I Want to Be a Part of It: Popular Music and Me

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Author's Note:

What you are about to read is basically my autobiography. It concerns my relationship with popular music, which, outside of family and friends, is the most important part of my life. It's a relationship that has been going on for more than two decades, and I feel it is worth close examination on my part.

For my senior thesis, I decided to perform my own concert. I would like more than anything in life to be an entertainer. Since show business is so hard to get into (and be successful), I thought I should perform while I still had the chance--before I had to settle down and get a real job.

The written part, which you are now reading, is very informal. Throughout high school, I was always told not to use contractions and not to write in the informal second person. I've always questioned this. After all, it's my work. Who has the right to tell me what I can and can not put in it? I write in a very conversational style. When I tell a story, it helps if I feel as though I'm conversing with or writing a letter to you, the reader. Consequently, I use the pronoun "you" from time to time. I use contractions because that's how we as human beings speak. I refuse to apologize for being human.

--William L. Allen, 1996
Chapter 1:
Popular Music
and
Its Influence on My Life
"Music is the key that unlocks stored memories."


It's safe to say that popular music has had a greater impact on my life than perhaps any other form of popular culture. When I look back on my life, I remember the music that was playing in the background. But I never gave it much thought until I was about twelve.

I get my taste in music and appreciation of it from my parents, particularly my father. Dad used to put me to sleep with Santana and Iron Butterfly when I was a baby. Most people think that using rock music to lull a child to sleep is odd--it would seem more logical to put a child to sleep with classical pieces of music like Brahms’ Lullaby. Dad used classical music as well, but he has been a fan of Santana since they first became popular in the late 1960s. From what I understand, their music worked well when it was time to put me down for the night. I still can sleep like a baby to Black Magic Woman/Gypsy Queen and Samba Pa Ti.

My musical recollections of my early childhood during the late 1970s stem primarily from my mother’s record collection and the radio. I spent a great deal of time with Mom during the day when I was little since I wasn’t in school yet and Dad worked. She played records of mainly four artists: Joan Baez; Judy Collins; Peter, Paul and Mary; and (her favorite) John Denver. I’ve since lost my taste for all of them except Peter, Paul and
Mary. I'm not really sure why. I guess maybe I just outgrew them. But I still like to listen to the harmonies of Peter, Paul and Mary. I often kid Mom about her music saying that she traumatized me as a child by making me listen to John Denver since I really can't stand to listen to him now. I find his voice really annoying for some reason. I have absolutely no idea why this is. I don't think he's that bad, I just don't like to hear him. I have the same problem with Neil Diamond. Trying to explain why I don't like to hear these men sing is like trying to scientifically explain religion. Sometimes, there are certain things in life that just go way beyond scientific reasoning. This is one of those things.

Through the radio, I heard songs that were hits at the time. I consciously remember hearing songs like Miss You (1978) by the Rolling Stones, Slip Sliding Away (1977) by Paul Simon, My Life (1978) by Billy Joel, You're In My Heart (The Final Acclaim) (1977) by Rod Stewart, and Heartache Tonight (1979) by the Eagles, but at the time I didn't know the names of the songs or even who sang them. I don't even think I really liked them. I still don't like Heartache Tonight--I think I'm the only guy in the world who really doesn't like the Eagles. They sound like an unholy mixture of country and (sometimes) disco which really does not appeal to me at all.

Through elementary school, during the early to mid-1980s, I was fairly unimpressed with the music of the time. I felt that there were too
many synthesizers, which were popular at the time, and it made the music almost too synthetic. It didn’t sound like rock 'n' roll to me. It didn’t even really sound like good music. It sounded like musical sound effects. I’m not knocking synthesizers. I think they have their place in popular music, I just don’t think they should be overused. Synthesizers make good background instruments. I don’t think they should be brought into the forefront of the music because it tends to overshadow the real instruments. Having just come out of disco, a popular style of dance music of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which also underwhelmed me, I started to avoid popular music. At that time, I didn’t make a distinction between what I liked and what I thought was good. I’m still not overly fond of disco, but when I listen to it now, particularly the soundtrack from the film *Saturday Night Fever*, I get nostalgic, remembering my childhood.

I remember listening to (and liking) early rock 'n' roll from the 1950s, such as Bill Haley and the Comets, as well as the works of Henry Mancini (hardly what you would call a rock ’n’ roller) and the Mamas and the Papas (my father had this weird thing for Mama Cass Elliot, so he played a lot of their music). Then, in the summer of 1986, something happened that changed my life forever.

During that summer, my uncle became the first in the family to own a compact disc player just when they were beginning to become popular. For my father, he dubbed onto cassette *Simon and Garfunkel’s Greatest Hits*
as well as the second disc of the Rolling Stones' *Hot Rocks* collection. I became an instant fan of both groups, particularly the Stones. I was twelve at the time. I had never heard anything quite like the Stones before in my life. I was totally fascinated by the music and have been ever since. For the first time in my life, rock 'n' roll actually sounded like real music to me. I listened to that tape so much, I'm surprised I didn't wear it out. To this day, whenever I think back to that summer, I can't help but think of *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and *You Can't Always Get What You Want*.

From that point forward, music, particularly rock 'n' roll, has been an integral part of my life. I often think back to a particular time of my life and can remember what music was playing in the background at that moment. For example, I'll always remember driving back from my senior prom at three in the morning listening to *Billy Joel's Greatest Hits Volume I and Volume II* in the tape deck of my date's car and singing at the top of our lungs (we listened to *Simon and Garfunkel's Greatest Hits* on the way there).

I look at rock 'n' roll the way I see other people look at sports. Throughout elementary school, I knew people who followed the game of baseball. They knew all the stats, all the players, all the teams. By the time I left high school, I became that way with rock music. I would listen to oldies or classic rock on the radio and within the first few notes of a song, I could name the song, the artist, the year it was done, and if I was really
good, I could even tell you what album it came from. I began to read album credits religiously. I like to know that the Rolling Stones recorded *Paint It, Black* in 1966 for the album *Aftermath* and the song went to number one on the charts in June of that year. Nobody else would ever care (except maybe rock ’n’ roll historians). As I write this, I’m listening to the radio and I’m quite pleased that I can identify the song as *Sympathy For the Devil* by the Rolling Stones who recorded the song in 1968 for the album *Beggars Banquet*.

Once I got to college in 1992, my taste in music became more eclectic. I started listening to more jazz and blues music and actually started to develop a taste for artists that I didn’t care for in high school, like Bruce Springsteen and Rod Stewart. My CD collection began to reflect this. I pride myself on the fact that I can listen to Jimmy Durante one minute and Aerosmith the next without missing a beat. With the exceptions of country and rap music which I really don’t like, I’ll listen to just about anything from Johnny Mathis to Hootie and the Blowfish.

Music is the closest I get to any kind of religion. I get a spiritual release out of music that many people don’t understand. It’s a release that’s hard to explain unless one has experienced it personally. I can only describe a time recently when B.B. King was on David Letterman’s show. With him was John Popper of the group Blues Traveler. They performed King’s classic song, *The Thrill is Gone*. Although King originally recorded
the song with a string section, it was the first time he played the song live with one. I had been having a terrible few days and within the first few bars, the mixture of King’s distinct guitar sound, Popper’s harmonica, and the strings literally had me in tears. I instantly felt better. It was very cathartic.

Within the past couple of years, I’ve started using music to express my own thoughts and feelings. This is sometimes difficult because I’ve never really had any kind of training in the field of musical performance. I know the individual notes on the piano. I don’t play any more than three notes at a time (two on the right hand, one on the left), but people like what they hear when I play, so I don’t argue with them. Until recently I didn’t even know what key I was playing in.

But I’ve found over the years that the longer I listen to music, and the more music I listen to, the more I want to create my own music. There’s something about a song that speaks to me more than just a straight piece of literature. I find that people are more willing to listen to what you have to say if it’s backed by music because it grabs their attention.

I recently began to examine my own musical creations and started looking at my own influences and how they played a part in my writings. Rolling Stones’ guitarist Keith Richards once stated, "If you turn out to be a musician, anything you ever heard comes out in what you play" (Richards, 1989). I often find it scary how true this statement is, particularly when I
write lyrics.

The following are some of the artists who have inspired me over the years. This is, by no means, a complete list. It covers only those who have had the most profound effect on me.

*The Rolling Stones* (and its solo components): As I mentioned earlier, I have been a fan of the Stones for nearly ten years. They are my favorite group. They symbolize everything that rock music should be--basically a rambunctious, hell-raising, cathartic, party-till-you-puke good time. Many people kid me for being such a fan since the original members who are still there are in their fifties and the band hasn't had a number one hit since 1978 (*Miss You*). They make fun of the Stones themselves for still doing what they do at their age. I personally have a tremendous respect for any band who can still play as well as they do after thirty years.

When I was a sophomore in high school, my dad took me to see them on the Steel Wheels Tour. When they played the first chorus of *You Can't Always Get What You Want*, Mick Jagger just sang "You Can't" and the entire audience sang back the rest of the line. It was the first time in my life that I felt as though I were a part of something bigger than I could possibly imagine. At that point something clicked in the back of my mind that told me I might want to pursue this as a career.

I guess part of it, for me, is that I have this image as a nice guy which clashes with the Stones' image as "the bad boys of rock 'n' roll."
Throughout their more than thirty year history, they have created great controversy whether it be through court appearances on drugs charges, or such classic songs as *Let's Spend the Night Together* (which was considered too risque in 1967 and had to be changed to *Let's Spend Some Time Together* when they performed it on Ed Sullivan's show that year) or, one of my favorites, *Sympathy For the Devil*. The group epitomizes sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll—something that nobody would ever accuse me of doing. It makes me feel kind of dangerous sometimes. I rather like that.

*The Beatles* (and its solo components): In the second decade of rock 'n' roll, the Beatles became gods. In fact, I've always felt that to cover a Beatles song is an act of blasphemy. I've never really understood why. With the exception of a few songs, such as *Hey Jude*, *Let It Be*, and *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)*, I don't really think the Beatles' material is any better than anybody else's work. I think it has to do with the image of the Beatles. They were the most successful group in rock history. In 1964, the Beatles became the only group to have the Top Five songs in America. That record has not been duplicated since. They have sold more albums than any other group in rock history.

The legacy of the Beatles survives to this very day. They were the British equivalent of Elvis Presley. There hasn't been another group quite like them since, and I don't think there ever will be. They are the only group that could split up and twenty-five years later have the entire group
sing together despite the fact that one of them has been dead for fifteen years. That's impressive.

Billy Joel: I've actually been a fan of Billy Joel's longer than I've been a fan of the Stones. In the spring of 1984, shortly before I turned ten, Bryant Gumbel had a week long interview with Joel on The Today Show. I happened to catch the final part of the interview which I have very little recollection of. What I do remember was the complete showing of Joel's new video to his song The Longest Time. This was at a time when MTV was still in its infancy and videos were really a big deal, despite the fact that many artists had been doing videos (or "promotional films" as they were called) for more than fifteen years at that point in time.

At the time, as I mentioned before, I was not very impressed with the music of the day. The Longest Time, however, had a 1950s/doo-wop feel to it that I've always enjoyed. It was refreshing. I found myself fascinated by the mood of the song. I was automatically hooked.

Since then, Joel's music has been in the background of some of my fondest memories. It was through his music that I grew to love the sound of the piano and I became aware of the power of a song's lyrics.

There are two particular lyrics that stand out to me. The first came from a song written in 1976 for the album Turnstiles called Summer, Highland Falls that states, "They say that these are not the best of times/But they're the only times I've ever known" (Joel, 1976). I think this
song taught me to look for the best in any situation I'm in.

The other was written ten years later and comes from the song Temptation from the album The Bridge in which he says, "I never claimed to be a hero/And I never said I was a saint" (Joel, 1986). As Joel has been a role model for me, it's nice to see role models admit that they're not perfect.

**Jimmy Buffett:** There is something about Jimmy Buffett's lyrics that I love. It's hard to describe what it is. He doesn't get involved with trying to be poetic and just says what he feels. He is the only artist I know who can sing about love, romance, margaritas, and cheeseburgers. He is a storyteller and he tells his stories in such a way that I can't help but admire his work. When listening to his songs or reading his books, I feel as though I'm actually experiencing the stories he tells. For instance in his song Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes, I can actually see myself in his situation. I identify with it and sympathize with him. The same is true for A Pirate Looks at Forty. He doesn't take life too seriously (or at least he appears not to) and just enjoys his time on this planet, writing and telling his stories. I hope I get to be known as a good storyteller myself someday.

**John Lee Hooker and B.B. King:** Hooker and King are the two greatest blues musicians alive today. They both have lived the blues first hand, growing up poor and having to deal with discrimination and unequal opportunity. They play in such a way that often times, I start crying when I listen to their music. When I'm feeling particularly low, I can pop on some
slow blues, shed a few tears, and though it may not solve all of my problems (in fact, it seldom solves any of my problems), I feel a little better inside. Ecclesiastes 7:3 stated, "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better." Or, to quote Mr. Hooker (with a little help from Santana), "The blues is the healer all over the world" (Santana, Thompson, Hooker, and Rogers, 1991). I listen to the blues, and even some rock or pop music, and I get the sense that someone knows what I’m going through. The singer doesn’t try to justify my situation, he/she just understands. I feel like I’m listening to an old friend.

I hope that someday, someone will come along and be influenced by what I wrote and want to do the same--just like these musicians have done for me.
Chapter 2:
The Concert
The only performance that makes it, that really makes it, that makes it all the way, is the one that achieves madness--right?"

--Mick Jagger as Turner in *Performance*, 1970

I get off on an audience--I always have. Although I don’t consider myself to be a great vocalist or musician, I still like getting up in front of an audience. I decided that for my senior thesis I wanted to perform some of the music that I love so much.

I got together with some guys who live in my building, conned my sister into playing trumpet, and we played some pretty decent rock music at Pruis Hall on April 18, 1996. Calling ourselves Traveling Willie’s All-Star Thesis Jamboree Showband and Revue (I initially wanted to call us The Lost Cause, but nobody else liked that name), we played a wide variety of popular music ranging from the Rolling Stones to Ogden Edsl.

In order to advertise the event, we had planned to put the band on the back of a flatbed truck and cruise down McKinley playing *Honky Tonk Women*, which was part of the show. According to Mick Jagger, jazz musicians in Harlem used to play on trucks to advertise their own performances (Jagger, 1989). I got the idea from the Rolling Stones who did it in 1975 to promote their U.S. tour.

Sadly, we had taken all the logistics into account and realized that we had no practical, inexpensive way of getting power to the instruments.
So, in the end, I stood on the back of the truck myself, holding a piece of posterboard with all the pertinent information written on it (where and when the show would be held) and shouting at the people in the street. It was quite fun.

The following is a list of songs that we did for the show and an explanation of why I wanted to perform them. There is no real rhyme or reason behind the order of the songs—it’s just the order that made sense to me. I felt that the show needed a kick-ass opener (Glory Days) and my all-time favorite song (You Can’t Always Get What You Want) as a closer. Everything else pretty much fell into place wherever. I tried my best to mix things around so the show didn’t hit a plateau and bore the audience. For instance, there were three Rolling Stones songs. I didn’t want to do them back to back. The same is true for my own material.

Glory Days (Bruce Springsteen), 1984. These are. "They’ll pass you by... in the wink of a young girl’s eye." Ain’t it the truth? These are my glory days, and they are passing me by too quickly for my liking.

It’s Only Rock ’N Roll (But I Like It) (Mick Jagger/Keith Richards), 1974. ’Nuff said. The lyrics in the verses don’t do much for me. But the chorus will always stand out. I think it’s a nice philosophy to have (at least in my life). I remember the first time I heard this song was when I saw the Stones on the Steel Wheels Tour when I was fifteen. I heard that chorus
and have felt that way about rock 'n' roll ever since--I like it, yes I do!

*Loves Me Like a Rock* (Paul Simon), 1973. I have always enjoyed Simon's music. This song reminds me of my mother just because I don't know what she would do without me sometimes (and probably vice versa). I also get a kick out of the third verse (as I do with any political statement). "If I was the President/The minute the Congress called my name/I'd say, who do/Who do you think you're fooling?" Although, at the time it was written, I think the Congress should have been asking that of the President, given the fact that Watergate was coming to a boiling point.

I had problems with this song because I normally don't sing that high. I could not figure out how to sing an octave lower so I had to stick with the higher vocal. I actually felt my voice crack in a couple of places because I didn't want to cross that fine line between a normal voice and falsetto.

*Tammy* (William Allen), 1994. This is one of only two instrumental pieces that I have written. I wrote it for a friend (named Tammy, coincidentally) who once asked me to sit down behind a piano and play. She said that she loved to hear me play the instrument. As I don't consider myself much of a musician, I, although quite shocked at her taste in music, considered it to be one of the greatest compliments I have ever received. This is how I repaid it. I don't usually write instrumentals, but, given the source of the inspiration, I thought lyrics would ruin it.
I was particularly concerned with the performance of this song, because I actually had to sit down and play something. It's easier for me to sing under pressure than play the piano. There are a lot of keys and a very high chance of hitting the wrong one. Sometimes I don't know how people can play it for a living.

_Honky Tonk Women_ (Mick Jagger/Keith Richards), 1969. This song is the Stones' second biggest single of all time (behind _Satisfaction_) and a sentimental favorite of mine. I won fifty dollars in a lip sync contest in high school with this song as well as a cassette single of a Don Henley song in a radio contest. It was also the first song I ever sang in front of an audience that had nothing to do with church or school.

It's just a nice song about free-spirited women who spend a lot of time in bars--that's all. For some reason, I've always liked the line, "She blew my nose/And then she blew my mind." I don't hear too many songs with lyrics about nose-blowing. I've always found that amusing.

_Now and Forever_ (Carole King), 1992. I once wrote a song called _Calamari (The Squid Song)_ . Although I've always liked it, it isn't one that a lot of people understand. It's more of an inside joke than anything. Basically, I just wanted to say goodbye to a group of people that meant a lot to me and a good deal of what we experienced together, nobody else knew about.

I have been trying desperately to write a follow-up song that would
be more acceptable to a general audience. Carole King beat me to it (two years before I even wrote *Calamari*). This song, which first appeared on the soundtrack to the film *A League of Their Own*, says exactly what I wanted to say in *Calamari*, and it says it exactly how I wanted to say it. They are a part of me... now and forever, as the song states.

*Arctic Bitch (Colder Than You)* (William Allen), 1995. O.K., I admit it... I was angry when I wrote this one. In fact, I was down right pissed off. Looking back on the whole incident I have to admit that I probably took the situation a bit more seriously than I should have. Basically, someone I thought was my friend (hereafter, known as Cynthia—it’s not really her name) decided, for some bizarre reason, that it was for the best if we didn’t keep in touch. I didn’t really know what to do except take such an offense personally. I thought about doing all kinds of ugly things as a way of vengeance, but, regrettably, I’m just too damn nice of a guy to do any of the things I thought of. So I wrote. Writing always seems to get vicious things out of my system. It’s quite therapeutic. I wrote an essay called *The Last Word* which sparked this song.

The idea to write the song came from an old Billy Joel number called *Everybody Loves You Now* which he described as "macho rationale for being rejected. 'Her? Leave me? She must be a self-possessed bitch!'" (Joel, 1981). After I wrote the song, I realized the lyrics were probably inspired subconsciously by the Rolling Stones tune *She’s So Cold*, with a conscious
reference to Rod Stewart's classic *Hot Legs*. I hope I've settled down a bit since I wrote this song. It's not usually the type of thing I write, but I still think the lyrics are pretty good.

For the record, although I take full credit for the word "arctic," "bitch" was actually Cynthia's word, not mine--I am, however, inclined to agree with her.

This was another song I was particularly worried about performing because I didn't know if I could remember all the words. Ironically, I forgot the word "remember" in the second verse.

*A Pirate Looks at Forty* (Jimmy Buffett), 1974. As I mentioned earlier, Jimmy Buffett is one of the major influences on me as a writer/musician/performer. While this is not necessarily my favorite Buffett tune (although, the more I listen to it, the more I like it), it is one that cheers me up when I'm down.

Buffett once said, "I guess I wrote this for an old friend of mine a few years back that could just not find his occupation in the twentieth century. So he just chose to live in a fantasy world. And then I looked at him and I went, 'well, what the hell is wrong with that?' So if this song has been able to ease your pain ever slightly, I'm glad I wrote it 'cause that's what it's for" (Buffett, 1990).

I have often had this problem, especially in recent months. I sometimes think I was born about eighty years too late and I would have
had a very successful career in vaudeville. "My occupational hazard is/My occupation's just not around." Nobody my age really has any respect for the way things used to be anymore. Sometimes I feel old, even though I'm only twenty-one at the time of this writing. That's why this song means so much to me--It's for all those pirates and vaudevillians who are lost and forgotten in this God-forsaken, computerized wasteland known as the 1990s.

**Dead Puppies** (Bill Frenzer/Richie Thieman), 1977. I wanted to do a novelty tune because I've always enjoyed them. Novelty songs give us an interesting perspective on life. Often, novelty songs are written about things that would normally be considered strange or even perverse. For instance, "dead puppies aren't much fun." Despite the fact that Jeff Smith (who played piano for the show) said to me recently that *Dead Puppies* is, "not a good song" (Smith, 1996), I enjoy it because it gives me a cheap laugh.

I wanted to do a Spike Jones song, but I figured that would be too much of an undertaking as Jones had a very large orchestra known as the City Slickers to back him up. I also didn't figure that my show would be enhanced too much by gun shots, belches, and gurgles. So I found something simple (albeit a little sick) to do. This song was originally done by the Ogden Edsl Wahalia Blues Ensemble Mondo Bizarrio Band (commonly referred to as Ogden Edsl). I was just pleased I didn't start laughing in the middle of the performance.
Cardiofrangerophobia or The Last of the Hopeless Romantics (William Allen), 1994. This is the first song I wrote in which I became aware of the influences of some of my musical and popular culture heroes. I credit Jimmy Buffett for the line, "When you are around me/My heart thinks it's a stock car./My stomach thinks/It's an Olympic gymnast," which I always thought sounded like something he would write. I'm just pleased that I found a word that in some half-assed way rhymes with "gymnast." I also thank Gary Larson, the creator of the popular comic strip The Far Side, for my invention of the word "cardiofrangerophobia," or the fear of a broken heart.

Although the song is dated and somewhat painful (Arctic Bitch is the sequel to this song), it is the one song I am most proud of having written. Her loss.

You Can't Always Get What You Want (Mick Jagger/Keith Richards), 1969. The B-Side of Honky Tonk Women, and my favorite song of all time. This is a philosophy of mine that I hold near and dear to my heart. After seeing the movie The Big Chill, my uncle, my father, and I all want this song played at our funerals. I've always felt that this song makes a nice closing number. I'm not really sure why--maybe it's because it is my favorite song.

I feel that the show itself went off quite well. The audience liked it and I got a personal thrill out of doing it. We made a few musical errors,
but we covered it up so well, I don't think the audience realized it.

The high point for me had to be in *Arctic Bitch*. During the chorus, I just listened to the music. When the band came together behind me and I heard them playing, it sounded so cool I couldn't believe that I had actually written it. That experience was just mind blowing. Maybe I could be a successful songwriter someday.

Performing in front of an audience has always given me an incredible rush. It still does. If I've done something to make someone's day a little better, I feel I've done something good. I was glad to have done this as an academic endeavor. It gave me a great deal of insight into myself as well as our own culture.
Band Personnel:

Traveling Willie's All-Star Thesis Jamboree Showband and Revue

William Allen: Lead Vocals and Piano on Tammy
Jeff Smith: Keyboards, Bass, and Backup Vocals
David Powell: Rhythm Guitar, Bass, and Backup
Tony Vassallo: Lead Guitar
Thomas "T.R." Yelton: Drums
Heather Allen: Trumpet and Backup Vocals

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Epilogue:
My Musical Genealogy--
Past, Present, & Future
I recently looked at my musical influences and what inspired them. What I find really fascinating is that, musically, I've also been influenced by my influences' influences.

For instance, one of my biggest musical idols is Billy Joel. Perhaps the major influence on his career was the Beatles, who also heavily affected me in high school. The Beatles were influenced by early rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues--Elvis, Little Richard, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry--artists I listened to in elementary school. These artists were influenced by early blues musicians such as Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and John Lee Hooker. Together, these early blues musicians and early rock 'n' rollers influenced the Rolling Stones, who, many years later, influenced me. I could spend the rest of my life analyzing this aspect of music, but it would get repetitive after about five minutes.

I've found that every musical role model of mine had his or her own role models who still inspire today's generation of musicians including myself. I can't turn on an adult contemporary station without hearing a re-make of a classic rock song that I listened to growing up.

Today, I make it a point to be influenced by everything that I listen to, whether I like what I hear or not. I make a definite distinction between what I like and what I think is good. For instance, I think John Denver is a good musician. I think he is a good writer, and a good performer. I just don't care to listen to him. I mentioned earlier that I have this problem.
with Mr. Denver. I can't explain why I don't like him—I just don't.

If I think a piece of music is bad in my opinion or if I just don't like it, it still makes a positive contribution to my life. I examine that music and try not to sound like it.

I try hard to take all the contributions from all my influences and combine them into something that is distinctly mine. For example, I can take the lyrics of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, the rhythm of the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, and the simplicity of Lyle Lovett's music, combine it with my own experiences (which is generally what I write about), and suddenly it becomes mine.

*Arctic Bitch,* as I stated before, is a combination of Billy Joel's mood (with which he wrote *Everybody Loves You Now*), the lyricism of the Rolling Stones' *She's So Cold,* and my own experiences backed by very simple music (which is all I can play). When I put these elements together, I had my own piece of work. The end product served as a form of therapy for me and a source of amusement to those who either saw the performance or read the lyrics. I took various elements of my life and created something of my own. I feel like a father in many respects.

Perhaps music has been the one thing that has managed to bridge any kind of generational gap, whether we realize it or not. It allows us to stay in tune with our past while simultaneously allowing the past to stay in tune with us. I think this should only continue with time. Someday, I
would like to see some musician who hasn’t even been born yet do his own cover of Arctic Bitch. I think I would be flattered.
Appendix:
Song Lyrics
Glory Days

I had a friend was a big baseball player back in high school
He could throw that speedball by you
Make you look like a fool, boy
Saw him the other night at this roadside bar
I was walking in, he was walking out
We went back inside, sat down, had a few drinks
But all he kept talking about was

CHORUS
Glory days--well they'll pass you by
Glory days--in the wink of a young girl's eye
Glory days, glory days.

Well there's a girl that lives up the block
Back in school, she could turn all the boys' heads
Sometimes on a Friday, I stop by and have a few drinks
After she put her kids to bed.
Her and her husband, Bobby, well they split up
I guess it's two years gone by now
We just sit around talking about the old times,
She says when she feels like crying she starts laughing thinking about

REPEAT CHORUS

Think I'm going down to the well tonight
And I'm going to drink till I get my fill
And I hope when I get old I don't sit around thinking about it
But I probably will.
Yeah, just sitting back, trying to recapture
A little of the glory of
But time slips away and leaves you with nothing, mister, but
Boring stories of

REPEAT CHORUS

--Bruce Springsteen, 1984
It's Only Rock 'N Roll
(But I Like It)

If I could stick my pen in my heart
   I'd spill it all over the stage
   Would it satisfy you
   Would it slide on by you
Would you think the boy is strange?
   Ain't he strange?
If I could win you, if I could sing you
   A love song so divine
   Would it be enough
   For your cheating heart
If I broke down and cried?
   If I cried?

CHORUS
   I said, I know
It's only rock 'n' roll, but I like it
   I said, I know
It's only rock 'n' roll, but I like it
   Like it, yes I do
   Well, I like it. I like it.
   I said, can't you see
That this old boy had been lonely?

If I could stick a knife in my heart
   Suicide right on stage
   Would it be enough
   For your teenage lust
Would it help to ease your pain?
   Ease your brain?
If I could dig down deep in my heart
   Feelings would flood on the page
   Would it satisfy you
   Would it slide on by you
Would you think the boy's insane?
   He's insane?
REPEAT CHORUS
And do you think that you're the only girl around?
I bet you think that you're the only woman in town!

--Mick Jagger and
Keith Richards, 1974

Loves Me Like a Rock

When I was a little boy
And the devil would call my name
I'd say now, "who do
Who do you think you're fooling?
I'm a consecrated boy,
A singer in the Sunday choir."

CHORUS
Oh, my mama loves me, she loves me
She gets down on her knees and hugs me
'Cause she loves me like a rock.
She rocks me like the rock of ages and loves me.

When I was grown to be a man.
And the devil would call my name.
I'd say now, "who do
Who do you think you're fooling?"
I'm a consummated man,
I can snatch a little purity."

REPEAT CHORUS

And if I was the President,
The minute the Congress called my name.
I'd say now, "who do
Who do you think you're fooling?"
I've got the Presidential seal
I'm up on the Presidential podium."

REPEAT CHORUS

--Paul Simon, 1973
Honky Tonk Women

I met a gin-soaked bar room queen in Memphis.
    She tried to take me upstairs for a ride.
    She had to heave me right across her shoulder.
    'Cause I just can't seem to drink you off my mind.

CHORUS
    It's those honky tonk women
    They give me, give me,
    Give me the honky tonk blues.

I laid a divorcee in New York City.
    I had to put up some kind of a fight.
    The lady, then she covered me in roses.
    She blew my nose and then she blew my mind.

REPEAT CHORUS

--Mick Jagger and
Keith Richards, 1969
Now and Forever

Now and forever
You are a part of me.
And the memory cuts like a knife.
Didn't we find the ecstasy
Didn't we share the daylight
When you walked into my life?
Now and forever
I'll remember
All the promises still unbroken.
And think about all the words between us
That never needed to be spoken.

We had a moment
Just one moment
That will last beyond a dream beyond a lifetime.
We are the lucky ones.
Some people never get to do
All we got to do.
Now and forever
I will always think of you.

Didn't we come together?
Didn't we live together?
Didn't we cry together?
Didn't we play together?
Didn't we love together?
And together we lit up the world.

I miss the tears.
I miss the laughter.
I miss the day we met and all that followed after.
Sometimes I wish I could always be with you.
The way we used to do.
Now and forever.
I will always think of you.
Now and forever.
I will always be with you.

--Carole King, 1992
Arctic Bitch
(Colder Than You)

Close your drapes and windows.
Leave me standing in the rain.
Throw my ass down in the mud
And leave my heart in pain.
Go hide out in your igloo,
Far away from here.
I can no longer distinguish
The rain from my own tears.

You may have the world’s hottest legs
But your cold heart I deplore.
And, lady, you remind me of
The winter of ninety-four.
The Ed Sullivan Theater
Hasn’t got too much on you.
I’m getting hypothermia
And I’m starting to turn blue.

CHORUS:
Colder than you
Colder than you
You’re damn right I’m bitter
But I’ll never be colder than you.

I can say that I regret
That moment we first met.
But, sadly, that’s a moment
That I cannot forget.
So I’ll sit back and remember
The times I thought of you as my friend.
Don’t think for a moment I’m happy
About the way things had to end.

Someday, babe, you’ll miss me,
But you’ll have to find out for yourself.
That’ll be the day you see me
In the arms of someone else.
Ride off toward your sunset--
Leave me pissed off and feelin’ blue.
Turn your back on the only one
Who never ever turned his back on you.

--William L. Allen, 1995

A Pirate Looks at Forty

Mother mother ocean,  
I have heard you call.  
I've wanted to sail upon your waters  
Since I was three feet tall.  
You've seen it all.  
You've seen it all.

Watched the men who rode you  
Switch from sails to steam.  
And in your belly you hold the treasures  
That few have ever seen.  
Most of them dream.  
Most of them dream.

Yes, I am a pirate.  
200 years too late.  
The cannons don't thunder, there's nothing to plunder  
I'm an over forty victim of fate.  
Arriving too late.  
Arriving too late.

And I've done a bit of smuggling.  
And I've run my share of grass.  
I made enough money to buy Miami  
But I pissed it away so fast.  
Never meant to last.  
Never meant to last.

I have been drunk now for over two weeks  
I passed out and I rallied and I sprung a few leaks  
But I've got to stop wishing, got to go fishing.  
Down to rock bottom again.  
Just a few friends.  
Just a few friends.
Now I go for younger women.  
Lived with several a while.  
Though I ran them away they come back one day.  
I can still manage to smile.  
It just takes a while.  
It just takes a while.

Mother mother ocean,  
After all my years I've found  
My occupational hazard is  
My occupation's just not around.  
I feel like I've drowned...gonna head uptown.  
I feel like I've drowned...gonna head uptown.

--Jimmy Buffett, 1974

Dead Puppies

CHORUS:  
Dead puppies,  
Dead puppies,  
Dead puppies aren't much fun.

They don't come  
When you call.  
They don't chase  
Squirrels at all.  
Dead puppies aren't much fun.

My puppy died  
Late last fall.  
He's still rotting  
In the hall.  
Dead puppies aren't much fun.
Mom says puppy's
Days are through.
She's going to throw him
In the stew.
Dead puppies aren't much fun.

REPEAT CHORUS

--Bill Frenzer and
Richie Thieman, 1977

Cardiofrangerophobia
or
The Last of the Hopeless Romantics

I'm not that courageous
To tell you how I feel.
I'm afraid my heart
Will only get broken.
But if I never take the chance
You'll end up with someone else,
And all these words will go unspoken.

When you are around me,
My heart thinks it's a stock car.
My stomach thinks
It's an Olympic gymnast.
I feel all warm and weird inside
And I just can't help but smile.
It's not like anything
That I've ever witnessed.

CHORUS:
I'm the last of the hopeless romantics.
The nice guy who finishes last.
Do you feel the same toward me
Or am I on my own?
And will you have to break my heart?

INSTRUMENTAL BRIDGE