

Creative Technology – Introducing Blu Tunes

MA Commercial Music Producer

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1.0 Introduction

Throughout this essay I will be discussing and explaining the research and work carried out to create my instrument 'Blu Tunes'. I will be explaining the principles behind how my instrument works, the issues encountered, and how Blu Tunes could be used in the commercial music world. I will compare my instrument to others that are similar within the industry alongside my reflection on improvements that could be made to Blu Tunes and how I would apply them in the future.

2.0 My Approach

Before explaining my instrument, it is important to understand the historical relationship between technology and music consumption in the modern world. Through studying production and working in the industry I have acknowledged the rapid change, growth and freedom technology has allowed in modern society. Through the promotion of music to the performance of music there is no doubt technology is enabling more and more freedom for artists, songwriters, and musicians. Reo (2020) supports this idea suggesting it is hard to imagine the world of music without technology. Lysloff and Gay (2003) explain how the growth of technology in music throughout history has allowed for a greater variety of music, such as building libraries of recordings, and creating new musical forms out of past recordings. Creating new musical forms out of past recordings is the approach I took when creating Blu Tunes.

When approaching the task to create an instrument, I wanted to ensure I played to my strengths. As a producer I find my greatest strength in vocal production and arrangement, as I am first and foremost a vocalist and songwriter. I therefore wanted to create an instrument that would incorporate my love for vocal arrangement alongside production. Royse (2021) references the importance of playing to your strengths to be more effective in your work. I consciously chose to do this when creating Blu Tunes. Just because it is production doesn't mean it has to only be beats,

guitars and midi, vocals are also a very important and valid part of production. Playing to your strengths enables you to work smarter not harder (Royse, 2021).

3.0 Overview of Principles

3.1 Creation Process

When creating an instrument that would incorporate my passion for vocal arrangement, I considered exploring different avenues, such as creating a type of loop machine, the use of vocoders, Kontakt, and Logic Pro X Sampler. I chose to use Logic Pro X Sampler as I wanted to sample my already produced vocal top line instead of attempting to create an instrument out of loops. I chose Logic Pro Sampler over Kontakt. Kontakt does have its strengths as Westwood Instruments (2020) states Kontakt powers many virtual instruments and sample libraries as well as enabling you to create your own samples. I instead chose to use Logic Pro Sampler to create my vocal instrument, as although Kontakt has sample libraries, I didn't necessarily need them for the creation of this instrument as I was sampling my own vocal top line.

I used Logic Pro X Sampler and my own vocal top line with the intention of creating an instrument that would provide the player with the opportunity to create a new lyrical arrangement of an already written song. I also created the instrument with the intention to help assist writers block. I used my original song Call Me Baby as the vocal sampled. I decided to use a track I had already vocally produced, take the top line, assign each word to a midi key, and attempt to create the opportunity to make a new song out of the lyrics used. I chose a song that I had already vocally produced for the samples to meet the commercial standard with the mindset of this instrument being used in a commercial setting. The vocals were already tuned using Melodyne and had been processed to a commercial standard.

McAllister (2018) states "Melodyne is arguably some of the most detailed pitch correction software available". Fink, Latour and Wallmark (2018) explain how auto tune is "long used in popular music" and how it is used with artists such as T-Pain for a robotic quality as well as artists such as Taylor Swift to correct notes and amplify vocal timbre. This shows the importance and necessity of auto tune in commercial

music. Manipulating a top line that was already tuned and processed at a commercial level helped make my instrument more commercially acceptable.

I specifically chose the top line from verse one and the chorus and cut them to ensure I had enough words that it would be a recognisable song but also to enable there to be potential to make a new lyrical arrangement within the song. I imported the stems of the top line into Logic Pro X, I then used Logic Pro Sampler to create my instrument by clicking Create Sampler (optimized). I then clicked “SLICE” in the Logic Pro Sampler that slices up each note automatically. I wanted to be specific with the words I was choosing for each specific sample, so I moved the slice marker to fit each individual word. I deleted some of the already provided markers to create my own. Through doing this I realised I could turn the breaths and endings of words such as “K” into what could also act as a beat. Therefore, making a new lyrical arrangement whilst putting a beat in between to assist creativity. I did this on purpose to further the creative opportunities within my instrument.

I manipulated the pitch of the original top line, as I wanted to make it sound like a sample and give it the opportunity to be a new song with a different feel to the vocal. I didn't want it to be too obvious it was my vocal. I did this by turning up the “Course” on the Logic Pro Sampler by +3. Alongside this, the strength of the keys played will affect the velocity of the note. The harder the player presses the keys the louder the note or word becomes. I did this because although it is playing a word, I wanted it to have the instrumentation feel to it. Each word was assigned to a different midi key on the keyboard, as if it was a piano, but now with a lyric coming out instead of one solid note. The first lyric starts on C2 and went all the way up to B3. I purposefully chose to only have it ranging from C2-B3 as I wanted to ensure all the notes could be played on a small midi keyboard so when playing live the set up could be as small as possible allowing for as much freedom as possible, inspired by Imogen Heap's Mi.Mu Gloves.

Blu Tunes:



3.2 Marketing Blu Tunes

When creating an instrument, it is important to acknowledge how commercial this instrument will be and who the target audience would be. As I am first and foremost an artist and songwriter alongside being a producer, I was inspired to incorporate the instrument under my artist name and business ‘Darcy Blu’ hence the title ‘Blu Tunes’. I see Darcy Blu and my production as two separate entities, so I was able to separate Blu Tunes and Darcy Blu from each other and see Darcy Blu in third person and create Blu Tunes around the brand and business created. I was inspired to use this instrument in collaboration with Darcy Blu’s brand as Imogen Heap did the same with Mi.Mu Gloves. They are associated with her artist project but are also an instrument on their own.

Darcy Blu’s audience and demographic is mostly young females around the age of 16- 25. I wanted to create an instrument that would enable the musician to create a new lyrical arrangement. I also saw the instrument as a method to assist writers block due to Blu Tunes already providing lyrics hence the tag line “turn your Blu’s into Tunes with Blu Tunes.”

I also thought I could market off the fan base the brand Darcy Blu already has behind it. The instrument Blu Tunes would be commercially appealing to artists in the

industry but also potentially Darcy Blu's fan base who follow her music who are interested in getting started with music or trying it out for fun. Blu Tunes could also be seen as a form of merchandise. I started creating my own music when I was young through being inspired by Ariana Grande's use of looping her vocal (Ariana Grande, 2013). This is one of the main factors I was inspired to create a vocal focussed instrument.

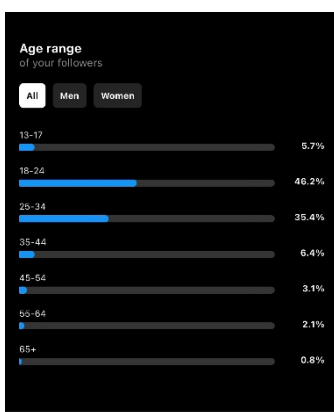
In terms of branding, I would keep the logo and overall brand of Blu Tunes intertwined with the already established brand of Darcy Blu. Darcy Blu is the brand of the artist but also has its own PR Company off the side of it called Blu Records. Blu Tunes would be an addition to this overall bigger brand. I believe having an already established pop artist connected to this instrument makes it more commercially desirable. Froude (2013) explains how branding is extremely important in the music industry stating, "image is everything". Froude (2013) explains how branding can trigger interests from fans which leads on to them listening to the music and going deeper into the artists project, buying merchandise, and going to shows. This is what made me realise the power of linking Blu Tunes and artist Darcy Blu together as it promotes the instrument therefore making it more commercial, like Imogen Heap and Mi.Mu gloves.

Darcy Blu Branding:

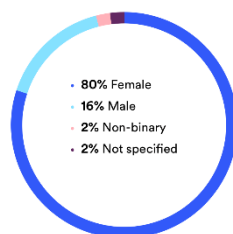
DARCY BLU

Instagram:

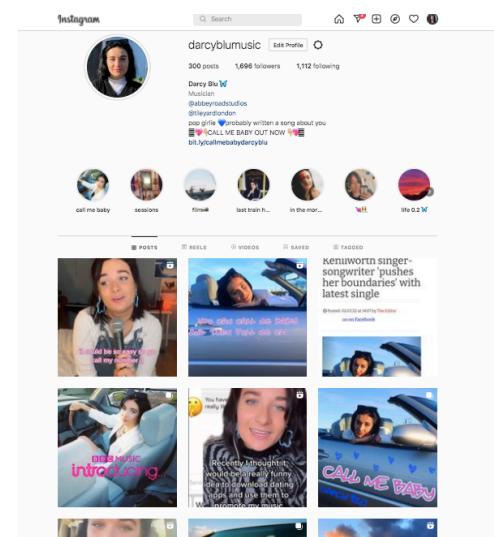
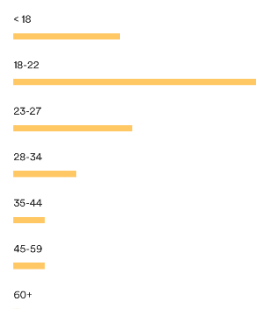
Spotify :



Their gender
LAST 28 DAYS



Their age
LAST 28 DAYS



4.0 Comparing Blu Tunes to Existing Commercial Instruments

My concept of creating an instrument that involves adapting vocal arrangement was inspired by other commercial instruments such as Mi.Mu Gloves. Mi.Mu Gloves are used in the commercial industry created by Imogen Heap and the Mi.Mu team (Mi.Mu, 2022). The Mi.Mu Gloves were created to enable new expressive ways of performing and composing music, this is what inspired me to attempt to take an already performed and composed top line, and turn it into an instrument to create a new composition of a new top line. UWE Bristol (2014) explains, “The Mi.Mu Gloves incorporate a range of motion sensors that enable musicians to compose and perform entirely with hand gestures”. Said-Moorhouse (2015) explains Mi.Mu Gloves work by each glove being loaded with sensors, buzzers, and buttons that all send information back to the computer software wirelessly. The ways in which you move your hand, the direction, how fast and slow all send signals and will influence the sound that is created.

This type of instrument has been used across the world for a wide range of artistic projects involving vocalists, classical pianists, guitarist, and beat boxers, showing their commerciality (Mi.Mu, 2022). Ariana Grande using Mi.Mu gloves on her world tour in 2015 is an example of combining a vocal instrument with a commercial performance. Grande incorporates the gloves into a live performance of one of her own songs “Why Try” showing how creative music technology and commercial music can go hand in hand (TheRealConcertKing, 2015). Ariana Grande reinforces this idea by using a loop pedal for her vocals in her Vevo performance of positions in 2022 (Ariana Grande, 2022). Said-Moorhouse (2015) describes the Mi.Mu gloves as “bringing technology and music together in visually stimulating harmony”. I have found in the past, the song writing and the technological side of music production can be two very separated entities. Although due to the growing of music technology the lines can begin to blur, there is still a separation between the song writing process and the production process. I was inspired to bring vocal arrangement and technology together through the creation of Blu Tunes.

Landr (2021) explains how song writing specifically focuses on the melody and lyrics, often organically written on an instrument such as guitar or piano. Landr

(2021) goes on to explain how production is the next step when developing the song for public presentation and is specifically focused on the digital side of creation.

“Despite the broad definition every workflow in modern music production has one thing in common – digital tools”.

Although my instrument somewhat bridges the gap between song writing and technology, I believe Mi.Mu gloves are a much more intuitive way for the performer to communicate music and performance in one, as it doesn’t even involve a midi keyboard like Blu Tunes does, enabling more freedom. The Mi.Mu Gloves further inspired my instrument as Imogen Heap states she wanted to have harmony in her voice (TheRealConertKing, 2015). I found through sampling my voice and turning it into an instrument and assigning it to midi keys, this enabled me to play two notes of my vocal at the same time creating a harmony from a top line that wouldn’t have been there otherwise.

Alongside the Mi.Mu gloves I was also inspired by Ariana Grande’s looping cover of Just For Now by Imogen Heap (Ariana Grande, 2013). I found this looping cover before I was a producer and was amazed at how one could create an entire song just using their vocal. This is what propelled my love for song writing and music through buying myself a loop pedal before any other instrument. The only musical instrument I had was my voice so I thought I might as well play to my strengths and use entirely my vocal to attempt to write and create songs. Klein (2012) explains how a loop pedal records a section of music and then plays it back on loop, leaving a blank canvas to create and write over with different harmonies and rhythms. Looping my own vocal in this way gave me freedom to write melodies and lyrics without any instrumentation music theory. This inspired me to create a similar instrument that focuses solely on vocal and lyrical arrangement instead of having to learn how to play an instrument with strings or notes.

5.0 Issues Encountered

Although my original plan was to create new lyrical song arrangements out of the lyrics given, I found this didn’t work as well as I hoped due to the lack of words available from only choosing the verse and chorus of Darcy Blu’s song Call Me Baby.

I found the words were a bit too specific to the original song to turn it into a whole new lyrically re-arranged song. The sounds of the words sometimes being too legato meant they overlapped into one another making it much harder to sample as a single lyric. However even though the words felt too legato on reflection, I did find elements within the vocals that could be used as a beat amongst the words played. This added a more interesting element to the instrument as it meant you could play beats in between lyrics. This opened doors to explore more elements of song writing instead of just starting out with lyrics. It enables the writer to think of how the beat and lyrics would intertwine themselves.

Another issue I encountered is the instrument doesn't allow for much freedom when performing on stage if being marketed to performers. Similar to instruments that don't involve creative technology if an artist were to play 'Blu Tunes' live they are still tied to the midi keyboard. It allows for more freedom in terms of vocal layering than a normal performance would allow, but not as much freedom as Mi.Mu Gloves. In terms of using the instrument for purely production, remixing or writing, this limitation isn't so obvious and the instrument works well.

A final issue is that the instrument still relies on Logic Pro to work so it therefore isn't that accessible to everyone. Having said that, this may be a limitation that will come with most creative technology instruments. Mi.Mu Gloves still rely on motion sensor technology to work.

6.0 Adapting to Issues

In the future I could potentially combine two songs together to enable more opportunity for lyrics, but I intentionally chose to only use parts of one song as I wanted it to still sound familiar and I wanted to see what I could make with limitations. I found sometimes having fewer options to work with creates more ideas and it made me find kicks and snares with the breaths and the ending of words.

Bardot (2020) explains sometimes when it comes to creating art in any form, by narrowing our focus, we can start to see new ways of creating. Smith (2020) speaks

about how he works with a variety of creative professionals who deliberately use limitations to generate new innovative ideas, similar to creating an instrument. Keeping it simple and only using verse and chorus words allowed space for this, again reinforcing the power of limitations and simplicity. Ewer (2013) talks about how “complexity in music has its place” but it is not to be overlooked by the power of simplicity and how in some cases it can be vital.

Throughout the manipulation of the vocals, I realised the limitations made the song feel like more of a remix of the top line. Showler (2021) explains a remix is when a producer uses the stems of a song, for example the vocal, and creates a new piece of work. Showler (2021) explains the importance of remixes and how they can elevate artists. Remixes are very much still used on the commercial music scene for example Dua Lipa’s Levitating (2020) was turned into a remix featuring Da Baby reaching over 1,000,000,000 streams. Another example is Elton John’s remix of Cold Heart featuring Dua Lipa (2021), taking an old song and making it new. This made me realise Blu Tunes could still be used as a commercial instrument and tool to remix top lines instead of entirely rearranging the lyrical arrangement of the song.

However, there would still need to be more of a variety of words sampled into the Logic Pro X Sampler for this to be an instrument used by the masses. It is still too specific to the one song I sampled. I have also considered sampling multiple song top lines to give an even bigger variety. In hindsight I understand this would make my instrument more accessible.

7.0 Reflection

Upon reflection of my instrument, I would say it successfully sparks ideas for new inspiration through vocal arrangement. The high-pitched vocal allows for a slight disconnect between the original vocal of artist Darcy Blu for it to feel like its own instrument and voice, but it is still in there enough to have a unique selling point to the consumers and add texture to the music being created. The fact it is only a top line vocal being sampled enables Blu Tunes to create room for producers to make a new beat and instrumentation around it, therefore assisting with writers block and sparking inspiration. This is a strength of Blu Tunes.

Despite the successes, there are limitations to the results that could have been avoided through further trial and error. As mentioned previously with comparison to the Mi.Mu Gloves, Blu Tunes doesn't allow for live performance freedom so if I am to make this instrument and market it to Darcy Blus audience, I would need to bare that in mind. For production this isn't a problem but for use in a live performance like Mi.Mu Gloves, this would need to be considered. The instrument currently would be limited to Logic Pro X due to the use of Logic Pro Sampler. This could be avoided by creating a sample pack of the sounds created. If I were to create the instrument again, I would make an entire keyboard full of lyrics. As mentioned previously the limited words limit the amount of lyrical arrangement possible. Although limitations can spark creativity, on reflection I believe more words were still necessary. Even though all the lyrics wouldn't have all fitted from C2 - B3 on a small midi keyboard, the performer or producer could still press one octave above to move towards the next set of lyrics. The feature of pressing the keys harder to change the velocity of the note was a creative feature that worked well, enabling for a change of emotion in the vocal and lyric pressed.

I gathered feedback from my peers and the majority agreed with my reflections and supported the opinion that there could be more lyrics, although the lyrics chosen are still suitable to what I am trying to recreate. Bone (2022) from Tileyard Education stated that he didn't think it was a problem that the instrument limits movement due to the fact it is assigned to midi keys; most instruments end up limiting movement in some way or another. Feedback from producer Nyitrai (2022) from Tileyard Education suggested pitching the vocals even higher or much lower so it sounds less like Darcy Blu would make the instrument more appealing to anyone. Although I agree I think intertwining the instrument with Darcy Blu has its benefits in terms of marketing the product.

8.0 Conclusion

Overall, amongst all its limitations I still believe Blu Tunes was a success to a certain extent. I can conclude the marketing and branding side of the instrument ties in well with Darcy Blu as a commercial artist similarly to Imogen Heap and Mi.Mu Gloves.

If I were to recreate Blu Tunes again for production purposes and performance purposes, I would like to blend multiple song lyrics from Darcy Blu's discography to allow for a more dynamic range of lyrics to choose from to re-arrange. Although this may remove the consistency of re-arranging just one song, I believe it would provide the creator with more of a choice of lyrical arrangement therefore furthering their inspiration. The only limiting factor of this choice is that it is still solely Darcy Blu lyrics, but this is intentional to allow the instrument to have a unique selling point.

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