

Major Project Proposal

Production and Engineering Portfolio

Finding My Excellence

Tileyard London

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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Declaration Of Originality

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.

Jan Trafas

12 May 2023, London

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

Table of Contents

Title page	1
Table of Contents	2
Idea Development	3
Project Introduction	4
Outline	4
Final Project Considerations	4
Criteria For Success	6
Research Methodology	8
Questions	8
Answers	8
Legal And Ethical Considerations	9
Contract Draft - Rules	10
Closing Thoughts	11
Implications And Limitations	11
Conclusion	11
References	13
Appendices	15

Idea Development

The germ of the idea for my final project to be a production portfolio began rooting itself in my mind as soon as my Music Producer course had begun. Ideally, after finishing a Master's degree one would ideally start working in their desired industry and in the music industry, a portfolio is even more important than a curriculum vitae. (The Guardian, 2014). What stands behind that statement is the undeniably practical nature of what a music producer regularly does, while working with songwriters on their music. Providing all tools necessary to maintain an uninterrupted creative flow is the most important task for a producer to accomplish. However this does not mean that we are not writers, composers, arrangers, musicians, artists and engineers at the same time, in fact we have to be all of the above and we have to be willing to learn how to excel at, to say the least, a few of those skills. 'Jack of all trades, master of none' cannot become the expression used to refer to us and that should be the goal of a producer - to, after discovering and exploring all areas of 'making music', want to and do - specialise in one of them and become known for it. This is the ultimate goal and this is what I am hastening towards with my portfolio project and this degree.

Every songwriting camp spent in Tileyard I have asked and opted to be the main producer in the session. I saw my skills develop throughout the course and I saw myself becoming faster, more efficient and direct in communication as well as more skilled and versatile when it came to using DAWs, both Logic Pro X and ProTools. The evolution of my abilities sprouted more varied ideas for songs to be crafted at camps and this has allowed my creativity to flourish even more.

At the same time I have begun my freelance work by running my first paid sessions with a friend-musician, who had reached out to me after the collapse of one of my bands, in which he was the bass guitarist. His personal projects, soon to be released on streaming services, started as demos crafted by him in Garage Band: drums and software instruments programmed with MIDI, acoustic and electric guitars and bass as well as vocals. The set-out for the project meant that all four songs needed to be re-recorded, to then be properly produced, mixed and mastered, all done by me. This experience was happening while I was studying and in my first trimester at Tileyard and it created an enormous amount of workload which had to be dealt with. The whole process allowed me to understand artists' needs more than ever before and even more importantly - it has helped me immensely to make sense of what I would want to be doing in this music career. He was extremely satisfied in the end and with the first song needing nineteen mix revisions and the last one only requiring three of them, it was clear we were both acclimatising to working together and I was learning to mix better songs and deliver more confident productions.

Project Introduction

Outline

The outline of the final Master's Dissertation project presents itself like this; A compilation of music where I had an impact, either as a producer or as engineer/recordist or both. The title of the written commentary would state "Finding My Excellence" and explain in detail what the process of writing, composing, recording, producing, engineering, mixing and mastering have taught me. Determining what my area of expertise can be after the completion of this course is the main aim of my project. Being unsure, at this point, of what the jewel of my skillset is, I have this following plan to propose, that will hopefully help me determine what I am best at.

Final Project Considerations

In order to fulfil the submission requirements of thirty to forty-five minutes of musical media, and to actually be able to complete several bodies of work from start to finish, many timing considerations must be put in place.

Firstly, a limit on the amount of songs that are going to be originals, fully written from start to finish by me. Having completed a Bachelor's dissertation before, I know how easy it is to overpromise on this. Another reason for this is that originals take a lot more time to complete. Not only because they need to be written first, as this process is usually quite meteoric in my own productions, but when looking at it from an angle of objective artistic approach. The lack of it, more precisely, which is the bane of solo projects. Basically mixing one's own productions and mastering one's own mixes is not a great idea. (Musictech, 2021) I had known the theory of it before setting out to complete my first paid freelance engineering job last year, which I have mentioned in the 'Idea Development' but I still went for this solution and I have to say, have got away with it quite luckily. Only because of a longer break between the production and editing/mixing process could I maintain *some* level of objective judgement when it came to the mix. The master was just a rough improvement of the mix and I had disclosed with the client before having started work on their project that the case of mastering one's own mix.

The plan includes **two** originals...

Secondly, inspection of the amount of time the mix alone, without editing took me in my first client project. This was established to be three to five days per mix, where no editing was needed anymore. That number enabled a calculation to be made, of how many songwriters should receive invitations to collaborate. The invitations remained open-ended because one songwriter is not always enough and/or the perfect choice for a project. Over the course of this degree I have observed some combinations of people I have come to get to know from my course simply work better together than others. In simple terms, I know my favourite singers, writers and musicians who have volunteered to join forces on this in a mutually-beneficial exchange of services.

...**three** co-written songs which are going to be produced, mixed and mastered by me and...

Thirdly, I am planning for a substantial part of my future work to just be engineering, so mixing and/or mastering. The problem which I have often faced in my career when it comes to those two specialisations is that before them in the timelines of all my projects I have had to edit, correct, produce, fix and more often than not also record the music I was dealing with. This meant that I never really just mixed a song which was not mine, which is where the *objective ear effect* (MusicTech, 2021) can be maximised. The need to learn to isolate only this part of my skillset has sprouted the choice of including, as part of my final project

...**three** mixed/mastered songs that were already recorded, edited and only needed engineering work done on them.

This sums up to eight songs, where one part of them will have been fully written and completed by me, another part would have another person's songwriting credentials, but my co-writing and production work as well as the mix and master, and then finally the last part only focusing on my engineering work. (Monsell, 2003).

Criteria For Success

The success of this project can only be determined by my further career performance following the creation of this portfolio. The criteria, by which it can be judged and rated, include:

- Completion of several bodies of work from start to finish that demonstrate my impact as a writer, producer, engineer/recordist or both.
- Quality of the production portfolio that showcases my skills and abilities in writing, composing, recording, producing, engineering, mixing, and mastering music.
- Determination of my area of expertise after the completion of this Master's degree.
- Adequate time management to ensure the completion of the project within the required time frame. This will be monitored with the *dissertation schedule* (Appendix 1A).
- Collaboration skills when writing with other songwriters and musicians.
- Meeting industry standards and client requirements by successfully delivering high-quality productions that are release-ready within a constrained timeframe.

and possibly even...

- Improvement of my mixing and mastering skills to ensure more objective judgment when working on my own productions. Exceptionally useful in the future as I am planning on continuing my solo artist career alongside freelance production and engineering work.

As a platform for what this project should bring into existence, a professional artist website will be created. Work on it has already started with a photography session earlier this year and a few online web design marketing sessions.

Here is what concluded so far:

- Highlighting my best projects and categorising them by the type of work that has been done on them, while making sure to include my most recent work. This will give potential clients a good idea of my skills and, what is equally important; my style. (Tingen, 2014).
- Making it easy to navigate and ensuring that the website is user-friendly. Visitors should be able to find what they are looking for quickly and easily - this will help determine the success of my final project in a more direct manner. (Wix, 2021).
- Optimising the website for search engines by using relevant keywords in content and metadata. This will help it rank higher in search engine results, making it easier for potential clients to find my work. This includes genre-tagging songs and thinking of it already at the composition stage which is a lesson in songwriting on its own and develops the ability of writing to brief. (Artwork Archive, 2022).

Creating a strong online presence is essential for artists, as it allows them to reach a wider audience and connect with potential clients. To further improve the website and attract visitors, several things on the checklist above must be accomplished.

Research Methodology

Questions

Why is working with several songwriters on multiple songs' productions at the same time a good idea? Why is a time-constrained and deadline-based project a great type of work to choose for personal development? What are the outcomes going to be and what conclusions can be brought from the results of this project? All the above questions describe the apex of what being a freelance music producer consists of.

Answers

Working with several songwriters on multiple songs' productions at the same time can be a good idea for a number of reasons. First, it can provide variety and prevent boredom or burnout from working on the same project for an extended period of time. Second, it can help to develop a diverse skillset as each songwriter may have different needs and preferences in terms of production style and approach. A time-constrained and deadline-based project can be a great type of work to choose for personal development because it can help to develop time-management skills, the ability to work under pressure, and the ability to prioritise tasks effectively. (Haines, 2019). It can also help develop a strong work ethic and a sense of accountability, as there is a clear deadline to meet.

The outcomes of this project depend on a variety of aspects, like drive, work ethic of the songwriters as well as me etc. but a predictable outcome could be the development of new production techniques and an established idea of what I excel at.

Legal And Ethical Considerations

It is obvious that when working with multiple people on a large scale project many considerations come into place and a producer who leads their project has to ensure that several guidelines are met before deciding to submit the project. Also then releasing the readymade songs, even if their only place in the entire internet would be the artist portfolio website, still has to reflect the mutual-benefit rule set in place at the beginning of the project and of course comply with local copyright laws and agreed-on songwriter splits. (Gov.uk, 2014) It is crucial in this situation, to maintain a positive and productive working relationship with all parties involved in the project.

In order to avoid any problems which could come in the way of publishing the songs later into the project, a signed legal contract has been prepared. It includes rules from the next page.

Contract Draft - Rules

1. Purpose of Agreement: The purpose of this Agreement is to establish the terms and conditions for the creation, production, and distribution of [Project Title].
2. Scope of Work: The Producer shall be responsible for managing and overseeing the production of the Project. The Artist(s) shall provide musical compositions and recordings for the Project. The parties shall work together in good faith to ensure the successful completion of the Project. All parties agree that according to their current judgement upon signature date, the Project [Project Name] works towards mutual benefit of all parties.
3. Project Ownership: The parties agree that the Producer shall retain ownership of the Project, including all recordings, compositions, and other materials created as part of the Project.
4. Copyright Ownership: The parties shall agree to split ownership of the copyrights in the songs created as part of the Project in accordance with the terms set forth in the attached Schedule A.
5. Representations and Warranties: The parties represent and warrant that they have the legal capacity to enter into this Agreement and that they will comply with all applicable laws and regulations in connection with the Project.
6. Confidentiality: The parties agree to keep confidential all information related to the Project, including but not limited to, financial information, trade secrets, any pre-release information and any other confidential or proprietary information.
7. Termination: This Agreement may be terminated by either party upon written notice to the other party. In this case the project is abandoned and both parties agree to discontinue work on the project, unless agreed otherwise.
8. Governing Law: This Agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the United Kingdom Copyright, available at www.gov.uk/intellectual-property-an-overview

Schedule A - Copyright Ownership:

“The parties agree to split ownership of the copyrights in the songs created as part of the Project as follows: [agreed songwriter splits in percentages, of ownership, per song, and full names]” (Nolo).

This agreement will be a helpful tool in clarifying expectations and ensuring that all parties are aware of their responsibilities and obligations. On my side, having a signed legal contract in place, I can help to avoid any complications or misunderstandings from my friends-songwriters that could arise during the project or when I am publishing the songs, which could result in a slowed-down reception of the project.

Closing Thoughts

Implications And Limitations

One can imagine a scenario of a Master's degree student completing their course and, using their built-up portfolio, entering smoothly into the world of freelance music production and becoming a successful producer straight away. Even though the amount of students who finish their degree in creative arts in the UK and continue their career in the same line of work is around *fifty percent*, the answer is still uncertain as to what this project will mean for me professionally. (Universities UK, 2017).

As per worldwide outreach, unless a decision is made to pitch any of the songs to record labels in the future, the chance for this Master's Degree to *guarantee* my professional success are not very high *per se*. There is however great potential to be enabled with this idea of launching what is in actuality a beginner career campaign.

Conclusion

The present paper delves into the planning, development, and execution of a music production project led by me as the author as part of their Master's degree studies. The project aims at producing a collection of original songs written and performed by a group of collaborating artists, with the goal of establishing a strong portfolio for the my future freelance music production career.

Key steps taken in the project's development, from conceptualisation to songwriting and recording, as well as the legal and ethical considerations involved in producing and distributing original music are also outlined in this plan. The importance of maintaining positive relationships with all parties involved in the project and adhering to local copyright laws and agreed-upon songwriter splits is highlighted. To ensure that these considerations were met, a legal contract was drafted. The writing also reflects on the implications and limitations of the project.

While there is potential for the project to serve as a starting point for the author's future career in music production, the likelihood of immediate professional success is uncertain. Nevertheless, the project offers to me a great amount of valuable experience and knowledge, which will definitely be beneficial in future endeavours.

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Appendices

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