

One Direction: Better Apart?

One Direction. Everyone knows who they are, and they were most likely an influential part of your childhood. They were as popular in the early 2010s as the Beatles were in the 1960s. You may have had a giant poster of Harry Styles torn out of a Tiger Beat magazine, or you could have been on the other side of the spectrum, hating them, thinking it gave you a sense of individuality making you different from other girls. (It didn't.) I am ashamed to say I was the latter. It wasn't until my teenage years that I discovered the gift that is One Direction. Ten years ago, Harry Styles, Zayn Malik, Louis Tomlinson, Liam Payne, and Niall Horan auditioned for the solo category on the X-Factor. When they did not individually make it to the Boys Round, they instead progressed as a five-some into the Group section. While the boys only placed third in the competition, their song "Forever Young," which would have been released if they had won, was leaked on the internet. Their mellifluous voices, as well as their charm and charisma, won over the hearts of teenage girls around the world who would soon be rhapsodizing their every move, with a fanbase that would eventually grow to over 3.4 million. Although their time together was exceptional, I believe that One Direction is better apart.

During the band's time together, including the post-Zayn era, they sold over 50 million albums, four of which appeared at Number 1 on the Billboard 200 chart, with a fifth landing at Number 2. Among those, their most popular album is their premier album *Up All Night*, with over 4.5 million copies sold. Even their worst-selling album had over 3.2 million sold. Although they went on an "indefinite hiatus" in 2016, the members, excluding Zayn, made around \$2.3 million each in 2019 alone. According to a *Forbes* article from July 2016, One Direction earned \$110 million in 2016. They were the most popular boy band of the early 2010s, excelling in every endeavor they took on.

Zayn Malik's solo career began in the spring of 2015, when he released his first single "I Don't Mind," after leaving One Direction to *be normal*. In multiple interviews he has revealed that being a part of One Direction precluded him from being able to behave and dress the way he wanted to. He was obligated to act a certain way, which presumably led to his eventual separation from the band. He was never considered the most popular member of the band, often in the shadow of Harry or Niall. In the case of other artists leaving their bands to become solo artists, such as Beyonce and Destiny's Child, they are usually the most popular, so when they leave, they bring their fans with them. With Zayn, many One Direction fans placed the blame on him for the band's eventual downfall. As a consequence of this, Zayn's early music did not get much media coverage and barely had any radio time. His first album, *Mind of Mine*, debuted at Number 1 on the Billboard Top 200, so he was still quite successful all in all. Louis Tomlinson did not release an album until January 31, 2020, when he released his debut album, *Walls*. It hit Number 1 on the Billboard Top 200 and sold approximately 35,000 units when it was released. Before releasing *Walls*, he also recorded a plethora of singles, many including collaborations with other artists, all of which performed relatively well. Much like Louis, Liam Payne was slow to release his own music. He released his debut single *Strip That Down* in 2017, which achieved Number 10 on the Billboard Top 200. His first album, *LPI*, was released in December 2019 and didn't even hit the Billboard Top 100 in its first week of sales, only selling around 10,000 copies at that time. He was given a myriad of harsh reviews, some saying that X-Factor judge Simon Cowell was right that he would not do well as a solo artist. Niall Horan was actually the first of 1D (as they are also known) to release solo music, with his hit single *This Town* off the album *Flicker* released in 2016. *This Town* reached Number 20 on the Billboard 100, and *Flicker* debuted at Number 1 on the Billboard charts. His most popular song, *Slow Hands*, hit Number 11 on the Billboard 100 and sold 1 million copies just in 2017 when it was released. He is currently working on his second album, *Nice to Meet Ya*, and is planning to go on tour in 2020. The four of

them were able to explore options that would have never been possible if they were still a part of One Direction. They were able to embrace their personalities the way they wanted to instead of the way they felt they had to in the band.

Harry Styles is without a doubt the most successful member of One Direction. His self-titled debut album, released in May 2017, was the 9th global best-selling album of 2017. *Sign of the Times*, a song from said album, was rated best song of 2017 by both *Rolling Stone* and *Billboard*. It debuted at Number 4 on the Billboard 100, and 19 minutes after its release, hit Number 1 on iTunes charts. His latest album, *Fine Line*, debuted at Number 1 on the Billboard 200 and immediately hit Number 1 on the iTunes charts. Aside from his flourishing music career, Harry has also gained attention as an LGBTQ+ ally. He makes frequent donations to GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), has openly supported gay athletes, waved pride flags at his concerts, and even helped a fan come out to her mother. He also advocates for gender-fluid fashion norms and the eradication of toxic masculinity. He has done many photoshoots breaking gender stereotypes; wearing skirts, dresses, jewelry, and makeup. His solo career has helped him become an individual rather than just a member of a band.

One Direction was without a doubt one of the most influential bands of the decade. However, all bands have a time, and unfortunately, the 1D era may be over. Although they were successful financially together, their separation has provided them with the opportunity to explore and diversify their music. They were able to and continue to grow and achieve something as close to normal as possible for them. Two of the five members are now fathers and have the freedom to have families. I truly believe that One Direction's *hiatus* was for the best. We were able to watch boys grow into men who are continuing to learn and mature, and maybe someday, after they have found themselves, they will be ready to reassemble. Until that time, I think One Direction should keep doing what they're doing, and work on developing their solo careers and themselves.

Works Cited

Bricker, Tierney. "Evaluating the Solo Careers of One Direction After the Split." *E! Online*, E!

News, 13 Dec. 2019,

www.eonline.com/news/1101790/evaluating-the-solo-careers-of-one-direction-after-the-split.

"Liam Payne's Solo Album 'LP1' Is Being Subjected To The Most Brutal Reviews Imaginable."

Pedestrian TV, 17 Dec. 2019,

www.pedestrian.tv/music/liam-payne-debut-album-lp1-reviews/.

'New Entry at 84': Why Are One Direction's Solo Careers ...

www.theguardian.com/music/2019/nov/08/new-entry-at-84-why-are-one-directions-solo-careers-stalling.

"One Direction." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 15 Mar. 2020,

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Direction.

Lipshutz, Jason, and Keith Caulfield. "One Direction With Zayn Malik, By The Numbers: 23

Million Songs, 6 Million Albums & More." *Billboard*, 25 Mar. 2015,

www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6509669/one-direction-zayn-malik-by-the-numbers.