

MARIKA BASTIEN

STUDENT ID: 2023943

MA COMMERCIAL PRODUCER

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An Insight Into the Production Process: To Define the Musical Characteristics of Three Analysed Genres and Their Incorporation Into Your Own Work

My main objective throughout this essay is to discuss and explore three different musical genres of my choice. I will be defining the characteristics of Roots Reggae, R&B and Afro House, looking at each artist's individual interpretation and their place in contemporary music today. The three songs I have selected to examine are '*Smile Jamaica*' By Chronixx (Chronixx, 2013), '*BMO*' by Ari Lennox (Lennox, 2019) and '*Turn Me On*' by Black Coffee (Black Coffee, 2012). Additionally I will be examining other reference tracks that fit the musical genre and discussing how I interpreted these characteristics into my own tracks; *No Doubt*, *No Exes* and *I Want You*.

In the 2016 BBC Four documentary *Roots, Reggae, Rebellion* reggae music has been described as "*the bedrock of the expression of freedom*" (BBC Four, 2016) and has proven its influence not only in Jamaica and the surrounding Caribbean islands, but the entire world. Due to its conscious lyrical content, expressive thoughts and feelings surrounding love, God, spirituality and life, reggae music has been a dominating force to come from such a modest country. As someone raised listening to reggae legends for over 20 years, I was curious to explore how the genre is interpreted today and whether or not it still captures the nature of freedom and "*the upliftment of the mind*" (Dreisinger, 2013) like it did 40 years ago. To begin with, I must clarify the different sub-genres within reggae music. The most popular include *Roots*, *Lovers Rock* and *Dancehall*. Though all have been birthed from the same motherland, each has a distinctive and particular sound and vary depending on tempo, instrumentation and

arrangement (Wildridge. D J, 2020). In my analysis I will be looking specifically at Roots Reggae, which relies more on the message and mood, then the musical style.

Reggae sensation Chronixx began seeing commercial success in 2013 with his hit song '*Smile Jamaica*', a tribute to the beautiful island that he calls home. Frequently described as this generation's Bob Marley (Buzz, 2019), Chronixx successfully gives us a youthful take on the well loved genre. Often adopting nonconventional instruments and sounds, yet still making his roots apparent. In '*Smile Jamaica*' he demonstrates a familiar kick drum introduction, followed by what appears to be a live rendition of the classic *One Drop Rhythm* that features in many reggae songs from the 1970s and beyond. The One Drop rhythm, created by drummer Winston Grennan in the late 60s, is a defining characteristic of reggae music and the foundation to many tracks such as '*One Drop*' by Bob Marley and The Wailers. Chronixx incorporates this simple yet charming drum beat throughout. The *One Drop* involves the kick drum being played on the third beat, rather than the first, followed by the dominant snare. By bypassing or dropping the first beat, this creates the illusion of a "*false offbeat*" (Computer Music, 2017) ultimately establishing the classic *One Drop* effect.

As a non-drummer I had difficulty replicating this live and authentic sound due to skill and resources. However I managed to source a suitable drum loop from *Splice* to set the foundation for '*No Doubts*'. I added a subtle reverb using *Space Designer* in Logic, to create a sound system effect, often seen in the party scene in Jamaica. On top of the drum in '*Smile Jamaica*' lies a simplistic yet pleasant chord progression, another distinctive element of Roots. This is in no way a demonstration of Chronixx's inability to play more complex chords, which I'm positive he can, but is a deliberate move to help achieve a meditative state for both the

artist and the listener. It was that exact feeling that I wanted to convey in '*No Doubts*'. With the help of software instruments, such as *Fingerstyle Bass* on Logic Pro, I was able to achieve a less computerised sound to my bass guitar when using my MIDI controller. I also added percussive instruments like the snares and hi hats, to accomplish a more timbales-type sound.

As the years have passed, Chronixx seems to have benefited from touring around the world, incorporating different cultures into his once very traditional sound. In his second hit '*Here Comes Trouble*' the unmistakable rhythmic pattern played by the trumpet, confirms my original thoughts on the artist. Chronixx isn't afraid to shy away from the conventional norms and incorporate elements from other musical genres, in this case Jazz. In an interview with NPR, Chronixx stated that contrary to popular belief he is "*not doing it like Bob Marley did or like Burning Spear did*" (Chronixx, 2013). Instead he confirms that he is "*using their blueprint to bring on a new generation of works*" (Chronixx, 2013) which is quite apparent in his later work. Not only is his sound evolving, but his lyrical content is being altered to fit today's narrative and reflect a more 21st century mindset. Though both Chronixx and Bob are rooted in Rastafarian culture, many earlier reggae songs conveyed messages surrounding the matters of racism, oppression and capitalism. The 28 year old however is "*repackaging what came before*" (Chronixx, 2013), making it more relatable to millennials. In his lead single *Likes* (2017) he shines a light on issues surrounding social media. One being the constant desire for more likes, followers and validation. He prompts his listeners to do things from a place of love and reminds us that "*success doesn't come overnight*" (Chronixx, 2017). Regardless of these new modifications, the message behind Chronixx's music is still crystal clear. Like those that came

before him, he is undoubtedly writing music according to his truth (Chronixx, 2017), guiding his listeners *“towards a higher, much more balanced state of consciousness”* (Ade-Gold. S, 2019).

Inspired by Chronixx’s nonconformity, I wanted to tap into the *“different realms”* (Taylor. A, 2017) of reggae. As a singer first, producer second, naturally I wanted to sing my own song. Considering that the Jamaican accent plays a big part in reggae music, I had planned on sourcing a Jamaican born singer from one of my parents' musical circles. However after careful consideration I decided to sing the lyrics myself. I thought it was quite fitting to contrast the rare reggae grooves with my distinctive British accent. Mimicking his story throughout ‘Smile Jamaica’, I wanted my song to be based around the theme of love and the trials you often face when you encounter true love. As most reggae songs are recorded live, I tried to use as little plugins as possible when making *No Doubts*. I wanted it to sound as raw and authentic as possible.

Though some have declared reggae to be *“suffering a serious decline”* (Hamilton. D, 2010), you cannot deny the new wave of reggae artists, who sit alongside Chronixx that are *“completely reinvigorating the genre”* (Ong. H & Dunn. F, 2019). Koffee and Protege, to name a few, are contributing to how the world now listens to reggae, reaching a much wider and diverse audience outside of Jamaica. Reggae is not confined by the music style, but how it makes one feel. Chronixx has since appeared on tracks with Hip Hop artists Joey Bada\$\$ (BABYLON) and Little Simz (Wounds), as well as contemporary R&B Band, Free Nationals (Eternal Light).

The second track I chose to analyse was *BMO* by Ari Lennox, taken from her debut album *Shea Butter Baby*. I fell in love with this track the moment I first heard it, during summer of 2019. I was sold within seconds, instantly taken by the groovy drums pattern and infectious rhythmic sample taken from the late Galt MacDermont's track entitled *Space*. Lennox's sultry, yet powerful adlibs during the intro were an icing on the cake, making it an instant hit and a perfect example of contemporary R&B.

In an article for *Clash Magazine* Nicolas Tyrell applauds *BMO*'s commercial appeal, declaring it's demand for "*chart attention*" (Tyrell. N 2019), implying that it should have taken "*centre-stage*" (Tyrell. N, 2019,) as Lennox's leading single. This may have been a result of its unconventional mid tempo, more familiar in Pop tracks. Prior to the 2000s R&B normally took a slower turn, with heavy influences from Soul and Jazz. It can be argued that R&B has changed over the years, depicting a different feeling to what we were first introduced to in the 90s. While some have argued for years that the genre is dead and that "*it's time has passed*" (Harrison. M, 2021) others have pointed out that R&B hasn't gone anywhere and that it has simply evolved to reflect the current times. Music Journalist Bailey Agbai adds that "*R&B has traded in the slow jams and chilled vibes*" replacing them with "*funkier and more upbeat sounds with faster tempos*" (Agbai.B, 2020). When observing the catalogue of R&B songs from the 1990s, hits like Brandy's *Wanna Be Down* and 112's *Only You*, put us in a baby making mood. Fast forward to 2020 tracks such as *BMO* and *Do It* by Chloe x Halle have adopted the mid tempo, putting everyone in a mood to dance. Though some artists (including Lennox herself with her track *Up Late*) are sticking to the original blueprint, many are turning to the club scene, proving Agbai to be right. When asked about the type of music she makes Lennox has placed herself in line with some of the greatest soul singers, such as Erykah Badu and Lauryn Hill, stating

that she is no longer “*running from neo-soul*” and that it is the core of who she is. However it can be argued that the Dreamville singer has crossed the very thin line between R&B and Soul when referring to *BMO*. Although other tracks on the album exhibit a more soulful side of Lennonx, for example *Up Late*, *BMO* tempo determines it more Pop.

When the time came to create *No Exes* I was indecisive on what tempo I wanted to settle on. My heart wanted to dive into my 90s bag and capture the slow seductive tone that R&B is known for, though my body was saying the complete opposite. I longed for the freedom to move and girate, in what has felt like a never ending prison sentence during this national lockdown. I found a happy medium and ended up increasing the speed of my piano keys to a pace that I thought fitted nicely. I looped an eclectic style chord progression similar to the Galt MacDermot sample, adding a natural snare to add more rhythm and energy. The profound bass in *BMO*, acts as a moving vehicle and was definitely my inspiration behind my bass guitar which I subtly crept into the track within the first few bars.

In order for *No Exes* to demand a place on the charts, I knew I had to follow the standard Top 40 structure similar to *BMO*. I used the typical verse - chorus - verse - chorus song form when it came to the arrangement (one that I depend on very heavily). Focusing on the vocals I incorporated a range of different harmonies and layers to add a warm and thickness that R&B is known for. I complimented them with the reverb *Space Designer* on Logic along with *Tape Delay*, to produce an atmospheric, wider sound.

When you mention Afro House, it is hard not to mention Black Coffee’s name. Not only does he hold the title as “*South Africa’s foremost electronic music artist*” (Murphy. B, 2018) but he is

also recognised as a household name when you're talking about Afro Deep House. Also known as Tribal House this particular variant of house music originated in South African in the 1990s, displaying elements of soul and jazz. With its African inspired drum patterns, soul touching percussive sounds and tantalising vocals, this new strain of house music is a dominant force in contemporary music today. Coming together for their second collaboration, Black Coffee and Bucie released their single *Turn Me On* in 2012 (Coffee. B, 2012), following the success of *Superman* earlier in 2009. Despite Afro House being "*willfully neglected by the electronic music*" (Barnes. M, 2021) scene for years, it is finally pushing through the barriers and demanding to be heard.

When it came to creating *I Want You* I also took inspiration from DJ Kent's Unreleased mix of *Falling* (Kent. D, 2012). Using Splice as my go-to for drum patterns throughout this assignment, I began with the foundation, sourcing a loop that penetrated something deep within my soul instantly. I knew that I had to start *I Want You* strong in order to capture the essence of deep house. I increased the tempo of the drum loop to 123 BPM, a distinctive feature creating a more "*African Vibe*" (Murphy. B, 2018) which is found in both Black Coffee and DJ Kent;s tracks. Due to limited resources on my Logic Pro Library, I managed to outsource a sample pack via Splice, where I found a variety of percussive instruments that fit nicely with the genre. Despite falling short on some of the mixing techniques, I did my best, improvising with the resources and knowledge that I had.

I would say that I enjoyed creating *I Want You* the most due the natural duration of Afro House songs. As someone who is an advocate for a great introduction and intense build up, I was

excited to take my time, realising that I was in a marathon and not a sprint (Zeeman. K, 2015). The build up of percussive instruments is what makes Afro Deep House what it is. Every 4th bar I introduce a new sound, signalling a new feeling, similar to both *Turn Me On* and *Falling*. I aimed to replicate the polyrhythms in *Turn Me On*, whilst maintaining a minimalistic African groove, that Black Coffee is best known for. Adding Jazz inspired piano chords to my drum pattern helped me to set the mood and vibe of my track, creating melody and an energy that runs throughout. I was limited with some of the software sounds available on Logic due to insufficient storage, so I found myself repeating the same sounds. However I thought this was quite fitting and related to Black Coffee who's music is inspired by the poverty and struggle within South Africa (Zeeman. K, 2015). This limitation motivated me to look at other aspects to enhance the overall mode of the track. Pairing this Afropolitan polyrhythms (Anderson. S, 2016) with my bright soulful vocals, meant I was able to create the graceful yet menial afro vibe that I desired.

Even though there is a direct association to South Africa, the genre has proven to have "*broken the boundaries of geography*" (pressureradio.com, 2021) influencing many contemporary artists today. Where it was once very exclusive and only those who knew knew, the genre has been taken up by mainstream musicians who are now "*investing in the culture*" (Canada. T S, 2017) now more than ever. DJ and producer Kaytranada, who is commonly known for his unique take on electronic house, continuously exhibits distinctive Afro House elements in his 2019 hit *Vex Oh*. Another person on the list of artists recognising Black Coffee's impact is recording artist Drake. In his 2017 album release *More Life*, Drake collaborates with British singer Jorja Smith, creating a stripped back version of Black Coffee's

infamous *Superman*. Despite it having mixed signals from native South Africans (Mkhabela. S, 2017) the rest of the world seemed to adore this Canadian's interpretation, many calling it some of Drake's best work (Lozano. K, 2017).

Despite the current climate and physical restrictions that Covid-19 that we have faced due to Covid-19, I am proud of the tracks that I was able to produce with such limited resources. My deliberate choice of tracks not only highlight some of the most impactful musical genres in black culture, but each represent the struggle that Black Coffee is referring to as his "*inspiration*". Going forward in my journey, I would like to adopt this humble mentality, following the theme that '*less is more*'. In a digital world where music is rarely recorded live and where producers tend to abuse software instruments, it was refreshing to create something that was stripped all the way back, allowing the feeling to take control and guide the listener.

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