

Berklee College of Music, Valencia.

Electro Shock

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

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July 2019

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Abstract

This paper will discuss Javier Martin's contribution to "Electro Shock", the final project for his Master's degree in Music Production, Technology and Innovation. Electro Shock is a collaborative project between two peer students, Javier Martin and Leanne Moser, based on the idea of experimenting with mixing EDM and rock music. It will be presented as an EP containing 4 songs and also as an audiovisual set, with interactive live performance and original visuals.

Javier's official part in the project was to mix Leanne's Rock demos and blend them with his own electronic parts. He found it difficult to remix them without diminishing their strong social messages and their old structure. But with an open mind and respect for the demos, Javier gained skills in the field of mixing several new instruments and musical styles and Electro Shock was completed successfully and showcased proudly during his final Master's defense.

1. Introduction

Javier studied percussion from a very young age. He has performed as a drummer and DJ several times in the past years. When he was 17 years old he found his true passion in electronic dance music production. He specialized in hardcore electronic music styles such as Dubstep and Hybrid Trap. In order to improve his electronic tracks, he used several organic elements that give a natural and real character to the music generated by a computer.

Javier came to Berklee Valencia with the goal of improving his mixing and mastering skills and also to further develop his arranging and mixing skills, combining electronic music with organics elements. He initially planned to focus the year on creating an audiovisual set that explores the idea of the Pepper's Ghost Technique. However his plans changed when he met Leanne Moser, and heard her music. He recognized potential in the idea of mixing his electronic compositions and her rock demos and asked her if she would be willing to work together with him. After texting this with the song *Barbie Dolls*, they asked for approval from their master's advisor and revised their final project proposal for the fulfillment of their degree. They called their collaborative project Electro Shock, playing with the thought of electronic music with an unexpected, shocking twist- live instruments and deeply thought songwriting with important messages.

The workflow was that Javier received stems of the songs- all originally composed, recorded and edited by Leanne. He was the electronic producer, meaning he restructured the music and added electronic elements. He used his Sound Design knowledge, added electronic elements and blended them with the stems, and mixed everything together. He brought the songs to a professionally sounding place. In addition, he played drums and percussion for the

recordings of the demos. If needed, Javier took active part in the songwriting and recording process, and stated his opinions and ideas throughout the whole process.

Javier had quite a lot of knowledge in electronic performance, and taught Leanne about the endless options they have. He showed her past shows inspired him and they planned together how to perform their own music. In their live set, Javier played the grand piano, acoustic and electronic drums, triggered samples on his MIDI controllers, manipulated effects.

Electro Shock is an EP that was re-invented as a cutting edge live audiovisual set, full of bold choices and creative elements. This also led him to decide he wants to continue working together with Leanne after the year ends, and they decided to call their band “MozX.”

2. State of the Art

The production and combination of hardcore electronic genres, in particular “Dubstep” and “Psytrance,” with organic rock/metal elements is unofficially referred in the music scene as “Metalstep.” One interesting example is the music of Keaton Prescott, better known as “Sullivan King.” Prescott is an LA based metal vocalist/ guitarist, who produces and performs his original material. Prescott elaborates about the inspiration that led him to experiment with these genres: “It [Bass music] was something else that I could listen to that was sort of a cleanser and refresher to what I was used to listening to, in that it sonically didn’t sound the same [As rock/metal music.] Whereas it may have the same energy, but it was a totally different format and style.”¹ His overall sound as a great reference for the Electro Shock EP direction, and the way he structured his music has a lot of potential as a platform for meaningful lyrics along with powerful EDM drops.

¹ "Sullivan King Talks 'House of Wolves' EP, Rock Influences, & More!" EDM Identity. October 20, 2017.

Robert DeLong, an American EDM producer, inspired the stage plot and characteristics of the Electro Shock audio-visual performance. In his set, DeLong plays many different elements of his songs live. Some examples are drums, keys, vocals (dry and processed) and controllers. DeLong explains his choices of exploring the live delivery of his music with several different instruments as so: “Going into electronic performance I realized that since these sounds aren’t created in the real world, there’s no direct analog for showcasing them, so I just wanted to find ways that were visually compelling to relay what I’m doing.”²

3. Description

3.1 Introduction

Javier was the electronic producer of Electro Shock, which is both the title of an EP and a live audiovisual set. He mixed electronic with non-electronic elements and completed four songs. He performed them live in the AKSS recording studio at Berklee College of Music, Valencia.

3.2 Electronic Production

The sound design of the electronic elements and overall mixing of the music was done in the digital audio workstation “Ableton Live Suite 10“. The reason for this choice is of personal preferences, due he is more experienced in producing electronic music in this specific workstation.

Javier received files with the stems of the organic demos *Happy Pills*, *Barbie Dolls*, *Drag Me to Your Queen* and *AM* from Leanne, and imported these acoustic mixed elements into Ableton Live. He re-structured the songs, decided where to add intros, build ups, drops downlifters, and outros according to the stylistic decisions made by the duo and the needs of the songs. These

² "Interview: Robert DeLong." Allston Pudding. March 30, 2015.

decisions were made carefully, to make sure the song will not lose its main purpose- that is in most cases the strong lyric content. With the new structured songs and production decisions that were made, he added sounds that fit the intentional vibe of the tracks and selected certain parts of the acoustic elements to integrate in the electronic parts (intro, build, drop, downlifter, outro).

The electronic elements were produced in the same order as the track went- starting with intros, then buildups, drop, downlifters, outros. Javier added elements in this order according to the needs of the songs: Drums and Percussion, FXs and Melodic Synths and Bass and Subbases Synths, using his sound design skills and samples he owns. For the elements he designed on his own, he used the following plugins: xFer Serum, NI Massive, Ableton Operator- all plugins that Javier is familiar and experienced with. In addition, he learned how to use Reveal Sound Spire, Lennar Digital Sylenth1.

3.3 Mixing

Javier was inspired by genres such as Metalstep, Psytrance and Electro house. The mixing of electronic elements is pretty much done during the production and the sound design stage. The mixing techniques for the electronic sounds at this stage were more creative tools rather than mixing tools. Javier automated panning and filters to create special effects, added manipulation plugins to color the elements and help them stand out in the mix.

Javier's approach for mixing the acoustic elements was to give them an over processed character, which helped blend them with sound and tone of the electronic elements. He used the following plugins for this manner: Stock plugins from Ableton, Soundtoys, Fabfilter, iZotope (Trash, Ozone, Neutron), kiloHearts, Valhalla DSP, u-he, Slate Digital, Waves.

3.4 Live Performance

Javier was “Linked” through Ableton to Leanne’s computer. They chose to use this DAW because of his broad knowledge and excellent past experience in live performances with Ableton. In addition, they could both communicate in terms of staying on the same tempo thanks to the “Ableton Link” function in Ableton.

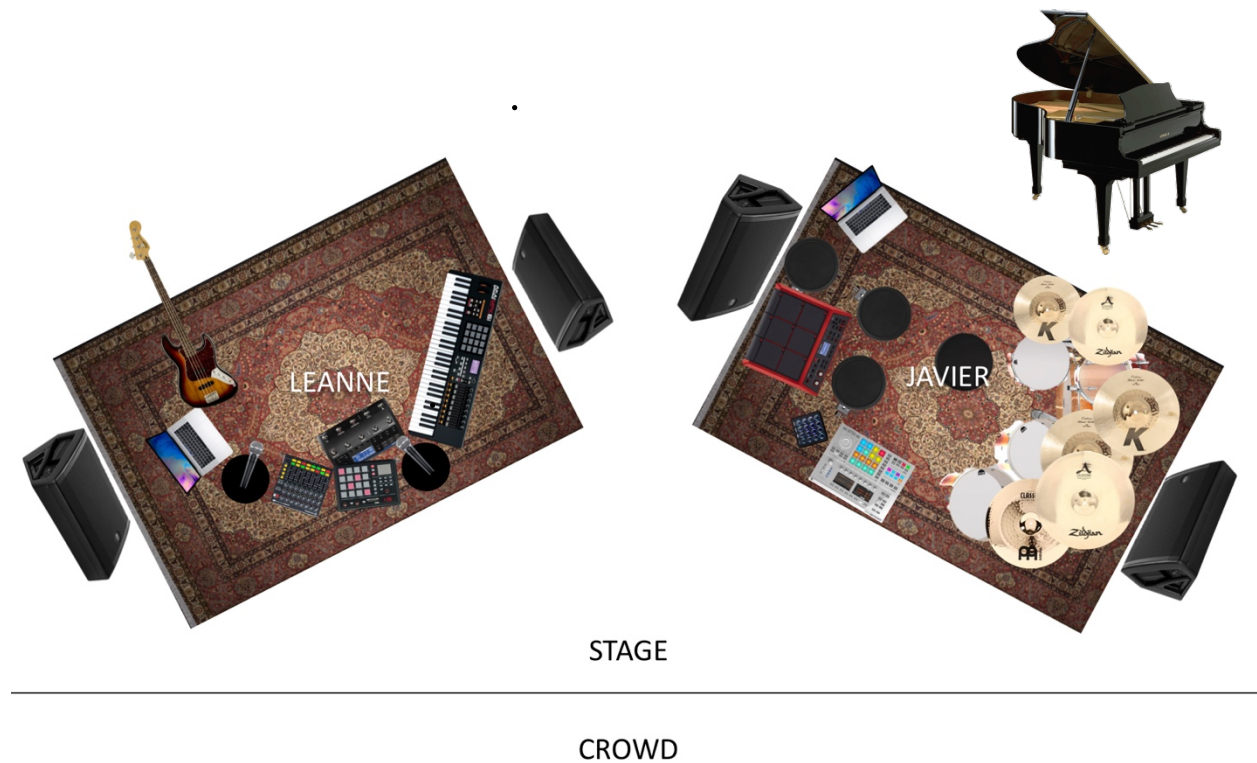


Figure 1. An illustration, the electroshock stage plan.

Figure number one represents the stage plan of Electro Shock-

Javier was based by the equipment shown on the right carpet for the most part of the show. He sat in the middle, approximately where his name is written, on a drum throne, so he could rotate his body rapidly between the following instruments (from left to right):

-His computer, which was playing back most of the background elements during the set and received signals from his several MIDI controls.

-The Roland electronic drum set, which triggered drum and percussion samples, impacts and horn hits.

-“DJTT Midifighter 3D,” a set of sixteen buttons that triggered samples. The whole controller also acted as a fader Javier could move up and down, thus added a compelling visual aspect of the “fader movement” when Javier was controlling different effects such as reverbs and filters.

-The “Native Instruments Maschine” controller, which had several different functions- pads, faders, all routed to the software, functioning inside the Ableton session.

-Acoustic drum set, which Javier played during *Barbie Dolls* and *AM*.

* On the back left stood a grand piano, which Javier used for a specific part of the song *AM*.

In addition to his active part in the performance, his computer also ran the following software: “Resolume Arena 6” for the visual content and “Lightkey” for the DMX lights.

4. Innovative Aspects

The combination of all the elements mentioned above can be considered as innovative, for as far as the research done by the duo shows, there was no use of these elements all together. As shown in the “state of the art section” (see page number 2), there are inspiring artists that previously wrote similar music, worked with similar setups, executed similar ideas. However, the combination of the complex stage set up, different genres and original visuals was, as far as the duo knows, unique and powerful.

5. New Skills Acquired

Javier learned how to use the software “Resolume Arena 6” and Adobe Premiere Pro for designing, controlling and editing the visuals, and “Lightkey” for DMX control. Audio related, he learned a lot about the mastering process, limiting, maximizing the tracks to sound professional. He also learned how to produce and process recorded vocals. He used to work with small vocal chops that functioned mostly as background elements. During the work on the Electro Shock project he learned to work with vocals that were meant to be the center of the song- and needed different processing.

6. Challenges

Javier was challenged by the fact that one year back from today he did not know of Leanne’s existence, leading to the need of additional time for the two to get used to each other’s working methods, strengths and weaknesses. They decided to collaborate on this project around January, and had to deal with not only the mentioned above, but also the final project’s different deadlines and the tight class schedules. Coming from an electronic background production wise, Javier was used to work with designed sounds and clean samples. He was challenged with mixing the acoustic elements given to him, needed to figure out how to integrate them with the electronic elements and glue them in the mix. To overcome this, he needed to step away from his comfort zone and adopt new ways of production. He watched tutorials, consulted other peers opinions and experimented with techniques he learned in the past.

7. Future ramifications

Javier's future plans are to base in London, and get the "MozX" duo's music released. He also will make his best efforts to perform the set of Electro Shock in several venues. He will remain partner with Leanne in "MozX" and in addition will work on developing as a mixing engineer with her or in different studios in London. His focus will be electronic music production, however he will be open to track and mix organic genres as well.

8. Conclusions

Javier came to Berklee looking to excel in electronic music production, and to learn how to create new music. Along the way he challenged his own boundaries by teaming up with Leanne Moser, and decided to change his original plans and create a special final project- Electro Shock.

The project Electro Shock was inspiring for Javier because of its goal. He produced new songs that speak to social change topics, unfolding issues such as body image, mental health, drugs. He used his knowledge and created drops of hardcore electronic genres- Dubstep, Psychedelic Trance, Electro-House, Complextro to emphasize the lyrical content of Leanne's organic demos. The shared result is arrangements are rich with complex harmonies and melodies, layers of own designed sounds and creative processing of live instruments. The songs are manifested in the live show to stimulate the listener's senses, showcasing not only a complex, dynamic performance but lights and most importantly, visuals that attempt to brutally highlight the topics of the songs.

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