

Creative Music Management (BMTY7000) – Harry Leckstein

Reflective Essay

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Creative Music Management – Reflective Essay

Working collaboratively on a single release with a £5000 budget was an exciting assignment to be tasked with and one I felt somewhat prepared for having released singles independently before. However, there was a lot of learning along the way, including from my teammates. Not only did our different life experiences add to the outcome of our portfolio but the way we worked as a team also contributed to this. Therefore, this essay will also consider Tuckman's teamwork model to analyse the way we worked together and how this influenced the outcome. We also engaged different technologies during the process, in part for the creation of content but also as organisational tools. This reflection will focus on pivotal moments of the portfolio task, highlighting areas where conflicting ideas needed a resolution, as well as other moments where all three viewpoints were needed in order to reach an agreed conclusion. I will also reflect upon my own input and learning during this process and what I can take forward as an independent artist for the future.

"The A Team" was a name we adopted for ourselves from the hit TV show and was the first step we took in uniting ourselves as a team. Although comical, it also gave us a brand and made us feel more like a label or management team as we became more than just Anna, Wyn and Felix. Initially starting as a four but quickly losing a member from the course, our first hurdle was presented to us however, we did not feel it had left the three of us with more work than necessary. This is because it was always our intention to play to our team's strengths, as this always makes for 'the most effective teams' (Aquino et al 2022). Within the group we had an unsigned artist, a professional producer, and someone who had worked in a corporate role at one of the most respected companies in the music industry; with the main requirements being to A&R a track, plan the artwork, an EPK and budgets, it seemed clear that, between the three of us, our strengths were easily dividable.

As an independent releasing artist, I took the lead in suggesting we use one of my tracks as the focus of the project. The reasoning for this was twofold: to save money on commissioning a song and for there to be a strong connection for us as a group to the release. I therefore offered the group my full repertoire as I wanted the A&R process to be as thorough as possible with all that I, the artist, had to offer. While the group were listening to the tracks, I reached out to Nick Halkes, Artist Manager of The Prodigy, who we had met whilst working

on this project. Asking how he A&Rs and what, to him, makes a song ‘exciting’, as he’d put it in our lecture, he responded that it is difficult to summarise but gave a mix of adjectives that contributed to his thinking: “dynamism, creativity, freshness of approach, connection, potential” (Halkes 2022) (Appendix 1). The group came back, having decided on using my most recently written song ‘Mother’, and so I asked them for their reasoning to see if it matched with Nick’s view of A&R. Felix responded:

“Looking at popular culture [at the moment], acoustic singer/songwriter compositions are [trending] as releases [...]. The simplicity [and] quality of the material allows it to sit within that spectrum perfectly without the necessity to rewrite or expand the narrative to suit” (Milton 2022) (Appendix 2).

It was therefore interesting to hear how Nick Halkes seems to ‘feel’ a song and Felix, in agreement with Wyn, had made a theoretical judgment taking into consideration the current market and industry standards.

Due to my experience of releasing songs on small budgets, the £5000 seemed like a luxury but I knew from previous experience where we could prioritise the spending and suggested we put a lot into marketing. The team agreed with this, and we then divided up the tasks. Ensuring the track was of release standard and arranging a remix was tasked to Felix - a producer with twenty years’ experience in the music industry. Felix also volunteered to work on the Electronic Press Kit (EPK), also having experience of this. I opted to lead on the artwork and iconography, something I had always done myself for my previous releases, as well as managing my own social media promotions so volunteered to add an artist-led social media plan too. Wyn therefore, deeming himself “the least ‘creative’ person to have stepped foot in Tileyard” [!], took a lead on the operational budget and the planning of a launch gig (Morgan 2022) (Appendix 2).

Using technology to keep organised was carried out using Google Drive; the capability that this freeware possesses for the sharing of work, along with its other offering Google Meets, enabled us to work on things simultaneously and ask each other questions when new documents appeared, rather than wait for a scheduled meeting which could have resulted in the delayed resolution of any issues. Upon reflection, we could have also worked with Gant charts in order to better plan our time across the project as there were times when Felix seemed ahead of progress on his tasks compared to those Wyn and I had assigned ourselves to, which sometimes left feelings of our team being not so ‘together’. However, we were

already adhering to Tuckman's model of teamwork, with 'forming' being the first, and arguably most important, stage as we had already recognised a 'commitment to a shared purpose, as well as initial bonding and establish[ed] connections' (Aquino et al 2022).

The 'storming' stage of Tuckman's model cannot be ignored however, even in a harmonious team; a phase that includes 'conflict based on differences of opinions' (Graffius 2022).

Having two people who have released music in the team, on two very different scales, there were some points where it became clear that my understanding of this project differed from Felix's. I had entered this project with an understanding of how to release a song independently with a set budget and thus had an idea about what needed to be done. Felix, having worked in the industry at a much higher level, consequently knowing a lot more than Wyn or I have ever known, provided some suggestions that led to confusion. A good example of this was when Felix produced a one sheet that included reviews from well established music publications and a tour of the UK and America. Felix informed us that this is what would be needed in order to sell an act such as mine and for the single to not be a loss leader. Whilst understanding the logic, Wyn and I questioned whether the tour fitted in with the £5k budget but Felix explained to us that a promoter takes care of those costs; however, as a group, we had not discussed the engagement of a promoter. There was a great learning opportunity for us in this moment. When we discussed this as a group, we acknowledged that a promoter's work is subsidiary to the work we, as the acting manager, carries out, and so we concluded that our priority for this project was to see what our £5k can achieve and thus retired the one sheet created by Felix from the portfolio.

The 'norming' and 'performing' stages of Tuckman's model seemed to play out simultaneously during our process, and the next part of the process I'd like to highlight demonstrates the 'high motivation' and 'trust' we had built to problem solve together (Graffius 2022). When discussing the requirements of the task, it was optional to plan a launch gig. Throughout the entirety of this project, we had to consider the risks and benefits of each decision. A single launch is always something I've undertaken as an artist to help with promotion and is thus something we agreed on as it can also increase revenue. Although this was Wyn's task, we all played a part in considering which venue, and the way we wanted to run the event, would 'constructively contribute' to the process (Hopewell and Hanlon 2003, p.221). In *The Music Management Bible*, Hopewell and Hanlon suggest that an agent can also be 'responsible for bringing offers of sponsorship' which is something we then considered (2003, p. 221). We wanted to honour the theme of Mother's Day and felt a

women's charity may be best for this and initially discussed charities such as Breast Cancer UK or Women's Refuge. We ended up deciding on a charity that more closely matched me as the artist, The Amy Winehouse Foundation, focussing instead on the cohesion of the brand we were creating. For the purposes of this exercise, we did not discuss sponsorship with the charity, but this could be a consideration for future, real-life projects.

Regarding the researching of different venues, Wyn had reached out to us to ask for our thoughts regarding a support act for the gig. Engaging a support act for gigs is an important consideration as it can 'create opportunities for the headliners, promoters, venues' and, more importantly for us, 'gives music-lovers another reason to buy tickets to a concert' (Henrie 2022). Felix explained that "it's important for the narrative of the show that the support acts are not a higher quality than the headline act" (Milton 2022) (Appendix 2), which then prompted my suggestion of using Talentbanq as an option. We had recently learnt through guest speaker James Gamble of the costs for that venue and that the ticket price could be set to what we wanted. He also mentioned that Talentbanq were able to provide a support act of a similar vein if required. One of the downsides to the Talentbanq venue was the capacity of forty, meaning a low ceiling on the amount of revenue and covering of costs that could be made. Therefore, we settled on The Water Rats due to the established reputation and higher capacity.

Regarding my individual input to the process, I spent time on the artwork and brand of the release. As an unknown artist, it has always been an intention to use striking artwork instead of a self-portrait for the purpose of standing out. This approach also gives 'musicians the chance to [distil] the ethos and sonics of their music into a physical representation' (Campbell 2021). As detailed in the portfolio, using contemporary art is something I had done previously and considering cohesion as an artist, cements an artists' brand (Hyatt 2021). It was therefore an initial idea to use the same artist I'd used before, Sarah Beth, to commission a new artwork. However further research, looking into songs about mothers, depicted a theme of using childhood photos. I felt this still stayed true to the personal brand I had created as an artist and used this to confirm the choice for the final artwork.

In a modern society, image is specifically important, not least for the artwork of a song but also because this is 'synchronous' with social media too (Hyatt 2021). This was why, above the money put into marketing, we felt it important to include artist-led social media ideas. As Seth Godin says in his book *Tribes*: "Marketing is the act of telling stories about the things

we make – stories that sell and stories that spread” (2008, p.13). Using Instagram is an easy way to tell these stories and is a tool that is “designed to connect” and to “amplify [...] work”, therefore creating a personal connection with the consumer (Godin 2008, p.5). The technology used to create content was Canva.com which is an easy to use, inexpensive online tool for creating social media content; in comparison to needing to ask a friend with photoshop skills to help with the creation of the single artwork, Canva is much more time efficient (Godavarthi 2021). It is useful to note that a ‘major disadvantage’ to this accessible system is the risk of ‘brand reputation’ as the templates may be recognisable – this is why we pursued the photoshopped image for the artwork that we could then use as a base for the social media posts, along with original photos (Godavarthi 2021). Another way to advantage social media promotion is via tools such as hootsuite.com; a scheduler tool that can be used to plan social media campaigns in advance. The downside to hootsuite.com for an independent artist is its pricing structure at £39 per month. However, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all have their own scheduling functions at no cost; this is just less streamlined than using a tool like hootsuite but all useful tools for low-cost marketing projects.

We were also introduced to Alex Brees during the course of this project who is the founder of another extremely beneficial marketing tool; an app called ‘un:hurd’. This new technology uses existing data from an artist’s music platforms and social media to provide suggestions for the best ways of marketing at affordable cost which, if successful, can eventually increase revenue. As their website states, Un:hurd ‘uses proprietary technology and AI to turn music data into stronger promotional campaigns for artists’ (Un:hurd 2022). Investing £1.5k into marketing, this covers a four-week campaign, and that money expires with or without results; by using data, Un:hurd could help continue the attention of a song long after its release.

The last technology I’d like to refer to is Felix’s suggestion of using bandzoogle.com for the EPK. This was great learning for me regarding excellent online tools that can be used for releases which compares to the simpler technology I have engaged with previously, using Microsoft Word to design the EPK which was then sent as a PDF. To consider the true benefit of this all-in-one EPK site, I spoke to music journalist for The Quietus, Patrick Clarke, to see if he, someone who receives “about a hundred press releases a day”, preferred this style of EPK (Clarke 2022). He agreed that “little things like clicking out to open a new tab might mean [he has] to move on to the next one” and our bandzoogle link gave him “more or less” everything he needed (Clarke 2022) (Appendix 3). He also kindly gave us feedback about the arrangement of the page which we decided to incorporate.

The main reflection of this task would be to have kept a closer eye on the budget – we did not stop to consider our expenditure at set times of the project and realised a little too late that we had invested a lot into the single launch gig which can generate profit but also has the potential to cause loss. I would've also liked to have seen what an extension of the marketing budget could've achieved via Soul Food or looking outside our previous connections to decide whether the money could have achieved more elsewhere. We also realised that we hadn't given enough guidance or a set process for feedback on the remix which is an imperative realisation to be able to deliver fully suitable work by a set deadline. Overall, there was a lot of learning during this process with a result that we, The A Team, were extremely proud of. Lots of new technologies used and lots of insight learnt from one another, with many methods I will take forward for my next release which may well be 'Mother'.

Word Count 2572

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Screenshot of email sent to me from Nick Halkes on 10th November 2022



Nick Halkes

to Anna ▼

10 Nov 2022, 17:54



Hi anna. Its not easy to sum up what exactly creates excitement for me - dynamism ,creativity,freshness of approach , connection , potential

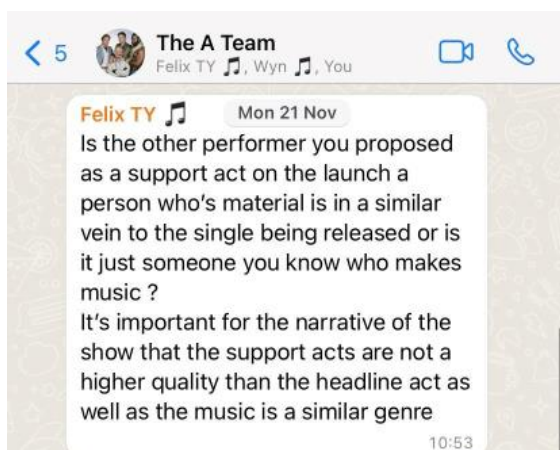
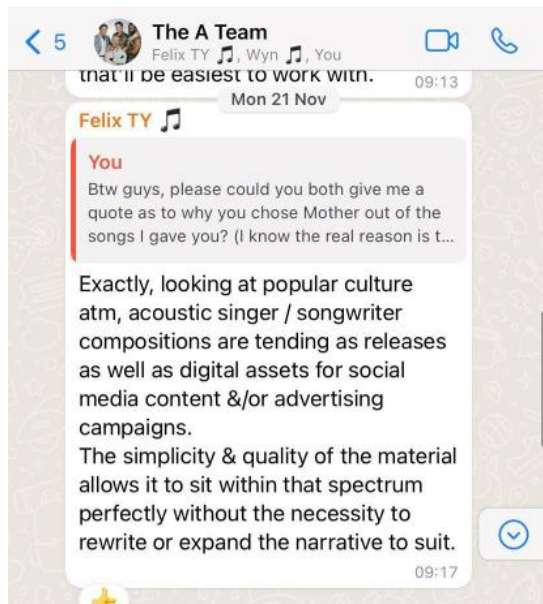
A mix of the above

Come say hi after the next session!

N

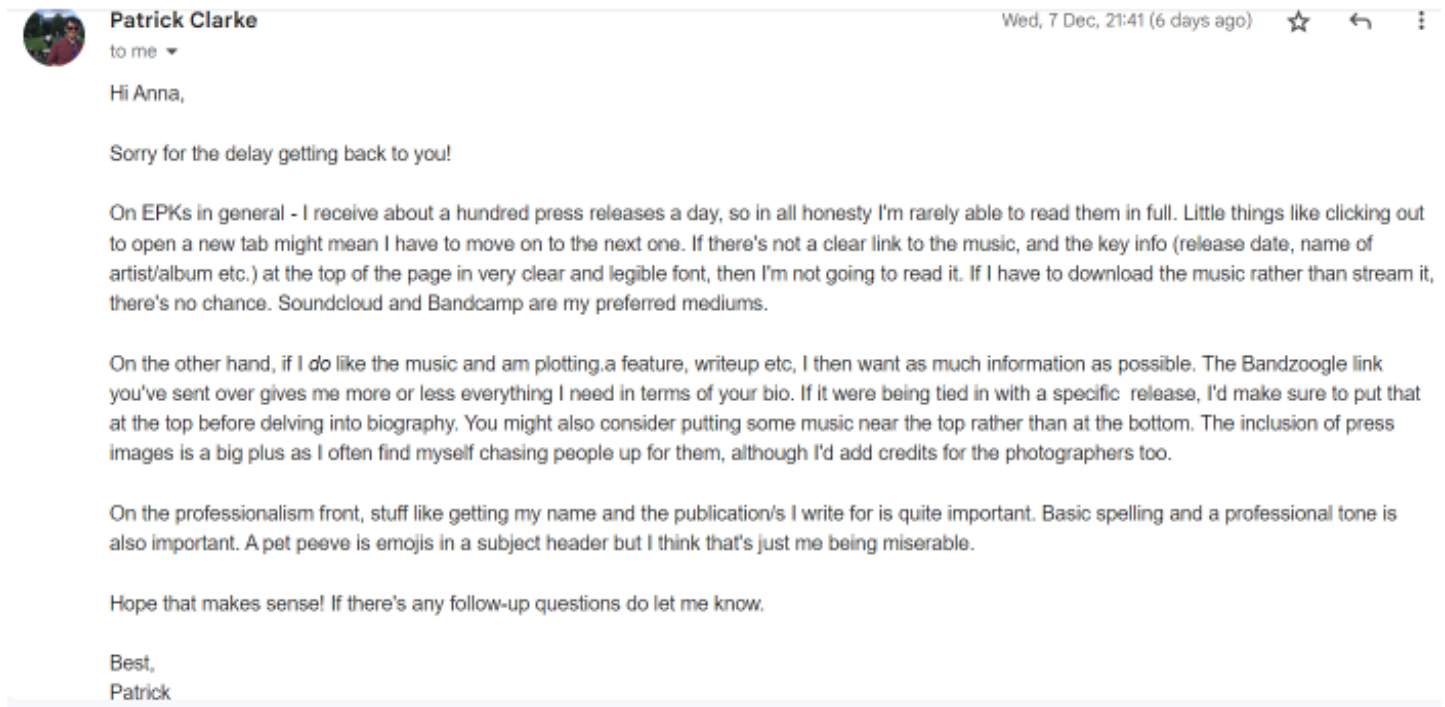
Appendix 2

Screenshots from the messages referred to in the essay sent from Felix Milton and Wyn Morgan to 'The A Team' WhatsApp group.

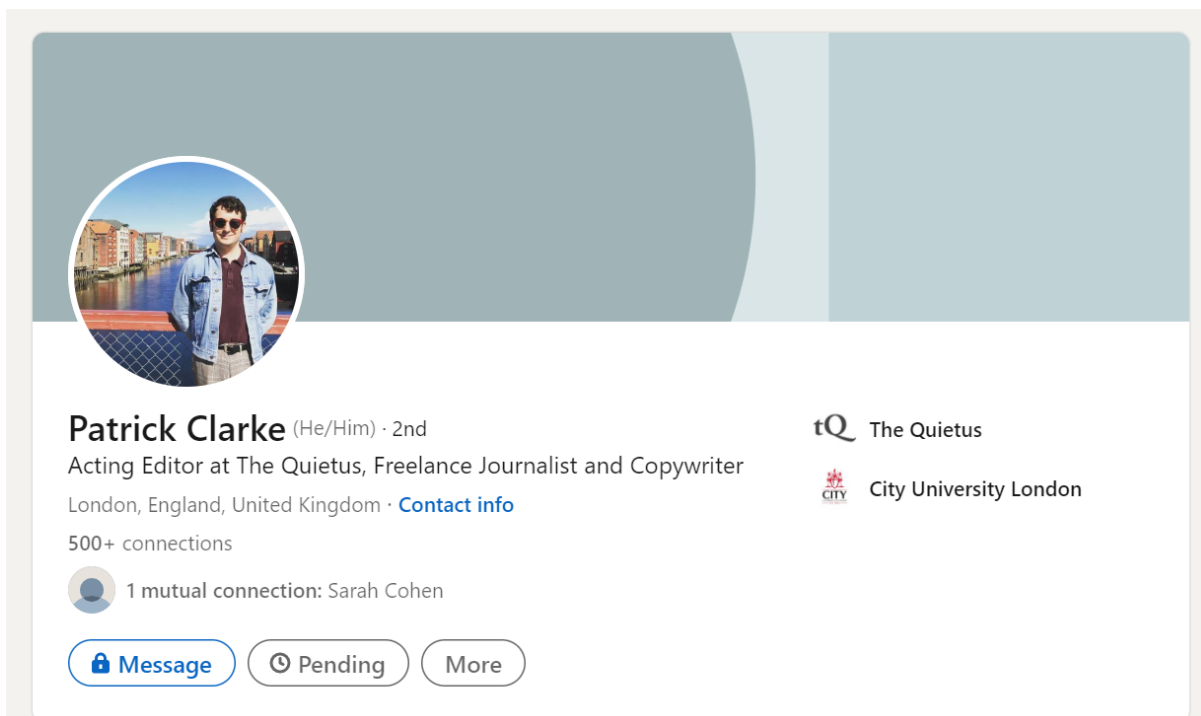


Appendix 3

Screenshot of email sent to me from Patrick Clarke on 7th December 2022.



Screenshot of Patrick Clarke's LinkedIn profile to verify his status as a music journalist.



Appendix 4

Screenshot of the to-do list made and uploaded to the Google Drive

	Track	Remix	EPK	Artwork	Video	Op Budget	Event	Marketing			
Anna	y			p	p			p	p=in progress		
Wyn						p	p		y=done		
Pete		1/12/23	p					p			
Still to do:	Add to PR	Upload final track when received	Add more info about	Arrange	Arrange (Week 2 on)	Upload to Drive	Add findings to Drive	Plan social media posts/video etc	turn green when done		
	EPK		Finalise	Sort IP (Rocker Lawyer?)		Add marketing costs (email sent to Felix)	Email charities?				
	Plan registration? (Heres)			Add hypothetical costs to SS	Add hypothetical costs to SS	Create 'you say we saved' version of budget & email competition track, asking voter for artwork and photos etc	Look into online streaming?				
	Upload screenshots to drive		IP for photos used? Anne give name of photographer	Upload to drive	Upload to drive			upload to drive			

Photo taken by Wyn of a progress meeting we had at Vinyl Café

