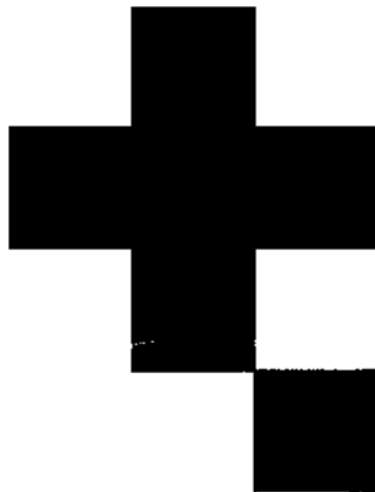


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INTRODUCTION

In this essay, a detailed exploration into three specific genres of music, namely Dancehall, UK Garage and Trap shall follow. In terms of production processes, these genres share many commonalities and throughout this analysis, it will become evident of how the similarities are present but also, it will reveal how they are different and therefore belonging to different genres. By delving deeper into each of the genres and their characteristics, looking specifically at drum patterns, melodies, lyricism and other technical features such as plug-ins and presets in Logic Pro X (though all of this is user-friendly knowledge and can be applied to all DAWs), the essay's purpose is to illustrate how my own productions fit into the genres but also how they differed to create a sense of originality by discussing the various points above. Thus, by analysing the traditional elements of each genre as well as how they have been adapted in recent times should provide the reader with a holistic interpretation of how my productions achieved the effects and states that they are now in.

DANCEHALL

Dancehall, a genre originating in Jamaica in the 1950s (Stanley-Niaah, 2004) has influenced a vast array of music that are now genres in their own right. 'Hip Hop, Rap, Jungle, Drum & Bass, Garage' (Henriques, 2016) take large inspiration from the 'culture and technology' of the Dancehall 'Sound System' (Henriques, 2016) and its 'riddims' (Manuel and Marshall, 2006). This is very important to highlight in reference to how my production, '1 Time', could be viewed as a fusion of the different Dancehall-influenced genres that Henriques (2016) raises and therefore, the following discussion shall be based on the blend of characteristics from the original Dancehall and the modern fusions of it.

One of the key characteristics which has transcended through multiple dancehall-inspired genres is the riddim. For example, from '1990-2003, most riddims featured a basic 3-3-2 pulse, at a tempo of around 90-110 bpm' (Manuel and Marshall, 2006). It could be argued that this vibe has continued in Dancehall records till now and the supporting track 'Simmer' by Mahalia featuring Burna Boy is good example of this. My production '1 Time' follows a similar 3-3-2 pattern with slight variations that tries to show how modern Dancehall, inspired by other geographical music tastes which, for instance, in my case would be the melting pot of sounds heard in the UK. UK sounds from genres such as UK Afrobeats have been incorporated in Dancehall-style records like 'Simmer' and in a way highlights how nowadays the music from the islands can appear to be far more fused and this is easily helped by the fact that there are many similarities in Afrobeat percussion and Dancehall that as a producer, can almost be seamless when arranging together. '1 Time' tries to follow in the more modern ways of producing Dancehall like 'Simmer' that have now become increasingly based on an artist's geographical interpretations of the Jamaican genre. For instance, the kick pattern in '1 Time' is almost identical to the ones in 'Gimme the Light' yet vocally, the diversions become clear to see with R&B-style vocals providing the top line.

Another defining characteristic of Dancehall is its heavy use of low-end frequencies. Not only through bass but usually through melody too, the low-end of Dancehall music is present and quite often drives the song. In 'Gimme the Light', the high-pitched plucks playing along to the

riddim acts as a driving force in the arrangement but it is in tandem with the bass hits which come on every 1,2,3 and 4 of any one 4-bar loop. In ‘Simmer’, the track has an all-in-one bass and melody synth instrument playing at the same time. In more modern revisions of Dancehall-inspired songs this is common practice and ‘1 Time’ utilises this technique with a bass-heavy synth to provide rhythm, drive and atmosphere - all vital to filling the space around the riddim when it is and is not playing. Through high usage of reverb and compression, particularly saturation and then to finish a high-pass filter, the synth was morphed into having a lo-fi effect when the chords were played. As a consequence, the track became more contemporary and representative of modern R&B sounds. This was perhaps an area of difference to the references but also a reflection of the earlier point regarding the Dancehall-inspired sound embodying parts of the artist’s geographical musical tastes and how they influence their take on riddims in this era.

Lyricism is a further characteristic of Dancehall that enables it to maintain relevancy in this era because of its permeating topic discussions. Dancehall ‘grapples’ (Hope, 2006) with issues such as ‘economic deprivation, gun violence, gang culture, sexuality, and relationships with women’ (Hope, 2006). Although ‘1 Time’ does not discuss every one of these topics, it does however discuss relationships. Nevertheless, the style of relationship discussed in ‘1 Time’ could be seen to disagree with the ideas conveyed by Hope (2006) whose title suggests that Dancehall was based on violent masculinity. Indeed, when writing the journal article, this may have been the case. But in 2019, one could argue that times have indeed progressed to some degree and in Mahalia’s ‘Simmer’, relationships and the thoughts and emotions of them are becoming increasingly projected from the female perspective. Thus, the tease-like lyrics popularised by Mahalia demonstrates how since Sean Paul’s ‘Gimme the Light’, between the early 2000s and now, women have come more to the forefront of Dancehall and its off-shoot genres in terms of the up-front nature of their lyrics and overall confidence to express. ‘1 Time’ is no different, being a strong proponent of the lyricism akin to Mahalia; a female displaying an abundance of confidence and comfort in her own skin whilst the listener is rhetorically made to think about the position of the man and how he ought to conduct himself. Therefore, lyrics in the genre have evolved to be more politically in-tune with the world of today and female empowerment is indeed a major characteristic. To support this notion, Rihanna and Drake’s ‘Work’ record is now six times platinum in the US alone (RIAA, 2019) and features a similar message regarding women, thus highlighting the success and mood of the current era.

UK GARAGE

One of UK Garage’s main characteristics is indeed its “cheeky...bumpy...chuck this in” (MJ Cole, 2017) syncopation. In particular, Garage has a skip to it with hi-hats and other percussive elements played in “triplets” and not “straight sixteenths” (Cole, 2017). In the reference track ‘On My Mind’ by Jorja Smith, producer Preditah makes obvious use of the skip syncopation in the hi-hats. This technique gives this song and UK Garage as a genre its defining characteristic when one considers that the genre is an off-shoot from big room traditional House, Jungle and Drum and Bass; all of which were predominantly based in straight sixteenths (Cole, 2017). In ‘R U Ridin’?', skips in the hi-hat pattern provide swing around a kick and snare that are quantized to 1/16. By quantizing the hi-hats to 1/16T I was able to achieve the “cheeky” (Cole, 2017) skip that is iconic in this style of music. Another important feature of UK Garage syncopation are the pushes. According to Cole (2017), “pushes” are when the

drums, either through a “little drum roll” or a “tiny little fill here” create a feeling “before the third beat” similar to that of transitions in other genres but in Garage it is used to simply re-introduce the continual 2-step or 4x4 drum pattern. This anti-climax built from the frequent usage of pushing is used in ‘R U Ridin’?’. The track’s snares and kicks suddenly concertina before the third beat and then the music re-enters at the steady 1/16 tempo.

Around 130bpm, UK Garage was “a bit more for the ladies” (Cole, 2017) because clubs during the late eighties would have a Jungle room, House room, Pop room and then Garage emerged to cater for those looking for a slower vibe than Jungle/Drum and Bass in particular. Therefore, the vocals, as is the case in ‘On My Mind’, drew much of its inspiration directly from R&B. As Cole (2017) notes, whenever he received a vocal from a sample, he would instantly be “time-stretching it”. For instance, “something might be 90bpm, the vocal we’ve got I’d be time-stretching it to 130, so you get this concertinary effect” (Cole, 2017). In ‘On My Mind’, the vocal samples and overall vibe of the artist Jorja Smith is heavily influenced by R&B, but the samples at the beginning of the song are an example of time-stretching soundbites and making a new groove all together when combined. In my piece, the main vocals were recorded at 130bpm but to a half-time drum pattern with the snare hitting on the three of every bar rather than the typical two and four. After recording the vocals, I laid down the UK Garage-inspired drum beat but not in half-time. As a result, this provided the R&B vibe over a double-timed beat. Blending this vocal in with the harmonies in the beginning that were recorded at 130bpm with no half-time allowed me to add my own twist whilst staying true to the “chuck this in” (Cole, 2017) style of UK Garage.

Melodies in UK Garage music were and still are mainly influenced by R&B. ‘R U Ridin’?’ features cinematic pads in the Bb minor scale that add to its atmospheric and romantic flavour. In the supporting track ‘Ladbroke Grove’ by AJ Tracey, producer Conducta offsets the rapper’s aggressive flow with smooth chord stabs in B minor. ‘R U Ridin’?’ is in Bb minor and the digital synth playing the chords were given a hi-cut filter to provide the very sought-after contemporary emotional sound recently popularised by the likes of Drake and The Weeknd who unintentionally ushered in a whole new wave of artists trying to replicate and create their own versions of this sound and the vibe that comes with it. Perhaps it could be argued that from a production standpoint, this was a way that I tried to not only make UK Garage more modern from the 1990s throwbacks, but also different and new to what the genre and artists in it have been making thus far. Like so, ‘R U Ridin’?’ is a composition blending multiple genre techniques from the Trap and R&B world that are extremely popular amongst young audiences in 2019.

TRAP

‘This is music stripped to its bare bones, dominated by heavy 808s and double- or triple-time hi-hats, with a fairly light-sounding snare, sparse but cinematic use of synths and other instruments, and overall very little mid-range content’ (Tingen, n.d.).

Trap music’s main purpose, similar to that of Dancehall and UKG is to have significant low-end frequencies that make the nightclubs come alive (Henriques, 2016). As a consequence, 808s are a staple of this genre not only providing groove to the song but also crucial body to

these ‘stripped’ (Tingen, n.d.) back arrangements. Important to note - unlike the previously discussed genres, Trap is a relatively new sound and therefore, artists and producers constantly challenge the norms in this genre more so than others because of its malleability. For instance, in the first reference, ‘Portland’ by Drake, Quavo and Travis Scott, the 808s do not always copy the kick pattern as a mere side-chain. The bouncy feel created by adding 808s slightly before or after kicks play a key role in assisting the hi-hats to make one feel as if they were tip-toeing on clouds and never having a chance to stop for a long-enough pause. In ‘Throw It Back’, by me and Benzkl, the 808s, using Native Instruments’ Maschine 2 are played with and without the kick pattern to give bounce where it would not be by simply following the kick pattern throughout. Deciding to lay some 808s on the kick was a choice that felt appropriate in this session and perhaps is indicative of one technique used to create a sense of difference.

As Tingen (n.d.) points out, hi-hats in Trap do often feature double- or triple-time rolls. In between the continual 1/8 note sequences in Portland, the producer, Murda Beatz includes a number of 1/32 rolls at different times within any given 2-bar loops that make up this song. Similarly, in the second reference track ‘It’s A Flex’ by 88GLAM featuring NAV, the hi-hat patterns are again varied every two bars and combine to create variation over four, eight or even sixteen bars in some cases. ‘Throw It Back’ features two different 2-bar hi-hat patterns with the 1/32 roll positioned at two different points on Logic Pro X’s MIDI grid. As for sound selection, many hi-hats in this genre are similar to that of the Roland TR-808 released in 1980 (Bein, 2012). Although not directly from the Roland TR-808, my production most certainly follows in the footsteps of Trap’s ‘trademark’ (Bein, 2012) hi-hats modelled heavily off of Roland’s TR-808 kit. As you can see in Murda Beatz’ Red Bull Remix with T-Pain (2018), he demonstrates how hi-hats are fairly loud in the mix, acting as a driver of the song alongside the bouncy 808s. Without the loud presence of hi-hats, Trap arguably would not be Trap and thus as a fundamental characteristic, ‘Throw It Back’ fit in with ‘Portland’ and ‘It’s A Flex’ because of this feature.

Typically, though not exclusively, Trap vocals are often said to make ‘obvious use of Auto-Tune’ (Tingen, n.d.). In ‘Portland’, Travis Scott’s vocals are very obviously displaying autotune but Drake on the other hand has far less obvious tuning so it could be argued that rather than being a set characteristic of Trap, this particular feature is case dependent on the artist’s vocals as well as their artistry. For example, Benzkl did not need a large amount of autotune because it was making his voice sound too robotic, so a retune speed of 28.00ms on iZotope’s Nectar 3 was an appropriate amount for this artist. In addition, Benzkl’s other works also do not include the same level of autotune as a Travis Scott vocal because his artistry and lane for his brand does not follow a similar path. Thus, Tingen’s perspective on Trap making obvious use of autotune could perhaps not be where the future of this genre lies. Drake is a versatile artist yet it would hard to debate whether he was not a Trap artist given his countless smash hits in the genre including ‘KMT’, ‘Going Bad’ and ‘God’s Plan’. In any case, autotune and vocal processing demonstrates how an artist can present themselves differently in this genre given the consistent production elements already discussed maintaining far more prominence than the vocal sound choices.

Like 808s and hi-hats, vocal ad-libs are an essential tool in Trap music that ‘Throw It Back’ includes. Words such as “skrrr skrrr” and “quick bang” are used with a plethora of effects. For example, treating the ad-libs like backing vocals but with further effects, Benzkl’s ad-libs were panned left and right alternately with a low-cut single band EQ - making the recording sound less full of bass and Nectar 3 assisting with high levels of saturation and reverb relative to the main vocal. It gave the feeling of being further in the distance than the main vocal but different

enough to Benzkl's main vocals to add more dynamic. Quavo uses "skrrr skrrr" in his track, a word with no meaning, perhaps not a word but nonetheless the effect he set out for worked as 'Portland' is now 2x Platinum in the US alone (RIAA, 2019).

CONCLUSION

On the whole, each genre and the respective reference tracks were very popular in their eras and a major part of that success was down to the various production techniques each track used which were raised here.

Dancehall's ever-evolving fusions have kept its relevancy high in today's listenership because of its ability to incorporate new sounds and syncopations that allow artists to express themselves differently and thus garnering that all-important commercial appeal. In particular, the way that lyrics talk about the struggling aspects of humanity and our societies means its slightly political way with words but at the same time over a feel-good riddim means the opposites attract formula could be said to be true in this instance.

As for UK Garage, it has had its moments in the spotlight and seems to have made a comeback recently, with radio-plays for 'On My Mind' and 'Ladbroke Grove' exceeding expectations in a genre notorious for its nostalgic supporters searching for a good 90s vibe. The R&B melodies that mimic whatever the R&B scene does in any given time could be viewed as a major reason for its sustained success. Like Dancehall, UK Garage has evolved and moved with the times whilst maintaining certain traditional elements like the skip syncopation.

Of all the genres doing exceedingly well commercially is Trap. The genre continues to boom and could be argued to be the Rock music of the 1980s for this era. Its rebellious minor scale sounding tones and heavy 808s make for great concerts where consumers search for loudness and larger sounds altogether. In a way, Trap is similar to UK Garage when it comes to the "chuck this in" (Cole, 2017) mentality, blending TR-808 sounds, famously used in tracks like 'I Wanna Dance with Somebody' by Whitney Houston so again, a common feature throughout all the genres discussed has been their ability to mould current sounds with classic sounds which has led to new sounds altogether and it is hoped that my productions reflected this outlook and therefore executed a similar effect whilst maintaining a sense of originality throughout.

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