

WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

AN INTRODUCTION TO ROCK AND ITS HISTORY

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LIVE FROM . . . WOODSTOCK

by Graeme Boone

They say that if you remember the 1960s, you weren't there. But one of the greatest here-and-now moments in American history took place on Max Yasgur's farm in Bethel, New York, from August 16 to 18, 1969: the Woodstock Festival. Officially called the "Woodstock Music and Art Fair, an Aquarian Exposition," it drew half a million fans to 600 acres of rolling countryside for three days of music, community, and sheer psychedelic ecstasy.

In the months leading up to the festival, "Are you going?" seemed a universal question among the hip tribes, but no one knew what to expect, because Woodstock was a risky bet on unknowable odds. Could the East Coast counterculture really pull off a West Coast-style "happening" on such a massive scale? A horde of fans bet that it could, and they were right. For a moment, the counterculture became the culture, and the diverse strands of '60s radicalism seemed to fuse together, with all varieties of celebration and rebellion converging in a great river—not of violence and destruction, but rather of celebration and sharing.

In February 1969, when planning for this huge event began, the logistics quickly grew into an unprecedented complexity. Organizers Michael Lang, Joel Rosenman, and Artie Kornfield probably never would have continued if they had realized how difficult their task was going to be. But they soldiered on toward their dream as obstacles arose over and over again. Negotiations proceeded fitfully and at astronomic expense over the dizzying array of utilities, services, and infrastructure, all of which had to be brought in or constructed on the spot; public opposition proliferated; and permission to use the site was denied just a month before the festival, so another venue had to be located. During the festival itself, catastrophe loomed at every moment: mind-boggling traffic jams; a complete breakdown of ticket-taking; thunderstorms and rivers of mud; bad drugs and bad trips; food, sanitation, and medical crises; and other logistical nightmares of every description. The governor of New York declared it a disaster area, and emergency help was provided from all directions, ranging from local stores and medical services to the National Guard and the army. But for the fans, such realities paled before the triumphal Woodstock vision of peace and harmony in action and adversity, soaring on a flying carpet of sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

One of the many uncertainties about the festival was whether musical groups would actually agree to participate. Many bands initially refused to play or demanded stiff fees, and even after the festival began there were holes and question marks in the three-day schedule. Scheduling problems were exacerbated by the fifty-mile traffic jams that made it necessary to fly every band in and out by helicopter. Ultimately, the majority of those who were invited did play, and they represented a remarkable cross

section of the late-1960s counterculture in music. On the first day, folk and acoustic performers were highlighted in a set that included Richie Havens, Country Joe McDonald, John Sebastian, Sweetwater, the Incredible String Band, Bert Sommer, Tim Hardin, Ravi Shankar, Melanie, Arlo Guthrie, and Joan Baez, as well as a spiritual lecture from Swami Satchidananda. The second day highlighted psychedelic, hard, and blues rock, with Quill, Keef Hartley, Santana, Canned Heat, Mountain, Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Sly Stone, the Who, and Jefferson Airplane. The lineup for the third day was even more eclectic, featuring Joe Cocker; Country Joe and the Fish; Alvin Lee; the Band; Blood, Sweat & Tears; Johnny Winter; Paul Butterfield; Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; and Sha Na Na. Jimi Hendrix was given the supreme position of closing out the festival, but by that time, 8:30 A.M. on

Monday morning, most of the fans had already left for the long trek home.

The release of a film documentary in 1970 and a two-album LP in 1971 helped to transform Woodstock from a fleeting experience into a classic document of late '60s culture. While lacking the enveloping tribulations and epiphanies of those three days, the documentary and album do provide a vivid account of the music, which still sounds fresh today. And some of the performances—notably Jimi Hendrix's rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner," which went relatively unnoticed at the time—are now counted among the finest in '60s rock.

Graeme Boone (Ohio State University) is coeditor, with John Covach, of Understanding Rock (Oxford University Press, 1997).



WATTSTAX: “BLACK WOODSTOCK” AND THE LEGENDARY FILM IT INSPIRED

by Rob Bowman

The story of Stax Records is chock-full of glorious moments, but perhaps none was as grand or ambitious as the Wattstax concert. It was the crowning moment in the label's post-Atlantic period when, under the leadership of co-owner Al Bell, the company was growing in a number of new directions. Bell had established a West Coast office in Los

Angeles headed by Forest Hamilton, the son of jazz drummer Chico Hamilton. Stax West was conceived with a mandate that included the promotion and marketing of existing Stax products, the ferreting out of untapped regional talent, and the establishment of Stax within Hollywood's motion picture and television industries.

According to John KaSandra, one of Stax's West Coast-based artists, Wattstax began in March of 1972 when "I came down [to the L.A. office] with an idea that we'd have a black Woodstock." Seven years earlier, to the chanting of "burn, baby, burn," a sizable section of the predominantly black Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles had been destroyed by fire during the first of the 1960s race riots (referred to as "rebellions" within the community). The Watts Summer Festival had been established to commemorate the rebellions and raise money for the ailing community. It was Hamilton's idea that Stax should be involved in the 1972 festival for promotional purposes, and he had not forgotten KaSandra's "black Woodstock" idea.

On August 20, 1972, that notion blossomed into an epic one-day festival at the Los Angeles Coliseum. The day opened with Reverend Jesse Jackson leading the audience in a proclamation of the black litany, "I Am Somebody," followed by Kim Weston singing the black national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." It closed with Isaac Hayes as Black Moses embodying the strength, beauty, and spirituality of contemporary black culture. In between, virtually every major artist signed to Stax performed, including the Staple Singers, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Albert King, and the Bar-Kays. All the artists played for free, and the Schlitz Beer Company helped underwrite production expenses. The event drew more than 100,000 people, making it one of the largest gatherings of African Americans at the

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time, and undoubtedly one of the pinnacle events in black culture of the early 1970s.

The day itself proved to be unremittingly glorious. The capacity audience paid a dollar apiece (all proceeds went to charities in Watts) to spend seven hours in the warm California sun listening to a stunning array of gospel, blues, jazz, and funk. Stax artists Melvin Van Peebles, KaSandra, Rev. Jackson, Billy Eckstine, and William Bell handled the MC chores alongside movie stars Fred Williamson and Richard Roundtree.

While Wattstax was clearly an event with large-scale political and sociological overtones, it was also a marketing coup. More than six months after the actual concert, the Stax organization was still producing and promoting a variety of Wattstax-related products. A double album featuring most of the live performances shipped in early 1973. Several months later, a second double album of Wattstax performances was issued. But by far the most important product to come in the wake of the concert was the documentary film *Wattstax: The Living Word*, which premiered in Los Angeles in February 1973.

Wattstax became much more than a string of great concert performances. Under the guidance of award-winning director Mel Stuart, the film remains one of the finest examples of the use of music—and its visual aspect—as a form

of profound social commentary. In addition to the concert material, Stuart, with the aid of assistant director and Stax marketing executive Larry Shaw, shot substantial footage within the Watts community. This material was deftly intercut with a biting monologue by comedian Richard Pryor. The combination helped dramatize certain realities of contemporary African American life and the crucial role that music played within it.

The film unfolds in a series of brilliantly edited chapters, with songs such as Little Milton's "Walking the Back Streets and Crying," Luther Ingram's "(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right," and Albert King's "I'll Play the Blues for You" setting the stage for impromptu meditations on themes such as religion, the blues, black pride, love, and race relations. Reinforced visually and verbally by the community footage and various "man-on-the-street" interviews, each song seems to capture a different aspect of the Watts neighborhood and, more generally, of the African American experience. Pryor's hilarious Greek chorus-like monologues further cement these connections, creating a tapestry that is—like the festival that inspired it—both multilayered and incredibly rich.

Rob Bowman (York University, Toronto) is the author of Soulsville, U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records.



SUB POP

by Theo Cateforis

On April 30, 1991, Nirvana signed with Geffen Records, leaving behind the tiny Seattle indie label Sub Pop, who had released their acclaimed 1989 debut LP *Bleach*. The trio from Aberdeen, Washington, soon released *Nevermind* in the fall of 1991, an explosive blend of abrasive punk and melodic pop smarts that would knock Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* from the top of the charts and help launch the alternative rock movement. *Nevermind* would become a global phenomenon, eventually selling over 30 million copies worldwide for Geffen. As part of Sub Pop's contract buyout, however, the label stipulated that their logo be placed alongside Geffen's on every Nirvana album, a strong reminder of alternative's underground roots.

Indie labels like Sub Pop were vital to the development and growth of alternative rock. Much as 1950s independent labels like Chicago's Chess and Cincinnati's King Records provided a showcase for regional rhythm and blues artists, the indie labels of the 1980s such as Minneapolis's Twin Tone and Washington, D.C.'s Dischord records supported the scores of local punk, post-punk and offbeat musicians who were initially of little interest to the major labels. At a time when the twin meccas of Los Angeles and New York ruled the recording industry, cities like Seattle remained on the periphery. Nobody went to the Pacific Northwest to be "discovered."

It was precisely in such remote environments that alternative scenes formed. In Seattle, one of the key players in shaping the direction of that scene was Bruce Pavitt, Sub Pop's founder. Pavitt first introduced the idea of a "Subterranean Pop" world of underground alternative American music in 1979 while still a student at nearby Olympia's Evergreen State College, where it served as the name of both his college radio show and self-produced music fanzine. After moving to Seattle in 1983, Pavitt continued his radio show, *Sub Pop USA*, on local KCMU, opened a record and skateboard shop, and contributed an influential "Sub Pop" indie record review column to local music magazine *The Rocket*. When Pavitt eventually decided in 1986 to release an indie compilation LP titled *Sub Pop 100*, the Sub Pop record label was born.

Pavitt was joined in 1987 by fellow KCMU radio DJ and venue promoter Jonathan Poneman. Together they assembled a roster of Seattle groups—Deep River, Soundgarden, Mudhoney, and Nirvana—who cohered around a lo-fi, muddy, distorted guitar sound that soon became known as grunge. Sub Pop had a recognizable sonic identity, one that was willfully out of step with the polished professional pop that dominated the major labels. Seattle photographer Charles Peterson's wide-angle concert shots, a blurry mélange of long hair and flailing bodies, gave the album artwork a similarly identifiable visual signature. More than a mere record label, Sub Pop was effectively a brand.

Alternative indie labels deliberately eschewed the glitzy language of fame and success typical of the major labels, and the Sub Pop brand played up this difference through deeply ironic tones. Rather than glorifying their musicians as heroic rock stars, they instead printed up Sub Pop T-shirts simply emblazoned with the word "Loser." For one

of the label's key public events, they chose the banner of *Lame Fest* to promote a 1989 concert showcase featuring Mudhoney, TAD, and Nirvana. And eventually they adopted a self-deprecating slogan, "Going Out of Business since 1988," that captured their distaste for the corporate business model.

As much as they mocked the traditional record label enterprise, Pavitt and Poneman also had a keen appreciation for alternative music fans, many of whom, like collectors of early jazz and blues records, eagerly hunted for obscure and rare recordings. They smartly catered to that audience by starting a limited edition "Sub Pop Singles Club" series that made their catalog instantly collectible. The first single in the series, Nirvana's "Love Buzz," routinely lists for a thousand dollars on eBay.

Sub Pop also recognized that their potential fan base was unlikely to peruse the pages of *Rolling Stone* or *Spin* for new music news. So, instead, they aimed their publicity at the weekly British music press. Major newspapers like *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* were highly regarded in the late 1980s American indie underground, for these were the only newsstand publications to place alternative artists like the Pixies, Butthole Surfers, and Sonic Youth on their covers. Sub Pop's visibility and credibility rose substantially in March 1989, when *Melody Maker* ran a cover feature on Mudhoney, followed in the next issue by a full Sub Pop label profile.

Thanks to this exposure and, of course, Nirvana's subsequent success, by the early 1990s Sub Pop had become virtually synonymous with the explosion of American alternative rock. The national media no longer viewed Seattle as some hinterland, but rather a breeding ground for new musical talent with its own unique subculture. In 1992, a reporter for the *New York Times* phoned the Sub Pop office

looking for more insight into the new grunge phenomenon. How did grunge kids dress? How did they speak? A 25-year-old sales rep, Megan Jasper, took the call and in true irreverent Sub Pop fashion concocted some absurd grunge slang words on the spot (old ripped jeans were known as "wack slacks," a loser was called a "cob nobbler," and so on). The paper accepted them as authentic and printed them under the heading of the "Lexicon of Grunge."

Labels like Sub Pop prided themselves on their freedom and "Do It Yourself" (DIY) ethos; it was what encouraged them to thumb their noses at publications like the *New York Times*. At the same time, as major labels increasingly devoted their resources to alternative artists over the course of the 1990s, the indies became more open to aligning with "the enemy." In 1993, fellow indie Matador signed a merger with Atlantic Records (itself a former indie), and two years later Sub Pop would sell 49 percent of its share to the Time Warner Music Group, a move that significantly broadened the label's infrastructure and promotional reach.

By the end of the 1990s, grunge was no longer in vogue, and the music industry had moved on from alternative rock. Indies like Sub Pop survived and thrived, however, by expanding beyond their original regional focus and cultivating the various niches that have come to define today's more fragmented indie world. In the two and a half decades since their first taste of notoriety, Sub Pop has released seminal slowcore, emo, synth pop, indie folk, garage rock, and chillwave albums, assuring their place of prominence in the vast indie landscape.

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DJ KOOL HERC: THE MAN WITH THE MASTER PLAN

by Jeff Chang

When Cindy Campbell and her brother Clive “DJ Kool Herc” Campbell threw a party in 1973, they had no idea what they were about to launch. At the end of the summer, they invited a hundred kids and kin to the modest rec room in their apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx.

Kool Herc started off playing some reggae dancehall tunes on his turntables, similar to the music he had heard at sound system parties in Kingston, Jamaica, where he

had lived until the age of twelve. But this was the Bronx. The crowd, at first, wasn’t very happy; they wanted the breaks, the kind of beats that they could move and groove to. So, like any good DJ, Herc gave the people what they wanted, and dropped some soul and funk bombs, songs like James Brown’s “Give It Up or Turnit a Loose,” Mandrill’s “Fencewalk,” and Rare Earth’s “Get Ready.”

Word spread quickly about the back-to-school party, and the Campbells soon found themselves throwing parties in the rec room almost every month. By the following summer, the crowds were so big they had to move outside to Cedar Park, just up the block. For electricity, they tapped lampposts and work sheds. With the loudest sound system, the hottest records, and personality for days, Herc and the Herculords, his group of rappers, DJs, and dancers, became the number-one draw in the Bronx.

Herc carefully studied his audiences. The moment when the dancers went crazy was during a song’s short instrumental break, when the band would drop out and the rhythm section would get elemental. Herc zeroed in on the break. He started searching for songs based on the sound of their break, songs that he would make into his signature tunes: nonstop conga epics from the Incredible Bongo Band called “Apache” and “Bongo Rock,” Johnny Pate’s theme to “Shaft in Africa,” Dennis Coffey’s “Scorpio,” black soul, Latin funk, and white rock records with an up-tempo carnival-style backbeat.

In a technique he called the “Merry-Go-Round,” Herc worked two copies of the same record, back-cueing one record to the beginning of the break as the other reached the end, extending a five-second breakdown into a five-minute loop. Before long, he had tossed most of the songs, focusing on building excitement through the breaks

alone. His sets drove the dancers from climax to climax on waves of churning drums. In the cyphers—the circles where they competed with each other for cheers from the crowd—the dancers became personalities in their own right. These kids had too much flavor to conform to the precision steps of group dances like the Hustle. They would simply jump in one after another to go off, take each other out, and just “break” wild on each other. Herc called them “break boys”—“b-boys” for short.

Herc’s audiences were full of visionary youths. Afrika Bambaataa, a former gang leader from the Bronx River projects, was inspired to return to his neighborhood and reach out to former enemy gangs and crews. Bambaataa’s parties became common ground, and from them he created the Zulu Nation, hip-hop’s first official organization, and the Zulu Kings and Queens, two of hip-hop’s first dance crews.

A teen from Fox Street in the South Bronx named Joseph Saddler, who would come to be known as Grandmaster Flash, went up to Cedar Park to see Herc for himself. Based on Herc’s “Merry-Go-Round,” he refined turntable techniques until he had helped lay the foundation for the kind of seamless beat-mixing that every DJ learns today. Along with his rap crew, the Furious 5, he perfected the art of the hip-hop musical performance.

After a period of intense gang violence, amid ongoing deindustrialization and governmental disinvestment,

unrelenting white flight, and massive housing destruction, Herc’s parties became a refuge for young Bronxites. He worked hard to make his audience feel welcome. He shouted out their names and kept the peace by taking a live-and-let-live policy and skillfully working the mic.

Along with his friends Coke La Rock and Dickey, he rocked entertaining rhymes like:

There’s no story can’t be told, there’s no horse can’t be rode, and no bull can’t be stopped and ain’t a disco we can’t rock. Herc! Herc! Who’s the man with a master plan from the land of Gracie Grace? Herc Herc!

This adaptation of Jamaican sound-system toasting, jazz poetry, and soul radio host patter was called “MCing,” and it formed the foundation for what we now know as rap music.

Herc became a hero in the devastated Bronx, a salve to the borough’s many wounds. He and his fans were kids abandoned by America, left behind in the nation’s progress. But one can never underestimate the creative powers of young people. In time, hip-hop would inspire and redeem youths all around the world. And it all started with a small community party in the summer of 1973.

*Jeff Chang is the author of the American Book Award-winning **Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation** and editor of **Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop**.*



AMERICAN IDOL

by Norma Coates

Media scholar Henry Jenkins calls *American Idol* “the first killer app of media convergence.” It may also be the first killer app of media globalization, as the program that originated in the UK as *Pop Idol* in 2001 now has local versions in forty countries. Worldwide votes for *Idol* competitors exceed 3 billion. At the same time, *American Idol* is the last killer app of old media during a time when digital technologies and the increasingly global economy rapidly undermine entrenched entertainment industry business models.

American Idol gets some of the highest ratings on current American television, consistently drawing upward of 25 million viewers to each program. The show is propping up the major music industry during a time of inexorable change in which the traditional business model is increasingly unable to reflect and react to market reality. *American Idol* is one of the last means to produce the type of performer whose sales can keep this model going. Several *American Idol* contestants, whether they won the contest or not, have released top-selling records. First-season winner Kelly Clarkson and Season 4 winner Carrie Underwood are major stars and Grammy Award winners.

Through Season 8, the judging panel consisted of producer Randy Jackson, singer/dancer Paula Abdul, and Simon Cowell, the record industry executive whom everyone loved to hate. Abdul left after Season 8 and was replaced by songwriter Kara DioGuardi. The panel was augmented in Season 9 with the addition of American comedian and talk-show host Ellen Degeneres. That season was rocked by the announcement that Cowell, the show’s drawing card, would be leaving. Season 10 constituted a “reboot” of the program. Of the original judges, only Jackson remained, joined by Aerosmith lead singer Steven Tyler and pop diva Jennifer Lopez.

American Idol is, at its heart, a combination of old-style television talent contests and game shows revived as “reality programs.” Reality television depicts “real people” as they participate in some sort of competition or task. Reality programs are heavily mediated and edited, yet viewers go along and identify with contestants who are “real people” like themselves. Reality television is much cheaper to produce than scripted television, given that it dispenses with writers and actors beyond hosts and occasional guest stars. Television sponsors love reality television because successful programs draw large audiences to advertisements for their products.

American Idol is “clean” family entertainment, unlike some of the competitions that revolve around romance, or that examine the bad behavior of fashion designers or chefs under stress. *American Idol* provides many different types of pleasure to viewers across age and gender. For sponsors, it provides a giant stage for product placement. In Season 6, for example, each judge drank out of a large cup that prominently featured the Coke logo. Ford commercials in each of the “final ten” episodes starred the

remaining contestants, blurring the line between program and advertisement so as to render them “DVR-proof.”

So why do people watch? *American Idol* is varied in format, has dramatic ups and downs, gives the at-home audience an active role in the outcome, provides different forms of entertainment, has heroes and villains, and, in the immortal words of Joni Mitchell, “reveals the star-making machinery behind the popular song.” In short, *American Idol* is riveting television.

Each season of *American Idol* begins with the audition process, in which the judges travel to several American cities for open auditions. The first few weeks of each season then show the at-home audience the worst of the performances—and some of the best. Until he left the program after Season 9, Simon Cowell’s often offensive comments in this phase sometimes attracted attention in the mainstream media. Thousands are then whittled down to a hundred, which are winnowed down to twenty-four in Los Angeles, where home audiences vote via phone or text message for the “final ten.” Then the real drama begins, and viewers get to vicariously live out a certain type of pop-star daydream by identifying with the contestants.

American Idol also has an active online culture. Fans can go to the Fox network’s *American Idol* website to participate in program-related activities. Fallen idols appear on television talk shows, and draw fans to their websites. During Season 6, spoiler websites proliferated and www.votefortheworst.com, associated with radio “shock jock” Howard Stern, received national attention in its attempts to manipulate voting in favor of a contestant with a lot of charisma and a penchant for interesting hairstyles, but minimal singing talent.

Records by “Idols” do sell, in part because of the exposure the buying public has to their voices over a television season, and in part because the chosen winner and the runners-up have been molded to produce “sellable” sounds. Some music fans rail against the inauthenticity of the process and the program.

Winners over the last few seasons have hewed to more conservative images and sounds than those presented by the most truly popular current pop artists, such as Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, and Beyoncé. For example, vocally and physically innocuous Kris Allen won over flamboyant Adam Lambert in Season 8. Lambert later came out as gay, but to date no serious *Idol* contestant has been out during his or her time on the program. The equally milquetoast Lee DeWyse won over the Janis Joplin-esque, in sound and biography, Crystal Bowersox in Season 9. Season 10 seemed to ignore trends in pop music in 2011. Two country singers went to the finals, which crowned a seventeen-year-old retro-country singer, the deep-voiced Scotty McCreery, as winner. *American Idol* may be diverging from what is most popular on the Internet, the radio, and iTunes, but it still taps into a large market. That’s enough to keep the hit-making machinery—and the entertainment industries and corporations that depend upon it—going, for now.

Norma Coates (University of Western Ontario) has written on the interaction of popular music, gender, and cultural industry. Her current book project is called Rocking the Wasteland: A Cultural History of Popular Music on American Network Television from Elvis to MTV.



LED ZEPPELIN IN CONCERT, 1970–1979

by Susan Fast

Led Zeppelin's studio recordings are innovative and awe-inspiring, but they tell only part of the band's story. For Led Zep fans in the 1970s, live shows were considered the "real deal," and there is little question that the concert setting highlighted much of what has become legendary about this group. Until recently, there was only one official live concert release, the 1976 documentary film *The Song Remains the Same* (also released as a double live album). This film captures Zeppelin in concert at Madison Square Garden on their 1973 tour, at the height of their domination of record charts and concert stages around the world. It is a fascinating document, not just for the music, but also for the famous "fantasy sequences" in which Page, Plant,

and Jones are depicted as protagonists in different fictional quest narratives. But the quality of the performance fails to capture how great they really were in concert. For years, committed fans circulated bootleg recordings of particularly renowned Zeppelin concerts, and *The Song Remains the Same* simply paled in comparison. In 2003, some of these recordings were remastered and officially released as a two-DVD set (*Led Zeppelin*) and on the CD *How the West Was Won*. These recordings provide an accurate and easily accessible snapshot of the band's concert legacy.

Led Zeppelin's concerts were marathons: three-hour shows were not unusual, and the increased length of individual songs, filled with extended improvisation, is a Led Zeppelin trademark that signals the band's much-revered penchant for taking musical risks.

Their 1970 gig at the Royal Albert Hall ranks as one of the best representations of the band's musical capabilities. Long virtuosic guitar solos by Page, sometimes brilliant and sometimes slightly off the mark, are moments in which expressiveness overtakes technique, usually to great effect. Aside from guitar solos, improvisation also included full-out jams by the band on old blues and pop songs, and musical ideas worked out on the spot. Page referred to the combination of precision and risk taking as the "tight but loose" factor of the band. Robert Plant's vocals are in peak form at this show, and the overwhelming power of his voice reaches above the excessive volume of the instruments. The performance of "How Many More Times" brings all these elements together: listen to the incredible driving energy of the riff, played by Page, Jones, and Bonham for large stretches of the song; the improvised exchanges between Page and Plant; and the lengthy blues-based improvisations toward the end of the song.

Bonham's drum solo—the core of the song “Moby Dick”—is already a feature in this early concert, and it remained a central component of their live shows. Much of what is “heavy” about Zeppelin's sound comes from Bonham, an astonishingly powerful drummer who was also agile and capable of very subtle gestures. Another important element of the live shows was Page's use of the violin bow to play his guitar during “Dazed and Confused.” The purpose of this was to explore new and interesting timbres on the electric guitar. The technique became strongly associated with Page's image as a kind of musical wizard.

A few features crucial to the later Led Zeppelin concert experience are not yet present in the Royal Albert Hall show. As with other rock bands, when they moved into stadiums and played to much larger crowds, the band exaggerated its visual gestures so the audience could see them. Page started wearing custom-made suits—one of them black with stars and planets, another featuring dragons, and a white silk suit emblazoned with red poppies—that furthered the magical aura around him. He also began to cultivate a grander kind of showmanship, duck-walking across the stage and throwing his left hand up triumphantly after laying down a riff. These gestures became more “wizardly” and emphatic when Page played the theremin, a simple electronic instrument used to re-create the experimental middle section of “Whole Lotta Love” in concert. Plant

began to bare his chest in a display of virility, like many rockers in the 1970s. The band rarely used pyrotechnics, which they felt would detract from the “pure” presentation of the music, but Bonham did set his gong on fire at the end of the concert. The musical and visual sparring between Page and Plant was a constant feature of the shows, Page often playing licks on his guitar that Plant would respond to or imitate. There was one of many displays of intimacy between singer and guitarist that have become hallmarks of rock music.

Page played the acoustic instrumental “White Summer” at the Royal Albert Hall, but the band would subsequently perform an entire acoustic set. While the band became legendary for the raw and excessive power and volume of their music (some have claimed them as the progenitors of heavy metal), they also produced a great deal of acoustic music. This is especially evident on their third album, and their acoustic songs were showcased in a separate section of their concerts. The acoustic set demonstrated an important element of the band's musical ability: they were flexible and multifaceted musicians. Heavy-rock bands have used acoustic performances to prove their versatility ever since.

Susan East (McMaster University, Ontario) is the author of In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music (Oxford University Press).



HOW I GOT OVER (MOTOWN, SOUL, AND THE LEGACY OF GOSPEL ENTREPRENEURIALISM)

Robert Fink

It is the second week of March, 1960. Berry Gordy is in a Midwestern sound studio, tinkering with the sound of The Miracles' new single, "Way Over There," his fledgling Tamla label's first national release. Assiduous promotion has made the track a regional hit, and though the record he's pushing is crude, it has the authentic "soul" sound: lead singer Smokey Robinson's high tenor soars achingly over gospel piano, harmony vocals, and hand-claps which evoke the sanctified singing of the black church, charging his I-miss-you-girl lyric with a powerful, almost mystical longing:

*I've got a lover way over there on the mountainside
And I know that's where I should be
I've got a lover way over there across the river wide
And I can hear her calling to me . . .*

As Gordy will later recall in his autobiography, Robinson's song means a lot to him personally at this moment. It speaks straight to his overpowering drive not for sexual satisfaction (Gordy was, for the time being, a reasonably happy married man) but for wealth, power, and prestige: "For the guy in the song Smokey was singing about, it was where his lover was, but for me 'way over there' was where my dreams were—for Motown, for happiness, for success." Restless ambition has driven Gordy to re-record the song, flying the Miracles to Chicago for a session in a real recording studio, so that he can fix balances and, most importantly, add a sheen of orchestral strings. He is convinced that the track, doing well in regional markets like Philadelphia as well as his hometown of Detroit, could be a national hit if it sounded a little more polished, a little "richer."

Ironically enough, the time it takes to re-record, press, and distribute the new version of "Way Over There" in the spring of 1960 kills its upward momentum; the song never charts. But Gordy's company, Motown, will go on to dominate the charts by combining the strong emotional drive of black religious music with the sophisticated sound of American studio pop, and in so doing, update some well-worn strategies of gospel music pioneers, pointing the way forward for black musical entrepreneurs of the soul era and beyond.

Images of black gospel music often foreground its unworldliness: a small, plain church by the side of a dirt road; impoverished people seeking ecstatic relief from oppressive circumstances; singers, instrumentalists, and congregations aiming to praise God and feel the Spirit, not to make money. But in pre-Civil Rights America, the black church was *the* bastion of middle-class values, its ministers

respected professional and civic leaders. Compared to the indignities of the so-called “chitlin’ circuit” (the segregated world of black popular entertainment) or to systematized exploitation in a recording industry run by whites, a career in the gospel music industry offered stability, respect, and the possibility of financial security for musicians with an entrepreneurial bent. To use an African American vernacular phrase with its origins in gospel, singing spiritual songs about “how I got over [the river Jordan]” was also a way to “get over,” that is, to succeed financially, in the material world.

Consider the career of Thomas A. Dorsey (1899–1993), the “father of black gospel music.” Dorsey, the son of a rural minister and a church organist, served a rough and tumble secular music apprenticeship in the 1920s as “Georgia Tom.” (He played with Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and later hit it big as co-author of an infamous dirty blues number, “It’s Tight Like That.”) But by the early 1930s, Dorsey had become a respectable businessman: he wrote gospel songs, published them through his own publishing company, employed salespeople on commission to sell the song sheets door-to-door, organized gospel choirs and quartets, and in August 1933 became the first president of what was, in effect, a gospel music trade association, the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses. Much of this infrastructure was built on the extraordinary business acumen and drive of an unschooled musical protégé, singer Sallie Martin, who went on to become a respected soloist, composer, and musical entrepreneur in her own right.

Gospel entrepreneurs like Dorsey and Martin created the business model for 1960s soul music. Musically, they harnessed the excitement of “sanctified” musical performance in the Pentecostal church—the moaning, screaming, shouting, foot-stomping, and hand-clapping that pushed worshippers into physical overdrive—to the theatrical polish and musical sophistication demanded in the “old-line” churches of the urban black middle class. Then they channeled that drive toward success as defined by the American middle class, building lucrative black-owned businesses around soul music’s explosive mixture of abandon and control.

Almost every major figure in 1960s soul music had some experience in the segregated gospel music industry built by pioneers like Dorsey and Martin. Some, like Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and James Brown, had significant careers as gospel musicians before they entered the world of pop. This legacy, which African American cultural critic Gerald Early, setting the scene for Berry Gordy and

Motown, identifies as a black middle-class tradition of “rectitude and cunning bourgeois thrift,” was basic to the way soul musicians did business in the 1960s. Soul musicians were more likely than other 1960s pop music performers to insist on tight discipline from band members (James Brown), more interested in controlling their own master recordings and publishing rights (Ray Charles), and more likely to set up their own recording studios and labels (Curtis Mayfield, Stevie Wonder).

Paradoxically, some of the least empowered soul musicians worked for Motown Records, because their employer, Berry Gordy, had so well internalized the gospel recipe for getting (himself) over. Gordy and his family staffed all the key positions at Motown, and with their help, he built and controlled all aspects of a vertically integrated business empire: Motown owned its own studios, controlled the production and manufacturing of records (Tamla, Motown, Soul Records), brokered publishing rights to the songs on them (JoBete Music, Inc.), and handled the management (ITMI) of the performers who sang those songs, on records or anywhere else.

The resulting business structure was, for those not cut in on the action, almost as exploitative as the overt discrimination and theft practiced by white record label owners. The Motown story is filled with ambitious songwriters, producers, and artists who chafed under the paternalistic rule of the company until they realized that they couldn’t get over until they got out from under Berry Gordy’s thumb. Gordy always professed to be wounded by their ingratitude, but he forgot that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery: the first thing most Motown alumni did after they broke away was attempt to become independent soul music entrepreneurs just like him.

Berry Gordy quickly found out what the success he saw “way over there” looked like up close; by the end of the 1960s, he had already achieved as much as anyone in the record business could dream of. Even at the time, though, voices were raised calling him, and the music he produced, a “sell out.” Nothing so determinedly commercial, so clearly constructed, so obviously aimed at financial success, could really be *soulful*, could it? Gordy’s genius—and it was a particularly African-American genius—was to understand intuitively that this was precisely the wrong question, framed in terms that might have made sense to countercultural white rebels but had little meaning within mainstream American culture, black or white. “Getting over,” in all its multiple meanings, remains a fundamental, highly prized dynamic within the African American community. That drive is in the music: for salvation, for satisfaction,

for success, and ultimately for *R-E-S-P-E-C-T*. Or, as you might have heard it from the pulpit of an African American church in the Civil Rights era:

You can't have *soul* without a *goal*. (*Can I get an "Amen"?*)

Epilogue: As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s and 1980s, and the economic environment darkened, ghetto entrepreneurialism parted ways with middle-class values. The drive was supplanted by the "grind" and the "hustle," where, as rapper Raekwon of the Wu-Tang Clan put it in 1993, "cash rules everything around me." Many African Americans are now openly nostalgic for the look and sound of the soul music era; what they fail to see is that hip-hop's most famous entrepreneurs are following in the footsteps of Dorsey, Gordy, and the rest. Linking African

American music's inner drives to the fierce will to get over, these strivers represent the latest evolution of goal-directed soul.

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MOTOWN 25: CELEBRATION, NOSTALGIA, AND ACTUALITY

by Andrew Flory

On May 16, 1983, a two-hour television special aired on NBC titled “Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, and Forever” that celebrated the music and historical achievements of Motown. With a reputation for creating world-famous stars, nearly 700 charting singles to its credit, and a history of successfully integrating black performers into the mainstream, there was much to admire in Motown’s accomplishments during its first quarter-century. The Emmy-winning program was primarily a tribute to Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr., and it was produced in the style of an awards show. Hosted by comedian Richard Pryor, it featured musical performances, comedy sketches, and choreographed dance segments. The show made it clear that the

company—now officially called Motown Industries—had changed dramatically over time, growing from a Detroit-based record company to a large-scale Los Angeles entertainment corporation that retained little of the character, sound, and personnel of its early years.

The most important performances on the program were by former Motown artists who had left the company for the greener pastures of major labels. Coming just weeks after the peak of “Sexual Healing,” his first hit for Columbia, Marvin Gaye’s performance included a monologue about black contributions to American culture (accompanied by his own piano playing), followed by his 1971 hit “What’s Going On.” The program’s finale included a brief reunion of the Supremes, arguably the most popular Motown group of the 1960s, led by Diana Ross, who had left Motown for RCA Records two years earlier. In a bittersweet thank you to Gordy, Ross acknowledged the many defections from the Motown stable, assuring the audience, “It’s not about the people who leave Motown that’s important, but it’s about the people who come back, and tonight everybody came back.”

One of the most notable performers who came back was Michael Jackson, whose appearance on “Motown 25” remains legendary in the annals of pop music. At the time of the broadcast, his second album for Epic Records, *Thriller*, was in the middle of a record yearlong run at the top of the *Billboard 200* album chart, and he was easily the most popular entertainer in the world. After a reunion of the Jackson 5, the anticipation of a modern-era Jackson song was incredible, extending far beyond the studio audience to include the millions of television viewers. *Thriller* was already a smash hit, but this was the first chance many of Jackson’s fans had to see him perform this material live.

He energetically paced the stage while reminiscing about the old days with Motown and then, symbolically shedding his youthful past, declared his preference for “new songs” and launched into his current hit, “Billie Jean.” It was not the vocal performance of this song that stunned the nation, for the television broadcast featured Jackson lip-synching to his well-known record. Instead, Jackson’s physical presentation took the spotlight.

Donning his trademark sequined white glove and silver socks, his heavily choreographed introduction began with several highly stylized hip thrusts. While the audience screamed, Jackson’s feet constantly moved as he kicked and spun freely, frenetically accompanying the song’s controversial text about fathering an illegitimate child. It was not until the instrumental bridge, however, that Jackson made history by performing his signature dance move—the moonwalk—for the first time. Perhaps more than any other appearance of his career, this five-minute performance helped to define Michael Jackson as the “King of Pop.” But in many ways, it also helped to signify the end of the Motown era.

In hindsight, “Motown 25” was a deeply conflicted undertaking. Subtitled “Yesterday, Today, Forever,” this special highlighted the nearly impossible task that Motown faced during the early 1980s: the need to celebrate the past while trying to remain vital in the present. This was a time of great nostalgic interest in early rhythm and blues, so there was real public interest in Motown’s exploring its own history. However, the company had grown and changed since the 1960s, and after focusing so much on the glory days, “Motown 25” did little to hide the bleak outlook of its

present state. Fewer and fewer Motown acts were cracking the pop charts, and the departure of many of its most successful artists, songwriters, and producers meant the company’s music division was not the juggernaut it had once been. Two of the most successful Motown artists of the time, Lionel Richie and Rick James, did not even attend the live taping, allowing former Motown greats like Ross, Gaye, and Jackson to steal the show.

Although the program was ostensibly a tribute to the musical legacy of the company, the high production value of the show highlighted the fact that Motown was more interested in television and film production than music. Furthermore, the company’s interest in producing music had drifted away from the styles that made it a household name during the 1960s and 1970s. The great Motown backing band the Funk Brothers had been largely forgotten after the company moved to Los Angeles in the 1970s, and “Motown 25” featured an awards show orchestra. The orchestra did little to recapture the early Motown sound while backing the performances of groups like the Four Tops, the Temptations, and the Miracles. In the end, the internal conflict among Motown’s past, present, and future gave way in 1988, when Berry Gordy Jr. made the first of several moves to sell the once fiercely independent company to a major corporate conglomerate. This signaled the end of what was arguably the most successful reign of black ownership in American music history to date.

Andrew Flory (Carleton College) is the author of I Hear a Symphony: Listening to the Music of Motown.



TOP 40: MORE HITS MORE OFTEN

by Ben Fong-Torres

It's hard to imagine, but there was a time, not long ago, when radio was declared dead. In the early 1950s, television was taking over as the most popular form of entertainment for Americans. Radio's network stars fled for the greener pastures of TV land—even if it was still black and white. Goodbye, Red Skelton; hello, red ink.

Radio networks indeed had problems, but independent stations—the great majority of license holders—fought back by focusing on local listeners and advertisers. They hired announcers who could relate to listeners in ways that a Jack Benny or Marshall Matt Dillon never could. Market research showed that music was a major reason listeners used the radio, and stations began to program records. Radio survived. But it didn't really explode until rock and roll and the Top 40 format came along.

The format came first. In the early 1950s, a young man named Todd Storz was running KOWH, a small station in Omaha, Nebraska, that his father had purchased. He had replaced the network programming on KOWH with music and disc jockeys, and following such countdown shows as *Your Hit Parade*, gave the Top 10 songs heavy airplay. In a 1957 article in *Television* magazine, "The Storz Bombshell," Storz explained his formula. "I became convinced that people demand their favorites over and over while in the Army during the Second World War," he said. "I remember vividly what used to happen in restaurants here in the States. The customers would throw their nickels into the jukebox and come up repeatedly with the same tune."

At another of his father's stations—WTIX in New Orleans—Storz heard about rival WDSU's "Top 20 on 1280" show. Radio historian Richard Fatherley, a former Storz employee, recalls: "He [Storz] added 20 titles, upstaged WDSU by one hour, and went on for an hour after the other show had ended." Thus, he had a forty-song playlist. Another broadcaster often credited with pioneering the format is Gordon McLendon, who operated stations in Texas. McLendon, Fatherley notes, has conceded that Storz was first. But McLendon is credited with labeling the format "Top 40." By 1953, McLendon's Dallas station, KLIF, "burst into national prominence with its formula of music and news plus razzle-dazzle promotion," according to a broadcasting magazine. Edd Routt, a former McLendon employee, explained that "disc jockeys were selected for their sexiness, their voice, their ability to communicate excitement. Basic service consisted of time and temperature checks. Any idea of doing anything more than entertain the listener was out of the question." The listener, back

then, was adult; the music, pop. Before rock, it was Perry Como and Patti Page; Nat “King” Cole and Doris Day; Les Paul and Mary Ford.

And then came rock and roll. It was perfect for Top 40, and vice versa. Combined with new technology—in the 1950s, that meant the portable transistor radio—rock and roll and the Top 40 format opened the floodgates to a new audience: teenagers. Music, and the medium, would never be the same. Disc jockeys became local stars, and some gained even greater fame by doing local versions of *American Bandstand*. But Top 40 did more than rock. Dedicated to playing the top-selling songs of the day, these stations amounted to democratic jukeboxes. Rock and pop shared airtime with rhythm and blues, country and western, folk and novelty tunes, and jazz and blues records that sold enough copies to hit the charts.

Top 40 itself hit the top of the radio ratings in many markets. Around the country, jingles identified stations as “Color Radio” or “Boss Radio.” DJs—invariably men—were “Good Guys,” “Swingin’ Gentlemen,” or “Boss Jocks.” Stations fought one another for Beatles interviews, for star DJs, and for ratings and revenue. In the late 1960s, they

began fighting upstart stations on the FM band, which offered better audio fidelity, and “free-form” formats that rendered Top 40, with its jingles, screaming DJs, and tight playlists, somehow passé.

But Top 40 carried on. Ironically, as a popular format, Top 40 lasted just about forty years. But by the mid-’90s, industry publications had turned to other labels—like CHR, or “contemporary hit radio”—and many stations had zeroed in on one specific area of music. There was dance, “light rock” and “smooth jazz,” along with the old standby, R&B. Hip-hop further fragmented the format. Like rock itself, Top 40 was declared dead more than once. But it still exists—if not in name, then in concept. Wherever a station plays the hits of the day on a regular basis, and plays them with energy, though maybe without the jingles, newscasts, and stunts from yesteryear, it’s Top 40.

Ben Fong-Torres is the author of The Hits Just Keep on Coming: The History of Top 40 Radio and six other books. He is a columnist at the San Francisco Chronicle, and published his most recent book Eagles: Taking It to the Limit in October 2011.



ROCK MUSIC IN VIDEO GAMES

by William Gibbons

Consider these three moments from video games: (1) While taking my “borrowed” car for a spin in *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013), I spend some time searching for the right in-game radio station. Elton John’s “Friday Night’s Alright for Fighting” (1973) doesn’t seem quite right, and I switch through Smokey Robinson’s “Cruisin’” (1979) and Rhianna’s “Only Girl (in the World)” (2010) before finally settling on Stevie Wonder’s “Skeletons” (1987). (2) After scoring the winning touchdown in *Madden NFL 11* (2010), I put my controller down to gloat about my victory. As the game sits on a menu screen, my friends and I hear a series of classic rock and metal songs, from KISS’s “Rock and Roll All Nite” (1975) to Bush’s “Machinehead” (1996) and Guns N’ Roses’ “Welcome to the Jungle” (1987). (3) As I satisfyingly complete the final tasks in the puzzle game *Portal* (2007), I settle in to watch the ending credits. To my surprise, I hear “Still Alive,” written by the folk-rock musician Jonathan Coulton specifically for the game—a song that has since become one of Coulton’s most popular tunes.

These three very different video games illustrate some of the many ways rock music has been incorporated into recent video games. In the early days of video games, technological limitations prevented the use of prerecorded music: games simply didn’t have the necessary memory space to store it, and consoles or computers didn’t have the hardware capabilities to play it back. But now, in the era of DVD and Blu-Ray discs, massive hard drives, and cloud computing, the amount and sound quality of game music is virtually unlimited. Even setting aside the many music-based games, such as the *Rock Band*, *Guitar Hero*, and *Dance Dance Revolution* craze of the 2000s and early 2010s (discussed by Mark Katz in his “Backstage Pass”), we must acknowledge that rock has become an integral part of the soundtracks to video games in a wide variety of genres.

There are many reasons game designers and audio specialists might choose to include either well-known or newly written rock music in their products. Most obvious are the aesthetic benefits, or how music can enhance players’ experiences by creating a particular emotional effect. In the case of *Grand Theft Auto V*, for instance, the variety of songs—over 240 in all, ranging from classic country to electronica—allows players to choose music that matches their mood, resulting in a more enjoyable and personalized game. In *Madden NFL 11*, the music keeps the players and spectators from getting bored, helping maintain interest even when nothing exciting is happening in the game itself. Both games rely on pre-existing songs, giving players the thrill of recognition—an “I love this song!” sensation—letting their already established enjoyment of the music transfer to their enjoyment of playing the game.

Although preexisting music is probably more common in games, games designers and composers might decide to use newly created rock or rock-influenced music. For one thing, new music can be directly tied to a specific game in a way preexisting music cannot. Jonathan Coulton's songs for the ending credits of *Portal* and its 2011 sequel, for example, provide musical epilogues, contributing to the stories and rewarding players for completing the games. Designers may also simply find that a rock sound best fits the mood of the game: composer Darren Korb chose an indie rock sound for *Bastion* (2011) and *Transistor* (2014), for instance, both of which include several complete songs. As games have become increasingly viewed as legitimate artistic products, well-known rock musicians have also contributed to game soundtracks. Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails, for example, created music for the game *Quake* (1996) as well as the theme music for *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* (2012).

Not all reasons for including popular music in games are aesthetic. Rock soundtracks also offer both the game and music industries the opportunity for effective cross-marketing of products: video games advertise the music they contain, and a soundtrack containing well-known artists may entice players to buy a particular game. The game company Electronic Arts (EA) is a case in point. For a time, many EA Sports games (such as *Madden NFL*, *FIFA Soccer*, and so on) included a feature that allowed players to purchase and download the music they heard in EA games. EA also owns the record label Artwerk Music Group, which signs new artists whose music can appear in games.

There have even been a number of games created to market the musicians themselves as much as their music. An early example is the Atari 2600 game *Journey Escape* (1982), which tied directly into the band Journey's 1981 album *Escape*, and featured brief snippets of "Don't Stop Believin'" (1981). Later efforts to immortalize musicians and their music in games have included the game *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker* (1990), which featured several of the

title musician's most famous songs; *Revolution X* (1994), an arcade shooting game featuring the band Aerosmith; and the action game *50 Cent: Bulletproof* (2005) along with its sequel *50 Cent: Blood in the Sand* (2009), both of which included a number of unique tracks designed to entice the rapper's fans into purchasing the game. While these efforts have not always been successful (much like films starring musicians), they are another illustration of the thinning boundaries between media.

As a final possibility, some games in recent years have allowed players to incorporate their own music into the gaming experience. The popular computer game *The Sims 3* (2009) and the PC version of *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2008), for example, allow users to create custom radio stations that play any music players choose from their hard drive, leading to an endlessly customizable soundtrack. Some home consoles—for example, the Sony Playstation 3 and Microsoft Xbox 360—offer similar customization options, letting players replace the soundtrack of some games with their own audio while preserving voice acting and sound effects.

The future of rock music in games is difficult to predict, but it offers many intriguing possibilities. Will rock musicians increasingly market their music through games? Will games incorporate streaming audio to allow for virtually unlimited amounts of preexisting popular music? Will some games completely do away with traditional soundtracks in favor of using only the player's own music? Or might we see many entire original game soundtracks provided by well-known bands? One thing seems clear: given the aesthetic and financial benefits of including rock music in video games, it seems all but inevitable that the trend will continue for many years to come.

William Gibbons (Texas Christian University) is co-editor of Music in Video Games: Studying Play (Routledge, 2014), and is currently completing the book Unlimited Replays: Classical Music and the Meanings of Art in Video Games.



THE INVENTION OF BING CROSBY

by Gary Giddins

Bing Crosby accumulated more unbroken statistics than any other figure in pop music history. Unrivaled in the sheer number of his studio recordings, his discography included 368 charted singles under his own name and 28 more as a sideman. He scored more number-one hits (38) than any other twentieth-century performer, among them the best-selling record of all time, *White Christmas*. As a movie star, he ranked as a top box office attraction for 20 years, five times in the number-one slot. He was nominated for an Oscar three times (he won for *Going My Way*) and introduced more Oscar-nominated songs than anyone else.

Crosby was also a major radio star for three decades, practically inventing the modern talk-music-comedy variety hour with the *Kraft Music Hall*, which he began hosting in 1936. At the peak of the show's success, 50 million listeners tuned in every week to hear him. During World War II,

he raised an unparalleled \$14,500,000 in war bonds. As an innovator of musical technology, he was the first to use the microphone as a musical instrument (leading one critic to observe, "he sang to you, not at you"); the first to pre-record on radio; and the first to record on tape—an invention he helped finance. Even his leisure pursuits made history: he created the first celebrity pro-am golf championship and was the central figure in the development of the Del Mar racetrack in Southern California.

All of which directly underscores the irony inherent in one of his least known yet most prescient achievements. Crosby was the first American singer to actively invent a persona—a part-real and part-fabricated character, polished with the detail worthy of a novelist. Comedians like Jack Benny or Laurel and Hardy had previously invented personae using their own names, and nightclub singers created personalities suitable to their performances. But Crosby prefigured the postures and attitudes of rock by presenting the illusion of a figure no different in song than in life.

It wasn't just Crosby's baritone voice, phrasing, range, and articulation of lyrics that sold his songs, but also his personality. Before Frank Sinatra re-created himself as a 1950s jet-set swinger or Elvis Presley perfected his pompadour and sneer or the Beatles settled on cheery irreverence and jackets without lapels, Crosby incarnated a unique temperament in American song—the everyman performer, the modern minstrel, friend to all.

The beloved Bing of the Depression and war years was a far cry from the young jazz crooner of Prohibition, who indulged his share of stimulants, both illegal (alcohol) and legal (marijuana), and women (mostly legal). In many respects, an unknowable and private man, Crosby

had a live-and-let-live attitude that put him ahead of the curve when it came to racial and gender politics. But he was hardly a portrait of personal reliability or professional affability.

The Crosby persona was reshaped with the aid of two close advisers—his wife, Dixie Lee, who threatened to end their marriage if he didn't stop drinking and take his career more seriously; and his record producer, the legendary Jack Kapp, who founded Decca Records and convinced Crosby that he should not limit himself to the “hip” audience of jazz fans and Broadway habitués. With Kapp's prodding, Crosby's repertoire grew to encompass more musical styles than any singer had ever attempted, all handled with unpretentious authenticity that won him fans in each field: jazz, mainstream pop, Irish and Hawaiian songs, country and western, operetta, French and Spanish songs (he was fluent in both languages), waltzes, Christmas carols, even rhythm and blues (he recorded duets with Louis Jordan).

Yet his persona was that of an incorrigibly lazy man: self-sufficient, unperturbed, shrewd, cool—a grown-up Tom Sawyer, complete with a pipe, battered hat, mismatched clothes, and jive lingo. Crosby invented a character so resonant that even those who knew and worked with him had a hard time separating it from the real Bing, though in reality he was the least lazy man in town. Despite being a ubiquitous presence in American culture, turning out three films a year (a full-time career by itself), a weekly radio show, and frequent recording sessions, he was known as a guy who didn't like to work, preferring to laze around, play golf, and hang out at the track.

Crosby routinely spoke of how idle and lacking in ambition he was, and media stories played it up. Feeding into the fiction were his easy charm and off-handed way of speaking, careless way of dressing, and cool independence, which came off as admirably aloof and paradoxically warm. He didn't seem to give a damn about Hollywood propriety. For example, Crosby lost his hair as a young man and wore toupees in movies. Yet he was the only star of his era who didn't wear one at private parties or when entertaining the troops during World War II. He demanded the maximum number of exterior scenes in his films so that he could wear a hat instead of the hated “scalp doily.” Even his vocal style offered the illusion of effortlessness. It was often said that every man singing in the shower thought he sounded like Crosby.

The success of the Crosby persona may be measured by its incalculable popularity throughout society: young and old, men and women, black and white, urban and rural, above and below the Mason-Dixon line. But it also contributed to the ebbing of his success in the rock era, when the casual, unperturbed attitude that proved so engaging during the Depression and war suddenly seemed remote, grandfatherly, safe, and irrelevant. In the 1950s, rock and roll changed the nation's tempo and temperature, but it never changed Bing Crosby. He had grown older while the country grew younger.

Gary Giddins is the author of Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams, Visions of Jazz, and the textbook Jazz (with Scott DeVeaux).



THE RISE AND FALL OF *AMERICAN BANDSTAND*

by John Jackson

In 1960, America was thinking young. As the country sent John F. Kennedy to the White House, the nationally televised teenage dance show *American Bandstand*—taped in Philadelphia and seen in 135 cities coast-to-coast—was unchallenged as a shaper of pop culture. The show’s youthful-looking emcee Dick Clark was the most powerful voice in American popular music. Although Clark could not create a hit record simply by playing it on his show, the publicity a song received from exposure on *American Bandstand* went a long way toward determining its success.

During the first three years *American Bandstand* was on the air, Clark stealthily cobbled together a pop music dynasty of his own. By 1959, he owned scores of

music-related companies, including record labels and music publishing firms.

As Clark offered up a seemingly endless parade of white “teen-idol” singers—many of them homegrown products from Philly—who lip-synched their latest recordings to a rapt sea of adolescents, *American Bandstand* continued to introduce the latest hit records, spark the latest teen fashion fads, and inspire new dance crazes. Indeed, the show was instrumental in turning America into the land of a thousand dances. During the summer of 1960, Chubby Checker’s recording of “The Twist” introduced the nation to solo, or open dancing, in which partners never touched. Because of “The Twist,” *American Bandstand*’s exalted status as the premier purveyor of teen-oriented dance music reached its apex. Dance fads arrived and departed more rapidly than ever, as teenagers and young housewives no longer had to leave the friendly confines of their homes to learn the latest steps.

American Bandstand’s amplified status was a stark contrast to the show’s modest beginnings. A local version known simply as *Bandstand* originated in Philadelphia in 1952. Hosted by disc jockey Bob Horn, *Bandstand* quickly became the most popular local television program in the City of Brotherly Love. But in 1956, Horn was cited for drunken driving, and Clark replaced him as the *Bandstand* emcee. In 1957, Clark made a pitch to the ABC television network to broadcast *Bandstand* nationally. ABC, then a distant third behind NBC and CBS in the network ratings and desperate for any kind of cost-efficient daytime programming, agreed to broadcast Clark’s show. Now called *American Bandstand*, the show could be seen for ninety minutes each weekday afternoon. It soon became the well-spring of American popular culture.

But *American Bandstand* eventually became a victim of its own success. As the popularity of Clark's show increased, so did ABC's stature. By 1961, the network was able to command larger commercial fees for new shows than it received from *American Bandstand*. To create space for these new shows, ABC began reducing *Bandstand*'s daily airtime, first to sixty minutes, then to thirty minutes. Distressed with *Bandstand*'s repeated reduction in airtime, Clark brashly predicted that, if handled properly, the show could run for thirty years. (It lasted for thirty-two!)

Early in 1963, *American Bandstand* lost much of its consequential spontaneity when, due to growing outside commitments, Clark abandoned the show's live format and began taping a week's worth of programs in one day. To exacerbate matters, *Bandstand* was stripped of much of its power to expose potential hit songs when later that year ABC ended the show's daily status and began showing it only on Saturday mornings.

In February 1964, less than three months after America was shaken to its core by the assassination of President

Kennedy, two events portending *American Bandstand*'s future occurred. By then Clark had forsaken Philadelphia's blue-collar grit for California's glitz and permanently relocated his show to Los Angeles. The move went virtually unnoticed, a sure sign that America's youth had begun to look elsewhere for the latest trends in music and fashion. The West Coast debut of *Bandstand* occurred on Saturday, February 8. The following Sunday, as 70 million households tuned in to CBS-TV's *Toast of the Town*, the Beatles were introduced to America, touching off the "British invasion" of American pop. These two incidents marked the beginning of a steady diminution of *American Bandstand*. Save for its longevity, Dick Clark's fabled music and dance program was on its way to becoming just another television show.

John Jackson is the author of American Bandstand: Dick Clark and the Making of a Rock 'n' Roll Empire, which received the Ralph J. Gleason Music Book Award and the ARSC Award for excellence in research.



ROCK MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY

by Mark Katz

In a crowded dorm room, a group of students play plastic instruments while staring at a TV screen. The instruments look like toys, and for good reason: this is a video game. It could be *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* or any of their successors. They might be manipulating a small plastic turntable while playing *DJ Hero*; perhaps they're not using controllers at all, instead waving their limbs wildly according to onscreen instructions. How do we make sense of all this impassioned flailing? What they're doing is not exactly like playing traditional musical instruments. Their gestures are clearly connected to the music they hear, but they're activating prerecorded sounds rather than creating their own music. But if they're not true instrumentalists, they're also not mere listeners. Playing music video games might be called collaborative performance, or more simply co-performance, but whatever it's called, it's a hugely popular

phenomenon that is opening up distinctive ways of engaging with music to millions of people.

In a computer lab, a headphone-wearing student sits in front of a monitor, using a mouse to create and manipulate sounds. She may be using any of dozens of programs, whether free, cheap (Audacity, GarageBand), or more costly (Ableton, ProTools, Reason). She may be layering short prerecorded musical fragments, or loops, to create a new composition; she may be mixing a song recorded with her band, adjusting the balance and editing out mistakes; she may be remixing the latest dance club hit, changing the rhythm and tempo to put a new spin on it; or she may be concocting a mashup by combining the instrumental track of one song with the vocals of a different song. When she has finished, she's likely to share her work, whether by e-mailing it to friends, posting it to her blog, or uploading it to a social networking or video-sharing site. Within minutes, people she has never met are listening to and commenting on her work.

Sharing one's own music is not nearly as common as sharing other people's music, and since the late 1990s and the rise of Napster, file-sharing has been an enormously popular and hotly contested activity, especially on college campuses. At any given moment, there are students sitting in front of their computers, sending and receiving MP3s and other digital music files, without payment and without permission. Some have had their campus network privileges revoked, a few have been sued, but most encounter no trouble along the way. Students are often conflicted about file-sharing—they know it can be illegal, but it doesn't feel like stealing (and technically it's unauthorized copying and distribution, not theft). Illegal file-sharing isn't the only way to experience music on the Internet without

paying for it, however. More and more, students are going to video-sharing sites such as YouTube, or Internet radio and music recommendation sites like Grooveshark or Pandora, to get their fill of tunes without downloading—or paying—a thing. And of course, many are paying to download through online music stores, using Amazon, iTunes, or any of the numerous other pay sites. However the music is being acquired, this kind of activity is rapidly replacing the increasingly old-fashioned ritual of going to stores and buying physical recordings, with enormous consequences for the way we all experience and think about music.

One consequence of the move from physical recordings to sound files is that we can easily carry immense collections of music wherever we go. To walk across a typical campus is to see ear-budded students immersed in their own private soundtracks, often oblivious to their surroundings. Music was once an almost totally social activity, but now listening in solitude (even if surrounded by others) is increasingly the norm. While we may celebrate this as tremendously convenient, there are legitimate concerns about the loss of the communal aspects of music (not to mention hearing loss) arising from so much solitary listening.

A century ago, Americans debated the value of the still-young technology of sound recording. (Thomas Edison had invented the phonograph in 1877, but it hadn't come to influence musical life until the early 1900s.) Some saw great possibilities in the technology, endowing it with an almost magical ability to bring great music to the world. Others viewed it as a threat. The composer and band leader John Philip Sousa famously condemned it as a menace, declaring that no one would make music themselves when

machines could do it for them. Neither side was clearly right or wrong. The type of music-making that Sousa cared about—parlor piano recitals, town band performances, and the like—has clearly waned since his time. Yet he was wrong about the broad effect of technology on amateur musicians, for today millions of people are not only making music simply for the love of it, but they are also using the latest technology to do so. On the other hand, it is hard to sustain the argument that technology has made America a “more musical nation”—as some contended a century ago—when the Internet music videos that enjoy the most views (often running into the tens of millions) are routinely denounced as the worst modern culture has to offer.

In the end, neither a utopian nor a dystopian view of music technology is warranted. This was true in the early twentieth century and it is true in the early twenty-first century. Technology can open up unimagined musical possibilities but can also cheapen music, rendering it an easily disposable commodity. Whatever new technologies emerge, two constants remain, one sobering, the other hopeful: the scarcity of truly great talent (and music), and the deep-seated need to seek out meaningful musical experiences. Technology will neither increase the former nor diminish the latter.

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BECOMING AN AMERICAN B(R)AND: PRE-EXISTING POPULAR MUSIC IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

by Joanna Love

Relationships between the American advertising and popular music industries date back to the turn of the twentieth century. Songs like “In My Merry Oldsmobile” were

composed in the popular Tin Pan Alley idioms of time and circulated as sheet music for families to perform around their living room pianos. In the 1930s, radio variety shows featuring popular music idioms were sponsored by household corporate brands, and when stand-alone radio jingles (short tunes composed specifically to advertise a brand) gained prominence, they often emulated the forms, instrumentation, vocal timbres, and rhythms and even sampled melodies from then-popular genres like country and western, barbershop, and Tin Pan Alley. After World War II, the rise of the baby boomer generation and their love for rock and roll not only changed the sounds of the American music industry but also eventually infiltrated the business of advertising. As musical audiences grew increasingly fragmented, corporate marketers realized that they too could cater to specific age ranges and regional interests. With the rise of the television culture in the late-1950s, marketers not only sought to *emulate* the sounds of popular genres but also began to incorporate famous musicians and their pre-existing songs (those created outside a commercial’s context) into television commercials.

Increasingly, advertising agencies began licensing (paying record labels for the rights to borrow) recognizable pre-existing popular music for television commercials. This caused music’s role in advertising to shift from mere background accompaniment to perceptible foreground entertainment and allowed hit tracks to become an active agent in marketing campaigns. Marketers hoped that potential consumers would transfer positive feelings and meanings associated with specific genres, songs, and musicians to the advertised commodities. As the twentieth century progressed, popular musicians also realized the potential benefits offered by these co-branding arrangements, which

included an increased exposure to mass audiences and opportunities for higher record sales.

By the end of the twentieth century, pre-existing popular songs had been incorporated into television commercials in countless ways. Three high-profile licensing deals created the climate for the co-branding relationships that have become commonplace today among new artists, marketers, and corporate brands. The first was Pepsi-Cola's 1984 "Choice of a New Generation" campaign, in which the soda giant paid Michael Jackson a record \$5 million to sing a jingle over the backing track to his then-hit song "Billie Jean" in two television spots. The commercials were pioneering in their placement of slogan material over memorable sound bites from his well-known single, including the syncopated opening groove, energetic pre-chorus, and danceable chorus. The spots also proved visually impressive, with their inclusion of flashy costuming, iconic choreography, and fast-paced editing techniques styled after Jackson's MTV videos. The innovation and timing of Pepsi's campaign at the height of Jackson's fame gave it unprecedented success, ultimately boosting the soda giant's sales over those of archrival Coca-Cola for the first time in history. And when coupled with his MTV videos and chart-topping singles, Jackson's commercial exposure on network TV also arguably aided him in securing *Thriller* as the best-selling album of all time.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, a 1987 commercial made by the athletic apparel and equipment company Nike, Inc., demonstrated the often-controversial place that pre-existing music can have in advertising. Nike's spot created considerable audience backlash and even prompted litigation by featuring a well-known version of the Beatles' 1968 hit "Revolution." Because the living Beatles members neither owned the rights to the song nor approved its use in the commercial, "Revolution in Motion" reignited debates over copyright and musical meaning in advertising. Snippets from memorable sections of the song's opening guitar riff, poetic first verse, soulful bridge, final refrain, and outro were cut up and spliced together to support black-and-white images of "common" people participating in various athletic activities. Beatles fans (and baby boomers in particular) were appalled that a song they understood to uphold countercultural ideals that included anti-consumerism was parsed down, restructured, and ultimately stripped of its original meanings to support Nike's corporate interests. The negative responses to "Revolution in Motion" also indicated that despite the success achieved just a few years prior by Michael Jackson's Pepsi spots, baby boomers held an unwavering stance against musicians from their own generation "selling out" their music to advertisers.

The third major licensing event of the twentieth century occurred in 1999, when Moby, an underground electronic dance music (EDM) artist, licensed the tracks from his newest album *Play* to various corporate brands, including Volkswagen and Nordstrom, Inc. Many of these commercials proved innovative in their synchronization of *Play*'s electronic blending of sampled vocals and other live sounds with visual images that were equally as avant-garde. And despite the sometimes-incongruent messages conveyed between the songs and the images (as in the Nordstrom commercial that portrayed "Porcelain" as a romantic tune despite its angsty lyrics), Moby's music was well received and sparked widespread interest. In fact, the exposure *Play* gained from its inclusion in commercials (and even a British indie production company) caused audiences to pressure radio stations previously unwilling to play Moby's tracks to give his songs substantial airtime. As a result, Moby's EDM album achieved unprecedented success by reaching audiences typically accessible only to mainstream pop, rock, and R&B artists backed by major labels. The appearance of *Play*'s tracks in various corporate commercials garnered it eight number-one singles and propelled sales to an astounding 10 million copies worldwide. The commercials also set the standard for pairing EDM tracks with corporate brands.

In the twenty-first century, licensing deals have become crucial for unknown artists and underground genres. This change reflects the music industry's struggles with the negative impact technology has had on record sales and the consolidation of nationwide playlists at Top 40 radio stations, which allows few airtime possibilities for untested, new, and upcoming artists. The shift toward the advertising industry as an essential patron for new music indicates not only a change in the cultural distribution of music but also a potential shift away from the negative reactions once made by baby boomers about "selling-out" to a wider acceptance of corporate influence on artistic production.

"Sonic branding" with pre-existing popular music has therefore become a central focus in contemporary advertising practices. Today's television (and now, Internet) commercials not only feature well-known pre-existing popular songs but also now seek to expose new artists to young audiences. An increasing number of corporate brands search for up-and-coming tracks to feature alongside youthful products in the hopes of breaking new singles and creating buzz for corporate goods (a practice known today as affinity marketing). Marketers no longer think it adequate to be current on the latest musical trends, but believe that millennial consumers can be reached only if brands demonstrate their ability to be tastemakers. Time

will tell what long-term effects advertising's increasing influence on the selection, dissemination, and even commissioning of popular music for commercials will have on the music industry and, more specifically, on popular music's sounds and production, but recent commercials by Pepsi-Cola ("Music Icons") and Toyota Motor Company ("Style Never Goes Out of Style") indicate that corporate brands already consider themselves to be fully inscribed in the past, present, and future of popular music.

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BACKGROUND VOCALISTS

by Maureen Mahon

Late one night in 1969, singer Merry Clayton dashed into a Los Angeles recording studio, the last-minute replacement on a session with the Rolling Stones. Digging deep into her gospel training, she sang with Mick Jagger on “Gimme Shelter,” a track the band was recording for its upcoming release *Let It Bleed*. The presence of Clayton’s powerful vocals on the haunting song was representative of a sea change in rock that had been underway for a few years: the use of African American women as background vocalists. In the late 1950s, Darlene Love’s Los Angeles–based group the Blossoms began lending background vocal support to songs by both white pop groups and black rhythm and blues acts, including “Monster Mash” (1962) by Bobby “Boris” Pickett and the Crypt Kickers, “In My Room” (1963) by the Beach Boys, and “The Shoop Shoop Song (It’s in His Kiss)” (1964) by Betty Everett. Known for their vocal flexibility, the Blossoms changed their sound depending on the race of the artists with whom they were working. They used very little vibrato and delivered a softer sound when backing white pop artists and employed vibrato, melisma, and vocal ornaments associated with gospel when singing with black rhythm and blues acts. On the East Coast at

Atlantic Records, the Sweet Inspirations—led by Cissy Houston (singer Whitney Houston’s mother)—provided gospel-infused background vocals on many of the label’s hits such as “Some Kind of Wonderful” (1961) by the Drifters, “Don’t Make Me Over” (1962) by Dionne Warwick, “Mustang Sally” (1966) by Wilson Pickett, and “Do Right Woman—Do Right Man” (1967) by Aretha Franklin. By the end of the decade, the secularized gospel sound that the Blossoms and the Sweet Inspirations brought to recordings by African American artists singing in the newly labeled “soul” style crossed over to the mainstream. White rock artists from southern rockers to blues revivalists to psychedelic experimenters to folk-tinged singer-songwriters were turning to the gospel-trained voices of African American women to enhance the vocal sound of their records.

Dusty Springfield, the English vocalist who, following the Beatles, was the second British Invasion artist to chart in the United States (with “I Only Want to Be with You” in 1964), was one of the first to latch on to the new sound. Springfield worked with Doris Troy and most frequently with Madeline Bell on many recordings, including her single “In the Middle of Nowhere” (1965). Soon, African American background vocalists were audible on a critical mass of rock releases. Former Ikette P. P. Arnold joined Steve Marriott, lead singer of the Small Faces, on “Tin Soldier” in 1967, and Doris Troy and Madeline Bell were among the voices on the Rolling Stones’ “You Can’t Always Get What You Want” (1969). The band featured Venetta Fields and Clydie King on several tracks of their classic *Exile on Main Street* (1972), including the hit single “Tumbling Dice” and the gospel-inspired “Shine a Light.” Merry Clayton, Clydie King, and Sherlie Matthews sang on Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Sweet Home Alabama” (1974), and

Clayton, one of the most in-demand session singers, sang on recordings by Buffalo Springfield, Joe Cocker, Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett, Jerry Garcia, Carole King, Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Rare Earth, Linda Ronstadt, Leon Russell, and Neil Young. Over the course of several albums and tours, British rockers Humble Pie worked with Doris Troy, Claudia Lennear, P. P. Arnold, Madeline Bell, and the Blackberries (Clydie King, Carlena Williams, Venetta Fields, and Billie Barnum). Following suit, Pink Floyd hired the Blackberries to provide background vocal support on the band's blockbuster 1972–73 *Dark Side of the Moon* tour. Gloria Jones sang on recordings by American artists REO Speedwagon, Ry Cooder, and Little Feat before organizing a backing group known as the Sanctified Sisters to tour with Joe Cocker. Before long, she had teamed up with British glam rock superstar Marc Bolan, guitarist and lead singer of T. Rex. Jones contributed backing vocals and clavinet playing to the five T. Rex/Bolan albums on which she appeared. Patti Austin and Valerie Simpson contributed to Paul Simon's *Still Crazy after All These Years* (1975), and David Bowie relied heavily on the black background vocal ensemble of Luther Vandross, Ava Cherry, and Robin Clark to achieve the Philadelphia soul sound he was exploring on his 1975 release *Young Americans*. From 1978 to 1987, Bob Dylan worked with a veritable battalion of background vocalists, among them Clydie King, Helena Springs, and Regina Havis, on the albums *Street Legal* (1978), *Slow Train Coming* (1979), *Saved* (1980), *Shot of Love* (1981), *Infidels* (1983), *Empire Burlesque* (1985), and *Knocked Out and Loaded* (1986). The related tours featured the background vocal ensemble as an opening act performing a set of gospel music.

The majority of background vocalists were black women, but there were also white women doing background singing on rock recordings during this period. Bonnie Bramlett, an American singer known for her soulful vocals (she was the session singer originally slated to sing on "Gimme Shelter"), performed in the duo Delaney and Bonnie, but she also did session work. Liza Strike, Barry St. John, and Lesley Duncan, who sang on Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973), were white British women. Doris Troy, who also appeared on the album, was the only

African American, but it was Clare Torry, another white British woman, who provided the impassioned vocals for "The Great Gig in the Sky." Whether the vocalists were white or black, their purpose when brought into rock recording sessions was to sing in a gospel-informed style that many in the business had come to consider a "black sound."

The presence of these vocalists became such a staple on so many rock songs that Lou Reed referenced the phenomenon in his 1972 single "Walk on the Wild Side" in the line "And the colored girls go 'doo doo doo doo da doo dooooo . . .'" The lyric invoked the nonsense syllables that background vocalists used to fill the sonic space dominated by the lead singers they supported; Reed sings it at the chorus, the part of the song where the background vocalists typically joined in. Rock artists were attracted to the sound of African American background vocalists in part because their gospel-drenched voices provided a black vocal sound that white rock and roll vocalists such as Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, Joe Cocker, and Mick Jagger had long sought to produce. With the inclusion of black background vocalists, 1960s and 1970s era artists went beyond appropriation of black musical practices to collaboration with black musical practitioners who added vocal volume and variety to recordings and live performances. As the '70s drew to a close, punk and new wave energy pushed rock musicians to more stripped-down sounds, and background vocalists fell out of fashion. Still, for more than a decade, African American women contributed an essential vocal element to the sound of rock. They brought rich harmonies, vocal finesse, and soulful energy to innumerable rock recordings and helped shape the sound of what we now call "classic rock."

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GARTH BROOKS, NEW COUNTRY, AND ROCK'S INFLUENCE

by Jocelyn R. Neal

“Being the youngest of six kids, my influences come from all over the board,” explained Garth Brooks. “I particularly liked James Taylor, Dan Fogelberg, Elton John, Journey, Boston, Kansas, . . . Janis Joplin, . . . Styx, and Queen.” From the reigning star of country music, such an unabashed declaration of musical pedigree was shocking. Country music had long emphasized its distinction from rock music and had placed tremendous value on singers touting traditional country music influences. But here, instead, was a bold confession of rock and pop influences, near heresy from the traditional country perspective, but music to the ears of the 1990s fan.

In the early 1990s, country music embraced Garth Brooks and a style known as New Country that infused the genre with many of the musical sounds and performance practices of stadium rock bands. The recordings featured more aggressive vocal performances, increased emphasis on drums and bass, plenty of rock-derived electric guitar solos, and more overt influences from gospel and R&B. The accompanying music videos had higher production values, globally oriented story lines, and more pop choreography. The stage shows eschewed any homespun feel, aiming instead for more spectacle and sensory experiences by employing the types of special effects including pyrotechnics that had become commonplace with the rock bands of the previous decade—Garth Brooks famously even used a rigging to fly out over the crowd during a concert in Texas Stadium. Using this formula, country music shed many of the hayseed-hick associations that had kept it marginalized from mainstream popular culture.

With this rock-influenced approach to making country music, Garth Brooks garnered unprecedented success. In 1992, his third album, *Ropin' the Wind*, landed at number one on *Billboard's* chart—the pop chart, that is, not just the country chart. And to critics' surprise, it held onto that spot through a much-anticipated release by Guns N' Roses, and then surged back to reclaim the top spot after only brief displacement by U2 and Michael Jackson. This was big news: *Rolling Stone* covered it in the magazine's “rock 'n' roll” section, declaring it a case of “David and Goliath, a pudgy country singer from Yukon, Oklahoma, had dethroned the King of Pop.”

Part of country's rise to prominence in the early 1990s was attributable to other factors, including changes in both technology and national politics. In 1991, *Billboard* began

using a company called SoundScan to track sales of music, and their new, electronically collected data revealed that country music was far more popular than the industry had previously realized when sales reporting had been subject to the musical prejudices of record store clerks. Country's popularity also got a boost from the politics of the early 1990s, a time when Middle America latched onto music that purported to represent suburban, middle-class, and working-class values and a (mostly) white identity. These were the years when America elected a Southerner as president, began paying attention to the "soccer mom" demographic in its political rhetoric, and faced an economic recession that directed sympathetic attention to the working class. Country music fit well in those larger trends.

The net result from the change in both sound and political context was that New Country gained tremendous market share, drawing audiences who had previously been self-declared rock fans. The Recording Industry Association of America's sales data, for instance, showed that in 1989 (the year of Garth Brooks's debut), rock music accounted for 41.7 percent of all music sales, and country for a mere 7.3 percent. Four years later, at the height of Brooks's prominence, rock's market share had dropped to 30.2 percent, while country had boomed to 18.7 percent. One well-supported explanation was that kids who had grown up on Boston, Journey, and Queen in the '70s and '80s were now middle-aged adults with kids and houses in suburbia, and Garth Brooks's music appealed to them far more than the contemporaneous rock.

New Country of the 1990s was not the first time that country and rock had intersected. In the mid-1950s, Elvis Presley and other early rockabilly stars emerged directly out of the country music industry and often toured and performed on country shows and with stars of the Grand Ole Opry. Many of the biggest country stars in the 1970s including Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Conway Twitty, George Jones, and Kenny Rogers had begun their careers in rock, and they retained varying degrees of that musical history throughout their careers. Other points of convergence included the music of country rockers such as the Byrds and southern rockers such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Marshall Tucker Band, most notably Charlie Daniels, whom rock fans think of as a rock musician, and whom country fans think of as a country musician. In the early 1980s, country artists including Dolly Parton, the band Alabama, and most especially Barbara Mandrell scored crossover pop hits with plenty of rock influences, continuing that same pattern.

Even George Strait, the biggest star of country music in the 1980s, confessed that he had grown up listening

to rock, notably the Beatles. But, unlike Garth Brooks, in interviews George Strait explained he had fallen in love with the music of Merle Haggard, George Jones, and Bob Wills—traditional icons of country music—and essentially left rock behind. The country music landscape that George Strait shaped in the 1980s was defined mainly by the revival of country styles from the past: western swing, Bakersfield music, the sounds of twangy honky-tonk. That "neotraditionalist" era, as it was called, was the launchpad for Garth Brooks, which made his open embrace of rock seem all the more radical.

Brooks destabilized the idea that country was distinct and different from other genres with his open acknowledgement that he was drawing from rock roots every bit as much as from George Jones and George Strait (his other two often-declared influences). By extension, Brooks's attitude suggested he knew his fans also listened to and liked more than just country music. This was a sufficiently novel idea that the press routinely commented on Brooks's habit of covering Bob Seger's "Night Moves" and the Georgia Satellites' "Keep Your Hands to Yourself" in concert. As his career evolved, Brooks continued to explore rock influences, even creating a fictional rock star named Chris Gaines, and, in 2013, releasing a career retrospective box set, *Blame It All on My Roots*, whose title was a lyric lifted from his most famous country anthem, "Friends in Low Places," but that featured two new discs of Brooks covering rock, pop, and soul numbers that he claimed as a native part of his "musical roots."

In the wake of Brooks's paradigm-shifting albums, other musicians and producers from the rock realm migrated into country music. The most influential of these was producer Robert John "Mutt" Lange, whose credentials included production for AC/DC, Def Leppard, and the Cars. Lange scored unprecedented success by injecting country diva Shania Twain's music with rock and dance-pop sensibilities, developments that further blurred the lines between country and other genres. Since 2000, plenty of other rock musicians, notably Bon Jovi, Sheryl Crow, Darius Rucker, and Robert Plant, have experimented with country recordings and, in some instances, even shifted their main musical identities to country. In more recent years, some mainstream country artists have imported hip-hop production and rapping techniques, with a few going even further and collaborating with artists across hip-hop/country lines.

All of these developments reinforce the idea that borrowing across genres is a time-honored source of innovation in all of popular music, even in musical genres such as country that espouse the importance of tradition and of remaining distinct from mainstream rock and pop. For

Garth Brooks in particular, his public avowal of rock as a major influence ironically helped him become the biggest-selling *country* artist of all time and injected country music with a boost in popularity that launched it into the center of mainstream popular culture.

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HOT PANTS MAKE YOU SURE OF YOURSELF!

by Guthrie Ramsey

“Let’s keep it real!” At face value, those words, taken from the lyrics of James Brown’s 1971 hit single “Hot Pants,” make little political or practical sense. Yet I seemed to focus in on them when, after learning of Brown’s passing on Christmas morning 2006, I decided to marinate in a CD collection of his greatest hits throughout the night. Not that the man couldn’t be lyrically profound; “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” became the anthem for social equities across the board and around the globe, yet he was equally known for good-time lyrics that simply celebrated life. But truly, it was his music—pared down ostinato bass patterns, syncopated guitars, and interlocking horn lines that worked as the mortar in the soundscape—that captivated our minds and our dancing feet. Add in a scream, a shout, or other oral nonsensical declamations like neck bones, candied yams, and a camel walk, and you have the

recipe for a funk revolution. For legions of listeners, this was how good music was supposed to be.

At times, his music made a real difference. Mid-1960s America was a kettle, and its contents were on a high boil. On the one hand, black performers were defining the very essence of American popular music, enjoying unprecedented prestige, influence, and financial rewards. But on the other hand, America was still living the nightmare of its quasi-apartheid state: many African Americans were stuck in low-paying jobs and living segregated existences in schools, churches, and neighborhoods. There was a general sense that America had come to a crossroads, and that change had better come—and soon. On April 4, 1968, when a gunshot ended the life of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, it silenced one of the most audible proponents of that change, and the kettle finally blew its top. Civil unrest swept like a tidal wave across the land: Chicago, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., all experienced the force of raw frustrations that had been simmering for years. Inner-city neighborhoods burned, businesses were destroyed, and lives were lost.

The day after King’s assassination, on April 5, James Brown was scheduled to play a concert in Boston, which city officials were threatening to cancel for fear of the type of violent outbreaks ravaging other cities. Boston had already seen hints of unrest as teenagers had roamed the streets of Roxbury that evening in protest for the slain leader. But a greater fear was that if the concert were canceled, the city could go up like tinder, and the already palpable racial tension could turn into violence. Mayor Kevin White and his advisors had to act fast. After meeting with Brown, they decided that not only would the show go on, but it would be televised as well.

The plan worked.

Although the Boston Garden's capacity was 14,000, only 2,000 loyal revelers attended, and many more could view the show at home on WGBH. The evening began with Mayor White greeting the crowd and his city, and then Brown, who had already earned the title "The Hardest Working Brother in Show Business," came on stage and gave the performance of a lifetime. He was in his most rare form that night, giving what one witness called a "million-watt performance." Existing grainy black-and-white footage shows the entertainer wooing and subduing his audience with the genius of his many talents.

It was, indeed, a spectacle. Decker out in a tailored suit, Brown's hair flipped dramatically from side-to-side, his arms, legs, and torso performed a litany of dance steps from "the James Brown" to the mashed potato and the camel walk, one of many African American social dances that mimicked the movements of animals. (Some of his protégé Michael Jackson's dance moves, in particular the "moonwalk," owed a strong debt to Brown's camel walk.) The crowd roared its approval as the band played the

smash hit "There Was a Time," and Brown chanted line after line of call-and-response with his band mates and the cheering crowd. Even when enthusiasm threatened to escalate into unruly behavior, Brown was able to get the party back on track, on the "good foot" as one of his songs suggests. This was sanctified theater, indeed.

That night, Brown showed why he was affectionately known as "The Godfather of Soul." As one of the most important American musicians of the late twentieth century, he used his considerable power to influence the country's political and civil life, not just that evening, but on many other occasions. Part preacher and teacher, part magician and shaman, that night James Brown taught America that "the funk" could cure all ills.

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THE BEATLES ON SULLIVAN

by Tim Riley

By early 1964, Beatlemania had seduced Britain and Europe, but American success was still elusive. Capitol Records had rejected “Please Please Me,” “From Me to You,” and “She Loves You,” and was about to snub “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” when manager Brian Epstein intervened. Tired of the runaround, Epstein called Capitol president Dave Dexter, who confessed he hadn’t heard these silly Beatles. Dexter agreed to listen, and quickly overruled his underlings (and his wife) in November 1963. Epstein thanked him and demanded a \$40,000 promotional campaign as he played his trump: Ed Sullivan had booked the band for three consecutive weeks in February 1964. Epstein wanted a hit record for their arrival. Dexter, who admired Epstein’s gumption as much as the prime-time booking, agreed to the purse, and the stars quickly aligned.

On February 9, 1964, alongside the Broadway cast of *Oliver!*, comedian Frank Gorshin, and Olympian Terry McDermott, the Beatles played five numbers, starting with “All My Loving,” “Till There Was You,” and their first U.S. number one, “I Want to Hold Your Hand.” For viewers, time froze: it had been seven years since Elvis Presley had graced this same stage, but it must have felt like forever for fans of rock and roll. With “She Loves You” and “I Saw Her Standing There” especially, rock and roll cracked open again—the music sounded bigger, more provocative, and more pressing than ever. In their Sullivan debut, the Beatles reframed all of rock and roll history up to that point, and hinted at a thousand enticing new directions.

The overpowering immediacy of the Beatles’ impact was a key part of their appeal, and largely ironic. What seemed fresh and spontaneous to Americans was actually a polished act of songs and quips refined throughout 1963. Stories of Britain’s peculiar Beatlemania phenomenon had trickled in via Jack Paar and Walter Cronkite—the Beatles were news fluff (“mop-tops” with “screaming girls”) even before their songs began playing on Top 40 radio over Christmas and the New Year.

Early 1964 was not, however, what many historians routinely call a “fallow” period for rock and roll. In fact, John, Paul, George, and Ringo saw themselves as participants, not saviors; the Beatles symbolized less a resurgence of rock and roll than an argument for its ongoing richness. The week “I Want to Hold Your Hand” reached number one, it ranked just above the Trashmen’s “Bird Is the Word,” and the Kingsmen’s “Louie Louie,” both absurdist juggernauts. If anything, the Beatles somehow made sense of such inanity, or at least lent it new context and bearing.

The Sullivan audience, and fans who picked up Capitol's *Meet the Beatles!* (compiled from UK singles and their second album), heard a galloping embrace of American styles, from swooning doo-wop ("This Boy") to rakish rhythm and blues ("I Saw Her Standing There," their first in Chuck Berry's "classic" mode). Alongside their Little Richard and Carl Perkins covers, they slung Motown (Barrett Strong's "Money" and Smokey Robinson's "You've Really Got a Hold on Me"), girl groups (The Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman" and the Shirelles' "Boys"), and soul that threw off giddy, intractable sparks (the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout"). The Beatles were already tinkering with the style of rock—exploiting new cracks in the sound, writing songs that implied even more than they entertained (the gigantically coy understatement of "I Want to Hold Your Hand," for example). Performing with supernatural self-confidence to the largest TV audience before or since, at least half the fun was watching the Beatles light their sonic firecrackers right in Sullivan's staid living room, his embalmed gaze acquiring the look of a catatonic Tin Pan Alley. "So you think America bounced back after the war, do ya?" their British attitude chided, while outmaneuvering the witless Yanks at their own game.

The Beatles played right into Sullivan's variety show format while transcending it. Their first number, a jaunty original ("All My Loving"), was followed by bassist Paul McCartney singing "Till There Was You," from the 1960s

Broadway hit *The Music Man*. How could a band so hip get away with such hokey sentimentality? (The arrangement, complete with flamenco acoustic guitar, was lifted off Peggy Lee's 1958 *Latin ala Lee!* album, not remotely rock and roll.) Elvis sang gooey ballads, but that was almost the only rule he didn't break. The Beatles delivered this "girly" stuff with relish, as if scribbling love notes between tossing cherry bombs.

Many had thought rock and roll was dead. Not only was it proven to be a vital, healthy style, but the Beatles abruptly redeemed it—"the biggest long-shot of all the biggest long-shots in the history of the world," says critic Richard Meltzer. That this renewal came as an import from Britain made it irresistible. It gave the Beatles their halo effect. Rock's second act began on a familiar stage with a transformational new context: these British youths, brash yet appealing, completely new yet instantly recognizable, held up an astonishing cultural mirror to Americans. Their command of rock and roll made it seem like they'd always known us, grinning strangers who had cracked our aesthetic DNA and were suddenly, inexplicably, lifelong friends.

Tim Riley, editor of the Riley Rock Index (www.rileyrockindex.com), is the author of Tell Me Why: A Beatles Commentary; Lennon: The Man, the Myth, the Music—The Definitive Life; and a contributor to NPR.



ELVIS COSTELLO ON *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*

by Mark Spicer

Live television and rock music have often worked hand in hand to provide us with some of the most defining moments in the history of popular culture. Who can forget, for example, the Beatles' performance, live from Abbey Road, of their brand-new single "All You Need Is Love" as part of the *Our World* global television spectacular on June 25, 1967? The event single-handedly ushered in the Summer of Love and introduced some 400 million viewers worldwide to the hip, new psychedelic fashions of swinging London. More recently, there was the infamous "wardrobe malfunction" at the Super Bowl half-time show on February 1, 2004, where a fleeting glimpse of Janet Jackson's bare breast during her dance routine with Justin Timberlake

sparked an outcry. It resulted in stricter censorship laws that, for better or worse, have since affected all mainstream television and radio broadcasts in the United States.

Although the viewing audience was far more selective, Elvis Costello's December 17, 1977, performance on the NBC sketch-comedy show *Saturday Night Live* surely ranks as another of these defining moments. For more than thirty-five years, *SNL* has been well known for its cutting-edge comedy and biting political satire, serving as the launching pad for many of North America's most beloved superstar comedians. (Dan Aykroyd, Eddie Murphy, Adam Sandler, and Will Ferrell, to name but a few, all began their careers as members of the "Not Ready for Prime-Time Players," as the *SNL* cast is sometimes called.) Yet the show has always been as much about popular music as comedy, regularly featuring dead-on parodies of rock musicians (such as John Belushi's and Gilda Radner's respective impersonations of Joe Cocker and Patti Smith during the show's early years) and inviting important new artists to perform as the weekly musical guest. The show often gave these artists—and the new styles they represented—their first real national exposure, much as the *Ed Sullivan Show* had done for pop and rock artists in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Such was the case with Costello's debut appearance on *SNL*, which, as it turned out, was also one of rock history's happy accidents. While punk rock was enjoying its peak in the UK in 1977, the style remained largely insular, with no British punk group able to crack the charts on the other side of the Atlantic. To capitalize on the growing buzz surrounding the new style, *SNL* producer Lorne Michaels had invited none other than the Sex Pistols—the notorious darlings of British punk—to perform on the show. But the Sex Pistols were unable to secure their work visas in

time, so Costello and his backup band the Attractions were brought in as last-minute replacements. It is customary for the musical guest on *SNL* to perform twice during the ninety-minute live broadcast, and for their first number, Elvis and the Attractions played their UK Top 20 single, the reggae-tinged “Watching the Detectives.” What transpired during their second performance, however, is now legendary: after singing only a few bars of “Less Than Zero,” Costello abruptly stopped the band, announcing “I’m sorry, ladies and gentlemen, there’s no reason to do this song here.” He then led the Attractions into a snarling rendition of his as-yet unreleased song, “Radio Radio,” written as an angry reaction against mainstream radio stations in Britain, particularly the BBC, and their practice of banning punk songs with politically charged or unpatriotic lyrics (most famously, the Sex Pistols’ “God Save the Queen”). Michaels was reportedly furious with Costello for changing the song without having first sought his approval, and he chased the band out of the studio, threatening that they would “never work on American television again.”

For many American viewers, this *SNL* performance by a gangly Buddy Holly look-alike was their first glimpse of the UK punk outrage that rock critics had been raving about for months. Although punk as a style would soon be on its way out, a whole “new wave” of British and American groups quickly emerged, following Costello’s lead in their willful and ironic appropriation of past rock styles. Costello himself, of course, would go on to become one of rock’s most eclectic and prolific chameleons, deftly changing styles from R&B to country to classical and everything in-between over the course of a remarkable career that is still going strong. Many rock fans, however, will always remember him most fondly for that moment in 1977 when he assumed the role of Britain’s punk ambassador.

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ROCK MUSICALS

Elizabeth L. Wollman

During the first half of the twentieth century, the American sheet-music industry, known as Tin Pan Alley, was a dominant force in popular culture. Because the commercial theater industry relied as heavily on sheet music as Tin Pan Alley relied on stage musicals to popularize published songs, Broadway too was far more central to American popular culture than it is today. But the ascent of rock and roll in the 1950s hastened Tin Pan Alley's speedy demise, and put Broadway on the defensive.

Traditionally, Broadway composers such as George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Richard Rodgers were quick to borrow the latest popular styles—like ragtime, jazz, and Latin styles—for use in their musicals. But rock and roll was louder and more repetitive, and it wasn't written down like other popular music was. Initially, Broadway chose to ignore rock and roll as a noisy, vulgar fad that would fade away once the teenagers listening to it matured and came to their senses.

Yet rock and roll's popularity and influence only continued to build through the 1950s, while Tin Pan Alley's steadily declined. Broadway's struggles grew too: the audiences for Broadway musicals aged, as the country's

generation gap—and the increasingly powerful youth market—grew, along with charges that the musical was an outdated, increasingly irrelevant art form. Regardless of what its creators thought of rock and roll, Broadway clearly needed to find new ways to appeal to young people.

At least initially, the interest in bringing rock and roll to Broadway was borne of necessity, not due to any respect for the new style. As a result, the earliest rock and roll numbers—in shows like the revue *The Girls Against the Boys* (1959), which featured the middle-aged performers Nancy Walker and Burt Lahr pretending to be teenagers—seemed forced and condescending. But in April 1960, Broadway's first hit musical to feature some rock and roll in its score premiered.

Bye Bye Birdie, with music and lyrics by Charles Strouse and Lee Adams, was a romantic comedy based loosely on Elvis Presley's 1958 induction into the U.S. Army. The musical avoided mean-spirited humor, instead gently mocking rock and roll-crazed teens and their confused, old-fashioned parents alike. The equal-opportunity teasing worked: the show proved popular with audiences of all ages.

Yet *Bye Bye Birdie* spawned no immediate imitations. When it opened, rock and roll was still in its infancy, and was considered too unsophisticated and unvaried to carry an entire musical. Also, theater producers were hesitant to invest in musicals that might alienate Broadway's primary audience: middle-aged adults, most of whom didn't share their children's passion for the new popular style. Rock and roll continued to be featured very rarely, and usually unsuccessfully, on Broadway through the 1960s. It was not until the end of the decade that the first commercially and critically successful musical with a score devoted entirely to contemporary popular music landed on Broadway.

Nurtured in the experimental Off Broadway realm, *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* was the inaugural production at the Public Theater downtown in 1967 before reopening on Broadway in 1968. *Hair* was written by Gerome Ragni and James Rado, two actors who were drawn to and interested in depicting the hippie lifestyle and ideology. Galt MacDermot, a composer with no theater experience who had only recently moved to New York, wrote the score for the show after he was introduced to Ragni and Rado by a mutual friend.

Featuring twice the songs of a traditional musical and a loose plot about young Claude Bukowski, who can't decide whether to go to Vietnam or burn his draft card and stay with his hippie friends, *Hair* was a critical and commercial smash. While *Hair* proved that rock and roll could, in fact, carry a musical, it is important to note that by the time it reached Broadway, rock and roll had become more varied and sophisticated; an array of styles are woven into *Hair's* score, from the soul-infused "Aquarius," to the Motown-inspired "Black Boys/White Boys," to the free-form jam of "Walking in Space," to the psychedelic "Be-In."

By the late 1960s, rock and theater had begun to influence one another, not only on Broadway and in increasingly theatrical rock concerts, but also on records. After the 1967 release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, concept albums—which featured songs that were thematically, stylistically, or narratively unified—became popular. Those concept albums attempting to develop characters and narratives became known as "rock operas." The Who's 1969 double-LP *Tommy* is often cited as the first rock opera, but Broadway showed more initial interest in *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970). A concept album about the last days of Jesus Christ that was written by the young songwriting team of Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Tim Rice, *Superstar* debuted on Broadway in 1971. (*Tommy* wouldn't make it to Broadway until 1993.)

Eager to capitalize on the success of *Hair* and *Superstar*, Broadway hosted a number of rock musicals during the early 1970s, but none was nearly as successful. A string of commercial disappointments convinced theater producers that rock musicals had been a passing fad.

By the close of the decade, Broadway had moved on to something new: "megamusicals." These big, spectacle-laden shows, many of which were imported from the West End in London (and quite a few of which were written by Andrew Lloyd-Webber), dominated Broadway through the 1980s. While some megamusicals—like *Evita* (1979), *Cats* (1982), and *Miss Saigon* (1991)—reflected contemporary pop music in their scores, none of them was as reliant on rock music as was *Hair* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

The 1990s saw a return of the Broadway rock musical as composers raised on both rock and roll and musical theater fare began to write scores that reflected a deep understanding of an ever-widening variety of music styles. Jonathan Larson's *Rent* (1996), about East Village squatters, premiered Off Broadway in 1996 before moving to Broadway following his untimely death. The show's success helped reboot an interest in rock musicals. *Rent* was followed by John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask's Off Broadway hit *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, in 1998. Through the early 2000s, enough rock musicals appeared on and off Broadway to prove that this time, they were no passing fad, but a reflection of the influence that rock and roll has had on a new generation of young American composers. Musicals like *Spring Awakening* (2006), *Next to Normal* (2008), *Passing Strange* (2008), *In the Heights* (2008), *Here Lies Love* (2013), and *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* (2013) have been plentiful on and off Broadway. So have "jukebox musicals" that focus on specific genres or bands, like the ABBA musical *Mamma Mia!* (2001) or the 1980s hair-metal influenced *Rock of Ages* (2009). These shows, and many others, reflect a wide variety of topics, and borrow from contemporary music styles ranging from punk to indie-pop to metal and rap. At this point, not only rock and roll is here to stay. The rock musical is too.

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ELVIS PRESLEY'S VISUAL APPEAL

by Albin Zak

From the very beginning, rock and roll has been defined by both its sound and its look. Between 1955 and 1957, rock erupted on the world stage with widespread radio exposure, mass distribution of records and images seen by millions on television and in films. On its initial release in 1954, Bill Haley's "(We're Gonna) Rock around the Clock" barely made the *Billboard* charts, fading after a single week. But the following year, when it was used as part of the soundtrack to *Blackboard Jungle*, it became one of the best-selling singles of all time. The film gave visual form to the record's sonic barrage, and young audiences responded as if to a call. Now the record's disembodied sounds were linked to specific images confirming and heightening rock and roll's association with youthful rebellion. And although the song played only over the opening credits, the film's

images somehow mingled in the public consciousness with the sound of rock and roll.

Teenagers' favorite DJ, Alan Freed, also brought rock and roll into film, capitalizing on his celebrity by starring in such films as *Rock around the Clock* (1956), *Rock, Rock, Rock* (1956), *Don't Knock the Rock* (1956), and *Mr. Rock and Roll* (1957). These films had little in the way of plot or characters, but in presenting performances by stars of the day—including Haley, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers—they provided mass exposure to the sounds and images of the new pop idols. To the consternation of many critics, those pictures included an unprecedented concentration of black faces.

Elvis Presley was especially suited to the visual medium. With good looks, sex appeal, and an electrifying performance style, his television appearances thrust him onto the national stage, linking his musical energy to a visual spectacle. He set off a firestorm of both adulation and scorn, depending largely on the age of the viewer. When audiences saw his hip gyrations, leg shakes, and lip curls—his seemingly reckless physical abandon—the responses were almost immediate. No mainstream pop singers made these moves, which many critics considered aggressive and even dangerous in their overt sexuality. Once again, the music was associated with specific images that became identifying markers. Presley's style invoked familiar rock and roll themes—the rebellious outsider persona typified by his favorite actor, James Dean; a repertoire and performance style drawing heavily on the music of black performers; and a powerful sexual presence. This explosive package was apparent to those who had seen

him perform live, but television would bring it to a huge nationwide audience.

Following the release of his first Sun recording on July 19, 1954, Presley was known primarily in the South, where he played dozens of one-nighters in venues from Florida to Texas. His biggest media stage was provided by radio, when he performed on the *Louisiana Hayride* or the *Grand Ole Opry*. In 1955, his three hit records showed up only on the country charts. But in January 1956, after leaving Sun and signing with RCA and Parker, Presley appeared on television in a series of four weekly performances on *Stage Show*, a variety show hosted by Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey. His first appearance was on January 28, the day after RCA released the single “Heartbreak Hotel.”

Stage Show had poor ratings, and at first relatively few people saw Elvis’s performances. At his first show, the theater audience was sparse; the promoter recalled being “unable even to give away” the dozens of leftover tickets. Publicity mentioning a “special guest” on the show referred not to Presley but to the famous DJ Bill Randle, who was brought in to introduce the young singer. But unlike any of Presley’s previous shows, this one reached a nationwide audience. If it was small by television standards, it was still the largest stage he had yet played. Most importantly, it linked the musical and visual sides of the Presley persona. In the following weeks, Presley’s fame increased with astonishing speed. “Heartbreak Hotel” began to sell more than any of his previous records; it not only put him on the pop chart but also rose all the way to number one. In turn, he

was signed for two further Dorsey shows. Following his six appearances on *Stage Show* in the space of two months, he appeared twice on *The Milton Berle Show* and twice on *The Steve Allen Show*, and signed a three-show deal for Ed Sullivan’s *Toast of the Town*.

Presley’s appearances on television attracted widespread criticism in the press, most of it aimed at his look and style. One commentator summed up the general unease: “Where do you go from Elvis Presley, short of obscenity—which is against the law?” But the criticism only sharpened the generational divide, and his popularity with young people meant Presley’s rise was unstoppable. Seven months before his first Sullivan performance on September 9, he had earned \$1,250 for his *Stage Show* appearance. For the three Sullivan shows, he was paid \$50,000. By January 1957, Presley was the biggest singing star in America, and *Love Me Tender*, his first film, was playing nationwide. In less than a year of mass media exposure, he went from regional hillbilly star to worldwide rock and roll icon.

Albin J. Zak III (SUNY Albany College of Arts and Sciences) is the author of The Velvet Underground Companion (Schirmer Books), The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records (University of California Press), and I Don’t Sound Like Nobody: Remaking Music in 1950s America (University of Michigan Press). He is also a songwriter and record producer.

What's That Sound. The Dolly Rocker Movement. 3:41. What's That Sound (For What It's Worth). Art. 2:50. What's That Sound (Live Mashup).(AGRMusic). Throttle. 2:58. What's That Sound. Cplus. 3:56. What's That Sound. VCL & Pawlowski. 5:48. What's That Sound. Keith Cole. 3:31. What's That Sound. The Jimmies. 2:15. What's That Sound. What's That Sound? is the third studio album by American music artist Haley Reinhart, released on September 22, 2017 by Concord Records, and produced by Reinhart and John Burk. An homage to music from the late 1960s, it features fourteen tracks on the standard release, with two bonus tracks on the Target exclusive edition. Lead single "Baby It's You" was released June 16, 2017, followed by "For What It's Worth" on August 11, 2017 and "Let's Start" on September 15, 2017. "The Letter" was also released Listen to What's That Sound | SoundCloud is an audio platform that lets you listen to what you love and share the sounds you create.. Melbourne. 1 Tracks. 116 Followers. Stream Tracks and Playlists from What's That Sound on your desktop or mobile device.