

BRANCHING OUT OF INTERNET MUSIC



In 2023, **underscores** declared that hyperpop is “officially dead.” Her 2021 album, *fishmonger*, is regarded as a defining moment in the genre; its relentless distortion and wry lyrics, in line with other acts of the time, stood out in its candid display of vulnerability. However, this work quickly became lost in the influx of imitators and uninspired regurgitations of the hyperpop sound after its release. It was clearly time to move on, but as a big name in a self-declared dead genre, where could she and other similarly labeled artists go?

The end of hyperpop is just as ambiguous as its beginning. PC Music, founded in 2013, has been the label most closely associated with the initial development of hyperpop proper, but other internet music lumped in with the genre evolved in parallel. Easy access to digital audio workstations like FL Studio and online communication spaces like Discord allowed teens to rapidly share demos back and forth, creating music that reflected what they were: chronically online. Internet music takes influences from emo, EDM, jersey club, and more, all tinged with equal parts irony and genuine adoration. Particularly appealing for queer artists craving a

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lane for free expression, the height of internet music built a strong, tolerant online community for them to create in. Largely self-contained in its own right, what came out of this movement was largely supported and validated by PC Music.



One of the first moments where internet music breached the mainstream was with 100 geecs' 2019 debut album *1000 geecs*. The duo's vocals are pitched up to the point of near unintelligibility throughout, transforming their voices into dynamic, screeching textures that support the album's rapid hi-hats and heavy bass. Many were put off by their brusque, in-your-face style, but they could not resist replay. Soon after the success of *1000 geecs*, the increasingly popular output of PC Music and the pandemic pushing even more people online converged into a surge in the volume of internet music. Several unofficial sub genres floated around, mostly

created by those on Discord and Reddit, to loosely group the output, including digicore, glitchcore, and hyperflip. To bring the movement to a wider audience, Spotify curated a playlist simply titled "hyperpop." Spanning the gamut of internet music, it included the likes of Charli xcx, midwxst, SOPHIE, and glaive. In doing so, it gave a name to the amorphous varieties of internet music for those unfamiliar, but also defined a group that had no interest in having a definition. The response was part appreciation for the playlist's ability to bring a name and legitimacy to the movement and part fear that the official genre title would lead to its own demise.

In the post-pandemic world, the genre has remained in a state of limbo with one foot in the underground and another in the mainstream. The Spotify playlist amassed widespread confusion with its inclusion of such a variety of artists; a listen through could not give anyone a concrete sense of what hyperpop really is. The ability for Spotify to group PC Music output with the depths of internet music and call it all the same was inaccurate, but ultimately, this playlist was the main tastemaker for the genre. A marked turning point in its perception came with the inclusion of the Grammy-winning Sam Smith and Kim Petras song "Unholy." Its forced clangs and dry percussion shot to the top of the charts despite being a stark presentation of the vapid remains that such a vibrant movement had been boiled down to. Where internet music thrived as a celebration of the queer underground, the outweighed success of these mainstream attempts framed the movement as the Pride Month section in Target. General audiences only accessed a bland, commercialized sample of a movement defined by its complexity and depth.

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The mix of more experimental and derivative songs zapped inspiration from both ends. The ethos of internet music stemmed from an aversion to imitation, taking from a wide range of material and mocking it by pushing every characteristic to its limits. The intentions of new artists to the scene who wanted to “make hyperpop” rather than just explore their creative limits were antithetical to — and considered disrespectful by — those who started the movement. Looking out at the mangled landscape, many internet artists felt the need to move elsewhere. This begged the question: Was hyperpop dead? The question reverberated through all corners of the internet. Some said it was alive but not thriving in the mainstream, others claimed the title contained too much variety in a single genre and oversimplified the constantly morphing microgenres. The conversation became so convoluted and cyclical that many artists abandoned the question altogether, taking themselves offline to create without any restrictions.

Jane Remover was a big victim of the hyperpop label. Her 2021 album, *Frailty*, pushed the glitchy elements of internet music to the extreme, balancing them out with nearly ambient, infrequent guitar strumming and distorted vocals. Despite it leaning more emo and industrial, anything glitchy and grainy was grouped with the hyperpop title and all its associations. For her, umbrella terms that attempt to describe such a dynamic scene are extremely limiting. To break away from the bleak categorization, her next album, *Census Designated*, was a completely new feat. She took away any elements that could be likened to hyperpop,

and took inspiration from shoegaze, noise rock and drone. Her experimental essence remains the same — she completely abandons traditional song structures and fills minutes of space with screams and static, building the soundtrack to a nightmare. Remover’s clean break from internet music embodies its ethos. If you can’t beat them, leave them behind and make something new.

Despite the success of her debut, underscores fell into a space familiar to mainstream pop and internet music artists alike — listeners perceived the rapid, relentless bursts of energy as superficial. Her next album, *Wallsocket*, proved this entirely wrong. *Wallsocket* completely scaled up her concept, creating a fictional small town and following its characters through their complex relationships with each other and themselves. In a way it mirrored the criticisms, presenting something seemingly simple and teasing out its nuances to reveal a darkness that lies underneath. Sure *fishmonger*’s overstimulating nature served as a cover-up, yet it’s not one of perceived perfunctory, but rather of distraction from her inner turmoil. *Wallsocket* demonstrates that internet music is not just a shtick, it can successfully translate to large-scale concepts and holds up when weaved in with complex issues.

Even hyperpop pioneers 100 geecs felt a need to move away from the title on their sophomore album *10,000 geecs*. Still altered into oblivion, the album shifts from a base in blown-out everything to a base in absurdism. The focus on theme over style opened up their sound to clearer influences from other genres, including pop-punk, rock, and ska. Despite the duo’s thematic erraticism, their sound’s expansion bridges their abrasive, two-minute bursts of noise with a familiarity that grounds the record’s sound. Influence from internet music is still apparent in tracks like “Dumbest Girl Alive” and “757,” yet it is clear the duo has taken some time to touch grass, realizing that they can retain their outlandish style while using their high-pitched synths and vocal chops more intentionally.

As time goes on, more artists are joining the hyperpop diaspora. Whether moving on to a larger concept, ditching internet music altogether, or using it as a base to push their sound forward, the artists that first defined internet music are collectively moving past it. It is unclear if the progression followed the natural aging of internet music’s young artist base, or was exacerbated by the movement’s commodification. Either way, the drive to push boundaries has stayed consistent, transitioning internet music into a new era, one a bit more removed from the screens.

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