

The Maturation and Perceptive Process of Dear Seven

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Music Production Technology and Innovation

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“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” I truly believe that I have lived and experienced what Helen Keller, was talking about in this quote. I have learned time after time that my experiences often give me the strength to keep going on when I feel I lost or if I am lacking creativity. This culminating experience is definitely one that I can say has challenged me in ways both expected and unexpected. Starting from the late nights and early mornings to manufacturing new music and ideas in a limited amount of time. I now know the feeling of going into uncharted waters and overcoming those fears and uncertainties because I can say that I made it through one of the hardest experiences in my life and I am grateful for the opportunity.

State of the Art:

When I first arrived here my primary focus was to become a better mastering engineer and my original culminating experience was about creating a mastering guide for the novice engineer. However, the more I talked with my advisor about my experiences in class the more I realized that my experience is teaching so much more than I expected. So after having this eureka moment I decided to team up with someone from the Contemporary Performance program and put myself in an environment that would be as real life as possible. By putting myself in this situation I figured I could improve on all areas of being a producer and audio engineer. Also, in taking this direction I still wanted to be able to help out novice engineers with my experience so I came up with creating a documentary from both my perspective and the artist perspective. With this series of videos and interviews both artist and engineer could see just how much work really goes into creating art and music.

Description of the Culminating Experience

This culminating experience is all about the process. Each of the tracks started out as demos that both the engineer and the artist developed collectively. The themes of the songs came from experiences or observations that were had while here in Spain or past experiences that taught life lessons. This EP tells a story heartbreak, joy, laughter, and lessons learned.

Innovative Aspects of the Work

Currently in the music industry there is seems to be two main themes that seem to be becoming the status quo for every song. These two themes are reggae and trap-soul, which has just become a new generation of neo-soul music. Amidst all of the current oversaturation of these two genre's we find that although, there is a vast majority that enjoy the evolution of pop and rap music to its current state there is another majority of listeners who have grown tired of hearing the same record re-created on the radio every three to six months. This is one major factor that motivated the sound of this work. The artist and I are both in the second category of listeners and wanted to create music that you could understand, relate, and even grow with. This required extensive internal research on why they grew tired of the current status quo, and how they would like to change it. The consistent tug and pull of wanting to be relevant and current, as an artist versus taking a chance on the genuine and original art that one has worked so hard for, weighs in on almost all major decisions. We did our best to take innovative strides when creating this music by combing the inspiration and aesthetics of the late 1990's and 2000's music and using lyrics catered to this generation to show the struggle.

New Skills Acquired

This process from beginning to end has been like experiencing a musical and engineering learning curve. I started with a certain set of skills and I feel that I allowed myself to learn and grow in ways that were both planned and spontaneous. The skills that I set out to improve on included my engineering skills and developing my ear. I feel that I recognized, and was astonished at how much I grew in such a short amount of time. Another skill that I gained from this experience was the ability to get things done quickly. Since we only have a certain amount of time to work on our own projects amidst all of the other requirements of me as a student, I had to learn how to effectively increase my efficiency. During this process I also felt that I was able to master the art of reading body language, and noticing when someone may be uncomfortable or has a lack of confidence in them selves in the moment. Furthermore, I learned how to get the artist out of that space and give them the support or confidence needed to continue creating.

Song Descriptions

On the Side is a song about the modern day romantic relationships that most people in their 20's are dealing with. This song gives the listener a perspective of what the person that has not yet made it to an actual relationship status, or what that third person in the love triangle, is going through. The instrumental goals for this song were to make the drums ¹have a groove like the reference track "Cranes in The Sky and Mad." The drums play a vital role in the aesthetics of these tracks. It drives the tracks and helps tell the story and this was something that we were really going for in the sound. The next reference track for this song was "All Night," by Beyoncé'. One of the things we were inspired by in this song was the various horns parts. The horn sound was very warm and authoritative simultaneously and it also helped tell the story the

¹ "Cranes In The Sky" Written by Solange Knowles Produced by Raphael Saadiq & Solange Knowles;
 ."All Night" Produced by Diplo, Beyoncé, and Henry Allen Written by Diplo, Beyoncé, Rock City, Ilsey Juber, Akil King, Jaramye Daniels, André 3000, Sleepy Brown, Big Boi.

vocals were creating and the bass, and we really wanted the story to be in the forefront in this song, in order to find all of these different aspects that could assist with this was a fun challenge.

Hoodie is a song about some of the things and feelings that one may still have after a relationship is over. It covers the love, hate, and anger that one may feel once they see something that someone has left behind. In my opinion this song went through one of the biggest transformations from the demo to the finish product. The reference for this song was “Mad” by Solange. This song has a heavy bass and drum low end and it allows the singers voice to breath amongst all of the other instruments. We really wanted to really focus on the sound of the piano and drums for this song. The piano had a heavy presence and was very dry and raw in this reference. While the drums were very present they tended to have more of a pillow-like persona to it. This is very unique because as listeners we are used to hearing the bass just in our face, so trying to match this sound was a challenge in the EQ stage.

Saturday Night is a song about culture appropriation and gentrification that is happening currently in the African American community. This song is an anthem to the youth of these communities that see this happening day after day and year after year. This song ²carries the same message as James Brown “I’m Black and I’m Proud,” or Marvin Gaye “What’s Going On.” The reference tracks for this song were spread out across various genres. The first reference we used “L is Gone,” by Musiq Soulchild was for the drums and guitar. In this song the lyrics and artist feed off the beat of these two combined. We used Anderson Paak as a reference for the horn sound that we culminated. Anderson has a funk and rap like quality to his music so it definitely fit with the persona of the track. We also went back to the 90’s hip-hop style with

²Mad" ft. Lil Wayne Written by Solange Knowles & Lil Wayne Produced by Solange Knowles, Dave Longstreth, Raphael Saadiq & Sir Dylan Additional Vocals: The Dream, Moses Sumney and Tweet, Lil Wayne appears courtesy of Cash Money Records; L is Gone by Musiq Soulchild, Smells Like Teen Spirit by Kurt Cobain, Didn't You Know by Erykah Badu; Am I Wrong by Anderson Paak, J. Dilla, Street Life by Randy Crawford.

J.Dilla and were inspired by his various grooves and how he ultimately created a completely different genre. The main challenge with this song was deciding how different we wanted the sound to be between the sections. Since this song is a medley of sorts we wanted to showcase two different sounds between the first and second half of the song. The second half of the song is a more raw and has more of a live concert feel. So the challenge was getting the vocals to sit in the right place over the crowd vocals so that the message can still get across. So naturally a great deal of time was spent on the arrangement so that everything could be heard in it's own space.

One Night Stand was one of the tracks that just developed with no effort or very little resistance. The reference tracks for this song is "4 Your Eyez Only," by J. Cole. Since this is a rap song the drumbeat was a major factor in this song and how the artist performed the lyrics to this song. I really loved the aesthetics that this song created, and how close the spacing was for the instrument to vocal ratio. The main EQ challenge for this song was frequency masking. Most of the instruments that were used in this track were in the mid, low-mid range and this was an issue when the vocals came into play. So I ended up handling the masking issue in the final mixing stage to avoid any second EQ trips.

Dear Ex-Lover is a goodbye letter from one lover to another. It is very raw and full of emotion. Also, it is very ambient and because of the overlapping melodies. We wanted the vocals in this song to be as if your emotional conscience was speaking. The reference track for this song is "Self Control," by Frank Ocean. This song is also very acoustic and close to the listener. Another unique factor about this song is how he does his background vocals. He tunes the vocals up an octave and sings along with them while having another voice sing the lead during this moment. I also loved the way they used EQ and placement on the backgrounds. Overall, this song was a great reference to the aesthetic direction that we were planning on taking.

Jordan is a song about desire; there is a great use of metaphors referring to the river of Jordan in the Middle East. The goal for this song was to have a classic Aretha Franklin or Ray Charles type of aesthetic. The reference tracks for this song were “Rocket,” by Beyoncé, and “Untitled,” by D’Angelo. We loved the groove and the mix of Rocket along with the guitar and vocals of Untitled.³

In conclusion this experience was one that I will be forever grateful for and in hindsight I am appreciative of every up and down I have experienced. I just want to thank the artist for allowing me to take their most precious ideas and mold them into these wonderful masterpieces of music. I learned so much about myself as well as others in such a short amount of time, and that experience will be unmatched.

Acknowledgements

First, I just want to say thank you to my friends and family for supporting me as I embarked on this journey. Your support does not go unannounced or unnoticed. I really appreciate it and I love you all. Secondly, I want to thank Kaya Rand. Thank you for entrusting your art and music to me and allowing me to mold your ideas into wonderful movements of music. Thank you for being there as a friend and sister that allowed me to be wrong, right and grow with out judgment so many times. Next, Drew Cappotto, thank you for taking me under your wing and showing me all of the mastering secrets, and for reigniting the inspiration so many times during our mixing sessions. Brenton, thank you so much for always having my back so

³ “4 Your Eyez Only” Written by Jermaine Cole. Produced by BLVK. Co-produced by J. Cole for Dreamvillain, admin. by Songs of Universal (BMI) and Elite for Elite That’s Me (ASCAP). Deep River Negro Spiritual, Back to Black Amy Winehouse, Withdraw by Kimbra, Untitled by D’Angelo, Rocket by Beyonce, Earned It by Weekend. Self Control by Frank Ocean (C. Breaux) Production: Frank Ocean, Malay Ho and Jon Brion Arrangement: Alex Giannascoli, Austin Feinstein and Jon Brion String Arrangement: Jon Brion Guitars: Alex Giannascoli, Austin Feinstein and Malay Ho

many times on things both in and out control and for being my extra pair of ears. Chris, thank you so much for your energy and for just being a ball of light, you don't know how many days a simple conversation kept me going. Satarra, thank you for being that person that consistently keeps it real no matter the time of day or the situation, and for showing me that its ok to change and grow in your weaknesses. Danielle, thanks for being the fresh perspective. You always kept an open perspective on everything that I brought you and always told the hidden truths. Tabari, the beanie man from St. Thomas, thanks for always coming through when it was needed, you are one of he best bass players I have heard in a long time and I truly appreciate your musicianship. Finally, thank you Pablo, for all of your advice and guidance on the development of my CE. Thank you for allowing me to figure it out without any added pressure and then supporting me in all of the various decisions that I made.

Notes

1. Mad" ft. Lil Wayne Written by Solange Knowles & Lil Wayne Produced by Solange Knowles, Dave Longstreth, Raphael Saadiq & Sir Dylan Additional Vocals: The Dream, Moses Sumney and Tweet, Lil Wayne appears courtesy of Cash Money Records.
2. "4 Your Eyez Only" Written by Jermaine Cole. Produced by BLVK. Co-produced by J. Cole for Dreamvillain, admin. by Songs of Universal (BMI) and Elite for Elite That's Me (ASCAP). Additional production by Childish Major. String arrangement and additional vocals by Chargaux, additional strings by Nuno Malo, additional trumpet by Kyla Moscovich, guitar by David Linaburg, live bass by Nate Jones and additional drums by Carlin White. Piano, Rhodes and organ by Masayuki "BigYuki" Hirano. Recorded by Juro "Mez" Davis at the Sheltuh, Dreamville, NC. Mixed by Juro "Mez" Davis at the Sheltuh, Dreamville, NC and Electric Lady Studios, New York, NY. Assistant Engineers Beatriz Artola and Gosha Usov (Electric Lady Studios) "Smile More" Produced and written by Sydney Bennett Recorded by Sydney Bennett at The Loft Guitar by Lamont Savor.
3. Deep River Negro Spiritual, Back to Black Amy Winehouse, Withdraw by Kimbra, Untitled by D'Angelo, Rocket by Beyonce, Earned It by Weekend.
4. "L is Gone" by Musiq Soulchild, Smells Like Teen Spirit by Kurt Cobain, Didn't You Know by Erykah Badu, Am I Wrong by Anderson Paak, J. Dilla, Street Life by Randy Crawford.
5. Self Control by Frank Ocean (C. Breaux) Production: Frank Ocean, Malay Ho and Jon Brion Arrangement: Alex Giannascoli, Austin Feinstein and Jon Brion String Arrangement: Jon Brion Guitars: Alex Giannascoli, Austin Feinstein and Malay Ho Keyboards: Jon Brion Programming: Frank Ocean Violin: Eric Gorfain (Concertmaster), Daphne Chen, Marisa Kuney, Charlie Bisharat, Katie Sloan, Songa Lee, Gina Kronstadt, Lisa Dondlinger, Terry Glenny, Chris Woods, Neel Hammond, Marcy Vaj and Crystal Alforque Viola: Leah Katz, Rodney Wirtz, Stefan Smith and Adriana Zoppo Cello: John Krovoza, Simon Huber, Ginger Murphy, Alisha Bauer and Stefanie Fife Strings recorded by Greg Keller and Eric Caudieux at Henson Recording.
6. "Cranes In The Sky" Written by Solange Knowles Produced by Raphael Saadiq & Solange Knowles Synths: John Kirby & Rog t Chahayed Additional Synth Editing: Adam Bainbridge."All Night" Produced by Diplo, Beyonc , and Henry Allen Written by Diplo, Beyonc , Rock City, Ilsey Juber, Akil King, Jaramye Daniels, Andr  3000, Sleepy Brown, Big Boi. "Ville Mentality" Written by Jermaine Cole. Produced by Ron Gilmore for Ron Gilmore Music (BMI) and Elite for Elite That's Me (ASCAP.) Additional production by J. Cole. String arrangement by Chargaux, background vocals by Kay Foxx, trumpet arrangement by Theo Croker. Recorded by Juro "Mez" Davis at the Sheltuh, Dreamville, NC. Mixed by Juro "Mez" Davis at the Sheltuh, Dreamville, NC and Electric Lady Studios, New York, NY. Assistant Engineers Beatriz Artola and Gosha Usov (Electric Lady Studios).

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