1980’s NZ Music

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

1980’s New Zealand Rock Music

# Main Musical features

DIY indie pop bands, with Dunedin and Christchurch at the forefront, characterized NZ Music in the 1980’s. Solo acts were almost non-existent and of the few that did emerge most had first started with a band. Most groups of this era were three or four piece bands containing drums, guitar, bass, vocals and keyboard. The simplicity of these band arrangements translated to their sound and in general NZ music was beginning to become more poppy, with all bands adopting a more simple and catchy sound.

The influence of the punk mentality of doing things their own way could still be seen in the indie pop bands from the alternativeness of their lyrics, lots of times writing biting satirical songs aimed at current issues such as the depression or keeping New Zealand nuclear free, however the delivery of these songs was much more poppy than their punk predecessors. With the bass and drums mainly playing a simple beat which would make up a large part of the song while a keyboard or guitar would play a very catchy melody usually for the chorus. What differentiated the indie bands from the more mainstream bands were their lyrics and their willingness to experiment with different sounds. This experimentation resulted in the development of the ‘Dunedin sound’ characterized by the jingle jangle guitar and the wide range of experimental sounds. Indie bands of New Zealand drew influences from all genres such as jangle pop, rock and roll, country, Maori and Pacifica, synthpop and punk. The Dunedin sound can be traced back to the punk movement of the late 70’s which was influenced by bands such as ‘the Stooges’ or ‘the Velvet Underground’ this complemented by jangly psychedelic-influenced guitar work similar to that of the 60’s bands such as ‘The Beatles’ and ‘The Byrds”. New Zealand was a frontrunner in developing an indie scene in the post punk era with countries such as the US and UK only developing an indie scene in the mid 80’s. This meant the early indie bands in New Zealand truly were ‘independent’ with each band exploring their own sounds focusing on issues they believed in. Like most indie scenes around the world the indie bands in New Zealand had plenty of local popularity but remained virtually unknown elsewhere. The Dunedin sound however found reasonable international success due to college radio play in USA and Europe.

Bands that gained the most mainstream success in the 80’s however, were more pop rock. They were similar to the indie pop bands in that they were mainly three or four piece bands with guitar, bass, drums, keyboard and vocals, playing simple catchy songs but the lyrics of the songs by these bands were much more ‘commercially appealing’ singing about internationally relatable topics such as ‘happiness’ or ‘love’. The vocals of these bands were characterized by catchy melodies particularly in the chorus of the song. In the pop rock genre most New Zealand bands were behind the times compared to main centers such as Europe and the UK as they were influenced by and played in a style similar to that of 70’s bands from those countries.

# Repertoire

Key pieces of New Zealand music and artists from the 80’s

* Tally Ho - The Clean
* There’s no depression in New Zealand – Blam Blam Blam
* Dunedin Double EP–The Chills, The Stone, The Verlaines, Sneaky Feelings
* Counting the Beat- The Swingers
* I Got You – Split Enz
* Don’t Dream It’s Over – Crowded House

These pieces of music and artists were important to the NZ 80’s era, as they are the most popular/significant pieces to emerge from their respective genres and provide an accurate representation of the Kiwi rock repertoire of the era.

‘Tally Ho’ by The Clean was the second song to be released by the new Flying Nun records and was the labels first hit reaching 19th on the New Zealand Singles chart. This song featured a chugging rhythm played by the bass, drums and guitar using a simple chord progression throughout the song with a memorable descending melody line played on a farfisa (electric organ) that the vocals follow and accurately represents the general musical features of indie pop bands of the 80’s. This song also represented the DIY attitude of 80’s music costing just $50 to record.

‘There’s no depression in New Zealand’ by Blam Blam Blam is a classic example of the biting satirical lyrics used by many New Zealand indie pop bands of the 80’s. Released in 1981, amidst growing unemployment, industrial strife and resentment of the Muldoon government where the impending springbok rugby tour had brought the fear of massive civil unrest, ‘There’s no depression in New Zealand’ was able to capture the sense of unease felt by many. Lyrics such as “But we’re as safe as safe can be, there’s no unrest in this country We have no dole queues, we have no drug addicts, we have no racism, we have no sexism, sexism, no, no” (heard at 2:03) criticized the government who were trying to convince the public that there were no problems in New Zealand.

The ‘Dunedin Double EP’ was where the term the ‘Dunedin sound’ was first coined. The song ‘Kaleidoscope World’ by the Chills was the most popular of the EP. In ‘Kaleidoscope World’ we hear the distinctive jingle jangle guitar playing right from the outset and throughout, the bass and drums play a simple rhythm that keeps the beat throughout the song, the vocals are almost spoken similar to that of the velvet underground and the keyboard adds a layer of psychedelic synth sounds that complement the guitar, similar to that of the popular 60’s bands. The ‘Dunedin Double EP’ established the ‘Dunedin sound’ across New Zealand and even internationally gaining popularity with the college radios of Europe and the US.

‘Counting the Beat’ by the Swingers ‘I Got You’ by the Split Enz and ‘Don’t Dream It’s Over’ by Crowded House represents the mainstream pop rock aspect of New Zealand Music in the 80’s. ‘Counting the Beat’ had a very distinctive and catchy descending baseline, which can be heard in the intro and verses this coupled with the muted guitar chords created a very solid sound giving it the rock feel the chorus that consisted mainly of the vocals singing “La da di da la da di da la da di daaa la da di da’ just reflecting the catchy melody provided the pop aspect of the song. ‘I Got You’ also had a very distinctive baseline that was coupled with muted guitar chords in the verse to create a solid chugging sound giving it a rock feel, the pop aspect also came in the chorus of the song but was applied through the guitar playing clean and the introduction of a keyboard playing major chords. ‘Don’t Dream It’s over’ is much more poppy compared to the other two songs with the vocals and instruments being much more melodical and softer. The base is much less prominent with a guitar playing clean being the main instrument in the verse. A faint chugging sound of a guitar and bass can still be heard in the background providing depth to the song and giving the chorus more intensity. All three songs gained considerable success with ‘Counting the Beat’ gaining #1 in Australia and New Zealand charts. ‘I Got You’ reached #1 in Australia and New Zealand, #12 in the UK, #13 in Canada and #53 in the US, in 2001 it was also voted the 11th best New Zealand song of all time. ‘Don’t Dream It’s Over’ was the most successful song of the 80’s gaining #1 in New Zealand and Canada, #2 on the billboard hot 100, #6 in Norway, #7 in the Dutch top 40, #8 in Australia, #13 in Germany, #19 in Ireland, #25 in the UK. It was also voted in 2001 as the second best New Zealand song of all time and the seventh best Australian song of all time.

# Performance Style

Bands in the 80’s were very static in their performance with little or no movement. Most lead singers also played an instrument while they performed. The indie bands such as ‘The Clean’ or ‘The Chills’ had very little production and lots of the time the vocals were very hard to hear, most of the bands were very bland in their presentation usually wearing jeans and a shirt. This reflected the garage rock mentality of indie music where it was just a group of guys making music this endeared them to people who did not like the commercialization of music. The pop rock bands such as ‘Split Enz’ and ‘The Swingers’ had better production using better amps and microphones to give a clearer sound and also using lighting to add to their performance but they were also very static on stage with band members almost never moving from their spot. These pop rock bands wore more bright and formal clothing such as a colored suit and tie with colorful instruments as well. This presented a more glamorous look to the audience, which sent the message that they were separate from the audience so the audience would look up to them.

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Casual Clothes

The Clean

Low production

Better production, more organized

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Formal colorful clothes

The Swingers

# Kiwi Flavored music

Kiwi flavor could constantly be seen in music from the 80’s for example ‘Blam Blam Blam’ singing about the socio-economic climate in New Zealand at the time with ‘There is No Depression in New Zealand’ with lyrics such as “Every body’s talking about world war three” which references the widespread fear of civil unrest due to the impending Springbok tour, or the many pacific influenced groups such as ‘Herbs’ or most famously ‘The Patea Maori Club’ with their song ‘Poi E’ which was sung entirely in Maori and utilized many different Maori practices such as poi and chanting to reach number one in New Zealand, even mainstream bands such as ‘Split Enz’ had songs with a particular kiwi flavor such as ‘Six Months in a Leaky Boat’ which refers to New Zealand and its isolated position in the world as seen in lyrics such as ‘Aotearoa, rugged individual  
Glisten like a pearl, at the bottom of the world’

Task 2

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| **Distinctive Features** | **SONG 1**  **Title: Six Months in a leaky boat**  **Artist: Split Enz** | **SONG 2**  **Title: Tally Ho**  **Artist: The Clean** |
| Beat/Tempo/  Speed/Feel | The tempo is reasonably fast at allegro (it is around 130bpm) this gives the song a flowing feel like it is at a comfortable pace for the singer and listener not too slow and not too fast | The beat is very fast at Prestissimo (it is around 240bpm) this causes the song to have a very exciting feel to it, almost breathlessness when listening. |
| Tone Colours | The vocals are very high and sung very melodically the lyrics flow very easily. The synth doing scales in the background provides a dreamy feel while the drums give a strong beat with the kick almost like a heartbeat. | The lyrics run into each other because of the fast pace and the vocalist is practically speaking/shouting the words. The keyboard is playing very high major notes in staccato giving the song a lively and happy feel while the fast drumbeat reinforces the running feel of the song. |
| Rhythm | The drums play a simple 4/4 rock beat with the synth doing scales in a very fast speed where you cannot hear the gab between notes | The drums play a simple even 8/8 beat with the keyboard playing quavers in staccato. |
| Melody | The melody is very flowing but has high peaks and lows but they transition very smoothly not sharply. | The melody is very flat throughout with not a lot of change in pitch but very jumpy on the flat line. |
| Key | The song is in D major meaning it has a C sharp and an F sharp. As it is major it gives the song a happy sound. | - I was not able to find the tab or sheet music for this song, I believe it is in a major key though. |
| Compositional devices | Six months in a leaky boat is a song about the long journey pioneers had to take to reach New Zealand the constant change from high to low pitch in the song provided a wave feel like the motion of a boat. The synth gave the song its dreamy feel making the lyrics seem less literal and more metaphorical leaving it open to interpretation based on the listeners own experiences. | I believe that Tally Ho is about being in love with a girl, from the lyrics ‘I've been on a trip since I've been onto you’ is describing the intoxicating feeling of when you fall in love. The fast pace of the song conveys the speed at which falling in love happens, where you just get rushed away by your emotions. The keyboard and jangly guitar gives the song a psychedelic feel further reinforcing the intoxicating almost drug like state when you fall in love. |
| Form/Structure | Intro, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, solo, chorus | Intro, Chorus, verse, verse, chorus |
| Mood/Impact/  Meaning | The mood is happy; encouraging saying that even with the hardships of traveling so far there is so much to look forward to. The lyrics “the tyranny of distance didn’t stop the cavalier so why should it stop me” illustrates the encouraging mood of the song. | The mood is very excited fast paced, so fast that everything is a blur to illustrate the feeling of falling in love. The audience is stunned by the speed and suddenness just like when you fall in love. |
| Other | The lyrics are so applicable that there have been many different interpretations of the meaning from the song being a metaphor for Tim Finns nervous breakdown to the song representing a relationship gone wrong and providing encouragement to being a song about being a New Zealander and the isolation of New Zealand. | The song was the epitome of DIY song production being recorded for $50 on a 4 track and a 16mm camera with a filmmaker who didn’t know how to work the camera. There was almost no editing for the music video but they were able to capture the great atmosphere and energy of the song. |