

Introduction:

The folk music of Jamaica is a rich and varied creative resource from which I draw inspiration. The Jamaica culture has also been an active contributor to the development of electronic music. With this work, I bring together Jamaican folk and electronic music and created something new from the fusion.

Description of the Culminating Experience Project (the WORK):

The Work consists of:

- A set of recordings based on a fusion of electronic music and Jamaican folk music. A minimum of 5 recordings will be presented- fully produced and mixed. These recordings will be original songs as well as traditional Jamaica folk music. The connecting theme among them will be that of the fusion of electronic music and elements or influences of Jamaican folk music.
- A live solo performance¹ of a selection of these recordings to be executed in one of the Salas, utilizing audio and multimedia technology and software. This performance will utilize software and hardware, audio, lights and video. The main software will be Ableton Live. Additionally Q Lab and DMXIS. Hardware: MacBook Pro, APC 40 , Alesis Vortex, McMillen 12 Step.
- Delivery of music videos (at least 3) done to accompany the recordings
- Delivery of at least one script and Keynote presentation of a lecture demonstration of the process for creating the work or aspects thereof
- A budget and plan for creation of a derivative app for iOS devices

Innovative Aspects of the WORK:

The work uses, as one of its main resources, the vast wealth of barely known Jamaican folk music. I employ the folk elements in various ways. I use samples of field recordings, melodies and rhythmic figures. While some of the songs are in known EDM styles, others have elements of sound design and sampling using synth textures and environmental audio to create rhythms and beats.

Another innovative aspect of the work is that it is a solo multimedia performance using Ableton Live, the TC Helicon VoiceLive 2, APC 40, McMillen 12 Step and other controllers as well as DMXIS for DMX light control and projection using Q Lab.

The live show showcased my performance as a solo artist and included some aspects of a lecture demonstration.

The stage was set with two projector screens one stage monitor and for the audience- two speakers and a sub.

¹ Folkbeats & Blipspeak live solo performance occurred June 29, 2014 in Sala D

from Q Lab was projected images and video of Jamaica for various songs in a 6 song set. The other video projected was either filmed and edited by me for the music video production class (Videos for : *Pass De Ball*² and *Bad Maddanlaw*³) or was sources as appropriate royalty free b-roll (for *Stalling for Time*⁴ and mixed in the with footage for *Pass De Ball* and *Dis Long Time Gyal*)

My station was placed center stage and the show was chiefly run from Ableton on my laptop. From within Ableton I routed a few things-

- Microphone/Vocal routing: I sent the microphone signal to Ableton Live via the Mbox Pro. From within Ableton I then sent a copy of that signal to the VoiceLive 2 for processing and returned the processed signal to Ableton. I had some control over the balance of the processed signal and the dry vocal.
- Midi Patch changes to the VoiceLive 2: I sent (using midi clips) messages to select the bank and preset and well as automation of various preset-specific and general parameters of the VoiceLive 2. This made quick work of preset changes with specific alterations for each song.
- I routed the midi signal of the Alesis Vortex keytar to the VoiceLive2 via Ableton so I could assign the desired notes and chord to the vocoder effect used in *Dis Long Time Gyal* and *Eva*.
- The return of the VoiceLive 2 was also routed to a Looper in Ableton, allowing me to loop and layer my voice at the end of *Dis Long Time Gyal*.
- The McMillen 12 Step midi controller was mapped to the controls of the Looper, allowing me to control it while away from the laptop (*Dis Long Time Gyal*).
- I assigned various parameters of a synth Bass preset in Massive to the X and Y coordinated of the Hot Hand controller allowing me manipulate the texture of the bass, live (*Bad Maddanlaw*).
- I used the Akai APC40 to trigger clips in Ableton and to reset the counter.
- The Arturia MiniLab keyboard controller triggered Stutter Edit preset effects for *Pass De Ball*.
- DMX: I used the ENTTEC DMXIS (a USB to DMX converter) to send lighting cues and lighting automation to a DMX driver (for which a sourced parts and assembled with the help of Ian Kagey) and also to the school's lighting rig. Specific lighting cues were programmed for each song in the set.

The proposed App would also be a new way of promoting the music as well as providing information on the folk resources utilized in the production of the work. It will be an aid in lecture demonstrations and well as disseminating the hybrid works I create.

² Dexter, Noel and Taylor, Godfrey. *Mango Time- Folk Songs of Jamaica*. Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2007. (Page 92)

³ The Edna Manley Collection

⁴ Original composition: Michael Sean Harris

New Skills Acquired:

- Sound design with zeta 2, massive, spear, iris: In the sound design class we explored various forms of sound synthesis which resulted in original patches for the synths on Ableton Live as well as Massive, FM8 and Zeta 2. We also designed textures and soundscapes with granular synthesis in spear another others. These patches and textures were included in the arrangements of *Lion's Lament*, *Bad Maddanlaw*, *Pass De Ball* and *Stalling for Time*.
- More in depth discovery of Ableton Live: I explored various ways to route audio and midi from within Ableton and also to communicate with devices outside of Ableton. Ableton really became the brain of my live performance set. Ableton also was invaluable for production as it allowed me the freedom to create and make changes realtime while composing and producing.
- The skills learned in the music video production class gave me a more elaborate concept of video production and has equipped me with the skills needed to produce my own videos on a more regular basis as a tool for marketing myself, my musical product as well as a YouTube channel.
- I learned clear compositional concepts for electronic music production after being exposed to and educated about various genres within the field of electronic music. I have also explored new ways to consider texture, rhythm and arrangement peculiar to electronic music and design.
- Stage, studio and performance rig design concepts and considerations: We explored the variables for set up of a small project studio as well as for live performance. I also prototyped and refined my personal set up of software, hardware and controllers for my live performance.
- Introduction to programming concepts: We explored the basics of programming in Max/MSP and also basic scripting and prototyping with the Arduino.

Challenges, both anticipated and unexpected:

- The first challenge was finding a way to keep track on my resources: The field recordings I had chosen as possibilities, song and compositional fragments I already had, ideas for new arrangements of folk songs and ideas for new original works. To accomplish this I created a spreadsheet and color coded completed works, folk songs,

original songs and songs fragments as well as field recordings yet to be implemented into a piece.

- Decision making was also a bit of a challenge at times. To help with this I got feedback from faculty and trusted friends. Ben Cantil was pivotal in helping me to make stylistic decisions and in guiding the direction of some of the songs.
- Yet another challenge was that of figuring out an elegant work and signal flow for the live performance based on the software and equipment that I already had and what I could afford to acquire. Through prototyping and trying various ways, I eventually arrived at a somewhat streamlined solution. I had to create separate signal flow charts for audio and midi, then even further within those two categories, decide on the various ways I needed to use and route audio and the various controllers sending midi and what aspects of the set needed to receive midi signals from unique sources. I believe it is possible to further simplify the set up and will continue to experiment with new models of the live set-up.
- After deciding I wanted to have more of a multimedia show, I had the idea to control LED strips as part of the live experience. The challenge was finding DMX lighting control software simple enough for a novice lighting designer to use as having the ability to automate and sync the DMX messages. I consulted with lighting designers and was eventually advised to go with DMXIS which could be used as a stand alone DMX software and also as a plug in within Ableton or any other DAW.
- I needed to find a way to drive the LED strips, the drivers available were out of my budget so I sourced the various parts needed from China and in Spain and with the help of Ian Kagey and Christopher Wainwright, constructed a DMX driver for RGB LED strips. This idea blossomed and in the end I programmed the LED strips as well and the LED fixtures in Berklee's lighting rig.
- With in the live performance, particularly using the VoiceLive 2 as a vocoder, there was a problem of not having enough of the dry signal of the vocal and too much of the harmony and effects. This was solved from within Ableton by routing the mic signal through an External Audio Effect and creating an audio chain with which I could have a spectrum from Dry Mic to Mic with full Vocoder effect to scan through. I also disabled the reverb and delay from the VoiceLive pedal and mapped Ableton's reverb and delay send to a knob on the APC40.
- There are many ways looping can be approached in Ableton and it took a process of trial and error to decide on the most appropriate way for what I was trying to accomplish. I realize that as I progress, I might have to explore other methods as my needs change.

- One of the main ingredients of the music is Jamaican folk and it proved difficult to obtain video footage from Jamaica. I had appealed to several contacts I thought could assist me and none of them were successful. I eventually made a Facebook post and had several people sending me footage.

Future Ramifications and/or plans for the WORK:

I will continue composing music that fuses Jamaican folk and electronic music. The hope is to perform these songs at World music and Electronic music festivals and also to deliver lecture demonstration, preferably at a tertiary level. The first performance of this music will most likely be at the Gungo Walk Festival in Kingston, Jamaica on September 6, 2014. The next planned performance will be in Berlin, along with a German Soprano, celebrating Jamaica's folk music for the Jamaican Embassy there. I plan to further develop the multimedia aspects of the work so that the performance will be an immersive multimedia experience.

The proposed App, when completed, will be a very effective tool for marketing the new music I am creating as well as informing the public about the folk culture of Jamaica.

In the future, I would also like to create a sample library of various traditional Jamaican instruments as a resource for others to employ in their compositions. The possibility also exist for hybrid versions of these instruments which might include Arduinos and sensors communicating with Max or Ableton Live.

I hope to further develop this unique voice of Jamaican folk/Electronic fusion and push the limits as far as I can while encouraging others to do the same, creating a kind of folk revival.

Conclusion:

This process has been intense, introspective and cathartic. I enjoyed the opportunity to explore and experiment with music that I truly love. The many challenges and opportunities for performance brought back the joy I had for performing and letting my unique sound be heard. I feel I am armed with skills and tools to address almost any challenge to do with production and sound design. The exposure to new technologies and the endless possibilities they present has opened up a fresh new window for creativity and

creative exploration. This work has potential on so many levels from Education, Entertainment, Politics and Technology... and that is just the beginning.