

Title:

Comet (E.P.)

Outcome:

I originally set out to create a 4 song, modern jazz E.P. roughly 20-25 minutes long, and only a year later, “Comet” was released, a 4 song, modern jazz E.P. roughly 25 minutes long. Not only was the project a success, but I was so inspired by the outcome, that I am looking to record another E.P. next year to follow up this one. For this report, I will show the problems and hurdles I overcame along with what went smoothly and resulted in such an inspiring and successful project.

After receiving the grant, I immediately began looking into the song ideas I had originally described in my proposal. However, a lot of the ideas were ones I had come up with a long time ago or just ideas that didn't match up with my vision in general. As an experiment, I just began writing- completely ignoring everything I had outlined previously. As a result, I had written what would end up being the rough draft to “Satellite”, and I realized that I wanted to continue writing in that same style, as it reflected the “space” theme that I was going for. Later on, I was writing for my jazz combo (completely unrelated), and I ended up writing one of the best and most unique melodies I think I've ever written. After outlining so much complexity in my original proposal and then seeing how simple “Satellite” turned out, I had a moment of realization where perhaps the complexity of a tune can be more subtle but still grab the listener's attention. For example, this tune “Somewhere Far” is a very simple tune, and it's hard to tell, but the melody is actually written in quintuplets. It's hard to tell because usually quintuplets are very rigid, but in this case, they sounded smooth while still retaining that strange quality. Although those songs were really cool, and I loved working on them, I wanted to create a song that was truly unique.

At one point, I was discussing with some of my friends how different instruments push musicians to create different sounding lines just based on the structure of the instrument. With this idea, I created some lines that I thought would only be playable on a guitar just as a thought experiment. These lines involved fast quintuplets descending in 4ths, with notes being duplicated as much as possible on adjacent strings in order to create a waterfall effect of notes pouring down the fretboard. This riff requires a large amount of finger flexibility to pull off, but it became the basis (and very first line) of the song “Voyager”. To contrast these descending fourths, The bridge section involves ascending fifths outlining a lydian chord. However, when the bass notes of the arpeggio are shifted, it creates a minor 11th chord. This became the basis for a lot of the sections and chord changes of the song shifting from a lydian to minor 11th tonality by only changing the bass note.

At this point, I had written many more songs, but none really stuck out as being the right choice for the last song in the album. I needed some inspiration, and I decided to lean towards something really simple. The final result was “Falling Up”, and it's meant to be a counter to the rest of the songs in the album due to its simplicity and melody. Although I had anticipated creating metrically and harmonically challenging songs for the album, I ended up closing with essentially a chord progression from a pop song.

After all the songs were in their draft stages, I brought them to my faculty advisor Mike Rosensky every week, where I would receive feedback and make changes. Over this course of time, there were less and less changes to make every week, and feedback ranged from simple fixes in notation to harmonic and melodic structure changes. This criticism was valuable for streamlining the process in the studio because Mike had experience playing with the studio musicians before, and he gave me advice on what to expect.

To prepare for going into the studio, I practiced by recording the parts as a backing track and then practicing the guitar solos over that. Also, I recorded some raw guitar parts to a metronome so the other

musicians could hear them and get an understanding of the parts. About two weeks before the studio session, I sent out the raw tracks and parts to them along with a document outlining my vision for the album.

On the day of the project, I met everyone at the studio and we got to work rehearsing the pieces. We started with “Satellite”, and I realized I wasn’t sure how to communicate what I wanted from the rhythm section very clearly. There were a lot of notes that I took ahead of time so that I was aware of what might be an issue in the studio, and luckily I figured this might happen. Since I went in with the list and I was working with such stellar musicians, most of the concerns were very easily and naturally resolved. In this particular case, we just looped the problem section, people tried new things, and I actively gave feedback.

The other tracks went way smoother since we figured out how to communicate better, and we breezed through the next tune “Somewhere Far” in only 1 take. Although I was a bit worried about the transition from the quintuplets into a 6/8 ballad going into the solo section, somehow it ended up naturally working out better than I could’ve imagined. However, “Voyager” was the monster that I was expecting it to be, and we had to punch the complicated rhythmic section because it was just too much to try and do the whole song in one take while keeping that section clean. Finally, “Falling Up” was one take, being the easiest song by far. On the day of recording, it would have been nice to spend a little more time rehearsing the songs, but unfortunately I only had about 7 hours in the studio before I started going way over budget. I underestimated the amount of time it would take to set up and walk through the tunes, much less, record them and listen back. Finally, after 7 hours, even though we did most of the songs in 1 or 2 takes, we had finished all of the recording.

I requested for the second day in the studio to be just me and the engineer so I could see how he went about mixing and mastering the tracks. We sat down and although he was generally quiet and didn’t say much, he explained how he used crossfades for almost every volume automation (which I found quite unique). Also, he showed me how he ran my guitar signal through his physical preamp to give it a little bit more of an analog feel. He had done a lot of the effects and panning beforehand, but still showed me a lot of nuanced techniques like flipping the phase and meshing it with the original to get a more balanced signal. Although a lot of it was over my head, he still provided great insight on how to go about professionally mixing and producing an album.

Afterwards, he sent me the tracks, and I sent them out to everyone to listen to. After everyone expressed their liking for the tracks, I went ahead and started the process of getting them on TuneCore, a distribution platform to put the music on services like iTunes and Spotify. However, I needed album art in order to release the tracks. I was originally planning to pay a graphic designer to create an image, but I was already over budget, and a graphic designer costs way more than I was anticipating, so I actually just generated an image using a free image online and a bunch of keywords in an AI generator until I got something that I thought fit the music. Although I felt like a fraud, it turned out to be a really cool album cover with the text inscribed over it fitting well with the colors.

Overall, the experience was so enjoyable and so much less stressful than I anticipated that I actually plan on requesting funds to do a follow up E.P. given everything I learned about part-writing and I want to use the opportunity to extend my vision further. Now knowing the capabilities of the musicians, I have a bunch of great ideas that never made it past the drawing board that I can now see as really interesting songs with a lot of potential. Knowing that I can write for them in a way that suits them, and seeing their follow-up reactions to hearing the music is really inspiring for me.

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.

Expenses:

Composition Software- \$100 (Lifetime student subscription to Flat.io)

Minimum Wage Recording Studio (2 days)- \$700 (\$300 per day + \$100 tip)

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

TuneCore- \$75 (5 years of music on streaming services)

Amount Funded- \$2850

Total: \$2975 (not including travel costs) (extra 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

