

MA Commercial Music Producer

Creation

ADAD7004_LON

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In this written proposal I intend to lay down my objectives, aims and, more importantly, my main vision regarding the Creation project for the final term of my MA in Commercial Music Producer at Tileyard Education.

I decided for this project to focus on the realization of a portfolio, more specifically a collection of 10 to 13 songs by various artists I am currently collaborating with in which I will try to showcase my skillset at its full potential, working on several steps of the production chain and acting on different roles, depending on the interaction with each artist and the state of the works at the point of my joining.

From composer and musician to recordist, mixer and producer, I will try to apply everything I learnt during the past year in the aim of tracking a blueprint for the vision I have of my future career in the industry but contemporarily working under the perspective of putting myself under scrutiny as a soon-to-be-professional.

Among the many possibilities I had to approach this project, I decided that a portfolio featuring several artists could be a great opportunity for me to reflect upon my current abilities, knowledge and preparation and a comprehensive chance to test myself in the attempt to reveal my strengths and weaknesses.

Much more than writing an album on my own or even working as a producer on a unique body of work, this project could closely simulate the daily challenges that a professional constantly encounters during his career. As multi Grammy-winning producer X O'Connor reveals:

A producer's job is to help the artist take their vision for a song or an entire record from a concept to reality. [...] Whether that's playing instruments or bringing in the right players or cultivating a sound, you're literally taking an artist step by step to achieving their vision, expanding it and taking it to the next level. (FullCircleMusic, 2019)

Reflecting on the whole experience of attending this course and, even before that, working on music during the Covid-19 world pandemic and consequent lockdowns, I now realize that my perspective on music slightly shifted in the last year. From taking care of my own band, my personal creative need of expression and commitments with promoting, touring, writing and producing for myself only, the quiet of my home studio pushed me into collaborating more and more

often with other musicians, artists and creatives in general and, even if through methods that nobody would have even dreamt of considering conventional before 2020, it surely came as a breath of fresh air and inspiration but also presented new challenges and technical requirements I felt like I had to catch up upon.

Having all of a sudden plenty of free time, and most importantly no financial income that allowed me to hire third-party collaborators as I was used to before, led me straight into studying mixing as an actual need to be able to release any music and, as soon as I started researching and practicing it, I became really passionate about this craft.

The mixing classes throughout the year and the many chances of getting to know and speak to industry professionals solidified my interest into this particular process of music creation and it really opened up a lot of possibilities to me. My goal went from being a musician and composer to becoming a versatile operator who can work on several levels and offer different services, covering every step of production from start to finish. Even ambitious as it sounds, it's not unusual nowadays to find this kind of multi-skilled figures operating at high professional level and some of them are exactly the artists I have been looking up to the most recently; I'm thinking of really successful and influential people like Rick Rubin or Mark Ronson, but also (relatively) newcomers like KennyBeats or Jack Antonoff, who all have in common the ability to get involved in the most different projects and even genres, never imposing their personality but always landing great help to artists and assisting them into achieving their vision and goals.

Reflecting on his role as an experienced music guru, Rick Rubin, who Rolling Stone defines as "the most successful producer of any genre" (Grow, 2016) talks about writing with Black Sabbath, mixing for Kanye West and engineering vocal tracking for Eminem as all activities under the same big umbrella of creativity and servicing:

It's really about the artist voice, what's their sound, what makes them special, what's unique to them and how can I help bring that out and support that as opposed to 'I have an idea, let's make my version of what you do' (2014)

About the same topic Lee DeCarlo, producer who worked, mixed and engineered hit records since the '70s for artists like John Lennon, Aerosmith and Zakk Wylde, talks about the main focus of his participation in music-making in these terms:

Everything has to breathe. Songs have a life, and you have to develop that life within the song. Every single piece of music in the world breathes if it's played properly. A song is about something and the trick is to capture what it's about and make it live. (2006, p139)

One could easily argue that all of the artists and professionals mentioned above belong to the old school and consequently used to work in a fashion that nowadays might well seem obsolete. In this regards, author and mixing engineer Eric Sarafin, more commonly known as Mixerman, talks about this shift in the industry and the derive towards specialization that the '90s brought along with a more defined separation of roles and the following rise of new professional figures who focused on their craft solely, like indeed third-party mixing engineers or recordists:

Before the 1980s, it was unheard of to bring in a third-party mixer. Mixing was more of a community event. Everyone had their hands on the faders and mutes, everyone was a part of the decision-making process. (2021, p57)

Analyzing the current landscape, I can easily identify this trend looking at the acts at the top of most charts and I'll use as example two of the biggest stars of our times: Billie Eilish, who relies on her brother Finneas for production and engineer Rob Kinelski for mixing as explained in his latest interviews (Pensado's Place, 2019) and Canadian rapper Drake, who as commonly known employs a huge team of professionals for every step of the creation, especially songwriting and production (Genius, 2017).

So it's hard to disagree with Mixerman about the specialization of each craft and the separation of the steps in music production but I also feel like I'm witnessing the comeback (assuming they ever actually went away) of "factotum" professionals, able to take production in their hands and bring it all the way up from early stages to finalization and release.

In a recent Pitchfork close up about KennyBeats, “the most sought-after producer of his generation” for NME (Williams, 2020), music journalist William Schube writes:

Musically, Kenny is a chameleon who doesn't lend artists his signature sound as much as help them develop and distil their own. He tailors his beats to artists' requests, does vocal production, and often mixes and masters the final product. (2018)

And on the same lines, New York Vulture reflects in an article by Justin Curto on “the Jack Antonoff Sound, a style that’s made an indelible mark on the last few years of pop and seems like it will only continue to do so” (2020), reviewing his role on albums by Lorde, St. Vincent, Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift in which he comfortably and easily wears several hats, from songwriter to recordist and mixing engineer. Talking about his beginnings, Antonoff uncovers in his ‘Inside the track’ breakdown interview with Mix with the Masters:

I think what's interesting is that you get started in... making work, making art! And then you get started in recording music. I had the need to write, which is essentially the same thing as record and produce and all these things. There is something that you want to get out. (2020)

Another important tract that really fascinates me here is that Antonoff is not only an accomplished and influential songwriter and producer, he also finds time to front his own bands: Fun. from 2008 to 2015 and Bleachers to this day (Curto, 2020).

Being involved in my own band project too, I am interested in putting the work in also on that front and that is why I want to include in this portfolio some of the songs I write and compose.

Another big influence and constant font of inspiration for me is someone who also releases music under his name and I feel ties up the old and the new school of producers, having started in 1992 but continuing to shape the modern soundscape and taste worldwide to this very day with credits on albums by Travis Scott, Kid Cudi, Migos and Gorillaz. I’m talking about hip-hop icon and legendary musician Mike Dean. As narrated by another illustrious and Grammy-winning engineer like Dave Pensado, Dean takes care of everything he is requested to:

I've seen Mike going to a studio, repair the board, modify the outboard gear, write the song, play all the parts, track the vocals, mix it and master it and I'm guessing half the stuff he does, that's what happens! (Pensado's Place, 2018)

Exactly this versatility and the ability to be useful on every level and at any point become an enormous advantage towards competition and not only help landing more jobs but also facilitate a comprehensive vision over art and music.

Questioned about his favorite part of the process among playing instruments, writing parts or mixing, Dean simply and candidly explains in the same interview: "it all ties together" (2018).

To enhance this theory, Mixerman reflects on his upbringing in the studios of LA in these terms:

There's no doubt in my mind that mixing on a daily basis made me both a better recordist and producer. Mixing successful projects not only illuminated the production and recording mistakes of others, it taught me about the end game. (2021, p9)

So what I intend to do is basically follow the steps of these giants and try my best to do the kind of work they have been doing throughout their careers.

The acts I selected for the portfolio are diverse and all require a different level of commitment on my side. As I was mentioning before, part of it is going to feature original songs by my own band Hostage, a duo in which I co-write, compose, play drums and bass guitar, co-produce and now mix everything. We are currently working on the demos for our next Ep, so the plan is to finish some of those songs in time for this project. Another artist I really want to include is Victoria, a singer-songwriter originally from Colombia who mostly produces all of his music but lacks the technical knowledge to bring it to release-standard quality. He's asked me to help out with vocal production and tracking several times and I mixed some of his songs already, so I already know what the process is going to look like with his next works. Similarly, I met WhyPonder, a very talented British songwriter last summer and worked on one of his songs starting from a stripped down demo and building a whole arrangement around it. Since the end result was satisfying on both ends, we agreed to continue our relationship and I will try and produce more of his tunes starting from demos and following pretty much

the same workflow. As Pharrell Williams says talking about this kind of production approach: “my job is to nudge in, poke and pull you in places you would not go so that you can get different results”. (2019)

Last but not least, I intend to bring in some music by Killowen, another London born and bread talent I met at a Tileyard songwriting camp. What happened during that session was something I had rarely experienced before: after getting to know each other and talking about the music that we both loved and admired, the energy in the (virtual) room was so high that we ended up forgetting about the brief and wrote two original songs from start to finish, all in 6 hours. Again, the good vibes we experienced during that situation made us plan more, so we scheduled writing sessions in the coming weeks where I expect to come up with material I’ll be able to use on this project.

What will come out of this collection not only is going to be helpful for the process and because of the challenges that will present but will also eventually transform into a catalogue of releases I will be able to use to showcase my work and hopefully land other jobs. As very common nowadays, it’s easy to navigate streaming platforms and find playlists of songs realized by a specific producer. [appendix A]. Being very accessible and immediate, this could be also a good way to apply for studio internships and jobs of this sort, utilizing practical examples of my previous experiences as a pragmatic CV.

Together with excitement anyway, all of these different scenarios present several problems. First of all, having many people involved is probably going to complicate scheduling; an attentive timeline is key to prevent troubles and it’ll be helpful to for me to plan ahead and not be caught by surprise by any last minute tasks [Appendix B]. Some of the productions I’m considering involve real instruments tracking, mostly drums and electric guitars. I will surely use the Tileyard studios as much as possible but in case that won’t be enough as I am sure the spaces will be busy because every student is going to be in my same situation, I’m planning of involving some friends who study at other universities like ICMP and Abbey Road Institute and have the possibility of booking their spaces. The workload is clearly another key element to keep in mind but having completed a personal SWOT analysis [Appendix C] I know that one of my main strengths is being a hard-working individual who embraces challenges and use

good planning as a resource. I'm also conscious at the same time that being stuck on music for too long can be a weakness and surely can become harmful; moreover, having to go back to my part-time job during the next months will take away a lot of time. That is why it's important for me to work fast and complete processes promptly and quickly. As Mixerman says: "I suppose the biggest problem with mixing what you've recorded is how insanely difficult can be to go back to big-picture thinking". (2021, p56)

I will need to study and put in place strategies to steer away from distractions and procrastination and strong focus will be key to stay on top of duties and succeed.

The secret combo is for you to come in, have a really great idea about what you want the song to be, then have the skill set to get the tracks to that point before you lose perspective because you're fatigued. (Kunkel, 2006, p189)

Having highlighted the key components of my plan and laying down clearly aims and objectives made me realize better than before how ambitious and challenging this project is going to be. I clearly understand that some of the difficulties I will encounter are hard to overcome and my skills are yet to be proven; at the same time I cannot wait to start and the excitement is hopefully going to help me where my technical knowledge will fail me. As KennyBeats reveals in a recent interview about his current success, the learning process never stops in this industry, even for an accomplished professional of his caliber: "I'm always trying to teach myself new skills so I can cover my blind spots". (2021)

That's exactly the type of journey I hope this project will take me on during the next few months.

Appendix

Sylvia Massy

PRODUCER

DISCOGRAPHY

PLAYLIST

Sylvia Massy

Rock bands who've been produced by the world famous Sylvia Massy (Prince, Seal, Aesop Rock, Tool, System Of A Down, Johnny Cash, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Smashing Pumpkins and Tom Petty), Rick Rubin's engineer.

Creative Sounds UK • 33 likes • 22 songs, 1 hr 53 min

Custom order

#	TITLE	ALBUM	DATE ADDED	
1	One Hot Minute Red Hot Chili Peppers	One Hot Minute (Deluxe Edition)	Aug 13, 2019	6:24
2	Unchained Johnny Cash	American II: Unchained	Aug 13, 2019	2:52
3	Climb That Hill Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers	She's the One (Songs and Music F...	Aug 13, 2019	3:58
4	Weak Shawn Anderson	Paranoid and Sunburst	Aug 13, 2019	3:32
5	Divine Intervention Slayer	Divine Intervention	Aug 13, 2019	5:33

Pharrell Williams Produced

PRODUCER

DISCOGRAPHY

PLAYLIST

Pharrell Williams Produced

Gregory Castel • 71 likes • 104 songs, 7 hr 4 min

Custom order

#	TITLE	ALBUM	DATE ADDED	
1	Milkshake - Radio Mix Kanye	Tasty	Mar 18, 2020	3:03
2	God Is a woman Ariana Grande	Sweetener	Dec 17, 2018	3:18
3	U Don't Have to Call Usher	8701	Aug 1, 2017	4:29
4	Blurred Lines Robin Thicke, T.I., Pharrell Williams	Blurred Lines (Deluxe)	Aug 1, 2017	4:24
5	Hot In Herre Nellyville	Nellyville	Mar 7, 2020	3:48

Kenny Beats - the complete playlist

PRODUCER

DISCOGRAPHY

PLAYLIST

Kenny Beats - the complete playlist

WOAH KENNY Music produced by Kenneth, ordered by release date.

Jordan Lelak • 1,941 likes • 231 songs, 8 hr 52 min

Custom order

#	TITLE	ALBUM	DATE ADDED	
1	Unusually Pine Foreign	Unusually	Apr 23, 2021	2:39
2	Ego ALLBLACK, Kenny Beats, Drake the ...	Ego	Apr 16, 2021	2:16
3	AINT GON STOP ME reggie, Monte Booker, Kenny Beats	AINT GON STOP ME	Mar 17, 2021	1:36
4	DIET 1.5 (Feat. Benny The Butcher) Denzel Curry, Kenny Beats, Benny The ...	UNLOCKED 1.5	Mar 8, 2021	2:24
5	'Cosmic' 4s [The Alchemist Versio... Denzel Curry, Kenny Beats, Joey Bada...	'Cosmic' 4s [The Alchemist Versio...	Feb 26, 2021	2:54

Marta Salogni

(produttrice/mixer/ingegnere del suono) x Rumore

DISCOGRAPHY

PLAYLIST

Marta Salogni

L'intervista a Marta Salogni, giovane produttrice, ingegnere del suono e mixer che ha lavorato all'ultimo album di Bork. Utopia.

Rumore Magazine • 64 likes • 30 songs, 2 hr 18 min

Custom order

#	TITLE	ALBUM	DATE ADDED	
1	The Gate - Edit Björk, Arca	The Gate (Edit)	Nov 12, 2017	3:56
2	Borders M.I.A.	AIM (Deluxe)	Nov 13, 2017	4:12
3	Swords M.I.A.	Metaholanth Scroll 01 "Broader Th...	Nov 13, 2017	2:24
4	In Time FKA twigs	MILLISSIX	Nov 13, 2017	4:32
5	Self Control FKA twigs	Blonde	Nov 13, 2017	4:10

Appendix A: Examples of Spotify playlists for production credits



Appendix B: Timeline planning

Strengths: - Hard working - Organized - Fast and decisive - Willing to improve - Ability to manage and bring in musicians when needed	Weaknesses: - Songwriting skills - Inexperience working on a project of this scale - If unsatisfied with a production, could get stuck and waste time and energies
Opportunities: - Practice on every level of production - Plenty of mixing practice - Several studios to book - Experimenting with recording techniques	Threats: - Workload - Studio availability - Artists availability and schedule - Part-time job consuming time

Appendix C: SWOT analysis

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