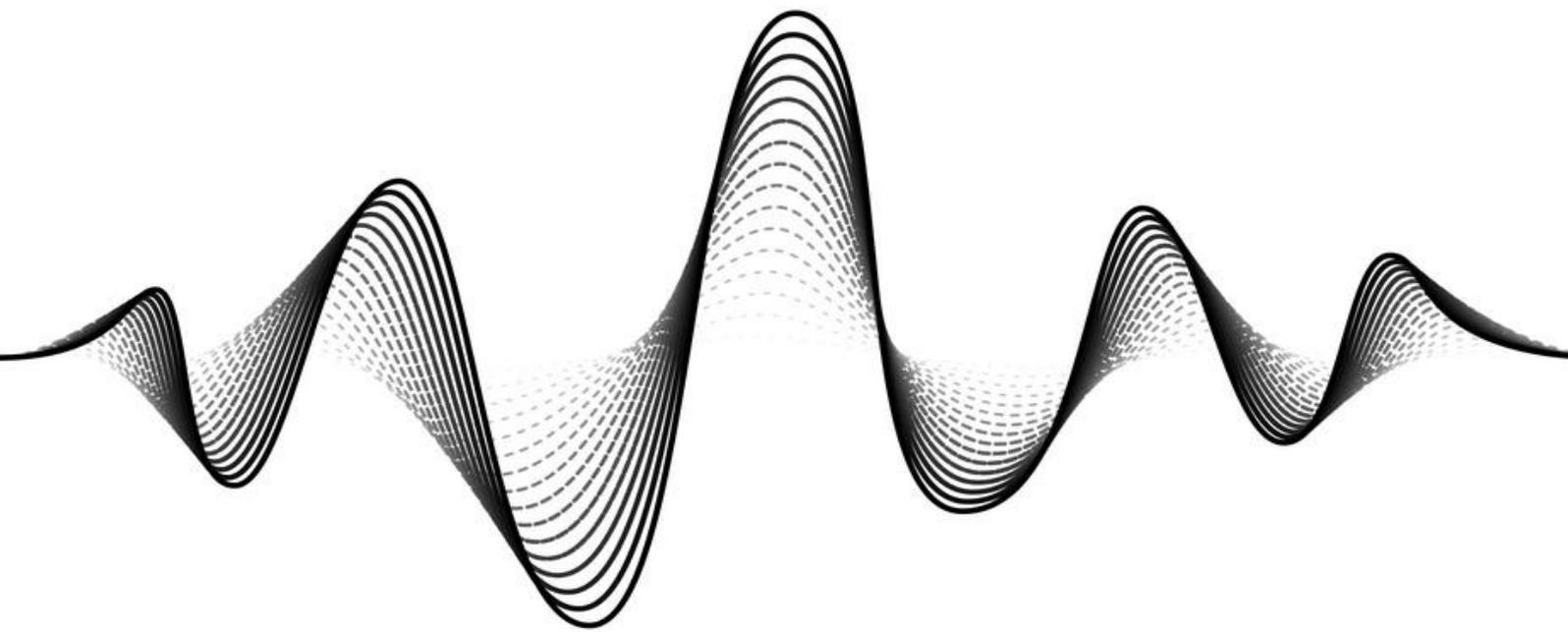


Method to produce a K-Pop music demo

Producing for the group ITZY



Meira

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0. Abstract

El propósito de este trabajo es demostrar si es posible crear una demo musical que sea adecuada para un cierto artista del género K-Pop si se sigue un enfoque metódico, creando así un método para que nuevos compositores puedan superar la dificultad de empezar una canción y poder darle uso en su carrera musical. Antes de diseñar este método, se ha hecho investigación sobre el K-Pop y la teoría de la producción musical, así como la creación de una adaptación de una canción para la práctica de los conceptos adquiridos. En su diseño se han establecido cuatro partes (*beat making*, desarrollo, edición y *pitching*) con sus correspondientes subdivisiones. Por último, para ponerlo en práctica, se ha hecho una demo pensada para el grupo ITZY, utilizando como herramientas el análisis de canciones junto a la experiencia anteriormente adquirida. El resultado ha sido que sí es posible crear una demo siguiendo un método, pero que el artista es quien decidirá si es adecuada. Por esto mismo, los compositores deben centrarse en mejorar sus habilidades, analizar otros artistas, formar conexiones sociales y crear un portafolio.

El propòsit d'aquest treball és demostrar si és possible crear una demo musical que sigui adequada per a un cert artista del gènere K-Pop si se segueix un enfocament metòdic, creant així un mètode perquè nous compositors puguin superar la dificultat de començar una cançó i poder donar-li ús en la seva carrera musical. Abans de dissenyar aquest mètode, s'ha fet una recerca sobre el K-Pop i la teoria de la producció musical, així com la creació d'una adaptació d'una cançó per a la pràctica dels conceptes apresos. En el seu disseny s'han establert quatre parts (*beat making*, desenvolupament, edició i *pitching*) amb les seves corresponents subdivisions. Finalment, per posar-lo en pràctica, s'ha fet una demo pensada per al grup ITZY, utilitzant l'anàlisi de cançons juntament amb l'experiència anteriorment adquirida. El resultat ha estat que sí que és possible crear una demo seguint un mètode, però que l'artista és qui decidirà si és adequada. Per això mateix, els compositors s'han de centrar en millorar les seves habilitats, analitzar altres artistes, formar connexions socials i crear un portafoli.

1. Introduction

1. 1. Hypothesis

The hypothesis goes as follows: It is possible to create a demo fit for an artist if a methodical approach is followed.

This hypothesis presents two problems to resolve. The first one being that the creative process varies a lot for every artist, and composers are not an exception. There is no defined path to follow in order to create a demo. There are so many options that you will never know if you choose the correct one for you until the end. This can be quite problematic to composer-wannabes because the fear of failing can be overwhelming, therefore it is difficult to start composing.

The second problem is that it is hard to get an artist to notice your work, let alone use it. For every song realised, there are thousands of demos that will not come out to the public. This frustrates composers as they see their work not being used or lacking in value.

Starting off from these problems, this work intends to present a possible resolution. If it is proved that a certain approach works and if it is formally registered, new composer-wannabes could have a reliable source to getting started.

1. 2. Objective

The objective of this project is to prove that it is possible to create and successfully pitch a demo following a defined method. To achieve this, I have chosen the K-Pop girl group ITZY as the objective artist. This means that, in order to consider this project a success, ITZY's company, currently JYP Entertainment, must accept my pitch.

1. 3. Motivation

The reasoning for this project starts with my love for K-pop music. As I grew up listening to it, I started to develop appreciation for the high-quality work behind it. Specifically, music production and composition gained my special admiration. As I learnt more about these subjects, I started to dream about working in the music industry.

When I had to work on a project for school, I decided to turn it into an opportunity to achieve my dream of working in the K-pop music industry. I chose to focus on a JYP Entertainment's project as some of my favourite groups and producers are under the said company. The chosen project was ITZY because the group's concept related to me the most as I am also a girl fighting to achieve my dreams *"Icy but I'm on fire, I'm following my dream, I know what I want"* (Icy - ITZY - English version).

1. 4. Methodology

The methodology of this project consist in five parts:

- 1) **Research:** As a beginner in music production, and specially in K-Pop production, I needed to know the context of my project. For this reason, I researched information about K-Pop history, production system, creators communities online and interviewed people I met in the way (see in annexes).
- 2) **Formation:** There is theory needed to be learnt in order to create a decent demo. Therefore, I went through several resources online such as courses and videos to learn the theory. Furthermore, I made a cover of a song to practice the concepts (see annexes)
- 3) **Define the method:** From what I observed in my research, I idealized a method taking into account the different production stages used by creators in the genre.
- 4) **Follow the method:** As I had defined it before, in this part I had to stick with it as much as I could. In the first three steps (beat making, developing and editing the song) I took as subject of analysis three of ITZY's latest songs (Wannabe, Not shy and In the morning). This let me find key characteristics of

ITZY's style and make my demo fit into it, but always giving room to creative thinking and freedom. In the last step, pitching the demo, I mainly took as a reference my own experience when pitching a cover (see the annexes) and some resources I found during my research.

- 5) **Conclusions:** In the conclusions, there is an overview of what I have done, giving constructive criticism of my work and presenting future projections for upcoming projects.

2. Theoretical framework

2. 1. Demo

In the form of a song, a demo (shortened from "demonstration") is a way for musicians to approximate their ideas to record labels, producers, or other artists. Its use is for limited circulation or for reference.

In general, a demo track is about 3 minutes long, but there are many cases where the demo is provided with a shorter length, no lyrics, or only a specific part of the song. However, sometimes a demo can be almost a complete piece of music.

2. 1. 1. Material

With the advance of technology, music production material is becoming more accessible for the general public, therefore a new term has been created: "Bedroom producer". It refers to the musician who produces at home with less expensive equipment. This is a great advantage for the newer producers, who can create quality without having a full equipped studio.

Nowadays, music composition is computer-based. So, in order to make a demo, you will need some essential hardware and software.

First, you will need **a computer** and **a pair of headphones or speakers** to be able to listen to your creation. It must be said that the chosen computer must be capable of supporting **a DAW**.

A DAW (digital audio workstation) is usually a piece of software where you can record and edit audio files and MIDI¹ sequences. To make MIDI sequences sound, you can have **VST plugins**² play them. There is an infinity of plugins to choose from, but they can be divided into two main groups: instruments and effects.

¹ MIDI stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface, and it's a universal language used to communicate music parameters between software and hardware.

² VST plugin stands for Virtual Studio Technology, and it can be described as virtual instruments.

We have talked about DAWs, and we said that you can edit audio files in them. But first, you will need to get audio files. You can get them by simply recording by a **microphone** or downloading them. Two types of audio files can be pointed out: long audio files (such as a guitarist playing or a singer's vocal line) and **samples** (a portion of a recording that can contain rhythm, melody, speech, sounds, or entire bars of music that can be manipulated). Samples are essential in a multitude of now-a-days genres, such as Hip Hop and EDM.

List:

PC capable of supporting a DAW
DAW
Headphones or speakers
Plugins
Microphone
Samples

2. 1. 2. Knowledge

Normally, for every big production in the industry, there is a team behind where every member is specialized in one music area. There are songwriters, sound designers, arrangers and mixing and mastering engineers. But our case is different, as we are “bedroom producers”, we do not have a team. Hereby, we need to have basic knowledge in every area to be able to complete our song.

In my own experience, I found it difficult to start learning. At first, it seems like there are a lot of different concepts that do not relate to each other. No matter how hard I studied, I felt stagnant as I had nobody to guide me. This is a problem many producers wannabes face at the beginning, as we can see in the interviews (XXX) Annexes.

On the internet, there is available all the information we need to know, but it lacks organization. Therefore, during the course of this paper, I am going to attach

resources where the theory points are explained in more detail as this project's main focus is on explaining and applying a method and not the theory behind. This way this paper is kept simple but, at the same time, the reader is provided with useful information.

Before starting a demo, it is important to learn music theory and to use a DAW as the first teaches us to understand music and the second is our tool to create it.

- Music is a language, and through music theory we learn to understand and use it.
 - I recommend the course, “Fundamentals of Music Theory” offered by The University of Edinburgh on Coursera, where you can learn the fundamentals of Western music.
 - And for Spanish speakers I highly suggest a lecture of the books “Teoría musical y armonía moderna” and “Técnicas de arreglos para la orquesta moderna” by Enric Herrera as they have been my main source of study in music theory.

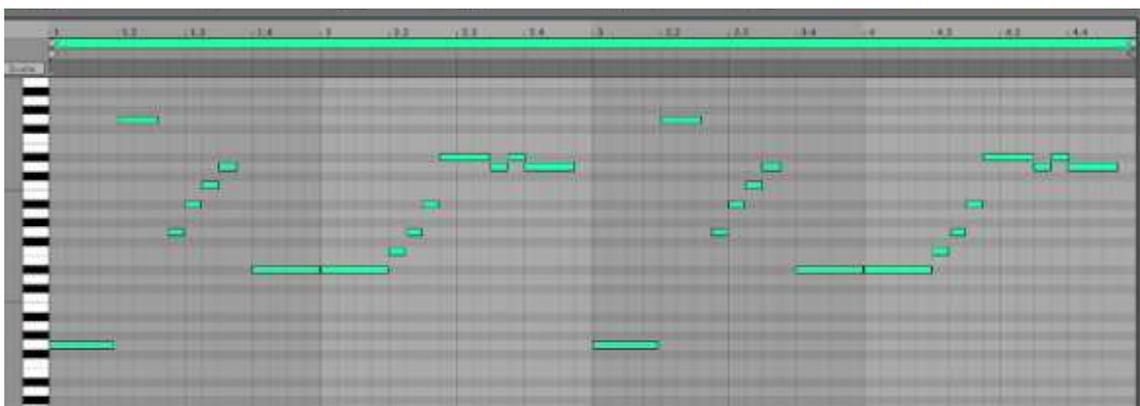
- A DAW or Digital Audio Workstation is today's musician's main instrument. So, if we want to create a demo by today's means, we must learn to use a DAW first. There are multitude of DAWs where to choose, and it does not really matter which one you work with, as we can see different K-Pop producers using different ones.
 - If you are indecisive about what DAW to choose, I advise you to take a look at the guide “How To Choose a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) To Produce Music” by Reuben Ch'ng in Audio Production.
 - Furthermore, the courses “Pro Tools Basics” and “Introduction to Ableton Live” offered by Berklee College of Music on Coursera are an amazing free resource to check up.

2. 2. Inspiration and analysis

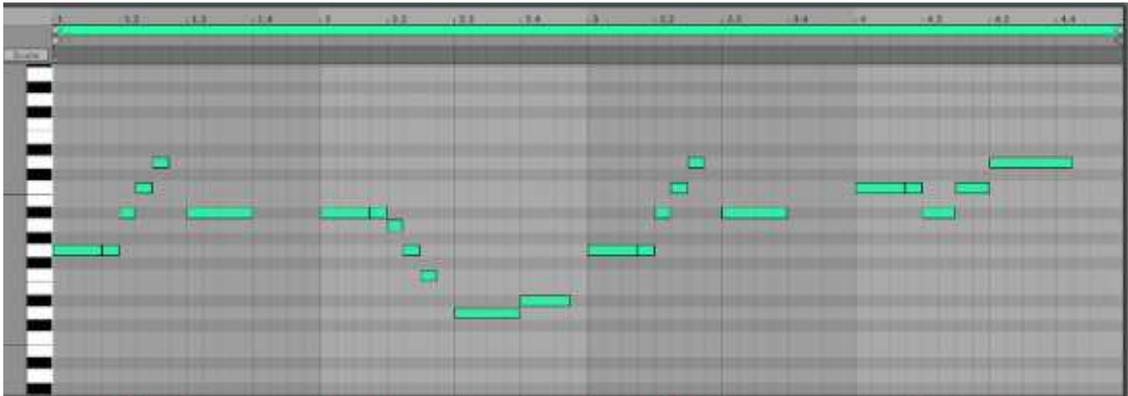
For centuries, philosophers have wondered about the origin of ideas. Plato said they were perfect and eternal, but I don't agree. Rather, I stand alongside the empiricists, who say that ideas come from the senses. This means that we have to go out and look for them. We must listen, see and understand other works to be inspired. In other words, we must analyse our favourite songs and to see what makes them so special.

But inspiration from other works can be dangerous, because if we are not attentive, we can easily cross the line of plagiarism. One way to avoid this is to not copy directly, but to observe the main characteristics and do a variation by applying them in another context.

For example, I recently heard the song "Pressure" by Martin Garrix and Tove Lo. What I liked the most about this is the bass line, and I decided to take inspiration from it to make the demo. Once I had the melody transcribed, I analysed what I liked the most about it.



Pressure's bass melody



My bass melody

From the original line, I have taken the succession of eighth notes and did a variation by moving them forward in time to adjust them to a previous bass line (the context). Now I can say that I have created an original melodic line inspired on “Pressure”'s bass line. The two may sound a bit similar, but are essentially different.

We can conclude that the process to get inspiration from other songs is:

- Choose a song
- Analyse it
- Choose a characteristic
- Apply it on another context

In the rest of this paper, you will see the importance of analysis, as it is present in every step from the beat making to the edition of the song. Furthermore, you will be able to read the analysis of ITZY based their songs “Wannabe”, “Not shy” and “In the morning” in the annexes.

2. 3. K-pop and ITZY

2. 3. 1. Introduction

K-pop (short for Korean popular music) is a music genre that originated in South Korea. On top of its traditional Korean music origins, it is inspired by styles and genres from all over the world, including pop, jazz, hip hop, R&B, reggae and EDM. It forms a separate subculture with its own customs, specially organized fan base and exclusive business system.

It is organised by so-called idol-groups where each member fulfils a function (singer, dancer, rapper...). Even though most of the groups are composed of members of the same gender (BTS, Blackpink, ITZY), we can also find mixed groups (KARD, Triple H, AKUM) and solo artists (IU, Sunmi, Taemin).

The K-pop industry is dominated by agencies that also serve as publishers, with SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, JYP Entertainment, and HYPE Corporation accounting for the majority of market share (Dawson, 2021).

2. 3. 2. History

In 1992, one of the first K-pop groups, Seo Taiji and Boys, formed the more modern version of the genre (DKDKTV, 2020). Their experimenting with various forms and styles of music, as well as the incorporation of international musical elements, specially American culture, contributed to the reshaping and modernization of South Korea's contemporary music scene. As a result, the integration of foreign musical genres has become a common practice for K-Pop artists.



From left to right: Yang Hyun-Suk, Seo Taiji, and Lee Juno

With the disbandment of Seo Taiji and Boys, many music labels were created to produce new K-pop groups. The oldest and more influential companies in the K-Pop history are usually referred to as the “big three” and were funded during the “First Generation of K-Pop”. These are SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment and JYP Entertainment . Each of them develop a distinct style, which is reflected in their groups.

The most important pioneer of this era was Lee Soo Man, founder of SM Entertainment in 1995, with the creation of the “idol system” in which trainees go through a systematic training to become the next superstar, learning how to sing, dance, rap, model and present themselves. This system still last to the day. The music from SM is known for being experimental and innovative, as well as for their perfect trained idols. These traits can be seen right from the beginning with their first group H.O.T. and even their now-a-days groups such as Red Velvet.

YG Entertainment was established in 1996 by Yang Hyun-Suk, former member of Seo Taiji and Boys. His background in hip-hop marked YG artists’ style, characterized for its hard-hitting sound. This company’s mainstream breakthrough started in “K-Pop Second Generation” during the beginning of the 21st century with the group Big Bang in 2006, which became one of the most popular and profitable boy groups in the world. Following their success, in 2009 the girl group 2EN1 was

created and the soloist PSY signed with the label. Later in 2012, PSY became viral globally with his music video “Gangnam Style”, which became the most-viewed video on YouTube. This song marked the beginning of the “Third Generation in K-Pop”, where the industry opened to the global public and became highly competitive. Four years later, Blackpink, YG’s most important group, debuted and quickly made it to the top of the charts.

JYP Entertainment was founded in 1996 by the singer-producer Park Jin-Young, also known as J. Y. Park. As the company’s main producer, his retro, pop and commercial style influenced the company’s. JYP found its global breakthrough with Wonder Girls and their song “Nobody” in 2009, becoming the first South Korean group to enter the Billboard Hot 100 at No. 76. This company’s most famous girl group is Twice. It was formed under the television program Sixteen (2015) and debuted on October 20, 2015. Since debut until December 2020, the group sold over 10 million albums only in South Korea and Japan.



Singer-producer Park Jin-Young in 2011

Apart from the big three, there is one more company that has helped to shape K-Pop’s history. It is HYBE Corporation (former Big Hit Entertainment) with its world-wide famous group BTS. The group, debuted in 2013, has become one of the most popular groups in history, helping K-Pop position into the global market. In 2020, the economic impact of BTS for South Korea was estimated on over 1.7 trillion won (\$1.5 billion USD) (Randolph, 2020). It was in 2017 when BTS did they American breakthrough, peaking at number 28 in Billboard Hot 100 with their song “Mic Drop” and being the first Korean act to reach 10 million followers on Twitter (Ming, 2017). From this moment, K-Pop entered the American market and “the 4th generation” started.

In the 4th generation, K-Pop's groups are globally recognized. As expected, companies invested in new projects and followed the globalization trend. Some of the most important groups from this generation are TXT from HYBE Corporation, Aespa from SM entertainment and, the focus of this project, ITZY from JYP Entertainment.

2. 3. 3. ITZY

ITZY is a Korean girl group produced by JYP Entertainment and formed by 5 members: Yeji, Lia, Ryujin, Chaeryeong and Yuna. They debuted in 2019 with their single Dalla Dalla, and since then they have positioned themselves into the top of K-Pop 4th generation (ITZY, 2021). Their music is energetic and danceable, targeting young audiences with their message of self-love, and their most popular songs are the lead singles "Dalla Dalla" (2019), "ICY" (2019), "Wannabe" (2020), "Not Shy" (2020), "In the morning" (2021) and "Loco" (2021). The complete analysis of ITZY is in the annex (7. 1. ITZY's analysis) and some parts of it are also used during this work (3. The method) to help exemplify.



*From left to right: Yeji, Lia, Ryujin, Chaeryeong and Yuna.
@ITZYofficial on Twitter*

3. The method

The process of creating our demo will have four main parts:

- First, we will create a “beat” where we define the main ideas of the song.
- Second, we will develop our creation by arranging ideas, designing the sound and creating the vocal line.
- Third, our song will be edited to sound at its best.
- And lastly, we will try to pitch the demo to the artist’s company and make the most out of our work for our career.

3. 1. Beat making

In music, like in the rest of arts, a piece usually starts with an idea that is developed into a full composition. As we can see in the interviews, most K-Pop artists start with making a draft, typically called “beat”, where the key ideas are presented. The process of creating a beat is called “beat making”. This term is present in a multitude of genres and styles based in music technology, such as Hip Hop and EDM.

Originally, the term has its roots in Hip Hop culture development in New York throughout the 1970s and early 80s (Hew Dale Crooke, 2018). With the expansion of this culture and technology, this tradition has defined innumerable genres and subgenres. Technology such as samplers, drum kits and more recently computer-based software have helped to arise now-a-days music scene.

In music, “a beat” can have several meanings. But when we talk about hip-hop culture, the term refers to “a composition of musical and rhythmic tracks”. Now-a-days, we say we are making a beat when we compose a track by adding drums, harmony and melodies.

More often than not, the term is used to refer to the first stage of music production: defining the idea. Within the beat, we can start to define key characteristics and ideas of the future song, such as the tempo, the style, the structure and the main motives. For this very reason, we can say that the “beat” does

the same function as jazz' "lead sheet". The main difference between the two is that the "beat" is computer based and the "lead sheet" paper based.

3. 1. 1. Concept

We can deduce that the first step we must do to create the beat is to define the concept, since two of ITZY's producers started this way (J. Y. Park, 2020) (LYRE Music, 2021).

We use the term "concept" to refer to the aesthetic theme of a K-Pop project. Usually, the concept defines the project's stylistic choices. As an example, if the concept of a song is "cute", there will be sweet and adorable elements to it. There is a long list of concepts in K-Pop (link to the video). To point out a few, there are "cute", "badass" "sad" and "cyberpunk" concepts.

1. Analyse

In ITZY's case, they started with the so-called "teen crush" concept. In this aesthetic theme, the keywords are "youthful" and "energetic", referring to the teenager's dynamic and vibrant lifestyle. A great example is their song "Dalla Dalla", where they sing about being careless and unique over an animated beat.

Most recently, their first song of 2021, "마.피.아. [Mafia] In the morning" has a darker undertone. With this change, we can determine that they are using a "girl crush" concept (Fashion Chingu, 2021), which is defined as "badass", "powerful" and more "woman-like".

2. Decide a concept

Having in mind that almost all the members in the group are now in their twenties, it makes sense that they are using a more mature style and leaving "teen crush" behind. For this reason, we are going to use the "girl crush" concept, which relates to women empowerment, matureness and confidence.

3. 1. 2. Music style

It is crucial to define the music style we are going to use right from the beginning, for it can help us choose basic musical features

Two of the most debated terms within the music community are "style" and "genre." For the sake of this project, we are going to define these terms as follows (White, 2014):

- A music style refers to the musical features of one or various pieces of music: rhythmic patterns, instrumentation, form, melodies, harmony...
- A genre includes all the songs which have common musical and nonmusical characteristics (social context, production process...)

1. Analyse

In ITZY's case, K-Pop is their genre, as they are a music group produced by a Korean company under a defined system, and their music style varies from song to song. We can find a multitude of styles throughout ITZY's discography. The most relevant styles for the group are Trap, Bubblegum Pop, EDM, Dancehall and Rock. As an example of every style:

- Trap: In the morning
- Bubblegum Pop: Wannabe
- EDM: TING TING TING (with Oliver Heldens)
- Dancehall: LOCO
- Rock: WANT IT?

2. Search for references

In our case, as we want to present a more mature concept, we must find a suitable music style. During research, while listening to songs with similar concepts, I found out that many styles can be used in order to achieve it (trap, R&B, house,

dancehall...). So I decided to take another path and made a playlist with songs with “the vibes”³ I wanted to archive.

3. Decide a main style

I realized that many of them can fit under the style “house”, which is characterized by its 4-on-the-floor drum pattern, a subtle groove that transmits confidence, and a BPM range between 115-130 (Splice, 2019) (Ableton, n.d.). With this solid base, this style gives us room to experiment with aggressive sound design (a metaphor for empowerment), meaningful lyrics (matureness) and additions from other styles. Another common characteristic in the songs on the playlist is the use of the bass line as the lead melody.

It has to be mentioned that the use of this style is provisional and used as a base to get started because in the point 3. 2. 1. 2. *Sub-styles* we are going to go more in depth and decide on the style of each part, as K-Pop is known for changing styles in between sections.

3. 1. 3. Structure

1. Analyse

A song can be divided into different parts, which have different functions. These parts can be arranged in different ways, omitted or new ones can be added. At the same time, the content of these parts can also change. We can analyse our objective artist to find patterns in their structure.

2. Decide a structure

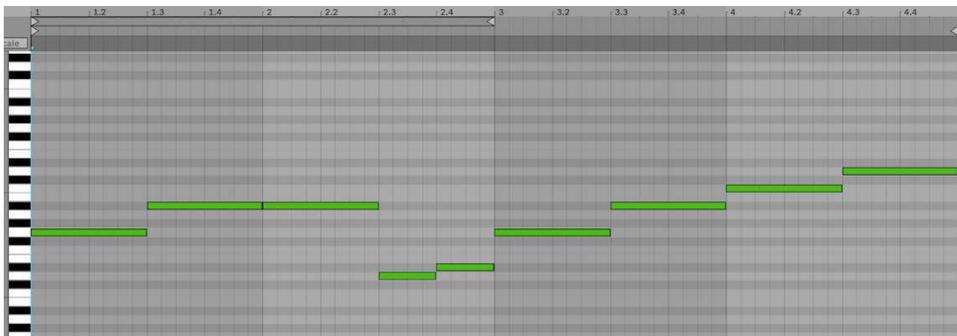
In my demo, I have used the same basic structure as ITZY. The result of the analysis (see on 7. 1. 3. Structure) concludes that their basic structure goes as follows:

³ Vibes: (also formal vibrations)(also vibe [singular]) a mood or an atmosphere produced by a particular person, thing or place. (Vibes, n.d.)

Intro	→ Ear-catching
Verse	→ Rap-oriented, poor harmony, chunks of lead
Pre-chorus	→ Melody-oriented, strong harmony
Chorus	→ Hook-oriented, lead-oriented
Bridge	→ Different from the rest of the song, dance break
Outro	→ Concludes the song, a reference to another part

3. 1. 4. Composing the beat

There are infinite ways to start a beat, but for the sake of this project, only one will be presented. The technique is called *Melodically-generated harmony*⁴, and consists in creating first a simple melody and then harmonizing it. Once we have our chord progression, we can create a more complex melody line to use as a lead. The only thing left to do is to add the drum pattern from the style we have previously decided. Now that the first section is completed, we must go forward and do the rest by reusing motives or creating new ones. You can listen to my beat at the pen drive named as “1. The beat”.

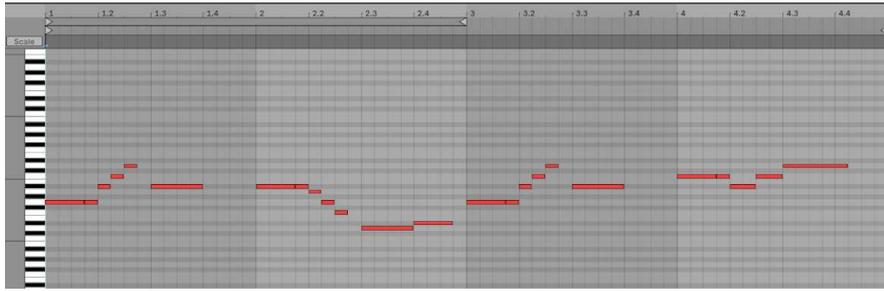


1. Write a simple melody

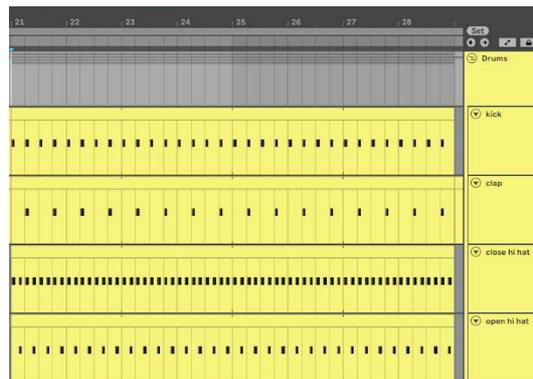


2. Harmonize

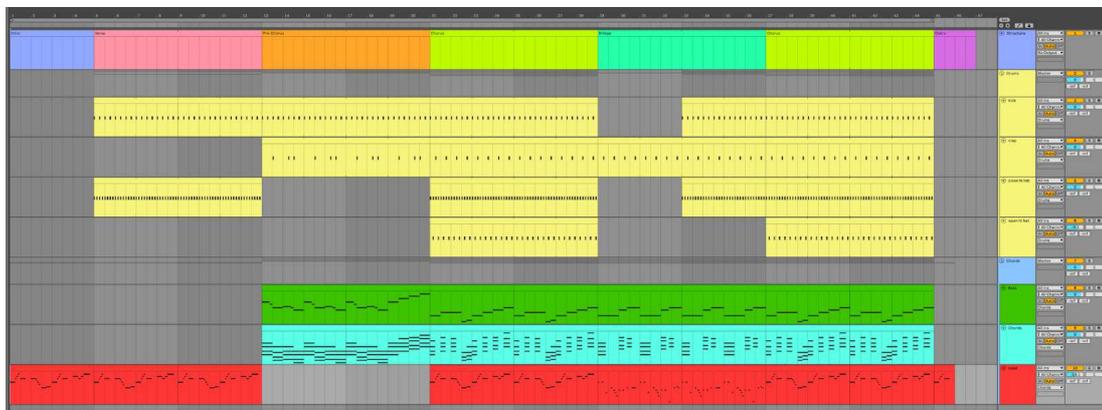
⁴ Technique mentioned in the book *A Guide To Jazz Composition and Arranging* by Jerry Coker



3. Write a complex melody



4. Add a drum pattern



5. Repeat

As for the sound we are going to use on the beat, I would recommend going for basic sounds of the chosen style, as in 3. 2. 2. *Sound design* we are going to work on it in more detail.

3. 2. Developing

In this section, we are going to talk about how we can develop our beat into a full song. In short, we are going to add new parts and elements (arrangement), designing the sound (sound design) and create a voice line (top-lining).

3. 2. 1. Arrangement

We can define the arrangement as the organisation of musical elements and sections in a musical composition with the intention of creating an enjoyable listening experience for an intended audience (Clarke, 2016).

3. 2. 1. 1. Structuring

1. Create scheme

If we want our demo to have a commercial length (around 3 minutes), we must add new parts to it. A grate way to visualize this is by **making a scheme** where we specify the sections' order and their length in bars. We can **repeat parts, create new ones and even double them**. Once the scheme is done, we can transcribe it to our DAW.

2. Add parts inspired in the analysis

The most usual extra part used by ITZY is the drop, a typical EDM part which consists of a rhythmic or bass line change followed by a build-up to introduce the chorus. As it is typically used, I also applied it on my demo. And apart from the drop, I also added a new section by doubling the bridge.

Intro	V1	P1	C1	V2	P2	C2	B1	B2	Drop	C3	Outro
4 bars	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	1

3. 2. 1. 2. Sub-styles

1. Analyse

Even if we have previously chosen a main style for our song, we can also be inspired by other styles, as it can give our composition more diversity and originality. This can be done in many ways, but as we commented earlier, one of K-pop's main characteristics is the implementation of different styles in one song. The tradition of mixing styles goes back in time since Seo Taiji and Boys, when they experimented with different genres, as we can see in their song "I know" where they mix a hip-hop beat with a disco instrumentation. As a result, now-a-days, we can point out two techniques in K-Pop⁵:

- Drastic change: As the name suggests, it consists in changing the style drastically in one particular section, as we can see in ITZY's song THAT'S A NO NO where they intercalate a Trap verse even though the song's main genre is EDM .
- Style Blend: We apply this technique when we use characteristics from different styles on the same section. This can be seen in ITZY's song Not Shy, as it mixes a dancehall drum pattern with trap drums, EDM instrumentation and Pop vocal production.

2. Associate sections and styles in the scheme

We can also use a scheme to illustrate our decisions by associating a section with the style or styles chosen.

Intro	V1	P1	C1	V2	P2
EDM	EDM	Trap	EDM & Pop	EDM	Trap

C2	B1	B2	Drop	C3	Outro
EDM & Pop	Rock & Dancehall	Pop	EDM	EDM & Pop	EDM

⁵ During the analysis of ITZY's songs, I found out these two recurrent techniques, but I could not find any discussion or established name for them on the internet. Therefore, I decided to name them according to their functionality.

As we saw earlier, the most relevant styles for ITZY are Trap, Bubblegum Pop, EDM, Dancehall and Rock. For this reason, I tried to apply all of them in the demo. As examples, I used Drastic change to Trap in the Pre-chorus and Style Blend in the Chorus, mixing EDM drums with a Bubblegum Pop voice line.

3. 2. 1. 3. Instrumentation

1. Analyse

As K-pop is a highly diverse genre in styles, it can vary a lot in instrumentation and sound design. Even though, taking ITZY as our subject of analysis, we can classify their most used instruments in the following categories: vocals, lead, chords (synth, pianos and guitars), bass, drums and extras (noise and samples). (Annex Analysis Instrumentation)

2. Name instruments for every section

To think rationally about our instrumentation, we can add to our scheme the name of the instruments we would like to use in every section. Once we have it done, we can proceed to create tracks in the DAW for every instrument used.

Intro	V1	P1	C1	V2	P2
Lead Bass Drums Noise Sample	Voice Bass Drums Noise	Voice Bass Chords Drums Noise	Voice Lead Bass Chords Drums Noise	Voice Bass Chords Drums Noise	Voice Bass Chords Drums Noise

C2	B1	B2	Drop	C3	Outro
Voice Lead Bass Chords Drums Noise	Lead Bass Drums Samples Noise	Voice Chords Bass Drums Noise	Voice Chords Bass Drums Noise	Voice Lead Bass Chords Drums Noise	Lead Bass

3. 2. 1. 4. Patterns and motifs

In the arrangement we play with patterns and motifs, which can be created, mixed, varied, suppressed and repeated. A good arranger must know when to use these techniques in order to create a pleasant and memorable sound environment for the enjoyment of the listener.

1. Analyse

A usual technique in ITZY's discography is to use a new pattern at the second part of a section. This can be seen in Wannabe's first verse, where a drum pattern consisting of hi hats and a clap starts to play at the fifth bar, creating more diversity and retaining the listener's attention. You can see this same technique in my pre-chorus, where a drum pattern starts to play on the fifth bar, creating a build-up.

2. Complete the scheme

As in the analysis we have pointed out different techniques, we can add some of them to a new section of our scheme where we specify what will happen in every section.

3. Turn the scheme into reality

Once we have our scheme completed (7. 3. The scheme), we can go to our DAW and play with patterns and motifs according to it. Keep in mind that there is complete freedom to change our initial plan if a better idea appears during the composition process. Therefore, the mixture of "rational thinking" (writing down ideas) and the "try and failure process" (trying new ideas directly on the DAW or on an instrument) can be beneficial.

Intro	V1	P1
Starting with a reverse sample, the intro consist of the lead and the kick. At the end there is a sample saying "Yoh ITZY".	The first 4 bars consist of chunks of the bass and the kick. Then, hi hats, percussion and a riser are added.	Hi hats, claps, the bass, a synth and an impact start playing. At the second 4 bars, a percussion motive is added.

C1	V2	P2
The whole drum set (hi hats, kick, clap and percussion), the lead/bass, the keys and 2 risers play at the chorus.	The whole lead motive plays together with the synth, the kick, the hi hats and the percussion. At the end there is a drum fill.	It is the same as the first pre-chorus

C1	B1	B2
It is the same as the first chorus.	The bass plays together with a drum pattern. There is also a sample and a riser playing to fill up the space. At the end there are a drum drum fill and chops of a sample.	Now the keys take the protagonism together with the bass, two risers and a steady 4-on-the-floor groove.

Drop	C3	Outro
This is a low density part at first with only the bass, the keys and a clap. Then, it increments in energy with the addition of the synth, layers of lead, impacts and percussion.	It is the same as the others.	Only a chunk of the lead motif plays.

3. 2. 2. Sound design

In K-Pop music production, sound design refers to the art of creating and manipulating audio using audio production techniques and tools, such as sequencing and synthesizers (Sound design - Wikipedia, 2021).

1. Take the style as a reference

To start sound designing our demo, we should think first about what kind of sound we want to archive. For this, we can use the styles we choose before as references.

EDM	Trap	Rock	Pop
Synth leads 909 drum machine Pads	Booms 808 drum machine Distorted synths	Electric instruments Acoustic drums	Guitars Pianos Claps

2. Search for a sound

Once we have decided what kind of sound we want, we can start searching for it. In K-Pop, we can find both recorded and digital sounds, and for the latter, we can use programs to search on sound libraries, being Splice the most relevant nowadays, or we can create sounds using plugins, such as Omnisphere, Analog Lab and Serum.

3. Edit the sound

Even if we find a sound that we like, it will usually need some editing to fit in the soundscape. For this reason, it is important to learn about sound theory and modulation. I can recommend Coursera's "Creating Sounds for Electronic Music" by Loudon Stearns, assistant professor on Berklee Collage of Music, and "Sound Design and Synth Fundamentals" by In the mix on YouTube.

4. Layer sounds

Lastly, there is a very used technique called "layering", which implies putting different soundtracks on top of each other to archive a fuller and more unique sound. I recommend watching the video "Music Production in 2 Minutes: How to Layer Sounds" by Hyperbits on YouTube to listen to an example.

As an example, in my case, while creating the lead, I took inspiration from EDM, searched for a sound in Analog Lab, edited it and layer it with an electric bass recording.

3. 2. 3. Top-lining

Top-lining origins as an answer to the producer's struggle to create the vocal line of the song, the so-called "top line". Top-liners songwriters work to fill this void by creating lyrics, melodies and harmonies on top of the instrumental tracks. Now-a-days, most mainstream songs are the result of the collaboration between a top-line songwriter and a songwriter-producer (Berklee, n.d.).

1. Identify emotions

One of my teachers said that music is a vehicle to express emotions. This means that with music we can express feelings and sensations. It is clearly seen in chords, where a major one feels bright while a minor is darker and sadder. Having this into account, we can start thinking about what type of emotion our track evokes.

In my case, I have previously decided to use the “girl crush” concept, which relates to women empowerment, matureness and confidence. As a result, my track makes me feel assertive, self-confident and hopeful, which leads assertiveness to be the chosen emotion.

2. Brainstorm ideas and words

Once we have an emotion, we can link new words and ideas to it, creating a bank of words which are all connected to our song. This can be done either in paper or digitally, but it is important to have a written record because within those words, we are going to find a title. It must sound cool and give space to create a story around it (Song 101, 2019).

Assertiveness: Not taking orders, Rebel, Empowerment, Escape, Unruly, Wilful, Docile / Obedient, Rules / breaking rules / breaking chains, Opposition, Stubborn, Wild and free, No longer walking through the fire, No shame in creating my name, I've got a ticket for my own train, I'm on my way, **My life, my way and you've got nothing to say**, Beware, I'm no bird, but I've got wings to fly away, follow my dreams

Title: My way

3. Create a story

Now that we have a title, we must create a relatable story around it. It can be written in different ways, but I found it easier to write it from the protagonist's perspective.

In my case, "My way" tells the story of a person who, despite the opinions of others, chooses to follow one's will and reclaim one's freedom.

Haters are always looking down to me, saying what I must do and giving no room to my opinions. I realise my life is only mine to define, and I want to reclaim it.

4. Create an outline

As we have seen before, the structure of the song usually has different sections with their unique function. The verse tells the story, the chorus sets the message, the pre-chorus gives us context and the bridge takes us into another perspective. Having these functions in mind, we can create an "outline", by assigning a key idea to a section. With this, we are creating the structure of the story.

V → They don't care about my opinion
P → They say their way is the best, but I don't take it no more.
C → I won't obey them, I'll do things in my own way.
V2 → They won't be content if I do my own thing, but I prefer being happy
B → Say what you want, I don't listen

5. Create the melody

During my research, I found out about two common ways to approach the writing of the melody.

- The first is recording yourself **humming** a melody while listening to the song. This method is perfect for those who prefer to catch ideas on the fly.

- The second approach consists in composing the melody by **writing down note by note**. While it is more time-consuming, it lets us be more rational about our decisions.

At first, I used the humming method, but it did not work for me as I was constantly getting already-existent melodies. Then, I decided to analyse ITZY's melodies to find characteristics:

- At the verse, the voice becomes very rhythmic-driven using fast notation with occasional syncopation. It usually plays with chord-notes with few passing notes in a low register.

Analysis of Not Shy's first verse.

- At the pre-chorus, the melody takes the spotlight. Sang in a higher register, it contains big interval jumps, a steadier rhythm and a wider use of chord notes, tensions and passing notes.

Analysis of Not Shy's pre-chorus.

6. Create the lyrics

In this step, we are trying to match our melody with a coherent phrase. We can start with filling the last notes of the melodies with rhyming words, then building a sentence around it, taking into account the song's story and outline.

Usually, ITZY's rhyme pattern is not a steady one, being able to change in every verse and even being non-existent. The most present poetic technique is the repetition of keywords.

7. Record

Just before starting to record, we must make sure to create an adequate sound environment. As we do not have the means of a professional studio, we must cope with our resources. In my case, I covered a wardrobe with blankets to soundproof it.

If we have the mic stand set, we can start recording the lines. It is recommendable to record several takes of every line, as later in the next stage this will let us choose the best performance. For a more detailed information, look up "How To Record Pop Vocals | Make Pop Music" by Make Pop Music.

8. Do voice production

Once we have recorded our takes, we can edit them in several ways to archive a better sound performance: comping, layering, editing out unwanted sounds, volume automation, autotune / pitch correction, EQ, de-essing, compression, additive EQ, reverb, delay... (LANDR, 2021).

3. 3. Editing

In the edition part, we are going to focus on the optimization of the sound to archive a presentable demo. This step is important because it ensures that the first impression will not be disappointing for the target listener.

3. 3. 1. Mixing

In short, mixing is the act of optimizing individual audio tracks, combining them together and bundling them into a single audio track called “stereo mix” (Pro Musician Hub, n.d.). Put in other words, mixing is the art of perfecting sounds and placing them into a soundscape. As an example, we can mix a guitar in several ways: it could be higher in volume during the solo, panned to the left during the verse and enhanced with compression and saturation effects during the chorus.

To archive a basic mix, we can follow these steps (Roth, 2021):

1. **Organize the session** for a better workflow.
2. **Use a song as a reference** if you are looking for a particular soundscape.
3. **Balance the volume** of every instrument to guide the listener’s attention.
4. **Use compression** to level the dynamics and tone shapes of an instrument.
5. **Equalize the instruments** to make them fit better together.
6. **Play with space (panning, reverb and delay)** to create a 3D soundscape.
7. **Automatize the volume** of every instrument to make the sound consistent.
8. **Use effects** to enhance sound of particular elements.
9. **Do a final check** to make sure everything is presentable.

For more in-depth information, it is recommended to read the *Interview 4#* (see on 7. 4. 4. Interview 4#) in which we talk with a professional mixing engineer. In the interview, we talk about mixing, mastering, the difference between them and study resources, among other topics. Two other recommendable resources are the articles “Mixing music 101: The 8 steps to a radio-ready sound” by MUSICIAN ON A MISSION and “How to mix music: The simple guide to mixing” by LANDR.

3. 3. 2. Mastering

A usual misconception is to think of mixing and mastering as the same thing. We can differentiate them because mixing focuses on working with several sound tracks to archive a “stereo mix”, while mastering only works on the “stereo mix” giving as a result the “master recording”, which is the final product that will be commercialized. In other words, mastering is the art of sound-optimizing a track for its use across all devices. You can think of it as a quality control where we polish the song doing finishing touches and setting a decent loudness. This is a very important step to be able to present a professional-sounding track, as it really sets a difference in quality. To archive this, we could follow these steps:

1. **Subtractive EQ:** remove unwanted sounds and frequencies with EQ.
2. **Additive EQ:** boost frequencies to make enhancements with EQ.
3. **Compare with a reference song** to adjust our demo to the commercial standards. In my case, I used “Wannabe” from ITZY as a reference.
4. **Automate volume changes** to add movement to the track.
5. **Use a limiter** to increase the level of the track to the loudest record possible without any bad distortion.
6. **Ask for feedback** as an outsider can give a more objective opinion.
7. **Do a last check-up** to fix major mistakes.
8. **Finish the demo** even if it is not perfect. You can find the final demo of this project on the pen drive attached.

It is recommended to read 7. 4. 4. Interview 4# and to look up resources such as the article “What is mastering?” from LANDR and the video series “Are you listening?” by J. Wyner on iZotope.

Having reached this point, we can say that our demo is finished. You can listen to mine on the pen drive named as “2. My Way”.

3. 4. Pitching

In music, the term “pitching” refers to sending a song to a music label, artist or publisher in the aim of starting a work collaboration.

Pitching, even though it is a business process rather than an artistic one, still counts as part of the production process because it can get our demo to be fit for the objective artists if they accept our collaboration offer.

As in every business, we need an action plan to reach our objective and a backup plan in case the first goes wrong. For this reason, I have idealised two strategies to guarantee that our work will not be in vain and that it will be useful to us. The first one, “short-term strategy” tries to reach the objective artist directly, while the other, “long-term strategy”, intends to make our work valuable for our career through the creation of a portfolio.

3. 4. 1. Short-term strategy

1. Get their contact information

As it has been mentioned before, in the short-term strategy we intend to contact the artist directly. For this reason, getting their contact information is our first step.

In our case, as ITZY is a group under the company JYP Entertainment, we will need to contact JYP Publishing, their publisher, first via the public information displayed on their web.

2. Write an email

In the music industry, as in many business sectors, the preferred way to contact an artist is through email, while using the adequate etiquette. It consists in writing a formal letter presenting yourself and asking for permission to send the demo. This is due to the overflow of messages that publishers get and their need to be selective to not waste time and efforts (Dodson, 2020).

3. Wait for an answer

An answer could take some time to arrive, or never arrive at all. This is totally normal, as beginners usually have a harder time getting noticed. In fact, this is what happened to me. The email I sent has not had an answer from JYP Publishing.

4. Send a link to the demo

In case there has been a positive replay, the next step is to send another email with an introduction about the demo and a private link to a platform such as SoundCloud and YouTube where you would have uploaded it (RORY PQ, 2018). This is preferable than attaching a file to the email, which is not that convenient (LOGOS, 2021).

If you decided to send this email without having the permission, there is a chance that someone will hear it, but the most probably result is to get ignored, as we can see in the annex “7. 2. 4. *Pitching*”, where somebody listened to my cover but did not replay.

3. 4. 2. Long-term strategy

1. Make a portfolio

As we said before, the objective of the long-term strategy is to make our work valuable for our career. We can archive this by making a portfolio, which can be described as a collection of an artist’s best work. In essence, it will serve us as a resume. It can be in different formats, such as a personal website or an account in a streaming service.

2. Keep learning, analysing, practising and producing

To grow our portfolio, we must work on new and better projects. If we keep learning, analysing and practising, we will improve our technique and produce better quality songs every time, thus forming an extensive repertoire from where to build out a career.

3. Network

Getting to know people in the industry can open many doors for you as it can lead you to work in different projects, learning new things and even job opportunities. Luckily for us, thanks to the internet, now-a-days it is easier than ever to connect with people all around the world.

As an example, part of my research has been possible thanks to the online community about K-Pop music production created by the producer, songwriter and YouTube content creator AZODi (AZODi, n.d.). From his discord server, AZODi's 방 [bang], I got to interview interesting people from whom I have learnt a lot.

4. Present yourself to auditions

Some K-Pop companies have open auditions where anyone can participate by presenting their work. This is a grate opportunity to get noticed by those companies and to practice making custom projects. To give an example, JYP Publishing has been holding annual auditions for three years with the requirement of submitting 2 songs (one for a girl group and the other for a boy group) (JYP PUBLISHING, 2021).

5. Keep pitching

The only way to get a successful pitch is to keep trying. It will not be easy, but being constant is the key to a grate career. If one particular artist does not respond, do not get discouraged and try pitching to others. Even if it does not work, we have alternatives, such as signing a contract with a publisher, getting to know inside contacts through networking and getting recognition for our portfolio.

4. Conclusions

4. 1. Final conclusion

With my project's results, we can conclude that it is possible to create a demo if a methodical approach is followed, but it may not be fit for an artist if it is not successful on the pitching stage, as it is the artist who has the last word. For this reason, the composer should focus on things they can control, such as improving their skills, analysing other artists, pitching for different companies, doing auditions, networking and creating a portfolio.

4. 2. Overview

In the course of this project, my knowledge about the creation of demos has expanded and this has opened new horizons for me. My research stage has taught me the basics on music production and I have learnt about the material and the knowledge needed to make a demo. I also got to know K-Pop's social context, as well as getting to know ITZY's position on the K-Pop music industry.

Even though they are not directly reflected on my paper, there are two more things that helped me on my research stage. First, by creating a cover of the song "Like this" by Wonder Girls (see on 7. 2. Like this), I put in practice some of the things I learnt on my research, helping me to later apply it on the final demo. And second, interviewing other musicians has helped me build a wider view of this field, getting to know other people's approach to beat making, sound design, top lining, mixing, mastering and pitching.

As my research has taught me, the process of creating a demo is always varying, but I found a basic pattern that some composers use. This consist of creating a beat, developing it into a full composition, editing it and then pitching it:

The first step, creating a beat, has its roots in Hip Hop culture, and it is an evolution of Jazz' paper-based lead sheet. It is used to get and define key

characteristics and ideas of the future song, such as the concept, the main style and the structure. My method consists of getting references from other songs, rationally thinking about a concept, finding a style that matches the concept, analysing the basic structure of the objective artist's songs and then using it as a guideline to the beat's composition. The steps to compose the beat are writing a simple melody, building chords from it, creating a more complex melody as a lead and then adding the drum pattern characteristic of the style we choose in advance. Those steps are repeated for the rest of the sections and done according to what we have decided before.

On the development of the song, arranging, sound design and top-lining take place. First, on the arranging, we restructure the beat by elongating it into a commercial length, we define the sub-styles in the song using the techniques "drastic change" and "style blend", the instrumentation is chosen, and we play with patterns and motives by creating, mixing, varying, suppressing and repeating them. Second, we design the different sounds by taking style as a reference, searching similar sounds using plugins or recording them, and we edit and even layer them to fit better in our composition. Lastly, we create a top-line, meaning that the vocal line is composed by creating a scene, brainstorming words, creating a story, making an outline, composing a melody, adding words to this melody, recording the vocals and doing some voice production.

Through the edition of the song, we can improve it to archive a grate first impression as well as a pleasant listening experience. First, in mixing, we work with individual tracks to make them fit together in a soundscape, then, in mastering, we optimize the whole song for its use across all devices.

The last stage is the pitching of the song, implying that the demo will be presented to a company with the aim of initiating a work collaboration. The short-term strategy, which intents to contact directly the artist, is not very effective for beginners as the company can easily ignore their emails. On the contrary, the long-term strategy, which focuses on making a portfolio, continuing to grow and learn, networking, auditioning and pitching to other artists, seems to be more suitable as it makes our work valuable for our career.

4. 3. Criticism of the demo

Overall, I am pretty happy with the result. It has been my first demo where I have worked on every single aspect of the song. Even though it has not been accepted by any company, it does not mean that its quality is poor. In fact, I have been both praised and constructive criticized.

In one hand, I must admit that there are some flaws, mainly in voice production. My vocal performance lacks of pronunciation, which leads the listener to not be able to understand the lyrics. This could be improved by practising more the vocalisation and intonation of the lyrics. I could also have added more voice effects such as harmonies, doubles and addlips. And lastly, the mixing between the vocals and the instrumental could be better if I had worked more on removing harsh frequencies out of the vocals.

In the other hand, it has been said that my demo has been well composed and that it is “catchy”, having iconic melodies combined with a striking sound design for some instruments such as the bass. The listeners’ reception has been good, being said that some of my friend had the song playing on repeat for hours.

I would like to comment that I consider by demo to be in ITZY’s style, as some listeners pointed out the grate resemblance. This has been possible because of the use of analysis, from where I learnt the key characteristics of their style. This reinforces the idea of analysis being a very powerful tool for any producer-wannabe, as it lets us learn directly from the best.

4. 4. Future projections

This project opens the door to theorizing about K-Pop music, as it has been proved that with analysis we can learn more about this genre. Is because of this that I invite to the discussion anyone willing to bring ideas and personal experiences.

Now that this project is concluded, I would like to shear it with the world as it could help another producer-wannabe. For this reason, I am planning to publicize it in different media formats.

On a personal level, my intention is to follow my own advice and keep working on a portfolio using the method proved here, learning through analysis, improving my skills, networking, presenting myself to auditions and pitching to different companies. On top of that, taking the acquired experience here, I am planning a personal project where I will be working on my own artistic ideals and career.

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7. Annexes

7. 1. ITZY's Analysis

ITZY is a Korean girl group produced by JYP Entertainment and formed by 5 members: Yeji, Lia, Ryujin, Chaeryeong and Yuna. They debuted in 2019 with their single Dalla Dalla, and since then they have positioned themselves into the top of K-Pop 4th generation.

7. 1. 1. Concept

They started with the so-called “teen crush” concept. In this aesthetic theme, the keywords are “youthful” and “energetic”, referring to the teenager's dynamic and vibrant lifestyle. A great example is their song “Dalla Dalla”, where they sing about being carefree and unique over an animated beat.

Most recently, their first song of 2021, “**마.피.아**. [Mafia] In the morning” has a darker undertone. With this change, we can determine that they are using a “girl crush” concept, which is defined as “badass”, “powerful” and more “woman-like”.

In general, their music is energetic and danceable, targeting young audiences with their message of self-love.

Wannabe (English version)

Chorus

Won't pretend to be someone I'm not
Yeah, I'll be staying true to myself
I wanna be me me me
I won't change, I'm loving what I got
'Cause I know I'm perfect just the way I am
I wanna be me me me

7. 1. 2. Music style

K-Pop is their genre, as they are a music group produced by a Korean company under a defined system, and their music style varies from song to song. We can find a multitude of styles throughout ITZY's discography. The most relevant styles for the group are Trap, Bubblegum Pop, EDM, Dancehall and Rock. As example of every style:

- Trap: In the morning
- Bubblegum Pop: Wannabe
- EDM: TING TING TING (with Oliver Heldens)
- Dancehall: LOCO
- Rock: WANT IT?

One of K-pop's main characteristics is the implementation of different styles in one song. The tradition of mixing styles goes back in time since Seo Taiji and Boys, when they experimented with different genres, as we can see in their song "I know" where they mix a hip-hop beat with a disco instrumentation. As a result, now-a-days, we can point out two techniques in K-Pop⁶:

- Drastic change: As the name suggests, it consists in changing the style drastically in one particular section, as we can see in ITZY's song THAT'S A NO NO where they intercalate a Trap verse even though the song's main genre is EDM .
- Style Blend: We apply this technique when we use characteristics from different styles on the same section. This can be seen in ITZY's song Not Shy, as it mixes a dancehall drum pattern with trap drums, EDM instrumentation and Pop vocal production.

⁶ During the analysis of ITZY's songs, I found out these two recurrent techniques, but I could not find any discussion or established name for them on the internet. Therefore, I decided to name them according to their functionality.

7. 1. 3. Structure

Intro	→ Ear-catching
Verse	→ Rap-oriented, poor harmony, chunks of lead
Pre-chorus	→ Melody-oriented, strong harmony
Chorus	→ Hook-oriented, lead-oriented
Bridge	→ Different from the rest of the song, dance break
Outro	→ Concludes the song, a reference to another part

- **Intro**

The introduction serves both to attract the attention of the viewer and to introduce the song. In ITZY's case, their introductions are always ear-catching and iconic. Ex: Not shy

- **Verse**

Generally, the verse is used to contextualize the chorus. In the verse the story is explained, while in the chorus the message is emphasized. With this, we can say that the verse gives a lot of importance to the narrative.

If we analyse ITZY's songs, we can see that they use this pattern, since their verses are made to make the voice stand out. To achieve this effect, they use different resources:

- Simple instrumentation
- Few chord changes
- Rap: emphasis on the rhythm of the lyrics
- Simple voice melody

Ex: Wannabe

Another technique that ITZY has used is to put chunks of melody played by the main lead to advance the main instrumental motif of the chorus. Ex: Dalla dalla

Normally, the second verse maintains some similarities with the first one, but changes the voice line and adds new elements. Ex: In the morning

- **Pre-chorus**

The pre-chorus serves as a link between the verse and the chorus. This can have a duration of 4 or 8 bars. Normally this section builds up the energy gradually to introduce the chorus. This can be achieved by increasing instrumentation, for example.

Although in many western songs it is not used, in K-Pop it typically appears. Moreover, the songs of this genre tend to reserve this section for the best singers of the group, as it is a very melodic part with a more interesting harmony in contrast to the verse and the chorus.

With the analysis, you can see that ITZY's harmony changes in this section to more interesting chords:

- Modulation to subdominant chord of the major scale or
- Use of minor scale
- Use of both triad and seventh chords
- Use of modal interchange ($V \rightarrow I^-$)

- **Chorus**

This is the most important part of the song. All the previous sections lead to this one, which is the most energetic. Here the main message is made clear thanks to the hook, which is made up of a catchy letter and a main motif.

As for the harmony, ITZY usually use a stable progression in their songs:

- It can be either in major or minor scale
- Use of the tonic (I^- or I)
- Use of the dominant (V^- or V)
- There are no secondary dominants.
- Triad chords

- **Bridge**

If one word could describe the bridge, it would be "different". This section gives us space to create something contrasting from the rest of the song before going back to the chorus.

“ I think the bridge is meant to take you away from the rest of the feeling of the song. And so, you're used to hearing verse, pre, hook, verse, pre, hook. Then all of a sudden, it's like, Oh dang, where are we going? We're going somewhere else. This is crazy. Blah, blah, blah... Then all of a sudden we're back.” (Yip, J., 2018)

In ITZY's case, we can clearly see creative freedom from the different bridges from all over their discography. As example, in Wannabe we can hear a dance break while in Not Shy and In The Morning the bridge is more melody-oriented.

- **Outro**

In short, the outro is meant to end the song, so it must feel conclusive. It can have different durations, depending on the composer's taste.

As we can hear in Wannabe, ITZY usually use a part of a key motive to end the song. In this case, it ends with the lead motive of the first verse.

- **Other sections**

The most usual extra part used by ITZY is the drop, a typical EDM part which consists of a rhythmic or bass line change followed by a build-up to introduce the chorus, as in Not Shy. They also double some parts, as you can hear in Wannabe since there is a double chorus.

7. 1. 3. Instrumentation

- **Vocals**

The vocals are made by the members of the group, which can be singers and rappers. The most common technique is to intercalate lines sung by different members, so to give sound diversity and to keep the attention of the listener.

- **Lead**

Normally, the lead plays a catchy and memorable melody. It can be played by numerous instruments depending on the style and concept, as an example, in Not Shy the lead is played by a trumpet and in In the morning by a synthesiser.

- **Chords**

Chord-based instruments can be played in several ways, focusing on the harmony, the harmonic rhythm or even playing melodies. Some instruments used in K-Pop are the synthesiser, the guitar and the piano. Example: In Wannabe's pre-chorus, we can hear guitars playing.

- **Bass**

The bass can have three functions (Bass (sound) - Wikipedia, 2021.). It can play as the lead (ex: Wannabe's verse), it can outline the chord progression (ex: Wannabe's chorus) and, lastly, it can play to underline the rhythm (ex: Not shy's verse).

- **Drums**

The drums are the rhythm base for every song. The rhythm pattern and the sound design varies with every style. Although the basic elements are the kick, the snare, the clap and the hi hats, we can also find drum fills with toms and different percussion instruments. Ex: In the morning's chorus.

- **Extras**

Apart from the typical instruments used, K-Pop also uses sounds to fill the space. I have detected two types:

- Noise (risers and impacts): these are sounds used to play with the energy of the track. Ex: In In the morning's intro, we can hear a riser on the third bar.
- Samples: these are pre-recorded sounds that help give texture to the song. Ex: Wannabe's intro is made up of samples.

7. 1. 4. Patterns and motifs

A usual technique in ITZY's discography is to use a new pattern at the second part of a section. This can be seen in Wannabe's first verse, where a drum pattern consisting of hi hats and a clap starts to play at the fifth bar, creating more diversity and retaining the listener's attention. You can see this same technique in my pre-chorus, where a drum pattern starts to play on the fifth bar, creating a build-up.

7. 1. 6. Top-lining

At the verse, the voice becomes very rhythmic-driven using fast notation with occasional syncopation. It usually plays with chord-notes with few passing notes in a low register.

5 D-verse 1 b3 b3 b3 b3 b3 C 3 1 1 d2 3 1 D- 5 5 5 1 1 C 5 5 5

No bo-dy bo-dy e - ver got in the way of some-thing I tru - ly want - ed

Detailed description: This image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notation is for the first five bars of the first verse. Above the staff, chord symbols and fingering are provided: Bar 1: D- (fingering 1); Bar 2: b3 (fingering b3); Bar 3: b3 (fingering b3); Bar 4: b3 (fingering b3); Bar 5: b3 (fingering b3). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some syncopation. The lyrics are: "No bo-dy bo-dy e - ver got in the way of some-thing I tru - ly want - ed".

Analysis of Not Shy's first verse.

At the pre-chorus, the melody takes the spotlight. Sang in a higher register, it contains big interval jumps, a steadier rhythm and a wider use of chord notes, tensions and passing notes.

2 Bb7 C A- Bb7 s13
b7 5 t13 s4 5 3 T9 1 T11 b7 5 T9 b7 s13

13 pre-chorus Hey there hey there we make a great pair great pair You know that

Detailed description: This image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notation is for the first five bars of the pre-chorus. Above the staff, chord symbols and fingering are provided: Bar 1: Bb7 (fingering b7); Bar 2: C (fingering 5); Bar 3: A- (fingering t13); Bar 4: Bb7 (fingering s4); Bar 5: Bb7 (fingering 5). The melody features larger intervals and a more rhythmic pattern. The lyrics are: "Hey there hey there we make a great pair great pair You know that".

Analysis of Not Shy's pre-chorus.

Usually, ITZY’s rhyme pattern is not a steady one, being able to change in every verse and even being non-existent. The most present poetic technique is the repetition of keywords.

	Not Shy - English Version
	<i>Pre-chorus</i>
D	Hey there , hey there
D	We make a great pair , great pair
-	You know that
-	If I could make you my own
E	I could show you things
-	You never dreamed of
-	Yeah, yeah, why don't you wake up
E	Follow the signs
F	You're a free agent, do what you like
F	But I'm impatient, swallow your pride
-	And let me know, let me know
F	'Cause I'm not shy

7. 2. Like this

In this section, I will comment on the process of producing my own version of the song “Like this” by Wonder Girls. You can find the track on the pen drive attached named as “3. Like this”.

7. 2. 1. Idea generation

I had the idea back in November 2020 when listening to Blackpink’s performance on 'SO HOT' (The Black Label Remix) (BLACKPINK, 2017). This song is a remix based on the song of the same title by Wonder Girls. In this case, The Black Label adapted an old song into a brand-new one with a fresh style. I really liked the idea, so I did research about Wonder Girls’ old songs and found out “Like this” (Wonder Girls, 2012).

I had two reasons to make this demo. The first reason was to apply what I was observing in the analyses. The second one was to get started in the music industry by presenting to the company a useful project.

7. 2. 2. Development

“Like this” is a song from 2012 in Hip-hop style, which contrasts with the Dance style that JYP uses now-a-days. Its key motive is a descending and aggressive lead line that plays through all the song. Starting from this motive, the first thing I did was adapting the sound design into a cleaner one to fit it better into a Dance concept and to change the tonality of the song one semitone higher.

As I had decided to turn the song into Dance style, the obvious step was creating a fitting Drum beat. It is characterized by the kick being on every beat, as well known as a 4-on-the-floor kick pattern. In the case of the clap, its mainly function is to go offbeat, but at times it plays on beat when the song needs it to. Lastly, on the higher frequency range, we have the hi hats and the shaker playing 8th notes. The only time that the drum beat changes is on the bridge, when the style changes into trap style with an irregular pattern.

During my analyses of JYP’s songs, I noticed that there is a strong tendency to give importance to the Chord Section during the pre-chorus, but it remains without it on the verse and the bridge. Following this tendency, I decided to find an appropriate chord progression. Once I had decided it, I realized that the melody did not quite fit in, so I pitched some parts of it to fix the problem.

On the chorus, the bass follows the chord progression as a unique sustained note, while in the pre-chorus there is a melodic line because the Chord section is able to sustain the whole harmony by itself.

As an extra, an uplifter is used to help to transition from one section to another.

7. 2. 3. Edition

The edition of this cover was possible thanks to iZotope's plugin Neutron 3. I am not quite happy with the result because the loudness of the track could be higher and sharper.

7. 2. 4. Pitching

First attempt

Once I finished producing the cover I uploaded two versions (the original and the instrumental) into a SoundCloud private list because it is the standard way in the industry to send demos to labels: *“For instance, private SoundCloud links with downloads enabled have become an industry standard” (RORY PQ, 2018).*



Like this (cover) on SoundCloud.

The next step I took was writing the email. In it, I present my demo, I ask for an opinion and I give a reason for them to take in consideration my work.

"Like this" version for Nizi U >



per a publishing +

dj., 25 de març 23:59 (fa 8 hores) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Good morning,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am 17 years old. I am currently studying high school in Barcelona while doing a research project.

The reason for this email is to communicate to you that **I have produced a demo for Wonder Girls' song "Like this" in a Dance style** and that **I would like to ask you for an opinion.**

I decided to remake "Like this" because I had the idea to adapt it to what I consider JYP Entertainment's current style as an exercise for me to get better at producing, but it ended being the first part of my year-long project where I am working on producing a song for Itzy. Even though this is not the final result, I think **it can be useful to you because it is a tribute to Wonder Girls in a style which can be sang by Nizi U.**

I am attaching a link to a private track in SoundCloud where you can find both the complete demo and the instrumental.
<https://soundcloud.com/amanda-freijo/sets/like-this-amanda-freijos/s-QbtCO9XXpTz>

Please, let me know your opinion when you can. It would be very useful for my research project.

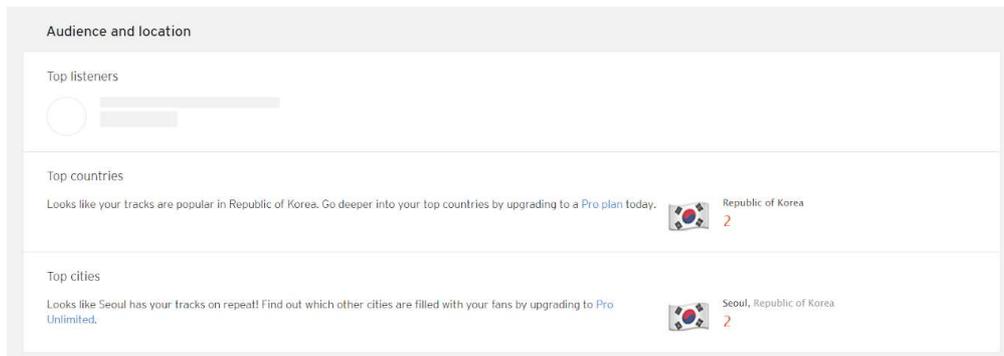
Lastly, I want to thank you. This is my first time presenting my work to a company, and I am very grateful for your time.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

My email to JYP Publishing.

In the first day, I found out that my track was being listened in Seoul, South Korea, though SoundCloud's stats. This fact means that my email was successful in getting to JYP entainment. In the other hand, I am still waiting for a response to this email.



SoundCloud's statistics showing that someone in Seoul, Republic of Korea listened to the cover.

Second attempt

On May 24th of 2021 I reached JYP Publishing again. This time I assure I was using a formal register as well as asking for permission to send the demo. Two weeks passed and I got no response.

Permission to send a demo >



per a publishing ▾

19:49 (fa 0 minuts) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to you to ask for permission to send you a link to my remake of the song "Like that" by Wonder Girls.

First, I would like to introduce me and my project. I am a 17-year-old from Barcelona doing a year-long research project about creating a demo for your group ITZY.

Specifically, this remake is the first part of my project. With it, I pretend to learn the correct way to contact you as well as practice what I have been learning with my research.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

↳ Respon

➡ Reenvia

My second email to JYP Publishing

Conclusion

With this two attempts, we can conclude that JYP Publishing do not answer via email if you are not a professional.

7. 3. The scheme

Intro	V1	P1
4 bars	8	8
EDM	EDM	Trap
Lead Bass Drums Noise Sample	Voice Bass Drums Noise	Voice Bass Chords Drums Noise
Starting with a reverse sample, the intro consist of the lead and the kick. At the end there is a sample saying "Yoh ITZY".	The first 4 bars consist of chunks of the bass and the kick. Then, hi hats, percussion and a riser are added.	Hi hats, claps, the bass, a synth and an impact start playing. At the second 4 bars, a percussion motive is added.

C1	V2	P2
8	8	8
EDM & Pop	EDM	Trap
Voice Lead Bass Chords Drums Noise	Voice Bass Chords Drums Noise	Voice Bass Chords Drums Noise
The whole drum set (hi hats, kick, clap and percussion), the lead/bass, the keys and 2 risers play at the chorus.	The whole lead motive plays together with the synth, the kick, the hi hats and the percussion. At the end there is a drum fill.	It is the same as the first pre-chorus

C1	B1	B2
8	8	8
EDM & Pop	Rock & Dancehall	Pop
Voice Lead Bass Chords Drums Noise	Lead Bass Drums Samples Noise	Voice Chords Bass Drums Noise
It is the same as the first chorus.	The bass plays together with a drum pattern. There is also a sample and a riser playing to fill up the space. At the end there are a drum drum fill and chops of a sample.	Now the keys take the protagonism together with the bass, two risers and a steady 4-on-the-floor groove.

Drop	C3	Outro
8	8	1
EDM	EDM & Pop	EDM
Voice Chords Bass Drums Noise	Voice Lead Bass Chords Drums Noise	Lead Bass
This is a low density part at first with only the bass, the keys and a clap. Then, it increments in energy with the addition of the synth, layers of lead, impacts and percussion.	It is the same as the others.	Only a chunk of the lead motif plays.

7. 4. Interviews

7. 4. 1. Interview 1#

This next interview's subject is Robswan, member of the Discord's server dedicated to K-Pop music production AZODi's 방 [bang]. As we will see, Robswan talks about his history with music production, his experience with K-Pop and his creation process.

Meira: When did you know you wanted to produce songs? Why?

Robswan: I've always believed that a person should do whatever they want. So, my life has been spent deciding what I want to do for myself as well. Someday, I thought that the recordings I took from the video games I play, are fun to edit. So it started my professional video editor career. But in one day I realized that something was missing. It took me two years to realize that what was missing, I myself was in too much background. Music has always been my passion. But I had never looked at it as a career. When I was a video editor, it contained things that were missing and added to it, so it started when I decided to completely change my career and jump into music.

Basically, it's like my final form, my final thoughts on what I want to do with the rest of my life. Trying to inspire kids all around the world, just like how some songs impacted me as well.

Meira: Oh! I understand this! Music can help so much, and creating it's a way of helping other people. So nice!

Robswan: Exactly

It got me through some tough days, so I want to be the same who suffered from the same things. And with it, they will think like "There's people who are just like me, so I gotta' hang on stronger" Yea it's just a life goal to be honest. And I believe music is the best way to achieve this.

Meira: In fact, that's my same objective! I would like to talk more about this later with you. If you want, let's pass to the next question and talk later!

Robswan: Sure thing!!

Meira: As you are in this server for K-pop producers, I suppose you are interested in K-pop. Why did you start producing it?

Robswan: I like the complexity of it, honestly. I've thought about it so many times, like what genre should I produce? What to do? etc. For example, I like to listen to a rap song most or like slow ballad songs out of all the genres. But when it comes to producing, K-pop offers more diversity among the genres. I mean, you can literally put 3-4 genres together and still could pull it off somehow without it sounding like a bad produced track. I don't think you can do this in other genres. As for the second reason, because it includes more than one genre in one song, it also offers more of an emotion rollercoaster. As I said, this is what I was aiming so, K-pop seemed like a perfect genre for me to produce I guess.

Meira: True, true. K-pop can get very complex and interesting!

Let's go back to your beginning as a producer. Where did you learn the basic concepts in music production? And now, what resources do you use for learning?

Robswan: Programs usually use same mentality in all aspects of purposes. I can say I was doing 25-30% of music producing while I was editing a video. (I realized this when I got into music producing) I learnt mostly about it from YouTube. It became something like you can't live without it. Even for educational purposes, it provides a limitless amount of content about almost anything. So yeah, I got the basics from YouTube. As for the polishing the things that you've learned from it, communities like Discord servers comes in handy. You can ask literally anything without any concern because that's what it is for, and you always get the reply that you wanted to hear. I also follow some producers that I like the most of their work from social media. They always go live on Instagram or post videos about how they produced their hit song on YouTube. You can't buy these with money so digging more about the style you want to produce will always offer good information.

For example, the TWICE song I CAN'T STOP ME, I really like the retro vibe in that, but there was no information about where is that sound comes from. I look for the

producer and catch him up live one day on Instagram, asked about the song, and he literally showed me the official song's project file.

Meira: Woow that's so cool!!

It's so nice, there is a supportive community!

Robswan: Yes, it is always nice to have people around you with the same goal with you. Especially in music, connections are priceless.

Meira: True!

Have you ever pitched a demo?

Robswan: No unfortunately. But even if I got a chance, I would probably refuse the offer because I know I am not ready to step in the professional field. I work so hard about this, practising 7 to 10 hours a day to improve my sound. So I believe I will get to do that eventually. But I'm in no rush, I'm taking my time to be honest! I also don't wanna be one hit wonder. That is also why I'm going step by step, slowly.

Meira: Ahh I see. Slowly and steady. That's a really good approach for a long term objective! How are you practising? Do you have a method?

Robswan: I always have something to be inspired of. I put that on my DAW (Digital Audio Workstation), trying to see "what makes this track successful, what is the catchiest part about it?" And when I found out about that, I try to implement that into my work. (With your own taste) Music is music in the end, if something is cool, then it's cool. And while I'm doing all of this, I'm passively improving my ear to be better. So I can say it's happening without me realizing it.

Meira: So, once you have the inspiration part, do you develop it into a beat and then a full song?

Robswan: Yes, inspiration part is foundation of it. It makes you get going. Otherwise, you just sit there looking at your computer without any thought xD. Once you get the foundation of the track, you can pretty much see where it's going and just can go

with it. So in case of practising, I do these steps like every day which improves me overall.

Meira: So in resume, your steps are: inspiration → beat → full song ?

Robswan: Yes.

Meira: So you said that once you got the foundation, you know where the song is going. What do you usually do to develop the foundation?

Robswan: I just load random synths, play random chords on it and then on top of that I load my favourite mixing effects. At this point this is where it's began to shape-sound like a song.

Meira: Can I ask what plugin do you use?

Robswan: Serum is my first go to for synths. If not, I use Kontakt Libraries. For effects, I use RC-20 Retro Color and SoundToys plugins. (EchoBoy, Crystallizer, Tremolator etc.) These for the first look generally. If I want something specific, I usually use something else. Like Omnisphere or Analog Lab

Meira: Do you use samples and loops?

Robswan: It differs really, but I use Splice a lot.

It depends on what I want to go for. Or time I can put on. Yes, samples and loops are like superheroes when it comes to saving time.

So I use most of the time, but I'm trying not to rely on them.

Meira: Do you prefer to craft your own sounds?

Robswan: Chopping up samples is also crafting your own sounds, but I always prefer to use my MIDI to record the sounds. Creating something completely from scratch by me is always way more satisfying.

Meira: That's sounds interesting, I may start designing my own sounds
You said you have favourite settings for mixing. How do you mix and master your songs?

Robswan: Honestly, I EQ the things that bothering me and that's it. I just randomly play with the settings to make it as good as possible. For mastering, sorry I don't even know I'm not there yet.

Meira: That's fine!

One last question, what would you say to someone starting in K-pop production?

Robswan: This is a note to myself too, always have your own sound. Although I said "I usually have a song to be inspired with", you can create something 100% opposite to it. Just make it unique in your own way, so people listen to your track and say "Oh, this is him!" or "Oh, it sounds like him, it must be him!" etc. Use the drums that you like the most, use the plucks, bass presets that you like the most over and over (with a couple of changes), let them be your signature of your craft. K-pop is also the best genre for achieving this uniqueness. So take advantage of that.

Meira: That's a good advice right there!

Well, this is all I wanted to ask you. I'm impressed because you have helped me a lot. Thank you very much for your cooperation!

You do explain yourself very well!

Robswan: Thanks to the hours I put into myself to trying to understand me better i guess. Thanks! It was really fun.

I'm glad if I helped!

Meira: Let's finish the interview here.

7. 4. 2. Interview 2#

This next interview's subject is Victor, member of the Discord's server dedicated to K-Pop music production AZODi's 뽕 [bang].

Meira: When did you know you wanted to produce songs? Why?

Victor: Well, I think that if you want to pursue something in this direction, you need to love music, in the first place. In my case, my interest in music started when I was small. I really enjoyed listening to music and I often times found it very inspiring. My dream has always been to do something with music, it's just that I wasn't really aware of what exactly I wanted to do. Many people dream of becoming singers or players in a band, but that wasn't quite what I was looking for. Then I discovered songwriting and music production. I immediately knew that this was the thing I had always dreamed of doing.

Meira: As you are in this server for K-pop producers, I suppose you are interested in K-pop. Why did you start producing it?

Victor: Usually, people produce and make the music that they enjoy listening to. My taste is pretty diverse when it comes down to music, but since K-pop is one of the genres I do enjoy, it was a matter of time that I try and make something in that direction. I'm still new to it lol.

Meira: I see, it's something you enjoy doing

Let's go back to your beginning as a producer. Where did you learn the basic concepts in music production? And now, what resources do you use for learning?

Victor: Nowadays, it's really easy to learn the basics of music production. There are many pages on Instagram that post very, very helpful and useful posts (My favourite page is @producersacademy). YouTube is full of tutorials as well. There are even channels dedicated specifically to producing K-pop songs (My favourite music production channels are - @LYRE Music, @Servida Music and @Make Pop Music). However, I think networking is also really important. Finding people that are better

than you and can give you feedback will definitely be useful for a beginner. The people who "mentor" you will definitely help you grow and improve.

Meira: Do you have previous experience in the professional field? Have you ever pitched a demo?

Victor: Nope, I haven't. I've been producing for about a year now, which is definitely not a lot of time. I am currently working on building my "portfolio" and doing as many different projects as possible. In my opinion, successfully pitching a demo requires two things: great connections - which happen with a lot of experience and work in the field. And second - it requires experience. I wouldn't advise beginners to jump straight onto pitching demos for K-pop artists. I would advise them to start with smaller artists, maybe even not in the K-pop field. It is very unlikely that your first released song is gonna' be a K-pop song.

Meira: I see, it's the same as traditional art where we have to gain experience before entering into the professional field

Victor: Well, it isn't necessary that you need to be experienced in order to pitch a demo. As far as I'm aware, there are no requirements about who can pitch a demo and who cannot. However, I think that if you haven't gained that experience yet, it would be a waste of time to try and pitch demos that are most likely not gonna' get accepted. Instead, you can be spending that time gaining enough experience in the field. You also have to take into consideration that K-pop music is much more complex than western music, so it takes a lot more time and practice to master it.

Meira: Now, I wanted to ask you about your creation process. How do you start a song?

Victor: Oh, that's a nice one haha! Well, each song starts in a different way, but here are the top 2 most common ways that I start a song. The first way is, I would come with a really nice bassline and then build a chord progression based on that bassline. Or I would hear a really nice chord progression and I would "steal" it but with some changes. It is important that you change it a bit, so it is still somewhat creative. The

2nd most common way that I start a song is by listening to new songs. For example, when I hear a new song, I would figure out the elements that I like the most, and I would try and make a song including some of those elements that I really liked. By listening to As If It's Your Last by BLACKPINK, I really become obsessed with bells and to this day, they are an element that I would try and sneak into almost every project haha.

Meira: That's curious! I've done another interview, and they have told me the same about picking things from other songs.

Victor: Yeah it's a very common thing. I mean, the music you make is pretty much a summed up version of the music you like so....It's like clothing, you know...If you like skirts, you're gonna' wear skirts haha. It's the same practice in music

Meira: Still, there is a thin line between inspiration and plagiarism. Where do you think this line ends?

Victor: That's a very very tricky question. I think that it really depends on the mindset you have. For example, when I use reference tracks, I want to recreate the vibe of that song. I wouldn't be scared to add elements that aren't in the reference track since my main goal is matching the energy. That's called inspiration. But when you start trying to get the track to sound as close as possible to the original in terms of everything, that's called plagiarism. The main sign by which you can tell whether or not you're plagiarising is your creativity. If you have creative freedom and you're not scared to change your track, add things that aren't in the original, change the arrangement, etc. then you know you aren't plagiarising. However, if you don't have that freedom, and you aren't allowing yourself to change the track, since it's gonna sound quite different, that's how you know you are plagiarising the reference.

Meira: That's a good explanation. Thanks!

Victor: Your welcome, haha!

Meira: I want to ask you two things more about the starting of the song. When you start a demo, do you have in mind a message or vibe you want to express?

Victor: To be honest, no. I never start with the lyrics or the top-line, so the message is something i figure out in the last moment. When I start out, I just know in what direction i want to go in, whether or not it's gonna' be badass, mature, cute, experimental, etc.

Meira: The second thing I wanted to ask is if you usually make beats. Is beat making your usual way to go? I mean, do you make a beat before developing the song into a full-length one?

Victor: Well, It really depends on what exactly you are creating. That is definitely an efficient way to do a pop song in a western style, you start a 4 bars beat and slowly develop it, since pop music doesn't really tolerate drastic changes. However, that doesn't quite apply to K-pop. In K-pop, every 8 bars are different, so you can't really make a beat and develop the rest of the song based on that beat. My way to develop a song is, I would choose a song that has a similar direction with the one i want to go in with that particular beat, and I would kinda reference it when developing the beat.

Meira: It must be difficult to mix several styles in one song. What do you think makes this sudden changes work together?

Victor: To be honest, I really don't know the answer to this one haha. I think the balance between the section makes them sound cohesive. Western songs are usually either slow or fast, but in K-pop you get all in one. I think that K-pop songs are longer than western songs and that somehow makes it more cohesive and gives more room for experimentation. Because even though your chorus may be completely different from the rest of the song, it's repeated 3 times and each chorus is like 40 seconds long, so you have time to get used to it. While compared to western songs which are shorter than 3 minutes in most cases, you really don't have that much space for creativity and sudden changes, since the listener won't have time to get used to them.

Meira: Maybe a more precise question would be better. How do you implement different styles in one song?

Victor: I think there are really no rules when it comes to implementing styles. I've seen everything at this point. Aespa's new song is the biggest example of that. The only thing I can say is - if it sounds good, it sounds good.

Meira: Can I ask what plugins do you use?

Victor: Do you mean virtual instruments or plugins for mixing?

Meira: Both.

Victor: About producing, I use most of FL Studio's stock plugins, Vital, Sylenth sometimes, Addictive Keys for Piano's and Ample Guitar M II is a great guitar VST. I also plan on getting some Spitfire libraries. They are free and really nice. About mixing, my favourite plugins are OTT - multi band compressor, saturation knob and shaper box. OTT and Saturation Knob are free, as well as SPAN. Shaper box is not free. It's great for artistic effects.

Meira: One last thing. What would you say to someone starting to produce K-Pop?

Victor: I would say that you should definitely start with doing remakes. If you are brand new to music production, first start remaking some simpler western songs, then move onto K-pop, and then you can start writing and making your own music. But remakes are essential! And also, it's gonna' be really tough. BUT, it's really important that you don't forget music is meant to be fun, don't overwork yourself!

Meira: Thank you for having me! This is the end of the interview.

7. 4. 3. Interview 3#

Meira: Hello, Hazel. Thanks for having me! I would like to start this interview by getting to know you and your music career. What's your background story as a songwriter/top-liner?

Hazel: Ah, I barely have one. I come from metal music, I have a few mates I jam with, they'd usually send me an instrumental, and I'd do the top-line and the lyrics over those. About a year ago I started considering songwriting as an actual career path, and K-pop seemed like a great genre where you could go a bit more creative with your ideas. I joined Azodi's server with no expectations, but actually met some amazing people. I now make tracks with them, some for pitching and some to release, coming soon.

Meira: First of all, how would you define top-lining?

Hazel: I would define top-lining as writing the vocal melody, rhythm included, and all the harmonies and ad libs - basically anything that constitutes singing, rapping or even talking.

Meira: Second question. How do you usually get songs to top-line?

Hazel: Usually I work with producers I know, they either send me a track ready for top-lining or we come up with some general direction, and they develop the track while I try to give feedback or any ideas.

Meira: How do you usually start to top-line?

Hazel: Usually I listen to the beat maybe once or twice, then turn recording on and freestyle over it with "nanana" instead of lyrics. Sometimes I'd throw in a random word here and there if I think it fits, but this is all subject to change during the process - I just want to capture all my initial ideas before I forget them!

Meira: Do you use outlines?

Hazel: Is Outlines a software? If so, I don't know it!

Meira: In my research, I found that some songwriters use an "outline". This means writing literally what you want to say, so to then write it more poetically.

Hazel: Oh right! Not really, if I have a general lyrical idea I throw some words and phrases that might work with the topic, but that's about it.

Meira: What goes first, the melody or the lyrics?

Hazel: That's a good one, for me, it's either honestly. Usually it's the melody as with K-pop writing at least a lot of the original lyrics are replaced, so the melody is a lot more important. This said, some things are best developed simultaneously, for example when writing hooks it's good to think of words that are just as catchy as the melody they go with. I'm also cautious of trying to jam words into melodies they don't work with and vice versa.

Meira: What is important when writing K-Pop?

Hazel: Ah, that's a long question. Keep it fresh, I would say. The genre is pretty famous for its constant musical changes, so don't let the listener get bored.

Meira: Can I make you some questions about pitching songs?

Hazel: If you want to write something about publishers, I can tell you what I was planning on doing and may still do in the future when I get serious about getting signed

Meira: Please do!

Hazel: I would start looking up potential publishers and see what music they specialise in (e.g. If you are specifically interested in K-pop, you would want a

publisher that actually does pitch and has connections with K-pop labels) - start with ones in your country as they might be easier to contact and network with. You can also look up known music producers and look who their publishers are and if it seems like they might work with you (e.g. If you're in Europe and the publisher is based in London or something in those lines). I would then prepare a few demos, polished and ready for pitching rather than still a draft, and send an email with those and some background about you. You can start with a few, if you get no responses, you can try your luck with others. From there, if you get a positive response, you can hopefully start looking at working with them more - maybe they'll start reaching out to you with potential projects, and you can continue sending them your work too. The way I understand it, if they consistently see good work from you, they would consider signing you and having you as part of their writers, send you leads and maybe even invite you to camps.

Meira: And lastly, what would you say to someone starting to top-line ?

Hazel: Start now! Practise really does make perfect, don't let insecurities hold you back. Find a free beat or ask a producer for a beat they might have lying around and try writing a song. Try to finish it, rather than spend hours trying to make it perfect and never finishing it. Also listen to songs you like and try to analyse them, what harmonies do they have? Do the verses change a lot? Do they have any cool ad libs?

7. 4. 4. Interview 4#

Meira: Hello, Gabriel. Thanks for having me.

In today's interview I hope to learn from you about mixing and mastering, so to be able to apply this knowledge into the creation of a demo.

First of all, I would like to know more about you and your professional background in music.

Gabriel: Hi. Thank you for reaching out to me.

My name is Gabriel Constantin, and I'm a professional mixing engineer from Switzerland. I've been a mixer in the music industry for about 8 years now, and I've come to learn quite a few things along the way. I've mixed for Indie-Pop artists like Yaeow & Neptune both incredibly talented young Australians and Hip-hop & Trap artists like DIRTYXAN, Lil yung pharaoh and 8father, including many more. And if there is one thing I've learned about mixing & mastering it is, that like any other artistic expression, it's endless and ever expanding.

Meira: How would you define mixing? And mastering? Is there a difference between them?

Gabriel: First of all, yes! there is absolutely a difference between mixing and mastering, which is one of the biggest misconceptions even some of the more established artists have. Mixing, to put it simply, is the act of balancing multiple tracks of audio, also called "stems", down to a single streamlined audio track output, also called "stereo mix". Mastering is the final touches on the "stereo mix", which most often than not includes elevating the volume of the "mix" to a commercial level, all the while retaining some transients, overall dynamics and tonality of the original song. Seems quite simple at first, but is easier said than done.

Meira: It sure is! If you had to resume the mixing process, what would the steps be?

Gabriel: Now that's the most difficult question there is about mixing!

As you know, music, like any other art form, is subjective. Combining stems into a single stereo mix can be done in as many ways as our creative mind can think of, as long as we have the available physical tools to do it, or to even make them.

If I had to describe the process as it is mainly done today,

I would say that there are two methods as well a hybrid of both, which are analogue and digital mixing. Analog mixing is done via hardware consoles, which we all think of when we think of mixing, a big desk with a lot of faders and knobs in which we load the audio stems of a song and sum it through the hardware. As opposed to digital mixing, done all "in the box" which means all on the computer, never converting the audio signal to analogue.

The core principles of mixing for both methods stay the same, and although there are no set rules to follow, the industry dictates a certain sound for every genre and a majority of mixers get to that sound through a similar process, which is as follows:

First the volume levels of each stem is adjusted to obtain a first balance, followed by the use of equalizers on each stem, which carve or boost frequencies of the audio spectrum depending on the needs to take out unwanted frequencies or enhance already existing ones. Then comes the use of compressors, if necessary, which control the dynamics of the audio waves on each stem they are used on and include a variety of parameters. And finally, the volume levels of each stem are revisited to make final adjustments to the balance. These are the main steps of the mixing process, but are all interchangeable and can be used multiple times throughout the stage, in the analogue domain as well as the digital realm.

Meira: Let's deepen in the different steps. How do we know how much we should level the volume of every stem?

Gabriel: that is mostly specific to the sound of the genre you are mixing for, as well as the record itself. In the end, it comes down to the individual preference and

subjectivity of the mixer. If, for example, you wanted to have a certain instrument seem further away from the listener, you would turn its volume down compared to the other sounds and vice versa. It's all about creating a three-dimensional landscape of frequencies where the main sounds of a record are in the foreground, usually, the vocals, the main melodic element and the main rhythmic element should come out the most in the mix and thus are balanced louder than the rest of the stems most of the time.

Meira: How do we know if we need to use compressors?

Gabriel: Compression is a concept hard to grasp even for the average mixer, its widely believed that compression is just a tool to control sudden bursts of volume during a badly recorded stem or to control audio peaks of an entire mix or individual stem to be able to get a louder overall mix in the end. This stands true, but is not the main purpose of a compressor as I see it, the main purpose of a compressor is to alter the "groove" of a stem by shaping the beginning and tail of the sounds that make up the stem through the "attack" and "release", the "threshold" and "ratio" of the compressor. The threshold being the amount of volume it takes to engage the compression, the ratio, the amount of compression, and the attack and release controlling the start and finish of the effect respectively. And so, compressor are mostly a creative effect used at the mixers' discretion, a few of the most renowned mixing engineers not using any at all.

Meira: What other effects are usual to use in this stage?

Gabriel: The main ones, that are used in almost every single record since the beginning of music recordings, although be it not purposefully at the start, are reverbs and delays. These situate sounds in space and add depth and width to the mix. They can be added directly during the recording stage of a sound, for example by recording in a cave, the reverberation and echoes of the cave will automatically be included in the audio file, or by adding it artificially, which is the case for most records now, during the mixing process. This is done by having a "send" on

the stem to which we want to add a reverb or echo, meaning that a copy of the signal is sent to an analog or digital reverb/echo on its own track making a new stem that only includes the echo/reverb and will be mixed with the other already existing stems. Nowadays one can also use a Reverb/Echo effect directly on a stem with the use of a plugin that includes a wet/dry option, meaning that one can directly blend the effect by itself, also called wet signal, with the dry signal, meaning the original sound without the effect, but this technique is mostly used by producers and not by mixers because it can affect the audio quality of the stem it is used on.

Meira: And what about panning?

Gabriel: Oh yes! good point!

I almost forgot about one of the most important techniques used in mixing, second only to the volume levelling of a stem, to create beautiful soundscapes. Just like volume levels and reverbs/echoes dictate how far away a sound is from the listener, panning dictates the left/right orientation of a sound. Panning to the right means that the levels of a stem are adjusted in a way to make the sound come from the right, and panning to the left is the exact opposite. In most cases this can be done with a knob on the analogue consoles or on a virtual knob in your digital audio workstation known as "DAW". With only panning and volume levelling of stems, one can achieve a perfect place for every stem in the audio landscape of frequencies of a particular record.

Thank you for reminding me about panning, I can't believe I forgot to talk about such a vital technique in mixing. I'm very impressed.

As an example, a very popular panning practice for rock music is to pan the two main guitars the complete opposite of each other so as to widen the mix and make them both more distinguishable to the listener.

As a good baseline, low frequencies are normally kept in the middle or "mono" usually around 90hz and less, as well as the vocals. The rest of the elements of a mix usually have some kind of panning or spectral imaging involved.

Meira: Any other step in mixing that you want to comment?

Gabriel: Sure. Although there are different popular schools of mixing , like "top down" mixing for example, the most important in any of them is to take breaks while mixing for extended periods of time to reset the ears and get new perspectives. Not taking breaks enough is a common problem among mixers, and we should all do more often. 15 minutes, even 5 can make a big difference in how you'll mix going forward.

Meira: What steps do the mastering process have?

Gabriel: In perfect theory a mastering engineer's job is quality control, small finishing touches and setting a decent loudness for the track to be commercially viable depending on the wants of whoever commissioned the track. So first the mastering engineer will check for any big or small problems on the track that the mixing engineer missed, for example the vocals being a bit too loud on a certain part of the track, and fix those issues with precision EQ's and any available tools to do so. Second, he'll add very small adjustments and enhancements, usually not more than 1.5dB's normally around 0.5dB's on each EQ band, to the tonal balance of the track. He'll also automate overall volume changes or EQ bands to add to the movement of the track, for example boosting the volume by 0.5dBs for the chorus to make it more impactful and reduce it by 0.2dBs on the verses and by 0.7dBs on the bridge. And finally he will increase the overall levels of the track with usually a limiter or other means. There is no volume level standard nowadays, but it's always the best to have the loudest record possible without any bad distortion. As a rule, it's good to go for -10Lufs or around -7 to -9 RMS to be competitive on the market.

Meira: When do we know if a song's mix and mastering are finished?

Gabriel: Well, there are two schools of thought when it comes to when a song is "finished". Some mixing engineers, like for example Jaycen Joshua, start the mix with a sound in mind, they work very fast towards that goal as to not forget the ideas they had when they first listened to the rough, and, as soon as they get to a point where they say to themselves "this is the sound" they stop mixing/mastering regardless of anything else to avoid second thoughts. Others, like P Diddy, work on

the mix and master until it's perfect in their mind, in his case this can last for more than 2 years for a single song. However, one must keep in mind that a bad song will never be good even after mixing and mastering. But, ultimately the song is only finished when the client is happy with the mix/master, unfortunately even that's sometimes impossible due to immeasurable expectations.

Meira: Now-a-days, thanks to internet resources, mixing and mastering are more approachable for artist-wannabes. Where do you recommend learning from? Is there an essential resource we can't miss?

Gabriel: There are great free tutorials on the internet like for example on the official "Izotope's" or the "Waves" channel and websites or independent YouTube channels like "Produce Like a Pro" that I recommend. However, there is ONE resource that is absolutely, with no doubt, THE BEST for beginners and professionals alike called "mixwiththemaster.com" where you can learn from true masters and pioneers of the craft, it's an absolute gold mine.

Meira: I heard that iZotope and Waves are big fishes in the industry. Would you recommend them for beginners?

Gabriel: If you are talking about their free tutorials and music blogs, then yes! absolutely! if you are talking about their plugins, as a beginner, I would refrain from using any third-party plugin and stick to your DAW default stock plugins.

Only as intermediate, when you are ready to get your first third-party plugins, would I recommend them, I would even go as far as to say that they should be your first third party plugins you get. They are great sounding, easy to use, low on CPU usage (waves) and affordable.

Meira: Is there anything else you would like to say to a beginner?

Gabriel: Yes, there is one thing I'd like beginners not to forget, and it's not to be afraid; Not being afraid of doing something wrong and not being afraid of learning. If

it sounds good, then it sounds good, so leave it be. And even for professionals, it takes 100s to 1000s of mixes to get a hit.

Meira: Thank you very much for your time and effort! This is the end of the interview.