

BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC

SPRING

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MUSIC IN SCORING FOR FILM, TELEVISION AND VIDEO
GAMES

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July 2019 – Valencia, Spain

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ABSTRACT

SPRING is a project that represents my culminating experience after years of study and hard work; from beginning to end I will guide you through this journey of creating a piece that represents knowledge, technique, sentiment, and primarily, soul, concluding in an intense and self-rewarding experience.

It is believed that a musical compositional process is a gift that only certain people possess, and it's a mystery for the rest of the world how they can create dancing melodies and intricate rhythmic patterns. However, this reflective paper will demonstrate and demystify the development and creation of music according to my personal perspective.

I believe that this reflection is not a conclusion to this stage; on the contrary, this is just the starting point of an extremely long, hard and particular path that I chose for my life.

KEYWORDS: Film Scoring, Orchestration, Music, Composition, Reflective Paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my Mom, for believing in me since the first moment.

To my Dad, for teaching me to be my best self every single day.

To my brother and sisters, for every detail that has influenced my growth as a musician.

Friends back home, for all the motivation and support you haven given me day by day.

My new friends and family, for everything I've learned and grown thanks to you this past year and for the unbreakable bond that now connects us.

To my teachers, for their dedication, knowledge and passion for education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning, my main goal has been to express feelings and emotions through music, no matter what they are. I believe that there is always a certain melody, chord or rhythm that can perfectly define what one is trying to say. My problem is that I am always listening to new music and observing new techniques from which I can learn. Every time I seem to establish myself in particular genre, it rapidly fades and throws me in a completely different direction. Sometimes, this can derive in not finishing a song because you get involved in a new style that is now flirting with your mind. On the other hand, this can bring new ideas and inspiration, fresh thoughts and more complicated questions. Nevertheless, I always make my way back to the roots, to my initial inspiration and the special thing about it.

SPRING is a constant battle between techniques and expressions; intricate rhythms confront bouncing melodies at times and very expressive lines in others. From *pianissimo* (very low volume) to *sforzando* and *fortissimo* (very, very loud), this piece plays with every dynamic you can think of, intending to represent my mind, within the picture.

All human beings and even animals perceive music and sounds in many different ways. So the question is: How can I make you feel the way I'm trying to? For me, that is the most important question you need to answer when you are trying to represent and play with something as delicate as feelings and emotions. You have to take in consideration that there's no technique, no specific pattern, that can explain this. So, do I want to please the other musicians, or do I want to make music for the sake of the emotions involved? Take in consideration that most of the people that are going to listen have had no musical studies, yet, their opinion is the most important one.

As a close friend says:

"THE MUSIC DOES NOT BELONG TO THE MUSICIANS".

It was the last week of August 2018. Moving to a new city, to a new country. New continent. Yes, it is frightening and you have to deal with the ghosts in your head telling you: “Are you sure that this is a good idea?”

For me it was pretty clear that I came here to learn, grow, and most of all, get to know myself.

Not even a week after moving I felt like home. I met a group of amazing people that have accompanied me since. Berklee does an amazing job in terms of getting people together and practically forcing you to meet each other. That’s awesome.

All of this is what keeps me going every day. Discovering, connecting and learning new things, and never being afraid to make mistakes—the best ideas come after you have been wrong several times.

Just keep going, and enjoy.

2. THE PROCESS

2.1 First Steps

The assignment. What is the assignment? I asked myself this question for a long time before starting to compose and sometimes even while I was in the middle of an idea. So, let me explain.

During your first week in the Master’s, teachers will tell you about all the things that you will learn and the different projects that you will be involved in. And then suddenly they say the keyword: LONDON. They tell you that your final project is to

compose an orchestral piece that will be recorded at the world-famous Air Studios¹ in London, England. I still remember everyone's face when they told us that. Faces astonished on all sides.

One thing they don't tell you is how time flies. In just a blink of an eye you are three months away from flying to London to not only record, but to also conduct an orchestra that has recorded countless movies. That's the moment when I started to think about what I should compose, and most importantly, what video I was going to use.

2.2 Finding A Story

The most difficult part of the process for me was to find the "perfect" story. Of course we all know that this doesn't exist, so you have to adapt to the circumstances; when there are only two months left and you still haven't found the "ideal" video, you start to worry. So I started to compose different ideas that I hoped would light up a bulb and guide me to a specific picture.

First draft structure:

- First: soft, expressive, childish maybe?
- Second: a constant growth of the first part
- Third: fast melody, rhythmic stuff
- Fourth: keep growing
- Fifth: keep... growing...
- Sixth: keep.....?

You get the point...

¹ <http://www.airstudios.com/>

2.3 Difficulties

After spending almost two months trying different ideas, melodies, rhythms, chords, sounds, etc. I found myself in a complex situation, and I finally decided to choose the first video I thought would be fine. Not perfect. Just fine.

*SINTEL*² was the name of the short movie I chose. I selected a passage that had a little bit of everything and a lot of different scenes, some fast, some emotional and some furious. Then, I proceeded to make the structure of my composition.

Second draft structure:

- First: soft, expressive, childish maybe?
- Second: a constant growth of the first part
- Third: fast melody, rhythmic stuff
- Fourth: keep growing
- Fifth: keep... growing...
- Sixth: keep.....?

...Again?

Really?

Something was missing. I didn't understand at first because I basically had all I wanted right in front of me. So, why wasn't my mind working? Maybe it was the temp tracks³ or maybe the instruments I chose to begin with or the tempo, the dynamic, the rhythm... As Jerry Goldsmith used to say:

“You don't score a horseback chase...
You score the fear of the rider”

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2gB83g_HSc

³ “temp track”: temporary tracks used as reference for the composer.

So if I don't have a proper connection, how can I be expressive? In that moment I realized that it was the video. I had no emotional connection with it. Even though I liked it and it had consistent variety, I was missing a special thing, a fundamental piece of the puzzle that would help me create the music I wanted.

I was missing *MY MUSIC*.

2.3 Spring

I will explain this in more detail further in the reflection. For now I can tell you that when I watched *SPRING* for the first time, I knew immediately that this was the video I wanted to compose the music for.

I surfed through the Internet looking for a new video after I dropped the previous one, I was determined and somehow I felt that I was going to find the precise short for me.

I ended up on a website called *BLENDER*⁴, a site where you can find several projects with free copyrights. After searching for a while I read the title. As soon as I did that I knew I had found the video for my project.

The name was key, I don't know why but the title of this short movie inspires me, and it definitely helped me along the way. The animations are excellent and the story drives you smoothly through a magical adventure.

When I sat at my desk and decided to begin, it instantly triggered a waterfall of ideas and I started to write that same day. One thing you need to keep in mind is that this was less than a month away from our trip to London.

⁴ Blender cloud <https://cloud.blender.org/p/spring/>

3. SPRING: THE ANALYSIS AND THE STRUGGLE

3.1 Reading The Picture

Whenever you have a new project the first thing you have to do is read the picture, find the instrumentation that you are going to use, as well as the tempo and the structure. These different components are essential for any media composer in order to have a guideline for your process.

For me it was pretty clear how I wanted to begin, taking into consideration my previous ideas. At first I needed to be intriguing but gentle. I was thinking of little bouncing melodies to demonstrate curiosity. Afterwards, I would show determination and power, together with the feeling of being amazed.

I started listening to a lot of Alexandre Desplat⁵. His ability to write simple and beautiful textures mixed with melodies was a big influence in my writing for this section. Christopher Tin was an inspiration as well. He's music helped me with the playfulness of the fast melodies. I was trying to find a balance between feeling childlike, curiosity and determination.

This is the first draft I did as a structure for *SPRING*.

- First: soft, expressive, gentle, curiosity.
- Second: determination, control, power, (keep growing)
 - o Followed by surprise, amazed
- Third: BREAK! Disaster? Horror? Desperation?
 - o Clusters, atonal? Feeling of "WTH!!!"
- Fourth:?

⁵ Alexandre Desplat - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YP2AP0WvHkc&t=49s>

As you can see, I changed some words compared to the first ideas. Now words were stronger and had “more meaning”, they made more sense (to me). This is the “connection” I was talking about previously.

With an animation, there were countless synchronization points that I had to consider. These are specific actions or gestures, movements, and camera angles that must be taken into account in order to emphasize the scene. This is a main characteristic of this kind of style. I spent hours with Logic⁶ setting up markers for every sync point I considered necessary and after I was done, it was a mess. The Logic session was plagued with different markers and notes for myself, trying not to miss any single one of these. And I asked myself;

“Ok, how are you going to do this now?”

After dealing with this struggle, the first one of many, I decided that it wasn't necessary to have every single one of the sync points, and just focus on the ones that are relevant for the story. At this moment my music started to flow constantly. I can't tell you precisely how it feels, but when your ideas are dancing with grace to the picture and they actually make sense, it is a feeling of completion and success.

- Third: BREAK! Disaster? Horror? Desperation?
 - o Clusters, atonal? Feeling of “WTH!!!”
- Fourth: complex harmony, feeling uncomfortable
- Fifth: action, movement, BOOMS!
 - o Into final crescendo to... nothing?
- Sixth: Silence, awkward silence.

⁶ Logic is a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW). Software I use for composing

From the third section to the fifth section was the most challenging passage of the whole piece. It is a long sequence with a lot of clusters and effects, countermelodies and comments, jumping from one family of the orchestra to another. I listened to John Williams and John Powell's works –such as *STAR WARS* and *E.T.*, and *HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON* respectively–. These scores are extremely elaborate and in certain moments they have the exact thing that I was looking for. I studied them and apply this in my own way.

After a sudden silence after section five, a calm string bed takes you to an uncertain situation, one in which you are hoping for the best but there is no guarantee of it. It all comes together when we have knowledge that everything is fine and creates gives room for the epitome of the song. The final section is meant to be glorious, hopeful and energetic, colorful and happy. Here is where everything comes together and the title closes the circle to give sense to the whole composition.

- Sixth: Silence, awkward silence
 - o Uncertainty
- Seventh: resolves, hope, adventurous
- Eight: glorious, energetic, colorful
- Ninth: **SPRING**
- Tenth: calm resolution, peace.

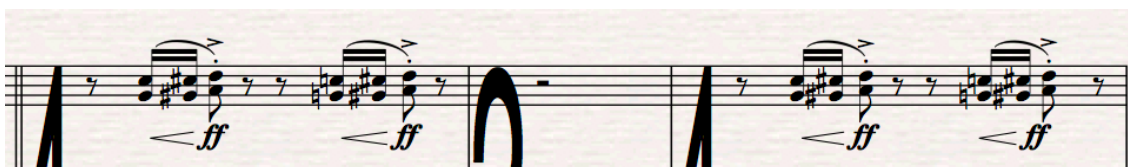
The plan was ready.

3.2 Themes and Harmonies

I started softly with a bed of strings. The woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon) begin to appear like a canon until I reach the first inflection point and the first playful melody comes to the scene. Accompanied by an ostinato⁷ on the violas and cellos, the woodwinds form “playful-childlike” movements between each other. Imagine a flock of birds playing around. This concludes with a constant crescendo into the first main melody.

This motive would be present in several sections of the track. There is always a section of the orchestra playing some ostinato or rhythm, and usually a melody comes in to blend everything together.

One of the most interesting sections is in the middle of the piece. It starts with a *Sforzando* in the brass section and a *Fortepiano* (suddenly soft from loud) in the strings with a continuous random tremolo glissando to a higher note. All of these in a constant crescendo to *Fortissimo*. This leads into an “action passage” with countermelodies, fast rhythms and some effects, such as runs from the French Horns in harmony.



In this section, I also used clusters and clashing chords between the brass family, moreover, dissonant intervals of trills between Violins I, Violins II and Violas. Low woodwinds give extra motion with rhythmic patterns; high woodwinds play around and add more colors to the clashing chords, and finally a heavy percussion to give weight.

In the middle of this passage there’s some kind of rest in which the dynamics goes down, but with minor and dissonant chords to maintain the tension. Finally, it ends with a *tutti crescendo* to a complete stop.

⁷ Ostinato: a continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm

After an interlude of pads between the strings and brass, the same idea from the beginning comes back. Playful woodwinds with counterpoint, resting in a long melody made of strings and background of brass, keep growing until a sudden stop. This takes the listener to the final section of the piece.

Introduced by a big *tutti* at the beginning, woodwinds start to play mixed with an ostinato in the high strings as they have done in the entire track, but this time the melody goes to the cellos and the trombones. This idea keeps growing until the epitome of the song arrives.

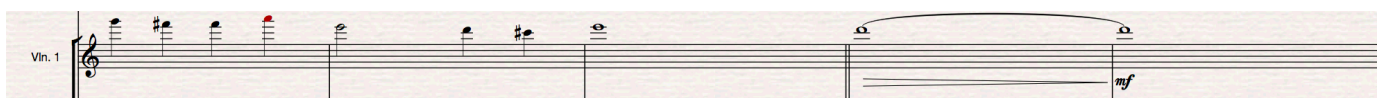
Played by Violins I, the main melody is extremely simple and expressive. The strings create the phrase and the brass responds with character.

Main melody, Violins I:

Bar 64



bar 73



After this, the brasses continue to make comments during the melody. Furthermore, they develop and grow until a final big crescendo starts. With a huge ostinato in the Violins, woodwinds still play around and everything sums up to a sudden full stop just before the final title appears and the playful woodwinds transfer to the strings, ending with a long fade out.

3.3 A Personal Fight

Usually when I am composing I try to establish a previous structure with ideas and keywords that will help me organize the musical drafts the best way possible. But it's common that sometimes in the middle of a project you enter a creative crisis. What do I mean by this? This can be by several reasons, for me the closest are: not having a connection with either the piece or the video. Lose the interest on the style that you are working on. Also, not having enough time to dedicate to the project, and the most important for me, feeling that the music you are writing doesn't identify you.

Of course, we composers want to make a leaving from music and sometimes this means working on projects that we have zero connection with, but when is something important you don't want to lose this attachment, and this happened to me twice while I was composing my final project. Deadline: less than three weeks.

I was listening over and over again to my drafts and ideas trying to find some kind of anchor to hold on to, but for days I had nothing. I felt I was going backwards in time to the beginning of the project and started to doubt about the video, about the music, about what I was trying to say with my music.

Every composer seeks for his/her own sound, something that can distinguish you from the rest, some characteristic that you will recognize immediately as soon as you hear the music—something unique. I think this can be found more easily when you compose music for yourself and not for a specific picture or script. You may be wondering what is the thing that makes me different from the rest?

I have no idea.

Disappointing right? But it's true. I am still looking for my own sound, and I believe that it is a thing that will come with years of experience and hard work and not a miracle chord that will appear in my mind by pure magic. But one thing I know is that I love melodies, and I believe that the most effective way to express emotions is through a good melody.

In this moment I had one of my last meeting with my advisor Lucio Godoy. One of the things he always has mentioned is that I need to stay true to myself; I needed to be truthful with my music. This resonated in my head, it was the boost I was looking for. The next day I finished composing and for the first time I looked at my project from an outside perspective. This gave me clarity and cleared my thoughts, for the next couple days I fixed some details and finally ended writing. Deadline: one week.

4. THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

4.1 Inside The Booth

After checking for the eleventh time in the day if I had brought all the scores and music sheets, I finally sat down and tried to relax; not think about what I was going to do.

If we roll back to September/October of 2018, one of the first classes we had was Conducting with the teacher Sergio Jimenez Lacima. I've never conducted before in my life and at first I thought it was something that I would never like. That changed completely after recording the woodwind quartet assignment. This was my first time on the podium conducting a small ensemble, but the bigger problem wasn't that. The problem was that these players were professional people dedicate their life to their instrument, and now they are playing my music while I move my hands trying not to be so wrong with the time signatures and dynamics. For those who think that conductors are worthless, well, you are totally wrong, and now I can say it with proof.

During recordings the orchestra is typically sight reading, meaning that the first time they play is the first time they read the music sheet. So, the conductor plays a huge role here to maintain the control of the orchestra. He or she is in charge of giving every entrance to the different instruments, meanwhile keeping a steady tempo with the other hand. In concerts, all we see is a showman, because the orchestra knows the pieces by heart, but what we don't see is the amount of rehearsal that is behind that. But now, I was waiting my turn to conduct one of the best orchestras in the world, without any rehearsal. Yes, I was nervous.

The moment that I would go out to the podium was coming. I looked at the clock—15.30 hours. That meant that there were two other people before me still. I was the last one, the last one of fifteen other recordings that day. The teachers decided the order of the recordings and I couldn't understand why mine was at the bottom. I wasn't happy when I read that email the day before. Usually the last recordings of the day don't go so well, at least with other orchestras, but not with Air Studios' orchestra. But of course, I didn't know that.

Now, 16:00 hours and the last slot was before me. I moved to the other side of the studio and I just looked at the orchestra. I couldn't see the clock from where I was standing and I didn't have my phone. I had no other choice but relax, watch and listen. Funny thing, I completely forgot I was wearing my watch, so I guess my mind was trying to get me to relax.

Before I could even notice, the orchestra and the people outside started clapping. 16.20 hours. The recording had finished and it was my turn. While I was getting my score one of my teachers approached me and said:

“We made the order of recordings for a reason. Don't disappoint us.”

And I didn't

4.2 Recording and Conducting

When I stepped on the podium I admired for a second the studio 2 of Air Studios. The same studio where countless movies has been recorded, and many of my favorite bands as well. In that moment I gave thanks for being there and realizing how lucky I was.

First things first—saying hello to the orchestra. Their reaction surprised me. Smiles everywhere looking at me excited to be there and practically telling me: “don’t worry, you got this”. In that moment I realized that this was going to be amazing. But, before starting, I had a problem in the scores that needed fixing. The night before I was practicing in my room and at one point I noticed that I was missing a time signature change and that this problem wasn’t only in the scores but in every single instrument sheet. Luckily, it is a mistake that is really easy to fix, but I couldn’t avoid the producer saying “Oh good! We started with a correction.” I didn’t mind his sarcasm, although I deserved it.

During the first take I didn’t get to listen too much to the orchestra in general. I was nervous and concentrated on looking for mistakes that would put the whole recording at risk. We decided to play again from the beginning. Now the orchestra could focus on interpreting rather than learning the piece. I took a long breath and the music began.

The feeling was unreal. I listened to every detail of the music. I focused on giving every cue⁸ and trying my best to keep the tempo and follow the score with every change in time signature. I was conducting and I was really enjoying it for the first time. The last time I conducted was in Budapest with the Budapest Art Orchestra. For that recording I was extremely nervous. My hands were shaking and I couldn’t concentrate at all. Because of this, I asked the main conductor Peter to start for me and then I could keep going. But this time was different. I knew my piece by heart, every line and every rhythm, all the different sections and their feelings. At one point in the middle of the recording I looked at myself and I was really conducting the orchestra, moving not only my arms but also my whole body to give the exact intention to the players so they could play the music as it was theirs.

⁸ In music it means to tell the entrance of a new instruments in a piece

Another thing you have to know about me is that whenever I perform music, I move with it. It doesn't matter if it's piano or guitar or bass or even a shaker or a tambourine, I can't help but to move my body according to what is happening in the piece and to what the emotions are. And that was reflected in my conducting. Whenever there was a part with a low dynamic (low volume) I shrank and when the music grew to a glorious moment my arms opened and punched the air if it was necessary. I was having fun and at the same time listening and paying attention.

In the booth, two of my teachers were producing the session—Sergio Jimenez Lacima and Vicente Gimeno Ortiz and Jake Jackson as well. This was an immense advantage and a relief at the same time because having a producer that you really trust makes a huge difference. At the end you are not alone listening to the piece. You have extra pairs of ears to help you.

4.3 Back To Reality

Right in front of you, you have your score, a measure counter and a clock. We had 18 minutes to record everything. The work of a whole year resumes into 18 minutes of recording and before you notice you are in your last take, only one minute left. When the take was over the room filled up with claps and voices of cherish, everyone was standing up indicating that the day was over. Stepping down of the podium was like landing back on earth, those eighteen minutes I was completely gone from the world, full focus on what I was suppose to do and accomplish. I walked into the booth again and smiling faces were all over the place. The first day was done and it was a success.

I sat down in one of the rooms inside on my own, trying to decant everything that just happened. Some people might say that this is a daily experience for a lot of people in the music business, or why is this so important. When you are a kid and you dream on being a composer for films you inquire into this world of big famous names and movies. Hollywood is everywhere and sometimes everything seems impossible to reach, but it was not impossible and I did it, and I am sure that this is just the beginning

5. AFTERMATH

5.1 Mixing and Editing

Once back in Valencia, we had the final stretch right in front of us. Just a couple more weeks before we'd graduate and start a new adventure. Before that, I had to put all my mixing knowledge to work. Just for you to know, I had no mixing experience before coming to Berklee, so my confidence wasn't the best. I have to give thanks especially to our mixing teacher, Pablo Schuller. His teaching method is extremely clear and effective, he taught us so much about mixing and mastering that even some people from other masters programs were jealous about our sessions. Just saying... Anyway, I was saying that I didn't have much confidence in my mixing skills, although I really enjoy the process of mixing and strongly believe that I have improved a lot during this course. But first comes the edit.

Teachers use to tell us that the most important thing of a recording is exactly that, the recording itself. The better the recording is, the less work you have to do afterwards. This is one hundred percent true and I realized it with this recording. I did some minor edits here and there and helped just a few details with VSTs⁹, panned everything minutely and balanced the level of the different sections. Just by doing this it sounded amazing but I had one problem, I was listening too much to the song.

5.2 One Last Debate

Have you ever said a word repeatedly so many times that after a while it sounds weird? Well, with music the same thing happens. I was listening over and over again to the same piece, to the same mix. At first, I started hearing the general details and trying to fix them, after a while I went to some small problems that I had, or I thought I had, and I began to feel uncomfortable with my own music. Sometimes, you start to fix something

⁹ Virtual Sound Technology, virtual sounds that imitate the sound of a real instrument

that is not even there because you want to feel the first emotion you got when you listen to the piece for the first time. The only solution for that is to let your ears rest and let the music rest.

After two days I started again and it felt really good, but I still felt not sure about my mix. It was time to ask for a pair of fresh ears. So I asked my roommate Andrew aka *MORSIFIRE*¹⁰ for advice (check his website for music), he was the first one on listening to the actual recording and after giving me his opinion, he only had kind words for the project.

I let the piece rest for one more day and then told myself that I needed to listen to it as if I were a spectator, someone who has never heard this music before. This moment marked a before and after in my head.

5.3 Accepting and Enjoying

For the first time I was listening trying not to analyze and not to look for details or errors, I was just enjoying the music. You know you are doing great when you get goose bumps with your own compositions. After a final mix session with Pablo, my piece sounded beautiful and I am extremely happy with the result.

I know for sure that I have learned so much during this past year. I have expanded my abilities in numerous ways, and I can say with confidence that I have composed my best piece ever.

¹⁰ www.morsifire.com

6. BERKLEE

6.1 Knowledge

I cannot begin to explain how much I have learned while my studies at Berklee, and I'm not saying only in a musical way. I learned a lot about myself, and how my personality works in different situations. The cultural impact you receive when you come here it is unimaginable; I would never thought that would meet people from all over the globe that have the same interests as me. My network is now immense and I am looking forward to collaborating with as many colleagues as possible.

I have expanded my knowledge of music in ways that I never thought possible before coming here. Orchestration, screen reading, score and recording session preparation, interactive music and audio, mixing and mastering, conducting, video games, different softwares and hardwares and the list goes on and on.

At school the teachers, the staff and us we were always trying to encourage people to give their best and to improve every day. One thing they mentioned at the orientation week (the week before classes begin) was that Berklee gives you all the tools to learn and improve, but it is up to you to use them and apply them because no one is going to do things for you. You have to do it by yourself.

6.2 Bonds

This is very difficult to put into words, because the relationship I've developed with my friends here it is something that I never experienced before. There was an instant connection that led us to be truthful and honest, and this was the key for any kind of collaboration. Before coming here it was inevitable to think about how the high the level of competition between classmates will be at this university, luckily, all of this remained in the past really quickly.

6.3 Me

This is my first time leaving abroad and at first there's always a feeling of uncertainty. It is the biggest adventure that I've been on, and only can say thank you to every single person that contributed to my growth.

During the year I collaborated with so many people, I recorded guitars in many different styles, some of them I would never thought of playing before coming here. I recorded piano and bass. I performed and produced the Valencia Film Orchestra, a project that involved more than 150 musicians for a beneficial cause. I did different arrangements for different project such as string quartets, synthesizers and keyboards, orchestral and electronic.

Also, I'm now a member of the best band I've ever played with.

As you can notice the list goes on and on, but in general what I'm trying to say is that this has been the best experience I've had in my life so far. In every single aspect.

8. CONCLUSION

This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of how my musical mind works. At last, I hope that I expressed with words something that is intangible, something that goes so deep into me that is hard to find the right phrases to show it.

My passion for music takes me further and every time I compose a new song or theme, a little part of me goes with it and I hope that every person that listens to my music could feel the same way I do, every time I play my music.

Simply Enjoy.