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Culminating Experience Reflection Paper

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My Culminating Experience Reflection Paper

The DJ kTunes experience has been a yearlong real life project I undertook in order to put myself on the ideal platform upon graduating Berklee as an international DJ. I chose this project during my time as a business student as a way for to remain creative while I study the business behind the industry I am a part of and seek to become more involved in. Although the goals and deadlines of this project shifted from the original plan, I felt that this was best for the nature of the project. In the end, the 3 portions of the project originally proposed were completed. Those three were: The music, the marketing and the performance.

The music portion of my project makes me extremely proud. Having been nervous to release music in the past, and now being able to say that I have finished an EP of original work is truly an accomplishment for me. I worked hard to learn as much as I could about sound design and music production outside of my business curriculum. Each semester I had one more class than my cohorts. I completed the Electronic Dance Music Composition course and the Sound Design course. In the end I finished two original tracks and 1 remix and they will be released on Monday June 30th. I received help from Berklee students Jana

and Daniel for vocals on the originals and am very happy with those collaborations.

In terms of my original goal, the only things that were not done here was a prompt delivery of the EP and the number of songs I wanted for the EP. I originally wanted it out towards the beginning of June but it is being released at the end. I also wanted a few more songs at the EP but I settled on 3 in the end. I am ok with that because I would have rushed to put out things by that time. Because this is so real life for me, I did not want to rush any part of the musical process and chose to let it build and finish naturally. That is something I realized during the Young Guru and Sean C sessions in April. Guru asked a student “why are you putting this out so fast? Is it absolutely necessary to do that?” It was then that I realized that although this is a thesis, I can’t take back something once its out on the Internet. It’s basically there forever, so I need to take my time with it. Hence the relaxed release date.

The marketing portion of my culminating experience was done in collaboration with Aalap Deboor (another music business student). Together, we worked to figure out who DJ kTunes is, who is his fan base, how can we build his fan base and through what mediums I can connect with my fans the most effectively. Over the course of the spring, my Facebook likes increased by roughly 45%. This is faster than any other other period for my page thus far. My instagram following increased by roughly 10% (although my engagement has increased a lot more)

and my twitter following increased by about 20%. I have also been able to understand who my fans are, what they like from me, and what I need to give them to engage more with me.

In terms of the marketing research done, my outlook on what I need is what changed the most. At first, I simply just wanted more Facebook likes and fans as a way to look better on social networks. As important as that is, I found its more important to know the fans I have and grow closer to them than it is to have a bunch of fans with no engagement. In addition, I would previously market directly to my friends looking for their engagement. With the help of Aalap and Gwen, I have realized that my fans do not have to necessarily always be people I know and that I need to find ways to acquire new fans. As simple as that may sound, it is not something I am taking lightly.

Another outcome of the marketing of myself with Aalap has been my entrance into the Valencia DJ scene. I have had the opportunity to play at many of the clubs in Valencia and even maintained somewhat of a residency every Wednesday at one of Valencia's best clubs. This was a result of my networking, but also what people were able to see when they looked me up. They saw a DJ who looks professional with a strong skill set and that allowed me to push my way into places. I put out more mixes during my time in Valencia than I have ever, and creating that online presence truly helped in the marketing portion of this experience.

This exposure also led to many opportunities on the Berklee Valencia campus. I have been granted the trust to play music at some of the campus' premier events (including Tedx), and I have also had the opportunity to teach the DJing and Turntablism class twice (once for undergraduates, once for graduates).

The performance portion of the DJ kTunes Experience is the part that evolved the most and turned into a very unique experience for myself and all parties involved. Originally, the idea was to have a live show in Valencia in which I would perform a lot of my music for the first time live. Then, the idea was to have somewhat of a Boiler Room event in which I would have a live set to a small crowd featuring my music that would be streamed and recorded. However there were too many obstacles to bring this to life effectively. Then, after attending multiple shows involving DJ's accompanied by live musicians, and after having several jam sessions myself with Berklee musicians, I decided to have a jam session featuring Carl on drums, Jad on guitar, Alexey on saxophone and myself on turntables. The Jam session was filmed and recorded on the scoring stage in mid-June.

The process of doing this culminating experience was quite an interesting one. At the beginning, I was more focused on the music and the performance portion of the project and much less on the brand of kTunes. In the end, the marketing and social media campaigns became the portion of the project I learned the most from. It is also the part that I was able to directly use what I was learning in my

business classes (International marketing and branding, Record label practicum, etc.). Through the process I began to think of everything from more of a business aspect. That was truly helpful and necessary for my project in particular because everything I do is very related to my current and ongoing career.

In the end, I had a very successful project and a very successful learning objective even though things did not line up directly to what I initially thought. If it had, I would have been pushing to meet goals that were not entirely realistic or necessarily needed. In the performance portion in particular, I think it was not necessary to do a huge extravagant show, but instead was more useful to do what I did. I already do so much DJing in Valencia as it is. Additionally, there are so many people looking to do shows that I would have easily ended up being another flyer on the wall in Berklee. Between the performance program, the MTI program, Friday concerts, and just summer time in Valencia, a show at the very end would not have been well attended and would not be as effective and long lasting as a tasteful performance showing a different side of me as an artist.

In terms of expectation on the music form of my project, I expected my music to have a much different feel than what I am putting out. However, as I learned through the process of creating this piece of work, it is not always essential to go into the thinking about what it is I want to make. I was much more effective and felt much more connected to my work when I went in with an open mind and let things come to me.

For the marketing portion, I am happy with the approach I took in the end as opposed to the one I originally had. I truly exceeded my expectations there. It became much less about how much things changed but more in understanding why they changed which will turn and already is turning into finding ways to make things work better for me.

For me, my next step is to attend the Music Technology Innovation program here in Valencia, and continue to work on my music and build my brand internationally. During one of my gigs this semester the flyer read “International DJ kTunes” and I would love to remain international! I was close to going back to New York, but I know another year being as productive as I have been this past year could truly boost my career to the level it needs to in a place where it is truly loved and understood. My style of music is loved here, and my New York style of DJing is appreciated here. Additionally, the MTI program will give me the missing pieces of music tech and audio engineering knowledge I am missing.

During the next year, I seek to build on my past culminating experience and set solid goals for my next culminating experience. It will likely be a build up from this CE but add more layers to the music and performance aspects (including more collaborations with new musicians and the addition of custom visuals). I also look to continue my residency in Valencia and will try and secure more and better gigs

around the city and others. Having the advantage of knowing so many music business students who will be around the world working in the industry, it will be possible to expand my horizons to other cities and other countries. This is something I have been talking to people about already and will definitely push to have during the next year.

In terms of after the MTI program, I am not sure what I will do. (I doubt I will go for a third masters degree) My plan will be to move back to New York City, and continue to DJ and look for ways to get into a leadership role either in my own company or a small one. This is somewhat vague for now but I am confident that things will come together over the next year as they have this past year.

My contribution to the profession is mainly from the music portion of my project. Releasing original music is always a way giving the world something that comes from inside you and that is definitely what I have done. I embarked on a journey this last year and the music I have produced is a product of what I have learned and will be around as long as the Internet and the people who download it will be. Otherwise, the majority of this project was a learning experience for me and what I have learned will have a direct effect on my career. If successful, my work could go on to affect the music industry in the positive as well.

As stated early, during the process of completing this project I have begun to think about my DJ career as a business. This has lead to my growth much

growth as a person, an artist and a businessman. This is the mindset I have needed for a long time and I am happy to finally have it. The marketing portion of the project will help me a lot and already has. The release of my music has given me faith in myself as a DJ/producer. And the performance portion has helped me understand that I am a musician and can truly be effective in performing with other musicians in the near future.

The full spectrum of the impact of my culminating experience this year while truly come to light over my next year here in Valencia. With the buzz I have going in this city, and with the connections I have made with people, I will truly be able to see everything begin to shine in the very near future.

I want to thank everyone involved in the process of my culminating experience:

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Alexey Leon with help on saxophone

The best is yet to come

Kareem Clarke

DJ kTunes