Assignment: CREATIVE BUSINESS PROJECT

(Student requests this assignment remains confidential indefinitely)

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Introduction to E.B.N.X

The following academic business proposal is centred upon the development of a music media platform and event series called E.B.N.X, that specialises within electronic or underground music made by Black artists. This report will be carried out with close consideration for the disruptions brought on by the digitisation of music, a hostile economic climate initiated by the Covid19 pandemic, Brexit, the Russian invasion of the Ukraine and a wave of objectionable governmental policies in the United Kingdom spanning the last 13 years. This proposal will utilise the ways in which industry actors and organisations are negotiating the effects that these circumstances have exerted on music industry practices. As E.B.N.X is partnered with a distributor, there will be a heavy focus on the curatorial and visual development of the project. Additionally, the proposal will touch upon solutions for marketing, branding, release scheduling and financial planning. It will also address the distinct hardships faced by Black artists within the electronic music realm, outlining the necessity of such a platform.

E.B.N.X is a multidisciplinary platform and forthcoming dance music record label, founded by artist and DJ Shannen SP. The primary goal of the platform is to elevate black voices within electronic music by diversifying its landscape and empowering the artists involved to cultivate sustainable careers within the industry. Through its operations E.B.N.X will also aim to collaborate with black and brown creatives, like graphic designers, videographers, editors and the like, in order to cultivate an ecosystem that fosters future collaboration and opportunity as well as a supportive network and sustainable careers within the arts. Furthermore, E.B.N.X is designed to provide not only a digital forum for a gloablised public sphere, but also physical space in the form of a travelling event series to foster a sense of togetherness and community around the brand.

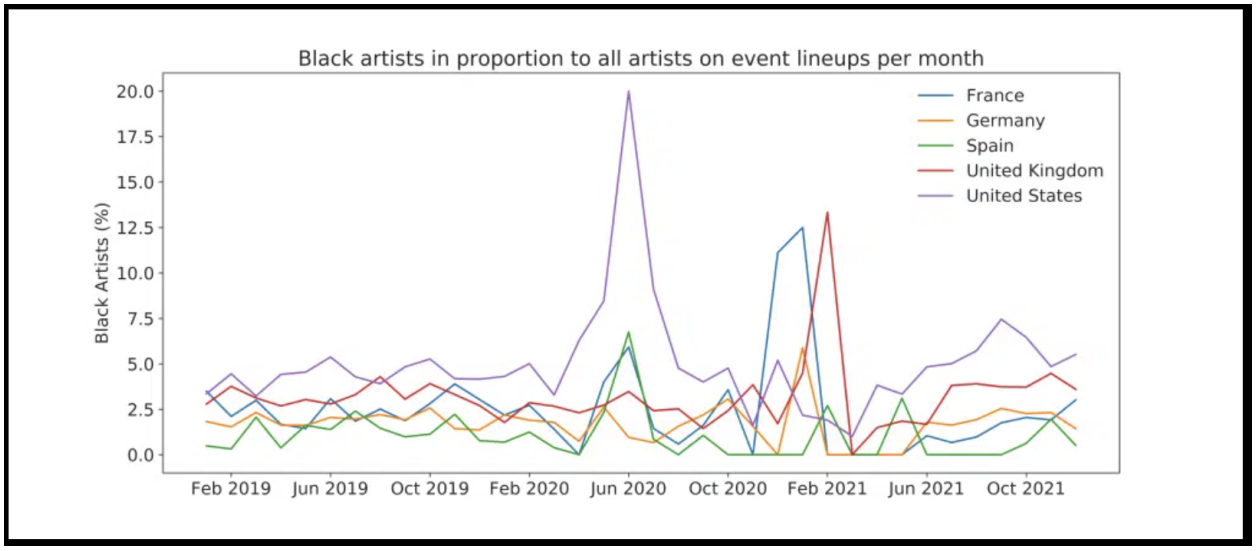
Although E.B.N.X is a platform to uplift black artists who are creating within the electronic sphere in order to address the disparities within opportunity, bookings, representation, partnerships etc, the events, releases and ongoings of the platform are open to all, with the platform's musical output and curation at the core of it’s identity. E.B.N.X’s core fanbase will be located with listeners who hold interest in and are receptive to new ideas and developments

within dance and club music, typically early adopters with a deep interest in culture and collectable merchandise.

Historically, dance music has been adjacent with marginalised communities and politically progressive discourse, due to much of its origins stemming from the Black and Latino LGBTQ underground of the 70s U.S cities, which have shaped the character of dance music culture ever since. (Heath, 2019) Whilst it is necessary to acknowledge that house and techno, two of the most lucrative electronic music genres, have been repackaged to soundtrack to the hedonism and excess seen in the clubs across European cities like Berlin, Belgium and London, it remains vital to reaffirm the genre's origins as a reaction to the African American and Queer struggle in the early 1980s, (Heath, 2019) manifesting it's form in sonic protests from techno's progenitors - known as the Belleville Three - Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson, who 'synthesised a new, Afrofuturist configuration of dance music' in response to the economic disparity and violence committed against their communities. Another influential and pioneering outfit were Underground Resistance, recognised as the figureheads of techno's '2nd wave'. Underground Resistance's also incorporated political discourse into their music, for example, their release *Message To The Majors,* the artwork for which brandished the text "All Murderers on the Detroit Police Force - we'll see you in hell!". The record itself is in memoriam of Malice Green, a Black motorist who was killed by white police officers in Detroit. (Heath, 2019)

The persisting issue of the erasure of Black artists from electronic music has been the source of heavy debate over the last 5 to 10 years in the dance music arena. The legacy of the aforementioned Detroit techno pioneers is often overshadowed by Europe's adoption and repackaging of house and techno music with this historical neglect resulting in a sustained material impact on Black artists in the industry today. In similarity with many other musical genres born of Black struggle, cultural histories are dissipated by a multimillion-dollar industry that favours foregrounding white artists who adopt the sound. (Herrera, 2022) This, in turn, serves to not only deny Black electronic music artists their cultural legacy, but also to financially subjugate through the exclusion from an $11.3 billion global dance music industry, with revenues growing by 30-35% annually. (Beck, 2023) Cornelius Harris, the label manager of Underground Resistance highlighted that "people don't understand how the economics [of dance music] empowers people, especially when there aren't a lot of other opportunities". (Orlov, 2018)

To address the necessity for a platform like E.B.N.X to exist in 2023, one must take stock of the current circumstances that exist for Black artists within the electronic music ecosystem. In 2019, 82% of artists booked for mainstream dance music festivals were male, 76% white, 18% identified as women, and 14% black. (Barnes, 2020) The Technomaterialism platform's report found that while there was a significant spike in black artists bookings in the U.S and France in June during the peak of the Minneapolis uprising, this trend did not continue or translate into better representation for black artists in dance music. Particularly in France, where Black artists have been *less* represented since June 2020, despite France having the largest Black population in Europe. (Techno Materialism, 2022)



Dance music and techno continues to be drawn upon as a tool of political mobilisation, for causes that vary beyond those of the Detroit originators. Germany's adoption of techno and its rise in popularity has been linked to reunification and the fall of the wall, with its immediate, indelible impact on Berlin still felt today. Divestment in post war Berlin, and the structural racism enacted upon the city of Detroit generated the same symptoms of economic distress, (Wei, 2020) making the music transferable. Other contemporary examples of the political usage of the music include the track *Silence Is Oppression*, by Portuguese producer ØTTA, played in street demonstrations against a ruling by Poland's Constitutional Court that led to a near total ban on abortion. (Barret, 2021) Across Europe, the rise of populist governments has been met with the employment of immense sound systems unleashing relentless techno during protests and direct actions. (Dillane, 2021) On the May 18th armed police raids and intimidation of LGBTQ youth that took place at internationally renowned dance music venue Bassani, located in Tbilisi, Georgia, club goers from nearby venues marched to the parliament building and set up a soundsystem and protested for two days, stating "We Dance Together, We Fight Together", quickly garnering support from the international dance music community. (Bram, 2018)

This adoption of genres like techno across Europe - although often deeply problematic due to the erasure of its black and queer origins and creators - refenforces underground dance music as fertile ground for political discourse and progression. It signals that there is indeed a demographic of dance music fans who are in alignment with the utilisation of dance music and the events surrounding it as a force for social progression, particularly in times of socio-political unrest. For this reason, it is acceptable to envision a place for a label like E.B.N.X to thrive within the electronic music landscape. Although the "keep the politics out of dance music" narrative still surfaces amongst some fans, there are many listeners who became fans because of the music's political connotations. Bump agency, who partner with brands like Boiler Room, Atlantic Records and Pioneer, released their 2023 inaugural On The Record Report, which surveyed 1,807 music fans and revealed five key insights on dance music audiences:

- **Progressive Idealists**

  45% of the dance music community strongly agree that they prefer brands that promote equality and are inclusive, as opposed to 34% of mainstream music consumers, with 2.5 times more dance music fans professing to have boycotted a brand in the last year.

- **Fans, Not Consumers**

  Avid dance music fans are 13X more likely to use Bandcamp, and 2X more likely to be active explorers rather than passive consumers of music and are more likely to use online community recommendations when finding new music.

- **Invest in Live**

  88% of those surveyed said they preferred investing in an event rather than dining out, showcasing the importance of live and in person community that accompanies the music.

- **Grassroots Supporters**

  66% of fans reported that they respond better to endorsements from actual customers, and the wider community, rather than to those from high profile influencers. They are also 2X more likely to share news, music or events daily and 30% more likely to listen to educational podcasts.

- **Brand Critical**

  66% of dance music fans - as opposed to 14% of mainstream fans - are more receptive to purpose led marketing, with 80% of fans agreeing that brands can help address wider music industry problems such as diversity and inclusion, mental health and substance abuse. (Murch, 2022)

Market Research: Live and Recorded Electronic Music Sector

For any new business venture conducting market research is an important undertaking in order to create a succinct and viable business plan. Particularly in the case of somewhat niche markets like electronic dance music, market research may provide critical information for start ups on who their target demographic may be, how to reach those audiences, how viable a product or service may be, pricing strategy and shifts and trends in consumer behaviours. Furthermore, potential investors place importance on thorough market research that indicates potential returns on said investments. There are two types of market research one can conduct:

- Primary research, which consists of collating data and feedback first hand in order to improve the company's specific product or services and cater to their customers needs. (Cote, 2022)

- Secondary Research, which is conducted using industry reports, public databases and other company's proprietary data to gain insights into a target market and consumer behaviour. (Cote, 2022)

As E.B.N.X is in its infancy, the company does not yet have access to a varied target market pool to conduct primary research or collect data and for this reason, this analysis has been carried out predominantly using secondary research, drawing on reports and articles detailing the challenges, trends and shifts in consumer behaviours in the dance music industry over the last 10 years. As a result of the digitization of the music industry, there is a wealth of data analytics that will inform the following market research.

It is important for any company to identify what questions it aims to answer through market research, as these questions can aid in developing predictions or hypotheses. (Cote, 2022) A relevant question to begin the market research with for E.B.N.X is how the economic climate affects the dance music consumer's willingness to spend on related products, events and music.

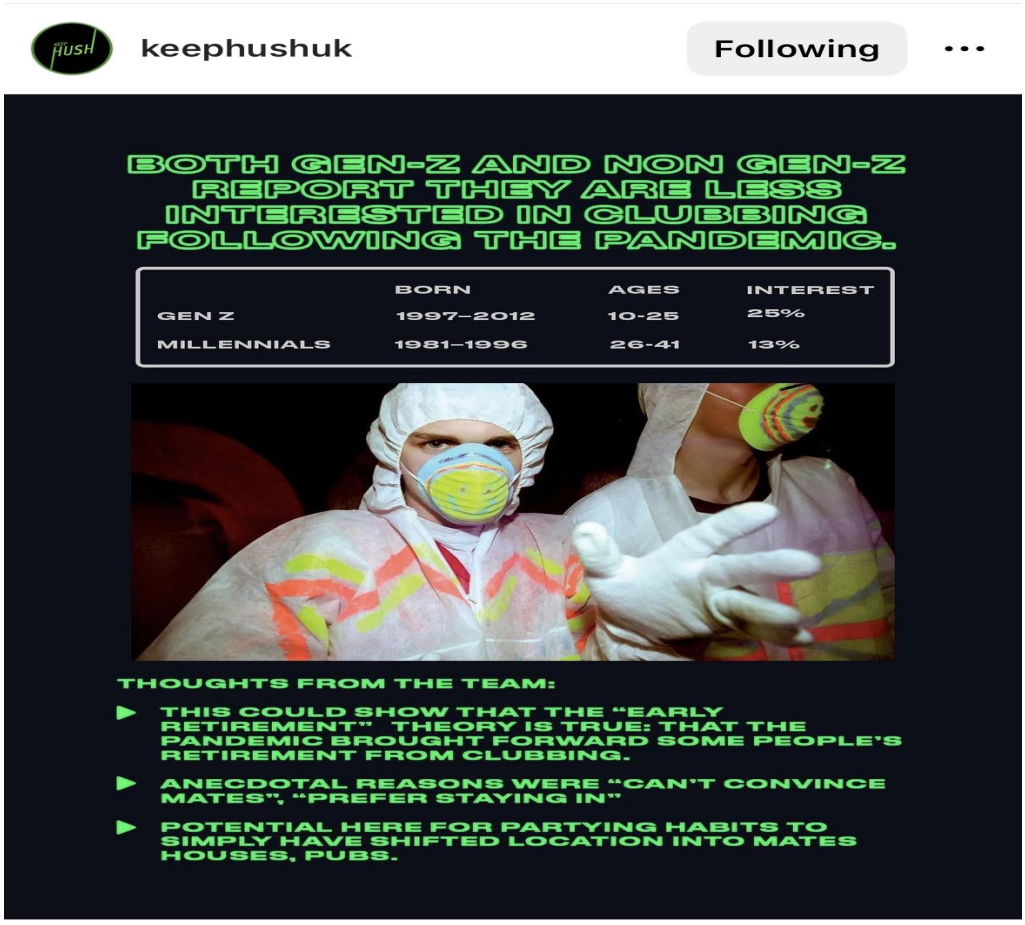
Across the industry, for artists, promoters, record labels etc, dance music's revenue flow is intrinsically linked to and primarily stems from live events. Although dance and electronic music has seen growth on social media and streaming platforms, the primary method to reach audiences and increase revenue for electronic musicians is generated through DJing and live shows. Although record labels do not traditionally participate in the booking or touring process of a dance music artist, it is mutually beneficial for the artist to build a successful touring schedule in order to strengthen the marketing and visibility around a release campaign and to keep fans engaged in their output. As live events will be an important revenue stream for E.B.N.X, with aims of collaborating with festivals and securing residencies with nightclubs, it is important to assess the current climate of electronic music's live sector.

In order to survive the pandemic hardships and generate some revenue under lockdown regulations many venues, different sectors of the dance music industry responded by joining together to orchestrate live streams - some featuring key artists from the sector like David Guetta - which were well received by clubbers in lockdown. In Berlin, a collection of 40 of the city''s most popular night clubs launched the United We Stream initiative, streaming DJ sets from empty venues. Club Commission, the non-profit organisation behind the initiative aimed to raise €1m from the streams to then distribute across venues in need. (Woolsey, 2020) However, this medium's engagement outside of high profile platforms like Keep Hush and Boiler Room waned once lockdown regulations were lifted. Similarly, throughout and following lockdown, some dance music scenes saw a return to the underground rave beginnings, with a resurgence of artists playing secret warehouses and illegal squats, often for considerably lower fees with

reduced or free ticket pricing. Whilst the analytics around these shows are near impossible to collate, it is acceptable to assume that the revenue accrued for these shows offered little financial contribution to the dance music economy. However, they served to strengthen community engagement, authenticity and cult appeal.

The easing of the pandemic offered the music industry some much needed respite from almost two years of venue closures resulting in huge loss of revenue from live events. However, 2022 was not without its challenges for the live music sector. Club promoters were immediately struck by troublingly low ticket sales in the months after British venues reopened post lockdown,which were consequently further exacerbated by the cost of living crisis and recessions in the West, with 24% of Gen-Zs and 31% of millennials found to be less likely to buy tickets in advance and ‘early bird’ or discounted tickets having little sway on their decision to spend money on nightlife. (Guttride-Hewitt, 2022) The results of this were felt across the nightlife industry and are reflected in dance music media platform Keep Hush’s community led *Are You Going Out* survey, published in July 2022. The survey found that, during 2022, some months out of the pandemic, the top cited reason for the hesitation around clubbing amongst young people was a decline in the desire for alcohol and drug use, as well as financial concerns or a preference for staying at home.



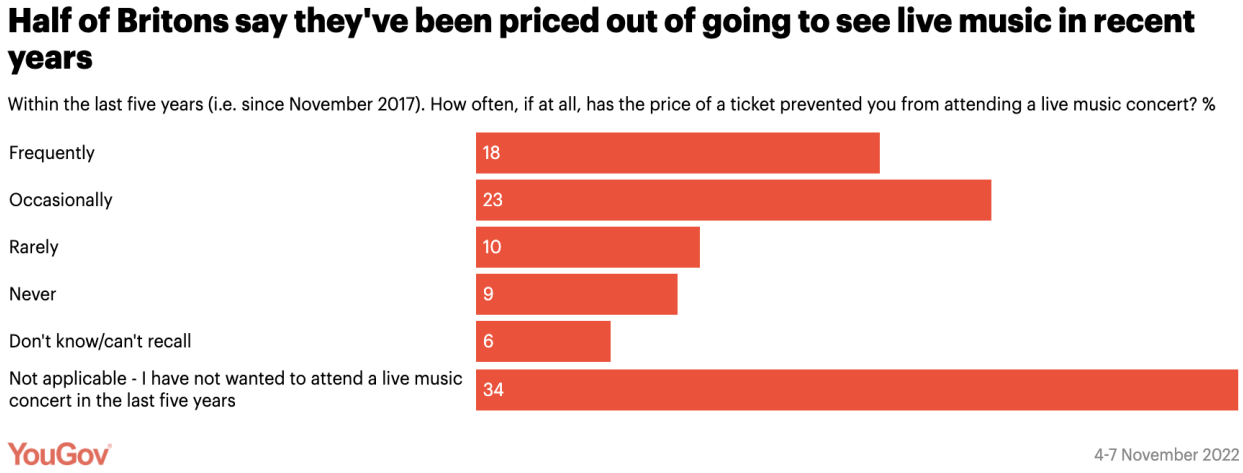


Declining ticket sales in the months following the lifting of lockdown measures stoked apprehensions within the dance music industry manifesting in the Early Retirement Theory, expanded upon in Keep Hush's report, which proposed that lockdown had a lasting effect on the drive for young millennials and Gen-Zs to engage with the live aspect of dance music after becoming acclimatised to lockdown rules, preferring to spend time at pubs or house parties with friends. The findings of the report suggested that these demographics developed a preference to gatherings with an immediate circle of friends or socially engaging online for a number of reasons; including the cost of living post pandemic, a lack of desire to engage with the substance and alcohol use associated with underground club culture, fears surrounding the spread of COVID 19 to vulnerable loved ones and a general desire to stop clubbing all together having seen out the final years of their 20s in lockdown. Furthermore, 3 generations of 18 year olds who may have embarked on their first and formative clubbing experiences were prohibited from doing so due to the pandemic, causing a loss of revenue to clubs that would normally receive such consumers.

Additionally, clubbers experienced limited options of international artists who were able to tour during this period. Emerging artists who may have achieved some success via streaming and social media were unable to optimise these results or meet new audiences. (Dee, 2021)

Consequently, many venues were unable to remain open. Figures shared by the Night Time Industries Association (NITA) show that as of August 2022, only 1130 nightclubs remained in England, Wales and Scotland, a 20% drop on March 2020….caused by the culmination of pandemic debt, growing energy bills, workforce challenges, supply chain issues, insurance premiums and landlord pressures. These factors led to calls from industry players for the government to recognise the economic, cultural and community value of nightclubs and the wider night time economy.'(Khomami, 2022).

Recent shifts in the U.K economy induced a wave of post pandemic precarity for the nightlife and hospitality sectors. Various music industry organisations including UK Music, LIVE, The Music Venue Trust and Night Time Industries Association (NITA) petitioned for the government to introduce conservatory measures to protect their sectors. Michael Kill, CEO of NITA called for reduced VAT, extended business rates relief and an energy cap for small enterprise businesses. (Ahmed, 2022) The residual effects of Brexit included new import taxes, visas, loss of workers and shortages of equipment, paired with a worsening global energy crisis due to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, with London venues like Dalston Superstore reporting a 300% rise in energy costs in February 2023. (Townsend, 2023) Rising costs in alcohol, resulting from the government's August 2023 tax hikes, partnered with a 20-30% drop in consumer spending. Furthermore, U.K promoters are taxed four times higher on VAT on ticket sales then their European counterparts, with the UK's tax rates ranking as one of the highest on the continent. (Minelle, 2022) A YouGov survey published in December 2022, which surveyed a range of participants from across the british population (Muk, 2023) revealed that half of Britons have - at some point over the last 5 years - been priced out of attending live music events with nearly one in 5 stating that ticket prices frequently prevent them from attending gigs. (YouGov, 2022)



From this, it is acceptable to deduce that lack of disposable income caused by periods of socio-economic disruption has a direct effect on the clubbing landscape and how regularly consumers will spend on nightlife. Furthermore, post pandemic, consumers are much more spontaneous and sporadic in their attendance. Often 80% of tickets are now being purchased a matter of hours before the event, with consumers regularly buying on the door in a shift from pre

pandemic behaviours, compounding venue owner's anxiety as to whether they will be able to cover their overhead costs (DJ fees, suppliers, staff wages etc) until the event takes place. (Ahmed, 2023) These factors, alongside the increase in financial liability due to the cost of living crisis, create a destabilised environment for new promoters who have yet to establish a brand or community.

Whilst the pandemic made evident the industry's heavy dependence on the revenue generated by the live sector, there has been a period of recovery between the latter half of 2022 into 2023. The annual IMS Business report from 2023 proposed that the continental dance music industry had finally shaken off the effects of the pandemic, attributing the ability to survive the most challenging of economic environments to the foundational role that music plays in people's lives. (Mulligan, 2023)

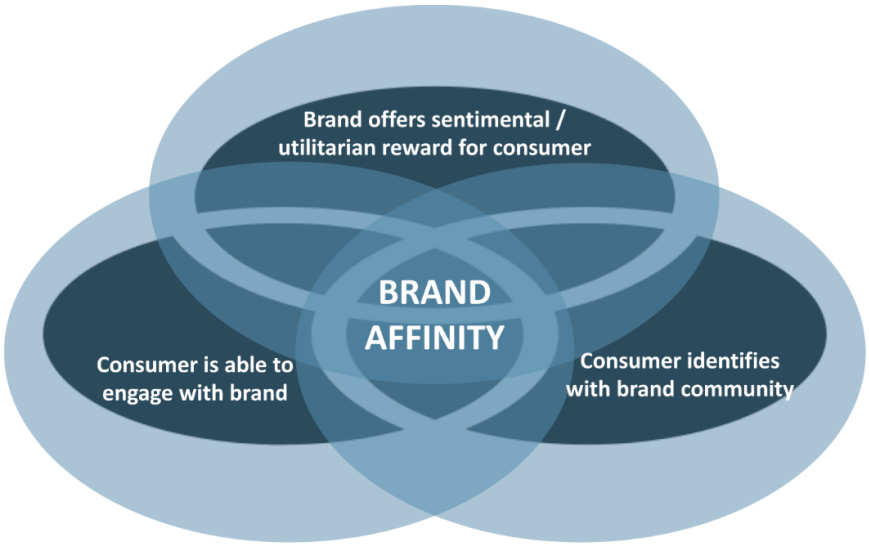
According to Market Watch's 2023 press release, 'the global dance music market is anticipated to rise at a considerable rate …between 2022 and 2030…with the rising adoption of strategies by key players.' (2023) Mixmag reported that new data from The British Phonographic Industry revealed that dance music is now the 2nd most popular genre in the United Kingdom, with the genres' chart presence increasing by almost 80%.' (Buckle, 2022) In 2022, Scottish Duo LF system topped the U.K charts for 8 weeks, replacing Kate Bush, with their single 'Afraid to Feel', with a consecutive number one for the genre from Eliza Rose and Interplanetary Criminal with their track B.O.T.A. This increase in popularity can be seen in major industry players Beyonce and Drake opting to release dance music projects, marking a successful metamorphosis of popular genres like Hip Hop and Rap and Dance within the mainstream.

The dance music industry has attributed a reason for this boom to the pandemic generating a renewed interest due to consumers inability to socialise during lockdown. With collective gathering prohibited under the pandemic, it can be argued that this enhanced the desire for audiences to re-engage, and also peaked the interest of new audiences - with dance music consumption up 14.8% year on year in 2021. (Paine, 2022) Due to its roots in 90s rave culture, community and shared space are a primary motivating factor in audience engagement with the genre. The IMS Business Report states 'live [music] remains a scarce, unique experience that consumers crave more then ever after two years of lockdown…Electronic music's growth is happening predominantly through social media, specifically TikTok where the genre is growing 10 times faster than Hip Hop' (Mulligan, 2023) Tiktok's role in the growth of dance music reflects the genre's uptake of new, younger audiences. With ages 10 - 29 accounting for 47.4% of the apps users in the United States, paired with similar statistics coming out of the U.K. (Shepherd, 2023) Furthermore, Tik Tok recently officially partnered with Tomorrowland 2023, one of the world's leading dance music festivals, for a content collaboration.

When market hardships occur, brands that have successfully fostered a community or following that generates extreme loyalty from consumers occupy a stronger position for survival. Building meaning within a commodity or brand requires a network of meaningful practices (Negus, 1999, p. 20) and cooperative intermediaries to solidify context and perception in the minds of consumers. Usually, brands that evoke strong feelings from consumers need to be inspirational, remarkable and relatable. (Constantin et al, 2014) When building a cult following or community around a record label, platform or event series, a passage through numerous social and cultural spaces and functionaries such as disc jockeys, clubs, radio (Anderson, 2014) is required. In a contemporary context this also applies to relevant influencers, brand associations and partnerships. In a live context, where market health is intrinsically linked to socio political events, it has become necessary to build a consistent following where appeal is generated not only through the artists playing but also through providing an opportunity to build community and encounter familiar faces.

It can be argued that, in regards to brand alignment and individual self branding, consumers have developed a multicultural identity allowing them not only to adopt and integrate elements of other cultures into their own behaviour and image, but also be more receptive and accepting and interested in alternative identities. (Zolfagharian & Sun, 2010) MIDiA reports that, in 2023, consumers are less responsive to targeted ads, with ineffective branding holding the potential to send away as many customers as it may attract. With the ubiquity of advertising, and an increasing attention deficit from digital consumers, brand choices are as much a personal statement by the consumer to their peers as a testament to trust and loyalty in the company. (Kahlert, 2020) It is evident that it is possible for contemporary brands to centre a specific community, however, they must remain inclusive to all.

Brand advocacy from consumers holds the potential to help cultivate an audience community capable of withstanding market hardships. In an era of heightened competition for consumer attention, it is crucial to focus on scenes, cultural reach and the wider identity of dance music fans. Furthermore, the IMS Business Report foreshadows that the adoption of AI will accelerate a further saturation of music makers, making it harder for fans to identify excellence. As a result, DJs and producers will need to get better at telling their stories, conveying authenticity and reaching wider audiences, (Mulligan, 2023) whilst maintaining their initial supporters.



Based on Kaur, H., Paruthi, M., Islam, J., & Hollebeek, L.'s (The role of brand community identification and reward on consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty in virtual brand communities. Telematics And Informatics, (2020)

MIDiA.

A useful case study to examine regarding successful community building can be seen in London nightclub Fold's bi-weekly Sunday event series Unfold. When speaking to Red Bull, venue founder Seb Glover explains the venue and event series has built a "very loyal and diverse following by supporting local artists, banning photos in order to facilitate connection, safe space and inclusive policies that serve diverse demographics, a 24 hour licence as well as access to artist studios during the week for those within their ecosystem, with some fans viewing Unfold Sundays as adjacent to a Church or temple experience. (Roberts, 2019) Early into its inception, Unfold garnered fierce allegiance from London's queer community, often hailed as the city's answer to Berlin's super club Berghain. However, despite centering its primary clientele being queer identifying, Unfold is open to and supported by a number of clubbing demographics. Alongside their support of local and upcoming acts, larger artists on the techno circuit will play for reduced fees in order to be associated with the club and event series.



There are a number of creative decisions that have contributed to Unfold's cult status, solidifying it as an institution within London's clubbing and electronic music landscape and in turn ensuring its survival through market hardship. Unfold's in-house visual design team has developed a strong brand image through its social media, logo and flyer designs. The event's opening hours are also a unique selling point, opening on Sunday from 10AM - 8PM with 50 tickets made available in advance with the rest of the tickets on the door, serving to generate a hype around the event with patrons queuing for over an hour to enter the space. (Roberts, 2019) Unfold's strength lies within word of mouth with low budget campaigns and unconventional tactics to attract its target market. Such strategy is adjacent to the guerrilla marketing concept, an alternative to traditional marketing strategies invented in 1984 by Jay Conrad Levinson. In the age of digital, Guerrilla marketing could alleviate the content saturation and attention deficit marketeers and businesses currently face when advertising online. Whilst this marketing strategy is not without risk, if done successfully it can leave a lasting and emotional impression on the target market. (Coursera, 2023)

This is a viable pathway in the initial launch of a brand like E.B.N.X to attract early adopters, however, employing more typical strategies when moving into the digital space is necessary. Digital marketing has a higher return on investment (ROI), with internet penetration at 97.8 percent in the United Kingdom in 2023. (Kemp, 2023) Whilst guerrilla marketing may be useful for initial audience capture and cutting through a saturated and precarious market, the ultimate goal of any business should be to scale up brand awareness on digital platforms. Social Media is a digital marketing channel that can lend itself to guerrilla marketing tactics, e.g disruptive content has the potential to go viral and stimulate content sharing and user generated content

from prospective consumers. (Coursera, 2023). One artist who has mastered an IRL guerrilla marketing to social media virality pipeline is Summer Walker. On her debut studio album “Over It”, Walker secured the attention of consumers with exclusive pink phone booths situated across various cities in Canada and North America, labelled as the “Over It Hotline”, the booths encourages fans to listen to samples of tha album, and leave a message for the artist with stories of their own romantic mishaps. This resulted in an immersive and accessible street-activation that encouraged fans and the general public to share their experiences on social media, in turn furthering the visibility of the project via user generated content.

Partnerships and Funding.

As an increasing number of artist and label services form, artists and labels must understand what each organisation offers, and what will be the most suitable for their product. Distribution platforms like Tunecore, Create Music Group or United Masters may offer a straightforward uploading process for a minimal fee. A distribution subsidiary of a record label like Sony’s The Orchard might offer more boutique services catered to a particular artist or label’s needs, but have a much more selective process when onboarding artists and labels. A distribution deal from The Orchard might include marketing, advertising, soliciting sync licensing opportunities, video monetization, performance rights services etc. (Fowlkes, 2019)

A boutique digital distribution deal is the most suitable for E.B.N.X and Shannen SP for the initial entry into the field of recorded music, as one of the label’s main intentions is to remain artist centric with artist friendly rates. This keeps in line with the E.B.N.X ethos of empowering Black artists with a small cash injection in order to release their records with the professional infrastructure and a useful network of contacts that may not have been accessible if they were to remain completely independent. It is important to consider that the shift of the master recording from physical to digital distribution has democratised the industry further for artists, lowering the cost of reaching consumers with their product, with an incremental amount of resources available to do so. (Fowlkes, 2019) In order to achieve longevity, independent labels like E.B.N.X must operate with deals that are attractive and beneficial to artists with fairer licensing terms than the traditional 360 deals offered by majors throughout the history of the industry.

E.B.N.X has partnered with London based creative agency One House on a boutique distribution deal, negotiated for a 4 release term, with an extension of term if not mutually terminated. One House is an appropriate partner for E.B.N.X due to its diverse artist roster and its team of electronic music specialists. One House’s artist roster particularly benefits E.B.N.X’s live and events arm, as they retain a number of successful black dance music clients, who are socially conscious but have still achieved a diverse listenership. This will be built into E.B.N.X’s launch strategy in order to benefit from cross posting and brand alignment. Additionally, this creates an opportunity for artists signed to E.B.N.X to join One House’s artist booking agency,

management roster and become recipients of brand ambassadorship and other such opportunities.

The principle definitions outlined in the distribution deal negotiated between E.B.N.X and One House and encompassed by a world territory clause with regards to pertaining to the licensing of master rights only, with a rights period of three years from the end of the term, extending to recoupment (including pipeline). E.B.N.X and One House have settled on an initial agreement of 4X EPs with a budget of £3000 for the first release, £2000 for the consecutive EPs, with the option to be exercised at the discretion of One House for a longer form projects. With regards to funding , One House may at its discretion but subject to label owner's approval (Shannen SP) make excess funding available for the E.B.N.X label owner to pay third parties in respect of recording and promotional asset costs which will be held as recoupable against the label owner's Royalty.

The deal is set out between E.B.N.X with One House to receive 25% of net receipts for distribution, with the remaining 75% to be split between E.B.N.X and the specific artist. As E.B.N.X does not yet have a publishing wing, the artist will remain responsible and in control of this.

Responsibilities are divided between One House and E.B.N.X as so:

One House responsibilities:

- Overseeing the campaign of each record
- Providing a product manager
- Digital distribution
- Helping you assemble and co-ordinate wider team (e.g. radio plugger, PR, digital, creative content)
- Marketing and creative content budget per release
- Release strategy
- Relationships with DSP (editors and marketing)
- Collaboration with A&R and creative vision

E.B.N.X Responsibilities include the following:

- Creative vision
- A&R
- Signing artists
- Primary artist communication
- Physical distribution
- Art direction
- Final artwork

- Final audio

Developing E.B.N.X's Brand Identity

In order to develop a strong brand identity, is vital to have a detailed understanding of the intended target market. The demographics of E.B.N.X's target market include:

- Aged between 18 - 30
- Mixed gender
- Based in major cities
- Multi ethnic, international audience
- Likely unmarried
- Works in the creative industries

E.B.N.X's initial target cities are London, Manchester, Birmingham, France, Johannesburg, New York, L.A and Tokyo.

Also taken into consideration are the psychographics of the E.B.N.X listener, with a brief summary of personal characteristics, habits and preferences of those likely to engage with the brand.

- Early Adopters who are prone to sharing content they find cool or interesting
- Dance Music Fans
- Uses Instagram, Tik Tok and Twitter for social media
- Regularly engage with nightlife and festivals
- Stays out late
- Ahead of trends in music and other artistic mediums
- Values diversity in both the artists they engage with and the events they attend
- Liberal thinkers
- LGBTQ friendly and adjacent
- Interested in fashion, including high fashion brands like Mugler and Bottega Veneta who have strong affinities with electronic music. Also supportive of sportswear and hype beast brands like Daily Paper
- Supportive of Black, POC and Queer owned brands and startups
- Socially Conscious
- Influenced by platforms like Boiler Room, Keep Hush, Complex Mag, Pitchfork, Nativ and Resident Advisor

Through the market research carried out in this proposal, E.B.N.X proposes that these demographics are open to buying direct from platforms like Bandcamp, support initiatives like Bandcamp Friday or artist websites in order to support electronic music's underground. It is also reasonable to deduct that these audiences are eager to contribute to the underground dance music community through authentic and direct engagement with artist's social media output, as outlined in Bump Agency's aforementioned On The Record Report.

From these statistics, it is possible to conclude that they are inquisitive and exploratory listeners who will turn to democratised platforms like Youtube and Spotify for their music discovery. Features like “similar artists” and Playlists will be incremental to reaching audiences beyond the initial tastemakers and early adopters. For this reason E.B.N.X will create and maintain Spotify and Youtube accounts with curated playlists to communicate the audio aesthetics of the label and grow a dedicated listening community. Following consultations with E.B.N.X’s distributor One House, E.B.N.X has been advised that Spotify’s curated playlists are becoming less influential, with label and artist curated playlists increasingly generating positive engagement with streaming audiences. E.B.N.X has advised artists with forthcoming releases on the label to closely consider the artist algorithms and tactically curate their playlists, incorporating relevant higher profile artists into their lists to optimise their own exposure through Spotify’s ‘suggested artist’ features. As the trends in industry are consistently shifting, One House has further advised that building a popular and consistent E.B.N.X playlist will be effective for pitching to DSPs and press, alongside continuing to pitch for placements in official playlists.

Visual Branding and Asset Creation.

In any business, excellent branding and logo design has the potential to connote feelings of honour, trust, pride, excellence and integrity and evoke a sense of connection between the brand and consumers. (Westgarth, 2018) In addition to the aesthetics, the psychology of logo design involves understanding the context in which the logo will be seen, with an understanding of the target audience, the industry and the values of the company. Furthermore, the shape and symbolic connotations with a logo can effectively and immediately communicate the tone and feel of the brand. (Fay, 2023)

When developing the logo and branding of E.B.N.X, the collaborative work of visual artist David Rudnick and music producer Evian Christ was referenced, in particular, their event series Trance Party that accrued a dedicated cult following with successful tours across multiple major cities. This collaboration was considered due to crossovers of Trance Party’s target demographic with that of E.B.N.X.

Trance Party’s open minded philosophy regarding their artist booking policy, as well as their motivations to decentralise club and electronic music culture from London (Martin, 2015), resonates with E.B.N.X’s political agenda to empower Black artists and musicians who create dance music outside of house and techno. Trance Party is a useful case study because it achieved a sustained brand loyalty from its audience regardless of line ups, largely through word of mouth and Rudnick’s compelling and immediately recognisable design concepts, as seen in the event flyers below.


Tranceparty9
ANA CAPRIX
BAD BOY LIVE
CHILLER CREW
DARKO
EVIAN CHRIST
LISA PINUP
TOTAL FREEDOM
VARG
ZARTHERB • NOIR • DARK
67g
07-12-2019
CORSICA STUDIOS
10PM-7AM

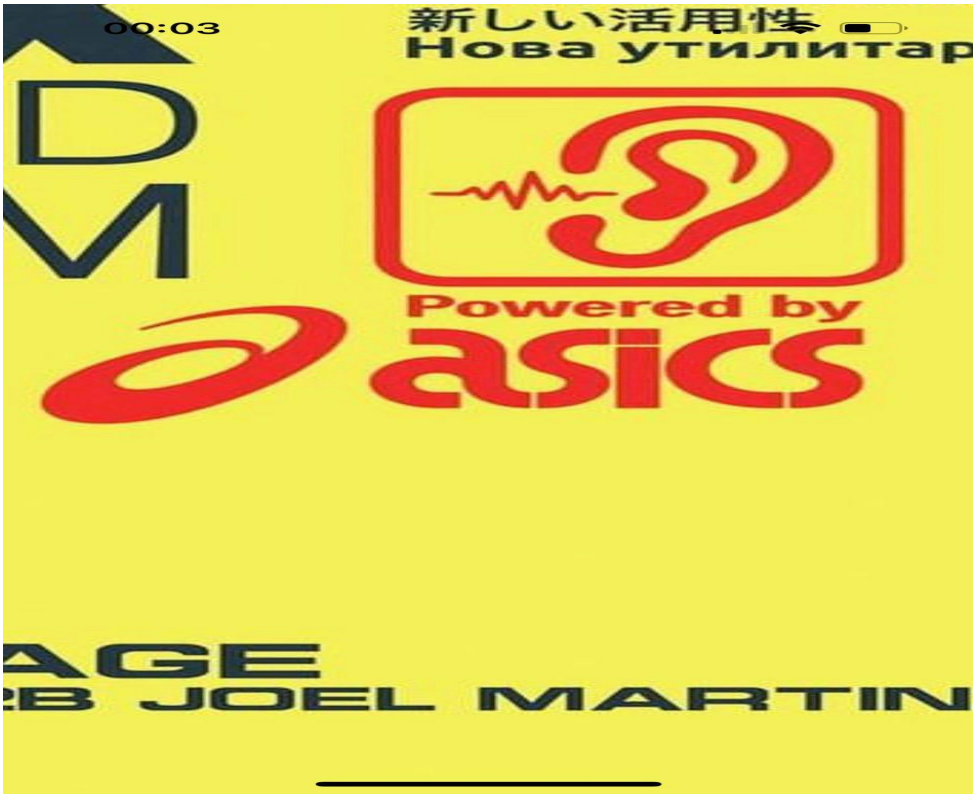

TPN
TPN
PROGRESSIVE
ARAAB
MUZIK
EVIAN
CHRIST
MSSINGNO
TOTAL
FREEDOM
NIGHT
COREGIRL
KAMIXLO
MANARA
09.12.19
CORSICA STUDIOS LONDON

In an interview with Crack magazine, Rudnick describes his design sentiments as an “antagonistic motion towards moments where the viewer is allowed to become familiar, to not require language to explain”. (2014) The playful nature and hyper bright colouring in his work, alongside his trademark fonts synergised perfectly with Trance Party’s distinctly humorous and carefree attitude and connected with young audiences likely to buy tickets to their events. Creating a memorable, distinguishable visual identity is a key component to building a successful brand. Not only does this distinguish a brand from its competitors, it visually conveys the overall identity and strategy. Strong branding in dance music can capture supporters on a global scale, encourage music tourism as well as encourage opportunities for external funding, partnerships and collaboration.

With this in mind, E.B.N.X worked with young London based Zimbabwean artist Kumbirai Makumbe to consult on and design the platform's logo due to the distinctive afrofuturist motifs in their work, where they often incorporate traditional Shona symbolisms into their sculptures and moving image pieces. Multiple ideas on the desired tone and feel of the logo were exchanged, with some of the below examples included in the visual moodboard:

1/2




00:03
新しい活用性
Нова утилитар
Powered by
asics
AGE
B JOEL MARTIN


05 Sept 1900 GMT
©
SENE
Halton
VPkart.com

The designer was prompted that the E.B.N.X logo should have soft and rounded edges in order to contrast with the typically sharp edged, unemotional logos common in electronic music. This was in order for the logo to visually capture the interest of and create a sense of welcoming amongst women and gender non conforming consumers, as well as men who are the typical majority demographic in dance music. Below are the final options proposed by Makumbe:

EBNX_LOGO
DIRECTION_1



EBNX_LOGO
DIRECTION_2



EBNX_LOGO
DIRECTION_3



Due to the importance of eligibility for a first time consumer who may not have any previous experience with or knowledge of the brand, option 1 was selected as the official logo. The ‘B’ lettering was reversed in order to create a butterfly symbol, in order to honour the feminine tone of the label and evoke a sense of delicacy, with a swirling graffiti font created specially by the designer. The graffiti style of the font also references street wear, counter culture and rebelliousness, and translates the concept of alternative thought upon viewing the logo. For professional correspondence, the designer also created a simplified logo in the font ‘obviously extended bold’. The logo design will also be used on T-shirts, hats and other clothing merch once the platform expands.

E.B.N.X Release Plan - Flowdan X Jay Music, Title TBC

The label division of E.B.N.X will incorporate the following strategies: discovery, development, promotion and collaboration. The label will launch with exciting, forward thinking artists who are proactive within their respective musical ecosystems and have already achieved some listenership. As the profile of the platform grows, E.B.N.X will also seek collaborations with more established artists. E.B.N.X will initially be a pipeline for popular tracks from Shannen SP’s sets to be bought and discovered by interested club goers - using her radio show and network on Rinse FM to promote the music and artists.

The first release for E.B.N.X is a collaborative feature between the well respected British Caribbean rapper Flowdan, who has had a recent collaboration with Skrillex and Fredagain, and South African up and coming amapiano producer Jay Music. The project will consist of one single, utilising the £2000 budget advanced by One House.

In order to optimise the efficacy of the budget, the majority of the spend will be held back for social media marketing spend and visual assets.

Flowdan Vs Jay Music - Untitled

Budget distribution:

- £1000 for Visual Assets - short form video assets as advised by One House as more effective then music video assets. Short form video assets will highlight key points in the track, also to be utilised as assets for press pitches. Cover artwork also to be pulled from this to keep a consistent visual aesthetic. As E.B.N.X is a collaborative artist centric platform, creative direction regarding artwork and assets will be discussed with artists and their relevant teams.
- £600 for artwork for All Ears Radio Pluggers
- £400 for marketing spend
- Mixing and Mastering in House at no cost
- Distribution & DSP pitching done by One House for 25% of net receipts.

N.B - E.B.N.X will look to procure excess funding / if good response create a music video asset / press a limited run of vinyl.

PR Overview:

- Pitch long read collaborative interviews between Flowdan and Jay Music to the following outlets: The Guardian, The Times, The Wire, Pitchfork, The Face, Crack, DJ Mag who have all previously covered the work of Flowdan and Shannen SP, as well as the Grime, UK rap and Amapiano genres covered in .

E.B.N.X will include suggested options for themes to cover in order to provide context and prevent something appealing in potential collaboration with one of the following prolific music writers:

1. Pitch a long read with rhythmanalyst, media theorist and writer Deforrest Brown Jr, who specialises in Black music movements and is the author of *Assembling a Black Counter Culture* - a comprehensive account of techno with a focus on the history of Black experiences in industrialised labour systems - repositioning the genre as a unique form of Black Musical and Cultural Production. (Primary Information, 2023) He is also a representative of the Make Techno Black Again campaign. E.B.N.X will pitch a piece with Brown where he highlights the connection points between Grime and Amapiano, amongst other global Black underground dance music / afrofuturist sonic movements, with potential references to seminal afro futurist the film last Angel of History and Kodwo Eshun's literary exploration *More Brilliant Than The Sun*.

2. Pitch a feature with prestigious London based music writer Gabriel Szatan, author of *After Daft,* a book about the influence of Daft Punk and the explosion of electronic music's reach in the 21st century. Szatan has previously covered the work of Shannen SP in DJ Mag, and is aware of the forthcoming label. He has also written a cover story on Hyperdub Records who previously released Flowdan's music. He has written for Pitchfork, Crack, DJ Mag and is currently the head of Dance and Electronic at Tidal.

3. Pitch to Dhanveer Singh Brar, author of *Teklife Ghettoville Eski: The Sonic Ecologies of Black Music in the Early 21st Century*, and *Beefy's Tune (Dean Blunt Edit)* on a long read highlighting the legacy of Flowdan's career as well as the rise of Jay Music and his unique expression of amapiano, further drawing the lines between other black underground electronic movements and the U.K / South Africa cultural cross over within the track.

   E.B.N.X will also pitch for reviews and coverage spread across both underground and more commercial spaces.

   Similarly, E.B.N.X will pitch Jay Music for Amazon's music content platform +44's Get To Know Feature, as well as other relevant social media platforms like Trippin and the Native Magazine. Distribution partner One House has access to Tik Tok credits, as well as the potential option to use ad credits across social media and DSPs like Spotify & Tik Tok.

   Roll Out:

   - Once track and assets are complete, send out DJ Promo
   - Start pushing out the track on Tiktok, develop a challenge or trend with Jay Music that encourages user generated content to authentically spread the track's presence / use of the audio. Contact key accounts with ad spend to use the sound on Tik Tok
   - Gain traction using the Evergreen pre-save feature on Feature fm.
   - Announce the label and track with various press outlets
   - Jay Music and Flowdan to promote on their social media channels
   - Pitch for a 1st play on Radio 1 with Benji B. Back up pitches include Jamz Supernova or Tom Ravenscroft
   - E.B.N.X to produce a launch party for single. E.B.N.X also to pitch for a Boiler room set from Jay Music and Flowdan.

Reflections

This section of the essay will examine and analyse the initial business operations, with reference to the market research, environmental analysis and findings of the above E.B.N.X business proposal and market research focusing on the events wing of the platform as the label currently under development. This will be carried out primarily through a deliberative lens on the E.B.N.X 'soft launch' in April 2023, which was a partnered event with Boiler Room and Colour Factory. The reflections will have a specific focus on the platform's brand building process via its live event wing, with attention to the development of the flyer and logo designs, with an in depth reflection on the production of the E.B.N.X Boiler Room and how this may have been improved to further benefit the brand. It will account for the curatorial challenges faced when orchestrating the initial E.B.N.X live series in depth, as this is the sector of the platform that has been announced and activated in the public realm. There will be reference to the advantages and disadvantages of E.B.N.X's distribution partnership with One House, and how this may develop and evolve after the initial contractually agreed partnership term. Finally, the essay will touch upon how E.B.N.X can expand and diversify the scope of the business and increase its revenue streams in the future.

E.B.N.X Live Event Series

Spanning 2022 - 2023, Shannen SP was invited for a residency as a DJ and curator at East London's 1000 capacity venue Colour Factory. Whilst E.B.N.X's label wing was under development, the residency was used as a way to slowly build brand identity through the event series. This also served as a tactical strategy for audience capture via the booked artists' cross posting to their social media accounts which in turn generated direct exposure to E.B.N.X's target market. The booking policy included both up and coming DJs and artists who had already accrued a cult following within the areas that E.B.N.X aimed to reach. Although the residency began under the title "Shannen SP Presents", from the 2nd residency onwards it was entitled E.B.N.X. Shannen SP invited Black and 'global south' artists and DJs who specialise in genres that span Black electronic diasporic sounds to perform at the event. Guests included Parisian DJs Crystalmess and Vanille, Congolese producer Nkisi, London's Josh Caffe and Kundai, South African Amapiano artist DBN Gogo, Chicago footwork legacy act RP Boo and Uruguayan Candome experimentalist Lechuga Zafiro.

Each event brought about both successes and challenges.The partnership between Shannen SP and Colour Factory was initially agreed as 3 X dates across 2021 and 2022, on Saturday nights. Whilst this presented a great opportunity to establish Shannen SP's platform further, taken with the socio-economic circumstances of this period and the effects they had on nightlife

culture (addressed in detail in the accompanying business plan) launching a night with experimental curation in a one thousand capacity venue on Saturday nights - when promoters experience the highest volume of competition - proved challenging. Furthermore, the brand of E.B.N..X was still in its developmental stage. Electronic music and nightlife consumers were still adjusting to the lifting of lockdown regulations. This also took place against the backdrop of a post pandemic landscape where the hospitality sector had been economically decimated, leading to an anxious working relationship with the venue and pressure to adapt the curation ethos to sell out shows and ensure profit margins were met.

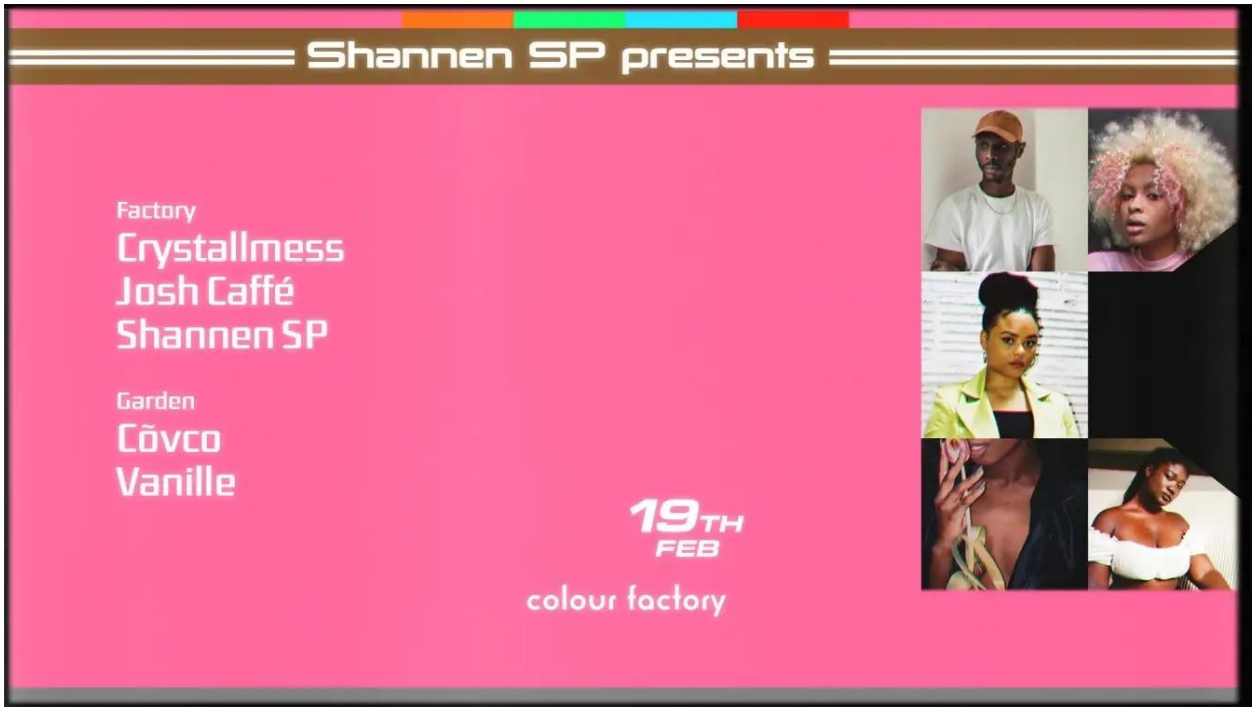
The budget offered to Shannen SP for the residency nights equated to approximately £4000 for talent. Whilst this seemed sufficient for a local event series, curatorial challenges arose due to the saturation of primarily local artists playing regularly in London post pandemic. During this period flying in international and continental artists proved complicated in the context of Covid 19 travel regulations, antigen tests, early event curfews and health precarity. The initial residency event took place when club goers were required to remain seated for the duration of the evening, prohibited from mixing with other tables and all events were required to be outdoors. Colour Factory was also experiencing noise complaints and late licensing issues when throwing events in their garden area. This precarity meant that the curatorial process had to be more strategic than creative. As E.B.N.X and Shannen SP were yet to develop brand affinity or a community for the event series, the booking and curation process was particularly meticulous, with a requirement to spend the majority of the budget on one headline as opposed to distributing budgets across the line ups.

Another aggravating factor regarding ticket sales was the fee inflation, often brought about by ‘mega clubs’ and large promoters, perpetuated by booking agents who shared the incentive for financial growth with venue owners and DJs alike, consequently resulting in artist exclusivity clauses and extortionate DJ fees to drive up ticket sales and create scarcity around particular acts. (Kimbrell, 2020) In some cases DJs and their agents even negotiate agreements to perform exclusively at a specific club. This is replicated on the festival circuit, where sponsored events and promoters with large budgets similarly contribute to inflated artist fees, leaving an competitive economic environment that is unsustainable for independent promoters without commercial financial backing. In conversation with Mixmag, a representative of Peckham’s Rye Wax, a 100 capacity venue and record shop commented on a shift towards ‘headline culture’ where bookers stack line ups with multiple high paid headliners to lure in larger audiences, with crowds perceiving these line ups to be value for money in a time of economic precarity and diminished disposable income for many. (Shortlidge, 2019) Rather than going out regularly, in a way that sustains nightlife culture and allows for experimentation, some fan behaviour shifted towards engaging with nightlife far less consistently in favour of saving up to attend one event with a huge line up of trending artists.

In reflection, curating an event centred around one genre appears more palatable for ticket buyers, particularly those who, at the time of the initial events, were slowly readjusting to the lifting of lockdown regulations and the uncertainty of the threat posed by Covid 19 following 2 years of lockdown. As well as the political and economic factors affecting the nightlife industry,

social factors like wellness trends, social media and online dating contribute to shifting attitudes towards going out, leaving promoters with an unclear formula for how to sell out a venue or guarantee breaking even. (Shortlidge, 2019) These were all challenging factors for a new event series that was yet to establish a dedicated community.

Colour Factory initially generated the flyers in house in order to reduce costs. The initial flyer for the first event was as follows:



Upon reflection, whilst the in-house flyer design kept costs low, allowing for the design budget to be allocated elsewhere, the designs were extremely basic. During a time where selling tickets was challenging for any promoter, distinct, creative and interesting flyers were inherently beneficial. Forbes advises consistent branding and assets as a key method in creating better brand recognition. Use of the same logo, font or a colour theme across marketing materials and all forms of internet communication is advantageous (Michaels, 2013) in a media landscape that is highly saturated, where capturing the sustained attention of consumers is becoming increasingly challenging for marketers.

In MIDiA's 2022 attention economy report, this was described as the era of attention inflation. As each unit of user attention becomes divided among an increasing number of activities, the value of that attention is diminished. The concept of attention inflation addresses how time spent on entertainment is growing while simultaneously becoming less valuable. As touched upon in the E.B.N.X business proposal regarding developing a cult audience who are emotionally invested in the brand, MIDiA suggests that for entertainment companies the metrics of fandom should be prioritised over traditional engagement metrics as maintaining positive consumer sentiment will be vital to retaining increasingly distracted customers. (Gresham, 2022) 90% of all information

that is transmitted to the human brain throughout the course of the day is visual. Visual content is processed by the human brain 60,000 times faster than text based content, with studies indicating that 40% of people respond better to visual promotion, making the concepts and products presented to consumers easier and quicker for consumers to accept. (Taei, 2017) This again reinforces the importance of branding, and particularly flyers for events.

With this in mind, Shannen SP began branding the night as E.B.N.X and working with the same graphic designer for each event in order to create flyers that were distinguishable in order to build brand recognition. The process of flyer design became one of the most crucial factors when producing the events, in order to ensure that audiences may be attracted to the night due to the tone of the flyer as well as the line ups. Colour Factory allocated a £500 budget, with Shannen SP leading on the creative direction in collaboration with the graphic designer.
The following deliverables were required:

- 4:5 asset (web), 9:16 asset (web)
- A3 poster (print)
- Resident Advisor banners to the following spec:

Leaderboard

728x90 (GIF, JPEG or HTML5 tags)

Max file size 150KB

Oversized leaderboard

952x152 (GIF, JPEG or HTML5 tags)

Max file size 200KB

Billboard

952x250 (GIF, JPEG or HTML5 tags)

Max file size 250KB

Standard MPU

300x250 (GIF, JPEG or HTML5 tags)

Max file size 150KB

Shannen SP developed a mood board of aesthetic ideas that would reflect E.B.N.X's ethos and communicate the brand effectively to new audiences, taking inspiration from flyer designs for club events that achieved a cult following like Trance Party whose flyers were designed by David Rudnick. A list of themes and references were also shared with the designer. It was important that the flyers had a futuristic feel, with references to Black pop cultural artifacts like Blaxploitation film posters like Foxy Brown, Supa Dupa Fly and Coffy, as seen below.


EVERY BROTHER'S FRIEND.
EVERY MOTHER'S ENEMY.
BLACK SAMSON
ROCKNE TARKINGTON · WILLIAM SMITH · CONNIE STRICKLAND · CAROL SPEED · MICHAEL PAYNE as Arthur

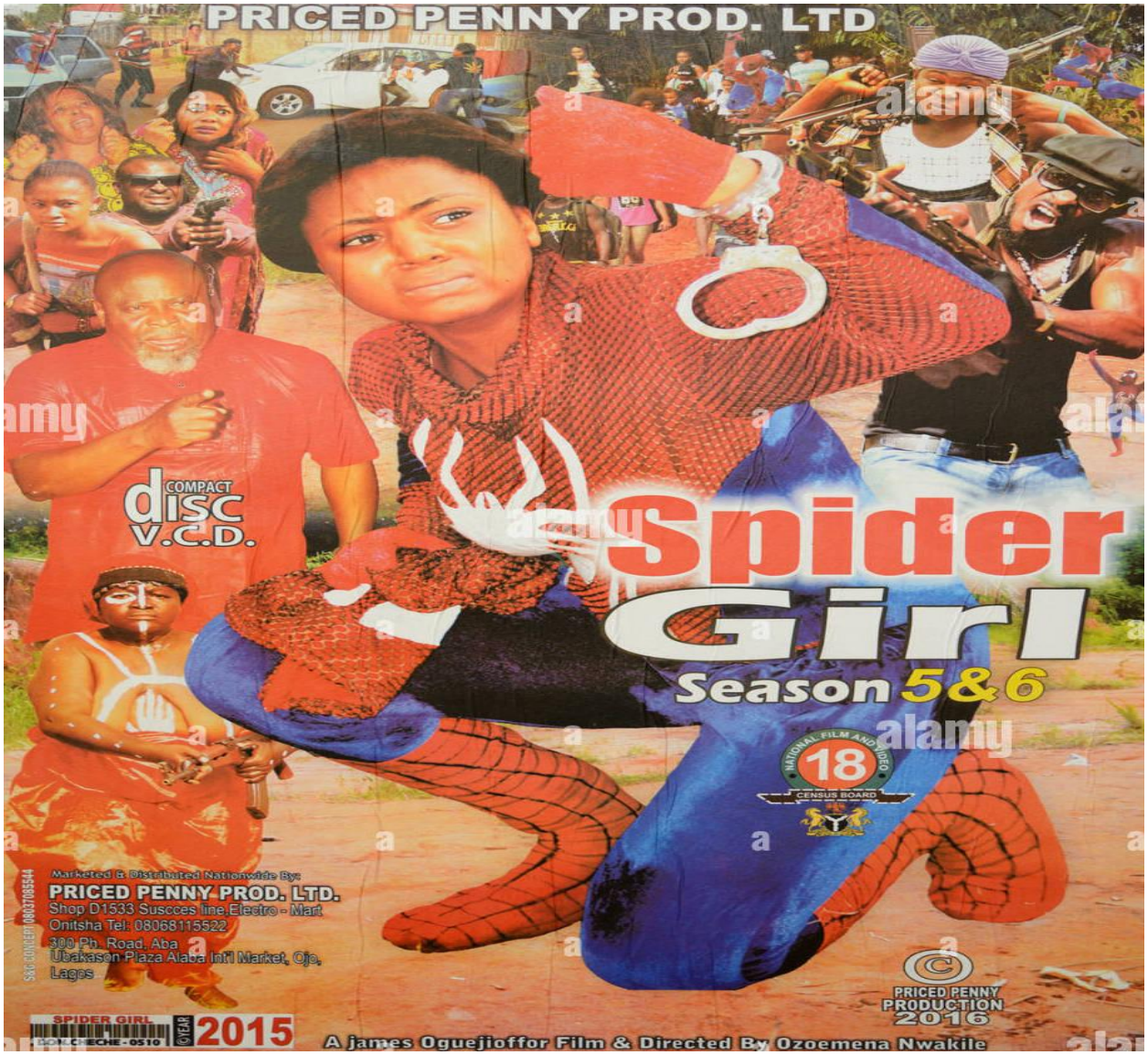

She's the "GODMOTHER" of them all
...The baddest One-Chick Hit-Squad that ever hit town!
"Coffy"
"COFFY"
PAM GRIER · BOOKER BRADSHAW · ROBERT DOQUI · WILLIAM ELLIOTT · ALLAN ARBUS · SID HAIG

Blaxploitation is often hailed as a redefining movement in cinematic history, with there term coined by Junius Griffin of The NAACP derisively coined the term by combining “Black” with the “Exploitation” genre of film. This genre of Black cinema has since been re-appraised for elevating Black characters into heroes, rather than sidekicks or criminals, as they were often portrayed onscreen during the 1960s, making stars of Black actors and depicted Black society as full of wit, wealth and substance. (Sayej, 2022) The film posters in the Blaxploitation genre played a huge role in the film’s marketing, often with intricate and detailed paintings, bright colours and eye-catching text. The posters depict black characters as powerful, strong and aspirational. Representation of Black women in the media at the time was scarce, however, Blaxploitation flyers often featured them front and centre, as beautiful and strong. Often, the flyers helped the films to successfully reach their African American target market, and build a cult following for the genre, with films like The Mack generating $3 million at the Box Office. Blaxploitation also has strong ties with the music industry, with soundbites from films like The Mack sampled by rappers like Snoop Dog, LL Cool J and Wu Tang Clan. (Sayej, 2022)

Other reference points discussed for the flyers were Nollywood film posters. In order to positively communicate that E.B.N.X is an event series that offers something different, it was important to have some humour in tone, to evoke feelings of fun and lightheartedness. As E.B.N.X does have political undertones, it’s important that potential ticket buyers know that the live manifestation of the concept is fun and inviting to all. The popular Atlanta based digital platform Nolly Babes brought Nollywood film posters, clips and fashion out of a Nigerian niche and into western social media culture with their Instagram account, launched in 2017. The intention of the platform was to share, curate and archive images from the late 90s to early 2000s, a period they define as the Golden Age of Nollywood. The platform has also evolved into a public sphere where its community tackles the thornier discussions taking place in contemporary Nigerian and Black culture globally. (Benson, 2022) The curators behind the platform have since produced exhibitions and club nights surrounding the event. Due to Nolly Babes popularising and highlighting these diasporic artefacts, referencing Nollywood film posters on a flyer for a club event has the potential to permeate a target audience (Black british clubbers) and immediately communicate to them that they are not only welcome but centred in this event. A flyer with the right references can connect with this audience who are visibly less present in London’s electronic music culture, and make them feel comfortable and invited into spaces they may not have before.

The below Nollywood flyers were also shared for reference, specifically regarding the desired tone of the flyer:


18
Ama-Right Prod. Ltd. presents
LICENCE TO KILL
SEASON 1&2
marketed & distributed nationwide by
AMA-RIGHT PRODUCTIONS LTD.
G2609, Electronics Market, Onitsha.
Tel: 08032685822.
amarightmovies@gmail.com
NOJIN PRODUCTIONS
UB 79 Ubakason Plaza, Alaba Int'l, Ojo - Alaba, Lagos.
KING
2015
An Azumsmekus Production



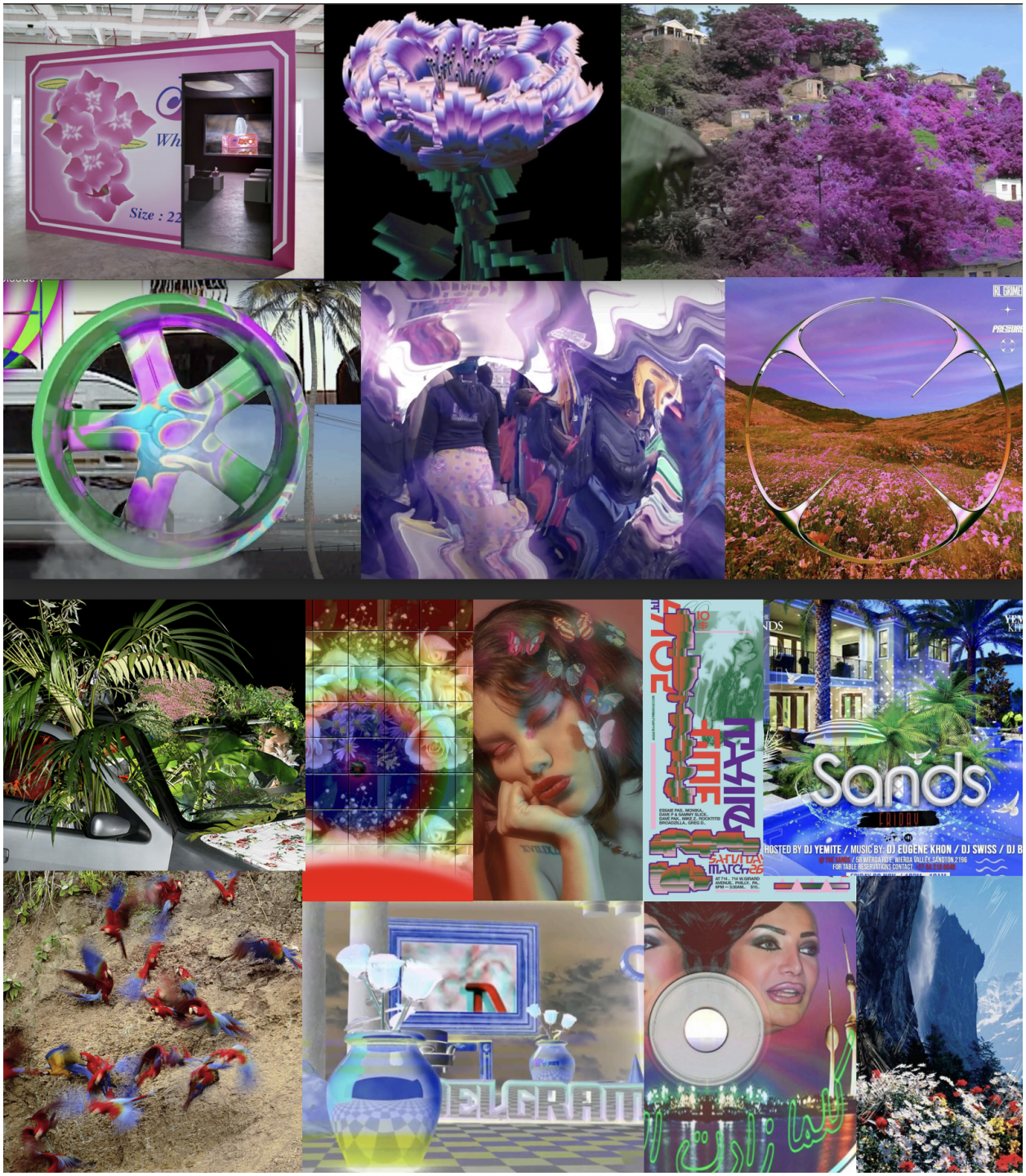
Finally, the artwork for Shannen SP's previous widely acclaimed project Amapiano Now, a compilation consisting of 19 amapiano tracks from some of the genres biggest South African stars, in collaboration with NTS Radio, was shared for reference. This was a strategic decision to generate brand recognition with consumers who had bought, heard of or seen the compilation. The aim was that some promotional capital from the compilation would translate over the club night, despite the night being a new venture, independent of NTS Radio. The artwork for the compilation, creatively consulted by Shannen SP, led by artist Jamal Nxedlana was a meticulous and time consuming process, with multiple weeks spent world building to promote the relatively unknown genre of Amapiano to new, U.K audiences. It had to be eye-catching, sleek and futuristic.

Below is the mood board for the development and creative direction for Amapiano Now:

Approach

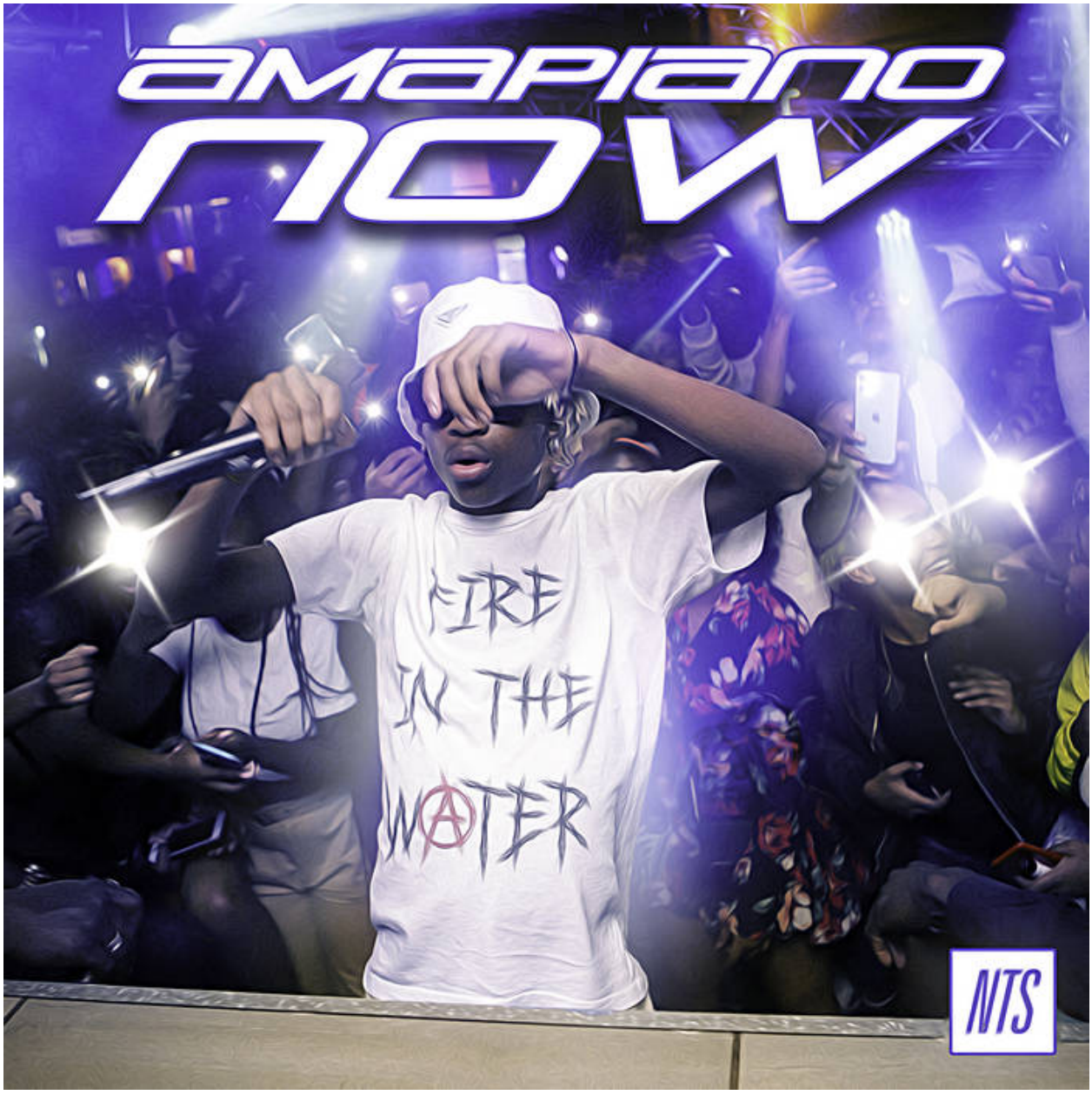
When it comes to the visual aesthetics of Amapiano there is an opulent, tropical, vacation - even escapist quality to it. From the flyers to the event/venue decor to what people drink and the way they dress and dance.

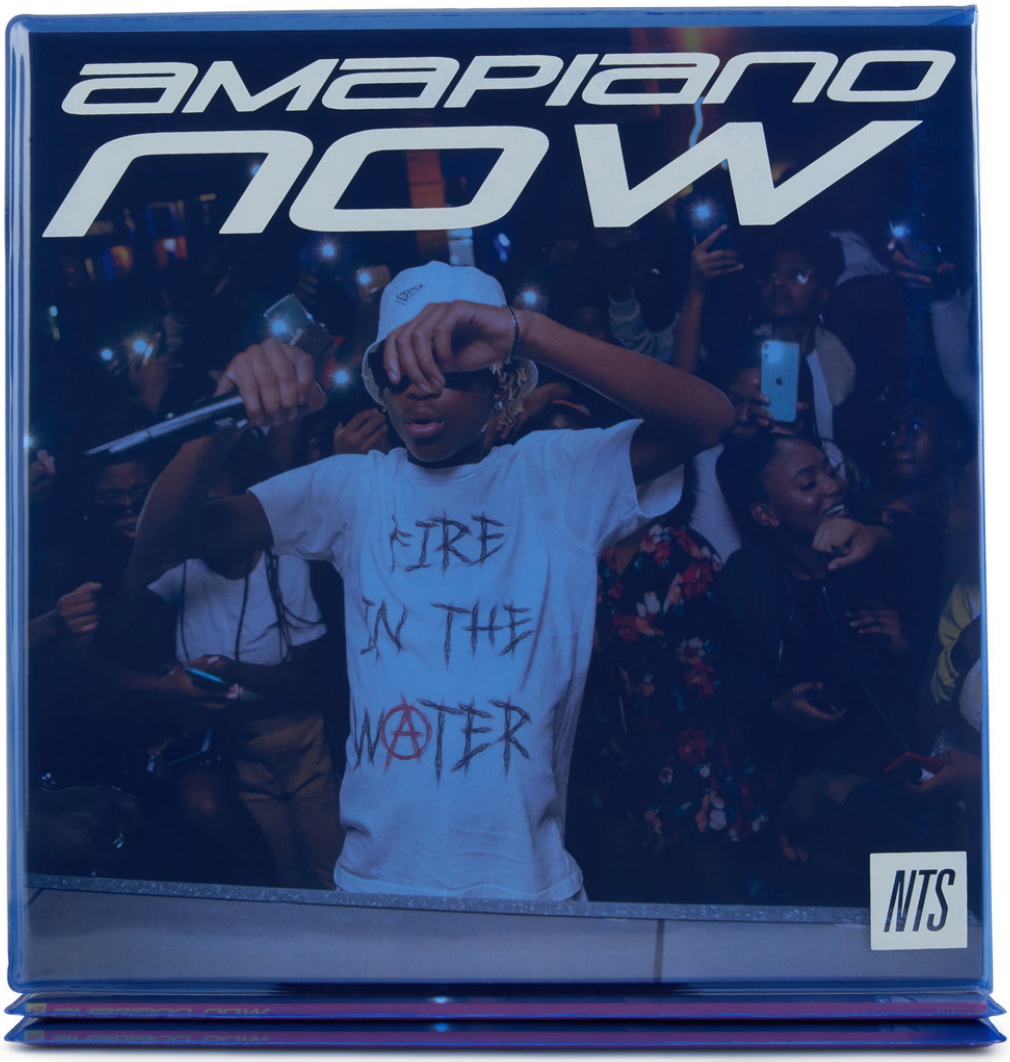
Our plan is to draw from and incorporate popular motifs such as hookah pipes, palm trees, bottle service within the Amapiano culture but to do so in subversive ways by infusing references from horror film, pop surrealism and digital culture to create an Amapiano take on Afrofuturism.



The final artwork for Amapiano Now is below:

Digital Asset, Followed by Vinyl Sleeve




amapiano
now
FIRE
IN THE
WATER
NTS





These references culminated in the following E.B.N.X flyers, done in collaboration with visual artist Laurie Herman. The first collaborative flyer is below.



This visual concept was then expanded upon and developed due to the positive feedback from both the venue and ticket buyers. The aim for the following flyer was to be bright, eye-catching, surreal and over the top, whilst keeping in line with the aforementioned references, as the consecutive event was produced in partnership with Boiler Room.



E.B.N.X Boiler Room

Shannen SP's final official showcase at Colour Factory was scheduled for April 22nd 2023, due to the venue eliciting a new group of residents every year. Shannen SP has now produced two live events under the brand name of E.B.N.X. The intention of both Colour Factory and E.B.N.X was to tailor the final event to be the largest of the residency partnership. At this time, the nightlife and hospitality sector had undergone a period of recovery following the hardships brought on by the global pandemic, as well as the socio-economic challenges posed by Brexit and Russia's invasion of the Ukraine, referenced in the E.B.N.X business proposal. The reasons

for this recovery are unclear, with conflicting accounts from independent promoters and the highly sophisticated, well funded actors of the electronic music industry e.g, festivals and sponsored event curators with large budgets.

From a curatorial perspective, Shannen SP aimed to maintain and optimise upon E.B.N.X's brand affinity with the trending South African music genre Amapiano, following on from the well received Amapiano Compilation produced by Shannen SP for NTS Radio's new record label wing, and the headline show E.B.N.X produced for Amapiano superstar DBN Gogo. Amapiano live events were proving to be popular and lucrative, and also appealing for both black and white audiences. There was a curatorial incentive to optimise upon the industry relationships cultivated by Shannen SP during the production of the Amapiano Now Compilation as a number of the artists had increased visibility and success following the release. Shannen Sp and Colour Factory approached the team of Mr JazziQ, a hugely prominent Amapiano star from South Africa and owner of the record label Black Is Brown, to do a headline London show. One challenging aspect of securing the booking was JazziQ's excessive artist fee, as well as direct flights from South Africa for the artist and 4 members of his team. After much deliberation, as it would have been his first headline show in London, both Shannen SP and Colour Factory predicted expected profit returns through ticket sales and increased the budget to secure the show.

Unfortunately, a competitor in the newly forming U.K Amapiano market was made aware of the booking, and that it clashed with their own date with a smaller South African headliner. In order to avoid loss of sales, the competitor approached JazziQ's team, on the day of the E.B.N.X show announcement and priced out the booking offer offered by Shannen SP and Colour Factory, instead promising the artist a headline show with them where he was able to curate his own line up. This caused a major disruption to E.B.N.X, and the announcement was postponed whilst trying to find an equally high profile Amapiano headliner form South Africa, who could not only draw the same crowd but also guarantee the same profit returns with a shorter promotional run.

Inflated artist fees are becoming increasingly challenging for independent promoters to meet, with companies like the aforementioned competitor whose events are partnered with a 'mega club', an African music festival and, beyond public knowledge, a booking agency through which they are motioning to acquire the majority of the recognised South African Amapiano artists. Upon further investigation via Companies House, each of these entities fall under the same ownership. The aforementioned promoter could be suspected of perpetuating fee inflation in order to monopolise the genre and create exclusive relationships, essentially isolating business for independent promoters with less market share. A monopoly refers to a market situation where one company has a dominant position in an industry or sector that enables it to exclude all other viable competitors. As outlined in T*he Competing Fairly* document from the U.K Government's Office For Trading, this type of 'Anti competitive behaviour' is prohibited under Chapters I and II of the Competition Act of 1998. This legislation prohibits anti-competitive agreements between businesses abusing their dominant position in the market, and re set in

place to ensure that monopolies don't act in a manner that is detrimental to market efficiency, with practices that restrict free trading and competition between businesses prohibited. (2005) Unfortunately, the aforementioned company has conducted its strategies in a way that is exploitative to South African artists's desire to perform in the U.K and enter the European and U.S dance music circuits. These anti competitive tactics have resulted in multiple prominent artists within Amapiano entering into a cycle of exclusivity with this entity, and being overlooked by the traditional European dance music circuit due to extortionate fee demands that don't equate to the market norms in these territories, where high profile DJs with larger local audiences settle for lower fees. The genre now exists within one circuit, depriving the artists the opportunity to become breakout stars in their own right.

In order to overcome the precarity caused by the loss of the JazziQ booking, E.B.N.X applied to Boiler Room's Jameson sponsored Broadcast Lab open call, where promoters, labels or artists complete a detailed application form, with the winner awarded up to £9000.

Below are excerpts from the E.B.N.X application by Shannen SP.

Are you applying as an individual musician or a collective of musicians? Expand on who you are. *

I am applying as an individual DJ and curator, on behalf of my as yet to launch record label E.B.N.X, which I hope to announce alongside this broadcast and event. E.B.N.X is a platform, label and events series that explores the thread between global black club movements, from Amapiano to U.K Rap, to Footwork to Ghanaian Drill.

Where are you based? Please state city and country *

London

Give a detailed description of the music-focused live stream event you want to create. Make sure you include as much detail as possible on the activity. Think about overall concept, programming, creative direction & design, event production, broadcast production, marketing and so on. *

The broadcast would take place at Colour Factory, a black owned venue in Hackney, that has consistently welcomed and supported queer or marginalised promoters and audiences since opening its doors, and upholds a safe space policy. I have carefully selected a pan-African line up celebrating underground genres stemming from the African continent and trust the team at Colour Factory dearly to help me deliver this.

I am proposing the Boiler Room debut of the mysterious and bunny mask wearing Amapiano duo 2wo Bunnies as the headliners. 2wo Bunnies are new comers to the Amapiano touring circuit with at least two viral songs circulating in South Africa, Jagermeister and Dzepa. Amapiano has multiple sub genres that drastically differ in sound and energy, and 2wo Bunnies are pushing the "Piano Tech" strain of the genre, which has not been significantly platformed yet in the U.K dance music industry due to the mass popularity of the more commercial "Private School" soulful house style championed by artists like Kabza De Small. Their blend of Amapiano is dark, log drum heavy and techno adjacent.

The second headliner is Kida Kudz, a Nigerian British rapper who has previously collaborated with Burna Boy, Juls and Ms Banks, who is on the cusp of releasing a long awaited album that excitingly blurs the lines between Nigerian Afrobeats and U.K rap, who is yet to do a recorded Boiler Room set.

Amapiano and Gqom have revived and in some instances birthed a collective black interest and belonging within the electronic music landscape that was last seen in Detroit in the 80s, or the era of UK garage and UK funky. Despite the resurgence of black techno collectives, artists and DJs, black audience participation has not followed in a way that reflects this. The reasons for this are hard to pin point, but I believe it can be overcome. Now feels the right moment to address this following the commercial success of black artists in the mainstream dropping records like Uzi Vert's I Just Wanna Rock, Uniiiqu3's Grammy consideration and Beyonce and Drake's albums. I believe that marketing, affordable or free ticket prices and welcoming venue spaces, as well as more black promoters and line ups can all be factors that may alleviate this problem. This grant will help me keep the ticket prices low, or free for this event, which will be vital in welcoming black and diaspora audiences (as well as others with precarious income) due to the current economic climate, meaning that lack of funds won't be a defining factor of who can attend the event. It is imperative to note that this is one of the main reasons I am applying for this grant, in order to be able to offer low cost or free tickets, which are unheard of in the Amapiano ecosystem in London.

This resurgence of black dance musics has certainly reinvigorated my own sense of belonging as DJ of Zimbabwean, South African and Zambian decent as it has for many other black contributors to the electronic and dance music industries. It's impossible in my opinion to lament over "making techno black again" without supporting Amapiano and it's sister genre of Gqom to become embedded within the fabric of mainstream dance music. However, it's important to support black and specifically southern African diaspora promoters and artists to remain part of it's unfolding story to avoid the same fate that techno and house have faced in Europe and the U.S.

Although Amapiano has achieved global audience, it needs infrastructure outside of he diaspora niche, and promoters like myself who are willing to push the boundaries of where the genre can go and what spaces and genres it may be aligned with. This is why I have carefully selected a line up with U.K artists like Kida Kudz, whose audience demographic is the Nigerian diaspora and U.K rap fans, DJ Lag who appeals to a wider explorative club culture audience and myself who operates at the intersection between dance music and diaspora events.

This is the spirit of E.B.N.X, exploring the thread that aligns different black underground club movements to bring them and the communities that support them together under one roof, and to foreground and platform the diversity of African and black dance music, without "othering" or "room 2'ing" it!

List out the artists you want to work with on the event. Are they already in your community of collaborators? *

AsiaTheHosst (dancer / performer / host) - I have not worked with Asia yet but I am excited to bring her on board and feel this show will help establish her further as a performer within this circuit.

2wo Bunnies - I have not collaborated with them yet. I have however curated an Amapiano compilation called Amapiano Now in 2021, which was widely well received and reviewed in Pitchfork, The Native Magazine, Mixmag and more. It was also one of the first Amapiano releases pressed to vinyl. On a recent trip to stay with family in Johannesburg I saw 2wo Bunnies perform and was blown away by their energy behind the decks.

Kida Kudz - we have not worked together yet but we are in discussions for a release on my label that hybridises the genres platformed on this line up.

DJ Lag - I have booked DJ Lag in the past to play at a monthly club night I curated in collaboration with Kode9 on behalf of Hyperdub Records called Ø, and have invited him to do a guest mix on my radio show.

How will this event benefit your wider scene or community? *

Due to the U.K government's xenophobic practices around artist visas and touring the U.K, there has become a bottle neck on South African artists entering the country. I believe it's vital to establish a strong touring infrastructure for the Amapiano, gqom and other contemporary African music genres as well as support for up and coming artists - not just the superstars - to thrive overseas and aid the development of sustainable music careers outside of their home territories.

Amapiano culture has not only propelled South African music into a global cultural export, but has also played a vital role in the diversification of the clubbing landscape within the U.K and has been a unifying force in its strengthening of southern African diaspora communities across Europe and the U.S, providing us with a space to congregate that didn't exist to this degree before the genre took the world by storm. It is to those from southern African regions, what Dancehall is to British Jamaicans, Afrobeats is to British Nigerians and Reggaeton is to Latin diasporas. As of present, African music is receiving global industry attention, however, African diaspora promoters, DJs, A&Rs etc who play a major role in developing these genres overseas are repeatedly cut out of this ecosystem due to lack of funds or racial disparities within the industry. In future E.B.N.X releases and events I aim to partner with both African and Diaspora labels and promoters for the platform's output.

Following this submission Shannen SP was contacted by Boiler Room and informed that E.B.N.X was the successful applicant and would be awarded the grant. However, due to the short time frame between the panel choosing the beneficiary and the event date, Jameson consequently revoked the grant in favour of a runner up initiative with a longer event lead time. Boiler Room's curatorial team chose to partner with Shannen SP and E.B.N.X to support the event without Jameson. Whilst this alleviated the pressure on ticket sales, the grant of £9000 was no longer available to put towards artist fees, which had been the sole reason for the application. On the insistence of Colour Factory who wished to guarantee a sold out show after a period of precarity following the cost of living crisis and the pandemic, E.B.N.X accepted the partnership with Boiler Room, which was announced 5 days prior to the event's date.

The E.B.N.X and Boiler Room collaboration was successful in that the event was oversubscribed within 2 days of announcement, with sign ups outnumbering Colour Factory's 1000 capacity by a considerable margin, without a high profile headliner. However, in hindsight, it may have been more beneficial to launch E.B.N.X a high calibre platform like Boiler Room with a release to promote from the label, with a more substantial preparation period leading up to the event to organise potential revenue streams like merchandise.

Moreover, Boiler Room opted to withhold the email addresses acquired through the ticket subscription link that the audience was required to use in order to attend the event, despite E.B.N.X'S request on the basis that the event was a collaborative venture. Generating a mailing list for E.B.N.X consisting of those who attended the event would have been greatly beneficial when promoting the first release and future events. Whilst Boiler Room stated that GDPR protocol prohibited them from sharing the emails, Shannen SP sought legal consultation on behalf of E.B.N.X from a music lawyer who responded with the following:

Under the definition of a joint controller under Article 26 of GDPR, both E.B.N.X and Boiler Room may be construed as joint controllers.

Two entities become joint controllers when they jointly determine the purpose and means of processing. Given that E.B.N.X collaborated with Boiler Room on the event, it is clear that both parties were in collaboration and working towards a common goal - as such, this a joint determination of the purpose for which the data was processed. Though Boiler Room controlled the means of processing by way of the Boiler Room submission form, the explicit acceptance of this means of processing by E.B.N.X suffices as a joint determination. The Boiler Room submission form was accepted in order to facilitate the joint purpose of hosting the event - this is evidenced by the fact that the ticket link place prior to Boiler Room's involvement was taken down so that signups could occur via the submission form.

Given the above, as both parties have their own distinct interest in the processing of personal data, the collected data should be shared with E.B.N.X.'

In order to maintain an amicable relationship this consultation was not discussed with Boiler Room, however, upon reflection, all future E.B.N.X collaborations will ensure that the data obtained from sign ups is equally shared where possible and lawful.

Conclusion

E.B.N.X will develop a watertight launch strategy for the official label announcement in order to optimise audience capture. This will include the production of a limited range of an assortment of high quality merchandise, available for consumers to purchase that will add new revenue streams and authentically circulate brand identity. For specific projects, where relevant E.B.N.X will do limited runs of vinyl to accompany the digital release. In future operations there will be a meticulous consideration of agreements around data aggregation from sign ups and mail outs for marketing purposes.

Growing both an online and ‘IRL’ community will be a key focus in the next year regarding the platform. E.B.N.X will apply for external funding to engage a social media manager with a proven track record of maintaining authentic and consistent social media strategies that resonate with E.B.N.X’S target market in order to encourage voluntary advocacy from its audiences and build a cult following that has the potential to help the platform withstand inevitable future market precarity. The event series and label’s primary incentive is to support and empower Black innovation within dance and electronic music whilst ensuring artists are fairly remunerated, in turn diversifying the landscape of not only the artists but also dance music’s audiences whilst cross collaborating with Black creatives spanning a diverse range of industries and mediums.

E.B.N.X will strategize to create meaningful and mutually beneficial future brand partnerships and collaborations that correlate with the label’s release scheduling to optimise growth and visibility for the artists and the label while creating entry points into new areas of business, including festival stage curation and fashion collaborations. Finally, the concept of a non geographically bound brand community with progressive values will remain at the core of E.B.N.X’S ethos.

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