

TILEYARD

MA Commercial Music Producer

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Foundation Element 2

Essay

Word Count

3283

“Without deviation from the norm... progress is not possible” (Zappa, 1989). In this essay, I aim to analyse three different music genres as well as three different songs and complimentary songs within each genre. Firstly I will define through research the key aspects from each genre, and then delve into how the reference tracks adhere to these characteristics. I will then provide insight into how I as a producer have attempted to create a unique track deviating from a simple copy-cat style, but while remaining true to each genres identifying characteristics.

Defining Characteristics of Progressive Rock

The first reference track is: ‘A Three-Legged Work Horse’ (This Will Destroy You, 2008), the complimentary reference track within this genre is: ‘To The Skies From a Hillside’ (Maybe She Will, 2010). Both of these tracks belong in the wider musical genre Progressive (Prog) Rock, as well as subcategories, such as Post Rock and Instrumental Rock.

A common characteristic of prog rock songs is their increased length. Hegarty (2011) claims the genre has stereotypically long songs, he states that there is no such thing as progressive rock without the extended form, stretching established boundaries. Prog rock needs time: to arrive, to develop, and time to work through its content and form. This is perhaps why research carried out by Swanson (2013) showed the average length of the top 50 Prog Rock tracks were 6:02 vs. Pop at only 3 minutes 45 seconds.

Atton (2001) claims that prog musicians desire to create rock that uses sophisticated artistic modes of musical expressions. Drawing on classical models for musical arrangements, harmonies, and forms. According to Olson (2015), the complexity expected in progressive rock music necessitates band member’s mastery of their instrument. PRM (2020) claims the dynamics of prog song arrangements keep changing, which can be perceived as jarring as you can’t bop your head along to it.

According to Ahlkvist (2011), detailed musicological analyses have shown in general prog bands seek to develop a “symphonic” style of rock music. MClub (2020) describes prog as music that is meant to be listened to closely for its own sake, as opposed to the casual background listening of other genres. Prog songs are divided into movements, with long

intros and an extremely wide dynamic range, often with very quiet and loud passages occurring in the same song.

When it comes to the timbre of prog rock, The Prog Archives (2020) determine it as an expansion of typical rock, where more instruments from other genres are added, such as electronic keyboards, synthesizers, and electronic effects, not typically associated with rock music, but still keeping the main rock foundations of electric guitars, bass, and drums. The melodies in prog are more likely to comprise of longer developing passages, not catchy ones.

For a genre such as prog rock, there is an inherent shift in focus on pre-production vs post-production for genres like pop. Bradford (2016) claims that pre-production is the most overlooked and often the most important part of the production process. Having a clear idea of the song format and layers musically is necessary pre-recording in prog, as its production is about mixing levels rather than adding layers, the layers need planned in pre-production and recorded in the studio.

[How the reference tracks conform to the genre](#)

The main reference track by This Will Destroy You (TWDY) is over 9 minutes long, with a 1:42 intro of atmospheric noise and only getting to what may be perceived as a chorus after 4:23 of simple guitar and drums. The song is a very ambient track, where the band are adding layers of guitar with sustain and feedback throughout the song rather than changing direction. It reaches its crescendo around 5:45 where it brings in some crunchy sounding distorted audio samples before stripping it right back to an atmospheric extended outro that continues to build again until echoing off almost leaving you wanting more. The soft timbre of this song moves in long developing passages adhering beautifully to prog rocks symphonic style. This wide dynamic range utilizes reverb, distortion, and sustain to create their ambient shoegaze soundscape.

The complimentary track by Maybe She Will (MSW) is at the shorter end of the lengthy prog tracks at 5:11, but still shows the same uniqueness in the structure of the song. Neither song follows a simple verse-chorus structure, both tracks have building layers and different bridges or atmospheric sections that lead the song elsewhere. The MSW track has a time

signature of 6/8 throughout, even though the time signature is consistent, the dynamics of the song changes dramatically. It goes from an atmospheric section into an almost angry-sounding section, it then strips itself right back to a beautiful melodic piano riff with a well-balanced mix led by the piano before pushing into the big outro led by the guitars using distortion and reverb before pulling back to a short empty sounding outro. This gives the feeling of completely different musical sections typical of prog rock.

Both of the reference tracks have musical virtuosity amongst their band members, where the musicians are extremely talented at their instruments. The reference tracks are also both very intricate, interesting and deserve to be listened to for their own sake, where they take time to arrive, to develop, to change, falling perfectly into what is desired from a progressive rock song. Neither use lyrics, the music sets the mood successfully with no need for words.

[My production techniques and musical decisions](#)

For my song "From a Daydream to Reality" I had originally planned to record it with my old band Psychojet back in Ireland, but due to coronavirus and lockdowns this became challenging, so I decided to push myself outside of my comfort zone and see if it was possible to make a prog/post-rock track all by myself, with the hope to record it together in the future. I wanted to have the ambient feel from the TWDY track, where I would build my track in subtle layers, having the feeling of development and growth throughout the song. I brought it in low with piano and drums and then added volume and distortion to guitar layers to it to give a gritty building feel to my intro. I decided to add some interest to my chorus by adding a sound sample that NASA has recorded in space, inspired by the style of TWDY to thicken up the chorus and make it more chaotic sounding. I brought in a high string pad to extend the dynamic range in the chorus, as well as a lower grainy pad to bolster the bass. I didn't want the track to be quite as long as TWDY and wanted to emulate stripped back feeling from MSW with the raw drums in the heavy part of their song. As a drummer, it was important to create an authentic live feeling with the drum track throughout the song. When it reaches its full noise levels I added a guitar-based synth tremolo on top of the track to create tension and added more layers of instruments to create a similar wall of sound with heavier sections of drums like MSW. Then it drops out almost completely and then

slowly add synth keys and build again but subtly adding more layers of keys going out on an up similar to YWDY. Throughout the song, I utilize production techniques such as panning, reverb, and delays to create depth associated with prog rock.

Defining Characteristics of Pop Music

The second genre to be analysed in this essay is pop. Rialton (2011) claims that pop music is only judged by its catchy tune and danceability, implying it was not music for contemplation. This sentiment is shared by Rojek (2011) who states that pop grew out of light entertainment, for easy listening. Pop by default is designed to appeal to the masses, so it is ideological, with no wish to generate criticism or social alternatives, due to this pop carries certain restrictions on narrative content and musical composition. To appeal to the masses pop tends to use clichés and stereotypes to connect with its listeners, speaking directly to them through shared experiences. According to Shuker (2005), pop is driven by commercial prospects and has an emphasis on memorable hooks with a lyrical focus on romance. He claims pop's defining characteristic is that it is produced commercially for profit as a matter of enterprise, not of art.

“In a broad sense, pop is any music based on memorable melodies, repeated sections (usually, but not always, verse and choruses), and a tight, concise structure that keeps the listener’s focus on those elements” ALLMUSIC (2020)

Pop listeners need to be drawn in early on and then sustain and nurture that attention with a progression or subtle change, leaving them with a tease by ending at the point of maximum attention and interest. Stylistically pop uses regular phrase lengths with simple time signatures and stepwise diatonic melodies to make it easy to listen to and bop along to for the consumer. Pop likes to keep its style simple and uncluttered, everything has its place and purpose with clear textures, restricted harmonic movement, and clearly defined roles of each instrument. For sake of easy listening well defined short sections provide music in easy to swallow portions. (Warner, 2012)

Pop lyrics also have a fondness for simplicity, limited vocabulary, straight narrative themes, reusing the same words, and their songs lie in the 3-5 minute range. Repetition is used a lot in pop, whether it is repetitive beats or loops, or entire sections like repeated chorus, this

repetition is vitally important to further ease the listening for pop consumers. Time feels cyclical listening to pop music rather than linear. (Blaukopf 1992, pp. 23)

According to Music Radar (2020), pop has a very simple formula that it's been using for the last 50 years known as ABABCBB. Variations of this classical formula are key to make a more interesting sound, some recommendations can be seen in figure. 1

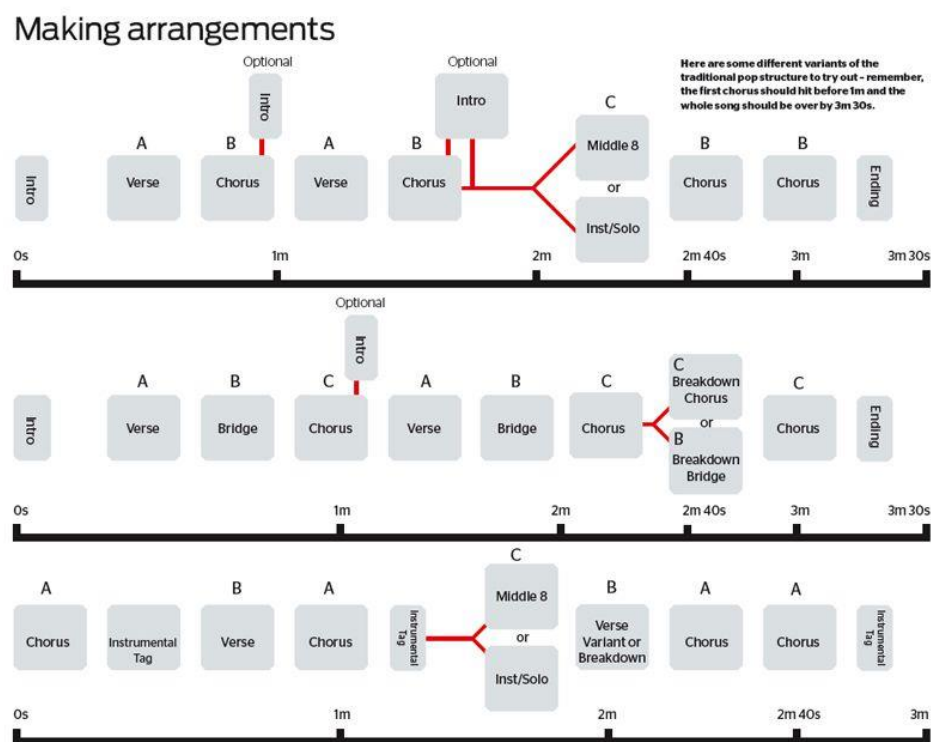


Figure 1: Pop arrangement

How the reference tracks conform to the genre

The first reference track is 'Never Forget you' (Zara Larsson, 2015), the second complimentary track is 'In the Name of Love' (Bebe Rexha, 2016). Both of the reference tracks follow this generic pop format, but with their own twist. As can be seen in the above arrangements (fig.1) a pop song should have finished its chorus by 1 minute, which both of these songs do. They both have a big drop after the first chorus before bringing in the next verse, they then follow a similar format and have a bridge before the last chorus. This is very stylistic of cyclical pop arrangement.

Another way both tracks have adhered to the pop characteristics researched is their lyrical content. As can be seen in Appendix F and G both songs are about a relationship, using simple vocabulary, so it is accessible and relatable to many listeners. The Zara Larsson track is about a broken relationship that they can't let go of, and the Bebe Rexha song is about a painful relationship they are holding onto. The Bebe Rexha song uses a lot of repetition with the words and also musical patterns. Both songs start very acoustic and atmospheric in the verse and then become very electronic and heavily produced in the chorus, causing a stark disparity between the two.

A commonly utilized pop production technique used subtly in both these tracks is autotune. The use of echoes and delays emboss the vocals and help it sit in the track. The shortened reverbs and samples in the drop make it feel more present and punchy. Re-pitching her vocals adds texture to this part of the song. As both songs are not about happy relationships they are written using minor chords to give this jarring feel, but with the up-tempo beats to keep it punchy and not sad. See Appendix B for my breakdown of each song.

[My production techniques and musical decisions](#)

I wanted to continue this feeling with my song "What's It Gonna Feel Like" and chose to write my song in C# minor with a high tempo of 140BPM and lyrics about an unhealthy relationship (See Appendix H). I utilized the same structure as the Zara Larsson where it starts immediately with no intro, uses piano, and has a running flow pattern in the lyrics. The arrangement is the same with a verse, chorus, drop, with each section using the same (AABA) structure. I also incorporated the rising scale from the first line of the Zara Larsson song 'I used to be so happy but without you here I feel so low' - using this same idea for the 'Ooooooooooooo' in the building chorus of What's It Gonna Feel Like. Another creative decision was to add the quarter octaves in the background of the bassline like from the start of the reference track.

Similar to both reference tracks where the verse is more stripped back and the chorus is more electronic I did the same by pulling out EQ and bringing it back louder and big at the chorus. I also used a reverse cymbal like reference track building for the chorus. I wanted to have clean transitions between each section to create impact, so I used uplifters and down lifters from Splice and added phat bass into the chorus using a plug-in called sausage

fattener. This keeps the stylistic definite sections desired in pop music for easy listening. In the drop, I used a plug in called little alterboy to re-pitch the vocal for the hook to add texture and depth. In the bridge, I used many layers of vocal to thicken the vocal track and overdubbed the vocals.

Defining Characteristics of Synthwave Music

The final genre to be focused on in this essay is synthwave. The first reference track is Stranger Things Vol.1, No. 2 Kids (Kyle Dixon, 2016) the second reference track is Total Control (Mega Drive, 2012).

Even though Synthwave was only birthed as a genre in the early 2000s, Reverb Machine (2018) states that the music is influenced by 80's synthpop and film soundtracks. Enright (2019) references the inspiration drawn from horror soundtracks as well as early video game soundtracks. According to ModeAudio (2018), synthwave tends to ebb and flow in a way that follows the ebb and flow of storytelling. Some elements build excitement or release tension. Using contrasting soft and loud parts, using a lot of textured strings and other pads, the builds and releases are part of the "basic musical language" of the Soundtrack genre. Computer Music (2017) talks about the use of pedal tones in synthwave music, where a note is held while music changes around it and another tool utilised well is employing suspended chords. The foundations of many synthwave songs are built on arpeggiated patterns, where synth artists have developed a lush ambient sound, using delays and reverb.

According to UJAM (2020), Synthwave has a distinct production style, contrasting to EDM where tracks are heavily compressed and very bright, synthwave rolls of higher frequencies in search of a more subdued timbre. A chaos modular can be used to provide unpredictability over the cold precision of digital synths. A slightly wavering pitch is a foundation of synthwave songs, with a 16th note repeated bass pattern and a sawtooth LFO to modulate low pass filter cut off.

Ahmnot (2018) talks about the synthwave characteristics in using a drum machine, with each aspect of the drum compressed and filtered to sound eighties. Amongst the synthesisers (often imitated) are the E-Mu Emulator II, the Minimoog Voyager, the Korg

Polysix, and many more. Whether it's actual analogue synthesizers or VST (Virtual Studio Technology) Synths, drum machines, and big juicy basslines are found in synthwave music.

Synthwave as a genre is well suited to original soundtracks due to its instrumental and atmospheric sounds. Davis (2016) found that film score can consistently convey specific emotions to the audience. To induce negative mood, the present researcher selected scores that used minor keys and chords, mostly dissonant tones, descending melodic movement, and sustained tones of stringed instruments, as these musical properties tend to signal loss or depression within a film.

“The use of music to effect changes in emotional state is most strikingly evident in film and television” (Thayer & Levenson, 1983, p. 44)

How the reference tracks conform to the genre

The Kyle Dixon track is a very simple short soundtrack. It's a very clever synth song, with limited layers he manages to encapsulate nostalgia perfectly. The song paints on a surprisingly sparse and restrained canvas. Using a simple G-Bb- F melody gives a serene almost hopeful feeling, but with the lower synth loop having a slightly wavering pitch keeps you on edge still. “It's not uncommon for us to run them (digital synths) out to an analogue delay or tape echo to warm them up, or even just roll some of the high end off with EQ”. Stein (2017) It is clear to me that this method has been used in this track. The mix in this track feels warm and dynamic with more low end than most TV soundtracks.

Mega Drive adheres to all these synth characteristics spoken of previously. Even though it's technically a single it uses a lot of audio samples from lots of old school games to make it feel like the soundtrack to a video game. Through all the samples he still manages to take you on a journey and they enhance the track. It has the same repetitive distorted square base synth loop throughout the whole song. It uses a side chain compression on the drums to help them cut through and distortion on the instruments to develop a gritty sounding cyber synth soundscape to give a dystopian vibe.

My production techniques and musical decisions

For my track "Hypothesis" I wanted a scifi feeling, to ebb and flow with an ambient soundscape, so I used a pumping bassline and really long reverb and delays to give that spacey vibe. The minor tones of the chords give an eerie tension to my track Like Megadrive I decided to use an audio sample to add texture to my song, but rather than game samples, I used a physicist speech to engage the listeners critical thinking early on in the track. I wanted to find a balance between Kids and Total Control, as one has a very simple soundscape and the other is a bit more chaotic. TO find this balance I had more layers and structure than kids, but without being as distorted and gritty as total control, trying to keep that airy vibe created by Kyle Dixon. A common synthwave production technique I have used is adding an arpeggiated loop similar to kids. I also used vocal effects over snippets of the speech to add texture and further develop the atmosphere in the main section of the track. The drums have

I wouldn't typically listen to pop music but I felt the researching it and producing the track gave me a better appreciation of the genre. I realised the singer is not the only creative driver, the producer is a major part of the process making it as simple or complicated as they desire. Surprisingly I struggled the most making the progressive track as I am usually behind the drums in this kind of music, so trying to emulate an entire band and write all the instrumental parts was a challenging but developmental experience. Out of the three genres, the one I felt most at home in was the synthwave, I really enjoy trying to make this soundscape and using audio samples and would love to look into soundtrack music in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Prog Rock Song Breakdowns

This Will Destroy You – A Three Legged Workhorse	
Structure of the tracks: - Instrumentation - o 2 Electric Guitars, Bass and Acoustic Drums, Piano - Arrangement - o Intro 0:00 – 1:42 - o Verse ->1:42 – 2:50 - o Developed Verse 2:50 – 3:23 - o Next Passage 3:23 – 4:23 - o Chorus 4:23 – 5:45 (brings in distortion) - o Distorted Chorus 5:23 – 6:12 - o Stripped Back but still building 6:12 – 9:12 - Use of effects - o Delay Pedal on guitars - o Overdrive Pedals used by guitarist to give distortion - o A lot of reverb on all instruments	- Mix (eq and level balances) - o Well balanced mix overall, nothing predominant, the distorted guitars are mixed to both be at the forefront. The EQ has everything right in your face, with all the distortion and windy distortion feeling like a wall of noise at the crescendo. The slow tempo gives the feeling of softness but while the song is very gritty and in your face. - Tempo - o 112 - Time Signature - o The whole song is in time signature 4/4 - Musical key signature and mode - o E flat Minor
Maybe She Will: To the skies from a hillside (length 5:11)	
Structure of the tracks Instrumentation - Piano - Acoustic Drums - 2 Guitar - Bass - Violins Arrangement - Intro - 0:00 - 0:17 - Verse - 0:17 -0:51 - Chorus - 0:51-1:34 - Weird atmospheric thing -1:34 - 2:05 - Angry part -2:05 - 2:30 - Strip back bridge thing pushes into big - 2:30- 04:40 - Outro - 4:40 - 5:11	Mix (eq and level balances) - Leave space for the piano really well as piano could be easily drowned out by the guitars. The keys aren't necessarily a main instrument, more of a carrying instrument. Use of effects - Reverb on all instruments - Overdrive used to get Distortion guitars - Delay guitars Tempo Time signature - Main Song 6/8 - Heavy Breakdown is 4/4 Musical key signature - Db

Appendix B – Pop Song Breakdowns

Zara Larsson – Never Forget You Structure of the tracks (length 3:33)	
Instrumentation - Female Vocals - Male Vocals - MIDI Piano - MIDI Drums - MIDI Bass - Arrangement - NO INTRO - Verse 0:00 – 0:25 - Chorus 0:25 – 0:52 - Instrumental Drop 0:52 – 1:18 - Male Verse 1:18 – 1:43 - Chorus 1:43 – 2:10 - Bridge 2:10 – 2:38 - Chorus 2:38 – 3:08 - Outro 3:08 - 3:33	Mix & Effects - o Vocals very present, in the verses they are saturated and utilize reverb - o After the drop it loses the reverb and sounds close which gives a juxtaposition between the two parts of the song, giving a clear distinction between the parts - o Clean instruments, hidden edits Tempo - 146 BPM Time signature - 4/4 Musical key signature and mode - B minor
Bebe Rexha & Martin Garrix – In the Name of Love Structure of the tracks (length 3:17)	
Instrumentation - Female Vocals - Midi piano - Midi bass - Midi guitar Arrangement - Intro 0:00 – 0:11 - Verse 0:11 – 0:38 - Chorus 0:38 – 0:54 - Drop 0:54 – 1:06 - Verse 1:06 -1:35 - Chorus 1:35 – 1:51 - Drop 1:51 – 2:05 - Bridge 2:05 – 2:33 - Chorus 2:33 – 2:49 - Drop - Out 2:49 - 3.17 Tempo - 134BPM Time signature - 4/4 The vocal is doing 1,2,3, 2 pattern a lot.	Mix & Effects - Vocals at the forefront, auto tune used subtly on the vocals. - Reverb in verses on vocals to make them sound warmer - In the verses it feels stepped back - In the chorus it feels more in your face with less reverb, more clear - On the drop the instruments are full and in your face - The song is very acoustic in the verse the disparity between that and the very electronic in chorus is stark. Musical key signature and mode - E minor The song is effectively three chords Em Cmaj 2nd inversion Dmajor F sharp.7 with second inversion. Her melody is Em over Cmaj chord. Bridge is an inversion of G major relative to the E minor

Appendix C – Synth Wave Song Breakdowns

Kyle Dixon - Stranger Things Vol.1 No. Kids Structure of the track (length 2:38)

Sounds light but eerie, the track ebbs and flows with an underlying repetitive loop throughout

Has 4 phases

- 0:00 – 0:49
- 0:49 – 1:20 (Brings in a new loop changes dynamic of the song)
- 1:20 -2:00 (starts to strip back)
- 2:00 (a new up top loop comes in while under layers develop)
- Goes out on a long synth reverb

- Instrumentation
 - o Synthesisers
- Tempo
 - o 120
- Time signature
 - o 4/4
- Musical key signature and mode
 - o Gminor

Total Control by Mega Drive Structure of the track (length 5:52)

Sounds gritty, dark, lots of samples and layers in this track, plenty of noise.

- Instrumentation
 - o Synthesisers
 - o Speech samples (recordings of people)
 - o FOLI samples (sirens, explosions etc)
-

- Tempo
 - o 186 BPM
- Time signature
 - o 4/4
- Musical key signature
 - o G# minor

Appendix D- Pop Arrangement

Making arrangements

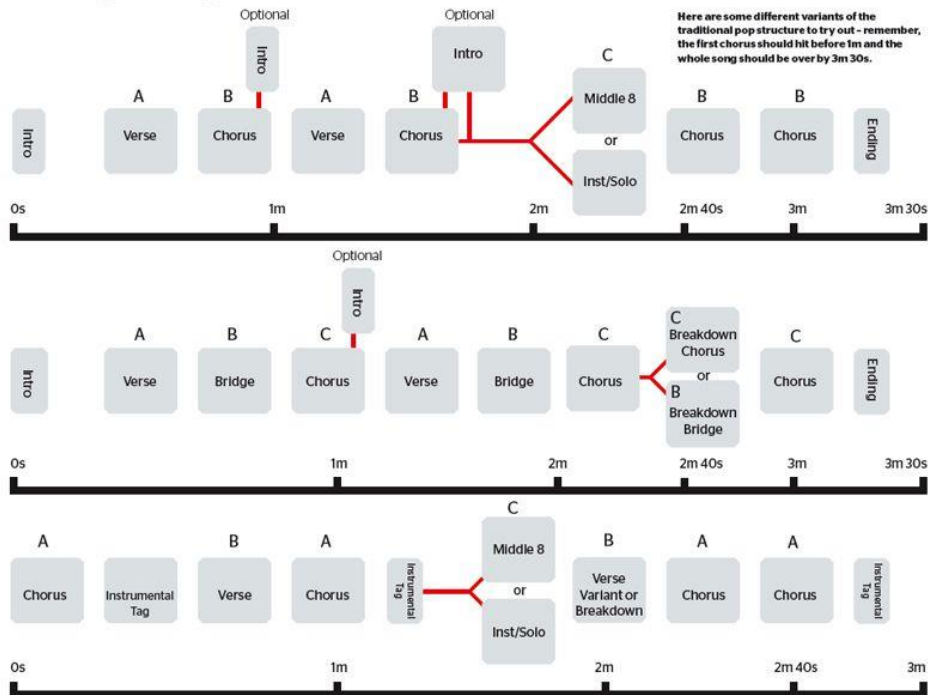


Figure 1 Music Radars Pop arrangement chart

Appendix E – Music Genre

Pop	Rock
Singles	Albums
Emphasis on recording	Emphasis on performance
Emphasis on technology	Emphasis on musicianship
Artificial	Real ('authentic')
Trivial	Serious
Ephemeral	Lasting
Successive	Progressive

Figure 2 Warner Clear distinctions between pop and rock can be summarized

Appendix F – Never Forget You Lyrics

Zara Larsson, MNEK

I used to be so happy
But without here I feel so low
I watched you as you left but I can never seem to let you go
'Cause once upon a time you were my everything
It's clear to see that time hasn't changed a thing
It's very deep inside me but I feel there's something you should know

I'll never forget you
You'll always be by my side
From the day that I met you
I knew that I would love you 'til the day I die
And I will never want much more
And in my heart I will always be sure
I will never forget you
And you'll always be by my side 'til the day I die

'Til the day I die

Funny how we both end happy but everything seems alright, ooh
I wonder what will happen
If we went back and put up a fight
'Cause once upon a time you were my everything
It's clear to see that time...

Appendix G: Lyrics - In The Name of Love

Bebe Rexha & Martin Garrix

If I told you this was only gonna hurt
If I warned you that the fire's gonna burn
Would you walk in?
Would you let me do it first?
Do it all in the name of love

Would you let me lead you even when you're blind?
In the darkness, in the middle of the night
In the silence, when there's no one by your side
Would you call in the name of love?

In the name of love
Name of love
In the name of love
Name of love
In the name of...

In the name, name
In the name, name

If I told you we could bathe in all the lights
Would you rise up, come and meet me in the sky?
Would you trust me when you're jumping from the heights?
Would you fall in the name of love?

When there's madness, when there's poison in your head
When the sadness leaves you broken in your bed
I will hold you in the depths of your despair
And it's all in the name of love

In the name of love
Name of love
In the name of love
Name of love
In the name of...

In the name, name
In the name, name

I wanna testify
Scream in the holy light
You bring me back to life
And it's all in the name of love

I wanna testify
Scream in the holy light
You bring me back to life
And it's all in the name of love

In the name of love
Name of love
In the name of love
Name of love
In the name of...

In the name, name
In the name, name
In the name of...
In the name, name
In the name of...

Appendix H: Lyrics - What's It Gonna Feel Like?

PiRhythm & Emma Horan

Verse 1

I wish I knew how to love you
It feels so alien to me
My actions don't speak your language
This is our new reality

The seasons change
We're not getting younger
The summers gone
And the long nights are coming

I wish I knew how to love you

Chorus

Oooooooooo
If this is what it feels like now then
Oooooooooo
What's it gonna feel like

When the worlds moving forward
We're stuck on repeat
If we press pause and stop now
Its left bittersweet

What's it gonna feel like?

DROP

Oooooooooo
When the worlds moving forward
We're stuck on repeat
If we press pause and stop now
Its left bittersweet
What's it gonna feel like?

Verse 2

Now that the ice is broken
The damage is done
Oooooooooo
We haven't done much to fix it

Bridge x2

Cos we're In and out of love
In and out of loving
In and out of trust
In and out of trusting
In and out of love
In and out of loving me

CHORUS

When the worlds moving forward
We're stuck on repeat
If we press pause and stop now
Its left bittersweet
What's it gonna feel like?
In and out of

Appendix I – Emotions in instrumental music

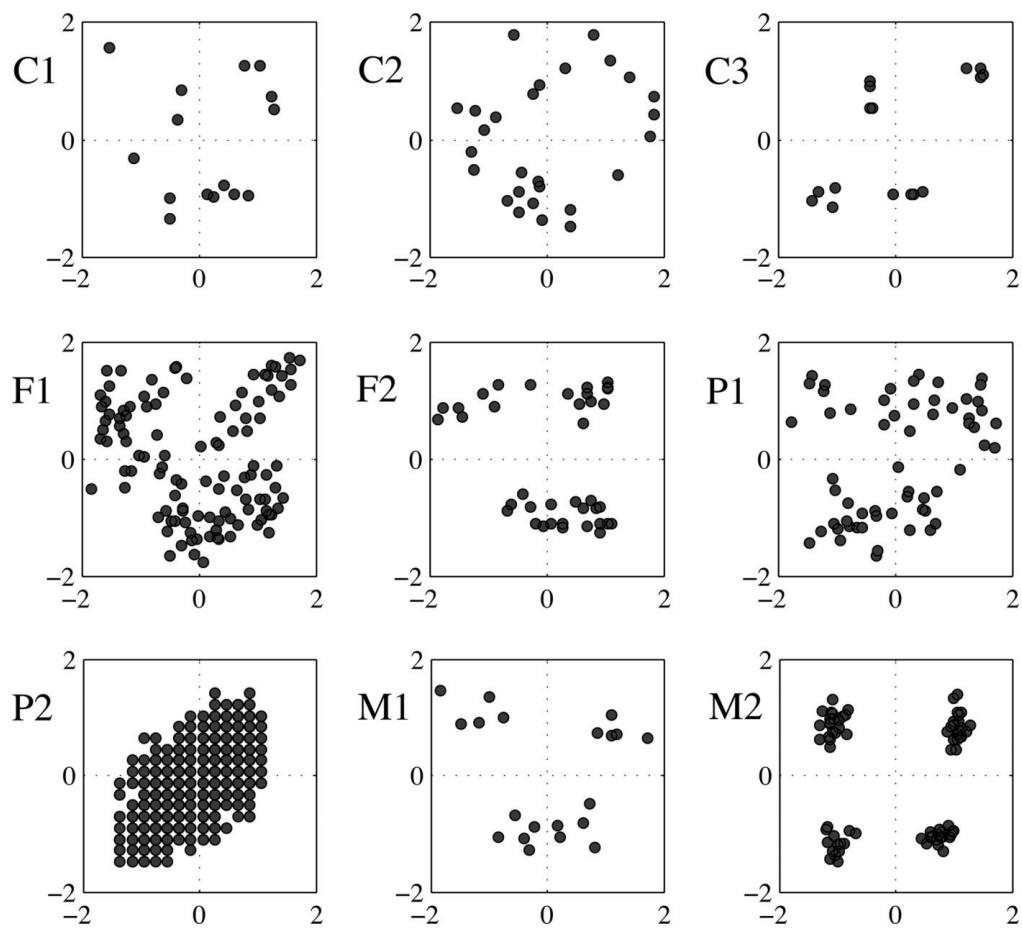


Figure 2 Different genres and how the affect emotions

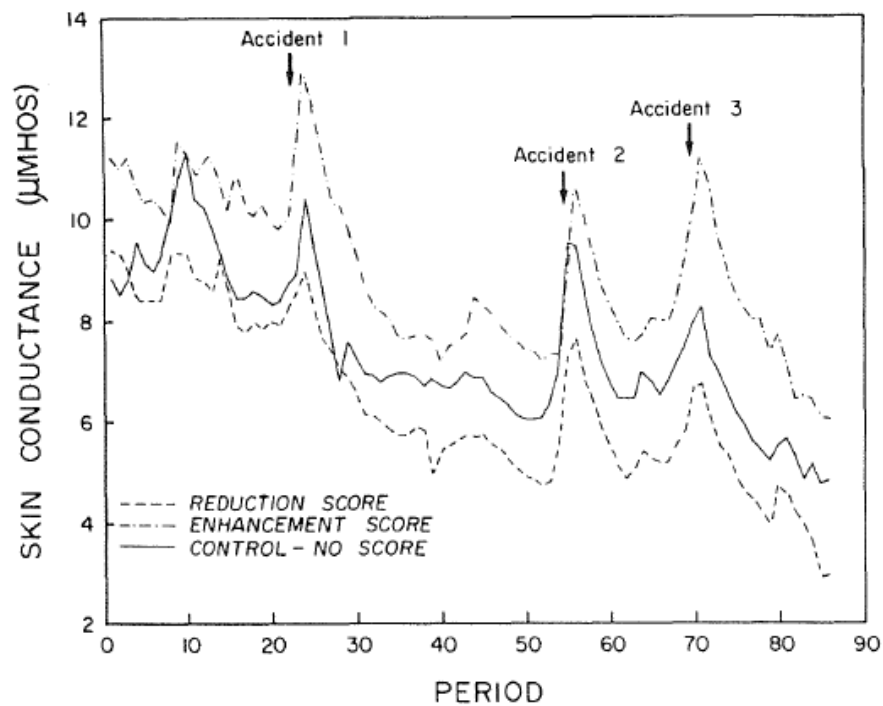


Figure 3 How musical scores affect stress levels

Figure 1. Diagram of the proposed relationship between emotions, film score, and self-talk. Ultimately, film score is predesigned with emotional intent, and therefore will likely be more advantageous for emotional response and subsequent self-talk.

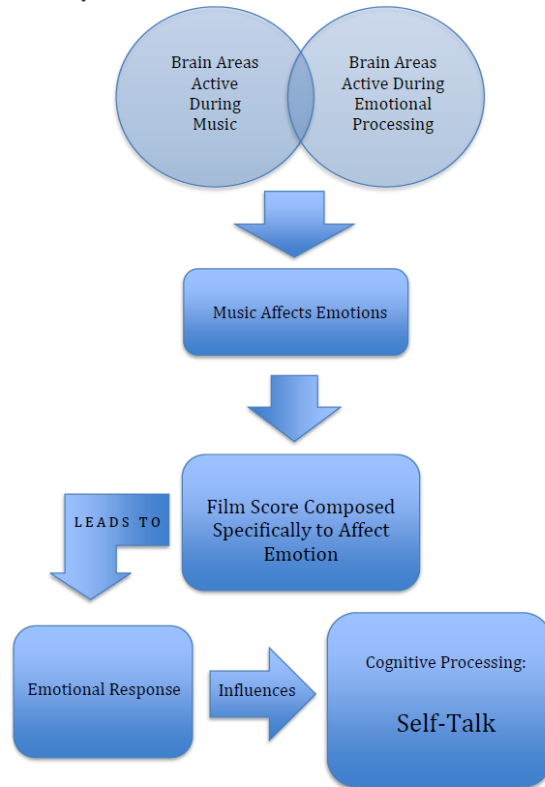


Figure 4: Proposed relationship between emotions and film scores

Appendix J – My Track Organisation

