

REVIBE COMPETITION SERIES – REFLECTION PAPER

Andres Arenas

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Emilien Moyon

Berklee College of Music

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## Revibe Competition Series – Reflection Paper

### Project Summary

For my culminating experience within the record practicum study/Disrupción Records, I decided to do something a little out of the normal. It seems that a lot of the time, students within the record practicum (and our very own Disrupción Records) that are hoping to pursue careers in areas such as A&R or talent management tend to lean towards projects involving the usual artist scouting, development, and/or project release. I for one was thinking of doing something similar at first, but in the end went a different way. Right before our initial proposals were due, I got struck with the idea of an interactive and fun way to find talent that could hopefully not only bring the talent to me but provide collaborative opportunities and possibly a learning experience for the talent as well. I began to create what came to be the “Revibe Competition Series.”

Revibe is a Berklee-exclusive songwriting and production competition that was held over four months throughout the spring semester that was open to Berklee Valencia, Boston, and Online students as well as Alumni. The competition consisted of three official rounds that would be used to put contestants through a series of talent showcasing and collaborative challenges that would help me and the team that I put together discover incredible creatives right in our own Berklee backyard. Contestants would compete throughout the competition to continue on through each round along with win some prizes and opportunities. As mentioned, the competition would be judged not only by me but by a member of the Berklee Boston A&R Club (Luke Seigel) and a different “Industry Guest Judge” each round by filling out a scorecard that I put together and deliberating over zoom. This way I would have an “A&R Team” to assist in the scouting and judgment because I believe that collaboration, even outside of the music, is key.

The first round featured two no-format competitions running simultaneously: a production competition and a songwriting competition. This was to make it clear that we were looking for both types of creatives and wanted each to have the ability to showcase what they thought was their best strength. From this round we took the top five songwriters and the top 5 producers and “A&R’d” them in to five groups of two. Each team would have a songwriter and producer that me and my team believed would work together based off of their initial submission’s style, genre, feel, vibe, etc. The second round would consist of these new teams collaboratively creating a brand new song within about three weeks. Once again there was no format, giving the contestants freedom to experiment and find the best way to collaborate together. From here we would listen to the five new tracks and decide on the top two that we thought shined above the rest, moving them on to the final round. This time only the two remaining teams would create one more new song from scratch within a similar three week period. Finally, in the third and final round we looked at the two new songs and picked a winning team.

### Results

The final results of this project overall definitely exceeded my expectations and provided me with a learning experience that I am extremely grateful for. The interested parties were not only talented but extremely diverse as well, which is something I was really hoping for. To paint a picture with numbers, Revibe acquired 85 overall registrations. Within this population was an immense variety of musical backgrounds with over 50 practiced genres ranging from Pop to Indie Folk; and 20 different instruments played including singers, guitarists, marimba players, trumpeters, and more. Amongst the same population of interested students the majority were songwriters with the split being 58 writers to 27 producers. This skew was not too much of a

surprise seeing as how usually producers participate in competitions that are more “Remix” or “Beat Flip” central. In the end we still had plenty of talented producers to participate in the coming rounds. Finally, at the end of the first round we had our official batch of 50 submissions with a split of 15 producers and 35 songwriters. Although I would have certainly liked a few more producers the difference was once again not a total surprise.

The diversity certainly showed straight from the first round. Everything from hip-hop productions to country writing and folk story telling. Most tracks were not like the rest and each submission really came from its own world which to me was one of the most important things I thought this competition could provide. I was able to find talent, making music that I for example might have never even looked for. And although there were certainly some tracks that could have used a little more development, we certainly found some that showed potential and seasoned creativity.

Contestants seemed to flow pretty well with the structure created for the competition in regard to the submission process, filling out the terms & conditions, submitting split sheets, etc. It was good to see that the way everything was organized went smoothly. Every finalist from each round was excited to move forward and work with someone brand new and was up to the challenge with no problems. The progression of the competition definitely seemed to move forward fluidly.

Finally, the winning track was a successful collaboration between our top writer and producer. Blending their different backgrounds (one an R&B/Jazz Producer, the other a Country Writer) to create a track that displayed both of their strengths. For me that was one of the most rewarding parts of this process. Having put together two talents that me and the team believed in

and seeing them grow not only in their art but collaboratively and against a deadline no less. The winning track as promised will also be released through Disrupción Records this summer.

### Process

This CE idea, like previously mentioned, came to me close to the deadline for our proposal so once decided, planning and execution had to happen fairly quickly. Over the winter break I had my first meeting with Raja Weiss, the owner and CEO of SpotIdol.com. Spot Idol is a site that hosts various kinds of competitions all over the world and when we were put in contact, I knew he would be a vital part of this project. Instantly, Raja gave me plenty of great advice and ideas on how I could structure and go on about this competition. He also offered not only to advise from time to time, but to host the competition on the site and even help with customizing the judging capabilities on the site according to how I was planning to do it. From then on began weekly to eventually bi-weekly meetings with him that would prove to be extremely helpful throughout the planning process.

### *Marketing and Promotion*

Once winter break was over, I pretty much had the entire structure in mind and was ready to begin full execution once the spring semester was underway. Since the official competition started in March it was definitely crunch time in terms of getting the word out to the entire Berklee community. To start this, I immediately contacted Camille Lopez-Silvero, Disrupción Record's Head of Marketing and Branding and our very own in-house graphic designer. Together we met up to start working on the first bit of promo and branding material that I could use to instantly start circulating around the few channels of promotion I had while working on securing the rest. Once we had our first poster, it was time to start spreading the word.

One of the most important parts of this entire process was of course the promotion. Throughout the month of February, I spent countless hours contacting and emailing any leads that I could find that could help not only promote the competition in Valencia, but Boston, online, and to alumni as well. Along with that I held what I called the “Free Round” in February. A low pressure, no elimination, competition round that would serve as a promotional and troubleshooting tool. This was really good for giving already interested parties a taste of the competition, try their hand at winning a small prize, and for me a way to test out the submission website.

Once I finally secured a good number of channels for promotion, I was ready for March. I placed my main channels on a weekly plan that gave them all of the necessary information they needed to help get the word out as efficiently as possible. This included number of posts per week, type of posts, which assets to use and where, etc. Along with this I would send them a “Promo Pack” at the beginning of each week with all the assets needed including posters, statements, video ads, etc. I found that communicating across the time zones (and even just in general with some of the local administrative channels) was certainly a challenge in terms of response time when I was originally securing the promo channels, so I wanted to make sure everyone had everything they needed and made things as clear and easy as possible. This proved to be vital to the effectiveness of the promotional campaign.

### *The Competition*

Little by little throughout the month submissions were coming in. Although slowly, I was warned that with any competition the bulk of the submissions were more than likely going to be turned in within the last 24 to 48 hours. Staying hopeful I continued with the full promo press and waited to see the results of the campaign. As expected, the day of the deadline came an

influx of new music for us to enjoy. Just as diverse as expected, the tracks ranged from folk to EDM and I was ready to dig in to them.

After the deadline I held what I called the “Be our A&R” community vote week. Here I opened up a voting round to the Berklee public so that they could fill out their own scorecard and support their favorite tracks. This was mostly just to keep the competition interactive amongst the community even if they were not submitting. After this week I officially closed the competition and set up a zoom meeting with the first round’s A&R Team. This would consist of myself, Luke, and Marjorie Schecker (Co-head of Sync and Licensing and active A&R at Warner Chappell Spain). The three of us listened to all 50 tracks beforehand, filled out our scorecards, and were ready to deliberate. After an extremely fun and insightful video call, we listened to the tracks together and picked our top 5 writers and top 5 producers. Finally, we placed those 10 remaining contestants into production and songwriting groups based off of what we heard and who we thought would work well together. Things such as genre, style, voice, etc. were all taken into account.

The next two rounds would be a bit more hands-on in terms of communicating directly with the remaining finalists. Now that promotion was over, it was all about continuing the show. To start, I set up zoom calls with all 5 groups individually to answer any questions that they might have and to get them briefed on the next steps of the competition. Each group was very excited to create something new with a brand-new collaborator and race against their three-week deadline. So much so that they had already been in contact by the time I talked to them. After talking to each group and clearing up any questions, it was all about waiting for the new music. Funny enough, once again, all submissions came in the last 8 hours before the deadline.

For the second round judging our “industry guest judge” was Prince Charles Alexander (Grammy award winning producer). Once again, the three of us would listen to the tracks beforehand (this time only 5 instead of 50) and then hop on a call to discuss who we believed excelled amongst the rest. The final round was fairly similar in process, except this time we had Jonathan Perkins (chart topping songwriter) to help us pick the winning song. Not only that, but Mr. Perkins so generously helped us with one of the prizes we offered which was to showcase the winning song to “The Heavy Group / Republic Records” for feedback and critique. Something I personally thought was invaluable to the winning contestants.

### *Final Steps*

Having decided on a winning track, I immediately contacted the contestants announcing the winner and set up a follow up call with the winners. Along with gathering a bit of their information to be able to deliver them the prizes they won (these were gear/software or cash equivalent) I discussed with them what they wanted to do with the track. One of the prizes offered was a release with our very own Disrupción Records through our distributor The Orchard. Immediately they showed interest and we began to plan the release. We decided who would be the lead artists, who would be the featured artist, tentative release dates, possible release campaign, etc. The whole nine. Currently to this day we are working on cover art creation and creating a content and release calendar for them. Truly a great way to tie up this competition and have it come full circle.

### Next Steps, Contribution, & Impact

The next step for the Revibe Competition Series is to hopefully provide some inspiration and a template for anyone in the coming years that might consider doing a similar project. Although an amazing experience for me, I do not believe my future is in creating competitions



per say, but generally in continuing to pursue out of the box talent finding initiatives when necessary. As an A&R I think one of the best things one could do is try to find talent where it is not being looked for. Incredible writers and producers are all over and the ones that are going viral on Tik Tok or Instagram are already being looked at by someone else. In my opinion, one of the best ways to get ahead of the scouting competition is to think outside of the box and this competition was my attempt at that. While competitions are not necessarily brand new, I believe that because of the digital age we live in, they may have become a bit neglected and forgotten outside of say the EDM world (where remix type competitions are still very relevant). Hopefully this can be an example of how in our day and age, they can still find some incredible diamonds in the rough.

Personally, I learned a lot from this entire process not only when it came to building my skills as an A&R but also when it came to things such as marketing and project management. Starting with the A&R side, I was able to really gain insight from the other judges that I brought in, especially those with much more seasoned ears. Through our zoom call deliberations, I was able to get a new perspective on the way I was listening to a track simply by putting myself in the other judge's shoes. Taking their comments and thoughts into account and learning from that. Something that anyone working in this focus can always benefit from. For me this was an extremely successful growth aspect of the project.

On the marketing and management side, I was definitely a bit more out of my comfort zone. Although I have a little bit of experience marketing when it comes to artists, putting on an entire event was a new ball game. Chasing down promo leads, staying on top of asset development, securing a marketing plan... All things that are common but sometimes done by a team of people. Having to do most of that myself was certainly a challenge but definitely a

learning experience. I learned for sure that I do not love planning entire events (or at least would not do one all by myself again), but I do think that I needed to do it on my own to really gather a first-hand insight on those processes. The best way to understand the separate parts of a system (i.e. the music business) can sometimes be just by trying them out yourself. I believe this is a huge benefit for anyone to understand parts of our industry outside of their own.

And finally, the greatest impact this had on me was the way everything worked out in the end not only for me but for the contestants. Setting up teams and watching them grow and collaborate to create brand new music was rewarding to say the least but hearing how the competition helped the contestants was equally as rewarding. Contestants voiced to me how great of a challenge it was to work with someone brand new and under a time crunch no less. To be pushed to create something with a partner that has a different musical background and style can definitely be a challenge and something I know they will face in the real world outside of Berklee. That along with releasing the winning track with *Disrupción* was again not only a great way to wrap things up, but something I saw benefit the winners as well. For one of them it would be the first time releasing with a team and getting PR and Marketing advice along with signing a licensing contract. All incredibly real-life applications for their future. This project to me was certainly a learning experience all around and I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have come to Valencia to bring it to life.