

# **Finding My Excellence**

## **MA Final Project Reflective Commentary**

Tileyard London

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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Student ID: 2214125

Student Full Name: Jan Trafas

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### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this is my own work, and does not use any materials other than the iced sources, tools and figures. All explanations that were copied directly or in essence have been marked as such. This work has not been previously submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jan Trafas', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jan Trafas

21 July 2023, London

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# Methodology

## Qualitative Research

The aim of the project *Finding My Excellence* is to establish a direction of personal development and an outline for the professional career path of a Master of Arts degree student completing the Commercial Music Producer course. There is a multitude of ways to approach this. Given the nature of the skillset of a music producer, which is both practical and theoretical but with an emphasis on the practical application of knowledge, the way of gathering research data must be personal and project-based as any work completed by a creative is highly subjectively interpretable. (Dietrich, 2019) For this reason, the method of qualitative research is most applicable in the case of this project. The definition (Cambridge, 2023) of individual interpretation states that it is a mind-dependent outlook on something or someone, as opposed to objective interpretation, which does not allow any personal aspects to interfere with or alter any information or data that has been gathered. (Burton, 2009) Most aspects of music are completely personal (Greasly, 2013) and so are the characteristics of the process of its production.

## Quantitative Research

Is it true then, that virtually every piece of work a music producer completes is not at all objectively interpretable? Not entirely. What is objective, can be directly comparable to others so any aspect of a body of work or as is in this example, a set of songs, can be compared in the competitive rivalry that the music industry is (Essling, 2017) can be labelled as objective. For example: *How balanced is the mix? How loud is the master? How 'wide' is the stereo image? What is the length of the song? How long into the song does a listener have to play, for the vocals to come in?* Those are all valid questions that can make it easier to judge the success of this project's outcome in a more quantitative way.

There are as many opinions on a mix as there are mix engineers (Sadun, 2019) and it creates an obstacle for upcoming mix engineers and producers in learning the skills of the art form that is music production. Uncertainty in making decisions and an ego undermined by self-doubt is what virtually every creator, including music producers, has to deal with. This paired with an unhealthily perfectionistic view makes for a pattern of never committing to one's own decisions and releasing music extremely rarely, and this is one problem this MA Piece of work attempts to tackle.

# Project Personal Introduction

The project titled *Finding My Excellence* has its output in a portfolio demonstrating my wide set of skills and aims at finding what I am most proficient at and what my most profitable and most advanced abilities are and then expanding on them to fulfil the personal and professional goal of making a living in music. This reflective commentary reads what data the practical part of the project has produced, analyses it for challenges, both accomplished and failed and plans for the future while demonstrating the tools that will be useful in showcasing what has been learned during the MA Commercial Music Producer course.

## The Practical Part

As per the *Project Proposal* submitted earlier this term, the practical part of this final project was supposed to consist of a set of songs, some of them fully written and composed by me, some of them co-produced with songwriters and collaborating producers and some just mastered by me. The actual outcome does not differ from the proposed in terms of the specific skills presented. A medium for presenting the skills gained throughout the past year in the industry is now an originally-created and fully functional portfolio website, an addition to the practical portfolio element that allows potential clients to orientate themselves in what kind of work I am capable of doing and where my skills shine.

## Adherence to The *Project Proposal*

There is a difference between what has been proposed earlier this term for the outcome of the completion of this project and what is actually being submitted. It lays in how much of each of the individual producer must-have skills were used. As the project progressed, studio time was booked, sessions were completed and the songs began to take form, I realised that for the most part I am inputting more of the writing than the technical components. My sessions consisted mostly of songwriting and production as well as writing drum parts and then performing them with some direction from colleagues and peers. A vision of what aspects of production come to me naturally, began to clarify itself. This does not mean that I did not run recording sessions from the position of an engineer, because for every one of them where I did not need to be in the live room tracking drums, I was the one responsible for the session's smooth running and artists' comfort, which is where the engineer/producer role really shines.

# Contents of the Practical Part

## A. *I'm Trying Tonight*

**Jan Trafas:** Writing, Composition, Instruments, Production, Mix, Master

**Nzilani Francq:** Vocal Performance, Lyrics, Vocal Melody,

## B. *Company*

**Jan Trafas:** Writing, Composition, Instruments, Production, Vocal Prod. Mix, Master

**Jacob Buchardt:** Co-Writing, Instruments, Lyrics, Vocal Melody, Vocal Prod.

**Lottie Hughes:** Vocal Performance, Lyrics, Vocal Melody

## C. *You Showed Me*

**Jan Trafas:** Writing, Lyrics, Composition, Instruments, Production, Mix, Master

**Sophie Feriani:** Lyrics, Vocal Performance, Vocal Melody

## D. *Ego*

**Jan Trafas:** Writing, Composition, Instruments, Production, Mix, Master

**Chris Chords:** Writing, Composition, Instruments, Lyrics, Vocal Melody

**Nicole Simmons:** Lyrics, Vocal Performance, Vocal Melody

**Alex Faria:** Lyrics, Vocal Performance, Vocal Melody

## E. *Sweet & Salty*

**Jan Trafas:** Writing, Composition, Instruments, Production, Mix, Master

**Celine Newkirk:** Writing, Lyrics, Vocal Performance, Vocal Melody Instruments

**Nicole Simmons:** Lyrics, Vocal Melody

**Albin Fredy:** Lyrics, Vocal Melody

## F. *Escape*

**Jan Trafas:** Production, Drum Performance, Keys Performance, Mix, Master

**Hana Evans:** Writing, Composition, Lyrics, Vocal Melodies, Vocal Performance, Vocal Production, Instruments, Instrument Production, Mix

## G. *Truthseeker*

**Jan Trafas:** Drum Performance, Production, Mix, Master

**Kiran Bose:** Writing, Composition, Lyrics, Vocal Performance, Guitar Performance, Production

**Matthew Nicholls:** Writing, Composition, Vocal Performance, Guitar Performance, Production

**Thom Pew:** Bass Guitar Performance, Production

## H. *Limbo*

**Jan Trafas:** Writing, Drum Performance, Master

**Kieran Keohane:** Writing, Lyrics, Composition, Instruments, Vocal Melody, Vocal Performance, Production

**Carrie Linney:** Writing, Lyrics, Vocal Performance, Piano Performance

**Sean Guy:** Writing, Bass Guitar Performance, Production

**Ollie Fisher:** Writing, Saxophone Performance

The contents of the practical part appear in order of how much creative input I had in each of them. From *I'm Trying Tonight* which I could consider 'my song' to *Limbo* which is a song by a band called *Salaryman* which I was a part of over two years ago, contributed the writing and performance of the drum part to it and have decided to master it for the purpose of this project. The fact that my contribution to all of those projects was so different in each case made for an incredibly varied skill portfolio which I will be displaying on my portfolio website.

## Professional Portfolio Website

The website, fully created by me using a domain provider and website design application called *Wix* is still in development behind the scenes to ensure its smooth operation, but it is available live and is being constantly updated. As a producer and musician it is crucial to display your work to a large audience of potential clients that could turn into customers when they are attracted by the displayed services. While building the website I took into consideration multiple aspects of what an exemplary artist services website needs to represent.

It must be ensured that everything is aesthetically consistent and easy to navigate with simple and clear menus. The design of the website matches my image and reflects my branding style.

My homepage is a classic landing page with a short *About* section, an eye-catching and colourful profile picture, which is also my cross-platform recognisable logo. The further sections display my services:

To properly showcase my portfolio I have included a *Work* page on the site, which includes three tiles:

*My Portfolio* with playable songs and readable credits that are part of my production portfolio. *Personal Project* which contains *Every Shadow Nods*, a single released by me earlier this year. This section will also host the song *I'm Trying Tonight* which is part of the practical part of this Master's Final Project. *Mastering* which contains already-released songs of other artists that have been mastered by me. All of those sections will grow as my career progresses.

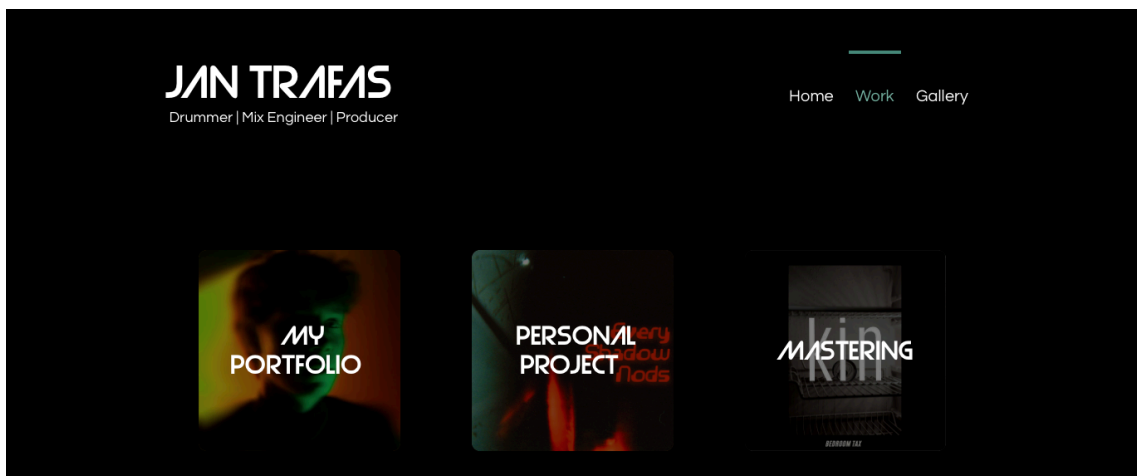


Fig. 1 Portfolio website: Work Tab.

# Creation

## Session Planning

Each recording that was planned for this project had a session plan going along with it. In order to optimise the workflow and ensure everything was running smoothly, the live room microphone setup was planned out and included with a bird's eye view drawing within the plan as in the example below.

### Recording Session Plan

1st June 2023, Tileyard London  
Jan Trafas

#### Info Sheet

| Song Info |                             | ProTools Session Info |       | Input List |                | Microphone                                  |
|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------|------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Titles    | Song A, Song B              | Sample Rate           | 48kHz | 1          | Kick In        | Audix D6, D112, RE20 or similar             |
| Artist    | Jan Trafas Music            | Bit Depth             | 24b   | 2          | Kick Out       | RE20 (reso head removed)                    |
| Tempo     | 136BPM; 110BPM              | Tempo grid            | Yes   | 3          | Snare Top      | SM57                                        |
| Pulse     | Straight 16th               | Guide tracks          | Yes   | 4          | Snare Bot.     | SM57                                        |
| Key       | E minor, A minor            | Comped guide track    | Yes   | 5          | Hi-Tom         | MD421 (reso head removed, miked from below) |
| Copyright | Fully original compositions | Structure Markers     | Yes   | 6          | Mid-Tom        | MD421 (reso head removed, miked from below) |
|           |                             | Colour Coding         | Yes   | 7          | Low-Tom        | MD421 (reso head removed, miked from below) |
|           |                             |                       |       | 8          | Hi-Hat         | (any pencil condenser)                      |
|           |                             |                       |       | 9          | OH Stereo (AB) | Shure SM81 or similar (pencil condensers)   |
|           |                             |                       |       | 10         | Room (Mono)    | U87 or similar (large diaphragm condenser)  |

#### Equipment List

| Equipment Booking |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Microphones       | SM57 x2, MD421 x3, RE20 x1, Audix D6/D112 x1, (any pencil condenser) x3, U87 x1                                                                                                                                     |
| Cabling           | XLR x15, TRS Extension for drummer IEMs                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Mic Stands        | x12                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Instruments       | <b>Drum Kit:</b> Kick Drum, Small High Tom, Medium Mid Tom, Floor Tom.<br><b>Hardware:</b> Snare stand, Hi-Hat Stand, Cymbal Stand x3, Kick Drum Legs, Tom Rack x2 (or Two Tom Stands), Floor Tom Legs, Drum Chair. |

Fig. 2 Session Plan

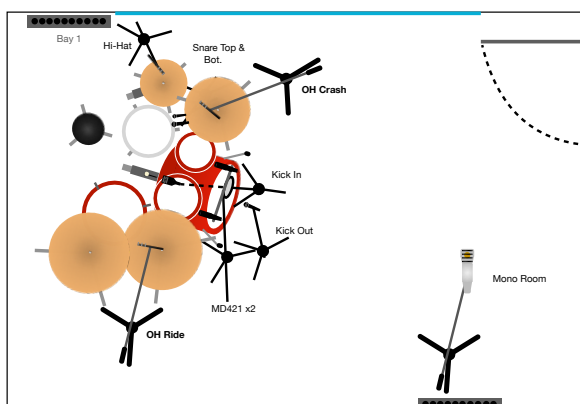


Fig. 3 Session Plan - Live Room Setup

The first page contains two information sheets, both detailing aspects of the session that matter to me as the producer or engineer or, as in this example, to another engineer recording me behind the drums. The *Recording Session Plan* also helps with setting up a ProTools project with the BPMs of songs that are going to be tracked, which allows for whoever is running the session to prepare beforehand to maximise the use of time in the studio. This practice for the past few years has allowed me to save hours and it definitely looks more professional to come to a recording with a ProTools file already prepared and ready, while the on-site engineer is ready with the instrument, microphones and routing. This way when everyone comes together, the setup takes just minutes instead of long hours. In the near future when my work in the industry begins to take a fully professional and not strictly just educational shape, this practice will work to bring down the allocated amount in my budget necessary for booking a recording studio making for a business model that is more sustainable over a longer period.

## Recording, Engineering and Performing

Being able to observe how a professional, commercial recording studio works while having the experience both of a recording musician and the main engineer allowed me to unlock a level of care for the well-being of any artist I am recording, that would otherwise be difficult for me to achieve. When behind the drum set in the live room, certain habits and typical behaviours tend to shine in me more than others, and those become rules for every session I later run from behind the glass pane of the control room. The fact I have experience both performing in a studio and running a session also means I tend to set the bar high when it comes to the outcome and finished product of a recording session. The bare minimum for a successful session is having high-quality recordings of multiple takes including the potential for several copies of the same parts performed without mistakes. This sometimes means an amount of takes in the fifty-to-eighty area which usually translates to the performer being unable to produce anything better on the day. The aim, however is not to tire the artist until complete exhaustion but to help them reach new highs and sing or play to the top of their abilities, which is a challenging task for a producer to accomplish. Given that artists' potential and capacity to perform as well as their skill sets vary enormously, yet a song is supposed to sound *industry-ready* no matter the technical hurdles of its writer, a lot of fixing of imperfections can be involved. For an untrained producer, this takes an amount of time that is commercially unprofitable. That is one of my biggest take-aways from this course.

## Songwriting Camps

During multiple songwriting camps which took place within the course, many different skills that producers and songwriters have to bare could be observed. The one aspect of production that made a large impact on me is how fast commercial producers work. How quickly they are able to get the results of what exists in their heads down and into a session through playing multiple instruments. I play the drums and keys. The latter is incredibly useful for writing and production on songwriting camps but the former, apart from rhythmic training and groove can not be recorded live when there is not a drum booth or when a song needs to be completed from start to finish within eight hours of a day. The skills that other producers, who I have met on songwriting camps, have are: swiftness in setting up channel strips and sends for effects, fast comping and quick decision-making when it comes to choosing the right takes and lastly - presets. Sets of ready-made sessions in *Logic Pro X* which was the main *DAW* used by everyone. The process of creating templates before going into sessions, and having them on and ready for a session is an enormous time-saving *hack* which I have started using as soon as I have observed producers do it at songwriting camps. Being able to immediately make a vocalist have more confidence in their performance by having some basic processing with tuning on their channel strip makes enough of a difference to convince me to never start with an empty channel strip again. At least when another speed-oriented songwriting camp happens.

# Challenges

## Problems and Outcomes

### Distortion

*When recording, err on the side of caution: don't add more distortion than you will eventually need. You can always add more during mixing if you need to, but there are very few practical ways to reduce distortion in a recorded piece of audio. If you're uncertain, it pays to play safe and use a splitter or A/B box to record an undistorted, 'dry' version of the input signal alongside the distorted one.*

(White, 2010)

During one of the recording sessions for *I'm Trying Tonight* which is a personal project for me I was performing the written drum part in the live room while being engineered by a person unskilled to record drums. After having booked the session weeks in advance and being assigned someone who would have had enough experience that I would not have to worry about how the recordings turn out I was assured everything would go according to plan.



Fig. 4 Snare Top Microphones during drum recording for 'I'm Trying Tonight'

While in session I was focused on performing the drum part and only came into the control room once to listen to the whole drum sound.

I had made a remark before on how there is a slight distortion but was reassured that it was “coming from a pencil condenser” we were using as **one of** the Snare Top microphones.

To my surprise, when sitting down to comp and edit the drums, most of the microphones used for this recording session captured audio that was distorted to the point of it sounding like a creative effect.

The waveform of the *SM57 Snare Top* microphone recording indicated that the input of at least one of the *Heritage Audio* preamplifiers that were used for this recording session must have introduced a signal so high in level that the device broke off the circuit so as to avoid damaging any equipment on the way into the AD/DA converters. This resulted in a severely distorted snare drum sound that was gated into complete silence just milliseconds after every recorded hit.

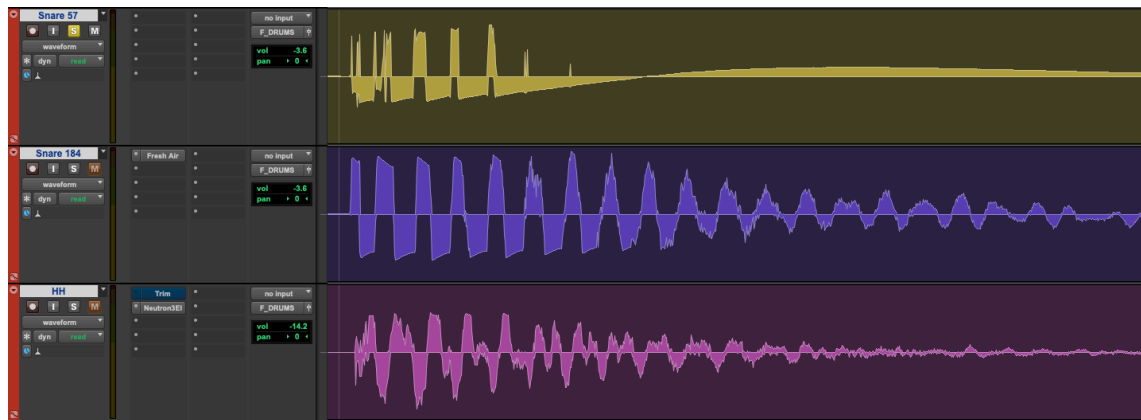


Fig. 5 The waveform of a snare drum hit through different microphones' recordings.

Visible in *Figure 5* above are the different waveforms that one snare hit produced as recorded by three separate microphones. The top and yellow one was supposed to be the main snare drum microphone used for the mix. The signal can be seen clipping heavily which causes the waveform to have a square wave shape and then a long sine wave which represents a low-frequency signal of a safety gate of the device that detected a clipping signal. The waveform in blue is still visibly very distorted but only at the attack, the tail of the snare remains natural as can be seen by the more natural-looking waveform.

The cleanest snare drum sound was recorded by the Hi-Hat microphone. Normally a recording from the Hi-Hat microphone can be gated to remove bleed from the snare but in this case, utilising the snare sound that it had captured was crucial for maintaining a somewhat-clean snare sound. Despite this being an obvious mistake that should never have happened in a professional studio environment like this, the sound of the drums worked for the song's purpose. Being inspired by the artist *Boy Harsher* and the general genre of *darkwave* (Reesman, 1999) those recordings were used by a stylistic choice decision and will not be re-recorded. This seemingly-challenging to get out of situation, became a successful outcome that *sounds like it was intentional*.

*“It is failure that guides evolution; perfection provides no incentive for improvement, and nothing is perfect.”*

(Colson, 1999)

# Trust

Booking a recording session weeks ahead means preparing everything and everyone involved for it so that when the day finally comes, everything runs smoothly. Professional recording studios are typically in high demand. By booking my sessions weeks ahead during my course I aimed to teach myself the level of organisation necessary to operate in professional studios in the future. Recording sessions involve multiple parties, including musicians, engineers, producers, and possibly additional personnel. Coordinating everyone's schedules can be challenging, especially if they have other commitments or work on different projects. By booking in advance, the outcome should be a successful session, given that everyone working on the preparation process for the sessions is reliable and responsible. Booking in advance should mean that everything is checked, and then double-checked for any faults and potential issues that may arise during a recording session. This includes work that the producer/artist must complete, like rehearsing, arranging the music and ensuring any required pre-production work is completed, but also things the studio employees should also do, like preparing the necessary equipment or running signal through channel strips of consoles and hardware to check if everything sounds clean and clear. Having the advantage of being able to discuss specific requirements for the successful completion of the project also comes with booking sessions far ahead. All this falls under the label of professionalism and mutual respect between everyone involved in a project. By booking in advance I aim to demonstrate professionalism and respect for the studio and the audio engineers' time. By this, I mean to uphold a good relationship with every professional I intend to work with. The more respect I - the producer, and the engineer have for each other, the better for both of us and anything we work on.

As preparation for one of the recording sessions for *Escape* by Hana Evans, we had to track drums that would only be playing a part in the outro of our song, which was otherwise drumless. The main reference for the drum part was the general drum sound and role in *Florence and The Machine's* song *Shake It Out* being a rather slow crescendo-style *tom groove* with a touch of folk. The focus was a buildup on tom-toms with an addition of cymbals towards the end of the part. The needs of this session accidentally aligned with an issue that occurred where the Hi-Hat stand was not functional due to the fact no one had reported the fault previously. The issue could not be fixed during the session so we had to resort to not using the Hi-Hat at all for the recording. This ended up moving me and the producer in that session, Hana, to move out of our comfort zone and utilise other parts of the kit in more creative ways. The final take used for the song had me playing a groove where syncopated hits landed on the ride and the rest of them were spread around the tom-toms, bass drum and snare.

The week following that session, I had another drum recording booked and the Hi-Hat still had not been fixed, despite the engineers on duty assuring me the issue will be raised and solved. I have managed to resolve the issue by speaking with another professional within the same studio environment who steered me to speak with a fellow drummer occupying a neighbouring studio space. He allowed me to borrow his Hi-Hat stand and all was solved. Even though this experience comes as a lesson in creative problem-solving, it could have been avoided with just a dose more of respect. It shows how sometimes seemingly minor problems with equipment that can easily be avoided, create issues not only with the technicalities of a recording session but also with mutual trust between different parts of a recording studio. What this situation taught me is to get used to confirming everything has been checked multiple times on my own instead of fully depending on others' competence because as it is shown in this example, it can not always be trusted completely.

## Co-Operation

Our last songwriting camp within the course happened abroad, where some students went to Helsinki in Finland and some, including me, were assigned to go to Copenhagen in Denmark. There we met producers and songwriters who are far more commercially established than us - students of both a songwriting course and one for producers. Still, the others' attitudes were incredibly open and open and their minds lush with song ideas. Having taken part in songwriting camps before, where I always naturally assumed the role of a producer, for one of the four days spent composing in Copenhagen I have decided to try giving away the role of a session's main producer to someone else who is trusted in the craft and who I could learn from. After my group had been assigned, work began and so writing a catchy melody, lyrics, drums and chord progressions took place all at once. After just some time I quickly realised I am not fulfilling my role as a now-songwriter to a level I would expect were I in the *producer chair* myself. Taking the back seat for once made me realise how much there is to contribute from this position. The flow of a commercial fast-paced songwriting session depends highly on how quickly the lyrics and vocal melody are written. Thankfully, in our group of three, the vocalist was highly proficient at songwriting and she quickly assembled rhymes and melodies for us to use. This experience has definitely impacted me as a producer and I will remember how important the input of a great songwriter is when it comes to coming up with quick musical results.

The day after I took on the role of the main producer and was met with completely different challenges. Again in a group of three, I was one of two producers and we were paired with the singer-songwriter Lottie Hughes who is behind the lyrics and vocal melodies for the song *Company* which is part of my practical submission. The brief of that day stated that a Korean artist had requested a western-sounding song with influences of *The Weeknd* but still within the K-Pop genre. This brief immediately spoke to me and I began writing, composing and arranging the song while Jacob - the second producer, began co-writing lyrics with Lottie. By the end of the day Jacob suggested, as a time-saving manner, to process Lottie's recorded vocals while I focus on finishing the production and so this is what happened. At the end of the songwriting camp, we had a *listening party* which is an event attended by everyone taking part in the camp where all the songs written during the week are played back for everyone to hear. The last time I'd heard *Company* was in a room together with Jacob and Lottie while he was working on the vocal production. After hearing it at the playback I remember feeling amazed by his technique in producing the vocal that Lottie had provided.

Weeks later at Tileyard in London, me and Lottie decided to finish the song. This meant writing a second half to a chorus and adding a middle-eight. I prepared a middle-eight and composed it beforehand and after Lottie's approval, we met for a recording session. We quickly got the lyrics down and began recording and then I began comping and editing the vocal to match what had been done by Jacob back in Copenhagen.

I knew this was going to be a challenge and I had to carefully listen and analyse how much tuning work was done to Lottie's vocal, what the compression sounded like, the saturators that were adding so many breathy high frequencies in Jacob's production had to be matched. The obvious differences were the room we recorded in being different and the microphone being a Manley Reference in Copenhagen and a Neumann U87 in London. While compiling a channel strip and set of effects I realised that I am not going to achieve a result where it is not obviously a different recording. What moved me closer towards creating a very similar vocal tone was using whisper and breath takes and panning them to broaden Lottie's vocal and bring it *closer* in the mix.

The final result will forever have for me and Lottie an audible transition between Jacob's and my vocal production within the second chorus. Objective listeners may not be able to tell the difference unless pointed towards where the newly-recorded vocal starts but it is there. The purpose of the songwriting camps was not to create finished, releasable productions, but to pitch them to labels in the hope of receiving single deals in exchange so what is more important is the songwriting and vocal performance than the difference in two separate recordings. Looking back, however I believe I would have been more content and the project itself would have benefitted more from re-recording the entirety of the vocals in London. The version produced by Jacob could have been utilised as a reference for processing and not been used in the actual song. This does not mean that *Company* is not a successfully-completed project. I certainly have walked away richer in experience and one more song to add to my portfolio repertoire.

# Mastering

When mastering my own productions or mixes, the issue that often arose was the lack of objectivity necessary to amplify what a song is trying to communicate. The process of mastering is completely different from mixing as it should depend on a *fresh set of ears* (Kitch, 2023). The benefits of having an external and separate mastering engineer come into play when considering the advantages of an unbiased perspective. While many may initially think of fancy studios, massive speakers or an impressive discography, it all boils down to the mastery of a *fresh pair of ears*. The significance lies in the idea that **we can only hear a track for the first time once**.

The value of a fresh perspective becomes apparent. Spending weeks and months immersed in a single track can lead to losing the ability to make objective judgments. Every aspect of a mix becomes familiar and blurred, making it challenging to identify potential areas for improvement. A skilled mastering engineer can offer detailed feedback on how to enhance specific elements of the mix, ensuring no aspect of the song remains overlooked. Such a level of objectivity cannot be obtained by a producer or mixing engineer who has worked on the mix himself and is now attempting mastering on their own.

That is why I had far less trouble mastering *Limbo* by *Salaryman* the production of which I have had no involvement in, than trying to achieve a commercially-ready record sound with *I'm Trying Tonight* where my composition was produced, recorded and mixed by me and then had to be mastered. With *Truthseeker* which I have performed on and mixed but was not the one behind the writing and composition, the task to get it mastered was *slightly* easier than in the case of *I'm Trying Tonight* but still quite challenging. The outcome of my attempts at mastering suggests that the less I have to do with a record before I master it, the better the master will come out.

# Success and Completion

The successful completion of this project could just mean that all the work planned has been finished and submitted before the deadline but there is an aspect to this experience that goes beyond that.

What have I learned while producing, writing, mixing, mastering and performing for so many different artists and projects during my MA course? An answer to this question can be summed up in three points:

- Co-operation in creating musical projects is an extremely powerful tool and can save a lot of time and creative energy, **so long as everyone involved in a project fulfils their assigned task and aims to aid the project's success in any way they can.**
- Building positive and trust-based relationships in the music industry goes a long way, **but depending on others and relying on them to fulfil their duties should only happen when we know they would not let us down, which requires a mutually-respectful relationship.**
- Having high-level technical abilities and skills enable a producer to work with multiple different artists and contribute to projects one gets involved in, in many ways, **it is counteractive, however to spend more time learning new skills than practising and mastering what skills one has to become as swift and productive in using them as possible.**

# Summary

In this reflective report, my experiences and lessons learned throughout the journey as a music producer is what is being explored. The report begins by highlighting the importance of booking recording sessions in advance and the need for thorough preparation to ensure a smooth and successful outcome. Emphasis is put on the significance of professionalism, mutual respect, and attention to detail in the recording process.

The report then delves into specific incidents, such as the issue with a faulty Hi-Hat stand during a drum recording session. Through creative problem-solving and seeking assistance from fellow professionals, the obstacle was possible to overcome. This experience taught me the importance of confirming and double-checking everything independently to avoid technical issues. The problem highlighted by this chapter is trust issues within the professional environment.

The paper also contains a reflection on participating in songwriting camps and collaborating with other producers and songwriters. The value of cooperation, positive relationships, and the contributions of great songwriters in the creative process is being discussed. The report highlights the need for balance between learning new skills and mastering existing ones to become efficient and productive as a music producer. This report serves as a reflection on personal and professional growth, offering valuable insights for my future endeavours in the music industry.

# Conclusion

*Finding My Excellence* being the title and thesis of this paper highlights the need to express oneself and establish a profession where I am most proficient and skilled and ready to work in. Leaving institutional education after eighteen years in a row can feel intimidating but every little amount of work done for this final project has turned out to bring a level of reassurance that I was seeking. This final project has brought to my attention what is most important to my creative process and what I find most valuable. By naturally selecting tasks that I most enjoy, the conclusive thought is that collaboration and composition are my most desired directions in music. Whether it is performing written parts on the drums, recording someone else's performance or producing a record, the amount of creative impact seems to be directly proportionate to my personal and, possibly in the near future also professional satisfaction, and what do we all do it for if not satisfaction and fulfilment?

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# Appendices

Apx. Fig. 1: 13.06.2023 Recording Session Plan.

## Recording Session Plan

13th June 2023, Tileyard London

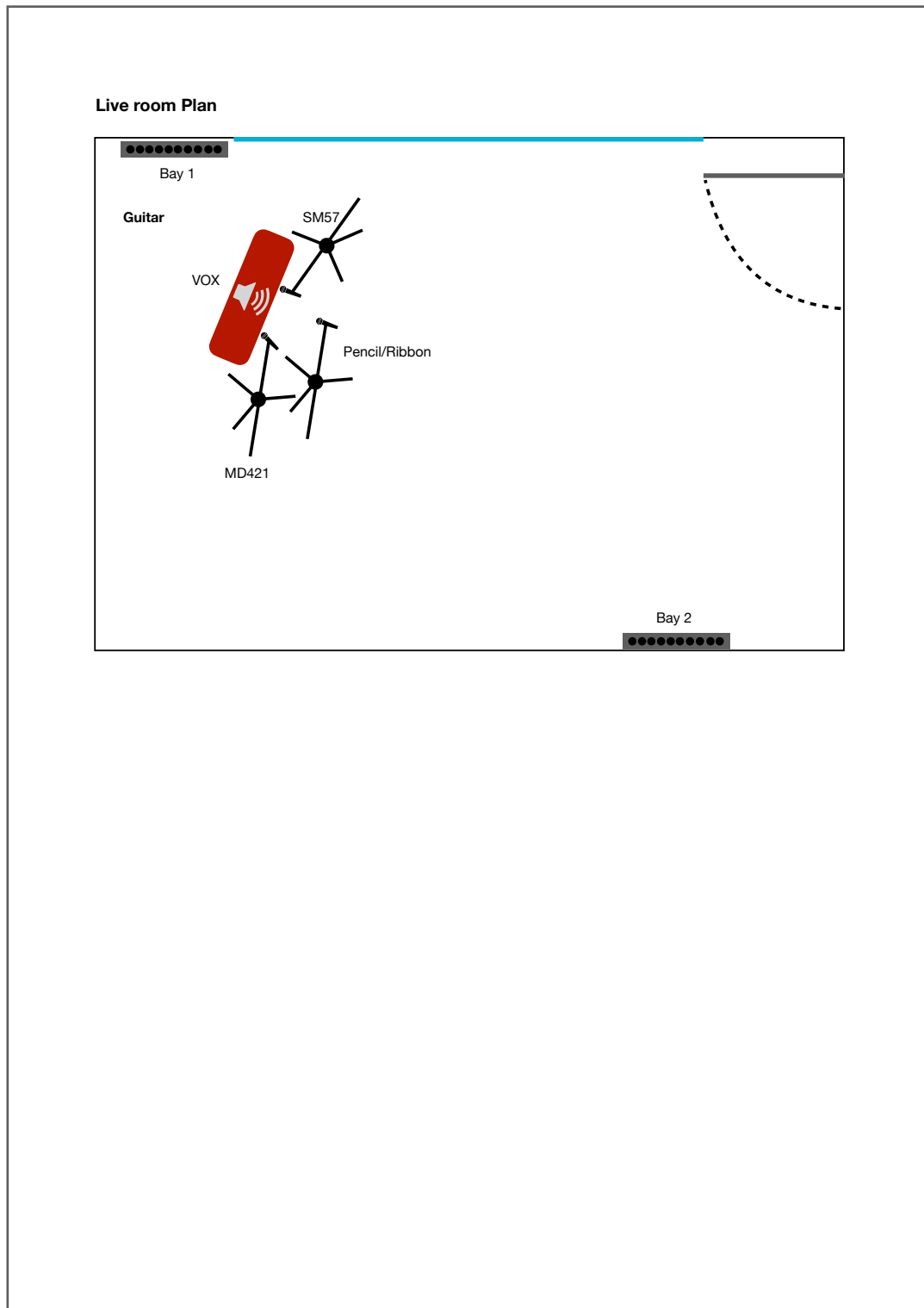
### Info Sheet

| Song Info |                            | ProTools Session Info |       | Input List   |
|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------|--------------|
| Title     | Escape                     | Sample Rate           | 48kHz | Guitar DI    |
| Artist    | Hana Lili                  | Bit Depth             | 24b   | Guitar AMP 1 |
| Tempo     | 130BPM                     | Tempo grid            | Yes   | Guitar AMP 2 |
| Pulse     | Straight 16th note         | Guide tracks          | Yes   | Guitar Room  |
| Key       | A minor                    | Comped guide track    | Yes   |              |
| Structure | Intro-A-B-A-B-C-Solo-Outro | Structure Markers     | Yes   |              |
| Copyright | Fully original composition | Colour Coding         | Yes   |              |
|           |                            |                       |       |              |

### Equipment List

| Equipment Booking |                                                              |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Microphones       | SM57 x1, MD421 x1, (pencil condenser or ribbon) x1, Talkback |
| Cabling           | XLR x6, Instrument Lead x2, Power Adapter x2                 |
| Headphones        | Pairs x2                                                     |
| Amplifiers        | Guitar AMP (Fender, Marshall, VOX)                           |

Apx. Fig. 2: 13.06.2023 Recording Session Plan - Live Room Layout.



Apx. Fig. 3-19: Session Gallery

Available online until August 31st 2023 under this [link](#).