Music: Mainstream vs. Non-mainstream

篇名：
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作者：
陳依鈞。士林高商。三年六班
周映竹。士林高商。三年六班

指導老師：
張玉英
I. Introduction

Have you ever listened to music? The answer must be “yes” more than “no.” Then again, have you ever heard of mainstream and non-mainstream music? The answer probably is “yes.” However, people may stammer when they are asked what mainstream and non-mainstream music is.

What is mainstream and non-mainstream music exactly? According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, “mainstream” is the common current of thought of the majority. In other words, mainstream music is a common music, highly appealing for the majority of people. It prevails in the crowd and lives up in the music market. Because its music style fits the market trend, it consequently leads listeners, audience to buy the albums and watch the concerts. By contrast, non-mainstream music, also called underground music, is the music that cannot be easily accepted and recognized. It is reported such music will NEVER reach the radio and even their CDs are seldom released and sold.

What is the difference between these two music types? Who decides music to be mainstream or non-mainstream, people, record stores or music producers or companies? In what situation does non-mainstream music become mainstream music?

Doing the project paper, we first studied relevant information from books, theses, magazines, newspapers and the Internet. Then, we did a questionnaire survey. Our purpose is to solve the questions mentioned above. In addition, through our paper, we hope the crowd neither limits their interest in music, nor has a bias against non-mainstream music.

II. Thesis

A. Mainstream Music vs. Non-mainstream Music

What is mainstream music? This is a common question in the music market but no one could truly define it. Nevertheless, most people agree that mainstream music is popular music, hip-hop music, and rap music, and the like that we usually listen to any time and anywhere. Mainstream music fits the current trend, the public, and music markets. Most people can accept it easily. In other words, mainstream music is the music that most of the crowd likes. Trickyly, if the crowd likes the superstar or the idol, then what he or she sings is also considered mainstream music. It sounds that the idol’s image and popularity decides whether the music is mainstream or
non-mainstream. In a sense, music producers or musicians do their music not from their life attitude or beliefs, but from their interest in earning a lot of money. Simon Frith said, “Pop music as we know it now has been shaped by the problems of making music a commodity and the challenges of adapting money-making practices.” As a result, instead of inspiration in music, mainstream music must have little to no depth in culture and thoughtfulness.

Non-mainstream music, on the other hand, is not that popular and accepted by the crowd. However, it can be named offbeat music or independent music because it usually occurs when non-mainstream music enthusiasts think mainstream music does not express their concept for music. These music enthusiasts do not follow the crowd’s favor; instead, they break through the restriction. All non-mainstream music’s singers express culture and thoughts by music that only belongs to them. They fully show self-confidence and creativity in music. They don’t rely on abundant founds, good commercial transformation, and even a large number of advertisement fees. Non-mainstream music singers have many experiences that mainstream music singers don’t, so they can walk out in a different way and create different styles and formations. However, their insistence and dream also bring them greatest stress. K. T. Logan, an editor of the Internet, indicates that young up and coming musicians and artists are often overlooked, so it is hardly to receive any spotlight or admiration. Indeed, unlike mainstream music, non-mainstream music doesn’t attract people to buy the albums and watch the shows. Holding a large-sized concert for non-mainstream music singers is a big challenge.

B. Music Producers and Record Companies

The way of doing music should critically influence people’s favor of music. Ironically, influenced by the money pressure, music producers or musicians almost give up their gift and mission and turn to the taste accepted by most people or create what commercials love. It seems become the truth in their mind: once people pay for it, it is mainstream music. In other words, they are merely interested in what the phonograph record sales volume is. Shu-Ming Ye, at Fu Jen Catholic University, mentions that pop music is usually decided by “business planning” and “propaganda cost.” For example, when the transnational group enters and is stationed in Taiwan music industry, commercials or music companies surely invest a great propaganda budget in it, ignoring music industry culture and musicians’ thoughts. As a result, ignoring the quality of music, music producers spend much more budgets on phonograph record and packing. What they care is they want attract much more consumers to pay
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attention to their new albums and make money.

Record companies have a big influence on music as well. However, they have been paying scant attention to non-mainstream music. In order to make more money, record companies would rather spend more funds on the mainstream music than on the non-mainstream music. Thus, record companies will issue more advertising to promote mainstream music. That is why people are immersed in mainstream from television, radio, official website, advertisement, etc. Having more funds, record company do more advertisements to announce their artists’ new albums, hold new tour concerts, take more music videos and refine their artists to become superstars.

Mainstream music taste is easy to be replaced although music producers and record companies spend efforts on it. So do mainstream music singers. Xin-Zhen Cai, the music enthusiast, points out that there have not been many the true long-time singers in the mainstream musical world in Taiwan. Once the record companies see the sales volume drops, they will look for another taste or another new singer immediately. The conclusion is the unprofessional conducts of the professional. However, music should have great power of expression of an artist’s mind. Commercials and record companies should not transmit their ideas and their so-called mainstream music to listeners and consumers.

C. Current Examples

Mainstream music idols and singers usually have much money to rent big locations or stadium that can accommodate more audience to join their concerts. And they have enough money to decorate concert events, to rent good media, and to rent gorgeous clothes. In fact, most of the audience buys a ticket to watch concert just for watching their idols and some are attracted to the fancy or decorated stage. How about the music? It becomes a trivial thing. No one pays attention to it.

Take Jay Chou as an example. Jay Chou, the most famous singer in Taiwan, took a concert at Chendgu sport center on November 7th last year. According to the newspapers, the performance location has a 100-meter giant stage. The stage modeling was just like the huge distortion Jin'gang, where audience could see the giant deep-space rocket. Surrounding the stage was the smoke and fire demolition, special effects, special stage prop, and so on. The scene was designed as the outer space and a marvelous fairyland. The sound equipment loaded in 80 containers cost more than millions of NT dollars. Moreover, the US dancers and the orchestra were
also involved in the performance. Several million Yuan quartz pianos, personally played by the Zhou, were shipped to the concert.

In comparison, non-mainstream music singers barely have big events or hold concerts full of excellent media equipment, a huge stage, brilliant decoration, and gorgeous clothes. Because of no money, non-mainstream music singers or musicians can’t attract the mass media and even a lot of audience to buy concert tickets. Even so, they still rush out for a piece of day! For example, non-mainstream music’s singers will perform at some famous live house and pubs such as The Wall, Witchhouse. Or every summer they can perform during the Ocean Festivals in Kenting and Kungliao that does not cost them or the sponsor much money. Although they do not many budgets, Jian Hui, Zhu points out that they are standard music players. Zhu even emphasizes that they all have the ability to have live show. They have full of life-force and tension that mainstream music singers a not. In fact, the large-scale music ceremony of non-mainstream music still attracts ten thousand people although the music or the singers are less attracted to music companies or record stores.

D. Survey and the Results

A survey questionnaire was conducted in our project. The sample students were composed of fifty teenagers that are about sixteen to eighteen years old. The content of the questionnaire included three parts, six questions. The first part was whether people have ever listened to mainstream music and non-mainstream music. The second was about how people defined mainstream music and non-mainstream. The last part was what reasons attracted them to listen to mainstream music or non-mainstream music.

From the result of the questionnaire, we discovered that all of the students had experience to listen to mainstream music, but only 44% of them had experience to listen to nonmainstream music. All of the students preferred to listen to mainstream music although they said they liked non-mainstream music little by little. In addition, we found that most of students defined mainstream by the criteria of fitting trend, easy to sing, the influence of ads, etc. (see Figure 1). Among the elements, music that is easy to be sing was viewed as the most important definition of “mainstream” (38%). However, unacceptable, unfashionable, unfussy were the adjectives that these students considered non-mainstream music. Shown in Figure 2, many students (31%) thought non-mainstream music always did whatever they liked; many students (36%) believed that it was difficult to accept such kind of music.
Furthermore, when the students were asked why they were attracted to mainstream music, the first three reasons were “it was easy to sing (42%),” “they liked the singers (35%),” and “it was fashionable (18%)” (see Figure 3). Echoing to the discussion in the section of Music Producers and Record Companies, easiness, fashion, and even singers were intertwined with mainstream music. At this moment, we believed Wassily Kandinsky might feel hurt because he mentioned, “Music has been for some centuries the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena but rather to the expression of the artist’s soul.”
On the other hand, Figure 3 showed the reasons why the students were attracted to non-mainstream music. The major reasons they liked were its meaning (24%), creative features (30%), and uniqueness (24%). Yet, 36% of the students said they disliked non-mainstream music. In other words, they admired the music itself, nothing to do with the singers, fashion, and popularity.
Ⅲ. Conclusion

After we finish the project, as we expected, mainstream music is still popular in music markets for two major reasons. Firstly, there are abundant advertisements, promotion of tour concerts, and a lot of profitable albums. Secondly, mainstream music is always connected to popular singers, so there are a lot of fans to support it.

In terms of non-mainstream music, we realize it more. Through music, non-mainstream music singers want to express their thinking and attitude to life or to social events and phenomena. Thus, their music could be a piece of news or a pedestrian in the city. For example, Jian Hui, Zhu points out, “What non-mainstream music producers do is to promote a kind of concept, idea, not to please the crowd”.

After non-mainstream music singers release new albums, they often stop to make music. That’s because non-mainstream music singers need to relax themselves and experience and enjoy wonderful life more. Non-mainstream music singers don’t make music frenziedly because they emphasize originality. They hope their listeners can get life power form their music. In fact, this viewpoint is the same as that how people like their music.

As the saying goes, “Behind every successful man, there is a woman.” Likewise, behind all mainstream music, there are abundant founds and famous record companies. On the contrary, there is not any of it behind non-mainstream music. Although non-mainstream music record companies do not have enough money to spend on advertisements or on other accessories such as clothes, they give singers or music producers much freedom. They do not interfere with singers and music producers who have their own concepts and ideas about music. That is why non-mainstream music has various music styles. That is why non-mainstream music singers can make different music to move us.

In fact, both kinds of music are worth admiring. The governments hold many concerts at the beach and invite both mainstream music and non-mainstream music singers to perform in different nights. We are glad that non-mainstream music begins to be noticed and there are more and more people going to live house or the beach concerts to listen to non-mainstream music and support non-mainstream music singers. After all, no matter whether it is mainstream music or non-mainstream music, there are full of people every night. Therefore, we would like to call on the belief: both kinds of music have actually significance to Taiwan’s phonograph record industry.
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IV. References


