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Case study of the production process: Defining and analysing the characteristics of three genre's and the incorporation of my findings into my own emulated work/tracks.

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Introduction

In the following essay I will be analysing three chosen tracks, with each belonging to separate genres. Furthermore, I'll be discussing their place in the musical landscape and looking at defining characteristics such as form, sound design, instrumentation and arrangement of each genre. I'll be outlining the key elements the artists used to create the feel for their chosen genre, as well as reflecting on my response to replicating each track with my personal artistic interpretation. The three tracks I have chosen are Gorillaz – *Clint Eastwood*, Red Velvet - *Zimzalabim* and Black coffee - *Garden of Eden* feat. Zonke (Black Coffee, 2015)(Gorillaz, 2016)(SMTOWN, 2019).

1st Track Discussion

Artist: Gorillaz

Track Name: Clint Eastwood

Genre: trip-hop/ reggae

The Gorillaz are a virtual band with a diverse sound of hip-hop, trip-hop, electronica and pop (Trash Theory, 2020). A sound that has intrigued me from a very young age.

Choosing to emulate Clint Eastwood, being Gorillaz breakout single on their first album, it seemed only natural to grasp an understanding on the origin of their sound (Angelica, 2020). When Damon Albarn (lead musician in the band) was asked for his opinion of the best Gorillaz song, he responded "Clint Eastwood, I mean you don't get more perfect than that it's just complete hybrid weird shit." (Phares, 2020) (Moore, 2020). This reinforced my desire to analyse this song.

The striped backed minimalistic sound of the track is reggae-inspired and has been described as trip-hop or alternative hip-hop (Case Study 1 – Gorillaz "Clint Eastwood", 2020). When analysing the song, the main chords are being played on an ARP Solina String Ensemble keyboard with a skanking reggae atmosphere. One

of the key standout instruments is the Melodica (Angelica, 2020). This being Damon Albarn's go-to instrument for writing his melodies at the time and ended up being a defining texture within the song (Case Study 1 – Gorillaz "Clint Eastwood", 2020).

Furthermore, the drums are the glue and driving force of the track with the song starting with a four-bar introduction, followed by a two-beat drum fill setting the pace of the song (Case Study 1 – Gorillaz "Clint Eastwood", 2020). The beat was created on a drum machine called the Suzuki Omnichord, surprisingly using the first pre-set found (Clint Eastwood by Gorillaz, 2020).

When taking an analytical approach, this song is from the perspective of the drummer Russell (virtual band member) who is being haunted by the memory of his dead friend (Rindner, 2020). Armed with this information, the rapper Dyle the funk Homosapen creates a narrative of the conflict between ego and spirit urging the listener to understand the power of their mind (Angelica, 2020). In addition to that, singer 2-D (virtual band member) contributes with the iconic chorus vocal line (see Appendix I)(Angelica, 2020).

'Losing Touch' Track Discussion

Artist: Jon-Henri Clayton (feat. Baris Hewitt)

Track Name: Losing touch

Genre: trip-hop

When going through the process of constructing my track I wrote down the key elements that I wanted to focus on. I tried to get the most out of the track with the least amount of elements, trying to keep it minimalistic, driven and intriguing. The main elements being a solid repetitive drum beat and a melancholy chorus with rap verses, trying to follow the same structure as Clint Eastwood (see Appendix II). I created a synth motif to reinforce these elements. My methodology behind doing this came from my experience in learning multiple songs and genres in my performance

degree, gaining an understanding of the elements and why those elements in songs create the feel and sound of that genre.

Although I did not run with the same reggae feel, the track progressed and sat well in the trip-hop space just like Clint Eastwood. I purposely used the same ballpark tempo of 84 BPM, with my track being at 82 BPM. This helped me create the same feel as Clint Eastwood as the drums are one of the main linking components. I chose to similarly open my track with a one beat drum fill, not a two-beat drum fill (Case Study 1 – Gorillaz “Clint Eastwood”, 2020).

To create the drum sound I decided to use a sampler, as I couldn't find a sound that captured the same kind of snare Tambra. This was an understandable compromise, because even Albarn himself states that if he wasn't able to play the instrument, he would openly use a sampler (Trash Theory, 2020).

Additionally, I wanted to incorporate the melodica, however I layered glass bells with an ominous two-note motif trying to create my own unique textured stand out melody like the melodica (Angelica, 2020). In doing so I found that when trying to sample the melodica it didn't work with my track, so it was omitted in the end due to a creative choice. To keep the track interesting, I added layered strings and piano stabs to roughly mimic the synth of the ARP Solina string ensemble giving the track a bigger sound.

I added foley with the birds and walking footsteps to mimic someone walking to the drumkit before the drum pick up. This was to create the same kind of atmosphere that Clint Eastwood does with Murdoc's (virtual band member) sinister laugh at the beginning of the song just in my own way (Gorillaz, 2016).

The chorus in my track incorporates a melancholy hook, which shares the same topics that Clint Eastwood features, such as being the brain with a narrative of the conflict between ego and spirit (Angelica, 2020). This creative decision to mimic Clint Eastwood's vocals was inspired by having two male vocalists doing the chorus and the rap verses. I wanted to outsource the rap part as one of the fundamental elements of the Gorillaz is their collaborations. Some obstacles that I knew I'd have

to overcome was trying to incapsulate and imitate the work of the Clint Eastwood chorus, as it is very iconic, which is why I opted for the same theme. I also tried to replicate Albarn's vocal sound using the logic pre-set 'Telephone Vocal' to give me a foundation to work off of, because Albarn's vocal sounds muffled or vintage like in the song Feel Good Inc (Gorillaz, 2016). I used EQ to cut out the high end of my vocal, putting more emphasis on the mid-range adding saturation to create that vintage/muffled sound. I also used tracks such as *Melancholy Hill* and *Tame Impala's - Elephant* as references (Gorillaz, 2010) (Tame Impala, 2020).

The sampled deep vocals were a way for me to differentiate my track by contributing to the dark atmosphere of the song. I did that using the technique of pitching vocals to the point that it's unrecognisable, which is loosely inspired by the rap vocal sound in *Sanutaz Barz* by Gorillaz (Gorillaz, 2017).

2nd Track Discussion

Artist: Red Velvet

Track name: Zimzalabim

Genre: K-pop

It seemed only right to create a K-pop track after a Gorillaz track because K-pop manifests the ideas that the Gorillaz pioneered, being the amalgamating of different genres, which K-pop takes to the next level (Phares, 2020).

When approaching K-pop I was aware that it would be a big compositional challenge purely due to its distinct use of genre switch-ups, with distinctive parts in a singular song. This is clearly heard in the song 'I GOT A BOY' by Girls Generation, where it moves from hip-hop, pop rock, EDM and bubble-gum pop (Sound Field, 2020) (SMTOWN, 2012).

Similar switch-ups can be heard in the reference tracks Zimzalabim with pop and EDM being fused, focusing on build ups to the drops and ballad like pop vocals. The reason I chose Zimzalabim was because it was less dense than other tracks and I wanted to be able to pull from multiple tracks incorporating their ideas into mine. I wanted to write for a big girl group so I could layer multiple harmonies and vocal parts.

Zimzalabim uses well know pop formats, the song starts with a single vocalist switching to another vocalist on the first verse. It then goes straight into the pre chorus with a new vocalist before the main chorus where all singers join in. Multiple vocalists are a staple in K-pop songs, so writing parts for each vocalist was important (Sound Field, 2020).

This format of multiple vocalists is heard in Blackpink's '*Lovesick girls*' and Aespa's '*Black Mamba*', all following the same song structure (BLACKPINK, 2020)(SMTOWN, 2020). However, with K-pop the structure is always subject to

change for example different sections for a dance number, as well as switching sections like chorus becoming pre-chorus.

EDM production techniques are constantly in K-pop, for example in my chosen track the use of snare build-up and raisers are used before the chorus. The thing I enjoyed the most about Zimzalabim is the multiple percussion in it, a sound I wanted to emulate.

‘LET’S GO!!’ Track Discussion

Artist: Jon-Henri Clayton (feat. Teoman Gava & Lucinda Weber)

Track Name: LET’S GO!!

Genre: K-pop

The genres I wanted to incorporate in my song include Pop, EDM and Trap with African style percussion influenced by the percussion in the Zimzalabim. I chose the genres beforehand to have a direction for my switch-ups, influenced by ‘Feel Special’ by TWICE (JYP Entertainment, 2019).

Hiring songwriters in K-pop is a staple so I also worked with songwriters (ReacttotheK, 2018). They helped me with the structure and lyrics. Lyrically, common themes are not to be divisive, crude or critical. K-pop likes to promote happiness, fun and innocence, therefore we were lyrically aware of this in the writing process. My song utilises the theme of female confidence in social environments, for example at a club. With that being said, I also tried to stick to similar structures of well know K-pop tracks, for example I used different drops before the final chorus like Zimzalabim as well as a dance section before a new third hook is introduced.

Furthermore, I used EDM production techniques in my track using the typical rapid snare build-ups and raisers, creating tension before the chorus. My drop uses synth brass, based on Brazilian bass that uses synth brass as a staple sound like in Alok & Sevens’s ‘The Wall’ (Alok, 2019). The most challenging thing for me was the mix, I felt that I had accomplished creating a song that moved relatively seamlessly

between sections, however the mix was where the track would be the downfall for my song, which is sonically dense and finding a way for everything to have its place was difficult. There were also challenges in creating vocals that sat forward in the mix but felt coherent and a part of the instrumentation, an example being my mixing reference track 'Can't Stop Me' by TWICE (JYP Entertainment, 2020).

I decided to try a new method in this mix, wanting to create dimension and depth, learning from Chris Lord-Alge (CLA) masterclass (Waves Audio, 2020). It works by using four separate delays and four separate reverbs busses, running elements into the delays/reverbs to create that sense of depth. With this technique, it allowed me to understand the use of delay and reverb more, and how it can help fuse elements together helping the vocals feel like they belong. Thus, bridging the gap between instrumental and vocals.

The execution of this technique contains some flaws, as there are instances in the song in which the vocals get lost and could sonically sit better. However, on the other hand, by adopting the CLA technique there was a good learning curve of improvement and with some practise the execution will become better. The song certainly sounds better compared to my first mix/rendition (see Appendix III for demo link).

3rd Track Discussion

Artist: Black Coffee

Track Name: Garden of Eden (feat. Zonke)

Genre: Afro-House/House

For this next genre, my choice was merely driven by an artist and genre that represented the culture of the country I grew up in, South Africa, also bringing light to music that is not in the mainstream, whereas the two previous artist and genres are.

I have been following Black Coffee (name Nkosingithi Maphumulo) career, progression and sound for the last five years (Buchanan, 2020). Ever since I started producing, I have unconsciously used African rhythm and percussion, which I think is ingrained in me due to my experience of listening to the radio in the past, with the growing house scene in South Africa. Fundamentally, it was from my experience singing African Hymn, chants and oral traditional songs in the choir. Here I was also introduced to the rhythm and feel that African music intrinsically has in the culture (Mnisi, 2014).

My interpretation of Black Coffee is that he is the embodiment of South Africa's acceptance of house music, infusing it with African feel. Black Coffee is the biggest African artist to break into the mainstream, in 2015 getting the breakthrough DJ of the year award in Ibiza, even gaining a residency in Ibiza (Intriguing Facts About DJ Black Coffee's Music Career Achievements, Net Worth and Failed Marriage, 2020). In addition, his music has even been sampled by Drake in his 2017 playlist opening him up to the US market gaining him collaborations with Usher and David Guetta (Buchanan, 2020).

Garden of Eden is one of his most well-known and reworked songs. The song uses the classic house four to the four kick and adds African percussion and polyrhythms, for Afro-house is a stripped back house music with emphasis on Polyrhythmic percussion, influenced by South African Kwaito music (DJP, 2020)(Polyrhythm |

music, n.d.). Afro house emphasises the offbeat creating the bounce feel to it (Mnisi, 2014).

The song's instrumentation includes kicks, scattered hi-hats, synths, synth bass, vocals and percussion all militaristically layered throughout the song with the use of polyrhythms, a staple in traditional African dance music (Polyrhythm | music, n.d.) (Muscato, n.d.). These polyrhythmic ideas and vocal similarities can be found in the song Seng'Khatele by Euphonik ft. Shota, influenced by traditional Zulu drum music (shotarhythms, 2011) (Traditional Music Channel, 2014).

Garden of Eden like other tracks by him uses layered female vocals, which are reminiscent of African chant and Afro-jazz (Mnisi, 2014). The same textures can be heard by him in 'Turn Me On' (Black Coffee, 2015). This vocal style can also be heard by the male singers in the opening of Paul Simons's 'Diamond's on the Souls of her Shoes' (Simon, 2011).

To understand Afro-house I needed to have an understanding of its predecessor 'House', which was pioneered in Chicago through the sampling of funk and disco tracks, which can be dated back in history as influenced by African music (Electronic: From Kraftwerk to The Chemical Brothers, 2020). Furthermore, House introduced the revolutionary drum machine, the 909 (Vox, 2019). This is where house, techno and lounge sounds and the feel of the time can be heard in Black Coffee's music, with an example in 'Can You Feel It' by Larry Heard and 'MOVE YOUR BODY' by Marshall Jeffers (Larry Heard – téma, 2016)(Yaza House, 2009). This being a good example of the staple four to the floor kick and scattered hi-hat sounds with punchy snare hits (Electronic: From Kraftwerk to The Chemical Brothers, 2020).

‘NE!’ Track Discussion

Artist: Jon-Henri Clayton

Track Name: NE!

Genre: Afro-House/House

I wanted to create a long track, for Black Coffee is a DJ, therefore the song must be DJ friendly (Cercle, 2018). I was considerate of this starting the song with the four to the floor kick and scattered hi-hats, done for beat matching purposes. These elements gluing the first and second part of the song, building everything around this layering percussion sounds. Finding all kinds of polyrhythmic ideas before fleshing out the track. I used different types of percussion sounds of marimbas, steel drums and African drums using an arpeggiator to create the polyrhythms. Using arpeggiators is well-known in-house music, dating back to the early days where synth sounds were arpeggiated to make the interesting soundscapes of house music like in the classic Frankie Knuckles ‘Your Love’ (MAXMELIX, 2018). I ran with the idea experimenting with arpeggiated patterns in the synths, percussion and hi-hats.

The sampled synth sound in the second half of the song brought a new element to the song with the chopped-up vocals from an African Taxi rank found on Aporee (a site for open sourced field recordings). This experimentation came from not having a vocalist in mind while producing the instrumental. I created the bouncing/dipping feel with the sampled synth by sidechaining it to the kick, which gave a new feel instead of it being so straight, which Afro house is not.

I love making this kind of Afro-house music, because it is reminiscent of when I first discovered house, finding the creative process the most freeing out of the three tracks. I enjoyed experimenting with the structure, sounds, synths and arpeggiators, as there wasn’t as much freedom to do that in the other songs. In spite of that I still faced some obstacles, especially in the mix, once again finding my ability to get what I want out the track hard.

Conclusion

Overall, I'm happy with the work that I have put forward. I have seen a massive personal progression in my ability to take the genre's concepts and applying them in a creative manner seeing this as a strong characteristic in myself. All three songs have challenged me creatively, but fundamentally it was the mixing that I found challenging. There is an improvement from previous mixes but vocally my mixes are still not up to a broadcasting standard. I can see my progression for I made multiple mixes of the tracks applying the CLA method, which improved things. I have become more methodical in my workflow, enhanced my decision-making abilities. This was a hurdle I wanted to overcome in this assessment, approaching mixing better, creating a personal checklist to stay on task as well preventing myself from overthinking my decisions. I have work to do to get my songs to a broadcasting standard, but I've achieved my goals thus far, allowing me to take the next step forward.

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Appendix I: Gorillaz – Clint Eastwood Lyrics

[Intro: 2D]

Hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo

[Chorus: 2D]

I ain't happy, I'm feeling glad

I got sunshine in a bag

I'm useless, but not for long

The future is coming on

I ain't happy, I'm feeling glad

I got sunshine in a bag

I'm useless, but not for long

The future is coming on

It's coming on, it's coming on

It's coming on, it's coming on

Appendix II: Form Comparison

Clint Eastwood:	Losing touch:
INTRO	INTRO
CHORUS	CHORUS
VERSE	VERSE
CHORUS	PRE CHORUS
VERSE	CHORUS
CHORUS	BRIDGE
OUTRO	CHORUS
	OUTRO

Appendix III: Demo Link

<https://soundcloud.com/jon-henri-clayton/lets-go-teo-lucinda-jon-henri-k-pop-g2-fmix/s-PPdiUWHCMAJ>