

Final Approved Project
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DIY--A Documentary Film

A Final Project Proposal for the SDM Committee

Documentary Studies

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Background Information

As a documentary studies major, much of my education at Skidmore has been about observing and analyzing the world around me. Since my first days on campus I have been exposed to a variety of cultures present throughout the community. During my first night of orientation, I met another first-year student who told me that one of his hobbies was producing music. I assumed that he was some kind of musician; however, this was not the case. He led me into his room, opened his computer, and showed me an application, called FL Studio, with which he was able to create songs using pre-recorded sounds and instruments. He then pulled up a website called Soundcloud. He described it as an online interface for people to publish their songs for the world to hear. It appeared to be the auditory equivalent of Instagram. He told me that there were millions of these “do it yourself” (DIY) music producers on Soundcloud, who were using the site as a means of getting heard by the public and, possibly, professional music producers.

That acquaintance who introduced me to DIY music production is now my housemate. Every day I hear him in his room, producing music in his homemade recording studio. Over the years I have met at least twenty other students who consider themselves DIY musicians. Some of them produce, some DJ, some sing or rap, and all of them have something in common—they all use Soundcloud.

Though introduced only ten years ago, Soundcloud has drastically changed modern music. According to a 2013 estimate by Soundcloud CEO Alexander Ljung, the service had grown to more than twenty million users worldwide, and was adding over

one-and-a-half million users per month.¹ Now, musical artists do not need to have access to professional studios. Soundcloud, along with online sound recording and mixing applications, has made it possible for people to engage with music production at an amateur level, and have their creations heard by millions of other users.²

Hip-hop artist Post Malone is an example of a famous musician who owes his career to Soundcloud. Malone was discovered after one of his songs on Soundcloud received over 10 million hits and then toured the country with Justin Bieber.³ Another example is hip-hop artist, Lil Yachty, who, until a few years ago, was an average teen, rapping in his mother's basement in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2015, one of his songs on Soundcloud was used in a viral comedy video, and now Lil Yachty has an international following of millions of people. Florida's XXXtentacion's song "Look at Me" has received over 76 million streams through Soundcloud alone in the last year.⁴ He, along with fellow DIY Florida artists like Lil Pump, Ski Mask the Slump God, Smokepurpp, and WifisFuneral have practically become hip hop icons overnight.⁵

Proposed Project

For my self-determined major capstone project I plan to create a documentary film about this new development in music production and the local Skidmore artists who take part in it. I will examine, from a variety of standpoints, how DIY music and Soundcloud have influenced music production in the Skidmore community. I will talk to

¹ Pham, Alex. "Rising Cloud." 2013.

² Turner, David. "Look At Me!: The Noisy, Blown-Out SoundCloud Revolution Redefining Rap." 2017.

³ Staple, Justin. *From SoundCloud to Success with Post Malone*. 2017.

⁴ Turner, David. "Look At Me!: The Noisy, Blown-Out SoundCloud Revolution Redefining Rap." 2017.

⁵ Ibid.

the individual artists to get their opinions about the power of Soundcloud and DIY production to widely disseminate their music to the public, and find out how they believe this new age of technology has affected modern music. The final product will be a short-form documentary film, roughly 15-20 minutes in length.

Methodology

The process of creating the film will consist of many steps. First, I plan to conduct filmed interviews with five to ten local DIY music artists at Skidmore about their experiences with, and knowledge of, DIY music production. I have already received confirmation from five artists, who are willing to be interviewed and are excited to share what they know with me. Through mutual friends and Facebook, I have acquired contact information for additional Skidmore artists.

I also plan to reach out to a Saratoga-based professional music producer, whom I know through a Skidmore music professor, to get his thoughts about how DIY production has affected his industry.

My Skidmore education has thoroughly prepared me for these interviews. I have taken courses such as Documentary Film Production, Interviewing Musicians, and Video Ethnography, all of which have taught me about the process of creating release forms, getting subject consent, conducting proper interviews, and more.

Throughout my time at Skidmore, I have taken many film production courses that will help me complete this project. Through these courses I have learned how to light an interview, use a camera, record audio, shoot B-roll, and edit everything into a cohesive

piece. I have spent the last two years making documentary films, conducting interviews (both in and out of Skidmore), shooting and editing videos for Skidmore's Communications Office, and doing freelance videography, all of which have prepared me for completing this project.

In terms of technology and resources, I am well prepared to take on this project. I will be shooting my film using a Canon C100 MKII Cinema Camera, which I own. I have roughly a year and a half of experience with this particular camera, and I am confident that it is the right choice for my project. I am equipped with lenses, a microphone, rig accessories, and more, which will make it easy to get the shots I need. I will be editing everything together with Adobe Premiere Pro, which I have been using for over two years.

I have spoken to Mary Hoehn, the Assistant Director for the Office of Sponsored Research at Skidmore, and she has concluded that I will not require Institutional Review Board approval for my project. The content of my film does not contain any sensitive material, nor does it have the potential to harm the subjects in any way. I will, however, be using a model release form that will specify the exact parameters of my project. The form is attached below.

Closing

I am excited to undertake this project, which will combine all of the skills I have learned in my self-determined major of documentary studies. Completing this major has confirmed my desire to work behind a camera, either creating my own films or serving

as director of photography for other filmmakers. This project will take me one step further toward reaching this goal.

Timeline

November - December: Write & finalize documentary treatment

December: Schedule interviews with participants

December - January: Conduct 1 - 2 interviews over winter break

January - February: Conduct remaining interviews & gather b-roll footage

March - April: Assemble footage into a cohesive and meaningful documentary film

References

1. Pham, Alex. "Rising Cloud." *Billboard*, vol. 125, no. 29, 2013, p. 34.
2. Turner, David. "Look At Me!: The Noisy, Blown-Out SoundCloud Revolution Redefining Rap." *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 2017.
3. Staple, Justin. *From SoundCloud to Success with Post Malone*. Noisey, VICE, 2017.

PARTICIPANT RELEASE FOR MAKINGS OF DIY

I authorize XXXXXXXX to make use of my appearance and performance in the film or video production tentatively titled **DIY**.

I understand that XXXX is relying on this release from me to permit me to appear on the production. I understand that I am to receive no compensation for my appearance or performance or the rights granted herein, or from any use of the production or any ancillary, spin-off, or derivative works made therefrom. I further represent that any statements made by me during my appearance are true, to the best of my knowledge, and will not violate or infringe upon the rights of any third party.

XXXX shall have complete ownership of the production, including copyright in my appearance, statements, performances and other contributions (all of which shall be “works made for hire” for copyright purposes) and shall have the perpetual and exclusive right to make such use of the same as it wishes, including (but not limited to) the rights of broadcast, transmission, performance, display, reproduction and distribution in all media of whatever kind, including distribution of the program by any cable, microwave, satellite, and other systems carrying or capable of receiving the broadcast signal, whether now known or hereafter devised, throughout the world and universe, forever, and the right to create, reproduce, perform, display and distribute derivative works thereof and to use the same in other programs dealing with any topic and in any media or form (including without limitation

print, video and audio), whether for profit or non-profit purposes and including publicity and promotional uses.

I give XXXX the right to tape and photograph me, use my name, biographical material, voice, likeness, and conversation in the production, and to edit and/or publicize the production and derivative works thereof. I understand that XXXX has no obligation to complete the production, nor to give me credit therein.

ACCEPTED AND AGREED TO:

By Participant:_____

(Parent or guardian must sign for a minor)

Print:_____

Address_____

Date:_____

Phone:_____

E-Mail:_____

Annotated Bibliography

Ascher, Steven, and Edward Pincus. *The Filmmaker's Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age*. 4th ed., Plume, 2013.

This book is widely acknowledged as the bible of video and film production. The authors include techniques for making features, documentaries, experimental films, and more. They discuss shooting and editing, funding, producing, marketing, and distribution. This book will be my primary guide through this process. It covers a wide variety of film-related topics, all of which will come into play at some point during my creative process.

Bernard, Sheila Curran. *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*. 4th ed., Focal Press, 2016.

This practical guide reveals how today's top filmmakers bring the tools of narrative cinema to the world of nonfiction film. The book offers practical advice for producers, directors, editors, cinematographers, writers, and others seeking to make ethical and effective films.

Grindon, Leger. "Q & A: Poetics of the Documentary Film Interview." *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television*, no. 60, 2007, pp. 4-12.

This article discusses the evolution and prevalence of interviews in contemporary documentary filmmaking. The author makes the claim that, in modern documentary practice, the interview can be considered one of the more important elements of any film project, as it has the potential to dictate the flow of the entire film. In the context of my project, this article will provide me with interview theory and application, which will help to guide me when conducting my own interviews.

Lee, M., B.A., M.A. "Cinematography." *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Science*, 2017.

Cinematography is the science behind the techniques involved in creating a motion picture, as well as the practical application of those techniques. Basic cinematographic tools include film and video cameras; lenses, filters, and film stock; the equipment involved with artificially lighting a set; the machinery used to mount and transport cameras and control their angles and movements; and a wide variety of computerized special effects that can be created or integrated into the motion picture in the post-production stage.

Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. 2nd ed., Indiana University Press, 2010.

Nichols is considered by many to be a documentary expert. His introductory book covers many basic premises of documentary and uses real-life examples as a means of

applying key concepts. I have used this book in every MDOCS class I have taken at Skidmore, and I will refer to it when it comes to thinking about which documentary style I wish to use for my project.

Pham, Alex. "Rising Cloud." *Billboard*, vol. 125, no. 29, 2013, p. 34.

This article focuses on founder and chief executive officer of SoundCloud, Alexander Ljung, on topics including SoundCloud's continued growth, investments, website, and impact on mainstream music streaming. The content of this article is essentially the basis of my project.

Rabiger, Michael. *Directing the Documentary*. 6th ed., Focal Press, 2015.

This book covers fundamental to advanced elements of directing a documentary film. It includes dozens of projects, examples, practical exercises, and thought-provoking questions, and provides best practices for researching and honing your documentary idea, developing a crew, guiding the story, and more. I will refer to the examples in this book when making decisions about planning my shoots and the ways in which I will maintain control of my story.

Richards, John. "Beyond DIY in Electronic Music." *Organised Sound*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2013, pp. 274–281.

In electronic music Doing-it-together (DIT) and the idea of community and shared experiences are at the root of DIY practice. Through the sharing of information online, the DIY community has grown in numbers and become more knowledgeable and experienced.

Shrum, Wesley, and Gregory Scott. *Video Ethnography In Practice: Planning, Shooting, and Editing for Social Analysis*. SAGE, 2017.

This book covers the basic techniques of creating a video that documents human culture and behavior, with true examples of the process of videography throughout. This text shows how new technologies such as smartphones, video editing software, and YouTube have brought video ethnography within reach of students in a conventional classroom framework. It offers step-by-step instructions for shooting and editing, as well as strategies for how to film using a video ethnography approach.

Staple, Justin. *From SoundCloud to Success with Post Malone*. Noisey, VICE, 2017.

This is a short documentary produced by Noisey, which is a sub-channel of VICELAND productions. This piece focuses on rap artist Post Malone, and examines his rise from SoundCloud to superstar. I will be using this piece, and others like it, as a reference in shaping my final piece.

Turner, David. "Look At Me!: The Noisy, Blown-Out SoundCloud Revolution Redefining Rap." *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 2017.

This Rolling Stone article discusses the rise of current SoundCloud (DIY) rappers and their integration into mainstream music. Many of these artists began their careers by producing and recording music in their basements, and now their songs are streamed by millions of people. Their stories convey the power of new technology, SoundCloud, and the momentum of the DIY music production, and are all integral to my capstone topic.

Walzer, Daniel A. "Independent Music Production: How Individuality, Technology and Creative Entrepreneurship Influence Contemporary Music Industry Practices." *Creative Industries Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2017, pp. 21-39.

The author of this piece examines some of the multifaceted cultural, ideological, technical, and entrepreneurial factors contributing to a significant evolution in do it yourself (DIY) music production and distribution. He discusses the rise of this independent "recording class," anticipates changes in the contemporary music industry, and offers new production and cooperative business models.

