

Berklee College of Music

I Hate It Here: **A Multi-dimensional Album**

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Master of Music in Music Production, Technology, and Innovation

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Abstract

This project aims to incorporate collaboration, multi-genre experimentation, and live performance into the final production of an LP to be delivered to *Kro Records* in Los Angeles, CA in 2021. The LP consists of ten tracks with pre-production starting during a six-month quarantine at the onset of Covid-19 in March of 2020. The goals for this project include: a) incorporating remote and non-remote collaboration among different musicians and styles; b) developing multi-genre representation across ten tracks; c) forming a group in Valencia, Spain to perform and record a “Live from Valencia” version of the LP; d) employing both professional and DIY techniques, and; e) delivering the LP and performance to *Kro Records* with audiovisuals and electronic remixes. Central to the purview of this project is the overcoming of isolation and separation in order to produce a unique LP that thematically explores these obstacles within the turmoil of 2020.

Keywords: quarantine, collaboration, LP, *Kro Records*, performance, DIY, audiovisual, production.

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Lastly, I thank my incredible parents to whom I owe my music, my life, my everything. Thank you for guiding me here, now and always.

1. Introduction

While 2020 increasingly demonstrated new limits of frustration within the United States and elsewhere, the circumstances of this year challenged creatives everywhere to not only respond, but to also find new methods of creating while in varying degrees of isolation.

I Hate It Here is not necessarily an album responding to the events of 2020, nor is it responding to a divided country or a corrupt government. This album is instead a collection of thoughts that germinated in 2020's maelstrom, written in a time of great isolation save for a few close friends, often huddled together in the drunken glow of the unforgiving news. It is an album written at times from the tension within one's own family, processing feelings through the internal and external anxieties felt at the dinner table by so many divided families and friends over the last few years. The songs themselves tend to come from the position of being terribly stuck, only able to see the nightmare out the window and the reflection of oneself in it. All of this work is now the product of several collaborations and experiments as they were altered, built, and fully produced from Valencia, Spain.

Such an opportunity has allowed the album to transform not only its physical sound but especially its emotional profile for the author and, hopefully, for the listener as well. As assuredly as the year 2020 will be remembered as one of the most widely hated in recent memory, it has been one of unique self-transformation as well as collaborative opportunity, almost certainly guaranteeing a new generation of artists who will challenge the roles of creators everywhere to grow in a remorseless yet hopeful world. While the work may hold contempt for the place in which it was started, the album offers a message of re-invention despite the looming darkness outside the window.

2. State-of-the-Art Review

The following are contemporary examples and influences surrounding the different foci within the larger multimedia album release of “I Hate It Here” by *Sister James*, expected over spring of 2021 under *Kro Records*. Different developments, events, and ideas are herein examined so as to properly frame the influences of the larger project within the state-of-the-art for this specific production.

There are numerous influences on the music to be created in the scope of this project, both on the “I Hate It Here” album itself as well as the electronic remixes therein. This brief review will examine one for now. The album “Rocket” by *Alex G*¹ released in 2017 is one example of a genre-defying indie rock record that “I Hate It Here” borrows insight from, yet attempts to build upon in different ways. “Rocket” consists of several songs ranging from pure Americana/Folk styles all the way into Hardcore/Noise/Punk. These two genres will be prevalent in the production of “I Hate It Here” which includes more folk-centric tracks such as “Success” and “Sudden Clarity” in the same way that *Alex G*’s album features acoustic-guitar-led tracks such as “Proud” alongside the otherwise blistering and noisy “Brick.” “Rocket” is one LP out of many that could have a traced influence on the music to come from this project, specifically where “I Hate It Here” reaches out to its collaborators in an effort to feature instruments and styles that will not show up on any of the other tracks nor in any of the other past releases under the *Sister James* catalogue. Similarly, the engineering style of “Rocket” and the albums of *Alex G* in general is massively influential on the production styles of this project where the effort to combine DIY techniques and professional techniques is concerned. This includes but is not limited to taking home recordings (including field/ambient/foley samples) and processing them

¹ Alex G, Rocket. Domino Records, 2017.

in a professional setting. Beyond these concrete musical influences on the LP material itself, the project must take into account the goals for what is delivered beyond just the ten tracks, how it is delivered, who it is meant for and why.

Where this project aims to incorporate various levels of remote collaboration in its composition, engineering, and production, it assuredly comes after a long line of renowned remote collaborations. Among the more well-known instances of remote collaboration within the Indie/Indie pop realm are the American “supergroup” *The Postal Service*.² Formed by *Death Cab for Cutie* singer Ben Gibbard and fellow Seattle musician and producer Jimmy Tamborello, *The Postal Service* is a unique example of a creative project that incorporates remote collaboration not only as a means of *making*, but also as *expressing*. Their name comes from their reliance on the US Postal Service to construct and produce their music from the early 2000’s onward. Perhaps as most remote collaborations are said to arise out of not-so-ideal circumstances of distance and time, a conflict in scheduling led Tamborello to send CD’s of his electronic creations to Gibbard via the USPS. Gibbard would then introduce his now famous indie-rock personality into Tamborello’s productions, linking his trademarked vocals, guitars, and drums with whatever was delivered by the postman.³

Please note this is just one of many different examples the music production world has seen in remote collaboration, and there tends to be a DIY element to its nature despite whether it is taking place in a professional studio or a bedroom. This project analyzes the different implications within this thought as applied to different past examples of remote collaboration.

Where remote collaboration is related to this project, a ten track LP born out of 2020’s

² The Postal Service, *Such Great Heights*. Sub Pop, 2003.

³ Dan Shaw, “Deserted Sessions: Collaborating on Music Remotely,” Happymag.tv, March 20, 2020, <https://happymag.tv/deserted-sessions-collaborating-on-music-remotely/>.

quarantine called “I Hate It Here”, it has several different layers. Primarily, it involves the same method employed by *the Postal Service*, though luckily not with CD’s by physical mail. Across the ten tracks, several different layers of instrumentation and production have been collected and sent from various other producers and musicians stranded during the quarantine. Varying degrees of direction were given to the artists, producers, and engineers involved, of which there are many. The results are something that could only have been achieved through the means of remote collaboration, creating spaces for people to contribute in their own isolations and without a sense of what the surrounding music would even sound like in the end.

Just as the presence of remote collaboration has grown in recent years, so has the desire to release albums in unconventional ways and/or with bonus material. Many instances of the unconventional album release come to mind, perhaps none more famous than *Radiohead* releasing “In Rainbows” on a pay-what-you-want platform in December 2007.⁴ The band has stated that this move is in part made to call attention to the nefarious role that major labels and the music industry at large have played in both the cash flow and the artist-to-fan relationship.⁵ Not as controversial was the release of “Polyfauna,”⁶ an immersive audiovisual app commissioned by *Radiohead* to accompany the release of their following album “The King of Limbs.”⁷ The app offers users a unique and constantly developing landscape and soundscape through which one can travel and interact with various objects while experiencing increasingly unique extrapolations of audio from “The King of Limbs.”⁸

⁴ Radiohead, *In Rainbows*. XL Recordings, 2007.

⁵ Greenwood, Colin (13 September 2010), "[Set Yourself Free Archived](#) 5 November 2015 at the [Wayback Machine](#)", Index on Censorship. Retrieved 31 October 2010

⁶ Polyfauna, Radiohead, Nigel Godrich, Stanley Donwood. Universal Everything, 2014.

⁷ Radiohead, *The King of Limbs*. XL Recordings, 2011.

⁸ Matt Pyke , “How We Made Radiohead's PolyFauna App for IOS and Android,” March 7, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/mar/07/how-we-made-radiohead-polyfauna-app>.

For a band who has been praised for consistently innovating themselves past the point their previous work, this particular multimedia accompaniment is particularly unique and perhaps their most interactive. “Polyfauna” has certainly influenced the creative project herein, specifically as “I Hate It Here” is performed and released this year. The “Live from Valencia” performance by students of Berklee College of Music features different video mapping compositions for each track, arranged across various software (including *Resolume* and *Max MSP*) in order to be controlled by the performance in real time as opposed to pre-recorded and pre-timed video. For the purpose of broadened interpretation and collaboration, this project includes the public release of album stems, artist remix collaborations, as well as the video composition patches in addition to the album itself and the live performance.

Following the release of their debut LP “Schlagenheim,”⁹ *Black Midi* released their album stems giving fans the chance to try their hand at remixing the vastly complex record themselves. This is hardly new, as many other artists have released stems including but not limited to Nine Inch Nails, Bon Iver, and Moby.¹⁰ The release of the “Schlagenheim” stems is no more groundbreaking than these other releases yet offers fans a chance to remix intensely complicated music that is delivered by perhaps the youngest experimental rock band to do it so far. This project aims to release the “I Hate It Here” album stems in the same manner as past artists have while also releasing the building blocks used for their electronic remix and live performance counterparts. If successful, this would mean the extended album release package would involve bonus material ranging from Max patches to Ableton sessions in an effort to promote different interpretations and user performances.

⁹ *Black Midi*, Schlagenheim. Rough Trade, 2019.

¹⁰ Nine Inch Nails, *Year Zero*. Nothing Records, 2007. Bon Iver, *Bon Iver*, *Bon Iver*. 4AD Records, 2011.

3. Description

“I Hate it Here,” as it has been developed over the course of a year in Valencia, is most easily described as a wayward mantra stretched over varying forms of media, methods of production, and means of delivery. It extends beyond the eleven songs contained on the “album version,” which itself has been split into two parts. From its genesis in 2020’s quarantine, the initial tug and pull between isolation and connection remains at the heart of its musical and lyrical themes as well as in the methods used to create it. Pairing the most basic and consumer level technologies with those of state-of-the-art studios such as Berklee Valencia’s has yielded something full of imperfections and intimacy in a professional and polished package. The purpose here is that all of the music contained on the album proper feature raw foley recordings of the quarantine house as well as sounds and moments from Valencia, whether it be a low rumbling gust of wind from the track “Sudden Clarity” (I Hate it Here pt. II) or singing birds from a walk through the Turia on “Zoning” (also I Hate it Here pt. II).

Furthermore, the introduction of newer and more innovative technologies allowed for the production of the albums surrounding multi-media content; programs such as Max MSP and Resolume are introduced to create unique live performances of the music from Berklee’s Ann Kreis Scoring Stage in which the instruments played live actually influence and direct the lights and colors used for each song’s visuals. In the same sense, different DAWs and remote recording methods such as Audiomovers have been crucial to track with collaborators remotely, following suit with the theme of joining isolation with connection in a time where one needs to innovate in order to hurdle the creative circumstances forced upon us since 2020. While there are plenty of disadvantages in creating something this way, it actually led to many new ideas and revelations

on what other media can and should fit into this larger package. Using electronic and sound design techniques inspired remixes of the original material as well as new approaches for how to arrange it. Working with visual programs for the live performances influenced the artwork, some of which has been filtered through the same Max patches used to create the live visuals for the AKSS. Overall, the project as a multi-dimensional album was only made possible through being open to incorporating technologies that sometimes seems to contradict each other, all while being open to embarking on an entirely self-produced record with the addition of numerous collaborations.

“Questions (feat. Samia)” is the first single from “I Hate it Here Pt. II” and technically is the oldest song on the record. A version of the song on acoustic guitar was performed for Samia on tour in 2018, yet the song was not further developed until 2020 when the initial demo recordings for the record began. This track in particular was recorded across many different places, including the guitars which were in added in quarantine in Stone Harbor, New Jersey and the drums which were added from Brooklyn just before leaving for Valencia. From there, remote tracks for bass, vocals, and lead guitar were added early on during the school year. The tracks were compiled and edited with multiple sessions remotely over long-distance communication before they were sent to engineers Tyler McDiarmid and Justin Pizzoferrato (Justin would end up mixing and mastering the entirety of Part I.

Nearly all of the guitars and drums on “Temper” were recorded from Stone Harbor in the summer before arriving to Berklee. This would be standard for most of the tracks on Part I, which saw a lot of the initial rhythm instruments being recorded from quarantine before working on remote tracking for the bass and leads from Valencia. This is the same for “Success,” in the sense that the drums parts initially performed were replaced with the same parts performed more

“tightly” by a session drummer in Brooklyn. Lap steel, viola, and cello were all remotely recorded after long-distance writing sessions. Vocals were performed in Valencia and added in near the end of the process.

The title track, “I Hate it Here Pt I,” was a very peculiar development within the surrounding songs on the record. It also involved the more unique mixing techniques, including a rather aggressive and noticeable sidechain compression effect on the 12 string guitars and synths, which allow the song to bounce punctually along with the session drummer in Brooklyn. The synths within this song were all resampled from various Logic synths, mixed in with some resampled synths from a Roland VR-09 keyboard. Everything save for the drums were written and recorded together within about two hours.

The final track on Part I is “Harbor,” which is likely the most cinematic track on the record. The chords and lyrics were developed in quarantine and all five people living in the Stone Harbor house developed and performed harmonies which are the final recorded performances heard on the track today. Almost all of the instruments from the initial recordings needed to be re-tracked, and the string parts for viola and cello were added in at the very end in Valencia after remote collaboration and tracking. The various piano parts were also recorded from Valencia using two AKG 414s on a practice room upright.

Part II of “I Hate Here” is comprised of six songs which carry the same emotions from part I into different sonic packages. One track, “No,” was entirely written before quarantine but needed much of the recording and engineering work to take place afterwards in Valencia. This is also due to the “Live from Valencia” AKSS performance of this song, which informed much of the decision making as the recorded version was produced. The original guitars were all recorded from Stone Harbor using the same microphone setup as much of the guitars from Part I. This

setup involved an SM57 slightly outside the center of the speaker cone on either an Orange combo amp or a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe depending on the desired tone. Several different guitars were tried in order to achieve the final sound, yet the most important element here is the amount of doubling required to make the guitars fullest in size. In fact, it could be stated the biggest guitars on the record (Questions, Temper, No, I Hate it Here Pt II, On/Off) are all double-tracked, if not triple-tracked. A technique that really helped create this size in the guitar sections was placing an AT2020 condenser mic on top of a high cabinet in the room facing the corner of the ceiling. That room mic blended in really seemed to lift the low-mid-range while still leaving room for the bass guitar and other low-end elements. After sending original drum parts to the session drummer and obtaining a very overly-compressed and distorted drum sound, the “Live from Valencia” performance of “No” really needed to match that energy. The song is in many ways separate from the surrounding record both emotionally and sonically, and it is purposefully presented this way to reflect the thematic messages of isolation within a contrarian, my-way-or-the-highway mindset. While mixing this version, a great vocal chain for the song was discovered and the vocal performance for the album version needed to be completely redone to fit this new idea (*Soundtoys’* Devil-Loc with Echo Boy are the plugins which create the harshness and slap-back of the live vocals). This track was guest-mixed by MPTI peer Sam Ruff and his brother Eddie. “On/Off” is another fast-paced and more punk oriented track that came together more in Valencia than in quarantine. The synths and drums were recorded Brooklyn shortly before leaving for Valencia, but the song was not originally ready to be included in the album until the additional guitars and vocals brought the song to its end. The synth parts from a Korg Minilogue were blended with an original FM8 patch created in Valencia while the guitars remained as

grungy and as loud as they were when originally tracked. This track was guest-mixed by MPTI peer Rodrigo Branco.

“Benjy,” a softer and older song written for the contributor of most of the lead guitar tracks for the record, was another very difficult song to arrange and record. All of the vocals were re-tracked in Valencia along with synth and piano parts. The drums were recorded in Brooklyn and tracks were sent to accompany the original demo tracks. For these drum tracks, the session drummer switches between brush sticks and wood sticks midway through in order to add another layer of dynamics to the choruses of the song. This track was guest-mixed by MPTI peer Paige Shephard.

“Zoning” is another track which is quite different from the others. Written in a stream of conscious method and re-produced through minimalist means, it is a short piece including only vocals, foley sounds, and organ. The harmonies for the vocals were composed in quarantine and reworked in Valencia along with the overall mix. Different delays were sampled by automating the feedback and time parameters and capturing only the “wet” signal of the plug-ins used. This yielded a thin static-like sound used in different moments, offsetting the otherwise thick and slightly auto-tuned melodies from the vocals. “I Hate it Here Part II” is somewhat similar, built around a slightly adapted version of the motif from the earlier track with the same title (for Part I). The vocals are left intimate and dry, recorded into an SM7B at home in Valencia. The piano is actually a MIDI version of the original piano, building into layers of multiple piano tracks on top of each other. The ending is abrupt and violent, bursting into a massive and over-compressed drum section from a four-mic recording from Stone Harbor. The snare was tuned way down in order to have a different characteristic from any other drum tracks on the record, with the overhead drum tracks being aggressively side-chained to kick drum with an extra long release.

These two tracks were mixed by myself, and will be handed off to Justin as the album nears the final stages of production.

“Sudden Clarity” is an old idea that became heavily reworked in Valencia. The most obvious traits of this song are in the foley sounds throughout which were all captured around the house in Stone Harbor over quarantine. They are used in the verses to create an almost distractingly peaceful atmosphere of nature before they are quickly sucked away for the clean and clear choruses in which the lyrics are “someone else is speaking through me.” The acoustic guitars, drums and accompanying instruments were recorded in Valencia along with several tracks recorded remotely and sent from collaborators. This track was guest mixed by MPTI peer Jesús Pineda.

4. Innovative Aspects

The term “innovation” here can most easily describe the idea of making something new out of preexisting materials. This is not the first record made across multiple locations with multiple styles and varying degrees of studio equipment, nor is it the first to be made by means of sending and receiving tracks remotely. The performances are not the first live performance videos with audio reactive visuals, nor is the album the first one to be compiled with remixes (including one from the artist themselves), bonus tracks, stems, and original paintings. The innovation here rests on the idea that this project attempts to combine all of the above under the same collection of media. Mainly, this project differs from others in the sense that all of this music is garnered under one producer/artist who has learned new skills and overcome challenges in order to provide a cohesive yet varying multi-dimensional experience through music and visuals. All of the methods used, whether it be remote tracking, collaborating, performing live, painting artwork, audio-reactive visuals, rearranging remixes, etc. have all been employed by a

sole producer to create something new from pre-existing ideas which first germinated at the start of coronavirus.

5. New Skills Acquired

Of the many new skills acquired, the ones regarding visual production have been the most unexpected. Learning Max MSP, Adobe Photoshop and Premiere, and Resolume Arena has led to a new confidence in the realm of live performance, music video editing, and design. Such skills directly transfer to career opportunities in video production as well as live performance, specifically in the realm of audio reactive visuals where a performer might want their instrument to trigger specific visuals but not know how to program their idea. Furthermore, a new confidence across multiple DAWs including Ableton and Pro Tools directly transfer to career opportunities in engineering and producing, specifically for artists who possess an abstract idea for a song but not the tools to physically shape their idea into a reality. New skills acquired in the realm of sound design have led to a new confidence in screen scoring and audio mixing in general, directly transferring to possible career opportunities in sync licensing, commercial marketing, film scoring, and more. Lastly, the ability to work with peers on a tight schedule, all while working to overcome conflicts related to scheduling or anything otherwise, is a skill that everyone is constantly learning and striving to improve as the most fundamental and necessary skill to have when working on a creative project or within the entertainment industry in general.

6. Challenges

The AKSS performances were the most innovative and technically foreign tasks, which called for designing visuals in programs never before used and executing them live for specific tracks. In a small timeframe, video editing programs such as Adobe Premiere needed to be learned completely from the ground up in order to self-produce these performances in a

professional manner. These challenges were less expected at the beginning of this year, unlike the challenges that arose in the realm of mixing, engineering, and sound design. The most expected challenge centered around the production of the music itself, writing the parts and playing them while occasionally collaborating with people from different time zones to write and perform parts as well. The challenges would always be there in this category, especially being able to develop the songs tastefully and cohesively despite some drastically different styles.

Unexpected challenges were more technical, particularly the crucial need to develop new skills in the visual arena as well as in engineering and sound design. Self-remixing a track was a specifically unexpected challenge, as one is often not willing to fully mix one's own music which has already been composed, performed and engineered all by oneself as it is. Jumping into a remix with several new electronic and sound design skills proved to be more rewarding than one ever could have thought, offering all new ideas for later tracks on the album and even some bonus tracks with new aspirations.

7. Future Ramifications

After applying new skills and old ones to hurdle the various obstacles, the only task that remains is to obtain the label approved masters from engineer Justin Pizzoferrato (*Dinosaur Jr.*, *Krill*) after hearing and meditating on the new ideas gleaned from the classmate's guest mixes throughout the final month of the Berklee year. Hearing these different interpretations from different peers is a process that will lead to being more confident in addressing the mixes that will be sent to the label. Ideally, Justin will provide the subtle consistency across all the finalized mixes that one would want to hear on a deluxe version of the album that has both parts together, with certain bonus tracks depending on the purchase.

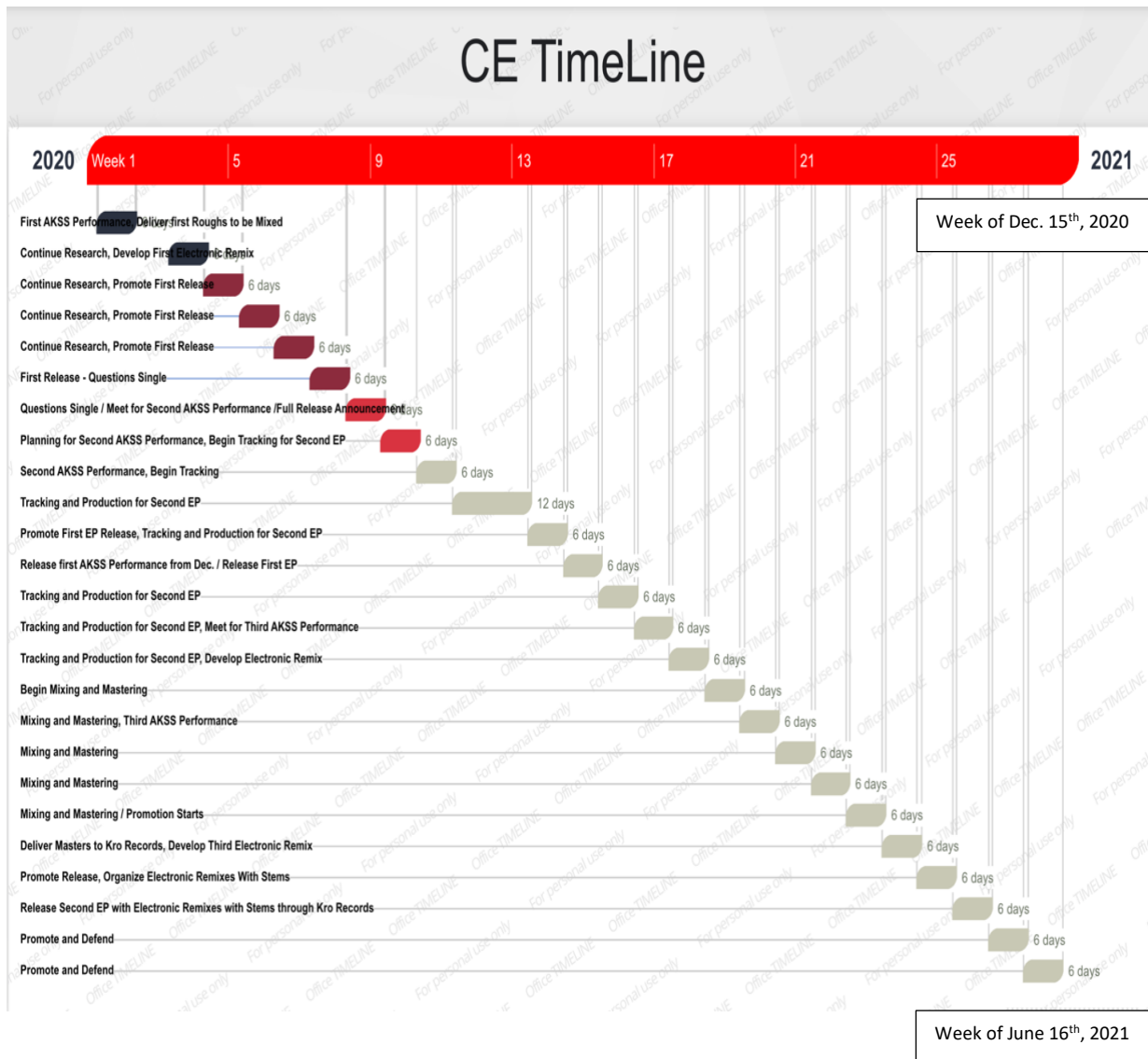
Ideally, this project aims to offer bonus tracks in a personalized way, where people purchasing different editions or colors of the physical package have a certain bonus track or tracks that another purchaser might not get. As KRO Records will release Part 2 by the end of the summer, and as the AKSS performances follow suit, one is yet to know if they will be able to fund the pressing and distribution of vinyl and other physical merchandise. One is prepared to carry out these goals digitally if this is not an option. Additionally, more and more content to support these songs, such as music videos, visualizers, artwork and live performances will be provided. These ideas seek to support the greater goal of keeping the album multi-interpretive yet grounded in its origins. In the meantime, surrounding deliverables from this project including the AKSS Performances, Bonus Tracks, Remixes, Stems, Artwork will be released in an appropriately timed manner following the conclusion of this academic year.

8. Conclusion

This collection of music, stemming from a phrase muttered around the house during quarantine, will always be reminiscent of a thematic pull between the isolation and connection that everyone has endured since 2020. The technologies employed and the new skills acquired amount to something that is still grounded in the most troublesome time period encountered this far. In an effort to provide music situated within a larger collection of materials, the time spent on this project has yielded something more than the sum of its parts. “Here” is not any one place or any one memory, nor is it existence itself. Rather, “here” is all of these things presented in a stream of consciousness in order to present passing thoughts as they occurred. They are packaged in something that was meticulously produced over the course of a year spent honing just as much personal growth as technical skills. All of what this project contains, from the songs down to their artwork, are an effort to combine the various styles and modes of thinking which

have influenced me so deeply with the open-mindedness necessary to create art in the first place. It is multi-dimensional album about the relationship between isolation and connection, their similarities rather than their differences, written in a time where the world seemed desperate to find hope in either state.

Appendix A: Timeline



Appendix B: Budget

ITEM	PROPOSED	REAL
MATERIALS (disposables)		
Hard Drives	\$500	\$500
EQUIPMENT		
HARDWARE		
COMPUTER (purchase)	\$2,500	\$2,500
CAMERA (rental) 3 for 1 day at 30/day	\$90	\$90
SOFTWARE		
ABLETON (purchase) 120 days	\$500	\$500
PRO TOOLS (purchase)	\$320	\$0
MAX MSP (purchase) 120 days	\$200	\$200
PERSONNEL		
MUSICIANS 4 players x 50 x hr	\$800	\$0
ENGINEERS 1 x 50 x hr	\$250	\$0
CAMERAMEN 2 x \$50 x hr	\$400	\$0
MIXERS 1 x \$50 x hr	\$100	\$0
EDITORS 1 x \$50 x hr	\$200	\$0
STUDIO		
BERKLEE AKSS 1,000 x 8 days	\$8,000	\$0
BERKLEE STAD 1,000 x 8 days	\$8,000	\$0
HOME daily x # of days	\$XX	\$0
CATERING		
MEALS 20/person x 6 x 5 days	\$600	\$0
OVERHEAD (120 days)		
RENT 400/month for 4 months	\$1,600	\$1,600
POWER 20/month for months	\$80	\$80
WATER 10/month	\$40	\$40
GAS 10/month	\$40	\$40
INTERNET 20/month	\$80	\$80
PHONE 20/month	\$80	\$80
FEES		
YOUR FEE	\$1,800	\$0
YOUR PARTNER'S FEES 4 hrs / 8 days	\$900	\$0
TOTALS	\$27,080	\$5,710

Bibliography

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