GEORGE CLINTON - LADY GAGA - ZIGGY STARDUST

School of Rock

SPACE INVADERS!
The Rise of the Alien Persona

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90’s and 00’s Listening Lists!
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Any attempt to corral a definition of “Funk” and Funk music is a somewhat hopeless task. On the one hand, the genre of Funk music is easily distinguishable because of its clearly defined influences such as Soul/R&B and its unique musical characteristics including a strong bass line, a prominent drum beat, syncopated rhythms, and an emphasis on the first beat/groove. Additionally, the peak of Funk music can be pinpointed to a specific era, which included the late 1960s into the mid 1970s. However, the term “Funk” extends far beyond a simple category of music. Its founders have used the term to express a general attitude, feeling, or lifestyle that is associated with and expressed through Funk music. This duality creates a dilemma where an individual might be fully capable of defining the musical genre, but entirely incapable of understanding what it truly means to experience the Funk. And although I hate to say it, I am one of those people.

So how do we get past the narrow musical and generational definition of Funk in order to truly understand what it means to be Funky? In this piece, we turn to several of the Founders of Funk (James Brown, George Clinton, Bootsy Collins, and Bernie Worrell) and to those that carried on the Funk torch in later generations (Rick James and Outkast) to gain a better grasp on this elusive term, all the while providing a snapshot view of the history of Funk music in the U.S.

The consensus founder of the Funk genre is James Brown. In the mid-to-late 1960s Brown made the key switch to an emphasis on the downbeat, which meant that the first beat of every measure was stressed.

“Funk is nasty, funk is sexy, and it’s a feeling.”

by Kyle MacDonald
Through this technique, which he called “on the one,” he shifted away from previous Soul styles and created a new type of music – Funk – characterized by powerful dance rhythms. In a 2004 interview, legendary funk keyboardist Bernie Worrell describes the “One,” and how James Brown used it to separate Funk from Soul, Jazz, and R&B.

BW: The one is the measure accent on the sheet of music, on the first accent of the bar. Let’s say: on the 1, 2, 3, 4 (he’s counting the beats and emphasizing on the first one) POUM poum poum poum (imitating the sound of the drums, still emphasizing on the first poum), the one that’s the major… the prime… the major accent, the major hit! Hit it! Like hit it up! Hit it on the one baby! Bam! Major pulse!

It is clear that even while explaining the technical aspect that separates Funk music, Worrell is demonstrating the attitude and excitement associated with the Funk style.

Soon after the invention of Funk, a new, psychedelic version championed by artists such as George Clinton and his troupe of musicians generally known as Parliament Funkadelic arrived. Clinton and company’s music was characterized by the same strong “Funk” backbeat, but placed even more emphasis on the bass line. The band also consisted of a classically trained pianist, Bernie Worrell, and a charismatic bass player, Bootsy Collins who are both credited with creating P-Funk’s unique brand of music. Their stage shows were outlandish, their concepts were deep, and they truly stood apart from other groups of their time. Here are some candid explanations of Funk from three of the most prominent band members.

GC: Anything it need to be, whatever need to be that. It morphs into whatever the new era need, whatever the new generation need; it’s the DNA for all that’s here. Look at hip-hop: the DNA for hip-hop is funk.” Funk is the DNA. In blues and rock ‘n’ roll and gospel, it’s the ability to say, ‘Fuck it!’ I do the best I can and you got it. Y’all gotta take it from here.”

Bootsy: To me, it’s just the way I grew up. One room, fifteen people in the family, no air conditioning, no windows, it’s hot, you know? It’s a way of life before the music. The music was a way for me to express that. But to me the funk is a rhythm, a way of life. It’s the attitude – everything, all of that. It transformed into music, but it was about everything, about where come from, the feeling in the streets.

BW: Funk is a feel; it’s a feeling like reggae. (Imitating Jamaican accent)"You hear Bob Marley in the back, yah” (NB: In the bar where I am conducting the interview, we hear No Woman No Cry). That’s the feel… Funk is nasty, funk is sexy, and it’s a feeling.

After reading these descriptions, the picture of what it means to be funky becomes a little clearer. It is obvious that following the norm is not funk, but how one chooses to resist or channel their Funk is incredibly personal and is not limited to Funk artists.

Building off the success of groups like P-Funk and Sly and the Family Stone, artists such as Rick James and Prince carried on the Funk tradition into the 1980s. However, Rick James, who was a fan of a variety of musical styles, played a version of Funk, which he deemed “Funk and Roll” and resisted any form of labeling as Funk artist. In a 1979 interview James discusses the essence of Funk music and his angst towards labels (JA: interviewer; RJ: Rick James).

RJ: All funk comes from the bass line and the percussion, so if you relate that way then everyone sounds like George Clinton…

JA: Why do you react so violently to being called a disco artist?

RJ: It’s just some more stagnating, limiting verbal bullshit. I’m not a disco artist. I’m not a Rock artist or a Funk artist. I’m an artist.

JA: Yet you were the one to coin the term Punk Funk. Aren’t you labeling yourself?

RJ: Labeling myself is different!

JA: But labeling is a necessity...

RJ: Then let me label myself! (Smile!)

Once again, Funk music is defined as a bass and percussion heavy style, but James’s distinction between accepting others’ labels as opposed to creating his own (Punk Funk) perfectly demonstrates the Funk attitude—do it your own way, separate from the norm, and then you will be funky.
The influence of Funk from the 60s, 70s, and 80s can be seen in modern artists such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rage Against the Machine, Gnarls Barkley, and Outkast. Additionally, James Brown and Parliament Funkadelic are two of the most sampled artists in modern hip-hop, and interest in Funk music was revitalized by the emergence of West Coast Gangsta-Funk in the early 1990s. This style consisted of heavily sampled Funk music with a much slower tempo. To help gain perspective on how the modern generation of Funk artists defines the term, we turn to a 2001 interview with the band Outkast who are known for following the Funk convention.

**Dre:** The word funk came from them. So what we’re thinking is funk is like freein’ up, like when you’re to your last and it’s all you can do... Like, I can’t really sing or nothin’ like that, but if you’re to your last and you know you got something, that’s funk. Like when Michael Jordan throw up a slam, and he sticks his tongue out, that’s funk. It’s life, to its bare essentials. And funk music...? It’s hard to describe, but you can hear a song and think ‘That’s cool’, but you hear another song and you think ‘That’s funk’. You just know it.

**Big Boi:** You can immediately identify it as soon as it hits you. It makes you frown your face up, like [gurns as if smelling something rotten]. It’s just that frown. It explains the feeling. When you hear funk it hits you, in the chest. It’s like a reflex, like being hit on the knee in a doctor’s office. It’s something you can’t control.

It appears that the concept of Funk created by James Brown, augmented by Parliament Funkadelic, and carried on by Rick James is still very much alive in groups like Outkast that understand its significance. While it is unclear whether the musical genre of Funk will ever regain comparable popularity to its heyday in the 1970s, it is obvious that as long as artists continue to stress individuality, create powerful music, and stay true to themselves while avoiding conformity, then the essence of Funk will persevere.
2009 was a year of big name, ambitious albums in indie rock. Grizzly Bear’s “Veckatimest” had otherworldly harmonies and a clear classical influence, with avant-garde classical musician Nico Muhly and a girls’ choir joining them on the album and in performance at Town Hall in New York. Animal Collective’s “Merriweather Post Pavilion” was an aurally powerful blend of jam guitar and laptop-created music. Yale music school-educated Dave Longstreth and the Dirty Projectors created “Bitte Orca,” which has unusual female harmonies and unexpected instrumental turns. The Dirty Projectors seem to have inherited the joyful and sophisticated artistic experimentation (and the throne of the educated, alternative New York music scene) from the Talking Heads—after receiving his blessing in the form of “Knotty Pine,” a duet with David Byrne on a benefit for Red Hot, an AIDS organization.

But another strain emerged in the indie scene—a return to simple pop songs. A sound that didn’t necessarily evoke “Brooklyn,” rather its music for a summer spent riding the waves. Or listening through headphones in a library in the dead of winter, pretending you’re at the beach instead. Surf rock is having a moment again. Several indie groups have returned to simple pop songs about a slacker beach bum lifestyle, with a lo-fi, reverb-heavy sound. Surfer Blood. Best Coast. Real Estate. Beach Fossils. The band names, the lo-fi aesthetic, and the lyrics evoke a campfire in the sand.

“Wake up, It’s a beautiful morning / Honey, while the sun is still shining/Wake up, Would you like to go with me? / Honey, take a run down to the beach,” begins the Drums’ “Let’s Go Surfing.” The Drums are a band from New York. None of its members surf.

While the Drums may not necessarily fit into this grouping, not quite qualifying to be labeled as a “surf rock” group because of only having one song about surfing, their influences are similar to Brian Wilson’s. Johnathan Pierce, a member of the Drums, summed up their turn to simple, 60s-inspired songs: “We kind of feel like now, especially living in Williamsburg, everything is so experimental, hip and edgy and overly interesting. We got really inspired by those girl group sounds of the fifties and sixties, which were really perfect pop songs. They were short and they were simple but they were so powerful.”

The Drums’ other songs, “Don’t Be a Jerk, Jonny,” and “I Felt Stupid,” are more direct and hook-driven than the meandering lo-fi sound of other groups, but their bouncy songs wouldn’t be out of place on the soundtrack to Gidget or Beach Party.

If the “little surfer girl” the Beach Boys crooned about formed her own band, and added guitars to the girl group sound, it would be Best Coast. Few of the songs surpass three minutes. Cosentino is backed by simple drum beats and self-proclaimed “Beach Boys bass lines.” The lyrics are straightforward, about hanging out at the beach, getting high and the boy who got away. “When I’m With You” exemplifies her style. The lyrics are simple: “when I’m with you, I have fun/I hate sleeping alone,” and is followed by a guitar solo. “The Sun Was High (And So Was I)” has a looping guitar line while Cosentino sings about a lazy, mellow day. “This is Real” could be straight from a 60s girl group. It opens with an “oooo, ooo, ooo” harmony, then Bethany sings, “I know we were meant to be because you were chasing after me.” Phil Spector-inspired vocals, Beach Boys-inspired bass and guitar, with a stripped down, garage sound that fits in with 2010 (because it’s reminiscent of earlier decades)—Best Coast puts a fresh, winning spin on surf rock. While skinny jeans replaced board shorts in the crowd at Eclectic a few weeks ago, the crowd that normally respectfully only nods their heads
was swaying and bopping to the catchy choruses like they were in a Beach Boys video.

Cosentino doesn’t shy away from the comparisons and acknowledges her love of the beach aesthetic. In an interview with Free Williamsburg, she described her dream concert as “Best Coast, Fleetwood Mac, Nirvana, The Ronettes, The Beach Boys, and we would play on the sand at El Matador Beach in Malibu...The Ronettes because obviously I’m obsessed. Actually, I saw Ronnie Spector play at McCarren Pool last summer before they tore it down, and it was one of the coolest shows ever. My best friend Alex and I were right up front dancing around so many 50 year-old women, it ruled. And then The Beach Boys, because again, I’m obsessed, and watching The Beach Boys play in the sand would be like the most overwhelmingly perfect thing ever.”

New Jersey’s Real Estate eschews the tight, straightforward pop sensibility for songs that are slowed down, with a warm, slightly fuzzy sound. Many of the songs have long, instrumental sections with just a shimmering guitar sound that make it a perfect accompaniment to a day spent letting the sun fry your brain. “Suburban Beverage” has a slow buildup of lilting guitars, to its only lyrics: “Budweiser, Sprite, do you feel alright?” But while Real Estate hails from the Jersey shore, and not the “best coast” in the west, the themes of sand and sun come across strong in their debut eponymous album, filled with warm, lo-fi songs like “Beach Comber,” “Let’s Rock the Beach” and “Pool Swimmers.” Real Estate has been championed by Underwater Peoples, an independent label that has pushed the lo-fi, garage sound. Girls don’t create the shimmering, dense sound of these groups, but has a simple guitar lines and even simpler lyrics, as in the single “Lust for Life”: “Oh, I wish I had a suntan. Oh, I wish I had a pizza and a bottle of wine. Oh, I wish I had a beach house, then we could make a big fire every night.”

Perhaps the trend is just inspired by music you just sing along to and not think about. Or, they were inspired as Bethany Cosentino was – by lazy cats: “I love the beach, and I used to love the ocean as a kid but now I am absolutely petrified of swimming in it. This is going to sound so stupid, but I think a lot of it has to do with when I started smoking weed. Because now I think: ‘Oh my God, the ocean is so fucked up. There are so many crazy creatures in there, and planes have crashed and boats have sunk in it.’ I like the 50s, party-movie aesthetic of the beach. I’m not really into modern-day beach. Recently, I was looking at pictures of cats laying out on the beach and I thought, ‘Cats hate water, so why would they like the beach?’ But then I realized that cats like to just lay around and lounge and be lazy, and what better place to do that than on the beach? So I found all these stupid pictures of cats at the beach, and I was like, ‘They get it, man. They totally get it.’”

“So I found all these stupid pictures of cats at the beach, and I was like, ‘They get it, man. They totally get it.’”
British music has been highly influential in shaping the direction taken by artists in the United States. Furthermore, it has been seen that the songs made by British artists are widely popular with American listeners. This is highlighted by the British Invasion, which refers to the plethora of bands from England who became incredibly popular from 1964-1966 in the United States. Principally, this was marked by the success of the Beatles and the bands that followed them. This phenomenon is defined by some of the most well known rock ‘n’ roll bands of all time, including The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Animals, The Who, and The Yardbirds. All of these bands had remarkable commercial success during the 1960’s in the United States.

But why did this occur? What’s the difference between the music made in the United States and that of the UK? There are a few speculations as to why this particular music became such a hit in the United States. One important factor that may have shaped this phenomenon and paved the way to allow for this British Invasion was the national environment of the time. To begin with, the great leaders of rock ‘n’ roll then all dropped out of the scene for a variety of reasons in the late 1950’s. First of all, Little Richard, who was a very successful crossover artist, decided to drop out of rock ‘n’ roll to further pursue religious efforts. Then the King of Rock, Elvis Presley, joined the army. His unprecedented success and sudden musical absence paved the way for new artists and new genres. Later, it was discovered that Jerry Lee Lewis had married his fourteen year old cousin, news that abruptly ended his rock career. Lastly, Chuck Berry was arrested on charges on Mann Act charges. It was claimed that he had transported a young prostitute across state lines, and was sentenced to five years in prison. (Ironically enough, Chuck Barry was later able to return to the rock scene because of the British Invasion. Bands such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were covering his songs which kept his music popular).

Another argument is that the assassination of President John F. Kennedy so deeply devastated the youth of America that they needed an uplifting musical act from abroad. For this, they looked across the pond to the upbeat songs by the Beatles that could provide some hope and optimism in the aftermath of Kennedy’s death. Both the loss of the aforementioned four great rock artists and the desperation felt by the youth across the United States created an opening, and a need, for a new wave of musicians to infiltrate the music scene in America.

“But why did this occur? What’s the difference between the music made in the United States and that of the UK?”

When the Beatles landed at JFK in 1964, they paved the way for tons of British bands that were influenced by rock artists from the United States. They had taken the musical aesthetic of rockers such as Little Richard and Chuck Berry, added their own style, and then crossed the Atlantic to become rather immediate chart success.
stories. Their own influences were marked by local traditions such as skiffle, dancehall, and Celtic folk, incorporated into popular rock music. The desired audience, which was primarily young adults, was ready and willing to listen to this type of music and therefore, the bands of the British Invasion had great Billboard chart success.

There were a few criticisms of the British Invasion. One main argument was that the British bands were not that different from those in America. They were not in fact creating new music, but rather simply playing watered down versions of preexisting music in the United States. Furthermore, some critics said that as Americans, we should have not supported those bands because they had the capacity to damage the careers of American artists. For instance, it was argued that this moment overshadowed the talent of Ben E. King and Smokey Robinson, in lieu of a more upbeat sound.

It is clear that the influences of the British Invasion have penetrated music scenes throughout the world. But a more direct influence of the time period can be seen in the 1980’s and was called The Second British Invasion. This marked a new age of British music that became popular in the United States, and the success was made possible by the start of the cable music channel, MTV. This became an incredibly efficient way to allow music to transcend boundaries and to become successful globally. The music was primarily an aftermath of punk and was labeled New Music, which was characterized as British, androgynous, and technologically oriented. This new wave of music was expressed through music videos and was focused on “bringing color and energy back into pop music”.

It is clear that the British Invasion was a very influential phenomenon and had plenty of consequences, both negative and positive. It was a very time sensitive movement as it only could have occurred within these exact parameters. But it is fair to say that contemporary music and musicians would not be where they are today without the strong presence of British music and musicians in the United States between 1964 and 1966.

The Beatles flee from their overzealous fans.
Marshall Bruce Mathers III, aka Eminem, is the best selling rap artist of all time. He has had eight #1 albums on the Billboard Top 200 and 12 #1 singles worldwide. He has sold 80 million albums worldwide. One of the things that sets Eminem apart from other rap artists is the fact that he is white. The color of his skin has been a large source of controversy since he was a young kid growing up in a predominately black neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. After achieving success and fame subsequent to the release of his first major studio album, The Slim Shady, LP, many people accused him of being a poser. Eminem was compared by some to Vanilla Ice, a one-hit wonder white rapper who was widely viewed as having no talent or street credit. So, does Eminem pretend to be something that he is not? Is he only successful because he is white?

Unlike Vanilla Ice, Eminem has certainly shown over the years that he is not a one-hit wonder. However, it is possible that being white has helped Eminem to sell more records than he would have if he were black. The interesting thing is that Eminem realizes that this may be the case and addresses it in both interviews and in his music. For instance, in the song “Without Me” on The Eminem Show, Eminem says, “I am the worst thing since Elvis Presley/ to do black music so selfishly/ and used it to get myself wealthy.” These lyrics show that Mathers realizes that much like with Elvis, a white face made it easier for him to sell black music to a white audience. Yet, immediately follow these lyrics he also says, “There’s a concept that works/ Twenty million other white rappers emerge/ But no matter how many fish in the sea/ It’ll be so empty, without me.” Essentially, Eminem believes that even though he might be making more money than other rappers because he is white, he is also...
uniquely talented. This is a logical assertion as he is really the only white rapper to become very successful. If simply being white and able to rap were enough to make a person rich there would be far more white rappers.

Clearly Eminem is talented, but another major source of controversy for rappers is whether they have street cred. In the rap world a rapper is not seen as legitimate unless he has come from a troubled background and has had a hard life. For this reason, many artists lie about their background if they did not grow up poor or in a bad neighborhood in order to establish credibility. Also, many artists give off the impression that they have a troubled background through their lyrics. In a 1999 interview with Howard Stern, shortly after The Slim Shady, LP came out, Eminem addresses his success and his background. Howard accuses Eminem of “talking black” and having bad grammar, but Eminem insists that it is just how he talks and that he is not putting on an act. Eminem describes growing up on welfare in a black community in Detroit. He talks about how his father left him and that he has no interest in reconnecting with him. He was beat up often growing up, mainly because he was white. He dropped out of school in ninth grade and moved out of his mother’s house at the age of 17. Mathers has the required background for a rap artist. However, he does not personally see it as a necessity. He believes that it does not matter what the color of your skin is, or where you grew up. He says that if you want to rap you should just be true to yourself and that if you come from the suburbs than you should just rap about that.

Eminem follows his own advice. His lyrics are often about his life and the issues that he is both dealing with and has dealt with. He raps about his struggles with his mother, his ex-wife, and drugs. He raps about his daughter and being white. His lyrics are often homophobic, misogynistic, violent, and hateful, yet somehow also clever and comedic. Eminem’s lyrics are highly controversial. In the song “97 Bonnie and Clyde” on The Slim Shady, LP he sings about killing his ex-wife Kim and driving with his daughter to dump the body. When asked about the song Mathers said that it was a song about how he was feeling and more about his love for his daughter. He says that everyone has felt at some time like they wanted to kill somebody and that is how he was feeling so he wrote a song about it rather than doing it. He suggests that there is an important distinction between the violent ideas that he raps about and actually doing them. In the song “Sing for the Moment” on the album The Eminem Show he raps “if my music is literal, and I’m a criminal/ How the fuck can I raise a little girl/I couldn’t, I wouldn’t be fit to.” Eminem has often been accused of negatively influencing his listeners and this lyric is his way of responding and showing that it would be foolish for anyone to take everything he says literally.

In one interview Eminem says “so I’m at that point where if everyone’s like ‘You’re an asshole,’ I’m like ‘I’ll show you what an asshole really is.’” Eminem enjoys the shock value of his music and likes to say things that will upset people just to get a rise out of them. The messages in his music are often inappropriate, and it is understandable that some people would boycott his music. Perhaps you should not listen to an artist who advocates hate and violence. However, Eminem is a great lyricist and has amazing flow, style, rhyme, and humor. He comes from a poor neighborhood, raps about his real life experience, and has an “in your face” attitude. You can love him or hate him, but it's hard to ignore him; and he likes it that way.
FROM GIRL POWER TO LADY GAGA
In 1960 The Shirelles released their hit single “Will you still love me tomorrow.” Nearly fifty years later on October 2009, Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta (better known as Lady Gaga) released “Bad Romance.” In this article I trace women in pop music beginning with The Shirelles and the emergence of girl groups and continuing with Carole King, Blondie, The Spice Girls and Lady Gaga.

The 1960 hit by The Shirelles helped create what Brackett calls “a new, female-centered pop sensibility” (Brackett, 140). The group composed entirely of females was part of the Brill Building phenomenon that produced numerous pop songs of the 1960s. Young Jewish songwriters and young African American singers worked together to create a new kind of sound. As Brackett describes, these “frequent collaborations of Brill Building songwriters, most of whom were Jewish, with young African American female singers” led to the emergence and success of these girl groups. In this light, The Shirelles are largely responsible for the entrance of women into a more public pop music audience. Their song was number one on the pop charts, and number two on the R&B charts.

The lyrics, written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin, speak of a woman’s fear that the man she is sleeping with will leave her in the morning. This sentiment is made clear in the opening lines of the song—“tonight you’re mine completely/ you give your love so sweetly/ tonight the light of love is in your eyes/ but will you love me tomorrow?”

A decade later, in 1971, Carole King released her own Grammy award winning album Tapestry. “It’s too late,” written by King and Toni Stern, speaks of a love grown cold. It’s a sort of Dear John letter, made clear by the chorus, “And it’s too late baby now/ it’s too late/ though we really did try to make it./ Something inside has died and I can’t hide and I just can’t fake it.” Unlike the Shirelles, Carole King played a large role in her songwriting. One article refers to her as “the unquestioned queen of the singer/songwriter phenomenon” (Brackett, 281). She transitioned from a behind the scenes writer, to a performer herself. Unlike the Shirelles, she “considers herself a writer rather than a performer” (Brackett, 281). She says of her music, “I want my music to speak for me. You can get to know me through my music.” She didn’t seek attention and fame through her music, but wanted to play music that she hoped others could relate to. She says, “I want to play music, but I have no particular desire for the limelight itself.”

When Blondie emerged in the late 70s, “Heart of Glass” touched on a similar theme to King’s “It’s too late,” but had a different tone. The lyrics speak of a lost love with lines such as “I was so blind,” “If I fear I’m losing you it’s just no good,” “I’m the one you’re using,” and “please don’t push me aside.” This is also the story of a relationship ending, but here it seems more superficial, a teenage lost love brought on by her partner.

Blondie’s image also set them apart. Deborah
Harry was the face of the band (though the band consists of Harry and Chris Stein). Harry says, “People view Blondie in terms of music and more in terms of the way I look. All I know is that I’ve always tried to stimulate interest in this group through whatever channels possible. I’ve used whatever advantages I might have to sell records.” She has been described as a “seductress,” “The face that launched a thousand magazines,” and “one of the most photogenically alluring images in rock’n’roll today.”

Harry acknowledges that she “doesn’t really see herself as being particularly musical” and is not afraid of using her sexuality. She told Cosmopolitan: “I happen to have a sensual nature and I suppose it comes out in pictures. My face seems to sell. I can’t help that.” In addition to her music and image, her fashion also broke barriers. She began “wearing hot pants on her first British visit” and was “instrumental in starting the craze for thigh-length leather boots.” She is as much of a personality as she is a singer.

In the 1990s the Spice Girls emerged along with their idea of “girl power.” When asked what this meant, they responded: “It’s looking at yourself in the mirror and saying, ‘this is me, I’m going to make the best of it. I’m going to have fun, I’m going to have a positive attitude, I’m not going to be dominated by anyone, especially not men. We’re up for equality, for having a laugh.”

This sentimentality is apparent in their 1996 hit “Wannabe.” It’s a song about women getting what they want. It’s about sex and sexual freedom—an acknowledgement that women have sexual desires too. The woman in this song is in charge, and demanding—she tells her potential partner that he must “forget her past.” Lines such as “make it last forever,” “you have got to give,” and “that’s the way it is” express the idea that this is not a relationship to be taken lightly. It speaks against one-sided relationships where women give everything and men take everything. There is no compromising—this is the way it is, take it or leave it.

“I sing about oral sex in my underwear.”
-Lady Gaga

This confrontational no compromising persona has come back with Lady Gaga. Described as, “a chameleon and visionary, a singer and composer, a musician and dancer, she has brought the notion of art, a tantalizing blend of high concept and trash aesthetic, back to the tired halls of the Top 40.” She’s the first in a long time to make people do a double take. As she says, “I sing about oral sex in my underwear.” “Bad Romance” released in 2009 features lines such as “I want your ugly, I want your disease. I want your everything as long as it’s free” and “I want your psycho, your vertical stick.” She’s bold, uncompromising, and sings songs people want to dance to.

“I’m not going to be dominated by anyone, especially not men. We’re up for equality, for having a laugh.”
Is the Internet the end to Music?

by Christian Opalinski

With music’s availability through streaming and illegal downloading individuals can now listen to almost any music past or present. With everyone capable of downloading music it would seem that purchasing these pieces is no longer necessary; compensation for musical work would seemingly cease. File sharing may have stirred the greatest commotion in the music industry since the Beatles invasion of America. Its potential, which many thought would stop album purchasing and therefore end monetary gains led an uproar from musicians, producers and label companies, however the internet has acted as a catalyst for musical dispersion and growth.

Why does file sharing occur? Individuals who are money-poor but time-rich spend their days searching for good music with no monetary means to purchase CDs. With no incentive or money to purchase CDs peer-to-peer sharing is the result. Programs such as Limewire and Napster have been forums for music distribution.

When illegal downloading was first introduced there was a huge buzz about how money would flow into the music industry if people “stole music”? Several individuals have been indicted for copyright infringement in hopes of preventing further downloading. One case, United States vs. Dove, Daniel Dove was indicted for running a torrent file-sharing program. The court found him guilty and sentenced him to 18 months in prison. Dove was also charged over a million dollars in restitution fees for illegally supplying music and movies. In a statement Dove claimed that, “those who download movies and music for free would not necessarily purchase those movies and music at full purchase price.” Although he still had to serve his penalty Dove made a point worth considering, not everyone looks to download full albums, rather samples and single songs. It was not fair for him to be charged that large sum for if he did not spread his files CD sales would likely not have greatly risen because not everyone is willing to spend nor does everyone have money to spend on a whole album.

Dove’s statement shows, although illegal downloading does not help album sales it exposes artists’ music to more people. Those who do not want to spend fifteen dollars on an album can download a single song instead, if they like the song and want to support the artist they can now go on such sites as iTunes to support by purchasing a single song at a decent price.

How do musicians support themselves after CD sales supposedly dwindle? If a musician or musical band has had a tremendous impact on a large audience he/she or they will gain supporters. Supporters are the key to this whole equation, by being able to freely stream music on sites like Youtube, new music is spread to a greater audience than simple radio or television advertisement. The Internet is not only less expensive than other media outlets, it is possibly the most popular outlet to everything media. People, who frequently visit such sites as Youtube to view favorite artists, are likely to give their support encouraging artists to produce more songs. Artists such as Justin Bieber and DeAndre Cortez “Soulja Boy” Way have become musical sensations, with their songs hitting top spots on musical charts. Both of these artist as well as older musicians and newer ones have had their music spread over the Internet and peer sharing sites to their advantage. The more they sample to the outside audience the more likely their fan base will grow. A strong fan base wants to see the artist succeed, thereby purchasing the bands songs or CDs and encouraging other popular media to

“If the Internet allows us to download music for free will artist still have incentive to make music? The short answer...Yes.”
purchase it. A fan base will be more inclined to spend money on favorite musicians’ concerts and spread the word to friends, attracting an even larger audience. Justin Bieber and Soulja Boy both have hits that play on Youtube and are illegally downloaded, but the public continues to support them and they are getting richer. One popular quote that advertisers and talk shows prevalently use is “Bieber fever,” referring to the growing desire to hear Justin Bieber. Just one example, despite illegal downloading, in which artists’ music is still surviving and spreading.

CD sales have declined not because no one wants to hear music or no one wants to support their favorite artists, but because there are new ways to support artists. With new technology such as MP3s, people no longer rely on buying CDs to hear music, instead websites such as iTunes allow for single song purchases. File sharing does not mean the end of music innovation despite previous popular thought; it has in actuality opened new forms of artist explosion. File sharing creates the same incentive CD sales had, artists will gain support if they are good enough to gain a fan base. The more people who want to hear songs the more they will purchase off of iTunes, the more radio stations, in order to attract listeners, will purchase albums to play them and the more other multimedia outlets will pay to use the music. The Internet is the music industry’s friend, it is not the enemy, nor is illegal downloading (to a certain extent).
Independent Hip Hop: The Rise of Rhymesayers Entertainment

by Dan Storms

For as long as the genre of hip hop has existed there have been artists looking to break into the scene. Generally this process involves making a mixtape and hoping to get it into the right hands of an A&R at a major label. However for many talented artists this course is too difficult. A&R divisions look for artists who fit growing trends in the industry and may neglect those who take a more experimental route. When this kind of road block occurs, some entrepreneurial artists start their own independent labels. Independent labels have existed since the beginnings of hip hop. Some independents such as Def Jam Recordings eventually gained great notoriety within the music industry.

Independent labels are nothing new, but what is new is the up and coming label out of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Minnesota may not be the first place that comes to mind when people think of good hip hop but Rhymesayers Entertainment is attempting to change all that. Rhymesayers was started in 1995 by Atmosphere, made up of co-producers Slug and Ant. Rhymesayers now boasts an impressive cast of twenty-four artists including Brother Ali, MF Doom, and Eyedea & Abilities. These artists decided to join Rhymesayers for a multitude of reasons. While artists may seek out an independent label due to being turned away from a major, this may not have been the case with many who joined Rhymesayers. Rhymesayers offer an outlet for hip hop as artistic expression. They work in a very artist-based way and hope to advance the careers of everyone who works with their label. Money, however, is far from the minds of those who join Rhymesayers.

Having a growing label both in number of artists and popularity is a clear goal for any independent label, but Rhymesayers has more in mind than just selling records. What makes the members of Rhymesayers different is their lyrical content. Atmosphere, headed by lyricist Slug, have taken on the challenge of writing thought-provoking, inspiring, and emotional lyrics backed by beats by Ant that invoke feelings that make the audience feel personally connected to the music. When interviewed about Slug and Rhymesayers, Eyedea stated that, “[Slug] was the mentor . . . He worked in a record store, and he’s the most musically involved person I know . . . When I met him, he said, yeah, your music is great, but you really ought to make music that’s about something.” This idea can be seen in any of Atmosphere’s songs. Often times Slug’s lyrics seem more like literature than lyrics at all. Coupled with Ant’s highly experimental and mood-capturing beats Slug draws the listener into his stories in a way that much of major hip hop and popular music in general neglects.

Another Rhymesayers artist, Brother Ali, reflects this creed perfectly. The story of how Brother Ali joined the label sums up what he is about. While he did follow the normal path of showing up with a mixtape, his was a tape of rhymes, poems, and stories. It can easily be seen why a traditional A&R at a major label would have turned him away if he had approached them in the same manner. When Brother Ali played a show at Wesleyan last year those of us who were lucky enough to go got to see one of his raw, emotional performances first hand. Instead of rapping about being gangstas, partying, or any of the more mainstream topics in rap Brother Ali and Atmosphere tend to rap about their real life experiences. Their songs range from touching stories about being the true nature of manhood and being a father, to heart-wrenching songs about alcoholism and divorce. Atmosphere, Ali, and Rhymesayers Entertainment are attempting to change the very nature of hip hop in order to bring back some of the passion, emotion, and intelligent lyricism that has been lost by some of the major labels.
After many months of hard work and perseverance, I have finally come up with the top three things television and movie stars do when they have finally achieved celebrity status.

1.) Carry around many small dogs.
2.) Date a Jonas Brother.
3.) Make an album.

“Indeed I can think of no better way to celebrate my fame and fortune than by pushing the boundaries of my skills and talent. Clearly if people love to see me on screen, there is no doubt that they would love to hear me through their headphones as well.” These must have been the thoughts passing through the minds of young stars and celebutantes across America as they made their way out of the television and film studios and into the recording studios. If such a face can grace TV screens, the big screen, magazine covers, and life-sized cardboard cutouts, it only makes sense that it should also adorn an album cover as well as your iPod.

“Having an established fan base seems to make up for the lack of musical talent that has become more and more common in the world of celebrity pop stars.”

We all know Paris Hilton for one thing or another. Perhaps it was her TV reality series made with best friend Nicole Richie called Simple Life (which went on to shoot five seasons), or maybe it was her 2003 sex tape titled One Night In Paris, but most likely it is for being a very wealthy heiress who always seems to grab the spotlight. By August 2006, Paris Hilton was ready to release her first album, creatively titled Paris. Paris debuted at number 6 on the Billboard 200, a chart that lists the week’s top-selling albums across all genres. She spent 2 weeks on the Billboard 200, 2 weeks at number 6 on the digital albums chart and one week at number 4 on the Canadian albums chart. Her first single, “Stars Are Blind”, spent 3 weeks on the Top 100 chart in August, peaking at number 16. She also saw success overseas, with her single reaching number 5 on the European Top 100 and spending 8 weeks on the chart. She was accompanied by artists such as Christina Aguilera, Rihanna, The Fray, and the Pussycat Dolls.
Child Star to Pop Star?

Lindsay Lohan began her career as a movie star after her starring role in the 1998 Disney movie The Parent Trap. She has also starred in movies such as Mean Girls, Freaky Friday, and Herbie: Fully Loaded. After signing with Casablanca Records, she released her first album Speak in December of 2004 which peaked at number 4 on the Billboard 200. Lindsay’s first single from Speak peaked at number 51 on the Top 100 chart. Her second album A Little More Personal (Raw) was released in December of 2005 and debuted at number 20 on the billboard 200. Her first single from the second album, “Confessions of a Broken Heart”, reached number 57 on the pop chart but had little staying power.

Other Disney Progeny

Disney seems to be cranking out child stars by the handful these days. One day there is a new teen television series and the next day they are out recording albums. The Jonas Brothers got their start on various programs on the Disney channel followed by starring roles in the Disney Channel Original Movie Camp Rock. The band has released four albums and won the award for Breakthrough Artist at the American Music Awards in 2008. They have sold over 8 million albums worldwide.

Miley Cyrus also got her start with Disney with her widely popular TV series Hannah Montana. Her first album titled Meet Miley Cyrus was released in June of 2007. Her third album Hannah Montana: The Movie went 2x platinum in the U.S. and featured the single “The Climb” which reached number 4 on the Top 100 chart. Her fourth album went 3x platinum and featured the single “Party in the U.S.A.” which reached number 2 on the Top 100. Clearly there is some correlation between starring on a Disney television series and gaining commercial success in the music industry. Having an established fan base seems to make up for the lack of musical talent that has become more and more common in the world of celebrity pop stars. And if you don’t have a hair-do like Justin Bieber, Disney doesn’t seem like a bad place to start. Unfortunately Paris must have missed the memo.
Conor Oberst: He’s Indie Rock’s Boy Wonder, but is he this generation’s Bob Dylan?

By Rhyan Toledo

Perhaps best known as the lead singer of Bright Eyes, Conor Oberst has been designated nicknames like “Rock’s Boy Genius,” “Indie Rock’s Boy Wonder,” and most controversially, “The next Bob Dylan” by the music press and fans.

Those first two nicknames stem from the well-known fact that Oberst began his successful music career recording at the age of 13. At seventeen he formed his own label, Saddle Creek, with his brother. He’s been a member of several bands, including The Faint, Commander Venus, Park Ave., Bright Eyes, and the Mystic Valley Band. His newest project, Monsters of Folk, includes Jim James of My Morning Jacket, M. Ward, and Mike Mogis of Bright Eyes. He’s currently achieved the most commercial success and critical acclaim under his band Bright Eyes. In 2004, Bright Eyes’s simultaneous release of “I’m Wide Awake, It’s Morning” and “Digital Ash in a Digital Urn” resulted in “Lua” and “Take It Easy (Love Nothing)” holding the No. 1 and No. 2 spots on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart a week after their release.

“Oberst willingly takes on the role of social commentator and activist, as opposed to Dylan who never wished to be labeled the voice of his generation.”

It is possible that some may draw a comparison between Oberst and Dylan because of the way Oberst strums his acoustic guitar and sings with a voice that is sometimes reminiscent of a Dylan-esque cadence. Or perhaps the comparison is made because he writes intelligent wordy lyrics that incorporate themes of alienation from modern society and social commentary. Many rock critiques agree that Conor Oberst is one of the most talented and prolific songwriters of his generation. In 2008 Rolling Stone Magazine named him that year’s “Most Talented Songwriter”. However, Oberst has not revolutionized music, and that fact alone is enough to refute the claim that he is this generation’s Bob Dylan. Oberst may be different in more ways than he is similar to Dylan.

Oberst willingly takes on the role of social commentator and activist, as opposed to Dylan who never wished to be labeled the voice of his generation. In May 2005 Bright Eyes appeared on The Late Show with Jay Leno and preformed “When the President Talks to God.” Oberst appeared on stage wearing a black cowboy hat, a not so subtle jab at the President’s home state, and sang, “When the president talks to God/I wonder which one plays the better cop/’We should find some jobs the ghetto’s broke’/No, they’re lazy, George, I say we don’t/Just give ‘em more liquor stores and dirty coke’/That’s what God recommends/When the president talks to God/Do they drink near beer and go play golf/While they pick which countries to invade/Which Muslim souls still can be saved?/I guess god just calls a spade a spade/When the president talks to God.” Oberst’s extremely repetitive protest song concludes bitingly, “When the president talks to God/Does he ever think that
maybe he’s not?/That that voice is just inside his head/When he kneels next to the presidential bed/Does he ever smell his own bullshit/When the president talks to God?/I doubt it, I doubt it.”

Some found Oberst’s performance achingly honest and reminiscent of early Dylan, while others considered it a whiny poor excuse for a protest song. Either way Oberst’s dedication to political and social activism cannot be denied. Bright Eyes participated in the vote for Change Tour in 2004 and countless rallies in support of Obama leading up to the election. In his latest album, “Outer South,” with the Mystic Valley Band, Oberst remains ever critical of his country and government. In the song “Roosevelt Room” he sings, “What good, what good are you/With your Cherokee trail and your Roosevelt Room?/What good, what good are you/With your Seneca plague and your Arlington tomb?”

Connor Oberst cannot be considered the next Bob Dylan because of the unparalleled impact Dylan made on music. But maybe in an age when young people seem so apathetic towards social and political issues, and Ke$ha has a number one album, what we really need is more artists like Conor Oberst. We need more artists willing to speak up about social and political issues, or at the very least write meaningful songs that make people feel something more than just the urge to brush their teeth with Jack Daniels and throw up glitter.

**New Amerykah Part Two (Return of the Ankh)- Erykah Badu**

Erykah Badu recently got in some trouble. Soon after releasing the video for her newest single “Window Seat” off of her latest album, New Amerykah Part 2: Return of the Ankh, Dallas police issued her a fine for disorderly conduct. In the video, Badu is seen stripping naked while walking through Dealey Plaza, the plaza in which President Kennedy was assassinated. Inspired by Matt & Kim’s “Daylight”, Badu’s new video is a typical move for the R&B songstress. Since her beginnings in the nineties, Badu has constantly made career moves that uphold her status as one of the strangest popular artists in the business.

With New Amerykah Part 1: 4th World War, the precursor to her newest release, Badu successfully maintained her out-of-left-field status through the album’s lyrical content and instrumentals. She considered culture, government and more while singing over some of the most creative beats her career has seen. With Part 2, Badu has lost some of these
unique aspects while maintaining and amplifying others.

Instead of politics and society, the focus of Badu’s new album is love. Whilst the majority of lyrics from her previous albums were self-congratulatory, many of her lyrics on the new album show her as a woman desperate for love. On “Out My Mind, Just in Time” she confesses that she is “a recovering undercover lover,” seemingly implying that the powerful Erykah we used to know was simply an act. Also, the beats on the album are much simpler than previous releases. Badu does keep an experimental feel, but to a much lesser degree. The instrumental backgrounds on the album sound like a return to a more traditional Marvin Gaye-like R&B. Bass and drums dominate the beats, but more electronic instruments are also included.

Erykah’s return to simpler beats and lyrics is not necessarily a bad thing. The music does become a bit repetitive towards the end of the album, but the majority of it is as exciting as any Badu release is expected to be. Even when singing about a musical subject as cliché as love, Badu upholds an interesting and thought provoking style. On the “You Loving Me” interlude she sings “You loving me, but I’m fucking your friends,” a lyric that counters the heartbreaking tone of the rest of the album. While she has lost some of her eccentricity, Badu has put out another solid neo-R&B album that still seems outlandish next to other contemporary music.

Rating: 91%
Key Track: “Window Seat”, “Gone Baby, Don’t Be Long”

NONSTOPEROTIK- Black Francis

Black Francis (aka Frank Black aka Charles Thompson IV) has been very prolific in his post-Pixies career. A short while after the Pixies broke up in 1993, Francis released his first solo record, the well-received Frank Black. All the way through the nineties and into the 21st century Francis has kept up a steady stream of releases. He has also maintained his passionate tones that he developed with the Pixies. It has been obvious throughout his whole career that there were certain desires and emotions brewing below the surface. However, with his latest release, Nonstoperotik, some of these emotions have come to the forefront. While Francis keeps his trademark pent-up energy, much of Nonstoperotik has more obvious subjects and themes than his past releases.

Nonstoperotik is filled with sex and energy. Even on the slowest songs of the album, Francis’ vocals are filled with lust. On the slowburner “When I Go Down On You,” sex is presented as a cure all for every bad situation. “I don’t need to have a point of view, when I go down on you,” Francis sings during the chorus. Francis is presenting a theory that when practicing a sexual act all one’s worries go away and one is caught in the pleasure of the moment. On the title track of the album Francis sings to his lover the he wants to be “Inside of you, all the way.” With sexuality being so prominent throughout out the album it becomes obvious that sexuality dominates Francis’ life. At times it seems like Francis’ over the top sexual references are a bit tongue in cheek, but there is no doubt that he holds a passion for sex, and wants to communicate that. On “Lake of Sin,” he describes his entrance into the sexual world. “My body pierced, I throw me in…the lake of sin.” Francis’ plunge into the lake of sin is celebrated not condemned or morally looked down upon. For
Francis, sex and passion are the best parts of life, so there is no sense in concentrating on anything else.

The songwriting on Nonstoperotik is much more traditional then Francis’ work with the Pixies. The songs come across as more singer-songwriter than the punk attitude of Francis’ early days. While still passionate, his singing is also much more subdued. This is likely related to Francis bringing sexuality into his lyrics. Rather than his sexuality and fury being held in his vocals, they are represented in the subject matter of his songs.

None of the songs on Nonstoperotik come across as filler. The whole album plays as though Francis is telling the communicating something to the listener that is absolutely essential for them to know. Nonstoperotik is a great listen and leaves the listener wondering, and anxious to know, what Black Francis will release next.

Rating: 94%
Key Tracks: “When I Go Down on You,” “Lake of Sin,” “Dead Man’s Curve”

Astro Coast- Surfer Blood

Coming from Palm Beach it was a given that Surfer Blood’s music would be influenced by the sun and surf. Even though the sunny feeling is very likely heavily influenced by the band’s name, one can’t help but picture sand castles, bikinis, and palm trees when listening to Surfer Blood’s indie pop.

Surfer Blood’s songs depend on the guitar. Although there is no virtuosic guitar playing, simple chords and strums dominate the music. Also, the choruses of each song are undeniably catchy. The band is obviously not shooting for the Top 40, but the music sticks in the listeners head for hours after listening. This combination of guitar driven songs with catchy indie pop has caused many critics to compare Surfer Blood to Weezer. While it is true that many moments on the album resemble Weezer’s albums of color (Blue, Green, or Red), there also are many aspects of Surfer Blood’s music that stray from the Weezer formula. Subtle guitar solos are reminiscent of Built to Spill, while the reverb filled vocals of lead singer John Paul Pitts bring James Mercer of the Shins or even Brian Wilson to mind.

All the way through Astro Coast, the music holds a lackadaisical attitude. On “Take It Easy” the band promotes an apathetic approach to life. “We should take it easy, or we will both be sorry,” Pitts sings over rhythmic guitar. This aspect of Surfer Blood merits a comparison to Pavement. Although much effort surely goes into their music, it comes across like the band just rolled out of bed and someone placed instruments in their hands. This laid back outlook is continued throughout “Take It Easy.” Later on Pitts continues saying, “The ice inside me is melting rapidly.” The melting ice metaphor is also mentioned in “Slow Jabroni,” the best song on the album. “Whatever’s deep inside of me…thaw me out completely,” goes one of the song’s last lines. From these two lines it is clear that Surfer Blood is going through some life changes. However, they will not actively attempt to lead their lives in any direction, they will just wait for their bodies to thaw and see where they end up. Instead of making a huge effort to reach life goals, the ice will slowly melt and place Surfer Blood in their rightful place.

This surf rock/indie pop album from Surfer Blood is an enjoyable listen. Playing a Beach Boys/Weezer combination, the band maintains a laid-back lifestyle. Even though the music is relaxed, the songs are still catchy as ever. Surfer Blood brings an original sound to the table while still making nods towards many influences.

Rating: 88%
Key Tracks: “Swim”, “Slow Jabroni”
Your typical college band imitates the legendary jam bands – The Grateful Dead, Phish, etc. With influences across the spectrum of genres – Eric Clapton and Derek Trucks to Joni Mitchell and Billie Holiday to Red Hot Chili Pepper’s Flea and a host of others – Thelonious Funk is not your typical college band. Thelonious Funk, a group of six Wesleyan University freshmen, is a jazz, funk, blues and rock band of exquisitely talented musicians: Julian Applebaum (bass guitar), Adam Brudnick (electric guitar), Adam Jaskol (saxophone/hand percussion), Audrey Kiely (vocals), Greg Shaheen (drums), and Zack Sulsky (piano/keyboards).

I had the opportunity to sit in on one of their practices and see them perform a few days later at Buttstock. Their set list is a 50/50 mix of originals and covers including jazz standards and bluesy female-vocals. They play with a relaxed style and soulful sound and lay down some addictive melodies. The band loves to rock out and certainly doesn’t mind being associated with jam bands, but their jazz, funk, blues, and rock influences make them seem less like a jam band and more like – as Gregg Allman has oft been quoted saying – “a band that jams.”

I had a chance to chat with them after their practice. Here is what they told me:

**How did you guys form up as a group? How long have you been playing together?**

**Greg:** We just found each other and started jamming, and almost immediately it really clicked and
we could easily bounce musical ideas off each other and listen to what each dude was doing with his instrument.

Adam B: We began jamming together pretty early on last semester in a slightly different lineup, and it’s been somewhat fluid since then until early this semester. I can’t really point to a time when we decided to crystallize into a band, but if I had to say something I’d probably point to the Battle of the Classes in February.

Zack: I think I can speak for everyone in saying that we’ve finally found the right setup. The thing I love about this band is that it is so different from the music I play elsewhere. I’m in the jazz orchestra (on saxophone), and play acoustic singer-songwriter music with a band at home. Thelonius Funk is a departure for me, but I think I bring a bit of jazz and singer-songwriter sensibilities to it nevertheless.

How would you define the band’s genres?

Adam B: I guess I’d call us a Jam Band, in the sense that we’re all sort of musical dilettantes who just enjoy messing around. I guess we wear our funk and jazz influences on our sleeves, but there’s a lot of rock and blues in there too. I really like the way an All Music Guide reviewer characterized the Derek Trucks Band as a “group of musicians that share a passion for improvisation and musical exploration.” I guess my own vision for the band is to be equally deserving of that description.

How did you choose your band name?

Adam B: The band’s name was sort of a joke. We tried kicking around names that were more or less random words pushed together. “Snowshoe Bandits” was one, I think. Eventually someone suggested Thelonious Funk as a joke, and we sort of coalesced around it as reflecting our shared appreciation of Monk’s music (and Jazz in general) while still being funny and somewhat irreverent. It’s still somewhat of an interim name, though if we don’t come up with anything better we may wind up sticking with it.

What would you say your musical influences are?

Adam B: It’s more or less an amalgamation of our individual influences. I’d like to think our overall sound is fairly “fresh.”

Then what would you say your individual influences are?

Audrey: A lot of different musicians...Joni Mitchell is my favor-
ite female vocalist, also this singer/songwriter from Vermont named Anais Mitchell, but their stuff doesn’t work so much for this kind of music. I love the older standard women: Fitzgerald, Holiday, Vaughan. With me it’s not so much emulating one person as it is identifying what I like in a lot of different singers, and applying that to my singing.

Julian: I have some pretty eclectic influences. I have and always will idolize Flea for his creativity and technical expertise. That dude can wail out a growling, distorted solo one minute, then make it sound like his bass has angel wings the next. Flea can play whatever the hell he wants and it sounds great. Chris Wood of Medeski Martin and Wood is another one. He does some really cool atonal stuff, and his tone is just so warm and rich. In a less direct, but still very important way, Top 40 dance radio has a pretty big influence too. Sometimes my lines tend to get too complex and busy when I’m in the middle of a jam. Dance/pop songs always remind me how a dead simple, heavy line can often do so much more than all that complicated stuff.

Zack: I try not to model my playing off of anyone in particular. I listen to a lot of jazz pianists and saxophonists, and lately have been listening to a lot of jazz and jazz-influenced singers. My listening is probably least like the music that we play of anyone in the band, but I like that. I think the fact that I don’t really listen to music like we play makes it easier to avoid copying someone’s sound, and makes us sound more original.

Adam B: My main influence on guitar is unquestionably Eric Clapton. I’ve branched out a bit, but he’s my touchstone reference and I still find myself coming back to his music over and over for inspiration. He’s a very melodic player as far as the overall pantheon of guitar gods is concerned, and that aspect probably carries over into my playing most prominently. Derek Trucks is another giant, and I strive to be as talented at jamming as he is. Recently I’ve been really digging Grant Green’s feel, and I’d be a fool not to mention John Scofield (although I really don’t sound anything like him yet). Jeff Beck is also incredible; though I’d probably be a fool to even try to imitate him. I’ve started transcribing solos from horn players like Maceo Parker too, and it’s really starting to bring a new perspective to how I see the fret board.

Greg: I like a lot of jazz drummers, you know ‘the greats’ Max Rach, Art Blakey, Tony Williams. Any drummer that I’ve heard with a good feel and interesting ideas has probably influenced me. I let it all affect me. I’ve learned a lot from just listening.

I know you guys play covers and write some of your own songs. And, I believe Zach wrote “Blue October, Crimson June”. Who else writes for the band? How do you guys decide what to cover?

Zack: A few weeks ago, we started recording our weekly jam session/practices, and we would listen to ideas that we happened upon and talk about expanding particular ones. What would become the chorus of Blue October, Crimson June was one of those ideas. [We] met later to play around on the idea and come up with a general form. We discussed the images that the song brought to mind – a desert sunset and wolves howling, etc., Brudnick, suggested making the song a Western. That is what ended up happening. That night, I wrote a draft of the lyrics based on making the song a Western. The songwriting process then went back to the band, where I pitched my ideas, and we all honed the groove together.

Adam B: Our covers have been songs that catch our eyes, plus vocal songs Audrey finds. [We cover] “Superstition”, “Summertime”, and “Cissy Strut” by The Meters, as well as “Right as Rain” by Adele and “Blame it on Me” by Chrisette Michele, [both of which] Audrey is singing. We’re a fairly communal band, musically speaking, and if someone has an idea they’ll typically throw it out there and we’ll all work to shape it into something presentable.
EARTH, WIND, AND FIRE: SPRING MUSIC AT WES

SNAP CRACKLE POP
KOREAN DRUMMING
EBONY SINGERS
WESWINDS

Photoessay by Isabella Cucchi
He sings in a downhearted tone, words impregnated with introspection, uttering his disillusion with the human race, exhibiting a relatively visceral loneliness. He rocks a flamboyant floral print button-down shirt, buttoned up just half way, displaying his pale-fleshed chest, topping it all off with a sweet pompadour. His fanatics yell his name with affection, hoping to feel his legendary hands, or a simple touch of one of his fingers will do to satiate their want for any kind of intimate contact with Morrissey.

Morrissey has a dedicated group of Hispanic fans in L.A from a young generation that did not have the opportunity to admire and worship their idol in his prime. The Sweet and Tender Hooligans is a direct manifestation of their longing to sing aloud the words that offered them comfort in their moments of confusion and loneliness with the man who understood and sung those emotions. The Sweet and Tender Hooligans is a Smiths cover band dedicated to delivering that experience the young generation yearned. With his classic Morrissey pompadour and dandy sartorial fashion, Jose Maldonado fronts the band performing with a similar Morrissey voice, posing in characteristic Moz moves.

The Sweet and Tender Hooligans have acquired much media attention, has a young Latino L.A. fan base, and is being portrayed as a true phenomenon. A phenomenon that is apparently extremely bizarre, enough so to get this much media attention: a young Latino audience from the less-than-glamorous neighborhoods of L.A. drawn to an eighties band of British men from Manchester, UK. Such apparent superficial discrepancies between band and audience puzzle the media enough to be utilized for tabloid material for commercial success, lacking knowledge and familiarity with the scene and its aesthetics, devoid of careful analysis.

Is It Really So Strange? is a documentary about the L.A. scene devoted to “worshiping” Morrissey through community-organized Sweet and Tender Hooligan shows and simple dance events, all Smiths music. This documentary is centered on interviews with the Latino Morrissey fan community; however, not limiting it solely to the Latino demographic. The interviewees discuss their fascination with the English band, their personal sense of fashion, their encounters
with their idol or fantasies of meeting him. The film is not just another depthless piece of media interested in profiting from the so-called phenomenon. It is a realistic representation of the Morrissey fan community, with no particular agenda to make this another product for consumerism. The film relies on the voices of the interviewees only; empty of potential promotion material that may shift the focus of the audience such as Morrissey performance footage or a Smiths soundtrack for accompaniment. The film is all about the fans individually, each having a different story and grounds for their infatuation with the man and the band.

The filmmaker, a Smiths fan himself, allows the interviewees to interpret their own phenomenon. Their speculations are reflective of their attentive analytical listening and sense of solidarity with the lyrical content. The Smiths’ lyrics convey the theme of loneliness and alienation, not only in terms of social relationships or perceived social awkwardness, but it goes beyond to refer to racial marginalization. This community of Latino Smiths fans is from the outer neighborhoods of Hollywood, which are agricultural centers where housing is affordable. This Latino community is obviously suffering from the unequal social and socioeconomic circumstances that exist in the U.S. The Smiths, in contrast, are from Manchester; Morrissey in particular was the son of Irish immigrants, living as an unemployed writer before he collaborated with guitarist Johnny Marr to start the Smiths. Morrissey’s experience as a minority Irish man in England struggling financially is communicated in his lyrics, attached with it his feelings of alienation, which his fans clearly recognize and comprehend. The theme of loneliness also relates to the prevalent ambiguity in the lyrics regarding the sexuality of the speaker. A significant amount of the fans interviewed (some were white males) expressed a sense of comfort in their times of confusion over their own sexuality due to the widespread negative and condemned view of homosexuality in the U.S. Morrissey understood the baggage of feelings that came with that confusion and the audience responded with appreciation and gratefulness.

In addition to that, the Latino community in particular also felt an attraction for Morrissey’s dandy/Rockabilly sense of fashion. The interviewees clearly exhibited the importance of their style and it being one of the reasons for being drawn to Moz.

Morrissey’s lyrics provide comfort for all those betrayed by society and its insensitive norms, values, and inequalities. Is It Really So Strange? rightfully gives a voice to this fan base and allowed them to represent themselves, as opposed to the general and vague depiction of this group by the media. It is also important to acknowledge that Morrissey fans are of all different races and ethnicities and singling out the Latino community specifically as a “phenomenon” hinders the understanding of the true importance of Morrissey and his lyrics. Morrissey is the voice for those invisible and they will hold on to Moz’s hand for comfort and love.
1990

1. Vanilla Ice. *Ice Ice Baby.*
Robert Matthew “Vanilla Ice” van Winkle (vocalist and composer). Recorded 1990. SBK Records. Pop LP #1 (11x platinum), Pop #1, R&B LP #6, R&B #6
   Vanilla Ice: *To the Extreme.* 1990. SBK Records. (1st LP)

   This song helped diversify hip-hop and introduced it to a mainstream audience as one of the first hip-hop single to reach Billboard charts. It samples the bass line from the song “Under Pressure” by Queen and David Bowie, who did not receive credit or royalties until after the song became a hit. The sudden and extreme success of this artist’s hip-hop raises the possibility of exploitation of sound and race issues.

   “The way I do stuff is to go through old records that my brother has. He used to listen to rock ‘n’ roll and stuff like that. I listened to funk and hip-hop because rock wasn’t really my era. But having a brother like that, well, I just mixed the two, and he had a copy of ‘Under Pressure’. And putting those sounds to hip-hop was great.” (Vanilla Ice in “Feature: Has Vanilla Ice been stealing other people’s songs?” 1990)

2. MC Hammer. *U Can’t Touch This.*
   MC Hammer: *Please Hammer, Don’t Hurt ‘Em.* 1990. Capitol. (3rd LP)

   Samples Rick James’ “Super Freak” and significant primarily for its role in making hip-hop accessible to a mainstream audience.

3. Mariah Carey. *Vision of Love*
Mariah Carey (vocals). Composed by Mariah Carey and Ben Margulies. Produced by Rhett Lawrence and Narada Michael Walden. Recorded 1990, NY. Columbia Records. Pop #1, Pop LP#1 (9x platinum), R&B #1, R&B LP #1

   The debut album of one of the most successful artists of the 90’s, influenced as a singer by R&B, gospel, and hip hop. Cited as inspiration for both Beyonce and Rihanna.

1991

4. Metallica. *Enter Sandman*

This album saw Metallica establish two things – themselves as the masters of metal, and metal itself as a genre worthy of notice. No one can question that Metallica put their name in the books and metal in the mainstream.

5. Red Hot Chili Peppers. Under the Bridge
Anthony Keides (vocals and lyrics), Michale “Flea” Balzary (bass), Chad Smith (drums), Josh Frusciante (guitar). Produced by Rick Rubin. Warder Bros. Records. Pop #2, Pop LP #3 (13x platinum, platinum ‘92), Modern Rock #6, Mainstream Rock #2.


This song introduced the band to the mainstream for the first time. Signing on to WB Records and with Beastie Boys’ and Run DMC’s producer, Rick Rubin, the album revealed the bands digression from heavy metal, instead integrating punk and funk. Unable to cope with the subsequent popularity, guitarist John Frusciante quit the band mid-tour in 1992 (until returning in 1998).

6. Pearl Jam. Alive

Pearl Jam: Ten. 1991. Epic. (1st LP)

This album, and song especially, cemented Pearl Jam’s role in the Seattle grunge movement, alongside the likes of Nirvana and Alice in Chains.

1992

7. Dr. Dre. Nuthin’ but a “G” Thang
Andre Romelle “Dr. Dre” Young (composer and vocalist). Death Row Studios, Los Angelos. Pop #2, Pop LP #3 (3x platinum), R&B #1, R&B LP #1

Dr. Dre: The Chronic. 1992. Death Row (1st LP)

While hip-hop originated in the east coast with the likes of Afrikaa Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and DJ Kool Herc, Dr. Dre defined west coast rap and G-funk and introduced it into mainstream. This was released soon after Dre’s departure from N.W.A. and Ruthless Records over a financial dispute.

8. Sade. No Ordinary Love
Sade Adu (vocals, lyricist), Stuart Colin Matthewman (guitar, sax), Paul Spencer Denman (bass), Andrew Hale (keyboards). Composed by Sade Adu and Stuart Matthewman. Epic Records. Pop #28, Pop LP #3 (4x platinum), R&B #9, R&B LP #2, UK #14, UK LP #10


This English R&B, soul, jazz, funk, and soft rock band formed in the early 80’s and was awarded Grammy, Brit, and American Music awards for the next two decades; this song won a Grammy for Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals.

9. Sublime. Date Rape
Bradley Nowell (vocals and guitar), Bud Gaugh (drums and percussion), Eric Wilson (bass guitar). Skunk R-
An amalgam of punk, rock, reggae, and hip hop, Sublime is significant for their huge crossover success and influence in the revival of punk rock in the early 90’s. Their success on the pop charts was not until mid to late-90’s however.

1993

10. Wu Tang Clan. *Protect Ya Neck*

Wu Tang Clan: *Enter the 36 Chambers*. 1993. RCA (1st LP)

Defined NY style hip hop and helped instigate the East Coast Renaissance, a wave of hardcore hip hop developing out of the New York after a brief lapse following the original birth of hip hop, fostering the growth of Wu Tang, Nas, Biggie, Gangstarr.

11. Radiohead. *Creep*

Radiohead: *Pablo Honey*. 1993. EMI (1st LP)

Influenced by grunge era of rock ushered in by Nirvana, Radiohead would become one of the primary heirs to rock art, following in the footsteps of The Beatles and especially Pink Floyd in their avant-garde experimental attitudes. Their first album being much simpler and more grunge-influenced, this is their first and most popular single, being covered by the likes of even Prince and many others at one time or another.

12. Snoop Dogg. *Gin and Juice*
Cardozar Calvin “Snoop Dogg” Broadus (lyrics, vocals). Produced by Dr. Dre. Death Row Records. Pop #6, Pop LP #1, R&B #3

One of Dre’s first and most successful protégés, Snoop Dogg’s debut album went 4x platinum and set the standard for rap music for the mid 90’s and has a clear influence on the pop music of today, drawing heavily from the music of the forefathers of funk like George Clinton and Parliament.

1994

13. Green Day. *Basket Case*
Billie Joe Armstrong (guitar, vocals), Mike Dirnt (bass, backup vocals), Tre Cool (drums). Recorded 1994. Reprise Records. Pop LP #2, Modern Rock #1 (7 weeks), Mainstream Rock #9 (10x platinum)


Both hailing from California, Bad Religion and Green Day spearheaded the punk rock revival of the early 90’s seen in the United States, resulting in a wave of similar bands like The Offspring, Rancid, and NOFX. MTV and radio stations like Los Angeles’ KROQ-FM played a major role in the crossover success of this genre of music. Gurewitz’s label Epitaph Records produced many of the albums belonging to this music scene.

15. NOFX. *Lineoleum*
Michael John “Fat Mike” Burkett (vocals, bass), Eric Melvin (guitar), Erik Sandin (drums), Aaron “El Hefe” Abeyta (guitar). Epitaph Records.


Playing a role similar to the Sex Pistols in the 70’s, NOFX has had a “leave us the f*** alone” attitude to radio, MTV, and major record labels since the mid 80’s. Without any radio play or aired music videos, this album reach gold in 2000 and secured their place as one of the most prominent punk bands of the punk rock revival.

1995:
1. Jewel, *You Were Meant for Me*
Jewel (guitar, vocals) Producer: Ben Keith, Arranger: Charlotte Caffey, Jewel.

   Hot 100 #2, Modern Rock #26, Pop LP #4 (12x platinum) Released on November 12th, 1996 on Atlantic Records.

1996:
2. Dave Matthew’s Band, *Crash Into Me*
Dave Matthews (guitar, vocals), Carter Beauford (percussion, drums), Stefan Lessard (bass), LeRoi Moore (sax, flute, horns), Boyd Tinsley (violin). Producer: Steve Lillywhite. Pop #3, Modern Rock #7, Pop LP(7x platinum).

   Released on April 30th, 1996 on RCA.

Dave Matthew’s Band was integral in the alternative rock music movement that originated in the 1980’s and became widely popular in the 90’s with the likes of Radiohead and Nirvana, garnering attention and success for the genre. There music also included elements of funk, brought to life by their brass and percussion section.

1997
3. Backstreet Boys, *Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)*
A.J. Maclean (vocals), Howie Dorough (vocals), Brian Littrell (vocals), Nick Carter (vocals), Kevin Richardson (vocals). Composer: Max Martin, Herbert Crichlow, Producer: Max Martin, Kristian Lundin. Pop #2. Released on June 10th, 1997 on Jive Records

The Backstreet Boys are the most successful boy band ever, and the first to gain mainstream success since the rise and fall of the original boy band, New Kids on the Block which split up in the early 90’s. Their debut album was released first in the UK and Canada, where it gained tremendous success. It was released a year later in the US where it received a similar reception.

4. Sugar Ray, *Fly*
Mark McGrath (lead guitar, vocals), Rodney Sheppard (rhythm guitar, vocals), Murphy Karges (bass, vocals), Stan Frazier (percussion, vocals), Craig “DJ Homicide” Bullock (turntables, programming). Modern Rock #1 (8 Weeks), Billboard Hot 100 Airplay #1 (4 weeks) Producer: David Kahne. Released on June 17, 1997 on Atlantic Records.

The album Floored contained two versions of fly. The one that gained the most chart success was the Reggae fusion version, indicating that reggae was still a thriving and relevant genre of music even late in the 90’s. How-
ever, it was prevented from charting on the Pop charts because it was a non-single.

5. Hanson, *MMMBop*
Issac Hanson (guitar, vocals), Taylor Hanson (piano, vocals), Zac Hanson (drums, vocals), Composer: Hanson, Producer: The Dust Brothers. Pop #1, Pop LP# (2x platinum). Released on April 15th, 1997 on Mercury/Universal.

6. Modest Mouse, *Polar Opposites*
Issac Brock (guitar, vocals), Jeremiah Green (drums), Eric Judy (bass), Producer: Calvin Johnson, Issac Brock, Scott Swayze. Released on November 18th, 1997 on Up Records.

This album is considered to be Modest Mouse’s breakthrough album in addition to being hailed by many as one of the best Indie Rock albums of the 90’s.

7. Radiohead, *Paranoid Android*
Thom Yorke (rhythm guitar, lead vocals), Johnny Greenwood (lead guitar), Ed O’Brien (vocals, guitar), Colin Greenwod (bass), Phil Selway (percussion, drums). UK Pop #3, Pop LP #21, UK Pop LP #1 Composer: Radiohead, Producer: Radiohead, Nigel Godrich. Released on May 26th, 1997 on Parlophone (UK).

Ok Computer is Radiohead’s breakthrough album. The album featured an broader sound and the lyrics expressed themes of modern alienation. Paranoid Android was the single of the album that had the most chart success in the UK. The single was not released in the US, but the album did well on the US charts with, peaking at #21.

1998:

8. Britney Spears, *...Baby One More Time*

This is Britney Spears debut single off of her debut album and it was extremely successful. It reached the #1 spot on the pop charts in 14 different countries and was one of the first examples of Teen pop.

1999

9. Eminem, *My Name Is*

Eminem, much like the Beastie Boys did in the 80’s, increased the accessibility of rap to a larger white audience. Although there was already significant crossover, he provided many white listeners with a gateway into the rap genre, allowing them to become involved with the genre for the first time. Also, he was produced under Dr. Dre, a pioneering figure in early 80’s rap who went on to start his own successful record company as a talented producer.

10. Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Scar Tissue*
Michael “Flea” Balzary (bass guitar), John Frusciante (guitar, vocals, keyboard), Anthony Keidis (vocals), Chad Smith (drums, percussion) Composer: Red Hot Chili Peppers, Producer: Rick Rubin. Pop #9, Mainstream Rock #1, Modern Rock #1, Grammy Award, Pop LP #3 (5x platinum). Released on June 8, 1999 on Warner Bros. Records.
The album represented a shift in the sound of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, as this new album was the first released with new guitarist John Frusciante. The old guitarist had been Dave Navarro, added on after the Blood Sugar Sex Magic promotional tour had ended in the early 90’s. Navarro had influenced the bands sound by adding on sounds of heavy metal and psychedelic rock. This album retained roots of their once characteristic “punk funk” sound, but touted much more virtuosity with more melodic rifts and more structured songs.

2000:
11. ‘N Sync, Bye Bye Bye

‘N Sync was the next biggest boyband after the Backstreet Boys, by what also the last popular and successful groups of its kind.

2000
Thom Yorke (lead vocals), Jonny Greenwood (lead guitar), Ed O’Brien (guitar, backing vocals), Colin Greenwood (bass guitar, synthesizers), Phil Selway (drums, percussion), Andy Bush, Steve Hamilton, Martin Hathaway, Andy Hamilton, Marty Lockheart, Stan Harrison, Liam Kerkman, Mike Kersey (horn section), Henry Binns (Rhythm sampling). Composer: Radiohead. Recorded: 1/99-4/00; released 10/00, Parlophone, Capitol. Pop LP #1 in UK & US.

2. U2, Beautiful Day.
Bono (lead vocals, guitar), The Edge (guitar, keyboards, and vocals), Adam Clayton (bass guitar), Larry Mullen, Jr. (drums and percussion). Composer: U2. Recorded 9/00, Hanover Quay Studios, Dublin, Ireland; released 10/00, Island. Pop #15, Pop LP #3 (4x platinum).

3. Daft Punk, One More Time.
Guy Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter (music), Romanthony (vocals). Composer: Daft Punk, Romanthony. Released 11/00, Virgin Records. Pop #1 in France, Pop #61 in US.

2001
Andé “André 3000” Benjamin (vocals), Antwan “Big Boi” Patton (vocals). Composer: OutKast. Recorded 2000; released 1/01, Arista. Pop #1, Pop LP #2, R&B #1, R&B LP #2.

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2002
5. The Flaming Lips, Do You Realize.
Wayne Coyne (lead vocals, guitar), Michael Ivins (bass guitar), Steven Drozd (lead guitar), Kliph Scurlock (drums, percussion). Composer: Wayne Coyne. Recorded 6/00-4/02; released 8/02, Warner Bros. Pop # 32 in UK.


**2003**


**2004**


2005
1. Coldplay, *Speed of Sound*.
   Chris Martin (lead vocals, keyboards, guitar), Johnny Buckland (lead guitar), Guy Berryman (bass guitar), Will Champion (drums, backing vocals). Released 4/05, Parlophone. Pop #8, Pop LP #1.

2. Gorillaz, *Feel Good Inc*.

2006

5. The Raconteurs, *Steady, As She Goes*.
   Jack White (guitar, vocals), Brendan Benson (guitar, vocals), Patrick Keeler (drums), Jack Lawrence (bass guitar). Released 5/06, Third Man Records. Pop #54, Pop LP #7.

   Performed by Justin Timberlake. Composed by Justin Timberlake, Timothy “Timbaland” Mosley, Nate “Danja” Hills. Produced by Timbaland, Justin Timberlake, Danja. Released 7/06, Jive. Pop #1, Pop LP #1, R&B #52, R&B LP #1.

7. Lupe fiasco, *Daydreamin’*.

2007
8. Fall Out Boy, *This Ain’t a Scene, It’s an Arms Race*.
   Patrick Stump (vocals, rhythm guitar), Joe Trohman (lead guitar), Pete Wentz (bass), Andy Hurley (drums). Released 1/07, Fueled by Ramen, Island Def Jam. Pop #2, Pop LP #1 (1x platinum).


10. Amy Winehouse, *Rehab*.
    Written and performed by Amy Winehouse. Produced by Mark Ronson. Released 3/07, Island. Pop #9, Pop LP #2 (2x platinum).


Kanye Omari West (vocals), T-Pain (Auto-Tune vocals). Composers: Kanye West, Quincy Jones, Faheem Najm, James Ingram, Adrian Davis. Produced by Kanye West, DJ Toomp. Recorded 2006; released 10/07, Island Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella. R&B #3, R&B LP #1, Pop #7, Pop LP #1, 2x platinum.

2008
13. MGMT, *Time to Pretend*. March 3
Performed, composed and produced by Andrew VanWyngarden and Ben Goldwasser. Released 3/08, Columbia. Pop LP #38.


2009


16. Wilco, *Wilco (The Song)*.
Jeff Tweedy (vocals, guitar), John Stirratt (bass guitar), Nels Cline (guitar), Glen Kotche (drums), Pat Sansone (multi-instrumentalist). Produced by Wilco, Jim Scott. Released 6/09, Nonesuch. Pop LP #4.


17. Miley Cyrus, *Party In The U.S.A.*

