TOWARDS ROBUST MUSIC SOURCE SEPARATION ON LOUD COMMERCIAL MUSIC

Chang-Bin Jeon  
Department of Intelligence and Information  
Music and Audio Research Group (MARG)  
Seoul National University  
vinyne@snu.ac.kr

Kyogu Lee  
Department of Intelligence and Information  
Music and Audio Research Group (MARG)  
Seoul National University  
kglee@snu.ac.kr

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, commercial music has extreme loudness and heavily compressed dynamic range compared to the past. Yet, in music source separation, these characteristics have not been thoroughly considered, resulting in the domain mismatch between the laboratory and the real world. In this paper, we confirmed that this domain mismatch negatively affect the performance of the music source separation networks. To this end, we first created the out-of-domain evaluation datasets, musdb-L and XL, by mimicking the music mastering process. Then, we quantitatively verify that the performance of the state-of-the-art algorithms significantly deteriorated in our datasets. Lastly, we proposed LimitAug data augmentation method to reduce the domain mismatch, which utilizes an online limiter during the training data sampling process. We confirmed that it not only alleviates the performance degradation on our out-of-domain datasets, but also results in higher performance on in-domain data.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent commercial music has extreme loudness compared to the past [1, 2]. Since many artists and producers want their music to be perceptually louder, it has become so trendy that it rather harms the quality of music [3] even there exists the expression ‘loudness war’ [4].

A dynamic range compressor [5] is used to increase the loudness of music while keeping the digital level under 0 decibels relative to full scale (dBFS), which is the maximum possible level in the digital domain. It is a time-varying non-linear processor that adjusts the level of the signal when the level exceeds the threshold. Especially, a limiter refers to a dynamic range compressor that strongly compresses the signal with a high ratio parameter above 1:10 and increases the gain of the signal by the headroom obtained through compression.

In the last stage of music production, so-called mastering, engineers are often asked to increase the overall loudness of music. A limiter is a core tool for achieving it; it is used to make small parts of music to be louder and loud parts of music fit under 0 dBFS [7, 8]. In this process, original signals are distorted and become louder. The example of a limiter usage is depicted in Figure 1.

However, these characteristics have not yet been thoroughly considered in the music source separation. Although many data augmentation techniques have been proposed, such as random gain scaling and mixing of different instrumental stem sources [9, 10], the training examples have small overall loudness that is far from real-world commercial music 1, as can be seen in the blue line of Figure 2. This causes a huge domain shift between train and real-world domains. The term LUFS in Figure 2 is an abbreviation for loudness unit relative to full scale, which is a

1 Based on the investigation of 50 songs in ‘Pop Life playlist’ created by Tidal, May. 2022.

Figure 1. The short example of a limiter applied music source in our musdb-XL dataset. Recent commercial music has this loud volume and distorted signal characteristics.

Figure 2. The boxplot representing the loudness distributions of different evaluation datasets, recent commercial music, and training examples generated from the official implementation of Open-unmix [6].
measure of music loudness [11, 12].

Furthermore, since the standard benchmark datasets for music source separation, musdb [13] and musdb-hq [14], do not reflect the characteristics of loud commercial music as shown in the red lines of Figure 2, they are unable to show performance degradation comes from the domain shift. Therefore, we conjecture that even good-performing networks based on musdb test subset may exhibit worse performance on real world. This problem is no exception to other datasets [15–17] for music source separation, since they do not consider the music mastering process.

Based on this question, we investigated how heavily compressed music and its loudness affect the degradation of music source separation networks. To this end, we manually built new evaluation datasets by applying a limiter to the musdb-hq test subset [14] to get loud and compressed music imitating the modern music mastering process. One is the musdb-L dataset, with increased loudness to an appropriate degree for pleasant sound following [3]. The other is the musdb-XL dataset, which raised the loudness to an excessive degree, as often found in recent popular music. Using our datasets, we confirmed that more dynamic range compression in test domains results in more performance degradation of the networks.

Moreover, we conducted various experiments on the training data creating methods to reduce the domain shift between train and real world data from the perspective of music loudness and heavy compression. We trained music source separation networks using the training examples constructed by (1) linear gain increasing, (2) the proposed LimitAug method which utilizes an online limiter during the sampling process of training examples, (3) simple input loudness normalization, and (4) the loudness normalization after applying the LimitAug. We confirmed that all of the methods not only showed robust performance on out-of-domain musdb-L and musdb-XL data, but also showed better performance on in-domain musdb-hq test dataset than the baseline.

To summarize, our contributions are three-fold.

- We built musdb-L and XL datasets 2, which have comparable overall loudness to commercial music, for evaluation of music source separation algorithms.

- Using musdb-L and XL, we quantitatively confirmed that the domain shift causes performance degradation of the state-of-the-art networks that were trained without considering loud and compressed music characteristics.

- We proposed LimitAug 3 data augmentation method and experimentally confirmed that it is beneficial to alleviate the domain shift between train data and the musdb-L or XL.

| dataset    | min   | max   | median | mean (std) |
|------------|-------|-------|--------|------------|
| musdb-hq   | -18.84 | -13.52 | -16.02 | -15.92 (1.27) |
| musdb-L    | -14.39 | -8.61  | -10.61 | -10.89 (1.19) |
| musdb-XL   | -11.93 | -6.99  | -8.41  | -8.61 (1.17)  |
| commercial | -10.75 | -6.10  | -7.96  | -8.05 (1.06)  |

Table 1. Loudness statistics of musdb-hq, musdb-L, musdb-XL datasets, and the investigated commercial music.

2. MUSDB-L AND MUSDB-XL

musdb [13] and musdb-hq [14] have been the standard benchmark datasets on music source separation since their presentation in Signal Separation and Evaluation Challenge (SiSEC) 2018 [18]. They consist of various genres of 150 professionally produced songs — 100 songs for train, 50 songs for test — from folk, indie to electronic, rock genres. Each song has its constituting 4 stems, vocals, drums, bass, and the remaining as other. The musdb-hq dataset is the uncompressed version of musdb with the extended frequency bandwidth from 16kHz to 22.05kHz, which is a full bandwidth of 44.1kHz sample rate. We used musdb-hq for high-quality dataset construction.

Since the test subset of musdb-hq has small overall loudness compared to commercial mastering-finished music, we conjectured that it could not fully reflect the performance degradation related to heavy dynamic range compression, which prevails in recent commercial music. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, there is no dataset for music source separation that reflects these characteristics or considers the music mastering process. Therefore, we built musdb-L and musdb-XL datasets, which have loud and compressed characteristics similar to commercial music. L and XL each stands for Loud and eXtremely Loud.

2.1 Dataset construction

To reflect the characteristics of commercial music, we created datasets by imitating the music mastering process. Both datasets were made by manually applying the commercial digital limiter, iZotope Ozone 9 Maximizer 4, to the musdb-hq test subset. For each musdb-L and musdb-XL, we controlled the threshold parameter of a limiter so that compression is applied about 3-4 dB and 6-7 dB in loud parts of mixture tracks of the musdb-hq. As shown in Table 1, musdb-L and musdb-XL are about 5 and 7 LUFS louder than the original musdb-hq dataset on average, respectively. musdb-L has insufficient loudness compared to loud commercial music but less distorted sources. musdb-XL has comparable loudness to commercial music and more distorted sound than musdb-L.

To make the ground truth stem tracks of each mixture, we calculated the sample-wise ratio between the limiter applied mixture and the original mixture, then multiply it to the individual stems to make the ground truth stems for musdb-L and XL.

2 https://github.com/jeonchangbin49/musdb-XL
3 https://github.com/jeonchangbin49/LimitAug
4 https://www.izotope.com/en/products/ozone.html
3. METHODS

In general, a limiter is used as the last signal processor in music mastering of commercial music [7, 8]. Since it tends to be used excessively in modern commercial music [1, 2, 4], it should be considered in music source separation for the development of robust application.

We assumed that the key differences between the real-world mastering-finished music, i.e., a limiter applied music, and the standard training examples for music source separation are i) the overall amplitude scale, and ii) the signal distortion caused by a limiter.

Here we introduce two ways to avoid each domain mismatch problem.

3.1 Input loudness normalization

First of all, the simple loudness normalization, which is a linear gain adjustment of network inputs to the pre-defined reference level, is the easiest technique to avoid the domain shift caused by i) overall amplitude scale mismatch. This can be categorized into two, (i) input loudness normalization during both the training and evaluation stages of networks, and (ii) normalization only at the evaluation stage.

The method (i) is already used in various studies with different ways. For example, the network such as Demucs v3 [19], uses input standardization in time domain based on the mean and standard deviation of the training data. In Open-unmix [6], the network implicitly normalizes the input by utilizing trainable input scaling parameters that works in time-frequency domain. However, we assumed that explicitly adjusting the gain of the inputs based on the waveform, thereby minimizing the overall amplitude scale mismatch between train and test domain, can greatly reduce the performance degradation comes from the domain shift.

The method (ii), normalization only at the evaluation stage, can be considered as a readily applicable workaround for the models that were trained without considering music loudness. This method is a simple idea to reduce the overall amplitude scale difference between train and real-world domain. Since the music source separation networks are non-linear systems, we hypothesized that linear scale difference of the inputs might affect the quality of final outputs. That is, input normalization only at the evaluation stage can be a simple, yet effective trick for models that were already trained without considering the domain mismatch.

Though these methods can mitigate the domain mismatch related to i) amplitude scale, there needs to be another strategies that can reflect ii) the signal distortion caused by a limiter.

3.2 LimitAug

The best way to consider the characteristics of the limiter applied source is simply using the limiter during the network training. Therefore, we propose the LimitAug data augmentation method, which utilizes an online limiter during the training examples construction process, to reduce the domain shift between the training examples and real-world commercial music. The LimitAug can be considered as creating train examples that forcibly reflect the distortion that comes from a limiter, which cannot be reflected by the simple input loudness normalization technique.

The pseudocode for LimitAug is shown in Figure 3. First, calculate the LUFS of the mixture created by the data sampling process. Second, adjust the gain of the input mixture source targeting the randomly sampled LUFS value. Then, it is followed by the online limiter to fit the waveform under 0 dBFS. Lastly, calculate the sample-wise (A sample refers to an each waveform value) ratio between the limiter applied mixture source and the original mixture source, then multiply the ratio to the original target source to get the ground truth target signal of the limiter applied mixture source.

When adjusting the gain and applying the limiter to the input mixture, for example, if the input mixture had -15 LUFS and the randomly sampled target LUFS was -10, note that the gain-scaled mixture by +5 dB does not have exact -10 LUFS due to the compression of a limiter and the nature of LUFS calculation, which considers frequency weighting [11, 12].

The proposed LimitAug can be used with other data augmentation methods; in our study, random gain scaling, channel swap and mixing of different instrumental stem sources [9, 10] were used. Also, additional loudness normalization can be applied after the LimitAug as depicted in conditional statement of Figure 3, so that the overall amplitude scale mismatch between training and evaluation stages be minimized.

4. EXPERIMENTS

Here we briefly summarize our following experiments.

In Section 5.1, we quantitatively evaluated various music source separation networks that were trained without considering the loudness and heavy dynamic range compression, and confirmed the performance degradation on musdb-L and musdb-XL, compared to the original musdb-hq evaluation dataset.
In Section 5.2, we simply normalized the network inputs in the evaluation stage, to observe the performance degradation caused by the signal distortion caused by a limiter, not an overall amplitude mismatch between the training and the evaluation data. Then, we carefully analyzed the results on Demucs v3 [19], which took the 1st place in the 2021 Sony Music Demixing (MDX) Challenge leaderboard A and the 2nd place in the leaderboard B [22]. The leaderboard A was the competition that only allowed training on the only musdb-hq train subset, and the leaderboard B allowed the extra training data.

In Section 5.3, we conducted a comparative study on various training data construction strategies. Unfortunately, we were unable to train the current state-of-the-art Demucs v3, due to the constraint of our GPU experimental environments. Considering the training efficiency and reasonable performance, we used TFC-TDF-U-Net [20] — a backbone architecture of KUIELab-MDX-Net [23] with slight modifications, which took the 2nd place in the 2021 MDX Challenge leaderboard A — in this experiment.

### 4.1 Training

In Section 5.1 and Table 2, we used official pre-trained weights of each model except TFC-TDF-U-Net since there were no official weights for the 4 stems of musdb-hq. For fair comparison in Section 5.3, we trained TFC-TDF-U-Net for 300 epochs with early stopping, based on official training framework of Open-unmix [6] and official network implementation of TFC-TDF-U-Net. We used default network hyper-parameters introduced in its webpage.

For the LimitAug, we used the limiter implemented in pedalboard [24]. The threshold parameter was set to 0 dBFS, and the release parameter was randomly sampled from uniform distribution of (30, 200) milliseconds in data sampling process. Also, we used pyloudnorm [25] for loudness calculation.

### 4.2 Evaluation

In all of the evaluations, Signal-to-Distortion Ratio (SDR) [26] was calculated using museval python library [18]. Also, in following experimental results, both median and mean SDR scores were presented for the detailed comparison. Note that we only used the musdb-hq train subset for training the networks. musdb-L and XL are only for evaluation.

In the original musdb-hq test subset, as stated in the official webpage, ‘PR - Oh No’ track’s mixture signal is panned to the right channel, which causes the inconsistency between linear summation of stems and mixture source. Since this causes the limiter to be operated in unmusical way while the construction of musdb-L and XL, which also can be hardly found in popular music, we used the linear summation of stems as a mixture only for this track. This may results in the slight difference of SDR scores between the Table 2 and the official scores of each network.

### 5. RESULTS

#### 5.1 Performance degradation on musdb-L and XL

Here we quantitatively evaluated the performance of state-of-the-art networks on musdb-hq [14], L and XL datasets and confirmed that the domain shift in perspective of music loudness and compression negatively affect the performance, indeed. As shown in the Table 2, all networks showed significant performance degradation on the evaluations with musdb-L and musdb-XL datasets. The amount of decrease on Demucs v3 [19] was slightly larger than the others. Overall, we concluded that every networks are somewhat overfitted to the musdb-hq data, making the networks vulnerable to loud and heavily compressed music. Therefore, it is highly required to consider these characteristics for the robust music source separation. Note that

### Table 2. Performance of various music source separation networks trained with musdb-hq [14] on the test using musdb-hq, musdb-L and musdb-XL.

| network      | extra train data | test data | SDR median (mean) [dB] |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------------|
| Open-unmix [6] | -               | hq        | 6.16 (2.54) 5.03 (2.67) 6.00 (5.46) 4.22 (3.46) 5.35 (3.53) |
|              | L               | hq        | 6.33 (1.63) 4.81 (2.71) 5.82 (5.38) 4.11 (3.42) 5.27 (3.28) |
|              | XL              | hq        | 5.98 (0.89) 4.76 (2.59) 4.97 (4.89) 4.04 (3.29) 4.94 (2.92) |
| TFC-TDF-U-net [20] | -               | hq        | 7.18 (4.26) 5.59 (3.35) 5.76 (5.30) 4.04 (3.18) 5.64 (4.02) |
|              | L               | hq        | 7.03 (3.65) 5.41 (3.08) 5.52 (5.09) 3.67 (3.00) 5.41 (3.71) |
|              | XL              | hq        | 6.95 (3.14) 5.48 (2.90) 5.11 (4.68) 3.55 (2.82) 5.27 (3.39) |
| Demucs v3-A [19] | -               | hq        | 8.11 (5.22) 9.34 (6.21) 8.57 (8.01) 5.51 (5.03) 7.88 (6.12) |
|              | L               | hq        | 7.54 (5.15) 9.32 (6.22) 8.26 (7.65) 5.51 (5.01) 7.66 (6.01) |
|              | XL              | hq        | 7.30 (4.86) 9.19 (6.14) 7.62 (7.68) 5.37 (4.97) 7.37 (5.69) |
| Open-unmix [6]  | ✓               | hq        | 7.02 (4.93) 5.91 (4.06) 7.18 (6.91) 4.94 (4.76) 6.26 (5.17) |
|              | L               | hq        | 6.83 (5.12) 6.23 (4.09) 7.07 (6.92) 4.94 (4.78) 6.27 (5.23) |
|              | XL              | hq        | 6.70 (4.77) 6.16 (3.87) 6.80 (6.48) 4.89 (4.61) 6.14 (4.93) |
| Spleeter [21]  | 25000+          | hq        | 6.51 (4.42) 4.77 (3.57) 6.00 (6.09) 4.22 (4.12) 5.38 (4.55) |
|              | L               | hq        | 6.18 (3.90) 4.73 (3.34) 5.67 (5.94) 4.37 (4.03) 5.24 (4.30) |
|              | XL              | hq        | 6.03 (3.38) 4.80 (3.13) 5.55 (5.52) 4.24 (3.91) 5.15 (3.98) |
| Demucs v3-B [19] | 200+ including musdb-hq test set | hq        | 9.24 (7.05) 11.65 (9.58) 11.73 (11.34) 7.83 (8.03) 10.11 (9.00) |
|              | L               | hq        | 9.05 (6.91) 11.61 (9.55) 11.05 (10.27) 7.83 (7.91) 9.88 (8.66) |
|              | XL              | hq        | 8.76 (6.41) 11.56 (9.29) 9.22 (8.78) 7.52 (7.51) 9.26 (8.00) |

5 https://github.com/ws-choi/ISMIR2020_U_Nets_SVS

6 https://sigsep.github.io/datasets/musdb
5.1.2 Performance degradation on drums and vocals

It is noteworthy that the degradation on drums and vocals were more significant than the others. Due to the percussive nature of drums, in general, they have the biggest momentary energy in music. Also, since vocals are important ingredients in modern commercial music, they usually consist of not only a single singing voice but also doubling, harmony and chorus. Therefore, we assumed drums and vocals are most affected by the limiter, which is activated when loud input sources that are above the threshold are given. To quantitatively confirm the signal distortion by the limiter, we calculated Scale-invariant Signal-to-Distortion Ratio (SI-SDR) [27] between musdb-hq and musdb-XL for each stem. As a result, drums and vocals scored each 19.97 and 23.69 dB, on the other hand, bass and other scored each 25.12 and 25.48 dB on average. That is, the signal distortion caused by a limiter is more significant on drums and vocals.

Unfortunately, since the networks in the Table 2 have never seen these kinds of distorted drums or vocals as training examples, we assumed that the degradation on drums and vocals were significant compared to the rest. This result strongly supports the necessity of considering the heavy dynamic range compression from the training stage, i.e. the LimitAug, which forcibly makes the distorted and compressed training examples for training purposes, thereby minimizing the domain shift.

5.2 Analysis on the input normalization at the evaluation stage

If the key differences between the real-world music and the training examples of music source separation networks are i) overall amplitude scale, and ii) the signal distortion caused by a limiter, as stated in Section 3, then what if we give the loudness normalized musdb-L or XL data as inputs to the networks in Table 2? Due to the non-linear nature of deep neural networks, we assumed that simply normalizing the amplitude scale of the networks on the evaluation stage may affect the performance.

The inference was conducted with following procedures, (i) reducing the loudness of musdb-L or XL input so that its loudness becomes same with that of the corresponding original musdb-hq data, (ii) inference with loudness normalized input, and (iii) increasing the scale of output as much as reduced in step (i).

Comparing the scores between Table 2 and Table 4, we confirmed that the performance degradation was greatly alleviated by just the simple loudness normalization of the inputs only at the evaluation stage. Note that the networks were not trained with loudness normalized inputs. This result shows that the input loudness normalization at the evaluation stage can be a quick and easy solution to get robust results from the pre-trained music source separation networks.

Especially, on drums of Demucs v3-B, it should be noted that the amount of decrease on median SDR score between the test using musdb-hq and XL was sharply reduced from 2.5 dB in Table 2 to 0.4 dB in Table 3. This implies that the network is overfitted not only to the contents of the signal, but also to the scale or loudness, especially

Table 3. Performance of Demucs v3 [19] trained with musdb-hq [14]. On the test using musdb-hq, each of the input sources were loudness normalized targeting the LUFs of its original musdb-hq sources.

| network          | extra train data | SDR median [dB] |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                  | hq   | L   | XL  |
| Demucs v3-A [19] |      |     |     |
|                  | 8.11 | 9.34 | 8.57 |
|                  | 6.21 | 8.01 | 5.81 |
|                  | 5.51 | 5.03 | 4.33 |
|                  | 7.88 | 7.82 | 7.82 |

Table 4. Performance of networks with loudness normalized input at the evaluation stage. Each score represents the average score across the 4 stems. Note that the networks were trained without considering music loudness or dynamic range compression explicitly.

| network          | extra train data | SDR median [dB] |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                  | hq   | L   | XL  |
| Open-unmix [6]   |      |     |     |
|                  | 5.35 | 5.32 | 5.25 |
| TFC-TDF-U-Net [20]|     |     |     |
|                  | 5.64 | 5.62 | 5.51 |
| Demucs v3-A [19] |      |     |     |
|                  | 7.88 | 7.82 | 7.62 |
| Open-unmix [6]   | ✓    |     |     |
|                  | 6.26 | 6.25 | 6.18 |
| Spleeter [21]    | ✓    |     |     |
|                  | 5.38 | 5.33 | 5.21 |
| Demucs v3-B [19] | ✓    |     |     |
|                  | 10.11| 10.08| 9.94 |
network methods linear gain increase LimitAug input loud-norm target LUFS SDR median (mean) [dB]

| network | methods | target LUFS | test data | SDR median (mean) [dB] |
|---------|---------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| baseline | -       | -           | -         | 5.64 (4.02) 5.41 (3.71) 5.27 (3.39) 5.44 (3.71) |
| TFC-TDF-U-Net [20] | (1) ✓ | -           | -         | (5.90) 5.83 (4.25) |
|         | (2) -   | ✓           | -         | (5.79) 5.83 (4.25) |
|         | (3) -   | -           | ✓         | (5.89) 5.86 (4.33) |
|         | (4) -   | ✓           | ✓         | (5.89) 5.86 (4.33) |

Table 5. Performance of TFC-TDF-U-Net [20] trained with various training data construction strategies. Each score represents the average score across the 4 stems.

on drums. Note that there was no distinction between the given input sources to the networks except the linear gain difference.

Although the performance degradation was reduced by the input loudness normalization, still there exists the performance degradation due to the signal distortion caused by a limiter. Similar to Section 5.1.2, this result also supports the necessity of the LimitAug for robust music source separation.

5.3 Analysis on various training strategies

In this section, we trained the TFC-TDF-U-Net [20] with various training data creating methods; (1) linear gain increasing, (2) the proposed LimitAug, (3) input loudness normalization, and (4) input loudness normalization after the LimitAug. Of course, the methods (3) and (4) includes the input loudness normalization at the evaluation stage for the consistency between train and test domains. We compared the results to check which one is the most powerful way for training robust music source separation networks. For the input normalization, we chose the target reference LUFS value as -14.

In Table 5, we confirmed that all of the methods were effective for robust music source separation; every methods showed relatively robust performance on musdb-L and XL compared to the baseline. Especially, except the method (1) targeting LMFs of a normal distribution following statistics of musdb-XL, N(µXL, σXL2), all methods showed greater performance on musdb-hq than the baseline. This result implies that these methods are useful not only for the domain shift, but also for the standard benchmark data.

Furthermore, the methods (3) and (4), which prevent the domain shift caused by overall amplitude scale mismatch by input loudness normalization, showed slightly better performances than others. In the stem-wise analysis as presented in Table 6, though we expected that the LimitAug would be of help for vocals and drums, the method (4) was better at vocals and other than the method (3).

Overall, it seems obvious that considering the music loudness and heavy dynamic range compression from the training stage is beneficial for robust music source separation. For real world applications, it is highly recommended that not just using the single method we experimented, but using various training methods on different stems or using a bag of models trained with various methods.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we questioned the domain shift between the research and the real-world data for music source separation, from the viewpoint of music loudness and heavy dynamic range compression. To answer this, we first built new evaluation datasets, musdb-L and musdb-XL, which reflect dynamic range compressed music characteristics and heavy loudness. Then, we confirmed the significant performance degradation of state-of-the-art networks on our datasets. To alleviate this, we conducted various experiments on training data construction strategies, including the proposed LimitAug method, and confirmed that the methods using the input loudness normalization only or with the LimitAug greatly improved the robustness. We hope that our proposed methods and evaluation datasets could contribute to future music source separation research and application.
7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
We appreciate Zafar Rafii, the author of musdb, for allowing us to reprocess the original musdb data. We thank Antoine Liutkus, also the author of musdb, for giving the creative suggestion on the distribution of our proposed datasets. We are grateful to Ben Sangbæ Chon, Keunwoo Choi, and Hyeongi Moon from GaudioLab for their fruitful discussions on our proposed methods. Last but not least, we thank Donmoon Lee, Juheon Lee, Jaeeun Lee, Junghyun Koo, and Sungho Lee for helpful feedbacks.

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