

Black_BRU_Creation_Element2b

Branwell Black MA COMMERCIAL MUSIC PRODUCER

Module code ADAD7004_LON

Element 2b – Reflective commentary

ULTRAVISION

(all songs *could* be Eurovision if produced in the *right* way)

Introduction:

This reflective commentary will provide a detailed analysis of an artistic journey travelled, culminating in the submission of the following: the Portfolio - entitled **ULTRAVISION (all songs *could* be Eurovision if produced in the *right* way) (ULTRAVISION)**, (Appendix 1 & 2); the critical feedback received for the written proposal ‘Element 1’ and subsequent reflection on how this feedback influenced the ultimate transformation of the Portfolio; the obstacles affecting live performance which arose due to the Covid 19 pandemic, resulting in a complete refashioning of the initial vision for the Portfolio; Ethics of Eurovision, a discussion into the more political, potentially hidden agenda (Belkind 2010,) and culturally biased voting, which is seemingly occurring within the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) community regardless of its apparent homogeny (Budzinski and Pannicke 2017); and the production process of the Portfolio entitled **ULTRAVISION**. In addition, a Knowledge and Skills research exercise focusing on the effects of plosive and sibilant sound.

Reflection and Critical Feedback:

The submission entitled 'Element 1' was to be a detailed outline of the proposed Portfolio. The initial intention was to revisit the digital recording of my own album entitled 'LOVE LIFE' (LL), an album which could be termed as HYPERPOP, at times ironic, satirical and thought provoking (MicTheSnare, 2020). Frith and Horne (1987) discuss the concept of the consciousness of *self*. They argue that we are influenced by our social structure and therefore our interpretation of *self* will also alter and shift within the changing shape of the new environments to which we are exposed. The *personality* of LL the album was influenced and styled by the environment in which it was perceived at that time. In an attempt at self-improvement, with a goal of standing out from the crowd i.e., 'Personality is the quality of being Somebody' (Frith and Horne, 1987, p. 17), the LL album was to be revisited, reworked, remastered, remixed but ultimately – re-Rocked and immortalised in Vinyl (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015). The feedback received for this intended re-interpretation of LL highlighted the need to include an identification for an indicator of success within 'Element 1' and '2b'. This would establish an understanding as to how the Portfolio as a finished product would be realised. The LL album on Vinyl, as a finished product would not merely be a top quality demo; but a finished article of release-ready standard, showcasing a high grade of production artistry i.e., professionally accomplished (Gerth and Wright, 1991). The criteria for reflection would be not only my own critical eye; interpreting assumptions using emotions and feelings whilst becoming more self-aware (Bassot, 2016), but would also seek and take advantage of input from peers and professional feedback from supervisors.

The changing face of Covid 19 pandemic recurring lockdowns, meant the opportunity for a live performance at Camden Assembly Hall altered elements of the initial creational idea of producing a finished Vinyl product. Instead of using the studio digital remastered LL album refashioned into a Rock theme; now came the opportunity to record the raw live performance of the album, including real drums and guitars. This presented a whole new reinterpretation of the Portfolio with a Rock theme – a *live Rock Love Life Vinyl album*. Unfortunately, again the idea was to be thwarted - another covid 19 lockdown lift was delayed in England. This finally resulted in the performance being postponed until after the final Portfolio submission date: ‘The Black Heart – Camden Rocks Presents’, London, 29 July 2021.

After digesting the feedback received and interrogating the key elements of reflection, and whilst collaborating with colleagues and fellow Producers, it was clear the application of a completely new concept was the only option now open to develop (Bassot, 2016). After accessing supervisory guidance, the idea of **ULTRAVISION** as a creative Portfolio of between thirty and forty-five minutes of original music recorded, mixed and mastered, was sanctioned (Shuker, 2008).

Research:

The Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) was first broadcast in 1956 and now reaches forty-two countries, ironically worldwide. Since 2015, Australia, clearly not a country located in Europe, is also a participant. The contest is undoubtedly one of the most successful television programmes of all time; incredibly popular, not least because it is one of the longest running, viewed avidly amongst European countries, regardless of where they rank in terms of success (Filippidis and Lavery, 2018), good or poor, within the voting system. Of course, not everyone is a fan, in some countries the programme may be considered an excellent example the *love it*

or *hate it* marmite effect (Chu, 2016). Some love the sublime; some deplore the ridiculous (Appendix 3). The conclusion of a recent research found that a country's participation in the ESC actually improved the population's life satisfaction; although winning the competition did not improve it more – therefore it was the participation that appeared to be more important; in fact, performing very badly within the results was much better than not performing at all (Filippidis and Laverty, 2018).

Salibian (2021) describes the essence of ESC as loud and joyous, the exuberant debonaire attitude of the artists; the entire event is described as a veritable extravaganza, an unstoppable high energy fashion barometer, tracking the evolution of fashions and changes in gender trends, a 'celebration of the differences within the European community' (Salibian, 2021, p. 19). With such a strong public image and style, Eurovision is keen to highlight their message of diversity and inclusion. Salibian (2021) says the organisation is proud of this theme and quotes executive producer Sietse Bakker who says [we] '... invite people to open up to others, to different opinions, each other's stories and, of course, to each other's music' (p. 20). Historically, the ESC has shown it can represent people from a variety of communities and ages and from different cultural and identity backgrounds i.e., Austria's 2014 winner, the glamorous Conchita Wurst, beautifully dressed in a gold brocade gown, a self-titled sis male and bearded drag queen (West, 2021), the Russian 'folk grannies' of 2012 and 2018 winner for Israel, the former reality star and plus-sized Netta Barzilai - ambitious and determined (Zwart, 2018).

One of the ESC rules is that the winning country host the contest for the following year. The fact Netta Barzilai won in 2018 meant that controversial Israel (Belkind, 2010) were now to host The Eurovision Song Contest for 2019. 'Pink-washing' is a label Wood (2019) has used when describing those who attempt to soften the impression of Israel, *exploiting gay-rights politics*, in the face of accusations against the Human Rights of the Palestinians. He says painting Israel as a liberal regime by averting attention towards their *gay friendliness* is

singularly apologetic. Although, to counter Wood's claim, it cannot be ignored and is seemingly quite impressive that a previous representative for Israel was artist *Dana International*; a transgender woman, robed in French *haute couture* by French designer Jean Paul Gaultier, who won the contest twenty-three years ago, in 1998 (Salibian, 2021), (Appendix 4).

Ethics of Eurovision:

The concept **ULTRAVISION** is the identification of a sound - but also a feeling. Piotrowska (2020) describes the cultural identity (Appendix 5) of Eurovision as utopian with nostalgic ideals; it often over exploits stereotypes and mocks nationalism, heritage, gender and the exotic, regularly resulting in an explosion of hyper-reality, with displays apparent of rapacious hedonism (Piotrowska, 2020). Eurovision, although it can display an environment at times ridiculous and self-mocking, is not unaffected by the serious issue of ethics. Whilst the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) spin off, the *Junior Eurovision Song Contest*, has its own *code of ethics* '... ensuring the best possible treatment of all children participating in, performing in or attending ...' (EBU, 2021, para. 2), clearly the ethical underpinning of the *code* encourages acceptance, non-discrimination, and respect – although the words equity and equality are not featured. However, the EBU *code* for the Junior Eurovision Song Contest does name the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and indicates the rights of [their] children will be, in effect, advocated within this overall legislation. The annual event of the ESC, unsurprisingly, hits the global headlines regularly. Ethics and Human Rights specifically highlighted for the ESC of 2021 was the banning of the song *I'll Teach You* by the band from Belarus called Galasy ZMesta (translation: Voices from the Places). West (2021) discusses the 'paradox of liberalism' (para. 10) within the contest. He says the Belarussian

band, whose loyalty is proudly in support of one of their most prominent fans, President Lukashenko, say with their *anti-protest* song, they are speaking out with the voices of the unheard people of the provinces (Appendix 6). The EBU may have banned Galasy ZMesta and their *anti-protest*, protest song; but they did not ban singer Jamala from Ukraine, who won in 2016, with a decidedly political condemnation of the Russian Crimean invasion entitled **1944**. Perhaps the reason is that the EBU appears to have its own reasons for why it might choose which ethical or political battles it supports (West, 2021), (Appendix 7).

From a methodological position

The image and glitter surrounding Eurovision might give the impression that all of the music must be of one variety, after all it is an experience ‘so delicious to watch ... lightweight pop music, jewellery and costumes add to the dramatic appeal’ (Woods, 2020, p. 37). Surely this is not fair? Is this a fair summing up of the entire musical of Eurovision? Wood (2019) says ‘Queen of Pop Madonna’ (p. 1), who was paid ‘A million bucks’ (p. 2) to perform in Israel at the ESC in 2019 missed the opportunity to make a musical political comment on behalf of the Palestinians and their Human Rights sufferings. He continues to chide her for her ‘wishy-washy’ Human Rights, sitting-on-the-fence politics, suggesting she should take the money and ‘hit the road’ (Wood, 2019, p.2). What Woods (2019) is actually suggesting is that it is the responsibility of Madonna, a hugely globally famous Popstar known for her previous outlandish performances, to ‘... distract music fans and others from thinking about the unlawful and shitty things the Israeli government does ...’ (p. 2). Can this be done on a platform which is expected universally to be so frivolous? Is this a fair assumption of the nature of this reality? (Denscombe, 2014). It is likely the paradigm as a set of assumptions for a study into Eurovision as an **Ultra** Universe may sway. From a methodological position Eurovision, critically

speaking, creates its own reality universe and therefore one must surely approach this study as interpretive - there is no single truth, and also continuously constructivist, but also perhaps with a touch of pragmatism i.e., with an evolving reality, continually created by individuals and in groups – whilst constantly renegotiated and debating a floating reality (Punch, 2014).

The hugely popular film entitled *Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga* (2020) dealt with the whole *shebang* of the contest - the feel, the pomp and the ceremony. In order to achieve this musically, the highly regarded and commercially very successful Producer/Writer Savan Kotecha was brought in to create the style and perception of the ESC. Kotecha, who for this venture gathered both veteran and new fellow Scandinavian songwriters to assist her with the vast project, has enjoyed hits with Elie Goulding, Katy Perry and Ariana Grande, and says:

Serious songwriters in the big pop-music world kind of make fun of things like Eurovision. But when you have to do it, you realize it's actually a craft in itself (Bilge, 2020, p. 1), (Appendix 8).

Production techniques:

In order explain the methods and technical comprehension used to formulate this project's distinct body of compositional work, it is necessary to include an explanation of the theoretical understanding of the importance of the impressive and immense sound of the **Ultra** world of the Eurovision Song Contest, which is almost legendary. In 2015 the massive company MIDAS was in control of the enormous sound and organisational output from host Austria. The German division of the corporation explained their methods: output was controlled by the PRO 6, whilst also micromanaging the announcers, playbacks and any other inputs; the PRO 9 singularly took care of the artists and music, the monitors on stage were operated by PRO X consoles; in addition, there was a spare active console operationally available for every working console

(Anon, 2015): ‘... mixing engineers are the voice of the artist’ (MIDAS, 2021, para. 4), (Appendix 9).

The Project:

ULTRAVISION (all songs *could* be Eurovision if produced in the *right* way) has been designed as a comprehensively **Ultra** Eurovision album, with an expression of artistic merit. The album is from the vision of myself **Branwell Black** as *The Artist*. **Ultravision** is what the Artist believes is a fusion of ‘Eurovision’ themed ideas. The vision is not for all of the songs to sound the same, but to be an homage of eclectic mix. **Ultravision** has been deliberately purposed with historical reference points. There is absolutely **no** intention to make an album of Eurovision styled tribute songs. The *Artist* has skilled a personal gourmet recording technique, with current recording technology and methods and set these within a conventional time frame. It has been explained how the style, feel, sound and production of the **Ultra** Eurovision Song Contest Universe gives rise to the extravagant, exceptional, exaggerated, and spectacular (Filippidis, 2018, Yair, 2019, Bilge, 2021, Block, 2021). When experiencing **ULTRAVISION** the album, it was the intention to reflect this sensation. But is the ESC brave enough to steer away from cliché? The freedom and expression for a Producer/Songwriter to provide an example of ESC, as a potentially identifiable genre of music (Salibian, 2021) is almost overwhelming. In fact, it could be described as a sense of almost euphoric artistic liberty; but if this liberty – is limited to confines of the familiar – is it really freedom? (Gerth and Wright, 1991). Salibian (2021) told the ESC viewing community to watch out for the bold glam-rock Italian 2021 entry **Måneskin** ‘with catchy guitar riffs and gritty vocals’ (para. 6). She commented even before the band won, that the four high school friends, and ex-buskers from Rome, who cite their influences as Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin, would be filling a gap

noticeably missing in the contest. Salibian goes on to say over the last decade, the contest has catered for ‘Jazz ... opera, pop and romantic ballads. Yet rock was still missing’ (para. 12). Undoubtedly, the band’s thundering success was thanks to the newly introduced viewers’ voting system. Just one month before the contest, the YouTube video of their winning track *Zitti E Buoni! (Shut up and Behave!)*, had over 22 million views. The band’s moto translates to ‘*We're out of our minds, but we're different from them ... get ready*’ (Salibian, 2021, p. 16). The fresh exciting young band are a new and different entrant to a tried and tested, but maybe too familiar formula. Enter a new interpretation for Eurovision. Could this be a change from the accepted and judged establishment? But could it also be an almost forced, begrudged acceptance? The ESC judges worldwide did not rate the successful Italian pop-rock group Måneskin to come anywhere near the top of their voting choice, and it was not until the public vote came that they won.

A Producer, given permission to showcase their personal skills and artistry without having their wings clipped or writing to a specific brief, is surely a privilege provided only to the likes of the ‘Super Producer’, for example: Nile Rogers, the chief creative adviser of Abbey Road Studios, co-founder of hugely successful 70s disco group *Le Chic*, whose long antecedents lists musical couplings such as: Donna Summer, Diana Ross and David Bowie; but also exciting new and audacious acts i.e., Scottish Artist/Producer, Sophie (Xeon), ‘Pioneer of new Sound and creativity ... icon of liberation’ (Beaumont-Thomas, 2021, para. 3), who died accidentally, in Rome, 2021 aged thirty four. Rogers has little time for commercial music, preferring the avant-garde. However, he has a love for the *guilty pleasures* ‘I’ve got to be honest with you — I love records that, just are catchy and get under your skin and you can’t stop singing’ (Harod, 2019, p. 5). So, if the ESC wants to capture the culture of the youth, they must be encouraged to embrace (like Nile Rodgers), the new and adapt to change.

The expression following the title **ULTRAVISION** which claims ‘(all songs *could be Eurovision if produced in the right way*)’, is there to accentuate the argument that it is the production of the track which can influence the style and delivery of sound, and Eurovision feel - and not the track itself. This is highlighted on **ULTRAVISION** specifically by the inclusion of a cover of *Bitter Sweet Symphony* (1997), by The Verve.

Producing this album gave for an extremely liberating process, this would be because Eurovision itself throws all creative restrictions out of the window. If anything, the production is as important as the writing of the song. There is a sense that too much is not enough.

The idea for this project was to create a *theme* album that could be seen as music inspired by the eccentricities embellished within Eurovision’s most recognisable sound - Kitsch. There are thirteen songs on **Ultravision** the album, including the interlude track ‘*Solace*’. Of course, there are no Eurovision songs that are only one minute long, but it made perfect sense that an album with this concept would be so bold as to have an electronic synth wave interlude - to entice the listener - as they realise, they are half way through the album.

All of the songs on **Ultravision** were mixed and recorded in Ableton, aside from some recorded elements being created in Logic. The interlude ‘*Solace*’ was the only song not fully made with Ableton as it was developed using Cubase - the idea behind the song was to create a wideness to the sound waves and pads, using reverb and delays that pan from side to side. This a soundscape piece that did not even require bass, as the EQ’d dynamics added to the pads were already powerful.

The general mixing of the tracks was quite analogous, as to have a cohesive production sound to the album. The writing style is always fitting the ESC theme, but constantly adding electronic surprises such as gated drums, distortions, delays and panning, to turn the songs into recorded art (Frith and Horne, 1987). The approach is to recurrently sound as though one is mocking

commercial music by mixing it all together - whilst actually taking it very seriously! (Bilge, 2020). The mastering track for most of the songs followed similar plug-in methods such as Glue Compression, Stereo Enhancing, MaxxBass, Multiband Dynamics, EQ Eight and Imaging.

The track '*Ultraviolet*' (originally dubbed '*Get Your Head Right*') has three versions that have clear individual elements to define them. The song creation was a production puzzle of sorts, as it was written with a more robotic approach. The writing process paralleled the production, using the DAW Ableton. Synergy between the writing and production process turned the track into a kind of 'puzzle game' - and once all of the elements were created - they were moved around the board to make cohesion within the song. This is why '*Ultraviolet*' is a production haven, as it is stylised to showcase a wide range of artistic effects. These effects embellish the song for the better. The vocals contain much layering, with often panned adlibs added on key words throughout the song - this was to create a more sleek and exciting approach to the track - it felt redundant to only feature a main vocal with very little harmonies and adds. The Branwell Black band Finnish drummer Alexandra-Ellie Jääskeläinen, suggested the song might sound good in French and felt it may have a more 'continental' ESC sound. Being bilingual, I translated the lyrics and then concentrated on some nuances within the language which I felt would be attractive or appealing to a French speaking audience. I was pleased to receive feedback from Alex who notably said the vocals come across 'very confidently'. It became clear that the vocal effects alone would not suffice, without the particular delivery of the vocal performance itself. This version also features for the first time, the use of the plug-in OTT, which adds distinctive distortion to the voice. The vocal is also heavily gated, with most of the breaths removed one-by-one, by hand. The speeded up ending to the extended version features a panning to the voice, which was inspired by *Waking The Witch* from the concept album *Hounds Of Love* (1985) by Kate Bush.

The track '*Sick*' was the last song recorded for the album. It follows the emotion of wanting to cheat on your partner because of how they are making you feel, but the guilt is making you 'sick'. The production was inspired by the song *Alice* from the album *Chromatica* (2020) by Lady Gaga. '*Sick*' follows a 90s retro beat with heavy hi hat; the instrumental also draws inspiration from 90s House Music (Hoeven, 2014), with a midi Clavacin played using the Novation Mininova, reminiscent of the aesthetic of the album *Baby...one more time* (1999), the first album by Britney Spears (produced by Max Martin *et al*).

The track '*You'll Never Know*' is a remix and genre change to an original song made with the Producer 'Contradusk'. The original was an impacting electronic club piece, which had limited vocals, as the Producer wanted to create something more instrumentally heavy which a dance club could radiate towards. The new version is a representation on how *any* song could be Eurovision given the *right* direction. Two guitarist colleagues were recorded at Tileyard Studios and were instructed to play in an 80s inspired, simply irresistible way (Taut, 2005). The re-mixing was relatively straightforward, needing some EQ reshaping, delays and stereo panning. Eurovision has a tendency to mix different genres into one track; this was made apparent in the genre blend created for '*You'll Never Know*'. Niamh Sygrove, a Producer colleague, used the TC Helicon for the vocal effects at the beginning of the track: 'I can't hear you, I can't hear you' and also at the very end: 'I will never leave'. Distortion was heavily used in order to give a more 'upfront' tone to the spoken parts throughout the song.

The track '*The Fool*' can be thought of as the 'dark horse' of the album; feedback from listeners being that this is the track that stands out as being 'different'. This might come down to the very risky choice of no percussion. There is only voice and guitar on this track; the song relies on the lyrics and avant-garde or fractious, experimental and degenerative sound (Graham, 2010), and vocoder effects during the middle 8, which helps to make it one of the most identifiably Eurovision songs on the album. The vocoder was created by bringing down and/or

up the duplicated main vocal and tuning it to sound almost alien. The remarkable guitar part (which shifts seamlessly from Grunge to Blues) was played by French colleague Vincent Tordjman (Junky), which I recorded in one take using a Sure SM58 mic to record the raw sound of his Fender Telecaster, through a Marshall 100w Head and 4x4 speakers. The guitar was then panned during the chorus to create a stereo effect and feel heavier and fuller. The finished product demonstrates the importance of a Producer in maximising the best performance from an Artist. The 'heavenly' sounding effect at the end was created by the use of Melodyne. This allowed me to reshape the sounds and pitch the vocal several octaves lower in order to harmonise. I created and played some new Pad sounds on the Novation Mininova to guide the angelic real vocals, recorded with a mix of the Rhode RT-1 and Aston Spirit microphones. Eurovision choreography would surely send these angels down and guide the singer up to an eternal ascent.

The track '*Acid (Let Me In)*' was described by a listener as a 'grimy club anthem' and is a much less 'commercial' piece. This is a song that would represent the strange and bizarre (Yair, 2019) of Eurovision and to always expect the unexpected. The production for this song was a mix of samples and midi played by synthetic instrumentation. The rap during the second half of the song was artistically edited using Manual Quantising. This was to add an almost impossible dynamic to the vocal and reflect the theme of the genre: 'Hyperpop' or 'Glitchpop' - in an attempt at breaking the sound or cutting the natural sound so that it adds an inhuman effect, i.e., 'you can manipulate it however you want' (Lynch, 2021, para. 3).

There is one cover on the album. Of course, covers are not accepted as Eurovision entries, but it seemed creatively intriguing to put the idea that *any* song could be Eurovision. The song chosen was *Bittersweet Symphony*, originally performed by The Verve (1997). This is a full electronic remake and completely changes the meaning/feeling of the song. Most of the percussion, as well as song melodic sounds were made by sampling cups, glasses and even a

bin with fellow Producer Michael Dahl, from Tileyard Education. Michael has much experience recording Orchestras and Artists for Musical Theatre, which helped develop this new version into an electronic orchestration; much of the instrumental using string midi instrumentation. This was to show homage to the original version which is very string based. What makes this version Eurovision is the confidence of the performance along with the production. This version could easily have been misunderstood, but its electronic cohesion and new found aesthetic give it a different dimension. The choice of heavy echo and delays on the voice were added to create an almost arena effect to the voice, which adds a layer of *chaos* to the production. The original inspiration was to create an epic version of the song, much like remakes of iconic songs such as *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1983), by The Eurythmics from the film *Sucker Punch* (2011). The idea was to remake an already epic song a different kind of epic. Thereby making epic dramatic. And what could be more dramatic than Eurovision? (Filippidis and Laverty, 2018).

Personal Development Plan:

Knowledge:

As a Producer/Writer/Singer, one of my particular passions is the voice, and in particular how to draw the best representation of an artist's voice. This does not mean how to improve a voice artificially, but how to make a voice the best it can be. I wanted to make sure I was recording the sounds from the voice in the best way, using best practice, to understand why there was certain sound interference, and what I could do about it i.e., to hone my technique. I was introduced to a *Soundfly* article called 'How Close Should I Be to My Mic When I Record Vocals?' (Veach, 2020, para.1), (Appendix 10). This article covers the effects of an artist literally singing too close into the mic: what sound effects this will cause; why these effects

will happen; and how to prevent them. When a mic is placed in the vicinity of an instrument (in this instance, the Voice), the surrounding ambient noise will be picked up, not just the targeted noise. Although this may be desirable in certain instances, in particular if a certain *outside* effect is solicited (Huber and Runstein, 2014), it mostly makes a considerable negative difference to sound quality if the mic is too close or not close enough (Veach, 2020). For example, when phonetically pronounced, the letters *b, c, d, g, h, k, p, q,* and *t* make a special sound which is picked up by a mic when it is too close - they are known as a *Plosives*, due to their strong low frequency, which are described as a 'sudden outward push of air, or a sudden stop of the air flow within our speech' (Veach, 2020, para. 8). To maintain a clear human voice sound and eliminate unwanted airy wheezing or other unexpected noise, a high-pass filter (at approximately 80Hz, or certain mics have this facility built in), is recommended. In addition, if the voice is too far away from the mic, this creates a different potentially problematic hissing sound made by the letters *s, sh,* and *z* - these are called *Sibilants*, due to their strong high frequency. In order to create a cleaner, clearer recording sound, the mic should be pulled a little further away from the sound source (Veach, 2020). The article also warns of the complications of attempting to reduce the encumbrances of standing too close and standing too far from the mic. Simply standing too far away and turning up the *Input*, in an attempt to reduce plosives and sibilants will introduce low-level noise, echo and bounce, not perhaps at first noticeable. These pale unwanted vocal reflections may become a nuisance, appearing to be heard only later on the recordings. Vech (2020) goes on to say compromise, repetition and experience are the best tools to gather; mixing up additional measures with a variety of needs based on relative mic distance. He would counsel, use a pop screen a couple of inches at most from the mic. Cooper (2014) warns some condenser mics come with a foam pop screen, which although controls the plosives, also badly dulls frequency; he advises the use of a nylon pop screen. Then position the voice no closer than two inches and no further than twelve inches from the mic

Vech (2020). These techniques I found invaluable and used throughout **ULTRAVISION**. But it was on the songs ‘*Lift Off*’, ‘*I’m A Mess*’ and ‘*Stone*’ in which I was particularly pleased with the results and was able to exploit the techniques with greater effect.

Skills:

The tracks ‘*Lift Off*’, ‘*I’m A Mess*’ and ‘*Stone*’ were recorded using three vocalists: Morgan Black, Ria (Artist name) and Branwell Black. The technique to record them was inspired by an article from *Soundfly*, which explains how close one should be to the microphone when recording vocals. This is a technique whereby the singers would stand in one spot for their takes and when they needed to ‘belt’, they would merely put one foot back, in order not to over-saturate the wave form as they projected with higher decibels. This made the process faster and allowed the vocalists to feel more at ease while performing, without feeling restricted by the Producer. This method proved very useful and on an emotional level, made the Artists feel as though they were working with a more experienced Producer. This also added a natural compression to the voice when the ‘belts’ were further away, which gave a more natural dimension to the end mix.

I feel positively rewarded in reflecting on the finished results; in particular the technique effect of controlling background and unwanted ambient sound, which was successfully reinforced and explained by this article. I was able to reduce the effect of *plosive* and *sibilant* sound i.e., lower and heightening the mic (Cooper, 2014). In addition, by explaining to the artist what was happening with the sound received by the mic from the strong high and low frequency sound, we were able to improve not only the recording technique and sound outcome, but also their sound recording experience. They have told me they now use these techniques for themselves and *love it*.

Conclusion:

It has been established that the Eurovision Song Contest operates and gives the impression of *otherworldliness*, as in another, alternative or **Ultra**-environment altogether (Piotrowska, 2020). It is worth mentioning, whilst conducting this research, there was apparent source gender disparity. It was noted that a greater proportion of the articles and papers could be identified to a female source. This was the case with both academic and non-academic resources. Could this also reflect the portrayed otherworldliness? (Rosenberg, 2020). Much of the overall production in **ULTRAVISION** was made in an attempt to replicate what is stereotypically perceived to be what sonically suits Eurovision (Bilge, 2020 and Yair, 2019). Modern songs from the ESC such as *Mata Hari*, by Efendi and *ZITTI E BUONI*, by Måneskin gave clear tone to the production and overall eclectic sound to go for. What makes this album interesting, and individual is its boldness and the sonic continuity it contains. **ULTRAVISION** (**all songs could be Eurovision if produced in the right way**) the album, although full of different genres ranging from 80s rock to 90s house to drum and bass, has a clear direction and aesthetic that suits as a fully-fledged album; almost as though it were categorised by a multitude of countries represented by their contestants performing their songs one-by-one for the Eurovision Song Contest itself.

(5,485 words)

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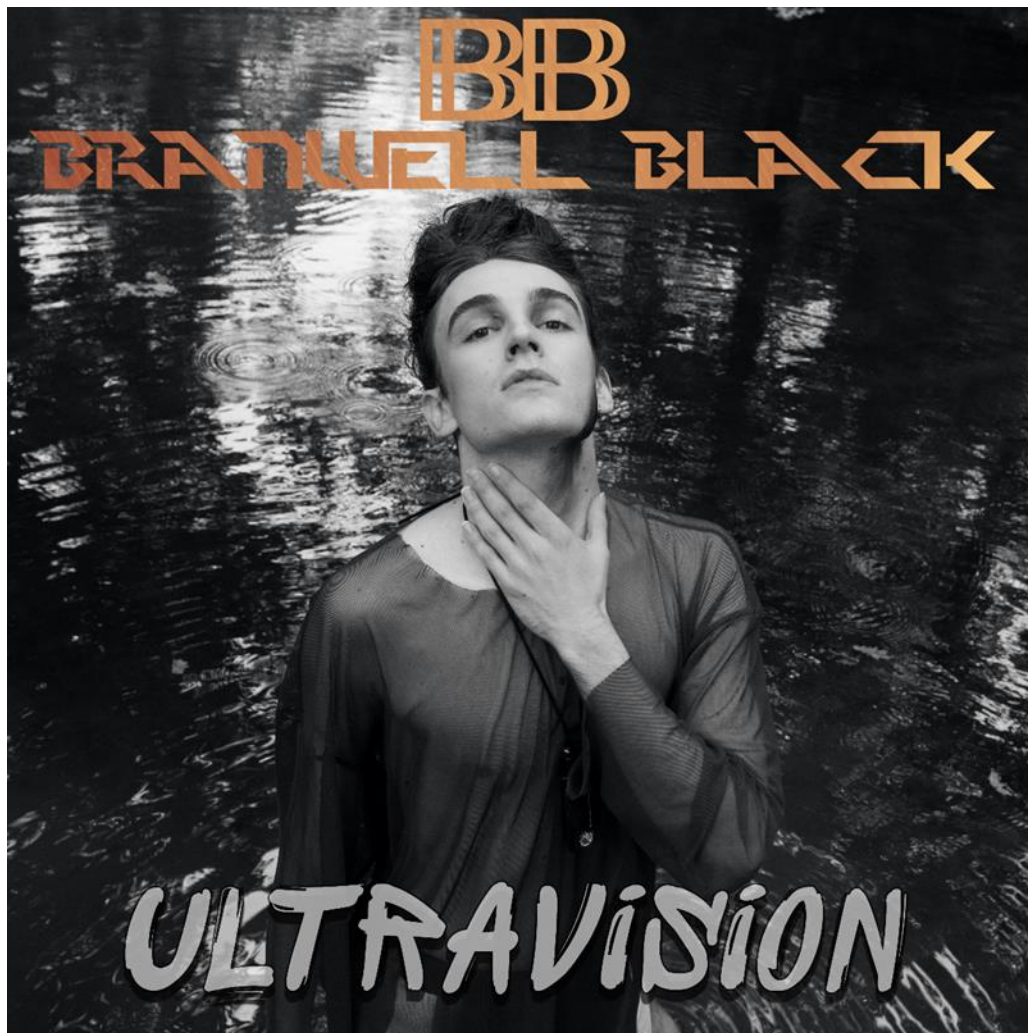
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Eurythmics (1983) 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)', *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*. USA: RCA.

Lady Gaga (2020) 'Alice', *Chromatica*. USA: Interscope.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Album Cover Artwork



Appendix 2: Album track listing:

ULTRAVISION

1. YOU'LL NEVER KNOW (4:04)
2. ULTRAVIOLET (Radio Edit) (3:01)
3. ULTRAVIOLET (French version) (3:01)
4. SICK (4:40)
5. STONE (3:06)
6. SPOTLIGHT (3:19)
7. SOLICE (Interlude) (1:00)

8. I'M A MESS (3:45)
 9. ACID (Let Me In) (1:54)
 10. LIFT OFF (4:12)
 11. BITTERSWEET SYMPHONY (3:12)
 12. THE FOOL (3:30)
 13. ULTRAVIOLET (Extended, with different ending) Bonus Track (3:35)
- (Total running time: 42:19)

All songs written, recorded and produced by Branwell Black. Except track 1. Co-produced with Contradusk, track 2. 3. & 13. additional writing Alexandra-Ellie Jääskeläinen, tracks 5. & 8. Co-written and Produced with Morgan Black, track 7. Co-produced with Niamh Sygrove, track 10. Written by Ria (track production Hospital Records Producer), track 11. Written by Richard Ashcroft, additional Production by Michael Dahl, Track 12. Co-written with Junky.

All vocals, instrumentation, keyboards, programming, drum programming and recording by Branwell Black. Extra musicians: vocals on tracks 5. & 8. Morgan Black, track 10. Ria, track 12. Frances Black & Ian Black; Guitar on track 1. Tom Morrison, track 1. & 12. Junky, track 2. 3. & 13. Harvey Cartilage, track 8. Morgan Black; Drums on track 2. 3. & 13. Alexandra-Ellie Jääskeläinen; additional keys on track 11. Michael Dahl.

Appendix 3:

The devout of Iceland go crazy for the show (Bilge, 2020), with almost the entire country glued to their sets (Filippidis and Lavery, 2018). When aired, it was watched in 2016 by an incredible 95.3% segment of the entire 204 million worldwide viewing audience (Filippidis and Lavery, 2018).

Appendix 4:

Gaultier claims he is fascinated by difference; he distinguishes himself as a benign voyeur, the **Ultra** out-of-this-World-ness of Eurovision feeding into his creative enthusiasm: 'Worlds untouched by the standardisation of fashion are grounds for stylistic expression' (Bilaud, 2021, 'Fashion' page).

Appendix 5:

Does Eurovision have a cultural identity? Or have *they* created an **Ultra**-artificial one? Wood (2020) says since joining in 2015, Australia have competed six times, their most successful entrant being Korean born, Queensland based, Dami-Im in 2016. Due to the subsequent popularity of the ‘Asian Pop Star’ television show and the amazing, but unforeseen success of their 2016 entry, Australia has now secured the exclusive option to launch the *Eurovision Asia Song Contest*. The organisation of the Asian market believes Eurovision and Eurovision Asia are a bizarre, camp and kitsch marriage-made-in-heaven, exploding with aesthetic contradictions; served up and custom made ready for delivery to a hungry Asian market, who are willing and waiting with their passion for pop music and ready-made shiny brilliant and glamorous pop stars (Woods, 2020).

Appendix 6:

Belarus has seen wide spread anti-establishment, pro-liberalisation solidarity protests and huge public outcry against human rights abuse in the 2020 Presidential election and claims of systematic and brutal violence (West, 2021).

Appendix 7:

North Macedonian, who hosted its first Gay Pride event in 2019, was represented in the ESC by Vasil, an artist who received thousands of homophobic tweets when he revealed his

homosexuality. North Macedonia which borders Belarus, only legalised homosexuality in 1996 (West, 2021). West (2021) goes on to argue although the EBU organisation managed to score points themselves by blocking the anti-freedom speakers, he suggests it may have been more productive and possibly even more thought provoking - to greater global audience - if they had been allowed to perform; he believes the EBU have used an erroneous political rule to ‘... evade a moral choice’ (West, 2021, para. 13). West (2021) uses a 1906 quote by the English writer of *The Life of Voltaire*, Evelyn Beatrice Hall (pen name Stephen G. Tallentyre): ‘I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend, to the death, your right to say it’ (para. 09), to explain why perhaps the band should have been allowed to perform. Yair (2019) says the world of academia noticeably ignores and steers well clear of Eurovision on a scholarly level. Perhaps the shyness or snobby arrogance, is due to the predominance in the ESC for the camp, kitsch and overt displays of a weird and exaggerated **Ultra**-world, which is unfortunate, as the ESC seemingly remarks and reflects current cultural events and important issues of the day i.e., the growing awareness for the LGTBQ+ community (Yair, 2019).

Appendix 8:

The film *Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga* (2020) was a jolly good romp with the main character, Lars, spending a lot of time wearing fake armour and lumbering about in a volcanic desert. Bilge (2020) says the Producer explains that Lars is misguided and needs to be the ‘... act with the biggest bells and whistles’ (p. 2). The Producer/Actor Will Farrell who plays Lars, was so invested with the reality of the film, he was only too pleased to give in to his ‘inner’ Lars as the stage and props became bigger and more imaginative: ‘Should we just do the hamster wheel?’ (Bilge, 2020, p. 2). However realistic the costumes and support were

which created the imaginative reality of the ESC, these were merely props, built on the strong foundation of carefully constructed music.

Appendix 9:

An impressive story for a company which started in 1970 with just one man in an upstairs flat in Euston, London. The company joined German Klark Technik in 1987 and this brought renewed success and innovation; the renewed section branching off in 1996 (MIDAS, 2021). Since 2015, the microphones employed by the ESC have become even more impressive, making the sound experienced by the consumer and user, even more spectacular (Block, 2021). The sound equipment for the 2021 Rotterdam Contest was provided by Dutch companies Ampco Flashlight and NEP/United. They used the Shure Axient Digital Wireless System to deliver ‘the impeccable audio quality throughout all performances for singers, musicians, and viewers to enjoy’ (Shure, 2021, para.1). The company ordered one hundred 4088 Directional Headsets and forty 4018V Vocal Microphones from the enormously successful American Dutch company DPA Microphones. It is indeed hard to question the professional quality or reliability of DPA - their 4006 Omnidirectional microphone is attached to the NASA rover buggy on Mars, which they claim will be its ‘ears’ (DPA, 2021, para. 1).

Appendix 10:

Personal Development Plan: Knowledge & Skills

Soundfly article: How Close Should I Be to My Mic When I Record Vocals?

<https://flypaper.soundfly.com/produce/how-close-should-i-be-to-my-mic-when-i-record-vocals/>

