

Berklee College of Music

Born In Quarantine

Creation of an Audio Visual Extended play (EP)

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Abstract

In the year 2020, Covid 19 came as a shock as the entire world was in a lockdown. Several places were hit really hard with the virus, leaving many people infected and unfortunately, many lost their lives as well. This project aims to convey the journey that the artist Sparsh Narang experienced through the creation of an extended play (EP) called Born In Quarantine, consisting of Electronic, glitchy, atonal and ambient elements along with visuals for each track, that take you through a journey of emotions and makes you accept the reality of this challenging times.

Keywords: extended play, Covid -19, electronic music, Music production, Electronic music production, Audio Visual, Reactive visuals, Atonal, Ambient, Glitch

1. Introduction

This project involves the artist Sparsh Narang as the main subject of experiment. He will challenge the role as an artist, music producer, visual artist and an innovator to reinvent himself into a versatile musician. His scope of work will involve producing, directing, innovating, creating, experimenting and leading this whole project.

The main objective of this research is to convey the story of the experience of Covid-19 with visuals elements. This will be achieved by dividing the research into smaller objectives, which will be as follows

:-

- Composing, arranging and producing five tracks consisting of electronic, ambient, glitchy and atonal elements, to convey the intensity and the reality of the situation by taking the audience through a journey of intensity and bringing them back to the normality of life.
- Conceptualising the visual story to enhance the impact of the tracks.
- Using Max MSP and Adobe AfterEffects to create a story line consisting of abstract as well as audio reactive visuals.

After Effects will be used in cases where the story line is a bit more complex and extensive details are required.

In case of tracks that have a minimalistic approach Max MSP will be used along with Ableton to send midi data to trigger changes along with changes being triggered by the amplitude of the audio.

1.1 Covid 19

COVID-19 is a contagious ailment brought about by a newfound coronavirus. A great many people tainted with the COVID-19 infection will encounter gentle to direct respiratory ailment and recoup

without requiring exceptional treatment. More seasoned individuals, and those with basic clinical issues like cardiovascular infection, diabetes, constant respiratory ailment, and malignancy are bound to create genuine disease. The most ideal approach to forestall and hinder transmission is be all around ¹

1.2 Purpose of the project

COVID -19 is a pandemic responsible for creating a state of alarm around the globe, infecting 5.4 million people and causing 344,556 deaths as of 24th May, 2020.² It has led to economic crises in multiple countries, along with people losing their jobs as well as their loved ones. The purpose of the project is to take the audience through a journey where they accept and live the reality and intensity of the situation.

1.3 Credibility of the project

The project originates from the emotional struggle and the challenges the artist went through, and convey the message that music is a tool that could make you deeply connect with your inner self and emotions despite the challenging times.

¹ [World Health Organization. 2020. "Coronavirus." Www.Who.Int. 2020. https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1.](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1)

² [Worldometer. 2020. "Coronavirus Toll Update: Cases & Deaths by Country of Wuhan, China Virus - Worldometer." Worldometers.Info. 2020. https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/.](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/)

2. Review of the State of Art

2.1 Introduction to audio visual

Visual music predates the contemporary concept of the music video by at least half a millennia, depending on how one qualifies it. Most historical commentary on visual music finds an origin point in the Medieval colour organ, which is the earliest known technological precursor to today's iTunes Visualizer. Many commentators, however, do not go so far back, and relate visual music to early 20th Century trends in Modernism. In today's maker culture, there is often a lack of a deep historical sense and context. At the start of the first video embed below, an Arduino-tinkerer claims that the colour organ originated in the 1970s when there was a genre of music-light interactive consumer novelties that were also called color organs.³

In 1921 German, painter and filmmaker Walter Ruttmann created Opus 1. He assembled each projection print of the film with an old college friend who wrote the score. A string quintet performed live with each screening of Opus 1, which was shown in several cities across Germany. The abstract shapes moved onto the screen in time with the music, Ruttmann achieved this by drawing colour pictures in the musical score so musicians would be able to synchronise their playing with the film.

Upon the attendance of a rehearsal of Opus 1 in Frankfurt, Oskar Fischinger decided to make visual music. He started to experiment with slicing wax and clay images while using silhouettes combined with drawn animations.

³ PhD, Michael Filimowicz. 2020. "Audiovisual Aesthetics #5 | Visual Music." Medium. May 13, 2020. <https://medium.com/sound-and-design/audiovisual-aesthetics-5-b29c9471020>.

Fischinger made some of his earlier films using a colour organ which was controlled by several slide projectors and stage spotlights that had changing colour filters and fading capabilities.

In 1925 he designed a new colour organ with five projectors, which added a more complex layer of colour. Fischinger created wooden cubes and cylinders that were painted and coloured with fabric, that were projected on screen to create his films.⁴

⁴ [“Brief History of Visual Music.” 2016. February 5, 2016.](https://overprocessedthinking.com/brief-history-of-visual-music/)

3. Description

The project aims at conveying a personal journey that the artist went through during the phase of quarantine, with the following tracks:-

1. A night in oven - Based on a personal experience that the artist went through, right before the world wide lockdown was announced, Conveying the story of how things seem fine but the intensity builds up slowly, and the phase of acceptance hasn't been achieved. This track explored the genre of techno, with melodic, glitchy and atonal elements.
2. Isolation - Defines the phase one of the lockdown, where you are stuck at home, away from your family, friends and loved ones, just with your own thoughts. Conveying the feeling of being stuck and isolated in one place. This track explored the genre of Techno, with melodic and atonal elements.
3. Pause - A track based on covid 19, conveying the feeling that the world is on a hold, nothing seems to be moving forward, no optimism stays in the situation and being stuck in a time loop made using vocal samples of people explaining their story, hopes and feelings to create a bigger impact.
4. Pipe dream - A track based on hope, conveying that despite the challenging times there is always a hope for improvement. A phase where the intensity builds up and the reality of the situation has been accepted, and now there is a hope for betterment, things don't seem that bad. The sound of the track is bright and lush exploring the genre of synth wave.
5. Goya - An Urdu word that refers to the transporting suspension of disbelief that happens when fantasy is so realistic that it temporarily becomes reality. An Experimental atonal and glitchy track that brings you back to the hope that the world will be normal again.

Visuals

1. A night in oven - Visuals made using Max MSP, the movement and the rotation is impacted by the amplitude and the intensity of the track itself. Consisting of glitchy images that are changed, manipulated and deformed during the duration of the track.
2. Isolation - Visuals made using After Effects. The track required more detailed and abstract visuals to convey the story and the intensity of the track.
3. Pause - Visuals made using After Effects. The track required actual facts, statistics and animation to convey the time loop that we are stuck in.
4. Pipe Dream - Visuals made using Max MSP. After the buildup of the intensity in the previous tracks the feeling of calmness and hope needs to be explained. Visuals made with a minimalistic approach reacting to the kick, snare and melody of the track that bring a change in the shape, size and colours of the visuals.
5. Goya- Visuals made using After Effects. A minimalistic approach with extensive details to match the atonal and glitchy elements of the track.

Having a combination of these many elements is a good way to communicate with the audience, they have something to hear and connect with visually. But at the same time this led the artist to explore the path of being a producer, audio engineer, composer and a visual director.

4. Innovative Aspects

Coming from a background of being a guitar player to identifying himself as an audio visual artist in a span of one year, Creation of the extended play Born in Quarantine, has been a journey of self exploration and self growth for the artist Sparsh Narang. The project in itself pushed the artist to explore several genres, sound design techniques , composition tools and as well as learning Max MSP and After Effects along with other softwares like Processing, Blender and Premier Pro at an advanced level outside the academic curriculum as well. The artist also found ways of creating Audio visualizer plugin for Ableton , triggering of Midi notes in Ableton with the use of a flashlight and doing a bit of research on motion season using Max MSP, Along with using Blender for 3dimensional designing with reactive elements and After Effects to do the same as well. In the end all of the skills acquired were used in making this project.

Despite the challenging times and the lack of academic resources available due to the lockdown, the growth of the project and the artist did not take a step back. The artist went through several experiments of learning and coding visuals along with understanding how to make elements of a visual react to certain elements of a track.

5. New skills acquired

Throughout the academic year and the phase of Covid 19, the artist has not only acquired technical skills, but has also developed soft skills. Being proficient in industry standard softwares like pro tools and ableton is not only a necessary skill, but also gives you an opportunity to take advantage of both of their strengths. Along with that the artist also explored the area of audio visual and reactive visuals, using softwares like Max MSP, After Effects, Blender and Processing, which opens up avenues in the future and gives the artist a great tool to visually express music as well. Given the opportunity to work and collaborate with fellow students in different roles, have helped the artist's team building, working, communication and interpersonal skills. Coming from a non technical background and never being in a studio setup the artist always had a curiosity to learn and throughout the academic year played different roles of being a producer, engineer, mixing engineer, Visual artist, visual director and assistant producer and engineer as well.

6. Challenges, both expected & unanticipated

The challenges faced were as follows :-

- Switching roles from between being a producer, audio visual artist and an engineer.
- Covid- 19 slowing down the progress of the project along with several opportunities being canceled or delayed.
- Lack of a stronger system to render or preview visual ideas.
- Motivation to work in the initial phase of the lock down.
- Feeling intimidated around highly skilled individuals

These challenges were overcome by:-

- Dividing days into being an artist, producer and an engineer to focus on one element at a time.
- Creating achievable goals and deadlines
- Accepting the reality of the situation and moving on with the project, to later on making the project about the entire experience of covid-19
- Taking the advantage of the time to learn about new resources, platforms and spending extra hours learning, innovating and conceptualising ideas.
- Taking time to figure who the artist is, having patience to develop skills and learn.
- The challenges also made the artist extremely grateful for good health along with resources available.

7. Future Ramifications

They are as follows :-

- Marketing is an extremely important tool for any artist, it can make or break a brand. Coming up with the marketing team, for promotion, realistic release deadlines, marketing strategies and budgeting as well.
- Conceptualising similar ideas, keep working on them and release audio visual projects.
- Branding and promoting the artist as an audio visual artist named ocular (which is a synonym for vision) spelled as OQLRR, where the O will represent an eye socket.
- Exploration of projection mapping using resolume.
- Take the content created in this academic year and the future project and perform them live.
- Getting a deeper understanding of creating Max for live devices, and using Max MSP for more detailed and complex visuals that react to specific frequencies and not just amplitude.
- Collaboration with other artists, not only as a visual director but also as a producer and an engineer.
- Pre- release promotion on platforms like Instagram and facebook to keep the audience engaged but giving them short clipping of work in progress or teasers for upcoming releases.

8. Conclusion

The academic year and the pandemic has been a challenging phase. Despite the slowdown the growth of the artist and the project did not stop, the willingness to work and the support from faculty and the peers kept the artist going and motivated. Leaving the academic year with knowledge of softwares like Pro Tools, Ableton, After Effects, Blender, Processing, Runway, Premier Pro and Max MSP has given the artist a hope and optimism for the future. Challenges will be faced at several moments of our lives, and music has kept the artist going and helped him to cope up and bounce back.

9. Appendix

9.1 Budgets and resources

ITEM	PROPOSED	REAL	ACTUAL Running			Subtotal
			Initial	AFTER 1 MONTH	Final	
MATERIALS (disposable)						
Hard drive *2	\$135	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Memory Card	\$10	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Extension Chord * 2	\$20	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Sandisk SSD (500 gb) *2	\$176	\$176	\$176	\$176	\$176	
						\$176
EQUIPMENT						
HARDWARE						
Interface (Purchase)	\$159	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Computer (Purchase)	\$2100	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Novation Launchpad X (Purchase)	\$169	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Audio Technica M50 X	\$129	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Beyerdynamic DT 990 pro (Purchase)	\$145	\$145	\$145	\$145	\$145	
						\$145
SOFTWARE						
Ableton (purchase)	\$449	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Max msp	\$250	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Blender	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Adobe creative cloud (Monthly subscription)	\$16	\$16	\$16	\$16	\$16	
						\$16
PERSONNEL						
Mixing Engineer	\$2000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Mastering engineer (\$70/track)	\$350	\$350	\$350	\$350	\$350	
						\$350
OVERHEADS						
Rent		\$0	\$0			
Water	\$12	\$12	\$12	\$12	\$58	
Internet	\$22	\$22	\$22	\$22	\$88	
Phone	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$40	
						\$186
TOTAL	\$6152	\$731	\$731	\$731	\$785	\$873

9.2 Timeline

Timeline	Plan of Action
September 2019	Understanding the making of electronic music and visuals using Max MSP and Aftereffects
1 st October – 30 th November 2019	Exploring ways to make visuals react to the audio
31 st January 2020 - 31 st march 2020	Composing arranging and finalising the tracks and conceptualising the EP
1 st April 2020 - 15 st may 2020	Conceptualising, editing and finishing the visuals
15 st may 2020 - 1 st may 2020	Finish the mixing and mastering of the tracks

9.3 Deliverables

Deliverables will be as follows

1. Audio tracks that were made during the year to form an EP. Which are as follows :-

- Track 1 - A night in oven
- Track 2 - Isolation
- Track 3 - Pause
- Track 4 - Pipe Dream
- Track 5 - Goya

2. After Effect and Max MSP files that were used to make the visuals

3. Ableton Session files

4. list of gear and instruments used for creating the EP which will include the following :-

- Novation launch pad X
- Akai mpk mini
- Electric guitar

5. Visuals along with the audio consisting of both .MOV and .MP4 files

10. Bibliography

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