

Berklee College of Music

From Nowhere to Everywhere: Lady Blackice Album

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Master of Music Production, Technology, and Innovation

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Acknowledgement

The Lady Blackice Album project was made possible with the collaboration of peers, teachers, mentors, and advisors at Berklee Valencia. Since the month of September, this twelve tracks album was a brand new project with only ideas and experimentations that needed to be executed. New topics were covered during this year and a lot of help was provided to accomplish this album.

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Abstract

The culminating experience project called “*Lady Blackice*” is a 12 tracks album. This project was achieved by the female artist Audrey Cousineau. This album demonstrates different genres and influences like Electronic Dance Music, Deep House, Reggaeton, and Pop music. This Canadian DJ from Montreal is presenting the final project at the end of her formation in the Music Production, Technology & Innovation program at Berklee Valencia. A concert and listening party were also a part of the whole plan. For this event, the pieces were introduced by a live performance at a venue in Valencia (Spain). This project is the first album in her career as a DJ and producer. She integrated other musicians to her project as she wanted the music to be more collaborative and not only performed or created by one person only.

Introduction

Audrey Cousineau has a strong background in music, especially as a singer and pianist. She started classical piano lessons when she was three years-old, followed by her classical singing formation at the age of seven. At her young age, she learned a lot about analyzing scores, , harmony, transcribing, solfege, and ear training. She graduated from Cégep de Saint-Laurent in Jazz Performance (Voice Concentration) in 2014, and from the Jazz Faculty program at McGill University in 2018. Audrey is also known as Lady Blackice since she was part of the nightlife in Montreal for the last 8 years as a DJ and performer. She was performing every weekend in nightclubs, festivals and corporate events across Canada. From R&B, Hip-Hop, Rock, Reggae to Trance music, she was comfortable playing many different genres. But this path felt a bit redundant at some point. As she evolved in the local music scene, the sets were getting similar, and agencies were trying to get her to perform to increase incomes and popularity.

The natural evolution of her career brought her in the composition and production path. In this album, Audrey is using her own voice on multiple songs. Every track were composed, arranged, mixed, mastered, and performed by the artist while she was developing her production skills in the Music Production program at Berklee Valencia. The album will be available on many platforms like Spotify, Soundcloud, and iTunes after graduation. It will be a great occasion for Lady Blackice to introduce herself as an artist and producer to the world. She also wants to achieve a breakthrough in the electronic music scene where women are truly underrepresented, stereotyped as dancers or entertainers instead of performers producers. Unfortunately, women are not taken seriously into consideration in this male-leading industry.

Review of the state of the art

Lady Blackice's influences are mainly electronic music artists and producers like; Tiësto, Armin Van Buuren, Avicii, DJ Khaled, Timbaland, Hardwell, Zedd, Above & Beyond, Diplo, and Alan Walker. So far, many genres have influenced her style like EDM (Electronic Dance Music), Pop, Jazz, Blues, Trance, House, Hip-Hop, and Progressive. A lot of EDM albums have been released in the last decades by many DJs and producers. First, gathering information on the topic is primordial. It is necessary to focus on the music and understand its origins : DJ-ing and turntablism, technology breakthrough, and the evolution of the industry. Performing electronic music live is not a new form of art, it has started in the 70s, and left the underground scene at the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s¹. EDM in 2018 is a big trend and this part of the industry represents billions of dollars according to Billboard². This phenomenon is similar to the Disco movement in the 1980s. Many DJs introduce their new tracks in a live performance context like festivals, nightclubs, or private events. Lady Blackice will innovate by incorporating collaborations with Berklee musicians to and by achieving the whole composition and production part. Nowadays, many musicians and DJs are only performing their music. It is common to have the final product (album) made by a whole team of engineers, producers, and composers. Many big names of the electronic scene do need the help from ghost producers since Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) are becoming more accessible, and modern home studios

¹ Webber, Stephen. *Turntable Techniques*. Boston: Berklee Press, 2009.

² Billboard. "IMS Biz Report: Global EDM Market Falls 2 Percent to \$7.3 Billion." Accessed June 27, 2019. <https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/8457536/ims-biz-report-2018-global-edm-market-electronic-dance>

are getting more affordable and approachable than professionals³. We also need to be aware that there is a lack of female DJs in the electronic scene. Most female DJs performing in festivals like Tomorrowland and Ultra Music like Juicy M are mainly mixing and doing mashups of other artists' records. There are other female acts like NERVO, Anna Lunoe and Alison Wonderland that are recording their own vocals and performing live as well⁴. By performing and producing her own album, Lady Blackice will be able to demonstrate that women in the electronic music scene can be taken seriously and as good as other male performers.

Description

The Lady Blackice Album was produced with Ableton Live and Pro Tools. The entire process of arranging, composing, mixing, performing, producing, recording, and songwriting was completed by Audrey Cousineau with the collaboration of other Master students and advisors in the Music Production program in Valencia. She first had to do some research on the topic, the origins of DJing, the evolution of Dance Music industry, and gather information on other female artists during the Fall semester. From this new perspective, she created sketches and jam ideas in Ableton. When the song form was being developed, she recorded her vocals on top of these tracks. Audrey explored close miking techniques. It was a challenge but also a realistic simulation of what could possibly happen in a professional context. Studio times were hard to

³ Henke, Robert. "Live Performance in the Age of Supercomputing." Accessed June 27, 2019. <http://roberthenke.com/interviews/supercomputing.html>

⁴ Billboard Staff. "25 Female DJs You Need to Know Now." Accessed June 17, 2019. <http://www.billboard.com/photos/6495020/female-edm-djs-to-know-2016>

book, due to limited access and traffic. The limited four hours per student per week forced her to be creative and find new techniques with the tools she already had. She recorded all her vocal tracks at her studio apartment in Valencia with a Shure SM7B and an Apogee Duet interface. She found along the way that this small setup can be efficient, affordable, realistic, and also easy to set up. Many DJs and producers are not always recording in multi-million dollar studios when they are on the road. The songs were completed by the artist by the Fall semester but were reworked and inspired by creative ideas of her peers in the Spring semester. Producers and sound engineers in her program helped to take these tracks to the next level. They have been a good help for mixing and mastering, arranging, and vocal processing.

Online masterclasses and all the knowledge acquired at were also helpful for sound design. For songwriting, Lady Blackice wanted to explore relatable themes for the lyrics. Being away from home, love, pain, and meeting new cultures abroad have contributed to the creative process of the lyric writing part. Since English is her second language, she collaborated with native speakers who were helping to develop ideas and corrections.

There was a listening party on June 6th at Up&Down (club) in Valencia. The researches for the venue started in January and by the month of March she narrowed down interesting places for the presentation of the album. Other students of the program were involved for the technical aspects, photography, and booking the venue since most club owners only speak Spanish. The concert was performed by Lady Blackice singing and djing on a controller (Roland 202).

Innovative Aspects

Lady Blackice album was entirely produced by Audrey Cousineau. Nowadays, many famous DJs are using ghost producers to make a track⁵. Unfortunately, not a lot of producers (as recognized by the DJ Magazine for example), have knowledge about the software they are using, sound design, or even sound recording. Especially for female performers, most of them are only remixing existing tracks and shining in the underground Techno and House scene. Other famous female figures like Paris Hilton or Ruby Rose are using their famous figure to propel their hobby. It was also proved that ‘anyone’ could be a DJ with the right connections⁶. Audrey is proving that one person can accomplish many things and that a female DJ can produce relatable music. She thinks that it is also important to draw the lines between DJs and producers. The Huffpost mentioned “The distinction between producer and DJ has become an important one. Producers are responsible for creating tracks, while DJs mix or play music. Oftentimes, EDM artists are both.” and she couldn’t agree more⁷.

⁵ EDM Ghost Producer. “Dimitri Vegas & Like Mike on Ghost Production.” Accessed June 25, 2019.

<https://www.edmghostproducer.com/dimitri-vegas-like-mike-on-ghost-production/>

⁶ Electronic Dance Music. “An EDM Experiment: How a ‘DJ’ Fooled the World & Got Away With it.” Accessed June 30, 2019. <https://edm.com/news/nadja-brenneisen-fake-dj-art-project>

⁷ Gates, Sara. “Breaking The Myth Of The Female DJ In Electronic Dance Music.”

Accessed June 30, 2019.

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/female-djs-edm-electronic-music-women_n_3873434?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNhLw&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGuLU5sfQJKtT63ZsjD7OJ5RVGDxqoSUCBiFI-DeNMNab9Gq5XE-QleK7Ais7eFhmhokPSkHK7nKsGbp-up518wqv37t3Wf6SRJ1219dqiVBumEHJH09CmfwkUD2BLRM488qvhqArJ6SuZrERB2PltsMHSvEOlmwsvV69mcrGLLy

New Skills Acquired

The Music Production, Technology and Innovation program at Berklee Valencia offered many skill sets like: Electronic Music Production with Ableton Live, sound design, sound recording, and DJing. Ableton Live is a top and leading software in the Electronic Music world. It will make future collaborations easy. This software was also used in Benjamin Cantil's Transitions ensemble. It opened new horizons for live performances in professional situations. Sound design is also an important skill that was discovered through the year. Making original presets in Serum (Virtual Studio Technology) can be helpful and makes other plugins more understandable. The sound recording class allowed to explore different recording techniques, knowing in depth the different categories of microphones and how to make the best recording possible. These knowledge are important not only to be recognized by other peers in the industry, but also to be efficient and powerful in the field.

Challenges, both expected and unanticipated

During the Masters program, realizing and producing a complete track was more demanding than expected. It takes a lot of time and material to put together in order to accomplish only one single. Only for mixing or sound design, Audrey now comprehends the urge to understand every part of the process. Buying a new MacBook Pro wasn't part of the financial plan but Pro Tools and other softwares were malfunctioning on the actual assets. Mixing-wise, it was challenging to realize that one can spend hours on a single snare to make it blend perfectly with the other elements. The sound design class was taken over by Mr. Bill in the Spring semester. In the beginning it was challenging to learn and work with new methods getting closer to the end of the

year. Learning from different teaching angles can be beneficial and some tracks on the album took a completely different direction with the inputs of Mr. Bill. New concepts like arranging and layering were reviewed during his time at Berklee Valencia. Collaborating with other artists was difficult since everyone has busy schedules with their projects and travelling plans. Re-orienting the whole project was challenging but focusing on the twelve tracks was more important. Moving in a different country and living in a different culture was challenging on many levels. To live with complete strangers can demand a lot of energy and adaptation. In the course of the year, she was assaulted at her own apartment. It was both difficult mentally and physically to carry on with this project. Fortunately, there were many resources available at Berklee to help her get through the situation. The staff, faculty, and her peers were more than supportive. Meetings with the advisor helped to orient the project in a realistic direction considering the situation. Life happens, and artists need to face these challenges to evolve.

Future Ramifications

The artist is planning to take the Lady Blackice album to the next level. She is going back to Montreal as a freelancer DJ and Producer. The first step would be remixing and remastering the tracks with the collaboration of local artists and engineers. By the end of the year the whole album will be available on digital platforms. The evolution of Lady Blackice will also happen on many aspects. Building a team (agent, lawyer, manager), increasing her presence on social medias, and designing a marketing strategy (creating a website and being present online) are on the list for the next months. Future collaborations with producers, local visual artists, and

musicians are already planned for the next few years as she wants to be involved in the growth of the Dance music scene in Canada.

Conclusion

Finally, the Lady Blackice project album is taking listeners on a journey across genres, diverse, and relatable themes. It also demonstrates as a whole the execution and fulfillment of the knowledge that was acquired during the year at Berklee Valencia. Lady Blackice applied the multiple skills learned in DJing, Electronic Music Production, sound design, and sound recording. The music industry is constantly evolving and artists must surpass themselves regularly. Collaborations can be the key solution for lack of inspiration or to take an artwork to the next level. Online presence is also really important for musicians. Nowadays, the artists need to be present and active on every aspect of their career.

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