

Berklee College of Music
Culminating Experience Paper

Outward, then Inward:
Artistic Consistency in Genre Inconsistency

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of
Master of Music Production Technology and Innovation

Supervisors: Pablo Munguía, Daniel Castelar, Elysha Zaide

By Ethan Eugene Toga

Valencia Campus, Spain

June, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Acknowledgements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iii
Abstract	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iv
Introduction	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Review of the State of the Art	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Description	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Innovative Aspects	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
New Skills Acquired	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Challenges	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Future Ramifications	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Conclusions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Appendix	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Bibliography	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I want to thank Dani Castelar, who first inspired this project, when I felt very lost at the beginning of this program, and who gave me advice on recording, mixing, and more, every step of the way.

Elysha Zaide, who stepped in, unaware of what my project was, and brought a new and refreshing perspective. Especially with regards to the more electronic side of this project.

Pablo Munguía, for the detailed mix feedback, and being flexible with me when early on, I decided to make a huge pivot in the direction of my CE project.

I want to thank my peers who assisted on this EP. I couldn't have brought my dream to life without your help, and I'm so incredibly grateful. Matty, Quinn, Mike, Rodrigo, and more... I hope to count you among my friends and collaborators for years to come.

Finally, thank you to all my friends and family. You got me here. I wouldn't be where I am, without your support, and I certainly wouldn't have anything to write music about.

ABSTRACT:

This project aimed to create an EP with no commitment to genre consistency, that still retained a consistent artistic voice. This endeavor began with a review of existing works that have a diverse genre composition. This author (The Artist) conducted this review, and then wrote/recorded six songs, with the assistance of a Co-Producer, Engineer, and various session musicians. Each song was treated with complete creative freedom to incorporate any and all desired instrumentation or production techniques. The Artist and Production Team then discerned whether the work had achieved its goal of being stylistically inconsistent, while artistically consistent, or if the songs were too eclectic to work as a unit. They found it had met this goal, by virtue of having the same core creative team behind each song. Hopefully, this project will inspire other artists and producers to push the boundaries of genre, and use extreme variation to their benefit.

INTRODUCTION:

When a musical artist releases a body of work, they traditionally identify a genre, that their work falls into. Usually this label is a product of the arrangement and instrumentation of the album, as well as the influences that the artist considered when writing it. Throughout the timeline of music history, and today is no exception, Artists have mixed genres they find inspirational, in their own music. This is how new genres emerge. However, rarely do artists abandon genre loyalty entirely.

This project will aim to do just that. The Artist has been pulled in the direction of many different genres over the past few years, including Hip-Hop, Folk, Americana, Rock, Punk, Cinematic, Electronic, and Pop. Rather than take those influences and draw them inwards, The Artist will attempt to leap between them. The goal is to create a group of songs, that are diverse in songwriting technique, arrangement, and instrumentation; and see if a consistent artistic voice emerges on its own. If no consistency emerges organically, then the Artist and Production team will make the necessary changes to bring that consistency to life.

In the pursuit of finding “their sound” many artists may box themselves in, by attempting to distill the vast range of their influences into a unique but narrow “sound”. The Artist will try to push back against that convention, by showing that it’s possible to have strong thematic ties within a body of work, while also having extreme diversity of sound.

REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE ART:

Genre, like most labels, is a useful descriptor. It can be used as a tool to help express to the audience what they should expect when they pick up your record. However, as time goes on, more and more musicians have begun to blur the lines between genres. Blending them together, or performing them separately under the same name.

In the modern day, Jon Bellion's *The Human Condition*, is a fantastic example of this blend. Bellion draws from influences in folk music, hip-hop, pop, and more, to create a sound that is extremely unique.¹ Bellion pulls the laid back drum grooves and beat-driven melodies from hip-hop. He pulls his lyricism straight out of the folk and americana tradition, mixed with some pop sensibilities for mass appeal. His style can be described by the line: "*It's Dilla in the pocket, but it's so Paul Simon*" from the song Pre-Occupied, off an earlier album. Bellion manages to package big ideas in an accessible format. He combined his favorite genres of hip-hop, and singer-songwriter, with his knowledge of pop writing, to create something that was diverse, with broad appeal, but still artistically honest.

Another modern example of someone blending genres or using them separately, is The 1975's *A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships*. This album has a unique sound to almost every track. The linking factors are the lead singer, Matty Healy's, voice, and some instrumentation crossovers. The album manages to span the genres of rock, indie, RnB, folk, and

¹ Ahmad, Khan. 2014. "No Genre: An Introduction To Jon Bellion". *Huffpost.Com*.
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/no-genre-an-introduction-_b_5565470?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAC_2EDlu2JBO7U94G8Rrm1vA3VcwMm_AHMte0m2Pj6D_-cVYw6h7BU4M_kdHvQ2MnGez0PqjalQPbR0oyPXqztYvfuv9F6a2Hd-j_LyhW9fGgyOgGkn85wRtB4-k1kM5mhPaUySal5qj8SMFXuegsBZzWq2v1vJq8bemYch5xGq7.

electronica, all under one name. It ranges from the Rock-ish sound of *Give Yourself A Try*, to the heavy electronic instrumentation from *I Like America and America Likes Me*, to the acoustic singer-songwriter feel of *Be My Mistake*, to the hip-hop and RnB influenced track *Sincerity is Scary*. The album still feels cohesive, but keeps the listener interested, by constantly changing the feel/instrumentation, while still having the same creative team behind it.² The ever constant creative team, fronted by Matty Healy, is the linking factor in the music.

The artists' tastes and sensibilities, carry forward through the music, regardless of the genre providing the foundation. However, the genre exploration usually takes the shape of a sound that's somewhere in between the artists' influences, rather than the sound being drastically different across songs.³

Even when Artists in the past have elected to create bodies of work that contain songs of wildly different genres, with clear separation. It has often been as parody of the original genre, with the purpose of co-opting that sound to drive a point home. This often results in the music having a sort of comedic flair. The Beatles did this with various concept pieces⁴, as well as The Turtles, who released an album called *Battle of the Bands* in 1968. The Turtles portrayed a different band for each song, and they played a different genre as well. This ranged from Latin,

² Brigid, Walshe. 2019. "Looking Back: The 1975'S A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships". *The Cowl*. <https://www.thecowl.com/arts-entertainment/looking-back-the-1975s-a-brief-inquiry-into-online-relationships>.

³ Neil, Shah. 2019. "The Year Genre-Bending Artists Took Over Pop Music". *WSJ*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-future-of-music-is-blending-rap-rock-pop-and-country-11577541601>.

⁴ Michael, Connolly. 2015. "Genre And Parody In The Music Of The Beatles". *Open.Library.Ubc.Ca*. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0167202>.

to Rock, to Bluegrass, with band names and music bordering on satirical.⁵ However, The Turtles had the help of outside songwriters when formulating their genre-bending entry.

This EP will attempt to go further than the references above, in the sense that, rather than having a core style, influenced by a range of genres, or creating a parodical catalogue, each song will start with a single unique genre, and be written by The Artist alone. It will then grow from there, with no obligatory loyalty whatsoever, to the starting genre. The goal is to create a body of work that is incredibly diverse, but still consistent with the voice and identity of The Artist.

DESCRIPTION:

This project aimed to create an EP with no commitment to genre consistency, that still retains a consistent artistic voice. The project can be broken into three stages: Writing/Arrangement, Recording, and Post-Production (Mixing, Mastering etc...).

The writing and arrangement process of the tracks was completed over the first 5 months of the project timeline. The Artist compiled a collection of new songs, as well as old songs reformatted to work as a part of this project. They started the project with a goal of making a 4-track EP, but quickly amended that to a 6-track EP, when they realized that there was even more viable material to work with.

Each song was started with a single, unique, genre in-mind, but quickly evolved beyond that scope, due to the amount of freedom allowed, and the goals of the project. The first song on the EP, for example, began as a bluesy solo acoustic piece, but rapidly transformed into a punk

⁵ Bill, Kopp. 2019. "They Showed Us: 'The Turtles Present The Battle Of The Bands' At 40". *Musoscribe: Bill Kopp's Music Magazine*. <http://blog.musoscribe.com/index.php/2019/03/11/they-showed-us-the-turtles-present-the-battle-of-the-bands-at-40/>.

influenced, dirty-guitar driven anthem, with a full band. The fourth song, began as an electronic piece, that evolved into pop/rap, when The Artist noticed that lyrics might work on top of it. It's important to note, that all lyrics, chords, and melodies were penned by The Artist, in an effort to maintain some solid link between the eclectic collection of songs. The Artist believed that had other writers assisted, it may have diminished the relationship between the songs.

The initial recording for this project began in January, after all writing had concluded, and arrangement was nearly finalized. The first recordings for this project involved only the songs that required a full band to be present, as these would require the most intensive recording and post-production process. This meant that the post-production work could begin, and continued arrangement of these songs could occur, while the recording for the other songs was still in process. Over the following two months, with the help of an Engineer, and Co-Producer; The Artist recorded the basic elements of all 6 songs, either in the AKSS, or in their home studio. On some songs, the team elected to use the Berklee studios, for a more polished sound, but on others, they purposely chose to record and produce in a home-studio environment, to make sure that that flavor was present in the music. For songs that required more in-the-box production, this time was used to fine-tune the electronic and sound-design elements in the music.

Lastly, the post-production process of mixing and mastering, began in April, and continued through the end of the project timeline. During this time, The Artist, and assisting Engineers worked through all of the tracks, refining, and cleaning up the sounds recorded earlier in the year. They made creative decisions within the mix, to help support the diverse stylistic choices made in the writing process. For example, songs with more “real” instrumentation, played by The Artist's band, were mixed in the style of records that include a full band, with a more “live” feel. While songs that were more poppy and produced, were mixed with a tighter,

punchier, polished feel. The goal was to have each song transport the listener to a totally different space, supported by lyricism, instrumentation, and mix; linked to the previous space only through The Artist's creative sentiment.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS:

While many artists in the past, have attempted to combine, or switch, the genres they compose within; this work is innovative because of the creative team behind it, the depth of diversity, and because of the techniques employed. Many artists, when attempting to combine genres, or float between them, will bring in outside writer, or producers, to help them achieve the desired sound. In this case, The Artist has elected to write all the songs alone, and do the majority of production alone as well. This is to ensure that the songs are linked by having the same creative team behind them, in contrast to prior works that have employed various other creators familiar with the desired style.

In addition, many of these artists that play with multiple styles, will not stray too far from their core, including the characteristics of only two or three different genres within a single body of work. This Artist, has included more styles, with greater differences between them, than the majority of predecessors. For example, jumping directly from a heavy, electronic, rap-piece, straight into an emotional, solo acoustic piece.

Nothing in art can truly be original, but the breadth of genres explored, and the consistent creative team, make this project innovative.

NEW SKILLS ACQUIRED:

After completing this project, this author (The Artist) found that they feel much more comfortable with the process of making a record. In all aspects. The Artist improved their capabilities within multiple DAW's (ProTools and Ableton), from both a practical and creative standpoint, while using these software's to meet their goals. The Artist also improved their engineering abilities, through the course of the many sessions required during this project. Finally, The Artist learned new collaborative skills. They had been hesitant to share the burden of this project with others, as it meant giving up some small amount of control. However, the timeline of this project necessitated the use of outside help for sessions, and instrumentation. The skills acquired in cooperation and collaboration will be invaluable to this author in the future.

CHALLENGES:

The challenges, like the work, can be broken into a few categories: Writing/Arrangement, Recording, and Production/Mixing.

Challenges during the writing process included time constraints, song-form concerns, and instrumentation decisions. The Artist struggled to complete some of the songs, by the deadline proposed, and so had to take a few extra weeks in January to finish the pieces. The Artist was familiar with all of the styles that they attempted to incorporate, but the precise way in which they would be employed, took quite a lot of time to figure out. The Artist was initially unfamiliar with Ableton Live and ProTools, but gained an extensive knowledge of both

programs, in order to write some of the more electronically based tracks; as well as self-produce and share the mixing process. Additionally, there were concerns about song-forms in some of the band rehearsals, where The Artist elected to rework the song-forms several times over, until they had something they were happy with. The Artist is normally quite protective of their work, so ceding to arrangement and instrumentation suggestions was difficult at first. However, The Artist soon realized the value of this outside output, as it spurred ideas that never would have happened in solitude.

During the recording process, the majority of challenges were with concern to engineering. The Artist was new to engineering and had to rely on the suggestions and support of some of their more experienced peers. It was difficult, but necessary, for the artist to give up some control in this field, to trusted Engineers. The Artist gained extensive knowledge of recording techniques and session flow, prior to, and during this project.

Finally, during the post-production, there was one main challenge: mixing. The Artist had the necessary skills to create the sounds they wanted, but lacked enough mixing experience to refine those sounds to the desired level. So The Artist was forced to bring in some help from outside Engineers to fine-tune the mixes that The Artist had completed earlier. Again, it was difficult for The Artist to give up some creative control through mixing, but they were present during all the mix sessions. This afforded The Artist the opportunity to give input, and learn through observation of the Engineer.

FUTURE RAMIFICATIONS:

The work, an EP entitled *All My Songs Are Questions*, will be released later this year via Disrupción Records. The Artist has formed a management team that is assisting with the promotion and distribution of this EP. The EP release will be preceded by three singles, each with their own artwork, for a total of four releases. The Artist intends to continue exploring the subversion of genre in their own music, as well as music they produce for other artists. The Artist hopes to create a flexible brand, so that their audience knows not to expect anything in particular. This will allow The Artist to continue reaching uninhibited in any direction they desire.

CONCLUSIONS:

Musical artists have distilled their influences into their own sound for thousands of years. In the modern era, there are a myriad of artists working to combine multiple genres, or exist as chameleonic artists, releasing projects of one genre, and then switching sounds for the next project. However, this author has created a body of work that is artistically cohesive, while being incredibly diverse in comparison to the aforementioned projects. The Artist has accomplished this without the help of outside songwriters, creating a strong link between songs, despite their drastic stylistic differences.

APPENDIX:

Team:

Artist: Ethan Toga

Songwriters: Ethan Toga

Producers: Ethan Toga, Mike Dodson, Quinn McGovern

Engineers: Ethan Toga, Mike Dodson, Rodrigo Branco, Phillippe Dionne

Musicians: Ethan Toga, Quinn McGovern, Matty Jontiff, Mike Dodson, Nic Phang

Budget and CE Timeline below:

ITEM	PROPOSED	REAL
MATERIALS		
Hard Drives	\$300	\$100
EQUIPMENT		
<u>Hardware:</u>		
Mics (rental) 10 days	\$400	\$0
Acoustic Guitar (purchase) 120 days	\$700	\$0
Alt. Monitors (purchase) 120 days	\$300	\$0
<u>Software:</u>		
Ableton (purchase)	\$500	\$0
Pro Tools (purchase)	\$600	\$0
PERSONNEL		
Musicians 4x100x4	\$1,600	\$0
Engineer	\$1,500	\$0
Co-Producer	\$4,000	\$0
STUDIO		
Berklee AKSS \$1000/day	\$5,000	\$0
Berklee STAD \$400/day	\$2,000	\$0
Home \$290/day	\$2,900	\$0
OVERHEAD/month (Personal Cost)		
Rent	\$750	\$750
Utilities	\$150	\$150
Sustenance	\$500	\$500
TOTAL:	1400x6= \$8,400	1400x6= \$8,400
FEES		
Producer's Fee	\$9,000	\$0
Mix Engineer's Fee \$200/track	\$1,000	\$250
FINAL TOTAL:	29,800	\$8,750

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Connolly, Michael. 2015. "Genre And Parody In The Music Of The Beatles". *Open.Library.Ubc.Ca*. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0167202>.

Dombal, Ryan. 2020. "The 1975'S Matty Healy On 9 Things That Inspired New Album Notes On A Conditional Form". *Pitchfork.Com*. <https://pitchfork.com/features/moodboard/the-1975-matty-healy-notes-on-a-conditional-form-interview/>.

Khan, Ahmad. 2014. "No Genre: An Introduction To Jon Bellion". *Huffpost.Com*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/no-genre-an-introduction-_b_5565470?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAC_2EDlu2JBO7U94G8Rrm1vA3VcwMm_AHMte0m2Pj6D_-cVYw6h7BU4M_kdHvQ2MnGez0PqjalQPbR0oyPXqztYvfuv9F6a2Hd-j_LyhW9fGgyOgGkn85wRtB4-k1kM5mhPaUySal5qj8SMFXuegsBZzWq2v1vJq8bemYch5xGq7.

Kopp, Bill. 2019. "They Showed Us: 'The Turtles Present The Battle Of The Bands' At 40". *Musoscribe: Bill Kopp's Music Magazine*. <http://blog.musoscribe.com/index.php/2019/03/11/they-showed-us-the-turtles-present-the-battle-of-the-bands-at-40/>.

Sanson, Jim. 2020. "Genre". *Oxford Music Online*. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040599;jsessionid=73911AA7D711398A8703E4FA421DA8F5>.

Shah, Neil. 2019. "The Year Genre-Bending Artists Took Over Pop Music". *WSJ*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-future-of-music-is-blending-rap-rock-pop-and-country-11577541601>.

Walshe, Brigid. 2019. "Looking Back: The 1975'S A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships". *The Cowl*. <https://www.thecowl.com/arts-entertainment/looking-back-the-1975s-a-brief-inquiry-into-online-relationships>.