

MA Commercial Music Producer Foundation 2016631

TILEYARD EDUCATION

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Introduction

In this essay I will be discussing three tracks that I have written and produced in three different genres. I did all three tracks from my small “studio” at home that comes with its own limitations, but I got to see how far I could push a production from my own space.

I’m going to talk about the defining points of the genres, the production process and methodology used to achieve the results. I aim to provide a clear insight into why I made certain decisions along the way and how those decisions were made whether down to research or the environment and tools at hand. I’ve broken down each track into its key elements including instrumentation, structure, key, time signature and discussed what makes each track fit into its defined genre.

TRACK 1

- Indie Folk / Electronic
- Bon Iver – 22 Over Soon
- 135bpm
- 02:48

My reference track is **22(OVER Soon) By Bon Iver.**

It falls into the Indie Folk / Electronic genre, this is when an artist pulls influence from traditional folk music using contemporary and sometimes complicated instrumentation with multi voiced harmonies (Ruehl, K., 2019). The reason I included electronic as a genre is Bon Iver's use of synthesizers, mainly the OP-1 (Tingen, P., 2017). This track starts off intimate however the whole piece is a build up with minimal yet intertwined instrumentation that keeps the song constantly moving.

Indie Folk / Electronic	135BPM	D Flat Major	02:48			
	Intro	Verse 1	Verse 2	Instrumental	Verse 3	Outro
OP-1	+	+	+	+	+	+
VOCAL		+	+		+	+
GUITAR			+	+	+	+
SAMPLES			+	+	+	
Saxophone				+		

+ = Instrument in section

Table 1 Indie Folk / Electronic Reference Track Structure

Indie Folk / Electronic	100BP M	A#	03:07				
	Intro	V1	instrumental	V2	Middle8	Chorus	Outro
OP-1	+	+				+	
VOCAL		+	+	+	+	+	
GUITAR	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
SAMPLES			+		+	+	+
Saxophone			+		+	+	
Glockenspiel			+		+	+	

+ = Instrument in section

Table 2 My Indie Folk / Electronic Track Structure

GUITAR

My first track, “Caves” starts with an acoustic guitar. I wanted the listener to feel like it was just them and the guitar in the room. At my disposal I had an SE Magneto and a Sure SM57. I set up the Magneto facing the sound hole of the guitar and the SM57 facing the 12th fret, both mics equidistant from the guitar with enough space for me to still play comfortably (Senior, M., 2010) I ended up only using the take from the 12th fret, it sounded slightly more intimate and natural rather than balancing the two takes together.

I took out some low end and I boost at 434Hz to give some clarity to the body of the guitar. I added a compressor to just get control on the dynamic range as one of the issues I encountered with recording acoustic guitar was the sound of fingers sliding on the strings, I used a ‘De-esser’ plugin to soften this, however it does sound natural and give the intimate feel I was after. As the room I recorded in didn’t have

much natural reverb, I added 'Valhalla room' with 6ms pre-delay / 0.69 second's decay. I added 1db of this as it sounded fresher and rich.

VOCAL EFFECTS

Like the reference track, I layered my vocal lead, a low-pitched harmony and a falsetto harmony. I balanced my vocals L/R and Centre with the L&R slightly quieter than my main take. I used a room reverb that I panned to give some space to the vocal and give it some depth. For the pitched vocals I used 'Little Alter Boy' and changed the pitch and formant. for the first verse I did -3 on the formant and mixed it with the clean main vocal and the falsetto.

In the second half of the verse, I did some backing vocals. I used logics built in pitch corrector to create that autotune sound and used 'Repeater' to keep them wide and smooth, I also increased the formant by three, so they have a different feel to the lead vocals. I decided to keep them drier than the lead, things started to get muddy when I had multiple reverbs.

I struggled to find the sweet spot of my own voice, I have a nasal sound when I sing that low and soft, so I felt like I was always at the wrong end of the EQ, however this was something I had to work around, as it freed up some space on the high-mids for me. I boosted 8khz and 5khz to make my vocal cut through nicely in this mix especially the busier parts of the track. (White, P., 2004)

INSTRUMENTATION

One of the key elements of “*Indie Folk*” is instrumentation. My favourite parts of the track are the saxophone and Glockenspiel samples. I found a video of a saxophone player, ripped it and put into a sampler. I wasn’t getting anything usable from letting logic chop to the transients, so I went rogue and blindly chopped the audio. When nothing else works I tend to get some interesting results from this method, in this case some pretty, autumnal sounding sax chops. I layered two saxophone lines together and I was very pleased with the result, in terms of it not sounding too fake, I let the sax take up a lot of the mid-range so that when it comes in it’s uplifting. The glockenspiel is a factory logic sound, with some compression and a pinch of reverb it sits comfortably with the Celeste that I layered it with. I let the glockenspiel take up some high-end space 3khz-4khz whilst the celeste sat in the mids to thicken the sound up.

OP-1

Bon Iver have always been champions of the OP-1 (Hyden, S., 2015).

There’s a vocal sample from Sam Cooke – A Change Is Gonna Come in the instrumental sections, I recorded it out of my DAW into the OP-1 and played it back in pitched down. In the Bon Iver track he samples a similar vocal at 02:07. I’ve taken all the low end out of this sample, added a big plate reverb, some ‘EchoBoy’ and panned slightly left, all of this was done to give the sample some distance and space from everything else that’s going on in that section.

In the beginning of the song, and throughout the first verse there’s a sample from the lead vocal saying “Made Up In My Head”, I used the same technique where I

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recorded my lead vocal out into the OP-1 and played it back in at different speeds.

For the intro sound I used a lot of reverb and panned to the right, so it didn't deflect attention from the guitar. Through the first verse I kept the sample quite dry, so it fits in almost as a backing vocal. I've found the OP-1 to be a really versatile instrument and I use it on almost everything, I find that Bon Iver's use of it outside of traditional electronic music is really interesting.

I'm happy with how this turned out, but I still think there's a way to go with mixing, especially with the instrumentation at some points. I want to come back to this one at the end of the year and see what I'd do differently.

TRACK 2

- **Trap / Rap**
- **Kanye West – Wash Us In The Blood**
- **140bpm**
- **03:09**

Trap, is a subgenre of hip-hop which came about in the 1990s in Southern America and achieved widespread popularity in the 2010's (Holt, 2019). **Trap** can be defined by including loud tuned 808 kicks that sound like someone banging on your front door, intricately programmed hi hat patterns, moody synths and tuned vocals (Run The Trap: The Best EDM, Hip Hop & Trap Music. 2020). Although trap is a modern development Kanye West, the producer on this track pays homage to the roots of hip hop, using vocal and drum samples (BBC Bitesize. 2020).

My reference track is **Kanye West – Wash Us In Blood**.

It has such a moody sound using minimal layers. The 808, layered with a kick to make the bass line pop. The lead vocal is dry and upfront with a sample from a preacher throughout the track. The synth riff is played throughout the song but changes octaves between sections which is a great way to keep the sound new for the listener whilst keeping the vibe and energy consistent.

Trap / Rap	140PM	B Flat Major	03:09						
	Intro	Verse 1	Drop	Verse 2	Drop 2	Verse 3	Drop 3	Verse 4	Outro
808			+	+		+		+	
VOCAL	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	
DRUMS			+	+		+		+	+
SYNTH	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
SAMPLES	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	

+ = Instrument in section

Table 3 Trap / Rap Reference Track Structure

Trap / Rap	130B PM	G Sharp Major	03:23					
	Intro	instrumental	V1	Instrumental	V2	V3	V4	Outro
ZHONGHU	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
VOCAL			+		+	+	+	+
DRUMS		+	+	+		+	+	
BASS		+	+	+	+	+	+	
SAMPLES		+		+	+	+	+	
SERMON		+		+				

Table 4 My Trap Track Structure

808

At 00:08 the drums and bass come in and bring the track to life.

I intended to use an 808 here but it wasn't cutting it for me in terms of feel, I did however stick to lining up my bass notes with my kicks. Doing this stays familiar to the reference and leaves space in the track to be filled with a vocal. I think it's quite

important within **Trap** to not make your instrumental complicated with multiple instruments and layers. Keep it simple and the space will open up for what's meant to work.

The bass sound I went for was actually pre-set on the OP-1 called "Bassline", I didn't change the sound at all until after I'd recorded it. I took out 50hz and added compression to control the level. I also side chained it to the kick to let the kick cut through a bit more as I struggled to let them both share the low end. Although different to a traditional 808, it worked well and had the aggression I couldn't get from the 808.

VOCALS

The vocals come in at 00:39, in the reference the lead vocal sounds clear, slightly squashed with a touch of distortion so I compressed the vocal using the 'FG-116' with a 4:1 ratio, fast attack and slow release. This also helped Tarju hitting the first words after a breath a little harder than the rest of the take, this levelled out the dynamics of the vocal. For extra saturation I used a 'de-esser' which made the vocal smoother. Tarju's voice was quite raspy already, so it already worked well with the space it had. I boosted 2.50khz by a 2db and 3.5khz by the same to help cut through and sit on top on the music. I didn't feel the need to add any effects to the lead vocal after this as it sounded great dry and upfront.

Throughout the song I layered Tarjus vocal with a pitched shifted double. I used 'Little Alter Boy' to shift the Formant and pitch to -12. Even though this isn't an effect used in the reference track, I hear it a lot in modern music (Friedman, S., 2015) and

thought it worked really well in this track, especially when working with a small number of vocal stems. This was due to the lockdown and me and Tarju having to work over the internet.

SAMPLING

The first thing you hear in the track is a sample that I found while looking for a woodwind instrument sound. I came across a Zhonghu which is a Chinese string instrument, developed in the 1950's (Web.stanford.edu. 2020.) the sound was perfect for what I needed to stay close to the reference. I put a low pass filter on the sample so that the transition into the drop feels smooth. You hear the Zhonghu throughout the whole track and to differentiate between different sections I reverse it and/or change the bass note from an F to a C.

I also sampled a sermon by HB Charles Jr. The inspiration for this came from the reference where Kanye has sampled a bible reading and pitched it down. I loved the tone of Charles Jr's voice and felt it added some life to the instrumental sections. Like Kanye I pitched it down to give the voice extra power and rumble, there's also a small plate reverb added to give it space. I sent this vocal to a backing vocal bus where I boosted the high end at 5khz and 3.4khz, I did this to glue the sample to the track a little better.

Other notable samples I've used are the "HEY" shout riser that you hear 3 times in the track as it flows between sections. I took out everything apart from 800k – 1000khz and added some fuzzy distortion and a big plate reverb, 8 second delay time to give some aggression to the sound. There's also a Lion's roar, it's a play on

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Tarju's accent as he's from Birmingham, referring to the line "*I ain't lyin*". Even though it has no musical relevance there's a similar sample in the reference track so what started out as a joke ended up working out.

TRACK 3

- Indie/Rock
- Japanese Breakfast - 12 Steps
- 115 bpm
- 02:37

The 3rd song I've chosen is an **indie rock** song called **12 Steps by Japanese Breakfast**. The term **indie rock** comes from the labels that used to release this style of music being independent it became interchangeable with the genre as these labels were releasing alternative rock (AllMusic. 2020.). Music in this style tends to consist of warm but gritty guitars, round bass guitar and poppy yet saturated drums with a soft vocal on top (Green, P., 2015.). I worked on my song with an artist called Bessie Turner who is already established in the indie scene.

Indie Rock	115BPM	G Major	02:37				
	Intro	Verse 1	Pre-Chorus	Chorus	Guitar Solo	Pre-Chorus	Chorus
Rhythm Guitar	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Lead Guitar				+	+		+
Bass		+	+	+	+	+	+
Drums		+	+	+	+	+	+
Vocals	+	+	+	+		+	+

+ = Instrument in section

Table 5 Indie Rock Reference Track Structure

Indie Rock	114B PM	B	03:24								
	Intro	V1	Gap	V2	PRE	C1	V3	C2	M8	C3	Outro
DRUMS		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
BASS		+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	
GUITAR	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+
VOCAL		+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	
REV VOCAL			+						+		
Shiny Guitar			+						+		

+ = Instrument in section

Table 6 My Indie Rock Track Structure

GITARS

Guitars are a key part of the sound in **Indie Rock** and as a guitar player I felt comfortable with taking this on, however one of the first issues I had to tackle was that my guitar parts were going to be DI's using amp sim plug ins, I used the 'TH-U' by Slate. I know what the ballpark sound for my guitars is from listening to the reference, I also know the band use VOX AC30 amps (Equipboard.com. 2020) so for my intro I wanted something warm & bright that didn't have much distortion. As the part being played was picked, the dynamics can be quite sharp. To soften this, I compressed with a slow attack at a ratio of 2:1 to try and keep the transient.

I layered this with a grittier version when the drums and bass joined in. This is where I started to play around with panning reverbs to try and give the guitars a live feel by placing them in the room. I did a cool trick that I learnt from Warren Huart (Produce Like A Pro, 2016).

The Guitar I had panned Right, I sent a reverb that was panned Left, and the guitar I had panned left, I sent a reverb that was panned right. Doing this gave my guitars a more realistic and roomy sound.

Another guitar sound is the dirty rhythm guitars in the chorus's (Ultimate-guitar.com. 2012). I've got two guitars both playing the same thing with slightly different guitar tones panned L&R for width. Both with distortion from the THU and some decapitator to give the mids some presence. One is taking up more mid-range which I have boosted at around 200hz and 1.5khz and the other sitting slightly higher up being boosted at 3.5khz and 7khz. I was happy with my guitar sounds but would have loved to have recorded some amps here.

DRUMS

I used MIDI drums and drum loops on this as there was no way to get in the studio and record a real kit. For me, live drums have a lively natural sound and feel to them that you lack with samples. For the verses I programmed the beat myself, as it's a straightforward beat it doesn't sound too robotic.

I didn't have to do much to the sound of these drums as the samples I used sounded authentic. For me they just needed a bit more energy so I EQ'd out the low end of the hats and the snare but left the kick as I wanted to give it space. I compressed the kick with a fast attack and a slow release to let the transient of the beater come through. I boosted 91hz to give it extra weight and at 1.40khz to let its bite through. With the snare I compressed with a super quick attack and slow release, boosted 10khz and 1.2khz to let some sizzle through as well as some of the whack. The sample I used was already gated which worked for the sound I was trying to get.

In the chorus I needed something that felt looser with a human feel. I ended up using a loop I found on Splice which I've never done before with drums. The main

challenge was finding something that was similar to the drums I already had, so it didn't feel like two different drummers on two different kits. Luckily the loop was close in terms of sound. To make it sit up with what I already had, I compressed it, made it louder and boosted the EQ where the kick was sitting and where the snare was sitting. I also added a medium sized room reverb to try and give it some natural resonance to add to the live feel. It would have been useful to have everything on separate channels to mix properly but when you don't have real drums, loops are the next best option. I felt I needed another percussive element to help bring out the rhythm, so I recorded a layer of acoustic guitar to sit behind the electric guitars and drums to add a bit of life. I recorded the acoustic guitar using the same technique that I used on my previous track (Senior, M., 2010).

VOCAL

I wanted the intro to feel like the singer and guitarist were in the same room, I tried to do this by setting 3 reverb sends. Each one increasing in pre-delay and decay. The idea being that the short one will give the effect of something being 6ft away. The maths being 6:1. I did this but felt like the vocalist could have some more space so sent through a bit more level.

For the chorus I wanted to have a bigger vocal sound layered with backing harmonies. When recording we weren't sure what was going to be the lead take, so we ended up recording 4 different styles that were all in key with each other and I got the fun job of layering them until I found what worked best. The take I went with as the lead had a lot more honesty to it so I put that straight down the middle, doubled and quite clean. Panned left I have a really bright take full of life. Panned right I had

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another harmony that I kept dry to blend it with the lead sound to bring it all together.

On my bus I added 'Decapitator' to help the vocals cut through and sit on top of the music. I had to compress heavily because of some of the dynamics. If we had more time, we could have achieved the perfect take, to fix this I compressed with a ratio of 6:1, a 2ms attack and 3ms release.

I really enjoyed making this track, I'd like to come back at the end of the year and see what I'd do differently in terms of giving the instrumentation its own space to breathe. I also would have loved to have recorded a real drummer and guitar amps on this.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, we can see from looking at each track how different production techniques can be applied to different genres and how they can define the sound of a record, for example the intertwined layers of instrumentation in the **Indie folk** track. The kick's that knock with intricate hi hat patters in the **Trap** track and the live band sound of the **Indie rock** song. Each are within their own right a key element that might not necessarily sound good if applied to another genre in the same way. That being said it's been great to experiment with different sounds and mixing techniques during the production process. I'm really happy with the tracks I've produced but I would like to come back to them in the future as I still feel I have a lot to learn with mixing, especially when it comes to giving instruments their own space in the mix.

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