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Foundation Assignment Brief

CPO 0721

F2- Essay

Word count 3023

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In this assignment I will be analysing the defining characteristics of three different genres of music, Blues, Britpop and Electronic Dance Music (EDM). Whilst analysing production techniques commonly used within these three musical genres I will be looking at how the reference tracks I have provided conform to these genres and discussing production techniques used in these tracks. The three tracks I have chosen are *The Thrill Is Gone* by BB King (Completely Well 1969), *Sonnet* by The Verve (Urban Hymns 1997) and *Dangerous* by David Guetta (Listen 2014).

I will describe how I have used these production techniques and the genre defining characteristics in three of my own tracks that I have created for this assignment which I have called *Baby Left*, *Somehow* and *Say Something*.

Blues classic *The Thrill Has Gone* by the legendary BB King is a leading example of Blues music that showcases the majority of the defining characteristics found within this genre. Considered one of the most influential blues musicians of all time he earned the nickname “The King of the Blues” (undiscovermusic.com 2022).

Minor in key and melancholy yet smooth thanks to legato violins which become more pronounced when playing along with the lead guitar, this track adheres to the classic twelve bar structure with guitar leads in between. *If you want to play blues guitar, you need to start by learning the 12 bar blues* (happy blues man.com 2022). One of the most prominent chord progressions in popular music, the twelve bar blues has a distinctive form in lyrics, phrase, chord structure and duration. In its basic form it is predominantly based on the first, fourth and fifth chords of a key (pbs.org 2003). This Chord structure has been used since the inception of the genre and appears in almost every iconic blues song ever written including Chuck Berry’s *Johnny B Goode*, Jimi Hendrix’s *Red House*, Eric Clapton’s *Crossroads*, Elvis Presley’s *Hound Dog* and Stealers Wheels’ *Stuck In The Middle With You* to mention just a few. *The Thrill Is Gone* makes no exception and so it was only right to include this progression in my blues track *Baby Left*.

Found in both my track and the reference track, the lyrics follow what’s known as an AAB pattern. “A” refers to the first and second four-bar verse and “B” is the third four-bar verse. In a twelve bar blues, the first and second lines are repeated and the third line is a response to them. These “call and response” lyrics represent another of this genres defining characteristics. Blues lyrics are usually based upon problems of love (which applies to both my blues track and the reference track), oppression and hard times. *It’s name notwithstanding, blues music can invoke a range of emotions: joy, anguish, triumph, or plain old sadness. As Nina Simone demonstrated, the blue can feel really, really good* (musical-u.com 2021). BB King delivers his lyrics in *The Thrill Is Gone* with a baritone rasp and intimate breathiness whilst bending the pitch. This I have tried to recreate in my track, hence bringing a suitable vocalist in. As for vocal processing on my track I’ve tried to emulate the reverb used on the BB King track using a classic EMT 140 plate reverb plugin as this was commonly used during the recording era in question (toolfarm.com 2020) and have also applied some gentle compression to control the dynamics.

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Generally in blues music the lead guitar has enough overdrive to elevate it over the band but without being too distorted. Whilst BB King holds back on the overdrive in *The Thrill Is Gone*, in my track I decided I would add a little extra to help me express a little more emotion through the instrument as this is an important and major characteristic of this genre. I used a Fender Telecaster through a Fender Frontman amp with the 'extra drive' button selected. Choking and bending the guitar strings play a big part in this also, as do the flattened blue or "worried" notes found within the minor pentatonic scale. Many blues players opt to use a bottle neck or slide. Ry Cooder shows this off well in *The Prodigal Son*. (The Prodigal Son 2018)

The lead guitars on both my track and BB Kings also have a touch of reverb. The lead guitar in my track is backed up with a solid, trebley, scratchy, rhythm guitar where as BB King in the reference track has opted for a second lead guitar overdubbed and low in the mix however a cello delivers the same effect as my rhythm guitar. This kind of rhythm guitar is very common within this genre of music. (See *Got My Mojo Working* by Muddy Waters 1956).

Throughout *The Thrill Is Gone* you can hear another of this genres defining characteristics in the vocal melisma where single syllables are sustained across several pitches. BB King expresses this right from the start of the song. It stands out the most when he sings the word "gone". You can hear this in my track on the words "stay" and "anyway".

Walking bass lines play a key roll within this genre. A fun video by Riff Ninja Productions demonstrates a simple version of this(YouTube). "A walking bass line is simply a melodic bass line found mainly in jazz and blues styles in which you 'walk' around in quarter notes connecting the chords"(talking bass.net). It's very easy to sound similar to others whilst performing this kind of bass line so you can notice in both the reference track and my track that although the idea remains the same, unique rhythms have been formed often accenting non important beats where they wouldn't usually occur, either highlighting off beats or resting on beat. This displays another defining characteristic of this genre. I used a Fender Precision jazz bass for its classic tone.

"Drums in blues music work best when they're a little washy and sloppy" (izotope.com 2019).

With this in mind and wanting to keep an authentic blues rawness I was careful not to over process my drums, applying just a little EQ and compression to the kick drum, rack tom and snare, with a touch of reverb on the snare.

Keyboards such as the world renowned Fender Rhodes regularly feature in the blues. A fine example of this would be *Ray Charles Plays The Slow Blues In Madrid* (YouTube). This instrument is instantly recognisable in *The Thrill Is Gone*. As not to produce a carbon copy of the reference track, included in my blues track is an organ which I applied some mild distortion to for a little more authenticity. Organs such as the famous Hammond organ are also a common feature in this genre. *I've Got A Woman Part 1* by Jimmy McGriff portrays a great example of this (YouTube).

From all the blues tracks mentioned it is clear that the featured soloist whether vocalist or instrumentalist should stand out, centred in the stereo field and louder than the rest of the band. BB Kings vocals and lead guitar are a prime example of this and I've been cautious to pull the drums and bass back a little in the mix of my track and panned the rhythmic parts to the left and right in order to achieve this.

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"Britpop, movement of British rock bands in the 1990s that drew consciously on the tradition of melodic, guitar-based British pop music established by the The Beatles. Like nearly all musical youth trends, Britpop was about songs, guitars, jackets and attitudes" (Britannica.com 2018).

"This movement- characterised by regional accents, working-class culture and 'boys in bands', mostly drew musical inspiration from different kinds of rock from the 60's and 70's made by The Beatles and The Kinks, and from 80's indie rock, most notably music by The Smiths." (musicorigins.org 2020).

Formed in Wigan (a mere twenty miles away from where I grew up and continue to live) in 1990, The Verve are responsible for my reference track representing the Britpop genre. Containing the bulk of this genre's defining characteristics, this masterpiece tells the story of a quest to achieve love, the level of effort involved in this quest, and how painful it can be. I have used a similar influence whilst creating my Britpop ballad. Instrumentation found in this genre usually consists of two guitars- rhythm and lead, drums, bass, keyboards, vocals (usually male) and backing vocals (Blur, Oasis, Pulp, The Charlatans, Supergrass and Ocean Colour Scene). Exceptions to this would be Elastica and Sleeper who both consisted of female lead vocalists.

Often in the studio, extra guitar layers were recorded (see *Moving* by Supergrass) and regularly orchestral arrangements (see *Whatever* by Oasis) were recorded that were not always recreated during live performances but were magical when they were (see *Bitter Sweet Symphony* by The Verve). This is down to the somewhat experimental and free approach to creating music with an inventive musical structure in this genre.

As for layered guitars *Sonnet* definitely conforms as two clean, jangly acoustic guitar tracks can clearly be heard along with three different electric guitar parts- one clean and rhythmic, one distortion laden lead track with controlled feedback and a distorted strummed guitar which reinforces the later half of the track boosting the aggression. When creating my Britpop track I decided to follow suit and recorded two acoustic guitar parts (although one is only in the introduction) and two electric guitar parts- one providing a rhythmic stab whilst the other delivers some low level lead. EQ and reverb were applied to my acoustic guitar tracks and I used compression, distortion, a touch of delay and reverb on my electric guitar tracks to remain in keeping with what the Britpop genre is musically built on.

*The Verve were the Britpop kings of strings, and History was just the first in a long line of string-laden hits that the band would achieve in between their various breakups. By the time of their mega-selling 1997 album **Urban Hymns** the Verve recording motto was "and all shall have strings" (recordwindplay.co.uk 2014). Taken from this album *Sonnet* involves a large string section sitting central in the mix with the rest of the song built around it creating a powerful, epic piece of music. Difficult for me to recreate on my track, I have settled for reverb enhanced virtual legato strings which whilst are effective in the mix cannot compete with a live orchestra.*

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Sonnet is arranged in mainly in eight bar sections with a 4/4 time signature. The introduction and instrumental section after the first chorus however consist of four bars. To add inventiveness the final phrase of the choruses are repeated adding an extra bar to total an unconventional nine bar sequence. This tactic I have used in my Britpop track as I feel its effective and adds interest. The bridge doubles up to sixteen bars before returning to a seemingly combined chorus and outro making up the final twenty six or so bars. This along with the fact that this chorus has different lyrics, once again shows an inventive musical structure.

A lot of bands in the Britpop genre used Fender basses, mainly the Fender Jazz or Precision. The bass lines were usually kept simple and just followed the root notes of the songs. (See *Don't Look Back In Anger* by Oasis, *Disco 2000* by Pulp). There were exceptions to this however (see *Girls And Boys* by Blur). On my Britpop style song I intentionally recorded a simple Fender Jazz bass line playing little more than the root notes then did little processing other than a touch of EQ. *The only Oasis songs I know which had memorable bass lines were the ones from the "Standing On The Shoulder of Giants" album which were recorded by Noel Gallagher. Such as on "Go Let It Out"* (talkbass.com 2012). My Britpop track also features a subtle piano similar to *Sonnet* to which I've applied a little reverb.

Whilst analysing the lead vocals in *Sonnet*, I couldn't detect evidence of them being double tracked. ADT (automatic double tracking) may have been used but what is clear is the use of a prominent delay and a wet fairly long reverb. I chose to sing myself on my Britpop track despite having an extremely weak voice in comparison to Richard Ashcroft (The Verve) who has been referred to as being one of the greatest singers of all time (faroutmagazine.co.uk 2021). Production wise I've use multiple EQs and compressors, some light distortion then a digital delay and a blend of two reverbs in an attempt to enhance my vocals as much as possible whilst ensuring they don't sound out of place in a song of this genre. Ive tried to go like for like with the instrument volumes and the panning, splitting the guitars up and centralising the strings. If I was to anything differently I would have used a better quality acoustic guitar and brought a stronger vocalist and a live string section in.

The final genre of music I decided to include in this assignment is Electronic Dance Music (EDM). *EDM is the combined term for all genres within the dance music space. This includes genres such as ambient, drum and bass, house, electro, techno, trance, hardstyle and many more* (armadamusic.com 2022).

For a reference track I have included *Dangerous* by David Guetta (*Listen* 2014). EDM allows a wide variety of musical genres to be combined into complex and pleasing combinations. *Dangerous* highlights this using a classical piano sample (prsformusic.com) alongside classic 1980s sounding synthesiser parts similar to what a Roland 303 bass synth, Juno keyboard or similar would deliver. Deliberately inorganic sounds FX and timbres are heavily used throughout this genre and it's sub

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genres. *Dangerous* uses a kind of impact noise to exaggerate the entry of new parts. In my EDM track I've done something similar in the introduction using a kick drum with a snare hit and plenty of reverb to reinforce the entry of a synth part. Both *Dangerous* consists of a combination of live or authentic instrument sounds along side virtual instruments. A funky, simple yet effective bass line plays a major roll in this reference track. My intention was to create a bass line as effective on my own EDM track, add several synth sounds and FXs. I opted for an active Fender Precision bass with light gauge 'funk' strings through a TC Electronic amp. I recorded a few bars which I then sampled and looped, a technique fundamental to this genre. I was pleased with the sound from the bass and amp so I found no further processing was necessary.

The bass is accompanied by a live guitar sound when it comes in. Relatively clean sounding with I suspect chorus and reverb. I played a Fender Stratocaster style guitar on my EDM track straight into my interface then mixed with a bit of EQ and reverb. I've used the guitar track much lower in the mix on my track with the purpose of filling a gap to help glue the track together. A virtual string section can be made out later on in my track again low in the mix serving the same purpose and using the same reverb as the guitar. Although these live instruments feature in both *Dangerous* and my track *Say Something* this isn't necessarily an essential factor in this genre.

Live instrumentation and singing are often featured but usually as a garnish rather than the main dish. Most important, the music is specifically for the social function of dancing all night (britannica.com 2017)

David Guetta's *Dangerous* features Sam Martin on vocals. This brings quite a poppy feel to the track making it more commercial and tells a story for the listener to get involved in. Heavily processed with a lot of delay and reverb, the use of pitch correction or Auto-Tune is deliberately obvious. Found in other genres too, auto tune is heard on most modern vocals whether subtly or not. Some would say it's an essential tool in EDM as well.

Auto tune is often mis-used (in my opinion), but it's still an essential tool if you are making music that you hope to compete with other modern styles of EDM (EDM tips.com 2022).

Needless to say in the EDM track I have created, Martin Jones who also features on my twelve bar blues track *Baby Left* was drafted in to provide under my instruction a powerful vocal which I have chopped up, sampled, formed loops from and manipulated. I've gone heavy on the delay and reverb influenced by the reference track whilst light on the Auto-Tune but without making its presence unknown as I realise the importance of it being noticeable in modern commercial music. Originally designed to go under the radar, the likes of Cher (see *Believe*) and T-Pain (andscape.com 2021) popularised Auto-Tune but it came at a cost at the time to T-Pain.

The fact that these vocals even exist once again proves the diversity of EDM as a musical genre. As this again is difficult to class as a defining characteristic of the genre.

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EDM is solely about you. The lack of vocals in the largely instrumental music prevent someone else from guiding your thoughts and maybe that, right there, is the beauty (EDM oft.com 2016).

To conclude I feel I have competently reflected the defining characteristics of Blues and Britpop and that my original song creations conform to these characteristics, making use of the typical instrumentation and production techniques that play a vital role within these musical genres. I've done my best to create a song that conforms to the defining characteristics of EDM using similar instrumentation and production techniques showcased within my reference track, however, with the amount of sub genres categorised within EDM I question is it even a genre at all?

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