



**SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP –**

**ELECTRONIC POP CULTURE**

Potentials of electronic music  
for popular music

Priska Reinhard

## **Executive Master in Arts Administration UZH**

Faculty of philosophy and Faculty of Business Administration of the University of Zurich in cooperation with Institute of Musicology of the University of Zurich, Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen

Priska Reinhard

[priska@priskar.ch](mailto:priska@priskar.ch)

+41 (0)79 454 22 50

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## ABSTRACT

Influenced by an economic boom and new media like television and CDs, different youth- and subcultures of the 1970s and '80s led to the emergence of various social and political movements which, in turn, had an impact on popular music. The politically and socially critical punk and later new wave music appeared on the scene. The blending of gay culture with the different club scenes in Europa and the USA, as well as new music-production facilities, resulted in new genres such as disco and synth- and electro-pop. Synth- and electro-pop were easy to dance to and intended for home listening. They marked the beginning of electronic dance music (EDM) as it is known today. Especially the evolution of the digital synthesiser and electronic production facilities lent this type of music its unique characteristics. As punk had done, synth- and electro-pop continued to use music as a means of social protest, however, in a more subtle, ironic and cooler way. The staging of anti-idols facilitated the discourse on current topics.

Women also utilised synth- and electro-pop to address their issues. As a result, a remarkable number of successful female artists have dedicated themselves to these genres or incorporate synth- and electro-pop characteristics into their musical compositions. In addition, with the emergence of synth- and electro-pop, which also have

their origins in the gay-club and black scenes, many gay musicians started to compose synth- and electro-pop. Both women and gay men saw these genres as a means to erotically, provocatively and in different disguises question social standards and stereotypes.

Since the 2000s, a new generation of artists has been using synth- and electro-pop in their music production – that decade even saw new genres emerging from synth- and electro-pop. Seasoned artists are still in demand and many who used to produce purely electronic music now use synth- and electro-pop in order to mix pure EDM with pop music.

To this day, not only the ability to change and adapt, but also the subliminal and humorous provocation regarding current events are an integral part of synth- and electro-pop. It is, so to speak, a musical and sociocultural revival of the 1980s.



In the following chapter, the research question regarding electronic pop culture, synth- and electro-pop and electronic music will be presented. In addition, the methodology employed to clarify the question will be introduced. Furthermore, an insight will be given into the emergence of electronic music within a historical and technological context, before defining the terms *synth-pop* and *electro-pop* and differentiating them from other musical genres. The terms *synth-pop*, *electro-pop* and *electronic music* are then juxtaposed and their respective characteristics explained. The chapter closes with a conclusion and an outlook.

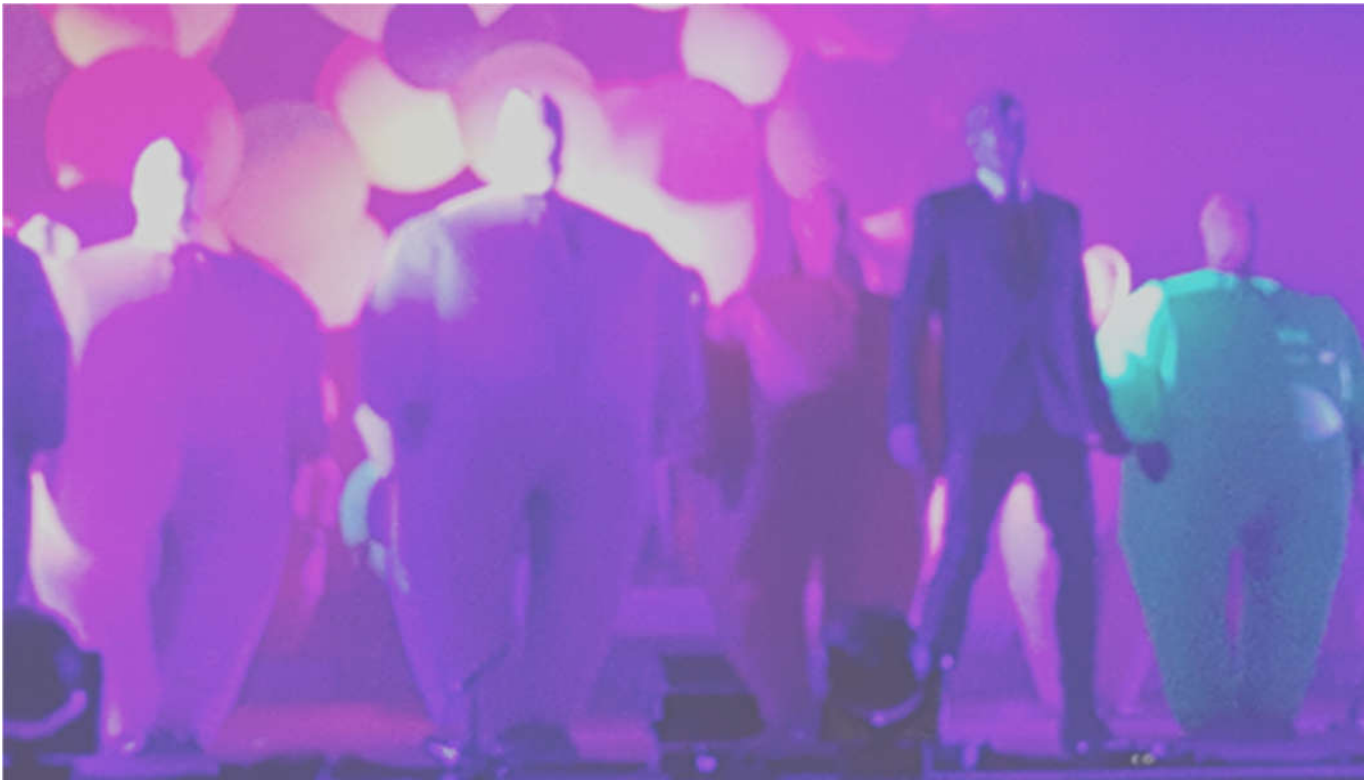


FIGURE 1-2: SYNTH-POP CONCERT PET SHOP BOYS 2016, ROYAL OPERA HOUSE IN LONDON, OWN PHOTO

## 1.1. RESEARCH QUESTION SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP – ELECTRONIC POP CULTURE

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### **Research question**

Potentials of electronic music for popular music:

Which strong and weak points of the synth- and electro-pop of the 1980s can be identified as a basis for the future potential of today's electronic music?

In the present thesis, the question shall be clarified on the basis of critical success factors from the fields of entertainment, so-

The abovementioned goal shall be achieved by applying the following methodology:

- Provide a historical context for electronic music
- Clarify the musical genres of popular music from the 1970s to the 2000s
- Define and differentiate the terms *electronic music*, *synth-pop*, *electro-pop* etc.
- Define the hypotheses for the analysis based on the success factors of the 1980s and 2010s
- Determine the critical success factors of electronic music and the genres synth- and electro-pop
- Assess and compare the critical success factors and instruments, including strong and weak points
- Compile and define the synthesis and the implications of the possible potentials for electronic music
- Draw a conclusion and give a closing statement

cio-culture and economy. The aim is to determine how the genres synth- and electro-pop, as well as electronic music in the wider sense, prevailed in the music market and with listeners, and which factors contributed to its continued growth. Furthermore, the thesis examines what the current and future potentials are and how they can be defined.

Firstly, the research question focuses on 1980s synth- and electro-pop and electronic music and compares them to the years 2010 to 2015.

## 1.2. TOPICS, TERMS AND DIFFERENTIATIONS

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In order to comprehend the goings-on around electronic music, an introduction into its history and development is necessary. In addition to musical history, the emergence of the genres taking centre stage here – electronic music in general and synth- and electro-pop in particular – will be explained.

### 1.2.1. The emergence of electronic music

In the years following World War II scientists, technicians and avant-garde composers worked together on new sound-production facilities. Technologies developed during the war encouraged the post-war generation to explore new avenues. During that time tensions in the music world often involved rivalries between artists of the French *Musique Concrète*<sup>1</sup> and the German *Elektronische Musik*<sup>2</sup>, which reflected the experiences made during the years of war. This period of relative peace in a post-colonial world order with fundamental social changes and an economic boom had a lasting impact on the 1950s and influenced musical and technological advances alike (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 5, 50; Schenk, 2014, S. 24-33; Manning, 2013, S. 19f, 39-41).

*“Electronic music has been around since 1953.”* (Karlheinz Stockhausen, 1958; quoted from Die Reihe, 1959, S. 50ff)

The electronic music of the 20th century was based on the popular twelve-tone technique and expanded by means of a technical-mathematical understanding. The first studios equipped to produce electronic music were established in Europe, Japan and the USA, although not, for the time being, in Switzerland. Switzerland followed in 1954 with a future-oriented research project in the acoustic-electronic field with an experimental studio in Ticino led by *Hermann C.J. Scherchen* (German composer and conductor). However, electronic music would not have its breakthrough in Switzerland for a long time. In fact, *Scherchen’s* legacy was barely spoken of, his studio in Ticino becoming all but forgotten.

Most electronic music studios like *Scherchen’s* had in common the practice of using instruments and equipment in an unusual way to create the respective sounds. In order to do so, they used sound alienation, electronically produced sounds or noises from nature and technology that

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<sup>1</sup> *Musique Concrète*: Performed derived from records/material from nature, sound, music and language.

<sup>2</sup> *Elektronische Musik* (here: loose definition): Produced and played by electronic means.

were processed and reproduced. Sounds were cut on tape, others were combined, recorded at varying tempi or played in reverse, all of which influenced pitch and key. Some of the sounds produced back then already resembled today's scratching technique as cassette tapes, for instance, were pulled manually through the cartridges. Echoes, delays and loops were produced by having the different tape heads read the sound material multiple times. Reverb was created by playing and re-recording the same sounds with microphones or by using reverb plates and springs as well as large rooms like concert

halls and churches. Oscillators were invented to change the wave patterns of sounds and noise generators were developed to generate acoustic volume and range. By mixing multiple sound sources, complex soundscapes were created. Filters were invented and constantly refined – they are typical and highly important for electronic music. With the help of filters sound alteration was facilitated to emphasise, mute, rhythm or also characterise music. (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 51, 56-58; Spoerri (HG.), 2010, S. 31-33, 49)

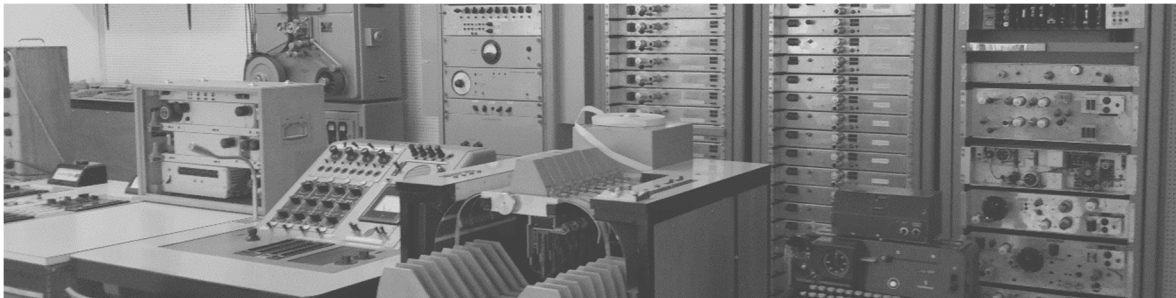


FIGURE 1-3: SIEMENSSTUDIO, OWN PHOTO FROM DEUTSCHES MUSEUM IN MUNICH

A famous sound studio in the early days of electronic music was the *Siemensstudio*, established in Munich in 1956. It promoted the advancement of electronic music in collaboration with composers such as *Carl Orff* and *Pierre Boulez*, whose novel approaches and techniques, in turn, had an effect on electronic music (cf. Schenk, 2014, S. 39-60).

Other famous studios for experimental and electronic music in the '50s to early '70s include the LEMS<sup>3</sup> in Rome, the STEM<sup>4</sup> in Utrecht, the IPEM<sup>5</sup> in Gent, the CPEMC<sup>6</sup> in New York and the SEPR<sup>7</sup> in Warsaw. In 1959 the radio studio in Geneva opened a small electronic studio for employees as well as the occasional external artist, while

<sup>3</sup> LEMS: Laboratorio Elettronico per la Musica Sperimentale (1967), Rome

<sup>4</sup> STEM: Instituut voor Sonologie Studio for Electronic Music, Utrecht

<sup>5</sup> IPEM: Instituut voor Psycho Acoustica en Elektronische Muziek, Gent

<sup>6</sup> CPEMC: Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, New York

<sup>7</sup> SEPR: Studio eksperymentalne, Polskie Radio, Warsaw

Gravesano in Ticino was home to the previously mentioned audio-acoustic experimental studio run by *Scherchen*.

In the mid-1970s the first independent label (short: indie label or indie) specifically for electronic music was founded and promoted with its own styles and production facilities. At the time, the recordings consisted of mixed live and studio recordings (cf. Spoerri (HG.), 2010, S. 45-48, 51-54; Wikipedia, 2016c).



FIGURE 1-4: INDUSTRIAL RECORDS, SOURCE INDUSTRIAL-RECORDS.COM

### **Dissemination in the 1950s**

Even early on, electronic music was already part of communications and cultural programmes. Thus, in 1952 a holiday course for contemporary music in Darmstadt offered an introduction into the German variation *Elektronische Musik* and the French *Musique Concrète*. The following year, the Donaueschinger Musiktage hosted a performance of the feature-length audio-acoustic, electronic production *Orphée 53* with *Pierre Schaeffer* and *Pierre*

*Henry* from Paris – a theatrical work consisting of played back tape recordings accompanied by spoken and sung vocals as well as cembalo and violin. The production ended in a completely blacked out room with the electro-acoustic piece *Voile d'Orphée*. It was followed by a lively discussion between supporters and opponents of this type of music (cf. Spoerri (HG.), 2010, S. 34). In 1958 the BBC initiated a radio-phonetic project which focused on supporting the development of music and sound effects, thus promoting the dissemination of electronic soundtracks via the radio (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 51).

In the early 1950s Swiss daily newspapers first began publishing articles on talks and music festivals that introduced the equipment and the synthetic language of electronic music. As early as 1950 *Radio Genf* broadcast an interview with French composer Pierre Schaeffer on electronic music. The radio studios in Zurich and Basel followed suit with a number of pioneering events for electronic music, explaining, for instance, the first attempts at producing music on a computer.



FIGURE 1-5: PIERRE SCHAEFFER AND PIERRE HENRY 1953, SOURCE YOUTUBE, ORPHÉE 53

Several events, such as the three-day event for *Elektronische Musik* and *Musique Concrète* in Basel in 1955 or the 31<sup>st</sup> world music festival of the ISCM<sup>8</sup> in Zurich in 1957, represent further important landmarks for promoting and popularising electronic music. Since the start of the 1950s the dissemination of electronic music has been aided considerably by radio and music broadcasts.

Such, at times also international, events and press coverage led to reactions from music critics, who depicted *Elektronische Musik* and *Musique Concrète* as a dehumanised art form, as musical Dadaism or as surrealist and utopic audio plays without any real value. Similarly, at a talk in New York the representatives of electronic music were described as being a threat to other musicians, seeing as their new style of music might take the bread out of many “traditional” musicians’ mouths (cf. Spoerri (HG.), 2010, S. 34-38, 42-44).

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<sup>8</sup> ISCM: International Society for Contemporary Music, Zurich

### 1.2.2. The development of synthesiser music

Synthesiser laid the foundations for electronic music. While sounds and recording material can also be produced with other instruments, synthesiser is arguably the key instrument in electronic music.

#### **Synthesisers of the 1950s, '60s and '70s**

The search for recordable devices began as early as the 1950s. However, only the technological advances of the '60s allowed for such equipment to be constructed from the various elements needed for the production and manipulation of sounds. Thus, in 1966 the analogue Moog synthesiser (developed by *Robert Arthur Moog*) was built. The individual modules were as yet connected by cables and the instrument took up considerable space. Consequently, it did not take long for smaller synthesisers to be built to enable the fast creation of sound combinations on stage. In the early '70s synthesisers were already being widely used in pop music, which led to the foundation of a number of companies that began mass-producing synthesisers. In addition to their being used in music, in the '70s electronic sounds became ever more popular and commonplace in broadcast media, for instance in the 1977 film *Star Wars* (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 66f; Spoerri (HG.), 2010, S. 101).

#### **Synthesisers of the 1980s**

The early '80s marked the birth of digital synthesisers (e.g. the Yamaha DX7 1983). While they were still quite expensive, they

would nevertheless revolutionise the music world.

These new synthesisers were easy to operate and available to everyone. Subsequently, the composing of music on the computer allowed for songs such as *Thriller* (Jackson, 1982), *Purple Rain* (Prince, 1984) or the rock song *Jump* (Van Halen, 1984) to come out on top in the music industry (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 94).

One of the probably most famous synthesiser artists is *Jean Michel Jarre*, who has been working with synthesisers since the 1970s and virtually pioneered melodious synthesiser music (cf. Horst, 2011, S. 41). Swiss artist *Bruno Spoerri* also needs to be mentioned for his fundamental work in electronic music – he has been composing synthesiser and experimental electronic music combined with jazz since the 1950s (cf. Spoerri (HG.), 2010, S. 377).



FIGURE 1-6: MOOG SYNTHESISER, 1966, ADAPTED FROM MOOGMUSIC.COM

### 1.2.3. The development of synth- and electro-pop

Ever since the 1960s the influence of the popular music scene on the visual arts has been undisputed, continuously leading to new synergies. As a Western artistic concept, over the years electronic music became globally widespread. Through electronic music the protest culture of the '70s and '80s evolved into a club culture that represented a performative, collective and artistic synthesis – ephemeral, vibrant, in the here and now (cf. Poetter, 2009, S. 193, 198f).

Electronic music is mainly defined by being generated electronically. However, the use of electronic instruments such as electric guitar or organ does not necessarily create music that must be classified as electronic music. Equipment like synthesiser, on the other hand, generally demands that the music it creates be categorised into the genres of electronic music.

Synth- and electro-pop were based in the new wave movement known as 'Neue Deutsch Welle', which emerged in the second half of the 1970s. New wave, in turn, originated in an initially purely punk movement and, in the early '80s, began evolving into other genres, some of which are still popular to this day.

#### ***Focus on synth- and electro-pop, as well as electronic music in general***

Punk formed the basis not only for genres such as synth- and electro-pop, but also for less electronically specific styles like new wave. Over the years the "wave" abated and the defining genre new wave, including the very famous band *Duran Duran*, slowly faded into obscurity. Synth- and electro-pop prevailed, however, becoming ever more popular (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 90-94).

During the time that saw the emergence of synth-pop, many other genres also developed in Western popular music. Thus, in the early 1970s, disco and the localised Bronx hip hop appeared on the scene. Both styles had an impact on subsequent genres right up to techno.

Synth-pop developed from earlier popular music styles like new wave and punk in the 1970s. In turn, from synth-pop arose a variety of genres such as electro-pop, dance-pop, Italo disco, hi-NRG<sup>9</sup> and many other dance music styles.

**Important genres of electronic music and their times of emergence**

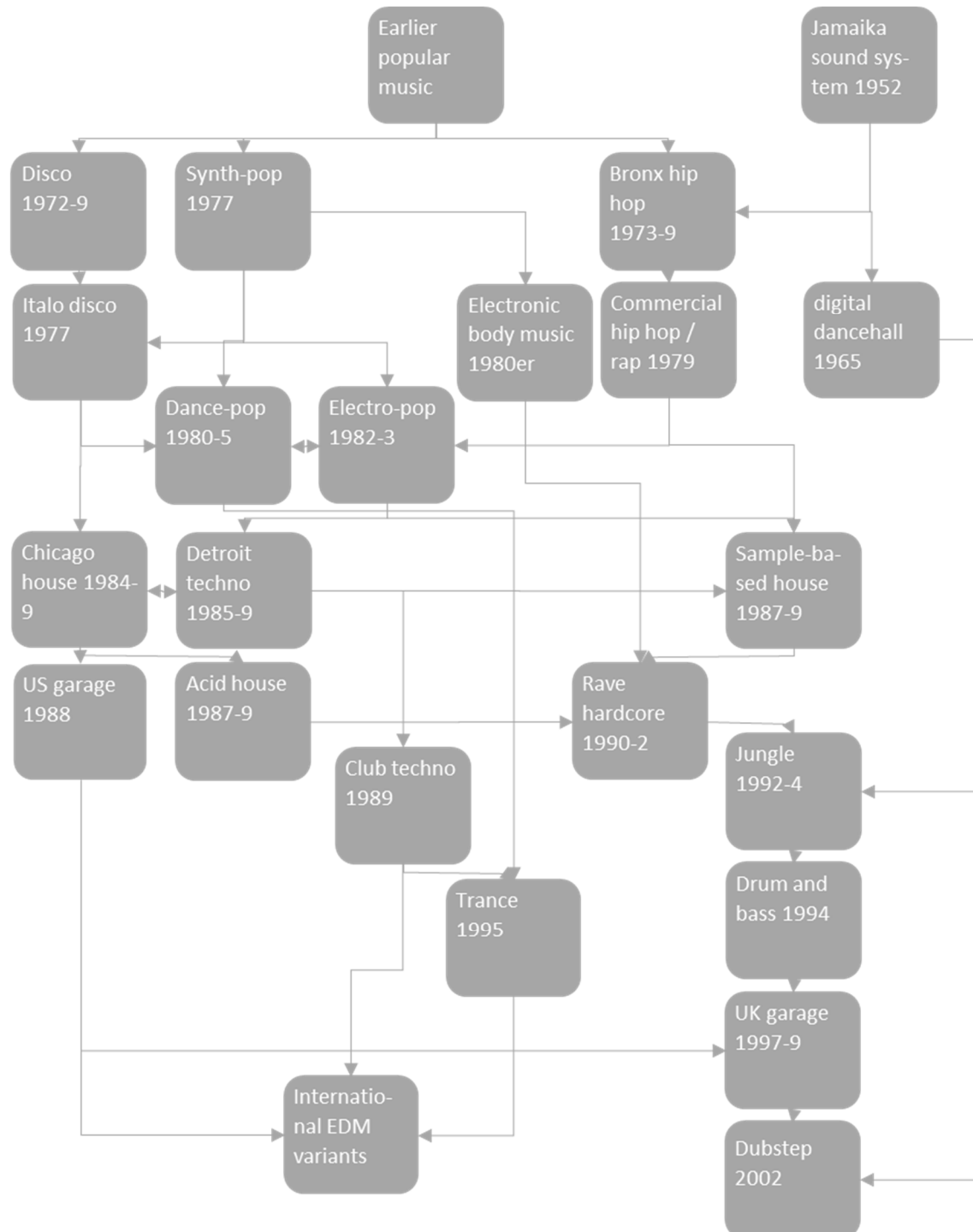


FIGURE 1-7: DEVELOPMENT OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC GENRES, ADAPTED FROM COLLINS, SCHEDEL & WILSON, 2013, S.111 AND SUPPLEMENTED WITH GENRES DANCE-POP; WIKIPEDIA, 2016i

<sup>9</sup> Hi-NRG: Known as gay music, as it was being played in clubs. Related to disco and synth-pop.

Following the emergence of various genres in the 1970s, electronic music evolved in a broad and diverse way that would not have been thought possible thirty years earlier. Electro-pop is a direct descendant of synth-pop and hip hop, while also containing influences from disco and hi-NRG.

### ***A supplementary chronology including further genres***

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Time of emergence</b>	<b>Place of emergence</b>
Ambient	Early 1970s	UK
Disco	1972–79	USA, UK
New wave <sup>10</sup>	Mid-1970s	USA, Western Europe, Australia
Industrial music	Mid-1970s	UK
<b>Synth-pop</b>	<b>1977–79</b>	<b>USA, UK, Germany, others</b>
Hi-NRG	1977–80	USA
Dance-pop	Early to mid-1980s	USA
Electronic body music	Early 1980s	UK, Western Europe
Chiptune	Late 1970s to early 1980s	Japan
Italo disco	Late 1970s to early 1980s	Italy and Spain
<b>Electro-pop</b>	<b>1982–1983</b>	<b>USA, UK, Germany, others</b>
Euro disco	Early 1980s	USA, UK and Germany
House music	Early 1980s	USA (Chicago)
Techno/techno house	Mid-1980s	USA (Detroit)
New beat	Mid-1980s	Belgium
Acid house	Late 1980s	UK
Deep house	Late 1980s	USA
Eurodance	Late 1980s	Western Europe
Rave	Early 1990s	UK
Jungle	Early 1990s	UK
Drum&bass	Early 1990s	UK
Trance music	Early 1990s	Germany
Hardcore	Early 1990s	Netherlands
Dubstep	Late 1990s to early 2000s	UK
Glitch music	1990s	Germany
Hardstyle	Late 1990s to early 2000s	Netherlands and Italy
Trap music	2000s	USA
Synth-wave	2000s	France
Electro house	2000s	Global
Nu-disco	Mid-2000s	Europe

TABLE 1: KEY ELECTRONIC MUSIC GENRES, ADAPTED FROM COLLINS, SCHEDEL, & WILSON, 2013, S. 111; DANNY KRINGIEL, SPIEGEL ONLINE, 2010; PHIL CHEESEMAN, 2003; WIKIPEDIA, 2016A; WIKIPEDIA, 2016D; WIKIPEDIA, 2016E; WIKIPEDIA, 2016F; WIKIPEDIA, 2016G; WIKIPEDIA, 2016I; WIKIPEDIA, 2016J; WIKIPEDIA 2016M; WIKIPEDIA 2016N; WIKIPEDIA 2016R; WIKIPEDIA 2016S; WIKIPEDIA 2016U

<sup>10</sup> New wave: A punk movement with synthesisers and electronic elements that gradually blended with various youth cultures. Later the term was used for anything that was similar to punk.

### ***The genres synth-pop and electro-pop***

While synth-pop emerged in the late 1970s, arising from new wave, punk and other music movements of the '70s or the years before, the early '80s marked the birth of electro-pop (also: electronic pop music) and other trends that would dominate the entire decade. Certain earlier electronic styles, such as industrial music, disco, hi-NRG, dance pop and hip hop were also direct predecessors of electro-pop. Already in the early '80s synth- and electro-pop were very popular with the public and became a veritable cornucopia for chart hits. Seeing as many bands originated there, Germany was the driving force in the dissemination of synth- and electro-pop. Germany was followed by the UK, the USA and Sweden as well as other European countries. Later, synthesiser, and with it electronic music, also found its way into Japan, Korea and other regions.

Contrary to some genres of the 1980s like italo disco, euro disco and other emerging electronic styles, synth- und electro-pop offered a simple accessibility. At a straightforward four-four-time, it figured as an important element for night clubs because it was easy to dance to, no matter how fast or slow the song. synth- and electro-pop were defined by a pop harmony with a verse-chorus structure and characteristic sung and spoken vocals. Since pop pro-

ductions have reserved the freedom to incorporate ideas from various styles and trends, even now in the 2010s there are various pop and dance groups that – without specifically being part of the synth- or electro-pop movement – draw on the material it provides. These musicians include, for instance, *Britney Spears*, *Katy Perry* and *Rihanna* (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 94-96; Horst, 2011, S. 96f; Wikipedia, 2016k).

#### **Song structure synth- and electro-pop**

- Uses synthesisers, other electronic instruments, samplers and drum machine
- Verse-chorus like in pop music
- Mostly four-four-time
- Suitable for dancing
- Suitable for home listening
- Always contains a single (7'')<sup>11</sup> and a dance mix in maxi format (12'')<sup>12</sup>
- Innovations overlap from pop to dance music

However, synth- or electro-pop groups also drew on different material: *Madonna* or the *Pet Shop Boys* originally leaned strongly towards genres like disco and dance. In the early stages of their career the Pet Shop Boys even used the rhythmic talking of hip hop in their songs (cf. Pet Shop Boys, 2016o; Madonna, 2016p).

<sup>11</sup> 7 Inches: Single with app. three minutes of recording time (technical limitations)

<sup>12</sup> 12 Inches: Dance mix with app. 6 to 8 or more minutes of recording time (technical limitations)

Differentiating the genres synth-pop and electro-pop is not all that simple, seeing as specialised literature only defines the term *synth-pop*. Some online encyclopaedias even insist that synth- and electro-pop are one and the same genre, although they did not emerge during the same time period. Others distinguish between synth-pop as being derived from punk and electro-pop as merely being a descendant of synth-pop. In doing so, synth-pop is pushed towards electronic punk, rock music and electronica, whereas electro-pop is placed closer to dance/disco, hi-NRG and hip hop (cf. Wikipedia, 2016d; Wikipedia, 2016j; Wikipedia, 2016m; Wikipedia, 2016n; Wikipedia, 2016u).

Sometimes a distinction is also made by describing electro-pop as being reduced to

a purely electronic production-mode, and synth-pop as being a mixture of electronic and non-electronic elements. This last definition also allows for the continued association of synth-pop with punk and rock music. Under this assumption, electro-pop continues to follow the structure and technique of synth-pop (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 90-101, 111).

All these definitions have one thing in common – namely that synth-pop originally had to have been a more experimental and rougher synthesiser sound. Electro-pop, on the other hand, from the outset seems to have been created for night clubs and consequently also spread that way.

### ***Important synth- and electro-pop artists***

Historically speaking, the German group *Kraftwerk* – founded in the 1970s – greatly influenced synth- and electro-pop. Depending on the reference basis, further groups are mentioned for the subsequent decades. These include *Depeche Mode*, *Madonna*, *Eurythmics*, *New Order* and the *Pet Shop Boys* for the 1980s, as well as *Lady Gaga* and *Hurts* for the 2000s. The arguably most globally famous Swiss pop group – *Yello* – also belongs to the genres synth- and electro-pop. All these groups or musicians are to this day still successfully active in the music business (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 90-99; Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2011, S. 97; Wikipedia, 2016k; Wikipedia, 2016m; Wikipedia, 2016q).

*Kraftwerk* (synth- and electro-pop), famous for their pioneering work as a synthesiser ensemble, had a subliminal humour that was reflected in their music. They produced albums with names like *Computer World* or *The Man-Machine*.

*Kraftwerk* came from experimental mu-



FIGURE 1-8: IMAGE "ROBOTS4", SOURCE KRAFTWERK.COM (SECTION CONCERTS)

sic and, in the beginning, accordingly used

to mix analogue and digital equipment. Over time *Kraftwerk*'s music evolved from avant-garde to the well-known three-minute recordings of a typical pop song. They also began to focus more strongly on

dance music. *Kraftwerk* are regarded as one of those groups that significantly influenced popular music regarding songs, synthesisers and dance music across all genres from electro-pop to techno.

#### 1.2.4. EDM, disco, dance pop, IDM and electronica

Electronic dance music (EDM) refers to all types of music produced with synthesisers, samplers / drum machine<sup>13</sup> and software-based sequencer tools<sup>14</sup>.

For some styles of EDM sometimes the incorrect terms *dance music* or *dance* are used. Hence, EDM is often associated with the dance and party scene and its superstar DJs. Experimental electronic music, on the other hand, can be more easily excluded from such associations.

Over the years EDM was used in the USA as a commercial form of house music. Artists such as *Bob Sinclar*, *Avicii*, *David Guetta* and *Calvin Harris* fall under this category. Especially the last two house artists have long ago turned to pop music and are thus also associated with synth- and electro-pop, dance pop und disco.

Disco and dance pop are two separate music genres. Inspired by funk, soul, pop and salsa, disco had its heyday in the 1970s and '80s, before being replaced by Italo und Euro disco. Italo disco originated in Italy, Euro disco (disco fox style) being its

English-language counterpart. Italo and Euro disco's popularity declined in the late '80s and '90s respectively. Both styles evolved into house and Eurodance which, in turn, was replaced by dance pop and Nu-disco in the early 2000s.

Dance pop is directly related to the genres synth- and electro-pop, and is intended for night clubs as well as home listening. If and to what extent synth- and electro-pop can be associated with EDM is debatable, seeing as the latter is also regarded as the precursor of such music styles that are – at times exclusively – produced to be used in night-clubs (cf. Wikipedia, 2016i).

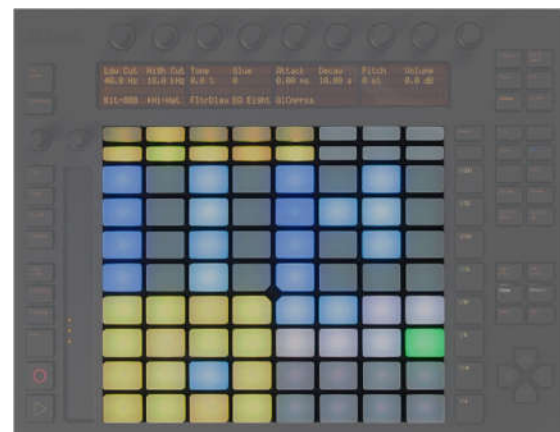


FIGURE 1-9: SAMPLER AND DRUM MACHINE, SOURCE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA (DIY)

<sup>13</sup> Sampler / drum machine: Create tonal / percussive sounds (digital or analogue).

<sup>14</sup> Sequencer: Software-based tool for music production, e.g. Ableton Live, Cubase or Logic Pro.

In the 1990s, the term *electronica* –originally also referred to as experimental electronic music – was adopted in the USA for marketing purposes, thus becoming associated with EDM. In Europe and Latin America the term is associated with electronic music.

Intelligent dance music from Europe (IDM) is based on underground and experimental electronic music.

Finally, the term *electro* is used in various ways and can refer to electronic music, EDM or any subgroup of genres such as industrial or synth-pop (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 90-105, 108-110, 136f; Wikipedia, 2016g; Wikipedia, 2016j; Wikipedia, 2016k; Wikipedia, 2016l; Wikipedia, 2016s; Wikipedia, 2016t).

### 1.2.5. Final differentiations and conclusion

In order to differentiate the genres, it is determined that both synth-pop and electro-pop can be explained with the same musical structures and social and economic factors. This means that the difference between the two genres lies mainly in the use of electronic and non-electronic equipment as well as the intensity of the music. Thus, synth-pop is produced not only with electronic, but also with acoustic instruments. Given its roots in punk music it is also more at home in a strongly socio-critical environment compared to electro-pop. For the subsequent analyses it is further determined that synth-pop is compelled to utilise synthesisers in order to actually fall within the genre. Electro-pop with its associations to underground clubs and music styles is, on the other hand, more strongly dedicated to dance as an expression of freedom.

			Allocation
Synthesiser	Acoustic instruments	Electronic instruments	
✗	✗	-	Synth-pop
✗	-	✗	Synth- and electro-pop
-	✗	-	Pop music
-	-	✗	Electro-pop
-	✗	✗ (few)	Pop music
-	✗	✗ (many)	Synth- and electro-pop

TABLE 2: DIFFERENTIATION OF SYNTH-, ELECTRO-POP AND POP MUSIC, OWN ILLUSTRATION

Electronic musical instruments, other electronic genres and the emergence of electronic music will not be discussed in further detail in the subsequent chapters. However, other genres of electronic music such as dance, dance pop and disco – although they are not the

main focus of the present thesis – are nevertheless relevant for clarifying the research question.

In the following chapters the two elementary genres synth- and electro-pop will be further elaborated and the research question will be explained in more detail.

**FRANKIE  
GOES  
TO  
HOLLYWOOD**  
•  
**the  
POWER  
OF  
LOVE**



*FIGURE 1-10: SINGLE COVER "THE POWER OF LOVE" 1984, FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD, SOURCE SPIEGEL ONLINE (SECTION EINESTAGES, LIEBE DEINE FEINDE)*

### 1.3. SCIENTIFIC BASIS AND APPROACH

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The clarification of the research question is divided into the areas entertainment, socio-culture and economy. The entertainment part primarily analyses the status of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music in the music market. Socio-culture, on the other hand, is examined by means of an analysis regarding, in particular, women's status in the popular music scene, as well as a literary clarification of Queer culture<sup>15</sup> in the genres synth- and electro-pop. Finally, the economy part focuses on the issue of the economic relevance of synth- and electro-pop within the music scene, also discussing general economic issues regarding popular music.

#### ***Next steps***

The basis for answering the research question consists of a combination of several empirical studies and various literary elaborations. Economic aspects are based on research in web portals and books with published information. As there is plenty of literature on entertainment and socio-culture, these topics are also suitable for a literary-based approach. The literary research on pop culture, sex and gender are supplemented with two music analyses as well as examples on the effects of music videos, idols and performance. The aim is to show how the music video and the idol contributed to the dissemination of the genres synth- and electro-pop and electronic music.

#### ***Empirical work***

The first analysis compares the music of the 1980s and 2010s in order to determine to what extent synth- and electro-pop and electronic music retained their popularity. A further analysis examines how important synth- and electro-pop and pop music were for women. In order to conduct a field study, the information that is to be compiled is introduced in the individual chapters before being documented and evaluated empirically. The results are analysed at the end of each chapter and referred back to the research question by means of an evaluative comparison. For the studies it is determined whether the effects of the 1980s can be transferred to today. Wherever possible, the results are assessed for strong and weak points.

The synthesis and conclusion contain the final clarification and presentation of arguments for the research question. Possible future potentials for synth- and electro-pop and electronic music are introduced and assessed in a closing statement.

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<sup>15</sup> Queer: General term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual.

### 1.3.1. Information basis and data acquisition

The data and reference literature are compiled with regard to Switzerland as well as the three major music markets USA, UK and Germany. In those cases where only insufficient information was found, another comparable country, for instance Austria, is used as a reference point.

In order to conduct the studies, I shall draw on my own experience in producing electronic music. Such will be the case when analysing the importance of the genres synth- and electro-pop and women's status of in popular music.

While preparing for this thesis it transpired that some information is only available for pop and rock music. Based on current information, record labels do not file

data on synth-pop, electro-pop, disco or dance. The same can be said for electronic music in general, which some sources refer to as dance. Consequently, it is unclear whether they are talking about EDM – i.e. dance music with DJs – or dance pop as a genre. In those cases, audio samples will be used and, based on my own experience, matched with the appropriate genres.

In order to acquire literature and information, requests were made to a number of institutes, organisations, record labels, public authorities, promotion agencies, consultancy firms, bands and market research enterprises in Switzerland and Europe. Unfortunately, no information could be obtained from some of the institutes, especially companies within the music industry. The general reply was that no data were available – *if* the request was answered at all. It soon became clear that, depending on the research question, there was very little information to be obtained. Regarding questions on gender equality there is great interest in the Swiss music industry, as efforts are being made to achieve it. However, specialised organisations like *Pink Cross*<sup>16</sup> or *Helvetiarockt*<sup>17</sup> were not able to provide information. Thus, information was obtained through publicly accessible data banks such as the *Zentralbibliothek Zürich*, book stores and internet platforms. The decision was made to carry out the empirical analyses by means of two self-conducted field studies and linking them with the acquired literature. They are the analyses of the importance of the genres synth- and electro-pop and electronic music, and women's status in popular music. The field studies were possible due to international chart data, which have been published globally for decades.

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<sup>16</sup> Pink Cross: Umbrella organisation of gay men in Switzerland.

<sup>17</sup> Helvetiarockt: Promotion of women in jazz, pop and rock.

The analysis on changing listening habits and audiences' preferences will be carried out by means of several, mostly publicly accessible statistics. These come from national and international organisations such as the German Federal Music Industry Association, the German Music Information Centre, the Swiss Federal Office of Culture, FEM.Pop Austria, the UK Department of Culture, Media & Sport, the Recording Industry Association of America, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, the IFPI Switzerland and others. The assessment is limited to data from the historically most influential markets USA, UK, and Germany and, in addition, Switzerland.

### **Literature**

The bibliography in the appendix of this thesis is compiled of information from specialised literature, periodicals and newspapers, as well as copies of e-books, studies, statistics, internet archives, e-documents in PDF format and purely electronic websites. Wherever possible, sources without a scientific basis were avoided. Since information on electronic music is mostly provided via websites and internet archives, these were used for obtaining the necessary information. Furthermore, the aim was to use specialised magazines and

periodicals as much as possible, which were once again mostly available online or in printed form via the entertainment press.

### **Electronic data**

The bibliography also contains references to purely electronic sources (Wikipedia, hitparade.ch, offiziellecharts.de etc.), which were either saved as PDF documents or electronically archived as permanent websites. Following the recommendations of the University of Zurich (ex. Geographic Institute), websites were filed in a permanent, electronic online archive. For Wikipedia and similar online data, this storage location contains the article or statistic, copyright holder and timestamp of the consultation. The advantage of internet archiving is, in such cases, that everyone reading the study can access the exact same website information. Electronic data were either archived with *WebCite*® (electronic archiving tool for academic contexts), or the permanent links were copied from the respective Wikipedia citations.

PDF files were used in those cases where information was already offered to download in PDF format. Hence, such information is not available in a permanent online archive, but can be obtained in PDF report form via the files' creator.

### 1.3.2. Success factors synth- and electro-pop – electronic pop culture

The question on synth- and electro-pop and the electronic pop culture is subdivided into three critical success factors: entertainment, socio-culture and economy. The presumed success factors of the 1980s serve as the basis for the hypotheses by means of which a comparison with synth- and electro-pop and electronic music of the 2010s shall be made. Defining the success factors is essential to organise the required literature and data research. Based on the success factors, the potential of the genres synth- and electro-pop and electronic music can be elaborated in the synthesis.

#### ***Hypothesis 1: success factor entertainment***

This hypothesis serves to determine how entertainment helped make synth- and electro-pop and electronic pop culture successful.

#### ***Home entertainment und video clip***

The first hypothesis states that new communication and marketing channels promoted the dissemination of music, thus helping synth- and electro-pop to a global breakthrough. New TV shows, video clips and formats like CD and MP3 intensified the interaction between musicians and audiences.

#### ***Entertainment, staging and idol***

Moreover, one can presume that the 1980s saw the emergence of new forms of performance, which specifically addressed

synth- and electro-pop audiences. It can also be assumed that a new kind of image staging (anti-authenticity) was created.

#### ***Performance and club culture***

Furthermore, the blending of dance, home-listening and club culture presumably facilitated the acceptance of synth- and electro-pop.

#### ***Synthesiser, synth- and electro-pop***

Finally, the relevance of synth- and electro-pop in the 2010s, as well as the acceptance of electronic music-production facilities and synthesiser, shall be examined. It will further be shown which contemporary musicians utilise electronic music and whether synth- and electro-pop is experiencing a revival.

## ***Hypothesis 2: success factor socio-culture***

This hypothesis serves to determine how social changes and new societal forms facilitated the acceptance of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music.

### ***Women, masks and pop culture***

The second hypothesis assumes that women were essential for synth- and electro-pop's breakthrough, promoting the popularity of the anti-rock movement with their provocative, erotic and creative manner. Moreover, the thesis is put forward that – by metamorphosing the reception of music – the women of these genres promoted a change in role models, thus creating a space for new female musicians.

### ***Queer in popular music***

Furthermore, it will be examined how important the Queer movement and culture as well as a new male image were for the

## ***Hypothesis 3: Success factor economy***

This hypothesis shall determine the attitudes of audiences and promotional agencies regarding synth- and electro-pop electronic music.

### ***Audiences' musical preferences***

The third hypothesis states that synth- and electro-pop and electronic music are an

development and dissemination of synth- and electro-pop. The thesis shall be put forward that Queer artists changed audiences' reception in favour of a synth- and electro-pop focal point, as a result of which audiences became open to new staging and role models.

### ***Protest against social structures***

It can also be presumed that the critical, cynical and distanced attitude of synth- and electro-pop towards social structures became a key element in entertainment and post-modern discourse.

### ***The importance of women in pop music***

Finally, by means of an empirical analysis, it shall be shown that particularly female synth- and electro-pop artists became very successful, thus having a lasting impact on popular music.

important part of today's popular music, being the preferred musical genres of both Europeans and Americans.

### ***Concert, festival und party***

Lastly, it shall be shown that synth- and electro-pop are popular content for concerts, festivals and clubs alike.

### 1.3.3. Justifying the approach

The use of statistical, comparative figures and a structured analysis of the data ensure that an internal as well as external view of the object of investigation in a scientific context is made possible. Furthermore, the comparison of the empirical data of the 1980s and the 2010s establishes a basis on which to assess critically the hypotheses on the success factors entertainment, socio-culture and economy, and to determine the possible potentials of synth- and electro-pop.

#### *Data basis as a success factor*

Of the five greatest music markets – USA, UK, Germany, France and Japan – the USA, the UK and Germany were chosen for assessing the already introduced critical success factors, since – due to historical development – these markets are most relevant for electronic music (cf. German Music Council, 2015e). The analysis will be supplemented with data from Switzerland.

As was previously mentioned, the success of the field studies and literary research depends on finding sufficient qualitative and quantitative material.

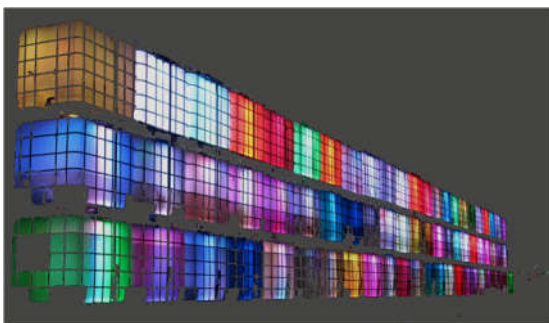


FIGURE 1-11: FESTIVAL 'SONNEMONDSTERNE' 2012, OWN ILLUSTRATION IN ADAPTION FROM SONNEMONDSTERNE.CH

The chart data from the USA, the UK, Germany and Switzerland, as well as the

quantitative information on women in electronic music based on data from Austria, the USA and UK, allow for a retrospect all the way back to the 1980s.

#### *Imprecise data*

Since there is a lack of clarity regarding the distinction of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music from IDM, EDM, dance und disco, assumptions will be made, which shall be explained for each analysis. Generally, it can be said that dance is regarded as a style related to synth- and electro-pop and electronic music alike, whereas disco and dance pop are associated with synth- and electro-pop only. Wherever data bases distinguish pop, rock and dance, synth- and electro-pop are assigned to pop.

In terms of electronic music, it is accepted that experimental electronic music cannot be examined separately from general electronic music. The amount of experimental electronic music is assumed to be rather minor and thus will not be considered for this thesis.

### **No interviews**

Regarding the initial desire to do a series of interviews with musicians, it soon transpired that – while there were interesting questions – it would be very difficult to actually get any interviews. Moreover, it was not clear what would have to be asked in an interview. The idea was to verify certain points of the field studies with interviews. While evaluating the study details it became apparent that interviews would still be interesting, however, that they were no longer necessary regarding the question on women in synth- and electro-pop. Moreover, it seemed that Queer bands were ra-

ther unwilling to give interviews. In addition, this topic was merely one point of the many aspects to be examined for this thesis.

Finally, during the beginning of research and initially contacting artists, record labels, associations and record-store owners, it was determined that interviews would be more significant in a further, more specific discourse on the popular and electronic music scenes than within the framework of the present thesis. Based on these reasons, the idea of conducting interviews was rejected.

Having established the required data and information bases, the following chapter will focus on the literary and empirical studies as well as the analysis of the research question. Firstly, pop and its historical development will be elaborated, before the topics entertainment, socio-culture and economy will be examined in more detail. Each main chapter closes with a comparison and conclusion regarding the obtained results.



FIGURE 1-12: ELECTRO-POP AND EXPERIMENTAL CONCERT, PABLO NOUVELLE 2016, OWN PHOTO

## 2. SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP – ELECTRONIC POP CULTURE

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Popular culture of the 1980s was influenced by historical, economic and social changes. An unwavering belief in the economy, its recovery and a self-regulating system prevailed; it was a time of economic boom, the beginning of mass tourism and the era of TVs and personal computers as everybody's toys for fun and games. In contrast, there were subcultures and protest movements that called ever more loudly for a change in society. Numerous protest movements emerged, campaigning for changes regarding stereotypes and role distribution, for more freedom and the environment, and against existing policies. Concern for the future of humanity led people in Europe, America and other regions of the globe vehemently to try and find new ways and measures to make themselves heard. These people questioned economic powers and demanded new social forms of coexisting.

In 1991 MTV opened its doors with the song *Video killed the radio star* (*The Buggles*, 1979), thus marking the beginning of the story of pop music.

With 1980s synth- and electro-pop a new form of music emerged that was critical, multi-coloured, creative and danceable. The music matched the desires of that time, addressing the masses subliminally, creating a space for socio-critical lyrics and yet still be entertaining.

Moreover, it was also a way of life: Suddenly, from the various youth cultures in Europa and the USA, the underground clubs of the gay and Black scenes and the punk avant-garde emerged synth- and electro-pop tunes that were suitable for the

masses and were both popular and harmonious. What rock music had not yet dared to do, synth- and electro-pop did. The result was music such as *Like a prayer* (*Madonna*, 1989), *It's a sin* (*Pet Shop Boys*, 1987) or *I need a man* (*Eurythmics*, 1987). Many of these songs were a combination of allusion, criticism of society, provocation and self-reflection.



FIGURE 2-1: LOGO MTV, SOURCE MTV.COM

## 2.1. SUCCESS FACTOR ENTERTAINMENT

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Popular music is considered as entertainment, as a combination of spectacle and idol-fan relationship. It is a close network of image, concert culture and art that connects to its audience. Since the 1980s, synth- and electro-pop as well as electronic music have had a strong influence on pop culture. There is probably not a single successful synth- and electro-pop group not famous for its slightly chilly-ironic, sweetly critical appearance and for its perfect, artistic performance. The pop image – both role model and show.

The subsequent chapter will briefly chart the evolution of the media and its influence on pop music. Furthermore, the video clip, together with television an important promoter of 1980s popular music, is examined. The phenomenon of the, at times, subtle eroticism and subliminal allusions in synth- and electro-pop as well as the connection of the club culture to popular music

will also be elaborated. In addition, entertainment, provocation and social criticism are discussed, as is the anti-idol in synth- and electro-pop and electronic music.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the importance of the genres synth- and electro-pop and electronic music for popular music in the years 2010 to 2015 and a comparison of the results.

### 2.1.1. Radio, TV and new media

When wishing to examine and discuss pop music – particularly the electronic kind – one does not avoid considering the interplay of different actors, media and technologies.

#### ***New circumstances for radio, TV and film***

After World War I radio broadcasting became a mass medium in a time of public service broadcasters. Music artists, publishers and promoters initially managed the situation well. This changed, however, when *Warner Bros Records* released the first sound film in 1927 and entered into the music business in 1958. More competition from the film business soon followed and began pushing into the music business. It

was the beginning of the era of large entertainment groups.

Radio broadcasting came further under pressure by the invention of television, and later by the growing music market in the 1950s and '60s, and thus had to adapt increasingly to a younger, disc-jockey audience. With the emergence of rock 'n' roll and beat in the '50s and '60s, vinyl became the most important recording

medium for music. The 40-year-long era of the recording industry had begun.



FIGURE 1.0-1: RADIO BBC, OWN ILLUSTRATION

In the 1970s the music cassette came on the market – allowing audiences for the first time to make their own music copies – followed in 1983 by the CD. The recording industry took this as an opportunity to re-launch already released vinyl recordings, thus profiting a second time from the sales.

### **Internet and new media**

Due to the amount of data per song the internet was initially not suited for broadcasting music. The emergence of MP3 format in 1993 solved this issue. Seeing as the music industry continued to rely on CDs and later on DVDs, their production costs were reduced, however, consumers still had no legal access to MP3 songs. This led to online file-sharing networks being founded by private people. In 2001 the file-

sharing platform *Napster* was shut down by court ruling, which put pressure on many other providers. Thus, legal downloading possibilities were created. As the first major online music store, *Apple iTunes* went live in 2003. Yet, even these legal downloading providers were initially not given much consideration by the music industry. Compensation for copy- and usage rights as well as market options were not yet being used. The appearance of legal streaming services like Spotify in 2011 further exacerbated the situation.

Consequently, the music industry found itself in the situation of having to create new sources of income. It did so by demanding and receiving compensation for various copy- and usage rights, thus ensuring new revenue streams. The music in computer games, TV shows with specifically composed music, advertisements and music at events allowed for new demands to be made (cf. von Appen, Grosch, & Pfeleiderer (HG.), 2014, S. 81-88; Arditi, 2015, S. 31-33; Rogers, 2013, S. 103f).

### 2.1.2. Video clips and TV formats

The entertainment and popular culture as we know it today would be unconceivable without television. Many of the early TV formats were focused on the musical reception of a cinematographic reproduction in a personalised form. This could be playback or live performances – the priority of these formats was to promote stars.

Only as time went by was the medium used more innovatively. Thus, musical interludes were incorporated into entertainment programmes, for instance, as a cover for set changes. This was followed by music shows that contained game interludes or that focused entirely on presenting music such as the *ZDF-Hitparade* from 1969 to 2000).

The decisive impetus for a rearrangement of music presentation on television and for the establishment of the video clip as a central, pop-aesthetic elements came from MTV in 1981.

*“Contrary to radio broadcast, the optical presentation [in the video clip, P. R.] plays a significant role for the making of a hit. By means of video clips, it now became possible for musicians to be present in a country [...] without actually doing exhausting tours there.”*  
(Huppert, 2005, S. 71)

MTV’s system was simple and clever at the same time – it combined youth-specific behaviour of leisure activities, watching television and listening to pop music.



FIGURE 2.1-2: SYNTH-POP, ADAPTED FROM LAUT.FM / SYNTHPOP

Since audiences could not constantly be offered the same kinds of videos in an endless-loop, MTV’s influence led to the creation of a defining innovation: the institutionalising of audio-visual music production and reception. Record labels, directors and bands were henceforth challenged regarding the creativity and innovation in their music videos. In the 1980s video-clip shows like *Formel Eins* or *Ronny’s Pop Show* were created, which featured alternating video clips and hosting (cf. von Appen, Grosch, & Pfeleiderer (HG.), 2014, S. 141-146).

### **Examples of synth- and electro-pop video clips**

Since the 1980s various synth- and electro-pop groups have released very creative, socio-critical and also amusing video clips. The following section introduces one example from the '80s and one from the 2010s.

#### **Video-clip music reception**

- Presentation of the musicians while performing (performance)
- Representation of persons, e.g. dancing (connection method)
- Presentation of non-objective things, e.g. graphics (artificialisation)

The video clip is music for the eyes; it is a part of natural everyday experience. You see what you hear, and vice versa. In the case of non-objectivity, the image visualises the sound. A video clip thus chooses between naturalisation and artificialisation (cf. von Appen, Grosch, & Pfeleiderer (HG.), 2014, S. 146-150).

#### **Video clip example from the 1980s**

*I love you* (Yello, 1983) is a declaration of love, clichéd within an aesthetic context on the '50s. At its centre are a classic car, two lovers and graphically erotic visual metaphors – sketched allusions to intertwined bodies, shots of colliding, silver high heels and images of a man turning into a gorilla. What follows is a bizarre milking-stool dance with a bride and a frigid good-bye kiss in front of a neon heart. She says, “I love you”, and he says, “I know.”



FIGURE 2.1-3: 'I LOVE YOU' 1983, YELLO, ADAPTED FROM YOUTUBE

The music is synth-pop, slightly experimental, with the strong, rough synthesiser basses of the early '80s. The video itself is a combination of slapstick, sexual allusion and artistic playing with clichés. The video clip blends reality with surreal images and twists the game of love of the '1950s into the postmodern context of the '80s. No longer is he the admirer alone, she also adores him. She drives the car, he is being driven.

The clip follows the music reception principles 'representation of persons' and 'non-objective things'. One of the artists plays the beloved, whereas the second musician does not appear in the video. It is a combination of the visualisation of sound with the declaration 'I love you' and a simultaneous artificialisation of the drawn coolness of the images that are only about lust. In other words, it is an ironically distanced, intentionally twisted and amused look at love and lust – exactly the way synth- and electro-pop like to do it.

### ***Video clip example from the 2010s***

***Twenty-something*** (Pet Shop Boys, 2016) addresses the generation of 20- to 30-year-olds. It talks about how difficult it has become nowadays for young people to find a job in order to have enough money for day-to-day life. The video is set in a gang neighbourhood in the Western USA. The protagonist is a Latin-American ex-convict who is trying to build an honest life for himself and his family. The clip ends with the protagonist, after countless job application, relapsing and being arrested.

The song is a mix of electro-pop and reggaeton (music from Latin and Central America). The video clip criticises US society, questioning the US penal system and society's attitude towards socially weaker young people with a Latin-American background. The black-and-white video highlights the protagonist; the message could be: a colourless outsider who is denied access to the system.

The clip follows the music reception principle 'representation of persons' in order to establish an identification of the lyrics with the protagonist. The view of the video's plot is reinforced by the artists' decision not to present themselves.



FIGURE 2.1-4: 'TWENTY-SOMETHING' 2016, PET SHOP BOYS, SCOUCE YOUTUBE

Synth- and electro-pop often tend to be presented as being cool, yet provocative, and subliminally socio-critical. That which, in the video, might appear as being casually cool and distanced is often a deliberate view of the essential. The direct identification with the topic is removed in order to be

even closer to it. Moreover, the principle of anti-authenticity is supported by the musicians' absence.

Following the introductory elaborations on radio, TV, internet and social networks in connection with the music industry and the presentation of two video clips from the 1980s and 2000s, the following chapter shall examine synth- and electro-pop and electronic music within the context of provocation, anti-authenticity and entertainment more closely.

### 2.1.3. Anti-idol, entertainment and provocation

Entertainment and provocation are two essential elements of pop culture, deliberate self-presentation in public distinguishing it from rock music and other genres. Synth- and electro-pop resort to even further methods of emphasis. By being both provocateur and voyeur within a commercial system, they created, in the 1980s, a pop art anti-idol that was everything from extravagantly salacious, to cynically melancholic, to ironic. Synth- and electro-pop are individuality, club culture and eroticism. Yet, at the same time, they are also a popular discourse on society.

#### ***Basic art and performance***

In the history of European music performance, especially in connection with the representation of physical individuality, has a negative connotation. In other words, it is considered the downfall of culture and a danger to decency and morality. The sole exception is spiritual individuality, which requires a certain amount of education.

In the case of staging, the underlying intellectuality is emphasised, while what is actually heard and perceived is removed. The actual focus of the performance is on the hidden, the concealed content.

According to *Dietrich Helms* and *Thomas Phleps* (2011) the Greek philosophers already generated a contrast between a rationally permeable, ethically and aesthetically superior music which must be preserved, and an ecstatic, body-related, technically virtuosic and for those reasons socially basic music (cf. S. 24-32).

Even in 18<sup>th</sup> century opera audiences were not so much interested in the composition, the libretto or the stage setting as they were fascinated by the physical charisma and eroticism of the eunuchs – that is, by an exhibition of the individual.

**Pop culture – body and individuality**

Pop culture is mostly ascribed to basic music. The composer and his notes play an inferior role in this communicative system compared to the classical arts. Pop musicians directly interact with their audiences; the attention is focused on the group that creates the music. Pop music is both body and individuality. This direct kind of discourse between the performers and consumers of music is facilitated by fanzines, TV appearances and video clips. These are, among others, a consequence of the need for a physical discourse.

Through popular music, music evolved from a service into a product that can only give mainstream feedback via the medium of *money*. This results in the artist's need for individualisation in order to distinguish his/her product. Since this is most often only possible by means of physicality, individualisation goes as far as eccentricity of voice, looks, acting and behaviour. Contemporary musicians have an image – a fictionalisation of themselves – whereby the boundaries of the real world of communication are deliberately crossed regarding decency and morality.

The artists see themselves as private persons who, within this system, are publically forced to keep up their fictitious image in order to appear authentic. Yet, it is due to this precise reference to image that we can make the following statement: "Do you remember when that song was playing...?"

(cf. Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2011, S. 28-32).

**Synth- and electro-pop from David Bowie to Pet Shop Boys and Madonna**

*David Bowie*, who dedicated himself to the entire spectrum of acoustic and electronic pop music and also worked with synth- and electro-pop groups, became one of the most mediatised figures in popular music. His multifaceted musical output and the clever staging of his public persona turned him into a role model (cf. Edgar, Fairclough-Isaacs, & Halligan, 2013, S. 55f). In this regard, *David Bowie* stated as early as the 1970s that he was only playing the role of a rock musician. He insisted that he had no message to convey, stole his song ideas and did everything simply to make money. Thus he presented himself as a critical, independent and genuine provocateur – a postmodern rejection of the personal, socio-cultural and emotional authenticity of the rock music of the past.

In the 1980s, the *Pet Shop Boys* also fired at the technical authenticity of the live concert as an obsolete value by stating:

*"It's kinda macho nowadays to prove you can cut it live. I quite like proving we can't cut it live. We're a pop group, not a rock and roll group."* (Neil Tennant, 1998; quoted from Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2013, S. 58)

When, in the late '80s, the *Pet Shop Boys* went on tour nonetheless, they turned all the previously introduced markers of authenticity on their head. One could never discern what was being played live and what was pre-programmed. Improvisation or spontaneous variation were not part of the plan. The song *Electricity* even ironically announced: “*Call it performance, call it art. I call it disaster if the tapes don't start.*” During the *Pandemonium Tour* (2009 / 2010) the musicians' heads were masked with white cubes. Over the course of a show they and their dancers would appear wearing ski jackets, crowns and suits and bowler hats. There was a lack of effort to suggest a personal, socio-cultural, emotional or technical authenticity. The Pet Shop Boys thus highlight the term **authentic inauthenticity** (cf. Grossberg, 1992, S. 226). That is to say, as a result of their flaunted rejection of striving for authenticity they appear even more authentic – a characteristic of synth- and electro-pop's image.

*“The music video, this artificial bastard of commerce and avant-garde, will by tendency replace the sound carrier as the medium of image building in pop music.”* (Huppert, 2005, S. 71)

*Madonna* utilises in her video clips and stage performances the power of sexual imagery and relies on provocative self-staging that is, at times, highly controver-

sial. As a result of her ambiguity she is provocative, feminist and sexist at the same time. *Madonna* creates a plethora of disguises such as, for instance, in the video clip to *Like a prayer* (1989), where she alternates between being a bride in white and a temptress in black. *Like a prayer*, however, is not only a staging of the freedom of femininity, but also denounces the church with its strict role models, course of conduct and power structure. She stages and restages again and again; she dissembles roles and puts them back together in a different way, thus creating the key to aesthetic – a permanent restaging and presenting of male phantasy about the female sexual object. She plays with sexual stereotyping as much as she removes the taboos from social issues. She shows that there are others behind the mask of femininity, alternatively exposing them as dominatrix, diva, vamp or virgin (cf. Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2011, S. 99; Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2013, S. 58-60; von Appen, Grosch, & Pfeleiderer (HG.), 2014, S. 140).



FIGURE 2.1-5: 'LIKE A PRAYER' 1989, MADONNA, ADAPTED FROM YOUTUBE

### ***Gender, sex and popular music – a desired discourse***

Pop culture contributes to the continuous process of challenging or further developing preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity. However, sexual stereotypes of society also define parts of Western pop culture – popular music is not free of sexism. It is true that, already in the time of rock ‘n’ roll, sexuality was freed from the conventional context of home, marriage and romantic love and became the liberating expression of desire and ecstasy – albeit mostly for men. The female as well as gay and lesbian needs, however, remained concealed.

*“Pop culture influences the gender- and sexuality-related attitudes and actions of its listeners.”* (Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2011, S. 97)

#### **2.1.4. Body, spirit and individuality**

*“The attention is drawn to the doer, his body or his intellect.”* (Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2011, S. 22)

Performed music, whether it be listened to live or over the radio, contributes to the identification of the performer. The artist attracts attention from a source of musical information and stands out from others and the environment. The actual person shares with the audiences, opens up and gives an

insight into what he / she feels and thinks. Since the 1980s, synth- and electro-pop artists such as Madonna, the Pet Shop Boys or David Bowie as the role models for many synth- and electro-pop groups have not only produced entertaining music, but they have also – through witty criticism – created an intellectual and political discourse on a hegemonic stereotype of masculinity.

The development of the club and dance culture in the ‘80s, with its styles like hi-NRG, synth- and electro-pop, Italo and Euro disco, dance pop and later EDM led to a public discourse on homosexuality, androgyny and equality. This process survived the past decades relatively unscathed and helped establish new expressions of social conception. (cf. Edgar, Fairclough-Isaacs, & Halligan, 2013, S. 97-99).

The audience’s part in the communication, on the other hand, is largely reduced to listening or, in the worst case, to turning away. Although the audience decides whether or not to pay attention to the performance, at the same time it succumbs to the provocation of having to submit to the artist (cf. Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2011, S. 22f).

### ***The open eroticism of pop music***

Communication within the popular universe is direct – here, the musicians stand for themselves. Accordingly, the performing person is forced to create an individual space through physicality. The voice, the effects and the music generate their own, virtual space.

With the progressing commercialisation and marketing of music on the various media channels and the ensuing increase in competition, the performer is forced to create individualisation by means of an exaggerated emphasis on the body.

By presenting the individual sexuality (eroticism), the bond with the audience is inwardly strengthened. The boundaries of intimacy shift; the intimate knowledge of a communication partner seems to go as far as an imagined role reversal. For the duration of a song one can picture the musician's imagined body as one's counterpart. The listener can project into that body and can thus possibly take over its eroticism into his/her own body (cf. Helms & Phleps (HG.), 2011, S. 36-38).

#### **2.1.5. Club culture and the freedom of the underground**

The burgeoning club culture of the 1980s was the result of the many subcultures at the time. On the one hand, it was a general search for new forms of expressions for the various youth cultures, such as yuppies, punks and later ravers, of the '80s and early '90s. On the other hand, it was a blending of the underground gay and Black scenes with dance music like disco and hi-NRG in the early '80s. All of these subcultures had in common that not only did they want to express their desire for differentiation and a new way of life, but they also wanted to build new lives for themselves. This was only possible via the body.

Even today young people's styles manifest themselves mostly on and around their body. Affinities are made visible by wearing a specific T-shirt or through certain behaviour on the dance floor. Social belongingness, staged individuality, sensual indulgence and pleasure are all means of self-stylisation. At the club, the social staging and presentation of self occurs via the medium of the body. However, in club culture the body is more than mere self-staging. Club culture is dance, which is why the

body is not only a passive element, but also an actor in the limelight. Dance lives through physical presence. As a central element of communication it creates an active attachment to the event. This intensive belongingness to a group, in turn, leads to a new, if only temporary, form of community and art. Dance as an aesthetic medium is used to create a mediation between body and cultural practice.

Club culture and ravers caused gender differentiations to waver, which led

to the emergence of various forms of sexual and gender identities. Especially for heterosexual men, the erotic game on the dance floor ushered in a new, historic era. Ways of behaviour that characterised the gay scene in particular began influencing mixed-gender clubs. This blending of the homo- and heterosexual scenes can be described as a hallmark of club culture.

Seeing as synth- and electro-pop have always been created for both dancing and home listening, they are the genres associated with the beginnings of club culture.

In contrast, later EDM and DJ music was generally produced exclusively for clubs. Club culture is therefore an important component of synth- and electro-pop as well as electronic music (cf. Klein, 1999, S. 77-84; Reitsamer & Weinzierl (HG.), 2006, S. 157f).

### 2.1.6. Status of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music in pop music

In order to answer the question of how important synth- and electro-pop and electronic music are for popular music, an analysis of the charts of the most listened-to songs of the last few years will be carried out on the basis of assessing the type of music as well as measuring the use of synthesisers and others electronic instruments. The aim is to determine if a song characterised by:

1. Synth- and electro-pop or a closely related type of pop and dance music
2. Extensive synthesiser use
3. Being a purely electronic piece of music that supports the object of investigation with regard to popularity

The analysis is based on a comparison of the charts from Switzerland, Germany, the UK and the USA from the years 2010 to 2015. It is carried out by means of audio samples and follows a qualitative, empirical assessment that is determined on the basis of the top-ten chart rankings. The result is an analysis of four countries, six years and ten top-selling singles, which adds up to a corpus of 240 songs.

The evaluation is carried out based on the genres electro-pop, synth-pop, dance (incl. EDM and IDM), folk music, funk, global music, pop, punk, reggae and rock. Since it cannot be conclusively determined whether dance is more like experimental IDM, dance-related EDM or pop music, for the purpose of the analysis this genre is assigned to electronic dance (style *dance*).

**Criteria for the data collection**

The evaluation criteria were determined prior to the audio-sample analysis. In order to evaluate each genre (in the table: ‘category’) I shall draw on my personal, qualitative experience in music production to classify the songs by ear regarding the following criteria:

- Speed (e.g. pop 110-130 bpm<sup>18</sup> vs. dance music 130-180 bpm)
- Time (e.g. 4/4 or alternating)
- Style of music to indicate the genre
- Online check of the group’s genre
- Use and type of synthesiser and electronic instruments (e.g. sampler, drum machine. Not a criteria: electric guitar, electric organ)

Each song is assessed by listening to several neuralgic points of different lengths. The selected points are: intro (of applicable), verse, chorus, solos, bridges within the song and outro. Based on a cross-comparison with the artists’ Wikipedia entries, the song is subjected to a final check before the genre is assigned in the ‘category’ field. The ‘evaluation’ field is used to record how important a song is to synth- and electro-pop, rating it with the predicates ‘very important’, ‘important’, ‘less important’ and ‘not important’. Songs rated ‘very important’ are synth- and electro-pop-related songs from electronic music or songs that can be directly assigned to synth- and electro-pop. Purely electronic music, such as techno or rave, is not part of this evaluation group, seeing as it does not follow a pop-like song structure.

Criteria		
Artist(s)	Name of person, group, duo etc.	- Free text field
Single (song)	Information on the examined song	- Free text field
Charts	Information on the chart country	- DE, CH, UK, USA
Ranking	Information on the chart ranking	- 1 through 10 (top 10 only)
Synthesiser	Information on synthesiser use	- Synthesiser - No synthesiser
How?	Type of synthesiser use?	- Lead melody/melodies - Backing - Sounds - - (no audible synthesiser)
Use of other electronic elements	Are other electronic elements such as instruments, vocals and sounds used?	- Free text field
Notes	Free text field for important notes	- Free text field
Category	Genre / style	- Electro-pop, synth-pop - Dance (incl. EDM, IDM) - Folk - Funk - World music - Hip hop - Latin music - Pop - Punk

<sup>18</sup> BPM: Beats per minute.

<b>Evaluation</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reggae</li> <li>- Rock</li> </ul>
	How important is the song for the clarification of the question on synth- and electro-pop, electronic music and synthesiser?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Very important</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Synthesiser = main melody or backing</li> <li>2. Electro- or synth-pop</li> <li>3. Pop music produced entirely with electronic instruments</li> <li>4. Dance with song structure (no techno, rave etc.)</li> </ol> </li> <li>- <b>Important</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Synthesiser sounds</li> <li>2. Large amount of electronic instruments</li> <li>3. Hip hop, folk or rock music produced entirely with electronic instruments</li> </ol> </li> <li>- <b>Less important</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Small amount of electronic instruments</li> </ol> </li> <li>- <b>Not important</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. None of the criteria apply</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

TABLE 3: CRITERIA TO IMPORTANCE OF SYNTHESIZER, SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP 2010-2015, OWN ILLUSTRATION

### **Basis for the chart data collection**

- **Switzerland:** The basis is the archive of GFK Entertainment, as well as Hitparade.ch. The data obtained from GFK Entertainment include all sales points in Switzerland – actual stores, online and download shops and, since July 2014, streaming providers selling legal units to the end-users. The Hitparade.ch data were taken from Wikipedia, as they could not be obtained from GFK Entertainment. The data were verified on Hitparade.ch by means of manual samples (cf. IFPI Schweiz, 2014; Wikipedia, 2013; Wikipedia, 2014; Wikipedia, 2015a; Wikipedia, 2016a; Wikipedia, 2016b; Wikipedia, 2016h).
- **Germany:** The basis is also the archive of GFK Entertainment, as well as Offiziellcharts.de. GFK Entertainment represents a market coverage of over 90 % of real sales figures and turnover. The download and streaming charts have been included in Offiziellcharts.de since summer 2014 (cf. Offizielle Deutsche Charts, 2010; Offizielle Deutsche Charts, 2011; Offizielle Deutsche Charts, 2012; Offizielle Deutsche Charts, 2013; Offizielle Deutsche Charts, 2014; Offizielle Deutsche Charts, 2015; Offizielle Deutsche Charts, 2016).
- **UK:** The annual charts are compiled by the Official Charts Company. The annual list combines CD-, vinyl- and download sales, as well as – since the turn of the millennium – streaming providers (cf. Official UK Charts, 2010; Official UK Charts, 2011; Official UK Charts, 2012; Official UK Charts, 2013; Official UK Charts, 2014a; Official UK Charts, 2015; Official Charts Company, 2016).

- **USA:** For the American market the annual figures of the charts published by Billboard and Prometheus Global Media were used. The charts are made up of sales and downloads, radio air time and tours, as well as based on streaming activity and social networks (cf. Billboard.com, 2010; Billboard.com, 2011; Billboard.com, 2012a; Billboard.com, 2013; Billboard.com, 2014; Billboard.com, 2015; Billboard.com, 2016).

There is little variation in the chart data from Switzerland, Germany, the UK and the USA with regard to data type, seeing as, for instance, the Swiss and German data come from the same market research institute. The US annual charts differ in terms of data collection, as they also include information from Facebook, tours and radio air time. Since a comparison of the samples regarding music consumption in the Anglo-Saxon regions seemed to reveal only minor differences – which can also be explained by other effects such as listening habits and demand – this issue was classified as negligible.



FIGURE 2.1-6: LASER CONCERT, OWN ILLUSTRATION

### 2.1.7. Findings for synth- and electro-pop and electronic music

The findings are put into a global context and partly supplemented with regional conditions. The clarification of the research question ensues by means of presenting an overall view of the analysis and is further examined based on the question regarding the importance of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music.

#### ***A comparison of the situation in the examined countries***

Depending on the markets examined, the amount of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music developed differently in the years 2010 to 2015. The Swiss and German market behaved quite similarly regarding their respective single charts. In addition, the UK and USA developed their own repertoires, which appear on the top-ten single charts. Although in the UK and parts of the USA the same music is heard as in Switzerland and Germany, there are further genres or events that influence the British and US charts. In the UK popular, regional music shows like 'Pop Idol' led to high chart rankings for this type of music. Such competition music can rarely be classified as synth- and electro-pop or electronic music. In the USA country music is very popular, as are R&B and hip hop, both of which are also favoured music styles in Europe.

#### ***Non-electronic music***

As a common feature of the most popular singles from 2010 to 2015, all of the examined countries show that a broad spectrum of non-acoustic pop music prevailed that practically eschews the use of electronic music production (*'not important'*). This share amounts to approximately 29 % of all music. As was defined in the introduction to the analysis, electric guitar and electric organ were not considered as electronic instruments although, technically speaking, they fall into that category.

There are quite clearly genres in popular music that clearly differ from synth- and electro-pop and electronic music regarding the manner of how they are produced.



FIGURE 2.1-7: ED SHEERAN, BRITISH MUSICIAN, SOURCE BILLBOARD (JASON BELL)

#### ***Music with synthesiser and some electronic elements***

In addition to the music that does not use any – or hardly any – electronic elements, there is a larger number of songs (*'less important'*, *'important'*) that are structured

electronically, however, due to minimal synthesiser use cannot be classified as synth- and electro-pop or electronic music.

This amounts to approximately 16 % of popular music.



FIGURE 2.1-8: CRO, GERMAN MUSICIAN, SOURCE CROMUSIC.INF

### The power of synthesisers and electronic production facilities

A large number of musicians use synthesisers and electronic production facilities extensively (*‘very important’*) and as a main resource for their artistic, instrumental work. Contrary to previous years when, for instance, techno and rave were in high demand, since the 2010s only the music in the evaluation groups containing vocals and text achieved top chart rankings. These songs have in common that they generally follow the pop syntax of verse and chorus and fit in somewhere between dance and home listening.

As can be deduced from the figures on the influence of the genres synth- and electro-pop and synthesiser on popular music in Switzerland, Germany, the UK and the USA, their significance is clearly measurable. Even though not all artists can be attributed to synth- and electro-pop and there is a lack of a clear distinction of dance music, a large amount of musicians are making use of these genres.

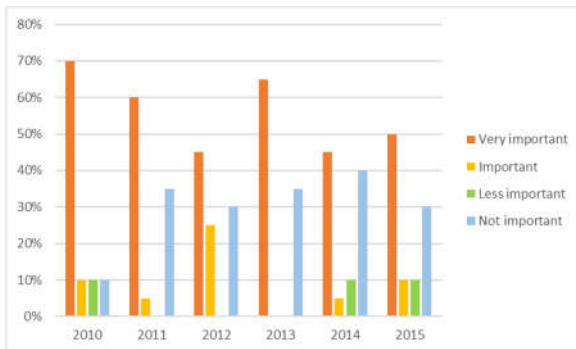


FIGURE 2.1-9: SHARE OF SYNTHESIZER, SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP SWITZERLAND, OWN ILLUSTRATION

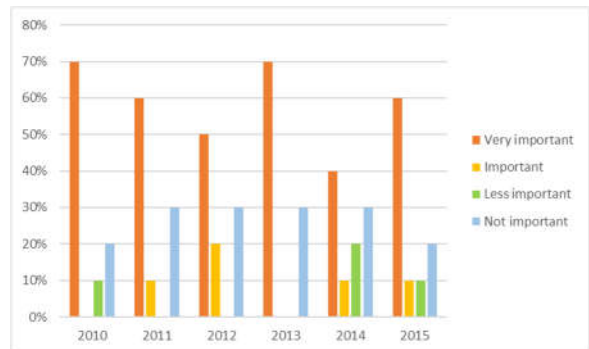


FIGURE 2.1-10: SHARE SYNTHESIZER, SYNTH- UND ELECTRO-POP GERMANY, OWN ILLUSTRATION

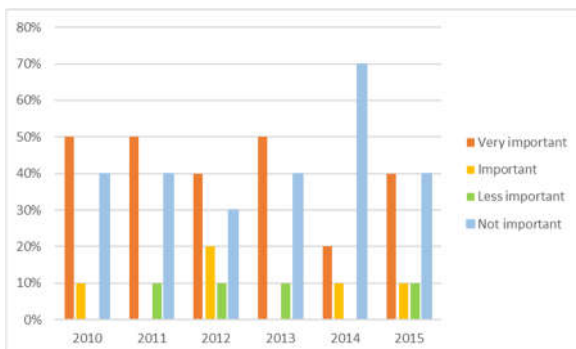


FIGURE 2.1-11: SHARE SYNTHESIZER, SYNTH- UND ELECTRO-POP GREAT BRITAIN, OWN ILLUSTRATION

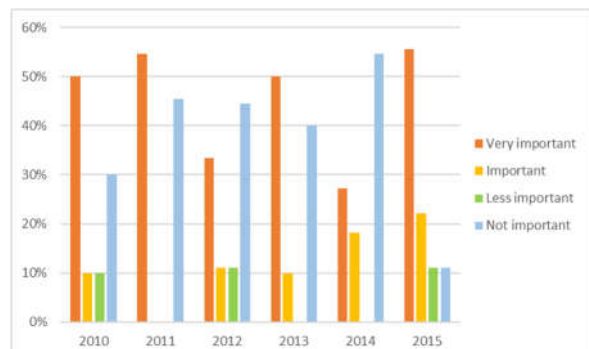


FIGURE 2.1-12: SHARE SYNTHESIZER, SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP USA, OWN ILLUSTRATION

Traditionally, hip hop has been characterised by its use of electronic instruments (see 1.2.316). In today's hip hop, song structure is more similar to that of synth- and electro-pop and pop songs than it used to be. A reason for this might be the fact that hip hop is not as popular as it once was. Hip hop now contains more synthesiser – it is used as an acoustic backing element, main melody or bass.

EDM, which has been characterised by genres like techno and house since the 1980s and '90s, has always used almost exclusively electronic instruments. Synthesisers are used depending on style and are an integral part of the genre. The difference today is that house and techno artists have adapted their style. Not all, but many successful artists can now also be attributed to dance pop, synth- and electro-pop. In part, this is criticised as a commercialisation of the house scene. However, it can also be regarded as an extension of music-production facilities – song structure, speed, length and amount of lyrics have shifted in favour of synth- and electro-pop. There was a convergence, so to speak, as many EDM musicians have expanded their genres by including synth- and electro-pop (see 1.2.4).

### ***Synthesisers in popular music***

Synthesisers are regularly used for music production. Comparing the absolute with the percentages shows that synthesiser as a musical instrument has established itself with listeners and bands on a high popularity level. In the analysed time period 2010 to 2015 a slight decline of synthesiser use was observed, although the numbers generally appear to remain

In recent years, pop musicians have also drawn on the genres synth- and electro-pop, more and more frequently using synthesiser as a melodic instrument (e.g. *Rihanna, Katy Perry, Justin Bieber, One Direction* and many more). The reasons for this development are not clear. It might be that electronic music-production facilities became more interesting, or that new ways of collaborating with EDM, synth- and electro-pop artists were sought.

In pop, rock and folk music synthesiser has also been used more frequently as a bass or backing instrument in recent years. In addition, it is more and more often used as a melodic instrument, which results in a decreased use of electric guitar and electric organ. The same can be observed for the genres synth- and electro-pop – in pop music synthesiser typically replaces the electric guitar and other important melodic and backing instruments. Slow pop and rock music, on the other hand, seems to be more instrumental, consisting of acoustic compositions.

Finally, the analysis shows that Latin and world music have barely been affected by the trend and continue to use traditional instruments.

constant. However, especially in 2014, 40 % less synthesiser-based music was purchased in the UK and the USA.

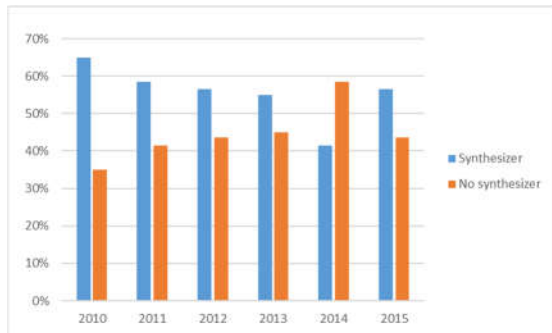


FIGURE 2.1-13: SHARE SYNTHESIZER-USAGE (IN %), OWN ILLUSTRATION

Songs that can be attributed to the genres synth- and electro-pop amount to a share of approximately 43 %. These songs can be either pure synth- and electro-pop music or mixed with other genres (e.g. dance, hip hop and folk). The remaining 57 % belong to other genres, whereas those songs can also be purely electronic productions and use synthesiser (e.g. dance or hip

hop). However, based on their style, they cannot be attributed to the analysed genres synth- and electro-pop and would have falsified the evaluation. Generally, it can be said that music compositions with electronic instruments and tools such as samplers and sequencers has firmly established itself.

The top-ten single charts of the analysed time period 2010 to 2015 contain a few pop and rock musicians who did not use any electronic production facilities, or if they did, these were not detectable. They include, among others, *Pharrell Williams*, *Ed Sheeran*, *John Legend*, *Ella Henderson* and *Adele*.

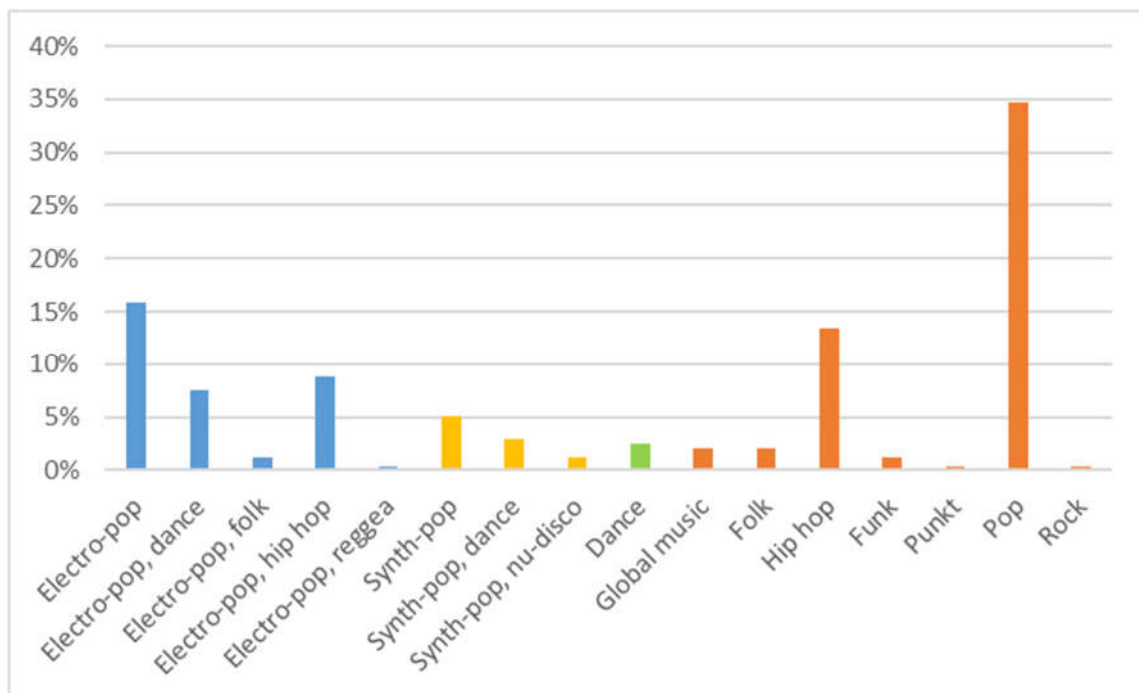


FIGURE 2.1-14: SHARE OF SYNTH- AND ELECTROPOP IN SWITZERLAND, GERMANY, GREAT BRITAIN AND USA IN COMPARISON TO OTHER GENRES, OWN ILLUSTRATION

As can be deduced from the analysis, in Switzerland music produced with electronic tools and synthesisers is generally very popular (approx. 56 %). While more synth-pop and dance were purchased between 2010 and 2012, from 2013 electro-pop, pop and hip hop once again became more popular.

From 2010 to 2012, the Swiss-based electronic music market was very strong, inspired, among others, by *DJ Antoine*, who rose to international fame during that time.



FIGURE 2.1-15: DJ ANTOINE, SWISS MUSICIAN, ADAPTED FROM SZENENIGHT.DE

For music, the 2010s – characterised by globalisation, technological progress and social networks (e.g. mobile phones, social media) – after a period of DJ and acoustic music in the 1990s and parts of the 2000s, sparked a revival. Countless musicians now use stylistic elements of the '80s, and thus also synthesiser, for their music. Moreover, since the 2000s further musical genres have emerged that are influenced directly by dance pop and synth- and electro-pop, such as synthwave, nu-disco and electroclash. These genres can be regarded as a direct reintroduction of '80s music, deliberately placing dance pop, synth- and electro-pop, together with new technical music-production facilities, at centre stage.

In the 2010s, the production of dance-like music often led to the use of stylistic elements from dance pop and synth- and electro-pop. Musicians who, up to that point, had exclusively produced EDM, discovered the creative possibilities of synth- and electro-pop and other genres as a pop version of their own electronic music. After a period of house in the 2000s, a trend seems to be developing towards other directions of dance and home listening music.

Pop groups, but also hip-hop and R&B musicians, now draw on genres like dance pop and synth- and electro-pop for mixing. Some, who had once been at home in other genres, have switched to dance pop and synth- and electro-pop in their latest releases.

The revival led newly-formed bands of the 2000s and 2010s to rediscover the genres synth- and electro-pop (e.g. *Lady Gaga*, *Ellie Goulding*, *Sia*, *Stromae*, *Hurts*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Calvin Harris* or *Kesha*). Established greats such as *Madonna*, *New*

*Order*, *Pet Shop Boys* or *Depeche Mode* are today once again in high demand.

This trend seems to be continuing unabated. The comparison of the 1980s and 2010s allows for the question to be partially answered. A revival of the '80s – complete with anti-idols and colourful, provocative behaviour – has helped popular styles of electronic music, including synth- and electro-pop, to renewed success.



FIGURE 2.1-16: HURTS, BRITISH SYNTH-POP DUO, SOURCE [PLUS.GOOGLE.COM/+HURTS](https://plus.google.com/+hurts)

### 2.1.8. Comparison: entertainment

Synth- and electro-pop and electronic music have – thanks to a new popular culture, new media and new technical music-production facilities – profited from sub- and youth cultures as well as broader audiences. For audiences, in turn, a new world of affordable music and multifarious media channels has emerged. Not without cause, and not for the first time, are synth- and electro-pop artists dubbing album releases ‘pop art’. By combining new media with new music and instruments, new popular art is being created.

#### ***Video clips, TV, internet and communities***

In the 1980s popular music was able to benefit from the new circumstances created by the mass media and mass consumption. During that time, practically everyone could afford a television set and thus consume music at home. Later, with the emergence of mobile phones, internet, online communities and streaming or downloading, the possibilities of music distribution via multiple media resources grew infinitely – which also benefited genres like synth- and electro-pop. These new, diverse channels for music marketing and consumption enabled popular music to grow steadily well into the 2010s.

The video clip as a new means of staging music enhanced this effect. Without the easy access to new music styles, synth- and electro-pop could not have achieved such wide popularity. By using media presence and new technologies as an art form, they gained recognition not only with their audiences, but also within the arts. One of the strong points of synth- and electro-pop is the early combination of technical means, the unusual and trends.

Potentials for synth- and electro-pop still exist. Due to the anti-authenticity and coolness on which synth- and electro-pop are

based, they create a distance to fans and music lovers.

However, by communicating and giving insights into their artistic work, the bond with the fans could be intensified, which would benefit a band's popularity. Moreover, a continued flow of new trends and technologies into the art form is also necessary to preserve its freshness and unruliness.

### ***Synthesiser and electric instruments***

In the 1980s, the invention of digital synthesisers brought a new instrument on the market. For the newly-emerged synth- and electro-pop music of the '80s this new kind of music presented a crucial advantage. In

addition, by using electronic instruments and tools new paths of music production were taken. Thus, synth- and electro-pop became the number-one music of the '80s. While synthesiser was less popular outside the EDM genre in the '90s, this changed towards the late 2000s – (young) audiences had rediscovered electronic music and synthesisers. Thus, in the late 2000s, synthesisers and electronic pop music experienced a revival which continues to this day.

The strong point – and, at the same time, the weakness – of synthesiser lies in its own, very specific sound and the means to use it as main melody as well as backing instrument or sound-generating element.

### ***Entertainment, concerts and club culture***

Thanks to television, the need for comfortable home entertainment was fulfilled. However, concerts did not become obsolete, but grew more and more popular, the artists' performances – by means of the camera – taking centre stage. The concert and the pure, artistic rendition of music turned into a staged production for shared dancing and emotions. The desire for shared identity and personal performance evolved into the dance and club culture which, in turn, enabled music lovers to meet.

Electronic music is intended purely for dancing. Synth- and electro-pop, however, allow for dancing at clubs, being together at concerts and listening to music at home alike – special strong point of these two genres that causes the boundaries between listening and participating to become blurred. This new, entertaining approach not only had an impact on music consumers of the 1980s, but also has a

continued influence on this generation and the people who go to concerts and parties. Events are in ever higher demand and, thus, so are synth- and electro-pop and electronic music.

Another future potential is the continued blending of different ways of interacting such as concerts, club culture and the feeling of shared identity.

**Musicians’ anti-authenticity, individuality and creativity**

By refusing an eclectic, chauvinist style and instead relying on the anti-idol, music is able to appeal to everyone.

In recent years, many young bands chose to create music based on synth- and electro-pop. Moreover, other, experienced musicians from pop to house music decided to include these two genres in their repertoires. Since the 1980s pop music, especially regarding hit singles, has been a guarantee for success. Following the decline in synth- and electro-pop’s popularity in the ‘90s, the genres’ revival in the late 2000s and in the 2010s put many older artists back to audiences’ minds.

A further strong point of synth- and electro-pop lies in the initially obscured, but no less concentrated force it contains. This type of

music is very versatile and receives great support in various subcultures. In addition, anti-authenticity allows artists to adopt and propagate new roles and behavioural patterns. As anti-idols with a certain coolness they can also question things without running the risk of destroying old role models and thus rebuffing the audience. While authenticity is created through art, it is also, in part, so ironic and twisted that it defines itself through non-authenticity (see 2.1.3).

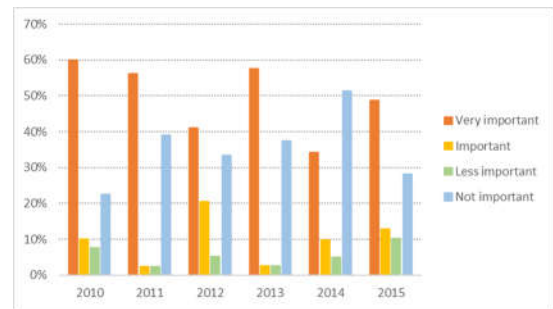


FIGURE 2.1-17: SHARE OF SYNTHESIZER, SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP IN SWITZERLAND, GERMANY, GREAT BRITAIN AND USA 2015, OWN ILLUSTRATION

**New music genres**

In the 2010s, synth-and electro-pop experiences a revival. Other genres influenced by them, such as nu-disco, synthwave and electroclash, also appeared on the scene. As is general custom in electronic music, especially in dance music, the listener is presented with a perfect show, whereby – contrary to other music genres – it is basically irrelevant for the audience whether the music is live or pre-recorded. This phenomenon is particularly common with DJs, who are renowned for only playing canned music; often even the mix itself is no longer produced live.

For the genres of synth- and electro-pop, and for electronic music in general, this ironic and clear dissociation from rock and also classical music was crucial. It allowed for the creation of distinct authenticities that, especially in synth- and electro-pop, are so clear and specific that they could consciously and deliberately stand out from the rest of the music

market. This image dissociation also contributed to retaining fans and to pop culture as a whole – it is the basis for a new, electronic synth- and electro-pop culture.



*FIGURE 2.1-18: LIVE CONCERT, SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP, OWN PHOTO*

## 2.2. SUCCESS FACTOR SOCIO-CULTURE

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The social landscape of the 1980s was a tangle of youth cultures, protest movements, technological development and a tendency to capitalism. It was the time of creation for electronic popular music. Culture and art in pop? One might assume that popular music is only defined by consumption and is thus not a form of expression worth investigating. However, by looking and listening more closely, one soon becomes aware of the concentrated force behind the electronic music of the '80s. The music had entertainment value and was unusually new, subliminally erotic and ironically socio-critical.

New wave, disco, synth- and electro-pop all offered the possibilities to express social, political, feminist and sexual issues for a wide audience. Although 1980s society was still firmly in the hands of the patriarchy, music was already used to address provocative and critical topics. In that regard, synth- and electro-pop artist *Neil Tennant* (1994) of the Pet Shop Boys retrospectively said in an interview that he wrote songs from the perspective of a homosexual man, even though the play with ambiguity was intended for everyone (cf. Neil Tennant, 1994; zitiert nach Burston, 1994). A similar thing can be said for women – except for punk, they had no status in the rock music of the '80s and their opinions were irrelevant. Especially in New wave, disco, synth- and electro-pop women and Queer artists were given a chance to break free of male, heterosexual hegemony – an absolute taboo in the '80s (cf. Kringiel, 2010).

### 2.2.1. Feminism and male dominance in popular music

Female musicians of the 1980s are an important starting point for the analysis of socio-cultural aspects. Thereby, women's social status as well as the way they were received in the music world are key elements. Is the woman of the '80s a mere sex object in the music world and subject to male dominance? Or is she an electronic pop phenomenon – androgynously erotic, critical and provocative as a new role model of the future?

#### *1980s pop and women*

The 1980s saw the emergence of new youth cultures that connected to the mentality of the resistance movements of the '70s. These, at times radically political, approaches supported young people's and activists' desire for change in numerous

European countries such as Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Switzerland. In Zurich, the protests led to the notorious Opera House riots in 1980 (cf. Ramming, 2000). These movements all demanded more freedom, autonomy and

self-government. This also included the wish for women's equality and equal rights for those who were different, as well as the need for freedom, sustainability, disarmament and less nuclear power.

In the 1980s in Eastern Germany, women started opposing militarism and the restriction of basic human rights. Similarly, more and more women all over Europe stood up for peace and advocated the end of Europe's division into East and West. During that time, various feminist groups were founded in Western Germany, some acting autonomously, others left-wing radically. When, in the '80s, moderate groups demanded the creation of a female counterculture with the inclusion of motherhood, sexuality and homosexuality, left-wing autonomous groups saw themselves faced with the need to strive for a militant, state-negating approach.

The time was marked by powerful changes and developments. Not only did society, in its social, regional and international nature, push its way through social emancipation, but technological development also called for a change in our way and view of life. With the advent of consumer-culture and capitalism, many believed that the expressions and demands of the women's and youth protests would now be resolved. Soon after, synth- and electro-pop began criticising the unspeakable faith in capitalism and the masses.

*“Despite significant liberations, it remains important to acknowledge the*

*existence of such issues (stereotypes of male musical thrust; P.R.) in order to avoid future discrimination.”*

(Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 10)

The protest movement punk is a musical testimony of that time. Even though, following punk, a lot of music became more an expression of mainstream popular music rather than socio-cultural challenge, the protest and the wish for change as the primary sources of 1980s music was retained. The evolution of punk and subsequent other music genres in the popular sector not only influenced audiences, but also had an impact on the music and publishing scenes (cf. Balz & Friedrichs (HG.), 2012, S. 14, 87f, 157-166, 197-200, 226f).

Famous female musicians of the time include *Nina Hagen* (punk), *Madonna*, *Annie Lennox* of *Eurythmics*, *Grace Jones* (synth-and electro-pop) or *Donna Summer* and *Nena* (new wave).

*“Macho, close-cropped clones ruled the city's mega-discos, but I hadn't escaped my small suburb just to conform, so I sought out unconventional spaces like Hurrah's, the Mudd Club, and Danceteria, where dub, reggae and post-punk alternated with chilly synthpop and radical funk.”* (Grace Jones, 2015; quoted from Barry Walters, 2015)



FIGURE 2.1-19: GRACE JONES, ADAPTED FROM PITCHFORK.COM

### ***Feminist music networks and cultural events***

Contrary to the postfeminist myth whereby feminism has become obsolete and (young) women no longer identify with it, the turn of the millennium saw the development of a pop-cultural feminism with an internationally active network. Independent media platforms, labels and festivals founded for girls and women created their own distinct free spaces and cultural identities.

In the new millennium, the networking and collaboration among girls and women became an important part of the creation of identity. With regard to electronic music, at this point the singer and experimental, electronic composer *Björk* – who, in the 1990s had her breakthrough as a model musician in a man's world – is generally mentioned, as is *DJ Electric Indigo* for the German-speaking part, who founded the online database *Female Pressure* for fe-

male artists in electronic music. Music labels founded at the time increasingly blended with feminist ideas and, in part, with the Queer movement.

*“Pop cultural feminism is relevant in the lives of countless girls and women.”* (Reitsamer & Weinzierl (HG.), 2006, S. 17)

The initially tumultuous and protest-related campaigns slowly evolved into feminist art and culture festivals, creating spaces both for women and men. Thus, these festivals (e.g. *Grrrl*, later called *Ladyfest*), which were organised around the globe in cooperation with hetero-, homosexual and transgender women, were open to male and female visitor – i.e. *ladies of all gender* (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 87-89; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003, S. 878-902; Reitsamer & Weinzierl (HG.), 2006, S. 17-28).

### **Male dominance in 1980s pop culture**

Based on the insights of *Rosa Reitsamer and Rupert Weinzierl* (2006), rock and pop cultures are gender productions that construct perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Noting that women are clearly underrepresented in music, especially regarding well-known bands, they state that the reasons for this lie in the glorified, revolutionary-romantic notion of pop culture being inherently resistive and subversive (cf. S. 33-35).

*Reitsamer and Weinzierl* argue that the continued male dominance in pop culture can largely be traced back to the myth of the romantic image of the savage. It is the omnipresence of the white middle-class male in music that led to the body as an object becoming the norm, however, not a subject of culture. Although, at first glance, the productions of male artists appear to be genderless, they are not. The male body is presented as a conveyor of content, whereas the female body is stylised as content, which leads to the female body becoming almost the sole topic in the reception of cultural productions. This interpretation process is supported not only by the media and audiences, but also by a growing feminist criticism which unintentionally put the female body in pop culture on a pedestal of uniqueness.

*“This myth is essentially constructed by white, middle-class men who, for the image of subversion, have transferred a romanticised image of the savage to the urban centres.”* (Klein, 2001, S. 24f)

Perfect confusion! If the female body takes centre stage in pop culture, why are there not more female artists? According to *Reitsamer and Weinzierl* (2006), this is due to a refusal to accept female musicians (vgl. S. 36f). Self-verification is based on a certain notion of white, heterosexual masculinity such as, ideally, a young, male musician rocking his guitar. Thus, the well-known, male form of music production is amplified and associated with technical knowledge and music skills.

All-female bands<sup>19</sup>, however, are often identified with feminism – a problematic circumstance, as it contributes to the perception that a purely female group does not correspond with the determining beliefs of society. The woman is thus given the only possible role in the pop universe – that of the singer.

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<sup>19</sup> All-female band: Female group, duo etc., or solo artist.

### 2.2.2. Women in popular culture – a question of reception

*Friedrich Nietzsche* (2007), in his book *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, presents a basis for the argument for female pop music – the mask (cf. S. 96). While he does not consider the mask as something negative, he nonetheless demands that one be aware of the masquerade and take pleasure from it. *Walter Kaufmann* (1982) completes Nietzsche's philosophy of the mask by stating that behind every mask there is another mask or nothing at all (cf. S. 118f). Getting to the bottom of the mask strategy and to extent the focus to women in popular music requires further deliberations.

The way music is received always depends on the artist. *Mary Ann Doane* (1991) argues that the audience must oscillate between the poles of the female and the male position, as a result of which the metaphor of a transvestite emerges (cf. S. 33-43). At the same time, she assumes that women find it easier to experience a bisexual environment than men, which, in her opinion, is expressed by a masculinisation of the audience. Our heroes, whether on screen or on stage, are often men. Doane argues that this is the reason why women want to take on male roles – a female role is not associated with privileges. Feminists therefore criticise that there is not enough room for women in mainstream by giving examples of films such as *Alien 2* and *3*<sup>20</sup>, where both women and men adopted a female point of view.

Men perceive her as evil – the *femme fatale*. She is the mask of a woman who strategically uses her body to influence the laws and words on which a man focuses. For *Teresa de Lauretis* (1994) this female mask is a kind of performance and thus a display of self for others within a certain socio-cultural context. (cf. S. 274ff). The philosophy of the mask represents two approaches to identity. The first one supposes the existence of an authentic self, thus assuming that every mask is covering and sometimes even deceptive. In contrast, the second approach believes every manifestation of the mask to be authentic by expressing the multiplicity of identity.

In female pop culture, especially for many synth- and electro-pop artists, the play with the masks of femininity, parodied masculinity and gender stereotypes is an important element (cf. *Queer Tracks*, 2010, S. 136-137, 146-161; Merck (HG.), S. 230).

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<sup>20</sup> *Alien 2/3* (1986 / 1992): US science-action film, starring Sigourney Weaver in the lead role.

### **Examples from the 1980s synth- and electro-pop masquerade**

According to *Katja Kauer* (2009), actress and singer Marlene Dietrich was the most famous artist to play with masks. Without her, *Kauer* argues, today's pop cosmos would be much smaller and considerably more limited (cf. S. 71-76). Given the fact that the genres synth- and electro-pop brought forth a remarkable number of female artists who play with the mask and the gender question, a few of them will be introduced in the following.

*Annie Lennox* played with androgynous elements and was, not without reason, dubbed the female David Bowie. She wore men's suits with shoulder pads, had short, red hair and, with her angular facial features, resembled a feminine man. Statements and behaviour, combined with a feminine look in the song *I need a man* (*Eurythmics*, 1987) caused confusion. In the video clip the woman treats the man the way a macho man might usually treat a woman – slightly condescending, yet, at the same time, with an obvious lust for the game and with so much makeup that she could just as well be a transvestite. Is she playing a man in a woman's clothes or is she a wild, female vamp? Ultimately, her femininity is merely a deception as part of a masquerade. Her femininity is undefined and she maintains an androgynous image

of herself. By means of these multiple masks she causes the original her to be brought into question.



FIGURE 2.1-20: 'I NEED A MAN' 1987, EURYTHMICS, SOURCE YOUTUBE

*Madonna*, with her fictions, alludes not only directly to Marlene Dietrich, she also deliberately plays with a blending of femininity and masculinity. Already in the song *Material World* (1984) she refers herself to the material world and makes her claim for power – a characteristic normally reserved for the male sex.

A perfect example for a feminine-androgynous camp artist<sup>21</sup> is *Grace Jones*, who staged herself as a disco diva with a sharp-edged androgyny. Her connections to the gay club culture all the more cemented her role as a camp cult figure. In her music she develops a postmodern role play, showing that there is more than one Grace Jones and giving up introspection in favour of style and aesthetics (cf. Leibetseder, 2010, S. 114-126).

<sup>21</sup> Camp: Ostentatiously effeminate, affected and theatrical.

### 2.2.3. Women in electronic music

The fact that women are underrepresented in popular music is often justified by a belief that they have little interest in electronic music and technology. Is this really the case, and how have women developed in pop music?

A study at *the University of Oxford* (2009) shows that there are many well-educated women in electronic music. Nevertheless, male musicians use the computer for composing 56 % more often than women. The study examined gender issues and made inquiries with both male and female electronic musicians (cf. S. 496-504).

For further analysis, the musicians were put into three groups – novice, intermediate and advanced – which were divided by region. It is noticeable that the novice group contained more women than men (61 %). In the intermediate group men prevailed at 58%, however, with a large percentage of women in the USA. The advanced group also contained more men (62 %), but with a significantly large percentage of women in Asia. The overall comparison revealed that more men than women make electronic music.

Questions concerning music are generally directed towards men instead of women by both sexes. This might be explained by the fact that, in the study, more women than men were novices and thus fewer experienced female contact persons were available. The respondents also answered questions on gender. 50 % of the women said that gender played a role with regard to learning music, whereas only 30 % of the men raised this point. 83 % of the women were taught music by a man.

**Table 24.4 Have you ever observed discriminatory practices around gender in the field of music technology?**

Gender	Experience level	Yes		No		Never thought about it		Total
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Female	Novice	25	39.1	12	18.8	27	42.2	64
	Intermediate	28	63.6	3	6.8	13	29.5	44
	Advanced	33	84.6	0	0.0	6	15.4	39
	<i>Total</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>58.5</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>10.2</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>31.3</i>	<i>147</i>
Male	Novice	10	24.4	8	19.5	23	56.1	41
	Intermediate	19	30.2	2	3.2	42	66.7	63
	Advanced	21	33.3	2	3.2	40	63.5	63
	<i>Total</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>29.9</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7.2</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>62.9</i>	<i>167</i>
All	Novice	35	33.3	20	19.0	50	47.6	105
	Intermediate	47	43.9	5	4.7	55	51.4	107
	Advanced	54	52.9	2	2.0	46	45.1	102
	<i>Total</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>43.3</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>8.6</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>48.1</i>	<i>314</i>

TABLE 4: GENDER DIFFICULTIES IN THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC 2009, SOURCE THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF COMPUTER MUSIC, S. 503.

The global survey among electronic musicians revealed that 50 % of the women at an intermediate and advanced level felt uncomfortable in an all-male classroom. In this respect, the University of Oxford points out that the pedagogical concept of a school or university is accountable for this fact and that, in some circumstances, the teaching system needs to be updated.

Based on these answers, the University of Oxford asked the respondents to what extent gender can be discriminating, which

yielded the following results: in the novice group, both women and men experienced a similar amount of gender-related discrimination (42 %). In contrast, the intermediate group revealed a noticeable difference between men and women – twice as many women as men indicated that they had suffered gender-related discrimination. Moreover, in the advanced group, as many as 85 % of the women said to have experienced or witnessed discrimination (cf. Dean, 2009, S. 496-504).

#### 2.2.4. Women's status in popular music

In order to examine socio-cultural aspects more closely, an investigation of female artists in popular music was conducted. The importance of women for electronic music is determined based on previously obtained chart data, while the gender-equality issue is elaborated by means of a pre-existing Austrian study. The aim is to determine the status of women making synth- and electro-pop and electronic music compared to their competition, and to what extent these women were able to assert themselves.

The question of women's status in popular music shall be clarified by:

1. Analysing the music genres and number of women per year and genre
2. Analysing the musical instruments learned by women

The field analysis of women's status in electronic music is based on an assessment of the type of music as well as the use of synthesiser and electronic instruments, and is supplemented by information on the artists' musical genres. The aim is to find out whether a song is characterised by:

1. Electronic music or synth- and electro-pop
2. A small amount of electronic music or acoustic music

The first analysis compares the top-ranking women in the UK and US charts from 1980 to 2015 by means of audio samples

based on a qualitative, empirical assessment of the UK top 40 and the US top 100. The analysis of learnt instruments and

genres is carried out based on an Austrian study that was published in 2015 and reaches as far back as the 1960s.

**Criteria for the data collection on women’s status in popular music**

In the material previously obtained from FEM-POP the following three key points were identified to be analysed: number of women in popular music, learnt instruments and musicians’ genres / styles. The data are catalogued and classified according to genre / style and instrument group. The data basis is not distinguished by synth- and electro-pop, but by dance, electronic, dancefloor, experimental and pop music. All styles except pop music are attributed to the genre of electronic music.

Criteria	Content/question	Detailed criteria
Genres	Information on artist’s genre	- Free text field
Women	Number	- Free text field
Men	Number	- Free text field
Genres / Style	Information on style	- Electronic music - Pop - Hip hop - Rock - Blues, funk - Folk - Jazz, punk, world music - Other
Number of female artists	Information on number of female artists registered in the respective year	- Free text field
Year	Date (year)	- Free text field
Instrument(s)	Name(s) of instrument(s)	- Vocals, guitar, etc.
Instrument group	Free text field for elaborations on synthesiser, style and/or instruments used	- Vocals - Electric guitars - Electronic instruments - Winds - Strings - Percussion - Keyed instruments

TABLE 5: CRITERIA TO SHARE OF WOMEN WITHIN POP CULTURE, OWN ILLUSTRATION

**Basis for the survey**

The survey on which the analysis is based was conducted by the platform *FEM.POP* and is part of the Austrian archive of popular music (vgl. FEM.POP, 2014).

**Criteria for the data collection on women’s status in electronic music**

The evaluation criteria were determined prior to the audio-sample analysis. In order to assess the music genre (*‘evaluation’*) and type (*‘electronic / acoustic’*) I shall draw on my personal, qualitative experience in music production to classify the songs by ear. Each song is evaluated by listening to several neuralgic points of different lengths, as was previously applied in the analysis of the importance of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music (see criteria ‘audio sample’,2.1.6).

The artists’ Wikipedia entries are essential for the analysis, as the provided information is compared with my own evaluation and put into a historical context. Each song is subjected to a final check before classifying the music as either electronic or acoustic. The *‘evaluation’* field is used to record whether a song or artist fits in the genres synth- and electro-pop or should be assigned to a different genre.

In the case of overlapping genre information, the most important genre for the question is evaluated first. Artists whose genres are listed as pop music as well as synth- and electro-pop will be assigned to synth- and electro-pop. As far as artists in the US Billboard charts are concerned, multiple songs were used as, in this case, the chart ranking is not based on one song, but rather on the artist’s entire work.

Criteria	Content / questions	Detailed criteria
Artist(s)	Name artist, group, duo etc.	- Free text field
Song	Information on analysed song	- Free text field (UK only)
Year	Year of release	- Year
Charts	Chart country	- UK, USA
Ranking	Chart ranking	- 1 through 10 (top 10 only)
1980s-2010s	Information on artist’s active years (from ... to)	- ‘80s, ‘90s, 2000s, 2010s - Earlier, up to 1980s
Category	Style/genre listed in the artist’s Wikipedia entry (English version)	- Electro-pop, synth-pop (incl. disco, dance und Euro pop) - Pop - EDM (incl. IDM) - Folk/country - Rock - Hip hop - Latin / world music - R&B, soul, jazz, reggae etc.
Electronic / acoustic	Classification based on music style / genre	- <b>Electronic music or synth- and electro-pop</b> 1. Electro- or synth-pop 2. Pop created with electronic instruments 3. Dance, disco and hip hop with electronic instruments 4. Synthesiser as melodic or backing instrument

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Acoustic or small amount of electronic music</b></li> <li>1. Acoustic music</li> <li>2. Pop and rock music, dance, disco, hip hop and other styles/genres with some electronic elements</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	Classification of the music regarding its relevance for electronic music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Synth- and electro-pop</li> <li>- Dance</li> <li>- Others</li> </ul>

TABLE 6: CRITERIA FOR WOMAN IN ELECTRONIC MUSIC 2010-2015, OWN ILLUSTRATION

### Basis for the chart data

- **UK:** In the UK, chart data are compiled by the Official Charts Company (vgl. Official Charts Company, 2014b).
- **USA:** The chart data for the US market are published by the UK Billboard Charts and Prometheus Global Media (cf. Billboard.com, 2012b).

### 2.2.5. Findings for women's status in popular music

Although women play an increasingly important role in popular culture, they are nonetheless still a minority in a man's world. However, especially in the genres synth- and electro-pop and electronic music, doors have opened for them.

#### *Percentage of women in popular music*

According to *Regula Frei* (2015) with *Helvetiarockt*, in Swiss popular music of the 2010s around 5 to 10 % of the artists are women. Furthermore, in the culture section of *Schweiz am Sonntag*, *Tanja Kühne* (2014) said with regard to the peculiarities of learning an instrument at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZUA):

*“With ten men to one woman, the female gender is barely represented on the drums – for the guitar it is even fifteen to one. And not a single female student did a degree on the bass guitar or trumpet.”* (Muriel Rhyner, 2014; quoted from Kühne, 2014)

She thus points out the fact that women traditionally study classical music. Contemporary music such as pop or jazz is less favoured, solo vocals being the most popular in that regard. (cf. Kühne, 2014).

In 2014, for the first time, five female solo artists occupied the top five in the US Billboard charts for six consecutive weeks, breaking the record of 2009, when five female artists held the top five for four weeks in a row. Moreover, in 2014 the three top-selling albums were all done by women – marking the second time in the past ten years that female solo artists outranked male solo artists (cf. Newman, 2014).



FIGURE 2.1-21: MUSIC THEATER, UN BALLO IN MASCHERA 2009, SOURCE THEATER ULM

According to an analysis carried out by *Reitsamer and Weinzierl* (2006) in 2005, in the German-speaking region there was only one all-female band to 99 male performances (cf. S. 34). In the online news article on the statistic by *Female Pressure*<sup>22</sup> (2013), the percentage of women in music releases and at festivals was estimated to be around 8 % (including women-only festivals: 10 %).

<sup>22</sup>Female Pressure: Initiative for the networking of women in electronic music.

“When this happens en masse, it’s not just a song or two. There’s something going on culturally,” says Evan Lamberg, Universal Music Publishing Group president of North America, who believes artists like Miley Cyrus, Rihanna, Adele and Katy Perry primed the pop pump for the current round. [...] And even Lamberg, who says, ‘I’ve never seen a gravitational pull like this,’ believes a gender balance will inevitably return, though he expects solo women to remain a strong presence on the pop charts.” (Evan Lamberg, 2014; quoted from Newman, 2014)

An analysis of the Austrian platform *FEM.POP*, which in 2014 examined the situation in the Austrian pop music scene, concludes that women’s contribution to the music market is small, having been at around 14 % for years.

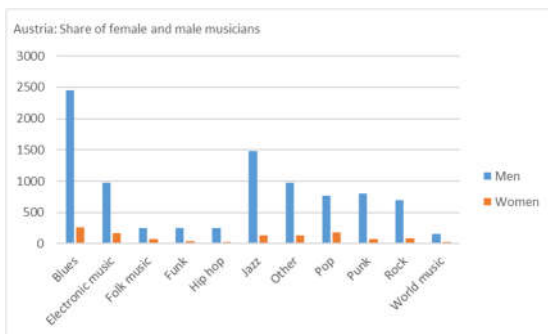


FIGURE 2.1-22: SHARE WOMEN IN POP MUSIC AUSTRIA 2014, ADAPTED FROM *FEM.POP*

As is the case in Switzerland, in Austria the majority of women studied singing (ca. 57 %), while around 18 % learnt a classical instrument (wind, strings or keyed). A combined 20 % took up drums and electric guitar, however, only around 5 % studied electronic instruments. In comparison,

men make up 90 %, whereas, as a whole, only 1 % of women learnt an electronic instrument.

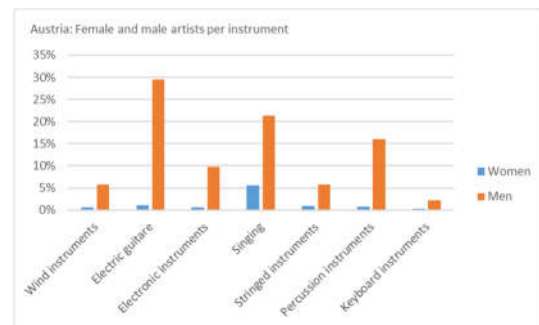


FIGURE 2.1-23: SHARE OF WOMEN PER INSTRUMENT GROUP IN AUSTRIA 2014, ADAPTED FROM *FEM.POP*

Although the 1980s set a milestone in the development of women’s contribution to popular music in Austria that prevailed right into the early 2000s, this growth was once again reduced to the level of the 1990s. Since 2005, the percentage of women in pop music has been rising slightly, however, the evaluation of 2014 is yet to be completed (vgl. *FEM.POP*, 2014).

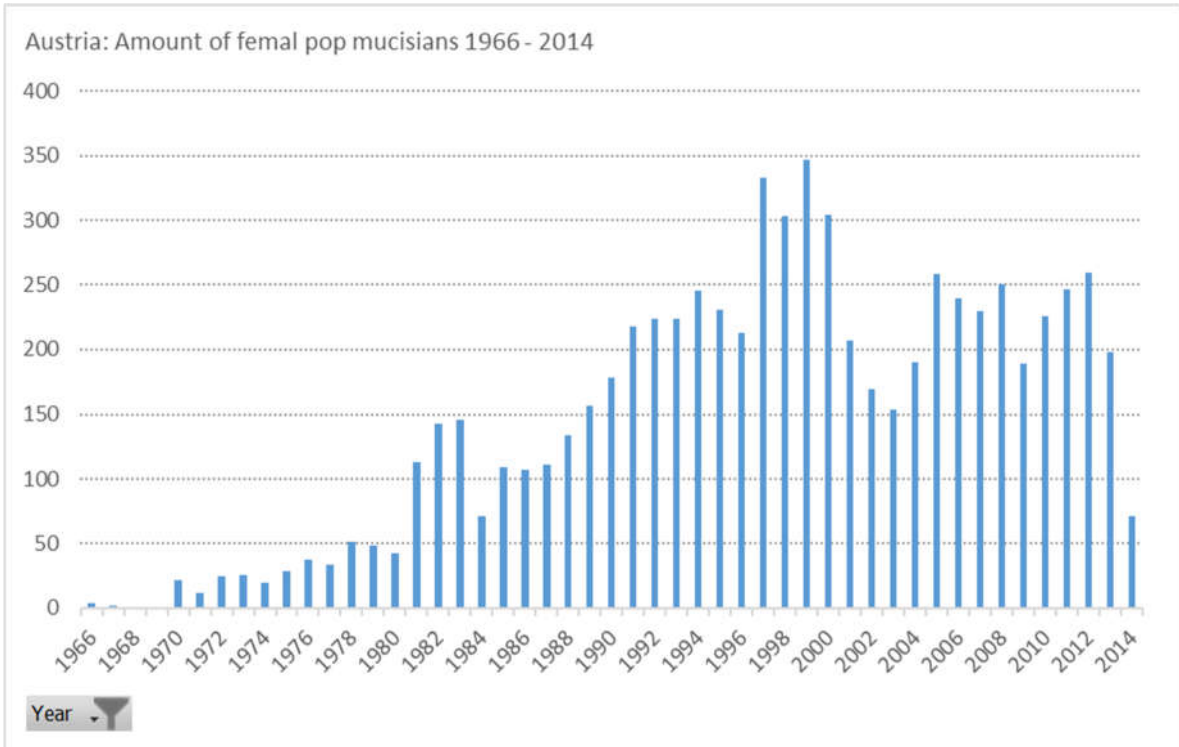


FIGURE 2.1-24: AMOUNT OF FEMALE POP MUSICIAN IN AUSTRIA 2014, ADAPTED FROM FEM.POP

The percentage of pop and electronic music is at around 29 %, purely electronic music (dance, experimental and electronic music) making up 14 % and pop (Austro pop, pop and Latin pop) constituting the remaining 15 %. Compared to the other major genres in Austria, pop and electronic music thus represent two of the most important ones. Other important genres are blues at 22 % (incl. blues rock), jazz (11 %) as well as rock and punk at 7 % each.

Based on the Austrian data, the percentage of women in the genres synth- and electro-pop cannot be established. Given the significant number of women who cre-

ate pop and electronic music, it can, however, be assumed that a large part of them also move in synth- and electro-pop circles.

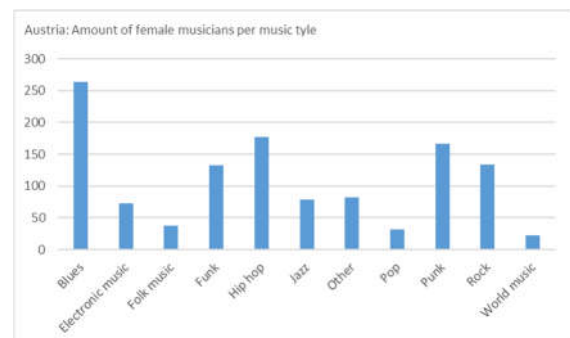


FIGURE 2.1-25: SHARE OF ELECTRONIC AND POP MUSIC IN AUSTRIA 2014, SOURCE FEM.POP

In order to better answer this question, the percentage of women in electronic music was examined.

### ***Women's percentage in synth- and electro-pop and electronic music***

In the UK and US charts women are traditionally more strongly represented compared to, for instance, Austria or Switzerland. For the US Billboard charts and the UK Official charts lists of the best-ranking women were compiled. The data go back as far as the 1980s and allow for statements to be made on the genres synth- and electro-pop as well as electronic music.

Female artists are attributed to synth- and electro-pop if they either call themselves synth- and electro-pop musicians, or are known for making use of that type of music. All artists were analysed by means of audio samples and musical compositions. They were evaluated based on whether their music can be classified as *electronic music/synth- and electro-pop*, or as *acoustic/less electronic music*. In addition, it was assessed whether the music can be better attributed to synth- and electro-pop, hip hop, pop or other genres.

Some US musicians produce synth- and electro-pop as well as dance music, however, the artists' information does not clarify whether they consider dance as EDM, dance pop or something else. Based on the audio samples it can be assumed that they mean synth- and electro-pop and dance pop. Seeing as dance pop is a descendant of synth-pop and disco and the artists are often attributed to synth- and electro-pop, dance is categorised as synth- and electro-pop, as are disco and Euro disco.

**USA:** Since the 2000s there has been a decline in the success of purely acoustic music production and a rise in electronic music production.

At the end of 2015, the percentage of electronic music compared to acoustic and less electronic music was at 50 %, the large percentage of acoustic and less electronic music mainly being a result of 1990s R&B, soul and the ever-popular country-music.

Combining all female musicians who, since the 1980s, have had continuous top-chart success in the USA paints a different picture: today around 52 % of female US-musicians belong to the genres of electronic music.

The question on the success of synth- and electro-pop in the USA will be answered by means of the subsequent analyses and illustrations. The curve peaks twice – once

for female musicians who began their careers in the 1980s, and once for those who started making music in the 2000s. For these artists, electronic music as well as

synth- and electro-pop are particularly important.

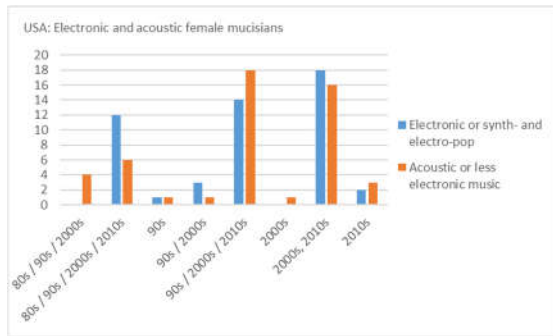


FIGURE 2.1-26: ELECTRONIC AND ACOUSTIC FEMALE MUSICIANS USA 2015, ADAPTED FROM 100 GREATEST WOMEN BILLBOARD

The US Billboard charts have always contained a considerable amount of country music, this being the reason for the continually high percentage of acoustic music as well as electric guitar. The 1990s were characterised by country, pop and rock music, electronic music having only a minor impact at the time.

The late 1990 and early 2000s saw yet another change in the music scene, implemented by R&B artists – most of whom were Black, female solo artists. The music of female R&B artists represents an important part of popular music in the USA.

The fact that R&B was influenced by electronic music and likes to dig in synth- and electro-pop's toolbox complicates distinction. Generally, it can be said that electronic music is quite important for the R&B genre. However, for the purpose of the analysis R&B will not be attributed to electronic music, seeing as the two styles are

too diverse and R&B would not fit in with the funky, fast-paced disco music.

To this day, synth- and electro-pop are two of the most successful and enduring music genres in women's pop history.

Female hip hop and dance musicians also use synth- and electro-pop to produce mixed-style music. One of the reasons for this might be the fact that hip hop and rap are not as popular as they used to be. Furthermore, as far as club music is concerned, dance genres are less interesting to hip hop artists compared to genres that can be listened to both at home and at the club. Accordingly, it is also a question of the economy.

From a female musician's point of view, electronic music and electronic production methods have become eminently important across a variety of styles. The influence of synth- and electro-pop has further increased in recent years, leading more and more women to focus on mixing dance, experimental, folk, grunge, hip hop, jazz, soul, pop and rock music with synth- and electro-pop.

The chart below shows how important synth- and electro-pop is for female artists in popular music in the USA, accounting for 27 % of the 100 most successful music productions by women alone. In addition, 15 % and 9 % of the pop

and hip hop artists respectively could – based on their style and on the audio samples – also be attributed to synth- and electro-pop.

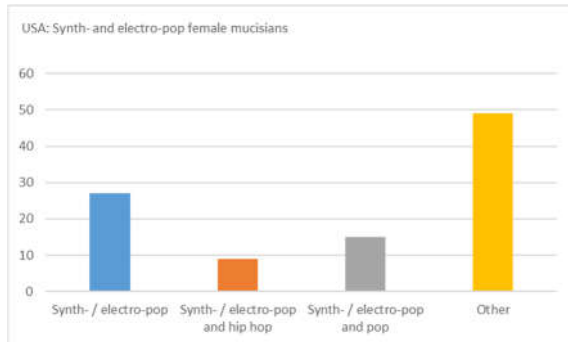


FIGURE 2.1-27: SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP FEMALE MUSICIAN USA 2015, ADAPTED FROM 100 GREATEST WOMEN BILLBOARD

These artists utilise electronic music-production facilities with synthesisers in order to produce popular music. Compared to other styles, and based on the song analysis, this means that approximately one in two songs between the 1980s and today was an electronic pop song by a female artist.

The most successful female pop artists from 1980 to 2015 came from synth- and electro-pop.

The results of the analysis of the most successful female artists as of the end of 2015 are best shown based on the US Billboard charts. Synth- and electro-pop artists *Madonna* (1980s to present) as number one and *Lady Gaga* (2000s to present) as num-

ber four are leaders of the board. In between, there are two pop and R&B singers – *Mariah Carey* in second and *Beyoncé* in third position.

Artist	#	Evaluation
Madonna	1	Synth-/ electro-pop
Mariah Carey	2	Other
Beyoncé	3	Synth-/electro-pop and pop
Lady Gaga	4	Synth-/ electro-pop
Adele	5	Other
W. Houston	6	Other
Janet Jackson	7	Synth-/electro-pop
Ch. Aguilera	8	Synth-/electro-pop and pop
Mary J. Blige	9	Other
P!nk	10	Synth-/electro-pop

TABLE 7: USA TOP 10 2015, ADAPTED FROM 100 GREATEST WOMEN BILLBOARD

Looking at the 20 most successful women in the US Billboard charts, the results are as follows: 45 % are synth- and electro-pop artists (incl. dance, Euro pop and disco), while 30 % of pop and 20 % of hip hop artists use electronic music (e.g. *Beyoncé*, *Christina Aguilera*, *TLC*, *Katy Perry* and *Missy Elliott*), at times with a strong mix of synth- and electro-pop. Beyoncé’s and Katy Perry’s music is so heavily mixed with synth- and electro-pop that they could basically be attributed to that category.



FIGURE 2.1-28: KATY PERRY, US POP SINGER, SOURCE PINTEREST.COM

**UK:** Since the 1980s there has been an increase in successful purely acoustic as well as electronic music productions. However, since the '90s, electronic music production has grown more than acoustic music.

The percentage of electronic music compared to acoustic or less electronic music was, as of the end of 2015, at 60 % compared to 40 %. The large share of electronic music consists predominantly of the British synth- and electro-pop from the '80s to the 2010s.

Combining all the musicians who have been ranking at the top ten of the UK charts since the 1980s paints an even clearer picture: today, about 66 % of British female musicians can be attributed to genres if electronic music.

The question on the success of synth- and electro-pop in the UK will be answered by means of the subsequent analyses and illustrations. Since their emergence, synth- and electro-pop have been important genres in the UK, their popularity steadily growing since the 1980s. Since that time, women's music also has been influenced by electronic music. Contrary to the USA, the percentage of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music is proportionate to that of purely acoustic music. In the UK, both groups are seeing an increase in popularity, however, this has been more strongly characterised by synth- and electro-pop and electronic music in recent years.

Unlike the USA and many other countries where rock and guitar music were generally the most popular genre in the 1990s, in the UK, synth- and electro-pop kept evolving continuously – albeit less quickly. The 2000s once more saw an increased number of female synth- and

electro-pop artists getting into the music market, which resulted in the UK's having a substantial, female synth- and electro-pop scene.

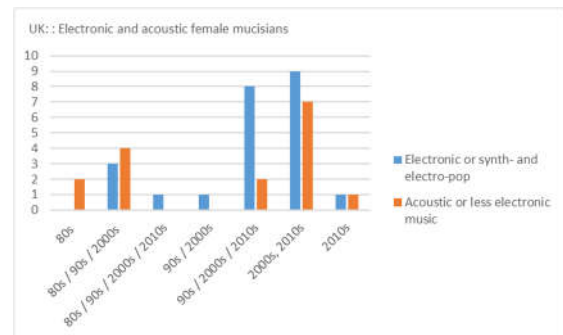


FIGURE 2.1-29: ELECTRONIC AND ACOUSTIC FEMALE MUSICIAN UK 2015, ADAPTED FROM FEMALE TOP 40 OFFICIAL CHARTS

The chart below shows how important synth- and electro-pop is for female artists in popular music in the UK, accounting for about 58 % of the 100 most successful music productions by women alone. In addition, 5 % and 1 % are pop and hip hop artists respectively who – based on their style and on the audio samples – make up a total of 65 % of female synth- and electro-

pop. What is striking is the small percentage of electronic hip hop which, in the UK, seems to be considerably less important than in the USA.

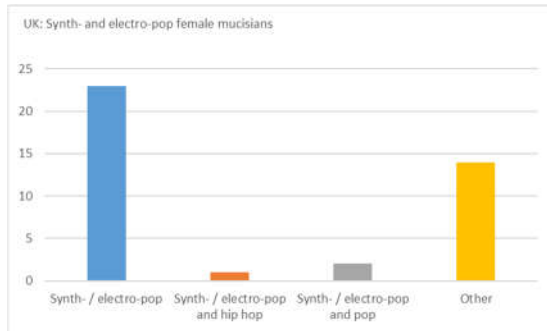


FIGURE 2.1-30: SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP FEMALE MUSICIAN UK 2015, ADAPTED FROM FEMALE TOP 40 OFFICIAL CHARTS

The results of the analysis of the most successful female artists as of the end of 2015 are best shown based on the UK Official charts. Synth- and electro-pop artists *Cher* (1970s to present, disco) at number one

and *Britney Spears* ('90s to present) at number three, as well as others like *Celine Dion*, the *Spice Girls* and *Rihanna*, are leaders of the board. Celine Dion appears twice because two of her songs are listed in the all-time charts. Other female pop artists also use electronic music (e.g. *Katy Perry* and *Nicki Minaj*), at times with a strong mix of synth- and electro-pop.

Artist	#	Evaluation
Cher	1	Synth-/electro-pop
Whitney Houston	2	Other
Britney Spears	3	Synth-/electro-pop
Celine Dion	4	Synth-/electro-pop
Adele	5	Other
Jennifer Rush	6	Other
Spice Girls	7	Synth-/electro-pop
Celine Dion	8	Synth-/electro-pop
Rihanna feat. C. Harris	9	Synth-/electro-pop
All Saints	10	Synth-/electro-pop

TABLE 8: UK TOP 10 2015, ADAPTED FROM FEMALE TOP 40 OFFICIAL CHARTS

### 2.2.6. Queer in electronic music

Especially disco and hi-NRG are often associated with the gay subculture of the 1970s and '80s. Generally speaking, this type of music stands for an emancipatory point in time as a cultural expression of the gay and Black movements. In addition, disco is known for its romantic utopia, which draws its power from the escape from everyday life marked by class relations, racism and homophobia. Due to the 'anti-disco movement' – starting in the UK in the late '70s and demonstrating against homosexuals as well as sexual and ethnic deviants in general – disco was, on the one hand, forced back into the gay club scene and, on the other hand, defined as 'gay music' and revised as a mainstream variation that lived on as dance music.

Hi-NRG – a direct descendant of disco, but faster, more powerful and with pulsating octave bass lines – is strongly associated with the gay club culture of the 1980s. As was the case with disco, it attracted a broad audience. Famous soul divas such as *Gloria Gaynor* and *Donna Summer* who grew up with disco date from that period (cf. Collins, Schedel, & Wilson, 2013, S. 95; Reitsamer & Weinzierl (HG.), 2006, S. 157f, 161f; Wikipedia, 2016j; Wikipedia, 2016u).

The connection between gay culture and synth- and electro-pop was forged by

1. Club culture in the late 1970s and early '80s, partly underground
2. Synth-pop and disco with electronic music-production facilities
3. Music produced with synthesisers
4. Mixing synth-pop with disco, which led to dance and electro-pop

In the early '80s, the mixture of homosexual club culture, synthesisers and danceable music piqued many a homosexual musician's interest in synth- and electro-pop. Artists like David Bowie, with his androgynous, creative and diverse style, further influenced gay musicians. Female synth- and electro-pop artists such as *Madonna*, *Kylie Minogue* and *Grace Jones* were, by

means of their music, directly connected to gay (club) culture. Moreover, their provocative and pulsating productions helped getting through to audiences. In turn, gay culture supports female artists, as electro-pop artist *Lady Gaga* (2009) confirms:

*“The turning point for me was the gay community. [...] I've got so many gay fans and they're so loyal to me and they really lifted me up. They'll always stand by me and I'll always stand by them. It's not an easy thing to create a fanbase. [...] Being invited to play <the San Francisco Pride rally>, that was a real turning point for me as an artist.”*

(Lady Gaga, 2009; quoted from Vena, 2009)

Although a noticeably large number of male synth- and electro-pop artists in the 1980s were homosexual, it was still a time when coming out could mean the end of one's career. Artists mostly sang about their relationships with women, but hardly ever about those with men. They certainly did not sing about relationships with both, let alone the same sex.

Even *MTV* avoided this confrontation in the '80s. Thus, they failed to address a whole

generation of listeners, seeing as video clips only promoted sexuality based on socially accepted standards (cf. Horst, 2011, S. 45f; Simon, 2016).

Famous gay bands of the '80s are, for instance: *Frankie goes to Hollywood*, *Bronski Beat*, *Marc Almond*, *Culture Club*, *Eraseur*, *Jimmy Sommerville* and *Pet Shop Boys* (cf. Simon, 2016).



FIGURE 2.1-31: PET SHOP BOYS, *ELECTRIC TOUR 2014*, ADAPTED FROM ESDEVLIN.COM

### 2.2.7. Queer in popular culture – a question of reception

The play with the mask, with different characters and genders was an important performance element not only for female synth- and electro-pop artists in the 1980s, but also for gay musicians. The question of reception, anti-authenticity as well as the discourse initiated by these artists will be examined in the following by means of the synth- and electro-pop duo *Pet Shop Boys*.

#### *The play with masks – Queering*

The *Pet Shop Boys* wrote lyrics about their sexual desires while, at the same, leaving room for interpretation. In their music, eroticism became a dance – perhaps verbally suppressed, but also directly accessing

physicality. Masculinity was shifted by defiance, irony and cynicism. The androgynous blending of femininity and masculinity and the play with different masks was achieved by lyrics like “*I find you when I want you, and lose you late at night. The*

*woman in me shouts out, the man in me just smiles.*” (*Why Don't We Live Together?*, 1986). Thus, their music reached both male and female audiences. Furthermore, the disregard for and the pluralisation of opinions encouraged a variety of styles which, in turn, facilitated the introduction of a new sensibility for camp. The definition of masculinity of the 1980s experienced a shift towards a postmodern future, thus creating a male androgyny which led to mainstream fashion and a shopping culture.

On the musical level, artists like the *Pet Shop Boys* continuously collaborated with Queer women or those close to Queering and the gay culture. They were, for instance, fascinated by the female camp artist *Dusty Springfield*, who has been using the mask as a creative element

since the '60s and today stands for a female Queer discourse between inhibition, ambiguity and the creation of identity (cf. Scott, 2009, S. 207f; Whiteley (HG.), 1997, S. 118-120; Simon, 2016).

*“[...] created a decidedly queer persona, while achieving popular success in a trendy milieu in which lesbianism, lacking the criminal status and thus the glamour of male homosexuality, remained invisible and unfashionable. Utilizing the tactics of camp, she adopted more visible (or conversely a female female impersonator) visually and a black woman vocally. In this manner she pushed accepted notions of femininity to absurd extremes.”* (Smith, 1999, S. xviii)

In his essay on the *Pet Shop Boys*, “Musicology, Masculinity and Banality”, *Stan Hawkins* states:

*“But it is precisely through a range of readings that various meanings are revealed. By disrupting stereotypical codes of gender and sexuality through a parody of artifice and masquerade that challenges patriarchy, these artists remind us that music can function as a key vehicle in deconstructing fixed notions of gendered identity in everyday life.”* (Whiteley (HG.), 1997, S. 118f)

### ***Authenticity and ambiguity***

According to Hawkins, the postmodern world of pop of the 1980s no longer allowed for real authenticity to be created by reality, but rather by being conscious of one's own anti-authenticity. In case of the

*Pet Shop Boys'* music, he sees this circumstance in a simultaneous ambiguity and superficiality, which he considers as genius. For *Hawkins* the staging is enhanced by the stimulating mood of the

songs. By means of a suppressed and precise, yet banal, language the *Pet Shop Boys* have distinguished themselves from the chauvinistic genres of popular music through their lyrics.

*Hawkins* further assumes that sexual otherness is expressed less through lyrics, videos or performances, and more directly through the music itself. He supports this statement by saying that pop music allows the listener to redefine, reject or restore sexual identity. Their progressive, even ambitious, lyrics enabled the *Pet Shop Boys* to musically express their understanding of masculinity, largely supplemented by music consumers and their definitions of man and woman.

Regarding masquerade, *Hawkins* mentions the subliminal ambiguity of the *Pet Shop Boys*' performances, however, he

does not deduce it directly from the lyrics, but rather, for instance, from the discrepancy between the music and the video. In the song *Domino Dancing* (1988) he shows, among other things, that the viewer sees two men fighting for a woman on the one hand, but that, on the other hand, two men fall obviously lovingly into each other's arms.

*Neil Tennant* (1993), singer of the *Pet Shop Boys* and former music journalist with UK magazine *Smash Hits* catapulted the postmodern notion of sexuality into a broader understanding by stating:

*"Our music is, and always has been, fueled by a strong sexual undertow. Pop music is partially about sex. The two things can't be divorced."* (Neil Tennant, 1993; quoted from *Melody Maker*, 1993)

Thus, everything was out in the open. Sexuality was open to be negotiated, redefined and reinterpreted. The music of the *Pet Shop Boys* remained accessible to groups and subcultures of both heterosexual and homosexual women and men (cf. Whiteley (HG.), 1997, S. 119-122, 130f).

### ***A Queer discourse through music***

When the *Pet Shop Boys* in the mid-1980s addressed the taboo topic sex in their song *West End Girls* (1986), the time seemed right. Whether it was intended or not, *West End Girls* marked the breakthrough of a duo of which at least the singer would come out as gay in the early '90s. Although the title might suggest otherwise, the song

contains indecent lyrics such as *"Which do you choose, a hard or soft option?"* By alluding to both male and female sex partners, the song shows that a preference for both sexes or for the same sex does not have to be a taboo.

Neil Tennant (2016) supported this message by saying that:

*“This is us doing gay disco — the words are completely about going to a club and picking up someone. [...] When we first started writing together Chris was very keen that we should write sleazy songs — it had never occurred to me before.”* (Neil Tennant, 2016; quoted from Simon, 2016)

As a result of this musical discourse in the 1980s, the male image in popular music

has experienced a considerable shift towards a more homosexual, erotic environment with versatile, at times confusing, male fetishizing.

Through music, and thus through the discourse on sexuality, gender and view of life, the Queer community found its place culture. Gay nightlife influenced club culture, whereas the play with androgyny had an impact on the whole electronic music scene (cf. Simon, 2016; Scott, 2009, S. 207f; Whiteley (HG.), 1997, S. 123f).

### **2.2.8. Comparison: socio-culture**

Synth- and electro-pop and electronic music benefitted from the emancipation of society, women and the Queer community. Had it not been for a change in thinking, abandoning stereotypes and the possibility of questioning role models, synth- and electro-pop and the electronic music most likely would not have become thus established.

#### ***Provocation and men***

In the 1980s an old-fashioned male image still shaped the Western world and popular music, although for the past one or two decades, the desire for a different, modern and equal society had been slowly germinating. However, not until the ‘80s – an era of technologizing and mass consumption as well as the emergence of new pop music – did the time seem right. Criticism of society was not only being expressed as part of the protest movements, but also in music. By differentiating synth- and electro-pop from rock music, a deliberate border was drawn between old and new. Critical lyrics, provocative video clips and erotic performances were created. Men, women and Queers all demanded new social structures.

#### ***Accepting women in popular music***

Female synth- and electro-pop artists were very important for pop music not only in the 1980s, but also in the 2000s and 2010s,

shaping pop culture in general and electronic music in particular. 1980s women managed – maybe due to protest or due to blending desire and play into an artful,

erotic form – to break free of stereotypes. Precisely those women created a space for later generations. Today, this space exists not only for synth- and electro-pop artists, but also for female musicians of other genres. Contemporary R&B, dance and pop artists are at times significantly more successful compared to their male colleagues. However, not only female artists benefitted from this, but also other women of subsequent generations. By questioning stereotypes in music and critically presenting or even reversing role models, synth- and electro-pop women have contributed a lot to the emancipation of both sexes.

### ***Electronic Queer music***

Without the Queer culture, the synth- and electro-pop market would be considerably smaller. Seeing as the source of synth- and electro-pop lies in dance and hi-NRG

– that is to say, in gay music – it is apparent that homosexual artists had a crucial influence on these genres. Furthermore, the Queer community is very loyal, supporting their idols in a unique and fascinating way. In synth- and electro-pop many gay artists found a means to question stereotypes, enabling the listener to define themselves through music and to explore new avenues. Gay club culture, Queer style and a change of perception made allowed for the definition of a new, flexible male image.

By contrast, one of the weaknesses of synth- and electro-pop is that only very few lesbian artists came out on top. Reasons for this might be the fact that synth- and electro-pop is generally held in high esteem by women, and that sexual categorisation seems to be less relevant for women compared to men.

### ***Queers and women***

The Queer and women's movements in the 1980s are closely connected – leaving old paths and wishing for a change of role models were omnipresent. It is possible that precisely due to those reasons, since the '80s, synth- and electro-pop has seen the development of a close collaboration between the two groups. The symbiosis born of the social discrimination experienced in the '80s would prove to be an advantage for the future.

While this is not to say that everything is fine nowadays, it is nonetheless a fact that Queer men and women still work closely together, sharing an interest in supporting the continued development of society. Genres such as synth- and electro-pop are predestined for this task. In future, further blending and stronger collaborations between these artists – with advanced production facilities, new trends, styles and subcultures – are necessary in order to continue to be successful and thus to keep passing on the message as creatively as they have been doing to this day.

### ***What about the women?***

New synth- and electro-pop artists such as *Lady Gaga*, *Carly Rae Jepsen*, *Robin*, *M.I.A.*, *Kesha* and *Sia*, as well as closely related pop and R&B artists including *Katy Perry*, *Beyoncé* and *Rihanna*, are an important addition to the upper echelons of popular music. These musicians are complemented by purely pop and *Schlager* artists like *Adele*, *Helene Fischer* and *Taylor Swift*. Although this not a sign of female supremacy, there is certainly more acceptance of female musicians as main act. The most creative artist with socio-critical potential of recent years is electro-pop artist *Lady Gaga*, while the probably most famous riot band is the punk ensemble *Pussy Riot*. Expressively socio-critical synth- and electro-pop artists who have been famous for decades are *Madonna*, *Grace Jones* and *Annie Lennox* of *Eurythmics*.

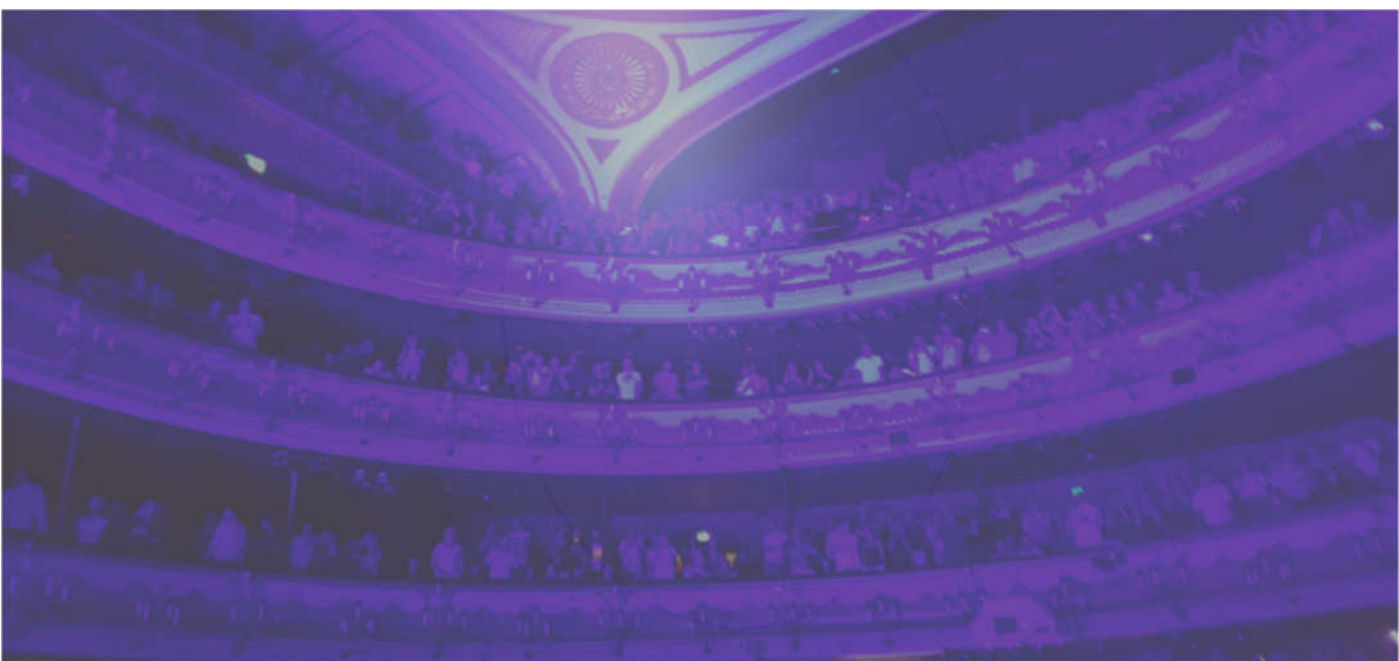


FIGURE 2.1-32: CONCERT HALL 2016, OWN PHOTO

## 2.3. SUCCESS FACTOR ECONOMY

What would popular music be without the audience? What would any music be without concerts? Not only did the music business see increased profits from performances and gigs in recent years, audiences' preferences also have become more complex and modern. Electronic music and synth- and electro-pop gigs are staged, theatrical mega-shows that generate the artist a nice pay cheque. Although not everyone can make it to success, the concert scene receives substantial government funding in order to ensure a broad, cultural variety, for instance, in Switzerland.

### 2.3.1. Listeners' music preferences

Tastes differ, also regarding music. Nevertheless, an analysis of music preferences in Europa and the USA shows that there are certain tendencies.

#### *Music preferences in Switzerland*

In 2008, an analysis of the music preferences of the Swiss population, carried out by the *Federal Statistical Office* (2011) revealed that one in four music consumers is primarily interested in pop and rock music (cf. S. 34-36, 38). In second place was classical music, followed by jazz, blues and soul, with dance, house and techno coming fourth.

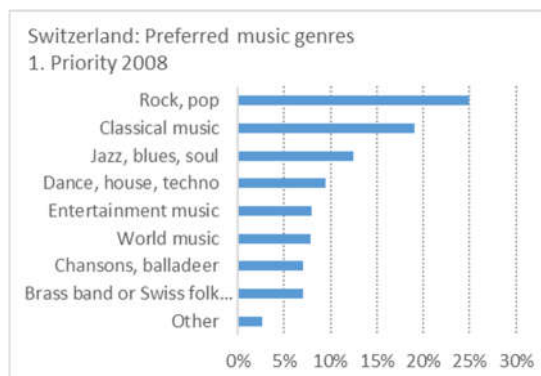


FIGURE 2.1-33: PREFERRED MUSIC, CULTURAL BEHAVIOUR SWITZERLAND 2008, SOURCE SWISS FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE 2011, S.34

With regard to the population's secondary preferences, the statistic shows that jazz, blues and soul in first place are only a fraction ahead of pop and rock music, while classical music takes third place.

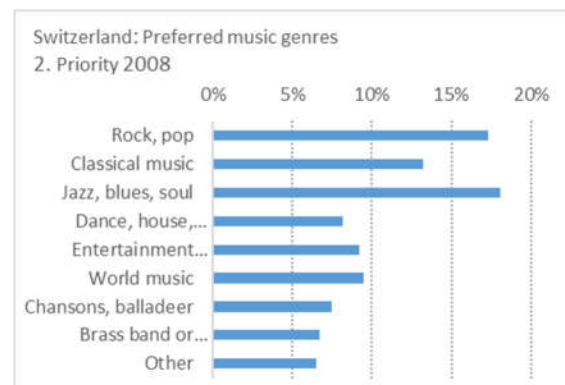


FIGURE 2.1-34: PREFERRED MUSIC, CULTURAL BEHAVIOUR SWITZERLAND 2008, SOURCE SWISS FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE 2011, S.34

Unfortunately, there was no distinction of the individual genres within the categories, meaning that synth- and electro-pop cannot be analysed in terms of preference. It

is apparent, however, that pop and rock music, together with electronic music, take the lion's share regarding the most popular genres (ca. 35 %). By combining this result with the knowledge that some of the pop and dance music could probably also be classified as synth- and electro-pop or any related style, it becomes clear that these genres are most likely of great importance in Switzerland.

When considering people's age, the study revealed rock and pop music to be the overall most popular genres with ages 15 to 59. Furthermore, electronic music coming in second place with ages 15 to 29 shows that the younger the respondents, the higher the popularity of electronic music. Older generations might not be familiar with dance, house and techno, which could complicate evaluation.

Regarding the often discussed educational background – which is said to be lower with pop and rock audiences compared to classical music listeners – the statistical differences are negligible (tertiary education 2008: classical 28.4 %, pop and rock 27.2 %). Even with regard to a higher educational level classical and pop/rock music remained the most popular genres. The difference between the two appears, among other things, to be due to the fact

that, based on their age, younger listeners are yet to reach that high an educational level.

According to the FSO, the present statistic, which dates back to 2008, is soon to be replaced by a new one. Based on the existing data and current demand, it can be assumed that the new statistic will reveal audiences of pop, rock and electronic music – and thus also synth- and electro-pop – to have increased in the intervening years.

### ***Music preferences in Germany***

The *German Music Information Centre* (2015b) examined the most popular music genres and styles in the years 2010 to 2014 by comparing each genre in relation to the overall turnover. English and German pop music makes up 37 % of the entire market, followed by rock music with a share of over 20 %. Classical music only comes in sixth place in the statistic.

As was the case in Switzerland, the shares of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music are not listed and thus cannot be evaluated. Furthermore, it is not clear whether EDM and dance pop are attributed to the category dance (3 %). Seeing as no audio samples could be examined, no further statements can be made on this analysis.

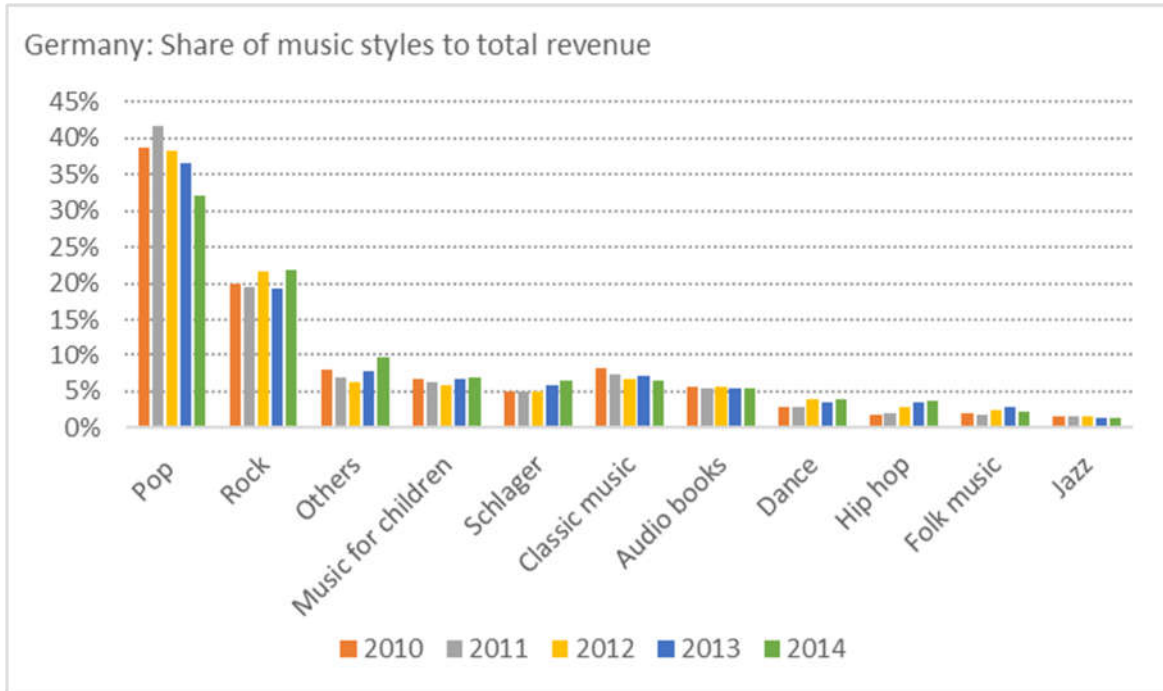


FIGURE 2.1-35: SHARE OF MUSIC STYLES TO TOTAL REVENUE 2010-2014, SOURCE GERMAN MUSIC INFORMATION CENTER 2015

In Germany, between 2006 and 2015, the popularity of pop and rock music increased with all age groups – including ages 50 to 70. Thus, for instance, 26 % more of the 60- to 69-year-olds listen to pop and rock music compared to 2006. German-language pop and rock music did not increase in popularity as much as English-language music (25 % compared to 29 %), whereby English-language pop and rock is more popular with men (> 6 %) than women (> 2 %) (cf. German Music Council, 2015a; German Music Council, 2015d).

### Music preferences in the USA

In the USA, audiences seem to be quite volatile regarding their preferred music genres. However, some general observation may still be made – for instance, the fact that pop and rock music are the most listened-to genres.

Alternative, modern and indie rock experienced a considerable popularity increase in 2015. Country music's share, on the other hand, has continuously declined in recent years, even falling below hip hop – which, since 2012, has been the least preferred genre. Classical music was not

considered for the analysis (cf. The NPD Group, 2012; The NPD Group, 2013; MusicWatch, 2014; MusicWatch, 2015).

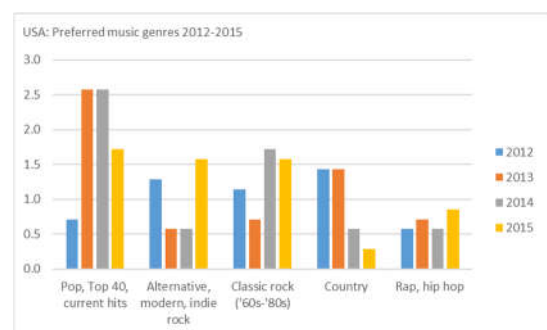


FIGURE 2.1-36: MUSIC CONSUMER PROFILE USA 2012-2015, ADAPTED FROM THE NPD GROUP, MUSIC WATCH AND RIAA

The *Nielsen Company's* (2016) annual report 2015 also lists rock music as the most listened-to music, followed by R&B, hip hop and pop music (vgl. S. 10). Both the *Nielsen* and the *MusicWatch* analyses should be viewed critically, seeing as, for instance, *Nielsen's* (2015) fourth quarterly report lists pop music in first place, whereas rock and alternative only come ninth and 15<sup>th</sup> respectively (cf. S. 13). Moreover, an article in *Music Business Worldwide* (2015) points out that the *Nielsen* report categorises rock music across too broad a spectrum, spanning from heavy metal to pop music in the widest sense.

The significant fluctuations to which the *NPD Group* and *MusicWatch* data are subject cannot be explained. It remains to be seen how the report is developed and expanded over the coming years – after all, it has only been available in conjunction with

the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) since 2012.

Based on the available, far from exact data, no statement on the popularity of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music can be made at this point. Furthermore, the US data have a different focus compared to the European ones. While in Europe, customer behaviour is measured according to music genres, US surveys assess behaviour by focusing on the charts and on each decade.

### ***Music preferences in the UK***

Unfortunately, for the British music market no data concerning consumer behaviour and music preferences could be obtained. Analyses carried out by *PWC*, *Deloitte* and the music industry evaluate, among other things, digital music behaviour, the market shares of the British music industry and the importance of British culture, none of which will be analysed for the purpose of this thesis.

### **2.3.2. Consumers' concert preferences**

The concert scene has changed considerably in recent years. While for some music genres concerts have always played a major role, there are those, such as synth- and electro-pop, which have long been regarded as being less important for the stage. After concerts experienced a decrease in demand during the 1980s, since the 2000s and 2010s the concert market for popular music has once again been growing significantly across all genres. In the following, the Swiss and German concert scenes shall be analysed.

### Concert preferences in Switzerland

In 2008, classical music concerts were visited most, with a share of 30 %. It is assumed that classical music is particularly suited for the concert hall and that therefore such concerts continue to reach a high percentage. Pop and rock concert amounted to a share of around 27 %, while dance, house and techno events made up 13 %. Cumulatively, rock and pop combined with dance, house and techno took the lion's share of concert visits even in 2008 (cf. Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2011, S. 34-37).

Seeing as the concert market for popular music has grown significantly in recent years, it can be assumed that, in the FSO's next analysis (2016), rock and pop music will have superseded classical music – as was already confirmed by initial results of a survey in 2014 (cf. S. 8). It can further be assumed that concert visits for electronic music will have increased (cf. Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2016, S. 8; Rogers, 2013, S. 111f).

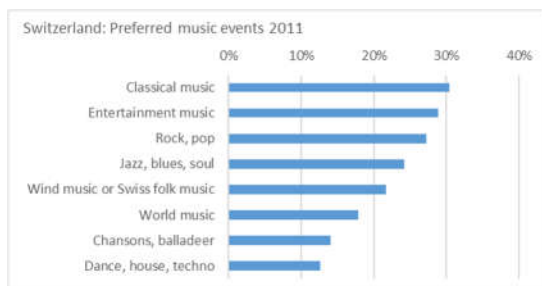


FIGURE 2.1-37: KEY FIGURES TO MUSIC EVENTS IN SWITZERLAND 2008, SOURCE SWISS FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE 2011, S.38

### Concert preferences in Germany

Based on revenue, most concerts visited in Germany are musicals, followed by pop and rock events, with classical music and opera / operetta in third and fourth place. The list compiled by the *German Music Information Centre* (2011) does not clarify to which category music festivals are attributed. Furthermore, for certain genres, such as dance, techno and house, the analysis does not contain reliable figures.

In Germany, visits to jazz, rock and pop concerts as well as classical performances have been increasing since the 1980s. Jazz, rock and pop music experienced the most significant growth, the number of visits to popular music and jazz concerts lying level with musical theatre in 2010 as well as in 2011. By contrast, visits to traditional folk music and *Schlager* events have decreased noticeably (cf. German Music Information Center, 2011; German Music Council, 2015c).

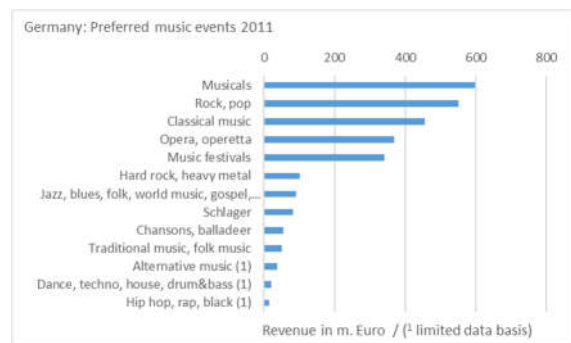


FIGURE 2.1-38: KEY FIGURES TO MUSIC EVENTS IN GERMANY 2011, SOURCE GERMAN MUSIC INFORMATION CENTER 2012

**Madonna’s 120 Million Dollar Deal**

In 2007, synth- and electro-pop artist Madonna signed a ten-year contract with concert organiser *Live Nation* for three albums, concerts and advertising rights totalling 120 million US dollars. Assuming that, as is customary, 90 % of ticket sales went to the artist, *Live Nation* would have made USD 18.57 million on concerts (out of USD 200 million), with Madonna’s share amounting to around USD 186 million. In addition, there would have been the proceeds from advance payments as well as album sales (cf. Pitt, 2010, S. 73).

The live industry has become an important element of the music business and for popular music groups. Many festivals, events and concerts are being played – a trend that does not appear to be breaking soon – and there are more and more opportunities for gigs and performance. Current concert structures, however, are to be regarded differently compared to the past. Nowadays, concerts are stand-alone events; they no longer serve to promote the sale of recorded music by first releasing the album and then playing a series of gigs. Today, it is rather the other way round – a new release is used to promote a concert tour (cf. Wikström, 2013, S. 140ff).

	Million USD	
Advance for artist	17.5	
Advance for 3 albums	50-60	
Ad rights for tour	50	cash & stock
Proceeds Tour	90 %	Madonna
	10 %	Live Nation
Proceeds license artist’s image	50/50	split

FIGURE 2.1-39: EXCERPT OF CONTRACT LIVE NATION AND MADONNA, SOURCE L. PITT, 2010, S.71

### 2.3.3. Promotion of culture in pop, rock and electronic music

Amateur cultural organisations as well as promoters of cultural events do not subsidise pop and rock music. With regard to the chart below, it is also necessary to add that, in addition to the small *Prix Walo*, there is a great *Prix Walo*, which covers all music genres and does not receive any funding from the mentioned incentives.

Subsidised musical societies	Type	Genre	Amount CHF
Arosa Culture	Music academy	Classical	35,000
Wind Music Association CH	Music week and <i>Prix Musique</i>	Wind music	48,000
House of Folk Music	Music camp	Folk music	10,000
Jeunesses Musicales CH	Orchestra traineeship children, teens	Classical	13,000
Youth Symphony Orchestra	Swiss youth symphony orchestra	Classical	45,000
Youth Choir CH	Concert season	Classical	50,000
Youth Music Orchestra	Swiss youth music competition	Classical	100,000
Show Scene Switzerland	Small <i>Prix Walo</i>	Folk music	39,000
Suzuki Association	European conference	Classical	40,000
Association Helvetia Rockt	Band workshops for women	Pop, rock	37,000
Association Jolimont Musique	Music camp	Classical	15,000
Association Orpheus concerts	Chamber music competition	Classical	5,000
Association Showband CH	Season 2015	Wind music	53,000
Association Superar Suisse	Children's orchestra concerts	Classical	25,000
<b>Total subsidies</b>			<b>515,000</b>
Share rock, pop			7 %
Share classical			64 %
Share folk music			10 %
Share wind music			20 %

TABLE 9: SWISS MUSICAL SPONSORSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENT IN SWITZERLAND 2014, SOURCE SWISS FEDERAL AGENCY FOR CULTURE, ANNUAL REPORT, S.31

In addition to these figures, in 2014, the Swiss federation used around 17 % of the CHF 2.7 million incentives to subsidise associations of musical professionals that are active across various genres (cf. Federal Office of Culture, 2015, S. 26, 31-33).

Subsidised musical institutes (professional creative artists)	Amount CHF
Association musical creators and artists Switzerland (Action Swiss Music)	70,000
Swiss Music Syndicate (SMS)	70,000
Swiss Music Association (SMV)	120,000
Swiss Sound Artists Association (STV)	200,000
<b>Subsidies music</b>	<b>460,000</b>
% compared to rest of funding	17 %
<b>Total subsidies of all professional association in different cultural areas</b>	<b>2,694,000</b>

TABLE 10: SPONSORSHIP OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS WITHIN DIFFERENT CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN SWITZERLAND 2014, SOURCE SWISS FEDERAL AGENCY FOR CULTURE, ANNUAL REPORT, S.26

### 2.3.4. Comparison: economy

Not only the music of the 1980s, but also the concert and club culture have experienced a revival. While nowadays numerous '80s themed parties are being organised, at the same time, countless new festivals, concerts and events are being held in public spaces. Among other things, the music played at such events also depends on audiences' preferences.

#### ***Music preferences USA to Europe***

The majority of people listen to rock and pop music – depending on the continent, they prefer rock (USA) or pop music (Europe). In the USA, pop music was the most popular music between 2013 and 2015, although so-called old rock – i.e. styles from the 1960s – such as rock 'n' roll continue to be in high demand. In Europe, in addition to pop and rock, classical music is a much listened-to genre. Furthermore, EDM – although a relatively new genre – is also already quite popular, depending on the country. Especially with audiences aged 20 to 60, pop and electronic music take the lion's share of popularity.

For the genres synth- and electro-pop this means that they can presumably also be counted among the most listened-to music. This assumption is based on the fact that not only have synth- and electro-pop been favoured during the 1980s, but they have also featured on the charts ever since the 2000s and 2010s. Consequently, synth- and electro-pop are some of the most popular music genres both in the USA and Europe, with famous artists such as *Lady Gaga*, *Sia*, *Madonna*, *Hurts*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Depeche Mode*, *Pet Shop Boys* and many more.

#### ***Concert preferences USA to Europe***

In Germany and Switzerland, people mostly visited classical performances, musicals or rock and pop concerts. In Switzerland, in 2014, more than one in four people went to a rock or pop concert, while one in five went to a classical one. In Germany, in 2011, musicals were visited the most, followed by rock and pop concerts. Whether these statistics will turn out the same for 2016 is doubtful.

In the 2010s thus far, rock and pop concerts are the most popular form of live entertainment for the Swiss and the Germans alike. Given the fact that, in recent years, many synth- and electro-pop artists have been touring and these genres are currently in high demand, it can be assumed that synth- and electro-pop concerts are popular as well. In addition, according to concert organiser *Live Nation*, electronic music is an emerging market (cf. Godard, 2015). It can thus be further assumed that EDM and DJ concert are also a popular form of entertainment of the 2010s.

### **Music promotion in Switzerland**

Music promotion in Switzerland currently offers hardly any funding to pop and rock music, as it generally focuses on subsidising classical music, choirs, traditional folk music and wind music.

In this regard, there might be potential for synth- and electro-pop and electronic music. If these genres contribute significantly to music, society and art, specific funding by the Swiss government would be required. Regarding the extent to which other states promote popular music, unfortunately, nothing can be said.

The analyses carried out reveal that Swiss popular music has gained but little popularity on the global music market. Hardly

any Swiss acts reach the top of the examined charts. Moreover, the analysis of the ten highest-ranking songs from 2010 to 2015 shows only one Swiss artist to appear on the annual top ten – *DJ Antoine*, who relied on collaborations with other artists. However, even *DJ Antoine* had his two top-ten hits as a house and dance-pop artists (and thus related to electro-pop) only in Switzerland.

Given these factors, increased subsidies for electronic music and synth- and electro-pop, particularly in other countries, would be essential.

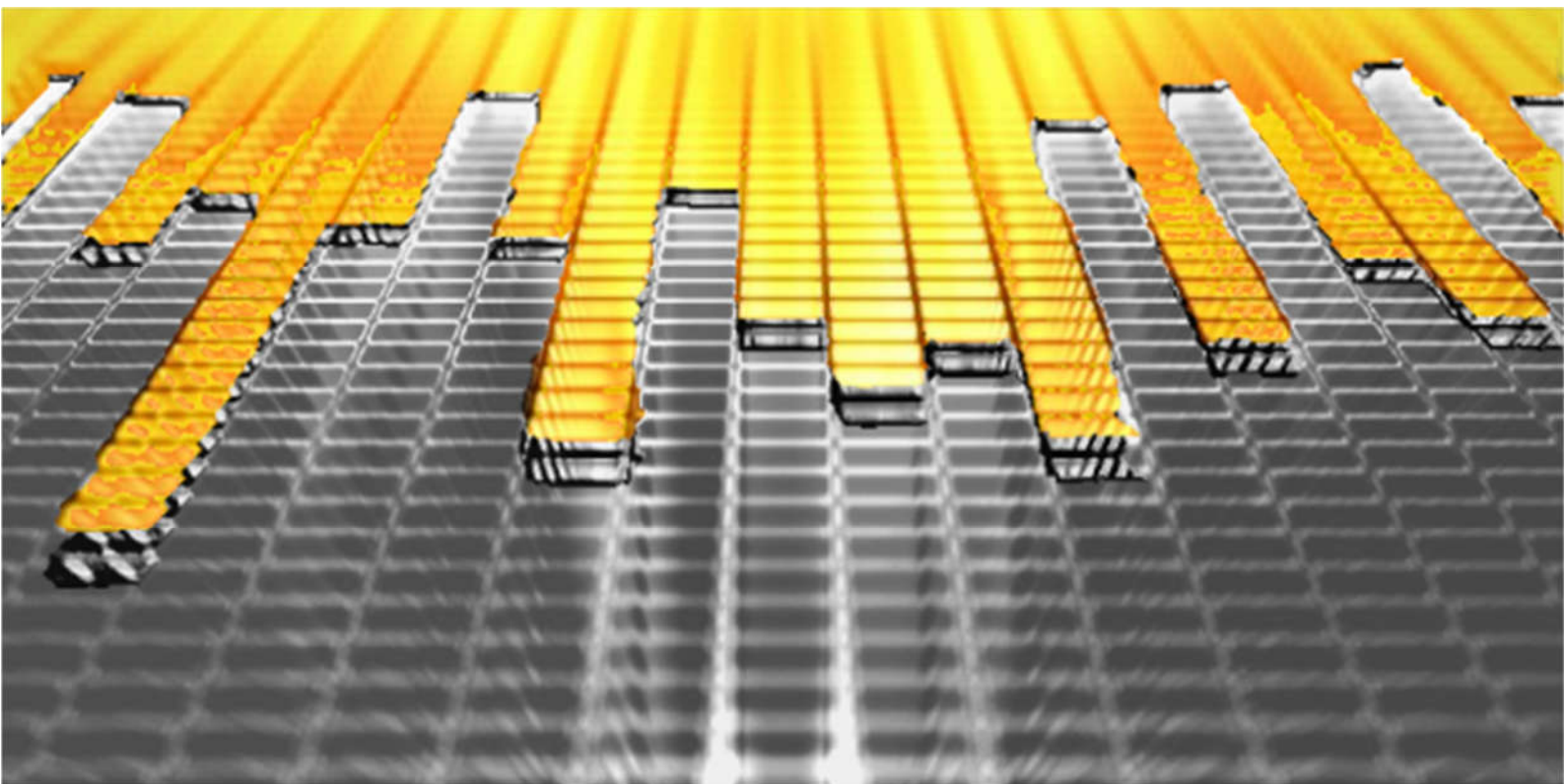


FIGURE 2.1-40: MUSIC DATA, OWN ILLUSTRATION

### 3. SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

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Since the 2000s, synthesiser music and the genres synth- and electro-pop have been experiencing a renaissance of superlatives. Not only did numerous young artists devote themselves to these genres, but also many established musicians began making synth- and electro-pop. What is more, these genres continue to represent provocative creativity, subliminal eroticism and an ironic and distanced, but all the while critical anti-authenticity. Synth- and electro-pop have seen such an increase in popularity in recent years precisely because this kind of music would not have its dreams of openness, change and renewal be crushed – not even by commercialisation and the mass media – but retained its sense of pleasure and play.

#### 3.1. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

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The blending of women, Queer and social deviants with new, electronic music styles in the 1980s led to a plethora of potentials. These strong points instigated a postmodern, musical and social evolution which is nowadays as much in demand as ever. Although clarifying whether this development is connected with the current social changes, movement of the masses and general unrest was not part of the present thesis, there is no denying that today, once again, popular music is being shaped by a strong desire for change and an opening of society

##### ***Importance and acceptance of synthesisers and synth- and electro-pop***

An analysis of the charts in Switzerland, Germany, the UK and the USA was carried out to elaborate the importance of synthesisers as well as the genres synth- and electro-pop for music in the 2010s. A corpus was compiled, containing the ten top-ranking songs in each country from 2010 to 2015, thus providing 240 songs for juxtaposition. Although there were certain disparities regarding the different language

areas and continents, the comparison nevertheless yielded valid results and tendencies.

With regard to the popularity of synth- and electro-pop as well as electronic music-production facilities in the USA and Europe (based on the largest music markets), it can be concluded that both synthesisers and synth- and electro-pop are very important (status *very important*, 50 %, see chart below).

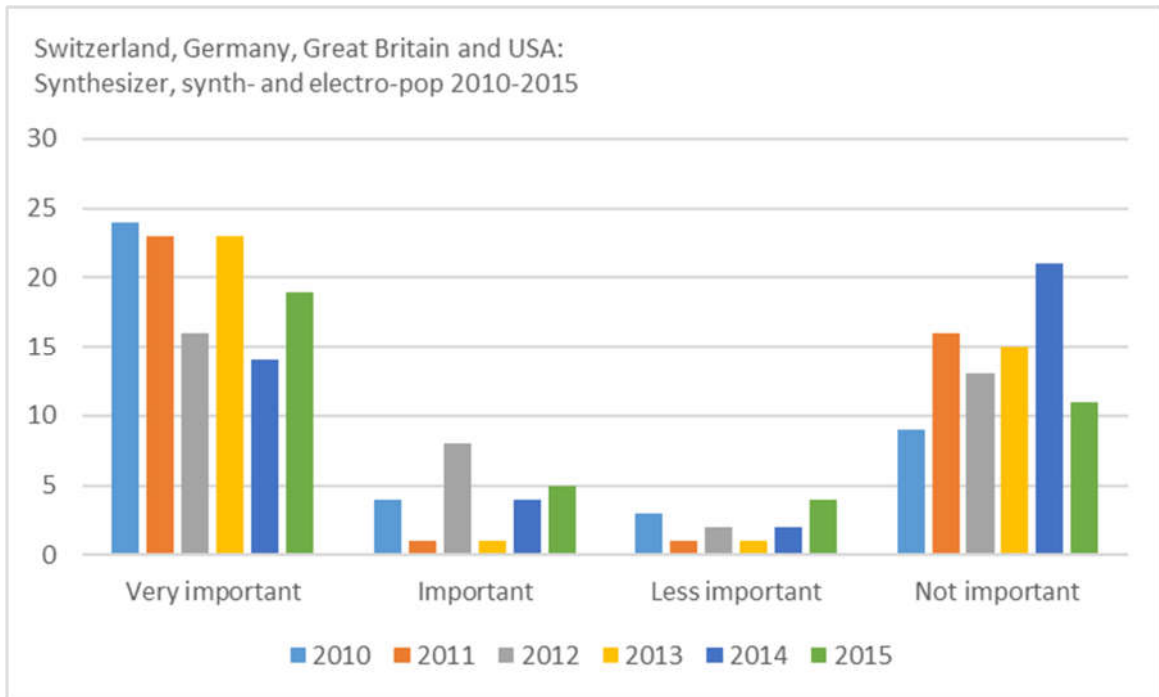


FIGURE 3-1: OVERALL COMPARISON SWITZERLAND, GERMANY, GREAT BRITAIN AND USA, IMPORTANCE OF SYNTHESIZER, SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP 2010-2015, OWN ILLUSTRATION

Synthesizers are thus used by many artists of different genres not only as an important instrument for both melody and backing, but also as an effect instrument. Despite the wide dissemination of electronic music, acoustic music (status *not important*, 35 %) perseveres as a sort of antipode. In addition of the general acceptance of electronic instruments and music-production facilities, many synth- and electro-pop artists achieved high popularity, belonging to the top-ranking musicians on the charts since the 1980s.

### **Women electronic music**

Apart from a general analysis of different charts of the 2010s, the status of women in synth- and electro-pop was examined. A comparison of the *All-time Best Female Artists* charts in the USA and UK from 1980 to 2015 provided a corpus of 140 songs for the analysis. The results revealed several synth- and electro-pop musicians (incl. dance, disco and dance pop) among the top-ranking artists. Across the USA and Europe (analysis based on the two largest music markets) the status of female synth- and electro-pop artists in popular music

appears to be quite significant for the 1980s as well as the 2010s (36 %). Moreover, music production with electronic tools has become important for artists across countless genres (19 %). However, female artists also retained the means to produce acoustic and less electronic music. Thus, this group of artists remains quite large, especially in the USA (45 %). Genres using less electronic instruments are, for instance, soul, folk, reggae, metal, blues, jazz and rock music – although the latter regularly utilises electronic tools.

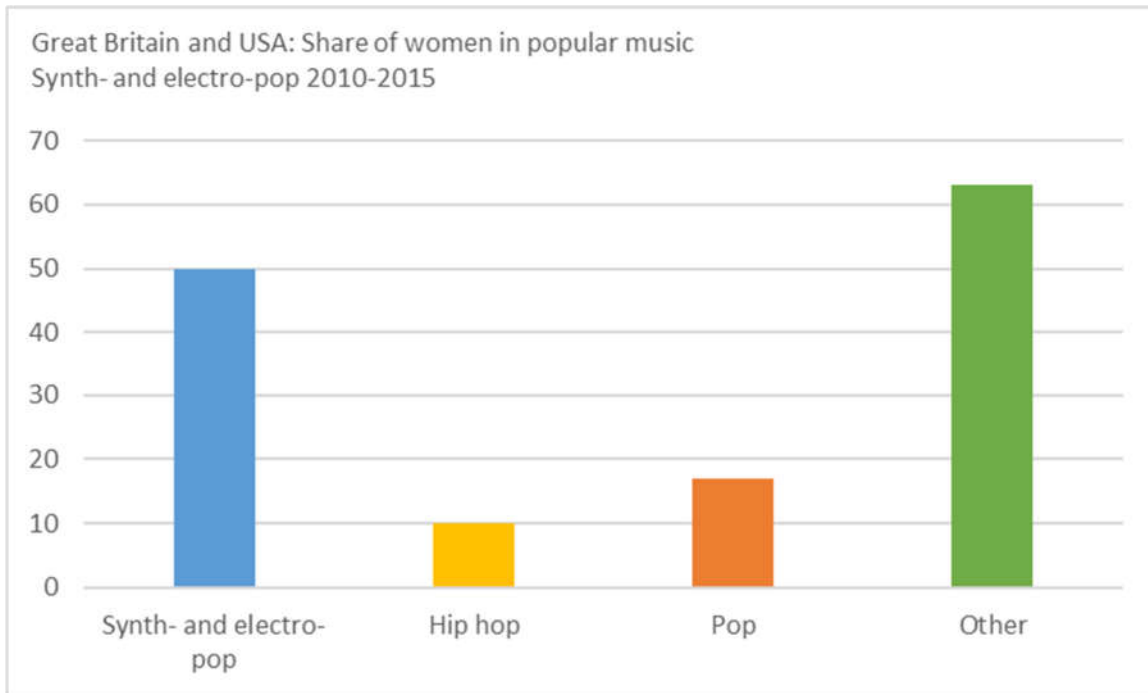


FIGURE 3-2: OVERALL COMPARISON GREAT BRITAIN AND USA: SHARE OF WOMEN IN SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP VERSUS OTHER MUSIC GENRES 2010-2015, OWN ILLUSTRATION

When evaluating the data, one must keep in mind that female synth- and electro-pop artists were also active in other genres. This needs to be pointed out, seeing as a blending of the genres exacerbated the clear distinctions required for the purpose of this thesis. As a result, more detailed elaborations could only be made by means of audio samples.

### ***Women in popular music***

The erotic, provocative discourse sought by many synth- and electro-pop artists resulted in traditional female and male images to be critically questioned. Quite deliberately, women put themselves artistically in a man's position in order to stage new role models. By using masks and openly displaying their lust for the game, they showed that women also have needs they wish to express. These women thus initiated a playful, amused discourse on gender/sex and society, which created spaces, emancipation and a shift in stereotypes for subsequent generations of women.

### ***Queer in popular music***

Subcultures from the Black and Queer scenes also had an impact on 1980s music. Numerous homosexual artists dedicated themselves to synth- and electro-pop, consciously creating music that was ambiguous, provocative and questioning of role models. These artists not only initiated a discourse on a new acceptance of the homosexual community, but also promoted the emergence of a more flexible, androgynous male image. This new male image, that is to say, the expanded space for a different masculinity, also supported women's interests. Given the increased interest in a modern masculinity and by acknowledging male needs,

the female image was relieved of some of the pressure regarding sexual and social terms.

However, although there are many successful gay synth- and electro-pop artists in the music business, only a few lesbian musicians became famous. While the reasons for this might lie in women's wide acceptance in synth- and electro-pop, as well as in a lower interest in categorising sexual orientation, it would nonetheless be nice to see more lesbian synth- and electro-pop artists.

### ***Anti-authenticity and eroticism***

In the postmodern discourse, anti-image as well as the critical questioning of one's individuality and dominant social standards are essential. Real authenticity can only be achieved in the postmodern world by creating anti-authenticity – which is precisely what many 1980s synth- and electro-pop artists did. They instigated an erotic, at times subliminal and ironic, questioning of the current situation. Distanced and almost coolly, they positioned themselves as an antipode to rock music, thus enabling synth- and electro-pop to address a wider circle of people compared to rock and rock music.

The elements of anti-idol and distancing prevailed and continue to be characteristics of the synth- and electro-pop artists even of the current decade.

### ***Performance and staging***

Perfect staging as well as elaborate storylines in their video clips and on stage opened up new ways to perform for synth- and electro-pop artists. The fact that their music was less suited for stage – and, what is more, that many artists deliberately opposed to performance for being 'too rock 'n' roll' – led to the emergence of theatrical, medial music shows filled with stories and eroticisms that prevail to this day.

### ***Dance, home listening and club culture***

Synth- and electro-pop is music that is suited both for dancing and home listening, with each single release containing various danceable songs. As a result of this blending of active and passive behaviour, this type of music addresses wider audiences and can thus cover more versatile needs. Even today, the music community is constantly asking for a mix.

What is more, the 1980s saw the emergence of club culture – a means for the young generation to distinguish themselves from the rest of society. Homosexual culture had an influence on heterosexual clubs, while women protested against stereotypes. All this created an unknown, danceable world with new rules and ways of behaving. Club culture promoted synth- and electro-pop – not least because it could profit from them.

Unfortunately, this fellowship of dancers was not able to change all role models, nor

break down all prejudices, and thus, over the years, new obstacles were put in their path. For instance, as far as contemporary EDM is concerned, both female and Queer artists are once more underrepresented – which might be one of the reasons as to why synth- and electro-pop are not as popular as they used to be.

**Music preferences and concert visits**

Of the most popular music genres of the current decade in Switzerland, Germany and the USA, pop music is the most listened-to, followed by rock and classical music. EDM, on the other, has a smaller audience, coming in fourth place.

An analysis of music and concert preferences in Switzerland and Germany revealed that classical music and musicals continue to be quite popular. However, in the 2010s, they were superseded by pop and rock music’s increased following. In addition, the live market for EDM, rock and pop music continues to grow – for EDM, in particular, concert organisers see major possibilities that are as yet unexploited. Seeing as synth- and electro-pop are among the most listened-to genres of the current decade, it can be assumed that this type of music is also popular for concerts, and that there is further potential for these genres.

**Comparison of the success factors entertainment, socio-culture and economy**

The question was divided into the success factors entertainment, socio-culture and economy. The chart below juxtaposes all the important results from rock to pop music. Seeing as synth- and electro-pop are more closely associated with pop music – although the genres use strong electronic elements – the comparison is based on the factors for rock, pop, EDM, synth- and electro-pop.

Rock music	Pop music	Synth-/electro-pop	EDM
<b>Success factor economy</b>			
<b>Audience’s listening habits</b>			
Audience’s 2 <sup>st</sup> music priority (can also be 1 <sup>st</sup> priority)	Audience’s 1 <sup>st</sup> music priority	1 <sup>st</sup> priority music, based on charts	Audience’s 3 <sup>rd</sup> music priority
Concert music 1 <sup>st</sup> priority	Concert music 1 <sup>st</sup> priority	Concert music 1 <sup>st</sup> priority (based on charts)	Concert music 1 <sup>st</sup> priority (after classical & musical)
Hardly any subsidies	Hardly any subsidies	Hardly any subsidies	Hardly any subsidies
<b>Queer women’s music</b>			
Queer not important	Queer less important	Queer very important	Queer rather important
Women not important (hardly any all-female bands)	Women less important until ca. 2010, after that rather important	Women very important	Women less important
<b>Success factor entertainment</b>			
<b>Music production and instruments</b>			
More acoustic music	Acoustic and electronic music	Electronic and some acoustic music	Electronic music
Synthesiser not important	Synthesiser important (since New Wave, 1970s)	Synthesiser very important since 1970s – ‘80s	Synthesiser very important since 1950s

Electric guitar very important	Electric guitar important/very important	Electric guitar not important/important	Electric guitar not important
<b>Entertainment, music dissemination and communication</b>			
TV shows less important	TV shows very important	TV shows very important	TV shows less important
Video clip less important	Video clip (very) important	Video clip very important	Video clip important
Internet, new media important	Internet, new media very important	Internet, new media very important	Internet, new media very important
Home listening	Home listening	Dance and home listening	Dance
Concerts very important	Concerts very important	Concerts important	Concerts less important
Festivals very important	Festivals very important	Festivals very important	Festivals very important
Hardly any club culture	Small club culture	Large club culture	Large club culture
Entertainment important	Staging and entertainment very important	Staging, art and entertainment very important	Staging very important
<b>Success factor socio-culture</b>			
<b>Sociologic factors and authenticity</b>			
Idol culture	(Anti-) idol culture	Anti-idol culture	Rather idol culture (previously anti-idol)
Authentic	(Anti-) authentic	Anti-authentic	Rather macho-authentic (previously anti-authentic)
Conveying existing values	Entertaining, erotic, sometimes critical	Entertaining, erotic, provocative and critical	Avant-garde to purely entertaining
Chauvinist, approachable	Chauvinist, individual	Distanced, ironic and individual	Chauvinist, individual (previously critical)
Unilaterally body-related (man OR woman)	Mutually body-related	Mutually body-related and masquerade	Mutually body-related and masquerade
<b>Queer, women, dominance and role models</b>			
Male dominance	Rather male dominance	Less male dominance	Rather male dominance (previously not)
No new male image since 1950s – '60s	Rather new male image	New male image	Rather new male image
Old female image	Rather new female image since 1980s	Expanded female image since 1980s	Expanded female image since 1980s
Reception of women: sex and low value	Reception of women: rather flexible	Reception of women: flexible	Reception of women: sex and low value
Hardly any feminist ideologies	Few feminist ideologies	Feminist ideologies	Feminist ideologies
Old role model Queer	Rather new role model Queer since 1980s	Expanded role model Queer since 1980s	Expanded role model Queer since 1980s

TABLE 11: OVERALL COMPARISON ROCK AND POP MUSIC WITH SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP, OWN ILLUSTRATION

### 3.2. CLARIFYING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

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The strong points of synth- and electro-pop and electronic music lie in their changeability, the willingness to learn and the courage to conduct a critical, provocative and subliminal discourse with the audience. These genres are open to different subcultures, genders and ways of thinking. Contrary to other styles of popular music, synth- and electro-pop and electronic music are clearly more dependent on role and gender. Furthermore, they define art through a connection between audience and band, as well as through musical staging that is fascinating, ambiguous and ironic at the same time. Synth- and electro-pop continuously reinvent themselves with creative performances, subtly showing the audience by means of simple lyrics that only by negating authenticity is a postmodern view of life and society made possible.

Synth- and electro-pop and electronic music grant access to young as well as more mature audiences that have been evolving since the 1980s. What is more, synth- and electro-pop are suited for mixing with other styles and are defined by being easily accessible as music both for home listening and dancing. The lack of reservations regarding new technologies, other music styles and new marketing and communication channels helped promote the evolution of these genres and their dissemination. In addition, the acceptance of electronic instruments as well as the 1980s revival with its music genres and production facilities resulted in synth- and electro-pop being used by many newcomers for their artistic creations. Even established artists changed to synth- and electro-pop in order to benefit from the creativity and informality of these styles.

Potentials lie in the renewal of this music, in its critical way and in the further mixing with other styles, as well as in the women's and homosexual discourse. The underrepresentation of women in popular music has, especially in EDM, pushed electronic pop culture – which initially used to be very open and liberal regarding women and Queers – towards a slightly patriarch male dominance that must not be adapted by synth- and electro-pop. Furthermore, due to its mega-parties, the former anti-culture of EDM has recently become much more focused on idol, chauvinistically tinged and subjected to sexual stereotypes compared to the original free underground-club culture of the 1970s to '90s. In order to survive, synth- and electro-pop need to continue the independent, critical and provocative discourse that characterises these genres.

The renaissance of synth- and electro-pop has been successful well into the current decade. How long the revival will continue and how the music will evolve remains to be seen. It seems certain, however, that synth- and electro-pop were able to keep their original essence alive – a combination of entertainment, socio-culture and economic aspects.

### 3.3. CONCLUSION, CRITICAL EVALUATION AND OUTLOOK

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The question regarding the potentials of synth- and electro-pop in electronic pop culture was clarified on the basis of a literary and empirical methodology. Strong and weak points of the genres synth- and electro-pop and electronic music, as well as possible future potentials, were also elaborated. Given the complexity of the research question and a lack of obtainable information, part of the basis for the present thesis was compiled by means of a field study, which required the comparison of numerous data bases as well as the acquisition of raw data on the musicians. Moreover, the examined markets presented very little pooled information, structures or process models that would have been useful for clarifying the question.

Finally, in-depth analyses would be required regarding topics such as Queer music and women in synth- and electro-pop, seeing as, to date, literature has not discussed these issues in detail.

In conclusion it can be said that only time will tell how electronic music will evolve, how it will be modernised and how synth- and electro-pop will redefine and reposition themselves.

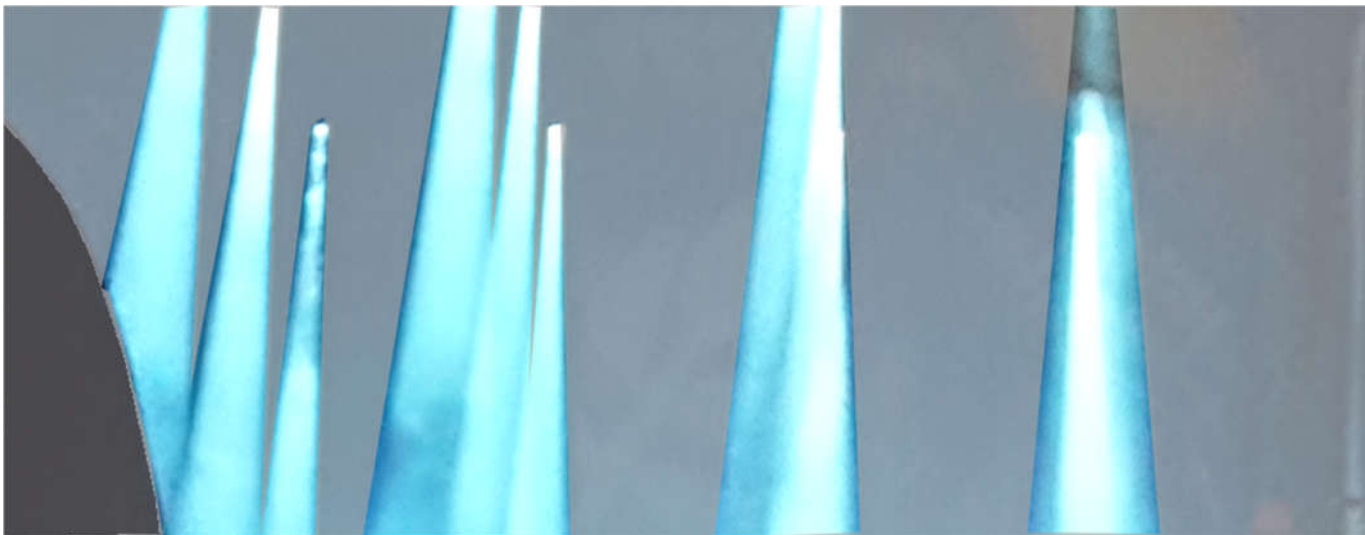


FIGURE 3-3: SHOW LIGHTS, OWN PHOTO

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## 5. LIST OF SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP MALE AND FEMALE ARTISTS

Synth and electro pop artists are listed below, which had been collected during the analysis in chapter 0 und 2.2.4.

### *List of Synth-, Electro-pop- and Dance-pop male and female artists*

Name	Land	Lan- guage	Artist Band Duo	Synth-pop, electro-pop and dance-pop	Year(s)
A flock of Seagulls	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave	80s till 2010s
ABC	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, sophistipop	80s till 2010s
Adolphson & Falk	SE	EN	Band	Synth-pop	70s till 2010s
Adult	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, electroclash, electropunk, techno	90s till 2010s
A-ha	NO	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, pop, rock, alternative rock	80s till 2010s
Alanis Morissette	US	EN	Artist	Dancepop, electronica, alternative rock, post-grunge, pop rock	80s till 2010s
Alexandra Stan	RO	EN	Artist	Dancepop, eurodance, electronic	80s till 2010s
Alphaville	DE	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave	80s till 2010s
And one	DE	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic body music	80s till 2010s
Annie Lennox	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic, pop-rock, rock, (blue-eyed) soul, R&B, contemporary jazz	80s till 2010s
Art of Noise	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic, avantgarde	80s till 90s
Atomic Kitten	UK	EN	Band	Europop, disco, dance, pop	90s till 2010s
B'Witched	UK	EN	Band	Dance, pop	90s till 2010s
Bananarama	UK	EN	Band	Pop, dance, new wave	70s till 2010s
Beborn Beton	DE	EN	Band	Synth-pop, electronic body music	80s till 2010s
Blancmange	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, alternative dance	80s till 2010s
B-Movie	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, post-punk, new wave	70s till 2010s
Boytronic	DE	EN	Duo	Synth-pop	80s till 2000s
Britney Spears	UK	EN	Artist	Electropop, pop, dance	90s till 2010s
Bronski Beat	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, Hi-NRG, dance-rock	80s till 90s
Calvin Harris	UK	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, dance-pop, nu-disco, electro house, EDM	2000s till 2010s
Camouflage	DE	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave	80s till 2010s
Carly Rae Jepsen	CA	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, pop, pop-rock, dance-pop, indie-pop	2000s till 2010s

Celine Dion	CAN	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, pop, soft-rock, pop-rock, R&B	80s till 2010s
Cher	UK	EN	Artist	Disco, electro-pop, dance, pop, folk, rock	70s till 2010s
Cheryl Cole	UK	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, R&B	90s till 2010s
Chicks on Speed	DE	EN	Duo	Electro-pop, electroclash	90s till 2010s
Client	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, electroclash	2010s
Covenant	SE	EN	Band	Synth-pop, electro-pop, electronic body music, industrial music, future-pop	80s till 2010s
D.A.F	DE	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, electro-punk, electronic body music, techno	70s till 80s
Daft Punk	FR	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, disco, dance, electronic, house	90s till 2010s
David Bowie	UK	EN	Artist	Art-rock, glam-rock, pop, electronic, experimental (partly electro-pop)	60s till 2010s
David Guetta	FR	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, electrohouse, EDM, house, progressive house	80s till 2010s
Deine Lakaien	DE	EN	Duo	Pop, avantgarde, electrowave/synthwave, darkwave	80s till 2010s
Depeche Mode	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic, rock, dance-rock, alternative rock	80s till 2010s
Diorama	DE	EN	Band	Electro-pop	90s till 2010s
Dollar	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, pop	70s till 80s
Donna Summer	UK	EN	Artist	Disco, dance, rock, R&B, funk	60s till 2000s
Dubstar	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, alternative dance, dream-pop, alternative rock	90s till 2010s
Duran Duran	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, dance-rock	70s till 2010s
Ellie Goulding	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, indie-pop, folktronica	2000s till 2010s
Empire of the Sun	AUS	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic, electronic rock, EDM, alternative rock, glam-pop	2000s till 2010s
En Vogue	US	EN	Band	Dance-pop, pop, R&B, soul	80s till 2010s
Erasure	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic	80s till 2010s
Eurythmics	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, pop, rock, dance-rock	80s
Familjen	SE	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, techno	2000s till 2010s
Fischerspooner	US	EN	Band	Electroclash, electronica	90s till 2010s
Frankie Goes to Hollywood	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, dance-pop, Hi-NRG, dance-rock	80s
Frankmusik	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, dance-pop	2000s till 2010s
Gary Newman	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, new wave, dark wave, post-punk, electronic, industrial rock, gothic rock	70s till 2010s
Gloria Gaynor	UK	EN	Artist	Disco, R&B	60s till 2000s
Goldfrapp	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, electroclash, electronic, art-pop, trip-hop, folktronica	90s till 2010s
Gwen Stefani	US	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, Dance-pop, new wave, pop, R&B, hip-hop	80s till 2010s
Heaven 17	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave	80s till 2010s
Hurts	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, soft-rock	2000s till 2010s
Irene Cara	UK	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, disco, dance-rock, R&B	60s till 2000s
Janet Jackson	US	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, pop, R&B, hip-hop, funk, new jack swing	80s till 2010s
Japan	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, art-pop, glam-rock, post-punk	70s till 90s
Jasmine Thompson	UK	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, pop, teen pop, R&B	2000s till 2010s
Jennifer Lopez	US	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, R&B, pop, latin, hip-hop	80s till 2010s

Jess Glynne	UK	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, pop, soul, house, R&B	2010s
Kesha	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, electro-pop, dance, pop, rap, rock	2000s till 2010s
Kraftwerk	DE	EN	Band	Synth-pop, electro-pop, electronic, krautrock, art-pop, progressive-pop	60s till 2010s
Kylie Minogue	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, dance-pop, pop, nu-disco	80s till 2010s
La Roux	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave	2000s till 2010s
Lady Gaga	UK	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, dance-pop	2000s till 2010s
Ladytron	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic, shoegazing, indie-pop, dream-pop	90s till 2010s
Little Boots	UK	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, electro-pop, Dance-pop, House	2000s till 2010s
Lorde	NE	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, art-pop, dream-pop, indie-pop, Indietronica	2000s till 2010s
Loreen	SE	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, eurodance	2000s till 2010s
Lykke Li	SE	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, dance-pop, indie-pop, dream-pop, art-pop	2000s till 2010s
Madonna	US	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, pop, dance, electronic, rock	70s till 2010s
Marc Almond	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, cabaret, art-pop, gothic-rock	70s till 2010s
Melotron	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, future-pop	90s till 2000s
Mesh	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, synth-rock	90s till 2010s
Michael Jackson	US	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, disco, post-disco, pop, Soul, thym and blues, funk, rock, new kack swing	60s till 2000s
Miss Kittin	FR	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, electroclash, hip hop, electronica, tech house	90s till 2010s
Modern Talking	DE	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, euro-pop, dance-pop	80s
New Order	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, dance, post-punk, alternative, dance-rock, electronica	80s till 2010s
OMD	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, Electronic, Experimental, Post-Punk	70s till 2010s
Owl City	US	EN	Band	Synth-pop, electronica, Indietronica Pop, CEDM, CCM	2000s till 2010s
Oy	CH	EN	Duo	Electro-pop	2010s
Peaches	CA	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, electroclash, electropunk, dance-punk, punk-rock, hip-hop, alternative-dance	90s till 2010s
Pet Shop Boys	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, pop, dance, electronic	80s till 2010s
Rick Astley	UK	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, pop, Blue-eyed soul	80s till 90s
Rihanna	US	EN	Artist	Dance-pop, pop, R&B, reggae, dancehall, hip-hop	2000s till 2010s
Robyn	SE	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, dance-pop, R&B	90s till 2010s
S.P.O.C.K	SE	EN	Band	Synth-pop	80s till 90s
SIA	AUS	EN	Artist	Electro-pop, indie-pop	90s till 2010s
Soft Cell	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, pop	70s till 80s
Spice Girls	UK	EN	Band	Dance-pop, pop,	90s till 2000s
t.A.T.u.	RU	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, pop, rock, alternative Rock, electronic	90s till 2010s
Tears for Fears	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, pop-rock	80s till 2010s
The Assembly	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop	80s
The Bravery	US	EN	Band	Electroclash, post-punk revival, dance-rock, indie-rock	2000s till 2010s
The Buggles	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave	70s till 2010s
The Communards	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, dance-pop, pop, Hi-NRG, alternative dance, club	80s

The Human League	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave, electronic, avantgarde	70s till 2010s
The Postal Service	US	EN	Band	Electro-pop, indietronica, Indie-pop, indie-rock	2000s till 2010s
The Twins	DE	EN	Band	Synth-pop	80s
The Wanted	UK	EN	Band	Dance-pop, euro-dance, pop	2000s till 2010s
Ultravox	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave	70s till 80s
Visage	UK	EN	Band	Synth-pop, new wave	70s till 80s
Whigfield	DEN	EN	Artist	Eurodance, dance	90s till 2010s
Yazoo	UK	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave	80s
Yello	CH	EN	Duo	Synth-pop, new wave, dance, electronic, jazz	70s till 2010s
Yellow Magic Orchestra	JP	EN	Artist	Synth-pop, electro-pop, ambient house, electronica	70s till 80s

TABLE 12: SYNTH- AND ELECTRO-POP MALE AND FEMALE ARTISTS, SEPTEMBER 2016, OWN ILLUSTRATION

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## 7. APPENDIX

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### *Wikipedia data*

Regarding the information basis and data acquisition, chapter 1.3.1 elaborates how the data were obtained and archived. Wikipedia was used to match the audio samples with the information on the artists' genres. These sources, which contain over 100 examined profiles, are not listed individually, as it requires a lot of effort for a relatively small benefit. Other Wikipedia sources are filed in a permanent, electronic online archive, as explained in chapter 1.3.1. Wikipedia data used as literary references were issued with a time stamp of the most recent perusal and modification. There are no further differentiations for the Wikipedia entries regarding authorship.