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The SATURATION Trilogy: The Importance of the Vocal Mix

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The SATURATION Trilogy:

The Importance of the Vocal Mix

ABSTRACT

This paper goes over the background of BROCKHAMPTON and how the group came together. It will also discuss each role that the members of the group have. This history of the group will be one of the topics in the paper. The three albums from *The SATURATION Trilogy* will be the main topic that this paper will examine. Within these albums, the tone and stand out elements will be discussed. The importance of the vocal mix will be highlighted throughout, and the paper will pinpoint the three important tools that help the vocal mix within these albums. The three tools examined will be pitch shifting, panning and auto-tune. Certain songs that use these tools to improve the vocal mix will be examined. The elements of the vocals that will be talked about are the main vocals, overdubs and ad libs. These are the areas of the vocal mix that interact with the previous three tools.

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Introduction

Imagine a group with over thirteen members meeting online to form a “boyband.” Now, imagine this boyband releasing three albums in this same year. This is how BROCKHAMPTON came together, and this is exactly what they've done. They have created three albums known as *The SATURATION Trilogy* and have earned much success for these projects. The instrumentals from the group’s producers display the group’s distinctive style along with the messages from the group’s vocalists. Another aspect of the group’s success that is often overlooked is the quality of the mix. The mixing decisions made by BROCKHAMPTON have improved each album. Processors and effects were used to get this quality from the mix. All in all, BROCKHAMPTON has utilized these mixing tools to help them reach musical success.

Background

Kevin Abstract is the leader of this group and is the person who started this journey. Abstract formed the group with members that he met on a Kanye forum, KanyeToThe. He posted a question on the forum stating, “Anyone want to make a band?”, and thirty members come together. This group was named AliveSinceForever. This was the first group formed, but as time passed the members of the group started to diminish. They ended up parting ways, which lead to the start of BROCKHAMPTON in 2015 (Scott, 2017). Abstract had success in the music industry before the creation of BROCKHAMPTON, and released a solo project in 2014 (Ramirez, 2014). This gave the group leverage entering the music industry, and Kevin Abstract became the face of this new group.

Most members lived in San Marcos, Texas but those who did not decided to move there. These thirteen members have specific roles and are what makes BROCKHAMPTON who they are. These members consist of rappers, singers, producers, graphic designers, web designers, video directors, and a manager. The vocalists of BROCKHAMPTON are Kevin Abstract, Merlyn Wood, Matt Champion, Dom McLennon and Ammer Van. Joba and Bearface are members who are both vocalists and producers. The main producers of this music collective are Romil Hemnani, Jabari Manwa, and Kiko Merley. Romil and Joba are the main engineers in the control room. Robert Ontenient is also a producer and is their official web designer. Hencock “HK” is the graphic designer and also helps with video directing. Ashlan Grey is BROCKHAMPTON’s photographer, and Jon Nunes manages the entire group (SIDHU, 2018).

The group started to put out singles and gained recognition by winning the VFiles Loud contest in 2015 (Euse, 2018). The group decided to take time away from singles and release a group mixtape. On March 24, 2016, *ALL-AMERICAN TRASH* was released (“ALL-AMERICAN TRASH,” 2019). This mixtape was the building block of what BROCKHAMPTON sound would become and was the first project that was collectively put together by the group (Pearce, 2017). The mixtape helped the group gain popularity, but they were still unnoticed by the mainstream music industry. They then decided to work on another mixtape. They released four music videos to build up the momentum for this mixtape. Due to the quick popularity of their videos, they decided to expand this mixtape into an album. This is where the *SATURATION* series came together (SATURATION Documentary, 2017).

SATURATION Series

SATURATION I is what put BROCKHAMPTON on the scene and propelled their career. The group lived in San Marcos, Texas, but moved to LA during the start of this series (Eater, 2017). The group released music videos for “FACE,” “HEAT,” “GOLD,” and “STAR” (Zisook, 2018). These four songs gave a taste of what their album would become. *SATURATION I* was released on June 9, 2017 (Zisook, 2018). This album contains seventeen tracks and is around fifty minutes in duration. The tone of this album can be aggressive at times, but it settles down with a softer tone in some tracks. For example, “HEAT” is one of their more aggressive songs with high energy lyrics and a distorted bass. The distorted bass is a synth that carries the energy from start to finish. According to reviewers, “‘HEAT’ is pure insanity and contains some hard verses behind a dirty instrumental” (Elliskarran, 2018). This song is first on the album and gives the listener a lot at once, but it introduces the group’s unique style.

SATURATION I introduces BROCKHAMPTON with a high energy song like “HEAT,” but later songs show their range in genres. The song “WASTE” features Bearface and is one of the songs that breaks away from hip-hop. This song branches off to the indie rock genre and is important in showing the groups musical diversity. Rhyian Sterling of *WHUS Sound* states:

This whole album shows the versatility the group has, as it seems they can successfully make any type of song they want to make. There isn’t a single song on this album where you can tell they’re trying something new or experimental and it’s not working.

Within each beat, there are different processors and effects that bring out each instrument or sound. The space given to each component of the beat is what makes this album really clear and

crisp. The objective of the mix is to really bring these tones out so that feeling can be fully captured for the listener. The vocals are another area that is mixed well, and they have a great relationship with the mix of the beat. Owl Beanie of *Sputnikmusic* states, “SATURATION is a music fan’s hip-hop album. It’s a carefully constructed mosaic of pop-culture references, antagonistic rhymes, and a chemistry between the members of the ‘boy band’ which cannot be understated. The end product is kind of scary, kind of lovely and kind of exhilarating.”

SATURATION II was made immediately after the release of the first album.

BROCKHAMPTON took a week break after the release of *SATURATION I* and continued to work on the series. During this time there was added pressure put on the group due to their previous success. They battled with this pressure and the group was starting to lack chemistry. In the documentary BROCKHAMPTON created on the series, Kevin Abstract states, “It’s only different because we are making it different, with *SATURATION I* we never stopped working” (SATURATION Documentary, 2017). Despite the struggles, the album was made in less than three months and was released August 25, 2017 (Goddard, 2017). This album contains sixteen tracks and is about the same length as *SATURATION I*. Through this album BROCKHAMPTON stays true to their style by having the same aggressive tracks to go along with more playful beats. The more playful beats come from songs like “GOLD” and “JELLO.” In the song “JELLO” there is a plucked string melody that exemplifies the playfulness within the beat and brings a funky tone to the mix.

Songs in the first album were focused on showing the group’s diversity, but here we find that the melodic content is what drives the success of this album. Matthew Strauss, a writer for *Pitchfork*, states, “The production on *II* continues in the same form as their debut: cool, funky,

and polished, with just enough odd ornaments.” The odd ornaments he is referring to are the unique melodies and instruments used to really portray their style. The lyrics from each member interact with each beat perfectly, and the production of beats through this album is what really stands out. Sul Fell of *Medium* says, “Of course, the beats cannot think for themselves and the switches throughout are entirely by design but they sound so seamless it’s nearly believable that the music is simply responsive to the various artists rapping over it.”

The song “QUEER” is the best example of how the vocals and beat interact perfectly. The beginning of the track has a bouncy feeling to go along with Matt Champion’s verse, but the beat introduces a new instrument when Merlyn’s verse arrives. This seems to add more volume to the track as well. Merlyn is known to have a chanting-like style of rap, so the beat seems to match this with more elements added. The beat then seems to come back down with Kevin Abstract’s chorus (Fell). The spacing of the vocal and beats allow each song to capture the tone intended for the song. In songs like “CHICK,” there are low frequencies that could ultimately clash with vocalist voices that share the same frequencies, but the mix puts each element in their most comfortable frequency range. All in all, this album gained much success and was critically acclaimed when released. Sul Fell continues, “it is safe to say that Brockhampton didn’t just live up to the standard they set for themselves, they surpassed it.” Although this album was accepted by many critics there was still more work to be done with *SATURATION III*.

The group went on tour for *SATURATION II* and started to work on the last album once that was over. During the tour they tried working on *SATURATION III* but decided to save it after their shows (*SATURATION Documentary*, 2017). The album had fifteen songs and was about equal in duration to the previous albums. In preparation for the two previous albums,

BROCKHAMPTON released videos to help bring attention to their project, and they continued this by releasing “BILLY STAR.” Rather than a music video, Kevin Abstract directed this short film that displayed some of their new tracks that would be on *SATURATION III*. The songs that were introduced on the short film were “BLEACH,” “SISTER/NATION” and “TEAM.” The album finally dropped on December 15, 2017 (Lamarre, 2017). The trilogy was finished, and BROCKHAMPTON found the same success they had with the previous two albums with *SATURATION III*.

The album shares the same energy as *SATURATION I* and *II*, but this album is the most balanced. The *SATURATION* series was mixed/recorded in BROCKHAMPTON’s L.A home, but this album has more professional elements within the quality of the mix. Sheldon Pierce of *Pitchfork* states, “Songs have the same energies as before and have similar ambitions, but they are staged better and fully rendered.” It seems like the first two albums were the building blocks to get to this quality of an album.

The beats involved in this album keep to the *SATURATION* style involving unique sounds with playful melodies. The energy is exemplified with songs like “BOOGIE” and “ZIPPER.” “BOOGIE” is the first song on the album and has the same value as “HEAT” of *SATURATION II*. BOOGIE has a lot of unique elements including a brass instrument sampled from Nintendo's Wii theme music (HypeBeast, 2017) and a shouting vocal that enhances the energy. These choices are examples of the sounds that create the playful side that makes BROCKHAMPTON’s style. The song “ZIPPER” shares the same energy to start off this album and has an interesting piano riff that interacts with the shouting vocal. Although the beat is very energetic, the vocal elements stand out further. Certain vocals have overdubs layered on them

when the beat is its most energetic but are taken out when the verses occur. This helps that transition between chorus and verse, which keeps the listener's attention.

Like in the previous albums, BROCKHAMPTON shows their diversity and slows down the tone of *SATURATION III* with songs such as "BLEACH" and "HOTTIE." "BLEACH" is a song that has a trippy tone to it but does not surpass the energy that the first two songs contained. There is a unique melody that carries throughout the song, and it gives off a dreamy sound. The dreamy tone comes from the reverb effect and gives an echo to the instrument. This works well together with the low end kick, which carries the rhythm. "HOTTIE" is another song where listeners can experience the diversity that this group brings. This song is led by a synth melody that is consistent throughout the song and a whistle melody that comes in at certain moments of the song. The drums keep the rhythm bouncy and have more of a sub tone to them. The kick is not punchy but is more like an 808 drum. The sub tone of the kick has a longer release time and that fills in empty space. BROCKHAMPTON portrays themselves as a boyband while being heavily influenced by hip-hop, but this song displays the "poppy" side of their music. Dona Chesman of *DJBooth* states, "One of the poppiest moments on the record, "HOTTIE" summons up the ease and sunshine of *SATURATION* and refines it." This is what BROCKHAMPTON is about: drawing the audience's attention with intense songs, while also having songs that bring the mood back down.

Overall, these albums have been praised for their quality and creativity within the mix. The mix of the beats are important, but the details that go into the vocal mix are vital, especially in a large group like BROCKHAMPTON. The elements that mixing engineers use to mix the vocals are through processors and effects. These tools are used all throughout the *SATURATION*

series, and there are some that reoccur. The main tools that improve the vocal mix are pitch shifting, panning and auto-tune. Pitch shifting is a tool used in many of the *SATURATION* productions and helps bring a different timbre in certain verses and choruses. Panning is used on the vocals through each album and helps make room for the vocals in the stereo field. Panning can also help avoid clashing if certain elements of the beat are in the same area of the stereo field. Auto-tune is mainly used on the hooks and chorus portions of the tracks, but they do use this effect on some of the verses. This tool helped the non-singers and made natural singers of the group sound even better. These were the three main tools used in the mix that impacted the vocals positively throughout the *SATURATION* series.

Pitch Shift

Pitch shifting is a process used to raise or lower the original sound presented. *BrightHub* explains, “Pitch shifting is usually accomplished by extending the length of the audio track, thus making it longer in association with how much lower you want the pitch to be.” For example, a vocalist’s original voice can be contracted or stretched to have a higher or lower pitch. This effect has been used in hip-hop classics such as *The Unseen* by Quasimoto and *To Pimp A Butterfly* by Kendrick Lamar. *The Unseen* uses pitch shifting to distinguish two personas between one artist. Quasimoto is the higher pitched voice while Madlib (the same artist) sticks to his original voice. Kendrick Lamar used this effect the same way BROCKHAMPTON did in its albums. In certain songs of *To Pimp A Butterfly*, pitch shifting is used to bring a different aesthetic to the track and help transition from chorus to verse. BROCKHAMPTON uses pitch shifting this way in every album of the series, but there are also differences in their application.

The *SATURATION* trilogy uses this effect frequently and applies it to the main vocals and overdubbed vocals. The first two albums apply this effect to Ameer Van, who has two solo songs that involve pitch shifting. The song “2PAC” uses pitch effects in order to pitch his voice higher. This develops an interesting aesthetic, since his natural voice contains many low frequencies. It is a unique switch up for the audience who are used to hearing Van’s natural voice. Despite the pitch shifting, the timbre still resembles Van. Sometimes pitch shifting effects are used to completely make the natural voice unrecognizable, but this is not the case with “2PAC.” It seems that his voice is raised less than an octave, and that is what keeps that familiarity. In this song, Van says,

I got some demons on me, they been feeding on me
When I sold prescriptions, and my pill addiction
Fuck the damn detectives, momma called the Reverend
I know she praying for me, but I'm in the shadows. (“2PAC”)

The effect brings more attention to the message and story Ameer Van is trying to portray. These elements of pitch shifting along with his serious message are what intrigues the listener.

“TEETH” has similar qualities to “2PAC,” and it uses pitch shifting as an interesting aesthetic for the listener. This song, like “2PAC,” has Van’s main track as the only vocal element. This is surrounded by an unaffected vocal melody that sits behind his voice throughout the song. This pitch shifting effect sounds more like Van, so compared to “2PAC,” his voice is not raised too intensely.

The most common similarity that the albums in the *SATURATION* series share is the transition from chorus to verse. In genres like R&B, a female vocalist is sometimes used for the chorus to have a change in tone. This incorporates a different timbre to the song and adds a new

element that was not present before. BROCKHAMPTON uses this same strategy with pitch shifting. This effect has been consistently used by BROCKHAMPTON and has developed as one characteristic of their style. Tracks such as “CASH,” “TOKYO” and “STUPID” are all examples of BROCKHAMPTON utilizing this effect to improve the common transition between chorus and verse. *SATURATION I* has seven of the sixteen tracks that incorporate some aspect of pitch shift.

“CASH” is one of the songs that stands out. This song starts off with Kevin Abstract on the chorus and his voice is affected with pitch shifting. His voice is pitched shifted higher, which gives him a female timbre when the chorus drops in. This is applied to his main vocal, but there are some overdub tracks that are added. Abstract has two overdubbed tracks that work together with his natural voice. The two overdubbed tracks are that focal point of the chorus and are layered with a high pitch shifted voice. His natural voice is also implemented with these overdubs, but it is layered under the effected vocals. The two higher pitched tracks work well together while adding more body to the chorus. Also, having his natural voice with the other tracks helps improve the body of the chorus, because the lows in his voice help fill in space where the higher pitched voices cannot (“4 Ways You Can Use Pitch-Shift,” n.d.). After the chorus Kevin Abstract has a short verse where his natural voice is now the focal point. This is a great transition because of the unique switch in timbre from chorus to verse. The pitch shift effect used on Abstract's voice gives him a female quality, which sounds beautiful when transitioning to his natural voice.

Kevin Abstract is one of the members who is on most of the choruses and is mostly affected with pitch shifting. *SATURATION II* has ten songs out of the sixteen that have a pitch

shift effect. Abstract is on “TOKYO” where the transition between chorus and verse is impacted with this effect. Nicholas Scully states, “Abstract and other members’ vocals are pitched up multiple times throughout the project, making the album’s track listing exciting, though unpredictable at times(Scully, 2017). “TOKYO” starts off with Joba singing in his falsetto and then transitions to Kevin Abstract’s pitch shifted voice. This transition is appealing to the listener because it begins with a familiar timbre that the audience is used to but then drops into an affected voice that is different. The difference that is appealing to the ear comes from using this effect on Abstract's voice. Overdubbed vocals are used on this track, too, and his natural voice is used for the same purpose. Abstract’s affected vocals are center stage for the chorus, and his natural voice stays as that low frequency underlayer. The transition from the chorus leads into Van’s natural voice. His verse is only one track and does not contain any overdubs. This improves the transition because the overdubbed vocals had more happening and fills in more body, but then leads into a verse with less happening. Van’s voice is the deepest within the group, so he has more low frequencies than other members. This is where this track differs from “CASH” because the transition in timbre is much stronger. The reason its is stronger is because the change in timbre goes from a high effected voice to a lower one. Kevin Abstract’s chorus gives him a female type of timbre again, but it is perfect in transition with Van’s low frequency voice. Going from the affected vocal to Ameer's natural voice also brings the listener's ear back to a familiar voice they are used to hearing. Joba’s falsetto leads into the affected chorus well, and then dropping into Ameer’s natural voice works even better.

SATURATION III utilizes this same strategy with pitch shifting and overdubs but doesn't use this effect as much as the previous albums. *SATURATION III* has six out of the sixteen

songs that have a pitch shift effect, but “STUPID” is a song where they use the same strategy. The difference in this song is they balance the affected overdubs and only use them the second time the chorus is said. When Abstract starts off the chorus his high pitched voice is the only vocal track. With that said, the first portion of the chorus is one track. When the second part of the chorus is said, the pitch shifted vocal is overdubbed. The beat also implements an 808 kick at the same time as the overdubs are present. This brings more energy to the track as a whole, and the affected overdub tracks are used to help bring that energy to the chorus. The transition is the same as the previous songs, but the chorus does not start at the beginning. The listener is introduced to a verse by Matt Champion, and he has some mid-to-low frequencies within his voice. This fits the transition into the higher pitched chorus, and having that switch in timbre brings a unique element to the track. Overdubs are extremely important for bringing more body to the vocals, and adding pitch shifting helps bring a unique aesthetic. Having this effect on the chorus helped the transitions to the verses and had a nice change in timbre. This effect has become part of the BROCKHAMPTON sound.

Panning

Another notable aspect of the vocal mix on these albums is the use of panning. This is a mixing tool that is sometimes overlooked but it can improve the overall presence of the vocals. Panning is a tool that can send a signal to any location between left and right speakers. *Sound Bridge Academy* explains, “An audio pan pot can be used in a mix to create the impression that a source is moving from one side of the soundstage to the other.” For example, a vocal track can either be left in the middle of the stereo field or be sent to the left or right speaker. The stereo field is the range between left and right speaker,] and a signal can be placed in any area of this

field. The signal doesn't have to be panned completely left or right but can be slightly adjusted either way if that is the mixing decision. There are many reasons why a mixing engineer would use this tool, and BROCKHAMPTON displays these reason through the *SATURATION* series.

These three albums are praised for the quality the group produced in the short amount of time during which they were created, and the attention to detail within the vocals made a significant impact. Panning is a mixing tool that was used through every album in the series and helped many aspects of the overall mix. The areas where this tool particularly helped the vocal mixes were overdubs and ad libs. BROCKHAMPTON uses overdubs frequently throughout the series. Panning helps improve the mix in each album with songs like “2PAC,” “FIGHT” and “BLEACH.” “2PAC” is a song that features Ameer Van and Kevin Abstract. Van’s voice is the highlight of this track, but panning is implemented to Abstracts vocals. Abstracts on a stereo source, which displays a left and right pan pod for the mix. Abstract has his main vocal panned in the middle of the stereo field, so the left and right pan pod are placed in the center. His overdubs are placed more to the right side of the stereo field. Although there is more signal sent to the right side his vocal are still heard within the left. This is an interesting aesthetic used on the overdubs and bring more body to the right side of the stereo field. The use of panning on his overdubs helped add body to Abstracts main vocal and field in space within the stereo field.

Another song that has a great use of panning is called “BOYS.” This song is verse heavy with a chorus from a pitch shifted Kevin Abstract, but Merlyn is highlighted for his hook. The panning use in this song is interesting because Merlyn’s verse is panned with a delay effect. This is not just a basic delay but a ping pong delay. This is an effect that moves the signal back and forth between the left and right sides of the stereo field (Latham). His hook is a phrase that

repeats over and over, so having this delay creates an interesting aspect of the hook that memorable. Using this delay effect with panning helps improve the hook and was a mixing decision that made Merlyn's vocals stand out.

SATURATION II continues to use panning in songs like “FIGHT” and “QUEER.” “FIGHT” starts off with verses from Van and McLennon, but as the beat intensifies, Abstract’s vocals come in with the hook. Abstract’s vocals start off as two tracks panned slightly left and right, but the left side seems to be increased in volume. When the hook comes around the second time, the vocals are overdubbed adding more layers. The left side is still more prominent but not to a point where the listener cannot hear the right side of the stereo field. This part of the hook also implements more instruments, which fill in the space on the right side of the field. The overdubs help the vocals bring more energy to the hook, while panning helps make room for each element that intensified that section of the song.

Also, panning the vocals usually helps them avoid clashing with elements of the beat, so this is another area where this tool helped the vocal mix. Merlyn was a part of the ad libs during Abstract’s hook and panning was used in the same way as in the hook. Merlyn says “blood sucka” in the background of Abstract's vocals, and he has two tracks of ad libs panned left and right. This continues to help make room for other elements of the beat but also fills in more space behind the hook.

Merlyn stays the focal point in the song “QUEER.” Merlyn has the second verse on this song and sticks to his traditional “shouting” style. His vocals are overdubbed to add more body and make sure his verse is present. These overdubbed vocals are slightly panned left and right; but his ad libs are placed down the middle. The ad libs that are panned in the middle of the

stereo field are barely heard, but they are panned left and right as his verse moves along.

Merlyn's uses a "WOO! WOO!" type of ad lib, which goes back and forth to the left and right side. This adds more energy to his verse and keeps movement all throughout the stereo field.

Merlyn's verse would be stationary if everything was panned up the middle and it would most likely clash with other elements of the song.

SATURATION III keeps to the script with similar strategies used to improve the vocals, and "BLEACH" is a great example of that. Just as on the previous albums, the overdubs used on this song are panned left and right. There seems to be a main vocal that is overdubbed, along with a higher pitched overdub. The higher pitched overdub in the previous songs were used to add body, but this overdub is also used to harmonize the singing of the chorus. Adding the higher voice adds those higher range notes while improving the volume.

Overall these albums have used panning to assist in areas that need more energy and body. These areas happen to be the chorus and hooks. Overdubbing is an arrangement decision that can improve the vocal presence, but utilizing the stereo field is extremely vital in music. BROCKHAMPTON was able to get the best of this tool, and it helped improve the quality of the *SATURATION* series.

Auto-Tune

This effect is used in many modern hip-hop and pop productions. This effect differs from actual pitch correction, but is often thought of the same tool. Pitch correction is meant to adjust certain notes in the artist's voice. Therefore, if an artist wants a certain note sharper or flatter, pitch correction can help. With auto-tune you can select the key you want and the notes that the

artist sings will adjust automatically to fit the nearest note. When the effect adjust to fit the closest note, the voice gives off that “robot” timbre. The importance of they key is significant and the closer you are to the songs key the more precise the auto-tune becomes. Staying in key takes some amount of talent and Ryan Bassil of *NOISY* states, “The tool’s main purpose, after-all, is for pitch-correcting imperfect vocal tracks. But used correctly, there’s nothing wrong with that.” BROCKHAMPTON has mastered the auto-tune effect and have used it effectively through each album.

The group’s most notable songs that incorporate auto-tune are “SWIM,” “GAMBA” and “RENTAL.” “SWIM” is a song that incorporates singing from each member and auto-tune is applied. The start of the song has Joba singing in his falsetto but transitions to Kevin Abstract’s auto-tuned voice. This effect is used on Abstract’s main track that is panned up the middle. As the beat picks up, the main vocal is combined with overdubs. One overdub has a higher pitched vocal from Abstract and is affected with auto-tune. This is panned to the left and brings more of the energy from the vocals that way. The right side of the stereo field has more of the beat’s energy but still has some overdubbed vocals that work together. An extra auto-tuned vocal is overdubbed, and when he says “on you” it is panned to the middle. There is an adlib vocal track that uses this same phrase, but it is panned completely left and right. The effected vocals are now being placed in multiple areas of the stereo field. This is where auto-tune is the most active and this leads to the verse sections. As usual, BROCKHAMPTON does not use as much overdubs during verses as they would in a chorus. Merlyn’s verse has an auto-tune effect to match the style of the song, and it is only on his maintrack. His verses tend to be high energy, but this song switches things up. Merlyn has a softer tone in this song and uses more of his

singing side. Towards the end of his verse there are overdubbed tracks from Van and McLennon. When the overdubs start, Van's lower tone is heard, and McLennon's overdub comes in shortly after. Van's voice sounds natural, which keeps his low frequencies unaffected. His low voice helps bring body to Merlyn's verse. McLennon's overdub is affected with auto-tune, so it works well in harmony with Merlyn's vocals. This also brings more volume to Merlyn's original vocal, and McLennon continues with this effect after Merlyn ends this vocal section.

"GAMBA" is a song that starts off slow with McLennon's affected voice and leads into Abstract's hook. Just as in "SWIM," the beat starts to increase in energy and overdubs are added to Abstract's vocals once this happens. The overdubs are panned to the left and right of the stereo field, and there are two effects added to his voice. Pitch shifting works together with auto-tune and is added to the overdubs as well. The overdubs are panned to the left and right, while the main vocal is down the middle. Abstract's overdubs surround his main vocal and add elements that make the vocals sound more present and full. The auto-tune helps pitch correct his vocals and is not a completely wet mix. Therefore, the auto-tune effect helps his voice but not in a drastic way. The next part of this track continues with the combination of pitch shifting and auto-tune, but Abstract's verse is pitched shifted to a lower octave. This is an untraditional tactic from the group because they usually have the voice pitched high. His verse contains singing, so the auto-tune helps his voice stay on key. Abstract's pitch effect takes a break from the low end and turns back to higher pitched for two lines of his verse. The lower affected voice comes back for the rest of his verse and leads back to the chorus. After the chorus, Bearface has a singing verse but the ad libs are the parts affected by auto-tune. The ad libs themselves help fill in empty

space that his main vocal does not, but the auto-tune adds more harmony to his singing.

BROCKHAMPTON hardly adds auto-tune to ad libs but they enhance Bearface's main vocal.

“RENTAL” is a song from *SATURATION III* that implements auto-tune and has become one of their most popular songs. This song is an attention grabber because it starts off with Kevin Abstract pitch shifted to a lower octave, just like in “GAMBA.” Auto-tune is used moderately in this track, which differs from the two in the previous albums, but this song is chorus and hook heavy. There are only verses from Abstract and McLennon, but this is where auto-tune is used. Abstract has his verse affected with pitch shifting, but there is auto-tune added to help his singing. The first portion of his verse has these effects, but then they are taken off on his second portion. There aren't any overdubs on his verse, and this is the same case with McLennon's verse. The difference is McLennon's verse contains an auto-tune effect without the pitch shift. McLennon rarely has an affected voice throughout the *SATURATION* series, and it seems this effect was added to match the style of song. McLennon also has a singing portion that comes towards the end of his verse and auto-tune helps in this area. All in all, this effect has helped members' vocals and has improved songs that implement this effect. This has been known as BROCKHAMPTON's style since *SATURATION I*, and they have utilized it in a successful way.

Conclusion

BROCKHAMPTON has come a long way from meeting on KanyeToThe and have developed a career that has surpassed many milestones. Most artists take years to release two albums, let alone three, but BROCKHAMPTON has challenged this through the *SATURATION*

trilogy. It is impressive enough that they released three albums in one year, but it is the quality of the mixing that speaks volume. Anyone could release three albums in a year, but not everyone can do this with the high quality of production that they have. As each album was released, the quality of the mix improved. *SATURATION I* was the introduction to the group and had an aggressive tone while still being able to lighten the mood with certain tracks. The next album had similar elements in tone but was really praised for the lyricism throughout. The final album of the trilogy brought every element of BROCKHAMPTON together and was more polished than the previous two. This is a phenomenal way to end a series of albums.

Their albums' success had to do in large part to the quality of the mix and the vocal mix especially. Mixing is an element of music that many listeners tend to overlook, and the vocal mix is an area where a lot of importance lies. Throughout the *SATURATION* albums, the vocals and lyrics have been praised the most. Since there are multiple vocalists and rappers it is important for the mixing engineer to bring out each individual's voice within the mix. The main tools that are used that make the vocal mix the most important aspect of these albums are pitch shifting, panning and auto-tune. Pitch shifting shows up constantly throughout the entire series and has been what BROCKHAMPTON is known for. Their style has shaped around this effect, and its use has helped the vocal mix bring a unique aesthetic through the series. This mixing tactic helps intrigue the listener and brings attention to the vocals. Panning is another effect that impacts the vocal mix and can help the clarity of the vocals. Using the stereo field is vital to a mix and will prevent clashing with other elements like the beat. BROCKHAMPTON uses this tool specifically with overdubs and adlibs, which are placed in certain areas of the stereo field. Auto-tune is another effect that has improved the vocal mix and has helped BROCKHAMPTON

develop their style. This effect appeared in every album and was helpful in correcting pitch with certain members. Overall this group has become successful through the quality of their music in a short period of time. The mix of each album has enhanced the value of each track, and the vocal mix has been most important in doing so. These tools and effects are what impact the vocal mix and are elements that helped each member of the group sound their best. The *SATURATION* series shows great production along with great lyrics, but it is the mix that helps hone in their overall success.

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