Reflections

Audio Production

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Contents

Waterford Venue VO

Script

At the beginning of the semester, we were to do up a script for a Waterford venue of our choice. My initial script was long, unorganised and convoluted. It was only after my lecturer pointed this out that I realised. The pointers given to me were:

- Keep sentences short and sweet
- At each gap in the script, move the next part onto a new line
- Have no more than seven words on any given line
- Use bullet points if listing
- Title each section of the script e.g. REV1, REV2 etc.

Upon implementing these methods, I found my script flowed much better. I was pausing where I should have which helped me avoid running out of breath and having sentences trail off at the end as a result.

The one other thing that applied to my script was to avoid using common phrases such as 'Come on down'. While I altered it slightly to 'Pop on down, revolt…', if I was to do another in the future, I would completely overhaul the phrase.

Recording

While it wasn't my first time in a recording studio, I would be lying if I said it wasn't a daunting experience when it's solely you in there recording your own material. I found the exercises we had done before being left to our own devices useful in warming up my vocals, clearing my throat and just generally mitigating any doubtful thoughts I had going in.

There were a few moments where I lost track of the script and as a result stumbled over my words a bit. This was due to my script being flat down a short distance away from me. To counteract this problem, I propped my script up on a folder directly in front of me. This saved me moving slightly from the microphone to see lines from my script a bit more clearly (which, upon listening to my first few takes, really affects the audio quality).

Mixing

I didn't run into too many problems mixing the Venue VO. However, the one major issue I had was the sound of my voice. I tend to speak in a low, relaxed manner and I wanted to sound a bit more aggressive given the contents of the VO. It was here I discovered how big of a difference equalisers could make. Upon applying a parametric equaliser and speech volume leveller I could notice the difference right away. I also added some reverb which acted as the cherry on top.

In hindsight, if I were to do the same VO again, I would put more effort and aggression in at the recording studio. This would perhaps save some time when editing and mixing.

Smarter Travel VO

Script

I had written the initial script for the Smarter Travel VO around the same time of the initial Venue script and, as a result, ran into the same problems as before. In fact, it was even more convoluted as I was trying to fit in more given the informational theme I was going for.

For this script, however, I used an online thesaurus to find more suitable wording that flowed best. I found this a great addition to what I had previously done and would be pressed to use a thesaurus in any future VOs.

Recording

I was a lot more relaxed in the studio this time around and repeated the exercises I had done when recording my previous VO. I also had my script propped up directly in front of me to save me from moving my head in front of the microphone.

However, upon listening to my recordings I discovered they were way too quiet. I put this down to not being close enough to the microphone when speaking a returned to the studio. I went through a few test-runs before recording this time around, paying attention to the gauge in front of me. I eventually found the optimal distance to between the microphone and myself when the arrow was consistently pointed upwards.

While I neglected this process for my first VO and my first attempt at recording for this VO, I would make sure to pay attention to this gauge in any future recordings.

Mixing

While creating a backing track in Bandlab I attempted to use guitars and other high tempo samples to give a sense of urgency to the VO. It was here I realised that I couldn't always stick to my initial ideas as these instrument/samples made it hard at parts to distinguish my voice from the backing track, so I went back to the drawing board. This time around I opted for wind instruments and a steady tempo throughout all my samples, making it easier to differentiate my voice from the melody.

Mashup Project

Warping

While I had no problem finding the tempo of my chosen songs, I did make the mistake of not setting the 1.1.1 at the first beat. As a result, the warping kind of drifted from the beats further into the tracks. There was a simple solution to this however – simply set the 1.1.1 to the first drum beat of each song.

I also made the mistake of not saving the warp the first time around and, upon opening the live set at a later stage, I had to redo the warping again. I did not make the same mistake twice, and I wouldn't be so careless as to forget to hit the save icon again in the future.

Saving

In terms of saving, I had little trouble using the collect all and save feature after watching the video posted to slack. Where I did encounter trouble was loading my project. After saving my warped set in class I made the mistake of only saving the live SET to my USB. After opening the set again at home to continue working on my project I discovered that all my sample audio was missing. It was only then I realised that I needed the entire folder with the live set, samples, backup and Ableton project info in order to continue working on it. Much like saving the warps, I made sure not to make this same mistake twice.

Clipping

It was during the presentation of my portfolio that my lecturer pointing out my mashup was clipping at parts. I couldn't understand how as I clearly remember bringing my track into audition to master it to -14 lufs and further altering the volume of the track to minimize clipping. It was then brought to my attention that all automation should be concluded BEFORE running the match loudness settings.

I opened the AIFF file in audition and played it through a couple of times to spot where exactly the mashup was clipping and I found that my main culprit was the drums. They seemed far louder than my audio tracks and even drowned them out in some parts, especially during the build-up. To remedy this, I once again opened up Ableton and decreased the volume for the drum track significantly. I could tell the difference straight away but noticed that it took some impact away from my 'end clap' clip at the end, hence I proceeded to slightly alter the end line of the last 'goosebumps' track so that it was still louder than the rest of the 'goosebumps' audio to give impact to the words 'every time' but not so loud as to be heard over my 'end clap' clip.

To finish remedying the clipping problem I saved the live set and exported the mashup as an AIFF file, opening it in Audition. After a small bit more tinkering with the volume I once again went through the match loudness settings and exported the improved mashup as an MP3, ACC and OGG file, replacing the current ones in my portfolio.

Key Takeaways from This Semester

Voice Overs

- Keep scripts short and to the point
- Label each segment of a script and leave comments beside each segment as to how you want it to sound
- Avoid using common phrases in your script, use a thesaurus where necessary.
- In the recording studio, keep script close at hand as to keep it legible.
- Avoid fidgeting with script and mic when recording
- Keep an eye on the input volume gauge while recording, do not stray from microphone.
- Speak load and clear into the mic.
- Experiment with equalisers and other effects to give your voice the sound you want.
- Match pace and tone of backing tracks to that of the voice overs.
- Don't be afraid to start over if your beat/melody/VO/script do not sound as good as they did in your head.

Mashup

- When warping, set the 1.1.1 to the first drum beat of the song, not just wherever the audio kicks in.
- Save each warp as you go along.
- Keep all Ableton files together when saving/loading to avoid losing samples and other project info.
- Keep and eye out for clipping.
- Ensure volume of audio tracks is consistent throughout.
- Try not to have too much going on at once when creating a drum beat.
- Make all adjustments to the automation of a track BEFORE setting it to -14 lufs (-16 in case of a podcast).