

Foundation Module - Element 2 - Essay

Analysis of and comparison between three contemporary tracks in different genres and three original tracks inspired by them, based on analysis and research of genres, production styles, recording techniques and songwriting.

In this section I will discuss the tracks I have selected, analyse them and note the defining characteristics of the different genres, musical elements, production, recording techniques and songwriting. Then I will discuss the original tracks, explain the production process and choices made to match the selected tracks or perhaps emulate their spirit and to bring a new original experience which has all the right ingredients.

Selected track 1: *Freelove* (M. Gore)

Year: 2001

Artist: **Depeche Mode**

Album: *Exciter*

Producer: Mark Bell

Genre: New wave, post punk, synth-pop, post rock

Tempo: 103bpm

Key/Mode: F Minor (Dorian)

Key words: Dark, Mysterious, sexy, free, atmosphere

This classic is a masterpiece of pristine production, epic performance and mesmerising atmosphere that keeps the listener captivated. It sends a universal message of letting go of our fears and learning how to love freely and show compassion. No wonder it was such a massive hit.

"If you've been hiding from love
If you've been hiding from love

I can understand where you're coming from
I can understand where you're coming from
If you've suffered enough
If you've suffered enough
I can understand what you're thinking of
I can see the pain that you're frightened of"

"No hidden catch
No strings attached
Just free love"

A minimalistic electronic beat lies underneath layers of beautiful synthesisers, reversed guitars and ambient noises, clicks and beeps, creating a futuristic and innovative sound for which producer Mark Bell deserves his credit (Billboard, 2001). The acclaimed producer has also brought forward the electric guitar, which gives the right warmth and the perfect contrast to the futuristic sound, creating a "grounding" effect to a highly innovative track. The arpeggiated clean guitar sound on one hand, and soaring and ripping fuzz sounds later on in the track on the other, communicates nicely with the electronic sounds and contributes to the track as a whole. The 6:11 album version features a long intro with a strange dial-tone like loop in stereo panning followed by an eerie guitar riff feeding back (similar to the guitar part on the Smiths' 'How Soon is Now', a track which shares many similarities with the sounds from Depeche Mode).

Dave Gahan's larger-than-life vocals deliver the song's message brilliantly. In an interview with Mitch Schneider he attributed his confidence in his performance to producer Mark Bell and also revealed that he is not always comfortable with or

confident about his singing (Schneider, 2001) which proves how important the role of the producer is in the studio, even when it comes to a widely respected, celebrated and worldwide famous singer such as Gahan. There is a lot of air in the vocals and the arrangement leaves proper space for the vocals to drive the track forward. This style of singing is reminiscent of other influential singers of the genre and post-punk/new-wave era such as Ian Curtis of Joy Division and Morrissey of the Smiths.

Freelove is a mature track for a pop group, compared with older Depeche Mode hit tracks such as 'Just Can't Get Enough' or 'Personal Jesus' both in songwriting and production. There is more focus on the emotion, message and aesthetics, whereas on other tracks, it feels as if the attention was in engineering a track to make people dance and party in a club atmosphere. To me this track has matched the quality of songwriting in the band's all-time favourite 'Enjoy the Silence', which is in my opinion probably the best pop song ever written.

Original track 1: *No Smoking in Heaven* (E. Pik)

Album: Single

Genre: New wave, synth pop, alternative rock

Tempo: 112bpm

Mode: A major

Key words: Dark, Mysterious, sexy, free, atmosphere

I was inspired to write this song by a friend of mine who had expressed to me her frustration and confusion in these crazy times between Brexit and a global pandemic. I believe it tells a story which one can easily relate to.

The song was written in a major key, so several 'suspended second' chords (chords that create a manipulation of the harmony which is neither minor or major) were added to somehow match the minor key in 'Freelove'.

"Gonna take a flight to Zurich and Brexit off,
Take the rest of my belongings,
It would be so grand to have fun tonight,
And whilst I shiver in the sunshine I will hold my faith
As I wallow in the darkness,
It would be so grand to be home again,

I will be loved,
I will not withhold,

There's no smoking in heaven,
There's no smoking in heaven,
There's no smoking in heaven,
Always truth to the lie, if it saves your life.

It's absurd like getting sunburned in a London park,
Sitting down for drinks and dancing,
It would be so grand to have fun tonight,
I get anxious when they ask me where my accent's from
Or if I'm visiting their country,
It would be so grand to go home with you,

I Will be loud,
I will be proud.

There's no smoking in heaven..."

The song's structure is slightly different from the reference track. There is a slow, synth-based intro, leading to a double verse, chorus, another verse and a double chorus to outro. A middle-8 was written originally although it was chopped out since the track worked better without it. When recording my vocals I thought mostly of Morrissey and Ian Curtis along with Dave Gahan to try and match that new-wave style of singing, using similar reverbs and delay on the vocal tracks. Joy Division's 'Love will Tear Us Apart' has inspired the final part of the song with a similar bass line and synth part. The tremolo electric guitar part was inspired by Johnny Marr of the Smiths.

The track was recorded at Private Room studios owned by legendary Israeli producer Eyal Leon Katzav (ELK) in Tel Aviv. We were joined by Shlomi Bracha, founding member, songwriter, guitarist and producer of Israel's all-time biggest rock band 'Mashina', which started as a new-wave band in the mid-eighties.

Both men are respected veterans who started their musical career in the new-wave era and are still influenced by the genre.

Another more contemporary influence on the production was 'Breathe Deeper' by Tame Impala, particularly on the beat, choice of tempo and the approach to mixing the track, providing a modern, three-dimensional mix.

Selected track 2: *Pumping On Your Stereo*

(G. Coombes, R. Coombes, M. Quinn, Danny Goffey)

Year: 1999

Artist: **Supergrass**

Album: Supergrass ("The X-Ray album")

Producer: Professor John Cornfield

Genre: Britpop, power-pop, alternative rock

Tempo: 132 bpm

Mode: E major (Mixolydian)

Key words: Rock, party, fun, happy, sarcasm, glam-rock, britpop

Providing the ultimate rock and roll party song, Supergrass's track includes all of the elements and defining characteristics of the band: fun, cheekiness, rock and roll, humour and attitude. It has a feel of 90's England while acknowledging 70's "Glam Rock" artists such as Marc Bolan and David Bowie.

The band's bassist, Mick Quinn said in an interview to 'The Portable Infinite' music magazine in regard to the recording of the song; "There were certain instances where Danny didn't hit the snare [drum] loud enough so we all had to clap over the snare. In the end it sounds like [David] Bowie." (Potable Infinite, 2006),

In his biography of Bowie, David Buckley has mentioned the song and described it as a "chuckling slice of 'Rebel-Rebel'- dosed riff-rock". (Buckley, p.5)

Gaz Coombes' high pitched vocals drive the song with energy, cheekiness and britpop superstar sex appeal. He is reminiscent of David Bowie or Mick Jagger in his charisma, energy and passion, yet is iconically of his time, sounding like his Britpop counterparts Richard Ashcroft or Liam Gallagher.

The phrases in the verses are short and powerful phrases, designed to grab your attention and the sarcastic lyrics overflow with life experience:

"Take a look through your window now,
You're all alone on the road,
Well you'll burn all your bridges down,
And now you're losing control,
The wider your eyes, the bigger the lies, yes it's true,
If you make a mistake where you couldn't
relate to your groove, (yes, that's true)"

Crunchy and punchy guitar sounds playing clever bluesy riffs with the right bite to them and the addition of claps and cheers create a live atmosphere to a studio track. Another characteristic of Supergrass's music is clever key changes and 'modal interchanges, where chords are borrowed from parallel modes. For instance, in the chorus of 'Pumping On Your Stereo' the chord F major is borrowed from E Phrygian, followed by C major and G major, both taken from the E Aeolian mode (E Minor). One of my favourite things about Supergrass is the high intelligence of their songwriting which is engineered in a way that makes these key (or tempo) changes sound natural. These ideas are also ubiquitous in seventies art-rock, psychedelic,

progressive and glam-rock which the band is massively influenced by.

Evidence for that is in their incredible cover version of 'Just Dropped in', an obscured psychedelic 60's track by Kenny Rogers and The First Edition'—before it was famously featured on Joel and Ethan Coen's all-time classic masterpiece; 'The Big Lebowski'.

Fascinating footage from the recording studio of the band (in the excellent 2004 documentary film 'A Home Movie') shows both analog tape machines and vintage microphones and amplifiers which they have utilised to achieve their raunchy, warm and psychedelic, fuzzed-up sound.

The use of an upright 'Honky-Tonk' like sounding piano playing mostly in the high register (in hits such as 'Alright') is another defining characteristic in Supergrass' music. This is an element borrowed from older rock and roll artists such as Little Richard, whose inspiration on Rock was critical, as he was admired by Bowie, the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. (Winn, p.12)

The structure is very simple and straightforward, appropriate for a rock "Banger":

Intro (hook based "Can you hear us...")

Verse

Chorus

Hook

Verse 2

Chorus

Hook

Verse 3

Chorus

Hook

Ending (applause)

In general it is very clear that this track was played by a very tight musical unit of friends who knew how to have an extraordinary amount of fun in the studio. As their co-producer Sam Williams has attested: “I don’t think I’ve ever enjoyed making a record as much as I enjoyed making *I Should Coco* (the band’s first record) and I certainly haven’t laughed as much as I did when we made *I Should Coco*.” (Hilton, 2004. 17:18).

Original track 2: *Apocalypse* (E. Pik)

Album: ‘Quarantine’ E.P (due 2021)

Genre: Britpop, power-pop, Alternative Rock

Tempo: 130

Key/Mode: Eb major

Key words: Rock, party, fun, happy, sarcasm, glam-rock, britpop

From my new EP which I have been writing during lockdown. It is an account of people’s wants and needs in times that feel like the end of the world is near as so many days have felt to many of us during this challenging year of 2020. The verses were edited to fit the format of a britpop hit song.

When writing the song I was considering different points of view and the song itself is sarcastic and humorous. This felt like the way to match Supergrass’ approach to songwriting which combines intelligence, wit and cheekiness. Also there is a sense of a global message when it comes to Britpop. It is political and universal in a fresh and young sort of way: “All my people right here, right now - D’you know what I mean?” (from Oasis’ “D’You Know What I Mean” 1997)

These messages, in my opinion are more than relevant now, which is why I believe Britpop is coming back in a new wave or new form and I’m happy to be part of that. I wrote the verses in short phrases, including words that stand out and are attention-grabbing. The vocal take was recorded on a hot summer day in Tel Aviv, and recording a power-pop song with singers like Gaz Coombes, Liam Gallagher or Mick Jagger, has turned the studio into a sweat-box which contributed to the general atmosphere.

"I need a sweetheart for the apocalypse,
Need me a sweetheart for the apocalypse,
Can she be blonde please?
That is what I like.
You need a rock star for the apocalypse,
You need an icon for the apocalypse,
Well I'm out of work now,
Kinda' sounds like fun.

Would you run towards me on the beach with open arms?
'Cause I was made for a revolution,
You best be sure I was made for this.

You want a cease-fire for the apocalypse,
You want some world peace for the apocalypse,
Well I guess that's sorted,
Didn't seem too hard.

You want a quick fix for the apocalypse,
You want your hair back for the apocalypse,
I'm afraid that's gone now,
How about a mask?

Would you run towards me on the beach with broken arms?
You can't write the script, can't write the spore now,
You best be sure I was made for this,
The apocalypse"

As references I have had two songs in mind; 'Pumping On Your Stereo' and 'Sun Hits the Sky', both produced by the band's long-time producer Professor John Cornfield. The chord progression in the verses of 'Apocalypse' is similar to the one on the chorus of the latter, going from the major first chord to a minor fourth, borrowed from the Aeolian mode (the natural minor scale), in this case Ab minor. Another modal interchange happens in the chorus, where the second chord is major, borrowed from Eb Lydian.

In order to replicate that party and fun atmosphere of 'Pumping On Your Stereo', I knew I had to record live drums and it had to be a drummer with to whom I felt very close. So I joined forces with one of the people I've had the most fun working with in my career, New-York based, drummer, drum-tech genius and producer, Ariel Shafir, who works at the legendary 'Dreamland' studios in Woodstock, NY. Not only does he fit the criteria of an astonishingly tight, loud and wild rock drummer, he's also one of the funniest people I've ever met. We've played music and laughed together for many years so that was a perfect match and he happily accepted taking part in the project to my great joy.

Dreamland is entirely based on vintage, analog sounds and equipment with an incredible selection of drum sets, tape machines, amplifiers and microphones. Ariel and I worked on the song remotely, which is a first experience for me. Having sent over tracks I recorded in London and Tel Aviv, the vocals were passed through a tape machine and played into the live room. They were recorded to tape at Dreamland. My guitar tracks were fed into vintage guitar amps from the late sixties and recorded to tape and my bass track was reamped and recorded to tape whilst Ariel laid down his incredible drum tracks, adding claps and bongo drums to bring that party atmosphere to life.

An old upright piano was also recorded, playing quavers on the high register of the piano but the absolute icing on the cake was an original vintage Italian Farfisa organ which has brought sounds reminiscent of Ray Manzarek of the Doors and his Vox Continental combo organ to the mix.

Vintage keyboards and organs such as the Hammond Organ, Fender-Rhodes or the Mellotron are also very common in Supergrass tracks such as 'Moving', 'Faraway' or 'Sun Hits the Sky'. Analog delay on the vocals was added and finally the track has been given a completely analog mix at Dreamland (with me in the studio via Zoom), to which I have done digital mastering on Logic Pro X.

Selected track 3: *Sober*

Year: 2017

Artist: **Lorde**

Album: Melodrama

Producer(s): Lorde, Antonoff, Malay, Harrell

Genre: Female fronted electropop, dark-pop

Tempo: 108bpm

Mode: E major (Lydian)

Key words: Female vocalist, teen icon, soulful, vulnerable, powerful

Trendy, sexy, painful, dark, mysterious, mischievous, childish, tender, aggressive, this mysterious genre brings out many painfully real experiences in ultra-HD. It includes some disturbing stories and unimaginable sincerity in the context of a pop song and shamelessly handles aspects of young lives that no one speaks of. Stacey Anderson has described Lorde's album Melodrama (2017) as 'a sleek and humid pop record full of grief and hedonism, crafted with the utmost care and wisdom.' (Anderson, Pitchfork, 2017).

'Presented by young and beautiful women who belong to a new generation where the dynamics and roles have changed, millennial and Gen Z women claimed the right to be complicated pop auteurs.' (Snapes, The Guardian, 2019)

"Night, midnight
Lose my mind
Night, midnight
Lose my mind"

"We're sleeping through all the days"

"I'm acting like I don't see

Every ribbon you used to tie yourself to me

But my hips have missed your hips

So let's get to know the kicks

Will you sway with me?

Go astray with me? (aha)

King and Queen of the weekend

Ain't a pill that could touch our rush

But what will we do when we're sober?"

A minimalistic approach is key to this genre. A trap-pop electronic beat throbs underneath the vocals of Lorde's low-voiced, effortless, perhaps lazy performance. She sings very close to the microphone, so you can hear every syllable or move of her lips. This is the complete antithesis to Classical singing. Throughout the album, her dynamic singing style shifts from soft, low-voice singing to almost rapping (Shaffer, Newsweek, 2017)

This three-chord pop song features sporadic layers of loops and synthesisers leaving most of the space to the vocals and beat. The use of effects such as the vocoder to create developments in production and the brass section loop in the chorus are appropriate to the genre.

Original track 3: *Burnt* (E.Pik)

Genre: Female fronted electropop, dark-pop

Tempo: 138bpm

Mode: Eb minor

Key words: Female vocalist, teen icon, soulful, vulnerable, powerful

Burnt is a song that tells a story and gives the perspective of a young person in isolation during lockdown. It expresses loneliness, frustration and confusion.

I have decided to create some sort of 'Frankenstein' track of this genre, taking different elements from different songs by Lorde and Billie Eilish.

The chord progression was inspired by Lorde's 'Green Light' which opens the 'Melodrama' album, the beat was inspired mostly by 'Sober II' from the same album.

A hook was added to bring the track together and closer to the genre.

"Too many nights I've been tossing and turning,
Too many tears I've shed for you,
What's my life if not a random excuse?
Anyway, you do it tonight.

I wish that I had a powerful suit,
To wear in times of conflict and blues,
What's this life if not quest and pursuit?
Anyway, you do it tonight.

I've seen this place before, next week is going to be cold,
Feeling tired and cumbersome, I want this year to be gone,
I've never felt so burnt.

I've seen this place before, next winter's going to be cold,
Haven't kissed no one all summer, I want this year to be gone,
I've never felt so burnt."

For the role of teen-icon I have called up Sapir J. Fox, a contestant of 'The Voice', the Israeli version of Talent Show. She is also a close friend. Her voice was a perfect fit for the song and genre, providing a playful, edgy, young and unique female sound and the right attitude (which she referred to as "broken Billie Eilish voice", to which I replied, "Yes, that's the one").

In the studio, we created an atmosphere to resemble a live show; I played the role of a massive audience as Sapir performed the track. I wanted it to sound as if she was singing to thousands of people with her large personality and charisma.

Other tracks used for inspiration included: 'You Should See Me in a Crown' by Billie Eilish and 'Lovely' by Eilish and Khalid. We've also looked into Lorde's track 'Homemade Dynamite' to try and capture the somewhat childish demeanour in performance.

Other than synth sounds and loops, reversed self-oscillation in stereo panning was added at certain points to create motion and to expand to production, a use of stereo enhancement plugin was also used to bring the feel of tracks in this genre.

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