

Analysis of Musical Characteristics of Spanish Pop Hits of the Eighties (1980 – 1989)

Luis Nuño, Miguel Á. Almonacid
Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain

Abstract

Years 1980 – 1989 are known as the golden decade of Spanish Pop music. Unfortunately, there are few publications describing the main characteristics of this music. And, regrettably, they are not intended for professional musicians, but for the general public. Additionally, Pop music in general has not been introduced in Spanish Conservatories yet, even that this music is most appreciated by the general audience. So, in case it is decided in next future to include Pop music in the official curricula, there will be a lack of bibliography on this subject. These reasons fully justify performing an analysis of this music, which is the objective of this work. But furthermore, it is worth underline that this music, besides of being sustainable by itself, is part of the soundtrack of many people's lives.

The first problem in carrying out this work was to select a representative set of songs or hits. To do it, four criteria were developed, which took into account information on sales, lists of best songs from different publishers, statistics of radio programs, and interviews to music professionals. A total of 84 songs were selected. Then, the second problem was to choose the musical characteristics to be analysed. In this case, six musical aspects were considered: form, harmony, rhythm, melody, lyrics, and timbre. And, for each of them, two or three characteristics were defined, which led to a total of 16 musical characteristics. The condition for defining them was that each characteristic, considered independently, included more than 50 per cent of the songs in the study. Finally, the results were condensed in a graph showing the percentage of songs having a specific number of characteristics, from 0 to 16. This way, the optimum ranges of musical characteristics for these songs could be determined.

Keywords

Spanish Pop music, Musical Analysis, Eighties, Hit, Musical Characteristic, Lyrics

Introduction

Years 1980 – 1989 are known as the golden decade of Spanish Pop music, mainly its first years, which coincided with the so-called “movida madrileña” (the Madrid scene). Unfortunately, there are few publications describing the main characteristics of this music. And, regrettably, those few publications describe this music only from the sociologic point of view. The reason is that they are intended for the general public (not necessarily musicians) or, in the best case, for amateur musicians. Consequently, in spite of its great importance, there is a lack of information on the musical characteristics of Spanish Pop music of the eighties. This is one of the reasons that drove the authors to carry out this study.

On the other hand, musical education in Spanish Conservatories is primarily focused on classical music; and, in some recent cases, also on Jazz. Pop music, on the contrary, even that it is most appreciated by the general audience, has no room in these institutions by the time being. Including just a few subjects on Pop music in the Spanish Conservatories curricula could be enough for many musicians to earn a living. So, another objective of this study is to contribute to the development of a basic literature on this music, which might be useful for future official studies. Additionally, the contents of this study will be included by the authors as a chapter in some subjects of Music Education, both in a current Conservatory program and in a Master on Music and Scenic Arts. It is

worth underline that this music, besides of being sustainable by itself, is part of the soundtrack of many people's lives.

Selection of the Songs

Selecting the most representative songs or hits of this decade is a very hard task. Some songs which are considered very important for some ones are not so important for others. In fact, the concept of hit itself is ambiguous. In this study, the main requirements for the songs to be included in the study were *relevance and influence*. After many fruitful discussions, the final decision was to include those songs meeting any of the following 4 criteria:

- a) Songs being, at least during 1 week, the most sold single in Spanish shops (taken from Salaverri, 2015).
- b) Songs included in at least 2 of the following 3 lists: Spotilists.com (2015), Diariocritico.com (2015) and Valencia Magazine (2011).
- c) Songs included in at least 1 of the 3 lists above and in at least 1 of the following 2 groups: Number one of "Los 40 principales de la Ser" during the eighties (taken from Cadena Ser, 2105) and top-selling single (in the top 30) at least during 1 week in the eighties (taken from Salaverri, 2015).
- d) Songs chosen by at least 50 % of 20 music professionals interviewed by one of the authors. It was a group composed by singers, musicians, radio speakers, DJ's, sound technicians and businessmen.

The result, after applying these criteria, is a set of 84 songs, which are shown in Table 1, first column. Column 2 shows the name of the artists (music bands or singers).

Table 1. List of selected Spanish Pop hits of the eighties.

SONG	ARTIST	CHARACTERISTICS	NUMBER
1. <i>La chica de ayer</i>	Nacha Pop	1-2-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-16	12
2. <i>Enamorado de la moda juvenil</i>	Radio Futura	1-3-4-6-7-8-12-13-14-15	10
3. <i>No dudaría</i>	Antonio Flores	1-2-3-4-6-7-8-10-13-14-15-16	12
4. <i>Déjame</i>	Los Secretos	4-5-8-10-11-12-14-15-16	9
5. <i>Groenlandia</i>	Zombies	1-2-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15	12
6. <i>Háblame de ti</i>	Pecos	1-3-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-16	12
7. <i>Pongamos que hablo de Madrid</i>	Joaquín Sabina	1-2-3-4-6-8-10-12-13-14-15-16	12
8. <i>Aire</i>	Pedro Marín	1-2-3-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-13-14-15-16	14
9. <i>Morir de amor</i>	Miguel Bosé	1-2-3-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-16	14
10. <i>Sin amor</i>	Iván	1-3-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-13-14-15-16	13
11. <i>Santa Lucía</i>	Miguel Ríos	1-2-5-6-8-9-11-12-13-14-15-16	12
12. <i>Dime que me quieres</i>	Tequila	2-3-4-6-8-9-10-11-13-14-15-16	12
13. <i>Te amaré</i>	Miguel Bosé	1-5-6-8-11-13-14-15-16	9
14. <i>Salta</i>	Tequila	2-3-6-7-8-9-13-14-15-16	10
15. <i>Autosuficiencia</i>	Parálisis Permanente	2-8-12-14-15-16	6
16. <i>Las chicas son guerreras</i>	Coz	1-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-13-14-15-16	12
17. <i>Te quiero tanto</i>	Iván	1-2-3-5-6-8-10-11-12-13-14-15-16	13
18. <i>Caperucita feroz</i>	Orquesta Mondragón	2-4-5-6-8-9-11-12-14-15-16	11
19. <i>Hoy no me puedo levantar</i>	Mecano	1-2-3-4-6-8-9-12-13-15	10
20. <i>Bailando</i>	Alaska y los Pegamoides	1-3-6-7-8-9-12-15	8
21. <i>Me colé en una fiesta</i>	Mecano	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-15	13

22. <i>Maquillaje</i>	Mecano	2-3-5-6-8-9-15	7
23. <i>La estatua del jardín botánico</i>	Radio Futura	4-6-7-8-9-10-14-16	8
24. <i>Cábillac Solitario</i>	Loquillo y los Trogloditas	1-3-4-6-7-8-10-11-14-15-16	11
25. <i>Embrujada</i>	Tino Casal	3-5-6-7-8-9-10-14-15	9
26. <i>El pistolero</i>	Los Pistones	1-2-3-5-6-7-8-9-12-14-16	11
27. <i>Barco a Venus</i>	Mecano	1-2-3-6-8-9-15	7
28. <i>Huesos</i>	Los Burros	1,5-6-8-10-11-12-13-14-15-16	11
29. <i>No controles</i>	Olé Olé	1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-15	13
30. <i>La noche no es para mí</i>	Video	2-3-6-8-12-13-15	7
31. <i>No mires a los ojos de la gente</i>	Golpes Bajos	1-2-3-5-7-8-10-12-14	9
32. <i>Malos tiempos para la lírica</i>	Golpes bajos	1-2-4-5-6-8-9-10-12-13-14-15	12
33. <i>Ataque preventivo de la URSS</i>	Polanski y el ardor	2-6-8-12-13-14-15-16	8
34. <i>No tengo tiempo</i>	Azul y Negro	1-2-3-5-7-8-9-10-12-13-14-15	12
35. <i>La fiesta nacional</i>	Mecano	1-2-3-5-8-10-15	7
36. <i>Lobo hombre en París</i>	La Unión	1-3-4-6-7-8-9-14-15-16	10
37. <i>Amante bandido</i>	Miguel Bosé	2-3-6-7-8-9-10-11-14-15	10
38. <i>Escuela de calor</i>	Radio Futura	1-2-6-7-8-14-15-16	8
39. <i>Cuatro rosas</i>	Gabinete Caligari	1-2-5-6-8-9-11-12-13-14-16	11
40. <i>Fotonovela</i>	Iván	2-3-4-6-7-8-9-11-12-13-14	11
41. <i>Sevilla</i>	Miguel Bosé	3-4-5-7-8-9-10-12-13-14	10
42. <i>Semilla negra</i>	Radio Futura	1-3-6-8-12-14-16	7
43. <i>Pánico en el edén</i>	Tino Casal	1-2-5-6-8-10-11-14-15	9
44. <i>¿Cómo pudiste hacerme esto a mí?</i>	Alaska	1-2-3-6-7-8-10-11-12-15	10
45. <i>Ni tú ni nadie</i>	Alaska	1-2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-13-15	12
46. <i>Rufino</i>	Luz Casal	2-3-5-6-8-9-10-11-13-15-16	11
47. <i>Bailaré sobre tu tumba</i>	Siniestro Total	1-2-4-6-7-8-9-13-14-15-16	11
48. <i>El imperio contraataca</i>	Los Nikis	1-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-12-14-16	11
49. <i>Venezia</i>	Hombres G	2-4-8-9-12-13-14-15-16	9
50. <i>Baila</i>	Iván	2-3-6-8-9-10-13-14-15	9
51. <i>Princesa</i>	Joaquín Sabina	1-2-3-4-5-8-10-11-12-13-14-15-16	13
52. <i>Querida Milagros</i>	El último de la fila	1-4-5-6-7-8-9-11-13-14-15-16	12
53. <i>Lo estás haciendo muy bien</i>	Semen Up	2-4-5-6-7-8-11-12-13-14-16	11
54. <i>La puerta de Alcalá</i>	Víctor Manuel y A. Belén	3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-12-13-15-16	12
55. <i>Marta tiene un marcapasos</i>	Hombres G	2-4-5-8-9-10-14-15-16	9
56. <i>A quién le importa</i>	Alaska	1-2-3-5-6-7-8-10-13-15	10
57. <i>Cien gaviotas</i>	Duncan Dhu	2-4-6-7-8-10-12-14-15-16	10
58. <i>Insurrección</i>	El último de la fila	4-5-6-7-8-9-11-12-14-16	10
59. <i>Cruz de Navajas</i>	Mecano	6-8-9-10-11-12-15-16	8
60. <i>Al calor del amor en un bar</i>	Gabinete Caligari	2-3-4-5-7-8-10-11-12-14-16	11
61. <i>Mi agüita amarilla</i>	Toreros muertos	2-4-6-7-8-9-10-13-14-15-16	11
62. <i>La negra flor</i>	Radio Futura	2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-12-13-14-16	12
63. <i>Jardín de rosas</i>	Duncan Dhu	3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16	13
64. <i>Camino Soria</i>	Gabinete Caligari	3-4-5-6-8-9-10-12-13-14-16	11
65. <i>Me cuesta tanto olvidarte</i>	Mecano	2-4-5-6-8-9-11-12-16	9
66. <i>¡Chas! Y aparezco a tu lado</i>	Álex y Cristina	2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-15	10
67. <i>Annabel Lee</i>	Radio Futura	1-4-6-8-11-14-16	7
68. <i>Eloise</i>	Tino Casal	3-5-7-8-10-11-13-14-15	9
69. <i>Yo no danzo al son de los tambores</i>	El último de la fila	4-5-6-8-10-11-14-16	8
70. <i>Una calle de París</i>	Duncan Dhu	4-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-14-16	10
71. <i>Mediterráneo</i>	Los Rebeldes	1-2-4-6-7-8-9-10-13-14-15-16	12
72. <i>Adiós papá</i>	Los Ronaldos	1-2-6-7-8-9-12-13-14-15-16	11

73. <i>Sabor de amor</i>	Danza Invisible	1-4-5-6-7-8-10-11-13-14-15-16	12
74. <i>Hijo de la luna</i>	Mecano	1-2-5-6-11-15-16	7
75. <i>¿Quién me ha robado el mes de Abril?</i>	Joaquín Sabina	2-3-4-6-8-10-12-13-14-15-16	11
76. <i>Más y más</i>	La Unión	2-3-5-8-11-12-13-14-15	9
77. <i>Mil calles llevan hacia ti</i>	La Guardia	1-2-4-5-6-8-10-11-12-14-15-16	12
78. <i>Mujer contra mujer</i>	Mecano	1-5-6-8-9-10-11-16	8
79. <i>Toro mecánico</i>	Dinamita pa los pollos	2-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-13-15-16	11
80. <i>Entre tú y yo</i>	El Norte	1-2-3-6-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16	13
81. <i>Los amigos de mis amigas, son...</i>	Objetivo Birmania	1-5-7-8-9-10-11-13-15	9
82. <i>Aquí no hay playa</i>	Los Refrescos	1-3-4-8-9-13-14-15-16	9
83. <i>Alma de Blues</i>	Presuntos implicados	1-2-3-6-8-10-15-16	8
84. <i>El límite</i>	La Frontera	2-4-6-7-8-9-13-14-15-16	10

Musical Characteristics

All songs in Table 1 have been analysed by listening to the original recordings. No song books or other sources (such as dedicated Web pages) were used, because generally they are not complete and sometimes may contain inaccuracies. The number of musical characteristics analysed is 16 and they have been grouped into 6 musical aspects or categories, which are: Form (3), Harmony (3), Rhythm (2), Melody (2), Lyrics (3), and Timbre (3). The number in parentheses indicates the number of characteristics in each category. All the 16 characteristics have been defined in such a way that each of them, considered independently, include more than 50 % of the songs in the study. Table 1, column 3, indicates which of these characteristics are present in each song. And column 4 shows the total number of characteristics contained in each song. These characteristics, grouped by categories, are the following.

Form:

- 1) *Length*. The length of the songs in the eighties was less standardised than nowadays, since they were not forced by promotion or commercial criteria. So, we found lengths ranging from 2'07", as in *Autosuficiencia*, to 5'49", as in *Eloise*, the average length being 3'46". Under this characteristic we included the songs with lengths between 3'20" and 4'20", which represent the 57.14 %.
- 2) *Sections*. The most common sections in these songs are: intro, verse, chorus, bridge, and coda. Other possible sections are: pre-chorus, post-chorus, and solo. There is a variety of songs regarding their sections. Under this characteristic we included the songs having, apart from other sections, only one verse (which can be repeated), which represent the 65.47 %.
- 3) *Fade out*. Ending the songs with a fade out was very common in the eighties, mainly during its first years. Afterwards, this practice gradually decreased and nowadays it is rarely used. Under this characteristic we included the songs ending with a fade out, which represent the 55.95 %.

Harmony:

- 4) *Keys*. Generally, most Pop songs are composed in a major key; and not only in the eighties, but also nowadays. Additionally, there is a clear prevalence of those keys that are easy to play on a piano or on a guitar. Under this characteristic we included the songs written in C major, A major, E major or G major, which represent the 53.57 %.
- 5) *Chords*. Of course, the most used chords in Pop music are those being diatonic to the current key. However, secondary dominants are also quite used, mainly the dominants over the V and VI

degrees (that is, V/V and V/VI, respectively). Moreover, modal interchange chords are very common, too, the most important one being the VIIb. Under this characteristic we included the songs using, apart from diatonic chords, at least one secondary dominant or one modal interchange chord, which represent the 57.14 %.

- 6) *Modulation*. Usually, modulation in Pop songs is limited to raising the final choruses a half step with the aim of avoiding monotony, rather than introducing a new section. Under this characteristic we included the songs having no modulation, which represent the 80.95 %.

Rhythm:

- 7) *Tempo*. The tempos of these songs are very diverse, ranging from very slow, as in *Mujer contra mujer* with 72 bpm (beats per minute), to very fast, as in *Marta tiene un marcapasos* with 204 bpm, the average tempo being 135.9 bpm. It was also observed that, for the Spanish Pop, the average tempo in the eighties is higher than in the sixties. Under this characteristic we included the songs with tempos between 120 and 150 bpm, which represent the 53.57 %.
- 8) *Time signature*. Contrary to the Spanish Pop of the sixties, where different time signatures were used, in the eighties there is practically only one: the common or four-four time. A reason may be the tendency to avoid triple metres, which were considered somewhat folkloric. Under this characteristic we included the songs composed in common time, which represent the 98.80 %.

Melody:

- 9) *Chorus ending*. The analysis of phrase endings shows that, in many cases, the last syllable is placed on the last eighth note of the measure, thus anticipating the down beat of the next measure. Under this characteristic we included the songs having a chorus with a metrically unaccented ending, which represent the 60.71 %.
- 10) *Riff*. This element is very typical in Pop-Rock style, where it is usually performed by the electric guitars. However, it is not so common in the Spanish Pop of the eighties. Under this characteristic we included the songs having no riff, which represent the 63.09 %.

Lyrics:

- 11) *Subject*. It is apparent that love has been a recurrent subject in literature and, therefore, in musical lyrics. On the contrary, the lyrics covered under this study do not show a strong social or protest component. Under this characteristic we included the songs whose lyrics deal with love and couple relationships, which represent the 51.19 %.
- 12) *Onomatopoeias*. This concept has been used for describing both words imitating real sounds and simple syllables with no meaning. This kind of words are quite common in Pop songs, although not in the majority of them. Under this characteristic we included the songs having no onomatopoeia, which represent the 55.95 %.
- 13) *Reiterative title*. The title is sometimes used as the hook of the song. In fact, in some cases it is excessively repeated, as in *No Controles*, where it is said 44 times! Under this characteristic we included the songs where the title is said 6 or more times, which represent the 57.14 %.

Timbre:

- 14) *Male singer*. Generally, there is a prevalence of male voices over female ones, as it occurred in previous years as well. Nevertheless, some of most representative hits correspond to female singers, as in the case of Mecano or Alaska y Dinarama. In other cases, there are several voices, including male and female. No song in this study is purely instrumental. Under this characteristic we included the songs with a male main singer, which represent the 73.80 %.

15) *Choirs*. Many Pop songs include sections with several voices or choirs, and even sometimes it is the only singer who doubles his or her voice when recording the disc. Under this characteristic we included the songs containing choirs, which represent the 76.19 %.

16) *Electronic programming*. A great development of electronic technology took place in the eighties, where a variety of electronic and acoustic instruments shared the stage. Basically, the instruments most used by Pop bands were guitar, bass, keyboard and drums. The analysis carried out shows that the main difference regarding the instrumentation is if it contains or not an electronic programming. Under this characteristic we included the songs containing electronic programming, which represent the 69.04 %.

In order to condense and simplify the information given in Table 1, the graph in Fig. 1 has been developed. It shows the percentage of songs having a specific number of characteristics, from 0 to 16. As can be seen, there is no song in this study with 5 or less characteristics. As well, there is no song with 15 or 16 characteristics. Most of the songs have 9 to 12 characteristics, which represent the 70.21 %. And the percentage of songs having 7 to 13 characteristics is 96.39 %, that is, almost all of them.

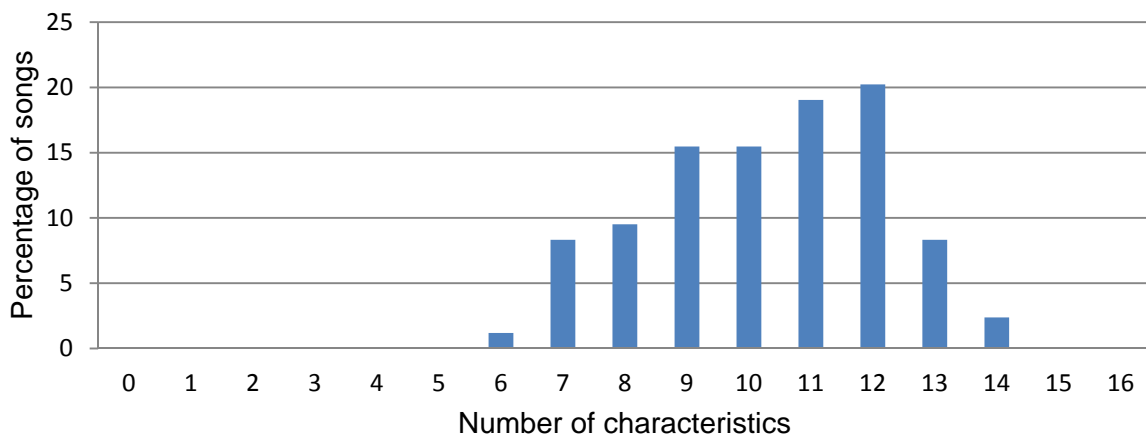


Fig. 1. Percentage of songs having a specific number of characteristics.

Conclusions

An analysis of Spanish Pop hits of the eighties has been carried out. The selection of songs was done by using 4 criteria, which took into account information on sales, lists of best songs from different publishers, statistics of radio programs, and interviews to music professionals. A total of 84 songs were selected. Then, a total of 16 musical characteristics were analysed, covering 6 musical aspects: form, harmony, rhythm, melody, lyrics, and timbre. The results show that more than 70 % of the songs have 9 to 12 of those characteristics and more than 96 % have 7 to 13 characteristics.

Bibliography

Cadena Ser (2015). *Los 40 principales (The top 40)*. Available online at: <http://los40.com/lista40/numeros1>

Diariocritico.com (2015). *Las 100 mejores canciones del pop español (The 100 best songs of Spanish Pop)*. Available online at: <http://www.diariocritico.com/ocio/musica/mejores-canciones/mejores-canciones-espana/455695>

Salaverri, F. (2015). *Solo éxitos 1959-2012*. Madrid: Ed. Fundación SGAE.

Spotilists.com (2015). *Las 200 mejores canciones del pop-rock español, por Rolling Stones (The 200 best songs of Spanish Pop-Rock, by Rolling Stones)*. Available online at: <http://spotilists.com/lista/las-200-mejores-canciones-del-pop-rock-espanol-por-rolling-stone/>

Valencia Magazine (2011). *Las 200 mejores canciones de la historia del pop español (The 200 best songs of Spanish Pop history)*. Available online at: <https://nicolasramospintado.wordpress.com/2011/01/08/4269/>