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**Insight into the production process of three
contemporary commercial music tracks.**

Contemporary R&B

Reference tracks for No Breaks;

- Arianna Grande - Needy
- Ariana Grande - better off

It's believed that R&B has been evolving since the 1930s, from Louis Jordan and his blues-based humorous lyrics song with an upbeat rhythm. The R&B, invented in 1947 after Jerry Wexler found record companies to be demeaning towards black musicians.

"...*Billboard's* rhythm-and-blues chart thereafter were in a variety of different styles, the term was used to encompass a number of contemporary forms that emerged at that time."(L. Sacks The Soul of Jerry Wexler, The New York Times,1993).

Moreover, the term rhythm & Blues was used for various postwar African-American music compositions as an avenue to resist oppression. (T. N. Allen, A. Randolph, **Sociology of Race and Ethnicity,2020.**)

The Guardian describes: **"For a while, it felt like R&B would fall into this transient category. The genre, a child of, but sonically emancipated from, 1940s rhythm and blues reached unparalleled popularity in the 1990s"** (Sam Waolfson, The Guardian, 2015). Thanks to the worldwide popularity of the genre and more diverse audience, RnB music has gained an impact on society regarding issues such as racism, injustice and more. Arguably this popularity potential has its downfalls by portraying false narrative to the public throughout the over-sexualised image of woman likewise false representation of masculinity to the youths.

"...recent scholarship focuses on how R&B artists such as Beyoncé and Mary J. Blige articulate interiority in their declarations of desires, dreams, and sovereignty" (T. N. Allen, A. Randolph, **Sociology of Race and Ethnicity,2020**)

Throughout the evolution of R&B mainly caused by technological development (drum pads, more accessibility to the professional equipment, more affordable recording equipment, the internet) genre has changed since the 1940s,"***...technology is implicitly seen to have direct psychological effects...it provides new ways of rooming identity, and hence a new form of person-hood.***"(p.8, D.Buckingham, R.WillettDigital Generations: Children, Young People, and the New Media, 2006)

Characteristics

Accordingly to the M. Zager majority of R&B vocalist have a background of church music with likewise highly experimental and expressive vocal skills. Moreover, many R&B compositions contain sophisticated harmonies and improvised jazz elements.

(p.192, p.109, p.48, Michael Zager, Music Production: For Producers, Composers, Arrangers, and Students 2012). Furthermore, Zager explains "In R&B and hip-hop, the fell of the rhythm tracks, the production values, and the songs are equally important to the success of the production."(p.53, Michael Zager, 2012). Majority of contemporary R&B songs contains instruments such piano likewise piano loops, horns, string sections, electronic guitar:" All R&B songs are melodic with a steady, semi-predictable beat that uses a bass track that stands out from the other instruments. (Yi Ting Audio, 2017).

Accordingly to the BBC's the R&B vocals are melismatically accompanied by vocal harmonies, R&B oscillates between 60-80 BPM, the article from RYM says: "It is much richer in diversity, but the sweet melodies, rhythm and the indescribable essence of Soul" (RYM, 2020, Contemporary R&B music). Contemporary R&B is rich in melancholic style thanks to a dreamy electronic production, reverb effects, although still contains trap elements likewise Future Garage. (Ed Ward, Britannica, Sep 25, 2020).

My first reference for R&B track was Ariana Grande - Needy while producing No Breaks I wanted to emphasise this romantic/ambient sound using strings with a focus to create nostalgic R&B vibe. The track Needy is in 4/4 time signature whatsoever is often in current R&B arrangements. The song has four chords, one of them is CMaj7 chord, being said major7 chords mostly are used in jazz although often are used in R&B genre to achieve the more soulful sound. Furthermore, Needy proves to be RnB thanks to its lush backing vocal arrangement, The Blues Project describes; "...R&B today expresses itself through a range of contemporary-influenced sounds, whilst still pulling from the tradition and sound of Soul...", (The Blues Project, 2020). Vocal harmonies create a sense of intimacy but also develops the atmosphere like the electronic keys supports the day-dreamy vibe. Throughout analyse of Needy, the keys have a lo-fi vintage vibe, for a similar effect, I added some Vinyl effect plugin from I-Zotope similarly added some detuning to keys instrument likewise guitar melodies. I used guitar melodies likewise background synths to emphasise and add a bit of atmosphere to the song to support the main chords progression. I have decided to go with 73 BPM, I wanted to be not overcrowded but to create a sense of space, being said I chose snare to be more present enhanced it with some reverb and stereo imager plugin to increase that effect. As the song progresses, I have added more electronic elements like synths which are very common nowadays in RnB music. Furthermore, I have added sweeps effects which help to create the dynamic of the song but also to smoother introduce another section of the song. In the chorus, also chose to use some midi violins to enhance a sense of loneliness and longing.

As the second reference track for No Breaks was Ariana Grande - better off song possesses often use R&B structure with emphasis on the 2nd and 4th beat. As prior, Needy production is built electronic instruments like keys and strings whatsoever help to create a romantic vibe. The kick and the snare appear to be steady alongside with some elements of shakers. Moreover, the song has four chords commonly used in jazz music like Emaj7 or Bmaj7 in the tempo of 92 bpm whatsoever fits in today R&B music. Following, I wanted to emphasise the strong melodies for that reason, I have built No Breaks with Key of B major, using Mixolydian mode. Another technique I used was making sure that each instrument has its place while mixing. In order to clear up some of the 2k frequencies, I have used TDR Nova plugin so it doesn't fight with the vocal. Moreover used some automation to create some sense of movement likewise to emphasises the emotions of the song. For the vocals I have used some pitch correction plugins likewise, Desser also used TDR Nova multi-band compression to compress some unpleasant high frequencies. Another step was adding some parallel compression to give it more analogue sound along with the side imager from i-Zotope.

K-pop

Reference tracks for Stable Ground;

- K/DA - MORE
- KDA - THE BADDEST

Arguably the beginning of K-pop culture is dated from the 90s when groups such as Sen Taiji and Boys band has emerged."Korean popular culture catapulted forward during the 1990s, leaving much of Asia behind as it abandoned conservatism and censorship, diversifying, appropriating, absorbing and innovating. In its fusions, it created an Asian equivalent of European and American pop". Therefore bands such as Seo Taiji and Boys are considered as the pioneers regarding experimentation on K-pop field;" groups began to come

"assembled" in various flavours. the hip-hop of B.A.P. or the bubblegum pop stylings of girl idol group Apink."

(S. Leung 2012, Globality in the Production, Distribution, and Consumption of South Korean Popular Music Sarah Leung, B. Vincent 2019, A Brief History of K-pop).

"One of K-pop's greatest attractions is its willingness to push creative boundaries, and SM Entertainment has been behind some of the genre's most groundbreaking experiments."

(Paul Bowler, Discovermusic, 2020, K-Pop: Everything You Need To Know About Music's Most Exciting Scene)

K-pop music has lots of space for experimentation, as it combines elements from different western genres. The exists in an article from Vox we say; "K-pop has become a truly global phenomenon thanks to its distinctive blend of addictive melodies, slick choreography and production values..." (Aja Romano, 2018, Vox, How K-pop became a global phenomenon).

The first reference track for my production was More by K/DA. The K/DA is a virtual K-pop group produced by the League of Legends team (computer game company). The song More, in particular, was inspiring as it infuses many elements from other genres such as R&B/Trap among some electronic future bass flavours. Despite its sassy vibe, More obtain the rich vocal harmony structure whatsoever is often aspect in the K-pop scene. Similarly, hi-hats elements help the dynamic of the track moreover implemented fills and triplets elevate the energy of the uptempo track, whatsoever commonly implemented in the trap genre: "The way trap music uses hi-hats is unique. The sound is a busy, short burst. The hats are programmed in complicated patterns, at rapid-fire speed—faster than any human could ever play it—usually contrasting with a relatively simple and pared-down drum pattern on the kick and snare drum". (S. Setaro, Feb 14, 2018, How Trap Music Came to Rule the World).

Regards to the production of the Frozen Heart, I implemented some trap elements also I have placed some of the hi-hats fillers to keep a listener more engaged or surprised. Similarly, I created some of the hi-hat patterns to make transitions smoother and build the dynamic. Another element which I have implemented into my production was a distinctive snare to enhanced It, even more, I have added some short reverb to it (S. Setaro, Feb 14, 2018).

Another crucial element of this particular track it's the distinctive futuristic bass lanes which glue entire composition and bringing a sense of "power" and "space". The RollingStone describes "*future bass takes the ecstatic drops of dubstep or trap, but provides a warm bounce rather than a lumbering brutality. Basslines are provided by harsh, detuned synths that buzz and purr instead of gulp and whomp.*" (RollingStone David Turner, 2017, Future Bass: Get Familiar With EDM's Sound of 2017)

Being said I wanted to enhance that method in my track, I have balanced the low end of the frequency spectrum. Moreover, I have used some synth bass instruments following by using EQ I cut off some low end to create space to other low range instruments. Similarly, I have used EQ to clear up any potential unwanted frequencies from elements like snares, or other mid-range synths. Furthermore, I added some vocal harmonies and melodies although to do not overshadow the main vocal I have cut off some frequencies leaving mostly the high end to give more crisp/airy sound. Furthermore, I have used the Sampler plugin to create the vocal samples also I have changed the pitch on some of them. The K/DA production uses vocals modification, whatsoever is highly known in Future Bass genre. To obtain more contemporary sound, I have used some electronic samples (Sweeps, special effects) to give it a more "metallic" type of sound. (D. Turner, 2017, RollingStone)

The second reference track for my production was "*K/DA-THE BADDEST.*" The Baddest obtain trap and future bass elements, the Major chords progression creates "happy" bubbly vibes on the pre-chorus section. Despite trap elements and rich future bass, the positive message remains about woman empowerment remains. In terms of different aspects that proofs the BADDEST song

to be a K-Pop genre are the close uplifting/melodic harmonies and the backing add-lip vocals in the pre-chorus. Whatsoever proofs the versatility of the K-pop. (ReacttotheK, 01.01.2020) Moreover, both reference tracks are written in at least two different leagues, blending Chinese Western and Korean cultures. The key is a strong concept of the song likewise original melodies, Adrian McKinnon who has worked for Korean record labels like SM Entertainment, describes;” With K-POP you expect the chorus to be very distinctive”.(ReacttotheK, 12.02.2020) (F. Kelley 06.2018, Genius)

Dance Pop

Reference tracks for Stable Ground;

- Becky Hill Better - Off Without You
- Beyonce - Sweet Dreams

Dance-pop debuted as a form of post-disco in the 1980s, the name Disco evolved to terms such as “club” or “dance-pop as the more electronic and experimental form (sequencers, synthesisers). “Dance-pop was more up-tempo and dancey than regular pop music, yet more structured and less free-form than regular dance music, usually combining pop’s easy structure and catchy tunes with dance music’s strong beat and up-tempo nature.” (Mark Campbell March 13, 2017, Tempo Shift) (T.S. Elliot,2012, Beats through Generations)

The main characteristics of contemporary Dance music are prominent hooks with catchy and obvious pop structure. Likewise, the attention to the grooves and the beats, majority dance music is written in 4/4 with a tempo of 120-140 BPM. However Mark Campbell points out;” In 2010 the average tempo of the top songs in the Club & Dance genre clocked in at 130 BPM. Today, just 7 years later, the average tempo stands at 108 BPM – a decrease of 18%.”. In terms of the lyrical part of dance music, it tends to touch upon common topics of society such as parties, breakup songs, empowering, likewise simple chord progression. Dance-pop songs, in majority, have auto-tuned vocals following the main melody along with the electronic sounds like snares/claps/snap. Furthermore, the majority of the dance songs use digital instruments, guitars, keys synthesisers and sequencers. (Mark Campbell March 13, 2017, Tempo Shift).

Becky Hill Better Off Without You is a perfect example of contemporary dance-pop song Helen in her article describes;” is an instant dance club anthem with offbeat synth rhythms and a huge drop, describing the feelings involved when getting over a breakup”. (H. Payne, 10.01.2020). The song is written in 4/4 with a tempo of 125 BPM, with the simple chord progression of Am/Em, C, G, D in the key of G major. The track contains many elements of electronic instruments like ambient pads and synthesisers similarly electronic bass sequences among digital string sounds. Likewise, in the pre-choruses, the drums rolls and snares patterns are used to help create tension before the drop.

My other reference track was Sweet Dreams by Beyoncé, the song written in 120 BPM, produced with layers of synthesisers and electronic instruments what inspired me to write Stable Ground. In the Sweet Dreams, the elements of the piano and violin are well balanced to create more space in the mix for the low frequency based instruments. (M. Shiver, Audient, How To Mix Kick & Bass In Dance Music, n.d.). Future-more the bass appears to be very distinctive among the kick although together creates cohesive energy which carries the entire track. For that instance, I have focused on the kick and the bass sound, as it is arguably the core of the dance-pop music. ”...it doesn’t matter which genre—you always have to pick where

the low end is coming from. Because low-end frequencies are so big, and they take up so much room, you can't have things fighting for it" (N. Messitte, iZotope Contributor November 6, 2017,13). One of my methodologies was clearing up any mid/high range synthesisers from low-end frequencies. Furthermore, to create more presence on the kick, I have decided to use parallel compression. In Sweet Dreams production the vocals have reverb effect with some accent on the last words of the sentence, to get that effect I have EQ high frequencies from the reverb also used some automation. (Nick Messitte, iZotope Contributor, 2017).

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