



Berklee

Berklee College of Music, Valencia Campus

STEVE UMCULO

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Degree of

Master of Music in Contemporary Performance

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by

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Personal Background	3
1.2 Road To Berklee	4
2. Objectives	6
2.1 What Do We Need?	7
2.2 Sub-Objectives	7
2.2.1 Music	7
2.2.2 Identity	8
2.2.3 Promotion	9
3. Methodology	9
4. Processes and Tools	11
4.1 Music	11
4.1.1 Listening	11
4.1.2 Practising	11
4.1.3 Composing	12
4.1.4 Lyric Writing	12
4.1.5 Arranging	13
4.1.6 Performing	13
4.1.7 Producing	13
4.2 Identity	14
4.3 Promotion	14
5. Execution	16
5.1 Music	16
5.2 Identity	20
5.2.1 Who Is Steve Umculo?	20
5.2.2 Why “Steve Umculo”?	20
5.2.3 What Does “Umculo” Mean	21
5.2.4 Defining An Identity	22
5.2.5 The Logo	24
5.2.6 The Branding	26
5.3 Promotion	29
5.3.1 Photos	29
5.3.2 Live Shows	30
5.3.3 Show Design	31
5.3.4 Social Media	32
5.3.5 Visuals	33
5.3.6 Digital Distribution	36
5.3.7 Website	37
5.3.8 Print	37
5.3.9 Radio	38
5.3.10 Merchandise	39
6. Challenges	40
6.1 Time	40
6.2 Adaptability	40
6.3 Persistence	41
7. Unexpected Outcomes	41
8. The Road Ahead	42
9. Conclusion	43
10. Bibliography	46

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal Background

I have always had a somewhat naive dream of becoming a rockstar. As a child, my response to the age-old question of “what do you want to be when you grow up?” was always “musician” or the more unconventional “rockstar”. These responses were totally acceptable at the time because I was only a small child who couldn’t fathom that those weren’t your typical household job titles. In fact, it’s rather endearing to hear a child respond with such aspirations that only a select few people in the world have managed to make full-time jobs. The difference between then and now is that the question has changed slightly. Someone may ask me, “what do you do for a living?” To which I would respond, “I’m a musician.” The next part of the conversation is always the most interesting to me. I’ve been hit with a vast array of responses. I’ve narrowed them down to a top 5.

- 1) “Awesome!”
- 2) “Interesting.”
- 3) “Really?”
- 4) “So then what do you do to make money?”
- 5) “Yes, yes but what is your real job?”

This conversation then could quite naturally spiral into a long discussion about how to make money in the music industry that usually gets me quite fired up. I have tried my hand at many jobs in the industry. I have taught guitar and drum lessons at a high school, played on several live and in-studio session gigs, managed and played in bands, organised entertainment for corporate events, managed stages at music festivals and, most recently, I spent a year and a half of my life as a drummer on cruise ships. I have honestly loved every single musical venture of which I've been a part but never really latched on to one single thing.

1.2 Road to Berklee

In September 2015 I decided I wanted to take my professional music career to the next level and figure out what “my thing” was. I'll save you the “packed-my-bags/new-whirlwind-adventure” speech and just say that I applied to Berklee College of Music Valencia and was accepted in December 2015.

Before I left for Berklee I decided that it was important for me to do some mental preparation so I could have a vague idea of what career path to follow. I established the following things during my thought processes:

- I love to perform.
- I love to create.
- I love to sing.
- My happiest musical memories were the ones where I was a part of bands that wrote and performed original music.

- My dream of becoming a rockstar is still as present as when I was a child.

I had one last cruise ship contract to fulfil in-between my Berklee acceptance and orientation. This contract landed up being the most eye opening one yet. I was sincerely starting to loath playing the endless production shows and dance sets toward the last two months and in order to let off a bit of steam, I set up a few gigs down in the crew bar for my fellow crew members. These gigs were great. I could play whatever I want, say whatever I want and wear whatever I want. I got paid in beer and by the end of the night I had a hundred crew members singing their lungs out to old time pub covers. All because I had a guitar, microphone and kick drum. I was happier for it and I'm pretty sure the crew members would say the same thing. It was a break from the mundane production and dance repertoire and I loved it. I decided then that I wanted to do exactly that. Just replace the old time pub covers with my own songs and the beer with some actual financial compensation. I wanted to be a singer/songwriter.

Once I disembarked from the ship for the last time I decided that I wanted to dedicate as much of my time as possible to creating my own music to determine if it was (a) something I could do and (b) something I wanted to do. I had three months between the ship and Berklee. Amidst the chaos of getting ready to move to Spain and saying goodbyes to friends and family I managed to squeeze out two songs, one of which I performed while still in South Africa. I was extremely proud of my compositions but wasn't too sure how they would be received in such a prestigious music environment as Berklee. Especially seeing as I hadn't been accepted into Berklee as a singer or even a

guitarist. I am traditionally a drummer and I was heading to Berklee with the expectation of being one. Regardless, I had my goal in mind and set off with my guitar on my back.

In short, what I have decided to do is change my career focus to “singer/songwriter” rather than “drummer”. My time at Berklee has been concerned with the creation of that singer/songwriter profile and the processes necessary to make the singer/songwriter a self-sustaining original musician.

2. OBJECTIVES

There are two main objectives that I have devised over the course of my year at Berklee. The first is to create and develop a singer/songwriter profile. The second is to make the project self-sustainable (i.e. profit generating) which is a far more long-term goal that I will continue to pursue for years after I’m done with my studies.

My singer/songwriter profile’s name is “Steve Umculo” and the origins of this will be explained further on in this paper. The ultimate achievement would be to make Steve Umculo a self-sustaining original musician.

2.1 What Do We Need?

What exactly do I need to become a self-sustaining original musician? Well, there are thousands of opinions out there but I have consolidated my thoughts and derived the following three essentials:

- 1) Music
- 2) Identity
- 3) Promotion

2.2 Sub-Objectives

2.2.1 Music

Music is the most important factor of this project. Every part of this project exists because the music exists. All of the music recordings are original. Covers are exclusively kept for on stage performances.

The first thing that is necessary to do is to define what type of music I create for Steve Umculo. The following list consists of various words that reflect my personality and the music. It is a list that serves as a reference for me whenever I create music for Steve Umculo.

- Happy
- Upbeat
- Groovy
- Fun
- Energetic

- Rhythmic
- Lively
- African

The following statement is an elevator pitch, which I came up with to summarise Steve Umculo's music. "Steve Umculo's music pays tribute to the tasty harmonies of folk-rock and the groovy rhythms of Africa."

Whenever I create music for Steve Umculo I adhere to these defining boundaries. Not to the extent that it is inhibiting but rather so that I have an idea of what musical direction to take. If I don't envision the kind of music I'm going to create then it can be quite difficult for me to construct something that has a particular style and is cohesive.

2.2.2 Identity

The identity of Steve Umculo should follow the same fundamental principles of the music. The music and identity have a symbiotic relationship. Once the music is defined, the identity will follow suit. The music, however, may adapt to the shape of the identity over time.

The identity will dictate how the branding is formed and how the public perceives the artist. Any content relating to Steve Umculo is also determined by the identity. The same words used to describe the music are the same that are used to describe the identity: fun, happy, energetic, groovy, African etc.

2.2.3 Promotion

The promotional aspect of the project is based on the identity of the artist. Promotion is the quintessential facet of any artist's marketing arsenal that has now become extremely accessible and cost effective. In an age of instant communication and information transfer, we now have a multitude of tools with which to promote ourselves and spread our music.

I am building the Steve Umculo project from the ground up so this project is primarily concerned with first finding out who Steve's target audience is and then targeting that audience with appropriate content.

3. METHODOLOGY

Creating an artistic profile is hard work and in order to facilitate the project coming to fruition, I put different teams together to handle certain tasks that I could not execute myself due to lack of time or knowledge.

My first team member was Maria de Luna from the business program. She guided me through many processes that would have otherwise taken me ages to figure out. She acted as my "manager" at the beginning of the project but as the year progressed and we got busier she became more of an "advisor".

Next was putting together a group of musicians to help bring my songs to life. We became a very close-knit band over the course of the year. We were known as "Steve Umculo & the Governors of Groove". One or two members changed over time but the

ones that remained for the majority of the time were Johann Audiffren on drums, Clifford Bond on keyboard, Michael Bester on electric guitar and Ricardo Osorno on electric bass. This group of extremely talented individuals played both the Steve Umculo live sets and recording sessions throughout the year which helped stylistically structure Steve Umculo's music.

The third team of individuals that helped me throughout the latter half of the year was my CE advisor board. Consisting of Clara Barbera, Enric Alberich and Maxwell Wright. I met with them on a regular basis to discuss the progression of the project and the potential outcomes. Their input on matters pertaining to the project kept my mind focussed on the important tasks at hand.

I put together a team of engineers to facilitate recording Steve Umculo's music. This team was a result of my lack of technological knowledge and restricted ability to operate the relevant facilities. The team consisted of Sergio del Castillo, Nitin Muralikrishna and Luis Díaz. They were there to record every sound applicable to the Steve Umculo project.

Finally, I worked with Scott Peters (producer) and Clifford Bond (musical director) in order to make the music sound as good as possible when we recorded it. Having those two individuals by my side meant that I had extra pairs of artistic ears. This process most certainly gave the Steve Umculo arrangements a shape and sound that may not have existed without their input.

I have become aware that having the right individuals on your team who actually care about the progression of the project is essential to its success. Being able to coordinate a team that works well together is also extremely important.

4. PROCESSES AND TOOLS

4.1 Music

A creative process started to develop when I began writing my songs. It became more defined over time but the following processes have been consistent creative elements that are essential to my creative process.

4.1.1 Listening

The first step in my creative process is to listen to as much music as possible. This means that I am listening (I mean really listening) to 5 new songs on an average day. Amidst this plethora of music there is usually one or two that has some type of melodic, harmonic or rhythmic hook that I just can't get out of my head. I then religiously listen to that song for weeks as if I am addicted to the sound.

4.1.2 Practising

The next step is to pick up my guitar and start learning these new songs. If I'm repeatedly listening to it then it means that I'll enjoy playing it. If I enjoy playing it then I will absorb the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic ideas into my songwriting arsenal.

4.1.3 Composing

In order to become a self-sustaining original musician and entertainer, I need original compositions. Composing is probably my favourite process. For me, it entails getting into a practice space and hacking away at inspired melodies and harmonies until something appealing is produced.

Most of my songs are constructed from an initial melodic idea that comes to me at the most random of times. I could be walking down the street, working out or just casually hanging out with friends. My brain is not circumstantially preferential. All I know is that once I feel like I have something worth exploring then I have to get a guitar as soon as possible and figure out a harmonic structure.

4.1.4 Lyric Writing

Lyric writing is a fun process for me. When I write my lyrics I adopt a stream-of-consciousness method rather than try to write about specific ideas. This means that whenever I write lyrics I tend to just shout out the first random phrase or melody that comes to my head. I will persistently do this over the song structure until I hear something I like. I will then take that idea and develop it into lyrics. I may adjust the structure to better fit the new melodic or lyric idea.

4.1.5 Arranging

Once the compositions have a general structure and form, the pieces are arranged in terms of instrumentation, dynamics and density. These things are particularly important when considering touring, musician availability, venue size etc. The arrangements must be adaptable to many different playing circumstances. This process also involves the creation of charts and demos for potential session musicians to have a reference for rehearsals, gigs and recording sessions.

4.1.6 Performing

Performing the music live is the best way to determine what works and what does not. Getting a real time reaction from a crowd for something that you have created is as daunting as it is revealing. Just because I created something that I am ecstatic about doesn't necessarily mean that everyone will be too. Performing live versions of my songs gives me a way to bridge this gap.

4.1.7 Producing

In order to produce the best possible sounding song, special attention needs to be given to how the music is fostered and developed. The production phase exists to ensure that the music is artistically fulfilling and authentic. With the help of my production team, every song is analysed and assessed to ensure a good dynamic and emotional flow. To do this we may change the arrangement (key, instrumentation, bars, harmony, melody etc.)

4.2 Identity

There are many processes involved when building the identity of an artist's profile. We can liken the creation and development of an artist's profile to that of any commercial product. It needs to have a particular brand and image to be successfully marketed.

It takes a team of expert minds to successfully define and brand a product. Various things need to be considered when building a profile. What personality traits does the artist exude? What are the artist's fundamental principles? How does the public perceive the artist?

The team allocated to the task of image and branding is a company called Boniqueta Studio based in Barcelona, Spain. Weekly feedback and communication between Steve and the company is required to successfully create and develop an image that truly reflects the artist's identity.

4.3 Promotion

In order to facilitate becoming a self-sustaining original musician I have to think about how I am actually going to get people interested in my product. I have a clear idea of what the product is but this needs to be shared and sold in order for it to generate a profit. It is, therefore, necessary to devise marketing strategies and campaigns to get the music into as many people's ears as possible. The most relevant promotional platforms for this project are:

- Live shows
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube)
- Digital distribution (Spotify, Apple Music, Google Play etc.)
- A website (own domain)
- Print (flyers, posters and business cards)
- Radio
- Merchandise

Content relevant to the promotional aspect of the project includes:

- Music videos
- Lyric videos
- Live videos
- Official audio videos
- Promotional videos
- Corporate manual/branding guidelines
- Mastered songs for public release (and relevant album art)
- Electronic Press Kit
- Professional photos

5. EXECUTION

5.1 Music

The first idea that I turned into a song can be heard in my debut single, “Answer” which is an upbeat, happy and groovy tune. The initial idea behind the groove was just to create something that I could dance to while on stage. This theme started to slowly take over my music. The basic guideline for any music I create is essentially: it should be fun and make people dance.

The main riff to “Answer” was derived inside a practice room while I was listening to a song called “Pluto” by Beatenberg. The riff is based on a typical kwaito beat that is quite common in South Africa and which is used throughout “Pluto”. It took me about a week to get comfortable enough with the riff to start singing over it. I had a distinct few words and melodic lines in my head that I would scream ferociously over the riff. I recorded every minute of it and enthusiastically listened back to determine which moments worked and which didn't. Once I had some form of a structure I took the song to the Governors of Groove to hear what it would sound like with a band. I also remember that I was hesitant to invite a drummer to the rehearsal because I still wasn't sure if I maybe wanted to record the drums on the track or not. It just so happened that my good friend Johann Audiffren stopped by the room out of curiosity. I invited him in to hear how the song would sound with drums and I was absolutely blown away. He has been a permanent feature on all of my recordings and live shows during my time at Berklee and has played an integral musical and social part in my band. Once I had

workshopped it a bit with the band I went back in to the practice room, finished off the lyrics and was left with the first taste of my new developing style.

The lyrics in “Answer” are a string of phrases, which implore the listeners to liberate themselves from society’s conventions and take control of their lives. They are a rebuttal to the little fiendish voice inside your head that may tell you it’s a bad idea to break free of the chains holding you back from chasing your dreams. It’s not a strict instruction but a suggestion to say that if you’re unhappy then do something about it.

Ch-ch-ch-ch-change your plans be free

You need to walk before you crawl, yeah

Grab ahold and jump with me

You need to leap to take control, yeah

And just say what you mean

This clock's tickin' and a-runnin' and it won't stop comin'

We could obey anarchy

To repair these broken seams

(Excerpt from Steve Umculo “Answer”)

This idea also started to leak into the lyrics of my other songs. Reflecting on it now, I believe it was a reaction to the time I spent on the cruise ships and the singer/songwriter epiphany I had. The concept of realising your potential for happiness and doing everything in your power to make that potential a reality started to become very

appealing. My single released on 29 June 2017 called “Emancipate” also uses this theme as its premise.

You have begun your journey

With an entity that existentially

Will liberate your mental slavery and move your body

For-get your fears and worries

The rhythm, the groove, the rhyme will make you loose sense of time

T-t-take a look inside and what you'll find is sublime

(Excerpt from Steve Umculo “Emancipate”)

Another theme that started to appear in my lyrics was belonging. I started to realise that I was writing a lot about “home”. In fact the one song that I wrote in South Africa, during my time in between the ship and moving to Spain, is entitled “Belonging”. It was a song I wrote for my mother because she represents “home” to me.

Follow me

All is okay

Nightmares flee

Your mind is at bay

No need to be in that cold, darkened space

For you and me

It's a brighter day

(Excerpt from Steve Umculo "Belonging")

Then when, once again, I left the comfort of her presence, I started to create songs around the concept of "home". The lyrics from another original of mine, "Undertone", display this.

All I have to give is set in stone

And you talk to me about broken bones

For we get lost in these complexities of tone

Please postpone

Leaving home

(Excerpt from Steve Umculo "Undertone")

In summary, through using my creative process, two very distinct concepts started to define Steve Umculo's music: (1) the concept of liberation and (2) the concept of belonging. I would say that the first is responsible for how the music actually sounds and the second, for what message is conveyed. In other words, if you were to listen to the music you would feel an upbeat, happy and free atmosphere and if you were to dig a bit deeper into the lyrics then a sense of belonging would be apparent.

5.2 Identity

5.2.1 Who is Steve Umculo?

Me. I am Steve Umculo. Steve Umculo is a representation of me. My personality traits are reflected through this artist profile. I have grappled with the possibility of creating an entirely different stage character. Someone for whom I could make up a ridiculous story but I resisted the urge to do so because this profile actually feels a lot closer to home, a lot more like me.

5.2.2 Why “Steve Umculo”?

There are a few reasons why I chose to use a stage name instead of my real name. For one, as an artist’s name goes, “Stephen Haiden” sounds a bit too plain for me. Steve Umculo has a bit more of an upbeat ring to it and gives the name more movement.

Secondly, it is quite common to acquire a stage name for the purposes of memorability. For anybody who is unfamiliar with the word, I think that the attempted pronunciation of “Umculo” is rather funny and is somewhat of an icebreaker. Once people have a bit of a strange pronunciation moment with me then our conversation is likely to launch into something quite memorable.

Finally, as the music I create tends to be naturally influenced by Afro-centric grooves, it only makes sense that the name is also influenced by African origins.

Choosing a stage name also develops a bit of a psychological barrier between the musician and the artist, which makes it easier to treat the project as a business. A stage name can give someone a bit of distance from the project and allow the individual to

breathe outside of the chaos that can become an artist's career. Kevin Perry lays out the psychology behind this concept in his article *The Psychology of Stage Names*. "... adopting a new persona can be a tool which allows an artist to create a distance between themselves and their performances." He explains how through creating Ziggy Stardust, David Bowie was able to distance himself from the project slightly. Bowie told interviewer, Joe Smith in 1988, "I found it quite easy to write for the artists that I would create. I did find it much easier, having created Ziggy, to then write for him... even though it's me doing it!"¹

5.2.3 What does "Umculo" mean?

"Umculo" means "music" in two traditional South African languages: isiZulu and isiXhosa. It just so happens that it means a completely different thing in Spanish. When I arrived in Spain, I was very soon informed that "umculo" to the Spanish ear sounds a lot like the phrase "un culo" which is directly translated to "an arse". I was advised against persisting with this name but thought that I would take it in my stride and use this funny anecdote to my advantage. It's a great story to tell on stage and another topic to keep conversation going with fans.

¹Kevin Perry, "The Psychology Of Stage Names – Why Musicians Create Personas For Themselves," *NME*, accessed July 3, 2017, <http://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/the-psychology-of-stage-names-why-musicians-create-personas-for-themselves-766424>.

5.2.4 Defining An Identity

Once I had figured out what the stage name would be, I decided to get a professional brand and identity designed. Maria de Luna introduced me to the ladies at Boniqueta Studio in Barcelona who I hired to undertake the mammoth task at hand. This process took months of back and forth communication.

They first started by asking me various questions in relation to my relationship with music. Such as:

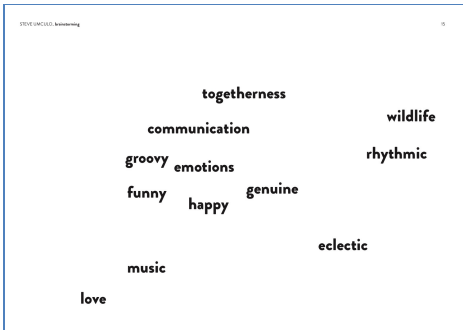
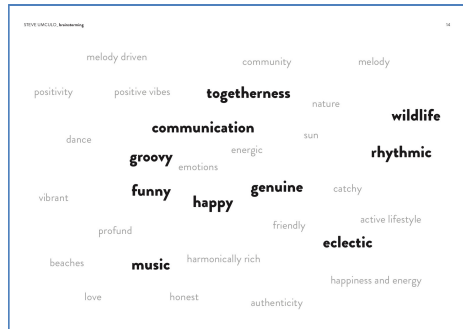
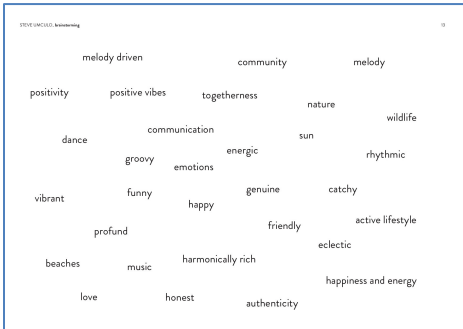
- What does music mean to you?
- Who are your biggest influences?
- How would you define your music?
- What values do you want your music to transmit?

They then summarised my answers and highlighted the most important words.

- Music gives me purpose and belonging.
- Music makes me happy.
- Music breeds positivity in an otherwise negative world.
- Music means community and togetherness.
- Music is a powerful mean of communication, particularly for emotions.
- Music is a dance immobilizer.
- When you listen to good music and dance you feel better.
- I look for music that is genuine, that comes from an artist that is creating music because he/she loves music.
- Music is real to me, more real than some people.

They then extracted the words and concepts below and refined them until they were left with words that defined the character. They then already started the design process by giving each individual word a relevant font.

Now that we had an idea of the defining qualities of Steve Umculo it was time to start creating the content with which we could brand and promote the project.



5.2.5 The Logo



VARIOUS LOGO BRAINSTORMING STAGES
(NOT USED IN FINAL)

Logos are a critical aspect of business marketing. As the company's major graphical representation, a logo anchors a company's brand and becomes the single most visible manifestation of the company within the target market. For this reason, a well-designed logo is an essential part of any company's overall marketing strategy.²

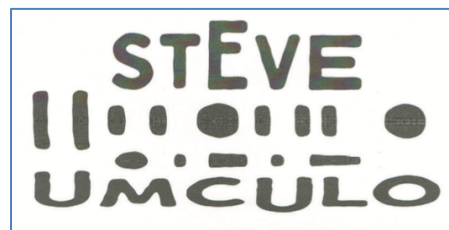
The same applies for an artist's profile. The artist must have a logo that is immediately identifiable and represents their music and identity.

Boniqueta Studio and I worked for a long time to ensure that the logo that they produced was a perfect representation of the music and my personality. They workshopped various options until we settled on one that we all believed worked.

Two branding direction proposals were presented: handwritten (left) or obscured typed text (right). They were both very appealing options but I chose the obscured typed direction because I felt that it was more representative of the project, particularly the African aspects of the music.



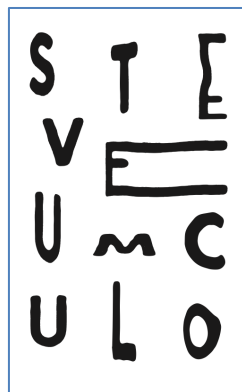
BRANDING DIRECTION 1



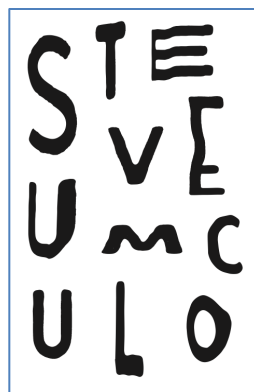
BRANDING DIRECTION 2

² Jason Gillikin, "Importance of Logos in Business," *Chron*, accessed July 3, 2017, <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/importance-logos-business-577.html>.

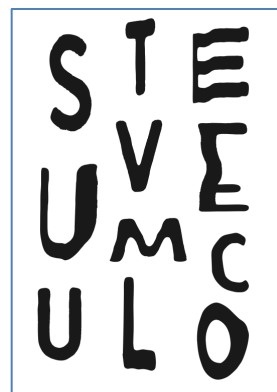
Various factors were then considered when creating, developing and reviewing the logo. Movement, space, position and size were continuously revised. For instance, you may notice in the first logo revision below that the lines of the second “E” are extremely long which is not appealing to me. I, therefore, requested that they change the “E” and that they make the “S” and “U” more pronounced so as to separate and accentuate the beginning of both words. In their second revision I requested that they make the spacing slightly more square, they give the first “E” a bit more movement and they make the “M” less squashed. The final result is the logo that you see on the right hand side. This is the logo I use today for any branding related activity. You know it is a good logo because even without colour or context it still represents the traits defined at the beginning of the process.



LOGO REVISION 1
9 FEB 2017



LOGO REVISION 2
15 FEB 2017

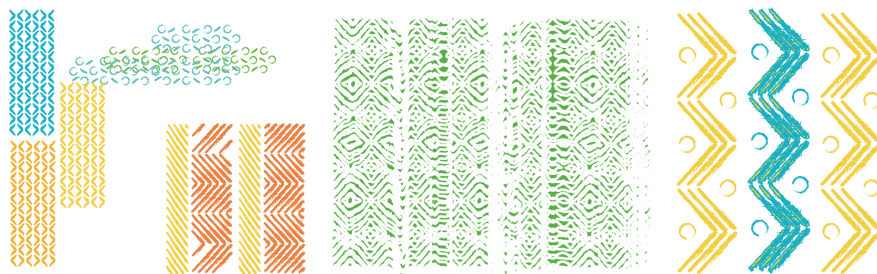


LOGO REVISION 3
28 MAR 2017

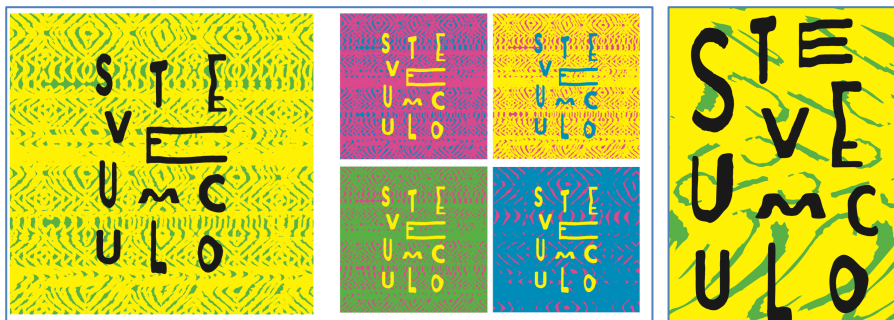
5.2.6 The Branding

At the same time that the logo was being developed, so were the other elements that are necessary to brand a product. In this case the vital elements considered were patterns, colours and fonts.

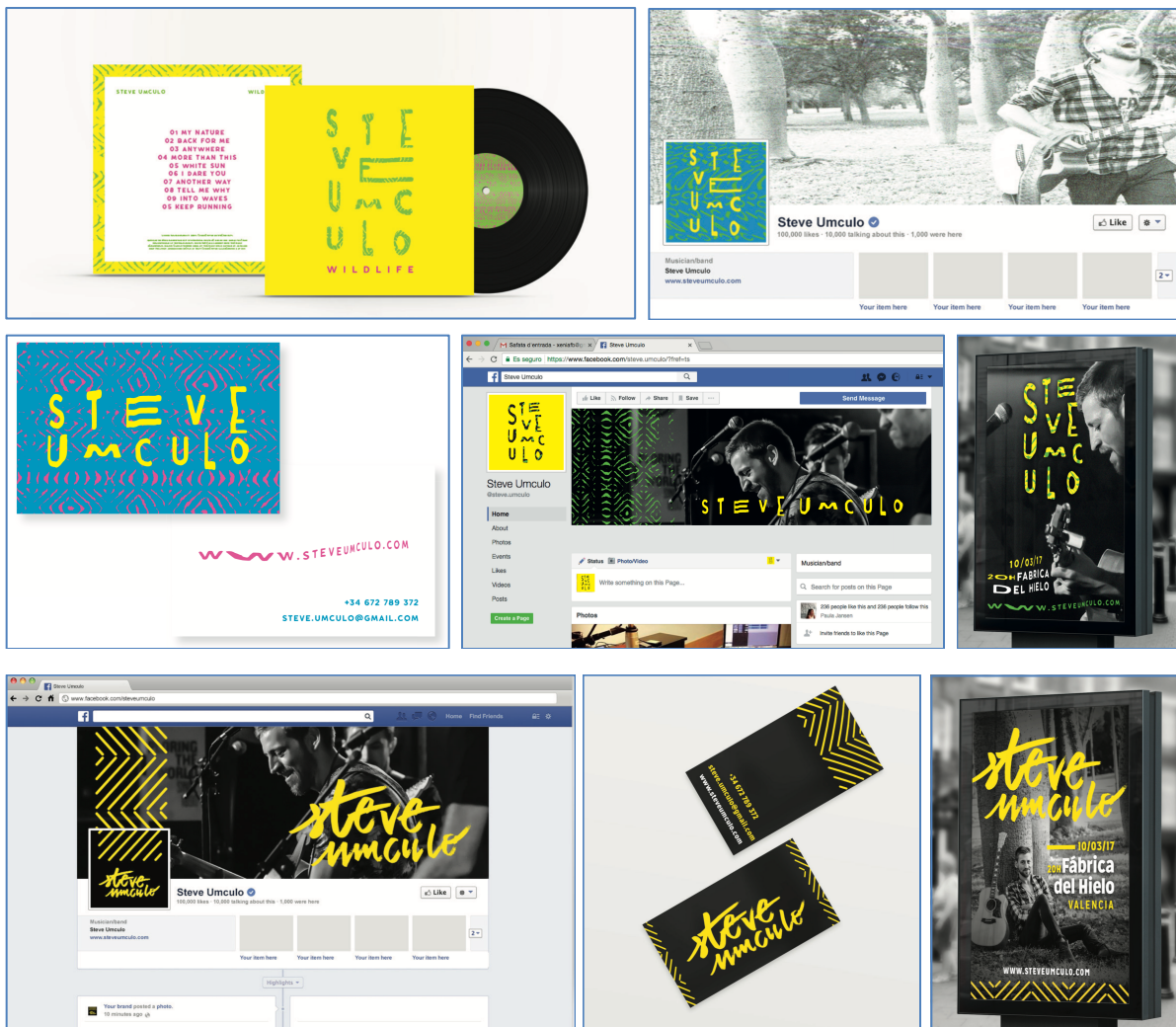
I wanted the identity of Steve Umculo to hint at elements of Africa but not be too blatant. I asked Boniqueta Studio to start developing an eclectic edge to traditional African imagery. Their solution was to start adding “electric colours” to traditional African patterns, which you can see below.



I loved this direction and encouraged them to explore it some more. They then started applying even more bright colours to the patterns and logos. Below you can see the 1st and 2nd logo revisions with the new colour schemes and patterns.



The last step in the demonstration processes was to show me how the logo, patterns, colours and fonts could be used in marketing applications, including social media, print and album covers. This gave me a clear idea as to how I was going to use my future branding in the promotion phase and making my decision about what direction to take was easier because of this. What you see below is an evolution of the brainstorming phase.



After 5 months of back and forth communication I was sent my final branding corporate manual which you see below. It is a phenomenal tool with which I develop all of my marketing content. The manual covers everything that I could possibly need to know when it comes to content creation, advertising, marketing and branding. It gives me clear cut boundaries as to how the artist will be displayed to the public and is extremely beneficial to have when you are a start up, do-it-yourself artist.



I'm very happy that the identity aspect of the project had been taken care of prior to the bulk of the promotion because maintaining brand consistency for an artist, even one as small as I, is very important.

5.3 Promotion

A large portion of this year has been dedicated to promoting the defined Steve Umculo brand. The guidelines set out by Boniqueta Studios has given me a very good platform with which to create effective promotional content.

5.3.1 Photos³



All Photos Taken by Tato Baeza

The first thing any musician should add to their marketing arsenal is a decent set of photos with which they can market themselves. The photographer should work with the identity of the artist to ensure that he/she is displaying the artist in the most appropriate manner.

In my case, Tato and I discussed what it is that needs to be portrayed by the photos he takes of me. I explained to him the elements of the identity that were emerging (we

³ All photos taken by me unless otherwise stated.

had our meeting in the initial phase of my interactions with Boniqueta Studio) and we decided that capturing a lot of live as well as outdoor photos would be the most suitable for my identity. All of the photo shoots were not necessarily “directed”, Tato just let me jump around like a monkey in front of the camera and gave me the occasional position change. The result was a ton of Steve-in-his-natural-habitat photos which I think is perfect considering the identity guidelines.

5.3.2 Live Shows



Photo Taken by Melissa Struthers

Live music is still my favourite method of promotion for original music. My approach to music creation is that it needs to work live. How good my music is going to sound on a recording is based on how good it will sound live. I work like this because one of my biggest strengths is my entertaining nature and ability to engage with people while on stage. This is, therefore, my main platform on which to promote my music.

My live shows this year have been in various locations around Valencia, from hole-

in-the-wall bars to festival stages. Depending on the venue, I played either solo, with a cello, guitar and keyboard folk trio which I called Steve Umculo & the Fundamentals of Folk or with the Governors of Groove.

My method of promoting Steve Umculo at my shows has evolved quite substantially over the last year. Learning the most effective way to promote myself is a constant work in progress. My promotion tactics at my second last show was the one I was most excited about. It was at Festival de les Arts where I was selected to perform one of my originals during Berklee's Discover: Ahora show. It just so happened that I was closing the hour long set and as soon as I was done I ran down into the crowd with a pocket full of promotional flyers and a big smile on my face. The flyers, in conjunction with my strange facial hair, caught the attention of quite a few people in the audience who wanted to hear about the project and take a few photos. This then would catch the attention of onlookers who also wanted to be told about my work. It may be an obvious thing to do but is something that can easily be overlooked. It was a big learning curve for me because it taught me the importance of personal interaction with your fans and how a small action can lead to mass interest.

5.3.3 Show Design

Another idea that is still being workshopped is the idea of creating the aesthetic design of a Steve Umculo show around a central theme. In other words, I would like to give Steve Umculo's shows a signature look. I have experimented with the aforementioned concept of "home" or "belonging" as a central theme and came up with

the aesthetic that you see below. The idea is that you give the stage a homely feel to enhance the audience member's emotional experience.



5.3.4 Social Media



My entire opinion on social media has shifted this past year. I was quite anti the social media movement until I realised the potential it has to grow one's fan base. I learnt how to run a campaign, run advertisements, grow and analyse a fan base, network and engage, and generate and promote content.

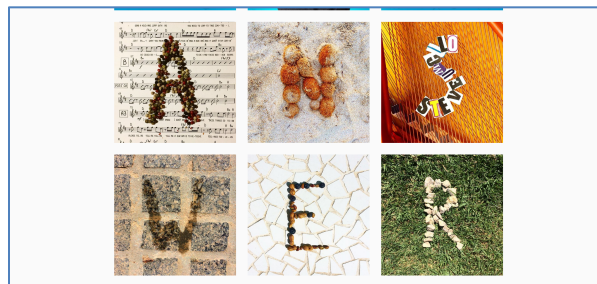
What I've learnt through my dealings with social media is that it is important to backlog a lot of content with which you can "drip feed" your fans. Having a lot of content is great but people want to be continuously engaged. Dropping a big load of content in one sitting will cause the material to get lost in the sea of content that is out there. Giving

your fans a slow release of content will keep focus on your pages.

5.3.5 Visuals

A good social media campaign cannot be successfully implemented without some sort of visual stimulus. In order to stick out above the rest, one has to create something worth looking at. After all, social media is primarily based on what we can see. So to effectively promote your music on social media, one has to accompany the audio with some good looking imagery.

When it was time to release my debut single “Answer”, I decided that I wanted to create some good looking visual stimulus for the audio. The first thing I decided to do with this song was create hype. I initially did so by uploading “riddle posts” to Instagram. These were pictures that contained something relevant to the lyrics of the song. There is a line in the song that says “tickin’ and a-runnin’ and it won’t stop comin’” so I posted a picture of a different clock everyday with relevant hashtags alluding to the fact that a surprise is coming. This initial attempt at hype creation didn’t work out so well. It gained a bit of attention but not to the extent that I was expecting. What I decided to do next was create a countdown but keep what I was counting down to (the launch date) a surprise. I uploaded a letter a day to spell out the word “ANSWER” and the same day that the final letter was uploaded was the release day. The campaign looked like the picture you see below and was a huge success. People really enjoyed the suspense and creativity of it.



I let the hype die down slightly and about a week after the song was released, I released my very own stop motion lyric video. This lyric video is the one class project I dedicated the most time to at Berklee. I spent approximately 80 hours shooting, directing and editing the video. The project involved physically spelling out the lyrics of the songs with different mediums (beach fuzz balls, rocks, fruit etc.) and then editing it so that it looks like stop motion words are being written out.

It was also a continuation on the Instagram campaign as it corresponds to the look of the letters, as you can see by the snapshot below.



A friend of mine who owns a graphic and web design company called Chalk Creation in Johannesburg, South Africa, helped me put together a short GIF teaser. GIFs tend to do very well on social media and the one we made for Answer's release looked

like the image below. There are just 16 more images that move with different coloured backgrounds.



It was also quite fortunate that Berklee made a music video for “Answer” that was released just two weeks after my campaign had started. This maintained hype and general interest in the song when I had already exhausted my content.

5.3.6 Digital Distribution



The method that I have used to share my music is solely through downloading and streaming platforms. I have purposefully chosen not to print CDs because statistics show that they will no longer be a cost effective method of promotion in the near future.

“Streaming accounted for 30% of overall label revenues in 2016, compared to 32% for physical sales. According to the BPI, the rate of growth means that streaming is expected to overtake physical in 2017.”⁴

For a do-it-yourself musician such as myself, some of the biggest promotion tools are streaming and download platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Google Play etc.

I stumbled across something called a Smart URL while I was constructing the Answer campaign. A Smart URL is essentially a website to which you direct someone who is interested in your music. This website contains buttons labelled with the various streaming and download platforms (Spotify, Apple Music, Google Play etc.). The listener then selects their platform of choice and the website will then take him/her directly to your song in the relevant app. It was extremely useful for directing traffic to appropriate platforms that have potential to become revenue generating. I will continue to discover small innovative things such as this to assist in getting my music more exposure.

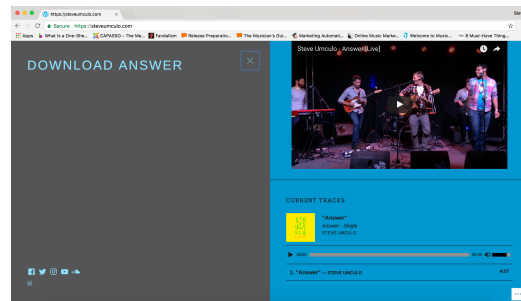
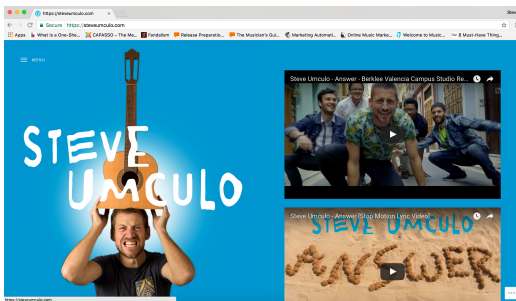
Being a part of streaming platforms is essential in the music industry today.

⁴ Scott Wilson, “Streaming to overtake sales of physical music in the UK for the first time ever,” *FACT*, accessed July 3, 2017, <http://www.factmag.com/2017/04/13/streaming-overtake-physical-music-sales-uk-2017/>.

They are heavily contended platforms because they are not profit generating for a lot of artists. The reality is that this won't be a revenue source for me for a long time, if anything it will actually cost me money to be a part of them. It is, however, how people listen to music nowadays and being a part of that is more beneficial to me right than not being a part of it.

5.3.7 Website

A website is a fan's one stop shop for any information that they may want about the artist. To be a professional artist one must have a professional website. I have been working for the last few months with a friend based in Johannesburg, South Africa, to create my website. The pictures you see below are the extent of the website so far. It is still a work in progress. The idea is to get it to the point that it looks like a really professional electronic press kit.



5.3.8 Print

I still like to throw in the traditional physical print marketing campaigns. I think there is something romantic about taking the time to print out posters and flyers and physically stick them up or hand them out. The small time gigs that I have organised this

year usually requires that I print and stick/hand out. I think this form of media will not die out for startup and do-it-yourself artists. Below is a poster for the latest gig I organised. I printed about 40 of these posters and stuck them up around Valencia. The show was a major success. I think people like to see when independent artists put in effort for their shows.



5.3.9 Radio



I was fortunate enough to be invited to perform on a popular radio show called Hoy Empieza Todo, Radio 3, in June 2017. They were visiting the Berklee Valencia campus and set up their portable booth in the main studio. This meant that I was able to play live with the Governors of Groove for over 200,000 people. The exposure from this interaction was incredible as my social media engagement spiked and some people recognised me in a few venues around town, albeit by my terrible Spanish. It was one of the most phenomenal music experiences I've ever had and it proved to me that radio is still very much a viable means of promoting oneself. You just have to be selective with

your audience.

5.3.10 Merchandise

My latest venture is to create merchandise by hand. I have started with t-shirts as you can see from the image below. The idea was just to create some for a gig that I was hosting. Not for sale but rather just to have to throw out into the crowd. The pattern and logo combination was a big hit at the concert so I am thinking about making more to sell at future concerts. The only thing is that the process is super time consuming so I will eventually need to outsource this job but for now I am sticking true to the do-it-yourself nature of the project.



6. CHALLENGES

6.1 Time

Time is a massive factor for anyone pursuing a career in the arts. Having an effective time management system is essential to maintaining public interest in your work. The thing about being a do-it-yourself musician is that I should be able to wear many hats. I have done everything from writing songs to creating the music videos for them. The problem is that while I am busy with one facet of the project another facet doesn't get as much attention, possibly to the point that people lose interest. For instance, a lot of time went into the development of the Answer single release campaign but because I was so concerned with that, I have not created much content for my new upcoming single. I have realised that it is important to give myself enough time to manage every aspect of the project equally.

What I have learnt is that I should calculate the time that it is going to take to complete each aspect of the project and then adjust and execute that task accordingly.

6.2 Adaptability

Things are not always going to go according to plan. When this happens then, instead of giving up, simply adapt your circumstance. If you have a studio booked and someone calls in sick at the last minute then don't just go home, find something else to record. Make a plan so that if circumstance changes, and it will, your time isn't wasted. The world is a beautiful place with a lot to offer, you just have to open your mind and let the good times roll.

6.3 Persistence

The entertainment industry is temperamental, and it will not necessarily provide instant gratification for your work. It is, however, the most rewarding experience when you receive praise for your labour. I have come to realise that it takes a lot of passion to work in this industry. There will be many times when you doubt whether or not what you are doing is right. If you have enough passion and work hard enough then you will undoubtedly succeed. You must persist.

7. UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

There was a period in early 2017 where I was having some serious self doubt and began to question whether or not I had chosen to do the right thing. I still maintained though that relentless persistence would start to reap benefits and I auditioned for Berklee Valencia's biggest concert of the year. I wasn't too happy with my performance and in my state of wallowing self-pity accepted that there was a good chance I wouldn't get in. I soon found out that I myself and the Governors of Groove were fast tracked through the next round and made it straight to the performance. I also have been asked to be a part of the choir for the finale in this show which I see as a huge compliment. The unexpected outcome here is that with the effort and dedication that I have put into this project this year, there are subsequently big opportunities arising as well as opportunities outside the project to sing. It seems as though other potential gigs could come from the time that I have put into improving my voice this year.

8. THE ROAD AHEAD

I laid out two objectives at the beginning of this project, create and develop a singer/songwriter profile (short term) and make the project self-sustainable (long term). I am proud to say that my initial intention of creating and developing a singer/songwriter profile has been fulfilled. I have an up-to-date portfolio that contains professional looking work that is ready for review.

The challenge I face now is how to take that portfolio and use it to enable Steve Umculo to become self-sustaining. I understand that I have a long road ahead of me and that it will take some time, and investment, to make that dream come true. I have already started paving the way by enrolling myself in a year long online course called Making Money in Music with the esteemed do-it-yourself Ari Herstand. Now that I have the artistic product to generate profit I just need the knowledge on how to do so efficiently, which is what this course aims to fulfil. During this course I will be covering topics such as publishing deals, record deals, digital distribution, festival circuits, touring, sponsorships and many more.

The aim here is to treat this project like a business and have it slowly grow over time so that it eventually becomes my full-time job. It will, however, get to the point where I can't handle the various jobs required for its success due to lack of time. At this point I will have hopefully started to develop a team that I trust and can rely on to take care of those jobs. This team will consist of a manager, lawyer, live agent, promoter, publisher, publicist, synch agent and a record label.

9. CONCLUSION

From playing drums on an American cruise ship to singing at a major Spanish music festival, my journey has taken me through many twists and turns to get to the point where I can confidently say that I have strong conviction I am following the right path. I don't regret a single minute of my past because it has lead me to where I am today and I feel privileged to have been a part of the Berklee family for this past year.

Building an artist's profile and portfolio is not a simple task. It requires extreme dedication, time and effort and must be something about which you are sincerely passionate. I have hardly had time to breathe this past year but I have loved every minute of it.

I have built a solid portfolio from which my stage pseudonym, Steve Umculo, can start to work toward becoming a self-sustaining original musician. That portfolio was built around three essential artist elements:

- Music
- Identity
- Promotion

The music always comes first. It is the independent element out of those three. The other two would not exist if it were not for the music. Always remember that through every step and process.

Once the music has been defined and created, we can then define the identity of the artist based on the characteristics of the music. From there, the identity and the music have a symbiotic relationship. The music may change slightly to fit the direction of the

image or vice versa.

Promotion and the content found therein is determined by that symbiotic relationship. Effective promotion today consists of both old (live show, radio, print) and new (social media, streaming) platforms. While maintaining a good connection with the old, the content of the promotion should stay current and note global trends.

A team who is on your side every step of the way is vital. There isn't an equation to what positions you fill first, just get people to help you with aspects of the project that you may be weak at. My first example of this was to get help with someone interested in the music business because I didn't know where to begin with that aspect of the project. I am fairly knowledgeable on the topic now because I built a good relationship with Maria de Luna and gained a lot of insight as a result. It's about being constantly surrounded by the right people and you will naturally absorb the right information.

I personally feel like the project was an overall success. I have obtained what I set out to achieve and I feel I have accomplished my goal. I think that if I could give any advice to anybody doing the same thing as I have done it would be to stay true to your own artistry and who you intrinsically are. If you ever feel like you are being steered on a path that isn't quite you then fight back and don't do it. Even if it means you have to work harder as a result, at least you get to keep the thing that makes you you and I think that is pretty cool. All of the best content that has been developed for Steve Umculo happened when I felt like I could just be myself without any pretences. I know the irony of that statement is rife because Steve Umculo is not my actual name but the personality traits that were portrayed in those moments were all authentic.

Ensure that you lay out a timeline for yourself and make it realistic. This is really rich coming from me because I find myself constantly having to cut back on goals but just ask yourself if your timeline is really going to facilitate you doing what you're setting out to achieve. My initial idea was to have a whole 7 track EP out by the time I was done at Berklee, which, given everything else I wanted to accomplish, was absolutely impossible to achieve. I sit here currently with 2 really well produced, mixed and mastered tracks as part of my portfolio and I couldn't be happier with the result. Solely because when reality sunk in and I realised what I had actually got myself into, I stepped back, took a breath and said, "okay, what is the best feasible outcome from where I stand right now?" And adjusting the project accordingly. Being able to do exactly that has been one of the most valuable and eye opening lessons for me this year.

Since coming to Berklee, the Steve Umculo project has grown exponentially and has far exceeded my artistic expectations. I am so grateful to my mentors and peers for always aiding me in my rambunctious musical ventures and encouraging me to push myself beyond what I think is possible. The most important lesson I have learnt at Berklee is how to effectively channel my creativity into music, identity and promotion and how to create a professional artistic product that is both commercially marketable and artistically fulfilling. Even though this has been one of the most arduous journeys of my life, I still have that childhood rockstar fantasy burning through my veins. For me, that is enough to know that I'm on the right path.

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