CE written report
Will Lydgate
6/26/16

Introduction

I have been in love with reggae music ever since I first heard it, on a mixtape from my sister Emily in 1995. It wasn't too long after then that I picked up the bass guitar for the first time. I played in lots of bands, in school and outside of school, and I was ALWAYS was the guy in the band who wanted to play a reggae groove. Reggae had all the elements I enjoyed in music: harmony, history, dynamics, a wide tempo range, soul, energy; it was endlessly fascinating to me. Everyone else seemed to get bored with it after a while, but I could play that groove for hours. I began a quest to find musicians that loved reggae; to be able to play great reggae bass was my dream.

Most great reggae is very organic with a live recording feel, it's one of the great things about the genre. But, I remember the first time I heard reggae that I knew was made in a computer. It was a record called Jubilees of Zion by Midnite. I could tell the drums were programmed, and the bass was a synth. But it sounded SO AWESOME. I wanted to learn how to make music like THAT someday. If I never found enough great musicians to play reggae with, I could fall back on my laptop, so it seemed.

In time I became a professional bass player, live and in the studio, as well as producer of records(in the traditional fashion with microphones and musicians in a room). My dream of learning to program music in a computer laid dormant. However, I saw few of my friends programming music successfully; they didn't need anybody; they were electronic music producers. To be able to make music alone seemed like true freedom to me, but I was secretly terrified that I wouldn't be able to be motivated enough to make music on my own. True freedom could mean total annihilation as well.

For years I had all the tools I needed, a studio, a computer, pen and paper, but I hadn't made much of anything alone. I made great songs with others but that wasn't the point. Making music on my own meant personal growth; it was a goal that I thought was worth reaching. So, I gave myself some structure to reach it: A masters degree in Music Production, Technology, and Innovation at Berklee college of Music's Valencia campus.

This Culminating Experience project is the fruit of the creative process I discovered during the program. It is the result of me facing down my laptop and learning the ways of solo production, the true nature of procrastination, and the reason most artists never live to their full potential.

Description of the Culminating Experience Project (the WORK)

I have created an album of dub reggae titled: Will Lydgate VS. The Night Marchers in DUB. This album features 10 tracks of down-tempo future-dub reggae vibrations designed to make you feel intoxicated, highly creative, and inspired to make love. The musical roots of this work are rooted firmly in the classic reggae dub genre. It features many classic techniques pioneered by classic dub producers like King Tubby, Scientist, Mad Professor, and Lee 'Scratch' Perry. Musical inspirations also come from rock and psychedelic bands such as Pink Floyd. I also sing on a few tunes and lyrical inspirations are drawn from contemporary Hawaiian culture, my personal experience of the drug war, as well as stoic philosophy. The work was created and mixed in Ableton Live, mastered in Pro Tools, a digital organic creation.

Innovative aspects of the work

Working on a laptop, I am an electronic music producer by definition, and I used many techniques of electronic music producers to create this album. But, this work sounds different than any reggae that I have heard. I feel that my years as a live and session musician guided my groove, sound, and note choices and because of this I was able to bring fresh and innovative approach to the music. I get many comments that my grooves have a true to life feel and authenticity, these are congruent with my standards as a electric bassist, it has to feel great. Most electronic musicians count on techniques like quantization to create groove, but that method didn't hold up to my standard of groove and I quicly found new ways to work. The fact that I spent most of me career as a non-electronic musician created innovation through translation.

The early dub pioneers performed all of their dubs throws live. I, on the other hand, automate all of my reverb and delay throws, allowing me to precisely control the sounds. I am also able filter the feedback on delays and re-pitch the delays in such a way as to create melodies with nothing but the fed-back signal, something I have seen live but never heard on a record in any

meaningful way. This can be heard on my record on the tune 'Rockers on the Rock' as well as 'Mermaid's Chant'.

Using synths such as Operator, and Z3ta-2 I have created other sounds, common in most electronic music, but rarely found in dub-reggae. Including the resonant white noise filter sweeps, heard of the tune 'Into the Blue Room'; sample and hold throws of sent to a delay line, as heard on 'The Descendants'; And, sub bass womps as heard on the tune 'The Descendants'.

My use of the 'sticky bass', 'stuck line' or 'percolator' (aka the plucked guitar line an octave above the bass) is a common technique, but I am the first producer to automate or use midi effects on it, creating a sort of voiced bass line that arpeggiates and evolves. This can be heard extensively on the songs 'Beach on Kauai', 'Mermaid's Chant' and 'MIDI Blaster.

I have further pioneered the reggae genre with use of further MIDI effects in Ableton Live such as the combination of inverting midi, reversing midi, and legato MIDI found in the tune 'MIDI Blaster'.

New skills acquired

In the course of this undertaking I have acquired many new skills in production. The fact that I am a laptop producer is a new skill in and of it's self

I have greater fluency and knowledge of the classic reverbs used in dub music, from the convolutions of classic spring reverbs found in altiverb, to classic emulations of digital hardware halls and plates found in the recordings of the 70 and 80s, to room reverbs and slap backs; my knowledge of reverb has grown. By far my favorite plug-in reverb is ValhallaVintageVerb by ValhallaDSP, go pick it up now!

My knowledge and practice with the classic delay lines in dub reggae has grown. I now have 5 or 6 different delays that I can use to achieve a classic, fed back filtered dub delay sound. I can also create classic sounding feedback loop from scratch using a return channel/delay line feedback loop, and an eq. As mentioned above I have also learned how to sculpt re-pitched delay feedback with filters to play melodies.

I have learned how to program great sounding reggae drumbeats, and designed my own custom ableton drumrack 128's with my sample libraries as well as samples taken from existing recordings.

I have a complete conceptual and practical understanding of subtractive synthesis as well as a working understanding of FM synthesis and can design completely every classic sound of synthesis including hi-hats, deep dub basses, chops and bangs, pads, leads, and plucky textures.

I have learned to use harmonic distortion and tape emulation to make a track sound and feel more gritty, dirty, and vintage in a throwback way.

And I have learned how to do all of this inside the context of program that I had no experience in Ableton Live, that I now consider my native production environment. Ableton live is DEEP, although I feel I have only scratched the surface, I can do some cool things now.

I have learned how to work by myself, without the supportive structure of collaboration. I have learned how to track my own vocals, and how to produce myself. As well as how to take breaks to gain the essential perspective needed to maintain proper focus in a track.

Living in a culture outside of the one that I grew up in, I have learned how to be a better person, culturally sensitive to the other, and humble enough to know that I am but a small part of a greater whole. Spain has humbled me, I hope to hold on to the feeling for as long as I can. Looking at everything with fresh eyes has much power. Y, ahora puedo hablar mejor que antes!

Challenges, both anticipated and unexpected

Drum fills, I still don't understand the best way to incorporate them. I am going to start grabbing them from the tops of records and putting them in a library for later use.

Resistance: It took sometime to identify the source of my productivity problems, I call it resistance. This is the phenomenon that makes it hard to do the things you know you should do as an artist. Generally the cooler the thing is and the more meaningful, the more resistance you will feel. Call it the unconscious, call it the devil, call it what you will, it's a bitch. This is the true source of

procrastination and the reason most artists never reach their full potential. The cure for resistance is sitting down and getting to work.

Mixing in an unfamiliar DAW environment has been challenging. I still don't feel my Ableton mixing is up to where I have it in Pro Tools. Nobody seems to be complaining about my mixes but still, I don't feel as capable of controlling all the sound sources in the same way as before. Part of this could be because I am designing the sounds with the mix in mind so much of the job of the mixer is gone.

Organization was and is a challenge. Keeping a clean workspace, keeping files and folders organized, this is something I want to do very well and a department I could use improvement in. I have come a long way but I want to get to level-OCD with all my file management and hierarchy and workspace organization.

Quantization: I can hear grooves in my head before I sit down to work, so I need my grooves to be correct; groove is incredibly important to me and the laptop has to have great feel. To this end I found that I was unable to quantize bass to the grid and still achieve a great feel for my tunes. So many subtleties of envelopes, human attack, note endings, and feel were lost in the process. I find that I can easily quantize hi hats, snare, kicks, and guitar and piano chops as long as the element of the bass is allowed to roll and flow and the music grooves hard.

One of my goals not yet achieved was to understand how to make my delay throws binaural. However there currently appears to be no way to do this in real time.

Video production, I did not get as far with video as I had hoped for. I still feel like a total kook in after-effects and premier.

Future ramifications and or plans for the work

This work will be posted on the interwebs and shared with the world, it will be my public face as an artist/producer. Many people will hear it and I am hoping that it will lead to lots more work for me in reggae music. My goal is to first create and produce top reggae artists in Hawaii, then top reggae artists in the world. Also to make a name for myself as a dub producer with a killer live set. This album is the beginning of me becoming a famous music producer.

Conclusion

The goal of this CE was to reinvent myself, from someone who worked with instruments to someone who could work in the box; goal achieved. The world of sound design is now one that I inhabit; I am an electronic musician. I am so excited to continue my career in music with the greater flexibility to work by myself anywhere that I have a laptop and electricity. This flexibility to produce my own artistic vision is something I have been wanting for years and now I have it. Huge gratitude to Ben Cantil, Stephen Webber, Ian Kagey, Nacho Marco, and Pierce Warnecke for helping me to achieve these goals.

And, I know that I will be able to share these skills with others. As someone who has faced his personal artistic demons, I can help others to face theirs. It is an exciting prospect for a collaborator and lover of musicians such as myself.

Footnotes and citations