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Media Music Composition and Production

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Media Music Composition and Production

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This project is a collection of four pieces of original music that will be used for professional demo purposes. It represents some of my best compositional and songwriting work and shows that I have the capacity to compose music in a broad variety of genres suitable for placement in film, television, or other media. The genres included in this project are indie rock, jazz, electronic hybrid, and orchestral. The recording of these pieces involved the collaboration of many different students: those who helped me run the recording sessions and the musicians that played the pieces.

Each song was taken through the entire process of music production: pre-production (which includes composition, score preparation, booking studio time, and hiring musicians), production (live recording), and post-production (mixing and mastering). The rock, electronic hybrid, and orchestral pieces were composed using Apple's music production software Logic Pro X. Instead of writing notes down with pencil and paper I used Logic Pro X to compose the music with a MIDI keyboard that acts as a remote control for virtual instruments, audio sample libraries, and synthesizers. These programmed tracks served as a way for me to hear my composition before it was recorded live. It also provided synthetic backing tracks to be layered underneath the live players. The jazz piece was first composed on the guitar, and then arranged for a big band using the music notation software Finale. I also used Finale to create all of the scores and sheet music for the recording musicians. All live recording sessions were done at BYU's Studio Y.

Each live recording was done using Pro Tools, the industry standard software for digital audio recording. All live recording musicians were volunteer students enrolled in the school of music. The recording process varied for each piece. For the rock song I recorded guitar, bass, drums and vocals separately to ensure sound isolation between the difference instruments. The jazz and orchestral pieces were recorded by section. Each section was actually a half section that I recorded over itself to create the sound of a full section. For example, when recording the trumpet parts for the jazz piece I brought in two live trumpet players whereas a big band trumpet section typically has four players. To create the illusion of four players playing at the same time I recorded the two players twice. The first time they played parts one and two and the second time they played parts three and 4. This is a technique commonly used in commercial recording sessions to cut down on costs. As for my electronic piece the pre-production and production stages blended into each other because of the nature of the music. All the audio elements in that piece were made from either sample sets or synthesizers which were programmed within the music production software (Logic Pro X) and not recorded live.

Post production mixing and mastering was also done using Pro Tools. Mixing is the process of taking all the recorded tracks and balancing them together in terms of volume (loudness), space (placement of audio elements in a stereo field), and frequency equalization (tone). In order to get the mixes just right I listened to other professionally mixed tracks of similar genres and used them as a sonic reference point for my own songs. Mastering is an extremely specialized and skilled discipline that involves taking a mix and making very detailed and minute adjustments to the mix on a global scale in order to make it louder or more dynamic, less harsh, more aggressive, or whatever the mix needs to sound its absolute best. It is also the process in which an album is properly formatted for commercial distribution either on CD, vinyl, or digital formats. Since I did not have the proper listening environment, experience, or equipment to truly master the tracks, my mastering was a very rudimentary version of what actually happens when a mix is professionally mastered. I made the mixes louder to match the volume levels of my reference songs, applied more tonal balancing, and properly formatted the files for digital distribution.

The end result was four individual songs of different genres that sound professionally recorded and mixed. These songs will be used as demos to be pitched to local and online music production libraries such as Warner Chapel and Amphibious Zoo. They were also submitted with a detailed report as my senior capstone project to BYU Commercial Music director Ron Saltmarsh. Lastly they were posted to my 1SoundCloud profile where they can be streamed for free.

The current standard for professional music demo tracks is very high. For any professional media content creator to even consider listening to demo tracks they must be fully and professionally recorded, produced, and mixed. Normally this is a very expensive process. To have one demo song professionally recorded, mixed, and mastered can easily cost thousands of dollars, even with cutting as many costs as possible. In comparison top 40 pop artists and Hollywood film composers will spend millions of dollars to go through the process that this project has done. This grant and the vast student resources the BYU School of Music has to offer made it possible for me to produce high quality demo tracks that I feel confident about showing to other professionals in my networking and job searching.

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