

DyeR Culminating Experience Written Report

WILD PRISON OF YOUTH

David Acosta and Robert Cooper

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CE Committee: Ben Cantil, Ian Kagey, and Nacho Marco

Introduction

DyeR is the creative artist persona of David Acosta and Robert Cooper. During the beginning of our second semester at the Berklee College of Music in Valencia, Spain, we had a conversation about merging our initial individual Culminating Experience projects to make a more fruitful and diverse musical work. We both believed that our time would be best spent working on a single project together because we understood the increased potential and impact of collaborative music.

Our vision for our collaborative project was to combine our training and education as musicians, composers, and producers with our love for electronic and acoustic music. Robert attended Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Composition and German Studies in 2013. He has been playing trumpet since the age of 10 and producing music since 2009. David studied at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito in Quito, Ecuador and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music and Sound Production at the university's College of Music (COM). The College of Music is part of the Berklee International Network (BIN), a group of universities around the globe that are partnered with the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts. David has played electric bass since he was 16 and has been producing music since 2007. He also owns and operates a recording studio in Quito that has existed since 2011.

Description of the Culminating Experience

Our Culminating Experience is a six track album titled "Wild Prison of Youth" to be finished by June 28th with an additional live performance on July 3rd as part of the Lagos de Conciertos Series at Berklee Valencia. Our CE melds analog hardware and digital software with

an emphasis on creating studio and live versions of each song. Our music does not fit into any particular genre. Instead, we have blended musical styles from our two countries of origin, the United States and Ecuador, as well as those of our fellow classmates at Berklee Valencia with whom we have collaborated. They go from House and Techno electronic music to folk music from different parts of South America.

The name DyeR means “David y el Robert,” a name that came about when we decided to work on our CE together. The core of the setup is a Roland TR-8, a drum machine that emulates the famous Roland TR-808 and TR-909. Furthermore, we are using other synthesizers like the Korg Volca Keys, Korg Volca Bass, and Roland TB-3 that are based on vintage synthesizers like the Roland TB-303. Lastly, we use the Novation Mininova and the Dave Smith Tetra synth, a 4 voice analog synthesizer modeled after the Prophet 8. These synthesizers are controlled by an iPad Mini running a custom Lemur template from Jazzmutant. Then, Ableton Live will be used to control most of the MIDI data that will be distributed to the drum machines and synthesizers, with the addition of triggering audio samples and clips in real time. We both shared the thought of collaborating with the diverse group of Berklee Valencia students and featuring them in our album and performance. For the live performance, this setup will be supplemented with live instruments like trumpet, keyboard, guitar, bass, marimba, percussion, and vocals to enhance the creation of live music while on stage.

Innovative Aspects

This project presents a significant use of analog hardware and digital software creating most of the music in live and combining with audio and midi management in Ableton Live. Ableton makes it possible to create this setup because of its ability to sync all of our hardware via MIDI. We have explored the capabilities of each of the pieces of gear involved to make sure

we utilize their various special functionalities. For example, the Scatter effect of the TR-8 can be fed through the External Input so the whole sub mix in Ableton can be affected by it. Or, use the iPad Mini to fully control Ableton Live with dedicated Apps like TouchAble, Conductr or Lemur. The original Lemur was a separate touch interface controller where you could create a custom controller for any MIDI system. We believe that even though the computer is a very important part of our setup, we have succeeded in creating a live performance setup where we do not have to stare at a screen onstage. Furthermore, since we are instrumentalists, we wanted to play our instruments live in the performance.

Another one of our innovative components is our use of Serum, a new virtual studio instruments (VST) created and released by Steve Duda at Xfer records earlier in January of 2015. Since Serum has only been around for a few months, we spent many hours learning the ins and outs of the interface and creating custom synthesizer patches that we used in our album.

Lastly, aside from featuring musical styles from various countries around the globe, our album has songs in 4 different languages, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and English. The common thread of our album is that we used the same musical hardware and software tools in all of the compositions. Our collaboration with musicians from several different countries gave us the opportunity to learn more about the musical culture of different countries we were unfamiliar with, as well as create music with as many of our fellow classmates at Berklee as possible. It was one of our main goals to showcase the diversity Berklee offers as well as the caliber of musicians featured on our album.

New Skills Acquired

During the course of the CE process we both learned a lot from our professors, peers, and each other. We both learned how to use each other's pieces of hardware because there is a

considerable amount of role exchange in regards to who controlled/controls what piece of hardware or instrument in each song. This gave us new programming skills, and has made us able to navigate our way around new pieces of hardware faster than before. Moreover, we learned how each machine and company is unique and that they work and react in different ways.

Another practical skill we acquired over the course of creating our album was learning more efficient and effective ways to work in Pro Tools and Ableton Live 9 in regards to routing, producing, and utilizing the native and third party plug-ins within each Digital Audio Workstation (DAW). Although it is a less tangible skill, we both agree that adopting aspects of each other's work flow over the past few months has made us considerably more productive overall. We both discovered how important collaboration in music truly is because we were able to learn so much from each other, and from the musicians featured on our album.

Challenges

One of the most difficult challenges we faced during our culminating experience process was interfacing our hardware devices with software. Each device is unique and therefore has its own latency issues. For instance, the Roland TR-8 only operates at 96khz when it is the input and output audio interface in Ableton Live. This makes the sessions really DSP intensive and hard to process with plug-ins in real-time or in tandem with soft synths, especially Serum. Serum runs at a very high quality audio, but as a result each instance of Serum takes a significant chunk of CPU processing power. We spent many hours laboring over fine-tuning custom track delays because each session uses a different amount of DSP, depending on the sample rate and the number of tracks and plug-ins of each session. It was a constant thorn in our side that often took

us away from being able to be musically creative, but it was necessary in order to have consistency in our tracks.

Working together was also a challenge because with two minds, there are two opinions. Sometimes we got had differing ideas of how a part should sound and that caused a few speed bumps along the way. However, with every disagreement we always compromised in the moment. We both realized from the beginning of the creative process that any minor clash would be immediately trumped by our shared vision for the success of our album. We learned that for our CE to be successful, we both had to give up some aspect of the original ideas we had for our initial individual CEs. Lastly, we both play acoustic instruments but were not actively playing them before Berklee, so we have had to spend a lot of time practicing in order to have our acoustic playing elevate our compositions in a meaningful way.

The final challenging aspect of our CE project was limiting our resources so that the album would have a sense of cohesion from a hardware and software perspective. For example, we recorded every vocalist with a Neumann U87 microphone. While a U87 may not have been the best possible microphone for every vocalist we recorded, it makes our vocal recordings consistent. We also tried to limit ourselves to using the same preamps, same instruments, same analog hardware, and digital processing in each track to make a cohesive sound in our album.

Future Ramifications

Firstly, our plan is to ultimately have our music released on a label whether it is a label with a physical location, or one simply with an Internet presence. We have already begun researching labels all over the globe and have also asked for advice from our peers and professors about which labels we should be on the look out for. Since our album does not fall

into the category of any specific genre we know of, we are optimistic that our music will appeal to many different musical platforms.

Secondly, we will get a clean press kit together to accompany the album to get us as much exposure as possible. Given our limited financial resources, we have been reaching out to friends who studied journalism but also have an interest in music. Ideally, we could get an album review as a whole along with a more in-depth write up of the tracks we end up deciding to get our singles. Robert has recently secured a friend from Emory, Nick Bradley, who recently graduated with a Bachelors degree in Journalism, wrote for the college newspaper, and is also a musician. Robert's brother Andy, a product designer working for Snapchat, will create the album artwork for the album. Andy received a Masters in Industrial Engineering at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, and a Bachelors degree in Product Design from Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

Thirdly, we would like to get some radio airtime for our music because we believe that it has the possibility to cross cultural boundaries. Even though the Internet is undoubtedly the most important source for music these days, the radio is still a crucial player in the distribution of music. Additionally, many less affluent people do not have access to the Internet and rely solely on the radio to consume their music. David have reached out to Jose Arteaga at the online radio station Radio Gladys Palmera based in Zaragoza and has already begun communication to possibly get our project, as well as the projects of our classmates, on the radio. Furthermore, we would like to have our music on all the major online music services including Spotify, Deezer, Pandora, Songkick, etc.

Finally, we will continue working together as DyeR since the tools we have today permit us to work back and forth even if we do not live in the same country. We will also start promoting our live performance in Ecuador and in the United States.

Conclusion

We are incredibly happy to have worked together on our CE project here at the Berklee College of Music in Valencia, Spain, and will continue making music together long into the future. If we were to do this process all over again perhaps we would change a few aspects here and there such as planning ahead oftener. A lot of what happened during this time would have been impossible to predict before actually experiencing it. However, many of our best songs were created by just spontaneously bouncing musical ideas off one another and spend the following hours working until we had the concept of a full track. We are excited to share our album, "Wild Prison of Youth," with our professors, peers, friends, family, and the rest of the world. We would like to thank everyone who helped us along the way on this journey.

Song Appendix

1. “Open Your Eyes”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

Lyrics by Cinnamon Denise

Vocals by Cinnamon Denise, Marimba and Mixed Percussion by Daniel Marin, Trumpet by Robert Cooper, and Electric Bass by David Acosta

Recorded by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

2. “Hot Springs”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

Lyrics by Bruna Lucchesi

Vocals by Bruna Lucchesi, Mixed Percussion by Oscar Bahamonde, Electric Guitar by David Villarreal, and Electric Bass by David Acosta

Recorded by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

3. “No Va A Parar”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

Lyrics by David Acosta

Vocals by Lili del Sol, Mixed Percussion by Oscar Bahamonde, Congas by Sebastian Laverde, Electric Guitar by David Villarreal, Trumpet by Robert Cooper, Electric Bass by David Acosta

Recorded by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

4. “Fallen Leaf”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

Lyrics by Robert Cooper

Vocals by Mariko Reid

5. “Toi, Moi et la Musique”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

Lyrics by David Acosta

Vocals by Aimée Jagou, Congas by Sebastian Laverde, Tenor Saxophone by Wycliffe Gordon, Electric Bass by David Acosta.

6. “What’s Next”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

7. “Going Up”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

8. “Party Machen”

Composed by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

Lyrics by Robert Cooper

Vocals by Robert Cooper

*All songs composed, performed, mixed and mastered by David Acosta and Robert Cooper

**Artwork by Andy Cooper