

Samuel Gerardi  
Third Year Arts Award Outcome Report  
Faculty Mentor(s): Leah Reid, Ted Coffey

### **VAGABOND: Crashing and Learning**

Before anything, I would like to thank the J. Sanford Miller Family for granting me this opportunity to create in ways that would've been difficult to impossible for me before. My experience in the Miller Arts Scholars program has taught me numerous lessons and allowed me to greatly grow as a musician. In my original proposal, I had three overarching goals:

- Finish a project (previously titled *Memory Lane*, now titled *VAGABOND*) I'd begun in MUSI 4581 (Composition I) and release it on major streaming services.
- Finish a separate project (*Vintage Modernity*) based on the usage of vintage synthesizers and vinyl records and release it on major streaming services.
- Create a website to house my musical portfolio .

In hindsight, it's clear to me that my initial goals of independently composing, recording, mixing, and mastering two different albums over the course of 2 semesters were very ambitious. I suppose I'd gotten swept up in the excitement of the whole thing, forgetting the tendency of life to throw obstacles into the way. Nonetheless, I feel as though this entire experience was incredibly informative and resulted in a greater understanding of what creating long-form projects requires, my personal limitations, how to ensure motivation in myself, and much more.

My first faculty mentor was Professor Leah Reid of the music department. I'd taken several classes with her previously, and each one greatly improved my ability to compose with electronics, as well as how to bring out my voice in my work. Because of this, she was my first choice when I was seeking a mentor for the project. I began work on *VAGABOND* in the summer of 2021, after I'd received the equipment I ordered. Initial progress during this time was smooth, and Professor Reid was very helpful in assisting my initial arrangement of my equipment.



***Pictured:** The eventual set-up of my home studio, post fall mini-grant (Electric guitar and record player not visible).*

Particular pieces of music equipment, such as studio monitors, have specific ways in which they must be placed, in order to minimize the clashing, amplifying, and muting of particular sounds and frequencies. Professor Reid provided much needed guidance for how to select spots to place my monitors. She would also give exceptional feedback to any samples of work I sent her, picking out things I strongly doubt I could've heard on my own.

Over the course of the summer, I learned to use many of the other pieces of equipment I received, which made my mixes and recordings higher quality than they had ever been before. For example, I'd purchased an audio interface with a portion of the grant, which essentially acted as a hub for all inputs and outputs that I needed. I wired my studio monitors, headphones, guitar, and microphone to it, all at the same time. This let me record electric guitar and vocals at the same time right into my Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), where I'm able to take recorded and new sounds and manipulate them. Prior to this grant, I had to individually record each instrument with a lower quality microphone, so this was a major improvement to my quality of life when recording music.

***Pictured:** Five separate plugs wired through the audio interface, with room for more.*



Unfortunately, my progress became choppier after I had to pick up a job at the start of July. A major hurdle appeared around August, in which the hard drive I'd purchased began to act erratically. Eventually, it stopped working entirely. I brought it into a local repair shop to be inspected, and it appeared to have a hardware defect that would've cost more than the grant itself to repair. This effectively meant that the progress I had made during the summer was entirely gone. I was forced to return the hard drive to WD, and instead of using the replacement provided (as at that point, I wasn't exactly trusting of WD products), I got another LaCie SSD from my home back in Arlington and used it instead. Because SSDs, or Solid State Drives, do not contain moving mechanical parts, they are less prone to hardware failure, so I figured this would be the best way to avoid the problems I had before.



*Pictured: The remnants of my hard drive after inspection.*

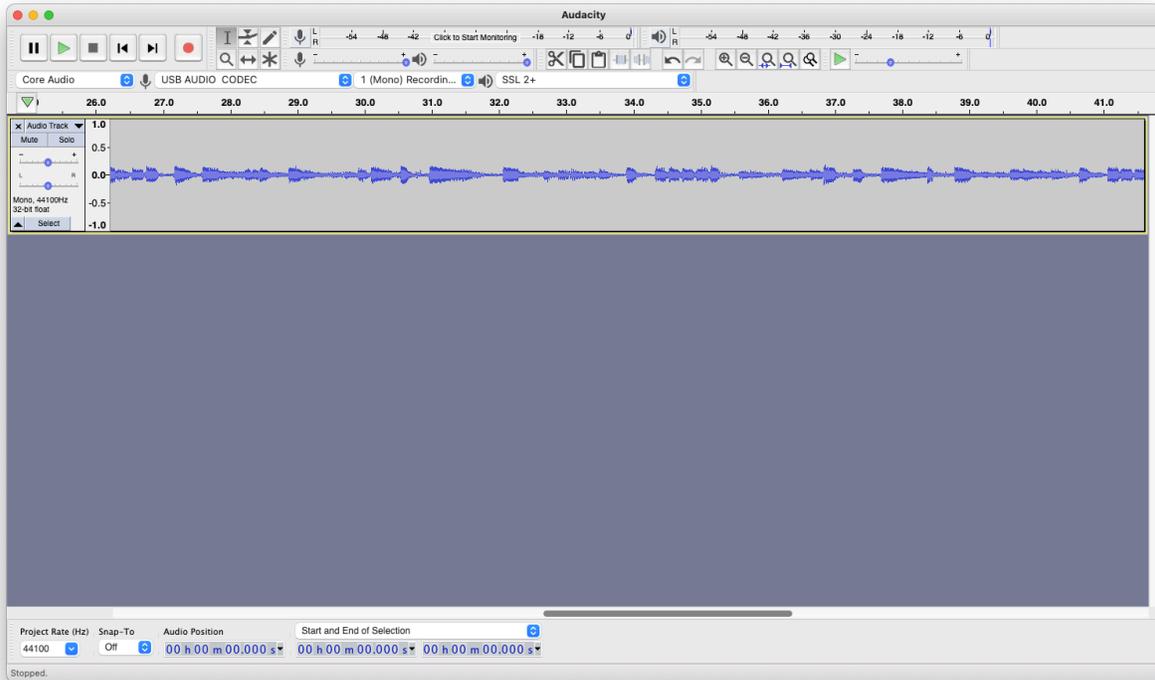
This loss of data was, understandably, a huge blow to my morale, as I had to recreate music which I'd already composed once before. Rather than the spark of creativity pushing me, the stress of recovering to where I was became my motivating factor. It certainly was a cruel way to learn that keeping a backup of your backup is always necessary.

Another change which affected my ability to work was the necessity of switching faculty mentors. Professor Reid informed me in August that she was taking an academic leave-of-absence, so I had to find a new faculty mentor for my project. At the recommendation of Professor Reid, I reached out to Professor Ted Coffey to be my new faculty mentor. The natural shake-ups that happen with a transition like this, such as finding a way to coordinate our schedules with one another, did slow progress on both getting back to where I was and creating new material. To add to this, Fall 2021 was more strenuous academically than I'd anticipated, and major transitions in my personal life ended up both acting as a source of stress and occupying much of my time. In lieu of this, I found my initial approach of setting "hard" deadlines for myself was not an effective way of keeping myself motivated to consistently work on the project while still maintaining a healthy work-life balance. I needed another plan if I wanted to make progress.

I recalled that in my composition course with Professor Reid, having weekly meetings was a strong motivator for me to work, as I did not want to waste her time by having hardly anything at all to critique. With this in mind, Professor Coffey and I made the decision to have weekly meetings during the Spring 2022 semester. This was very effective in keeping consistent progress throughout the semester for me. I was able to get nuanced and helpful feedback, resources to reference, and more from working with Professor Coffey each week. I also worked to reorganize my academic schedule around my propensity to work creatively into the late hours of the night, providing myself time in the morning without classes in order to make sure I sleep eight hours a night. As a result, I've found a consistent workflow that works for me while practicing healthy habits.

Currently, *VAGABOND* is close to completion, as I have begun moving into the mastering stage of the project (where the music in an album is edited to ensure sonic cohesion) and working on the promotion for release. If I continue at my current pace, I expect that I will have the album on streaming services by the time of the Arts Award Outcome Presentation. As for the website, I am also aiming for it to be live by the time of the Outcome Presentation, but I am uncertain whether this will come to fruition or not. *Vintage Modernity* is only in its infancy, but I've begun collecting unusual and eclectic records which may not be found online and recording them onto my computer for processing in Isotope RX and later sampling.

*Pictured: Audio from a vinyl record which I digitized in Audacity using the new record player I purchased with the grant.*



I've also been creating small demo pieces with the various synthesizers in order to become familiar with the various functions that each one has. I anticipate working on it after the release of *VAGABOND* until the next semester begins. Whether or not it will be ready for release by then is up in the air, but I'm hopeful that, given the knowledge I've gained over the first album cycle, I'll better understand how to allocate my time effectively while still creating a great product.

Overall, I'm very grateful that I received the opportunity to bring many of my musical ideas into reality in a way not possible before this grant. My technical knowledge of music equipment and professional audio programs has greatly expanded, and I've learned so much about the best composition practices for myself to ensure I remain motivated but healthy at the same time. Both Professor Reid and Professor Coffey have been immensely helpful in my growth as a composer and producer over this time, and I'm exceptionally grateful for all the work they put in with me outside a classroom context to aid me in completing these projects. Finally, thank you once again to the Miller Arts Scholars program for funding this essential part of my artistic journey.

**Final Budget:**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Price</b>
SSL SSL2+ 2-In/4-Out USB-C Audio Interface	1	\$317.99
Rode NT1KIT Cardioid Condenser Microphone Package	1	\$285.14
Cable Matters 6.35mm (1/4 Inch) TRS to XLR Cable (XLR to TRS Cable) Male to Male 3 Feet	3	\$48.52
WD 5TB My Passport Ultra for Mac	1	\$146.17
Lacdo Hard Drive Carrying Case for Western Digital WD My Passport Ultra	1	\$16.17
KRK RP7 Rokit 7 G4 Professional Bi-Amp 7" Powered Studio Monitor Pair	1	\$474.18
Beyerdynamic DT 770 PRO 250 Ohm Over-Ear Studio Headphones	1	\$165.19
Samson MK-10 Microphone Boom Stand	1	\$23.73
Audio-Technica AT-LP60XBT-USB-BK Fully Automatic Belt-Drive Stereo Turntable with Bluetooth and USB	1	\$45.70
Distrokid Musician Plus Membership	1	\$33.47
Arturia V Collection 8	1	\$599.99
Izotope Ozone Standard	1	\$124.50
Izotope RX 8 Standard	1	\$199.50
<b>Total (Tax included)</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>\$2480.25</b>