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Question

Can I Successfully Create a Concept Album in the spirit of a *Café Del Mar Electronic Genre*
and would such an album be relevant in the streaming world of today?

Introduction

This project has been a long-term passion and has been on my bucket list of things-to-do. This is the first opportunity I have had to dedicate time to investigating this question. Over the next twelve weeks, I will apply the music skills I have acquired during my Honours Degree and this Master's to this project. This will also be an opportunity for me to self-evaluate if I can handle a project of this magnitude and if I have the tenacity to be successful in the music industry as a producer.

I anticipate that the envelope of my time management, work rate & music quality will be pushed to the limit with this project. This project is, in my opinion, a simulation of the real music world and will encompass aspects for example project management, people management (outsourcing), quality control, visual art e.g album / track art.

My plan, since this is my first artist project, is to do a nine-track downtempo electronic, world album under the name *Nomathemba* (pronounced *Noma-them-ba*). Over the last two years since I have been producing, I feel I have progressed immensely. This project will be an accumulation and benchmark of all the work and skills I have acquired during my Master's program.

This essay will discuss the elements of my proposal for the project and will allow me to

- Identify my objectives and goals.
- Build a step-by-step plan to achieve the stated objectives
- Pre-empt any problems that I may encounter.

My Story

To understand why I want to embark on this project I need to give a brief overview of my life and musical background. Born in South Africa I started playing guitar when I was ten years old, and I recall being surrounded by electronic music. During my formative years (the early 2000'ss), the electronic scene was gaining popularity in South Africa (In Session: Orbital (Movement Detroit special), 2021). I recall being enthralled by electronic music, especially when my parents introduced me to Café Del Mar's compilation albums. I recall two albums being particularly influential i.e. Café Del Mar. Vol 13 (Various Artists, 2006) and Best of Café Del Mar (Various Artists, 2004)

My musical education gained a leg up when I attended boarding school where I was required to study all genre's including *Classical*, *Jazz*, *Rock* and *21st Century Music*. However, it was the rhythm and vocals of traditional African Music that fascinated me the most. I used to sing in the school Choir and was the Prefect responsible for Community Engagement; as a result, I used to teach a rural choir, resulting in me being introduced to the vocal group *Ladysmith black Mambazo*, especially their song Nomathemba (BBC Two - The Arts Show, 2012/2013, Episode 2, Ladysmith Black Mambazo perform live, 2021).

My creative influences were further expanded when we spent some years in Bahrain, which exposed me to the Arab culture and music. When I left school, I took a gap year, becoming a ski instructor in Austria, followed by a sailing trip around Ibiza and the Greek islands. These experiences added to my desire to absorb additional cultural influences.

My family now resides between Italy and England and the commute between London and Venice has further expanded my cultural experiences, but my true love is Prague; I find the architectural beauty inspirational.

There are multiple places I have not yet visited; I would like to explore Japan and America. This travel bug will be with me for the rest of my life. I am particularly fascinated with the unique sounds associated with each destination and how I can incorporate them in my music.

Influences & Success

The majority of my productions find their roots in the Café Del Mar influence, maybe because it is unconsciously embedded in my psyche from my childhood. My love for this music was re-ignited over the Covid period when I have been listening to the radio station *Smooth Chill*, which plays a lot of Café Del Mar.

In addition to Café Del Mar compilations, another artist that has had a big impact on me is Bonobo, in particular his albums *Animal Magic* (Bonobo, 2001), *Dial 'M' for Monkey* (Bonobo, 2003) and *Black Sands* (Bonobo, 2010). I envisage myself taking a similar approach to Bonobo since he is also a sample artist. His latest album *The North Borders* was placed in the top 30 in the UK and US, achieving No.1 in the US and UK, and a sell-out concert at Alexander Palace, making Bonobo one of the world's top electronic artists (Bonobo · Biography · Artist RA, 2021).

My Proposal

My proposal is to create a concept album that encompasses the music of the places I visited and lived, in the style of Café Del Mar electronic music. I will research the factors that made the Café Del Mar brand so successful and current industry / music consumer habits to establish if I can create a product that works in the current streaming world.

I would like to create an album with the same texture and sound scrapes mentioned under the section 'My Story', but with my own interpretation.

Conceptually my idea is that each individual song will take its influences from the cities / countries that have been most influential in my life. This connection / influence could be in any form, like the music, local cinema, cultural experiences, and activities (e.g., camping in the desert in Bahrain) etc. The plan is to compose a song, from each place I have lived or visited, then to infuse each song with either a lyrically reference or a culture reference that is unique to that particular place. The places I have considered are the UK, America, Japan, Bahrain, Italy, South Africa, Austria, Australia and Prague.

The Album will consist of six to nine songs, each track being about 4-6 min in length and DJ friendly. Café Del Mar origins are from the DJ scene with multiple DJ artists having performed at Café Del Mar in Ibiza (Spain) from the 80s until now (The Story | Café del Mar 2021). I would like each song to be evaluated on its own merit, and the album to be eclectic mix that takes the listener on a musical ambient journey.

Whilst the music is at the centre of this project, I feel visual art can really draw a listener in and garner interest. I originally wanted to create an animation to accompany one of the songs, but the opinion of the animator that I am collaborating with is that to combine music and animation professionally, to achieve the required aesthetic and storytelling, will require at least five months. The problem is I do not have five months or the required budget, so the conclusion is I need to change my vision.

My plan now is to do an album cover, but in the form of a fifteen second animation or Gif (*Graphic Interchange format*). This is a “*type of computer file that contains a still or moving image*” (GIF, 2021).

Down scaling the project, while equally challenging, makes it more achievable and will allow me more time to focus on the music. The proposal is now to do three Gif's, each GIF being ten seconds to one minute in length. The anticipated cost is estimated to be in the range of about £60-£250 per GIF, including a one revision done by a freelancer (Fiver, 2021).

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I selected a GIF animation length of ten seconds to one minute because I am of the opinion, that in this digital age of kinaesthetic learning, the visual medium has the biggest impact (*people listen with their eyes*). The attention span of the average person has reduced, on account of social media. Measured at twelve seconds in 2000 to eight second in 2021, which is, believe it or not, equivalent to that of a goldfish (Human Attention Span Shortens To 8 Seconds Due To Digital Technology: 3 Ways To Stay Focused, 2021).

Having decided to utilise GIF's (*moving art pieces*) I envisage an opportunity in the future, if the album were to be successful, to convert the GIFs into NFTs (*Non-Fungible-Token*) each with an assigned physical value e.g., a personal vinyl attached to the NFTs. In 2021, NFTs became a commercial reality for artists, creators and investors. NFTs can be digital assets, which fans can acquire (Everything You Need to Know about NFTs—the Crypto Art Selling For Millions, 2021).

Kings of Leon have already established a proof of concept. They marketed their latest album with digital assets attached to it. This was in the form of *Golden Tickets*, which gave the given owner four guaranteed front row tickets for their next show. In addition, the holder was given access to exclusive album artwork and a limited-edition Gold Vinyl. The sale of the NFTs generated an additional revenue of about \$2 million (Kings of Leon have generated \$2 million from NFT sales of their new album, 2021).

Another example is that of Steve Aoki who sold his NFT collection for \$4.2 million. These examples illustrate that NFT's, created with block chain technology, have created a new assets class and revenue stream for musicians (Kings of Leon have generated \$2 million from NFT sales of their new album, 2021).

How will I create the elements for the album?

Music

I will be collaborating with one of my good friends (Baris Hewitt), with whom I have been successfully collaborating for the last three years, since he understands my style and workflow. I will also be working with songwriters to assist with the lyrics. I will be utilising session musicians for this project, especially drummers to replace drum grooves and create samples for use in the tracks. I will arrange recording sessions for the vocals. The time in-studio will be more beneficial with the mixing process.

Art/Animations

The art aspect of the project will be achieved through collaboration with a good friend from school (Myles Brown) who is a qualified animator. He has kindly agreed to assume the role of Art Producer for this project. We will be jointly collaborating on the album art, but the animations will be outsourced using the platform *Fiver*, with Myles overseeing the process.

Skills

I am excited about the prospect of being in a studio by myself; I have never had this opportunity. I consider this as the final jig saw piece to my puzzle of production skills. I will finally be able to learn how to mix using out board gear in an acoustically treated room.

I have been using headphones for almost the whole of 2021 and whilst I have achieved a lot, I miss being able to mix using proper speakers and equipment, which would have, in my opinion, undoubtedly elevate my music.

My objective with this project is to improve the automation on my tracks. I think that the tracks that I envisaged to produce will need life breathed into them, through dynamics because of their proposed minimalist nature. The method used to mix the songs drastically influences their reception (good or bad) (Owsinski, 2014)

There are other techniques I would like to explore through this project for example (i) top-down mixing, to understand if this technique is worth adopting and (ii) mixing in mono, to understand why this technique so highly regarded (Owsinski, 2014)

Another objective for me is to learn how to story board and communicate my concept to visual artists. I want to experience the process of communicating ideas, because within the arts there is always collaboration between mediums e.g., film and art.

Benchmarks/Quality Control

Professional Feedback

I intend to obtain four opinions / comments from industry professionals regarding the mix, the song form and aesthetic through a A&R specialist to see if the songs are pleasing to ear and have a demographic. I would like two other professionals to give their opinion on the projects in its entirety. The four professionals I have selected (assuming they agree) are.

- (i) My mentor Martin Ware.
- (ii) If possible, Sister Bliss (because Faithless are in the same genre), I feel her expertise in the electronic music would be invaluable.
- (iii) For mixing, Alessandro Favero, a mixing engineer / technician at Tileyard.
- (iv) Someone in A&R e.g. Jamie Searls, to get a perspective on the *saleability* of the album and songs on where and how to market the album.

Peer Feedback / Listing Party

This is important since in my opinion the criticism / commentary from peers can be more poignant and honest. The best feedback I have received, in my Masters to date, is from peers. The idea is to play the mixed album to them and ask for written feedback via email.

Mix test

The plan with this test is to record a DJ mix that would include my songs, plus other songs of a similar genre, and if possible, show case the songs at *Campfire*. This will enable me to hear my songs, and the reference tracks, in a real-world setting and for me to ascertain if my music is of the same standard as the references tracks, i.e. I want my music to sound as professional and as polished as the comparative songs.

Timeline / Schedule

The timeline is broken down into weekly objectives. I have twelve weeks to complete this project. My plan is to complete a minimum of one song per week, over an eight-week period.

The remaining four weeks will be dedicated to mixing. The project plan is illustrated in the Gantt chart below.

Each week will be planned individually on the Sunday prior to the commencement of the week, to make the planning flexible, since adjustments to the planning are anticipated. A draft Gantt chart is below, which will be updated weekly depending on progress.



WEEKLY GANTT CHART

keeping on track with master's project
PROJECT NAME

Jon-Henri Clayton
OWNER

1/05/2020
START DATE

2/08/2020
END DATE

Task Name	Start Week	End Week	WK01	WK02	WK03	WK04	WK05	WK06	WK07	WK08	WK09	WK10	WK11	WK12
Creating concept Art ideas	WK01	WK08												
Creating concept Music idea	WK01	WK03												
Proposal Essay	WK01	WK03												
Commission 2D art landscapes	WK04	WK05												
Have animation commissioned	WK06	WK08												
Animation reviews and fixes	WK08	WK11												
Song fleshing out and finishing	WK04	WK06												
Mixing	WK06	WK08												
Listing party and feedback	WK11	WK11												
Music Amendments	WK10	WK12												
Reflective Essay	WK07	WK12												
Mastering	WK10	WK11												
Industry professionals feed back	WK10	WK10												
Studio time (if needed that week)	WK04	WK08												

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(Management, 2021)

Risks

One of the objectives of this project is to quantify if my proposed music genre is too niche to pursue and if I need to change my creative trajectory. In addition, this will be my first opportunity to evaluate my project management skills i.e., from track creation, to mixing, people management, quality control, time management and meeting deadlines.

This is of particular concern to me, and I am interested to self-evaluate how I cope, especially since I have ADD. Extensive documentation exists on how adults with ADD struggle with such aspects as time management, tasks completion, staying on task and completing the task in a specified time scale ((ADHD) - Symptoms, 2021) (Segal, 2021).

Conclusion

Although this project is ambitious, and its multiple aspects will push the envelope of both my talent and management skills. I feel this project is a natural progression for my development.

Café Del Mars's compilation albums remain influential on my style of music and production.

The creation of my concept compilation album is my form of paying homage to the music that inspired me. This will also be my foray into creating my first full album, which has the potential to not only create opportunities for me within the music industry, but to establish a commercial music portfolio to show my diversity.

Whilst this project is a passion project for my Masters, I would also like to ascertain if there is a market for this genre. There are specific reasons why I chose *Café Del Mar* and *Bonobo* as my references, not only for the creative inspiration, but also to understand the marketability, sell- ability and demographic of this music genre.

I would consider this project a success if I manage to:

- *Create and mix & master six tracks*
- *Create a one loop animation (for one track)*
- *Create GIF album cover*
- *Record my own drum samples and use them in my tracks. (Being a sample artist, this is a primary objective)*

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