

Exploring The Future of Electronic Music

When analysing some of the most successful Electronic Dance Music compositions in the last twelve months, it becomes apparent that the world of electronic music is undergoing rapid changes. Considering the rapid success achieved by artists such as Kygo, it can be deduced that change is desired in the multiple subgenres of electronic music.

Pioneering the genre of Tropical House, an artist by the name Kygo entered the music industry in 2013, spurring a bidding war between three dominant record labels as a result of a few remixes and original compositions under this unique subgenre (Buerger, 2014). Similarly, renowned, developed artists such as Porter Robinson have undergone a complete transformation, from a production standpoint. In the release of his album *Worlds*, Electronic Dance Music composer and producer Porter Robinson delivered a product far different from his previous works. Though Porter claims not to have made this change for commercial reasons, the album greatly impacted his career. "*Everyone seems to be refreshed by it. It's really vindicating to me*" Porter reveals (McCarthy, Z. 2014). It can thus be seen that many changes are due to occur under the wide umbrella of popular Electronic Dance Music. When analysing popular EDM, as a whole, it can be seen that the development of modern productions draw many influences

from multiple external genres of music. Thus it can be assumed that a successful step, in creating popular Electronic Dance Music, involves the fusion of different genres of music, outside of Pop and EDM, with the common production techniques of popular Dance Music.

This Culminating Experience project therefore seeks to deliver a combination of pieces of original music, in the form of an EP, that contribute to this wave of change currently occurring in the world of popular electronic music. This is achieved through radical choices in the production of this EP, drawing influences from multiple external genres as well as from similar popular works currently trending in popular Electronic Dance Music. Furthermore, the promotion of this EP to a designated demographic is discussed.

The Artist



Figure 1: Image of Meh including band members

I have recently begun to work on a trio project, under the alias *Meh*, consisting of a joint effort in composition and arrangement. The compositions often include viola or violin driving the melodies of the compositions. In this group I am solely responsible for the production of the material, and am involved in the compositional processes. I believe this group has the potential to achieve recognition through the release of unique yet commercial material as well as through the approach taken in live performances. These live performances will involve the use of live synthesizers, drum machines and an electric violin. For this reason, I have chosen to allow the content created in this Culminating

Experience project to be released and branded under this artist/band name.

Production

The value of the production, in the creation of this EP, was paramount. The uniqueness of the production, which is achieved through making radical choices and fusing unconventional genres with EDM, acts as the innovative aspect of this project. This therefore becomes the selling point of this EP and it was therefore approached in a very meticulous manner.

Uriella

A very minimal production approach was taken to this song. The verses are occupied solely by piano and vocals. This was purposefully done to create more impact with the radically different chorus of the song. This also gives the song more dynamic range, and thus contributes to the emotional quality of the song.

The pre-chorus of this song acts as a vital transition to the chorus of the song, and features a children's choir as a lyrical response to the lead vocals in the verse. This song was composed by Matthias Bakker, and the lyrics refer to his emotional state after the birth of his first daughter. It was felt that the fragility of this emotional state would be best represented through the voices of children and this thus spurred the choice to record a children's choir. As a result, ten of my nephew's third grade classmates were individually recorded through a Rode NT1-A microphone and to maintain the authenticity of this choir, none of the

voices were tuned.

Judging from recent, popular works in pop/EDM such as the highly successful Jack Ü and Justin Bieber collaboration, *Where Are You Now*, a trend is highlighted in creating very unique sounds through unconventional methods. In the aforementioned single, the lead melody is created through the extreme manipulation of a vocal sample (New York Times, 2015). Drawing influence from this, the lead melody in the chorus of *Uriella* was created through resampling the sample of a sustained saxophone note. This was overlaid onto a hip-hop influenced rhythm, containing 808 bass and unique, manipulated percussive elements.

Chosen

The production process of the song *Chosen* began shortly after it was established that this EP would be marketed mainly to a South African audience. With that in mind, the production was conducted bearing reference to the rhythmic qualities of popular South African House Music that I had grown up listening to (Buzzsouthafrica, 2013).

This essentially meant lowering the tempo of the song to approximately 100bpm and producing an energetic, bouncy hook. This was achieved through driving the chord progression and melody with short pluck sounds with a very short sustain and release. In addition, male voice samples were used as percussive elements to further attribute to typical South African House Music (Buzzsouthafrica, 2013).

Radical choices were again made in the production of the verses and choruses of this song. In an attempt to remain minimal, like with the production of Uriella, this song introduces itself solely with a lead vocal and a programmed drum rhythm. The absence of melodic instrumentation in this introduction emphasizes the quality of the lead vocal. It was felt that this would also induce intrigue in listeners. To further deliver a unique product, and to maintain similarities, in the production, between this song and Uriella, a choir was again used in the pre-chorus of this song. The use of a lead vocal backed by a predominantly male choir acted as a strong build up to the instrumental hook of this song and strongly emphasizes the emotional qualities of this song.

Album Fillers

It was decided that both Chosen and Uriella would act as the selling point of this EP to a broad demographic audience in South Africa. These are the most commercial of the four songs and therefore act as the selling point of this EP. The remaining two songs on this EP, being mainly instrumental, cater more for an audience of avid Electronic Dance Music listeners, as well as the specific demographics affiliated to the fused genres revealed in these two songs.

This, however, does not mean that the production process of these songs was pursued with less importance. These two songs were approached with the idea to create a successful fusion of genres, and it is felt that this was well achieved.

An orchestral approach was taken towards the song named **Motion**. Here

references were drawn to orchestral film songs such as those produced by the popular duet, Two Steps From Hell (Bergersan, n.d). Emotions of empowerment are delivered through an instrumental introduction of staccato strings and the energy is increased as the song morphs into a dance floor appropriate song with rhythmic qualities characteristic of Electronic Dance Music. Although the strings were mostly programmed with Native Instruments' Session Strings plug-in, the authenticity of the sounds are maintained through violin recordings overlaid onto the programmed strings.

The song named **Eastern** was approached in a similar manner. This song draws a great deal of influence from middle-eastern instrumentation and this is delivered in the introduction as the song opens with a programmed oud and embellishments of Sufi vocals and a violin played in a characteristically middle-eastern manner, with many pitch fluctuations. This progresses into an instrumental chorus, which, again, draws rhythmical hip-hop influence through 808 bass drums and triplet patterned hi-hats. Rhythmic value is added in the unique percussive elements. The snare, for example, was designed through the layering of multiple percussive elements to create a unique sounding snare, while maintaining its percussive role.

Promotion

“Connectivity (online), which has previously been poorly organised and largely represented by faceless information-technological innovations, has slowly

become an ideological force to reckon with" (Wikström 2013, pp.107).

This quote strongly emphasises the strength of the Internet as a medium for social interaction. In a period of just over twenty years the music industry has undergone immense, rapid changes. In a guide to *Making a Living In Your Local Music Market* (Anon n.d., p.105), Dick Weissman highlights the importance of attaining a record deal for developing artists. The emphasis is placed on approaching one of the four major labels of the time: Universal, Sony, EMI and Warner Music. In today's music industry, the importance and relevance of record labels, to a certain extent, is negligible. The advancement of technology has seen the rise of the bedroom studio leaving the need for record label-based funding virtually non-existent. In addition to this, "*music firms also have less control over...the promotion of music*" (Wikström 2013, pp.170). It was therefore decided that this EP would be released and promoted through the independent label, Ossia Records. This is a label founded by one of the band members, Matthias Bakker, insuring that no share of the money made from sales would go to a third party record label.

"The internet has completely changed the overall marketing picture for developing musicians...The downside is that there is more noise than ever before, too" (King 2009, pp.89 – 98). According to a report by *Next Big Sound (Analytics and Insights for the Music Industry, no date)*, more than 90 percent of a large sample of artists are classified as undiscovered. Close to 7 percent are classified as developing and only one percent have reached a point of

establishment within the music industry. This leads to the conclusion that the current music industry is both extremely competitive and, with the lack of legal music consumption, highly unviable for undiscovered artists. In addition, attaining a record deal means that the artist loses a portion of the little money made.

Modern music marketing guides, targeted towards undiscovered artists, place strong focus on generating online presence through social networking, from creating weekly podcasts to offering free music on social media. As a developing artist myself, I can say without doubt that these suggestions are not a totally concrete manner for achieving recognition in the music industry. Employing these strategies does assist online presence, however achieving extensive recognition, in this manner, is often dependent on luck. However, one constant in music promotion is radio. On 12 May 2016, midway through the creation of this EP, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) introduced "*a new quota system, requiring 90% of the music played on its 18 radio stations to be homegrown*" (BBC, 2016). This acted as a great opportunity for the promotion of this EP. As a result, a renowned PR company within South Africa, the Melissa Conradie Company, was approached with the sole objective to achieve playlisting on a number of the most popular radio stations in South Africa, most of which are run by the SABC. To achieve the greatest results from this opportunity, it was decided to release all the material, on the EP, as singles, starting with what we believed to be the most popular of the songs, Uriella. Depending on the reaction to this single, a date would be determined to release the following single, Chosen.

Results:

After submitting Uriella to these major radio stations, some attention was received. Two popular radio DJ's of the most popular radio station in South Africa, 5FM, played the single a number of times on their radio shows. These DJ's also Tweeted at featured vocalist, Kyle Deutsch, asking about the artist/band Meh. Despite this positive feedback, however, the single did not receive official playlisting on either of the major radio stations in South Africa. After individual meetings between the Melissa Conradie company and the playlisting managers of a number of the major radio stations, it was unanimously determined that the single was "too different" for the South African music industry. Although it was agreed that the composition and production was inline with international trends in pop music, it was felt that the single did not meet the trends of local content. In addition to this, there was a great deal of skepticism regarding the band. With no online presence, or previous releases, the validity of the artist name was questioned.





Figure 2: Conversation between 5FM DJ Stephanie Be, Kyle Deutsch and Meh

As a result of the disappointing feedback from this release, it was understood that Uriella was not the appropriate song choice for a first release. The appropriate choice would have been a single that draws influences from South African productions, and thus caters more for a South African Market (i.e the single *Chosen*). It was therefore decided to immediately release *Chosen* as the second single release. The song was thus submitted for distribution and will become available on all popular platforms on the 28th of June 2016. It is predicted that this single will be playlisted on all major radio stations in South Africa as it is far more appropriate for a South African audience. Furthermore, falling shortly after the release date of Uriella, *Chosen* creates more certainty in the sustainability of the

band Meh.

Conclusion

The creation of this EP was a very interesting endeavor. This process led to a number of contacts in the South African music industry through collaborations as well as business relations in the promotional process of the releases. This means that a concrete starting point, as an undiscovered artist, was developed solidifying my next step towards the South African music industry. I have also gained some experience in production, as well as working relations in the industry.

This project has also strengthened my working relationship with my brother in both the creational aspect, as well as the business. As a result, this has confirmed my belief in our potential to grow and to maintain growth in the years to come as a well-balanced partnership.

Production and Composition Resources

Production:

1. Ableton Live Suite 9.5
2. Leanner Digital – Sylenth
3. CakeWalk – Z3ta 2+
4. Native Instruments - Kontakt

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