Inside

Remembering Whitney
Perfume Genius’
Put Your Back N 2 It hits stores

PLUS
The Black Keys,
Beach Boys,
& Johnny Cash

childish gambino

Transitions from TV to music and find success on the charts.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page Range</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 – 9</td>
<td>The Influence of Pet Sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 11</td>
<td>Then and Now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – 17</td>
<td>Perfume Genius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 19</td>
<td>Hallyu Hits America?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 21</td>
<td>An Academic Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 – 25</td>
<td>The Art of Sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 27</td>
<td>Childish Gambino is a Mastermind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Voice</td>
<td>28 – 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Townshen and the Birth of Rock Opera</td>
<td>32 – 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Be Clear, the Gaslight Anthem is Not the Boss</td>
<td>34 – 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old ‘Skool’ Hip hop: Its Origin and Conclusion</td>
<td>38 – 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rise of the Black Keys</td>
<td>40 – 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughing with the Sinners</td>
<td>44 – 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Q&amp;A with Zack Kantor</td>
<td>48 – 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison</td>
<td>54 – 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of Classics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
That notion was irreversibly shattered when I heard the Pet Sounds album for the first time.
When I first discovered the music of the Sixties I never quite understood the allure of the Beach Boys. Only having been exposed to earlier hits such as “Surfin’ Safari” and “Surfin’ USA,” I was under the impression that all of their songs sounded the same and that they hadn’t earned their place in rock history alongside such innovative artists as Jimi Hendrix or The Beatles. I mean, I’m from Southern California; I didn’t need them to detail the merits of going to the beach. I liked their music and thought it was catchy, but never thought they deserved the respect and accolades that they seemed to have accrued over the years. That notion was irreversibly shattered when I heard the Pet Sounds album for the first time.

Pet Sounds was released in 1966 on the Capitol Records label and was the Beach Boys’ 11th album. While it has since become their most well-known and respected album, it was not initially received as well as the band’s members had hoped - not initially reaching gold status and only reaching #10 on the American Billboard 200.

Whereas the Beach Boys’ earlier albums had been written collaboratively, Pet Sounds was almost completely composed by Brian Wilson, the band’s leader, after quitting touring with the band in order to focus on writing and producing. The album was a departure from the Beach Boys’ early, carefree music; instead the lyrics and music were much more personal and had an unprecedented substance that surprised even the band members themselves upon returning from their Asian tour. The album, unlike anything the band had ever produced, was classified as the Beach Boys’ first foray into the emerging genre of psychedelic rock and ultimately was credited as one of the catalysts that ushered the new genre into the public eye.

The sudden change of pace has been attributed to Brian Wilson’s experimentation with LSD and other drugs and his declining mental health. Band members Mike Love and Al Jardine were caught off guard by Wilson’s new sound and did not approve of his experimentation, believing it was taking the band in a negative direction. While they may not have approved, Wilson’s drug use is likely what caused him to look inward, writing songs that reflect great longing and possess a melancholy feel that certainly was not present in their earlier surf anthems.

This change can also be accredited to The Beatles’ album Rubber Soul that was released just months before Pet Sounds. Wilson was taken aback by the quality, but even more so by the continuity of Rubber Soul. He was so blown away that the night he first heard the album he sat down at the piano and began work on Pet Sounds. He desired to create an album that could be looked at as a complete work rather than just an amalgam of singles. Not to mention his competitive desire to create something that would best The Beatles.

It is widely accepted that upon hearing Pet Sounds, The Beatles recorded arguably their most famous album, Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band. They echoed many of the components of Pet Sounds, even including the
barking of dogs, an unusual touch that the Beach Boys applied. Paul McCartney was blown away by the album and greatly influenced, saying, “It was the record of the time. The thing that really made me sit up and take notice was the bass lines... and also, putting melodies in the bass line. That I think was probably the big influence that set me thinking when we recorded Pepper.”

Even The Beatles’ manager, George Martin, conceded that the album was one of his favorites and inspired them going forward. This rivalry between the two bands continued to propel their respective musical endeavors for the remainder of their careers.

In the years since Pet Sounds’ release it has gained clout in the musical community, now being considered, almost unanimously, one of the great rock albums ever recorded. While some of their music from earlier albums lacked the technical skill and depth to be considered more than just catchy, this album provided them with legitimacy. The first time I listened to this album all the way through they crossed over in my mind from being a kitschy beach band to a respectable rock band. They transitioned from surf, sun, and girls to something much more universal and real. Even just the song titles have a depth that cannot be found in early material. They sing of feeling lost and hopeless and in and out of love - much more developed and relatable topics that lend a much-needed maturity to their music. Pet Sounds not only revolutionized the genre of rock, but it established the Beach Boys as one of the great bands in Rock and Roll history.

Wilson’s drug use is likely what caused him to look inward.

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Wouldn’t It Be Nice/You Still Believe In Me
That’s Not Me/Don’t Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)
I’m Waiting For The Day/Let’s Go Away For Awhile/Sloop John B.
God Only Knows/I Know There’s An Answer/Here Today
I Just Wasn’t Made For These Times/Pet Sounds/Caroline No
Then and Now

By Mujaahida Shakur
Over the course of Music History the term R&B has been used to describe a variety of musical styles. In its earliest history, the term R&B was used to describe what were originally called Race records. These were Blues songs that were produced by record companies as separate genres from the rest of their music for their black audiences. Some of the most famous and influential Blues artists included Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. This style of R&B is characterized by its somber songs that told stories of hard times and the struggles that many Black Americans were experiencing at the time. This type of music fell out of style however, because many teenagers found it to be too depressing to listen to; they wanted music that they could dance to and that told happier stories.

In the ‘50s R&B came to be used as a generic description of the music made by black artists for black audiences. This terminology was used to separate Black Pop music from White Pop music. This form of R&B music, with such famous artists as Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and Little Richard, contributed much to what is known today as Rock and Roll. These new R&B songs still had the story-like quality that had been so distinct of Blues music but these artists took the original Blues sound that they grew up with and changed it up by adding what the artists called “Boogie Woogie” style rhythms to create a new sound. Chuck Berry, one of the most influential R&B guitarists, influenced many famous rock groups and musicians, including the Beatles, Elvis and Bruce Springsteen. Artists like Elvis were responsible for bringing Black music to White teenagers in the mid to late ’50s. This caused great controversy because White parents didn’t want their teens listening to the sexually explicit lyrics that were characteristic of the R&B of the time. The R&B of the late ’50s came to known as Rock and Roll because Whites didn’t want to accept that their teenagers were listening to Black music.

After the 1960s, the term R&B came to be used to describe music that had its roots in electric blues and gospel and soul music. Artists from the 1980s and ’90s such as Whitney Houston and Boyz II Men got their start in gospel music. This influence is clear in songs such as “I Will Always Love You” by Whitney Houston and the A Capella version of Boyz II Men’s “It’s So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday.” R&B went through another change in the mid-1990s when it took on a more “Pop-like” sound. This new style was coined “New Jack Swing” and was the characteristic sound of artists like Boyz II Men’s Pop hits like “Motown Philly” and the even more popular “Poison” by hit R&B group BellBivDevoe which featured three of the members of the original line up for the R&B group New Edition. This era of R&B music was all about dancing and having a good time. It represented the ideals of the teenagers of the time and their desire to just have fun and enjoy being young.

Since then, R&B music has returned to its blues and soul roots with artist like Trey Songz, Usher, and Chris Brown. More recently, in the last two or three years, R&B has begun to find itself taking on the sounds of Dance-Pop music again. Artists like Usher and Chris Brown have begun to incorporate Dance music into their R&B hits with songs like Usher’s “OMG” and Chris Brown’s “Beautiful People.” A new music wave called Dubstep, which is very characterized by its heavy use of low frequency bass lines, has slowly wormed its way into the R&B world, with Dubstep artists doing remixes of R&B songs, laying their Dubstep beats over hit R&B tracks such as Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep” and Katy Perry’s “E.T.” This new mix hasn’t quite taken hold on the Pop music scene yet, but as a lifelong R&B fan, I’m looking forward to seeing what exciting new twists this genre has in store.
Perfume Genius
HITS THE INDIE MUSIC SCENE

From YouTube videos to pop music – Mike Hadreas is the singer/songwriter known as Perfume Genius

By Ian McCarthy
At the age of 25, Mike Hadreas created a YouTube account while living in his mother’s house. Under the pseudonym Flossy, Hadreas donned a pink pigtailed wig and a white beret, his voice manipulated to sound cartoonish as his female alter ego hosts her own YouTube talk show. Throughout Flossy’s four videos (all shot in Hadreas’ mother’s house), she stands in front of a closed door in a bare, white room, reviewing the 1999 Claire Danes thriller Brokedown Palace, sharing her acting resume, and celebrating Halloween dressed like a Japanese geisha. As of February 2012, the channel has 6,123 video views.

Five years after releasing his most recent Flossy video, Hadreas is a critically acclaimed recording artist touring the globe as Perfume Genius, currently promoting his second solo album Put Your Back N 2 It (released February 21, 2012 on Matador) and slowly becoming one of the most important queer artists to emerge this century.

Hadreas first started releasing music as Perfume Genius on MySpace in 2007 while living with his mother in his native Seattle after a lifetime of trauma and abuse and several years of alcoholism inspired him to write his first song, “Learning”. Written and recorded at his mother’s piano, the song is a delicate piano-based ballad with Hadreas’ thin, boyish vocals cooing, “No one will answer your prayers until you take off that dress/No one will hear all your crying until you take your last breath”. As he continued to write songs, he slowly built up confidence in his peculiar singing voice, releasing more songs and gaining attention from several music blogs, who found...
his homemade music videos disturbingly provocative. One such music video for the song “No Problem” is a clip from a fetish film in which a blonde woman with weights at her ankles holds her breath underwater and mugs at the camera while seductively blowing bubbles. Hadreas’ ability to find beauty in the unsettling, both in his songs and videos, gained him the attention of Turnstile Records in the UK, and soon later Matador in the US.

He released his debut album Learning on June 22, 2010 with almost no promotion from Matador, becoming one of the year’s biggest buzz artists nearly entirely through word-of-mouth and a glowing Pitchfork Media album review (8.2 and a year-end Honorable Mention). The ensuing barrage of press, interviews and a headlining tour in small venues across the globe overwhelmed Hadreas. Unable to cope with the stress such attention brings, he resorted to the familiarity of alcohol: the very substance for which he entered treatment years before – the substance that caused him to move from New York to his mother’s house in the first place. As we’ve learned too many times, no amount of success can fully heal an addiction.

Fortunately, Hadreas rebounded after a few months of sobriety, putting all of his energy into his sophomore LP. Recorded in England and co-produced with Drew Morgan, it was his first time working on his music with a second party. The songs on Learning were self-produced and ordered chronologically, beginning with the title track and ending with the ethereal dirge “Never Did.” The production quality of Put Your Back N 2 It is clearly higher, but Hadreas maintains his musical intimacy with the same gentle piano and breathy, emotive vocals. He still has a lot to say, and many people who want to hear it.

When both he and Matador noticed the general slowness of the tracks he recorded in the UK, Hadreas felt dissatisfied. “At first I was pissed,” he told Beats Per Minute, “but then when I listened to the album I realized that all those slow songs, when put together, lost some of their weight. So, I tried to write a couple new songs, still about stuff that I cared about but that were a little more fun, and I recorded them in Seattle.”

The video for one of these tracks, “Hood”, features popular gay porn star Arpad Miklos brushing Hadreas’ hair, lovingly applying lipstick and eye shadow to the singer while wearing only small, black underwear. The scene is intentionally odd; Hadreas, rail-thin and boyish-looking, appears even smaller while cradled in the arms of a giant, bearded muscle man. “I didn’t want it to be me and my boyfriend and have people think it’s after school special,” he explains to Fader TV (Hadreas is currently dating his stage companion Alan Wyffels, who shares the singer’s petite frame.)

When Matador created a 16-second video advertisement featuring a clip from the “Hood” video to YouTube—one those annoying ads we need to sit through before watching the video we clicked on—the video was rejected for “promoting mature sexual themes” and being “not family safe,” inciting criticism from several fans, blogs, and even Michael Stipe of R.E.M., who referred to YouTube’s actions as “downright discrimination”. He’s come a long way since his days as Flossy.

There is nothing explicitly sexual in the clip; the sight of Hadreas and Miklos in a shirtless embrace was probably enough to earn the rejection. The controversy comes from YouTube’s hypocrisy, though, as the promo clip for Lana Del Rey’s 2012 album “Born to Die” featuring the singer in a similar, yet heterosexual shirtless embrace, had been running for weeks. This ridiculous situation is unfortunately very telling of where our country is at in regards to queerness – it’s OK to be gay, we just don’t want to see it. Just a year ago, fans had to campaign to get domestic partners Mitch and Cameron to kiss on Modern Family, considered one of the most progressive shows in terms of queer exposure. Perfume Genius is one of very few unapologetically queer artists on the music scene today; his first single, “All Waters” is about his infuriation that no matter how comfortable he feels holding his boyfriend’s hand in public, there will always be a little shame and fear in the back of his mind, and he “can’t

**Put Your Back N 2 It** was released on **February 20, 2012**
even imagine that hesitation ever going away.” While artists like Peaches are pushing boundaries with explicitly queer sexuality in music, Perfume Genius is writing heart-on-sleeve songs with universal themes.

Because several of his songs are about his experiences growing up as a depressed, gay male, Hadreas often is asked in interviews about his opinions on Dan Savage’s It Gets Better Project. Talking to John Norris of Noisevox in a filmed sit-down interview in 2010, Hadreas is visibly uncomfortable and nervous. Norris mentions the It Gets Better Project, to which Hadreas replies, “It definitely does [get better]. It gets worse, too, but in a more real way.” His honesty concerning the plights of young queer Americans is, much like his music, simultaneously unsettling and therapeutic.

The name Perfume Genius is taken from a night watching an “awful movie” with his best friend Caralee McElroy in 2007, during which she would squint at the screen and say, “This guy thinks is some kind of fucking Perfume Genius.” Though she hasn’t directly contributed to any of Hadreas’ music, McElroy is shown in some Perfume Genius promotional photos and even made a guest appearance as Flossy’s grandmother in the video “Flossy Halloween”. As the multi-instrumentalist for the American experimental pop band Xiu Xiu, McElroy has been one of Hadreas’ closest personal and musical allies; the duo is namedropped in two separate Xiu Xiu songs—one written by bandleader Jamie Stewart several years after McElroy left the group to join Cold Cave. Hadreas has clearly been influenced by the grim, confessional songwriting of Xiu Xiu, but he trades their avant-garde noise for a pop sensibility, his lyrics like his most personal diary entries generalized. Speaking to Dummy Magazine in a 2010 interview, he says “I don’t ever want to feel like mine is the only experience.” What a genius.

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**Hallyu** is the term coined for the spread of Korean culture around the world which literally means Korean wave in the Korean language. A huge part of Hallyu is its pop music which is a genre of its own called K-pop for Korean pop. K-pop is gaining wide interest around the world for its catchy beats and intricate choreography. Most of its Korean pop acts are girl and boy groups. Hallyu has gone global and the major Korean pop labels have taken notice. Because of this, its CEOs have actively tried to promote it outside of Korea to the point that it’s now common for Korean acts to redo their music in Japanese to sell in Japan since they have the second largest music industry. Currently many K-pop acts have been successful in Japan and now they want to achieve that same success in the first largest music industry, America.

SM Entertainment is one of the veteran and most famous Korean pop record labels. It was founded in 1995 by Lee Soo-Man. It holds many of Korea’s most popular pop acts. After dominating the Korean pop market and proving successful in Japan with various acts, they’ve also tried to enter the American music market. One of their most popular acts is female soloist, BoA. She is often referred as the Korean equivalent of Britney Spears. This is due to her ability to perform extensive choreography and her long success of pop hits. Also, like Britney, she entered the entertainment industry at a young age. She was discovered at SM Entertainment talent search. She trained for two years before releasing her debut album *ID: Peace B* in 2000 when she was 13 years old. During her trainee years she took vocal, dance, English and Japanese lessons. SM entertainment planned to make her a star to represent Korea in Asia and later the world which made her study of foreign language a huge priority. Two years later she released her first Japanese language album, *Listen to My Heart*. Her Japanese album turned out to be hugely successful in Japan and surpassed the success of her Korean debut album which had only sold 156,000 copies. However, she proved herself by having her second Korean album become the best-selling album of the year with 544,000 copies sold. Her popularity continued to grow and SM Entertainment focused more on her Japanese promotional activities since she was the most successful there. The focus on Japan made her popularity wane a bit, but she is still one
publications. The lack of promotion was due to the fact that SM entertainment opened a subsidiary label in the US the same year as her debut to distribute her album and they had little knowledge of the American market. This being their first American music venture, they failed to prepare and plan properly. BoA then took an indefinite hiatus from the American music scene.

Nevertheless, SM entertainment decided on a second musical endeavor into the American market. This time they would use the most successful group in South Korea which is under their label, Girls’ Generation. The group, like BoA, also gained huge success in Japan. Girls’ Generation debuted in Korea in 2007 with nine girls. Their popularity prior to their Korean debut was already so high that people would tear off promotional teaser posters on the street and called their record company to ask if they were on sale. They released the longest charting Korean pop single in Korea, holding the number one spot for 8 consecutive weeks. Their achievements in Japan and Korea made them their label’s most likely next candidates for an American debut. This time SM entertainment planned more carefully. They had the group sign with the multinational music company, Universal Music Group under Interscope Records which houses Lady Gaga. Their English debut single was composed and arranged by Teddy Riley who was Michael Jackson’s producer. Their debut English track was released with their latest Korean album in Korea and in America. Girls’ Generation promoted their Korean album’s release in America by taking part in the SMtown NYC concert at Madison Square Garden on October 2011. SMtown is a concert series held by their record label where various SM artists perform together. Here Girls’ Generation along with their label-mates became the first Asian pop groups to perform in Madison Square Garden. They performed their English single and advertised their album to a sold-out stadium in Madison Square Garden. They then continued American promotions of their latest album by performing a remix of their English single on the Late Show with David Letterman on January 12, 2011. The next day they performed their single on Live! with Kelly and did an English interview. Their record label has yet to release their official American album but they have already executed various promotional activities for the group. The group has now been featured in nationally syndicated television programs, radio segments, and online and print articles. The success they will achieve in American is still uncertain but it seems like their American debut will be better off than BoA’s.
Elvis Presley (bottom), and Chuck Berry (top).
The average college or high school student has specific tastes in music that, for the most part, don’t vary until they grow older. In some areas of the country, people may be disgusted to hear Blake Sheldon come on the radio, while other places may avoid a business that plays pop music over the speakers. Some people are much more open to different styles of music, yet they will only listen to current artists. On the other hand, some people will only listen to classic rock and will shun anything from the past decade or so. Of the different varieties, it’s rare to find a young person who truly enjoys listening to “Oldies”. Some may tolerate it, while others who really understand music can acknowledge the huge contributions artists such as Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, and Jerry Lee Lewis made to the industry. Yet few young people choose this music for their own personal listening. These people can’t seem to see the forest for the trees.

The contributions made by artists in the fifties cannot be exaggerated. Elvis opened an entire genre of music for people to enjoy. Fats Domino brought rhythm and blues to a white audience with his smooth, easy-going voice, and Chuck Berry inspired every major guitarist born in the decades to follow. Looking at all of this from an academic standpoint truly causes a person to miss the point of what these men did. To them, it was all about the emotion and thrill of the music. When Jerry Lee Lewis lit a piano on fire while playing “Great Balls of Fire” in 1957, he brought the house to its knees.

It’s been said that there are two first names you can say to nearly anyone in the world, and they will immediately know whom you’re speaking of. The first is Jesus. The second is Elvis. The man isn’t The King of Rock ‘N’ Roll just because of creating a new genre of music (as if that weren’t impressive enough), but he had an amazing talent. The event surrounding his death, his cheesy movies and the way girls screamed when he was on stage usually take away from his stardom these days. Looking past that, Presley had a vocal range many singers could only dream of. The sheer power of his voice is evident in songs such as “American Trilogy” and “My Way”. These songs are enough to give someone who sets aside the cynicism and listens to the music goose bumps.

The lack of appreciation for Elvis has been around since the beginning. People mock his movies, but Hollywood saw a talent in him. He was offered the starring role in the classic West Side Story, but Colonel Tom Parker talked him out of taking it. Still, Elvis’ status has never faded completely. Even thirty-five years after his death, the Elvis name is still making money. Some moments are too overpowering to forget. One such moment was during a live show in Elvis’ early years. His dancing was so controversial that behind-the-scenes men told Elvis he couldn’t dance. He could just wiggle his pinky. Elvis went on stage and sang like he would in any other show. Every time he put his hand out and moved his finger, the girls would scream and the crowd would go wild. There are several interviews with Elvis where he laughs at the way people act around him. He was a humble person who always gave to charity and never thought of himself as changing the face of music forever. When considering these superstars, a person has to remember the innocence they had through the whole process. They were guided by the emotions they felt and they fed off the crowds they performed for. None of the set out to make history, yet no one can deny their impact on the world.

It was moments of pure emotion and pure Rock ‘N’ Roll that people who “appreciate the contributions” miss out on. When Chess Records released “Maybelline” in 1955, Chuck Berry had no idea that he would inspire the people who have gone down in history as guitar legends. He just wanted to make the music he felt passionate about. This desire he and the others felt to carve their way into music is voiced in Berry’s ’56 song “Roll-Over Beethoven”. The classical music that was the standard all music was held to would have to step aside to make way for the revolution that was happening around Berry. With the discovery of Presley, the King; Lewis, the Killer; and Berry, the legendary guitar player, life in America would never be the same. These men may argue now over who was the greatest of their era, but when they actually changed the music, when they actually changed the world, they were doing what they wanted, and what felt right. The emotion is the fuel that drives Rock ‘N’ Roll, and it’s that emotion that fades as a result of the academic love that people hold for this music. Chuck Berry told Beethoven to “tell Tschai-kowsky the news.” He wanted to replace the stuffy classical music with music that spoke to people and was fun for them. Chuck Berry was a true rocker, who held the right perspective on his music. Don’t over think it, and don’t love it academically. Love the music because it’s Rock ‘N’ Roll, and after all these years, it’s still here to stay.
As the genres of hip-hop and rap started to take off in the late 80s and early 90s, artists started heavily using sampling as a way to enhance their music. Robert Rauschenberg did so with his art, creating collage-like works that intertwined genres and generations. Artists like Run DMC, Notorious B.I.G., and Jay-Z are perfect examples of the successful use of sampling as a contribution to the growth of hip-hop culture. They each surpassed the boundaries of what a hip-hop song was supposed to sound like and inspired others to do the same. Some sampled melodies or drum beats, while others sampled vocals and even specific lyrics. Since the establishment of copyright law in the late 80s, all of these artists obviously had to give due credit – and payment – to the artists from whom they took their samples, but somehow this gave artists more freedom to explore different types of music and expand their sound.

A classic example of the early application of sampling in hip-hop music would be Run DMC’s “Run’s House” from *Tougher Than Leather*, released by Profile Records in 1988, which samples and loops the drum solo in James Brown’s “Funky Drummer”, released by King Records in 1970. The song also samples a horn section in “Ashley’s Roachclip” by The Soul Searchers, released by Sussex in 1974, which serves as the hook/riff for the song. During this time in the late 80s hip-hop was still a growing art form, so Run DMC’s use of sampling as not only a reference to R&B and Jazz, genres of music that had long been established, but also as a modernization of these established musical genres, was a revolutionary...
Run–D.M.C.

idea. Run DMC would go on to do more sampling and covering, as well as being covered by other artists later on, as a way of showing appreciation for the contributions they made for early hip-hop culture.

Rap artists began to get more creative with sampling in the mid-90s, using different methods of sampling in one song. For example, Notorious B.I.G.’s “Big Poppa” from *Ready to Die*, released by Bad Boy Records in 1994, samples the melody of “Between the Sheets” by The Isley Brothers, released by Epic Records in 1983. He also samples vocals from the song “Bad Boys” by Bad Boys featuring K Love, from *Street Sounds Electro 9*, released by Starlite Records in 1985, beginning the song with their famous line, “To all the ladies in the place with style and grace.” Given the popularity of this one line and the swagger with which Biggie delivered it, some may be disappointed to discover that the big man did not write it himself; however, his fans still maintain the belief that Biggie was one of the cleverest lyricists of his time. The significance of this sample still remains; it was proof that artists could successfully combine different methods of sampling to create a song that was all their own.

Another important development in the use of sampling in hip-hop music was when rappers began to use samples from completely different genres of music, and even still, few ventured into the field that Jay-Z did when he came out with “Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)” from *Vol. 2.. Hard Knock Life*. The single, released by Roc-A-Fella Records in 1998, samples “It’s the Hard-Knock Life” by Andrea McArdle from the Broadway Musical *Annie*, the soundtrack of which was released by Columbia Records in 1977. The sample Jay-Z uses from the show’s most popular song functions as the chorus and is looped throughout the song. Coincidentally, Jay-Z also
uses a small sample from Notorious B.I.G.’s “Big Poppa” at one point in “Hard Knock Life” when he mimics the distinct way Biggie says “baby” musical at this time. This song also was proof of the power of the crossover effect. “Hard Knock Life” was Jay-Z’s first single to achieve success outside the US; it reached #2 on the pop charts in the UK in December 1998.

Flash-forward to present day – hip-hop artists have been sampling for a while now and are starting to explore all kinds of new ways to sample. Something as significant as a melody or vocals can be used as a sample, just as something as little as a two-second grunt or a short line can be sampled. Kanye West is an artist who has fully embraced the practice of sampling and has since become somewhat of an expert; he frequently samples in not only his own music but the music he produces as well. This is not to say that his work is unoriginal; using samples still requires a lot of creativity, for example, to modernize an old song or sound, or to present older music in a way that listeners have never heard before. Kanye West’s “Through the Wire” from College Dropout, released by Roc-A-Fella Records in 2003, directly samples the chorus of Chaka Khan’s “Through the Fire” from I Feel For You, released by Warner Brothers in 1984. West also adapts the title of her song to his situation, referring to the wire that kept his fractured jaw shut for six weeks after a near-fatal car accident in October of 2002.

The song’s instant popularity allowed him to officially make the transition from producer to rapper/producer when Roc-A-Fella Records finally allowed him to release a solo album – a great decision on their part, seeing as Kanye West has become one of the most popular rap artists of the 21st century. Many of West’s most popular songs, such as
“Gold Digger,” “Touch the Sky,” “Stronger,” “Otis,” and countless others, include samples from various artists in different genres and time periods.

As one can see from the growing use and significance of the practice, sampling has become its own art form and is sure to become more popular as music continues to develop over time. Sampling can be seen as a way to reinvent a song that lacked dimension, or a way to pay tribute to an artist, song, or genre that deserves relevance in the present day. We have artists like Run DMC, Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, and Kanye West to thank for bringing this creative process to the mainstream.

Sources

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Which transition is easier—music to acting or acting to music? By and large, musicians have transitioned more frequently from music to acting. Think Elvis, Justin Timberlake, Will Smith, Frank Sinatra, Ice Cube, Beyoncé and tons more. But how many make the switch from acting to music? And, in reality, how many are successful at both? Drake began his way to rap stardom in 2009 with the release of his first EP So Far Gone after his career as a Degrassi star ended. This was his most well known bit of acting, and his performance as Jimmy Brooks, a paralyzed high schooler, was praiseworthy, captivating and convincing. His rap career, however, is what he is better known for, as it is his current focus.

Donald Glover, 29, has a similar story—some might know him better as Childish Gambino. Glover got his start as a writer for The Daily Show in 2005, and continued writing for shows we know and love, like 30 Rock. He is currently best known in the field of acting for his role as student Troy Barnes on the hit TV show Community. If his talents as a writer, actor and comedian weren’t enough, just last year Glover traded in his God-given name for another—Childish Gambino—and signed with Glassnote Records as a rapper. He released his first studio album Camp in November of that year. The album was a success, hitting #11 on the US pop charts and #2 on both US R&B and rap charts. By spring, kids all over were bumping Gambino in their cars, and his first tour, IAMDONALD, was a great success for such a new artist. His twenty-three stops in thirty-three days were one party after another. His two shows in New York sold out within three hours of the tickets becoming available. His upcoming tour, called Camp Gambino, begins the 16th of next month in the artist’s home state of Georgia.

Childish Gambino’s sound is catchy yet hard-hitting and somewhat controversial; the songs are the kind kids want to learn the lyrics to. One of his most popular songs from Camp, “Heartbeat,” is based in an electronic beat while Glover raps in his typical quick and clever fashion. It is catchy yet aggressive, in keeping with his style. This song is a prime example of his typical style, in that most songs on Camp are electronic and, therefore, memorable—quite the kind to get stuck in one’s head. His lyrics are clever and well thought out, yet still flow quickly and are absolutely to the point. All in all, his first studio album is not at all amateur and keeps the listener interested. You better believe that you want to hear what he has to say. Borderline offensive and pushing the limits with language and profanity, Gambino gets his point across and you will not forget it. The trend of incorporating pop-culture into rap is catching on, and makes the songs relatable and current. He also DJs, mixes and produces his own music under a third name, mcDJ. He typically makes his mixes available to the public through his official website, iamdonald.com.

Donald Glover, mcDJ and Childish Gambino’s successes are numerous. Very few gain the type of all-around fame and recognition in every area of performance they choose to dabble in. Childish Gambino’s attention to current culture is interesting and smart, while his at times controversial word and subject choice keep listeners interested in what he’ll say next. For a newcomer to the rap scene, Gambino has been a sensation and it looks like he’s only going up from here. It will be interesting to see what he brings to the music scene in the future and how far he goes in his numerous endeavors.
THE VOICE

How Whitney Houston became one of the most talented and reknown pop and R&B singers in the world.

By Melissa Luning
On September 14th 2009, Oprah Winfrey dubbed Whitney Houston “The Voice” during a live interview on ABC. Houston seemed shocked, but the world already knew that her musical talent was the best the world had seen yet. By the year 2006, Houston won 411 awards. Houston was the only artist to ever chart seven consecutive number one Billboard Hot 100 hits, and was listed by the Guinness book of World Records as music’s “most awarded female artist of all time”.

Houston’s success was surely no surprise given her family background. She was born on August 6th, 1963 in Newark, New Jersey to a family of singers and performers. Her mother, Emily “Cissy” Houston, was the choir minister at her church at New Hope Baptist Church. Her mother sang in a gospel quartet and in the vocal group Sweet Inspirations, singing backup for such stars as Aretha Franklin (Whitney’s godmother) and Elvis Presley. In her interview with Oprah, Whitney tells Oprah of a time she sang backup for her own mother. When it was her turn to sing, the crowd rushed to the stage. Her mother told her that God had given her a talent and that singing was what she was supposed to do with her life. Houston’s cousins, Dee Dee Warwick and Dionne Warwick were also superstars in the music industry.

Whitney Houston’s cousins and mother highly inspired her to sing gospel. Houston sang in her church choir as a child and started performing in New York not long after. At the age of only nineteen, Whitney Houston was performing at a nightclub in Manhattan when Clive Davis heard her performance and signed her immediately. Two years later in 1985 her first self-titled album was released under Arista Records containing three number one hits and a Grammy award-winning song. Arista Records budgeted $250,000 for her first album and it definitely paid off. Whitney Houston set the record for the largest selling debut album by a solo artist. Houston’s second album was released in June of 1987, and Houston became the first female artist to enter the Billboard album charts at number one. Houston’s third album was also a success internationally. Whitney Houston owned pop music, but she remained faithful to her church and gospel routes. In 1989 Houston founded the Whitney Houston Foundation For Children Inc. for children with diseases such as AIDS and cancer, and homeless children.

In 1992 Whitney Houston married “bad boy” R&B artist Bobby Brown. The couple had been dating for three years before the marriage, and the first few years of their marriage were like a dream. Together they had one daughter, Bobbi Kristina Brown. In 1992 Houston also starred in the film The Bodyguard with costar Kevin Costner. The film produced the biggest selling motion picture soundtrack of all time, including Houston’s most popular single “I Will Always Love You”. The song is also known for being the biggest selling commercial single in history. To most Americans, this was Houston’s highest point in her career. But Houston would disagree. She had wished for privacy. The life of being a star clashed with trying to raise her daughter and supporting her husband. Houston wished for a normal life and thought she was done. She took some time to herself, however she began to have trouble with Bobby Brown. She would later say that he was “jealous” of her and that he would abuse
her emotionally. To forget her pain, Houston turned to marijuana and cocaine.

Houston’s success went downhill from this point forward. She finally divorced Bobby Brown in 2007 and dodged arrest for possession of marijuana in 2002. She released a comeback album in 2002 but it was not well received since she had left Clive Davis. She entered rehab for the first time in 2004 but it failed to eliminate her drug addiction. Her seventh album was released in 2009. The album *I Look to You* was recorded with her producer Clive Davis with contributions from artists such as R. Kelly, Alicia Keys and Akon. These artists gave it an R&B boost but her songs never reached the tops of the charts again.

Whitney Houston was found dead in her hotel in Beverly Hills, California on February 11th, 2012. She was only 48 years old. However, she had lived her life. She traveled the world, fell in love, had a daughter and used her God-given talent to make people happy. She was an icon to the pop industry. Many artists that Houston had influenced in her lifetime sang at her funeral on February 19th. Toni Braxton, R&B singer and performer, was greatly influenced by Whitney Houston. She said at an interview at Clive Davis’s annual party: “She taught me how to stand”. Houston set the standard for pop singers and songwriters in the 1980’s. Singer Celine Dion once stated: “When I started my career, I wanted to be like her”. Houston did an incredibly successful job in crossing R&B and pop. She inspired and worked with many R&B artists such as Alicia Keys and Mariah Carey. In addition, Houston popularized her music to other genres, such as R&B, soul, and even country. Everyone bought Houston’s albums regardless of race or what genre they had previously preferred to hear her voice. The voice.

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Pete Townshend
and the Birth of the Rock Opera

By Jeffrey Arace
In the early and mid 1960’s almost every Rock n’ Roll group sold single records. Singles were used to gain commercial radio airplay and the ‘45 was a promotion- al tool for selling the L.P. The Who, a young four-piece band from Shep- herd’s Bush, was no exception. Pete Townshend, who had taken the role as group songwriter, wrote the group’s first single “I Can’t Explain” in 1964. The release was quickly followed by Pete’s second single “Anyway, Any- how, Anywhere.” The following year the band would release the youth an- them “My Generation” which would go on to reach #2 on the UK charts and #4 in the US, proving Pete’s mas- tery of the compact 3-minute single format.

The band’s manager, Kit Lambert, constantly urged Pete to experiment with more complex song forms. On the group’s second album Happy Jack, Pete pushed the bound- aries of pop composition and orchestration with the 9:00-plus opera- lite track “A Quick One, While He’s Away”. The song is actually made of a half-dozen mini-bites: ‘Her Man’s Gone’, ‘Crying Town’, ‘We Have a Remedy’, ‘Ivor the Engine Driver’, ‘Soon Be Home’ and ‘You Are For- given’ that tell a story of girl whose lover has been gone. Townshend’s long track filled both the “physical and artistic demands of the album” as the styles range from pop, to country, to folk, all brought together by Pete’s unique guitar style. This is often considered the band’s first try at a “rock opera”. Loosely defined, a rock opera is a work of rock music that presents storyline told over multiple songs, similar to a traditional opera. A rock opera is different than a tradi- tional rock album, which is usually compiled of songs that do not share a common theme or narrative.

The Who’s third album, The Who Sell Out, would serve as a stepping stone from the “operatic rumblings” heard on Happy Jack to the “full blown” rock opera Tommy. The tracks on The Who Sell Out are linked together by the theme of fake advertising. The songs themselves are unrelated for the most part but are in- terspersed with faux commercials and public service announce- ments. Townshend’s idea behind this concept al- bum was that the fake commercials be- tween songs would give the listener the feeling of listening to a live radio program. While the concept behind the album was definitely ahead of its time, crit- ics argued that Townshend was unable to assemble the individual tracks in to single, unified album. Although the album would only reach #13 on the UK charts and failed to appear on US listings, it provided listeners a taste of things to follow on their next album.

With continuing support from Lambert to push the bound- aries of pop composition, Townshend’s next album would become one of the most influential albums of all time. Tommy, released in 1967, is a more advanced version of the band’s previous work. Townshend found the con- ventional single format (3:00 singles from top to bottom) “limiting”. The album is not only compiled of tracks that all share a central topic but is also “welded” as one piece instrumentally. On this album Townshend was able to accomplish everything he at- tempted previously on Happy Jack and The Who Sell Out. The album brought together various singles, tied them together subject wise, and ex- tended the pop song structure to al- low for more complex orchestration. Although Townshend experimented with the rock opera format on previous albums, Tommy was the first mu- sical work to be explicitly billed as a rock opera. The album tells the story of a “deaf, dumb, and blind pinball wizard” named Tommy. Through- out the album Tommy undergoes assault, cruelty, an LSD experience, and eventually develops great sensi- bility and awareness from his expe- riences. Town- shend uses the story of Town- shend to convey the underlying theme of mind expan- sion under extreme circum- stances. At a time when pop music was under heavy criticism, Pete Townshend and The Who provided an “important facelift to the somewhat battered image of pop.” Tommy would eventually be- come a live performance, movie, and eventually stage play. The album and the birth of the rock opera would lay the foundation for Townshend’s next opera, Quadraphenia (1973), as well as some of the most influential class rock albums of all time including The Wall by Pink Floyd, Joe’s Garage by Frank Zappa, Soap Opera by The Kinks, and many others. Thanks to Townshend and The Who the influ- ence of Tommy provided the spark for the golden age of the rock opera in the 1970’s.

Sources


As long as Rock and Roll has been around, new upcoming artists have been compared, by fans and critics alike, to their predecessors. This process is natural considering that younger artists are exposed to these older artists while they are growing up and then as the new artists mature, they build off of what has come previously. The Gaslight Anthem is no exception to this lineage of rock and roll history. Although this up and coming band has a wide range of influences, like to name a few, The Rolling Stones, The Clash, The Replacements and The Cure, they are most widely compared to none other than Bruce Springsteen (MacNeil).

The Gaslight Anthem hails from New Jersey, formed in late 2005, and released their first album Sink or Swim in 2007. Their popularity has been growing steadily since, especially with their critically well-received second album The ’59 Sound, which was released in 2008. They have gained a fan base by heavily touring and exploring the music festival circuit. Many have described them as working class heroes, with front man Brian Fallon’s gritty voice, and as guitarist Alex Rosamilla said, “songs that are mostly about nostalgia and hopeless romanticism” (Levack). With all of these similarities of style and background, it is impossible not to see their likeness with the most famous rock and roller from the Garden State.

Fallon has been taking all of the Bruce comparisons in stride. He is a big fan of the Boss (MacNeil). When asked about the constant comparison, he told reporters that he sees it as a huge compliment (which he should). He has even received comparison from Springsteen himself (MacNeil). Fallon recalls Springsteen sharing his own experience with Gaslight of constantly being compared to Bob Dylan in his early years. As Bruce and now Gaslight know, a comparison to one of Rock and Roll’s Greats is an amazing thing. It means you are doing something right. So Fallon wears the comparisons to Bruce “like a badge,” he says. “The fact that he likes us is even more of a badge” (MacNeil). Rosamilla on the other hand
To Be Clear, the Gaslight Anthem is Not the Boss

By Naomi Hecht

Springsteen and Gaslight Anthem’s Alex Rosamilia play at Ashbury Park.

seems to be over this comparison. He says, “We’re from Jersey, he’s from Jersey and both my singer and Bruce can sound the same... But suddenly the Media turned into this passing of the torch, and we all became Springsteen-philics” (Levack). He sounds a little touchy on the subject. It is too bad that what he is saying sounds exactly like means for comparison.

It is understandable that Rosamilla doesn’t want to be seen as just a Springsteen copy, but with such basic similarities of sound, roots, and topic of music, namely the dissection the American dream, juxtaposition was bound to happen. It only adds fuel to the flames of critical comparison when they perform alongside Springsteen. They joined Springsteen on stage at two performances in England and he was even a surprise guest for one of their own concerts in June 2010 in their home state of New Jersey at Convention Hall in Asbury Park. The combustion of these two Jersey powers was almost too much for fans to handle. First hand accounts say the concert was a once in a lifetime event. If this is what happens when these two forces combine, they should have a cross-generational Jersey jam session more often.

With these performances and their friendship with Bruce cementing the tie between the two of them in fans eyes, at least for the time being there is no point in Gaslight worrying about it. They just need to focus on doing what they are doing. Bruce’s comparison to Dylan eventually faded as Bruce grew into his own and became a respected artist for his own unique style. That is what needs to happen for the Gaslight Anthem. They seem to be on their way though. Although there are many similarities between Gaslight and Springsteen, there are also many differences. Gaslight is much more punk infused than Springsteen ever was, while they lack the jazz component of Springsteen and the E-Street Band. Once the fans and critics get over the initial realization of their similarities, hopefully they will see past them to their differences. As Fallon said of the Bruce comparisons, “I think its one of those things we’re gonna have to wear until it wears out” (Graff).

Comparisons of new artists to influential predecessors are going to happen in the music business. There is no use trying to stop this from occurring. The only thing the Gaslight Anthem can do is to keep making music they want to make. If they continue to go down their own path and explore what interests them, hopefully the public will start to see them away from The Boss’s huge shadow.
Sources


Hip hop originated in the late 60’s with the rise of Jamaican native, Kool Herc in South Bronx, New York. Initially, hip hop music circulated solely among African Americans and Hispanics. It wasn’t until the 70’s when hip hop culture was recognized by whites and the masses. Legendary MC (Master of Ceremony), a title given to an artist who creates and performs their own original music, Keith Cowboy is credited with coining the term “hip hop” to the new genre of music that developed in South Bronx, one of the poorest quarters of New York. Hip hop was initiated as a cultural movement by the inner-city youth, and is also known as “rap,” a slang word which meant “conversation.” Old ‘Skool’ hip hop was a period of hip hop which lasted from the late 60’s to the mid 80’s and was the earliest commercially recorded hip hop music in the history of the United States. This genre consisted of stylized rhythmic speech and placed a general focus on the aspect of partying and having fun. The most prevalent theme in this genre is the promotion of letting loose and enjoying your time in life. Old ‘Skool’ hip hop’s most distinguishing feature is its use of simple rap techniques. It utilizes a relatively few number of syllables per bar of music and maintains a very simple rhythm and beat. It sampled from other genres such as funk and soul music but added its own spice by incorporating a more up-beat tempo and rhythmic lyrics. Another distinguishing characteristic of this genre is the use of turntables to create a “scratching” or “mixing” sound that could be used to create a unique beat. Modern day hip hop artists accredit numerous MC’s for the popularity they now endure from fans.
worldwide. Afrika Bambaataa, The Sugarhill Gang, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Kurtis Blow, and Kool Herc were among the most prominent artists of this genre and all played a vital role in the expansion of hip hop's popularity. Afrika Bambaata, often referred to as one of hip hop's godfathers was best known for his album, “Planet Funk” and was the first rapper to officially collaborate with famous funk artist, James Brown. The Sugarhill Gang, was assembled by a woman named Sylvia Robinson who believed that there was a market in the hip hop industry. The group comprised of Henry Jackson, Wonder Mike, and Master Gee made a name for themselves from their hit single “Rapper’s Delight,” which eventually went on to sell 2 million copies, reach #4 in the R&B charts, and became the highest selling 12 inch single in history. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five played an important role in ameliorating the public image of hip hop artists as their hit single, “The Message” conveyed an anti-drug statement and told the youth, “Don’t do it.” “The Message” also altered the outlook on hip hop songs by showing that artists could rap about topics other than partying and still sell records. Kurtis Blow, also referred to as “the father of Run-DMC,” was best known for his political rap songs such as “The Hard Times,” which talk about the inequality that African Americans endure. Lastly and arguably the most important MC, Kool Herc, was regarded as the founder of hip hop. He became the first DJ (Disc Jockey), the term used to describe an artist who produced beats for his music, to utilize two turntables simultaneously. Herc’s technique was emulated by countless artists to come and his song “Apache” is still considered a classic today. Old ‘Skool’ hip hop paved the road for future artists to follow and although the once simple beats, rhythms, and techniques have been made more complex, many modern day artists such as Eminem, Jay Z, and Snoop Dogg admit to have sampled from the greats of this era. Old ’Skool’ hip hop was said to have concluded with the emergence of Run-DMC in 1984, who revolutionized hip hop music by introducing a radically different beat and lyric content than previously heard in the decades that preceded him. Although times have changed and many of the originators of Old ’Skool’ hip hop have passed, their influence continues to inspire, mold, and foster new music.
The Rise of The Black Keys
THE RISE OF THE BLACK KEYS

By Erik Yan
In early 2001 a deadly-duo band called The Black Keys, a blues/alternative rock band, emerged from Akron, Ohio. This two-man band, consisting of Dan Auerbach (guitarist and vocals) and Patrick Carney (drummer), had dropped out of college to pursue a career in music. Auerbach and Carney had always lived within close proximity of each other since childhood, but led two very different lives that eventually converged into the making of The Black Keys.

During their years at Firestone High School they managed to become friends, despite the fact that they led very different lives in high school. Auerbach “was the captain of their high school’s soccer team”, while Carney “was a social outcast” (Hiatt). Despite their difference, the two always managed to meet up and jam together in Carney’s basement. As their years in high school came to an end, they both briefly attended college until they dropped out and returned to Akron, Ohio. Back home, “My dad told me that if I dropped out,” said Auerbach, “I’d have to start playing gigs and making a living out of it” (Leahy). Auerbach tried to obtain various gigs in bars throughout Akron, but struggled to get gigs without a demo. So the duo decided Carney would supply the basement and equipment for the music, and Auerbach would supply the band members to create a demo. Unfortunately, the additional band members that Auerbach had recruited had decided they would “rather get stoned and play video games than come to rehearsals” (Light). So Auerbach and Carney created a rudimentary demo consisting of six songs Auerbach and Carney had “made up on the spot” (Leahy). Shorty after mailing their demo to record labels across America, a small record label in L.A. gave them a record deal before they had even played a real gig. From then on, the Auerbach and Carney had become The Black Keys.

Since 2001, Auerbach and Carney have made seven albums and have sold well over 2 million albums in the U.S. alone. Their debut album: *The Big Come Up* was released in 2002, and they later released *Thickfreakness* in 2003, *Rubber Factory* in 2004, *Magic Potion* in 2006, *Attack & Release* in 2008, *Brothers* in 2010, and most recently *El Camino* in 2011. During 2002 to 2007, The Black Keys’ success remained minimal as their first four albums remained anonymous among the sea of artists. Their albums gained some recognition as many of their songs such as: “I’ll Be Your Man, Set You Free, When the Lights Go Out, 10 A.M. Automatic, Keep Me, Grown So Ugly, Girl Is On My Mind, and Your Touch” were featured on various shows and movies. The band did not receive a substantial amount of recognition until they released the album: *Attack & Release* in 2008. *Attack & Release* was number 14 on the Billboard 200, and the song “I Got Mine” was named the 23rd best song of 2008 by Rolling Stone. The Black Keys’ success continued to skyrocket and were named Artist of The Year by Spin Magazine after the release of their sixth album: *Brothers* in 2010. The album *Brothers* sold almost 75,000 copies within the first week, and reached its peak as number three on the Billboard 200. In addition, their song “Tighten Up” remained number one on the Alternative Songs chart for several months, and was the band’s first single to be on the Billboard Hot 100 as number 87th. The band’s success continued as the music video for the song: “Tighten Up” won the MTV Video Music Award for Breakthrough Video of 2010. The album: *Brothers* was also ranked number two on the list of best albums of 2010, and the song “Everlasting Light” was ranked number eleven on the list of best songs of the year by Rolling Stone. The Black Keys success brought them many new opportunities, as they were featured as musical guests on Saturday Night Live on January 8th, 2011. During the early months of 2011, the band continued to revel in the success of their album *Brothers*. The band released a music video for the song “Howlin’ For You” that was nominated for the 2011 MTV Music Video Award for Best Rock Video. The band also nominated for three Billboard Music Awards: Top Alternative Artist, Top Rock Album, and Top Alternative Album for *Brothers*. Recently, The Black Keys released their latest album: *El Camino* which sold well over 200,000 copies in the first week and reached number two on the Billboard 200. The album *El Camino* was one of the best albums of the year by Rolling Stone and Time. The Black Keys also won three of their five Grammy Award nominations in 2011, and were again nominated for a Grammy Award in 2012.

The Black Keys are well known for their basic band composition of guitar, bass, and drums. Similarly to the band The White Stripes, The Black Keys are a guitar and drums blues-rock duo. Although The Black Keys are well known for their blues-rock they also dabble in other various forms of music, such as their cover of the “Beatles psychedelic classic: “She Said She Said” (AOL). There have been several debates as to whether The Black Keys are blues-rock or rock and roll. But the Black Keys style seems to be more than just blues-rock or rock and roll. The sound of The Black Keys is a mixture: blues, alternative, indie, and rock. In many of their songs such as
Sinister Kid and Lies, the blues influence is prominent in their slow/heavy beat, soul-filled riffs, and powerful-lyrics. Whereas songs such as Just Got To Be and Everlasting Light display the bands alternative/rock style through a consistent beat, strong guitar/bass riffs, and upbeat percussion. Finally, the indie-rock style of The Black Keys is found within songs such as Gold On The Ceiling, which is similar to their alternative/rock songs, but have a bit more of a funky-feel and oldies-feel to it.

The Black Key's soul-filled music continues to shake the world of blues/alternative rock. Despite the fact that the band has only scratched the surface of their potential, and continues to make the music they love. Many people look forward to the amazing albums and great songs The Black Keys will release in upcoming years. “[I’m] ready as I’ll ever be” said Auerbach (Hiatt), and I am sure they have no plans to stop anytime soon.

Sources

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Dan Auerbach (left) and Patrick Carney (right) are the only members of the two-man group, the Black Keys.
Formed in early 2007, New York-based indie alternative band Sins of the Loose Buttons – some sort of sexual innuendo? Benjamin Franklin reference? – is representative of the contemporary college music scene in all of its dance-enthused, fast-paced, rhythmic glory. With songs ranging from catchy, upbeat disco fare (such as recently released “Retrobox”) to more toned-down, Kings-of-Leon-esque anthems (“Slow Burn”), Sins is like a less produced, more accessible collage of current alternative figureheads ranging from the aforementioned Kings of Leon, to the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Muse. After a few additions and unfortunate losses, Sins of the Loose Buttons is presently comprised of lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist Eric Niz- gretsky, lead guitarist and backing vocalist Zack Kantor (Wesleyan class of 2015), bassist Manny Silverstein, and drummer Andre Jevnik, who all, despite the several-hundred-mile gap between them, manage to keep the band alive and continually growing. To date, Sins of the Loose Buttons has four singles and one full 8-track album available for purchase on iTunes, the earliest of which (Nikolai) was released in December of 2010 and the most recent (Nothing But A Grin) mid-February of this year. Listening to Sins’ work from beginning to end is like a timeline of their experience as musicians; the band’s evolution is clearly audible in the progression of their sound from their angrier, heavy early material to their smoother, more sophisticated and more complex recent works. That said, the band, who plan on releasing a new single some time in the next month, are continually evolving and developing their own unique musical signature, effortlessly hollowing out a place for themselves in the modern music scene.

Laughing with the Sinners

A Q&A with Zack Kantor

By Eden Levin

Photo courtesy of facebook.com/SinsoftheLooseButtons
Q&A with Sins of the Loose Buttons’ Lead Guitarists, Zack Kantor ‘15

What inspired the band’s beginning? We started playing in about 9th grade of high school after some older bands we were playing in slowly began to dissolve. We all just wanted to play music in a studio, so we made it happen.

What are your influences? What music did you listen to when you were younger? We all listened to a lot of rock/alternative when we were younger [and still do]. When I, personally, was younger – and again, still today – some of my biggest influences were Kings of Leon and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, etc...Which you can clearly hear in our music.

Give me a very brief history of Sins. How long have you all been playing together? We’ve been playing together for about five years, and, though some of the members have changed over the years, we continue to play together and write new material. We recorded one full-length album with SONY Music about two years ago and tons of other tracks since, hopefully in an attempt to put out another album over the summer. We play all over the greater New York area all the time and hope to continue doing so. We also recorded our first music video over the summer called “Retroblox.”

And you, specifically – when did you start playing guitar? Were you involved in any other musical ventures prior to Sins? I started playing when I was about eight or nine (ten years ago) taking a few lessons here and there and teaching myself the rest. Though Sins has always been my main project, there are a bunch of other groups I’ve played with, both professionally and for fun. Since I’ve gotten here, I play with about five other groups, both electronic instruments and real ones.

Your band’s title seems a bit esoteric; where did the name ‘Sins of the Loose Buttons’ come from? Well, there are truly a number of different stories, none of which have ever actually been confirmed as true... One is about Benjamin Franklin losing a button, I believe, while another is that it’s a straight up sexual reference.

In a couple of adjectives, how would you describe your music and your sound? Dancy, Funky, Energetic, Fun...

How do you think the band has evolved since its formation? Has your sound changed at all, in your opinion? Why? It has changed a lot, mostly because we’ve just become better musicians so our parts are more intricate. Also, we have changed members over the years twice, which obviously added a new element to the sound we had already developed.

Now that you’re attending Wesleyan, how do you manage to keep the band alive? You’ve recently released a new single – when do you practice and record with the other members? Basically, though we do play every break we get, the lead singer and bassist/engineer both go to the UMiami Music School, so they pump out new tracks all the time there, send ‘em to me so I can add my parts, and then I send my parts back and they mix them into the song. It seems to be working well so far. We’ve already done three songs this way. We also try to play shows every long break.

As a relatively new addition to the music scene, where do you hope to find yourselves in the next couple of years? Not really sure, though I’d love to be playing music, whether it be with Sins or a different group.

In what setting or under what circumstance do you hope people are listening to your music? What emotional response do you hope your music has on its listeners? In a live setting, it’s always great to look out and see everyone dancing to your music, which is the best setting to see people listening to it. But
there are slower songs we’ve done too that aren’t quite danceable...

What do you think has been the most valuable lesson you’ve learned from being a part of a band? Have there been any real challenges that you’ve had to deal with over the course of your musical career?

What’s been the most exciting aspect of the whole thing?

There have been many challenges, but it’s been worth it mostly to play shows, which I find to be the best part. It’s been great to write these tunes, too, because it’s prepared me well for similar situations here. I actually wrote my Common App essay answering this question, but you can imagine how cheesy that was...

And about you, personally – has being part of a greater musical ensemble changed your sound at all?

Before the band, what sorts of things were you playing?

It’s changed my sound as a lead guitarist immensely, but as a singer/songwriter myself, it hasn’t really changed too much, because I’ve always been writing my own songs as well as those with the band.

If there is a particular one, which of your songs do you feel is most representative of the sound you’re trying to exemplify?

Not too sure, maybe Southbound Night, which is one I’m working on now. Hopefully, it will be released next month or something.

What types of music do you typically listen to? Are they similar to your own music, or do you like to shake it up in terms of what you experience musically when you’re outside of the band?

I listen to so much; a lot of it is rock music, like us, but a lot isn’t. I listen to a lot of jazz and electronic music.

I’ve never been to any of your shows, although I hope to go to a few in the future; with that said, as a member of a rock band, how important do you think performance is with regard to success?

Playing shows is the most important thing you can do. Collectively, we’ve played over 40ish shows over the past five years at different venues all around New York City in both Manhattan and Brooklyn, along with a few outside of New York (Miami/L.A.). Some of the places we’ve played, to name a few, are Gramercy Theater, Bowery Ballroom, Webster Hall, Santos Party House, The Bitter End, etc, both opening up for bigger acts and headlining ourselves.

If you’re looking to find out more about Sins or to purchase their music, – which comes highly recommended by myself – check out their Facebook page at facebook.com/SinsoftheLooseButtons, or search the band on iTunes.

Sources

Title quotation courtesy of Billy Joel
All images courtesy of Sins of the Loose Buttons’ Facebook page
Sins of the Loose Buttons, April 2011
Zack Kantor, ’15
JOHNNY CASH at Folsom Prison

By Josh Kule
Folsom State Prison was opened in California in 1880. It is the second oldest prison in California, after San Quentin. It was built as part of a deal with a power company that gave land and funds for the prison in exchange for the convict labor to help build a dam on the American River. Folsom is a maximum security prison and it has been known for the harshness of both its inmates and its guards throughout much of its history. Killings, rapes, and beatings were a part of the everyday life for inmates within the gang ruled walls of Folsom Prison. On January 13th, 1968 Johnny Cash played a show in the dining hall, and *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison* would become one of the early defining moments of his career.

Johnny Cash spent three years in Germany in service for the US Air Force, decoding messages in Morse code before he was promoted. It was in Germany that he saw the documentary *Inside the Walls of Folsom Prison* and the hard lives of those living inside of it. Johnny Cash always described himself as a compassionate man because as he said, “Anyone who has suffered a lot of pain, as I have done, has a lot of compassion.” Cash recorded “Folsom Prison Blues” in 1955, a year after he was discharged. The song heavily borrowed from “Crescent City Blues” by Gordon Jenkins, in both lyrics and composition. Cash’s version became a hit though, and he eventually had to pay Jenkins for its rights. He first visited and played in Folsom Prison in 1966. The show was held in the prison yard and was a welcome break and treat for the inmates.

Years of drug abuse are no secret when it comes to Johnny Cash and they had caught up to him before the Folsom concert. He was in need of a comeback of sorts and the man in black certainly found it at Folsom. The idea of recording an album in a prison required a producer as ambitious as Cash. That man was Bob Dylan’s producer Bob Johnston, and the wild duo refused to take no

Johnny Cash plays Folsom Prison Blues at Folsom Prison.
for an answer until they staged the show they both wanted. Dylan and Cash met for the first time in 1965 and a close, lasting friendship formed. It may have even been Cash’s influence at Colombia which helped convince the label to keep the young Dylan.

The album, in most of its releases, starts with the famous, “Hello, I’m Johnny Cash.” In its most recent version, however, M.C. Hugh Cherry can be heard instructing the inmates to wait until that famous line is delivered to start cheering. Upon arriving at Folsom that morning Cash and those with him, including June Carter, his band, and his father, were all very somber. The danger of their surroundings was evident and the weight of the prison scene was on top of each of them. He played two shows that day, in order to guarantee that the recording was smooth enough for the album. The first was at 9:40, the second at 12:40. The enthusiasm emanating from Johnny Cash and being sent right back by the inmates made the shows as electric and exciting as any he ever played.

He started off with “Folsom Prison Blues” and never let up. Many of his songs related so well to the prisoners that although Cash never served real prison time, they accepted him as one of their own. His second song was “Busted,” at the end of which he reminded the crowd “that the show is being recorded for an album release on Columbia records and you can’t say hell or shit or anything like that.” They loved his rejection of authority and he deeply felt their struggle against the odds of their lives. For Johnny Cash, the concert in Folsom was not a publicity stunt or an effort to make his songs seem more legitimate. It was part of a lifelong belief in the failure of America’s prison system and a belief that the men spending their lives behind bars are more than the system has turned them into. Many of the songs followed the same theme, as Dark as a Dungeon came next, followed by Cocaine Blues. The violent and criminal nature of his songs created a back and forth between the crowd and performer that gave the album a life of its own. Cash’s comedic take on the end of a death row sentence, “25 Minutes to Go,” gave the inmates another opportunity to look at their plight from the outside and to see it transformed into something enjoyable and even celebratory. Cash was personally a strict opponent of the death penalty and once said, “what a horrible thing that we have to kill our own, even the elephants don’t do that.” June Carter came out for two songs near the end, much to the delight of the prisoners to see an attractive, country woman singing to them. The last song of the show, “Greystone Chapel” held special significance to Johnny Cash and one inmate in particular.

The night before the show Cash was given a demo tape from one of the inmates, Glen Sherley. Cash liked the song so much that his band practiced it with the plan of performing it the next day. At the end of the show, without telling him in advance, Cash announced that he was playing a song written by inmate Glen Sherley. Sherley was ecstatic and the song was a fitting finale to a great show. The story does not end there though, and it remains one of Johnny Cash’s most haunting moments. Cash helped Sherley gain his release from Folsom on probation and even got him a record deal. Unfortunately Sherley could not handle the pressures of the outside world and committed suicide. Johnny Cash had placed a huge amount of faith in those around him and did everything he could for Glen Sherley. His death would always be a reminder to Cash of his limits and as his daughter put “he wasn’t this guy who could save you or anyone else.” Johnny Cash was a man of many faults, the man in black. He battled drug addiction and refused any way but his own way. He never hid any of these things from his fans, and that may be why the inmates of Folsom prison, the hardened criminals, murderers, rapists, kidnappers, and others deserving of maximum security embraced him so whole-heartedly to create a masterpiece.


My parents, being crazy classical music fanatics, raised me with a stream of constant piano, string, and orchestral sounds. Records after records lined up neatly on a shelf, cassette tapes stacked in disarray, and the CDs that my parents invested in of Beethoven’s sonatas, the Mozart symphonies overflowed in my home. They didn’t really understand the music— they weren’t musicians, other than my father’s rudimentary guitar skills. But, they loved it, from the soft silk of the piano keys, running gracefully over the waves of my head to the great walls of brass in symphonies leaping mountains in the sky, over the moon and the sun. Those were the sounds of my lullaby. Those were the tunes of my childhood.

Like most other girls my age, I started playing the piano and receiving lessons in first grade. My teacher declared that I showed talent, and my mother proceeded to make little practice sheets, the etudes that had to be played twenty times a day, thirty times a day, hundred times a day. Like most other kids my age, I detested and resented the hours spent on practicing the piano that could have been spent on the playgrounds outside. Unlike most other kids, however, once I started practicing the piano, I couldn’t help but to fall into the music. There were intricacies in the little black ovals and lines that you couldn’t find in everyday life. The black slashes across the paper, as complex as they looked, as nonsensical as they seemed, they told stories. They painted colors brighter than words. It was art, and art in the highest sense that it was pure. Everyday, I fell in love with it more. Mozart, despite all his music that sounded so light, so happy, those dark undertones that surely haunted him as he became older, those purple and blue bruises of his life that he couldn’t erase with drinks. Beethoven filled skies with fireworks of color that danced, always absolutely dramatic, except it was fine because it was his music that put the spurts of paint in my vision. Bach and his blocks of sound, filling the tips of your fingertips with a complexity of sound that you didn’t think was possible with such simplistic style of music. Schubert and the notes flowing like water downstream with the reeds dancing. Rachmaninoff and the majesties of the mountains—all these composers and their music, I came to love. When I began to play the violin, my love for them all intensified and grew larger to include even more composers and their songs.

Take an average person on the streets of the city today, and they won’t know much about the composers I had listed earlier. Start talking about Lady Gaga and her impact on pop culture today, and chances are that most people will recognize the name Lady Gaga in the least and will proceed to have a fulfilling conversation with you regarding her. These great musicians, these artists are start-
The little black ovals and lines of everyday life. The black slashes as they looked, as nonsensical as they seemed, they told stories.

death of the classics

By Shiny Park

There were intricacies in the little black ovals and lines of everyday life. The black slashes as they looked, as nonsensical as they seemed, they told stories. Classical music is slowly dying in that the music from this era is no longer on the conscious minds of average people. It is the stuff of old and dusty bookshelves, the cassette tapes that music professors once owned a while back in time. Classical music, which is a very broad term that encompasses music of three different periods, (Baroque, Classical, and Romantic) is slowly, stealthily exiting relevancy in today’s music world.

Well, one may ask why such an act is important, why does it impact us, if it does at all. Go back in time a few hundred years back, and the reader will see that all these classical songs, they were the contemporaries of the time, the top 40 hits. Not only that, but classical music, as it was developed by the composers of the time, was also shaping the world of Western music that we know of today. Bach, also called the Father of Music, his foundations and framework that he laid out for music was as important as an architect learning how to build buildings. Bach and the rest of the Baroque era’s composers paved the way for future generations by understanding and coming up with rules regarding classical music. Then, the classical music era hit and new rules were being made while the old ones were being broken. Some people called the new style of the music blasphemous and didn’t take it. Others jumped on the bandwagon and celebrated. Afterwards, again, the romantic era hit and similar things occurred. All these different eras added new sets of rules and broke the old ones from the previous. As time passed, all these composers as a collective whole were shaping Western music, as we know today. The notes that we see, the things that we hear on the radio have roots in the classics.

Classical music is dying. Perhaps there isn’t a definite path to avoiding the imminent danger. After all, one cannot force a certain brand of music onto others. Music must be shared, but it must be shared openly without any pushing. So, perhaps it was inevitable that classical music should fade away from the public except in remote places of the minds of people with classical music training. Still, as an honor and tribute to a collective work of great genius and beauty, and as a thanks to the foundations it laid for the kinds of music that we hear today, we should remember the dying genre with the respect it deserves. Perhaps even listen to Chopin’s Fantasie Impromptu as a last goodbye.