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Miller Arts Scholars Minigrant Application Spring 2021

Coming from a live music background as a multi-instrumentalist, the pandemic has significantly changed my personal relationship with music. Live shows no longer being an option, I was forced to seriously readjust so I dove into producing, engineering, mixing, and songwriting. I have spent countless hours in the last year studying everything from dynamic range compression to the ideal mic placement techniques for recording instruments and voices to how to build energy within a song's chorus to how to get a nervous artist to relax and give their best performance. I took songwriting with Professor Ted Coffey last fall where I had a safe space to work with other artists and really try out different sounds and styles to learn about my own areas of strength and where I have the most room for growth. Around this time, I bought a microphone, an interface, near field studio monitors, and software, pouring all my available funds into musical equipment.

Over winter break, I had the chance to professionally produce songs for two different artists, one from UVa and one from Nashville. Working in my pieced together bedroom studio, I put these skills I had spent months developing in songwriting class to use in a real high-stakes environment. I arranged, engineered, produced, and am currently mixing these songs for release on all major platforms. I also self-produced and mixed a song of my own which is currently at the mastering stage and I am preparing to release. Through this process, I realized that I am really passionate about producing and it is something I can see myself doing for the rest of my life if I am able to.

While there are a few pieces of equipment I will need to get as I continue my trajectory down this path, one thing stands out as the most urgent: another really good microphone. I know it may sound silly to prioritize acquiring something I already have, but in my work, a second microphone is critical. Recording a song with only one microphone is a bit like serving dinner to a family with only one plate. Yes, everyone will get food eventually but you will miss all the stuff that makes a dinner great...the social act of eating, the conversation, etc. Not to mention that it will be a logistically difficult time. Eating dinner with family is a lot more than simply getting food from the pot to your mouth. With only one mic I am unable to capture the uncreatable magic of two musicians playing together or the cohesion of a musician singing and playing guitar at the same time or a piano that has both bass and treble frequencies represented or the tone of a room from a far mic along with the detailed intimacy from a close mic. Furthermore, with only one microphone, you cannot create a stereo image of a sound source which is crucial to crafting a real 3-dimensional image of the song for the listener to experience. All of these are concepts that I am currently learning about in MUSI 4543 "Producer as Composer" which is an in-depth exploration of modern music production and I really want to be able to implement them in my work as opposed to just reading and hearing about them.

Recording many of today's most popular tracks are microphones that cost upwards of \$10,000, which is obviously ridiculously expensive, but there are also microphones in the \$500 range that come quite close to their more costly counterparts and can deliver comparable quality. Out of everything I have heard, the Aston Spirit Large Diaphragm Condenser mic stands out to me as one of the best. At only \$449, the Spirit delivers astounding clear quality, a sturdy build, 3

switchable polar panels (which let the microphone pick up sound from different directions), and a lovely frequency response curve which means it sounds good on everything from guitars to vocals to pianos to drums and everything between! For an additional \$50, the “Spirit Black Bundle” also comes with a shock mount to mount the microphone on a stand and a pop filter which is critical when recording vocals to minimize “plosives” which are little bursts of air released when someone says certain hard consonants.

In my current setup, if I am working with someone and multiple microphones are needed, I have to send them to a pro studio which can be cost prohibitive, especially for young or disadvantaged artists, or I have to cut corners to make it work. Having a second microphone would open serious doors for me and allow me to pursue many projects that currently are out of reach for me as well as significantly increase the quality of my productions. I plan to continue to push my skills by learning from the amazing faculty in the music department, especially through independent studies and I believe that having this microphone will free me up to take even greater advantage of what I can learn here by allowing me to do even more ambitious and experimental projects. This microphone would get constant use as I pursue my passion for music production. I greatly appreciate the committee taking time to consider my application.

Budget:

1x Aston Spirit Black Bundle with Shock Mount and Pop Filter: \$499
Purchased as soon as funds are available

Found at: https://www.amazon.com/Aston-Microphones-Spirit-Limited-Production/dp/B08BS3M3PV/ref=pd_lpo_267_t_0/134-4146704-7177909?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=B08BS3M3PV&pd_rd_r=4c8e64c7-e7be-4479-b3ba-b26776a1c4f6&pd_rd_w=BvqMO&pd_rd_wg=XeO6x&pf_rd_p=16b28406-aa34-451d-8a2e-b3930ada000c&pf_rd_r=A4646C4KDSCX8BR22C06&psc=1&refRID=A4646C4KDSCX8BR22C06