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# A Self Reflection on My Journey as a Berklee Student in Valencia Spain

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JUNE 16, 2019  
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My name is Bianca Johnson and I am a graduate student, and soon to be an alumnus, of the **Berklee School of Music!**

My time in Valencia as a student in the Global Entertainment and Music Business graduate program has been the most amazing and challenging months of my life. When deciding what graduate program would be the



best opportunity for me to develop my career, I was looking for a program that had a great reputation in the entertainment industry and an international presence. Berklee's Valencia Campus checked off all the requirements. It is located in a foreign country, which allowed me to experience people and cultures that are outside of my comfort zone. My network has expanded having now worked alongside a great group of schoolmates from all around the globe that have similar goals and aspirations. This tenure has expose me to different music markets from around the world. Finally, it has help me formulate my thesis on the importance that social media and YouTube have had in exporting those cultures.

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*My reflection about being at Berklee*

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When I first arrived in Spain, on the Berklee Valencia Campus, it exceeded my expectation. I had visualized this place for the last year and a half and now I had finally arrived. Upon just seeing the Berklee sign for the first time moved me to tears. This dream I had been chasing was now a reality. From day one, the main question on my mind was what my

cumulative experience project going to be. During orientation we received a brief overview about Berklee's expectations for its students. This overview gave us the basics of what we could do and projects that had been completed previously in the program. I met with my director immediately to give him some of the ideas that I had come to Berklee to execute. I was told to not give it much thought at that time, instead allow the transition of moving to Spain to sink in.

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### My reflection about living in a foreign country

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Living in Spain will definitely have a long-lasting effect on my life, I must say that I my life is so much better for this experience. I have had the opportunity to travel throughout the European Union. In these eleven months, I have been to other parts of Spain such as Seville and Tarifa, where I was able to look across the sea and view the beaches of Africa. As an African American, that feeling was indescribable.



*I have had wine in Rotterdam...*

*I have visited the Royal Palace in London...*

*I sailed on a yacht in Cannes, France...*

the vacation spot of the most rich and powerful.

I have taken full advantage of the opportunity to

completely merge into the European culture. Having

been born in Karlsruhe, Germany, I have now seriously

considered establishing my EU citizenship to further take advantage of the new global “ME.”



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*My reflection about my colleagues*

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While here at Berklee, I must say that I have met a dynamic group of individuals who are certainly about their business. When I first arrived, I was a little concerned due to my age how would I fit in. At age, 28, I was one of the oldest

students in my class! My anxiety quickly dissipated. I have worked alongside a great group of

schoolmates from all around the globe that have

similar goals and aspirations. We have travelled

together, shared common vision, and aspirations.

Overall, my colleagues have really enhanced my

perspective of how I might make an impact after my

time at Berklee. I know I have built a network of

friends that I can call upon long after we leave the Berklee campus.



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*My reflection about the international market*

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Within our first week of starting school we had the opportunity to go to the Future Music Forum in Barcelona, Spain. This was my first international music conference I ever attended. I had previously attended a conference on the corporate level, and one music conference earlier in the year, but this one was not on the



same level as either of those. Later I had the great opportunity to moderate at the New Skool Rules conference in Rotterdam.

The conference was amazing. It was held in the in the beautiful city of Rotterdam with some amazing people on the panels. Unfortunately, most of the conference left me underwhelmed. One of the most important things that I have learned from this experience is the concept of expectations versus reality. I went to the conference expecting it to be like the corporate events that I had attended previously, but the reality is that the music industry is different. This conference was my one of my first exposures to this global cutting-edge music culture, but it surely would not be my last.

Moderating at the conference really have given me a better understanding of how globalization has affected the music industry and helped establish artists as brands. I have seen first-hand the vast differences between local music markets and the importance that social media and YouTube have had in exporting those cultures.

I also had an opportunity to participate in the BBC Music conference in London, England. It was certainly an accomplishment I would may not have otherwise experience were it not for attending this program.



Despite not being able to do a Ted X event for my cumulative experience project, I was still able to participate in the event. This was an amazing experience.

I had the opportunity to serve as an MC for one of the events.



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*My reflection on my thesis*

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My journey toward creating my thesis has been a rocky road. I knew I wanted to explore how the entertainment industry impacts the global markets but how I was going to achieve that objective was left to fate. I really wanted to host a Ted Talk as my cumulative experience project. I thought this was attainable as Berklee had done two previous years. Prior to my arrival, I studied the videos of the 2017 Ted X Berklee event. I was excited to bring my ideas and learn from those that are intricately involved in bringing life this event. Unfortunately, during one of my initial meetings with my director, I found out that this was not a possibility. I discovered that due to Spanish government regulations on labor, Berklee was no longer allowed to have students officially participate in this collaboration for project consideration.

Closer to the end of the first semester, we were given a presentation on the available cumulative experience projects. 'Women in Music' were one of the options and two specific roles were right in line with what I wanted to do. The Women in Music would allow me the opportunity to expound upon the work that I had done with the Women in Music organization in Atlanta. I had previously researched the different chapters that they had all around the world and identified events that they had sponsored in collaboration with the Berklee Valencia campus. I was very excited to be able to use my research to further the cause of this organization while here at Berklee. I applied confident that I would be accepted as I knew I could really make an impact if I was given one of the positions. Unfortunately, I was not selected. This left me completely blindsided and at a loss for what my cumulative experience project would be. I wanted to do a project on where my passion lies, what motivated me to be here in the first place. Now both ideas I had were taken away. This is when I had to begin a new journey of self-discovery.

This redirection forced to sit back and really evaluate the reasons why I had come to Berklee and what I wanted to get out of this experience. When coming to Berklee I wanted to understand the world of music outside of the confines of the United States. I wanted to understand how an artist can transcend his presence to become an international icon. I needed to discover the factors, the culture, that present itself that allows artists to equally thrive outside of the U.S.

In several Musically and Music Business Worldwide articles, a recurring factor was the impact of YouTube and social media. YouTube and other social media vehicles have granted new access to the discover of talent. You no longer need a major distributor to push your

creativity to the masses, you just need your own mobile recording device, and a YouTube account, to create the next entertainment sensation.

Upon discovering these factors, I decided to further explore this concept as a research paper. As I delved deeper, I discovered that I was on the cutting edge of this topic. There was not a lot of current research. Most of the articles that I found were dated between 2010-2013. My research could really set a precedent in the study of this phenomenon.

To gain a better understanding, I took a class on the global markets offered during second semester. My expectations for the course were that we would have Skype calls with music professionals from all around the world. I imagined that these professionals would give us detailed insight about their local trends. The actual course syllabus was quite different from my expectations. Instead, the class consisted of student-run lectures about different music markets. Some presentations on global markets lacked a lot of important content and required that I do some in-depth research on my own, while others really provided pertinent information. The top markets that really stood out to me were Brazil, Mexico, South Korea and India. I decided that I would further research these music markets and discover the different factors that contributed to their global success.

The presentations on Brazil and Mexico inspired me to understand more about the Latin music market. I found that several music publications have written articles on this market's rise to the top. An article from *Variety* magazine and *MusicAlly* discussed the Latin music market's 18% growth. This market was becoming extremely popular in the United States and the numbers attributed YouTube and Spotify as reasons for gaining global popularity.



There was also a great presentation on the South Korean music market that help me formulate my thesis. This market has also shown a significant number of views on YouTube and popularity all around the world. The entertainment companies within this region have perfected the art of branding.<sup>1</sup>



Korean boy band EXO performing in China in 2016

They have leveraged their artists' influence to create amazing partnerships with global brands. Also, the support from the Korean government, was a significant factor in the growth of this market. They invested a lot of money to ensure that the Korea was portrayed as a positive image throughout the world.

Finally, I completed a presentation on the Indian music market that left a significant impression. This market has received so much attention from music publications about its increase in music streaming and vast numbers on YouTube. Recently the Indian Label and film production company, T-Series was the first YouTube channel to reach 100 million subscribers<sup>2</sup> and Indian dialects are the top listened to content on YouTube. Therefore, I thought it was important to further research this market and gain a better understanding of its significance.

As I began searching for different sources of information, I found that there were very limited resources on the Indian market. Most of the information that I obtained discussed

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<sup>1</sup> The Surprising reason why china is blocking South Korean music videos and TV. <https://www.vox.com/latest-news/2017/3/3/14795636/china-south-korea-pop-culture-kpop-attacks-thaad>

<sup>2</sup> Eamonn Forde "T-Series hits 100m subscribers on YouTube" MusicAlly May 31,2019 <https://musically.com/2019/05/31/t-series-hits-100m-subscribers-on-youtube/>

growth of the Over-The-Top (OTT) Platforms. These platforms are video on demand subscription streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Video. Due to India's love for local Bollywood content it was easy to correlate the importance of these to the Indian culture. Bollywood films are still the most popular source of income for India representing 80% of the country's revenue. Unfortunately, YouTube is not included in the over the top platforms. Therefore, a lot of the information did not pertain to the topic that I was focusing on.

Although India is experiencing extreme growth in music subscription and YouTube views, I have found that it is more because of population size and recent internet access.<sup>3</sup> Based on the research it shows that this growth does not translate into the music market in this country. Shridhar Subramaniam, head of the Sony Music India, says. "India was never a CD Market, and we never really had a download business either. We had a brief cassette era and one of our biggest revenue streams up to around four years ago was ring back tones."<sup>4</sup> Only time will tell is this music streaming penetration will change this market behavior.

Also, India does not currently represent the concept of global exchange that I am looking for. A lot of the music enjoyed by the locals is not consumed on a global scale and a lot of the global hits do not reach the charts in India. Now this can change over the next 5 years because more of the people will have access to YouTube and social media but based on their current behavior this does not seem likely. The change would require the Indian government to

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<sup>3</sup> Cherie Hu "How India, The Global Music Industry's Sleeping Giant, Is Finally Waking U" Forbes September 23 2017 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cheriehu/2017/09/23/how-india-the-global-music-industrys-sleeping-giant-is-finally-waking-up/#1cd814e430bf>

<sup>4</sup> Cherie Hu

alter their regulations on the radio market to allow for more international music penetration. Due to these factors I did not believe that India was a good market to discuss in my paper.

As I began compiling all the information that I had collected in my research, I was able to formulate my opinion about the future trends of the music industry. There is no way to understand international music markets without understanding the data from YouTube, Spotify, and the consumer engagement from the entire social media platform. Music markets around the world use social media barometer for local trends and for marketing. All credible news and research outlets have sited YouTube numbers as a way to legitimize their artistry.

YouTube has proven to be the most important tool for international music markets. The allure of free content brings many subscribers, which attracts significant investments from advertisers. Advertisers investments fuel YouTube and exposes globally the local music markets to the mutual benefits of brand sponsorships and partnerships. Artist have now been given the leverage to establish themselves as brands and obtain non-traditional sources of revenue.

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### *Conclusion*

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This is a fascinating time to be in the music industry. It is the age of the artist understanding their worth as a brand and a business. New roles within the music industry are being created to keep up with the changes in technology. Data is king and understand how to read and manipulate that data is a skill that is well paid for. Top artist such as English rapper Stormzy are now hiring brand managers to be their liaison to marketing companies. We have left behind the time when the only way that an artist could make a living doing what they love

was to sale their “soul” to the record company. We are now in the era where the only thing any artist need to become successful is a savvy team and un-yielding determination.

This research has really help me to identify where I fit within this industry. The brand and artist relationship is something that I am intrigued by. The art of creating a campaign that is authentic to both the brand and the artist is a delicate balance. A balance that must be treated with respect and cultural sensitivity. I believe that this is right in line with my passions and my skillsets. While this was a challenging process the results that came from this research paper has inspire me to pursue an angle of the music industry that I had not previously anticipated. I am a better person because I have had the opportunity to take this journey and discover my place in this industry.



**Thank you Berklee for giving me this once in a lifetime experience!!!**