

*Here and There: an Autoethnography on Creating and Releasing a Debut EP as an Independent
Female Artist*

By

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Submitted to the Board of Liberal Arts and Sciences
School of SUNY Purchase College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2019

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Singer-songwriters, performers, musicians, and studio engineers/producers can be found all over the world. But one thing has become vocally and physically apparent in recent years. Though there is a variety of occupations in the industry, it appears there is a disconnect between the number of women versus the number of men who are actively working in these musical based professions. Research shows that in the United States, the male-to-female ratio in the music industry, whether it be on stage or behind the scenes, is approximately 3.5 to 1 out of a total counting of about 1,200 artists.

When I began to do my research, I was extremely baffled by these numbers, seeing that it's 2019 after all. As a singer/songwriter, a studio recording musician, and a live performer myself, I was sad to see that this is the industry that I'm hoping to work in.

The goal of my Senior Project is to be able to document and reflect on the process of making and releasing a Debut EP with close attention to how gender can affect females in the music industry. Looking at everything from why studio musicians tend to be mostly male, along with sound engineers, and even songwriters. In a study done by the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, I noticed that the percentage of working female songwriters in the industry decreased between the years of 2016 and 2017 by 2%. This was measured by looking at 700 of the most popular songs of said year, and seeing who exactly was writing them, males or females.

This deeply moved and upset me. Now, I find myself wanting to be one of the many young women who can help change not only this industry but the world, making sure that women are being represented and respected throughout the world for their talents and professions.

My senior project will be my Debut EP, as a singer-songwriter, showcasing a total sum of five songs that I have written over the course of the last three years. This project, which will be

entitled *Here and There* will be recorded, produced, and performed by an all-girl band with a female producer; a team that I will be putting together and orchestrating myself. Feeling encouraged and driven, I want to be one of many to break the glass ceiling with my musical endeavors. I want to encourage young women everywhere that we are just as capable as any typical man.

Methods

Autoethnography is a research method that seeks to describe and methodically analyze a personal experience to deepen one's understanding of that experience. It is also when one uses their life experience as a story and situates that story in a broader social, cultural, political, or historical context. This method relies heavily on the analysis of a specific occurrence or set of occurrences, leading the writer to reflect on the experience, as well as the emotions attached to it, and situate it in a broader context.

This is a method I have chosen to use to help scaffold and build my senior project. According to Carolyn Ellis from her chapter in *Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials*, when using this method, the writer is describing their own experiences while paying attention to their physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. "Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts- and emotional pain" (Ellis). It is important to be able to dive into what you are feeling when something happens as well as to why you are feeling that way. It is like writing a deeply personal diary for the entire world to read, but in an evocative way. This allows the author to better connect with their audience, by sharing their vulnerabilities, challenges, and growth along the way.

This method is crucial to my research because it is the process of diving deep into my own personal experiences and repacking them into an EP. Creating an EP can be difficult, time consuming, and emotionally and physically exhausting. It is important for me as an artist to be able to express to other upcoming musicians all that goes into independently creating an EP, especially as a woman, and how rewarding it can be. Using this method of autoethnography will help show more of my perspective to the audience and situate in the larger context of the challenges faced by female artists as whole.

What is an EP?

An EP, also known as an extended play record, is a compilation of songs often created for promotional use and is considered the “middle ground” between a single and full-length album (McDonald). EPs, which are typically between 4-6 songs, are usually used as a marketing strategy. They are what is used when introducing a new artist to the music scene, when an artist is changing their “sound,” to add some buzz between full-length releases, promoting a tour, or simply because an EP can be cheaper than a full-length album (McDonald).

When creating an EP, it is important to be aware of many different factors. Some of the first things an artist might want to ask themselves are: “Why am I making this EP?,” “What do I want to accomplish with making this EP?,” “How am I going to record my EP?,” and “How am I going to release my EP?”. In my case, I am creating an EP to be used as my formal introduction into the music scene. As of right now, the only music that I have released with my name on it is a collaborative project I worked on during Summer 2018. This project was different from my own music in the sense that it is considered EDM/Dance/Pop music. Stepping away from my usual sound of guitars and acoustic percussion, I decided to challenge myself and worked with a DJ to

release the song “Catch Me”. This project taught me many things about the music industry. I learned how to work with others in and out of the studio, how important communication is, as well as the logistics of releasing music professionally (i.e. distribution, publication, and copyright services).

I am hoping to use my Debut EP as my way of being able to introduce myself as the musician I am. This means by creating my brand/image and letting the world know how I, Elise Noelle, would like to be perceived in the music industry. Currently, I have the goal of releasing my full EP by February 2019. Through my Senior Project, I am going to document some of the basic necessities one needs to know when releasing an EP. I am going to research and document information that I, as well as other upcoming singer-songwriters, should know in regard to creating, distributing, marketing, etc. As a woman developing her first EP, it is important to understand the current state of the gender parity within the music industry.

Inclusion in the Recording Studio

According to a study by the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, the leading global think tank studying issues of inclusion across entertainment mediums, it was found that “females are missing in popular music” (Smith). In January of 2018, the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism division released its inaugural report, a study titled “Inclusion in the Recording Studio,” based on research found on inclusion in popular music between the years 2012-2018. Throughout the decade, Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, Dr. Katherine Pieper, Hannah Clark, Ariana Case, & Sylvia Villanueva analyzed women’s presence in the music business, in front of and behind the scenes. By showing who and how many of them (women)

were involved in songwriting, music production, performance, etc., it is revealed that just like in the film and television industry, there is a strong need for more females in the music industry

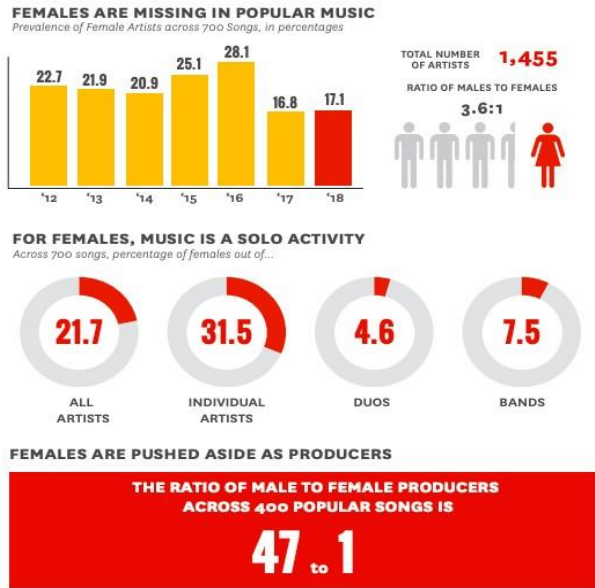


Figure 1 (Smith)

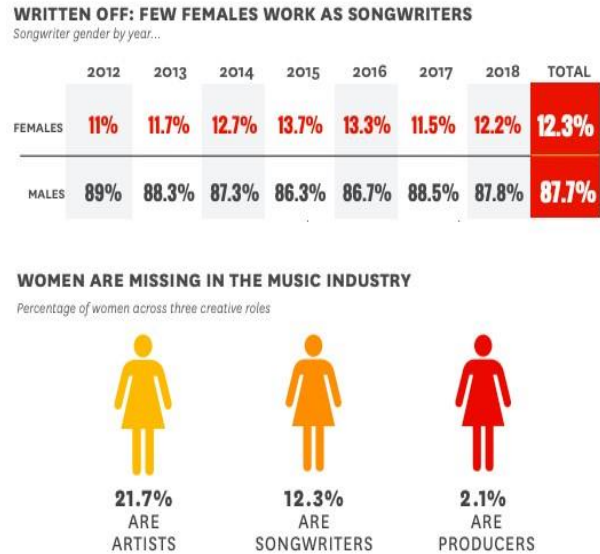


Figure 2 (Smith)

THE GENDER GAP AT THE GRAMMYS® IS REAL

Percentage of Female Nominees by Category, 2013-2019

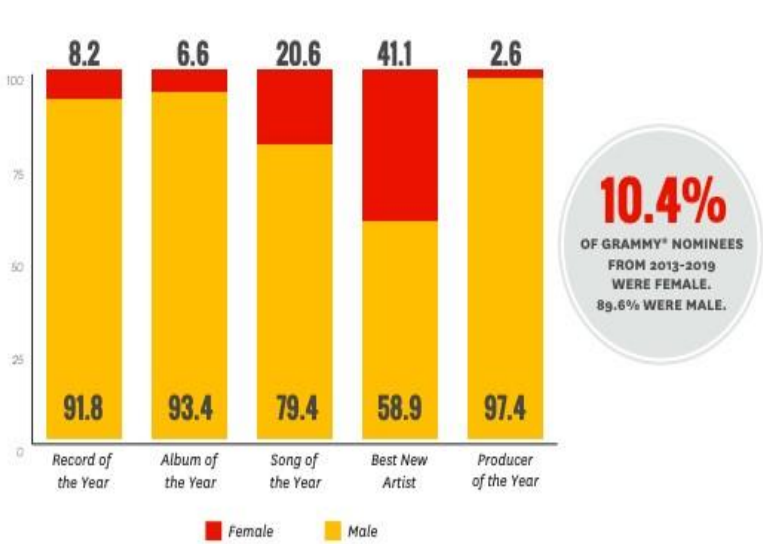


Figure 3 (Smith)

CREATIVE CONSTRAINTS: FEW FEMALE PRODUCERS WORK IN MUSIC



Figure 4 (Smith)

After reading through these infographics, it is apparent that there is a lack of female representation in the music industry, not only as musicians, but as studio engineers, songwriters, and even award winners. In 2017, 83.2% of artists were men and only 16.8% were women, marking a six-year low for female artists in popular content. Of songwriters, 2,767 credited, 87.7% were male and 12.3% were female and out of the study’s 651 producers, 98% were male and only 2% female (Pajer).

It was also found that out of 600 songs played on the radio, downloaded or streamed, women only counted for 16.8 percent of the artists accounted for. For groups and duos, the numbers were even worse as they only counted for 8.7 percent and 5.1 percent, respectively. Of the 899 individuals who have been nominated for the last six Grammy ceremonies, 90.7 percent were men and 9.3 percent were women. The study found that women were most likely to appear in the best new artist category (Smith).

Being a performer on the stage can be difficult, however, being the musician or engineer in the recording studio is not any easier. “Working female songwriters only accounted for 11.4 percent—compared to their male counterparts at 88.6 percent—when it came to music consumption in 2017. That was a decrease in songs written by females, which make up about 13.3 percent in 2016.” This is still nothing when you compare female-written songs to male-written songs. It was even worse for working female producers, only making up two percent of music produced while male producers get the lion’s share of the work and credit. The Grammys are a prime example of this gender disparity that is seen in the music industry, as women are barely present in the major categories. From 2013 to 2018, females only counted for 9.3 percent of those nominated, with no female producers nominated for Producer of the Year.

One thing that really shocked me from this report was the reasoning behind much of the lack of female representation in the studio. In the Annenberg report, one of the findings showed that of 75 women, 39% were objectified, 25% said there were only women there, 28% were dismissed, and 20% had noticed the presence of drugs and/or alcohol. “Interviewees also answered a question that specifically asked whether any aspect of the environment of the recording studio had ever made them feel uncomfortable or uneasy. More than three-quarters (83%) of participants said that they or other women experienced discomfort in the studio.”

(Smith) A prime example of this is artist Jessie Reyes.

Jessie Reyes is a Canadian singer-songwriter who first made her claim to fame in 2016 when her single “Figures” went Platinum. In her debut album, *Kiddo*, which came out following the famous single, she has a song titled “Gatekeeper”. Following the release of this album and song, she released a short film/music video that was about the story behind the song.

“Gatekeeper” is a song that follows the experience of an aspiring singer-songwriter, waiting for her big break. She meets a very famous music producer at a party, he asks her to sing, offers to record her that night, gets her into the studio, and says that he will only help her if she provides a sexual service. “The lyrics to ‘Gatekeeper’ deal with misogyny and coercion by power players in the music industry, including the lines, ‘We are gatekeepers/spread your legs, open up/you could be famous/you know we’re holding the dreams that you are chasing.’” (Holmes) Jessie Reyes did not see the opportunity through and left. It was about two years until Jessie shared that the famous producer was Detail, when two other girls from the same night were not so lucky and were sexually abused came out and shared their story.

The music industry can be a dirty, grimy place and is mostly run by men. Many other women in the industry experience the same things of not worst. I.e. Lady Gaga, Bebe Rexha, Kesha, Lilly Allen, and many more. I believe that with more women becoming present and having a voice in the industry, we can start to diverge from the toxicity and the idea that you must sell yourself to gain success. I have had my own experiences in the music industry, starting as young as 16, where men have objectified or dismissed me. I have been made to feel small and indefensible, all due to the fact that I have a different sexual orientation than them. It is through this lens that I reflected on the process of creating and releasing my Debut EP.

Autoethnography

The Beginnings

The process of creating this EP has been stressful. Having initially started in October of 2017, and going nowhere, I decided to take a break, find who I am creatively again, and dive back in. The music that I was writing was subpar and not at the level of creativity and professionalism that I wanted it to be at. I was having difficulty trying to figure out what it was I wanted to say, how to say it, and how I wanted to be heard. I would note that at this time, I was dealing with what most people would describe as “writer’s block”, or in my personal opinion, a “creative block”. Aside from the music I was trying to write, I was having difficulty seeing exactly how I wanted this record as a whole to sound and be recorded. I was allowing one hindrance of not being able to write, to affect my entire project. I did not have a fully formed strategy or plan for the project, no band, and no confidence in myself to see this through.

Believing in not only yourself, the artist, but your project is probably the most important advice I could give to any musician. If you do not have confidence in something you are creating, how can other people have confidence in it? As a musician, you are also working part-time as a salesperson. You are constantly having to sell yourself (your brand) to other people. This includes potential bandmates, producers, venues you want to perform at, investors, other businesses, and most importantly, the fans/listeners. Being your own personal salesperson as well as being the creator can be challenging because you have to believe in yourself 100% of the time, especially when you feel like you are failing. Doing all this as an independent artist, you are solely responsible for your image, your sound, and even your success. You have to constantly be telling yourself how you can do better while telling others you are more than enough,

constantly trying to convince them why they should choose you, why they need you and how you do not *need* them but you appreciate them.

The people you are working with, no matter what it is you are doing, should want to work with you just as much as you want to work with them, if not more. This is so important and something that I have learned an immense amount about while working on this project. This is because it helps to guarantee that your co-workers and your team will believe in what it is you are doing just as much as you do and will do everything they can to help make sure that you get the best results from them. Having people who wanted to work with me, rather than just people who had agreed because they had free time, was a huge game changer in my project.

Picking the Band

At the beginning of my senior year, Fall of 2018, I found myself out of my creative block (and rut) and decided it was time to start brand new. I do not know what it was that changed, maybe the change of scenery (being back at school) or the people I was being surrounded by (new and old friends), but I was writing new music again, some of the best songs I have had in a long time. It finally felt like I was figuring out what I wanted to say and exactly how to say it. Thus, began trying to piece my project together. I had decided on the songs for the five-song EP, all I needed to do was find a drummer, a bassist, a guitar/keys player, and the most important, a producer. The one I was most stressed about finding was a producer. At this moment in time, I had not decided on the all-female band idea yet, however, I knew that from past experience, having only worked with male producers, I never felt 100% secure about my project and myself.

I believe that working with men, especially in the music industry, can be quite difficult. With many of the male producers that I have worked with, I usually found myself spoken down

to in a condescending tone. While I do not have much knowledge when it comes to the technological side of the music industry, I do not find that to be a good enough reason to treat someone in such a patronizing manner. This made working in the studios very difficult. I appreciate people who do not roll their eyes when I ask questions and are willing and able to help me understand what it is exactly they are doing to my project, because, at the end of the day, it is my project, and I want to understand the ins and outs of it just as much as they do, if not more.

This expectation of being belittled by a man has been formed, not only from my experience in the studio, but also from my day-to-day experiences within the music industry. I took some Music Production classes in my junior year and was shocked when I noticed that I was only one of three females in many of these classes. The other two girls in my class appeared to be less femme and talked and acted as if they were one of the “dudes,” making this idea of being a female in the production industry even less realistic.

Frequently, the challenges faced by women in the music industry goes beyond bias. It can veer into sexual harassment and sometimes result in dangerous situations. I experienced this on a smaller scale with one of my first experiences in the industry, when I worked on my project that came out in September. The male DJ I worked with was, simply put, disgusting. At first, I thought our conversations on the phone to be witty banter, when actually it was verbal sexual harassment. He was speaking about me and my body and the sound of my voice and the things it “did to him”. When I decided it was time for our collaboration to come to an end after the song came out, I had to give him the news that I did not want to perform it to a live audience in Syracuse with him. He kept trying to convince me and I stood my ground saying no, making sure he knew how disrespected I felt by him, and that by going with him, I would be throwing away my values as both a female and an artist. He did not like what I had to say (as I later found out

through another collaborator of mine) and when I asked him, he told others that they could not work with me, attempting, and failing, to ruin the possible connections I could make. This form of sexual harassment goes hand-in-hand with the recent #MeToo movement.

The #MeToo Movement was founded in 2006 with the sole purpose of helping and supporting survivors of sexual violence, mostly women of color (MeToo). Shortly after, the movement went viral with the #metoo hashtag and began a nation-wide conversation regarding sexual violence and those affected by it. One of the main cases that helped the movement become what it is today was made by allegations from Christine Bailey Ford regards to being sexually assaulted by Supreme Court Justice Candidate Brett Kavanaugh. Another event that pushed the MeToo movement forward was women coming forward publicly with allegations of sexual harassment and assault by producer Harvey Weinstein in October of 2017. “In the weeks and months that followed, the movement gained steam as more and more Americans shared their own stories of being harassed or assaulted in the workplace by people — most of the men — in positions of power (Vox).” The MeToo movement is growing bigger every day, making the workplace more workable and less threatening for women everywhere. It is important for me to be able to find someone who I can work with who would not make me feel sexualized, patronized, or inferior.

After speaking with many different potential producers, I was considering one producer. I did not want to lock myself down because I still was not sure I felt this was the right fit for me. My producer and I had minor creative differences. For example, I wanted to record everything mono and he wanted to everything live. I was not sure it was going to work out. I wanted someone who wanted to collaborate, who wanted to record the way I thought was best

(everything isolated), and, if they disagreed with me, then at least give me reasoning as to why that was better than the excuse “it is just easier”.

I ended up finding exactly who I was looking for and found a wonderful and talented producer who understood exactly what I wanted to do with this project, even when it seemed a bit fuzzy to me. When I told her how I thought we should record, not only did she agree with me, but she told me that that was her preference as well. Bridgette Hoth, a transgender female, is probably one of the most kind, easy to work with, and insanely talented producers that I have worked within the past couple of years. And the best part? Hoth is a female-identifying musician, and drives me forward with the idea of an all-female team for the project entitled “*Here and There*”.

The second hardest part of securing an all-female band was picking the drummer. I learned that regardless of how open-minded Purchase College may be, there is a very small number of female bassists, guitarists, and about zero drummers. I had to use the Open Forum, a Facebook Page for the students of Purchase College. There, I managed to find a female drummer, one whom I actually knew from the Arts Management program.

Kelly Hayes, a senior Arts Management major has been studying drums for about 14 years. Having gone to La Guardia High School, she was able to declare a “major” in their program and auditioned and eventually joined their percussion department. Kelly Hayes was one of 6 students, being the only female. When she told me this, I was not surprised, I was just a little angry.

It was apparent to me that Purchase College was not the only place where female drummers are scarce: it is everywhere. I came to the conclusion that the only reason for this is because my generation was born in the late '90s. It can be assumed that woman at this point in

time was less represented in the music industry then they are now. I started to think about the '90s and early 2000s and what it was like to have grown up in that time. Girls were taught that we had to look like dolls, small and frail, beautiful and soft. Of all the mainstream instruments (guitar, piano, bass, drums), drums are the ones that don't represent this imagery. They can be intense, loud and rough. If you look at many of the females playing drums growing up, you'll see that they are the girls who fell under the category of being a "tomboy." According to the dictionary, a tomboy is "an energetic, sometimes boisterous girl whose behavior and pursuits, especially in games and sports, are considered more typical of boys than of girls." I still just cannot seem to understand why a more feminine girl could be a drummer.

When it came to picking my guitarist, I reached out to a good friend of mine, Jorge Portero. Jorge is the person who, believe it or not, actually gave me the idea to finally make an EP. Having known him for four years, he heard some of my music and automatically believed in me. He put shows together just to give me an opportunity to perform and did what he could to connect me to other artists and musicians on campus. It is through him that I had the pleasure of meeting Lilli Oliviero, better known as "Lillimure".

Lilli is a singer-songwriter who plays guitar and piano. She is a wonderful performer and a very talented artist when it comes to her music. I first met with Lilli one Thursday afternoon in the music building. We chatted for a bit and then I went on to show her my music. Together we came up with some nice arrangements for the guitar and piano tracks on the EP. After, she agreed to play guitar and keys for me and accompany me on the day of my EP release show which was to be held on February 15th, 2019.

Getting Started

On November 7th, 2018, the recording process for *Here and There* began. We decided the best plan of action would be to first record scratch tracks for everything. A scratch track is basically a rough take of the song recorded to a click. This typically includes vocals and one instrument (i.e. guitar or piano) and is used as a guide for the other instrumentalists to allow you to properly build your sound for each track. As we got set up in a D.I.Y. setup, which is a set up that is typically considered “unconventional” that Bridgette had put together in her apartment, I rehearsed the songs that my guitarist/keyboardist had some questions on still, giving Bridgette time to properly set up mics and set levels for sound. Our D.I.Y. setup consisted of an interface, a mic for guitar, a mic for vocals, and recording software which was pulled up on a laptop. There were no sound barriers, no sound system, nothing about this setup was in any way “traditional”. This process took us a total of about two hours to get scratches for all five songs. Bridgette then took the rest of the day to clean them up a bit and get them to sound nice and compact, sending me copies by the end of that day. The scratch tracks came out very good considering our situation of being in a living room with a midi piano and a single mic. I was looking forward to finally starting the rest of this project.

The following week was Thanksgiving break, so we decided to meet up again the week after when we got back. Bridgette managed to book studio time in advance and got us set up for Tuesday, November 27, 2018, from 6:30-close, allowing us to finally start tracking drums. She also managed to book us the week after, the first week of December, so we could hopefully finish up everything else. Tuesday, December 4th was for guitar/keys and bass, Thursday, December 6th for violins and horns, and Friday, December 7th for vocals and any other small things we felt like we should add.

Drum tracking was a huge learning experience for me. Having never really learned much about drums, I learned that they, just like every other instrument in this world, also need to be tuned, an idea which never crossed my mind. With drums, you also have to be very conscious about how you are going to mic everything. One mic two inches in a different direction could change the sound of the whole thing. We decided to record this in a very small tight spaced room, which was a very interesting experience. We set the mics up in a way that each sound was so carefully picked up allowing Bridgette to be able to alter how big or how closed that drum would sound. We managed to record everything we needed in a matter of about six hours.

Complications

As it is often said, “all good things must come to an end”. It was around the beginning of December, when we went in to track guitars, that Bridgette shared with me the news that our drums were, in the simplest terms, awful. Our drummer failed to keep a consistent time and rhythm throughout each song, and while it actually was not that bad, it was not great. I was promised a solid, clean drum track and that wasn’t what I got. While we could have quantized it, which is the process of transforming performed musical notes, which may have some imprecision due to expressive performance, to an underlying musical representation that eliminates this imprecision, it would have taken too long, making things more complicated. It was as if God heard my insides drowning in the anxiety because, within that moment, an angel walked in the door.

Christopher Iorio is a junior in the Studio Production program. His background in music is drum heavy, however, he is also well versed in the guitar and has basic knowledge on the bass. Chris offered to play drums for me after seeing and hearing about everything that had been going

on, and I couldn't have been more grateful. We came to the conclusion that it would not hurt my project if we included a male drummer (even though he would be identified as not a part of my band but as a studio musician), but it would help my project. The fact of the matter is, not many female drummers exist, especially in the realms of Purchase College. I had approximately three female drummers to pick from, and the one who was the most compliant did not work. So, having to look outside of the category of females, I was forced to look at the whole catalog of Purchase drummers, to guarantee a successful sounding EP. It just so happened, that the best choice, was male.

Chris was very eager to help. Regardless of the fact that it was already 9:30 pm, he offered to go grab his drum kit and track all the songs that night. We went ahead and set up his kit, the necessary mics, and got each track ready for him to listen to what was done previously. By the time we got out of there, it was 7 am, and all five tracks had the necessary drums recorded. Aside from being sleep deprived, I was so happy and satisfied because not only did the drums sound better, but they sounded amazing. Considering the drums were now finally tracked, it was time to move on and record keys and bass. And of course, things did not go smoothly this time around either.

As we got ready to move forward and track keys, Lily, the instrumentalist who had agreed to play both keys and guitar for me, now backed out. When I asked for her availability the only day she could record, was the last official day of school before Winter Break. This was not feasible due to the fact that studios were no longer in access then, I would not be on campus, and neither would anyone from my production team. She then decided that she just would not be able to see this commitment through and backed out of not only this part of the project but the performance part to take place in February. I was lucky enough that on the night that we were set

to track violins, my good friend Brittany, who is in a band with the violinist, Steve, came along as support.

Brittany Rose, a singer-songwriter is an excellent pianist, guitar player, and vocalist, who has been studying music for years. She came in that night to support her friend, as he was slightly nervous to be playing the violin for me. After hearing the songs a couple of times through, she offered to write me charts for my songs, free of charge. I so graciously accepted and was so thankful. This would make life a lot easier for anyone who ever wanted to gig, play, or record for me because then they would have a clear idea of how to play my songs. As the night went on and we got to talking, I told Brittany about the issues had come up since we began tracking. She then offered to play keys for me, willing to even play that night, regardless of the fact that it was already 11:30 am. We were able to track all the keys that night and even add a new song to the record.

When starting a project, it is imperative that you find people who want to work with you as badly as you want to work with them. This makes the “working” part of the project more enjoyable. If people are just as interested in you and what you are doing as much as you are in them, then they are more likely to want to help you to achieve the best possible outcome, causing them to work just as hard and not half-ass anything or even flake out when things get hard. This is something that I was learning in an unideal setting and began to further prove true, as my bassist and second guitarist backed out as well.

It was the middle of Winter Break when my producer and I got to talking about the project, discussing what we needed to finish, and the necessary steps to make to accomplish this project in a timely manner. However, it was during this conversation, that my producer informed me she was having a hard time with my bassist. Emma had not been able to meet again before

the break to finish and fix her parts and assured me that she could record these parts remotely and send them to my producer throughout the break. What we realized through this, though, was that Emma's bass parts were coming in out of tune and not sounding good. Emma did not know how to properly tune her bass. Out of the two songs I needed from her, she was able to get one finished, and the other one incomplete. After about a million different try's, it came to my conclusion that it was time to go a different way. Thankfully, I knew an excellent bassist by the name of Drew Fermo, who would be able to execute this in a single session. After realizing that this would be the new course of action, I sent Drew a message and he happily obliged saying he was more than happy to help in any way that I needed him.

The Recording Process

Now it was time to get the ball rolling. We had the drum tracks done, needed to redo the guitars, bass, and any and all keys. We also had to add a string and horns section to one or two of the songs and had to figure out what other elements would help give my music the sound that it needed. I had my friend Jorge Portero, an excellent guitarist I have worked with in the past, offer to play a lead line on one of the songs, "Letting Go". A lead line is a line that is played on guitar that is not a chord, but more a melody made out of individual notes. We recorded that in one day, going on to add the piano part (via Brittany). It was in this session that I got talking to Jorge who made me really realize the strap for time I was in. It was idea and convincing that led me to take this five song EP and make it a three song EP. While this technically is not an EP (an EP is 4-8 songs) it did not matter much to me. It seemed like the right idea, and that it was. After talking to my producer, we settled on the three songs that would be in the EP would be "Handcuffs," "Letting Go," and "Paralyzed". These songs were in my opinion, the most complete songs and also some of the strongest. "Letting Go" was the first song I had ever written, the song that

kickstarted this whole project, pushing me to continue and grow with my writing. It was primarily a pop-song, and with production we gave it a nice big Coldplay-like feel. “Handcuffs” and “Paralyzed” were two of my newer songs, that I was extremely proud of. “Handcuffs” had more of a grunge rock vibe, with rule breaking themed lyrics, giving the EP a feeling of angst. “Paralyzed” was the third and final song of the EP, the most ballad-like song of the mix, with poetic heart-wrenching lyrics about not being able to fully feel what is being experienced in the face of love, and a piano part that was played parallel to the melody, yet at some points contrasting, making the listeners hear all the highs and lows of not only the music, but also the emotional message being delivered.

Are We Done Yet?

February 5th rolled around, and we were still not done. We were very close, but just not done. We still needed to get some final vocals for one of the songs, but I had been hit hard with a nasty head cold and needed to take a rest from the never-ending work that was this project. I took this break to finalize any and all artwork/promotional content that was needed for marketing purposes. I had my roommates working on the artwork and had been sent some drafts of what they had created on. I used this time to sit down with them and finalize the cover art for the album. After doing this, I went through all the photos from a photo shoot I had done the day before, picking and choosing the best ones to use for marketing content, and began to play out a simple marketing plan for social media. I looked at the aesthetics I wanted (sweet, simple, innocent, pink and blue) and began to curate my postings for Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. I also went ahead and pre-planned the captions for all the postings as well as the hashtags that would be used, trying to keep everything as consistent as possible.

My head cold began to subdue, yet I was also running out of time, and it was time I recorded final vocals for “Handcuffs”. Of all the musical production elements that had occurred out of my control throughout this process, I think having this head cold was the best. After getting back the mixed and mastered version of this song, I noticed the rasp that I had from my head cold added an element to the song that complimented the angst and grunge-like atmosphere of the song. February 12th, I had finally received the final versions of all three songs, and it was time to submit them to distribution. At this point, I was very late, but I was hoping luck would be on my side, and they would get out without a hitch.

DistroKid, is a service for musicians that puts your music into online stores and streaming services. It is a service that I have used in the past and is notoriously known (from my past experience and from other peoples’) for releasing music before I desired deadline. I thought this would be best as I was already super close to the date that I had planned to have this out, February 15th. Last time I had used this distribution service was with a Christmas EP that I collaborated with a friend on. The song came out two days after we had submitted it, and this is exactly what I had needed this time around. However, this time the odds did not work in my favor, it took about four days for the album to show up on Spotify, and about six days to show up on iTunes and Apple Music. These were the most important streaming services for me specifically, based on the demographics of my listeners. From past experience, I learned that a majority of my listeners get their music through Spotify, and the other half (a smaller half) from Apple. By the time it came out everywhere, on February 18th, I was already about 500 streams in for the whole album. My monthly listeners/followers on Spotify jumped from 21 to 105. I was feeling successful with my music.

Final Thoughts

While this project was very stressful, time-consuming, and a rollercoaster and a half, I was very thankful to be done, and also very proud of the outcome. The project soared above and beyond my expectations. I was getting an immense amount of positive feedback, friends and acquaintances I had not realized had been following my musical career, reached out to me with their love and support, saying how proud and surprised they were with the music that was entirely mine. I had reached people worldwide, hearing from someone in France who just happened across my music and wanted to share how much they loved it with me, as well as friends of friends in China and in Spain, who shared with me how much they loved it and how they were also sharing it around their side of the world. I also got reached out to by a couple of artists that I vaguely know, telling me how much they loved my style of writing, how honest and organic it is, asking to collaborate with me on some of their very own projects. The feedback from this EP has been outstanding. If it is given me anything, it is given me the faith and courage that I needed to truly know that this is something I am good at and can be successful doing. It is given me the momentum to push myself further, looking to do bigger and better things with the LP, an album which will be titled *Home* and will most likely contain these three songs as well as seven more, pulling a total of ten songs together for my first full-length album.

Conclusion

While I may have been unsuccessful in pulling a 100% female team to push this project through, I have learned that it is okay. It is just important for me to be an advocate for females everywhere in this industry, helping push all of us toward success, utilizing women whenever I can, and recommending them whenever I can. Women in this industry need more of a voice and if I could just be one voice amongst many to help us sound louder as a collective, I will do it. What is important is that we use the best resources that we can and trust the teams we surround ourselves with, as well as trust ourselves in our creative choices. It is now my goal going forward to continue to be a pioneer in the music industry for women everywhere. Thanks to technology, it is now easier than ever to do things for yourself musically. The more that women see other women doing exactly what they want to do, the more they can and will believe it's possible to be a singer, songwriter, producer, studio engineer, and studio musician, without having to rely on a male. Women can start to educate themselves to be just as intellectual and talented when it comes to their music, slowly but surely changing the numbers, leveling out the playing field.

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