

Max Martin & the '90s, the Noughts

i know the name **Max Martin**, today.

a target, at last, for years of disquiet, a sickening in the airwaves.

a name, at last, for my furtive props, for kickdrum tricks i've used on tracks that live & die on my harddrive.

an author of the song i hear from passing cars, merging in the doppler drag; in Ginger on Yonge, all along Yonge; on drugstore P.A.s, and froshweek jams in the quad.

soundtrack for the public debasement of Disney tweens to twerkers on Vevo, to vegan size-queens.

i know the name Max Martin, today, i couldn't resist: i googled **Ariana Grande**. J, eyes narrowing, named her to me, offered her to me. a smirk pressed his Belmont to archaic prop, he's a wiseguy with sexual knowledge of chorus girls.

he offers her to me: as an **e.g.** for my Theory.

he pulls out the Belmont, grows serious, weary. notes her hold on his five-year old girl.

i did **not** jerk off, did **not** jerk off to 'Problem'. i kept it on Play while scrolling thru her Wiki page. i need to know my very lovely Enemy.

these memes i'd ignore but they press in on my periphery. a lusty glow, a gloating i thought was the moon upon my cheekbones.

they own all space but the path i'm trained on, straight ahead.

i know the name **Max Martin** today: a single source for so much happy noise. for twenty billion Vevo

plays. to know this name, to drop a Pin on his pinewood retreat in Sweden is to justify Conspiracy Theory. agencies concentrate, accrete into cabals and as we move on thru the inner circles sum into a One, into a Satanism.

i play his Hot 100s as i'm getting dressed, hear it as my makeover music. a medley over an action-comedy montage.

the 80's mean: that **Thriller** now is hard to pry from **Ethiopian Famine**. the 80's are a frightening memplex. pop by def is what dominates attention space, and Martin is the sound of its triumph: his music is the sound of popularity per se.

Max Martin, the "hidden poet of Pop"¹ - a subtle quote, for quotes set off the Sayer in a second realm of Discourse, they ironize. Sayer & Reader recede from inward unity, from vocal intimacy. this is the "wideness" of irony, its smile.

a subtle quote, for being in **The New Yorker**. every page is glazed in the gaze of a well-to-do flaneur, of Urbanity itself. every page is jaunty by his cocking head. his eyeglass holds back Life from his head, the Goings On miniaturize. he's high in his remove, yet bent in close for a look. he's sucked up into his hat, a sniffy godlet.

a subtle quote, for page is glazed, to get them off for lying before God. NOW extend their indy pride & name, one XMas, Kelly Clarkson's "Since You've Been Gone" as Song of the Year. they, too, praise Max Martin, admit their wider politics: that Martin pop & NOW Mag are both sex-positive, are both pro-life.

J and i are Nietzsche, veejay, sullen at the sideline. forever unpicked yet have my pen, am Genet in his cell yet sworn from masturbation.

my sperm backs up, is souring.

you must read Munro, her subtle & complete Sci Fi. a muted sheen in the Workshop Realism, a CD tray, wholly flush, that opens with a light and thoughtless passing caress.

Wingham ON is a smooth VR, a dollhouse we've entered then forgotten about.

pop is a Machine, eidetic sound by our generous game engine. what i mean is the City's native hum is by an in-board A.I.: Virgin Radio 99.9. the e-bird song that follows King Graham, our boyish saviour, thru **King's Quest**.

pop is a Machine that pulls in the Weeknd's weirder azaans.

ashamed, i am, for never loving Daughtry or Theory of a Dead Man. both are males extended in sincerity, in their sonic phenotype. my irony thinks badly of them; yet i think badly of my irony. i may as well hate the rabbit Tommy, scorn his horny murmur as he seeks out MoMo's puffy rump.

Theory of a Dead Man are serious men, for taking time with lighting & make-up, for letting in artifice. are overdressed in a frontier town, brave.

Drake, when i'm generous, is a mounded old semite, a Cantor from whose condo descend microtone melismas that waft over harbour, down King West. soldiers of the nightlife, their pea-collars up & headphones on, stay with his song.

i do not buy that Martin formed "a brilliant sound all his own". **Hit Me Baby (One More Time)** is

¹John Seabrook, 'What Kind of Genius is Max Martin?' **The New Yorker**, Sep 30 2015.

instantly familiar, the first time heard. i didn't look it up, i forgot my curiosity. it sounded, back then, like all the hits he'd yet to make. **Born This Way** at the 53rd Grammys was Boney M and ABBA, was Madonna and Cher, the sound of pop hearing itself, "the generic" per se.

"Hit Me Baby (One More Time)" is a song about obsession, and it takes all of two seconds to hook you, not once but twice, first with the swung triplet "Da nah" and then with that alluring growl-purr that Spears emits with her first line (following Martin's trace vocal): "Oh, baby, bay-bee." Then the funky Cheiron backbeat kicks in, with drums that sound like percussion grenades. Next comes Tomas Lindberg's wah-wah guitar lines, which signal to one's inner disco hater that it can relax: it's a rock song, after all.

Martin's oeuvre, brought to you by: Swedish public education and its excellent after-school music program. i remember my confusion, back in the 90s, when mun & cham called the sound all over FM **R&B**. i wasn't surprised the Back Street Boys had crossed the racial divide; but a genre still existed, known to kids, called **R&B**? and now it meant - what? the term endures, finds a wide & mysterious extension every decade.

the term endures so Whites may cross the racial divide, again; and give **The New Yorker** moral frame to cheer on american consumption.

R&B is 80s nightjazz, a bluesy urban balladry. what divides BOYSIIIMEN from BSB? they promise a similar courtship. they're ardent males, aching strivers. what is Black, what is White? miscegeny i do not mind but my sister is muslim and serene. i fear she'll accede to you lovers of life. the mixing of race i don't despise, it's all of you, cavorting; your noise pours in wherever i've tried to hide. the noise is

endless, a phalanx of Harleys that May thru September roar by Y's old Bloorcourt walk-up. i've tried to hide though am no Thoreau, i prefer the City for the warmth it provides. when dwindled to ghost, or returned as a rat, i'll nest behind your tv set. i'm drawn to the crackly black in the rec-room corner, where your voices still reach me. where breathing in brings burning dust from the oven-hot tubes & transistors. a sizzling, down here, as loud as your laughter. your show gives off a tiny smoke, a frying in the circuitry. here i hear the machine itself, and its alien hum comforts me. it fills my lungs with burning dust, and cleanses me.

on Martin's legacy, Seabrook defers to future historians. quality is longevity, is mimetic success. genes persist because they can, are winners for enduring.

a tautology of quality: *if* it endures, it has what it takes, clearly.

but what if pop is endless? our deathship pulse in later eons, sampled for an off-world HOT 100. a Martin revival by alien scholars is always possible. Martin's tricks thought into being by writers of some treacly TLön: so a song's quality, if it's longevity, is always indeterminate.

there's a cross-world cult of Lata Mangeshkar, her perpetual re-discovery.

Martin's team at Studio Sweden are relaxed at the console, are sober and await you. a vocal guide is laid and waits you, high in your headphones.

an agent played for Seabrook a snippet of the vocal guide and *The Swede sounded exactly like Spears*. his lids go heavy in sweet concentration, every song i hear. i can't unsee his beard on every HOT 100 diva. his round tho solid upper arms hug a bevy of gold records, grammies held heavy at his belly. his arms are large, emerge maternal from his tight leather vest. i can't unsee his soft pout at the pop-filter. the micro-mesh circle is his structural coyness, as the courtroom mic we bend to be heard at shows our Deference, forces our bow to judge & queen in her portrait. we're close on his mouth, thru the shanasheel filter, we've just enough face to infer he's slightly wincing, tiny agonies with every vocal fry. with every **oops** and every **baby**, ardent croaks of a schoolgirl during heavy petting, worrying herself wet.

one man, Max, behind the song, and one man Si, behind The New Yorker. one man's nod on every page of Glamour, GQ, Vanity Fair.

every page must make him nod, draw his smile, help him get Hillary elected.

a call from Si, and Random House drops whole genres from Aquisitions.

In discussing people or things, Si uses the word 'attractive' the way other people might use the word 'spiritual', says a former senior executive who requested anonymity because he didn't want Mr. Newhouse to consider him disloyal. "It means to him a sort of roundness and depth."²

behind it all, a century Jew, born on my birthday. a frumpy dresser, not really in it for the power or money, it is said. behind it all, if so, a vapid mystery.

² Richard Pérez-Peña, the New York Times: 'Can Si Newhouse Keep Condé Nast's Gloss Going?' July 20, 2008.