Berklee College of Music

A Self-Produced Extended Play:

A Magical Blend of Psymbient Electronic and

Experimental Rock Music

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Degree of

Master of Music in Music Production, Technology and Innovation

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to compose, record and produce an extended play (EP) of six songs influenced by psymbient electronic music and experimental art rock music that blends the earthy sound of analog world and digital ambient tones, inspired by some of the life changing experiences that motivated the author to leave his eight year corporate job to pursue his passion for music. The EP will musically reflect the authors struggle with depression and anxiety during the transition phase and how he overcame it. On some of the songs the author aims to use a different approach where he composes the instrumentation completely and get his collaborators to write and compose vocals over it. Coming from a rock and metal music background, the author aims to improve his skills in the production of electronic music, analog synthesis , sound design, hybrid recording and stereo mixing with this creative project and aims to find his artist identity through the process.

Keywords: Electronic music, Extended play , Composition, hybrid-recording, analog synthesis, Creative sound design.

1. Introduction

Since 2009, the author who is also a drummer, has been part of multiple rock bands in India and has been involved in the Bangalore music scene as a performer all while working as a software engineer for a full-time corporate job. All went well until the end of 2015, when he had an emotional meltdown, which was followed by two year of struggle with anxiety and depression. Those two years were hard times in his life, but they inspired him to take the decision to follow his passion of music as a career. With this EP, the author who is also the artist wants to talk about this period of transition, and his fight with depression. The style of this Ep is inspired by Psychedelic ambient electronic and experimental rock music, which were the music genres he listened to during those two years, in which he evolved from being a narrow-minded rock musician who only appreciated rock and metal music to someone who is open-minded and explores and appreciates all genres of music.

First, with this EP, the author aims to enhance his composition, sound design and music production skills. Although he has a lot of experience composing and performing with his bands, he has always struggled to compose his solo materials because of lack of technical know-how of music production and his unhealthy habit of over criticizing his own work. He aims to use this opportunity to overcome these obstacles through this project. Secondly, coming from the world of progressive rock and progressive metal, he is very new to electronic music and aims to combine his expertise in the experimental side of progressive rock music with psychedelic and ambient electronic music and aims to find his new artist identity. Thirdly, the author would like to experiment with a slightly different approach where he composes the instrumentation of the song completely first and then letting his collaborators to write and compose the vocals over it. Finally, the theme of the songs

revolves around sudden change in course of his life, mental health, and the authors struggle with them , he aims to use his songs as a medium to musically communicate his emotions with others who are in their struggling stage of life.

The author believes that this project is very relevant to him as it sets a strong foundation for his long-term goals of being an independent electronic music artist who regularly releases music and constantly experiments and evolves his musical style through his releases and is capable of composing songs which are worth syncing in movies, series and with other video contents, a music producer who can collaborate in person and remotely with other artists, and educator who is a well versed scholar on the subject of music production , sound design, composition, Ableton and audio engineering.

2. Review of the state of the art

The author carefully selected three artist albums as references for his EP's composition, sound design and production style. First one is the album Anima by Thom Yorke [1]. This is the latest solo album by Thom yorke, who is best known for being the singer and the songwriter of the band Radiohead. Yorke has used a very abstract and experimental style of song writing leaving it to his audience to interpret the song their own way, though he talks about dreams of dystopia through which he talks about anxiety[2]. The sound design and style of production is very minimal but experimental with the use of synthesizers, drum

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[1] Andy Cush, "Thom Yorke Fully Realizes His Electronic Vision On The Bleak, Beautiful 'ANIMA'", Spin, Last modified 2020, https://www.spin.com/2019/07/thom-yorke-anima-review/.

[2] Ryan Baesemann, "Thom Yorke Seems To Have Mysteriously Announced A New Album", Mixmag, Last modified 2019, https://mixmag.net/read/thom-yorke-mysteriously-new-album-news.

machines, samplers and mixing with guitar, bass and drums and other analog instruments
which is something the author wants to use in his songs.

The second album which influenced the author the most is LP5 by a German music
producer and composer Sascha Ring who goes by the stage name Apparat[3]. Paul Simon in
his review of LP5 for AllMusic.com mentioned that

> Like all of Apparat's albums since 2003's Duplex, LP5 is filled with live
> instrumentation as well as Ring's fragile, yearning vocals, which are refreshingly not
> over-emotive. The songs seamlessly blend electronic and acoustic textures, with
> waves of Fennesz-like guitar fuzz lapping over dusty pianos, swelling strings, and
> glowing horns. The drums often sound played rather than programmed, and they
> range from the drum'n'bass-like patter of "Dawan" to the post-dubstep skip of
> "Heroist." Ring[4] .

The author is very much inspired by Ring's minimalist approach to vocals and the
way he blends it with the instrumentation making it feel more like an accompanying
instrument than a lead. Another feature of this album that the author wants to use as
inspiration for his work is how Ring has kept the melody instruments very ambient and
minimal, which were a blend of electronic and acoustic textures, while keeping the rhythm
section very percussive and experimental .

The third album the author chose as reference is A Moon Shaped Pool [5]by the band
Radiohead. In contrast to their previous albums that were a mixture of rock and electronic

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[3] "Apparat", Discogs, Last modified 2019, https://www.discogs.com/artist/50406-Apparat.

[4] Paul Simpson, "LP5 - Apparat | Songs, Reviews, Credits | Allmusic", Allmusic, Last modified 2019, https://www.allmusic.com/album/lp5-mw0003251603.

[5] Greene, Jayson. "Radiohead: A Moon Shaped Pool." Pitchfork. Pitchfork, May 11, 2016. https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21907-a-moon-shaped-pool/.

music, this one added orchestral arrangements[6]. That is something the author want to experiment with in his EP by using string instruments in a non-classical arrangement. The artist is using these three album and his experience in composing progressive rock music as inspiration for his EP.

Finally the theme of the EP revolves around the artists struggle with depression, his state of mind during this phase, his search for a purpose and some of the events which helped him fight it and get back on his feet.

3. Description

The author correlates his composition experience directly to his learnings during the fall and spring semester. He started with a clean slate in terms of electronic music production, so the composition of his first song 'Elysian fields ii' in December of 2019 was triggered by his sudden exposure to the world of analog synthesisers and ableton and he also invested in an analog synthesizer Deepmind 12[7] which gave him opportunity to experiment with synth sounds leading to the initial ideas for the song .He used ableton to arrange produce and mix the track, and revisited some of the synth sounds when he got more comfortable with sound design using different software synthesizers. . This instrumental track musically conveys the idea of accepting changes as it is the only constant in life, through three separate musical sections transitioning smoothly in a six minute song.

[6] Will Hermes, "Radiohead 'A Moon Shaped Pool' Album Review", Rolling Stone, Last modified 2019, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/a-moon-shaped-pool-202854/.
[7] "|DEEPMIND 12|Behringer|P0AC5", Behringer.Com, Last modified 2020, https://www.behringer.com/Categories/Behringer/Keyboards/Synthesizers-and-Samplers/DEEPMIND12/p/P0AC5#googtrans(en|en).

The author started working on the second track 'Swerve' during the same time in which he wanted to convey the idea of change in course of life. The initial ideas for the song was ignited by the authors new acquisition of the tool Novation Launchpad Pro[8]. Being a drummer and a percussionist the author was well versed with rhythms and beat-making but always struggled with translating melody ideas in his head on an instrument as he did not play any melody instrument and also only had the basic understanding of music theory at the time. The launch pad with its scale mode[9] helped him get better at understanding music theory as well as made it possible for him to easily translate the melodic ideas into recordings. Getting comfortable with Launchpad Pro was instrumental in making his composition process more creative, enjoyable and fast for the later compositions. The author intended this song to be a blend of analog sounds and digital ambience and started with composing a bass line and melodic ideas on bells and chimes and then later gluing it together using ambient synthesizer sounds. The author used vocal chop techniques to create hooks for this track and the whole instrumentation of the song was completed before sharing this track with singer-songwriter Keana Perry to top-line over it. The author and the artist Keana rehearsed few times at the studio and created the melody lines and Keana wrote the lyrics over it later based on the idea of change of course in life.

February 2020 was a time where the author was having a huge creative block as he was struggling again with anxiety and the feeling that he was lagging behind and his lack of inspiration which changed with his introduction to creative sound design during the spring semester. His later songs were inspired by production and sound design techniques he learnt

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[8] "Launchpad Pro | Novation", Novationmusic.Com, Last modified 2020, https://novationmusic.com/en/launch/launchpad-pro.

[9] "Launchpad Pro Scale Mode | Novation", Novationmusic.Com, Last modified 2020, https://novationmusic.com/en/launchpad-pro-scale-mode.

during this phase. The instrumentation of the song 'Find me' initially called 'Div 0619'
heavily uses hocket [10] technique on synth bass sound as well as atonal noise based
percussions for its initial draft and then later developed with melodic ambient synth sounds
he designed on newly learnt synthesisers like Xfer Serum, Tone 2 Gladiator 3[11], Ableton
Wavetable[12]. This track was then shared with Tatiana Lamella Rabell to top-line over it.
This was a remote collaboration owing to lockdown placed during the Covid 19 pandemic
crisis but the artist was quick at composing and writing over the track and we finished the
track very quickly.

The next three songs were worked on in parallel as the author got more comfortable
and efficient in working remotely. The fourth song, 'Levitate' was developed out of a bass
oriented melody riff the author created during December 2019 which he later jammed on
with bass guitar player Carlos Sierra and pianist Luigi Tasso and recorded a mud-pie [13]of
ideas. The song then started to shape up from some of the melodies taken from the mud-pie
and arranging with the initial idea of the author. Another interesting fact about this song is
that except for the bass recording every sound used in the track including the drums and
percussions were original sound design by the author using synthesizers and resampling
techniques used in Ableton. The top-lining on the song is done by Delia Bowman who wrote

[10] "Linear Rhythm In Melodies | Making Music Book By Ableton", Makingmusic.Ableton.Com, Last modified 2020, https://makingmusic.ableton.com/linear-rhythm-in-melodies.

[11] Markus Krause, "Gladiator VST AU Plugin - A Revolution In Synthesis", Tone2.Com, Last modified 2020, https://www.tone2.com/gladiator3.html.

[12] "Wavetable | Ableton", Ableton.Com, Last modified 2020, https://www.ableton.com/en/packs/wavetable/.

[13] Mr. Bill's Guide To Sound Design Mud Pies - Pyramind", Pyramind, Last modified 2020, https://pyramind.com/mr-bills-guide-to-sound-design-mud-pies/.

beautiful romantic lines on the track though it was initially out of context of the EP. Later with some rework was transitioned into a melancholic track which fit well in the EP.

The fifth song 'Fear is an incompetent teacher' started as an intense electric bass oriented track with an intention to have an intense synth bass riff in the chorus which is inspired by the authors earlier experience in metal genre of music. The author also made this track very experimental with using distorted guitar riffs which is unusual is an ambient electronic track and with multiple highly processed samples. The completed instrument track was shared with Serin Oh who top-lined over it and wrote about the idea that fear should not be the thing that guides a person.

The sixth and final track from the EP, 'Elysian Fields iii' is an instrumental track co-composed with Ankit Malik. This song also was intended to be more experimental with more randomness specially in the percussive and rhythmic section. Ankit who is well versed with production techniques to add organised chaos in music helped the author with the style of production in this track which also helped him learn production techniques using algorithmic composition tools like Ableton Probability Pack[14]

Once the composition of all the tracks were done, the author diverted all his effort on doing the stereo mix of the track using Ableton. The mastering of the EP was done by Giorgio Schipani.

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[14] "Probability Pack | Ableton", Ableton.Com, Last modified 2020, https://www.ableton.com/en/packs/probability-pack/.

4. Innovative aspects

The author believes that the Ep is innovative in terms of creativity. He has brought in influences and techniques from other genres of music which is not very common in ambient electronic music from his previous experience as a metal music drummer, for instance the ending section of the song 'Elysian Fields ii' has a polyrhythm where the synth is going in 8/8 and the drums is going on 6/8 over it. There are odd time signature beats in other song like 'Elysian field iii' where the melody of the bassline is in 7/4 which is phrased as 6/8 + 8/8. He has used similar ideas in other songs too.

Second thing the author believes is an innovation in his EP is his composition approach is started with creating bass guitar or synth bass which carries the main melody in all the tracks in the EP. The author strongly believes that having a good , powerful and catching melody on bass makes the song interesting and catchy which made his writing approach innovative where in all the tracks he first created a bassline before adding other melodies or rhythms to the tracks in the EP.

Thirdly, the author believes that working with collaborators remotely and having the instrumental track completely composed before sending to the artist for top-lining is an innovative approach for him personally for collaboration.

Fourthly, more than 80 percent of the sounds used in whole of the EP was sound designed from scratch which the artist believes makes the ep sound fairly different from similar releases.

Finally, coming from a drummer background with limited electronic production and

music theory knowledge and transforming to a self-sufficient electronic music producer in a short period of time is a personal reinvention to the author.

5. New skills acquired

The author being completely new to electronic music production, every step he took in composing and producing this EP was a new skill acquired by him. Starting with learning to use synthesizers, midi programming, audio editing, automation, using different instruments on Ableton, stereo mixing, in-depth understanding of sound design, ability to collaborate remotely with others are some of the main skill the author acquired during this process.

These skills equip the author pursue his long terms goals of being an independent electronic music artist who regularly releases music under his artist identity ˈKōdəh[15] (Kodah) as well as for sync in movies and other media, an independent music producer who can comfortably collaborate with other artists both in person and remotely, a proficient audio engineer who can record, edit and do stereo mix, a proficient sound designer who can create sound for his own music as well as for creating sound packs and an educator who can teach music production, audio engineering and sound designing.

6. Challenges both expected and unexpected

The author faced multiple challenges during the creation of this EP. One of the primary issue which was already expected was facing mental health related issues like depression and anxiety causing creative blocks or creative blocks causing anxiety and then

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[15] ˈkōdəh", Facebook.Com, Last modified 2020, https://www.facebook.com/kodah.space/.

getting stuck in a loop. Since the author has faced these before he was aware of it and whenever he faced it, he was quick at taking breaks or engaging himself in different activities or attending counselling to keep these issues under control.

There were many issue's the artist faced when due to the unexpected event of the Covid 19[16] pandemic the college moving online. Since the author was concentrating on completing the composition on his own, before sharing with the collaborators in the initial phase he did not video document his process as he expected to do it during the collaboration phase but since lockdown started he was not able to do proper video documentation of the EP's creation process as he has initially expected. The author used whatever he made during his working process and what his collaborators shared with him for the final documentation.

Additionally, the author faced difficulty in collaborating with artists during the initial stage of lockdown as all of them were struggling to adjust to the sudden change and were set back by weeks on their own projects and initiatives.

The author also faced issue where he was really dependant on using the studio space for creating music . Although the author uses headphones for mixing, prefers composing using a studio monitor as when he jams and plays along gives him a sense of performing and that keeps him in his creative space. Losing access to the studio space was a tough change for him which slowed down his composing process and took some time for him to get used to

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[16] "WHO Announces COVID-19 Outbreak A Pandemic", Euro.Who.Int, Last modified 2020, http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/whoannounces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic.

working with a headphone. He also invested in a pair of studio monitor with room correction and set up a small home studio to get back to speed.

Another main issue faced by the author was him losing an opportunity which he had worked really hard for, for almost half a year because of Covid 19 pandemic, this was demotivating for him which took few weeks to recover from mentally. The author started spending more time preparing and creating stronger profile to be able to enter the real world after his education to cope up with this.

7. Future ramification

The authors primary short term goal is to release the EP on all platforms, though he is also looking into the option of submitting the demo tracks to record labels which cater to ambient electronic music. He finished the stereo mix by the first week of June and got it mastered by the third week on June. In parallel he created a new artist identity. After brain storming and talking to brand consultants he finalised on an artist name ˈKōdəh (Kodah) and have created the social media handles for it.

The author will spend the whole of July creating visual contents for his social media which he will use to share regular updates or snippets and teasers of the tracks till the release . The author aims to build expectation through this process and then release singles as videos. The author is also considering the option of creating few short instrumental tracks which will connect the songs in the EP seamlessly or release them as part of bonus track or Side B. He is also considering to release instrumental version of some the tracks with few additional instrumental jams as bonus tracks. The author is also in talks with music magazines and music communities like rolling stones India, India music diary to cover the release.

8. Conclusion

The authors looks at this EP as an important mile stone in his music career. He aims to use it as the first step in creating his artist and music producer brand. The goal was to create a six song ep which is a blend of ambient electronic music and experimental rock music. The artist has drawn inspiration from his past as a metal genre drummer and blended those with his new learns of electronic music production techniques to create this EP. He has also managed to collaborate with various artists to top-line over his compositions in the EP both remotely, The author is happy with the final stage of the songs and is planning for the release of it on all streaming platform by August 15.

9. Appendix

9.1 Time line

Table 1: *Timeline for the CE*

Timeline	Plan of Action
10 September 2019 to 01 October 2019	Skill Development in Music Production
01 October 2019 to 07 October 2019	Researching for references and Analyzing them
08 October 2019 to 14 October 2019	Listening and studying the first reference album LP5 by Apparat
15 October 2019 to 21 October 2019	Listening and studying the second reference album Anima by Thom Yorke
21 October 2019 to 31 October 2019	Listening and studying the third reference album A Moon shaped pool by Radiohead

01 November 2019 to 07 November 2019	Learning Ableton, Protools , Analog Synthesizers
08 November 2019 to 14 November 2019	Learning Ableton, Protools , Analog Synthesizers
15 November 2019 to 21 November 2019	Learning Ableton, Protools , Analog Synthesizers and creative sound design for experimental electronic music
21 November 2019 to 30 November 2019	Learning Ableton, Protools , Analog Synthesizers and creative sound design for experimental electronic music
01 December 2019 to 07 December 2019	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song one, two and three
08 December 2019 to 14 December 2019	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song one, two and three
15 December 2019 to 21 December 2019	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song one, two and three
21 December 2019 to 31 December 2019	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song one, two and three
01 January 2020 to 07 January 2020	Collaborating with topliner for song two and three
08 January 2020to 14 January 2020	Collaborating with topliner for song two and three

15 January 2020 to 21 January 2020	Collaborating with topliner for song two and three
22 January 2020 to 31 January 2019	Collaborating with topliner for song two and three
01 February 2020 to 07 February 2019	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song four, five and six
08 February 2020 to 14 February 2020	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song four, five and six
15 February 2020 to 21 February 2020	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song four, five and six
22 February 2020 to 28 February 2020	Creating the sound design and the basic arrangement for Song four, five and six
01 March 2020 to 07 March 2020	Collaborating with topliner for song four and five
08 March 2020 to 14 March 2020	Collaborating with topliner for song four and five
15 March 2020 to 21 March 2020	Recording and Overdubbing for song 2 and three
22 March 2020 to 31 March 2020	Recording and Overdubbing for song four and five
01 April 2020 to 07 April 2020	Revisiting song one, two and three

08 April 2020 to 14 April 2020	Revisiting song four, five and six
15 April 2020 to 21 April 2020	Mixing Songs one two and three
22 April 2020 to 30 April 2020	Mixing Songs four, five and six
01 April 2020 to 07 April 2020	Post Production, Final Touch Up for Song one and two
08 April 2020 to 14 April 2020	Post Production, Final Touch Up for Song three and four
15 April 2020 to 21 April 2020	Post Production, Final Touch Up for Song five and six
22 April 2020 to 30 April 2020	Stereo Mixing Songs one and, two
01 May 2020 to 07 May 2020	Stereo Mixing Songs three and four
08 May 2020 to 14 May 2020	Stereo Mixing Songs five and six
15 May 2020 to 21 May 2020	Mastering all six tracks
22 May 2020to 31 May 2020	Mastering all six tracks

01 June 2020 to June 30 2020	CE Defense

9.2 Deliverables

The list of deliverables for the CE project are as follows:

Table 2: *List of Deliverables*

Paper
Wav file of the Songs in the EP
CE experience Video
Defence Presentation

9.3 Resources

Table 3: *List of resources*

Equipment
MacBook pro
Mixing headphone: Audio technical M50x
Studio Monitor : Ik multimedia Iloud MTM
Audio Interface : Focusrite Scarlet 2i2
Home studio microphone: Shure Sm 57
Analog Synthesizer : Behringer DeepMind 12
XLR Cables X 5
Hard disk X 2

Novation Launchpad
Electric Guitar : PRS SE 24
Acoustic Guitar : Epiphone
Bass Guitar : Fender Bass

Personnel
Top- liner and Singer : Keana Perry - Swerve Serin Oh - Fear is an incompetent teacher Tatiana Lamela Rabell – Find me Delia Bowman – Levitate
Composer : Shakthi Prasad Kizhikki Thara, **Co-composer:** Ankit Malik – Elysian fields iii
Producer : Shakthi Prasad Kizhikki Thara
Guitarist : Kartikeya Dixit -   Fear is an incompetent teacher
Bass Guitarist: Carlos Sierra - levitate

Pianist:
Luigi Tasso - Levitate
Mixing Engineer
Shakthi Prasad Kizhikki Thara
Mastering Engineer
Giorgio Schipani

Facilities
STAD Studio , used for recording, mixing and mastering
AKSS Studio, used for recording, mixing and mastering
Teaching studio, used for rehearsals
Rehearsal Rooms, used for rehearsals
Home Studio for Mixing
Soundbygio Studio for Mastering

9.4 Budget

Table 2: Budget information for the CE

ITEM	PROPOSED	REAL	ACTUAL (RUNNING) INITIAL	AFTER 10 MONTHS	FINAL	SUBTOTAL
MATERIALS (disposables)						
Hard Drives X 2	$600	$0	$0	$0	$0	
Wireless keyboard and mouse	$25	$25	$25	$25	$25	
						$25

EQUIPMENT						
HARDWARE						

MICS (Rental) 9 days	$300	$0	$0	$0	$0	
INTERFACE (purchase) 120 days	$200	$200	$200	$200	$200	
COMPUTER (purchase) 120 days	$3,500	$3,500	$3,500	$3,500	$3,500	
Analog Synthesisers	$700	$700	$700	$700	$700	

Studio Monitor IK multimedia iLoud MTM	$650	$650	$650	$650	$650	
Novation Launchpad (purchase	$299	$299	$299	$299	$299	
SOFTWARE						
ABLETON (purchase) 120 days	$599	$359	$359	$359	$359	
Protools (purchase)	$499	$499	$499	$499	$499	
Native instruments Komplete 12	$599	$0	$0	$0	$0	
						$6,207

PERSONNEL						
Co- Producer	$200	$0	$0	$0	$0	
Audo Engineer	$900	$0	$0	$0	$0	
Mixing Engineer	$1,800	$0	$0	$0	$0	
Mastering Engineer	$600	$0	$0	$0	$0	
Musicians	$1,000	$0	$0	$0	$0	
						$0
STUDIO						
BERKLEE daily x 12 of days	$3,600	$0	$0	$0	$0	

Rehersal daily x 12 days	$960	$0	$0	$0	$0	
						$0
CATERING						
MEALS cost/person x 5 persons x 5 meals	$200	$0	$0	$0	$0	
					$200	**$200**
OVERHEAD						
RENT	$250	$0	$0	$2,500	$2,500	
POWER	$30	$0	$0	$300	$300	
WATER	$20	$0	$0	$200	$200	
GAS	$20	$0	$0	$200	$200	
INTERNET	$15	$0	$0	$150	$150	
PHONE	$20	$0	$0	$200	$200	
Food	$200	$200	$200	$2,000	$2,000	
						$5,550

FEES						
YOUR FEE	$3,000	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTALS	**$20,786**	**$6,432**	**$6,432**	**$11,782**	**$11,982**	**$11,982**

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