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Concept idea

At the start of this MA my main goal for the course and for my final project was to improve my music and production skills and to start building and developing my artistic project. As the year has progressed, I have started realising that to make a living out of the music industry and to build a long career it is important to be open to as many opportunities and ways of generating an income as possible. For that reason, the concept of my final project has evolved into something more extensive than my initial idea of just making an EP for my artistic project.

Having said that, the main idea behind this project is going to be implementing my signature aesthetic songwriting view, production, artistic approach and vision and sound design applied to the two main musical projects I am working on at the moment and the ones that I am going to focus the most in my near future.

The first one is my personal artistic project, focused on the electronica, IDM, ambient genres. Secondly, the alternative and experimental pop artist *Rojaz*, for which I've co-written and producing an EP.

Regarding my artistic project *Nuwaya*, one of the first things to mentioned is that the main aim of the writing and production of this tracks is finding the balance between achieving a dance feel on them but being emotional at the same time. In the electronic music scene, I have always felt that the music that resonates the most with me is the one that is able to make you feel something special but also works in a club or festival environment where people can dance to it. For achieving this goal, I strongly believe that some of the main traits of my signature sound can help me to get to that mixture between emotion and dance feel, such as depth, warm and a textured quality. The second one, which is related to achieving that balance, is accomplishing a blend between an organic feel with an analog sound.

Regarding the sound and production aesthetic of the EP for *Rojaz*, the aim is to create tracks that explored textures, moods and atmospheres in order to convey the psychological process of the seven stages of grief. Equally important, the EP would explore RnB melodies and rhythms together with experimental electronic production. The narrative would follow a broken relationship, focusing on the themes of intimacy and love addiction.

Personal and professional analysis

Later on this commentary, I will explain some of the technical skills that I have needed to develop and research for achieving this goals, as well as the soft skills and attitudes that have been required to and that I have develop during the consecution of the project.

Before that, I have done a critical and objective self-analysis to help me define my vision for my future professional career and for this project, as well as a SWOT analysis and a personal development plan to better understand which skills I have to focus on in order to achieve my aims for this project and for my future goals.

Initially, I am going to set my vision, goals, ambitions and possible ways of completing them using a personal development plan. This will help me to self-analysed and understand in a more in-depth way which points I need to address during the next year in order to achieve my professional aims. In short, my vision and long term goal is to create, develop and lead to success my personal artistic project within the next 3 years, as well as working with and producing other artists and musicians. (view Appendix Figure 1)

Secondly, I have done a SWOT analysis (view Appendix Figure 2) to understand in which areas of my professional development I have to focus on.

Now that I have defined my vision and main goals for the future, I am going to differentiate and categorise the most important skills, knowledge and attitudes that I have to develop in order to accomplish my goals based in the SWOT analysis from above. Consequently, this will allow me to plan which areas I need to develop the most in order to succeed in my vision and future plans. I have divided the skills that I need to learn in technical skills, soft skills and knowledge and attitudes. (view Personal Development Plan in Appendix Figure)

As a result of this self-analysis, I found which areas would be more difficult for me to develop and which skills I needed to learn in order to accomplish my aims with this project and my future goals. Below, I am going to document my development in terms of soft and hard (technical) skills.

Soft skills development

• **Dealing with perfectionism and finishing projects.**

As I've mentioned on my SWOT analysis, one of my weaknesses at the start of and during this project has been dealing with perfectionism and not finishing tracks. I considered that knowing how to finish ideas is equally important to starting them, because as an artist and commercial music producer one of your first aims is to release music so people can listen to it and you can develop yourself as a musician. For this reason, I have spent time researching methods and ideas for finishing tracks, as well as trying to understand some of the principles behind why so many artists struggle finishing their projects.

One of the research sources that has helped me the most regarding this skill is the book *The Creative Habit* by Twyla Tharp, where there is an entire chapter focused on dealing with and accepting failure:

'Change—changing the work and how we work—is the unpleasant task of dealing with that which we have been denying. It is probably the biggest test in the creative process, demanding not only an admission that you've made a mistake but that you know how to fix it. It requires you to challenge a status quo of your own making.' [1]

One of the key points behind finishing ideas is the fear of rejection. Fear of not being able to get that idea to the incredible high level where you want it to be. This worry often makes me procrastinate and not spend enough time working on developing an idea, something that is vital to make that track sound finished and ready to be released or send to labels or management companies. For that matter, I have been trying to develop methods for not judging an idea too critical when I just have to spend a few hours working on it. Developing a routine around working on the same two or three ideas for a week without starting new ones has been one of the most difficult skills to accomplish for me during this project. I think artists sometimes spend too much time working on developing technical skills but they forget to work on their soft skills such as perseverance, organisation and dealing with frustration. In my case, I still struggle a lot in focusing just in one or two ideas for a few days without starting new ones and getting distracted by them, so this is one of the most important skills to work on after finishing this project and thinking about my professional future in the music industry.

After doing some research on this topic, I found an interesting and useful explanation of dealing with criticism and learning about your weaknesses, from the artist, producer and composer Ryan Lee West (aka Rival Consoles) in an interview with Pop Matters magazine:

"It's a little bit challenging. The thing about making good work is that you have to make mistakes and be criticized in order to get better at something or to see the bigger picture. At lot of the things I've been criticized for in the past, I'm already aware of and probably even agree with a lot of the time. It's not that it's a weakness it's more about learning and trying to get better. It's essential for making good art." (Ryan Lee West, 2018) [2]

· **Interaction in the studio with the artist as a producer.**

Additionally, one of the most important skills that I have learned and developed this year is the personal interaction ability that is required in the studio when you are working with other musicians and artists. Specially while producing the artist *Rojaz*, I have realised how important it is to achieve a comfortable atmosphere where both the producer and the artist can express ideas and thoughts with total confidence and creativity. During this year I have worked with several other artists and producers and that experience has helped me to comprehend that it makes a big difference being open-minded and flexible, specially when you are working with someone for the first time.

At the same time, I have understood that the process and the path for developing an artist and helping him or her get to the sound and concept that they are aiming for takes time, and that it is not possible to achieve without working on quite a few sessions with them to really comprehend the ideas that they have in their mind.

· **How to find your own artistic voice for your music artistic project.**

Another key point that I've been working on has been finding my own artistic voice and sound. At the start of this MA, I had many influences but I hadn't been able to create something that spoke to me and seemed real based on all of those influences. One of my main goals with music has always been not just copying what is trendy on the music industry or trying to write a hit song to make as much money as I can, but to truly develop my own unique vision without thinking too much about how commercial or successful that vision might be. I consider that a lot of upcoming artists often get obsessed about how to sound exactly like their reference artists, but I strongly believe that what really matters if you're aiming for a long artistic career is finding what resonates with you the most and explore it as much and as deep as you can, without thinking about what other artists are doing.

· **Finding the best routine for you to work creatively and efficiently**

Finally, the last soft skill I came across I needed to develop was my organisational ability. After a few years producing music I have realised how important your routine and way of approaching daily work is. It makes a big difference on your results, as well as on your efficiency and on your interaction with other people in the studio.

Regarding this, a few professional music producers have talked about this matter on different interviews. Songwriter and producer Carlo Montagnese (a.k.a. *Illangelo*) mentioned in a Webinar with Mix with the Masters that *'is important to not spending more than 3 or 4 hours working on the same track, because you stop making progress. Take a break and come back the next day. Take it slow, don't rush anything.'* (Carlo Montagnese, 2020) [2]

Hard skills development

• Ways of starting a track

Regarding the hard skills that I have researched to apply in my project, the first one is developing and becoming comfortable with different ways of approaching the start of a track. As an artist, one of the most difficult things to master is the early stages of creation. Particularly in music, each songwriter start a track in different ways that clearly define the final outcome of his/her creation.

I have done a research focused on interviews of electronic music artists talking about how they approach the early stages of songwriting. The process that I found most useful is an explanation of Benjamin Plant (aka Mild Minds) on a Reddit AMA of how he normally starts the foundation of a track:

'I tend always approach starting a track from more of an electronic production angle than 'writing a song'. Thus meaning I'll start by building a strong drum loop, chords or Ostinato. My favourite trick is starting with an Ostinato - its essentially a repetitive motif of melody, could even be a one bar/chord arpeggio.. From that point I build the bass movement and then chords around that which creates the emotion. It's such an easy way to start because the emotion becomes immediately apparent when you hit the bass notes while the Ostinato is playing. Historically I love when emotion leads a track, I had given up on starting with Ostinatos many years back until i realised they could be done in a new way(Embracer) and am using them a lot more on new music as I never fully got to explore them. They essentially become the musical hook.' (Benjamin Plant, 2020) [4]

What I have learned from the approach of other artists to starting a track is that there is no general correct way of doing it. Therefore, the best method is finding those techniques that most inspire you to create interesting and foundational ideas that, in the future, you will be able to finish. In my case, I've realised that starting creating a really consistent and groovy drum loop or starting with a chord progression or melody that it's moving just with a piano are the best two ways of approaching the early stages of songwriting.

· How to blend organic and textured elements with electronic analog sounds

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 balance between using organic elements but keeping it electronic and powerful. 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.' (Simon Green, 2017) [5]

I have found that the technique of recording found sound 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 these artists from similar acts or producers that don't use this method. Moreover, this textural character can help to achieve depth and warmth in the production and mixing quality of a track.

Changes that occur during the competition of the project

During the execution of this project there have been several changes regarding the selection of the tracks to be submitted, just as with some elements of the production and the direction of them.

Firstly, there has been an evolution on the sound and artistic direction of the artist *Rojaz*. This change has evolved from commercial r&b towards a more experimental production and alternative pop feel. Consequently, the writing sessions with her have become something more similar to writing electronic music, where the production and the songwriting blend in the same process and the decisions are taken thinking both about the music aspect as well as the sound.

Secondly, my artistic project *Nuwaya* has left behind the future bass and trap genres influence of my previous works to move in the direction of electronica, IDM, textural house, garage and ambient. This evolution has been happening slowly since the start of this MA, where I started realising that this new direction felt more real to me. Moreover, I consider that adding stronger constant sense of rhythm to my tracks allows me to keep my experimental side without losing the focus on the music and the emotion of the songs.

Finally, some tracks that they were going to be used for the project has been substituted for others that were created during the last two months. This is due to that they show better the direction and evolution of both projects, as well as they are more suitable for being released in the near future.

Evaluation of my work against industry practitioners

With the songs finished and thinking about my professional development plan, now I am going to evaluate my work against some similar musical industry practitioners to find things to improve in future works as well as finding some of the best qualities and strengths of my current pieces.

Regarding my electronic project *Nuwaya*, probably the aspect that I have to put more effort on after analysing these pieces is achieving a more cohesive concept between all of them. In order to improve this aspect, the best thing to do is simply continue working in a clear direction, instead of trying to approach a different genre with each song. This is something that I have already improved during this year, increasingly understanding and finding the kind of electronic music project that I want to make.

Moreover, the other characteristic that I am going to prioritise as an improvement in the next few months is accomplishing a more melodic and harmonic driven tracks. My experience and knowledge in musical theory and songwriting is not as developed as in production and sound design, so I am going to focus on improving my skills on the first ones to achieve more musicality, better melodies and more emotional harmonies in my tracks.

Finally, the last attribute that I consider will make my tracks better is working more on the selection of the words that I use as sampled vocals. On instrumental music that repeats the same word or phrase throughout the whole song is really important to pick carefully the words, due to that they can completely change the meaning and feel of a song.

In the same way, I have done an evaluation of my production and writing work for the artist *Rojaz* against other producer's work for other similar artists.

Firstly, the aspect that I believe requires more of my attention in the future is the vocal recording, production and mixing. In artistic projects like that one, the vocal is the most important aspect and, therefore, the element that requires more attention and detail from a production and sound perspective. The improvement of vocal production techniques that I want to develop in the next months are not only focused in achieving a clean sounding and well mixed vocals, but also to experiment more with sound design and creative production techniques on them. There are a few similar artists that use creative techniques on their vocals such as *Sevdaliza*, *James Blake* or *FKA Twigs*, and those examples show how much of an extraordinary and unique character an unusual vocal production approach can bring to the music and emotion of a song.

Secondly, comparing the outcome of this tracks to the production and songwriting approach of the artists mentioned above, I consider that another characteristic to improve is achieving a more minimalistic approach while keeping all the emotion and quality of the music. Being able to use only two or three main elements in each section of a song can help those elements to sound bigger in the mix and to have more impact in the listener. For this reason, spending enough time when writing the melodies, top line and rhythm of a track is something necessary and fundamental if you are trying to achieve a minimalistic production. Once you have those main elements, then you can start properly producing and developing the track, but you have made sure that the key components of the song are there from the start.

Conclusions

To conclude, based on the research and on the skills development done during the realisation of this project I consider that I have accomplished the main aim of being able to implement my artistic vision as well as my production and songwriting approach to the two main musical outcomes that I have worked in during this MA. However, there are still other skills that need to be improved in the next months in order to achieve my professional goals for the future.

Appendix

Figure 1. *Vision and Goals Table.*

My Vision
To create, develop and lead to success my personal artistic project within the next 3 years. An artistic project that brings something new to the electronic music scene. Secondly, working with and producing other artists. For me, success will represent having the admiration and respect of the music industry (specially from the electronic music niche) and, secondarily, being able to make a living from that.
Short/Medium Term Goals (next 6/12 months)
Release my first pieces of work (album, EP or singles) with a proper marketing campaign and a developed artistic concept based in a proper project management plan. Meet and work as a songwriter and producer with as many artists and musicians as possible. Establishing my network of music industry people for a long term (artists, label managers, a&r's) that can help me to grow in the industry and became better as an artist and producer.
Long-Term Goals (2-3 years)
To create, develop and lead to success my personal artistic project. To collaborate with some of my reference and favourite artists, producers and musicians. Touring and making music around the world.

Figure 2. SWOT Analysis Diagram

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
- Sound design and production experience and skills. - Clear vision about my artistic projects. - Understanding and interest in other fields that are equally important than the music to achieving a successful music career (marketing, artistic concept, project management plan, etc.). - Deep understanding of electronic music. - Constant working and always learning new things to apply in the studio.	- Struggling finishing tracks. - Networking (personal interaction). - Mixing and vocal production. - Low self-confidence. - Composing great melodies.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
- Working with other artists based in London (producers, songwriters, singers, musicians). - Establishing professional relationships with video-filmmakers, designers and photographers to get opportunities at making music and sound design pieces for adverts, short-films and media art. - Maintain and strengthen professional relationships made during this year with artists, music producers and songwriters. - Keep developing musical skills and exploring genres (improve piano and guitar skills, learn how to sing, ...).	- Not finishing projects due to perfectionism. - Absence of confidence that can lead me to avoiding certain situations and opportunities that I think I'm not ready to deal with or that I'm not good enough yet (writing sessions, live sets, networking events). - Less opportunities in the music industry due to the coronavirus crisis. - Not following my inner artistic voice and vision because it's not the trend nowadays or because it doesn't sound like the music that it's already out there.

Figure 3. *Personal Development Plan* for 2020/2021

Professional Development Plan 2020/2021				
What do I need to learn?	What do I have to do?	What support and resources will I need?	How will I measure success? - What does good look like?	Target date for review?
- Improve on my mixing skills. (Tech skills)	- Attending mixing classes. - Book tutorials with mixing teachers and with students that have more experience in mixing than me. - Practice a lot.	- Professional equipped studio. - Mixing books, tutorials, masterclasses.	- Comparing my new mixes with older projects and with reference tracks from the industry. - Showing new mixes to sound engineers and asking for feedback.	6 months
- Finding income resources inside the music industry. (Knowledge)	- Research in how electronic artists established a regular income when they started their careers. - Explore sync music publishing deals, producing other artist, sound design scores.	- Research in the web and books.	- Having the opportunity to make a living from music production.	6 months
- Create my professional work team and networking chain. (Soft skills)	- Establishing my own network of industry contacts and collaborators that give me support and help me to grow in the industry.	- Talk and network more with my team and other marketers and find out what good practice looks like.	- Feeling like I'm part of a team that is going to help me to achieve my goals. Feeling more confident about working with others. - Able to attend networking events in my own and be more confident in speaking to people	12 months
- Improve my wellbeing and personal fitness (Knowledge and Attitudes)	- Establish a daily routine of 30 min of making sport.	- Gym membership.	- Feeling better and healthier in a couple of months. - Reducing stress levels.	2 months

- Looking for opportunities outside Tileyard. (Soft skills)	- I have to take advantage of living in London and attending as many electronica clubs and networking events as I can. Also look for other emerging electronic artists in London that might be interesting for working, networking and collaborating with them.	- Make the most out of songwriting/remixing contests, networking events. - Use facebook events to find events that might be interesting for this goal.	- Having collaborated with more than 3-4 artists outside Tileyard. - Knowing which clubs might be good for presenting my project and trying to get a gig there.	6 months
- Learn to find a balance and emotional stability for avoiding having burn out or blocks periods. (Knowledge and Attitudes)	- I might need to get better at giving the same importance to meditation and regular sports practice than I give to making music. Due to that I don't have as many people to talk with and options to switch off than I had in Barcelona, it's really important that I find my own balance and learn when I should stop making music and go swimming, take a walk or simply going out to disconnect for a while.	- Meditation (read more books about it and established a daily routine). - Try to attend some yoga classes. - Talk more with people about how I feel (specially when I'm feeling stressed, not motivated).	- Being efficient and with positive energy. - Having less burn out days.	6 months
- Finding a digital designer/artist that can help me developing the branding and the artistic persona/image/concept for my project. (Soft skills and attitudes)	- Use Instagram, pinterest and other digital resources/media to find artist that I like and email them explaining my project.	- Social media. - Internet. - Having a portfolio with artistic brands/concepts that I like to use as a reference/examples.	- Having developed a strong image and branding in social media. - Artworks and designs that fit my musical concept.	5 months

- Dealing with perfectionism and finishing more tracks (Soft skills and attitudes)	- Reading and studying about how artists deal with perfectionism. - Pastoral and psychological sessions with a professional to learn more about my perfectionism and to determine how to deal with it. - Learning to be less critical while creating or producing a track.	- Internet. - Books. - Therapist, mentor.	- Finishing at least 1 out of 3 ideas that I start. - Being less judgemental with myself and my music.	3 months
- Learn and develop a live set performance. (Tech skills)	- Look for examples of similar artistic projects (How do they create their live set?)	- Attending live performances from electronic artist. - Looking for interviews about live sets. - Talking with people that have already been touring.	- Developing a strong live set that fit my music and give the audience and incredible musical and visual experience.	24 months
- Improve on my vocal production skills. (Tech skills)	- Practising and trying different vocal production techniques to become more confident and experienced in this field. - Sending mixes with vocals to sound engineers asking for feedback.	- Microphone and other professional studio equipment. - Singers, artists. - High quality headphones.	- Achieving a better vocal production and mix quality. - Becoming self-confident about how to always make vocals sound professional.	6 months
- Finding and contacting music management agencies and music labels to send my demos. (Soft skills and knowledge)	- Doing a research about which labels and management companies would be more suitable for my current position and for the musical genre of my artistic project. - Sending well-written emails to the labels and agencies attaching some of my best quality tracks.	- Internet. - Connections to labels and music management agencies.	- Releasing a track with an important label. - Getting signed by a music management company.	3 months

- Improve on melody writing and counterpoint (Tech skills)	- Writing a melody every day. - Study music theory. - Analysing melodies from reference tracks.	- Piano (or midi keyboard). - Music theory books. - Access to Internet.	- Being able to write more interesting and emotional melodies than before.	4 months
- Developing the branding and the artistic persona/image/concept for my project. (Soft skills)	- Studying the branding image and storytelling of similar artistic projects in the music industry. - Brainstorming, writing ideas. - Compiling artworks, designs, pictures and paintings that I like and I think they could serve as a reference for my image.	- Designer/concept developer to help me creating the branding image. - Photographer.	- Accomplishing a strong branding artistic concept that suits and fits my music and vision.	6 months
- Improve on piano and guitar skills (Tech skills)	- Sitting everyday to practise and play at least one of them. - Taking classes with a professional teacher.	- Daily access to a piano (or midi keyboard) and a guitar. - Teacher.	- Being able to express my musical ideas with both instruments. - Being able to perform live with both instruments.	6 months
- Looking for other artists to work with and produce for (career opportunities and possible income) (Soft skills)	- Sending instrumental demos to singers and artists asking if they might be interested in having a songwriting session.	- Music equipment. - Internet.	- Producing between 3 and 10 artists during the next year. - Having strong professional relationships with artists that I like working with.	12 months
- Creating an extensive portfolio of my works for film, adverts and TV music (Tech skills)	- Composing, scoring and producing between 10 and 20 demos as a showcase. - Upload this demos to my personal web. - Send demos to filmmakers, advertising and multimedia companies.	- Music equipment. - Internet.	- Having a new scoring job opportunity every 2-3 months.	9 months

Bibliography of Secondary Research

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