

I'd Like to Write the World an Ad:  
A Compositional Analysis of Popular Jingles

By:  
JJ Tyson

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Approved:

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Kevin Kearns

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## ABSTRACT

JJ Tyson: I'd Like to Write the World an Ad: A Compositional Analysis of Popular Jingles  
(Under the direction of Lynn Owens)

For nearly a century, advertisers have used music to communicate messages on behalf of companies. However, despite their prevalence as a marketing tool, very little research has been conducted on what makes jingles an effective means of reaching consumers. In 2010, Forbes magazine published a list of the “10 Greatest Jingles of All Time,” as voted on by a panel of C.M.Os. However, when they were asked what made these jingles “enduring”, the response was simply “sticking power.”

This goal of this research is to elucidate what creates the “sticking power” found in a successful jingle. Through critical analysis of the lyrical, musical, and visual aspects of the ten jingle-based advertisements on the Forbes list, the goal of this thesis is two-fold; to clarify what elements these ten advertisements have in common, and to lay the groundwork for future research into the question, “What makes a good jingle?”

To my mentor, friend, and inspiration Lynn Owens, who believed in me wholeheartedly from the beginning, and without whom this research would have never been possible.

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## Preface

Although it surprises me enormously, the fact that virtually no researcher in the history of academia has cared enough to study advertising jingles has not been shocking to many of my peers and professors. “Why bother?” one of them asked me between perplexed sips of coffee. “You’re won’t be able to find anything to write about,” someone else said. “Why would you waste your time studying that?”

In answer to this question, I simply responded “Why study anything? To understand it better.” Jingles are an odd phenomenon, in that virtually everyone in the U.S. interacts with them, but rarely do people care to know how they work. Yet, from a young age, I’ve wondered about what makes jingles effective. Why do I think of State Farm when people mention the term “good neighbor?” Why does my mind leap to visions of Kit Kat bars every time someone uses the phrase “give me a break?” And why, for the love of all that is decent, do I know the phone number for Empire, an utterly unremarkable domestic flooring company?

The answer is jingles. I don’t shop regularly for insurance or buy chocolate bars, and I certainly am not in the market for new carpeting. Yet, I find myself pondering these brands an inordinate amount given how little I need their products. So why study jingles? Perhaps because I have a genuine interest in the techniques they use to increase recall. Or perhaps I just want to stop buying so many Kit Kat bars.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

*800-588-2300*. Nothing is particularly memorable about this set of digits. They do not correspond to a word, they do not form a numerical pattern, and they tell an audience nothing about who or what the number represents. And yet, all one has to do is begin to warble the 6-second melody associated with this phone number to suddenly find that a surprisingly large portion of the U.S. population has, willingly or otherwise, memorized this telephone number; some even have a fond sense of nostalgia for it. To be clear, Empire—the company with which the number is affiliated—is not an emergency hotline. It's not an innovative or life-changing service. It is, in fact, a domestic flooring company, headquartered in Northlake, Illinois, that got its start as a distributor of industrial plastic coverings. Yet Empire's advertising has been featured prominently as a topic of discussion on the Ellen DeGeneres show. It's been mentioned on multiple HGTV programs. It's even been used as a gag on Late Night with Conan O'Brien (Kyles, 2006). The words "800-588-2300 ... Empire," and a six-second melody got a small flooring company the exposure that an international conglomerate would kill for. And they did it while actively ignoring every major trend in advertising for the past four decades.

Before progressing further, it may be helpful to define what a jingle is. According to its denotative meaning, a jingle is "a short song that is easy to remember and that is used to help sell a product on television or radio." The earliest known jingle is thought to be a 1926 ditty from General Mills entitled "Have you Tried Wheaties". The social media age has thrown traditional advertising for a loop in virtually every aspect of the business,

with consumer good companies now spending more on digital media than traditional ads for the first time (Neff, 2017). Advertising today is supposed to portray a company as being simultaneously sexy, ultra-modern, and socially relevant beyond the sphere of mere business. But somehow, Empire Carpet remains a major player in the industry in spite of what many would consider an antiquated publicity model. Other than exchanging their live-action spokesperson for a cartoon version in the mid-2000s, the company has not changed its strategy in over four decades.

To make matters “worse” from a modern ad perspective, the music from the advertisement is not even remotely contemporary in sound, and never has been. To a consumer in the Facebook era, the jingle sounds distinctly antiquated. The brief melody is presented by a mixed chorus singing acapella in close harmony, evoking a style characteristic of Big Band-era vocal groups like The Pied Pipers. The final nail in the coffin should be the group’s stage name; the jingle’s singers called themselves “The Fabulous Forties.” In short, by modern ad standards, there should be nothing cool, sexy, or chic about the Empire or its 40-year-old jingle. And yet, last year, Empire Today’s estimated revenues topped \$600 million. They’ve routinely been ranked one of the best flooring suppliers in the nation, and continue to be a major player in the industry. Empire is a case study in successful use of original music in advertising. However, cases like Empire are not as common as they once were.

A recent trend in advertising which has threatened the very existence of the television jingle is the advent of pop-music licensing. At one time, many artists in the popular sphere considered the idea of selling their song to a corporation to be the antithesis of artistic intent. After all, what could be more commercialized than allowing a

piece of one's own music to be literally turned into a commercial for a product (Sanburn, 2012). Such was the case when famed 1980s group The Police, to great publicity, turned down a company's offer to use the song "Don't Stand so Close to Me" in a deodorant ad. The band members claimed it would have made a mockery of what they held to be expressive art (Hunter, 1999).

However, all one has to do is examine the ads airing during the 2017 Super Bowl to realize the marked absence of original music used in current TV ads. Kia's Niro spots were scored with the 80s hit, "I Need a Hero," GoDaddy made use of Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up," and PepsiCo utilized John Legend's "Love Me Now." In short, there's been a paradigm shift; musicians no longer view it as artistically disingenuous to allow their work to be used in commercials. And although it is much more expensive to acquire music rights than it is to pay someone to compose an original tune, many advertisers would prefer to bank on the popularity of a celebrity's work rather than risk coming across as old-fashioned by using a originally composed melody (Lauro, 1999). So where does the jingle go from here?

Contrary to what some might believe, television jingles are not dead (Stanley, 2016). However, they no longer tend to occupy an ad's entire runtime. Rather, they serve as a memorable way to help consumers recall key information. State Farm as recently as last year ran ads which prominently featured everyday people singing the "Like a good neighbor" jingle to summon a genie-like State Farm agent who could resolve the most absurd of circumstances. The Stanley Steamer Company continues to let American households know, musically, that it can be can be reached at 1-800-STEEMER. And Nationwide is currently in the midst of two campaigns which have

sought to rework the “Nationwide is on your side” jingle, one featuring country singer Brad Paisley, and another showcasing Broadway star Leslie Odom Jr. Clearly, jingles are still seen by some advertisers as an effective means to disseminate commercial messages. However, in an era when so many companies have moved away from jingles in favor of licensing pre-existing music for their campaigns, one specific question is crucial to the survival of the art form: What makes a jingle good? (Block, 2003)

As of now, there is minimal research on what makes an advertising jingle effective. While the general consensus seems to be that they are past their heyday (The death of the jingle, 2003), it would seem that an institution in decline needs to understand itself then more than ever if it wishes to survive. This study asks, what makes a jingle good enough for a company to take a chance on original content versus a pre-licensed song? Of course, a common idea is that “it has to be catchy.” Indeed, there are musical methods for constructing a “catchy” tune, many of which are used in the creation of pop music (Jakubowski et al., 2017). But the question remains whether or not following the conventions of popular music translates into an effective jingle, especially given that a pop song runs for 3-4 minutes and a jingle has just seconds to convey the entire essence of a brand. Bad jingles are notoriously annoying to consumers, as are bad pop songs, but both seek to convey a relatively simple idea to a consumer. Further both are selling a product; a jingle sells an outside product, and a pop song sells itself.

It is possible that “good” pop music and “good” jingles share similar characteristics, but until now, there has been virtually no investigation into the relationship of these two kinds of music. Thus, this paper seeks to compare the musical,

lyrical, and visual characteristics of jingle-based advertisements within the United States, and compare them to those of the most famous popular songs of the past 40 years. My goal in researching this relationship, if it exists, is to more precisely identify what makes a successful jingle. Even if a 'magic formula' cannot be developed to conjure up the perfect jingle every time, an improved understanding of the traits of a successful piece of advertising music might be helpful to the industry. By demonstrating the qualities which are likely to create an excellent jingle, the perceived risk of using them in ad campaigns can be minimized. If these newly lessened risk factors are combined with the cost benefits compared to music licensing, this could potentially lead to an overall revival in their popularity as a marketing tool.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

### Introductory Questions

Although they have existed for decades, exactly what creates an effective advertising jingle is a question for which research has not provided a decisive answer. While ad firms have published articles on the subject, scholarly writing about music in advertising has rarely focused on jingles (Gupta, 2013). This may be because scholars simply do not find them worth studying; indeed, the perceived relevance of jingles has plummeted in the past two decades (Taylor, 2010). This is not merely an academic opinion; the Atlantic recently posed to its readers the whodunit-style query, “What Killed the Jingle?” (Stanley, 2016) Earlier, in 2003, the Economist lamented “The Death of the Jingle” (2003).

Reports of the ad-jingle’s death have been greatly exaggerated, considering the fact that numerous current television and radio ads continue to utilize them. From the “Stanley Steemer gets your home cleaner” ads to the simple, ascending tones of the “H-O-T-W-I-R-E” Hotwire.com spot, jingles are still quite present in the media landscape. Even if Americans encounter fewer jingles today than they did in the past, far more time has been spent discussing much less prevalent forms than advertising jingles. For example, there are far more peer-reviewed papers on Renaissance paintings than jingles, even though advertising jingles are likely a more common part of the average American’s daily life than most of Botticelli paintings. Of course, few would argue that jingles deserve to be regarded as high art, and doing so is far from my purpose here. Therefore, I will strive in this literature review to consider jingles not so much an art, but

an advertising tool, worthy of study in the same sense that voiceover narrations or imagery in ads are considered worthwhile topics of scholarly discussion and analysis.

### **Early Research**

Before considering what makes a good jingle, it is first important to establish whether any jingles are actually “good” at all. Indeed, there is some evidence, especially from the early days of TV advertising, to support the idea that music in advertising is ineffective and a waste of resources (Burke, 1978; McCollum & Spielman, 1976). However, much evidence exists to the contrary, thus, it is surprising that so few studies have focused on jingles. Much of the research that does exist on the subject of music in advertising was published from the 1970s through the 1990s, an era when the relevance and reach of broadcast television, especially network television, was at its zenith (Morgan, 2012). Despite the dearth of current research on jingles, the general use of music in advertisements has been studied by a number of researchers, and seems a good place to begin a review of applicable literature.

Although music was included as an element in several advertising studies of the 1970s, these did not focus entirely on music. Rather, they evaluated numerous characteristics of then-current ads, and included music as an element of study. This meant that if an ad was unsuccessful at improving day-after recall for any number of reasons, but happened to contain music, this would be counted as evidence that music was not helpful in ads. Thus, the research gave no consideration to what the product was, whether the music was well-suited for the audience, or if the music contained was a jingle or an instrumental playing in the background. Thus, most of the available

literature of the time claimed that despite their popularity, jingles and music in advertising did little to improve the efficacy of advertisements, and indeed, may have detracted from their goal of communicating effectively. (Burke, 1978; McCollum & Spielman, 1976).

One of the first studies to focus upon music in advertising within a controlled environment was conducted by Gerald Gorn (1982). In "The Effects of Music in Advertising on Choice Behavior: A Classical Conditioning Approach," Gorn used a method based on Pavlovian conditioning to examine what effects, if any, so-called "pleasant" background music had on a relatively minor consumer choice. Gorn's experiment involved playing a "liked" piece of music to a subject while presenting that individual with a pen of a certain color, then playing a piece of "disliked" piece of music while the subject was shown a pen of a different color. Gorn found that over 70% of respondents, when given the choice between the two pens, chose the one associated with the "liked" music.

Of course, demonstrating that consumer choice can be classically conditioned is different than proving the effectiveness of jingles. However, the importance of his research to the topic cannot be underestimated, as it demonstrates that music can have a demonstrable effect on preference. Although some scholars were unable to reproduce Gorn's findings (Allen & Madden, 1988), others were more successful at replicating the results (Groenland & Schoormans, 1994). Nonetheless, Gorn's willingness to study the topic paved the way for further research into the effects of music on consumer preferences.



## Reconsiderations

In 1984, Sidney Hecker published “Music for Advertising Effect” in the journal *Psychology and Marketing*, which examined the various roles which music can play in television advertising. Until this point, despite the presence of music in many ads, the metrics used for demonstrating effectiveness were not encouraging. In fact, two of the studies Hecker sites in his article actually suggest that music decreases recall in certain cases. However, Hecker makes the argument that the metrics being used up to this point were not necessarily accurate representations of the potential power of music in ads. Until the time of the article, the effectiveness of an ad was examined almost exclusively via next-day recall, which he suggests are prone to penalizing emotional ads and rewarding rational ads. Thus, if an ad strongly appeals to a consumer’s sympathies, the feeling may result in a higher purchasing rate despite the consumer being unable to repeat verbatim what the copy of the ad was. (Hecker, 1984)

Hecker goes on to argue that the effectiveness of music in ads depends on how the music is used. For example, an advertising song with humorous lyrics might help sell boxed chocolates or stain remover more effectively than life insurance or reverse mortgages. He also claims that a distinct advantage of using music in advertising is its tendency to be “attention grabbing,” thus preventing the ad’s message from being lost in “noise” of everyday life, i.e., domestic distractions beyond the control of an advertiser. However, Hecker’s writings are far from conclusive; he advocates in his paper for more research into the topic, but insists that said research must be carried out differently from current methods if the field was ever going to get clear answers about the importance of music in ads. Following Hecker, a number of studies were carried out over the next

decade which sought to elucidate the relationship between music and recall. As was the case with earlier studies, most of this research was not directly related to jingles, but evaluated the efficacy of music in advertising as a whole, specifically, background music in ads. Some of these have been very positive in associating music with recall, while others have been less encouraging.

One study which demonstrated the significance of music, and more specifically, the importance of matching content with music choice, appeared in “Background Music as an Influence in Consumer Mood and Advertising Responses,” a 1989 study which concerned greeting cards. The study involved showing simulated greeting card advertisements to college students with the only difference between the ads being the music played in the background. The researchers hypothesized that “happy music” (music with a major tonality) would cause the listener to rate their mood “happier” and thus make the user more likely to buy the greeting card, and that “sad music” (music with a minor tonality), would cause the listener to rate their mood as “sadder” and thus make the user less likely to buy the greeting card. Although these assumptions seem to make sense, the hypotheses were not entirely correct. While the results of the study did confirm that happy music raised self-reported mood scores and that sad music lowered them, sad music did not make the audience less likely to want the card. In fact, sad music made users more likely to want to send a greeting card, while happy music and no music made sending the card equally unlikely (Alpert, 1989).

## Counterpoints

Although music can be powerful in altering the mood of an advertisement, it can also be distracting, and thus decrease recall—counterproductive if the intent is to maintain focus on the product and encourage consumption. Pierre Salame (1989) analyzed the effects of background music by having subjects perform a memory-based number-sorting task on a computer. Over the course of three experiments, he found that subjects who heard background music while carrying out their task tended to score lower than those who completed the task in silence. Although instrumental music did decrease recall in the two of the three experiments, vocal music proved the most significant obstruction to recall. However, because this study examined numerical as opposed to verbal recall, the implications for language or text-based advertising are uncertain (Salame, 1989).

A more recent study examining recall also found that background music had a significant impact on viewers of television advertising, specifically. In two separate experiments, subjects watched advertisements with nearly identical background music, the only difference being that some songs ended on the melody's tonic (a major chord, i.e., a "normal" ending) and some songs that ended abruptly (i.e., a "truncated" ending). The study found overwhelmingly background music that ended with a major tonality was either helpful or neutral in its effects on recall, while music with an abrupt ending impacted message recall in a markedly negative manner because it was "distracting" to the viewer. Thus, this study emphasizes the necessity of carefully choosing background music when scoring advertisements. (Guido, et al., 2015)

## Hooked on Mnemonics

Although the quantity of research available concerning jingles' efficacy at conveying brand messages is minimal, there is significant evidence to suggest that a well-known or easy-to-learn melody can be an effective mnemonic device to aid in memorization of facts. In 2002, researchers at John Carroll University carried out a study designed to test the effect of music on recall by combining well-known melodies with unrelated texts. Two experiments were performed in the study, both of which had similar findings. In the first, participants were given a list of twelve baseball players who played in the 1948 World Series. One group was presented a recording of the twelve names spoken a-musically, while the other was presented a recording of the twelve names being sung to the tune of "Pop Goes the Weasel." Both groups were told to memorize the names as best as they could. They were then asked to repeat the list from memory shortly thereafter, and then a week later. Although the study found that there was no statistically significant difference in the first and second group's short term recall, the study did find that respondents who had heard the tune-based list were able to reproduce the list considerably more accurately one week later than those who had only heard the list spoken.

The results of the second phase of the study reinforced these findings. After the first part of the research session, participants were given a list of 14 nonsense names based on the syllabic structure of characters from the Hobbit. One group was given these names as a spoken list, and the others heard the name sung to the tune of Yankee Doodle. As was the case in the first scenario, both groups initially memorized the lists at similar rates, but the group who heard the tuneful version of the list

demonstrated significantly more accurate recall one week later as compared to the other group (Rainey & Larsen, 2002).

Although this study did not directly relate to advertising, it did demonstrate that music, even when paired with an unrelated text, can aid recall as compared to a-melodic memorization of the same text on a long-term basis. This might suggest why advertisements with music would fail to increase recall on a day-after memory test, although advertising songs—jingles—can linger with an audience member even after the ad is no longer in circulation.

One way to demonstrate this concept is a case study from the late 1980s related to Almond Joy and Mounds chocolate bars. In 1988, Hershey bought the Peter Paul Candy Company, the confectioner behind Almond Joy and Mounds, but struggled to develop ads for the products they had acquired. Hershey conducted focus-group testing in 1989 to better understand public feeling toward the products and to guide a new ad campaign. To the company's surprise, the most common association that consumers had with Almond Joy and Mounds was neither the chocolate nor the coconut, but the long-discarded jingle: "Sometimes you feel like a nut, sometimes you don't." Spots featuring the song had not aired in over a decade. Yet, research indicated that the jingle was the most popular association the American public had with Almond Joy and Mounds. Thus, Hershey's decided to revive the jingle rather than commission a new campaign, which turned out to be an immediate success (Dagnoli, 1989).

## **Moving Forward**

Much of the research on music in advertising has focused on the ways that music affects brand recall. Although research about music in advertising is limited and often contradictory, there is more general agreement with the idea that music can work as a mnemonic device to aid recall of information in the long term, as opposed to the short term, even when the text being presented is a collection of nonsensical syllables.

Remarkably, American consumers are still capable of humming advertising jingles that have not been heard in years. However, they are also certainly not able to hum every jingle that they have ever heard in their collective lifetime. Given the numerous jingle obituaries which have been published in the past two decades, the semi-imperiled nature of the jingle would seem to make the form more appropriate for study than ever.

The purpose of this study is to identify the most successful/popular television jingles of all time in order to analyze them for commonalities in the melodic and lyrical structures. By doing so, I hope to at least begin to answer the question that previous research has not: What makes a good jingle?

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methods of Analysis**

#### **Setting a Precedent**

The musical analysis and comparison of advertising jingles (and the ads that use them) although certainly a matter encompassed by advertising and mass-communications research, does at its core require an understanding of music and associated analytical techniques. Although musicology, the scholarly analysis of musical compositions, has been the subject of serious academic interest for at least two centuries, no single method of musical analysis is considered to be appropriate in all cases. Some scholars approach the study of music using melodic analysis, jazz chord analysis, and improvisational analysis. However, many of these systems fall into the category of Formalized Analysis, a highly technical form of compositional investigation which involves the use of a formalist nomenclature and symbols, relatively inaccessible for an audience outside the discipline of music (Middleton, 1993). But, because music is also an important part of media communications, a method of analysis with broad applications is helpful.

Since little research has focused specifically on the analysis of advertising jingles, there is no previously established method for studying them. Attempts to apply historically accepted models of musical analysis to advertising jingles are complicated by the fact that the models are highly technical. For example, the Schenkerian method, a widely venerated system developed by musicologist Heinrich Schenker is considered by scholars to be one of the most influential systems of compositional analysis since its introduction in the late 19th century (Biringer et al., 1995). However, Schenker's predisposition toward the common-practice period, the era between 1650-1900 when

“great” western composers wrote, means that his theories rest upon supposed superiority of this kind of music (Narmour, 1980). This leads to another problem: the inherent issue of datedness in musicological analysis. Disregarding any and all problems that may result from the European biases of Schenker’s writings, this particular theorist died in 1935, at a time when both radio and jingles were relatively new. Thus, applying a framework such as this to a genre that barely existed during the life of the theorist feels distinctly unhelpful, and unlikely to elucidate meaningful relationship between popular ad jingles of the 20th and 21st century.

### **Jingles as “Popular Music”**

More relevant to the analysis of jingles is the study of musical semiotics, which analyze the both the music itself, (i.e., the chords, the melody, the meter) and what the music represents in a larger cultural context. Emphasis in this area is generally placed on three distinct categories: analysis of western concert music, ethnomusicology (the study of music in culture, usually with an emphasis on non-western music), and analysis of so called “popular music.” One of the more recent approaches to studying music, particularly popular music of the last century, has been developed by Dr. Philip Tagg. As a popular-music theorist, his methods have sought to decrease the Eurocentric nature and formalized rigidity of musicology through a heuristic, semiotic approach to theory which allows for the analysis of a vast swath of music. However, before explaining Tagg’s theoretical framework, it is important to ensure that ad jingles can reasonably be considered “popular music” in the first place, and therefore candidates for analysis using Tagg’s method.



Although ad jingles are commercial in nature, few would argue that monetary motivations invalidate a song's designation as "real" music. Indeed, there has historically been a great deal of crossover between popular music and advertising jingles. For example, the quintessentially 1960s hit "*Music to Watch Girls By*," performed by such artists as Bob Crewe and Andy Williams, was originally the instrumental backing to a Diet Pepsi commercial (Taylor, 2014). More recently, a similar situation arose when hip-hop performer Chris Brown was contracted by Wrigley to produce a commercial for Doublemint chewing gum. Although initially a mere 30 seconds long, Brown expressed an affinity for the material and developed the spot into a full-length track, with sponsorship from the gum company. Although the working relationship between Brown and Wrigley ultimately soured, this international radio hit was, by all accounts, an extended version of a jingle for chewing gum (Smith & Jargon, 2008). There are many other examples, both direct and indirect, of ad-centric songs becoming hits in their own right, however, compiling a comprehensive list of these examples is not my purpose here. Rather, providing this background is meant to argue for the inclusion of ad jingles in the lexicon of popular music, therefore allowing them to be analyzed with the same methods as other forms of popular music.

Tagg (1982) does not provide a definition of "popular music," opting instead to lay out two general principles by which music can be analyzed using his methods. First, the Analysis Object (AO, as Tagg calls it) should be received by a "large, socioculturally heterogeneous" group of listeners. Jingles disseminated on television would meet this criterion. Second, the work best suited for analysis should involve "para-musical fields of connotation" (Tagg, 1982, p. 47) which connect the music to another aspect of either

academia or culture. This is certainly true of jingles, which occupy a place in both mass media and musical realms of thought. Thus, the framework can apply to numerous types of music that would broadly be described as “popular.” This can include music developed directly for radio airplay, like a Britney Spears dance track or an Adele ballad, but can also include less obvious incarnations such as orchestral-film scores and even soap-opera background music. Put simply, popular music is music disseminated on a mass scale. By this definition, ad jingles are a type of popular music, as they are musical works performed for a mass audience, disseminated via telecommunications (Tagg, 1982). Thus, Tagg’s method of analysis should be readily applicable to ad jingles.

Tagg’s method, which draws on semiotics, consists of seven parts, each of which is meant to be broad enough that it can be applied to a wide variety of styles of popular music. The first part of the analysis are aspects of time: duration, tempo, rhythm, and motifs (i.e., bits of music which recur throughout the piece). Second, the framework looks at melodic structure: pitch range, tonality, and timbre, or “tone color” of the work. The third aspect of analysis is orchestration factors--the instruments involved and their phrasing/accenuation. A fourth consideration is the tone/texture of the work. Especially relevant for jingles are the tonal center (the “key” of the song), and relationship of the song’s chords to one another, both within the song, and in a broader musical context. A fifth target of analysis, according to Tagg, relates to dynamics of a piece, such as the sound levels, and the audibility of individual musical parts, such as when multiple singers are audible. Furthermore, it will be important to note whether or not the entire ad is made up of singing, or if there is a spoken part, and if this part is underscored by

music or not. The sixth aspect, dynamic and acoustic properties, mainly applies to live performance, and is the only item irrelevant to ad jingles, as jingles are almost always recorded in a studio context. Jingles are meant to be clearly understood; rarely if ever are jingles layered with secretive artistic meanings that can only be revealed via an analysis of the acoustics. Finally, seventh on the checklist are the electro-musical and mechanical aspects of a song, in other words, post-production edits to a work, such as auto-tune, tone filtering, and the like (Tagg, 1982). Utilizing six of the seven aspects of Tagg's popular music framework to review jingles as AOs will allow for a clearer understanding of what characteristics, if any, popular ad-jingles have in common, ideally broadening our understanding of what components are commonly used to make a memorable jingle.

### **For the Sake of Context**

Although the focus of this paper on television jingles, it is also important to note that other factors besides the jingles themselves must be considered in this analysis. The music and lyrics of these songs do not exist in a vacuum; rather they exist as part of a larger advertisement. Aspects such as imagery, narration, and spoken lines provide vital context for the pieces. Context, although not technically an element of the music itself, must be considered if a piece is to be fully understood. As Dr. Tagg points out in *Analyzing Popular Music*, "no analysis of musical discourse can be considered complete without consideration of social, psychological...and linguistic aspects relevant to the genre, style...and listening attitude connected to the sound event being studied" (Tagg 1982). Thus, if one is to fully appreciate what is considered "great" about these jingles, it is impossible to overlook the overall tone, extra-musical and extra-lyrical content of the

commercials. The purpose of considering these factors is not to distract from the main purpose of analyzing the jingles themselves, but to complement and contextualize the findings. Television is a visual medium, and despite the focus of this paper's analysis being musical, neglect of the images and spoken words that accompany them would be folly.

### **Method of Analysis Object Selection**

The jingles selected for analysis represent a purposive sample; the actual selections to be analyzed are detailed in the chart following this section. Detailed information on decades-old ad spots, specifically how long they ran, on how many channels/stations, and how well they were received is rarely a matter of public record, and in any case not readily available even in the online era. One solution would be to only include jingles that are currently running on television. However, given that the golden-age of jingle writing, as previously mentioned, is thought to be over, reviewing “the best jingles ever written” in a sub-prime age seems rather self-defeating. Thus, there are few options in the realm of true objectivity. Since there is not a non-subjective way of accurately quantifying the success of ad-jingles, the selection of AOs will be in some way arbitrary regardless of methodology used to choose the pieces. Therefore, the most appropriate course of action appears to be selecting jingles of renown as indicated by an established publication with a knowledge of the advertising industry, as opposed to simply picking the ones that sound interesting. In doing so, we can at least maintain some sense of objectivity. One of the few investigations into the popularity/success of ad jingles came in 2010, when Forbes magazine asked a panel of Chief Marketing Officers to vote on what they considered to be the most successful

jingle of all time (Bruno, 2010). Although many on the list were “classics,” such as “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke,” and “The Oscar Mayer Weiner Song,” others, including “You Deserve a Break Today,” have not been in use for decades, which may demonstrate the “stickiness” of certain jingles.

Even though the Forbes list is undoubtedly the result of subjective opinion, this is to be expected in research involving the ranking of art. Attempting to analyze the “greatest works of J.S Bach” would yield the same problems. It is not as though reviewing too many jingles is likely to be detrimental to their study; this is true in the same way that analyzing too many of Bach’s pieces would not detract from an understanding of his work, even if creating a universally accepted list of his 10 greatest works would be an impossible task. What is important for this study is for a researcher to care enough about ad-jingles to analyze them in the way previous writers have written about voice-over techniques, imagery, and other aspects of audio-visual advertising. While it is simply not possible to objectively compile a list of the most successful ad-jingles of all time, it hardly seems like this should hamper an exploration of the form. Thus, the Forbes Top 10 list appears to be a functional and appropriate choice as a launch pad for the study. Researching these initial 10 jingles should begin to shed light on the research question, “What do great jingles have in common?”

## Jingles to be Analyzed

I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke	Coca-Cola	1971
I Wish I were an Oscar-Meyer Weiner	Oscar-Meyer	1962
Two All Beef Patties	McDonalds	1974
I'm a Toys R US Kid	Toys R Us	1982
You Deserve a Break Today	McDonalds	1971
Wouldn't You Like to Be a Pepper, Too?	Dr. Pepper	1977
M'm M'm Good	Campbell's	1935
Plop Plop Fizz Fizz	Alka Seltzer	1953
Stuck on Me	Bandaid	1975
Double your Pleasure, Double your Fun	Doublemint	1960

## Chapter 4

### Analysis

#### Unity in Variety

One of the first things that became clear after performing a close reading of Forbes' top 10 jingles was the surprising lack of homogeneity among the selections. Although they have the reputation of being "simple" and "cheesy" due to their supposed lack of musical sophistication, the jingles on this list were not whatsoever lacking in variety. One area where this heterogeneity was particularly clear was in the musical style. For example "Plop Plop Fizz Fizz", the famous 1976 diddy that advertised Alka Seltzer, features a relatively simple melody, a small vocal range, and a general lack of musical complexity. In contrast, the McDonald's ad "You Deserve a Break Today," also from the 1970s, features a comparatively enormous musical range, multiple part harmony, and Broadway style choreography, all inspired by the everyday upkeep of a fast food restaurant. Others, such as the Campbell's jingle "M'm M'm Good", were written in the style of a slow, tenderly articulated ballad, while Toys R Us' "I Don't Wanna Grow Up" and Band Aid's "Stuck on Me" were delivered quickly and imprecisely by mostly adolescent singers.

The instrumentation of the jingles also varied widely. Some, such as McDonald's "Two All Beef Patties" use only the voices of the singer and light music backing, in this case, a guitar. Others, such as "Wouldn't You Like to Be a Pepper, Too" and "You Deserve a Break Today" utilize more complex scoring, with the former incorporating a nearly-full orchestra, including a harp, a significant string sections, and brass fanfare. However, although the jingles on the list are far from homogenous, several notable similarities run through many of these advertisements. Although not all of these

commonalities are present in every single selection, every element discussed here is present in a majority of the selections.

Although it obviously cannot be reasonably be posited that incorporating the following qualities into future compositions would guarantee the success of any jingle, taking note of them is important for many reasons. For one thing, it may help guide future jingle writers in the right direction. If the majority of the jingles on a “greatest of all time list” feature definitive similarities, this can help demonstrate what to avoid when writing a memorable product-centric song.

For example, one finding from the research shows that certain keys were considerably more popular for jingle compositions than others. Although it may seem like a silly question to a musically literate person, a composer could wonder “which key is more likely to lead to a pleasant jingle, G-major or F# minor?” Additionally, it may shed light on what makes these jingles so “sticky” in the first place, aiding researchers’ understanding of recall, and what the human mind deems “memorable.” It would obviously be rash to guarantee that incorporating these findings ensures the success of a given jingle. Indeed, the point of this research is not to tell jingle writers how to do their job. Rather, it is meant to serve as a frame of reference for potential composers to understand what techniques have worked in the past, so it may inform the future of the genre. By comprehending what methods have worked before, the burden of creating successful jingles out of thin air may be lessened, especially given the fact that advertisers are more reluctant to use jingles today than ever before.



## **“Key” Similarities**

There were three notable similarities which almost invariably appeared in the jingles from the Forbes list. The first and most obvious of these was the universal preponderance of major keys in the composition of the jingles. Most of the melodies are fairly simple and relatively upbeat. Several of the tunes modulate, or change keys during the course of the song. However, all ten of them remain within a major key throughout most the song, and end on a major chord. While this has not been previously been discussed at length in a scholarly context, this revelation is unlikely to be seen as earth shattering or groundbreaking information. Considering that jingles are meant to convey good feelings about a product, and western ears tend to hear minor tonalities as “sad”, as noted in the Alpert study, the fact that jingle-writers tend to avoid them should not prove particularly unprecedented. (Alpert)

In terms of key, it is worth noting that the tunes found on the Forbes list are not dominated by one, two or even three keys. Rather, a multitude of major keys are represented. The most commonly used key by far was E major. “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke,” “Plop Plop, Fizz Fizz” and “You Deserve a Break Today” are entirely in E-major, and “Two All-Beef Patties” and “I Don’t Wanna Grow Up” are partially written in this key as well. Given that this research is considering jingles through the broader lens of popular music, this is fairly unusual, as E-major is not considered a particularly common key in western music. For reference, Spotify, one of the world’s leading music streaming services, has made available an analysis of the key signatures for every song on its site, which range from classical European compositions to modern pop. The two most common keys are G and C; in fact, more than one of every five songs on the site

is in either G-major or C-major. Only 3.6% of the songs in Spotify's library are composed in E-major. (Buskirk)

Another notable finding is the complete absence of even a single song written in the key of C-major. This is fairly unusual because C-major is the second most common key signature in Spotify's library, making up 10.2% of all songs on the site. While it is of course possible that music has changed significantly since some of the jingles on the list were written, the fact that 50% of the compositions utilize a key that is present in less than 4% of Spotify's offerings appears relatively unusual given the "pop-esque" nature of advertising jingles. (Buskirk)

Four other keys are tied for second place in terms of list representation. The keys of G-major, D-major and B flat-major are all represented twice on the list, with F-major, B-major, and E-flat major each appearing once. At this juncture, it would be unwise to speculate on the reasoning behind the choice of key signatures. Any number of factors, from composer preference to the range of the singer's voices may have affected which key was chosen for the performed version of these jingles. Although we cannot easily know why E-major was so common among selections on this list, being aware of this fact could indicate that something about the key helps improve some aspect of the jingle. Perhaps it makes it more singable for an average person, and thus aids recall. For now however, this will have to remain conjecture until further research can be carried out regarding this topic.

## **Repetition Repetition Repetition**

A second, nearly universal inclusion in the selections on this list was the use of repetitive elements in the jingles. Much of this repetition was musical, however, this was generally accompanied by some level of lyrical reprisal as well, sometimes with humorous alterations. Usually, the repeated section corresponded to the advertisement's conveyance of key brand information, such as the name of the company, or the sponsor's slogan. Perhaps most interestingly, this repetition almost always appeared in groups of three. In fact, in nine out of the ten jingles on the Forbes List used a triple repetition of some variety during the commercial, regardless of whether the ad was 30 or 60 seconds. (Of the 10 items on the list, five ads were 30 seconds and five were 60 seconds). The idea of repeating a marketing idea exactly three times is not at all unheard of in the field of advertising, and has in fact been supported by academic research. Especially insistent upon this point was noted public opinion researcher Herbert Krugman, who argued that there was "no such thing as a fourth and fifth exposure, psychologically; rather fours, fives, etc., are repeats of the third exposure effect." Although his research has proved controversial, it appears that many jingle writers have either knowingly or unknowingly adopted this theory, as examples of three-part repetition are consistently present within the selection on the Forbes list.

An obvious place to start when examining this triple repetition pattern is to look at jingles where a large section of music or a distinct musical phrase is repeated a total of three times during the course of the ad. One place where this is particularly obvious is found in the famous "I'd Love to Be an Oscar Mayer Weiner" spot. The one minute ad is broken up into three distinct sections of approximately 20 seconds each. Each section

has virtually the same tune and repeats similar lyrics. The first section is performed by a group of children in a marching band, singing in unison about the brand's signature frankfurters. The second section is a direct reprisal of the first section, sung by an individual boy, with slightly altered lyrics for comic effect. The third and final section features the same music, but cuts some of the lyrics in order to avoid singing over the narrator's monologue, which assures consumers of the Oscar Mayer's quality meat. Although most of the lyrics are cut from the third verse, the song's titular line, "I'd love to be an Oscar Mayer wiener" remain intact, emphasizing the brand's popular slogan at the time.

A very similar phenomenon is present in both the Toys R Us jingle "I Don't Wanna Grow Up" and Band Aid's "Stuck on Me" ads. In both cases, a basic tune is established in the beginning of the song, which is then repeated nearly verbatim (with a few minor alterations) with somewhat altered lyrics that still refer back to the song's titular line. Both of these selections place a gap between the second and third repetition of the commercials main theme using a non-repeated musical element called a bridge. "Stuck on Me" also provides a narrational interlude between the bridge and the third verse. In both cases however, the lines "I don't wanna grow up" and "I am stuck on Band Aid, 'cuz Band Aid's stuck on me" are repeated for a third time, with tunes nearly identical to the one used before. In both cases, the repetition is blatant, unsubtle, and purposeful, as the repetition appears to be meant to emphasize the title of the song, which is considered the main idea of the ad.

Another example of this concept is found in "Wouldn't You Like to Be a Pepper, Too?" The spot features actor David Naughton as a singing, dancing soft drink

enthusiast, referring to himself and other Dr. Pepper consumers as “Peppers.” The ad, which is broken into three sections, makes use of three different key signatures; the song starts off in A-major, shifts to F-major, then finally to B-major. The name and main idea of the song “Wouldn’t You Like to Be a Pepper To?” is repeated three times throughout the course of the jingle. As in the previous cases, the melody and timing of the line are identical throughout the song, excepting of course the key signature. Also repeated three times is the simplified version of the song’s message “Be a Pepper”, which also functioned as Dr. Pepper’s slogan at the time. The melody for all three of the “Be a Pepper” lines is the same, and since repetition of this phrase happens at the very end of the ad, they are in the same key as well.

Similar, but not identical to this situation is McDonald’s famous “Two All Beef Patties” jingle, which functionally, is simply the ingredients of a Big Mac set to a tune. Although multiple commercials in the 1970s featured incarnations of the jingle, the one which appears to be the most famous is from 1975. While it is difficult to measure the popularity of an ad decades after the fact, this version appears to have been the first one which someone cared enough to upload to Youtube, and has since been viewed hundreds of thousands more times than any other ad featuring the jingle. Therefore, it seems to be the best candidate for analysis given that the Forbes list did not specify which version it was referring to.

The ad is split between spoken segments of people attempting to declaim the lyrics of the jingle, interspersed with song itself, a rapid fire musical recitation of “two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun.”

Melodically and lyrically, each iteration is identical, albeit, the key signature of the second version is in the key of E-major, while the first and the third are in D-major.

This example constitutes one of the purest representations of the triple-repetition rule on the Forbes list, as the reprised section is not just a portion of the song, but is rather the jingle in its entirety. By keeping the song brief, McDonalds avoids having to pick out one key piece of information to emphasize using repetition. Rather, since the entire piece is so short, the whole thing can be repeated without even using up  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the commercial's airtime.

A slight variation of triple-repetition can be found in both Alka Seltzer's 1960s spot "Plop Plop, Fizz Fizz" and Doublemint's "Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Fun." On the surface, these two ads are vastly different. One features a sprite-like claymation figure singing about indigestion, while the other involves a pair of identical twins singing about gum behind a pair of violinists. However, both use triple-repetition of one key musical phrase to emphasize the overall message the brand is attempting to convey.

In the case of Alka Seltzer, the commonly cited title "Plop Plop Fizz Fizz" is likely not the phrase company was trying to ingrain into consumers' minds, given that their slogan at the time was actually "What a relief." Speedy, the brand's mascot, only sings the "plop plop" line twice in the ad. Instead, it is the follow-up line "Oh what a relief it is" which is sung three times through the course of the commercial. In terms of repetition, the ad is front loaded. The key phrase "oh what a relief it is" appears twice early on in the ad and then recurs at the end. All three times, the tune used is essentially identical; the only difference comes on the last repetition, when the singer holds the word "relief" for emphasis.

In the case of the Doublemint advertisement, the repetition is more explicitly musical than lyrical. The jingle itself, which features the now-famous “Doublemint Twins,” is only approximately seven seconds long. The first half contains the product’s slogan “Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Fun” as the two twins sway to the music of a pair of violinists. The repetition occurs in the second half, as the pair warbles “With double good, double good, Doublemint gum”. Both of the “double good” phrases and the word “Doublemint” have exactly the same tune, a simple descending melody made up of a B flat, a full-step drop to an A-flat, and a 3-half step drop to an F. The lyrics reflect this by using the same number of syllables in each of the three pieces, eventually finishing with an E-flat on the word “gum.”

Another slight variation of the triple repetition can be found in the famed “Hilltop” spot, better known as “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke.” Although the song’s title is only repeated twice within the 60 second runtime, a different motif is present which does conform to the triple repetition rule. At the time of this ad campaign, the slogan of Coca-Cola was not “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke”, but the arguably more generic, “It’s the real thing”. Although a variant of the phrase, “*that’s* the real thing” does appear about halfway through the ad, the exact slogan “it’s the real thing,” does not find its way into the proceedings until the end of the ad, when the choir of singers have split into harmony. As the camera zooms out and the spot comes to a close, the singers repeat the phrase “It’s the real thing,” using the same tune, a total of three times just before the video fades to black. Although the main song takes most of the ad’s runtime, the commercial still uses triple repetition to emphasize key brand information, in this case,

the brand's long-term slogan, which could have been easily forgotten about in this ad if it had not been included near the end.

The final example of triple repetition in the Forbes list is found in McDonald's ambitiously produced "You Deserve a Break Today", a Broadway style musical number extolling the cleanliness of the chain's restaurants. Pointing out the repetition, although not difficult, is somewhat less clear cut in this ad spot because there is no repeating lyrical phrase or chorus. However, the structure of the song reflects the triple-repetition rule well. The verses, of which there are three, all share nearly identical tunes, with the notable exception being the endings of the three verse. The titular line "You Deserve a Break Today", although held for a fairly time, is not repeated whatsoever. However, the ending also incorporates the rule of triple repetition by repeating the name of the restaurant thrice just before the end of the ad. Even though the jingle does not perfectly fit the mold cast by the others, it is clear that elements of triple repetition are at work within it.

The only jingle on the list not to conform whatsoever to the triple repetition pattern was the Campbell's ad. As was the problem with the "Two All Beef Patties," spot, there have been multiple commercials produced over the years featuring this jingle. After watching over a dozen Campbell's spots from varying times periods, the earliest ad featuring the "M'm M'm Good" jingle that appears to be publically available was produced in 1990. Written in the style of a slow ballad, there are no repeating lyrics, and very little of the melody is repeated throughout the song. While this is not helpful to an argument for the ubiquity of the triple-repetition pattern, it seems presumptuous to expect that every jingle on the list would share this characteristic. Every rule has



exceptions, and in this case, it appears that the Campbell's ad is the only jingle out of the ten on the list that does not adhere to that rule.

It should be reiterated that this analysis can by no means prove the universal efficacy of repeating brand specific information exactly three times in a jingle-based ad. However, it does provide an interesting perspective on what has worked in the past. Three is not a “magic number” that can suddenly make a product fly off the shelves, but evidence from analyzing this top 10 list seems to indicate that nearly all successful jingles repeat a musical, and in most cases, lyrical section of the song exactly three times.

### **Make ‘Em Laugh**

The third most common element, appearing in 8 of the 10 jingles was the inclusion of light-hearted humor in ads featuring jingles. Although none of the ads seem to have been intended to be outright ridiculous, (with the arguable exception of “You Deserve a Break Today”, which will be discussed later) virtually all of the spots find some way of incorporating levity into the spot. This is accomplished via several different techniques; some ads use the delivery of the song to create humor, others use of jokes written into the lyrics or spoken dialogue, while still other utilize humorous visuals with the song.

Although not all of the methods of incorporating humor into the jingles are directly related to the musical/lyrical qualities of the jingles, they provide vital context for the pieces, as referenced in the Methods section. To demonstrate why this is the case, consider the famous “I’m Stuck on Band Aid” jingle. Imagine how differently the ad

would have been interpreted if the visuals had focused not on happy families, but on gruesome images of the wounds the Band-Aid is designed to heal. The tune, with its major key and light synth-organ backing, would likely go from charming and friendly to creepily off-putting. Similarly, if the jingle, “Two All Beef Patties” were not interspersed with footage of customer’s humorously futile attempts to recite the whole lyric from memory, it’s hard to know whether the ad would have been as effective as it was, and thus, have made it onto the Forbes list. Thus, it only makes sense that this paper should evaluate the jingles not just in terms of their strict musical/lyrical qualities, but in terms of the role they play within the larger context of the ad. This ensures that the analysis takes into consideration the full set of circumstance within which the ad exists, and not just the music and lyrics.

As previously mentioned, eight of the ten jingles-using ads included on the Forbes list are humorous in tone. However, no one technique is present in all eight selections. Rather, a diversity of methods are used; often the multiple methods are combined to retain a lighthearted, comically tinged musical delivery of product information. Two jingles, “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke” and “M’m M’m Good” avoid humor, and do so very deliberately, which will be discussed later.

One advertisement on the list with a particularly obvious propensity for humor is “I’d Love to Be an Oscar Mayer Weiner.” As the ad begins, a precocious young girl named Sandra is shown standing in front of children who appear ready to march. The sign one boy is holding humorously credits Sandra as the “Leader, Director, President and Treasurer.” After the sounding of a pitch pipe, the group begins marching down the street, smiling and warbling happily in G major, “I’d love to be an Oscar Mayer Weiner;

that is what I'd truly like to be, for if I were an Oscar Mayer Weiner, everyone would be in love with me." The lyrics here are clearly intended to be comical, as the idea of wishing to become a frankfurter to garner affection from "everyone" is a silly, fanciful idea with little basis in reality. Of course, the marchers are children, so the full implications of becoming a hotdog are not immediately clear to the performers.

After the group marches away, a lone child repeats the same melody, but humorously changes the words to reflect why he would "never want" to be an Oscar Meyer wiener, pointing out the major problem with the desire to exist as a hotdog. "If I were an Oscar Meyer Weiner" he sings, "There would soon be nothing left of me". As he finishes the comical line, Sandra reappears and glares at him, causing him to trail off in his delivery of the final words. He then falls back in line with the other marchers, as the tune restarts for the third time. After a spoken message from an unseen narrator, the song completes its third repetition. A still-annoyed looking Sandra stands watching the marchers next to the "delinquent" boy. After being shown to possess a pack of Oscar Mayer hot dogs, she turns to deliver the ad's punchline "Next time, you handle *just* the refreshments". By combining an upbeat major tonality, humorous lyrics within the jingle and visual gags like the sign and Sandra's reactions, the ad maintains a light-hearted, humorous tone.

A similar combination of techniques is used in "Wouldn't You Like to be a Pepper Too," another 60-second ad promoting a grocery item. The commercial begins with a man sitting down in a scene overlooking a harbor. The lyrics of the opening verse are basically light-hearted assertions about the beverage being "the perfect taste" for the singer. Visually, the ad's movements quickly become heavily choreographed, as the

smiling main singer and backup dancers begin to perform upbeat dance moves.

Although the tone of this opening bit is happy, there is not much demonstrated humor until the singer begins listing the various types of “Peppers,” (the sponsor’s nickname for consumers of Dr. Pepper.)

As the singing and dancing continues, the lyrics proceed “There’s boating peppers, totin’ peppers, cookin’ peppers, good looking pepper’s”, at which point he laughingly glances a woman who smiles and joins him in dancing. This idea returns later, as the main performer is dancing among members of a wedding party. When he begins listing off more types of “Peppers” with the previously established tune, the lyrics repeat the same pattern, three light-hearted lines, and one spoken punch line. In this case, he sings “Carryin’ Peppers, marrying Peppers, diet Peppers” then softly whispers the words “quiet Peppers” a-melodically towards a woman, who appears charmed. In the final scene, as the lyrics list “saluting’ Peppers, tootin’ Peppers,” there is an appearance from “Popeye”, the iconic cartoon sailor featured in numerous comic shorts. After playing a whistle sound effect used in the Popeye theme song, the sailor begins singing and dancing along with the rest of the cast. Given that much of Popeye’s humor comes from the character’s comically low voice and masculine persona, the fact that the generally stoic character is spryly dancing and audibly singing adds another element of humor to the advertisement. Although the point of the ad is not solely to make people laugh, its overall tone demonstrates what is present in almost all of the ads; upbeat music, dancing, and touches of humor.

Some of the ads on the Forbes list derive their humor not from the actual lyrics or dialogue, but from the delivery of the lines. This is especially true for the two ads

focused on children and families, Band Aid and Toys R Us. Neither incorporate specifically outlined jokes into the ads. However, both of them create a comic atmosphere by combining upbeat, majorly tonal melodies with technically imperfect singing. By subverting the expectation that performers in television ads will sound classically trained and highly polished, both commercials create a feeling a comic realism; by not hiring vocal professionals, the singers seem more like “real people”.

“I Don’t Wanna Grow Up (I’m a Toys R Us Kid)” is unusual in that it is the only ad in the top 10 that features exclusively children. A total of nine kids appear in the advertisement, who take turns singing the jingle’s lyrics, which predictably, revolve around a collective desire to avoid becoming adults. As the song begins, a small girl is seen surrounded by stuffed animals, singing “I don’t wanna grow up, I’m a Toys R Us kid” to a doll. Her voice is, by adult standards, fairly shrill and her delivery imprecise, as she winds up talk-singing the second half of her part. The girl’s expression is comically concerned, which is juxtaposed to the silliness of singing to a doll. A different girl is then seen riding on a train, singing “there’s a million toys at Toys R Us that I can play with.” Although the actor changes, the singing voices does not appear to.

A young boy riding a bike sings the next portion, a reprise of the previous verse. His delivery is even less precise than the previous singer’s; the boy sharply exhales through part of his line to an almost comically exaggerated extent. He then slurs the name of the store to the point he seems to says “Toys-uh-ous”, while also rushing the timing of the line. This section is followed by a different boy, playing with a bouncing toy at a desk, who delivers “they’ve got the best for so much less, you’ll really flip your lid” with comparatively excellent tone, although he does pronounce “really” similarly to

“rolly.” As the song continues into the bridge, “From bikes and trains to video games, it’s the biggest toy store there is,” a small group of children sing on-pitch, and in time, as three girls ride tricycles synchronistically. The store’s mascot, Geoffrey the Giraffe, then appears momentarily to exclaim “gee whiz”. After a girl playing baseball gives a fairly straightforward delivery of her line, the girl from the opening shot reappears, holding a different stuffed animal, again looking humorously concerned, singing “I couldn’t be a Toys R Us kid!” Afterwards, in one of the briefest but most comical shots of the commercial, a small boy on a swing performs the line “More game more toys...” by semi-melodically shouting while thrusting his head back and forth quickly and making a funny face. The ad finishes as a previously unseen girl shouts “oh boy!” which cuts to a child sitting with Geoffrey, as the title line is repeated for the final time.

As should be obvious from the above notes, most of the individual child performers are far from excellent singers. However, it is mainly their lack of technical proficiency that provides the ad with humorous elements. At a basic level, the humor is the result of a contrast between expectation and reality. Audiences generally expect actors on television to sing almost perfectly. But by using child actors with imperfect delivery, the ad reflects how actual children speak and sing, which likely resonates most with audiences who have kids, and thus, would be likely customers of Toys R Us.

“Band Aid’s Stuck on Me” uses a similar approach to humorously contextualize a jingle with lyrics that are not inherently funny. The ad begins with a young bespectacled boy standing under a small waterfall next to a campsite. He moves rhythmically while singing “I am stuck on Band Aid brand, ‘cuz Band Aid’s stuck on me”. As with the “I Don’t Wanna Grow Up”, the humor is derived from his imprecise delivery more than the

words he is saying. The next scene shows a man who appears to be with his son on a golf course, wading ankle deep in water, humorously implying that he missed has missed his shot and is searching for his ball. Although he hits the notes, his vocal tone is shaky, and humorously realistic for a non-performer. The comically imperfect singing reaches a crescendo in the next scene, which shows a little girl in a bathtub. In addition to not really hitting the notes of the tune, the girl is missing her two front teeth, causing the line to become almost completely unintelligible halfway through her part. Following a narrational interlude, the ad finishes with a woman in a pool, carrying a child on her shoulders; although she gets through most of the final lyric without a problem, the child she is holding suddenly puts her hands over the woman's eyes, taking her seemingly by surprise, and causing her to stumble over the last few words of the song, and emphasizing the humorously realistic imperfection of the performance as a whole.

McDonald's "Two All Beef Patties" also uses the concept of imperfect performance for comic effect, however, it uses this technique differently than the Band Aid and Toys R Us ads. Instead of using untrained sounding voices in the jingle itself, the ad's humor is derived from people attempting, and failing, to a-melodically recite the song's lyrics. Given that there are 27 individual scenes in the ad, going through all or even most of them individually would likely be superfluous. However, to demonstrate the method which the commercial uses to create humor, it does make sense to examine several parts of the ad to understand how it conveys humor without a lyrically funny jingle.

The commercial opens on a pair of women sitting in at a table, presumably in a McDonald's restaurant. When the two begin saying "Two all-beef patties, pickles..." their

words are in sync, however, this quickly breaks down as they continue, until the women are saying different words, talking over one another. The ad quickly cuts to an elderly man staring downwards, as if concentrating very hard, as he slowly lists “pickles...cheese” before shaking his head, flummoxed. He is in turn cut off by a woman standing outside, looking confidently into the camera as she recites “lettuce and onions....”. However, this confidence quickly falters as she stumbles over her words, saying “sesame on a...seed bun” before mugging for the camera and laughing at her own confusion. Another quick cut shows a man at a table, looking away as though he is thinking intently, as he says “I think they’re describing a Big...” The video then quickly jumps to a child, being held by his mother, who excitedly finishes the previous man’s statement with the word “Mac!” Immediately after, the actual jingle begins to play, with a male folk duo softly but swiftly singing “Two all-beef patties special sauce lettuce cheese pickles onions on a sesame seed bun,” as stop motion footage shows the titular sandwich being assembled. The camera then cuts to a perplexed-looking woman on a street, asking the camera, “Can you say that again?” The jingle is then repeated a second time. The basic format of the ad continues like this, with people attempting with great difficulty to recite the lyrics verbatim, followed at the end by another repetition of the actual jingle. In short, the ad derives its humor not from the jingle itself, but from the comically concerted, yet overall fruitless efforts of everyday people to recite the piece from memory.

Some of the ads on the list use humor in a more subtle manner. One such ad is Alka Seltzer’s “Plop Plop, Fizz Fizz”, which does not feature bad singing played for



comic effect or a great number of particularly funny punch lines. However, elements of humor can be found in the spot's uniquely detailed visual design.

As the ad opens, a magical claymation figure named "Speedy" descends from an alarm clock onto a bedside table. The mascot's design alone is fairly comical; his body is an amalgamation of human-like limbs attached to a very large Alka Seltzer tablet, which functions as his torso. What appears at first to be a wide-brimmed hat is also an even larger tablet of A.S. In addition, the magic wand he uses to conjure up Alka Seltzer is actually a toothpick. Another subtle moment of humor occurs when the Alka Seltzer tablets drop into the glass next to Speedy. As the tablets hit the liquid and fizz, the water splashes upward and nearly hits the mascot. Given that most of his body is a highly dissolvable tablet, he quickly transforms the toothpick into an umbrella to shield himself from the falling droplets, before changing it back. A last moment of humor occurs at the very end of the song, when a hand reaches out and grabs the glass of bicarbonate from behind Speedy, revealing that the mascot has not been singing about a theoretical person during the ad, but a literal one who is in the room. Although this point is subtle, this may imply that Speedy's toothpick wand is not something he always has, but simply a used toothpick he found lying on an unwell person's bedside table. Whether or not this was the animator's intention is unclear, however, it seems as though choosing a toothpick for a wand was unlikely to have been an accident.

Another commercial that makes considerable use of visual humor is Wrigley's "Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Fun". As in the case of Alka Seltzer, the jingle itself is fairly straightforward and does not contain any jokes. However, the imagery within the ad is dominated by pairs. This is done to emphasize the campaign's focus on

the word “double”, which is used a total of five times over the course of the 30 second spot. This imagery is present from the moment the ad begins and continues throughout its brief runtime.

As the ad opens, the audience is shown a woman sitting in front of what appears to be a vanity mirror, making minor adjustments to her appearance. This continues as an unseen male narrator says “Here’s a tip you’ll appreciate”. As this line is spoken, the individual woman who appears to be sitting in front of a mirror begins to shake hands with her “reflection,” which is, of course, impossible. She then stands up, revealing that she has not actually been in front of a real mirror, but an empty mirror frame occupied by her twin sister, who has been imitating her movements to maintain the illusion of a mirror. The moment they rise up from their seats together is revealing and humorous as they two stand side by side to demonstrate that the two women, who are dressed in exactly the same clothes with the same hairstyle, are indeed actual twins. The brief spot then concludes with the pair singing the jingle behind a pair of identical violinists. Throughout the song, the two move perfectly in sync with one another, maintaining the ad’s humorous use of twin imagery to emphasize the “double” aspect of Doublemint Gum.

The final advertisement from the list which exhibits elements of humor is perhaps the most unusual selection as well. Set inside of a Mcdonald’s restaurant, “You Deserve a Break Today” features a group of dancing employees singing while performing highly choreographed sanitation work.

“You Deserve a Break Today” draws the majority of its humor from contrast between subject matter and performance style. More specifically, the ad juxtaposes

lyrics about a mundane topic, restaurant sanitation, with the grandiose musical and choreographic style of a Broadway show tune. Cleaning up around a fast food restaurant is rarely thought of as a glamorous activity; most people, in fact, would likely consider such a task remarkably unpleasant. Thus, showing a gleeful group of employees rhythmically mopping floors and wiping down surfaces creates a humorous contrast which continues throughout the ad.

Humor is also found in the part of the manager, who, rather than cleaning, is happily tap dancing by himself throughout part of the ad. His voice, which is also by far the highest among the ad's performers also adds an element of humor to his lines. Finally, the ending of the ad is particularly humorous because the choreography shifts from stylized-cleaning to pure dance, as the performers turn, kick, and side step perfectly in sync with one another, before each dropping to a knee and forming a tableau, as though a velvet curtain were about to fall in front of them. While the comedic elements of "You Deserve" are not as blatant as some of the other examples, the tone of the work is undoubtedly light-hearted, with the contrast between performance style and subject matter creating an ad that is conceptually humorous, despite fact its script is not brimming with punchlines.

### **In Defense of Sentiment**

Only two advertisements from the Forbes list buck the trend of utilizing humor in jingle-based spots: Campbell's "M'm M'm Good", and Coca-Cola's "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke." Although the spots are not funny (and are not supposed to be), both of them are considered iconic, especially "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke", the top overall entry on

the Forbes list. So what is it that these ads do differently from the others that allows them to stand with, or in Coke's case, above the other famous jingles on this list? The answer appears to be active subversion of expectation via appeals to pathos. While the other jingles on this list feature energetic choreography, cartoon mascots and humorous visual, Campbell's and Coca-Cola avoid these more lighthearted aspects entirely. Instead, both corporation's spots communicate the brand message through emotional resonance.

Campbell's "M'm M'm Good" opens on a young boy walking home from school with an art project in his hands. After accidentally dropping it into a puddle, partially ruining it, he is shown walking away sadly, clearly upset about the fate of his work. An unseen singer performs the lyrics "won't you comfort me". After showing a concerned mother looking out the window at her distraught son, she is shown giving him a hug, then serving him Campbell's chicken noodle soup, which causes him to smile, as his mother hangs up the "ruined" artwork in spite of its state of relative destruction. The singer finishes "A warm hug from Campbell's; M'm M'm, Good," as the boy beams at his mother.

The message of the ad is simple; Campbell's soup is like a warm hug. This is a sentimental product message which is supposed to resonate with audiences to create an emotional response. As such, using humor would have been unlikely to enhance this message and almost certainly would have detracted from it. Imagine, for example, if the boy dropping his artwork had been played for laughs rather than sympathy. The boy's response to the destruction of his project would not have made sense, and the necessity of the "warm hug" from both his mother and the soup would seem both

unnecessary and confusing. Thus, Campbell's actively avoids putting any humor in the ad to enhance the emotionally compelling aspects of the ad. By purposely avoiding humor, the jingle's tenderheartedness is allowed to take center stage, likely producing a commercial more apt to move a potential consumer emotionally.

Although the tone of Coca-Cola's ad is less overtly sentimental in tone, "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" also actively subverts the use of humor in order to increase the spot's emotional resonance. The commercial starts with a young Caucasian-looking woman, singing individually about her desire to "buy the world a home and furnish it with love." She is soon revealed to be standing with a group of two other singers, who join in the song, expressing their desire to "grow apple trees, and honey bees, and snow white turtle doves." As the ad progresses, the group of singers is gradually shown to be larger and larger, before it becomes clear that dozens of singers of multiple nationalities are proclaiming that they would "like to buy the world a Coke and keep it company." A text appears in the last 10 seconds of the one minute ad to explain that Coke had "assembled young people from all over the world" for the filming of the spot. Nowhere within the lyrics or visual portion of the ad is anything played for laughs, because doing so would have destroyed the tone of absolute sincerity which earned this jingle the title "greatest of all time". Produced in 1971, the height of the Vietnam War, the simple message of the ad, the desire to "buy the world a Coke", resonated with audiences in a deeply emotional way that a humorous commercial likely could not have. The song was even re-recorded as "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing", and released as single; the song became a Top 10 hit in the US, and gained huge success internationally as well. By actively avoiding humor and subverting what is normally

expected of jingle-based advertisements, Coke connected with an audiences and created an emotional touchstone which has, according to the Forbes list, never been surpassed in the world of music-based advertising.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

Jingles are not simply a homogenous pile of songs meant to sell a product. A diverse array of companies use jingles to more effectively communicate brand information in a way that is memorable to the consumer. They vary enormously in style, length, instrumentation, and compositional structure. However, the jingles ranked by Forbes as “the greatest” do share several aspects in common.

Musically, jingles are written in a great variety of keys, however, the ones on this list are almost entirely major tonalities, most commonly in E-major. This gives the songs a distinctly “happy” sound, and create a positive atmosphere to present the brand information. They also universally end with on a major chord. This causes audiences to associate the brand and its message with feelings of not only happiness and warmth, but a literal sense of resolution.

Secondly, all of the jingles on the list use an element of repetition to solidify communication and ensure key takeaway points are not easily lost on the viewers. In 9 of the 10 jingles, the repetition is present in groups of three, and permeates both the musical and lyrical aspects of the jingle. In other words, when a verbal communication is repeated, the musical cue which accompanies it earlier in the ad also tends to reappear, in an either identical or subtly altered form. This method aligns with the popular advertising theory that the use of three exposures to brand communications solidifies the retention of the information without overloading the viewer.

Finally, the use of humor permeates the vast majority of jingle-containing ads, even if the lyrics of the jingles themselves are not always the major source of the

comedy. The ads use an array of techniques to achieve this effect, whether it is through comically imprecise performance of the jingle, subtly comedic visual elements, droll contrast between musical and non-musical parts, or humorous pairing of subject matter and musical style. In cases where humor is not used, this is done so very intentionally, in order to subvert common expectations about jingles, and to allow them to resonate with the audience's sense of pathos. This allows a form infamous for seeming "cheesy" to deliver product information with a disarming sense of sincerity. Especially in the case of "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke," choosing sentiment over comedy can create a cultural icon capable of transcending beyond advertising and into the popular imagination.

This information is by no means an exhaustive review of every possible similarities these 10 jingles hold. For example, it is possible that these jingles have more in common musically than their major keys and use of repetitive musical patterns. However, the research presented here is meant to serve as a starting point for more research into the nature of advertising jingles. Up until now, there has been practically no research focusing exclusively on the form. Given the number of advertisements that use the jingles, it would likely behoove both media researchers and the advertising community at large to perform more rigorous studies of techniques used by jingle writers. Given the enormous impact that advertising has on both individual consumers and society as a whole, attaining a better understanding of how these communications are presented to consumers could aid both researchers interested in media topics and advertising firms.



To conclude, there is still a great deal of work to be done regarding the nature, structure and effects of advertising jingles. However, this research will hopefully serve as a starting point that future research may build on, as academia seeks to answer the elusive question “What makes ‘good’ advertising?”

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