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- **Introduction**

After thinking a lot about how to blend all the different projects that I'm working on I've decided that the concept of my project is going to be my signature aesthetic production, artistic approach and sound design. My main intention with this project is trying to show how a certain type of sound and approach to music composition and production can help to trigger and stimulate similar emotions in different genres.

Implementing my signature sound and aesthetic in multiple genres and artistic projects. Focusing on how to translate this kind of sound in different styles of music, being able to adapt it with the objective of always giving the main focus to the artist or project itself.

The project is going to be focused in three different outcomes:

- 1) An electronic music EP for my personal artistic project *Nuwaya*.
- 2) Composition, production and sound design of an EP for the artist *Rojaz*.
- 3) Others production and songwriting collaborations.

- **Concept summary**

Regarding the characteristics that I intent to achieve with my production and sound design approach, these are some of the main ideas that I'm going to research about during the theoretical and study part of this proposal.

First of all, I'm going to explain the sound that I'm aiming for before moving to the research aspects of this proposal.

Firstly, one of the main aspects that I want to achieve with my sound and production is an atmospheric and ethereal feel, based on the use of reverbs, delays, eq's and other production tools to always obtain a certain depth and a clear sense of space in my tracks.

Secondly, another characteristic that I intend to have in my productions is a warmth and textured sound, as opposed to some super commercial productions that only aimed for sounding as much loud as they can. Some of the main production techniques that can help me to achieve this characteristic are saturation and distortion processors, use of found sound, eq and the use of noise.

Next, the creative use of sampling and different techniques of processing audio samples as granular synthesis and audio time stretch to create timbres that couldn't be achieved with any other type of synthesis or audio processing. Regarding this aspect, I will search for how some artists and producers have approached sampling and different ways of processing audio.

Finally, the feeling of evolution, contrast and development throughout each song, which can be achieved based on automations and other tools of sound design to develop and move sounds.

- **Research (theoretical and technical framework)**

After describing the concept of my final project, now I'm going to conduct a theoretical research for understand all the theory underpinning the sound that I'm aiming for.

This research is going to be divided in two main aspects. On one side, the technical aspects of production and sound design. On the other, the artistic and songwriting intention, approach and ambition that other producers and artists have used to solve similar problems and to try to communicate similar emotions.

Technical aspects

1. Depth

To start my theoretical framework, I'm going to analyse which production and sound design tools can be used to achieve interesting spaces as well as depth in a mix. Although the use of long and creative reverbs and delays is often avoided in radio music genres as pop, hip hop and EDM (due to that adding depth to a mix often means losing volume on the final mix), this restriction doesn't apply to other genres, specially to the more independent side of electronic music and other related genres. However, this is something that might changed this decade, as we can hear in *The Weekend's* last album. Moreover, I want to study and explore how depth and space can help a song to embrace a certain nostalgic and deep feeling.

Probably the most used effect for achieving depth in a mix is reverb. However, it's fundamental to use a suitable one and to spend some time tweaking it and processing it until we get to the result we want. Moreover, using some eq to roll off some of the high end can help to push the reverb and the sound back in the mix. [a]

Secondly, playing with and automate different volume levels is a key point for creating contrast between the different elements in a mix and, therefore, being able to achieve depth.

Next, using delays and echos instead or combined with reverbs is a great way of creating a sense of distance and. Like the reverb processing mentioned above, filtering the high and the low frequencies of the delay or the echo is helpful to really push things back in the mix.

Last, the arrangement and the choice of instruments or elements is crucial to accomplish the sense of space and movement throughout the song, moving things back and forth in the mix, as we do in the stereo from left to right. [b]

2. Advanced Sound Design Techniques

Following that, another theoretical aspect that I intend to study for this project are advanced sound design and audio processing techniques. The first one is granular synthesis and grain audio processors. This type of synthesis is more frequently used every year as it hasn't been explored as much as others and more common types of synthesis such as subtractive synthesis or FM (frequency modulation) synthesis.

The principles of granular synths relies on the term granulation, which refers to the process in which an audio sample is broken down into small segments of audio called 'grains'. These grains can then be layered on top of each other and can be played within different speeds, pitches and formants variables, achieving textures and musical timbres that couldn't be reproduced using other types of sound creation techniques. [c]

Secondly, another audio processing technique that I want to explore in this project and apply to my production with as much musicality as possible is the different possibilities that audio time stretching offers. Although in principle time stretching refers to the digital process of altering the perceived passage of time in an audio signal without of intention of modifying its spectral characteristics, the creative side of it comes out when we use it for intentionally modifying its spectral characteristics such as pitch and timbre. [d]

In the DAW that I'm going to use for the production of this project (Ableton Live), we have the following time stretching modes available:

- Beats Mode: works best for material where rhythm is dominant.
- Tones Mode: for stretching material with a more or less clear pitch structure (such as vocals, monophonic instruments and bass lines).
- Texture Mode: works well for sound textures with an ambiguous pitch contour (e.g., polyphonic orchestral music, noise, atmospheric pads, etc.).
- Re-Pitch Mode: it doesn't time-stretch or compress the music; instead, it adjusts the playback rate to create the desired amount of stretching.
- Complex Mode: works well for warping entire songs, which usually contain beats, tones and textures.
- Complex Pro Mode: uses a variation of the algorithm found in Complex mode, and may offer even better results.

Alternatively, there are other options for more extreme time stretch processing, such as well-known Paul Stretch tool, that works with a unique algorithm to create lush and long sounds.

3. Use of found sound and unusual elements to make textural music and how this can help to define and build a certain sound and brand as an artist and producer

Another technique that I want to apply is the use of found sound and unusual recorded sounds to add a textural feel to the music. I think this can help to put the listener in a different space and help to set a certain scene or atmosphere that makes people enter the world you're creating.

I have found that this technique has helped a lot of different artists in electronic music and other related genres to develop a personal and distinctive sound through their careers. This is mainly due to that using sounds recorded by yourself and using them in creative ways helps differentiate this artists from similar artistic acts or producers that don't use this way of working.

One of the best examples and case studies to analyse regarding this matter is the British musician, composer and producer Simon Green (aka *Bonobo*), an artist that have accomplished a distinctive sound during the whole of his career thank to the recording and use of found sound and unusual instruments. In an interview with *XLR8R* [e], he explained how he approaches this topic:

'I record a lot of stuff on my phone when I'm out and about and regularly use the recordings in my tracks. For example, I was in New Orleans on one of those fan boats and noticed the really interesting texture and sound it was making. I recorded the fan and then layered it in a sampler to be the basis of a synth patch. It gives a nice alien-like sound and is an easy way to give your synth patches personality.'

Bonobo

4. Sampling

Secondly, the technique of sampling is the last of the key aspects of the production tools that I intent to use for this project. This technique simply consists in the reuse of a portion of a sound recording (it can be a song, a dialogue from a movie or anything else that it's already been recorded) as an instrument or an element in a new recording. Although this tool is used in a lot of different genres, it's specially fundamental in hip hop and in electronic music.

Despite the fact that in its origins the process of sampling was always made using hardware sample machines as the well-known Akai Music Production Center (MPC) series, the Roland/BOSS Dr. Sample SP 202, 303, 404 and 505 or the Casio SK-1 and FZ-1, the growth of digital production technology has open this world to almost anyone with a laptop, giving virtually limitless possibilities for sampling. With digital audio workstations as Logic, ProTools or Ableton Live, musicians and producers are able to manipulate pitch and time and to chop and rearrange a whole music composition into something completely new. [f]

In an article about sampling in electronic music done by Glenn Jackson in *Modern Approaches* for *Red Bull Music Academy* [g], some artists explained how important this tool is for their music compositions and how they approach the matter:

‘When I sample, I try to choose things that have a special atmosphere; the atmosphere of the sample itself can bring so much background and energy to the track that you can’t create with just your synthesizer or a microphone and a guitar.’

Glenn Astro (Ninja Tune, Money \$ex Records)

‘My goal with sampling is simple: I want to find two (or more) samples from different sources that work together to create something new. Different harmonies that wouldn’t work in theory, but somehow create something nice.’

Axel Boman (Studio Barnhus, Pampa)

‘Sampling is essentially the foundation as well as the detail of all of my tracks. I use samples to spark ideas, add texture, and help add structure. I would say the more creative you can be in gathering material, the more fun it’s going to be and the more interesting the results will be as well.’

O’Flynn (Blip Discs, Ninja Tune)

Artistic/Songwriting ambitions

1. How to make people feel things with sound, as apposed to words

One of the crucial aspects of my sound is that I want to be able to make people feel things with sounds, as opposite as words and lyrics.

Regarding how to make people feel emotions with sound, as opposed to words, I've analysed how some of my reference artists think and work about this. In words of William Philipp (aka *Tourist*) in an interview with *Purple Sneakers* [h]:

'it's a different challenge to make people feel things with sound, as opposed to words, because you have to think differently about the relationship that people have with sounds. Yes, words can be oblique and metaphorical, but I think sounds are far more elusive in how they affect you.'

Therefore, one of the key points of this project is going to be putting a lot of attention in how every sound (synths, bass, pianos, drums, etc.) makes an impact in every record, adding expression to the particular feel that each song is trying to embrace.

2. Lack of expression and in commercial electronic music

Last but not least, another essential matter that I want to achieve is significantly expression, honesty and emotion. Specially in electronic music, where it's so easy to forget about that and get lost in overdoing things and layer tons of sounds, I think is important to try to spend as much time as you can in getting that especial feeling, before moving on into the sound design and production process. However, due to that I often start the songwriting process in Ableton looking for interesting new sounds, this can be something difficult to achieve.

In spite of this, it also takes into consideration how crucial it is the selection of sampled words or vocals that appears into the songs. This is because in a lot of electronica songs there's only a one line lyric phrase (or sometimes just a word) that goes through all the track. William Philipp (aka *Tourist*) mentioned something similar in interview with *FUTUREMAG Music* [i]:

*'Which is why I think **it's important to pick words carefully. In electronic music that doesn't have featured vocals, it's really important that you put words in there that are actually meaningful or relevant.***

*‘That’s my most favourite thing in the world is trying to tell a story with sounds. It’s what makes me so excited each day. **There’s ambiguity with sounds – you can hear something and someone else can hear something else.** I love the ambiguity of how sounds can make us feel. I think that’s why I’m bad at making club music. It just doesn’t interest me. **It’s designed to make you feel a certain way and it’s almost predetermined.**’*

3. Dynamics, automations, evolution, contrast, organic feel

Next, an additional intention that I want to achieve with this project is the feeling of evolution, contrast and development throughout each song, as opposed to some mainstream hits that only focus on always keeping the energy up for holding the listener engaged. This characteristic is defined using both songwriting and production techniques, instead of just one.

With this in mind, the production approach and artistry that is often used to add that progressive and transformative feeling in music is the continuous automation of different parameters (volume, filters, ADSR envelopes, dry/wet effects, etc.) as the song evolves. Although this process is often tedious and takes a lot of time, it definitely makes a difference in the final product.

In an interview with *Resident Advisor* [j], the composer and producer Jon Hopkins mentioned the importance of this evolution in his music:

*“I like everything to **evolve**, I don’t like sounds to be static really... I like the **idea of trying to create this musical world where everything is fluid and any sound can at any point just change.**”*

Jon Hopkins

Likewise, the producer and sound designer Ryan Lee West aka *Rival Consoles* explained something similar about his intention of achieving a sense of realness and movement in his music in an interview with *Native Instruments* [k]:

*'Firstly, there's always a long list of essentials: mainly, hundreds of small changes to EQ and volume automation, so that everything sits together better, or builds when it should build. **I really want music to move and shift so that it feels real.** As opposed to some dance music that seems to want to maintain power throughout, I try to shape the music so it goes through weak and then strong movements, more like a band does.'*

Rival Consoles

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[c] <https://producelikeapro.com/blog/understanding-granular-synthesis/>

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[i] <https://www.futuremagmusic.org/publication/tourist-interview-depth-and-purpose>

[j] <https://www.residentadvisor.net/features/3210>

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