

Creation Module - Element 2b - Reflective Commentary

Presentation, discussion and a detailed and comprehensive account of the complete process of production for the final project in the MA Commercial Music Producer course with Tileyard Education. Complete description of the final product and analysis of the work with its many different aspects, documenting what proved successful and areas in need for improvement for future projects.

Reflecting upon the process itself, methods used, ideas, research, obstacles, struggles, solutions and measures taken towards the ultimate outcome. I will be comparing the final results and the conclusions made throughout the project (and after the fact) with the intention behind this project and the bench-marks I have set for success in the proposal, including a plan for personal development, moving my career to the next level, equipped with newly acquired knowledge, insight and experience.

What a year. Thinking about a way to describe the period of time from enrolling to university to this moment, writing these words to describe a project which is the culmination of it all. Words fail to describe how much of a roller coaster it has been, on every level imaginable— eventful would be a complete understatement.

With the entire world struggling in the face of uncertainty and collapse of whole industries and social structures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Personally, finding myself not being able to work all of a sudden, being a very active and busy musician, playing concerts and events alongside developing my solo career as a singer-songwriter, playing gigs with my live band and spending days in venues, rehearsal spaces and recording studios, mostly around London. Finding out about the MA course seemed like the best thing to do in a time where other people

were desperate for any sort of distraction during lockdowns, but also a very positive way to forward my career and extend my network, which is probably THE most important asset in the music business, an opinion which the course has only strengthened, being more aware of the different music business communities, having more insight into how things actually work, and it has never been so apparent to me that the old “who you know” is the key to success— given well developed people skills and talent(s), although the latter may seem less important at times, which upsets the artist in me and at the same time intrigues the producer that I am.

This project concludes my MA course which has been a highly enjoyable challenge. Throughout the course I have made countless contacts in the music industry as well as friends. I have extended my personal knowledge whilst augmenting my expertise and technical abilities. My ability to take on more work and handle it efficiently has improved massively, being able to produce high quality tracks in commercial standards more quickly, raising the bar higher and higher.

My mixing skills are improving exponentially, thanks to the constant feedback on various tasks from my teachers, peers and fellow students, A&Rs from different record labels on A&R sessions, playback sessions, listening parties and songwriting camps that provided an incredibly important sense of collaboration which I have missed terribly as so many other people on a global scale during the passed year. The songwriting camps have also brought back the intensity of the studio, which takes pushing yourself harder in order to bring out the best performance where time is scarce and the thrill of racing against time, not to mention the joy and satisfaction at the end of the working day.

Setting up for a highly ambitious project after presenting a proposal comprised of three different elements, each having the potential of becoming 'stand-alone', elaborate projects on their own, I knew I was facing an outstanding challenge. The feedback and advice I was given by both the senior academic manager at Tileyard Ciaran Robinson and musical director Sean Hargreaves was to focus on one of the elements, yet I was determined to try and work on all three.

On the menu I have originally had two musical projects and the formation of an independent music management group.

The first musical project 'Band E.P.' (working title) had to be put on hold for several reasons, although I believe it would be completed in the future. However it had quickly become apparent that it would not be possible to complete the project in time to make the deadline.

Travelling from my home in North West London to Rosewood studios in Redhill, Surrey, in order to complete the recordings and mixing was literally impossible with the UK being under lockdown. The idea of completing the recording elsewhere and mixing the project myself was not accepted by the studios, and sadly the communication has stopped, despite several attempts on my end.

I have learned a highly valuable lesson and drawn important conclusions from this experience.

This project has started as a friendly gesture towards myself and one of my bandmates which made a very enjoyable and fun experience, however the absence of a time-frame, agreed working budget, terms of work and a deadline has proven to be dangerous and harmful to the project.

It's disappointing when people allow themselves to "flake-out" on a project, especially when people whom they consider as their friends, who have made great efforts to bring a project to life, putting in many hours and days.

Friends can be fickle, friendships and relationships come and go, however that's not an excuse to be unprofessional on a moral level, so the most important lesson learned from this experience was two-fold: firstly, in future projects, I will do whatever I possibly can in order to narrow down other people's control over my projects and most importantly, setting a time-frame, budget and having a clear idea of the roles each person takes in the project and matching expectations, so everyone is on the same page.

I admit that this sort of management doesn't come naturally to me as an artist, but that is definitely something I can only be firm about in the future, as this is the second time in my career where a big project I was invested in had faded away to incompleteness due to an unprofessional behaviour from a friend who either could not deliver or perhaps didn't care enough, at the same time I'm truly hoping this project would be completed in the future, as the songs and performances were absolutely fantastic.

The music management group has taken a similar turn, although it is still going.

We started off on a very positive note, four keen Tileyard Education students from different disciplines, doing research and A&R work around and developing my brand, coming up with a marketing strategy around the release of my debut solo album 'Mercury Retrograde' released earlier this year and started forming a large database, which has grown to impressive measures, containing relevant contacts and divided by categories: Spotify Playlist Curators, Media(blogs & magazines), Radio and Management/A&R.

The group started weekly meetings, discussing our work and setting goals to achieve weekly progress. Although we could only meet online via Zoom software, we managed to be very productive, and we started making plans to get together and create promotional content whilst planning future events.

Our first event was an online listening party, which proved very successful and fun, people's responses were very positive and the participants showed great enthusiasm and interest in the music, during the event I answered questions, told stories and ended up doing an impromptu short acoustic set where I played 3 songs. The event was held via Eventbrite, which was my first personal experience using this platform and it was a hassle-free success so I am planning to continue using it for future events.

As an avid swimmer I suggested we name our group 'Swim' which everyone accepted instantly. A Google account was set and I went on and designed us a logo (Appendix A). In the logo I did to include the first words of description of the word

'Swim' in the Oxford Dictionary of English which is "propel the body through water"(Oxford, 2020) which I find beautiful and matching the spirit of the way I have always brought myself forward in the world, particularly in music, which has always been my "ticket" to the world.

In general, we discussed the appearance of my brand on social media platforms, Pulling the brand tighter, talking about the message, the style and uniqueness. Thanks to guidance and approval from Ella Hally who has taught us Music Industry Marketing during the Development Module, I had the confidence to develop my logo (Appendix B) and my short bio for an EPK (Appendix C), marketing me as a 'Millennial Beat-Poet', capturing my psychedelic sixties influences and modern approach and subjects.

Thanks to Swim Music Group, I have finally figured out and joined TikTok which I am still experimenting with, but certainly feeling more focused than before. The dynamics within our group is very pleasant, and all parties believe in the brand's potential very strongly.

Understandably, as the group is composed of students, having their own personal projects, assignments and responsibilities, the group is on hiatus until things calm down and everyone would have more of their precious time to invest in the project.

The Idea of creating a music management, which is a cooperative, based on passion and love for music, where all contributing parties can grow together, each in their field is still something I'm interested in developing, and I'm having several candidates with whom I'm in communication.

I see the team behind an artist as massively important and possibly the most important asset an artist can have, particularly an up-and-coming independent artist. I find working in groups motivating, which, being honest, has been my biggest challenge throughout this year. It's important to realise what works for you and what doesn't to avoid frustration and negative feelings toward future projects.

However, with all things considered I decided to focus on the second musical project and extend the working titled '**Quarantine**' EP into a 6-track album– '**Apocalypse**'. An anthology and a timepiece, made of personal stories and observations about these times, packed with symbolism and philosophy which manifests and correlates with the brand and idea of the 'Millennial Beat-Poet', taking inspiration from Jack Kerouac, Kurt Vonnegut, Bob Dylan and the Beatles– to be a voice of a generation.

The project originally came to life when a dear friend and colleague Ariel Shafir and I came up with an idea to do an album inspired by Supergrass' 1999 self-titled album, also known as "the X-ray album" (Parlophone, 1999).

Working with Ariel is a true blessing. As a Berklee graduate Drummer, with Rock-and-Roll in his veins, who produces Incredible warm analog sounds at the legendary Dreamland studios in Woodstock, New York, in which he is a resident– Ariel is every songwriter's dream to work with, not to mention his reliability and professionalism or the fact he is one of my favourite people.

Other guest appearances on the album from very close friends such as the incredible Mayda Narvey on Cello, Naaman Shadmi on Hammond organ in 'TikTok Superstar' and Marley Owen Le-Bozec on bass in 'My Day Means Time', on which I could feel as if we all got together and played, which during lockdown in the English winter, it was very emotional to feel how much love and attention these dear people have put in recording their instruments to my songs so beautifully.

As Peter Hook lists first in his "Ten Commandments" of starting a band in the introduction to his excellent book about New Order 'Substance: Inside New Order'– "Always play with your mates"(Hook, p.4).

Using vintage instruments I own (mostly guitars and effect pedals) and the incredibly wide selection of vintage drum-sets, organs, synthesisers, microphones and tape-machines at Dreamland I was able to attain that sound. Since I can't go to New York and be present in the studio this time due to lockdown, my tracks are being recorded digitally, mostly in my home-studio in North-West London. They are then passed through and recorded to tape, using many studio effects such as re-amping my guitars and passing vocals through a genuine Leslie speaker for a rotating effect,

to name a couple. Having a solid rock-and-roll drummer who is also a Berklee graduate to play on the record and having been able to record at such amazing facilities has been a massive privilege. The fact that we communicate so naturally as musicians and long-time friends only adds to that “band-like” feeling, which is also crucial to the sound and type of performance we are aiming for.

The range of sounds we have been generating so far with songs such as ‘Apocalypse’, ‘2020 Year Zero’ and ‘Quarantine’ are definitely hitting the mark on achieving styles inspired by the work Radiohead, Led Zeppelin, The Velvet Underground, The Dandy Warhols and Supergrass. It will be very interesting to see how the project will turn out after the analog mix and mastering at Sterling Sound Studios in New York.

During the work on the album, nineties “one-hit-wonder” group ‘The Goo-Goo Dolls’ have unexpectedly taken over Dreamland studios to make a new album, which meant that the studios will be occupied until early July, which caused a bit of stress. Luckily we have already recorded the majority of the tracks, apart from drums to a couple of tracks, which were eventually recorded at a private studio, owned by Ariel's colleague at dreamland John Mac, who has helped us with the production from the start and played an old Farfisa organ on ‘Apocalypse’, maintaining the analog and vintage spirit of this production. However, we couldn’t find a studio to mix at, so the decision was made to mix the album myself, using the tracks we have been recording to tape, plus the digitally recorded tracks passed through the old Studer tape-machine at Dreamland Studios.

With songs dealing with such troubled times on a global scale, times of isolation, loneliness and uncertainty, I was inspired to start working on the visual side of this project. I commissioned a very talented photographer in Poland to take photos of a beautiful field of sunflowers outside of the city of Poznan.

Those images of a field full of yellow flowers, has brought to the album the association of freedom and the sunny open-air reminiscent of a festival crowd, photographed from a helicopter hovering above the happening. For me this triggers feelings of nostalgia and optimism for a brighter future. The end result for the artwork design had immediately reminded me of Storm Thorgersons’ artwork designs for Pink Floyd Albums, which obviously made me very happy (Appendix D).

The contrast between hope and reality will be accentuated by switching the clear blue sky in the original photos with one of a fiery red sky I captured in London with my camera. This reminded me of the artwork to Red Hot Chilli Peppers classic 1999 album 'Californication' (Warner, 1999), which also creates a dissonance between luxury or beauty and freedom and a sense of alienation and danger which still resonates with me from the albums' release.

As a keen Tarot card reader, I am trained to spot symbolism and the aesthetics of the artwork resembles a Tarot card. The meaning of Tarot cards lie within their symbolism and value in Numerology.

As you can see, uncharacteristically to sunflowers that normally turn their faces onto the sun, are turning away from the sun, telling us perhaps of a coming change or warning us from danger, showing us that something isn't right.

The number of rays around the sun is 18 which reduces to 9.

The number nine is a number symbolising endings, the final stage and moments before the completion of one cycle and the beginning of another, which seemed ever so appropriate to a project titled 'Apocalypse', therefore I decided to include the number 18 in the artwork and later to design my own Tarot card (Appendix E), to perhaps include as a give-away print with a physical copy of the album or sell as merchandise.

The Tracks:

'Tiktok Superstar (Internet Crook)'

Inspired by The Who's cover version of Eddie Cochran's 'Summertime Blues' (Decca, 1967), famously played in the legendary 1969 Woodstock Festival.

Perhaps in the absence of live performances due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I, like many others, have missed the atmosphere of a good old sweaty and loud live gig at a rock venue which used to be my reality in the pre-covid days.

This is a somewhat grim, yet humoristic and painfully sarcastic view of the music industry today and loosely inspired by commercial briefs we students have been presented with throughout the course.

The reversed vocals in the outro is another 'Easter-Egg' if you like;

In my entry essay about recording and production techniques in 1960's psychedelic rock I have addressed two groundbreaking sounds from the Beatles on Their 1966 double sided single 'Rain'/'Paperback Writer' (Parlophone, 1966) that in many way The reversed phrase I'm singing is actually a bit from the song itself– my secret is safe with you, I'm sure.

'2020 Year Zero'

An apocalyptic account of my view of a year which changed everything and the opportunity it offers to perhaps start a new in many different ways with the sense of "anything could happen" and our old sense of control over this world or over this life has completely shattered, exposing us humans as most vulnerable as we have been in generations.

'Quarantine'

A rock ballad, describing a fantasy of the wonderful life you could have or wanted to have with the woman of my dreams during the lonely days of lockdown.

Once again taking this idea of treating this project as a culmination of the MA course as a whole, I was toying with the idea to incorporate the musical instrument which I was assigned to build and develop on the Development Module. For that task I have created 'The Strudel', which is an amplified DIY musical box with in-built spring reverb unit, creating unique and very interesting soundscapes, varying between dreamy and eerie sounds. An idea I had for a melodic loop has been chosen for the Studel's moment of glory in recorded music.

'My Day Means Time'

Another Ballad, describing the experience of suddenly having more time on your hands to simply live your life and focus on self-care and taking care of those important to you, which brings a sense of freedom and perhaps comfort in the break we have been given from the "race" which is life in the modern world.

‘If I Could Wait’

I find this track very unique and unpredictable on many different levels with inclusion of 8-bit sounds and synthesisers. This is a song about soul-searching and in a sense— over-thinking, thinking about the ‘what if’s, and worrying that we’ve made the wrong choices, feeling desperate for something real to happen, dismissing that fact that real life happens all the time and we shouldn’t get stuck in the past.

‘Apocalypse’

The title track for the album lists ideas of what a person might want for the end of the world, a sort of “shopping-list” if you like, what I may want for the apocalypse suggesting myself to the world as their “rock star for the apocalypse”.

A track which is strongly faithful to Supergrass style, sound and cheekiness.

Mixing the track myself in my home studio was a massive challenge. I have found the advice from the past three terms extremely helpful. A remarkable improvement to my mixing process was new skills and methods I have learned such as ‘side-chain’ compression, EQing and ‘Bussing’ I mastered during the Development Module from Ciaran Robinson, I also learned how to use compression more moderately than I did in the past, which made a tremendous difference, and the importance of having your own template for mixing on the Foundation Module from Dov Waterman, and later from Goetz Botzenhardt. I even started assigning colours to the different tracks and groups in my projects. Those new skills have made me a far better mixer and I am very proud of my mixes now and the ability to be more independent in my productions.

Alongside the ‘Apocalypse’ album, I decided to finish and include another couple of tracks that I am very happy with, recorded in the enchanting Cowshed Studios in Bounds Green, North London, an old analogue studio where great musicians and bands from the 1960’s have made great sounds, including John Lennon.

‘**Girl**’ is a love note to a beautiful Swiss girl I met once after a gig (these days seem so far away now, but I’m staying optimistic nevertheless). A soft ballad played mostly

live to tape with my live band 'The Delilahs', which is according to my mentor Jon Kelly– “your finest work yet”.

'Millennials' is an internet age take on the Who's 'My Generation'(Decca, 1965), which caught the attention of Tileyard Music in an A&R session, not too long ago. Yet another sarcastic view from your's truly on our times and the way my generation is handling them in several aspects of life. I have only managed to play this song twice on stage before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, however I can still hear the crowd singing along with us by the second chorus, which is exactly the response and reaction I am trying to do when writing a song.

Both songs were mastered in collaboration between two of Israel's top mastering engineers: Eyal Leon Katzav (ELK, also known as 'the Chief') and Reuven Shapiro.

When thinking about the role of the producer and what it means to be a good producer, a few main ideas come to mind. Being a producer is definitely taking the driver's seat and bringing the absolute best out of everything and everyone around you. It is capturing and very often creating a moment and having the insight and intuition to spot it– a special moment in time where something real is happening in the room and translating that to recorded art, I always think about Butch Vig's story of recording the haunting 'Something In the Way' during the production of the seminal 'Nevermind' album (DGC, 1991), where they weren't quite sure what to do with the song, and suddenly as Kurt Cobain was quietly playing and singing the song to himself in the control room, Vig spotted that moment, turned off the air conditioning, kicks everybody out of the control room, only to capture that moment and atmosphere. This story is told beautifully in the wonderful documentary about the making of the 'Nevermind' album 'Classic Albums: Nirvana - Nevermind' (Shand and Kempin, 2005).

Being the producer is being a magician, making dreams come true for others and for yourself.

The bigger the opportunities get, so does the volume of work, the different factors involved are often increased, and SHOULD increase, as I concluded earlier, when I meditated upon the importance of having a solid team of professionals, who are also

keen, passionate and committed to the project.

This project has also taught a most valuable lesson in separating personal relationships and work. From a commercial and professional point of view, there should only be one objective, which is to come out of the project with a product which suits a standard which was premeditated and decided upon during the pre-production period. Being brought up in a family where family-based businesses have been held successfully for generations and the beginning of my own professional career in a band with my older brother and two childhood friends, not to mention my nature and personality which always strives to always be open and personal with people in my life, bringing them closer and treating them as family, can create various tensions in a professional environment. Without going into personal details, having an emotional imbalance between yourself and the people with whom you work could be catastrophic to the productiveness of any project, and those should be avoided, for the sake of the products, in this case— music, which very often ends up being the victim of egos clashing and going out of control. As the producer, one has to own that control, finding the way to reach middle grounds and making people feel comfortable in order to allow a peaceful working environment. Writing these words is bringing me to think about Sir George Martin, and the way he has handled mediating between the four members of the Beatles, particularly between John Lennon and Paul McCartney for so many years, being able to facilitate their whims and rows, and often completely mad ideas, standing as a solid pillar to balance their egos and competition into harmony.

My mentor Jon Kelly, who has known and worked with both Sir Martin AND Sir McCartney over the years, has shared with me some brilliant stories and insight from working with these men. Both Jon and George Martin are soft-spoken gentlemen who are immensely empathic and great listeners who are true music fans, having the ability to focus on what's important and finding the best ways to bring the best out of artists with kindness and empathy.

As a personal development plan for the future, I would say that focusing on finding the right team to work with, with emphasis on management, so all the different tasks and areas are covered according to a strategy we agree upon, creating more opportunities to maximise and capitalise from the music, which its potential has

been well noted within the Tileyard community and beyond, receiving praises and saying my catalogue is a gold-mine for publishing.

Yet, most importantly, I will be keeping on writing and producing catchy, interesting and heartfelt 'Bangers' and maintaining the mental stability to do so. Staying strong, believing in yourself and having resilience are to me amongst the most important qualities to nurture and maintain if one wishes to succeed in the music business and life— particularly if you have something special to offer, preferably something other people don't, and if you want it badly enough. As a former film student and a fan of 'Rocky' films which have inspired me deeply, I would include a little nugget of the philosophy behind the films, which is about winning and facing your deepest fears and what is truly important in life. The Rocky story teaches us that it's not about winning the fight— it's about going the distance! (I encourage you to try reading that with the Stallone voice). It's all about the journey, the story and the love.

Certainly a massive attribute of the course was the constant challenges to master several new fields of craftsmanship that are not necessarily my forte, from making video presentation, looking into computer game designing, building instruments and working within different musical genres, outside of my comfort-zone and overall encouraging me to push myself forward towards becoming a better professional— a master.

I am thrilled to have joined the Tileyard community and am looking forward to bringing to fruition the countless new collaborations with fellow students and amazing people I have met throughout this MA course, which has been one the best life and career choices I have taken.

Lastly I wish to thank my teachers, the amazing professionals I have had the honour to learn from and meet absolute legends throughout this course, particularly to my incredible mentor Jon Kelly, who's been working with many of my idols yet treated me as equal, which is a lot for a kid from Herzliya, Israel, dreaming about making music in the land of the Beatles and Pink Floyd (I still haven't had a proper meat-pie nor garden-cress with my egg sandwiches, which to me was as important as discovering the LA-2A electro-optical tube-compressor).

Jon is a model of humbleness and kindness, very supportive and gives incredible feedback. To me, working with him was like working with George Martin.

Special thanks to Ciaran Robinson, who has truly been supportive and always there to help and encourage, and make this experience which was somewhat overwhelming at times— much easier. An absolute gentleman and mastermind who's also a pleasure to learn from. I hope we stay friends in the future.

Bibliography

Supergrass. *Supergrass (X-ray Album)*, Parlophone, 1999.

<https://open.spotify.com/album/7fAfHvKNHlQav4CtSN7Iqz?si=ImgxG-1yROGylxY3HL7AFw>

Red Hot Chilli Peppers. *Californication*, Warner Bros, 1999.

https://open.spotify.com/album/0fLhefnjllV3pGNF9Wo8CD?si=pSGx0uRGQ_yoDc68cMaUtg

Shand, T and Kempin, G. *Nirvana - Nevermind, Classic Albums*, Eagle Rock Entertainment Ltd, 2005.

Lennon, J and McCartney, Paul. *Rain/Paperback Writer*, Parlophone, 1966.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/48TNLcToLs8DWkdj5vYdiW?si=5550063f416a43e4>

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0Ui8KPWZbJJQ2Y0CIQuVqX?si=acb41980f2ea4f66>

The Who. *My Generation*, Decca, 1965.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2EMmHEhCZSMMEM85HTFJvj?si=2481c6f681864613>

The Who. *Summertime Blues*, Decca, 1967.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3akHFIHXowtVTTjY4QQvPC?si=8ca4801e679b48b8>

Oxford University. *Oxford Dictionary of English*, version 11.7.712, Oxford University Press, 2020.

Hook, P. *Substance: Inside New Order*, Simon & Schuster UK, 2016.

Cobain, K. *Something in the Way, Nevermind*, Parlophone, 1991.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/16LgXyNShQbrqBRF4TT1Sr?si=93a04ca0a5354d32>

Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D

Appendix E