Contemporary Music in Bamako:
- Malian music has a rich history that is world renowned for its unique sound and instrumentation.
- The stylistic range of contemporary Malian music is immense, blending elements found in Western pop and hip-hop with traditional tonalities.
- In the last decade, most music producers in Mali have transitioned from 20th century recording methods to digital recording using DAWs (digital audio workstations)(1).
- Using DAW-based recording and its built-in instrument technology allows music recording to be much more accessible to aspiring record producers.

As there is no formal music recording education in Mali, new producers must rely on YouTube tutorials and their local network of producers to learn the basics of music recording and signal processing (1).
- Distribution of studio equipment and technology in Mali is very sparse (1).
- Despite these limitations, the production quality of contemporary music coming out of Mali in recent years has been world-class from an arranging, creative, and performing standpoint.

Overview of Research:
- Ethnomusicologist and researcher Amandine Pras along with collaborator Emmanuelle Olivier set out to Mali in 2018 to discover the musical practices of young producers in the area.
- In the early months of 2022, seven recording sessions from seven different music producers were filmed in Bamako, Mali.
- These producers were intentionally chosen to display a large range of age, production experience, and musical style/genre.
- The project is centred around Elizier Oubda, who has played a crucial role in developing audio engineering education in Mali.
- Oubda produced an instrumental song called “Damonzon Hope”.

This piece along with its individual MIDI tracks was given to the other 6 producers as inspiration.
- The result of this initiative is seven unique songs, each with their own style and genre.

Research Methodology:
1) Field researchers collect footage of the studio session using a SF12 ribbon microphone and several digital cameras.
2) Camera footage is synchronized with the audio files on Adobe Premiere Pro for each session.
3) Adding markers at important points in the session to create a timeline of the song making process.
4) Analyze recurring production patterns across multiple producers and musical styles.

Deconstructing the production techniques of music producers in Bamako, Mali

Observations after Analysis:
- Across the board, tremendous attention was given to the instrumental (beat) arrangement (1).
- Mixing of the tracks was done through volume automation rather than using the mixing window (1).
- Hip-hop producers almost always used ISOOTOPE’s T-PAIN Autotune plugin on the vocal takes, giving it a glassy and robotic sound.
- Communication between performer and producer was constant and very fluid. Producers did not hesitate to give immediate feedback to their recording artists.

Conclusions:
- Passing of information on recording techniques between producers has created a sound unique to the area.
- Songs across all genres, including hip-hop and traditional styles, are full of cultural references in both the music and lyrics.
- Various producers commented on the disappointing options they had for electronic sound choices that reflected traditional Malian instruments (1), showing a gap in the current state of music technology that favours Western instrumentation and musical styles.
- The act of relying on presets as a producer indicates that there may be a limitation in technical knowledge of sound manipulation(1).
- Many internationally respected Malian musicians have their songs mixed and mastered outside of the country(1).
- Focus was disproportionately on the creative and musical side of production, which may explain the reliance on built-in presets as a way to work quicker.
- The interface between incredibly rich musicianship and outdated tools of recording produces a unique sound that will continue to evolve as access to music technology becomes more widespread.
- It would be interesting to explore how these producers would use state-of-the-art technology to continue to create culturally significant pieces of music.

Acknowledgements:
I am grateful for my research supervisor at UVIC, Kirk McNally, for his support throughout the research period. As well, thanks to Amandine Pras for her commitment to this research, and Max McKinnon for tech support. Finally, a sincere thank you to Lucy Durán who graciously provided her expertise on cultural and historical traditions in West Africa.