DR. JOE BENNETT x MASTERCARD
BRIT AWARDS 'SONG OF THE YEAR' FACT SHEET

The findings below highlight the key analysis from Dr. Joe Bennett's research on the BRIT Awards 'Song of the Year' winners and nominees.

After analysing over 300 songs from the last 40 years of Song of The Year (SOTY) winners and nominees at the BRIT Awards, Mastercard commissioned research to be carried out by Dr Joe Bennett, Professor of Music at Berklee College of Music, Boston to look into how the nations annual award winning songs have evolved and how technology has both influenced their creation and the ways in which we listen to them.

The below findings are the key takeaways from the research, which highlight how SOTY winning tracks have changed and developed over time. All research was carried out by Dr Joe Bennett and his team, William Weston Bennett and Jacob Sunshine PhD researchers at Harvard University and Simon Troup a music notation consultant and designer from Digital Music Art UK.

More information can be found by contacting **mastercard@talkertailor.com**

Shorter song length

Overall, the length of tracks has changed, in the mid-80s, SOTY nominees' were averaging 4:30 with the 90s not much shorter [4.13]. However, by the 2000s the duration decreased to [3.40.], with present day (2021 nominees) standard length reduced by nearly 35 seconds to [3:07]. Songs that are reduced in time are more favourable largely due to listener preferences, Spotify algorithms, and the rise of social media platforms such as Tiktok.

The below graph highlights the song duration of Song of the Year finalists from 1982 to 2021:


Fig.01 – Song durations – BRIT Awards 'Song Of The Year' finalists
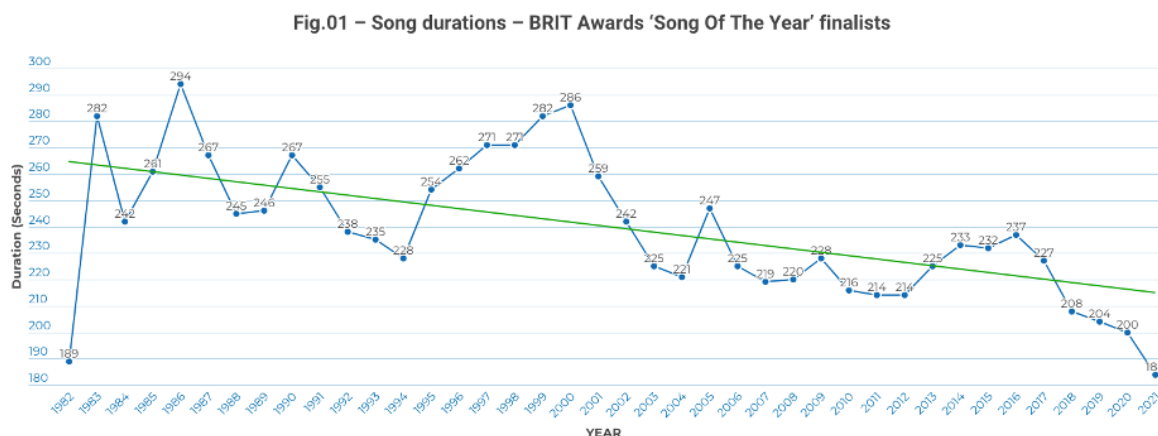
Shorter song title

In fact, for artists struggling to land on a song title, one word should do the trick. Shorter titles have become much more common in recent years, with half of the 2021 nominees having one-word titles – e.g., **Lighter**, **Physical**, **Rain**, **Rover, Secrets**. Of the 329 nominees, 75 have one-word titles.

The below graph highlights the average number of words in a song title for Song of the Year finalists from 1982 to 2021:

Fig.04 – Average number of words in title
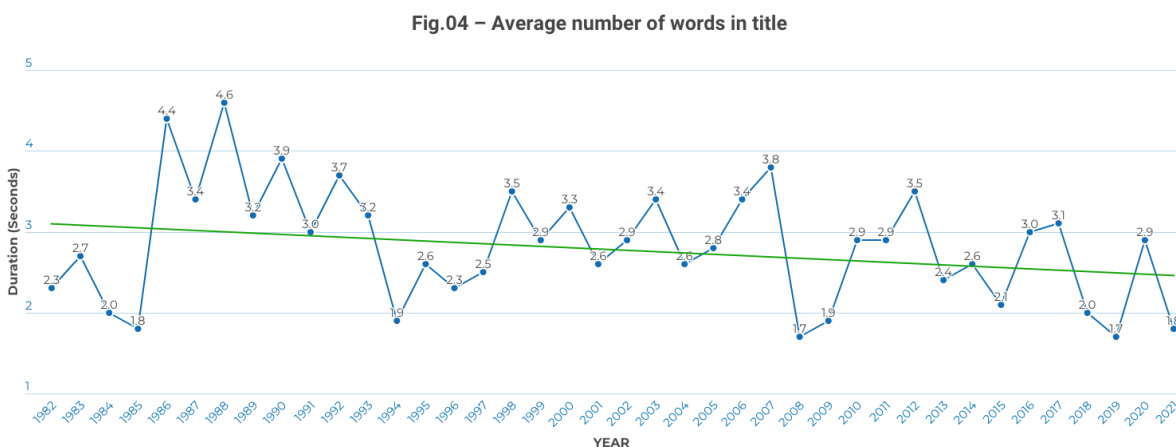
Start the song with the chorus

Since the first winner of Song of The Year (SOTY) in 1982, the structure of songs has gradually progressed. Interestingly throughout the 80s, the vocals for most songs began by singing the verse, including the first three years' winners 1982-84 – **Tainted Love**, **Come On Eileen**, and **Karma Chameleon**. The 90s was the start of introducing the chorus at the beginning of the song, for example, **It Only Takes a Minute by Take That.** By 2021 however, 50% of the SOTY nominees began with the chorus (**Rain**, **Rover, Secrets, Don't Rush, and Ain't It Different**).

Social Media influence

In the 2000's social media platform, MySpace launched the careers of popular artists such as *Lily Allen*, *Panic! At The Disco, Bring Me the Horizon* and *You Me At Six*. For the first time, unsigned artists were able to reach the mass audiences, as well as receive chart recognition. This trend has stood the test of time as tracks first released on TikTok, such as **Watermelon Sugar** and **Lighter**, are dominating the music charts. Proof that the way we consume music is impacting the style and structure of successful songs.

Since the emergence of TikTok, in 2017, the average danceability of shortlisted songs has hit new highs*. The most "danceable" nominee of all is *Sugababes'* **Push the Button,** released in 2006. Evidence of recurring danceability peaks in the mid-80s, early 2000s, and late 2010s.

The below graph highlights the danceability of Song of the Year finalists from 1982 to 2021:

Fig.09: Danceability
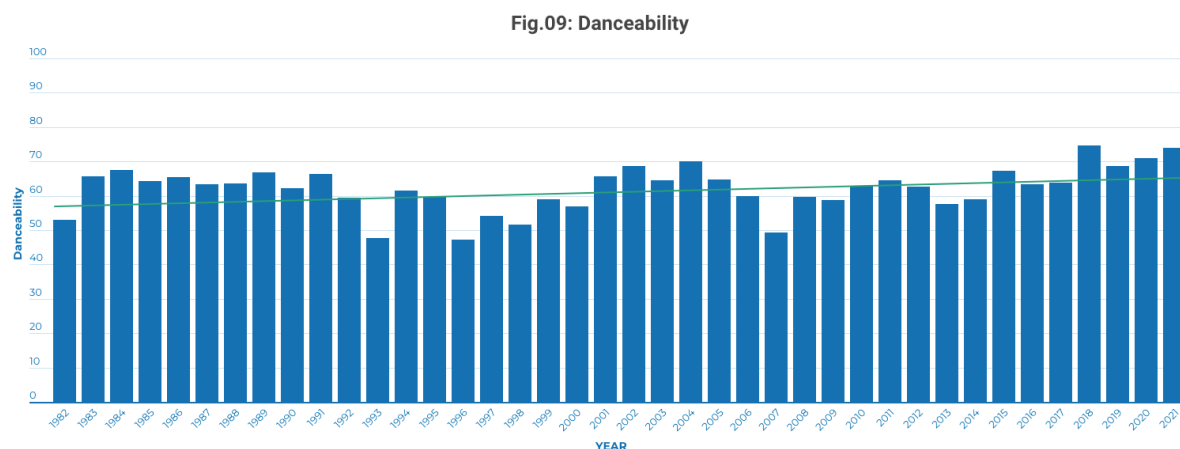
However, it's not only how fans consume music, but also the tech behind the track, which has moved on. Findings show that songs that include the latest tech at the time were the most successful. **Tainted Love**, the 1982 winner, used the Synclavier, one of the first commercially available samplers, to generate its synth-piano and synth-orchestra sounds. Rick Astley's **Never Gonna Give You Up,** the 1988 winner, uses tape-synched MIDI sequencing to great effect to create that distinctive rhythmic bassline that appears in so many of the Stock Aitken Waterman recordings of the late 80s.

Have multiple songwriters create the track

The number of co-writers has been rising throughout the 40-year period. Single writer songs were common in the early 1980s. 1982's winner Tainted Love was written by a single writer, Ed Cobb in 1964. The 2000s saw the number of writers per song begin to rise, through bands with co-writers like Take That **Shine** and **Patience** the 2007 and 2008 winners, and artists with large songwriting and production teams such as Mark Ronson feat. Bruno Mars's **Uptown Funk**, 2015.

Write about Heartbreak

One of the themes within successful songwriting that has remained a constant is heartbreak. From the 329 songs analysed 60% of the lyrics were about romantic love. When this is split into what types of romantic

love: the most popular type are "Spring" love songs (looking for love, flirting, admiring someone); of the winners, the most popular type are "Winter" songs (breakups, loneliness, heartache).

Project methodology

A team of music researchers analysed the <u>nominees</u> and <u>winners</u> of the BRIT awards' Song Of The Year (SOTY) between 1982 and 2021 – a total of 329 songs, including the 40 winners.

Metadata was extracted from the corpus using a combination of computer-automated and human-coding methods. For the 329 nominees, researchers coded the following information – around 6500 data points in total:

- Title (song title only - removed credits in the title e.g. "(feat. Bruno Mars)"
- Artist
- Songwriter/s
- Originality (original song, cover version, remix, or sample-based)
- Lyric
- Duration
- Length of intro (time from start of track to the main vocal entering)
- Chorus time (time from start of track to the first chorus)
- Explicit lyric
- Valence (aka 'happiness[SR1] score')
- Loudness (the average loudness of the track across its duration)
- Tempo (beats per minute)
- Lyric theme – Character, Dance Party, History, Home / Family, Love (Spring, Summer, Autumn or Winter), Money, Places, Self-Belief, Social, Spirituality, Youth, Other. These categories are explained in more detail later in this document).
- Key signature (e.g. C major, F# minor)
- Tonality (the main musical scale used in the vocal melody and underlying chords)
- Chorus chord loop (for choruses that used looping materials)
- Vocalist gender (Female, Male, Female Group, Male Group, Mixed group)
- Genre/style descriptors