

MARIKA BASTIEN

STUDENT ID: 2023943

MA COMMERCIAL PRODUCER

CREATION ASSIGNMENT C2B: REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY

WORD COUNT: 4938

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TRACKLIST

Track 1) Aliene Babe [Intro] - 1:40s

Written by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien. Produced by ActiveByNight

Track 2) Feelin' A Way - 2:41s

Written & Produced by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien

Track 3) Stuck In The Middle [Interlude] - 2:20s

Written by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien, Gerry Rafferty and Joe Egan & Produced by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien

Track 4) Will You? - 3:27s

Written & Produced by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien

Track 5) 24 Hours - 2:58s

Written Marika Aliene Zara Bastien. Produced by WTSN

Track 6) Easy Come. Easy Go [Interlude] - 1:36s

Written and Produced by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien

Track 7) Ready - 3:51s

Written by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien & Produced by Keith Classiq

Track 8) Way Up - 3:14s

Written by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien & Produced by Jacob Disaster

Track 9) Worth The Wait - 3:36s

Written by Marika Aliene Zara Bastien & Produced by Keith Classiq

INTRODUCTION

For our final creation assignment, we were asked to curate a portfolio of work, consisting of original music. Since I officially began my music journey back in 2015, I have always strived to create a body of work that I can be proud of years later. A Project that truly captures my essence as an artist. I had decided on the name of my EP years ago, but was yet to create the perfect records. I desired a space that allowed me to be vulnerable and open, but also still hold my own as the woman I was becoming. So when the opportunity to create an original project arose, I knew I had to get over my writer's block quickly, which was easier post pandemic.

Growing up I was exposed to a variety of albums thanks to my mum and older sister. Projects such as ***Baduizm*** by Erykah Badu, ***The Score*** by The Fugees and Destiny's Child's, ***The Writings on the Wall***, were on rotation in my household. As a result, I learnt from a very early age the importance and beauty in creating a cohesive body of work that tells a story. Looking back I can say I definitely favoured an artist more for their album than one off singles. I have gracefully carried this knowledge into my adult life, which has influenced my listening and creation today. Many of my favourite artists and peers over the years have released projects that bring that same excited feeling I often felt as a child.

In this reflective commentary I will be exploring the inspirations behind my EP, the challenges that arose, things that worked well and other factors that may have influenced the outcome of my final project. I will also be diving deep into my personal development, reflecting on the process and where I envision myself in music.

For my project I created a 9 track EP entitled ***ALIEN[E]P***. ***ALIEN[E]P*** derived from a period in my life that felt very alienated. After a season of trials and tribulations, I was filled with heartbreak and depression and these songs were my medicine during such dark times. This collection of songs displays my younger self overcoming obstacles and finding my way back.

THE PROCESS

The plan

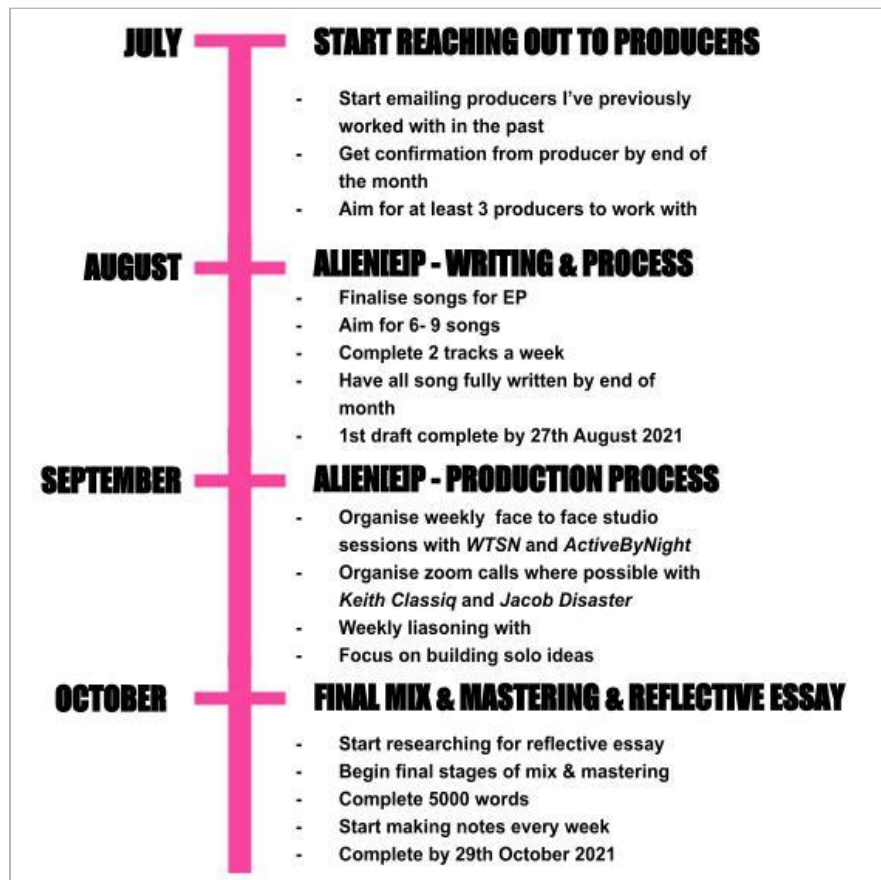


Figure : The Timeline for the creation of my project

In a parallel universe I imitated one of my favourite rappers *J.Cole*, when creating a new body of work. I organised a two week trip to Jamaica, accompanied by some of my most talented friends, who all happen to be musicians. I'd set up camp in a beach front villa and write, produce and record my entire project in those blissful two weeks. In this universe however, things didn't go as I would have liked. With post-pandemic jitters still being a thing and everyone tackling this new chapter we millennials call '*adulging*' (Hoffower. H, 2021), I found it quite tricky organising consistent studio sessions.

In my project proposal I stated that I would be working with one producer throughout my project, however I found myself at a crossroad between two important decisions. A part of me wanted to

follow my original plans and collaborate with my good friend and music procure WTSN on my entire EP. When researching different methods, I found that many of the projects I admired all had one thing in common. They had all been produced by one single producer. British Rapper Little Simz recently revealed in an interview with *The Gentlewoman Magazine*, her ongoing relationship with her producer *Inflo*. Inflo, who the artist met as a young child, was single handedly responsible for producing the artist's latest album *Sometimes I Might Be Introvert*, as well as her award winning project *Grey Area*, which was released in 2019 (Emina. S, 2021). These bodies of work were a result of two individuals with great musical chemistry. A relationship I longed for.

Another example that caught my attention was a music producer London Tyler Holmes professionally known as *London On The Track*. The artist won the Soul Train, Album of the Year award in 2020 for composing *Summer Walker's* debut album *Over it* in 2019. The two were not only musically connected but were also dating for a year before their release (Capital Xtra, 2020). Again supporting my idea of working with one producer who really understands you musically and is able to bring the best out of you.

Though this idea tempted me in the beginning, I found it difficult to choose one single producer to work with. I didn't feel like there was anyone I had built a strong enough bond with, to sit and produce a whole project together. I didn't feel like there was anyone that had fully grasped my vision, therefore I settled on the decision to work with a variety of my favourite producers. Over the years I have connected with various musicians both nationally and overseas. Some were successful encounters and others not so much. During the month of July I decided to get in contact with a few producers to ensure I had options in case anyone was unavailable. Giving me enough time to confirm before I needed to start my assignment. A few were unable to help due to professional and personal reasons, which left me with producers, *WTSN*, *Keith Classiq*, *ActiveByNight* and *Jacob Disaster*. I had previously released my single *U.F.O.* with *WTSN* in 2019 (See Appendix 1) and *Ready* with *Keith* earlier this year (See Appendix 2), so I knew they would be more than happy to help with my project.

All four producers that contributed to *ALIEN[E]P* lived either in Greater London or abroad. That meant a lot of solo work in the beginning, due to everyone's busy schedules. Despite my original proposal which specified my desire for collaboration, I chose to look at it from a positive perspective. Deep down I wanted to challenge myself and see if I could really produce an entire project myself. Although I knew this wouldn't be the case with the final submission, I wanted to

do as much as I could myself, really practicing the skills I had learnt in my last two terms. This overwhelmed me in the beginning, however as I began my writing process in August, I got more comfortable with my production skills.

The Writing Process

In December 2020 I decided to finally invest in my own home studio. The main reason behind this decision was partially due to lockdown. Having to stay at home with no studio access made me miss recording. With no normality I was forced to buy myself a microphone, interface and monitors to stay creative. This turned out great for recording spontaneous vocals, which led to many of the productions included in this project. My room has amazing high ceilings which work great for recording vocals. During recording lectures with James, he taught us of the various ways to record your vocals, making use of your room's acoustics. I remembered this method particularly when recording the backing vocals for *Feelin' A Way* and *Stuck In The Middle*.

Another reason behind my investment was comfortability. I wanted to create a space which brought out the best in me and where I was comfortable to perform. Throughout the years I had attended several professional and home built studios. All of them were run by men. As a young woman attending sessions which are very male dominated can be intimidating. In the past the lack of females has stopped me from giving my all, out of fear of being judged or misunderstood.

As mentioned previously my project was 70% written, barring a few songs that were composed in my home studio, prior to my submission. I had hand picked my favourite records from my 5 year catalogue that I thought told a story when in a collective. This technique isn't anything new and it's quite a common move for emerging artists. In 2018 British singer Jorja Smith revealed in an interview with *Coup De Main* Magazine that she wrote many of the songs on her debut album *Lost & Found* when she was 16 (Riddell. R, 2018). Five years before those tracks would ever be heard by the world.

The Production Process

My production process really started earlier in February of this year. The moment I enrolled at Tileyard I began subconsciously working on my final assignment. Many of these tracks were born from trial and error and were a result of me playing around with the sample packs I discovered on Splice. I officially started production in August and finished during September. By

the time my creation project came round, I was already quite used to recording my own vocals at home. In the very earlier stages of my music career, I spent several days in the writing rooms at RoundHouse, figuring out how to use Logic Pro and the subtle mixing techniques that would bring the best out of my vocals. Though it was nice and necessary to change your environment, it is also really comforting to know you can record an idea straight away, rather than wait to book a studio at Tileyard and risk losing that initial inspiration.

I always began my tracks with chord progressions, taking notes from my *Music Theory* lectures with Phil Baxter. I began to build on the songs I had already written, identifying the key, BPM and timbre which I wanted for the tracks. I also sourced reference tracks and inspiration from producers on Youtube, to help gain additional knowledge to what I was already taught. Once we were able to arrange schedules and fit each other into one another's busy lives, I visited both Dev, professionally known as *WTSN* and *ActiveByNight*'s home studios in Greater London. Most sessions would begin with an idea I had recorded in my voice notes (See Appendix 6.). Many would contain snippets of a melody idea that I had thought of at work or random chord progressions that caught my interest on *Splice*. I would also come to the sessions with a rough demo version (See Appendix 7) I would record at home, to help with the arrangement of the track.

Taking notes from my *Arranging and Composition* lectures with Phil Baxter, I learnt to incorporate a few writing techniques into my songs. My fifth lesson on *Arranging Theory and Dynamic Punctuation* particularly stood out to me. The 5 *Arranging Elements* foundation, rhythm, pad, lead and fills all work together to build in the perfect commercially reliable song. Though my goal wasn't to necessarily make a song that was a commercial hit, I kept this in mind when building on my simple ideas. Coming from a Caribbean background, my sense of rhythm has always been quite exceptional. I wanted this project to represent that side of me. Tracks *Will You?*, *Way Up* And *Worth The Wait* were all created based on what I was taught during these lectures. I backed up my evidence with *The Basic Elements of Music* (Schmidt-Jones. 2013) that validated the roles that rhythm and timbre play in most chart toppers today.

Not all my studio sessions were face to face. Thomas Pascal who also goes by his artist name *Jacob Disaster*, is a friend of mine and music producer who lives in Paris, France. During the summer we often spoke via Instagram messages and email to discuss music ideas for *Way Up* (See Appendix 7). Originally entitled "*Gary's Gold Chain*", the track took approximately a month to develop into what we know it as today. The 18 months worth of lockdown and social

distancing helped me to adjust to this post-pandemic way of living. We are currently in a digital world (Cooper. L, 2020), although not always ideal, it was great to know that I could achieve something with such a barrier.

i. Interludes

In 2018 Billboard released a list of the *50 Greatest Interludes of All Time* (Billboard Staff. 2018). With examples like Miguel's *Girl With the Tattoo* (See appendix 3), *Bria's Interlude* (See appendix 4) by Drake and Syd's *Drown in It* (See Appendix 5) I knew I had to feature at least one interlude in my project. Those "in-between musical moments" (Polsinelli. D 2018) really have the potential to tie an entire project together. Due to their simplistic nature, I knew I could tackle the production myself. The simplicity of both *Stuck In The Middle* and *Easy Come. Easy Go.* is intentional and purposely stripped back to keep the focus on the lyrics and the transition from one chapter to the next.

Mix and Mastering

I was quite excited and confident when it came to mixing my project. Not that I wasn't still figuring it out or that I was the most seasoned engineer, but because I was confident in what I was taught during my first and second term at Tileyard. Of course lack of finances were a factor and in an ideal world, I would pay someone with experience to mix my record, however what justice would that be doing to me? I would be robbing myself of a year's worth of studying. If I was just going to get someone else to do it for me, what would be the point? No, I wanted to challenge myself and at least that way clearly identify my limitations and strengths. With the help of my friend WTSN, we both worked together to mix *ALIEN[E]P*.

Since the beginning of my course, I have been training my ear to listen out for mixing techniques that I liked and wanted to incorporate into my music. I began to recognize the artists I wanted to mimic. Canadian music producer and DJ, Kaytranada was an artist who I found myself referring to with almost half of the project. His upbeat dance beats always mixed so perfectly with the soulful vocals on his album *BUBBA*. I would often send reference tracks to WTSN of Kaytranada songs, asking him what effect was being used and how we'd be able to duplicate that in my music.

As my deadline approached I had to make quick decisions in order to stay within my desired timeline. My normal 3 take rule did not always apply on more vocally challenging songs such as

Low Key, *Worth The Wait* and *Will You?* While I normally like to take my time and go through each vocal take individually, picking out the best qualities, I found myself having to go with my gut instincts a lot more, and trust in my talents. This forced me to make more abrupt decisions and not overthink the process.

i. Reverb

I used Kaytranada's *Taste* (See Appendix 8) and *Chances* (See Appendix 9) as references for both *24 Hours* and *Ready*. I had learnt during one of my lectures in the first term, how useful and important it is to cross referencing your mix with a reference track. By importing the reference song into your DAW project and moving from each track really helped me with the gain and fitting my vocals within the mix perfectly. As mentioned I would often record my vocals in my room, which was perfect for achieving the feeling of multiple voices. Kaytranda's two bouncy tracks display a perfect amount of reverb on the lead vocals, creating the illusion of different spaces. As two of the most uplifting songs on the EP, I wanted to replicate that same feeling.

During our second term, guest lecturer and sound engineer *Taz Matter* taught us a few tips on mixing. At the time he was currently working on a track entitled '*Change*', but British Rapper *Kay Young*. The track itself was very soulful and pretty much the exact genre of music I loved to create. I couldn't believe he'd mixed that track within the space of a few days. I had asked Taz for some advice on an original track I was working on, since he's mix for Kay Young sounded so professional. I played *Ready* which Taz and my fellow classmates all had a positive reaction to. Taz highlighted my use of reverb and delay in particular and the different ways I could use basic stock plugins to have my vocals sitting nice and not have my lost amongst the instrumentation.

Personal Development Plan

SPECIFIC

- I am re-mixing and mastering my debut EP 'ALIEN[E]P'
- I am releasing my ALIEN[E]P on all streaming platforms including Spotify, Apple Music and TIDAL
- I am launching a successful marketing and promotion campaign
- I am releasing a music video for my lead single as part of promotion and marketing campaign
- I am hosting a listening party with live performances from ALIEN[E]P

MEASURABLE

- I am receiving feedback from my family and friends directly
- I observing my analytics from social media promotions such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok to
- I am receiving feedback from my performance at my listening party

ATTAINABLE

- I am giving myself 6 months to release my EP. This includes mixing, mastering and distribution
- I will create and launch my marketing campaign within a 2 - 4 month period
- I will plan and rehearse for a listening party in 2 months

REALISTIC

- I am releasing my final project within a 6 month period. This gives me enough time to organise effectively and professionally.
- I am throwing my listening party 4-2 weeks before EP official release
- I am launching my marketing campaign 1 month prior EP release and 2 months after

TIMEBOUND

- I am tracking my progress weekly. By staying on top of activities and communicating with my team, I will be able to ensure my project runs on schedule.
- I have 6 months to release my EP for the Summer 2022
- I am putting on a live performance in the autumn of 2022

My personal development plan is a plan I have put in place to help serve me over the next year. By the end of 2022 I would like to have released my debut EP *ALIEN[E]P* within the first 6

months of the year. This gives me enough time to perfect the project and have it remixed and mastered professionally in order to compete commercially. For the next half of the year I would like to launch an authentic and effective marketing campaign across a variety of platforms, including social media. Part of my promotion will include a music video release and a live listening party performance. In order for me to achieve this within a year is an opportunity that excites me, but frightens me at the same time. This course as a whole really gave me a taste into the real world, and what it really takes to be an artist today. That being said, there isn't anything more I would want to achieve, therefore I recognise that I have a lot of work to put in.

Although my communication is getting better and I am a lot more vocal than I once was, I would still like to work on voicing my opinion more. It is important for me to have the ability to give correct instructions to those that I hire. Studio time can be quite costly and the last thing I want to do is spend money and be unsatisfied with my final project. This leads to my next area of development, building relationships. As mentioned one of my concerns was not having my own producer to work closely on my project with. Though this is how I feel currently, there is potential in a handful of producers that I am, currently working with. I believe with patience and hard work I could have the right musical relationship needed for future projects.

In terms of musical areas to improve, I personally would like to develop my performance on stage and in the studio. As an inexperienced vocalist, I am not too proud to admit the benefits of regular vocal training sessions. First hand training from a professional on areas such as breathing techniques to pronunciation would be extremely helpful. Not only would this sharpen my live performances, but it will also grant a better performance in the studio. I would also like to develop my ability to work within a team. For a number of years I have independently navigated my way through the music industry. Despite my increased confidence, many people have not always believed in my talent or vision. Therefore I have had to find ways to get things done myself. Whether that is releasing a music video or receiving funding, I haven't had much external help. However in the last few months I have seen the power in collaboration. As I discovered I am not good at everything and nor do I want to do everything. Consequently it is important for me to learn to delegate jobs to those who are rightfully skilled.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
- Talented - Self sufficient - Music connections - Eagerness to learn - Determination - Passion - Catalogue of music - Leadership skills - Friend's home studios - Ability to write music - Ability to compose music - Great hooks - Melodic - Logic Pro knowledge	- Procrastination - Independent - Trust Issues - Self doubt - Busy schedules - Ability to overthink - Less lectures during term to help with production techniques - Lack of experience in production - Lack of knowledge on music theory
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
- Access to studios i.e. Tileyard, Noa Studios, Roundhouse, Friend's studios - Home studio - Collaboration - Friends within the industry - Gigging	- Inability to bring guest to writing rooms at Tileyard due to covid restrictions - Finances - Lack of experience in mix and mastering - Technical knowledge - Competitive field

When reflecting on my project I chose to put together a SWOT Analysis, loosely based on my career so far, but specifically on my time at Tileyard this year. As a whole, I was very pleased with my progress.

When I first set out for this course, the main aspect I wanted to learn was the basic elements of music production. How to produce an entire song myself without having to rely on others. Although this was my plan, things didn't turn out that way once I got stuck into my assignment. Even though I am still new to the game, I recognise my weaknesses and producing is one of them. During my studio sessions and zoom calls, I was able to communicate what instruments I wanted to feature in *Aliene Babe*, *24 Hours*, *Worth The Wait*, *Ready* and *Way Up*, as well as the arrangement of each song. However, my lack of knowledge on music theory and inability to play an instrument, held me back during this project. Despite this recent discovery, I was still proud of what I created individually and collaboratively.

One of my strengths would include my ability to record my own vocals. For years I would spend my days at Roundhouse recording demos to send out or put on Soundcloud. The facilities were affordable and beginner friendly. I grew accustomed to laying down my own vocals. So much so that earlier in the year, I finally invested in my own home studio, making recording even more attainable. So when it came to collaborating with producers abroad, sending my vocals was effortless and immediate. It was also great as studio sessions that tend to be male dominated can be quite intimidating and uncomfortable. The ability to record from home has made me more relaxed during my performance. A factor that many female musicians would appreciate I'm sure. In 2020 Billie Eilish's brother and producer, Finneas O'Connell interviewed with *Pro Sound Network*. He discussed the production process of his sister's debut album *When We Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* "which took place in his bedroom. The Grammy award winning producer talks about how his sister would sit on his bed and record her vocals in what he describes as a "regular room". This familiar and comfortable environment "brought the best out of her" (Harvey. S, 2020) which lead to one of the most charted albums of 2019.

The decision to mix my own tracks was an idea that I contemplated for weeks before finally making the decision. The pressure to have my project at a professional standard was extremely high. I had heard some of my peers' work, which always sounded so polished and ready for radio play. I knew my resources were limited in comparison to some of my peers, but I refused to let that stop me. Though many, including a very head strong fellow student of mine, had reminded me of the difficulty one can face when mixing their own vocals, it was a challenge I wanted to face. I knew I didn't possess the physical ability or technical knowledge to mix my tracks 100% myself, but I was confident in the skills I had learnt during my course to at least take creative control of the mixing process. With the help of my good friend and collaborator

WTSN, I was able to successfully communicate the mixing elements I wanted my tracks to feature. One of the main reasons I took this course was because of my inability to communicate what I wanted during my studio session and this project granted me that opportunity to voice my opinion comfortably.

Skills

SOFT SKILLS	HARD SKILLS
Organisation Time management Communication Creativity Collaboration Adaptability Team work Multitasking Attention to detail	DAW knowledge Mixing Knowledge Technical skills

SUMMARY

Looking back on my project and my time at Tileyard as a whole, I would say I am quite proud of progress this year. I began my course with little to no knowledge of music production and I am ending it with a full project that I will one day release to the world. I definitely feel more confident with my music and have a new sense of belonging within the industry. Being the perfectionist that I am, I wasn't 100% satisfied with my final submission, however I am happy with how far I have come in such a short space of time.

When I think about my future in music, I want to be a well respected artist known for her incredible bodies of work. Whether that is my future EPs, mixtapes or albums, I want to be fully involved in every aspect of the process. It is important to me as not only a female musician but a black female, to have full creative control over my work. In the past women have not always been given that freedom to create freely. Britney Spears and Katy Perry are two examples of female victimisation control, from the music they release to their image. We are now in a time that is changing and women have more control over their careers than ever. Although the journey at times may be difficult and involve a lot of deferred gratification, the reward is priceless.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1.



U.F.O.

Account Owner
Marika Bastien (me)

My release split: 50%

+ Split All

#1 U.F.O.

CANCEL

 Marika Bastien (me)

My track split: 50%

Name

Email 

Split

Dev-Kishan Bhikha

devbhikha@gmail.com 

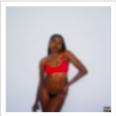
50%

Resend email



Figure of

Appendix 2.



Ready

Account Owner
Marika Bastien (me)

My release split: 50%

+ Split All

#1 Ready

CANCEL

 Marika Bastien (me)

My track split: 50%

Name

Email 

Split

Keith Classiq

info@beatsclassiq.net 

50%

Resend email



Figure of

Appendix 3.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1eUGmzzvahJjOSWgDHuRlv?si=9c39e7f5ddd74d58>



Figure and link for Miguel '*Girl With The Tattoo Enter.lewd*'

Appendix 4.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4i3GraNMzBKze1WsVI38DS?si=32c58cced5cc41e4>

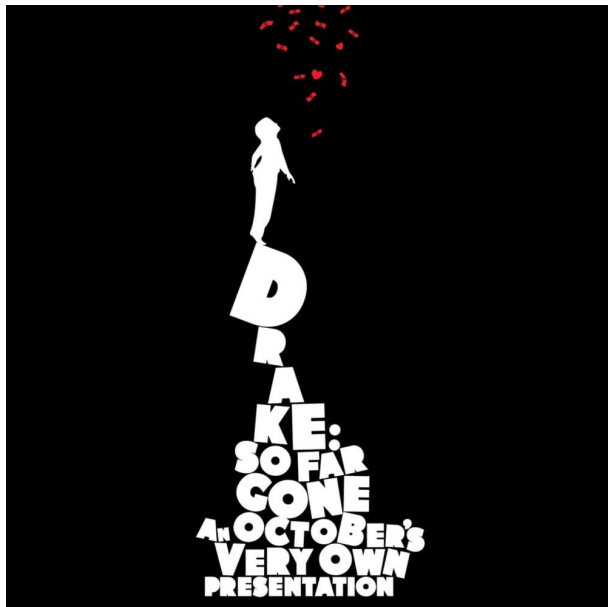


Figure and link for Drake '*Bria's Interlude*'

Appendix 5.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4nSCXiPMaXcQ79c6ahAiKv?si=535aabb5da3149f6>

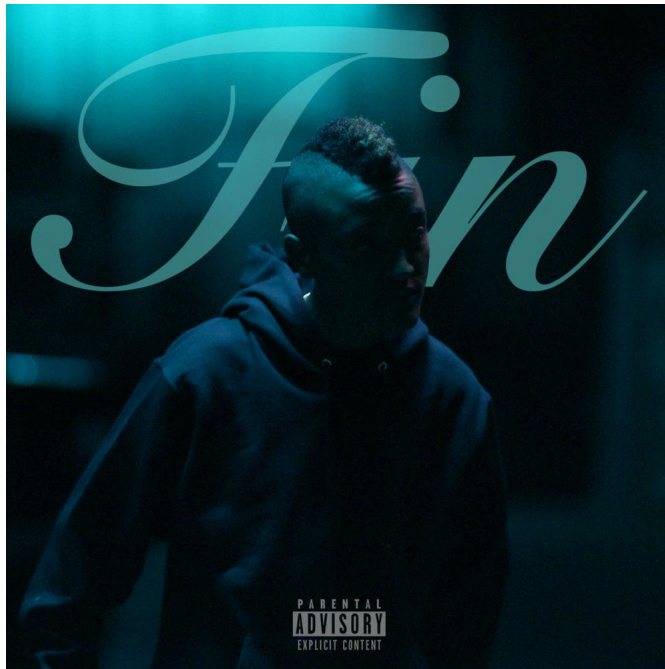


Figure and link for Syd '*Drown In It*'

Appendix 6.

5 AUG

Way up - verse bv idea

📍 Location is not set



Way up - verse melody idea

📍 Location is not set



Way up - hook idea 2

📍 Location is not set



Way up - hook idea

📍 Location is not set



Way up - melody idea

📍 Location is not set



Figure of voice notes. *Way Up* ideas.

Appendix 7.

Re: Beat



Marika Bastien
Sat 11/09/2021 14:35
To: Jacob Disaster



Heyy Jacob,

Here is the draft I've done for Gary's Goldchain. I still need to add a few lyrics to the hook and verse and record the ending, but I just wanted you to hear what I've done so far. I'll get it finished and sent by tomorrow.

Marika 🍷

From: Jacob Disaster <jacobdisastermusic@gmail.com>
Sent: 04 August 2021 21:08
To: Marika Bastien <marika.bastien@outlook.com>
Subject: Re: Beat

Hey hey Marika,

Here is the final beat ! Let me know if you want to change something at the end of the beat :)

See you

Thomas

Gary's Goldchain feat. Malika (V2).wav

Email between me and Jacob Disaster discussing ideas for *Way Up*

Appendix 8.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0BrNxI46Vnt1Ln8jVJFktI?si=8a9ee33ed3964bba>



Figure and link for Kaytranada *Taste*

Appendix 9.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/439X8jGytErRiPnaoUJHju?si=b01a31982c584b0d>



Figure and link for Kaytranada *Chances*

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