

# “ALL WE GOT”


## Hip hop, Spotify, and Demographic Delimitation of Genre

Tom Johnson

IASPM-US Annual Meeting  
New Orleans, LA • March 7, 2019

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- What kind of music is this?

- What kind of music is this?   
“Beautiful Flower” (2008)

# Chance the Rapper



<https://pmcvariety.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/chance-the-rapper-grammys.jpg?w=1000&h=563&crop=1>

# Chance the Rapper



Daniel Ek:

“In this new world, music has no borders. Spotify enables someone in Miami to discover sounds from Madrid. ... We’re working to democratize the industry and connect all of us, across the world, in a shared culture that expands our horizons.” (Feb. 28, 2018)



Mike Shinoda 

@mikeshinoda

Genre i

# GENRE IS DEAD! MAGAZINE

RETWEETS

1,380

L

2,895



10:18 AM - 10 Feb 2017



224



1.4K



2.9K

Perry (2014): “What do such vague terms as Americana, metal (which has more ad hot of those genres convey anything about how the music sounds? Not really.” 2019

Hyden (2013): “In 10 years, all pop music genre classifications will be obsolete. ... The more you hear, the less genres matter.”

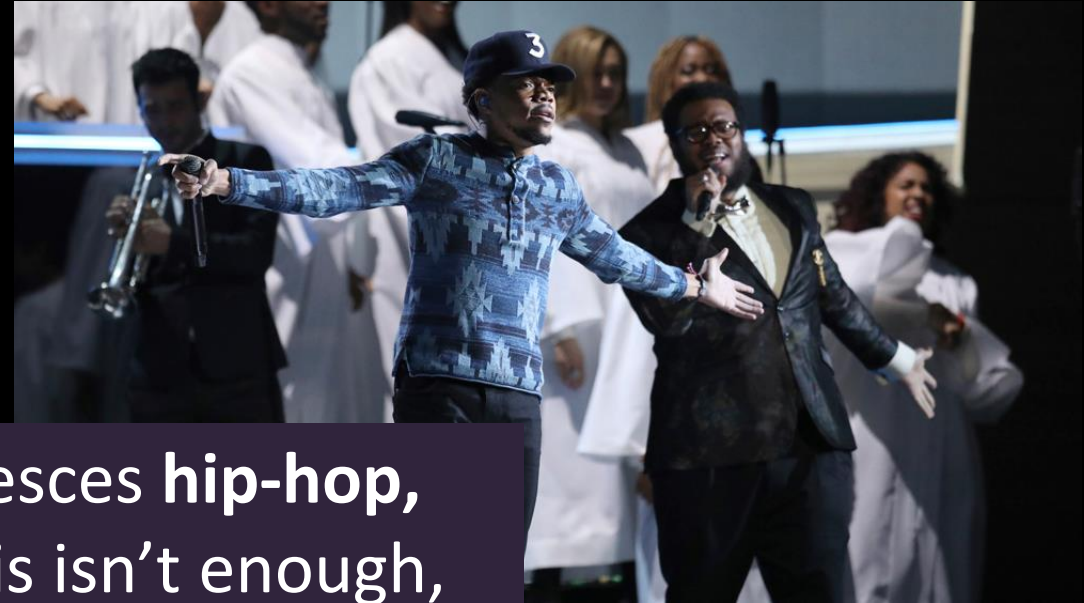
# GID

# GENRE IS DEAD!

YOUR NEW FAVORITE MUSIC MAGAZINE

2018

# Chance the Rapper – *Coloring Book* (2016)



*Coloring Book* is a gospel album that coalesces **hip-hop, spoken word, soul, jazz, and funk**. ... If this isn't enough, "How Great" features a rendition of the popular worship song "How Great is Our God", and the album incorporates modern gospel musicians ... making everything that much more explicit. (Ramirez 2016)



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“[Chance delivers] **boundary-pushing hip-hop** and audibly steeped in black music history, from **doo wop** to **soul** to **funk** to exuberant **electro** (the particularly storming All Night) and especially gospel. Religion and spirituality features everywhere from visuals of stained glass windows to the innumerable biblical references in his flow. (Simpson 2016)



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Despite his evasion of stylistic pigeonholing and no label affiliation .... All the while, the productions that supported the verses and hooks included various regional **contemporary rap production styles**, and among other genres synthesized elements of gospel, jazz, and soul. (Spotify 2019)

# Chance the Rapper – *Coloring Book* (2016)



“So many people want to talk about church when they talk about Chance”  
(Abdurraqib 2017)

# Chance the Rapper – *Coloring Book* (2016)



“Blessings (reprise)”  
<chance the rapper>



# Genre is dead, long live genre!

- Not “mere” stylistic descriptor
- *Coloring Book*: does more than *signify* gospel
- Para-, meta-, intra-, and intertextual semiosis of genre!

# LONG LIVE GENRE!

**“Vancouver(WA)-based country-rock-Americana-Western swing band.”**





# LONG LIVE GENRE!

**“We're a new wave, psych rock, dream pop and shoegaze Brooklyn band with nods to early 4AD sound and Factory Records.”**



**“Vancouver(WA)-based country-rock**



# LONG LIVE GENRE!

**Onra: a producer “inspired by 80’s Funk, 90’s Hip-Hop and R’n’B, Electronic and even a Spiritual Jazz project,” while incorporating influences from “Hip-Hop, to Bossa to Indian Music to Psych Rock, Soul.”**



**eam pop and shoegaze Brooklyn  
ound and Factory Records.”**



**“Vancouver(WA)-based count**



# LONG LIVE GENRE!

## Linkin Park



Linkin Park performing in [Berlin](#) on October 20, 2010.

From left to right: [Joe Hahn](#), [Dave Farrell](#), [Brad Delson](#), [Mike Shinoda](#), [Rob Bourdon](#) and [Chester Bennington](#).

## Background information

**Also known as** [Xero](#) (1996–1999) ·

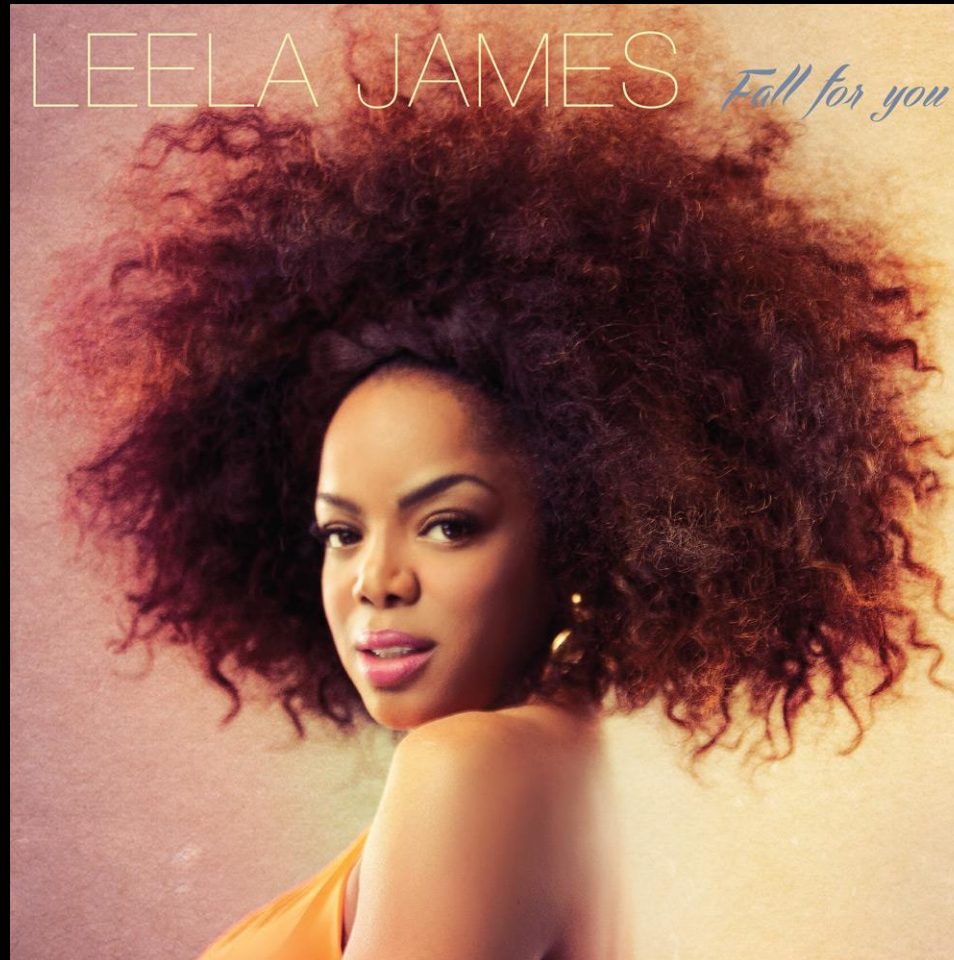
[Hybrid Theory](#) (1999)

**Origin** [Agoura Hills, California, U.S.](#)

**Genres** [Alternative rock](#) · [nu metal](#) ·  
[alternative metal](#) · [rap rock](#) ·  
[electronic rock](#)

# LONG LIVE GENRE!

Leela James's *Fall for You* (2014): "'70s funk stomp, '80s Quiet Storm precision, and '90s hip-hop soul all within the same song."

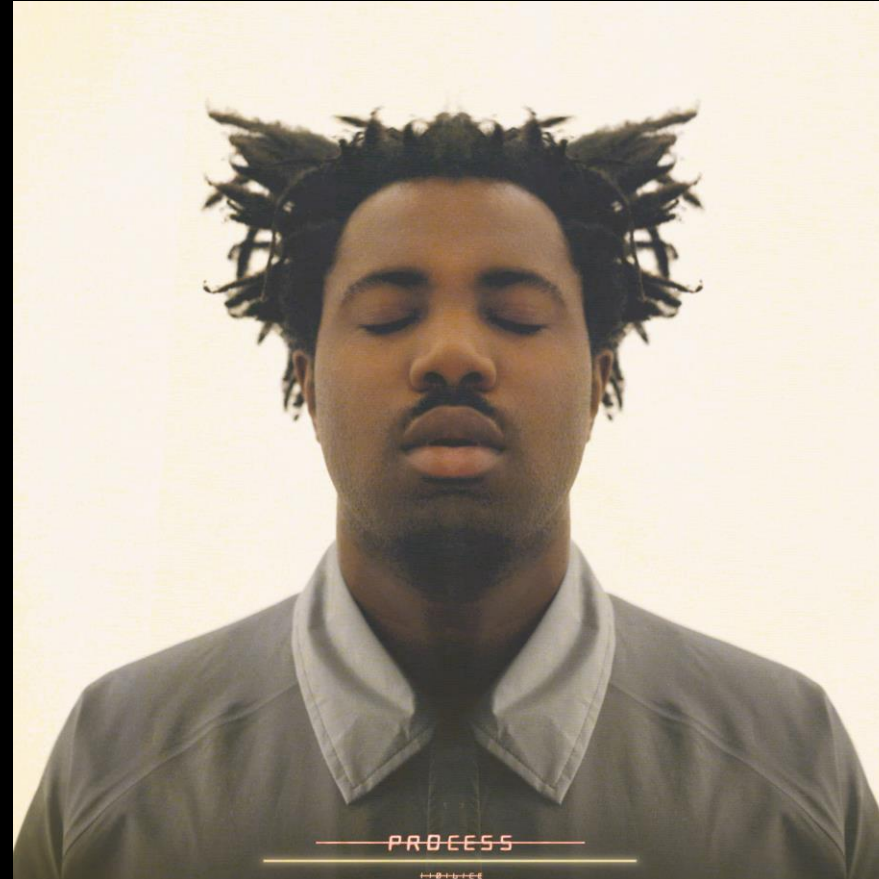


Linkin Park	
	
Linkin Park performing in <a href="#">Berlin</a> on October 20, 2010. From left to right: <a href="#">Joe Hahn</a> , <a href="#">Dave Farrell</a> , <a href="#">Brad Delson</a> , <a href="#">Mike Shinoda</a> , <a href="#">Rob Bourdon</a> and <a href="#">Chester Bennington</a> .	
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# LONG LIVE GENRE!

Sampha's *Process* (2017) is “a bit gospel, a bit R. & B.  
There's some classic soul, made to feel modern with synthesizers;  
there's experimental electronica, made to feel classic ...” (Battan 2017)

Linkin Park	
	
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*You* (2014): “’70s funk stomp, ’80s Quiet  
’90s hip-hop soul all within the same song.”





# Spotify and Genre Metadata

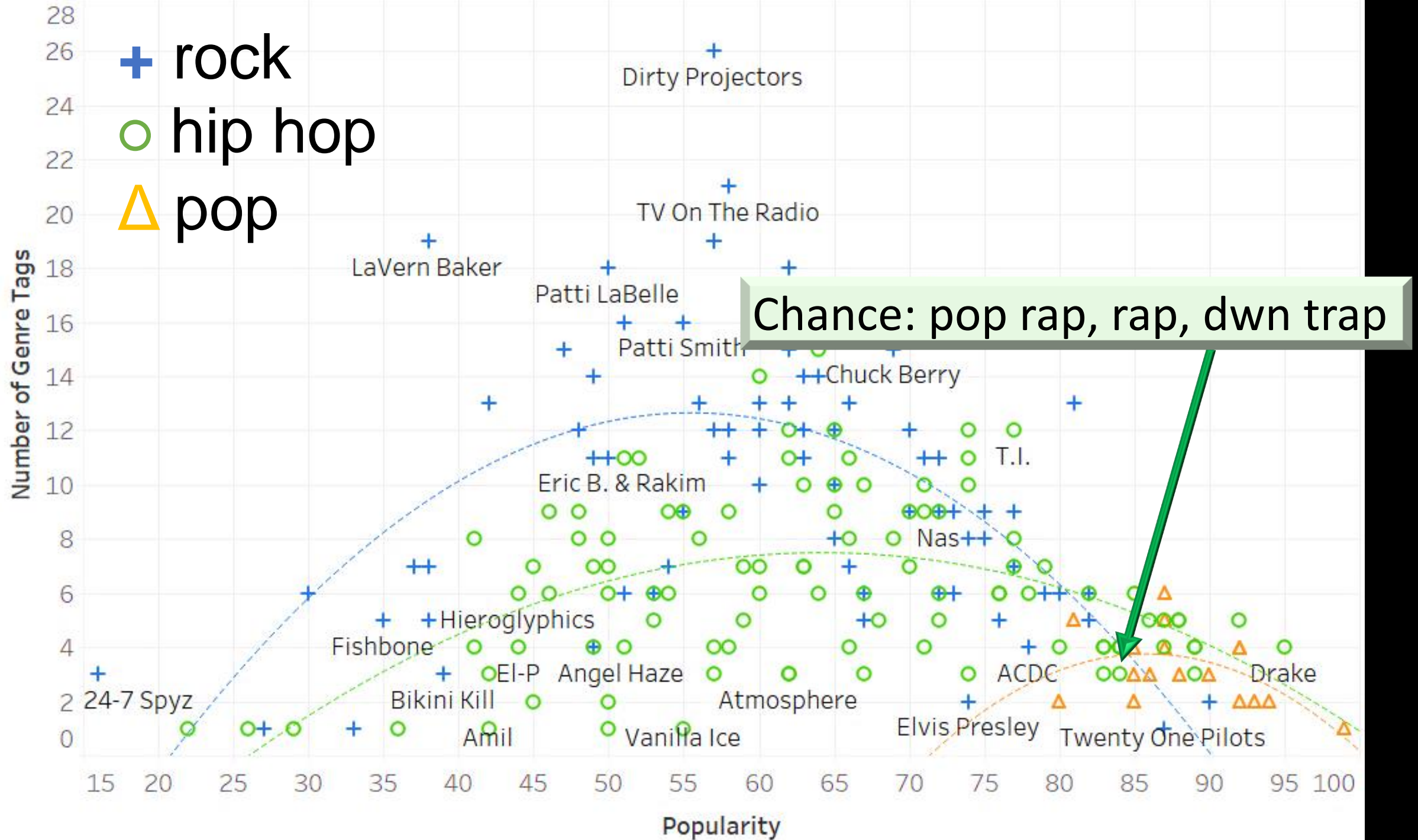
Genre tags:

Spotify uses “connections between artists rather than individual songs or albums as a way of organizing the similarity relations on which the company’s taxonomies are based.” (McDonald, qtd in Brackett 2016, 325)

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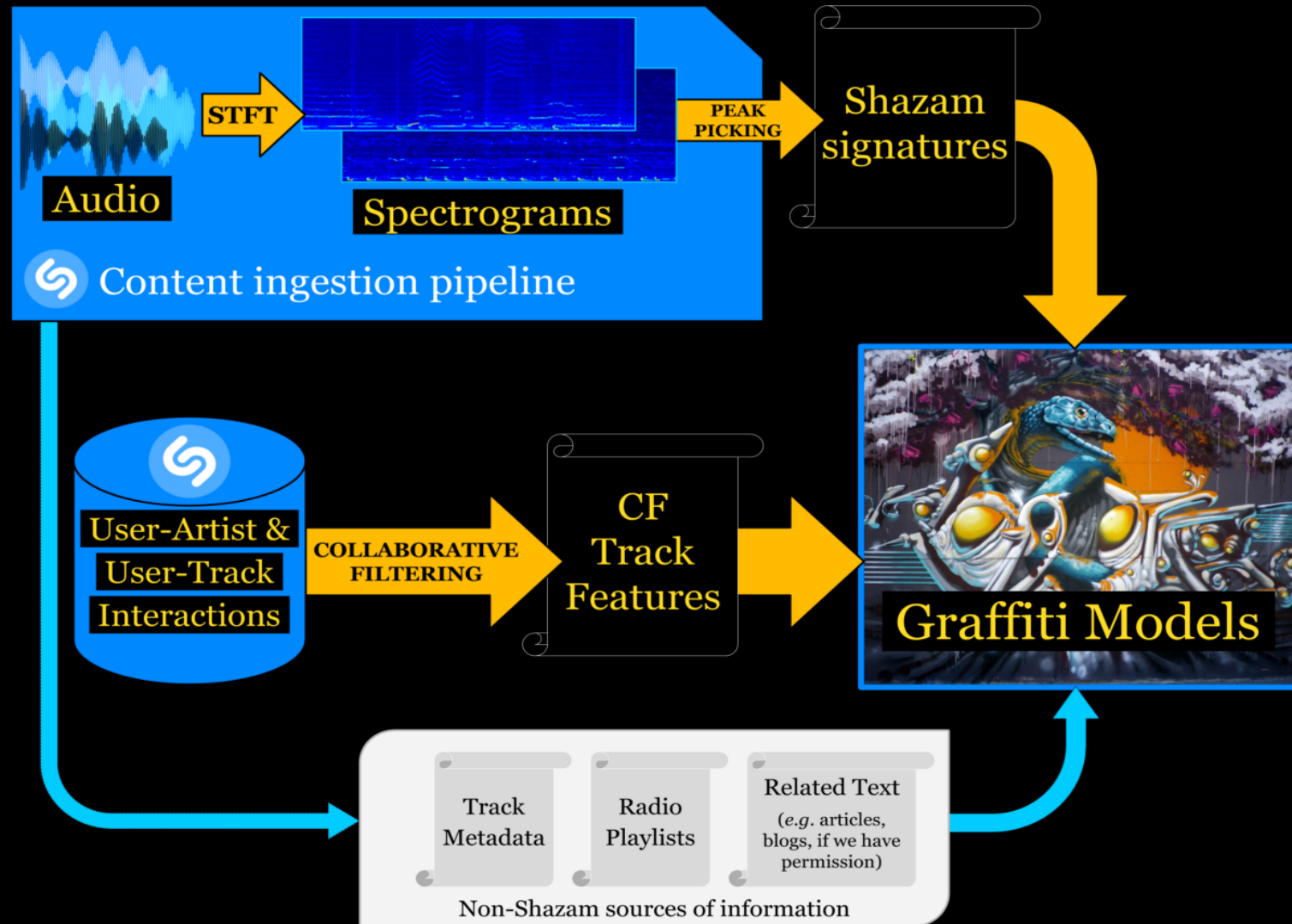
Genre tags:

<b>Rihanna</b>	dance pop, pop, r&b, urban contemporary	<b>Sam Hunt</b>	contemporary country
<b>Taylor Swift</b>	dance pop, pop, post-teen pop	<b>Esperanza Spalding</b>	contemporary jazz, contemporary post-bop, cool jazz, indie r&b, jazz, jazz fusion, neo soul, soul, vocal jazz
<b>Kendrick Lamar</b>	hip hop, rap, west coast rap	<b>The Beatles</b>	british invasion, classic rock, merseybeat, protopunk, psychedelic rock, rock
<b>Dirty Projectors</b>	alternative dance, alternative rock, anti-folk, brooklyn indie, chamber pop, chamber psych, chillwave, dance-punk, dream pop, escape room, folk-pop, freak folk, indie folk, indie pop, indie r&b, indie rock, indietronica, lo-fi, neo-psychedelic, new rave, noise pop, noise rock, shimmer pop, singer-songwriter, stomp and holler	<b>Dr. John</b>	acoustic blues, blues, blues-rock, boogie-woogie, british blues, chicago blues, classic funk rock, classic rock, country blues, country rock, deep funk, delta blues, electric blues, folk, folk rock, funk, jam band, jazz, jazz blues, louisiana blues, mellow gold, memphis blues, memphis soul, modern blues, new orleans blues, piano blues, psychedelic rock, rock, rock-and-roll, roots rock



# How are labels determined?

- “Ensemble model”  
(Goldschmitt and Seaver)





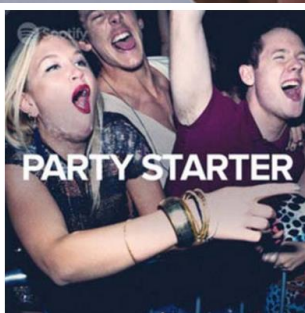
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- “Ensemble model”  
(Goldschmitt and Seaver)
- Co-presence on user-generated playlists

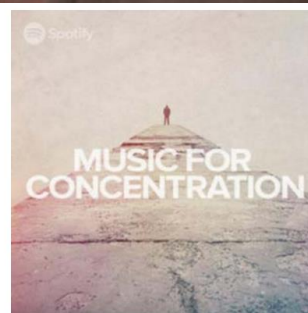
Reach the audiences that matter most.



Workout



Party



Focus



Commute



Relax



Travel



Dining



Romance



Reach the audiences that matter most.

“Globally male listeners make more and longer playlists than female listeners on average, so this is a **pretty textbook example of algorithmic confirmation bias** due to inherent asymmetries in the data inputs” (McDonald 2018)

# Demographic Delimitation of Genre

Aaron Marcus:

“**the meaning of a sign** (including linguistic signs as basic as ‘horse’) is not a specific referent in the world,  
but **a whole cultural complex of significations** that may or may not (as in fictive entities such as unicorns) be *about* entities in the world” (2017, 132).

# Demographic Delimitation of Genre

Spotify fits into a long history of pop music classification in the U.S.:

- 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century sonic color lines (Stoeve 2016)
- Segregated sound in early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hagstrom Miller 2010)
- Racial disparities in early recording distribution (Filene 2000)
- Segregation of mid-1900s radio (Redd 1985)



# Boxed-in By Genre

India.Arie



<https://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2018/03/11/591576816/all-songs-1-india-arie-talks-about-worth-and-the-grammys>

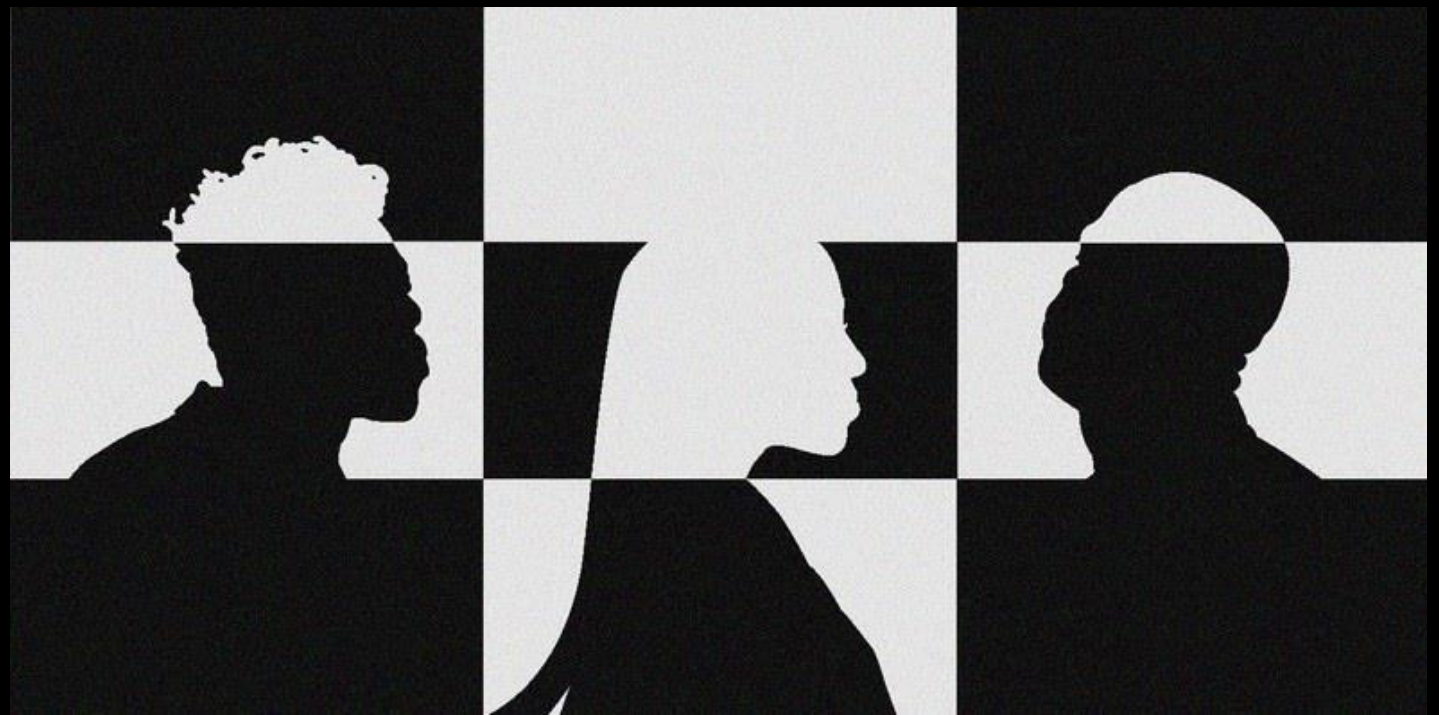


Illustration by Martine Ehrhart

## **Black Musicians on Being Boxed in by R&B and Rap Expectations: “We Fit in So Many Things” Briana Younger (9/28/17)**

Frank Ocean: “If you’re a singer and you’re black, you’re an R&B artist. Period.”

Moses Sumney: “When we put black artists in these boxes, we strip their ability to morph—which is something white artists don’t have to deal with.”

<https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/black-musicians-on-being-boxed-in-by-randb-and-rap-expectations-we-fit-in-so-many-things/>

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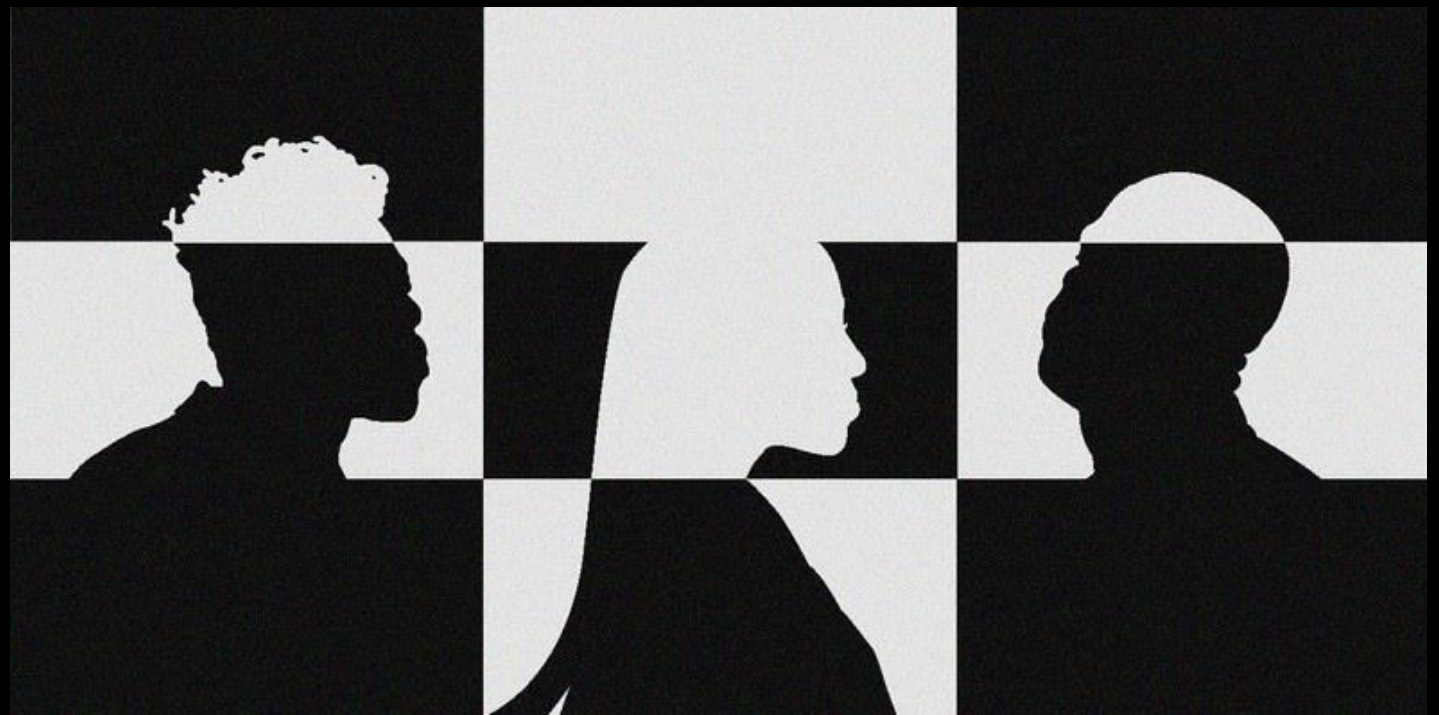


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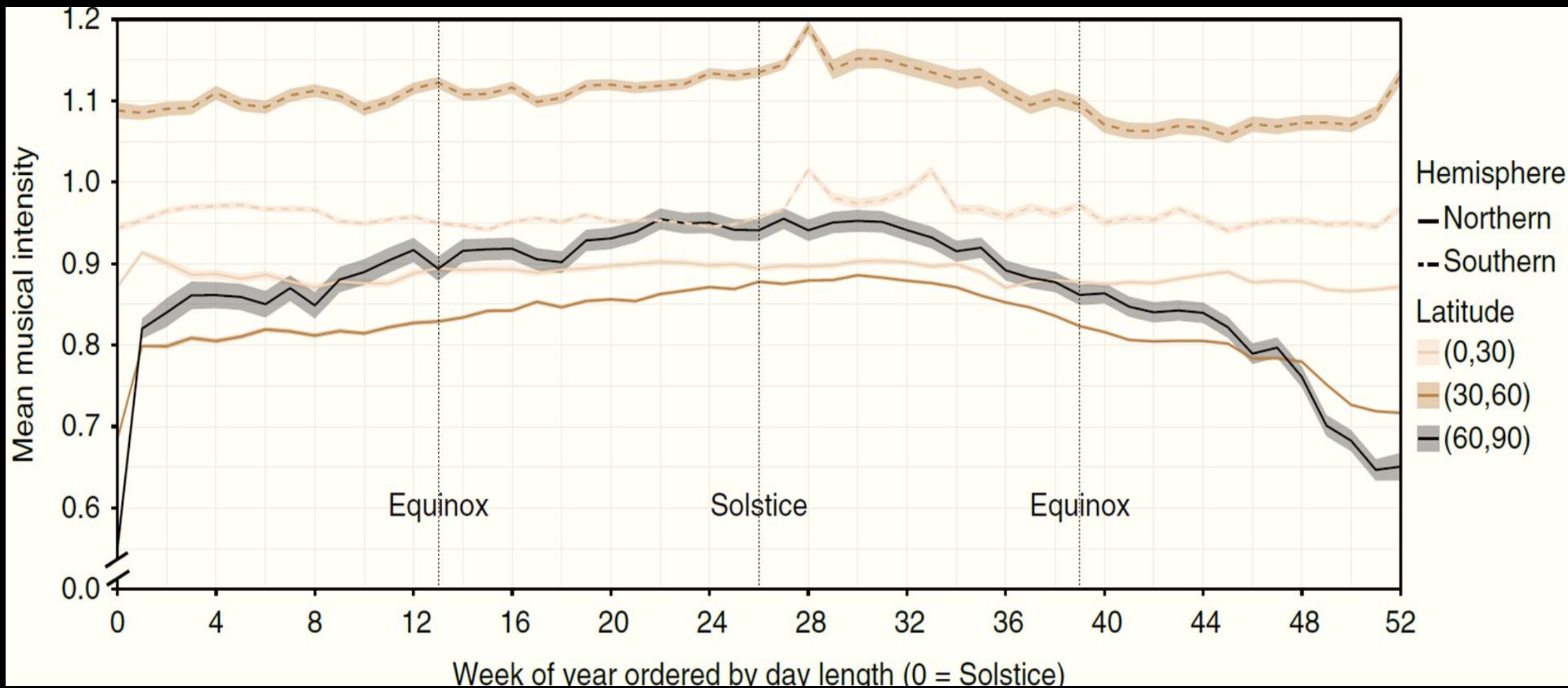
# Boxed-in By Genre



Is India.Arie's FOLK *your* FOLK?

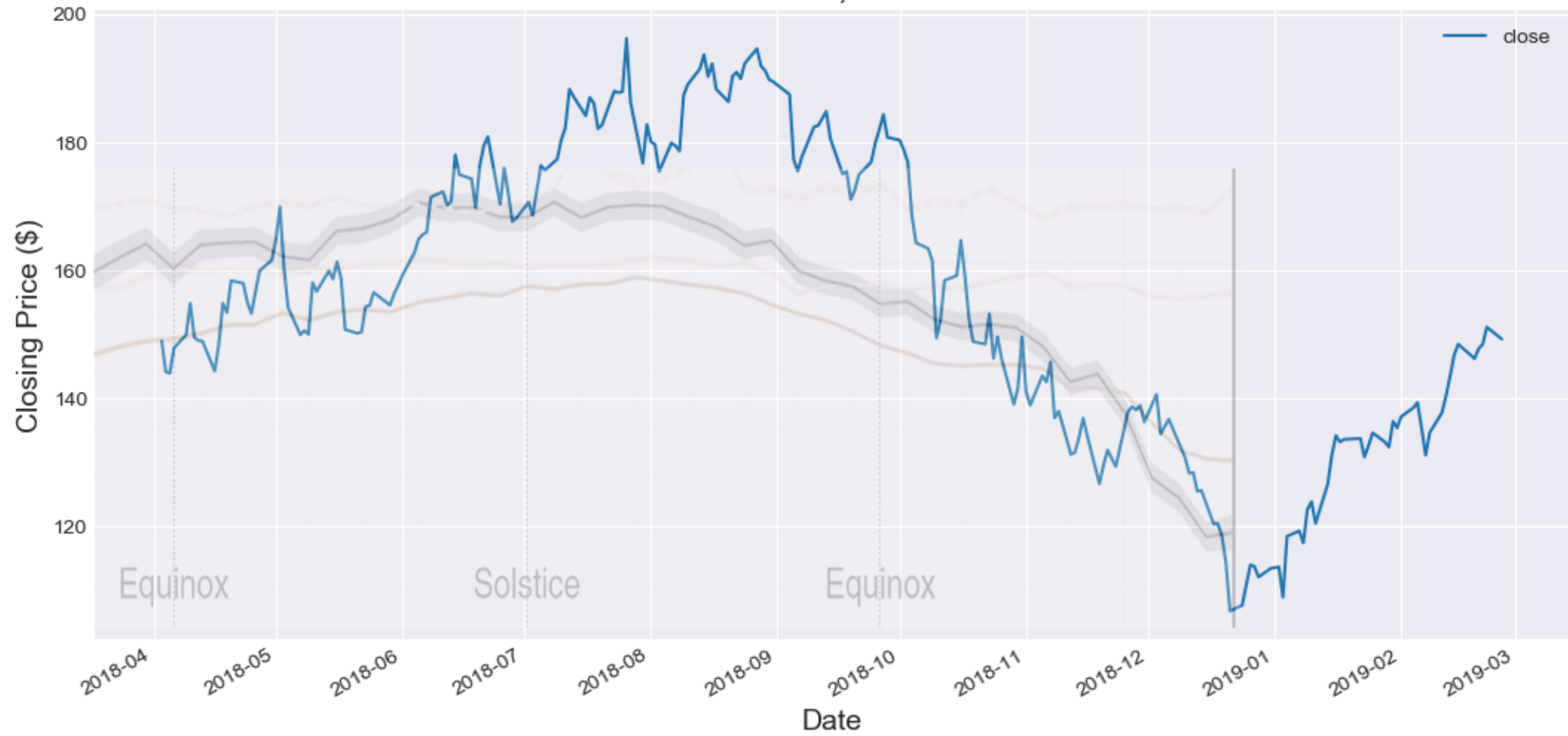
Does Chance's GOSPEL count?

How Spotify's userbase  
understands genre can directly  
affect musician success



Park et al. 2019

## Spotify (SPOT) NASDAQ performance Feb 25, 2019



# Which listeners matter for Spotify?

- Spotify's prized userbase values omnivorous listening habits
- Northern-latitude listeners' habits are generally tied to the seasons
- Very easy to make false claims based on true data!

Thank you!

# Selected Bibliography

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# Omnivorousness

- Eclectic genre tastes, focus on variety and openness
- Associated with “high-status” audiences
- “A higher diversity score should indicate a higher social status, which means that these listeners can have more expensive ads sold against them.” (Seaver 2014)