

The Music Cycle: The Extremes Approaching in 2018 **by Guy Zapoleon**

Why will 2018's music cycle be like 1988 (and 2001 as well). It's the Extremes of the Music Cycle. The Music Cycle is composed of 3 phases that have repeated every 10 years since 1956, where the balance of core styles differs from phase to phase

Birth/Pop Phase with plenty of Pop hits plus Rock & R&B are more pop

Extremes moves toward the edges, away from Pop, Top 40's ratings begin to dip.

Doldrums - Mainstream Top 40's R&B and Rock edges soften and much of Rock and R&B music is avoided entirely. Mainstream Top 40's ratings dip even more.

So what causes the phases to change or brings on a new Music Cycle? The masses music tastes act much like a pendulum. It's simply human nature and just like with anything else in life, people's tastes change over time especially when you have too much of a one thing and not enough of something else you might desire. When one genre is overexposed or another genre suddenly becomes popular and the pendulum swings -more Rock or More Pop or more R&B/Rhythmic. Each new generation of teens and young adults want their own music, artists and often different genres of music. Another factor and what has kicked off each pop phase is the emergence of a superstar or a new platform, the Beatles in 64, MTV in 82, and in 2013 music technology/digital platforms like iHeartRadio

The intensity of a phase depends on the reaction by the leading mediums & platforms of the day to the phases, and Top 40 radio is still the biggest factor in deciding which songs become hits

So, 2017 has been an incredible few years for music as EDM/ Dance has evolved into the Pop of today for today's young fans as Pop superstars Justin Bieber, Selena Gomez and Alessia Cara have paired with the best EDM DJs Zedd, Kygo, David Guetta and today's most successful EDM artist The Chainsmokers. However, it's easy to see by looking at the top songs on the playlists from the various music platforms, that the hottest sounds/artists that are dropping and then exploding are Hip-hop artists dropping #1 music albums and songs. Now you are beginning to see this at Top 40 radio as well.

So why is this like 1988 (and 2001) read on.

1988 followed a Rebirth Pop phase started by a new Platform MTV. Bob Pittman's MTV's debut in August of 1981, MTV's influence took hold in 1982 as a hit breaking platform and spawned the 80s Rebirth/Pop phase of the Music Cycle that had a 6-year run. However, 1988 was a turning point in music, drying up of the sheer amount of great pop music that had dominated the previous 6 years with many of the major Pop stars like Madonna and Prince taking a break. Tastes were changing and the two other key components of Contemporary Music Rock and

R&B were getting more raw and extreme in sound. The active audience had grown tired of Pop versions of everything as the Pop Rhythm/R&B of the past few years had morphed into New Jack Swing (Keith Sweat, Bell Biv DeVoe) and Rap was exploding with music's edgiest sound. N.W.A, Public Enemy, LL Cool J and then Salt N Pepa, Rob Base and finally MC Hammer in 1989 were crossing to Top 40. At the same time Rock was changing from Pop Rock (Journey Survivor, John Mellencamp), to Metal (Def Leppard/ Guns N Roses) Hair (Bon Jovi/ Poison) So, the Pop Rebirth phase became the Extremes with more and more of the biggest hits being either Rap/R&B or Metal/Hair but there was much less of CHR's Pop center sound to be the glue to hold the more extreme Rock and R&B blending together as a successful format. What radio didn't realize was that was the natural way listeners tastes change and how the music cycle corrects itself for a new generation of music fans as eventually all 3 genres go back to become more Pop again. So, while radio's 12-34 ratings continued to be successful as 1989/1990 rolled around CHR began losing its 25-54 numbers and CHR's 12+ numbers began to drop as well. Owners refused to accept what most experienced programmers had always known, which is that CHR's base the leading edge of the format, 12-24 listeners, needed to be kept satisfied to keep the format healthy and successful for the next generation as well as the current generation. However, owners were concerned about their revenue goals and the health of their radio companies as well, because a majority of radio buys were 25-54 Persons. What they didn't accept was that they needed to hold on tight during this white-knuckle amusement park ride of the Extremes that it was necessary to be relevant to the CHR 12-24 base and by so doing Top 40 radio would become healthy again. However, owners needed their revenue goals met then and there.

In 1989 my company Nationwide Communication told me they wanted out of the top 40 business while I was National Program Director. In 1989, having handed the programming reins of KZZP to someone else, I moved to Houston to put the 25+ format my company wanted in July 1990, KHMV/Houston, Mix 96.5 the First Hot AC. Meanwhile if we thought it was bad in 1989, in the early 90s owners continued to over reacted as they told their programmers they needed 25-54 ratings first and CHR Radio became Adult focused CHR's not concerned about their 15-24 base and began thinking they needed to sound more like 25-54 leaders AC format and so began asking for lots of Billy Joel, Gloria Estefan as well as softer more adult appeal hits to get their adults back, So labels instead of understanding that radio needed a balance of genres reacted to CHR's "needs" and began looking for adult acts to produce AC Pop and having their Rock/Pop acts release power ballads. So, AC Pop superstars like Michael Bolton, Celine Dion, emerged and at the same time with a lack of Pure Pop, Rap/Hip-Hop or Metal/ Hairbands were still growing in popularity at Urban and Rock radio.

As the ratings of Top 40 struggled with the format no longer delivering the relevant Pop Rock and R&B sounds people expected... two major radio consultants were asked in both the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times why the sudden downturn of CHR/Top 40 was happening and both made the ridiculous statement to the two top newspapers in America...

" Top 40 radio is dead"!!!

That was exactly the answer radio owners were looking for to create a mass exodus from the tremendously challenged Top 40 format. A few years into the 90s after that statement 500 stations left the format!!!

So, what you saw in 1990-1996 was the ending of the Top 40 format as a "Play All the Hits" format and in many markets owners adopted the other formats including the more Adult Friendly Hot AC to replace Top 40's during this time.

Watching the fate that had befallen Top 40 still bothered me and I of course never believed Top 40 was dead...so President Steve Berger still puzzled by Top 40's downturn asked several of us to write up a white paper on what we believed caused the format's issues. I had been a student of local and Billboard charts music charts since the dawn of Rock & Roll in 1956. After reviewing year after year of charts I realized that what I saw was a 10-year repeating pattern of 3 phases...a Music Cycle and that the worst radio/label reaction in Top 40 history was causing this downturn, as Top 40 radio struggled with its lowest ratings in decades since the Music Cycle began. After sending it to Steve, I sent the article to Joel Denver at Radio & Records, who was also horrified by the poor reaction to the format by the radio and labels and really believed that his readers needed to see this article and so the first music cycle article was published in October 1991.

It wasn't until the summer of 1996 when Tom Poleman/Sharon Dastur and Paul Cubby Bryant moved Z100 back to Mainstream Top 40 to great success as Teen Pop acts, Backstreet Boys, Hanson, Britney Spears became huge acts. Z100 led the way to bring the format back in its true form as a balance of Rock, Pop & Rhythm/R&B. Tom and his team understood the importance of balancing these 3 key genres, never going overboard on any one style.

Case in point when we went into the Extremes of 2001-2003, It was extremely tempting to become a lot more Hip-hop and R&B at Top 40 since there were tons of bestselling hip-hop titles to play and Urban as well as the new Rhythm CHR format were experiencing strongest ratings in years. Once again Z100 programmer Tom Poleman led the way. He knew that the proper reaction and to ride the wave of the Extremes success was to play the Hip-hop and R&B hits and not go overboard, always maintaining a Pop Rock Rhythm balance. The result was that Tom maintained his great 18-34 and 25-54 ratings at Z100 and we sailed right into the next Rebirth Pop phase brought on by American Idol. We did have an Extremes in 2010 with Hip-hop at Top 40 in 2010 Eminem, Jay Z, Nelly + B.O.B but nothing like the Hip-hop and R&B avalanche that hit in 2001-2003.

So, while Hip-hop R&B Extremes & Doldrums have happened in the '00s and '10s, they've been less intense because Radio better understands the music cycle and has learned to maintain the

3 genre balance no matter how intense each phase gets. Also equally important the music labels understand the music cycle and have continued to deliver this balance of Pop Rock and R&B genres to radio for airplay. Because radio and labels work together in harmony, the industry has had a much better chance to surf the cycles properly if they deliver the music that consumers want most.

So here we are in 2017, there is plenty of pop music in the form of Dance Pop Hits to play but some of major Pop superstars have struggled recently at the same time, and there is no other single music genre that is hotter than Hip-hop. When a Hip-hop superstar dropped an album sometimes 20 cuts rule the Top 50 of streaming charts. Drake, Kendrick Lamar, Logic, Big Sean and now Jay Z all have followed this same pattern. At the same time while Top 40 ratings have been off, you've seen Urban radio become more popular. All obvious signs show that Hip-hop has become mainstream and more mass appeal than ever before. Top 40 Radio is beginning to adopt Hip-hop tracks more quickly now based on success at other music platforms and occupying more fulltime slots for the first time instead of just getting played at night as it has in the past few decades at the format.

But times as like 1988 where with 25-54 continues to be very important to Top 40 owners and the biggest selling streaming hits are more 12-24 in appeal so we're at the crossroads again. So, there's a big question regarding the approach Top 40 radio will take.

Option 1 Is CHR poised to still maintain its Rock/Pop/Hip-hop and R&B balance and intelligently embrace Hip-hop and play this genre fulltime when these songs became hits like it did in last two Extremes phases, but always maintaining its Pop, Rock, R&B(Hip-hop) balance?

Option 2 Does it over focus on 25-54 ratings as it did in 1990-1996 and not embrace what 12-24 wants including a healthy dose of Hip-hop and thus sacrificing its leadership with Top 40's core 12-24?

Hopefully we'll see radio pick Option 1 because if radio doesn't react properly Top 40 radio will lose our leadership role and making the hits to the music platforms that provide a vast genre variety of songs on demand to eager music fans.