

GENRES

Learning what makes a good song in other genres will make you a more rounded songwriter. But to really understand some music scenes you have to live them. The list of musical genres is enormous! And most genres have sub-genres and crossover genres. Here is a basic list of some of the many genres that exist in contemporary music. Disagree? Design your own chart and discuss it with your tutor.



POP/ROCK	URBAN/DANCE	ART/ROOTS	COMMERCIAL
BRITPOP	DISCO	AMBIENT	ADVERTISING
DEATH METAL	DRUM' N' BASS	AMERICANA	COMPUTER
EUROPOP	ELECTRONICA	BLUES	GAMES
GOTH	FUNK	CLASSICAL	CORPORATE
GRUNGE	GARAGE	COUNTRY	FILM
HEAVY METAL	GRIME	DUB	ENTERTAINMENT
INDIE	HIP HOP	FOLK	LIGHT
NEW WAVE	HOUSE	GOSPEL	THEATRE
PROGRESSIVE	NU SOUL	JAZZ	TV
PUNK	RAP	NEW AGE	
ROCK	R'N'B	REGGAE	
ROCK'N'ROLL	SOUL	WORLD	
SOFT ROCK	TECHNO		
THRASH METAL	TRANCE		
	TRIP-HOP		

Changes in musical genre can be driven by politics, lifestyle or technology. They are generally not invented, but evolve over time. The development of each genre of music has its own history. What kind of music do you like – and why do you like it?

- Do you identify with the lifestyle and culture associated with it?
- Do you like the sound of the instruments used?
- Do you like the message that the words (lyrics) convey?

HOW IS MUSIC CREATED IN EACH GENRE?

Music is created in many different ways. Let's explore some of the methods...

JAMMING OR REHEARSING IN A GROUP

This can take place in a rehearsal space or the live room in a recording studio. A lot of pop and rock music is created in this way, particularly with bands. The original idea for a song may have come from one individual (a guitar riff, a chord sequence, a lyric idea or a complete song) but the final product will evolve into something with the shape, energy and features of a song in a live room, because each musician takes on a role (bassist, drummer, guitarist, singer etc.) and they bounce ideas off each other, responding to what they hear in a natural, 'live' way. The gear will be mostly acoustic and electric musical instruments, amps, mikes, PA.



BEDROOM STUDIO, USING A COMPUTER

A lot of pop, dance and urban music is created by individuals or small collectives of people, based in cheap home studios. The song might start out with a sample, either from an existing tune or a loop from a sample library and will build up one element at a time, adding more samples, loops, midi parts and audio (live vocals/ instruments). Musicians will be involved in the development of the song depending on their speciality – a rapper, a singer or a DJ may work on the song at different points, while still responding to each other’s performances. It’s a very liberating way to work, as many ideas are drawn together and much of the arrangement is constructed as part of the mixing/production process. This is a very different evolution from the band-based process, but the goals are the same – to create a song, with hooks, character, feel and shape. The gear will be mostly music technology equipment – a computer, midi/ audio software (like Cubase), samplers, synths, decks. If you’re using samples from existing music you MUST be aware of copyright issues.

» WORKBOOK 7 – COPYRIGHT, LEGAL AND MANAGEMENT



WRITING FOR COMMUNITY / ARTS AND ROOTS MUSIC

The field of art/roots music is enormous and the creative processes are many! Classical music will generally be the work of just one writer, notating the notes to be performed later. Folk music might evolve out of a community environment, where songs are part of work and life.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDING STUDIO

The piece of music has already been written (composed) and it is now the job of a music producer to create the final production using the full capability of a professional recording studio, sound engineer, programmer and possibly session musicians. One example may be the score for a film, which has already been written, but requires performing by a full orchestra.



COMMERCIAL MUSIC COMPOSITION

Commercial music is created to a specific, non-musical brief, to fulfil a need such as supporting spoken word and moving image, rather than existing for its own sake. It will generally evolve from one or two people using a midi/ audio recorder, or traditional notation. There will probably be strict timings to adhere to (both in the length of the music and the date it needs to be completed!). Examples include theme tunes for TV shows, advertising jingles, Radio station Idents, incidental music for TV and film, music for computers games, production music for corporate videos and supermarkets/ trade test transmission.

ARRANGING

Increasingly, session musicians work from home. The traditional session, where a group of musicians turn up at the same time, same place is still a common and effective way of working, but with the technical developments in home recording and broadband internet, many musicians will add their specialised contribution in their own home studio, sending computer audio files to the writer/producer by post or email.



ARRANGING IN A LIVE ROOM

Working on an arrangement in a band situation is a stimulating musical experience. Just like the band writing process, it can lead to something unique, that no individual would have achieved. The flip side however, is that each individual may not ‘see the big picture’ or hear the arrangement as a whole, concentrating instead on his or her own individual contribution. To get all the elements to gel, to interact in a satisfying way, either needs musicians with perfect diplomacy skills or one person taking charge of the arrangement. If there’s one useful piece of advice, it’s spend as much time and effort listening, as playing.

Disagree with these generalisations? What’s your opinion?



KEY ELEMENTS IN DIFFERENT GENRES

Look at the examples on P50 - 59.



ROCK AND POP SONGS, FOLK, 'ROOTS', BLUES, COUNTRY

- 1 Traditional methods using an instrument, or jamming with a band
- 2 Read Chapter 1 on songwriting for more information. Often starts with chords or melody.



HIP HOP, R'N'B, URBAN, ELECTRO, DRUM AND BASS, JUNGLE

- 1 Computer driven, using 'break beats' - they work best at 80 – 100 bpm or double this! Often starts using rhythm.
- 2 Rather than complex musical ideas, production is all important in Hip-Hop/ RnB. Tracks can just be a beat and single vocal.
- 3 The METER and tone of the vocal is a key factor. For example, Eminem has a very original style.
- 4 Good production does not always mean a good quality sound. Like early punk, where roughness suited the time, a bit of an edge is desirable. Public Enemy, Dr. Dre, Eminem and 50 Cent are good examples to listen to.
- 5 Music is written in blocks of 4, 8, 16, 32 bars, and its very rare that it changes from this format. Because of the way it's written on software, there is a lot of copying of large sections of the same thing. There is a lot of repetition, even in fills, which occasionally makes a kind of hook, because the same fill or device comes round every 8 bars.

TIP

- A 'fill' is a short rhythmic pattern between sections of music.
- 6 Many songs use no chords at all! Recently there have been many songs released with no bass line.
 - 7 Certain sounds may be common in a particular style. You must be able to identify them, and the equipment used to create these sounds.
 - 8 For example, the Akai MPC sequencer and sample player is still used in American Hip-Hop and RnB, giving a very definite feel.



HOUSE, TRANCE, TECHNO, DANCE

- 1 Computer driven, inspired by the groove, using 'four to the floor' beats, generally around 120 -150bpm.
- 2 Once the groove is set up, the chords or melody are adapted to match the groove. The bounce or feel will make them sound different.
- 3 Arranging is done by muting tracks or parts on the sequencer. Usually no bridges are used and the middle 8 is a 'drop down' or 'break down'.
- 4 There is a very constant feel to the chord progression, often the same four chords are used throughout.
- 5 Dance music is often moved into the pop arena by introducing more mainstream influences, such as disco, gospel and soul.
- 6 Similar to urban music, certain sounds may be common, so you must be able to identify them, and the equipment that creates the sounds (for example Nord Modular synth). New technology can drive a music scene as the same sounds or techniques are regularly used.



CLASSICAL

Composers often write parts for different instruments straight onto papers, using their understanding of music theory - or use a piano. Usually start with writing themes which are the central melodies.



JAZZ

Melody and chord progressions are crucial, often start with a 'riff' or short melodic idea, based around a particular scale. Much jazz is composed in a live environment.

COMMERCIAL MUSIC

There are many ways of earning money by writing commercial music to a brief.

WRITING FOR A PARTICULAR ARTIST WITHIN A GENRE

Sometimes, writers are asked to create music for a particular artist in a certain style. It might be worth taking these points into consideration.

- Listen to what they and other similar artists have recorded.
- Try to work out the next step or musical progression for the artist.
- You may be asked to provide backing tracks in the correct style for the artist to write melodies over.
- Get them involved whenever possible and they will feel happier using the song and working with you more often.

FILMS AND ADVERTS

- Music used in adverts can give the artist a big hit, so it’s a very desirable thing to do.
- A recent development is for advertising companies to get unsigned acts to provide the music. The ad company will own the copyright, so both sides share profits from record sales caused by the TV exposure.
- Play a favourite scene from a movie with the volume down. Now play a variety of other tracks along with the pictures and see what fits.
- Examine why some things give a totally different feel to the scene.



Music for TV and Radio

A theme tune for a TV programme. Incidental music for a TV documentary. ‘Stings’ for a TV quiz show (like the Channel 4 programme ‘Countdown’) Radio Station ‘Idents’ (like the jingle for BBC Radio One)

Advertising

Radio and TV advertising music, including jingles. You need to work fast and to very tight deadlines. Pays very well if you are good.

Ringtones, musitones, polyphonic ringtones

Creating fairly simple MIDI music files from existing works and migrating the data to the various ringtone formats inside mobile phones.

Musicals

An incredibly competitive field of work, you would normally work with a lyricist and arranger.

Sound design for computer games and films

Very specialist work which involves creating special sound effects and synchronising them to computer games or films. A sound designer will have access to a huge library of sound effects and other source material.

Film soundtracks

The ultimate job in commercial music – writing film soundtracks – requires incredible musical creativity and attention to detail. The top film composers such as John Williams, Danny Elfman, John Barry make millions.

Library music (Production music)

Writing music of many different genres, which is stored in a library and bought by commercial companies. Music in hotel lifts, supermarkets, TV programmes and corporate videos uses a lot of library music. You can make surprisingly good money if you are good at this.

note : Any details or photographs of equipment, software, manufacturers or suppliers do not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by DWP, but are intended to provide typical reference examples only.

MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GENRES

ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT MUSICAL GENRES

Let's explore some music from different genres and see if we can analyse it. Most of these examples come from nominations at the Brit Awards 2003, Classical Brit Awards 2003, Mercury Music Prize 2003 and Q's best of 03 CD.

POP &
ROCK
MUSIC
AND ITS SUB GENRES

URBAN &
DANCE
MUSIC
AND ITS SUB GENRES

ART &
ROOTS
MUSIC
AND ITS SUB GENRES

COMMERCIAL
MUSIC
AND ITS SUB GENRES



COMMERCIAL POP


like **ONE LOVE** by **BLUE**



STRUCTURE
Classic song structure, predictable but effective – verse, chorus, verse, chorus, middle 8, chorus.




MELODY
Very memorable, easy to sing, very ‘melodic’.



HARMONY
Chords from the key, not too provocative, but satisfying.



RHYTHM
Solid on - beat / off - beat, with additional character drawn from other genres. Moderate tempo – 95 bpm.



INSTRUMENTATION
Arranged and produced to perfection – many classy sounds, drawn from many other genres, loads of vocal.



MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES
Vocal harmonies, slick production, hooky vocal melody.

photography © Roger Woolman
www.gigpics.com

POP &
ROCK
MUSIC
AND ITS SUB GENRES



POP & ROCK MUSIC

AND ITS SUB GENRES

CLASSIC ROCK

like **GET YOUR HANDS OFF MY WOMAN** by **THE DARKNESS**



STRUCTURE

Classic song structure, predictable but effective – verse, chorus, verse, chorus, solo, chorus.



MELODY

Ambitious melody, though vocal ‘attitude’ as important as the notes themselves. Melodies also exist in the guitar riffs.



HARMONY

Many chords from the key, but some odd ones thrown in, giving the track some edge. Plenty of guitar power chords.



RHYTHM

Mostly 4s and 8s, fragmented and syncopated, but not as much as jazz influenced music like funk.
Fast tempo – 152 bpm.



INSTRUMENTATION

Lead vocal, bass, drums and distorted guitar.



MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES

Screaming lead vocal, guitar and bass riffs.

photography © Karen McBride



POP & ROCK MUSIC

AND ITS SUB GENRES

INDIE

like **LITTLE BY LITTLE** by **OASIS**



STRUCTURE

Strong song structure, building from a low - dynamic verse to a big chorus.



MELODY

Memorable, instantly appealing, easy to sing. Plenty of melodic guitar riffs.



HARMONY

Mostly straight chords from the key, but the chord sequence is a satisfying part of the song, helping to define each section.



RHYTHM

Solid on - beat / off - beat groove, big drum fills. 73 bpm.



INSTRUMENTATION

Predominantly guitars, bass, drums, lead vocal.



MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES


‘Baggy’ feel, strumming guitar, memorable melody.


photography © Allen Kiely www.gigpics.com





HIP HOP


like DON'T MUG YOURSELF by THE STREETS


- 

STRUCTURE
Just 2 main sections (verse and chorus) repeated, with some links. The main difference between the 2 sections is the vocal – backing remains mostly the same
- 

MELODY
The lyric is more important than the melody. The verse is rapped, the chorus uses a simple repeating melodic hook.
- 

HARMONY
Repetitive, same loop of chords for both verse and chorus – harmonic movement is not important here.
- 

RHYTHM
Fast – 180 bpm. Rhythms are angular and fragmented, with many quirky elements.
- 


INSTRUMENTATION
Synths, loops, samples rap vocals. Tight, edgy sounds.
- 


MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES
Lyrics, rap vocal.


photography © Allen Kiely www.gigpics.com


URBAN


like DY-NA-MI-TEE by MS DYNAMITE


- 

STRUCTURE
Just 2 main sections (verse and chorus) repeated, with some links. The main difference between the two sections is the vocal – backing remains the same.
- 

MELODY
Verse uses fast moving, repetitive lines, chorus is broader and more obviously melodic.
- 

HARMONY
Repetitive, same loop of chords for both verse and chorus – harmonic movement is not important here.
- 

RHYTHM
Heavy, slow groove – 79.5 bpm. Repetitive, syncopated rhythms.
- 


INSTRUMENTATION
Many samples and loops (often ‘tatty’ acoustic loops) – lots of percussion. Lead and backing vocals are the main elements as much of the instrumental arrangement is repetitive.
- 


MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES
Lyrics, vocal melody, wacky loops.




URBAN &
DANCE
MUSIC
AND ITS SUB GENRES


R'N'B like B WITH ME by MIS-TEEQ


- 


STRUCTURE
Strong verse - chorus structure, with the chorus repeated often, but several contrasting sections.
- 

MELODY
Ambitious but hooky vocal melody, wide range, syncopated and pacey. Slips in and out of rap and sung vocals.
- 

HARMONY
Based on just a few chords in a minor key, but plenty of jazzy extensions, particularly in the vocal harmonies. 134 bpm.


- 


RHYTHM
Very tight and syncopated, many layers. Lots of short sounds, percussion and synths.
- 


INSTRUMENTATION
Vocals are most prominent, with many percussion, synth and sampled sounds. Advanced arrangement and production gives it a slick feel.
- 


MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES
Slick vocals, hooky chorus melody.
- photography © Karen McBride


JAZZ
like DON'T KNOW WHY by NORAH JONES


- 

STRUCTURE
There are 2 sections, but not really a verse and chorus, but an A and B section that alternate.
- 

MELODY
Advanced – hooky but difficult to sing, wide range.
- 

HARMONY
Jazzy! Many different chords, using chord extensions like 7ths. The chord sequence is important to the character of the music
- 


RHYTHM
Syncopated but not accented, so the complex rhythms appear quite subtle. 88 bpm.
- 


INSTRUMENTATION
Light, gentle sounds – acoustic bass, kit with brushes, jazz guitar, piano.
- 

MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES
Sweet, expressive vocal, jazz chords, guitar / piano licks.


COUNTRY


like THE MAN COMES AROUND by JOHNNY CASH

 **STRUCTURE**
Simple structure, with many repeated verses.

 **MELODY**
Instantly memorable, easy to sing, very natural melodic shapes, often repeated, that fit neatly with lyrics.

 **HARMONY**
Simple, chords from the key.


 **RHYTHM**
Lose, simple and fluent.
Approximately 100 bpm.


 **INSTRUMENTATION**
Strummed acoustic guitar and lead vocal are at the core, with other acoustic instruments.


! **MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES**
Lyrics and vocal delivery.


FOLK


like LIMBO by ELIZA CARTHY

 **STRUCTURE**
Simple structure, with many repeated verses.

 **MELODY**
Timeless, folksong quality, typically ‘melodic’ and ‘modal’.

 **HARMONY**
Mostly simple chords from the key with some ‘modal’ twists.

 **RHYTHM**
Simple and lose – giving it a very natural, human feel. Approximately 104 bpm


 **INSTRUMENTATION**
Simple, acoustic, plenty of space. Vocal quality is a big part of the aural identity.


! **MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES**
Guitar licks and vocal delivery.





COMMERCIAL
MUSIC
AND ITS SUB GENRES


FILM MUSIC like TO KILL A KING by RICHARD MITCHELL

 **STRUCTURE**
The structure of each musical cue is dictated by the action and drama, with dramatic dynamics. Structure, with many repeated verses.

 **MELODY**
Melodies are ‘motifs’ – each associated with a character or dramatic theme in the story. Some are long melodic lines, others are short hooks.

 **HARMONY**
Varied, experimental, using many classical music conventions.

 **RHYTHM**
Varied, experimental, using many classical music conventions, often no obvious on-beat / off-beat feel or clear bpm

 **INSTRUMENTATION**
Full orchestra and choir – using a large number of classical instruments, plus some unusual ones, like shakuhachi.

! **MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES**
Textures, motifs, diversity of influences.



RICHARD MITCHELL

How would you describe your job?
Film Music Composer, Arranger, Producer, Engineer, Musician.

How do you usually start creating a piece of music?
I use many different approaches. If, for example a film needs a drum and bass score, I start with a drum loop. If it's a period piece, I may take just the rhythmic 'feel' or 'groove' of a piece of music that in some way either comes from or helps relate to the feel for the period. I might then then invent something that has an essence of that style but hopefully morphs into something totally different. If it's a traditional 'Hollywood' type score, the starting point may come from simply inventing a series of chord progressions that may represent a strong emotional aspect of the film, to which I might then attempt to write a simple melody around. Another aspect may relate to the 'geography' of the piece, so a sample of performance from an ethnic instrumentalist or vocal performance could be the basis for the composition.

Which 2 pieces of musical equipment are most important in your work?
Keyboard and MIDI recorder.

What, for you, are the 2 most important elements in a well-crafted piece of music?
For me, there are no '2 most important' elements for every piece, it depends on the job.



If you consider you work within a genre, do you take influence/ideas from outside that genre?
Yes , I think juxtaposition creates the most interesting work.

Do you like to collaborate with others in the composition process?
I've never really had much experience of this although I'm sure it's good for your creative learning process.

Do you like to collaborate with others in your arranging/recording process?
Yes otherwise you risk becoming completely stale. Performance is a huge part of my work.

If you were to offer one piece of advice for writers working in your area of music what would it be?
Don't be trapped by the confines of only ever using 'off the shelf' drum loops and grooves. Force yourself into creating your own unique starting points for creativity so you never risk sounding like everyone else.

photograph supplied courtesy of **RICHARD MITCHELL**



CASE STUDY

DAVE BAINBRIDGE from Christian rock band Iona

How would you describe your job?
Musician, composer, producer, arranger, artist

How do you usually start creating a piece of music?
Lots of different ways, sometimes the concept shapes the way the music should proceed. Sometimes a melodic idea or interesting chord progression is a starting point. Often a lyrical idea, sometimes a poem or other literary idea is a good starting point. Occasionally an interesting sound sparks off a particular direction.

Which 2 pieces of musical equipment are most important in your work?
Piano (or keyboard) & guitar are pretty important as they're my main instruments, but the ability to build up ideas on a audio / midi recorder has been invaluable for me. But the main equipment is one's imagination!!

What, for you, are the 2 most important elements in a well-crafted piece of music?
Many different aspects are important, depending on the piece! But...melody & chord sequence are top of my list!

If you consider you work within a genre, do you take influence/ideas from outside that genre?
Most definitely, otherwise you can end up with a blinkered outlook. Music from other genres can suggest ideas or ways of doing things that one might not otherwise come across. These can then be applied to one's own field, but can really sound new or fresh in their new context.

Do you like to collaborate with others in your composition process?
Sometimes it can be very inspiring to have input from others, and this is often an essential part of working together in a band. However, it can be counter productive to incorporate everyone's compositional ideas. There's a place for both methods and to have time spent doing both is the ideal scenario.

Do you like to collaborate with others in your arranging/recording process?
Certainly sometimes in the recording process. I find it most valuable, though, to collaborate with someone at the mix stage of a project, who is able to offer some outside objectivity and be able to bring new ideas.

If you were to offer one piece of advice for writers working in your area of music what would it be?
Don't give up. If you feel you have something unique to offer that you have a real passion for, keep on pursuing it. Eventually, by honing your craft and developing your ideas, you'll find your niche.

photograph supplied courtesy of **DAVE BAINBRIDGE**