedback; although Ion *et al* (2019) say not enough study has been made in this specific area. Legette and Royo (2019) say feedback given and received from peers was more empathetic, and this proved to be more appreciated. Jasper Salmon, 'Fiddler' from Aberystwyth based Celtic Rock band The Hicksters said the sound was really impressive; he particularly liked the arpeggios. French Celtic trad'n'roll/folk band Les Humeurs Cérébrales from Corrèze, were also very enthusiastic and complimentary. They agreed collectively that the 'Sleazy Lyre' sample was useful and efficient. They enthused particularly about the 'live' appeal the instrument might have, potentially offering a new direction which was not originally envisaged. The authenticity behind the instrument means it can still be heard when used live and compliment the 'real' played instruments.

When used to its best abilities, the 'Sleazy Lyre' can be relied upon to come up with an impressive soundscape and take its place as a part of the band; it can emulate sounds which can be enhanced, and possibly double tracked to either use for live shows or to lay down on top of real instruments at the mixing and recording stage.

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