

Berklee College of Music

**Recording engineer portfolio:  
Transmitting a project through  
a personal approach and  
aesthetics.**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of  
Master of Music in Music Production, Technology and Innovation.

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Valencia Campus, Spain July 2019

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## **Abstract**

This Culminating Experience consist in the creation of a portfolio made of a set of recording engineering work made this year 2018-2019 at Berklee College of Music, along with a webpage to reach out possible customers in a personal and familiar way.

*Keywords:* recording engineer work, webpage, personal approach.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project would not have been the same without the help of my advisor, Pablo Munguia. As lost as I was at the beginning, he guided me through a journey of being professional and believing in myself, all of this with the help of the rest of the faculty.

What also has made this experience unique and special is the fellow students that have shared life with me these past months. It is hard to live in such a intense environment without the understanding and support of your surroundings, and the Berklee community has been the perfect place for that.

Thank you to the people that gave me a chance recording even though I had no experience, I remember all of you and I really appreciate it. I have learnt so much because of you.

And of course, I would like to thank my mom for being the most supportive person in my life, and my brother for being always there.

## 1. Introduction

A portfolio is “a living and changing collection of records that reflect your accomplishments, skills, experiences, and attributes. It highlights and showcases samples of some of your best work, along with life experiences, values and achievements”<sup>1</sup>.

This portfolio focuses on the engineering side of production. The outcome of each record is a professionally produced mix, but a variety of roles are played, including engineer, assistant and mixer. Also, a large part of the Culminating Experience (CE) has consisted of working on the platforms where the portfolio exists. This includes creating a webpage to show the work and personal experience as an engineer, and various social media accounts for contact as well as Soundcloud and other musical platforms. All of this comes along with creating a certain image and branding as an engineer, working on developing a clear work ethic and strategy as well as a clean and appealing aesthetic.

Before listening to any track, it is important to make a good visual first impression to create an impact in the client’s mind. This impression will affect the image and opinion they will have about this portfolio and therefore, the work that appears on it.

With this project, the intention is to jump into the engineering world as a professional, well-prepared, and passionate candidate in order to be appealing for a recording studio. It shows all the skills acquired over the course of the year and the techniques that developed. It also demonstrates ability to lead a studio recording session,

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<sup>1</sup> *CofC Career Center*. «The importance of a Portfolio» "a living and changing collection of records that reflect your accomplishments, skills, experiences, and attributes. It highlights and showcases samples of some of your best work, along with life experiences, values and achievements" 29.10.18

from setup, to recording, to mixing.

## **2. Review of the State of the Art**

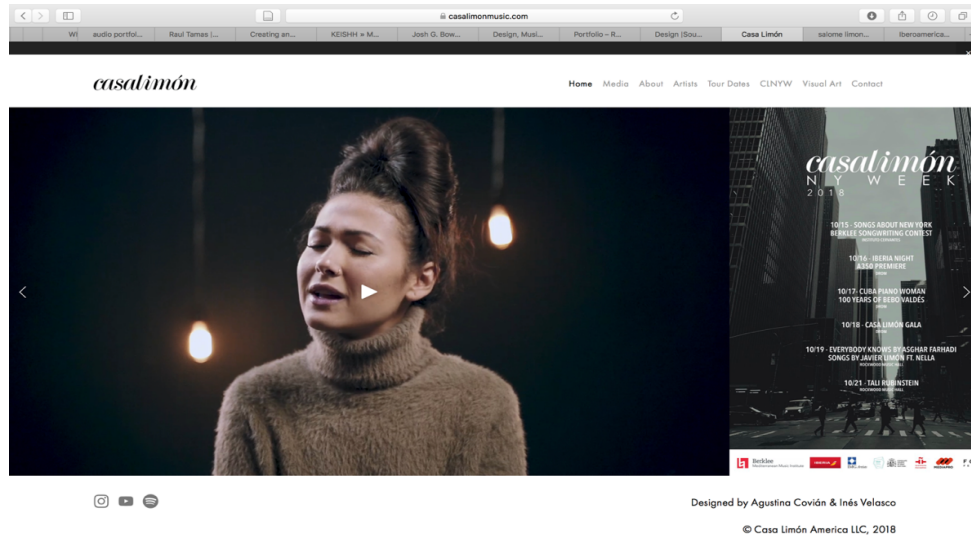
Portfolios are one of the most useful tools to show potential clients the nature of your work; they make it possible to show a disparate range of experiences in one easy-to-access location. Recording professionals often underline “the importance of every professional’s need to consider a portfolio career in order to take greater control over his or her economic and occupational destiny”<sup>2</sup> By creating a portfolio, an up-and-coming producer can be proactive about finding work. Rather than expecting clients to spend a great deal of their own time seeking out a producer by searching any number of a plethora of online platforms, the producer can quickly and easily recruit his or her own clients by sending them to one specific place.

Engineers use a wide array of tools to record and produce music, and showing that work afterwards is almost as important as the actual creative process. Portfolios allow us to achieve this. Because this tool is so important, it is very common in the industry. As a result, it is important to distinguish one’s portfolio from the field. A fresh, appealing aesthetic combined with intelligent branding strategies makes this project stand out from the average portfolio.

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<sup>2</sup> Carucci, «Why Everyone Needs A Portfolio Career» “the importance of every professional’s need to consider a portfolio career in order to take greater control over his or her economic and occupational destiny” Forbes. 29.10.11

One example of a unique aesthetic is Casa Limón Studio<sup>3</sup>'s webpage (shown in Picture 1), which utilizes a clean, minimalistic design. Before even hearing any recordings, someone visiting the webpage gets the impression that this is a professional and reliable company.



Picture 1: Casa Limón's Webpage

This technique—using mostly black and white with small pops of color—is widely used, as seen in Josh. G. Bowman Sound<sup>4</sup> and Keishh<sup>5</sup> (shown in Picture 2). The black and white theme is elegant and professional, while the color makes it distinctive and gives it personality. The aforementioned example also stands out because of its original and creative design, resulting in a clear aesthetic and personal

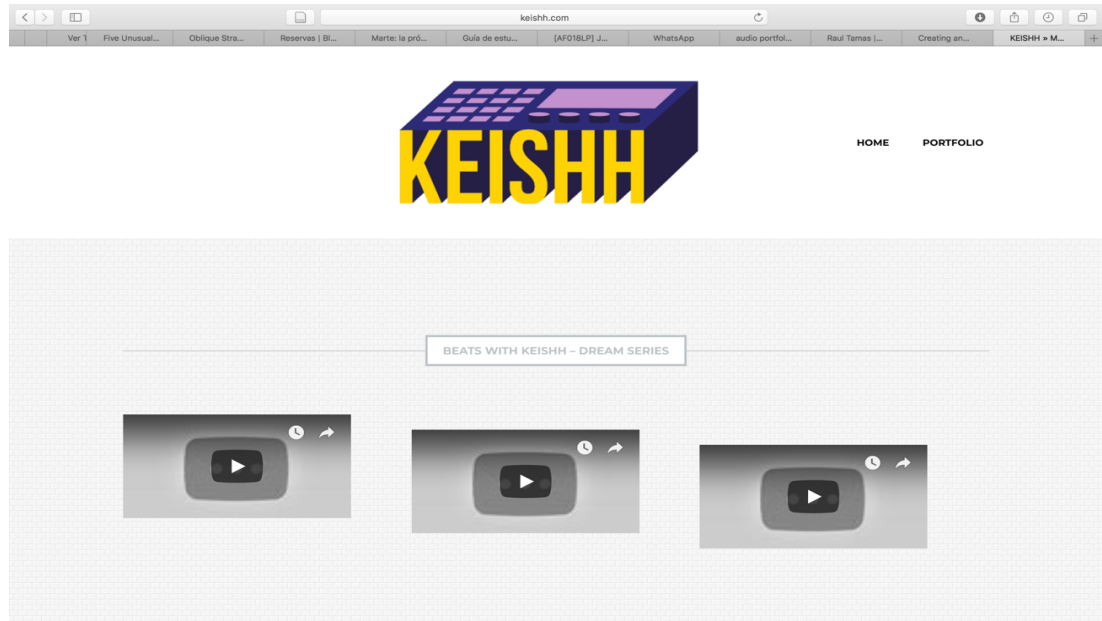
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<sup>3</sup> Casa Limón Studios. <https://www.casalimonmusic.com/ukr0ktoxouw53jm4lyrnp6j2bqknf3> 25.11.18

<sup>4</sup> Bowman. <http://bowmansound.com>. 25.11.18

<sup>5</sup> Keishh. <http://keishh.com>. 25.11.18

image that the creator wants to transmit. The creation of a logo is important to immediately be identified and to perceive an idea of the whole of the portfolio with just one look. The following is an example of a great logo design:



Picture 2: Keishh's Portfolio

A further example in which the created image is very personal and sets a branding is in Raul Tamas<sup>6</sup>. A quick look at these webpages leaves one with a memorable impression in mind.

On the other hand, there are many cases in which the design is not as emotive, and the idea gets lost in the layout. In Rob Kelly Sound<sup>7</sup>(shown in Picture

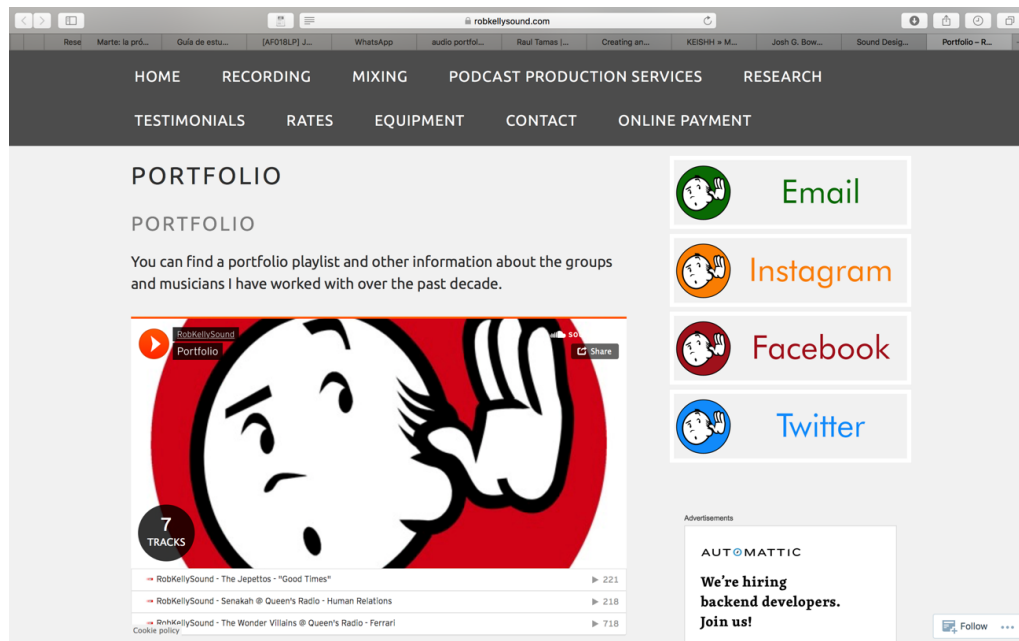
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<sup>6</sup> Tamas. <http://www.raultamas.com>. 25.11.18

<sup>7</sup> Kelly. <https://robkellysound.com/site/portfolio/>. 25.11.18



3), an unexciting configuration is used—one which the average viewer has probably seen many times before. This gives them no reason to remember or come back to the webpage. The use of bright colors brings to mind children, which detracts from the professional look it needs. Also, in terms of colors, there is no consistent theme. Rather than using different shades of one or two complimentary colors, it uses four completely contrasting colors which have no relation to each other. Furthermore, there is very little hierarchy in the text, so it is unclear which part is the most important. Typically, links to contact info such as email, phone, and social media should be small, but here they are the biggest text on the page—bigger even than the title of the page. The word “portfolio” is also unnecessarily repeated. Having the name of the producer always present is important for someone starting their career, but here it is missing.



Picture 3: Rob Kelly Sound Portfolio

Looking at all of these examples, it is hard to ignore the fact that all of the research done and the results found are by men. Men make up the majority of the music industry, especially in the audio engineering world. Because of this, creating a personal brand as a woman will already make the portfolio stand out more than usual. One common thing in the majority of the cases is the link to social media/contact information. Creating an easy and accessible method of contact determines if the portfolio is useful or not, so this is something that cannot be excluded.

In conclusion, a good portfolio must have a modern, intuitive design, along with a connection to the social media and platform where the work is posted.

### **3. Description**

This project consists of a set of 13 songs recorded and 7 mixed that display the mixing and recording skills acquired this year. These songs have been recorded and mixed using Pro Tools, with the intention of reaching excellence on the manipulation of this Digital Audio Workstation as it is one of the most used currently in the music industry. Pro Tools is “an industry elite in recording studio software<sup>8</sup>” and the industry standard for recording studios, so having a high proficiency level with this DAW is key to building your way into working in studios. The same thing is intended with the outboard gear available in the Ann Kries

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<sup>8</sup> D’Angelo, «Pro Tools Review» “an industry elite in recording studio software”  
<https://www.business.com/reviews/pro-tools-hd/> 22.06.19

Scoring Stage (AKKS) (as seen in Picture 4) as they are the standard of technology used in the biggest studios in the world.



*Picture 4: Example of the AKKS's outboard gear*

Along with the songs, the project also includes a webpage following the previously mentioned aesthetic aspects in the “State of the Art” section (see Picture 5) where the music is posted, so the access and communication are easier. This webpage also introduces the other aspect of the project that is relevant: the personal communication. This is done in the form of a blog, where descriptions of the recording and mixing sessions are posted. These writings attempt to conjure up the image of “the recording engineer” and make them more approachable, likeable and interesting for everyone to know and contact, instead of the distant and inaccessible figure that it seems to be in general.



*Picture 5: Image of the Home page of the webpage*

#### **4. Innovative Aspects**

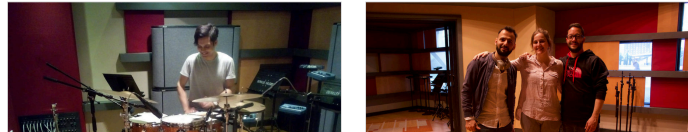
The difference between this and the average portfolio is that it connects more deeply with the user. Instead of showing everything about the professional, it also shows things about the person behind the professional. Injecting your work ethic and personality into a project is very important these days in order to distinguish yourself from others and to make you more likeable and likely to get a call. This project achieves that by using the blog, testimonials and telling a story through video where you can see more about the person and their way of working.

The blog here acts as a tool of real-world personification, rather than portraying the person as someone distant and unreachable.



## Stories from the Studio

Hours and hours of music recording from a personal point of view.



*Picture 6: Image of the blog*

As important as it is to be a good engineer, people also want the best environment while recording. That is why showing yourself as a pleasant person to work with will give you the extra distinction you want. A lot of portfolios published focus only on the work done and the experience that specific engineer has. What this portfolio achieves is to still maintain the professional look of an experienced and solid portfolio, while also transmitting how working with this person will be. It is not only about the result but also the process, something that is very valuable for musicians.

### 5. New Skills Acquired

One year seems not long, but Berklee allows students to gain several new skills and strengthen the ones already learnt rapidly.

First of all, engineering has been the main skill acquired. Coming from an audiovisual background and knowing very little about music production, becoming a well-prepared recording and mixing engineer was the principal goal of the year,

and all the different projects and homework have led to improvement in this area. Microphone placement, phasing, equalization and compression have been some of the most used techniques on the process of creating and shaping the music recorded.



*Picture 7: Blumlein technique, learnt working on the project, used on a piano*

In addition to this technical learning, becoming a Master's Graduate also allows you to expand your business knowledge. Nothing is useful if one does not have the business skills to know how the industry works and how to sell themselves as a professional in it.

Managing stress, deadlines and creative blackout has been something that, while it is difficult to handle in the moment, once you are looking back it feels like improvement has been made, trying to stay positive, focused and motivated through every project.

## **6. Challenges, both expected and unanticipated**

Learning how to engineer has been the most demanding task. It was completely expected as it was the main challenge this project wanted to overcome. Being conscious about what your strengths and deficiencies are is very important to never stop learning. There is always room for improvement and falling into routine and repetition can be very easy, but staying awake and learning new techniques and processes has been a very rewarding practice, although very challenging in some moments.

Related to awareness self-deficiencies, an unexpected challenge has been not to compare acquired strengths with other people's strengths. Every student every year is different. People learn at different speeds, everyone processes things differently. Comparing yourself with others, especially in this technical field, is something very difficult to avoid yet very harmful. In this world, to be aware that each and every one is unique, and anybody can offer something different from the rest, that could be another musical perspective, another miking placement or just the way of giving feedback after takes, is very important. Trying not to think less of the self-image in this competitive world is a strength that must be acquired, and even at Berklee, where there is one of the most positive, friendly and safe

environments in education, avoiding this is definitely a challenge.

## **7. Future Ramifications**

The main future use of this portfolio will be to keep posting and updating the content of the webpage, be it music or writings in the blog. The process will be to upload the songs newly recorded and produced during the next years, and also keep adding content to the blog, trying to keep up with the voice reached this year and with a possible growing audience.

On the expansion of the project, creating a Spanish version of the webpage and ultimately blogging in Spanish will open the market widely. Duplicating the website and creating a Spanish option will broaden the possible customer scope. Once the main website is done, the goal is to start posting in the blog in both versions as well, writing two different posts for both languages to connect easier with everyone that is interested in the project.

## **8. Conclusion**

This project tries to make the distant image that recording engineers have disappear and make it more approachable and likeable to the possible customer and less unknown and mysterious to the music fan. Growing up, I always wanted to become a recording engineer but I knew very little about the position and the studios seemed like a very strange and exotic place.



These days, trying to expose yourself as a better professional and more approachable person is very important in order to distance yourself from other engineers. Trying to achieve this, this portfolio not only showcases my work and ability as an experienced engineer, but also brings the whole experience closer to you by using audiovisual and writing content.

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