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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate and discuss my reasoning behind building my sample pack '***ALIEN[E]FFECTS***' containing a variety of vocal instruments. I will also be highlighting any significant discoveries or information that has stood out to me during the process of this creation.

To start I wanted to make a disclaimer that I am a singer and songwriter first, producer second. Saying that, as someone new to the producer game, I naturally found this assignment a little challenging. I know my strengths and creating an instrument is definitely not one of them. For weeks I circled around the idea of what type of instrument I wanted to create. Even asking the basic question, "*what is an instrument?*". I asked myself this several times. According to Merriam Webster, an instrument is "a device used to produce music. Also: a singing voice" (Webster. M, 2021). Then it dawned on me, my voice *IS* an instrument. I could hear someone in my head saying "use what you already have" and I was going to run with it. After contemplating for days what to do with my voice exactly, I decided I wanted to create a custom sample pack containing various vocal sounds recorded by me. Again as a producer in the making, I heavily rely on samples when I'm creating music, so this was right up my street.

RESEARCH

Sampling

I first started with the basic fundamentals of sampling to ensure I was on the correct path. To sample someone's music, simply means to reuse "a specific portion of an artist's sound recording" (Cornell. K, 2016) transforming it into a completely brand new piece of work. Samples can be implemented into your own musical works as an addition or they can be used as the foundation for a track (O'Bryan. J, 2020)). The original sound is normally compromised, leaving it different to its original. Many producers will take a sample and manipulate it with various plugin effects, such as EQ, tempo, reverb, compression, filtering and delay.

Thanks to much modern day music, sampling has become just “another tool in the modern creative arsenal”. Like the famous 808 drum machine, Roland TR-808, sampling has slowly swept onto our “collective unconscious” (Fintoni. L, 2016). It is very rare you will hear music that does not contain at least one sample. Your average listeners are most likely unaware that a sample is even being used, because of how considerably normalised it is. We live in ‘the age of the sample.’ (Fintoni. L, 2016), now more than ever. However sampling isn’t a new phenomenon that millennials invented in the last millenium. Musicians have been sampling sounds since 1948. Though it is often associated with Hip Hop music, for example Grand Mixer DST’s “*The Home Of Hip Hop*” who sampled the 1972 hit “Troglodyte” by The Jimmy Castor Bunch, the art of sampling dates back as far as 1940. In 1948, French musicologist and composer Pierre Schaeffer first publicly introduced the *Musique Concrete*, a form of musical composition that demonstrates a variety of music sounds as raw materials” (Patrick.J, 2016). This was also known as the first music hardware sampler to ever be used, changing the course of music production forever.

Unlike now, finding samples was not the simple and easy process we all know it is today. If you wanted to sample an existing recording, you couldn’t just turn on your smartphone and search endlessly through Spotify or Apple Music till you found the right song. Sampling meant you had to hunt around in record shops, sometimes travelling to different countries, immersing yourself in the culture (O’Bryan. J, 2020). It was a whole experience. Since that time, sampling has become many producers' best tool. Taking something that once was and creating it into a whole new entity or genre even.

Some may claim that sampling is “unoriginal” (Vultaggio. M, 2020) or “criminal” even (NPR, 2011). After Schaeffer’s life changing contribution, music producers were no longer subject to physical instruments and meant that they didn’t even have to learn how to play in order to make great sounding music. Scores and notation were a thing of the past (Patrick.J, 2016). Despite this proving true many still argue that sampling was a blessing and in fact an art form in itself (O’Bryan. J, 2020). Truth be told, many producers, especially bedroom producers (Vultaggio. M, 2020) rely on samples as a

way to demonstrate their creativity. Detroit born producer and icon J Dilla, is known as the pioneer of sampling within hip-hop culture (O'Bryan. J, 2020). Popularly known for his use of the Akai 2000, Dilla took sampling to a whole new place. Chopping, looping and quite frankly butchering a song till it was unrecognisable. A technique and skill that many producers till this day can not do as effectively.

For me personally, even as a child I have always admired sampling and have found it to be very creative in itself. To take the 1954 hit "*I Got A Woman*" by Ray Charles and transform it into what we all know today as "*Gold Digger*" by Kanye West is something I find mind blowing. There's something exciting about hearing a sample in your favourite artist's song and discovering the original track randomly, years later.

Sample Packs

During a time of Covid-19 where most people are isolated or working from the comfort of their homes, I thought this was a perfect time to create something that was accessible to everyone online. With limited human contact and access to singers, many would benefit from having the ability to incorporate these sounds into their music, without having to leave their homes. In March 2019, research company Statista (Statista Research Department, 2021) showed that Splice, a cloud based music platform, had over 2.5 million subscribers, majority being music producers. This number would increase rapidly as Covid-19 hit, nearly doubling by the end of 2020. These results meant that producers were finding ways to become completely independent and liberated (O'Bryan. J, 2020) from needing session singers or other musicians in order to complete tracks.

Unlike sampling where a piece of music already exists, sample packs are normally created from scratch. With a variety of instruments including but not excluded piano chords, guitar riffs, backing vocals or melodies. Producers are still able to demonstrate their creativity, but with royalty-free sounds. In the last 10 years, there have been several legal cases surrounding the issue with sampling and copywriting. In January 2021, American rapper Nicki Minaj, settled a three year copyright dispute with singer

and songwriter Tracy Chapman (Savage. M, 2021). Minaj ended up paying a total of \$450,000 to Chapman after mistakenly using a portion of her song “*Baby Can I Hold You Tonight*” in her song “Sorry”. This is only one of many ongoing problems that surround sampling.

There are several different types of sample packs, depending on your intention. The most popular type is a loop pack, containing a collection of single sounds, melodies or chords, that create a pleasing rhythmic pattern when looped. One Shots are another variety of sample packs that are deemed as quite popular. Often described as the “single word in a sentence” (Rudemuzik.C, 2021), one shots can be random or melodic sounds that create emphasis on a song, or bring an extra feeling to an already existing piece of music.

Examples

During my research I sought inspiration from other artists in the game, particularly those that I admired. Producer and songwriter Dark Child was someone who struck up inspiration. Not only was he a dominant force in 90s R&B, but it was inspiring to see him still making an impact on music, 20 years later. His sample pack “*Sounds of Dark 1*” was released on Splice earlier this year containing some of his signature drum loops and percussive sounds. Maria Dahlstrøm from Denmark is another artist on Splice’s long list of musicians who have graced us with their own unique sounds. Different from Dark Child, Maria has over 100 sounds including luscious vocal loops that are perfect for those who need something extra in their tracks.

Hardware Vs Software

Most sampling was done using a hardware sampler, such as the MK II Mellotron. A sampler, popularised by John Lennon from The Beatles, or the Akai MPC 2000, which was known for the famous 808 drum pattern. However in this new technology based world that we currently live in today, samplers are often incorporated into our software systems, making them more accessible.

INTRODUCING ‘ALIEN[E]FFECTS’

Alien Effects, branded as “**ALIEN[E]FFECTS**” is a unique vocal sample pack, carefully curated by myself, containing a collection of one shot and looped vocal samples. The name ‘**ALIEN[E]**’ is a play on my second name, ‘*Aliene*’ and is also directly related to my obsession with astronomy. I have been building my Brand ‘**ALIEN[E]**’ for over 5 years, so to name my sample pack **ALIEN[E]FFECTS** was a natural and divine driven discovery. Prior to my assignment I was in the studio with a friend of mine where we birthed the song “Alien Babe”. I had already figured out the foundation of the beat and written the lyrics, however I sought help from a professional producer to help me tie everything together into a whole song.

On countless occasions I have been told I have a distinctive tone, so I wanted to create a sample pack that reflects my unique style of singing, making it easy to identify to listeners. The samples are intended for producers to use in their musical productions (Rudemuzik.C, 2021), where they are able to manipulate each individual sound to accommodate their own track. All instruments are compatible with every DAW and MIDI controller keyboard. Vocals can be manipulated with plugins and transformed to achieve the producer’s desired sound. The pack will be hosted in Splice, an online sample library, which is available on a monthly subscription basis.

CREATING THE SOUND

When it came round to creating the actual sounds, the first thing I thought about was the originality of the pack. I wanted to create sounds that were familiar and gave a sense of nostalgia, but also something new and fresh. They needed to represent me fully or I was worried they would sound like every other vocal pack available online. My love for 90s R&B has always inspired my song writing, in particular my melodies, therefore I wanted to take this inspiration and implement it within my pack. With a tone similar to the musician Brandy, I knew that it would sound familiar to listeners. This was one of my

main aims for ***ALIEN[E]FFECTS***. I wanted to create a set of sounds that overtime would become part of every musician's subconscious, similar to the 808s.

Though most sample packs contain over 30 samples, I was short on time and did not want to submit a folder of 30 plus mediocre sounds, just for the sake of it. So I decided on a solid 10 samples, which I would find manageable.

The sample pack contains the following:

1. 4 Individual Backing Vocals
2. 2 Signature Marika Ad Libs
3. 2 Harmonies in both E flat minor key

All sounds that can easily be incorporated into any genre of music or style of choice.

Recording the vocals

Recording my vocals was trickier than I imagined. Though I am used to recording my vocals independently, I had to bear in mind the purpose of my sample pack, which I tended to forget. I wasn't just simply recording vocals for a new track, I was recording with intention. I needed to add enough effects on my vocals to give the feeling of out of space, but also leave them raw enough for producers to later manipulate themselves.

I recorded all my vocals in Logic Pro on a track I have been writing entitled *Alien Babe*. Another branch off of my alien themed tree. I chose to create them within a song, rather than sing them acapella because I wanted an authentic performance on my behalf. I managed to get takes that I was content with, therefore happily moved on to the mixing element of this process. Singing the word "alien" I wanted a direct implication of the overall theme throughout this project. My most comfortable key to sing in E flat Minor. I believe it highlights my best vocal abilities, therefore I wanted to perform all sounds in this key. It also represents the E in "***ALIEN[E]FFECTS***". When played separately each backing vocal individually pronounces the sounds "A", "Lee", "En" and "Oh". When

played together this sounds the word alien. The intention behind this is that producers can play these in a loop, separately or in a completely different order.

I then proceeded by adding a mild reverb using *Space Designer*, a stock plugin on Logic Pro. I desired an effect that transported listeners to a wider atmosphere, as if they literally were in space. This would later become a distinctive feature throughout the sample pack and also known as the “*alien effect*”. I recorded my backing vocals, harmonies and ad libs using my Se Electronics X1A microphone in my bedroom, really playing on the theme of the bedroom producer. My room has pretty high ceilings which nicely allows sound to bounce off of. A useful method I learnt from my lecturer James during my recording lessons. This combined with the reverb gave me an almost psychedelic, airy feel when performing. In *Space Designer* I opted for the plate preset entitled “R&B Plate” simply because it fits the theme. I chose this specific setting because plate reverbs are great for adding brightness and allowing higher frequencies to be heard first. My intention was to have the soundwaves bounce back and forth around my bedroom, hopefully giving an airy yet full sound.

I then added a slight delay using *Tape Delay*. Another stock plugin that comes complimentary with Logic Pro. I tried to visualise myself in space and what that would sound like. I pictured me floating around in this never ending blackness with my microphone. I then went on to search for Sci-Fi sounds or music scores to get some inspiration. I wanted a very slight echo after each vocal, but not too much where it overpowered the vocal.

In the beginning I struggled with the harmonies. My first set that I recorded sounded quite terrible in all honesty, I put that down to panic and fear of not finishing this assignment on time. Though many of my friends around me argued that I had an ample amount of time, I am someone that doesn't like to rush, therefore could feel the sense of panic taking over as I went to record my harmonies the first time. I decided to discard these and start again. I recorded in stereo to try and achieve a more surround sound. I

panned the higher and lower harmonies on the left and right, creating a fuller feel almost like a choir.

For each vocal sample I used the inbuilt *Channel EQ* that comes with Logic. Again I did not want to add too many plugins to the vocals because it wouldn't leave room for producers to sample at their own disposal. I added a high pass filter, allowing the higher frequencies of my vocals to pass through, ultimately accomplishing a much brighter vocal. This nicely complimented my natural light and airy vocals, yet still kept the dry and natural recording. The EQ was used to enhance my vocals, ensuring they sound best in my bedroom environment, as well as within a song.

HOW 'ALIEN[E]FFECTS' WORKS

Out of the whole process getting your sample sounds to work in a DAW is a rather simple and quick process.

Splice

To use the sample pack in your music, producers must first sign up to Splice. Splice is one of the most popular and viable cloud-based sample libraries, with over one million samples, loops, presets and plugins. Artists can choose to buy a monthly subscription at \$5.99 a month where they have unlimited access to '**ALIEN[E]FFECTS**' and thousands of other packs to choose from. If this option is not desired then members can opt for a pay-as-you-go payment, only buying that instrument they use. Users must have downloaded the Splice desktop app in order to use instruments effectively. Here you can search directly for the sample pack.

Each instrument download deducts one credit from your Splice account. Before committing to a particular sound, you can preview it and review information such as the key and tempo.

DAWs

Once an instrument has been downloaded, you can open your chosen DAW. I am most familiar with Logic, however I did my research on Ableton and Protools, to discover that both have a very similar method for importing samples. All sounds can be dragged directly from the Splice desktop application to your file browser or finder folder. Once you have your desired sound drag this to your DAWs software sampler. In Logic this the *Quick Sampler*, however Ableton's *Sampler* and *Structure Free* in Pro Tools are great alternatives.

Midi Keyboards

Once you have your samplers set up, you can then move on to creating. Each sample can be mapped with any given MIDI keyboard or controller, making your performance more authentic and organic. I personally was using the M-Audio Axiom Air Mini 32 keyboard to test out the samples. Sounds can then be played in chronological order, separately or placed in the producer's desired form.

REFLECTION

Overall I was rather pleased with my final results. Of course there is always room for improvement. Given the opportunity and resources I would have made a few changes.

Looking back if I could change one thing about my project it would be the quantity of my sample pack. From my previous experience using samples and the research found, most packs contain anything between 30 and 50 samples. However due to lack of time I was only able to make ten sounds that I was happy with. If time was on my side I would have chosen to make 30 samples for producers to choose from, maybe varying in instruments, but I choose quality over quantity. I knew I did not have the efficient amount of time to produce such a body of work to such a high standard. As mentioned previously I struggled with deciding on what instrument I was going to create in the beginning of this assignment process, due to my lack of knowledge. This unfortunately meant that I was delayed in the process of creation, which resulted in only 10 sounds. Despite my regrets, I was happy with the sounds that I did manage to create.

In order to achieve a more distinctive, acoustic, space-like effect that I sought after, I would have opted for a better reverb plugin than the one I used. Though *Space Designer* is a great stock plugin and contains a variety of plate presets, there are more advanced software reverbs that provide the exact sound that I desired. *Space Designer* is mainly a convolution reverb, therefore it stimulates a more realistic sounding room (Robinson, G. 2019). As a vocalist I would normally be satisfied with my vocals sounding more natural, however for the purpose of this project I desired a more artificial sound, to fit with the out of space theme. Given the resources I would have chosen to use *Movement by Output*, A popular all-in-one plugin used by music producer Timbaland (Master Class. 2020). Timberland recently produced the album *Space and Time*, by singer and songwriter Justine Skye. The album includes a lot of elements on her vocals that I would have liked on my sample pack. When listening to the album, in particular the reverb, I could hear the character throughout the song.

I attempted to use Chromaverb within Logic to achieve this extraterrestrial sound that I was after, however I was left quite underwhelmed with the results. Chromaverb is a software reverb consisting of 14 different types of algorithms, so naturally after doing my research I expected one of these to help me reach my desired sound. Not that I have ever visited space myself, but in my imagination it must sound very airy, with a great deal of echo.

To conclude this essay, I can proudly say that '**ALIEN[E]FFECTS**' is a great extension of my brand '**ALIEN[E]**'. In the future I hope to revisit this sample pack, expanding on what I have already created and completing it to the standard that I fully desire.

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