

Music Publicly Hidden: Analysis of the Functioning of Hidden Tracks in Contemporary Popular Music

Introduction

Music can be enigmatic. Throughout the years, artists have tried and often succeeded in creating a mysterious aura around their art and lives. Sometimes it would happen intentionally, and in other cases the media created such an atmosphere. Surprisingly this atmosphere was often established by accident, because of the unpremeditated doings of the musicians. One may think of a few examples of this: the Ziggy Stardust persona constructed by David Bowie with his celestial identity, which materialized alongside one of his biggest albums; the Beatles, who became one of the most popular acts of all time because of their media coverage, the devotion of their die-hard fans and their conspiracy theories; or Kurt Cobain's stardom, which came by surprise even to the artist himself, and led to him attempting to live a life away from fame which created suspicions about his art.

But let us look at something that is beyond such artists' lives, even beyond their canonical music and LPs. There is one part of their work, which corresponds to every one of the aforementioned mysterious characteristics. Hidden tracks have been recorded since the late 1960s, and they are still present in

contemporary music today. They first arrived in the form of vinyl LPs, then thrived during the CD era, and have survived the streaming revolution of the early 21st century.

In each of these decades, they surprised, amused, and gave additional content to fans, creating suspense and willing listeners to search for something more in music albums. What is interesting is that even after music business entered the Internet era, where, quoting James Murphy's "Losing My Edge", everyone "can tell me every member of every good group from 1962 to 1978"¹, hidden tracks did not vanish, but still remain an artistic measure, used because of and for multiple reasons.

This article's purpose is to show how contemporary music uses hidden tracks as a way to enrich artists' works, and to analyze strategies which are used to introduce them to the public. It is important to present its genesis and the history of hidden tracks' usage in popular music, which should give a comprehensive introduction to this topic, and then analyze how its form has evolved since its introduction in the 1960s. By analyzing four case studies, which were studied for this paper, it will show that not only were hidden tracks not eradicated at the beginning of the Internet era, but artists also found multiple ways to use this measure to enhance their albums.

History of Hidden Tracks

When it comes to analyzing the genesis of hidden tracks, one must decide on how to define a hidden track, as it influences our perception of the true beginning through this measure. One thing is clear – The Beatles were the first band to introduce hidden tracks to a wide audience, but it is inconclusive which song can be considered as the foremost. The band's legendary 1967 LP "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" is the earliest album which could be considered to include a hidden track. Its concluding composition – "A Day In A Life" – ends with a firm note, but after a few seconds, an additional sound collage can be heard. This post-song element was never officially acknowledged in the LP's prints or reprints, but it was given a title on the US edition of "Rarities" compilation

¹LCD Soundsystem, *Losing My Edge* (words: J. Murphy), [in:] *LCD Soundsystem*, DFA Records 2005, <http://genius.com/Lcd-soundsystem-losing-my-edge-lyrics> [retrieved: 05.05.2016].

from 1980 – “Sgt. Pepper Inner Groove”² Another theory highlights The Beatles’ 1968 self-titled album (often called “The White Album”) and its song “Cry Baby Cry”. After the initial ending of the composition and a very short break, Paul McCartney starts playing a section which does not resemble the previous one, and is not mentioned on the track list. The so-called “Can You Take Me Back” composition is often treated as part of “Cry Baby Cry”, but this is not always the case among fans or specialists.³

However, the first commonly accepted example of hidden track use by the majority of audiences is “Her Majesty” from The Beatles’ 1969 LP “Abbey Road”, and it happened all by mistake. Jude Rogers writes in her article titled “Manna for fans: the history of the hidden track in music” that John Kurlander, who was 18 years old at the time, was put in charge of making rough mixes of the album in question. “Her Majesty” was initially thought to be included as part of a medley on the B-Side of the LP, but Paul McCartney decided to cut it out. Rogers writes that “studio rules meant any edited material had to be left at the end of the mix, so Kurlander left nearly 20 seconds before Her Majesty, and put the tape in Abbey Road’s tin of masters [...], not the [box] for rough cuts.” It is said that he left a note for mastering engineer Malcolm Davies that he had done it that way, but he did not understand it, and thought it was the final version of the album. Eventually, the band found out about “Her Majesty” at the end of “Abbey Road” during the airing of the LP’s final master, and they loved it. Kurlander remembers it as “just a happy accident.”⁴

The Beatles’ action sparked a worldwide trend and motivated artists to experiment with hiding additional content on their albums. The classic understanding of hidden tracks evolved into other forms and it eventually became very popular. One has to mention such techniques as creating specific loops, which were placed on LP’s inner grooves and in turn they would play indefinitely if there was no automatic return of the needle on the gramophone. The Beatles’ ending of “A Day In A Life” is considered to be the first of its kind. Jude Rogers

² The Beatles, “Sgt. Pepper Inner Groove” from *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, <http://www.hiddensongs.com/beatles-sgt-peppers-lonely-hearts-club-band> [retrieved: 06.05.2016].

³ M. Cummings, *The Secret History of the Hidden Track*, <http://www.wonderingsound.com/feature/hidden-album-tracks-history/> [retrieved: 02.05.2016].

⁴ J. Rogers, *Manna for fans: the history of the hidden track in music*, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jan/25/history-hidden-tracks-musicians-albums> [retrieved: 28.04.2016].

also cites Pink Floyd's "Atom Heart Mother" as a perfect example with its sound of falling water drops, alongside others like Brian Eno's "Taking Tiger Mountain – By Strategy", Heaven 17's "Penthouse and Pavement", and ABBA's "Super Trouper" album.⁵

When discussing the specificities of hiding within music, one has to mention backmasking, which is another technique for providing additional content to audiences. This process involves recording a message and reversing it, so that the audience should be able to recognize it. The most popular era of such measures was in the 70s and 80s when multiple bands, such as Pink Floyd (in "Empty Spaces" from the LP "The Wall") and Slayer (during the introduction of the LP "Hell Awaits") used them.⁶ On the other hand, it has to be emphasized that these cannot be considered as hidden tracks as these messages were placed *w i t h i n* other songs.

Even though The Beatles started the hidden track trend in the 1960s with other artists following their lead, there were some instances where the reason behind it was simply by accident or unintentional. The most famous example of this was on The Clash's 1979 LP "London Calling" and its song "Train in Vain". It was added to the track list at the last minute, when its album sleeves were already in print. This caused its omission on the official listing, and eventually its acceptance as a hidden track, despite the fact that it was never intended to be one. Reprints of "London Calling" corrected this mistake and included it on the track list.⁷

The real revolution in the world of hidden tracks came through the introduction of the Compact Disc (CD) format. It was radically smaller than the vinyl disc, but could provide a greater deal of music. What is more, listeners could not see how tracks were played – as there was no needle-on-vinyl, only laser-on-disc within a closed player. This provided additional capabilities when hiding songs as the audience could not *s e e* what they were listening to. The classic format of providing extra compositions at the end of albums was still present, but modified. The most famous example of this being Nirvana's "Endless, Nameless", which was placed after a 10 minute silent interval after the last song of their famous "Nevermind" 1991 LP. Another example of "classic" usage of

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ M. Cummings, *The Secret History ...*

⁷ A. Fleming Petty, *Behind the Music: The lost art of hidden tracks*, <http://www.theparis-review.org/blog/2015/05/06/behind-the-music/> [retrieved: 01.05.2016].

hidden tracks that must be mentioned is Lauryn Hill's "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" – Frankie Valli's cover, which appeared on her 1998 debut album "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill". There were, in fact, two hidden tracks on this LP, the second being Hill's composition "Tell Him", but Valli's cover was the one that caught peoples' attention and was even nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance, eventually losing out to Celine Dion's classic "My Heart Will Go On". However, the nomination itself became the official recognition of hidden tracks, making them formally as important as singles or album songs.⁸

There are also other variations for adding compositions to LPs, such as one presented on Prince's "20Ten", where "Laydown" is hidden as song #77. The original tracklist includes 9 compositions, which are followed by tracks #10 to #76, each one of them containing a few seconds of silence.⁹ A similar measure was used in Nine Inch Nails' "Broken" EP – it was initially released with two additional songs on a separate 3-inch mini-CD and a 7-inch LP, but due to pressing expenses, the band was forced to place them on one disc. Thus, there are 6 songs at the start of the CD, but they are followed with tracks #7 to #97, which each consist of one second of silence, with bonus songs being #98 and #99.¹⁰

The most important discovery that allowed for even more distinguished hiding was the pregap, which was only accessible on CD players (as computers do not tend to "read" pregap tracks even to this day). They were accessible by pressing rewind at the beginning of the first song. These songs were truly hidden, as not only were they not included in the listing, but the listener could not even "accidentally" find them by failing to turn off the player – there had to be a deliberate action to discover it. Some notable examples of this practice include Ash's album "1977", Super Furry Animals "Guerilla" LP and "Out Spaced" compilation, or Arcade Fire's 2013 "Reflektor" LP, which includes a 10-minute instrumental song in the pregap area.¹¹

The 21st century brought wide access to the Internet and therefore rapid change to the music industry. What is most important in this context, is the

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Prince, *20Ten*, <https://www.discogs.com/Prince-20ten/release/2349465> [retrieved: 08.05.2016].

¹⁰ L. Comaratta, *20 Best Hidden Tracks on Albums*, <http://consequenceofsound.net/2014/07/20-best-hidden-tracks-on-albums/full-post/> [retrieved: 07.05.2016].

¹¹ J. Rogers, *Manna for fans...*

transformation from the classical format of a disc to a digital one. Having that in mind, one would think that this erases the possibility of hiding a track within an MP3, because the listener can tell how long it is, simply by looking at its digital specificity. The same situation concerns the number of tracks in an album's digital form. Moreover, there can be no pregap, nor can there be an indefinitely played loop on run-off groove. Surprisingly though, hidden tracks did not cease to exist, they evolved, using elements of previously used conceptions. The most popular form of this measure was (and still is) to make hidden tracks public, but promote and list them as hidden. However, in order to analyze such a process as well as understand it, one must think about the artists' motivations behind using hidden tracks on their albums throughout the years.

Motivation Behind the Usage of Hidden Tracks

When attempting to explain why musicians use a specific measure, one must think of the simplest answer of them all – there was no reason at all. The examples from The Beatles and The Clash show that in the best possible way there are some cases which are simple mistakes, and the work ethic of a teenage intern can even lead to their existence. What is even more interesting and must be emphasized, is that the very existence of hidden tracks was caused by a mistake made by John Kurlander. Of course, The Beatles approved this concept, but nevertheless, it must be considered an accident. Even though it is very unlikely that something similar could happen in the contemporary music business, these landmark cases have to be taken into consideration when studying 21st century music.

In Adam Fleming Petty's opinion, the author of the "Behind the Music" article, artists have always had their listeners in mind when hiding tracks, that "[...] they did so with full confidence that their audiences would search for them: that listeners were thorough."¹² Moreover, Darrale Jones, who was working as an A&R representative for Columbia Records, told Vibe magazine in 2001 that recording more than 12 songs per album was associated with higher costs, so it was cheaper to add hidden track as a way of rewarding fans without stretching the budget. Additionally, Coldplay's Chris Martin previously told that they used such songs on "Viva la Vida, or Death and All His Friends", because it enriched the value of the LP.¹³

¹² A. Fleming Petty, *Behind the Music...*

¹³ M. Cummings, *The Secret History...*

These are only a few opinions that may provide the reasons behind why bands decide to use hidden tracks on their albums, but they show that economic motivation and a feeling of gratitude towards fans can be combined and treated as one of the main reasons. One may also think of using them solely as a reward for the audience, by providing additional material, which can only be discovered by devoted fans. On the other hand, by including them on LPs, artists might be thinking with strictly economic intentions – as fans may want to find out if there is a hidden track on an LP, so they buy it in order to do so, and those who succeed tell others that might also want to hear them, and eventually they too buy the record. Alternatively, an explanation could be of a purely artistic nature when authors think that songs do not fit into the general concept of an album – they add it as a hidden track, because they do not want it erased from the final material, but at the same time they do not include it as an element of a whole notion of an LP either.

There are various examples of hidden tracks in popular music, so it is likely that the reasons behind them are diverse as well, but those cited before seem to be some of the most probable cases. What is also of interest is the evolution of their functioning as part of an album, which was mainly caused by formats changing. With that in mind, reasoning may have also changed through time. Equally, tracks that were hidden during the premier of a specific LP, may not be considered hidden nowadays, like in the cases of The Beatles and The Clash. Because of that, it is thought-provoking to analyze songs that should be hidden and continue to function on the Internet and in the streaming era, when really nothing can actually be hidden.

Contemporary Music's Case Studies

21st century music was forced to invent different techniques to hide music on albums. With the lessening importance of magnetic tapes, vinyl and compact discs, the early 2000s presented new forms which could adapt the previously known trends in question. Interestingly, the decline in traditional ways of listening to music did not affect the artists' will to hide tracks. Their invention simply forced them to explore and experiment with new means of artistic expression, which lead to its adaptation onto the Internet where every album's detail is available to its listeners. Classic forms of hiding tracks, which were discussed previously, are still in use today. However, together with other new techniques

for placing unlisted songs, new marketing strategies were also invented, and there are a few examples representing contemporary trends that may show the ways in which hiding tracks currently function, or in which direction this usage could evolve.

In 2000, the British group Coldplay released their debut album “Parachutes”. The original tracklist consisted of 10 songs, the last one being “Everything’s Not Lost”. Yet, they kept an additional composition right after the concluding one – the song titled “Life is for Living”.¹⁴ By means of hiding, they have used the traditional technique of simply not mentioning it on the album cover or inlays. However, the “Parachutes” album is currently available on Spotify, one of the most successful streaming services in the world, and “Life is for Living” is revealed on there in a specific way. The track title for the last song on the album reads: “Everything’s Not Lost – Includes Hidden Track ‘Life Is For Living’ [7:16]”.¹⁵ This example represents the issue with delayed disclosure, where artists, recording companies, and probably fans alike, are aware of the fact that everyone has the knowledge about this track’s existence. Moreover, on the English version of Wikipedia’s article about this LP the following similar title is used: “«Everything’s Not Lost» (5:39 / includes hidden song «Life is for Living» 1:37) 7:17”, which further proves that it is not hidden anymore.¹⁶

Queens of the Stone Age’s 2002 LP “Songs for the Deaf” provides us with another specific example of contemporary usage of this measure. The musicians have used three different hidden tracks on their third studio album. The first one, titled “The Real Song for the Deaf”, is placed as a pregap composition. The CD version of this album does not include it on its list of songs, yet Spotify treats it as the core of this LP, marking it as composition #1, while “You Think I Ain’t Worth a Dollar, But I Feel Like a Millionaire” is #2, conversely to what can be seen on the disc’s back cover. The second hidden track can be found right after the 13th composition – “A Song for the Deaf” – concludes. It is a variation of “Feel Good Hit of the Summer”, a Queens of the Stone Age composition from a previous record, however here all the lyrics are replaced with laughter. This song

¹⁴ Coldplay, *Parachutes*, <https://www.discogs.com/Coldplay-Parachutes/master/3334> [retrieved: 06.05.2016].

¹⁵ Coldplay, *Parachutes*, <https://open.spotify.com/album/6ZG51RT77aJ3btmArcykra> [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

¹⁶ *Parachutes (album)*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parachutes_%28album%29 [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

is not separate, but, similarly to Coldplay's "Everything's Not Lost", it is a part of its core tune. What is interesting here is that this composition is not disclosed on Spotify.¹⁷ Finally, the "Mosquito Song" is the third hidden track. However, its secrecy is revealed absolutely – it is included on the back cover's track list, and is officially named as a "Hidden track", which represents an approach of intentional disclosure.¹⁸ Meanwhile, it is not highlighted as hidden in any way on Spotify, making it another regular song on the album.¹⁹ Queens of the Stone Age have used the platform of the music album to present multiple methods on how to conceal a song, teasing fans, and entertaining them with a great deal of additional material (whether it be made public or not originally).

The next album which exemplifies the contemporary trend of specificity of hidden tracks usage is Kanye West's "808s & Heartbreak" LP. This 2008 album enumerates 11 songs on its back cover, but there is an additional composition in #12, which is not included within the tracklist.²⁰ "Pinocchio Story (Freestyle Live From Singapore)" is simultaneously concealed on the CD, but revealed on the Spotify version of the "808s & Heartbreak" LP. It is important to mention that there is no reference to it being hidden or a bonus track in this streaming service. On the contrary, "Pinocchio Story..." is treated as a complementary element to the album, just like "Mosquito Song" in Queens of the Stone Age's "Songs for the Deaf".²¹ In this case, the composition is either completely unknown or revealed, which makes it an example of concealment depending on form.

Finally, Jack White's "Lazaretto" from 2014 is one of the most famous contemporary examples of extra content being hidden within the form of a music album. One has to keep in mind that this process only concerns the vinyl disc version – known as "Ultra LP" – what may well be considered as the return of concealing songs in their original form. Moreover, there are various ways in which tracks are hidden on "Lazaretto". "Just One Drink" has different musical

¹⁷ Queens of the Stone Age, *Songs for the Deaf*, <https://open.spotify.com/album/4x39CZ46hbtHyEtTFAFnvL> [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

¹⁸ Queens Of The Stone Age, *Songs For The Deaf*, <https://www.discogs.com/Queens-Of-The-Stone-Age-Songs-For-The-Deaf/master/3239> [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

¹⁹ Queens of the Stone Age, *Songs for the Deaf*, <https://open.spotify.com/album/4x39CZ46hbtHyEtTFAFnvL...>

²⁰ Kanye West, *808s & Heartbreak*, <https://www.discogs.com/Kanye-West-808s-Heartbreak/master/8489> [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

²¹ Kanye West, *808s & Heartbreak (Softpak)*, <https://open.spotify.com/album/6iFQqMVZ6eLQESfdkIzVXO> [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

introductions depending on how the needle is dropped onto the vinyl disc. This technique was originally presented by George Peckham, with his work on Monty Python's "The Monty Python Matching Tie and Handkerchief" from 1973.²² However, there is only one classic hidden track on "Lazaretto", which is the under label groove, which can be heard after placing the needle through the paper on the disc's label. There are also other additional functions with the Ultra LP, which are: a locked groove at the end of Side A, different versions of compositions on its vinyl and CD forms, an angel hologram appearing after placing a source of light over the spinning disc, or the way Side A is played – from inside outwards. Jack White created a vinyl disc that can be treated as a toy for fans, who can experiment with a great deal of additional material. However, the content itself is not what is of most interest, but the way in which it is hidden. The artist decided to show all the bonus material and the general concept of this unusual vinyl disc in a presentational video on YouTube lasting over 9 minutes.²³ Obviously, this approach of using hidden tracks can be treated as full disclosure. White explicitly tells his audience where to look and what to search for. He does not enclose any information about it with the original vinyl LP, but the YouTube video can be thought of as a complementary element to his promotional campaign, which cannot be overlooked in the Internet era of the music business. This act caused the tremendous success of "Lazaretto", making it the best-selling vinyl record since Pearl Jam's 1994 album "Vitalogy".²⁴

Music Publicly Hidden

One may think that the radical change in the music business over the past 25 years from a CD-concentrated industry to an Internet era, where every detail is known by the fans, may cause a decline in hidden tracks. Conversely, when this issue is analyzed, still keeping in mind the previous conversion – from vinyl disc to CD – it becomes clear that contemporary transformation is just a mirrored version. What once was visible on vinyl was concealed on CD, and

²²E. Smith, *How The Hidden Track Faded From Recorded Music*, <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/how-the-hidden-track-faded-from-recorded-music> [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

²³ OfficialTMR, *The Lazaretto ULTRA LP*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-8B-_Jq2ro [retrieved: 09.05.2016].

²⁴M. Cummings, *The Secret History...*

again disclosed by streaming. The propitious compact form was just simplifying measures for artists, but when it was then replaced by the less merciful online services and know-it-all databases, musicians faced the same fate as ones did decades later, when they tried to hide music that cannot be concealed, due to its form. Therefore, new solutions arrived with variations on previously known techniques. It can be assumed that reasoning stayed the same – artists wanted to reward fans with additional material, sometimes they were placed by mistake or tunes were made officially “hidden” unintentionally.

Furthermore, some may think that money was another motivation that affected this process; that the hiding and then simultaneously the revealing of songs influenced total sales of LPs, of which Jack White’s “Lazzaretto” may be the proof. By discovering tunes that were not originally meant to be known by the audience, musicians made them look more desirable, but also agreed with the assumption that nothing is actually secret any longer when it comes to music albums.

On the other hand, it would be unconscionable to suggest that only money and rational approach to the music business really caused these attitudes towards the usage of hidden tracks. It should be remembered that when one talks about art, the issue of creativity and finding new ways of artistic expression are extremely important. Contemporary music’s usage of this technique is just an adaptation to the present-day reality and necessities of the world. Artists are constantly finding new ways to entertain, to express themselves, to reward fans and to find a connection with them – despite revolutions, transformations, changes of forms, or business requirements.

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