

# **Microgenres**

A Catalogers' Dilemma

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Blumenthal Family Library

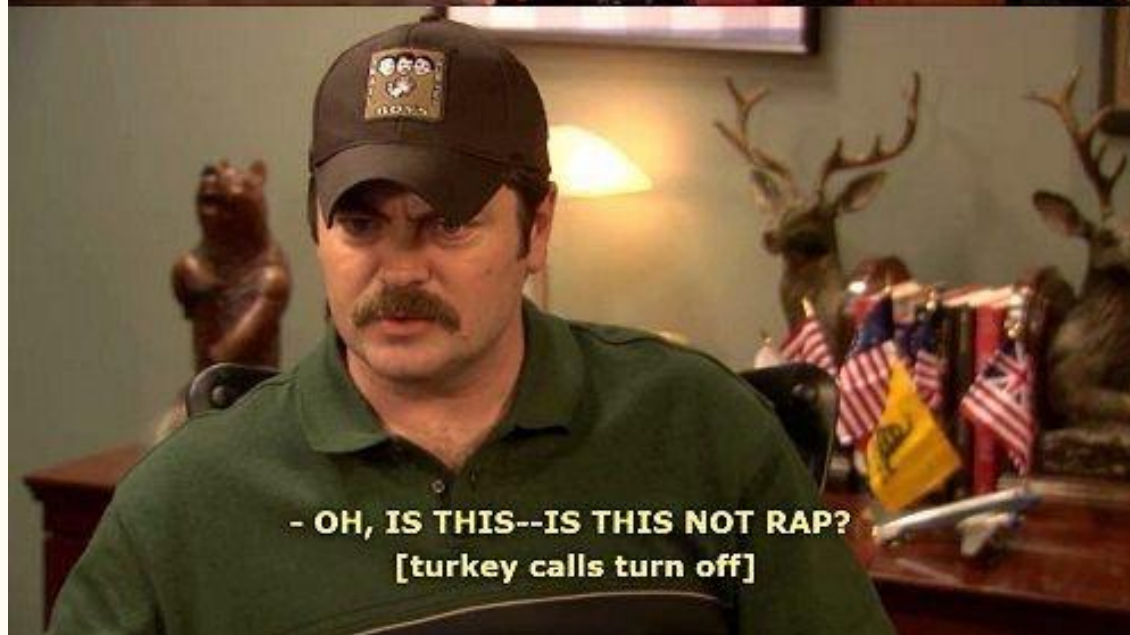
New England Conservatory of Music

# Brief Overview

- Microgenres as a cultural phenomenon.
- Classifying and defining musical microgenres in a library environment using controlled vocabularies and potentially assigning local subject headings.
- Challenges and resources for metadata description and acquiring microgenre musical sound recordings.
- This presentation will focus primarily on chopped and screwed music, with a brief discussion on vaporwave music and ambient music.



- YOU'RE LITERALLY LISTENING  
TO TURKEY CALLS.



- OH, IS THIS--IS THIS NOT RAP?  
[turkey calls turn off]

# Microgenre

noun

/mi · cro · gen · re/

1. A hyper-specific subcategory of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content.
2. A flexible, provisional, and temporary category used to establish micro-connections among cultural artifacts, drawn from a range of historical periods and from literature, film, music, television, and the performing and fine arts.
3. A specialized or niche genre; either machine-classified or retroactively established through analysis.

# Examples of Musical Microgenres

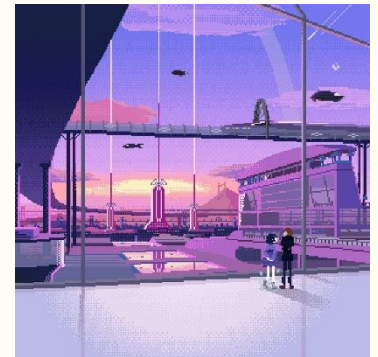
## Hyper-specific

- Chopped and screwed music



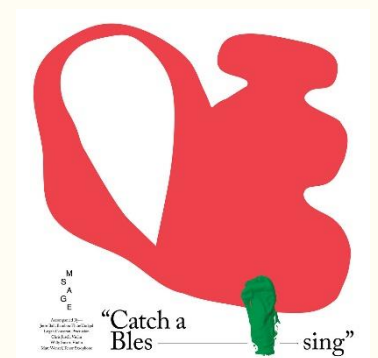
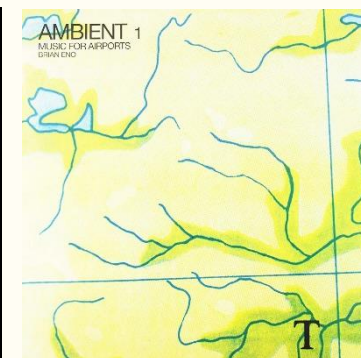
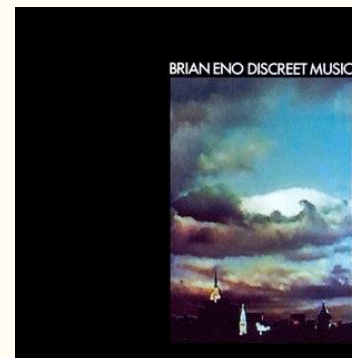
## Flexible, provisional, and temporary

- Vaporwave music



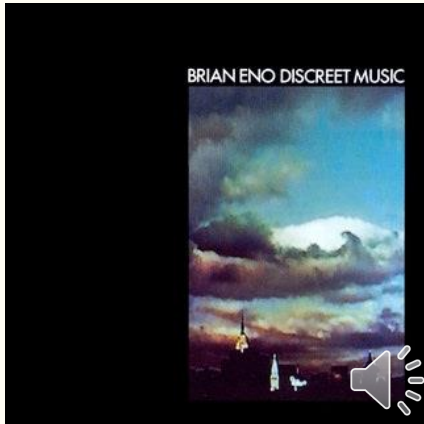
## Specialized or niche

- Ambient music



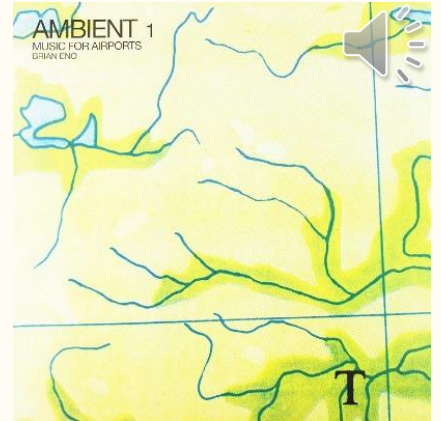


# Ambient Music

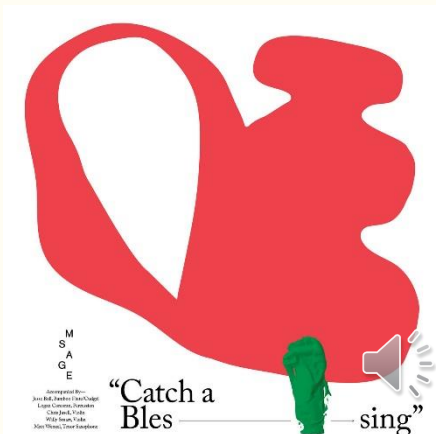


Discreet Music, *Discreet Music*, by Brian Eno, 1975, EG Records.

- The term ambient music was coined by composer Brian Eno upon the release of his album, "Discreet Music," in 1975.
- Ambient music is a broad microgenre encompassing a breath of natural sounds, acoustic and electronic instruments, with frequent use of loops and sampling to produce repetitive soundscapes.
- LCSH: Ambient music; Environmental music; Minimal music.
- LCGFT: Ambient (Electronica); Background music; Minimal music.



1/1, *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, by Brian Eno, 1978, EG Records & Polydor.



Michigan Turquoise, *Catch a Blessing*  
Genre tags: devotional, ambient,  
Americana, analog, experimental, home  
recording, Chicago

## M. Sage - "Catch a blessing"

- Chicago based ambient/electronic musician Matthew Sage's well received album.
- Owned and operated ambient music label Patient Sounds (2009-2019).
- Released April 5, 2019 on vinyl and digital download.
- Distributed on Geographic North, and via several US and EU distributors.
- 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> vinyl pressing sold out; library purchased 2<sup>nd</sup> pressing via Amazon.

# Vaporwave Music

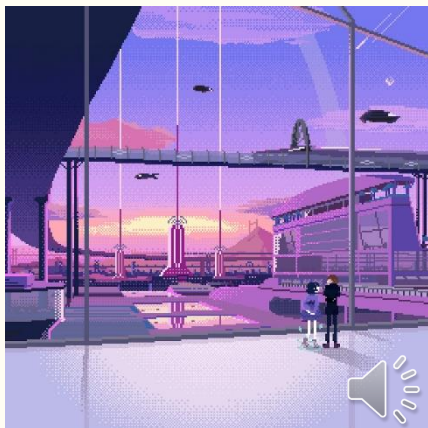


花の専門店 = Hana no Senmon-ten = "Floral Shoppe", by Macintosh Plus (Vektroid); December 9, 2011. (genre tags: electronic)

- The term vaporwave broadly describes a musical, visual and cultural aesthetic which is grounded in nostalgic iconography. This commonly includes references and abstractions of 1980s-early 2000s popular music, art, politics and consumer culture.
- Vaporwave music is a microgenre within electronic music that principally utilizes sampling, plunderphonics, and sound collage.
- LCSH: Popular music; Electronic music; Ambient music.



Livin' Loose & Walk Slow, *Slide*, by George Clanton. Released August 17, 2019 (genre tags: electronic, chillwave, futurepop, vaporwave, Los Angeles)



Sector 131, *Building a Better World*.  
Genre tags: electronic, dream, jungle, love, mallsoft, plunderphonics, post-internet, rain, sound collage, vaporwave

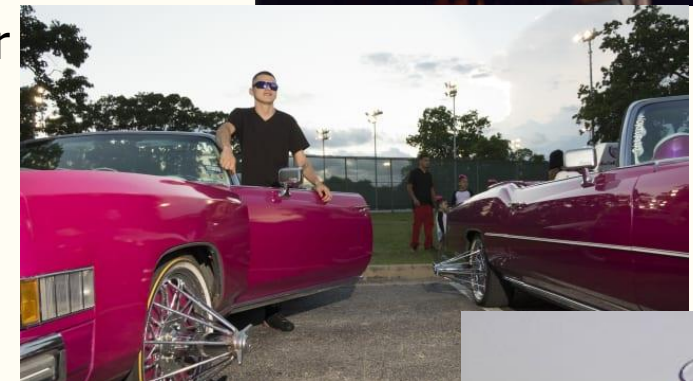
## 猫 シ Corp. & t e l e p a t h - Building a Better World

- Collaboration between two vaporwave pioneers, 猫 シ Corp. (Cat System Corp.) & t e l e p a t h providing a well-rounded and produced experience for new listeners.
- Released July 27, 2019 on cassette, vinyl, CD, and digital download.
- Each format has multiple color options, and the CD features a bonus track.
- Sold out on cassette and vinyl; library purchased CD has not arrived (yet).

# Chopped and Screwed Music

DJ Screw on the mixer and turntables.  
Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries

- Originated in South Houston in the early 1990's.
- Created by Houston based DJ Screw (Robert E. Davis, Jr., 1971-2000).
- Identifies with cultural iconography of late 80's-early 90's Houston, and more broadly Southern rap culture.
- Drug culture driven by socioeconomic factors (Lean/Purple drank).
- Historically chopped and screwed music is a regional subgenre of Southern rap music.
- Chopped and screwed music is principally released as authorized or unauthorized remixes of singles and albums.
- LCSH: Rap (Music) \$z Texas \$z Houston.
- LCGFT: Chopped and screwed (Music)
- [Excerpt](#) from Anthony Bourdain's Parts Unknown ("Houston" from Season 8, Episode 5).



David S. Holloway/CNN





# **DJ Screw Making a Screw Tape**

**from Soldiers United for Cash (documentary film)**



# Challenges with Acquiring Sound Recordings of Microgenres

- Mixtape culture still predominates distribution for chopped and screwed music:
  - Mid-late 1980's: Rap mixtapes originated as homemade cassettes, which were sold and shared.
  - Mid-late 1990's: DJ Screw's earliest tapes, "screw tapes," produced and duplicated on cassette. Later recordings and compilations were released and distributed on CD.
  - Early 2000's: Popular use of early digital download sites such as Napster, Limewire, and Kazaa increased distribution. DJ Screw passes in 2000, with numerous posthumous releases over the decade.
- Since the 2010's sound recordings, including mixtapes, are often released exclusively on streaming platforms such as Soundcloud, YouTube, Bandcamp, and DatPiff.
- Vaporwave releases are difficult to acquire due to limited production. Digital distribution and copyright issues also present issues for library acquisition and circulation.
- Physical media is often sold and distributed by indie music labels or self-released by the artist. DIY labels such as Screwed Up Records, Dream Catalogue, 100% Electronica, Leaving Records, and Geographic North are often the only distributors of their respective microgenres.

# Resources and Potential Solutions

- Bandcamp Tags via Bandcamp Discover (<https://bandcamp.com/tags>)
  - Aggregates existing music genre tags used on Bandcamp.
  - Bandcamp Discover is a separate site with tag visualization features.
- Every Noise at Once (<http://everynoise.com/>)
  - A Spotify web application using Echo Nest API and Spotify Web API.
  - Provides data visualization and artist search function using genre tags.
- Musicbrainz, Discogs, and Dream Graveyard ([vaporwave music](#)).
- Alternatively, creating/establishing local genre terms (\$2 local).
- Potential creation of a controlled vocabulary based on internet-derived genre-tags.
  - Inspired by the recent development of the Genre Terms for Table Top Games (\$2 gttg).

# Thundercat + OG Ron C and DJ Candlestick present “Drank”



- Official “chopped not slopped” remix.
- “Purple drank” iconography.
- Remix (collaborative work).

Subject Headings (LCSH)			
650		0	Popular music \$y 2011-2020.
650		0	Funk (Music)
650		0	Rhythm and blues music.
650		0	Electronica (Music)
<b>650</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>Remixes.</b>
Genre/Form (LCGFT)			
<b>655</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>Chopped and screwed (Music) \$2 lcgft</b>
<b>655</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>Remixes (Music) \$2 lcgft</b>

# Medium of Performance & Relationship Designators

- Partial LCMPT, following MLA BP for using LCMPT.

382	1	1	singer \$2 lcmpt
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- All supporting musicians listed in the contents note.

505	0	0	-- \$t Drink dat / \$r feat. Wiz Khalifa \$g (Chopnotslop remix) --
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- Supporting musicians assigned, \$e performer, relationship designator.

700	1		Khalifa, Wiz, \$d 1987- \$e performer.
700	1		Loggins, Kenny, \$e performer.

- Utilized \$e remix artist, for producers; and AAP's for artists using pseudonyms.

700	0		OG Ron C., \$d 1973- \$e remix artist.
700	0		DJ Candlestick, \$d 1985- \$e remix artist.
710	0		Chopstars (Musical group), \$e remix artist.



# Moonlight: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

- Soundtrack features a score inspired by and incorporating chopped and screwed music.
- Film includes rapper Jidenna's grammy-nominated "Classic Man," chopped and screwed.
- Success of the film generated renewed enthusiasm and interest in chopped and screwed music.
- The Chopstars later released, "Purple Moonlight," a chopped and screwed mixtape featuring music from the film and soundtrack available online only.
- "Purple Moonlight" received great acclaim in major media outlets and music review blogs.



# Moonlight: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack



“Our biggest breakthrough was when I expressed my love of Chopped and Screwed... When I listen to this music, I picture a 74 Impala on 28 inch rims drifting down MLK Boulevard... blasting Bach, chopped and screwed”—Barry Jenkins, director.

“When you apply these [chopped and screwed] techniques to music, the whole character of a piece changes...”—Nicholas Britell, composer, conductor.



# In Summary

- Microgenres are a cultural phenomena, oftentimes manifesting in literature, and the visual and performing arts under a variety of sociocultural conditions.
- Microgenres can be grouped into three broad categories: Hyper-specific; flexible, provisional and temporary; and specialized or niche.
- Microgenres present a unique set of challenges for libraries to acquire, create metadata descriptions of, and make accessible to their patrons.
- Microgenres are rarely static, but are instead dynamic and can change over time.
- The purpose of this presentation was to breakdown the ways in which cultural production intersects with lived experience and art. This set of sociocultural and socioeconomic conditions can result in microgenres such as chopped and screwed music.
- Lastly, this presentation posited the idea that librarians are not only stewards of their collections, but are also active participants in understanding and describing the context in which their institutions function in preserving unique materials and formats.

# Illustrations

1. Amy Pohler, Nick Offerman, Parks and Recreations, NBC Universal.
2. The Legend, DJ Scew, YouTube.
3. UGK Underground Boy's Ridin' Dirty, YouTube.
4. Drunk, Thundercat + OG Ron C and DJ Candlestick, Brainfeeder.
5. Floral Shoppe, Macintosh Plus, Vektroid via Bandcamp.
6. Slide, George Clanton, Bandcamp.
7. Building a Better Future, Cat. System Corp. & t e l e p a t h, Hiraeth Records via Bandcamp.
8. Discreet music, Brian Eno, Discogs.
9. Ambient 1: Music for Airports, Brian Eno, Discogs.
10. Catch a Blessing, M. Sage, Bandcamp.
11. DJ Screw on the mixer and turntables, Special Collections, University of Houston.
12. Drunk, Thundercat, Brainfeeder.
13. Candy paint and elbows, David S. Holloway/CNN.
14. Purple drink, Medium.
15. Moonlight: original motion picture soundtrack, Lakeshore Records.
16. Purple moonlight, the Chopstars.
17. Director Barry Jenkins (L) and composer Nicholas Britell Edwards, Amanda/Getty Images.



# Audio and Video

1. Discreet Music, Discreet music, by Brian Eno, 1975, EG Records.
2. 1/1, Ambient 1: music for airports, by Brian Eno, 1978, EG Records & Polydor.
3. Michigan turquoise, Catch a blessing, by M. Sage, 2019, Geographic North.
4. 花の専門店 = Hana no Senmon-ten = "Floral Shoppe", by Macintosh Plus (Vektroid); December 9, 2011.
5. Livin' Loose & Walk Slow, Slide, by George Clanton, August 17, 2019, 100% Electronica.
6. Sector 131, Building a Better World, Sector 131, Building a Better World, July 27, 2019, Hiraeth Records.
7. The Game Goes On (feat. K-Rino and Z-Ro), The Legend, DJ Screw, 2001.
8. Them changes, Drunk, Thundercat, 2017, Brainfeeder.
9. Them changes (Chopnotslop remix), Drank, Thundercat + OG Ron C and DJ Candlestick, 2018, Brainfeeder.
10. Classic Man [Remix] (feat. Kendrick Lamar), Jidenna, 2015.
11. Classic Man [Remix] (feat. Kendrick Lamar), Jidenna + the Chopstars, Purple moonlight 2017.
12. Cell therapy (chopped not slopped), Goodie Mob + the Chopstars, Purple moonlight, 2017.
13. Chiron's theme (chopped and screwed), Nicholas Britell, Moonlight: original motion picture soundtrack, 2016, Lakeshore Records.

## Video:

1. DJ Screw Making a Screw Tape, DJ Screw "Soldiers United for Cash" documentary, 2000, REL Entertainment, accessed April 9, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSmMoVf1j\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSmMoVf1j_8)
2. Houston, Anthony Bourdain, Parts Unknown, aired October 30, 2016, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/travel/2016/10/26/anthony-bourdain-parts-unknown-houston-2.cnn/video/playlists/atv-bourdain-s7-premiere-preview/>



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