

MA Final Project

The Final Project Execution and Further Career Development Plan

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Introduction

This essay will contain information on what my final project is, how it was done, and the results I am hoping to achieve further on with my career. As I have stated in my proposal, my final project is of practical nature, and I tend not only to submit this as a final project for my master's degree, but to actually promote myself and further develop my connection that Tileyard has provided me with.

This essay will be contain an approach that is supported by Gibbs Reflection Cycle, where I will try and demonstrate how I felt during the process of making the tracks I submitted, how I handled the challenges that crossed my path and what I was able to take out as a lesson for my future development, as well as the ways I plan to implement these lessons in the coming period.

It will also address the progress I have made throughout this course and how this masters programme has helped me find my way into the industry.

The Project Overview

This interactive portfolio consists of 6 tracks produced, mixed and mastered to industry standard. As someone who has started their musical journey with electronic music, I wanted to have some electronic music in it as well, since I have not portrayed any of my dance music production skills through this course. This project does include two tracks that are purely dance influenced, which marks an homage to my roots and to where it all started for me. It also includes tracks that are not directly related to dance music, but are rather pop influenced, which is what I will be discussing throughout this essay.

Ever since I have joined Tileyard, my main goal when it comes to music production, amongst many, was to find and work with vocalists that satisfied my needs as a producer and an artist. I always knew I had the knowledge to work with vocals, but I have never had a proper opportunity to do so, considering the circumstances, where I come from and other factors. So this masters course was mainly focused on detecting the right collaborators and expanding my knowledge when it comes to vocal production and songwriting. Therefore, this portfolio includes two vocal tracks that were handpicked amongst many that I have produced over the course, in order to showcase what I want to further pursue as a producer and an artist. Both include female vocals, which I am particularly satisfied with, as for some reason I consider female vocals to work well with my productions. I have not had a chance to work with male vocals for a while, and since the last time I worked with male vocals, I feel like my production skills have developed a lot. So this is the area I would like to develop further on with my career, and I am quite sure I will have the opportunity to do so.

As I have said in the proposal, this portfolio is shaped to Tileyard Music artists and it presents my take on something they would release. With this strategy, I will try to narrow down the steps I need to take in order to accomplish my goal with them. During multiple conversations with our tutors and course leader, we have come to a conclusion that signing with Tileyard Music is a realistic goal for me, and this project will present a breakdown of the steps I took and will take in order to make that happen.

1. Too Into Yourself (featuring Emma Horan)

The Backstory

This track came about thanks to our Head of A&R and Commercial Partnerships, Jamie Searls. Going further into this, Jamie and I had an A&R Session in July this year, where I played a couple of tracks to Jamie and asked if he had contacts to any vocalists or topliners. This is where he introduced me to Emma Horan, and where the communication between Emma and I had started. At that point I had a lot to work on in terms of assignments in Term Two, and that had occupied me so much up to a point where I could not fit any more collaborative work to my schedule. At that point, I had forgotten to send any new material to Emma, and nothing was happening for another month. That is when I came to London Songwriting Camp in August this year, and pretty much bumped into Emma, meeting her in person for the first time. That is when I remembered I had some material to send out to her and I had sent the track that was an instrumental version of “Too Into Yourself”, and we were ready to go.

The Production Process

With pretty much no input from my side, Emma had written and toplined this track very quickly. She sent me the stems that were pretty much spotless and I was ready to work on the track arrangement and mix.

In terms of stems, I have never received so many vocal takes and harmonies, and in the beginning I was very worried about how I am going to mix the track. What worried me about it is that I had the synth playing throughout the whole song, but then the vocals were there for the whole time as well. I knew I needed to balance the synth with the vocals, but since I have never done this before, I felt a certain amount of anxiety in doing so. In numerous 1-2-1 audio sessions that I had with our lecturer Ciarán Robinson, we discussed this topic over and over throughout the course. This was the time for me to apply the knowledge I was aware that I had. After a bit of hesitation, I started working on the track and was surprised by how fast I made the decisions that defined this track. I was able to mix the vocals with the synths very quickly to a point where I was very satisfied with what I had.

I believe that the key to producing and mixing this track, and any track that I will come across in my career for that matter, is the psychological factor and proving to myself that I am perfectly capable of producing and mixing a dense vocal track. This is something that Tileyard has helped me with to a great extent - developing a healthy amount of self confidence. This has helped deal with so many challenges during this short amount of time and it has definitely affected the way I work and how quickly I make important decisions.. This is something that pretty much sums up my experience with Tileyard, which is breaking out my comfort zone. This project is only one amongst many that has made me do things I have not done before when it comes to music production and this is something I will be getting back to throughout this essay.

How it Affects My Career

One of the reasons why I am covering this track first in this essay, besides liking it very much, is that I believe it has already helped me take another step further when it comes to my career. Furthermore, as I have mentioned in the proposal, I have been awarded with Tileyard Music bursary that included mentorship with the label's very own Michael Harwood. Very recently, I have had a chance to play some music for him, and I played "Too Into Yourself" amongst many. He was already very keen on booking me for Tileyard Music Songwriting Camps, but he was looking for tracks where I had shown my vocal production techniques and overall music production knowledge in order to be able to organize the sessions for me. After hearing "Too Into Yourself", he was sure that this track was the one to be forwarded to the Tileyard Music publishing team that would later take care of the organization of the camps. I believe that this is a big step for me and that it will impact my further career development on a great scale.

After receiving positive feedback from Michael, we went back and forth with the tuning of the vocals, where he suggested using Melodyne instead of AutoTune. At that moment, I did have Celemony's Melodyne and have used it in the past, but not too many times. This way, Michael challenged me to do something I have not done much before, and I felt that this little objection helped me grow in many ways. It has made me try, adapt and learn the software in a very short amount of time, and that is something that resulted in a feeling of self confidence and value. So looking from this perspective, I can only imagine what further communication and feedback could do to my production skills as well as my self esteem. This has only made me more ambitious and determined to develop a further connection with Tileyard Music.

As a producer, I think the best approach is to not be too picky if there is a client that one is working for, but to commit to the project as they would with any other. This goes unless there are certain genres that the producer is not very comfortable working in, but I am a type of person that embraces challenges, and I can pretty much say that I would be ready to take on pretty much anything.

As for this track, it is not something that I would release with my artist project, and I will be covering that later on in the essay, but I can definitely say that I enjoy producing projects like this.

2. FUML (featuring Cheska Moore)

The Backstory

As I have planned out while preparing this project, I wanted to have a couple of tracks from the London Songwriting Camp that I attended in August, as this is where it was most likely for me to come up with something that would work for the final project. Even though I collaborated with many artists in those four days, this track was the only one that I felt represented what I want to do in the future, hence it is the only one that made the cut in this project.

This track was written on the first day alongside Gemma Barnes, alias Cheska Moore, and from the moment we started I simply knew that we would have something great by the end of the day.

The Production Process

After being given the briefs, I was able to come up with the instrumental in just under two hours. Again, I have had no input on the lyrics as I have had a meeting with Tileyard Music's Michael Harwood. I say this because I believe that this has had a role in my further development. This period marks my attempt to balance the music and songwriting with career development, so it was physically impossible for me to present at both places at same time. In order for this to make sense, I have produced an instrumental and left it with Gemma. After just a few hours, she had toplined it and we pretty much had the version that I am now submitting. The brief we were going for was a Dark Pop track with a catchy hook. At that moment we didn't have the post chorus part that we do now, but this track is something that I would definitely focus on with my artist project.

For this track I did not go too much out of my comfort zone when it comes to producing. Other than the vocal recordings, everything was pretty much done in the box. Even though I always want to start a track with different drum samples, or introduce different bass or synth sounds, considering the circumstances and the time limitation, I had to reach out to the sounds I felt comfortable using. Those were later replaced with the sounds I found more interesting, and thought worked better in context of the track. While working on this particular track, I did not feel any discomfort or anxiety while mixing it. I believe I know the reason for this, and I guess it was because there were not too many vocal takes playing together and I did not have a lead synth playing constantly throughout the track, as I did with the previous track I described. So this track felt a bit more comfortable to mix.

How it Affect My Career

FUML is maybe the closest to what I want to release with my artist project in the future. I believe it covers all of the fields that are important to me. It has vocals, it is radio-friendly, it has electronic music influence and I got to showcase my production skills. This is something that I will definitely focus on in the future, and try and develop a business plan as I have planned out to release not only one genre of music, but rather have a diverse discography.

3. VÄHN - Transience (Working Title)

The Backstory

This track is of a great sentimental value for me, because I have started my musical journey with Electronic Dance Music, that is referred to as EDM. Moreover, the first release that I had under my project, VÄHN, is the track called “Trompeta” that was released under Spinnin’ Records’ sub label, Fonk Recordings. At the time, in 2019, this was a great achievement for me, but after the release, on the contrary, my confidence had dropped. I got carried away by the tracks’ success, as it was performed by many DJ’s around the world on stages like Tomorrowland, EDC Las Vegas, Ultra Music Festival, and many more. (VÄHN, 2019)

I had cracked under the pressure of social media and tried to please people with everything I would say, post, do, etc..

This had led to a point where I was unable to produce a track that I personally liked in this genre. At one point I started hating the genre, and simply moved away as if it was a handicap. It is fair to say that I have not focused on producing EDM for a good couple of years, which gave some space to study pop music, which helped me understand how music works and that is something I will be focusing on in the future.

In light of joining Tileyard, I have entered a phase of feeling confident and understanding my abilities, and handling the challenges that once seemed too hard.

Most recently, a few weeks ago, I started this track in order to prove to myself that I had all it takes to produce a successful EDM track, again. In fact, I still liked the genre, but the series of events that I have mentioned led to me moving away from it.

The Production Process

I have always found electronic music to be too distorted, high end heavy and hissy, and this is one of the reasons why I have avoided making it, as it sounded way too unnatural and synthetic to me. Besides having to get the sound selection right, you would have to make sure to carve out the unnecessary harshness that electronic music seems to be full of. This has to be done in order to provide the actual healthy high end and air for the elements that play in that register. This track is a perfect example of this observation, as there were a lot of samples, sounds and synths that contained the unnecessary high end. (Guetta, 2020)

As I have stated, I have committed to more natural sounding pop music that I have had a chance to portray throughout the course. So dealing with this much unnatural distortion and hiss was not a joyful experience for me, as it was very time consuming and stressful. But the end result was worth the patience that I have invested in this project.

Another important part of electronic music is layering. It seems that there are never too many lead and bass layers to cover every inch of the frequency spectrum. This is something I generally do not enjoy doing and that was an approach I had when starting this track.

Mid through the process. I thought it would be a good idea to get out of my comfort zone and start layering sounds in order to make a fuller sounding track. I believe my repulsion towards hyper layering starting with the discovery of phase cancellation, a couple of years ago, and how too many layers playing in the same register can cause this artefact. (Audio Technica, n.d.) I was also worried that too many sounds would muddy up the mix, and this is what held me back from producing electronic music for some time. But in light of my confidence boost and Tileyard, I decided to try and do it. This is, as in many other projects during the course, where I realized that I am fully capable of producing dense tracks and mixing complex music without phase cancellation. It is fair to say that I am very proud of the end result and how well it all turned out. I have proven to myself that I can overcome any challenge that crosses my path, not only production wise, but life wise as well. I believe that being surrounded by supportive people with good intentions can do miracles to one's personal and professional growth. And this is exactly what I believe happened to me at Tileyard.

How it Affects My Career

As previously stated, I am not very keen on releasing this type of music anymore, for the reasons aforementioned. But when it comes to this very track, I think it would be good to release it with my artist project if there happens to be a good record label deal. I am saying this because this track was one amongst many that I have played to Tileyard Music's Michael Harwood and gained a very positive feedback. In a further discussion with him, we have come to a conclusion that building my portfolio and artist profile would make it way easier for his publishing team to book me for Tileyard Music camps. This made sense to me and I am very open to trying and releasing this track if the good opportunity comes. I strongly believe that this track can compete with festival tracks in this genre that are being put out by the major record labels.

Furthermore, in the recent A&R session with TYE's Jamie Searls, he offered his help to find a home to this track. I trust his connections and I left the track with him and we will take it from there.

As for the productivity and financial side of this music genre, as I have explained above, EDM music is very time consuming and not so unique as there are too many producers and DJs that produce this very generic sounding style of music. Not to mention that the same sample packs and sound libraries are used over and over in order to make a three minute euphoric track. It is needless to say that these kinds of tracks are less likely to be featured on radio or gain any sync profit, apart from something that really fits. This musical genre is very specific and very limited to festivals, raves, and mass events.

Nevertheless, it is not the profit that I am after, but the originality, uniqueness, and creativity that fulfills me, and this is not something I am seeing in this musical genre anymore. I just feel tired of it and I am showing way more interest in live instruments being implemented in my music. So this track is definitely not a representation of a long term goal for me, but rather something that would help me kick off my career and set foot to the scene.

4. 80s Synthpop Instrumental

The Backstory

This project came about very spontaneously after hearing Call me Loop's "Year of the Ex" on the radio in a shopping center. I shazamed it straight away and found out who the artist behind this track was, which is how this project had started. I was already familiar with Call Me Loop's work considering that she is a Tileyard Music artist, but I have never actually dug deep into what she was doing. Having in mind that I like producing synthpop very much, I was very keen on giving this track a try.

The Production Process

As soon as I heard the $\frac{1}{8}$ bassline and the chords of this track working together with drums in order to create a very well known groove that 80's tracks have, I was ready to do something like this myself. I had started with the very simple $\frac{1}{8}$ bassline, mimicking the reference track. After some tweaking, I have come up with a very simple, but effective chord progression that carries the emotion of the track. (Call Me Loop, 2022)

That is where I pretty much started to arrange the project and organize the segments throughout the project. In the section where I planned to have a chorus, I felt like I was missing something, so I added a lead melody that gave a certain definition in my opinion. As there were no vocals or something else that would compete with the synth, mixing this track did not present a great challenge for me, or something I have not done already. (AudioTechnology, 2020)

How it Affects My Career

Synthpop is something that I genuinely enjoy listening to, producing and mixing. It sends across a very simple yet important life lesson, that things should be simple and yet manage to leave an emotional mark on the listener. This is how I see it and it makes sense in my head not only for this type of music, but every other genre or project I might come across further on. As for my artist career and synthpop living in symbiosis, it is very likely to happen. I see myself releasing this radio - friendly genre, but of course shaped to my liking and being in tact with modern sound.

Currently, this instrumental is at Arieleno's, waiting to be toplined. He is the Tileyard Alumnus that has toured and performed with Sigala, and achieved other very respectable milestones. This connection was made possible through Jamie Searls, who has shown a significant will and enthusiasm to help me build a network of collaborators. As stated, this track is currently in progress and I am looking forward to seeing how it will turn out. (Tileyard Education, n.d)

5. Afropop Instrumental

The Backstory

This track was started around the beginning of this year, right before I joined Tileyard, but was tweaked accordingly to become what it is now. This genre is something I only started to study and produce at the time, so I am very satisfied with how it turned out. I have taken inspiration from the likes of Tileyard Music artists such as Ella Eyre, Becky Hill and other artists that put out similar music.

The Production Process

As you can hear in the reference tracks, there are a lot of African influences but there is still a mainstream note to it, hence the name of the genre. These include mallets for chords, african drums combined with latin percussions to support the rhythm of the track. Some of the tracks include guitars as the lead sounds to set the theme of the track, which is the case with “Lessons” by Becky Hill and Banx & Ranx. (Hill, 2021)

This track is the main reference I used to create this project, alongside some other tracks that I will address a bit later. The thing I managed to notice while listening to these tracks is that there is nothing much happening in the low-mid area of the frequency spectrum. I believe that is done deliberately and it made sense to me after I have heard some other tracks in this genre. I have tried to mimic this by cutting out the unnecessary low mid from almost all the instruments, which is what I do in every project. This does give a certain amount of cleanliness and headroom, but could be tricky if there is not enough information in this area, it could make the track sound thin. (Soundgym, 2022)

Another thing I believe happens there is compensating the lack of low mid area with the low end boost. I think the sound selection makes it easier to achieve this, and picking the right bass sound could do a lot. (Eyre, 2020)

There is another thing I have learned throughout the process, which is removing the 500Hz area from the bass track, therefore making the space for other elements to pop out more.

In this particular track I have created a low pass filter up to 200Hz, eliminating almost all of the low mid and giving the feeling of rumble in the low end.

Chronologically, after producing this track, I have produced a couple of tracks in this genre and it is fair to say that at the moment I feel very comfortable producing this pop music sub-genre. This was the first track that I have produced in that genre and at the time, and it presented quite a challenge for me. But throughout the course, as stated before, I have gained the confidence to pursue the things that I like and that make me happy, and this is something that I consider a great success.

How it Affects My Career

Even though this track was started right before I joined Tileyard, I wanted to have it featured in this project as it has already helped me make a few steps when my plan with Tileyard Music comes to play. Moreover, this track, amongst many, was first played to Tileyard Music's Michael Harwood in May during my first visit to London. This was something he really liked and after that I had received a Tileyard Music bursary. Because of that, I hold this instrumental close to my heart. At the moment, I am not quite sure what is happening with it, as he asked me to send to his email in order to forward it to Tileyard Music artists and get me on some of their camps. So I believe that this track has done a lot already, and I am very happy to keep in touch with Michael and see what happens to it further on.

6. Piano House Instrumental

The Backstory

This is one of my recent attempts to pay homage to the musical genre that had me started in music production. This track, when compared to the other EDM track that I have submitted, is more commercial and radio friendly. Furthermore, this is something that Tileyard Music like Sigala, Joel Corry and others release. I had that in mind when starting this track and this is the result I wanted to achieve.

The Production Process

While listening to tracks such as “Living Without You”, “Stay The Night”, and many others by Sigala, an artist that I have used as a reference for this instrumental, there were a few things that caught my attention. In terms of the production, I have noticed a pattern of the piano chords being played by the famous M1 piano by Korg. (Sigala, 2022)

This is something that is used as a main sound, along with the famous M1 organ in some of the tracks. This is not the case only with the Piano House, but with many other subgenres of electronic music including : deep house, future house, UK garage, and French House. (musicradar, 2020)

In terms of the mixing, I have noticed that the reference tracks are very low mid heavy on the piano, vocals and bass, and overall. This is something I have tried to fix in my own track As previously stated when addressing the first electronic track included in this essay, this is me getting out of the comfort zone. This is something I have been trying for years, but due to the circumstances aforementioned, have not succeeded to accomplish. This project sounding solid gives me a great amount of satisfaction in knowing that I am not limited in any way by the lack of knowledge, or practice.

Chronologically, this instrumental came before the track that I have named “Transience”, and this was pretty much my comeback to dance music after which I felt more comfortable producing “Transience”.

My take on this track is that it is a stepping stone for many more finished tracks.

How it Affects My Career

As I said, this track serves as a stepping stone for the tracks that are yet to be finished. I played it to Tileyard Music's Michael Harwood, and received very positive feedback. His only objection was that the vocals are missing in order to complete it, and that the track itself could be pitchable but that vocal version is preferred. When it comes to this track, that was enough for me. I wanted this track to be a part of this project as a significant step that would pave my way to finishing more music in this genre.

Further Career Development

As I have stated before, my goal is to get to work with Tileyard Music and further develop the connection I have with them. The best case scenario would be getting a publishing deal from them, which is what I am working towards, and I think there is a significant amount of progress I have made in that direction during this course.

On another matter, I have been booked as a pro producer for the Tileyard Education Winter Songwriting Camp in November, which is something I really am looking forward to happening. I believe this is one of the steps in this process of expanding my connection with Tileyard and eventually moving to London and pursuing my dream career.

On top of that, I am currently in the discussions with Michael and his publishing team about bringing me over for a Tileyard Music camp that would happen off the back of the Tileyard Education Camp in November.

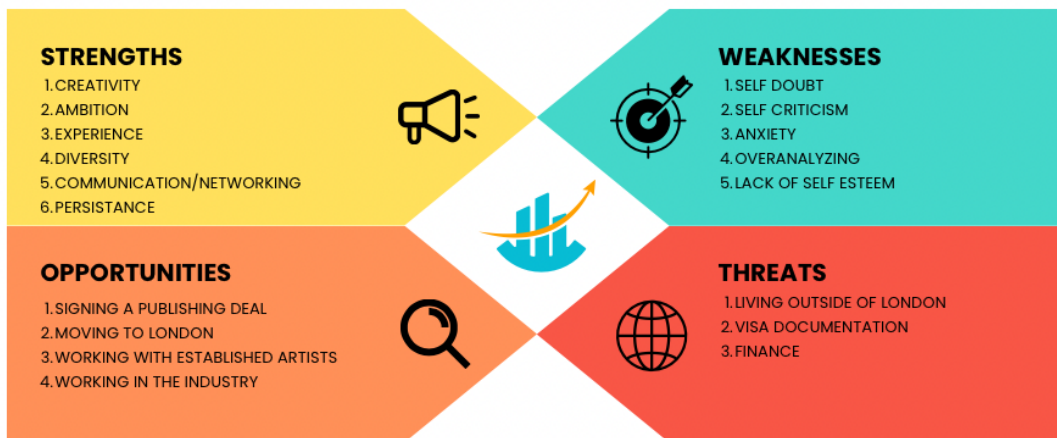
Considering all that, I would definitely say that “Success Measurement” section of the final project proposal made sense at the time and I believe I have already done so much.

Conclusion

Overall, Tileyard has taught me a lot with its hands-on industry approach. I would say that the biggest progress I have made is of psychological nature. I have realized my worth as a producer, understood and objectively noticed my skills that I was not aware of before Tileyard. I believe it has made a huge impact on how I perceive myself and how to be assertive in the steps I take to achieve my goals. It is very well known that every big change has its ups and downs, but yet somehow I have experienced a great learning curve that was only going upwards. I have managed to learn a lot from our lecturers, our staff and partners and this is something I will be forever thankful for. I really do believe that I am compatible to be a part of this community and this is something I will continue working towards. The one thing that did present an actual challenge

Appendices

SWOT ANALYSIS



Appendix A : SWOT Analysis

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