

Culminating Experience Reflective Report

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## ABSTRACT

My Culminating Experience project is introducing four audio recordings of all original compositions. Throughout this Culminating Experience report I will reflect on the process I went through from the early stages of the project until the final product. I will discuss my plan of action, objectives and how I was able to achieve them and also what wasn't accomplished during this timeframe. I will also discuss my goals for the near future and the impact this process has created in my life as an artist.

Other topics include a reflection on what I consider potential contributions to my profession as a composer, arranger and performer.

## CULMINATING EXPERIENCE SUMMARY AND GOALS

I've been involved in music education and music mentorship for the past 20 years. I wanted to spend this year focusing on fine-tuning my skills as a composer, arranger and performer.

I chose to do a recording because it would be the perfect vehicle to work on bringing my compositions to a higher level of craft and to be able to explore new concepts that I have been learning at The Berklee Global Jazz Institute. A recording would also help to create more performance opportunities in the near future. And finally, the recording will also be challenging for me as a drummer and percussionist and will help me develop as such areas as well.

The BGJI and the masters program in jazz performance has provided me the most valuable tools to further my craft and to bring it towards excellence, striving to be the best I can be,

digging deeper, exploring and expanding my potential.

## THE PROCESS: WHAT DID AND DIDN'T WORK

This project includes four original compositions that reflect the values I believe in: Melody, groove, storytelling, sound and beauty.

The compositions presented are:

- "Wind",
- "El Reto",
- "Gratitude"
- "To My Parents".

These were songs I had already composed, but with the tools I've learned during the Master program, they were disassembled, put back together and overall transformed.

I come from a strong folk and popular music background; therefore, at first it was challenging to hear my songs in different ways. It took a lot of patience, perseverance and an open mind to go through this process. I explored different meters, harmonies, orchestrations and even different tempos. In the end, I am happy with the results and I have learned quite a bit during the process.

I wanted that this project would involve a special combination of long time collaborators such as bassist Tal Gamlieli, pianist Kevin Harris, singer Sissy Castrogiovanni and saxophonist George Garzone, as well as new musical partners as violinist Layth Sidiq and saxophonist Edmar Colon. The challenge with this idea was that Tal Gamlieli lives in Israel and Kevin Harris lives

in NYC. Fortunately, it coincided that around the time of the recording Tal was coming to Chicago for some concerts with his trio, therefore it wasn't that difficult to bring him to Boston; however time for rehearsing was very limited. I was able to schedule two rehearsals with the band to go over eight compositions. I thought that since we have played many times before, this goal wouldn't be that ambitious.

In reality, it was too ambitious trying to rehearse and record eight songs in a ten-hour recording session. For the next time I'd make sure the band has more rehearsal time and ideally with more time in advance. If time will be a constrain in the future, I will choose to work on less songs, to be able to work better on the details of each composition. Although I sent the music over two weeks in advance, in reality it is better to go over the music together some days before the session date, and if at all possible, to go on a short tour before going into the studio.

After all tracks were done, I decided that four of them were material for an album, a fifth one would need some more editing that wasn't possible before the end of the semester and a sixth and seventh one would need further work- revision.

The four tunes that are "album ready" are the ones presented here. I am very pleased with the sound, feeling and emotion captured. However I am now hearing new "reharm" ideas for some sections of "El Reto". I guess the tunes will keep on evolving.

The classes with Bob Patton were very helpful in planning the recording session. We had an Excel spreadsheet where we defined various aspects such as panning, room set-up, instrumentation, order of the tunes to record, etc. This was helpful in organizing the schedule with the musicians as well as with the engineer.

I wanted to acknowledge the inspiration and extra push from BGJI teacher and mentor Terri Lyne Carrington who encouraged me to look further and to go beyond my comfort zone while arranging these songs. Also I want to acknowledge the immense help of Danilo Perez, who brought to light precious compositional tools and ideas for alternative harmonies, especially for the songs “Gratitude” and “Wind”.

The ensembles at the BGJI master program were important “laboratories” to explore our compositions and receive precious feedback from mentors such as Adam Cruz, John Patitucci and Ben Street. This is one of the elements that made the difference and helped us to grow as writers and performers.

We also had a number of opportunities to perform our compositions for a live audience during the BGJI “concert series”. This was another way to keep crafting our compositions.

My experience in mix one studios was an overall positive one, however set up time took almost over three hours, leaving only over six hours of actual tracking time. There was an issue with the way the studio and booths are set up where it only allowed for me to see all the musicians, but they couldn’t see each other. Also I ended up with an issue on one saxophone track for the best take of one of the songs. There was “feedback noise” recorded on that track and the take became useless which was a real pity.

The recording session went smoothly, and we didn’t do more than three takes per song.

I wanted to create a relaxed atmosphere, which we were accomplished. However having more rehearsal time would have been better to fine-tune some details in the tunes. I could have been more involved in listening back and monitoring how the takes were coming along.

The weeks following the tracking sessions were dedicated to mixing at home. This was a great learning experience. I had the support and guidance of vocalist Sissy Castrogiovanni and we were able to come up with very satisfactory edits for the four of the songs.

Mixing with Kareem Clarke was also a breeze. He's a very easy person to work with and extremely helpful, knowledgeable and supportive.

Although ten hours was a short time to record a whole album, it was enough time to give us students, a powerful experience in the area producing songs in the studio setting as a leader.

## THE NEXT STEP

The next step is to edit and add overdubs to the song "Hope" and re-arrange and record updated versions of the songs "I See You" and "Chant". Additionally, I'd like to compose one or two more songs to complete an album and ideally release it by October of this year. I plan to book some gigs around the northeast of the United States to promote the release of the CD.

I intent to show the recorded material to booking agents and music marketing specialist to help promote it, with the ultimate goal of having an ongoing schedule of performances.

The knowledge and advise of Peter Alhadeff during office hours and during his classes has been an important tool in developing an strategy to promote the album.

I have learned quite an amount of new techniques and concepts in composing and also as a performer. I am committed to develop these new ideas over the next few years. It has been a

truly special and transformative year. Many questions have been answered and new ones have surfaced. I am extremely honored for having this precious experience this year at the Master Program at the Berklee Global Jazz Institute.

## CONTRIBUTION

This project is a combination of folk sounds and rhythms from South America, jazz, improvisation, interplay and the use of traditional instruments.

Specifically, this recording brings songs that contain a unique blend of the following music styles: The Afro-Peruvian “Lando”, the Argentinean “Zamba”, the Cuban “Son”, as well as a jazz harmonies, improvisation and odd meter explorations, including 7/4 and 7/8.

As a drum set player, I have incorporated the use of a traditional drum kit (bass drum, snare drum, tom drums and cymbals) with the addition of the Peruvian Cajon, and the Argentinean “Bombo leguero”.

With this project I hope to create more performance opportunities for the community of musicians involved in the project. I am aiming to disseminate the message of this music, bringing inspiration to the listeners and uplifting their spirits.

Music has a real power and can touch the hearts of the people. Musicians and humanists have the responsibility of bringing awareness and healing that can literally create a change for the better in society. Music is the catalyst, the element that can “alkalinize” and balance our

lives. Music is a powerful tool in creating unity and reconciliation, which are the antidote to the main ailments of our world today.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

I want to cite the following quote by J. D. Meier. I correlate his definition of “inspirational movies” toward “inspirational music.” My goal is to create music that matches this definition.

Inspirational Movies. You know the movies. The ones that make your heart grow ten times bigger, or the ones that give you the strength of ten warriors on your side. These are the inspirational movies that inspire us. They make the blood rush through our veins. They make our soul sing. They make us want to get up and give our best ... until there's nothing more to give ... and then give some more. They move us. Why we are alive and what's worth living for.

They make us laugh, they make us cry, they make us think. But mostly, they remind us why we are alive and what's worth living for.

They remind us that every day, is another day, to get up, venture into the world, and make a difference. Our difference. Whether that difference is to conquer a personal demon, or to make a difference in somebody's life, or to make the world a better place. It's our story that we write each day. Keep your spirit strong to go the

distance. Everybody, every day, has their own adventures, and their own unfolding story, but we're all in this together. And that's why we identify with the movies that inspire us — to make the most of what we've got ... to live more, learn more, laugh more, and love more ... and, above all, to keep our spirit strong, and to go the distance. (J.D. Meier, 2011)

## References

J.D. Meier (2011). *25 Inspirational Movies*. <http://sourcesofinsight.com/25-inspirational-movies/>