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PEOPLE PROJECT

Combining Music and Visual Art to create a Multimedia Package for today's music industry.

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College Scholars Senior Project 2007

Mentors: Donald Brown, Eric Smith, and Mark Boling

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Abstract

The People Project is a complete work combining music, graphic design and electronic media elements. The music is composed and arranged for piano, upright/electric bass and drums, emphasized stylistically by Jazz, Latin, Gospel and Pop elements. For the most part you will hear my own compositions including two remarkable Michael Jackson songs and one from Sonny Clark. The graphic design and electronic media part is focused on the CD, designing the booklet, a commercial website with live recorded video footage, interviews with the mentors and an integrated online merchandise shop. The People Project ties together music and visual art as a commercial product for today's music industry.

People Project Name

The name, People Project, evolved from a long conversation with Donald Brown about what inspires us musicians the most. Where do we find our creative motivation to compose? Is it nature with its landscape, the mountains or maybe the country with its people? For me it was the people that I met here in Knoxville and of course UT. I was very much involved in black communities and their musicianship, playing for the church service every Sunday at a local Black Baptist Church in town. I met great people, not only musicians, but people in general that inspired me. And then also people at UT that encouraged, helped and trusted me with the path I was taking. You would never think sometimes that most of what we do comes from our friends, family and people in general.

Donald Brown, my piano teacher, inspired me by answering all the questions I had when it came to Jazz. He actually pushed the buttons for the idea to work on Michael Jackson tunes. He captures for me the true passion as a teacher and musician. I'm glad that I chose a teacher way over my level, which caused me to practice seriously. His experience in any music genre that I was looking for gave me hope of being able to do this project. Eric Smith, my mentor in Electronic Media and Design, definitely was the most open and knowledgeable person I could ever find when it comes to Media related questions and design ideas. He would listen to my ideas and always tried to enhance them by little things, like moving pictures or fonts in the right direction and explaining why. I just love to work with people like that. All these great people made the People Project happen, by inspiring me and to name it that way.

Early Influence

Music

My influences in music, while growing up in Germany, exposed me to a variety of mostly European music with a touch of pop music from the US by radio. Listening to the Top 40 Charts every weekend was a habit during my time as a teenager, looking back, I see that the top 5 numbers were mostly American songs. My parents had no particular interest in other language performing artists. They loved their traditional German folklore and therefore I was forced to listen to my parents' music too. At the beginning of taking piano lessons I approached the tradition of Baroque, Classic, Romantic and the modern world. It gave me a better understanding of what I was listening to and explained the harmony, theory and composition questions that I always asked myself.

After I graduated from High School, I started playing for a Black American Baptist Church in my hometown of Mannheim, Germany. Here I explored the freedom of Rhythm & Blues, Call and Response and more importantly, listen to something my ear wasn't used to hearing; Gospel music is very closely related to the Blues and Jazz. I started to like the music; especially knowing that every Sunday the music would change and I always knew it would be a challenge to accompany the choir and the congregation by mostly improvisation, since they didn't have any music sheets. After I worked with the church for about 4 years I decided to come to the US to study Jazz at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, knowing that I had a lot work ahead of me, to learn this new art form.

Electronic Media

Electronic Media, my second area of interest, was something I loved to do since going to High School in Germany. We had the option to choose majors and since music wasn't available I decided to go with Multimedia/Graphic Design. It was my introduction to the Internet and the computer, since I never had one. I enjoyed learning the HTML code, as basic language to design websites and also programs like Turbo Pascal and Visual Basic. That also included pixel and vector applications like Photoshop 3.0 and Illustrator 1.0. At that time, nobody knew that these programs would one day become the most important design applications for the media industry. I knew I would benefit from them later on. On the other hand I enjoyed colors. I learned the difference about RGB and CMYK as a base for print publishing and understood what is needed and when. I also explored fonts by actually designing my own fonts. First by hand on a simple paper, later scanned into the computer and than vectorized in Illustrator, which was and still is a major vector-oriented desktop publishing software today.

Our major also focused on sound and video. I was taught the basics about sample formats, sound recording, and sound editing on a Mac using programs like Peak and Logic in their early stage of course. Here I started to enjoy the benefit of knowing music and sound from my piano lessons, which are now useful. Last, but not least, I approached the video area by creating simple animations with video footage that we made on our own and transferred to a PC for editing. This area developed really fast and therefore changed very often with new video formats, which made it hard to keep track of. Being an electronic Geek, I never had a problem to keep up with new gadgets and formats available to enhance my skills to always be on the top of possibilities.

Research – Music

When I started my research about my Thesis Project I was thinking about incorporating everything I learned here at UT when it comes to musical styles from the Jazz genre. My undergrad program in Jazz would take me from the Blues to the modern sounds of McCoy Tyner and Chick Corea, which was exactly what I wanted to do; capture the sound of all these masters through my performance. It was important to me that the listener would have the choice to find the particular genre that he liked. On the other hand I wanted to show that Adrian Zalten not only could play the Blues but also some Latin and modern sounds of Jazz. Variety was what I was looking for. Being able to enjoy and execute as many styles as possible was my goal of this Project. It was important to me that a good pianist should have the knowledge about the world of music on his instrument, unlike others that believe only classical music would be the key to success.

Michael Jackson Songs

As I arrived here at UT I had a chance to buy a Michael Jackson CD, the "*Best Of Michael Jackson*". Donald Brown always emphasized in his solo class things to know about pop music and its relationship to Jazz. I was fascinated about the fact that Jazz elements were everywhere, especially in Michael Jackson's music. For example, taking the song, "Shake the body to the ground", particularly the bass intro, and compare it to "All Blues," by Miles Davis. The bass intro in Jackson's song definitely is derived or developed from the bass line of "All Blues." Its choice of notes is very close.

Michael Jackson's music is, for me, based on simplicity, groove and compositional standpoint. By that I mean taking one chord for 16 measures and make it happen through variations of sound, knowing what has to play when and what needs to stop at the right time. It will go on for one or two minutes but retains its power to keep grooving. The compositions are simple, some of them follow the AABA or ABAC form but create an ongoing never boring recurring beat that wants you to keep dancing until tomorrow morning. For me, he invented a new music genre, or let's say he was one of the first ones that defined a new complete Pop culture. His style of dancing, particularly the Moonwalk, which he adapted from Marcel Marceau, a French artist, just enhanced his popularity and lead to the remarkable music videos like "Thriller" in 1982. I was so overwhelmed by listening on and on and wanted to take this music as a learning process to test my skills as an arranger, doing something that maybe no one else thought to do.

Adrian Zalten Compositions

My work on the College Scholars Senior Thesis project also opened up my own ideas for compositions. I was inspired by the music of Michael Jackson but also felt like that I wanted to include some of my own compositions to complete it. I had this feeling that people should know or hear what I compose or what else I can do. I have to say all my compositions did not really need research. All of them happened during either practice on the piano or a music class here at UT.

I am an artist who is easily inspired by what surrounds me. I didn't really spend time thinking about it; it just happens and from there you go. It sometimes was a single note, or order of notes, that I played accidentally, but gave me the key to a great start of a chorus or a bridge. It is like the moment you sit and have a coffee and there is the idea for a problem that comes into your head and you know this is it. From a musical standpoint it's a melody that I start to whistle and suddenly realize that I never heard that before and run to the piano thinking "Whoa! That sounds great." These are the moments that make me develop great music and do not work on schedule. On the other hand I listened to a lot of music, especially Bebop and Modern Jazz, where Donald Brown always made sure I had something for the week to listen to. I know that I had to develop my ears for this music as well as learn a new language from the ground up. The listening part was very important.

Research – Design

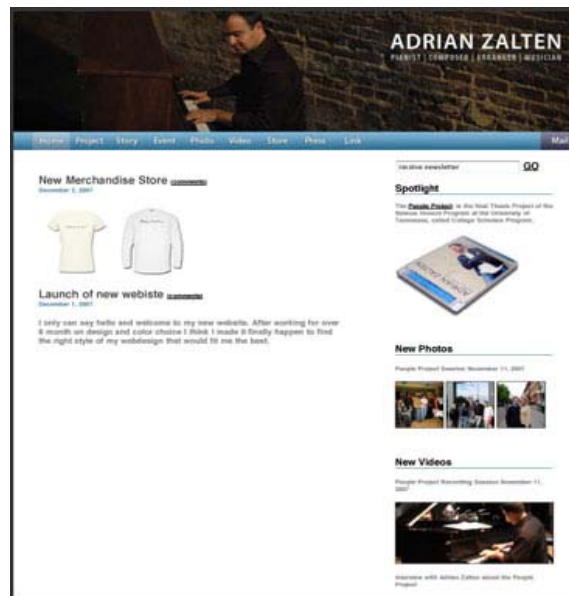
According to what we see today, web-design is changing almost every year and is heavily influenced by the media, music and fashion. We used the Internet to look up something, information first of all and maybe some music and videos occasionally. We called that Web 1.0. Well, of course it changed today into Web 2.0 and has another aspect than just finding information. The main idea we use the Internet today is to exchange ideas, thoughts and even more. We like to share our experience and want to engage with other people. So we invented the Blog around 2005, which allows you to post information and also to allow others to leave a comment. I decided to build my own website according to a Blog template that I designed on my own. All pages will have a Blog structure and will allow posting a comment on my thoughts, videos, pictures and shows. From that I will get a feeling about my audience and give them the opportunity to be a part of my music or inspiration for my next project.

Flash vs. HTML

I know a lot about HTML and not really much about Flash, but the future trend is Flash. So I thought about designing it entirely in Flash, because everybody, especially artists, have their websites built in Flash today. I love interaction on the screen, which is a major part of today's websites. However, there was a problem with the maintenance. To update a website I have to download the entire Flash site, make my changes and upload the entire website again to the server. I knew that this would take time and I didn't like that. For example, having a lot of pictures, movies and sound files would increase the time to download it, work on it and then send it back. You have to look into the future. Later on, I will have a lot of these things on my website which will cause a lot of traffic and time in maintaining it. Another factor is also the search result, since search engines cannot read the content of a Flash file, but can read the information that is written in HTML code, which provide better search results about the Artist. This allows one to find the website faster in Google or Yahoo.

Structure

For the website structure, I was looking to have “less is more” ideal. It should be based on a 900x800 pixel frame, centered and divided into three sections. The top table would have a picture and text that will support the topic or theme of the page. The middle table would have a picture and text that will support the topic or theme of the page. The middle table would have the navigation buttons that always will look the same and would make the navigation intuitive for the user. And last, the bottom table, largest of all three, would focus on text, pictures, movies and message board.



Colors

For the color choice of my CD and website, I wasn't really worried about at all. I took a couple pictures at the Golden Roast Café on a Saturday morning with Eric and looked at them on the computer. I went for a single shot that he made against the wall that triggered my idea for the CD Cover booklet. I chose a light blue color, grey and the crème color for the theme of the CD package. That also continued with the website. My

interest was to keep the whole product clean, serious but also laid back.

CD Case

Let's look at the typical CD case that is commonly available. I had many options to choose from; the most common being a paper case, a single jewel or single slim jewel case, I wanted to be different. I was looking for something that looked good, but didn't require a lot of work. I searched the internet and could not really find many other options about CD packaging. Finally I found one company that took the CD custom packaging process further than I could imagine. The company is called Jewelboxing and maybe found at www.jewelboxing.com. This company really does amazing things with CD cases. They offer perforated and scored paper inserts, tray liners and disc labels that are ready to print. All you have to do is to design the booklet and the tray, using Photoshop or Illustrator. The effort is minimal and the result looks great. Even the design of the plastic case itself is different than a regular case. The company redesigned the case by rounding the corners of the case, which makes it sturdier than other cases. It also gives it a modern look and it stands out on any CD shelf.



The Music

Bad – Michael Jackson

This song moved me into the Latin American music section. I have been doing Latin-comps exercises when I was working on those songs, trying to play the original tune “Bad.” I recorded the bass line of the song and just let it play for a minute or two while I was figuring out a different voicing for my arrangement. I played a Latin-vamp over the G minor chord progression and it actually fit with the bass-line. At first I was surprised because I thought I made a mistake, but I realized that I didn’t. That step made this song work. Everything after that evolved without complications.

The melody follows the original composition slightly altered to fit the rhythm. The chords vamp over the G chord as basic structure. The Form of the song itself is pretty simple. It has two sections A and B with the order of A-A-B-B. Traditionally, you follow the form during the solos as each musician performs his solo. However, I decided to not have a form at that moment. That means that we don't know what will happen during the solos. Everything is captured in the moment, when each musician is listening to the rest of the trio. Each time we perform the song, our solo ideas could change entirely and will be based on the mood we are in, the feel on stage and the audience itself. The main inspiration for this arranging concept came from Chucho Valdes with the Song “La Comparsa” from his album “New Conceptions”.

Shake the body – Michael Jackson

Here, too, we have a bass line that drives the song. I realized that most good music has a strong or remarkable bass intro that captures the attention of the listener. My appreciation for the upright bass has risen since I was never really exposed to it earlier. Here, I was inspired by the bass and decided to do it as well. The bass intro, as in the original song, starts off for 8 bars and sets the mood for the drums and the piano to come in. The melody is played in the block chord style pioneered by Milt Buckner and later mastered by Oscar Peterson. It creates a powerful sound by playing an octave with the chord being played within the octave. The melody is doubled in the octave. It also is called “locked-hands mode.” It sounds good in the middle range of a grand piano.

Oscar Peterson definitely had an influence on my arranging the song like he would play it as a Jazz Trio. The Form for the song is A-B-A-B-C. Form C is a vamp taken from the original song to bring you back to the beginning. Stylistically, I was looking to capture a good medium swing sound by letting the piano take care of the melody. The really hard part for me is creating interesting licks and melodies, since we deal with a chord for 8 or 16 measures per section, like A section or B section. You have to find a lot of ideas to keep the audience interested by not repeating yourself as often as possible. I try to use a lot of side slipping while we play and then later on, break the tension by coming back into the traditional key.

Tinah Blues – Adrian Zalten

Originally called the German Blues, this composition, was created in Vance Thompson's class, Big Band Arranging 320, and with some influence from Donald Brown's piano lesson working on Big Bertha last year. This is a typical 12 Bar Blues with the melody only using the F and Bb Blues Scale as the main theme. The melody of my blues has a little bit of the melody of Big Bertha. I practiced licks for solos over the Big Bertha tune and started playing the particular lick that is now the main melody of the Tinah Blues. I liked the lick so much that I kept it for the whole song, like you would play Bags Groove, another famous Blues head. The melody is easy to sing and definitely catchy to remember. I first called it the German Blues but dedicated this Blues to Tinah Utsman, a Designer and Photographer here at UT. It is the first Blues I ever wrote and wanted to call it the German Blues, to show that even stiff Germans can write a Blues that goes along with any other Blues you can imagine.

Little Monsóá – Adrian Zalten

This tune demonstrates for me the Hard Bop era in 1960, beginning with the Jazz Messengers up to Art Blakey's last days. Another inspiration is “Moanin”, by Bobbie Timmons. I love the composition and arrangement of this song. I heard this song on a DVD recorded in 1984 by the Blue Note Label. This is the time when Donald Brown was playing with the Jazz Messengers and therefore I dedicate this song to him.

The melody for this song actually happened by trying to play “Moanin,” or at least trying to figure out the notes for it. The first couple of notes were actually the melody of Little Monsóá. I knew that I mistakenly played the wrong melody, but I realized that what I did play sounded cool. So I end up playing the whole night that riff of my own tune. It didn't take long and I completed the entire composition in just one day. The bridge or B-section of my tune sort of implied the bridge content of “Moanin’”, which I really liked. The stop time pattern in the song and the so-called “Art Blakey Shuffle” really reveals, for me, the progress of today’s Jazz music. I knew that this would tell the audience how this song developed and where it actually came from.

Softly as in a morning sunrise – Sonny Clark

This Jazz Standard really caught my attention after I transcribed the entire piano solo on staff paper as an exercise for Donald Brown's piano lesson. It took me an entire day and resulted as a four-page solo. The standard has a simple melody within an AABA form. The solo that Sonny Clark played on the spot or LIVE at the recording is magnificent and truly incredible, one of the best Jazz improvisations I have ever heard or transcribed.

The title, “Softly as in a morning sunrise” triggered the idea of a sunrise on an island in the ocean. I decided to arrange it as a Reggae tune that would hopefully give you the feeling being out and enjoying the sunrise in the morning. I wanted to move away from the traditional swing arrangement, the way Sonny did.

My inspiration for that idea came from the Monty Alexander record, “Jamento”. Monty, born and raised in Jamaica, recorded the most famous Reggae songs of Bob Marley, but as Jazz arrangements with the right feel of swing. I liked that idea and saw the same potential in Sonny Clark's tune “Softly as in a morning sunrise.” It is a fun tune to play and I hope it also elicits the same feeling I get from it when I play it. To take it a step further, I also changed some harmonies of the traditional song to make it more original and my own.

Swing your hips – Adrian Zalten

One of my goals was to have a so-called “Rhythm Change tune” on my CD. Rhythm Change tunes are Jazz standards like “I got Rhythm” composed by George Gershwin that follow the same chord progression and later used on many Jazz standards out there. It was important for me to compose my own Jazz Standard according to the same chord progression. The name and composition evolved in Donald Brown’s Jazz composition class last spring. We were asked to compose a simple Jazz standard that would express the music of the Swing era around 1930’s, Pop music at that time with simple melodies and lyrics, everybody would sing.

After listening to and playing many swing standards at UT, I had a pretty good idea what I was looking for. I knew that everybody was dancing in clubs at that time and as a result I named my tune “Swing your hips”. I then concentrated on “I got Rhythm” and saw that melodies don’t have to jump around up or down, which would make the singing part harder. I decided to go with a simple melody that would support the words “Swing your hips” and finally created a nice melody that really captured the essence of this little Rhythm Change tune. Here is the beginning of the song:

*“Swing your hips and let it flow
Tonight we dance, tomorrow we go
Swing your hips and dance with me
That is why you stay with me”*

Summary

I am very satisfied with the result, although we all, the musicians and myself, know we always can do better. However, as Miles Davis thought, you will always have another chance to improve yourself on the next Jazz gig or CD, so just keep moving and don't get upset about it. The idea to write my own music was the biggest part that I enjoyed. I can see the influence now when I listen to the CD and it takes me back many months when I was in class or sitting at the piano composing the music. I also see great potential in the Michael Jackson arrangements and think that in the long run I will be able to even top these ideas based on the knowledge that I already encountered doing this project on an improvisational level. According to my research and by talking with musicians around the US, I think that I am the first one who maybe started doing something different with Jackson's music.

On the other hand, I am really happy that I found a website style that I finally can say that I will stick to for some time. I did design other websites before but the research that it took me to bring me to where the website is now was worth the hours and weeks of designing. I definitely think that this new website will cause people to come back and check what's new. I also will make sure that you find plenty of music videos, interviews and pictures in the near future.

Finally I hope that this College Scholars Senior Project will inspire other music majors to think about doing more than just music alone and maybe gather some knowledge in the field of Electronic Media. For me it was a great learning experience to see a project grow and know that everything from the first to the last step was done the

way I wanted it. Not only did I gain experience on a very professional music level, but also from a visual perspective to work with today's media world, where music plays a major role. The combination of Jazz and Electronic Media opens a lot of doors and I am already perhaps a step ahead. I encourage every musician to take a bite of this Program, in which I enrolled two years ago, and make themselves more knowledgeable people in the field of Jazz and Electronic Media. Thank you!