

**Chicago 17**

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As an international student who is not familiar with old American rock music, it is weird for me to write an analysis about the Legendary Rock Band “Chicago”. I was very familiar with the band since I did not know any English because of Chicago’s songs. "You're the Inspiration" came out in one of my favorite video games, “Elite Beat Agents”. The story that the song cover was so dramatic it broke the gamers' hearts whenever they played the game and listened to the song. With a beautiful melody and impressive vocal and synth sound, I was searching about the band and noticed that this song’s production was so much different than the original style of music that they used to produce. I felt like this project was a great opportunity to know more about the band and the song and to introduce the great songs that they produced.

‘Chicago’ is a Rock band formed in 1967, in Chicago, who is still currently active. They are considered one of the greatest bands in American Rock Band History by selling 120 million copies of albums around the world. As the band lasted over 50 years, they have changed the members of the band and producers several times and producers too. However, although they have changed their band members frequently, members tried to keep the color and genre of the band. One of the main characteristics that Chicago has as a band would be their brass section. The band was originally formed by Walter Parazeider, who was majoring in Clarinet performance at DePaul University and tried to make a band with a brass section. Original members, Walter Parazeider as saxophone, Robert Lamm as the keyboard, Lee Roughnan as the trumpet, James Pankow as the trombone, Terry Kath as the guitar, and Danny Seraphine as the drum. They grouped inside the basement of Walter Paraseider’s house and created a band “The Big Thing”. Later that year, Peter Cetera joined the band as a bassist. After a short amount of time as “The Big Thing”, the band changed the name to “Chicago Transit Authority” which later became “Chicago”. (*A Chicago story*)

It did not take a lot of time for the world to know about the band. Even though their first album “Chicago Transit Authority” was filled with experimental songs trying different genres of music such as “Free from Guitar”, “Poem 58” and “Prologue, 29”. Their first album hit 17th place on Billboard 200 and sold 1 million copies. After their successful debut in 1967, they were facing their prime time around the mid-1970s. They released a total of 7 albums from “Chicago” to “Chicago XI”. There were several hit songs such as “Saturday in the park”, from Chicago V, and “If you leave me now” from Chicago X. “If you leave me now”, a song written by Peter Cetera, hit the top in Billboard's top 100.

Everyone thought “Chicago” will last as a successful band forever as the quality of their album increased with each album. However, a tragic accident that changed the whole band happened without a signal. One of their original members, Terry Kath died because of a gunshot. It was a tragic accident, Terry Kath liked to play around with a pistol and he did not know that his gun was loaded. This tragic accident made the whole band enter the dark age. The album they released, “Chicago 13” was a failure for the band, only hundred thousand copies were sold and they did not even rank on Billboard. Columbia Records, Chicago’s former label, fired them due to their failure in selling their albums.

The band needed the change. They needed a new producer, new label, and other aspects to change their image from a former mega-hit band that failed to a mega-hit band that still releases good music. Chicago found a new label, Warner Brothers Records, and also, a new producer, David Foster. “Who won a Producer of the Year Grammy award for his work on "Chicago 17," is considered to be the architect of Chicago's phenomenal resurgence.”(Holden,1985) Chicago’s newly released album with David Foster, Chicago 16 was a huge success. The band Chicago that people used to know are back on track. One of the songs

inside the album, “Hard to say I’m Sorry” hit first place in Billboard's top 100 for 2 weeks and it remains one of the legendary songs in American rock ballad history.

Chicago 17, which is the second album that Chicago released with David Foster, is still known as the greatest pop-rock album in American Rock history. Producer David Foster and Jeremy Lubbock has awarded “Best Instrumental Arrangement, Accompanying Vocalist/Background Arrangement award” for the song “Hard Habit to Break.”(*Chicago 17 - Chicago: Awards*) The album itself reached 4th place on the Billboard hot 200, and singles “You’re the Inspiration” and “Hard Habit to Break” reached 3rd place on the Billboard hot 100. Music critics like Thomas Erlewine said “ *Chicago 17* is “the pinnacle of [producer David Foster’s] craft and one of the best adult contemporary records of the ’80s,” and one of the most influential albums “within its style.”(James, 2019) However, on the production side, Chicago and David Foster were having trouble while recording this album. The band’s identity and the most specialized characteristics are its brass section and progressive rock, and fusion jazz genres from the brass section. For example, the song “Ballet For A Girl In Buchannon” which was released on the band’s 1970s album Chicago II, is a 12-minute song, 7 part music filled with the musical characteristics that Chicago liked to produce before David Foster. Inside one song, Chicago put jazz, rock n roll, and classical aspects with a beautiful brass sound in every single part of the song. Lee Roughnan’s beautiful trumpet solo coming in the fifth part, “Colour My World” shows how Chicago loved the brass instrument and how they are good at using them also. However, from the last album, songs like “Hard to say I’m Sorry”, and “You’re the Inspiration” were more of a soft pop rock. Members of the band had to play different instruments in the album, Robert Lamm, who plays piano and keyboard in the band, did not get to play the keyboard because David was playing piano while recording the song. Also, Lee Roughnan, Walter Parazeider, and

James Pankow, who are in the brass section of the band, had to play different instruments like guitar and synthesizer. In the music video for “You’re the Inspiration”, it is easy to see them playing different instruments, not the brass that they used to play. Members had hostility toward David Foster while producing the album, but they all knew that the music was good even though the music itself was far from what they tried to make.

“Stay the Night”, one of the legendary songs in the album, is written by David Foster and Peter Cetera. Besides thinking about how Chicago changed the genre from jazz fusion rock to pop and soft rock. This song itself is filled with characteristics of typical 1980s music. From recording traditional keyboards, lots of bands tried to produce music using a newly invented instrument called a synthesizer. The song starts with a very experimental synth sound that strongly has characteristics of the 1980s. Also, Peter Cetera’s vocal was filled with reverb and harmony. It sounds like Peter Cetera and several other singers recorded vocals together when audiences first heard it. Another characteristic that this song has is panned drum sound with reverb. Drum sound first starts from the right side and moves to the left side very quickly. This song also has a strong backing guitar and bass sound more modern rock. A strong guitar solo with an overdrive sound shows how powerful the song is, which is not the style of “Chicago” but the song was good!

"Hard Habit to Break" is a song written by Steve Kipner and John Lewis Parker with a production by David Foster. It was released as a single in 1984, from their album "Chicago 17". The song is a power ballad with a slow tempo and strong emotional content. It features a catchy melody and a memorable chorus that has made it one of Chicago's most enduring hits. The lyrics describe the struggle of a person who is trying to get over a past relationship but finds that the memories and feelings are difficult to shake off. Musically, "Hard Habit to Break" is

characterized by its use of synthesizers and drum machines, which were popular sounds in the 1980s. The song also features a guitar solo by Bill Champlin and a saxophone solo by Walter Parazaider. The song was a commercial success, reaching No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and No. 8 on the Adult Contemporary chart in the United States. It also charted in several other countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Overall, "Hard Habit to Break" is a classic example of Chicago's ability to combine rock, pop, and soul elements into a memorable and emotionally resonant ballad that has stood the test of time.

"You're the Inspiration" was a type of song that the band would never imagine producing. Ironically, this is the song that audiences recognize whenever they hear the band name Chicago. Like Stay the Night, this song also contains characteristics of the 1980s producing techniques. However, the genre of the song is different compared to Stay the Night. In Stay the Night, Foster produced the song with strong guitar and bass sound. However, in "You're the Inspiration", David Foster put even more synthesizers to create various harmonic sounds. Members who used to play brass had to grab a synthesizer and record for the song. This is why members do not play this song often when they are on tour. Production-wise, this soft rock ballad song, led by organ and piano sound, is filled with keyboard synth sound which reminds listeners of the 1980s. Not just chord and pad sound, the bass sound was also played by the synthesizer. Another clear characteristic that this song has is a drum full of reverb. Not just in snare or hi-hat, the whole drum is full of reverb. Also, high-frequency EQ is boosted and listeners get to hear the sound of snare and hi-hat more clearly and reverb.

The album Chicago 17 is the album that listeners recognize whenever they hear the name Chicago. Songs like "Stay the Night", "Hard Habit to Break" and "You're the Inspiration"

remain one of the greatest hit songs of the 20th century. However, like other hit songs inside the former album, Chicago 16. It is really hard to find members who play these songs produced by David Foster even now. From the late 1970s to the early 1980s when David Foster produced the album, Chicago had to change the genre and style of the music that they used to produce. As soon as David Foster left, Chicago tried to keep the style of music till now although band members changed frequently. For fans or potential fans of Chicago, this album is not the best one to start listening to. However, for fans of the 1980s or people who would like to study music production in the 1980s, this album is recommended. According to the mastering box, the main production techniques in the 1980s are Gated Reverbs, Making Huge Lead Lines, Synthesizers, Drum Machines with 80s Sound, Vocal Reverb, Delay and Harmonisation, and Master Bus Mix Downs & Tape.” (Dunphy, 2021). And as I mentioned in the production analysis for the song “Stay the Night” and “You’re the Inspiration”, huge reverb for drum vocals, synth and every other instrumental track and synth usage in multiple ways are trademarks inside the album. Not only these songs, songs like “Hard Habit to Break” used similar production techniques such as multiple synth sounds with reverb with multi-track reverb and delay vocals. Even though these songs share similar characteristics to other songs produced in the 1980s, impactful melody, guitar riff, and synth sound show the reason why the band “Chicago” and David Foster remain a legend in 20th-century music history. Not just they were following the overall characteristics, but they were making it with progressive use of sounds.

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