

Will Trippas

2019909

Foundation Element 2 - Essay

Producing Music for Commerce

2869 words

Introduction

In this essay we will examine three pieces of music from different genres; we will look at their defining characteristics and how these tracks conform to their genres before analysing the production techniques used in each tune. The three tunes selected for analysis are Rag 'n' Bone Man - *All I ever wanted* (Sub Focus remix) (Rag 'n'Bone Man, 2021), Chase & Status - *Let You Go* (Chase & Status, 2010) and Stone Temple Pilots - *Dead and Bloated* (Stone Temple Pilots, 1992).

We will then go on to compare these works to the three original works submitted with particular reference to the production techniques, before discussing the additional musical, commercial and artistic decisions made beyond the scope of the reference or genres discussed. The three original works are, respectively, *In My Soul*, *Flashback* and *Passed Me By*.

In My Soul

Drum & Bass (aka Jungle) is “characterised by ferociously complex digitised drum patterns and synthetically-treated booming bass lines, it bore the traces of UK hip hop, combined with the electronic assault-tactics of European and US techno.” (Quinn, 2002) This is music designed for DJs to play at clubs, warehouses and festivals. Due to Jungle producer's embrace of both sampling and remixing, the styles can take vary wildly, such as hip hop (Jungle Brothers 1997), reggae (Marley 2013), rock (Bring Me The Horizon 2020) and pop (Rag'n'Bone Man 2021), also, according to (Noys, 1995, p321), “... dub, soul, ambient, garage and acid.”

If we look at modern Drum & Bass and House in the context of Electronic Dance Music, we can also see the arrangement centres on “The Drop” to increase tension, typically:

- i) extensive use of uplifters
- ii) the “drum roll effect”,
- iii) large frequency changes,
- iv) removal and reintroduction of bass and bass drum, and
- v) a contrasting “breakdown” cause tension and anticipation

The Drum n Bass reference track (Rag'n'Bone Man, 2021) is written at 174 BPM and in 4/4. It is typical in that it starts without any rhythm or bass elements - just pads and vocal, before heading to the drop. It's vocal themes centre on urban life; although the original was written in a different genre, this is a common theme for Jungle, as well as its cousins Dubstep and Grime. (Christodoulou, 2011, p45)

While there are some “uplifters” in this example, they are not as prevalent as on some other tunes even by the same producer (Sub Focus, 2019). Likewise there is not a big drum roll, per se, however a little drum and laser-pew-pew fill before each of the 2 drops. These drops, when the drums and bass both come in at once are used here to create the effect on the dance floor - this music is written explicitly for a crowd, and it is the largest source of tension-release exploited by producers in this genre.

One key Sub Focus technique is layering, particularly for his drums, bass and leads. Each of these layers is EQed to fit together and processed separately. For example in the reference there is a sub layer which is essentially just a sine wave in mono, and then stacked on that up an octave is a mid-bass layer which is wider in the stereo field with a small amount of FX, then a lead on top which is even wider and with even more effects. By re-using old sounds, especially drums, and stacking them accordingly he can create a signature sound. (Cyril B, 2020)

Building tension and releasing it is a common songwriting technique, generally taught through the verse-pre-chorus template (Baxter, 2021). Analysing the Sub Focus remix we can see that while chords and melody are used to build tension, the production elements are used to reinforce this dynamic. This tension is further accentuated with 8 bars on the tonic before the drop.

All I Ever Wanted was written in D Major, and the second reference tune was selected due to its similar arpeggiations after the chorus - *Where The Streets Have No Name* (U2, 1987).

The arrangement of *In My Soul* mimics the reference tune, albeit with different chords. The track itself is in C major, with the verse using a I-V-ii (C-G-d) chord structure. The pre-chorus increases tension, first with a G7 chord, then the major of the ii - Dmaj7. (Baxter, 2021) This tension is resolved when the chorus comes back in, we start with the familiar I-

V before continuing to vi-IV. The chord progression then resolves to the tonic for the 8 bars after the chorus, before going into a variation of the chorus chords for the drop.

The piece also takes advantage of layering - at the start the orchestra sounds in the introduction are layered as a real orchestra might, we start with a French horn playing with a violin flautaundo, then as we progress the pizzicato strings are layered with the Juno synth. Once we reach the drop the drums are comprised of several kicks layered, several snares layered, a number of hats, and a drum break to provide ghost notes, while the bass is comprised of several patches with different processing to produce the large-spectrum sound in the production.

In *My Soul* features a number of “real”, albeit soft-sampled, instruments in the sections without drums and bass. This was done to create as much difference between the introductory sections, giving them a luscious stereo feel, and the driving drop with its minimal but loud arrangement. As a tip of the hat to the genre’s origins, the french horn mimics the classic Jungle sound of the airhorn. Real instruments are common enough in the genre, for example *Prelude* (Pendulum, 2006).

The lyrics are based on a series of Carl Sagan quotes and misquotes (Quote Investigator, 2013) but the sentiment remains - the subject matter was to designed match the music - to inspire awe. As with *All I Ever Wanted*, this is a piece of music written to be played to large crowds, so it was important to employ as many tricks as possible.

The biggest challenge for this production was the orchestral elements, and having them stand up sonically to the drum and bass drop onslaught in the tune. Upon reflection, less chord movement would have lent itself to a more static accompaniment to the vocals, such as in *All I Ever Wanted*. I feel that would have made it easier to produce a full-spectrum introduction for better overall balance.

Flashback

Moving on to the second analysed track, *Let You Go*. House, too is part of the larger genre family of EDM - ie it is a primarily produced “in the box” and designed to be played by DJs mixing the music together (Montano, 2010, p406). Along with the aforementioned EDM “drop”, another key arrangement technique is that the music very rarely varies from an 8-bar section before new elements are introduced or taken away.

House is characterised by BPMs between 120 and 135, once again 4/4, and can also incorporate a wide range of influences on top of its primary beat structure - a 4-to-the-floor kick pattern. This kick forms the focus of any good house mix down, and it is complimented by snares on the 2 and the 4, and hats and shakers for movement and drive.

The kick drum pulse of house makes it very obvious what the groove is, making it easy to dance to, oftentimes either the bass, or sometimes the entire mix, is side-chained against the kick to produce a signature ducking sound (Prydz, 2004), further accentuating the kick.

The reference track (Chase & Status, 2010) also follows the tension-release formula laid out by Solberg with its use of a riser, introduction of bass and kick drum and contrasting breakdowns. The verse and pre-chorus sections do not have a beat behind them, building to the drop which features a kick drum after the drop which is side-chained against the bass, guitar and looped vocal - giving the ducking sound discussed previously. In these senses it is part of the EDM family, and the notes about tension and release from the previous section still apply here (Solberg, 2014, p1), however this is not a classic House record.

Structurally, House tracks will generally have an introduction of beats so that DJs can beat-mix tunes together, a technique pioneered during the hey-day of disco, however Let You Go forgoes this for an introduction with vocals and pads. The VIP and Feed Me remixes address this issue, but the structure of the original is instructive: this is a piece written for radio and subsequent live performances, not for DJs to play.

Written in B flat, *Let You Go* features extensive use of power chords. These chords feature the root and the fifth only, by leaving out the third it gives the chord ambiguity but also means it sounds much better with heavily distorted guitars as the ratios of the notes are 3:2 (Robert Walser (1993)) A common extension of this idea is to add a 7th note while still excluding the third. These guitars are then side-chained against the kick drum and EQed to make them sound like a brick wall.

Flashback starts with an arpeggiated guitar riff ala *Sweet Child O' Mine* (Guns & Roses, 1987). Slash's lead guitar is focused on an arpeggiation that has only the first note of each round descending, giving the sense of the chord changes while the majority of the

notes are actually the same. When it moves to the pre-chorus, the track features a very prominent, heavily-processed guitar playing power chords.

The guitar is built around the descending motif of G#-F#-F-E. In the verse this is not fully realised, so this motif only plays G#-F#-F before going back to the G#. In the pre-chorus these notes are incorporated into power chords on the guitar, so while the bottom notes are still descending in that motif, there is a perfect 4th above the F instead of the C, effectively inverting the chord. This idea to tease the pre-chorus chords in the verse can also be heard in Let You Go.

The climax of *Flashback* is the drop - getting the guitars working with the kick, and having the side-chain pump in a musical fashion is integral to the reference, and extremely important here. To achieve the guitar sound MIDI guitar sounds were run through Guitar Rig and then layered - a few different rigs with different EQ and effect settings - to nail the sound. This approach was preferable to recording a real guitar as there is not much to the performance - the end sound is key, and the ability to tweak and control as many of those parameters throughout the production and mixing stages was preferential.

The drums were kept quite dry for an in-your-face feel for the rhythm section, a common house technique - all the space being provided by the guitars. The kick EQ was tweaked to get it to fit in with the bass & guitar, and they were then heavily compressed to glue the sound together.

Upon reflection, I feel that the structure and overall feel of the Flashback adheres too closely to the reference tune - not surprising given my familiarity with the source material. The chords and chord structure are overall different, so to move this track forward towards release i think a different tempo and some varied arrangement need to be experimented with. I am happy with how the guitars and the overall mix sounds, and gets close to the reference - the vocal demo (ably performed by fellow student Scott Curtis) may have benefited from a different voice - something with more power.

Passed Me By

Rock, referenced here with We Will Rock You (Queen, 1977) and Dead & Bloated (Stone Temple Pilots, 1992) is characterised by instrumentation that is almost invariably bass, guitar and drums, perhaps with a keyboard. The time signature is generally 4/4 and while

it's tempo can vary, we'll be working around the 70-90 BPM range - perfect for stadium singalongs.

Vocals make up the focus of any Rock mix, and arrangement - as songs are generally in a verse-chorus-bridge format, but they are usually fighting in the mid-range with the distorted guitars. While themes of alienation and angst are common in the grunge era, Rock has a long tradition of protest songs.

Dead & Bloated features extensive use of power chords as discussed previously. Due to many guitars playing shapes on the neck, and moving them around, there is a high prevalence of chromaticism - with many incidentals. (creativeguitarstudio, 2013)

Rock's production techniques, particularly from the halcyon era of the references, were centred around large recording budgets and expensive studios. Brendan O'Brien, producer of Stone Temple Pilot's debut album (All Music, 2021), made liberal use of the room sound at Southern Tracks for his drum sounds, and got a very aggressive vocal sound through heavy compression which he would generally then double-track and add chorus. (Beato, R, 2016)

In a significant departure from the reference material, all the instruments are electronic instead of "real." While this was a stylistic choice, there are also commercial considerations given the popularity of electronic production techniques in the musical zeitgeist and on the charts. It was important the heaviness and riff groove of the original Stone Temple Pilots reference were maintained. The synths are still very raw-sounding, and given the notes and rhythms they are playing, they still present a heavy rock groove.

Passed Me By begins with the classic kick-kick-snare pattern from We Will Rock You (Queen, 1977), albeit with bass and gang vox. As the composition develops, the notes have a number of incidentals to give it that grunge sound. It is arranged in a verse-chorus structure like most rock records. The verses alternate between A and F# in the bass, with no other notes - allowing the vocal to dictate the tonality giving the impression of an A7no5 and F#m.

For the chorus section, the bass synths start at C before sliding down an octave. The bass line plays C-D#-E-C-D#-F which again gives ambiguity to the nature of the chord while giving a heaving sense of chromaticism, even atonality, often associated with

grunge. To further give the groove some weight the baseline is swung on the 8th notes, as opposed to usually 16ths, giving a noticeable drag.

It was critical to get the drums and vocal sounding as big as possible. These 2 tracks were sent through some hardware processing, particularly the Neve 1176, in the Tileyard studio for added weight and authenticity resulting in a slamming vocal take and crunchy drums. This hardware processing was the last effect on the chain, so the drum reverbs and vocal chorusing, doubling and reverbs have all been subject to the compression and grit from the outboard gear.

The vocal processing on the “hey” is made up of about 40 different takes of the singer singing the word in a variety of different articulations, then panned across the entire stereo field before being added in with the other vocal processing. This produces a gang vocal that ties into the political themes of the lyrics, and gives a sense of an angry crowd. The Queen reference is actually a live rendition of We Will Rock You, and these gang vocals were recorded with Queen’s iconic live shows in mind.

The synth snippets and the gunshot sample were included to further differentiate this track from a rock record while adhering stylistically in other areas. Their origin can be heard in Nero’s You and Me (Nero, 2010), but (along with the sampled gunshot) are also informed by Hip Hop’s cut and paste aesthetic, exemplified by Coldcut’s remix of Paid in Full (Eric B. & Rakim, 1987)

I think that Passed Me By fails as a “classic” rock track, but has morphed into something altogether more interesting with its synths instead of guitars aesthetic. Perhaps if I had to produce it again, guitars could have a place in the tune however the smooth slide down the octave from one C to the low C is not something easily replicable on a guitar, and getting that C note is very rare given how uncommon Drop-C tuning is. The synth work enhances the sound.

Given the heritage of the reference material, there is certainly scope to offer remixes featuring either a full band or accompaniment just an acoustic guitar.

Conclusion

In this work we examined three commercial musical works in three different genres, and analysed how these works both conform and deviate from the chosen frameworks of the

both the genres and the reference tunes. We then compared three original works presented in Element 1 to the reference works and the genres before analysing the resultant works, how they conformed to the genre and what could be done differently given the opportunity. WE've also looked at how the decisions made during the production process are affected by both commercial and artistic considerations.

Bibliography

All Music, 2021. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brendan-obrien-mn0000514979/credits>

Attias, B. Gravano, A. Rietveld, H. (2013) *DJ Culture in the Mix: Power, Technology, and Social Change in Electronic Dance Music* Accessed 30 Mar 2021

Baxter, Phil, 2021, Composition and Arranging class, Tileyard Education

Beato, R, 2016. Music Production - Brendan O'Brien Music Production Techniques Explained <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFw4LAWvEXs>

Bring Me The Horizon, 2019, *Bring Me The Horizon - Mother Tongue (Sub Focus Remix)*, YouTube, viewed 7 April. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hdcpiDTjvc>

Case A 2007 Sound FX: Unlocking the Creative Potential of Recording Studio Effects

Charles R. Cross - *Here We Are Now: The Lasting Impact of Kurt Cobain* 2014

Christodoulou, C. (2014) *Waiting for the Bass to Drop: Correlations Between Intense Emotional Experiences and Production Techniques in Build-up and Drop Sections of Electronic Dance Music*, <https://dj.dancecult.net/index.php/dancecult/article/view/451/457> Accessed 13 Apr 2021

Computer Music (2020) Producer Masterclass - Sub Focus, accessed March 30. Available at: <https://www.musicradar.com/news/producer-masterclass-sub-focus-working-with-vsts-seemed-quite-natural-for-me-but-for-a-lot-of-hardware-producers-it-was-a-difficult-transition>

Chase & Status, 2010, *Chase & Status - Let You Go ft. Mali*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBFEBEOTGXc>

creativeguitarstudio (2013). GUITAR THEORY: Chromatic Harmony Essentials <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXVJPU5rN2o&ab> Accessed 30 Mar 2021

Cyril B - Producer Masterclass Sub Focus (drum 'n' bass producers) - 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jaw4aRmmqA8>

Eric B. & Rakim 1987 - Paid In Full (Coldcut Remix), 1987, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDBeSszh8Ok>

Eric Prydz, 2004, *Eric Prydz - Call On Me (HD)*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3hbKFaoAeE>

Grammy Award Winning Producer Brendan O'Brien- Interview Pt.1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7sCoH8E7DI>

Grossman, P. (1996). Identity Crisis: The Dialectics of Rock, Punk, and Grunge. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 41, 19-40. Retrieved April 8, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41035517>

Guns and Roses, 1987, Guns N' Roses - Sweet Child O' Mine, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1w7OgIMMRc4>

HODGSON, JAY. "A Field Guide to Equalisation and Dynamics Processing on Rock and Electronica Records." *Popular Music*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2010, pp. 283–297. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40926923. Accessed 9 Apr. 2021.

Jungle Brothers, 1997, *Jungle Brothers - Jungle Brother (Urban Takeover Remix)*, YouTube, viewed 7 April. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojFrFDnqXyw>

Langlois, Tony. "Can You Feel It? DJs and House Music Culture in the UK." *Popular Music*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1992, pp. 229–238. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/852943. Accessed 9 Apr. 2021.

Laing, R 2017. <https://www.musicradar.com/news/dean-deleo-on-stone-temple-pilots-core-track-by-track-there-was-an-innocence-yet-a-determination>

Osborn, Brad. "Subverting the Verse–Chorus Paradigm: Terminally Climactic Forms in Recent Rock Music." *Music Theory Spectrum*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2013, pp. 23–47. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/mts.2013.35.1.23. Accessed 10 Apr. 2021.

Marley, B, 2013, *Bob Marley - I shot the sheriff (Roni Size Remix)*, YouTube, viewed 7 April.

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qy7h1dshtpU>

Mazullo, Mark. "The Man Whom the World Sold: Kurt Cobain, Rock's Progressive Aesthetic, and the Challenges of Authenticity." *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 4, 2000, pp. 713–749. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/742606. Accessed 10 Apr. 2021.

MONTANO, ED. "How Do You Know He's Not Playing Pac-Man While He's Supposed to Be DJing?": Technology, Formats and the Digital Future of DJ Culture." *Popular Music*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2010, pp. 397–416. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40926942. Accessed 9 Apr. 2021.

Nero, 2010, Nero Me and You, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE47er6qnqg>

Noys, B. (1995). 'Into the Jungle'. *Popular Music*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1995, pp. 321–332. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/853128. Accessed 30 Mar 2021

Quinn, S. (2002) *Rumble In The Jungle: The Invisible History of Drum'n'Bass*. http://www.transformationsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Transformations03_Quinn.pdf Accessed 30 Mar 2021

Pendulum. 2005 *Prelude* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oe_hyRjCP5I

Rag'n'Bone Man, 2021, *Rag'n'Bone Man - All You Ever Wanted (Sub Focus Remix)*
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hdcpjDTjvc>

Reitsamer, R. (2011) *The DIY Careers of Techno and Drum 'n' Bass DJs in Vienna* <https://www.dj.dancecult.net/index.php/dancecult/article/view/315/309> Accessed 1 Apr 2021

Robert Walser (1993). *Running with the Devil*, p.43. ISBN 0-8195-6260-2.

Quote Investigator, 2013 - <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/03/18/incredible/>

Queen, 1977, 22. *We Will Rock You - Queen Live in Montreal 1981 [1080p HD Blu-Ray Mux]* [youtube.com/watch?v=TfhhGILPchc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfhhGILPchc)

Stone Temple Pilots, 1992, *Stone Temple Pilots - Dead and Bloated*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdCEPhNBnrM>

Sub Focus, 2019, *Sub Focus - Solar System (Visualiser)*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUebWv_QXCM

U2 Where The Streets Have No Name, 1987. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzZWSrr5wFI>