

MBO0123: Creative Music Management (BMTY7000)**Lecturers: Michael-Dann Joseph, Harry Leckstein****Submission Element 2: Reflective Summary**

The main objective of the group work that will be the subject of the following reflection was to create a portfolio for the release campaign of an original single including its remix and all related media material. In order to do this, groups of three to four students were to come together and were given a theoretical budget of £5,000. Alongside my teammates Elle Bowen, Kirsten Davis, and Emma Squire, I was originally responsible for the creation of digital content (such as the website) and social media. As the artist we originally wanted to work with for the campaign dropped out at short notice, I was also responsible for the exchange with the “new” artist we decided to work with instead, as she is an Austrian singer and songwriter. Since our group is made up exclusively of students from the online blended degree programme Music Business (Tileyard Education, 2023), we also relied exclusively on digital technologies for the implementation of the group project. This applies to meetings, shared folder structures as well as the creation of the actual content. The following summary shall provide an overview of the development of the project as well as my personal involvement, experiences, and learnings.

Since there was no one in our group with a songwriting or producing background, we agreed that we would take a fully mixed and mastered single from an artist for the campaign. Initially, we had hoped to collaborate with a musician from the neighboring master’s programs at Tileyard, but as already indicated, we unfortunately no longer received any answers from the originally intended artist. As an alternative, we decided to collaborate with Austrian singer and song writer “Maia Onda” (YouTube, 2023a) who I have known for a couple of years now. Maia has been making original music since she was 13 and usually writes, composes and sometimes even produces her own songs. I contacted her without further ado, informed her about the project and she was very enthusiastic. A short time later she had already provided us with two unreleased but fully produced singles to work with. One song was clearly more upbeat than the other, but everyone in the group liked the melancholic one better, which is why we decided to go with the piano ballad “Echoes” for this assignment. Thus, even though we worked with a finished single, we also included the costs for recording, mixing, and mastering in the budget plan, as these would theoretically also be part of the entire campaign. To fulfil another obligatory component of the portfolio, my colleague Elle then reached out to a contact from her circle who knows a lot about remixes and regularly creates his own musical works. In order for us to start creating the first drafts for the artwork and digital content in the next step, I asked Maia to provide us with a collection of visual material. Based on the photos she shared with us, her preferred font type, and previous posts on her social media pages, we then started to create a mood board for the single together as a group. In doing so, we tried to take inspiration from other, already established female artists (Clarkson, 2009; Perri, 2010; Kelly, 2012) that either she as a person or the music reminded us of and incorporate these inputs into the look and feel of the assets we were going to create for the single “Echoes”. After we had agreed on a direction during the joint creation of the mood board and assigned the different parts of the release campaign to the group members, it was up to the individual students to contribute their inputs.

Fundamentally, I contributed a floor plan for a possible website for Maia, as she does not currently have one of her own yet. In doing so, I was very much inspired by the style of the mood board and the inspirations it contains. In the course of this creation process, I also came up with three different artworks – potentially for social media or other digital platforms – that partly also included the imagery provided by Maia. In addition to this, it was an important task for me to create the bridge between my group members and the musician. In the course of creating the individual media assets, questions naturally kept coming up, which is why I had regular exchanges with Maia. I also did some research on her musical career myself to provide the group with basic information on her efforts and development so far. This included, for example, the musician's network and current management, social media preferences, previous press appearances and locations where she has already played live performances. Even though Maia's manager also has media contacts beyond Austria, it was very helpful in this case to find input from my colleagues regarding similar venues etc. in London. When it came to the actual planning of the release campaign, I provided both strategic and creative input. This included, for example, the selection of the release date, the choice of the repeating hook in the creation of teaser clips from the official music video or the setting up of a pre-save campaign.

Since no one from our group was directly involved in the creation or production of the song itself, there is not much we can say about the influence of digital technologies in this respect. What is very clear, however, is that we are individuals who live in different places – I, for one, even live in a different country with a different time zone – and yet have managed to put together a comprehensive campaign. That can really only be done with the help of digital technologies. After all, our collaboration started out with a virtual meeting where we also began to create a shared document so that everyone could contribute their thoughts and we could keep track of everything. In terms of further project management tools, we have relied on a cloud-based storage service that has allowed us to build a folder structure for the different content elements we have designed over the last few weeks. In fact, there seems to be no end to the use of such technology in creating a digital campaign. For example, to support our campaign with data and, above all, to optimise it for the right target group(s), we made use of the evaluations of the Chartmetric (Chartmetric, 2023) platform. Thanks to several open databases on the world wide web, it was also possible for us to choose between seemingly endless templates and downloads, which was very helpful when deciding on a font that matches Maia's brand and the single "Echoes". In terms of creative work, it would be hard to imagine creating any kind of visual content without software like Adobe Photoshop or similar applications from the Adobe Creative Cloud (Adobe, 2023). For this campaign in particular, it was exciting to experiment with Maia's existing visuals and edit them according to the mood of the single.

It stands to reason that digital technologies will, of course, not only help with the creation of the campaign, but also with the (in our case hypothetical) publication and, above all, wider distribution of the single and its associated content. At this point, however, one must also note that thanks to those very technologies, it has never been possible for so many people to release music without the financial, technical, or other support of major labels. This is precisely why the competition supposedly is so fierce these days (O'Dair and Beavon, 2017, p. 472). At the same time, only a recent study (Watson, Watson, and Tompkins, 2022, p. 34) has again proven that there is a direct connection between social media follower numbers and streaming income.

If an artist gets more followers, this also has a visibly positive impact on the revenue generated. The authors could also identify “a correlation between followers on Spotify and total live music royalties, again with an increase in followers having a significant impact on royalty income for artist,” (ibid.). With this knowledge in mind, it was clear that we would of course support the release of the song with social media campaigns including Meta (Meta, 2023) platforms, TikTok (TikTok, 2023), YouTube (YouTube, 2023b) and Google ads (Google, 2023) as well as a release via the distributor DistroKid (DistroKid, 2023) to reach as large an audience as possible. A live performance in London, which would be Maia’s UK live debut, should not only boost her social media followers but also her Spotify listener and follower numbers. In addition, we have of course planned for contacting relevant media persons or institutions, which are described in more detail in the portfolio itself.

In basic terms, all the group members very quickly adopted a similar dynamic and way of working, which was probably due to the fact that everyone continued to work on the campaign when they just had time besides their jobs and online lectures. We also met again virtually at regular intervals to clarify any open questions or ambiguities and to check on progress. There were also no difficulties in distributing the tasks, as everyone oriented themselves to the topics that best corresponded to their own strengths and interests. In some cases, we shared larger task packages; for example, we all contributed to the overall release and marketing plan. Especially with visual content, we also asked each other for feedback again and again, because it is not so easy to notice inconsistencies or sloppy mistakes all by yourself. What I had received particularly good feedback for was my input regarding the release timing. In fact, a simple blog post (Ditto Music Distribution, 2022) alerted me to the fact that one should think carefully about the timing of the release of a single. Accordingly, I thought a little about the message of the song, which was also revealed to us by Maia, and tried to find the most suitable time around which a comprehensible storyline could be formed. I would not have believed that such a simple strategic consideration would meet with so much approval.

As already briefly mentioned, there were also a few challenges that we had to master as a group. One of them was definitely the cancellation at short notice of the artist we initially wanted to work with. While we contacted her quite soon after we had received the requirements for the portfolio and our group had found each other, we waited a bit too long for her response and hoped for her participation. Even though once we had decided to look for a new artist, we all quickly came up with alternative proposals and also agreed that Maia would be the best fit for the task, we could have done this much earlier and accordingly spent even more time planning the actual campaign. What was also challenging at times was the fact that several people from the group were involved in the creation and design of visual content. While it is not necessarily a bad thing to have different interpretations of the common starting point (in our case the mood board and the single itself), it was sometimes a bit of a hindrance in our case. Since we had not appointed a creative director per se to keep an overview of exactly the aspect of a consistent look and feel, a few assets had to be reworked or rather adapted so that in the end there would still be a consistent image. Despite all the advantages that digital technologies bring, you are of course still limited to a certain extent if you never meet in person. Especially for the creative phase, where ideas are constantly being generated, a lot of experimentation is taking place and quick, short feedback is often needed, a brainstorming session in presence would have been

beneficial, for example, in order to avoid something like inconsistencies in style. At the same time, new and exciting ideas often emerge during common breaks that are spent outside the actual working environment. A more personal challenge, which should perhaps also not be completely ignored, is the fact that I personally know the artist for whom we created the release campaign and felt a little restricted creatively as a result. On the one hand, I put pressure on myself because I wanted to make sure she would be happy with the material. On the other hand, it was sometimes difficult to find the balance between the smooth continuation of the way she promoted her previous singles and trying out new approaches.

Overall, I think we can be very satisfied with the release campaign and our collaboration as a group. It was exciting and encouraging to see that such a group project can be conducted completely remotely with the help of digital technologies. What I will definitely take away for future projects or even jobs is that with an artist's single release campaign like this, there definitely needs to be enough time buffers built in. Even up-and-coming artists like Maia are often on the road for days at a time working on new music or their skills, which often prolongs response times. This, in turn, should not affect the quality of the campaign in any way. Furthermore, it would be important to clearly distribute not only the individual areas of responsibility but also the actual roles in future group projects. On the one hand, this prevents several people from working on the same tasks at the same time, and on the other hand, it avoids inconsistent results that have to be corrected. This may not have tragic consequences in a hypothetical campaign, but efficiency simply plays a very important role in everyday working life. What I have found for myself personally is that I definitely prefer to be involved in strategic as well as creative processes and decisions, occasionally also directly in the creation of visual content such as artwork. I still have a lot of catching up to do when it comes to budgeting or especially the data and number-related side of marketing. What I also learned is that the creation of a release campaign in the music sector – and on an international level – is very different from other campaigns. In the course of my professional career, I have already worked in on several PR campaigns for a communications agency in Berlin as well as on marketing campaigns for the start-up where I am currently employed. However, even if you have acquired skills in project management, media work and writing, that does not mean that you know which distributors to work with, which song snippets to share when or which locations are best chosen for release events straight away. That is precisely why it would be exciting for the future to actually implement at least part of the campaign – regardless of whether the single or just the remix is released, or, for example, the live event takes place. Even when creating the campaign itself, it is advisable, if the group members are not in the same place, to at least get together for one or two joint meetings in presence, in order to avoid creative processes and decisions being made exclusively in front of one's own laptop.

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