Ludomusicological Immersion in
Curaga EP

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Acknowledgement

With this thesis, I conclude my fifth year at the Institutt for Rytmisk Musikk at UiA in Kristiansand. And "*Curaga EP*" is a project that highlights the progress of my personal endeavors as a music producer living in Norway. The time I have spent these five years has been a personal journey together with my music and progressing as a producer has been instrumental to my career going forward. During these years I have been lucky to work on amazing projects together with all manners of different people, to which without them my music wouldn't grow as much as it has.

I want to thank all my fellow students on the Electronic Music specialization through our five years in Kristiansand, the creative and safe space that we all created together really inspired me to keep learning and to have fun exploring the depths of music production. I have had the absolute pleasure of working together with some amazing teachers through the years. I want to thank Jan Bang for his reflective insight into my music, our conversations have been both inspiring and motivating. Also, I would like to thank Jo Brodtkorb for lending an ear when discussing the plans for my master thesis. My other teachers: Jonas Lie Theis, Erik Ljunggren, and Jon Marius Aareskjold, thank you for teaching me the ins and outs of the music business.

Thanks to Noah Johansen for being my compatriot in the writing process. My mom and dad for keeping me sane. And finally, thank you Nina for your everlasting wisdom.

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1. Introduction:

This dissertation is an endeavor in artistic research. It documents findings within the field of video game music immersion, and how it ties into the three pieces of music from my EP: *Curaga*.

The three songs on the EP: Firebreath, Rose and Pure Noise, were created with a direct inspiration from video game music. Somewhere within the music, there were elements that attracted me as a player and made me completely immersed in the video games. I want to understand the immersive quality of video game music and apply it to my own productions. This research will attempt to answer the question:

Can I find potential values through musical immersion in video game music, to enhance my own compositions?

The method of this research falls into the epistemic realm of artistic research, this allows for parallel observations between the music and the documentation, in which the music speaks for itself.

To investigate the properties of video game musical immersion I will discuss the ALI-model which was created within the field of Ludomusicology. The ALI-Model splits the term "Video Game Musical Immersion" into the three concepts: Affect, Literacy, and Interaction. Through reflecting upon the creative workflow and the aesthetic choices on the EP, I will further elaborate on and discuss the potential for added immersion in my productions, which will in turn improve how I work as a producer to be able to create more cohesive experiences for my audience.

2. Methodical approach and theory:

2.1 Artistic Research

Artistic Research is a form of practice designed for art education institutions. In Norway as of 1995, it has become a central part of the institutions responsibilities to let art practitioners pursue this type of research (Malterud, 2012, p. 11).

As the subject of Artistic Research has often opened for conversations of relevancy and importance, different researchers have written their takes on the practice (Malterud, 2012, p. 13). Henk Borgdorff is a vital component to the uprising of Artistic Research, and in his book (*The Conflict of the Faculties. Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia),* he discusses together with historian Hans-Jörg Rheinberger about the importance of the unknown capabilities of artworks as research:

Rheinberger's argument:

"As long as artworks and their concepts remain vague, they generate a productive tension: in reaching out for the un-known, they become tools of research. In the context of artistic research, artworks are the generators of that which we do not yet know. They thereby invite us to think." (Borgdorff, Henk, 2012, p. 194)

To which Borgorrf answers:

"Artworks as epistemic things can never become fully transparent, and it is this structural lack of completeness that is the fuel and the motor of a creative, constructive practice, in which meanings emerge and realities are constituted." (Borgdorff, Henk, 2012, p. 194)

The music with its unknown capabilities is what becomes the fuel for the research question and within that, the practice of creation is what will determine the answers for the research questions.

When presenting pieces of music as the research results. I believe it is also important to create an accessible and easy way of interacting with the media for the dissertation. In the grand scope of the research, this is what will enhance the flow between text and sound. I cite Borgdorff:

"In the context of artistic research, the research catalogue is positioned precisely in the gap between the documentation of the work using texts, images and sound and the publication of the work as research. Something happens here that is crucial: a transposition of the work from the aesthetic realm to the epistemic realm" (Borgdorff, Peters, & Pinch, 2019, p. 21).

As Borgdorff clearly states, it is important to use documentations together with the publication of the work so that it doesn't fall into the realm of aesthetics. I argue that this also allows for research that works with multi-media, so rather than creating a piece of software or a webpage, I want to keep the thesis constrained to the PDF format. I will publish the sound files on the website, Dropbox. The use of hyperlinks will allow the text to directly work with the sound. The links will all be highlighted and presented as: (example *x*). I chose to use this format for multiple reasons, one of which is the ability to show the music in a higher fidelity than other services. Also, I would have direct control over the privacy of the URL's, which in context means that only those with the ability to read this dissertation will have accessibility to the music. An extra link will be available on the last page if the hyperlinks do not work for some reason.

In overview, the display of workflow and musical structure present in *Curaga EP*, together exploring a possibility in improvement as premise, makes for interesting artistic research; because the questions that unfold from this premise are relevant and the intent is for me to explore myself as a creator.

2.2 Case Study

"Case studies can bring about the discovery of new meanings, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known." (Pellegrino, 2015)

I want to present three pieces of music in a particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic manner using case study as the form of method. The focus is primarily on me as a creator instead of as an objective observer.

The case study will be split into parts, this makes it easier for me as an artistic researcher to approach each song individually and to discuss them in their own space. The pieces of music are different to each other in nature, so in having a more precise discussion around each piece on its own, will naturally be a better approach for research. This also leads into the focus of the case study, as the research revolve around the songs themselves just as much as it also focuses on their unique strengths.

At the end of the study, a possibility opens that allows me to draw lines between the cases. In a plausible case of similarities and other discoveries, this will be brought to life in the discussions. I expect to find data about my creative processes both aesthetically and technically.

2.3 The ALI-Model

In this research, I want to learn from the existence of video game music immersion as a phenomenon; find out what they provide in their context, to further build upon my own productions. The paradox is that video game music accompanies their video games, but my music productions are on their own footing through streaming platforms. The choice of using this model comes purely from my personal belief that video games has had an impact on my musical signature and identity, and with that I want to generate the same opportunities of immersion that video game music does. Even if parts of this analytic method do not correspond with the music I provide in its context, it would at least generate a new reflective perspective, which would in turn encourage a broader understanding of my own musical identity. I believe that both my background as a gamer and my professional work as a producer has a clear open dynamic throughout the overarching creative process.

In 2016, Isabella van Elferen constructed a researching model for measuring the amount of immersion the video game music has as an effect on the listener. The article she wrote called "Analyzing Game Musical Immersion (The ALI Method)" was published in a book created by Michiel Kamp, Tim Summers and Mark Sweeney called Ludomusicology (Elferen, 2016). The book is a compendium of newly found research in video game music, therefore the term: Ludomusicology.

When discussing the term: "Immersion", Elferen is quick to explain it as:
"Becoming physically or virtually a part of the experience itself." (Elferen, 2016, p. 32) This is a vital component to video games, and it is what gives the player the incentive to dive deeper into the content. It catches the consumer and inherently makes the product more appealing.
The model is named "ALI" by Elferen and is an abbreviation of three different elements, *Affect, Literacy and Interaction*. Understanding what all these elements mean and what they have in common is key to analyzing video game musical immersion. Using this in my research will make way to understand how this can be a tool I can apply to my music.

Affect

"Something about music urges us to engage with its larger context - it seems to be part of our genetic makeup that we can be so deeply moved by this artform." (Byrne, 2012, p. 221)

When the music grabs and hold on to your emotions, to stir the distinction between what is musical and what is physical. In video games it establishes a form of virtuality drawing gamers out of the here and now (Elferen, 2016, p. 35).

When analyzing my own productions, this is the one element out of the three that I suggest will have the most influence in generating individually personal relationships between the listener and the music. Translating this element into the realm of music as an individual form of media, it makes for a bigger part of the strength and cohesiveness of the music. I argue that reaching a high level of affect will increase the effectivity of immersion in my musical context, because in the context of video game music, it needs to sometimes be compromised to not overwhelm the more interactive elements in the gameplay.

Literacy

"Habituated practices of media engagement shaped by cultural practices and discourses." (Elferen, 2016)

In a broad sense this is the expectations of audiences in media consumption. It revolves around our shared cultural intelligence of media practices, and therefore envelopes our practical engagement to work with these expectations. When looking at elements of literacy in video game music, it is interesting to see how much of this has to do with interactive elements of video games. Take for example the interactivity of "entering a battle"; In the game, something changes that evokes the player to feel threatened or defensive, the music is placed in between the game itself and the expectation of the player, making for a dynamic and immersive experience.
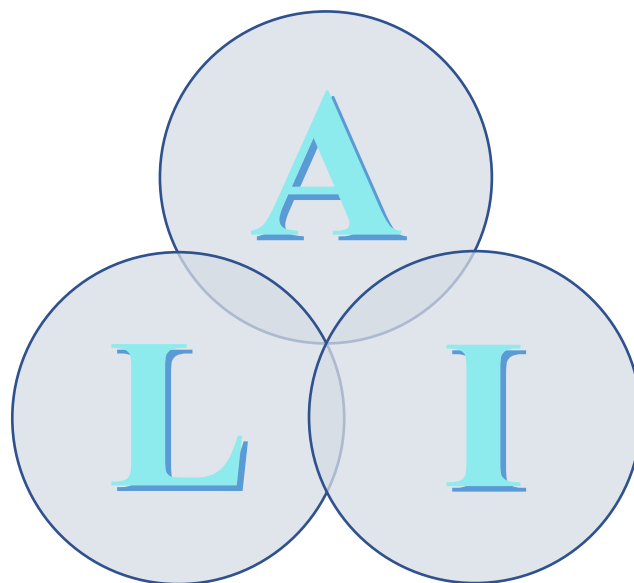
For this research, I want to also apply literacy from video game culture in my productions, with an approach towards the arrangement. I will involve this into the thought process behind sound designing and the flow between musical ideas.

Interaction

"Musical interaction is interaction with and through music." (Elferen, 2016)

The one element that effectively makes video games function, is the ability to give control to the player, and the music works in tandem with this element. The interactivity can vary between games and the music will change its approach looking at the demand of the game. A game like "Guitar Hero" (Harmonix, 2005) which puts the player front stage with a physical controller shaped like a guitar will create an opportunity for the music to be to be the focus point, using real music to engage the players. Contrary to this; "Portal" (Valve, 2007), which is a game that focuses on solving puzzles in minimalistic terrain using teleportation, the music is not a highlight of the game, but it commits to being a part of the landscape, as it has a slowly developing soundtrack that increases dynamically with the narrative.

"Interactivity" as a phenomenon in video game music invites the paradox for the research question in this dissertation. The music I am producing is without help from any type of visual media, but this is what creates an interesting approach to the discussions. If interactivity cannot come from any intricate player behavior or code, then I argue that the interaction is happening in all the choices that the listener makes when choosing to directly play my music or even just actively listening. This will tie into the discussions in the chapter: "Part I: Concepts of Interactivity"

Delimitation

Approaching video game music immersion through every single genre of games would be a waste of time and it would inherently interrupt the flow of the research question. Therefore, any video game music that will be referenced and discussed, is chosen because of its relevancy to my own musical identity, genre, and creative inspiration.

The Curaga EP, contains elements that are heavily inspired by the video game franchise Final Fantasy. If music is referenced it will be from the game, Final Fantasy XIII, which features the compositions of Masashi Hamauzu.

3. Results

The Project

Part I: Concepts of Interactivity

Part II: *Firebreath* – Creative & Aesthetic Choices

Part III: *Rose* – Emotional Capacity

Part IV: *Pure Noise* – Limits of Literacy

3.1   The Project

Curaga EP is a project containing some of the music that I have produced over the last year. I want the release to introduce my musical signature as a producer, and it will function as my sonic portfolio. Within the results, I have chosen three of the songs from the EP to highlight my discoveries within the realm of video game music immersion.

The idea behind creating Curaga was to release a handful of music that I felt had a cathartic and meditative effect on me, and through the music I want to hopefully affect my listeners in the same way. The title of the EP: Curaga, is a fictional term from the video game series: Final Fantasy, and it is described as "A greater healing spell" (Fandom, 2006). I conceptualized this fictional term in my music because I have a personal nostalgic connection with video games. This connection branches out into my workflow, and it is present in a multitude of the elements within my sound. Through the sound design, I constructed sonic textures and colors to enhance the emotions within the music. And through the interest I have with video game music literacy, I felt inspired to shape my music into having a stronger narrative effect.

The project contains three tracks: Firebreath, Rose and Pure Noise. The music can be described as electronic, ambient, and downtempo. The songs have completely different sonic properties and conceptual ideas, but collectively, they are all imbued with emotional soundscapes that I have created within them.

Within "*Firebreath*" I showcase my creative processes within the arrangement, and how they produce an emotional quality to the song. In "*Rose*", I will further develop my thoughts around manifesting my emotions within the sound. And through analyzing "*Pure Noise*" I will discuss how elements of Literacy can be used to spark ideas for new sounds.

3.2 Part I: Concepts of Interactivity

Elferen discusses the strength of interactivity as a concept in her chapter about the ALI-model with the quote:

"Game music enhances and demands game interaction, as a game needs to be played for its soundtrack to be heard." (Elferen, 2016, p. 39)

Somewhere in the structure of video game code, developers allowed there to be music, and that music required the involvement of the player. Without the player, the music could not be triggered to play. This is how music inherently works in video games, and it is a formula which has been the same since video games first got published in the 70s/80s.

Elferen also states that the flow of game musical interaction leads to a highly personal affective investment for the player (Elferen, 2016, p. 39), which makes sense, since the player practically engages the music to start. In a sort of miniscule way, this concept makes the player the conductor of the music. The positives for this type of immersion, is that the music can directly connect with the memories and emotions of the player.

Music in video games is one of the many different assets that make the game what it is. In most cases it does not make for the whole experience, nor does it take the center stage. As a form of media, it is created to stimulate the player both visually and sonically. And in my case, the music is made purely to stimulate sonically.

In creating the Curaga EP, I was cornered with a prospect; What sort of interactivity happens in my music, since it is existing on streaming platforms contra video games? And it evoked some ideas.

The music on the Curaga EP is meant to be played on headphones and speaker systems, and the intention has always been that the music will do its best to stand on its own. Therefore, when discussing the ALI model towards my music, the relationship between their respective contexts become flustered. I believe this is only because of the concept of interactivity, or lack thereof.

If the player in video games has full control over their choices in game, and through that they decide when and where music is going to play. Who is then the "player" in the circumstance of my music? It must be the listener. And to that extend they also interact with the streaming platform as if it was the "video game".

A very important choice happens here. The listener chooses to press play, and from this point onward they actively become focused on the music.

In the music on the EP, I was determined to create an experience that would take this one single action of interactivity, to get their attention. When the listener presses the play button, my music is free to express its full potential. I contemplate that the simplicity of interaction in my music is one of its core strengths, because the focus for me as a producer is to try and tell stories sonically. I do not expect my listeners to involve themselves in my music other than listening for the purpose of entertainment.

The simple act of pressing play will be the sort of interactivity I am expecting from my listeners, but there are also a few other instances where this happens. If I publicly release the lyrics of each of my songs, the viewers are free to interact with those as well. They can choose to analyze them, read them while listening or sing to the music while looking at them. Building upon this, I reflect upon that if a listener chooses to play the music in front of other people, they are also influencing those people to interact with the music. A direct example of this would be a DJ; they would play my music with the intent to make people dance.
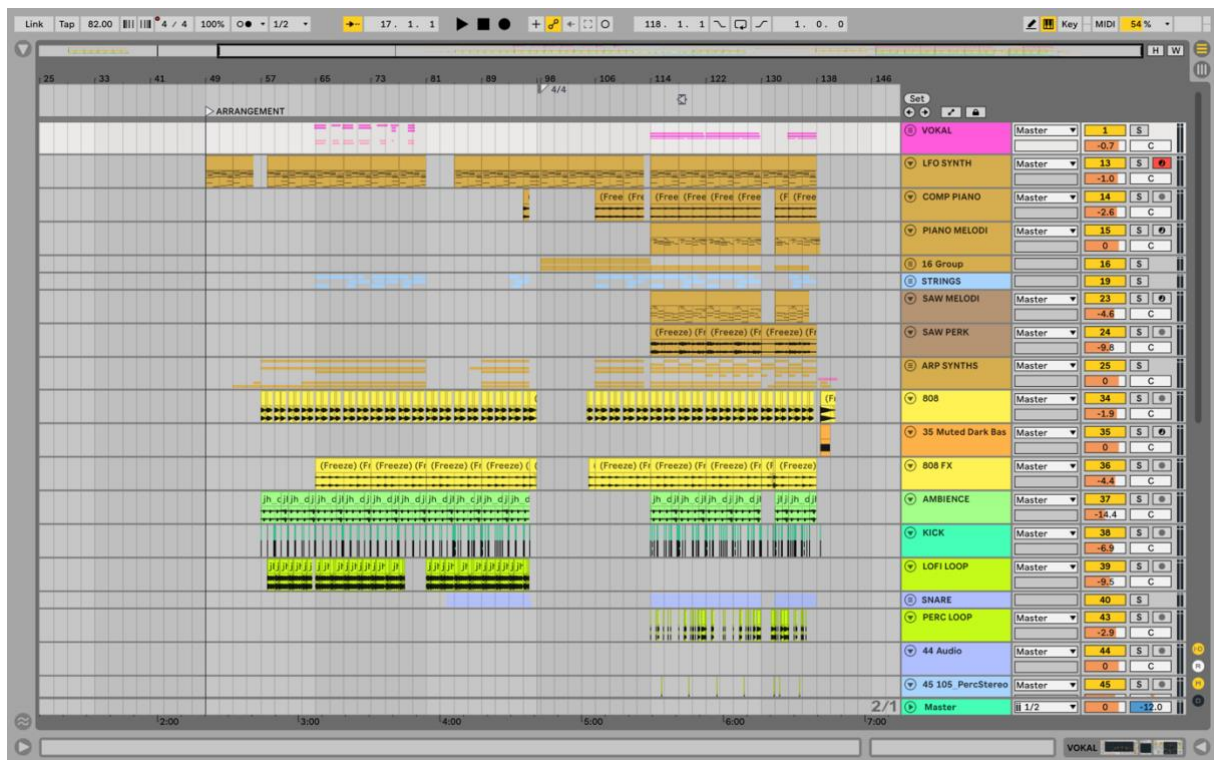
A listener could also have an intent to use my music to create a certain mood, some of these circumstances could be for studying or for comfort.

Going forward I will discuss the concepts of the ALI-model, but with a focus on the three songs from the Curaga EP. I am adamant that the music can speak for itself, and that the discussions will fall in line with the processes and the intentions I had when I created the music.

3.3 Part II: Firebreath – Creative & Aesthetic Choices

(Song link)

Firebreath is an ambient and cinematic piece of electronic music, it draws upon elements from the electronic drum & bass genre, and nordic jazz. The intention with creating this piece of music was to develop a progressive form that felt cohesive in nature. To me it invokes a feeling of meditation and repetition, with elements that dynamically evolve over the course of its 4 minutes and 36 seconds runtime. Firebreath presents an opportunity for me to give examples on the aesthetic choices in my workflow, whether it is through the process of designing the music or the awareness of its immersive appliances. Through showcasing this, I can paint a detailed picture of the relation I have together with my thought processes, which in turn leads to discussions about the level of immersion I strive to achieve.

(An overview of *Firebreath* in Ableton Live)

Aesthetics

When conceptualizing the song, I was drawn towards creating a mood that felt sad yet uplifting. The four chords that encompass the whole song was also the first element that I created, and every other element was built around it. I composed the chords so that they would feel endless in the context of the arrangement. I believe it has to do with the way the chords resolve; the second chord resolve the first one, and the fourth chord resolve the third one. This explains the mood I was trying to create, as the resolving chords creates comfort in the harmonies, while the first and the second chord introduces a level of intrigue.
I was drawn towards a simplistic mindset when creating the soundscape, and I think the obvious strength of the song is the fact that there aren't huge dynamic changes to the overall arrangement. At some point in the song, a counterpoint is introduced; a melody which is played by an upright piano. Even though this can feel like a complete change, the transition between part A and B of the song still revolves around the same chords, the only thing that changes, is that the vocals now sing along to the melody and the rhythmical section becomes a bit more advanced. The song ends with an amalgamation of different sounds that leave a long tail of different textures. I call this the "gong".

In the process of creating Firebreath, I was inspired by the song *The Gapra Whitewood*, one of the pieces from the video game, Final Fantasy XIII (Masashi Hamauzu, 2010).
They both feature many similar elements, such as a string like synth orchestra, fast paced electronic drums and percussion, vocals, and piano.
When using this piece of music as a comparison to my own, I also wanted to observe what sort of function it had in its video game context.

The Gapra Whitewood is a piece of background music for a fictive area in the sci-fi fantasy world of Final Fantasy XIII. The player explores a forest of crystal-like trees while walking around on a metal highway. It becomes apparent that Hamauzu wanted to create a soundtrack that focused on the details of the landscape. The electronic drums and the over-processed vocals create the imagery of the modernized highway in the middle of the forest, while the beautiful string arrangement and the piano tells the story of the crystalized trees and its fantastical fauna.

I respect the drama in Hamauzu's music, he composes music that focuses on everything the narrative asks for. In the soundtrack for Final Fantasy XIII, there is music that supports characters and narrative concepts, but for the most part, the music is there to help the mood of different types of scenery. While creating Firebreath, I used this idea to imagine my own visual sceneries while composing.

The act of visualizing inanimate concepts while writing or producing helps me to structure and conceptualize my ideas, it is a process of being creative that has always stuck with me.

When producing Firebreath, this idea was a big part of finding the narrative in the song. I imagined a character (the vocalist) expressing their feelings to the listener.

For added context, I will try to translate the meaning of one of the lyrics in the song, this is the first sentence: "Your breath is fire, there's water under the ice".

The song is inherently about bad communication in a toxic relationship, where the character keeps living their life with someone who is bad for them.

The character is singing about their opinion on the bad communication in the relationship. I imagined a dragon spiting fire; and if the dragon was the opponent, then the water was the character. The character tries to hint at the fact that if they so want to, they can extinguish that flame. The ice represents the embodiment of a coping mechanism that lives between the dragon and the character, blocking the path towards a better relationship.

This is only one example of the processes I go through when writing music, but the general idea is that creative processes for me, can come from a multitude of different elements, in this case it was the lyrics.

If I don't let myself radicalize my ideas in the creation process, I cannot find the motivation I need to complete the ideas. I believe that an important role I have as a creator, is to give the listener an immersive experience. I can overanalyze my own music and put it into imaginary contexts, but it is more important to me that the listener feels the freedom to make their own story through the music. This encourages me to write music that builds upon simple human concepts like private mind emotions and states of being.

"The private aspect of emotions is evident in the fact that you can't actually feel my pain, or my delight." (Bowie, 2007)
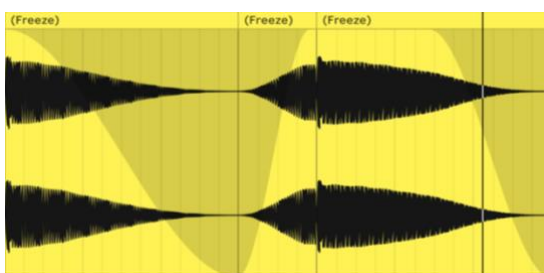
Sampling

To further elaborate on the aesthetic choices in Firebreath and the EP, I want to demonstrate a more technical aspect of the working process. The way I facilitate myself with sound designing tools are important to me, because I want to feel as much in control as possible.

All the music in the EP were created using Ableton Live, which is my choice of Digital Audio Workstation. I feel as though I have become very efficient with the software and the way it interconnects with my workflow. A general example of how I designed audio for Firebreath is to show how I worked with the audio files.

After having selected an audio sample, it would be shown in this window (see picture below). This is the audio file control panel. Most of the basic parameters of working with audio will not be present here as this is a tool for directly manipulating audio. There are simple tools here such as: volume control, time signature and audio length. In warp, I can choose to place warp markers on the timeline, they can then be stretched or shortened to my liking. The audio can be pitched, automated, and quantized based on how I work with the warp markers.

The song features a lot of sounds that have been digitally manipulated to take on the sonic appearance of real-world instruments. The sounds were manipulated using effects and sampling techniques to completely change their structure. Below there is a picture of the bass instrument of the song in a sample format; I started by sampling an 808 drum machine, the bass sounds from this old piece of hardware have a very low frequent and deep sonic marker, which made for a great foundation when making a bass sound. Afterwards I completely changed the sound into what can be described as a gong drum using resonances and reverbs.

This bass sound is present during the whole song, and it is an important ingredient for the production. At the end of the song, I decided to construct an impact sample of sorts, using this bass/gong sound as the primary ingredient.

Firstly, I re-sampled the gong to make it much larger and epic. Secondly, I looked around the arrangement to re-sample more sounds from the song, then I combined all these new samples to make a sonic explosion of textures and colors. You can hear the result at the end Firebreath. I felt that it was fitting to end such a progressive and meditative song in a dramatic way. The intention was not to overwhelm the listener, but to instead give the song itself a proper send-off. The amalgamation of sounds that I now coin as: "*the gong*", is an aesthetic choice in sound design that I will continue to use in my music.

I choose to work with sound a way that feels natural to my workflow, and it is important to me that my toolkit consists of software that can challenge me creatively. The VST plugins that I have chosen to be a part of my toolkit is part of the sonic language I present in my artistic vision. Each third-party software that I bring into the designing process have different personalities, qualities, sonic colors, and usages. An example of this is "Soundtoys 5": a massive collection of creative tools for shaping and coloring sound (Soundtoys, 2022). One of those tools is "littlealterboy", which is a monophonic voice manipulation device. The vocals in Firebreath were manipulated using this plugin, it helped me to distance myself from the vocals, to create the fictional character I had in mind for the narrative.

Summary

When considering what levels of immersion Firebreath showcases, it revolves mostly around the relationship I can create between the music and the listener. This can be said for the other two songs as well. Effectively, I want the listener to fall out of reality to fully embrace the content in a state of absolute immersion. I believe that if I am consistent at indulging in my emotions while I produce the music, maybe some of those emotions will manifest into the product.

During the process of producing Firebreath, a large percentage of the time I spent was creating a cohesive arrangement. All the technical aspects set aside; at the end of the process, I tried to connect with the music personally. If I could listen to the music myself and enjoy the experience, that would make me feel like I had completed the work. Personal enjoyment is subjective, and I don't expect to know how my audience will experience listening to my work, I just want to make sure that I leave a footprint in the music that details most of the emotional experiences that I had when creating it.
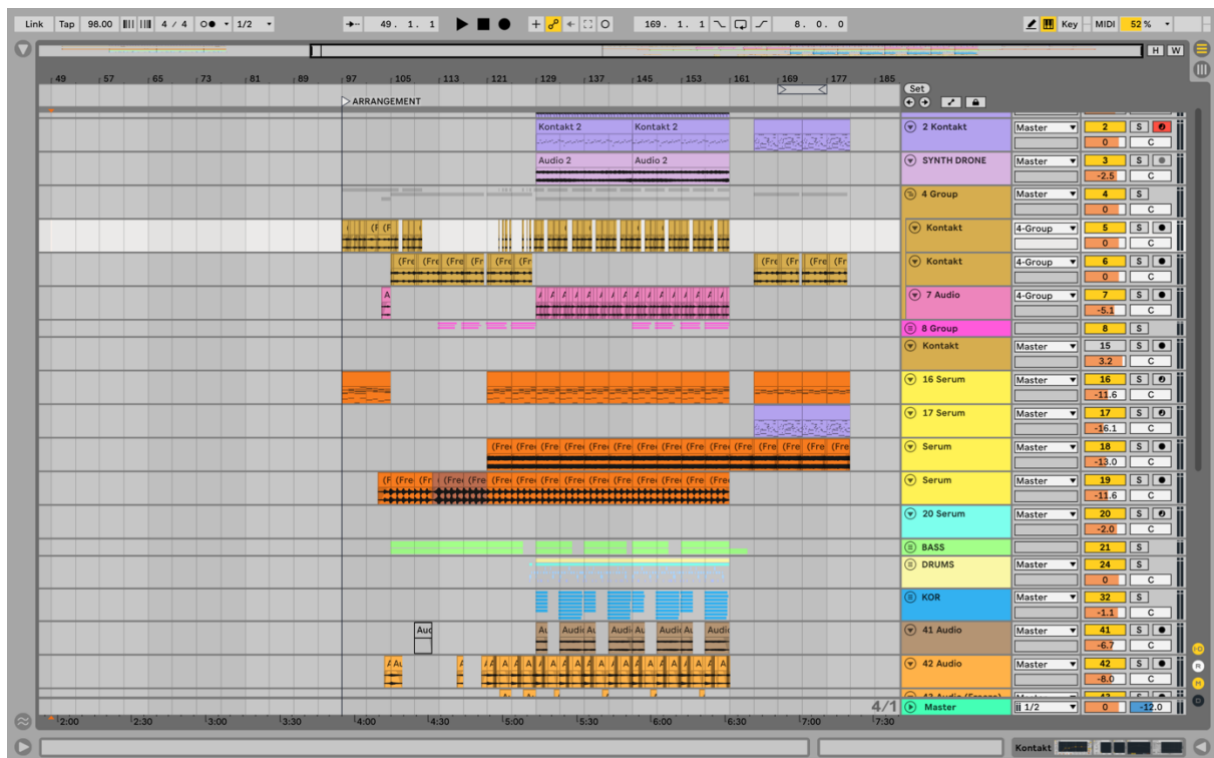
3.4 Part III: Rose – Emotional Capacity

"Musical affect is a determining factor in the attribution of personal and collective meanings to music." (Elferen, 2016, p. 35)

I am constantly in pursuit of obtaining an amount of musical affect that can captivate my audience. But to a certain degree I am scared that if the music struggles too much to achieve this, it can come off as pretentious. There must be a certain limit to how much of this I can work into the music without losing the full grasp on the emotional qualities in the sound.

Rose was produced with an idea to showcase a state of personal emotions I had. My intention was to make the sounds and textures incorporate themselves into the overall feeling of the song, and I chose to do this through selecting a unique timbre that I felt was fitting. I thought that if I designed sounds that could contain the same feelings that I had, maybe it could increase the immersion for the listeners.

(An overview of *Rose* in Ableton Live)

Sound as Metaphor for feelings

Through this assessment, I began designing a library of sounds that felt fitting to the emotion of the song. The result was a mass of sounds that was dominatingly high frequent and airy, to the point that it almost sounded like a wind or a breeze. As a result of this, I decided to go with "wind" as the recurring theme. A large amount of the sounds in this song references the element of air or wind, in which I experimented a lot working with noise. Using noise became very useful for creating luscious soundscape environments, and for an additional effect I paired the noise together with large reverbs and delays, to emulate large echoing open spaces.

The modulated and glitchy piano in the intro which loops through the whole song was one of the first elements I created for the song. The sound is experimental and high frequent, to me it sounds like different breeds of birds, chirping. I wanted to make something that sounded fun and nostalgic in a sense. And it was also the element that inspired the chords of the song. The audio of the modulated sample plays four chords, but in the intro the two last chords are pitched down two semitones each to a total of four semitones. To me this created an interesting intro, towards what is the main part of the song. After this, the modulated piano repeats the four chords in a loop.

These elements of winds and breaths created a large space within the arrangement that I filled with large synths and compressed drums. I recorded a choir with a bright timbre, using breathy vocal techniques to make a large wall of sound. The choir sings the lyrics "Hold on, for us"; I wanted to write about the feeling of persevering through a process of emotions. The choir sings with a pressure on the vowels, and when all these voices harmonize, it can be difficult to hear what the words are. I wanted the vocals to remain vague in diction, so that the words wouldn't take center stage in the arrangement. I did this by diffusing the vocal group in compression and reverb effects.

The lead vocals contain a much more traditional vocal performance. Since the chords in the song created a constant momentum in the arrangement together with the open space, I chose to write lyrics that seemed "wanting" in a sense, building upon the already existing choir. The song is a story about a person that has a strong connection to someone, and I found this to fit well together with the choice of emotion in the sound.

In pursuit of imbuing the soundscape with elements of nostalgia and air, I felt as though the sounds became a metaphor for the feeling I wanted to convey. I don't want the music to become bloated with being too "emotional"; if that is even possible. At certain times, I feel that music with oversimplified lyrics and productions with a heavy focus on pop culture literacy can become too easily digestible. And personally, I feel that some of these songs doesn't engage the listener to have a personal relation to the music. The songs exist to be exactly what the audience wants. Not to say that this type of music doesn't have its unique strengths, it is just not what I am looking for in my productions.

If I create a metaphor within the sound that can present my feelings. This could be an interesting solution to increasing the amount of musical affect in the production.

My listeners choose to play the music because they want to be indulged in the content. I want to grasp their full attention in the moment they become an active listener, and within that space I hope they will feel the way I feel. Finding a method to quantify the effect of this on my listeners would be interesting, but the data is not as important to me as to how this positively affects me as a producer.

A part of the individuality within my musical identity lies within these metaphors, and I believe that I consciously choose to exert my signature within the sound design. At an earlier point as a producer, I focused more on using my vocals and lyrics to bare the weight of the music. but with current projects I am more intrigued by the sound designing and the composition. To elaborate further, part of the element of affection in my music lies within the emotional qualities of the sound rather than in the more humane elements of my voice.

I want Rose and the other songs on the EP to be an honest representation of who I am as a creator. I choose to produce music that revolves around my personal emotions, and with this paradigm I can present my honest self to my audience. I will of course never know when someone will stumble across my music, and therefore it is important that the first impression they get, will be a presentation that I feel is honest and introductory.

Summary

"Affect is a vital and inevitable aspect of any musical experience: listening to music cannot but stir emotions, connotations or identifications." (Elferen, 2016, p. 35)

Elferen acknowledges the importance of musical affect as an element within musical immersion, and not just in video games, but in any musical experience. And when I reflect upon the emotions that I exert within my creative workflow, I argue that musical affect is the core strength within the level of immersion in my music.
I also contemplate that within the context of my music, musical affect can stand on its own as an overarching element of immersion.
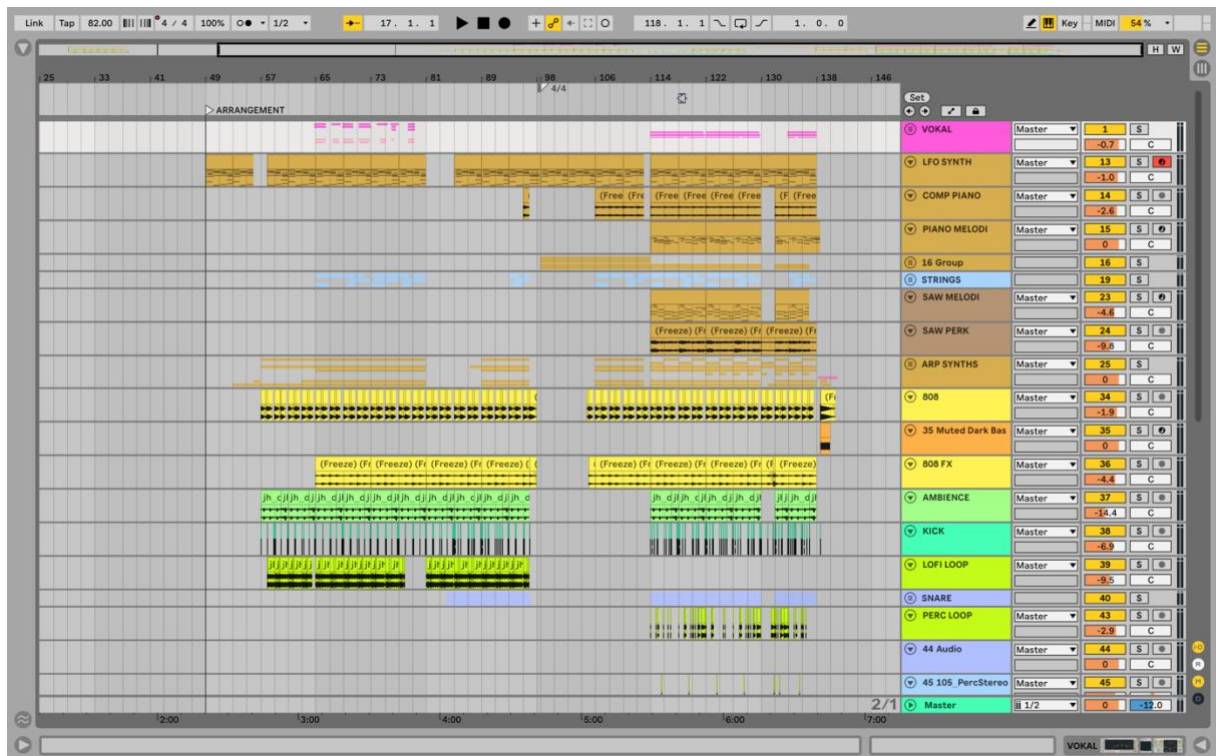
Elferen argues that game audio needs to evoke predictable emotions so that it can help assess gameplay situations (Elferen, 2016, p. 35). Therefore, the metaphorical emotions that are developed within the sound in game music, exists to strengthen the emotional qualities of the game itself. The difference between music as a standalone media and video game music is simply the context of which it exists.

While producing the song Rose, I was inspired by my own emotions. Even the meaning of the lyrics, is about feelings that I have previously felt. I am not assessing gameplay situations with my music; I am developing a time capsule containing my emotions. But even though I am aware of what I am creating, I am not in control over what someone else might feel through my music. When an individual listens to what I create, they are not constrained to feel any type of way, because the music in this state, is just music. The expectations or the psychological backgrounds of someone listening to my music is not something I am capable of predicting. And that is why a strong musical affect, can be both the strength of the song, but also its downfall; all depending on how I tell the story.

3.5 Part IV: Pure Noise – Limits of Literacy

[(Song link)](#)

Within the first moment of Pure Noise there is a sound of a car approaching at a fast speed. When the sound eventually reaches its apex, a doppler effect creates the transition into the song. I found video footage on YouTube of a Porsche 911 car driving on a racetrack and I sampled it into Ableton Live, I wanted to use the engine sound from this car as the main element of the song to challenge myself by making something beautiful out of something that is generalized as a disturbance in nature. Working with a real-world element like car noise was an engaging experiment because I knew that my listeners would be able to notice the origin of the sound.

(An overview of *Pure Noise* in Ableton Live)

Sound Designing Musical Literacy

"Musical media literacy is the fluency in hearing and interpreting film, television or advertising music through the fact of our frequent exposure to them and subsequently; our ability to interpret their communications." (Elferen, 2016)

I agree that an interesting property within musical media literacy is the fact that it revolves around our collective perception of the media. I believe that when we listen to music, we constantly try to understand what we are listening to, and if we find elements within the music that we recognize as something familiar, we feel more connected with these elements. In Pure Noise I wanted to create a balance between elements that are easily recognizable and elements that are surprising and new. This idea gave me many new perspectives of working with sound design, and that motivated me.

Working with creating the sounds of a car proved to be a fun challenge because I had to become aware of the properties of that sound.
The sample is of a car driving and shifting gears, within this sample I found an interval between the lowest and the highest resonance of the frequencies. I used this interval as the backbone for the arrangement; throughout the song, the sound is present, and every other element in the production was treated with this sound in mind.

It felt fitting to conceptualize the song about cars, and because of this I had many ideas come to mind. Firstly, I extracted the literal perception of what a car is, to further develop the arrangement. A car is used for transportation and takes you from point A to B, the way I transformed this idea into the music was to create a progressive beat that had a forward momentum, it is very similar to what I did with *Rose*. To enhance this feeling of momentum, I started designing the rhythmical elements of the song.

The drums I designed for Pure Noise were created using a technology that exists in Live, called *Groove*. With groove I can extract the rhythmical "time" I find within a certain sample and apply that same "time" to any other source of audio. The groove I extracted was from a recording of someone playing a djembe drum. In Pure Noise, I applied this groove to all the percussion elements and the synth bass to create an overall homogenous rhythmical feel.

To further elaborate on how the soundscape was literally turning into a car. I created mechanical and digital noises to apply details to this visualization. Throughout the song, I designed high frequency textures that jump in and out of the arrangement, some of these noises were sampled directly from the game: Gran Turismo (Polyphony, 1997).

Creating sounds inspired by a car was a very indulgent and interesting process. To some degree, it affected how I worked with all the elements in the song, because I was constantly thinking about it. While I was inserting these new textures into the production, I felt as if I was doing sound design for a video game.

When it came to the process of arranging the song, I produced a loop containing the car noises, mechanical noises, and the drums. Furthermore, I synthesized elements using my polyphonic synthesizer, Behringer Poly D. This synth was created by Behringer with an inspiration from the old analog synth, Minimoog Model D from the 70s.

These noisy and analog synths emerged into a color that worked well with the car noises. At this point I had created a full sonic representation of a car within the music, effectively completing this objective I had in mind.

Using the concept of literacy within musical immersion to conceptualize a song was an innovative experience for me as a creator.

I didn't feel constrained to only using my theoretical or technical knowledge in music. The epiphany I had from this was the feeling that, hypothetically, I could become creatively inspired from anything that I know exists physically or mentally and produce art from that.

Even though I embraced this process, and it helped me to create a different perspective on conceptualizing an idea. I also argue that literacy as a concept within my music comes in many already existing forms.

The usage of elements like piano, synthesizers, vocals, and drums is something my listeners already will be able to reference, because these musical instruments has already existed in contemporary music for decades.

Summary

Within the concept of Literacy in musical immersion, there is an element that proves to be almost too logical. I managed to create Pure Noise from a personal discovery within this concept, by manifesting a physical phenomenon within the soundscape. But even though this discovery proved to be helpful towards my workflow, I do not see that it will have a large impact on the musical immersion in the context of my music.

To compare to the discussions about "Interaction" in Part I. For the most part, the effects of immersion within musical interaction and literacy are based upon the spontaneous individuality of the listener, and because of this, I do not see a possibility for the music as a standalone source of media to directly control the behavior of the audience within these parameters. Instead, I can decide to use a specific genre, mood, or choice of instruments to inspire the listener towards a certain behavior.

I created Pure Noise to inspire my audience to listen for sounds that can be recognizable. The soundscape of the car creates an opportunity for my listeners to understand the effect of literacy on a base level, but in theory, musical immersion occurs through a synergy between all three elements of the ALI-model.

4. Discussion

I have discussed the immersive musical qualities within the three songs: Firebreath, Rose and Pure Noise, from the Curaga EP. The results indicate that I have reflected on the aesthetic and creative choices within my music, and that I have discussed the properties of "Interaction", "Affect" and "Literacy" within my creative workflow and thought processes.
When using the ALI-model to reflect upon the immersion within music as a standalone source of media, I have discovered that the synergetic paradigm that exists in the model, changes to a certain degree. The reflections that occurred because of this change, resulted in interesting discussions about my personal connection with my music and how it links together with my audience.

I presented three songs that I feel showcases my ability to develop musical immersion. One of the most prominent discoveries I found when creating the music, was that I have a choice to embellish the textures and colors within my sound design, by taking direct inspirations from my emotions. Through this process I can sonically manifest emotional metaphors within the soundscape of the music. Because "Affect" as a principal element within the ALI-model proves to have a strong connection with personal emotions, it also develops a plausible synergy between how the behavior of "Literacy" and "Interactivity" occurs within the music.

In the song Pure Noise, I created sounds based on theory of how "Literacy" exists within video game music. I created a recognizable soundscape within the arrangement because I hypothesized that if I created an element that the listener would be able to imagine, this could also affect the immersion. But with my research, I believe it is difficult to propose a theory within how Literacy works in my music. I do suggest however, that the way "Literacy" works within my music, is almost identical to the way Elferen describes it in her chapter about the ALI-model. Her description:

"Musical media literacy is the fluency in hearing and interpreting film, television or advertising music through the fact of our frequent exposure to them and subsequently; our ability to interpret their communications." (Elferen, 2016)

The concept of Interaction proposes a discussion about active listening and the behavior of the listener. In ludomusicological theory, musical interaction is described as interaction with and through music (Elferen, 2016). I argue that because my music does not contain any of the interactive elements that exists within video games, the interaction fails to be something that I can control. Instead, the interaction within my music becomes the active choices of the listener. Hypothetically, I can inspire this active behavior, by increasing the level of "Affect" in the music. I suggest that further research is needed on the topic of "Interactivity" within music on streaming platforms, to further develop the understanding of the individual behavior of how people actively listen to music.

In conclusion, The ALI-model proved to be a useful conduct for reflective discussions around my aesthetic choices and my creative workflow, the results indicate that I create music with an intent to affect my listeners emotionally, and through this, I desire to attain their full immersive attention.

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Weblinks

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