<p>This is a story about proving, with data, that No Diggity by Blackstreet is timeless.</p>

<p>Until recently, it was impossible to measure the popularity of older music. Billboard charts and

album

sales

only

tell us about a song’s popularity at the time of its release.</p>

<p>But now we have Spotify, a buffet of all of music, new and old. Tracks with fewer plays are fading

into

obscurity. And those with more plays are remaining in the cultural ether.</p>

<p>20 years have passed since No Diggity's release. Its popularity on Spotify, relative to every other

song

from

the

90s, is a strong signal for whether it will be remembered by our children’s children. So let's

examine

every

song that ever charted, 1990 - 1999, and rank them by number of plays on Spotify, today.</p>

<p><b>Out of the entire catalog of music from the 90s, these are the tracks on the trajectory to

survive.

</b> Some

of

my

friends were deeply disturbed by what's been lost in time (e.g., Pearl Jam). And No Diggity isn’t

just

anecdotally timeless, it’s the fifth most-played song from the 90s.</p>

<p>Note the tracks that hardly charted on Billboard, in their day. Smells Like Teen Spirit, a track that

never

reached the Billboard Top 5 when it was released in 1992, is now the most-played song from the 90s.

</p>

<p>Using Spotify plays, we can also see which rappers are still remembered from the early days of hip

hop

(e.g.,

Biggie vs. Tupac).</p>

<p>Biggie has three of the Top 10 hip-hop songs between 1986 and 1999. This is a strong signal that

future

generations will remember Biggie as the referent artist of 80s and 90s hip-hop. And there's No

Diggity

as

the

top – perhaps it's that glorious Dr. Dre verse.</p>

<p>Hip hop heads will lament the omission of Rakim, Public Enemy, or Jay-Z’s Reasonable Doubt. It’s a

depressing

reality that exists for every genre and generation: not every artist will be remembered. The

incoming

generation

will control what’s relevant from the 90s and carried into the future, independant of quality and

commercial

success. For rock, that might be Blink-182. For electronica, that might be Sandstorm.</p>

<p><b>Past popularity doesn’t always translate into present-day popularity.</b> Here's how that

manifests

across

all

genres

and decades.</p>

<p>For the entire 1980s, Don’t Stop Believin’ is the most-played song on Spotify. This song barely

charted

on

Billboard. From the 70’s: Bohemian Rhapsody. If we were to time travel to either decade, no one

would

reasonably

believe that these two songs would be cultural touchstones for their respective decades in 2015.</p>

<p><b>Over time, our biggest stars will fade, and sometimes surprising acts emerge.</b> Let's examine

this

pattern to better understand the present-day popularity of historic superstars.</p>

<p>Here are the top-5 tracks from the 90s, along with Billboard performance in the year of each song's

release

date.

</p>

<p>There were 41 more popular songs in 1991 than Smells Like Teen Spirit: End Of The Road (Boyz II Men),

Baby

Got

Back (Sir Mix Alot), Save The Best For Last (Vanessa Williams), and I'm Too Sexy (Right Said Fred).

</p>

<p>Since 1992, these songs have slowly faded from culture with the incoming generation, whereas

Nirvana’s

music

has

not only maintained its popularity, but augmented it.</p>

<p>For example, in 1961, Bobby Lewis’s Tossin’ and Turnin’ spent 7 weeks at #1. For all intents and

purposes,

Bobby

Lewis was the Beyonce of 1961. Yet, have you heard of it? Do you know who Bobby Lewis is?</p>

<p>Meanwhile, Etta James’ debut album dropped the same year, with At Last peaking on Billboard at #68.

</p>

<p>Music historians will regard Bobby Lewis as a pioneer in rock and roll and R&B, yet whatever led to

Tossin’

and

Turnin’s popularity in 1961 has faded over time. His music, for countless reasons, didn’t persevere

in

the

same

way as Etta James’.</p>

<p>One hypothesis: Tossin’ and Turnin’s success had more to do than just the song...perhaps Bobby Lewis

was

a

huge

personality. Great looks. Amazing dancer. <b>When we examine pop hits, popularity is so much more

than

song

quality.</b></p>

<p>But future generations don’t remember Bobby Lewis’s dancing and good looks. Spotify only catalogues

his

music.

And unfortunately, that quality didn’t endure in the same way as At Last. (And of course, we have

not

even

considered the role of covers, samples, and movie soundtracks, etc. – a future project to

undertake).

</p>

<p>And for this reason, it will be weird to hear future generations reverently listen to groups such as

Nickelback –

the kids only know their music, not what they culturally stood for in 2015.</p>

<p>Thus far we’ve only examined two sets of data points: popularity at release (Billboard) and

popularity

today

(Spotify).</p>

<p>Yet, we don’t know what happened in-between: a song’s trajectory from peak popularity until today. If

we

had

such

data points, we’d be able to understand how major cultural events or changes in taste influenced the

trajectory

of a song.</p>

<p>With Spotify, we have so much more detail: daily playcounts. We can understand a track's decay rate

from

its

peak

popularity: whether it’s quickly fading from culture or holding steady to be played by future

generations.

</p>

<p>If we were to review “Best of 2013” lists, Daft Punk’s Get Lucky and Robin Thicke’s Blurred Lines

would

be

the

cultural touchstones. Get Lucky won the Grammy for Record of the Year and Blurred Lines was

nominated.

</p>

<p>If my children's children were to ask what we listened to in 2013, I'd pick either of Pharrell’s

collaborations

or someone like Calvin Harris.</p>

<p>But that was two years ago, and we expect popularity to fade. Today, one track in particular has the

most

interesting trajectory: OneRepublic’s Counting Stars. Counting Stars never had breakout success

following

its

release, yet it has managed to stay in the cultural zeitgeist for more than a year after its peak

popularity.

</p>

<p>One hypothesis: Counting Stars had a chance to spread organically via word-of-mouth since its April

2013

release,

cascading from indie music circles to casual listeners. Get Lucky, on the other hand, dominated

music

channels

in its heyday. Most people likely heard the track via mass media rather than friends.</p>

<p>When a track experiences such a rapid ascent, it’s a deal with the devil: the song achieves

commercial

success,

but it also saturated culture in such a way that there’s immense listening fatigue among fans and

fad-like

connotations.</p>

<p>Lana Del Ray’s Young and Beautiful and Arctic Monkey’s Do I Wanna Know look like modern equivalents

of At

Last:

little commercial success on its release, but steady growth over time. Today in 2015, both tracks

are at

parity

with Royals and Get Lucky, and you’d probably never guess it.</p>

<p>What's still popular from different periods in history is almost never the obvious choice. Accolades,

Grammys,

and cultural dominance mean nothing to future generations.</p>

<p>The artists who have cult-followings and underground appeal: it’s a signal for some undefined musical

quality

that’s impossible for a hit song to replicate. Perhaps it means that they are culturally ahead of

their

time. Or

perhaps generations will feel obligated to share it, for fear of it fading.</p>

<p>Either way, time will tell.</p>