

Berklee College of Music

“Not Just a Beat, Not Just a Scene”

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of
Master of Music in Contemporary Performance (Production Concentration)

Supervisors: Lucas Martin & Joshua Wheatley

by Sam Rowley

Valencia Campus, Spain

July 2021

Table of Contents

Abstract.....*iii*

Acknowledgements.....*iv*

1. Introduction.....*1*

2. Culminating Experience Project.....*4*

3. Objectives.....*5*

3.1 Sub-Objectives.....*6*

4. Methodology.....*7*

4.1 Resources.....*7*

4.2 Plan of Action.....*7*

4.3 Justification.....*8*

5. Execution.....*9*

5.1 Artistic Process.....*9*

5.2 Workflow.....*10*

5.3 Releasing Music.....*19*

6. Reflections.....*21*

6.1 Next Steps.....*22*

7. Bibliography.....*24*

Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to provide an analysis of the music and production techniques of well known instrumental Hip Hop producers, and to then apply them to my own artistic and creative processes in the creation of an instrumental beat tape utilizing samples primarily from the mediteranean region of europe, all in the pursuit of finding my own voice and identity as an artist and producer. Through gathering information regarding the creative processes and techniques utilized by these producers from interviews, tutorials, live streams, articles, Instagram Q&A's, and more, I was able to find a process consisting of a set of steps (workflow) that I generally follow every time I make a new track, that I find to be streamlined and efficient for the way that I like to create. By compiling this information into a research document, I hope to offer a helpful resource to other aspiring artists and producers that can offer some sort of guidance to those looking for new techniques or are still searching for their own personal creative process

Keywords, Hip Hop, Production, Beats, Instrumental Hip Hop

Acknowledgements

*To Juno, the sun to my moon,
the yin to my yang,
the Wallace to my Gromit,
the light of my life,
the best damn cat ever*

*And to Nacho Marco, Javier Vercher, Mel Uye-Parker, and the all of the faculty that offered
guidance through this unpredictable COVID-19 filled year*

Thank you

1. Introduction

Compared to many of my peers in the music world, I'm a little late to the party. Growing up outside of New Orleans in a family of scientists, I was constantly exposed to all kinds of music, but at the same time, never really thought that I would ever have a career in it. It really wasn't until I was around seventeen or eighteen years old that I began to see music as something more than an extracurricular. I've played music since kindergarten, starting with Violin (hated it), before moving to the trombone, eventually picking up bass guitar, upright, and then getting into Hip Hop production in college. Growing up near New Orleans, I had always been around jazz, blues, hip hop, etc. and had played in big bands occasionally through school, but it wasn't until I stumbled across *The Bad Plus Joshua Redman*, a 2015 contemporary album by the jazz trio The Bad Plus and Saxophonist Joshua Redman, that I found my calling, and realized that I needed to pursue music.

Moving to Atlanta for undergraduate studies was my first formal experience with proper music education at a high level. Finally, I was immersed both in jazz and in Hip Hop, as Atlanta is known as one of the most important origins of modern hip hop. I was able to attend countless shows of rappers and beatmakers, and really began to learn more about the instrumental side of Hip Hop, although I wasn't really beginning to learn how to produce quite yet. I initially went to Georgia State to study music education, but after a big band rehearsal on my second day of college, I knew I needed to change my major and pursue jazz and improvisation. After two years of school, and attending jam sessions almost every single night, I transferred to Berklee in Boston to finish out my undergraduate, where I suddenly found myself in situations where I was playing and performing with people from all over the world, and was constantly exposed to new music.

If you were to look at me on paper, you'd primarily see my education and work experience as a performer, specifically in the study and performance of Jazz improvisation. It is true that the majority of my education and study up until this point has been dedicated almost exclusively to the growth and development of my abilities as an improviser. Jazz improvisation truly is, to me, one of the most fascinating and rewarding things to ever come out of this sonic tradition that humans call music. Nothing really could ever compare to the excitement of the unknown, as you start a tune on stage with fellow musicians, without any preconceived notion of where you are all going to end up in the song as you play. On top of the incredible history of Jazz and the context of its development and growth in the American society, the tradition of the music and the collaborative improvisational elements and efforts one is required to understand in order to perform at a high level caused me to fall in love with the music. Jazz is arguably the most important art form to ever emerge from America, even in spite of the oppression and systematic persecution that the originators and pioneers faced throughout their personal lives and musical careers. Over the past years that I have dedicated myself to understanding this incredible art form that was birthed from the Black American musical traditions of gospel and blues and work songs, I was also simultaneously falling in love with a different style of music that stemmed from the same roots, Hip Hop.

As I was first beginning to dive into the world that is Jazz improvisation, I accidentally stumbled across the incredible musical tool in Hip Hop known as sampling. The day that everything clicked for me, I was listening to *Illmatic*, the debut album of legendary NYC rapper Nas, when I suddenly realized that I had heard the piano sample from the fourth track on the album, "The World Is Yours." After some quick digging, I found that Pete Rock, the producer of the track, had sampled a small section in the middle of the Ahmad Jamal Trio recording of "I

Love Music” from his album *The Awakening*. That discovery of the link between the two styles of music only further inspired me to dive deeper into studying the link between Jazz and Hip Hop, and led me to see just how similar the two forms of music are. There are so many elements that the two share that you can trace all the way back to Africa. In both Jazz and Hip Hop, there is a strong emphasis on the ability to improvise. Within Jazz, improvisation is clearly a necessity, but within Hip Hop culture, part of being a rapper is having the ability to create lyrics and verses on the spot, called “freestyling.” The ability to freestyle is basically a requirement to be taken seriously as a rapper, and some of the best throughout history; Jay-Z, Big L, Notorious B.I.G., Common, Rakim, Nas, MF DOOM, and many others have been able to tell detailed stories while simultaneously weaving incredibly complex rhyme schemes, and combining it all into a rhythmically-interesting musical performance. If you look at one of Kendrick Lamar’s flows transcribed rhythmically and put down onto paper, it’s incredibly complex, and looks like something that Sonny Rollins would have improvised in a solo from a rhythmic standpoint.

Another huge rhythmic link between Jazz and Hip Hop can be found in the beats that rappers perform over. Coming from straight ahead Jazz, where the rhythmic emphasis is on 2&4 instead of beats 1&3, you see the same emphasis with the snare in Hip Hop, just like the hi hat in Jazz. The use of hi-hats in Hip Hop fills the same time keeping role that the ride cymbal does in Jazz. Of the legendary Hip Hop producers that have truly had an amazing impact on the music, almost all of them have a strong background in Jazz, whether it's because they play jazz themselves, or because they grew up with it filling their parents’ record collection. The producer Madlib, primarily known for his work with the late MF DOOM (RIP), has complete access to anything and everything in the Blue Note Records catalog, and can sample anything he wants within their catalog without having to go through the process of clearing samples.

The Golden Age of Hip Hop, aka the 1990s and early 2000s, is what really caught my ear when it came to production. Something about the jazz samples and the really crunchy drums that make up the boom bap sound really inspires me, and it's a sound that I have chased as a producer, scouring ebay to buy the vintage tools that producers used to make some of my favorite music. Much like J Dilla, Madlib, STLNDRMS, Leem Lizzy, Dibia\$, Flying Lotus, Knxwledge, I strive for a sound that is by no means perfect. All of these producers rely on obscure samples and unquantized drums to give their music a unique and more human feel. These are only some of the incredible beatmakers that have taken the art of instrumental Hip Hop Production to the next level.

2. Proposed Culminating Experience

The core of my Culminating Experience will consist of a 30 minute beat tape consisting of original productions that cover a wide range of territory within Hip Hop. Every track flows into the next in order to create an overall cohesive experience linked together sonically. In a blending of samples, acoustic instruments, and synthesizers, the process of creating this tape will only further my abilities as a producer and my understanding of the numerous production and mixing techniques utilized by the best in their craft. Through studying the music of the greats and emulating their sounds and methods, I will continue to get closer and closer to finding my voice in Hip Hop production.

Through my research of instrumental Hip Hop, I will dive into beats that truly inspire me, and attempt to break them apart in order to find out just how they were made, and why they sound the way that they do. I will then continue and put those methods to work as I continue to hone my skills and my sound and implement them into my own beats. In my current work, I combine modern techniques (Ableton) with my vintage hardware/samplers; MPC2000XL,

SP-404sx, SP-505, and a record player to sample directly from vinyl. I have spent so much time with these devices taking up space on my desk, that it's getting to be time to finally put together my first release as a producer. Utilizing my time in Spain and at Berklee Valencia, I am focusing on honing my production and mixing skills, exploring new sounds, and assembling the best of my work to present in my first full length beat tape. The overarching theme of the beat tape will be focused on my time in Spain, and the primary limitation I am putting on this project is that I will source all of the samples from the music of mediteranean artists, bands, and composers. Regardless of genre, the music has to have originated in the mediteranean region of the world.

The overarching goal of my time here at Berklee Valencia is to have a full length release ready to share with the world, and to begin to make a name for myself in the beat community. Apart from my work as a jazz musician and session trombonist, I have a short beat tape and some remixes of various things such as the Westside Doom single, and the Big L and Jay-Z freestyle from the Stretch & Bobbito radio show, but I have yet to get a full length project out into the world. With the completion of my CE, I will have an album-length project that I will release on streaming services that will only further my career, and give me a launching pad to begin to reach out to other collaborators and rappers, and continue on my journey as a musician and producer.

3. Objectives

Through the completion of this tape, my overall objective isn't just to compile a body of my original work, but to experience and fully understand the complete process of releasing music, from inspiration to getting it published on streaming and promoted, and through this process, continue to refine myself as a producer and truly find my identity as an artist. By extending myself past my background in Jazz and instrumental performance, I can fully express

myself musically and show the world who I am across multiple styles and genres. I am not a one-dimensional artist, I have so many interests across all genres and there are so many projects that I want to pursue in the future, and by going through and understanding the release process from beginning to end, I will be able to diversify and explore many different opportunities throughout my career.

3.1 Sub Objectives

1. Creative
 - a. Compose and produce numerous original beats that fit together into a cohesive project that accurately displays my sound as a producer.
2. Analysis/Research
 - a. Analyze the work of notable producers
 - b. Reach out to notable producers to discuss their methods and approaches
3. Technical
 - a. Further my understanding of the tools used in production, both DAWs and hardware, and the techniques used to create better sound
 - b. Develop my understanding of mixing techniques and how to put together a track and mix it down all within the same Ableton session
4. Dissemination/Promotion
 - a. Create a release plan to build up interest in the project
 - b. Put together a social media plan to promote my work
 - c. Organize the release of a few singles prior to the full release date to begin to build public interest in my music

4. Methodology

_____The methodology is primarily action-based and performative research through listening, analyzing past notable projects, and the assimilation of new production techniques, and through the sheer trial and error of making far more tracks than I intend to release, learning from my mistakes, what I could have done better, and going back and applying new knowledge to previous tracks in order to understand what will and what won't make my music sound better.

4.1 Resources / Tools

- Activities
 - Musical analysis of well known producers
 - Crate digging (finding samples)
 - Producing new tracks
 - Mixing my tracks
 - Working with a distributor (Distrokid, etc) to get my music onto streaming
- Production Tools
 - DAWs - Ableton
 - Samplers - MPC 2000XL, SP404sx ,SP505_
 - Record player, records, music to sample.
 - Berklee Studios to check final mixes

4.2 Plan of Action

- Continue making tracks on a daily basis, utilizing new production techniques
- Assimilate new methods in production and mixing through tutorials and lessons with other producers

- Conclude the creative process around the beginning of May, shifting heavily into mixing and polishing the tracks, and cutting out excess tracks that don't quite fit
- Finalize album artwork by May 1st
- Have a finished track listing by the initial presentation (May 31st) of about 25-30 beats.
- Following the initial presentation, I will begin the release process of working with a PRO and a distributor to get my music onto streaming services.
- 3 weeks before the confirmed release date, Drop 2 singles a week on instagram as 1 minute videos with visuals, and promote them through promoted posts and shares on social media.
- Arrange playlist placements on spotify, to help boost traffic to my Artist page.
- On the release date, stream a full performance of the beat tape, and upload it onto youtube with visuals, and share on social media pages.

4.3 Justification

The release of this project is the first step in establishing the producer side of my artistic identity. I am also in the process of putting together my first album as a leader outside of school, and with both of these projects releasing this year, I am officially establishing my identity as an artist. As a first release, this will be a foundation to branch out from and to reach out to collaborate with other musicians, vocalists, rappers, etc. as I continue to grow as an artist and producer. Having music released under your name is an important step in establishing one's career, and through releasing music, you gain credibility and public recognition for your work. You can finally share the countless hours you've invested into your art, and people can finally

experience your vision as an artist, and share and understand your thoughts, emotions, and experiences.

This tape is a culmination of everything I've ever loved within music and Hip Hop, and I can't wait to share that side of myself with others and the world. This is my attempt at emulating and interpreting the ideas and textures and styles of what made me fall in love with Hip Hop. Through sharing it, I want others to see the art form the way I do, and to have something to sit back and listen to that keeps them on their toes from track to track, and makes the listener forget about whatever is going on in the world.

Apart from the musical outcome of this project, I also hope that this paper will become a helpful resource to producers of all skill levels who may be looking for any sort of inspiration or new techniques or new concepts of workflow that may assist them in their own artistic journeys. This paper lists out my thought process and describes the techniques that I have learned and I use to make beats. In the past, specifically pre-COVID, a lot of this kind of information wasn't given out easily, and, now, with the wealth of instruction that is available online, it's easier than ever to find the answers to any questions one may have about production, and hopefully this paper can serve as a useful guide to someone interested in sampled hip hop.

5. Execution

5.1 Artistic Process

Other than producing a lot of music, an incredibly important part of my culminating experience is discovering and refining my artistic process when it comes to the creative side of things; not just what I make, but how I make it. Through my time in Valencia, I've examined the methods and techniques used by a wide range of producers across many different genres in order to understand the music creation process from their perspectives. Through a combination of

analyzing and deconstructing beats, reading interviews, and watching many different videos and tutorials in which producers explain their thought process, I began to experiment with the different techniques that I had discovered would result in the certain sounds that I was looking for. From the beginning stages of finding a sample and laying out the foundation of the track, to sample chopping, drum techniques and layering, all the way through the mastering phase, I began to assimilate all of this information into a workflow that works for me in Ableton, on hardware, or a combination of both. After a lot of trial and error, and many beats that will never see the light of day, I have settled into a relatively consistent sequence of steps that I follow as I create from start to finish.

5.2 Workflow

The most important step in my workflow is the first, finding a good sample. Some producers look for samples that will fit a groove or drum beat that they've already made, however, I always start from the sample itself. I'll dig through album after album until I find something that really catches my attention. As soon as I've found something that stands out I'll either download it if it's an electronic source, or record it into Ableton if it's from a physical format. After chopping the sample and rearranging the chops into a few variations that loop well, I begin to add drums. Generally, I like to work from the top down with drums, starting with hi-hats, percussion, shakers, etc. and then working my way down to the snare and finally the kick drum. From there I make sure there is a bass part present, whether it's coming from the sample or something that I record myself with a software instrument or a bass guitar. Keep in mind that this may not work for everyone, and some might disagree with the ways through which I get my end result, but this is a workflow that, through my research and experimentation, I enjoy, find incredibly efficient, and feel produces the results that I am seeking.

Step 1: Finding the Right Sample

_____ Working from a strong foundation is the first and most important step in my workflow. While theoretically you can sample pretty much any piece of audio, and there are an infinite amount of ways in which you can process and manipulate audio, I generally only sample something when I listen to said song, and immediately hear how I would manipulate it into something new. When physically crate digging (looking for records), I generally don't go out looking for anything specific or with anything particular in mind. There are some pretty concrete rules that I follow that have pretty consistently resulted in some good finds:

1. Soul records are king; ballads and slower songs generally contain the best material
2. Gospel records always have something, I've never bought one and not found a sample
3. Movie soundtracks always contain a pretty good variety of textures
4. With any "world" music, the more destroyed the cover, the better the material inside
5. ALWAYS buy an album if the cover is a zoomed-in closeup of the artist's face

That last rule is somewhat unorthodox, and has nothing to do with the genre, but I swear by it when combing through a record store.

When it comes to finding samples online (youtube, etc) it's both easier and harder to find something worthwhile. I generally prefer working from a physical medium like a record or a cassette tape, as it provides you with the limitation of having a finite amount of audio to utilize. With a 12 inch vinyl LP, you get around 20 ish minutes of audio per side, and that forces you to be creative with what you have in front of you. With youtube alone (not even considering other online sources), it's so easy to get overwhelmed with the sheer amount of music that's available, and that can cause you to waste hours going through song after song without ever actually choosing something to start working with. I have made numerous playlists of videos I intend to

sample from, and each one is hundreds of videos long. The upside to youtube, however, is the incredible variety of and diversity of genres and artists from all over the world available at your fingertips. If I know what I'm looking for, I can find something to sample in a matter of minutes.

Listening to as much music as possible from a wide range of genres is a crucial part of sample-based production. Being familiar with as much music as possible helps to point you in the right direction when it comes to finding what you're looking for. For instance, if I'm looking for something with a lot of sustained vocals, I'm either looking for soul ballads, or older gospel choir records. If I want something with a lot of interesting percussion, I look for something from Brazil, Africa, Latin America, etc. If I'm looking for some weird synth noises, I tend to look for "library music" from the 70s. Having a high level of familiarity with a wide range of genres will let you find the sounds you're looking for much faster than if you were starting from scratch, and that just comes from listening to as much music as possible.

As far as what I personally look for when trying to find good material to sample, I try to keep my ears open for anything that I know I can manipulate pretty easily into something new. Regardless of genre, I tend to look for the intros/outros and interludes of songs as they're generally the sections with the most exposed instrumentation, and don't contain as much drums or vocals as the verse or chorus would. I'm always looking for interesting textures, especially something with an element that is creating some sort of pad; strings, horn, background vocals etc. I will often look for a sample with a bassline included, as I love to utilize the bass from the original sample, and bring it out with some simple processing. I have a pretty important rule where I don't sample lyrics, melodies, or riffs that are easily recognizable because I don't want to have to deal with sample clearance, an issue I will touch on later.

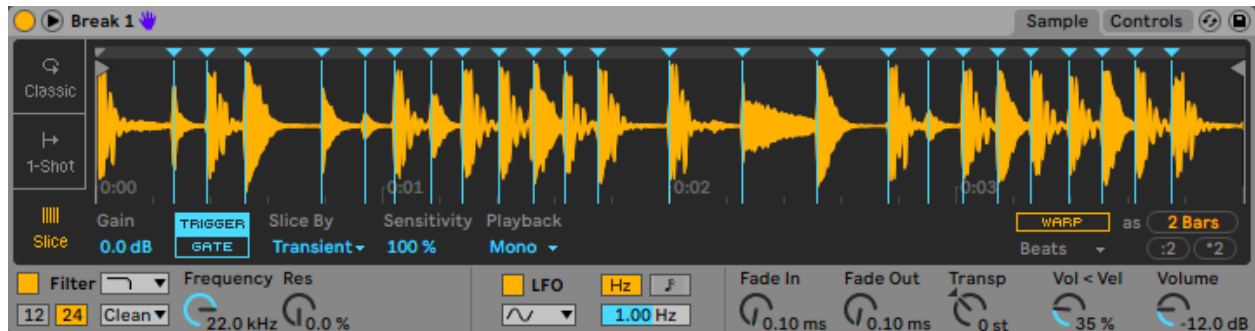
Step 2: Sample Chopping

Once a sample has been found, the next step is to manipulate it. Right off the bat, I immediately start to alter the pitch and speed of the sample. Changing either one or both of these musical elements can result in something drastically different from the original sample. Once I've shifted the sample into the general sonic space that I had in mind, next comes the chopping of the sample. Some producers look for four or eight bar loops, and many songs have been built using this method through which the loop is either repeated, or a chop is made on every downbeat of the loop, and the loop is rearranged into something new. This technique is called micro-chopping, in which you systematically make chops at a consistent interval over the span of that loop (i.e. make a slice every eighth or quarter note) and then sequence the chops in a new order.



Micro-chopping works particularly well with loops and gives you a lot of flexibility, especially when you're dealing with a section of a song with a consistent rhythmic pulse, or when your sample already contains some sort of drum groove. It's easy to create new loops from the chops, and if you have a section where it's not quite a perfect loop but, say there's a drum fill that starts on beat four of the last measure, you can either use a different slice in that same spot that doesn't contain the fill and allows the loop to circle back around smoothly, or find a similar spot earlier/later in the song with the same groove and use beat four from a different section.

Another approach to sampling that works particularly well for slower or more spacey sounding samples, is to make chops at the beginnings of notes or chords. This allows you to play these chops in any way you wish, as you aren't necessarily bound to the original rhythmic grid of the sample. This involves listening for any sonic/textural changes, or looking at the waveform of the sample for any noticeable transients.



This is generally my go-to method of sampling, as it allows me far more room to be creative and deviate away from the original sound of the sample. Once I've found all of the interesting slices in a song, I like to spend some time and physically play them in order to get a sense of my options and discover new possibilities, whether on my MPC2000xl or SP-404, or on a midi controller, or just my laptop's keyboard, approaching the the sampler as an instrument one plays, instead of printing the sequence with my mouse.

Step 3: Drums

As important as it is to find a good sample, it's even more important to select the right drum sounds for what you're trying to make. Good drum sounds and processing can carry a less-than-stellar sample, but bad drum sounds can ruin an amazing sample, and the entire beat in general. Having a large variety of drum kits at your disposal is invaluable, because if you have enough sound packs, somewhere in that drum kit folder, you'll find something that matches the sound in your head. However, at the same time, with great variety comes great responsibility; it's

easy to get overwhelmed when you have 10gb of one shots (like I do), and organizing that folder and knowing what each kit sounds like makes the selection process faster. Good sound selection is crucial, and really helps down the line when it comes to the mixing phase. On my computer, I have dozens of kits that I've acquired over the last year or two, and I keep a few different kits on my MPC2000 that I've assembled from other kits by picking out specific things from different sound packs that I keep saved as different drum programs.

Through the process of deconstructing and analyzing beats made by the greats, and then attempting to emulate those tracks using similar samples and drum sounds, I've been training my ear, similarly to how in learning Jazz, one learns the solos of the greats by ear, and then through imitation assimilates the jazz language into their own playing. It's the same concept, learning and training the ear to know what would be appropriate for what setting. The TR808 snare noise doesn't fit everywhere, and neither do sounds pulled from drum breaks. Do you want a hi-hat that sounds super metallic, or something that sounds more like click, or something that sounds wooden? Do you want a kick that's short and punchy with a lot of high end? Or do you want something lower with a longer sustain and a lot of thump? These are the decisions a producer has to make as they sit down and construct a track. Understanding the different sounds used in different genres within hip hop is important; trap, boom bap, lofi, drill, west coast, chillhop, hyfy, southern rap (especially stemming from Houston, Texas), etc all utilize different sounds that are characteristic of those specific genres. Obviously, it's not a requirement to stick to a specific genre when it comes to drum selection, but being familiar with what makes different genres makes it easier to blur the lines between styles, and pull from different influences, which really helps when it comes to coming up with a unique sound.

A lot of what I make falls into the boom bap/lofi category, but I still borrow a lot from trap and more modern, both in terms of drum sounds and rhythmically. The timing of the drums themselves is arguably just as crucial as the sound selection. Different styles of beats follow different trends when it comes to how drums are placed within the styles. Trap music tends to follow the rhythmic grid, while boom bap starts to introduce an element of swing that carries into the cadence of the rappers within boom bap. Shifting the timing of the different drums and creating a sort of rhythmic “rub” between the percussion elements creates a cycle of tension and release throughout the track. In a lot of my tracks, I tend to drag the hi hats behind the beat, while the snares I’ll keep in time, or rush a little bit in front of the down beat. This creates tension that is released every time the snare hits on beats two and four. When it comes to kick drums, I only quantize the first downbeat of the first measure of a section and leave almost all of the rest of the beats untouched to maintain the human element within the music. A lot of the bounce that I try to instill in my beats comes from the rhythmic disagreement between the three main percussive elements, and over time, I’ve gotten better and better about learning how to play my drums in exactly where I want them to be. If something doesn’t quite feel right to me, I’ll just go back and re-record that specific track.

I tend to keep each different drum sound on a different track, both in Ableton, and on my MPC. Instead of just using a drum rack (Ableton) or program (MPC) and putting all of the drums on the same track, I keep it separated for more control over the individual sounds when it comes to mixing and processing. I also prefer to play each element separately so that I can focus on the timing of each individual sound and place it exactly where it needs to be.

Step 4: Bass

There are a few different techniques that I utilize in order to give my tracks more low end presence. If the sample contains a bass in it already, I'll generally do everything I can to keep the original sound included. I'll try to chop around the bass line in particular and rearrange the slices so that the new bassline is cohesive and still makes sense musically. Through some simple EQing and saturation, it's pretty simple to bring out the already existing bass sound of a sample, and have it sit well in the mix with whatever sounds I'm adding on top of it.

Of course, that isn't always a possibility, and sometimes it's better to just use a high-pass filter on the sample and start from scratch. I love playing in the bass parts as well instead of programming them with my mouse, so I'll either play a line on bass guitar, or load a bass sample into a sampler in Ableton or onto my MPC, and sequence something that way. As far as what sounds I like to use in particular, I tend to somewhat-subtly use 808s underneath a lot of my tracks. I like the texture and variety that modern 808 bass samples present, and they're easy to fit into most scenarios. Sometimes it's better to use a synth bass, like something that sounds like a patch that would've come from a Microkorg synthesizer, but it's really all up to the discretion of the producer and what kind of sound they're chasing. Regardless of the means by which one creates the bass element of a track, all that matters in the end, is that it sounds strong and helps to carry the track along.

Step 5: Mixing and Mastering

Once I have all of the parts of a track the only thing left to do is glue the pieces together. In general, I do very minimal mixing compared to other producers. I try to cut down on the work as much as possible through good sound selection and making sure all of the parts fit together and sound cohesive, like they belong to the same track. If the sounds work together, and are

balanced volume-wise, there isn't much left to do. Knxwledge said on an informal Instagram Q&A that he only uses Ableton and the stock plugins. He also tends to work relatively simply, and when treating his samples, tends to use EQ3, the simple three band EQ that comes stock with Ableton. Seeing the results that he gets without using any third party plugins, I try to use what comes with Ableton as they're generally incredibly functional compared to other DAW's and their stock plugins. They're also generally much easier on the CPU and very simple to use. I love the way that Ableton utilizes groups, and I tend to group tracks together, for instance putting all of the hi hats into one group, the snares into another, etc. That allows me to work as if I'm just mixing with just the stems, drastically simplifying the process. Other than compressing the drum sounds to fatten them up, and sidechaining the hi hats, sample, and bass to the kick drum to create a ducking effect when the kick plays, I generally do more of the mixing from the master bus.

I only really use two 3rd party plugins; Serato Sample, which I use for sampling due to the time stretching and pitch shifting capabilities, and the Goodhertz Vulf Compressor. The Vulf Compressor is an emulation of the SP-303 Vinyl Simulator compressor. The 303 has a sort of cult following because of the compressor that comes with it, and it's incredible ability to warm up a track and glue anything together. I tend to use it on my master bus due to the sound it imparts on whatever passes through it. I own the SP-505, which is sort of the big brother of the 303, and has the same compressor that I use in my hardware chain as a master bus compressor. When working in Ableton, however, I love the Vulf compressor for the convenience of not having to route the audio signal out to an external effects chain and back into the Daw. My master bus starts with an EQ8 just to take out any ugly frequencies, and then passes into the Vulf compressor to glue everything together, before entering the rest of my relatively simple chain.

After the Vulf compressor, it hits the stock Ableton Glue compressor that further solidifies the track, and tames the dynamics, while adding some gain. Following the glue compressor is the stock saturation plugin that adds the tiniest bit of distortion and adds some high end that you initially lose from the Vulf Compressor. Finally, an adaptive EQ just to make some final minor adjustments, before the limiter that brings the track up to the ideal loudness. I tend to work from beginning to end all in the same session, because I find it easier to get the sound I want at the end of the signal chain by having the ability to go back and tweak things while the master chain is processing everything. I have this master chain saved as a preset in Ableton, and it's there every time I open a new session. Other than some minor tweaking from track to track, it stays pretty consistent, which helps all of my beats to have a similar sound and texture.

5.3: Releasing Tracks

Once the track is done and exported, it's a pretty simple process to get my music out to the world. I put all of my music on Soundcloud and Bandcamp, and any full length releases also go on streaming. I've found that Distrokid makes the process relatively painless, and that it's far easier to get music onto Spotify than I thought. I don't put everything I make onto streaming, however, due to how poorly streaming services pay. I can make \$10 from one person buying one of my tapes on Bandcamp, but to make that same amount of money, I would need 2,290 streams on Spotify. Because of that, I generally don't feel the need to put my music onto streaming. As of my time writing this, I have one project on Spotify, and four on Bandcamp, and to earn what I've made from Bandcamp on Spotify, I would need thousands and thousands of streams. Besides the poor compensation, I also don't want to have to fight with the copyright issues that come with releasing sampled music onto streaming platforms.

[My Sampling Manifesto](#)

_____I personally feel that the copyright law surrounding sampling is ridiculous. Visual collage, the art of cutting up existing images and combining them with other images is considered a protected art form, similar to parody. It makes no sense to me that sampling, which is literally the sonic equivalent of visual collage, is not seen in the same light. Using a little snippet of the wrong person's song can land you with lawsuits for "damages" and claims to whatever royalties you have made from your track. The only legal way around it is to go through the incredibly annoying process of sample clearance through which you go to whoever owns the rights to each song you have sampled, and work out a deal with them in order to have their permission to sample their music. Some artists don't mind, some will want a flat fee out front (usually starting around \$500), some will want a songwriting credit for a share of the royalties, and some will just refuse to allow a producer to release said song. For larger artists, or anyone backed by a label, this usually isn't an issue, as either they have the resources to pay for the clearance, or the label will negotiate on behalf of the artist. For independent artists such as myself, we're left with three options:

1. Go through the clearance process (generally horribly expensive for the average person)
2. Don't release the song
3. Release the song and hope you don't get caught

I choose option #3. Realistically, if I don't blow up, there's a good chance that I won't get caught, and even if I did, it wouldn't be worth the court fees to try to stop me unless I were somehow pulling large streaming numbers. As long as I can alter a sample drastically enough through chopping, pitching, reversing, and time stretching to the point where it's relatively unrecognizable as the original source material, I will probably be fine. It's a risk I'm willing to take, as I put a lot of effort into transforming samples away from its origin into something new. I

also do my best to avoid sampling anything remotely popular or easily recognizable. Will I get sued? Maybe. Do I care? Not really. If I get caught, the way I see it, that's kind of a good thing honestly. That means enough people were listening to my music that eventually someone who was familiar enough with the original sample was able to catch me.

6. Reflections

2020-2021 has been a pretty horrible time for musicians all over the world. Our industry was destroyed overnight, the ways we normally paid our bills were put on hold, and forced so many of us to adapt to a new world where live performance wasn't an option. Suddenly, we all had to adapt to this "new normal" because of the coronavirus, where remote recording and teaching were basically the only ways to continue earning in these times. However, I did manage to find a small silver lining in these dark times, where I had the time and opportunity to really dive into recording and production technology, and really immerse myself in the music that I loved, but didn't know how to make. As soon as Berklee in Boston shut down during my last semester and everything went remote, I knew that I had to capitalize on the time that the live music industry was shut down, and really began to focus on practicing, writing, and producing, and when the last minute opportunity to come study production in Valencia (thanks Magda!), I knew this was my chance to finally learn and create my own produced music.

This year has consisted of hundreds of hours in Ableton, or playing with samplers, or researching the methods of other producers in the pursuit of finding methods that work for me and the music that I want to make, and it's been such an amazing experience, starting from scratch in May 2020, to now a full year later with a few different projects released, and much more on the way. I've grown so much in discipline and work ethic, both in production and as an instrumentalist; every time I hit a plateau, I just kept working and practicing until I pushed

through it and made it out on the other side. I've found that I'm a lot more patient with myself when learning new things, at least far more patient than I was a year ago. Having gotten the first releases out of the way a few months ago, it's been an incredible journey learning how to finish a project from start to finish, a lesson that I'm also taking along with me into my instrumental music as well, as I continue to compass and prepare to record my first acoustic release soon. When I finally set my sights on what I wanted my complete CE to look like, I thought that I may have been getting ahead of myself, shooting for a 20+ track beat tape, but I far surpassed the amount of material necessary for this project, and have certainly exceeded my expectations of what I thought I would be able to learn in this short span of time.

Setting my limitation of only trying to use samples from Europe, primarily around the Mediteranean region, was a wonderful challenge that really exposed me to so much music I would have never encountered, and really forced me to think outside the box as I tried to work with styles of music I wasn't accustomed to sampling. In my normal work, I look for samples from the Black American idiom, but really having to dig into the popular music of Greece, Spain, etc. was such a wonderful journey, and really opened my ears to new sonic possibilities within my music, and has given me so many other sources to draw inspiration from. I'm grateful for the opportunity I've had over this past year to really dig into sampling and production and hip hop, and I can't wait to get to work on the next project, and start collaborating with other artists/rappers/producers in the future.

6.1 Next Steps

_____ This tape will be my first album-length release, and will be released on all streaming platforms and for sale on Bandcamp. Once back in the US, I will continue to pursue producing music for myself and for others, and this tape will be a nice example of what I am capable of, for

others that may be interested in collaborating with me. I obviously love instrumental Hip Hop, but at the end of the day I want to be producing entire projects for rappers who also love the sounds of alternative and experimental hip hop. A lot of my favorite Hip Hop projects were produced by one person; Madding Villainy, NxWorries, the Alchemist and Freddie Gibbs, etc, all stem from a combination of one rapper and one producer, and that's the kind of project that I will be making in the future. At the end of the day, this is really just the beginning. Knxwledge has over 100 releases on Bandcamp to his name, and with the amount of work and research that has gone into not only the Culminating Experience project, but myself as an artist, I don't think I'll be that far behind in a few years.

7. Bibliography

Feupha, Boiler Room. "Mndsgn & Knxwledge - Breakfast with Ringgo 001 [2014, Full

Breakfast]." YouTube. YouTube, December 6, 2020.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXcj10E4fHo&ab_channel=MoaiGardenMoaiGarden.

Foisey., "✖ Foisey - spirit_whops. (Feminine Edition) [FULL ALBUM] ✖ [sf]," SleepyFunder.

April 23, 2018, Youtube Video, 23:18, <https://youtu.be/zuRULeJHIk8>

Knxwledge Interview Part 1. YouTube. YouTube, 2019.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpSPORomwhw&t=175s&ab_channel=VersatileVerbeckVersatileVerbeck.

Knxwledge Interview Part 2. YouTube. YouTube, 2019.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fS2mInZSvQ

Knxwledge., "Knxwledge. - HX.PRT14_ [Full Album]," Proved Records, March 31, 2020,

Youtube Video, 39:47, <https://youtu.be/TRLZ0VGdkhU>

Knxwledge., "Knxwledge - 10,000 Proof EP (Full Album)," Stones Throw, June 22, 2020,

Youtube Video, 25:18, <https://youtu.be/yAb8AyN6t64>

LEEM LIZZY, "Leem Lizzy CONTROLLERISE SET 2020 Butter Trilogy 3," LEEM LIZZY,

June 16 2020, Youtube Video, 29:44, <https://youtu.be/vUBxszOnNMY>

Madlib, "Madlib - Sound Ancestors (Full Album)," Madlib Invazion, January 29, 2021, Youtube

Video, 41:18, <https://youtu.be/eyRw2zqesSk>

Sorcinelli, Gino. "Beatmaking, Racism, and White Supremacy." Micro-Chop. Micro-Chop, June 1, 2020. <https://microchop.substack.com/p/beatmaking-racism-and-white-supremacy>.

STLNDRMS, "BEATS+CHILL sessions | STLNDRMS live SP404 set." STLNDRMS, March 30, 2017, Youtube Video, 15:29, <https://youtu.be/UfJJybUgdis>

You Suck at Producing, 11 September, 2013, Youtube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/c/yousuckatproducing/featured>