

MUSICAL REFERENCES IN
COMMERCIAL PSYTRANCE:
A STUDY OF VINI VICI AND KSHMR

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ABSTRACT

Psytrance finds its roots in full-moon parties held in Goa, India since the 1970s. Communities surrounding the EDM-subgenre would thereafter continue to grow, and psytrance eventually found itself proliferating globally. In recent years, the presence of psytrance artists in more commercial EDM environments has rapidly increased. Psytrance DJs are more frequently featured in “mainstream” circles, playing at large commercial festivals such as Ultra and Tomorrowland and giving interviews for magazines like DJ Mag. What distinguishes these commercial psytrance artists from their electro house and big room counterparts, are the specific references made to India, one of the primary sites where psytrance finds its origin. Whereas extensive research has been performed on psytrance communities outside of the EDM-mainstream, commercial psytrance has received little scholarly attention.

In this thesis, I study how commercial psytrance artists Vini Vici and KSHMR employ both musical and extra-musical techniques to market a commercial psytrance sound to a broader public. I reveal how both artists signify Indian musical practices and Hindustani beliefs in their musics. Through an extensive study of Vini Vici’s “Namaste” (2015) and KSHMR’s “Invisible Children” (2016), I explain the different musical and extra-musical tactics that are employed. Building on Butler’s method for analysing EDM-tracks, I map the various musical references evoked by Vini Vini and KSHMR. I argue that whereas Vini Vici uses more ambient sounds, KSHMR builds his track around a vocal sample from a sample pack that references Indian practices. Similarities between both approaches are found in the use of specific instrumentation in a Western tonal context. In addition, both psytrance artists refer to Indian practices in their lyrics, track titles and cover art. Altogether, this thesis sheds light on the underrepresented area of psytrance in electronic dance music studies by tracing the use of musical references in a new wave of commercial psytrance artists.

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Musical References in Commercial Psytrance: a Study of Vini Vici and KSHMR

From entering the DJ Mag Top 100 as a first-timer in 2017 to getting awarded the highest climber in 2018 with a massive leap of 38 places is a unique achievement. Israeli psytrance duo Vini Vici managed to do it.¹ Since bursting into the psytrance scene in 2013, Vini Vici quickly became commercially successful in this genre. But there is another rise to the top which is an unusual achievement as well. In 2015, progressive/electro-house and psytrance artist KSHMR entered the DJ Mag top 100 only to take over the twenty-third spot as a newcomer.² His career leaped when he released his track “Secrets”, a collaboration with Dutch DJ and producer Tiësto. Since then, KSHMR has dominated the mainstages on festivals all over the world.

Both artists exemplify the recent growth of the number of psytrance artists in more commercial EDM environments. Part of a genre that finds its roots in the full-moon parties held in Goa (India), psytrance DJs are increasingly featured in “mainstream” circles. Commercial psytrance artists are invited to perform at large commercial festivals such as Ultra and Tomorrowland and are featured in interviews for magazines like DJ Mag.³

In scholarship, psytrance is a well-researched phenomenon.⁴ Especially in the areas of social and cultural anthropology, the subgenre was taken under the loop by several scholars, for example in relation to the concept of “neo-tribes”.⁵ Whereas extensive research has been

¹ “Top 100 DJs,” DJ Mag, accessed June 11, 2019, <https://djmag.com/top100djs>.

² Ibid.

³ See, for example, the line-ups for Tomorrowland and Ultra between 2014 and 2019, as well as the listed articles on DJ Mag.

⁴ See, for example, Joshua I. Schmidt, “Full Penetration: The Integration of Psychedelic Electronic Dance Music and Culture into the Israeli Mainstream,” *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 4, no. 1 (2012): 38–64; Emília Simão, Armando Malheiro da Silva, and Sérgio Tenreiro de Magalhães, *Exploring Psychedelic Trance and Electronic Dance Music in Modern Culture* (Hersey: Information Science Reference, 2015); Graham St John, *The Local Scenes and Global Culture of Psytrance* (New York: Routledge, 2010) and Graham St John, “Liminal Being: Electronic Dance Music Cultures, Ritualization and the Case of Psytrance,” in *The Sage Handbook of Popular Music*, ed. Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman (Thousand Oaks, US: Sage Publications, 2015).

⁵ In particular the work of Graham St. John, for instance in Graham St. John, “Trance Tribes and Dance Vibes: Victor Turner and Electronic Dance Music Culture,” in *Victor Turner and contemporary cultural performance*, ed. Graham St. John (New York: Berghahn, 2008): 149–73 and Graham St. John, ed., *The Local Scenes and Global Culture of Psytrance* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

performed on psytrance communities outside of the EDM-mainstream, commercial psytrance that resides in the EDM-mainstream has received little scholarly attention.⁶ What distinguishes psytrance artists from their electro house and big room counterparts, are the specific references made to India. Whereas the majority of psytrance artists don't perform on the mainstages of EDM-mainstream festivals, artists like Vini Vici, KSHMR, Timmy Trumpet and Armin van Buuren managed to bring psytrance to the wider and bigger mainstage audience.

Especially the origin of psytrance in Goa and the connotation of psytrance with India evokes questions about the use of samples and musical references in this subgenre: What history underlies this practice? What implications does this have for the production and consumption of psytrance?

In this thesis, I research how commercial psytrance artists Vini Vici and KSHMR employ both musical and extra-musical techniques to market a commercial psytrance sound to a larger public. Through an extensive study of Vini Vici's "Namaste" (2015) and KSHMR's "Invisible Children" (2016), I reveal the different musical and extra-musical tactics that may be used. As mentioned above, there aren't many psytrance artists headlining the mainstage. Therefore, I consider Vini Vici and KSHMR as the most natural choices for my case studies.⁷ I selected the two specific tracks from personal knowledge as I consider them to fit well with my method of analysis.⁸ I follow Mark J. Butler's two-fold method for analysing EDM-tracks by first extracting and categorizing all individual components of the track, and then designating a colour to each loop in order to create visual representations of both tracks.⁹ Using these categorizations and visualizations, I map the various musical references evoked by Vini Vici and KSHMR. I argue that whereas Vini Vici uses more ambiance sounds, KSHMR builds his track around a vocal sample from a sample pack that references Indian practices. Similarities between both approaches are found in the use of Indian instrumentation in a Western tonal context. In addition, both psytrance artists refer to Indian practices in their lyrics, track titles and cover art.

⁶ In this thesis, I refer to (EDM-)mainstream as the EDM music and artists programmed (as headliners on the mainstage) on the largest and most expensive dance festivals in the world, like Tomorrowland, Ultra Music Festival and Electric Daisy Carnival.

⁷ Earlier I mentioned that Armin van Buuren and Timmy Trumpet perform psytrance on mainstages as well. However, they perform and compose in wide range of genres varying from deep house to trance. For this reason, I choose to omit them in my analysis and focus on Vini Vici and KSHMR.

⁸ Other tracks by Vini Vici and KSHMR could also have been used, such as Vini Vici's "The Tribe" (2015) and KSHMR's "SHIVA" (2017). However, the size of this thesis does not allow so.

⁹ Mark J. Butler, *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

In the end, I answer the research question that underlies my research. This question is phrased as follows: *How are musical references to India used in the music of commercial psytrance artists KSHMR and Vini Vici?* With musical references, I refer to references in terms of instrumentation, harmony, rhythm, vocals, and lyrics. I answer this question through three subquestions, separated into different chapters:

1. Is there a commercial psytrance?
2. How does Vini Vici use musical references to India in its tracks?
3. How does KSHMR use musical references to India in its tracks?

Altogether, this thesis sheds light on the underrepresented aspect of psytrance in electronic dance music studies by mapping the use of musical references in a new wave of commercial psytrance artists.

Chapter 1 - A brief history of (commercial) psytrance

Whereas the origins of Electronic Dance Music Cultures (EDMC) are often linked to Western-Europe (trance; techno) and the United States (house), the roots of the psychedelic trance (psytrance) subgenre lie in India. The beaches and hinterlands of Goa, India, were filled with full-moon parties in the 1980s.¹⁰ This would eventually result in the goa trance subgenre, which developed into a globally produced and consumed genre within Electronic Dance Music (EDM) in the mid-1990s. Psytrance is characterized by an energetic sound of between 125 and 150 BPM, which is generally faster than other forms of trance and techno. This sound is made up of a large range of rhythmic patterns, layered melodies, and high tempo riffs. Herein, artists make use of a variety of musical instruments and samples that refer to specific geographical areas. The use of these musical instruments and samples creates a unique sound that gives psytrance its “Goa”-sound. Moreover, anthropologist Graham St. John argues that this “Goa”-sound is “journeying music”, rhythmically characterized by strong four quarter-note kick drum patterns in 4/4 and an accentuation of the 16th-note layer.¹¹ Prominent early artists experimented with analogue, digital and hybrid synthesizers, as well as samplers and digital drum machines to build evolving patterns with layered synth sounds and sub-bass frequencies in hypnotic arrangements.

According to St. John, sharing these music production techniques and technologies among artists eventually created the distinct sonic and visual aesthetics of psytrance.¹² By 2010, psytrance music and style had travelled all over the world, translated among populations widespread across the continents.

In addition to St. John’s criteria, Robin Lindop states that there are a few criteria to consider when deciding whether a track is “psychedelic” or not.¹³ As the main criteria, Lindop names the use of synth sounds for a “texturological” effect, sampled passages from non-Western music that are often significantly transformed using cut-up, distortion and “stutter” filters, in particular vocals and percussion, drone effects, samples of spoken text that often focus on psychedelic experience and a focus on the construction of a specific non-Western ambiance or atmosphere.¹⁴

Since these elements are present in both commercial and non-commercial psytrance,

¹⁰ For a more elaborate outline of the origins of psytrance, see, for example, Graham St John, “Freak media: Vibe Tribes, Sampledelic Outlaws and Israeli Psytrance,” *Continuum* 26, no. 3 (2012): 437–447.

¹¹ St John, “Liminal Being,” 245.

¹² St John, *The Local Scenes*, 3.

¹³ Robin Lindop, *The Local Scenes*, 118–119.

¹⁴ Ibid.

the difference between the two is not always a clear cut. This is a common phenomenon in EDM; there is a fine line between different (sub)genres.¹⁵ Commercialism is difficult to define in relation to solely musical aspects: as we have seen, musical elements can hardly be categorized as strictly commercial or non-commercial. For this reason, I consider extra-musical aspects of psytrance production as well: do psytrance artists in the EDM-mainstream domain produce their tracks in a different manner than other musicians in the psytrance scene? And how are these tracks distributed, marketed and consumed?

These extra-musical elements appear to be part of discussions in EDM scenes on the (non-)commercial character of psytrance artists as well. On online forums, musicians and fans have lengthy discussions about the factors that supposedly make a track (non-)commercial. On Psynews.org, for example, forum user Digitalys shares what (s)he views as the distinction between commercial and non-commercial psytrance:

I see it like this: When artists create their music because they know beforehand that style will appeal to the big crowd and only want to do it because of that reason, then it is commercial. When artists create a track because they feel it might induce a trance state to certain listeners, then it is not commercial. If the latter appeals to most listeners just because it is decent and musical, and the artist ends up making a lot of money from it, it is still not “commercial” for me.¹⁶

In response to Digitalys’ comment, user Grayling adds another criterion (s)he thinks is relevant to the subject:

It’s “EDM club” music wrapped in psytrance effects. Not that you aren't allowed to listen to it, but I surely wouldn't call it psychedelic.¹⁷

I agree with the opinions mentioned above: because commercial psytrance has to be manageable for the bigger EDM audience, it’s not striking that commercial psytrance artists conform their tracks to mainstream EDM guidelines. Digitalys describes the intention to appeal to a big crowd as a key element of commercial psytrance. For KSHMR, this was indeed one of his primary aims. In an interview, the artist explains that he sought a larger

¹⁵ Kembrew McLeod, “Genres, Subgenres, Sub-subgenres and More: Musical and Social Differentiation Within Electronic/Dance Music Communities,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 13, no. 1 (2001): 59–75.

¹⁶ “Commercial psytrance?”, Psynews.org, accessed on June 12, 2019, <https://www.psynews.org/forums/topic/74200-commercial-psytrance/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

audience because he felt like he could “add something to the dance music world.”¹⁸ However, in contrast to Digitalys’ claim that artists are commercial only when they use compositional techniques *solely* to appeal to a large crowd, each artist may have additional reasons for composing in a specific manner. However, since these motives differ for each artist, I will not discuss them more in-depth to avoid any potential intentional fallacy. In addition to Digitalys’ comment, forum user Grayling elaborates that by adding psytrance elements to an EDM track, artists can induce the feeling and sound of a psytrance track without fully meeting the criteria of a psytrance track. Keeping the above opinions in mind, Vini Vici and KSHMR do fit into this description. Both artists conform their tracks to the EDM standard because they know their tracks are going to be played on the mainstage of the biggest EDM festivals around the world.

1.1 Vini Vici

Vini Vici is an Israeli psytrance duo consisting of Aviram Sarahai and Matan Kadosh. Although they have been active in the psytrance world for over twenty years - under the name of Sesto Sento - they decided to take another approach in 2013. *Old school* sounds packed in new, futuristic ideas should be the foundation for a new Vini Vici.¹⁹ With their decades of experience, Vini Vici managed to transform itself into one of the most prominent artists within the commercial psytrance scene. A characteristic sound combined with old school influences makes that Vini Vici distinguishes itself from the rest while maintaining its distinctive psytrance sound.

In this thesis, I will analyse the track “Namaste” from their debut album *Future Classics*, released on April 27, 2015. It has a clear intelligible structure and every instrument has its cue, which makes them distinguishable from each other. This will help me identify and categorize the instruments following Butler’s methodology for analysing EDM-tracks. Moreover, “Namaste” is the only track on the album that incorporates lyrics that are intelligible to an anglophone audience. Whereas other tracks on the album use vocals as well, their explicit texts are more difficult to extract. In order to provide in-depth analyses of my case studies, I aim to use tracks of which I can discuss as many components as possible. For this exact reason, I consider “Namaste” especially appropriate for my case study. Moreover,

¹⁸ “KSHMRS Talks Music Career, Early Aspirations and Writing a Children’s Book,” EDM.com, accessed July 7, 2019, <https://edm.com/interviews/kshmr-music-career-aspirations-childrens-book-interview>.

¹⁹ “Vini Vici Talks About Their Recent Release, Dream Collaboration & Evolution of Psy-Trance,” EDM.LI, accessed July 7, 2019, <https://edmli.com/2019/01/04/vini-vici-talks-about-their-recent-release-dream-collaboration-evolution-of-psy-trance/>.

there is a possibility that artists use lyrics to explicitly contribute to the constitution of a certain ambiance. In order to take this possibility in consideration, I would need a track with lyrics that are intelligible to me, or of which a good translation is available. Keeping this in mind, “Namaste” again surfaced as the best-suitable option.

1.2 KSHMR

Niles Hollowell-Dhar, better known by his artist name KSHMR, is an American producer who was elected 12th best DJ in the world in 2016 by DJ Mag’s Top 100 DJs.²⁰ Since July 2017, he has his own label Dharma Worldwide. His artist name derives from the Indian states Jammu and Kashmir. KSHMR’s music does not restrict itself to one subgenre in EDM. Influences of big room, electro house, progressive house, and psytrance, amongst others, prevail in his tracks. In contrast to Vini Vici, KSHMR’s music is not only limited to psytrance, although he is a prominent artist in relation to the sampling of musical references to South-Asia, especially India. Not only in his psytrance tracks, but also in the rest of his repertoire, he uses these references.

In this thesis, I will analyse the track “Invisible Children”, a collaboration with Australian DJ and producer Tigerlily, released on September 16, 2016. Because KSHMR is so familiar with the use of musical references to India in his tracks, I chose one of his psytrance tracks to analyse. I selected “Invisible Children” not merely because it fits in the psytrance genre, but also because the idea behind the track evokes the expectation of references to non-Western music. In several interviews, Tigerlily and KSHMR explain that the track’s title “Invisible Children” refers to the situation of street children in slums in India.²¹ Especially in “Invisible Children”, KSHMR uses Indian vocals *and* Indian instruments next to each other, which makes it a suitable track for my analysis.

²⁰ “Top 100 DJs,” DJ Mag, accessed June 11, 2019, <https://djmag.com/top100djs>.

²¹ “KSHMR and Tigerlily’s ‘Invisible Children’ Turns Up for a Cause: Exclusive,” Billboard, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/dance/7495400/kshmr-tigerlily-invisible-children>.

Chapter 2 - Vini Vici and the use of musical references

In *Unlocking the Groove*, musicologist Mark J. Butler theorizes a way to study compositional structures of electronic dance music.²² His method is two-fold. First, all individual components of the track are extracted and categorized into four tables:

1. Rhythmic sounds
2. Melodic sounds
3. Atmospheric sounds
4. Articulative sounds²³

These components are notated in Western music notation and are positioned between repeat signs. Each element presented within a pair of repeat signs is a loop that is repeated throughout the track. Thereafter, all these individual components get a designated colour which will represent a specific loop in the visual representation, showing very clearly what component is added or subtracted during the track.²⁴ This allows me to study more in-depth the compositional elements and structures underlying the case studies. I focus specifically on musical references in the forms of instrumentation, harmony, rhythm, melody, and lyrics.

2.1 Vini Vici - “Namaste”

Vini Vici’s “Namaste” is the second track featured on their album *Future Classics*. *Future Classics*, released on April 13th, 2015, is their first album under their new stage name Vini Vici. As their goal with Vini Vici is to combine the “classic” progressive style with “futuristic” progressive,²⁵ this also influenced the name of their first album, and soon became a huge success. A few tracks such as “Namaste”, “Alteza” and “The Tribe” were brought up to the first spot on Beatport’s top-selling psytrance chart and were played heavily on dance festivals all over the world.²⁶

In order to see if, and how, Vini Vici use musical references in “Namaste”, I first analyse the track’s musical elements. I do so within the categories of rhythmic, melodic, atmospheric and articulative sounds. Throughout the analysis, I refer to appendix A. The first section of the appendix shows these musical elements categorized according to Butler’s method. I consider how the type of instruments, as well as the specific melodic and rhythmic

²² Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*.

²³ Ibid., 24-28.

²⁴ Ibid., 27.

²⁵ “Interview with Vini Vici,” Mushroom Magazine, accessed June 11, 2019, <https://www.mushroom-magazine.com/interview-with-vini-vici/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

motives that they produce, are employed as musical references to non-Western geographical areas. Thereafter, I study how these different musical elements relate to each other in “Namaste”. Using the visual representation in the second section of appendix A, I discuss the functions of the different musical elements in relation to each other and the track in its entirety. Moreover, I consider the similarities and differences between the function of the musical instruments in the track, and the traditional function of the musical instrument outside of the particular track.

Appendix A reveals the twelve instruments - and sixteen distinct melodic and rhythmic lines - that altogether constitute “Namaste”.²⁷ In addition to these instruments, the track features vocals and atmospheric sounds. While the rhythmic section functions as the foundation, the melodic sounds mainly serve the purpose of short sound effects that frequently occur throughout the track. As evidence from the visual representation in appendix A, the bass drum continuously runs throughout the track in looped sixteenth notes that are characteristic for the genre of psytrance.²⁸ Additional layers of rhythmic patterns enter the track one by one, as shown in the visual representation of Appendix A.

The first observation in relation to the instrumentation of choice is the rhythmic section. Bass drums, snare drums, hi-hats, tom-toms, and cymbals give the track its “classic” four-on-the-floor EDM sound.²⁹ The instrument that stands out most is the tabla, an Indian membranophone percussion instrument that forms a foundational part of many Indian music genres. The tabla is used to play *tala*,³⁰ primarily in post-1800 Hindustani classical music.³¹ Although the tabla in “Namaste” also fulfils a rhythmic function, it is not employed in the same manner as in Hindustani classical music.

In addition to the rhythm section, the melodic section employs multiple instruments of Indian origin. We first hear a glissando from the swarmandal, a plucked string instrument.³² The swarmandal is primarily used as an instrument for accompaniment in vocal Hindustani classical music. In “Namaste”, the glissando appears as early as in the first measure. The swarmandal does not occupy the same function as it does in Hindustani classical music. Instead, it is primarily used to suggest a supposedly Indian ambiance.

Approximately three seconds later, the alghoza makes its way into the track. The

²⁷ See Appendix A.

²⁸ St John, “Liminal Being,” 245.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tala is a term used in Indian classical music, referring to musical meter.

³¹ Willi Apel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 862.

³² Neil Sorrell and Ram Narayan, *Indian Music in Performance: A Practical Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 37.

alghoza consists of two flutes that are either bound together or held in the player's hand, and it is a much-used instrument in Balochi, Sindhi, Punjabi and Rajasthani folk music.³³ Both in these folk musics and in "Namaste", the alghoza has a melodic function.

After the entrance of the alghoza at 0:12, we hear the sitar for the first time. The sitar is a popular instrument across the entire Indian subcontinent. Its distinctive timbre makes the string instrument one of the instruments most associated with India. Still, its presence in Western music does not come as a surprise. From the 1960s onwards, pop musicians began experimenting with sitars in their music.³⁴ Within the context of Western popular music, the sitar has evolved into a conventional signifier to India. In addition to the melodic function that the sitar fulfils in both Western popular music and Indian music, the sitar in "Namaste" thus also functions as a conventional signifier to India.

All instruments discussed above serve a signifying function in the introductory section of the track. As evident from the visual representation in appendix A, the instruments are introduced one by one, or sometimes with two instruments at a time. All instruments used in this first section have an origin outside of Western musical practices and are employed to instantly immerse the listener in the non-Western soundscape. Right before the main section of the track begins, we hear the nadaswaram, a double reed wind instrument. In South-Indian culture, the nadaswaram is often played in temples at Hindustani weddings. In "Namaste", it merely has a melodic function.

In the main section of the track, from 0:53 onwards, another instrument is introduced that originally does not trace back to Western nor Indian culture: the didgeridoo. As the didgeridoo originally is an Australian wind instrument, it does not appear to fit the summation above. However, as "Namaste" conforms to Western tonality, the instrument in this context is employed to signal an ambiance that is non-Western. It is precisely in this manner that musical instruments are employed in the main section of "Namaste". The instruments recur in shorter segments, for example the didgeridoo in measure 32 and the nadaswaram in measure 176. This specific ambiance is further strengthened by the inclusion of bird sounds and other sounds that refer to nature-related settings, such as knocks on wood.³⁵ Here, the musical references are primarily employed as atmospheric sounds.

In addition to these musical components, extra-musical elements such as the title and lyrics also contain various references to non-Western areas. For example, the vocals,

³³ Ibid., 34-35.

³⁴ The Beatles' collaboration with Ravi Shankar is perhaps one of the most well-known examples.

³⁵ See Appendix A.

robotized spoken female voices, express the meaning of the Hindu greeting Namaste.

According to Indian author K.V. Singh, Namaste has the following meaning:

Indians generally greet each other by saying namaste. While doing so, the two palms are placed together in front of the chest, with a slightly bowed head. [...] In Sanskrit, when namah is combined with *te*, we get ‘namaste’, which means ‘I bow to you’ or ‘my greetings and salutations to you’. [...] Recognizing divinity in all, we say ‘namaste’ with a bowed head and folded palms; in other words, we bow to divinity in the person we meet, regardless of his caste, colour or creed. Thus, ‘namaste’, if sincerely said, spreads universal love.³⁶

The vocals 1, presented in the atmospheric sounds table of appendix A, correspond with this meaning in multiple respects. For example, the lyrics “I bow down and humbly bow down to the true you” correlates with Singh’s explanation of bowing as part of the namaste greeting. Moreover, the practice of bringing hands together is also incorporated in the lyrics: “As I bring my hands together”. The lyrics end with “It’s Namaste”, completing the already suggested reference to the Indian greeting.

Another reference can be found in the visual cover art. “Namaste” does not have its own cover art. Instead, the track is accompanied by the album cover of *Future Classics*. An astronaut is portrayed holding the tone arm of a gramophone, which plays a record that looks like an image of the universe. Perhaps this non-logical composition is used to suggest a psychedelic environment.



Figure 1. Album cover *Future Classics* (2015)

As a final point, Vini Vici clearly focusses on the creation of a non-Western atmosphere by using sound effects and short signifiers to India, rather than employing non-Western instruments for the creation of harmonies and melodies, as is conventional in their original non-Western context. Since there is no leading melody and multiple melodic motives are not once used at the same time, the track does not have any foundational harmonies. Overall, Vini Vici thus mainly uses their instrumentation to make musical references to India. As mentioned above, the Indian

³⁶ K.V. Singh, *Hindu Rites and Rituals: Origins and Meanings* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 73.

melodic instruments are primarily used as sound effects, with their distinctive timbre serving as the main signifier to India.

Chapter 3 - KSHMR and the use of musical references

Continuing my methodology of chapter two, I will use music and text analysis to focus on the multiple forms of musical references in the form of sampling: instrumentation, harmony, rhythm, melody, and lyrics. I will again apply Butler's methodology.

3.1 KSHMR & Tigerlily - "Invisible Children"

On September 16, 2016, KSHMR and Tigerlily released their long-awaited collaboration. "Invisible Children" is the first track in which KSHMR joins forces with the Australian DJ and producer Tigerlily. Initially, Tigerlily presented her ideas for this track to Tiësto. However, he was quick to refer her to KSHMR, as Tiësto viewed him to be the right person to realize this idea.³⁷

Appendix B shows that - in contrast to Vini Vici - KSHMR employs a shorter arsenal of melodic instruments. Instead, the psytrance artist incorporates a richer variety of rhythmic phrases. Similar to many other EDM tracks, synthesizers have an especially prominent role in the composition. The track is built out of twenty-five distinct melodies played by fourteen different instruments. Contrary to "Namaste", the melodic motives have a more foundational role as the other musical elements are structured around these melodies. Rather than being used in shorter sections as sound effects that articulate the track, they are looped and function as repetitive structures that run throughout the song.

KSHMR and Tigerlily use standard rhythmic instruments, such as bass drums, snare drums, hi-hats and tom-toms as the basis for the track. Similar to Vini Vici, the artists employ a tabla to add another non-western rhythmic layer. Many of these rhythmic phrases are primarily used to accentuate one or multiple beats. Within the rhythm section, figures consisting of sixteenth notes are again used as a typical psytrance element.

What instantly stands out at the beginning of the track is the sitar. The originally Indian instrument has a prominent role throughout the entire track. The melody played by the sitar is the main melody of the track and is identical to the melody sung in the sample from the sample pack "Indian Vocal Sessions".³⁸ A sample pack is a collection of samples made with the purpose of being sampled. These packs can be bought for a certain price and the buyer thereafter owes no royalties to the artists that created the specific sample. KSHMR probably took this small fragment from the sample pack and subsequently build the entire

³⁷ Billboard, "KSHMR and Tigerlily's 'Invisible Children' Turns Up for a Cause: Exclusive."

³⁸ "Indian Vocal Samples," Loopmasters, Accessed June 11, 2019, <https://www.loopmasters.com/genres/57-Vocals/products/2099-Indian-Vocal-Sessions>.

track around it. The sound categorization in Appendix B reveals that all melodic lines are at least partially based on the vocal sample. Whether the melody is transposed up or down an octave in the sitars and vocals, or it is reduced to still notes constituting a bass line, the basis lies in the vocals. Herein, melodic figures primarily serve the purpose of ambiance sounds, and the rhythmic section takes a leading role.

This particular sample pack is available online for €22.44 through the Loopmasters website.³⁹ KSHMR's choice to use a sample from a relatively cheap sample pack - especially compared to the income generated from the final product - underlines the commercial character of the genre. Rather than approaching an Indian vocalist for collaboration, KSHMR chooses to use a ready-made sample pack that prevents him from having to pay further royalties over the final track. Following forum user Digitalys' claim that psytrance artists are commercial when they aim to target a large audience, KSHMR's use of a sample from a sample pack might be viewed as a way to generate income without having to put in large financial and artistic efforts. The use of a sample that supposedly instantly refers to India can thus be interpreted as a way to easily acquire a non-Western musical reference that is intelligible to a larger audience.

KSHMR's use of this commercial sampling pack led to an intriguing debate on the use of sample packs. Since these packs are available for anyone willing to put down €22.44, there is always the chance that two artists will end up using the same sample in a similar manner. Exactly this situation occurred when KSHMR was accused of plagiarism by his fans: Israeli DJ and producer JANGO used the same sampled vocals in one of his tracks, and both artists - supposedly without the intention of doing so - also used the same bassline. KSHMR responded to the allegations that he recognized that the tracks sound familiar, but that he was unaware of the existence of JANGO's track.⁴⁰ Following KSHMR's statement, JANGO agreed that it was a coincidence.⁴¹

Loopmasters, the company that produces and sells these sample packs, assembled the entire sample pack in collaboration with Indian percussionist KV Bala Krishnan. KSHMR's choice for a sample pack that is specifically marketed as "the authentic sound of India" affirms KSHMR's deliberate search for marketable references.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ KSHMR (@kshmr), "I've seen a lot of comments about Invisible Children," Caption of Instagram Photo, September 7, 2016, https://www.instagram.com/p/BKDxgzcgU_1/?utm_source=ig_embed.

⁴¹ "KSHMR Responds to Criticism by his Fans in Instagram," Wide Future, accessed June 12, 2019, <http://widefuture.com/2016/09/08/kshmr-responds-to-criticism-by-his-fans-in-instagram/>.

⁴² "Indian Vocal Samples," Loopmasters, Accessed June 11, 2019, <https://www.loopmasters.com/genres/57-Vocals/products/2099-Indian-Vocal-Sessions>.

Not only the presence of Indian vocals, the sitar, and the tabla are references to India. The specific melody used in the vocals and sitar also stands out. The whole track is - conforming to EDM standards - written in a western tonal setting. The E major key of the track creates a stark contrast with the melody of the vocals and sitar that - in Western tonality - we would say to be in a minor mode. For instance, the transcription of the sitar in the melodic table of appendix B reveals that the accidentals before c and g create distances of a half tone between b and c and between f-sharp and g, that are then put against the initially full tone distances of b - c-sharp and f-sharp - g-sharp in the E major context.

In addition to the musical elements discussed above, KSHMR also references to India through non-musical elements. Let us begin with the track title “Invisible Children”. In an interview with Billboard, KSHMR explains that the term “invisible children” refers to street children in India.⁴³ In a lot of slums, KSHMR continues, poverty is so prevalent that to the rest of the world population, these children have become invisible. This strain of thought is translated into the cover art of “Invisible Children”. The cover shows three children that are posed as the representation of Indian street children.

The positioning of these children against a very dark backdrop makes them almost invisible, but their presence is still made known.

Altogether, the musical references in “Invisible Children” are made not only by employing musical instruments with a non-Western origin, but also by incorporating a sample specifically marketed as an “authentic sound of India” that uses harmonic and melodic structures unfamiliar to the Western-trained ear.



Figure 2. Cover art “Invisible Children” (2016)

⁴³ Billboard, “KSHMR and Tigerlily’s ‘Invisible Children’ Turns Up for a Cause: Exclusive.”

Conclusion

KSHMR and Vini Vici exemplify the recent growth of psytrance in more commercial EDM environments. In this thesis, I studied how commercial psytrance artists Vini Vici and KSHMR employ both musical and extra-musical techniques to market a commercial psytrance sound to a larger public. I revealed how both artists signify Indian musical practices and Hindustani beliefs in their musics. Using Butler's method for analysing EDM-tracks, I mapped the different musical references evoked by Vini Vini and KSHMR in two-part schemes. The first scheme contained an overview of all instruments used with transcriptions of their musical material, which I used to analyse the musical components separately. I selected and discussed different musical instruments and their respective parts while especially taking into consideration the use of non-Western musical instruments. Thereafter, the visual representations of the tracks revealed how exactly all musical components were used throughout the track. Using this section of the appendix, I analysed how the different musical elements relate to each other and to the track in its entirety. Moreover, I discussed the similarities and differences between the function of the musical instruments in the track, and the traditional function of the musical instrument outside of the particular track.

From my analyses on Vini Vici's "Namaste" and KSHMR's "Invisible Children", I concluded that both artists make references to India in several ways. In Vini Vici's "Namaste", the rhythmic section functions as the foundation for the track while melodic sounds mainly serve as short sound effects. The rhythmic section conforms to general psytrance characteristics, such as the looped bass drum in sixteenth notes. Musical references are primarily made in the choices of instrumentation - such as the alghoza, swarmandal and nadaswaram - in order to create an Indian ambiance. In the introduction of the track, these traditionally non-Western instruments are introduced one by one without the accompaniment of any Western musical instruments. After immersing the listener in this supposedly "Indian" sphere, Vini Vici moves on to the main section of the track, where non-Western instruments are occasionally employed to signal a non-Western ambiance. This specific ambiance is further strengthened by the inclusion of bird sounds and other sounds that refer to nature-related settings, such as knocks on wood. Rather than forming a foundational part of the track, the segments played by these instruments are thus placed "around" the track to articulate an Indian ambiance.

KSHMR takes a slightly different approach in "Invisible Children". In contrast to "Namaste", "Invisible Children" is built from a richer variety of rhythmic phrases and reserves a more foundational role for the melodic sound. Similar to Vini Vici, KSHMR

employs a tabla to add another non-western rhythmic layer in sixteenth notes. Rather than being used as sound effects, the melodic sounds are looped as repetitive structures throughout the track. Both the vocals and the sitars are transformations of the same melody from the “Indian Vocal Samples” sample pack. This sample lies at the basis of the track, which affirms in part the commercial nature of this branch of psytrance by using a compositional technique that is uncommon in the larger psytrance domain. The sung melody is placed in a major key setting in Western tonality, creating tension between the melody’s own seemingly minor mode.

In conclusion, I suggest that whereas Vini Vici uses more ambiance sounds, KSHMR builds his track around a vocal sample from a sample pack that references Indian practices. I argue that commercial psytrance artists reference to Indian “signifiers” and Hindustani beliefs in multiple ways. Simultaneously, I also suggested a few similarities. These lie mainly within the use of specific instrumentation in a Western tonal context; the referencing to Hindustani beliefs, Indian practices and/or sociopolitical issues on the Indian subcontinent in their lyrics; track titles and cover art.

These findings pave the path for further research on commercial psytrance. This research could, for instance, move into the direction of performance studies: in what settings is commercial psytrance performed and how do artists, audiences, and technology work together to create the impression an Indian setting? Throughout this thesis, I experienced difficulty when analysing psytrance solely on its musical characteristics and album covers. This difficulty led me to further questions. For example, how do the references to India made in the tracks of Vini Vici, KSHMR and many other psytrance artists contribute to an on-site psychedelic experience at EDM-festivals? And how are these references experienced in the setting of EDM-mainstream festivals? Altogether, this thesis sheds light on the underrepresented area of psytrance in electronic dance music studies by tracing the use of musical references in a new wave of commercial psytrance artists.

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APPENDIX





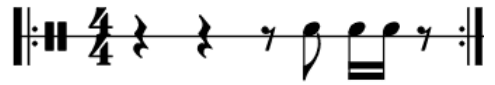
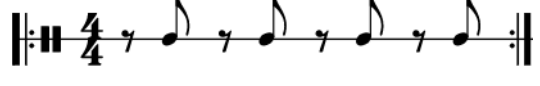
A. Vini Vici – “Namaste”

Sound palette

D maj key

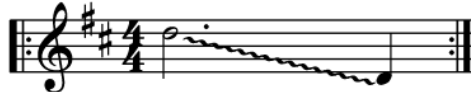




ca. 156 BPM




Rhythmic sounds

SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Bass Drum		○	
Snare Drum		○	
Tabla 1		○	
Tabla 2		○	
Tabla 3		○	Echoed fade-out.
Hi-hat (closed)		○	

Tom-tom		○	High tom. Heavy echo and reverb.
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Melodic sounds

SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Swarmandal		○	
Alghoza 1		○	
Alghoza 2		○	
Sitar 1		○	Legato
Sitar 2		4 ○	Legato, first measure is an anacrusis

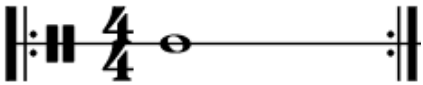
Nadaswaram		<input type="radio"/>	
Trumpet		<input type="radio"/>	Muffled sound.
Didgeridoo		<input type="radio"/>	

Atmospheric sounds

SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Bird sounds	Various bird sounds.	N/A	
Vocals 1	<i>“I bow down and humbly bow down to the true you. The true you that’s inside this body. The true essence of your atman, your true self. I bow down and I honour that. And as I bring my hands together and as I look at you, I see that true you through your eyes into your soul and I let you see me. It’s Namaste.”</i>	N/A	Spoken text. Female voice with robotic effect.
Vocals 2	<i>“It’s Namaste.”</i>	N/A	Spoken text. Female voice with robotic effect.

Vocals 3	Unintelligible text.	N/A	Female voice with stutter effect.
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Articulative sounds

SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Synthesized cymbal		O	

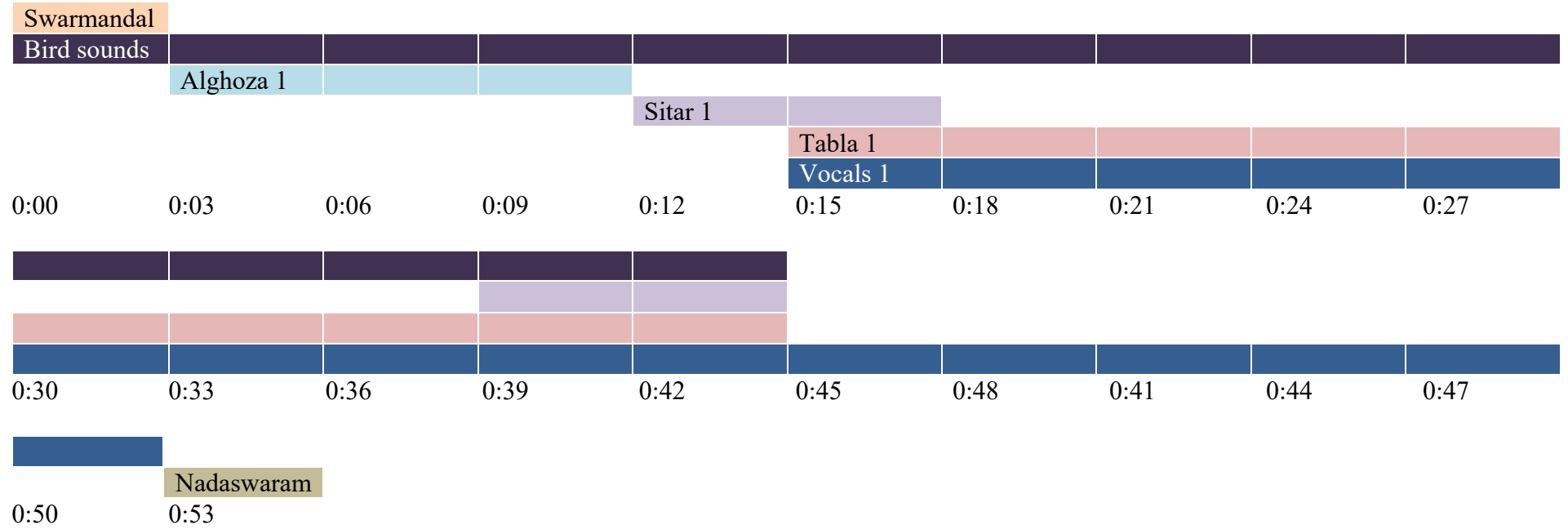
A. Vini Vici – “Namaste”

Visual representation

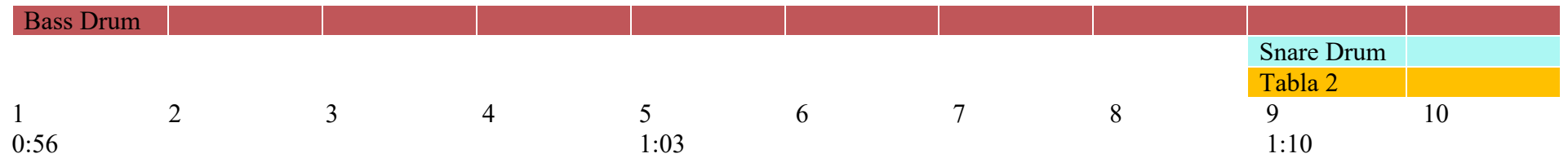
D maj key

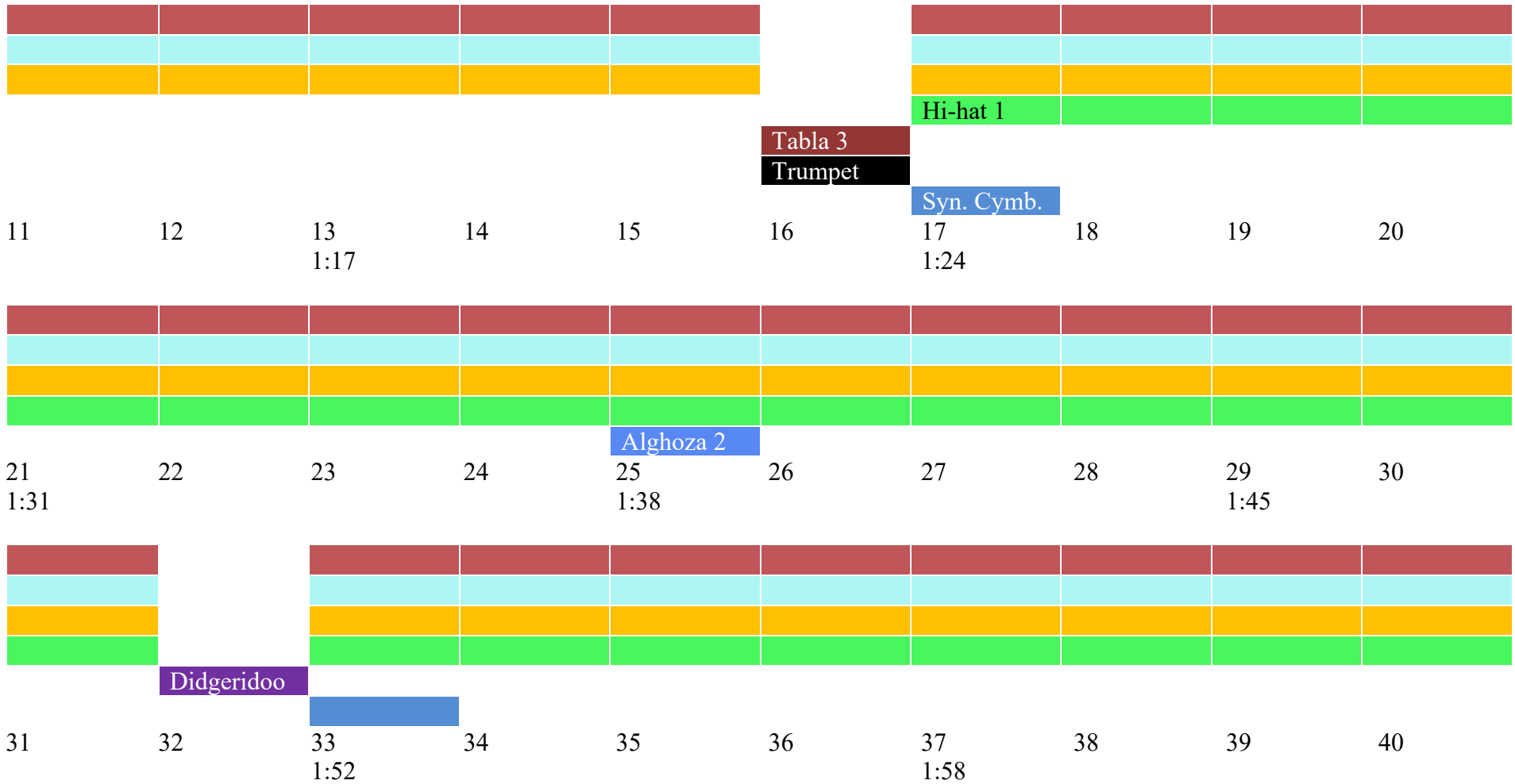
ca. 156 bpm

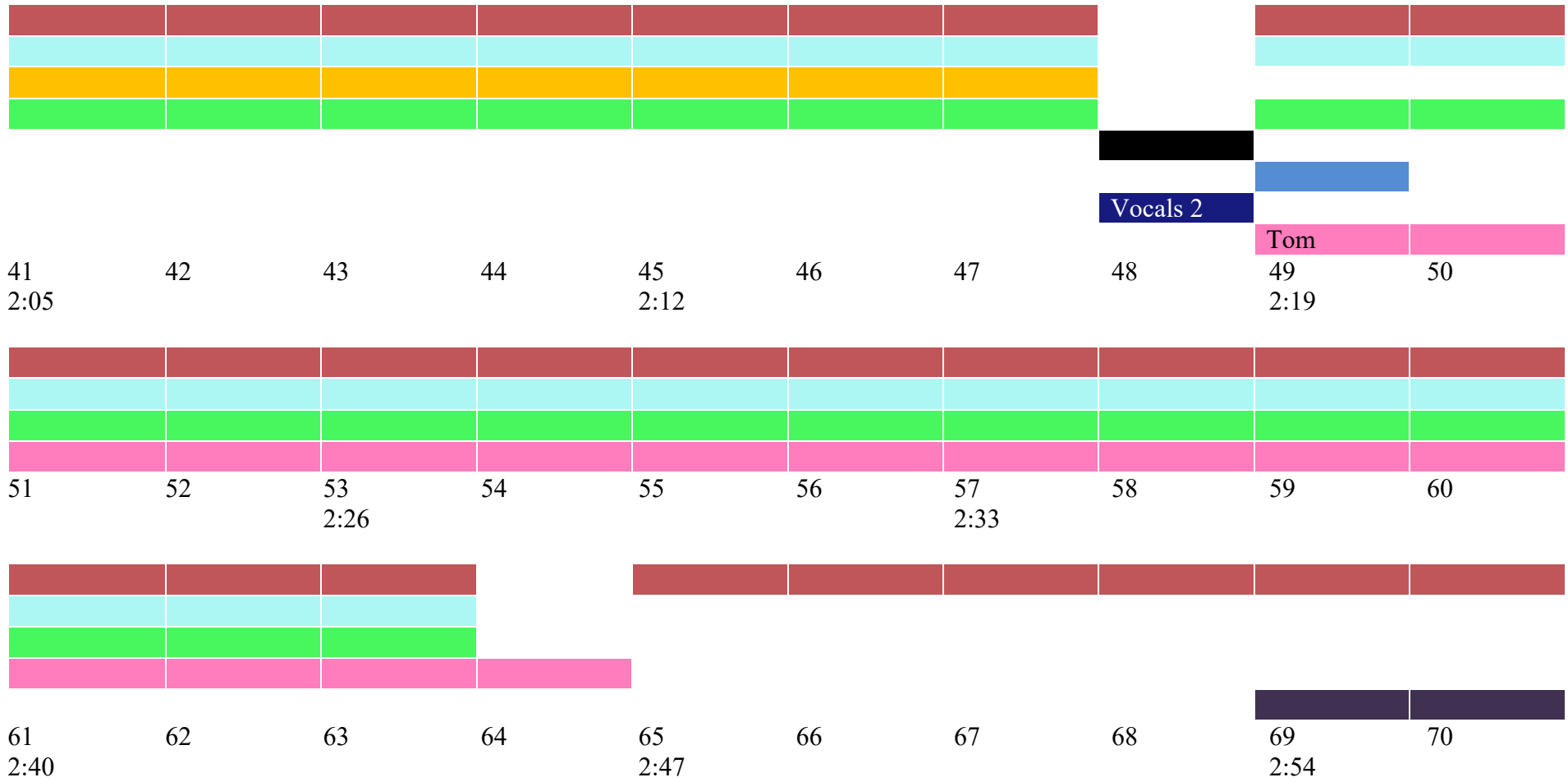
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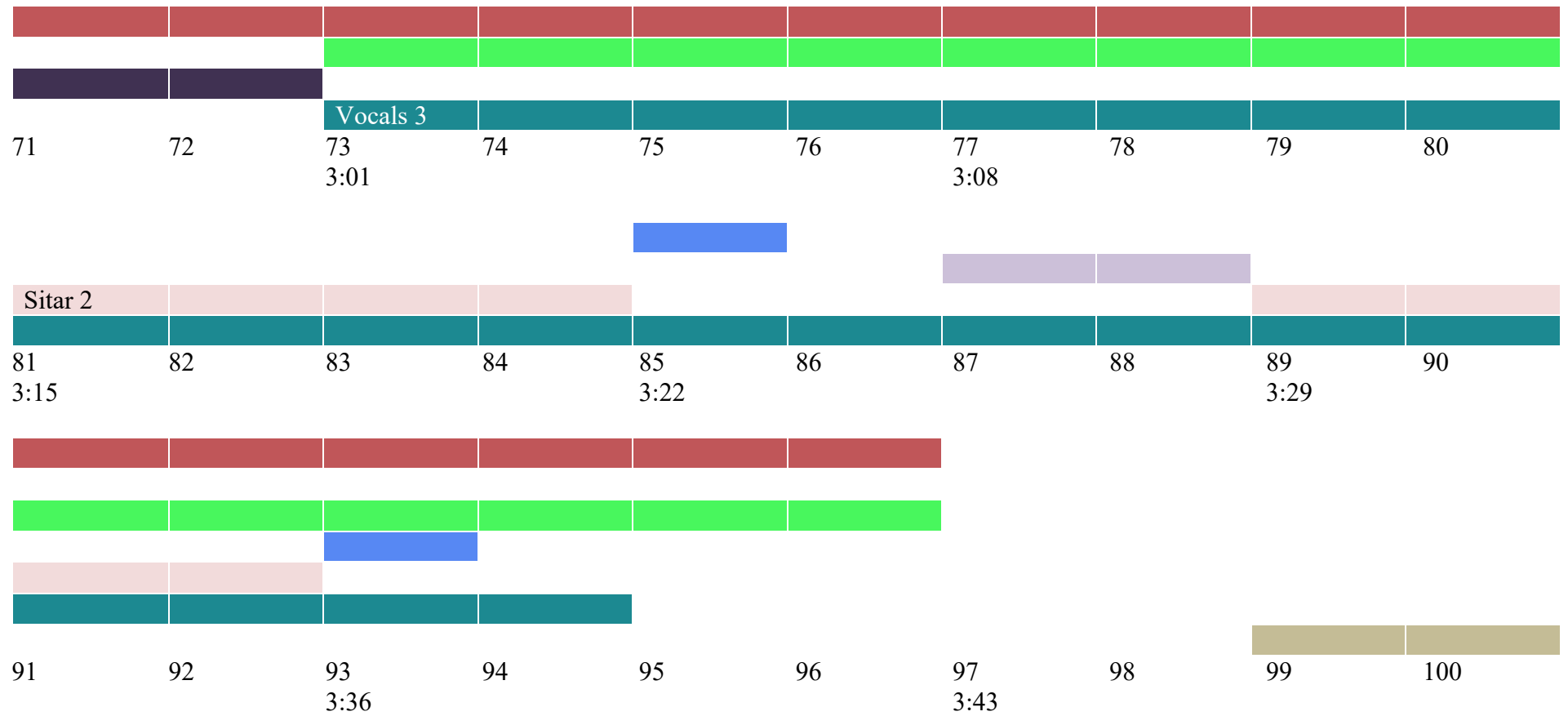


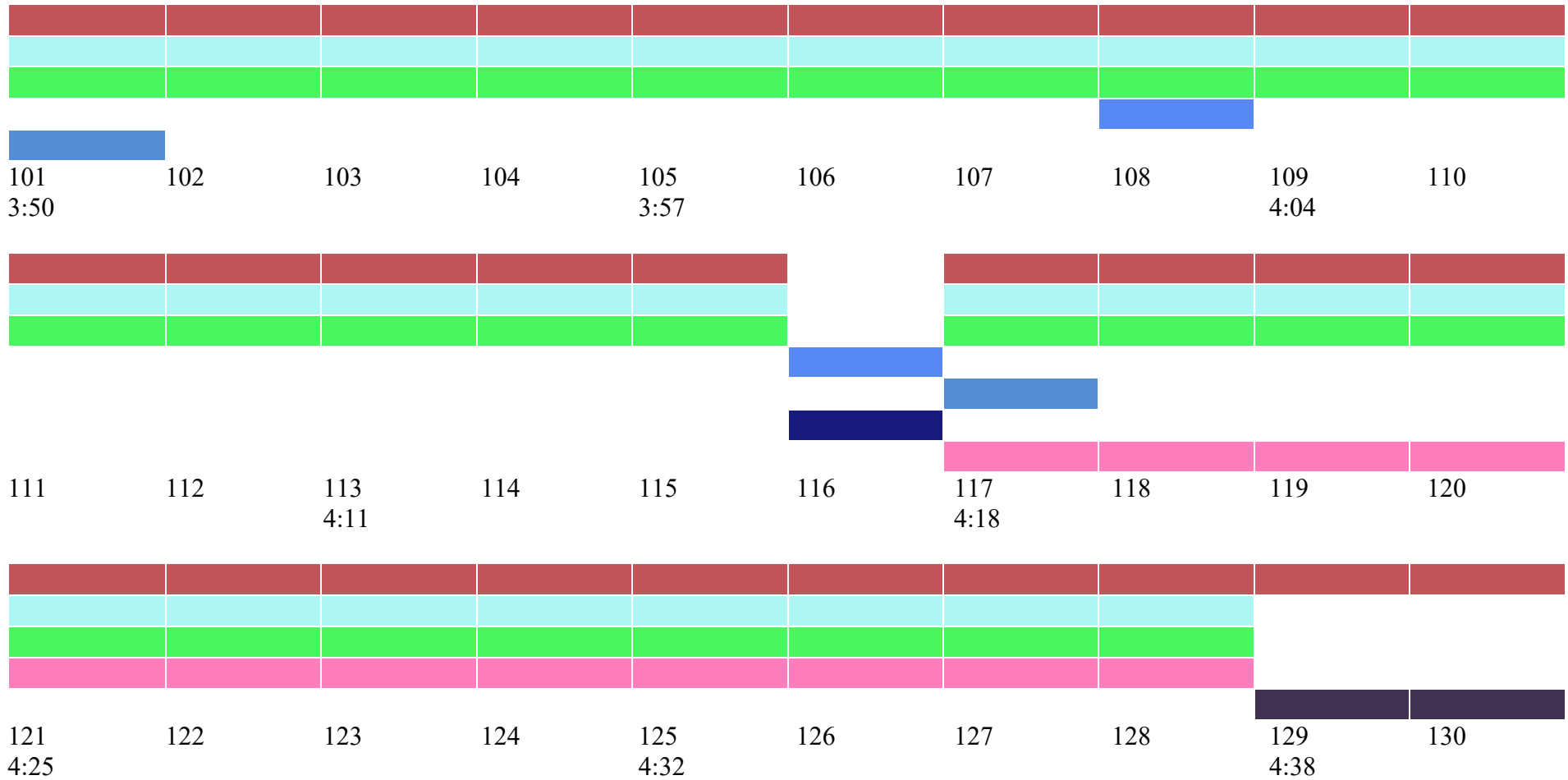
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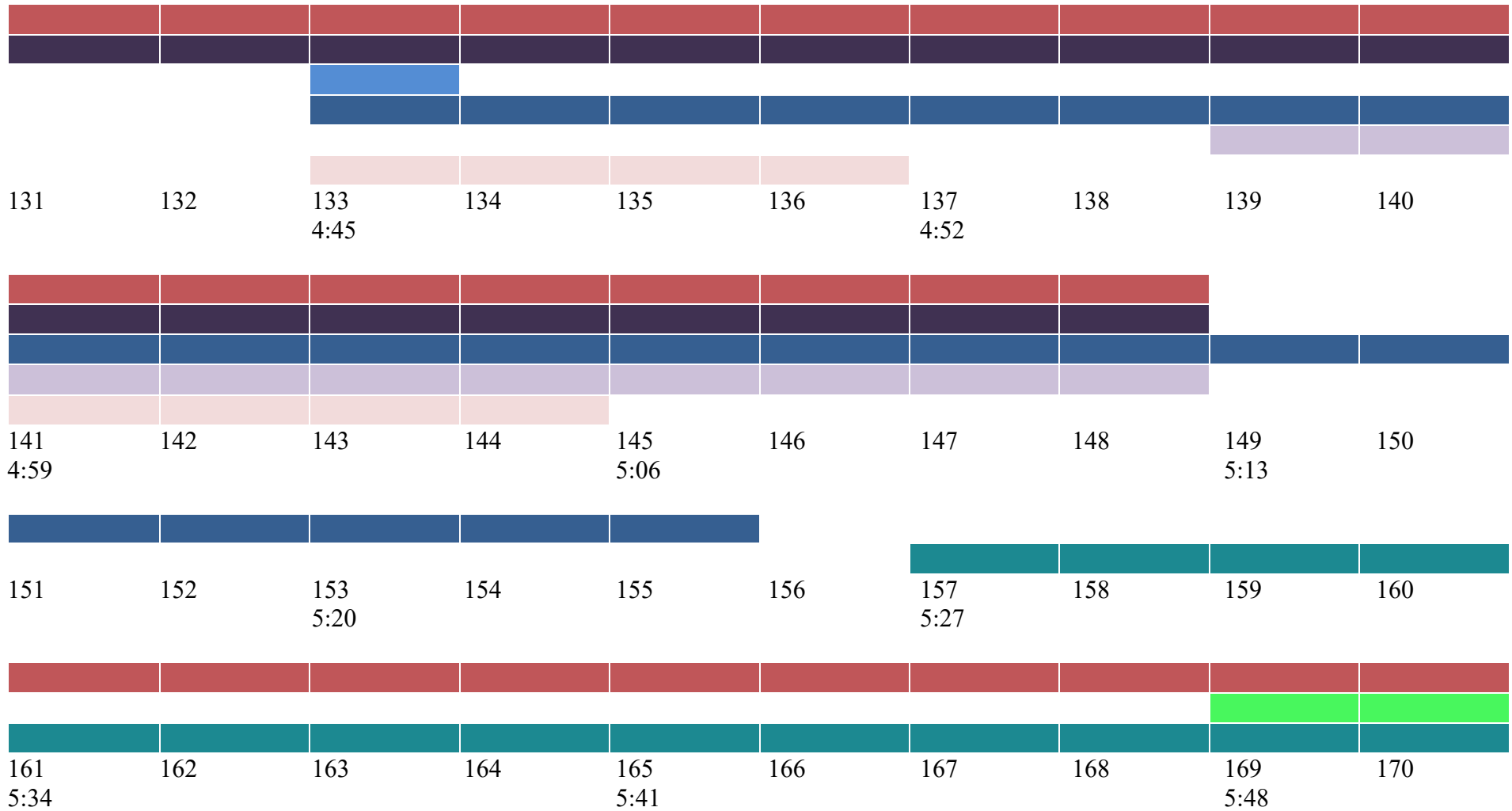




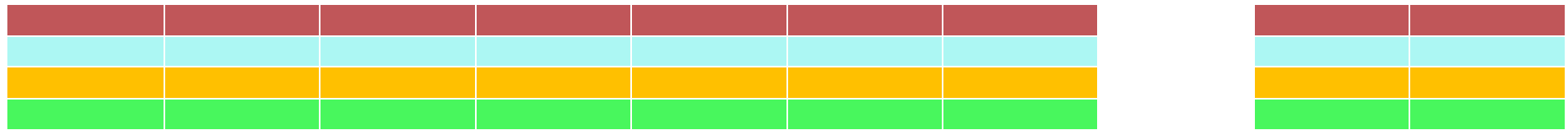




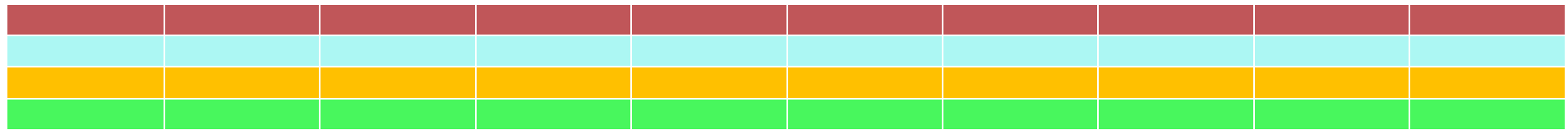




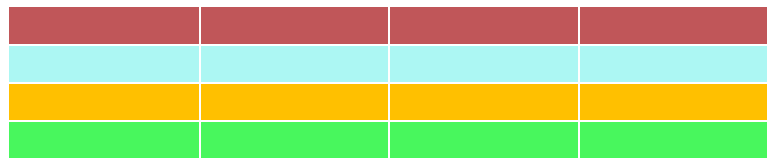




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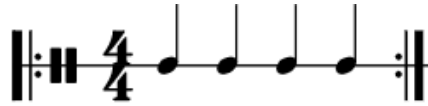

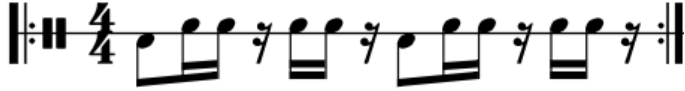




B. KSHMR & Tigerlily – “Invisible Children”



Sound palette

E maj key



ca. 128 BPM

Rhythmic sounds

SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Bass Drum 1		O	
Bass Drum 2		O	
Tabla 1		O	
Tabla 2		O	Played with wooden drumsticks
Snare drum 1		O	
Snare drum 2		O	
Snare drum 3		O	


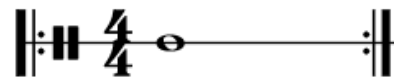
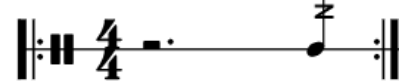
Hand clap		1	
Tom-tom		2	Low and mid tom

Melodic sounds






SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Sitar 1		4	
Sitar 2		8	

Strings		2 ○	
Synthesizer 1		2 ○	
Synthesizer 2		8 ○	Played with an octave above and beneath
Bass synthesizer 1		2 ○	Heavy reverb
Bass synthesizer 2		8 ○	

Atmospheric sounds

SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Suspended Cymbal		2 ○	
Cymbal		○	
Maracas		○	
Vocals	<p>Unintelligible singing. Melody often corresponds with the melody of Sitar 1, Sitar 2 or Synthesizer 2, depending on which of the three is playing.</p>	N/A	<p>Female voice. Sample from Loopmasters' sample pack "Indian Vocal Sessions". Occurring in different octaves.</p>

Articulative sounds

SOUND NAME	MOST CONCISE REPRESENTATION	LOOP LENGTH	OTHER COMMENTS
Bass Drum 3		O	
Snare and Kick		O	
Snare Drum 4		O	
Snare Drum 5		O	
Tabla 3		O	Played with wooden drumsticks

B. KSHMR & Tigerlily – “Invisible Children”

Visual representation

E maj key

ca. 128 bpm

