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## **Michael Jackson's 40th Anniversary of "*Off the Wall*"**

### *A Tribute Performance*

This year, I expanded my musical literacy from my mastery of voice, reaching into the discipline of electric bass guitar. The inspiration behind this pursuit has been a lifelong fascination with bass guitar, understanding that it is the foundation of my favorite musical styles like funk, jazz, and classic 70's soul. Now that I have developed my skills on bass, I want exciting and challenging ways for me to showcase my musical achievements, so I decided to produce and perform in a 40th anniversary tribute to Michael Jackson's "Off the Wall", my favorite album of all time. I am tasked with the responsibility of organizing, facilitating, arranging, and delivering all aspects of the performance. I've relied heavily on my community, collaboration with artists and industry experts, and it has been the ultimate way for me to test my skills as a music business intermediary, performer, and hopeful ethnomusicologist. I've refined my skills as a project manager to direct all facets of my performance, including musical arrangements, musician recruitment, rehearsals, and marketing the event. I sourced performers and arrangers from every program at Berklee Valencia, forcing me to analyze and reacquaint myself with the best possible practices for organized leadership. The show, supported by a multitude of Berklee Valencia affiliates, is booked for June 27th at Veles e Vents in Valencia Spain, in partnership with LiveX promotion, a live music promotion company based in Valencia.

Honoring and celebrating one of the greatest musicians of all time and my personal idol, Michael Jackson, seemed like the perfect way to fully explore my interests in a way that would

both highly engage and challenge me. 2019 will be the 40th anniversary of one of his most impressive solo albums, *Off the Wall*, and I felt passionate about organizing an event commemorating this milestone in musical history. In a marriage of many interests, I will perform as a vocalist and bassist, and I will employ my business acumen and past experience in live event planning. Furthermore, I will dive deep into the works of Michael Jackson and his social impact on the world. This performance works in tandem with my research on realization, reconciliation, and healing for public musical figures. With controversy surrounding him in life, as well as postmortem, there are few artists who could have benefited from this kind of social consulting like Michael Jackson. Much of my attention has focused on the life and career of Jackson, and it served as a catalyst for further research into how to host a respectful and productive dialogue surrounding the social perception of artists no longer able to advocate for themselves.

This project will serve me in many personal ways, but the main objective is quite simple: to put on an amazing show where people can sing, dance, and have a good time. I've committed my time to higher education and learning skills, but I am a musician first and foremost. My love for live music stems from an innate desire to share the most important aspects of my own culture and identity with the world. While the technical term for what I hope to become an ethnomusicologist, I think a better term to apply to my personal and professional persona is a griot. These nomadic poets, musicians, and storytellers in parts of West Africa continue a tradition of oral history through spoken word and music, and with family from Ghana, I feel culturally tied to this term. Furthermore, within the pop music I will perform, the baselines, drum grooves, and the percussive manipulation of Michael Jackson's own voice all share an undeniable connection to the musical traditions of West Africa. The arranging and writing on this album is a 20th century version of the sacred traditions of a West African griot sharing song,

dance, poetry, and news through exciting and engaging music. It is my goal to continue this tradition through the lens of a 21st century African-American.

**Resources/Materials Needed**

- Adobe Creative Suite
  - Marketing content
- Finale/Sibelius
  - Musical arrangements
- Complete backline (provided by venue) and musical instruments
  - Drums
  - Full set (Hardware, Cymbals)
  - Guitar
  - Amp
  - Bass
  - DI
  - Keys
  - E. Keyboard/Amp
  - 2 Hand Percussionists
  - Bongos, Congas, Djembe, tambourine, egg shakers, cowbell
  - 4 Background Vocalists
  - 5 sm58's/microphone stands (Including Lead Vox.)
  - Full horn section (2 trumpets, 1 trombone, 2 saxophones)
  - Clip on microphones
  - Strings (Violin, viola, cello)
  - Clip on/sm57's
- Ableton
  - Remixes of MJ songs for transitions
- Tech available at all times
  - Phones/laptops for communication
- Live event support for OTW
  - LiveX Promotion

Resource	Projected Expense
Equipment Rental Keyboard Drum Kit Bass Amp Guitar Amp Keyboard Amp Microphone(x5) Stand(X5) XLR/1/4 inch cables	€400.00
Musicians Piano Bass Drummer Aux Keys Guitar 4 Background Vox Trumpet (X2) Sax Trombone 13 musicians 3 rehearsals x3 hours 2 hour performance \$25/hour =\$275/musician	€3,575.00
Venue Rental w/Sound Tech	€500.00
LiveX Promotion	€250.00
Catering	€75.00
Transportation	€60.00
Rehearsal Space	€1,350.00
Marketing/Promotional Materials	€50.00
After Party Venue Rental	€800.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>€7,060.00</b>

The spreadsheet above highlights the approximate expenses associated with the production of my show, however each of the recorded items and services has been donated. Utilizing the community of academic musicians each person donated their time and talents. The venue was secured through a partnership with LiveX entertainment, Valencia-based live music promotional company, owned and operated by Berklee Alumni, Alex Canuto. LiveX sponsored the digital promotion of the concert, and booked the after party venue High Cube, free of charge. The rehearsal space, equipment rental, as well as printed marketing materials were able to be covered within the tuition I have already paid by using the practice facilities at the Berklee Valencia campus, and renting a majority of the equipment from the off campus rental services available to students. Included in the rental of the venue are two sound technicians, and a partial backline complete with microphone, stands, on stage monitors, PA system, and all required instrument and XLR cables. The only expenses incurred will be the transportation to and from the venue from Berklee campus to the venue, as well as the catering provided to musicians for rehearsals, these expenses are to be personally incurred by me as host of the event. The marketing for the event relies heavily on digital outreach on Facebook by creating an official event, and posting in social groups based in Valencia such as “ExPats”, and “Valencia Events & Parties”. Through the participation of the Berklee Valencia marketing office, we are able to take advantage of the official Berklee channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, website) to advertise the upcoming show. To further reach the Valencian community, I have printed posters for distribution around the city to local business, as well as wall canvassing in public spaces. The target audience for this show is of course the local community of musicians, but it’s a family-friendly, free show, and the main goal is to spread the word as much as possible to draw the largest audience.

## Plan of Action/Tasks

- December
  - Off the Wall (OTW) plan of show
- January
  - OTW arrangements
    - With Berklee graduates Brenna Carroll/Jas Kayser/Carolina Araoz
- February
  - Personal practice on Bass/Keys/Drums/Vox for OTW performance
- March
  - Continue vocal/bass study
    - As it applies to OTW performance
  - Secure venue for OTW performance
  - Secure partnership (promoter)
- April
  - Library Research Appt
    - Michael Jackson History
    - Sheet Music for horn/string arrangements
- May
  - OTW Rehearsals
    - For duets/solo songs of the show
      - “She’s out of my Life”
      - “It’s the Falling in Love”
  - Write reflective paper on findings
    - OTW project
- June
  - OTW Rehearsals
    - June 1st/3rd “She’s Out of my Life” rehearsal
    - June 6th (horns arranging and Background Vocal (BGV) sectional
    - June 13 “It’s the Falling in Love” Rehearsal
    - June 20th Horns sectional
    - June 19th BGV sectional
    - June 22nd Full band rehearsal
    - June 23rd Full band rehearsal
    - June 27th Full run of show/Soundcheck
  - Marketing to Valencia Public of show
- June 27th
  - Perform “Off the Wall” at Veles e Vents
    - 10:30pm-12:00am
  - After party at High Cube club on the water
    - 12:00am-4:00am

The greatest risk to this project would be failure to deliver an enjoyable, professional, and polished show. If I am unable to technically execute the music required of me, if we receive poor backline and sound engineering support from the venue, or if my peers and colleagues are reluctant to participate, the event will encounter challenges. Additionally, in live music, there is constant risk that one or more performers fall ill and are unable to perform at the event.

Executing a show with high energy from an audience to feed off of is ideal, and performing big songs for small crowds can be challenging for some artists. If our marketing efforts do not produce the audience turnout and participation we anticipate, I will delve into my experiences of performing with high energy for small audiences. As a musician and a music business intermediary, I believe these are the shows that truly define you as a performer. By collaborating with trusted, experienced individuals, we mitigate many risks. The musicians and industry professionals I've chosen to work with now are people I've been privileged enough to work with previously, and I am able to rely on their work ethic and commitment. I chose to work with a Valencia-based promotion company, LiveX Entertainment, for vital technical and administrative support. By choosing to utilize a company owned and operated in Valencia, we can take advantage of an insider's perspective on the city, its music scene, and how to most efficiently market our show. I stay aware of risks, but a lifelong relationship with live music has taught me how to manage challenges well, should they arise.

The greatest pressure comes from myself. I have a very critical desire to do justice to the music of Michael Jackson. His music means the world to me, and I would be disappointed with myself and my efforts, if I were to deliver a sub-par show. I risk my musical integrity by

attempting to pull off such a demanding performance, but having rehearsed diligently, and surrounded myself with incredible musicians, I am prepared.

Participating in this show as the executive producer, and also the performer, has given me fascinating insight into the lives of the performers through an administrative lens. As music business professionals, we are often focused on business, administrative, and technical aspects of a performance, and don't take the time to consider the burden that falls on the performer. Though I have often both organized and performed at an event, I've never done so to the scale of over 20 different musicians performing live in a public space. Evolving as a musician, learning a new instrument, and showcasing these skills in a performance of some of the most technically-advanced recorded music available is the most inspiring and impressive of all outcomes. When I first came to Berklee Valencia, I could hardly hold an electric bass guitar correctly, and now I'm playing classic Louis Johnson Funk lines that I could only dream of playing previously. I have studied with the iconic Gary Willis, I have arranged for a full orchestral group, and I have learned all of the chords and rhythmic notation of my favorite album of all time. This experience has helped me grow as a musician like nothing else ever has.

When I started to do this project, someone asked me if I was worried about achieving my goals, being so old to start on a new instrument. I knew that with full confidence and belief in my own talent, abilities, and work ethic, I would achieve my desired outcome. What started as a showcase of newly learned bass guitar skills has evolved to playing drums while singing, as well as performing on piano, something I rarely do in a live setting. I was determined, I worked hard during the last few months, and I knew it would not only be a challenge to me, but also an opportunity to highlight how much I've grown.

As a music business professional, seasoned musician, songwriter, and poet there's constant pressure to be on the cutting edge of culture, listening to the hottest new music to be aware of the up-and-coming stars of tomorrow, but my heart is in old music. Nothing makes me feel like disco, funk, soul, classic R&B, and Neo-Soul does. There's something about these near-antiquated genres that moves me, and I stand with my contemporary peers who create visionary art, serving as a bridge to connect them to the art that paved the way for theirs to exist. I love watching the faces of my peers as they listen to some of the music I love. They are often blown away by its quality, and it's been available to them their entire lives. I provided an opportunity for at least 20 musicians to be exposed some of the best music in the world, and I trust will only improve the quality of their own art.

The best part of this entire experience is that I'm excited to perform and I'm happy with the progress thus far. With the show coming up on the 27<sup>th</sup>, I cannot speak to how many people will attend, or how the rehearsals were executed. I do know that we are on track to have a fantastic show, and everybody I've communicated with is enthusiastic to participate or attend. The top priority is to offer an affordable and accessible enjoyable musical experience to the community. Hopefully drawing a diverse audience, I want to musically facilitate a celebration, followed by a conversation on the influence and musical contributions of Michael Jackson. I have the experience and expertise to execute the production of a performance of this scale, but to do so as a front woman is both extremely vulnerable and risky. I feel success in the growth I've experienced as a musician and music business professional through this process already. I know that this show, and the knowledge and skills I've acquired along the way, will continue to inspire my artistic, academic, and professional endeavors for years to come.