

Berklee College of Music

# **Trials & Tribulations:**

*Breaking Barriers*

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of  
Master of Music in Music Production, Technology, and Innovation

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## Abstract

Unrequited devotion has many women underrepresented in the Haitian Music Industry (HMI). Blending new-age African rhythms with melodic *Compas* styles, this project focuses on a 6-track debut album for artistic alter ego: Widdo named Venom. Showcasing talented efforts of a new-age artist, Haitian *Kompa* and R&B styles will empower women in the HMI; inspiring the rising generation. With the ongoing political crisis and social unrest in Haiti, part of the EP will shed light on its never-ending protests allowing its people to have a voice. Overall, it showcases Widline's ability to produce, songwriter, and be an artist. Using electronic music with innovation by uniting different styles and technological skills. This will build Widline's portfolio, allowing her to apply the knowledge she's attained from her undergraduate journey to her tenure at Berklee Valencia maters.

## 1. Introduction

As a fervent lover of music, Widline was exposed to a multitude of genres at a very young age. This aided in her musical growth, beside her passion for all things sound. With parents hailing from Haiti, the first free black republic, the tunes and rhythms it holds are her second language.<sup>1</sup> Avidly wanting to be a singer, she looked to Alicia Keys for inspiration which influenced her to learn the piano, and undertake singing. This dream slowly began to fade as the years passed on. Fairly between fourth and sixth grade, she began to get severely tormented because of her weight, the darkness of her skin, her Haitian culture, and just simply being herself. Each year it got worse, middle school being the most unpleasant three years of her life.

Tyrannized until high school, she retreated into her shell more and more. Covering up and hiding from the public eye until she was in so deep, it seemed there would never be a way out. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Only, they do. Oftentimes they hurt more as the mental pain lasts far beyond the physical tingle that ends swiftly. She soon decided not to let anyone call her less than. Unbeknownst to her, that mental trauma would take years to overcome, but it was something she was willing to pursue. She began singing and performing heavily, as it provided an irrefutable level of thrill that kept her returning for more. Nevertheless, during her undergraduate career at Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, she slowly stopped singing altogether. Taking that time to evolve her technical skills, and apply them on countless projects.

<sup>1</sup> “History of Haiti.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, November 12, 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Haiti#The\\_struggle\\_for\\_unity\\_\(1806–20\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Haiti#The_struggle_for_unity_(1806–20))

Widline wants to display the talents and melodies that flow nonstop to those around her. Blocking out the fear, she wants to be her. So, this is Widdo, creating an original EP composed of six tracks. Widdo explores creative electronic sounds with a strong musical influence from the Haitian *Kompa* genre. The author reveals her many different skills by incorporating them into this project. She will produce these tracks to implement what she has learned at Berklee's Valencia campus.

## 2. Review of the State of the Art

Haitian music is a large genre that is mainly influenced by French, Spanish, and African rhythms.<sup>2</sup> Its styles include *Rara* (parade music), *Twoubadou* (ballads), Creole Hip Hop, and one of the most popular forms, *Compas (Konpa/Kompa)*. Widline will be focusing mainly on the *Compas* genre. *Compas* has a strong base rhythm of meringue, bachata & salsa. This fuses together the African rhythms with ballroom style dancing, placed to a steady beat making it easy to follow. In comparison to the now popular *Kizomba* craze, the major difference of *Kizomba* and *Compas* is the solo section.

The solo section is crucial for new school Haitians, but not so much older generations. Made up of many instruments and effects, it allows artists to freely express emotions to give listeners a heart-dropping melodic line. There are numerous plays on call and response, harmonic tunes, and percussion allowing musicians to let their creativity fun free.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton Slim. "Music of Haiti." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, September 28, 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music\\_of\\_Haiti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Haiti)

Widline knows that there isn't enough emphasis on the women within the HMI. The impact women, such as Phyllisia Ross, Rutshelle and Meilan, have on the HMI is existent and constantly growing, though the appreciation for them is not.<sup>3</sup> She believes they should be equally represented, and advertised as much as the men.

As the first free black republic, Haiti has been oppressed in multiple different ways and their music is the only thing that is solely their and for them. It has played a good portion in the island's advancement, continuing to be instilled into every generation.<sup>4</sup> The HMI is a way for the people of Haiti to not only express themselves but to show the world our beautiful rhythms and instrumental ballads. They use music to escape from the injustice that steadily rocks the tiny island. This has provided much opportunity for artists to take our sounds abroad, women included.

### **3. Description**

Venom is a 6-track EP featuring Widdo as a singer, producer, and lyricist; showcasing Haitian *Kompa* styles while fusing with simple R&B melodies. Track one is a danceable *Kompa* groove intended to get listeners off their feet and to the dance floor. Track two is an R&B original turned *Kompa* remix. On these two specific tracks, she is collaborating with artists in Florida,

<sup>3</sup> L'union Suite. "10 Haitian Female Artist You Should Add To Your Playlist." *L'union Suite*, 23 Sept. 2017, [www.lunionsuite.com/haitian-female-artist-playlist/](http://www.lunionsuite.com/haitian-female-artist-playlist/).

<sup>4</sup> Alanna Stuart. "'Music Is the Haitian Soul': a Primer on Haiti's Unstoppable Music Scene | CBC Arts." *CBCnews*, CBC/Radio Canada, 27 Nov. 2015, [www.cbc.ca/arts/music/haitian-music-primer-etienne-cote-paluck-1.3336973](http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/haitian-music-primer-etienne-cote-paluck-1.3336973).

France, and Boston as well as Berklee's Daniel Prophete. Track three is an alluring interlude, expressing Widline's explorative side. Track four is an upbeat pop track collaborating with Miles Shipps as the producer and engineer. Track five R&B style with Berklee's graduate students Kauner Michael and Destiny Carter. Michael is the lead producer and engineer with Carter being the lead songwriter. Carter and Michael add in their own musical flares allowing Widdo to display her vocal attributes. Track six is a jazz inspired song written in love format. The citizens explain to Haiti that although they love it, it feeds them nothing but injustice.

Widdo uses Digital Audio Workspaces such as Logic, Ableton, and ProTools to complete this EP. Logic is her main Digital Audio Workspace as she enjoys the ease of use, and the quality of their stock plugins. She primarily uses plugins to edit her sections of the EP. As she is collaborating with other engineers and producers and they will use what is necessary for them. She mainly wants to show that good quality music can be created, without having to break the bank. Having limited resources during this time, she's had to work with just an audio interface, an AKM320 MIDI keyboard, an AT2020 mic, and her MacBook Pro. No fancy gear, no large analog boards, or booming studio monitors. She wants to show the younger generations, who come from little, that you don't need much to start off. Just determination, and hard work to push off the start line.

Once she acquires pricier gear, it won't be too difficult to produce, due to the fact that she has worked with little resources. Unfortunately, she doesn't get to implement the more expensive advantages into her first self-made EP.

#### **4. Innovative Aspects**

Within the HMI, many DJs release songs, albums, and EPs they are not featured on. They don't produce or compose any parts of the music, just paying for the services, and tagging their name amongst those who create it. The innovative aspect of her EP starts here.

When tasked to think about our CE topic, her main goal was to make it innovative. She scoured friends, family, even past professors to aid her in adding that magical touch of difference. Not realizing the innovative part would simply be her coming out as not just a DJ. She will be amongst the first to be a featured singer, songwriter, producer, engineer, and much more within the HMI DJ world. The cherry on the cake is that she is a young woman. Unfortunately, the HMI is heavily male-oriented, meaning that most seasoned artists don't put much effort into recognizing women. This is the perfect condition for her to debut her EP, and make an unforgettable impact.

#### **5. New Skills Acquired**

The greatest about this journey of an EP is the massive amount of techniques and skills Widline has learned along the way. The now global pandemic, those skills have more than doubled. While at Berklee, Widline was placed in many group projects. This allowed her to become more of a team player, and observe those who held different positions, where she could expand on her own skills. She learned how to produce, which wasn't a strong quality she possessed. Pablo Munguia gave her the opportunity to step out of her comfort zone, and explore a new environment of music.



Through her courses with Liz Teutsch, Daniel Castelar, Elysha Zaide, Andrea Mendoca, and small workshops with Munguia, she's expanded her knowledge of mixing techniques. This enlarged her level of confidence and understanding of what she wanted to do with her career. Being a woman of color, one is tempted to come across as humble when you are in a field that has just begun to diversify in its gender. Intimidation levels peak, as there are many around you who may know more. She Knows Tech abruptly ended those beliefs, giving Berklee female students the opportunity to be surrounded and taught by women alike. Thanks to Jasmine Kok's initiative, and everyone who had a part in making that vision come alive, Widline was given the chance to explore herself and the lives of women in tech. The ability to work under pressure is a quality that many should work towards achieving. On account of the coronavirus, she was forced to learn this skill hands-on.

## **6. Challenges**

COVID19, better known as the coronavirus, rocked the world in many contrasting waves. This pandemic was nothing that anyone could have predicted. It sent many of us Berklee students back home overseas unexpectedly, miles away in opposite directions from our peers. To say the least, this has been the most challenging time of her graduate tenure. She moved home to Florida with little to no equipment, less than suitable motivation, and a freshly obtained self-quarantine order. Her initial challenge was obtaining gear to continue her CE, meaning that she would be working with less equipment than anticipated. She had been counting on Berklee Valencia's expensive gear to get her EP done, so this was a monumental shift for her.

Moreover, her motivation suffered tremendously. She had inferior days and extraordinary days. Days where she would wake up and immediately start creating, and days where she could lie in bed and not crack open a laptop until 48 hours later. More hours than ever were the ones filled with no motivation. Her mind ran 2 miles a minute, while her body was stuck at the start line. It's these days that she confronted her heaviest setback. Aforementioned, she'd been struggling with accepting her true desire. Being in quarantine with the same two people for more than two months forced her to stop pushing those thoughts away, and deal with them head-on. No matter the circumstance, she is grateful for each unique day, as it's led her to the destination of becoming an artist.

In hindsight, she recognized the meaning of her stage name. In a recent prototype presentation, she was encouraged by a professor to drop the 'DJ' in front of Widdo. She thought about this quite extensively since she held an emotional connection to that detail of her name. She used it to break into the music industry and for that, she'll always be grateful for it. Yet keeping this name will place a label on her when she cannot be categorized into any one bracket. Due to this, she's decided to flow with just Widdo. It's easier on the tongue and doesn't lock her into one box, leaving room for the many surprises that lie beneath.

Many also wondered why she chose the name Widdo as it carries the negative connotation of a widower. She chose the name and black widow spider logo by reason that although she seems fragile and helpless, she is ready to make a deadly attack at any time. She represents female energy as a creative force. This ties perfectly into Widdo since in her shy state, there's not much that immediately meets the eye. Though once you take a deeper look, you will notice her extensive list of talents. Moreover, the black widow Marvel character is a jack of all trades. A world-class

athlete, gymnast, acrobat, and aerialist capable of numerous complex maneuvers and feats, Widline also has many flares that qualify her as a triple threat.

## **7. Future Ramifications**

Widline's upcoming plans include completing her songs, finalizing her logo, setting up a tangible release schedule, and licensing & syncing. She originally planned to release her debut EP in early July but due to COVID19, she had minor and major setbacks which caused her to shift many pieces of her CE. She is now looking at a release set in late fall. Widline is a perfectionist at heart, so she wants to ensure that she is releasing quality music.

Track two is being reformatted into an original, being stripped of samples from the Justin Bieber song, Where Are You Now. Track 3 is continuing on in production, whilst tracks 4 and 5 are on its final mixing and mastering stages. Apart from the musical portion of Venom, Widline will also be focusing on her branding. She is curating a professional portfolio website that will allow anyone to access her past and current projects, her abilities, performance videos, and more.

## **8. Conclusion**

In closing, Impossible love shows that no matter the circumstances, everyone is capable of anything they put their mind to. We should not allow anyone to determine the outcome of our well-deserved destiny. An artist, using Haitian *Kompa* and R&B styles to empower women in the HMI is something that many listeners don't know they need to hear. She plans to rock the industry with her talents, and break barriers for younger women stuck behind her.

## Appendix

**Table 1 – Projected Timeline**

January 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: Begin production and collaborating on lyrics and instrumentation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: Continue production &amp; begin small vocal recordings, record Say My Name vocals</p>
February 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: Travel to the States to work in person with collaborative artists</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: Continue production and vocal recordings, mix ‘Say My Name’</p>
March 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: Continue production and vocal recordings, finalize ‘Hotel Remix’, master ‘Say My Name’</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: Travel home &amp; purchase new equipment, finalize ‘Hotel Remix’</p>
April 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: Record ‘On My Mind’ main vocals, continue producing</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: mix and master Hotel Remix, begin logo design</p>
May 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: Record ‘Where Are You’ main vocals, mix &amp; record ‘On My Mind’ adlibs &amp; harmonies, continue producing, continue logo design</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: Continue producing, continue recording ‘On My Mind’,</p>
June 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: mix and record ‘Where Are You’ adlibs and harmonies, finalize &amp; master ‘On My Mind’, Finalize logo design</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: mix and complete vocal recordings for Impossible Love and 90’s Aphrodisiac</p>
July 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1: master last tracks, finalize cover art</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 2/3: Break</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 4: Finalize musical production of all tracks, begin creating</p>
August 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: Final mix &amp; master of all tracks, continue working on portfolio</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: visual photoshoot for portfolio, write social media schedule</p>
September 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1: finalize social media teasers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 2/3/4: Finalize portfolio, licensing &amp; syncing, begin social media</p>
October 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1/2: Continue social media release</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 3/4: Debut portfolio</p>
November 2020	Debut & Promote EP

**Table 2 – Resource & Budget**

<b>Trials &amp; Tribulations: <i>Breaking Barriers</i></b>			
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b>	<b>ACTUAL</b>	
<b>MATERIALS (disposables)</b>			
Hard Drives	\$300	\$300	
Memory sticks	\$50	\$50	
Memory cards	\$75	\$75	
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>			
<b>HARDWARE</b>			
MIC BUNDLE (purchase) 120 days	\$200	\$150	
INTERFACE (purchase) 120 days	\$700	\$110	
COMPUTER (purchase) 120 days	\$2,500	\$1,000	
CAMERA (rental) 10 days	\$1,200	\$1,200	
<b>SOFTWARE</b>			
ABLETON (purchase) 120 days		\$449	\$449
PRO TOOLS (purchase) 120 days		\$299	\$299
LOGIC PRO X (purchase)120 days			\$199
<b>PERSONNEL</b>			
MUSICIANS # of players x rate x hrs	\$1,200	\$1,200	
ENGINEERS	\$3,000	\$1,000	
CAMERAMEN	\$1,500	\$0	
DIRECTOR	\$2,000	\$0	
MAKEUP	\$300	\$0	
MIXERS	\$2,000	\$500	
EDITORS	\$2,000	\$500	
<b>STUDIO</b>			
BERKLEE daily x # of days		\$3,500	\$1000
HOME daily x # of days		\$300	\$800

<b>CATERING</b>			
MEALS cost/person x #persons x meals	\$500	\$250	
<b>OVERHEAD</b>			
RENT	\$335	\$450	
POWER	\$35	\$100	
WATER	\$0	\$60	
GAS	\$0	\$20	
INTERNET	\$20	\$30	
PHONE	\$10	\$30	
<b>FEEES</b>			
YOUR FEE	\$500	\$300	
YOUR PARTNER'S FEES	\$650	\$400	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$23,623</b>	<b>\$10,472</b>	

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Alanna Stuart. “‘Music Is the Haitian Soul’: a Primer on Haiti's Unstoppable Music Scene | CBC Arts.” *CBCnews*, CBC/Radio Canada, 27 Nov. 2015, [www.cbc.ca/arts/music/haitian-music-primer-etienne-cote-paluck-1.3336973](http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/haitian-music-primer-etienne-cote-paluck-1.3336973).

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