Reference Music As Guidelines
Using reference music to create better songs
Abstract (Eng.)
This essay examines how reference music can be used as a tool to fix weaknesses within my own songwriting and production process. The weaknesses were found by analysing feedback from other students on my own music. Four reference artists were then analysed with the intent of finding solutions to these weaknesses. Four new songs were then written and produced by implementing the solutions from the reference artists into the creative process.

The results were mostly positive, as the songs had improved on various issues found in the feedback analysis. However, the method restricted the creative process in some occasions rather than inspiring it. The reasons for this are in part due to the choice of reference artists and which aspects of their music were in focus for the analysis.

Abstract (Swe.)
I detta arbete undersöker jag hur referensmusik kan användas som ett verktyg för att stärka svagheter i mitt eget låtskrivande- och produktionsprocess. Svagheterna hittades genom att analysera feedback från andra studenter på min egen musik. Därefter analyserades fyra referensartister med syftet att hitta lösningar på dessa svagheter. Fyra nya låtar skrevs sedan och producerades genom att implementera lösningarna från referensartisterna till den kreativa processen.

Resultaten var mestadels positiva, eftersom låtarna förbättrades på olika svagheter som hittades i feedbackanalysen. Metoden begränsade dock den kreativa processen i vissa tillfällen snarare än att inspirera den. Anledningarna till detta beror dels på valet av referensartister och vilka aspekter av deras musik som analyserna var inriktade på.

Keywords
Reference Music; Pop; R&B; Songwriting; Production

Thanks
1 Introduction

Musicians often use reference music as a guide towards a certain sound or a feeling that they want to incorporate into their own creations. In the constantly changing world of pop music, reference music can also be helpful to keep up with the current trends and sounds. However, as a songwriter and producer, I often feel like my songs are not as good as the reference music that I compare it to. To understand the reasons for this I decided to take an in-depth look at my own music as well as the reference music. Can reference music be used as a tool to improve my own musical weaknesses?

1.1 Background

I often use reference music when writing and producing my own music. However, the process is mostly based on general feeling or sound, rather than conscious decisions about specific musical elements. With this project I wanted to take a more detailed and conscious approach to utilising reference music in the creative process.

Last year, I participated in a songwriting course where I wrote and produced five original songs. After getting written feedback on my songs from my fellow students, I started to think about my own music in a more critical manner. Even though I received a large amount of positive feedback, I saw some patterns in the criticisms of my songs that I found interesting.

After listening again to some of the reference songs that I used as inspiration for my songs, I found that they did not share the same issues as mine. For example, the song that was loosely inspired by Drake’s *Controlla*, received criticisms concerning a lack of range in the vocal melody. Drake does not usually have a large range in his vocal melodies but they are still very interesting to listen to. Therefore, he must be doing something else to keep his melodies interesting. The basic idea of the project is to figure out how these artists avoid the musical pitfalls that I tend to fall into and implement their solutions into my own music.

This project and it’s results are based on my subjective opinions on the reference music and the new material that I wrote.

1.1.2 Previous Research

Though there are many research papers on the use of specific methods to influence the creative process for songwriting and production, their findings are not relevant to this project. However, the artistic research project *Sia Furler som inspirationskälla till mitt eget musikskapande* by Sophie Verdonk (2016), provides some insight into a similar process to the one used in this project. Verdonk describes the process of using Sia Furlers music as an inspiration for her own music. Through a detailed analysis of three of Sia’s songs, Verdonk wrote three new songs influenced by her findings. Her results indicated that it was possible to implement specific techniques and elements from reference music into her own music. Furthermore, Verdonk writes that as a producer and songwriter, being conscious about what to do is important. Whether the goal is to
recreate someone else’s sound or create something entirely new, consciousness is an important factor that affects the final results.

1.2 Purpose
The purpose of this project is to improve on my weaknesses as a songwriter and producer through the process of creating four songs influenced by reference music.

The research questions to which I seek answers to are:

1. What are the main weaknesses in my own music?
2. Can I use reference music to strengthen those weaknesses?
2 Method

The method is made up of three stages:

1. A preliminary analysis of the feedback to find issues within my own songwriting.
2. A preliminary analysis of four reference artists to find solutions to the issues.
3. Implementation of the solutions into four new songs with the goal of improving on the most prevalent issues.

2.1 Preliminary Research

2.1.1 Analysis of the feedback

It is hard to stay objective and critical while trying to find flaws in my own music. Therefore, the written feedback I received as part of a songwriting course is the foundation for this project. There were a total of 11 students in the songwriting course, including myself. I received about 1600 words of total feedback per song from the other students.

In order to get a better feeling for the most commonly mentioned issues, I counted the positive and negative comments for each song and organised them into categories by their musical nature. The eight categories are:

Lyrics - Comments about the lyrics including rhyming, metaphors and similes.
Theme/meaning - Comments about the overall theme or meaning of the song.
Vocal melody - Comments about the melody of the vocals such as note choice and riffs.
Vocal rhythm - Comments about the rhythm of the vocals such as timing or whether a phrase is back-heavy\(^1\) or front-heavy.\(^2\)
Variation/repetition - Comments about repetition or lack thereof concerning the vocals.
Range/energy - Comments about the range of the vocal melody or the energy within a section of the song. This is a separate category for the sake of clarity though it is closely related to vocal melody.
Production - Comments about anything concerning the production or arrangement.
Harmony/chords - Comments about the choice of chords including the repetition of the chord progressions.

As the songs have lyrics in Icelandic, I included a rough English translation to the lyrics of each song for the other students. This may have caused some of the subtle lyrical nuances and meanings to be lost in translation. However, judging from the quality of the feedback, I don’t think this impacted the results in an important manner at all.

After analysing the feedback and displaying the results visually with graphs, I created a list of the most widespread issues that served as a basis for the rest of the project.

\(^1\) A phrase is back-heavy when it starts after the first beat of a bar.

\(^2\) A phrase is front-heavy when it starts on the first beat of a bar.
This essay includes a summary of my overall findings based on the data and individual analyses I wrote for each of the songs. An example of an individual analysis for one of the songs can be found as “Appendix E”.

2.1.2 Analysis of the reference music

The four reference artists that I chose to analyse are Drake, Jhené Aiko, Kehlani and Roy Woods. I chose these artists as I like their music and I think all of their styles share some similarities with the music that I make. The style of music that I focus on in this project is pop influenced by contemporary R&B and the reference artists all fall within those parameters.

I analysed three songs by each reference artist, listed here below.

Drake - *Feel No Ways*, *Passionfruit* and *Marvin’s Room*.
Jhené Aiko - *While We’re Young*, *When We Love* and *Nobody*.
Kehlani - *Personal*, *Undercover* and *Distraction*.
Roy Woods - *Dangerous*, *Down Girl* and *Say Less*.

I focused on slightly different elements for each artist analysis, such as melody, production, repetition, lyrical theme etc. Finally, I made a short list of interesting elements that I found in each analysis that could be implemented as fixes to some of the issues in my own songs.

This essay includes summarised versions of each analysis. An example of a full analysis can be found as “Appendix D”.

2.2 Implementation

After analysing each reference artist I made a new song with a focus on improving a few of the most common issues found in the feedback data. I used the same process I normally use, starting with the instrumental production, followed by the vocal melody and lyrics and finally recording and mixing. However, at each stage of the creative process I would try to implement some of the solutions that I found in the reference music.

2.3 Limitations

Although I do think about certain aspects of mixing when it has a relevant connection to the reference music, it is not the central focus of this project.

The english versions of my lyrics, which are included as appendices, are word-for-word translations and are not meant to be artistic.
3 Preliminary Research

3.1 Analysis of the feedback

This analysis will attempt to answer the research question “What are the main weaknesses in my music?”

An example of a snippet from an anonymous feedback for one of the songs:

“Det känns som att du har ett tydligt tema och att texten har en bra helhet! Jag saknar något som är lite mer originellt eftersom att texten är väldigt klassisk. Vad skiljer din text från andra liknande texter?”

This snippet awards one positive point and one negative point under the category “lyrics” as well as one positive point under “theme/meaning”. I didn’t include repetitions or very similar comments from the same person in my counting.

I find the negative comments more interesting as they are more relevant to this study. However, the correlation between the positives and the negatives can also help reveal which weaknesses are the most relevant. Another thing to keep in mind is that people tend to give out more compliments in the feedback rather than criticisms.

Though the graphs provide an overall representation of which issues are mentioned the most, reading through the feedback and taking notes for each song was also an important part of the process.

3.1.1 Results

\[\text{Figure 1. Graph showing the frequency of positive feedback by song.}\]
The most obvious issues are in the categories “variation/repetition” as well as “range/energy”. This is confirmed both by the peaks in the negative feedback as well corresponding valleys in the positive feedback.

Though people complimented the melodies, there was a general consensus about a lack of variation as well as distinction between sections. There was also positive feedback on these elements, mostly concerning “Song 1” (as seen in Figure 1), which received many compliments on repetitious elements as well a clear distinction between sections.

The criticisms in the “production” category were also mostly related to a lack of variation throughout the songs.

There were many positive comments about individual lines in the lyrics as well as the overall style of writing. However, there are fewer positive comments related to the lyrical theme, as seen in Figure 1. I also noted many similar comments about the lyrics being too mysterious in some cases, making them harder to relate to. “Song 1” and “Song 4” had clear lyrics that explained the story of the songs, while the others weren’t as straightforward in their lyrical meaning. This is reflected in the positive feedback as seen in Figure 1.
After reviewing the data I wrote a detailed list of issues to improve on:

Melodic and rhythmic issues:
- Lack of energy in a chorus
- Lack of melodic and rhythmic variation
- Lack of distinction between song sections

Performance issues:
- Lack of energy in the performance

Lyric issues:
- Lack of an obvious problem or theme
- Lack of clear lyrics that explain the theme of the song
- Lack of new lyrical content in bridge sections

Production issues:
- Lack of production variation as the song progresses
- Lack of production variation in bridge sections

3.2 Analysis of the reference music
The analyses include three songs by each artist and the results are based on my own subjective opinions.

3.2.1 Drake
Feel No Ways, *Views* (Drake, 2016)
Passionfruit”, *More Life* (Drake, 2017)
Marvin’s Room, *Take Care* (Drake, 2011)

Drake has a unique way of writing lyrics and melodies. I chose to focus on those aspects of his music in order to find unique ways to look at my own issues with lyrics as well as melodic and rhythmic variation.

Drake’s rhythmic phrasing is a blend of pop and hip-hop influences and many of his songs include both singing and rapping sections. Drake’s vocal melodies tend to stretch over bars and flow independently rather than using the beat as a structure (Holistic Songwriting, 2017).

The verse in *Feel No Ways* is phrased in a way that allows the most important parts of the lyrics to land on the first downbeat of the bar:

```plaintext
I should be downtown, whipping on the way to you
You got something that belongs to me
Your body language says it all
Despite the things you said to me
Who is it that's got you all gassed up?
```
Changing your opinion on me  
I was only gone for the last few months  
But you don't have the time to wait on me

There are two melodic phrases that are used as an outline for the verse but the rhythm has a lot of variation as it follows the lyrics rather than the other way around.

Many of Drake’s instrumentals have been processed by degrading the sample rate of instruments or sections. This results in a sound that has less high end frequencies allowing the vocal to occupy the high end almost exclusively (Native Instruments, 2016). The resulting focus on his vocal makes his rhythmic and lyrical variation a driving force behind many of his songs. At first glance, this seems a bit contradictory since most of his songs don’t have a particularly big melodic range. However, Drake uses this to his advantage and uses the listener’s focus on his vocals to bring attention to the subtle rhythmic and melodic variations in his performance.

Drake’s verses often serve as introductions while keeping the theme or problem of the lyrics hidden. The chorus in Passionfruit reveals that the problems that were introduced in the verse are because of a long-distance relationship.

Passionate from miles away  
Passive with the things you say  
Passin’ up on my old ways  
I can't blame you, no, no

The chorus has a similar melody as in the verse and even starts on the same note. However it is more repetitive, both lyrically and melodically. Drake usually uses the same three or four notes as the basis for his melody, so when he goes any higher or lower, it is very noticeable. The melody in Feel No Ways introduces one new note in the chorus and another one in the post chorus. This creates distinction between the sections and keeps the melodies interesting in a subtle way.

3.2.2 Jhené Aiko

While We’re Young, Trip (Jhené Aiko, 2017)  
When We Love, Trip (Jhené Aiko, 2017)  
Nobody Trip, (Jhené Aiko, 2017)

Jhené Aiko makes relaxed R&B music where the vocal is in focus. Her productions rely on subtle details to keep the listener engaged.

The lead vocal is the central element throughout all the songs and the instrumentals sound fairly minimalistic. However, there are subtle hooks in the instrumentals as well that keep the listener interested. For example, there is a catchy piano riff that plays all throughout most of When We Love. In Nobody there is a percussive riff that plays throughout the first half of the song and keeps the song interesting as some of the vocal melodies are very sparse.
The instrumentals don’t follow all the genre conventions of R&B. *Nobody* has no bass line, hi-hats or snare drum for the first half of the song. The instrumentals introduce subtle new elements throughout the songs.

Jhené’s instrumentals have a large number of fills processed with long reverb. For example in *Nobody* there is a vocal shout effect as well as a water drop effect drenched in reverb. These effects fill out the song as well as creating depth in the mix. The snare drum in *While We’re Young* has a very noticeable gated reverb which also creates depth in the mix. There are other subtle elements in the background of her instrumentals such as filtered percussion loops, synth riffs and white noise effects.

Jhené’s vocals are used to create much of the variation in the songs. Her performances include a great deal of riffing as well as many ad-libs, especially as the songs progress. The ad-libs are mixed a bit different from the main vocal sometimes processed with modulation effects and more reverb than the main vocal. In *While We’re Young* there are three distinct vocal parts layered together in the chorus section.

The songs usually feature a new and unexpected hook in the second half of the songs. In *When We Love* there is a bridge section where Jhené repeats the line “I never knew a love so good”. In *Nobody* the fourth verse is built around the repetition of the line “take this”, which serves a similar structural purpose to the previously mentioned bridge.

### 3.2.3 Kehlani

**Personal, SweetSexySavage** (Kehlani, 2017)
**Undercover, SweetSexySavage** (Kehlani, 2017)
**Distraction, SweetSexySavage** (Kehlani, 2017)

Kehlani has a playful and catchy style that is both pop and R&B as well as having some hip-hop influences. I chose to focus mostly on her lyrics and vocal arrangement.

Kehlani’s lyrical themes are relatable and are often about relationship issues. The lyrics are straightforward and the lyrical theme is sometimes explained in multiple song sections. In *Undercover*, she explains the lyrical theme right at the start of the first verse with the line: “You know they don’t wanna see us together, but it don’t matter no, ‘cause I got you.” In *Distraction*, the verses are a bit more vague, while the pre chorus and chorus both have a clear explanation of the song’s core theme.

Background vocals are often used to answer the main vocal which gives the songs a strong R&B flavour. The chorus in *Personal* has background vocals that answer the main melody with a “na, na, na” and a “yeah, yeah, yeah”. The pre chorus in *Distraction* also has similar backing vocals which answer the lead vocal.

The chorus sections in *Undercover* and *Personal* are very repetitive and are both built around a simple three note riff. In the chorus of *Undercover*, Kehlani makes the words sound more like rhymes by accenting the right syllables in the words. She does this in the chorus of *Personal* as well, where “personal” is rhymed with “hurts to know”.

9
The bridge sections in *Personal* and *Undercover* double down on the lyrical themes using new words rather than introducing new angles on them. The bridge sections usually bring the energy of the instrumental down and then build it back up before a final chorus.

### 3.2.4 Roy Woods

- Dangerous, *Nocturnal* (Roy Woods, 2016)

Roy Woods has a melodic style of rap. His style has some similarities to my own melodic style, though his is more hip-hop. I want to focus on his flow and vocal arrangement in order to add more of a rap influence into my pop sound.

*Dangerous* starts with the chorus, which is very common for the genre. The first half of the verse that follows keeps the chorus melody and rhythm but changes the lyrics. Roy’s verses often start with a slower rhythm and switch to a faster more rhythmic style in the second half.

The panned vocal doubles in the chorus of *Dangerous*, drop out as the verse starts. This creates a distinction between the sections, as the rhythm and melody stay almost the same. This method is also utilised in *Down Girl*, to help create a bigger variation between sections, as Roy typically stays within the same vocal range for his verses and choruses.

Delay and reverb are also used to great extent in his productions. It is used to create a bigger distinction between the chorus and post chorus in *Say Less* It is also used to accent words and phrases, as in the verse on *Down Girl*.

Roy often uses ad-libs to fill out his songs. The pre chorus in *Dangerous* has ad-libs that harmonise the lead vocal. He also uses “oh” and “yeah” ad-libs to answer the lead vocal and to transition between sections. The ad-libs have been processed with an equaliser so that they sound duller than the lead vocal.
4 Implementation

4.1 The process
The new songs and their respective reference artists are:
*Alveg Sama (Don’t Care) - Drake*
*Meiri Tíma (More Time) - Jhené Aiko*
*Enga Nýja (No New Girl) - Kehlani*
*Hreyfir Big (Move Yourself) - Roy Woods*

The point of this project was not to imitate the styles of the reference artists. However, to make sure that my reference music solutions remained applicable, I made sure that each song was in some way stylistically similar to the reference artist.

I started each song by making a mostly finished instrumental production. Afterwards, I wrote and recorded a demo version of the vocals at my apartment. I then re-recorded the vocals at Linneus University’s studio using a Neumann TLM 103 microphone (expect for the song *Meiri Tíma*, where I used a RØDE NT1). The recordings from the RØDE microphone had a significant amount of room sound in them compared to the ones from the Neumann, which affected the quality of the mix for *Meiri Tíma*. This might have been because of the microphone, the recording settings I used, or a combination of both.

The solutions that I applied to each song are listed here below as well as some details concerning the process.

4.1.1 “Alveg Sama”
In order to implement the solutions found in the Drake analysis, I found that the style of the song needed to by quite similar to his. Because of this, I had to limit myself a bit more creatively than I initially had in mind. As my first three productions went in a direction that was not working for the purpose if this project, I decided to take a more conscious approach and lifted elements (the percussive rhythm and the bass line to an extent) from *Marvin’s Room* to use as the basis of the instrumental.

The solutions for this song were mostly implemented during the writing stage. The verses includes many elements of Drake’s writing style. For example, the phrasing is inspired by *Feel No Ways* as I use the first downbeat to accent the words. I also allowed the lyrics to guide the rhythm in the verses like in *Feel No Ways*. The pre chorus uses longer notes to create a distinction from the verse as in *Marvin’s Room*” The pre chorus also goes one scale degree higher than the verse, as in *Marvin’s Room*. The chorus is rhythmic and repetitive, as in *Passionfruit*, though the feeling is vastly different.

I followed Drake’s pattern for the lyrics, starting with a mysterious verse and revealing more information in the consequent pre chorus and chorus. The lyrical theme is also inspired by *Marvin’s Room* and *Feel No Ways*. 


I processed the vocals with Autotune, which is a key part of Drake’s sound. After recording the song, I added a beat stop at the beginning of each verse. I also added filtered vocal edits of the pre chorus, intertwined with snippets of the chorus, as in the outro on “Feel No Ways”.

The solutions that were applied from the Drake analysis are listed here (in green):

- Lack of energy in a chorus
  - A more rhythmic and repetitive chorus section than the rest of the song
- Lack of melodic and rhythmic variation
  - Allow the lyrics to set the rhythm while following a simple melodic outline
- Lack of distinction between song sections
  - Introduce one new note into the vocal melody to create distinction between sections
- Lack of an obvious problem or theme
  - A mysterious verse that introduces the characters
  - A chorus which explains the theme of the song
  - Lyrics about relationship issues using a first person point of view
- Lack of clear lyrics that explain the theme of the song
  - Place important lyrics on the first beat
- Lack of production variation as the song progresses
  - Play with filters to create variation in the instrumental and the vocal
  - Use beat stops to create variation and bring attention to the vocal

4.1.2 “Meiri Tíma”

The solutions applied to this song were in large part implemented at the instrumental stage rather than the writing stage. Yet reference solutions were applied to the writing of the bridge section.

The main element in the instrumental is a choir sample that I cut up and time-stretched, this was inspired by the song Never Call Me by Jhené Aiko, though it was not one of the three songs that were analysed.

There are many elements, which are heavily processed by reverb, sitting in the background of the mix. The bridge section, which stays in the background for the duration of the song’s final chorus, is inspired by the intertwining vocal arrangement in the chorus of While We’re Young, as well as the bridge hook in When We Love. As the song progresses, there are additions of new synth layers, processed vocal ad-libs and a subtle percussion loop to add variation to the production.

I applied more audible vocal processing to the main vocal than I generally do. The processing is less subtle than on the reference tracks, as it fits the dreamy feeling of the instrumental. This was also done partly to mask the quality of the recording, which was not as high on this song as the others.

The solutions that were applied from the Jhené Aiko analysis are listed here:
• Lack of melodic and rhythmic variation
  - Intertwining vocal parts
  - New hook in the bridge
• Lack of production variation as the song progresses
  - Slowly add elements to the instrumental
  - Process vocal sections differently to add variation
  - Add lead synths, effects or ad-libs to fill in the production
• Lack of production variation in bridge sections
  - Process vocal sections differently to add variation

4.1.3 “Enga Nýja”

The basis of the instrumental was the guitar riff, which is very R&B influenced and fits the musical style of Kehlani. The drum beat was originally meant for the Drake inspired song (Alveg Sama), but it didn’t work out as it was too R&B sounding.

The lyrical theme is obvious from the first verse and is underlined by every consequent section, as in Kehlani’s Undercover.

One of the main elements in the song is the “oh no no” backing vocal that answers the main vocal in the intro, bridge and the chorus. This element was inspired by Personal. After recording the main vocal, I recorded backing vocals, ad-libs and vocal doubles to fill out the arrangement.

The solutions that were applied from the Kehlani analysis are listed here:

• Lack of energy in a chorus
  - Ad-libs that repeat the main vocals with a variation in the melody
• Lack of distinction between song sections
  - Backing vocals that answer the main vocal
• Lack of an obvious problem or theme
  - Have a simple lyrical theme that people can relate to
• Lack of clear lyrics that explain the theme of the song
  - Have the lyrical theme clear from the beginning and explain it multiple times
• Lack of new lyrical content in bridge sections
  - Bridge section that underscores the main theme of the song using different words
• Lack of production variation in bridge sections
  - Have a different chord progression in the bridge

4.1.4 “Hreyfir Þig”

The instrumental is influenced by dancehall music. Though it is not Roy Wood’s primary genre, he has experimented with the it on the song Gwan Big Up Urself.

The focus for this song was to use a rap/hip-hop influence in a more direct manner than I usually do. This was implemented by using faster vocal rhythms and different types of
ad-libs, mostly in the verses. I also used delay to accent certain words in the first verse, as in *Down Girl*. The second verse is split into two sections each, using a similar melody to the chorus in the first half and implementing a faster rhythm in the second half, as in the verse on *Dangerous*.

I focused mostly in implementing the solutions found in the analysis into the verses and the bridge to some extent. The chorus is more in line with my usual melodic style as I felt that the song needed a pop sounding chorus.

The solutions that were applied from the Roy Woods analysis are listed here:

- Lack of melodic and rhythmic variation
  - Use different flows for the verses
  - Split the verses into a slow “hook” section and a faster rap section
  - One verse with a similar melody to chorus
  - Different types of ad-libs
- Lack of distinction between song sections
  - Use vocal doubles and other processing tricks to differentiate between song sections
5 Results

5.1 The songs

Overall, the method had a positive effect on my creative process. It pushed me towards trying out new solutions, which affected my writing and production positively. However, the method also caused some negative effects on the process. It proved important which aspects of the reference artists music were in focus during the analysis stage. The starting point of the instrumental was also important, as it guided the whole process.

These following sections focus on details concerning the outcome of each song.

5.1.1 “Alveg Sama”

Though getting the song to go in a fitting direction for the project was difficult, the solutions that I found in the analysis proved useful and improved the overall quality of the song.

Usually, I write the lyrics mostly after the melody is already decided. Letting the lyrics control the variations in the rhythm allowed me to express the theme of song more freely than I usually do. Most of the lyrical, melodic and rhythmic choices were made with regard to solutions from the reference music. This resulted in a song that is quite similar to Drake’s style, though that was not the goal of the project.

The reference music affected the sound of this song the most, out of the four that I wrote as part of this project. However, as I wrote the song in Icelandic, the language served as a barrier that kept the song from becoming too much of an imitation and pulled it more towards my own musical style.

The focus for this song was on creating distinctions between sections, writing clearer lyrics and improving melodic and rhythmic variation. The song sounds like a cohesive and finished production as well as improving on all of these issues to some extent.

5.1.2 “Meiri Tíma”

Jhené Aiko’s style is vastly different from my own musical style. I went in the direction of a laid-back electronic production which I am not used to writing over. As I was mostly focused on her instrumental production in my analysis, the songwriting itself became more of an afterthought. Therefore, the end result is a song that feels uninspired, both lyrically and melodically.

The main focus of this song was to improve the production as well as the writing of the bridge. The bridge section which intertwines with the final chorus is not an idea I would have come up with without the reference music.

Although the method was functional at improving the issues I set out to improve, I should have focused on different elements for this reference artist. Although the
instrumental was improved as a result of the solutions from the reference music, the song itself is of lower quality than usual for me.

5.1.3 “Enga Nýja”
Kehlani’s music has many shared elements with my own musical style. Therefore, I found implementing her solutions into my songs to be a very natural process. However, some of the solutions that I was applying production wise might have been similar to what I would have done anyway.

The song benefitted the most from the lyrical method of explaining the song multiple times. I was also focused on implementing backing vocals and ad-libs. As a result of these two factors, the song feels very simple lyrically while the other elements keep it interesting and varied throughout.

The song does feel a bit disconnected from verse to pre chorus. I added ad-libs to mask the transitions, which was not the perfect solution as it would probably have been better to improve the endings of the verses instead.

The solutions that I wanted to implement into this song attempted to fix varied issues ranging from lyrics, production and arrangement. Nevertheless, it doesn’t feel like an imitation of Kehlani’s musical style and it is arguably the closest to my own style, out of the four songs that were written for this project. The song managed to improve on all of the issues I set out to fix.

5.1.4 “Hreyfir Þig”
The analysis for Roy Woods did not end up offering any particularly inspirational solutions. I didn’t have a focused approach towards which elements of his music I wanted to analyse, which resulted in a scattered analysis. I did not go deep enough into his rhythm and flow as I did with Drake, for example. This, coupled with my inexperience with faster vocal rhythms, affected the song negatively.

Although the instrumental is well made, it’s structure and blend of pop and dancehall influences doesn’t lend itself perfectly to all of the solutions that I applied. For example, due to the pop structure, the verses don’t have enough space for the Roy Woods influence to fit in. The verses sound disjointed and don’t flow as seamlessly as I wanted. Writing rap influenced verses is something that takes practice and perhaps it was unrealistic to expect this method to work in that regard to such a high standard.

The main focus of this song was to improve on the rhythm and melody, as well as differentiating between song sections with mixing and arrangement tricks. Although it is not entirely clear if the rap influences resulted in a great song, the mixing and arrangement tricks were a success. Although the results are mixed, the method did push me in a new musical direction.
6 Discussion

Overall, the project was a success and I managed to find many interesting solutions to the issues at hand. The analysis of the feedback data on my old material proved to be valuable, both for the purpose of this project and to further my future musical development. The reference music analysis gave me a more in-depth look at some of my favourite artists and into music in general.

The project may have been focused on too many different issues from the start. If I were to do another similar project, I would focus exclusively on one musical element rather than the whole process from start to finish. This would have given me more in depth results for some the reference artists, such as Roy Woods and Jhené Aiko. However, the varied focus of the method that I used, resulted in four finished sounding songs, regardless of their artistic merit.

The reference artist analysis which gave me the most interesting insights was the one on Drake. My focus for that analysis was almost exclusively on lyrics, melody and rhythm. Nonetheless, my analysis of Kehlani, which focused on many different elements, resulted in what I consider to be the best song out of the four.

One of the main issues I had during the creative process, was starting the songs off in the right direction. In order to implement the solutions that I found, the instrumentals had to have certain elements, which restricted my process and affected some of the end results negatively (in particular Meiri Tíma and Hreyfír Þig to some extent). A solution to this issue would be to choose the reference artist based on an existing song idea. I agree with Verdonk (2016), that being conscious about what to do in order to achieve the desired results is a positive thing. However, it can also limit the creative process in a significant manner. The method described in this project could also be used to find tools for re-writing songs and adding finishing touches to the productions.
References

Research:

Music:


Web:


Appendices

Appendix A: Lyrics to “Alveg Sama”

“Alveg Sama”

Verse:
Ég veit þú ert búnað sjá mig
En hringdu korter í fimm því að þá vil ég fá þig
Ég veit aldrei hvað ég finn þegar ég horfi á þig
Ég veit aldrei hvað ég vil fyrir en að það er horfði
Svo ég stari á gólfið

Pre Chorus:
Þegar ég er búnað drekka of marga mun ég gleyma hvar ég er
Óg þegar þú ert búnað drekka of marga muntu gleyma hver ég er
Þú sagðir við mig “Mér er sama hvernig þetta hérna fer”
Vitum þæði alveg hvað þetta er
Ættum ekki að flækja þetta meir

Chorus:
Af hverju viltu tala um það?
Ef þér er alveg sama um það?
Af hverju viltu tala?
Ef þér er alveg sama

Verse 2:
Ég þarf bara tíma
Til að átta mig á hlutunum, þú þarf það líka
Þegar þú segir mér “Já ég nenni ekki að bǐða”
Ég skil ekki alveg hvað þú meinar, ertu til í þýða?
Ertu til í að þýða?

Outro:
Þegar ég er búnað drekka of marga mun ég gleyma hvar ég er
Af hverju viltu tala?
Ef þér er alveg sama
Þú sagðir við mig “Mér er sama hvernig þetta hérna fer”
Af hverju viltu tala?
Ef þér er alveg sama

“Don’t Care”

Verse:
I know that you already saw me
But call me quarter to five ’cause thats when I want you
I never know what I feel when I look at you
I never know what I want until it’s gone
So I stare at the floor

Pre Chorus:
When I’ve had too many I’ll forget where I am
And when you’ve had too many you’ll forget who I am
You said to me “I don’t care how this goes”
We both know what this is
We shouldn’t tangle it any further

Chorus:
Why do you wanna talk about it?
If you don’t care about it?
Why do you wanna talk?
If you don’t care

Verse 2:
I just need time
To figure things out, you need it too
When you say “Yeah I don’t wanna wait”
I don’t really know what you mean, can you translate?
Can you translate?

Outro:
When I’ve had too many I’ll forget where I am
Why do you wanna talk?
If you don’t care
You said to me “I don’t care how this goes”
Why do you wanna talk?
If you don’t care
Appendix B: Lyrics to “Meiri Tíma”

“Meiri Tíma”

Verse:
Ég veit að við hófum ekki alla nótt, nei
Svo hví að eyða tíma í að hafa hljótt
Ég vil ekki sóa einni sekúndu
Þó að sólin setjist ekki mun hún vekja okkur
Því ég veit að við hófum bara eina nótt

Pre Chorus:
Ég þarf ekki að eiga síðasta orðið í kvöld
Ég þarf bara að vera hér því nóttin er köld
Nóttin er köld
Og áður en við vitum er hún öll

Chorus:
Mig langar bara að horfa á þig
Mig langar bara að horfa á þig
Horfa á þig
Horfa á þig

Verse 2:
Augu þín svo björt, þau eru blindandi
Og þau gera eithvað við mig sem ég skil ekki

Bridge:
Ég vildi við hafðum meiri tíma
Meiri tíma
Meiri tíma

Outro:
Meiri tíma

“More Time”

Verse:
I know that we don’t have all night, no
So why waste time being silent
I don’t wanna waste one second
Even though the sun won’t set it’s gonna wake us up
Cause I know that we only got one night

Pre Chorus:
I don’t need to have the last word tonight
I just need to be here because the night is cold
The night is cold
And before we know, it’s over

Chorus:
I just wanna look at you
I just wanna look at you
Look at you
Look at you

Verse 2:
Your eyes so bright, they are blinding
And they do something to me that I don’t understand

Bridge:
I wish we had more time
More time
More time

Outro:
More time
Appendix C: Lyrics to “Enga Nýja”

“Enga Nýja”

Verse:
Ég veit ekki hvað þú ert að hugsa en
Ég veit að þælir alltof mikið
Sama þótt þú vitir ekki hvar ég er
Treystu mér

Pre Chorus:
Þú þarft ekki neinar áhyggjur því (ó nei nei)
Þú veist að ekkert getur breytt okkur og (ó nei nei)
Þú þarft ekki að hringja og tjekka, þó þú meinir það vel
Veistu jafn vel og ég að…

Chorus:
Ég vil enga nýja
Ég vil þig en ekki hinar, nei
Óg ég er að reyna að segja þér
Enga nýja, ó nei nei

Verse:
Ég veit alveg hvað þeir eru að reyna
En ég hef ekki áhyggjur af neinu
Engin hér sem gæti fengið mig til þess að koma með
Treystu mér

Bridge:
Ekki hafa áhyggjur af neinu
Ekki hafa áhyggjur af neinu
Ekki hafa áhyggjur af neinu
(Já þú veist alveg hvað ég meina)
Ekki hafa áhyggjur af neinu
(Pú veist að ég er ekki að playa)
Ekki hafa áhyggjur af neinu
(Já þú veist alveg hvað ég meina)
Svo ekki hafa áhyggjur af neinu, ekki neinu

“No New Girl”

Verse:
I don’t know what you’re thinking but
I know that you wonder too much
Even though you don’t know where I’m at
Trust me
Pre Chorus:
You don’t need to have any worries cause (oh no no)
You know that nothing can change us and (oh no no)
You don’t need to call and check, even though you mean it well
You know it just as well as me that…

Chorus:
I don’t want no new girl
I want you but not the others
And I’m trying to say
No new girl, oh no no

Verse 2:
I know what they’re trying
But I’m not worried about anything
There’s no one here that could get me to come along
Trust me

Bridge:
You don’t need to worry about anything
You don’t need to worry about anything
You don’t need to worry about anything
Anything

(You know what I mean)
You don’t need to worry about anything
(I’m not playing)
You don’t need to worry about anything
(You know what I mean)
You don’t need to worry about anything
Anything
Appendix D: Lyrics to “Hreyfir Þig”

“Hreyfir Þig”

Verse:
Hárið svart eins og nöttin
Þú ert ein út á gölfint
Hreyfir sig í takt við ljósin
Ó ég verð að fá þig
Þú komst ekki hingað til að tala (nei)
Þú ert ekki hér fyrir neinn annan (nei)
En þú komst ekki hingað til að fara ein
Svo láttu mig vita þegar þú ferð heim

Pre Chorus:
Því ég vil sjá
Því ég vil sjá
Þegar enginn er að horfa á
Hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, hreyfir Þig þá

Chorus:
Því ég vil sjá hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, missir þig smá
Hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, hreyfir Þig, hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, hreyfir Þig þá
Og ég vil sjá hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, missir þig smá
Hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, hreyfir Þig, hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, hreyfir Þig þá

Verse:
Ég vil sjá
Hvernig þu hreyfir Þig, vá
Eina hér sem ég vil fá
Bara þig, bara þig ó
Við þurfum ekki að tala frekar en þú vilt það
Við þurfum ekkert annað og ég er að skynja
Að þú vilt fá það sama og ég
Við skulum ekki bída lengur, viltu koma med mér?

Bridge:
Allir hér eru að horfa á þig, horfa á þig
Haltu áfram að hreyfa þig, hreyfa þig
Allir hér eru að horfa á þig, horfa á þig
Haltu áfram að hreyfa þig, hreyfa þig

“Move Yourself”

Verse:
Hair black like the night
You’re alone out on the floor
Moving herself in sync with the lights
Oh I gotta have you
You didn’t come here to talk (no)
You aren’t here for someone else (no)
But you didn’t come here to leave alone
So let me know when you’re going home

Pre Chorus:
Cause I wanna see
Cause I wanna see
When no one’s looking at
How you move yourself, move yourself then

Chorus:
Cause I wanna see how you move yourself, lose yourself a bit
How you move yourself, move yourself, how you move yourself, move yourself then
And I wanna see how you move yourself, lose yourself a bit
How you move yourself, move yourself, how you move yourself, move yourself then

Verse:
I want to see
How you move, wow
Only girl here that I want
Only you, only you oh
We don’t need to talk if you don’t want to
We don’t need anything else and I’m sensing
That you want the same thing as me
So lets not wait any longer, do you wanna come with me?

Bridge:
Everybody here is watching you, watching you
Keep on moving yourself, moving yourself
Everybody here is watching you, watching you
Keep on moving yourself, moving yourself
Appendix D: Full analysis - Drake

Drake has a unique way of writing lyrics and melodies. I chose to focus on those aspects of his music in order to find unique ways to look at my own issues with lyrics as well as melodic and rhythmic variation.

Drake’s vocal melodies tend to stretch over bars and flow independently rather than using the beat as a structure (Holistic Songwriting, 2017). He does this a lot in his raps but has also used this technique in his more melodic songs such as “Marvin’s Room”.

The productions are usually pretty simple. Drake’s beats come from many different producers including Boi-1da and Illmind but his closest collaborator is Noah Shebib. As the beats come from many different producers, Noah and Drake add their own personal touch to them through mixing in various samples from pop and R&B.

Many of Drake’s instrumentals have been processed by degrading the sample rate of instruments or sections. This results in a sound that has less high end frequencies allowing the vocal to occupy the high end almost exclusively (Native Instruments, 2016).

The resulting focus on his vocal makes his rhythmic and lyrical variation a driving force behind many of his songs. At first glance, this seems a bit contradictory since most of his songs don’t have a particularly big melodic range. However, Drake uses this to his advantage and uses the listener’s focus on his vocals to bring attention to the subtle rhythmic and melodic variations in his performance. His rhythmic phrasing is a blend of pop and hip-hop influences and many of his songs include both singing and rapping sections.

“Feel No Ways”

The verse phrases start with a long pick-up which allows Drake to place the most important lyrics of each line on the downbeat.

I should be downtown, whipping on the way to you
You got something that belongs to me
Your body language says it all
Despite the things you said to me
Who is it that's got you all gassed up?
Changing your opinion on me
I was only gone for the last few months
But you don't have the time to wait on me

The melody consists of two phrases that respond the each other but the rhythm follows the lyrics which makes some lines more percussive and stretches out other words longer. The melody becomes less important and instead brings focus to the words and brings the listener into the headspace of Drake. By using this type of phrasing he can
make the most important parts of the lyrics hit on the first beat. Drake uses this a lot in his songs, another good example is the song “Blem”.

The verse doesn’t explain a lot, it sets up the plot and introduces us to characters who some issues in their relationship to one another. The next part of the song is the pre chorus which goes like this:

    I tried with you
    There's more to life than sleeping in
    And getting high with you
    I had to let go of us to show myself what I could do
    And that just didn't sit right with you

Here Drake starts closer to the first beat with the word “tried” landing on the first beat but then goes back into the same style of phrasing as in the verse. He’s still using the same notes as in the verse but the rhythm is different in a subtle way. It’s a bit faster. There’s also a change in the lyrics as he reveals the reasons why the relationship didn’t work out.

In the main hook of the song Drake finally uses the present tense. He also goes one note higher and finally sings the root note of the songs which gives the listener a sense of melodic closure.

    And now you're trying to make me feel a way, on purpose
    Now you're throwing it back in my face, on purpose
    Now you're talking down on my name, on purpose
    And you don't feel no way, you think I deserve it

He’s still following the basic rhythmic outline of the pre-chorus but it feels more confident. He’s stating facts. The rhythm is broken up by adding the repeated “on purpose”, which gives a steadiness to the hook as well as the meaning of the lyrics. This is followed by a post-hook where he continues down a similar lyrical path but ends the part by noting that the relationship could have gone better if she had only followed his way of doing things.

    Feel a way, feel a way, young nigga feel a way
    I've stopped listenin' to things you say
    'Cause you don't mean it anyway, yeah
    Feel a way, feel a way, young nigga feel a way
    Maybe we just should have did things my way
    Instead of the other way

The structure of the song is not very typical as there is no second verse. The pre chorus, hook and post-hook repeat as the starts to stutter and fades into an outro with a different chord progression overlapped with a filtered version of the post-hook. The story is over, there isn’t anything more to add lyrically, the information is all there. The listener is drawn inside Drake’s headspace as his thoughts circle around until the song ends.
“Passionfruit”

In the first verse Drake directs his words at a girl and confronts her with their failing relationship. Here Drake is very confident in his phrasing and starts his lines on the first downbeat. The word “listen” invites the audience into the song and hear what he has to say. The pause after is also very fitting. The first lines describe a lot as “ritualistic” can mean both that he can’t help but see this girl all the time (like a ritual that he needs) but also that maybe their meetings have lost some of their initial excitement and are now predictable.

The way he sings listen/ritualistic and tension/fences makes gives the illusion of a rhyme even though they're slant rhymes or even a just examples of assonance/consonance. This verse is very similar to his verse on “Feel No Ways” as it sets up the story but doesn’t give us much information about the meaning of the song.

Listen
Seein' you got ritualistic
Cleansin' my soul of addiction for now
'Cause I'm fallin' apart, yeah
Tension
Between us just like picket fences
You got issues that I won't mention for now
'Cause we're fallin' apart

The chorus then reveals that the problems are because of a long-distance relationship. The rhythm in the chorus is more static and percussive. He still uses the same intervals and even starts on the same note as in the verse. Here he uses similar sounding words all starting with “pass” to make the hook more repetitive and catchy.

Passionate from miles away
Passive with the things you say
Passin' up on my old ways
I can't blame you, no, no

The second verse builds on the lyrics that came before but now in the context of what we learned in the chorus.

The production is very simple but features an interesting and catchy synth lead that fills in the song between chorus and the new verse. Drake has many instrumental sections in his songs that increase the laid-back feeling of his music.

“Marvins Room”

This is one of Drake’s longest songs clocking in at 5:47. It is interspersed with real phone recordings of his ex-girlfriend Ericka Lee (Genius, 2011). The song’s story takes place in a club at nighttime and describes a drunken phone call to an ex.
The verse describes the club and thoughts that Drake is having while contemplating calling his ex. The melody is back-heavy and seems to purposefully avoid the first downbeat until the fourth line where he makes a longer phrase which lands on there with the words “too long”, which he then accents by dragging out the words and almost overlapping with the next line. Here, Drake uses his technique of rhythmic variation over the same melodic pattern again. The second part of the verse changes the melody slightly by going up a note on the third line. The last line is similar to the fourth line in rhythm and even overlaps a little with the next line. It drives the song forward into the next section and further draws the listener in lyrically as we are now curious about what he wants to say to her.

Cups of the rosé
Bitches in my old phone
I should call one and go home
I've been in this club too long
The woman that I would try
Is happy with a good guy
But I've been drinkin' so much
That I'ma call her anyway, and say…

The hook’s lyrics are what Drake is saying directly to his ex. Here, the melody finally starts on the first beat which is a sigh of relief for the listener. The notes here are longer and very steady which helps underscore the feeling of a new section.

Fuck that nigga that you love so bad
I know you still think about the times we had
I say fuck that nigga that you think you found
And since you picked up, I know he's not around

The post-hook is a bit similar melodically but has a back-heavy phrasing. The lyrics continue to explain his thoughts on her new boyfriend and that he thinks that he’s a better choice for her. He also goes one note higher here than in the previous section which he also did in “Feel No Ways”.

(Are you drunk right now?)
I'm just sayin' you could do better
Tell me, have you heard that lately?
I'm just sayin' you could do better
And I'll start hatin' only if you make me

XIV
Figure 4. The frequency of positive feedback for the song.

Appendix E: Feedback analysis - Song 02 - “Eyðiey (Desert Island)”

Figure 5. The frequency of negative feedback for the song.

There were criticisms about the range of the vocal melody and that the chorus was lacking in impact because it used many of the same notes as the sections before it. This might partly be the mixes fault, as the chorus gained significant energy after I raised the volume of the falsetto layer. But there might be something to work on there, similar to the issues in some of the other songs. One person mentioned that the verse and pre chorus were to similar as well.

People liked individual lyrical lines but the overall theme didn’t come through for some people. I think the song might not feel cohesive because the subject isn’t as obvious as it should be. When the chorus hits, I want the listener to think: “ah thats the issue that’s causing trouble in the relationship”. It could be partly because of a language barrier and maybe the lyrics just aren’t clear enough. The song is supposed to be relatable but ends up being a bit mysterious and unclear, which wasn’t my intention. The main issues in this song are “getting the lyrical meaning across to the listener”, “distinction between song sections” and “energy in the chorus”.

XV