

Creating a Radio Documentary About Music's Influence On Mood

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Abstract

This study addresses the ways in which music's impact on an individual's mood can be subjective based on an individual's background, personal experiences, and moral beliefs. The purpose of this study was to conduct interviews through fieldwork, edit the audio collected and, finally, broadcast the gathered research through an audio documentary. Once the interviews were conducted, they were edited and mixed for placement in a radio documentary. Narration and music was added. By creating the documentary, the student showed some examples of how music affects individuals through ethnographic research, enhanced his recording and mixing capabilities, and opened doors for further research on music's emotional influence.

Introduction

Almost every person on the Earth consumes music in some form. Whether it is through an mp3 player or live music passed down through the family, or distributed through media channels such as the radio, music is an omnipresent force in our world and has been used for several purposes. Scholars have long sought to understand the links between music and our brains. Indeed most of us have experienced the emotional impact of particular sounds and songs upon our emotions. Since music is largely a subjective art, studying music on a personal level was an important aspect of this project. (Jauregui, Antonia)

This multi-faceted project can be divided into two main categories of activity: fieldwork and studio work. In order to gather research, fieldwork was conducted through interviews in downtown New Haven. The International Review Board approved the fieldwork process to ensure proper treatment of human subjects in the research. Each participant was asked a set of questions that focused on music and how it impacted their lives. Asking effective ethnographic questions was important to collecting answers that could later be used in the radio documentary. Indeed, the length and detail of each response was central to how it was used in the final radio show. Once interviews were completed, the second portion of the research began.

The studio work involved organizing, editing, and creating the radio documentary to be broadcast. By using several resources online on crafting documentaries, the student began to use his audio engineering abilities to analyze the interviews and create themes. Using skills learned from sound recording courses such as Recording Fundamentals, Intro to DAW's, and Studio Recording I, the student worked to create a professional – sounding documentary with organized and relevant content.

Materials & Methods

International Review Board (IRB) Process:

The initial research focused on the effects of music's influence on teenagers that struggle with depression to identify how music helped them cope with struggles in their lives. In order to conduct research on this subject, plans were made to meet with support groups for depression around New Haven, Connecticut, and interview participants

at these locations. At the beginning of the project, ideas of both a video and audio documentary were entertained. The original proposed research had to undergo strict review because of the nature of the research.

Any studies involving human subjects must be reviewed by the International Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the study subjects are treated well and fairly. Based on the standards set by the IRB, the initial project did not pass for multiple reasons. Individuals diagnosed with depression are considered a 'special population' and require a much longer review process. The same is true for adolescents. Since the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) project takes place over a 2-month period, the longer review process could not take place within the scheduled time, so the project had to be adapted to fit within the standards for the expedited review process. Another important aspect of the IRB review was creating a consent form that allowed interviewees to request complete anonymity in the final documentary if the interviewee wished for it. In order to keep the project entirely anonymous, a video version of the documentary was not possible and would have distracted the focus of the project.

The new, adapted project proposal changed the scope of the project to instead focus on the overall influence of music in people's daily lives. The age group changed from teenagers to anybody over the age of 18, so that 'special populations' were not involved.

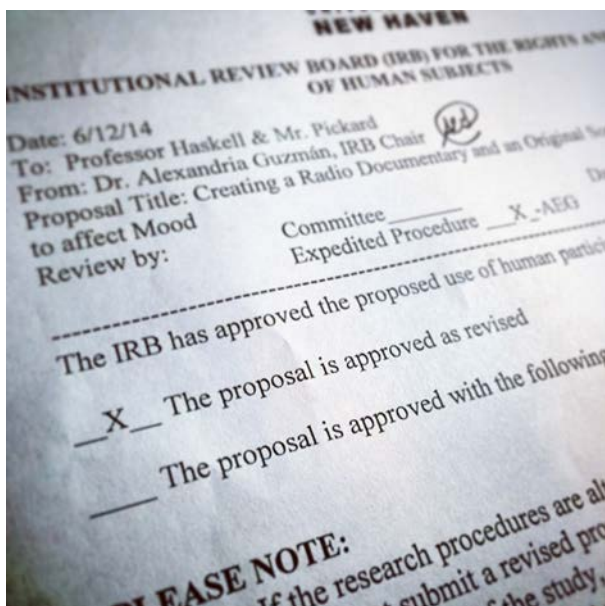


Figure 1. IRB Approval.

Fieldwork:

Following the approval of the IRB review, the fieldwork took place over the next month. Research on how to conduct interviews effectively was done in order to gather meaningful research. A valuable resource was the book *Fieldwork* by American Folklorist Bruce Jackson. A list of questions was created using research techniques that evoked expansive answers from the individuals being interviewed. These questions were tested on well-known acquaintances of the student through mock interviews to evaluate their effectiveness and change questions accordingly. Once a solid skeleton of questions was created, the real interviews began.

Conveniently, the International Festival of Arts and Ideas was taking place in downtown New Haven during the period of the fieldwork. This festival featured a variety of different performances and included diverse cultural art forms. Consequently, the audience consisted of people from varied backgrounds and life experiences, which was helpful to gather many different interviews. The location of the interviews, New Haven Green, can be seen below, in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The International Festival of Arts & Ideas at the New Haven Green.

The interview questions created during the mock interviews were put into action at the festival. Recording the interviews was very important, and high-quality recordings were imperative to the success of the whole project. In order to determine the quality of a recording, one can look at the bit depth. If a recording is a 16-bit recording, then it is CD-quality audio. This also matches a standard mp3 version of a song or recording. Above this is the option of 24-bit audio, which can be recorded in Waveform Audio File Format (.wav). For the purposes of this project, the Zoom H1, a digital recorder that can record 24-bit audio, was used. The hand-held recorder also features two condenser microphones, which allow for a stereo image to be created in the recording. This is similar to listening to music through one ear versus both. The digital recorder that was used is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. The Zoom H1 Handy Recorder.

The interviews at the festival took place over a week, and consisted of the following procedure:

1. An individual was approached and informed about the research and the purpose.
2. If they were interested in being interviewed, a consent form was presented for review.
3. Once the consent form was signed, the interview began while the Zoom H1 recorded the conversation.
4. Each interviewee was asked the same questions, listed below, although the interviewer left space for the respondent to expand on their ideas:
 - What kind of music do you like?
 - How often do you listen to music?
 - Does the music you listen to now differ from what you listened to growing up?
 - How do you choose what music you want to listen to?

- Can you talk about if you listen to different music depending on what you are doing?
- Can you tell me a story about any music that you associate with any memories, moods, or places?
- Can you think of a song that reminds you of a hard time and how it may have helped you?

The research focused on personal narratives more than quantitative data, so that every interview might contain material useful, to the final documentary, as long as the recording quality was high enough. Unfortunately, the noise from wind disrupted many of the initial recordings, and rendered them useless. This issue was remedied using a windscreen, which is a piece of foam that fits over the microphones to block the wind noise.

Throughout the festival, over 20 interviews were conducted and many different people were represented. After the interviews were recorded, they were brought to the studio for use in the radio documentary.

Studio Work:

Once the interviews were conducted, the wave broadcast file forms (.wav) were brought into the recording studio. The studio used is shown below in Figure 4:



Figure 4. Kyle Pickard in the studio.

The interviews consisted of many different stories and topics in the responses, so each interview was reviewed and analyzed for main topics and themes. As part of the editing process, each response in every interview was edited down to only include the answers, and the initial questions asked, as well as pauses, were cut out.

The individual responses were then organized based on their content and the following five themes became the basis for the radio show:

1. Musical genres' effect on mood
2. Motivation
3. Relationships & breakups
4. Memories
5. Working through tough times

All of the responses that fit within these categories were imported into a digital audio workstation (DAW), which is a

computer program made for editing and mixing audio files. This project was created in Pro Tools, the industry standard in audio workstations. Each topic became its own segment in the radio documentary, which is one single section of the entire documentary. Generally, the individual segments focus on one topic, just as they do in this project. The segments were created independently in their own Pro Tools session, which is similar to a new word document in Microsoft Word.

In addition to determining documentary topics and editing the interviews, the creative process of the documentary also involved choosing music as background that played behind the individuals as they spoke. In many cases, the songs played directly reflected what was being said in the interviews. In order to make the song quiet enough, the technique of ducking was used. This is when the volume of a song is brought down enough to still be heard, but not distract from or cover up the interviewees' stories. The volume fluctuations were all done with automation, which means that once the changes are programmed, Pro Tools will perform the ducking automatically.

Each interview clip, which contained one answer from the interviews conducted, was placed on its own track to keep them organized and easily manageable. While this created upwards of 20 tracks per Pro Tools session, the clips were much easier to manipulate and move around to keep the documentary organized. An example screenshot of one segment in the documentary is shown below in Figure 5:



Figure 5. Example of Pro Tools session.

The student then worked to add narration to the documentary to make the entire project flow and work together. The narration acted like transitions in formal essays. After each component of the segment was put in place, mixing was required to make sure every track was at an appropriate volume.

Once every segment was created through the same process, each segment was bounced to a mixed track, which means all the separate tracks were blended together in Pro Tools to create one stereo track. The resulting five tracks (one for each segment) were brought into a new Pro Tools session to be mixed together. During the mixing process of the final documentary with all five segments together, several effects were added to enhance the overall sound of the documentary. One of these effects was compression,

which helps even out the high and low peaks of the sound, which provides a steadier volume and is causing less fatigue to the listener. Another effect that was added was a high-pass filter, also called a low-cut filter, which reduces the volume of bass frequencies, such as the sound of wind that was aforementioned to cause problems in the recordings. The filter also helped to take away the boom-y quality of the narration and helped make it sound more natural.

After the compression and EQ, a volume controller, called the Maximizer, was used to raise the entire documentary volume up to commercial radio standards, while also preventing it from clipping, which is audible distortion in the sound. Once the final five segments were mixed together, one ultimate stereo track was created, and this was the 'final product'.

In order to make sure the documentary was as good as it could be, it went through a critical listening process. This involved contacting professionals in the field and other students in the Music and Sound Recording program at University of New Haven, and having them provide constructive criticism on all aspects of the documentary from organization to the quality of the sound. This improved the documentary and made it sound more professional.

Results & Discussions

The project took over two months to complete and went through many different stages. While over twenty interviews were conducted, only about eight were used in the final documentary because of the quality of the interview or cohesion with the five main topics that were chosen. Even so, the documentary has a running time of about twenty-five minutes and takes the listener on a long journey through many different stories of music's influence on individuals and how they respond to it now.

It is hoped that this research opens doors to understanding how music could be defined as a 'product' similar to over-the-counter medicine, which would further develop the music therapy realm. By knowing how certain music affects someone, music can be tailored to individuals to help alleviate symptoms of unhealthy mental processes.

The final documentary will be aired on the university's radio station, 88.7 WNHU West Haven.

Conclusion

By completing this research, a radio documentary was created that showcases authentic personal narratives about music's influence on individuals. Reactions to music differ based on personal background and experiences, and therefore must be treated as the subjective art that it is.

The project had two main sections: fieldwork and studio work. The fieldwork took place in downtown New Haven with various individuals from many different backgrounds and ages. Over twenty interviews were conducted and recorded. The studio work involved bringing the raw interviews into the studio to create the documentary. Each interview was broken into individual clips and organized by themes, which became the topics of the five documentary segments.

This research focused on the collection of field recordings and the dissemination of the material collected. Through the synthesis of field recordings, narration and music, the student created a documentary that helped develop skills in the audio engineering field.

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Biography

Kyle Pickard is currently a junior at the University of New Haven expecting to graduate in May 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music and Sound Recording with a Theater minor. Kyle began his music career in his hometown of Scituate, Rhode Island where he was first introduced to flute in fifth grade. He has since picked up guitar, piano, and singing throughout his years in high school. Following his college graduation, Kyle hopes to continue working in the entertainment industry, whether it be as an audio engineer, musician, or actor. Eventually, he would like to create an organization that focuses on using music to help combat depression and negative self-image among teenagers.

