

Samuel Gerardi  
Rising Fourth Year Arts Award Outcome Report  
Faculty Mentor: Matthew Burtner

### **Distinguished Major Project Funding**

First, I'd like to thank the J. Sanford Miller Family for awarding me this grant, as all of my current creative endeavors would've been far more difficult without their generosity. Being in the Miller Arts Scholars program has greatly improved my capacity to make original and high quality music. My original proposal was designed to provide funding for my Distinguished Major Project, a final composition I created over the course of my Fourth Year. In my original proposal, I had several overarching goals:

- Create and complete a full length album.
- Increase efficiency of my work process with a working computer screen.
- Create higher quality vocal and string recordings.
- Acoustically treat my home studio, creating an environment more conducive to home recording.
- Create compelling textures and timbres in my samples and newly recorded material.

My faculty mentor was Professor Matthew Burtner of the Music Department. I met Professor Burtner in a course I took called Ecoacoustics, which focused on the use of natural sound and data from the natural world as rich material for composition. I chose him as my mentor because of his rich knowledge of sound design, audio recording, and composition, all of which were exceptionally useful for my goals in this project.

Many of my previously mentioned goals were achieved: I'm currently in the process of finishing my album, I'm now more efficient due to a working screen, new microphones have made my strings/vocals richer, and new plugins have given me access to interesting tools, greatly enchanting my exploration of texture. However, through the process of consulting with my mentor and the randomness of life, my priorities for the project shifted.

For example, my goal of acoustically treating my home studio was dropped. After a conversation with my mentor, we decided that the money would be better spent elsewhere. Acoustic treatment is not only expensive, but it is difficult and costly to move from place to place. Given that I will probably find myself moving frequently in the years following college, it doesn't particularly make sense for me to invest in this sort of treatment right now. Plus, good results can be easily achieved through DIY means. This combination of the factors made the decision to not purchase treatment an obvious one.

My mentor also suggested multiple options for my microphone purchase. I ultimately decided on the AKG C414, as it appeared to be more versatile than the Royer R-121 from the original proposal. Not only does it capture string sounds wonderfully, but it also has a variety of polar patterns to choose from. These are patterns which define how much of a signal the microphone picks up, and can be used to selectively record some audio and not others. These come in different shapes like cardioid (heart-shape) and figure 8. This microphone ended up being slightly cheaper than the microphone from the original proposal, leaving me with extra budget.



*Pictured: The size, speed, and durability of the Rocket Nano SSD made it the ideal hard drive purchase.*

Unallocated budget also rose from other sources. Repairing my computer screen at a local shop was significantly cheaper than going to an Apple store, and certain discounts such as Black Friday and student price cuts meant items like the SoundToys 5 Plugin collection ended up being cheaper than expected. This totaled to around \$1190.28 of grant money no longer allocated to specific items.

For part of this money, I decided to continue with an intention I set in my Fall 2022 mini grant: portability. Much of my time as a student is spent away from my home, where I keep items like my studio monitors and microphone. To be able to work on the go, I need smaller, lightweight music making devices that will allow me to create and develop ideas no matter where I am. With this in mind, I purchased both a Rocket Nano 2 TB SSD and a Zoom H5.

The first is a solid state external hard drive, or SSD. Compared to hard disk drives (HDD), these have both superior data transfer speeds and durability. Both of these are important to travelling production setups, as I won't have

frequent access to a power source and I will continually move around, leading to risk of damage for less durable drives. The Rocket Nano is also only 2.85 x 1.28 inches, making it ultra portable. In addition, having multiple external hard drives acts as a failsafe if one of the drives breaks. I've had experience with losing all of my progress on a musical project in the past because of this problem, so I wanted to avoid a repeat.



*Pictured: The Zoom H5 Recorder, furry attached.*

The Zoom H5 is a portable recording device that I've used in the past on film sets. It has two built-in microphones, and inputs for external microphones to be connected. Although we have some access to similar devices through UVA, my album requires frequent use of a device like this. I often collect and manipulate samples from real-world recordings in my music, and owning a device to conduct field recordings greatly enhanced my ability to collect and access new compositional material. I also purchased a wind muff/furry to prevent the built-in microphones from being blasted by wind noise every time I conducted a field recording outside.

Additionally, there were unexpected developments that lead to me using this excess budget. One day while I was composing, I knocked over my MIDI keyboard and it hit the ground, damaging it and crippling its functionality. It appeared it would cost more to repair the keyboard than it was worth, so I decided to purchase a different MIDI keyboard. I settled on the Arturia Keylab Essentials, due to its

price and high compatibility with Logic Pro X, my choice in music making software. Replacing

my keyboard and computer screen made it possible for me to continue working on schedule in a way that would've otherwise been costly. It is one of the many reasons I am incredibly thankful to the Miller Arts Scholars for this grant.

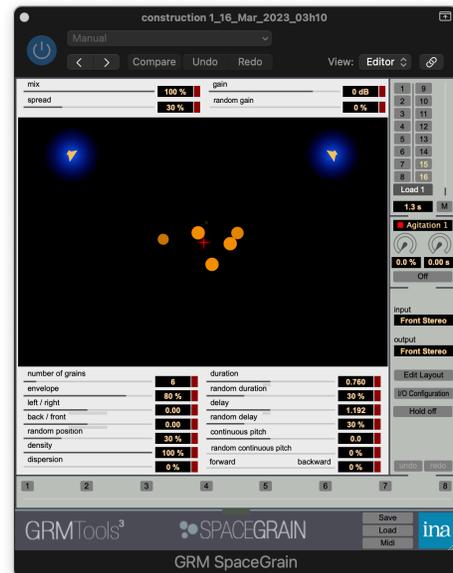
Excess budget also went to purchasing a djembe, a kind of West African hand drum. I became familiar with it in Learn to Groove, a series of classes at UVA which teach multiple levels of hand drumming. As I progressed in the courses, moving from intermediate to advanced, I desired to integrate the sounds and rhythms of djembe hand drumming into my album. In the course, I used my friends very old djembe, which over time had dulled in sound and diminished in quality. I needed a drum with a better tone if I wanted to record with it, so I ended up purchasing the Toca djembe listed in the budget. This added an incredible amount of life to the recordings I made, and allowed greater nuance in the sounds I could produce. The drum also blended better with my classmates in our ensemble pieces, so that was a plus.

The plugins I purchased were also incredibly helpful in my creative process for the album. Plugins are pieces of musical software integrated into music-making programs which add effects and depth to your recordings. These include reverb, distortion, delays, etc. I purchased the SoundToys plugin collection and two plugin collections from GRM Tools, a company which designs plugins for sound design and creating electroacoustic music. The GRM Tools plugins were a recommendation from my faculty mentor, and ended up using the final portion of the unallocated funding of the grant. These plugins allowed me to create interesting timbres in my music. I could change the sound's location spatially, add warmth emulating analog equipment, freeze the sound in place, stretch it out; the possibilities were vast and exciting. I've used these plugins extensively to make compelling sounds and textures in my album.

Overall, I'm very grateful that for this grant. It has made working in any location easier, enhanced the number of sounds and timbres I could produce, and in some cases, saved me from very difficult circumstances surrounding the equipment essential to my craft. My technical knowledge of music equipment has increased, as has my knowledge of sound design. Professor Burtner was exceptionally helpful in advising me on what purchases



*Pictured: The rope-tuned djembe I bought.*



*Pictured: One of the GRM plugins, SpaceGrain, used a combination of granular synthesis and spatialization to generate interesting effects.*

were necessary and beneficial to my project, and I am incredibly thankful for his guidance. Finally, thank you once again to the Miller Arts Scholars program for funding this final step in my UVA artistic journey.

**Final Budget:**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Price</b>
Zoom H5	1	\$309.60
AKG Pro Audio C414 XLS Condenser Microphone	1	\$1,106.87
Toca SFDJ-10WP Freestyle Rope Tuned 10inch Djembe	1	\$106.34
SABRENT Rocket Nano 2TB External Aluminum SSD	1	\$239.60
ChromLives Windscreen Microphone Wind Muff	1	\$23.60
SoundToys 5 Plugin Collection (Student Price)	1	\$229
13-inch Macbook Pro 2019 Screen Repair	1	\$473.85
GRM Tools Evolution Plugins	1	\$211.38
GRM Tools Creative Plugins	1	\$105.16
Arturia KeyLab Essential 49-key Keyboard Controller	1	\$220.08
<b>Total (Tax included)</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>\$3025.48</b>