

Blurred Lines of Genres: Unboxing The Creativity

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We are already living through the third decade of the 21st century. Music has constantly been evolving, so have the artists. For the past couple of years, we have witnessed many artists trying out a different genre than that they have been established in and many new artists not sticking to one genre. Since the artists are the ones to define the art, saying the lines between the genres are getting blurry would not be wrong. In this article, I will study the cases of two established artist switching genres in the past year and two relatively new artists not boxing themselves in a genre. Before we get to see the artists' adventure with the genres, I should explain the impact of their actions and the importance of the genres and genre-bending.

We need to grasp the fact that genres are separated by the elements that form the songs: melodies, singing, duration, instruments, and production. The genre is what a listener expects from a piece. There are many subgenres to define and categorize the songs more accurately. Still, there will be singers and songs that will not fit any of the genres. You are entitled to ask the question, "Why are the genres such a big deal?" A quote can answer this question from a 2019 article about Tyler, the Creator's Grammy win "Yet, his album was only nominated for Best Rap Album, and it contains less than 30% actual rapping. The rest of the album is brilliantly orchestrated instrumentation, singing, chords, synthesizers, and melodies that could well be considered pop ballads." (1) As seen, the genres are the political reflections of the art, and they have award-wise consequences. Tyler, the Creator, being a black artist, seems like the only reason his pop-weighted album is categorized as a Rap Album, which forces us to question the unbiasedness of the institutions that classify the art and the necessity of the categories. This makes the genre-bending and genre-switching an unusual act in music because, from labels to listeners, everyone is trying to categorize everything. Some popular subgenres have their own playlists, charts, radio stations, and award categories. When a song is genre-bending, or a singer is genre-switching, this requires a re-categorization, or it may even fail to fit in a particular category. Hence, creating genre-free music or mixing multiple genres is risky for both the artist and the label. Keep this in mind while reading the next part, where I will examine these four artists and their accomplishments between the genres.

First, Taylor Swift won her 11th Grammy for her 9th studio album last month. Her genre adventure has begun with her first album, "Taylor Swift," a country album, in 2006. Her following three albums, "Speak Now," "Fearless," which she re-recorded and will release this week, and "Red," were labeled as Country and Country Pop albums. Since 2014, starting from "1989", her subsequent three albums were labeled Pop, for her music became more mainstream and popular. Last year, she released two Alternative albums, "Folklore" and "Evermore," which makes her genre adventure an evolution of career and character. Her songwriting and theme choices have also evolved through time. However, we should call her last two albums a genre-switching because she released them six months apart in the 15th year of her pop-dominated 15-year-old career. Even though her "Alternative Era" does not seem to come to an end, we should not expect too much change in the re-recorded version of "Fearless," which is titled

“Fearless (Taylor’s Version),” still, the album will include some songs from her vault, but they are most likely to be Country-Pop genre rather than Alternative.

Like Taylor’s evolving genre adventure, Machine Gun Kelly also evolved as an artist throughout his 12-year long career. The first two studio albums consist of Rap/Hip-Hop songs with many Hip-Hop and Rap artists featuring. His third studio album “Bloom” still includes Rap-dominated songs, but we see the hints of Pop Punk and Pop sounds on some of the songs from the album. When we get to his 4th studio album, the real challenge to define the album appears. “Hotel Diablo” is described as a Hip-Hop/Rap album, but there are multiple songs that are featuring Alternative artists, and the most popular song of the album, “I Think I’M OKAY,” is MGK’s first entirely Pop Punk song featuring a Pop Punk legend of the last two decades. Travis Barker and a relatively new artist YUNGBLUD. The song is defined as Pop Punk and Hip-Hop/Rap besides including neither rapping nor any classical Hip-Hop instrumentals. I conclude that the addition of the Hip-Hop/Rap title was because of the entirety of the album and probably the rapper identity of MGK. His last album, “Tickets To My Downfall,” is a complete Pop Punk album and a collaboration with Travis Barker. This album shows us the result of MGK’s evolution from a rapper to a “Rock Star,” again, similar to Swift’s case. Since this change is many years later from the beginning of his career, we can call it a genre switch. However, he still continues to collaborate on Hip-Hop/Rap songs and singles with other artists. In the latest news, his last single featuring CORPSE “DAYWALKER!” is defined as Rap Metal and Dance-Punk, which is a first in his genre adventure. From the looks of it, the only thing that is consistent on his adventure is Rap and evolution.

These two artists might be beginners in the music industry. However, their works are very advanced, so are their paychecks. I will look at Lil Nas X and Billie Eilish’s genre adventures, or should I say genre-free adventures? With his latest single and music video release, “Montero (CMBYN),” Lil Nas X was one of the most talked-about artists for the past couple of weeks. Unfortunately, we cannot go into too much detail about the religious and shoe-related controversy surrounding that single in this article. His first single, “Old Town Road,” was intended to be a country song until the “genre police” decided it was a Pop song. Then Lil Nas X did something very unusual and released “Old Town Road (Remix),” featuring Billy Ray Cyrus, one of the first names that come to mind when talked about Country music. This act of genre-bending with the masters of that genre has become a tradition for a Lil Nas X song since his first one; Cardi B, Nas, Travis Barker are the other names that he has worked. His first and only EP “7” includes his first three singles, and all of them are categorized as Hip-Hop and Pop, but the EP includes even a Travis Barker collaboration where the tone is clearly Pop Punk-Rock. We can summarize his genre-free adventure with lyrics from his 4th single, “HOLIDAY”: “Pop star, but the rappers still respect me.” His tracks until this moment cannot be boxed in a Pop or Hip-Hop genre and probably will not be boxed in the future as well, yet this does not keep him from being on the top of the charts or receiving Grammys.

In a very similar case, Billie Eilish is a new artist with 7 Grammys and a unique music style. Her music can be categorized as Pop, Electropop, or Dark Pop. Still, pop music’s core is the popularity of the music, so her music being categorized as Pop would not be wrong due to her

and her music's immense popularity. From the beginning of her career, every new song of hers had something different from before. Her first studio album, "WHEN WE ALL FALL ASLEEP, WHERE DO WE GO?" includes melancholy pop tones, but still, every song brings something new to the Pop genre. Calling her art Pop because of the popularity makes us realize the artists are the ones to define a genre and the trend. Maybe Swift's and Lil Nas X's interpretation of Country music is not exactly the same, but that is the point of creativity. If every song were similar to each other, we would not need new songs, and the same goes for the artists. Billie Eilish's unique style may start a new wave of Pop where the sound is entirely different from the 2010's Pop songs of Katy Perry or Lady Gaga, yet, this is the consequence of creativity. You might think the new artists are genre-switching because they are trying to find their voice, maybe, genre-switching is their voice, and they have a unique voice.

These were some of the many artists with unique music styles and genre-bending/switching styles. We should consider that genre-bending or creating genre-free music might be the new trend, or genres are getting useless at this point. Expecting contemporary art to be in the lines of a tradition that came before discourages the artists' creativity. A new way of music should be freedom and not caring about rules and genres.