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Production Seminar

Lesson 1:
The Six Aspects of Production

This lesson is excerpted from an online course. While the navigation links on each page are not active, all of the multimedia interactions are. Have fun!

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Introduction

Welcome to "The Production Seminar." In the following weeks, we will look at each other's productions in-depth, as well as discuss each others' evaluations of these productions and the various topics that arise from them. As we are doing that over the next six weeks, we will also be looking at elements of three hit songs, and examine why they work so successfully. Alongside these, we will also look at three hit songs, and examine why they work so successfully. Our technical focus will be on issues of form and development, though we will discuss many other aspects of production as well.

This week, we begin by considering the "Six Aspects of Production," a list of six criteria that I have found to be very helpful in assessing productions, and in isolating ways that they can be improved.

Throughout all six weeks of this seminar, you will hone your abilities to analyze music in this way, and the "Six Aspects of Production" will serve you well in your production work afterwards.

If you haven't already done so, please send me the **first** of your three productions through the Private Thread.

Now, let's get started!

Objectives:

By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- Use the "Six Aspects of Production" analysis to develop your awareness of the production process.
- Apply the "Six Aspects of Production" to your analysis of the posted productions.

Timeline for Week 1

Lesson Days	Suggested Readings	Activities
Monday-Sunday	<i>Inside the Hits</i> by Wayne Wadhams (Introduction and Chapter 0) (Pay special attention to pages 4 and 5 (from "But This is Not a Textbook") and <i>Inside the Hits</i> (p.18) pp. 17–19 ("Key Elements of a Hit"))	Assignment 1.1. Analyze Seminar Productions: Due Wednesday

[Next Topic: The Six Aspects of Production](#) 

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The "Six Aspects of Production" will help you, as you produce your music and analyze completed productions, to determine what makes them successful (or to troubleshoot problem areas). Click on the button to download:

**6 Aspects of
Production**

As we look at these "Six Aspects of Production", we must always ask "WHY" is really? "WHY was this done?" (Or, in the middle of the production process, ask yourself "WHY am I doing this," "WHAT does this section or part need?," "WHY isn't it working well enough?") "WHY?" It's really the ultimate question and the basis for understanding a production.

It especially helps to build up a list of answers that explains why certain production elements ARE working. For example, I work best with a singer by finding those sections of their performance that amaze me, and use those as a model to try to get more out of them, rather than focus on what's wrong.

Inside the Hits

Wayne's list of elements (p. 18) covers the same concepts that my list does, but is organized differently. If his approach works better for you, by all means, use it!

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The Six Aspects of Production

Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why?

WHO

The question of “who” should be directed at both the artist and the song.

Who is the artist?

- Describe the artist's identity.
- Indicate when the recording was made.
- Identify the song's style and intended audience. Is it similar to other records?
- Describe the budget constraints?
- Describe the record's purpose, in terms of an artist's career. Is it a catchy first single to establish the artist? To get a deal? A demo to get a gig as a cover band? A different direction, used to learn something new?

Knowing about the artist's qualities and motivations creates a context and shapes an overview for how to approach a production. It will help you answer the overarching question, “Why take this particular production approach for this particular artist and this particular song?”

Who is the song?

Knowing the identity of the song is as important as knowing the identity of the artist. Indeed, “production” is the melding of song and artist onto record.

How does the song itself influence the approach to the production? What is the lyric's story, and what individual sections, phrases, or even words direct or affect the production at all scales? How does the melody interact with the lyric? Does the melody emphasize lyrics or direct the flow of the song, or just create a musical element and draw attention in its own right? How do these invite production elements? How do harmonic elements affect all of this, and again, invite production attention? How does the overall structure of the song dictate the production approach and/or flow of the record?

These may seem like “songwriting elements,” because they are! The first job of the producer is A&R (“artist & repertoire”). Choose the best song and then oversee touching up or rewriting and restructuring the song, if necessary, until it is the best it can be. That is what much of preproduction is, and it is often the most important element of the entire production process. A great song for a great artist makes the producer's job easier, and the song often points the way to approach the production.

WHAT

What specific elements are you hearing, sonically and musically?

Name each element you are hearing (instrument, voice, sound, combination). What are each element's sonic qualities, and what is its part in the arrangement? What we hear is the sound maker (its tone or coloration) AND the music it is playing. For example, I might describe a part I'm hearing as a 12-string electric guitar (the type of instrument) with a clear but idiosyncratic sound (color/timbre), playing a IV chord (the music) with the third on the top, open voicing (arrangement), with a slow but aggressive, anticipated strum (performance).

You'll expand on the sound's sonic qualities as you get to "where" and "how," as they also effect the sound.

The analysis process is best organized by listing elements as they are heard, so that you don't just compile a list of things out of context. So let's go right to "when."

WHEN

At what point does an element appear in the production/song?

I find it best to analyze a production by going section by section, and then bar by bar, down to the beat and sub-beat, for that's how each "what" is heard. A record is a series of "whats" appearing and unfolding over time.

It helps to define the general, overall production feel of each song section. That will guide the specifics of each component part—each "what."

WHERE

Where in the 3-dimensional aural space does the musical element appear?

We, as producers or engineers, often think in technical terms—panning, reverb, delay, volume, etc. The listeners, however, just hear things located in 3-dimensional space. So, define spatial placement as they do. Then you can figure out the possible technical ways to achieve that.

For example, a muted trumpet drenched in reverb, panned off to the right, with a lot of a high ratio of return signal (reverb) to dry (source signal) and low in the mix, is heard by the listener as a soft trumpet off in the distance, perhaps on a misty night.

HOW

How is it played? What is the emotional approach, attitude?

This overlaps with much of the above. “How” may include equipment, effects, and so forth. A specific instrument through a specific processor helps define the sound and is used to support the attitude,

WHY

What is the purpose of each musical element?

Above all, “why?” is the most important question for learning, and for good production. For each and every element in a record, a choice was made to have it. WHY? Why was it included to achieve such a purpose?

Why that specific instrument at that specific location in this specific song, located in that specific space, played with that specific approach?

Each “why” will always be guided by the overall “why” of the context of this song, for this artist, approached this way (see “who?”). Each “why” is a specific element supporting the big “why.” There is a purpose for each choice, even if it’s just to “keep the groove,” or some other simple musical purpose.

In looking at “why,” we also spot the “hooks” of a record—those elements that grab the listener, and tend to stay with them. It may be the chorus of a song, a single lyric, or it may be an individual effect, a turnaround, a surprise stop in the arrangement, an instrumental hit, etc.

Any grabber that hooks us in. The “why”—the purpose of a hook—is . . . to hook us!



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