

**2019 European DIY Musician Conference Project & Operations Manager  
Culminating Experience Reflective Paper**

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## **Summary of Operational Project:**

In the spring of 2018, CD Baby and Berklee College of Music Valencia came together to create the first annual European DIY Musician Conference, a new European edition of the CD Baby DIY Musician Conference in Austin, Texas. Due to the great success of the inaugural conference, both CD Baby and Berklee agreed to put on the second edition of the conference in 2019, once to once again take place in the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias in Valencia, Spain. Unlike many other music conferences that tend to be ‘industry’ focused (high level trends, business strategy, new tech), the goal of the DIY Conference is to provide real, actionable advice to DIY musicians over the course of two days. The European version of the conference is technically tailored to European musicians, but in a day and age where more and more aspects of the industry are becoming digital, information that is good for one DIY musician is good for any other DIY musician. Because of this, we were able to attract 262 attendees and 26 speakers from 29 different countries.

The conference spanned over three nights and two full days. It consisted of three showcases, one day of keynote presentations and panels in Aula Magistral, and one day of breakout sessions, workshops, and office hours across Berklee’s campus. Topics included: How to Build a Sustainable Music Career and Collect All Revenue Streams, Leverage YouTube to Accelerate Your Career in the Music Industry, What Every Indie Artist Needs to Know About the Law, Music Publishing: The Key to Getting All of the Money You Are Owed, The Truth About Spotify Playlists, and many more.

The conference this year was organized by a team of students consisting of me (James Connor) acting as the Project & Operations Manager, Annelise Rivera acting as the Talent & Partnerships Manager, and Stephanie Piedrahita as the Marketing & Communications Manager.

Our team was led by our professor and Conference Organizer Alexandre Perrin, who oversaw all aspects of the conference in addition to handling high level logistics such as speaker contracts, travel accommodations and legal paperwork between Berklee and CD Baby.

### **Results/Process:**

A strong network can be a catalyst for a successful career in the music industry. As an artist manager, I understand the importance of having a strong network. Therefore, I am always looking for opportunities to expand my professional network. From the moment the idea of the Culminating Experience was presented to us in the beginning of the year, I knew that I wanted my thesis to involve a music conference as I believed that this would be the best way to grow my network of non-Berklee connections during my time here at Berklee. I had originally thought about organizing my own conference, which in hindsight would have been nearly impossible. However, when the roles for the DIY Conference were announced, I knew that this was the project I wanted to get involved in during my time here at Berklee.

Although my initial intentions for this project were based on growing my network, as I got deeper into the project my priorities began to shift and become more selfless. Heading into the role I assumed that I would be in more of a project management role, managing the team and being more focused on my peers meeting deadlines. It turned out that I would actually be in charge of the entire Berklee side of the talent acquisition. I believe that given my background in artist management, Alex came to the conclusion that I would be the right person to be communicating with the prospective speakers. Although input was openly welcome from every member of the team, it was Alex and I that were interviewing the candidates and making the final decision for the conference schedule. Going into this project this role was barely on my

radar, yet it became the primary focus of my efforts. I took this responsibility of curating the conference schedule very seriously. As more and more tickets were sold and the conference and its future attendees became more 'real' to me, my goal of growing my personal network became secondary to creating the strongest and most impactful lineup of speakers I could. I spoke extensively with the CD Baby team to find out what sort of topics seemed to resonate the best with attendees the year before, and from there Alex and I determined what speakers would provide the most useful information possible for attendees.

Something that I really appreciated and benefited from throughout this speaker curation process was Alex allowing me to bring forward candidates that I either had prior connections to or thought could add real value to the conference. Because of this, we were able to secure one of the biggest and most influential YouTube music curators in the world, Gereon Sommerburg aka Cloudkid. His YouTube channel has over three and a half million subscribers and over one billion views. The DIY Conference was the first conference Sommerburg had ever spoken at, so Alex and I helped him to develop the theme and subject matter for his presentation from the ground up. It was a special moment for everyone involved. His session on leveraging YouTube was one of the most attended of the entire weekend. Sala E (70 capacity) was overflowing with attendees and there were dozens of people lining up after he was finished to ask him questions and network.

A lesson that I learned through all of our correspondence with potential speakers was to always have ourselves covered in times of uncertainty. For example, during the process of finding a speaker to represent YouTube, Danielle King at CD Baby introduced us to three women who were employees at YouTube who were expressing interest in coming out to speak. Alex and I had two video calls with them and had to wait to confirm Cloudkid because we did

not want YouTube to be overrepresented. However, they ended up pulling out of the conference pretty late in the selection process, which would have been a big setback for us. Luckily, Alex and I had been communicating with Cloudkid throughout the entire process, so when they pulled out, we were able to officially lock in Cloudkid as a speaker with CD Baby and ensure that our attendees would be able to learn about YouTube at some point over the weekend.

Being able to execute and see this plan come to fruition was extremely rewarding and I highly recommend next year's Project Manager to try and do something similar. I think that another Berklee student with their finger on the pulse of the industry would be able to find another amazing guest to bring to the table.

Moreover, I had expectations of a more collaborative team environment going into this project. Although we did come together for our weekly call with CD Baby, we mostly operated independently of each other on a day to day basis. I personally enjoyed the fact that we were working on our own a lot of the time. I have sometimes found in groups that too many opinions and perspectives can inhibit progress, and I believe our trust in one another to complete our work independently was a main reason that we as a group encountered relatively few setbacks. However, the closer we got to the actual conference, the more we enlisted each other for help. There were times during this process that required all hands on deck, and we came together as a team to get all of the last minute things done. I think that Alex's ability to effectively manage us as individuals was a major contributor to our collective efficiency and allowed us to work independently towards the same goal. For the majority of the project, Annelise and I did most of our communicating surrounding our weekly video call with CD Baby.

Due to this being the second year of the conference, we had measurable results from last year that we could base our expectations off of. We knew how many tickets were sold, we could

see the caliber of speakers that they were able to secure, and we had speaker and attendee testimonials. All of these things gave us a well-rounded picture of how last year's event went and allowed us to create a set of realistic goals that we hoped to achieve for the second edition. Although none of the Berklee team from the first year returned to the project this year, we were able to learn what could be improved upon from Danielle King and Kevin Breuner, our main points of contact at CD Baby. For example, they told us that people did not like that the showcases were so far from the Berklee campus last year, so we made it a point to be more strategic about the venues we chose for these late-night events.

Through my work as the Project Manager, I was able to really develop my organizational, time management, and project management skills. In general, I felt that these were places where I had room for improvement. I knew that they would be paramount to my success in this role, so I went into this project with the intention of addressing and developing these skills. At any point during this project I was in communication with nearly a dozen people, so it was really important for me to stay on top of each conversation. Additionally, I created and managed several project management applications (Asana, Trello, and Slack), so we could stay organized as a team.

### **Next Steps:**

Given the success of the first two years, I would assume that there is going to be a third edition of the DIY Musician Conference in 2020. CD Baby, Berklee, and the attendants were all extremely pleased with the way things went this year, and I can only see it improving with another new group of students who can learn from and improve on our work. I have a couple ideas for next year that I think could really help take the conference to the next level.

Firstly, I think that the conference would benefit from a third day. One of the more common complaints was that people had to choose between two Sunday workshops that they wanted to attend. I think that this problem could be solved by adding another day to the conference. If the day in Aula Magistral were to take place on Friday during the day, you could free up both Saturday and Sunday for workshops at Berklee. Doubling the amount of time dedicated to workshops would allow for next year's team to comfortably increase the total number of workshops by 50% while still allowing for 50% less overlapping. So, by adding another day to the conference, you would not only be able to increase the amount of material that would be available to the attendees, but also decrease the chances that they miss out on something they really want to attend. If the budget allows for it and it is logistically possible, I would strongly recommend adding another day.

Additionally, for next year I would suggest changing one of the nighttime events from a music showcase to a more intimate networking event. A lot of the feedback that we received from our post-show surveys had people asking for more networking time. I think that we assumed that as a musician-oriented conference most attendees would prefer to be in a showcase setting. However, it was clear from the feedback that many attendees would have appreciated a calmer, quieter place to network with their peers. I think that substituting one of the showcases for a more relaxed cocktail party would be well received by next year's attendees.

### **Contribution to the Discipline & Profession:**

This experience has allowed me to grow immensely as an individual and team member; undoubtedly preparing me for future career endeavors in the music industry. Prior to working on this conference, I primarily worked as an individual manager of my artists. I have always had full

control of creativity, finances, deadlines, and everything in between. Because of this, I sometimes find myself having trouble working in groups. I typically enjoy the ability to be in full control of the work I am doing, especially because I consider myself someone who thinks and operates differently than most people. It may sound cliché, but the ability to work well on teams does not come naturally to all. In a way, it is something you must learn and experience firsthand. Sometimes you have to put your frustrations aside, and really just focus on what is most important to the event. Although there were some commonalities between the work I do in management and the work related to this project, I felt that my role of Project Manager was drastically different to what I had been used to. This role required team collaboration, flexibility, and trust in my teammates. We were a team and I needed the support from my team members as much as they needed the support from me. I'm proud of how much my teamworking skills have developed while working on this project and have no doubt that it will serve me well in my future career.

During my interview with mtheory, I felt confident in speaking of my time working on this conference, and I know that my interviewer felt impressed by the fact that I had this experience under my belt. Being able to speak about my role in this conference during my interviews definitely helped me secure the position.

**Student Impact:**

Overall, I feel very pleased with my performance in this conference, and I feel lucky that I had the chance to do this as my Culminating Experience. I may be biased, but I truly believe that this is the best choice for a GEMB student's Culminating Experience. The opportunity to work with a company as reputable as CD Baby to any degree is beneficial, but to be able to work



so closely with their team of executives to create an event like this in unparalleled in this program.

During the actual conference, I remember feeling very nervous about everything running smoothly. I had also never spoken in front of such a long crowd, and the MC experience was one that boosted my confidence and reminded me no one is truly judging or critiquing you as much as you are yourself.

I also feel very thankful that I had the support of Alexandre Perrin; he supported and guided all of us throughout the conference while simultaneously allowing us to make our own final decisions. As I mentioned earlier, I truly appreciated that Alex trusted me to make recommendations for speakers that I thought would add value to the conference. As a student, being given this opportunity was motivating for me because I felt as if I was making a real contribution to the conference and its attendees. Seeing the packed room for Cloudkid was a special experience, and it was only possible because Alex trusted me to deliver a high-quality speaker.

All in all, working on the 2019 CD Baby, Berklee European DIY Musician Conference was an incredible experience - one that I will carry proudly with me in my future in the music industry.