

Music Production Workshop

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Inspiration

The inspiration for our project was a desire to learn to use music production technology in spaces that encouraged exploration and experimentation without the stress of performing for a grade or credit or performing for other participants. We wanted to create a welcoming learning environment for students to learn to create their own music. Music is an important part of many people's lives but learning how to create one's own music is a daunting undertaking and we hoped to make the learning process enjoyable and stress-free. We hoped to provide youth with the opportunity to experience the joy of creating their own music and the skills they need to continue to create music after the workshop ended. We also wanted to create a space for youth to meet others with similar interests and passions, especially after a difficult year of isolation and virtual learning.

Beginning to learn music production is a difficult and confusing process on one's own. There are many online resources and free softwares available, but it can be difficult to navigate these various resources and tools. We hoped that in creating this course we could help each other (youth and CTEP members) through the process of learning how to create original music. We focused on creating an environment where everyone was learning together, including the CTEP members who led the project, and in doing so hoped to create a space in which it is ok to make mistakes and to bring out the joy in creation and focus less on the output. Ultimately, we wanted to set the participants up to continue to make music after the course. Rather than feeling stressed and disempowered, we made sure that they felt their voice was of equal weight in the class and that we all had things to learn from one another.

Accomplishments

The course had two participants that attended sessions in-person at SPNN. They learned basic music theory, songwriting techniques, and the music production software Waveform. The software we used is completely free, enabling participants to continue to make music on their own after the course ends with this software. We originally had a total of six sign up for the course but others who planned to attend were unable to make it work with their schedules. Our age range was initially from 16-24, however, one of our participants was 15. We expanded our range to allow for more people to join.

In addition, we produced and taught a curriculum for seven sessions that cover basic music theory, music writing, and how to use the music production software, Waveform. We were able to teach the class hybridly, both in-person and over Zoom and offer up learning materials, such as the powerpoint slides, and resources to youth to use on their own time. These resources are available on the [website](#) we created for the course and are available to those who wish to go through a crash-course in creating their own music.

While creating this workshop, we learned SPNN has Midi Keyboards in the equipment room that had previously not been used. Through our curriculum, SPNN now has the tools to teach free music production software to the community.

Participants were able to produce a song in a stress-free environment and both participants showed interest in continuing to produce music after the program ended. This is likely our biggest accomplishment, as the two youth feel empowered to be making their own music and know how to do so.

While we did not meet our participation goals of 10-20 youth, we did have two youth who showed up, were engaged throughout the sessions, and made connections with us and each other.

One of our goals was to specifically impact the demographics that do not usually participate in music production, namely non cis-white men. We didn't necessarily reach this goal. Part of the issue with not reaching this goal was outreach. Although we did reach out to ShiftMN, an LGBTQ+ organization, and Listen Up! Youth Radio, whose youth participants come from underrepresented communities, the schedule of youth programming at Listen Up! with ours and the lack of time between outreach and the program start date made it difficult to recruit youth from these organizations. Other factors that may have contributed to lack of participation include an inability to provide youth with a stipend to attend and with various different scheduled times. Also, it would be difficult for youth who had to work jobs or who did not have access to reliable transportation to attend in person or those without personal computers and access to the internet to attend virtually.

Challenges

Switching to in-person/hybrid from previously planning on doing a virtual event was a bit of a challenge. While it was excellent and the right decision to switch to in-person/hybrid, we weren't originally planning on it and there was no way to plan on being in-person until May when it was clear that vaccinations were going well and cases were decreasing. Switching to in-person was a stumbling block because it required us to find a location that we could use, make it work with each of our individual schedules and make sense for youth. In addition, we needed a space that could provide computers, internet access, easy location for youth to get to, etc and one that would be available when needed. Jackie's site, St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) became the obvious choice for hosting the program as there was access to computers, internet, and it is a relatively easy location to reach. After finalizing the location we had to figure out our schedules and request the Youth Lab at SPNN. While it originally appeared that this wouldn't be an issue, there did end up being several scheduling issues that came up at the end of May and June. This delayed the outreach that we were able to do. While in the end Jackie reached out to ShiftMN, Listen Up! Youth Radio, various CTEP members that worked in youth programming, and SPNN's network, we were only able to recruit six participants and only two were able to attend the sessions in person and those who were planning on attending virtually

didn't end up being able to fit it into their schedules. We are very grateful to all the organizations and people who promoted our project on social media and within their networks.

Another stumbling block was the issue of technology and funding. This also led to delays in curriculum development and outreach. We applied to a Best Buy grant within a grant that SPNN wrote for youth programming. While usually applicants would hear back from Best Buy by end of May, SPNN did not end up hearing back until the end of June and by then our project was in full swing. We delayed making definitive decisions on software until we knew about funding because we were hoping to be able to purchase software for the youth to use and purchase Midi Keyboards for use in the program. Rachel had been developing curriculum and doing research for awhile and at the middle/end of May we officially decided to move forward with completely free software and try to facilitate the program with no cost. Luckily, when Jackie was helping in the SPNN equipment room she found two Midi Keyboards that SPNN had and we were able to use those for our project. In the end, we ended up moving forward with a no cost version of the program, which also benefited the youth participants.

Risk

Some risks we outlined in our Charter were COVID-related safety concerns and shutdowns. Given the state of the pandemic in June, we taught classes in person. However there was a COVID risk in this and also risks in teaching hybrid, as it can be difficult to be engaging both in-person and virtually. It was interesting to navigate in-person teaching after such a long time of teaching virtually. One thing that virtual teaching has made easier is scheduling and space. We decided to use the SPNN Youth Lab space, which we were able to use at no cost and which provided computers, internet access, midi keyboards, etc. There were some scheduling difficulties however within the SPNN space and with member's individual schedules. While all of the issues that came up were manageable, we hadn't foreseen these risks. For example, teaching in-person tends to make scheduling more difficult and that was a risk that we did not foresee originally as we had planned to meet virtually.

Another risk we foresaw that we did not run into issues with was the issue of explicit language, hate speech, etc. in the creation of their original music.

Include at least 5 pictures/video that shows the work of the project, with written descriptions for each picture.

Image descriptions in order of appearance:

1. CTEP Members Rachel Brodt, Jackie Tyson, and Grayson Betz sitting on the couch in the SPNN youth lab during a drop-in space for the workshop
2. CTEP Member Rachel Brodt teaching music production in the background with a Zoom screen in the foreground showing the material
3. Music Production Workshop participant Baine working with the Waveform software.

4. CTEP member Rachel Brodt and participant Finn during a songwriting workshop in the SPNN Youth Lab
5. CTEP member Grayson leading a workshop with participants Baine and Finn.
6. Music Production Workshop participant Finn working with Waveform Software.

Looking Forward

The project could continue as a virtual learning tool for organizations and/or individuals to use as a crash course in creating music using a free music production software. This could be useful to organizations looking for a way to have their members learn to produce music without having to create their own curriculum. In addition, we plan to create a document with various online resources that we will share with the participants and on the website and twin cities resources that people can use to learn music technology and continue their music creation education.

What did you learn about civic engagement from this experience?

We learned many things about Civic Engagement through working on this project. Foremost, we learned to address community needs. If we had reached out to Listen Up! Youth radio earlier we could have come up with a curriculum that specifically set up their youth to be able to create music that would play as the intro, theme, etc. on their podcast productions. Having a specific community tie and youth base would have made it so that we could curate curriculum and gain more participants. Ultimately, being more proactive in recruitment and asking about needs.

In addition, we learned the importance of curating an environment. While we all had practice in creating virtual spaces this past year, creating a welcoming and inclusive in-person space was a new experience for many of us after a difficult year of isolation and remote instruction. Luckily, SPNN provided an excellent environment for fostering creativity and feeling open and welcome. We are incredibly grateful to SPNN for letting us use their space and are indebted to the staff at SPNN.











