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Writing Assignment #1

Since the 60’s, *it can be shown objectively*[1] that popular music in the US has *lowered*[2] in quality. For this argument *I will define popular music*[3] as music from artists that appear on charts such as the Billboards.

In 2012 and article was published called “Measuring the Evolution of Contemporary Western Popular Music”. The *article describes*[4] that results of an intensive study of over 500,000 songs ranging back to 1955. The *research chose*[5] three areas of focus in songs, Harmonic Complexity, Timbre and Loudness.

Harmonic Complexity is *basically*[6] the measure of how many different pitches (notes) are in a song. Timbre is the character of a musical sound. For example, if you play the same note on a piano and a guitar, timbre is the word that describes the characteristics that differ between the two instruments. Loudness describes a subjective perception of sound pressure. In other words, volume.

The changes in Harmonic Complexity are relatively *small*[7] compared to Timbre and Loudness. In the timeframe observed, Timbre has *dropped*[8] while Loudness has *increased*[9]. How did this happen? *I’ll start with Timbre*[10].

To exemplify the difference of timbre I would point you to “Hey Jude” released by the Beatles in 1968 and “God’s Plan” release by Drake in 2017. Both songs spent several weeks at the number one spot on the billboards and by that standard could be considered the artists *most popular*[11] song.

*However*[12], that production was quite a bit different. “Hey Jude” was recorded using analog devices, 7 instruments (if you don’t include the orchestra version) and 4 vocalists. “God’s Plan” on the other hand was recorded with digital equipment, 1 synthesizer and one vocalist. The synthesizer in the song emulates 4 distinctly different sounds and a drum line (Yes, I counted![13]).

*To total this up*[14], “Hey Jude” contains 7 distinctly different instrumental sounds and 4 vocal sounds. Or a total of 11 distinctly difference sources of timbre. *Whereas*[15] “God’s Plan” 5 distinctly different instrumental sounds and 1 vocal sound, or 6 distinctly difference sources of timbre. To reiterate, *that’s an 11 to 6 difference*[16].

Analog versus digital recording is a *slightly*[17] *more complex topic*[18]. Whether or not analog sounds better than digital is subjective. *Because*[19] of *how the conversion from analog to digital works*[20], *it can*[21] be demonstrated how we as the lister, get *less*[22] music when listening to digital recordings. Digital conversion works by capturing pieces of sound waves as a fixed sample rate. The problem is that everything between the sample rates are *lost*[23] in the process. In short[24], the listener is receiving *less*[25] music when listening to digital recordings than analog.

It is *difficult*[26] to pinpoint why popular music in the US has changed so much in the last 60 years. Breakthroughs in recording technologies is an obvious suspect for the digital versus analog situation *but*[27] eventually technology will get to a point where “lossless conversion” is possible. Creative decisions by musicians that have led to *less*[28] variety in timbre are harder to explain and outside of the argument.

*In conclusion*[29], musical tastes are largely subjective. *Who’s to say what a person should or shouldn’t listen to*[30]? *However*[31], through technological advances in recording technique and artistic decisions, the quality of American pop music has measurably *decreased*[32] in quality.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/srep00521>

1. AM
2. E-
3. G
4. A
5. A
6. G
7. E-
8. E-
9. E+
10. A
11. E+
12. D
13. R
14. AM
15. D
16. CM
17. G
18. A
19. RM
20. A
21. G
22. E-
23. E-
24. CM
25. E-
26. G
27. D
28. E-
29. CM
30. R
31. D
32. E-

Modern pop music uses less instruments

Instruments add timbre to music

~~~Modern pop has less timbre

Digital recordings capture less sound than analog

Modern pop uses digital recordings

~~~Modern pop recordings have less music captured

Modern pop has less timbre

Modern pop recordings capture less music

~~~The quality of music has decreased