Offbeat is an audio fashion concept that taps into the storytelling capacities of both music and fashion. It aims to showcase the possibilities of audio branding for the fashion industry. The theory of Offbeat is applicable to many brands. Here it is applied to the Italian fashion house Marni.
Design-Integrated Audio

Audio Identity Layers - Concept

Jazz

Spring / Summer 2014

Audio Identity Layers - S / S 14

Offbeat Integration

Henrik Schwarz

Ben Frost

Glossary
Design-Integrated Audio

Offbeat is a concept for design-integrated audio. In this audio is an organic element of the design process. It is equal to other expressions and part of the design.

Marni creates fashion intuitively; a play with textures, colours and materials, opposing and complementing each other, creating a vibrant pot-pourri (of looks). Audio offers the opportunity to add another texture and language to the mix. Which through having its own sense of communication doesn’t compete with the visual but complements and can tell a story.
Both the music and fashion industry rely on the use of storytelling. In vocal and popular music more obviously through lyrics, but also instrumental pieces more often than not tell a story. To look at universally known classical repertoire take Grieg’s Peer Gynt, which was written for the play by Henrik Ibsen and is now often performed on its own. The music tells a whole story, in its own language. One doesn’t need to know the play to grasp the atmosphere when listening to “In the Hall of the Mountain King”. Or to give another well-known example, Dvorak’s Symphony Nr. 9 (From the New World); here the story told isn’t a literal story but based more on overall themes: “Negro music” and the melodies of Native Americans, marking a departure to new shores from European composition.

Fashion also tells stories. They are differently structured and less graspable, revolving around themes, culture references, history, textures, colours and shapes, but they are there. Be it Vivienne Westwood’s rebellious spirit mixed with the latest political causes or Chanel’s catwalk displays.

Now is the time that we tell both stories together, because it is easy to translate fashion concepts into music. Music knows texture and temperament and personality.
Marni is a diverse brand and part of an industry with strong seasonal changes. Its musical identity needs to allow enough fluidity to accommodate this.

The identity becomes multi-layered, combining several themes at once. Music pieces are naturally layered and consist of many elements and melodies, which makes it easy to incorporate different concepts in one track. This allows a flexible and individual approach while still being Marni at the core.

Dividing all identity elements into conceptual layers allows for a better overview and also makes it easier for a composer to establish the correct hierarchy. The composition itself should later not be perceived as layered but one piece.

FASHION IS SEASONAL, BUT A BRAND IS NOT.
Layer 1 - BRAND

This conceptual layer will always be the same and represent the brand’s personality. It will only change if the brand identity should be reoriented. It also sets the basis for all other layers, defining overall style and characteristics. Think of it as a brand book for sound.

Layer 2

This layer encompasses the hierarchically next important identity. For Marni S/S 14 it encompasses the collection themes. But in a different usage scenario it could also be an exhibition theme, a film concept, an event or installation concept.

Layer 3

Layer 3 represents the next smaller identity or concept. For Marni S/S 14 those are the individual looks, but for a different application this could be identity of a collaborating artist or venue.

There is no fixed number of layers. They are dependent application and the amount of involved identities.
Marni’s values define the style of the musical composition. Modern Jazz shares those values and makes it an ideal basis for Marni’s audio layer signature. Jazz has a long tradition of experimentation and fusion, innovating so often that it has accumulated a large amount of sub-genres. But uniting them all is a passion for improvisation and collaboration, an openness for the unusual and the blending of styles.

The advantage of connecting the brand to a specific genre is to ensure a unified style and recognition. Beyond this Jazz also already has the public image of being experimental and a music of unlimited creative freedom, which makes it possible for Marni to benefit from association especially with people unknowledgeable of the brand’s personality.
Polyphonic: (two or more melodic lines)
Marni’s design signature is combining unique materials, textures and colours to complex stunning designs. This weaving together of influences has to be reflected in sound.

Staccato not Legato: (each note sharply separated from the others vs. notes sung smoothly and connected)
Marni has a pulsating energy, buzzing with life and colours. While being feminine, it isn’t sweet and smooth. For strings this may also be expressed through pizzicato (plucking the strings of a stringed instrument with one’s finger).

Instruments
Piano; Cello; non metallic percussion; no/few brass instruments:
To achieve equal weaving of textures, no instrument should be too dominant. Piano and Cello are timeless instruments, but with a high diversity of playing options. However tweaked and played they have a pleasant tone.

Digital
Electronic and digital distortion:
Marni’s personality is anything but traditional. To spice things up a bit and sound distinctively different from the next Jazz bar, sounds will be tweaked, distortions are welcome and digital alterations the norm.
Marni produces four main collections each year, for men and women and an additional four to six capsule collections for women. All have their own design theme, season and purpose. This creates multiple levels of meaning that should all be represented in the music.
Restrained and austere romanticism. Together they create a balance of opposites, resulting in weightlessness as well as bringing up a memory of the feminine.

Spring and Sport. The mood is airy and light, creating floating volumes. Sport is a distant memory that puts romanticism off-kilter.

Each look has its own concept inside the collection theme. To provide each of it with its a distinct audio signature he outfits need to be deconstructed into their individual themes to become a musical layer.
Audio Identity Layers

APPLIED - SS14 - #27

Fashion becomes music. Here the layer system is applied to Marni’s S/S 14 collection and look Nr. 27 to show how design themes translate into audio.

Layer 1 - BRAND

Marni’s identity is expressed through modern, experimental jazz as both share the values of being innovative and unexpected. This music, just as the S/S 14 Marni collection, is eclectic and juxtaposes multiple motifs. Coherence comes from the collage, not the individual.
Restraint and Austerity: Mirrored in the minimal continuous background sounds accompanying everything and moderating it.

Romanticism: Throughout all pieces is a certain underlying sweetness and lightness, never coming out openly.

Sport: Energy through rhythm. Percussion as well as melodic instruments are used to quicken the pace.

Spring: Quicken pace increases further as does the growth of nature from timid to an uncontrolled energy freeing itself from the restraint of winter.

Check patterned restraint opposing luxurious flower explosion. Sportswear opposing evening-wear.

Repetitive structured rhythm provides a dynamic pace as well as restriction. Xylophone and Piano weave in a blossoming and sweet roundness to complement the percussive sounds.
Offbeat can go many places. It becomes part of the environment and part of the customer’s experience of the brand. It is there during the fashion show, it is online when the collection is presented to consumers. Motifs can be woven into advertising films. Social media with its short video sequences provides an ideal opportunity to showcase designs. Events and event promotion can have its own audio signature, reflecting themes or collaborator influences. It has the power to provide a variety of experiences while staying its distinctive self. The possibilities are endless as long as audio can be integrated.

This Marni Prisma event could have its own custom music.
Integration

Website

One possible outlet is the brand website and more specifically the online presentation of a new collection.

The launch of a new collection is the biggest and most natural moment of advertising and brand communication. While the buzz is about the actual fashion show, most will never attend the show and instead view the video or images online.

With this in mind the proposed web presentation goes beyond sound and aims to offer deeper a glance into the collection, with collection concept introduction, info about garments and images from the inspiration gathering process. Together with its designed audio it gives a complete understanding of the collection.

The site is functional for desktop and mobile devices.
Marni has a long history of successful collaborations with artists and makers. For Marni creation is an open dialogue filled with passion and attention. As audio isn’t the brand’s core competence it provides a good opportunity to collaborate with artists and circulate the brand’s vision.

They give musical impulses during the design process, help translate the visual language and compose or arrange the final music.
Henrik Schwarz

Based
in Berlin

Role
Composer, Producer, Sound Designer

Style
Schwarz is known for his eclectic musical approach to composition and sound design. He has successfully maintained a balance between electronic music, classical and jazz.

Work Excerpt
2014: Henrik Schwarz – House Masters – (Defected)
2014: Bugge Wesseltoft, Henrik Schwarz & Dan Berglund – Trialogue (Jazzland Recordings)
2015: Henrik Schwarz – Instruments (Sony Classical International)

Previous Collaborations
Bugge Wesseltoft
Dan Berglund
Nik Bärtsch
Hauschka

Ethnic Heritage Ensemble
Guem
Kahil ElZabar
Kuniyuki

Fit
Schwarz is well established in electronic music and jazz. He is constantly exploring new avenues and formats. He has produced a lot of commissioned work for jazz and classical venues as well as participated in unexpected collaborations.
Ben Frost

Based in Reykjavik
Role Composer, Producer
Style minimalist, instrumental, experimental

Work Excerpt
Composition:
ITMOi – Dance Theater

Production:
Björk – Medulla
Colin Stetson – New History Warfare Vol.3
Amiina – The Lighthouse Project

Fit
While Frost’s personal albums are dark and electronic in nature, his range as a composer and producer is incredibly versatile. In order to create the eclectic signature needed for Marni, the composer must be proficient and experienced in many styles including modern Jazz. His extensive client work show he is able to work to a brief.
# Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce a pleasing effect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legato</td>
<td>indicates that musical notes are played or sung smoothly and connected. That is, the player transitions from note to note with no intervening silence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pizzicato</td>
<td>a method of playing by plucking the strings with the fingers, rather than using the bow. This produces a very different sound from bowing, short and percussive rather than sustained.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polyphony</td>
<td>a texture consisting of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody, as opposed to a musical texture with just one voice which is called monophony, and in difference from musical texture with one dominant melodic voice accompanied by chords which is called homophony.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staccato</td>
<td>a form of musical articulation. In modern notation it signifies a note of shortened duration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timbre</td>
<td>the character or quality of a musical sound or voice as distinct from its pitch and intensity.</td>
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