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Arts Award Outcome Report: An Exploration of Musical Styles

Recap:

A year ago, I began my application for a Third Year Arts Award with the mere thought of upgrading some of the tools I use day-to-day as a musician and composer in and out of the classroom. As I planned out how I would utilize the Arts Award, I realized that there were many resources I desired to create a basic home studio. I also found that I really enjoyed learning the guitar and wished to pursue this further. I came up with a plan to make a few compositions of different mediums and styles/genres, and requested \$3000 worth of software packages, studio equipment, and an electric guitar and related accessories. I informed the Miller Arts advisory committee of my plan to create a multi-genre collection of compositions, as I found it resonated with my own composition interests, and it also allowed me to explore my newfound materials, especially the guitar, which I really wanted to take the time to learn.

I chose to work with Prof. Daniel Sender, who teaches violin in the music department. While he is not a professor in the Composition and Computer Technology quadrant of UVA's music department, within which I have taken most of my courses for the music major, he has much experience in composing, including for the violin, which is my primary instrument. He specifically is accustomed to gathering and interpreting folk works from other cultures and creating a composition in a different medium than the original form of the folk music. This is an aspect of composition I wanted to explore. In addition to drawing from folk pieces and songs, I wanted to capture styles of performance and composition from other cultures that I would use not only in my compositions but as a tool to learn new techniques on my own instruments (primarily violin and guitar). This is why I chose to work with Prof. Sender, in addition to the fact that we meet on a regular basis for violin lessons, which gave us many opportunities to chat about the aforementioned concepts. I am incredibly glad I chose to work with him and grateful for the plentiful advice he provides.

Outcome:

As initially planned, I began my project by exploring topics in production and composition that interested me, as well as learning more about guitars as I researched what electric guitar model I would purchase. I began listening to podcasts, watching videos, and listening to lots of music and paying attention to how each instrument added to the song. I listened for the guitar in particular. Around this time, I spent time focusing on traditional rock and roll from the '60s to the '90s. I was especially interested in how it originated and evolved, spawning and influencing other nearby genres such as country and grunge. I initially chose to

focus on this style because of the rawness of the music. Many notable songs were minimalistic and utilized only vocals, guitar, bass, and drums. The production was basic and was completed on tape recorders that only recorded a handful of tracks at once. The ingenuity of creating masterpieces in a minimalistic environment was fascinating. Also, the historical and societal aspect of this musical evolution was especially interesting to me. At the beginning of summer break, I visited Nashville with my family. This trip was so beneficial to my early exploration of the studio gear I would eventually purchase, as well as my electric guitar. I spent hours wandering guitar shops, music museums, and live performances. The city was alive with music and there was so much to soak in, which helped me select an electric guitar model that encompassed my many genre interests.

Shortly thereafter, I purchased much of the gear outlined in my original proposal. I acquired studio equipment such as mics and mic accessories, studio monitors, DAWs and plugin libraries. For the guitar portion of my project plans, I started by purchasing a Fender Telecaster electric guitar and related accessories and tools. I chose this model because Telecasters are timeless, all-encompassing, workhorse guitars. I wanted something with a simple, elegant design that allowed me to play many genres, and the Telecaster fit the bill. I was also inspired by the guitar's country roots, which was a style I wished to learn. I eagerly began playing my new electric guitar alongside my old acoustic, but soon realized that the electric guitar made playing much easier and didn't encourage me to practice my fundamental guitar technique. This revelation convinced me that I needed and desired to learn basic guitar technique on my acoustic guitar first. I decided to take beginner guitar lessons at my local Music & Arts for a couple months during summer break.

My teacher and I worked on songwriting and composition for the guitar for many of the lessons. We also refined my basic technique, especially with my picking hand. I had been getting by mainly through my ear training. It was very rewarding to solidify some of my fundamental skills. At this point, I also began jamming with friends and singing and playing with family. I was practicing songwriting for many genres as I began to brainstorm ideas for my compositions. I also honed in on my ear training, and am excited to say that I have gotten to the point where I can learn songs on guitar by ear completely, not needing to read any music at all. My ear training has also helped me compose more effectively.

Towards the end of the summer and the beginning of the fall semester, I began to start working on a few pieces I considered adding to my project. One piece in particular was a ecoacoustic-sonification of extinct organisms known as ammonites. This piece of computer music was particularly difficult to achieve and still remains a work-in-progress. It combines many of my interests and skills, so I am excited to continue working on it and hope to release it soon. Other pieces being added to the project include songs I have worked on in classes with Prof. A.D. Carson. Last semester and the current semester I was able to take classes with Prof. Carson and explore two new genres: hip hop and R&B. The recent months have also yielded further exploration of folk works for the violin with Prof. Sender. I learnt pieces inspired by Hindustani classical music and African-American spirituals. These pieces helped me begin

writing my own folk-based piece for solo violin. Finally, over winter break, I had my first gig as a guitarist, further testing my new guitar abilities.

The last year has allowed me to learn so much about my interests as a composer and instrumentalist. I quickly realized how important to me pursuing guitar was. I have leaned into that aspect of my project. While I initially planned to have four finished compositions at this time, I spent more of the last year exploring various styles from a performance point of view, which has allowed me to expand my horizons as a composer. I still achieved my goal of visiting different musical styles, genres, and cultures, but I am also happy to call myself a beginner guitarist. I will have a few pieces ready for listeners at the Miller Arts Ceremony in April, but I am in no rush to crank out my compositions. I want them to reflect the ideas I have come up with during the past year of musical exploration.

Final Budget:

Item	Price	Details
Scarlett 2i2 Audio Interface	\$179.00	Recording Equipment
Fender Mustang 25W Amp	\$159.99	Recording Equipment
Shure SM58 Microphone	\$89.00	Recording Equipment
Shure SM57 Microphone Cable/Stand Bundle	\$129.99	Recording Equipment
AudioTechnica AT2035 Microphone	\$129.00	Recording Equipment
KRK Studio Monitors	\$398.00	Recording Equipment
Arturia Minilab3 Controller	\$109.00	Instrument
Electric Guitar and accessories	\$692.95	Instrument: budget to choose a good-quality beginner electric guitar and accessories
Desktop Mic Stand	\$17.95	Equipment Accessories
10-ft XLR Cable	\$28.99	Equipment Accessories
Microphone Pop Filter	\$24.00	Equipment Accessories
Ableton Live DAW	\$299.99	Software/Online Service:

		(student discount)
Max/MSP Software	\$199.00	Software/Online Service: (student discount)
Kontakt 7 Full Sample Library	\$149.50	Software/Online Service
One Month of Lessons at Music and Arts	\$206.00	Lessons
Total*	\$2,969.87	

* Budget does not show tax and/or shipping from the various purchases. Total amount spent is after tax/shipping.

As seen above, the budget was spent almost exactly as proposed. A few minor changes were made; as I found discounts for certain items, I was able to spend more on other items such as my amp (purchased higher-end amp). Also, notice the ~\$30 remainder. This is allotted for the DistroKid subscription outlined in my original proposal. I am waiting to purchase this until I am ready to release all my music to get the maximum time out of the 1-year subscription. Finally, as mentioned earlier, I took two months worth of guitar lessons, but I chose to cover only one month with the Arts Award. The other month's cost I covered myself.



Above are photos illustrating the wonderful time I had this past year learning and pursuing my interests as a composer and budding guitarist, gigging, jamming with friends, exploring Nashville, and setting up my new home studio! I am ever grateful to the Miller Arts program for this opportunity to develop as an artist and am so excited to continue doing so.