

Not All Critics are Creators

Many people build an internet following by reacting to and reviewing media such as other videos, episodes from television shows and of course, music. Weaver Beats has done just that, amassing 42.9K subscribers and thousands of views on every video as a self-proclaimed “Music Production Commentary Youtuber” (U/weaverbeats7). Although he is typically known only for his reactions to music, Weaver Beats came out with his latest album in November of 2022. One particular song (and music video) from this album has recently become a topic of interest on the r/crappysuic reddit page (U/twak2twak): “Follow Me.” Weaver Beats’ shift from music critic to creator has presented us with an opportunity to ask whether the ability to qualify music as good or bad gives you the ability to create good music of your own.

David Hume defines his criteria for true judges as those who have a “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice,” and these judges “can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty” (Hume 9). This true standard of taste and beauty thus helps us qualify “good” music against “bad.” Although it is difficult to say whether Weaver Beats has delicate sentiment and is cleared of all prejudices, he most definitely has a sense improved by practice and comparison simply due to the longevity of his YouTube channel and the number of reviews he has done. As we can see, Weaver Beats is at least partially qualified to deem a standard of taste in hip hop music, at least by Hume’s standards; however, these qualifications do not lend him the ability to create good music. In short, practice in critiquing music does not equate to practicing music performance.

Multiple commenters on Weaver Beats new song point out his lack of practice or skill: “could be way way brighter singing wise, 50 dollars of singing coaching for an hour could go a

very long way” (@genuinefreewilly5706), “You may need to stop and come back later. In fact, it would be better to only spend less than 30 minutes each day as it would be better if you spent your time learning to sing and to find your voice within. Find your true range and learn to sing it well.” (@tauvholiik7936), “Id say for your voice you can probably train and pull off a vocal style similar to emawk or even Khalid. But only if you dont cheat it. Put the same sweat in your vocals that you do in your production and I swear you will go further than how you did here” (@TahniZCat2). This common thread throughout the comments on the song drive home our point that although Weaver Beats has put in the practice necessary to credibly review music, that practice does not translate to writing and performing music. Perhaps, in the words of Hume, if he put in the same practice he has to become a “true judge” he would become a “true” performer. These comments also indicate that “Follow Me” is being held to a low musical standard; whereas songs held to a higher standard would be written off as bad, Weaver Beats is being given “constructive feedback” on how to improve and encouragement to keep practicing.

If Weaver Beats won’t put in the necessary time and practice, as alleged by commenters, to create “good” vocals, why did he release this song at all and why is it getting any attention? In *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*, Adorno describes how fetish in music and capitalism has caused music to be measured by exchange value rather than use value. Specifically, he says “the more inexplicably the principle of exchange value destroys use values for human beings, the more deeply does exchange value disguise itself as the object of enjoyment”(Adorno 39). In Weaver Beats' case he is creating this song and album in order to boost his brand and channel; he is employing the exchange value of his name and popularity instead of the use value of the potential art of creating music (note how the song is literally called “follow me”). This is evident in the plethora of comments noting that this song must be a joke

and his responses to them. For example, when user @54LZ says “It's nice. But I'm not sure if you are going fully ironic here”, @Weaverbeats replies: “definitely ironic here ahem.” He won't defend his music because there is no use value for him in that he did not pour his soul into the song, there is just exchange value which he is clearly getting in the form of views and comments no matter good or bad. As they say, any press is good press. Similarly, Weaver Beats' followers are listening to and perhaps even enjoying his new song because, as Adorno puts it, the “exchange value [has disguised] itself as the object of enjoyment”. In one example, Adorno states that “[people] attach greater importance to the hairdressers and cosmeticians than to the situation for the sake of which the hairdressers and cosmeticians are employed”(Adorno 39). We see this with Weaver Beats because listeners don't see themselves as listening to the song Follow Me, rather they are listening to “Weaver Beats' new song”.

In listening to “Follow Me,” many different commenters noted how the “Beats are good but vocals need work.” Based on his comments on “regressive listening habits” Adorno might say that “Follow Me” is “bad” because its production does not focus on the song as a whole but just the strong, “dope” beat leaving the vocals lacking. We can see here how the fading of music's “wholeness” caused by denying attention to music over time, according to Adorno, has not only contributed to bad listening habits, but also to bad music production. So even though Weaver Beats has good beats, his extreme use of autotune and painfully simple lyrics don't allow the song as a whole to be “good.”

Although many listeners are taken with Weaver Beats' beat, people have a lot to say about the lyrics: “Damn that's really bad! Big ‘he claps on ones and threes’ vibe.” (U/lifeworthlivin) and “tempo? pffft....that's for amateurs” (U/mjohnson801). Because so many YouTube commenters and r/crappymusic frequenters consider this to be a “bad” song for only

the explicable reasoning of bad lyrical tempo, we need to look at a larger picture of why this is. Perhaps part of why many people think this song is crappy is because of the strange tempo and cadence of Weaver Beat's lyrics. What we see is an intrusion of the hegemony of Western European music theory. It begs the question, if we hadn't been conditioned over time to think that a consistent, predictable and cohesive rhythm is necessary for "good" music, would we still think "Follow Me" is "bad?" In his book *Rhythm in the Aesthetics of Western Music*, Thomas Andrew Kingston says that Western "understanding of well-measured movement as a proper ratio between rhythmic phrases unnecessarily limits the rhythmic possibilities in music"(Kingston v). So perhaps in "Follow Me," Weaver Beats has challenged the limits of rhythmic possibilities of Western music and created something more unfamiliar which listeners may refuse to enjoy due to, as Adorno says, a regression in listening habits limiting the enjoyment of unfamiliar things.

Overall, commenters across YouTube, Soundcloud and Reddit generally seem to agree that while Weaver Beats' beat is "good," his lyrics need work. Perhaps if his lyrics were less simple and slow, Weaver Beats never would have found himself on r/crappymusic. According to a study on the affective impact of music versus lyrics by Stratton and Zalanowski, "lyrics appear to have greater power to direct mood change than music alone and can imbue a particular melody with affective qualities." So, maybe if Weaver Beats had put more effort into his lyrics and not just his beat, he would have created a "good" song.

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