

Berklee College of Music, Valencia Campus

## **Change Fiction**

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

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by

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## **Introduction**

This is the first EP produced under the artist name 'Palendroma'

With 'Palendroma' came a new approach to producing music. This includes recording a variety of instruments and incorporating them into compositions that are a fusion of different styles and a mixture of electronics. All the different musical ideas grasped through a 10-year musical journey have nurtured and shaped the sound of Palendroma.

All three songs were composed, arranged and produced over the course of 6 months. They were all different tonal ideas composed on the piano and were rough mobile phone recordings. One of the aims of this project was to build a musical portfolio and create an artist image as a music producer and an audio engineer. As a producer the goal was to create melody-based, orchestrated and densely arranged music, to showcase versatility by fusing different musical influences, writing for a variety of instruments and combining the raw acoustic sound with electronic sound. As an audio engineer the goal was to produce clean and almost perfect sounding recordings experimenting with different mic placements, using a combination of different mics, recording equipment and recording in different spaces. Mixing and blending all the different sounds together was the final objective of this elaborate process.

## **Review of the State of the Art**

The idea of this project is to produce well-engineered music that uses a combination of acoustic and electronic elements, a fusion of different styles with elaborate arrangement making the music to sound dense.

There are quite a few musicians that have a portfolio of work in this field.

### **AR Rahman**

AR Rahman is an Indian film composer. His unique style of film music is a blend of different styles of music from Indian folk, classical music, electronica and various other genres from around the world and thus resulting in huge soundscapes with a combination of intricate melodies and film scores.

Below are a few of the many examples from his plethora of work that matches the description of this project.

*Dil gira dafatan – Delhi 6*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRUqfVcZSEE><sup>1</sup>

‘Dil Gira dafatan’ is a song from the Bollywood film Delhi 6. In terms of the arrangement, there are a variety of instruments used, hence creating a fusion of different styles. The main riff is played on a banjo fused with bagpipes, strings and percussion. All of this layered on an ‘Indian’-sounding main melody sung by the singer.

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<sup>1</sup> "Charly Mathai. "DELHI 6 - DIL GIRA DAFATAN (FULL SONG) - LYRICS." Accessed [January 04, 2017]. YouTube video, 06:25. Posted. [February 16, 2009]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRUqfVcZSEE>.

### *Mausam and Escape – Slumdog Millionaire*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJAdT5K4NT0><sup>2</sup>

‘Mausam and Escape’ is from the Hollywood film Slumdog Millionaire. This song is a great example of complete fusion combining Indian sound, electronics and western harmony. The song is led by the Indian string instrument ‘Sitar’ and a string section while everything else is electronic. The first song ‘The Awakening’ follows a similar arrangement style. It consists of a more simpler melody played on an Indian flute combining electronics and the sound of a string quartet.

### **Bonobo**

Bonobo is an English DJ and music producer. He produces a unique style of down-tempo electronica genre of music fusing live acoustic instruments and electronic elements. A special characteristic of his music is that he finds the right balance of both worlds as a part of the arrangement.

### *Second son – Migration*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ew4FWW1q200><sup>3</sup>

‘Second son’ is a song from his latest album Migration. This mellow piece combines creative audio sampling/sound design and live acoustic instruments. The string quartet plays just three chords throughout; this minimalistic arrangement blends

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<sup>2</sup> artmania1990. “Mausam and Escape” (Slumdog Millionaire Soundtrack - #3)” Accessed [January 04, 2017]. YouTube video, 03:59. Posted. [January 12, 2009]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJAdT5K4NT0>

<sup>3</sup> Bonobo Official. “Bonobo : Second Sun”. Accessed [February 04, 2017]. YouTube video, 03.43. Posted. [January 13, 2017]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ew4FWW1q200>.

very well with the rest of the elements in the song and yet it stands out. All the different sounds used in perfect proportion in terms of their arrangement makes this piece sound dense and spacey.

*Prelude & Kiara – Black sands*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNIgi64qlKE><sup>4</sup>

‘Prelude’ & ‘Kiara’ are two parts of the same song from the album Black sands. ‘Prelude’ catches the attention of the listener immediately with the melody on the violin. ‘Prelude’ leads into ‘Kiara’, it’s electronic counterpart, finding the perfect balance between the violin and the groove of a sample based down-tempo electronic track.

### **Steven Wilson**

Steven Wilson is an English progressive rock musician. His music is strongly concept-based with the arrangement highlighting emotions and songwriting. With compositions consisting of elaborate arrangements and layers of instrumentation, his music is dense, emotional and complex at the same time. He gives great importance to the quality of production and hence his work is very well engineered from start to finish.

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<sup>4</sup> Vassenato. “Bonobo – Black Sands “Prelude”& “Kiara” Accessed [January 03, 2017]. YouTube video, 05:08. Posted. [July 25, 2010]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNIgi64qlKE>

### *Hand Cannot Erase*

<https://youtu.be/xy71Vvah7fM?list=PL2g-7NS0WKivfm3zEVIT8P8lq2UWbdOeB><sup>5</sup>

The album 'Hand Cannot Erase' was released in 2015. It is written from a female perspective. The concept and story is inspired by a woman living in a large city who dies in her apartment and no one misses her for over three years, despite her having family and friends. Steven usually sings lead vocal in all his music, in this album, different voices and vocal textures are used as lead vocals in specific parts of the album in a way to convey emotions more effectively. Instrumentation includes the usual progressive rock elements – electric guitars, drums, bass, and synthesizers. The very unusual use of flute, piano, choir, solo chorister voice with the combination of a well thought-out arrangement of all the other usual instrumentation make this album unique and musically dense.

### **Other References for this EP**

*Giorgio by Moroder - Random Access Memories - Daft Punk*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhl-Cs1-sG4><sup>6</sup>

'Giorgio by Moroder' is a song by French electronic duo Daft Punk. It is a perfect blend of Drums, Strings and Modular synthesizers. The first song 'The Awakening' from this EP, 'ChangeFiction' has strong references from this song with emphasis on the string quartet throughout the song especially at the end just like this

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<sup>5</sup> Bruno M. "Steven Wilson – "Hand. Cannot. Erase" complete album." Accessed [January 04, 2017]. YouTube playlist, 01:07:00. Posted [February 24, 2015]. <https://youtu.be/xy71Vvah7fM?list=PL2g-7NS0WKivfm3zEVIT8P8lq2UWbdOeB>.

<sup>6</sup> DaftPunkVEVO. "Daft Punk - Giorgio by Moroder (Official Audio)" Accessed [February 04, 2017]. YouTube video, 09:13. Posted [February 24, 2014]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhl-Cs1-sG4>.

example.

*Wake up - End Credits - EDEN*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YthChN1Wq8M7>

‘Wake up’ has a very dramatic ending with multiple distorted sawtooth oscillators playing chords simultaneously. This sound combined with the ending of the above track ‘Giorgio by Moroder’ has influenced the sound of the song ‘The Awakening’.

*Ahista Ahista – Swades – AR. Rahman*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKVqFeRLSy48>

‘Ahista Ahista’ is a song from the Bollywood film ‘Swades’. This song is based on the Indian scale ‘Charukesi’ with Harp being the major instrument throughout the song. The second song from ChangeFiction, ‘Change’ is based on this song because of the use of this scale with a combination of harp solos.

### **Description of the Culminating Experience (The Work)**

This project is a 3 song EP. The idea of this project was to produce well-engineered music that uses a combination of acoustic and electronic elements, a fusion of different styles with elaborate arrangement making the music to sound

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<sup>7</sup> MrSuicideSheep. “EDEN - Wake Up”. Accessed [January 04, 2017]. YouTube video, 04:39. Posted [August 21, 2015].  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YthChN1Wq8M7>.

<sup>8</sup> Tseries. “Aahista Aahista (Full Song) | Swades | Shahrukh Khan”. Accessed [January 04, 2017]. YouTube video, 06:26. Posted [May 30, 2011]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKVqFeRLSy48>.

dense. One of the main goals was to record a wide variety of instruments and incorporate that into a new contemporary sounding musical environment.

The name 'Change Fiction' was born from a common phenomenon 'change' that all things in the universe go through in phase of time. All the three songs in this EP were conceived by taking inspiration from this phenomenon.

All songs started with simple tunes that were composed on the piano. Finally after many versions, a basic structure for the songs had been framed. With a rough idea of the instrumentation, all the acoustic instruments were first programmed using Virtual instruments and sample libraries from Kontakt and Omnisphere. All synths were designed and programmed using soft-synths like Serum, Spire, Rob Papen synths and Arturia instrument bundle. All percussion and rhythm elements were programmed using various samples from different sample libraries.

The first song 'The Awakening' started off as a very simple melody with two main melodic motifs. One of the main recording goals for this song was to record a string quartet. Programmed strings were then properly arranged and written into parts by CP student Joyce Cheung.

The second song 'Change' is based off of two Indian scales. The main melody is in 'Charukesi' and the Cello interludes are in 'Bhairav'. The idea was to make this song sound huge and cinematic. Instruments like Cello, Harp and Nylon Guitar were recorded to shape the acoustic sounds. This was then fused with synthesizers and electronics. This song features vocals by Colombian singer and CP student Lili Del Sol and lyrics by Ena Marley & Dav Abrams. The lyrical content focuses on the relation between time and change and how it is all a cycle.



The third song is a peaceful ambient style track. Double bass, Nylon guitar, Cello and vocals were recorded. This song in particular uses a lot of resampling, time stretching and granulation forming the main sound design elements, forming the sonic base of the song. It also features vocals by study abroad student, Vasundhara Gupta.

All the three songs have been composed in such a way that it goes from an easy listening state through an intense heavy phase which then leads to a resolved peaceful state. The first two songs were mixed in Pro Tools using various plugins from Waves, Slate digital and Lexicon. The third song was mixed in Ableton live using stock Ableton plugins and other third party plugins.

A music video with abstract visuals has also been produced for the third song “Coda”. It first was made as a part of the Non Linear Structures in Real Time Media course. It features manipulated-original visuals of leaves, flowers and insects.

Album cover-art was designed by Indian artist and concept designer Vinay Vishvesh.

### **Innovative Aspects of The Work**

- Use of different instruments from different spheres of music and combining them with electronic sound
- Fusing Indian scales and melodies with orchestral and electronic sound.
- Incorporating Spanish lyrics sung by a Colombian vocalist and adapting them to an Indian melody in the 2<sup>nd</sup> song ‘Change’.
- Resampling instruments like guitar, piano and vocals to create melodic and sound design elements in the 3<sup>rd</sup> song ‘Coda’.

### **New Skills Acquired**

- Working on Ableton live to program, produce and design sounds.

- Since all the recording and mixing was done on Pro tools, familiarity with shortcuts and a much more comfortable workflow in this DAW has been acquired.
- Using synthesizers such as Serum, Spire, FM8, analog synth emulations such as Arturia Jupiter 8, mini moog, Prophet to synthesize and design original sounds.
- The use of resampling, sound volleying, granulation, time stretching as sound design tools to shape the sound of the songs.
- Mic-ing techniques to record different instruments after recording them multiple times to get the best sound.
- Knowledge on different mics and mic preamps on how they sound on different instruments has been acquired through trial and error.
- Mixing skills to blend electronic sound with acoustic sound and manipulated acoustic sounds.
- Working relationships with different collaborators
- Writing for different instruments (guitar, strings, harp, vibes, marimba, double bass, electric bass)
- Shooting and creating original visual content in Adobe After Effects and Adobe Premier Pro for the 3<sup>rd</sup> song 'Coda'.

## **Challenges, both expected & unexpected**

There were quite a few challenges that were encountered throughout this process.

- The initial idea was to produce an experimental folk-fusion EP. This did not proceed due to a personal block in musical ideas. The first challenge was to change this and try something different and constructive.
- Scheduling and rescheduling musicians and re-recording their parts due to unusable takes from previous recordings. Example.,

### *1. Microphones and Recording -*

- The 'Schoeps Cmc6 mk4s' were used for the initial recordings of the harp. This sound did not blend well into the arrangement. The 'AKG 414s' were used the second time and it worked very well.
- The guitar parts on the first song 'The Awakening' were recorded 4 times. With two different players and four different performances. The takes from the first three recordings were not usable. A variety of mics from the Neumann U87, Schoeps Cmc6 mk4s, AKG 414 and the Shure SM81 were tested. Finally by the 4<sup>th</sup> recording session, the guitarist, Mauricio Ribero was more familiar with song and after a few takes knew exactly what was needed. Sonically the SM 81 did the job.

### *2. Difficulty in getting the musician to play what was required for the song -*

- First time recordings were approached in the mindset of getting the musicians to improvise their parts. This did not work well for the songs

as they weren't comfortable in doing this. The second time charts of rough ideas were prepared and then they were asked to improvise based on this. This method was a success.

- Writing music for different instruments with no proper knowledge of the range of the instrument and the technique required to play the instrument.
- Getting the musicians to play music out of their comfort zone.
- To make the visual artist, Vinay understand the goal of this project and what was exactly needed in terms of cover-art and logo.
- The biggest unexpected challenge thus far has been the collaboration on the second song 'Change'. Other than the musical part (melody, arrangement and production), everything else (lyrics, vocals and a music video) was dependent on Lili. Due to scheduling issues and a busy calendar on her end she dropped out of the project. This was a major setback as this song was completely dependent on her. It took almost four months to find another song-writer, make them understand the goal of this project and then start over again. Due to this setback the music video that was planned for this song had to be cancelled.
- Mastering the whole EP – As all the three songs are sonically very different from each other, to get them in a similar sonic plane was a challenge.

### **Future ramifications and/or plans for The Work**

- This EP will be made available online on Bandcamp and Soundcloud.
- A search for a record label for an official release.

- Music video/visuals for the first song 'The Awakening' and the second song 'Change' will be produced. The core concept of the videos is still in works. But the videos will feature a lot of images from nature, focusing on the 5 elements and relating it to the theme of the songs. Shots of animals, insects, greenery etc will be included. The visuals will be an extension of the existing video from song 3. It will also be a way to connect all the three songs, with similar nature-esque themes and images but expressing completely different moods for each song.
- A live performance set will be prepared incorporating all three songs along with visuals. Since they completely sequenced in Ableton Live, a hybrid live set will be prepared. Musicians will perform their parts live depending on their availability. Everything else including synths, effects and rhythms will be triggered and controlled using midi.

## **Conclusion**

This project has been an incredible experience. A wide set of tools and skills in music production and engineering have been acquired that would be very useful for the next step in the musical journey of Palendroma after Berklee. A lot of challenges did come about at every step while making this EP. But overcoming them, finding a solution and moving forward was the biggest skill acquired.

There will be more music and more such albums released under 'Palendroma' in the future with the similar idea of fusion and collaboration of different musicians.

## **Bibliography**

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