Guitar Legend
Jimi Hendrix

“when I die I want people to play my music, go wild, and just freak out”

The return of Vinyl

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Jackson’s Legacy on Culture
by Shiny Park

Michael Jackson, born on August 29th, 1958 died on June 25th of 2009, became one of the most influential figures in pop music history. Starting from an early age, Jackson’s life was filled with music and turmoil. He became one of the singers of Jackson 5, a small group of performers made up of his siblings, singing and dancing at an early age. Due to their incredible talent, the Jackson 5 became a hit, and Michael Jackson was thrust into fame. From then on, his life as an artist spiraled out into an almost astronomical success, as did his talent and growth as an artist. Unfortunately, the media’s fascination with Michael Jackson grew alongside, later wreaking havoc and misery in his later adult life.

There are very few, if at all any, that do not consider Michael Jackson a major influence in American pop culture. One must stop and consider the extent to which Michael Jackson culturally and musically shaped the history of music. There are some obvious facts in the study: Jackson enjoyed enormous commercial success throughout his career, as well as a large audience that fell in love with his work. He was a prime example of a crossover artist that churned out hit after hit, and a prime example of an internal struggle with racial identity gone wrong, resulting in the many plastic surgeries he had undergone by the time of his death. Later on, he became a regular target for the tabloid papers, and was often harassed by the media for his attention. All this sums up a part of Jackson’s life that has had such an influence in American culture.

Musically, from a historical perspective, Jackson contributed to shaping America during his career. His previous experience with music from the performances of Jackson 5 had prepared him to create the music of Thriller, Bad, and later albums. Before, his Motown musicianship had been great; when he embarked on his solo career, his musicianship became phenomenal, and the artist known for his perfectionism and obsession with the minutest of details, expanded his horizons as he grew with his technicality and skills. His songs had a danceable beat, yet it were also very melodic. His more ballad-esque songs, such as “You Are Not Alone” also garnered much success commercially and artistically. Such tidings began to open the door to other artists that followed his style of danceable, yet melodic music style. Even modern artists such as Ne-Yo and Justin Timberlake draw influence from Jackson’s musical expansion.
Culturally, Jackson was a force to be reckoned with. When MTV first began to air, it was filled predominantly with white, rock music and artistically very boring music videos. Jackson’s company at the time (CBS), demanded that Jackson’s music videos be aired and played. MTV first refused, but finally caved in. The very music video they first rejected became one of the most watched videos in MTV history, which began an explosion of Black music in MTV and the television industry in general. The importance of this breaking of racial barrier is monumental: racial tensions had always been high in American history, and this social, moral, and political tension had carried over to the realms of music. In early rock and roll and in blues music, black and white music was often at conflict with each other. Often, new kinds of black music took a long time to be accepted. Even then, black music was met with much opposition and criticism from white audiences. MTV’s refusal to air Jackson’s music videos is an embodiment of such times. However, when Jackson’s videos aired, these racial barriers came crashing down and black musicians and their videos were given more airtime and general, if somewhat begrudging, acceptance.

This cultural influence that Jackson had on America is important. It is a symbol of the changing times. Not only that, but with more airtime for black musicians, more of the public’s attention and knowledge of different kinds of music thrived and expanded. This raised cultural awareness, alongside a growing database of different kinds of music other than the white rock and roll scene. His bleaching of his skin and surgical alterations of his face signaled an internal struggle about his racial identity that many black Americans felt ashamed and disproving of at the time. Still, Jackson was able to open the doors for black music and black musicians. In this way, Jackson is considered extremely important to the culture of America.

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The King of Pop was “a force to be reckoned with”
Adele: Rolling Deep

By Melissa Luning
I first heard the soulful voice of Adele Laurie Blue Adkins on an episode of CW’s 90210 in 2009, and downloaded her entire first album 19 immediately. What had attracted me, and many other young fans, to the British R&B singer were her modulated voice and rich tone, along with the uniqueness of her music compared to the Pop music today. Since the release of her first album in 2008, Adele has soared to the tops of the Pop and R&B charts, claiming six of six Grammy awards at the 54th annual 2012 Grammy Awards, including album of the year. I remember watching with pride as Adele accepted her Grammy award; humbly stating that the record was about something everyone has been through: just a “rubbish relationship”. The year 2011 was known as “the year of Adele” due to her rise to musical fame.

Adele’s talent and passion for music has always been evident, and the troubles she has faced in her life have added to her highly emotional lyrical content. Adele was born on May 5th, 1988 in Tottenham, North London. Her mother, Penny Adkins, raised her alone. Her father left them when Adele was only three or four years old. To this day she does not forgive his absence in her childhood and this is reflected in aspects of her music. Surprisingly, no one in Adele’s family has ever had any musical training or experience, even though Adele displays unbelievable talent in Soul and Jazz music with R&B influences. Adele listened to musical legends as a child. It was unusual for such a young girl to be greatly inspired by older artists such as Etta James and Jill Scott, but this for her was an awakening of her dream to be long lasting like they are. She also adored listening to the Spice Girls growing up, dressing up like them and putting on performances arranged by her mother. The two-person family moved to South London when Adele was still a child. The new neighborhood became the subject for one of Adele’s first hit singles “Hometown Glory”. Here, Adele also started listening to R&B artists such as Mary J Blige and Aaliyah.
Adele was never much of a schoolgirl, and so her mother enrolled her in the BRIT School for Performing Arts and Technology. She attended school with singers Leona Lewis and Jessie J. The now deceased star Amy Winehouse was an alumnus of the same institution.

Through her schooling, Adele recorded songs herself and posted them on MySpace, receiving much positive feedback on her luscious and plummy voice. Approximately three days after her graduation in 2006, XL Recordings offered Adele a record deal. She was hesitant to sign because she was unfamiliar with the record label, but accepted the offer after research was done.

The growing superstar Adele has recorded only two albums thus far: 19 and 21. Her albums are named after the age in which she records them. According to Adele, the songs reflect her morals and attitude of her age. She has significantly matured from her first album, as have her songs: “I’m more patient, more honest, more forgiving and more aware of my own flaws, habits and principles. Something that comes with age I think. So fittingly this record is called ‘21’. The whole reason I called my first album ‘19’ was about cataloging what happened to me then and who I was then, like a photo album, you see the progression and changes in a person throughout the years”. Adele’s album 21 was named album of the year, and spent more weeks at number one than any other album since Whitney Houston’s soundtrack for “The Bodyguard” in 1992.

From listening to 21, anyone can conclude that Adele had just gone through a harsh ending to an exhausting relationship. In an interview with Anderson Cooper, she states she had only written her album “selfishly to get over a break up”, and that she would have never expected any of the songs to become a hit, and especially for her album to go gold.
Her main hit off of the album, “Rolling In the Deep”, was written literally the day after breaking up with her boyfriend whom she wrote the album about, although Adele now has no feelings left for neither the song nor the man. She claims to just be writing love songs, and “everyone loves love songs”. She had considered giving the song the title, “We Could Have Had It All”, but to her that seemed too “Whitney Houston”. Instead, she gave it a name that would make Americans curious. In the UK, to “roll deep” means to have someone always by your side. This is slang almost exclusively used by the British, so Adele designed the title precisely to intrigue the American public.

Adele admits she has always had stage fright. Furthermore, Adele’s confidence performing live was damaged when she lost her voice during a concert. She appeared to have a polyp on one of her vocal chords. She had surgery on her throat in November of 2011, however claimed to never have the strength to get over that boyfriend, she has advanced towards happiness quite quickly and is currently in a new and more rewarding relationship. She told Anderson Cooper on 60 minutes that she laughs at the past er, she has no doubt that if she does a major tour it will occur again. She claims that her voice is much deeper, however it will not stop her from ever writing songs or performing again. Her voice is fully healed today, therefore creating a high demand for live performance. Adele states that she needs to take time off, not because she needs to wait until another break up to write an album, but to absorb all that has happened to her the past year. I would guess that after Adele’s overwhelmingly successful year in 2011, and her widely popular breakup album, Adele would need some time to recover. She has stated that although she has been naturally generous with the details of her life, it is getting less so. This is practical since it seems that overnight she has gone from just a well-known artist to one making history, selling albums as well as stars Whitney Houston and the Beatles.
It is no secret Adele is trying to back away from becoming a major celebrity. Adele has been coined an “anti-pop star” despite her popularity due to the Jazz influences in her music, intensely personal lyrics and curvy appearance. She has no desire to become the main focus of attention. Adele never expected to become as famous as she is today, and she continuously tries to escape. She has bought a remote mansion to escape to, and took up a part-time job in the back of a record store sorting and labeling CD’s after she won her first Grammy award. She chose this occupation because to her, it was “incredibly real”, and that is what she says she needs, parts of her life that seem real. With this said, one can only wonder what Adele will do next as a person naturally down to earth. Will she become tired of the celebrity fame that comes with natural talent and retire early? Or will she continue writing and recording songs despite her vocal incident? One can only hope that she will continue to release material, because at the moment the world cannot get enough of Adele. And although her boyfriends may come and go, she will forever be “rolling in the deep” thanks to her fans.

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The Legend of Jimi Hendrix

by Donovan Suh
Popularly believed to be one of the most influential and prominent musicians of the 20th century, Jimi Hendrix took the musical ingenuity of the electric guitar to new heights. Jimi, born as Johnny Allen Hendrix, was born on November 27, 1942 in Seattle, Washington. As a young child, Hendrix endured the hardships of family turmoil, sexual harassment, and poverty. He turned to music as a haven for peace and conciliation from life’s tribulations. At the age of 15, Jimi’s musical career officially began when he acquired his first guitar, which replaced the ukulele and broomstick he had previously been strumming in imitation. He immediately fell in love with playing the guitar and learned to play by practicing for several hours a day, watching others play, getting advice from older, more accomplished players, and listening to records whenever he had spare time. Because Jimi was entirely self-taught, he was unable to read and write music, which made his meteoric rise to fame even more gilt-edged. Young Jimmy took a deep interest in blues music, drawing influence from major artists such as B.B King, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Buddy Holly, and Robert Johnson.

Throughout his early career, Hendrix played with various bands including The Velvvetones and The Rocking Kings. On May 31, 1961, Hendrix enlisted in the U.S army against his will; he fell into trouble with the law for
being associated with stealing multiple automobiles and was given an ultimatum, to join the army or serve two years in the state penitentiary. It was while serving in the army he met fellow soldier and bass player, Billy Cox who would later play with Hendrix in his band, The Jimi Hendrix Experience. After only one year, Hendrix was discharged from the army, allegedly by his commanding officers who regarded him as a subpar soldier. Ensuing his discharge, he moved to Tennessee where he performed in low paying gigs in obscure venues. He refined his ability to play the electric guitar with his teeth, which later became a hallmark of his signature style. Hendrix’s first studio recording took place in March 1964, where he worked with the Iggy Brothers on the song, “Testify.” Around the same time as his first recording, he toured with famous artist Little Richard, but after months of increasing tension, the two parted ways.

Early in 1966 at the Cheetah Club in New York, Linda Keith, girlfriend of the guitarist of the Rolling Stones, Keith Richards, befriended Hendrix. Initially, she had recommended Hendrix to Stones’ producer, Seymour Stein as well as their manager, Andrew Oldham, but neither were interested in signing Jimi; she then introduced him to Chas Chandler, the bassist for the Animals. Chandler, impressed by Hendrix’s electrifying guitar playing abilities, signed him to a production contract in London. It was in London where Jimi, with the help of Chandler, formed his first premier band, The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

After his enthusiastically received performance in France, an on-stage appearance with Cream, important appearances on top UK television pop shows, and showcase gigs at popular nightclubs, word of Hendrix’s music spread like wildfire in London. On May 12, 1967, the first Jimi Hendrix Experience album, Are You Experienced, was released in the United Kingdom. The album received great praise and was second only to the Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band on the UK charts. During this
time, The Experience extensively toured the United Kingdom and various parts of Europe which allowed Hendrix to develop his stage presence and perfect his playing style. Months after the release of Are You Experienced in the UK, it was finally released in the United States and Canada. Although it endured great popularity and success in Europe, the album had difficulty cracking into the Top 100 Billboard Charts in the United States. Hendrix’s breakthrough came when Paul McCartney, member of the Beatles recommended the group to the organizers of the Monterrey International Pop Festival. This event proved to be a great opportunity as there was an enormous audience present, numerous journalists came to cover the event, and the world’s most well renowned artists were performing alongside him. Hendrix’s famous performance marked with the burning and smashing of his guitar, finally brought him to the attention of the U.S. public.

After a year based in the US, Hendrix moved back to London temporarily with his girlfriend, Kathy Etchingham. During this time, Noel Redding, bassist of the Experience, became increasingly frustrated with the fact that he was not given an opportunity to play his most favored instrument, the guitar. The escalating chagrin of Redding toward Hendrix caused fruitless recording sessions and discomfort among other members of the band. Eventually, after a chaotic concert marked by the police throwing tear gas into the crowd, Redding quit the band, signaling the end of the Jimi Hendrix Experience. The first performance after the breakup of the band was at the Woodstock Music Festival on August 18, 1969, where Jimi announced the new name of his band, The Gypsy Sun and Rainbow. Hendrix was considered one of the biggest draws for the festival, exemplified by the greater pay and attention he received compared to his fellow musicians.

After The Cry of Love Tour, which showcased the reunited Jimi Hendrix Experience with Noel Redding, and his second large-scale European Tour, Jimi performed in his last public performance at a jazz club in Soho. On September 18, 1970, Hendrix died in London at the young age of 27. He had spent the later part of the evening at a party and was picked up by his girlfriend, Monika Dannemann. She claimed in her original testimony that Jimi had taken nine of her prescribed Vesparax sleeping pills. According to surgeon, John Bannister,
the doctor who was the first to tend to Hendrix, Hendrix had asphyxiated on his own vomit. Multiple theories exist for the actual cause of Jimi’s death: drug overdose, murder and suicide. Because there was no tracheotomy, it is impossible to prove the real cause of his unfortunate death; however, years later, former Animals “roadie”, James Wright, published a book in May 2009 claiming that Hendrix’s manager, Mike Jeffrey had Hendrix killed because the rock star wanted to terminate his management contract. Jeffrey defended himself stating that Wright simply wanted to increase his book sales and popularity. Despite his early death, Hendrix receives acclaim as one of the greatest electric guitarists of all time.

Hendrix once pronounced, “When I die, I want people to play my music, go wild, and freak out, and do anything they want to do.” Most people would agree the legacy and music he left behind does just that.

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The Reemergence of Vinyl

Andrew Postman

One of the most surprising trends in music distribution in the last few years has been the steady reemergence of vinyl records. Though one usually expects listening technology to move forward and not revert, vinyl records are certainly bucking that trend. Though not nearly as popular as digital music files, last year 3.9 million vinyl records were purchased, and the number of vinyl record sales is likely to increase in 2012. Interestingly, most vinyl consumers are under the age of 30 rather than older generations who had originally grown up listening to vinyl records, as one might expect. This young demographic suggests that vinyl has a real potential for continued future growth.

Vinyl is not just confined to older records and indie bands, as new mainstream releases have come out on vinyl. Even though last year’s top selling vinyl record was the Beatles’ Abbey Road, other top selling vinyl records were new releases, such as Wilco’s The Whole Love and Radiohead’s King of Limbs. Although these top sellers are indie bands, mainstream artists like Lady Gaga and Adele have released their newest albums on vinyl as well.

Often these vinyl releases contain mp3 download codes, giving listeners the option to listen to a record on their computers and iPods as well as on their turntables. Most vinyl records are sold in independent music stores, though large national retail stores, like Bestbuy, have started to sell some vinyl records in addition to their other products. One promotional tool independent music stores use to sell vinyl is Record Store Day. Record Store Day has been held nationally on the third Saturday of every April for the past 5 years. On this day, artists release rare vinyl records exclusively at independently run record stores, which attracts many buyers to these independent stores.

Many who buy vinyl claim that vinyl records simply sound better, as digital formats do not aptly capture sound, though some audio experts disagree with this sentiment. When interviewed by NPR, Scott Metcalfe, the director of recording arts and sciences at Johns Hopkins’s Peabody Institute, who prefers
digital files to analog recordings, said, “With analog formats, although the sound can be very pleasing in certain styles, it’s definitely imparting its own sound on it. And I think, to an extent, it’s that sound that some people are really drawn to. But it’s nice as an engineer to have the confidence of knowing that what I’m putting into - in most cases these days, the computer - is pretty close to what I’m going to get out.”

One of the leading factors in the reemergence of vinyl is nostalgia and vinyl’s general experience. People who use vinyl typically appreciate the album artwork, and enjoy the actual physical experience of putting a record on a turntable. Many feel as if there is a certain mystique to vinyl. Lily Meyers, my next-door neighbor, who is a vinyl record junky told me, “I like listening to vinyl because it’s more fun. It’s just more of an experience. I see the artwork, which I love and which is lost on the computer, and I listen to the whole thing, instead of just pressing play on iTunes. I guess I just feel that I get more out of it.”

Even though Vinyl is growing, it certainly will not come anywhere close to becoming the dominant medium of listening. Consumers may not buy vinyl because a large collection of Vinyl records takes up a significant amount of space, while an equally large collection of digital files fits on a physically small hard drive. Additionally, consumers may not buy vinyl because new vinyl releases are expensive compared to legally downloaded digital files (not to mention illegally downloaded ones.) On Amazon, new vinyl releases typically cost up to $20, compared to the standard $10 dollar price of an album on iTunes.

Even though vinyl will not overtake digital files, the potential for future growth of vinyl looks bright. Record companies may be compelled to promote vinyl recordings since there is no easy way to illegally acquire them, which would help grow vinyl record sales. Furthermore, some argue that vinyl may surpass CDs as the most purchased physical format. All in all, although a few years ago the market for vinyl was nearly gone, it seems that the market for vinyl will continue to grow.

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LADY GAGA

JENNELLE HERRICK
The relationship between artists and their fan base has drastically changed in the 21st century. The 1964 image of the Beatles landing in America with thousands of screaming teenagers has now been trumped.

Lady Gaga now has over 23 million followers on Twitter.

With the rise of the Internet and iTunes, a new media has emerged and has changed the music industry forever. Some musicians are taking full advantage of the Internet as an opportunity to gain a fan base. Social networking and media websites like MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter allow anyone to see up to the minute news from their favorite artists. Our culture has changed with time to embrace the technological revolution; but has social media driven music out of the musician and turned it into a popularity contest?

In order to fully understand social media and its influence, we will evaluate the megastar Lady Gaga who recently launched her own social media website littlemonsters.com. One might question her intentions and wonder if she has gone too far. In order to answer that, one must look back at how she achieved social media supremacy and earned the nickname ‘Queen of Twitter.’ Lady Gaga was the first person in the world to reach 20 million Twitter followers, over 47 million people have “Liked” her official Facebook Fan Page, and her YouTube videos have been viewed over a billion times. Lady Gaga is able to attract many fans worldwide, while still maintaining and strengthening the relationships with the fans she has had since her underground days in Greenwich Village performing with Lady Starlight.

But what does Gaga do to keep her fans interested and invested in her, even when the spotlight is on someone else? Contently.com contributes her successful following from: appreciating her fans, being real and uncensored, and promoting charitable causes. In three words: attention, realness, and thoughtfulness. Gaga is quick to thank her fans for her awards and successes as she is also quick to reward them with exclusive sneak-peek
and insider information that she would most likely get into trouble for leaking—that is—if she actually had a publicist. Additionally, Gaga pledged to stop updating her Twitter and FaceBook accounts until $1 million was raised for Alicia Key’s foundation Keep A Child Alive, after a fan that was bullied tragically committed suicide. What Gaga doesn’t say is also noble. She doesn’t flaunt her celebrity status or her wealth. She acts like an individual who has found her calling and wishes to share the experience with anyone willing to listen and appreciate it.

So how can the megastar possibly reach any more notoriety through the outlet of the Internet and various social networking websites like YouTube, FaceBook, Twitter, and MySpace?

Simple, launch your own social networking website.

Gaga teamed up with Backplane, and has recently launched a new strategy for “little monsters” (Gaga fans) and “mother monster” (Gaga herself) to communicate via a new social media outlet called little-monster.com. In a statement from Backplane to The Economist the main purpose of the new website, “…is to create a one-stop shop for everything Gaga. Fans
Lady Gaga has truly redefined the stereotypical musician-fan relationship. After gaining limited access to littlemonsters.com, the love felt for Gaga was contagious. There are hundreds of pictures of Gaga that fans have taken and Photoshopped for the superstar, and thousands of pictures of Gaga in her outrageous outfits. Gaga’s fans are also her biggest defenders. There is very little love for Madonna on littlemonsters.com, as well as any person who has publicly criticized any of Gaga’s fashion choices (cough, meat dress, cough).

Although I am trying to be critical, my love for Gaga only inflated after being accepted, in my eyes, to the ‘elite’ fan base of my mother monster. My friends often ask me how I can like someone I don’t know because they are always in disguise. Honestly, what is on the outside doesn’t matter to me as much as what Gaga reveals with her personality. Gaga opens up to her fans and pours out her soul. She takes pictures of herself without makeup and with fake jewelry on; she lets us know if she is having a bad day, she gives words of encouragement to those who are looking for it. Yes, I may have a girl-crush on Gaga, but how couldn’t I (have you seen her body)? Joining littlemonsters.com gives little monsters a mouthpiece that goes directly to the mother monster’s ear.

Some say that littlemonsters.com is a big risk for Gaga. If she were to leave Twitter or Facebook those websites...
Lady Gaga has truly redefined the stereotypical musician-fan relationship.

websites would survive without her. But will she always have the support needed from her fans to sustain littlemonsters.com? Only time can tell, but I predict that Madonna and Lady Gaga are more similar than people give them credit for. They both have found that the trick to fame is to stay around, with risqué music videos helping to aid in that task. Just as Madonna is still performing well into her fifties, I believe that Gaga will have the same, long-lasting impact.

Lady Gaga: performer, Queer activist, and fashion icon. These are the things that currently define her. I personally do not believe that Gaga has found herself as a musician yet, but fans flock to buy her albums because they would go to any length to support this mystical being that they wish to feel closer to. With time, I feel that the music aspect will come. And, hell, who cares anyway—her 23 million Twitter followers and I will buy it regardless.

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Daft Punk

Daft Punk is an iconic electronic music duo that became extremely popular during the late 1990’s. Specializing in electronic, techno, and house music, Daft Punk is well known for their unique loops, acidic beats, and thick mixtures of bass-lines. The French duo, Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter, have created an Electro legacy for themselves and undoubtedly followed a strange and unique path into the music industry.

In 1987, the lives of Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter converged when the two met on the playground of Lycée Carnot, a secondary school in Paris. The two quickly became close friends, and eventually formed a small indie-punk rock band in 1992 called Darlin’ which consisted of Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo, Thomas Bangalter, and Laurent Brancowitz (Contact). Bangalter played the bass, de Homem-Christo played the guitar, while Brancowitz played the drums.

The band released songs under the record label Duophonic, releasing a debut single that sold about 1,500 copies. The single received mainly optimistic reviews, as the single was a promising start for the young band. But not all critics were as kind, such as the British music journal Melody Maker, who dismissed the band’s music as “daft punk” (daft is British slang for something that is silly or stupid). The band Darlin’ continued to perform local gigs and release songs with little success and recognition by the community. “The rock n’ roll thing we did was pretty average, I think.” Said Bangalter, “It was so brief, maybe six months, four songs and two gigs and that was it” (Petridis, and Tope). The band eventually disbanded in 1993, leading to Bangalter and de Homem-Christo’s initial exploration of electronic style music. “We just got bored with rock’n’roll” said Bangalter, “we got bored with the sound, so we started trying different things” (Adcock). Soon after, the duo began to produce their unique and innovative electronic/house music style.

De Homem-Christo and Bangalter attended a rave at Euro-Disney in 1993, where they met Stuart Macmillan of Slam and co-founder of the small Scottish record label Soma. The duo gave their demo tape to Macmillan, who eventually signed the two a year later. De Homem-Christo and Bangalter decided to
The ‘90s electronic duo

By Erik Yan
take the amusing critical remarks of the music journal Melody Maker, and dubbed themselves as Daft Punk. They later released their debut album New Wave in 1994 that contained an “acidic mix of beats and bass-lines” (NME). Soon after, Daft Punk returned to the studio in May 1995 to record the single Da Funk, which brought them a lot of commercial success.

De Homem-Christo and Bangalter decided they would need a manager for their new group, so they hired Pedro Winter, who often promoted Daft Punk at his Hype nightclubs. The duo also decided to sign with Virgin Records in September 1996, “Many record companies offered us deals,” said Bangalter, “they came from everywhere, but we decided to wait--partly because we didn’t want to lose control of what we had created. We turned down many record companies” (Adcock). Daft Punk made a deal with Virgin Records, through which they licensed their tracks to the major label through their production company Daft Trax.

By March 25, 1997 Daft Punk released their debut album Homework, which featured their singles “Da Funk” and “Alive”. The album was a success as it sold well over two million copies worldwide, and received gold and platinum certifications. The album is often regarded as one of the most influential dance music albums of the nineties that brought worldwide attention to French progressive house music. Two of the most notable songs of the album were “Around The World” and “Da Funk”.

The duo did not release another album until Discovery in March 2001. The album took on a smoother and distinctly synth pop-oriented style, initially stunning fans of Daft Punk’s previous material in Homework. The album still managed to become a huge success and broaden the Daft Punk fan-base. By 2005, the album sold over 2.5 million albums and peaked as the #3 top electronic album of 2001. The single “One More Time” was highly successful as it reached #1 on the Canadian Singles chart, and the Dance Music/Club Play Singles and #2 on the Hot Dance Music/Maxi-Singles Sales in 2000. The single “Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger” peaked at #3 on the Dance Music/Club Play Singles in 2001. The single “Face to Face” reached its peak success at #1 on the 2004 Dance Music/Club Play Singles.

Daft Punk also released the live album Alive 1997 in 2001, which contained a 45-minute recording of a live performance at the Que Club in Birmingham on November 8, 1997.
Their third studio album was Human After All, which was released on March 14, 2005. The album is often noted for its combination of minimalism and rock style with Daft Punk’s typical House music style. The album received many mixed reviews as critics felt the album was rushed due to its reported six-week creation, and that the tracks were overly repetitive and low quality. The album peaked as #1 on the Top Electronic Albums chart in 2005, and was later nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Electronic/Dance Album in 2006. The tracks on the album Human After All did not receive as much commercial success as the tracks on Daft Punk’s previous album Discovery. The highest rated singles included “Robot Rock” and “Technologic”, which peaked at #7 and #9 on the Hot Dance Singles Sales re-

On November 19, 2007 Daft Punk released their second live album Alive 2007, which was a recording of their performance at Bercy in Paris on June 14, 2007. The album received positive reviews overall, and featured the single “Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger”. The album ranked #1 on the Top Electronic Albums chart in 2007 and eventually won the Grammy Award for Best Electronic/Dance Album. The single “Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger” won the Grammy Award for Best Dance Recording in 2009.

In 2009 Daft Punk created eleven new mixes of their music for the video DJ Hero, in which they also appeared as playable characters. The following year Daft Punk was admitted into the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (The Order
Recently, Daft Punk has continued to shake the Electro music industry with their infectious tracks and albums, such as their 2010 Tron: Legacy soundtrack album. The soundtrack album peaked as #1 on the Top Soundtracks, Top Digital Albums, and Top Electronic Albums in 2010. The album was also #1 on the Top Electronic Albums, Top Soundtracks, and Top Electronic Albums in 2011. The soundtrack album’s singles received moderate success, as the single “Derezzed” peaked at #14 on the Most Added and Heartseekers Songs, while the single “The Game Has Changed” was #15 on the Most Added chart in 2011.

De Homem-Christo and Bangalter are undoubtedly veterans of the Electronic House music style, and continue to produce outstanding music under the group name Daft Punk. They have transformed and redefined French house music, and are a group that millions of fans continue to support. Whether the duo will continue to produce tracks for years to come is a question that only Daft Punk can answer. “I don’t know if we will do this forever, we just like doing it now, we just want to be happy.” Said De Homem-Christo, “But you can’t sit in front of your television all day just because it makes you happy. It’s really up to us—we can just take our time” (Adcock).

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INTO THE UNDERGROUND: Dylan, Ginsberg, and the Beat Generation

by Eden Levin
“I saw the best minds of my generation
destroyed by madness, starving hysteri-
cal naked...”

It’s these and a pastiche of similarly chaotic, experimental images that characterize Allen Ginsberg’s monumental 1955 poem “Howl,” a piece that would later become the most widely renowned poetic representation of the American underground movement known as Beat Culture. Birthed from the ashes of the era of World War II America, the Beat Generation emerged out of a powerful, shared terror brought on by McCarthyism, a perceived inflation of institutional power, and the pedestalization of corporate America. What the youth during this time believed was occurring was a mass desensitization of the American people; in a 1966 interview, Ginsberg states that “the Cold War [was]...a hardening, a shutting off of the perception of desire and tenderness which everybody knows” (Ginsberg, 1966).

In order to overcome the national brainwashing that the Beat Generation anticipated, they set out to reawaken, through texts almost knifelike in character and in gravity, the spiritual and the passionate in a society seemingly regressing into widespread numbness.

Elements of the Beat Generation flowed through the compositions of both Ginsberg and Dylan.

Beat writers embodied the ideals of uncensored and exhaustive expression, creative experimentation, and, ultimately, a focus on the alternative – sexual, artistic, spiritual and expressionistic. Beat writers strove to describe and catalogue their surroundings and their experiences in novel ways, transforming their perceptions into striking literary collages of vivid images with piercing emotional undertones. Overarchingly, the authors of the Beat Generation were devotedly anti-conformist, reveling in the explicit and the underground and transcending government censorship in their often-times controversial compositions.

Allen Ginsberg, born in 1926, epitomized the aesthetics of the Beat generation in his spectacularly imagistic poetry. As a forceful retaliation against the contrived sameness he perceived in his surroundings, Ginsberg emphasized individuality, expressions of personality, and transcendence of the immediate in his compositions. Also prized in both the works of
Ginsberg and those of his fellow Beat writers was a sense of momentum, of perpetual movement forward, upwards, through the drug-riddled urbanity of the downtown street corner and the realm of poison-lipped prostitutes to a place of realization, of spiritual purity, and of ultimate self-revelation.

It is this symbolic sense of momentum – the journey, the road, the perpetual evolution of self – that later manifested itself in the poetry of musician Bob Dylan. Fifteen years his junior, Dylan first met Allen Ginsberg in 1963. Serving both as artistic supporters of one another and as friends, Dylan and Ginsberg stayed in relatively close contact following their introduction, and Dylan proceeded to dedicate a rendition of “Desolation Row” to Ginsberg in concert the evening following Ginsberg’s death. There is no doubt as to the impact Ginsberg had on Dylan and his lyricism, nor can the reverse influence be contested; although Dylan most immediately fell into the generation of folk revivalists, his work later came to be greatly inspired by the compositions of the Beat Generation writers, and many of the aesthetics of Dylan’s lyrics were influenced by themes and tones characteristic of Beat culture.
Thematic and topical overlaps between the lyrics of Dylan and the poetry of Ginsberg can be spotted even when considering only two of their respective works – Dylan’s “Homesick Subterranean Blues” and Ginsberg’s “Howl” – in the context of one another. The aforementioned notion of perpetual momentum, first and foremost, is predominant in both “Howl” and “Homesick Subterranean Blues.” The structure of “Howl” in itself is representative of the perpetual forward movement characteristic of Beat writing; Ginsberg uses diction suggesting movement and repetition to propel his poetry forward line by line. Throughout “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” Dylan’s rhythmic continuity suggests and creates a very similar sense of perpetual forward momentum. Additionally, both Dylan and Ginsberg include disillusioned, pessimistic images of schooling and education;
Dylan’s “twenty years of schoolin’/
And they put you on the day shift” and
Ginsberg’s “who passed through uni-
versities with radiant eyes...who were
expelled from the academies for crazy”
seem to express similar anti-institutional
views with regard to the academic sys-
tems of their time (Dylan, 1965; Gins-
berg, 1955). Also apparent in both texts
is a general thematic emphasis on the
struggle for individualism in the societ-
ies in which Ginsberg and Dylan dwelled
(Dylan’s lyrics representing a more basic
commentary on the overarching theme
of societal suppression of the individ-
ual and relative cultural sameness and
Ginsberg’s concentrating on the actual
self-liberation and transcendence in re-
sponse to this societal numbness’).

These overlaps illustrate both the au-
thor-to-author influence between Gins-
berg and Dylan and the shared zeitgeist
of one movement within a greater na-
tion; both Dylan and Ginsberg recog-
nized with terror the encroachment of
sameness, and both struck out – lyrically
and poetically – in search of a reinvig-
oration of transcendent self-revelation
and impassioned individuality. Although
Ginsberg’s striking images of madness
far overshadowed Dylan’s mellower lyri-
cal imagery, elements of the Beat Gen-
eration flowed through the compositions
of both as it flowed through the streets
of New York, bringing life to the words
of a generation rising with fervor from
an America quickly forgetting the signifi-
cance of the individual mind.

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Rock Fest
From Monterey to Woodstock
ival Success: odstock to Coachella

Coachella, 2012
Rock Festivals, from the ‘60s through today
by Naomi Hecht

Rock music festivals have a long history of bringing together many artists to the same place at the same time to create a great experience. Starting with The Monterey Pop Festival, rock music festivals have been numerous and have had a special place in United States culture. One of the most well-known music festivals of all time was Woodstock in 1969. The Coachella Valley Music and Arts festival in Indio, California is one of the biggest music festivals today and shares many features with Woodstock that make it successful.

The Monterey International Pop Music Festival took place in 1967 and is pointed to as the first large-scale music festival for the rock genre. It took place at the Monterey County fairgrounds in Monterey, California two years before Woodstock and helped kick-start the summer of love, the prime year of the counterculture. Some of the counterculture greats played there, including The Mamas and the Papas, Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, The Who, and Otis Redding. This festival had many influential music performances, like when Jimi Hendrix lit his guitar on fire. There were an estimated 90,000 people in attendance. This festival helped to standardize the three-day outline of music festivals and influenced the promoters of Woodstock. Monterey was also a good model for the music festivals to come because there was no violence and was an overall peaceful show (McCulloch).

Two years later in August 1969 the Woodstock Music and Art Fair took place in Woodstock, New York on a dairy farm. This is one of the most well-known music festivals in history. When examining why this is so, a few conclusions can be made. First of all, Woodstock had some of the most notable bands of the era, with the likes of Santana, the Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Janis Joplin, Sly and the Family Stone, The Who, Jefferson Airplane, Crosby Stills Nash and Young, Jimi Hendrix, and many more filling out the lineup. Its size was also enormous with an estimated half a million people attending. It has kept its place in history by symbolizing the 60s counterculture movement. It was a place where the young generation could live together happily their own way. Food was shared when it started to run out, drugs were shared, and there was hardly any violence, which, considering the
conditions is a pretty remarkable occurrence. The weather was terrible, with rain and mud. Even under extreme circumstances though, everyone treated each other kindly and cooperated. These ideas are what captivate the imaginations of the following generations and made Woodstock go down in history as such a remarkable time. There was chaos at the festival with food shortages and weather, but the overall show and efforts of this large group still succeeded. It may be over glorified as the peak of the hippie culture, but it can be said truthfully that Woodstock was three days of peace, love, and music.

People have tried to recreate the magic of Woodstock again and again since 1969. Woodstock ’99, for example was one of the biggest failures. The music festival took place in Rome, NY near the original area of Woodstock. It was heavily commercialized, and televised by MTV. Unlike the original Woodstock though, violence raged and the crowd of around 200,000 people was uncontrolable. There were sixty hospitalizations from violence. There were fires, vandalism, and looting. What really makes this music festival different than the historic one it was trying to emulate was that the performers helped to instigate this
violence and seemed pleased that the power that they had could cause destruction. Examples of this include when Insane Clown Posse threw money into the crowd, and then when fights broke out they were seen on camera smiling. Kid Rock told the audience to throw water bottles on the stage, and Limp Bizkit told the crowd not to calm down. They were pleased to get reactions out of the crowd. They made the show into an ego trip, instead of a communal effort to have fun with the crowd. This show was reminiscent instead of Altamont, the antithesis of Woodstock. In the way that Woodstock gave the world a look at what a music festival could achieve, Altamont was a showing of how horribly bad a music festival could become. Altamont tried to recreate Woodstock in the west in 1969, as a free concert by the Rolling Stones, but it instead was a total failure ending with the stabbing and death of a man by Hells Angels who were hired as security.

The first Coachella music festival was held three months after Woodstock ’99 but with a far less violent outcome. The site in Indio, California proved to be a good location for a music festival. The first Coachella, failed to make a profit, and because of this the organizers took a year off. When Coachella reappeared in 2001, in April instead of October to avoid the heat, it was a success. After this, Coachella started to really pick up with attendance, and sold out for the first time in 2004. In 2007, Coachella went from a two-day music festival to a three-day festival, resembling the format of Monterey and Woodstock. Coachella
is a highly commercialized music festival, with sponsors, and expensive ticket pricing, but no one seems to mind and the tickets continue to sell out. Coachella tickets sell out so quickly that for 2012 they even added a second weekend featuring the exact same lineup, which sold out as well.

Coachella keeps a bit of Woodstock’s spirit alive.

Coachella has become a big name music festival and is known around the United States and the world. Major news sources provide coverage of it every year. What makes Coachella so successful is that it features musicians from a wide array of styles. Multiple performances are going on at the same time so that festival-goers can choose who they want to see. This diversity opens up Coachella to most of the youth, no matter what kind of music they like. What distinguishes it from other such festivals like Lollapalooza, in Chicago is that it is in California. This location gives it a more summer of love-hippie-peace vibe relating it more so to the Woodstock era. There are other similarities between Woodstock and Coachella. The quality of the music at both festivals was and is top notch. Much of Coachella’s success can be attributed to the top name artists that they have been able to get to perform each year that attract big crowds. Yes, at Coachella the sponsors are making lots of money, but this is not at the expense of the attendees happiness. Like Woodstock, everyone is genuinely excited to be at Coachella. Festival-goers want to listen to good music and have fun in peace. By doing so, they keep a little bit of Woodstock’s spirit alive with them.

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Altamont Speedway Free Concert

“It was perhaps rock and roll’s all-time worst day, December 6th, a day when everything went perfectly wrong,” wrote Rolling Stone’s John Burks.

The 1960s: a decade which summons images of a cultural phenomenon dedicated to the movement away from the conservative fifties and a change in political and social ways of thinking. It was the age of youth that permeated the fabric of American life. Its ending, al-
though debatable, may have occurred Friday night, Dec. 6, 1969, at the Altamont speedway, just as the Rolling Stones tensely worked their way through “Under My Thumb”.

The Altamont Festival brings the end to the “Woodstock Nation”

There were two major festivals during the Sixties: Woodstock and Altamont. Although occurring within months of each other, the two concerts embodied drastically different ideologies. The massive, three-day Woodstock Music and Art Fair was held in August 1969, and was widely viewed as a successful event by the national media, as it demonstrated that half a million attendees could gather peacefully, even in a seemingly chaotic environment rich with sex, alcohol and drugs.

Joni Mitchell said, “Woodstock was a spark of beauty” where half-a-million kids “saw that they were part of a greater organism.”
About four months later, in order to reconstruct the success of “Woodstock” on the West Coast, Altamont was organized as the finale of the Rolling Stones’ 1969 tour. Altamont stunned “Woodstock Nation” by producing four deaths (fatal stabbing, three accidental deaths) and, according to one report, 850 injuries. The destruction from the free concert made it clear that Woodstock’s huge success in becoming “the most pivotal moment in music history” was due to extensive planning by a team of well-funded organizers, instead of an inherent “peacefulness” that existed amongst people as previously believed.

**So what went wrong at Altamont?**

Headlined and organized by The Rolling Stones, Altamont took place near the San Francisco Bay Area and featured local bands such as Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Flying Burrito Brothers, and Santana. Anticipated as “Woodstock West,” Altamont’s infamous occurrences resulted from several major components. Unlike Woodstock, the event was poorly planned and was primarily improvised: Altamont was scheduled originally to be held at San Jose State practice field but after a dispute and several location changes, the organizers finally settled on the Altamont Speedway location several days before the event’s occurrence. This involved logistical problems including a lack of facilities such as portable toilets and medical tents.

The move also caused the geographic location of the stage to be at the bottom of a slope. Chip Monck, The Rolling Stones’ stage manager, explained that “the stage was one metre high... and because of the short notice for the change of location, the stage couldn’t be changed.” Due to security issues regarding the low stage, several dozen members of the Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang were hired to acts as the informal security staff for the 300,000 people the concert drew, in exchange for $500 dollars worth of beer.

Ultimately, the mixture of poor planning, alcohol, drugs, and approximately 300,000 people led to disastrous results.

Although the atmosphere of the concert was initially peaceful, over the course of the day, both the crowd and the Angels became progressively more intoxicated, paranoid, and violent. The Hells Angels’ usage of pool cues to control the crowd was asking for violence from an audience full of people under the influence of
drugs. In fact, during a performance by Jefferson Airplane, an Angel who jumped onto the stage to break up a fight knocked singer Marty Balin unconscious. The Grateful Dead canceled their performance out of concern for their safety after learning about the incident. The general violence accumulated as The Rolling Stones took the stage in the evening. During the band’s performance of “Under My Thumb”, Meredith Hunter, an African-American teenager, approached the stage armed with a knife and gun. Hells Angel, Alan Passaro ran toward Hunter, stabbing her several times with a knife as a pack of Angels beat Hunter to the ground. Unaware of the death that occurred in front of them, the Rolling Stones completed “Under My Thumb” bringing an end to a tumultuous day that also included three accidental deaths.

Although there is no definite explanation for the disorder that occurred during Altamont, or the nature of the Meredith Hunter’s death, many people came to view Altamont as the decade’s “loss of innocence” and “literal” death of the Flower Child. The moment of Meredith Hunter’s death was also captured in Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin’s documentary of the Stones’ 1969 tour, Gimme Shelter, thus further cementing Altamont’s reputation as the official end of the 1960s counterculture.

Mick Jagger, in an interview, rejected this notion: “Of course some people wanted to say Altamont was the end of an era. People like that are fashion writers. Perhaps it was the end of their era, the end of their naivete. I would have thought it ended long before Altamont.” Similarly, Eric Danton of the Hartford Courant argues that Altamont is a more accurate representation of the ’60s than Woodstock: “In too many ways, Altamont was a condensed version of the preceding decade, with queasy race relations, well-intentioned non-conformism turned reckless and a bid for peaceful, harmonious co-existence—among the most valued ideals of the ’60s—shattered by senseless violence.”

One can argue that Altamont did not necessarily bring the end to an entire era, but ultimately Altamont still “provided a complex metaphor for the way the era ended” wrote Robert Christgau, and revealed that the line between freedom and anarchy is still thin, the human impulse to violence is still prevalent in a generation’s collective dream for peace.
Kitten is Your New Favorite Band

Clara Neilson
South Pasadena, California: a rural suburban town with a good public school system, nice restaurants, a cheap tailor, and a soda fountain. Sounds quite like 1950’s suburbia, but it’s not. It’s actually a five-minute walk from the house I grew up in. Coincidentally, it’s also the place where Teenage Rebellion took shape within the up and coming Indie Pop/Rock band, Kitten. It began with Chloe Chiadez, now 17 and a junior in high school and already an ex-member of cover band Wild Youth. She is on the short side, even for a high school girl, and has brown shaggy hair and a round face. Since their start in 2009, Kitten members have come and gone, but currently consists of Chloe, Chris Vogel, Andy Miller and Max Kuehn—all under 21. They have already toured in the US and in the UK, despite the fact that their age prohibits band’s personal friends from their venues.

The first time I heard of Kitten was during my sophomore year of high school when lead singer Chloe’s brother, Julian, who was in my graduating class, invited me and some other friends to a house party where they were playing. The show was cramped into a small downstairs room with tons of people crowded around the corner of the room, where the band was set up—no stage. The sound was new and loud, but overwhelming and interesting, and vibrated through the whole house. It was the kind of thing that made you want to keep listening. There were sounds I couldn’t identify but that made sense when woven into the music. The performance was very live, real, and present. Chloe was full of energy and truly a great performer. Everyone was invested in the music. Two years later during my senior year, Chloe’s brother brought Kitten back to perform at school. The show was dynamic. Chloe’s stage presence was enthralling; you couldn’t look away. She threw her mane of brownish hair all over, always in her face, dancing and jumping, screaming the lyrics—but they still sounded good. She looked like
she was genuinely having fun. In that moment, it was evident that the whole band was passionate about what they were doing. Their sound was still pretty new—at the time Chloe and the band were experimenting with electronic, robotic sound. It was playful but strong, very high-energy.

**KITTEN IS DYNAMIC AND EXPLOSIVE. BUT THERE EXISTS A SECOND SIDE THAT IS REAL, RAW, AND EMOTIONAL.**

Though a significant amount of time had passed between performances, both times I’ve seen Kitten live I’ve noticed the same thing. Kitten is dynamic and explosive. But there exists a second side that is real, raw, and emotional. One where the lyrics are far deeper than one might expect coming from a high school girl from a well-off town in southern California. The subject matter is unexpectedly deep for a girl of her age, but her youth doesn’t get in the way of the believability, authenticity, or reality of her songs. They have already been mentioned on music blogs and websites, as well as in publications like Nylon. Her current sound has evolved since I last bore witness to it, but it retains its basic roots and the band’s passion. They have adapted a gritty feeling, with emotional, distorted, reverberating vocals, backed by strong drums, bass, and driving guitar. The band still maintains their electronic sound and strikes an important note, allowing their sound to perfectly convey playfulness, yet depth and emotion—their energy and passion still has a definite presence. Chloe’s voice is a strange but beautiful combination of breathy and clear. It has hints of Lana Del Rey and Florence of Florence + The Machine. The band’s first EP is currently on iTunes and they did not fail to deliver. As they’ve already told you on their Facebook page, “Kitten is your new favorite band.”
Azealia Banks: New Rap Starlet

Ana Castro
Azalea Banks, the talented young rapper from Harlem, is a rising star.

First, there was Lil’ Kim, who helped break the male-dominated barrier in rap for women at the turn of the century. As a Brooklyn native she proved herself by getting Biggie Smalls to take her under his wing and soon collaborated with some of the biggest rap names of the time. Then Nicki Minaj succeeded her as the reigning female rap leader. Her success has been immense as is exemplified by her successful world tour and constant presence in headlines. Now, Azealia Banks, another female rapper from Harlem is emerging and trying to make a name for herself in the rap industry. Recently signed to Universal Records, she has proven that she is a new artist to watch out for. Azealia Banks, like many rappers, has had a difficult life prior to entering the media’s eyes. Her father died when she was two years old, and her mother was physically and verbally abusive. Despite her less than ideal childhood, she soon found that she had a talent for singing and acting. Her mother took notice of Azealia’s interests and enrolled her in the famous La Guardia High School of Performing Arts in Manhattan. During her teen years she found herself growing distant from acting and began dabbling in rap. Rap soon became such an integral part of her life that she left La Guardia and never finished high school. She instead opted to learn about life on her own and hone her new craft. At sixteen years old she collaborated with Diplo, a DJ, songwriter, and producer and later that year released the track “Seventeen” under her stage name, ‘Miss Bank$’. “Seventeen” was the first track to garner her significant attention within the music industry, as it lead to her being signed to XL Records, which is the same record company that Adele is signed to. Unfortunately, she found herself having creative differences and she was dropped from her label. She then moved to Montreal and formally changed her stage
name to Azealia Banks. There she released new tracks, one of which received a lot of critical acclaim.

That track was “212” which was listed on NME 2011 Cool List and the Pitchfork “Top 10 Tracks of 2011”. The song’s lyrics are one of its standout features. It alludes to many sexual images that make up most of the song. It also highlights Azealia’s arrogance despite her being a newcomer to the genre. It has been speculated that the ending verse is a warning to Nicki Minaj, leading some to come to the conclusion that Banks’s new album will kill Minaj’s career. The catchy and danceable beat of the song helped it get, what many consider to be, well-deserved attention. This track’s success soon lead to her being signed to Universal Records, one of the biggest record labels in the world, but her latest string of successes doesn’t end there. Most recently, her latest performance at Coachella has been praised by many: her thirty-minute set proved her to be an amazing performer. She rapped fast, danced, and sang. Such showcase of raw talent explains how she also managed to get signed by Troy Carter, Lady Gaga’s manager. She has already begun to take advantage of her new industry resources as she’s delayed her EP to revamp it and make it a LP since she now has a better budget and equipment. At the same time, to keep her current momentum going until the release of her LP, she has announced that she will release a mix tape this summer.

A lot of people who have listened to Banks’ music find themselves comparing it to that of Nicki Minaj. Banks understands where these comparisons come from as she has been quoted as saying, “It’s just people making sense of things. If you listen to B.O.B. for the first time, you might think, ‘He sounds like Andre 3000’. If you eat sorbet for the first time, you might think, “Oh, this is like ice cream but there’s no milk in it.’” However, that doesn’t mean she is happy about the comparisons. She has commented that Nicki Minaj has sold out to appeal to white America and has just become a “big cartoon” while also noting that Minaj is talented enough to be successful without the “ugly wigs and ugly costumes”.

Although her music is innovative and commendable, the rapper’s publicity stunts haven’t been as admirable. Banks has found herself making headlines by getting into a feud with another up-and-coming female rapper, Iggy Aza
lea, who is a protege of rapper T.I. This dilemma seems reminiscent of the Nicki Minaj and Lil’ Kim feud which helped catapult Nicki into stardom. It would then make sense to wonder if this Iggy and Azealia feud might be fabricated to boost the visibility of both in the press. Azealia has also found herself in a conflict with rapper Lil’ Kim. Azealia recently ranted on Twitter that Lil’ Kim supposedly pulled out of a collaboration. However, Lil’ Kim’s representatives have said that the two rappers have never talked and that Azealia is trying to create a “phony beef” to gain publicity. Despite all of these negative doses of publicity, she has found herself being exposed to audiences through soon to be released musical collaborations. She is now working on the remix of M.I.A.’s song “Bad Girls.” She’s also just finished up a remix for Lana Del Rey’s song, “Blue Jeans”. She also plans to collaborate with veteran rapper, Missy Elliot who has approved of Azealia so far.

Azealia’s music career seems to be going strong. With her distinct lyrics and sound, new label, new manager, and media tactics, which she hasn’t finished exploiting, her career can only get better. She is definitely an artist who should be watched, as she appears to be a uniquely talented, raw artist. Her successful entrance into the genre could help make the road easier for other aspiring female rappers.

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The Most Perfect
American Idol is using
& the American Dream to

by Annie Maxwell

Even if you don’t watch American Idol, I bet you know at least one person who does. The reality show, which is formatted as an interactive singing competition, was created by Simon Fuller and initially aired in June 2002. The premise of the show is to find “the next big thing,” wherein viewers vote off singers each week following preliminary auditions. There is a celebrity panel of judges who critique the performances and entertain the crowd. It is one of the most-watched shows in the history of American television: it is the most viewed television series ever and is the only show that has been ranked number one in viewers for eight straight consecutive seasons. Idol is such a force in
Show on Television: Celebrity, Consumerism, win the hearts of millions

The most perfect show on television that chief scheduler for CBS, Kelly Kahl, referred to Idol as a “monolith” that is “the ultimate schoolyard bully.”

But Idol is neither a new nor American phenomenon. It was born out of long-standing tradition of televised song contests, the oldest being Eurovision. Eurovision was created in the 1950s by the European Broadcasting Union to bring a sense of unity and good humor back to countries in Europe still recovering from the devastating after-effects of World War II. It was the first singing competition to be broadcasted on live television despite the fact that such technology did not even exist yet. The format, which differs slightly from Idol’s, includes individual competitors associat-
ed with certain countries. Eurovision is still on the air today, and has launched the careers of prolific and international stars such as ABBA and Celine Dion. Eurovision may be the first broadcasted singing contest, but it certainly was not the only one before American Idol. Star Search originally ran from 1983-1995 and included competition categories other than singing such as modeling, dancing, and comedy. Although viewers were not a part of the voting process, audience members often had to participate if there was a tie amongst the judges. Notable former contestants of Star Search include Adam Sandler, Britney Spears, and Alanis Morissette. Similarly, Popstars first aired in 1999 in New Zealand and was the inspiration for Pop Idol (2001). Pop Idol was the seed of the franchise we know today in this country as American Idol. In the last ten years there has been an explosion of reality shows in America and abroad, franchises and non-franchises a-like, that are formatted as interactive reality-show competitions. The X-Factor franchise, created by the snarky but entertaining one-time American Idol judge, Simon Cowell, came out in the UK in 2004 and was followed in 2006 by
the Got Talent franchise, another Cowell creation. The Sing-Off, which aired in 2009 in the United States, focused on competing a capella groups. The Voice, which debuted just last year, is yet another interactive competition that ups the ante by having celebrity judges handpick individuals to add to their celebrity teams. Eventually the teams compete against one another; it’s not only individual vs. individual, but established star vs. established star. And these are just some of the shows in America. The interactive television formula works; it brings in viewers, a profit, and is long-lasting. But why?

Perhaps Cowell, Fuller, and others recognize the universal appeal that such interactive shows promise to each viewer: celebrities, power, consumerism, and narrative.

The idea of “celebrity” precedes Idol by years and years. A celebrity is not just one who is famous, but one who is packaged as a commodity (Bell, 145). By allowing voters to pick the winner of the competition, they are directly creating the commercial success-story that they desire. The Idol is a choice made by viewers as consumers. Winners are not just chosen by their voices; they must have other goods to offer as well. For many, they represent the quintessential rags-to-riches success story Americans love to love. This aspect of the competition, the back-stories of the contestants, is used to humanize the singers and make them relateable. For many contestants, short pre-recorded vignettes are shown about their lives outside of Idol. Auditioning is often equated with the sacrifice of many things, such as working, studying, and being away from loved ones. For others, a more dire situation is presented, wherein Idol is the last ditch effort to follow one’s dreams, or find financial security to support a terminally ill family member. Fantasia Barrino, winner of season three, was an average-looking, illiterate 19-year-old with a young daughter—not someone who would typically be in the running for a record deal. She went

Voters pick the winner of the competition and directly creating the commercial success-story that they desire.
on to star in her own Lifetime movie, ingeniously titled: Life is Not a Fairytale: The Fantasia Barrino Story (2006). Contestants must be representative of an ordinary person but also an extraordinary one. Carrie Underwood, winner of season four and one of the most successful Idols to date, walked into her first audition with a nice voice, classical American beauty, and little star power. Instead she was armed with the quaint back-story of her life as a football-playing farm-girl. She showed off—with a girly giggle—her strange talent of clucking like a chicken, and she smiled widely and told the judges about the embarrassing birthmark she had removed. One recent YouTube user commented explicitly about this when he or she wrote, “SHE HAD A THIRD NIPPLE!!! she is one of us..”

Viewers tend to enjoy the bad auditions just as much or more than they like the good ones. One of the most famously bad auditions of all time, 19-year-old William Hung from Hong-Kong (season 3), was such a terrible singer (although a perfectly nice person) that he ended up making his own record out of the success of his audition failure. Mary Roach (season 3) was so strange during her audition that the show unofficially labeled her as a schizophrenic. The mocking words presented by the narrator, the judges—Simon told her she was “one of the worst” he’d “ever heard”—and the viewers, seen within the many YouTube comments that were disgusted by the young woman, show how as viewers, we love to capitalize not just on contestants triumphs, but on their humiliations as well (Stahl, 167).

Embedded in [American Idol’s] appeal is the American Dream.
American Idol deserves volumes dedicated to its history, content, form and function. Embedded in its appeal is the long-standing history of music on television, but also the American Dream, which includes the narratives of ordinary people becoming extraordinary and our country’s dedication to communication technology. Television, the Internet, and text messaging (among other things), allow viewers voting for Idol a sense of autonomy as consumers whilst fostering a sense of communal choice. Ironically, there’s no denying that any Idol spinoff lumps certain viewers together—it’s a mass profit venture like any other. The only difference is, it tricks each viewer into thinking that he or she actually dictates the fate of the friendly-face on the opposite end of the television.

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The History of Detroit Techno

Jeffrey Arace

Disco ruled the world of dance music in the 1970s. It died out as the 80’s began, but electronic based dance music remained popular in many nightclubs. DJs and producers continued to create new variations of older disco records that drove their audience to dance (Brackett). Pioneers like Frankie Knuckles and Marshall Jefferson in Chicago revived disco and adapted it to the environment of large, underground black and homosexual nightclubs, like the Warehouse. The result was a funky, soulful, and futuristic sound. At this time in the mid 1980s, this music, now marketed as “house”, was largely ignored by the mainstream in the United States. However, when house hit the UK in 1987 it became a national obsession, with No. 1 hits like “Love Can’t Turn Around” and “Jack Your Body” (Savage). At the same, time in the early- and mid-1980s, DJs and record producers in Detroit, including Derrick May, Juan Atkins, and Kevin Saunderson, began creating their own style of electronic dance music (Brackett). Detroit dance music is often lumped together with Chicago House, but Detroit DJs created their own unique sound that “goes beyond the beat” and takes influences from post-punk, funk, and electro-disco.
The Detroit sound extended the futuristic sounds of European electronic music to create a new style that blended European industrial pop and black America’s garage funk (Savage). According to Derrick May, “The music is just like Detroit, a complete mistake. It’s like George Clinton and Kraftwerk stuck in an elevator” (Cosgrove).

Techno originated at Belleville High School, located in the heart of West Detroit where May, Saunderson, and Atkins all went to school (Cosgrove). By 1985, the three began recording together and separately under various names like Model 500 (Atkins), Reese (Saunderson), and Rhythm is Rhythm (May). The three released many records in the Detroit area such as “Strings of Life”, “Rock to the Beat”, and “When He Used To Play” (Savage). These records, however, had limited popularity in the United States, largely due to Detroit’s isolation. It wasn’t until English entrepreneurs got a hold of the records and gave them their correct place in mainstream dance culture that they became populat. As a result of the popularity of House in the UK, pop music quickly became dance music. When Neil Rushton, a British Record Dealer, heard the first techno records to reach the UK from Model 500, Reese, and Rhythm is Rhythm he quickly contacted May and began to release his records in England. May then introduced Rushton and Saunderson and they realized they could make a good compilation album. Rushton flew to Detroit and met with May, Saunderson, and Atkins to try and think of a name. Given the popularity of house at the time they came up with the idea of Motor City House Music, but Saunderson, May, and Atkins kept using the word techno. Rushton returned to England with 12 tracks and release them on an album called Techno! The New Dance School of Detroit. The album had a picture of Detroit on the cover and within a couple months Saunderson had a huge UK hit with his track “Big Fun”. Soon enough everyone in the UK knew about Detroit and they all loved techno (Savage).

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Levon Helm, True American

Josh Kule

Levon Helm was one of the greatest American drummers, singers, and musicians of all time. I only began to appreciate his talents right before his death; so when I found out he had succumbed to throat cancer after fifteen years, it felt too sudden. He represents an ideal; a core moral fiber, full of love, and willing to share it with anyone through his music. I have no misconceptions of ever living up to the Levon Helm standard, but I believe he would understand.
1940. Turkey Scratch, Arkansas. Cotton. Music. Ronnie Hawkins. Bob Dylan. The Band. Levon was the drummer and vocalist for The Band. He was the lone American and by far the grizzliest of the three singers. He brought a raw soul to his music that many thought had been lost long ago, somewhere deep in the heart of America. The incredible keyboard and organist Garth Hudson, Robbie Robertson, Rick Danko, whose voice dripped with earnestness, and Richard Manuel, the lead singer according to Levon, made up the rest of The Band. Four Canadians and Levon Helm would create the most singularly American sound ever created, instantly transporting anyone listening to the majestic expanse in the heart of the country. Levon’s drums were the beating heart of the group. The embodiment of the heart of the country, a true product of genuine southern upbringing and interactions with folks from every corner, both with and without The Band, was Levon’s voice. I hear his singing as an uninhibited vocal expression of emotions most people don’t want to acknowledge.

Levon was not afraid to be real with his audience, in fact he did not know any other way. Every guttural, weathered note he sang hit on a specific truth. I do believe that in many ways Levon represents the best we can be. The simple but beautiful music he created is a window to one of the most basic American ideals we have lost. It is love for where you are, what are you doing, and who you are with that brings true happiness.

After Levon started playing concerts in his house, called Midnight Rambles, in order to pay for his medical treatment and mortgage, he solidified his place as the centerpiece of one the most iconic musicians in the country. The people of Woodstock, New York grew tired of talking about the festival, but Levon Helm is the embodiment of the Woodstock ideal.

To overshadow an event viewed as the epoch of the hippie movement, in the town itself, is no small feat. Levon did not represent wholly different ideals, but rather the realistic incarnation of them. I have struggled with how the hippie movement fits into American culture. The rhetoric rings true, but the execution is marginalized. Levon didn’t need to be a hippie to love his family, friends, and community, or to show it each day.
Each year in Woodstock, Levon performed at a ceremony for the town’s volunteers; he performed in the village green and let neighbors into the Midnight Rambles, even though tickets became coveted. The music was the most important thing to Levon, it always was.

When Martin Scorsese filmed the Last Waltz about The Band’s final concert, Levon was opposed because there was nothing he would rather do than create and perform music with his band. I will never live through the sixties, never live in the world Levon grew up in, but he cut through time in the way he warmly yet harshly sings. The reality of America today is that it is fractured, and may have even lost any remnants of an idea of a collective spirit. Levon’s voice and drums illicit the idea that this spirit can be captured, but his lifetime of actions makes it undeniable. By living the life he sought to portray in his songs, Levon produced an unmistakable authenticity.

Four years ago Levon won a Grammy award, his second of three in the last five years, in the inaugural Americana category. In his autobiography, Wheels on Fire, Levon worked his way through the country without the Band but said he stuck to “my standard policy, which was to whistle while I worked.”

He wasn’t afraid to get his hands dirty because it was an adventure; an exploration of a great nation and people and he could share that back with us through his music. I haven’t known about Levon Helm for that long, but his character has taken me by storm. I have fought with my own perception of being an American and what that means, but Levon has shown me that it is about incorporating your ideals into what you love. For Levon it was his music and for that I am thankful. I am still searching, but I will often think of the way Levon lived when I search for authenticity, and most importantly when I interact with those around me. Levon was most often described as a light: his smile illuminated the room, he shined on stage, and there was a twinkle in his eye. Levon was the sun around which The Band revolved.

He once said, “Music is the language of heaven, I believe that’s right.” I just wish I could have met him.

Sources:
Every guttural, weathered note he sang hit on a specific truth.
Marvin Gaye: What’s Going On

David Bales

Great musicians set themselves apart by revolutionizing a facet of the music world. The ones that will go down in history are revered for their ability to create something unprecedented; to produce a sound that has never before been heard. For each of these musicians there is a defining work that marks their transition into this other realm. For Marvin Gaye it was his 1971 album What’s Going On, an album that bucked the stereotypical Motown trend and established him as a mainstay in music history.

By 1971 Gaye had already achieved success under the watchful eye and direction of Motown producer Berry Gordy. Up to that point Gaye’s music had adhered to the manicured and polished style that was a trademark of the genre, but his 11th studio album certainly deviated from that norm.
Instead of maintaining the charming innocence of traditional Motown, What’s Going On reflected the tumult of Gaye’s personal life and the state of the world. Gaye’s vocals on the album are inevitably influenced by the depression that affected him while recording the album. He had recently lost his longtime duet partner and dear friend Tammi Terrell, who passed away after being diagnosed with a brain tumor at the age of 24, his marriage to Gordy’s sister, Anna, was quickly deteriorating, and he owed unpaid taxes to the IRS. Rather than creating a work that dragged on, however, Gaye managed to capture the melancholy that possessed so many Americans during the early 1970’s in the midst of the Vietnam War. Wanting to create an album that had a definite commentary on the war, civil rights, and the environment, Gaye said, “I was very much affected by letters my brother was sending me from Vietnam, as well as the social situation here at home. I realized that I had to put my own fantasies behind me if I wanted to write songs that would reach the souls of people. I wanted them to take a look at what was happening in the world.”

While Gaye was not a typical activist of the 1960s and 70s, choosing to keep his distance from the riots and rallies, his pacifism allowed for the reflective and calm message that comes across in the song What’s Going On. This message is one that almost kept his timeless album from being made. When Gaye first showed the album’s opening and title track to Berry Gordy, he immediately rejected it. It could have been just because it was not in keeping with the Motown trend, or maybe Gordy thought that if this album was made it could begin the demise of Motown. Upon Gordy’s refusal to release his song, Gaye resolved that he would not produce any more music for the Motown label. He remained steadfast and after several months his label, which could not continue to release nothing from their biggest star, conceded. After seeing the success of his single they agreed to back his album. Just 10 days later, Gaye recorded
What’s Going On with the help of The Funk Brothers - Motown’s main background band who had remained anonymous until Gaye credited them on this album.

Once their biggest star had veered from the typical, oblivious path that their feel-good songs always took, Motown would never be the same. The music they produced was much more socially conscious and, while Motown stars still had great success, the record company lost much of its luster and ultimately faded into obscurity.

As famous as Marvin Gaye already was, What’s Going On provided the launching pad for him to truly become a superstar. He continued to produce groundbreaking music into the 70s and early 80s until he was shot and killed by his father in 1984. The incredible vocals on the album surprised even Gaye himself and were a revelation in singing for him. He later stated, 

“I felt like I’d finally learned to sing. I’d been studying the microphone for a dozen years, and I suddenly saw what I’d been doing wrong. I’d been singing too loud.”

At the expense of the genre and company that built him up into a star, Marvin Gaye effectively transcended Motown with his album What’s Going On. He grew up from one of Berry Gordy’s pawns to one of the greatest artists of the century. His technique of including chatter from his friends that he obtained by simply letting the tapes roll and recording saxophonist Eli Fountain’s rehearsal exercises were unprecedented and yielded a unique sound. The saxophone solo that kicks off the album in the single, What’s Going On, was not a carefully calculated tune, but rather Fountain “goofing off.”

In its musical composition, Gaye’s smooth, hypnotizing vocals, and his divergence from the Motown-sound that the public had grown accustomed to, What’s Going On changed the face of music and is unequivocally one of the most important albums of the twentieth century.
At the expense of the genre & company that built him up into a star, Marvin Gaye effectively transcended Motown with his album What’s Going On.

Sources:
To some, Michael “Mike” Stewart is best known as the guitarist of folk-rock band We Five, whose 1965 remake of Ian and Sylvia’s “You Were on My Mind” hit #3 on the Billboard Hot 100 in September 1965 and was nominated five months later for a Grammy for Best Performance By a Vocal Group. To others, Stewart is known as the producer of Billy Joel’s acclaimed breakthrough album Piano Man. Maybe for a few he’s known as one of the developers of the first version of Pro Tools in the 80s.

For most, though, Stewart is most famous for inspiring his son Jamie. A largely absent father throughout Jamie’s childhood, he later played bass in the band IBOPA (The Indestructible Beat of Palo Alto) Jamie fronted. When that band dissolved in 1999, Mike reminded his son that the point of music is to try to touch people. Jamie treasured that advice, and started his Xiu Xiu project in 2001, releasing deeply personal and uncomfortable music that often, for better or for worse, hurts to listen to. One year later, at the age of 57, Mike killed himself.

The name Xiu Xiu (pronounced “shoe shoe”) comes from the Chinese film Xiu Xiu: The Sent-Down Girl about a 15-year-old girl forced to prostitute herself during the Cultural Revolution’s Down to the Countryside Movement. The title character’s trials share a helpless, depressed tone, often reflected in Stewart’s lyrics. Many Xiu Xiu songs describe his rough upbringing in Los Angeles and the challenges he’s faced as an adult, but not all of the band’s songs are autobiographical. In a 2010 Time Out New York article, Stewart explained, “Xiu Xiu doesn’t have to be about stuff that is bad. Xiu Xiu is just supposed to try to be about things that have seemed to
have an intense impact on somebody’s life. It doesn’t have to be about my life—it can be about somebody else’s life. And that could be something good as well.”

Surfing through the band’s catalogue, one will struggle to find any uplifting or optimistic songs. Xiu Xiu’s first album, Knife Play, is filled with dark, suicidal themes, either shouted or creepily hushed by Stewart. His voice is one of the most polarizing in popular music today; his lyrics challenge the listener even more. Upon first listen, some immediately discredit Xiu Xiu as pure shock value (ex: the chorus of “Hives Hives” is “A-I-D-S-H-I-V/I cannot wait to die/Can’t you tell, can’t you tell, can’t you tell?”). One of the biggest draws for fans of Xiu Xiu is the band’s absolute lack of subtlety in both its sonic and lyrical output. In naming Xiu Xiu song “I Luv the Valley OH!” the 176th best track of 2000-2009, Pitchfork Media explained, “A good Xiu Xiu song is like someone vividly describing his pain. A great Xiu Xiu song is like someone actually hurting himself, right in front of you.” Some of the band’s songs are incredibly unsettling and sometimes scary, either driving the listeners away or bringing them closer than they’ve ever felt before to music. With loud, obscure percussion, moody synthesizers, wild breaks of noise and Stewart’s haunting, expressive voice, a Xiu Xiu track stands out from a mile away. They have mastered their aesthetic yet are constantly evolving it. Xiu Xiu’s fans have been rabid from the start, connecting with the lack of pretension in Stewart’s songs and the human pain he refuses to mask.
The songs with uglier subject matter sound uglier. His work has considerably influenced indie pop band Los Campesinos! for his refusal not to address, and embrace, even the most horrible subject matter. The first single “Hi” from Xiu Xiu’s most recent album, Always (out February 28, 2012 on Polyvinyl), celebrates shared misery. He explained to ClashMusic in a track-by-track album guide, “It is about trying to find beauty and company in the realization that life, for the most part [is] incredibly difficult and that pretending otherwise only adds disappointment to hardship. Therefore, one can embrace one’s fellows down-trodden condition [sic] and try to find meaning in what otherwise can seem and be rank meaningless.” It feels like a Xiu Xiu mission statement.

On stage, Stewart sweats profusely, his eyes closed and his body rocking. He rarely looks like he’s performing for an audience. He looks upset, at times disturbed. Featuring subject matter ranging from abortion politics, to an ex-bandmate’s attempted suicide whilst touring, to child molestation, to a friend’s forcible rape by a police officer, Xiu Xiu’s songs deserve Stewart’s intense, commanding stage presence. He’s not there to stage dive.

Stewart has been the only constant member of Xiu Xiu since its inception in 2002. One of his most significant collaborations was with his cousin Caralee McElroy, who joined Xiu Xiu in 2004 and contributed to albums La Foret, The Air Force, and Women and Lovers until leaving the band in 2009. Caralee was the first person other than her cousin to sing lead vocals on a Xiu Xiu album track, lending her voice to Stewart-penned track “Hello From Eau Claire”. McElroy has since joined and left Cold Cave, and her voice was heard in back-to-school Target commercials singing Cold Cave’s single “Life Magazine”. Following her departure, Stewart enlisted friend and roommate Angela Seo to the band and moved from his native Bay Area California to Durham, North Carolina – a move he has since learned to regret.

**Xiu Xiu’s songs deserve Stewart’s intense, commanding stage presence. He’s not there to stage dive.**

Though Xiu Xiu’s music hasn’t suffered from the change of scenery (most re-
cent albums Dear God, I Hate Myself and Always have both received widespread critical acclaim), Stewart makes it clear that he personally cannot stand his new home. In a post-move promotional interview in 2010 with Xiu Xiu ex-label Kill Rock Stars, Stewart was asked, “What is the most bigoted place you have ever been?” His response: “My gym.”

On Xiu Xiu’s blog, now over six years old and frequently updated with Iraqi death tolls, tour photos and bird watching logs, Stewart often rants about his neighborhood, and has begun writing articles for the Huffington Post with titles like “Being Bi in Quasi-Liberal Southern Sub-Utopia.” Sexuality and gender clearly inform his music; in songs like “Sad Pony Guerrilla Girl” Stewart whispers, “We do it in the back of my car/pull up my pants and fix my bra/go on home to your kids/I’m going to be quiet and I’m going to tell the whole block,” the gender and age of the subject creepily unclear. Stewart avoids few subjects in his interviews and blog posts, even raffling a cup of his own pee for a Graveface Records fundraiser. There isn’t much fans haven’t seen or heard from Stewart.

Stewart also expects such intimacy with his fans. On xiuxiu.org, he hosts a monthly 18+ project in which fans email xiuxiuforlife@gmail.com a photograph of a specific part of their body, and he posts them on the site. In 2006, he and photographer David Horvitz organized a Polaroid project in which fans brought Polaroid film to concerts along with a stamped and addressed envelope, and in return the band takes photos on tour with the film and sends them back to the fans. Xiu Xiu fans can be intense,
with so few musicians who write so openly and truthfully about such serious and dangerous subjects. One bonus track on 2008’s Women as Lovers is an 11-minute interview with Stewart in which he responds to questions emailed to him by an 11-year-old girl from the Ukraine throughout previous year (“Will you buy me a knife?” “What should I do with my grandpa’s dead horse?” “Why did Penthouse move from being a hardcore porn mag to softcore?”). He laughs at some of the sillier ones, but he answers honestly to them all. It seems like nothing can shock Stewart, like he’s the one person to whom you can tell anything because he’s been through it all before and he’s willing to share through his art the pain he feels.

In 2007, Xiu Xiu, along with Canadian punk band Fucked Up, filed a class action lawsuit against Rolling Stone magazine and RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company following a pull-out “Indie Rock Universe” spread in Rolling Stone featuring Camel advertisements on the back pages and listing the names of several bands without their consent. Though the case was eventually dropped in 2010 due to freedom of speech laws, it represented Xiu Xiu’s artistic integrity. There were 186 artists named in the outer-spacey guide to indie-rock subgenres, many of whom more famous than Xiu Xiu (Sonic Youth, Beck, R.E.M.) and many with more politically active brands (Bjork, M.I.A., Arcade Fire) but only Stewart and co. took a stand against the blatant attempt by Rolling Stone to associate these musicians with Camel cigarettes — let alone through a cartoon. Stewart has stated numerous times that he would never use his music for any commercial purpose. Xiu Xiu has worked for over 10 years to share stories of frighteningly sincere turmoil. At 34 years old, it feels as though Jamie Stewart has already accomplished so much artistically to make his mark in music history, but, heeding the advice of his father Mike, success isn’t Stewart’s goal.

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The Parallel Evolution of Popular Music Crazes
The Parallel Evolution of Social Dance with Popular Music Crazes in the 20th Century
Dancing has always been an integral part of the way we enjoy music.

Rock ‘n’ roll and R&B music in particular, and the subgenres that fall under them, have all heavily influenced the evolution of various styles of social dance in the last century. Starting in the 1920’s, big band orchestras and swing bands played “syncopated dance music” that encouraged coordinated partner dancing, inspired by older forms of ballroom dance like the waltz and the minuet, but modernized to fit the fast-paced rhythms of swing (Bracket 10). The foxtrot became the popular ballroom dance at the time, with several variations such as the “tango foxtrot” and the “military foxtrot” that sprouted from the youth responsible for spreading the fad. Novelty dances like the Charleston and the jitterbug became popular with young people in dance clubs at the time. As explained by Paul Whiteman in his autobiography, “few new dances, except those for stage use, are ever brought forward by teachers; they are developed, in public, by persons of no particular skill, and with little or no knowledge of the dance as an art” (Brackett 13).

Later in the 20s and into the 30s, big band orchestras influenced by Afro-Cuban music and culture began to experiment with conga drums, sticks and Latin-inspired horns, which brought the rumba to the US. As a form of music, rumba is characterized by “medium-to-fast polyrhythmic” tempo, 3-part introductions, improvised verses, and call-and-response patterns. As a dance, rumba is an extremely sensual branch of ballroom dancing that focuses on keeping partners connected through the movement of their hips. Along with salsa, rumba became one of the most popular ballroom dances of the time.
Although the roots of salsa music are in Afro-Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Caribbean Hispanic cultures, jazz harmonies and rock guitar also seeped into the style and made it accessible to a wider audience. Salsa music is heavily rhythmic and is often accompanied by trumpets, flutes, and vocals typically sung in Spanish. This style of music and dance took prevalence in the 1950s, along with the likes of the rhumba, the mambo, and the cha-cha, which were all popularized by Puerto Rican musician and bandleader Tito Puente. The Brazilian genre of bossa nova – a soft, rhythmic blend of Afro-Brazilian samba and American Jazz named after the Portuguese phrase for “new trend” – also became popular during the 50s and 60s. Although the tempo of this music was slower, it allowed for a more relaxed style of dancing that was popular in less formal nightclubs and other casual settings.

While this influx of Latin-inspired Jazz was occurring in the 50s and 60s, the era of the “dance craze” was taking place in the world of mainstream R&B music in the US. Record companies started to notice that young consumers of R&B music were mostly buying the music they could dance to in the hops or juke joints. Producers like Barry Gordy of Motown began to produce records through girl groups like The Supremes, Martha and The Vandellas, and The Marvelettes that were driven almost entirely by a danceable beat and lyrics that typically described how the dance was done. Moves like the jerk, the limbo, the mashed potato, the swim, and the shake were all born during this boom of clean-cut dance music. The most successful by far was Chubby Checker’s “The Twist,” which became a Number One hit in both 1960 and 1961, and created a dance move that would be performed on dance floors and stages all across the country (Brackett 139).

Once this breed of dance music began to die down in the late 60s, a different phenomenon took its place. Disco culture swept the nation in the early and mid 1970s. The umbrella term “disco” incorporates a style of music, a style of dance, and a type of venue in which disco music and dance was typically performed. Gaining initial momentum in gay clubs in black and Latino neighborhoods all around New York City, disco music encouraged people to forget about their worries and let loose on the dance floor all night long. The dance style that developed along with disco music was a highly choreographed, group-oriented
blend of line dancing and partnering, captured perfectly in the 1975 film Saturday Night Fever. The movie helped to bring disco culture to the white, straight, mainstream community and produced four Number One hits on the pop charts. TV shows like Soul Train also caught on to the disco trend, showcasing musicians, singers, and dancers within the genre who wished to spread their culture across the country.

As disco began to fade out in the late 70s and early 80s, rap arose as a new genre of music that combined funky melodies, heavily rhythmic vocals and the party-oriented mentality of disco. The culture that developed along with the birth of rap was referred to as “hip-hop,” and encompassed the musical genre of rap, as well as the new style of dance and the graffiti art trend that had come along with it. Breakdancing blew up as a new form of expression for dancers and non-dancers alike, as well as an outlet for tensions that would have otherwise resulted in violence in the tough streets of the Bronx. Popping and locking are the essential components of breakdancing that contributed to the growth of hip-hop dance as a movement. Popping is a hard-hitting, intricate variation of breakdancing that involves the contracting and releasing of muscles to creating the appearance of a jerk in the dancer’s body, and is usually associated with more percussive, electronic-based music. Locking is a more playful, rhythmic, character-driven style that involves a lot of isolations and freezes, and is usually associated with funk music. Dancers used these techniques in street competitions called “cyphers” to battle each other and gain credibility in their neighborhoods, which contributed to a big drop in gang violence at the time. As hip-hop culture grew and developed, more subgenres were created and hip-hop dance became it’s own independent movement.
As technology improves and new styles of music are created, new forms of social dance are sure to follow.

Simultaneously, the popularization of electronic “dance music” in gay and straight clubs alike encouraged an uninhibited, free form style of dancing, which was a big contrast to the highly choreographed style of disco in the 70s. Although the practice of having big calculated dance numbers on the dance floor had mostly diminished, the 80s and 90s produced a new batch of “fad dances” inspired by party music of the time. These moves were easy ones that young people could all do together while partying, without breaking a sweat. The rise of music videos during this decade allowed social dances like the Running Man, the Humpty, and the Hammer dance to spread more quickly and easily than ever before. This practice has carried throughout the 2000s and 2010s, producing popular social dances that are still used today, like the Soulja Boy, the dougie, and the cat daddy. It is clear that the evolution of social dance in the past century was heavily dependent upon the evolution of popular music; as technology improves and new styles of music are created, new forms of social dance are sure to follow.

Sources:
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Spoken Word is an electrifying form of performance poetry that developed, as it is performed today, in Black communities in the 1960s. This form of poetry developed out of the poetry and Blues music of the Harlem Renaissance. A form of Spoken Word, called Slam Poetry, is often used as a way for young poets to discuss social issues. The popularity of the form has greatly increased in the past few years with the help of shows like Brave New Voices on HBO, which featured breakout poet Alysia Harris, and Slam competitions held around the country. With its roots in music, it is only natural to see Spoken Word often coming in contact with the music world. Recently, there has been a strong connection between Rap and Spoken word, with Rap artists, using the format of Spoken Word for songs like Wale’s “Ambitious Girl.” This song takes the form of Spoken Word and puts it to music, making it more musical than Spoken Word in its original form while still maintaining the integrity of the model. Other artists are also following this example, although not yet to the same extent that Wale does.

Many Spoken Word poets are starting to use music in their performances. A group called The Strivers Row, consisting of seven young poets, often incorporates Jazz or other forms of music in their shows. One of the members of The Strivers Row is a young musician by the name of Jennah Bell who often plays the guitar and sings during the poets’ performances. One of the poems she plays for is called “Waiting,” written by Jasmine Mans and Alysia Harris. Some of the artists even freestyle—which is a form of improvisational Rap—before they perform their poetry.
Many poets also find inspiration for their poems in music. One example of this is a poem written by Strivers Row poet Jasmine Mans about Rap artist Nicki Minaj, in which Mans questions the integrity and morality of Minaj’s lyrics. She does this by using some of Minaj’s own lyrics to question her judgment and try to appeal to her to create more socially conscious music. Another is the poem by the Philly team at the 2011 Brave New Voices finals called “Good Music,” in which the poets talk about the declining content of music in general but also specifically Rap music. They talk about the asinine lyrics of artists like Nicki Minaj, Lil’ Wayne, and Lil’ B the Based God and how music from their own childhoods was actually about something. Joshua Bennett also finds inspiration in music from older generations in his poem “Dear Stevie” about Stevie Wonder and the effect that his music has had on his relationship with his father. The connection between music and Spoken Word, whether it is inspiration or actual content of the performance, is getting undeniably stronger. The theme of social commentary and creating something that appeals to the morality and the integrity of the audience is a theme that is appearing more frequently in music, as well as in Spoken Word. As a lifelong music fan and recent Slam poetry fan I look forward to the continuing blending of the two, and hope that the influence of the socially conscious content of Spoken Word will eventually help mend the weakening and trivial content of much of today’s Pop and Rap music.

Sources:
How to Become a Viral Pop Sensation...the Rebecca Black Way:
1. Find a reputable vanity record label, preferably one recommended to you by a classmate.
2. Shell out four thousand dollars to record a pre-written song. The more superficial the lyrics, the better.
3. Record the song and let the producers have their way with it. Cross your fingers and hope that they will do their best to overlay it with excessive Autotune.
4. Make a music video for the song and upload it onto Youtube.
5. Wait about a month until a comedian posts about the video on his Twitter.
These are essentially the steps that Rebecca Black took that propelled her to unanticipated fame. Her single, “Friday”, produced by Ark Music Factory, with its trite lyrics and overdone production, has caught the attention the internet community and other media outlets, and inspired countless memes and parodies. And who could forget the accompanying music video? It is one of the most awkward things I have ever watched. Regardless, I believe that “Friday”, a song seemingly about nothing, raises many valid questions, especially about this new wave of teenybopper pop.

Firstly, why all the hate? So the lyrics of “Friday” may not be the most profound (“Kickin’ in the front seat/ Sittin’ in the back seat/Gotta make my mind up/ Which seat can I take?”) And I agree, the video is absolutely ridiculous. The average American thirteen year old does not drive a convertible to school. Perhaps it is legitimate to say that “Friday” simply sucks. But is that a genuine reason to send a thirteen year old girl death threats? According to ABC News, shortly after the release of “Friday”, Black had received death threats via email and phone. “Kill it before it lays eggs”, says a Youtube comment. Somebody else commented “this is what hitmen are for”. Of course we must keep in mind that the Internet is a gigantic breeding haven for trolls. However I do recall discussing “Friday” with my peers when it first came out, and many of them had very violent reactions to it as well. I understand how one may be repulsed by the vapidity of the song (“Partying partying partying YEAH!”), but I cannot fathom why this would compel somebody to want to slit Rebecca Black’s throat. I’d prefer not to delve too much into the latent violent desires that Black awoke in some individuals. What about this little suburban girl with a frozen smile makes people want to kill her?

A peer of mine (who, I should note, had childhood dreams of becoming a famous singer) made a bitter remark about the aspect of the vanity release, that Ark Music Factory is for talentless rich kids who want to find fame fast. I’ve seen some Youtube commenters make the same statement. So I typed in “trizzy66” in the Youtube search bar (it’s the Ark Music Factory channel) to investigate the other artists. It was how I had expected it to be. Young white teen girls and boys prancing around in school, wistfully longing for a member of the opposite sex to notice them, or
at their laptops while singing sad songs of betrayal. I’m being mean, aren’t I? I understand it now. Watching enough of these videos is bound to stir up feelings of extreme annoyance.

But it’s sort of a misdirected annoyance. Why do some of us take such personal offense to this music? Maybe we’re in denial; we don’t like thinking we were like that as pre-teens. We were smarter! Less vapid. That’s just one guess though. While that may be part of it, I realize that I am more confused by the adults who wrote these songs and directed these videos. “Fun fun fun fun looking forward to the weekend. Yesterday was Thursday Thursday, today is Friday Friday, we we we so excited, tomorrow is Saturday and Sunday comes afterwards…” Those lyrics were written by Patrice Wilson and Clarence Jey, two adult men. Why the hell do they insist on making young people look so stupid? Something more disturbing was Jenna Rose’s live performance of “My Jeans”. I had discovered this song on the ‘Related Videos’ tab on Youtube. On the stage is a line of skinny 13 year old girls in tiny tiny denim shorts and tank tops bouncing around in what appears to be an awkward attempt to look sexy. Her music video for “O.M.G.” is even more unsettling. “Just take a picture, baby… it will last longer for you” she croons at the camera. I’m legitimately disturbed, and I’m not even a prude. I believe in sexual liberation and expression, but I am vehemently opposed to this over-sexualization and exploitation of young girls for the sake of entertainment. Who are the adults that approved of this and what is their reasoning? Gee, I’d like to thank them for portraying young girls as shallow shimmying glitter drones or sad wallowing creatures.

Why do some of us take such personal offense to music?

But back to Rebecca Black, who was my initial inspiration for this dark journey through current teenybopper pop, which has managed to disturb, sadden, and repulse me. She has released a new single song titled “Sing It”. There were no artificial club party scenes in this video, no extreme Autotune. The entire experience elicited no emotion from me, except for relief. She is no longer signed with Ark, so hopefully this means more creative musical autonomy for her. No more adults pretending they know what kids like, thank goodness.
Our word “music” comes from the Greek word “mousike”, meaning “art of the Muses.” A muse was originally a goddess who inspired people of the arts to write, paint, or otherwise fulfill their artistic abilities. Currently, the word is used to mean “one who inspires.” The common etymology of these words is very fitting, as every successful musician (and even some who aren’t very successful) becomes a muse to the next generation.

When “music sensations” sweep the nation, or even the world, people in sup-
port of the “new” music believe they’re doing something innovative and original. For years after Elvis Presley achieved international fame, he was considered an innovator, and many still regard him as such. As his stardom faded, people began to realize he hadn’t created anything; he had just transmitted it in a way that made it more acceptable to a larger number of people. White Americans were so unwilling to accept African-American culture that only “non-threatening” blacks like Fats Domino and Nat “King” Cole achieved crossover success. In fact, Domino was such an inspiration to Presley that in one of Presley’s concerts, in which Domino was present in the audience, Elvis denied that he was the king of rock ‘n’ roll, and said that title belonged to Fats.

Like all great musicians, Presley became a muse to the musicians who came behind him. The Beatles, voted number one artists of all time by Rolling Stone magazine, openly admit that Presley influenced them, and John Lennon has been quoted as saying “Before Elvis, there was nothing.” Elvis wasn’t the only muse the Beatles had. Chuck Berry was so loved by the group that they covered his song “Roll Over Beethoven” very early in their career. They were also inspired by musicians who were making albums at the same time they were. The Beatles’ album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band was inspired by the Beach Boys’ album Pet Sounds, which in turn had been inspired by another Beatles album, Rubber Soul.

Another musical giant of the twentieth century was Michael Jackson. Considered the King of Pop, Jackson holds many musical world records. His album Thriller is the highest selling album in history. He set a precedent for music videos and choreography as well, yet he was influenced by the music he grew up listening to just as surely as other artists were.
Another musical giant of the twentieth century was Michael Jackson. Considered the King of Pop, Jackson holds many musical world records. His album Thriller is the highest selling album in history. He set a new precedent for music videos and choreography as well, yet he was influenced by the music he grew up listening to just as surely as other artists were.

Jackson, in turn, became a muse to many. Justin Timberlake, Usher, Chris Brown, and Justin Bieber are just a few of the artists who admit to being influenced by his music.

The chain goes on. These artists will, in turn, inspire the next generation of musicians. Admitting the influences in no way detracts from what these individuals have accomplished. Just because the Beatles enjoyed Elvis, and Elvis in turn enjoyed blues and gospel, doesn’t mean they weren’t amazing artists. There’s a famous quote that says, “There are no original thoughts, only original people.” We are all the sum of our experiences and our lives, yet we are all a little more than that. It’s a case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Musicians will become the muse of the next generation as long as there is a next generation.