

Culminating Experience Reflection

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Berklee
college *of*
music

Valencia Campus

Summary of the Project Completed:

Over the course of a year, I have been working towards developing both audio and visual material in conjunction with the Signal Kitchen, a multi-purpose music venue, recording studio, and content creator located in Burlington, Vermont. Signal Kitchen has an estimated one Terabyte (library) of live recordings that are being, or will be, used for promotional purposes. The audio is organized in a way that each individual instrument tracked during live performances is recorded as a separate file, or a stem.

Our goal was, and still is, to use these exclusive live stems to generate new musical content built from recorded past Signal Kitchen performances.

The development of new musical content will be captured in a behind the scenes video series highlighting the creative process as well as the musicians and bands incorporated and sampled within the project.

More specifically, the functionality of this project is as follows:

- The project involves four principal parties: Signal Kitchen, external brand sponsors, original performing artists, and licensed artists who are invited to participate.
- Invited artists will be given access to the Signal Kitchen audio library and will use the live tracks as components for new and original compositions. The creative process will be captured in behind the scenes video vignettes that will feature both the vision and work of the invited artist while highlighting the contribution of original performing artists.
- Signal Kitchen will act as an intermediary between the participating artists. All recorded content and selection of participants will be organized and controlled at Signal Kitchen's discretion. Invited licensed artists will receive technical and creative support from Signal Kitchen and will be the focal point of the content produced.
- The material accessible in the archive will be comprised exclusively from audio content of past Signal Kitchen performances where permission has been obtained from original performing artists. Participating artists allowing use of their original content will gain copy benefits through being cited on all project announcements and promotions.

Ultimately, the project will not only act as method of brand expansion for Signal Kitchen but also as a creative nucleus, connecting artists that otherwise may not normally work together. There is potential for mass outreach to a significant and diverse target audience of music fans interested in a variety of different genres.

This project is multifaceted and will take a substantial amount of time to complete in a way that is thorough and efficient. Initially, I proposed to finish the following by the end of the school year:

Primary Task	Necessary Sub Tasks
Outline project and define details with Signal Kitchen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Length of project (EP vs LP) ○ Budget and payment for parties involved
Create media kit and pitches for remixers, artists to be remixed, and potential sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clearly and concisely summarize project concept ○ Express mutual value for parties involved ○ Identify inspirations for project ○ Highlight similar projects and relevant statistics ○ Profile services provided by Signal Kitchen ○ List Signal Kitchen experience and work samples ○ Detail timeline for project ○ Communicate with design team for media kit finalization
Develop list of and contact potential remixers and sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct research and determine what artists and sponsors are relevant and appropriate ○ Organize artist and sponsor market data ○ Package individual messages with media kit and pitch to remixers and sponsors

Due to unforeseen issues with scheduling and communication, some of the expectations set at the beginning of the project had to be adjusted throughout the year. The following work has been completed to date:

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Process

As with any partnership, the first step of this project was to pitch the idea to the co-owner of Signal Kitchen, Alex Lalli. Though the idea for the project wasn't yet fully formed, I knew Signal Kitchen had the necessary resources (audio stems) to follow through with my plans. Additionally, my past relationship as a performer and consultant to the venue allowed for our conversation to be open and casual. After our initial Skype meeting, I was asked to better outline what sort of value might be generated for all participating parties.

During the early phases of planning, we had discussed the project being exclusive to audio content; rather than having a separate visual element, Signal Kitchen would be the curator for a series of new audio compositions deriving from past live performances. However, it was later decided that an audio product alone would not allow for significant value for artists allowing their work to be sampled. As an artist, being cited as the source of an audio sample in liner notes does not always provide substantial benefit. It was at this point where the idea for an accompanying video series came to fruition. Incorporating a short video series following the making of each audio composition allows for viewers/listeners to access an in-depth look as to what inspired the music and where the samples originated, thus adding value to artists granting permission for their recordings to be used. Providing a visual element also would make the project appealing to sponsors, as it would create another avenue to reach a wide variety of music fans.

Once the idea for the project had been laid out and agreed upon, a to-do list was developed depicting starting steps. Primarily, the most important task of the preliminary responsibilities was creating a succinct, yet clear, proposal. From this full-length proposal, a short visually stimulating version would be created to pass onto to artists and sponsors we aimed to have participate in the project. This proposal went through a series of multiple drafts and was the topic of email and Skype conversations for months. Mainly, establishing value for all parties involved with the project proved to be most difficult. After it had been agreed upon that the long form version of the proposal was finished, the five-page document was cut down into bullet points into a two-page quick read version.

Despite the proposal being time consuming, I was able to compile a comprehensive list of thirty-six potential sponsors and over one hundred potential participating artists that I plan to later approach about participating in the project. Specifically, I determined the location of the sponsor, professional field, mission statement, and previous related work. The most likely sponsors to want to be involved with the project would have past experience with arts and music related projects.

Being a DJ for nearly a decade and a fan of electronic music, much of the artist selection in my list was based on my personal preference of who might be best to remix the stems made available to the Signal Kitchen. The list of artists also includes social media statistics, past performance experience, and management contact.

Results: Expectations and Reality

I expected to complete more of the project by the time the school year had ended. While I was able to finish most of the work I had outlined in my Culminating Experience proposal, there were a few key tasks that have yet to be worked out. In addition to what I have completed to date, I had originally planned to have a budget created and to send out initial contact to potential artists and sponsors. As previously indicated, this work was affected by unforeseen difficulties in communication.

Shortly after Berklee received and passed the first Culminating Experience proposal draft, Signal Kitchen began some large-scale projects. Over the winter, their venue underwent significant renovations. Following the construction, Alex (co-owner) began to organize a festival and develop a separate branch of the company devoted to creating brand content. Along with my busy schedule of schoolwork and interviewing for jobs, our agreed upon communications schedule soon fell to the wayside. Much of our contact was maintained over email; the six-hour time difference between Valencia and Burlington, Vermont caused delayed responses and often follow up emails were sent to verify whether or not Signal Kitchen had received my original messages.

By nature my project is multifaceted and is, simply put, large-scale. However, I do believe that with stronger communication we might have been able to accomplish more over the nine-month period.

Next Steps

Continuing the project would mean creating and refining informational material so that it is ready to be passed onto potential sponsors and artists. A pilot episode of the behind the scenes documentary needs to be created to give sponsors and artists an example of what a final product might look like. Second, the proposal needs to be adjusted so that it is visually stimulating and easier to glance through. Lastly, financial and legal details must be confirmed before the project moves any further.

This work will be easier to do once I am working within the US. While I am in Vermont I will be able to effectively coordinate with the Signal Kitchen video team and determine how much a pilot might cost and what resources it would require. Similarly, I would be able to speak with some of the Signal Kitchen designers to discuss visual work on a new proposal. Legal aid will perhaps have to be conducted through personal connections. Unfortunately, neither Signal Kitchen nor I am in a financial position to spend money on an entertainment lawyer to suggest how we might carry out our project legally. I intend to use my Berklee connections to see if we may be able to get legal advice at a low cost.

Once these details are resolved we will be able to create a budget that we will be able to present to sponsors. By understanding exactly how much the project will cost and how it will work legally, we will be one step closer to contacting artists and sponsors and creating audio/visual content.

Contribution to Profession

This project will help launch the Signal Kitchen brand farther into the public eye and is inspired by two different brands based out of the United Kingdom: Fabric Live and Boiler Room.

Fabric is a venue located in London that specializes in showcasing electronic dance music. In early 2001, the venue began sponsoring and releasing a series of DJ mixes featuring a variety of electronic producers representing the music that would be played in the club on any given night. The mixtape series has enabled the brand to expand globally and to partner with likeminded labels and organizations (Fabric Nightclub, 2013). Fabric has since become an icon in the realm of DJing and is continuing to expand through variations of their initial brand equity.

Boiler Room is a web-based concert streaming services started by Blaise Belville, a young entrepreneur based out of the UK. The project began as Belville inviting friends to perform live DJ mixes over a U-Stream web cam set up in his office space and later evolved into a global music platform that now reaches out to millions per month (Fucknfilthy.com, 2011). Boiler Room sessions are normally curated a single musician or record label and features anywhere between one to ten performers throughout the show. The web based medium is not only appealing to world wide audiences, as fans are able to access unique concerts for free, but is also appreciated by many musicians who see the Boiler Room as a chance for them freely experiment and spend time with like-minded artists (Boiler Room, 2013). The success of Boiler Room is built on user accessibility and the creative and collaborative structure of each event.

My culminating experience is more or less a mix between both of these business models. The idea is a combination between the brand expansion of Fabric and the collaborative foundation of Boiler Room. Signal Kitchen would extend internationally through releasing records and would be recognized as the architect behind a project that brings a wide variety of musicians together.

Moreover, this project is entirely unique to other remix projects. Often times remix projects take the form of compilation albums. *Blue Note Records*, for example, has released compilations in which many electronic music producers are assigned to remix individual songs from the labels catalogue (e.g. *Blue Note Revisited*) (Dave Segal, 2004). Additionally, remix projects can be focused on the reinvention of a certain style. Alternative electronic and rock label *Friends of Friends* has released multiple compilations in which artists signed to the label remix pop hits from the 80's, 90's, and 2000's (*Pop Massacre* series) (FoF Music). Less often, remix albums feature one artist reinterpreting a catalogue of music. *Blue Note Records*, in addition to its *Blue Note Revisited* album, licensed Los Angeles beat maker Madlib to remix select titles from its catalog for a 2003 album entitled *Shades of Blue* (Sam Samuelson, 2004).

My culminating experience, while similar to the idea of Madlib's *Blue Note* project (one artist remixing a catalogue), would build upon the concept by allowing the remixer to take inspiration and material from a variety of tracks to make an original composition rather than restricting them to only one. The unique nature of the project would be both new to the music industry and a valuable tool for popularizing the Signal Kitchen brand. This proposed project would allow the venue to expand while still staying true to their brand identity and aesthetic.

The visual element will act as a way for the project to reach a wider audience. Music fans will be able to not only experience the music through mini behind the scene documentaries but will also be introduced, in detail, to the remixing artist and the artists being sampled.

Impact on Student

Working on this project allowed me to experience first hand some of the lessons I was learning in class throughout the school year. First and foremost, I found that plans do not always turn out the way in which you intend. Communications between Alex and me, despite being detailed in my initial Culminating Experience proposal, ended up completely changing and altering what we were able to accomplish during the year. This was also the case in a few Berklee courses, namely Marketing during the first semester and Entrepreneurship and Innovation during semester two. In both of these classes, group projects were difficult to navigate in that coordinating a team of students (as opposed to working as an individual) complicated our preliminary plans to create and hand-in deliverables.

Second, and perhaps most important, I learned the importance of demonstrating the value of a project. Furthermore, it takes time for a good idea to develop. Benji Rogers best illustrated this concept when he spoke about his company, Pledge Music, describing that the full development of his initial idea took years to complete. There are many fine details that must be ironed out before a project is brought forth to investors and sponsors. Pledge Music is great example of how a well thought out and executed plan can lead to a successful venture.

Primarily, communication continuously played a critical role throughout my Culminating Experience. During the times where Alex and I were communicating on a regular basis things moved smoothly and we were both able to accomplish a great deal. In contrast, when we were unable to speak with each other for a substantial period of time tasks remained unfinished and we were not ready to tend to other areas of the project.

It is my hope that upon my returning to the U.S. I will be able to facilitate better communication with Signal Kitchen in an effort to move this idea passed its beginning stages and to a point where we can start licensing and creating brand new content. I truly believe that this project will be able to generate value and cultivate meaningful artistic partnerships between a wide range of artists as well as introduce a variety of new music to diverse circles of music fans. This Culminating Experience has allowed me to experiment with what does and does not work and paves the way for focused and educated efforts moving forward.

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