

Analysing Three Songs Across Different Genres: A Study In Recreating Musicality And Style

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In this essay, I aim to analyse the production processes and defining characteristics of three distinct genres reflected by the commercially released chosen tracks and where the songs conform or deviate in each genre's musical landscape. I will be discussing the artist/producer's rendition of the genre, furthermore considering feedback received from music critics on the tracks. This analysis will aid in the creation and production of three original tracks. *As It Was* (Harry Styles, 2022), *Parasite Eve* (Bring Me The Horizon, 2020), *Nova Two* (Tale Of Us, 2021) are the tracks I will be examining. I will go into detail on how the production techniques present in these tracks and in each genre overall, enabled the framing for my own tracks: *This Town*, *It's our Time*, *Think about Me*. Finally, my interpretation of the genre and songs will be evaluated, comparing the commercial songs and my work.

When first listening to *As It Was*, the duality of the lush and spacious sound of the ethereal pads and electronic hook motif against the rhythmic guitar and analogue-sounding drums establishes a compelling merging of many genres and influences. The hook makes use of a Farfisa Organ (Beat Academy), an instrument that "*hit the pop stage several years before synthesizers*" (Arturia, 2022) and was widely used between the early 60s and early 80s. Initially found in psychedelic rock bands of the likes of *Strawberry Alarm Clock* (Lenhoff & Robertson, 2019, p.178) and *Pink Floyd* (George, 2011, p.109), it then made its way to soft rock through *Elton John* (Lenhoff & Robertson, 2019, p.178). After the advent of synthesizers, the Farfisa was reintroduced by punk and new wave bands like *The B-52's* and *Talking Heads* (Lenhoff & Robertson, 2019, p.178). The combination of this instrument with the soft and soundscape-esque pads that permeates the whole track length takes the feel of the song back in time, sonically closer to a synth-pop track of the late 80s. "*As It Was swerves into Eighties-style synth-pop, in the vein of A-Ha or Depeche Mode*" (Sheffield, R. 2022). The hook's tone and melody are reminiscent of the hit *Take on Me*. Harry's track also shares many parallels in tone and arrangement to a more contemporary synth-pop top chart song, *Blinding Lights* (The Weekend), which can be contended to be one of the leading "*contributors to the revival of the '80s*." (Andrews, A. 2022). A few common characteristics surface by deconstructing synth-pop to its lowest denominators: "*Songs based around synthesizers and drum machines, simple lyrics, gender-bending fashion*" (MasterClass, 2021). There is evidence of these statements, not only in the studied track but also in Harry Styles' latest discography and overall artistic image. Contrastingly, when the attention shifts towards the drums and guitar elements of the track, an analog essence cuts through the mix, deviating the overall song towards a more indie composition. "I'm sitting there on the drums and I was like, oh, this could have a Strokes kind of vibe" (Hull, T. 2022). The live instruments give the track a band-in-a-studio-recorded atmosphere.

"For much of the creation of 'Harry's House' these two collaborators and Styles would take over a large space, and set up three workstations, constantly tossing ideas at one another, and to an engineer positioned in the middle." (William, C. 2021). Styles worked with the two producers (Tom Hull and Tyler Johnson) in symbiosis, each one driving forward their taste and music inspirations, ultimately creating a blend that spans multiple eras and genres. This album encompasses many styles, from "*soul and R&B in 'Daylight'*" to "*folky 'Matilda'*", from the lo-fi "*ventures into outer-space*" '*Satellite*' to 80's electropop. "He counterbalances those tales of domesticity and romance

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with songs that blast to the heart of old-school funk, disco and soul, but never strays into pastiche, homage or cheap retro knock-off territory."(Daly, R. 2022). This integration between all of these musical elements ultimately establishes Harry's sound as its own, and it is how "these (classic) influences make it feel modern, as opposed to throwback."
(William, C. 2021).

The first step in tackling *This Town* was to write a simple and effective hook, taking inspiration from 80s and modern synth-pop music. I combined Juno-6 and Jupiter-8 to replicate that distinctive electronic synth sound. I was happy with the tonality; however, as a lead, it lacked punchiness. To overcome this, I incorporated a triangle wave with a raised resonance frequency of around 2 kHz and enveloped it to create a pluck which, layered with the other instruments, presented me with the sound I was aiming for. Moving to the pads and textures, I knew I wanted these elements to permeate the whole length of the track, therefore I refrained from making them pronounced in the mix and instead opted for LFO automation of parameters such as saturation, pan, EQ and reverb between the different parts of the arrangement, to smoothly bring forward or push back in the mix specific characteristics of the instrument. The pad aims to encompass the song with a luscious and soft soundscape.

Guitars were recorded, drawing inspiration from the subject track to introduce an indie feel to the overall song. Muted strums in the verses rhythmically carry the verses forward, and open chords in the chorus add brilliance and brightness. Furthermore, the guitar harmonics motif in the chorus, being processed with multiple delays and reverbs in parallel, takes on an almost bell-like character reminiscent of the bells found in the last chorus in *As It Was*. For the drums, a decision was made to try and blend the familiar synth-pop drum machine's electronic tone with analogue live recorded transients. To accomplish this, I first selected live clips of classic drum kits, then applied post-processing which is generally associated with modern electronic music. I side-chained elements to the drums to give the track a pulsing feeling and heavily processed the drums. This resulted in pushing the song towards electropop instead of indie. The pumping drums, in conjunction with the high tempo of 174 BPM, give a dancier feel to the final demo.

Lyrical *As It Was*, is melancholic. "His vocals are bittersweet, almost piercingly poignant, with the intimate vibe of a journal entry."(Sheffield, R.2022). There is a strong contrast between the Ionian mode instrumental, which portrays good feelings and a positive outlook, and the gloomy lyrics. I wanted to replicate this dissonance with my track, creating a push and pull between the tone of my lyrics and the feel of the instruments. I put myself in Harry's metaphorical shoes and pondered what it would feel like to travel back to my hometown after years of success. I tried to convey the dichotomy of emotions between rekindling connections with family and friends while also regretting missing a big part of their lives. On a technical level, the aim was for the vocals to sit just above the mix, smoothly gliding in and out of the instrumental. I parallel-processed the vocals with the same reverbs and delays used for the pads and guitars to achieve this.

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Retrospectively my track manages to sit between the reference tracks reasonably well. It pays homage to the many genres that inspired them in the first place while also varying from the set boundaries, avoiding being just a carbon copy of the reference. The vocals could be improved, as I could not hire a professional singer and had to rely on my singing skills. However, in doing this, I learnt many techniques on vocal comping and pitch correction, which helped with the production of my second track.

The second reference track of choice is *Parasite Eve*, by the metal band Bring Me The Horizon. "Metal Band" should be used lightly, however, as through the years of their discography, BMTH's sound branched in numerous facets of the rock and metal genre. They began with deathcore and, with every album release, evolved their sound, incorporating a stronger emphasis on vocal and synths harmonies and combining genres of EDM, trap, and even pop. "Oli Sykes once told this writer that, creatively, there's more of an attitude of 'Why not?' than 'Why?'" (Ruskell, N.2020). This mentality repeatedly surfaces in their discography. The band takes risks in changing the overall sonic genre between albums, potentially losing a large number of their fanbase, nevertheless gaining more extensive exposure to new demographics. James Hickie from Kerrang explains it perfectly when describing *Amo*, possibly the furthest departure of genre for a BMTH album, "In less skilled hands, this hopping between genres and experiments with style could have come across as an attempt to fit into worlds beyond rock...Rock, metal, pop, dance and classical aren't thrown in to appeal to their respective fanbases, but wielded by artists with a constantly expanding palette and no-one to tell them what they can and can't paint."(Hickie, J. 2019).

This push and pull between convention and innovation keeps their relevance and prevents stagnation, with every new release pushing genre-defining boundaries, resulting in an amalgamation of fanbases that would previously not connect.

Another example of a band being fluid with their genre between album releases is Linkin Park, as they also experimented with different genres, however, with a less successful strategy. "The nu-metal heroes have gone pop, and it ain't good" (Bhagwandas, A. 2017). However, the band's decline in popularity could be attributed to the death of lead singer Chester Bennington shortly after the release of *One More Light*, the album Bhagwandas is referring to.

Similarities between Linkin Park and Bring Me The Horizon are even more profound than just genre leaping. "Even with the record we're doing right now, we still reference them", says Jordan Fish, keyboardist and, as of the last album, producer in BMTH. "It's the *Bible* for heavy, catchy music that combines electronic and pop music, which is our brief."

Post Human: Survival Horror is the latest entry from the band and the album containing *Parasite eve*. The album was produced mainly during the lockdown restrictions, which raised many problems as studios were closed and band members could not play together, resulting in Jordan Fish producing the album at home. In contrast, the other members sent over recorded sessions for instruments and vocals, ultimately giving them complete creative freedom on the sound of the record.

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"Parasite Eve shows that the new reality of lockdown has not halted the band in their path, but instead acted as further fuel for their creative ammunition."(KAM, A. 2020).

This fact raises further questions within the music community and today's "bedroom producers" landscape, where technology keeps advancing, and a grammy nominated band can produce the entirety of their album within the comfort of their homes, which carries both positive and negative outcomes for the industry. On one side of the argument, the artist is not restricted and pressured creatively by engineers and production teams, and working in isolation "could increase creativity due to challenges posed [by isolation] needing [to be] overcome"(Caniels & Rietzschel,2015). On the other hand, we are faced with an overly saturated musical landscape where anyone can release a product onto popular streaming services. Music analyst at MIDiA, Tatiano Cirisano, released a research paper on this subject. "Just because of how everything is online and on demand and because of these algorithms. So we're in this situation where the artists that are competing today are in a much more oversaturated and fragmented landscape where it's a lot harder to have a mainstream impact."

Traditional measures of success are less informative than ever before; for example, album sales are becoming a more challenging benchmark to rely upon to measure success. "Gunna outsold The Weeknd when both of their albums debuted the same week. But no one would say that Gunna is more "successful" than The Weeknd, who is selling out stadiums right now".(Runcie, D. 2022) The music business is shifting as the algorithms constituting the backbone of the platforms artists use today push niches above anything else. "The top 100 tracks of last year accounted for 4.4% of all streams market-wide — a figure that has more than halved from 2016 when it stood at 10.3%." (Radcliffe, M. 2022)

Today consumers spend more time listening to "mid-tier" artists than mainstream music. However, it is spread more thinly between them due to oversaturation and fragmentation of streaming services, resulting in the artists mentioned above not being able to break through and have an impact on the music landscape overall. Consequently, musicians seek sustainable earnings and recognition within their scenes rather than fame and fortune. Eventually, the music industry as a whole will need to consider these platforms as their own consumption platforms rather than using them only to drive traffic to music streaming services.

When listening to *Parasite Eve*, the contrast between the different parts of the instrumental arrangement struck my attention first. The verses are bare, focusing on the bass and kick, and the synth motif surfaces sparingly—the overall sonic pushes towards electronic rather than metal. It is only when the chorus comes in that the more traditional instruments are introduced, analogue guitars and drums take over. This arrangement positively impacts the energy of the chorus, making it stand out from the rest of the track. I wanted to incorporate this technique into my track. In the verses, I used a synth bass and a drum machine kick in combination with dark pads and heavily processed flute. I side-chained all of the elements to the kick, enhancing its placement in the mix. My goal was to move away as much as possible from conventional metal and rock instrumentals to

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offer the listener an element of surprise as the song evolved through the arrangement, much like the reference track.

Contrastingly, in the chorus, the bass becomes analogue, which I play as well as the guitars. Rhythm and lead guitars have two takes each at different octaves, panned through the stereo field and, combined with a stereo widener, provided the chorus with a wide-ranging guitar palate. I could not record live drums, so I studied drum covers of BMTH songs on YouTube to achieve a live-sounding drum track. Here is where I learnt which types of drums and cymbals I needed for my track. When programming the MIDI with the chosen drum samples, I especially paid attention to making the drums feel organic by introducing ghost notes and slightly varying tempos, resulting in a more natural and human-feeling arrangement. However, at this point, the chorus and verses were too dissimilar, hence the introduction of guitars in the pre-chorus, which aided the connection between the two parts. Adding to the cohesion of the track as a whole, a decision was made to add an arp synth, which attenuates in verses and acts as one of the song's hooks.

In the reference track, string instruments come through the mix, and hearing them reminded me of Bring Me The Horizon live performance at the Royal Albert Hall (2006). During this performance, an orchestra played alongside the band, and the presence of live strings, drums and choir delivered a cinematic show. This inspired me to create an orchestral build-up in the middle 8. Utilizing the BBC orchestra plugin by Spitfire, I layered strings and horns with the electronic riff from the verses to create tension before the final chorus.

Unfortunately, the singer I had planned for this track could not deliver his recording within the time frame for the submission, so I took it upon myself to sing on the track. The microphone I own is a cheap non-brand product. However, it added to the grittiness and distortion of the vocals, resulting in the tone I was aiming for.

When looking back on this track, I surpassed my expectations. The tone and lyrics of the vocals fit with the genre of the reference tracks. The orchestral build-up delivers a refreshing take on a middle-8 making my song stand out. It was exciting and ultimately satisfying to intertwine the diverse melodic and instrumental parts together between the chorus and the verses. As a fan of this music genre, I'm now ready to delve deeper, tailoring what I've learned to my own style of producing.

I chose *Nova Two* by Tale Of Us as the third and final reference track. The song sits confidently in the techno genre, and the structure and sonics suggest the sub-genre of melodic techno. "Melodic techno is characterised by arpeggiated minor melodies" (Schossberger, S. 2022). The pads and chords are luscious, with long reverbs and delays, and they are contrasted by deep pulsing bass. From an arrangement perspective, melodic techno's emphasis is on slowly progressing through the song, keeping the same energy throughout, creating "a hypnotizing atmosphere reminiscent of early trance." (Schossberger, S. 2022). Another giveaway for *Nova Two* being melodic techno is its BPM of 125, "melodic techno often has a slower pace, typically ranging from 120 to 125

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BPM"(Soundbridge, 2022). The omission of a drop from the arrangement further confirms the sub-genre.

The most crucial part of any techno song is the synergy between kick and bass. Hence this is where I focused at the beginning of the production of my track. Because such importance lies on the drum kick, I programmed the sound by combining a group of samples, giving me complete control on the sonics and final tone. For each sample, I processed and applied EQ, isolating each element of the kick (transient, body, tail), utilised compression and effects to glue the sampled material together. This process enabled me to create a tailored kick for my track *Think About Me*.

The referenced song has a couple of bass sounds within the mix. We can find the deep rolling bass, which carries throughout the song, this bass being characteristic of techno music. Also, we can hear a more "growly" bass riff that surfaces at critical moments. I achieved the rumbling bass by using a wavetable and automating the parameters of its wavelength and envelope, then mid\side EQ to add delay and reverb only on the sides. This helped the bass merge within the same space as the kick while also adding a unique ping-pong character to the high-frequency tail.

Adding another bass in the mix was necessary to keep the track interesting. I took inspiration from popular techno tracks like *Running* by Anyma, where they use a stab bass to create "chugging" sounds. Rhythmically, in my opinion, it serves a similar purpose to guitar riffs often used in heavy metal breakdowns.

Ultimately I chose this genre for my final track to challenge myself. As I am not a fan of techno, I felt friction at the beginning. However, as I learned the constituents of the genre, my ideology shifted. The structural simplicity, the reduced spectrum of instruments and tone of techno liberated my creativity instead of hindering it. Working within the boundaries of the genre allowed me to spend more time on sound design, crafting each noise, hit and rumble, creating a more personal connection to the final track. Finally, I believe *Think About Me* accomplishes what is expected from a techno track, and through its production, I've learned that boundaries are needed to push the creative process to new and exciting limits.

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