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HKU University Of The Arts

Muziek & Technologie

Music Design

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Written Contextualization

Joona Jaakkola's Master's Thesis

– Sound Designer In Composition –

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1 Introduction

In 2012 I enrolled in a bachelor's program in a film school in Helsinki to study sound in film. After years of amateur musicianship in experimental and avant-garde outfits, the music educational opportunities in Helsinki didn't seem appealing to me. I was already leaning away a bit out of the traditional tonal music, investing more and more time to experiment with musical textures and sound arts, so pursuing a career in film sound was a natural choice in my situation. In my studies I quickly submerged myself to the expression and understanding of film sound trying to learn as much as I could and very soon I got drafted into the professional environment. Towards the end of my studies, music came back to me but this time in a more professional sense - as a composer rather than amateur performer/instrumentalist.

2 My Professional Practice

My professional practice is based on the auditive medium of moving image: sound editing and sound design for film and television, along with occasionally providing location sound for documentaries and advertisement as a freelancer. Couple of the most prominent film post-production studios in Helsinki contact me when they are in need of dialogue- and sound editing, and prior to my studies in the Mmus I was an “in-house” sound recordist for a couple of documentary film production houses. Recently on my career I have crossed over to the musical side of the media and composed original soundtracks for advertisement, series and documentaries. Entering this new career opportunity was natural and easy for me, since I have been a musically inclined person ever since early childhood.

3 My Goals

When I first entered the Mmus my goals were set mostly to the field of sound design for film & TV and applied composition, but my goals quickly mutated to prioritize music as an autonomous practice above everything else, as I realized that as an artist - music appeals to me the most. The focus of my studies in the Mmus became to develop my musical understanding and expression further through autonomous artistry and induce the newfound musical revelations along with improved ears to my sound design and applied music context, but I also realized it worked the other way around as well – my understanding for sound design from the cinematic context also shaped how my music was turning out. My music has a more cinematic approach to narrative and form.

Composing music to me is fundamentally about conveying feelings through pitch patterns which appear in sequence (melody) and in parallel/vertical relations (harmony) and the space between them (rhythm). The function of sound design in film is essentially the same, but it must work in conjunction with a much larger array of components of which the most prominent one for most people is the image, followed by editing. It forces sound design to take a more of a “subliminal” approach to expression.

Sound in film is also telling a story and conveying emotions but in a much more subtle way, because in the world of cinema, sound is almost always submissive to the visual content, as sight is our most dominant sense. Some theories suggest that during the human gestation period our existence in the womb is dominated by our hearing linked with tactile sensation. The mother's heartbeat and respiratory system is providing a constant rhythm for existence until the birth, during and after which the battle for the sensory domination occurs, with sight emerging as a the dominant sense. Finding parallels between the music and sound design in story telling and having them benefit from each other is essential for a powerful and holistic cinematic experience.

Through my surrender to music for the duration of Mmus I'm going to carry on the findings from the musical side of things to a more sophisticated fusion of these two mediums of story telling to my professional practice. I mapped out how I could maximize my growth in understanding music theory, musicianship, composition within the two years of the program.

- Strive towards a greater understanding of music theory, especially jazz harmony, in order to relate what I hear and create to a theoretical context, granting me tools to quickly identify and create my ideas. Sufficient theoretical knowledge will grant me the tools to modify my ideas to fit a request by a third party (ad briefing or director for example), or regarding my own music to express more complex ideas and concepts
- To be able to write comprehensible score in order to communicate my music to musicians I hire
- Delve deeper into my secondary instrument, the guitar, to make it a viable interface for composition and also to reach a higher level of instrumental mastery for the benefit of my music
- Establish an international professional music & creative arts network in order to collaborate with other artists and musicians. Use this network to find suitable musicians for my album
- Reach a higher level of musical craftsmanship through experimenting with a plethora of different musical genres.
- Bring all these aspects of professional and artistic development together as a form of a musical product, in this case an EP of my own music. The goal of the EP creation is to use it as a platform for artistic-technical development and experimentation

I chose these goals with a simple thought behind it: the increased knowledge in musical elements, such as dynamics, melody and harmony directly translates to how I perceive arranging with sound effects in film. It also enables me to write music faster with a more satisfying result and with a more complete understanding of what's happening, so I can include music in my professional focus more than before. Having a work of art such as my EP which exhibits a very advanced level in musical content and in conceptual thinking, is a great addition to my portfolio as a composer and as a sound designer. After all I am a multifaceted professional in sound, holistically understanding and contributing to the both technical and artistic sides of sound and music.

4 Motivation and relevance

I had quickly reached a certain level on my career as a sound editor and sound designer in Helsinki, which allowed me to work on the biggest productions happening in the country. It made me question how I see my future in the industry and that future in relation to my needs for self expression as an artistic person. It quickly dawned on me that sound design for the professionals working on these big productions had become more of a technical endeavour rather than an artistic one. I could see myself in their shoes in a couple of years, and that branch of the future did not appeal to me as an artist. I wanted to express myself more and through a more personal and meaningful autonomous practice.

I felt the need to develop myself as an artist and the way I express myself towards an unique fashion since I had something most of the people working on the film sound post-production crews necessarily didn't – a knack for arranging and composing. This would help towards creating a distinct sound both in both sound design and my music, which would certainly appeal to my employers when I started displaying new ways to enhance the interconnectedness of these two elements. My need to create music for myself and others is pushing me towards acting as a band leader, musical director and a composer to create original music which was ultimately to be performed live or experienced as a concept album. Mmus will grant me the time and the resources for introspection and learning: to reach a higher level of artistry through gained insight from practice and theory, and also develop these skill-based needs I have, in order to take my expression to the next level.

This will give me a firmer position in the industry to work as a boutique artist, providing music and sound design with a deeply personal layer. Also most of the post-production studios in Helsinki are often on the lookout for people with a multi-disciplinary background with strong musical connections, for the sound designers and sound supervisors are aware of the connection between musical talent and proficiency in sound design, and they often have some form of background in musical activities.

5 Critical Review

There aren't that many people pursuing both sound design and scoring with full weight – at least for the major international film market. It's much more common to pursue both in the advertisement media. However there are people where their approach is dancing on the line between both of those mediums, which is what I'm pursuing. Here's a quick overview who's working both in the local (Helsinki) and international scene.

5.1 Nicolas Becker

Nicolas Becker is a French sound designer, providing Foley effects and sound editing for major blockbuster to indie films. His filmography is extensive, working with directors such as: Gaspar N oe, Roman Polanski, Alfonso Cuaron and Danny Boyle. He is known for his musical approach to both Foley and cinematic sound effects, and he is also active as a film composer.

His multi-disciplinary approach is very much based on musicianship and especially music recording techniques. He describes his approach as transposing musical ideas into film as he sees the sound design more as musical performance rather than the conventional Pro Tools -editing centric mechanical task. As a performative method he records the sound effects for a film in a music recording studio live to generate the material for the sound design. He spends a lot of time at the actual locations of the film recording textures and effects, bringing a more immersive aspect into play.

I'm a huge fan regarding the performative aspect of Nicolas' method. Generating the raw material for sound design yourself adhering to a prepared concept is an important step in custom making an unique film experience. The performative aspect allows me to bring musicality into play and jump out of the Pro Tools environment which can

fuel new ideas and allow you to compose through improvisation straight into the film.

5.2 Marko Nyberg

Marko Nyberg was a band leader and producer of a Helsinki-based indie band Husky Rescue. As a band they made cinematic pop music and their music was used in the popular HBO series “The Sopranos”. Marko is active as a composer and a sound designer for film, TV and advertisements and he has his own studio in Helsinki. His clients are domestic and international and are drawn to his boutique-style signature sound both in music and sound design.

Marko's artistic approach is based on exploring the meeting ground between sound design and music. He perceives the sound for the project as raw material to be used to create a story; no matter whether it was originally intended as music or a sound effect, but treating them with equal weight and intention. According to Marko the sound design and music should be working in conjunction with one another and influencing each other consciously. His music compositions resemble more what could often be found on the sound effects -track on a film sound session – textures and timbres created by fusing musical instruments with programming.

Marko's boutique-style way of working appeals to me a lot as he has been able to craft his unique sound through composition and sound design. He uses his autonomous music as a method to grow musically and induce new elements to his applied compositions. He feels that without having the strong foundation and continuous interest towards his own music, he would be recycling material in his applied work. Such balance and bleed effect the between applied work and artistry self is important for remaining relevant.

5.3 Kristian Eidnes Andersen

With over 80 credits as a sound designer and over 20 as a music composer Kristian Eidnes Andersen is one of the most prominent sound designer / composers in the

world. He is most commonly known for his frequent collaborations with his fellow Dane Lars Von trier, but his work is extensive both with sound design and composition. His signature sound is a crossover blend of musical elements in sound design and vice versa – sound design in music.

Andersen explains his school of thought for sound design as following: “I see the sound design of a film like a score. Everything has to be treated with musicality, when you have silence, when you have dialogue. You have to choose your instruments and your parts. You have to mix your film like it was a piece of music.” In other words Andersen perceives also the sound design aspect of the film as functions in a composition: a certain sound can be a solo-voice, the atmospheric effects can be seen as a harmonic background, and you also utilize rests and tacet. When he is handling both duties – the sound design and the music, he sees the whole film sound as a single composition.

Andersen exemplifies a prime example in conceptual thinking and the fusion between sound design and music as a narrative tool for cinema. For example the film “Sami Blood” Andersen used the chime of glass and pure sine waves to craft the score as well as the sound design of the film. The result is a unique, thematically strong and immersive soundtrack where the sonic side is unified and often indistinguishable between score and sound design.

6 Method Of Approach

As the Mmus is a project based program I assigned my goals to be very focused on developing all my “weak spots” in my musicality. I needed to develop through research of musical theory material and translate what I've learned through practical learning to my music.

6.1 Research and theory

I started delving into books on basic and intermediate music theory through Finnish conservatory textbooks (Tohtori Toonika) and international best sellers (Aldwell & Schachter: Harmony and voice-leading, Johan Fux: The Study Of Counterpoint) in order to learn transcribing, harmony and voice-leading. I actively transcribed my music to notation in order to start perceiving my music in a more universal written form which allows me to communicate the content of my music with musicians and as an educational tool. Online sources like Rick Beato's and Adam Nealy's Youtube channels were very beneficial for advanced concepts in music theory, the guitar, as well as arranging and jazz harmony.

The integration of my musical practice with my professional practice in sound editing and sound design has taken place more in conceptual thinking and in effort to develop my perception allowing me to treat them more as a single entity. It has been an ongoing mental process of transposing the expression and techniques used in music to the film sound design format. Out of this school of thought I managed to develop a different way of perceiving film sound as well as actual sound processing methods for unifying sound design and music, of which I expand more about in chapter 7: Projects & Professional Practice.

6.2 Practical learning

All these theoretical concepts which I soaked in I put immediately in use in my music, testing out all different techniques of arranging and composing. I revised parts in the songs numerous times as I improved, always thinking of a new way to approach the writing process.

I started training the guitar every day through rudimentary exercises and taking jazz guitar lessons with Reinier Baas (a teacher in Rotterdam conservatory) enabling me to use the guitar efficiently as an interface for music composition.

7 Projects & Professional Practice

7.1 Scoring the documentary film: “Once I was a Dragonfly”

My Mmus kicked off already on day one with the scoring of the feature length documentary film “Once I was a Dragonfly” for the Finnish production company Tuffi Films in collaboration with Finland's National Broadcast Service (YLE). I was to compose around 20 minutes of original music for the film, and it was my first assignment on my career as a film composer. Heading into this I didn't know anything about music theory other than the minor and major diatonic scales, so you can draw a pretty clear picture of my development through my research during the Mmus comparing my work for the documentary and my album.

The film is essentially a docu-drama set in the wilderness of Finland centered around Miikka Friman, an amateur insect researcher focused on dragonflies. The film combines archival footage of Miikka since the age of three till 25, following his growth as a person as well the growth of his passion for nature and dragonflies.

His research is set in the nature and the methodology of the research is extremely repetitive as he has to map out the same habitat for years. This inspired me to base the compositions on repetitive patterns and ostinato which I created with various looping techniques. The microcosmic reality in which the insects reside is for most of us so incomprehensible and alien, that I wanted to portray it with more futuristic & electronic textures instead of natural, wooden instruments. During the end of the production a deal with an established Swedish singer-songwriter fell out, so I had to replicate his song which was originally to play during the ending titles. It was my first time creating pop music and I hired a couple of fellow students to assist me in the production.

- This project taught me a lot in terms of crafting a narrative with the music. I took some wrong turns, but they were all a great lesson in the end. Most of the wrong turns came from looking for shortcuts in the process when faced with

deadlines for the composition. I feel that not a lot of the pieces were as complete as they could have been, and with a better time managed could've supported the film even better. A great positive realization was made when I chose to incorporate elements of sound design in the scoring process by placing the sounds in a narratively coherent space. I used a convolution reverb armed with impulses recorded in forests and looking for inspiration in the sound banks the sound designer was utilizing, to further try to impose a familiar mise-en-scene on the score. This was a good exploration to the relation of sound design and score.

7.2 Red Bull Music Academy Montréal

I was selected out of more than 5000 applicants to be one of the 30 people to attend the Red Bull Music Academy in Montréal, an all expenses paid workshop of two weeks. In the academy we had a strict daily agenda featuring lessons and lectures by award winning producers, musicians and composers as well as networking with leading professionals in the music industry.

The academy building also featured state of the art studios which were open for 24-hours per day if we wanted to create music and collaborate with each other or the lecturers. The lecturers this year featured for example Björk, Pauline Oliveros, Iggy Pop, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Greg Phillinganes etc.

Also by becoming an alumni of the RBMA, Red Bull will now back me up on the marketing of my releases to some extent and allow me to use any of their studios around the world which allowed me to record parts of my EP at their studio in Amsterdam. The workshop for me acted as a validation for my plans to fully pursue music and the opportunity to collaborate with leading professionals and upcoming talents made it a once-in-a-lifetime experience. RBMA gave me a lot of power to pursue the goals I had set for myself for the Mmus and more. Being a part of such a carefully selected group really acts as a great motivator for me, and a great catalyst for me to explore the depths or what I can do with my set of skills.

7.3 Chilly Gonzales at Le Gesù, Montreal

The Grammy award winning composer & songwriter Chilly Gonzales approached me with an email right before I was set to leave to Canada, whether I would like to join four other RBMA attendees to play as his band for a sold-out show in Le Gesù. I made the decision not to play this show as a drummer but as a guitar player so I could learn more about the role of a performing guitar player in preparation for any shows following my album release in the future.

The set list also featured a composition of mine which I originally wrote for two guitars for the “Once I was a dragonfly” film. I arranged a version of the song for two grand pianos, drums, two voices and synthesizers. A great lesson in working with professionals and fulfilling your part in a band.

7.4 Joona Samuel feat. Stephen Bruner & Niels Broos – Pink Cloud

I collaborated with yet another Grammy -award winning artist Stephen “Thundercat” Bruner and a Dutch keyboardist Niels Broos (Koffie, Pete Philly, Kyteman Orchestra) to create my first release as “Joona Samuel” - the monicker for my autonomous music. It was released on a compilation album called “Various Assets”. On this song I really wanted to explore a different structure and form for the music and also experiment with spatiality and sound design in music.

The process started with deciding that the song is going to be divided in three acts which are short but intense – much like a roller coaster ride. I wanted to listener to be immersed in the song and wanting to “go for a ride” again right after the song has finished. I built the texture of the song in a manner that there's something new for you to pick up each time your listen to the song. The first act is the introduction which is a mellow ambient piece which introduces some of the instruments from the latter parts, so they won't catch you totally off guard. After that a short interlude launches us to the second act which I compressed to be very short but very intense with virtuosic solos and a needlework tight arrangement of textures and synthesizers.

In the third and final act I wanted to display the elements of the first two acts and tie them all together. I experimented with spatiality and sound design in form of field recording to serve the narrative. I made up a band of fellow students and made gave them the chords to the theme of the song. Then I set up a ORTF-microphone setup using two AKG-414 microphones on a boom pole which I held in front of my face. I chose microphone setup because to me it's closer to the natural stereo perception of the human ears. I told the band to play and I recorded myself walking into the studio, with the doors slamming behind me and walking around the room with the band slightly panning in the stereo field. This part was the more cinematic sound design aspect of the song which I wanted to portray how we went from a futuristic portrayal of jazz music into a more traditional one, with the door live SFX working metaphorically as the door between these two expressions.

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7.5 Metropol Academy

I attended the Metropol Orkest academy as an arranger to learn more about arranging for an orchestra but also to scout for some musicians for my album. The workshop was based on the music of Christian Elsässer, Reinier Baas and Ben Van Gelder. The workshop included arrangement and composition lessons by Christian Elsässer, and we were also provided with full score to all the songs they were rehearsing with the orchestra to further study the arrangements.

This academy was a great opportunity to follow how a professional arranger approaches his work and the actual theoretical side of arranging for an orchestra. It showed me the ropes in what knowledge I should pursue to learn more about arranging, and the philosophy of arranging in general and how I can apply it to my own music to create more meaning. Due to this workshop I chose to choose the lead instruments of my upcoming EP to be woodwinds, to explore more the tools of arranging. This was also extremely helpful for when I

need to handle arrangements for any film scoring.

7.6 Jazz guitar studies with Reinier Baas

I have always been dissatisfied with my pick of the drums as my main instrument. While I love playing the drums, they aren't as useful for composing as piano or the guitar might be. As I was working towards a greater understanding in music theory and composition using the guitar as an interface, I also needed to work on the instrument on the level of musicianship.

I started working with Reinier Baas with a study programme which featured lessons in jazz guitar, advanced compositional techniques and music theory. Reinier taught me his routine of continuous technical improvement on the guitar which was a combined effort of ear training and technical exercises, along with using the guitar and improvisation as a compositional tool. He also introduced me to tools for compositional development through self-evaluation. Working with a professional of his calibre also offered me the chance to dissect my music, my routine and understanding of music and find ways to improve ultimately contributing greatly to my set goal of increasing my craftsmanship with music.

7.7 Scoring the student documentary “Never Ever Without”

I got contacted by a group of students from HKU to work on a short documentary film about the gay scene in Amsterdam and the youth involved in it. At this time I was working in Denmark and I had only a couple of hours of time to put into this project. The time I had put in during year one in research and self-development really paid off, as it enabled me to work faster than ever before. Soon as I heard their briefing I got to work and composed some electronic pop-style music they were looking for. As more requests came in for the film I had

to alter the music I composed to be more happy, more sinister, more dreamy etc. to fit their needs. The increased knowledge in musical theory and also my improved ear enabled me to quickly transpose their suggestions into the musical world and offer them variations at a very quick pace.

7.8 Dialogue and M&E editor for the film “Kääntöpiste” and “Heinähattu ja Vilttitossu”

In the summer 2017 I worked with two feature length films – the Finnish-Swedish production “Kääntöpiste” and the film adaptation of a popular Finnish children's book “Heinähattu ja Vilttitossu”. Providing dialogue editing and dialogue pre-mixing for films is an integral part of my professional profile. While editing through the raw dialogue material of the film is largely a technical and mechanical effort, it also requires a lot of creative problem solving skills and it's full of opportunities to enhance the narrative of the film. After all constructing a clear, realistic and intelligible dialogue track is the key component on forging the illusion of a immersive story. It also enables me to take part in the sound design process as I'm working so closely with the supervising sound editor, that I'm able to follow and learn from top dogs of the industry.

7.9 Debut EP: The Act Of Disintegration

7.9.1 Composition & demo -phase

I started the creation of my debut release by creating the concept and the theme to which base the future compositions into. On a certain period in my life I suffered from moderate mental health problems and I wanted the album songs to portray some stages of how my problems manifested, progressed and in the end came to a sort of conclusion. I wanted to create a narrative which would not be separated by clear cuts between the tracks, as I think it grants a deeper immersion to the music. The songs would have a highly altered form much like

the progressive rock music of the 1970s, resembling more the form of a short film rather than conventional song structures. I wanted to be able to leap outside genre specified boundaries freely and basically fuse all my musical influences that I've had during my lifetime into these songs.

From the start I made the decision that it's going to be symphonic – not in terms of writing for a symphonic orchestra but in terms of using instruments from different families outside of the established band line-up.

I started out by generating a lot of demos out of which I chose the most viable ones for further development. Those raw ideas acted as an interface to I apply and play around with my newfound knowledge of music theory which I was building up simultaneously. I started to invert chords as I repeated them on the next cycle and finding more natural resolutions to chord progressions. All of which was pretty much new knowledge to me. I still wanted to keep some of the dissonance and unconventional progressions which has always been somewhat of a distinctive feature in my music. As my compositions progressed I decided to construct the EP form to a three-act narrative structure, resembling the common structure of drama in film: setup – confrontation – resolution.

Characteristic to my music is that it's mostly modal and not specified to a certain key, but I tried to find a way in each of the songs in well thought out places to move along a territory in which an argument could be made that it's tonal, but it isn't, and ultimately in the end resolving the album in being fully inside a key. It's usually a fine line between dissonance and consonance. For example a progression where I play: Bb-9, Amaj7, Eb-7, D-9 – an argument could be made that the key is in Bb minor but it would be stretching it. I used progressions like this and also clearly tonal progressions in points which need more power and more accessibility, and a high energy point of the narrative.

I wanted my music to be complex yet accessible and for that I needed an approach which would test the accessibility of my music. As my compositions progressed I would select people to sample my music to, fellow composers, musicians, casual music fans and people who only listen to music for the sake of background ambience. I knew all these people intimately and I took in con-

sideration their musical background and their relationship with music: do they have musical training and if so what is the importance of it in the way they perceive music. How certain personal revelations they've made regarding their own music creation may result in bias to certain aspects of music they hear.

I could relate their feedback to their background and possibly filter out these biases and learn to see my music through their perspective. These trials lead to revisions of parts also as I thrived to find the middle path between complexity and accessibility.

There is a temptation to be infatuated with the texture you have created: you might disregard the fact that the part you are writing might not have a clear or strong enough melodic foundation, but it is merely built on the textural character. Dissecting the song down to its essence and seeing how it is built helps you to evaluate what you are doing – arguably the strongest foundation is that the bass and the core melody could be played with the forefingers of each hand the rest is built upon those, even on Bach's compositions. After that you can add harmony and perhaps a counter-melody. On each part I would ask myself a question regarding the core of the part – is the foundation strong, clear and approachable? If not what is the motive behind the decision and what do I want to convey with this decision? How do I want to impact the listener?

The parts where I chose not to include a clear melodic foundation were planned to be dictated by more of a textural approach – sound design if you will. Where I would be free to experiment and get infatuated with a more textural approach created by effects and try to fuse the composition with sound design. The same observation works also for sound design in film: let's think of the dialogue as the melody and the atmos and FX as harmony/texture/colour. Is your textural foundation based on infatuation or does it serve the melody? If the melody is important and strong, is there need for the extent of harmonic structure?

I also started designing how the “world” of the album would sound. At first I wanted it to sound very open and clean with pristine production quality, much like a contemporary jazz album. I quickly came to the conclusion of: why should I sound like something that has already been done? My music already is

outside of genre-specified boundaries so I will have to find my own sound - and my background as an artist certainly isn't the most typical one.

Analysing the contemporary sound led me to alter the sound that I wanted quite a bit. Instead of being a pristine polished production,

I wanted it to be gritty and somewhat dirty, with left-field out of the typical scheme -type of sounds. In order to reach this impression, I needed players who could improvise and play in a less predictable manner. I also wanted to use sound design in the form of field recordings and heavy effecting to further elaborate the intention and the story behind the songs.

7.9.2 Production & Recordings

As my music is somewhat complex and requires quite a high level of musicianship, I had to research a lot of musicians to find the people who have the right kind of expression. I wrote full score to all the music but I also wanted the musicians to use their own artistry and creativity to lift the music to another level and be free to further elaborate on the idea musically. This would include instructing the musicians to perform improvised lines, slightly modifying the theme, for example introducing passing tones to the melody, or the drummer to play with a syncopated feel to the underlying rhythm instead of a straightforward beat. The fact that I wanted to have a lot of takes to choose from, from each individual musician and that I needed the music to be as tight as possible (or loose if I so choose) with minimal to no time to rehearse, I chose that the album is going to be a studio construction instead of a live session.

To generate an organic level to the music and mimic some band dynamics I programmed the BPM to increase by +5 beats in a span of a minute on a couple of occasions. This created a natural sense of acceleration which happens when playing with a band, without it being even detectable. To make the music less stale and give more chances to “happy accidents” I made the choice to have the core of the album, meaning the drums and synth bass & Fender Rhodes, to be played live. I chose Niels Broos (Kytoman Orchestra) and Jamie Peet (Pete Philly, Glerum Omnibus, Windkracht 7) for this task since I consider

them to be the premium improvisers in the Netherlands. Their parts were laid down in Red Bull Music Academy studios in Amsterdam, and I acted in the sessions as a conductor to elaborate the dynamics of the music.

Making the choice to improvise along my written music and actually jump outside of my written material also acted as a method for me as a composer to generate new ideas to continue in the post-production. This type of working is something I can definitely use and benefit from in the future when I'm working with film scoring

7.9.3 Post-Production

The post-production process was the stage where I would forge the world of the album – the sound design and editing in this stage was to be equally as meaningful as the written material. I knew the kind of aesthetics I wanted to construct: to utilize effected layers, compression and saturation for the overall sound of the album. Given the freedom modern music technology has granted us we were able to experiment and work towards finding the right balance between natural recorded sounds and highly effected sound design approach.

I cannot stress enough the importance of modern music technology to how I work with music, as I view the whole composition process happening as much in the editing view of Pro Tools as in writing the scores. It enables me to think of the last part of the process already in the beginning as the digital audio work environment grants me total freedom regarding the material I gather in the recordings. Already in the original concept it was clear to me that the textural side of the album was going to be a prominent narrative tool. I felt that strictly the written music alone could not convey the story I wanted to tell so I had put in largely silent parts in the writing process of all the three compositions which were to be constructed in the post-production. The knowledge I have regarding these digital audio workstations enables me to not perceive the creation process as linear but rather something that resembles more a circle - being conscious of the end and have it feed back into the writing process.

8 Conclusion

When I look back at the two years I spent in the Mmus I have to say my development has been drastic and intense – the difference to where I started from in my skill level, the depth of my perception, work ethic and professional attitude is like day and night. Out of all the things I sought to develop during the program, the most valuable one was something I couldn't foresee appreciating so much. It is habitual discipline and especially applied to musical development. During the two years I was able to transform myself into a composer and a professional who works with music daily, not because I have to, not because somebody is forcing me, but as a daily routine / lifestyle which will provide sustenance to my professional and creative efforts. So the routine of self-development I practised throughout the two years not only led to a higher level of artistic expression and professionalism, but in conjunction I grew immensely as a person and a creative entity. I believe it is the key to coming up with fresh ideas for your art as our culture and technology evolves.

As I was re-forging and building up my musical side I noticed also growth as a film sound professional. The steps I took in the musical side of things contributed also to my sound design immensely – most importantly improving the ability to enhance the interconnectedness of the score with the sound design and vice-versa. In terms of artistic vision and perception of the sound I feel like I'm in a very good spot professionally since I am now able to utilize compositional thinking, more accurately tuned ears as well as artistic-technical knowledge, which puts me in a great position regarding the angle I approach the industry in Finland. My story is all but finished as I plan to take these newfound insights and mastery to the next stage as I start to pursue my career as a composing sound designer, as well as taking my own autonomous music to live stages.

My original goals:

- ~~Strive towards a greater understanding of music theory, especially jazz harmony, in order to relate what I hear and create to a theoretical context, granting me tools to quickly identify and create my ideas. Sufficient theoretical knowledge will grant me the tools to modify my ideas to fit a request by a third party (ad briefing or director for example), or regarding my own music to express more complex ideas and concepts~~

This goal couldn't have been reached more on a personal level. When I first started out in the Mmus I didn't know almost anything about relating music to an intellectual or a theoretical context, my ear-training was non-existent and my musical vocabulary was extremely limited. The only thing I had going for me was a heightened sense of musical aesthetics and styles. Through hard work and research I'm now able to detect even complex harmonic and melodic movements and have a sense of what's going on and find a way to express myself in that manner if I need to.

- ~~To be able to write comprehensible score in order to communicate my music to musicians I hire~~

During the development process of my EP I managed to learn to write comprehensible score through trial and error. It's now clear to me what's considered "hard to read" by majority of the players and I've learned the ways to make reading easier, especially if there's someone who needs to sight read the music. I found it remarkable as starting out the program I had not written a single bar of score.

- ~~Delve deeper into my secondary instrument, the guitar, to make it a viable interface for composition and also to reach a higher level of instrumental mastery for the benefit of my music~~

The guitar to me is a completely different entity compared to what I started out with. It has indeed become a viable interface for my compositional workflow as I have now further unlocked the fretboard. I am able to visualize and perceive the instrument in a different manner due to intense practice and transposing music theory to the fretboard. It enables me to voice chords of my choosing and invert them to different permutations if I so choose, and also perceive the shapes and functions of tones to the harmonic context, which I believe is essential for composition. I also use it now as also an improvisational tool which further feeds my compositional process.

- ~~Establish an international professional music & creative arts network in order to collaborate with other artists and musicians. Use this network to find suitable musicians for my album~~

This was never a goal of intentionally getting to know people for the sake of gaining something from them or systematically "networking". It was more of a process of putting myself out there with the intent of learning as much as I can

about the work and routines of other fellow musicians and composers. This led to not only to learning from my peers but also forging friendships that helped and will continue to help me along my path of music composition. I did manage to utilize this network to find the right people for my EP, but most importantly, I found friends.

- ~~Reach a higher level of musical craftsmanship through experimenting with a plethora of different musical genres.~~

Along my path during the two years I think I fiddled with every sort of musical style that I had not previously touched. It helped me a lot in demystifying a lot of musical genres which used to be unavailable to me, such as certain classical pieces and their techniques. Everything can be dissected into the building blocks they're made of, understood and assimilated to become a part of your craftsmanship.

- ~~Bring all these aspects of professional and artistic development together as a form of a musical product, in this case an EP of my own music. The goal of the EP creation is to use it as a platform for artistic technical development and experimentation~~

The whole process of my EP was an utterly transformative process. I went from having a goal of writing certain level of complex music on a never before seen scale personally to actually having 20 minutes of original music behind which I can stand proud. The whole creative part of the journey which started in a class room in HKU IBB and ended in Wessel Oltheten's studio was a learning process on such a scale that it is hard for me to comprehend everything. The EP is now mixed and mastered, and I'm currently offering it to various record labels around the world and waiting to hit the stages. It was a platform to successfully trial and experiment with my growing knowledge of music, yet somehow I managed to mask the learning process in musicality, and not end up sounding like a practice drill.

This project as a learning experience also bled into my perception of film sound design the most - the seemingly endless fiddling with textures and layers during every phase was a true lesson in how to manage energy, contrast, dynamics as a narrative tool. Much like you do in a film. This endless toying and searching for the optimal solution also enabled my perception to evolve into a three-dimensional way of thinking regarding music and sound. Previously my musical expression was hindered by the inability to think in multiple voices in parallel or counterpoint and the harmony and movements they construct. I was thinking more in 2D where everything is just linear, without perceiving the whole texture in individual voices. Unlocking this three-dimensional way of thinking enables me to utilize a much more rich and detailed sound, whether we're talking about music or sound design.

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