

Versatility and Characteristics of a Producer: A Written Proposal

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Outline of the Original Music Work Submission and Reasonings

The most significant trend that I have seen while writing commercial music is versatility. For instance, in the February songwriting camps, we were asked to write to briefs that span a wide range of genres and labels. Some of these briefs included writing emotional acoustic pop, radio friendly anthemic house tracks and songs that fit for the sea shanty viral sensation Nathen Evans. This alone outlines the struggles that producers often must go through, as they must be prepared to write nearly anything at the drop of a hat, and often on a tight deadline. As such, my final audio submission will outline my versatility as a producer.

The audio submission will be a collection of songs that showcase my ability to collaborate and work alone across a variety of genres. These will include songs due to be released under my music alias 'Mizu', including a commission brief to write a song for the end credits scene of a movie for YouTube. I will also include songs written for commercial brief as a ghost producer, which will outline my ability to tick the boxes the record label wants while also bringing something unique and positively outstanding to the submitted tracks. I will make sure that there are tracks written for advertising and sync opportunities as I can foresee myself going into that line of work post degree. There will also be a track produced for a fellow student on the songwriting course, which will help demonstrate my ability to communicate with clients to get the type of sound they want in a professional and timely manner.

The primary reason behind my proposal, as previously mentioned, is displaying my versatility as a producer. Putting me in front of a range of briefs covering most of the areas that I am expected to produce for is a good way of showing where I excel and where I need to improve. Another reason why I want to do this type of project is to properly cement the characteristics that my production style emits. While there are some obvious ones that I will point out below in the case study, there is not enough consistency with some of them to consider them characteristics. This collection of songs will help me see which parts of the production I can both consistently do and excel at, meaning I can accurately create an up-to-date electronic press kit and properly advertise myself as a producer.

Case Study: Adam Young

When considering case studies and research examples for my proposal, I decided to base my future work on a producer that inspired me the most during my formative years. Adam Young,

best known for being the main member of Owl City, is a talented producer in many genres, creating aliases for each one. For instance, his acoustic guitar led tracks are under the alias Sky Sailing, while his more ambient tracks have been under various names, including Color Therapy, Port Blue and Insect Airport. Even his orchestral project in 2016, titled Adam Young Scores, was a considerable step away from the commercial success of Owl City. It is interesting to note that some of these aliases were supposed to be anonymous, such as Color Therapy, but the characteristics of Young's production and creative technique shone through the anonymity to clearly show he was behind this alias. While I do not wish for this to be my exact case in the future as I do not plan to have multiple active aliases, the concept of having a production style with defining characteristics is something that I wish to achieve in this assignment and beyond.

Furthermore, Young is known to be a versatile producer for more than his aliases. According to discogs.com, Young has produced for various acts such as Reliant K and Katie Havnevik, as well being a featured artist for trance artists like Ørjan Nielsen, Paul Van Dyk, Chicane and Armin Van Buuren. It has also been confirmed that in 2013, Young composed the various ringtones found in IOS7, with a few comparing the ringtones to his previous works and finding similarities in the melody structures, arrangement, and overall style. Even as a nameless, faceless producer, Young has characteristics in his production and composition that allows the listener to identify who the producer is while not affecting the overall product. I wish to achieve this in my final submission, but with different characteristics as Young. Young's characteristics can be boiled down to airtight mixing, heavily refined vocals, catchy melodies with emotive synths, and genre appropriate instrumentation that contradicts yet compliments the theme of the lyrics. The characteristics that I have and want to build on consist of a contemporary and explorative use of orchestral instruments, multi-layered vocal processing, and intricate sound design. I am also leaving myself open to the possibility that new, more applicable characteristics will arise during the creation process.

In interviews, Young goes into depths about the genres and acts that inspired him in his production. For instance, in an interview with MSN, Young states that listening to a lot of hip hop growing up enhanced his interest in beat making, while his experience in being a drummer in a heavy metal band helped curate his complex drum rhythms, as well as directly influencing the use of double kick drums in his heavier tracks and live performances. He also gets inspiration from other sources, such as film scores and his belief in Christianity. This concept of getting inspiration from different genres and stimuli is something that I will try and implement into my work for this

assignment. Getting information from varying sources enriches the overall product, whether it is production, songwriting or even academic writing. Even in personality traits there are similarities between Young and myself. We are both shy, introverted musicians that often use our music, and in turn our aliases, as a mask to hide behind: 'The music is like a curtain that I can hide behind, in a way, and suddenly the music empowers me and... the shyness and the introverted whatever just goes away.' (Young, 2012) This encapsulates the reason behind why I chose Adam Young as my case study, and why I want to base my final submission around his production work across the years.

Areas of Analysis for the Reflective Commentary

It is worth pointing out that not all these objectives will be applicable to every track in the final submission. For instance, any song made entirely by myself cannot be judged on anything to do with collaborations. However, these seven criteria cover everything that I want to achieve, both in this assignment and in my career as a producer. There are also no criteria that covers commercial and analytical success. This is because many of these tracks will not be publicly released to the public before the May deadline, and therefore cannot be fairly judged across the board.

Personal Opinion

The area that will be the hardest to consistently achieve will be whether I personally enjoy the track after it has been finished. As a part of my journey as a producer and artist, the possibility of being an impostor has regularly been at the forefront of my mind while producing and finishing songs. As such, listening back to songs that I produced, especially in the long term, has been a difficult experience, often filled with harsh self-criticism and second-hand embarrassment. This also led to me not sharing my work to my peers under the assumption that what I was writing was not good enough. However, over the last year I have been slowly getting better as a producer and as a critic of my own work, and my time at Tileyard Education has helped me realise that I am a better producer than my anxiety was telling me. As such, finding merit and healthily looking back on the submitted works will be a key objective in the reflective commentary. Some questions that I would ask myself include:

- Are there any changes that you would now make?
- Would you willingly listen to this if it came on while listening to music?
- Would you be happy to submit this work as a part of your professional portfolio?

A personal and professional approach to this objective will help me get the clearest answer, making the overall outcome more decisive.

Opinion of Peers and Mentors

Whilst the opinion of your own music matters, getting feedback from people with fresh ears and an open mind matters just as much. Being able to reach out to industry professionals and fellow students for assistance not only helps my confidence in my own music, but also helps home in on areas that may need improving and gives a clear trajectory for the future of the song. On top of this, I will also submit certain tracks to A&R feedback sessions to get valuable information from someone that does not know me personally, meaning that there is less bias towards their answer. I will also get feedback from peers and followers of my artist alias. This will give me a better idea of whether my music is 'on brand', as well as showing if my production characteristics and styles run through all the tracks. I will take any criticism with a grain of salt, as one of the disadvantages of giving your work to someone who knows nothing about it is getting critiqued on purposeful production decisions. Here are the questions I will ask myself in May:

- At what stage did you submit this track for feedback?
- Was the feedback positive, negative or a mix of both?
- Did you and your peers consider this track to be in line with your brand/production characteristics and why?

Responding to Feedback

This follows through from the previous objective, as I will put into practice the feedback that I received. To make sure that this area is properly addressed, I will outline the changes suggested in, declare whether I took them on board and state my reasoning why. Being able to take feedback and utilise it into something productive is a key characteristic of a good producer, but the same can be said about not acting on critiques for perfectly valid reasons. The questions asked in the reflective essay will include:

- What was the specific feedback that you received and who said it?
- Did you take on board the changes advised to you?
- Why/why not?
- In hindsight, do you think the other option was better and why?

Improvement on Weaker Areas of Production

From previous A&R sessions and the marking from previous assignments, one of the areas that I need to improve on across the board is vocal processing and production. This includes mixing vocals other than my own, keeping a relatively balanced level across the entire song and making sure the

vocals sit higher and better in the mix. The varied styles, genres and collaborations on the final project will make this more challenging, as I will have to mix multiple voices with wildly different instrumentals happening. I will aim to find relevant reference tracks for each song and see how prominent the vocals are in their mix. This will also be an area that I will ask specific feedback for when talking to peers and professionals. The points that will be covered are as follows:

- Whose vocals did you mix?
- What steps did you take to make sure the vocals were clear and sit well in the mix?
- What was the feedback from peers and professionals?

Better Integration of Orchestral Instruments

A big identifier and characteristic of all my previous works has been the use of orchestral instruments. Whether it is a simple string section or a fully arranged cinematic piece, the use of classical instruments is something that is embedded in my productions. With that being said, the integration and use of said instruments could be improved on. For instance, in a song that is supposed to be a standard catchy pop song, I tend to go too far into orchestration, making that the main focus of the production rather than the catchy hook or the driving chorus. Furthermore, I often use classical instruments in the most straightforward and traditional way, often putting some processing and little to no effects on their bus. Relying less on orchestral instruments and experimenting with more abstract sound design are both areas that I want to change, while simultaneously keeping the style of production that is connected to my alias. In summary, here are the points that I will aim to answer:

- How much of the overall track consisted of orchestral elements?
- Would you consider every element necessary? Could they have been replaced by an electronic substitute?
- Did you experiment with orchestral elements to create a new/interesting sound?
- Do you think this adds to the over cohesion of your production style and why?

Being Good to Work with in Collaborations

One area that I have gained the most insight in while at Tileyard Education is how to work effectively with a group of songwriters while building a solid working relationship with them. In the same vein, it has also taught me the truth about how much a bad working environment affects the final product, as well as your view on them as a collaborator. They might be incredible at what they do, but if they are difficult to work with then the experience and the end product will not be good. I had primarily worked as a solo producer before beginning my Master's, so working in groups of up to five

people was a considerable change from the norm. As such, a concern of mine is whether I am good to work with in the honest opinion of other songwriters. Therefore, I shall be analysing the interactions surrounding the creation of the collaborative songs and see if my responses, my workflow, and everything in between works for them. As different people work in different ways, I will also be documenting the way I approach and interact with the other writers and see if this adaptability pays off in the long run. An issue that I have had in the recent past is keeping the collaborator up to date with the progress I have made, especially if there are no set deadlines. This will be an area that I will cover in the questions I will ask myself at the end of the process. These are some of the criteria that I will ask in the reflective essay:

- Was the songwriting experience enjoyable and why?
- Was the songwriting experience productive and why?
- Did you have to adapt workflow or communication to work better with your client/collaborators?
- Did your collaborator enjoy working with you? Any feedback from the experience?

In conclusion, I believe that my proposal covers a variety of different criteria that I want to continue beyond my degree. The objectives outlined are both well linked to the music being made and my reasonings, which in turn will help me become a more well-rounded producer and therefore increase my chances of being successful in the industry in the long term.

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