

The Berklee Sessions – COPE Radio Valencia

CULMINATING EXPERIENCE REFLECTION

Berklee College of Music's Valencia Campus

Global Entertainment & Music Business

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Project Summary

Widely known across the country, Cadena COPE is one of the largest national radio stations in Spain. Coming in at just over two million daily listeners, they broadcast from several locations nationwide; with one in Valencia. An amazing opportunity presented itself when the local station connected with Berklee Valencia to feature live music performances on the radio. With this knowledge, I approached the Berklee Valencia Communications department head, Amanda Tornel, to express my interest in turning the COPE Radio collaboration into a monthly feature that I would then organize and manage as my Culminating Experience. I wanted to organize an opportunity to showcase the cultural and musical diversity of the Berklee Valencia campus, while at the same time creating an invaluable experience for the emerging artists who are currently attending various degree programs during the term.

From this came the COPE Radio and Berklee Valencia collaboration. Over the course of six months I executed six different and genre diverse live or recorded music sessions to be featured on COPE Valencia's Monday show, "La Tarde," during a segment called "Escenario FM". Starting with a test show in December, a Berklee act was selected to be featured; students coming from various cultural and musical backgrounds, as well as different degree programs within Berklee Valencia. Out of six sessions, four featured graduate student performers and two were undergraduate student performers. In addition to the student musicians, a Berklee Faculty/Fellow/Staff member(s) were also selected to speak on various relevant topics in order to incorporate an additional dynamic to the show. This created more live content which showcased the exciting events happening on campus and the immense talent and diversity of the students who attend Berklee.

This collaboration proved to be an invaluable experience for all parties involved. Not only was it enriching for COPE's programming, but it also created a unique performance opportunity for new artists. Each of the student performers commented that they believed that the COPE collaboration was an invaluable initiative to help students promote themselves and their music. Pre-show and post-show social media numbers were collected from each artist in order to gauge if any noticeable difference could be determined, however, throughout this process I was able to determine that the true value of this collaborative initiative was on a more personal level. For Berklee, organic promotional content, COPE unique and engaging programming, and for the students, an industry relevant resume builder.

Plan of Action

The session lineup for each week was planned around key events happening with Berklee Valencia in order to allow for maximum exposure in the Valencian community. The plan was that each artist be evaluated based on ensemble size, genre, sound, diversity, social media presence and language. Specifically, I looked for live acoustic performer(s) no larger than a group of 2-3 or a group with larger instrumentation having recorded music, each also would need to be able to adapt to the Spanish-speaking only requirements of the radio station.

Though acoustic, an effort would be made to showcase a variety of genres. At least one performer would need to speak fluent Spanish in order to converse with the show host, Carles, in a casual manner. Answering general questions about their background, musical influences, as well as life in Valencia and their time spent attending Berklee. The application process would consist of a Google Form in which student performers submit an artist bio, sample audio and

video clips, as well as links to any social media. Preference would be given to students with an online presence if possible. This would provide a pre-established platform to gather data and engagement. I would then review all of the applicants and make programming decisions with the supervision of Amanda Tornel, Head of Communications at Berklee Valencia. A test session would be executed in December, upon the completion of which COPE would locked us in for our Monthly feature through June 2018.

Results

This project, at the execution level, immensely exceeded expectations. I couldn't have found better performers. Even though it became stressful at times, often due to forces outside of my control, everything worked out in the end. COPE was thrilled with our monthly sessions and often commented their amazement at the talent level brought to them from Berklee, as well as expressing their excitement on air for the various concerts and initiatives happening on campus. However, things were not only great on COPE's end. Most of the student performers featured had never done anything like it before, which made it an exciting learning opportunity for them. Nervous and full of anticipation, each executed a fantastic interview, regardless of radio inexperience.

Though each session was a success, there were still plenty of areas that I struggled with. To start, the actual selection process of the student musicians was not successful. The Google Form, great in theory, did not get as many submissions as expected. In fact, as was often the case, there were 0-2 submissions per form. This lead me to lean heavily of a more traditional approach of seeking out the musicians myself and familiarizing myself with the assets around

me, on my own. This, in turn, made it rather difficult to stick with my selection criteria. I had originally anticipated being able to take my pick from a wide variety of submissions, but it was not the case. I found myself, more so than not, having to actively seek out the students whom I felt would be a good fit. It was a difficult situation at the time, but it ultimately worked in my favor and it became much easier to connect with the musicians in this way.

Despite the fact that there are many musicians who perform acoustically, this performance requirement did present another problem and limiting factor to the selection process. Many of the on-campus musicians perform in large ensembles, as well as using non-tradition instruments for performance. To combat this, I was able to arrange with COPE the potential to feature the recorded music of featured student performers. This allowed a performer(s) that required more instrumentation to still have their music featured and answer questions. The final two months of sessions took advantage of this new arrangement and resulted in excellent discussion content. April's student feature was an aspiring DJ/Producer who was being featured at the premiere of Berklee's MUSAICO Festival, while May's feature was an undergraduate jazzy singer-songwriter who was promoting her featured single on Berklee's Women in Music Album project. COPE was able to play their recorded music, which would have otherwise been impossible due to instrumental limitations.

On the side of social media impact, I monitored their social number growth over the five days following the radio broadcast. With this, I noticed that it depended on the platforms that the artists were already working with and their own interaction with their current followers whether or not there was any growth in correlation to their radio session. For example, each artist gave a shout-out for listeners to follow them on their social media. Upon review, follower count, on

average, did not change much in the hours following the show. Contrary, each artist who chose to take advantage of the photos I provided to them of the sessions posted to their pages and stories about the experience. To this their followers responded very well. However, no definitive number growth was noticed out of the ordinary of the following days post-show. Ultimately the true value that each performer gained from the experience was on a personal level.

Next Steps

If this project were to continue, one of the issues moving forward is how to streamline the selection process and ensure that everyone has as much of an equal opportunity as possible. I still believe that an interest form would be ideal, however the way that the students are reached could be more efficient. Why were they not taking advantage of the performance opportunity when it was advertised? Upon asking around, many students had not even heard about the Berklee Sessions as an opportunity, so a lack of visibility was a clear indicator despite sharing and promoting each month on social media. A great way to combat this could be to start promoting it as soon as possible to the students so that there is a campus-wide understanding of the radio performance opportunity. Having completed six sessions in total, there are a wealth of videos and photos that could be utilized as marketing materials to future students. By getting the word out to the new students as soon as the semesters start, this could be key to added interest in the sessions.

At Berklee Valencia we have students from all over the globe, but with each term the ratio changes with new students coming in and leaving for semesters abroad. Moving forward with this project also presents the Spanish-fluency obstacle. Many Berklee students work and

collaborate with a variety of local ensembles and groups. Should there be a short supply of Spanish-speakers, this could be a potential area of struggle. As a preemptive measure, it might be best to limit the sessions to only one semester, so as to ensure enough participation and variety for each session. But that is just one of many options.

While it is indeed heartwarming to know that everyone had a fantastic time working on the project, in terms of an actual metric basis of proof, there is a severe lack thereof. This was another issue moving through the session process because from the beginning I originally planned to collect not just social media numbers from the performers, but also engagement data from the COPE Broadcasts and posted podcasts of the monthly sessions. This was an intense struggle after trying for many months to gain access to COPE's information, after being told yes, to never receive any data. I think moving forward, we should establish that requirement with COPE from the get-go to ensure that we are gaining some insights on the engagement value. This is not only beneficial for the artists, but is also very helpful for Berklee to know the audience that they are reaching in the area. Additionally, in an effort to increase social media exposure for the students, it would be interesting to see if we could take the Sessions on a "tour" of local radio stations and then compare the effects of one show versus multiple shows over a short period of time.

Aside from problem-solving, moving forward it would also be interesting to explore the idea of having larger live ensembles more accessible. For example, a pre-recorded or live session on-campus at Berklee in our studio with the Flamenco Ensemble. This would be an exciting chance to involve more students and showcase live performances with multi-instrumentation.

Contribution to the Discipline/Profession

Though I had an amazing experience executing this project, if I had the opportunity to do over again, I would still choose to do it. However, I do not think that I would choose it as my Culminating Experience. Upon my initial start of the program, I was very much set on the Live track. Through my experiences and various classes I took here at Berklee, I ultimately decided that the Record track with a marketing focus was the ideal path for me. With that, I personally believe it would have been more advantageous for me to design a music marketing based CE, one that could have potentially established some connections for future career prospects or projects. Nevertheless, I am still extremely proud of the work I did this year and I stand behind this project and an invaluable learning experience.

Personal Impact

The opportunity to work with one of the most established and well-known Radio stations in Spain was not only a fantastic opportunity for Berklee artists, it was also an invaluable learning opportunity for my development as a Music Business professional. My role as curator within this Culminating Experience ties in a variety of key elements of this area of the Business such as A&R, Promotion, Managing, and Marketing. Each coming together to form the whole project as a diverse industry experience and contributing to the professional development of these artists through their exposure to radio on a local and national level. The successful execution of this process was an excellent opportunity for me to showcase my ability to manage a long-term project.

Although a success, the project was not without its struggles. I believe the area where I was the weakest was the maintaining of a schedule to have sessions lined up and organized. I

found it extremely difficult to keep to the original timeline that I laid out at the beginning of the project. There were many factors that lead to this struggle, some being: lack of artistic interest, genre diversity, communication, language barrier, and schedule flexibility. I am very proud of the work that I have done, but I believe the planning and execution of each session would be far less stressful if each session was finalized a month in advance, as originally intended.

On a more emotional note, it was very rewarding for me to see the show process come to life for the artist. Many of them were quite nervous, never having performed on the radio before or done anything similar. Each performer expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to put themselves and their music out in such an extent. One artist even became slightly emotional while listening to herself on the radio for the first time. It was moments like that which made all the little stressful moments worth it.

Following up on this experience, I spoke with Amanda Tornel about her thoughts on the institutional value of the project. She mentioned, “Berklee's campus in Valencia proactively seeks opportunities to give visibility to students' music and projects. Having been able to move this initiative forward thanks to Melissa's involvement in it, has provided the campus with a platform to showcase its students' initiatives and talent among the Valencian society through one of the main radio stations in the region, hence further connecting with the local community and positively increasing its presence among them. For our students, having access to these opportunities is a way to develop tools to face similar situations in a professional setting in the future, which can definitely benefit their careers.” All performers throughout this process have listed their experience on their artistic resume and claim that this experience was invaluable for their growth as a performer.

For all parties involved, each gained invaluable assets throughout the experience of the Berklee Sessions. By result of this collaboration, COPE Radio has decided that they would like to continue their partnership with Berklee in the future and schedule radio sessions in the following school year. It is my hope that this relationship continues for many years to come, continuing to grow and allowing a countless number of students the opportunity to showcase their talents and the many different cultures, genres, and backgrounds that come together to create amazing music at Berklee Valenica.