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## CE Written Report

Before I came to Berklee Valencia, I had a fair amount of experience as an audio engineer and as a musician. I had studied classical, jazz, latin, funk, and played in rock bands throughout my childhood. I'm very proud of the level of musical diversity that I've reached at this point in my life. A major problem that I faced was that I had almost nothing to show for these experiences, save for a handful of projects lead by other people that I had contributed to. I had no voice of my own, and no material with which to show people what my musical personally sounded like. In fact, I didn't even know myself what my own voice was. This becomes an issue when people that you meet (i.e. potential contacts) inevitably ask you if they can hear "your stuff" and you are forced to shrug and tell them to listen to some obscure EP that you played rhythm guitar and glockenspiel on. I had nothing tangible to show for my 10+ years of musical knowledge.

This became the primary motivation for the concept of my culminating experience: to record a collection of original music in an effort to develop my voice as an artist. My secondary goal was to stretch the limits of my own abilities as a producer. I wanted to try as many different experimental ideas and techniques as I could and hopefully find some interesting new sounds along the way. My main obstacle would be a massive case of writers block. Until this year I had literally never completed an original

piece of music that I was truly happy with. I didn't think I had it in me to write music, and was too self-conscious to even give it an honest attempt. I knew that by making songwriting a part of my CE, I would be forced to do it.

My Culminating experience consists of four tracks. "Two Faces" is a foray into an obscure but influential subgenre of EDM called "future garage". The genre's primary proponent, Burial was the first electronic artist that I really got into. Future garage is characterized by complex/off the grid beats, ghostly and heavily manipulated vocals, and cut up samples of everyday objects used in a musical way. For my track, I sampled various objects like rain, vinyl pops, knives scratching together and a lighter being flicked. I started by writing the two-step beat and synth progression. The vocal came about in a miracle of xenochrony. I was searching a library of acapella vocals for clips to cut up and I imported an obscure 90s vocal that just so happened to fit perfectly over my track (after some pitch shifting and slicing). Technically this makes "Two Faces" a remix, which is not exactly what I had in mind for the song (The original vocalist for the track was Ganavya Doraiswamy, but the new vocal worked so well that I had to leave it in). I added the bass line at the end with an electric bass to give it a slightly more organic, human vibe (something Radiohead would probably do).

The other of the two mostly electronic tracks, "Trio" started as two completely separate songs. The first was an abandoned attempt at writing a piece for woodwind trio from earlier in the year, and the second was a Four Tet inspired IDM beat that I had made

around the same time. It wasn't until much later that I decided to try combining the two tracks, to a pleasing effect. I always wanted to try and adapt classical music to synthesizers ever since getting into artists like Wendy Carlos and Isao Tomita, and this gave me a perfect excuse to do so. The section of the trio that I took is actually partially atonal; one of the voices is a 12-note tone row, and the other two harmonize it. The other portion of the song features musicians Sergio Martinez, Luis Regidor Pain and Michael Sean Harris, but their parts have been cut up beyond all recognition. The groove starts off almost as a two-step pattern, but evolves into a borderline house track by the end of the song.

“All I Wanna know” is a homage to 80's new wave and power pop, a la The Smiths, R.E.M, and Siouxsie and the Banshees. The song is a collaboration between Tim Shull and myself. I brought in the bass line and we took turns layering guitars onto it. Afterwards I took the session home and cut everything up into a coherent song form. From there even more guitars were added. Once I had a complete instrumental, I went to Luis Regidor Pain to write and record a vocal. The sound is purposefully more simple and accessible than something that I would normally make, but hidden inside are a lot of interesting subtleties and inconsistencies. The guitars are heavily glitched using Ableton and even MAX/MSP. There are parts that don't add up evenly over bar lines and irregular phrases in surprising places, for example the downbeat of the song is ambiguous. If you try and count it, you will find that all of the entrances and transitions happen on upbeats. To me this is the “single” of the record, if there ever was one.

“Temps Real” is my tribute to both Funkadelic’s “Maggot Brain” and one of my guitar heroes, John Frusciante. I wanted to show off my guitar chops here, but more than anything the song is fueled by my deep passion for improvising. In the spirit of collaboration, I invited fellow guitarist Stephen McHale to play on the track with me. I wanted to invoke the feeling of a classic old school jazz cutting contest, where two musicians would battle for instrumental glory over the course of a song. Think Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane on “Tenor Madness”. Despite being essentially a guitar solo, this song had by far the most production involved in it. The drums were built purely from samples of classic breaks. I scoured hundreds of recordings searching for the ultimate drum sounds and grooves, and then spent hours cutting them up, note by note to create a living breathing drummer for the track. You will hear everything from James Brown and the “Amen break”, to Led Zeppelin, Herbie Hancock and Miles Davis in there. The mellotron samples also took a considerable amount of time to orchestrate, as I do not have a mellotron VST.

From the start, my CE has been about introspection and personal growth. I never had any interest in innovation on a global level. I don’t think that I could ever come up with anything that hasn’t been done before and moreover I feel that beginning a project with the specific goal of innovating is disingenuous to the art of music. Rather, I believe that innovation comes from necessity, and the process of problem solving. For me, attempting to create music for the first time brought a slew of interesting and new challenges, and the innovation occurred purely on an intrapersonal level. These small challenges presented themselves in a number of ways: for example hearing a sound in my head and having no idea how to make it, and then subsequently figuring it out through

research and experimentation. I also did a lot of research into past musical innovators and found that a lot of these great works came about because the artists were just following what interested them at the time. I found that “It hadn’t been done before” was almost never a primary motivator for great art. After pondering innovation and art for some time I gave up on trying to justify my work from that perspective, and chose instead to just make the music that I was hearing in my head.

I have learned a considerable amount over the last 10 months. I’ve learned about the creative processes and my own way of working, and I’ve picked up plenty of new music production techniques. Before Valencia I had never tried sampling, or making remixes, or manipulating vocals. Before coming here I was proficient at Pro Tools and Logic, but I surprisingly started every single one of my CE tracks in Ableton. Thanks to Prof. Cantil I am proud to say that I now am somewhat knowledgeable on what is perhaps the most relevant DAW on the market today. I also absolutely improved my mixing skills, thanks in no small part to Ian’s lessons. This was the first electronic music that I’ve ever really worked on and I now feel comfortable working on EDM projects, be it mixing, mastering or producing. I now feel like an artist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Before, I really only knew about traditional production, as my record making experiences had been mostly jazz, classical and rock.

Writers block is something that I’ve struggled with my whole musical life. I tend to be very picky and detail-oriented with everything I do. These qualities mean that anything I start tends to get bogged down fairly quickly. This is very dangerous and led to me abandoning a lot of music just because it wasn’t exactly what I had envisioned.

Now I am learning to embrace imperfections. As an example, my EP is stylistically all over the place. I have other songs that could have made the cut that are more similar to say, "All I Wanna Know" but I decided to release only my favorite music instead. I could have become hung up with specific aspects of genre and let that effect the music that I was making, but I ended up opting just create and not worry about the tracks in context with each other. This enabled me to work more purely and effectively.

Another way I overcame writers block is by collaboration. Collaboration is a sure fire way to get the ball rolling on a song. Even just having a conversation can spark a new idea. Working with someone gives you motivation to actually get something finished, and puts pressure on you to work at your creative best. I found that Tim and Luis pushed me to make my tracks better so as not to disappoint them with the final product.

In conclusion, I feel like I am finally starting to develop a brand new aspect of myself as a musician. I creative wheels are now in motion. I know that I'm not 'there' yet, but at least I am no longer afraid of what's ahead. I look forward to the things I will create, and look back fondly on the music that I have made this year.