Uptown Funk Music Background Context

During the 60s, soul started to become popular with the sounds of “Motown”. Artists including Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, Stevie Wonder and many more artists helped to promote this genre during the 60s. During this particular decade, times in American culture were changing however, it wasn’t just the culture of American history changing, it was the music as well. Motown was the first record company owned by African Americans. Without this sound music would have branched off to other genres such as funk and soul. James Brown, known as the founding father of Funk, or grandfather to Soul, had an outspoken voice in Soul music and had a groove that would be proven to be the future of Funk music (New Funk Order). The genre of Funk can be described as those songs with feel good vibes that make you want to dance.

Soul music began post war with artist such as Ray Charles, Sam Cook and James Brown who turned gospel songs into art. It could be described as secularised gospel. These artists were known as founding fathers of soul music and this style was very much a race music. However it ended up being one of the first successes of the civil rights movement as their songs were enjoyed by more than the ‘black’ race that it was originally intended for. It was classed as funky, energetic, deep, jazzy, churchy, upbeat, religious and relaxing to name but a few.

Although Motown was a record label, the Motown style (a subgenre of soul) broke down barrier and brought together a nation of black and white Americans. It is known as the sound that changed America. The music of these artists including the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, the Jackson 5, Diana Ross to name but a few communicated to a nation and brought together a nation divided by segregation and race. Their music brought together races and nations. It had a distinctive upbeat style that brought together black and white, old and young, pop and soul. It continues even today to inspire and entertain across races. Their music was typified by the following characteristics:

* tambourines to accent the back beat
* prominent and often melodic electric bass guitar lines
* distinctive melodic and chord structures
* a call and response singing style that originated in gospel music
* pop production techniques such as the use of orchestral string sections
* charted horn sections
* carefully arranged background vocals
* elaborate, melismatic (singing of a single syllable of text when moving between different notes in sucession) vocal riffs were avoided.

The sound of Motown is heavily produced as it can create many different sounds. They use many instruments layered up to create a wall of sound. With the aesthetics being a clean polished sounds for the radio. Where as compared to the band “Stax” they prefer an earthier sound, where they sound live in the studio.

The song “Uptown Funk” has all the key elements of Funk in modern era including the inclusion of certain instruments including guitar, bass, synthesizers and horns instrumentation. Throughout his song he has used backing vocals that use the low frequency range expanding and creating a more dominant bass. [Low End Sound, over 2015] Uptown Funk is a song that many people have used to create parodies of using president speeches. By recreating a song with a genre/style from the past, the artist can easily appeal to a newer generation of listeners than if they were to solely rely on the style alone.