

Berklee College of Music

**The Process with Matty Jontiff:
Inside the Making of an Artist Interview Series**

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

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iii
1. Introduction	1
2. Review of the State of the Art	2
3. Description	8
4. Innovative Aspects	11
5. New Skills Acquired	12
6. Challenges: Expected and Unexpected	13
7. Future Ramifications	14
8. Conclusions	14
Appendix	15
Bibliography	20

Abstract

This project aims to address the idea of looking outward to look inward by exploring the artist and the importance of collaboration on multiple levels. This artist series, where the interviewer is also an artist and collaborator, will show the audience the importance of community in music and artistic collaboration, while also being introduced to various artists, music and ideas. As the series progresses, the audience will gain personal insight into the interviewer as an artist, collaborator, songwriter, and producer. The interviewer acts as a story-teller providing a window into this collaborative music community, by taking them along on the collaborative journey with six visiting artists and sharing those experiences through audio and visual media. The goal of this project is to connect musicians of all kinds, inspire collaborations and reveal the collaborative process. The project is continuing in nature to provide new and interesting interactions and music.

Keywords: Collaboration, Community, Interviewer, Story-Teller, Artist, Collaborator, Songwriter, Producer, Process.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this project is to illuminate the relationship between one's experiences and the intimate and endearing details in one's life that inevitably shape the music and/or art that one creates. This project will highlight those intimate, endearing, and relatable details and moments through a variety of processes. However, the twist in this project is that in creating this audiovisual experience for the audience, the interviewer and visiting artist are given the artistic freedom to create their own narrative if they choose to. In this project, the audience will initially be introduced to the interviewer's perspective and by the end, the audience will see things from three perspectives: their own, the visiting artists, and the interviewers.

By combining thoughtful podcast-style interviews and Cinema Verité filmmaking/techniques, the intimacy of the collaborations are documented so that the audience truly understands the process behind the songs/collaborations. They will see, hear, feel, understand, and connect with the interviewer and the visiting artists. This project will prove that if one can open themselves to truly see and hear someone, an unforgettable connection can be made and shared. The interview series will continue for at least three more seasons, making this part one of four. This project is relevant and important because in today's society, the masses have grown accustomed to overlooking the process of what goes into creating music/art and the unique traits each artist brings to the table. The goal of this project is four-pronged: to show musicians and non-musicians the process of artistic/musical collaboration in a realistic scenario, to highlight the importance of a musical community/peers, to give creators the ability to create their own narrative and to make sure that artists are appreciated for their unique creativity.

2. Review of the State of the Art

The synchronization of audio and visual media is a concept that spans almost a century. Starting with the first “talkie”, *The Jazz Singer (1927)*¹ starring Al Jolson, the synchronization of picture and sound has captivated audiences, and continues to captivate audiences. “The reason why the Jazz Singer occupies such an important place in the history of cinema is not so much the story as its technical achievement.” Moving forward there have been so many advancements and innovations regarding music, filmmaking, audio, visuals, and everything in between. Although the idea of combining picture and sound has not changed, the approach towards creating one’s own unique mixture has been taken in a vast number of directions resulting in various outcomes. That said, there are a few outliers that have influenced the scope of this project greatly.

Chronologically speaking, the first great music movie that serves as an influence, beyond the actual technological achievement of the synchronization of picture and sound, to this project is *A Hard Day’s Night (1964)*², The Beatles’ first full length feature film. The charisma and humor of the group really shines through in this film. The audience grows so much greater of a connection to the group by having the experience of spending time with The Beatles’ through their “First Full Length Hilarious, Action-Packed Feature Film.” Something to take away from this was the ability to create a “real” persona through film because it gave a personality to go hand-in-hand with the music. The value of creating that connection is apparent as most people revere The Beatles as one of the greatest, if not the greatest band of all time.

¹ S. Raghunath “The First Talkie – ‘The Jazz Singer.’” *A Tribute to Al Jolson*, 11 Sept. 2013, jolsonville.net/2013/09/10/the-first-talkie/.

² *A Hard Day's Night*. 1964. [film] Directed by R. Lester. United Kingdom: Walter Shenson Films / Proscenium Films.

The next major influence on this project is *Don't Look Back (1967)*, an American film documentary directed by D.A. Pennebaker that covers Bob Dylan's 1965 tour in England.³ Pennebaker has been described as "arguably the pre-eminent chronicler of Sixties counterculture."⁴ Furthermore, this film is described as and acclaimed by critics as a phenomenal example of the Cinema Verité style of filmmaking.⁴ More than anything else from this film, Cinema Verité style of filmmaking is what will influence this project the most. According to D.A. Pennebaker,

"For the verite documentarist, film-making can be a frustrating process, full of missed opportunities. It's like if you got permission to film Columbus, but then found out you couldn't film beyond the port. It's tough. You often miss things that you think are your reasons for making the film, but it usually works out."⁴

Another major influence for this project is, *Willy Wonka and The Chocolate Factory (1971)* starring Gene Wilder.⁵ The imagination and creativity behind the whole film is stunning. However, the most impressive part is that after watching the movie once, the audience walks away singing the songs. Proving that creating a connection through an audio-visual experience is powerful.

Another influence for this project is the *Woodstock (1970)* film.⁶ Just by capturing the reality of what was happening there and then, the power of these moments was captured and they

³ *Don't Look Back*. 1967. [film] Directed by D. Pennebaker. United States: Leacock-Pennebaker, Inc.

⁴ Dennis Lim. "Arts: A Marriage Made in Verite." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 22 Oct. 2011, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/arts-a-marriage-made-in-verite-1295862.html

⁵ *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory*. 2020. [film] Directed by M. Stuart. United States: Wolper Pictures / The Quaker Oats Company.

⁶ *Woodstock*. 1970. [film] Directed by M. Wadleigh. United States: Bob Maurice and Dale Bell.

live on today. Woodstock was an incredible event with an incredible lineup but having an audiovisual experience to go with it took the event to a whole new level.

Another influence for this project is *The Song Remains The Same*(1976) by Led Zeppelin and directed by Peter Clifton.⁷ The mixture of reality, fantasy, and music in this work is phenomenal. In this film, each band member has a piece of visuals dedicated to them and their persona. Each one is unique and thought provoking. The idea of creating a persona through an audio-visual performance is powerful, especially the idea of creating a persona that is almost mythological, like Led Zeppelin has done here.

Another influence for this project is *The Last Waltz* (1978) directed by Martin Scorsese starring The Band and many other featured acts.⁸ This film is very much so a documentary with absolute truth in it. It is wonderfully shot. It has poignant and interesting cut scenes between songs that draws one in. The film documents a massive connection to, and between, the musicians. The idea is that the audience feels like they are experiencing this last big show with the band, and it works perfectly. The audience can feel the joy, the sorrow, the exhaustion, the relief and everything in between because of the honesty conveyed in this film.

Beyond these classic films, there are a few more modern films where inspiration is being drawn from. Films such as: *Almost Famous* (2000), for the creativity in a plot that is so realistic and gripping but has a documentary/journalistic feel due to the perspective of the main

⁷*Song Remains The Same*. 1971. [film] Directed by P. Clifton ; Massot. United States: Warner Bros.

⁸*The Last Waltz*. 1978. [film] Directed by M. Scorsese. United States: United Artists ; Robbie Robertson ; Jonathan Taplin.

character.⁹ *8 Mile* (2002), for the ability to tell a story through a character that has many truths, but not the whole/exact truth.¹⁰ *School of Rock* (2003), for the ability to have fun, laugh, and make music movies not seem so serious all the time.¹¹ *August Rush* (2007), for the ability to inspire others to achieve their potential through a fictional story.¹² And, *Across The Universe* (2007), for the ability to use a body of music to dictate an entire plot of a film.¹³ All of these films have these unique things about them, but the one thing that they have in common is that they all have great music synchronized with these powerful visuals and ideas.

The funny thing is the initial reference for this project was *Guava Island* (2019) starring Donald Glover and Rihanna.¹⁴ The film is a great example of what a music movie can be, and it is beautifully shot. However, looking further into the study area, one realizes how much came before it.

Beyond creating a strong visual identity, it is important to this project to create a strong musical identity to go hand-in-hand. John Mayer's live concert album and film, *Where The Light Is* (2008), is less of a film and more of a live concert, but nonetheless, it does the job of creating a strong musical identity.¹⁵ This project will most likely sit in a similar soundscape to a lot of John's musical works.

⁹ *Almost Famous*. 2000. [film] Directed by C. Crowe. United States: Columbia Pictures ; DreamWorks Pictures ; Vinyl Films.

¹⁰ *8 Mile*. 2002. [film] Directed by C. Hanson. United States: Imagine Entertainment ; Mikona Productions GmbH & Co. KG.

¹¹ *School of Rock*. 2003. [film] Directed by R. Linklater. United States: Scott Rudin Productions.

¹² *August Rush*. 2007. [film] Directed by K. Sheridan. United States: Southpaw Entertainment ; CJ Entertainment.

¹³ *Across the Universe*. 2007. [film] Directed by J. Taymor. United States: Columbia Pictures ; Revolution Studios ;Gross Entertainment ; Team Todd.

¹⁴ *Guava Island*. 2019. [film] Directed by H. Murai. United States: New Regency Productions.

¹⁵ *Where The Light Is: John Mayer Live in Los Angeles*. 2007. [video] Directed by J. Mayer. United States: Chad Franscoviak ; John Mayer ; Steve Jordan ; Columbia Records.

Additionally, the music side of this project is also influenced by Tom Misch and his style/approach to creating music. His application of samples, beats, and tasteful guitar-work is incredible, and he is only getting better. His EP, *5 Day Mischon* (2017), is a great example of how to create collaborative works in a short amount of time.¹⁶ Additionally, the sounds from his EP, *Reverie* (2016), will be a large musical influence on this project.¹⁷

Another musical influence for this project is Amy Winehouse and her album, *Frank* (2008).¹⁸ Her vocal inflection, powerful songwriting, and jazzy compositions combine to make her one of the most influential musicians of her time.

Another musical influence for this project, and arguably the most important musical influence, is Jeff Buckley and his charisma when performing and recording music. His album, *Grace* (1994), is a wonderful example of songwriting and expression.¹⁹ However, his album, *Live at Sin-e* (1993), is an incredible example in spontaneity and performance that highlights one's unique personality.²⁰ Jeff's delivery of soul in his music is unmistakable and one that is revered the world over. Jeff's music has influenced an entire generation of musicians and bands who followed him. Some of those, being Radiohead, Muse, Coldplay, and many others. One thing that all these wonderful artists have in common is they were heavily influenced by Jeff Buckley, his music, and his persona as an artist.

¹⁶Tom Misch. *5 Day Mischon*. Beyond The Groove, 2017.

¹⁷Tom Misch. *Reverie*. Beyond The Groove, 2016.

¹⁸Amy Winehouse. *Frank*. Island, 2003.

¹⁹Jeff Buckley. *Grace*. Columbia, 1994.

²⁰Jeff Buckley. *Live at Sin-e*. Columbia, 1993.

Beyond all this, the idea of David Bowie and Ziggy Stardust is a huge influence on this project. The ability for one to create their own story and tell it the way they want to be told is a powerful tool. In David's album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972), David and Ziggy are the perfect example of this phenomenon.²¹

Now even after doing all this research, *The Process with Matty Jontiff* boils down to having three main modern inspirations. *The Cave with Kenny Beats*²², *Hot Ones*²³, and *Saturday Night Live*²⁴. The reason being each of these extremely successful series has a beautiful thing about them that became big influences on the series.

*The Cave with Kenny Beats*²² has an amazing feeling of professionalism in the production, but also realism in the scenarios. Also, it is extremely satisfying to see the fast work rate of making a song in a day and the spontaneity of creating a song on the fly.

*Hot Ones*²³ is the perfect example of disarming a guest on an interview show to get an honest interview. Not only are the interview questions and subjects interesting, but they also have another aspect (the hot sauce!) to push the interview into a spontaneous place. Although hot sauce is not used in this series, it is still important in this series to have the artist feel comfortable and to remove the guard that we all sometimes put up.

²¹David Bowie. *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. RCA, 2017.

²²Kenneth Charles Bloome III. *The Cave with Kenny Beats*. KennyBeats:Youtube, 2021.

²³Christopher Schonberger. *Hot Ones | First We First*. HotOne|FirstWeFeast:Youtube, 2021.

Lastly, *Saturday Night Live*²⁴ is a huge influence on this project because of the idea of hosting a visiting guest for a period of time to create music/art. Each time someone hosts SNL they inspire the vibe of the show for that week. This series aims to draw inspiration from that aspect of SNL.

In this project, the goal is to use aspects of the aforementioned films, documentaries, artists, music, and musical styles to create an audio-visual experience that will have the audience move through a spectrum of emotions to create a connection between them, the interviewer, and the visiting artists. Additionally, these aspects of inspiration encourage the interviewer and the artists to create their own narrative, in which the audience can't tell what is real and what is not because they are so close to the truth and a fantasy. Hopefully, this lends to letting the audience letting go of their inhibitions to truly appreciate the music and the artistry, leaving them feeling the need to connect with their new friends again, and again, and again. With this mixture, one can infer that it is definitely possible to achieve the aforementioned goals in the introduction through the medium of an audio-visual artist interview series that follows the process of an artist-interviewer and their collaborations inside of an optionally fictional reality.

3. Description

This project is an interview series documenting the process of creating and producing a song with six different artists over the course of the second semester. Throughout the process, the audience will be shown the unique characteristics, specialties, and musical styles of each artist.

²⁴Lorne Michaels. *Saturday Night Live*. NBC, 2021.

Additionally, the audience will be shown the unique characteristics, specialties, and musical styles of the interviewer/producer. The visiting artists were:

1. Ethan Toga
2. Quinn McGovern
3. Helo Houviez
4. Vasilisa Moroz
5. Eli Major-Wright
6. Sergio Ruiz

Each visiting artist was allocated two weeks for their interview and collaboration. During each two week period, there were three to four meetings.

1. The pre-production meeting. (to discuss the vibe of the collaboration)
2. The actual recording session. (a couple episodes had overdub sessions)
3. The interview. (all conducted on zoom except for one episode)

Once the timeline was settled and the artist roster was complete, the project truly began and these were the three goals that were originally written for the project in the CE Proposal.

1. The interviewer and the visiting artist will spend genuine time together to find the vibe of what their collaboration will entail. This time could be spent doing anything (cooking, painting, going for a walk, seeing live music, etc.) as long as it's genuine and highlights the importance of connection.
2. The host and the visiting artist will create a song together. In each two-week artist period, there will be a minimum of 5 hours allocated for this element of the process. In some cases, this may happen in one session. That said, it is expected

and welcome if the host and visiting artist spend more than the minimum allocated time for this element in the two-week artist period.

3. Lastly, there will be a thirty-minute final podcast style interview, in which the host will interview the visiting artist. Topics covered will be subject to the nature of the relationship between the host and the visiting artist but will mainly revolve around the musical/artistic interests, musical inspirations, and the vibe of the collaboration that would have been completed, and the presentation of that song. Lastly, the host and visiting artist will perform/present (depending on what the visiting artist wants) the song made in the collaboration.

These goals/guidelines that were originally stated in the CE proposal were upheld except for three things.

1. The genuine time that the interviewer and the visiting artist were required to spend together ended up becoming more or less the pre-production meeting.
2. The interviews were changed to twenty-one questions and a lighting round of questions format instead of thirty minute format.
3. The songs are being presented in the form of a sixty second mix-breakdown on Tik Tok. Each artist has made one with the interviewer.

All the creative production work was done in Ableton Live 11. Some of the audio recordings were done in Pro Tools, but were soon transferred over to Ableton for editing, mixing, and mastering. The reason for using Ableton being that it is much more conducive for fast and easy creative flow when producing. All the video footage was edited in Adobe Premiere Pro. All the interviews were conducted on zoom except for the first one with Ethan Toga. The reason for

this being the mixture of the zeitgeist of zoom, the ease of use, and (the actually pretty good) zoom audio quality. The four main deliverables involving the visiting artists of the project are:

1. Six songs recorded with the visiting artists.
2. Six mix breakdowns of the songs.
3. Six audio-only interviews.
4. Six music videos documenting the process.

That said, there is some content that will have to be with just the interviewer. For ease of storytelling and simplicity, the project will show the interviewer's perspective in the format of a video journal narrating the storyline of the interviewer throughout the series. The pieces of content needed here are:

1. An intro for the series and Youtube Channel
2. Six interlude videos to get the interviewer from one collaborator to another
3. An ending for season one of the series / announcement of season two of the series

4. Innovative Aspects

The innovative aspects of this project are how all of the content of the project and how all of the following are presented as a whole series:

- Documentation of the visiting artist and their persona shows in each episode.
- Documentation of the interviewer and interviewers artist persona.
- Documentation of artistic/musical collaboration and songwriting.
- Educational for viewers who are interested in music, production, and the arts.

There are lots of different forms of audio-visual content as aforementioned in the Review of the State of the Art, but research suggests that this series' mixture of flavors is unique.

5. New Skills Acquired

This project has required many new skills to be acquired throughout the course of this school year. Before coming to Berklee, the interviewer had no experience with Ableton at all and very limited knowledge of Pro Tools. By the end of the first semester, the interviewer could conduct sessions in either Ableton or Pro Tools and made the conscious decision to conduct the sessions for the interview series in Ableton to practice in that software more. Additionally, the interviewer had not used Adobe Premiere Pro before coming to Berklee. Although the interviewer had previous knowledge of Final Cut and iMovie, video editing at a professional level is a skill that has been improved greatly throughout the course of the project.

In addition to these main skills, other skills were worked on by means of practice and have also improved immensely. Such as, Practice in producing for other artists, Practice in songwriting, Practice in session musician work, Practice in audio engineering (recording/mixing/mastering), Practice in artistic/musical collaboration, Practice in interviewing, Practice in video editing / AV storytelling.

These skills will all be extremely important and useful to the future of this project and the interviewer's career in the music/entertainment industry. Whether they choose to work solely on the series as a career or if they work at a recording studio or in video, all of these skills will be valuable in the real world.

6. Challenges: Expected and Unexpected

The expected challenges of the work were:

- Volume of the work.
- Delays due to circumstance.
- Ability to create high quality music.
- Video editing

The expected challenges of the work were:

- Volume of the work
- Ability to finalize music without help
- Ability to finalize video edits without help

Even with the proper planning and timeline, this project took on a lot of work and the interviewer found it to be a bit exhausting with the rushed timeline. That said, this is the exact type of work that the series is meant to capture. Additionally, the mix/master of the songs and the final music video edits are finished, but the interviewer would like to check their final versions with someone they can trust before releasing to the public because of the unexpected challenge of feeling like the interviewer's video editing skills need to be double checked. Also, wanting someone to double check the mix/master of the songs.

7. Future Ramifications

The first plans in store for the project are to release the content from each artist's episode once a month for six months on a mixture of platforms such as, Youtube, Spotify/Streaming Platforms, Instagram, and Tik Tok. The project is set to continue on for at least three more seasons making this part one of four seasons. The main goal of the project to continue is to contact more artists for collaboration for the second season. Additionally, the project will seek out possible partnerships and/or sponsorships for funding for the second season. Also, the project will seek to travel to artists' individual locations for the second season to make the series more visually appealing due to location change for each episode.

8. Conclusion

During this year at Berklee Valencia, this project has grown, but not without time and effort. Throughout the journey this CE has created, so many experiences have added up to create something more powerful and honest than what was originally intended. The memories created while completing this CE have been documented and will be immortalized in the forms of content that they eventually release as. They are time capsules of a time here at Berklee and a time in this upside down world when seven artists decided to embark on a journey together. In conclusion, the interviews will continue and season two, three, and four will hopefully bring an exponential amount of growth, adventures, experiences, friendships, and memories.

Appendix

Project Timeline

CE Project Timeline	Start Date	End Date
Visiting Artist #1	5-Jan	19-Jan
Screenplay Shoots / Edits	20-Jan	25-Jan
Visiting Artist #2	26-Jan	8-Feb
Screenplay Shoots / Edits	9-Feb	15-Feb
Visiting Artist #3	16-Feb	29-Feb
Screenplay Shoots / Edits	1-Mar	7-Mar
Visiting Artist #4	8-Mar	21-Mar
Screenplay Shoots / Edits	22-Mar	28-Mar
Visiting Artist #5	29-Mar	11-Apr
Screenplay Shoots / Edits	12-Apr	18-Apr
Visiting Artist #6	19-Apr	2-May
Mixing / Mastering / Video Editing	3-May	31-May

Figure. 1 CE Project Timeline

Resources & Budget

In this project, there will be an emphasis on using resources and budget sparingly in order to simulate a real-world experience. Therefore, things will stay relatively simple. The project will use the following resources:

- § 3x External Hard Drives
- § 6x Memory Cards
- § Home Audio Interface
- § 3x Go Pro Hero 8Black (one owned, two rented)
- § Pro Tools
- § Ableton
- § 6x Visiting Artists
- § Actors – on camera actors
- § On-Set Engineer
- § Director
- § Make-Up Artist / Art Director
- § Mixing/Mastering Engineer
- § Editor
- § Berklee AKSS
- § Berklee
- § STAD
- § Home Studio

CE Budget Proposal MPTI	PROPOSED	REAL
MATERIALS (disposables)		
Hard Drives	\$400	\$400
Memory Cards	\$100	\$100
EQUIPMENT		
HARDWARE		
Interface	\$315	\$315
Camera (Rental) (2x \$30/day x 8 days)	\$480	\$480
SOFTWARE		
Pro Tools	\$600	\$0
Ableton	\$500	\$0
Max MSP	\$200	\$0
PERSONNEL		
Actors (5 actors x 100/day x 8 shoot days)	\$4,000	\$0
On-Set Engineer (200/day x 8 shoot days)	\$1,600	\$0
Camera Operator (200/day x 8 shoot days)	\$1,600	\$0
Director (200/day x 8 shoot days)	\$1,600	\$0
Makeup Artist/Art Director (100/day x 8 shoot days)	\$800	\$0
Mixing/Mastering Engineer (100/hr x 16hrs)	\$1,600	\$0
Editor (100/hr x 16hrs)	\$1,600	\$0

STUDIO		
BERKLEE AKSS (\$800/day x 8 of days)	\$6,400	\$0
BERKLEE STAD (\$400/day x 8 of days)	\$3,200	\$0
HOME (\$175/day x 16 of days)	\$2,800	\$0
CATERING		
Meals (\$15/person x 4 persons x 8 shoot days)	\$480	\$0
OVERHEAD		
Rent (\$450 x 6 months)	\$2,700	\$2,700
Phone (\$24/month x 6 months)	\$144	\$144
Groceries/Food (\$20/day x 6 months)	\$3,360	\$3,360
FEES		
My Fee	\$7,500	\$0
My Partner's Fee	\$7,500	\$0
TOTALS	\$49,479	\$7,499
MONTHLY OVERHEAD	\$1,034	\$1,034
6-MONTH OVERHEAD	\$6,204	\$6,204
HOME STUDIO GEAR IN VALENCIA		
adam t5v monitors	\$350	
scarlett 2i2	\$100	
prs 277 se baritone	\$1,018	
epiphone sheraton	\$850	
akai mpk mini	\$100	
nylon string acoustic	\$90	

dynamic mic	\$100	
sennheiser e906	\$190	
aston spirit condenser	\$365	
Macbook Pro 16"	\$5,500	
	\$8,663	
	$\$8,663 \times .02 = \173.26	
	One Day Rate - 5%	
	Week Rate = 2.9%	(4 days for 1 week)
	Monthly Rate = 1.7%	(12 days for 1 month)

Figure. 3 CE Proposal Budget MPTI

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