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Class of 2024
Third Year Arts Award Proposal for Spring 2022: Creating and Performing a "lofi" Album

Background

Since July 2020, I have been creating and releasing music publicly under the alias "skyswimming". My music can be found on Apple Music, Spotify, and hundreds of other music streaming platforms worldwide. Currently, I have over 350,000 monthly listeners and over six million total streams. I have released over 30 singles and two EP's, collaborated with producers and instrumentalists from around the world, and worked with a variety of record labels. My artist project exists in the genre of "lofi," which is an instrumental genre of background music. Within lofi, there are a few sub-genres including jazzy lofi, mellow lofi, and sleep lofi. The difference between each of these is based on the instruments and sounds used, tempos, and timbral atmosphere.

Lofi is a unique genre and tempo is of supreme importance. When I begin creating in this genre, I focus on tempo first. If I am trying to make a jazzy lofi track, I will start with a tempo around 75-90 beats per minute (bpm). For mellow lofi, I use a range of 65-80 bpm, and for sleep lofi, 50-65 bpm is a starting place. Lofi's influences range from the late music producers J Dilla and Nujabes to old Brazilian Bossa Nova and American soul records. I have spent the past two years studying these drum patterns and rhythms, chord progressions, and basslines.

Collaboration is a large part of the genre, as is working with record labels. I have collaborated with other music producers and instrumentalists. Collaboration is a fun tool in my musical arsenal that also brings in different perspectives to my work. Collaboration in lofi enriches the work but is not incredibly important to the learning process. In my work, I have done extensive research about how to correctly mix and master songs for music streaming platforms. I have taken courses, watched videos, and read books about creating professional quality music.

The one part of lofi that I personally have not explored is live performance. As I am an electronic music artist, my music cannot be performed live by a band or with instruments. Performance consists of playing back recordings of my songs on a computer-like piece of hardware while making specific choices about the way that I blend songs together. The choices I make in the performance (what order to play the songs, the filters I add, the live edits I make) create my performance identity. That identity is a key part of my research and exploration of the lofi genre, and I can only attain it through live performance.

Proposal

For this project, I am proposing the creation and performance of an album to be completed over this summer and fall. I will be recording, producing, mixing, and mastering the album, and then releasing it to music streaming platforms. Then, I will be creating and performing live sets of the album. I will be using this grant money to ensure that my album will be as authentic and high quality as possible, and that I am able to perform my music to live audiences to further my exploration of this genre.

Overview

This past winter, I finished my first album. The work I am proposing is the creation of a new and original second album. My first album took just under six months to complete, and I am

planning to finish this proposed one a bit quicker. In addition to creating this album, I am planning to perform live using my work. This can propel my work to new levels, as live performance is how music producers like myself further spread their names, gather fanbases, and make an income upon graduation. The creation of new material and the performance of it ties together. My outcome presentation for this project will reflect the creation and live performance of this proposed album.

Process

The first step of this project is planning my album. I am already beginning to brainstorm album themes. For example, I have an existing album titled "Gentle Memories," and its themes are memories, dreams, and space. Some potential themes include nature, the forest at night, and rain. After the final determination of themes, I will start planning the sound palette as I will then know what sounds will best fit the work. Next, I will determine the average tempo for the album (this is important due to the differences in the styles of lofi), the specific instruments and timbres I want to focus on, and potential collaborators (producers and instrumentalists who I can bring in to add instrumentation and external input). This will ensure my album is cohesive which is key for the listener and for my future performances as well.

I will then begin formal composition. This summer, I will be spending a large amount of time in my home studio writing and producing my album. I am usually able to start at least one good idea each day but finishing these ideas can take days or even weeks. My goal is to complete a minimum of ten tracks so I will be spending a serious amount of time researching learning new techniques on my own and with Professor Rasbury. Next Fall I am considering conducting an independent study course with Professor Rasbury to finish the album and continue my electronic music studies. In addition to Professor Rasbury's assistance, I will be using techniques learned from music classes I have taken through my music major career (specifically Computer Music with Michele Zaccagnini and Ecoacoustics with Matthew Burtner) to complete composition of my album.

To increase the quality of the sound of work, I need to improve and expand my library of sound creation software. The items I propose for purchase in this proposal include industry standard software and sound libraries that will greatly increase the sound I am able to achieve for this album. Serum is an advanced software synthesizer and will be a massive upgrade from what I am currently using. The Abbey Road Collection contains a variety of digital emulations of analog equipment. The analog sound is important in lofi, and my current library of analog emulating software is limited. This addition allows me to further study the analog sound and the production techniques that surround it. The sound library I wish to buy is created by Felt Audio. This library provides rich digital emulations of real string instruments with incredibly organic sounding textures. It is necessary to expand my current set of acoustic string samples, and this upgrade will greatly improve my existing library of sounds.

After the album is fully written, I will mix and master each of the songs. Mixing and mastering is the final step before music can be published and performed. Mastering is the process of adding finishing touches to ensure that the music meets industry standards. I mix and master all my own songs, and the new software I will buy will serve as a major upgrade for the process I have been using.

After the album is mastered, I will plan for its release to digital music streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. Given my previous successful experience with releasing music to these platforms, I am poised and ready to ensure this work will be released successfully.

Once the album has been released, I will be able to perform it to live audiences. I am also requesting the Pioneer DDJ-XZ performance system as a tool for live performance. This hardware is essential for me to be able to perform my style of music live and will allow me to elevate my artist identity. Performance is an aspect I have previously been unable to do, but with this device I will be able to research electronic music performance and expand my study of lofi by the incorporation of the immediacy of live performance.

Professor Michael Rasbury has agreed to mentor me throughout this process. He is a sound designer and electronic music producer with an array of talents and skills that will prove invaluable to my research into electronic music creation. I have taken two classes with Professor Rasbury through the Miller Arts Scholars program, and we have been talking about music production and the possibility of an independent study for the past two semesters. His input will greatly enrich my learning process throughout the creation of this album.

Budget

Software Synthesizer, Xfer Serum: $189.00
https://xferrecords.com/products/serum/
Serum is an advanced, industry level wavetable synthesizer that can be used to design an array of sounds. In the context of the creation of this album, Serum will be utilized to create a lush sound palette of synthesizer pads and plucks.

Digital Software Bundle, Waves Abbey Road Collection: $197.99
https://www.waves.com/bundles/abbey-road-collection?w_campaign=2072548242&gclid=CjwK CAjwxOCRBhA8EiwA0X8hi2JVk1QCWZnxgXI7ZDy6Ef6Ea31G-F8fRU_rPR24m8gosxetoUj EZhoCnasQAvD_BwE#legendary-analog-sound-abbey-road-collection
The Waves Abbey Road Collection is a collection of advanced, professional digital analog emulating software packages. This software will be important in the sound design of my digital instruments, as it will allow for my sounds to be more analog and imperfect (in a good way).

Digital String Library, Felt Audio blisko collection: $354.85 (£269.00)
https://feltinstruments.com/blisko-bundle
The Felt Audio blisko collection is a library of digital string instruments that emulate real string instruments. This library will allow for me to add professional quality string ensembles to my music, which is something my current string libraries cannot provide.

Live Performance Tool, Pioneer DJ XDJ-XZ Digital DJ System: $2399.00
https://www.sweetwater.com/store/detail/XDJXZ--pioneer-dj-xdj-xz-digital-dj-system
The Pioneer DJ XDJ-XZ Digital DJ System is a performance tool utilized by electronic musicians to perform music live. This tool is how I will be able to provide live audiences with authentic, innovative performances that showcase my work and my artist identity.

Total: $3140.84
*I will be covering the extra $140.84 using my own funds

Timeline

May 2022
- Begin planning album

- Research themes, influences
- Set bpm range, mood
- Begin composition
  - Research new techniques
  - Research how to utilize newly bought software to its full potential

June 2022
- Continue composition
  - Research potential collaborators, reach out to them

August 2022
- Finish composition
- Finalize mixes of songs
- Master album

September 2022
- Research album release options

Late 2022/Early 2023
- Release album
- Begin performing sets to live audiences using the album

Participation in the Arts at UVA

I have immersed myself in the arts at UVA through a variety of different musical opportunities. Though my involvement has been somewhat limited by COVID and additionally by my specific discipline, I am optimistic that the next few semesters will allow for much more exploration. I have taken multiple music classes each of my four semesters at UVA (ten total), and I declared my music major in my third semester in the College. Many of these classes have either aided me in my research and studies of electronic music production or given me inspiration by introducing me to music I had not previously been acquainted with. With regards to Miller Arts, I have completed CASS 1010 and am currently taking CASS 1011, and I have been collaborating with other scholars throughout the past two semesters. I have recorded and edited a podcast for the Brody Jewish Center since my first semester (this will be my fourth), and last semester I helped with recording and engineering for the musical Believer by my friend Josh Eiger. Finally, I am a lead ambassador for the student organization Up & Up - a music festival promotion organization with nationwide participation. This semester, we won and are planning a concert at UVA for San Holo (one of my biggest inspirations). In the coming semesters, I am hoping to join Matthew Burtner's Mobile Interactive Computer Ensemble (MICE) and Michelle Kisliuk's African Music and Dance Ensemble.