

Berklee College of Music

# **Culminating Experience Reflective Paper**

## **Summer Whistle Project**

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# Culminating Experience Project

Summer Whistle project is a comprehensive music-creating experience that begins with a diverse, innovative, and collaborative songwriting and production camp and culminates in a global collaborative album release, under the A&R theme of Summer Whistle. This project offers an opportunity for beginning artists and emerging artists over the world to adapt to the working pattern of the globalized music industry, develop their professional skills, and expand their audience by the final album release.

To encourage the artists to innovate and to step out of their comfort zone, the artists were purposefully grouped with other artists in two or three who share a completely different cultural background or music tastes to co-write and produce songs in this project. There are eventually six groups of artists that each group has accomplished a song that is specifically written and produced for this project.

Meanwhile, to include more diverse music styles in this album, I successfully connected with the Berklee Global Initiative. We reach out to artists studying at or graduated from the Berklee Global Academic Partners and have received other six songs.

After all, the Summer Whistle album would include 12 songs that are written and produced by artists from nine countries: United States, United Kingdom, France, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Austria, Japan, and China.

# Results

I have already conquered four difficulties that I faced at the beginning of the project — a global scale, a creative process, an artistic collaboration, and institutional coordination. We are currently enclosing the songwriting and production camp by collecting the final mixes from all the artists. Preparation of album cover and other promotional materials is also on the top of the schedule.

The strongest part of this project at this point would be the songs. The collaboration between the artists and the song they came out with surprised me. The chemistry between artists from different cultural backgrounds is magical. Especially when the artists are assigned different jobs in the songwriting and production process and when you can tell if there were ideas from someone new added to the song, you would realize how much the taste and the texture of the song can change with input from new energy. For me, the songs that were written during the camp are way more than genre fusion, they were more about the fusion of the artists' styles and identities. This observation and experience are inspiring for me as the manager of this project and as an artist. I feel blessed that the songs I received have exceeded my expectations. The project has also received appreciation from the artists that could prove its phased success.

However, on the other hand, the methodology for execution can be improved hugely from the beginning to the end.

# Plan of Action

## Where Project Met Expectations

As the songs written by the artists from the songwriting and production camp met my expectations, the core of this project to create an innovative, diverse and collaborative songwriting and production experience shall be kept, as well as the strategic planning of the songwriting and production camp, and the methodology of grouping artists.

- **Strategic Planning of the Songwriting and Production Camp**

The songwriting and production camp is divided into four parts: songwriting, arrangement, production, and mixing. Each part is assigned a Berklee professor to guide the artists to make sure that the songs and the productions meet the industry standard of pop to attract as much audience as possible. There are also constant deadlines for the artists to submit their demos to review. Making the deadlines and constant reviews mandatory benefit me hugely to keep track of the working process and to identify communication and production problems within the artist groups. It is the most essential tool to help me keep the camp atmosphere collaborative and healthy.

Another core strategy for planning this camp is to keep the communication between the artists themselves, and between the artists and the professionals going.

When it comes to a creative process with multiple artists, there is no doubt that disputes would happen, especially when the artists have completely different cultural backgrounds and musical tastes. As the artists tend to insist on their own thoughts, there must be a third perspective. In this project, two roles are playing this third perspective: the more experienced and the more professional Berklee professors, and a mutual mediator who looks at the situation from a bigger picture — me. I am equipped with strong empathetic ability from my experience as the president of an international student organization that I can analyze a dispute from both sides and help them find a mutual way and offer a direction as the producer of the album. To make the communication easier, I created a big group of all the artists where I deliver the most important reminders for the camp and six individual groups at the beginning of the camp so that I could communicate with them easily if anything came out.

- **Methodology of Grouping Artists**

First and foremost, I prioritized grouping a Berklee student and a non-Berklee student because I think it would encourage them to innovate by working with someone who receives different music education. Then, I must make sure that each team can complete the full songwriting and production process. Carefully checking the skillsets of each artist by having them evaluate themselves and listening to their

past works is mandatory during the recruitment process, which I will expand on in detail below. Thirdly, pairing them with the balance of their voice textures, songwriting vibes or themes (passion, love, rhythmic, etc.), trendy fusion genres, and so on. I practiced my A&R ability in this session where I tried to identify if one artist would work well with the other artist musically, stylistically, and personally (this part was a gamble).

## **Where Project Did Not Meet Expectations**

As I concluded, nearly all executive processes can be optimized. I would unfold the top three crucial executive processes that can be optimized below. A more fluid working flow in these processes would make the whole project practice much more efficient.

- **Pre-Project Promotion, Opportunity & Resources Outreach**

After completing the songwriting and production camp, I realize the importance of self-promotion with an idea of a project. Telling people what I want to do would gather people who are interested in doing something similar around me much faster and easier. Meanwhile, sharing the idea not only to peers but also to faculty members. I have received crucial help from faculty members and academic resources. For example, I was connected to artists in a songwriting community in Japan by one of our seminar guest speakers. It happened because I reached out and

talked about this project I had and have received help. The Japanese artists who joined my project wrote an amazing city-pop song with a Berklee student. I was also recommended to reach out to the Berklee Global Initiative team for my global outreach approach. I connected to Jason and have received tremendous help from him connecting to talented artists from Berklee Global Academic Partners.

The two outreaches happened in the middle of the project and nearly to the end of the process. I was not confident enough to make the connections at the very beginning since I have nothing practically done yet. However, now I understand that the power of a good idea and a practical plan is persuasive enough to bring valuable resources onboard.

- **Building a Team vs. Running a Team**

This is the first time that I try to put together a team from nothing and it is such a challenge. I did not understand the logic behind putting together a team at all, which led to my failure in teamwork. There is a huge difference between building a team and running a team. I had experience running a team of selected members, while each of them was self-driven to the role that they were elected. I did not have to worry too much about their dedication or job assignment. All I need to do was to assign them tasks accordingly to make everything run smoothly and keep the team united. However, it was entirely different to start building a team from nothing. The

first thing I must worry about was how I can make others interested in what I do and keep them interested. The two outreaches happened in the middle of the project and nearly to the end of the process. I was not confident enough to make the connections at the very beginning since I have nothing practically done yet. However, now I understand that the power of a good idea and a practical plan is persuasive enough to bring valuable resources onboard.

- **Promotion and Release Planning**

The promotion and release plan for this project has changed three times. Initially, I decided to release a single to kick off the album release. Then, considering the shortage of promotion budget and enhancing the publicity effect, my team suggested dividing the album into three EPs and release them one by one. In this case, we would have more time to pitch partners to get more funds for further promotion. However, the plan didn't run as smoothly as we thought. We were short on hand to reach out to global conservatories to include more works from the global artists. With only six songs on hand, it would be a waste of resources if releasing in three EPs, so we agreed on releasing all the songs in one album. Eventually, we started the collaboration with the Berklee Global Initiative team and successfully received songs from the global artists. Though, at this point it would be too late to get back to the EP plan, so we decide to keep the one album release.



The promotion and releasing plan have changed back and forth throughout the process due to all the uncertainties. Even though the uncertainties are inevitable, it is still possible to get rid of most of them in the future by better organizing resources and confirming participating institutions.

## Next Steps

The album is planned to be released at the end of July. Working toward that goal, we are finalizing the release and promotion plan with the Berklee Global Initiative team. Other than that, we are still preparing materials for promotion. First, we will invite the professors who were speakers and mentors for the Summer Whistle project to record a short clip of the promotional video. Each of them would answer three questions regarding their experience with the virtual songwriting camp and what they feel about the global collaboration between young artists. Then, we will release a short video of the artists talking about what they feel about global collaboration. Short clips of the songs will also be included in these promotion videos.

There will be an album cover that would be attached with the Summer Whistle project on social media for promotion. Meanwhile, each artist team would have their promotion picture for their song, preferably with themselves presented on the pictures.

Ideally, the artists would share their song and the album project on their social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. At least one group of artists is planning on producing a music video for their song. Moreover, we will prepare some press releases that we will try to pitch to some music magazines to introduce this project.

## **Contribution to the Profession**

The most important lesson I learned from this process is to be confident and always do self-promotion. The strongest tool to be persuasive is a strong, positive, and confident attitude, rather than how completed and perfect a business plan is. I must believe my project and my idea is valuable first in order to make others believe the same way.

Meanwhile, I have also practiced my A&R skill which would be helpful for my future career. I have recently confirmed that my job at Tencent Music Entertainment will include projects working with singers or well-known influencers who only know a little bit about music, and industry professionals. I feel more comfortable being the liaison between influencers and industry professionals to help with the communication between them while offering suggestions for the artwork.

Moreover, I have a more detailed acknowledgment of an album production process. The understanding of the collaborative songwriting and production process and the album

production process gives me more space for innovation in my future career. I am currently adapting to a streaming platform A&R methodology where you just need to find potential influencers, give them a mass number of songs to sing, and let the market test them. I find it interesting to adapt this production process to a streaming platform where you identify some precise music elements in a mass number of songs and let the market tells the tendency of becoming hits. This is the situation that you pay less attention to each song but make each music element choose intentionally. For me, it is a great balance between music creation, social science, and business.