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“I’m Happy Just to Dance to the Best Song Ever”:

A Comparative Musical Analysis of The Beatles and One Direction

Rachel Jones

MUSC 393

Professor Don Meyer

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Introduction

On the 26th of July, 2010, the bootcamp portion of the seventh series of *The X Factor* was drawing to a close. 108 acts remained in the running, but 72 of these acts had to be eliminated leading into the next stage of the competition. Among the group of solo artists who did not make the cut were five boys, all of whom were between the ages of 16 and 18: Niall Horan, Zayn Malik, Liam Payne, Harry Styles, and Louis Tomlinson. But almost immediately after learning that they were not continuing in the competition as solo acts, Horan, Malik, Payne, Styles, Tomlinson, and four female solo performers were called back to the stage.

What happened next was unprecedented—on a whim, the judges chose to take these strong performers and allow them to proceed within the competition as two group acts.¹ The female group, dubbed Belle Amie, only made it through to the fourth week of live shows, coming in 11th place overall.² The story of the male group unfolded a little differently; despite the fact that they only placed third in the competition,³ One Direction’s fame did not stop with their *X Factor* run. In the years following, they have risen to a level of superstardom that extends

¹ The X Factor, “Bootcamp 2.” *The X Factor* video, 55:40. September 26, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtqKvUdh07c>.

² Sarah Bull, “Flaky Katie survives by the skin of her teeth but Simon is down to one act as Belle Amie go out in the public vote,” *The Daily Mail*, November 1, 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1325412/X-FACTOR-2010-Katie-Waissel-survives-Belle-Amie-public-vote.html> (accessed September 20, 2015).

³ Liz Thomas and Chris Johnson, “Dannii Minogue’s boy is crowned winner of the X Factor,” *The Daily Mail*, December 12, 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1338003/X-Factor-2010-Winner-Matt-Cardle-Dannii-Minogues-boy-crowned.html> (accessed September 20, 2015).

far beyond anything that those judges could have imagined when they made the initial decision to form the group in 2010.⁴

The seeming impossibility of this band’s success only becomes more pronounced when one takes into account the precise circumstances that brought these boys together. For Liam Payne, this 2010 audition was not his first for *The X Factor*. Back in 2008, he auditioned and was eliminated in the last round prior to the live shows on the grounds that he was only 14; Simon Cowell asked Payne to give himself time to develop his voice more, and encouraged him to return in two years to audition again.⁵ The 2010 series was also the first since 2006 in which *The X Factor* held auditions in the Republic of Ireland, without which Niall Horan would not have had the opportunity to audition. Even as it was, Horan only barely made it past the first round of auditions because of misgivings that multiple judges had about his lack of vocal maturity. Perhaps the most remarkable of all, Zayn Malik stated after the fact that he seriously considered not attending his audition in the first place, and in all likelihood he wouldn’t have if his mother had not literally pulled him out of bed.⁶ It was sheer luck that these boys all ended up in the bootcamp stage of the seventh series of *The X Factor*, and it is even more miraculous that they were able to perform so well as a group, considering that they were so haphazardly thrown together.

One Direction’s journey on *The X Factor* is only the first piece of a rather remarkable career; after the band placed third in the competition in December of 2010, supporters rallied to ensure that One Direction was not forgotten. Simon Cowell describes the campaign in *One Direction: This Is Us*, stating, “literally from the second [*The X Factor*] finished, fans made it

⁴ *One Direction: This Is Us*, directed by Morgan Spurlock (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures, 2013), DVD.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

their mission that One Direction were going to become the biggest band in the world.”⁷ The mass internet frenzy surrounding the band escalated over the following months, and the boys became a global phenomenon before even releasing a single.⁸ This culminated in the release of their first album, *Up All Night*, in the fall of 2011. With *Up All Night*, One Direction became the first UK group to debut at the number-one spot in the US with their first album,⁹ and in the years following, support of the band has only become more widespread with the release of each new album.

For all of the band’s commercial success, however, the critical reaction to One Direction has remained largely mixed. A *Billboard* review of their debut album speaks of the group very well, saying that “even on its weakest tracks ... ‘Up All Night’ demonstrates an originality in sound that was necessary for the revitalization of the boy band movement.”¹⁰ A review of the same album by *Rolling Stone* is far less favorable, and in a strong criticism of the group, reviewer Jody Rosen puns on the band’s name, suggesting that they instead be called “One Dimension.”¹¹ This sort of mixed reaction is representative of the response that One Direction received across the board with their first four albums. Even those who have overall positive remarks to make about One Direction always make sure to mention the band’s status as a boy band, first and foremost. In his review for online magazine *PopMatters*, Zachary Houle prefaces

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Keith Caulfield, “One Direction Makes History With No. 1 Debut on Billboard 200,” *Billboard*, March 20, 2012, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/499420/one-direction-makes-history-with-no-1-debut-on-billboard-200> (accessed September 20, 2015).

¹⁰ Jason Lipshutz, “One Direction, ‘Up All Night’: Track-By-Track Review,” *Billboard*, March 7, 2012, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/502856/one-direction-up-all-night-track-by-track-review> (accessed September 20, 2015).

¹¹ Jody Rosen, “Up All Night,” *Rolling Stone*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/up-all-night-20120328> (accessed September 20, 2015).

the article by acknowledging, “this British boy band is the kind of thing serious music critics like myself *aren’t* supposed to like.”¹²

Comments like this one by Houle raise a question that is seemingly obvious, but well worth examining: What makes the “boy band” designation so objectionable? So many groups have been described as boy bands over the years that the definition has become rather loose, but there are a few traits common to a great many boy bands that most likely contribute to the negative perception that the image has garnered. For example, when *Billboard* created a list of the 20 best boy band songs of all time, they specifically included only groups in which a majority of the members do not play instruments on their albums or on stage.¹³ As a result of this characteristic in particular, One Direction and other such bands are often blatantly dismissed. In addition to accusations that they cannot play instruments, a vast majority of boy bands are accused of being unable to sing. Boy bands are also often developed by talent managers or record producers and often perform music that was written *for* them, rather than by the members of the band, which invites criticism from those who regard this as sign that the band has not developed organically.

Disregarding these features, there is one characteristic in particular that unifies all boy bands across decades: lyrical subject matter. Boy bands are known for releasing love song after love song, intended to make each individual fan—generally an adolescent girl—feel unique, and believe that she’s been noticed by not just any boy, but the members of the band specifically. One Direction’s discography most certainly falls into this camp, and for this, too, they have

¹² Zachary Houle, “One Direction: Up All Night,” *PopMatters*, March 15, 2012, <http://www.popmatters.com/review/155316-one-direction-up-all-night/> (accessed September 20, 2015).

¹³ Jason Lipshutz, “Top 20 Essential Boy Band Songs,” *Billboard*, July 13, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6627352/boy-band-songs-top-20-essential> (accessed September 21, 2015).

received a great deal of criticism. Despite the fact that it is a common complaint, it’s worth questioning whether it is a *valid* one, because many, many well-respected bands have committed the crime of primarily writing their music for their female fans.

Among these, one group in particular stands out; after coming together in the late 1950s, this band spent approximately five years crooning love songs to their young female fans before diverging from this path around 1965. With their later music, The Beatles earned the respect of casual fans and seasoned musicians alike, but people are far too eager to forget the reality of their early career as one of the first truly successful boy bands. In their early albums, the melodies were good, but not remarkable, and their lyrics were—in the style of boy bands—essentially love letters to their fans. The difference between The Beatles and bands like One Direction might initially seem overwhelming, even when one examines only The Beatles’ early years, because they do not meet many of the traditional standards that people have established for boy bands: the four boys came together organically and all played instruments on stage, and from the very beginning, Lennon and McCartney were composing a vast majority of their own songs.

However, I would contend that far more important are the lyrics and the audience of the band in question, and these are characteristics which the early Beatles and One Direction inarguably have in common. The lyrics of One Direction songs might differ in magnitude – where The Beatles talk about wanting to hold a girl’s hand, One Direction sing about wanting to “go all the way” – but this is clearly a product of the era in which their music is being released. Lyrically speaking, a vast majority of The Beatles’ early songs are about love, and they are often written in second person, implying a relationship with their fans in the same way that other boy bands often do with their music.

Beyond this, The Beatles and One Direction followed a remarkably similar path to stardom. Beatlemania took Great Britain, and then the United States, by storm, and images of screaming girls at Beatles concerts neatly epitomize the reality of the band’s experience in the early ‘60s. For those who attempt to claim The Beatles as the quintessential rock-and-roll artists, it must certainly be rather difficult to reconcile the similarities between the masses of screaming girls shown over the course of *A Hard Day’s Night*,¹⁴ and the hysteria exhibited by fans in *One Direction: This Is Us* as Horan, Malik, Payne, Styles, and Tomlinson follow the same journey from obscurity to fame.¹⁵

This comparison is not intended to dismiss the latter portion of The Beatles’ remarkable career; it is certainly worth stressing that The Beatles were one of the most innovative bands in recent history, and their legacy is apparent in countless ways in today’s music industry. However, to disregard the reality of their stint as a boy band is to disrespect their beginnings. On their early albums, The Beatles honed their craft, developing an understanding of music that made *Sgt. Pepper* and *The White Album* possible. They, like any boy band, received severe criticism as a result of their relatively simplistic sound. In 2014, the *Los Angeles Times* published an op-ed piece containing several snippets of reviews of The Beatles’ music, all from the year 1964. Within these reviews alone, they are described as, “god awful,” and, “a group of disorganized amateurs”; in a February 11, 1964, review for the *Los Angeles Times*, William F. Buckley Jr. blithely declared that, “not even their mothers would claim that they sing well.”¹⁶ Their reputation at the time lacked any modicum of respect for what is now regarded as The

¹⁴ *A Hard Day’s Night*, directed by Richard Lester (1964; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2002), DVD.

¹⁵ *One Direction: This Is Us*.

¹⁶ Cary Schneider, “What the critics wrote about the Beatles in 1964,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2014/feb/09/opinion/la-oe-beatles-quotes-20140209> (accessed September 21, 2015).

Beatles’ rather incredible musical and song-writing capabilities. Of course, in 1964, The Beatles’ most successful days—musically, if not commercially—lay ahead. But even in their early music, there are already healthy flashes of what’s to come, brief indications of the very characteristics in their music that The Beatles are lauded for when they bring these features to the forefront in later albums.

So what were these critics missing? The musicality was there all along, but it’s something that music critics only seem to have been able to identify after the fact. Is it possible, perhaps, that their dismissal is related to a distrust of what young people—namely, teenage girls—enjoy?

I would like the question to linger on our minds—because to my mind, the discussion of boy bands will always be a feminist one, even if only sub-textually—but for the time being I will direct my attention elsewhere, namely: if The Beatles’ musical direction was not apparent to critics at the time, is it possible that we are missing a similar journey that is currently playing out in real time?

One Direction has the potential to fit the bill, despite their more inorganic formation and their seemingly generic music. With a level of fan and commercial success that rivals the success of The Beatles, it is certainly worth examining the two bands more closely in relationship to one another, charting their musical growth to gain a better understanding of whether their similar degree of commercial success has any relation to a larger amount of musical skill than their other boy band counterparts, and exploring how the musical similarities and differences between the groups might be indicative of what could lie ahead for One Direction.

One Direction Misconceptions

Prior to examining the music of One Direction and The Beatles, I would like to identify and dissect some of the misconceptions about boy bands like One Direction that ultimately prevent people from regarding them as a serious band. At its core, the primary objection seems to trace back to the common image of One Direction fans. In the two years since I became a fan of One Direction, I have cultivated a mental catalogue of the various expressions that people make when I reveal the secret – because it is of course generally assumed that it *is* a secret, something of which I must be deeply ashamed – that I am a fan of the band: sneers, widened eyes, uncomfortable chuckles, and blank stares of confusion are all within the norm, almost always followed by the declaration, “You don’t seem like a Directioner.”

For some time, I shrugged it off and agreed with them. After all, everyone knows what a One Direction fan is *supposed* to look like—picture young teenage girls, most likely screaming or crying, daydreaming about dating at least one member of the band but mostly just obsessing over whether their “fave” might reply to one of their tweets. I certainly had to agree that this image did not suit me. I was under no illusions that I would ever date my favorite member of the band; more importantly, I was an articulate college student and consequently many people assumed – many people still assume – that I should *know better*. I thought the same things of myself, and to some degree, I saw myself as existing outside of the true One Direction frenzy, though I was at no point ashamed of my personal involvement in it.

It took me a while (longer than I’d care to admit) to begin questioning this mentality. I became increasingly aware of other fans of the band who are my age or older, fans who, like me, saw the members of One Direction and felt that there was a genuine chemistry and camaraderie

between them which surpassed that of a generic manufactured group. I determined that I could more overtly support a band that was only intended for “little girls.”

Since I, as a sincere fan of One Direction, saw the band in a negative light for so long, it is no wonder that so many misconceptions exist surrounding their legitimacy in the general public. These misconceptions originated from numerous sources. On the one hand, it is worth at least briefly acknowledging the correlation between One Direction being regarded as having a primarily young female audience, and the lack of respect that the band gets. Descriptions of the fans dwell on the fact that they are young, that they are girls, and that they are screaming. In a recent *Rolling Stone* review of a One Direction concert, Rob Sheffield makes numerous references to the audience, heavily implying and overtly stating that the band’s fans are all teenage girls.¹⁷ But when describing the crowd as such, Sheffield seems not to intend his words to be rude or dismissive of the fans; his article in particular actually casts the fans and the band in a remarkably positive light, praising One Direction’s evolution. Many other critics are not so kind; Alexis Petridis questioned the success of One Direction in a review of the band’s second album, *Take Me Home*, stating that, “if you’re not an 11-year-old girl or the long-suffering parent of one, their oeuvre will remain a mystery.”¹⁸

Comments like Petridis’s are far more prevalent, and lurking in the background of such comments is the persistent, disparaging notion that these young girls are foolish for becoming enthralled with a group like One Direction. In September of 2013, *British GQ* writer Jonathan Heaf composed an interview with the band as that month’s cover article. This patronizing article

¹⁷ Rob Sheffield, “16 Reasons One Direction Are on Top of the Stadium Rock Game,” *Rolling Stone*, Aug. 6, 2015. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/live-reviews/16-reasons-one-direction-are-on-top-of-the-stadium-rock-game-20150806> (accessed October 21, 2015).

¹⁸ Alexis Petridis, “One Direction: Take Me Home – review,” *The Guardian*, Nov. 8, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/nov/08/one-direction-take-me-review> (accessed October 21, 2015).

states that One Direction fans “don’t care about the Rolling Stones. They don’t care about the meta-modernist cycle of cultural repetition. They don’t care about history. All these female fans care about is their immediate vociferous reverence: the beatification of St Harry, St Zayn, St Niall, St Louis and St Liam.”¹⁹ Heaf’s discussion of the fans goes beyond Petridis’s subtle condescension, resulting in an overt declaration that it is not possible for girls to simultaneously support One Direction and entertain any outside intellectual interests; moreover, as Aja Romano notes in a rebuttal to Heaf’s article, he is objectifying fans and treating their sexuality as their sole motivator.²⁰ That sentiment echoes throughout Heaf’s entire article, leaving readers with the distinct impression that Heaf perceives himself as existing well above the hormonal screaming girls that he is describing.²¹

It is peculiar that the fans have somehow become responsible for the negative image that is projected onto them. This is done despite the fact that they are in no way responsible for the manufactured nature of the band. There is no justification for blaming young girls for falling in love with the band that was specifically engineered to make girls fall in love with them, but when critics and the media consistently portray the fans of One Direction in this deprecating light, it makes sense that people react to my own claims of enjoying the band by expressing various levels of bewilderment, sometimes bordering on genuine discomfort and distrust.

There is a strong interplay between this negative perception of the fans and the negative perception of the band—as a boy band, One Direction receives a great deal of criticism simply

¹⁹ Jonathan Heaf, “This One Direction interview got us death threats,” *British GQ*, Aug. 24, 2015. <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/entertainment/articles/2013-07/29/one-direction-gq-covers-interview/viewall> (accessed November 4, 2015.)

²⁰ Aja Romano, “One Direction fans are right to be outraged by GQ,” *The Daily Dot*, Jul. 31, 2013. <http://www.dailydot.com/opinion/one-direction-fans-gq-outrage-is-valid/> (accessed November 5, 2015.)

²¹ Heaf is far from the only person who describes the band and the fans with this condescension—comments like this are rampant in articles from other reputable sources and on forums across the internet.

for existing. The persistent distrust of young girls and their ability to make informed decisions about the music that they like then only serves to strengthen the vehemence with which many reject One Direction. People make numerous assumptions about the band, the same assumptions that have been made about essentially every boy band (as noted earlier): that they cannot sing; that they cannot play their own instruments; that they do not write any of their own music, etc. These assumptions quickly become accepted as fact, and once that has happened, it is incredibly difficult to convince someone that the members of One Direction are anything more than the pristine, lip-syncing “What Makes You Beautiful” artists that people automatically visualize.

When this image is so embedded in the collective public consciousness, my comparison between The Beatles and One Direction becomes difficult. In *One Direction: This Is Us*, they attribute much of the band’s success to the use of the internet and social media.²² A common initial rebuttal to comparisons between the bands is that Beatlemania escalated to a massive scale *without* the assistance of social media. This reasoning is flawed in multiple ways. Firstly, because the increased use of social media has resulted in a larger mass of content which people have to sift through, creating an entirely different problem from the one that The Beatles encountered: although fans were able to discuss One Direction, due to the sheer volume of information that is constantly being relayed through social media, discussion of the band could have easily gone nowhere.

Beyond that, it is very clear that this claim corresponds with an overarching double-standard which is created by an ingrained bias in favor of The Beatles. For those who claim that The Beatles are superior, more modern developments such as social media are quickly brought into the conversation in order to justify the claim that One Direction are ultimately undeserving

²² *One Direction: This Is Us*.

of their renown. However, these same people disregard other innovations over the past 50 years within the music industry as it pertains to the characteristics of One Direction which are most commonly brought up as flaws within the band, despite the fact that a majority of these characteristics simply illustrate that One Direction are a product of their time.

A basis for comparison between The Beatles’ and One Direction’s music becomes potentially viable when we extrapolate on these particular characteristics. Therefore, I would like to devote some time to discussion of the common criticisms of the band and explore two things: first of all, the accuracy of each claim, and secondly, whether these characteristics are unique to boy bands such as One Direction.

First and foremost, the “boy band” title is accompanied by the generally recognized understanding that the members of a given group cannot sing. This impression seems to have originated with the group New Kids on the Block, a popular boy band from the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1992, they were faced with allegations that they were lip syncing on stage, and despite all of their efforts to prove that these allegations were false, they were never able to regain the ground they lost, and their popularity waned.²³ Since then, this understanding has become an ingrained part of the definition of what makes a boy band. Some will even take this accusation a step further, assuming that groups like One Direction are Auto-Tuned in the studio in addition to their lip syncing on stage.

At its core, this is a peculiar accusation to make about the members of One Direction in particular, simply due to the band’s origins on *The X Factor*. Because the members of One Direction were put together – at least in part – as a result of their singing abilities when they would have otherwise been eliminated from the show, it puts these assumptions about their

²³ John Seabrook, *The Song Machine: Inside the Hit Factory* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2015), 50-51.

vocals into question. It is more difficult to contradict claims that the band is Auto-Tuned in the studio because of the private nature of the recording process. This is the case with a vast majority of other pop artists today, yet in an interview with *TIME* in 2009, one unnamed recording engineer states that “every singer now presumes that you’ll just run their voice through [Auto-Tune].”²⁴ This suggests that, regardless of whether the producers of One Direction choose to utilize Auto-Tune to correct errant pitches, it has become prevalent in the pop industry to such an extent that its presence on a track is not, in and of itself, a reasonable indicator of a vocalist’s ability. For this, live performances serve to most effectively illustrate vocalists’ skills.

It is easier to dispute the notion that the members lip sync on stage because so much evidence exists to the contrary. Countless fans have uploaded their own videos of concerts onto YouTube, and one need not look too far before finding recordings where the members do one of a few things: alter the lyrics, alter their own melodic line, or sing out of tune. In my own recording of their performance of “Fireproof” in Chicago on August 23rd, 2015, many of these characteristics of a live performance are present.²⁵ In the original lyrics of Niall Horan’s portion of the first verse, his lines are, “I’m feeling something deep inside/ Hotter than a jet stream, I’m burning up/I’ve got a feeling deep inside/ It’s taking, it’s taking all I’ve got.” In contrast, at 0:23 of the live recording, he reiterated the statement, “I’m feeling something deep inside,” rather than saying the line, “I’ve got a feeling deep inside.” At two points in this recording in particular, members of the band also alter their portion of the melody in a prominent way. Liam Payne does it first at 1:52, slipping into a falsetto as he sings the word “long”; then, beginning at 2:22, Harry Styles draws out the word “fireproof” with a vocal run that is not present in the original

²⁴ Josh Tyrangiel, “Auto-Tune: Why Pop Music Sounds Perfect,” *TIME*, Feb. 5, 2009.
<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1877372,00.html>.

²⁵ “One Direction sing ‘Fireproof’ live,” YouTube video, 2:47, posted by Rachel Jones, Nov. 27, 2015,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6cYwDAAAZU&feature=youtu.be>.

recording. Finally, as is apt to happen occasionally in live performances, Louis Tomlinson seems to go briefly out of tune in his verse, which begins at 1:04. This is most notable on the word “won’t,” which he sings at 1:09. However, for each instance where one of the members sings out of tune within a given performance, there are countless others where they show themselves to be remarkably capable vocalists. When taking into account the conditions of a generic One Direction concert, their skills become even more pronounced, because during a majority of their songs, they are running around and exerting a great deal of energy on massive stages constructed for stadium venues. This concert experience necessitates a level of breath support and control which serves to illustrate that One Direction’s vocal abilities are well beyond what people tend to assume.

Members of One Direction also face extensive criticism because of the assumption that none of them can play a musical instrument. This belief, too, is connected to the preexisting notions about boy bands that predated One Direction; groups like New Kids on the Block, the Backstreet Boys, and NSYNC were notorious for their lack of instruments when they performed on stage. The members of One Direction possess varying levels of instrumental proficiency, primarily on the piano and guitar, but Niall Horan is the most skilled guitarist, performing lead guitar on several songs when they perform live; most notably, he plays the acoustic guitar in “Little Things,” a ballad in which his part serves as the entire instrumental track. Although Horan is the only member of One Direction who plays an instrument during concerts, criticizing the band for performing primarily without instruments is unreasonable when one takes into account the vast number of pop artists who do not play instruments when they are on stage.²⁶

²⁶ This criticism in particular also displays a very strong cultural bias that has developed in America, in particular, because of the ingrained belief that singers cannot be musicians unless they are also instrumentalists. To think this way is to disregard the remarkable amount of musical ability a singer must have.

Many well-respected contemporary artists play the guitar or piano in a small number of songs on stage, as Horan does at One Direction concerts, but will opt to spend the majority of concerts walking around the stage so that they can interact more with the crowd.²⁷

Finally, people generally assume that, as a boy band that formed at such a young age, One Direction do not write their own music. To some degree, this is probably a reasonable assumption to make. Their first album, *Up All Night*, came out in 2011, when the oldest member of the band was only 19 years old, and at the time, none of them had any real experience writing music. Given the circumstances, it would not be overly presumptuous to suggest that their writing credits on that first album were gratuitous. In particular, this supposition is supported by the fact that all five members are credited as writing on the same three tracks, which makes their presence on the list of writers seem like even more of an afterthought.²⁸ By the time they reached their fourth album, though, they seem to have hit their stride. The members of One Direction contributed to *Four* to varying extents: Niall Horan made the most minimal contribution, credited as writing on three songs; Liam Payne is credited with writing on the most tracks, contributing to 10 out of 16 songs on the album.²⁹ They also have formed particular groups that they often are credited as working in, suggesting that each member prefers to collaborate with certain songwriters.

Due to the opaque nature of the band’s writing process, any exploration into how much a member contributed to a given song will be essentially fruitless, despite the fact that surface-level evidence supports the notion that One Direction had begun to play a larger part in the

²⁷ Taylor Swift is one notable example of this. She will play the guitar at points during her concerts, but because of the sheer size of the venues, she tends to set the guitar aside for the majority of a given performance.

²⁸ This is further supported by the sheer number of writers on each of One Direction’s albums—not counting the members of One Direction, 33 different people are credited for writing on *Up All Night*.

²⁹ Liner notes to *Four*, One Direction, Syco Entertainment, CD, 2014.

writing of their own music by the time they reached their fourth album. In this area, it is worth acknowledging the stark difference between One Direction and The Beatles’ circumstances; not only were The Beatles’ albums dominated by songs written by members of the band themselves, but in a vast majority of Lennon and McCartney songs, the two men could pinpoint their own contributions to the composition.

However, as with the other common objections to One Direction, treating this as an inherently negative trait of the band is a gross misjudgment of their music because it is common for popular artists today to collaborate or to perform songs written entirely by other people. Even pop artists who are renowned for their songwriting, such as Taylor Swift and Adele, collaborate on their albums with other writers.³⁰ For years, rumors have circulated that Beyoncé Knowles puts her name on songs to which she barely contributed,³¹ but the possibility of this is not enough to prompt the same kind of criticism that One Direction suffers. So where, exactly, is the line drawn? At what point do co-writers cease to be collaborators? When is it acceptable for musicians to build a career on music that they haven’t written? Most of the history of recorded sound is marked by “great interpreters,” with the rock era existing as a stark outlier of original songwriters performing their own music. Consequently, it makes little sense to single out and criticize One Direction for a potential lack of songwriting contributions because the trend is so common across the music industry today.

Ultimately, although it is important to identify and overturn any existing misconceptions about the band, whether One Direction wrote the individual songs is, quite frankly, beside the

³⁰ Both of them have worked with Max Martin and Shellback, two of the Swedish “factory” songwriters referred to in *The Song Machine*. Not worth delving into now, but it’s interesting that these two singers who are renowned for their “authentic” songwriting have both written with writers who seem to represent a very inauthentic side of the industry (if you believe that songwriting *for* an act makes that act somehow inauthentic).

³¹ Daniel D’Addario, “Is Beyoncé a Plagiarist?” *Salon*, Jan. 11, 2013. http://www.salon.com/2013/01/11/is_beyonce_a_plagiarist/ (accessed Dec. 4, 2015).

point. The basic fact remains that their musicianship would not come under fire in the same way if it were not for their status as a boy band. When examining the quality of their music, then, we must separate our ingrained cultural bias about what a musician should look like. One Direction might exist as a combined entity of singers, songwriters, and producers, but that is very much the state of the music industry today, and their end-product is the only thing that we can pass judgment on. Therefore a comparison between them and The Beatles can ultimately rely on only one thing: their music.

From *Please Please Me* to *Help*: The Beatles’ Boy Band Years

Like the formation of One Direction on *The X Factor*, The Beatles’ origin story was well-documented, starting with the first meeting of John Lennon and Paul McCartney on July 6, 1957, through to their first gigs in Liverpool, Hamburg and beyond. Most people have at least a cursory knowledge of the humble beginnings of the band; while people remember the frenzy of Beatlemania, however, the music of this early period is often glossed over. As previously mentioned, the critical perception of the band at the time was far less reverential than it later became;³² this stands in remarkable contrast to the current overall impression of the band, which holds them as one of the most influential acts in the history of rock-and-roll. Furthermore, it is the fandom, not the music, of The Beatles’ early career that is recognized now, despite acknowledgment from more contemporary critics that the band’s first few albums certainly hint at the musicality that emerges more prominently in later music.³³

This shift in their image is peculiar, but hardly surprising. While The Beatles were on the rise in the music industry, critics were not paying serious attention to them. In the critics’ defense, they had little reason to: the lyrics in most of The Beatles’ early songs were remarkably simple; the members were all handsome, to the point of inciting aggressive frenzies among crowds of their fans; and in 1963, the oldest members of The Beatles were only 23 years old. Serious music critics saw these characteristics and assumed that The Beatles were the next in a long line of young male performers on which teenagers would fixate for a brief period of time before moving on to the next act.³⁴ They couldn’t possibly have known that The Beatles –

³² Schneider, “What the critics wrote...”

³³ Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press), 5-30.

³⁴ It is worth noting that these young male performers were the “boy bands” of the 1950s and ‘60s, arguably existing as little more than a pretty face to sell records.

Lennon and McCartney in particular – would contribute so extensively to the craft later on in their careers.

Viewing their career in retrospect, we see their musical innovations across their later albums, and we can identify characteristics from their later music hidden behind the more mainstream sound of their first albums. However, examining their progression from a contemporary standpoint, a retrospective bias has arisen, and many people now refuse to recognize the early Beatles for what they were: a boy band.

This simple declaration earns a great deal of criticism; various people’s objections stem from many areas, but almost always culminate in a statement about the genuineness of The Beatles in comparison with more commonly recognized boy bands. In a forum discussion comparing The Beatles with boy bands such as One Direction, one commenter states, “the difference is: One Direction is a fabricated band, that exists to target a specific demographic.”³⁵ Other responses within the same forum thread cite the manipulated image of boy bands, claiming that The Beatles’ image was not warped to present them to their audience in a certain way. It is remarkable how prevalent such comments are despite clear evidence to the contrary. In Hamburg, all members of the band wore leather jackets, and swore, smoked, and drank alcohol on stage. The moment they signed a record deal, they had to change their ways; their bad boy image was traded in for a more buttoned-up, professional look, and their other habits were out of the question on stage. Consequently, their image became manufactured, just as many other boy bands’.³⁶ Although it is quite possible that The Beatles made this shift of their own volition, at least in part, it is also unquestionable that on some level, the move was about marketing a certain

³⁵ Yahsper, November 2014, comment on warrenseth, “Were the Beatles their era’s One Direction?” in TrueAskreddit subreddit, November 2014, https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueAskReddit/comments/2jaude/were_the_beatles_their_eras_one_direction/.

³⁶ Howard Sounes, *Fab: An Intimate Life of Paul McCartney* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2010), 82-83.

image of the band. This particular fact also harkens back to the suggestion that The Beatles were not targeted to a specific demographic: all evidence of their early career points to the contrary. Their non-threatening image made them “acceptable” heartthrobs. Perhaps most noteworthy is that each member of The Beatles fits into a certain stereotype, resulting in four unique images that allowed fans to select their favorite Beatle and appealing to as many potential fans as possible. A fan’s choice, then, was a defining characteristic of her personal identity, as well as her identity within her group of friends.³⁷ In comparison, the internet today is riddled with quizzes and articles that claim to be able to determine what a fan’s favorite One Direction member says about her, showing a modernized take on the same trend.³⁸

It is hardly significant whether a band formed organically, whether they play their own instruments or write their own songs; rather, the dynamic between The Beatles and their fans – their overzealous, young, female fans – during the Beatlemania era is what most clearly indicates that they are a boy band. If their popularity had fizzled out after recording *Beatles for Sale*, or even after recording *Help!*, their status as a boy band would not be the unnecessarily contentious debate that it has become. It is not until *Rubber Soul* that their music begins to make a clear shift away from their boy band sound, and at that time, their fan base shifted accordingly.

To discuss The Beatles solely in terms of their fan base is, admittedly, to downplay their musical accomplishments, which are remarkable even in their early albums. However, their music across the Beatlemania period is more like that of any other boy band than many people are willing to admit: Lennon and McCartney’s early lyrics were heavily directed toward their largely female audience, and their music fit well into the firmly established pop sound of the

³⁷ Jonathan Gould, *Can’t Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain, and America* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008), 183.

³⁸ Pablo Valdivia, “What Does Your Fave One Direction Member Say About You?” *Buzzfeed*, Jun. 21, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/pablovaldivia/do-you-fly-solo-like-zayn> (accessed Dec. 5, 2015).

time. Professional critics and casual music fans alike tend to vacillate somewhere between vague criticism and explicit mockery of this blatant fan-baiting when it becomes apparent in contemporary boy bands.³⁹ What truly sets their music apart from other boy bands, then, is our ability to discuss it in retrospect and explore consistencies and differences in their compositions from this early period in comparison with later albums. By extension, if we can define the precise nature of The Beatles’ musical growth during the period from *Please Please Me* through *Rubber Soul*, it should be the most effective way to compare The Beatles to other bands in order to determine whether groups like One Direction possess any similar qualities that could be hinting toward the same sort of successful future that The Beatles had in store.

In 1999, musicologist Walter Everett published a two-volume book entitled *The Beatles as Musicians*, in which he tracks the musical development of The Beatles’ career. The second volume, which discusses *Revolver* through the *Anthology* at length, begins with a brief overview of their early music. His analysis provides a helpful, concise foundation for the rest of his book, presenting readers with a brief glimpse at numerous features that illustrate Lennon and McCartney’s evolution as songwriters in those early years. He initiates his analysis with more general comments; for example, he mentions The Beatles’ June 1961 demo recordings, from which he picks out McCartney’s “arpeggiation-based ostinato and alternations of roots and fifths in dotted rhythm [as being] among the qualities of those early tapes that point most clearly in the direction of the Beatles’ own emerging sound.”⁴⁰

In his more thorough analysis, Everett breaks The Beatles’ music into several categories, examining their lyrics, rhythmic techniques, formal designs, and tonal features, all as separate

³⁹ Al Fox, “The record-breaking boyband’s second album ticks every fan’s boxes,” *BBC Music*, November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/fh8r> (accessed October 8, 2015).

⁴⁰ Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians*, 12.

entities. Their lyrics were “direct, innocent, joyful celebrations of adolescent love, almost thoughtlessly perpetuating pop conventions”; Everett identifies 1966 as the point in their career when they diverge from this more standard tradition of lyricism.⁴¹ Everett is very complimentary of the creative choices that The Beatles made rhythmically, highlighting syncopation and “shuffle” triplet eighths as characteristics that mark the earliest portion of their career. He also praises their use of “unexpected rhythmic displacements,” although he specifically mentions that in their early music, The Beatles do not venture into mixed meter.⁴² The structure of their songs, like their lyrics, remains almost universally consistent across this early period. Their verses consistently follow an *aaba* or *aabc* pattern, which Everett breaks down further into the “Statement of a melodic idea, a Restatement at the same or contrasting pitch level, a Departure that introduces contrasting motive material, and a Conclusion that may or may not recapitulate the opening phrase,” or, as he proceeds to refer to it afterward, the “SRDC” structure.⁴³ Their verses and choruses nearly always prolong the tonic; even if the chorus ends on a V chord leading into the next verse, “when closing the song or when followed by a bridge, the chorus invariably ends on the tonic.”⁴⁴ The bridge usually differs noticeably from the harmonic sound of other sections, and almost universally ends on the dominant; if it does not, it ends on a retransitional V which they most likely embellish with an added sixth or ninth. Their intros tend to be the most “harmonically unstable event” within a given song, which Everett speculates is

⁴¹ Ibid. 14.

⁴² Ibid. 15.

⁴³ Ibid. 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 16.

motivated by efforts to entice a listener. If a coda is present, it always prolongs the tonic, which is often “embellished by added sixth, seventh, or ninth or a combination of these.”⁴⁵

Everett devotes the most time to his discussion of The Beatles’ tonal structure. In their earliest compositions – those that existed even prior to their recording of *Please Please Me* in 1963 – they remained closely tied to the traditional I, V, and dominant preparatory IV major chords, much in the style of Buddy Holly and other artists of the 1950s; they sometimes added minor sevenths to any of the given chords, but for the most part, their harmony remained diatonic. By the time The Beatles went into the studio to record *Please Please Me*, this was not the case. They began to incorporate more blues-based scale degrees in their arrangements for both vocals and instrumentals. Even in songs as early as “She Loves You” and “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” they were side-stepping the traditional roles of scale degrees in their compositions—by including the mediant to support the melodic $\widehat{7}$, it no longer served as a leading-tone up to $\widehat{8}$, but instead “evoked a unique aura of sensitivity and sympathy.”⁴⁶ In 1964, Lennon in particular began to play with chromatic lines in many of his compositions. Their intentional mixture of pentatonic minor scales with parallel majors and minors also became what Everett identifies as one of the defining characteristics of this period; their mixed modes, only a passing feature in early tracks, become a staple later in their career on albums like *Sgt. Pepper*.⁴⁷ Ultimately, most of their early compositions share a similar tonal pattern, but Everett identifies some early songs that diverge even further: in both “And I Love Her” and “Girl,” it remains ambiguous throughout which note is the tonic.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid. 17.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 17.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 18-19.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 20.

Everett’s survey of The Beatles’ early music is strongly foundational, presenting the facts about their compositional choices rather than analyzing the quality or effectiveness. Others have identified features of the music that they felt to be particularly significant – tonal, rhythmic, and lyrical – and examined them more in-depth. In her essay “Starting in the Middle: Auxiliary Cadences in the Beatles’ Songs,” Naphthali Wagner directs her focus only toward The Beatles’ songs that do not begin on the tonic, or that contain sections that do not begin on the tonic—this constitutes approximately one quarter of their total discography.⁴⁹ She explores how they intentionally use auxiliary cadences to varying effects, and how the trend is an overarching feature of the band’s career. For this reason, they are particularly significant: because they are “one of the stable characteristics that withstood the band’s rapid stylistic development, they can be seen as a defining compositional principle of that elusive concept known as ‘the Beatles style.’”⁵⁰

Wagner also wrote an essay that highlights The Beatles’ use of suppressed notes, a feature which is present in McCartney, Lennon, and Harrison’s compositions, once again across The Beatles’ discography. Many of their songs have a pentatonic core which extends to become more diatonic by the close of the song. In this context, suppressed notes are the diatonic notes that are only introduced in the latter portion of a song for the sake of effect.⁵¹ One of her most compelling statements in this article comes when she suggests that “[the use of suppressed notes]

⁴⁹ Naphthali Wagner, “Starting in the Middle: Auxiliary Cadences in the Beatles’ Songs,” *Music Analysis* 25 (March 2006): 155. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 10, 2015).

⁵⁰ Ibid. 155.

⁵¹ Naphthali Wagner, “Fixing a hole in the scale: suppressed notes in the Beatles’ songs,” *Popular Music* 23 (October 2004): 257. JSTOR (accessed October 19, 2015).

is not a planned compositional technique but one of the less conscious processes in musical composition.”⁵²

This observation in particular encapsulates an opinion about The Beatles that many critics seem to share: these four boys from Liverpool were not focusing on the fundamental theory behind their compositions, but instead composed based on what they thought sounded good in their heads. If the features that make up “The Beatles sound” – and in particular, their early sound – can all be pared down to this fact, it raises some other questions. As tempting as it is to claim that The Beatles became successful because of artistic intuition, plenty of musicians enter into the industry with a reasonable concept of what sounds good, but most do not reach a level of success anywhere near that of The Beatles. The overwhelming fan enthusiasm of the Beatlemania era certainly expanded their options, but I by no means intend to claim that their success can be attributed to that alone; after all, their ability to remain so relevant for the past 50 years is a clear enough indication that there is something musical at work.

Rather than looking at how The Beatles differ from their contemporaries, I would therefore briefly like to make note of a similarity between their music and other mainstream pop artists. Jon Fitzgerald discusses a common structural characteristic of The Beatles’ music in his essay “Lennon-McCartney and the ‘Middle Eight,’” examining the features of the “B” section of the “AABA” structure that the two writers often favored. He breaks down numerous songs that fit into this pattern to determine how they compare to the rest of the song in terms of tonality, rhythm, lyricism, and chord structure, and ultimately concludes that The Beatles developed a fair amount of their style from their musical predecessors; in doing so, he criticizes the tendency

⁵² Ibid.

among analysts to focus on elements of pop music that differ from music of previous eras, rather than acknowledging the significance of overlap in a shifting musical culture.⁵³

Fitzgerald is onto something with this observation. The Beatles did not record *Please Please Me* with any intention of transcending the pre-existing structure of the music industry; their early music fits squarely into the traditions established in 1950s pop music. What made The Beatles successful musically was the precise way in which they initially blended these traditions with their own intuitive style, and the success with which they ultimately executed their transition from traditional teen pop to their own new brand of rock.

Many boy bands reach this point in their careers, and promptly proceed to crash and burn as they fumble through an attempt at musical growth. The Beatles stand apart as a prime example of a group that successfully made it *past* this awkward stage in their music and found an appropriate balance between innovation and pre-existing pop tradition. But this transition was by no means seamless. Their fourth album, *Beatles for Sale*, is an indication of their shift from pop to rock, a fact commonly acknowledged by critics, and by the members of The Beatles in the *Anthology*.⁵⁴ However, *Beatles for Sale* exists as a low point in The Beatles’ career; Stephen Erlewine of *AllMusic* describes it as a regression, a common criticism among reviewers in regards to this album. Erlewine’s commentary is intriguing in particular because of the culmination of his review: he suggests that the flaws of *Beatles for Sale* resulted specifically because “Beatlemania may have been fun but now the group is exhausted.”⁵⁵ While they may have enjoyed the worldwide fame of their early years, their exhaustion with touring – which

⁵³ Jon Fitzgerald, “Lennon-McCartney and the ‘Middle Eight,’” *Popular Music & Society* 20 (Winter96 1996): 50. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 10, 2015).

⁵⁴ The Beatles, *The Beatles Anthology* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC), 160.

⁵⁵ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, “Beatles for Sale,” *AllMusic*, n.d. <http://www.allmusic.com/album/beatles-for-sale-mw0000189172> (accessed October 19, 2015).

would soon be enough to prompt them to cease touring altogether – had begun to reflect in their music. In contrast, Erlewine cites the more successful moments of the album as prominent foreshadowing of the pop/rock blend that The Beatles eventually managed to perfect.

At the time that The Beatles were making this gradual, relatively messy shift from pop to rock, it would have been unclear whether the band would accomplish the shift successfully. No amount of innate ability and intuition could have been enough to extend their career if they had not been able to come together to create a unified style. They found their own voice soon enough, though, and after this sloppier experimentation, *Help!* and *Rubber Soul* introduce listeners to a brand of hybrid pop and rock that The Beatles would come to perfect across their later albums.

Based on this understanding of The Beatles, it becomes clear that, in order to determine how One Direction compares, there are three primary factors that are worth noting: first, their musical growth as a stand-alone characteristic; second, their incorporation of other musical influences; and finally, how effectively these different sounds intermingle to create cohesive tracks of music.

step-wise in the pre-chorus, but even then, it only contains characteristic jumps between $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, and $\hat{5}$, shown in Example 2 below.



Example 2: “What Makes You Beautiful” pre-chorus (measures 13-16)



Example 3: “What Makes You Beautiful” chorus (measures 16-24).

The pre-chorus then leads into the 18-measure chorus, which consists of a repeated 8-measure phrase and a 2-measure tagline. Only the first iteration of the chorus theme is included in Example 3. Like the verses, the chorus is heavily dominated by $\hat{1}$, and also almost entirely step-wise, the one exception being a jump from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{3}$. Although the melody remains consistently simple throughout, if one were to identify a section of the song where it is the most complex, it would be the pre-chorus, if only because of the slightly higher prevalence of melodic jumps.

This conclusion is further confirmed upon examination of the song’s chord progression. It, too, is very simple, following a I-IV-V progression throughout the verses, chorus, and bridge, and incorporating a vi chord into the pre-chorus – which follows a I-IV-vi-V progression – creating the most harmonically compelling portion of the song. The harmonic and melodic elements of “What Makes You Beautiful” result in a very easy-to-learn, sing-able song that is sure to linger in people’s minds, making it a commendable choice for a debut single for this up-

and-coming boy band. This earworm quality only takes the song so far, however; the simplicity of the song leads to the criticism that it is boring and uncreative.

In and of itself, this objection cannot be based entirely on the melodic and harmonic characteristics of “What Makes You Beautiful.” This is not to suggest that such criticism is unwarranted, but rather that the specific focus of the claim is directed in the wrong place. An overwhelming amount of well-renowned contemporary pop songs rely on step-wise melody and a simple I-IV-V or variation on the I-IV-V-vi progression. The distinction between these songs and “What Makes You Beautiful” is that there are no other elements of “What Makes You Beautiful” where the writers took risks and branched out beyond common pop music conventions. The song contains little dynamic contrast, follows the common ABC song form, and utilizes rather generic drum, bass, and guitar riffs throughout. It is no wonder that many people listen to it and claim that it sounds just like another radio pop song, because that is precisely what it sounds like.

The most successful feature of “What Makes You Beautiful,” though, is the quality of the vocals, which is often dismissed due to the aforementioned misconstrued belief that One Direction lip syncs. The harmonies in the chorus – most notably in the culminating chorus after the bridge, beginning at 2:38 – are not particularly complex but they are executed well, leaving little question that the vocals are the strongest aspect of an otherwise relatively mediocre track.

Overall, this description also suits the other tracks on *Up All Night*. Excepting the ballads, the timbre is synthesizer-heavy throughout, which contributes to the manufactured sound of the album. They provide some variety to their timbre by incorporating scattered rock elements, most often in the form of a small amount of distortion in the guitar to create a “dirtier” sound. Melodies and chord progressions are simple across the board, with the pre-chorus or bridge often

emerging as the most tension-filled portions of the song. Interestingly, on *Up All Night*, the bridge is also the section that exhibits the most variation within the song form standard that “What Makes You Beautiful” establishes. Several of the songs, especially on the front half of the album, utilize a bridge that can be divided into two unique sections—in the case of “What Makes You Beautiful,” the first portion of the bridge is comprised of vocables over a minimal instrumental track, followed by a reiteration of the chorus by only one member of the band, again over low instrumentation. There are two common variations to this trend, the most common being the introduction of a new lyrical idea, as in their track “More Than This,” and the other being a reiteration of the pre-chorus theme instead of the chorus, such as in “Up All Night.” The latter half of the album consists of songs that almost uniformly only contain a new lyrical idea as the bridge. No doubt in part because of the distinct variations between songs on what otherwise sounds like a very uniform album, the bridge often stands out as the most compelling portion of a song.

As with “What Makes You Beautiful,” though, the greatest strength across the album tends to be the members’ vocals; compared to some of their other tracks, “What Makes You Beautiful” actually does not do the members justice in terms of showcasing their talent. Instead, the ballads on the album, such as “More Than This” and “Moments,” are most successful at providing the boys with an arena to showcase their true abilities, quite possibly because the tracks are less dense and, therefore, give the members a chance to bring their vocal chops to the forefront of the music. But even so, their voices leave a fair amount to be desired. This can probably be attributed primarily to their age – the oldest member of the band was 19 years old when they recorded this album, and their lack of vocal training at this point is very evident. Their

age also serves to hinder them because their voices still sound quite similar to one another, having not yet had an opportunity to truly develop.

Given all of this, it is not difficult to imagine why many people struggle to take One Direction seriously. If *Up All Night* and “What Makes You Beautiful” exist in people’s minds as what One Direction sound like, they are frankly quite justified in the claims that all of the band’s music sounds the same, that the music is uninteresting, etc. It’s not so much that *Up All Night* is a bad album, but rather that it is mediocre. Despite the fact that 38 different songwriters are credited with contributing to the album, it does all sound similar, and to many listeners, that makes it uninteresting. Some satisfying vocal moments and enjoyable melodic lines smattered throughout the songs are not enough to compel an average listener to purchase the album, let alone to keep listening to it.

Their second album, *Take Me Home* (released in 2012), largely follows in the tradition established by *Up All Night*. Most notably, the members have made some progress vocally, and it is easier to distinguish five unique voices than it was on their first album. Increasing vocal ability is the most distinctive improvement between *Up All Night* and *Take Me Home*, although some of the melodic lines are also less predictable and there is a more blatant rock influence on certain tracks which, overall, hint at the beginnings of a divergence from their bubblegum pop sound.

“Live While We’re Young” was the first single released from this album, and it very nicely highlights these improvements. The rock influence on the album is very apparent in this song because of the thinly veiled allusion to the introduction to The Clash’s “Should I Stay or

Should I Go?” Melodically, the verses still follow a step-wise pattern; in comparison with “What Makes You Beautiful,” the melody is less monotone and relies less on $\hat{1}$, as illustrated below:



Example 4: “Live While We’re Young” verse (measures 5-8).

As with “What Makes You Beautiful,” the melodic phrase ends on $\hat{2}$, a stylistic choice that the writers have most likely made to build some tension in an otherwise simple melodic statement. During the verses, the melody is doubled in both the bass and guitar, creating a uniform sound; the drumset serves as the only contrast, providing hits on each beat. Unlike the pre-chorus in “What Makes You Beautiful,” the pre-chorus of “Live While We’re Young” is the most melodically uninteresting portion of the song, remaining almost entirely monotone on $\hat{1}$, as shown in Example 5.



Example 5: “Live While We’re Young” pre-chorus (measures 13-20).

Instead of relying on a more complex melody to build tension from the verses, then, the guitar and bass shifting to their own supplemental lines at 0:23 work to the same effect, coming as something of shock as the pre-chorus leads toward the full sound of the band – both instrumental and vocal – joining in at the chorus.



Example 6: “Live While We’re Young” chorus (measures 20-29).

“Live While We’re Young” has a 16-measure chorus that can be further broken down into two identical 8-measure phrases; it differs from the form of the “What Makes You Beautiful” chorus in that the first 8 measures are sung lyrically, and the second 8 measures consist of a vocable rendition of the melody. One iteration of this phrase is shown above in Example 6. Melodically speaking, the chorus relies far less on $\hat{1}$ than “What Makes You Beautiful” did; it also contains jumps between $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, and $\hat{5}$ and in one instance makes a jump from $\hat{2}$ to $\hat{5}$.

The chord progression is relatively simple, as with “What Makes You Beautiful.” The verses follow a I-IV-I-IV-ii progression and once again, it shifts to a variation of the I-IV-V-vi progression in the pre-chorus—specifically, a vi-IV-I-V-vi-IV-V progression that leads into the chorus, where it resolves to I.

Like the songs on *Up All Night*, “Live While We’re Young” and many other tracks on *Take Me Home* rely heavily on changes in timbre, introducing and removing elements of the ensemble to create dynamic contrast and tension. In this song and others, the guitar is the primary contributor to the shifting tone of the album because by expanding the role of the guitarist, the instrumentals in general sound less manufactured. Compared to other tracks on the album, “Live While We’re Young” is not the best example of this change, but with even minimal variation in the guitar part between the verse, pre-chorus, and chorus, it sounds like the instrument plays a necessary role in the song in a way that the guitar often didn’t seem to on *Up*

All Night. The form of the song also differs from the common form on the first album. The primary difference is in the bridge, starting at 2:06, which consists of a brief instrumental, followed by a new lyrical theme and a slight variation on the “live while we’re young” refrain. This particular format actually differs radically from any bridge on the first album, a change which reflects pretty universally throughout *Take Me Home* – unlike *Up All Night*, where a few specific patterns for the bridges could be identified, there are no clear patterns that emerge among the bridges on *Take Me Home*.

Midnight Memories, One Direction’s third album (released in 2013), appears to be at war with itself. Like *Take Me Home*, it includes elements of their bubblegum pop sound and several nods to well-known classic rock anthems, but it also pays homage to the folk-pop style that was arguably at its peak when this album was created. Because of these very different sounds, it is difficult to identify particular features of the music that apply across the board, so it becomes necessary to examine more songs in greater depth in order to gain a full perspective of the changes within the band’s sound.

One Direction released “Best Song Ever” as the first single from the album, and it remains grounded in the same style that One Direction became known for because of their first two albums: it is shameless in its pop sound, and begins with an intro that unmistakably echoes the opening of The Who’s “Baba O’Riley.”⁵⁷ It proceeds where *Take Me Home* left off, slightly expanding on the band’s musical vocabulary and incorporating new strategies into the music

⁵⁷ “Best Song Ever” is generally regarded as an effective homage to One Direction’s musical influences. Title track “Midnight Memories” serves as another example that incorporates a well-known rock riff – an almost identical hook to “Pour Some Sugar on Me” by Def Leppard – which is criticized almost unanimously among critics as sounding ineffective and forced, illustrating that on this album, the band is struggling to find their own voice.

even as it remains simplistic. The verse consists of an 8-measure statement which is itself made up of two identical 4-measure phrases, one example of which is illustrated below:



Example 7: “Best Song Ever” verse (measures 11-14).

Although the verses are almost entirely step-wise, there are a few characteristics of the melody that are worth making note of. First, the phrase neither begins nor ends on $\hat{1}$, instead grounding itself almost entirely in $\hat{5}$. It also contains jumps from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{6}$ and, more interestingly, from $\hat{6}$ to $\hat{2}$.



Example 8: “Best Song Ever” pre-chorus (measures 18-22).

In contrast, the pre-chorus and chorus of “Best Song Ever” rely on fewer pitches. The pre-chorus – represented in Example 8 above – begins on $\hat{1}$, but the first scale degree arguably plays the least significant role in the phrase. After a persistent repetition of $\hat{6}$, the first half of the phrase ends on $\hat{2}$, and the full phrase ends on $\hat{7}$. These melodic choices increase tension within the pre-chorus, which is then resolved in the chorus, where the melody lingers on $\hat{1}$ for the longest stretch thus far in the song, as illustrated below.



Example 9: “Best Song Ever” chorus (measures 22-33).

The chorus makes predictable jumps between $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, and $\hat{5}$, but more remarkably, both the pre-chorus and the chorus make upward and downward leaps between $\hat{2}$ and $\hat{5}$. Despite the fact that the overall melody is still fairly simplistic, these features indicate, without a doubt, that One Direction’s melodies are becoming increasingly complex.

If “Best Song Ever” represents the perpetuation of One Direction’s bubblegum pop sound, “Story of My Life” is one of the songs on *Midnight Memories* that most clearly illustrates that One Direction have evolved since their second album. The melody in the verses actually shares many common characteristics with the verses of “Best Song Ever,” most notably in its predominant use of $\hat{5}$ and its comparably minimal use of $\hat{1}$: in the case of “Story of My Life,” $\hat{1}$ appears in the verse only once, as shown in Example 10 below.



Example 10: “Story of My Life” verse (measures 9-23).

In addition to this, “Story of My Life” differs from the other songs that I have discussed so far because the verse incorporates a new idea halfway through its melodic phrase, where a vast majority of the verses on their first two albums consisted of a shorter phrase that was repeated. Aside from making jumps between $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, and $\hat{5}$, the melody jumps from $\hat{2}$ to $\hat{6}$, as in “Best Song Ever,” and from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{7}$.

The chorus is the first point in the song where the melody is strongly rooted in $\hat{1}$. Like the verses, the chorus is relatively monotone, but in this song, the band shows a degree of melodic

sophistication that is not present in their first two albums. As shown in Example 11 below, at two instances in the chorus, the melody jumps from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{3}$ before returning to $\hat{1}$; shortly after, the melody jumps from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{4}$ and back. The jump from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{4}$ has a very specific function in the phrase because it resolves the tension that was established with the inclusion of $\hat{3}$ in the preceding measures. This choice shows that the band now has a higher expectation of their audience’s ability to understand the melodic structure: as a result of the quick return to $\hat{1}$ after the introduction of $\hat{3}$, listeners have to track the absent $\hat{3}$ through the melody until $\hat{4}$ resolves it. Even these small features of compelling musicality in “Story of My Life” indicate that this album’s target audience has shifted from the tween demographic that was expected to enjoy “What Makes You Beautiful.”



Example 11: “Story of My Life” chorus (measures 31-47).

Ultimately, though, the true value of “Story of My Life” lies in its harmonic structure, which is more nuanced than anything from One Direction’s first two albums. The chords in the verses are heavily structured around vi, following a vi-I-vi-I-vi-IV-I-vi-IV-I progression. For the other songs that I have discussed, vi has only appeared in the pre-chorus, but “Story of My Life” marks a turning point where this changes; the vi chord plays a crucial role in many of their harmonies from this point onward. The pre-chorus follows a simple IV-V-I progression, but none

of these chords occur in root position—instead, the pre-chorus follows a $IV\frac{5}{4} - V\frac{5}{4} - I^6$ progression. This inclusion of inversions is another new development for their harmonies.

Through the entirety of “Story of My Life,” the harmony and melody interact in a way that they never did on *Up All Night* or *Take Me Home*. They have interesting characteristics when examined separately, but this song is so strong specifically because the harmony emphasizes the compelling aspects of the melody, and vice versa. For example, in the verse of “Story of My Life,” shown in Example 10, the melody introduces a new melodic phrase halfway through the verse. This change is intensified by the chord progression, because this turn occurs on the same line where the harmony first progresses from vi to IV . This album marks a change where the interaction between the different elements of a song plays such a role.

One Direction released their next album, *Four*, in 2014. As with *Midnight Memories*, their fourth album increased the variety in their music as they strayed even further from their initial pop sound. The band and critics alike largely emphasize that this album was inspired by various artists from the 1980s. Despite this common thread uniting many of the songs, it remains difficult to identify characteristics that sufficiently articulate what the band is doing with their songs. While their sound has become a bit more nuanced since *Midnight Memories*, beginning to combine elements of their pop sound with inspiration from classic artists, I will simplify my analysis because for the most part, the songs on this album can still be identified as more folk-pop or classic rock-inspired.

In September of 2014, “Fireproof” was released as a free download to accompany the announcement of One Direction’s new album. The song has been compared to Fleetwood Mac

countless times since its release, with some critics specifically identifying Fleetwood Mac’s “Dreams” and “Gypsy” as probable sources of inspiration.



Example 12: “Fireproof” verse (measures 5-14).

Like a majority of the songs that I’ve discussed thus far, the verse of “Fireproof” is composed of two iterations of the same musical phrase, an example of which is shown above. Unlike each of those songs, however, this structure does not carry over throughout the track; halfway through the second verse, after only one cycle through this melody, the vocal melodic line briefly disappears and a guitar solo occurs, indicating that One Direction have an increasing lack of regard for their old stand-by song form.

The first half of the verse is heavily constructed around $\widehat{5}$, just like “Best Song Ever” and “Story of My Life” from *Midnight Memories*. The melody then changes halfway through the phrase, descending to $\widehat{1}$ and rooting itself in that foundation even as it returns to $\widehat{5}$ with the second iteration of the melody within the verse. Although the verse is primarily step-wise, there is a jump from $\widehat{6}$ to $\widehat{1}$ in addition to the commonplace jumps between $\widehat{1}$, $\widehat{3}$, and $\widehat{5}$.

“Fireproof,” unlike any of the songs that I’ve discussed thus far, does not contain a pre-chorus. This is not to say that no songs on the first three albums lacked a pre-chorus, although a majority of One Direction’s songs do utilize one. Because the pre-chorus serves so often as a place to build tension within the song, it is valuable to identify the means by which they build tension instead.

In my discussion of *Midnight Memories*, I noted that the verses were grounded in $\tilde{5}$, and that the chorus existed as the first point in which they truly rooted themselves in $\tilde{1}$. “Fireproof” does something very different, with the verse resolving down to $\tilde{1}$ halfway through. The chorus, on the other hand, grounds itself entirely in $\tilde{2}$, specifically utilizing $\tilde{1}$ in the context of the vi chord, as shown below in Example 13. As a result of this choice, $\tilde{1}$ plays a very minimal role in the melody of the chorus.

Example 13: “Fireproof” chorus (measures 25-40).

The entirety of the song’s harmony consists of the standard I, IV, V, and vi chords, but as with the melody, the structure differs greatly from a majority of their songs because the chorus serves to build tension, rather than to resolve it. In the verses, the two-part nature of each melodic phrase is also reflected in the harmonic structure; in the first six measures of the verse, during which the melody is built on $\tilde{5}$, the harmony stays primarily on the I chord, only briefly changing to the V chord three times before returning to I. In the latter portion of the verse, when $\tilde{1}$ plays a stronger role in the melody, the harmonic line changes, following a vi-V-IV-I progression. The chorus then utilizes a V-vi-IV-V progression, after which the resolution to the I chord at the beginning of the second verse is particularly satisfying. After the second verse, the

harmony consistently uses the V-vi-IV-V progression for the remainder of the song; it doesn’t resolve again until the tagline at the very end.

In contrast to “Fireproof,” fan-favorite “Girl Almighty” stands as a solid example of One Direction’s more pop-oriented side. The form of the song is curious, if only because it is rather difficult to determine where the verse ends and the chorus begins. The melody of the song is hardly worth dwelling on: the verses consist of a syncopated rhythm sung almost entirely on $\hat{3}$, and while the pre-chorus and chorus incorporate the use of more notes, they primarily rely on $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, and $\hat{5}$. On the surface level, it is worth pointing out the resemblance between this structure and the structure of “What Makes You Beautiful,” which was also relatively monotone, although “Girl Almighty” might surpass “What Makes You Beautiful” because the tonic plays a much more minimal role in the melody. However, “Girl Almighty” shows a remarkable amount of growth from the band’s first single as a result of the harmonic structure of the song. Within the instrumental, the bass appears only sporadically, but when it is present, it creates an incredibly variable harmonic rhythm. For example, the verses are almost entirely built upon I, but at the end of each four-measure phrase, there is an instrumental interjection of another four measures in which the bass quickly shifts through a V-vi-IV-I-V-vi-IV-I progression.

For the most part, the actual progression is not particularly notable. At the end of the chorus, however, there is a progression that stands out not only in the context of “Girl Almighty,” but also across all of One Direction’s music as a uniquely creative choice. The chorus closes with a reiteration of the refrain, “I get down on my knees for you,” with only one vocalist and light instrumentation. Having just finished the last portion of the chorus on a IV chord, the bass proceeds diatonically down the scale from C# to B and resolving on the tonic, A. One’s first instinct here would be to presume that the bass is playing inversions of the I and V

chords before resolving to I in root position, but instead, they surprise us, and in context they are undoubtedly using a iii-ii-I progression.

When looking at the strengths of the songs on *Four* and then revisiting the very basic structure of “What Makes You Beautiful,” One Direction’s growth over these four albums is indisputable. It is another question, however, whether their music has reached a level of complexity that hints toward the sort of career that The Beatles had in store when they were at a similar point in their career. If judging by that standard alone, it seems that One Direction have a long way to go. However, it is also worth noting that they seem to be following in The Beatles’ footsteps insofar as they are simultaneously incorporating contemporary and classic influences into their writing. If they can fashion their own unique sound out of their influences, then, perhaps, they will be on the right track. Their 2015 album, *Made in the A.M.*, just might prove to be an even stronger indication of their growth. As of the end of December, 2015, the band – now a foursome, with Zayn Malik having left in March of 2015 – has gone on a hiatus. If and when they return, it will be interesting to see how their future endeavors follow along the path that they have set for themselves so far.

Conclusion

Overall, it is inarguable that during their boy band years, The Beatles developed their musical abilities in ways that One Direction have not. The Beatles played a far greater role in their songwriting process, and each member of the band had his chosen instrument that he always played on stage. Beyond this, even their earliest music exhibited a level of complexity that One Direction are still grasping at and not quite reaching on *Four*. However, The Beatles were not always the revolutionary artists that people remember them to be; prior to *Sgt. Pepper*, they were a boy band in very much the same position that One Direction are in now. Both originated as bands that were thoroughly entrenched in the pop music culture of their time, and their early albums share a crucial commonality: they draw an increasing amount of influence from the great artists that came before them while simultaneously incorporating the pop style of their contemporaries. If they continue to follow the same upward trend that is evident across their first four albums, One Direction just might have the potential to make a lasting impact. The biggest question, then, is this: how well can the history of The Beatles predict the future of One Direction? At this point, there doesn’t seem to be enough evidence to make a call one way or the other. But while we might not have an answer yet, one thing is certain: up to this point, One Direction’s music has been severely misjudged. There is much to appreciate about the quality of their music thus far, if one is only willing to disregard their expectations of what a boy band is supposed to be.

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