

Title:
Eclipse (E.P.)

Outcome:

Last year, I released my first E.P. “Comet”, and although I was happy with the outcome, I felt like there was more that I could’ve done if I had had more experience playing with professional musicians in a studio environment. The process last year, as outlined in my previous proposal, went smoothly, but I could’ve done more to prepare musically and communicate better. This year, I corrected everything I had done wrong last year, and the product speaks for itself. Now that I had expectations in place, I was able to organize more musicians and communicate what I wanted more clearly.

After receiving the grant, I began writing for my small combo at UVA. Bringing tunes into a combo allowed me to hear what they would actually sound like. Since writing for jazz typically doesn’t involve through-composed pieces, it can sometimes be hard to get a sense of what the songs will actually sound like until they are played by a band. The first tune I wrote “Mon Sun” was originally just a fun piece I wrote over a repeating bass motif for my combo. It was never my intention to record the piece for the album since it didn’t really have any movement, and it was all kind of the same tonality. However, my faculty mentor, Mike, pushed me to think about expanding the tune a bit more from a boring 16 bar loop to an actual structured tune. Since the tune was originally inspired by Kurt Rosenwinkel, I made a bridge with a similar structure to one of his most well-known songs “Zhivago”. In “Zhivago”, there is a static Ebm chord while the bass line goes up chromatically from Eb. Since usually the bass is pedaling while the chords move, I liked the idea of having a “reverse pedal” where the chord stays while the bass moves. With the addition of this bridge and some horn harmonies, the song changed from a boring vamp into something that I knew had to be on the album. However, when I first planned for this album, I had no intention of having a horn, much less two horns to play harmony. After talking with John D’earth to ask for horn suggestions, he actually volunteered to play flugelhorn on the record free of charge. Upon that amazing news, I was able to use the remaining budget to get JC Kuhl to play tenor sax on it, one of my favorite local musicians.

The next tune, “Lunar”, was very inspired by a lot of John’s music, and since he was driving all the way from Cville, I figured it would be nice to get him playing the melody and soloing on it. After working with him privately for many hours, I finally settled on a form and melody that I felt confident about. Even though the changes were more difficult than I had anticipated, I worked really hard practicing them so I could nail them in the studio. This involved writing out lines to play and practicing inserting them. Knowing that I would be soloing after John was a lot of pressure, and that definitely encouraged me to work on the changes a lot more than I would usually do.

The final two songs, “Beyond the Moon” and “Stargazing”, are both rhythm section tunes with no horns. These went through the most changes throughout the year, and have a much more complex form and song structure. “Stargazing” is based on a metal tune called “I’ll Tell You Someday” by Plini, and “Beyond the Moon” is based on a jazz standard “African Skies” by Michael Brecker. The structure for “Stargazing” was so difficult, we ended up doing it in 6 different sections whereas all the others were done in one section.

While I was in the writing process, I brought the charts to my faculty advisor Mike Rosensky every other week, where I would receive feedback and make changes. Most of our time was spent talking about the changes and practicing improvisation. He was really encouraging, and spent a lot of time working with me even when he didn’t have to. On top of this, I met with John D’earth every week in

order to go over the structure and parts, and he gave me lots of great feedback, especially on “Lunar”. I even got a bass player to run the tunes with John on drums, so I could get a feel for how the songs would sound like with a rhythm section.

To further prepare for going into the studio, I practiced by recording myself comping as a backing track improvising over it. Last year, I recorded some raw guitar parts to a metronome so the other musicians could hear them and get an understanding of the parts. However, this year, I went a step further by recording all of the parts that I could on guitar and bass and making full demos of each song for them to play along with. This, along with a list of reference tracks, made the studio process much easier right from the start, as everyone was already familiar with what they needed to do, and what the song structure was.

One of my biggest problems last year was not communicating what I wanted very well with the other musicians. I was very vague, and didn’t have much in the way of technical knowledge to communicate to the drummer or bassist what the right way to get the desired feel was. Part of the issue is that I just didn’t have a complete sense of what I actually wanted. This year, I had everything planned out for each section, and I had envisioned everything that I wanted so I could make sure I knew exactly what to say. I also had a list of reference tracks with similar feels, so I didn’t have to try and explain everything in words. This helped reduce studio time significantly, and we ended up finishing in 7 hours. This is the same amount of time as the previous year, but I was dealing with more musicians, more setup, and more music.

Most of the songs we only did 2 or 3 takes on. By the time the second take rolled around, the song was already sounding amazing. Most of the songs were either pointless to do another take on because there were so few mistakes or there was such an incredible solo that we had to use that take in order to preserve it. In both “Stargazing” and “Beyond the Moon”, Garen’s piano solo was incredible, and as soon as I heard him play on it, I knew it was open and shut. Last year, we were only able to get one or two takes on a song before having to move on just due to lack of time, so I’m so grateful for how much effort I put into making things run smoother.

Afterwards, I sat with the engineer, Curtis, for a couple hours as we listened to takes and I chose which were the best ones. We also went through “Stargazing” and pieced it together one by one. I’m currently waiting on Curtis for mixing/mastering, but during the time I sat with him, we got all the takes selected and edited.

Overall, I felt even better with the outcome than last year, and I have a feeling I’m going to be more than happy with the results when I get the tracks back. I’ll update the doc below with the latest versions of the tracks as I get them.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mtaUw6DCY5HUIDIQLGpvMTNfeZuCRq2uFBFExDBZAMM/edit?usp=sharing>

Thanks so much to the Miller Arts program for allowing me to pursue this experience, and for the first time in my life, create and release music to the world. A special thanks especially to J. Stanford Miller and Stephen Colbert for helping me achieve this milestone along with the parents, faculty and alumni who were involved and/or donated to the Miller Arts program. This project has been my heart and soul for the past year, and it was an experience that I’ll never forget. I hope you guys enjoy Eclipse!

Expenses:

Spacebomb Studio (1 full day)- \$450

Musicians (7 hours, \$300 per hour)- \$2100

Featured horns (2.5 hours, \$100 per hour)- \$250

Mixing/Mastering (5-10 hours, \$30 per hour, \$100 tip)- \$250-500

Amount Funded- \$3000

Total: \$3050-3300 (remainder covered out of pocket)

Materials:

- iTunes: <http://itunes.apple.com/album/id1676688002?ls=1&app=itunes>
- Apple Music: <http://itunes.apple.com/album/id/1676688002>
- Spotify, Amazon Music, Pandora: Will be released in the coming weeks

