

Berklee College of Music

Sing with Me: Reborn

CE Reflective Paper

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1. Summary

I have chosen an operational project, where I produced a total of six recordings in order to test the global audience on international release strategy. As a result, I was able to produce an EP in three languages (Korean, English, Spanish) and three genres (Piano Trio, Rock, and Remix). As an artist, I have tested the role language plays in a song, and which language is the most popular one for a release; as a songwriter, I tested the genre to see if my song will transcend different genres, and test if these new genres will bring new hype into my music. The ultimate goal was to form a pre-release international strategy as a K-Indie artist, provide tools for other emerging artists in Korea who need global strategy, and solidify my hybrid identity as an artist and a business professional.

In order to form my international release strategy, I have conducted a survey on 200 people from three main global music markets – English-speaking countries such as US, UK, and Canada; Spanish-speaking countries such as Spain and Latin America; and Korea. I have compiled their nationality, language skills and genre preference, in order to see if those factors play a significant role in their choice of favorite version for my songs in varying languages and genres. In addition, I have gathered data on their demographics and email for future marketing purpose.

In MIDEM 2019, a group of K-pop panels in a session called “The Year K-Pop Broke in USA” highlighted multilingual release as a new niche trend, mentioning a successful case of one of the panel members WENGIE as a pioneer for multilingual songs as her key strategy. According to IFPI’s survey in 2018, Pop, Rock, and EDM were the top three genres of the world ; There have been successful cases of string players whose covers expanded the original song’s target audience, in the case of The Legend of Zelda’s cover by Lindsey Sterling and One Republic-Secret’s cover by Piano Guys. I base my choice of multi-languages and multi-genres for testing global audience upon these examples.

2. Results

The project aligned with my original plan in that I was able to produce a total of six recordings, with three different languages and three different genres. The project did not align with my original plan in that I had to shift my post-release market test strategy to pre-release market test strategy, in the fact that my original intention was to release the recordings first and test the market later. As I did not have a market release strategy, I have changed my focus to test the market first before releasing the recordings. In the end, my change of plan in market analysis actually resulted in strengthening my global release strategy for the future.

Originally, I planned to release my song in five different stages and test the real market with data from streaming platforms. However, I changed my plan to surveying the audience before the release. This modification had two benefits. First, instead of my original plan of releasing in five stages, I modified the plan to release all tracks at once, which will draw more attention globally. During the MIDEM conference of “How K-pop Broke in the USA,” the panel mentioned that unlike other global singles, EPs and albums, K-Pop has a strategy of releasing everything at once. Although BIGBANG’s strategy was releasing a single per few weeks regularly, their release strategy is outdated; the current trend in K-Pop is releasing everything at once, including tracks, music videos, and merchandises. Part of the competitive advantage of Netflix is its ability to let the viewers binge-watch all episodes at once, with the exception of few current shows. Second, by conducting a survey before releasing this EP in the market, I could see a quantitative data on people’s preference of languages and genres, and also gain qualitative feedbacks for future developments of my songs.

In addition, my assumption before the survey was that more people would prefer the languages they speak and genre they prefer. However, from the survey result, it was interesting to see that two of the three main markets, those from English-speaking countries and those from Spanish-speaking countries, chose versions that were different from their main languages.

Also, regarding genre, although currently the most popular genre is Pop, Rock, and EDM, and people chose their generally preferred genre, surprisingly the result was different from the assumed genre, as most people chose Piano Trio as their preferred version, which is not globally the most popular genre and mostly not people's genre preference choice.

3. Process

For the recordings, a total of 28 people in 11 recording sessions collaborated throughout the year for the recording of EP across all programs, ranging from SFTV, MPTI, CPPD, GEMB, undergraduate students, and a faculty. For the analysis, a total of 200 people were surveyed during a period of about two weeks, from all across the world.

#PRODUCTION TAKES TIME

I have started this project even before the fall semester started, when I started re-recording bass for multi-language tracks. Although I started early, I came to realize that production takes immense amount of time and effort, and also requires collaborative effort and skills to coordinate with a diverse group of people. In order to complete the production of my songs, I "lived" in the lab until 2 am every single day, getting "kicked out" of the school at its last hour. Producing six tracks really required immense amount of time, even to the point of physically reaching the limit several times. This understanding of production process and time frame will help me immensely in the future, as I know from experience what to expect from the producers and can plan the release accordingly.

#COLLABORATION ACROSS PARTIES

I have collaborated with four recording engineers, five mixing and mastering engineers, twelve musicians, two songwriters, a photographer and a designer. I have learned how to lead and organize different sessions and was able to directly coordinate different number of sessions

with Berklee students from all across the programs. This has led me to gain leadership and coordinating skills, which can be used as I step into a professional world as a marketing executive.

#INTERNATIONAL SONGWRITING

Collaborative songwriting in different languages were not as easy as I thought it would be. For instance, I met up with a songwriter Oscar de Lara once a week for more than a month to complete the Spanish lyrics of *Sing With Me*. It was a lot of discussions between me, who is an original Korean lyricist, and him, a songwriter for Spanish, as the lyrics should not be merely a direct translation for the language and should convey the overall theme and meaning of the song. We were discussing different words, atmosphere, and even visualizing potential music video scenes to rewrite the song in Spanish. As a result, we included a line that says the following, being able to come up with lyrics that imply Berklee students:

Mira como gozan en España hoy

Look how they are enjoying (life/moment) in Spain today

Los músicos del mundo

The musicians from the world

Esto si

This is

Qués vivir (Que es vivir)

Really living (it)

Ven a compartir

Come and share it

I have also found that it is easier to cowrite a song in a different language if I am able to speak the foreign language; for Spanish, it was much harder than English songwriting as I was not able to understand most of the Spanish lyrics and therefore had to guess how it feels in a context of a song. English songwriting was much faster and easier to collaborate with, and it only took about a week or two to finish cowriting.

#PERFORMANCE TRANSFORMS INTO A RECORD

Throughout the year, I was in a K-pop Rock band called K LIVE. It was composed of myself as a vocalist, and other talented undergrads as instrumentalists. We have performed at four different events, ranging from Boundless Music Concert, a concert showcasing music from around the world, K LIVE concert, the first all-Kpop Rock concert from Berklee Valencia, Disrupcion Showcase, and Asian Music Night. Throughout these performances, we received positive responses from the audience. Especially, the most popular song among different groups of audience was *Sing With Me*.

This has inspired us to produce a live recording in Rock version. We have used AKSS studio to record the whole band live simultaneously, to convey the live sound of a concert as much as possible. I have learned that most of the live tours are all played with bands, which means that Rock is still a significant genre to include in the recordings, as it is linked with live events, which is growing more and more in the music market. Also, there were several Rock versions of BTS that drew attention, which shows that transforming an original K-Pop into Rock version is still a trend that is going on.

#SURVEYING 200 PEOPLE

I have surveyed all kinds of people - friends from back home, college graduates, Berklee students and staff (ER, front desk, security, librarian, student affairs), as well as people

I met from MIDEM, such as African-American rappers and Swedish Music Video producer. I have also surveyed people from Spanish church and Korean church. I have also learned that I gather much more information and deeper insights when I survey people directly and get their responses face to face.

Also, there were types of people that 1) respond to the survey the moment I ask or send it to them 2) do not respond to the survey at the moment but promise to complete and gets it completed 3) say they will do the survey but never do, unless asked several times 4) don't do it even after asking several times 5) never read the request or responds.

This has also taught me about work ethics or styles I should have in the future - as an organizer, I have found 1) or 2) types the easiest to work with, as I was able to incorporate the result within expected time frame. I have also learned that I should avoid being 3) to 5) when working as a professional.

4. Next Step

I have changed my plan of releasing a pure Korean version into mixing languages in one track for an updated release. This was mainly from a number of qualitative comments I have received from 200 survey respondents, who have commented that they would like to see a mixture of different languages within a track. Thus, instead of releasing a pure Korean version which has similar instrumental to my original release in 2015, I will mix Korean, Spanish, and English in one track, so that it can be a "Korean-English-Spanish" version, which will be recorded in the K-pop history as one of the very first Korean artists ever to do so.

In addition, as a reaction to my survey test, I plan to release an A Cappella version. A number of survey respondents commented that more artists are releasing purely A Cappella version without instrumentals together with their original songs, so that more DJs can easily use them for producing remixes, which can bring more popularity of the original song itself. I

am also interested in experimenting mixing of genres, and A Cappella version can provide a liaison for testing several genres, as it can not only be mixed with EDM, but also with pop instrumentals, string instruments, and any kinds of genre.

For mix-language version and A Cappella version, since they were from qualitative feedbacks, in order to gain objective point of view, I will conduct another survey with the same sample size of 200 respondents to see if releasing these tracks will enhance the overall popularity of my EP.

Through this project, I gained interesting insights, which could then be used for international release strategy, such as releasing six tracks all at once with promotion; track ordering and choosing the main title for each target market; and formulating promotional points for each track. Instead of releasing an EP and risking the recordings, I was able to formulate a strategy that would strengthen the international release.

5. Contribution to the Discipline and Profession

#INTERNATIONAL RELEASE STRATEGY FOR K-INDIE ARTISTS

Coming from a diverse background of living in the US and Spain, I as a K-Indie artist had a challenge of solidifying international release strategy that would not only benefit myself but also other emerging artists from Korea looking for global strategy. With this project, I can set an example of challenging myself for multilingual and multi-genre strategy, thereby encouraging more emerging artists to engage in a unique strategy that solidifies their strengths and pave a way to reach the global audience.

At Berklee, there have been other students who are doing similar projects, such as Soo Wincci, an MPTI fellow releasing a song in several languages; Upatyaka Dutta, who will also release her songs in different languages as part of her graduation project. Together, we can pave the way of creating a niche genre for the music industry in the future.

#IN LINE WITH RECORD PRACTICUM

Many of what I have learned from the Record Practicum was utilized in this project. I have learned how to choose certain target markets to test my music; I also spent many hours in the studio and collaborated with musicians and engineers, learning how to manage and lead a group of different sessions; I have engaged in developing my artwork and artist photos that matches the overall theme of this EP, while making the EP jacket visible and fit to thumbnail sizes of the Streaming Platforms. I have also learned the importance of marketing and promotion and succeeded in reserving a promotional release in Korea.

#LYRICS WRITING

I have learned that if the lyrics need to be in different languages, they cannot merely be directly “translated”; the lyrics need to be smooth and connotative lyrics that is not a literal translation yet conveys the original lyrics’ vibes. I have also experienced the benefits of collaborative songwriting, as nowadays it is a trend for several songwriters to develop one song together.

#GENRE TEST AND PROFESSIONAL WORK

Testing my skills as a songwriter in trying out different genres can be translated into my future job, which will be working as a marketing executive at Warner Music Asia. Through this process, I would be able to distinguish which genres to choose and promote and create marketing points for different artists. In a wider point of view, this can help me to have a broader and more creative reception of marketing in general, as I start my work in the marketing department.

6. Impact on the student completing the work

#HYBRID IDENTITY AS AN ARTIST AND A BIZ PROFESSIONAL

This project was especially challenging in that it involved immense amount of time as an artist, as well as a business professional. It required me to continuously switch back and forth between the two identities, which was sometimes more challenging than I thought. As a business professional, I had to be punctual, exact, be in leadership of collaborating with different people, and be on top of schedule with clever strategies. I also needed the skill of multitasking. As an artist, however, I had to really focus on my own work for long hours without being able to juggle different tasks at the same time, as it involved enormous amount of effort and concentration

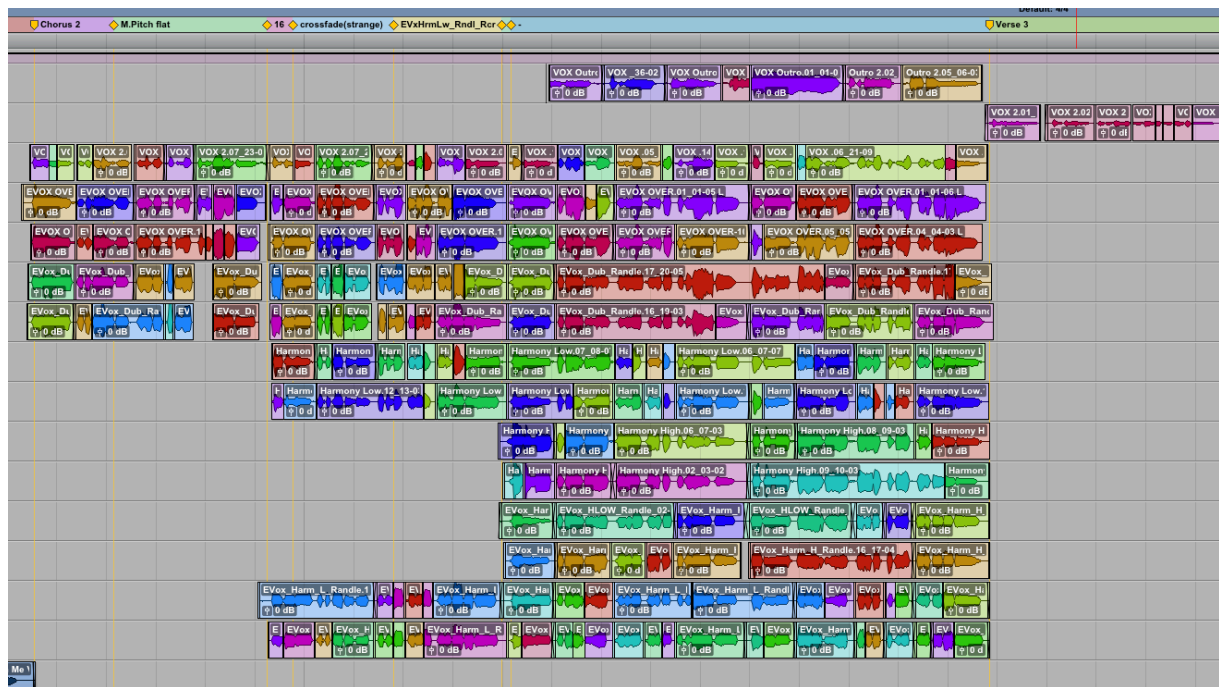


Figure 1. The process of comping different vocal tracks

I have comped total of 20 vocal tracks. The above photo shows the amount and time put into comping to make it sound the best. It involved extremely high level of concentration and intensive work in long hours. This was testing my limit as an artist and a producer, amidst my other responsibilities as a business student.

Although I have started this project even before the first fall semester has started, producing six successful recordings in a year was something tough and realistically very challenging, given the fact that even the major artists whose main job is to only record and produce music, sometimes take a year or two to release an EP. This is why I started early and worked on my CE even before most CE jobs were announced, planning a year ahead, but even so there was a risk of not being able to finish the production on time, as I had to produce everything with schoolwork and job searching. I had several hours of lab time every day for the past three months. At the same time, I had to go to conferences, attend all business seminars, and excel in business classes. It was one of the most challenging moments of my life. However, it was one of the best moments of my life that led to my hybrid identity as an artist and a business professional.

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