



Creation Assignment Element 2b Reflective Commentary

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Abstract

When I initially drafted my written proposal for my final assignment, I was convinced that the direction I was taking was the correct one for my career and development as an Artist/Producer.

I spent so much time working on the admin and written aspects of my project that I forgot to pay attention to the creative side of things. Once I handed in my proposal I was really inspired to start creating and writing music again. I managed to stay in that creative space for quite a few weeks and it doesn't seem to be slowing down. I have been digging deep as they say and drawing from all my experiences from life and my career as an artist, musician and engineer and used this to reevaluate some of my older creations to see what could be used or possibly upgraded and updated.

The most important thing that I have taken from this entire process is the fact that I am a creator, in every sense of the word. I have been involved in and around music for such a long time and in so many capacities that I am unable to box or define myself by one genre or style. I do however realise the importance of being able to help people understand who you are and where you can be placed in the industry albeit many different places. To be recognised in the music industry you need to be seen and in order to do that I would need to show off my skills in a way that Industry Executives, Peers and average music listeners can appreciate.

I spent a lot of time recently watching documentaries on some of my favourite producers and what made them tick, what things they did in order to make it and how they developed their sound. The one overriding factor and main source of inspiration I have taken from them is this. Be true to yourself above all else!

I believe with the skill and talent I have developed over the years, starting out as a Singer, Rapper and Poet and then later Sound Engineer and a Bass player playing in bands. I have the ability and skills to truly show my potential as a Music Producer and I believe that the quality of the work I will be displaying should be self-evident and that I will gain the recognition and validation I have always looked for from this career path I have chosen. Based on this, I have decided that my final project and reflective commentary will have to change from the initial proposal.

I would now like to represent myself in the best possible way. The only way I can do that is to show all sides of myself and not limit myself to one style or genre as a producer. I believe I have the ability and the capacity to do well in whatever I undertake. My reflective commentary will explain the reasoning behind my thought, my ideas for possible marketing

strategies, personal development plan and how I intend to establish myself as a successful artist/producer on the world stage.

Acknowledgements

I would like to say thank you to the staff and lectures at Tileyard who have given me the skills and information I needed in order to use what I already knew and turn it into the information I could use to now establish myself in the Music Business.

Thanks to my wife and kids for having the patience and understanding that I am actually doing work and not just messing around with sound toys, as well as putting up with hearing sounds, vocals and music countless times over as I went through my production, mixing and mastering processes.

I would like to thank my mentors, the creators, the artists, the producers, the engineers, collaborators and all the people who have been a part of the music that has inspired me to follow this career path and make the music which I love and could not live without.

Introduction

For my final portfolio I will be showcasing various songs that I have produced and the common theme among them will be my production, skill, musical ability and the standard or quality that they have been produced, mixed and mastered to. The music will all be based around the sounds and energy and artists which inspire me and hopefully have the ability to transcend genre yet still make it in the commercial music arena. Some of the styles and sounds are still based around my original plan but I am not going to produce tracks specifically for one genre in order to show the true depth of the producer that I am and wish to be. The defining factor should be that the music and the production is created and crafted to the highest standard possible and would be able to be translated across any boundaries and be able to permeate mainstream culture in whatever capacity or form it chooses to take.

(Brown, 2009, p5) "I'm not looking for any type of anything or to fit any mould. I'm not looking for the next Prince or something. It's really an emotional connection that transcends any genre." I'm just being true to what I like."

From the book Rick Rubin in the Studio, this quote represents to me exactly what I wish to achieve as a producer and how I feel about music and the process of working with artists in the capacity of a Music Producer.

I plan to highlight my personal development plan, the methodology behind my approach or various approaches I have taken. Market Research possibilities and Case Studies with feedback and peer reviews. My brand and personal identity which will include a One Sheet. The research I have undertaken in order to understand my direction and acquire inspiration from like-minded individuals who have already traversed this path.

My reflection on the process and where I see myself moving forward and the many struggles, pit falls, failures and successes and/or any shortcomings or achievements I have had to overcome during this process.

Research Methodology

I decided to start my research by watching documentaries, films and interviews with some of my favourite producers (The Neptunes, Salaam Remi, Rick Rubin, Quincy Jones) to establish what their habits are like, what they do or don't do to stay ahead of the game, pitfalls they may have faced along the way to avoid, how they react to different scenarios, how they find inspiration etc. This would help me in the quest to create my sound with a more well-rounded approach and has also inspired me to create many new and interesting sounds and styles and push me even more creatively as a producer.

One of the documentaries I watched was Hip Hop Evolution (*Hip Hop Evolution*, 2016) This really inspired me to start creating my own sound and also to limit the number of plugins and effects I use sometimes. The early pioneers of hip hop and in early music production were only limited to a certain number of tracks. This also made sure that a lot of attention was paid to the initial vibe and groove of a song, rather than relying on effects to create a vibe. I have been applying this methodology to all the tracks I have been creating by spending time working out the groove of a song before developing it more and allowing the song to grow into a production without trying to use every plugin or effect that I own.

I followed up on trends in the music production industry watching YouTube videos on how to create sounds etc. and I also spent some time reading books audio and written. Two of the books I received the most insight and information from were, In the Studio – Rick Rubin and an audio book called Quincy Jones – His life in Music.

One of the most important things I have learnt was, “Production by reduction”, which is a technique I have already begun to employ as a producer but did not know that it was a term already coined.

(Brown, 2009, p3) “When Rick Rubin enters the studio, his goal is to record music in “its most basic and purest form” – no extra bells and whistles, all wheat, no chaff.

I took a look at the commercial viability of music in today's climate and some of the research I have done explains this. “Digital music has nearly tripled its market share between 2010 and 2019 and has risen to make up 77.5 % of the music sectors spend by 2019. The UK is estimated to be the biggest digital music market in Europe with a revenue of approximately 1 billion US dollars estimated at the end of 2020 and streaming's shares is expected to rise year on year until 2025.” According to Statista Research Department (2020).

To me this shows that music is mainly consumed digitally in today's market. However, this does not mean that people do not buy music in its physical form and many people still place a lot of value on hard copy or physical music. The most surprising fact is that vinyl has actually started to outsell CDs for the first time since 1986 and according to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) the sales of Vinyl alone accounted for 1/3 of total sales from physical albums in 2018. The total number of CD sales were projected to be around \$500 million with vinyl sales slightly eclipsing it at around 510 Million by the end of 2020. McNulty (2019).

Based on this information I have established that there would be value in creating a physical product. However, for me personally I would have to weigh the benefits of promoting my music digitally first opposed to making an actual physical product. My goal as a producer is to get people to listen or be interested in purchasing or licensing the music I am producing and not necessarily to complete an album or EP which I may consider at a later stage.

I also researched the validity of releasing my music through an online service such as CD BABY, Ditto etc. or simply providing an outlet for interested parties to review or just listen to or demo my production style, quality and content etc. on a free platform such as Soundcloud.

Digital Publishing Services vs Free Online Services

Pros for releasing on a paid digital platform such as CD BABY.

- No label bureau-ocracy
- Some platforms such as CD BABY the artist receive a large percentage of sales profits
- Anyone can publish on these services
- You can be added to playlists on Spotify and iTunes
- More people are able to find and access your music

Cons

- Once your track is released it is harder to get a placement for ads or to sell or license your music.
- It's an official release so would need a marketing campaign or strategy
- You still have to pay for PR to promote the song
- It's a paid service
- The returns or profits can be very small if the song does not do well or attract enough attention

Pros for releasing on a free streaming service such as SoundCloud

- Music can easily be uploaded or taken down when needed
- You can create your own private playlists to send to PR companies or to interested parties, agencies, artists etc.
- You are able to make your track available for download or not
- You can gauge the response on a release without committing to a marketing plan or strategy to get a feel for if people like it or not
- Generates recommendations based on their algorithm and helps you gain more followers.
- Easy to access across several devices

Cons

- You are not able to get playlisted

- May not have the required trending power for all types of music especially if your sound is niche
- You would have to market heavily if you wanted to really gain any traction on your music
- You are not able to create albums

Weighing up the pros and cons of these services I would be more inclined to upload my songs to Sound Cloud in order to gain some valuable insight as to how my music is received but also to have the option of promoting and sharing my music with possible investors, artists or anyone who may be interested in using my music for their respective projects or possible ad campaigns for tv or movies etc.

I then started my personal development plan to outline and define some of the goals I would like to reach as well as the obstacles I may have to face along the way and how I could navigate this.

Personal Development Plan

<u>What are my Big Goals?</u>	<u>Which goals need to happen first?</u>	<u>When Do I want to achieve this</u>	<u>What obstacles might get in my way</u>	<u>How can I improve my chances of meeting my goal?</u>	<u>Where can I go for support?</u>	<u>Review How am I doing?</u>
To be a recognised Producer in the Music Industry	Need some sort of success with a track that I have released in terms of views, likes, interaction etc	Within 1 to 3 years	Lack of output Lack of self-belief Having the time to work on music Family responsibilities	Just keep on plugging away even when I don't feel like it. Just doing a little bit everyday goes a long way	Speak to fellow producers Try and collaborate more. Get to know Record Execs, Lawyer's publishers' people who are known in the industry.	I have a really good network of musicians, producers and industry executives that I could tap into in order to gain more recognition and work.
Create a body of work that is reflective of my production style and skill	Complete all the tracks to a high standard for my final semester project and then to be used to promote my brand as a producer and to be used a portfolio or showreel	Need the Final Mixes to be done by 25 April. I can elaborate more on the tracks or remix after my submission when I start using it for personal promotion.	Other responsibilities. Waiting for updates from collaborators ie. Waiting for Vocals to be recorded and sent over etc. Not working in a studio with an artist so not getting the performance that I want	Work faster and smarter. Do more at times where I can focus. Maybe book a studio in order to mix to be able to operate in isolation and get work done	Online Tutorials and videos Listening to more music for inspiration Speak to producers for new ideas and tips Follow producers who make similar music to see their workflow etc	At the end of this process I will have a body of work that can be marketed promoted or used to showcase my work.

Complete My Master's Degree in Commercial Music Production	Finish my final semester assignments	Before the 7 May	Family Life and kids, half terms easter holidays etc.	Working on my assignment everyday even if it is only a little bit but keep working on it all the time.	Mentors Lecturers Friends Family	On course
Have a song or songs that make the charts, goes viral, has more than 100k views, gets signed or cut etc.	Need to complete a portfolio or body of music which is of the highest quality and pitch them to artists, labels, A&R's, record execs.	On or before the end of 2022	Lack of motivation or inspiration Competition from other producers Lack of self-belief or self-doubt.	Make sure that everything I do is of the highest calibre and quality. Work on my branding and image to promote myself better. Try and make contacts in the Industry to be in the right place at the right time.	Speak to Industry Experts or PR companies. Use the resources available at Tile Yard and speak to Industry execs, publishing companies A&R's etc.	I believe with the quality of the music I have produced this can be possible in the near future

Getting the songs together

I am a multi-faceted person having many interests and passions from ancient history to philosophy, science, nature and spirituality. This is reflective in the artists I choose to surround myself with and in the music I create.

I could never say I am a hip hop or just a rock producer etc. I am moved by people, life, situations, drama and all the nuances of life. So, when compiling my list of tracks, I tried to make sure I could cover as much ground as possible with the different styles I create but also striving to make sure that the music still has commercial elements in order to gain me the recognition and financial stability I crave to achieve in my chosen discipline as an artist/producer.

I compiled a list of more or less 14 songs. It was quite a process trying to choose which ones I felt were my best works and that could be translated into a commercial market.

In the end I got the number down to 10 songs which I felt were the best representation of me as an artist/producer.

“In numerology and tarot card circles, eight is a number that represents balance, and that’s certainly true when it comes to album tracks lists. Eight sits right in the middle of what a proper album should be. Once you get past eight songs, you’re gliding the lily. Your risking filler and inviting the audience to hit the skip button.” Tedder (2019)

I really wanted to take the number down to 8 but that would not be enough to fill the criteria for the assignment brief and also this is not an album as such and more a representation of my production skill and ability.

The songs on the tracklist

1. When I die (Produced, Written, Mixed – solarkidd, Rap and Performance – Muti, Mastered by Steven Lewis)
2. When we Rise (Produced, Mixed and Mastered – solarkidd, Vocals Written and Performed by SILK, Chorus written by solarkidd and Yazmyn Hendrix, Guitars – Louis Squire, Drums - Sam Campbell, Trumpet Solo – Yazmyn Hendrix)
3. Ride or Die (Produced Mixed Mastered – solarkidd, Rap – ICE)
4. It’s not you it’s Me (Produced, Written, Mixed and Mastered – solarkidd)
5. She’s a Freak (Produced Mixed Mastered – solarkidd, Rap – ICE)
6. The Message (Produced, Written, Mixed and Mastered – solarkidd, Vocals – Tobio Additional Keys - Mrisi)
7. My My (Produced Mixed Mastered – solarkidd, Rap – Lil Suge)
8. Sure Thing (Produced Mixed Mastered – solarkidd Vocals Written Performed SILK)
9. Come with Me (Produced, Written, Mixed and Mastered – solarkidd)



Listening Sessions /Professional and Peer reviews (Qualitative Research)

My goal was to get a better understanding of the direction I had begun to undertake, by getting feedback from friends and colleagues on my music and the sound and feel of what I had been creating.

Using qualitative research methods in order to help me understand the behaviour of my listeners as well as some facts about their social appetites. My plan was also to attain some market research and data regarding the validity of releasing these songs and singles and where they could be placed and also give me the data required for my possible release/marketing strategy for each song.

I set up group listening sessions on zoom in order to get some feedback on my work before finishing off the final mixes. This would be part of my ongoing evaluation process in order to establish what level my music was at and how it could be improved etc. I arranged the listening sessions in various groups.

The first group consisted of mainly peers and musicians I have worked with and come to know during my time at Tile Yard who are also current students at the University. My reasoning behind this group was based on the fact that all these students were in some capacity studying Music and have all been involved in numerous listening sessions before so feedback would be comprehensive and constructive and they would be undergoing similar processes in their own right and through their studies.

- 9 Students attended the Online Feedback/Listening Sessions.
- The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive
- They were able to provide constructive feedback on technical aspects such as rhythm melody or specific sound choices etc
- They were also able to give feedback on the mixing and mastering
- They were various ages ranging from 22 – 35
- Only 3 responded to the feedback questionnaires from the sessions
- The overall rating for all the songs was 8/10

- Most generally prefer Live Gigs over Night clubs

The second group consisted of Music Producers who I know, respect, admire and trust and have proven in their own right their musical ability and production styles. The premise behind this was to obtain specific feedback pertaining to the Production styles, vocal production, mixing, sound choices and all the aspects surrounding the technical aspects of my music as well as their personal objective opinions etc.

- 7 Producers/Musicians attended the Online Feedback/Listening Session
- The overall feedback was very positive as well as varied
- The feedback was very clear regarding creative as well as technical aspects of the songs

The last group was made up of random people I know, who are average music lovers and are and not directly involved in the music industry.

They would be able to provide the constructive criticism I would need in order to ascertain if the music was market ready or even commercially viable.

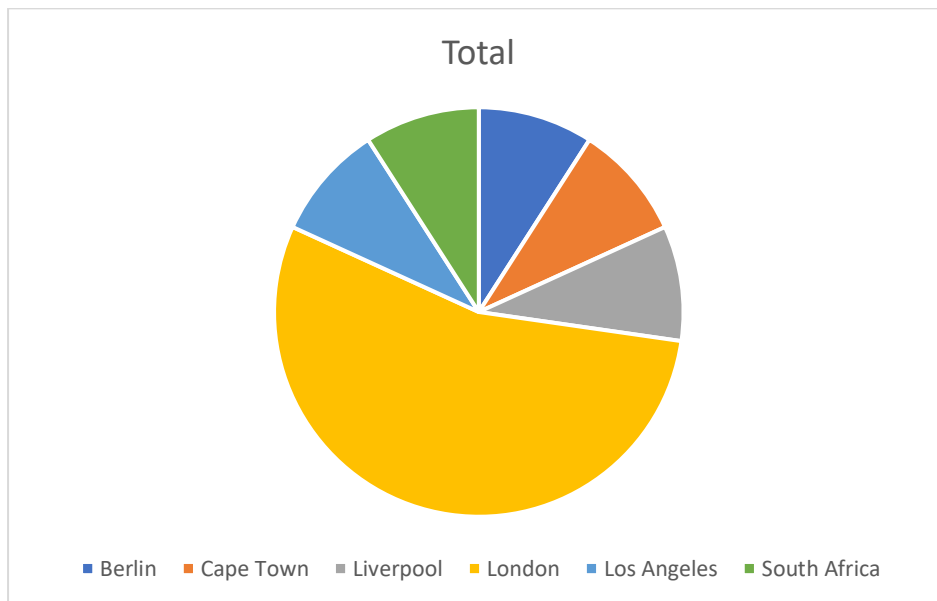
- 9 People attended the Online Feedback/Listening Session
- The feedback was varied as expected
- Some of the feedback was unexpected and very eye opening in terms of how I approached the mix or the musical direction and choices made
- It was noted that bias plays a big part in feedback scores, if a person does not like a particular genre, then the feedback score would not be as high.

The questions were :

1. What emotion does the song make you feel e.g., Party mood, sad, happy etc.
2. What would you say is the genre or where would it be placed
3. Would you buy this song
4. What would you change or improve if anything
5. What did you think of the Production Vocals Beats etc
6. What did you think of the Mix/Master
7. Overall Opinion of the song
8. Rate it/Hate it? Out of 10
9. Age
10. Location
11. What foods do you generally like to eat
12. What's your favourite drink
13. Do you prefer live gigs or nightclubs?

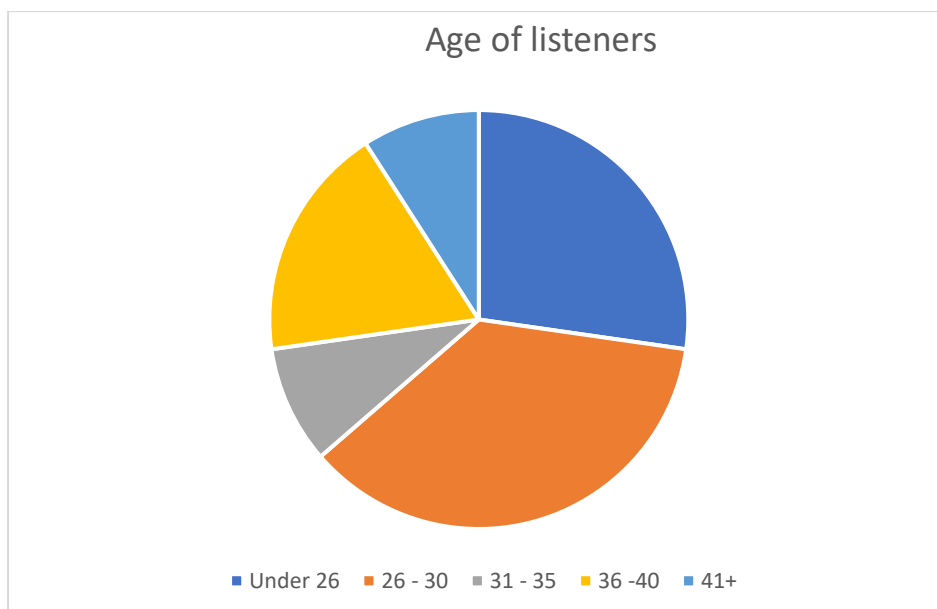
The Data (Quantitative Research)

Fig (a) Geographical Locations



This chart shows the geographical locations of the listeners who took part in the survey. If this was at a larger scale, I would be able to identify which areas my listeners are from and which areas to market my music to.

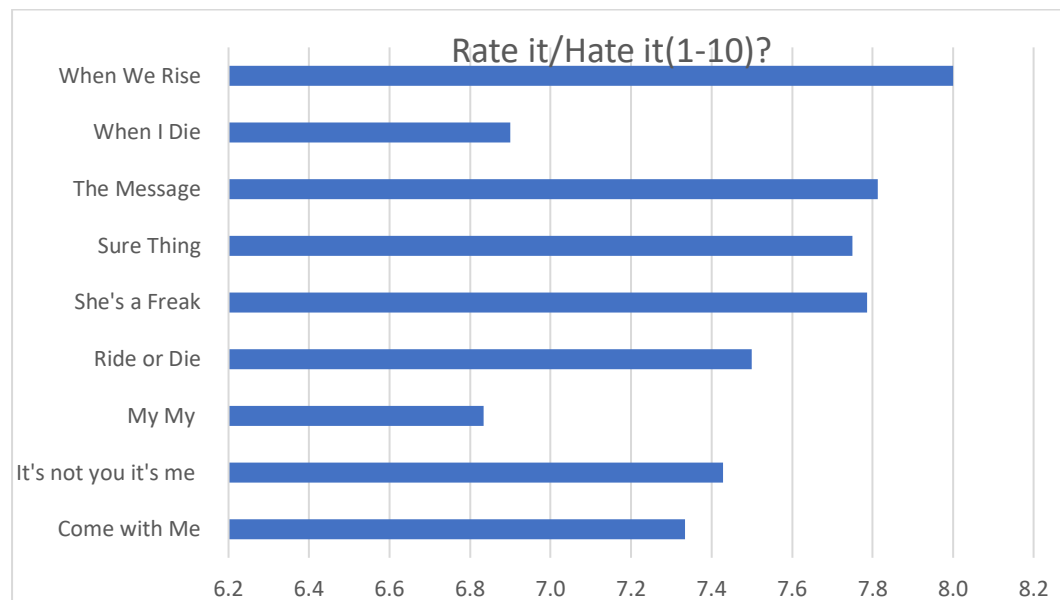
Fig (b) Listeners Ages



The age of the listeners in Fig (b), is a good indication of where my music could be marketed in terms of the age group demographic. For example, listeners of BBC radio 2 are on average

50 Plus. So if most of my listeners are within the age of 20 – 25 then I could focus my marketing strategy around that age group.

Fig (c) Song Ratings out of 10



What Fig (c) is showing, is the likeability factor of each song based on a rating out of 10. As far as the report shows, it would be a great idea to start on a release plan and marketing plan for the song entitled When we rise as the data shows, it is the song with the greatest number of high ratings. This report aids in the decisions moving forward regarding which track to release first based on it's over all popularity.

Fig (d) Would the listeners buy the song

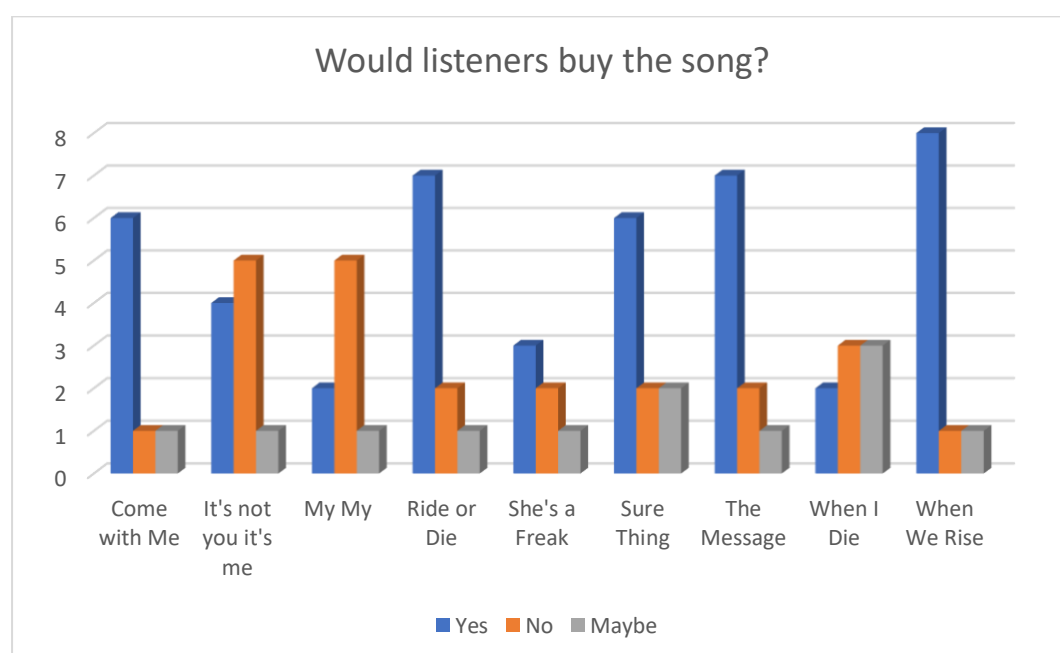


Fig (d) shows how many people would be interested in purchasing each song. It gives me a very good idea of how successful the song could be commercially.

Thoughts based on the feedback and the data from my research

Based on the feedback received from my music. I have a clearer understanding on how I wish to progress and move forward.

I realise that each song is a commodity or has been created to be a marketable product. The effort, attention to detail as well as the soul and character it has taken to create these works has given me the belief that I am able to produce music which could be considered marketable and mainstream.

Each song is not only a representation of my brand but also gives me the opportunity to provide a canvas or background for any type of creative undertaking for any artist, movie soundtrack, advert, art, or digital content creation project.

I would be able to use these songs as collateral when pitching for any project or idea, feature or collaboration.

I would also be able to create release/marketing campaigns for the ones I feel would be commercially viable and would promote me as a producer/artist.

Evaluation

What changes have occurred during this process

My approach to making music has changed dramatically. I now understand the difference between a passion project and working to a brief or for a commissioned work. The difference between trying to make music for a living and making music for a cause. I am now able to do both efficiently and effectively, understanding the persona and “hats” I would need to wear for each respective project.

I am more methodical in my approach. Even more than I was before. That is when producing a track to a brief, I try to make sure that I stick as close to the guidelines as possible, using reference tracks, understanding the nuances which are used to create the sounds I am working on.

What could I have done better (Struggles, Challenges, Pitfalls)

When conducting my online sessions, I could have found a better way to present the questions to all the participants because even though the online sessions were well attended not many people filled in the feedback forms and I think this was due to the fact that I didn't simplify the process enough.

I realise that when you are inspired it is easy to create music but when you are working to a deadline it's not always easy to find the inspiration to keep working and complete the task at hand. I feel I still have a lot more work to do on making sure I keep myself motivated.

Summary

Where I was before this project?

I felt like an island out in the sea. I had no clear direction of what I wanted to do or achieve as a music producer or if I did it was not written down and clear.

I had achieved relative success in my business and as a studio owner, recording, mixing and mastering music for mostly unsigned artists and playing in bands etc.

I now feel as if I am ready to be able to do it on a global stage at the highest level.

My skills were very good as a sound engineer and mix engineer and good at production.

I feel that now that I am able to complete the process from start to finish at a very high level and create music that is pitch able and ready to send to any interested investor.

What do I think of the results now that I have done it?

I am overwhelmed by the response I have received from this project. I feel extremely excited that I have put together a body of work that I am truly proud of and am not afraid to present to any interested party.

I have met most of my targets and benchmarks outlined in my project plan. I finished all the tracks in time to have the feedback and listening sessions on time. I conducted research for my music in order to establish a course of action, direction and feedback on the technical aspects of my music.

I have executed every stage of my plan efficiently and effectively and I had more time at the end to review, reevaluate, remix and remaster my material (written as well as creative) with relatively no stress other than trying to make sure it is "perfect".

Where do I go from here?

I plan to work on marketing strategies for every song in my portfolio and moving forward I will endeavour to do this for any work I do. By solidifying my brand, creating a body of work which can be monetised. I will start the process of getting my music to market.

I need to start scaling everything I undertake and do. Every song that I have created is a product which can be turned into a form of revenue. Sometimes life changing or even lifelong in terms of possible residual income as well as many other forms of revenue.

I will continue to use the methodology's, research and all the data received to make sure the course each of my songs take will create a return on the investment I have made and put into these works.

One Sheet



solarkidd



Keenan Bailey aka solarkidd is a Music Producer/Bass Player with a background in Sound Engineering.

He is proficient at pushing all the buttons and directing any studio session with the ability to write, sing and create with most instruments and sound toys but cites the bass as his main love.

solarkidd has a very diverse approach to creating music and always maintains been a fan of music first. Listening to many genres spanning all the decades and styles from Rock to Pop and Hip Hop, Soul and Jazz and everything else in-between.

Recently he has been focusing on creating music with an Afrocentric Urban Pop or Soul/RnB sound but is always open to work on pretty much any project as long as the vibes are right.

RELEASES AND SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS

<https://www.instagram.com/solarkiddmusic/>

<https://youtu.be/FpYkU6Cv8V8>

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/3tOnhEpkuJ5pFZuPVqMgLW?si=1r6RM31wQl-Re6yrsozxiw>

<https://music.apple.com/gb/artist/solarkidd/1471844405>

<https://soundcloud.com/solarkiddmusic>

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