

Berklee College of Music

The Artist as a Producer and Entrepreneur

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of

Master of Music in Contemporary Performance (Production Concentration)

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July 2021

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Abstract

This project dives deep into the processes of music production and distribution, and it aims to explore how the state of the art tools and technologies can support an independent artist like me to successfully manage both of them. As musicians, our responsibility often ends when the music gets created, but what happens if we want to take the lead as producers of ourselves and utilize all our technological resources to obtain the desired sounds? If we want to be entrepreneurial and upload our music on digital stores, how can we be sure that our music is protected, or be aware of all the royalties that it is generating once released and of how to collect them as independent artists? These, among other questions, are the treated themes of this project, that was practically executed through the production of five songs; to fulfil the purpose of the project, one of the songs was entirely produced by me using all the knowledge and experience acquired during my year at Berklee Valencia, and another one was registered with a performing rights organization, released, marketed and promoted by me, with the knowledge acquired through research, and through the attendance of webinars and workshops. I truly believe that the achievements of this project can support my future artistic career, and that they might be of interest to other artists that want to gain more responsibility in the production process of their work or in managing their own music business.

Keywords: Music production, music distribution, independent artist, artistic career, managing

1. Introduction

Music always triggered my curiosity, and even though I do not come from a family of musicians or artists, I can recall several ways in which I interacted with music during my childhood, from listening to the stereo until I fell asleep, to recording songs on the radio with audio-cassettes to be able to listen back to them. A clear connection with music only came towards the end of my childhood though, when I had to study the basics of music theory at school and as I started to play my first notes on instruments like the flute or the keyboard.

In late 2006 a group of close friends decided to put together a pop-rock band, and one day I found myself assisting at one of their rehearsals: for me it was the first time ever seeing a live band playing. Mesmerized by the energy and vibrations in the room, I became a constant spectator of the band's rehearsals and first performances. I was so motivated that I picked up an old classical guitar that my family had, and I started to try to learn guitar both with the online resources that I could find and with my friends' help; becoming better and better at playing some of the songs that the band was rehearsing and that I was in love with at that time (Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven", to name one), I decided to save up some money and buy my very first electric guitar. Teaching myself I achieved a good instrumental technique since the very beginning of my musical journey, thanks to the extensive resources available online: in a matter of months I became the lead guitarist of my friends' band.

From then on, music kept changing my life, and it became a growing vocation. I had the opportunity to play live with more and more bands and projects, having the occasion to learn from other musicians and to gather feedback from a live audience. Performing in blues and pop-rock bands for several years around the country, from clubs to festivals, gave me the

opportunity to experiment the beauty of improvisation, and to understand the ways in which I needed to master my own instrument. Composing originals with pop-rock bands and duos I went through the creative process of singles, EPs and albums, and as a consequence I started to create my own ideas and to wonder about my own artistic intention.

While I was starting to be involved in more and more musical projects, I decided to continue advancing my instrumental technique and to pursue private studies in music theory, ear training, harmony and improvisation with teachers and mentors Vincenzo Maurogiovanni and Ciro Manna. Furthermore, I started developing the need of a formal education in music, to refine my musicianship and to confront all of that knowledge that I was crafting on my own within a community of students of music like me.

In 2013 I signed my first contract as a professional musician, performing in the musical productions of PortAventura (Barcelona, Spain), where I had the opportunity to gain incredible stage experience, and to learn several aspects of being a professional of that level, collaborating with singers and dancers from all over the world, and with artists and acrobats from Cirque du Soleil.

I was developing my musical career in parallel with my education in mechanical and aeronautical engineering, and after my graduation in 2018 I successfully auditioned for the company Princess Cruises as an house-band musician: thanks to this opportunity for two years I travelled all over the world and I refined my professional skills as a performer in a vast variety of genres and instrumentations, performing classical, jazz, big band, Dixieland, pop, rock, Motown and many more genres on a daily basis.

Through these international experiences, living in Spain for a total of one year and at sea for a total of two, I was exposed to a unique fusion of cultures, experiences, and musical styles, which greatly influenced my musicianship and creativity. Through this path I was able to continue refining my artistry, improving my compositional process over the years, and managing to create original compositions that represent my expressive intentions better and better. Being exposed to such a dynamic change of environments, I found the best practical solution in performing my compositions on the acoustic guitar, which always enables me to perform solo regardless of the surroundings and of the musicians that I am working with at any moment. As a matter of fact I decided to record my first album entirely on the acoustic guitar, and I released it independently at the end of 2019 with the name “The Unconventional”.

Even though I was satisfied with my artistic decisions after the release, I started wondering if recording or performing my compositions with a broader instrumentation could support my artistic vision, enriching it in terms of sound and expression.

Furthermore, managing the album release on my own, I understood that there are many processes to be aware of and many questions to be answered when it comes to releasing music as an independent artist, especially in today’s quickly changing music industry.

2. Proposed Culminating Experience

This project is aimed to dive deep into the processes that music undergoes after its creation in the modern world of music, and to understand how those processes can support my development as an independent artist.

The deliverables of this culminating experience will be the recording and production of five songs, and the preparation of a release plan to support the entrepreneurial aspect of my artistic project in the long run.

One of the five songs will be completely produced by me respectively within Pro Tools, Logic Pro and Ableton Live, with the aim of exploring the possibilities of each of DAW in relation to my creative process, and of understanding how mixing and mastering, sampling, automation and other sound design techniques can relate to the recording process of my compositions. The remaining songs will be recorded with Pro Tools and produced in collaboration with students from MPTI, with the objective of contributing to the action-based research through the observation of other producers and sound engineers' ideas and approaches, and their subsequent application to my other works within this project. I want to focus particularly on the jazz hip-hop and lo-fi genres and instrumentation, gaining insights about how other instruments like drums, bass and keyboard perform in the chosen genres, strengthening my ability to own the recording process as a producer.

Another goal of this project is to define the essential steps that should be taken after the moment of the creation of a master recording, through the study of fields like copyright, royalties, publishing, social media management, data insights, and playlist curation, to gain a deeper understanding of how each and every one of them relates to a musical release of my artistic project. In particular, I want to solidify my ability to prepare a consistent release process, creating the release campaign of one of the songs in collaboration with GEMB students.

In summary, this work will contribute to support the development of my career as an independent artist, enriching its possibilities in terms of sound identity through the technological

tools explored, and in terms of business development thanks to a deeper knowledge of the artist management and marketing fields.

3. Objective

My objective is to support the expression of my artistic intention exploring the sound possibilities of my compositions in terms of technology and instrumentation in the jazz hip-hop and lo-fi genres, along with defining the fundamental steps of a solid dissemination of my art as an independent entrepreneur.

I have always believed that the successful musician has to look further, a step beyond the creative process, by being aware of the technology that is surrounding the recording and delivery processes.

Personally, after the completion of this project, I want to become more skilled as a producer and sound designer of my own work and as an independent artist in the broader sense of its definition, by defining the basis of an improved business model in order to sustain my artistic career after this project completion.

3.1 Sub-Objectives

The following list indicates the areas of work in which I will be operating throughout the project, and it is inclusive of all the fields that will support the fulfilment of the objective.

- 1. Research**

- a. Music analysis**

This will include listening to and analyzing several songs from artists that I refer to, in the jazz hip-hop and lo-fi genres.

b. Sound engineering techniques

This will consist of analyzing techniques like filtering, sampling and warping, which are characteristic to the explored genres. The processes in this area will be informed by the collaborative work with MPTI students.

2. Creative

a. Composition

This will include the creation of five original compositions in line with my artistic vision.

b. Arrangement

This area of work will include the experimentation of different arrangements of my compositions, with the aim of achieving the purpose outlined in the objective of this project.

3. Production

a. Recording techniques

This sub-objective relates to the exploration of practices that are used in the recording studio for the production of songs in the lo-fi style, with particular reference to warping and looping.

b. Mixing and Mastering

This will consist of applying elements of the mixing and mastering processes, like automation, to understand how they relate to the production of the songs recorded for this project and to me as a producer in general.

This area will be informed by the collaborative work with MPTI students.

4. Dissemination

a. Music law

This sub-objective is related to the study of legal subjects like copyright, music publishing and royalties, and how they relate to my work.

b. Social media management

This will consist of the evaluation of my online presence through data analysis in collaboration with GEMB students, with the subsequent application of online resources (data insights) and computational tools (programming) for its improvement.

c. Marketing plan

This will involve the collaboration with GEMB students, with the creation of a release strategy for one of the songs produced in this project.

4. Methodology

My methodology is of the “Action-based” type, combined with the addition of “Collaborative work”.

Also known as the test-error approach, the action-based methodology will allow me to learn from my errors and/or from the observation of other people’s workflow and techniques, and to apply the learned concepts right away in the remaining components of the project; the action-based research is intended to improve the efficacy of my working abilities and my knowledge, with specific orientation towards the fields of focus of this work. Through the development of this project, the results obtained from each process will be immediately re-utilized to inform subsequent ones, with the result of gradually improving my skills.

As a consequence the collaborative work methodology will be essential in informing the research processes through the consultation of MPTI and GEMB students, along with other available material resources and data, with the aim of improving my understanding of production and music business practices, and of refining those practices according to the so-known process of “triangulation”.¹

4.1 Resources

- Spaces:
 - Rehearsal rooms
 - Recording studios (AKSS, STADs)
- Tech tools:
 - Laptop

¹ Caulley, Darrel N. "Action Research: A Methodology for Change and Development." *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2007, p. 229+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A179135610/GPS?u=mclin_b_berklee&sid=GPS&xid=6a049abd. Accessed 24 Nov. 2020.

- Software (Notation software/DAWs)
- Audio devices
- Midi-keyboard
- Organizational tools:
 - Project management tools (Sharing systems, cloud, websites)
- Human Resources:
 - Musicians/artists
 - Producers
 - Sound engineers
 - Students
 - Educators
 - Mentors

4.2 Plan of Action, Delivery Timeline and Processes

4.2.1 Plan of Action

There are two main components of this project: the production and the music business part. In order to complete them I will have to follow the individual steps outlined in the “Processes” section of this paper, constantly bearing in mind the stated objective.

To achieve the deliverables of this project in a timely manner, I have created a timeline (based on the deadline of May 31st, 2021), which is outlined below.

4.2.2 Delivery Timeline

Activity/Process	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June
Research	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active		
Operational	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	
Reference analysis	Active									
Composing	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active					
Basics recording		Active	Active	Active	Active	Active				
Overdubs			Active	Active	Active	Active	Active			
Mixing			Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active		
Mastering				Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active	
Legal		Active	Active	Active	Active	Active				
Business/marketing			Active	Active	Active	Active	Active			

4.2.3 Processes

The processes below define the step-by-step path to achieve the completion of this project, and consist in the following:

1. PRODUCTION:

- Musical research activity:
 - Listening and analysis of reference recordings
 - Creation of a reference emotional timeline
- Creative activity:
 - Composition of the project songs
 - Instrumentation selection/arrangement (solo, trio or quartet)
- Operational activity:
 - Arranging of the project songs
 - Lead sheet/arrangement preparation for each song
 - People management
 - Rehearsals and studio session scheduling
 - Analysis of reference tracks
 - Input list and floor plan generation

- Basic recording session
- Overdubs session(s)
- Editing session(s)
- Mixing of the tracks
- Mastering of the tracks
- Collaborative work (MPTI):
 - Pegasus Project
 - Phoenix Project
 - Pelican Project
 - Flamingo Project

2. MUSIC BUSINESS:

- Research activity:
 - Copyright and creative rights
 - Workshops
 - External webinars
 - One-on-ones with mentors
 - Career advising

- ❑ Operational activity:
 - ❑ Legal (copyright and creative rights)
 - ❑ Performing rights organization registration
 - ❑ Publishing administrator registration
 - ❑ Social media management
 - ❑ Data analysis
- ❑ Collaborative work (GEMB):
 - ❑ Meetings with my marketing team
 - ❑ Single release plan creation

4.3 Justification

With the improvement of the production process of my songs, I aim to create a stronger connection between my compositions and the world, for the benefit of the audience that will enjoy my music. Moreover, with a deeper knowledge of the music business and a more sustainable business plan, I aim to reach a larger audience in the years to come.

Along with supporting the professional development of my career through building production, sound-design and business development skills, this project is aimed to inspire the other artists who will come across it (or its deliverables), redefining the technological and entrepreneurial tools that independent artists should possess, or at least have the knowledge of, and creating a role model for other artists. In fact, the outcomes of this project would be

beneficial and relevant to those musicians, artists and music producers interested in the technological tools and in the music business fields investigated: even if the deliverables might not be of direct interest, the processes and organizational work which lead to them might be.

5. Execution

This project was executed through the production of five original songs and through the release and the promotion of one of them. The development of the project included the processes indicated in the methodology section, and each song contributed to the objective of this project in different manners that are discussed in detail in this section of the paper.

5.1 Production

5.1.1 Afternoon Vibes

The composition of “Afternoon Vibes” was completed in two weeks, as I had to create a new song as part of the Pegasus Project, a project that has been developed within the “Recording Artist Ensemble” class (fall semester, 2020) and supervised by professor Liz Teutsch.

The arrangement process was led successfully thanks to a clear communication with the selected musicians, the use of reference tracks and, most importantly, a lead sheet prepared by me after the completion of the composition.

The demo creation was supported by Nicholas Phang: thanks to his knowledge of Ableton he was capable of supporting me to better express my artistic intentions through the demo creation. As well, as a producer, Nicholas helped in communicating the vision of the song to the musicians during the rehearsals, particularly by improving the groove and the overall sound, by making it closer to what I was looking for as an artist.

During the basics recording session carried out in the AKSS there was an important challenge that the whole team faced and that made me grow as a leader of the session: the console of the recording studio stopped working for an hour, creating a stressful situation in which nobody was able to know when the team would be able to continue the recording. In this situation, I made the decision of setting a deadline: if the console did not start working properly again within an hour, we would cancel the session and postpone it to another day, as it would have been too stressful to record in the remaining time if that deadline was passed; luckily the console problem was fixed by the Berklee Valencia production team and we successfully completed the session. A lesson learned from this situation was that it is always important to allow for extra time within the schedule, so that there is sufficient time to face and (possibly) solve unexpected problems.

Elliot Jensen led the editing process, helping me in better understanding the approach to the process in general. Thanks to working with him I had the opportunity to deepen my knowledge of the use of specific functions of Pro Tools like groups, playlists, fades and crossfades.

The overdubs of the song were produced and engineered by Sergio Ruiz and Nicholas Phang. I personally recorded the electric bass and keyboard parts, becoming more confident in the process and of my ability to record both of the overdubbed instruments.

Leading this project I learned a lot about the production process in general and, specifically, I contributed to the mixing process defining with Nicholas Phang how to use equalizers (filters), samples, and automation creatively and in order to obtain specific effects that are characteristic of today's lo-fi and jazz hip-hop music. An interesting outcome for me was to

see how through the production process we were able to decide whether to leave a section of the song natural and improvised or to give it a more loopy and simplified effect thanks to the use of warping and loop functions of Ableton Live which, again, is inspired by the style of music explored in this project.

The team for this production consisted of:

- Musicians: Marco Pisani (electric guitar and electric bass), Robert Lee (upright bass), Ashley Luo (drums).
- Production: Nicholas Phang (producer), Sergio Ruiz (sound engineer), Elliot Jensen (assistant producer), Wei Xiao (assistant sound engineer).

5.1.2 August Greetings

“August Greetings” was born as an acoustic guitar piece, and it was completely rearranged by me to take full advantage of the collaborative opportunity offered by the Phoenix project and to explore the artistic possibilities of developing my compositions in the jazz hip-hop and lo-fi genre. The Phoenix project, which was the second recording project of the “Recording Artist Ensemble” class, was also an occasion to solidify the interplay with Miquel Alvarez and Tetyana Haraschuk, who became part of my trio project, starting with this recording.

From the production perspective, I had the opportunity to apply the previously learned lessons in the field of comping and editing, as I worked side by side with the producer Sergio Ruiz. Thanks to this close collaboration I deepened my knowledge of Pro Tools features like shortcuts for editing and the use of playlists. More importantly, I understood how to use these features practically to make the comping and editing processes more efficient.

The completion of this project led to a very satisfying production that supported my artistic research with the achievement of a great sound inspired by the tracks referenced in the production. Furthermore, it gave birth to the idea of arranging my compositions both for acoustic guitar and for a larger ensemble with more modern sounds and grooves, inspired by the jazz hip-hop and lo-fi scene.

The team for this production consisted of:

- Musicians: Marco Pisani (electric guitar), Miquel Alvarez (electric bass), Tetyana Haraschuk (drums).
- Production: Sergio Ruiz and Marco Pisani (producers), Yatharth Sharma (sound engineer).

5.1.3 Particular Sunrise

The recording of “Particular Sunrise” was the occasion for me to put into practice many of the lessons learned throughout the previous recording projects, as I felt confident as a leader in managing one of the largest teams I had the chance to work with until then. Thanks to the experience gained, I was able to constantly keep an eye on the timeline and schedule, while not forgetting about the artistic side of it. Moreover, I used the artistic idea developed in the previous Phoenix project, using an older song that I had arranged for acoustic guitar.

The composition “Particular Sunrise” was completed in 2018, and the acoustic guitar arrangement was recorded and released as part of my first solo album “The Unconventional” (2019). Through the Pelican project (part of the “Applied Advanced Production Projects” class,

second semester) I had the opportunity to try to arrange and record an alternative version of this composition, experimenting in the genre explored throughout this thesis project.

Based on the lesson learned in the recording of another composition, “Fat Keys” (see paragraph 5.1.5), I made a particularly efficient use of reference tracks for the musicians, and I inspired them with very specific elements:

- the style of playing of the rhythm section of Tom Misch and Youssef Dayes.²
- the grooves and intention of pianist and producer Rob Araujo.³

These elements, along with the support of the co-producer Baptiste Watiez, made the rehearsal process very effective.

For the basics session I had the opportunity to involve a video team, who shot a video of the session and for which I allocated additional time within the basics schedule. The schedule preparation, the cautious time management, the communication with the musicians, co-producer and sound engineer and video team, and the preparation of individual charts for the musicians, were all elements that made the basics session successful. Part of this recording session was used to record samples of the whole drum kit, so that they could be used in the future to create a drum part with a virtual instrument, with the aim of obtaining a different type of sound and of taking the experimentation of this project even further.

² Tom Misch, singer and guitarist, “Lift Off”, track 7 on *What Kinda Music*, Beyond the Groove, 2020.

³ Rob Araujo, pianist, “Wavedash”, track 1 on *Hybrid Eyes*, Rob Araujo, 2016.

Using all the knowledge acquired in the previous semester I took charge as a producer to complete all of the comping and editing of the track, obtaining a very satisfactory result that was appreciated by the musicians, by the co-producer and by the sound engineer.

The mix was done by the sound engineer with my remote collaboration, as this was preferred by the sound engineer.

One of the problems encountered during this project was that one of the drums overheads was improperly recorded during the basics session. After I noticed the problem during the editing process, I communicated it to the sound engineer who found a solution, managing to complete the song production with the satisfaction of the whole team.

Artistically I was very satisfied with the song, as the sound characterized by the trio with Miquel Alvarez and Tetyana Haraschuk in the Phoenix project was enriched by the featuring of Marc Olivier-Poingt on the piano.

The team for this production consisted of:

- Musicians: Marco Pisani (electric guitar), Miquel Alvarez (electric bass), Tetyana Haraschuk (drums), Marc-Olivier Poingt (piano).
- Production: Marco Pisani and Baptiste Watiez (producers), Rodrigo Branco (sound engineer), Kanishk Seth and Ryan Tram (video production).

5.1.4 Mother and Sister

The song “Mother and Sister” is another composition extracted from my 2019 solo album “The Unconventional”, which I decided to reinterpret in a trio version to explore the sound

possibilities of the blend of folk guitar with the typical jazz rhythm section (drums with brushes and upright bass).

The recording of this song was self-produced through the Flamingo project (second project of the “Applied Advanced Production Projects” class), with the support of MPTI student Guillermo Montalvan (sound engineer).

Even if the style of the arrangement differed from the preceding songs, I had the opportunity to use the production skills that I acquired through the whole project, applying the action-based methodology. Furthermore, I understood the last step of the production process through collaborative work by assisting and contributing to the mastering process of the song. The mastering was done in the AKSS and with the track “Come Away With Me” by Norah Jones as a reference.⁴ Moreover, through the recording of this song I applied the experience gained through the collaboration with the video team that shot video during the basic session of the previous song: using two lights, four different cameras and a video editing software I self-produced a video of the recording, which was used to support the release plan and that is available as a deliverable of this thesis project.

The timeline of the project was managed entirely by me according to a release schedule that I developed in collaboration with the GEMB students I collaborated with as part of this culminating experience, and it was tightly adhered to.

The team for this production consisted of:

⁴ Norah Jones, singer, “Come Away With Me”, track 5 on *Come Away With Me*, Blue Note Records, 2002

- Musicians: Marco Pisani (acoustic guitar), Miquel Alvarez (upright bass), Tetyana Haraschuck (drums).
- Production: Marco Pisani (producer) Guillermo Montalvan (sound engineer, mastering engineer).

5.1.5 Fat Keys

The song “Fat Keys” is based on a guitar loop that inspired me while I was searching for lo-fi-sounding effects with my pedals.

I defined the overall idea and direction of the song by making a demo in Logic Pro. Thanks to the use of this DAW and to the previous collaborative experience in the Pegasus and Phoenix Projects, this demo-making process was significantly improved, and it led me to the creation of a demo that was much more expressive of my intention, giving me the confidence of having mastered this process for any future production.

In this song I took full control over the engineering and production processes, taking over the role of sound engineer in all of the stages, from basics to overdubs and mixing, hence taking full responsibility for the choice of the session scheduling and instrumentation, the choice of the microphones, the preparation of the input list and floor plan as they were needed, the patching and gain staging in the studio, along with the recording of the other musicians; as a producer, I gave direction to the musicians that recorded on the track, I did the comping and the editing of the track and I led the mixing and mastering processes.

Using Pro Tools I recorded the electric guitar part that inspired the whole song and I overdubbed the electric bass, as I felt much more confident in recording the bass parts for this

song after the previous experience in the Pegasus project overdubs. For this arrangement I made the production choice of recording two different drum kits, booking two different overdub sessions with drummers Nicholas Phang and Tetyana Haraschuk.

For the mixing process I decided to use equalizers and automation in Pro Tools creatively, taking advantage, once again, of the experience gained from the collaborative work in the previous projects; the result that I obtained was representative of my artistic intention, but it was not satisfying either production-wise, as it could have been much more expressive, or sound-wise, as it could have reached a higher level.

At the end of the second semester, I imported the stems into Ableton Live and re-mixed and mastered the song as part of the “Electronic Dance Music” class that I took with professor Elysha Zaide (spring semester, 2021). In this step of the production I was able to apply the experience gained from the previous collaborative works, and the lessons learned from the class “Production Concepts for the Contemporary Performer”. These, among others, are the tools that helped me to reach the final result presented:

- More than 100 Ableton plugins
- More than 10 automation lanes
- Chains of compressors and equalizers on the same track
- Multiple multiband dynamics plugins
- “New York” compression technique on bass and drums
- “Utility gain” to automate track volumes

- Effect racks
- Chains within the effect racks to have a dry and wet chain of effects on a track
- Sidechain compression:
 - The guitar was fed into the keys
 - The kick drum was fed into the bass
- Extensive use of reverb, resonators, overdrives and other plugins to obtain more characteristic sounds
- Mixing techniques learned (groups, auto-panning, stereo image)
- Mastering techniques learned (referencing to a mastered track, use of limiter, equalizing)

Producing this song I experienced some difficulties in giving the musicians directions during the takes. I understood the importance of the use of reference tracks and of clear, detailed explanations, as I noticed how the lack of clear instructions can highly impact the direction of the recording session and, as a result, of the song in general.

The final result was satisfying and I consider it representative of the culmination of the production part of this project, as this song's production was developed throughout the whole year applying the lessons learned producing the other songs in collaboration with other students.

The team of this production consisted of:

- Musicians: Marco Pisani (electric guitar, electric bass), Nicholas Phang (drums), Tetyana Haraschuck (drums).

- Production: Marco Pisani (producer, sound engineer)

5.2 Music Business

5.2.1 Copyright, Publishing, and Music Rights Research

The first step of the “Music Business” component of this thesis project consisted in a detailed study of copyright, public performance rights, publishing, mechanical royalties, and of the role that they play for an independent artist like me in today’s music industry.

This process was executed through a blend of research and participation in the following:

- Seminars and one-on-one meetings with professor Peter Dyson
- Workshops and one-on-one meetings organized by McKinley Short and Stine Glismand of the International Career Center at Berklee Valencia
- Webinars held by Songtrust.⁵

Because of the vast nature of the subject only the relevant outcomes of the study are outlined in this section; specifically, the following points are the ones that are relevant in respect to the entrepreneurial aspect of this work: understanding the rights of an artist and avoiding the generation of unmatched and unclaimed royalties that could end up becoming “black box” royalties and remain uncollected by the artist (unallocated royalties).

5.2.1.1 Understanding Music Rights

⁵ Songtrust, “Music Publishing 101”, posted by Songturst, June 15, 2019, YouTube Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_n7qy11D_U

A song becomes the intellectual property of the artist who creates it the moment it starts existing in a tangible form (for example a recorded demo or a lead sheet). Copyright law varies by country, therefore it is very important for an artist to be aware of the existing regulations in the artist's country, and to consider whether to register a song with the national copyright office or not. There are two parts of the copyright, the sound recording and the underlying composition, both of which can generate royalties.

5.2.1.2 Understanding Royalties

A sound recording generates sound recording royalties when the song is reproduced (physical copy, download, stream), which are collected by the distributor of the song who then makes them available to the artist and/or label, depending on the publishing deal (if any).

There are two main types of royalties generated by a song composition, the public performance royalties and the mechanical royalties.

The public performance royalties are generated anytime the song is publicly performed; they are divided into the writer's share and the publisher's share, and they are usually collected by the Performing Rights Organizations (PROs). While the writer's share of the royalties is made available to the copyright owner by the PRO itself, the publisher's share might be paid to a publisher (or publisher administrator) and then made available to the copyright owner, depending on the type of publishing deal.

The mechanical royalties are generated anytime the song is physically or digitally reproduced (downloaded or streamed), and they are collected by collection societies like the Harry Fox Agency (HFA) for the U.S. or other Collective Management Organizations (CMOs), depending on the territory's terms and restrictions. These royalties are made available to the

artist through the publisher (or publishing administrator) that is entitled to collect them in those territories on behalf of the artist depending upon the agreement of the society with the territory and with the artist.

5.2.1.3 Understanding Metadata

There are two codes that uniquely identify a song: the ISRC (International Standard Recording Code), which identifies its specific sound recording, and the ISWC (International Standard Work Code), which identifies the composition of the song. The ISRC is generated by the distributor of the sound recording while the ISWC is generated by the collection society (PRO) where the song composition is registered.

5.2.1.4 Getting all the Royalties

The most important lesson learned was understanding that registering with a PRO and registering with a publishing administrator (or publisher) is essential to be able to register an original composition to their respective catalogs and to receive all the money generated from the public performance and mechanical royalties, which will be collected worldwide by the selected societies once the composer registers their song. This process enables the selected PRO to collect the public performance royalties (writer's share) generated by the public performances of the song, and it enables the selected publishing administrator to collect the mechanical royalties and the public performance royalties (publisher's share) generated by the mechanical or public reproduction of the song; as the above mentioned societies collect such royalties on behalf of the song's composer connecting with hundreds of entities worldwide (i.e. The Harry Fox Agency for the collection of mechanical royalties), they do so for a fee. In addition, the composer has full

guarantee of collecting on all the deserved royalties once the song is released, along with the master recording royalties that will be collected directly from the song's distributor worldwide.

Therefore an important part of the execution was registering as a composer with IMRO (PRO) and with Songtrust (Publishing administrator), to register my compositions. The song "Mother and Sister" was registered as a composition on the websites of IMRO and Songtrust, to ensure that all the public performance and mechanical royalties generated from it will be collected by them.

A problem discovered during this process was that part of the royalties generated by my older compositions were not being collected by anyone, therefore they were ending up into the "black box" of royalties: after a waiting period of two to three years of remaining unallocated, these royalties would have been distributed by the collecting societies to their affiliated members (other composers) on a market share basis. Thanks to the existence of the waiting period (two to three years) I was able to solve this problem: my oldest release started generating royalties in the second half of 2018, therefore Songtrust and IMRO will still be able to collect most of the royalties generated by it (and by the subsequent releases).

5.2.2 Social Media Tools

Nowadays social media tools offer artists a way to virtually interact with their audience and to reach new fans.

5.2.2.1 Social Media Workshop

With the aim of defining a strategy that would support the release that is part of this thesis project I attended a workshop split in two meetings, led by GEMB students Zarrin Alam, Magda Jędrzejewska and Julia Amodeo.

The workshop supported me in better understanding:

- The most used social media platforms and their potential impact on my release campaign (Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Facebook)
- The tools that can be used to read the data available within the platforms:
 - Twitter analytics
 - Instagram insights
 - YouTube analytics
 - Facebook business suite
- Ideas to engage with my audience through the individual platforms and to try to better understand my audience
- Specific tips to improve the efficiency of the use of the platforms:
 - Use of hashtags (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube)
 - Frequency of the posts
 - Ideal times for posting
 - Targeting the posts' type and format:

- Using vertical photos and videos on Instagram
- Posting pictures instead of videos on Youtube
- Using longer captions on Facebook

5.2.2.2 Automation and Coding

Another important step of this part consisted in researching how the technology tools and skills available could be used to support or improve the marketing side of a release campaign. The main focus of this research was on the use of programming languages and computer science in general.

The target was to develop a script to automate as many actions as possible on social media platforms using the (open source) coding language Python.⁶

The research process mainly involved understanding the libraries available online at the time of this project's execution, studying the Application Programming Interface (API) of every platform to understand the available features, and studying the possibilities of using Python code for automating tasks.⁷

The resulting code was a successfully-completed, functioning script in Python that, given username, password and the features of a post (photo, caption), logs into the chosen Instagram account and posts a picture with the desired caption at a given time of the day; furthermore, other

⁶ LinkedIn Learning. "Using Python for Automation." Accessed April 2021.
<https://www.linkedin.com/learning/using-python-for-automation/how-to-write-files?u=42>

⁷ freeCodeCamp.org, "APIs for Beginners - How to use an API (Full Course/Tutorial).", posted by freeCodeCamp.org, December 17, 2019, Youtube Video,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZvSYJdk-us>

functions of the utilized libraries were tested like following/unfollowing other users, getting information of other users and direct messaging other users.

Even though the obtained script was successfully written, it was not used for the release campaign of this culminating experience, as further testing is needed to avoid problems with the Instagram API which could develop into restrictions placed by Instagram on my artist account.

5.2.3 The Release Campaign

The release campaign timeline was developed in collaboration with GEMB students Zarrin Alam and Magda Jędrzejewska. The aim of the campaign was to release the song on a selected date and to work backwards from that to define the essential channels, steps and assets needed for the marketing purposes of the release.

The channels used for the campaign were Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, and the main steps corresponded to defining the posting dates in which specific information was shared with the audience and in stating the assets needed for leading a successful release campaign.

5.2.3.1 The Assets

The following elements were used for the release campaign, and they were kept handy on the desktop of my portable computer for the duration of the campaign:

- Mastered audio track
- Artwork
- Music video

- Music video teaser (extracted from music video)
- Ads video (made using the canvas video and the artwork)
- Canvas (for Spotify for Artists)
- Vertical video for ads promotion (for Facebook Business Ads Manager)
- An official photo
- Document with all the useful artist's pages links and the song pre-save link
- Document with a brief description of the release

5.2.3.2 The Release Plan

The following consists in the final release plan used, agreed both with the GEMB team that took part to this project and with the advice of other industry professionals:

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Type of content</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Platform used</i>
15 days before	Audio track	Upload to distributor	Backstage (by Believe Digital)
14 days before	Photos, Videos	Maintain social media pages active with more frequent posting	Instagram, TikTok
10 days before	Text (Song description)	Pitch the song to Spotify editorial playlists	Spotify for Artists
	Canvas	Upload canvas for the song	Spotify for Artists

	Spotify playlist of the artist (i.e. “Marco Pisani radio”)	Upload “artist’s pick”	Spotify for Artists
5 days before	Official photo	Release announcement, copying pre save link in bio	Instagram
	Link	Pasting pre-save link in bio	TikTok, Instagram
	Official photo, link	Release announcement post with pre-save link	YouTube, Twitter, Facebook
	Official photo	Update bio and profile picture across socials and DSPs (digital store platforms)	Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, Twitch, Spotify for artists, Apple Music for artists, Amazon Music for artists
3 days before	Video teaser	Release announcement	Instagram, TikTok
	Video teaser, link	4 days Instagram campaign (Instagram stories) to generate traffic on the profile	Facebook Business Ads Manager
1 day before	Photos, videos	Instagram stories with all possible “behind the scenes” content (lead sheet shot, videos of the song recording, bloopers, collaborators’ photos, working moments, artwork making)	Instagram
Release date	Link	Pasting Spotify song link in bio	TikTok, Instagram
	Artwork	Release announcement	Instagram

		sending to the link in bio	
	Artwork, link	Release announcement with song link	YouTube, Facebook, Twitter
	Spotify canvas	Instagram story	Spotify, Instagram
	Ads video, link	10 days song save campaign (Instagram stories) to generate saves of the song on Spotify	Facebook Business Ads Manager
	Link	Send the song to main playlist curators' contacts (6)	Google Gmail, Facebook messenger, Instagram
1 day after	Video	Schedule video publication	YouTube, Facebook
		Pitching the song to other playlist curators' contacts (44)	Google Gmail, Facebook messenger, Instagram
2 days after	Video	Sharing the video on socials	Instagram, TikTok
3 days after	Link	Playlist pitching through curators' websites and remaining contacts (84)	Google Gmail, Facebook messenger, Instagram

6. Final Conclusions

6.1 Reflections

6.1.1 Production Reflections

Considering that the sonic research of an artist is a constantly evolving path, I am quite satisfied with the musical identity obtained in the four songs of this project where the

instrumentation is more experimental and inspired by the jazz hip-hop and lo-fi scene (“Afternoon Vibes”, “August Greetings”, “Particular Sunrise” and “Fat Keys”). I consider the sound and arrangement of “Particular Sunrise” to be a great achievement of this project; even though it has no electronic component in the instrumentation, its sound and feeling recall the characteristics of the genres explored, while the performed arrangement constitutes a strong original and artistic component of this song.

Upon completion of this project I still consider it challenging for me as a producer to obtain sounds that are, quality-wise, at the height of the modern productions that I took as a reference in the lo-fi and jazz hip-hop genre, but I definitely feel more confident in leading a team of collaborators that, with the right instructions, can obtain those sounds and achieve the desired result; furthermore all the production and sound-design tools explored in this project turned out to be powerful sources of inspiration that can make the production process a tool of creation that feeds back into the composition process, generating new ideas and, eventually, new songs.

Overall, I am more aware of the production process, and of its potential. Understanding the importance of the role of the producer was very relevant to me, as I was able to experience the impact that such a role can have on a song’s production in general; it was particularly interesting to play the role of producer in the tasks that are diametrically opposed to the ones of the musician. Additionally, being in the control room of the studio giving the musicians specific directions (and not being in the live room playing the song with them) was an eye-opening and valuable learning experience.

Referring to my artistic exploration in the jazz hip-hop and lo-fi genres, it was an impactful achievement for me to know that I can use the production tools and the knowledge acquired to re-interpret a composition or idea that was born as an acoustic guitar arrangement, and that I can use the acoustic guitar's open tunings and percussive elements to re-interpret a lo-fi-inspired composition or idea; this idea resulted a great source of creativity and it could become a powerful branding tool for my artistic career.

6.1.2 Music Business Reflections

It was very important to understand the role of collecting societies, and of knowing the different type of royalties: even if no artist should be going through the hard and time consuming task of getting in touch with every collecting society of every country of the world to collect their royalties, it is essential for an artist to know how the royalty collecting process works, so that they can delegate it to a chosen entity (CMO, PRO, publisher, publisher administrator) for every relevant type of royalty and/or share of a type of royalty, and access to what's due to them.

A very interesting outcome was understanding the relevance of the marketing placement of a release: looking at it as a product, a song performs better if its characteristic traits (mainly the genre and instrumentation) are in line with the market. In particular, the released song, "Mother and Sister" performed poorly in the playlist placement process compared to my older releases because, according to the playlist curators, the instrumentation of the song is peculiar in the folk-acoustic genre, and makes it difficult to place the product (song) in the market. Specifically the presence of drums along with the stringed instrument makes the song "not a good fit" for acoustic guitar focused playlists (where my older songs fit better), but the type of

instrumentation (particularly the absence of vocals) does not make it a good fit for indie-folk and folk playlists in general, where stringed instruments with vocals are preferred as instrumentation.

6.2 Results

6.2.1 Time Management and “Continuous Improvement”

These are all the processes followed during the execution of the release campaign, with the relative “time” needed to complete them; measuring the performance of this part of the project was very important to understand the actual time investment that I need as an independent artist-entrepreneur for a single release, and to have a detailed report that could be used in the future to apply the “continuous improvement” technique to reduce the “time” of the processes and increase my productivity as a result.⁸

<i>Process</i>	<i>Time</i>
Artwork creation	1 hour
Canvas creation	10 minutes
Video teaser editing	10 minutes
Posting across all socials (3)	20 minutes
Updating all socials and DSPs profile picture and bio	30 minutes
Ads video creation	15 minutes

⁸ Wikipedia. “Continual improvement process.” Accessed May 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continual_improvement_process

Creating Instagram campaign to generate traffic	20 minutes
Creating save campaign to generate saves of the song on Spotify	30 minutes
Posting stories on the release day	2 hours
Playlist pitching (main contacts - 6 pitches)	30 minutes
Playlist pitching (remaining contacts and websites - 128)	7 hours and 30 minutes
Scheduling video publication	30 minutes
Sharing video on socials	30 minutes
Total time investment:	14 hours and 55 minutes

The main areas in which time was invested during the release plan execution can be estimated to be (in order of relevance):

- Playlist pitching: 53,3 %
- Social Media activity: 26,7 %
- Graphic and administrative work: 20,0 %

6.2.2 Data Analysis

These are the main results extracted from the official Instagram and Spotify for Artists, which can be used for future reference to improve the impact of my release campaigns and the

general outreach of my releases. These data and statistics refer to the two weeks after the release of the song:

❑ Spotify for Artists.⁹

- Song streams: 186 (+ 0,74 %)
- Total catalogue streams: 25.200 (100 %)
- New followers: 26 (+ 4 %)
- Total followers: 607 (100 %)
- Main source of the song streams: my profile and catalog (38 %)
- Main countries of the song streams: United States (42), Spain (41), Italy (15)

❑ Instagram Insights.¹⁰

- Accounts reached: 85.300 (+ 2.122 % compared to the previous month)
- Interaction with content: 833 (+740 % compared to the previous month)
- Followers: 16.900 (+1.3 % compared to the previous month)
- Number of posts: 6 posts
- Number of stories: 112 stories
- Number of IGTV videos: 1 video

⁹ Spotify for Artists. “Managing your artist profile.” Accessed May 2021.
<https://artists.spotify.com>

¹⁰ Instagram. “View Account Insights on Instagram.” Accessed May 2021.
<https://help.instagram.com/1533933820244654>

Looking at the data extracted by Spotify for Artists it is clear how the impact of the song release over the overall catalogue is very minimal at the moment (less than one percent); however, the song has mainly been streamed by the followers and by the listeners that were directed to my catalogue during the release campaign, so there is still potential for the song to be added more and more to other listener's playlists, and to consequently have an higher impact on the the catalog's total streams.

On the other hand, the data reported by Instagram shows an outstanding performance of the posts and of the interaction with the audience in general (twenty times higher than the preceding month), which are all indicators of a well-executed marketing campaign. Furthermore, the main sources of Spotify streams of "Mother and Sister" were my profile and catalog, and the majority of the streams happened on the day of the release: this data clearly states the effectiveness of the campaign in directing my audience on social media to my Spotify profile, making them listen to the song and turning them into potential followers.

6.3 Future Developments

The creative outcome of this project can be leveraged with further investigation of my artistic identity, and it has huge potential to further enhance my overall creative process as an artist.

The technological tools explored, from specific plugins and techniques to specific social media platforms and content strategies, can all be of further support to improve both the creative and dissemination processes.

The drum samples recorded during the sessions can be used in the future to create unique sample packs that I can use to create drum parts when I will not be able to record with the

musicians with whom I have worked in this project; additionally, I recognize that even though the production part of this project was mainly inspired by genres with a strong electronic component, I preferred to work with the talented musicians who agreed to take part in the project to record live instruments; hence it would be beneficial to continue the exploration with the addition of more electronic instruments and tracks to my future productions.

The data collected in this project execution can be referred to to apply the continuous improvement technique with the aim of reducing the “time” of the single processes needed for the release; in this way I can obtain a more efficient and cost-effective release plan every time that I release a new song, better supporting the development of my artistic career.

The developed code could be expanded to create a script that executes several functions: it could be used to send a new release to playlist curators, to interact with fans through the direct messaging functions, or to plan the posts of an entire release campaign.

Finally, the overall knowledge acquired, the tools developed, and the constant evolution of technology, are all elements that can contribute to a continuous improvement of the processes underlying music production and distribution, and support me in making an impact, as an artist, on the future of music.

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