

Project (Music Technology) - Project Proposal

MU60001E 2009-2010...



Course: BA (Hons) Music Technology Specialist
Level: Year 3
Module Title: Project (Music Technology)
Assessment Point: Assignment 1: Project Proposal

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By submitting this assessment for marking I declare that I have in my possession the correct documentation for this module for this semester (Module Study Guide and Project Proposal), which I have read and fully understand *.

I also confirm that I understand the following:

- 1) The plagiarism regulations of the university.
- 2) The assessment regulations of the university.
- 3) The implications of using copyrighted material.

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1 Executive Summary

This project's intention is to show one of many possible life cycles for recorded music; from recording to mixing, from mixing to mastering and from mastering to independent release and promotion. It's an attempt to learn as many useful skills as possible for working in the music industry while retaining focus on my preferred future career path as a mix engineer.

2 Project title

A life cycle of recorded music

The project reach extends through the stages of recording, mixing, mastering and through to independent promotion and release. These are typical stages of progression for recorded music to go through; with independent release fast becoming the primary option for most bands today. These progressions could be thought of as the natural life cycle of recorded music today which gives rise to the project title.

3 Project content suitability

The course programme covers a lot of content; much of which is directly relevant to this project tackling several areas of the music industry. Though the times each part will be undertaken are not in this order, it helps to think of the project in a linear fashion as follows:

The first aspect of the project is studio recording. For this I have organised a three piece blues rock band called the "Sons of Gingerbread" (SOG) to record an album live in EFS1. This will require typical studio skills such as microphone technique, studio management, attentive listening, compositional skills used in preproduction and good artist communication. Microphone technique will be especially important due to the album being recorded live; spill is more of an issue than during a typical studio recording and microphone placement will be my best chance of reducing it.

The second aspect of the project is the mix stage. For this I intend to have two albums mixed, one recorded live from the SOG and another from a band I have been working with called "Neon Flea Circus" (NFC). This album was created in Ireland and recorded over various sessions in a DIY fashion using our own portable equipment; recording in various locations which required a good deal of ingenuity. The recordings were used for other academic work in my previous college, however since then I have been reworking the mixes. They were undertaken this January and are almost completed; they are about to be mastered and are due for release May 6th. The mixes on this album required very critical listening, good communication with the band and research into the genre of music being recorded so as to optimise them before going to mastering. I expect the same skills to apply for the SOG mixes.

The third aspect is mastering an album by "Rachel James and the Misterz" (RJM) an acoustic trio from Manchester. This section is a swap with another student so we can practice mastering skills on an unbiased mix and double our credits at the same time; I master RJM and he masters SOG. This will require very accurate listening, project planning and organisational skills to co-ordinate our timetables as well as to properly communicate what we want from the mastering stage for our respective mixes.

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The final aspect of the project will be independent release and promotion of the NFC album. This will require research and knowledge on the music industries current state and the various business models that can be adopted to best plan an effective launch. This will also require a mix of critical analysis, evaluation and untraditional thinking.

4 Project purpose, aims & objectives

The project aims to professionally produce three albums worth of material and to start exploring release methods for use in todays music industry. The purpose of these albums are to reflect the knowledge and skills gained throughout the projects range.

Literal project purpose, aims and objectives are as follows:

The NFC album is to serve as a marketing tool for the band as part of a new music business model; to gain fans in new areas and create general exposure necessary to sell tickets to larger concerts and open merchandise as a possible source of income.

The SOG album is to be recorded, mixed and produced to a professional standard that can be sold through traditional methods.

The purpose of the RJM album is to provide the band with a master recording ready for release.

All three albums are being produced with the intent and purpose of release to the general public.

Personal project purpose, aims and objectives are as follows:

The project itself was chosen as a way of practising necessary skills to operate as a studio engineer today and to gain a greater insight into the colossal changes currently happening in the music industry, which will massively influence the job prospects of the future.

A live recording setup for the SOG album was specifically chosen due to the higher standard of microphone technique required to deal with any extra spill and gain more mixing experience.

An independent band NFC was chosen as they are actively planning to break into the music industry through untraditional means. I feel that I will not get another practical chance to explore these kinds of business models in the near future.

The mastering section of the project with RJM was chosen as a chance to learn about mastering and to expand my horizons beyond the familiar genres of music I have typically worked with; their music is more about the ambience created together than the song structure or technique which relates well to mastering. This is because paying attention to the overall cohesiveness of the tracks is masterings main goal; because of this their music will be an appropriate starting point for my research into the area and provides good material for practical application.

I also believe that a strong working knowledge of the mastering process can help bring my mixes up to a higher standard.

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5 Project content

This project will provide three mastered audio CDs, three support CDs, several data DVDs and a written document.

Audio CD one is the recording and mixing of an untitled album by the Sons of Gingerbread. It will be a live studio recording of the trio with added overdubs. The music is semi-acoustic blues rock; based on amplified acoustic guitars sometimes played in a slide style with reggae based vocals. It will be the mastered version but a support CD will be included of the mixes pre mastering.

Audio CD two is the mixing of "*Fistful of I.O.U.s*" by *Neon Flea Circus*. Its independent release will be an ongoing venture so a written document of the release methods used and relevant information about its status until project hand-in will be included. Also included will be a support CD of the pre mastered versions.

The release is a ten track album which makes use of many different genres of music and production styles. The underlying theme of the band is psychedelic rock mixed with funk; though other genres such as surf, blues and 60's pop can be heard throughout the album.

Audio CD three is the mastering of the album "*Twigs & Leaves*" by *Rachel James and the Misterz*. This music consists of acoustic guitars, percussion, amplified bass and female vocals. The overall sound is based on the band creating an atmosphere together with these instruments. A support CD of the pre mastered versions will also be included.

The data DVDs will include the Pro Tools sessions of the mixes for NFC and SOG and the mastering session files. It is possible that other relevant data will be included on these DVDs and so a content listing will be available as a "Read Me" file on the disk.

6 Project meaning

The underlying concept of this project is to follow music from its infancy or the recording stage, through to its adolescence or mix stage onwards to its more mature life of mastering and independent release; a typical life cycle for a lot of releases today. A minor narrative may also be assumed when discussing specific processes so as to best convey the thought process behind certain decisions.

The project concept structure can sum up my personal interest in the creation of music and also my belief that music is meant to be shared. My interest in music creation and belief in freely sharing it is not sustainable with current industry models and so the project is also an attempt at finding a viable way for musicians to earn a living while allowing their music to thrive.

The SOG album concept is to create a live album in the studio that conveys the bands energy when playing together. It may contain flaws in performance that are endearing much like early rock recordings but keeping the sound relevant for todays listeners

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The NFC release has a lot of underlying social commentary as a subtext in many of their songs, this is presented in a humorous but satirical way. Subject matter includes poking fun at people pointlessly reading gossip magazines, “boy racers” who are a generalisation of nineteen year olds with done up cars and everybody in general. The underlying concept of the mix is to try sound authentic to the genres they touch on while still providing an acceptable mix for today's listeners; a retro but modern mix.

The RJM album I plan on mastering has no underlying meaning however the concept of the master is to keep the album sounding alive and natural but enhanced while being quite transparent which I feel the genre calls for.

7 Ethical issues

Ethical issues in this project arise in the NFC album with social commentary some people may take offence to. In this respect the album is fairly tame in comparison to other commercial releases and would probably not even warrant a parental advisory sticker. Apart from that it comes down to my personal ethics of whether or not I find their message principally right or wrong. In this respect I believe the album to be of sound principles.

On both other albums the material is inoffensive and should present no problems. In the music industry sector I feel my work to be based from a strong moral standing point where ethics should pose no problems. It's of my opinion that music is to be shared and in this instance I have express permission to do so. As for attempting new business models at the bands risk; they are in agreement that they would be no worse off if we failed and also see it as their best option. There should be no ethical issues in this section of the project either.

8 Copyright issues

It has been agreed with the bands that they withhold their copyright in exchange for licence allowing for use in my portfolio, for university work and credits on the albums. All material is original and so should not pose any copyright issues.

As for the industry section of the project the NFC album is being released with a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 license. This grants that general listeners the right to freely distribute the album at no cost, though retaining royalty rights etc.

When performing the song “Hyperspeed” live the band usually use the hook of famous car songs for the chorus, this was changed on the recording to original material in order to avoid copyright issues and so should also provide no issues.

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9 Project runtime length/s

All albums will be presented as finished products (mastered) with running order subject to change

Album One: *Sons of Ginger Bread "untitled album" - unknown time*

Album two: *Neon Flea Circus "Fist full of I.O.U.s" - estimated 37:30 min*

Of Dawn	03:41
Flea Pit	03:01
Join The Queue	03:56
Whimsical Popsical	07:13
Sofa Surfer	02:53
Fickle Fish	03:12
Iggy The Biz	03:05
Made Of Wood	03:33
Hyperspeed	03:11
Some People	03:34

Album three: *Rachel James and the Misterz "Twigs & Leaves" - estimated 51:20 min*

Before The Call	04:27
Whoa Neddy	03:26
Big Town	01:59
Gig Passé	05:32
Imaginary Ghosts	03:29
Rufus & Mr. Wood	03:37
My Last Tear	04:54
Miasma of Hands	03:55
No Plans	03:12
Minnow	04:14
Pinga	03:29
Smokin' Club	05:01
Ponderous Mile	04:12

Support CD 1– *Sons of Gingerbread pre master – Unknown*

Support CD 2– *Neon Flea Circus "Fist full of I.O.U.s" pre master - 37:30 min*

Support CD 3– *Rachel James and the Misterz "Twigs & Leaves" pre master -51:20 min*

Data DVDs – Content listing, Sons of Gingerbread Sessions, Neon Flea Circus Sessions, Rachel James and the Misterz mastering sessions and additional data

10 Finished project format/s

Audio CD 1– Sons of Gingerbread. Red book audio CD

Audio CD 2– Neon Flea Circus "Fist full of I.O.U.s". Red book audio CD

Audio CD 3– Rachel James and the Misterz "Twigs & Leaves". Red book audio CD

Support CD 1– Sons of Gingerbread pre master. Red book audio CD

Support CD 2– Neon Flea Circus "Fist full of I.O.U.s" pre master. Red book audio CD

Support CD 3– Rachel James and the Misterz "Twigs & Leaves" pre master. Red book audio CD

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11 Research

Project planning: listening to SOG demos, recordings and videos.

e.g. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tpkRNwJx-k&feature=player_embedded#

Recording and mixing: Critical listening to music similar in genre to the albums being worked on e.g. *The John Butler Trio (2007) Grand National. Jarrah Records, AU*

Microphone technique, Studio recording practices for the instruments being played, critical listening e.g:

Everest, A. (2007) Critical listening for audio professionals. Thomson course technology, US.

Huber, D and Runstein, R. (1997) Modern Recording Techniques. Focal Press, UK.

Stravou, M (2003) Mixing With Your Mind. Hyde Park Press Pty Ltd, Australia.

Mastering:

Critical listening, frequency balance, dynamic control, equalisation etc.

Katz, B (2007) Mastering Audio: the art and the science. Focal Press, UK.

Release: Understanding the current music industry

e.g. *Connect with fans + Reason to buy business model presentation*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Njuo1puB1lg>

Topspin discussions on independent release etc.

<http://groups.google.com/group/topspingreenroom/topics>

12 TVU resources required

EFS 1: Required for live room to record the Sons of Gingerbread album.

Other studios: Required for some mixing and mastering.

LRC: Required books and publications for research purposes.

MRC: Specific microphones required for recording Sons of Gingerbread.

Microphones: Condenser and dynamic kits supplied with studios.

Blackboard: Used for access to eJournals

Instruments: Drum kit supplied

12b Access time required

EFS 1: 51 hours booked for recording.

Other studios: 50 hours mixing, 70 hours mastering.

LRC: 80-100 hours research time.

13 Other (non TVU) resources required

DAW: Self owned for preparation and editing

Sennheiser HD 595s: Self owned for critical listening

Digidesign 002: Self owned to authorise DAW

MacBook Pro: Self owned to run DAW

External Drives: Self owned for backup

Instruments: Musician owned, Rented and provided for recording purposes

HHb Circle 5A Monitors: Available access in current accommodation for checking mixes.

Books: Self owned personal reference library

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13b Access time required for these resources

DAW: 20 hours for preparation and editing

Sennheiser HD 595s: 20 hours for preparation and editing

Digidesign 002: 20 hours for preparation and editing

MacBook Pro: 20 hours for preparation and editing

External Drives: Indefinite for storage and backup

Instruments: 51 hours for recording

HHb Circle 5A Monitors: 10 hours checking mixes

Books: Length of the project

13c How these resources are available

Most equipment is self owned with additional equipment (such as use of the HHb monitors) available at request from fellow students or the musicians. Editing and some mixing can be done with my personal equipment to save studio time; the session will be interchangeable between my home set up and the studios (Pro Tools HD & LE). Although I plan to make use of the recourses available to me, I can make additional changes and tweaks at home.

14 Any other information

An area of relevance not covered in the proposal is the story behind why a Creative Commons licence has been chosen for the NFC album and its title "*Fist full of I.O.U.s*". This could be seen as important from a marketing perspective.

I first met NFC while working for *free* at a music festival in Ireland in order to gain experience and was in charge an open stage where NFC played. I liked their music and decided to offer them *free* recording. We worked on the album over the course of a year during college holidays and our free time. With the new mixes nearly complete they are about to get mastered by a friend for *free* as well. As the band paid nothing to record the album apart from a bit of microphone rental and are paying nothing for mastering, they felt that it would be wrong to charge fans for the music despite their financial state, hence the album name "*Fist full of I.O.U.s*".

15 Work hours statement

The recording of the SOG album will take 51 hours to record with additional hours given to mix the album and the planning involved. Mixing of the NFC album has been an ongoing process since January with unknown hours already given to it, further hours are still required to finish it and meet the release deadline. At the same time research into release methods and practical use of internet promotional tools is required.

On top of this I intend to research into mastering and apply knowledge gained to the work I'll be doing on the RJM album.

This project should easily meet the 200 hours the module requires, much of the work has been in planning for a long time and some has nearly been completed. The large amount of time required to complete all the tasks I intend to undertake should not prove excessive for these reasons.

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16 Weekly schedule

Weeks 1-3

Organise band (SOG) and studio sessions.
Find a project supervisor
Mix NFC album
Industry research and planning

Week 4

Meet supervisor to discuss project proposal
Prepare project proposal for hand in
Mix NFC album
Research SOG demos and related listening
Industry research and planning

Week 5 Assessment 1 - 'Project Proposal'...

Hand in proposal
Finish mixing NFC album
Industry research and planning
Research on recording and producing similar genres to SOG

Week 6 Independent study (with tutor support)...

Prepare for studio sessions
Industry research
Research on recording and producing similar genres to SOG

Week 7

Live studio recording of the SOG album in EFS 1.

Week 8

Mixing SOG album
Mastering research
Industry research

Week 9

Mixing SOG album
Mastering RJM
Written work

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Week 10

The main practical work should be completed by this point...

Mixing SOG album and checking mixes

Mastering RJM album and checking masters on multiple playback systems

Written work

Week 11

Final tweaks on SOG album mixes and consultation with mastering engineer.

Final tweaks on RJM masters

Written work

Week 12

The written work should be completed by this point...

Create the press release brochure

Finish written work

Double checks on mixes and masters

Week 13

NFC album release

Finalise all practical and written work, check it works properly, prepare it for presentation.

Add additional information on release status

Week 14 Assessment 2 - 'Project' handed in for assessment...

Project handed in

WORD COUNT: 2969