

Studio Perfect – an iPhone 12 Pro pop-pilgrimage

Technology liberates artists of every description. One such Cape Town-based music maker made it his mission to push the boundaries of promoted possibility found within a device that helps craft and connect the world through possibility, his iPhone 12 Pro Max.

In short, Steve Freedom set to work with the ambition of creating an entire album's worth of music, from start to master, using only his latest iStore purchase.

Steve Freedom is a music maker, producer, DJ, and coding genius who has built an impressive career as a creative, driven and inspired by the rich world of music.

Over the past decade, Steve's also been invited and played stages across South Africa, the EU, and especially Berlin, as well as Australia and India, all to rapturous applause.

His journey in music started at Royals Schools, onto UCT studying Jazz, under Mike Campbell, as well as being a part of Jazz Workshop, under Mertyn Barrow.

After an extended period away from writing, recording, and producing, aged 42, he ventured back into the world of music. Having struggled with Windows XT/ 7 due to its well-documented latency issues, in a fit of frustration, Steve finally heeded the advice of his trusted music dealer and invested in all things Apple.

As any convert will corroborate, once you choose Mac, *everything* changes for the better, especially if you're creative. "The experience was so fundamentally different to what I had suffered in the past," Steve recalls. "It felt like I'd been driving an old *Volkswagen* bus and now, suddenly, I was on autopilot, powered by a supercharged BMW. From that day on I never looked back."

Besides no less than nine Number One songs on [Soundclick](#) global charts, Steve is also an Apple Developer and accredited Adobe Service Provider

Since the internet arrived in 1994, his curiosity and innovation have steered him down many a technical rabbit-hole in pursuit of creating extraordinarily original B2B / Web 2.0 applications and music that responds to an algorithmic-embracing beat.

His technical prowess is only superseded by the ability to amalgamate the world of sound in ways that are simply staggering. The beauty of this marriage is further amplified by Steve's Apple relationship, one that's seen him use its tools to bolster his coding and musical intent.

"I believe I was the first to play the Native Instruments Maschine, a decade ago," Steve points out. "I played in Bar 25, in Berlin, where you're expected to play records, and people were taken aback by it."

Future-proof

Bring it 10 years forward, Native Instruments had just released a not dissimilar Maschine, the Plus, as a stand-alone laptop-free device. You could simply plug in some power, set up some speakers and play, everything was onboard! "I was excited to play the Plus and was booked to perform in Germany to showcase it all."

Then, the pandemic struck, and everything got suddenly cancelled.

“Next, Apple announced the arrival of the iPhone 12, raving about how powerful the CPU would be. So, I went out and bought one, mainly for the photography promise,” Steve recalls. “Once I had it, I suddenly found myself downloading music-related apps and quickly understood just how powerful this micro-beast was.”

The challenge

Here was an instrument that could take the Nord Stage 3, with its ability to create 120 simultaneous voices (on one patch) to a whole new level. “The iPhone 12 offers over 280 voices, polyphonic, which means that the resolution, the quality of the sound, is a lot fuller and closer to an original instrument than anything before it.

That was when I thought, Apple spends a lot of time touting that the iPad was set to replace the desktop. So, how far does one have to go when Apple promoted that your iPhone could beat the power of your DAW (digital audio workstation)? Then they did just that! That was when the project took flight. I had time, thanks to the lockdown, to deep dive and challenge my latest hardware purchase.”

The curiosity

A now long-time fan of Apple’s wireless devices, be it a MacBook Pro or iPad, it was his iPhone 12 Pro Max that not only bridged a gap in Steve’s repertoire but also elicited a curiosity around what this Cupertino, California created powerhouse could deliver, given its commitment to delivering the best of breed technology.

Not only did Apple harvest a device that considers its intended audience right across its product offerings, but it also designed, built, and installed the staggeringly powerful A14 Bionic smartphone chip.

Besides sporting an eye-watering 11.8 billion transistors, all within a five-nanometre chip, Steve’s iPhone also packs a 16-core Neural Engine that can power a mind-baffling 11 trillion operations per second!

Then there’s the built-in, studio-grade, condenser microphone that can capture a perfect vocal take while you’re on the couch or abseiling Table Mountain.

Steve Freedom’s relationship with Apple is both as a longstanding software developer, building and successfully launching his software in the form of Traktomizer and Knobmega, as well as that of a professional musician active across Apple Music.

What immediately hit him, post unboxing, was just how expressive the iPhone 12 Max Pro is in allowing creatives like Steve to make music anywhere, anytime; with a world of sounds to choose from, all available from a single source, the Apple Store app. “When I visit the Store, I know whatever tool I choose, it will *always* install and work,” he insists.

Add to that the device’s rich sound, analogue-like power to simultaneously load more synths than his DAW could ever handle. “Apple has always been incredibly good at creating excitement by delivering immediacy while supporting creativity in an unprecedented way,” Steve shares.

"There is absolutely no mental jogging required, as is the case when I get in front of desktop DAW. With my iPhone, I can work with it anywhere and I'm immediately immersed!"

The final piece of the puzzle is wrapping tracks, and again the iPhone 12 Pro does not disappoint. "The Mastering capabilities are astounding," confirms "What it allows for, and delivers, is an all-in-one solution thanks to its ability to go from start to publish-ready product, all realised utilising a single device."

iRamping intent

So, the device devoid of the appropriate apps was raring to go. Steve then set out to correct that by onboarding a selection of recording applications, left right and centre.

Then the real work began.

"I started with Audiobus," he shares. "It allows me to get sound in and out of apps, as well as to and from apps, with time codes. It routes audio and midi between apps, and it has a mixer in there too, so think of it as your host console."

Finger on the pulse

"Some instruments give me up to 280 voices, which is rad," Steve exclaims. "That's a lot more impressive than my Nord Stage 3, but there's a trade-off, especially if you're a keys man like me. No app can quite replace the touchy-feely nature of a real-world electric piano. Get past that and you're back in Pro Max business."

There are many more Mastering apps out there too, but Grand Finale has been a clear winner. "I can get a great master within 15 minutes!" Steve attests.

Why Mondays Are Cancelled – "The Severely Glitched Experimental"

As to the project's genesis, the motivation came from Steve's need to respond to the world we all found ourselves in, in 2020. "I was looking to use music to respond to the world at the time, i.e.: Trump, lockdown, instability, uncertainty, lack of control, synchronicity and predictability, and our collective inability to plan," he sombrely recalls. "I wanted to reflect that in the music for this project - hence the "glitchiness" in the result is done on purpose.

Done and dusted

With success achieved, 25 tracks over, Steve's challenge to himself clearly illustrates that with an investment in time and technology and armed with passion, all anchored in an iPhone 12 Pro, and the sky's the limit when it comes to bringing it all home and turning art into something audibly amazing.

"What this exercise has taught me is, since I'm making a lot of glitch/dance and electronic music, there is a lot I can do on the iPhone that makes no sense doing it on a more traditional Nord piano, synthesiser or drumkit set-up."

Freedom favours the brave

The one crucial takeout for anyone curious to try and replicate Steve's colossal crusade is, you've got to play around. "The only concern should be, what does it sound like? No matter which apps or devices you decide to use for your productions, that's the burning question all artists should look to answer," Steve concludes. "What my iPhone 12 Pro Max delivered, without missing a stroke, was a seamless, sonically rich, and complete experience, all within a single package. Pandemic aside, that's hard to beat!"

Need more?

This [link](#) offers a plethora of additional apps, all of which work with [Audiobus](#).

Optional extras

You will need a USB-C hub if you intend to plug in a midi-keyboard and/ or headphones.

Jason Curtis

The South African
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