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All the songs DO sound the same: Modern pop is louder, less varied, and uses less chords than classic albums of 50s and 60s

- Less variety in chords or melodies in songs released now
- Analysis of half a million pop songs from 1955 to 2010
- Songs in Fifties and Sixties had much more variation, claim researchers

By FIONA MACRAE

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It is a familiar complaint from those of a certain age: today's pop music is louder and all the songs sound the same.

It turns out they are right.

Research shows that modern recordings are louder than those of those of the 1950s and 60s. They are also blander, with less variety in terms of chords and melodies.

The finding, which will come as no surprise to all those over the age of 35 or so, comes from Spanish researchers who carried out a computer analysis of the key features of almost half a million pop, rock and hip hop songs from 1955 to 2010.

This revealed today's tracks to be louder. The researchers say this is because sound engineers and producers are cranking up the volume at the recording stage.

As a result, if two tracks are turned up to the same volume at home, the more recent will sound noisier.

This is thought to not simply due to better recording equipment but an attempt to make music that catches the attention and is suitable for playing in discos.

The study, published in the journal Scientific Reports, also found evidence that songs are more similar than in the past.

The chords used and the changes between chords are simpler, leading to the production of music that is easy on the ear but contains little variety.

Researcher Martin Haro, of Barcelona's Pompeu Fabra University, said: 'I think this is related to the role of music.

'Nowadays, it is more about relaxing, you don't want to think about what the music is telling you.

'In the 1950s and 60s, music was more artistic and for getting messages, things about politics, across.

'When the synthesiser was introduced, you had lots of bands like Pink Floyd that were experimenting with different types of sound and chords, this was an experimental playground for them.

'Now it's about dancing and relaxing, rhythm and energy, with groups and bands not so interested in experimenting with sounds and chords.'



All the songs sound the same? New research suggests that new pop music is louder, but has fewer chords and less variation than older songs

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The real thing? The experimentation of bands such as Pink Floyd (pictured playing in 1994), is in stark contrast to today's blander music

The study also found that instruments fall in and out of fashion, depending on the sound of the time. Wannabe musicians looking for a hit should turn to the past for inspiration, said the researcher Joan Serra, of the Spanish National Research Institute.

Old tunes re-recorded with increased loudness, simpler chord progressions and different instruments could sound new and fashionable.

Professor Adrian North, a music psychologist, said: 'There isn't much research out there on how music should evolve, but what little there is argues that composers and performers are in a continuing battle for the attention of listeners, and apparently tailor their music to achieve this.

'One way in which they can achieve this is by, for example, making their music progressively louder over time, as seen in the research here.

'However, music can only get so loud before it becomes simply unlistenable, and so the same theory argues that this is where musical styles begin to evolve: rather than making their music novel by simply making it louder, performers and composers have to find new types of music, and so this is how new musical styles come about.'

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- roy pryer, slough berks, 28/7/2012 21:21

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The fact that pop has become more bland basically means it has become more kitsch, so better at having pop potential. To anyone that cares about music this just means they must look beyond mainstream music that is pop

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which used to be horrified by new pop but there is plenty of new styles and artists flourishing, and not only lame interpretations of artists of the past but true composers and artists trying to find their musical personality in a musical world already well explored. Some change medium which has seen a rise of electronic music which regardless of a lot of it being hard on the ears of those used to organic instruments is forward thinking. Others go beyond what has already been done nevertheless drawing on the valid past contributions to music. These must not be branded as uninspired rip-offs! Revisiting the past is extending it thanks to added experience.

- **Spencer Bambrough, Mouans-Sartoux, France, 28/7/2012 16:10**

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The fact that pop has become more bland basically means it has become more kitsch, so better at having pop potential. To anyone that cares about music this just means they must look beyond mainstream music that is pop which used to be richer. This article should not be understood as saying that music isn't what it used to be. It is too easy to be horrified by new pop but there is plenty of new styles and artists flourishing, and not only lame interpretations of artists of the past but true composers and artists trying to find their musical personality in a musical world already well explored. Some change medium which has seen a rise of electronic music which regardless of a lot of it being hard on the ears of those used to organic instruments is forward thinking. Others go beyond what has already been done nevertheless drawing on the valid past contributions to music. These must not be branded as uninspired rip-offs! Revisiting the past is extending it thanks to added experience.

- **Spencer Bambrough, Mouans-Sartoux, France, 28/7/2012 16:08**

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- **Yorky, Leeds England, 28/7/2012 14:06**

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Well it's only taken them how long to establish what most of us already know? There is NOTHING memorable about any of today's contemporary pop acts. The likes of Tulisa, Dizzy Rascal, can you imagine anyone playing those records in fifty years time and talking about them as classic and influential pieces of music? Everything in this country has been dumbed down to feed the lowest common denominator. There are bands out there that are worth listening to, Radiohead, Kate Bush, MUSE, to name but three but essentially popular music is absolutely dire, as for the chord arrangements (or lack of) that's because most so called artists cannot play the piano, everything is sequenced and quantized to within an inch of its life hence the horrible artificial or as some would describe, 'clinical sound'.

- **Nick, UK, 27/7/2012 23:50**

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This is why today there are so many 60s tribute acts IE Bootleg Beatles Oasis counterfit stonies etc.

- **roy pryler, slough berks, 27/7/2012 21:18**

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Just another symptom of societal devolution, along with reality TV and much "performance shock art." More information and technological tools are at our disposal than at any time in history, yet we make poor decisions and our art is simplistic. I used to wonder at our ability progress; now I just wonder how much longer society in its current form can exist before there is some type of "culling of the herd." How much longer will biology deem our existence worthwhile?

- **Cliff Stern, Just the Other Side of Midnight, 27/7/2012 17:15**

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- **Cliff Stern, Just the Other Side of Midnight, 27/7/2012 17:14**

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'Pop' is not modern as it is simply basic song form (several millennia old) in one of two diatonic modes (last coding by J S Bach - '48' - in the early eighteenth century). Over that august, time - honoured structure is ladled an excess of tawdry, garish persentation. That is what defines 'pop'. Before the days of mass - media (pre - Edison, Berliner, etc.) some performers would trash the material for the easily - impressed, just as now, but were, rightly, seen as novelty freaks - fun for a few seconds' distraction but, unlike now, could not profit substantially by their silliness. If customers are happy with less substance and more filler it is unbusinesslike not to oblige. In 'pop' it is the cheap, stock, unvarying mechanical, physical backing that sells, and performer hype, so that will be pushed via ever cheaper backing machines.

- **L. England., Leics. England., 27/7/2012 17:12**

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Most modern pop music is skilled producers putting backings to throw-away lyrics using their box of tricks, dressed up as the creations of the singers to make them look more talented than they are for the sake of worshipful fans.

- **Brenda Blessed, Plymouth, England, 27/7/2012 17:09**

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