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Element 2b – Reflective Commentary

'You are to submit a 5000 word Reflective Commentary that details and reflects upon the research, discussion, work and feedback conducted in the creation of the portfolio.'

Submission Date: 23/07/2021
Word Count: 4,551 (5,000 +/- 10%)

Final Project Reflective Commentary

Introduction

In this reflective commentary I will discuss in detail the body of work I have submitted for my final project as an MA commercial music producer at Tileyard Education, the journey I took to achieve it, and the commercial viability in its results with consideration to potential success. I will present my research and methods with thorough analysis, posing questions on the effectiveness of various areas in creative collaboration, alongside a broader overview of the techniques and skills used to write and produce new, original music with relevance to consumer demand.

I will endeavour to achieve a deeper level of personal exploration and assessment in order to refine my methods and understanding of the intricate details that take impact on the success of a product or individual in the current music industry climate. In its simplest form, my goal on completion of this final module is to enter into professional work as a rounded and experienced musical producer and director, with the necessary confidence to lead teams of creators through live briefs, camps and album projects in order to achieve impactful and profitable results with fair expectation and consideration towards all involved. More specifically, I hope to obtain feedback both positive and constructive, in order to continue refining my skills moving forward, using my experience in this project to make more informed decisions, both creatively and logistically,

“Management is about human beings. Its task is to make people capable of joint performance, to make their strengths effective and their weaknesses irrelevant.”

— Peter F. Drucker, *The Essential Drucker* (1)

I believe that the music industry and those of us who work within it rely on collaboration to achieve most of what we do, so developing more advanced knowledge and experience in this often diplomatically complex area will be invaluable to my progression both as a creator and performer. I also anticipate new opportunities to gain skills, knowledge and connections from successful collaborations and sessions, and hope to expand my network even further than I have already.

Concept & Approach

As anticipated, my creation module has been a journey of discovery, both internally and generally, around the complex dynamic of collaboration. When conducting my initial proposal, I imagined a project with a singular center and purpose, driven by a committed team with divided strengths.

I quickly arrived at an obstacle that changed the path I had mapped out, one so obvious and simple I was frustrated with myself for not considering its potential impact in the early stages of project planning. Whilst creating music is a passion for most of us on this course, it is first and foremost a business, one in which everyone must be a tactile competitor, as well as a trusted confidant. In my timeline, I had overlooked the inevitable time I would have to give to others, in return for their work. *“Professionally, few of us act purely like givers or takers, adopting a third style instead. We become matchers, striving to preserve an equal balance of giving and getting. Matchers operate on the principle of*

fairness: when they help others, they protect themselves by seeking reciprocity."

(Grant, 2013, p30). (2)

In order to sufficiently divide my time, I divided the project in half. Rather than a ten track album for myself, I set out to create a smaller body of work for my artist campaign, whilst producing a debut EP for fellow collaborator and artist, *Raven*.

With less time for my own vision, I knew I would have to be selective and thorough with my ideas. I spent a day at my desk, analysing each and every opportunity I have received in the last twelve months on my personal journey, in order to comprise a detailed One Sheet (**see appendix A**), as well as an EPK (**see appendix B**). Aside from developing two valuable assets to secure future sessions and press, I also now had a clear and concise visual for the creative decisions I have made, based on likely avenues of professional progression.

My streaming and sync success warranted the development of some original release content, to be marketed directly from source. I could have chosen to simply create a five track EP similarly to *Raven*, however, using my connections to pitch to global EDM giants like *Stefan Darbruck (Robin Schulz, Klingande)* and *Tileyard Music (Sigala, Joel Corry)*, has the potential to drive traffic in the millions through my social pages and streaming sites. Equipped with this analysis, I chose to create three personal release tracks, and two tracks tailored to pitch, but still featuring my vocals.

As a new artist, the requirements for *Raven's* EP were staggeringly different. We would need to create an introduction to his sound; something that would be impactful and memorable, with a clear and unique selling point. I initially asked him to curate a playlist on Spotify of his favourite artists and music he felt most inspired his sound (**see appendix C**). This was crucial to pinpointing the production methods I would use going forward, as well as being a reference to revert back to

later in the creative process. Assessing the tracks revealed that we would need to divide time between live recording and digital processing to meet the punk-rock/hip hop genre blend that Raven was inspired by. I was happy with the overall creative direction, especially from a commercial standpoint, as the rise of quick-consumer apps like TikTok and Instagram Reels has seen an increased demand for this hybrid genre, particularly amongst gen-z communities. Identifying this consumer bracket added to the requirements of the EP and helped shape Raven's brand identity, which moving forward into the project would set out some vital guidelines. For example, we knew based on recent digital trends that the songs would need to contain short, memorable hooks that could be easily looped, remixed and rendered acapella, for the purpose of user sync and over-dub. We also knew that having meaningful lyrical themes would be crucial to the usability of the sound. *"A hit song needs to be easy to remember, catchy, evoke a feeling or have lyrics or music that are easy to dance/act out to. However, instrumentals are also popular on TikTok for background music to videos requiring a voiceover. Dance challenges must be rather easy so that everyone can participate."*(3)

Naturally, this is something that I would take into consideration across the wider project, not only within Raven's EP. My personal artist tracks would need to have relevant marketability in this lucrative area of digital consumerism, and I have quickly discovered that the best way to remain knowledgeable on these trends is to be active within the apps & communities that create them. I have added TikTok scrolling to my daily routine (despite my best efforts for so long to avoid it), for thirty minutes every morning. I then cross reference any new soundbytes I find with Spotify and Apple music, to analyse the sales and metric data, and filter out

any old or untraceable sounds, focusing on finding DIY artists who are having success via the app.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

WHAT DO I WANT TO LEARN?	WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?	WHAT SUPPORT AND RESOURCES WILL I NEED?	HOW DO I MEASURE SUCCESS?	TARGET DATE FOR REVIEW
Manage and execute multiple project timelines	Organise and plan with meticulous attention to detail and timelines	- A well researched and realistic strategy - Collaborative team - Expense budget - Communicative assets and skills	- Completion of projects - Quality of results - Comparative analysis	10th July 2021
A confident understanding of a variety of	Work with others in a variety of	- Studio space - Digital planning and	- Team wellbeing & morale	10th July 2021

collaborative dynamics	scenarios and skill sets to gain experience and accurate methodical analysis	communicative assets (Calendars, TimeTree, Whatsapp, Zoom etc) - People management skills & emotional awareness - Flexible expectations	- Efficiency in completing tasks - Collaborator feedback - Asking 'would you work with us again?'	
Elevate personal artist progression	Create a commercially viable body of music to release in line with my brand and USP	- Studio space - High quality hardware and software (mics, preamps, monitors, DAW etc). - Instrumentalists and session musicians - Engineers	- Peer feedback - Profitability - Consumer growth - Industry feedback & review - Personal satisfaction	17th July 2021

Creative process

Grey Spaces (Georgia Meek) Originally written alone on piano, Grey Spaces' process was about applying a slick, modern production that resonated with the other two original tracks I plan on releasing from this project, whilst retaining the emotional impact and origins of the ballad.

Upon listening to the rough recording in the studio, we (*myself, Raven & an engineer*) knew immediately that the vocal delivery would need to be more rhythmic and tight to support a backbeat. We experimented with increasing the tempo, but decided it took away from the power in the lyrics. Referencing artists such as Chelsea Cutler, Fletcher and Gracey (*see appendix D*), I used wide digital synths with plenty of grit, paired with tight punchy 808 kicks and bass, avoiding using too much space in the 6k area to leave plenty of room for a really clear and impactful vocal. Compared to other tracks in the project, Grey Spaces was fairly straightforward to record & produce due to the electronic nature of the style, only using the live studio for one vocal recording session. The idea to create the anti chorus with the main hook with such a dramatic low pass filter came from the aforementioned research on TikTok, after noticing the popularity of tracks with exceptionally large dynamic changes.

Lavender (Georgia Meek)

Lavender was a rough production I dug out from earlier this year, composed exclusively from samples from *Sophie* (*see appendix E*) shortly after her tragic passing in January. I felt compelled to create an homage to her work after being

so inspired by her visibility in the industry as a trans woman and producer. Despite changing most of the original sounds I used, the track in general is still hugely inspired by her production style, using obscure foley and playful motifs paired with witty modern lyrics. Revisiting this song after some time in the studio with *Raven*, I saw it from a new, more commercial angle, with potential for virality on social media due to the nature of the lyrics. The chorus literally lists off actions you could make into a dance or trend, around the subject of anxiety and mental health. The chorus beat originally dropped in immediately from the pre chorus, however I felt the lyrical content needed to be the focus without any other distractions. I used vocal layers and a vocoder to thicken the sound, and placed samples in between each line, some of which are a literal reinforcement of the lyrics; for example '*take a xanny*' is followed by the sound of a pill dropping into a glass. Raven helped me to curate the samples which took some time, but I think it was really worth it in the end.

B!TCH (Georgia Meek)

In terms of writing, B!TCH is the least collaborative track in my project, having been composed by me alone on an acoustic guitar - I sat down with a fairly loose direction for lyrics and tempo, wanting to further explore my ideas as a writer. It was only when I took the guitar and vocal stems into the studio with *Raven* that we realised the track had something special as it was. I had originally imagined that the production would be developed using electric guitars, bass and synths. We even spent a day recording a live drum kit for the choruses, but during the editing process I made an executive decision to remove them; I felt they were distracting and were not adding anything of value to the overall record. We

tracked extra vocal layers and comps in the live room, and focused most of our time into getting really clean guitar takes and a good balance in dynamic.

Despite being one of the more simple tracks in the project, it took the most studio contact time to achieve, based on the fact that we knew you would hear every single resonance, buzz or pop that was picked up in the live room. I made the decision to have *Raven* mix the track based on his skill and experience with live recording, as opposed to my years spent in electronics music production.

Black Holes (For Pitch)

Black Holes, the first of two tracks intended to be pitched to major labels, was written in a larger session via Zoom. The lead guitar and beat were created first, with help from German production duo *Mushroom*, currently signed to Robin Schulz' management label. I arranged the sections into a suitable structure, referencing recent hits like Sugar Ft. Francesco Yates and Paradise by Medusa (**see appendix F**), then composed and recorded the topline with help from *Raven* and fellow collaborator *RAPHI*.

I asked Dustin from Mushroom to record a bass guitar line, sending over a piano line for reference of how the melody and rhythm should work. Upon receiving the audio, we decided to completely isolate the bass and vocal with just a snap to keep beat, for an extreme dynamic contrast in the pre-chorus, which I felt allowed more listener focus on the hook, meaning better chances of memorability and increased potential for video syncing.

I asked *RAPHI* to record the 'lalalala' phrase in the chorus; she has a high tone in her voice that made for a really sweet yet slightly dark hook. Production-wise we added vocal samples and other ear candy to hit additional stylistic requirements from the brief references.

Back Together (For Pitch)

Back Together was also born out of a larger collaboration. Co-produced by myself and Serhat Sakin (*Scooter, Ministry Of Sound, Ultra*), with Tobias Jundt (*Bonaparte*) featuring on lead vocals, it quickly became an exciting track to work on. With a direct brief from Kllingande, I knew no matter what we did, the track had to be emotive, inoffensive and uplifting. Unlike my approach to Black Holes, I started carving the song from piano chords and vocal melodies with Tobias. Working with Serhat was really efficient, as he was able to prepare drum sounds and empty tracks for us as we wrote. Based on the advice from Cedric (Kllingande)'s label, I kept the production really simple, using subtle guitar and pads all side chained to the kick, with basic risers and impacts to indicate section changes. I have learned that composing for DJ collabs means presenting a production with space for personalisation and interpretation, and pushing too far in direction or another can hinder chances for a cut.

The most lengthy part of this track's creative process was blending the vocals, which were recorded in different spaces on different mics. I used EQ and processing to compensate for the extra top end on my SM7b's low, warm sound, as well as removing the foam head to improve clarity.

16 Hours (Raven)

16 Hours was the first song we wrote for *Raven*, suitably setting the tone for the EP with huge synths & bass swelling beneath filtered percussion. Based on the reference playlist, I made a drastic dynamic drop to make space for punchy verse vocals on a down-tempo hip hop style backbeat.. The initial synth is re-introduced for a hook based chorus melody to drive the listener through the song with

repeated patterns and loops. Conscious choices like this were made throughout the production process to achieve TikTok marketability and impact as mentioned earlier. I added electric guitar with heavy distortion filters both digital and analogue, marrying the aggressive hip hop style beats with early 00's rock nostalgia to reinforce *Raven's* distinctive vision. Lyrically the song immediately suggests his identity both as an individual and artist, so it was particularly important for me to emphasise his vocals in the mix and keep the production reflective and moody.

999 (Raven)

999 was really fun to create; when *Raven* approached me with the first verse lyrics and the guitar part, I knew as soon as I listened to it that I wanted to create something really uncomfortable and demonic sounding that showed this twisted edge to his sonic brand. I composed the pre chorus and approached him with it, and the whole thing just exploded from there. The 'call 999' phrase that ended the section made me think of the drop in 'You Should See Me In A Crown' by *Billie Eilish* (**see appendix G**), which in turn became a really nice reference point for vocal effects and accents. I actually ended up using some samples from another Billie Eilish tune in between phrases in verse two, which was a nice nod to the influence on this one. We recorded the electric guitar directly through DI and I used logic's in-built pedal board insert to build a basic fx chain. I took the reverb trails from the guitar track and reversed them to create subtle ear candy over the droning bass in the verses to add detail and further aid the obscure nature of the track.

Die For You (Raven)

Die For You was challenging to produce, because the dynamic between the verse and chorus was so different, both in energy and genre. It essentially felt like an

avant-pop track that suddenly exploded into a Bring Me The Horizon tune. I used both high and low pass filtering on hyper-pop synths and samples to streamline the track and tie sections together. For the same reasons, I moved the guitar right back with a long reverb to act more as a thickening pad than a lead which softened the verse dynamic. Wanting to keep cohesive elements across the EP, I used pitch shifted vocal samples and delays as ear candy, and a huge bass stab in the chorus to drive a dark undertone suggestive of other tracks. A lot of time went into tracking vocals in the studio for this track; *Raven* is fairly new to using his own vocals, and I knew I'd need to be present to really encourage a strong performance from him. We layered up lots of different vocal takes with varying tonalities, which I blended using processing and panning. I also encouraged him to perform harmony stacks for the second verse and bridge to give the vocals even more power and impact.

Doomed (Raven)

Doomed is a satirical track with an upbeat, major tone that plays beneath cynical lyrics. With a nod to 'Miss U' by Charli XCX (*see appendix H*), I kept the structure and synths simple and repetitive, with an easily memorable melodic phrase to stick in the listeners mind. Although it is arguably the most upbeat track in the five songs we created, I kept the overall sonic themes using wide, aggressive bass lines and punchy percussive elements. I felt Raven's vocal lines were so catchy and effective already, so my decisions in the development of the production really revolved around that and I found myself constantly playing in new parts and then taking them back out again fearing overkill. I even decided to leave in a room mic take as the outro to give the overall record a really natural and honest point in the EP.

Drink! (Raven)

We considered using 'Drink' to pitch to bigger artists for a long time after it was composed. The dancehall style beat I initially made was really different for *Raven* as an artist, and he was unsure how to navigate the writing. I encouraged him to see it at a different angle, a sort of 'fun house' eccentric version of what you'd expect a dancehall record to sound like. At a short and sweet 1.44, I felt it was a perfect mood lifter for the EP and had plenty of commercial viability. Despite being sober, he wrote really clever lyrics that addressed the negatives of binge culture without being overly accusatory. I thought the whole concept turned into something pretty amusing, and I wanted to make the production unusual whilst almost making fun of techniques we would expect from dancehall; the stacked shouts of 'drink' and the odd clap here and there all lean into the style of the beat, whilst the bass drives attitude and mimics *Raven's* alternative views on the scene we all know so well. I used everyone who was hanging around on the day to record the gang vocals (at a two metre distance - ha) and took multiple records, each with people re-positioned in the room to fill all the natural space and build an overly aggressive version of what we imagined.

S.W.O.T Analysis

The following S.W.O.T analysis was created in consideration to the subsequent body of musical work we have created and its potential moving forward, with attention to content, marketability and financial viability in relation to the current music industry climate. Although most points are applicable across all ten tracks, I have focused specifically on *Raven's* five EP tracks, as I feel most able to assess them subjectively against industry practices.

<u>Strengths</u> - High quality demo mixes - Variety within catalogue - Cross genre, opening potential up to multiple markets - Meaningful and relatable lyricism - Marketable format i.e. structured with conscious attention to TikTok consumers, short lengths for radio etc - Clear sonic identity and brand	<u>Weaknesses</u> - Master quality not high enough - Lack of behind the scenes visual content to promote development story - Explicit content will need to be replaced for radio - Market oversaturation - Minimal budget
<u>Opportunities</u> - Great industry connections made through collaborating - Pitch to globally noted DJ's and artists by using existing contacts - Interest from labels, potential for investment - Artist now has material to launch career - Potential to build a fanbase within the Gen-Z market - Use of social media to promote/market	<u>Threats</u> - Highly competitive market - Potential for digital piracy - High marketing and PR costs - Poor initial release performance will impact metric data used to make playlisting decisions by streaming platforms - Expensive to produce in a live format (artist will need sufficient hardware to achieve digital sound)

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With appropriate planning and strategy, I believe that my new singles, *Raven's* EP and the songs for EDM pitch can be successful and lucrative, based on comparative analysis against industry practitioners and case studies.

Heavier, Guitar based music has back on the popularity incline in recent years, with UK and USA charts handing over more and more space to acts like The Architects and YungBlud. In March this year, Gigwise released an article on the genre variation in the UK album charts from 2020 to 2021, stating; *"guitar-driven albums from alternative bands have been dominating the top ten all throughout 2021"* (4)

Evaluation

Assessing the body of work I have created against original briefs and references, I am personally extremely happy with what I have created with my team. I feel that both my own songs and *Raven's* are strong enough to further our artist development, and that the two songs we have created for pitch have great potential, especially as 'Back Together' has already been put on hold by Klingande's publishers for a six month period.

To legitimise the results of my work, I held an online listening session on Sunday 18th of July, to which I invited a handful of peers and industry contacts to give non biased feedback on the songs. The overall reaction was really positive, with the only constructive criticism in the form of mix notes, which is a personal development still in process for me.

A general consensus was that listeners could imagine the tracks on commercial radio - this feedback was essential based on the marketing plans in place for the various releases. We were pleased that our consumer research had been effective in pushing the creative direction to meet the mainstream criteria that is required from national radio.

Despite completing the task I set out on, I was most eager to obtain feedback from my collaborators on how they felt I managed the project and the roles involved.

Not wanting to be impersonal, I spent the last week chatting to the fifteen writers, engineers, instrumentalists and producers who contributed to the whole project, discussing how they felt their sessions went, and what I could have done to improve their experience.

I was overjoyed to hear that everyone was made to feel confident and valued throughout our communication, giving credit to my '*creative solutions*' and '*flexibility*'.

"Georgia drives a session with high energy and leaves room for every writer to express themselves and feel comfortable. She's assertive with criticism yet kind and always ready to compromise" Celine Newkirk-Asher, Commercial Songwriting and Production MA

"Georgia has a strong leadership which drives us all to be better and write to a high standard" - Ellie Lamb-Wright, Commercial Songwriting and Production MA

"Georgia's ability to weave together different ideas always makes for an exciting session to be in. I was always looped in communication, around my role and also in the wider project, it was really nice to see updates about where my work was!"
- Tobias Jundt, Bonaparte

"Georgia can be very clever with her producing, she has a good eye for detail and knows what will work and what won't. It's good to feel like we have a person to make decisions when we get stuck on a lyric or something, and she's really fun! I'm glad to have worked on this project for her and would work with her many times again in the future" - Serhat Sakin (Producer)

Raven and I shared constructive criticisms for each other, mainly concluding that we needed to take more studio breaks and make an effort to switch off for at least one day a week. I have learnt the valuable lesson of being disciplined when it comes to rest and how it can make or break your attitude the next day. I have discovered that as a director, if I am performing at 60%, it's likely that those in my team will be too, and so saying no is the right thing to do sometimes; saying no to that extra shift, saying no to a last minute vocal session, and saying no to your friends when they encourage you to go on a rager the night before a key recording day.

Challenging myself and taking on this level of work has opened my process up to new obstacles, skills and setbacks, most of which I would never have considered before. I now know that the most difficult aspect of creative project management is often anticipating free will, individual opinion and creative conflict. Navigating these hurdles like oil to a machine is a skill I am still developing, and am sure I will continue to develop through the rest of my life. Difference of opinion is as inevitable as it is provoking; without it I don't believe we would possess a body of work that could compete with what we have created here.

Through my research I have furthered my personal comprehension of the industry landscape and market audience targeting during the creative writing and production process, understanding that a successful music project is not only measured by its quality and originality, but also by its relevance to consumer trends and demand. Finding a balance between creating for pleasure and creating for profitability is possible through establishing a solid audio-visual brand identity early on in a project and using that as an anchor for decisions and methods in both creation and release.

Appendices

Artefact A - Georgia Meek Artist One Sheet



GEORGIA MEEK

- Over half a million Spotify streams -
- 2020 Radio 1's Big Weekend performer -
- 3 sold out headline shows in 2019 -
- Supported Kelli-Leigh, NONO, July Jones -

British alt-pop artist Georgia Meek made her explosive entrance onto the UK music scene in 2018 with her critically acclaimed single 'Bare', which quickly thrust her **Spotify audience into figures just south of half a million**.

The 'organically viral' songstress has since scored some of **Love Island's** hottest moments over on **ITV2**, capturing the support of **Ministry Of Sound**, **Radio 1** & **BBC6 Music**.

Despite a global pandemic, 2020 has shown no slowing for the 26 year old's climb, hitting the bill for **Radio 1's (virtual) Big Weekend**, **Liverpool Sound City**, **The Great Escape**, and several other internationally recognised music festivals.

Meek prides herself in being an accomplished producer & prolific writer, insisting that the industry moves towards a more gender equal landscape, encouraging artists to work with female producers. Since founding **FMP World** in early 2020, she has gathered a community of more than 3000 women in her field, creating a

platform for their voices and talent to be heard. Beyond music, Meek's voice has become a monumental focus amongst both **UK and international press**, preaching feminist movement, self love & individuality.

Management

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Artist Sessions

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[SPOTIFY](#)



[INSTAGRAM](#)



[TWITTER](#)



[APPLE MUSIC](#)



[FACEBOOK](#)



[WEBSITE](#)

Artefact B - Georgia Meek EPK

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/lh459ROiSKMuK/>

Artefact C - Reference playlist for 'Raven' EP

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/01VWTpsmtVe2hull0xIzEn?si=01810c949f954fb8>

Artefact D - Grey Spaces Audio References

Gracey: <https://youtu.be/NoPlihGm4yQ>

Fletcher: <https://youtu.be/jPe5iAE9qww>

Chelsea Cutler: <https://youtu.be/6c9vKWqiy8k>

Artefact E - Sophie (Lavender Ref)

https://open.spotify.com/artist/5a2w2tgpLwv26BYJf2qYwu?si=tWayKroZRFWuBFmi0Bqpdw&dl_branch=1

Artefact F - Black Holes References

Paradise, Medusa: <https://youtu.be/e7HBypw4lhY>

Sugar, Robin Schulz ft Francesco Yates: https://youtu.be/bvC_0foemLY

Artefact G - Call 999 Ref

You Should See Me In A Crown, Billie Eilish: <https://youtu.be/Ah0Ys50CqO8>

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