CULMINATING EXPERIENCE PROPOSAL

Berklee College of Music, Valencia Campus

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Master's Degree Program: [CPPD]

Suggested Title: [Señor Real – Surreal Audiobook Authorship]

1. Introduction

I grew up knowing that I wanted something more from music, but never having the courage to give myself over to pursuing it completely; I've always been an anxious dreamer. My uncle, a drummer himself and a public defender, set the example that I followed for a long time: as a working, "real world" adult, music was a consummate outlet, a means by which to decompress after a long day at the office. Along these same lines, my close friends have always loved music, but in a way that felt a number of degrees removed from the way in which I loved it, or sought to love it as an active participant and creator. This being the case, my musicianship comes from a very DIY background—90% of my learning, playing, producing, etc., was done on my own, performing to imaginary audiences of screaming fans.

Stylistically, my listening pallet is a large one. My musical journey began at age 12 listening to 1960's-1980's US and UK punk-rock, progressed into contemporary thrash/progressive metal and 90's era rap as pubescent angst began to set in, expanded itself to let in grooves and traditional sounds from across the world (the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, etc.), and has continued to grow as I've been exposed to the likes of funk, jazz, fusion, folk, classical, electronica, etc. over more recent years of my life. Through listening to such a vast array of genres and being inspired by so many different sounds, my ears have

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opened themselves to endless avenues of experimentation in my own playing. All that said, I remained a fearful, nervous musician, all the while questioning whether I had what it takes to realize the dreams of being a professional musician I'd had since a child.

It is through the encouragement of friends, family, and the amazing faculty here on campus that I feel ready to face the fear of owning up to my identity as a musician. While I often feel behind my colleagues in terms of their technical abilities and experience, on the flip side of the coin I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to bring my unique sensibilities and approach to song-craft and performance to life in a formal musical education setting. In this way, my informal musical upbringing has proven to be a mixed blessing; while it may take me longer to comprehend and make use of certain conventions, it is through the unconventionality of this journey that I am able to apply these hard-learned lessons and ideas into the development of a distinct sonic signature. In applying to and going through with this Master's program, I now feel it is high-time to set my own example for how I want to lead my adult-life: as a creative and a musician.

My undergraduate background is in Creative Writing, and over the past summer I've been influenced immensely by a number of philosophers whose ideas have helped me realize my existential crises were in fact egotistical crises. After years of personal struggles with depression and anxiety, these larger ideas that I've come across have helped me gain and (usually) maintain perspective on that which is important, both in life at large and in a given moment during my day to day experience. Through reflective journaling I have come to find immense catharsis in these ideas—it is this catharsis that I hope to elicit in others by using my CE as a vehicle for the ideas that have helped me press into my fears, as well as a vehicle to convey the sounds and emotions that my musical influences have shaped me into the musical man I am today.

2. Proposed Culminating Experience

The proposed CE is to create an immersive sonic universe that acts as an "audiobook" for some of the aforementioned philosophies to be presented. More specifically, I will compose, perform, and record an audio/visual demo series of myself performing five soundscapes that complement philosophical ideas being presented lyrically. As a retooling of the standard audiobook format, the lyrics will be crafted

as lectures or stories to be packaged within "songs" or tracks, instead of chapters. These tracks will be reflections of five different philosophical themes of Zen-influenced personal philosophies, paired in synesthesia with the five elements. They will also fall under the umbrella of the burgeoning genre of "beat music" (blurring the lines of trip-hop, acid jazz, drum'n'bass, electronica, world music, etc.), a framework that allows for immense experimentation and creative liberty.

In using live-production as a baseline for worldly rhythms to flourish and philosophical themes to be supported, the generated tracks will act as malleable templates or canvases for myself (and other musicians) to paint the space with sonic colors and rhythmic movements, as well as a firm foundation for content development and distribution. The motivation behind this project is two-fold: I am enticed by the musical challenge that the project presents, and excited by the opportunity to spread philosophy in a new medium.

3. Objective & Sub-Objectives

The two main objectives in undertaking this project are to cultivate personal experience as both musician and producer, and forge the beginnings of an artistic identity to be further developed in the future. As a musician and producer, the objective will be completed throughout the process of learning and incorporating traditional world rhythms and modern techniques into my drum set playing, learning how to operate Ableton, composing, and ultimately mastering the live presentation of the material to be captured and used for promotion. Throughout this process, my identity as an artist will begin to take shape in multiple ways; not only will this redefine the limits of my current artistry, it will also act as a doorway to limitless potential future collaborations, and a community to form around its live presentation. Sub-objectives include improving my drumming in terms of versatility, technique, accuracy, and groove, bettering my musicianship and producer-ship in composing the tracks, and becoming more comfortable as an overall performer in perfecting the presentation of the original material.

4. Methodology:

The methodology this project will employ will consist of a self-ethnography, using an action and performative-research based approach. The self-ethnography will be conducted across the research and preparation for, creative rendering, and ultimate capturing of cohesive compositions. A key tool in this
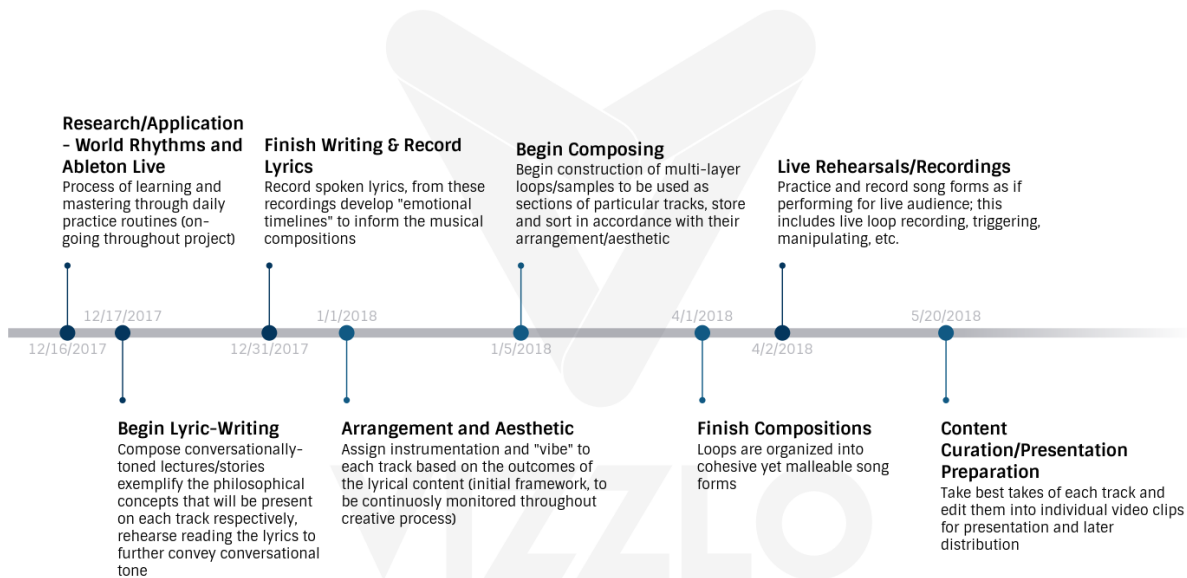
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aspect will be a journal entry on every session--keeping detailed notes on relevant information and/or skills while regularly tracking practice regimens will allow both reflection upon and study of the personal growth as a musician and producer this project will come to yield. Action-research will come to inform the ethnography in the creative process, as much of the project will boil down to cycles of trial and error; here again, a journal will be quintessential to the process. Finally, performance research will lend itself to the project as it nears finality; a large portion of executing this project to a point of true completion will be mastering it in a performative capacity. These rehearsals will be documented in audio/video clips, which will serve essentially the same function as the written journal.

4a. Plan of Action

Throughout the entirety of this project, a rigorous weekly practice regimen of drumming and learning Ableton will be introduced to hone ensure the highest quality finished product possible. The first steps in arriving at said finished product will be writing the philosophical lyrics that will inform the musical compositions. These readings will be rehearsed, recorded and sliced into useable samples to give direction for each track. Next will come arranging—each track will have its own signature sound and rhythmic aesthetic to match its corresponding philosophy, and as such will be needing different instruments and/or effects. This will require careful planning, as well as a good deal of experimentation. Composing comes next—each track must become its own sonic universe, both fluid and expansive. The composition process will consist of constructing layered loops to be sorted by track and assigned a structural role to give each song form(s). After compositions will come hours upon hours of recorded live rehearsal—whether it be a tune at a time or as an entire set, the compositions will be worked into the ground through practice, revealing potential problem areas in live performance as well as moments where transitions are possible, space is needed to let the song breathe, etc. The last step will be curating the audio/video content to find the best run throughs of each track and editing them into video clips for presentation and future distribution.

4b. Timeline

Time Line

Research/Application – World Rhythms and Ableton Live
Process of learning and mastering through daily practice routines (on-going throughout project)

Finish Writing & Record Lyrics
Record spoken lyrics, from these recordings develop "emotional timelines" to inform the musical compositions

Begin Composing
Begin construction of multi-layer loops/samples to be used as sections of particular tracks, store and sort in accordance with their arrangement/aesthetic

Live Rehearsals/Recordings
Practice and record song forms as if performing for live audience; this includes live loop recording, triggering, manipulating, etc.

12/16/2017   12/17/2017   12/31/2017   1/1/2018   1/5/2018   4/1/2018   4/2/2018   5/20/2018

Begin Lyric-Writing
Compose conversationally-toned lectures/stories exemplify the philosophical concepts that will be present on each track respectively, rehearse reading the lyrics to further convey conversational tone

Arrangement and Aesthetic
Assign instrumentation and "vibe" to each track based on the outcomes of the lyrical content (initial framework, to be continuosly monitored throughout creative process)

Finish Compositions
Loops are organized into cohesive yet malleable song forms

Content Curation/Presentation Preparation
Take best takes of each track and edit them into individual video clips for presentation and later distribution

4c. Resources/Materials Needed

The resources required for this CE are numerous. First and foremost, space for composing/rehearsing (practice rooms at school and a home-studio setup) is an absolute necessity. Learning resources (the internet, library, classes, etc.) will play a major role in cultivating the necessary skills to execute the project properly. Human resources will be vastly important in making this project a reality as well, both in terms of guidance and support. Finally: while it goes without saying, time is the greatest resource of all--creating and adhering to a project manager that stays true to the project timeline will be quintessential. Necessary materials are the instruments that will be used in the

compositions/performances (TBD aside from a drum set), Ableton Live, a high-functioning DAW interface, an external hard-drive to store each session on, a MIDI controller/keyboard, microphone(s), and the cables necessary to connect all of the above to a computer. Last but not least, I will need a video camera (iPhone) and film-editing software.

5. Justification

This work contributes to the profession in a number of ways. The creative process and outcome of original material are in and of themselves contributions, but the project also goes beyond that; once fully realized, it can be used as a platform for creatives across the globe to use these soundscapes collaboratively, both in-studio and on-stage. Its originality stems from this: it is both a hugely personal journey in its undertaking, as well as the beginnings of a creative community. Additionally, the philosophical element of the project is one which makes this project an important step forward; in a day and age wherein the average person is surrounded and controlled by mechanisms and cycles of stress, packaging these catharsis-inducing ideas into an accessible and exciting format will allow people of my generation to learn without realizing they are learning, ingesting at the point of experience and (hopefully) digesting afterwards.

6. Professional Plan

This project is in many ways a preparation for playing the finished product in front of a live audience--as such, playing gigs will be the first step in initiating the growth of a fanbase. In order to gig with this material, however, first a multimedia website must be created where people (venue representatives, potential collaborators, and would-be concert-goers) can interact with the content and the artist. In addition to an artist website, an Instagram account will be set up and updated bi-weekly to peak and maintain interest. The plan is to promote open-source shows; not "jam nights", but participatory concerts wherein local musicians can add to the song templates however they wish. The point here is to continue conveying the philosophies of the project, while at the same time keeping the material fresh/exciting--while the message remains the same, every show will ultimately be different. This will again expand the network of collaborators as well as the fan base, who will grow to expect the

unexpected. Ideally, this will lead to the formation of a large collective around the project so that it may be

taken to different cities across the world.