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Introduction

In this essay, I will analyse, compare, and imitate three musical concepts that have inspired me. Linking them altogether will be the “melodic content” as this is where I ‘feel ‘the music’, thus giving me clarity on which way works best for me. I will Innovate from a blank canvas and imitate directly from a reference track. The 3rd track will provide the results to this experiment. This will provide the evidence and insight I need to improve my own creative process. I will explore different techniques behind the recording, sampling, resampling, and processing of audio. I will compare producers that are in favour of creating music with no reference to work directly from - a system that is based on experimentation and feel - against other musicians/producers and engineers that believe that referencing is the strongest and most productive’ creative technique. I will break each track down into three elements: groove, melody/harmony, and message/Lyrics. Each of these take the same feel energy wise and using that energy, melodic feel, and lyrical message incorporating these specific elements into my own productions. I will conclude with three pieces of audio all produced in different ways from each other right from inception that have all shown a balance between the different workflow approaches across the genre to discover what is the best way to approach to make the music that I want to make.

Innovate, Imitate, or balance of the two: which way is more productive for me as a creative?

The Imitation Track (Direct Reference)

“You Imitate, and you grow from that” (Murphy, 2011)

Melodies & Harmonies

The first track I will begin with, is the direct reference exercise, beginning with Daft Punk’s album *Tron, : Legacy*, they are short in duration, but all follow the same musical theme, and main hook, therefore using multiple segments from the album as my inspirational anchor. It has 22 tracks between 1 to 4 minutes per clip, and each audio follow follows with the original chord progressions and cinematic theme, morphing between orchestral instruments and rich analogue synths. This is where I can begin the first exercise, which is working with directly from a reference track as the starting point for the idea. Beginning with the specific element that resonated with me first, that is: the lead arpeggio from *Son of Flynn* – which was going to be the building block to start building my knowledge base of composition and moving through the scales in a classical form. This will become a catalyst towards my growth as a musician and as a composer.

According to Hans Zimmer, from whom I take a lot of compositional inspiration from, the most important areas of cinematic are “theme, journey, tempo, and collaboration” (Zimmer, 2015) Once the theme was established, I moved to the next stage which was the general structure. I had to think about what kind of structure I wanted from my own production, I then started analysing different scores and soundtracks away from the reference track (for example Hans Zimmer – *Time* or Steven Price – *Gravity*). This research led me to the discovery of the concept which is “Leitmotif”, I find this concept incredibly useful, being that I am a dance music producer first and foremost, repetition is a key ingredient needed to achieve the type of dance music that I make and perform publicly.

After the discovery of Wagner and how fundamental he was during the early years of modern forms of ‘Leitmotif’, which is a by definition “short recurring musical phrases,” (Wiki, 2019) a technique I use in my material today, just in a much simpler form. On this occasion I wanted to expand on what Daft Punk created, which was to use one single arpeggio sequence as a lead instrument but keep the same theme of musicality throughout. I achieved this by layering a second arpeggio, almost as a counter melody, playing similar notations, but in a slightly different arrangement, whilst ensuring they all work together in trying to achieve an almost identical emotional reaction from its individual listeners, something cinematic boasts so very well. Now I have three elements: Main Arp, – Counter melody and drums, to bring these together I would have to bring some structure to the table, I took ‘*The Game Has Changed*’ as another example, it starts off calm and grows into something quite climactic and explosive. I find this to be the case across every single score that inspires me.

The Drums

Now that I have established what element I would like to carry forward, it would need to decide on what kind of rhythm I wanted, and how I would go about achieving this. Cinematic drums sequences appear to be quite a common theme across the entire album. After listening many times, and from what I could gauge by listening to the music and speaking with my tutor at University, Dov Waterman, simple drums are essential, due to the amount of information they take up in the frequency spectrum, this attention to detail is what also brings the dramatic feel through in the mix, which is required to work with film. I felt the drums from ‘*Disc Wars*’ and ‘*The Game Has Changed*’ were an ideal match for what I was going for, as this follows the same musical theme as *Son Of Flynn* and the album in general, however, placing more emphasis on the groove and energy is where I can bring something unique to the party. Based on how I was feeling at the time, the marriage of the two elements, in my own unique way, would be the best next step to making this unique to me. My approach to imitation continued, by using drums from a sample pack and programming them in digitally. In this case I initially played the drums live using a drum pad to play the drums I wanted, then once I was happy with how it felt, I would then go through the drums individually, quantising where I needed too. I felt in this case the main drum could do with quantizing, and the rest of the drums could stay natural. At the end of the day, I fully intend to get a professional to record them live by a professional also to bring back that natural energy throughout; all growing from the initial arpeggio I had created using Ableton’s built in Arpeggio Midi VST. These were based around my own notation tastes, and drums that I felt suited the rhythm I was going for. I can then utilise the recording techniques like Over-heading, and Mic Placement to carry out some drum enhancement and/or sample replacement to give it a professional touch.

The Innovation Track (Starting from a Blank Canvass)

"I close my eyes and feel my way forward in any creative process"

This experiment begins here with a blindfolded approach to creativity, essentially feeling my way through different sounds and samples that I can find, assessing what feels best in that particular moment in time, with one simple goal, to learn where I can maximise the uses of referencing, of course, there will always be something that has inspired me that day to create, but not as a direct point of reference, which is the point of the experiment.

I want to utilise the technical skills of resampling to try and create something unique to me, my inspiration initially was to merge hip hop which is traditionally a sample based style of music, which if I dissect hip hop's routes, I tend to put them down to two dominant areas of influence, East Coast & West Coast– Broken grooves born from the Amen Break with something more euphoric, which I why I also thought '*Moby – Why does My Heart Feel so Bad*' was a great track to include in my three.

Starting to break down what I wanted to carry through in my mix, simple groove was the first – catchy melody was second most important, and lead vocal being the dominant sound.

Drums

With that in mind, I wanted to take that concept trip hop being melodic hip hop, and us that as my point of entry into the creative process, adding some of my ambience and energy along the way! My Starting point was to sit for no more than 20 minutes finding something catchy from two instruments, on this occasion I settled on a drum kit/loop and a piano, for the drums I sifted through some loops I really enjoyed to get the energy going from chords I'd chosen (A minor) and the tempo which was 95 Bpm, I found a standard hip hop loop that grabbed my attention, popped it into a sampler and then began resampling the drum loop into something a little more quirky, then committed this into my own arrangement. In this case shuffling the start position of the duplicated file within the sampler, to the add, a unique swing to the drums, a kind of groove I've not heard before. now that I have the groove I want, I need to re-program or re-record some fresh drums that all have been recorded in the same room, as the current swing is coming from duplicate loops, I want remove the duplicate loop that I had edited, filtered and mixed and add a cleaner layer which will , removing current phase issues, and of course bring a natural feel back to the soul of the track. How I would go about completing this task, would be first to go into my recorded file set the warp markers to the transients, double check all warp markers are set correctly and then extract the groove, which will then give me a midi clip notes, related to of all the transients, previously warp marked. I can then use this midi clip to place my own live recorded samples, or even better have the entire groove recorded live, by a drummer, then I could go ahead and practice my techniques of recording even further, another option if a drummer is not available I could record the single hits myself, including overhead techniques, and then place them into a drum kit in Ableton, and use the mid clips I had extracted from the groove.

Melodies & Harmonies

Once I was happy with the drum loop, I began to evolve the chords and how I wanted them to play, the mood I was in at the time, which was positive and bouncy, and full of energy came out as a broken A minor chord. That decision inspired me to make the piano loop I now have in place, the idea here is,

to just be creative through re sampling, to gain something unique. I will do the same also with the piano to. I will commit the top line I currently have now, and re sample this, to see what more I can get creative with, however, I want to leave space for the vocalist. This meant that I had to be very careful with the low-end information, keeping it very simple with two notes.

Lyrics

I felt due to the simple nature of the beat, looking for a male rapper and a female top line singer to add some ad libs to the mix – Being that I took Moby as the kind of ball park genre that I wanted to be in, lyrics that were retrospective and positive would be idea. I'm not lyrically competent just yet, therefore to get lyrics for this track, I had two option, sample pack (which removes a certain level of control, and also changes the feel, as the room the vocal were recorded in will be different to the drum samples I will want recorded. I put together a brief for singers and songwriters at Tileyard Education and approached some selected students, I also used my social network as a tool to resource from. Having found someone to work with, to compliment the current feel from the track. The Brief description of what I am looking for is something positively reinforcing, at mid-tempo, with reference to beating mental health – nothing angry or negative or gang or crime affiliated'.

The Blend Track (Starting from Blank & Using a Reference to Mix)

"I gather a list of tracks I absolutely love, take each element that inspires me, then begin fusing"

I have used a blend of Camelphat & Fehrplay and their Electronic Dance track's panic room and Rosebud as inspirational point of reference for building this track, I broke them down again into three elements, Groove, Melody & Lyrics.

Drums

In both cases, a standard four to the floor beat, simple drums between 124-128bpm, and is typical across most Electronic Dance Music. I settled on 126bpm – identified through research, that anything between 120 and 130bpm is traditionally closed to our excited heartbeat, as mentioned by Blake Madden in his research into 'How Tempo affects us'. A 120bpm or 500ms delay between pulses proved to be the most natural of tempos to the human ear (Madden, 2014) "Here we show a highly tuned resonant frequency of human locomotion at 2 Hz [about 120 bpm] with no evidence of correlation with gender, age, height, weight, or body mass index," they wrote. "We speculate that this spontaneous tempo of locomotion represents some form of central 'resonant frequency' of human movement." (MacDougall & Moore, 2005) Therefore, based on my 10 years' experience as a DJ and my research, I've found that working at around 123bpm is just below the 'too much energy' limit, and just above the not enough energy for me which is 120bpm or slower. I wanted to expand creatively on the straight four to the floor beat, by going in favour of the same energy and rhythm, but breaking the beats into something driven by breaks, as opposed to disco or house orientated. Therefore, incorporating an Amen break into the re sample production process for this track, using the Amen Break as my anchor for the groove and rhythm,

Melody's & Harmonies

Panic Room is in F major, which when I think about it, is very clever, as the message from the lyrics and the harmonic content from the vocal instrument in the track, is, and positively reassuring, motivating and quite intense, whilst Fehrplay uses C minor to portray sadness, this time however using timbre to enrich the track, focused entirely on communicating through frequencies and not words. Dance musically typically is about a climax of some sort, whether it will be a large building drop, or a point where it goes back to its original state prior to the climax. Both tracks here provide evidence of this in slightly different ways. Whereas Panic room makes best of a more defined breakdown, and an accentuated drop back from the climax point. Whereas Fehrplay masks his climax under the continuous repetition of the top line drums, which in my personal tastes I really like this idea, as an experienced DJ, I find it much hard to keep dancers moving over breakdowns that have no lyrics, to compensate for this, drums can add a very light groove replacement over melancholic moments that drag on a tad bit too long, I practice this when I perform as a DJ to allow for me to commercialise the underground world.

Lyrics

Panic Room was the only reference with lyrics in, and quite rightly so, I did not want to confuse my mission to be simple with Leitmotif Style vocals, to understand a little a bit more about the type of dance music I wanted to create especially lyrically. I found that the most popular 'singalong' songs included long detailed musical phrases, multi-pitch changes in a songs hook, male vocalists and vocalist who strain to sing at the top of their capacities compelled crowds to sing along (Tough D.T, 2017). with that at the forefront of my mind, I wanted to make sure I left enough space from the melodies to either have a top line or something hook based that followed essentially a leitmotif style. Track length wise, dance tracks tend to nowadays come in two packages – Original Mix and Radio edits for commercial use, in an extended mix or in this case a club mix the track is 7:05 long. Writing Lyrics is my absolute weakness as a producer, and something in the past I've passed the buck over to someone else, however to understand how to compile the sound together with a meaning. I will need to explore the concept of lyricism, so I can better shape my own sounds to accommodate potentially my own voice as a singer. In this case, I will approach a singer songwriter, to discuss how I want to relay my personal life experiences from my dysfunctional childhood.

Conclusion

After analysing my own workflow here, and researching into other artists, musicians and producers methodologies and process', I conclude that there is not one particular 'right' way of starting ideas, However, in my case, the most beneficial approach to getting tracks done, as efficiently as possible, would be to enter essentially 'sessions' mode, and once I have an established the main hook/chorus I can then begin referencing tracks that I feel suit the production techniques that would work best for the production itself, therefore still keeping my own unique style within the production, but incorporating the technical sides of music production, like phase, and mixing. My ambition is not as an engineer, it is to be a producer/artist. Therefore Innovation before imitation – an instance where imitation is an ideal approach, is when writers blocks block occurs, where the fusion process of multiple ideas can be explored, I must agree with this statement by Jlin - "I'm going through my sounds trying to figure out do I like this do I not? Not really 'auditioning sounds as much as trying to get a... I'm trying to feel it' (Jlin, 2018, quoted in, Dj Pangburn, 2018).

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