

Berklee College of Music

# **The Live Music Experience: A Study Through the Eyes of a Drummer**

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Master of Music in Contemporary Performance (Production Concentration)

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## **Abstract**

In my efforts to be the best drummer I can be, to always be learning, to apply the skills I've been gaining here at Berklee Valencia, and to give myself material to further myself as an artist, I wanted to combine my experience with live music with my newer studio experience I've been gaining and put together live studio sessions similar to those that have greatly influenced myself and my playing. I wanted to create my own live music experience and to provide an audience the experience of being in the studio with the musicians while they're recording music and to be able to hear what they're hearing and be immersed in the session.

Keywords: Live music, studio session, drums

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# 1)Introduction

Everyone's musical journey is different, unpredictable, and interesting, and mine was certainly no exception. It all started when I was 8 years old in small-town rural Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, which is about an hour and a half northwest of Boston, Massachusetts. I remember the day that they brought all the instruments in the classroom and we got to see and touch them all, all in hopes of getting as many of us to join the band as possible. I can honestly say that my decision was entirely based on how big the case was, and once I saw that giant suitcase with the snare drum and bell kit in it, I was hooked. I couldn't get enough, and I practiced all the time and wanted to play as much as I could, and thankfully that hasn't really gone away, and for that I'm forever grateful. I remember seeing the older kids performing, seeing some concerts, and there was nothing more that I wanted than to be on that stage performing.

All throughout elementary and middle school my dad would play Led Zeppelin, so John Bonham was the first drummer I knew by name, so I spent many hours trying to figure out what he was doing on those recordings. I began taking private drum lessons apart from school, and once high school began I

made sure to involve myself in as many opportunities to play drums as I could, including marching band, jazz band, and concert band, in addition to more private drum lessons and gigs outside of school. Through all of the live concerts and events we would do, not only did I really enjoy playing drums, but I also really began to love performing for other people and seeing the positive reactions from audiences who were enjoying what I was doing.

Fast forward to college auditions, and of course I had to decide to officially get really serious and start applying and auditioning for programs. Even though it's super cheesy, I knew I couldn't see myself doing anything else, so I had to go all in. After auditioning and applying and doing lots of research, I decided to attend the University of Massachusetts Amherst and pursue an undergraduate degree in drum set performance/jazz and African American music studies. In addition to that, I also went through a rigorous audition process for the drumline, which is one of the best collegiate drumlines in the entire country, and I spent four wonderful years playing quads and performing for thousands of people, in addition to all of the performance opportunities I was getting through my major with my drum set playing. Even though I was constantly exposed to new and exciting music ever since I picked up the drums for the first time, my years at UMass are what really exposed me to a lot of the music that influences me today, and I also noticed an interesting trend.

Most of my serious musical experience has been performing live and idolizing those that play live music at the highest level and in the biggest capacity. I was hooked, I knew from early on that I wanted to play live music for as many people as I could and in the biggest venues possible. I do greatly enjoy being in the studio as well and want to continue doing that, but the need to perform live in front of thousands of people has always stayed with me. I also actively do research into live music experiences, both modern and historical. Woodstock, Live Aid, and Pink Floyd's The Wall are heavy hitters for me, but also modern day shows such as Ariana Grande, Disturbed, small shows in clubs and huge shows in arenas. Not only is the music impressive, but all of the thought, effort, and money that go into live sound, special effects, props, and other things that create a meaningful live experience are outstanding. Whether it's pyrotechnics, synced up glow sticks, dancers, choirs, a giant hanging planet, QR codes you can scan, or just going and listening to artists you love without any special effects, it's fascinating how these shows are put together. Super Bowl halftime shows are another good example, so much thought goes into these performances, which often feature multiple well-known artists, interesting musical arrangements, and insane special effects and props. For Pink Floyd's The Wall shows, they built the famous wall and then broke it down throughout the playing of the album, giving the listeners a visual representation of the album and the bigger idea behind it, while also listening to the band play the music. Nowadays,



it seems there's really no limit as far as what you can do to create a meaningful live music experience, and I aim to explore that.

Of course I also listened to many albums that were recorded in studios, but I started to really enjoy live albums and videos of live performances of some of my favorite bands and drummers. Snarky Puppy, Dave Matthews Band, John Mayer, and Led Zeppelin really stood out to me in this regard because not only do they thrive in live settings, but each one does their own unique thing when performing live. In the case of Snarky Puppy and Dave Matthews Band in live shows, the instrumental solos are greatly extended and take a long time to grow and develop until they eventually explode with energy. Of course keeping in mind the modern principle of not having studio-recording songs be too long, the studio albums that they have in their discography differ immensely from their live albums and performances. “#41” by Dave Matthews Band is 6 minutes and 41 seconds long on the studio album “Crash”, but “#41” live at Red Rocks in Colorado, off of the album “Weekend On the Rocks”, is a staggering 15 minutes and 20 seconds long. The reason for this is that when they perform live, they often have long and atmospheric intros for some of their songs, as well as solos that start very soft and eventually grow and develop into masterpieces. In the case of Snarky Puppy as well, you can see and listen that when comparing “Quarter Master” from the studio and “Quarter Master” live from Rio de Janeiro, that not only do they have different soloists and musicians than the ones that

played on the studio version, the length and development is much longer. One of the only arguments that could be made in favor of studio albums and their development of solos could be Cory Henry's multiple-keyboard solo on "Lingus", off of Snarky Puppy's 2014 album "We Like It Here". The solo is quite long and developed and has been hailed as one of the greatest solos in music history, but the number of songs on streaming platforms that were recorded in a closed studio environment with a solo that long is quite small. Additionally, during the recording sessions for "We Like It Here", Snarky Puppy had an audience in the studio with headphones witnessing and hearing the entire recording process, which has a profound impact on energy and in most cases, length of improvised solos. As a musician very trained in jazz, I felt extra intrigued by this since jazz puts such a huge emphasis on improvisation, and a lot of academic jazz studies for drum set players is all about how to play with a soloist and how to help them grow and develop a solo. Because of this, listening to these live versions is extremely helpful to me as a player, because not only do I hear different versions of songs, but I hear a more developed example of how to play with a soloist, undoubtedly helping my own playing. However, the unfortunate case for many jazz albums that were recorded in a closed studio environment with long solos is that they simply don't get recognized by a majority of the population due to the style and length, even though people pay large amounts of money to see the very same artists live and watch them take a very long and developed solo.

From a drumming perspective and an educational perspective, listening to live versions of songs has opened my eyes to the improvisational and complimenting possibilities for me as a drummer, but also how to assimilate and perform in groups where improvisation is an important aspect of the music, groups very much like Snarky Puppy and Dave Matthews Band. Not only was I listening to some of the best drummers ever playing in these bands both live and in the studio, but it was very interesting to hear the differences between the live and studio albums, especially when the songs played on the live albums were played differently than their studio versions. I greatly admire drummers like Larnell Lewis (Snarky Puppy), Carter Beauford (Dave Matthews Band), Aaron Spears (Ariana Grande), Ricky Lewis (The Weeknd), Steve Jordan (John Mayer), John Bonham (Led Zeppelin), and many others for their effortless mastery in both the studio and on the stage, and it's so interesting how those two experiences can be completely different. It's very interesting to me to hear audience participation, different solos being played, and different players being featured in live shows as opposed to studio recordings.

Another important point I'd like to discuss that is related, although a bit different, is live drummers performing music that does not have drums on the studio versions of the music. This is the case for most modern-day pop and R&B stars, because since such a large percentage of their music doesn't have acoustic drums, or really any live instruments at all, how do drummers and other

musicians that play on the biggest stages all over the world overcome and deal with this while adequately supporting these major artists? Two very important albums that pertain to this point are “k bye for now (swt live)” by Ariana Grande, featuring Aaron Spears as her touring drummer, and “Live at SoFi Stadium” by The Weeknd, featuring Ricky Lewis as his touring drummer.

Two drummers I previously mentioned that inspire me greatly, not only do they do exactly what I aspire to do career-wise, they play on quite literally the biggest stages and stadiums all over the world, playing music that does not even have actual drums on the studio recordings. To my point about live music, these huge stars having live bands and drummers performing with them brings a whole different energy to the performance and to the music, and there’s also space for improvisation built into these very produced and intricate performances. Not only is there little to no improvisation in the studio recordings of these hit songs, in almost all cases the live versions are longer and feature crowd and fan interaction.

Similar to the examples of more improvisational bands and performances, these live recordings not only showcase these immensely popular songs in a different light, but they help me as a player who aspires to perform at this level listen and learn how to musically approach playing in a setting like this. There are solos and fills that I can transcribe and learn that will teach me different

vocabulary than what I would learn from other styles of music, and accompanying a huge pop star takes a totally different approach than the approach you'd take when accompanying a soloist in a jazz setting, which makes these live recordings very educational and influential on my playing when supporting all different types of people and all different types of music.

Also, from a playing and performing perspective, since almost all of my experience is playing live, I've really developed that side of my playing, feeding off the energy of musicians and the audience, changing things and improvising things with no preparation, being prepared for things to go differently and reacting, as well as being able to give people an enjoyable experience when they witness live music. However, I've also greatly enjoyed the experience in the studio I've gained, and to be a well-rounded drummer and the best version of myself as a player, I knew that combining the world of live music and studio-recorded music is something that I knew I wanted to pursue when attending Berklee Valencia.

## 2) Proposed Culminating Experience

My proposed culminating experience project serves to develop my own artistic identity by way of intense cultural, rhythmic, and musical study in my never-ending quest to become the best player I possibly can be, while also utilizing the theme of “the live music experience” to put on 3 live recording sessions with an audience, featuring myself, many of my friends, and many different musical styles, all to create an entertaining live show that the audience can thoroughly enjoy. Through my musical influences and live music experiences, this project will continue to develop and refine my artistic identity through collaboration with my peers for the compositions and arrangements, the rehearsal and performance of the pieces, and the development of media from these sessions to further develop my identity as an artist and performer.

Since I’ve been so heavily influenced by the live music experience specifically and my influences with other live recording sessions, I felt that this would be my chance to bring that experience to audiences in Valencia, and collaborating with my talented colleagues to put together these sessions is something I know I will really enjoy doing. After the sessions happen, not only will I have tangible memories through photos and videos from the sessions, but I’ll

also be able to develop myself as an artist through social media and the promotion of media from these sessions, including releasing the tracks and videos.

### 3)Objective and Sub-Objectives

The objective of this project is to further shape and develop my artistic identity as a performer, musician, collaborator, and entertainer through the lens of live performance, live recording, and live production. Through collaboration with my professors, peers, and friends, I aspire to put on a live music experience that showcases not only myself and my friends' musical abilities and talents, but also brings people together, and leaves them with reassurance as to why live music is such an important part of today's world. In addition to that, audio and video recordings of these sessions will allow me to bring that live music experience to a wide range of people, while also highlighting my progression as a drummer and musician.

## Sub-Objectives:

Research and analysis of musical styles and genres that I intend to showcase through my repertoire as well as research and analysis into various concerts and shows from all throughout history to not only get a better understanding, but to also gain inspiration and ideas about what's possible.

Instrumental technique development and practice so I can be the best and most versatile I can be, and also incorporating electronics into my setup and into my playing.

Creative collaboration with my peers for the development of the music.

Further my studio experience, especially with these unique live recording sessions with an audience.

Dissemination and promotion of media to further myself as an artist.



## 4)Methodology

The nature of the project is performance-based, so a lot of practice-based research will be used to learn and master the repertoire I want to perform. I've already begun to incorporate other percussion instruments into my drumset playing, as well as approaching the drums in different and new ways, including the fusing of drum set styles, applying traditional percussion concepts and rhythms to the drum set that aren't a part of traditional drum set vocabulary, and being the most adaptable version of myself as a musician where I'm able to work with many different people and styles of music. The most prominent method employed for this performance-based project will consist of a combination of creative performance and multi-cultural research. I intend to perform different styles and genres of music, as well as creating fusions of genres and transcending the boundaries and definitions of modern day music. Through my own personal practice, what my instructors give me, and what I explore on my own, I'll be continuing my deep dive into the music of North America, South America, the music of the western tropical islands, European influenced music, African music, and eastern music. Through this exploration of all the music this world has to offer, I'll be applying those themes and methods to my drum set playing and also to the preparation and execution of these live recording

sessions, while also aiming to create a meaningful live music experience. I will also be doing research into concerts, shows, and live events, and another aspect I'd like to include is the relationship between musicians/performers and the audience, and I will be exploring that relationship and exploring and experimenting with ways that I can manipulate and change it.

#### 4.1: Resources/Tools/Processes/Instruments needed

##### Studio availability and resources

Since these are pretty elaborate recording sessions, I need plenty of time for each session that will account for the big setup, setup of the audience, and the setup of the video equipment, as well as the gain-staging, line-checking, troubleshooting, and testing we'll need to do. All of this requires a big and capable studio space, as well as enough time for each session to be held effectively and adequately.

## Production/business/media team

I've put together a team from the Music Production, Technology, and Innovation masters program here at Berklee Valencia to help me with all of my production needs, whether it be setup, sound, logistical help, or as more opinions on the effectiveness of these sessions. I also have a team from the Global Entertainment and Music Business masters program helping me with the business side of things, such as promotion and dissemination ideas and tactics, as well as what I can do to help myself as an artist, and how that can help me with this project. I also have a team of videographers for these sessions, that way I have very tangible and easily-accessible media outlets for the general public to have access to, as well as a continuation of the live music experience of these sessions, and also as memories for me to have of this wonderful experience.

## Lots of instruments and equipment/elaborate setup

This should be interesting. Since I have a very diverse setlist and group of musicians, being able to efficiently and intelligently accommodate that will take some thought. I also want to make sure that the audience is able to hear what's going on in our monitors and over the talk-backs, so the members of the audience will have cue boxes and their own pair of headphones so they can hear

the mix and get an even more detailed look into the recording process. Because of this, extra setup time and resources, such as cue boxes, headphones, chairs, and studio space, are needed to make that happen.

## Music

For these three live recording sessions I've been working closely with my dear friend and colleague Michael Ventura, who has taken the lead on composing and arranging each tune for all three sessions. Then we take the tunes and arrangements into rehearsals and further arrange and make edits with our other colleagues that will be recording in each session. I've really had to step into a new role as a producer through this project, which is something I thought I would never really have to do. It has forced me to make decisions and really think critically about what's happening at all times with everyone, not just with my role as the drummer. This was really put into action with the arrangements and soundscaping of the songs, especially because we had so many textures to play with. I determined who would solo and for what length, as well as how to start and end the songs, but a part that was particularly interesting for me was determining which parts would be acoustic, electronic, or somewhere in between. This was because not only did I have a sample pad where I could sample electronic and 808 drum sounds, but in some cases there were multiple

keyboards being used with different patches and switches to acoustic grand piano, and a Moog sub bass synthesizer being used alongside the normal electric bass. Getting to influence if and when some of these elements were being used was pretty new for me, and acting as a producer to make these songs come to life became a small role throughout this project.

### Rehearsal time and space

Ample rehearsal time and space will be necessary to make sure everything is ready for the sessions to run smoothly and effectively. I'd schedule one long rehearsal to really focus and dig into each song, determine solos, arrange the song, and work on any hits or rhythms or anything to make the song sound clean. I would get a score, lead sheet, and individual parts for the song we were going to work on at least two days before the rehearsal so everyone could look over it and learn it a little bit before coming into the rehearsals.

## 4.2: Plan of Action, Delivery Timeline and Processes

For this project, I decided to approach the plan of action song-by-song, so the composition of the music, rehearsal, and logistical planning was unique to each song and happened one-by one.

Session 1 is on April 16th, session 2 is on May 28th, and session 3 is on July 2nd, and my final presentation for this CE project is June 28th. With these dates, I can definitely present live sessions 1 and 2 almost in their entirety, while I can cover the composition and logistical planning process of the third live session.

For each session, the song will be composed and arranged, and then rehearsed, all while I plan logistics of each session with my producer and engineer, especially because the song, musicians, instrumentation, setup, and audience will be different for each session.

### 4.3 Justification

Naturally a huge goal of this project is to further my musical studies and strengthen my ability and fluidity behind the drum set. I've been on a quest to become the best player I can possibly be for many years now, and I've always loved that challenge and that fire that has driven me to practice and study. This process of assembling musical pieces of varying styles, fusing genres, and putting them into these three live studio sessions will be a big step towards forming my artistic identity, and will help me discover things I wouldn't have before. It could also be seen as a deep dive into the repertoire of the drum set. The instrument is utilized more and more as time goes on, but doing detailed research and seeing how it fits into all of these different styles can help with drum set education, informing my setup choices, and ultimately benefit my playing.

Additionally, the research I'll be doing into bandleading and coordinating as a drummer will greatly benefit not only my playing, but will give me valuable skills for my professional career, such as organization, coordination, and confidence. Pairing that with the knowledge I'll be gaining not only on my instrument, but also about the other aspects that go into creating a meaningful live music experience, I will have a well-rounded idea of what goes into the live music industry. This knowledge will greatly assist me with my career in this industry, especially because the post-pandemic music industry has really been

pushing to come back bigger and better than ever, providing more and more opportunities for not only me to play the drums, but to also create relationships with audiences and be entertaining to a wide audience. In addition to making myself a better player, the goal of this project is to also draw attention to the importance and impactfulness of the live music experience, and to put together something memorable for not only my peers, but for anyone who chooses to listen. With the audio and video deliverables from the sessions, I hope to be able to preserve that memorable live music experience so it can be enjoyed in the future.



## 5)Execution/Results

### RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF MUSICAL STYLES

I've learned and studied many new styles that I wasn't very familiar with before from all over the world, including Balkan music, South American Music, and Cuban Music, which all require their own drumming style that I've been working on throughout this year. Additionally, I've had the opportunity to strengthen my foundations in jazz, rock, and funk and increase my technical facility in those areas as well. Studying these styles has helped me with coordination, speed, independence, and awareness, all of which are important things when playing the drums, whether in the studio or live.

Since one major goal I wanted to achieve with this project was to learn and assimilate new styles into my playing, this had a profound impact on my playing for these sessions, and also for my whole academic year. Studying with Mariano Steimberg, one of my drum professors from Argentina, I was exposed to the rhythms and styles of the Caribbean Islands and South America, including *saya* from Bolivia, the different *cumbias* from both Argentina and Colombia,

Venezuelan *joropo*, Afro-Peruvian *festejo*, the wide array of sambas and rhythmic patterns from Brazil, as well as Argentinian *zamba*, *chacarera*, and *huayno*. We also went over *candombe* from Uruguay and the *bomba* and *plena* styles that come from Puerto Rico.

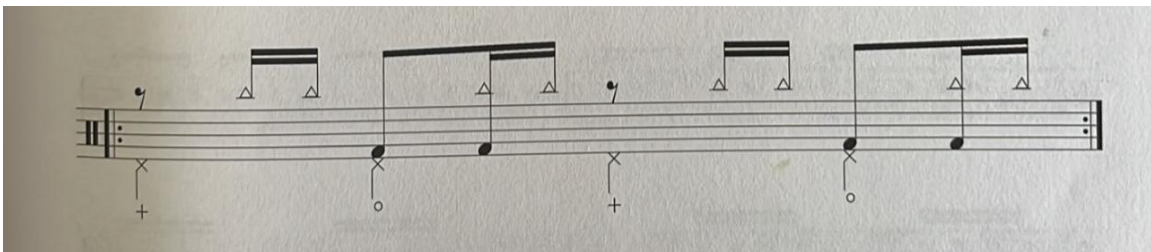


Figure 1: Plena (Puerto Rico) ostinato from *Raiz*.

The above example<sup>1</sup> from drummer Efrain Martinez's book *Raiz* that I studied with Mariano this past year is of the *plena* style from Puerto Rico, and shows the ostinato played and kept consistent with my right hand and both my feet, while my left hand plays syncopated patterns against it with the different drums of the drum set, shown on the page below<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Martinez, Efrain. *Raiz* (Puerto Rico: Independent, 2018), 19

<sup>2</sup> Martinez, *Raiz*, 24.

FRASES 3:2  
3:2 CLAVE PHRASES

24 | RAÍZ

Figure 2: Plena (Puerto Rico) rhythmic melodies, from *Raiz*, meant to be played against the ostinato in the three other limbs.

I also had the opportunity to study with Yoel Paez, another one of my drum professors, who is from Cuba. Cuban music is considered by many to be an entire genre of music on its own, and studying with Yoel exposed me to the numerous sub-styles and sub-genres of Cuban music, including the *cha cha cha*, *bolero*, *bongo*, *mambo*, *merengue*, *mozambique*, *abakua*, *guaguanco*, *cascara*, *bembe*, *elegua*, *osain*, *makuta*, and many others. Another thing that I really resonated with Yoel on is his love of fusion and integration of fusion into all of the styles he plays. Not only did I develop a love for fusion music during my undergraduate while studying jazz, but I really try to use that in my playing, similar to Yoel.

An example of this, shown below<sup>3</sup>, is the *guaguanco* section of his book *Bateria y Timbal*, which shows the traditional variations of how to play it, separated by each group of staves. Within each group of six staves, the main pattern is shown on the top one, and the top line is played by one hand on the hi-hat, ride cymbal, or cowbell, as well as the clave pattern with the hi-hat foot being shown right below the bottom line of the first staff. The two subsequent five-line staves are two options you have to play with your other hand, with the top one being what you play when you're playing with a conga player so you don't get in the way of them, and the bottom one implementing the conga melodic pattern in the case of not playing with a conga player, so you need to

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<sup>3</sup> Paez, Yoel. *Bateria y Timbal* (Valencia, Spain: Independent, 2022), 37

cover the conga melody yourself while playing the rest of the pattern. Then, the three subsequent single-lined staves are hi-hat foot variations you can play instead of the clave pattern, getting more difficult as you move through each of the three single-lined staves.

Each of the three groups of staves highlights a different hi-hat/ride cymbal/cowbell pattern (top line of top staff), and which one you use generally depends on the speed at which you're playing. The third example with less notes to play in the hi-hat/ride cymbal/cowbell will require less effort when playing at fast tempos than the first pattern with more notes.

He also shows how to take it further with some more fusion-oriented examples in the bottom section that feature a more linear style of drumming, where there are fewer cases of limbs playing notes at the same time.

Score

# GUAGUANCO (bateria)

Yoel Paez

The first exercise is a 4-measure phrase in 4/4 time. It consists of six staves. The top staff shows a hi-hat pattern with 'x' marks. The second staff shows a snare drum pattern with eighth notes and rests. The third staff shows a tom pattern with eighth notes and rests. The fourth, fifth, and sixth staves show the bass drum pattern with eighth notes and rests.

The second exercise is a 4-measure phrase in 4/4 time, starting with a '2' above the first measure. It consists of six staves. The top staff shows a hi-hat pattern with 'x' marks. The second staff shows a snare drum pattern with eighth notes and rests. The third staff shows a tom pattern with eighth notes and rests. The fourth, fifth, and sixth staves show the bass drum pattern with eighth notes and rests.

Figure 3: First page of *guaguanco* section from *Bateria y Timbal*, with first two exercises that work on coordination with two different hi-hat/ride cymbal/cowbell patterns (patterns on top line of each group of staves).

## GUAGUANCO (bateria)

## Guaguancó Fusión

Figure 4: Second page of *guaguanco* section from *Bateria y Timbal*, with the third exercise that works on coordination with the last hi-hat/ride cymbal/cowbell pattern (pattern on top line of each group of staves). This page also features the *guaguanco* fusion examples.

What I found interesting, shocking, and the most unlike my own playing were the rhythmic feelings of each style and their respective “swing”. Having my background in rock, funk, and metal music, these styles are very rhythmically accurate and precise, and more often “on the grid” than not, which means that there’s a consistent pulse and time feeling that every note and rhythm lines up with. They’re very consistently on an even subdivision of rhythm and not swung at all, and although the music doesn’t end up being robotic, the rhythmic subdivision is considered “straight”. Of course when my education in jazz was introduced and developed I was exposed and immersed in the jazz swing feel, which is most comparable to the triplet rhythmic subdivision. Working so heavily and closely in jazz music really strengthened my awareness, feeling, and comfortability in the triplet subdivision and feeling the triplet grid underneath the music I was playing everyday. What was so impactful on me when I came into Berklee Valencia and started learning about all of these styles from all of these different places was that many of them would have their own unique swing and rhythmic feel. This is very similar to how in the United States, legendary producer J Dilla revolutionized hip-hop, rap, R&B, and contemporary jazz with his un-quantizing of drum parts, beats, and loops, integration of the quintuplet as an uneasy, uneven rhythmic feel, and all-around rhythmic looseness and ambiguity in his music. The style of J Dilla rhythms have their own unique swing as well, and it was very easy to draw parallels between my knowledge of that and all of



this new music I was learning. Many of the South American, Caribbean, and Cuban styles of music rhythmically fall somewhere in-between the straight eighth note and the triplet, similar to J Dilla, and also put a bit more space in between the last part of the beat and the first part of the next beat, establishing a loose rhythmic feel and falling feeling. Learning this, getting comfortable with this, and integrating it into my playing has been huge for me this year, and of course I wanted to utilize it in this project.

## RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF LIVE PERFORMANCES (concerts, studio sessions, etc.)

I've also done a lot of research and analysis on live performances, live albums, and studio sessions. These include Woodstock, Pink Floyd, Ariana Grande, Snarky Puppy, Cory Wong, Dave Matthews Band, John Mayer, and many others. With some of the bigger concerts, events, and touring acts, there's a lot of production value and effort put into special effects and the experience for the audience in addition to the music. With Pink Floyd's "The Wall", they would build the wall on stage throughout the concert and break it down at the end, not only providing meaningful symbolization, but also because it was very entertaining and representative of their newest project, which you can see in the below video<sup>4</sup>, right around the 1:47:00 mark. At Ariana Grande's Sweetener world tour shows, there would be a massive sphere that represented a planet suspended in the middle of the stadium, and special lights, screens, and effects were used on that and the stage on the ground which created a huge and impactful visual experience for the audience in addition to the music.

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<sup>4</sup> La Linterna Magica. ""THE WALL" - ROGER WATERS en Buenos Aires [17-MAR-2012] {FULL}". Youtube. March 28, 2012. Concert Video, 1:47:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3iQTowlHsY>

I've always been particularly interested in these bigger productions not only because I want to drum at that level, but also because they're usually such a visually stunning and impactful experience. So much can be added to a show or concert, especially these big stadium headline tours, when visual effects are used.

Live music festivals are one of the major places where the live music performance experience can be enjoyed by massive audiences, starting in 1969 with Woodstock. That event literally paved the way for live music being enjoyed in its biggest form, and has inspired almost every music festival to date and has given tens of thousands of fans and music-lovers the opportunity to go enjoy their favorite artists all around the world. Specifically in the summer months in Spain, festivals such as MadCool or Resurrection fest are enormous events that feed back into the Spanish music scene and the Spanish economy, and feature hundreds of musicians from all over the world. Besides these massive festivals, there aren't really any other events that provide something similar, and these summer festivals bring in unreal amounts of money, provide an enormous amount of people musical entertainment, and are some of the only events that feature so many musical acts on the same stage during the same event.

Live concerts also followed a rapid evolution from the Beatles US tour in 1968 to what we know now, and another legendary example is Pink Floyd's "The Wall" live in concert. Not only is it entertaining, visually stunning, and surprising, but it has so much symbolization and impact that comes with it. Not only could it be seen as a remark on world history and the Berlin Wall, it also signified mental walls and physical walls within people and places, and even changed the sound when the wall became higher. On March 17th, 2012, they performed this show in Buenos Aires, Argentina in front of a massive crowd, and you can see the moment when the wall comes crashing down, again in the below video<sup>5</sup>, right around the 1:47:00 mark. It's the kind of experiences like these that make live music extra special and provide meaningful memories beyond just listening to music and enjoying it, and it gives audiences the opportunity to become more involved with bands and artists that they like.

The live music experience definitely has different angles, especially now in the modern-day. You can attend a concert or a show, no matter the size, and watch and listen to music being played that you enjoy. You can also watch and listen to music videos and live videos and enjoy those, and the live album I believe is an underrated aspect of the live music experience.

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<sup>5</sup> Magica, "THE WALL", 1:47:00

The case with live albums is an interesting one as well. Many people really enjoy listening to live albums for many reasons, including more raw performance energy than in the studio, personnel changes and guest artists that aren't on the studio versions, solos and soloists that change every night, and also the feeling of the music not being edited and just mixed. All of these things are very apparent on the live albums from Dave Matthews Band, John Mayer, Snarky Puppy, and Cory Wong. Cory Wong even says that live albums of him and his band are better than the studio versions because they're more suited to playing live than in the studio.

There has also been a surge in popularity with live studio sessions, similar to the ones that Snarky Puppy has done, as well as NPR's TinyDesk, and other groups like Scary Pockets. I had the opportunity to attend the live studio sessions where Snarky Puppy was recording their latest album, "Empire Central", in Dallas, Texas last March, and it was surreal. Everyone in the audience got to wear headphones and hear what the musicians were hearing, including mixes and the instruments coming through the microphones, and I got to witness multiple takes of songs with different sections and solos, all with different lengths and instrumentations for the solos. Originally, Snarky Puppy started providing that opportunity to the public from a financial perspective. Not only did it work very well as an immersive fan experience, it provided an exceptional opportunity for crowdfunding and fan engagement for the band, further setting them apart

and making them unique. I think it was even more impactful for me because I'm a musician, because not only do I greatly admire the members of the band and their musical proficiency, but I also know more about the recording process, arranging processes, and technical things on instruments and playing than the average non-musician fan, so seeing them do their work in the studio like that was positively mind-blowing. I truly believe that having an audience attend a studio session like that is a good way to make studio recording more accessible and provide an inside look at all the processes involved in recording music, but it also changes the atmosphere and energy of the recording session and the energy and direction of the music. I know that I really wanted to provide this experience to people here in Valencia and make this experience my own as well.

## INSTRUMENT TECHNIQUE

The main reason I decided to attend Berklee Valencia as a Contemporary Performance masters student is obviously because I want to improve at playing my instrument. The drums have impacted my life in such an amazing way and have given me opportunities I never thought I would receive, all while introducing me to so many different people. Improving on my instrument was such an important aspect of this project and experience for me, and with all of the new music I had the opportunity to learn more about that I mentioned above, the opportunity for growth on my instrument was huge. Two big parts of drum instrumental technique are your hand/foot technique and your coordination between all four of your limbs. Learning new styles and patterns is a great way to improve both of these things simultaneously, while also teaching yourself something new to play and increasing your knowledge, abilities, and repertoire. Being completely immersed in all of the styles I mentioned above that I had no knowledge of before coming to Spain gave me so much opportunity to raise my musical ceiling and become more versatile and marketable as a drummer, but all of that also really improved my skills. Also since many of these styles have their unique time feels, rhythmic subdivisions, and their own unique swing, I learned what those are and got used to them while also learning the pattern and what to play when.

Another wonderful thing is that, specifically for drums, almost everything is adaptable and applicable for almost anything else. While studying Afro-Peruvian *festejo* in a 6/8 time signature, I can take the emphasized rhythmic phrasing on the second triplet partials of beats 3 and 4 and use that to play a more interesting and syncopated *Texas shuffle*, Or I could be playing in a straight time feel and apply that phrasing in a triplet drum fill transition into a new section of a song. The fusing of styles and rhythms and the adaptability of the drums gives me countless options for phrasing, articulation, and musicality in any style of music, especially because the nature of playing the drums is very improvisatory, often requiring the player to experiment and interact with what they're doing and with the people around them playing with them. Because of this, all of the added vocabulary and coordination I've gained I can use for countless other things beyond its original use, and can provide a unique sound, style, and influence to my playing.

These new concepts and fusion elements are well illustrated in this YouTube video where myself and Yoel play a medley of Michael Jackson songs rearranged as salsa music<sup>6</sup>. Not only do we play traditional salsa patterns and phrases, but we also use phrasing from other styles and take advantage of fusing styles to sometimes put heavier backbeats and more complex patterns over what's going on in the music.

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<sup>6</sup> Lafond, "Michael Jackson Medley"



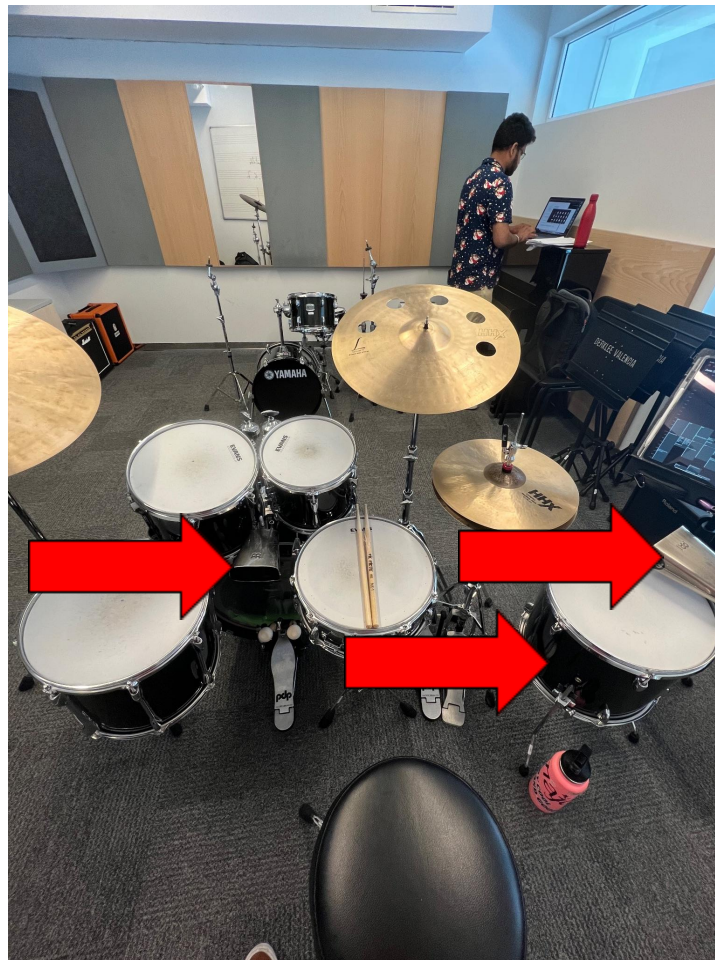
Another big factor in my instrumental technique enhancement through this project and this academic year has been the integration of new/more equipment to my standard repertoire. Since many of the South American styles require a *bombo leguero* to be played accurately and authentically, I've begun to utilize an extra deeper floor tom on my right side and to the right side of the hi-hat so I can play *chacarera*, *saya*, and *zoropo* more authentically, but I can also use it to play the Cuban cascara pattern on the shell of it, simulating a timbale pattern used in many styles of Cuban music.

Many of the South American, Caribbean, and Cuban styles, in addition to rock and funk and latin jazz, require the use of multiple cowbells to be played, especially if there is no percussionist playing with you. Through my studies, I've incorporated both the bongo bell, which is the bigger and lower-pitched one, and the mambo bell, the smaller and higher-pitched one, into my setup and regular playing style to accommodate for the needs of the music I play. The beautiful thing about that is that even if I'm not playing Cuban music at a particular time, I can use the cowbells and my knowledge and influences to use them in other styles of music, like playing the two simultaneous salsa cowbell patterns during the verse of a rock song and adding a backbeat snare to fit the rock style more.

The possibilities are endless, and that fascinates me. Adding congas to my right side has allowed me to play *bolero* and *guaguanco* fused with funk or jazz, and I can take up a wider spectrum of sounds and timbres with this wider range of added percussion equipment.

I've been very fortunate during my time at Berklee Valencia to have access to all different kinds of equipment to make expanding and differentiating my setup possible. I've been able to use electronics to modernize my setup, to change my playing, and to add effects and sounds I can't with an acoustic drum set. I've also been able to use new and different cymbals and percussion equipment to broaden my knowledge, comfortability, and choices when sitting behind the drum set. Below are some pictures and explanations behind some of the unique and fun setups I've had the pleasure to perform and practice on this year.

Shown below is the main practice setup I used for my entire time at Berklee Valencia, and features the added floor tom on the right of the hi-hat, as well as the two cowbells I have integrated into my playing, with the bigger one (bongo bell) mounted to the floor tom to my right, and the smaller one (mambo bell) attached to the hoop of the bass drum. With these additions I was able to practice all of the new material being given to me by Mariano and Yoel every week. Both cowbells, as well as the added floor tom, are highlighted by the red arrows below.



Below is a picture from the Berklee Valencia Un Lagos de Conciertos outdoor concert series of me performing with one of the bands I had the pleasure to be a part of this past year. Even though you can only see one, I have the two cowbells on this drum set that I would use on my practice setup so I could integrate some things that I was learning with Yoel into my playing. I also have a Roland SPD-SX sample pad to trigger electronic sounds, specifically an 808 drum machine soundscape like claps and snaps. All the way on the right I also added a big china cymbal for the bigger impacts of the set.



Below is a picture of the drum setup from this year's Berklee Valencia commencement concert, La Nit de Berklee 2023, held in the main auditorium of the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia. We played music from eastern Europe and the middle east with the group that I was in, so I needed the bigger floor tom all the way to the left to simulate some of the bigger traditional drums they use in those styles of music. It was also a very high energy set, so I used an extra crash cymbal right in front of me, and also had the bigger china cymbal all the way to my left.



Below is a picture of my setup for the Berklee a Les Arts production of 'The Kiss', which required a hybrid electronic/acoustic kit for the soundscape and style we wanted to achieve.



## CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Through this project I've been able to work closely with my friends and colleagues to put together two live studio sessions and get ready for the upcoming third one. I worked with Michael Ventura during the composition and arranging process, then we brought it into rehearsals with each group of musicians and got it ready for the studio, where I then worked with the teams I assembled to make sure everything ran smoothly. Creative collaboration has been such an important part of my musical journey, especially as a drummer, and this was no different. I would come up with what kind of styles and influences I wanted for each track and we would go over them, and then we would establish the drum part for each song first, and then we would brainstorm about what kind of instrumentation we wanted. After determining the instrumentation and the musicians, we would come up with parts and experiment with arrangement ideas, vamps, and solo sections. After this we would finalize it and send it to the musicians and schedule rehearsals.

It was also quite a collaborative process with my producer and engineer, because we would have pre-production meetings before each session and establish plans and equipment and timing. Then the day of each session we would get to the studio very early and get everything ready and prepared. Even

though I had the opportunity to act a bit more in a producer role than I previously have before, my producer Grace Wingler was also very helpful in providing her guidance, feedback, and support during each session.

Following each session, I would meet with my producer and engineer for mixing. The way we approached mixing was very simple since we wanted to preserve the live aspect of these recordings, so we didn't put any heavy effects on anything, and a majority of the process was EQing microphones and balancing levels between instruments and microphones. We also used the same types and amounts of compression and EQ on the drums for a consistent and modern sound. Since we had the live room mic in there for the audience, we also used some audience reactions throughout the pieces to keep the live music feeling authentic and true to the idea and premise of the project.

The end result is a trilogy of songs from these live recording sessions, with the first one being entitled "Here I Stand", followed by the second song "Street Race in Cabanyal", and ends with the third song "It Don't Matter". These tracks have their corresponding studio videos, behind the scenes videos, and drum cams.



## RECORDING EXPERIENCE

I wanted these studio sessions to be very diverse stylistically and to require many different things for each session, which I think I achieved pretty well. The first song, "Here I Stand", is a slower hip-hop/R&B style with very long phrasing and long solos with time and space to develop, inspired by Robert Glasper and R+R=NOW, which showcased Seth Chan on the electric violin with a pedalboard, as well as Felipe Ribeiro on an acoustic grand piano, as well as two electric Nord keyboards, and a Moog bass keyboard. In the trio format we all had enough space to really stretch out, experiment and develop everything we played.

The second song, "Street Race in Cabanyal", is inspired by Domi & JD Beck, Jojo Mayer, and Nerve, and is a faster and more syncopated odd-time drum and bass/breakbeat style. It featured Michael Ventura on saxophone, Imam Hamdani on electric guitar, Angi Moya on acoustic violin, Matt Carson on bass, and Felipe Ribeiro on electric keyboards. The nature of this song was totally different, requiring high energy and accuracy in everything we played. It also required a lot more notes and subdivisions to be played by me since it's fast, odd-time drum and bass, so the playing style for me was totally different than the

first session and required different skills during the rehearsal and recording processes.

The third song, “It Don’t Matter”, is a fusion of the DC GoGo and fusion styles, and was inspired by the Junkyard Band, Chuck Brown, and Snarky Puppy. This one was not only slower than the second song, but it was much more groovy and swingy, and less subdivided and technical. It featured Michael Ventura on voice, Ahko Mine on electric guitar, Imam Hamdani on electric guitar, Rachel Groves on harp with a pedalboard, Matt Carson on electric bass and Moog bass, and Felipe Ribeiro on electric keyboards. This song also featured the biggest drum setup yet, and included electronics like all of the other songs, usually in the solo sections. Another cool feature of this song and style from my point of view as the drummer is that I had to incorporate elements of auxiliary percussion into my drum set playing. DC Gogo and a lot of big fusion artists like Snarky Puppy usually have at least one percussionist to add elements and colors to the music, so I incorporated different cowbells, jam blocks, and effects into my playing to simulate that sound. Even though it’s a bit slower and less syncopated than the second song, this one still required lots of energy that I had to transmit through the heavy groove instead of quick subdivisions.

This year as a whole has given me a ton of recording experience that I'm very grateful for, and this project added to that, but with the live audience twist as well. It was nice to pair all of the things in the studio I've been learning with my experience playing live for audiences. Myself and the production team would get to the studio early and I would set up the drums while they prepared the computers and the session, then we would place microphones on the drums and gain-stage/line-check. I'd also have a few people setting up for the other instruments. Due to the live nature of the project, we usually opted to have as many people in the live room as possible, regardless of microphone bleed since it's the live music concept that we're going for. This meant that most instruments that could run a DI (direct input) did so they could all be together in the live room, such as guitar, bass, synthesizers, keyboards, harp, and electric violin. With these electric instruments running DI, therefore making no audible sound in the live room, it was easy to mic one or two acoustic instruments in the live room and have them be in there as well, such as acoustic violin, grand piano, and saxophone. Also, with the way that the studio is set up, myself being in the isolated drum booth still gave me a great vantage point where I could see everything and everyone and be able to react to my bands, as well as cue them and provide energy.

Below is a picture of the drum setup from the third live session, for the song “It Don’t Matter”. This featured the biggest setup of the three sessions, and included a Roland SPD-SX Pro sample pad, three cowbells, a jam block, and two snare drums. Since it was high-energy DC GoGo fusion, I had the cowbells and jam block so I was able to play authentic GoGo grooves, fills, and patterns. For all three of my live sessions, I primarily used the sample pad for electronic drum sounds during solos, which allowed me to become more comfortable with electronics like that, and also gave the solos a different feeling than the rest of the song. Like with most fusion music, multiple snare drums were used so I was able to switch between them depending on the section of the song we were in. Also, I had the large floor tom to the right of my hi-hat, underneath the sample pad, because throughout the year I had been getting very comfortable with the addition of this new drum there.



Apart from the drum setup, you can see through the isolated booth glass doors the common setup for these three live studio sessions, with the audience chairs and headphones being set up to my left, facing the other musicians in the session. The musicians would normally be positioned in an arc around the right side of the room from my perspective in the drum booth. That way I can see the audience and interact with them, but I can also interact with the musicians during the recording process.

For these sessions, the setup time would almost always take longer than we expected, but thankfully each studio session was long enough where that didn't turn into an issue. Also, the addition of the audience was quite a new and interesting experience for everyone involved. Not only did it require extra and special setup, but we took into account the number of takes we would do, incorporated breaks for the production team, musicians, and audience members, and also recorded differently. A microphone was always placed in the live room for the specific purpose of capturing the audience's reaction to the music, and it sometimes added an interesting color to the sound of any acoustic instruments being recorded in the live room since it would pick up some of their sound. Also, since this project is based on the premise of live music, we only did full takes on the songs, with no punches and no comping during the session or in post-production/mixing. This gives the audience a more enjoyable and full live music experience, but also changes the recording session for the musicians,

which I thought was very interesting and fun. Having the audience there watching you track entire songs has such a different energy to it than if you're only in the studio with the engineers and musicians. There's an added pressure to perform your best, especially since there aren't any punches and no comping, and with the audience there watching, it feels simultaneously like a recording and a concert, which combines both of my worlds and feels really special.

As mentioned before, after the tracking for each session is completed, I meet with my producer and engineer to listen through everything and choose the take we're going to go with as the final. Then we do any small edits that may be needed, and then we go through the mixing process. Most of the same effects and plug-ins are used on the drums to have a cohesive sound throughout this trilogy of songs, but since the instrumentation differs song to song, it does take a while to balance the levels of everything and to test out and decide which effects and plug-ins we will end up using.

## DISSEMINATION/PROMOTION

Now with the huge task of getting all of this media and entertainment out to the public. Since I have big aspirations of being a successful session and touring musician, effective promotion and dissemination of this project has the potential to greatly help my career and to open up opportunities for me, as well as getting myself and my friends exposure for the work that we did. The main tangible results from these sessions and this project will be the three songs released on digital streaming platforms, the three official videos from the live sessions, behind the scenes videos from each session, including a full drum cam of each song, and smaller videos and clips for promotion on social media.

The three songs will be released on all major digital streaming platforms under Michael Ventura, because he's the main composer of these songs, but due to my work in a co-producer/co-arranger role, as well as me being the one who completely organized and put together this whole project, I will be listed as a main collaborator on all three tracks. This presents opportunities for promotion for the tracks on these big platforms, playlisting, and utilizing other opportunities like sync deals for further exposure.

Another main deliverable from each session is its corresponding video. These videos are very well done and are of a very high quality and feature the best mix of the track, behind the scenes looks at each session, and all of the musicians performing the songs. These are so important, especially for this specific project, because I wanted to give people something more than just a track to listen to, and these videos provide a look into the recording session, as well as clear views of the musicians playing the music, just like many of the videos and sessions that have inspired me. These will be released on YouTube due to the extremely wide audience and general accessibility of the platform, as well as it being the most popular platform to release them on.

I also captured behind the scenes footage from the sessions that I can use for promotional purposes both before and after the release of each track and video. Especially nowadays, people really enjoy being more involved with art than at a baseline level, and audience members and fans really enjoy content that brings them closer to artists that they like. Also, considering most people don't know what happens behind the scenes in sessions like these, this content can be used educationally as well. In addition to the full official studio videos, I also captured drum cam footage of each song, where you can see exactly what I play for each track from each session. Not only is it behind the scenes content, it gives me more promotional material for my more drum-oriented following and will



hopefully encourage people to watch the studio videos and listen to the track on streaming platforms.

Additionally, since social media is such an important part of not only our modern day lives, but the modern day music industry, I'll be utilizing smaller video clips, pictures, and other promotional content to engage interest on social media. Especially since social media makes things so easily and quickly accessible, putting effort into social media promotion has the potential to greatly increase the success and reach of this project to all sorts of audiences. Especially since it's such a multi-cultural and diverse project, I believe I can really take advantage of social media promotion to gauge lots of interest for each track, studio video, and drum cam.

## 6)Final Conclusions/Reflections

Having completed this project and reflecting back on everything accomplished so far, I think I definitely accomplished what I wanted to achieve with the project. I was able to take my influences, the knowledge I've been gaining from my amazingly talented professors, use the resources available to me here at Berklee Valencia, and work with many of my talented friends and colleagues to put together my best attempt at the live studio sessions that have had such a huge influence on my playing and on my artistry. It was very eye-opening how many important details go into big sessions like these, and it was an absolute pleasure getting to make a lot of big decisions for something like this that I can call my own. I've never had huge aspirations to be a bandleader or frontman, and I really don't feel like this project changed that, but it was very nice and fulfilling to do something like this where I was one of the leaders and decision-makers.

This project was originally planned as a big outdoor concert that would feature more musical selections and more musicians with at least one live studio session as a part of the whole live music package, but after scheduling, rehearsing, applying, and receiving a date for the outdoor venue at Berklee

Valencia, the show got canceled due to rain, and there was no rain date scheduled or considered, so all of the effort and work put into the preparation for that show went out the window. However, I was able to pivot the project a little bit and put much more stock into these live studio sessions and make them the focal point of the entire project, and I feel like the themes, messages, and experiences still come across through the sessions without the concert also being an element of the project anymore.

There were also many unexpected things that came about as a result of this project. I had the opportunity to step in and assume a role as a producer more than I ever have before, making important decisions for both the music and for the logistical planning and running of each session. Since a majority of the sessions and other things that I play on aren't necessarily my own personal project, it was interesting and nice to take some more initiative and responsibility for this project than just being a session musician for something. I can also use the knowledge I've gained in doing this for my future career as an aspiring session and touring musician.

I also was forced to be more of a bandleader than I really ever have before. I've led bands and sessions before, but it's not something I do very often or have really had any overwhelming interest in doing. However, I know how important it is to be able to do that, and also it's a skill and experience that I can

use for the future when I inevitably assume some sort of leadership position for another musical project. Also, as an aspiring session and touring musician, it's very important to know about how bandleading works and all of the things that come with it.

### 6.1: Next Steps/Professional Plan

My ultimate career goal has always been to play drums in the biggest and best capacity I can. I've always wanted to tour stadiums and work with the biggest artists and make lots of music, and of course this project will help me turn those dreams into a reality. I'll be able to use this project to promote myself as a musician through my website, social media, streaming platforms, and YouTube, which will grow my audience and can help me get future gigs. The videos and audio will be made publicly available for everyone to enjoy, and it will be very high-quality material that people can check out, especially if they want to see me playing drums in case they audition me or want to see any examples of my work. The nature of this project also allows it to be easily continued, because of course I plan on being a part of many more recording sessions, both live and not, all of which I can use to promote myself and my playing.

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