

Berklee College of Music

**Rosy Mercury**  
**-5 Tracks EP About “Space Romance”**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of  
Master of Music in Music Production, Technology and Innovation

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## **Abstract**

“Rosy Mercury” is a 5 track EP produced and vocal performed by Zhang Siyuan, featuring instrumentalists at Berklee Valencia. This EP is inspired by artists like Moses Sumney, Daniel Caesar and JMSN. During the process of production, Zhang Siyuan used his new skills such as analog synthesis, sound design and different recording techniques. He also conquered challenges of vocal recording and working in two DAWs for the same session. Finally, this EP is completed and he plans to release it in August 2019.

*Keywords:* EP, cosmic concept, music production, collaborative project

## **1.Introduction**

“Rosy Mercury” is an EP telling a story about space romance, which has been constructed in a year. It contains 5 tracks: “Vacuum I”, “Moon Style Love”, “Wine River”, “Vacuum II” and “Those People Who Dance”, which includes an intro and an interlude (Vacuum I & II). Based in R&B music, “Rosy Mercury” also contains genres like Bossa Nova, Funk, and Electronic Dancing Music in different tracks. During the production of this EP, Zhang Siyuan collaborated with instrumentalists from Berklee College of Music Valencia campus.

## **2.Review of the State of the Art**

### 2.1 “Aromanticism” by Moses Sumney<sup>1</sup>

“Aromanticism” is the debut studio album of American singer-songwriter Moses Sumney. This is a soulful R&B album, combining indie rock vibes, which brings cosmic loneliness atmosphere and “Rosy Mercury” is inspired a lot from that.

The first track of “Aromanticism” is an acapella song called “Man On the Moon”, and that is what “Vacuum I” trying to simulate. The brilliant guitar sound in “Aromanticism” is made by Fender Stratocaster, “Rosy Mercury I” tries to simulate that guitar sound as well.

Except for that, “Rosy Mercury” contains more elements of sampling and electronic music sounds than “Aromanticism”, and focus more on the melody rather than harmonics.

### 2.2 “Freudian” by Daniel Caesar<sup>2</sup>

“Freudian” is the debut studio album by Canadian singer and songwriter Daniel Caesar. This is a R&B/Neo-Soul album, with a lot of Gospel elements.

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1 Sumney, Moses. “Aromanticism”, Jagjaguwar. Indiana, 2017

2 Caesar, Daniel. “Freudian”, Golden Child Records. Toronto, 2017

The way of arrangement and mixing in this album is what “Rosy Mercury I” tries to simulate, especially the drums and bass part. Acapella parts in this album from the track “Neu Roses (Transgressor’s Song)” inspires “Vacuum I” as well.

The music style of “Rosy Mercury” would be very close to this album, except for the Bossanova and Funky elements added in “Rosy Mercury”.

### 2.3 “Whatever Makes U Happy” by JMSN<sup>3</sup>

“Whatever Makes U Happy” is the fourth album by artist JMSN. This is a Neo-Soul/R&B/Blues album, devoted to the sound of late 1990s Neo-Soul.

The strings sound and arrangement in the track “Where Do U Go” from “Whatever makes U Happy” is very gorgeous and it influenced “Rosy Mercury I” a lot in strings arrangement. The vibe of Blues from this album inspired “Wine River”.

Comparing to this album, more modern sounds and sampling are going to be in “Rosy Mercury”.

## 3. Description

### 3.1 “Vacuum I”

“Vacuum I” is a quartette with soulful instrumental arranging. As the intro of “Rosy Mercury”, this track tries to describe a scenario of drifting in the space, shooting out signals and reaching out for other creatures out there. The lyrics are all mumbles like “do” “lo” and “ah”, which represents the signals being shot into the space. As the producer and audio engineer of this track, Zhang Siyuan invited several vocalists to sing in this track. He recorded each person separately, for the flexibility of editing and fixing.

Credits:

Composition: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

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<sup>3</sup> JMSN. “Whatever Makes U Happy”, White Room Records. Los Angeles, 2017

Lyrics: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Producer: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Guitars: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Bass: Choby Scheufler

Piano: Taylor Fleming

Harp: Eve Marin

Backing Vocal Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Backing Vocal: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan), Oneill, Xela V

Programming: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Recording: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Mixing: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

### 3.2 “Moon Style Love”

“Moon Style Love” is the second track of this EP, it is a Bossa Nova song combining with Pop in genre. This track continued the story of “Vacuum I”, it describes that after shooting out signals, the protagonist got some reply from some place far away. Soon, they started having connection and looking forward to seeing each other. The Bossa Nova vibe of this track is built by recording real Brazilian instruments like classical guitars and percussions. Besides that, Zhang Siyuan also did some FXs sound design in Ableton Live, to add some “cosmic flavor” to this track.

Credits:

Composition: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Lyrics: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Producer: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Guitars: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Bass: Choby Scheufler

Piano: Taylor Fleming

Vibraphone: Sebastian Laverde

Percussions: Patrick Graney

Drums: Joe Sturges

Backing Vocal Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Backing Vocal: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan), Oneill, Xela V

Programming: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Recording: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Mixing: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

### 3.3 “Wine River”

“Wine River” is the third track of “Rosy Mercury”, it is a R&B and Soul song, which describes that after waiting for a long time, two protagonists of the story finally met on one’s planet, and they fall in love with each other immediately after a single contact. Zhang Siyuan firstly did all the arranging in Ableton Live, with all the drums and bass in MIDI. Then he overdubbed the drums, bass, and electric guitar in Pro Tools, because he wants to have more acoustic vibes in this track.

Credits:

Composition: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Lyrics: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Producer: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Acoustic Guitar: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Electric Guitar: Sam Borrello

Bass: Choby Scheufler

Drums: Joe Sturges

Backing Vocal Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Backing Vocal: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan), Oneill, Xela V

Programming: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Recording: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Mixing: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

### 3.4 “Vacuum II”

“Vacuum II” is the fourth track and an interlude of this EP. It is a simple instrumental track with a guitar riff looping, and a lot of FX and ambience sounds. It describes the scenario of the protagonists decided to go for another trip around space together, and their spaceship slowly floated into the sky.

Credits:

Producer: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Guitars: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Programming: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Recording: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Mixing: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

### 3.5 “Those People Who Dance”

“Those People Who Dance” is the last track of “Rosy Mercury”. It is a Funk and R&B song. And it ends the story of this EP, telling that the protagonists finally found a new planet, which has a lot of aliens living there, and all these creatures love dancing very much. Except for recording the electric



guitar in Pro Tools, Zhang Siyuan did all the production in MIDI and audio sampling in Ableton Live since this track has much more electric elements than the others.

Credits:

Composition: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Lyrics: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Producer: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Guitars: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Keyboard: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Backing Vocal Arrangement: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Backing Vocal: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Programming: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Recording: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

Mixing: Leo1Bee (Zhang Siyuan)

#### **4. Innovative Aspects**

The innovative part of “Rosy Mercury” is music itself. During the production, Zhang Siyuan tried to bring acoustic instruments and electronic sounds all together. Even though the music style keeps changing, the “Space FXs” in each track make them really cohesive. Ambience sounds are crucial in this EP, and combining that with R&B, Funk and Bossa Nova music is the innovation Zhang Siyuan has been made.

## 5. New Skills Acquired

### 5.1 Recording

During one year's studying at Berklee Valencia, Zhang Siyuan learned a lot about recording engineering, which includes making input lists and floor plans, setting up mics, using different preamps and outboard gears, patching, and of course, operating consoles and Pro Tools. He put all these skills into use during the production of this EP, and by the end there were a lot of different instruments recorded. Recording skills would be crucial for Zhang Siyuan's future career, because he's trying to be a successful music producer, and recording is the inevitable part of music production.

### 5.2 Editing and Mixing

Through the production of "Rosy Mercury", Zhang Siyuan did a lot of editing in Pro Tools. In average, he has more than 4000 vocal takes in each session (song), and that brought him a lot of materials to work on. Eventually, he became very familiar with Pro Tools' editing tools and skills. Mixing in Pro Tools is another thing Zhang Siyuan has been doing through this year. He took the course "Advanced Studio" in the second semester at Berklee Valencia, not only learning the theory, but also did a lot of mixing practice, which upgrade his techniques a lot. Both editing and mixing are essential for a music producer in the future career.

### 5.3 Analog Synthesis

Zhang Siyuan took the course "Analog Synthesis" in the first semester at Berklee Valencia, and he was benefited a lot from it. In this EP "Rosy Mercury", Zhang Siyuan used Moog Sub 37 several times for the lead melody sound. And the theory of analog synthesis also helped him understand sound design better. Analog synthesis would be really helpful for Zhang Siyuan's future career, because he's production includes synthesizers a lot.

## 5.4 Sound Design

Zhang Siyuan took the course “Sound Design” in the second semester at Berklee Valencia. It helped him get a better understanding of all the synthesizer plug-ins he’s been using. All the FX sounds in “Rosy Mercury” are designed by Zhang Siyuan, and they play a crucial part in the tracks. Sound design would be extremely helpful for Zhang Siyuan’s future career, because he’s production includes a lot of electronic elements, and it’s important for him to have the ability to get a sound wanted quickly from scratch.

## 6. Challenges

### 6.1 Vocal Recording

Recording vocals turned out to be the most difficult part of this EP. Basically because that Zhang Siyuan has been a unreasonable perfectionist during the recording. He forced himself to have the backing vocals from different layers all in the same length and at the same timing spot, so it cost him a lot of time doing that. Also, he wanted all the vocals to sound similar in timbre, so Neumann U87 was the only vocal microphone he had been using for vocal recording in this EP. This brought out another problem of “not enough studio time”, because Zhang Siyuan doesn’t have U87 himself, and he has to book a studio to use it. At last, Zhang Siyuan spent a lot of money renting a studio out of campus to finish the vocal recording, since the studio time at campus is limited for each student.

### 6.2 Switching between Pro Tools and Ableton Live

“Rosy Mercury” is a special project, it has a lot of real instruments recorded in Pro Tools, and a lot of synthesizer sounds and FXs designed in Ableton Live. During the process of production, switching between these two parts was inconvenient. For a lot of times, Zhang Siyuan had to record and edit one instrument in Pro Tools, bounce it, put it into Ableton Live, do some sound design

upon it, and bounce them back to Pro Tools. There should be a better approach, if everything was well organized beforehand. However, for this time, Zhang Siyuan just suffered through this trouble, and finally made it by working hard.

## **7. Future Ramifications**

### 7.1 Releasing

Zhang Siyuan is going to release “Rosy Mercury” on Spotify, Apple Music, Sound Cloud, NetEase Music, QQ Music and Xiami Music through CD Baby in August.

### 7.2 Teaser Performance

Zhang Siyuan is going to hold a teaser gig for “Rosy Mercury” at DDC Live House, Beijing in August 26th. This show would contain 150 audiences, with media and reporters.

## **8. Conclusion**

Bringing fantasy to life via music has always been Zhang Siyuan’s chasing goal, and this project is part of his vision of all time. Thanks to all the skills he learned, and all these great musicians he collaborated with at Berklee Valencia, “Rosy Mercury” is eventually a complete story now.

Zhang Siyuan’s growth as a music producer through this project is not only in the skills, but also in the mindset. For a lot of times he got to make hard decisions for the goodness of the whole song, rather than single elements. The final tracks come through thousands of tries and failures, and here we are, spreading love and romance with beautiful melodies.

## **7. Bibliography**

Caesar, Daniel. "Freudian", Golden Child Records. Toronto, 2017

Sumney, Moses. "Aromanticism", Jagjaguwar. Indiana, 2017

JMSN. "Whatever Makes U Happy", White Room Records. Los Angeles, 2017