

Berklee College of Music

# **Often Inside: The EP – Where Music Meets Innovation & Technology**

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Music Production,  
Technology & Innovation

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project is to develop an Extended Play (EP) that blends traditional pop elements with contemporary production techniques and utilizes components of life's environment to record audio samples into multiple songs. Both the musical and artistic direction are closely intertwined to provide a cohesive audio-visual experience that is comparable to that of a concept album. The audio recordings collected are layered with synthesizers in unusual yet intriguing ways in order to stimulate and provide the listener with an unexpected audio experience. Additionally, this project entails collaboration with different parties around the world. This project includes the participation of an American Singer named Lizzy Land, and photographer and visual artist named Valentin Folliet. Moreover, the visual components of the project heavily rely on inventive ways of using camera effects, color, and perspective to provide a finished product that invites the listener to discover the world that the music entails.

Keywords: Electronic music, collaboration, EP

## 1. Introduction

The influence electronic music has on this project can be appreciated from its very inception. The genre's relationship with innovation and technology is precisely the pushing factor that looked to break the boundaries of what is possible in music production, which hugely influenced the overall creative process of this project. The 'Often Inside' EP set to release in 2021 is a complete body of work that is fully produced, mixed, and arranged by the artist *Manu Dia*, with additional help from collaborators that are credited in the final package.

The process of creating this EP started shortly after the artist moved to Valencia. It is an attempt at putting all the musical influences and creative skills learned throughout the years by the artist into one solid and cohesive project. This EP is an attempt at bridging the gap between experimental music and more accessible genres such as Pop, Rock, House and Indie. *Manu Dia's* passion for unconventional music has always pushed the artist towards looking for the unexpected when creating music, which is one of the driving forces behind the creation of this whole project.

Additionally, it is important to highlight the collaborative aspect that takes place in putting together this package of original music. With the help of a diverse range of successful artists, *Manu Dia* can have vocals and add more detail to his production. The EP is set to release on Grammy Nominated record label named 'Young Art Records', the music label of a world-renowned musician called 'TOKIMONSTA'.

## 2. Review of the State of the Art

Many artists and genres influence the work of this project, from music to other forms of visual arts. In terms of production, two of the artistic pillars that heavily inspired the sonic approach towards completing this EP are *Tourist* and *Jim-E Stack*. By providing some insight into their work and influences, a clearer picture is painted that helps to put this project into a wider context.

*Tourist* is an artist and music producer that utilizes sounds in unconventional ways, layered with synths and heavily post-processed percussive elements. Part of *Tourist's* discography can be directly linked as an essential reference point for the creative process of the EP. For instance, tracks such as 'Run'<sup>1</sup> or 'Last'<sup>2</sup> are perfect examples of how manipulation of vocal samples in creative ways can be utilized as the key component of a song. Another critical aspect of *Tourist's* music that impacts the creative process of this project is the peculiar arrangement of his songs. For instance, tracks such as 'Run' which has a slow progression allows to build up energy to unveil the drum elements at a crucial point of the song. This type of song structure which is usually associated with dance music is a key component used in many of the songs that are present in this project.

*Tourist* has a unique perspective regarding where he draws inspiration for his work. In many instances, he quotes painters as his biggest influence when creating music, as it's their creative process that interests him the most (Futuremag, 2019). Similarly, a huge part of the inspiration drawn when making this EP can be linked-to photography and graphic design, which in many ways help capture feelings that

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<sup>1</sup> *Tourist*, "Run," William Phillips, Spotify, Monday Records, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Tourist*, "Last," William Phillips, Spotify, Monday Records, 2020.

cannot be expressed through sound. Regarding *Touris's* musical influences, he draws inspiration from UK Garage, House, and Classical music. It is this ability to use different elements from a wide variety of genres and implement them into the music-making process that shaped the creative process of this EP.

Moreover, *Jim-E Stack* is another artist whose work greatly influences the sound of this project. His album 'Ephemera'<sup>3</sup> is the perfect example of experimental meets accessibility. With 'Ephemera', *Jim-E Stack* can put together a collection of tracks that perfectly balance an innovative approach to sound design with a more traditional Pop structure that could be found on the radio. It is this cohesive blend of musical influences that greatly influenced the work put into this project.

In terms of similar projects, artists such as *Flume* have been able to take this production-edge approach to music-making and sound design while maintaining a conceptual and cohesive piece. More recently, *Flume* redefined what it is to make experimental music with his Mixtape called 'Hi This Is Flume'<sup>4</sup>— a chaotic yet cohesive blend of many genres into one. While *Flume's* work did not directly influence the sound of this project, it is his ability to create an experimental yet cohesive package of songs that greatly influenced the visual and creative aspects of this EP.

Finally, a huge source of inspiration when trying to develop a new creative process to start new songs came from *Brian Eno*, a world-renowned artist and musician. His approach of simplicity and minimalism in music gave *Manu* the spark that was needed in order to start a lot of the songs present in the final package. It is from this added perspective towards starting songs from simple elements that *Manu's*

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<sup>3</sup> Jim-E Stack, "Ephemera," James Harmon Stack, Spotify, AWAL Recordings, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Flume, "Hi This Is Flume (Mixtape)" Harley Edward Streten, Spotify, Future Classic, 2020.

production process changed, thus shaping a new sound that can be appreciated in many of the songs of the EP.

In many ways, this project can differentiate itself from the electronic music landscape by focusing on two key concepts: innovation & accessibility. A huge focus was given on writing innovative and experimental music within an accessible scope so that perhaps a wider audience of listeners could be introduced to completely new sounds without instantly rejecting it due to its difference in musical style. Moreover, the project is packaged in with a collection of visual assets that will enable the listener to engage in a deeper level with the music and connect with the artistic vision of the musician

### **3. Description**

Manu Dia's EP is project that is fully recorded, mixed and produced by himself, using FL Studio as its primary DAW. The Extended Play is composed of 6 original tracks that were recorded in the span of a year. Additionally, the EP comes with an extensive visual work done in collaboration with photographer Valentin Folliet. To provide a full and detailed description of the EP, it is appropriate to divide this section in two parts: the music and the visuals.

#### Music

Manu Dia's approach to writing music is inherently technological as most of the production of the EP was done in his personal laptop utilizing a wide range of

software. This clearly poses a clear advantage over using a more conventional way of recording and producing music. For instance, fully producing one song inside the box allows for a lot of flexibility when working on a track, coming with ideas and manipulating the sounds recorded. On the other hand, by heavily relying on software it can easily translate into a generic or non-human sound. In order to curve this issue, Manu Dia tactically recorded a lot of his initial ideas in the studios available in Valencia. This would allow to capture the more authentic human touch in the music that usually comes from playing a real, physical instrument, but with the added flexibility of then being able to heavily process the sounds recorded after the session is done.

### Photography & Visuals

The visual aspect of the project is the final piece of the puzzle that helps putting everything together. Visuals were absolutely imperative to get right. Immediately after starting to work on his CE, Manu had already started to think about Valentin as the director of photography for his project.

The challenging aspect of the photography side of things was to capture movement in a way that it would also retain an intense contrast of colours. A lot of the shots captured were in periods where light was not very present, so Valentin Folliet had to find a way to pop out the colours with software. With limited hardware at his disposal (an outdated 2012 MacBook pro) he managed to achieve a result that outshined Manu's expectations.



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

To define an artistic project by its innovative characteristics is a task that requires a lot of self-reflection and perspective. While it is perhaps difficult to pinpoint what something may constitute as 'innovative', Manu Dia's work clearly stands in a lane of its own, both sonically and visually. This can be seen in three different aspects of his work:

Firstly, the project as a whole had a rather unconventional creative process, which Manu describes as the destruction of sound to create something new and unexpected. This is reflected in his rather unorthodox use of the production software at his disposal. By using said software in all the "wrong" ways, Manu is able to generate musical elements that are difficult to recreate or to observe in many of his contemporaries. To give a specific example, on his track 'Tuesday Morning', Manu bounces to audio and reverses the synth lead melody of the song, as well as adding many instances of a guitar delay and reverb which generates an odd, synthetic yet organic melodic composition which cannot be recreated by midi.

Moreover, simplicity is at the core of the production process. This does not mean that other musicians don't approach production from simplicity, but it is rare to see a producer project that manages to balance complex sound design and patterns while keeping the simple aspects that will attract and retain new listeners. It is by approaching electronic music with simple ideas rather than cramming a session with as many sounds as possible to achieve a highly 'technical' production that this project stands out.

Finally, it is important to note how important of a role the visuals play in taking the listening experience to another level of artistic expression and distinctiveness.

With his work and the help of the photographer Valentin Folliet, Manu achieves a visual and sonic cohesiveness that is often rare to achieve at such an early stage of his career. It could be said that it is the high synergy and creative flow between Manu and Valentin that allows for such a final product to appear. It is this relationship and collaborative process allows for a great result and a refined / distinctive visual identity

## **5. New Skills Acquired**

### Musical/Production skills

From a purely technical side, Manu was able to widely improve and harness his own distinctive sonic identity while working on this project. Whether it was by experimenting with new software, playing with the widely available range of synths at the Berklee campus, implementing techniques learned by his peers, or simply the plethora of audio engineering knowledge acquired while attending his courses, the learning curve of Manu was widely expanded. It is apparent that these skills will be useful in Manu's career, whether it is working on his future record, planning to perform live, or just be able to operate in a professional studio with other artists.

### Visual identity/Branding

Working on the visual side of the project allowed Manu to find the right person to develop his own unique visual identity. Besides his music, this was probably the most important aspect to put together the project, as the success of the music will widely depend on how visually stimulating the photography is alongside the music. It is this eye to find the right people to execute his ideas that will definitely come in

handy for his future career. The collaborative aspect of working with Valentin Folliet greatly improved and expanded the way Manu approaches visuals and graphic design. Whether it is finding the right colour palette, contrast or a cohesive theme, as well as references to get inspiration from, it is this skill that will undoubtedly allow Manu to shape his career in the right direction.

## **6. Challenges, both expected & unanticipated**

### Expected:

While this might be a recurring theme in other student's papers, it is important to highlight how big of a logistical nightmare Covid-19 has been for most of the artistic projects. This was mainly apparent when trying to plan a shoot with the photographer. Most countries closed their borders or heavily limited the entrance of foreigners, so for a big part of the academic year it was near to impossible to meet with Valentin, as both parties were located in different countries.

As expected, the occasional writer's block was a challenge to overcome. When this occurred, Manu decided to take a few steps back and try to regain the joy of music production by doing something else entirely different. It is only with a regained perspective that Manu decided to go back to creating music, which proved to be the right approach for him. This process is not to be confused with a lack of work ethic from his part, but rather a short reset which would allow him to get back to work with a renewed creative drive.

Additionally, Manu's natural ambition to work with bigger artists than himself was going to be a challenge from the start. Manu is at a point of his career with not a

lot of music out, so when approaching acts that have a more established presence in the music industry it was naturally going to be hard to get to work with all of the people he had in mind. This challenge was countered by carefully selecting the right people which would be interested to work with him. Having early demos that were really advanced proved to be the right approach in order to get a response from professional vocalists.

### Unexpected:

There were a few unexpected challenges that while they were hard to face at an initial stage of the project, Manu was able to overcome them. Firstly, at the beginning of the academic year Manu decided to switch from PC to MAC. At the beginning, Manu thought this transition would have been smoother, but the reality is that a lot of the software he was used to work with was not entirely available on MAC. This proved to be only a temporary adjustment as soon enough he was able to switch entirely from one ecosystem to the other.

## **7. Future Ramifications**

Manu has arrived at a stage of his career that is starting to look more and more exciting. Firstly, the opportunity to release on a Grammy Nominated record label will give Manu the seal of approval that he needs in order to solidify his position as an artist in the music industry. Making sure the marketing plan, schedule and all the adjacent elements of a release go as smoothly as possible will be key when the EP releases on Young Art Records.

Moreover, to support the social media campaign to promote Manu's music, a physical release is in the works in the form of Vinyl. Additionally, a limited run merchandising operation will be considered to further showcase the photography of the project.

Currently, Manu is in the talks with a couple of Sync agencies to place some of his tracks of the EP on an international ad campaign. This is key to be able to have a significant revenue that will allow to work on future music more consistently. Manu is in touch with international touring artist TOKiMONSTA in order to support her on her next EU tour. The prospect of playing live in the near future means that Manu is already working on adapting his music on a live format. Most importantly, this EP serves as a very positive foundation that will naturally lead to Manu Dia's debut LP, to which he plans to start working in the summer of 2021.

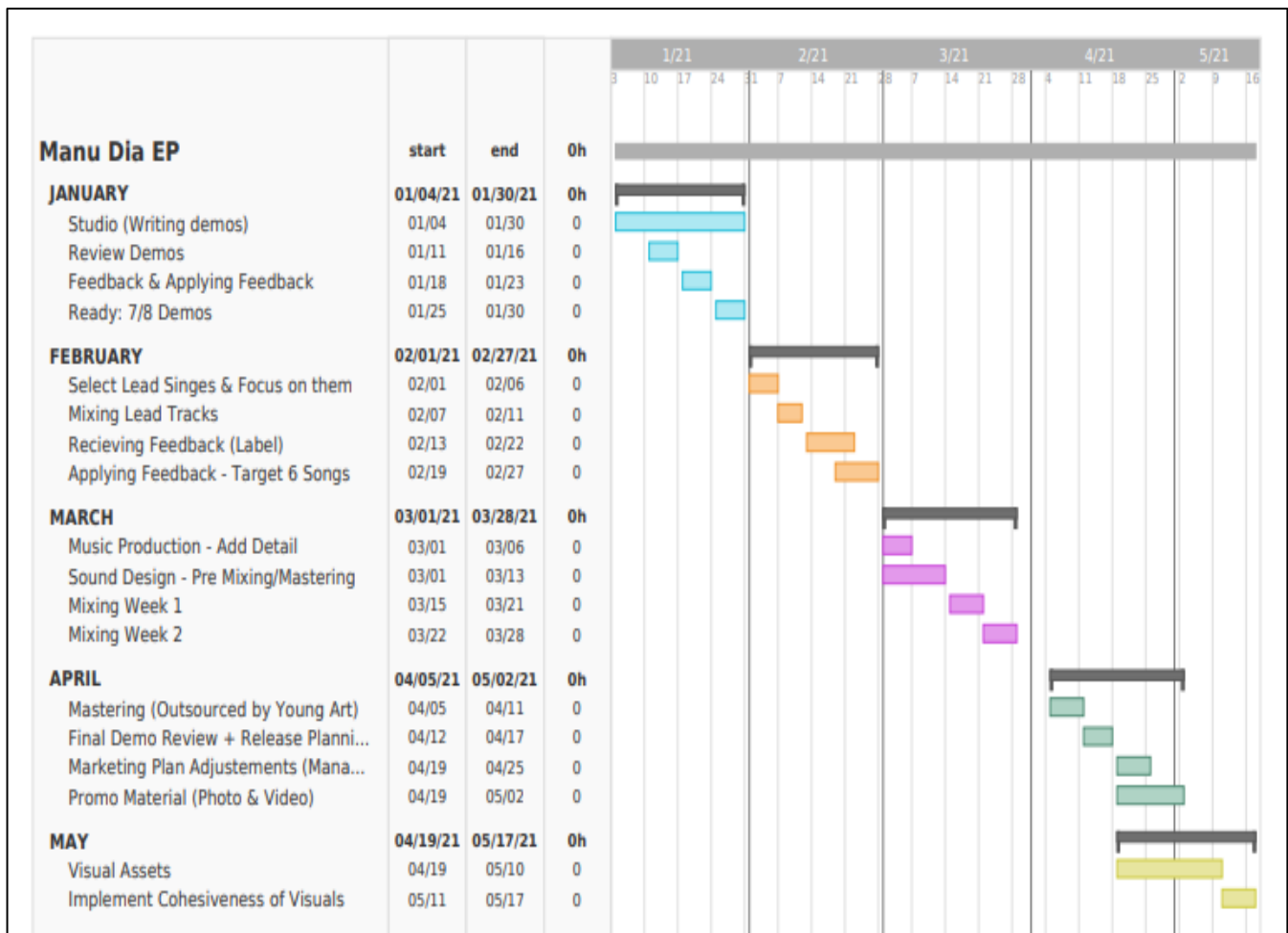
## **8. Conclusions**

Manu Dia's EP does not only serve as an artistic statement, or a rediscovery of his own creative process, but rather serves a bigger role, one-off carving a path towards a fully-fledged musical project with its own distinctive sonic and visual personality. The work that has been done for this project will be used as a foundation for Manu Dia's future steps towards achieving his goal; make a career out of creating his own original music. This EP serves as an attempt to break what the artist previously deemed as a 'generic' sound to which he was highly unsatisfied with. It is also a statement where he shows he has become fully confident with his work by appearing in the cover and visual assets of the EP.

While the process to get to the point of finishing the 'Often Inside' EP was at times challenging, the outcome of the work done is incredibly rewarding. Additionally, this work will serve as an important steppingstone towards Manu Dia's future career prospects in the music industry.

## Appendix:

### Timeline



Budget

ITEM	PROPOSED	REAL	ACTUAL (RUNNING)	AFTER 1 MONTH	FINAL	SUBTOTALS
<b>MATERIALS (DISPOSABLES)</b>						
Hard Drives	€300	€0	€0	€0	€0	
						€300
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>						
<b>HARDWARE</b>						
MICS	€500	€0	€0	€500	€500	
INTERFACE	€200	€0	€0	€200	€200	
COMPUTER	€3000	€0	€0	€3000	€3000	
CAMERA	€150	€0	€0	€150	€150	
INSTRUMENT	€500	€0	€0	€500	€500	
<b>SOFTWARE</b>						
FL STUDIO	€300	€0	€0	€300	€300	
VSTS: SOUNDTOYS	€220	€0	€0	€220	€220	
						€4870
<b>PERSONNEL</b>						
PHOTOGRAPHER	€1600	€0	€0	€0	€500	

MASTERING	€500	€0	€0	€0	€500	
MARKETING	€500	€0	€0	€0	€500	
						€2600
<b>STUDIO</b>						
BERKLEE	xx	€0	€0			
						€xx
<b>CATERING</b>						
MEALS	€700	€0	€0	€700 x 1 mo	€700 x 4 mo	
						€2800
<b>OVERHEAD</b>						
RENT	€520	€0	€0	€520 x 1mo	€520 x 4mo	
PHONE	€20	€0	€0			
INTERNET	€15	€0	€0			
						€2080
<b>FEES</b>						
YOUR FEE	xx	€0	€0			
YOUR PARTNER'S FEES	xx	€0	€0			
						€xx
<b>TOTALS</b>	€9.025	€0	€0	€6.090	€11.550	€15.115



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