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MA COMMERCIAL PRODUCER

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In my presentation of the final project I wrote that this last essay would have been written almost exclusively from the point of view of the collective I formed, as I felt that mine and the collectives were two different entities with different strengths, weaknesses and goals, hence I needed to take a step back from mine in order to be able to fully focus on LHC's point of view.

Unfortunately though, this will not be possible.

Since the start of the project I've been leading the collective as the main writer, producer, multi instrumentalist and by getting all of the songs done and recorded in the studio.

During the realisation of the album I've also been pushing to set meetings and deadlines, in order to have a timetable to follow and not be completely disorganised.

Everything was exciting and everyone was on top of meetings, brought ideas and were proactive, and both me and the collective were growing and improving on many aspects, but lately as we needed to be more pragmatic and start to get photoshoots and graphics down and done I was the only one bringing new ideas which now are just stagnating as no one else has really given me any kind of feedback or inputs.

At that point since I realised my bandmates are distracted in this moment, I decided to take some time to start focusing again more on myself, my personal growth and my goals.

I thought I would have been able to include photoshoots and visuals in this essay, which would have been doable since we actually were on spot with the timeline (appendix Figure A) I did in January, but unfortunately it didn't happen due to these dynamics I just mentioned.

In the past few months I have been exploring music and arts in a deeper and more thoughtful way, developing a certain interest not only for the music itself but also for the person behind the art and how they present themselves to the public.

From focusing on the lyrics and comprehending their superficial and inner meaning, I started trying to understand and figure out what the artist's story is and where they come from and what they have been through, socially and personally.

In extent to that, I was interested in who they are trying to connect with and communicate to, why they are targeting certain people and markets, what their presence on social media is and what their content is about, as well as how it's packaged, who they promote it to and why.

I also tried to figure out which collaborations (not only in between musicians, but also in other fields such as fashion) are based on money, trends and exposure and which ones were formed based on perhaps a bigger share vision and more pretentious and relevant project.

That said, all of this questioning and observing led me to a couple small revelations about myself and my surroundings which eventually led me to fall out of love (to a certain extent) with the album I've been working on over the past year as I am not the same person from a year ago; I am more aware of myself and my surroundings and I feel ready to step up in both of them.

This essay will then be a paper on my search for identity and how it led me to slightly fall out of love with my own piece of work (which I still value), as I realised some of its flaws which didn't allow me to fully embrace my identity.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
-Propositive -Not afraid of trying/don't hold back due to intimidation -Experimenting -Leadership -Often self evaluating (focus on improving) ^ -Able to see the bigger picture ^ -Able to compromise ^ -Trust (necessary when working with other people)^ -Hype Man ^ -Communication ^ -Willpower -Competitive -Determinate TECHNICAL: -Multi instrumentalist -Coming up with instrumental hooks and leads -Toplines	-Quick tempered -Stubborn -Get distracted easily -Mood swings -Too straight about things (If I think something isn't good I won't sugarcoat it) -Procrastinator -Organization TECHNICAL: -Run a studio session + -Production ++ -Mixing -Rapping ++ -Lyrics ++
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
-London -Tileyard -Working with signed artists -In touch with Kevin Abstract	-London -Full Time bartending job -Achille's tendon injury -Overload -Covid -Money

This SWOT analysis which I submitted in the proposal has been based on the development I had from summer 2020 to May 2021, and as of today, I can consider myself to be satisfied with the progresses and achievement I made.

The aspects I wanted to improve the most were followed by one or two plus signs, depending on the urgency and the relevance that I gave to them, and apart from production on which I haven't focused as much as I wanted to, I believe I made a few big steps forward in everything else that was prioritised.

My biggest focus has been on writing lyrics and melodies, which has made me realise two faults I had: firstly, before starting collaborating with many people and I got involved in several projects, I used to write very little and it would take me ages to get something

done, so the fact that now I could come up with many melodies and lyrics, to me seemed already a big achievement so I settled for them even though some of them now feels a bit average to me and could have used more thought and trial and errors to ending up to be more interesting on both a melodic and lyrical level.

When recording my vocals throughout the album, most of the times we had to split verses and track them one at the time since the whole part as it doesn't represent the way I normally speak, and even if I rehearsed the parts before tracking them, most of them would still sound stiff or out of flow.

One choice we made to try to limit/overcome the problem has been to use the Antares Autotune on all of my vocals (and basically everyone else's as well).

Problem is I stylistically don't like Autotune on my voice and in the music I make, if not in very specific circumstances if that's the vision I have and what I want for a certain song or part of a song (see minute 1.45 of "I see you everywhere" by Hostage, my old band, where we used autotune only to create a moment during the bridge section of the song. Figure D appendix) , so realising that Autotune was only there to help my performances and to fix some flaws is one of the reasons why I can't connect much to my parts on the album anymore, as they don't really represent me.

Secondly and more importantly, I realised how restrict my knowledge of English was, and how I was learning to speak from the medias I've been exposed to such as movies and music (most of the times coming from the US) instead of from where I live and the people I met.

One example of that can be found in the song "Dirk Diggler", track n.3 of the album, where instead of referring to "weed" in a British slang such as "doobie" or "spliff" I used the word "green" which I heard in the last BROCKHAMPTON album called Roadrunner, which has been one of the main influences over my music in the past year. (More

precisely in their song “Count on me” where in the third verse Matt Champion goes “That smoke puffing outta my teeth, I’m good I got my green”, appendix figure E).

I reckon this phenomenon has happened for two reasons: since I moved to London I’ve always struggled to fit in with the English culture and I’ve never been fully integrated in London, ending up living and making music with other Italian people living here and to search for my identity as a person first and consequentially as an artist elsewhere, since I was still living in a small Italian community which For many years, held back my growth in speaking the language and, more generally, my Uk experience.

The second reason has been the arrival and spread of Covid-19, which led almost all of us to be locked in our homes for pretty much a year and a half, leaving me with a really miserable if not non-existent practise of English.

The importance of using your own voice and your own slang hit me while listening to Little Simz’s second to last release called “Rolling Stone”.

Little Simz is a rapper born and raised in Islington, London, with Nigerian heritage.

She is known for her crazy flows and for having such a unique voice, timbre and way of rapping which has been awarded with many recognitions both academical and non, from people in the UK such as Stormzy who during his headline set at Glastonbury shouted her for being “one of 52 essential British artists coming through” and worldwide from legends such as Kendrick Lamar who referred to her as “the illest doing it right now”.

In her song “Rolling Stone” which was released on the 14th June, in the first few bars the song she is talking about the fact she’s in Sao Paolo, and thirty seconds into the songs she goes “fuck your blunt man I want my spliff”, (Little Simz, “Rolling Stone”, 2021. Figure B Appendix) 0.30) underlining and making a statement about a difference between English and american culture, supporting the one coming from the land of tea.

This stream of consciousness led me to a search of my individuality and artistic identity and outpoured into an “urge to establish a unique identity for themselves on the digital platform” (Patki, S. 2021) which is “one of the defining marks of Generation Z, which refers to those individuals born after 1995, who were surrounded by the Internet and ITC technology (Dunas & Vartanov, 2020).

I am strongly fond and “supporter” of each others individuality and persona, therefore I believe in being real and keeping all the peculiarities and things that makes you YOU, such as the accent, the phrasing or some cultural references to your everyday life based on your surroundings.

Keeping it real and relatable is the first thing that allows you to connect in the first place with the community you live in, and eventually, once you have the support of the locals, aiming towards the mainstream and global market.

I found the same arguments in documentary called The Pioneers - The British Hip Hop Documentary (appendix Figure C), about the hip hop scene in London during the 90s, featuring some of the most influential rappers that created and shaped the Uk Hip Hop scene such as Rodney P from London Posse, generally considered to be the grandfather of Uk Hip Hop, who said that “the fact that we’re English and how we grew up and our background is different, if we’re reflecting that in music it means that that’ll be different, that’ll make us sound different from a man that grew up in Brooklyn [...] For me, my background it’s west Indian grew up in London, my flex is different”.

The general take of the documentary it’s to show how important it is to keep your cultural and personal identity, and how even though that was seen and still could be seen as a limit it actually became one of the strengths of Uk Hip Hop which then led it to starting the conversation about London accent in mainstream music and nowadays enabled artists such as Little Simz to not having to compromise with the way she speaks, on the

contrary to embrace it, and embrace whatever experiences she had in her life and encounters with different accents or languages which reflected on the way she speaks now, and allowed her to find within herself her own style that led her to become such a good and influential rapper.

This is the way NiNE8 are doing it, a London based collective co formed by Lava La Rue, Biig Piig and Mark Wetha and then joined by Naiana Iz, Nige, Bone Slim and Lorenzo RSV, whom starting from their identities (influenced by growing up in London) are now the founders of the new Uk hip hop alternative scene, defining the new sound and style of London by blending together all the main elements from alternative music born and developed in the Uk during the past 50 years, such as the use of electric guitars, beats inspired by uk garage music and trip hop blended together and a use of language and accent close to the one of 90s uk hip hop.

They are creating a community which “have transcended to create an inclusive space where people from all parts can come together” (Van Spal, I. 2020) and it’s filled by musicians, photographers, artists, designers and stylists that reflects what part of London has been in the past few years and, I believe, how London will look like in the next decade. Within this scene I found my voice and identity and I finally started connecting to my surroundings, absorbing the English culture and mixing it with my Italian background, where there isn’t a predominant part but they’re merged together as something different. From the reactions of people I encounter on a daily basis, my spoken English is pretty credible/good, with influences from south east London slang and with an accent that doesn’t sell me as Italian, which made me realise how I could have a unique way of speaking the language, with different flows and choice of words, which could make me different from the rest of the rappers from here.

In the past few months my competence in the language has improved drastically and it’s helping me becoming a better rapper and lyricist, also due to the raise in awareness in

what range I'm more comfortable singing and rapping and where my voice sounds more credible and unique.

This search of one's inner voice and identity also seems to be supported and trended by platforms such as the Youtube show and online magazine COLORS (appendix F and G) a unique music platform showcasing exceptional talent from around the globe.

All COLORS shows seek to provide clear, minimalistic stage that shines a spotlight on the artists, giving them the opportunity to present their music without distraction.

The scenery in fact, is absolutely aseptic and the colours of the whole scenery are based around the artist vision, allowing the viewer to focus only and carefully on one artists' music and choice of colours and fashion, without being distracted by the environment.

COLORS focuses on the most distinctive new artists and original sounds in an increasingly fragmented and saturated scene.

It is through the pursue of their own identity and platform such as this one, that artists like the Lithuanian Tommy Cash or the Belgian Angele reached such a hype and mainstream gratitude, even though the first one sings mainly in English with an overly pushed Lithuanian accent (appendix Figure H) and Angele mainly sings in French (appendix Figure I).

In an oversaturated globalised music industry, today's trend seems to be moving towards finding one's originality and identity, regardless of the language or the country they're from, that while once used to be a flaw which would leave the mainstream target out of reach, nowadays might actually play out as an advantage for the artists.

“ As record companies continue to expand their geographical footprint and cultural reach, music has become more globally connected today, than ever before.” (Moor, F. 2021) and

so are listeners and upcoming artists, and as one of them, I can say that this is where the topic of influences and identity became shady for me, as we've never lived in a world so connected as of today, and the term "community" has now also a widely different connotation, as it doesn't refer anymore only to the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality, but also to the ones formed on social medias, for a group of people who have similar interests or who want to achieve something together.

There's an interesting case I think it's worth to examine, as I reckon it's a good example of how things became shadier due to globalisation and social medias and how not always the most natural of connections between a person and a community is based of surroundings and everyday life, but quite on the contrary.

Perhaps what connected Ashnikko, a young popstar in the rising, to the Japanese hentai world could also be a necessity of escape from her surroundings and her culture, in which she might not have found herself.

Ashnikko who was born in North Carolina, moved to Lithuania and Latvia and then eventually settled in London, where she lives now.

Her aesthetic, fashion, artworks and graphics is based around the Anime/Hentai world born and developed in Japan to which she was never really in contact with physically, for this reason she has been recently accused by some twits of cultural appropriation and if "The important aspect of determining cultural appropriation is when borrowing becomes exploitation" (Charisma, T. 2021) I guess they might have a point.

Still it makes me wonder about how much she was actually exposed, through streaming services and medias, to that hentai and anime culture she is evidently so fond about and how that, in her case, substituted her actual surroundings.

My goal for the next few months, is to reach the same maturity and consciousness I reached on my identity lyrics/writing/singing in music production.

in these past few months my focus was on getting the album done and since we had access to TY studios and more such as Studio13, Abbey Roads Institute, Pirates Studios for free and it was my first experience doing this myself, we took our time and tried different things and mainly just focusing on becoming as confident in a studio as we could, since that is a path that interests me and that I want to explore and work in.

Better recordings mean better sounds to work with and the search for great choices of mic placements and mics, preamps, compressions, tape delays (there's plenty in the album I submitted, I'm a huge fan of the Space Echo and luckily I finally had the opportunity to use it) which would also ultimately improve my productions.

The fact that I come from the other side of the spectrum as a musician who has been playing and recording different instruments for exactly ten years now and singing for a few years, helps me knowing, when I'm in a session as engineer and/or producer, if the musician/s I'm working with are comfortable, their needs even before they ask me, understand the room, get along with their requests and communicating with them, always keeping the calm and everyone happy and vibey, without faking it.

With the amount of hours and experience in the studio I gathered this year, I can say that I'm happy and confident with running a session in whichever studio.

This has also been the first year where I've approached Pro Tools after a few years only working on Ableton.

I'm also happy to say I'm confident enough with Pro Tools for tracking, editing.

I'm quite happy and satisfied with the way the recordings we made sound, but I still believe we will have to re-track some of the vocals as there are some parts in which I'm not satisfied with the performance.

During the time tracking in the studios I did find myself having to deal with unforeseen circumstances and I always managed to get out on top of it, even though I would like to be able to spend more time in a studio more regularly to get better and faster at problem solving.

This year I managed to assist and run a few commercial sessions and get a couple pounds for it, and I'm happy with that.

In the next month or so I'll just keep using the resources TY can give me such as free studio time

and then start applying to studios from September, starting from the ones I like and could jump in as producer if needed and give creative and artistic advices, and then anything else just to get experience.

I would also like to take this space and opportunity to say that my mixing skills were left behind and are still at a beginner/rough level.

I have received a few inputs during this year but mixing is an art I'm not particularly keen on right now, even though I do have a little knowledge which has helped me becoming a better producer and engineer.

Since I've been focused on so many other things, I had to sacrifice this aspect which is the one I had to deal with the least.

Mixing is an art which needs a lot of practice and time which at the moment I need to dedicate to all the things I listed before which I consider to be more pressing and important for what I'm interested in developing and achieving, which are listed in my personal development plan (appendix Figure J).

In the collective one of the other two producers has focused on mixing over the last couple of years and he really improved a lot, so we're going to mix the song together for the releases as he's got the skills and the tools to be more creative in the mixes and reach our vision of the songs.

On the mixes for this exam, I have just tried to make it sound as clean and standard as possible to showcase the quality of the recordings we did in the first place on vocals and instrumentals, but I haven't been able to really be creative with them as my skills and tools are limited.

Finally I would like to dispose a few words about LHC collective.

The way this project was born made me fall in love with making music again, and relived the feeling and excitement I used to feel when I was a kid playing the guitar in my early bands, which since I reconnected to, I never want to lose ever again, as it's the drive, need, meaning and purpose that led me to dedicate my life to making music.

I believe we had been good enough producers to capture the vibe that was in the room and keep it in the songs, which made the project cohesive and coherent and also unique, becoming one of the greatest strengths of the collective.

At the same time though, we failed in the developing part and process.

The first ideas were all recorded in my living with limitations on gear, which meant that the songs were good enough to be demos, but needed better recording and tools to sound at an industry standard and be competitive.

Since we had limited studio time available, not to waste any of it, we decided to cut the selections of worthy songs to ten, and to plan sessions in order to record all the drums first, then bass, acoustic guitars, electric guitars and eventually the main lead vocals.

It was the first time recording an album on our own, and I took the challenge with one other producer from the collective and TY.

Me and this other producer were the only ones figuring out Pro Tools and audio engineering, so even though the process has been really fun and we took our time experimenting and trying things out, it was slow and it took us basically six months to get everything done.

The length of the process led us to feel over exposed and saturated with the songs and it has been challenging to keep the vibe from the living room into the studio sessions.

The outcome of this process in my opinion has been that we lost the excitement and the momentum, therefore I believe we should have focused on getting the first couple of releases done and recorded, released them months ago and then keep tracking the other songs or new material.

I also realised we missed a few chance to create some work connections with people I fancied working with, due to the fact that I could only speak about the project and perhaps play some demos sometimes, but I didn't really have a "business card" to hand out to other producers and artists.

Those connections are still available to me and us and I managed to keep them alive so I'm not feeling too negative about it, but the issue now is that I will be releasing music that I made a year ago and around which I do not want to base and create my identity as it no longer fully represents me and the music I would be making now, which is annoying.

I think it's clear that this album has been more than a point of arrival a journey to discover self identity by analyse all the elements that we put together and realise which ones to keep in the bag with me and which ones to leave behind.

At the same time, I still believe this piece of work that we created is quite a big statement being the first music we make together and that we will be releasing, so it's definitely something that gives me confidence and makes me look forward to the next steps.

I just think we need to release a few singles soon in order to start building something which already sounds interesting and that has a lot of space for improvement.

As I was saying earlier in the essay, I'm working my way to some really talented and upcoming artists that I would really like to work with, and I'm sure we will be working together in a couple months time, hence another outcome and goal of the album could also be to reach out to those people and use it as portfolio to showcase some of my

talents and previous works in order to make contacts and develop the one already existing.

I'm also building a team of photographers, designers, stylists that I trust and esteem, to work with the collective and develop an identity for the project together.

Some of these people would be Freddie Stisted, a photographer based at TY (Figure J), Reece Owen (Figure K) and Alex Massek (Figure L).

At the moment I'm keeping track and collecting in a google drive all the magazines, radios, labels, websites, formats, festivals, venues, managements and prs I would be interested in working with and that I will be contacting once the songs are properly mixed and mastered.

This year has been great somehow, even with all the restrictions and the social and economic struggle that Covid has brought upon us for way longer than we imagined.

The two things that kept me going and gave me enough confidence and motivating me were Tileyard and this collective.

The personal grow both of these entities have allowed me to trigger has helped my confidence and my drive, and I feel ready to make my way into the music industry.

APPENDIX:

Figure A. Timeline

MONTHS - - - - >	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY
Week1	electric gtrs rec +prod + exams	Lyrics review + dictation + singers rehearsals	2 singers tracking + comping	Mixing + brainstorming + photoshoot	Mixing
Week2	Drums rec + Prod + exams	Singers rehearsals + comping	Adlibs + comping	Mixing + brainstorming + photoshoot	Mixing
Week3	drums rec + lyrics + comping + exams	2 singers tracking + comping	Prod + brainstorming	mixing + brainstorming + photoshoot	Music video + mastering
Week4	Lyrics + comping + exams	2 singers tracking + comping	Prod + brainstorming + photoshoot	Mixing	Music video + mastering

Figure B. "Rolling Stone" by Little Simz. <https://open.spotify.com/track/1Kz1tiH4ICV76K4Ajza2hO?si=21481bf4079a401c>

Figure C. The Pioneers - The British Hip Hop Documentary https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu9k60vv_iw

Figure D. "I see you everywhere" by Hostage. <https://open.spotify.com/track/3nNIqJrk6swZCPrAhTZjMu?si=188c5503bb22446b>

Figure E. "Count on me" by Brockhampton. <https://open.spotify.com/track/0hprLLUDMgFU0nL4yVCWTg?si=0ccceb53494f497f>

Figure F. <https://www.youtube.com/c/COLORSxstudios/featured>

Figure G. <https://colorsxstudios.com/>

Figure H. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2zx2i93R44>

Figure I. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgH_LsBHTPw

Figure J. Personal development plan

GOALS	HOW	WHEN
Working with NiNE8 and independent upcoming artists from that scene	Become part of the community by going to their events, talk to them and everyone involved, BE THERE. Also use portfolio.	Summer will be a key moment as gigs are starting again and there will be many chances to be around them.
Working in a studio as assistant or main engineer (preferably a studio I value to step in as producer if asked and establish connections with artists and producers)	Get as much experience as possible, create a portfolio, get in touch with them and be prepositive and proactive.	I will use all the available free time at TY to get as much confidence as I can and from September I will start applying to studios.
Develop identity (style, fashion, graphics, design) and distinctive sound as producer and artist within and out of the collective	Research research research, be updated on what new trends are, read magazines and online papers. Blend that with my background.	Now that the album is done I will have more time to focus on writing and producing new songs which will allow me to dive deeper into my own style.
Get the collective up and running	Start releasing music (split album into eps) get or fake a manager to get in touch with radios, magazines, formats etc.	First release MUST BE not later than September/EARLY October.
Become a better producer and songwriter	Practice	Everyday

Figure K. Freddie Sisted <https://www.instagram.com/freddiestisted/?hl=en>

Figure L. Reece Owen <https://www.instagram.com/reece.owen/?hl=en>

Figure M. Alex Massek <https://www.instagram.com/riversideblues/?hl=en>

Figure N. Album tracklist.

1. TIGER KING

2. JIMMY FALLON

3. DIRK DIGGLER

Single

4. HORNY MAN 808

Single (started as collaboration but ended up getting included in the collective's album as a feat)

5. EASTSIDE

6. SPOONS

Single

7. BOYFRIEND

8. SIRI

9. KIDS

BONUS TRACK ? QUENTIN

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