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Element 1 – Written Proposal

Introduction

In this proposal, I will outline my aims and objectives for my end of year MA Creation Project. In this, I hope to explain the thought process and creative journey that has led me to this point, and, use various references and examples to help inform my plan of action going forward.

This for me is solely a starting point from which I can build from, develop, and eventually reflect upon.

Creation Project Main Aims

- To experiment with production styles and techniques to create an original 5-Track EP using both 'in the box' and 'out of the box' recording methods.
- To establish my own artistic voice and production style.

Why Am I Doing This?

Having been a producer for the past 6 years, I have been involved in countless projects for various artists across a multitude of styles. I have released some original projects along the way but never more than a song or two on any one project.

For this project, I wanted to find a way to make a body of work that I can commit to and use this deadline as a means to see it through to the end.

In doing so, I hope to enable myself to express much of the creativity I have not fully focused on while working on other artists' projects.

Also, being such a lover of many genres, I have found it difficult to formulate a specific style that I feel is unique to me from an artistic standpoint. I am hoping that by allowing myself to experiment with this project, I will have a clearer picture (or not!) of my own musical voice and be able to identify a common thread or cohesive 'sound'.

According to Zac Citron (theproaudiofiles.com, 2013), not being able to 'find your own sound' is down to being 'scared to be completely vulnerable' so one must 'allow your unique self to come through in all that you do' ... fingers crossed.

The Need To Experiment

Kat Crow (medium.com, 2019) states that 'recognizing an act as an *experiment* releases it from a lot of seriousness and a lot of demands for perfection' and also that 'the outcome of experimentation is knowledge, and failure is just as valuable as success, because one has expanded one's awareness of one's own abilities and deeper ideas' (2019).

To this end, I am excited to allow myself time and space to write and create without a specific commercial expectation in mind, even though I know that my critical ear will undoubtedly kick in throughout.

Having said all that, my hope is to create a focused, cohesive body of work and treat the 'experimental' concept as a means to control potentially destructive hypercritical thinking and, in the words of Sam Riley - 'starve your inner critic' (medium.com 2019).

Additional Aims

Recording Real Instruments

Having worked primarily 'in the box' for most of my production projects, I want to take this opportunity to record real instruments to see how this human element can add real depth to my productions.

According to André Miranda, listeners resonate more with real instruments instead of VSTs (virtual instruments) because of the way 'musicians use the emotion they feel while playing to interpret a piece, improvise parts on the spot and interact with other musicians' (musiversal.com, 2019) and, in the words of R. H. Woody - "most performing musicians intend to communicate some kind of meaning (emotion, feeling, or mood) and listeners tend to hear this expressed in music (2000) so this is something which I am interested to explore also.

Psychological

Another facet of this I wish to consider is the psychological aspect of creativity. For me, I have found it much easier to work on other artists' projects because much of the pressure of the release is taken away. For example:

- Fear of rejection
- Stress associated with promotion
- Social media & marketing
- Commercial criticism and comparison

This has come into play when working on my own material in the past so I am interested to monitor my experience of this throughout the project, and, hopefully develop tools to overcome this and create an air of positivity and excitement throughout.

Preparation

Creating a Manifesto

Being fully aware of my capacity toward creative meandering, I decided to make an artistic mandate or manifesto in the form of a poster. This is to serve as a reminder for me of my initial intentions for the project and to pull my focus back to the creative headspace I was in when formulating this idea initially.

This is something I am interested to reflect on once this project is done.

G Kaye Manifesto Poster (2020)



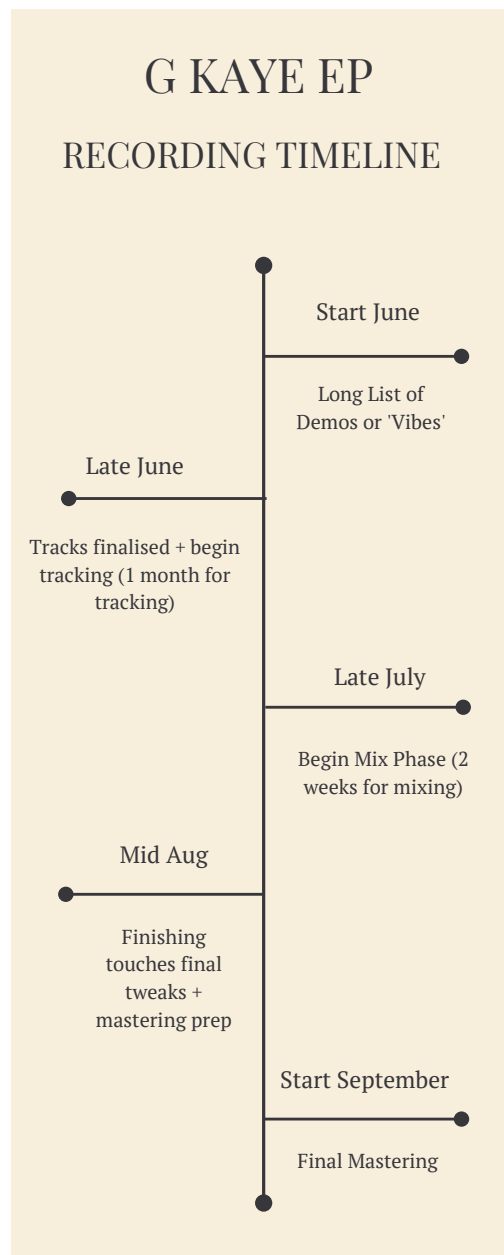
Creating A Timeline

Knowing that demand for use of the Tileyard Studio could be high, and with the uncertainty surrounding social distancing and Covid19 imposed restrictions, I decided to talk to Sean Hargreaves who operates the studio (and has a wealth of experience in session planning) about the task at hand and how to prepare adequately. This is to make sure that I stay on deadline and do everything in a professional and systematic way.

I will be interested to see the impact of an imposed deadline on this project and how it affects my productivity. Interestingly, according to Brian Flapping (The Guardian, 2015), 'people invariably want things more if they're scarce (e.g. precious metals, etc.) so when a deadline is looming, the possibility of time being in scarce supply should theoretically motivate us to finish a task'. We shall see.

See timeline below:

G Kaye EP Timeline (2020)



A Study Into Creativity

I've been trying to comprehend how my favourite producers create the incredible music they do. How are they able to carve their own space in the industry to create an identifiable and authentic sound that doesn't feel divisive or conceited? I'm exploring this in preparations for my project.

To this end, I have studied some of my favourite producers' views on creativity and artistic authenticity in the hope that it will inform my own process.

1. Pharrell Williams (Artist / Producer / Songwriter)

In an interview with LinkedIn, Pharrell says:

"The kids can tell when you're doing something for money...make sure the main ingredient is intention. If your intentions are pure - even if they don't like what you're doing - they will respect you."

He also goes on to say - 'It is imperative that we create content experiences with clear intention to gain their trust' (2015).

This call to create something with a 'clear intention' will form part of my EP conceptualization and, in conjunction with my Manifesto, will help guide my music creation.

2. Rick Ruben (Producer)

In an interview with medium.com, Rick Ruben states that 'you have to believe you can create your best work in order to do so'. He also asks the creator to visualize their best work - 'what would that sound like? How would that work? How much work would it take?' (2017).

This visualization could prove especially helpful to create an air of optimism and positivity surrounding the project.

Another interesting suggestion from Ruben is to 'approach creations like chapters in your life' (medium.com, 2017). Having this level of connection to a time and place or moment in your life can really help to make meaningful creative decisions and give a voice or identifiable energy to your project.

This 'chapter in your life' approach is also interesting when looking at the reverse - 'music triggers specific memories' (Brennan, 2016).

This is because, according to Tiffany Jenkins of the BBC, 'the hippocampus accompanied with the frontal cortex of the brain play a large part into determining what we remember' (2014) with music activating many parts of the brain also related to movement - the limbic system in particular (Bergland, 2013).

I may need a few years before I can fully reflect on this aspect of my project but knowing that the music I create could form a significant memory for a future listener is quite inspiring.

3. Steve Mack (Producer/Songwriter)

As part of my research, I reached out to Grammy and Ivor Novello Award winning producer Steve Mac who co-wrote and produced the most streamed song of all time - 'Shape Of You' by Ed Sheeran. I sat down with Steve at his Rokstone studio in Fulham to talk about creativity and his approach.

Steve's approach is one of complete simplicity and in his own words 'once I have produced a track I'll try to take out as many instruments as possible so that only the most important elements stay in' (2020). He also says that the fewer elements you have in a mix, the easier it is to make a mix sound big.

I will be looking at this method during the mix stage of my project to see if I can distil down the elements to only the core ones needed where suitable.

Another thing that Steve does has to do with repeating hooks as much as possible without the listener becoming aware of it. He does this by repeating a melody or rhythm across different instruments – constantly reaffirming the hook to the listener leaving them 'with no chance', in his own words (2020).

While this is his method for producing commercial mainstream radio pop music, I am hoping to utilize it in some shape or form, even at a subconscious level.

4. Earth, Wind & Fire's Ralph Johnson (Musician / Producer Songwriter)

One of my biggest musical influences in the past 10 years has been the band Earth, Wind & Fire who are 7-time Grammy Award winners as well as Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees. I decided to reach out to Ralph Johnson from the band, telling him that I was working on my final MA paper and he agreed to a video chat with me.

In Ralph's own words - 'It all starts with the song. Don't go in the studio and start cutting stuff if you don't have the right song - save your money' (2020). This definitely encourages the process of making a long list of tracks and whittling them down to the best ones (which I have included in my timeline).

Another element that Ralph talked about was the power of instrument arrangement and how a great arrangement can do a lot of the mix work before a song even goes to the mixing stage. He talks about how EWF did this:

'All of the parts, the guitar parts, the bass, the drums...all of it, it had a place within the track and that was consistent from track to track. Everything always fell where it was supposed to - everything had it's own space' (2020).

My takeaway from this is that a great track should have a great arrangement with each part having a clear purpose and it's own space, similar to the advice of Steve Mac about distilling parts down to the most necessary and important.

In terms of creativity, Ralph says 'stay true to your ideas...stay away from your detractors and stick with your plan' (2020). Wise words.

Knowing If I Have Achieved My Outcomes

At the end of this project, I will measure my achievements by asking myself the following questions:

1. Have I completed a finished 5-Track EP?

This will be a simple yes or no answer so is the easiest question to answer.

2. Did I stick to my recording timeline?

I will be interested to see if my timeline and imposed deadline will make me more productive and how I will feel creatively as I get closer to the deadline.

3. Has the project established my own production style and voice?

Who knows? I think this question is more based on subjective experience when the work is finished. I will be interested to see what my feeling will be upon completion. Hopefully I will not be an exception to the rule that 'artists generally are happier than the rest of the population' (Bruno S. Frey, 2014)

4. Did the Project Manifesto keep me creatively and mentally on track?

This will be an interesting one. I am hoping that the novelty of a new Manifesto or Mandate will not wear off and dull my enthusiasm for the project so this will be a question worth looking at upon completion.

5. Is the EP a cohesive body of work with an identifiable sound?

This could potentially be answered by doing some research with a number of listeners and seeing what the overall consensus is, even though, music is such an individualistic and subjective entity, it may be hard to tell. This could be more of a personal reflective matter I feel.

Personal Reflective Statement

Another way I am going to measure the successes and failures of this project is by personal reflection.

- Have I pushed myself outside of my usual processes and comfort zone?
- Have I developed new recording techniques?
- Has the option of leaving space for musicians to interpret parts produced a more interesting body of work overall or was it even possible to do this with Covid19 restrictions and time constraints?
- Have I been able to keep my self-critic at bay in order to approach this artistic project with an air of optimism and enthusiasm?

This will all be valuable research for me in planning future productions going forward.

Potential Pitfalls

With the best intentions in the world, there are still things that could hamper the completion of this project.

- **Lack Of Inspiration** – Let's face it, creating music relies on the ability to firstly be inspired and then to harness that inspiration to create. Mood boards, manifestos and playlists are all at the ready to help combat this.
- **Covid19** – This could cause problems in the area of real instrument recording so I will have to have an 'in the box' approach as a backup.
- **Time Management** – In the famous words of Douglas Adams - 'I love deadlines. I love the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.' Breaking tasks into small manageable chunks should help with this.

Current Phase of Project

As it stands, I am still very much in the conceptualizing and research phase of my project. I have created a Spotify playlist with songs that I feel are a broad representation of how I would like this EP to sound. I have some track ideas that I have written already which will go into the broad list but there's a part of me that would like to write completely new ideas.

I've made a shortlist of musicians I would like to bring in on the project and also have songwriters in mind that I would like to work with but the big variable in all of this is the current Covid19 lockdown situation whereby social distancing regulations are in place making studio collaboration quite tricky to plan so I am looking into the possibility of remote recording sessions with Sean Hargreaves but time will tell.

I feel that I have a lot of the technical tools needed to make this a successful project already so it's more the creative and conceptual side that I am interested in developing. I am still looking for that big 'WHY?'

My main mantra in all of this is to 'create something that I would be proud for my grandkids to listen to'. Here's hoping I do.

Conclusion

Overall, this proposal has been a thoroughly enjoyable experience for me. Along the way, I've met and interviewed some incredible people and done some long overdue creative soul-searching.

Setting goals and deadlines can be scary but being able to embrace the ability for self-expression, experimentation and collaboration far outweighs this. Ask me how I feel about it in 2 months and to quote Paul Valery – 'The artist never finishes his work, he merely abandons it'.

Thanks for reading.

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Johnson, R., 2020. *Gary Keane Interviews Earth, Wind & Fire's Ralph Johnson. Facetime Video* May 7.

Other Links

G Kaye EP Inspiration Playlist on Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1l0CLlSTKgLVJ7Oc1Mu9dd?si=ParXsi8WTauK99RJ0fhETQ>

Interview with Ralph Johnson of Earth, Wind & Fire

https://www.instagram.com/tv/B_5sYHNAwXw/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet