



# Magic Ritual Practice in Music Production

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Ceremonial ritual, conventional for thousands of years as a part of established religion and esoteric practices, generates belief and belonging in participants, often stimulating a sense of euphoria and social well-being. Music is a fundamental part of ritual practice, where the communal experience of playing music can have beneficial psychological effects. While live performance is often referred to as ritualistic and magical, the routines of music production are only seen as pragmatic functions. Where the science of sound production is devoid of the mysticism attributed to music as a wider artform, the magic of recording as an art can be underappreciated by those who practice it.

The objective of this thesis was to examine the benefits that magic ritual brings to the process of music production. The questions raised were whether the elements of the magic ritual increase productivity and focus and if the magic rituals could elevate social connection and value. To engage these issues, an extensive research study was conducted in the form of a 3-week album recording, where magic ritual was employed at the forefront of the daily production work.

Findings revealed that magic rituals performed during the production drew participants closer to their work, increased value, and enjoyment, and gave them a higher sense of connection and community within the project. The study indicated that magic ritual is simple to incorporate and of immense value to those involved in creating an album recording, and that it is both sustainable and conducive to the process.

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Key words: magic ritual, music production, recording

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Music as a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy is an ancient assertion. There is a vast body of literature which is dedicated to music as a powerful agent for self-transformation, for healing of body, soul and awakening the spirit within, from the music of Ancient Greece to modern times. Some see the cosmos created out of sound, and therefore music itself, while religions throughout history have used music as a spiritual tool to command and draw a sense of transformative experience from their adherents. When we look at the history of magical practice, music is synonymous and historically referred to using magical terminology. Whatever the discussion on music may be, there is no doubt that music is a mystical and mystified art-form upon which we continually broaden our understanding of its effects and applications.

While scribes from antiquity to present day have discussed music as a magical creative expression and one that creates magical results, the subject of ritual practice within modern music production is a lesser examined custom. That bands and recording artists are often referring to their work as ritualistic and giving their sound a mystical description for the feeling it provokes, the idea of music as a magical work from the moment it is conceived to recording and release is an under-discussed subject which is important to consider.

Music for me has been a life changing force, as a vehicle for otherworldly experiences that can often only be described using spiritual terms and, while performing and travelling live around the globe, as a very real catalyst for development. This religious connection to music is only enhanced and more fulfilling the more I understand the nature of how and why it has affected me to such a degree. According to my experiences when recording music, every part of the practical work can be considered "ritualistic." In the sense that a series of actions are performed regularly, many aspects of the recording production process can also often be thought of as holy in that they must be routinely followed, even without the spiritual significance.

Where some see sound and music as a magical and transformative art form, others go further and consider the practice and application of performing and recording music to be a ceremonial act. I have always felt the benefits from utilising magic ritual while recording music, to gain further enlightenment from the process without fully understanding or measuring the effects of the exercise. Going from doing something because you believe it is more worthwhile to knowing it is so, is a crucial step to a more informed understanding and proficiency in your skills.

This thesis discusses magic ritual and what it consists of, establishes magic ritual practice within music production as a convention and seeks to understand how magic ritual can be better used to enhance the results and experience of the production process. The purpose of the thesis is to better understand how mystifying a practical procedure could be necessary in increasing focus and effects of the experience. Where without magic ritual a recording session could be referred to as “a week of commonplace routine work” (Arellano, Appendix 1), a production where magic ritual is utilised can become an “adventure of life-changing experiences” (Helén, Appendix 2) that endures in the memory, closer to the heart of the participant and the listener

## 2 DEFINING MAGIC RITUAL

### 2.1 What is a magic ritual?

The pre-scientific world was inherently magical. Magical thinking was commonplace and an everyday part of life. Our knowledge of saints, witches, spirits and ghosts and of a God who is all powerful are all informed principles from human history where miracles and the concept of miracles were thought possible. The concept of magic is widely accepted, and belief in the principles of magic still exists today. Historically people have applied magic rituals to many aspects of daily life. According to Historian Stephen Wilson (2000,18) rituals relating to the production of food, agriculture and animal husbandry were usually public and often collective. While those daily rituals were not always magical, they had an important magical element. (Wilson 2000,18). Private rituals to ward off evil, or collective ritual practice within the Church to consecrate a union or a birth can all be considered part of our magical heritage.

Magic ritual has been defined in the Cambridge English Dictionary as “a fixed set of actions and words, especially as part of a religious ceremony” that Durkheim explains has a euphoric function, inspiring among worshipers a pleasant feeling of social wellbeing (Friedman 2017, 8). Ritual can be described as “repeated actions in set forms, which have significance beyond themselves” (Wilson 2000, 23). Magical practice can depend on social convention, and so can be a social practice connected with traditions, calendars and society. The collective agreement on what feels good, what effects magic appears to have, then also affects the practice of the ritual, to reflect the commonly agreed custom. When a community is faced with uncertainty or catastrophe, ritual can take on the significance of adding an air of optimism, shining “some rays of light in the dark tunnels of disappointment and despair” (Friedman 2017, 8).

Rituals conjure up fervent excitement with an effect that can be described as collective effervescence (Friedman 2017, 4). They also are instilled with moral principle by their collective approval of the meanings inherent within their outcomes, providing the group with an affirmation of their unity.

The ritual symbols are made sacred in the interaction between people. Both the group and the sacred totem objects of the group have the capacity to stir up emotions that have a moral standpoint; so, the things that give a positive affirmation of the group and the symbols they feel are sacred are seen as good, whereas those that threaten the symbols, or the sanctity of the group are deemed to be bad (Turner 1977, 135).

Magic ritual reflects a strong community requirement, where belonging and connection is an important aspect of initiation and participation. Understanding of societies, such as when Victor Turner went to live with African tribes and described ritual as the affirmation of communal unity (Bell 1992, 39) can be increased when seen through their practice of magic ritual. Monica Wilson said, of the Nyakyusa tribes of Tanzania, that rituals revealed principles at their deepest level. Men reveal in ritual what is most meaningful to them. We gain, in the study of rituals, an understanding of the fundamental composition of human societies. (Turner 1977, 6).

The actual effects of ritual can be measured and proven, whether they are truly magical or not, without any worldly explanation for the feelings they invoke. That magic rituals can achieve their desired outcomes of transformative behavioural changes or higher states of fulfilment in those who practice them, does not diminish an argument into whether magic itself can be scientifically proven.

Ritual practice is shown to induce altered states of reality, in such a way that belief and belonging develop and are sustained during and after ritual observation. These processes can be recorded in detail, with empirically credible results, which are theoretically sound (Marshall 2002).

To conclude, magic ritual belief has existed since ancient times. It is a practice of fixed actions with the function of a desired outcome, whether private or communal. Magic ritual can be seen to increase optimism and euphoria in those that practice it and can include a moral principle. Magic rituals can help us understand societies better, by seeing their relationship to community and culture and what they hold to be sacred. Magic ritual processes can be measured and be shown to be empirically credible.

## **2.2 Identifying the aspects of magic ritual**

Magic rituals incorporate paraphernalia that can be considered magical tools and objects. These objects are instilled with meaning and used throughout the ritual. Many different objects, substances, items, and objects have been used in magic ritual practice through the ages. Sometimes these items were chosen due to their proximity to the local area, sometimes because they were harder to find and often due to their common or everyday nature. According to Wilson (2000, 421) magical paraphernalia had inherent qualities, like iron, salt, or body fluids. Sometimes their power derived from religious or magical rituals, like sacramentals or herbs picked in a particular way. (Wilson 2000, 421)

Western rituals differ vastly from eastern rituals in the use of objects and natural elements. From amulets inscribed with spells, to totemic figurines, candles and symbols, the objects and items used in magic rituals had a strong connection with the communally recognised symbolism and meaning placed within them. Items used in ritual are chosen and utilised to symbolise the most to those who practice that rite.

Rituals are then conducted by priests or magicians who perform with and to an audience of participants or, if in private, then acting alone. The priest or magician's knowledge, and ability are important in securing the potency and success for the magical act. Magicians, like priests conducting religious rituals put restrictions on their diet or sexual activity to separate the rites they conduct from ordinary activities and to inject them with sanctity (Wilson 2000).



Magic rituals can include music, song and dance that are described as “stylized gestures and singing the cryptic songs of ritual performances” (Turner 1977, 6). These song and dance routines increase mystery and communal activity which is key in the sense of belief and purpose in the desired result of the ritual act.

### **2.3 Magic ritual in music**

The musician, producer and music theorist David Byrne describes music as having a specific series of practices that can be good for mental health and bring groups of people together, in a ritualistic sense (Byrne 2013, 346). Music as a divine or otherworldly mystical artform is not a new consideration. Either in enabling communication with a divinity, to know divine wisdom or simply divine, music is intrinsically connected to spirituality and the ideas of magical thinking. To this day people still apply magical terminology in describing musical experiences.

Music accomplishes what religion strives for, to gain something that we are unable to grasp with understanding, but can feel (Godwin 1986, 30). The power of music to move people can also be considered to have a magical effect, where the results are mystical or difficult to explain, though we can no doubt measure and witness the real-world results. Music is also seen as a therapeutic healing agent of a spiritual nature, where the unique combination or personal needs dictate what formula of sound could be required to heal the listeners.

Music can be seen as a tool for self-healing in the same way people drink coffee to get energy and become active. Ideas can be brought on by certain composers or you can clear your mind by dancing. Some listeners used music as a tool to get more creative, and to connect ideas that they never would have considered before: “thus they use music as the preeminent spiritual food” (Godwin 1986, 291).

The idea that music heals is not strictly a belief in magic, but it allows music to exist in an arena which is usually reserved for medicinal or holistic medicine devoted to well-being and health. This idea of the correct formula and the right

music to reach certain desired states of being and existence can be directly correlated and compared with magic processes and the planning of a ritual.

Music itself has been described as ritualistic, mainly because of its actual practical use in traditional magic rituals. That music reminds us often of magic rituals, reminds us of the concept that music contains magical properties and is a magical tool that can be utilised. William Burroughs explains it well when he discusses witnessing a Led Zeppelin show in 1975, comparing the sounds and experience to tribal ritual music rites of passage (Burroughs 1975).

It is to be remembered that the origin of all the arts—music, painting, and writing—is magical and evocative; and that magic is always used to obtain some definite result. (Burroughs 1975)

### 3 ARTISTS AND THE USE OF RITUAL

#### 3.1 Music as ritual, ritual as music

Ritualistic music has to be repeated in the same way, in more or less identical circumstances every time that ritual is performed. In the context of ritual, there is no concept of an “original” creation of a piece of music, a composer, or a first performance. Such music is thought to have always been there, that it exists outside history, like a myth. Our task as performers and participants is to simply keep it alive. In this sense, music, and the rituals it is part of, keep the world going (Byrne 2013, 345).

What makes music a mystical experience is that that the music itself is not the only contributing factor in the mix. The composer Peter Garland identifies three aspects that contribute towards transformative music experiences as, firstly, the factor of religious order where music takes place within “a framework of specific beliefs” (Garland 2010, 152). The second factor that Garland focuses on is “context” where music is taken out of a familiar setting to an “exotic” or unfamiliar one where “the musical and mystical experience reaffirms a sense of place that can be cultural, historical or geographical” (Garland 2010, 152). Finally, the third aspect that Garland says is a contributing factor to the magical experience of music is the personal subjective one of “one’s own receptivity and state of awareness” (Garland 2010, 152).

This awareness of the elements that make up a ritualistic and mystical experience from music would suggest that, like ritual itself, there is a specific “set of circumstances”, as Byrne puts it, that can be followed for this to take place. Taking that principle, Pauline Oliveros, an important American experimental and electronic music composer, devised a ritual for musicians to hear the world as music to become closer to their instrument and craft (minuteoflistening.org n.d.). The ritual is a practical application, which takes a lot in concept from the principle of practising a magic ritual for a desired outcome (Appendix 5).

English singer-songwriter, musician, poet, and performance artist Genesis Breyer P-Orridge considered the creation and production of their music to be a magical

work. P-Orridge's work was known for inclusion of ritualistic themes, but it is of note that they considered their work to be inherently magical.

It can be said, for me at least, that sampling, looping, and re-assembling both found materials, and site-specific sounds selected for precision or relevance to their message implications or a piece of music, or a Transmedia exploration, is an All-Chemical, even a Magical phenomenon. (P-Orridge 2010, 297)

Artist Drew McDowall, famously of the band Coil and their *Time Machines* album explained that the exercise of music making is an extension of his everyday spiritual practice, a routine in which he deconstructs the fibres of everyday life into their most fundamental structures and shapes (Lula 2018). As McDowall's music can be described as "creating transcendence" or "spiritual" (Dell 2020), it is of particular interest to this thesis that McDowall considers the actual production of his music to be a work of ritual, saying "I've always viewed music as a kind of ritual object" (McDowall, Dell 2020). Ritual music for McDowall is a state of being and one which he finds beneficial and fulfilling to his work:

I really wanted to continue to go back to that space where music can become overwhelmingly hallucinatory. I wanted to jump back into this pool. (McDowall 2018)

### **3.2 Antti Litmanen**

To gain a greater understanding of the use of magic ritual in music, I interviewed Antti Litmanen (Appendix 3) from Finnish band Arktau Eos, whose music is described as "standing on the threshold of Arctic Circle Shamanism and Western ceremonial magick" (The Wire 2009). Litmanen discusses that the very concept of Arktau Eos was formulated through ritual, explaining that: "Everything grew out of meticulously planned and rigorous ritual work, even the music was initially its by-product" (Litmanen Appendix 3). For Litmanen ritual and the artistic process are one and the same where "often it is futile to try to intellectually separate the two" (Litmanen Appendix 3).

It is of interest that the distinctive equipment Arktau Eos uses in the studio has some bearing on the successful application of the ritual process. Sometimes having older equipment that might be unreliable has provided them with uncanny,

creative opportunities which would have not been noticed as much had they been endowed with all the very latest technology (Litmanen Appendix 3). The sense of chaos and chance in the technical capability of the equipment opens up the feeling of almost supernatural input into the music.

As Litmanen expands on his view of ritual in music, it is not about belief or superstition as much as a healthy engagement with reality, not an escape from it. For Litmanen, ritual provides focus and gives the producer “the ability to concentrate on questions that transcend time” (Litmanen Appendix 3).

It is clear from the interview, that Litmanen’s practical use of magic ritual in the studio seems to be beneficial to the results of his work. Magic ritual adds a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that transcends the mundane, making music feel like something way more than a simple hobby or past time (Litmanen Appendix 3).

Where music production is a job and a career for some, and a hobby for others, it is clear, that it can be imbued with a greater sense of meaning and purpose through magic ritual practice.

## 4 RITUAL MUSIC IN PRACTICE

### 4.1 Hexvessel's All Tree album

All Tree was the fourth album by Hexvessel. It was also the first transmedia album release by Hexvessel, where the narrative of the songs carried over into the images and videos surrounding the release. All Tree carries themes of ritual but was also the first time the band had produced an album using magic ritual methods, to enhance productivity and experience, thus improving the atmosphere of the end product.

All Tree was an international collaboration project taking place over the course of three weeks, by musicians living in Finland, recorded at Orgone Studios in Woburn, England. The album also featured famous British session musicians Daniel Pioro on Violin and Dirk Campbell on Flutes/Duduk. The record labels that released the album was Century Media/Sony based in Dortmund, Germany for Europe and Prophecy Records in North America/Rest of World. The album was co-produced between Columbian based producer Jaime Gomez Arellano and Finnish based singer/songwriter Mat McNerney.

The concept behind All Tree was to unify the band's world-view and spiritual belief into a defining principle, which could be easily explained throughout. As Hexvessel plays folk with nature mysticism themes, we wanted to convey what folk means and also what nature mysticism is. We used the "poet singers hands" illustration used prominently in the Kalevala, and ancient Finnish text, and throughout history, to symbolise the community, storytelling and transference of knowledge inherent in folk music. We then used the tree image, as with the title All Tree to symbolise the "world tree", a prevalent archetype in many of the world's mythologies, religious and philosophical traditions, to represent the sacred in nature, relatable to Celtic and Pagan belief. The main message of All Tree is a sense of community that is created when you observe a spiritual connection to nature. For us it felt natural then to extend all the different aspects of the album across multiple platforms and to engage and connect with our community not just

once the album is finished, delivered and released, but also during production and part of the production itself.

A transmedia release is directly relatable to principles of magic ritual where symbolism and communal engagement are intrinsic to a shared magical experience. In this chapter I will explain how Hexvessel's All Tree album was a test case project to demonstrate how magic ritual can be applied to the production methods of an album and how the outcome can be measured.

#### **4.1.1 Ritual music composition**

It was important to incorporate the ideas and concepts of making All Tree a magical work from the very beginning, so that the work not only lent itself to the practice but was itself ritual music. Hexvessel has primarily been a Folk music act but over the course of their ten-year history, the band has delved into other genres of music. There was a conscious decision to return to a pure form of folk music with the All Tree album. We felt that folk music would allow for the connection between real instrument and the human element, maximizing the communal awareness. Samuel Forcucci describes folk songs as "songs of the people" (Forcucci 1984). The songs themselves are the work of the singular or collective musician and can be a collective human experience or a personal one or then a combination of those experiences. The human experience is used to describe a way of life (Forcucci 1984). If our way of life is informed by ritual history and innate spiritual culture, we felt that exploring that in the song themes, stories and lyrics would instill a deeper connection to the music in the performers and the audience, giving the ritual production added meaning.

The opening track, Son of The Sky, describes a Finnish bear-hunting ritual called karhun peijaiset. Peijaiset involved a ceremonial funeral feast for the bear and a ritual wedding between a woman and the bear (Waggoner, Paxson, Gundarsson 2018). The ceremony was accurately described in the song, using multiple texts to reimagine and recreate the idea of the ritual. The song's intro used a mixed choir and was imagined as a song which could be played at a peijaiset feast. Son of The Sky and the meaning contained within was particularly important because the musicians performing on All Tree were predominantly

Finnish and so the meaning of a culturally historic ritual described in a song would be of notable significance.

The track Visions of A.O.S concerns the British occultist Austin Osman Spare who developed a magical technique named 'sigilisation' (Ala-Hakula 2016). Sigilisation was Spare's ritual language to communicate with spirits or his unconscious self, where a word or statement of intent or desire became an abstract design or symbol that was charged with the meaning of the operator (Ala-Hakula 2016). Creating music can be compared closely to the principle of sigilisation where ideas are condensed and transferred into musical phrases imbued with meaning. Austin Osman Spare was an important occultist for Hexvessel because he created artwork within a magic ritual framework and so could become a figurehead for our own magical undertaking.

The track Liminal Night (see Appendix 4) was composed to describe the concept of 'liminality' which is a key aspect of magic ritual. The liminal space is a fundamental principle in esoteric symbolism, taken from the Latin word *limen*, meaning a 'boundary or threshold' (Vayne 2002). The priest who conducts the ritual inhabits this space and can access the 'otherworld', outside our known reality, to communicate with spirits or the divine. There are times when the boundaries are open, and in these liminal moments, such as at midnight or midsummer or Halloween for example, it becomes easier to have an otherworldly experience (Vayne 2002). Liminal Night became a song about Halloween and the liminal experience of those places and times surrounding the pagan tradition which invoke a feeling of the otherworldly. This subject would help the participants in the album and the listeners to gain a sense of the ritualistic ambience and atmosphere we wanted to create, for the magic of the album to succeed.

Journey to Carnac is a track that concerns a prehistoric monument called Carnac in Brittany, France, that is very important to pagans, as it has apparent ritual curative powers (Badone 1991). "The therapeutic discourse associated with the ritual draws on the past and on exotic cultures to construct a meaningful cosmology" (Badone 1991). The idea of a mixed culture worldview would be important to our multicultural band, where an agreed sense of spirituality and sacred places is necessary to conducting a ritual in an unfamiliar setting.



Closing a ritual circle is a fundamental element of ceremonial activities, a sacred place constructed to perform magic rituals within. There are many ways to erect a magic circle, from a ring of black stones to a paper circle, a ring of metal or simply drawn on the floor (Shah 1957). The song Closing Circles was a personal song about a bereaved friend, but it also encompasses the core principle in a magic ceremony where the closing of a circle is an important aspect of finalizing and ending the ritual. This song was chosen as the last song on the album and so the ending of the ritual, given weight with its themes of death.

#### **4.1.2 Pre-production planning**

Planning the research study for Hexvessel's All Tree as a magic ritual consisted of two key factors. Firstly, there was the practical arrangements of booking and preparing technical aspects of the music recording, comparable to any normal studio session, and secondly there was the arrangement of the magical operation. We decided, for the sake of this study, to arrange the session as a magic ritual from the outset, that we would fit and plot the recording into and not the other way around. Making the ritual the priority for us where the recording was an extension of our ritual work allowed us to think primarily in magical ways about what we were about to undertake, instead of from a purely practical standpoint.

When planning the entire session, magical or musical it was imperative to record and compile all the logistical information with a tool, so we used a folder on Gdrive to gather all the documents related to the session, with information from flights to itinerary, budgets and song files.

We would need a priest for the magic rituals, who would have the time to prepare for the rituals and conduct them each day, making sure that the instruments and tools for the ritual were attended to and arranged. I was producing the album and so I needed to make sure that I wasn't stretched between the role of producing the whole production and conducting daily rituals. For the role of the priest, we needed a figure who was outside the usual band of players, who could command the respect of the group, and who was also experienced in carrying out magic

rituals. For this role I chose Antti Haapapuro, who conducts ritual music with his own band Arktau Eos, and who would be performing on the album with additional instrumentation. Alongside providing samples, collecting found sounds from the environment and playing instruments such as bowed tree and bone flute, Antti would have the time to conduct the rituals and it meant that planning the session could be done with him, giving the practical role of overseeing the rituals to him.

The initial emails with Antti concerned magical paraphernalia that we needed to acquire for the production, such as candles for the altar and for the studio, which was to become our “temple”. The lighting of the space was key, to create atmosphere and then also the decorative cloth banners which would cover the usual studio walls and consecrate the space. It was important for us to make sure that the studio didn’t feel like a recording studio but a temple first and foremost. The candle colours would be chosen to represent the planetary movements of the time we were present at the studio, and the banners we covered the walls with, would be painted with the symbols of the spirits of creation we wished to invoke.

There would be an altar placed in the room and we wanted to make sure that the items placed on the altar would be of significance to every person who came to the studio to work on the album. We decided to ask the musicians to bring something of significance to them, spiritual value or sentimental worth, to place on the altar at the beginning of the session, so that the altar would be charged for them with some meaning. The incense we use on the altar would be a mixture of tar and local Finnish dried herbs, to give the feeling of displacement as the studio was located in the UK.

The rest of the planning concerned making sure that we had an appropriate dress code for the studio and that there would be a ceremonial robe to put on during the session. The robe we chose was a simple army working shirt, emblazoned with the spirit symbol we designed using Austin Osman Spare’s sigilisation method. This robe would mean that when we crossed the threshold of the temple, we were also removing and covering up our normal clothes. By doing so, the rite of passage, that we will go into further in this thesis, would be easier to accomplish.

The final part of the planning process was to then inform participants in the recording of the principles of the exercise. The sanctity of the temple space had to be respected as such and not considered a normal studio environment. There would be no casual alcohol consumption or band shirts and normal clothing allowed, as this would change the nature of the space from a holy one to an ordinary one. The participants in the studio would need to wear their robes and this would separate the working space from the recreation times when the daily session had ended. The entire session would begin with an opening ceremony and end with a closing ceremony. There would be a magic ritual every day, with group participation and also a welcome ceremony and a leaving ceremony for anyone joining the session later on, such as sessions players coming and going.



PICTURE 1. Ritual garments (Haapapuro 2020)

This photograph shows the ritual garments that we designed and decorated for the studio session. Each garment was ceremonially painted in blood, with the symbols of the spirits we invoked for the recording. The symbols identified the concept behind the entire project, making sure each musician was constantly aware of the wider implications of what they were doing and why they were doing it.

## 5 MAGIC RITUAL PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

### 5.1 Initiation of the musicians

In an ordinary studio session, the musician's well-being and mindset is left up to social conventions such as hospitality with drinks and food upon arrival or a comfy sofa to sit on and small-talk to calm the nerves. There is usually no consideration towards real focus and meditative initiation into the session to both relax and concentrate the players when arriving at the studio.

We had a session taking place in another country, flying from Finland to England, with a Columbian co-producer, Finnish musicians and an English producer. There are lots of reasons why this can add extra pressure and anxiety for everyone involved without proper consideration. This left a perfect opportunity for us to explore the ideas of incorporating magic ritual into the kickoff for both the entire recording session and each musician's daily or session work. Our magic ritual would allow us to deep dive into a more communal atmosphere without having to put too much emphasis on the usual aspects of social relaxation such as caffeine or alcohol.

Our opening ritual for the album would act as an ice breaker but also as a way for the community to bond. It was our first time in the studio, and we wanted to make it feel like a holy temple immediately, so as to start the magic ritual from the outset. The first thing to do was light the candles and the incense and then to start making sound there. It was important that the first sounds in the studio are not related to work, but more a way to break the silence of the space, bless it and awaken the senses. We used gongs and singing bowls to make sounds while our priest spoke some words which were ceremonial in nature. There would be group actions in the form of sun salutations which involved each participant stretching out towards the sun with their arms and stretching their limbs. This gave the element of physical exercise which is stimulating and pleasurable and there was involvement for each person. The ceremony would end with a group jam, with everyone playing music in a trance-like manner and attempting to reach a meditative state.

Though the opening ceremony would be longer, the daily rituals repeated the same actions, with the participants getting used to the functions and stages of the ritual, so that everyone knew what to do. The result was that people relaxed and welcomed the daily ritual as a necessary part of the beginning and end of the day. We would have a ritual first thing in the morning and then last thing before leaving, to close the space before we left. This was important to signify the beginning and end of work, and that it wasn't simple a working day but something more significant and something we were all focused on making a magical experience.

When a session musician would arrive, they would be issued with a ceremonial robe and place their personal sacred item on the altar. They would then join the daily ritual where a special welcome would be given to them. This would immediately bond the musician to the work and let them feel welcome and concentrated into what they were doing. The first sounds they make in the studio would not be recorded and so they would know the space with their ears even with their minds closed. This does a lot psychologically for a violinist for example who is used to the pressure of being expected to perform at the drop of a hat in front of a microphone. The idea of breaking the silence and of making music together that is not part of the recording, but an important spiritual aspect, cannot be underestimated in the beneficial respect of relaxation, bonding and fulfillment.

The technicalities of ritual production means that candles must remain lit, the altar tended to, with enough incense burning constantly while the musicians would perform. Making sure ceremonial robes were worn at all times, and that musicians who were relaxing did so outside of the sacred space of the studio room were important things to remember, to make sure that the emphasis on the ritual at work was not broken at any time. Keeping everyone within the sacred space, outside the normal world and in the right mindset, with smells, sounds and visuals was a way to make sure that our next topic, of rites of passage was our primary goal to achieve.

## **5.2 Rites of passage**

A rite of passage can be described as person passing from the normal world into the sacred world (van Gennep 1961). The journey where you leave and return makes a change of status, historically rites to adulthood and elderhood were marked and brought about with ritual. Our music production rites are “direct rites” meaning those that are meant to produce results. The result of those rites would be the successful passage of the participant into that sacred world. Rites of passage according to ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep could be divided into three different stages including: pre-liminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation). Pre-liminal rites would be leaving the real familiar normal world, liminal rites would be moving through the other world and trying, testing and gaining growth and then post-liminal rites would be reintegration and change of status or being (van Gennep 1961).

### **5.2.1 Rites of separation**

We chose our studio location of Woburn, England, so that we would be far from home in a strange new place and that it would be both exciting and easier to imagine a different atmosphere taking over. England is rife with horror stories, occult history and an eerie atmosphere with the weather. Woburn is a country area outside of London and the studio situated in the hills was particularly isolated in a natural environment. Making the studio into a sacred space wouldn't be difficult. Travelling from Finland was already the start of our rite of separation, even from the moment we started our physical journey from our homes.

### **5.2.2 Rites of transition**

Our studio was our liminal space. The creation of a sacred space in the studio, with the altar, banners, candles and incense marked our world that was uninterrupted and undistracted.

Our liminal place in time was in our studio hours. The time we started and ended marked the period when our liminal space would exist. Our ways of recording and tracking were entirely according to ritual and ambience. Some instruments had

to be recorded at night because the feeling would be right, especially vocals and the more unconventional bone instruments for example. This observation of the liminal times and spaces is essential in respecting magic ritual in sound production.

### **5.2.3 Rites of incorporation**

Returning to the world would be when we began leaving the space, cleansing the circle, putting out the incense and candles and performing our leaving ritual. Making sure we were leaving the liminal space intact but coming back into the world, gave a new significance in what we took with us and what we were leaving behind. Celebrating a good day in the pub afterwards also gave a new feeling, as we were decompressing and unpacking the experience together. The working environment and the recreational had been separated and this gave each a deeper meaning. Musicians returning crying in euphoria after the session and releasing at the accommodation afterward gave everyone a feeling that the progression of the days were reaping benefits both emotionally and mentally.

## 6 IMPACTS OF MAGIC RITUAL

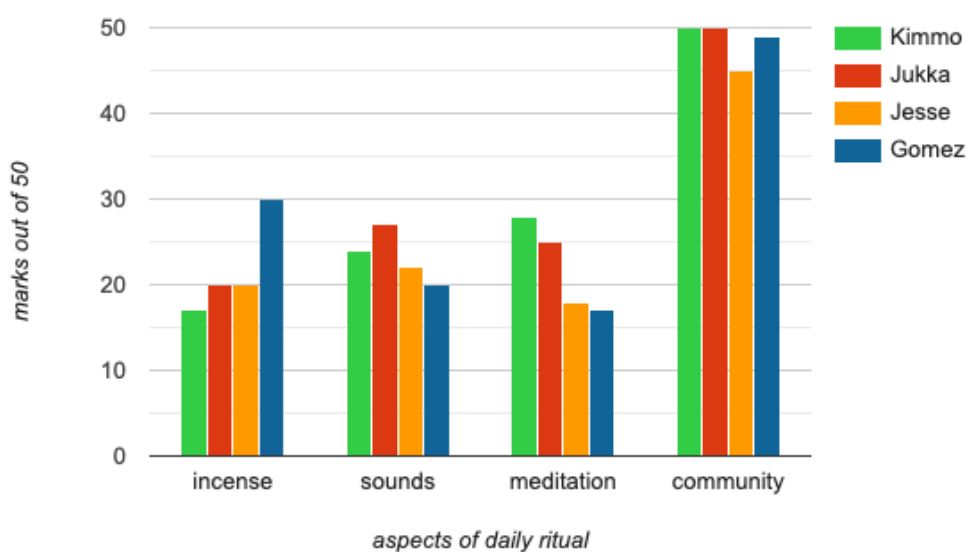
### 6.1 Measuring the outcome of ritual practice

To investigate what effect magic ritual had on the music recording process and the participants involved, interview data was collected through qualitative methods and analysed through quantitative methods. The following points are presented with graphs and tables to show the values our team placed in the various aspects of the magic ritual recording session.

#### 6.1.1 Musicians feedback to productivity questions

I interviewed the musicians involved in the album and asked them to rate the efficacy of the most important aspects of our daily ritual in the studio. The musicians gave marks out of 50, with 0 being the lowest amount that they felt the certain aspect contributed towards their productivity and 50 being the highest amount that the aspect affected their work. I created this graph to illustrate the summary of their reactions.

Graph 1. Aspects of daily ritual that musicians felt important to productivity.



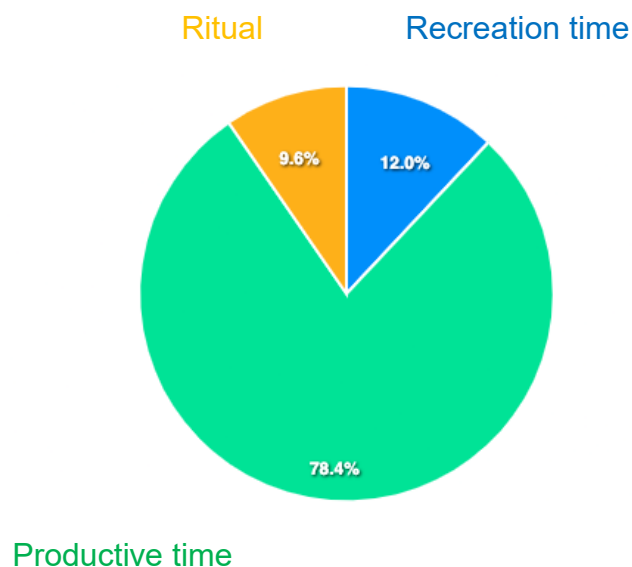
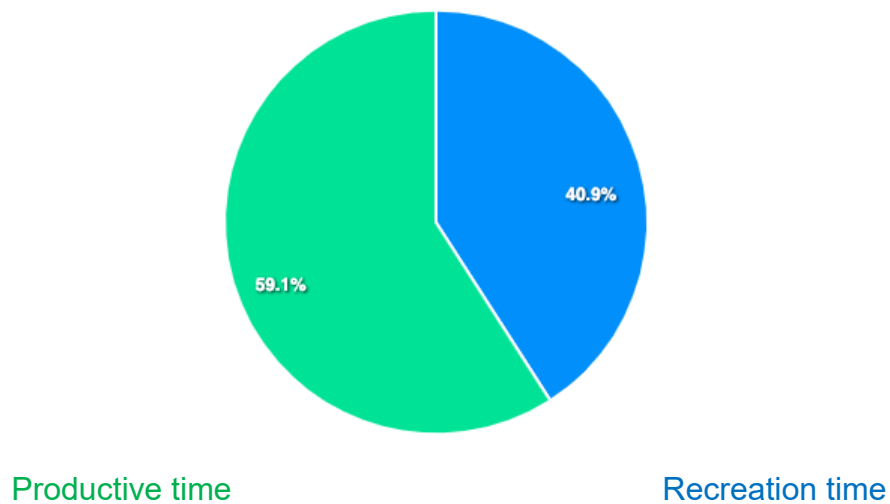
The results were based on the marks that the musicians gave for each individual element of the ritual that they felt was impactful. We can see from the diagram



that above everything the musicians valued the shared communal activity as the most important element of the ritual that led to a greater feeling of productivity during the day.

### 6.1.2 Analysis of productive studio hours

Graph 2. Productive time analysis



When analysing the productivity level, based on amount of material recorded and logged time spent working vs socialising or time spent on recreation, we could see that ritual recording sessions were far more productive. I produced this graph to illustrate just how much more time was spent on productive work when ritual

was utilised vs a normal session where magic ritual was not practised. The time was measured in comparison to a previous album recording's day sheets and schedule, looking at material recorded, and tasks completed. The fact that recreation time, and alcohol prohibition in the studio being separated must come into consideration.

### 6.1.3 Effectiveness of the magic ritual

I asked the musicians to give a % out of 100 based on how effective they felt the magic ritual aspect of the studio session was. I asked them to consider the effectiveness based on productivity and focus, compared with other studio sessions. I present the results in the table below.

Jukka	Kimmo	Jesse	Gomez	Antti
78%	89%	98%	82%	99%

### 6.1.4 Experience-based expertise

The experience of magic ritual music production changes people. From overcoming self-confidence problems (Helén, Appenix 2), describing it as a lifechanging experience (Helén, Appenix 2), to changing the way you approach and write music (Heikinen, Appendix 6), the magic rituals we incorporated into All Tree were of remarkable significance to those involved. Through this shared experience, the participants became experts in magic ritual music production, where trying to create same sense of community in future projects has become the norm (Helén, Appenix 2).

## 7 DISCUSSION

This thesis intended to examine the advantages of incorporating magic ritual into the process of music production. The question was, if magic ritual could increase productivity and focus and if the magic rituals could elevate connection and value, would this have an impact on the outcome. The All Tree album recording was a test project experiment of engaging magic ritual into the daily procedures of production to see what impact it would have.

Participants in the All Tree album project discussed how they felt more in the zone, more present and focused (Heikkinen, Appendix 6), deep, emotional and meaningful (Arellano, Appendix 1) and that their minds were prevented from roaming elsewhere (Heikkinen, Appendix 6). From the musicians' perspective, the modus operandi of the magic rituals had worked towards the intended purpose. There was a sense that the rituals had created an atmosphere where the musicians could express themselves more freely (Helén, Appendix 3).

Though difficult to measure the productivity and the eventual impact on the actual music, through mostly qualitative means, there is a clear result from the experimentation. The information gathered is based on the individual's perception and their knowledge of magic ritual, which in most cases may be limited. However, it can be argued that the simple benefits of parts of the rituals such as communal activity when working on a project, have been clearly proven elsewhere and are thus theoretically sound.

The learnings gained from the test project demonstrated that if considered from the very beginning, the planning of a magic ritual music production is very similar to a more straightforward production. Schedules are arranged, items procured the same way instruments and strings, and equipment is bought beforehand, and the details not only can be customized but should be modified to be more personal and relatable to the project, therefore making the ritual aspect more potent and the benefits heightened.

The results displayed, being beneficial to both producer, engineer and artist alike, showed that the methods of magic ritual music production can be useful in every

capacity of recording. No matter what faculty or procedure, the feeling of connection creates deeper value and fulfillment, relevant to why people involve themselves in these productions in the first place.

The spirit of community and the open-minded, welcome atmosphere that the magic ritual environment creates, appears to be of the most value to those who are involved. Aspects of these rituals can be taken piecemeal and ad hoc, depending on the circumstances, to add value to a session where relevant. The custom or spiritual dressing of the ritual itself can be reduced to what is personal or suitable, but everyone will gain their own conclusions and input their own significance on the process. The ritual itself is a procedure but the magic feeling is personal and so we bring with us what we want to achieve and take out of it what we want to get from it. Getting everyone in a production to be of the same mind and have the same focus is a valuable tool towards achieving goals on any level, if you can make the magic happen.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview with Jaime Gomez Arellano. Page 1

### **Describe the ritualistic elements you encountered during the recording of Hexvessel's All Tree album.**

There were two types of main daily rituals: sun salutations, which were based (to me) on yoga and pagan prayer in Finnish language, the latter I could not understand, however it felt really powerful and meaningful. I did enjoy this kind of ritual, but I personally preferred the second type of ritual, communal improvisation, which I found deeply therapeutic. I also enjoyed the fact that we had to all wear shirts that Antti drew with blood - it was our uniform. I loved putting it on and then taking it off at night - it felt interesting having to all wear "work clothes" and it created a sense of brotherhood and discipline.

### **Describe your experience during these rituals and how they made you feel.**

At first, I was kind of overwhelmed by the seriousness of the rituals. The Opening Ceremony was slightly intimidating for me, but I think it created a sense of responsibility/commitment for myself and for everyone involved. The rituals were a totally meditative, mind-clearing and peaceful way to start the day. I very well remember the smell of the tar that Antti brought from Finland, it kind of stuck to the studio and it was a nice reminder of the session. Personally, the sounds, smells and rituals had a relaxing and calming effect more than anything else.

### **How did the rituals impact your performance during the recording, especially in comparison to other recordings and productions you have taken part in?**

I was amazed how relaxed and clear I felt after the morning rituals every day. I still say to this day that those sessions always had the best start of all sessions I've done. It was also a great way for everyone to come together. It wasn't a week of commonplace routine work.

### **How did the rituals affect your feelings about the All Tree album upon reflection, especially in comparison to other work you have done?**



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It was definitely a one-of-a-kind experience. All Tree is very special record the making of it was no different. The whole experience made it more meaningful and unique. I don't think it would be the same album without the ritualistic aspect of it. The closing ceremony was very deep and emotional, something I'll never forget.

**What were your learnings and takeaways from this experience? Have you utilised aspects of the rituals in other work?**

I definitely picked up a lot from this experience that I apply with clients in different manners. Granted I can't be doing Pagan rituals with all my clients every morning, but it's made me realise the importance of having a good start of the day, for example with some bands I go running in the mornings, or on a country walk. Even a small thing like having breakfast all together in peace, enjoying the food, conversation, with no rush, has an impact on the rest of the day. I definitely learned something from this and as I previously mentioned, it's an album I'll never forget.

**Describe the ritualistic elements you encountered during the recording of Hexvessel's All Tree album.**

Before we began recording anything we held a short opening ritual for our coming sessions. Together we built an altar where each one taking part in the album brought a personal item as part of the altar. Our master of rituals had made special sigils that were painted on several banners. Those banners were painted with blood and were carefully set around the recording room. Each recording day we would start with lighting the candles on the altar and adding more whiskey as a sacrifice for the spirits. We would also have a sip of whiskey ourselves. Other than that, we didn't consume any alcohol during recording. We had different kinds of opening rituals each day. Sometimes we would start with sun salutations and some mornings with communal sound improvisation. Often, we would have a short meditation session at the beginning.

During the session each one of us wore a special shirt made for the sessions which had special sigil painted on it with blood. This made it feel like we were part of the same team working towards the same goal. Kind of reminded me of doctors wearing doctors' jackets. This was our uniform. Putting it on each morning made me feel it was something special we were working with.

**Describe your experience during these rituals and how they made you feel.**

The rituals certainly made you concentrate your mind towards what we were doing. It reminded me that we were working on this art piece together. Made it feel like it was more than just music we were doing. Rituals also brought a certain open-minded atmosphere. That we were all allowed to express ourselves through this music and bring our strengths and personality to this music.

**How did the rituals impact your performance during the recording, especially in comparison to other recordings and productions you have taken part in?**

Appendix 2. Page 2.

Rituals made me feel more focused during the recording. Mostly for me they brought a sense of community while doing the album. Feeling that you were allowed to express your creativity freely and that everybody was there to support each other to give they're best for the album.

**How did the rituals affect your feelings about the All Tree album upon reflection, especially in comparison to other work you have done?**

Making All Tree was a recording session I'll never forget. It was an adventure of life-changing experiences. During the sessions I overcame some self-confidence problems I had for several years. Recording that album was such an emotional journey that I've never managed to listen to All Tree after that properly.

Memory of that album is so strong. I'm afraid that if I listened to that album today it would somehow lessen that memory.

**What were your learnings and takeaways from this experience? Have you utilised aspects of the rituals in other work?**

Recording sessions, I've had after All Tree, I've tried to bring out the same feeling of community. I've tried to have a certain kind of opening "ritual" /get together which reminds everyone participating that what we're doing is happening just once in a lifetime and reminding everyone to enjoy the time we're spending together while creating music. To me ritual is a moment where we take a moment and focus our minds on the art we're about to create together. To remind everybody that everyone's part in this is equally important.

**Do you incorporate any ritual practices in your music productions?**

Certainly, though it happens on a much more ad hoc basis than in the beginning of our work together. Everything grew out of meticulously planned and rigorous ritual work, even the music was initially its by-product. This established the compass of our work, the perimeter of the sacred space - and its specific active vectors, both ingrained and optional. As time has gone by and our cooperation has deepened, less outward effort goes into re-establishing this space, and anything distinctly ritualistic is usually directed towards the more limited, intentionally pointed applications of the potentiality that the ritual space contains and generates.

**How frequently do you use them and over how many years, albums/projects?**

Over fifteen years over multiple projects, although every project utilises a slightly different idiom and emphasis, otherwise there would be no need for different projects in the first place, though some overlap naturally happens! The frequency is harder to assess. The after-effects (such as dreams and insights) of 'active engagement' are a part of the ritual: the inspirational residue that often feeds future cycles of work. Therefore, the process actually never quite stops, even if the time when we come together in the studio is more sporadic. Of course, this is akin to the general artistic process, and often it is futile to try to intellectually separate the two. In Arktau Eos, we have utilised simple gestures in a ritual opening of the cardinal directions at every performance since the beginning that serve as a connection to what we consider, in our private mythos, a 'primal' origin of our work, regardless of the current direction in which we are heading.

**At what part of the production process do you incorporate and utilise ritual practice?**

Any and all, in brief! They provide the impulse at the beginning of a project, recognisable even if that impulse is now at some distance. Intermittently, whenever there is a need to accentuate some element of the recording process, to imbue it

Appendix 3. Page 2.

with a distinct meaning, even a drastic alteration may happen at any point up to the final mastering.

As a side note, we greatly respect the creativity and skill of the old masters of recording and mixing in overcoming limitations and obscure problems. That skill set is itself turning into a lost art or esoteric lore if you will. Working with old and failing equipment has often provided us with creative, quasi-ritualistic openings, which would have gone unnoticed, had we simply worked in the box with an unlimited array of VSTs and developed our technical competence in that direction only.

**What do you experience when incorporating ritual in your production work? (Describe your feelings, senses as in smell, sight and touch. Explain what the different aspects of ritual as in candles or incense or meditation make you feel)**

The most basic reason for using any such elements is that it is a way of formally closing the door on mundane worries to concentrate on questions that transcend time. In deeper, optimal circumstances these separate sense-aspects fuse together, giving way to a singular perception; a wholesome engagement with reality, not a flight from it.

**How does ritual benefit your music projects? Explain how these benefits impact performance when playing, writing, recording and also how these rituals expand meaning and fulfilment in your work.**

Whilst I would never want to degrade music by belittling its pleasurable qualities, its power as an artistic outlet, its energy and joy, there is a sense of fulfilment in the certainty that music transmits other qualities; that it feels part of one's life in a way that goes far beyond a hobby, or merely killing time (when time, in fact, is killing us). Perhaps this sense of duty or meaningfulness comes across in performance, for I have found our listeners to be very acute, intelligent respondents to what we do, in a way that I never quite experienced in the past within the traditional rock music scene.

#### Appendix 4. Hexvessel's All Tree album

1) <https://open.spotify.com/album/031ESN9wKQ0B2JJ4jRrOXn>

## Appendix 5. Dissolving your ear plugs.

Dissolving your ear plugs: For classically trained musicians and anyone else interested.

Pauline Oliveros 2006

1) Take some time - no matter where you are - sit down and close your eyes for a while and just listen - When you open your eyes consider what you heard as the "music". Later try to remember what you heard and express it with your instrument or voice.

Do this practice often until you begin to hear the world as music.

2) Another time - sit down with your instrument and just listen with your eyes closed. As you realize that whatever you are hearing IS "music" allow your instrument or voice to enter this musical stream. Stop when the music is over. This is supported improvisation.

3) Listen to a favorite machine and play or sing along with it.

4) Listen to a favorite natural soundscape and play or sing along with it.

**Describe the ritualistic elements you encountered during the recording of Hexvessel's All Tree album.**

For me almost everything one does can be understood as a ritual. Rituals can adjust us to desired mindsets or they can be seen as exercises that lead us to certain results. All Tree was the first Hexvessel album where I was involved. The whole process was sort of an initiation ritual for me, which included smaller ritualistic elements. The starting point was pretty unusual - I was about to meet the band's frontman for the first time ever and go straight to the studio. None of the band members had heard me playing live before and I had only few days to finish my tracks. Some of the songs I had never heard before, so you can imagine there was some pressure.

**Describe your experience during these rituals and how they made you feel.**

The first ritualistic element for me was as simple as meeting up with the guys in a pub and having a pint with them - to bond and relax. I believe the whole outcome would've been totally different without our relaxed first night together. When getting in the studio, I first gave my offering on our shared altar. We cheered with the spirits and lit the incense. Other ritualistic elements included the decorations and certain tenets inside the studio.

**How did the rituals impact your performance during the recording, especially in comparison to other recordings and productions you have taken part in?**

The whole studio was transformed into a temple. The space was filled with a sense of holiness you didn't want to violate - there was a "pax templi" inside the studio. There was something for every sense, which made the recording situation feel really wholesome. The multi-sensory experience also prevented my mind and thoughts from wandering somewhere else.



Appendix 6. Page 2.

I was more present and focused than usually in the studio. Even if there was more self-discipline than normally, the ritualistic elements made me also feel somehow relieved. I guess you can say I was more "in the zone" than most of the times when recording.

**How did the rituals affect your feelings about the All Tree album upon reflection, especially in comparison to other work you have done?**

I feel like the rituals connected me to the album in a way I hadn't experienced before. The feeling is hard to describe, but the album has a huge personal significance for me. It was not only my first initiation to the Hexvessel family, but also changed the way of making my own music.

**What were your learnings and takeaways from this experience? Have you utilised aspects of the rituals in other work?**

After All Tree my methods of making music have changed entirely. The All Tree session really opened up some channels and I feel that I'm more connected to my music nowadays. I try to get in touch with the holiness in music and see the whole creative process as a ritual of self-expression. Nowadays music really is my primary form of self-expression, everything else comes after that. I really believe the All Tree session was the first push towards this.