

MA Commercial Music Producer

Foundation – Element 2

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Iain Sumner', written in a cursive style.

Iain Sumner

Production Analysis: Defining Characteristics of Three Genre's & their Influence on own Portfolio Track Production and Composition

The purpose of this essay is to provide analysis on the style and production of three original tracks, detailing comparison with three primary reference tracks, whilst providing summary of that genre and style of production. This will include reflection on critical listening of the reference tracks, academic research related to the style of each track, and which of the fundamental elements of the reference tracks which had the greatest influence on my own production.

The selected focused reference tracks for their respective original productions are as follows; Mungo Jerry – 'In The Summertime' (Mungo Jerry 1970) which influenced my production of the original track by beatboxer Ross Martin aka. Box Martian titled 'Unless You're a Fool', Van Halen – 'Love Walks In' (Van Halen 1986) which influenced my 1980's-style synth-wave track 'Synthesthesia', and the production/library music track 'The World of Tomorrow' by Eugene Barduja (Motion Array 2020) which influenced the production of my own track intended for use in a promotional video presentation, 'Power in Motion'. These reference tracks will provide a basis for comparison with my own music production, this paper will examine both the similarities and differences between the original compositions and reference tracks.

Beatboxing is a form of vocal percussion in which performers imitate drum sounds, interspersed with vocalization and other sounds, using their vocal tracks (Sapthavee 2013). One of the earliest and most enduring examples of beatboxing in popular music is the laid-back summer classic, Mungo Jerry – 'In The Summertime' (Mungo Jerry 1970), the ultimate feel-good anthem which sound-tracked the summer of 1970 (Hughes 2020). Throughout 'In The Summertime', the beatboxing on this track serves as the rhythmic backbone. It is the similar use of beatboxing as a rhythmic foundation that is reflected within the composition of 'Unless You're a Fool' by Box Martian, and is in both cases a prime factor in giving the tracks a laid-back and casual perception, which allows the listener to imagine themselves present at an impromptu jam session. While the tempo of 'Unless You're a Fool' is 80bpm, the breakbeat-influenced beatboxing element is in double-time at 160bpm.

Other elements which are shared features of both the reference track and the original production are the usage of piano for tonal punctuation, and stringed instruments with chords bent slightly out of key (banjo in the case of this reference track, and mandolin for this original production). 'In The Summertime' was rhythmically a mix of skiffle, Caribbean and the Latin American (Watkins 2020), while contrastingly 'Unless You're a Fool' draws heavily on indie rock and modern singer songwriter influences for the stylistic basis for its composition, which is most reflected in the palate of guitar and bass guitar tones.

The use of vocal percussion in musical performance has a long history in many cultures, including 'konnakol' recitation of 'solkattu' in Carnatic musical traditions of southern India, North American acapella and 'scat' singing, Celtic 'lilting' and 'diddling', and Chinese 'kouji' performances (Atherton 2007). Given the well-established and accessible usage of beatboxing technique in music, it is surprising that the use of vocal technique is not more widely adopted in modern original composition today. During the early 1980's, Doug E. Fresh (aka. Doug E. Davis) claimed to have invented the genre, while it was Darren Robinson of the Fat Boys (originally The Disco Three) who presented beatboxing to a national stage (Thompson 2011). Those who have studied the technique have discovered that beatboxers use different control centres in the brain to those who can't beatbox (Reynolds 2015), so irrespective of the apparent accessibility of beatboxing, it is perhaps the rare acquisition of this technique which inhibits its greater prominence in popular music at present.

Perhaps one reason for the infrequent use of the beatboxing technique, is the challenge of producing this kind of technique, which utilises plosives and the percussive sounds which result from close-mic technique. These plosives would ordinarily be avoided or removed, in a way that results in a polished production (iZotope 2018). For the production and audio processing used on 'Unless You're a Fool', listenability was achieved by careful and extensive use of multi-band and sidechain compression, in order to tame the effects of this technique, resulting in a more subtle presence of this rhythmic element. The use of other instruments such as bass guitar, sampled drum beat, guitars, piano and vocal performance, prevented the use of extreme audio process enhancement on the beatbox recording, due to

requiring the space in the mix for these other musical elements to be present. Sidechain compression ensures a particular instrument is compressed relative to other instruments in a mix (MasterClass 2020), and this was widely used throughout this track to ensure lead instrumental and vocal elements were not lost in the mix.

The additionally provided reference track, 'Journey' by Drishti Beats (Drishti Beats 2015) is provided as a modern production example which also utilises beatboxing. Stylistically this track is very different to 'In The Summertime', and significantly more electronic-sounding than 'If You're a Fool', however this kind of modern beatbox production did influence my audio processing for beatboxing. This was particularly influential in terms of the amount of reverb used. Beatboxing is a means to an end to create musical sonic products (TEDx 2015), and while the most prominent modern examples are of cover songs, there are some examples of successful beatbox tracks such as 'Move' by Reepes One, 'Baby Don't Go' by Dharni, or 'Take You Higher' by Ball-Zee (Shin 2016). The particular blend of styles incorporated within 'If You're a Fool' is so unique in many respects, that it lacks a direct comparison for reference. 'Unless You're a Fool' is led out by a gospel chorus and trumpet solo, stylistically leaning heavily on fundamental influences on modern pop music such as 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' by The Beatles (The Beatles 1967). It's this kind of influence throughout the composition of this track which gives it a somewhat familiar sound, although the track is very unique overall.

Synth-wave is a distinctly modern music genre, which despite its retro stylings does not include music from the 1980's (Cram 2018); it began in the mid-2000's, when gamers and horror nerds took a liking to French house artists, who were creating sounds inspired by 1980's film score legends (Neuman 2015). It is this unique take on the 'retro-future' concept from the present-day perspective which was the inspiration for creating this first synth-wave track, titled 'Synthesthesia'. This composition was originally written for a vocalist, however it is submitted as an instrumental due to reliability issues with a suitable vocalist. While the reference track 'Love Walks In' by Van Halen does not strictly conform to the specified genre, it was selected for its influence on the notation and guitar composition incorporated in my original track 'Synthesthesia'. Additionally, 'Love Walks In' is

uncharacteristically synthesizer orientated, making it exactly the kind of music that many synth-wave producers attempt to recreate.

Many synth-wave musicians are former or current metal musicians (Shah 2019), which may explain why it was reasonably instinctive for composition of this track to be based around guitar riffs. The additionally provided reference track 'Hypnotized' by Purple Disco Machine & Sophie and The Giants (Purple Disco Machine 2020) is a much more modern example of 1980's synth-wave style influences in modern popular music, which also shares many characteristics with 'Synthesthesia', such as the synthetic tom rolls and arpeggiated sounds being used to create movement throughout the track. In the context of the classic album '5150' by Van Halen, 'Love Walks In' put everything together – melody, voice, keys, guitar solo – in a manner unheard on any previous Van Halen record (Rhino.com 2017), and despite being the band's first record with Sammy Hagar replacing the widely preferred vocalist David Lee Roth, 5150 was their first number one album (Rhino.com 2017). The popularity of this record could be attributed to the synth-heavy tracks 'Dreams' and 'Love Walks In', both being songs that the original Van Halen could never have pulled off (Angulia 2021), and it's this large, feel-good energy combined with a raw power edge that has been the most influential when producing 'Synthesthesia'. It was this particular positivity-led era of the band that was my personal favourite when a fan of the band in my early teenage years.

'Synthesthesia' features significant use of 'Dexed', an open-source software emulation of the classic Yamaha DX7 synthesizer, which in 1983 caused digital synthesizers to take off (Allen 2020). The character of this is particularly evident in the bassline. Other software emulations of classic synthesizers used for this track were Korg's own M1 software emulation for the piano sound, which is widely associated with dance music from the 1980's and 1990's (Anderson 2019), and a Arturia emulations of the MiniMoog and Prophet synthesizers. The use of these classic synthesizer recreations and distinctively synthetic tom drum fills gives the track a distinctively 1980's sound, in addition to the use of guitar tone and techniques that are significantly influenced by the style of Eddie Van Halen, a style that was immortalised on tracks such as 'Beat It' by Michael Jackson (Jackson 1983). The main beats and tom fills for this track were played manually on a Roland E-Drum kit, used to

trigger audio samples within Cubase Groove Agent, to give the drum velocities a more human feel. 'Synthesthesia' is in a tempo of 125bpm, which is intentionally slightly faster than the reference track 'Hypnotized' by Purple Disco Machine & Sophie and The Giants (Purple Disco Machine 2020), which is in a tempo of 109bpm.

Samples of a Roland TR-808, the most iconic and influential drum machine in history (Beaumont-Thomas 2014), were layered to create the kick and snare/clap samples used, and the sound of this specific piece of drum synthesis hardware is one of the main signifiers of this classic production sound (Lyth 2018). Other drum processing decisions were led by the desire to create an authentic 1980's sound, such as the use of a gated reverb with long decay on the clap/snare, as it was this approach to drum processing that was a go-to for 1980's music production as a result of the popularity of 'In The Air Tonight' by Phil Collins (Allen 2020). The Slate Digital/Liquisounds Verbsuite Classics plugin was utilised to emulate the sound of a classic Lexicon 480 digital reverb, which is still considered by many to be the greatest digital reverb ever made (Computer Music 2017). By utilising a combination of these production tools and methods that were popular in the 1980's, albeit using software recreations of classic hardware, it was possible to produce a track with that authentic classic 1980's sound despite the use of modern software and production tools.

'Power in Motion' was created for use as a piece of modern library music. Library music, or 'production music', forms the backbone of the 'sync' market; which refers specifically to music made for films, TV and other visual media (Awbi 2019). The primary reference track, 'The World of Tomorrow' by Eugene Barduja (Motionarray.com 2021), was sourced from a video production library web site which provides libraries of video production assets such as music, stock photos, and video production templates. Most library music is now accessed by millions of video-makers through these kinds of online platforms (Graham 2017). This field is of specific personal interest due to the potentially lucrative marketplace for music of this kind, and as it is generally reliant upon relatively simple musical themes, with an emphasis on production quality and the ability for a given composition to 'enhance' a motion picture. 'Power in Motion' is in a tempo of 120bpm, which matches both reference tracks 'The World of Tomorrow' by Eugene Barduja and 'Ready to Take Off' by GvidonAudio (Motionarray.com 2021).

This genre or musical category can cover a vast range of sounds and styles, which are dependent upon their intended emotional impact when used with film. While 'Power in Motion' is of a similar intention and shares some similarities to the reference track 'The World of Tomorrow', the musical approach was fundamentally different in some respects. Both the original track and the primary reference track feature the use of arpeggiated synthesizers, modern production techniques and sequenced beats, to different musical ends. However, in terms of structure they both follow the contemporary structure format for library music, as detailed by library music composer Christian Henson in Appendix A, which demands the retention of a single musical theme throughout which is built up, broken down, then called back to.

Retention of the same key throughout is important to enable a video producer to cut parts out of the track, as desired. Structurally it is important to retain flow, while also writing definable changes which prompt video edit points. Both the reference tracks and the original composition were written with the same purpose, for use in promotional video presentation, aiming to provide the listener with dynamic and easy-to-listen experience which emanates positivity. In television, a lot of up-tempo, high energy music is used more often than low-energy, down-tempo music (Laskow 2016). It is exactly this kind of sense of positivity and 'getting somewhere' that is expressed musically within the composition and arrangement of 'Power in Motion', as many of the tracks that were listened to during research, such as the included reference track 'Ready to Take Off' by GvidonAudio (Motionarray.com 2021). This positive feeling was a prominent aspect in popular tracks of this kind.

A big influence of the reference tracks on the original production was the necessity for a bright, transparent, modern-sounding overall quality to the production, although they stylistically differ in several fundamental ways; 'Power In Motion' is broken-beat, a style prominent throughout modern hip-hop (Future Music 2021), and features a funk-influenced synth bassline, while the reference tracks 'Ready to Take Off' and 'The World of Tomorrow' feature straight 4/4 beats and simple root note basslines. These composition decisions were made to give 'Power in Motion' a unique groove, while still being palatable to consumers of

this kind of music. Additionally, both cited reference tracks use picked guitars and arpeggiated synthesizers, and the clean but saturated sound of these instruments is mirrored in 'Power in Motion'.

A particular focus in the production of 'Power in Motion' was to create transitions which really had power, sensory impact and sounded impressive, which creates important edit points for video producers (Wright 2021). These build-ups were created using multiple layered sounds, with steady rises in pitch, then by creating decayed versions of these sounds processed 100% wet with reverb for the post-transition after effect. Alongside resampled synthesis, a great tool additionally used for these transitions was Native Instruments Rise & Hit for Kontakt. Severe EQ cuts were used to tame this particular effect to make it much more subtle-sounding, as in film production music is hardly ever the star of the scene, it's there to play a supporting role (Laskow 2016). Aside from memorable and catchy TV or Movie theme songs, much library music required to not stand out, which makes it unique in this regard and requires the effective use of simple musical themes. Synthesized plucks were created on the Serum software synthesizer, and string stabs were triggered within Native Instruments Session Strings. It is the rhythmic use of these somewhat percussive tonal elements that provides the greatest auditory character and modern aesthetic within 'Power in Motion', and it is the use of these kinds of instruments in this kind of way that can be found widely applied within much modern production music.

While all the original productions differed from their respective reference tracks in some aspects, they each shared enough similarities to make reasonable comparisons with regard to both production and composition. All three were written in styles which were completely new to myself and outside my 'comfort zone' in terms of creation, and they each are very different to one another, which was a specified criterion of this assignment. In reflection of what may have been improved on these productions, the only area that would benefit from being revisited in the future would be to record vocals for 'Synthesthesia', other than this instance all three tracks could be considered complete in their present form. The research presented herein, in addition to the cited reference tracks, formed the required foundation to break new creative ground in the production of this music. This research and its related critical listening was fundamental in the production techniques utilised, resulting in music of

authenticity and relevance to their respective genres. All three areas researched genres; 1980's-style synth-wave, library/sync composition, and beatbox-led music, could each be considered to underpin much of modern popular music. However, acknowledgement of or research into this is rare, therefore it's my feeling that a research-led project covering these fields was of significant benefit to personal development and provides valuable insight into these areas.

Appendices:

1. Structure - It is good to follow a 3 act arc in 5-6 parts:

- **PROLOGUE** - Always come out of the gates with your pants down, exposing clearly where the track is going to end up. Imagine a library album for action music that all starts with brooding drones - well this will just sound like a brooding drone library and the editor will move on until she or he can hear some action music. My most successful library track by far starts bang in the middle of what you would call a chorus.
- **INTRO** - We love doing these. Why? Because they're EASY. Don't indulge them — your editor isn't here for that. Keep it short!
- **SUBJECT 1** - Imagine introducing a character, a motif, or theme.
- **SUBJECT 2** - Break down the first subject and develop the theme.
- **SUBJECT 3** - Return to Subject 1, but in a fuller, more developed sense, or modulated even.
- **EPILOGUE** - After the final cadence of the piece, offer an echo of your main theme or motif.

This structure is a familiar one to editors, and will also provide you with the opportunity to get it used on an ad or trailer, which is where the big bucks are.

Appendix A: Library music structure guide (Henson 2018)

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