

12-2020

Electronic Music Subgenres for Music Providers

Gage Alspach
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all



Part of the [Music Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alspach, Gage, "Electronic Music Subgenres for Music Providers" (2020). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 911.

https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all/911

This Capstone Project (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Capstone Projects and Master's Theses at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Gage X. Alspach

Lanier Sammons

MPA 475

November 2020

Electronic Music Subgenres for Music Providers

Genre labels are tricky. When I uploaded an electronic song of mine called “Ankh” to a music distributor, I was met with several electronic subgenre options. I would consider this song to be trap, however given my options, I labelled it as dubstep first and electronica second. When “Ankh” was released, it was labelled dubstep on [Apple Music](#)¹ but it was labelled dance/electronic at [Napster](#).² Because of these options I was given, I wanted to learn more about the genres that I could pick from in order to more accurately identify my music on these platforms.

Genre organizes the production and consumption of cultural material, including organizational procedures (Lena 3). What this means is if someone likes a song, they can find more songs like it based on its genre. Knowing what music is what kind of genre is important for someone who makes music as well as someone who is trying to promote music. Artists or managers must choose the genre that best fits the song they are trying to upload to stores, even if the genre they would want to use isn't there. This paper will explore this issue for electronic music.

Defining electronic music is a tough thing to do today, because most music involves a combination of electronic components and acoustic elements. Singing, for example, is an

¹ <https://music.apple.com/us/album/ankh-single/1444246051?app=music&ign-mpt=uo%3D4>

² <https://ie.napster.com/artist/gagexa/album/ankh>

acoustic element. Drums that are programmed rather than played and recorded would be an electronic element. Synthetic sounds, provided by synthesizers or effects that affect the sound greatly, are also electronic elements. In the last few years, pop music has become more and more electronic. This makes it difficult to define what songs are electronic songs and which are not as the distinction isn't as clear as it once was.

Researching these genres led me to believe that the system is ineffective as is. Some subgenres work well and define a certain type of music whereas others seem outdated or out of place. This paper is going to go over a few different styles of electronic music as well as identifying what makes each unique. The genres that I will be covering are from Distrokid's upload options. Distrokid is a popular independent distributor that sends music to music stores for artists. There are several other distributors with potentially different options. As a result there aren't all the genres in the world to pick from because some stores only have certain genre tags. Distrokid compiles the genres from the music stores, so the potential genre labels are not selected by Distrokid but rather the stores ("My genre isn't available").

I will be going over 22 genres in this paper. For Distrokid, it's possible to pick two genres; this is likely a backup rather than a secondary description as stores like Apple Music and Google Play that display the genre only display one. This means the first pick is the most important, and the secondary pick is in case the first one doesn't work for a certain store.

Several different elements can be used to define a genre. The tempo (in beats per minute or BPM), the mood evoked, and the types of timbres used are some of the common considerations. There is no single thing that makes a genre. BPM and other factors are not requirements, but just averages. Sometimes songs can be vague in what kind of genre they are

and that is the difficulty in choosing a genre for a song. There's not always a right answer, but there can be a better choice. Multiple genres are tied together as one option occasionally. This is indicated with the use of a /. For example, hip-hop/R&B is one option, not two, in the list offered by Distrokid.

Big Room

Big room is typically around 128 - 130 BPM as identified from the tracks on Beatport's Big Room Top 100 chart.³ There's a distinct bass sound that drops in pitch a bit over the course of it playing. The lead sound is typically something melodic and repetitive. [Animals by Martin Garrix](#)⁴ is an excellent example of big room, and a more recent song, [Colors by KEVU](#)⁵, has a lot of similar qualities. There's the same kind of bass and melodic lead synth. These songs are very similar in style when you compare them side by side and would both easily be considered big room.

This genre is relatively clear cut as to what makes it unique. It has a distinct bass and synth sound as well. It makes sense that this should be on a genre list, as it's still relevant and unique.

Breaks

DJs took drum "breaks" from 70s, 80s, and 90s songs and looped them. These breaks were essentially drum solos. They then sampled some vocals or instrumentation on top of it. The

³ Tempo of an individual track on Beatport's chart can be found by clicking on the name of that track. Tempo ranges were assessed by identifying tempo trends across several tracks present in the chart at the time of writing.

⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuFUtlL8zUAK&ab_channel=Spinnin%27Records

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iVEedCRvYI&ab_channel=RaveCulture

origin and how it's made is what makes this genre. [This example is a mix of more traditional breaks music.](#)⁶ *Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music* provides a thorough description:

There's also breakbeat or breaks, the scene (and main genre of that scene) that specifies in its very name that it does not have a 4-to-the-floor kick. The word "breaks" comes literally from the old drum breaks in 60s and 70s funk, soul, disco and R&B songs in which the music would stop and the drummer would continue unaccompanied for a bar or two, making it perfect for sampling. The earliest breaks were exactly that -- looping drum breaks, coming of age at a time when sampling was king and there was nothing the suits could do about it. (Taylor)

It's not as clear of a genre as it used to be; it was a broader term for electronic songs that looped acoustic drums. Now there's less of a need for that as electronic drum kits can provide rhythmic structure with more room for creativity. Resampling in this manner is no longer as common of a practice, but it still can be practical as a genre label if there are artists that are very familiar with it.

Chill Out

This is less of a genre, more of a mood. In the 80s/90s clubs when people were tired of dancing, constant energy, and noise there was a room for people to "chill out," and they played

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yT36Xz6oUI4&ab_channel=DamnRight

relaxing and calm music (Taylor). [Here's an example of a mix of chill music.](#)⁷ In general this genre has a relatively slow BPM, but no clear standard instrumentation.

Typically, genres like lo-fi hip hop and ambient music are chill out in nature due to their style. There isn't an ambient or lo-fi subgenre option, so those would fit in this category. This genre still is unusual in the list compared to other genres. It is similar to breaks since over time it has lost some of its meaning and clarity. Any music that is "chill" in its intended tone can be interpreted as chill out nowadays.

Electronica / Downtempo

Electronica is another word for electronic music and downtempo is more or less like chill out. Electronica in general is the use of synthesized instruments and/or samples from another work. *Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music* states:

'Electronica' does not exist. Not as a genre or a description. It was coined by the North American music press to refer to the second wave of electronic music's explosion in the late 90s. Nearly every popular act of the period -- Daft Punk, Moby, Fatboy Slim, Prodigy, Chemical Brothers, Basement Jaxx, Tricky -- were marketed as 'electronica' at one time or another, but the person who really popularized it was Madonna and her shallow William Orbit-produced piss-poor attempt at appropriating trance music as something she invented (Ray of Light). But there really isn't any actual thing called Electronica. It's just a corporate buzzword. (Taylor)

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISAz2ONC1rk>

So electronica is a vague term, but it provides a back up if the song doesn't fit well enough into any other genre. At the same time the combination of electronica and downtempo seems problematic. All of these genres are subgenres of electronic music, and electronica is just a word for a broad type of music.

Downtempo is basically the same as chillout. Searching for a 'downtempo mix' in Google yields 7,270,000 results whereas searching for a 'chillout mix' yields 32,600,000. Within Distrokid's labelling system, if a song is considered downtempo, it makes sense to label it as chillout instead. This is due to the electronica tag also being tied to downtempo. If you label it as chillout, it almost means the same thing and then with the second tag the user could specify the genre further, like hip-hop or trance. [Here's the best example mix I could find that uses the description of downtempo.](#)⁸ It is from the same channel that did the chillout mix example and has a similar mood and feel to it.

Drum & Bass

The name of the genre accurately describes the major components of it. It is usually 160 - 180 BPM with a heavy emphasis on drums, mostly kicks, snares and hi hats ("Drum & Bass Beatport Top 100"). Common instrumentation also includes growly bass synths. Its tempo is confusing due to it being very fast, so a DJ might consider a 170 BPM drum and bass song to be 85 BPM in double time. This is due to practicalities of mixing two songs together; it's easier to go from 85 BPM to a 90 BPM rather than 170 - 180. [This is a long drum and bass mix.](#)⁹

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC04qXYhIGU&ab_channel=MusicLab

⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nodB5gqt_mU&ab_channel=MrMoMMusic

The constant fast percussion, hi hats and rhythm immediately identify a track as drum and bass. It places the most emphasis on drums and then on bass. Drum and bass can be considered a form of breaks, as it involves looping a drum sample. It has since evolved to be a more defined genre.

Dubstep

Growling, wet, evolving bass sounds are the core of dubstep. Bass design is key for this genre. The main components are bass synths and drums. Tempos typically fall between 140 - 160 BPM (“Dubstep Beatport Top 100”). While not as important as bass sounds, half-time drums also are common in this genre. Half-time drums means a kick on beat 1 and a snare on beat 3, whereas other genres like house have a kick on every beat and a snare overlapped on beats 2 and 4. There’s usually a call and response structure with one type of rhythm and bass followed by a different rhythm and bass. It sounds very aggressive and loud compared to chill out. [This song has a lot of different examples of sounds commonly used in modern dubstep.](#)¹⁰ There is a lot of energy even if the drums are in half-time because the bass synths have a lot of energy and rhythm. One way to think of it is that dubstep is to electronic music as metal is to rock music. It is worth noting that dubstep has a ton of subgenres, such as riddim, wobblestep, chillstep, and brostep. [This mix also has a variety of different modern dubstep songs.](#)¹¹ This genre is a necessity to have in the electronic music subgenre; it’s extremely relevant and has only gotten more popular since Skrillex’s album *Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites*¹² in 2010.

¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBBKvWPHi8w&ab_channel=Disciple

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQ1txLdu6gg&ab_channel=AlexMTCH

¹² <https://open.spotify.com/album/35tQBmq1RbIVUzAvfsw5uO?si=QxPbzRKxQDa4UdTMgAKm2Q>

Funk / Soul / Disco

Excluding soul, these options are dance R&B songs with a higher tempo and focus on basslines. There is an option outside of the electronic subgenre for R&B/soul in Distrokid's genre labels choices. This implies that the soul option here is for electronic elements in a soul song rather than using more acoustic instruments. [This is a mix of classic funk, soul, and disco.](#)¹³ Funk is more about jazzy R&B with a moving bass line whereas disco is more electronic focused with synthesizers and samples. Disco also focuses more on dancing and a 4/4 beat. A funky bassline is usually the main point of interest here, and the BPM is less relevant or strict. These basslines are typically played using the slap bass technique.

These options stand out compared to the other ones in the electronic subgenre options, as one wouldn't typically label funk and disco as electronic music. It is important to note that the electronic genre will be first read for certain stores, ignoring the funk/soul/disco secondary tag.

Glitch Hop

This genre was incredibly popular around 2014 and has an arcade feel achieved by using various effects. [This song is the epitome of modern glitch hop.](#)¹⁴ Glitch hop consists of bright catchy melodies from a bitcrushed lead synthesizer. The mood is happy, upbeat and energetic. It can also be summarized as modernized 8-bit music. TheFatRat is a great example of a glitch hop artist, though, as described in a [tweet](#)¹⁵ by TheFatRat, he doesn't consider his music to be glitch hop.

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USbPbTtLyTg&ab_channel=SimonMicallef

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8X9_MgEdCg&ab_channel=TheFatRat

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/ThisIsTheFatRat/status/1197181024041603075?s=20>

Glitch hop is a more recent genre than other options, but it's somewhat vague. It's a genre that describes TheFatRat well, however, not many other artists or songs fit within the genre. There's a genre called chiptune which heavily leans into the arcade feel from this genre, however it is not an option on this list.

Hard Dance

This genre refers to music that is at a faster tempo than typical electronic music while maintaining the kick-every-beat pattern that EDM has. The tempo is in the range of 150+ BPM ("Hard Dance / Hardcore Beatport Top 100"). The most unique thing about this genre is the kick every beat; sometimes there also isn't a snare. Having the kick every beat seems normal for electronic music at this point, but when it's 150 + BPM it feels so much faster.

There are a lot of subgenres of hard dance, such as hard house, hard NRG, hard trance, and hardstyle. Hardstyle is the most unique subgenre from this genre and is probably the most popular for today's hard dance subgenres. There's a very tonal kick, and it is incredibly distorted. [Here's a recent mix of hard dance music.](#)¹⁶ There are several songs in this mix that are hardstyle and exemplify the specific style of kick drum. However this mix doesn't sum it up fully, because there are a lot of types of hard dance and not all of them sound great next to each other. Still, having this genre in the list makes sense as it covers all the "Hard" genres.

Hip-Hop / R&B

¹⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJIXh9dj4J0&ab_channel=JR98

This genre likely refers to drums playing over a sample or a looping instrumental part. Tracks matching this label will typically have a slower tempo, around 85-95 BPM (“Using Different Tempos”). Drums are the key thing here: snappy snares and quick punchy kicks with some slightly off-beat hi hats. It feels very human, as if someone was playing this live. There’s usually some sort of looped sample and manipulation of that sample. Using synthesizers and drum samples makes it feel more electronic. [This mix seems to hit the nail on the head for this ambiguous electronic hip-hop/R&B subgenre.](#)¹⁷

Hip-hop is about the drums for the most part, so there are plenty of other options that can be electronic-specific hip-hop/R&B. Trap music has some hip-hop influences and could be considered for this genre. The problem arises when you compare the previous mix to a [trap mix](#).

¹⁸ They aren’t very similar in style but they have similar elements. If you go looking for hip-hop/R&B the label appears to be a little too vague since the results could be something very relaxed or something super aggressive.

For Distrokid there are other options outside of the electronic genre to pick from including R&B/soul or hip-hop/rap, so that would likely mean songs with vocals and lyrics would fall into those rather than into electronic subgenres. This gets confusing as there are several options to say almost the same thing. Replacing this option with trap music might serve Distrokid users better.

House

¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zPVGE9Cwvs&ab_channel=SoulSearchAndDestroy

¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lg3T0rUYmdQ&t=2965s&ab_channel=TrapNation

House is a genre that is the root of many other genres like deep house and progressive house. This is what many would consider to be standard EDM. The tempo range is 120-140 BPM but commonly 128 (“House Beatport Top 100”). Instrumentation is mostly bass synths and drums with a lead synth. The core of house music is having a kick on every beat, snare on beats 2 and 4, and hi hats between the beats. The hi hat or percussion on every offbeat is what makes it classic house music. Experimenting DJs and the anti-disco movement helped create this genre (PQ). [This is a recent house mix](#).¹⁹ There are a lot of subgenres to this genre, so a pure house genre doesn’t exist as it used to. This would be a good genre if a song doesn’t accurately fit into one subgenre of house.

SEO, which stands for Search Engine Optimization, is important for understanding the potential ambiguity of certain genres. If one were to search for a house mix or playlist, deep house, progressive house, and all other house subgenres come up before house by itself. Searching for a “house mix” on Google results in mostly house subgenres. The first house mix is the 17th result in videos rather than higher up. House is not as unique of a name for a genre as dubstep for example. This makes any sort of search for house music to be more difficult. The lack of specificity and uniqueness in name are making this genre more difficult to find. Harder genres to find could eventually fade out, because consumers can’t find them and artists won’t be as motivated to make music that fits within them. Another possibility is that the artists making pure house instead label their music something else, like deep house, which then weakens the genre's uniqueness.

¹⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPwiRPBtEr8&ab_channel=Spinnin%27Records

Deep House

Deep house resembles house but with an emphasis on muted bass and a slightly lower tempo. There is a kick every beat with a snare on beats 2 and 4. It has the same tempo range as house music. The genre can be thought of as a smoother, more relaxed version of house music. [Here's a recent deep house mix.](#)²⁰ This genre isn't as specific as big room, for example. The best way to describe it is chill house music with more emphasis on bass. Synths are not as bright and the higher frequencies are filtered out.

Due to the poor SEO of house music, deep house is the first result when searching for a house mix or playlist. This is good for the popularity of deep house; however, the popularity of a genre can just weaken the meaning of it as the genre label is applied to a wider range of music.

Electro House

This genre is house but with an emphasis on gritty synths and basses. The tempo range is also the same as house music. It's similar in that deep house is house with muted bass sounds while this genre is house with bright bass sounds. [Here's a mix from 2013.](#)²¹ The electro in electro house means more usage of bright bass synthesizers.

There's isn't as much clarity as there used to be in this genre. *Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music* states:

Electrohouse started off, innocuously enough, as a French house subgenre taken up by a second generation of producers who weren't French. In fact, an alarming number of them

²⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnVPm1dGQJc&ab_channel=TSGMusic

²¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THNXJ_ja-Ow&ab_channel=MinistryofSound

were Swedish for some reason, to such an extent that people took to calling the new sound Swedish house. Eric Prydz was the first one and he was quickly followed by Axwell, Steve Angello, and Sebastian Ingrosso. (Taylor)

The main defining characteristic of this genre has to be the saw wave synthesizer for the bass that makes it a thicker sound. Later it includes “scratchy acid, glitch cuts and stutter edits on samples, aggressive in-your-face anthems, and eventually brostep yawns and belches” (Taylor). In other words, it begins to include some dubstep sounds and glitch. This is still relevant to today’s music, even if not as much as it used to be; so, it should still be included.

Progressive House

“Anthemic” is a good word to describe this genre as it means rousing or uplifting. The music features constant build-up effects and down-sweep effects. Percussion drum fills are used to keep interest between the repetitive choruses. It’s similar to house in terms of BPM and rhythm but includes brighter synths and a happy feeling to it. The synths are softer, not as harsh as electro house or as dark of a mood as deep house. There’s a larger dynamic range than most other electronic music, too. In progressive house tracks, the whole song feels like a big build up to the chorus. Even when the chorus is happening, the chorus gets more energetic as it progresses. After the chorus it usually goes quieter and soft, and then builds back up again. Artists like Avicii and Calvin Harris are famous progressive house artists. [Here’s a song by Avicii from 2011 that defines progressive house well for that time.](#)²² Around that time all the

²² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ovdm2yX4MA&ab_channel=AviciiOfficialVEVO

songs were very similar in style, and over time the meaning of progressive house changed, like how dubstep changed from 2012 or so until now. [Here's a more modern mix of progressive house](#).²³

This genre has changed but still is a relevant and useful genre tag. This is different from other genres in the sense that it describes a mood and a style at the same time. Progressive house is uplifting and happy while having a different style than normal house.

Techno

Techno is somewhat similar to house, but it uses a slightly faster tempo and a darker feel. It has a tempo range from around 120 - 125 BPM (“Using Different Tempos”). Techno has a darker, moodier feeling to it. There are a lot of samples such as sirens, vocal shouts, etc. Off-beat percussion dominates the high end of the frequency spectrum. Techno is dark and dystopian sounding. [This is a recent mix of techno](#).²⁴ It has a more sour tone due to the dissonance used when there are melodic parts. In the chorus there’s usually no consistent melody, just a bass synth and some rhythmic drums. Occasionally there is a melodic fill. The real key thing is the use of samples and the dark sounding bass. There is also the unusually high volume of the hi hats and other percussion. Other genres don’t put as much volume in their percussion, but techno is aggressive with it.

Techno is a genre that is unique on this list so it makes sense that it is on here. It is also still relevant today.

²³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwagzOvW-DE&ab_channel=TheGrandSound

²⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gshky0hLNS8&ab_channel=StefanoDjStoneangelsChannelTwo

Tech House

As the name indicates, tech house is a combination of techno and house music. The tempo range is like house music, and it features elements from techno music such as the dark bass and more rhythmic elements. [This is a recent tech house mix.](#)²⁵ Whereas techno is more dissonant, tech house is more consonant. The bass and samples are more in key and less atonal. The tempo sticks to house tempo, and since the kick is every beat and the percussion off beat, it has a similar feel to house. The harshness of the techno percussion is present.

This is a genre that takes parts from two different genres, making it both a subgenre of house and a subgenre of techno. Due to this, a tech house song could be labelled house or techno and not be wrong. If a song was tech house, it would make the most sense to label it as such; tech house isn't as big of a genre as techno or house and there'd be less music to search through. A tech house song will likely get more attention because there are fewer tracks carrying the genre label than a house song that can be lost in the sheer amount of house music.

Minimal / Deep Tech

Deep tech is less defined than minimal tech, so I'll go over minimal techno first. Tech is also short for techno, and the terms are used interchangeably. For the most part, it is the same as techno but with less happening at once. [Here's a good representation of a minimal techno mix.](#)²⁶ This means all the qualities of techno music like the BPM and the dark bass remain present. It's incredibly repetitive and will add very little when it does change. This style of slow song development is great for making very long songs. When a change does come, it's appreciated

²⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mw9yzHEONg4&ab_channel=FrontalRoast

²⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ky1WZVqJUw0&ab_channel=WejustmanRecords

more than other genres. The chorus usually begins with just a bass, kick, and more subtle percussion than techno. Subtlety is a great word to describe this genre as its little details and extra parts add a lot to the song.

Deep tech was a tougher genre to find; when searching the term “deep tech,” a lot of results come up that aren’t related to music. Any mixes with the words deep tech or techno often have house also in the title, making it not a pure deep tech mix. [Here’s an example of one mix I found for deep techno.](#)²⁷ Referring to *Ishkur’s Guide to Electronic Music* once again, he states:

As succinct as I can put it, deeptech is tech house's attempt to sound like deep house but failing miserably. But that's okay -- It is a UK genre and it's a running theme among UK genres to try to emulate non-UK genres, not quite succeeding at it, but still coming up with something interesting nonetheless [*sic*]. (Taylor)

Taylor doesn’t mention any sort of stylistic qualities to deep house and even states that trying to answer what makes deep tech deep tech is “like playing darts with cooked spaghetti.” He does state that it used to be a tech house subgenre for ten years or so before emerging as its own.

Between the two, minimal tech was much easier to find. It describes itself well in its name and is a different enough genre from techno to be considered a separate genre. This is a good inclusion, but it’s tied with deep tech. So, that makes both of them not strong choices.

²⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXUxb-i9eDQ&ab_channel=WejustmanRecords

Hardcore / Hard Techno

This is a confusing pair of genres. The meaning of hardcore in terms of electronic music is another term for hard dance. Even in Beatport, which is a popular music store targeted toward DJs, this genre is represented as another term for hard dance. As for hard techno, this has a clearer definition. It's hard dance but for techno music. This means faster tempos than normal techno ranging from 130 BPM - 150+ BPM. There's a kick every beat and percussion every off beat. The snare still hits on beats 2 and 4. I couldn't find a solid mix for this but [this is the top 100 on Beatport for hard techno](#).²⁸ There's only little snippets of songs available but listening to a few of them really helps to understand the genre better.

Hardcore is not a useful genre tag: it only works to describe other genres and is not a genre in itself. It works as a description for other genres. This is similar to how house has a bad SEO, but the hardcore label is unhelpful in a different sense because it's more widely used for various genres. Hardcore shouldn't be tied to hard techno in the same sense that electronica shouldn't have been tied to downtempo. One genre refers to a wide variety of genres and another is a specific subgenre of its pair. Hard techno is a useful genre tag whereas hardcore is repetitive because hard dance is another option and means the same thing.

Indie Dance / Nu Disco

The more common genre here is nu disco, and indie dance can also be called nu disco. Nu disco means "new disco." It's a term for a revitalization of interest in disco in the 21st century. There are a few differences between disco and nu disco. Nu disco has a more repetitive

²⁸ <https://www.beatport.com/genre/hard-techno/2/top-100>

structure that is eased with the use of filters and other effects to keep it interesting. For the most part they are the same genre but nu disco is slightly modernized. They both have a kick every beat. [Here is a nu disco/funk mix from 2018.](#)²⁹ A lot of nu disco songs are also edits or remasters of classic disco songs. That mix features some of those but in context of the mix they all sound like they're from the same time period.

This is also where the meaning of electronic music comes into question. Disco and nu disco are dance genres that don't necessarily seem like electronic music when compared to some of the other genre options because of their instrumentation. However given the history of disco and how house music originated from disco, it makes sense that nu disco is an option.

Reggae / Dancehall / Dub

Reggae is the core genre of these three. Dancehall and dub are both subgenres of it: "Technically dancehall is a blunt subgenre of reggae. Dancehall and dub are the only reggae genres that can technically be called electronic" (Taylor). This option is likely focused on dancehall and dub more so than reggae. [Rather than finding a mix, here's Beatport's Top 100 songs for reggae/dancehall/dub.](#)³⁰ I don't necessarily like using Beatport as an example because a song could be mislabelled, whereas a DJ is very good at collecting similar songs and putting them in together. However, these three genres are different from each other but still labelled the same in Beatport as it is in Distrokid. It seems like an effective way to listen to several different types of each of these genres when they don't all mean the same thing. Reggae is typically between 80 and 100 BPM. The most unique part of reggae are the staccato chords from a guitar

²⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYq8QKitaaQ&ab_channel=DJSteveAdams

³⁰ <https://www.beatport.com/genre/reggae-dancehall-dub/41/top-100>

or piano on the offbeats. There can also be call and response in the song, but in a more traditional sense than the call and response of dubstep. Bass is emphasized and vocals are typically sung with a Jamaican accent.

These three genres of music are too big for one option. There should be more options and these should be separated. Reggae music isn't necessarily electronic, but it is a common genre to DJ. Beatport also has a genre section that is named the exact same in the same order. Maybe it's still relevant as a combined genre, but it would be better defined if they were separate.

Trance

Trance is an uplifting genre that involves rapid arpeggiations. The tempo is between 125 and 150 BPM with a kick every beat and a hi hat every off beat ("Trance Beatport Top 100"). Rapid arpeggios are a core part of the trance genre. They instill a faster pace without needing a higher BPM. Compared to house, trance has much longer sections and transitions. [Here's a trance mix from 2014.](#)³¹

Since it is still a relevant genre today, trance is a good option. There are different styles of trance nowadays such as progressive, uplifting, and vocal to name a few. It would be nice organizationally to have subgenre labels available for some genres with several subgenres such as house with deep house, progressive house, and so on. That way, as more genres are added, the user should be able to find a specific genre easily.

Psy-Trance

³¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXAbte4QXKs&ab_channel=TheGrandSound

Also called psychedelic trance and goa trance, this genre is fast paced and originated in Goa, India. It's darker than trance and the focus is more on the bass. *Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music* describes this genre well:

Unfortunately the extreme heat would melt vinyl so Goa DJs learned to make pre-mixed cassette and DAT tapes. In effect, it was the Goa DJs who invented trance. But it was a bare-bones type of trance born out of necessity -- stripped down heavily edited EBM [electronic body music, also known as industrial dance music] with acid lines...In terms of commercial/club appeal psy-trance music is the longest with the average track being 10+ minutes (with bridges, and sections, and movements), thus reducing the DJ's role in having to DJ. (Taylor)

This is just a very good explanation of this genre. The history behind it helps explain the long tracks as well as the tools used. [Here's a trippy psy-trance mix from 2014.](#)³² The visuals attached to the mix are a little much and take away from a pure listening experience, but they also add to what psy-trance means. The main difference between psy-trance and trance may be the purpose of the music and the hardware used to make it. This kind of music is mostly played in a festival setting. This genre is less relevant due to the genre being "born out of necessity" from hardware limitations. However, it's still being created and sold so it still is a valid option.

Conclusion

³² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gp51lt9kdA&ab_channel=TobiasBassline

Overall, Distrok'd's genre list is outdated. That doesn't mean some options should be taken out, because someone somewhere is likely still making and selling music that they would place in each of these genres. The genres that are tied together would be better off if they were separate, because those are just different genres. Putting them together lessens the meaning of both of them. It would make sense to keep names together of genres that have more than one name, but that isn't the case for this list.

As time goes on genres develop and change. It becomes more and more difficult to identify what each genre means now compared to what it meant when it first started. New genres are also constantly being developed from existing ones. This means that if every single subgenre of electronic music was included, it would be an overwhelming amount to pick from. And there are potential problems with simply adding new genres to this list. Certain stores don't even use these subgenre tags, so it's wasted on them. Another problem is stores would have to be updating their lists at least annually, which could be a lot of work, and for the company it could spend more money than it could be worth.

Some streaming platforms are using other approaches to genre labeling. Spotify has a service for artists and managers to allow them to submit songs to playlists. When the artist does that they get to choose from a main genre and several subgenres. The choices are much more relevant to today as it seems like there's always a good option. However, this is only relevant when the artists submit music to their playlists, and the listener has no way to find the genre identification after submission. SoundCloud uses a tag system to label music. For the most part it's aesthetic, simply telling the listener that this song is this label. The label itself doesn't have to be a genre however, so there could be issues with that. Clicking on the tag brings up the most

popular music with that tag. It does seem like it could be useful if it was implemented in more ways. Music service providers could let users search by genre, opening up new ways to discover music.

Right now the genre labels available on Distrokid don't really mean much. It labels the music as something that may or may not be a good description of a song. Perhaps if the genre was more accurate, it could be of value. The purpose of genre is to group similar music in a category so consumers can find more music to listen to. Artists and managers know what genre is most applicable to their music. However given the current choices, coming up with a reasonable genre is more difficult than it should be.

Creative Project

I created several songs along with this essay. Those songs can be found here:

<https://gagexa.biglink.to/capstone>

Works Cited

Alex MTCH. "Best Dubstep Mix 2020 [Brutal Dubstep Drops]." *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQ1txLdu6qg&ab_channel=AlexMTCH.

Avicii. "Levels." *YouTube*, 2011,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ovdm2yX4MA&ab_channel=AviciiOfficialVEVO.

"Big Room Top 100 Tracks." *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/big-room/79/top-100>.

Damn Right. "Breaks Mix - Classic Nu Skool Breaks Vinyl." *YouTube*, 2014,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yT36Xz6oUI4&ab_channel=DamnRight.

Disciple. "We Don't Play." *YouTube*, 2019,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBBKvWPHi8w&ab_channel=Disciple.

"My genre isn't available on the upload form. Can you add it?" (n.d.). Retrieved October 28, 2020, from

<https://distrokid.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360021512113-My-genre-isn-t-available-on-the-upload-form-Can-you-add-it->.

DJ Steve Adams. "Nu Disco Funk Mix Jan 2018." *YouTube*, 2018,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYq8QKitaaQ&ab_channel=DJSteveAdams.

"Drum & Bass Top 100 Tracks." *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/drum-and-bass/1/top-100>.

“Dubstep Top 100 Tracks.” *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/dubstep/18/top-100>.

Frontal Roast. “🌀 Tech House | FISHER Style | March 2020 🌀.” *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mw9yzHEONg4&ab_channel=FrontalRoast.

“Hard Dance Top 100 Tracks.” *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/hard-dance-hardcore/8/top-100>.

“Hard Techno Top 100 Tracks.” *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/hard-techno/2/top-100>.

“House Top 100 Tracks.” *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/house/5/top-100>.

JR98. “Hard Dance & Hardcore Mix 2020.” *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJIXh9dj4J0&ab_channel=JR98.

KEVU. “Colors.” *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iVEedCRvYI&ab_channel=RaveCulture.

Lena, Jennifer C., and Richard A. Peterson. “Classification as Culture: Types and Trajectories of Music Genres.” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 73, no. 5, 2008, pp. 697–718., doi:10.1177/000312240807300501.

Martin Garrix. “Animals (Original Mix).” *YouTube*, 2013,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuFUtL8zUAK&ab_channel=Spinnin%27Records.

Ministry of Sound. “Electro House Mix.” *YouTube*, 2013,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THNXJ_ja-Ow&ab_channel=MinistryofSound.

MrMoMMusic. “Best Drum & Bass Mix 2019 (Melodic/Uplifting/Liquid).” *YouTube*, 2019,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nodB5gqt_mU&ab_channel=MrMoMMusic.

Music Lab. “Chillout Music — Late Night Work — Chill Mix.” *YouTube*, 2019,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISAz2ONC1rk&ab_channel=MusicLab.

Music Lab. “Downtempo Music — Chill Mix for Studying and Working.” *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC04qXYhIGU&ab_channel=MusicLab.

PQ, Rory. “The History of House Music and Its Cultural Influence: Icon Collective.” *Icon*

Collective, 1 Nov. 2019, <https://www.iconcollective.edu/the-history-of-house-music/>.

“Reggae / Dancehall / Dub Top 100 Tracks.” *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/reggae-dancehall-dub/41/top-100>.

Simon Micallef. “Ol'Skool Classics Vol 1 DJ Suss 2.” *YouTube*, 2018,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USbPbTtLyTg&ab_channel=SimonMicallef.

Skrillex. *Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites EP*, Big Beat Records, 2010. *Spotify*,

[https://open.spotify.com/album/35tQBmq1RblVUzAvfsw5uO?si=QxPbzRKxQDa4UdT
MgAKm2Q](https://open.spotify.com/album/35tQBmq1RblVUzAvfsw5uO?si=QxPbzRKxQDa4UdT
MgAKm2Q).

SoulSearchAndDestroy. “Sunset Park (Hip Hop - Chill - Electronic Mix)”. *YouTube*, 2017,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zPVGE9Cwvs&ab_channel=SoulSearchAndDestroy.

Spinnin' Records. "Spinnin' Records - Best of 2019 House Mix." *YouTube*, 2019,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPwiRPBtEr8&ab_channel=Spinnin%27Records.

Stefano Dj Stoneangels Channel Two. "TECHNO 2020 CLUB MIX VOLUME 1 #techno

#playlist #djstoneangels #clubmusic." *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gshky0hLNS8&ab_channel=StefanoDjStoneangelsChannelTwo.

Taylor, K. J. *Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music*. <https://music.ishkur.com>. Accessed 28 October 2020.

TheFatRat (ThisIsTheFatRat). "People often refer to TheFatRats music as Glitch Hop. That's not precise. Sure, some of his songs run at around 105 BPM with shuffled rhythm. But as the name suggests, an essential element of Glitch Hop are sounds that glitch into each other which is not the case in his tracks..." 20 November 2019, 7:52 AM. Tweet.

TheFatRat. "Unity." *YouTube*, 2014,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8X9_MgEdCg&ab_channel=TheFatRat.

The Grand Sound. "🎵 Best Progressive House Mix 2020 Vol. #1 🎵." *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwagzOvW-DE&ab_channel=TheGrandSound.

The Grand Sound. "🎵 Best Uplifting Trance Mix - All Time Favourites #1 🎵." *YouTube*, 2014,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXAhte4QXKs&ab_channel=TheGrandSound.

The Winstons. "Amen, Brother." *YouTube*, 2009,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxZuq57_bYM&feature=youtu.be&t=86&ab_channel=UpliftingWaves.

Tobias Bassline. “Supernova [Progressive Psytrance Mix 2014].” *YouTube*, 2014,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gp51lt9kdA&ab_channel=TobiasBassline.

“Trance Top 100 Tracks.” *Beatport*, 28 October 2020,

<https://www.beatport.com/genre/trance/7/top-100>.

Trap Nation. “Trap Nation: Quarantine Mix 2020.” *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lg3T0rUYmdQ&t=2965s&ab_channel=TrapNation.

TSG Music. “Deep House Mix 2020 Vol.1 | Mixed By TSG.” *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnVPm1dGQJc&ab_channel=TSGMusic.

“Using Different Tempos To Make Beats For Different Genres.” *iZotope*, 13 Nov. 2020,

www.izotope.com/en/learn/using-different-tempos-to-make-beats-for-different-genres.html.

Wejustman Records. “Deep Techno Mix - May 2020 (Wejustman Records).” *YouTube*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXUxb-i9eDQ&ab_channel=WejustmanRecords.

Wejustman Records. “Minimal Techno Mix - April 2019 (Wejustman Records).” *YouTube*,
2019,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ky1WZVqJUw0&ab_channel=WejustmanRecords.