

**The Modern Music Creator: An exploration of  
the creative process, the music creator, and  
the history of music creation and  
distribution**

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**Abstract**

Through my masters project, I seek to explore the creative process, look at who the music creator is today, and where they came from in a historical context. As part of this process, I am working on creating an album where the end goal is to release it on digital platforms, and to market the music to the public. I seek to approach the subjects through the lens of the home producer / bedroom artist, which I will throughout this thesis refer to as the "music creator", as I find this definition to best represent the amalgamation of roles that make up someone who creates, records, produces and markets their own music, as well as the ones who may only operate within certain steps of the process. This is under the assumption that this person works independently of any label or other third party. What roles make up the modern music creator? Which tools are available, and how do they influence the music creators of today?

I seek to understand and explore how the music creator fits into the music industry of today, and to inform myself as to how the music industry has changed since it's conception around the 1950s, as well as what the biggest factors for change within the industry has been since. How has new technologies or trends shaped the music industry, and what does this mean for the individuals within it?

I seek to gain a better understanding of how best to utilise your own creativity to create a musical product, but also understand the process and associated roles required for bringing a musical idea from conception to a realised product. As part of this I will look at how we can define creativity within music, looking at some of the literature on the subject. Can creativity in music be learned or improved? Is it something we are born with?

I will relate this to my own practice and background, as well as to the album project I am currently working on, explaining some of the thoughts that went into each track, and what the plan will be for me to finish said album, and some of my thoughts around releasing and marketing said album. I will look at other music creators in similar positions as myself, and try to relate some of their backgrounds and practices to my own background and works.

**Sammendrag**

Gjennom mitt master prosjekt har jeg søkt å utforske den kreative prosessen, undersøke og utforske hvem musikk skaperen er i dag, og hvor de kom fra sett utifra en historisk kontekst. Som en del av denne prosessen, har jeg jobbet med å lage et album hvor målet er å gi ut albumet på digitale plattformer, og å markedsføre albumet til et publikum. Jeg har søkt å tilnærme meg disse temaene gjennom øynene til hjemmeprodusenten / soveromsartisten, som jeg gjennom denne masteroppgaven vil referere til som "musikk skaperen". Jeg synes denne formuleringen best omfatter de forskjellige rollene og jobbene som utgjør en som lager, tar opp, produserer, og markedsfører sin egen musikk, i tillegg til de som kanskje kun tar del i deler av denne prosessen. Jeg tar utgangspunkt i en person som jobber uavhengig av plateselskap eller andre tredjeparter. Hvilke roller utgjør den moderne musikk skaperen? Hvilke verktøy er tilgjengelige for noen som ønsker å skape og produsere sin egen musikk? Hvordan påvirker disse den kreative prosessen, og den moderne musikk skaperen.

Jeg ønsker også å utforske og bedre forstå hvordan musikk skaperen passer inn i den moderne musikkindustrien, og å forstå hvordan musikkindustrien har forandret seg siden starten på rundt 1950-tallet. Hvilke faktorer har vært viktigst i utviklingen av musikkindustrien siden den først begynte? Hvordan har ny teknologi og trender påvirket utvikling innen musikkindustrien, og hva betyr dette for enkeltpersoner i industrien?

Jeg ønsker også å bruke prosjektet til å bedre forstå hvordan jeg kan best utnytte min egen kreativitet til å skape musikalske produkter, bedre forstå prosessen fra start til slutt, og rollene som inngår i skape et ferdig musikalsk produkt. Som en del av dette, så vil jeg undersøke måter å definere kreativitet innen musikk på, og litteratur knyttet til dette temaet. Kan kreativitet læres? Kan man øve seg til å bli mer kreativ? Er kreativitet innen musikk noe man er født med eller ikke?

Jeg vil knytte disse temaene til mitt eget album prosjekt og min bakgrunn og erfaring som musiker og produsent. Jeg vil prøve å forklare og illustrere noen av teknikkene og prosessene som har gått inn i mitt eget albumprosjekt, og skissere ut hva planen vil være videre for å gi ut og markedsføre albumet når jeg blir ferdig. Samtidig vil jeg undersøke andre artister og musikk skapere som operer i lignende posisjoner som meg, og se om disse kan relateres til mitt eget prosjekt og bakgrunn.

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## 1. Defining Creativity In Music

To begin, I think it prudent to consider how we can define creativity in music.

While most would likely agree that creativity is a desirable trait, defining the term can be tricky as the concept is often subjective, and can mean different things to different people. In an attempt to define creativity for the purposes of this thesis, I will include some definitions to inform my own findings on the subject of creativity, and creativity within music. Britannica defines creativity as:

*"the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form."*  
(Kerr, 2019)

For the purposes of this thesis, I will be looking at creativity within music, and how this relates to my own practices as a musician and producer, as well as the creative process within music. According to an article published on [springer.com](http://springer.com) in 2013, Authors Clint Randles and Peter R. Webster define creativity within music thusly:

*"Creativity in music refers to the divergent and convergent thought processes, enacted both in solo and in ensemble, that lead to musical products that are both novel and useful, within specific sociocultural contexts, manifested by way of specific modes of musicianship or combinations of modes that a can include but are not limited to the following: improvisation, composition, performance, analysis, and listening."*  
(Randles and Webster, 2013)

The idea of "modes of musicianship" referred to in the article builds on the idea established by Howard Gardner in his "Theory of Multiple Intelligences" where he defines intelligence as

*"the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting"* (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

Gardner's theory suggests that intelligence manifests differently within different fields and contexts, and that these different intelligences, or modes of intelligence, do not generally operate independently of each other. Instead he claims that the intelligences are used

*"concurrently and typically complement each other as individuals develop skills or solve problems."*  
(Brualdi Timmins, 2019)

*"For example, a dancer can excel in his art only if he has*  
1. *strong musical intelligence to understand the rhythm and variations of the music,*  
2. *interpersonal intelligence to understand how he can inspire or emotionally move his audience through his movements, as well as*  
3. *bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to provide him with the agility and coordination to complete the movements successfully."*  
(Brualdi Timmins, 2019)

This could suggest that in order to be creative within music, one would need to be familiar with, or proficient in multiple disciplines within music to be able to be musically creative.

However, Gardner's definition does not exclude someone without any formal education within music from being musically intelligent:

*"Musical Intelligence--encompasses the capability to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms. (Auditory functions are required for a person to develop this intelligence in relation to pitch and tone, but it is not needed for the knowledge of rhythm.)"*

(Brualdi Timmins, 2019)

With Gardner's theory in mind, we can then conclude that anyone can be creative within music, and that through practice and education one can become more proficient within disciplines relevant to music and creativity, despite not having much prior experience.

In my experience, this falls in line with my own beliefs on music and creativity. Through my album project, I have collaborated with some individuals who claim to have little background or education within music, and have still found them to make valuable contributions to the final musical product. None of these particular collaborations have found their way into the final roster for the album itself, so I will not elaborate exceedingly on the subject, but I can highlight an example.

With regards to creative collaborations for my own album project, I will discuss this further in the section titled "The Album" later in this thesis.

A friend of mine who is a physicist by trade, with very little musical background, has been working on creating a video game in his free time, with the goal of completing the project at some point in the future. As part of some early brainstorming for this project, he has asked me to sketch out some musical ideas, where we have collaborated over video conferencing software. In these sessions, I act primarily as a facilitator, where I attempt to remove some of the technical hurdles in the way of operating a DAW, and allowing him to "create the music" by proxy. Admittedly, one could argue that me being familiar with the process, I would fill in some of the "gaps" in his experience, but if we account for this, we have still sketched out a handful of musical ideas which I would argue are primarily his creations. I would therefore also argue that creativity in music is very much an ability that anyone could possess regardless of their background. Is this an innate ability though? Or can this be learned?

### 1.1 Is Creativity In Music Inherent?

A concept that often has come up in my own practice as a musician and producer is the idea of whether the ability to create music, or to simply play an instrument, is an inherent ability that some individuals possess, and others do not. This relates to the idea of talent versus practice; are some individuals born with a talent for creation unavailable to others, or can anyone, through practice, reach the same level of musical and creative proficiency as anyone else?

In her article from 2004, "The creative mind: Myths and mechanisms", M. Boden discusses two ideas which she referred to as the *inspirational* view and the *romantic* view with regards to the idea of creativity and talent in music. The inspirational view has roots from Greek philosophy. Plato had ideas regarding the "muse"; a person or personified force which serves as the source of inspiration for a creative artist, and an idea that the creator must be:

*"undisciplined and almost mad while waiting to be divinely inspired" -*

(Boden, 2004)

Similarly, the romantic view claims that:

*"creativity has a lot to do with the extraordinary and use of innate gifts of intuitive talent" -*

(Boden, 2004)

Such notions have created an idea which persists both inside and outside of creative circles that creative individuals possess some magical, mystical power beyond the grasp of mere mortals. Painting a picture of the artist as some unconstrained, self-expressive, whimsical and emotional individual waiting for inspiration to strike, guided by unseen and possibly divine forces.

The modern music industry seems happy to maintain the idea of the extraordinary, individual creative genius. Despite this idea being maintained by the industry itself, as well as music journalists and other publications, the reality is of course that the majority of creative work conducted within the modern music industry is collaborative in nature, especially within live performance and record production. That is not to say that the idea of the genius creator is solely upheld by the music industry itself, but rather that it has found its way into our collective consciousness, and certain aspects of the music industry may be benefitting from this.

In an article by Philip McIntyre, "Creativity and Cultural Production: A Study of Contemporary Western Popular Music Songwriting" published 8th Feb 2008, he proposes that Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, M., 1988) could:

*"replace the older Ptolemaic, or person-centered, views with a more Copernican conception where the individual agent is still engaged in creative activity, such as in the process of songwriting, but they are part of a much larger structured system in operation"*

(McIntyre, 2008)

The systems model referred to in the article by McIntyre suggests that multiple factors must be in place for creativity to occur, and that while an individual can still be a key part of the process as a whole, but will not necessarily be the starting point.

*"This system comprises of a domain of knowledge, a field or social organization that understands that knowledge, and an individual whose task it is to make changes in the domain. The system in this case has circular causality, as it may not necessarily start with an individual but may be instigated by any component within the system."*

(McIntyre, 2008)

Within the landscape of popular music in the western world, we can try to apply this system to the components within; The individual, for example a songwriter, can access the domain of knowledge, which can be a genre of music and the social knowledge and conventions that constitute said genre, while the organisation that understands this knowledge can be fans or listeners of this genre, or followers of an artist within the genre.

The theory behind this concept is of course much more complex, and while I could attempt to dive deeper into the subject, I believe this simplified explanation is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis. The point I wish to extract from McIntyre's article is that there is literature that

supports the idea that creativity is not necessarily some mystical, innate ability one is lucky enough to possess or not (Boden, 2004).

Through this masters project, I have worked on improving my own creativity and creative process through practice, as well as by exploring various creative techniques to see if they would have an impact on the final result. I will elaborate on how I did this in the methodology section of this thesis.

## 2.2 Describing My Own Creative Process

Through my career and studies within music and music technology, as well as this masters project, I have become more aware of my own creative process. Although I don't follow any specific formula or process every time I create something, I have identified three distinct stages within the process which I will try to summarise below.

### *Stage One: Ideation / Creation*

This is where my creative process begins. I will typically find myself inspired by something, the source of which can come from many places. It could be a melody or concept that has popped into my head, a song I have recently heard or that has stayed in subconsciences for some time, a concert I have attended, or from an idea I have doodled around in Logic or on an instrument. Once I find myself inspired, I try to "ride the wave" of inspiration as immediately as I can, as this may often be a fleeting feeling. In most cases, this will mean that I open a new session in Logic Pro, the DAW I prefer working in, and in which I have the most experience. I will begin by recording down the idea I have, either playing it on my bass, or programming it into a MIDI instrument. Once I feel like I have captured the essence of what may have provided the inspiration, I begin to explore the idea by adding in other melodies, harmonies, or rhythmical elements, with the goal of recording down as many ideas as possible.

In this stage, I very consciously try to be as un-critical as possible, adding in anything that feels relevant to the idea I'm working on. This may mean having several variations of the same melody, different sounds or instruments effectively doing the same thing, or attempting to add together multiple ideas into what could potentially form the structure of the track at a later point. I try to spend as little time as possible fixing errors or mistakes, or finding a good balance in the mix, nor to build the perfect sound or preset. The goal is simply to capture as much content as possible, and to immerse myself in the experience and simply have fun with the ideas.

The end goal of this stage is to have a large amount of musical content and ideas, which I can come back to in stage two.

### *Stage Two: Defining, Organising, and Cutting*

The second stage of my process will typically occur in a later or separate session to that of stage one. In this stage, I seek to filter through and decode the ideas I have produced in stage one. In this stage, I will listen through all the ideas I have previously added to a session, and begin to organise them into distinct parts or structures, with a goal of building a "skeleton" around the track I'm working on. This may involve cutting ideas I don't think will fit, making decisions with regards so sound and settings, spending more time building synth patches or



designing soundscapes, and fixing potential errors or mistakes in earlier recordings. It will often include re-writing certain parts, stripping them back for simplifying them as to not "compete" for space with other ideas. The goal for this stage is to create a scratch track or demo which I can refine and begin mixing / producing at a later stage. Sometimes this is also where I will begin ideating lyrics or lyrical ideas and concepts, as well as making notes as to which chords are used, which keys, and other theoretical information that may inform myself or other collaborators further down the line. This is also typically the longest part of the process's as I may find myself coming back to the same project several times to make adjustments until I feel like the track is ready for a final production.

### *Stage Three: Mixing, Producing and Finishing*

The final stage of my creative process is where I will aim to finish the track. At this point, I try to limit myself from adding any new ideas unless I find them absolutely necessary. In this stage, I try to stay as objective as I can, and will typically have an almost finished track to work with. This is where I begin mixing elements together, spending more time working out or refining effects and processing buses, balancing out elements and trying the mix on various speakers and environments until I find a balance which is somewhat consistent across various listening environments. This stage often blends into the end of stage two, as it can be difficult to find a point where I truly feel finished with a track. This I find to still be a work in practice, which is also demonstrated in some of the tracks for the album project as most of them are still works in progress, and find themselves somewhere in-between stages two and three.

## **2. Methodology**

In this section I will explore and discuss some of the techniques and approaches I utilised in my album project. As part of working on the album and creating new musical material, I wanted to challenge some of the ways I worked, as well as to examine or identify some of the techniques I may already be employing. I wanted to try to discover new "tools" I could use to push my musical ideas in new directions, and to improve my skills as a producer and musician. I will list my most significant findings in this section.

### 2.1 Repetition / Deliberate Practice

This may be the natural "first stop" for any endeavour where one tries to improve a skill. As a musician, practice through repetition is a fundamental technique which most musicians will employ throughout their career, be it professionally or as a hobby. However, the idea of deliberate practice is worth exploring, as simply doing something several times may not equate to any significant progress if one does not have a purpose for the practice.

A technique I have perhaps subconsciously employed throughout my career as a musician and producer, is the technique known as deliberate practice. Practicing a technique or completing a task with the express purpose of mastering a specific aspect. Early on in the process of working on my masters project, I set myself the challenge of creating one new idea every day through the summer of 2022 (specifically June-August 2022). The initial idea was to just practice working in a DAW as I felt I was a little out of practice after a few years of minimal creative work. This initially felt as an uphill battle with myself as I frequently felt myself wasting time figuring out how to do things on a technical level instead of making anything of substance. When trying to capture a creative idea, technical hurdles would stop me in the process, and I would need to spend time looking into how to make the DAW software do what

I wanted it to. At worst, this would bring the creative process to a halt, and discourage me from completing what I initially set out to do. Despite not feeling like I was making much progress, repeating this process every day for three months really helped my workflow within my DAW. By familiarising myself with the tools within the DAW, gaining a better understanding of how to produce the sonic results I had in mind, these technical hurdles became more and more infrequent, to the point where capture ideas without stopping. As well as improving my workflow, I also found that after a month of this, the ideas I came up with would be more complex and comprehensive than when I started out. I would be able to create more complex and comprehensive harmonic, rhythmical contents when I felt like the musical idea called for it for example, and doing so would take me significantly less time. A year later, in the summer of 2023 I was able to look back at some of the works I'd began in 2022, and notice what I perceived as a distinct difference in quality from when I started out. Defining how however was difficult; I found that my ideas were more harmonically complex, or that melodies and other parts were more complimentary of the other elements in a project, or that hooks and melodies felt more "catchy".

But how can one measure progress in such a subjective field as music and creativity? It is difficult to be precise as the outcome will be largely subjective, but through my own practice I tried to employ deliberate practice as a tool to improve specific elements in my productions, composing and songwriting.

*"Deliberate Practice is "the individualized training activities specially designed by a coach or teacher to improve specific aspects of an individual's performance through repetition and successive refinement""*

- *Ericsson, K. A., & Lehmann, A. C. (1996).*

*"Deliberate Practice focuses on a student's individual skill threshold, emphasizes interactive rehearsal for skill acquisition, aims for higher levels of sustained effort, and uses homework to advance clinical ability. Empirical research suggests that Deliberate Practice can significantly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of psychotherapy education and training"*

*(Rousmaniere et al., 2017)*

In my case, I did not have a teacher or coach to design or supervise my practice, but I tried instead to put a deliberate focus on certain aspects of my practice in order to achieve progression. I'd model some of my exercises on similar exercises I'd done through my studies for example, where the goal could be to recreate specific elements of other tracks, or completing certain tasks within a set period of time, and not necessarily create anything of any particular substance. Initially, much of this related to my use of the DAW, Logic Pro in my case. I have used the software for music making and production since being introduced to the software in high-school (Videregående in Norway). There I received some formal education in how to operate the software (ca. 2012), and I received further education while attending my studies at LIPA (in the period 2015-2018). Therefore I did not have to "start fresh", but I still had to re-acquaint myself with some of the functions and tools within the software to achieve an effective workflow, and to be able to spend less time in figuring out how to achieve a desired outcome, and instead focus on creating the musical result I was aiming for.

This meant that I would often spend time looking up guides for how to best use certain plug-in effects or digital instruments, or recreating specific synth-sounds using Logic. By using external guides, often through YouTube videos or other media, I could measure my progress by seeing myself master certain production techniques or software, and utilising it within my own musical compositions. By doing this, I found myself quickly spending much less time

figuring out how to achieve a desired musical outcome, and instead focusing on how to best use these techniques or softwares for my creative purposes.

In addition to being deliberate with how I used the DAW software, I also put more time into understanding what I was doing from a music theoretical perspective. To inform this, I should elaborate on how I usually approach music creation and playing. For me, music has always been an intuitive activity. I started playing bass when I was around 12 years old, and would usually listen to song I liked, and then try to recreate it on my instrument. This approach is similar to how I create music, where I will think of an idea or sound, and try to recreate it by playing an instrument, and to add in elements in a DAW to flesh out the idea. The theory side of music composition would be secondary, and though I have learnt much throughout my academic career and through playing in bands and other collaborative scenarios, I would rarely think much about what I was doing in a theoretical sense.

So as part of my deliberate practice, I would start analysing what chords and harmony I was using, and note them down, or practice different scales or other music theoretical concepts. This way I became more aware of which keys I was working with, and let me be able to consider harmonic possibilities beyond just exploring it in a purely intuitive sense. By sustaining this way of working on-and-off over the course of a year, I eventually found myself having a much more effective workflow, and being much more aware of "what was happening" in my own compositions. Though it is difficult to point to a specific point and say "this is progression", I think improving skills and knowledge relating to multiple points of my practice as a music creator, I can see progression in ideas coming out quicker, being produced to a higher standard, and my knowledge and understanding of my own music to be more comprehensive.

## 2.2 Different Tools

Another technique I employed quite a lot throughout this project was to work using different tools to what I would usually work with. Being a bass player myself, I will usually find myself most comfortable working primarily on the bass as my main instrument, and to begin most song ideas or compositions from a bass players point of view. Some of the tracks in the album project have been begun this way, but as a way to challenge my own ideas and ways of working, I tried to approach the creative process from different points to see if I'd get different results or ideas.

For many of the tracks I found using a two-octave MIDI-keyboard, and the Logic Pro stock "electric piano" instrument to be a very productive experience. Working on an instrument that I don't consider myself particularly proficient in made me think more about what creative choices I made, especially with regards to harmony. Playing bass, one will largely be playing the root notes of chords, perhaps subbing in other notes from the chord, but largely staying within the established harmony. One can also play around with rhythm and timing, largely focusing on interplay with the drums or rhythm-section, and seeking interplay with other elements of the musical ensemble, reacting to or "answering" musical phrases. As the piano is a much more harmonically focused instrument, I become much more aware of the harmonic choices I made when composing parts for a track, and found that I also approached writing melodies very differently, largely due to how the musical interface of a piano is laid out differently than to that of the bass.

Similarly, I also used guitar much more than I usually would. The guitar is of course conceptually very similar to the bass, as it too is a string instrument typically tuned the same as a bass guitar with regards to the E, A, D and G string. Playing an instrument that was very close to what I'd usually play was interesting, as on one hand I could rely on my knowledge of bass, while also exploring uncharted territory with regards to the harmonic and lead-melody focused aspects of the guitar. This I found had an impact on my ideas as I again had to think very differently about how I was playing and composing, and having less established "habits" for the instrument meant I found myself spending more time exploring new ideas rather than falling back on "old tricks" or habits.

An interesting technique I found to be quite effective was to compose bass lines on piano or guitar, and then recording the parts on bass at a later time, acting more as a session player would in a typical studio session rather than composing lines on the bass.

*"Sting, for example, has stated that: "You stick something in your hand that you're unfamiliar or slightly at odds with—like the lute, which is close to a guitar but different, and complex enough to really mess you up—it will put you in that strange territory of not being in your comfort zone, and that position can be stimulating and very fruitful.""*

*(Williams, 2017)*

In a similar fashion to using a different instrument, trying to compose ideas using purely the MIDI-piano roll in Logic Pro also yielded interesting results. The workflow became much more visual than the more intuitive approach I find I have when using an instrument. Although I personally didn't find this quite as comfortable as the immediate physical feedback of playing an instrument, I did find myself utilising a more "mechanical" approach as I could look at the grid of the piano roll and try moving things around just to see how it would sound or feel. This helped create some interesting rhythmical patterns that might not have felt as natural to play, but could create interesting rhythmical ideas for the tracks I was working with.

*"Jimmy Webb, in reference to piano-based songwriting, has made the interesting point that one can self-consciously ignore the instrument's traditional paradigm. His language here is interesting because he could almost be describing a DAW interface: "Sometimes I work graphically and look at the keyboard as if it had nothing to do with music and it's a mathematical grid. And going, 'What if I move that there and move that there?' And not even listen to the sound of it very much at the outset and just trying to gain another mathematical insight into how to move voices around and not be afraid to move them around.""*

*(Williams, 2017)*

### 2.3 Different Settings And Locations

A discovery I made during my album project was how much of an impact working from a different place had on my work. To preface this, I should describe my usual work setting. Most of my album project has been worked on from my living room in Trondheim. I have a simple home-studio set-up where I run everything through an external Audient EVO 16 sound card. I have my instruments; a couple of fender jazz basses, an Epiphone electric guitar, a 2-octave midi keyboard, a Moog SubPhatty analog synthesiser, and a few microphones that I can set up when needed. I use Logic Pro on a MacBook Pro, and have everything set up and ready to go at a desk in the living room. This is where I have spent the most time while working on the album, in addition to my office in my campus in Fjordgata where I have a similar set-up.

However, a couple of times I have brought my PC, the MIDI-keyboard and a simple Scarlet sound card when travelling, and found that working away from home to be very creatively stimulating. Just working in a different environment than what I'm used to, where I didn't have access to the same gear I would usually use, would impose limitations in what I could do, and I would therefore need to come up with alternative solutions during the creative process. In addition to working with limited tools, I also found that simply being in a different physical location often inspired me to create different music than what I would usually come up with when working from my "home studio". The track "Northern Lights" from the album accompanying this thesis was written while travelling. More on this in "The Album" section of this thesis.

## 2.4 Collaboration

I have always enjoyed collaborating with other people when creating music. I find that working with other people often introduces unexpected ideas, and can shape the music in different ways than what I could achieve when working solo. The ideal scenario for me is when working with someone who will challenge the ideas I bring to the collaboration, and offer alternative solutions to the creative "problems" we are solving. This can be a difficult line to thread as you can risk being at odds with your collaborators, which can at worst negatively impact the musical product or the working relationship, but generally I find myself enjoying working with someone who are willing to challenge, but also compromise on ideas. Some of the tracks in the accompanying album were created collaboratively with other creators.

As part of this album project, I therefore set out to work with as many collaborators as I could. For the sake of the album being a part of my masters project however, I wanted to ultimately retain creative control so I would not run into any issues that could jeopardise the the project with regards to it being a masters project. Beyond this, I would welcome anyone willing to collaborate to attend jam sessions or other creative sessions to get feedback on my ideas, and any potential input I could use to improve or experiment with the tracks I was working on.

*"Musical collaboration emerges from the complex interaction of environmental and informational constraints, including those of the instruments and the performance context. Music improvisation in particular is more like everyday interaction in that dynamics emerge spontaneously without a rehearsed score or script"*

*Walton, A. E., Washburn, A., Langland-Hassan, P., Chemero, A., Kloos, H., & Richardson, M. J. (2018).*

I find that any collaboration, especially when working with someone you don't already have an established relationship with, is much like improvising with other players when playing an instrument. The key difference of course is that when playing in a live setting, the communication with the other player(s) is much more immediate, akin to an ongoing conversation. One must be aware of when to "speak", and when to listen, and make sure to both give and demand space to "speak" depending on what the music calls for. A negotiation of sorts.

Similarly, collaborating with other creators in a studio or recording setting works much the same way, though verbal communication becomes more important to navigating the session. In stepping away from the live element of improvisation, the studio setting offers different roles to the participants than what one would typically find in improvised playing. The studio setting offers full creative control over all the elements of the music, as well as the time to edit individual components.

As the collaboration for my album project has primarily been in a studio setting, I wish to focus on the studio and production setting.

*"Vera John-Steiner in her seminal book Creative Collaboration (John-Steiner 2006) identifies four "patterns of collaboration" that she carefully caveats as being on a fluid spectrum, and that these move from the closest of collaborations to the widest and most open form (and vice versa). They are analysed as Integrative, Family, Complementary, and Distributed. These have associated roles, values and working methods, and they form a useful model for understanding different types of coproduction."*

-(Wilsmore and Johnson, 2022)

**Integrative Coproduction** is possibly purely hypothetical, where the parties involved have a shared understanding so in sync that they can act in complete unison, where there is no need for any recognition as to who made which contributions, and the creative vision for the work is shared completely.

**Familial Coproduction** is where trust and a common vision are central. This is typically situations where the parties involved are familiar with each other, their ways of working, and can share the roles and tasks easily. That is not to say that all tasks and responsibilities need to be shared equally, but rather that all involved can operate smoothly, possibly delegation certain tasks to certain participants without a need to oversee or correct the work.

**Complementary Coproduction** may be the most common mode of coproduction. In this mode one typically has clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and the tasks and roles are executed in accordance with this expectation. In this scenario one could have one participant focusing on a specific task, such as recording and mixing guitar, while another may focus on vocals. It is still important that the participants share some common values in their approach and creative goals so that the final product is consistent and cohesive. In this sense, the different skills and expertise on hand compliment each other to make up the end result.

**Distributed Coproduction** is what one might typically find in standard studio settings. This mode is typically informal spontaneous, and somewhat anarchic in nature. The lack of structure can at worst lead to the participants "sabotaging" each others contributions as the open and free-form approach doesn't necessarily restrict any party from interfering with each others contributions to the process. In this sense it can differ from a more professional studio setting, where professionalism and commercial interest may dictate a stricter distribution of roles and responsibilities.

For most of my own coproductions or collaborations, I find that I operate within the definition of *Complementary coproduction*, or *Familial Coproduction*, depending on who I am working with. When working with Kris or other members of my old band, we have worked together and known each other for long enough to be vary familiar with each others workflows and approaches. In these sessions it is exceedingly easy to come up with ideas, discuss and compromise on work and responsibilities, and the process will run smoothly. When I have worked with people I don't know from before, the relationship is usually more careful, at least in the beginning. It takes a while to identify what the other parties are comfortable with, how much feedback or critique are they comfortable with, and how protective are they over their own contributions. Generally though, I find after a while, the line between the two modes of coproduction become very blurred, and one often ends up somewhere in-between the two.

### **3. Where Does the Modern Music Creator Come From**

In this section I aim to explore some of the roles I believe to be key to the modern music creator. This is from the perspective of someone who wishes to create their own music, and to be able to find commercial success through their craft in order to provide some sort of stable income to sustain their practice. To do so, I will also provide some historical context for some key roles that make up the modern music creator, as well as how the industry itself has changed over time with the introduction of new technologies. Seeing how the role has evolved from a historical point of view should demonstrate why the skills associated with said roles are necessary for a successful career within the modern music industry, and how they pertain to my own album project.

Producer. Musician. Artist. Manager. There are many roles and classifications within the creative fields related to music making, and more often than not, one will have to wear a multitude of hats to make a project come together. In my own experience I have had to take on many tasks I wouldn't have expected to have to contend with in order to make a project or production work. Trying to carve out a career within the music industry requires a wide arsenal of tools which can quickly become overwhelming. The more mundane side of creative work such as correspondence with clients, booking agents, promoters, managing travel, expenses, booking rehearsal spaces, managing social media and other tasks which lie outside of the creative works can in my experience sometimes get in the way of the creative process and the joy of simply creating something. I think learning to manage the different tasks required, or how to find the resources you need to make the endeavour work for you is key to find what could be defined as "success" in the music industry of today.

#### 3.1 A Brief History of The Producer

I especially wish to explore how the producer has gone from being a project manager overseeing a specific part of the record production, often seen as an employee within a record label, to being someone more directly involved in the creative process. In order to do so, I think it prudent to look at where the role of record producer came from.

The role of music producer has become increasingly ambiguous over time, and has changed greatly since the first known audio recording was made in 1860. The precursors to what we today recognise as the music producer, were the A&R managers of the 1930s to the 1950's. The term "Record Producer" was allegedly coined by Billboard Magazine in 1953, referring to A&R executives known for exerting a certain degree of creative control over the artists that they worked with; often supervising, recording and leading musical ensembles. At the time, there was no formal distinction between a record producer and an A&R manager, and though these roles have grown into separate identities today, they remain closely related.

To better understand the role of the modern music producer, it is helpful to have a rudimentary overview of what an A&R manager does, and where they fit into the music industry. The term "A&R manager" refers to "Artists and Repertoire". An A&R manager will typically work for a record label, and will be responsible for the labels artistic roster, acting as a liaison between an artist or musicians management team, and the label itself. They are expected to have a good understanding of trends within the musical market, be up to date on local and international music scenes, and to bring in new acts for the label to work with. A successful A&R manager will be bring a label new acts that net them a profit. This may mean not only to bring in relevant music with commercial potential, but to ensure that the band or artist would be

someone that the label could work with, or to bring the right people together in order to create a commercially viable product. Similarly to a music producer, the challenges an A&R manager may face can vary greatly, but will generally be closely tied to the business goals of a label, ensuring a diverse and relevant portfolio of investments from which the label can sustain its business. (Valovirta, E. 2020 *What is A&R and that person does?*)

The role of an A&R manager has historically been closely linked to that of a label, or of similar commercial institutions, and naturally the same goes for the role that branched off from the same origin; the role of record producer. Both would typically be seen as employees within a label, fulfilling roles similar to a project manager for the business. Where the A&R manager would manage a portfolio of artists and scout for new talent, a record producer would have a more specialised role aimed at the record making process itself. The record producer would fill the role of "creative director" within a studio or recording setting, bridging the gap between musician or artist, sound engineer, and project manager. Their job would be to ensure that the song or record would sound as good as it possibly could, ensuring good performances from the musicians, a high standard of technical execution within the studio, and to make creative decisions ensuring the project would stay in compliance with the labels or artists commercial goals. Ideally without offending any interested parties. (Valovirta, E. 2020 *What is A&R and that person does?*)

The record producer became an increasingly integral part of the music business from the 1950's and onwards. They were seen as employees within labels or independents recording studios, and became vertically integrated structures within the labels and record making businesses of the time. Vertical integration in business terms is a strategy that allows for a business to streamline its production process by taking direct ownership of the different elements of the production pipeline, rather than relying on external contractors or suppliers (Hayes, 2023). Vertical integration can be risky as it would require a significant up-front investment for acquiring or building a recording studio, but successful labels would be able to recoup some of these costs by renting out studio time to artists and musicians.

Studios and music gear was not affordable to most musicians or artists at the time, so working with a studio or label would often be a necessity for someone wanting to build a career within music. Likewise, owning and operating a studio would require both technical expertise within its operation and maintenance, as well as creative expertise in how to best utilise the technological tools available to achieve wanted aesthetic musical results. Within these studios the record producer became essential, would slowly adopt more of the roles we associate with the producers of today. The producers would be there to protect the labels assets, ensuring they were used in a responsible manner, while also helping or guiding the musicians and artists in creating the best possible music which in turn could benefit the label if the work achieved commercial success.

The producers would traditionally not necessarily be associated with the creation of the music itself. Instead, they'd function as project managers, overseeing the overall process. This could mean working as a sound engineer tuning in the perfect sound for the artists or coaxing out the best performance, or maybe as a personal assistant or manager, taking care of the logistics or financials so that an artist could focus solely on what they would need to do. As becomes apparent when we examine what a record producer actually does, is that there are "many ways to skin a cat", that is to say that a producer would need a large bag of tools to effectively complete their tasks, and adapt to new challenges presented by artist and label alike.



### 3.2 The Tech

One of the most impactful technologies to emerge during these early days of the recorded music industry was the creation of the multi-track recording technique. Previously, to get a good recording, you'd need the entire ensemble of musicians to deliver a flawless performance simultaneously, and any imperfection or error would require a whole new take with every performer needing to deliver a take of equal or superior quality. Naturally, this would be a cumbersome and time-consuming process, so when multitrack recording technology was developed in the late 1940's, this fundamentally changed the medium of recorded music, and laid the groundwork for how most popular music is recorded to this day. Multitrack recording allowed for separate recordings to be made on different parts of a magnetic tapes surface, which could in turn be played back at the same time. The technique was spearheaded by guitarist Les Paul, and the company Ampex created the first 8-track tape machine in 1954 at Les Paul's request. By the 1960's, the 8-track tape machine had become an industry standard (National Museums Liverpool, n.d.).

As new technologies and recording techniques emerged and shaped the landscape within the music industry, so did the roles of the actors within the industry also change and adapt to the shifting landscapes. Some producers would become so integral to the sound and success of certain acts that they'd be attributed with some of the success of the artist or act themselves. One such example is The Beatles' relationship with their producer, George Martin, often referred to as "the fifth Beatle". George Martin was already an accomplished producer and classically trained musician by the time he began working with the Beatles. He has been described as "an informal music teacher" by Jonathan Gould in his book: *Can't Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain and America* (Gould, 2007). George Martin allowed the Beatles to experiment and enrich their sound with new influences and techniques, and functioned as stabilising or grounding element within their collaborations. Not only was Martin integral to their work in the studio, but had a close personal relationship to the members or the Beatles themselves, well illustrated but the following quote from "*All You Need Is Ears: The Inside Personal Story of The Genius Who Created The Beatles*" pp. 205-206.

*"Compared with Paul's songs, all of which seemed to keep in some sort of touch with reality, John's had a psychedelic, almost mystical quality ... John's imagery is one of the best things about his work - 'tangerine trees', 'marmalade skies', 'cellophane flowers' ... I always saw him as an aural Salvador Dalí, rather than some drug-ridden record artist. On the other hand, I would be stupid to pretend that drugs didn't figure quite heavily in the Beatles' lives at that time ... they knew that I, in my schoolmasterly role, didn't approve ... Not only was I not into it myself, I couldn't see the need for it; and there's no doubt that, if I too had been on dope, Pepper would never have been the album it was. Perhaps it was the combination of dope and no dope that worked, who knows?"*

(Martin and Hornsby, 1994)

I find this quote illustrates that not only were the Beatles and George Martin professional collaborators, but they knew each other on a personal level, where Martin had a mentor like role in the relationship. Despite differences in their personal lives, and personal habits which Martin did not condone, the group was able to work well together, and Martin was able to facilitate a creative and constructive environment for the Beatles to work in despite (or perhaps as a result of) these differences. This serves as a good demonstration of how the role of producer can go much further than simply contributing with studio or recording know-how, or assisting with musical or theoretical knowledge. In order to create the best possible work with a band or artist, one may need to deal with the human element of creativity and music

production, and work with or facilitate the personalities of one's collaborators as much as just the professional aspects.

This deep professional and personal relationship between the Beatles and George Martin earned him the honorary title of "the fifth Beatle", which shows how integral his contributions were to The Beatles' catalogue of music.

Examining Martin and The Beatles relationship highlights how the producer eventually went from being responsible for the technical oversight of record production, to someone more imbedded in the creative process and, sometimes, even the band or artist themselves. To better understand why the role of producer has evolved, we should also examine how the music industry itself has changed.

### 3.3 A Brief History of The Music Industry

In this section I will explore how the music industry has traditionally been structured, and how new technology has changed the industry, as well as the conditions for creators operating there in. In addition, I wish to highlight some of the roles a creator may need to take on in order to operate commercially within the music industry today.

In the last fifty years we have seen a dramatic shift within the music industry due to emerging new technologies, digitalisation, and the democratisation of technology. This has in turn led to new new business models and practices, which has had a profound impact on the industry as a whole, and in turn the music creators themselves. Whether or not this can be considered a positive or negative change will be up to the individual, but regardless of ones stance on the matter, I believe it important for any aspiring music creator to be able to find their place within the status quo. I will attempt to summarise some of the more substantial elements which affect myself and others in similar positions to myself, and what this means for us as music creators.

I think it's well established that the biggest change to affect the music industry in recent years has been the digitalisation of the medium. With the emergence of the internet as we know it today, music can be accessed from anywhere at any time. This has made physical formats such as CD's, CD players, specialised portable listening devices and music shops, and many other specialised mediums and businesses largely obsolete in the western world. This has massively disrupted traditional revenue streams within the music industry, which in turn forced many traditional "music jobs" to change accordingly.

*"Global revenue from the music industry in 2014 was US\$14.89 billion, with 46% of that constituting revenue from digital channels [30]. Global digital revenue has grown year on year since 2009 and music is a major force in the burgeoning digital economy."*

*- (McGarry et al., 2017)*

The challenges posed by increased digitalisation within the music industry arguably entered the public consciousness around the same time as MP3 files, file sharing networks and the practice of downloading music both legally and illegally became common practice.

*"The introduction of MP3 files, file sharing networks such as Napster, and the widespread practice of illegally downloading copyrighted music files constituted a structural shock to the North American music industry. As a result, new forms of technologically driven production and distribution are fundamentally altering the music industry, structurally and spatially."*

(Hracs, 2012)

As music sales and distribution moved over to new digital mediums, the established power structures within the music industry changed as well. Although the largest labels, namely Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music Group, and Universal Music Group and EMI still reign on top (*Current Popular Trends in The Music Industry*, 2016), new technologies have created platforms for independent musicians and labels to distribute music. Platforms such as Soundcloud, Spotify, Tidal, Bandcamp, and more allow for individual musicians to release their music entirely independent from any third party should they wish to do so. This has certainly democratised the music industry to a much larger degree than what we have seen before, but also brings its own challenges for the music creator. While new technologies offer unprecedented freedom, the workers within the industry must balance this newfound freedom with new risks which may previously have been mitigated by the power of labels and other actors within the musical market.

### 3.4 How Has The Music Industry Changed?

During the 1950's through the 1970's, the music industry was populated by several record labels, all whom of which varied in size, scope and power. The 1980's and 90's saw the larger labels purchase and merge large portion of the smaller labels, consolidating into what has been known as the five "majors" by 1999. These five corporate entities which firmly controlled the music industry at the time were Bertelsmann AG in Germany, the EMI Group in Britain, Seagram/Universal in Canada, Sony in Japan and Time-Warner in the US. These companies held their headquarters in London, Tony and Berlin, and the US had their headquarters in New York and Los Angeles. These cities naturally became known as hub for music and cultural content, a reputation which many of them still hold today. By consolidating their resources in these locations, the companies were able to cut down their infrastructure costs, create local pools of talent to recruit from and to monitor their competition (Hracs, 2012).

These companies kept every aspect of their production process "in-house", meaning that they would vertically integrate each step of the production process, and keep full ownership of each aspect of the production process. With sophisticated marketing, promotion and distribution networks throughout the world, this assembly-line process allowed these labels to sign artists to contracts which they had unchallenged control over the signed artists themselves would not need to possess any knowledge pertaining to the technical, legal, managerial or entrepreneurial aspects of the business as this was entirely owned or controlled by the label (Hracs, 2012).

This model created a sense of animosity and condemnation among some individual musicians, but the signed artists did enjoy a much higher degree of job security than what we see among the independent artists of today.

*"However, in signing a contract, musicians relinquished much of their autonomy. Indeed, signed musicians had to work within the confines of the creative vision developed by their label and relinquish creative control over what songs to record, what producer to use, what studio to record in, what artwork to use, and how to package, promote, and distribute*

*each album. Musicians were required to work when and how the label wanted them to and to spend much of their time near their major label in New York, Los Angeles, or Nashville.”*  
(Hracs, 2012)

If we look at some of the financial data from this period, we can see how dominant the major labels were on the global scale:

*“Between 1987 and 1997, for example, U.S. domestic sales increased by 160 percent (Scott 2000). Sales by the majors accounted for over 90 percent of the total domestic sales in the U.S., and between 70 percent and 80 percent of worldwide sales (Brown, O’Connor, and Cohen 2000; Scott 2000). With total domestic sales in the U.S. topping \$12.2 billion in 1997, the recorded music sector stood on top of the entertainment pyramid, surpassing domestic sales in the motion picture industry, as well as DVDs, video games, and the Internet (Scott 2000)”*  
(Hracs, 2012)

### 3.5 How The MP3 Toppled The Music Industry

When the MP3, known as the software program MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3, was developed in 1992 and then introduced by the Motion Pictures Expert Group of the International Standards Organisation, its purpose was to standardise picture and audio files to facilitate internal exchanges within the television industry. The MP3 was revolutionary due to its file size, requiring just one tenth of the storage space per minute of sound to that of the CD. This allowed for MP3s to be downloaded to any PC in minutes without the need for any specialised or expensive equipment. With a personal computer and access to the internet, this meant that anyone could now share their files digitally with anyone else, which would soon institute a crisis for the established structures of the music industry at the time.

*“During this period of transition, before nation states and firms began imposing legal regulations on file sharing networks and individuals, the Internet facilitated the development of a series of “gift economies” occupied by enthusiasts who exchanged digital commodities, including image, movie, and sound files, across Internet relay chat networks. The best-known example of these networks is Napster, which was developed in 1999 by Shaun Fanning, a computer science dropout. According to Leyshon (2003), by 2000 Napster had over 500,000 people logging in sharing copyrighted music files at any time. Moreover, by 2001 Napster had attracted over 60 million users without any advertising (Leyshon 2003)”*  
(Hracs, 2012)

As more and more copyrighted material was shared freely through platforms such as Napster, the music industry struggled to implement any form of efficient response to what they saw as a grave threat to their business model. The industry’s inability to change with the changing landscape resulted in an economic crisis in which the global music industry saw 5 percent drop in global sales in 2001, and a further 9 percent drop in 2002. This period would later be known as the “MP3 crisis”:

*“internal research by the Canadian Record-ing Industry Association revealed a 40 percent decline in consumer spending after the rise of the MP3, from \$1.4 billion in 1998 to \$850 million in 2004 (Carniol 2005)”*  
(Hracs, 2012)

Although the majority of the blame for this economic downturn within the music industry was blamed on the illegal download of copyrighted material by the major labels and the media at the time, some researchers have also pointed to other factors such as changing tastes, alternatives such as DVD and video games, cell phones and the internet itself (Hracs, 2012).

*"There is evidence to suggest that, for a number of reasons, the ability of music to command the disposable income of those between the ages of 14 and 24 is ebbing away rapidly. The most simple explanation for this is that other, newer, media and consumer electronics industries have begun to compete for this market segment, so that the amount of money young people have to spend on music has been reduced accordingly. New passions, be it computer games, mobile (cell) phones or even the Internet itself, have all attracted expenditure that, in many cases, was previously spent on music. Leyshon et al.*

*(2005: 184)"*

(Hracs, 2012)

Other researchers have also pointed to the fact that the music industry had grown stagnant, relying to heavily on top-selling artists, and producing formulaic content that lacked in innovation and creativity.

*"[The Music Industry] was already struggling and on the verge of crisis. Internet piracy has legitimised the talk of a crisis of reproduction within the music industry. Leyshon*

*(2009,1312)."*

(Hracs, 2012)

The failure to resolve the crisis on the side of the major labels stemmed from a multitude of factors. There were legal issues to consider in terms how to manage the rights and royalties of their catalogue with regards to digital distribution. Implementing a method of payment and finding service providers willing to process "micro-transactions" which could be less than a dollar proved very difficult, and indeed settling on a sales or subscription model that consumers would be willing to accept also became a big hurdle.

Ultimately the major labels were too slow and inconsistent in their response to mitigate the crisis, which created an opening in the market for other actors to step in.

*"Apple adopted the pay-per-song model of distribution and leveraged its online platforms, company brand name, and line of MP3 players (iPods) to make its iTunes music store the market leader"*

(Hracs, 2012)

The failure on the part of the major labels to keep up with the technological changes, implement new models of retailing and distribution, and to provide consumers with the content they wanted in a way they were willing to interact with, were all factors that culminated in the major labels losing the vice grip they held over the music industry as a whole at the time. This constituted a structural shift within the music industry and musical market which paved the online distribution of music, and ultimately, the streaming based model we have today.

### 3.6 The Restructuring of The Music Industry

As a result of the “MP3 crisis”, the major labels arguably lost much of the control they held over the record production process and the distribution of the records themselves. The major labels lost billions as a result of online distribution of music, but it was the music retailers that had to bear the brunt of these losses.

*“In the U.S., for example, it was reported that approximately 1,200 music retailers closed down between 2000 and 2003 (Power and Hallencreutz 2007). Retailing giants such as Tower Records and Warehouse Entertainment, for example, declared bankruptcy in 2002 and 2003 and closed 160 and 120 stores, respectively (Fox 2005).”*

(Hracs, 2012)

The major labels focused the majority of their efforts on “defeating” what they saw as the largest threat to their business model, and the most visible threat to them at the time was the file sharing network Napster. By 2001, Napster had lost this legal battle and was ordered to remove all copyrighted material from their system. This however only left a gap in the market to be filled by other services. These proved much harder to litigate, as they had spread their operations across several geographical (and by extension regulatory) spaces. This meant that the majors had to face the fact that they could not beat these file sharing services (Hracs, 2012).

*“Kazaa, for example, has servers based in Denmark. The software is programmed in Estonia. The domain name is registered in Australia, and the company that now owns the network, Sharman Networks, is registered in the “no names given” Pacific tax haven of Vanuatu (Leyshon et al. 2005).”*

(Hracs, 2012)

As the major labels conceded defeat with regards to digital file sharing, BMG entered into an alliance with Napster to convert the system into a subscription based service with a flat fee per month, effectively giving the users the same convenient access as they’d enjoyed before, but now legalised. Other major labels would also create their own services for digital distribution of music, but despite their efforts, Apple had already come out on top as the market leader with their iTunes pay-per-song model (within North America) (Hracs, 2012).

*“Between its introduction in April 2003 and February 2010, Apple has sold over 10 billion songs through its iTunes music store (Luttrell 2010). Moreover, as of August 2009, Apple accounted for 25 percent of the overall music market—both physical and digital—and 69 percent of the digital market (Whitney 2009)”*

(Hracs, 2012)

### 3.7 The Rise of The Independent Music Creator

*“In the early 1980s, being an independent musician was a choice. Some people didn’t want to work towards a major label deal because there were restrictions and conditions attached to that. . . . Now very few artists can still get signed to major label deals, so the majority of artists end up on the independent side. (Interview)”*

(Hracs, 2012)

*In the 1970s independent music production existed, but you had to raise at least \$10,000. You still had to go into a recording studio and hire some engineers and producers who had the*

*technical skills. The equipment was a lot less accessible because of the cost of it and it was very difficult to operate. You couldn't operate the recording equipment in his studio yourself because you needed specialized knowledge for that. (Interview)*

(Hracs, 2012)

If we look at how the major label lost their dominance within the musical market, one may be led to believe that this constitutes a great victory for the music creator. With the major labels holding less power, the music creator would now be able to create music in adherence with their own musical and creative vision to a much greater extent. Unfortunately, the reality is not so simple.

The perhaps unintended result of the restructuring within the music industry has led to the labels themselves being much more risk averse. Before the "MP3 crisis", labels would traditionally sign new artist based off demo tapes or word of mouth, and then mentor the artists, walking them through their in-house production process, before bringing the artists to market. Today, new artists may well have to release up to several albums independently before a major label will sign them. Even then, the label will drop the artist immediately if they do not achieve commercial success.

*"Why should the record company go out there and find a raw talent and walk them through all the steps in the whole process? . . . It is a much less risky proposition to take established talent or somewhat established talent than completely raw talent. (Interview)" - Leyshon*

*(2009, 1327)"*

(Hracs, 2012)

*"The onus is more than ever on the individual to actually do it themselves. . . . Under the old system, you get picked up, put in a studio and you just have to be creative and express the music. But now I am not interested in getting into business with individuals who don't know how to do these things themselves. (Interview)"*

(Hracs, 2012)

This effectively means, for the music creator, that the risks of the music industry have been moved from the labels to the individuals themselves, as the traditional record label has moved away from the role of producer, and instead adopted the role of brand-led marketing companies. This is arguably the point where the role of the record producer went from being an employee within a label, to an independent actor within the musical market, if not a type of artist in their own right. More on this in the section below, "The Producer".

### 3.8 Who Is The Independent Music Creator?

*"As the major labels withdraw from talent development and fewer individual musicians seek or obtain recording contracts, independent music production is becoming a more widespread alternative. While independent production has existed as a niche alternative to the major labels for over 30 years, it is taking new forms in the contemporary period."*

(Hracs, 2012)

As the labels withdraw from their role of supporting new aspiring music creators, the music creator is forced to change with the landscape and operate independently within the music industry. This means that they must take on new roles and acquire new skills to find success, no longer is it enough to simply create the music. They must now have an understanding of entrepreneurship in order to manage their craft as a business, navigating the shifting market

and finding their own place within it. They must be able to record and produce their own musical material, and set up their own marketing and distribution channels in order to bring their music to their audience, and find ways to monetise their craft if they hope to have a sustainable career.

In the time before the "MP3 crisis", this would for many be an impossible task, as the capital resources and specialised expertise required would be unobtainable for all but the privileged few. However, as digital technology has continued to develop, new tools have become available for the music creator to be truly independent.

*"Now, anybody who owns a computer is a producer and engineer. But it wasn't very long ago that being a record producer was a very specialized, very high-end field of work where you had to have hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in gear just to do the work. There still are people who do that but the bar has been dropped so much lower in terms of who can do that. To some extent that has a real flattening effect on what kind of money is involved in that. (Interview)"*

(Hracs, 2012)

Music production software such as the DAW has made music production accessible to anyone with a personal laptop, video sharing platforms such as YouTube provide a wide variety of educational material for aspiring home producers to acquire the skills they need to produce high-quality recording from their own homes, and digital software plug-ins and instrument emulators remove the capital needed for expensive gear. Services such as Distrokid provide independent music creators affordable and easy to use distribution solutions for their music, and services such as Bandcamp also provide a storefront for the consumer to purchase the music directly from the music creator. Alternatively, the creator can license their music through services such as Apple Music (previously iTunes), inserting the independent music creator directly into established distribution networks managed by larger corporate actors within the market. Furthermore, the digitalisation of music distribution means that it is no longer necessary for the music creator to operate within the geographic music centres such as New York or London. These new technologies have made it possible for the modern music creator to independently produce, market and distribute their music from the comfort of their own home.

It is worth noting however, that being an independent operator within the music industry has largely come about as a necessity rather than a choice:

*"according to the CIRAA, the declining number of recording contracts has left over 95 percent of all musicians in Canada without major or independent label affiliation, making them by definition, independent."*

(Hracs, 2012)

This effectively means that regardless of one's views on the sometimes romanticised independent music creator, acquiring the skillset needed to operate independently within the music industry has largely become a requirement to partake in the industry. While the bar for entry has been lowered, this also means that the competition among independent artists has also risen as a result.



#### 4. The Tools

New technologies allowed for new ways to create and record music. A Fender Rhodes Piano Mark V and amp for example would today weigh in at approx 95kg, cost approximately 3000 USD (in 2023), would come with additional costs related to transport or shipping, and would need a space to be stored. A digital emulator would set you back around 50 USD and could be installed on your personal laptop. Where before one would require a recording studio in order to record one's music, new recording techniques and digitalisation of recording technology has allowed for the emergence of the "bedroom producer". Everything one needs to create a piece of music produced to a professional quality can fit within a personal computer, and be made in the confines of one's own bedroom.

It is my personal belief that one of the most important tools in modern music making is the DAW, or Digital Audio Workstation. When creating music, I often work within a DAW (Logic Pro in my case), and find it offers creative freedom in introducing musical elements and arrangements that would otherwise be difficult to recreate in other mediums.

Since the 2000's Digital Audio Workstations and similar softwares intended for music production have become central to the creation of commercially released music. DAW's are used everywhere, and by everyone, and are just as integral to the music production process for recording engineers in a professional studio, to bedroom producers working from their own home. The emergence of the DAW is largely tied to the rapid evolution of computer power, which has revolutionised our ability to process sound in digital formats. In tandem with computers becoming stronger and more efficient, computer technology has become more compact and portable, as well as affordable for the average consumer, which has had a major impact on the popular music landscape of today. Gone are the days where the only way to create a commercially viable recording of music would be through booking expensive studio time in a professional studio, or relying on a recording contract with a music label.

In its simplest form, the DAW can be used as a conventional tool for recording and producing music. Most modern Apple Macbook computers come with a pre-installed version of GarageBand, and many other options exist, such as Logic Pro, Pro Tools, Ableton, FL Studio and Cubase, to name but a few of the most common DAWs in use today. Generally speaking, most of these softwares offer the same core set of functions, and the operation of the software is today largely standardised to the point where if one is proficient with a certain DAW, operating a different DAW software would function in much the same way.

*"like the piano or guitar in previous eras of songwriting, is an instrument in its own right which impacts upon the conception and organization of musical ideas. To put it another way, the DAW has its own particular creative "paradigms" to contribute to the songwriter's process, which once understood, can be harnessed to great effect."*

(Williams, 2017)

As the quote above illustrates, the DAW is by some seen as an instrument in its own right, akin to a guitar or piano. Mastering the DAW can be a powerful tool for any music creator, and offers greater autonomy in the music creation process than what was previously possible for the music creator. If we look back at how the "traditional" singer-songwriter would operate before the introduction of DAWs, the process would often manifest as a two-stage process.

*"Songwriting during this period [1920's through the 1960's] evolved into a two-stage process which has since become the tradition—namely, a writing stage usually involving the piano or guitar, followed by a studio realization stage involving recording engineers, arrangers and producers."*

*(Williams, 2017)*

Through the DAW, a music creator could of course work in the same way, using the DAW to record a completed song, and mix it themselves without invoking any third parties. Beyond this however, the DAW offers many more options for composing and arranging music beyond just capturing it. For example, one can comp together multiple takes into one cohesive piece of music, one can save and work on multiple versions of a track to explore different arrangements or approaches, or build comprehensive and complex arrangements and sounds using midi, subbing in realistic instruments or artificially created synth sounds without necessarily being able to play said instruments.

Despite the multitude of options the DAW can offer a music creator, there are also some drawbacks. As with any conventional instrument, proficiency within a DAW comes with practice and dedication, and can for many be a difficult hurdle for creators more used to a traditional approach to music creation. To get the best use out of a DAW, one should be familiar with some of the basic concepts within music production, and using the software may not be as intuitive as picking up a new instrument if one has no prior experience with basic studio technology and concepts.

*"the DAW can represent a stumbling block for the traditional songwriter is illustrated by a recent forum on the popular GearsLutz website, entitled "Songwriters favorite DAW and why." One user states for example, "I don't really see how a DAW can help with 'songwriting.' Song arranging and production, sure, but the writing part only requires an instrument and maybe a voice." [...] "most DAWs were developed for music production, but ... that's not the same thing as writing a song. Songwriting is not a linear process ... for most people.""*

*(Williams, 2017)*

To best understand how a DAW can enhance ones ability to create music, it is helpful to understand some of the fundamentals behind how a DAW functions. In simple terms, a DAW functions as a visual interface which graphically represents ways to manipulate digital audio and MIDI data. Each DAW has its own interface designed to facilitate workflow, and creative decision-making. How this may influence the users work is largely subjective, and is a matter of taste and preference.

While the appearance may vary, most DAWs share some common elements:

- An "arrange" page, a main sequencer interface allowing the user to arrange digital audio or MIDI information, and play them back in sequence. Often displayed as blocks or "regions" which can be dragged into place, copied and pasted, or cut and separated to fit the track as needed.
- A mixer, similar to that of a traditional mixing desk, which allows the user to adjust gain levels, panning, insert plug-ins and FX, and more for individual or grouped channels.
- A "piano roll", where the user can edit MIDI information, similar to to how Player Pianos (self-playing pianos) would operate.
- A waveform display, usually modelled after an oscilloscope.
- A traditional score for traditional music notation.

In addition to these elements, most DAWs offer functionalities modelled after traditional music technology, such as samplers, drum machines, synthesisers, signal processors (such as EQ and compression), and effects (such as reverb, chorus, distortion, etc.) (Williams, 2017).

The design elements within DAWs, as well as for first and third party plug-ins are typically modelled after physical hard-ware, often faithfully recreating the interfaces of the corresponding hardware units the digital recreations are meant to emulate. For this reason, which DAW a music creators chooses to use may often reflect their respective technical background or musical influences. For example, a classically trained musician may prefer to work in Sibelius, which displays the information as a traditional musical score, whereas a Hip-Hop artist may prefer to work in Ableton where they can easily sample and loop blocks of musical information.

As the DAW is a largely visual interface, some creators have commented on how music creation within a DAW can become a largely visual process. There are many takes on whether or not this is a good thing, and it can naturally affect the creative decision making when creating music. The way the traditional "arrange" window functions, there is also the notion of "everything being on a grid", and how this can discourage creators that may wish to create music that does not follow a typical 4/4 time signature or a fixed tempo.

*"Folktronica genre, Kieran Hebden (aka Four Tet), has observed that, "People who make music on computers don't realize how powerful the visual element is. Whether you like it or not, your mind starts to think in terms of patterns, because it's a natural human way to do things, and you start seeing the way drums are lining up on the screen, and it becomes completely instinctive to line them up in a certain way." He adds the caution that, "It's important just to close your eyes and use your ears, and trust what's coming out of the speakers more than anything.""*  
(Williams, 2017)

*"James Mooney, for example, has commented that the timeline aspect of the DAW interface suggests that the "music should be built additively by appending one item after another until the desired duration is achieved," adding that the "grid" encourages a "default state of affairs" for the creation of "rhythmical music in 4/4 time at 120 beats per minute.""*  
(Williams, 2017)

As a counter-point to the argument that DAWs can be complex and difficult to use for creators with little familiarity or knowledge of production principles or sound technology, a DAW can be a great tool for increasing ones understanding of said concepts. Due to the modular nature of how DAWs function, it is possible for the user to experiment with and try different effects or approaches in a DAW session, playing around with presets and settings and, by listening closely to the results, gain an understanding of how the different parameters affect the audio content. Used in tandem with educational materials, especially the numerous video guides available on YouTube and other platforms, it can be argued that it is easier than ever for the uninitiated music creator to become proficient in music production without needing a formal education or professional experience in the field.

#### 4.1 The Right Tool For The Job?

As with most creative decisions the music creator might consider when creating music, understanding the tool one employs and the range of actions it affords is important for understanding how it may shape the music they are creating. Be it an instrument, an effect or a DAW, these can all affect the sound, approach or workflow of the music one is making.

*"Being aware of the ways in which a tool one uses is shaping the musical outcome is sometimes referred to as knowing the "affordance" of a particular technology. This means that you develop an appreciation the range of actions the technology permits you to undertake and, perhaps more importantly, a sense of whether the tool might be pushed outside these boundaries."*  
(Williams, 2017)

### **5. References and inspirations**

For the album, I had a few references and inspirations in mind which I feel have influenced my work. Of these, I've decided to focus in on a few artists and producers which I have influenced my work in general, and specifically through this process. I will take a closer look at Tom Misch, Tame Impala, Whammyboy

#### 5.1 Tom Misch

The biggest inspiration for my own practice as a music creator for the past few years, and especially for my own album project is Tom Misch. Thomas Isaac Misch, better known under his artist and producer persona Tom Misch, is a London born and based producer, guitarist and vocalist. He rose to fame in primarily the UK in 2018 after releasing his debut album "Geography" through his own label, "Beyond The Groove". Prior to the commercial success he saw releasing "Geography", he'd primarily released music on Soundcloud since 2012, often collaborating with other artists or remixing existing works into his own music.

Tom studied music technology at Langley College for Boys, and would later attend Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance where he studied jazz guitar. Tom Misch, as per his Spotify biography, describes his music as a:

*"South London multi-instrumentalist Tom Misch fuses low-slung beats, glittering disco, and noodling jazz instrumentation. A frequent collaborator, his DIY approach has built a fanbase of 4 million monthly listeners on Spotify" - Tom Misch's Spotify Bio 12.10.2023*

In addition to being a producer and multi-instrumentalist, Tom Misch has become a renowned guitarist in his own rights, receiving recognition and praise from famous artists such as John Mayer. On 13th July 2020, Tom Misch and drummer Yussef Dayes, Performed two tracks from their collaborative album "What Kinda Music" (released earlier in 2020) on NPR Music's "Tiny Desk" concert series on YouTube. John Mayer made a surprise appearance at the end of the track "Nightrider", playing a guitar solo for the outro of the song (NPR Music, 2020).

Despite his popular achievements and commercial success within the music industry, Tom Misch claims to have little interest in the fame and celebrity status that often follows such achievements within the creative and entertainment industry. In an interview with Samuel Roberts of [guitar.com](http://guitar.com), published march 29th 2019, Tom states that:

*"I don't want a big budget behind my music or to be on billboards everywhere, [...] I want people to discover my music because they like it, or it's been recommended by a friend"*  
(Roberts, 2019)

This makes researching Tom Misch, and uncovering who he is beyond the artist or producer persona quite difficult. Tom has only done a hand-full of interviews throughout his career, and has often expressed that he is not particularly interested in the pursuit of fame.

*"I don't really want to get much bigger. I'm quite happy where I'm sitting." [...] "It really scares me, the idea of keeping on growing and becoming more well-known, I don't like how my life has changed in some ways. A lot of people know who I am before I've met them, which is a weird dynamic. It's a bit stressful. It doesn't really suit my personality."*  
(Smyth, 2018)

Tom Misch states that much of his early inspirations came from artists such as John Mayer, Robert Glasper and J Dilla. Tom began playing violin at the age of four at the behest of his father, a psychiatrist, who himself played violin. At nine he picked up the guitar after being inspired by his sister, Laura Misch, who herself is an accomplished artist and has collaborated with Tom on tracks such as "Follow" released on Soundcloud through Tom's label "beyond the Groove" 15th July 2016 as part of the "Reverie" EP (Smyth, 2018).

Tom Misch had his first breakthrough when one of the tracks got picked up by the influential music channel on Youtube, Majestic Casual. At the time Tom had just started his four year jazz guitar degree at Trinity Laban, but dropped out after six months due to the sudden success he'd found through his music.

*"My music was taking off at that point. I was already doing what I wanted to be doing." [...] "I like jazz but actually I didn't love it enough to study it for four years. It was boring."*  
(Smyth, 2018)

In his earlier works, he would rarely sing on his own productions. Upon noticing that tracks with vocals, and specially his own, would perform much better in terms of plays or streams accrued, he began singing on more tracks, and writing original lyrics for his own tracks. This would lead to his transition from primarily being a bedroom producer, to a full fledged artist.

*"I'm not a songwriter at heart. I'm foremost a producer and musician." [...] "I started singing because the tracks that I sing on have a much bigger reach. But I'm not one for lyrics really. It takes me a long time to write a song. My forte is instrumentals."*  
(Smyth, 2018)

Since the release of "Geography", Tom Misch partnered with drummer Yussef Dayes to release their collaborative album "What Kinda Music" in April 2020. The album was again released through Tom's label "Beyond the Groove", and was distributed through "Blue Note Records" and "Caroline". The album peaked at number four in the Official Album Charts (previously the UK Album Charts), achieving a higher ranking than "Geography" which topped out at number eight.

Since the release of "What Kina Music", Tom Misch seems to have taken a step back from his artist persona, to focus more on being a producer and musician. He has appeared on a few

collaborative tracks, like appearing on the track "Rust" from Yussef Dayes album "Black Classical Music" released through the label "Nonsuch Music" in September 2023.

Misch himself released a new album in August 2023, "Happy Music", under his new alias, "Supershy". The album however is referred to as a mixtape on Supershy's YouTube channel, which follows the format of Tom Misch's early releases before he saw commercial success. It seems that Misch has chosen to take a break from the fame that came with his artist projects to focus on production and collaboration. "Happy Music" plays like a DJ mixtape intended for dance clubs and similar venues, and borrows elements from old-school disco and hip-hop, with more electronic elements than what can be found in his mainline releases. There is minimal use of lyrics and vocals beyond a few phrases, which falls in line with Tom's statements regarding his own songwriting.

## 5.2 Whammyboy

Another more recent inspiration I have found is the Norwegian artist and producer Whammyboy. I saw Whammyboy perform during Trondheim Calling early in 2022, and became hooked on his music for a while.

Whammyboy, or Noah Johansen, is a Norwegian artist and producer who's sound has been described as a mix between Tame Impala and MGMT. Noah states in an interview with Norwegian the Norwegian radio channel P3 that his earliest musical influences came from techno, trance and karaoke. Growing up with a Norwegian mother, and a Vietnamese father, he describes the dichotomy of growing up in-between two cultural backgrounds as difficult, and describes how music became a way to define his own identity on his own terms.

At eight years old, Noah was inspired to learn to play guitar by playing the video game "Guitar Hero", and would ask his father to teach him to play. This became a lifelong obsession, and once he began middle-school (ungdomskole in Norwegian), he rediscovered his enthusiasm for EDM and techno. He began producing electronic music on his laptop, but would eventually look to combining his love for EDM, and playing the guitar.

*"– Etter hvert så jeg en forbindelse mellom rockesjangeren og det elektroniske. Jeg skjønnte at jeg kunne lage en bandlåt uten band på PC-en." ("Eventually I saw a connection between the rock genre and the electronic one. I understood that I could make a band tune without a band on my computer")  
(Translated by me).  
Nor Sørensen, A. (2021).*

I find that I have many things in common with Whammyboy, an appreciation for psychedelic music as well as EDM music, a similar background in growing up with two different cultural backgrounds, and even the same last name.

## 5.3 Tame Impala

Tame Impala, or Kevin Parker, is an Australian psychedelic pop-rock project which has seen enormous commercial success. Tame Impala released its debut EP titled "Tame Impala" in September 2008, which was well received in Australia, but truly broke through in the global mainstream market with the release of "Innerspeaker" in May 2010. All of Kevin's releases

since "inner speaker" have been received as massive hits, with the 2015 album "Currents" spawning his perhaps greatest hit, "The Less I Know The Better", which at the time of writing this thesis has a staggering 1,4 billion streams on just Spotify alone.

Despite achieving what many would describe as the "rockstar dream", Kevin Parker himself has never considered himself as such.

*"Shy, introspective and prone to perfectionism, he writes, records, performs, produces and mixes all Tame Impala material on his own, often holed up in his other home studio just outside of Perth, Australia, one of the most remote cities in the world. His music both feeds off of and reflects isolation — "There's a party in my head and no one is invited" goes the aptly titled "Solitude Is Bliss"*

*- (T. Cirisano, 2020)*

However, after working in solitude for most of his career, Kevin has in recent year pivoted toward more collaborative efforts. Having already worked with big industry names such as Kanye West, Mark Ronson, Travis Scott, and Lady Gaga to name a few, Kevin has now set his sights on writing pop songs for pop stars.

*"I hope to one day be able to do what I do on my own in a room full of people" [...] "I want to be a Max Martin."*

*- (T. Cirisano, 2020)*

#### 5.4 Relating My Inspirations To My Own Work

Tame Impala, Whammyboy and Tom Misch are only some of my many inspirations when it comes to music, but I decided to focus on these three as I find that not only do I love their music, but I find that their attitudes with relation to music and creativity to mirror my own. In my opinion, I find that all three value the act of creating music in and of itself to be more important than to create something solely for the purpose of garnering commercial success. That is not to say that is not a factor, and I personally don't see the two mentalities to necessarily be at odds with one another, but I believe there must be a balance. When I myself create music, I try to always be true to what I myself value, but to also keep in mind that what I create will only be meaningful for a potential audience if I also keep them in mind.

What these three artists have in common is that they are not only artists and musicians, but also producers, and largely independent musicians. Sure, Tame Impala has achieved great commercial success, and is certainly beholden to major label, but despite making it into the mainstream market of music, Kevin continues to maintain a great degree of independence, and does not seem to seek to give in to the whims of the pressures of the label or the trends within the industry.

*At Interscope, Parker is still left largely to do as he pleases — "rare for a major label," says his agent, Kevin French of Creative Artists Agency. "You sit back and trust that he's going to keep coming out with something better." Parker suggests that Interscope's laissez faire attitude might have something to do with the fact that his album budget is pretty much "zero dollars" by choice, he says, laughing. "Honestly, I can't really think of what I would spend it on." Renting studio space? "I don't like recording anywhere that's not a home studio." What about hiring studio personnel? "I would just wait until they leave."*

*(T. Cirisano, 2020)*

My own ambitions with my creative work is to achieve a degree of commercial success primarily to be able to fund my own practice. I'd like a career within the music industry, and ideally one where I get to be creative and work on my own music, or collaborate and produce or write for others, but I don't necessarily wish to become a celebrity in any capacity. In this sense, I can emphasise with Tom Misch a great deal, who seems to be content with being known for his music, and not as a popular persona.

I admire how these three individuals have been able to do just that, each in what I'd consider a different "rung of the ladder" within the music industry. Tame Impala has had a long and successful career, and is now brushing shoulder with what is arguably "the elite" within the global music industry. Tom Misch has achieved enormous success on the back of his first few releases, but does not have the same level of global renown as Tame Impala, and Whammyboy is a relatively fresh artist from Norway, who has yet to "make it" in the global music industry. All three write, perform and produce their own music however, and I find them to be good comparisons to my own activities and ambitions in this regard.

## **6. Background For The Album Project**

For my masters project, I went through a number of ideas and iterations based on my own interests, experience and ambitions. When I began my studies at NTNU in 2021, I had already completed a bachelor degree in popular music at The Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts in the period 2015-2018. After completing my degree, I pursued a career in music in the UK, before moving back to Norway in late 2019 due to forces beyond my control at the time. This unfortunately coincided with the global Covid pandemic of 2019, and the following years, as was the case for so many others, I was not able to continue my career in music and performing arts.

To keep things afloat through the pandemic, I found work in other industries, and slowly found myself losing touch with my creative side as the situation demanded I put my priorities elsewhere for the time being.

Once the pandemic lock-down measures receded, and the world returned to a semblance of normalcy again, I saw an opportunity to apply for a masters degree within music technology, a field I had explored during my degree at LIPA yet wished to dive deeper into, and decided that this could be an opportunity for me to reconnect with my passion for music, and a step in the right way for me to return to a career within the music industry.

Through my first year at the Masters Course at NTNU, I was not sure what I wanted to make my masters project about. I had a few themes and ideas which I wanted to dive deeper into, but was not yet sure exactly how to go about it. An early idea for the project was to explore how to use music and music technology to create community. This was based on a concept I took part in during my time in Liverpool where some friends of mine and I begun building a makeshift studio and rehearsal space in a friends flat. The flat was ideally situated in the middle of Liverpool city centre, surround by bars and clubs on all sides, which negated any real noise concerns in terms of neighbours and the like as this was an inherently noisy environment. By coinciding most of our work to when the bars and clubs where open, we could use the space for music and studio work without concerns for noise complaints (within reason of course). This was a great forum to experiment and practice different approaches to the



creative process, as well as a place to take on a diverse set of roles beyond the typical band set-up.

I wished to tie the same concept into my own masters project, but found that I didn't have the same network nor resources available to me in Trondheim to realise this ambition in the way that I'd hoped. Instead of pursuing this idea further, I decided to try to incorporate elements of this approach to a different project where I could allow myself to be creative, while also working towards some kind of end result.

I eventually set my aim on making an album, as I had played with the idea for a few years now, and the masters degree at NTNU, and especially the masters project itself, offered a great framework for the project. NTNU could offer me the resources I'd need in terms of professional studio equipment, mentorship and peers to discuss and collaborate with. This also allowed me to reach out to both previous and new collaborators to work with, without being wholly reliant on third parties to see the project to completion. In my experience it can be hard to coordinate projects with other people when needing to meet a deadline, so in keeping the album as a "personal" project I could collaborate with others, but ultimately retain creative control.

As I begun work on the album, I found myself drawn into the wider context of record production and music making, and wanted to widen the scope of the masters project to include a deep dive into how I as music creator could fit into the music industry. As part of my studies at LIPA, there was a great emphasis put on understanding the music industry and how to conduct a professional practice as a musician. I wanted to understand this topic better, and decided to conduct some research into how the music industry has evolved since its conception in the 1940s and 50s.

Ultimately, I have decided to focus my thesis on not just the album, but rather the process of making the album, how the creative process plays into the creation of finished, marketable musical product, and how the modern music creator fits into the history of the music industry both from a historical point of view, as well as looking at the roles that make up the modern music creator.

## **7. The Album**

The album I'm working on is still a work in progress. When I began this masters project, I initially had hoped to finish it in time for the hand in date, but as I continued to work on the album and considering subjects for the thesis, it eventually became clear that this was not the route I wished to go. That is not to say that I do not intend to finish it at later point, but I did not wish to rush the album for the sake of the masters project, and instead wish to continue working on it until I am entirely happy with it.

In this section, I will discuss each track on the album thus far, some of which are near completion, and others who are still in earlier stages. I will elaborate on some of the background for each track, how I came up with the ideas for them, and which techniques or approaches I used for each track. Additionally, I will outline my plan for the album going forward. I will elaborate on the plan in the critical analysis of this thesis, where I will tie in the various concepts and ideas I have discussed in this essay, and relate them to my own plans for the album, and the path forward for myself as a music creator.

The album will consist of eight tracks which I have primarily worked on for the past year. For the past two years, I have spent most of my time coming up with new ideas, and though I have built up quite the library of works in progress, these are the tracks I have decided to focus on for my album. As part of composing and writing for this album, at the time of writing this thesis I have 33 projects which were all contenders for the album, and an additional 57 projects which at some point were meant for the masters project, but that I don't find to be right for this album anymore. Perhaps I can use them for something else in the future. And this is only the top of the iceberg of works-in-progress in terms of projects I have worked on as part of my masters project. More on this in the critical analysis.

The following tracks are not listed in any particular order, and will also be handed in as an accompaniment to this thesis. The tracks are not listed in any particular order for the purposes of this thesis or album project.

### 7.1 Hold On Me

This track was a particular challenge, as it is based on an idea from my band Cloud Factories from my time in Liverpool. Already back then, this track went through many iterations and versions, but was never seen as finished by the band as we were never quite happy with the arrangement.

Through this project, I came up with a few different versions in an attempt to solve the problems we had with the track, but for a time none seemed viable, to the point where I considered dropping it completely.

I wrote the track with fellow band members and friends, Kristján, Krístrún, and Gard around 2016 as part of the portfolio of Cloud Factories.

When we first wrote the track, we based it off a jam Kris and I had recorded parts for in a similar setting as to what I describe as "stage one" of my own creative process. The track had a strong swing-feel in the rhythmical element, was intended to be jazz-sounding pop tune for the band. We tried many different iterations of "Hold On Me", but we're never able to shape it into something we were happy with, trying multiple versions in a live setting to gauge whether it was something our audience at the time would want to listen to. We tried adding various parts, restructuring the songs structure, and to straighten the rhythmical elements as to step away from the swing-jazz feel. None of these worked out however, and we eventually scrapped the idea entirely.

As such it served as a great challenge for me to revisit this conundrum with a few more years of experience under my belt, and with some fresh influences and approaches. I initially intended this to simply be a production exercise where I had the goal of practicing editing digital audio. As I worked more on the track however, I decided to attempt to create a new version, and to see how the other members of my old band would react to a brand new version of an old headache.

Despite making a few different versions, I never found that I was able to crack some of the old problems we'd had with the song, and eventually put it on the back-burner, considering simply dropping the project entirely.

I eventually found myself having a different issue where I had come up with a brand new track which I couldn't come with any fitting lyrics to, and this is where I eventually had a breakthrough with the track. While travelling in Iceland, I had brought my interface and a microphone with me with the intention to ideate some lyrics for the album project, and on a whim decided to try singing the lyrics over the demo-project. I found the lyrics to fit the track nicely, and with some re-writes to fit the new track, it all clicked.

I had the chance to show the new track to the other members of the band, and got positive feedback from them, as well as a go-ahead to use the track for my own album project. The original lyrics were written by myself, Kristján and Krístrún, but the track, new melody, harmony and production are all made by myself. The lyrics have also undergone extensive re-writes, though I feel consider the ownership of the lyrics as shared with the other members of my old band.

The track is at the stage where the structure, lyrics, and musical elements are finished, but I think they could have much more detail and dynamic variety. Currently I'm treating each "part" as placeholders, where I will ask the musicians to put in their own spin when recording to give the track more energy. The final production will not be finished before I have re-recorded that parts with more specialised musicians, but I have a plan in place for this. I plan to record drums and percussion with Gard in December, and I am currently in talks with Kristján and Krístrún about possibly having them record vocals and guitar/keys if we can make the scheduling work. Guitar and keys will likely be record over an online session with Kris, as he has the equipment to conduct the recording in his home-studio set-up, and I will likely travel to Iceland in the new year to record the vocals with Krístrún.

## 7.2 Northern Lights (Working Title)

This track was conceived while I was on a vacation in Iceland.

The inspiration for the track came from being at my family's summer house in Grundarfjörður in the west part of the country. From the summer house I had a great view of the landscape and the sea, and I felt inspired by the open, almost dreamlike landscape. I began by building a glimmering, reverberant electric piano patch to try to represent the open, empty landscape of Iceland. I added in a somewhat busy, almost drone like drum loop to underpin the open, reverberant content, and kept them entirely dry as to contrast the reverberant sound of the electric piano patch.

To add some texture I added in a reverberant, lower pitched synth which I dynamically pan left and right using a tremolo plug-in.

To add harmonic track I added in a deep sub bass which follows the chord established by the electric piano and pad. On "top" I placed a flute-like lead synth to provide a lead melody. This I placed louder in the mix to better serve as a leading melody, while running it through the same reverb bus as the other element to gel together the mix.

This track has so far been the quickest to come together, with the whole track being made in the span of one afternoon/evening in Iceland. I have some potential hip-hop inspired lyrics in mind, and will reach out to a friend of mine in the UK who himself is a rap and R&B artist to see if they would be willing to collaborate on the lyrics for this track.

### 7.3 Big Whoop (Working Title)

This track originally had a more modern, R&B sound. To make it sound more like my own spin, I gave it more of a lo-fi feel. I'm still playing around with the sound somewhat, as I still feel like it's not quite right, but currently this is a working demo of the track. For the lyrics I am collaborating with a student from the bachelor course, but we have not had many sessions yet, and will continue working on the track until we have some lyrics in place. I don't want to commit too much to the production before the lyrics are done, as I want the music to compliment the lyrics, more so than the other way around.

I came up with the music for this track during the summer of 2023 while attending the Molde Jazz festival. I felt inspired after seeing Nelly Moar perform the night before, and set out to create something with a playful, modern R&B feel to it. Nelly Moar with her band delivered a great performance with music reminiscent of 90s and 2000s R&B and soul, and I felt inspired to create something in a similar vein.

### 7.4 Hunter (Working Title)

This track was inspired somewhat by "Nightrider" by Tom Misch. I liked the sound of the track, and especially what I can only best describe as a late-night feel, and sought to create a similar soundscape for this track.

Inspired by Tom's sound, I added in a guitar hook-melody to add some energy to the Chorus part. I have also tried to give it somewhat of a "disco" feel, but I think it still needs some work before all the parts will work well enough together. I have begun sketching out some lyrical ideas for the track, using analogies related to hunting, but I'm not yet sure if I will stick to this idea.

### 7.5 Don't Wanna Leave (Working Title)

This track is a collaboration between myself and a fellow student from the Music Technology Bachelor Course, Gabriel.

I met Gabriel in Fjordgata through a fellow student from the Masters Course who introduced us while I was taking a break from working on my masters project. We got talking about our musical influences and backgrounds, and had a lot of tastes in common, so I invited him to my office for a jam. After some initial fumbling around a few ideas, Gabriel came up with the chord progression used in the chorus of the track. Feeling inspired, I added the guitar riff (which I recorded using my Yamaha six-string bass ironically), and added in a drum loop from Splice. The production came together very quickly after this, and once I returned home I came up with the verse section and some lyrical lines which I felt fit the "mood" of the track, which I had my partner record to serve as a scratch vocal. Due to conflicting schedules we have yet to be able to finish the track, but are hoping to find the time to finish the track before the semester is over.

### 7.6 Palette (Working Title)

This track was one of the earliest tracks that I decided to keep for the album project. It begun by finding a sample from splice which largely inspired the direction for the rest of the track. I had just begun playing around with loops at the time, and had was browsing through some

“song starter” loops looking for inspiration, as well as to become more familiar with the software and working with loops in general.

I added some bass and programmed a drum loop using a mix of samples and stock sounds from Logic and Splice. The lyrics are a collaboration between myself and my partner, though we have yet to finish them.

For now, I have doubled the lyrics from the first verse as a placeholder, but these will be two separate verses once the track is finished. I am also experimenting with the structure of the track, as the chorus idea as it stands in the demo might not fit the track. The next steps will be to finish the lyrics, and see if we can work with the chorus idea currently in the demo, or if this will change. I will also need to decide on a structure before finishing the track, as the parts currently in the demo are primarily there to capture the aesthetics I’m going for.

### 7.7 Vince Clarke (Working Title)

This track came about as a collaboration between myself and Kristján, whom I studied with in Liverpool and whom I founded my old band, Cloud Factories, with. Kris currently resides in London, and so the collaboration took place over Zoom, where we each ran a session in our DAWs, sharing the audio from my own laptop and would send audiophiles back and forth through Google Drive.

Working with other people over the internet has been an interesting experiment. It is tricky in parts, as not being in the same room introduces a lot of obstacles with regards to spontaneity where if any of the parties have an idea, you are both working on separate laptops, and it can be difficult to recreate an idea based on verbal descriptions alone. As Kris and I have known and worked together for a long time, I found the approach to be surprisingly viable, but I don’t necessarily think it would be as easy if a pre-established working relationship is not in place prior to the online session.

As a fun fact, the working title of this track came from a synth preset we both really liked during the process, and we are currently sketching out lyrics based on the name (and preset) Vince Clarke.

At this point we have not had the time to do another session to finish the track, but plan to finish it later in the year when we both have freer schedules.

### 7.8 Flow (Working Title)

This is probably the least “finished” track I have for the album so far. The track is somewhat inspired by an R&B style balled from Cloud Factories, where I have tried to capture the same aesthetic. I considered for a while to write the track as an alternate version of said Cloud Factories track, but decided instead to make something new. The music for the track so far came about as an experiment with with tritone substitutions. I came up with the music solely by playing on the midi keyboard, and trying to implement tritone substitutions in the harmony after coming up with a part. As I do not consider myself a keyboard player, it was interesting working on an instrument I don’t feel as familiar with as with the bass.

Trying to approach the process from a more theoretical point of view was also an interesting challenge, and I am very happy with the ideas in the track so far. I think I still need to decide on how the overall approach to the track should be, and as the goal is for it to be a ballad, I

believe I need to finish the lyrics before finishing the track, as I generally feel like the lyrics are the most important element in ballads. I have sketched out some ideas, but still have a way to go with this track. Some of the parts might also need to change as some of the harmonic ideas, while I find them interesting, might be a bit too complex to support the lyrics as they stand at this point.

## **8. Conclusion**

When I started this project, I set out with the goal of creating an album, to learn more about my own creative process, and to widen my understanding of the modern music industry and my place within it. In this section, I will take a critical look at my efforts and the knowledge I have gained, and provide my own analysis of how I think I have done.

Regarding the album: When I first decided to make an album for my masters project, I thought that once the project was done, I would have a finished album that would be more or less ready for release. As time went on however, I find that finishing the album within the timeframe of the masters project became less important to me. In part, I think this is because of how I approached the creative process with regards to making the tracks for the album itself. I initially considered using more material from my old band, Cloud Factories. As I spent much of my time coming up with new ideas however, I found that the ideas I'd come up with became stronger over time, and at some point I decided that I'd rather challenge myself to focus primarily on new material, than to recycle old songs. Before when I have composed or written songs, I have usually done so collaboratively with my band members, or other collaborative scenarios. I tend to find this more rewarding, as working with others will usually bring out ideas that I would not have been able to discover on my own. There is something that I find very exciting and rewarding in finding unexpected ideas when working with other people, and how sometimes by compromising on an idea that I may initially have felt very strongly about will often yield unexpected and interesting end results.

By venturing out of my comfort zone and committing to focus primarily on making new ideas, I feel that I have grown as a music creator and producer, and have had to hone my craft in both disciplines. On the other side of the coin however, I think that by doing this approach, I spent much longer exploring new ideas than I did working towards finishing the songs in time for the masters project. That meant that at one point, I had to make a decision on whether a finished album would be a feasible goal for my masters project, and had to concede that this would no longer be a realistic goal. I do however think that while I might have been able to finish the album if I had been more decisive earlier on in the process, by focusing more on the creative process itself, I have developed my skills more than if I had focused on finishing ideas solely for the sake of finishing them. By shifting my focus to exploring my own creative processes, and researching some of the literature on the subject, I have become more aware of my own practices, as well as new techniques that I was not familiar with previously.

I also believe I may have been somewhat naive with regards to the demands from the music industry when I first began the project. Having studied music in Liverpool for my bachelors degree, I was already familiar with many of the roles within the music industry, and through some of my career as a freelancer within the music industry I was familiar with many of the basics. Researching more about how the music industry is structured however, and how it has changed so much in the past 70 or so years, I believe I have a better understanding of what it would require of me to attempt to establish myself as an independent operator within the industry. Understanding why the industry went from revolving around unit sales of physical

media and managing trends, to primarily revolving around digital streaming and effective marketing has demonstrated my need to work out a solid marketing campaign if I want a potential release to provide me with any semblance of commercial success. I think therefore, if I am to be serious in my plan to release the album once I'm finished, I will need to map out how it could have the best effect. I need to research where new, independently release music is most likely to be discovered, as simply putting it on Spotify and hoping for the best is certainly not feasible.

I believe finding and building an audience for my music will be an important step before releasing an album. Ideally, garnering an audience first, and then drip feeding the songs one by one before releasing the whole album would be a better strategy with regards to building some form of market interest ahead of the release. I should also have a method of distribution in mind ahead of the release, considering if I might stand to gain a better result if I partner with a distribution service that might be able to help me with marketing the material, using a potential audience as a proof of concept to demonstrate that the music can draw in an audience. Should this be successful, I might want to consider reaching out to local labels to see if they could help me with this. Alternatively conducting an independent marketing campaign through social media, though the market for this is much more crowded, and would need to be well thought out.

I like Tom Misch's model, where he initially just released tracks on Soundcloud, and built his platform there until he got picked up by users with bigger audiences on YouTube. I think platforms such as Soundcloud are great as they function both as platforms to release music, but also as a social media network where you can comment on tracks or message other users. I have also seen that there are multiple forums on other sites such as Reddit or Facebook, dedicated to smaller communities on Soundcloud. This could be a good place to interact with other creators, and possibly be a way to build a community for my own music.

Ultimately I wish to continue creating music, and produce it myself, and find ways to monetise my own activities to the point where I could make a living for myself working within a field I enjoy. This is of course a somewhat ambitious goal with so many other music creators competing within the same markets, but with the tools available today, I believe that it is possible.

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