

Insight into the Production Process and Key Methodology

Introduction

This essay aims to provide an insight behind the methodological approach I used during the creative process of music production. It will demonstrate a detailed process of the analysis of three songs from different genres and the application of their methodological approach in my personal work of the portfolio. I will try to point out the major characteristics of each of the selected genres, how I understood them and how it affected the way I work during the production and arrangement process. In addition, I will explain further what in my opinion has benefited me and what it has not, what has worked in favor of me and what against me. I will also reflect on techniques that have been used effectively enriching the potential of my work, as well as methods that I will need to revise in the future and improve in certain areas. The first step of the production process started with the structural and musical analysis of each track, the identification of the choice of instruments and the arrangement decisions made from the producer. Then, I listed the exact sequence of each arrangement and compared them to the productions included in my portfolio, explaining the reason why I have used the same structure to the compared track and why I did not. Finally, I included the technical aspects used in the mainly in the mixing process inspired by professional engineers and producers.

Examined Tracks and the Analysis Briefing:

The tracks I decided to analyse and do my research on were 'Head and Heart' by Joel Corry and MNEK, 'Dance Monkey' by Tones and I, and 'Mona Lisa Overdrive' by Juno Reactor. The first two compositions of my portfolio (Hades Has More Fun and Touch Me) find themselves in a similar spectrum in terms of the genre. 'Head and Heart' is classed as a 'Dance' genre track, according to Beatport (2020), while 'Dance Monkey' as Electro-Pop (Hodgkinson, W. 2019). The major elements that would class it as such are the 'Vocals', 'Synth melodies' and the 'Drumbeat'. However, by doing a quick research on a few musical platforms, one can notice that both of the tracks tend to be found in mostly top Pop charts. The sounds and structure of them possibly differ from the classical pop music hits that kickstarted that genre and movement but it fits closely with the Pop Music of our era. More specifically, in Great Britain what's known as Pop Music is born in the year of 1952. Not only it is the beginning of the Pop era, but it is also the year that the first ever single chart will be printed, according to (Stanley, B. 2013, p. 30).

Distinguishing the rhythmical and musical elements of these genres can at times be challenging since both of the tracks mentioned above ('Head and Heart' and 'Dance Monkey'), have many similarities with today's 'Pop Music'. The exact definition and identification of Pop Music can sometimes be challenging as it originally consists of anything that is popular at the time. Some individuals consider the genre to be nothing more than just simple songs including lyrics related to partying, drinking and love. A few others argue that Pop music has more of a historic value than it is believed, by defining the genre as the melting

pot of music where sounds from all over the world are blended together, according to (Myers, K. 2016). The third song included in the analysis (Mona Lisa Overdrive) is considered as Electronica or Trance music.

For the purpose of my better understanding of the aspects of each of the three genres I did an analysis on all three tracks. This process helped me better understand the use of fundamental musical elements in Dance music, Electro-Pop and Trance music. Furthermore, after having done the analysis and deconstruction of each track, I was able to examine the way each of the tracks had been structured. My production process turned into a much simpler task than it used to be before after having gained an insight of the analysis that was undertaken. The analysis included the examination of four different fields of each song, the 'Tempo and Key', the 'Arrangement of the song and the Structure', the 'Melody and Mode' and the 'Frequency Balance', which is the frequency range in which different elements of the composition are found.

'Head and Heart' and 'Hades Has More Fun':

The first analysed track 'Head and Heart' by Joel Corry is in D# Major scale and the musical mode used is the Ionian, the tempo of the track is 123 beats per minute. The composition follows an arrangement that is considered to be one of the three more successful structures for Pop and EDM hits, more specifically the 'Standard Pop Structure', according to (Computer Music, 2019). The structure follows a certain pattern, Intro, Verse 1, Chorus 1, Verse 2, Chorus 2, Bridge and Chorus 3, which sums up as two Verses, three Choruses and one Bridge. In terms of frequency range, the 'Vocals' seem to be the predominant element in the mix

at the mid to mid-high frequency range, next element is the 'Bass' which takes up most of the low-end frequencies alongside with the 'Kickdrum', 'Claps and Snares' are in the mid-high range. The 'Hi-hats' represent the high frequencies; the piano chords are in the mid-range spectrum and lastly the arpeggiator from the low frequencies up to the mid-high ones.

Comparing the first composition of my portfolio 'Sytnhetika' with Joel Corry's hit, I could easily spot the similarities as well as differences. The first major difference is the key, 'Synthetika' was written in A Minor Natural scale, the arrangement structure was similar to 'Head and Heart' with the addition of a fourth 'Chorus'. The reason why I added another chorus was to bring back the hook with the 'Kick and Bass' aiming to make the melody of it as memorable to the listener as possible. The tempo is exactly the same at 123 beats per minute as well as the instrumentation of it. The predominant element of my production is the Vocals and the Lead melody both of them being from the mid-low to the mid-high frequencies. It is worth mentioning that these two elements do not play simultaneously in the track, but they swap from chorus to chorus depending on which element I want to showcase in that particular part of the composition. Following the lead and the vocal, the 'Kick and Bass' are both dominant in the sub and low frequencies, the distorted piano comes next at the midrange frequency spectrum alongside the claps and snare which take up the mid-high frequencies as well. Finally, the transition FX and the Hi-Hats take up most of the high-range frequencies.

In terms of the methodology used in my production process, by applying a technique that I have learned through my research I managed to make the choruses stand out and be explosive. I applied a volume automation in the master track so that the volume would reduce -4dBs before each chorus and then jump back to 0dB when the first beat of the chorus came in, '*so that's an arrangement trick to tell people, okay guys it's coming, it's coming, it's coming*' comments, Van Buuren, A. (2020, 00:39). As for the spatial effects, I used two types of reverbs and one delay. The delay technique I have used, maintains the vocals in the middle and at the same times it gives it a stereo effect and makes it more present, states Owsinski, B. (2015, 02:00). To achieve that outcome, I added a 'Stereo Ping-Pong Delay' to the vocals with a 16th note repetition on the Left Speaker and a 16th dotted note repetition on the Right Speaker. In terms of Reverbs, I have used a combination of Plate and Room Reverbs. More specifically, on both cases, whether it was a Plate Reverb or a Room Reverb I used the 'Abbey Road Technique', also known as the Abbey Road Reverb trick which is a technique that is being used at the Abbey Road Studios, according to Bobby Owsinski (2015, 00:04). Pensado Dave explained in *Abbey Road Reverb Technique – Into The Lair #128* (2015, 02:18) that for this particular technique to work the sound engineer needs to insert a Reverb to a specific input track or as an auxiliary track and then add an EQ to the outputted sound from the reverb to roll-out the low and the high-end frequencies. In addition, I have also added a Warm Tube Saturator which enhanced some of the low-mid and mid-range frequencies of the output signal, giving the sound more warmth, a technique applied by the same engineer previously mentioned, Pensado, D. (2015, 09:15).

This track was my first ever encounter to producing a track with vocals, hence it has made me develop my production skills even further by learning some essential methods to make the vocal shine and stand out against other professional records. However, I believe that I started working on the vocals at a late stage in the mixing process which made it a lot more challenging to make it sit nicely with the rest of the production. If there is something that I would do differently in the future, then that would be to focus on the vocals earlier on in the creative process.

‘Dance Monkey’ and ‘Touch Me’:

The second song that was included in my analysis is ‘Dance Monkey’ by Tone and I, written in the key of F# Minor, the mode is Aeolian, and the tempo is at 98 beats per minute. The arrangement structure of this composition differs from the one that the first examined track had, but it follows a similar approach to it. The song was arranged as follows, Intro, Verse 1, Chorus 1, Bridge, Verse 2, Chorus 2, Chorus 3, Middle-8, Chorus 4 and the Outro, similar to the previously mentioned ‘Standard Pop Structure’ but ‘Dance Monkey’, has an extended second Chorus and a Middle-8 section was added to the structure as well, four choruses instead of three. The instrumentation of this song is similar to the first composition ‘Head and Heart’ and the frequency range as well. The Vocals and Backing Vocals are the predominant element in the mix taking up from the mid to high-range frequencies. The Kick and the Bass frequency range is at the sub and low spectrum, the piano is at the low-mid to mid frequencies and the Claps and Ad-libs are covering the middle frequency range.

The arrangement of the second song included in my portfolio, 'Touch Me', differs from the second examined track of the analysis. The structure of the production follows that pattern: Intro, Verse 1, Chorus 1, Verse 2, Chorus 2, Mid-8, Chorus 3, Verse 3 and Outro. The elements that dominate the mix are the Vocals and the Guitar and their frequency range is in the middle and mid-high spectrum, the Bassline and the Kickdrum take up all the low range frequencies followed by the Toms that are in the low-mid range spectrum and the Claps and Snares that take up most of the middle frequencies. The Cymbals are predominantly in the high frequency field and lastly the Synth Chords are on the background at mid-low and low frequencies.

The ability to record more than one tracks simultaneously such as the Vocals, the Guitar, the second Guitar and the Synths is thanks to the technological advancement of the mid 1960's with the introduction of the Multi Track recording and the Portable Synthesizers (Hogan, M. 2016). Not only was I able to record multiple performances happening at the same time but at the post-production I was also able to apply effects to them or edit them. The Portable Synthesiser used is Novation Bass Station II for the creation of the Bassline as well as the Synth chords. In order to make the overall mix sound loud without having to master the production I used a technique applied by Bobby Owsinski (2016) in *Bobby Owsinski's Mixing Tips Webinar*. He also stated that, the mix needs to be in the same loudness levels as the recording that will be played before it and the song that is going to be played after it, the importance of that detail derives from the fact that some individuals equate loudness with quality, which

clearly is not the case. When I was implementing that technique to my mix the way that Bobby explained in his video, I was afraid that it might cause the overall recording to sound over-compressed or distorted. However, it worked surprisingly well and when I compared it with the previously bounced version that was not using that method, I realised that the overall sound of the mix was not distorted but enriched. Not only was the sound of the mix louder but it had added some warmth at the lower frequency range, as well as the guitars.

‘Mona Lisa Overdrive’ and ‘The Darkest Place:

The last composition included in the analysis could be classed as a fusion between Orchestral Cinematic music and Trance, ‘Mona Lisa Overdrive’ by Juno Reactor. Through my analysis I spotted out that the key characteristics of that specific composition were, the Tempo at 137 beats per minute, the root note Bb Minor and in Phrygian mode. For my third composition ‘The Darkest Place’, I tried to recreate a similar mood with sounds used, and I have implemented the instrumentational methodology used in Juno Reactor’s track, with the addition or the removal of certain musical elements. ‘Mona Lisa Overdrive’s’ arrangement structure consists of an Intro, 3 Choruses, 2 Verses and a Bridge. My arrangement approach was slightly different, and it resulted not only in the longer duration of the composition but also in turning it into a more emotional song and the Choruses a lot more energetic and powerful. I structured the track as follows, Intro, Chorus 1, Bridge 1, Verse 1, Chorus 2, Bridge 2, Chorus 3, Bridge 3, Chorus 4, Bridge 4, Chorus 5 and the Outro. The repetitive transitioning between the Drops and the Bridges resulted in the track maintaining the variation between

the loudest and the quietest parts, hence keeping the listener excited anticipating the musical pay-off coming after every bridge.

The predominant elements in 'Mona Lisa Overdrive' is the 'Kick and Bass' and the frequency range is the low and sub frequencies which are the same frequencies that Pads are found as well. As in most Trance tracks, the frequency balance in 'Mona Lisa Overdrive' has the Saw Synths and Vocals in the range of middle and high-mid frequencies, the Cinematic Percussions are in the mid-low spectrum and the Cymbals are on the other side of the range, at the high frequencies. Finally, the transition sound effects are predominantly at the high frequency range. The instrumentation of 'The Darkest Place' is varying slightly from the Juno Reactor production, hence the frequency balance between certain elements of my song were different. Instead of including Cinematic Drums and Orchestral Instruments in my composition I preferred to use Atmospheric pads and Claps and Snares, in addition to that, the Kick and the Bass in my composition sounded more aggressive and louder than in 'Mona Lisa Overdrive'. More specifically, I used an approach by Sean Tyas in *Psytrance Bass with Sean Tyas / Elite Sessions in the Club* (2018), 'by inserting a saturation plugin to the Bass track one is able to achieve the low-mid pure muscle that is coming out of the sound' he quoted.

It is worth mentioning that some specific effects were used in order to create depth and space in the last composition. The same Reverb technique that was mentioned previously was used here as well. In terms of the Delay, I applied a method to the Pads in order to give them a movement and make them sound as if

they were interacting more with the other elements of the track. According to Owsinski, B. (2016), the Pads can be turned dynamically interesting by using a 'Ping Pong Delay' so that the timing of the one side is two times the amount of the other. The same automation technique from the first composition of my portfolio was used here as well. I noticed that by creating that particular volume change the drop sounds bigger and louder, while what actually happens is a reduction in volume just before the main chorus comes in.

Conclusion:

To sum up, having gone through the analysis of all three compositions, I gained insights in a variety of aspects that will help the development of my career and performance skills massively. Apart from that, I was also able to spot areas of weakness in which either lack of experience or knowledge was present, it resulted in me seeing the production process a lot more seriously and planning ahead by organizing the workflow before even starting the creative process. The lack of experience in working with Vocals was mainly the reason why I struggle at a higher level when I was trying to make them sit properly in the mix. However, throughout the process of struggling with the Vocals, I came across some interesting techniques that I had the chance to implement in my own work process that changed the quality of the overall outcome significantly. Furthermore, I enriched my knowledge in the Reverb and Delay field by using them in all three portfolio songs, after having watched their demonstration videos, until I had a satisfactory result in my ears. The process of conducting a portfolio has also contributed in me having to actually finish a project rather than leaving it half ready until it sounds perfect, which was a habit that I usually had beforehand. Lastly, I would like to state that this project has helped further develop my organizational and task achieving skills to a greater extend.

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