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Doozy Productions

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Doozy Productions

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4/06

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ABSTRACT

Doozy Productions is a project in producing songs performed and recorded in Sound Studio 3 at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. The recordings range from a variety of musical genres, including rock, soul, and jazz. The purpose of the project was to produce the highest-quality music by using professional recording and mixing tools. Preparations for production included research on how sound functions and projects in an electronic medium, as well as listening to professional recordings across all genres. All music was recorded, mixed, and produced by Andrew Steier.*

* "Electric Waltz" was produced by Emily Osgood and Andrew Steier.

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ADVICE TO FUTURE HONORS STUDENTS

My first and most important advice to anybody who is willing to embark on the epic that is known as the Honors Thesis Project is this—know when you’ve had enough, and know when you’ve hit your limits and it’s time to quit. Keep in mind that if you work on an Honors Thesis Project, you will be subject to long hours by yourself, researching and studying in various rooms, ranging from ones that induce claustrophobia to the ones that, for some reason, smell like the 1960’s. And if you’re taking nineteen credits while working three days a week—not including the three days when you work at your unpaid internship—then there’s no reason to add the burden of a thesis on yourself. Everybody needs to live their lives and have fun, so don’t bother with this thesis nonsense if you can’t even enjoy the fruits of life. I believe that life should get in the way of your studies, and not the other way around.

So you still want to do an Honors Thesis Project? Then be sure as hell that you’re doing something that you love. Do something that brings you joy, even when you’re just thinking about

whatever you want to do. I'm not saying there are people who say, "Oh, how I love looking at fifty years' worth topographical maps of the Adirondacks," or those who would rather create experiments to test astrophysical hypotheses on a miniature scale than play PlayStation to pass the time; but there must be something in your brain making you think about your project at odd times, like when you're on a date or watching a movie. Maybe it keeps you up until the early morning. The project should always be with you, and it should be a very positive thing.

Now if you decide to take my advice, you may be asking what interests you on an academic scale. You may actually decide that engineering school is more of a means to an end rather than interesting and there's no reason to do more work than you need to. The inevitable thought becomes, "well, nothing academic gets me going. I'd much rather waste my time on the Internet and listen to hot new songs on iTunes."

Are you really wasting time? Can you make what you think is slacking off into a critical analysis or a creative work? The whole idea of turning the everyday leisure into a bona fide academic study became my drive to create my Honors Thesis Project.

When thinking about what project you will do in your preferred subject, it's always good to jump back to find out what brought you to your field of study in the first place. Why did you pick

Psychology as a major? Did something happen when you were growing up? Did your interest begin with observing what was going on in your neighborhood? Maybe it began with watching all of your elementary school classmates attach, detach and reattach into the cliques you saw in high school? Maybe there was an interesting episode of *Who's The Boss?* or *Full House* that made you interested? Instead of starting from Psychology 101 to begin your project, look back to your own origins for inspiration. I will discuss my own life experience as it pertains to my project in the Thesis Essay.

In other words, you need to do an Honors Thesis Project for yourself. It's happens too often where we find ourselves doing what our parents tell us to do or follow an adviser's suggestion because this something will look good on our transcript or this something will be immortalized in the halls of Syracuse University. Very early in my college career, I started treating outside suggestions, even from family and faculty, as secondary at best. This project is for myself, and I could care less what Syracuse University or my parents do with it, because the person with whom this project will be most important to is myself. You should take the same attitude with what you make in the Honors Thesis Project, as well as with whatever else you do at Syracuse University.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The most important people to this project are my grandparents, Richard and Eleanor Steier. Without their love and support, I wouldn't have been able to embark on this project, let alone have the time I had at Syracuse University. I give them all the love and thanks that I can possibly give. And make no mistake—I did this project for them.

My parents, Rodney and Elena Steier, have also supported me and have been a big inspiration in making this project. When I first arrived at Syracuse University, they urged that I pursue my musical interests. Though the final product may not be what they expected, my thesis project is as much their idea as it was mine. Thanks, mom and dad. I couldn't ask for more loving, supportive, and wonderful parents.

I'd like to thank Dr. Sharon Hollenback for guiding this project way back before I even thought of music recording as a legitimate project within my major of TV-Radio-Film. Before I talked with her, I was considering writing a script or making a video production. Dr.

Hollenback suggested that I should follow my interest in music and turn it into a thesis project. She was the first person to tell me about the sound recordings that happen at Newhouse and for that I am truly grateful.

I am utterly indebted to Dr. Stan Alten for giving me so much information and education in music recording. After working with him for three semesters, I am confident in saying that Dr. Alten is the smartest and most knowledgeable person in the TRF department. As much as I have learned about music recording from him, it is only the tip of the iceberg—Dr. Alten is truly a well of expertise and knowledge of sound and audio. If I ever find success in music recording, I can look back and point to Dr. Alten as the reason why.

Of course, I wasn't alone in figuring out the way audio works. For two semesters, I worked alongside Neal Daniel, Emily Osgood, and James Siciliano to make some great music. Together, we watched each other's backs as we switched roles between being the artist, the producer, and the engineer. James even came back for a third semester, not going in for a credit, and helped me out in the studio along with Max Bohichik, who I also thank for helping me out. When we couldn't figure stuff out, we went to our teaching adjuncts—Pat Finlon, Peter Scott Earle and Nate Prestopnik. I

thank them all and I hope that Syracuse is only the beginning of something great for all of us.

An additional thanks goes to the guys at the edit suites who manage all of the sound studios, not to mention all of the video editors. For weeks and weeks Studio 3 was my home, and I couldn't ask for better landlords. Keep up the good work.

Last but not least, I would like to give innumerable thanks and appreciation to all of the groups and artists who came in to perform. A well-produced track is only as good as the guys who play on it, and believe me—everybody who rocked out in Studio 3 was good. When I was listening through all of the unmixed songs, I felt a sigh of relief because I knew that I didn't have much to mix. The music was good on its own, and I had the privilege to enhance, rather than fix, the song. To all of the groups and artists that came in—Cold Cut Trio, Kate Moss, Travis Mason, and The Zen Lounge Trio—thanks for making some of the best music I've ever heard.

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THESIS ESSAY

WHAT IS MUSIC PRODUCTION?

Music production contains several different processes. It's part music recording, part mixing, and several small operations in between, including rerecording, overdubbing, and remixing. The production is part band and part producer, with the band being more noticeable. People tend to remember the artists on the album more than those who produced it, but producers polish and refine the music to perfection.

The first part of production, recording, is a very delicate procedure. Producers come in with a clear vision in the beginning—what sound they want, what mood the music will emit, and so forth—and record accordingly. They have to decide which microphones to use and how they will be placed. Microphones come in many different forms and no two sound the same. Depending on where they're placed, the signal (usually the instrument or vocals) will sound either clearer closer up or duller

farther away. Recordings can either happen at the same time or separately—for example, the drums may be recorded before the vocals, with the subsequent recordings being called overdubs. The placement and quality of microphones used can create a variety of results, even when using the same band with the same instrumental arrangements. Take, for example, the two eponymous albums by Weezer, which were released in 1994 and 2001, with the latter of which being nicknamed *The Green Album*. It's the same band, with the same producer, Ric Ocasek, on both albums, but they sound completely different from each other. *The Green Album* has crisper drums and vocals due to the higher quality microphones used. Microphones to a producer are as important as paintbrushes are to a painter. Different results happen depending on which one is used.

After the recording comes the mixing. This is where the recording gets balanced and tweaked to a polish. Mixing involves everything from volume control to adjustment of the sound frequency to adding effects like reverb and echo on each signal recorded. Adjusting sound frequency can make a bass sound deeper, a cymbal sound brighter and livelier, and a guitar sound bigger, depending on whether the low, high, or mid-range is raised, respectively. Reverb, echo, and delay are all effects that make the signal fill the space of the sound and mimic a large studio sound. When mixing in stereo, a signal can be spaced across the left and

right speakers. This is effective with drums, as the spacing makes the drum set fill the sound space. Mixing never happens once; mixing is a perpetual process, complete with multiple remixes that can occur for weeks on end. A producer, as with recording, can change sound dramatically depending on how he or she mixes the recording.

Music production requires quality in both the recording and the mixing. Mixing can only go as far as the quality of the recording, and it won't fix a bad recording session. Likewise, if a band lacks talent and musicianship, then mixing will only be of minimal help. After three semesters of music production, I learned that if I wanted to get the best recordings I needed to get the best talent in the studio. The better the artists, the better the recording, which makes for an easier time in mixing. Each part of production affects the next step, so the first step has to be done right.

THE MAKING OF DOOZY PRODUCTIONS

THE SELF-PRODUCED ALBUM

I initially got into music production to make an album of songs that I would write, perform, record, and mix. Though I had spent almost ten years playing saxophone and jazz music, I wanted to make a rock and roll album. I had written several rock songs in 2003 and 2004 and learned to play guitar and bass in hopes of getting the songs recorded in the Newhouse sound studio. I began the project early on.

Preliminary recordings for the self-produced album began in the spring of 2004. My choice of equipment was limited—I had a Peavey practice amplifier for the guitars and recorded through a computer microphone. I used Apple's GarageBand program to record the instrumental tracks, which were all individually overdubbed. I also used it to add effects and synthesized drums. As my interest in recording grew, I added more and more to the recordings. I took an old Mako bass amp from my house in Connecticut to improve the sound of the guitars. I bought two condenser microphones that made all the sounds clearer. I listened to rock albums to find out how instruments were placed and what frequencies the instruments landed on. Producers became a bigger deal to me than the artists as I was discovering the importance of

producers on albums. By the fall of 2004 I had made myself a little recording studio in my Syracuse apartment and recorded dozens of original songs and covers. I hadn't yet set foot inside of a Newhouse sound studio or talked to the school's resident sound expert, Dr. Stan Alten.

After a year of experimenting with home recordings, I took Music Underscoring in the spring of 2005—a course that got me into Newhouse's Sound Studio 3 and got me in touch with Dr. Alten. The professional studio was a completely different experience. I learned the importance of which microphone to use on which instrument and how to correctly mix music digitally using the ProTools program. It would be in Sound Studio 3 where I would make my album. At the end of the semester I proposed my thesis project idea of a self-produced album to Dr. Alten, who quickly rejected the idea. He thought it would be impossible to do what I wanted to do, so I adjusted my project idea.

Dr. Alten believes, as I do now, that an unskilled or inexperienced producer should not try to produce him or herself. There are so many operations that need to be done in the control room that no producer should attempt to bounce back and forth between the control board and the studio space. Somebody needs to be on both sides at all times. I could have had a partner help me out, but as a first-time producer it was best for me to stay in the

control room. I stuck with music production anyway, but I had to adjust my goals.

THE EVERYTHING ALBUM

My first production of a band came in the fall of 2005. After failing to get in touch with several bands, Emily Osgood, my co-producer, and I recorded our friend Neal Daniel and his hard rock trio, Kate Moss, which was nameless at the time. We wanted a heavy wall of sound coming from the guitar, complete with a booming bass and bright drums. The sound was kinetic; and despite a poor bass solo that we later removed, the mix on the song, “Electric Waltz,” came out really well. After listening to other bands that students produced, Ms. Osgood and I realized that we dodged a problem that every other producer had—recording a poor singer. We also had a problem with vocals and we opted to take them out prior to recording. The other producers didn’t have that flexibility with their artists, and they had to deal with a poor vocal recording that they couldn’t help in mixing. I learned an important lesson—choose who you record wisely.

I realized, after listening to the groups’ projects in class, that all music production students at Newhouse worked exclusively with local rock bands, with most of them being student groups. I got sick

of hearing all of these bands and decided on making an alternative production plan for my own thesis. I would make an album that would include hip-hop, R&B, and jazz on top of rock. There would be four groups, one for each genre, recording one or two songs. The payoff would be twofold. Not only would I have a nice variety of tunes to present, but I would also expand my level of producing and make myself a more versatile producer. I had dreams of being a young Rick Rubin, a talented man who produced albums with hip-hopsters like Jay-Z and The Beastie Boys and rockers like Audioslave and System Of A Down. The possibilities were very appealing.

The search for these various groups turned out to be harder than I thought. In the beginning of 2006, the plans began to falter. The rock group I wanted to record, Four Feet Away, couldn't make it to any recording sessions. The hip-hop groups on campus were invisible—if they were around, they didn't advertise themselves as well as other sorts of groups. Various funk and jam groups offered to help, but after listening to preliminary demos they submitted, I realized that they all lacked the necessary talent for Studio 3. By February, I had two acts lined up for the studio—jazz band mate Casey O'Connor's combo, which became the Cold Cut Trio, and my good friend Travis Mason. The album that was supposed to have everything on it was looking more like jazz and gospel only.

I didn't see this as a problem. I still had alternatives to local rock bands. I saw my previous decision to add rock to be misguided, seeing as I had already recorded a rock band in the past. It was time to move on.

EVERYTHING BUT ROCK

In late February, I recorded "Freedom Jazz Dance" with the Cold Cut Combo. I wanted a very classic jazz sound, keeping the instruments spaced out and very distinct while recording them all live and at the same time. It wasn't hard to do, considering the group consisted of only an alto saxophone, an upright bass, and a modest drum set. The session sounded great, except for the bass, which sounded too distant from the other instruments as a result of a poor choice in the microphone used on it. We rerecorded the bass track two weeks later.

Travis came in the week after the Cold Cut Trio's first session to sing and play the piano. Having heard Travis play when we lived in the same dormitory in the 2002-2003 year, I knew what to expect. I wanted an intimate and gentle sound for both Travis and the piano in order to accentuate the grace of his voice and his skill with the keys. I recorded both him and the piano at the same time, as it was the most comfortable for him. He came in and recorded a few

gospel tunes—"Surrender" and two unnamed original compositions. While mixing, I discovered that the piano bled too much into the vocal microphone, which made it a challenge to control and edit the vocal track.

I had the great luck and fortune to meet Mike Dubaniewicz after a jazz band rehearsal in which he gave a lecture. I asked him if he was interested in recording his group in the studio, and he was ecstatic at the thought and opportunity to record. Two weeks later, his band, the Zen Lounge Trio, came to the studio and churned out six songs in less than four hours.

Since the group was more kinetic than the Cold Cut Trio, I wanted the instruments to fill the sound space more comprehensively. The band was closer to fusion than classic jazz, so I made the sound as bright as I could. The instrumental arrangement was the same as the Cold Cut Trio with the exception of the bass. Instead of using a bass, the trio used an organ that played a bass line while providing rhythm chords. This added problems in mixing, as the bass and rhythm chords were blended in with one another.

The presence of great musicians was immediately apparent after the recording sessions. After listening to the unmixed material with Dr. Alten, I realized that I didn't have much work to do in mixing. I would be enhancing, rather than fixing, the recordings—the way it

should be, according to Dr. Alten. With the jazz trios, very little was added. I only heightened certain frequencies using EQ, or equalization, and added reverb to the saxophone tracks. Travis's vocals were a little tougher, and I had to add reverb and compression along with EQ to really make him stick out in front of the piano. The entire mixing process took two to three days a week for six weeks and covered twelve songs between Travis and the two trios.

CONCLUSION

For the Honors Thesis Project, I selected six of the best songs I've produced. I believe these to be the finest cuts ever produced in Sound Studio 3. The variety is great, and the talent is amazing. It's remarkable how well the songs came out, and I hope this album inspires other music recording students to look for talent outside of local rock bands when searching for groups to record.

The first song, "Electric Waltz" by Kate Moss, is from my Music Recording course in Fall 2005. I included it on the program to add variety, as the other bands are very acoustic in comparison. I remixed the song in mid-April of 2006, making the drums louder. The end result is a surprisingly high-quality mix.

Song number two on the album is the Zen Lounge Trio's rendition of Jimmy Smith's "Back At The Chicken Shack." The driving force of the drums should be immediately apparent. The organ stays to the low frequencies while the saxophone fills up the rest. The song, though over five minutes long, remains fun and fresh until the very end.

The Cold Cut Trio provided the next song, "Autumn Leaves." This rendition of an old standard balances the high sweetness of the alto saxophone with the boom of the upright bass. The drums are spaced out so that the focus remains on the bass and saxophone, in turn making the song a duet between the two instruments. Yet the trio blends together so well.

The fourth song is "My Father," an original gospel song by Travis Mason. The song passes along like a dream, with the vocals and piano spaced like they're floating in air. The lyrics are clear and crisp as the piano encompasses Travis's tender voice. The final chord of the song lingers in an ultimate moment of bliss and wonder. This is truly an enchanting composition.

The Cold Cut Trio comes back for "In a Sentimental Mood." This old Duke Ellington standard retains its classic roots, with the brush on the snare mimicking the pops on an old record. There is little spacing done to the instruments to emulate the one-speaker sound of the swing-era records. The quality of the saxophone and

bass, though, remain unchanged from “Autumn Leaves,” but there is still a classic feeling to the song.

Finally, the Zen Lounge Trio rounds out the album with John Coltrane’s “Giant Steps.” The trio adds a new twist to an old theme, adding Latin beats and a mellow beginning and ending vamp. The song drives at a faster pace than “Back At The Chicken Shack,” complete with bebop riffs and wild solos. The song is a perfect finish to a very impressive album.

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