

CALIFORNIA GURLS *deconstructed*

Artist: Katy Perry

Song: California Gurls

Album: Teenage Dream

Genre: Pop



HIT  SONGS
deconstructed

GENERAL INFORMATION

Artist: Katy Perry
Song: California Gurls
Album: Teenage Dream
Songwriter(s): K. Perry, B. McKee, C. Broadus, M. Martin, L. Gottwald
Week on BB Chart: 7/3/2010
Chart Position: #1 Pop Song
Genre: Pop
Sub Genre: Electro Pop / Funk

AT-A-GLANCE

Length: 3:56
Structure: A-B-A-B-C-B
Tempo: Mid
First Chorus: 0:54 (23% into the song)
Intro Length: 0:08
Outro Length: 0:21
Primary Instrumentation Type: Electric
Mood: Upbeat / Party
Lyrical Theme: Giving props to California through a girls perspective
Primary Lyrical P.O.V: 1st person

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

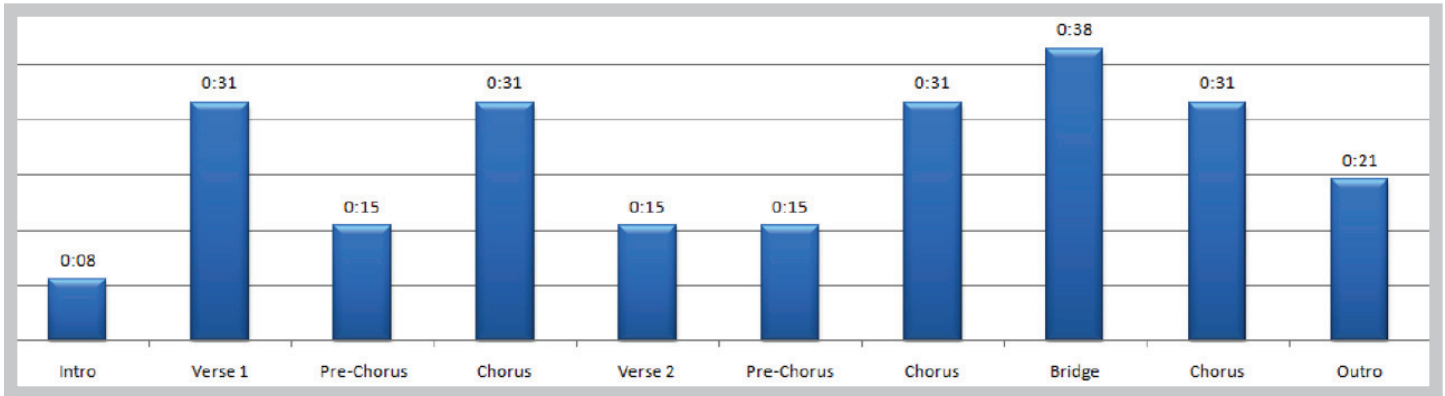
At-A-Glance:

	Intro	Verse	P-Chorus	Chorus	Turn	Solo	Bridge	Outro
# Of Occurrences	1	2	2	3	n/a	n/a	1	1
Average Length by Section	0:08	0:25	0:15	0:31	n/a	n/a	0:38	0:21
Section % to Total Song	3%	20%	13%	39%	n/a	n/a	16%	9%

Here we see primary emphasis being given to the chorus. It occurs most frequently when compared to other sections (3), and when looking at the total time allocated to all sections, it far surpasses all others, comprising 39% of the total song. As far as average section length goes, the bridge is the longest at 0:38, followed closely by the chorus at 0:31.

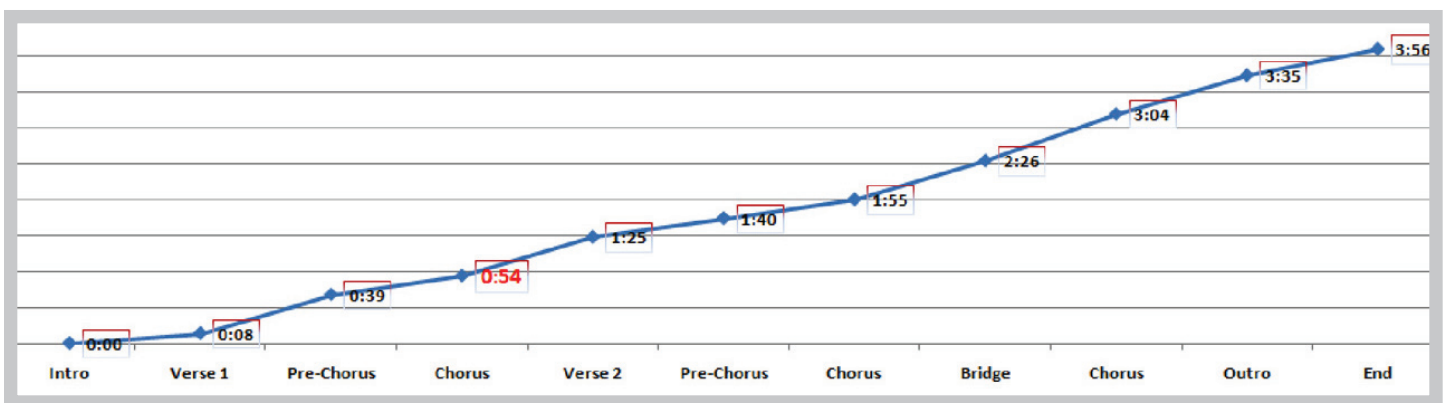
One point to take note of is that we can look at the structure of “California Gurls” in one of two ways. For analysis purposes of this report, we consider the “Snoop Dogg” part to be considered a bridge. However, we can also look at it as being a 3rd verse. And, if you take into account the 0:07 intro that kicks off that section, the verse would fall in at 0:31 – which is the same length as the 1st verse. However, since it is a departure from the rest of the song, we’ll be referring to it as a bridge for analysis purposes in this report.

Section Length: (Length of each individual section within the song)



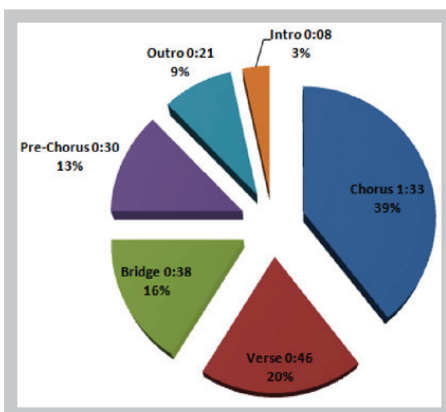
Here we see that the sections are structured quite evenly throughout the song. The choruses all clock in at 0:31, pre-choruses at 0:15 and full verse at 0:31 as well (with the second verse being half @ 0:15). The intro is short and to-the-point.

Structure Timeline: (Shows when each section hits within the timeline of the song)



The most interesting factor here is to note when the chorus kicks in. Historically, in mainstream pop songs, you want to get to the chorus within the first 0:30. Here, we don't get to it until 0:54. That being said, the verse and pre-chorus are obviously engaging enough to warrant the delayed chorus intro.

Total Section Analysis: (Total time consumed by each section and its percentage of the total song)

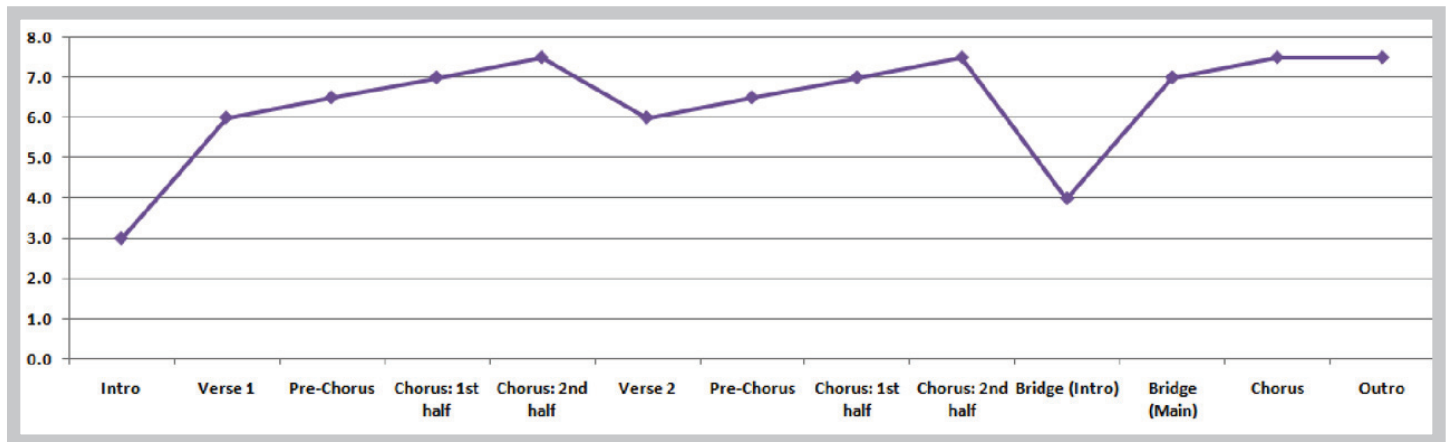


Again, we can look at this one of two ways. As it is shown above, the majority of time is allocated to that killer chorus at 39%, followed by the verse at 20% and then the bridge at 16%. However, since the bridge can also be considered a third verse, the A & B sections could technically be viewed as being given equal importance within the song (36% and 39% respectively).

- Intro: 0:08 / 3%
- Verse: 0:46 / 20%
- Pre-Chorus: 0:30 / 13%
- Chorus: 1:33 / 39%
- Bridge: 0:38 / 16%
- Outro: 0:21 / 9%

Momentum / Intensity Factor:

(Evaluation of the intensity of each section within the song timeline on a scale of 1 - 10, 10 being the most intense)



Overall, there aren't any significant momentum changes within "California Gurls", and the intensity level stays relatively constant throughout. That being said, the momentum does build slightly from section to section, increasing gradually through the verse into the pre-chorus. Even the chorus has subtle changes in momentum, with the second half spicing up the beat to increase the drive. The only primary shift in momentum occurs during the intro to the bridge, where the music takes a back seat to Snoop Dogg.

SECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Intro:

The "cheesy" 80's funk synth fade in with a brief Snoop Dogg narrative "Greetings, Loved Ones. Let's Take a Journey" perfectly sets the tone and vibe of the song in just 7 seconds. The "swoosh" transports you right in to the verse with Katy Perry.

Rating: 9/10

Verse 1& 2:

Here starts the perfect marriage of retro and modern. The vintage synth and slap bass gives the vibe of early 80's Rick James and Prince, yet the modern production values make it sound current. Katy also perfectly blends a modern sounding vocal with retro 80's funk phrasing. The lyrics automatically transport you to that California party. The verse is basically 80% retro and 20% modern (keep that in mind as the song progresses). The second verse is more of the same, though it's now a half verse. The added sound effects (giggling, car honking) even further accentuate the imagery in your head.

Rating: 9/10

Pre-Chorus:

Here we venture into modern Katy Perry territory. The synth still gives a hint of retro, but Katy's delivery is completely modernistic. The pre-chorus also melodically creates a shift in tension coming out of the verse, perfectly setting up the focal point of the song, the chorus. As for the style, the pre-chorus basically has the reverse feel of the verse as described

above. Here we're looking at a sound that is 80% modern and 20% retro.

Rating: 9/10

Chorus:

Here we dive into full fledged retro funk instrumentation (now with added "Chic" style guitar line) coupled with a modern vocal delivery by Katy Perry. Here phrasing is spot on, and both work in perfect unison in creating an exceptionally memorable chorus. The lyrics perfectly sum up what the verse and pre-chorus were building to. As far as vibe goes, we're now at 50% modern and 50% retro.

Rating: 9/10

Bridge:

Here we have a 50/50 split between modern and retro. Snoop's unique delivery coupled with the retro instrumentation work perfectly together in providing the listener with a new, fresh and interesting section. As I mentioned earlier, we could also technically look at this section as being a 3rd verse, but there is enough of a departure from the rest of the song where it justifies the classification. I couldn't imagine another rap star eliciting the same California vibe and imagery as Snoop Dogg. The idea for the Perry/Snoop Dogg pairing was right on the mark.

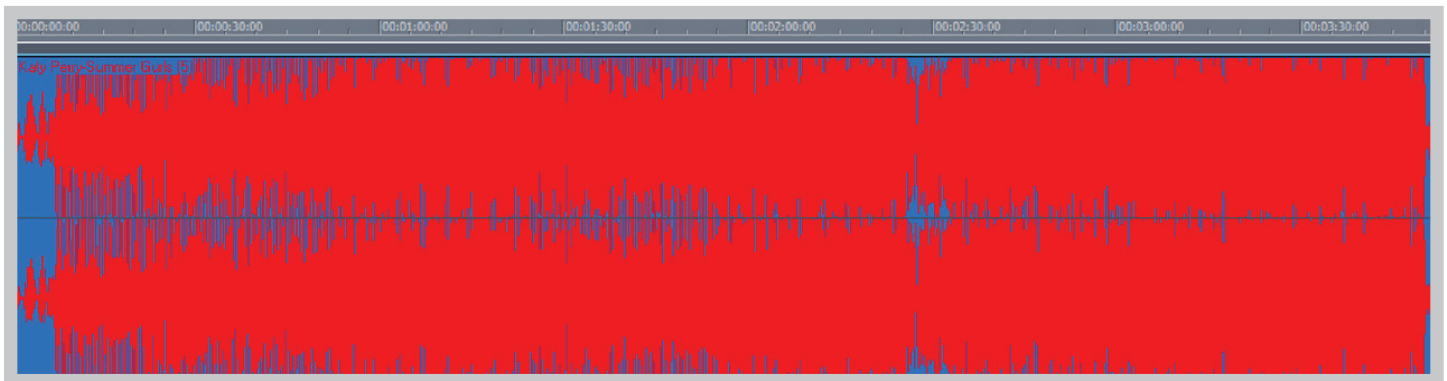
Rating: 9 /10

Outro:

This is probably the first time that I didn't have something negative to say about an auto-tune sounding vocal. I think the robotic "California Girls" lyric over Snoop's vocals and retro instrumentation work perfectly in creating an outro that really sums up the vibe of the song. I do get the impression, however, that they meant this to be a fade out and not a button ending. That being said, I REALLY do not like ending the song with that synth lick. It just feels like they didn't want to spend the time thinking of something better, so they just opted for something that sounds "cut" – like a bad edit. It would have been better to have that autotune robotic voice just say "California" at the very end. I would have bought into that. The way that it is just took me out of that party vibe and into "what just happened?"

Rating: 9/10 for the Outro, 1/10 for how the song is ended.

WAVEFORM



As you can clearly see from the waveform graphic, “California Gurls” is compressed to the max for maximum radio play impact. There some slight breathing room during the verses and first part of the bridge, but that’s only because the music is a bit more sparse during those sections.

PRIMARY INSTRUMENTATION, TONE & MIX

INTRO	Tone / Comments	Pan
Synth	“Cheesy” early/mid 80’s fuzzy funk synth	11:00
Synth	Swell into verse	3:00-9:00
Vox	Doubled Snoop Dogg spoken word	12:00

VERSE	Tone / Comments	Pan
Synth	“Cheesy” early/mid 80’s fuzzy funk synth	11:00
Kick	Electronic/Tight/Dry	12:00
Snare/Claps	Electronic/Bright	12:00-2:00
Bass (2nd half of verse 1)	Treble early 80’s slap funk style	12:00
Lead Vox	Katy Perry – subtle delay	12:00
Background Vox	Female-starts at 2:00 and moves to 12:00	2:00-12:00
Background Vox	Snoop Dogg – subtle undertone	12:00
*Background Vox Effects	2nd Verse – Female – airy “sex”, giggles	9:00-3:00
*Background Vox Effects	2nd Verse – Car Horn	2:30

PRE-CHORUS	Tone / Comments	Pan
Synth	“Cheesy” early/mid 80’s fuzzy funk synth	11:00
Kick	Electronic/Tight/Dry	12:00
Snare/Claps	Electronic/Bright	12:00-2:00
Synth Bass	Mid-Tone	12:00
Lead Vox	Katy Perry – subtle delay	12:00
Background Vox	Female - Right before chorus – multi-layered with reverb	11:00-12:00

PRE-CHORUS	Tone / Comments	Pan
*Synth/Organ	2nd Pre-Chorus – cleaner than first / modulating	11:00-12:00
*Background Vox	2nd Pre-Chorus – female – throughout the section	1:00-3:00

CHORUS	Tone / Comments	Pan
Synth	“Cheesy” Funk synth moves to the background	11:00
Synth	Swell and Pan effects	9:00-3:00
Kick	Electronic/Tight/Dry	12:00
Snare/Claps	Electronic and real sounding combo	12:00-2:00
Perc	Light, dry, bright perc-barely noticeable	9:00-3:00
Bass	Trebly early 80’s slap funk style	12:00
Synth Bass	Mid-tone (more up front than the slap bass)	12:00
Guitar	Clean treble funk style	10:00
Lead Vox	Katy Perry multi-layered – subtle delay	11:00-3:00
Background Vox	Female – multi-layered with reverb	11:00-12:00
*Background Vox	2nd chorus – Snoop Dogg – spoken	11:00
*Perc	2nd chorus – tambourine	2:30

BRIDGE	Tone / Comments	Pan
Synth	“Cheesy” Funk synth moves to the background	11:00
Synth	Swell and Pan effects	9:00-3:00
Kick	Electronic/Tight/Dry	12:00
Snare/Claps	Electronic and real sounding combo	12:00-2:00
Synth Bass	Mid-tone (more up front than the slap bass)	12:00
Bass	Trebly early 80’s slap funk style	12:00
Lead Vox	Snoop Dogg – multi-layered	12:00
Background Vox/Effects	Katy Perry & Snoop Dogg – multi-layered-echo	9:00-3:00
Guitar	Clean treble funk style	10:00

OUTRO	Tone / Comments	Pan
Synth	“Cheesy” Funk synth moves to the background	11:00
Kick	Electronic/Tight/Dry	12:00
Snare/Claps	Electronic and real sounding combo	12:00-2:00
Synth Bass	Mid-tone (more up front than the slap bass)	12:00
Bass	Treble early 80’s slap funk style	12:00
Lead Vox	Snoop Dogg – spoken	12:00
Background Vox/Effects	Auto-tune electronic vocal overlay	2:00
Guitar	Clean treble funk style	10:00
Perc	Tambourine / other	9:00-3:00

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Structure - *Does the song flow in a cohesive manner?*

The structure of “California Gurls” is as close to being perfect as you can get. All of the sections are well constructed and flow seamlessly into one another.

Rating: 9.5/10

Production - *How does the production stand up in maximizing the songs impact?*

Despite being overly compressed for maximum airplay impact (it’s just the way things are now in the industry – louder is better), “California Gurls” is a very well produced song. All of the instrumentation sits well within the mix – creating that infectious groove, and each instrument is clearly audible. The greatest achievement of the overall production is how it makes a retro funk vibe sound modernistic and relevant today.

Rating: 9/10

Music/Tone - *Does the instrumentation and sound maximize the vibe of the song?*

Absolutely. The early 80’s retro funk sound coupled with the modern production perfectly fuses old and new.

Rating: 10/10

Lyrics - *Do the lyrics serve the song and jibe with the vibe of the music?*

Once again, absolutely. The lyrics paint the perfect picture of what the song is about, “California” and “California Girls”. Just hearing Snoop’s line at the intro automatically transports you to that sunny California beach. Overall the song is filled with tons of imagery, and does the perfect job in eliciting that “good time” emotion within the listener.

Rating: 10/10

Vocal Delivery - *Does the tonality and phrasing of the vocals maximize the songs impact?*

I have to say it again...absolutely. Let's look at the 1st and 2nd verses first. Katy's phrasing and delivery over the retro funk instrumentation work perfectly in eliciting that early 80's funk vibe. The pre-chorus changes things up a bit, where Katy's vocal delivery is now more modernistic in its approach, deviating from the retro funk vibe. Her delivery during the chorus is spot on, working in perfect unison with the musical groove in creating an extremely memorable and infectious chorus. Throughout, her unique vocal style makes the song 100% identifiable as a Katy Perry composition. Last, but certainly not least, Snoop Dogg's delivery is spot on as well, delivered in his own unique style.

Rating: 10/10

HIT FACTOR ASSESSMENT

Memorability - *How Easy is it to remember this song after you hear it once?*

Quite easy indeed. The unique retro funk vibe coupled with the exceptional phrasing and groove create a song that sticks in your head long after your done listening.

Rating: 9/10

WOW Factors - *Does this song possess any standout elements or contain special moments that aid in catapulting it to HIT status?*

I wouldn't say that there was any particular part of the song that could be classified as a "wow" factor, but subtle elements like the car horn honking, girl giggling and Katy's background vocals during Snoop's bridge really aid in accentuating the imagery and vibe of the song.

Rating: 8/10

Originality - *Does this song have its own unique vibe when compared to other songs/artists in the genre?*

Yes – when comparing it to other CURRENT songs in the pop genre. No – when considering that it borrows heavily from early 80's Rick James and Prince funk. That being said, Katy's and Snoop Dogg's delivery coupled with the modern production values make this retro sounding song sound modern and original.

Rating: 9/10

Longevity - *Does this song have what it takes to stand the test of time? Will it become a staple of the artist's repertoire?*

I really do think this song has all the elements necessary to be regarded as one of the best summer pop tunes to come along in many, many years. It's both well crafted and extremely memorable. There is no doubt in my mind that this song will serve as a permanent fixture in Katy Perry's repertoire throughout the rest of her career.

Rating: 9/10

CONCLUSION: 9/10

The Good:

- It's extremely well crafted and memorable.
- The lyrical content and vocal delivery perfectly suit the vibe of the song, creating vivid imagery.
- The overall production and engineering does an excellent job in making a retro themed funk song sound modern and current.
- "California Gurls" has its own unique vibe and sound amongst most other songs currently dominating the pop charts.
- The idea to have Katy Perry collaborate with Snoop Dogg on a California themed song was great thinking – both from a song standpoint and a marketing standpoint.

The Bad:

- The only negative that I can find in this song is the ending. It's just too abrupt. It would have worked much better either as a fade out or ending it with the auto-tuned "California Gurls" lyric.

WHY IT'S A HIT

Allegedly conceived as a response to Jay-Z's "Empire State of Mind", Katy Perry brought together a crack team of songwriters and producers including Bonnie McKee, Snoop Dogg, Max Martin and Dr. Luke to craft one of the best summer pop songs to come around in years.

There are three primary factors that work together in making "California Gurls" a hit:

1. Songwriting.

"California Gurls" is an extremely well crafted and memorable song. Each section of the song is given equal importance and work perfectly together in creating a cohesive, infectious hit. The lyrics contain tons of imagery, and the overall vibe elicits that "good time" feeling that you just can't shake.

2. Collaboration.

The idea to pair up Katy Perry with Snoop Dogg for a California themed song was spot on. Not only does it work well from a musical perspective, but from a marketing perspective as well. You get double the bang for the buck in having two superstars from two separate genres on one song.

3. Timing.

"California Gurls" was released in late Spring, 2010 – perfect timing to maximize the impact of a song with a strong summer vibe.

TAKE AWAYS FROM “CALIFORNIA GURLS”

- **Retro elements** are great to incorporate into your song (such as the 80’s funk in “California Gurls”), but always keep in mind what is your intended use for the song. When it comes to licensing, you can be as fully retro as you want, and chances are you’ll find a home for your song, so long as it’s well constructed. However, when it comes to artist pitches and label deals in the current market, you need to be in line with what the current trends are to increase your chances for success. Today, retro elements are present in quite a few top charting songs, most notably “California Gurls”, but they all have an overtly modernistic vibe to them.
- The use of **imagery** within your lyrics is of key importance in creating a bond with the listener. Whether it’s describing a scene or an emotion, you need to make sure that your lyrics “paint a picture” within the listeners head. Doing this will greatly accentuate the listening experience, enabling the listener to form more of a bond with the song. “California Gurls” does an exceptional job of using imagery to get you in that “California state of mind.”
- Incorporating simple **sound effects** into your song (such as the honking horn and giggling within “California Gurls”) placed in conjunction with the appropriate lyric can really do wonders in accentuating the songs visualization experience.
- **Think your song through.** Remember that it’s the “**whole package**” that counts when it comes to your song. Having a killer chorus but lacking in the verse and bridge will kill any chances for success. Take your time when constructing your song. Make sure that EVERY note within every section is justified. Doing this will dramatically increase your chances for success. “California Gurls” is a perfect example of a perfectly constructed pop song. Take the time to really “listen” to it in conjunction with this report. It will be worth it.
- Your lyrical content should always **jibe with the vibe** of the music and vice versa. For example, if you’re lyrics are “fun” themed, then the style of the music should be “fun” in nature as well. Doing this effectively will enable the listener to really connect with the song. This is extremely well executed in “California Gurls”, where the lyrical content and music work in perfect unison, creating the intended vibe.
- **Collaborate with other artists.** Seek out collaborators who specialize in areas that aren’t your strong points. You may write fantastic music, but you’re not as accomplished in lyric writing. Finding the right collaborators will not only take your song to the next level, but can also open doors to opportunities that you might not find on your own. It’s also a great way to start learning more about areas that you want to become more proficient in. And, as with “California Gurls”, the right collaboration can be a win-win from a marketing perspective as well.