

Berklee College of Music

Reflection Paper

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1. Summary of the project that was completed

The past year I have been studying the Masters program “Global Entertainment & Music Business” at Berklee College of Music Valencia campus. At the beginning of the academic year I decided to apply for the A&R Manager position at the students run record label Disrupción Records.

Being an A&R was something that I was very curious about when I first came to Berklee. In Argentina, where I am from, there are not many courses from where you can get music industry knowledge, one basically has to get a job in a desired or possible area of a company, from which you can learn to do things.

My job in the booking department of an Argentinian promoter taught me many things about the live entertainment industry but very little about the recording industry. Therefore, my goal when I started this program was to learn as much as possible about the record business and which kind of jobs I could potentially pursue.

Also, at my work atmosphere in Argentina, being an “A&R” meant being an “artist relations”, not “artists and repertoire”. Therefore, I only had discovered the real global meaning of A&R while surfing on the internet, the year before coming to Berklee. Having had a musical education made being an A&R seem as a very interesting kind of job, and one that I definitely wanted to try.

Therefore, my culminating experience at Berklee was based in spending a year working as an A&R Manager for Disrupción Records, and learning what being an A&R really meant.

2. Results: how the project did and did not align with expectations

When I first started the job, the expectations about it were little because the previous knowledge about what it was about, was little. Nevertheless, after a month of being immersed in the A&R class, I started to understand what being an A&R was and which objectives I could set myself for the year ahead.

After receiving the news of being chosen to manage the A&R department of Disrupción Records together with Eleonora Muraglia, the other A&R Manager, I met with the new team. Posterior to that meeting I was able to set my personal goals for the academic year ahead, in order to make the best out of this job and acquire as many skills, experience and knowledge as possible.

Along the year and while trying to achieve the objectives set, I have definitely learned what being an A&R means. Since it was one of my biggest curiosities when I started this program, my expectations regarding this matter are now fulfilled.

I have made some mistakes and I also did things right during my work at Disrupción. Having a small team at the label allowed me to dive deeply into how other departments work, since many times all of us had to lay hands on other people's tasks in order to help. Moreover, another big personal win was having a more creative approach to artists than the one I used to have, which taught me how to be more empathetic, listen closely and try to help from a different perspective than the one of "my job is just to scout you and then get you to deliver the masters". Furthermore, I have learned things about me throughout this process, for example, how

analytical I am when it comes to contracts and how much I enjoy negotiating them, or how fast I am at problem solving. But as I said, it was not all roses. I have also learned that many times I cannot handle things alone and that I actually need to ask for help and advice. In addition to this, a good communication was key for making things work, which were some of the aspects that the team worked on improving.

Surely there are still a lot of concepts left to be learnt and situations not yet experienced about the recording industry, but this year has been a very good starting point.

3. Process

It all started in the first meeting I had with Pete Dyson. In that room, he told me about the position and that I should apply for it.

When I finally was given the news, the process of learning how to be an A&R, and actually being an A&R, started.

At first, artists were scouted by using social media platforms, streaming services, the Berklee roster, and live music shows. In the meantime, the A&R team's network and volunteers also contributed in the scouting of artists.

Once an artist was discovered, it was shared with Eleonora, my co-worker, to get her feedback.

Right after that, conversations began with the artist to understand desires and needs to be able to provide a well-tailored plan and pitch in order to get them to license their material to the label. Once the artist had expressed interest in the label's proposal, I approached the rest of

Disrupción team to start the road towards the signing of the contract. In that moment, the negotiations began to align the label's needs and requirements with the artist's needs and requirements.

Once a contract was signed, a job that splited into two started. The first branch focused in how the masters could be improved, and the other branch constituted the development of the artist from its identity to its craft.

Also, a close relationship with artists had to be built in order to gain trust and create a good and fruitful work environment since it is very important the tone of the conversations between the A&R and the artists, and how the artists takes the feedback given.

In addition, as an A&R I had to work closely with the other departments of the label to make sure that everyone understood the artists identity, so that we were all able to deliver the best product possible. Finally, it has been crucial to accompany the artists all along our contractual relationship in order to make the best out of it. Each artist has represented a different challenge for the A&R team and for Disrupción Records, requiring different approaches and attention.

4. Next steps

The next steps for Disrupción Records team are wrapping up the year of work, and passing over the operations of the label to the next team to come in the fall. For this matter, a google drive folder that will be shared with the next team was created. One of the main concerns in regards of Disrupción was how to make the transition between teams, a smooth one.

When we started working for the label, we had no clue of which artists had been signed the previous years, what those contracts included, the passwords for the social media handles and email, and what was the deal with the distributor and if there was a deal at all. Therefore, one of this year's team's goals was to avoid confusion between teams, and to create a good work flow.

We started by including in the most promising artist's contracts, a termination date of February 2020. Also, all of Disrupción's agreements there was a clause that stated that past the termination date, the deal would keep on rolling unless the label received a written notice from the artist asking for the deal's termination.

Moreover, we gathered every material and piece of work generated the past year on a Trello board for it to not get lost. Trello was the platform used for having a better work and communication flow. Consequently, it is quite easy now for us to put together the year work and pass it on to the next team that will take over the label.

The next step after completing this culminating experience, is making sure that the team coming up receives the information about the label, each of the signed artists, supporting materials, and knows how to move forward in September when they start the program.

5. Contribution to the discipline and profession

The efforts along this year have resulted in improving the organizational structure, creating a coherent vision for the signings and setting a long term goal of being able to rebrand Disrupción and start positioning it not as a student run record label. Finally, in its five year anniversary, Disrupción Records got to sign two artists from outside Berklee, marking the

beginning of a process that will contribute to achieving the long term goal mentioned above. This precedent was a very relevant one for the institution Berklee College of Music. Now, it is not only about having a record label to release school projects, now it is getting more serious by having external artists signed with longer contracts in duration. Also, the high tech recording studios that the school has, could maybe be in the future used as an opportunity for the label to start owning material by recording it at Berklee's facilities.

The DIY wave has discouraged a lot of self releasing artists into signing a contract with a label, especially since there are a lot of successful examples of self releasing artists. Truth is, those examples of success represent the minority. If an artist wants a better shot in having their music widely spread, a record label can help make that happen throughout marketing and promotional efforts. The investment that a label does in marketing an artist, along with the expertise that comes from the team, does not compare to what an artist can potentially do alone. Moreover, it is less likely that a self releasing artist can get a distribution agreement with one of the major distributors. Therefore, the arguments are getting short on how signing with a label, in particular one with an artist friendly deal, can harm an artist's career. The achievement of having encouraged artists to sign with Disrupción Records, and having closed those deals, has contributed to the profession in general.

Now that the foundations have been set, that the change started, and the intention to revamp Disrupción is here, the next team is going to find it easier to continue the work.

All in all, this year has been about hard work, restructuration, rebranding, and construction of a sustainable vision across time, for Disrupción Records to finally achieve being a proper and respected record label.

6. Impact on the student completing the work

This experience has nurtured me in so many ways, but it particularly has taught me to be more open to other music genres that are different from the ones I used to listen to on a daily basis, contributing to the growth of my cultural wealth and musical skills too. From this perspective, I believe I have earned more possibilities of working with a wider range of music genres and artists.

Moreover, Disrupción Records has a small team who worked very closely along the year with our mentor Pete Dyson. This has resulted as a very beneficial experience given the fact that we were able to absorb a lot of knowledge about how a record label functions, gaining insights from the work methodology applied in these companies, and especially, having the privilege of being advised regarding the legal aspects that concerned the relationship between the artists and the label, and the distributor and the label.

From all the things I have learned during this journey, there are some skills that I am thankful for having had the opportunity of acquiring them. Regarding the recording process, I have learned about producing, mixing and mastering. In particular: what each concept means; what each genre requires from them; the costs; the time it takes; and the human resources needed for it. In terms of the contractual relationship between an artist and a label, I have acquired skills to analyze, understand and negotiate the agreements, and also provide its follow up.

Finally, having embarked in the A&R world at Berklee, opened up the music curation door for me, and thanks to this, I have discovered a job that I really enjoy doing. After the

program finishes and while applying for open positions at companies, I run with the advantage of already having had experience in this field, at an indie record label level. The intention is to step up to the next level and eventually work for a major.

7. Other: final recommendations for next year.

For next year I would strongly recommend to open the applications for the positions at Disrupción Records a bit earlier than it was done in 2018, even if it means having some interviews done for making sure that the right team is being put together. In this way, they could be selected as soon as possible and start taking care of the artists currently signed at the label.