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### Artist Profile: Imogen Heap

In an industry that has faced drastic changes over the past few decades, Imogen Heap has been ahead of the curve each step of the way. A singer-songwriter, record producer, and sound engineer born in 1977's London, her twenty-some years in the music industry exemplify exceptional creativity (Rigby). From fan engagement to product development, Heap demonstrates innovation in her work unlike any other artist I am familiar with.

My first introduction to Heap's music was actually through American singer Jason Derulo's 2009 hit single, "Whatcha Say." I had listened to Derulo's song for years assuming that it was original content, and it wasn't until I was in high school that one of my friends pointed out to me that the entire chorus was sampled from Heap's 2005 single, "Hide and Seek." I remember hearing it for the first time, mesmerized by the vocoder harmonics of her voice. I was awestruck that the upbeat, embellished version of the melody with which I was familiar could be derived from such a profoundly simple and dynamic piece of art. I still find "Hide and Seek" to be so soothing, engaging, and provocative, and the song has frequented my playlists ever since.

Though Derulo's sampling may have boosted her sales later on, "Hide and Seek" enjoyed widespread commercial success in the UK and the US well before then. The song was featured in the season two finale of popular teen drama series *The O.C.*, and then in a spoof of said episode during a *Saturday Night Live* digital short in 2007, earning her sizable traction in pop culture (Capewell). A few months after "Hide and Seek" was released as a single, it appeared on Heap's second studio album, *Speak for Yourself*, which she released on her own after being dropped

from her previous label for budgetary reasons (Bartlett). The album performed exceptionally well, ultimately earning her her second RIAA gold certification, succeeding “Hide and Seek” in its single release (RIAA). Over the past two decades, Heap has created several iconic tracks, performed as half of electronic duo Frou Frou, and even composed for the Broadway play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Zuckerman). But her accomplishments hardly stop there.

In addition to her commercial success, Heap’s unique artistic style sets her apart. While many artists work tirelessly to make their electronically produced tracks sound organic, Heap goes out of her way to make her organically produced tracks sound electronic (Loeb). She finds inspiration in everyday noises that the average person would hardly consider an instrument. Her ability to create entirely new sounds and turn them into something sonically appealing is as resourceful as it is revolutionary, and it encourages us to look beyond the expected to find the extraordinary.

Heap’s unconventional creative process has opened the door for exceptional engagement with her fans as well. For one project, Heap called for fans to submit their own recordings of everyday noises to be processed and included in a collection of new songs (Heap). For another project, Heap selected tour performers based on video auditions sent in to her email. Her history of crowdsourcing projects allows her fans to feel like they are part of the process, strengthening the bond between her and them.

In recent years, Heap’s approach to music has crossed even more unexpected barriers. In the wake of streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music dominating the music market, she proposed an alternative system called Mycelia (Bartlett). The proposed system would utilize blockchain technology to achieve more equitable payments for artists at a time when they receive

increasingly less for the consumption of their work. Heap even experimented with this idea through the release of her song “Tiny Human.” Additionally, Heap has also been experimenting with revolutionizing live performances of electronic music. Her recently released MiMu gloves control audio effects in real time, bringing theatrical movement to a genre that has historically been constricted to standing behind a computer (Heap). In her 2019 Tiny Desk Concert with NPR, she demonstrates the versatile functionality of the gloves through a chilling rendition of “Hide and Seek,” bringing my research full circle.

During her twenty-two years in the industry, Imogen Heap has contributed significantly to creativity and innovation in music. Her memorable electronic sound has influenced pop culture, her willingness to collaborate with her fans has set a new precedent for celebrity engagement, and her unorthodox ideas have revolutionized how we can consume and produce music. Overall, Imogen Heap’s contributions to music are far greater than just an a-cappella vocoded song in my playlists.

## Works Cited

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