

Berklee College of Music

Elementos

A celebration of earth and human emotions

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-Mónica Andrade, June 2020

Abstract

The purpose of this project was to create and produce the first album for the author's music and find her artistic style and uniqueness through the process. The concept of it is oriented to celebrate human emotions, arts, and earth, as well as addressing climate change issues in the journey to create awareness of the dangers of plastic pollution because this is one of the artist's main concerns. The first step was the production of eight songs, each named after one element of nature, followed by the design of the cover art. For the sound design and style, this album mixes tropical beach vibes, warm rhythms, fun pop melodies and electronic synths mixed with organic sounds recorded using recycled waste for example plastic and glass. The author hopes this album will deliver a message of wellness and inspire people to take action against global warming through small changes in their daily life.

Introduction

Humanity is at constant evolution. This is the technology era and people live their everyday life in front of screens and Artificial Intelligence.¹ Artists in the modern world face the challenge to make people connect with their inner selves, with their community, and with the planet, both in and out of the box.² This is why this album is proposed for the project, where the listener can connect with art, humanity and earth.

The Planet has suffered a substantial change due to human activity. Some consequences of human footprints in environment are natural disasters, unbalanced ecosystems and the lack of vital resources, such as water and ocean species. Life as we know it is about to change, compromising the future of our species. ³

Artists are responsible for listening to those important messages and share them with the world through art. It's proven that the magic of music can make

¹Roy Hessel. "11 Hours a Day in Front of a Screen. This Is What It's Doing to Your Eyes." World Economic Forum. September 2016. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/09/staring-down-the-dangers-of-the-digital-workplace/>.

²Laura Zabel. "Six Creative Ways Artists Can Improve Communities." The Guardian. The Guardian. February 12, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2015/feb/12/creative-ways-artists-improve-communities>.

³Carly Casella. "Climate Change Could End Human Civilisation as We Know It by 2050, Analysis Finds." ScienceAlert. 2019. <https://www.sciencealert.com/by-2050-climate-change-could-alter-human-civilisation-as-we-know-it>.

people and masses come together to achieve powerful causes and unite at a certain moment in time and space.⁴

2- Review of the state of the art

2.1 Music as an agent of change

There are different actions by artists and musicians that are creating awareness and impact on their communities. An inspiring example is the British songwriter Nick Mulvey, who in partnership with a brewer, printed his latest single on a vinyl record made from ocean waste plastic (fig.2).⁵



Figure 2. A Vinyl record made out of ocean plastic waste. Image by. Marsha Silva

⁴ Gerry Bloustien, Margaret Peters, and Susan Luckman. 2016. *Sonic Synergies: Music, Technology, Community, Identity*. Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1551077&site=eds-live>.

⁵ Marsha Silva. "Nick Mulvey Releases a Vinyl Record Made from Plastic Ocean Garbage." Digital Music News. October 4, 2019. <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2019/10/03/nick-mulvey-releases-a-vinyl-record-made-from-plastic-ocean-garbage/>.

2.5. Artists going green

Some examples of other actions that musicians around the world are implementing into their day to day lives to make a positive impact and reduce carbon footprints are:

Dave Matthews Band, in partnership with the Reverb non-profit organization uses a Biodiesel-fueled tour bus, reducing waste and eating locally, recycling backstage with reusable water bottles, he neutralizes the footprint of his tours⁶.

Another action comes from the band named Cloud Cult, they built a recording studio on an organic farm and powered it with geothermal energy, they repurposed old CD Jewel cases and printed liner notes with soy ink on recycled paper.⁷

Will.i.am has partnered with Coca-Cola to create EKOCYCLE, a brand meant to inspire new things made in part from recycled material and making "sustainable living cool." They sell a 3D printer that isn't just partially made from recycled material, it lets you create new objects using post-consumer plastic.⁸

⁶ "REVERB." REVERB. December 13, 2019. <https://reverb.org>

⁷ "Artists Going Green." 2010. Rollingstone.Com. 2010. <https://www.rollingstone.com/interactive/artists-going-green/#cloud-cult>.

⁸ "The Coca-Cola Company." Coca-Cola.Co.Uk. March 6, 2015. <https://www.coca-cola.co.uk/stories/will-i-am-launches-ekocycle-in-harrods>.

3-Description

The work consists in an eight-song album, mixing Latin grooves and percussion with melodic Pop and Electronic synths. The process started with songwriting (The album is written in Spanish), followed by the melody creation, structure, arrangement, vocal recording, editing, mixing and mastering. For the integration of the environmental consciousness concept, each song is named after one element of nature:

“Elementos”

1-*Luna* (Moon)

2-*Viento* (Wind)

3-*Mar* (Ocean)

4-*Luz* (Light)

5-*Fuego* (Fire)

6-*Sin Estrellas* (No Stars)

7-*Tiempo* (Time)

8-*Amanecer* (Sunrise)



Figure 3. Vocal recording session for the song “Luna”. Image by. Jorge Vidal

Even though the song’s titles are named after an element of nature, the song’s lyrics talk about human emotions and stories. The listener will be able to find inside the lyrics the hidden word that names the song. In summary, the music represents the “Element” of nature whereas the lyrics represent the emotions of human feelings and the story that interacts with the “Element”.

For the incorporation of a nature preservation and recycling consciousness element, a new percussive instrument was built for the recording using waste materials for example: hard plastics, glass and aluminum. This instrument was named “*The Trashpad*” and it was used for recording original foley samples and then processed them for the sound design of the songs.

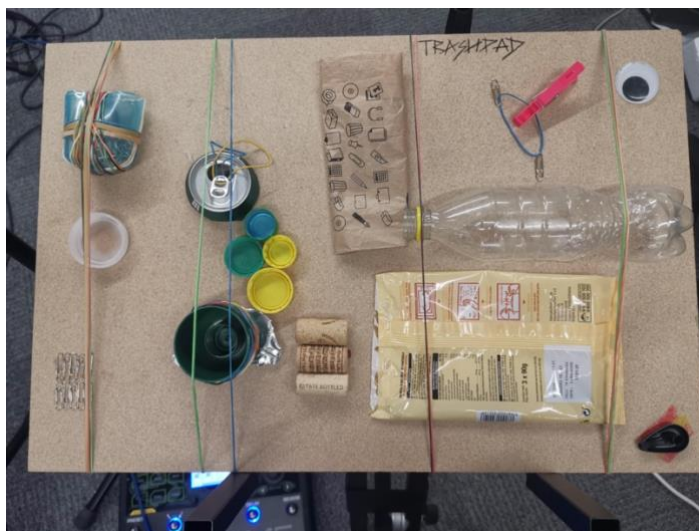


Figure 3. "The Trashpad": A percussive instrument made of recycled waste. Image by. Mónica Andrade

As for the art design, a brainstorm was made to get to the creative idea which was to showcase the personal brand of the artist through a drawing silhouette of her, wearing glasses and smile (which are her distinctive elements), holding a world in her hands. From the world would come out different graphic figures, each representing one element of nature. Here is a drawing sketch of the prototype and idea:



Figure 4. A sketch showing the creative idea for the art design. Image by. Mónica Andrade

4- Innovative Aspects

The album has four elements of innovation, which are:

-*The creative concept*: it has a clear thematic that involves environmental impact combined with human emotions and its represented through the music, the cover art and a merge of music styles like pop with electronic and Latin grooves.

-*Sonic signature elements*: The recording of Foley signature sounds with waste recycled material and the creation of “*The Trashpad*”.

-*Crafted Synth Sounds*: the creation of synths from scratch using different types of synthesis, for example FM (Frequency Modulated), Granular and Additive synthesis, using digital Synths like Serum, FM8 and Granulator for the sound design and the creation of melodic elements for the hooks and soundscapes for textures and sonic ambiances through the tracks.

-*Vocal treatment*: One of the artistic signature sounds for the project is the vocal treatment, because the particular vocal texture is airy, so there was a process of experimentation with different effects and processing to achieve an intimate color of the voice.

5- New Skills Acquired

For the development of the project, new skills were acquired through the process of creation, that will trace the artist's professional methodology for future work, they include:

- Songwriting: Writing the songs and melodies from scratch and crafting the art of combining words to transmit a message.

- Production: The creation of arrangements that match the core emotion of each song and giving it an objective structure.

- Audio Processing and Editing: Development of techniques for recording and personalize audio through modern digital tools for shaping sound like Protools, Ableton Live, RX by Izotope, Pitch correction, EQ.

- Mixing: Mixing the album led to discover techniques for achieving the best possible sound for enhancing the sonic experience for the listener, developing a methodology for balancing, EQ, compressing, adding creative effects and creating sonic spaces for the pieces of music.

- Time management and organization: for the development of the project, it was very important to have a good task management, creating a project roadmap for achieving deadlines and incorporating to the process tools like Trello and Google Calendar.

- Sound Design: Creating sounds from scratch substantially improved the album quality and originality because it gave sonic signature and consistency to the overall work.

6- Challenges

The main anticipated challenge of the project was producing an album entirely and creating a process for the first time, with basic previous production and mixing experience. Another expected challenge was to merge the concept of environmental consciousness with music and to make it digestible and fun, combining them accurately with stories and emotions as a mean to connect with the listener.

The most important challenge for the project was unexpected at the beginning of it, and it was the COVID-19 situation that came to the world, which limited the resources for the making of the project. Some of the limitations were: the lack of recording studios availability, professional equipment for the recording of vocals, foley sounds and instruments. The way this challenge was faced, was setting up a basic home studio using the following equipment:

- Shure PGA27 Condenser Microphone
- Pop filter and Microphone stand
- Ableton Push 2
- Scarlett 2i2 audio interface
- Eris 3.5 studio monitors
- AKAI MPK Mini controller
- AKAI Synthstation 49 controller
- CORT Electro Acoustic guitar

This equipment along with digital technology, were the tools used for the creation of the album. Working with limitations and isolation, were key elements that made creativity show up in an unexpected way which was in the end favorable to the project.

7- Future Ramifications

The short-term plans (2-4 months) after the album production are:

7.1 Release strategy through a record label:

The first step will be pitching the project to record labels in the Spanish market, both majors and indie. The objective of reaching out to labels is to get investment for marketing and exposure of the album and artist.

7.2 Do It Yourself (DIY) Release strategy

If the record label approach does not work out, the release would take place through a Do it Yourself (DIY) release strategy, which would involve the following elements:

-Distribution: through Believe Digital distribution platform.

-Social Media: content (both organic and paid) strategy involving the following social channels: Facebook, Instagram, Twitch and TikTok.

-Performance: pitching to both online and live music festivals (once they are available again) to reach new audiences.

-Collaboration with other artists, influencers and brands to reach cross audiences.

-Online exposure through networking, reaching playlists curators, blog owners and online radio stations.

-Publishing: Pitching to publishing and sync agencies to make the music available for licensing on movies, TV shows, advertising.

8- Conclusions

Environmental concerns are predicted to grow as a result of COVID-19 due to the excessive waste of masks and medical material, and the return of the same economic model that has ruled the world for years..⁹

This is why experts predict there will be an increasing need of voices and means of expression that address the problem and stand for a cause, influencing fans and followers to take action against this problem..¹⁰

There is also a trend to a more human society, more connected with their emotions , that's why this album aims to connect with the audience and shares a message of consciousness that stands for art and shows that with creative small solutions and everyday decisions each individual can contribute to a big social impact that benefits the future of humanity.¹¹

⁹ Nikolia Apostolou "Coronavirus plastic waste polluting the environment" 2010. Rollingstone.Com. 2010. <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-plastic-waste-polluting-the-environment/a-53216807>

¹⁰ Kathleen Gallaher. "After Coronavirus: Global Youth Reveal That the Social Value of Art Has Never Mattered More." *The Conversation*, 14 May 2020, theconversation.com/after-coronavirus-global-youth-reveal-that-the-social-value-of-art-has-never-mattered-more-138056.

¹¹ Rajendran Viswanathan. "A Wishlist for the Post Covid-19 Era: A Better Society for All." *Times of India Blog*, 22 May 2020, timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/a-wishlist-for-the-post-covid-19-era-a-better-society-for-all/.

Appendix A: Project Timeline

2019-2020

Steps	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
1. Songwriting								
2. Music Production								
3. Vocal recording								
4. Editing								
5. Mixing								
6. Mastering								
7. Art Design								

Table 1- Timeline by month 2019-2020

Appendix B: List of resources used

Studios

AKSS

STADS

Jazztone Studio

Personnel

“LUNA” Vocal Recording

Engineer- Jorge Vidal

Master Engineer-

Giorgio Schipani

Designer-

Fernando Ríos

Software

Ableton Live

Protools

Equipment

Ableton Push

Akai Mini MIDI controller

Scarlett 2i2 Interface

Shure PGA27

Eris E3.5 Speakers

CORT Acoustic Guitar

Appendix C: Budget

ITEM	PROPOSED	REAL	FINAL (REAL)
MATERIALS (disposables)			
Hard Drives	\$60	\$0	\$50
Memory sticks	\$30	\$0	\$0
USB Stick	\$40	\$0	\$0
EQUIPMENT			
HARDWARE			
COMPUTER (purchase) 120 days	\$2,000	\$0	\$2,700
SOFTWARE			
ABLETON (purchase) 120 days	\$300	\$0	\$0
PROTOOLS (purchase) 120 days	\$580	\$0	\$0
PERSONNEL			
ENINGEERS	\$200	\$0	\$0
MASTER ENGINEER	\$800	\$0	\$0
DESIGNER	\$300	\$200	\$100
MUSIC PRODUCTION			
STUDIO RENTAL (Berkee 15 days)	\$3,750	\$0	\$0
STUDIO RENTAL (Home 18 days)	\$900	\$0	\$0
PLUGINS FOR MIXING	\$750	\$300	\$120
MIC RENTALS (35 DAYS)	\$600	\$0	\$0
MIDI CONTROLLER	\$300	\$0	\$0
ABLETON PUSH	\$800	\$0	\$0
ACOUSTIC GUITAR	\$300	\$0	\$350
STUDIO MONITORS	\$100	\$200	\$100
STUDIO HEADPHONES	\$150	\$0	\$0
INTERFACE	\$200	\$0	\$0
MIC AND KEYBOARD STANDS	\$50	\$0	\$0
OVERHEAD			
RENT	\$1,225	\$1,125	\$1,125
SERVICES	\$175	\$175	\$175
PHONE PLAN	\$175	\$175	\$140
FOOD	\$700	\$700	\$850
FEES			
MY FEE	\$1,000	\$0	\$0
TOTALS	\$15,485	\$2,875	\$5,710

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