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**MA Music Industry Entrepreneurship**

**Creative Music Management**  
**Reflective Summary**

## Creative Music Management – Reflective Summary

Our group for the Creative Music Management project included myself along with Jordan Lazarus. Because we were working as a pair, the vast majority of work and decisions were taken on collaboratively; from top-line decisions like choosing an artist down to intricate details like what font to use on marketing material. At the same time, we wanted the artist to be as involved in the decision-making process as possible throughout the project. Whilst we were primarily working in a collaborative way, my personal contribution to the project was more focussed on the management strategy and timeline, and Jordan used his skills in the creative side more than myself.

The artist that we've been working on for this project is a singer-songwriter called Ellen Barrow who I had been in early conversations about being her manager previously. I had also booked her for shows in the past, including Oxjam St Albans 2017 and the KX: Sessions show that myself and Jordan ran together at Tileyard. Having seen Ellen play live, I knew that she was an incredibly talented musician and a great songwriter. One of the immediate challenges that I had to consider was figuring out how to translate her captivating live performances into a commercially recorded track. This track, *Lay Me Down*, is Ellen's first professionally recorded song – myself and Jordan were both keen to take on the challenge of working with someone who was at the very start of their music career, with no following on social media and no commercial releases.

After Ellen agreed to the project, we set up a meeting with one of the other Music Industry Entrepreneurship students, Desiree Banugo, to discuss how to go about finding the brand values we were going to be creating and promoting throughout our marketing campaign. Desiree is an expert in marketing and particularly social media, so it was extremely helpful to get her input on building a brand from the ground up. As a result of this meeting, it was decided that the most important values were being genuine and being able to tell a story through her songs. In particular, Ellen didn't want to be publishing content that looked awkward or amateur. Because the style of Ellen's songs is quite mellow and reflective, the imagery accompanying the music had to accurately represent this.

After this meeting, we created a project timeline to track the progress of creating the single and all other marketing assets to be used in its release, between March and May 2018. We arranged an initial photoshoot to take place quite quickly so that we could have assets that could be used for marketing and social media purposes. In keeping with the mood that we wanted to represent, Ellen wanted to have the photoshoot done in The Olde Fighting Cocks pub in St Albans – the oldest pub in Britain and a place she had performed live several times. By experimenting with lighting and the interesting backgrounds we could find at the pub, we were able to create assets that reflected the mood of her music quite well.

A significant part of the timeline centred on putting a band together. Because we wanted to release the single with a launch event, it made more sense to have a full band perform, rather than have Ellen perform a solo acoustic set – something she was more used to. The timeline also includes meetings and interviews with press and radio in the lead up to the release which was intended to promote the single and the launch event, whilst also generate some more exposure for Ellen as an artist. The timeline also provides a plan of

some top-line content that needs to be published through social media to promote various aspects of the release, such as the single, the launch event and the video.

Putting the budget together involved figuring out what a minimal viable product would look like that we could release and be happy with. We came to the conclusion that the quality of the track should be prioritised and so the money being spent is weighted heavily towards Mixing and Mastering. We also wanted the opportunity of creating additional revenue streams on to compliment any revenue coming from the single itself – this is why we budgeted amounts for merchandise and drinks to sell at the live show. The idea of generating multiple sources of revenue diversifies an artist's brand and mitigates the risk of investing in a single.

At first, we attempted to record the single ourselves as we both had experience in studio recording. We also thought that this would be a good way to approach Ellen's first recording in a professional setting. Although we all learnt a lot extremely quickly, the quality of the recording clearly not good enough, even after it was sent to a producer (see: Lay Me Down Acoustic Demo). As a result of this, we arranged Ellen to record the track in a home studio with a producer called Paul Carr, who was then able to mix and master the track as well. Thankfully, the experience of recording it the first time did allow Ellen to be much more comfortable in a studio setting once it came to working with Paul, and this allowed the process to go much more smoothly.

With the intention of opening the possibility of synchronisation deals for this song, I ensured that we also received an instrumental version of the track from our producer. Having received the final mix of the track, I'm very happy with it as a final product and although the initial feedback has been very positive, I'm looking forward to seeing how the song is received by more people once it's released.

For the release event, we have been planning to utilise the Two Tribes Brewery at Tileyard Studios as a venue. The benefits of this venue are exposure to industry professionals and also that myself and Jordan both have a network at Tileyard that we could invite. However, Ellen's primary following is based in St Albans, just outside of London. Whilst we're confident of being able to bring a large number of people to the event, it may be more difficult to bring people into London for the launch. The alternative to this would be to use The Horn in St Albans which is much more local to Ellen's current audience. I work at The Horn as an Event Manager and would be able to put Ellen on a mid-week standard slot that we could use as a launch. My opinion would be that we should be looking to organise a standard show at The Horn anyway and can make the launch more special by hosting it at Two Tribes. In order to maximise the audience for both shows, the local event can't be announced before the London launch has taken place.

In order to make the project more official, we decided to establish a business that would act both as a Management and Record Label entity as a vehicle to release the single through. As such, the single will be released through Resurrect Records and Ellen Barrow is the first artist on the label's roster. This reflects our intention to explore the potential of exploiting the track financially if possible and also allows the release to look more official than a self-

releasing artist when going to the press. Looking to the future, it provides us with a good foundation to release more music, whether from Ellen or other artists, as managers or as a record label.

As a result of this project, I am intending to continue working on developing Ellen's career in music as her manager. Over the next year, it would be good to release a 6 track EP and have her perform a small tour with a full band. The momentum and response to this will then provide information that we can then use to consider whether to consider a full-length album afterwards. Similarly, I am intending to continue working with Jordan as business partners and providing artist management as a pair. Our goals will focus on taking on more artists and learning from our previous experiences to provide a holistic service to each act that we work with.

## **Digital Technologies**

Over the last 5-10 years, the landscape of the music industry has significantly changed with the digital revolution. The way that music is created, promoted and consumed is pretty much unrecognisable compared to the environment that focussed primarily on CD sales and chart positions. Having a digital revolution in music has offered independent artists the opportunity to make their own music without needing a label to invest in them, release and market their music fairly cheaply, and allow several different options for their fans to listen to their music. Whilst this is all beneficial to aspiring artists and independent musicians, it is also making the industry more competitive on a grassroots level, where everyone is fighting for attention. This competitiveness has sparked a new period of innovation in the way that artists promote their music, as they try to find interesting ways to exploit the opportunities offered to them by digital services.

### **Creation**

One of the main changes in the industry is the affordability of creating records. We can now see countless examples of “bedroom producers” who are able to make their music with little more than a laptop (Weekes, 2014). Artists such as James Blake, Avicii and Skrillex are prime examples of the “notion that people can produce music of exceptionally high quality, through taking a minimalistic, modern approach” (Weekes, 2014). With high quality software such as Logic Pro, Reason and Ableton all available at a fairly low price, music creation has never been so accessible.

This development is not limited to software either, it’s entirely possible to build a makeshift, sound-proof studio space at home and record acoustic instruments and vocals to an excellent standard without having to spend a huge amount on it. Bedroom producers then have the opportunity to bring people in and work as a studio engineer for other people’s tracks alongside being a producer – creating a much broader range of opportunities.

### **Promotion**

The art or science of promoting music has been disrupted by social media, which has opened the possibility for independent artists to successfully self-release their own music and build a fan-base from scratch. Whilst this is a positive for grassroots artists at the start of their career, it has created an extremely congested market where it’s extremely difficult to stand out from the crowd and get someone’s attention. Allen states “the goal is to continue to engage your current fans and build your base with more. Even if an artist has little interest in online social media networking, it is somewhat like guitar strings and drumsticks – you need to use them to attract and keep fans interested” (Allen, 2014).

Whilst on the surface it may seem like influence is being taken away from labels, strong marketing teams and large budgets help to reach potential fans in effective ways that will not be possible to the average grassroots musician. Therefore, it seems that labels still have a similar amount of influence as they always have had, albeit with more independent artists becoming successful.

Because of the extremely congested market, even acts signed to major labels are having to run innovative marketing campaigns to get people’s attention. For example, Sigrid (signed

to Island records and winner of BBC Music Sound of 2018) has recently set up a Facebook chat bot alongside a brand partnership with The Sims. The chat bot interacts with users 'as Sigrid', provides a quiz-like game and also promotes Sigrid's new content as and when it's released. Interactive marketing between artists and their fan-base is likely to get even more popular as artists try to gain a deeper relationship with the people who consume their music and, to use Seth Godin's term, "tighten the tribe" (Godin, 2008).

## **Consumption**

The recent and ever-increasing dominance of streaming platforms has now almost wiped out revenue streams from digital downloads. Rosenblatt reasonably claims that we've entered "a new era: the era of interactive streaming" (Rosenblatt, 2018). It is hard to argue against this claim now that streaming makes up 65% of all music industry revenues in the USA (Friedlander, 2018).

In a similar way, the method of how people discover new music has changed with the digital era. Ann Harrison notes that "recommendations from online 'friends' are as influential as hearing a track on the radio" and this relates heavily to the new culture of playlisting that is becoming more prevalent (Harrison, 2017). Many artists are now creating playlists of music that they like, encouraging their supporters to follow the playlists, and then including their own music within it. This tactic can be seen as a win-win situation: the consumer gets to discover new music, the artists featured on the playlist get more plays, and the artist hosting the playlist gets to feature their own tracks whilst keeping control over a new promotional tool.

## **Conclusion**

To summarise, the extreme changes that the music industry has undergone in the last 10 years have all contributed to an environment that makes it possible to record and release a professional single with a budget of just £500. With our project, we made use of the affordability of music creation by going to a producer who has essentially built his own studio. The brand that we're creating will be predominately built on social media to start building a fan-base without needing much investment. Finally, we will be releasing the track directly to streaming platforms, made possible by digital developments and the use of distribution services that allow people to release their own music independently.

## References

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