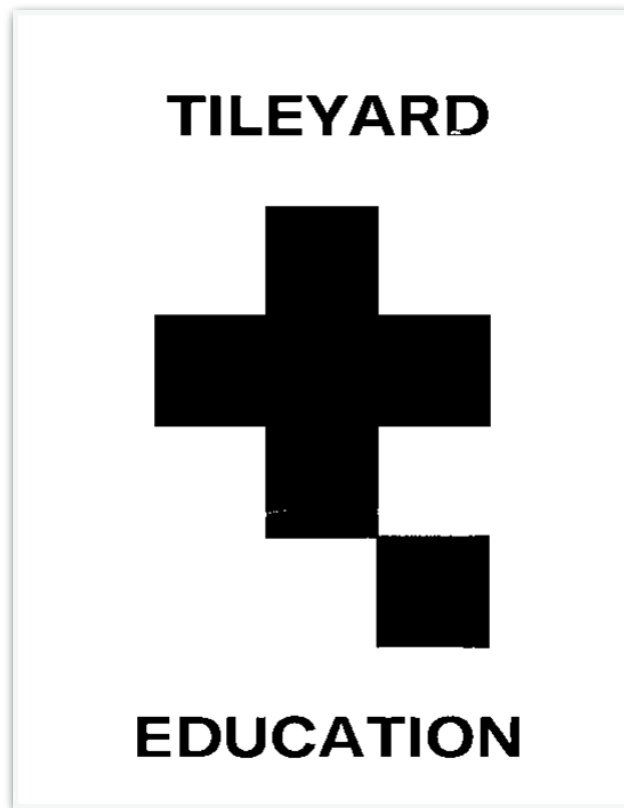


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Introduction

In this essay I'm going to be reflecting on the songs that I have written and produced for my Band, Deelun. This reflection will contain different sections that sum up the process and how I've gotten to where I am with it, these are: The project, reflecting on the initial plans that I had for creating the songs and how I wanted to go about them. The Process, I go into detail about the writing and recording process, discussing the different elements that went into this, such as the different studios that were used, Prof Studios, my home studio and TYE Studio. I also discuss the mixing and mastering process.

The final section of the essay is titled The Future where I will be discussing what the plans are with the final product. I will go into detail about releases, gigs and tours as well as future writing and recordings. I will be including a Swot Analysis in this essay which explains the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats I felt I needed to list before starting this project. I will also be including a Personal Development plan that I wrote when I first started the course which states my career goals. It includes my short term, medium term and long term goals for the career.

The Project

The plan for this project was to write and record 6 songs for my band, formed of myself and my younger brother. Our style is hard to pin down to one particular genre, it's made up of a few including Pop, Indie, Rock and Soul. To put it simply we aim to make anthems to get people singing along at gigs in the future, with tight harmonies, strong melodies and true relatable lyrics. Our core as a band is revolved around performing live, this is where we feel we're going to flourish moving forward so we have to write songs that compliment this. I mentioned in my proposal and I still believe to this day that Indie Rock music is going to take over the world in the next few years due to everyone from young to old being repressed over the past year due to Covid. Similar to how punk music was a way for the youth to vent their frustrations in the 1980's and Indie music was in the 1990's it's come round full circle in that there needs to be a place for angst against society and the issues in the world to be put and live shows will be this place, mark my words on this. What makes our music 'current' is our use of 808's, synths, programmed drum samples and other production techniques that fit in with modern pop music. Blending genre's is very common in the current music industry as artists are stepping out of 'their lanes' to develop their music styles.

The Process

The process involves the writing and recording process which make up the tracks that were created for this project.

Swot Analysis

Before I started the project I felt that it was necessary to do a Swot Analysis to get to grips with how I could plan everything correctly and see what the main issues that might arise during the process were.

Strengths

- We have a clear plan for how we want to create the tracks
- Unique brand and strong image
- Own studio space - Prof Studios
- Keen to learn and improve with every track that I work on
- Multi instrumental
- Good at networking

Weaknesses

- Based in Chester
- I have a lack of experience when it comes to mixing and mastering.
- I'm a Perfectionist
- Get overly stressed when short on time

Opportunities

- Youtube video tutorials
- Online forums for advice
- Asking engineers at Tileyard for advice

Threats

- Covid limiting me travelling to London to get to the studio at Tileyard.
- Writers block
- Lack of production ideas
- Running out of time when doing final mixes trying to get everything to sound right
- Brotherly fall outs - it happens with any siblings (haha)

The Songs

As I mentioned in my proposal I write all my songs before I start the production stage, this is how I've always gone about it and I always will. This may be because I have been a songwriter for a lot longer than I have a producer, but also because without a good song behind the production all you're left with is a beat and some fancy sounds. The actual songs will always be the most important part of the art in my opinion, they're what tell the stories and make people feel. Most of the time when I write a song an idea will come into my head, usually a melody but sometimes can be a lyric and I'll start the process at the piano or guitar. I'll get the basis of the chords and structure of the song down and then I'll work on the lyrics and meaning of the song. In terms of themes and meanings behind the songs Josh and I unfortunately lost our father Professor John "Prof" Deelun Somauroo last year due to Cancer so every song we wrote were all for him. The themes span from Love to loss and mental health. I'd like to think that they are almost uplifting sad songs in a way because they were written at the lowest time of my life and have inspired me to keep moving forward and I hope that they have the same affect on people listening to them. The names of the songs that were written were - Something more, Not Tonight, My darling, Don't lose faith, Bottled Wine, Chasing Shadows.

As there are six songs written I won't go into detail about all of them in this essay but I'll focus on just one - My Darling, which really highlights how I write and the message that we want to spread. This is a song about my parents incredible love story, written from my Mum's perspective to my

Dad. My darling is a phrase that my mum uses regularly and I am proud to have been able to use it in a song. This is a very catchy song with strong melodies running throughout it almost like a song by 'The Beatles'. My mum says it reminds her of a Van Morrison song I initially started with the pre chorus melody and actually played it to a few people to see if they could write something with me, no-one saw the vision in it which I was okay with as I knew it was a good melody and just allowed myself the time to work on it and build the song up. This is one example of how important it is to trust your gut because if I hadn't then I don't think I would have written this song. The key of the song is A major, the main chords used through are A, E and D with an F# minor added in the Pre Chorus and Bridge, with an F# added in the Bridge. The structure of the song is the standard Verse, Pre Chorus, Chorus, Verse, Pre Chorus, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus. Delving into the lyrics of the song now I think it's best to look at the chorus for it tells the main message of the song:

*'I hope we'll always be, carelessly so free
Living for memories
My darling
Lives may fade away, but I hope we'll stay the same
Kiss the night, seize the day
My darling'*

Simply it's about living in the moment with the one that you love. The line '*Living for memories*' really stands out because I feel that it's a very important message as people often get caught up in what they need to achieve and how they need to do something to compete with someone else but actually living for the now is what's actually important in the long run. The phrase 'Kiss the night' is something that doesn't actually make sense as I made it up, someone could say it means 'to have a good night' but it's more personal to me than that. My dad was the biggest fan of music and had the greatest taste in it. When he was unwell we would just listen to hours and hours of music, from Led Zeppelin to Bruce Springsteen and Rush to Erasure, even the Sugababes as their song 'About you now' was one of his favourites, and rightly so because it's a banger! We would listen to a lot of Jimi Hendrix and their one line in his song 'Purple Haze' '*Scuse me while I kiss the sky*' and my dad would tell me that when he would play it live Hendrix would always kiss the sky after it, so the line in 'My darling' is for my dad and when we play it live I'll kiss the sky for him after singing it. Lyrics I feel are at their best when they mean something to the writer. I feel a lot of lyrics these days are nonsense and people aren't writing what they feel but more trying to fit in and be 'cool', but this is just my opinion. I feel that music is truly timeless when you write something you truly feel and it then becomes relatable to listeners.

Prof Studios

Prof Studios, named after my father, is the creative space that we have built at my home in Chester. It's in an old converted barn away from the house so it means I can create music until whatever time I want and won't disturb anyone. We have built a vocal booth fitted with floor to ceiling acoustic tiles, and this has changed the game for our vocal production as the dead room sound makes mixing so much easier.

I have always used Logic Pro X as my VST. For me it has the best mix of live recording and midi recording features which benefit the recording techniques I use for our music. I have an Audient ASP800 Pre amp that goes into my Apollo Twin interface. This set up is really smooth and easy to use which helps with my workflow whilst recording. I have a Nord Electro 5 which I use as a midi keyboard for all synth and pad sounds, as well as synth bass and 808's which feature a lot in our music. The mics we use in the studio that feature on the songs we recorded for the project are the Audio Technica AT4050 and Rode NT1, we initially had the Rode NT1 but upgraded to the AT4050 after we'd recorded the vocals for 'My Darling' and Chasing Shadows'. I liked the vocal takes on these tracks so much that I didn't want to redo them with the new mic. Everything for the project was recorded here except from the acoustic guitars, piano and live drums, as these are the hardest instruments I feel to record at home studios so decided to record them at TYE. The guitar recordings on the tracks were done by my good friend and collaborator Todd Blackmore. He's based in London so travelled up to Prof Studios for a few days in May. The equipment he used for the recordings was a Fender Telecaster into his Kemper Profiling amplifier.

The Kemper is an insane piece of equipment that nails the dynamic and full sound of a guitar and bass amp. The Profiling amps recreate the sound of any amp once it's been profiled. Profiling an amp is when you capture a print of its sonic frequency response, the Kemper Profiling Amp then allows you to recreate this sound as you play your guitar or bass through it. We managed to get the guitar tracks nailed in two days due to how quick Todd and I work together.

Tileyard

Having access to the studio at Tileyard is probably the greatest thing that you get on the course. The days that we spent recording there were second to none and we got through a lot of work thanks to the incredible team there. I need to give a special mention to Ned Roberts, the engineer for our sessions who really brought our ideas to life in the studio. Not only did he have all of the knowledge about the recording process and the different mic set ups and engineering techniques he also gave great input on each song and shared his musical knowledge like the pro that he is. We used the studio to record acoustic guitar, piano and drums, the three instruments that we struggled to record at Prof Studios. The songs we recorded acoustic guitar in were 'Not Tonight' and 'My Darling'. The songs that we recorded drums in were 'Something more', 'Bottled Wine', 'Don't lose faith', 'Not Tonight' and 'My Darling'. Due to how quickly we were getting through the songs we had a few hours spare on the final day of drum recording and were able to track drums on an extra song, Nothing makes sense. The songs that we recorded piano on were Chasing Shadows and also Nothing makes sense as we also had a few extra hours in the studio the day of the piano recording. I recorded the acoustic guitar parts for both tracks and my good friend and insanely talented drummer Sam Horvath recorded all the drums. I originally planned to record the drums with fellow TYE student Marcus Copeland who is an incredible drummer but due to the nature of the drums being more of a John Bonham rock 'n' roll style I decided to go with Sam because he's toured in rock bands for years so this style is second nature to him.

Acoustic guitar

I'm firstly going to discuss the recording process of the acoustic guitar parts. The first song we started with was 'Not Tonight'. I initially had the idea of recording two guitars in the same room to create a natural stereo affect in the song, I saw this technique used by Andrew Watt on Post Malone's track 'Stay' in a video on the YouTube channel Genius - Deconstructed. Myself and my guitarist Todd tried this technique in the studio. After a few takes trying this technique it was clear that it wouldn't work in the song due to the 6/8 time signature and fast pace feel of the guitar parts, they were starting to clash with each other and staying in time was becoming an issue. Ned had a great idea that the start of the song could use the room mics for the more intimate section so I recorded the whole song through 4 times using this technique. We still wanted the wide sounding guitars in the chorus so I recorded these parts 4 times on the left hand side of the room and 4 times on the right hand side, giving it a natural stereo room feel. I also tried recording 4 takes of each with and without a plectrum. We basically spent the whole first day recording the acoustic guitars for this song, but I'm glad we did because I'm so happy with the results that we got.

Acoustic guitar mic placement



The acoustic guitar mic set up we used was:

- One Neumann 184 and one Shure SM57 used as a spaced pair placed 12 inches from the fretboard, the 184 just off the 12th fret capturing the body of the guitar and the 57 placed further down the neck capturing more of the top end - this was repeated on the other side of the room
- Two Neumann 184's in a NOS position at the front of room capturing the room sound, 8 foot in air.

I tried to record the acoustic guitar for 'My Darling' on the same day but this proved to be impossible firstly because after playing guitar for almost 6 hours I was exhausted and also the tempo of the song was a bit of an issue and needed tweaking before we could record the guitars properly. This meant I had to go away and change the tempo from the obscure 106.6849 bpm which it was set at to a more normal 105 bpm, the reason it was set at this tempo is because when I started producing the track I used the tap tempo feature on Logic to get the tempo of the song, it wasn't until we were in the studio that I realised how strange it was, and it became hard sending over the track and aligning a click track for it in Pro Tools on the Mac in the studio. Once I had fixed this issue we came back in for a second day and got the guitar parts done in a few hours. The mic set up was slightly different for this song. We still had the spaced mic set up with the Neumann 184 and Shure SM57 placed 12 inches away from the neck but this time Ned had the idea to put a Telefunken ELA M 251 as the room mic placed 6 foot away from the others, placed at head height. This was a great move as the ELA M really picked up the whole body and presence of the guitar.

Piano

The next stage of recording was the piano parts. I originally planned to record piano at Prof Studios but due to my lack of experience in doing so I felt that getting it done professionally at the

TYE studio was the best option. The only song that I needed piano in for this project was 'Chasing Shadows'.

The front of piano mic positioning



The rear panel mic positioning



The top corner room mic positioning



The piano mic set up we used was:

- Two Neumann 184's above the front piano in NOS positioning - the top panel removed.
- Two Coles 4038's spaced apart at the lower front of the piano - the lower panel removed
- One AKG C415 placed 6 inches away from the rear panel of the piano in the middle
- Two Neumann 184's pointed into the top corner at the front of the room to capture the full room sound

It was quite a quick process record the piano, we did a few initial takes then Ned changed a few of the mics positions for a more clear sound, then we did a few more takes and were happy with the outcome. As I mentioned we had a few hours to spare so I decided to lay down some piano for another track that's not part of this project 'Nothing Makes sense', this was more of an experimental recording session for the track as I hadn't previously written a part for it, but i'm glad we did it because the parts we got down have really brought the song to life and I look forward to working on it further in the future.

Drums

The final part of recording at TYE came with the drums. This happen over the space of two consecutive days. I'd previously done a practise session with the drummer Sam so he was familiar with the songs, but truly came alive with them in the studio.

The drum kit mic positioning



The hi-hat mic positioning



The room mic positioning



The drum mic set up we used was:

- Two Neumann 184's as overhead mics in NOS positioning
- One AKG D112 for the kick in mic
- One Shure 52A for the kick out mic, placed the middle left side of the drum skin
- One Shure 57 for the snare top mic, placed at an angle two inches away from the drum skin
- One Neumann KMS 105 for the snare bottom mic, placed six inches away from the bottom of the skin

- Two Sennheiser 421's, one for the high tom and one for the low tom, both placed at an angle four inches away from the drum skins
- Two Neumann 184's pointed into the top corner at the back of the room to capture the full room sound
- Two Coles 4038's placed just off the ground at the front of the room pointing towards the kit to capture more of the full room sound
- One Telefunken ELA M 251 used as the room mic placed six feet away from the kit two feet away from the ground
- One AKG C451 for the hi-hat mic, placed six inches above the cymbal facing towards the edge

The whole drum recording process went pretty smoothly if I'm honest. Having a great musician playing the instrument and a great engineer behind the desk made my job so easy, I was able to really focus on what I wanted out of the takes. As we recorded six songs I won't be going into detail about all of them because the procedures were pretty similar for each but I will be discussing 'Something more' and 'Not Tonight' in further detail. 'Something more' was the first track we did. The song doesn't have any drums until the second verse, we knew we didn't want a complicated beat entering here so we decided on a four on the floor and Sam added some nice hi-hat textures on top which slotted in perfectly. The main beat enters in the Chorus, there's a drop down Chorus for the first half and in the second half we wanted huge Killers and Kings of Leon type drums, Sam nailed this first time. The song finally had the life that it needed in it. We did a few more takes of this and then Sam switched up the beat in the bridge which fit so well and kept the drums interesting. After a few extra takes we were all done. We nailed it in 12 takes, which really isn't that many. 'Not Tonight' was slightly more complicated, we tried putting a standard 6/8 beat over it and it didn't work at all, then Sam tried a few other things and still nothing was working. I had an idea to us brushes to play the 16th notes filling out the space so we could layer more powerful drums on top, similar to Kodakline's 'All I want', the only issue was that we didn't have any brushes with us. Sam and I decided to head to a nearby music store to get some, if I'm honest I was a little worried that it wouldn't work and would be a wasted trip, but luckily it worked like a charm. The rest of the song flowed really well and the powerful drums really added to the emotion of the song. This track was done in 21 takes, which also really isn't that many considering almost half of them were before we got the brushes.

Mixing and Mastering

Mixing is a new art to me, I can see why professional mixers spend ten years sometimes perfecting their craft because it's not easy to do well. As a rookie in the mixing game I learnt a lot from youtube tutorials and tutorials on 'Mix with the masters', it's incredible to be able to have these resources to be able to learn from at the click of a button. I learnt a lot about the right types of reverb and reverb times and the correct ways to EQ and compress things. The main thing that they say to you in these tutorials is that you have to trust your ears.

The purchase of Sonarworks Reference 4, which is £200 but I bought it during the black Friday discounts for less than £100, is one of the best mixing tools that I have purchased for the studio. Rooms that aren't treated with the correct acoustic treatments make the worst mixing environments but the cost of treating them correctly sets you back a lot and although there are still a few issues with the low end in Prof Studio Reference 4 has cut out most of the issues I was having when mixing down tracks. It's meant that my mixes are starting to sound similar across all listening devices. It also allows you to program your headphones into the software so you can mix wherever you want and have the same sound as you would in the studio. The plugin is really easy to set up, you are given a mic to measure the room with and the programme plays beeps out of your speakers which you use the mic to capture the distance in different places from the speakers. I would recommend this to any producer to help their mixes if they haven't got a well treated room.

The true mixing stage began after I got back from London. I had worked on the tracks over the months before I was able to get into the studio at Tileyard to record the instruments so they were mixed quite well without them but the real obstacle was getting the recorded instruments to blend into the mix nicely. First of all I worked on the acoustic guitars, I actually worked on them a little bit whilst I was in London in my friends flat using just my headphones. Due to how well they were recorded they slotted straight into the mix with no real problem, I just added some slight amount

of EQ and compression and some reverb, not too much of anything. The only real problem I had was I felt that they sounded bit thin and lacked that low mid presence that I was after, and I had already slightly boosted the low mids and cut b

a bit from the top end. I asked Alessandro who works in the studio at TYE for his advice and he recommend using the J37 tape emulation plugin by Waves, based on the Abbey Road hardware. He recommended that I used it on a slow speed, 15 ips to be precise and he was right, it added the right character and presence to the low mids that I was looking for.

Next came mixing the drums. I had never mixed live drums before and only had 10 days once I got back from London to mix the drums into the 5 tracks, which honestly wasn't a very long time, considering that I had to import 150GB of drum takes onto my laptop and place them into each Logic file, which took about a day to do. Looking back I wish I could've had more time to mix the drums but I was very limited due to not being able to get into the studio at TYE until I did at the end of June/ start of July due to Covid.

To start the drum mix I did the necessary steps of checking the phase alignment, using a single channel EQ to cut all unwanted frequencies from each channel then balancing each of the tracks into the mix. After this I added slight compression to the tracks using the Logic inbuilt compressor then some reverb using Valhalla Vintage Verb. If i'm honest I did find it difficult to mix the drums further after this especially as I had never done it to this scale before and there were issues with timings and unwanted frequencies, but once I started to think of these drums in a similar way to drum loops from Splice then the process started to flow a lot better. I quantised the drums to make sure they were in time and then started to chop and change sections to fit what I felt the songs needed and EQ'd the issues out. I also added slight effects to some of the drum buses to give them more presence. These included the Waves PRS Archon guitar amp to add slight bite to the drums, Drip by Kyle Beats to add a bit of extra sauce, mainly to the hi hats, Decapitator to add saturation and warmth to the drums, UAD Raw to add distortion. The main issue I had with the drums was getting the cymbals to sit well in the mix, as everyone knows they sound very washy if you bring them up too loud so getting the balance and EQ'ing them correctly was key to getting them sounding right. There's a reason why it takes years of practise to get drums to sound good because its a very hard instrument to mix well, I know that my drum mixes aren't perfect but I am pleased with the results that I got from the short amount of time I worked on them.

With the mastering stage I have a normal template that I used on each track but catered each slightly to taste:

Fab Filter Q3 - Cut 1.5dB around 400hz (or nearer 300hz if it sounds too boomy)

Pulteq EQP-1A - Boost 3K slightly

Decapitator - Slight saturation to add warmth

SSL Comp - Slight compression to glue the tracks together

Kramer Tape - To add a natural tape sounding affect and top end shimmer

L1 Limiter - To boost the levels to make sure that they were loud enough, measured using a WLM Meter.

Hard skills and soft skills

I had to use both sets of skills heavily during the recording process. The hard skills were used particularly when I was layering down the different instruments on the tracks as I'd consider myself a skilled musician. I'd say that producing and mixing have become new hard skills for me as I've noticed that I've developed these skills over the months on this course.

The soft skills were used when I was booking sessions with the musicians who were recording on the tracks. As well as my communication with sed musicians during the recording sessions, making sure the vibe was right and that I was explaining what I wanted from the takes effectively.

The Future

The future plan for these tracks is firstly to send them over to our lawyer at Bray and Kraiss, Paddy Browne, who I'm in regular contact with and who will get us meetings with various managers and booking agents, then we'll plan a release schedule for two singles followed by an EP release but this will only be planned when we're able to start gigging again. We'll then aim to do a sold out

show at The Cavern in Liverpool for an EP release show, followed by a gig in London (venue not decided yet) which we will invite labels to. Our aim is to build our social media profile during this time to engage the 'Gen Z' audience, using platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok. We'll then try to do as many gigs as we can and do a tour if it's possible with Covid restrictions. During this we will still be working hard on other music, I'll probably take a portable studio on the road with me as I know that this will be when we're at our most productive and I don't want us to rest on our laurels and I'm not expecting that we'll have access to studios all over the world whilst we're making a name for ourselves so this is the best option to start of with.

Personal Development Plan

My Vision

The vision I have is for my band DEELUN to be the biggest band in the world in the next three years.

Short/Medium Term Goals

The short term plan is to get a management and release an EP, then sign a record deal. After this we will do a mini tour of the UK and release another EP.

Long Term Goals

The long term goals are to release an album and go on tour in the UK, Europe and the US. Once we have done these tours we will head over to Asia, Australia and South America.

Final Goal

Stadium tours and at least one grammy.

Conclusion

To conclude I am proud of the music that I have created for this project. I feel that I have achieved what I set out to do with the songs that I wrote and recorded, I aimed to create timeless music that would stand out in the current music industry and I believe that that's been done. The time recording at Tileyard was very inspiring and I learnt a lot about how to mic up the different instruments we recorded which I'll take forward with me. I feel that the weakest part of the work has been the mixing of the tracks and going forward we will be getting someone else to do the mixing but I am proud of how I've got them to sound because I know that I have improved massively as a producer and mixer during the time on the course, and that's what a masters is for; to improve your skills in the area that you are studying. Now it's up to Josh and I to work on the others areas of our brand to get ourselves out and become the biggest band in the world.

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