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# Computer Software Predicts Whether Song Will Be a Hit

Tuesday, April 04, 2006  
By Adam Sherwin



It could be the death of music or the birth of pop as science. Record companies are using a computer program to predict the mathematical properties of a hit song.

Barely one in 10 songs produces a return on its recording and marketing costs. How much easier life would be if a song could be analyzed and given a "hit" or "miss" verdict within 20 seconds.

That is the promise made by the creators of **Platinum Blue Music Intelligence**, a program that claims an 85 percent accuracy rate, and has predicted smash hits for corporations including [Sony](#) BMG and Disney ([DIS](#)).

Platinum Blue isolates the musical characteristics or "optimal mathematical properties" that are most often found in three million hit songs.

Using 30 variables such as tempo, melody and harmony, the program compares a song's characteristics with those of the hits, and places a song in a "hit cluster."

**Ben Novak**, a songwriter from New Zealand, submitted his song "Turn Your Car Around" to the program and received a hit rating of 761 out of 1,000, similar to OutKast's award-winning "Hey Ya!" It was rated by the program to be similar musically to hits by R Kelly, Jay-Z and Kelly Clarkson.

*(Story continues below)*

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Sony BMG chose the song as a single for **Lee Ryan**, a former singer with the band Blue. It became a U.K. Top 20 hit and has reached the Top Five in seven countries.

Producers submit songs to the program before the final mix, and receive feedback. Then the song is tweaked accordingly. Singles are sometimes dropped because of the results.

"A record company wanted to promote a smooth, British jazz singer to the Norah Jones audience," said **Mike McCready**, the chief executive of Platinum Blue. "But the analysis found that the single's underlying features were closer to the rock bands Aerosmith and Maroon 5. It was not a hit because it confused the target audience."

Novak credits the program with starting his career but thinks that it could remove individuality from songwriting.

"I think if it started telling people to speed things up, or put more 'E' and 'A' notes in their melodies," he said, "then we'd end up with a bunch of music that sounded the same."

But McCready insists that the program, originally called Hit Song Science, will not result in homogeneous music.

"It reveals that hit songs don't have to all sound the same," he said. "A song can be in the same 'hit cluster' as a metal, rap or pop track or even a Beethoven symphony. The program detects deep-lying patterns not apparent to the human ear and says 'This must be what humans like.'"

Record companies pay £3,500 (about \$6,000) for analysis of an album.

**LIGHT PROGRAM**

— The hit song program analyzes variables such as melody, harmony, tempo, rhythm, pitch, chord progression, fullness of sound, cadence, frequency ranges, texture and timber of voice.

— The program will compare songs and rate them; it cannot (as yet) give composers the necessary ingredients to write a hit.

— According to Platinum Blue, the British charts have a more diverse range of music than their American counterparts. Analysis of 50 years of hits show 62 different British "hit clusters", compared with 55 in the U.S.

— Hit songs demonstrate eternal qualities: the Beatles and Elvis Presley score higher than most contemporary songs.

— Platinum Blue is not the only company promising to uncover the "DNA" of music. The U.S. Music Genome Project has produced **Pandora**, a program that can, it claims, provide users with personalized playlists by matching song choices with "genetically" similar tracks.

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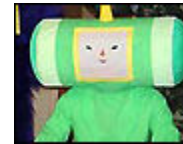
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