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Paper 1#: Personal Music Profile

The Revealing Quality of our Favorite Music

In his article, “Me, On Shuffle”, Chuck Klosterman shares his belief that the music that we listen to and the reasons why we listen to it cannot be explained by any unified theory. Because of this, he believes that the commonplace practice of asking someone what music they listen to at social gatherings is useless small talk. I both agree and disagree with Klosterman’s idea. I believe that knowing what particular type of elements of music someone enjoys are pretty universal, and so do not tell us anything specific about the listener. However the specific artists and genres that we are exposed to depend a lot on our surroundings and can reveal information about us through discrete stereotypes connected to race/geographic location/age.

My own musical taste exhibits this trend. Here I’ve tried to follow in Klosterman’s footsteps and make a partial list of my own favorite songs, and what I think draws me to them:

**Pink Floyd- “Wish you were here”:** The delicate guitar strumming that introduces us to this song followed by the louder guitar strumming that finally leads us to the first verse. The passionate, very deliberate vocals and instrumentation really gives me the goosebumps.

**Joanna Newsom-“Emily”:** Newsom’s distinct singing style presents a haunting, nostalgic piece of what can only be described as poetry. The waves of her voice washing over my eardrums, complemented by a distinct plucking instrument and the string instrument, create something beautiful.

**Magnetic fields-“Yeah! Oh, Yeah!”:** The relatively loud instrumentation, compared to the vocals, that stay in more or less the same pitch throughout the song, blends perfectly. Although repetitive, this song is just pure aural pleasure.

**Avalanches-“Frontier Psychiologist”:** The amazingly fluid yet at the same time abrupt combination of the samples incites my awe.

**Kanye West- “Dark Fantasy”:** The way the sweet, uplifting hook juxtaposes with the flow of the verses.

**Built to Spill-“Randy Described Eternity”:** That passionate instrumentation and the emotional vocals.

**Radiohead-“Exit Music (for a film)”:** The haunting voice of Thom Yorke saying, “Wake,” as he enters the song after a quiet intro. Also how the song changes in deliberate steps, all leading up to a release about 200 seconds into the song.

**LCD Soundsystem- “Dance Yrself Clean”:** The long anticipated drop at 3:08 that forces me, without fail, to get up and air-drum.

**Cunnilynguists – “Lynguistics”:** The mesmerizing violin beat looping in the background.

**David Bowie- “Five Years”:** The parallel structure of the song. It begins with a very slow drum beat, then goes off into the verses, with many different moods. Then at the end of the song, he ends with the same slow drum beat.

**MBV-“When You Sleep”:**  The way that every instrument, including the voice, work together to convince us of each musicians’ over-flowing passion.

**Spiritualized- “Ladies and Gentlemen We are Floating into Space”:** The soft, cathartic end after every single line, in addition to the layers upon layers of vocals and instrumentation.

**Neutral milk hotel-“Two Headed Boy”:** The incredible amount of emotion that Jeff Mangum puts into every single word.

**Tame impala-“Feels Like We Only Go Backwards”:** The unique way that synth and classic rock are

intertwined.

**Velvet Underground- “Heroin”:** How the instrumentation dissolves into chaotic craziness to emulate feelings relevant to heroin use.

**Bob Dylan-“Mr. Tambourine Man”:** The absolutely spectacular imagery in the lyricism.

Reviewing these songs, and what I liked about them, the elements of the music that appeal to me the most are those with vocals/instrumentation that teem with emotion and passion. Also prevalent in my list are songs that juxtapose two discordant sounds. I also tend to like when the music is on the complete opposite side of the spectrum: when the sound is relatively homogenous and works together to create a wall of sound that blends together the different components of the music.

I think these elements of music that I enjoy really don’t say anything about me. Passion is something that most demographics seem to enjoy in music. Songs that use juxtaposed sounds also are relatively common in music and so are songs that go for a more homogenous sound. Although, as we learned in class, homogenous and heterogeneous sounds are the ideal in different cultures, in the world today, where we are exposed to music drawing its roots from places from all over the world, these elements do nothing in particular to point at my own demographics.

Although someone would not be able to tell anything specific about me through the elements of music that I value, I do believe that the specific artists that I listen to do tell a lot about me. Firstly, The indie style music (from both the 00’s and the 90’s) that is on the list points to the fact that I’m probably younger, probably between 17-30 years old. That same fact that I listen to a lot of indie music from that era says that I’m probably on the internet a lot, as a lot of the music that I enjoy is very popular on internet blogs. Therefore it would be a safe assumption that I come from a middle class family, and the computer/internet is something easily available to me. Someone attempting to make assumptions of me based upon my favorite music might also assume that I am not black because there is not a large amount of hip hop, which is stereotypically black music, on the list. In addition to the factual assumptions that could be made, there are also some incorrect ones that someone might make. People could assume that I’m older after seeing the Bob Dylan, the Pink Floyd, and the Velvet Underground. Overall, however, most of the assumptions people would make would be correct.

To further elucidate my point about the utility of the abstract elements of the music versus the specific artists in learning about a person, imagine a similar analysis of a random 65 year old, African American woman who is from the Midwest. It’s very likely she may have similar elements of music that she enjoys, as they are very core elements of music found in many different genres from all different cultures. However, it’s unlikely that she is well-acquainted with the same artists that I listen to as she comes from a completely different background, and it’s not probable for her to have encountered the same music that I have through her life.

This hypothetical example, along with my own list of elements and songs, I think clearly demonstrates the uselessness of knowing what elements of music a person is inclined toward, while also shows how useful a list of someone’s favorite musicians/songs can be at homing in on their demographics and background. People who agree with Klosterman should consider being more open to questions about their music when meeting new people, as such questions are truly valuable in learning more about a new acquaintance.