

Assignment 3

Diane Gayle

MA Commercial Music Producer

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ASSIGNMENT CONTENTS

5000 Word Assignment

Eight original tracks, a total of 32 minutes, 24bit format

Introduction

This essay summaries the journey made during the making of a '90s inspired R&B music project. Discussed are the project proposal and pre-production phases. Included are the recording and mixing stages. Incorporated is also My Personal Development Plan, which outlines visions and goals for the future.

Meeting with Sean Hargreaves

My first meeting with Sean was, positive although the outcome was not at all what I had anticipated. I entered the meeting armed with my Jazz Project that I thought at the time would be a very cool thing to do. My proposed project lacked the credibility Needed to go ahead. After careful analysis of the situation, I knew that I would just be working on a friend's album and not showing my potential as a composer and producer. Sean asked to hear my compositions so that he might get an idea of what I was about. It was agreed that R&B music is my primary strength and that it would be best if I aimed my efforts in that direction.

On the second meeting, I showed him a rough sketch of what I had written so far, and I was delighted with the fact that Sean was very impressed with my work. I was feeling positive because at least I had a gauge on how my work was being perceived by someone who is looking in from the outside and also, that I would have access to the Neve pre-amps in his studio which I discussed with him in the meeting. After getting confirmation that my initial ideas were viable, my plan of action was to make contact with the musicians needed in order to complete my project.

Project Proposal

The initial project proposal proceeding my final assignment was a quantitative research-based study which outlined plans to make a 6 to 8 R&B tracks of music that incorporated singers and a rapper. The proposal outlined plans to create original music that was modern, with a 90's style feel and sentiment in both feel and production. I questioned whether it was still viable to make music from the 90's era that would even sound credible in 2019 and 2020. My initial findings were that "There's no arguing that the 90s is the golden age of R&B. The best 90s R&B songs still sound fresh, and their influence can be felt in the crop of modern R&B stars who are pushing the genre forward." (Team, 2019) With the information gathered from my research, it was then decided that this would be a great project to pursue.

Pre-Production

During the pre-production phase, my aim was to compose 6 – 8 songs that when finished, would result in rough demos with solid beats, melodies, and chord structures. This was completed at home where I have a small set up in which to do it. I had anticipated that it would take approximately three weeks for me to complete. I sent out rough sketches to the artists in which to write lyrics. Da Mistri, the rapper I intended to work with, was sent a track that I had programmed called BASHment.

This track has elements of Hip Hop and Afrobeat. I made BASHment because at the moment Afrobeat is very popular. I had the idea that blending the two would sound very interesting. As Da Mistri is a Hip-Hop Rapper, I was very excited to see what she would come up with.

Sean C was sent four tracks that were rough ideas; they consisted mainly of drums and keyboards. I chose to do it this way because I wanted to make sure that Sean was able to write freely without any constraints that may have been in the music. The main reason that I chose to work with Sean in the first place is that I knew he would do a fantastic job; he is an expert at writing 90's R&B songs. Alan was contacted to only to request that he would be part of the project. At this time, there was nothing for him to listen to. I was thrilled that he accepted and happy to be part of my project. As Sean is a very busy man, he sent me back the tracks with his vocals. The fact that technology has progressed so much since Sean and I met, gave me pause for thought. In the actual '90s, there was no way that we would have been able to work remotely like this; it has also given me a business idea I had not thought of before. Providing online sessions to songwriters would be an excellent way to make an income. By getting together a group of professional individuals, a bespoke service could be provided to people who need the services of a musician or engineer. Online Sessions state "We provide anything from drums, bass, guitars, keyboards, vocals, horn and string sections to ethnic and orchestral instruments, as well as arranging, programming, editing, mixing, analog summing and mastering." (Onlinesessions, 2019) This could be good with the right equipment and team working together.

As far as project management was concerned at this point, I was ahead of the game, and everything was going really well. I was very well organised, and I was following my project management outline that I created a few weeks before. There were milestones I was trying to reach. Therefore, liaising with the songwriter(s) and checking to see how they were progressing helped a lot as reassurance for both myself and them. This time was also taken to arrange studio time for Da Mistri to come in and lay down her vocals. During this time, I was arranging the music around the tracks that I was sent from Sean. Unfortunately, shortly after, I became unwell and was unable to follow the goals that I had set myself.

Recording

Throughout the recording phase, I planned to use Sean Hargreaves' studio to record vocals and guitar for all of the songs in the project. I envisaged fleshing out the rough demos and finally making them into songs. According to my project timeline, two weeks would have probably been enough time to get the results that I needed.

Lonely Without You

My guitar recording session was Alan is booked for 18:00 - 22:00. This was so far the only session I was able to do. I did not feel even slightly ready and only had one song for him to play on. I remember at the time before the session feeling gutted, frightened, embarrassed, and very apprehensive. Due to being ill prior, I was very unprepared. Usually, when I organise recording sessions, everything is already put in place before it starts. The plan beforehand was to make good use of a fantastic musician with the limited time that I had him for.

This was the first song I was to work on in my project, and the middle 8 section was not really developed yet. Alan arrived after me at the studio, where he found me already set up and waiting to go. I know I only had one song but tried to make the best of it. Justin help set up the session for me, and I ideally wanted to go straight for

a DI'd guitar that went straight into the Neve pre-amps and have Alan play in the studio with me. I wanted to do it this way because in the past, for example when we both worked on a ska project with Dennis Bovell, we were virtually sitting beside each other with him playing and me recording. Unfortunately, the set up I wanted was complicated for Justine to execute so we put Alan in the live room instead. We had three inputs, one for the Sound Deluxe Amp, an SM57 microphone to a Marshall amp, one for the DI'd clean guitar and the other for the pedals Alan brought with him. Each signal was sent through a Neve pre-amp.

I started to get into the spirit of things as the track sounded quite good, and I had a good idea of what I wanted on it. The track is a 90's style slow Jam that is reminiscent of the R&B that was made in the 70's Leroy Hutson - Lovers Holiday vibe. (Hutson, 2019) I left the lead vocals of Sean Cummings on the arrangement, and I let the track play a few times so that Alan could get his bearings. At first, I let Alan put down his own flavour and vibe into the track; to him, it sounded like something the Isley Brothers would produce. After a few takes, I took the reins and asked for specific parts to be added that I heard in my head.

This was definitely a pleasant experience as I had not been in a recording session with Alan for a few years, and it was great to get that old vibe back. One thing I did not know about Alan is this; he needs plenty of eye contact when he is playing on a track, being honest we usually work together in a room and this was one of the rare times that we were apart in separate rooms. Eye contact and reassurance is a skill I had never thought about until today, it depends on what type of session I am recording, yes I have worked with singers looking directly at me through the glass in a separate room but I have never thought about direct eye contact at all until Alan told me that he needed plenty of this to do his best work. It may be that I am inwardly quite shy sometimes, and I need to come across as being a little more confident in my dealings with artists.

The guitar tracks Alan played were outstanding, and with editing, I could make a fantastic record. The only thing that did let me down was the fact that, because I was unwell for all those weeks, I did not have time to develop the middle 8 of the song, so the guitar parts were quite sparse and needed a lot of work. Overall the rest of the track was great despite this.

Alan and I later discussed Eric Isley's guitar sound. Eric Isley states that "Usually, there's a Mesa Boogie and a Marshall' in his guitar rig and depending on the kind of song he is playing on Isley asserts that he does "use a pedal through the same amps. I have a Crybaby wah, a couple of Rat pedals, a Boss BF-2 Flanger, and a Rotovibe." (Jordan, 2019)

Follow Me

The second song went well, also. After the guitars were recorded on Lonely Without You, I pulled out a rough sketch of another song called Follow Me, an up-tempo tune that I had outlined, as the session was going well, I felt more confident about future

now. I played the song for Alan to hear. He immediately got up and nailed it. In one take the guitar was done. The funky flavor had me dancing around the room I was now elated that at least I was getting somewhere and that I was at least going in the right direction, albeit late in the game compared to my contemporaries who were probably now almost at the end of their projects. He had changed the track from a 50 Cent like Hip Hop track to a kind of disco orientated groove.

I would have changed nothing about the recording session as I felt it went well considering the circumstances, I had found myself in. I also had the interest of Chloe the receptionist who works at Tileyard; she expressed that she would love to work on some songs with me and was very impressed with the music that I make. At the time, I felt that this would have been an ideal situation for me also, as I actually needed more good songs for my project. Personally, this was a very positive day on which I started to build on the foundation of the album I wanted to create.

As for the BAshment track was concerned. Unfortunately, Da Mistri had a small accident and unfortunately could not attend the recording session that I had planned. Losing this time was detrimental to the project; however, the vocals may be done at a later date.

Mixing

Mixing this project in the box is something that I do not often do. I find that it makes my mixes sound squashed and thinner than if I mix on a console. However, there are ways I found to combat any worries I had with a little bit of knowledge and organisation. Making stack tracks in Logic Pro X helped me organise high track counts in the arrangements that I was working on, hence streamlining my workspace and speeding up the workflow. (Nahmani, 2018) Also, I found that sending the outputs of the stack tracks to a single auxiliary beneficial as it can be then treated as a summing track. This then leaves the stereo out untouched. The difference in sound is fantastic. The main lesson I have learned so far is that it is of paramount importance that as part of your organisation in production and mixing skills, it is imperative that you maintain a proper organisation of your workflow or it can be very overwhelming as it was in my case. I will definitely be using this approach from now on.

Tracks submitted

BAshment

As described in the pre-production phase is a cross between afrobeat and Hip Hop, the music would fit in with Starboy and Whizz kid-type music. I was using Soca as a reference at the time I was programming. (Soca, 2018)

This track shows my Urban Street style; I think that once this has vocals on it could do quite well. In the meantime, I will be seeking sync opportunities for the music.

Follow Me plus instrumental

Lyrics were written and sung by Sean C. Guitar Alan Weekes

The guitar style on this track sounds a little like Curtis Mayfield, Give Me Your Love (Mayfield, 2019) it did start out as a Curtis Jackson type of track. The fantastic guitar

that Alan Weekes laid down changed all of that. Also, because the track was a much funkier version of itself, I edited the middle eight vocals to keep it consistent with the feeling of the track.

If You Were My Girl plus instrumental

Lyrics and Vocals Sean C. The instrumental is another side to the urban music that I make, this is inspired by the soulful reggae tracks in the '90s this type of beat is now prevalent and is found in many pop records.

Lonely Without You

Lyrics and vocals Sean C. Guitar Alan Weekes

This track is a 90's style Slow Jam, and the elements are very 70's this song shows the fact that some of my main influences are songs and music from the era.

Yearning For your Love

This track was submitted in the first semester, Sean was singing about Nerogenous Zones at the time. We thought that it would be a good idea if we corrected the chorus. He now says Erogenous Zones. This track is indicative of a 90's slow Jam in the vein of Jaheim.

R&B 2019

A beautiful piano-driven piece of music. This track is indicative of the music that I really like to make, although it is just a drum and keys piece can be developed into a song.

The above tracks will comfortably fit into the Billboard Adult R&B Chart Khalid's single Talk is number one at the moment, and the producers are the UK outfit Disclosure (Billboard.2019). I feel with the right project; Sean could do very well.

Conclusion

This essay summarised the journey made during the making of a '90s inspired R&B music project. Discussed are the project proposal and pre-production phase of the project the recording and mixing stage is also discussed. Incorporated is also My Personal Development Plan, which outlines visions and goals for the future.

Personal Development Plan

Personal Development Plans are used to assist an employee or student support their lifelong learning and development. "employees' self-directedness in learning is shown to be a key success factor in **personal development** processes and consequently in advancing workplace learning and performance improvements indispensable for organizational success in today's business environment." (Lejeune et al., 2016) Frequently reviewing and revising my plan has been hugely beneficial, this is a new tool that has been introduced to me at university, whilst I am sure I will achieve everything on it eventually, it is an advantage to me that i have something to look at to constantly keep me on track of my personal aims and accomplishments.

In my last Personal Development plan at the beginning of the course, I expressed that I needed to understand everything that was required of me academically in order to complete my assignments. Having no prior knowledge or experience of an academic environment I soon realised that "with all its peculiar codes and conventions, essay writing can often be a very tricky business." (Oxbridge Essays, 2018) I therefore employed the services of a book that has been my constant companion throughout my days at university. "Essential Study Skills," has been a life saver that has helped me navigate the difficult subject of essay writing and the format in which it should be done. I would wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone that needs to brush up on their academic skills. (Burns and Sinfield, 2016) However there are still challenges that I face, getting used to writing reports I feel is going to be an important part of my career, especially if I plan to make proposals for projects and get them accepted.

Below is an updated Personal Development Plan with aims and goals that I need to focus on in the near future.

Vision and Goals

My Vision
My vision for the future is to utilise the new skills and lessons learned from participating in the Commercial Producer MA program. My main motivation is to become a successful record producer. The course has expanded my core skills and knowledge of production that I am sure will keep me in good standing for now and the near future.
My Short/Medium Term Goals (next 6/12 months)
In the next few months, I will try to find gainful employment within the music industry. Learning to fully understand and identify all areas of the music business and technical aspects of being a successful record producer may be challenging but I feel that it will be worthwhile in order to progress in the near future. With the new knowledge that I have learned I hope to have made enough progress to confidently run my own business. Over the next few months I plan to use my time to chase up opportunities that have been offered to me whilst I was on the course. However, the main focus for me at this time is to continue to work part-time within the security industry, as taking part in the MA program has proved to be expensive and therefore have to clear up debts that were incurred during this time.
My Long-Term Goals (next 2 – 3 years)
To have a fully functioning studio space in which to work. To work in sound for film and television as well as produce records with great artists. I would also like to delve into the music for gaming industry as I am sure that would be of beneficial use to me. Ultimately, I would also like to be in a position where I am earning a steady income from making music and working within the industry.

Strengths	Development Areas
Good composition and production skills, I have participated in writing camps which has helped in my development of working with different genres of music and vocalist with singing styles that I had not worked with before. Good interpersonal and communication skills, I am able to put an artist at ease and make them feel comfortable enough to give the best of themselves. Female producer, and sound engineer with an exceptional skillset that I think can comfortably work in any professional environment. Access to professional singer/songwriters and musicians who I can collaborate with and make good music. I have found a way to overcome my shyness and actually network with new people. I have will be collaborating with a few people whom I have met whilst on the MA Commercial Producers course.	Development of professional skills with Pro Tools software is of extreme importance for me at this time. At the moment I have only surface knowledge and need to get deeper inside the program. I have yet to release a recording independently, there are plenty of routes to be taken and companies that facilitate the music produced been positioned in the right place. Finding the right path to choose is something that needs more research at this time. Branding myself as a producer needs to be initiated as soon as possible, I have definitely got to sort out all of my socials so I can get started in my musical career. To develop my mixing skills within a DAW. Finding that warm sound at the moment is elusive, I feel I need to find a way to achieve what I can easily do on a recording console. Mixing in the box is a limiting factor that I must overcome. To ensure that all the new techniques I have learned whilst on the course becomes part of my workflow every time I work on a new project.
Opportunities	Threats
Offers of work and further development with Sean Hargreaves in his recording studio. Teaching Music Technology for a women's only course at Raw Material Music and Media. Recording a Jazz album with Alan Weekes in the very near future. Collaborating with Wayne Marshall (UK) on some of the projects he is working on at the moment.	The market place seems overly saturated, it may be hard to find a voice that stands out from so many that are out there now all competing to be heard. I need to overcome my weakness of perfectionism, I will spend a lot of time trying to get things right. This I am afraid, leaves me stranded and lagging behind when I should have been done a long time before that. The necessity to ensure that failure or setbacks do not side track me from my ultimate goals. Following up on offers and promises made, will also be of benefit to me as in the past I have let opportunities go by not been as proactive as I could have been.

SWOT Analysis

My Professional Development Plan

What do I need to learn?	What do I have to do?	What support and resources will I need?	How will I measure success? - What does good look like?	Target date for review?
Pro Tools software program	Follow Tutorials that help me to get beyond the surface and deeper into the program itself.	Utilising the knowledge of associates who are well versed in the software would be of advantage. Also updating my Pro Tools first Program into a subscription based one. Pro Tools first is good but restricts you to only three songs which has to be on the cloud platform they have. Having the flexibility of a fully functional program will be more advantageous and I will be able to use anything I learn directly within the DAW without having to find a work around, which is the case now.	When I know all the many facets of the windows, tools and functions, as well as short cut keys that will save a lot of time in a professional recording session.	3 months
Music for film and Television	Start and complete the course I have purchased on Udemey.	COMPLETE Music COMPOSITION AND FILM SCORING Guide part 1 & 2 is taught by Jason Allen, who has a PHD in music composition. In this 8-hour course I will be learning to utilise tools of the trade, namely MuseScore whilst learning how to make effective use of techniques such as working with string harmonies and writing to different kinds of scenes. The course ends with advice on how you can build up your portfolio and find filmmakers to help start your career.	Knowing exactly what Homorhythmic accompaniment entails and how to implement it within an arrangement will be interesting.	6 months
Game Music Composition	Start and complete the course I have purchased on Udemey.	The Game Composition course will be taught interactively. By following the tutor Karleen Heong, I will participate in quite an extensive course, included is a 4-hour section on how to make adaptive and non-linear music there is also a section on how to write vertical orchestration.	I will be able to effectively understand and use FMOD and Unity 5 as tools to make gaming music.	1 year
Continue to update my keyboard skills	Complete the courses I have purchased on Udemey.	Piano Fall and Piano Grooves are piano courses that will help me to enhance my chord library and give me at least a few part pieces to impress my friends and family with.	I am always striving to learn new and effective keyboard skills and tricks, implementing new techniques in my playing style will keep my music and ideas fresh.	1 year

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