

Finian McGregor

Hillbrook Anglican School

Semi-Dried Yoghurt

Statement of Compositional Intent

For the composition 'Semi-Dried Yoghurt', a straightforward compositional idea was followed from very near the beginning of the writing process. The idea was to create a piece that could be described as 'faux jazz'; recognisably pulling from a jazz style but altering key elements to create a piece less typical of the genre. This was an idea coined by the internet musician "fluidvolt" to describe their own music. In addition to 'volty's' work, albums such as Weather Report's 'Heavy Weather' and Squarepusher's 'Music is Rotted One Note' served as inspirations. A sense of artificiality was decided upon as one of the main goals of the piece in order to achieve a 'faux jazz' sound. To achieve an artificial quality, specific instrumentation was necessary. To make the bass sound less realistic, the bass patch was generated from an extremely low resolution sample. To place another layer of artifice on the bass sound, a smooth gliding effect was employed. To the same end, the rhythmic elements (aside from the shaker) were created from the sound of quickly audio cutting in and out. Finally, a fairly low quality MIDI string patch was used. This was used to evoke the sound of muzak that might be played in hotel lobbies. In order to maintain a jazz style, a number of different techniques were utilised. The tonality utilised is distinctly modal, with the piece starting in Bb Lydian. The chord progression consciously evokes a jazzy style through the use of many clustered chord voicings that often include extensions.

The piece is in a moderate swing for a similar purpose. The progression also includes non-sequitur key changes to an implied Ab major, but it never actually resolves to an Ab major chord. In general the chord progression avoids strong ii –V resolutions and instead aims for a less functional progression. For much of the piece the bass was written as a focal point, once again to evoke a jazzy feel. Many of the riffs make use of non-chordal notes causing the bass to sound more melodic. To avoid any interference between the parts, the lead synthesiser part is rhythmically interspersed between the bass lines. The chordal synthesiser is placed far away in the mix, through the use of reverb, for a similar purpose.

Semi-Dried Yoghurt

Reflective Statement

When composing 'Semi-Dried Yoghurt' a number of best practice techniques were followed to improve the quality of the composition and the efficiency of the writing process. Before starting the composition, an idea was conceived which could be used as a guide when composing. This reduced the time required to write the piece, as less time was spent experimenting to find useful and compelling ideas (Reynolds, 1990). While artists don't necessarily plan compositions in advance of writing them, many do plan out beforehand for the same reason. In generating this core idea, inspiration was taken from a number of different artists, primarily 'fluidvolt's concept of 'Faux jazz' and the bass work of artists such as Tom Jenkinson and Jaco Pastorius. This streamlined the writing process further, by providing listenable examples from which to take inspiration and compare to. The practice of using other artists work as inspiration is a tried and trusted method of generating new methods of musical expression, and coming up with interesting ideas (Roger Richards in interview with Stephen Soderberg - The Library of Congress, 1990). When it came time to write the music iterative development on musical ideas was used to keep the piece both interesting and cohesive across its runtime (Huang, 2018).

Iterative development was achieved through the addition of instruments, melodic counterpoint and new basslines. Development was also achieved by providing variations on the bassline, instrumentation in differing sections, and the expressive quality of the melody. As the piece neared completion, each instrument was given its own space in the mix, to maintain focus and clarity while avoiding muddiness. This was achieved by placing instruments at different frequencies, volumes, panning left or right, and placing some elements "further away" from the listener through the use of reverb. This practice of giving each element of the song its own space is considered a best practice technique by many producers (Bernie, 2019).

Bibliography

The Library of Congress. (2000), *An Interview with Roger Reynolds; Parts 2 – The Importance of an Overall Plan to Composition*; available at The Library of Congress, Performing Arts Databases: <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/rreynolds/interview-part2.html>

Huang, A. (2018), *How to make TRACKS and not just LOOPS*; available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEy9L7zyrGE>

Bernie, M. (2019), *How I Get Clean, Punchy Mixes*; available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WekoCnrLlf8>

Unless otherwise indicated content is © Finian McGregor 2021.

Available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence (CC BY 4.0)

Published by Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) 2021.

Certain layouts have been modified for copyright reasons or to improve publication quality.