

‘Things They Do Look Awful Cool:’ Ageing Rock Icons and Contemporary Youth
Audiences

Abstract: This article addresses the continuing appeal of ageing rock icons, for example, Pink Floyd, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page, for contemporary youth audiences. The article argues that much of the attraction of such artists for young audiences stems from the way in which they are used to position the development – and cultural resonance – of a late twentieth century rock history (of which young fans have no direct memory or experience). In examining this contention, the article considers the significance of issues such as the relevance of late 1960s and early 1970s rock music in parent-child relationships, the function of visual media in the historical representation of rock icons in the ‘post-digital’ age, the significance of classic album and tribute band performances in portraying ‘freeze-frame’ fashion the work of ageing rock icons, and the function of ‘classic rock’ as the signature tune of a golden age.

Keywords: youth; rock; ageing; audience; culture.

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Introduction: Whose music? Whose Youth?

Among the many rock music artists who enjoy critical acclaim and commercial success are a number whose careers date back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although many of these veteran rock artists continue to write and record new material, in many cases they are primarily revered because of music they released over thirty years ago. While a substantial proportion of the audience for such artists are original fans (now in their late forties and fifties), new, younger fans are also

attracted to such artists and their music. This article takes the form of a speculative essay offering some possible reasons as to why young audiences are drawn to ageing rock icons such as former Led Zeppelin members Robert Plant and Jimmy Page, or progressive rock group Pink Floyd.

The article begins by addressing some common interpretations of the cultural relationship between music and youth and suggests that, given the increasing trend among contemporary youth for re-discovering and appropriating the music of previous generations, such interpretations may warrant some critical revision. The article then turns to a consideration of the processes whereby youth gain knowledge about and access to late 1960s and 1970s rock music. This begins with an examination of the role of music as a form of inter-generational discourse and communication, notably the sharing and discussion of musical tastes between parents and children. The following section considers the role played by media technologies, notably MTV, CD re-issues and, more recently, MP3 and the internet, in the representation of what is increasingly termed “classic rock” to young audiences.

In a similar vein, it is subsequently suggested, tribute bands and the more recent trend for on-stage, recital-style reproductions of “classic albums” (including a number of late 1960s and 1970s rock albums) has provided its own impetus for youth to rediscover the rock music of the late 1960s and 1970s. It will also be considered how the endorsement by current rock artists, for example, Australian group Wolfmother, of 1970s rock icons, such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and AC/DC, has had an impact on younger audiences who come to view these groups as having provided the master narrative of rock, thus setting important benchmarks of artistry and authenticity. The final section of the article considers how the nostalgic qualities generated by late 1960s and 1970s rock, for example, through its positioning

in classic gold radio play formats, its inclusion in “period” films such as *Dazed and Confused*, and even the imagery contained in rock lyrics, album covers and other associated visual artifacts, may function to represent the recent past as a golden age with rock as its signature tune.

Youth, Music and Rock Icons

The emergence of popular music studies during the early 1980s placed considerable emphasis on the cultural significance of popular music for youth audiences. This took both the form of broad historical investigations (in a post-Second World War context), as seen, for example, in Chambers’s (1985) compelling book *Urban Rhythms* and studies of more contemporary musical genres such as heavy metal (Straw, 1990) and rap (Brake, 1985). As popular music studies developed, the range of music genres and their significance for youth audiences has expanded considerably, covering, for example, electronic dance music (Malbon, 1999), hardcore (Tsitsos, 1999) and straightedge (Haenfler, 2006). If rock music has been considered the soundtrack of youth (Frith, 1983), then the rock icons of particular eras – Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin, have been considered the spokespeople of the youth generations to whom they performed. To a large extent, this observed cultural relationship is judged to emerge from an “organic” affinity that is perceived to exist between rock icons and their youth audience. Thus, according to Plasketes and Plasketes, throughout the period of post-Second World War popular music history, rock and roll culture has rested upon a premise “that [its] stars [have] not be[en] imposed from above but ha[ve] sprung up from similar ranks as the audience” (1987, p. 30). Similarly, the fact these rock icons were rejected by the parent culture, who were often repulsed by their appearance, mannerism and music, made them all the more appealing to youth audiences (Shumway, 1992; Sturma,

1992). Such discourses of affinity between performer and audience lasted well into the 1970s, even as it became increasingly clear with the corporatisation of rock that the gulf between the more successful popular music artists and their youth audience was widening - this being an important antecedent for the rise of punk at the end of the decade (see Laing, 1985).

Some thirty years later, the cultural terrain of rock and pop is rather different. Most significantly, rock and pop can no longer be justifiably described as the exclusive property of youth; on the contrary, successive generations now claim cultural ownership of particular popular music genres. Even musics such as punk and rap, once clearly demarcated as “youth” musics, now attract multi-generational audiences (Bennett, 2006; Bennett, forthcoming). At the same time, with the emergence of new technologies opportunities for accessing music have increased manifold with the effect that music’s positioning in the everyday soundscape of the listener has altered significantly since the pre-digital age. This change, combined with a variety of other factors that will presently be explored, has arguably transformed the way in which individuals “experience” music. In a way that exhibits decidedly postmodern traits, listeners today absorb sounds and rhythms into their bodies, are emotionally moved by the hooks or poetical and political statements in song lyrics, and marvel at the visual images of the performers (some long since deceased) with no direct experience of the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which the music they are consuming emerged or the then topical issues that this music often engaged with.

The notion of a popular music style being consumed beyond the specific temporal context of its making and heard by “new” audiences has seldom been a concern in popular music studies. Yet there are clearly important issues to be considered here, not least of all in relation to the ways in which new audiences make

sense of old rock texts given their temporal distance from the cultural context that was deemed so important to an appreciation of the significance of rock in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Frith, 1981). For contemporary young fans of late 1960s and early 1970s rock, their understanding and appreciation of this music is not connected with any direct experience of the rock milieu that characterised this era – the larger than life stadium rock performances of artists such as Led Zeppelin, or the perception (left over from the late 1960s) of rock as a political discourse that served to challenge the technocracy of western capitalism (Roszak, 1969) and the injustice of the Vietnam War (Snowman, 1984). In other words, none of the factors once deemed crucial to the bonding of the young audience with the equally young rock icons from which they drew inspiration, can be straightforwardly applied in the case of today's young fans who are drawn to the music of late 1960s and early 1970s rock artists such as Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. Such fans are viewing and appreciating these rock icons through a specifically altered lens.¹

Rock Culture, Rock Parents

As noted above, many of the music movements – such as rock, punk, rap and even dance – that once critically marked out the cultural territory of youth are increasingly multi-generational. Those who spent their youth as hippies, punks, ravers and so on now have children – and in many cases – grandchildren of their own. As such, instances of musical taste being handed down from parents to children is increasingly common. In her ground-breaking study of local-music making in Liverpool, UK, Cohen (1991) observed that a number of those young musicians interviewed during the course of her research had grown up listening to their parents' record collection and been influenced by this experience in their subsequent musical endeavours. Similarly, during the mid-1990s, Bennett conducted an ethnographic

study of a Pink Floyd tribute band from Newcastle upon Tyne in north-east England. Although, with one exception, the members of the group were all in their late teens and early twenties, they shared a similar passion for the music of Pink Floyd as those older fans for whom they regularly performed in pubs and small clubs around Newcastle and the wider North East region. Interviews with members of the band revealed that several of them had been introduced to Pink Floyd very early in life by parents and older siblings who played Pink Floyd records in the family home. Thus, as the band's drummer explained: "I've been brought up with [Pink Floyd] me . . . mi' brother's always loved 'em since being a young lad and I've always liked 'em from being a young lad" (Bennett, 2000, p. 180). This notion of being "brought up" with a particular band or genre of music is significant in that it provides an avenue for understanding the acquisition of musical taste through familial bonds and shared family experience, the latter adding a new layer of significance to the emotive and nostalgic qualities that Frith (1987), De Nora (2000) and others have associated with the social meaning of popular music.

In a more recent study, Vrooman (2004) has noted how the music collection of a parent or parents might also appeal to a child because of its aesthetic qualities. Thus, for example, a collection of vinyl LPs with original gatefold album sleeves may be regarded as something by children who view such items as historical artifacts from a by-gone age. This might be particularly significant in the case of late 1960s and 1970s rock artists whose albums were often very elaborately packaged and characterised by visually striking artwork. Moreover, it has often been noted how the appearance, feel and texture of original vinyl albums generates a more aesthetically nuanced relationship between records and their owners (Hayes, 2006). In this respect, parents' accounts of going record shopping to buy new releases, casting eyes on them in the

record shop, and listening to them for the first time may evoke their own magic when recounted to children and infuse musical texts with new forms of highly personalised symbolism. This is effectively illustrated in Peter Smith's (2004) *Two of us*, an autobiographical account of a father's sharing of his interest in Beatles' music with his son. As Smith illustrates, integral to the musicalised dialogue that developed between he and his son was a discussion about the sleeves of Beatles' records that Smith had acquired during his teens.

Rock in the Post-Digital Era

Changes in the media dissemination of rock and the aesthetic discourses underpinning this have also arguably had an impact on the way in which old rock texts are viewed by new youth audiences. During the late 1960s and 1970s the live spectacle of rock was considered a crucially important aspect of the rock experience. Although, as Moore (1993) observes, rock albums provided audiences with the primary text through which to appreciate the "artistry" of rock groups such as Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Deep Purple, it was on the stage (and more specifically in the stadium) where such artists could be optimally experienced; large amplification systems and ambitious light shows produced new dynamics in sound and visual presentation that made rock music a primarily "live" experience. In this context, rock films such as Led Zeppelin's *The Song Remains the Same* were considered something of a revelation, attempting as they did to commit the energy and spectacularity of live performance to celluloid. Indeed, audiences were typically divided in their response to such efforts to bring rock performance to the big screen, with many claiming that filmic representations could never capture the atmosphere and energy of the live spectacle and were thus an irrelevance.

With the dawn of the video age, dramatically inaugurated in late 1975 with the release of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" and consolidated six years later with the launch of MTV (Frith, 1988), audience understandings and perceptions of rock as a mediated spectacle began to change (Kaplan, 1987). By the mid-1980s, videos had become equal in importance to album releases as a means of promoting artists and their music. Moreover, by this time a number of rock groups that originated in the late 1960s and early 1970s had either disbanded or were in state of temporary hiatus as various group members pursued solo projects or engaged in legal wranglings over royalty rights, ownership of band names and so on. During this period rock video became a primary text in itself as audiences, too young to have experienced live performances by major rock acts of the late 1960s and early 1970s, were introduced to these artists via the new medium of music television and / or privately owned videos. More pertinently, however, it could be argued that the video experience of rock was also instructive from the point of view of young audiences in terms of their understanding of rock's genealogy. Kaplan (1987) has suggested that the effect of MTV has been to de-historicize rock and pop by programming video performances from different eras and genres side by side. Equally, however, it could be argued that for youth audiences, who, as Frith (1988) notes, are more prone than the adult generation to watching MTV and subsequent copy-cat channels, such programmes became a valuable resource in terms of learning about the development of rock and evaluating the merits of particular performers. Similarly, 'rockumentary-style' films featured on such channels may be argued to have provided young people with important glimpses into the cultural and political climate of the late 20th century. A clear case in point here is *Woodstock: The Movie* which, although heavily edited (see Bell, 1999; Bennett, 2004), nevertheless serves as an important historical document of

the origins of the rock festival and the significance of the latter as a platform for political commentary. Relating this to their own generational milieu, young people may see palpable connections between the Woodstock festival and more contemporary events such as Live Aid and G8 (which respectively featured reunion performances by Led Zeppelin and the classic Pink Floyd line up with Roger Waters) and the 2007 Live Earth concerts.

The development of digital recording and the introduction of the CD (compact disc) in the mid-1980s has also arguably played a significant part in acquainting young audiences with the music of rock icons from the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the beginning of the CD era, much of the material released on this new digital format comprised remastered albums originally released during the late 1960s and 1970s on vinyl. Although targeted primarily at the more affluent 25 to 45 year old age group (Savage, 1990), the “re-availability” of such music on this new, state-of-the-art, user-friendly sound carrying format has also proved highly appealing to younger audiences (Hayes, 2006). The new dynamics in recorded sound offered by the CD has undoubtedly had important ramifications for the way in which rock music initially released in the late 1960 and 1970s is heard and understood by successive generations of youth audiences. CD both “freezes” sound in its pristine state whilst at the same time bringing out the particular contingencies and peculiarities of sound recording that helped to frame certain rock albums as historical documents, situated in particular contexts of time, place, technology and creative license.

More significant still, in the context of the current discussion, is the CD re-issue’s part in initiating what could be termed the “heritage” discourse of rock. Re-issues of what have come to be considered *classic* rock albums, especially special anniversary editions, often include liner notes and / or accompanying booklets

compiled by rock “authorities” such as music critics and studio producers, that detail aspects of an album’s production, provide an assessment of individual songs and offer accounts as to why an album is judged to be a landmark recording. In the context of rock, the vast majority of albums that become the subject of such heritage discourse date back to the 1970s (this being the decade in which, due to breakthroughs in recording technology, rock groups began to take full advantage of the studio as a creative space, see Zak, 2001). The packaging and representation of particular CD re-issues as landmark recordings in this way could also be argued to play a significant part in the way that young audiences come to experience and understand the significance of 1970s rock. Rather like the young classical music or jazz fan, the young rock fan is being provided with a ready-made canon of music – a series of past-masters whose music is to be taken “seriously” and regarded as the best of its kind.²

Frith (1996) has suggested that as canonical discourses of rock and other post-1955 popular musics harden and become an accepted part of the way in that popular music is listened to and appreciated, the once rigidly defended high / pop culture division becomes increasingly blurred, with the most critically revered examples of rock and pop acquiring their own quasi-high cultural status. In the case of contemporary young music fans, whose knowledge and understanding of rock has been acquired primarily through the lens of heritage and canonical discourses of rock, a tendency towards, what could be termed “rock elitism” may be all the more apparent. For these fans, the perceived mastery of artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Roger Waters, goes beyond the quasi-elitism of the late 1960s / early 1970s rock counter-culture for which the superiority of rock as a musical form was grounded in a rock-pop distinction (propped up by the music journalism of the day) that regarded rock as art while dismissing chart-orientated ‘pop’ music as commercially derived ephemera

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(Frith & Horne, 1987). By contrast, the heritage discourse of rock enshrines particular rock musicians of the late 1960s and early 1970s not merely as sub- or counter-cultural icons, but as key contributors to the essential character of late twentieth century culture per se and an integral aspect of the way in which this era of history is to be remembered, represented and celebrated. In this sense, the heritage rock discourse could be argued to counter, at least to some degree, the concerns of a number of observers that the canonisation of rock simply serves to normalise it as a musical genre. To be sure, those consuming late 1960s and early 1970s rock in contemporary context are removed from the cultural and political terrains of the original rock era. That said, this may to some extent advantage young audiences for 'classic' rock in that they are able to reassess the rock project with a critical distance that allows for a more informed picture of the genre's achievements and shortcomings. Thus, while particular artists from the original rock era are enthusiastically patronised by younger audiences, there is at the same time a critical understanding of rock's undeniably excessive, boastful, machismo stance (Frith & McRobbie, 1990). The cult status of Rob Reiner's (1983) spoof rockumentary *This Is Spinal Tap* and the more recent success of British group The Darkness are clear cases in point. The appeal of such ironic representations of heavy metal excess is testimony to a critical listening and viewing ability among young audiences that deconstructs many of rock's larger than life claims concerning the superiority (artistically and sexually) of its largely, male, white, heterosexual artists.

For young fans, the heritage discourse surrounding many seventies rock icons is further upheld by the endorsement of such icons and their music by contemporary exponents of what has come to be termed "retro-rock". For example, the musical influences of Australian rock trio Wolfmother are rooted in late 1960s and 1970s rock

music of artists such as the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and AC/DC and the band are outspoken in their championing of this era of rock. Similarly, California-based group Dream Theater, leading exponents of the progressive rock – heavy metal fusion referred to as progressive-metal, display a range of 1970s rock influences in their music including Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and overtones of Canadian band Rush's progressive rock phase during the late 1970s (as heard on the albums *2112* (1976), *A Farewell To Kings* (1977) and *Hemispheres* (1978)). In other cases, such endorsements by contemporary rock acts of their 1970s influences has given rise to celebrated creative liaisons between artist and mentor. For example, in late 1999 US rock band the Black Crowes, whose key musical influences include Led Zeppelin, undertook a US mini-tour with former Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page, performing a number of Led Zeppelin songs. The presence of three guitarists on stage, Page himself plus the two regular guitar players from the Black Crowes, facilitated an accurate reproduction – for perhaps the first time in a live concert setting – of many of the complex layers of guitar overdubs and multi-tracked parts created by Page on the original Led Zeppelin studio albums.

Equally important in endearing this particular rock spectacle to a youth audience was the marketing of the music recorded during the tour. Initially the concert recordings were available only on the internet via Musicmaker.com, a company specialising in the then relatively new and novel medium of downloadable music. Although given the title “Live at the Greek” (the music having been recorded during two performances at Los Angeles's Greek Theater), there was no generic live album as such. Rather, those purchasing the music online were invited to pick the songs they wanted and to state a preferred song sequence – thus creating their own customised album (In Music We Trust, 2006). In taking this step, Page and the Black Crowes

crossed over into a significant new cultural / commercial territory, one populated chiefly by young consumers whose technological know-how and post-Fordist³ sensibilities of music consumption predisposed them to the new freedom, flexibility and choice offered by the emergent sphere of downloadable music.

Tributes, Recitals and the New “Classical” Era of Rock

Another factor that appears to play a significant part in endearing younger fans to rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s is the highly popular and ever-expanding tribute band phenomenon. The precise origins of the tribute band concept are uncertain, although early examples include British-based tribute bands the Counterfeit Stones (formed in 1979) and the Bootleg Beatles (formed in 1980) and Australian Abba tribute band Björn Again (formed in 1988) (Homan, 2006). Tribute bands are now an integral aspect of popular music performance across the globe with some of the most established tribute bands, including those referred to above, attracting sizeable audiences wherever they perform (Bennett, 2006). As Bennett observed, much of the appeal of tribute bands revolves around their endeavour to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, the sound – and in many cases visual image – of the tributed act:

In some cases this involves seeking out vintage guitars, amplifiers and electronic effects, or having them specially built in order to capture the ‘authentic’ sound of the tributed act. Moreover, in many cases individual members of tribute bands attempt to emulate as closely as possible the image and persona of the musician they are portraying. Where a tributed act has a prominent front-person, the individual assuming this role will work particularly hard to ‘be’ that person, often perfecting his / her on-stage posturing, and in many cases popular on-stage phrases, the latter being learned

verbatim by repeated listenings to live albums and / or viewings of film and documentary footage of the tributed act. (2006, p. 20).

Such discourses of authenticity resonate particularly well with the consumption sensibilities young rock fans, who have become used to reading the recorded artifacts of rock and the images of rock icons captured in vintage performance archive as a primary text (Moore, 1993). While older, original fans of the tributed act will often apply a nostalgic reading to the tribute band performance, in which possible lapses in the tribute band's aural reproduction of the tributed act may be off-set by the simulated spectacle of live performances ingrained in the memory of their youth, for younger fans, it is the text itself – or rather the tribute band's studied rendition of it – that forms the key fascination. Evidence of this comes from the author's own attendance at performances by tribute bands such as the Bootleg Beatles and the Counterfeit Stones where, more often than not, it is teenage members of the audience who are seen to pay most attention to detail in terms of how the musical minutiae – the drum fill, the flourish at the end of a guitar solo, the vocal harmony half buried in the mix of the original recording – is replicated.

In relation to the tribute spectacle, it is also worth noting that many ageing rock bands are increasingly turning to the art of self-tribute. A notable example in this respect are US hard rock group Kiss who in recent years have revived their classic 1970s image, characterised by elaborate stage costumes and impressive pyrotechnic displays, in an effort to recreate what many fans now consider the most innovative and spectacular period of the group's career. Another example of ageing rock icons utilising an element of self-tribute are the Rolling Stones whose more recent world tours have seen them relying heavily on material they first released on record during the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, UK twelve bar boogie band Status Quo's regular UK

and world tours feature a standard set of “greatest hits,” the same being true in the case of the more sporadic tours undertaken by US band the Eagles. With these and other veteran rock groups, audiences are invariably made up of people of varying ages, with parents regularly taking their children along with them to concerts. Even in the case of new music released by ageing rock icons, the quality of the material is routinely evaluated through comparisons with material released in many cases over thirty years ago. Such was the nature of the critical acclaim that greeted Paul McCartney’s 1997 album *Flaming Pie*, with many critics citing it as McCartney’s best solo work since his first post-Beatles album *McCartney* (1970). Similar acclaim greeted the release in 2005 of former Led Zeppelin vocalist Robert Plant’s new album *Mighty Rearranger*. Many of the tracks featured on the album contained self-evident references to the work of Led Zeppelin, while the tour to promote the album included re-worked versions of Led Zeppelin songs such as “When the Levee Breaks” (originally released in 1971 on the album *Led Zeppelin IV*).⁴

In recent years, the tribute band phenomenon has been augmented by a new form of rock tribute – the “classic album recital.” As the term recital suggests, this involves the on-stage re-production, in a cut-for-cut, note-for-note fashion, of albums (and primarily rock albums of the late 1960s and 1970s) that have become critically revered as landmark recordings. There are quintessential differences between the classic album recital and tribute band concert, the former being grounded in a quasi-classical music discourse that squarely dictates the mode and conventions of performance. Eschewing the visual appearance of the artist(s) concerned, and other technical aspects such as group line up, and stage-set etc. – the classic album recital format centres purely upon achieving a “faithful” reproduction of a given album, selecting the best possible musicians and hiring as many players as necessary to re-

create the *authentic* sound of the album in a live context. The “classic album” recital concept is something of a departure from the way in which the album has conventionally been perceived by rock musicians and their audiences. With notable exceptions, primarily in the sphere of progressive rock, albums have not been perceived as “texts” to be accurately re-produced in a live setting. On the contrary, much of the rationale behind the making of albums, at least since the early 1970s, has been to surpass the limits of live performance by taking advantage of studio technology such as multi-tracking, special effects and mixing facilities to expand the creative palette and compositional possibilities of the rock band (Zak, 2001). In the context of a live performance, a rock band would generally select songs from their entire recording career, mixing new songs with older songs and routinely segueing tracks for effect in the concert hall situation. That rock bands were often unable to reproduce songs in live performance exactly as they could be heard on an album was regarded as being of little consequence. Indeed, the fact that live versions of songs were often different from their studio equivalents came to be regarded, by musicians and audiences alike, as an aspect of musical mastery in itself, thus enhancing the discourse of ‘authenticity’ through which an attachment to and preference for rock was commonly articulated.

The “classic album” recital reverses this established trend in rock by recasting the album as a text to be faithfully reproduced in a live context and appreciated accordingly.⁵ As such, the recital format adds a veneer of “high art” to rock albums (albeit on a highly select basis). In a way akin to the consumption of live opera, ballet, and classical music, the classic album recital demands that audiences appreciate a body of music in its entirety as a work of art and that the musicians performing on stage are appreciated primarily in terms of their skill in recreating the music precisely

as it appears on record - the latter being regarded as a document of the original author's creative intent. As with tribute band performances, classic album recitals are proving to be a major attraction for people of all ages including those in their late teens and early twenties. Again, through their exposure to rock in such a performance context, contemporary young people garner a quite different experience to older audience members who first experienced rock in a counter-cultural context during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Here again, however, it is important to bear in mind that what young audience members take away from such performances may not, in every case, be merely an appreciation of the music. Rather, in some instances attending a classic album recital may generate a desire on the part of young fans to learn more about the cultural context of the music, this leading to a more critical awareness of rock's place in a key moment of social and cultural change during the late 20th century. Or, at the very least, such an appreciation of rock may help young people better understand the how the cultural and political legacies of rock have worked their way into contemporary festival culture and the causes that are often promoted and / or supported therein.

Signature Tune of a Golden Age?

Significant shifts in socio-economic context since the early 1980s may be another contributing factor to youth's cultural investment in the rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In his instructive piece on the North American heavy metal scene of the early 1980s, Straw (1990) suggests that the heavy metal fan-base comprised largely of white, blue collar suburban youth whose life chances, economically speaking, were significantly less than those that had been enjoyed by their parents' generation a decade earlier. Post-industrialisation, economic instability and increasing risk and uncertainty (Beck, 1992) have added to, and exacerbated, this

picture of socio-economic change since the early 1970s. Indeed, a number of writers have suggested that one reason for the appeal of thrash and other forms of what is termed 'extreme metal' among sections of contemporary youth is its engagement with issues of fear, insecurity, and hopelessness experienced by young audiences for this music (see Weinstein, 1994; Kotarba, 1994; Berger, 1999). Thus, according to Weinstein:

The sense of impending doom, ecological, economic, political, educational, and social, has replaced a sense of progress and of hope for a future world that is better than the current state of affairs. Much of the distinctively youth-based music, especially thrash metal, cogently and emotionally articulates this view (1994, p. 81).

Significantly, however, little empirical research exists to support such claims concerning the resonance between extreme metal lyrics and imagery and the sensibilities of contemporary youth. Similarly, it is not all clear how accepting of such messages and their implications young people actually are. Indeed, one reason for young people's attraction to "classic" rock, and to the ageing rock bands who continue to perform it, may be its significance as an alternative to the darker, more menacing timbres and apocalyptic address of extreme metal. In this way, rock music, and particularly that recorded during the 1970s, may be regarded as the signature tune of a "golden age" (Pearson, 1983). If the lyrics of late 1960s artists such as The Doors and Jimi Hendrix often recorded the volatile political and cultural sentiments of the time, the lyrical content of 1970s rock songs are notably devoid of such references, despite the often equally volatile events occurring in that decade. Instead, classic 1970s rock tracks such as Led Zeppelin's (1971) "Stairway to Heaven" and Deep Purple's (1970) "Child in Time" evoked a new rock poetry, rich in abstract imagery,

that also fed through into the work of progressive rock artists such as Yes and Genesis. Even in the case of 1970s rock groups such as Pink Floyd, whose primary lyricist Roger Waters wrote with a more socially conscious, often cynical and satirical intent, the anguish expressed in Waters's lyrics was to some degree off-set by the ambient and transcendent qualities characteristically present in the group's music.

Visually too, 1970s rock music often traded on abstract and metaphysical imagery. For example, Led Zeppelin's (1976) concert film *The Song Remains the Same* intercuts live performance from the group's three Madison Square Garden performances in July 1973 with fantasy sequences in which members of the group act out roles that in some cases reflect Tolkienesque and other-worldly influences. Similarly, sleeve designs for albums such as Led Zeppelin's *Led Zeppelin IV* (also referred to as *Four Sticks*) and *Houses of the Holy*, and Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* contain references to mysticism, space travel, paganism and ancient civilisations. Taken as a whole, such imagery reflects elements of mysticism and surrealism (carried over from the psychedelic era of the mid-1960s) that may provide an alternative, from the point of view of younger audiences, to the darker and more fatalistic imagery present in contemporary rock album designs, videos and song lyrics.

All of this is, of course, not to suggest that youth audiences for late 1960s and early 1970s rock and contemporary rock / metal are entirely separate entities. It seems clear that many young rock / metal fans have an appreciation of this music that spans the decades from the rock and metal's origins in the late 1960s to the present. It is also true to say that many young people who acquire a taste for contemporary rock / metal progress to listening to older rock styles as they enter their late teens and early twenties. However, this only serves to reinforce the point that studies of contemporary rock / metal which cite a resonance between the social messages in this music and the

social sensibilities of youth overlook both the plurality of contemporary youth cultural groupings and the fact that the latter's social sensibilities may, in fact, be drawn from a far broader palate of musical and attendant popular cultural references.

The lyrical and visual imagery associated with a number of 1970s rock bands may also contribute to what could be termed a "received" nostalgia on the part of contemporary youth whereby the decade is perceived as a period of optimism, hope and expansive horizons – all of which have been steadily eroded by the socio-economic decline that has been a feature of subsequent decades. Youth films set in the 1970s, notably Richard Linklater's (1993) *Dazed and Confused* (this title having been borrowed from a track on Led Zeppelin's eponymously titled debut album released in 1968) arguably add to this picture through their portrayal of youth in the mid-1970s as characterised by playful innocence.⁶ As Hunt has suggested: "It may be many young people in the West now feel that they are in a kind of 'no-man's' land, as a result of discontinuity and disruption, without even the support of a rite of passage" (2005, p. 124-5). Given this situation, film and other media that appear to represent a previous generation of youth existing in its own cultural space – and collectively enjoying access to the rite of passage associated with this – may seem all the more desirable when viewed from the present context.

Finally, the positioning of late 1960s and early 1970s rock in the context of "classic gold" radio formats may also play its part in imbuing young listeners with a received nostalgia for a golden age when popular music was "better" and was taken more "seriously" by consumers as an important aspect of their lives. Emerging during the early 1990s, radio stations dedicated to the airing of popular music from previous decades have become an increasingly prevalent aspect of media entertainment on a global scale. Utilising slogans rich in nostalgic imagery, such stations emphasise their

commitment to playing *real* music by *real* musicians, their daily repertoire featuring staple songs such as Led Zeppelin's (1971) "Stairway to Heaven" and Pink Floyd's (1973) "Money." The exclusion of material by more recent artists is sometimes articulated in a highly vitriolic way, for example, a show on UK-based Virgin FM radio station's repeated on-air declaration several years ago that it would feature "no R&B, no rap, no crap" – an exclusionary strategy that also extended to other more recent popular music genres such as dance, hardcore and extreme metal. Sentiments such as these further reinforce the suggestion that the music of previous decades is superior to contemporary popular music, that the artists who performed it are more talented and "authentic," the audiences who listen to such stations more "serious" about their music. The continual circulation of 1960s and 1970s rock tracks via such 'classic gold' play formats also serves to give them an aura of omnipresence, particularly from the point of view of young listeners for whom such tracks have been an integral aspect of the daily soundscape for as long as they can remember. This sentiment was vividly related by a woman in her early twenties who informed the author that the music featured on 'classic gold' radio stations had a "timeless" feel to it, in contrast to the ephemeral quality that she associated with the popular music of her own generation.

Conclusion

The appeal of late 1960s and early 1970s rock, and, for that matter other post-1950s popular music forms, for successive generations of young people has still to be substantively mapped, both theoretically and empirically. This article has endeavoured to offer some possible themes and perspectives that could be taken up and investigated more comprehensively in future research. Those working in the field of leisure studies seem well poised to grow and develop the issues examined here in

ways that provide empirical fleshing out of the core ideas presented in this article. For example, the topic of inter-generational leisure practices in contemporary society could easily be extended to an examination of such patterns in relation to popular music consumption. Similarly, the premise offered in this piece that young audiences consume the rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s through a 'specifically altered lens' would clearly benefit from empirical scrutiny. As Garofalo (1992) observes, the meaning and significance of popular music has long been caught up in an ideological struggle between the producers and consumers of this music. The extent to which this struggle is intensified by the emergence of new, young audiences for these musics remains unclear. Likewise, the role of media and new media technologies, while well established in relation to other fields of leisure and consumption, is still at a relatively early stage of development with regards to popular music. Moreover, existing work in this area tends to focus on the technology itself, rather than the aesthetic and experiential aspects of music garnered through the everyday uses of digital playback and internet technology.⁷ The point made in this piece concerning youth's use of new technologies as a means of acquiring an informal musical and cultural education is clearly of importance in gaining a clearer understanding of the relationship between music and leisure. Finally, while the relationship between music and nostalgia is now widely acknowledged, such acknowledgement generally turns on issues such as music and memory or music and biography. This article has used the term 'received nostalgia' as a means of attempting to conceptualise how young audiences with no physical relationship to, or memory of, the rock era of the late 1960s and early 1970s aesthetically re-construct this era via the medium of music. Again, this is a vastly under-researched topic in the

field of consumption and leisure and something that clearly warrants more substantive empirical investigation.

Notes

1. It is, of course, true that a number of ageing rock icons give their support to more contemporary causes, as seen for example, with the reunion of the three surviving members of Led Zeppelin (Jimmy Page, Robert Plant and John Paul Jones) to perform at the 1985 Live Aid concert in Philadelphia and the reunion of Roger Waters with Pink Floyd for the London G8 concert in 2005. I return to this point and its significance for our understanding young audiences reception and understanding of late 1960s and early 1970s rock later in the article.
2. More cynically, Hayes (2006) has referred to this as the *Rolling Stone* version of rock history, by which he points to the discursive influence of “quality” music journalism in defining “art” and “authenticity” among rock musicians and their audiences.
3. In using this term I am referring to a trend identified by Smith and Maughan (1998), among others, for alternative practices of music production, dissemination and / or consumption that do not rely on established music industry channels. Such practices rely, for example, on high quality home recording equipment, internet distribution channels as well as more recent innovations and, such as myspace.com.
4. The actual artist credit for this album is Robert Plant and the Strange Sensation (Plant’s backing band for the album and subsequent tour).
5. There are, of course, a number of obvious contradictions underlying the recital format, but these cannot be properly addressed in a paper of this length.

6. At the time of its release in 1993, the nostalgic references in *Dazed and Confused* were directly compared with those of *American Graffiti* which applied a similar portrayal to youth at the beginning of the 1960s.

7. A notable exception here is Bull's (2000, 2005) on personal stereo and iPod technology.

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