Will Clark

Culminating Experience

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Slamtronix: the Octopus Show

I have been working on a project called Slamtronix for a number of years now, and my goal here at Berklee College of music in Valencia, Spain was to help this project flourish. I wanted to explore the best sound-design, visual arts and performance techniques to get this project ready for the big stage. Slamtronix is an interactive collaboration between electronic music and live musicians. It fits into a genre of music dubbed 'jamtronica'. I believe my unique and very diverse musical background is perfect for coming up with new, innovative ways to capitalize on this niche, musical genre.

In creating and presenting my musical ideas about electronic music, and performance in general, I recognize that a huge part of this lays in having great project management skills. From organizing the musicians, to stage design, to getting people to support this music, there is a lot to organize in order to present my concepts in a unique and digestible manner. To create successful music you must develop your skills and knowledge about music to the farthest complexities and intellectual idealism, to be able to make it understandable to people who have not opened the first page of this book.

The Octopus Party

Using all of the work I have done and things I have learned over this year I organized a party at a local venue in Valencia, Spain called Radio City to present my music, stage design and project management skills. I chose this venue because it is a very well known venue in Valencia, Spain and has a unique setup that lends itself very well to my music. There is a live stage for the live acts in addition to a DJ booth for the DJs. I secured the venue by playing at the open mic. They really liked my singing and so I asked to meet the owner of the venue to try and book a show. They agreed and so the planning began.

The night included a lot of things that I thought to be innovative in throwing a party at a small club like Radio City. I organized a few groups to play throughout the night and had a lot of people helped run the event. I organized acts to go on before and after my group Slamtronix, and had DJs ready to fill the silence as well as play to make the crowd dance after the live acts. During setup I had help hanging the projectors and even blowing up funny balloon hats for the crowd. Interactive things like the balloons I feel add a lot to the experience of the people going to the show.

In order to present my music I organized a band with a drummer, singer and guitarist and rehearsed them relentlessly. I have been using Ableton Live for a number of years and have accumulated a lot of musical ideas and full productions. I then took these songs and put them into one big DJ set to be able to rehearse and come up with the other parts in collaboration with the musicians. My goal was to make a live band feel for the electronic music I have created over the years.

The concept for the show came out of a night out with my friends during Fallahs here in Valencia. We like coming up with very inane ideas and have estimated our ratio of stupid ideas to great ideas 20:1. We liked the idea of having a theme for the show and therefore dubbed the show 'The Octopus Garden Party'. We used the octopus for many things including promotions and even built a giant octopus for the show that I projection mapped onto. I thought the octopus might inspire interest and a certain level of mystery to the show. I thought people might have more interest in coming to the show if I could evoke their curiosity about where the octopus might come into play with the concert.

I created out of foam a large octopus. I gave him a bowtie and hat and then projection mapped onto the different parts of the octopus. I gave him two large eyes, which worked very well with the projections. I recreated the spherical eyes in the 3D animation program Cinema 4D. I gave the eyes detail, color and movement and bounced them to video which I played through Resolume's Arena.

Innovation

There are many things I put into the show that I think not widely practiced yet in the music world. The music itself is a combination of many sound-design and electronic music techniques with live musicians. My experience comes from many years of creating music in Ableton Live, as well as the countless rock bands, jazz groups and other live music groups I have been in throughout my musical career. I have had a lot of musical opportunities in contemporary music because of my standup bass studies. I have been playing standup bass for almost 15 years now and it has taken me on some incredible musical endeavors.

The most valuable training I believe I have received has been my classical music studies. Throughout high school and undergraduate studies I played in countless youth and professional orchestras and had an extremely demanding training with some of the best bass players in the world, with the support of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and San Francisco Symphony. I have taken many of the techniques I learned in this world to my contemporary and electronic music. Not the least of which is the extreme discipline I have. I use the concepts I have learned from conductors and musical directors in rehearsing my musicians and conducting the electronic music. I use cutoffs and hand gestures to communicate with the musicians on stage. I also hold very close the concept of stamina when rehearsing the musicians, and how effective taking breaks can be.

There are many innovative and technological advances in live performance developing nowadays and I think taking advantage of as many of these technologies as possible will greatly advantage my career in performance. In the performance at Radio City I combined live music, electronics, creative projection art, stage lighting and audience interaction to create an experience for everyone involved. To top off all of the lighting installation, I handed out diffraction-lenses glasses to the first 50 people to arrive. These glasses contain microscopic prisms in the lenses that greatly enhance the visuals in the show. Combining all of these aspects of performance and lighting arts is what I believe made the performance truly innovative.

New Skills Acquired

Throughout my year here at Berklee Valencia I acquired many new skills in the field of electronic music production and feel very technologically empowered when it comes to production and studio technique. This has helped me a lot in producing the Octopus show because it has allowed me to cover all the bases in terms of media, promotion and setup before the show. The sound at the venue was very terrible but I was able to help the soundman a lot in terms of gain staging and setup for all of our equipment. Having gained the discipline from my classical training, the ideology of interactive performance from the circus and now the contemporary, technical training from Berklee, I believe I have a very powerful skill set to help innovate live performance in the future.

My main goal in doing this performance was to enhance my project management skills. For about two years before coming here to Berklee I worked in a circus and entertainment company called Velocity Entertainment in San Francisco. At this company I was a part of many big events and parties. I had many rolls in this company from clown, to musician, to artist management, to building and maintaining many large scale installations and art pieces. Working in this professional environment gave me a very good idea of the many aspects of project management. The main thing I learned is that it takes a lot of organization and help from other people. You really cannot do everything yourself.

Challenges

This subject of my paper should absolutely be the longest section. I had many problems both expected and not expected. The biggest problem I had was in getting people to commit to helping with something, and actually following through. I had a lot of people not show up for certain responsibilities or flake on my very last second. I went through three drummers before I found one that was actually able to commit. The circus act that I hired to perform at the event turned their phone of the day of the event and didn't show up at all. We had many other problems from securing equipment, to setting up at the venue as well as keeping the venue owners happy throughout the night.

We had a first trial show about a month before the final show, and the drummer I had lined up called me the day before to say he couldn't make it. The second drummer I had for the big show gave me a little more of a heads up but still had to cancel on me. I luckily found another drummer that was part of the summer program at Berklee. The sound-check we had before the event was an absolute disaster. Barley anyone actually showed up for the times I had requested. I had been there for hours beforehand setting up the projectors, octopus and rest of the equipment but when it came time to do the sound-check it took twice as long because we had to wait for people to arrive over an hour late to get the gain staging correct. The sound-check went an hour over the time we scheduled and I was in a major rush to eat something before the show. In the future I will always make sure to plan ahead all of my meals the day of an event.

There a lot of problems during the event itself. We ended up being an hour late on the acts by the end of the night. This was detrimental in keeping the venue owners happy. DJ Encanti was originally scheduled to go on at 1:30 but ended up starting at 2:30. A lot of people had shown up to dance around 2:00 and ended up leaving because the music was too slow and the venue owners were not very happy about this. In a real world situation acts would have gotten cut to be able to make up the time difference. The reasons for getting late were because of the technical difficulties during Sean000's performance and the rappers took about 30 minutes longer than they were being aloud. Anytime there was silence from the speakers the venue manager would come up to me and would chew me out. This was a very stressful environment and I ended up passing my stress onto the other performers. In the future I need to make sure this doesn't happen.

The Future of Slamtronix

This music is something that I plan to take with me for as long as I can. The fusion of electronic music and our conception of music now is a huge step in the history of music on this planet. For hundreds of years musicians and composers have come up with the theory and practice that has made our music so great, only to have everything change starting with the advent of recording. Electronic music is only in its infancy and I can see many innovations to come in

the near and far future. I want to make sure I play a roll in helping everyone understand the possibilities that these new technologies are allowing us.

After graduation I do not have a plan set in stone. I will return to California for a while to find job opportunities as well as try and find the next phase in my musical education. San Francisco is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States and with the technology industry in the San Francisco Bay Area, is one of the most influential cities in technology and arts. In the past San Francisco has played a major roll in changing the way we understand music, technology and the modern condition. However, San Francisco has also become one of the most expensive cities to live in. I am at an advantage however because on my knowledge of the area. The music and arts scene in Oakland, California is growing very rapidly and is in the perfect situation to breed a new genre of electronic music. I hope to use my connections there to start playing shows and promoting my style of live electronic music.   Hopefully I can take Slamtronix on the road as soon as possible to start growing a fan base. My experience here in Spain has been invaluable in helping me understand the global music scene and how to be a professional in any musical culture.

I have also been in contact with the visual artist Zebbler, in hopes of getting an internship with him. In my musical education this would be huge in helping me experience and learn how some of the best performers in the business operate. My knowledge of projection arts and 3D graphics has only just begun. I can see myself becoming very passionate about creating visual arts and learning from Zebbler would be ideal. At this point my plans are not set in stone but I am very hopeful for the future of my performance career.   The skills that I have gained so far in my life are pointing me in the exact direction I want to go with my career.

Conclusion

What the future holds for me, for music and for the world is very uncertain in this time of rapid growth and technological advancement. I am very uncertain of what I am even going to do in the next few months let alone where my career might take me. However, I am very hopeful that I have taken all the right steps to secure my place in the musical world. At this point I have a lot of knowledge about where my skills can take me, but getting there is going to take thousands of hours of hard work, sleepless nights and hard-core dedication.

I hope to drastically change people's perception of music in many different ways throughout my career. I want to convince people that music is all the same and can be loved by everyone just the same. From people who don't understand the skills needed to be a DJ or producer, to people who think that classical music is 'boring'. I believe these are delusional perceptions of people's close-minded experiences. I want to change this common ideology that only certain music can be valued by certain people by demonstrating the diversity of performance, music and composition in a way that all people can understand.