

Culminating Experience
Reflective Paper



*A Chance
to Dream*

**A REFLECTION ON
'A CHANCE TO DREAM MUSIC SERIES' AND
MY BERKLEE EXPERIENCE**

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I. Project Summary

A Chance to Dream was an original event concept conceived by the student club Creativo Collective, which the team built from the ground up with the support of Berklee College of Music. Our goal for this project was to do something educational and inspirational for the student community in Valencia while helping others in need. This is why we chose to use the event to raise money for Music Action International, which is a non-profit organization that supports survivors of war-related trauma and stress through music programs.

This event included two distinct parts, with a motivational seminar followed by a concert. The content of the event was strong, though the nuances of creating an event for a community I am not fully immersed in was more of a challenge. I learned several important lessons, and doing this project as part of my Berklee experience transformed my worldview and heightened my understanding of the music industry and where I fit in it.

II. Results

Frankly, the seminar was not well-attended. Though I knew it would be challenging to draw a crowd to any first-time event, I did not think the seminar would be quite so poorly attended. In choosing the Facultat de Belles Arts at Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), we targeted the UPV student body and thought that we would be able to get a decent amount of people from this group to attend, with the discount and the location. However, that did not go according to plan.

One thing I learned from this, in addition to the following key lessons that I learned, is that having a relatively well-known headliner is not necessarily enough to draw a crowd. Location and having time to promote is crucial. Having speakers, artists, and venues booked

well in advance of the event is a huge advantage, and time was completely against our team this whole time, especially considering how many changes we made to the lineup of this event.

The concert went better than the seminar, but again, time was not on our side. I learned how a real venue does sound check. I also learned about the conventions of live concert planning and what it would take to adequately staff an event. Though I had helped with organizing concerts before, I had done so in much less formal, underground DIY settings, which typically placed a premium on laid-backness. Planning this concert gave me more of an idea of what professional venues expect from event organizers.

The ultimate tangible result I was aiming for was to raise a decent sum of money for Music Action International. While some unanticipated expenses and low attendance made for a very slim profit margin, I was able to donate some money that was allocated to the Gofundme. This was partially only due to my own personal error in allocating a donation, but I am happy with the ultimate result which was that I was able to raise 235€ for the nonprofit.

III. Process

I chose this project because I was already working on it with Creativo Collective and had a hand in conceptualizing the event. I decided to take this on as my CE project because I wanted to have a more active role in it. I was also lucky to have a team of people helping me with the project. Even with all of the conveniences afforded to me by this, it was more work than I imagined.

There were all types of roadblocks to the project's success, including a lack of outside sponsorship, language barriers, and concert venue arrangements falling through. Despite the

challenges thrown at me, I was able to organize an event that had some degree of relevance and nuance in the community.

IV. Lessons Learned

a. What Went Well

The strength of this event is that the content was cohesive and powerful. Every speaker and musical act was solid and fit with the theme and feel of the event. Each speaker brought a unique perspective and experience to share. The Spanish speakers in the audience really enjoyed El Chojin, and he talked about a subject matter that is rarely talked about in Spain, which is being black in Spain. Some of the Berklee administration I invited came up to me after and told me that they had never heard a talk on that topic in all the years they have lived in Spain, which made it clear to me that the content of this event had some level of relevance. The topics seemed to flow well from El Chojin's talk to Devonte and Erin Corine's segments. The concert flowed equally well, if not better. Each act sounded great and there was a crowd of 30-40 people. People were enjoying the concert and many stayed until the end.

b. Lessons Learned: Key Takeaways

Do Not Underestimate the Importance of Location Accessibility

The main weaknesses of A Chance to Dream were logistical things. The first one was the location of the seminar. Though I had visited the Facultad de Bellas Artes at UPV before, I did not realize how difficult it was to find, since I had always come with someone who knew the campus. I also underestimated how far it was from the main road that the buses come to and how that factored into people getting there. It is at least a 5-8 minute walk from the bus stop, and even when you reach the right area, the entrance to the auditorium is not obvious.

If I were to do this at the same place in the future, I would put a very detailed map of the entrance and its relation to the campus on the website. I would also have brought more signage and had volunteers stand on the pathway from the main road and direct attendees.

As nice as this venue is, I would recommend students doing similar events to choose a venue that is more centrally located in the city. Though Facultad de Bellas Artes is a beautiful auditorium, and UPV was very generous in donating it to us for the evening, it is a very inconvenient location for most people, which was probably a factor in low attendance.

Time Is Not on Your Side

Time was something our team did not have a lot of, both from the moment we started planning the event and during the event itself. The timeline of our project did not allow for the substantial changes it underwent throughout, and we were too optimistic about how much content and production we could pack into one evening.

We began planning the event in the middle of September 2017, and we visualized it a lot differently than the way it turned out in March 2018. If everything had gone according to plan, five full months may have been enough time. This was not the case and it rarely is. By the time we decided not to bring any speakers from the US, it was January. Then, we did not confirm El Chojin as the keynote speaker until February. We also were not able to confirm the concert venue at Amstel Art until early February. We did not want to promote the event until we had complete information, so we only had about two weeks to heavily promote. This was not enough, especially given the challenging location of the venue, which would require more advance planning for attendees.

It also took a long time to get El Chojin to post about the event on his page. He did not add it to his tour dates until two days before the event. His post had gotten several likes and comments, and we believe that post was what prompted a few people from the general public to buy tickets. We may have been able to sell more to the general public if his post had gone up earlier.

All of the last-minute promotion stems from the fact that we had confirmed all the speakers and venues much later than we wanted. If things were confirmed earlier on the timeline, we would have had more time to promote through our own efforts and through our lineup's fan bases.

Confirming Amstel Art late also made it difficult to coordinate with the artists to submit their tech riders. One artist did not submit their rider until the day before, despite my team hounding them for it multiple times, and that caused me to have some very difficult interactions with the venue. If I was able to confirm this venue sooner, I may have had more time to get organized with tech riders and had an easier time working with the venue. I also may not have had to pay to rent a bass amp from them, but that also comes down to an artist's level of professionalism, which is out of my control.

I Cannot Be in Two Places at Once

The event schedule demanded me to literally be in two places at once, which is obviously not possible. We largely underestimated how much programming we were planning to fit into one night. When planning the seminar, it seemed only natural to follow it up with a concert. Since the seminar was about music, it did not seem like it would be a complete event without a live music component. I really enjoyed this part of the event, but I wish I had spaced out the timing

between the seminar and the concert, instead of having one almost immediately after the other. In hindsight, I should have either made the seminar an earlier, daytime activity or moved the concert to the next day.

I also underestimated how much I would be needed in both locations at one time. I came to set up and supervise the seminar with one half of my team and put the other half of my team in charge of supervising the sound check and making the artists comfortable at Amstel Art. While I was in the seminar, making sure everything was running smoothly there, I was also getting frantic text messages about issues arising with the sound check at Amstel Art. My team was annoyed at me for not answering quickly enough, but what really needed to happen was that I should have been at that venue too. I set myself up to need to be in two places at once and that is clearly impossible. I made it to Amstel Art by the concert start time, but I would have liked to have supervised at least part of the sound check as well.

Technology Is Out to Get You

Despite my taking extra precautions to make the technology run smoothly during the seminar, I had a technical difficulty during Devonte's talk. I downloaded the videos he was using from YouTube so I did not have to rely on the internet, but something else went wrong. I am not used to operating a Windows computer, which is what UPV had for us to work with. I tested it, and it was fine when I tested it. What happened is we played music during the intermission and whoever turned the music off just muted the volume on the computer and did not turn the music off. The video was muted and it took us forever to figure out what was going on. This was why I wanted to be in charge of the slides, but someone got into the computer without my

seeing to turn off the music. I should not have let anyone who is not me touch the computer, because I certainly would have made sure the music was off.

Be in Charge of Your Own Event

I was the team leader of this event, but it was complicated because I did not lead it from the beginning. One of my teammates originally came up with the concept and formed the team, and I took on a leadership role later on as a co-project manager. I became the leader of the project when I decided to continue producing the event but shift the focus on the local audience, though my teammate continued working closely with me.

This shift in leadership was difficult due to the short time in which it happened and also since not all of the assets were passed to me. There were pieces of content that I did not have access to, and this slowed my work process a lot. For example, my teammate was the only one that had access to editing the website. This was because it was under her own paid account, and I had to ask her to edit the information if there was a change, which is always an extra step that takes longer than if I could just do it myself.

Also, she was the person who started the conversations about our event with Berklee staff, some of the performing artists, and Music Action International. She continued to be the point of contact for some of these people out of convenience, which I thought was helpful. In hindsight, as the leader of the project I would have preferred to be able to answer questions about any given thing that was happening with the project, but sometimes I had to go through an extra step of asking my teammate. The communication channels between all the stakeholders of the event were not incredibly clear, though this is also due to the large scale of it and its various moving parts.

It would definitely have helped if I were in charge of the project from start to finish, or even further, if there were clearly defined roles for each team member. The team talked about this in our post-production meeting. Even though we all wanted to do a little bit of everything, it would have been more productive to define roles so everyone knew what they were responsible for throughout the project.

In Spain, You Need to Speak Spanish

One thing that is perhaps underemphasized at Berklee is how important it is to be able to communicate in Spanish if you are trying to do anything with the local community in Valencia. If you do not speak Spanish, you need someone on your team who does. I was lucky enough to have two Spanish speakers on my team, which was incredibly helpful when communicating with UPV staff, venues, and our keynote speaker El Chojin.

While I was able to work fine with help from my Spanish-speaking teammates, I felt bad that these extra translating responsibilities fell on them. Though they said they do not mind translating, I felt guilty about it because my project was not the only one that required this kind of attention from them, because the majority of the Global Entertainment and Music Business program (and probably the majority of the Berklee Valencia student body in general) does not even speak intermediate Spanish, and so we are constantly asking one of the four or five Spanish-speaking students in our class to translate copy for our events.

The importance of speaking the language in Spain should be obvious, but I think it is something that people should consider when attending Berklee Valencia and the scope of what they can accomplish here. My event went well despite my having a language barrier, but it was

not without significant help from my friends. It took a little longer to communicate, and there may have been some miscommunications at times, but it was a hurdle the team overcame.

c. Reflective Post-Production Meeting with the Team

After the event, the Creativo team had a meeting to talk about how we thought it went. The general consensus is that it went as well as it could have given the circumstances, such as the location, limited amount of time to promote, and weather.

There were some internal disagreements among team members about who was responsible for what, and each person had a different idea of how much work they were expected to do on the day of the event. We all agreed that each of us should have been clear about how much work we wanted to do. This was also the first big CE event any of our group had participated in at Berklee. Being inexperienced, we did not decide ahead of time who would take the instruments back to the Equipment Room or what roles everyone had during the concert. I thought the group I sent to help with the sound check would decide roles among themselves and decide what they would each do then, but I perhaps should have assigned one person from that group to a leadership role. In the future, I would be able to assign specific roles, since I know exactly what work needs to be done. This may not have been necessary if I was able to be at both the seminar and concert venue, which is why next time I would space out the two parts of this event. This would have been very difficult for me to do the first time around, since it was the first iteration of this event.

V. Conclusion: Shaping the Future

Though the tangible outcomes of this event were not what I had dreamed they would be, I learned a great deal from managing this project. The setbacks I experienced firsthand taught

me more than any other experience I had with more smoothly-run events, when I was working with more experienced professionals. The process of building this project and living its results has been a key factor in determining my current career trajectory.

When I started at Berklee, I thought I had an idea of what I wanted to do in the music industry, but really I did not. I thought I was going to do something with data and/or the live industry. That path led me to choose an operational project like A Chance to Dream, which was so ambitious in vision and large in scope, for my CE. Having to make a decision about what my CE would be by November 30 of 2017, I had barely discovered my interest in entertainment law, the recorded music industry, and publishing, which had come to me as a result of my coursework in these subjects. I was a student who did a complete 180° in career trajectory from when I started the Global Entertainment and Music Business (GEMB) program to when I ended it. Had I known earlier in my GEMB career that I would change direction, I may have chosen a different project. However, A Chance to Dream was a valuable experience for me, because I have learned so much about live event logistics, marketing, and managing people.

Doing this project gave me a better indication of what direction I want my career to take. I know this is partially due to inexperience, but I also learned that I do not feel comfortable or happy running an event of this scale. I learned that it gives me a lot of anxiety, and not the type I am willing to deal with as a sacrifice for the positive outcomes of the work. I am glad I know how to organize an event like this now, so I can help others with their events, but I do not think I want to oversee something like this again. If I did an event like this again, I would start something at a much smaller scale and grow it gradually over time rather than trying to do something big right out of the gate.

While it might be advisable to do a culminating experience project on a topic that will be relevant to the next step in one's career, it was useful for me to do this live operational project in conjunction with coursework focused on other areas in the industry, because it left me with a well-rounded experience. Because of this, I can confidently say that event management is not an ideal career path for me, and I can be less hesitant to pursue a different area of work in the industry for which I think I would be much better suited. At this point, I am optimistic about the new direction I want my music business career to take, and that is because of this CE project and my GEMB coursework.