

MA Commercial Music Producer

Creation: ADAD7004

Tileyard Education

Tariq Hussain

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Introduction

This project will be an opportunity for me to dedicate my time on a long term passion-project. Over the next 11 weeks, I will be focusing my energy on creating an 11 track electronic music album for my artist project, Shafkkat. This proposal will display my objectives and goals for completing this task, including problems that I expect to encounter, as well as a clear understanding of why I have selected this task and how I plan to allow my vision to unfold.

Why This Project?

Although my first love of music production lies with hip-hop, at the age of fifteen I became enamoured by electronic music, due to it's indefinite range of sounds. I spent many years working under multiple aliases, experimenting with different genres such as dubstep, house and disco. The arrival of the first lockdown in the UK halted several of my releases, all of which fall under the 'lo-fi house' aesthetic. During this time, I wrote a large amount of music without thinking of genres. This led to me experimenting with sonic manipulation and new production techniques more so than I ever had before.



Album Artwork (Option 1) : Photography by Alex J Corona

Before long, I had abandoned my previous artist name and cancelled all upcoming releases. This led me to creating the 'Shafkkat' moniker. I released my first EP in November 2020, flexing my dance muscles with broken beats, funky grooves as well as a moody downtempo number to showcase my darker influences. These tracks all received radio play across a wide range of stations such as Rinse fm, Balamii radio as well as Reprezent radio. For the first time, I felt like I had discovered myself as an artist.

This album will be the next step to showcasing myself as a musician, as not every track will be written for the rave scene. I'm looking to have a wider sonic palette to sit in different pockets of electronic music lovers. A few of the tracks will be commercially accessible by having an uptempo energy with what I hope to be catchy vocals. The rest of the album will

split into different styles that inspire me, such as ambient, breaks and even some glitch-hop influenced tracks.

Although my stylistic approach could make the album hard to follow for listeners who aren't particularly fond of each style, the benefit would be that I could release several singles prior to the album's release, allowing me to pitch to multiple playlists.

Influences & Success Stories

One of the biggest influences for the crossover potential of having a relatively underground album with a few radio friendly tracks in the mix would have to be the 2010 self titled album, Magnetic Man. Magnetic Man was a dubstep trio, formed of Underground artists Skream, Benga and Artwork. The album was scattered with the gritty sound of Dubstep, alongside chart hits such as 'I Need Air', 'Perfect Stranger' and ironically, 'Crossover'. Although the album reached chart status, dubstep purists were not overly fond of the departure from the trio's roots (**Ryce, 2010**). This is where my influence from this album's stylistic approach comes to a halt. Although I would like to include tracks of a commercial nature, I like to call them 'commercially accessible', as I am not writing music with aspirations of them charting, purely to be more understood by commercial audiences, rather than adored. Magnetic Man failed to please a portion of both audiences, due to the fact that it 'lacked' a pure feel of the commercial side or the underground side of the music (**Empire, 2010**). This concerns me as I feel as though finding the right balance to pull people in could be harder than anticipated.

Developing from this notion would be to take a look at Jame's Blake's 'Limit To Your Love', which was the lead single from his self titled debut album. Although the track was vocal led, the post-dubstep producer/singer held a dark and eerie influence of his electronic roots, that carried over the remainder of the album. I would never consider 'Limit To Your Love' a commercial record, even though it remained on the charts for 7 weeks (**Official Charts**). From this point, James Blake's career progression grew tenfold, he has since worked with the likes of Outkast, Beyonce and Common, without compromising his sound.

If we look one step further into an artist that more closely resembles my sound, we'll find Jon Hopkins. The electronic artist, who's work is mainly of an instrumental nature, has a total of 3 albums that have charted in the UK, one of which, *Singularity*, broke the top 10. The album crosses over from techno through to industrial with an immense use of complex synthesis and intelligent production (**Barleet, 2018**). Not a single track on the album fits the traditional commercial sound, and his discography shows that there is still room for commercial success with an experimental electronic release.

How to capture 'The Sound'

Although I would love to make this an album that could sit well with all audiences, that notion simply contradicts what I believe like an electronic album to entail. My goal is to blend several genres and sub-genres together across the album, with one key factor bringing them all together, colours. Two years ago, I was tested for synesthesia, a neurological condition that causes people to see and feel colours when listening to music (**Bradford, 2017**). This condition has helped (although, sometimes hurt) my creative progress throughout the years, as I often use visual aids, such as coloured lights to assist me when writing music that matches a certain colour. I have decided to write what I consider blue music. This, to me, has nothing to do with genre or even emotion, but it is

more of a sonic element of the sound. I see blue with very modern and complex electronic productions, similar to the likes of Floating Points, Four Tet and Jon Hopkins. As my album progresses, the shades of blue will evolve before returning to the exact same shade as we began. This is why I will be opening with a electro-cinematic track named Identity (Part I) and closing with the more aggressive, techno inspired version, Identity (Part II).

Benchmarks of Success

This project will be considered a success based on a combination of my own taste and personal joy with the project, as well as with how it's received by my peers and industry professionals. Finding a fine line between what musically works for me and how people perceive my music could prove to be difficult, as I am attempting to target multiple audiences with this piece. One thing that I must consider is possibly leaning more so towards the underground sound, in order to not compromise the music. There are several production based artists who have had extremely successful careers without making typically pop records, such as Massive attack (**Skar, 2013**).

Peer Feedback

Due to the global pandemic, online listening parties have become more popular than ever. Huge artists, such as Noah Cyrus have even gotten in on the trend by allowing a select number of fans to attend listening parties for her own releases (**Moran, 2020**). Taking influence from this, I will be organising a listening party to be held on zoom for my own project, where I will ask to receive critique for each song, this will be a recorded session so that I can use the information for my own development. As this is a predominantly electronic/underground body of work, I will invite a mixture of artists and fans of that side of the industry. I will combine this with a small amount of people that follow more commercialised styles of music, as well as people with more of a generally mixed taste in music. I have chosen these groups of people both for constructive feedback, as well as to test which audiences resonate with my music more. My only concern is that potentially hearing too many different types of opinions can cause me to doubt my own judgement for what will work on the record. For ethical reasons, I will have to abide by the GDPR. I will do this by informing my peers on how I shall be using their information for my project.

Professional Feedback

Tileyard education have assigned John Hendicott, a music producer, DJ and marketing manager, to be my mentor over the course of this year. We have very similar tastes in music, making him a great candidate for constructive criticism, as he's familiar with the general musical styles I will be going for. At the moment, I have received a great deal of praise from the early conception of the project(as well as the only completed track), but I'm eager to see how some of the more experimental tracks will be received.

Music manager, Henry Moller of ADMG, manager of Roy Davis Jr, writer and producer of 90's garage classic 'Gabriel' has agreed to give feedback to my entire album. Henry has experience in running large techno events across London, as well as having released music for experimental artists such as VESCE. His personal tastes are catered more towards the experimental and 'weird' side, so his critique could prove to be helpful for the less upbeat records.

My final piece of professional feedback will come from Sylvern Mathurin, commonly known as Poté. Poté has recently signed his latest album to Ninja Tune. He specialises in electronic music, both underground and commercial. With a great ear for mix flaws as well as having a tremendous talent as a musician, I am hoping to receive feedback that can help my album grow where it may potentially lack.

Musical Quality Control

Going by a slightly unorthodox method to test the quality of my music, I will record a DJ mix that will include my songs amongst others in the same realm of music. This will be a way to see if my music feels as of the same standard. For me, I do not consider my music good enough, if it doesn't sound as professionally polished as the artists I admire.

Schedule

For this project, I am aiming to complete a minimum of one song a week. The fortunate news is that I have completed one song already, with 4 already underway. This will allow me to spend more time on writing new music. Mixing between live instrumentation, vocals and field recordings, each song will have at least one aspect of live recording.

Below you will find a list of the album songs currently in production:

Identity (Part I) - *Almost Completed* | **Her (Featuring Rojaz)** - *Completed* | **Uprising** - *Mid-Development*
Lost Love - *Mid-Development* | **Artificial Lover** - *Early Development* | **Promethazine** - *Early Development* | **Rebirth** - *Early Development* | **Identity (Part II)** - *Early Stages*

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	Mixing Complete Identity	Songwriting (S/W) Uprising	S/W Lost Love	S/W Promethazine	Mixing Complete Lost Love	Break	Break
2	S/W Uprising	S/W Promethazine	Mixing Promethazine	Recording Uprising	S/W Uprising	Mixing Complete Promethazine	Break
3	S/W Artificial Lover	Mixing Complete Uprising	Break	Recording Artificial Lover	S/W Rebirth	Mixing Complete Artificial Lover	Break
4	S/W Rebirth	Mixing Complete Rebirth	Break	S/W Interlude	Recording Interlude	Mixing Complete Interlude	Break
5	Complete Artwork - Decide Album Title	UK Trip	S/W New Track	Field Recordings	Return	Organise/ Assess Progress	S/W New Track 2
6	Intensive Self Care/Repair	Album Revision Week	Album Revision Week	Album Revision Week	Album Revision Week	Album Revision Week	Break
7	S/W New Track	S/W New Track	Break	S/W New Track 3	Mixing Complete New Track1	S/W New Track 2	Break

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8	S/W New Track 2	Mixing Complete New Track 2	Break	Recording Dialogue to scatter over album	S/W Identity (Part II)	Mixing Complete New Track 3	Break
9	S/W Identity (Part II)	S/W Identity (Part 2)	Break	Mixing Complete Identity (Part II)	Album Revision	Album Listening Party	Album Revisit
10	Album Revist	Album Revist	Album Revist	Mastering	Mastering	Break/Final Feedback	Break
11	Mastering	Revision	Revision	Submission	Deadline		

I will be collaborating with multiple singers as well as session musicians for this project. The majority of the initial songwriting for each song will take place at home, but i will arrange recording sessions moving forward.

Songwriting

As previously mentioned, the majority of my songwriting sessions will take place at home. This is where I feel most comfortable writing and creating music. Collaborative sessions will also take place at home or via zoom (Melendez 2020).

Mixing

I've decided to mix the album in 'almost' mono. Using Ableton Live's Utility plugin, I will set the stereo imagine to around 30% whilst mixing. This is a technique that I tested during the mixing stage of 'Her' and came to love the results. As I go through the mix of the track, I check it in stereo, as well as full mono, to make sure everything is sitting where it belongs. Once I'm happy with all of my reverbs, EQ's, compression etc, I take the mix into stereo to finalise the mix (**Robjohns, 2011**). This could prove to cause a few potential problems with some of the more ambient or experimental tracks, as hard panning and drastic imaging will also be part of the songwriting.

Breaks

Due to an ongoing struggle with mental health, I have scheduled out days for complete breaks. This is to avoid reaching a 'burnout', that would ultimately hinder my progress with the album. Taking care of my mental health must be a 'top priority' (Burchell, 2019). I have a tendencies to not look after myself when working hard on a project, so this will be a difficult task to stick to, especially when I'm deep into a production of a song. Legendary producer Rick Rubin states that he meditates '20 minutes' a day every morning. This helps him to ground himself (**TMHome, 2014**).

Mastering

Although I am generally opposed to this method, I will be self mastering my own album. The main reason for this is that I don't feel comfortable pitching my work to record labels unless I know that the standard is of a great quality. As some of the tracks are written for the club, I have to consider that a lot of A&R's and label owners are also DJ's within their own right. These songs need to be ready to be put in a mix from the moment it has been mailed out, therefore, the tracks can't feel underwhelming amongst others in a mix. My assumption is that all the tracks will be remastered prior to their official release.

Recording

Each song will be written as a skeleton before being taken into the studio for additional recordings. Once I've collectively completed the body of the tracks, I will then book sessions at Tileyard studios, where the majority of live recordings shall take place. Due to a potentially large demand for studio space, I have prioritised the tracks that require vocal recording and live instruments.

Organise/Assess Progress

I struggle greatly with organisation. As I have always worked in quite a free flow mindset, it will prove difficult to stick to deadlines for each track. I have printed my schedule for this assignment so that I can look over it each day. Being realistic to my own workflow is important though. As the album progresses, I will more than likely encounter several setbacks, so I must be prepared to adapt and adjust my schedule to complete the tasks at hand.

Once the track listing has further developed, I will use my synesthesia to organise the album sequencing (**Hahn, 2018**). One concern with this approach is that it may not connect with listeners the same way it does for me. However, I believe that the artists vision should always come first, as it is their story to tell.

Album Revision Week

This week will be where I will look upon the work I have completed so far and make executive decisions. What songs will be removed? What changes need to be made? This will be a crucial point to decide on how best to adapt my project.

Conclusion

Although an ambitious task, I believe that the goals of completing my 11 track album are within reach. This project will allow me to explore my own skills and expand my reach as an artist. For me, it is important to not be scene strictly as a dance music producer, this project is my aim to establish myself more so as an 'electronic music musician'.

The largest obstacles for me to face will be the vocal aspect of the album. Finding the right artists to collaborate with could be tricky due to the nature of the style of music. Although a few of the tracks will have a form of commercial appeal, the remainder of the album will have more of an underground aesthetic.

I believe that this project will be a great step for my career as it has the potential to open up several doors within the music scene that I'm passionate about, as well as having

music for my commercial portfolio to show a diverse range of production. The most important benchmark of success for this piece, is making sure that this project will service me well after the duration of my course. Although I will be looking to pitch this as an album to several labels, I believe that I also have the ability to split the project into multiple releases if I am unable to achieve my initial goals. This safety net would secure that the amount of work I will be putting into the album will not be going to waste.

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