Sounds of Hwa Chong

WRITTEN REPORT

Aloysius Lee (**Leader**), Ho Wing Yip, Iann Tan, Yong Han Qin | Group 5-08

Introduction

OBJECTIVE

Our project aims to create electronic music representing activities of Hwa Chongian students and staff, compiling them into a single extended play (EP) that will be available to Hwa Chongians on multiple platforms.

IDEA

Our idea revolves around creating music for Hwa Chongians by collecting samples recorded around Hwa Chong and using them as song components. As our project comes just before Hwa Chong's 100th anniversary, music created for Hwa Chong is especially relevant, representing 100 years of Hwa Chong culture.

Literature Review

Andrew Huang

Andrew Huang is a musician who uses odd sounds to make music of many genres. He has made music with sounds from buses, chairs, and even a Donald Trump sniff.

When Andrew Huang works with an object, he records sounds made by the object, cutting up the sounds or editing them to make them shorter, longer, high-pitched or low-pitched, forming different song components: melody, hi-hats, claps and snares.

The sounds are still sound recognisable despite having been edited, allowing him to base the song off the object. This inspired to do the same with Hwa Chong-related sounds, linking it to school.

Rob Scallon

Rob Scallon is a guitarist using unorthodox methods: instruments like harps, berimbaus or even one-string guitars made out of rusty shovels.

He taught us not to stop at traditional music-making methods, instead creating unique pieces from unusual objects. This showed us that thinking out of the box is key to utilising samples innovatively.

GENRES

EDM Genre	Characteristics
Trap	• Hi-hats/snares • Well-defined rhythm • Mini-drops between repeats
Electro	• Machine-like beats • Robotic vocals/tune • "Zap-zap" sounds • No beat drop sometimes
Techno	• Drum machine beats • Warped vocals • Longer (7-8 mins)
House	• Machine-like beats • Hi-hats/cymbals • Distorted vocals

Software Used

Ableton Live

Music Creation

Adobe Premiere Pro
Adobe After Effects

Video Editing / Effects
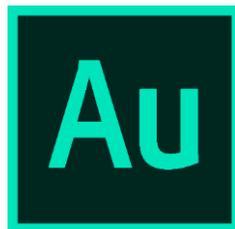
Adobe Audition

Audio Editing

Adobe Photoshop
Adobe Lightroom CC

Image Editing

Platforms for Product Release

Soundcloud
Bandcamp

Music release

YouTube
Vimeo

Video release

Process

INSPIRATION

Iann introduced the group to Andrew Huang. The idea of a project on music creation in Andrew Huang's style, and linking it to Hwa Chong in anticipation of its 100th anniversary, was thus born.

Gathering samples from around school to test our idea's viability, and applying audio effects to explore altering them, it was deemed viable.

RESEARCH ON MUSIC THEORY AND SOUND DESIGN

We analysed music theory and sound design to look for patterns, composition styles and structures we could follow.

We found three main musical forms – binary (AB) form, ternary (ABA/ABA'), and verse-chorus. In binary form, there are two parts to the music, a famous example of which is Greensleeves. In ternary form, there are three parts to the piece, with the third part being similar to the first, but sometimes altered slightly, for example in Clair de Lune by Claude Debussy. Verse-chorus form is used more in modern music with lyrics, where the same chorus is repeated in between verses with different lyrical content.

In sound design, one thing we learnt about was to manipulate stereo channels to produce interesting effects, such as a "call and response" effect caused by alternating between the two stereo channels. This is used in the well-known Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen.

Armed with this new knowledge, we began to foray more confidently into music creation, utilising it while doing so.

PROCESS

We sampled more sounds from around school – over a hundred. Using these samples, we handpicked the most relatable to Hwa Chong and painstakingly arranged them into melodies in Ableton to create songs, with many failed attempts. Subtle edits were made to them to make them more pleasing to the ear while retaining their audio integrity.
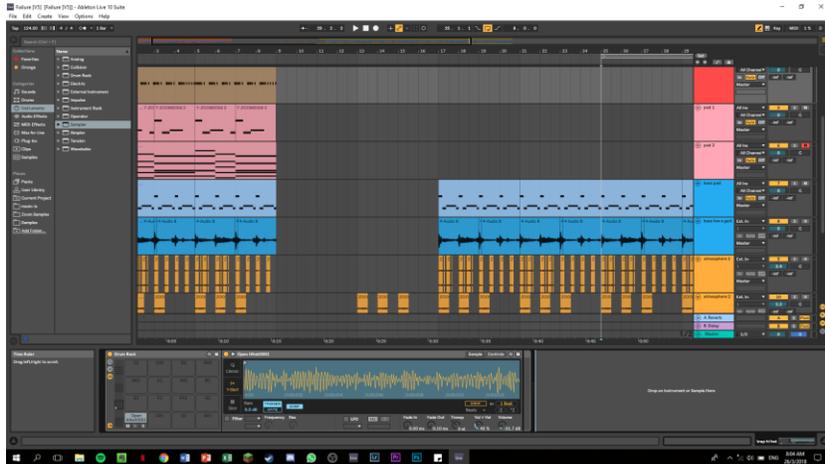
A screenshot of a song being put together in Ableton.

VIDEOS

A project purely about creating music lacks substance, and some may have difficulties distinguishing samples. Hence, music videos and behind-the-scenes videos were made to accompany our music and show our work in making them.

Shot from behind-the-scenes video #2.

Shot from a music video.

REJECTS / FAILURES

Live renditions of our music were scrapped. We planned to record sounds while filming them concurrently, then compiling them into videos to show the recorded samples. This idea, sounded theoretically feasible, but we found that our live renditions sounded too similar to the original songs, even with unedited samples, making them indistinguishable from the originals. The song and video were also troublesome to put together.

The tediousness of creating the live rendition video.

One of our songs, Stationary, was somewhere between failure and success. An idea created during brainstorming, it was less related to Hwa Chong, detailing the life of a student outside school. Feeling it would be a waste not to showcase our song-writing and videography skills, we included it as a bonus track in our EP, also releasing a music video for it.

Shot from Stationary.

FINAL PRODUCTS

At first, we thought of music as our final product. However, we decided to include the videos as final products as well, due to them being just as related to Hwa Chong as our music. Music has been released on Soundcloud and Bandcamp, and videos on YouTube and Vimeo.

Roles

Aloysius Lee

Group Leader
Music Making
Acting
Album Art

Iann Tan

Music Making
Cameraman
Album Art
Acting

Ho Wing Yip

Video Planning
Video Editing
Cameraman

Yong Han Qin

Admin Work
Acting
Miscellaneous

Reflections

ALOYSIUS LEE

As the group leader, I did not pull my weight at first. At first, we were unmotivated to create music and thought we had ample time. When July came, we had completed only two of six songs. Still, we were confident of our ability to create more songs and videos within a month.

Mid-Term Evaluation was a wake-up call. Judges complained that school-related samples were beyond recognition and could not be heard in songs. They also commented on the lack of music theory used and shown.

This gave us the determination to strive forward. We began editing samples less, using our teacher-mentor's suggestion to create an atmospheric track showing school life by including sounds from Hwa Chong.

Moving forward, I decided to focus on making music for the 100th anniversary of Hwa Chong, letting myself be in charge of music. We hope that through our project, we pay homage to those in Hwa Chong who make school memorable – friends, teachers and CCA groups, along with the energy at major events that shows Hwa Chong's school spirit.

HO WING YIP

In the beginning, our project was a boat with no one at the helm. Ideas were thrown around and project files were created, only to be deleted within days. Videos – my sole responsibility to the group – had not even been started on.

Midterms were a valuable lesson learnt in time management and efficiency. The project was nowhere near 80% complete, along with issues brought up the judges. For one of the first times in my life, I took initiative, drawing up schedules, boosting our productivity. This let us solve the issues and complete our project in time. As such, one success of the project was that good quality work was produced extremely quickly, albeit after Midterms.

An artistic takeaway was that music videos did not have to relate to song lyrics. For *Staccato*'s video, I struggled to formulate a plot – how would one make a video for a song without lyrics? Aloysius taught me to examine aspects of the song like speed and mood to create the plan.

Finally, I would like to reflect on our team. I would say that earlier on, we were not efficient. However, poor marks received for Midterms were cold water to the face, increasing our productivity. It was in this situation that our team's strength was found resilient. Through the many trials faced in this project, it was apparent that our team was more than the sum of its parts – a great honour.

IANN TAN

This project has been bittersweet, giving me creative freedom and more experience in making music. Yet, because of this inexperience, I found it daunting. Poor time management, a lack of motivation, few creative bursts and procrastination have taught me not to bite off more than I can chew, especially when I am aware of my character flaws.

Music-wise, I have definitely matured. This experience has taught me workflow optimization and compositional techniques that will help me in music production later on. I have also gotten to know Ableton Live better, together with the basics of sound design and sampling.

Lastly, working as a team has taught me much-needed team bonding and social skills, as well as teaching me how to be calm yet assertive as I fight for my opinions with difficult group members.

In summary, through this project I have matured as a musician and a person, and I will use the skills I have learned in future endeavors.

YONG HAN QIN

This project has had its share of ups and downs. Racing against time, meetings and evaluations served as an impetus for us to work efficiently throughout our project.

Midterms in particular were a stern warning about time management. We learnt that no matter how many other commitments we had, we could not treat this as a secondary priority. As a result, filming of music videos after evaluation went smoothly.

Though I was not heavily involved in the music-making process, the video segment taught me several things about videography, like exploiting camera angles and camera settings to evoke certain moods. Brainstorming and recording samples also reminded me how Hwa Chong is always a happening place, for we incorporated many distinct, uniquely Hwa Chongian sounds into our music.

Sounds of Hwa Chong has allowed me to step out of my comfort zone and do something I had never tried before, as well as grow together with teammates. This was a special opportunity for me and one I will keep close to my heart.

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