



CREATIVE INVESTIGATION

Concept Album

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Creative Investigation Project

Aim

My chosen area of study and development is a concept album. To bolster my paper, historical and contemporary practices shall be referenced. This project aims to test my music production and performance skills as a solo artist, encompassing multiple genres with meaningful lyrics and personal experiences. The project shall be concluded by the self-analysis of my production, defining positive and negative points and outlining the accomplishments made.

What is a concept album

Covach, J describes that the best way to define a concept album is as a group of songs that, in some way, tell a story or address a similar general topic or set of issues, thus defining the album's so-called "concept". (Covach, 2007). A concept album can be considered to sustain a central message or progress the subject's narrative.

Concept albums in historical context

Historically, if artists and record companies needed to reproduce an entire embodiment of work, they were limited to producing catalogue-style record collections in which multiple 78s (78 rpm disks) were required. Typically, at the time, the ideology behind creating a long-playing experience was to recreate the sensation of being at the theatre in attendance of a musical. Unfortunately for the music consumers, the reality of playing back an entire collection of 78s meant frequently changing disks, which may have detracted from the overall enjoyment and immersion in the listening experience. In 1948 the LP (a long-playing record) was introduced to the music market. The new LP technology offered up to 20 minutes of high-fidelity audio recordings per side; in comparison, the 78s offered just 4 ½ minutes per side (Britannica, nd).

This technological advancement was a clear defining point for the music industry, and the new format prompted recording artists and producers of the time to compile collections of songs into marketable products, giving rise to the first generation of concept albums. One of the first successful renditions of the LP was the 'South Pacific' cast album which reportedly sold more than one million copies. The 'South Pacific' LP is credited with helping to establish Columbia Records' ground-breaking new recorded music format, which, in addition to offering a longer playing time, also provided superior sound quality compared to the 78s, which had been the standard for the previous 50 years. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, artists from many different genres had taken advantage of the LP format, enabling them to grasp the potential of a concept. Seemingly, the LP platform allowed musicians to be heard in a way that had been previously untapped, where their music embodied social and technological revolution which stirred a generation (Decker, 2013).

This effect was most prevalent following the late 1960s with the rise of rock music and its subgenres, where bands like The Beatles, Pink Floyd and The Grateful Dead had left their mark in history with record sales, and folklore tales and even conspiracy theories. T, Adamczewski et al. describe how the concept albums of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s evolved beyond their written lyrics or musical notation due to their multi-layered literary references, album names and record sleeve artwork. This intricate complexity was a critical factor in the growth of progressive rock and the concept album in general (Adamczewski, 2018).

Concept albums in a modern context: Tame Impala 'The Slow Rush'

'The Slow Rush' was an album released in the year 2020 by Tame Impala. The release was a concept album encapsulating multiple themes and genres and testing boundaries of pre-existing musical notions. Upon listening to the album, it was clear that each track had an air of familiarity. Some easily identifiable genres include pop, hip hop, 90's dance, 80's synth, 70s disco and 60's psychedelia. Seemingly the album defies traditional genre-based production techniques and crosses borders between culture, race, and age, meaning one can't specify the target audience or demographic. This mixture of elements creates a freedom of expression and does not allow for boundaries within a musical scope. The effect of being exposed to the album may entice listeners to explore new genres and styles of music and learn about the cultures attached, which can only be a positive thing. According to Alyssa Colon, the album conveys a sense of time passing, pertaining to immaculate psychedelic vibes encapsulating nostalgia, death, and the reality of the artist spending his life with just one person. This record will make the listener feel a wave of emotions and give a glimpse of insight into Kevin Parker's (Tame Impala's) thoughts. (Colon, 2020)

My concept album – 'Idiosyncrazy'

In order to fulfil the creative investigation brief of approximately 30 minutes of audio content, I decided to create a project based on music tracks that would typically be around 3 minutes in length, giving me a clear indicator of roughly ten tracks. This aided my workflow and time management, where each track was designated around a week for the total turnaround from a scratch project to a complete mixed piece of work. Knowing how much time I had helped with planning any audio recordings needed from clients. The concept features music of differing types, including instrumentals, covers and original singer-songwriter material. In some instances, the process involved working with other artists and featured collaborative work where I was the producer and engineer with free reign on the projects. Predominantly, this project features my music, ideas, and lyrics and is a testament to my abilities as a music producer.

My concept is a particularly personified musical impression of my life experiences. It reflects my ideology that one doesn't simply have to conform in life; we are individual beings which means that it's essential for us to find our meaning and will to live, which reflects us on a spiritually harmonious level. The album borders several personal issues, varied emotions and states, characterised by different music genres, each individually defined by tempo and stylistic choices. The title 'idiosyncrazy' is a play on the term idiosyncrasy, which defines

someone's behaviour as peculiar in constitution or temperament (Merriam Webster, nd). I chose this title as I often feel that I am perceived as an outsider in social situations due to my idiosyncrasies. The probable cause of this is likely to be my dislike of technological advancement, modern practices, and my views on the seemingly throw-away nature of big industry consumerism. I feel my personal views cause tension and misunderstanding among my peers.

To give context, I was born in 1990 and grew up in a somewhat organic environment where humans weren't tied down to their phones or computers like they are today. I was surrounded by technology evolving rapidly, which did interest me as a child. Still, I've grown to dislike and even detest it in some circumstances, with music technology being the only exception. I believe I was lucky because I had insight into a life without digital dependency. But it's a double-edged sword as I often feel stuck somewhere in between the past and present, and nowadays, I struggle. I feel like I've lost my identity and find it difficult to function in this automated world we now live in. I hold the never-ending change in contempt. This internal confusion is directly reflected in my music and lyrics and ultimately defines the concept of my creative investigation project. Stylistically my music conveys influences from many different genres and periods, which I feel reflects my mixed, conflicted personality.

Equipment Itinerary

Equipment	Quantity
Mac Pro 3.1	1
MacBook Pro 9.1	1
Logic Pro X 10.5.1	2 (one per system)
Focusrite Saffire Pro 24 Interface	1
Sennheiser HD 201 Headphones	1
AKG K245 Headphones	1
KRK Rokit 5 Monitors	2
Bowers and Wilkin Monitors	2
Cambridge Audio Amplifier	1
XLR Cable	2
¼" Jack Cable	2
Roland Micro Cube Amplifier	1

Track Listing

Date	Name	Duration	Genre	Influences	Suitability	Artist/ Collaborators
18/04/2022	Track 1	02:31	Instrumental/Chillout	Luca - Desert	Visual media scoring/YouTube/b background music for café or restaurant/ Study music.	Calum Hailey - Solo Project

Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio.						
25/04/2022	Track 2	02:25	Hip Hop/Instrumental	We Aint Feeling Time – French Kiwi Juice	Visual Media scoring/YouTube/ background music for café or restaurant/ Study music.	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio.						
02/05/2022	Track 3	02:13	Experimental	Welcome To The Machine – Pink Floyd	Visual media scoring/YouTube or background music for café or restaurant/ Study music.	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio. Guitar used: Epiphone Les Paul Custom Pro						
09/05/2022	Track 4	02:19	House/Electronic	Pacific State – 808 State	Visual media scoring/YouTube or background music for café or restaurant/ Study music/DJ set/Nightclub	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio.						
16/05/2022	Track 5	02:37	Cover Music/Chillout/Hip-hop/Trap	Nirvana – Heart shaped box No Love - EibeyondatrackBeats	Study music/chill out/live performance.	Bridget Holmes - Drive Through Hazy.
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio. Mic used: Røde M3 Phantom Power: Yes						
23/05/2022	Track 6	02:56	Synthwave/Instrumental	Cassette – LooneyJet Man	Visual media scoring/YouTube or background music for café or restaurant/ Study music/DJ set/Nightclub	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio.						
30/05/2022	Track 7	01:58	Boombap Hip hop Instrumental	Un Dream ou 2 – Dela	Instrumental track for rapper, café music, and visual media scoring.	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio. Guitar used: Epiphone Les Paul Custom Pro. Mic used: Røde M3 Phantom Power: Yes						

06/06/2022	Track 8	03:04	Dubstep/Songwriter	Alex Clare – Too Close	Visual media scoring/YouTube or background music for café or restaurant/ Study music/DJ set/Live performance	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio.						
13/06/2022	Track 9	02:30	French House/Electronic	Ain't No Mountain, Andy La Toggo Edit – Global Playboyz	Visual media scoring/YouTube or background music for café or restaurant/ Study music/DJ set/Live performance	Gaby Dubois Jolie - Tileyard Education Student
Notes: Vocal samples were provided by the client for a commission of a remix of her existing track 'J'veux Des Frissons'. The track was interpreted and remixed on location at Tileyard Education U.G Studio, and later I revised and mixed it at my home studio. The audio files were sent with reverb and autotune already applied, so a significant amount of equalisation and enveloper usage was required to correct the stems for the remix. This added much more time than I had initially planned for the project.						
20/06/2022	Track 10	03:15	Synthwave/Electronic/ Experimental/Songwriter	Fade To Grey – Visage It's My Life - TalkTalk	Visual media scoring/YouTube or background music for café or restaurant/ Study music/DJ set/Live performance	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio. Guitar used: Epiphone Les Paul Custom Pro. Mic used: Røde M3 Phantom Power: Yes						
27/06/2022	Track 11	02:24	Synthwave/Electronic/ Experimental/Songwriter	A Forest - The Cure Blinding Lights -The Weeknd	Visual media scoring/YouTube or background music for café or restaurant/ Study music/DJ set/Live performance	Calum Hailey - Solo Project
Notes: Recorded on location at my home studio. Guitar used: Epiphone Les Paul Custom Pro. Mic used: Røde M3 Phantom Power: Yes						

Mixing and Mastering Process

In order to ensure continuity of the project, I felt it was essential to mix and master the entire concept on my own sound system using the same master bus settings throughout each project. Per each track, I had to adjust the compression ratios to suit the genre. I utilised different studio monitors and headphone setups to compare the mixes over varying applications to ensure a good listening experience for the finished product.

Why is my concept relevant to contemporary practice?

My concept encompasses multiple styles and covers a potentially vast field of applications; as a music producer, it is expected that one should be versatile and able to work on several projects. From receiving regular live music briefs through the Tileyard Alumni community, I am fully aware of the constant demand for high-quality multi-genre music and the opportunities available to gain credits and exposure. Haynes, J et al. describe working in the modern music industry as a gig economy where "musicians may thus be something of a barometer of current trends", which implies the constant necessity of a music producer to remain current and versatile within the industry (Haynes and Marshall, 2018). I have demonstrated something similar with the breadth of musical variety in my concept album.

Conclusion

Throughout the creative investigation, I have tested my capabilities as a musician, songwriter, and producer. I have studied the historical and modern contextual approaches behind producing a concept album. This research has educated me on the technological advancements which formed the basis for the birth and evolution of the concept album and its cultural impact on society. The idea of a concept evidently remains very personal and self-driven in a contemporary sense, and I've found a correlation between my musical influences and the work of Tame Impala. The project has involved careful planning and time management paired with accurate communication skills to negotiate with the collaborating artists for recording dates and filesharing. The collaborative process has highlighted to me the importance of having professionally prepared audio stems for dealing with clients. I was taken by surprise when I was provided with audio samples that required significant editing to work within my musical context. However, after overcoming this obstacle, I can see this setback was a positive aspect and a generally beneficial learning experience. Looking at the creative investigation project in comparison to a real-world paid scenario, I can see how the skills I have utilised will be crucial as a professional music practitioner; after all, in the real world, time is money, and accuracy makes everything run smoother. Overall, I am happy with the outcome of my concept album, and I am proud to exhibit this work as a professional portfolio with the outlook of seeking employment within the music industry. I also intend to release some or potentially all of the musical pieces featured in this concept, potentially opening new career and collaborative opportunities.

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