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Lonely Sounds: Popular Recorded Music and American Society, 1949-1979

by

Christopher Rasmussen

A DISSERTATION

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LONELY SOUNDS: POPULAR RECORDED MUSIC AND AMERICAN SOCIETY, 1949-
1979

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2008

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Lonely Sounds: Popular Recorded Music and American Society, 1949-1979 examines the relationship between the experience of listening to popular music and social disengagement. It finds that technological innovations, the growth of a youth culture, and market forces in the post-World War II era came together to transform the normal musical experience from a social event grounded in live performance into a consumable recorded commodity that satisfied individual desires.

The musical turn inward began in the late 1940s. Prior to the postwar era, the popular music experience was communal, rooted in place, and it contained implicit social obligations between the performer and the audience and among members of the audience. Beginning in the late 1940s, technological, social, and cultural innovations, including new radio formats, automobile radios, and an expanding recording industry liberated popular music from some of the restraints of place and time. Listeners in the 1950s acquired expanded opportunities for enjoying music in ways that were more private, mobile, and intensely personal. Not only did the opportunities to listen alone expand enormously, but so also did the inclination.

The postwar youth culture that grew up around the Top 40 radio format and 45-rpm singles stood at the vanguard of this revolutionary change in the musical experience. For many young listeners, rock and roll records represented a singular authentic experience. By the middle 1960s, these listeners believed that correctly listening to rock records not only revealed a unique self but also reintegrated alienated individuals into supportive communities. The isolated nature of the listening experience, however, poignantly frustrated such hopes.

The dream of social renewal through rock records collapsed in the early 1970s. In its place came a more aggressive emphasis on self-sufficiency and personal control. In the subsequent decade devices such as the Sony Walkman successfully colonized public space, shielding listeners from other sounds while enclosing them in a private sonic environment of their choosing. This revolution in the musical experience, I contend, reflected and contributed to the pervasive sense of loneliness associated with the postwar era.

For A. Grant Reed
“Papa”

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Introduction

*I'm in love with modern moonlight
 128 when it's dark outside
 I'm in love with Massachusetts
 I'm in love with the radio on
 It helps me from being alone late at night
 It helps me from being lonely late at night
 I don't feel so bad now in the car
 Don't feel so alone, got the radio on
 Like the roadrunner
 That's right*

In the lyrics of “Roadrunner” (1976) Jonathan Richman of the Modern Lovers captures the main concerns of this study. One of these is the post-World War II angst associated with perceptions of a declining sense of community or social connectedness. As he speeds down a Massachusetts highway at night, we learn that the roadrunner is alone and lonely, but that, while modern technologies may contribute to his malaise, they simultaneously offer him some relief from his anguish. The enclosed car itself provides not only the close quarters of a womb-like security but also its capacity for hurtling him down the highway at breakneck speeds serves to enhance his sense of personal empowerment. Technology facilitates perhaps an even greater feat for the Roadrunner. The car radio connects him to a world outside himself; it allows him a partial escape from the awful sense of being totally alone in an alien world. “It helps me from being alone at night. It helps me from being lonely at night,” he sings. “Don’t feel so alone, got the radio on like the roadrunner. That’s right.”

Yet Richman suspected or recognized at some level that technology’s answer to social disengagement was inadequate. Hence, he changed his relationship to musical performance. To many fans’ and critics’ confusion, he purged his live performances of common rock elements:

distortion, electric instruments, and eventually a supporting band all vanished when Richman took the stage. What was left by the late 1970s was a reinvigorated interpretation of the rock and roll of the 1950s, injected with Richman's characteristic energy, insight, humor, and pathos. Often appearing unaccompanied or with a percussionist on stage, Richman continued to release records to a small following, but achieved renown as a live performer. As a performer, Richman sought a direct, physical, and face-to-face connection with the audience, unmediated by pose or technology. He never abandoned recording, but placed the technology and the larger industry in a subordinate role to his performances. A Jonathan Richman record is more an invitation to an event, than the end product.¹

This study examines the relationship of a particular form of modern technology, recorded music, to post-World War II society. The same issues that unnerved Richman and led to his drive to create an unmediated stage presence were reshaping the American musical experience and social relationships between the years of 1949 and 1979. The musical performance, to which recordings were supposed to be inferior copies, declined in significance, while the recorded artifact grew more important. Since the turn of the century, popular recorded music had been one of a galaxy of standardized commodities available for individual consumption, but it was not until the postwar era that the record became the primary means by which American experienced music. As the recorded artifact gained prominence, musical genres proliferated, the recording industry expanded, and the market diversified, giving Americans the power to choose personalized soundtracks suited to their individual tastes and styles. New consumer technologies – from car radios to portable cassette players – allowed listeners to carve out their own private sonic space in their homes or out in public. The changes in the American musical experience

¹ Tim Mitchell, *There's Something About Jonathan: Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers*, London: Peter Owen, 1999, 9-13.

mirrored similar changes in the national culture that encouraged a greater focus on self-fulfillment at the expense of social obligations.

This study will focus on young Americans because popular recorded music played a central role in the development of that group's collective identity. The record-centric youth culture was largely responsible for developing and popularizing the era's personalized listening styles. Just as novels and newspapers had facilitated in the construction of imagined communities in other cultures, postwar American youth turned toward popular recorded music. Recorded and the devices used to play it gave structure, meaning, and a voice to the youth culture. The postwar youth culture, as opposed to youth cultures' of earlier eras, is largely incompressible without reference to the peculiar ways the young since the 1950s ritualistically consumed, listened to, and ascribed meaning to popular recorded music. In their consumption of recorded music the postwar youth culture constructed imagined communities that sometimes bridged regional, class, gender, and racial barriers. These imagined communities, more than anything else, however, helped to offset and manage the national culture's centrifugal forces.

Unlike previous generations including their parents, the postwar youth did not associate popular recorded music with the musical performance. A performance is best understood as a social event, one with mutual obligations between performer and audience as well as among audience members themselves. A performance inherently possesses connective, perhaps even coercive, properties. Face-to-face, audience and performer are forced to confront each other and negotiate the course of the performance. A performance exists only in one place in one time, and performers and audience must agree that being in each other's presence for an extended period has an intrinsic value. A performer may change venues and play the same songs, but despite his best efforts, there will inevitably be slight differences between two different performances. A

performance then is a unique, an ephemeral, and a collective experience. The recorded artifact is mass-produced, standardized, repeatable, and possesses the capability of being able to be enjoyed in solitude. The ways the youth culture and eventually the national consumed and listened to recorded popular music, combined with the way musicians produced music in the recording studio, liberated the listening experience from the time and place and from the social obligations contained within a traditional understanding of the musical experience.

As Americans gained greater technological connectivity via electronic media and an increased quantity and variety of commodities to choose from in the marketplace, scholars have found that they simultaneously faced increasing pressures of social isolation and loneliness. Political scientists have noted with alarm signs of a decaying political culture, civic disengagement, and the collapse of consensus in the postwar years. Media critics and psychologists have pointed to television and its allegedly passive and silent audience with growing concern. Sociologists and anthropologists have seen in the proliferation of suburbs as evidence of a collective national effort to avoid others. Building on the foundations of a longstanding critique of modern ways, scholars have continued a sustained analysis of the electronic media and the growing social distance between individuals and groups.²

² Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996; for the classic analysis of the effects of television on American democracy and intellectual life, see, Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, New York: Viking, 1985; For a psychological analysis of the asocial nature of television, see James P. Flanders, "A General Systems Approach to Loneliness," in *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy*, eds. Letitia Anne Peplau and Daniel Perlman, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982; For an interpretation of one Long Island suburb as evidence of a national collective avoidance of conflict and others, see M. P. Baumgartner, *The Moral Order of a Suburb*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; For more general works the relationships between technology, culture, work, leisure, and loneliness in postwar America see, Richard Stivers *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society*, Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004; Daniel Boorstin *Democracy and its*

Americans' relationship to popular music, as Richman begins to suggest, was related to a national move toward disengagement. In the postwar era, music disconnected from performance, and was reduced to mere sound to be manipulated, captured, packaged, sold, and consumed. The face-to-face presence of the performer vanished on vinyl, and the participation of the audience was relegated to a commercial transaction. No longer did enjoying music signify an event with social obligations but was instead wholly contained in the leisure economy and under the control of the consumer. In a society with fewer opportunities for public displays of sociability, this would appear to represent a profound loss. Yet, young Americans continued to identify music with community and reconnection. Their understanding of the musical experience as primarily a recorded artifact did not rule out, and in fact strongly emphasized, music's power to unite listeners into a truly authentic community. Thus Americans, for the most part unwittingly, attempted to use a technology that seemed divisive to instead encourage unity and reconnection. I will show that the transformation of the musical performance from an event to a commodity designed for individual consumption provides a window to describe, analyze, compare, and criticize American postwar social trends. Recorded music, the meanings listeners ascribed it, the manner in which it was produced and marketed, and the way in which they consumed it, represented both a potential cause of loneliness' increasing prevalence, and a positive response to the same.

This study falls within a vast literature concerning popular recorded music, youth culture, technology, and alienation in the postwar era. The focus on loneliness, however, finds it at odds with the dominant interpretations of the period's youth culture and its popular recorded music.

Unlike television, most observers have identified radio and recorded music as social glues, not solvents. Some have seen consumption of recorded popular music as a collective, if largely subconscious, mode of resistance against an artificial and/or inhuman dominant culture. Others have identified popular youth music styles such as rock and roll as authentic, albeit mass-produced, folk cultures. A smaller group of contemporary critics of recorded popular music tend to dwell on an alleged nihilism of particular genres, rock and roll again, or point to a damning lack of traditional aesthetic sensibilities.³

Overlooked or pushed to the side in these treatments are the ever-weakening social context in which recorded music is created and consumed and the alternatives that recorded sound and other technologies offered individuals seeking to manage their loneliness. Starting with the Omaha broadcaster Todd Storz's 1949 purchase of KOWH, one can glimpse the growing chasm separating recorded music from live performance and begin to chart the simultaneous rise of the postwar youth culture and market. In 1979, Sony introduced the portable cassette playing Walkman, which placed individualized sound on the body,

³ Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock*, Oxford University Press, 1972; David Szatmary David Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll*, Upper Saddle Creek, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000; Susan Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004; Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001; Mark Katz. *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004; Zach Albin, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001; Marc Fischer, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution that Shaped a Nation*, New York: Random House, 2007; *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, New York: Holmes & Meirer Publishers, Inc., 1976. George Lipsitz, "Who'll Stop the Rain: Youth Culture, Rock and Roll and Social Crisis," in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, Chapel Hill, NC.: 1994; Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, 68-81; Martha Bayles, *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Meaning and Beauty in American Popular Music*, New York: Free Press, 1994.

symbolically completing American's understanding of and experience with popular music, having transformed it from a communal and public performance to a personalized musical experience. In between these events, is a history of a revolution in music and its role in American life.

Chapter one, "Imagined Audiences and Make-believe Performances: Records and Radio in the 'Golden Age'" will survey the radio listening styles of the first half of the twentieth century. The appearance of recorded sound in the late nineteenth century and radio in the early twentieth altered the musical experience at both the production and consumption ends. These technologies did not, however, create the lonely listening styles characteristic of the postwar era. In providing a brief history of radio and its relationship to recorded music and its audiences, I will attempt to show how Americans continued to identify the performance as the authentic musical experience, despite the fact that the experience was mediated by an additional technological layer. Nonetheless radio did encourage the development of imagined sonic communities along with a desire for listener self-expression via music consumption. Looking at major theorists of early radio, such as academics, public intellectuals, and marketers, this chapter will show how commercial prewar radio shaped both radio's sense of community and the audience's desire for self-expression. A listening culture had been in the process of development since radio's so-called "golden age" before World War II. Americans intimate relationship with radio prepared the way for the lonely listening styles of the postwar era.

Chapter two, "The Top 40 Format: Records on Radio" and chapter three, "Communities of Top 40: The Postwar Youth Market, Audience, and Culture," take up the stories of Todd Storz, the Top 40 radio format, and the emergence of a youth culture devoted to popular recorded music. Storz's major innovations followed the advice of the radio theorists of the prewar era: he

played popular hits, hooked audiences with heavy repetition, and in a novel turn, broadcast only recorded music. This last programming strategy fundamentally altered the American musical experience. The young Top 40 audiences came to think that music meant the record. Storz believed in and helped popularize the idea the recorded music was sound alone, a sonic commodity that distributed in the same proportions that his unseen consumers demanded. Storz's Top 40 radio format swept the nation as a ratings winner by the early 1960s and was responsible for placing the record at the center of the postwar youth culture.

In a media environment increasingly dominated by television, Top 40 sought out a segmented or niche market of young consumers, and in the affluent postwar era, youth possessed unprecedented buying power. Young listeners not only turned their sets to their favorite Top 40 stations, however, but they also imagined into existence an inclusive national community. As with the physical reality of the high school, the imagined Top 40 community separated youth from the adult world. It also provided meaning to the rituals of high school and the trials of adolescence. Part marketing strategy, part media hype, and part youth invention, an identifiable and coherent culture emerged in the 1950s. Top 40 stations, through their elaborate giveaways and promotions, contributed to the creation of an imagined youth community by bringing their young listeners in on collective jokes played on bumbling authority figures. The records on their favorite radio station, as many a radio promotion reminded its listeners, were available for purchase. Young radio listeners thus became record buyers, putting the sound they heard on the air under their own personal control. At the same time, the musical experience, from listening to dancing, became more solitary. Car radios and the popularity of the partner-less twist and frug dance styles underscore these trends. In time rock records turned out to be the most popular of all, and this style became synonymous with the emerging postwar youth culture and its

understanding of the musical experience. In mass media depictions, the youth culture moved from being identified as a social threat or problem to being the most fashionable and consumer-savvy segment of the nation. As a result, the practices of the young, including music appreciation, began to reshape the sonic experiences and expectations of adults.

In chapter four, “Making Records, Making Money, Making Connections: The Rise of the Rock Long Player,” I will examine the growth of the recording industry and show how the sonic commodities on the market responded to the changing 1960s youth culture. The recording industry’s dramatic expansion in this decade resulted from a combination of increasing affluence and changing values of the youth culture. The youth culture became larger, more assertive, and fractious. Stumbling toward a successful business model, record companies, ceded a great deal of creative control over the recording process to young musicians who seemed more in tune with the inscrutable desires of the youth culture. The move imbued long playing rock records with great social and personal meaning and helped sell millions. Significant elements of the youth culture came to identify long-playing records, as opposed to for-radio-play singles, as possessing the qualities that would help to reconnect isolated individual consumers into an authentic community. Some began to dream of communities founded in recorded rock and roll that respected none of the racial, class, or gender barriers that separated their world. Dreams of social renewal and personal healing became intertwined with the practice of listening to rock records. An engaged listening style emerged that facilitated intense relationships between studio-bound musicians and their unseen and unheard fans. These connections were simultaneously more distant and more intimate. As the more expensive long player increased in sales recording industry consolidated behind a handful of major firms that had the studio sophistication and distribution network capable of delivering of the latest LPs to young the

young consumers who demanded them. While feeding the young's desire for authenticity and community, the major companies grew ever more powerful and exerted a profound influence over the national musical choice and experience.

Chapter Five, "Youth Culture of the 1960s: Pre-recorded Dreams of Authentic Connection" will examine the rapidly changing youth culture of the late 1960s and how segments of that culture went about seeking reconnection through recorded popular music. *Rolling Stone* developed overnight in 1967 as a mouthpiece for an increasingly record-centric youth culture, articulating a serious criticism of the latest recordings along with an editorial stance that emphasized the connective power of rock and roll. According to *Rolling Stone*, the artificial postwar American War of Life had corrupted traditional institutions and conventional social interactions between families, neighbors, and strangers. Only popular recorded music of the youth culture remained unsullied. The inclusive Top 40 format had established popular recorded music as the common meeting ground connecting young individuals across traditional barriers, but by 1967 *Rolling Stone* and a significant number of young people believed that Top 40 had sold out and had lost the social power it once possessed. These true believers placed their faith in the records alone. Through its editorials, interviews, and reviews, *Rolling Stone* articulated a consistent definition of the musical experience in which listening attentively, presumably alone, to records on stereo equipment constituted a socially regenerative act. The isolated listener put the needle on the record and embarked on a quest of personal self-discovery that would ultimately allow him or her to take off the headphones and build a more authentic community. Though the Top 40 radio lost its appeal for some young listeners, its lasting influence permeated the seemingly novel developments in 1960s youth market and culture. With listening to records at the center, the youth culture began developing public rituals to accompany

its private pursuits. Concert-going, taking illegal drugs, and, of course, listening to records, became community-building activities. The inclusive and satisfying community sought, however, rarely materialized and frustration and despair characterized much of the late 1960s youth culture, attitudes that would be decisive in shaping the listening style of the subsequent decade

Chapter six, “Lonely Sounds: Sonic Self Sufficiency, Personal Control, and Social Shields,” will conclude this study with an examination of the listening practices of the 1970s. The grandiose promises characteristic of some elements of the 1960’s youth culture gave way to an individualistic listening style in the subsequent decade that emphasized self-sufficiency and personal empowerment. This listening style traced its origins to the early 1950s, when a small, affluent, and male hobbyist subculture began constructing high fidelity audio “rigs” and listening room sanctuaries. By 1957, the technical barriers that had sealed off the high fidelity subculture from the national culture had begun to crumble. The consumer electronics industry introduced and successfully marketed stereo as affordable and user friendly, and in the 1960s the youth culture embraced long-playing records. As a result, the listening rooms and the obsession with sound quality characteristic of fifties’ male audiophiles became common concerns. By the late 1970s a diverse collection of consumers – young and not so young, male and female, sought in audio systems a sense of control and solace that they lacked in other areas of their lives. Building their home stereos and installing cassettes and 8-track machines in their automobiles, they completed the process of transforming the appreciation and understanding of the musical experience. Music became an individual pursuit, devoid of any collective associations or obligations. The introduction of the Sony Walkman in 1979 closes the story of popular music’s postwar journey from a public and social event to private experience wholly under the personal

control of the individual. This device, more than any stereo component that preceded it, allowed for the fragmentation of public space into discrete units of popular but suddenly private recorded music. Vulnerable individuals wrapped their bodies in music – which as often as not functioned as social barbwire.

Chapter One

Imagined Audiences and Make-believe Performances: Records and Radio in the “Golden Age”

At the end of each week in 1938 farmers in North Dakota journeyed overland, gathering at a favored and isolated homestead wherein they would initiate a ritual central to their collective identity. They tuned a radio to find their favorite program. “Saturday night is the affair of affairs up here...” A letter writer to *Rural Radio* and devoted fan of “Saturday Night Barn Dance” explained, “Those who have no radio congregate at the homes of those who have and what an enjoyable evening!” For African Americans in the Deep South, Joe Louis’s fights brought together a community of farmers for a related expression of group solidarity. Italian ethnics in Chicago gathered around their radios to talk, laugh, dance, and, when not otherwise occupied, listen. In the Golden Age, radio was a social hub for America’s diverse communities.⁴

Historian Lawrence Levine has used such stories to argue that radio, recorded music, and mass media in general, allowed for and encouraged audience participation and sociability. Listeners were wise to commercials, talked back to haughty announcers, and used the medium for their own purposes. In fact, consumer choice, as represented by song and program popularity, revealed a level of audience participation in mass culture that explodes a simple top-down understanding. Radio listeners did not necessarily listen alone, and in the most popular shows they heard echoes of their own desires. According to Levine, Depression-era soap operas,

⁴ Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 314-15; Lizabeth Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (March 1989), 16-17.

popular music, and the disembodied voice of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt,⁵ “fostered a sense of community.”⁶

Lizabeth Cohen has shown that rather than creating a homogenous national middle class culture, early radio promoted working class and ethnic solidarity grounded in local neighborhoods. Eighty percent of the radio audience tuned into local stations, and they usually listened to their favorite station in groups between four and five. The chaotic broadcast environment that existed before the passage of the 1927 Radio Act allowed for this kind of microcasting that disappeared a decade later. Stations played music by musicians who were known, often personally, in the Chicago’s ethnic neighborhoods. Radios were likewise the “prime requisite in social clubs that catered to working class adolescents and young adults.” Nationality hours, foreign language broadcasts and “Labor News Flashes” defined listeners by place, ethnicity, and social class, strengthening community ties. Even with the rise of commercial broadcasting after 1927 and the subsequent dominance of national networks, Cohen maintains that radio continued to serve community interests rather than the individual consumer’s and advertiser’s interests. The national market was actually a limited and middle class market, one in which perhaps a majority of Americans neither wanted nor had the means with which to participate.⁷

⁵ Roosevelt intuitively recognized radio’s power. The network men who broadcast his “fireside chats” called the president “the pro.” His natural manner was best heard when he stopped a broadcast and took a sip from a glass of water, the sounds of which, including the ‘ahh’ went live over the nation. “sure is hot in Washington,” Roosevelt commented. The “virtual community” dates at least back to the early days of radio, Eric Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. II, The Golden Web*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, 4-5.

⁶ Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past* 314.

⁷ Lizabeth Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (March 1989), 16.

Cohen and Levine documented radio's connective qualities, but assumed that the listening experience was relatively stable and unchanging. That people continued to listen to radio in groups, however, might suggest the persistence of old patterns that had predated radio. Certainly, the listening style in the postwar era was remarkably different than that of the 1930s. Indeed radio was more than just an extension of an older understanding of music and performance – it represented an entirely novel type of listening experience. With no visual analog to the sound coming out of the box, the radio listener was forced to rely on the sound alone. Radio, especially in its early years, required listener imagination in order to be effective. The listener imagined the presence of the performers and, at times, the audience. The desire to imagine a listening community into being was a distinct feature of prewar “golden age” radio, and it demonstrates the strength with which Americans then associated music with performance, with a social act. Later generations would have no such desire as sound alone would be sufficient, and the mass of lonely listeners that Cohen and Levine identify as solely middle class or as an outright fiction would become a pervasive reality. The novel listening style of the prewar radio's golden age was the first step revolutionizing of Americans' understanding of and experience with popular music.

A Comparison: Prewar and Postwar Radio listening

Following World War II, radio listening occurred regularly in automobiles, bedrooms, beaches, and diners. Independent local stations dominated postwar radio, but these same stations paradoxically catered to a national audience. The man most responsible for the dominant radio format of the postwar era would have heartily agreed with Levine's assessment that the

popularity implied audience participation. Todd Storz, manager of the Mid-Continent broadcasting company from 1949 until his death in 1963, believed that by playing the most popular records over and over again, he was giving listeners what they demanded. Record store and jukebox receipts, as well as the calls of listeners themselves provided evidence of this invisible audience's desires. To better understand the desires and habits of fickle listeners, Storz journeyed to nondescript hotel rooms, drew the blinds, and turned on the radio. Significantly, he did not surround himself with his friends, or turn on the set in his family room. Storz imagined his listeners as isolated individuals, searching for connections and, occasionally, a surprise.

The popularity of the transistor, the ubiquity of the car radio, and television's colonization of the living room allowed for radio to be things other than a social hub – it could be a companion to the individual. In almost every market Storz's Mid-Continent Broadcasting Company entered, his Top 40 format earned his station the rating's top spot. The postwar radio audience participated, but merely through their choice of radio station, or occasionally through promotions and giveaways, and, even more indirectly, through record purchases. If they talked back to the disc jockeys or chuckled at the inane commercials, it was much more likely they did these things alone, outside the social and communal context of their prewar counterparts.

Recorded Sound and Radio

Most Americans from the late twenties on experienced popular music through radio, and live performances formed the vast majority of most prewar broadcasts. This was not due to a lack of the recorded alternative, as one might expect. Records, cylinders, and wires had been in existence for nearly 50 years before radio became a common household item and were among

the earliest broadcasts. Recording technology had made it possible for music to be separated from a specific time and place and for an individual to enjoy music alone, yet its introduction did not fundamentally alter the prevailing belief that music meant live performance. During the Christmas season of 1924 Americans chose the radio in overwhelming numbers over the phonograph. This suggests that listeners desired not merely access to “free” music, but the experience of participation it seemed to offer.⁸ Radio successfully mimicked the trappings of performance, providing audiences the feel of the social event they associated with music that the phonograph could not.

Popular and folk music in the United States had historically been understood as a social event that entertained and allowed for artistic expression. In the nineteenth century Americans from all regions, social classes, and ethnic groups participated in local musical performances. Impromptu music making was almost as common as speechifying to turn-of-the-century Midwesterners.⁹ In New England, town bands received public funds and enthusiastic support in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ African Americans and poor whites in the South developed vibrant folk styles that formed the bedrock for the most popular genres of postwar music.

From colonial times rural New Englanders had interwoven musical traditions into their daily activities connecting individuals through music and dance into family, neighborhood, and regional groups. In the nineteenth century, local dances where neighbors of all ages gathered were regular events. In these “kitchen dances,” neighbors chose a home with a central staircase.

⁸ Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 138.

⁹ Robert Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown, A Study in American Culture*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1929, 245-246; the denizens of Middletown had lost much of the participatory musical style by the 1920s, according to the Lynds, as radio and changing patterns of social organization.

¹⁰ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, 216.

This allowed the dancers move in a circle, dancing from room to room. The male fiddlers and female organ player came from the neighborhood, and the hosts provided the food and drink. The events often followed “work bees” in which the neighbors engaged in communal labor, such as corn husking. New England dance songs in the nineteenth century included Anglo-American ballads and, increasingly, the offerings from the music publishing industry. By the 1920s, popular styles coming over the airwaves found their way into musicians’ repertoires. These, however, did not displace local traditions, but provided another source of inspiration for the syncretic musical style. The social and communal musical performance traditions of rural New England persisted until the mid-1940s, after which the audiences splintered off, finding entertainment and, perhaps, an equally satisfying activity in the privacy of their own homes.¹¹

The middle class quest for gentility did little to squelch folk musical traditions that encouraged sociability and participation. Nineteenth century middle class Americans invested considerable sums money in musical instruments, mainly the piano. The guardians of elite culture at *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harpers* sneered at the parlor piano, finding it little more than a grasping affectation, which an “ambitious mama” would force on an indifferent daughter. The evidence suggests, however, that these pianos were more than just window-dressing. Manufactures led by William Steinway sold more than twenty-five thousand in 1867, with ten used to every one that was new. The music publishing industry flourished alongside piano making. Even if most of the girls at the ivories were “bangers,” the parlor piano got a lot of use. Around the pianos across in the country an active musical life “was carried on mainly in the

¹¹ Jennifer Post, *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life, 1870-1940*, Durham, N.H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004, 5, 80.

parlors, the club rooms, and the churches – private, social, and spiritual sanctuaries...”¹²

Though generally serving the same social functions, the middle class parlor piano was disconnected from the work life of its players and audiences. The musical experience by the twentieth century had become, for better or worse, a leisure activity.

Recording technology and radio by themselves did not end long-standing popular and folk musical practices, and neither did the growing commodification of music. The popular music business had been profitable since the nation’s founding, and became increasingly influential and organized by the end of the nineteenth century. Tin Pan Alley and its regional equivalents sprouted in midwestern cities, such as Cincinnati and St. Louis. The extensive music publishing businesses made millions of dollars selling tunes, mainly in devotional or popular styles. The relentless tactics of song jobbers, the peculiar demands of composing for an unknown audience, and changes in copyright law at the end of the century tended to make the larger players in the business ever stronger and centralize the production of American popular music.¹³ By the 1890s, a system of payola, or pay for play, was entrenched. Paying well-known bandleaders to perform songs was perhaps the music publishing industry’s only insurance against inscrutable public tastes. Out of 200 songs only 1 ever became a hit and less than half broke even.¹⁴

Phonograph records did not dramatically alter the relationship between musician and audience, despite the best efforts of record companies. Victor touted its phonograph and expensive Red Seal line as superior alternative to attending a concert – “no need to wait for

¹² Joseph A. Mussulman, *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music, 1870-1900*, Northwestern University Press, 1971, 169-171.

¹³ Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business, Volume II, From 1709-1909*, 351-53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 339; Russell Sanjek and David Sanjek, *American Popular Music Business in the 20th Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, xi.

hours in the rain” when the music was in your home. The phonograph was also marketed as a preferable alternative to the middle class piano, and, in an appeal that would become more common later in the century, stress relief for nervous moderns. Though reporting revenue approaching of \$30 million in the early 1920s, record sales failed to replace sheet music sales as the industry standard for determining a hit. The resilience of sheet music in the face of the recording suggests that for most Americans, including those in the industry, music implied performance¹⁵

The arrival of the wireless not only unseated the phonograph from its position as the primary technological music medium, but also led to noticeable sale declines in sheet music and pianos. Radio’s dominance, however did not signal the death of performance, but at first adapted performance. With radio’s reach over the air, performance was no longer tied to a specific place. For its first thirty years, radio underscored the popular understanding that music was a social event. Radio seemed to offer Americans a technological means by which to experience the immediacy of a performance – to “be there.” For an increasingly urbanized and educated society the machine reconnected some listeners to the older, oral tradition, albeit one that now had no recognizable visual component. Listeners alienated by increasing social stratification and bureaucratization had an opportunity to hear life in its original excitement or be comforted by familiar, yet disembodied voices.¹⁶ The key for a would-be successful broadcaster in radio’s early years was to minimize the medium’s inherent spookiness. A 1923 article claimed that broadcasting from remote sites, or “out of the studio” was essential to audience enjoyment

¹⁵ Millard, *America on Record*, 63-65.

¹⁶ The level of security people found in radio became more apparent in the Depression years when social workers began reporting that destitute families had sold bedding, furniture, and ice boxes to make ends meet yet held on to their radios, Erik Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. II, The Golden Web*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, 6.

because of, “the atmosphere of life that is transported.”¹⁷ Thus the greatest strength of radio, vis-à-vis the phonograph was its ability to approximate the varieties of a performance, with security and excitement on either end of the emotional spectrum.

For most of the 1920s, radio was uncontrolled and stations rose and fell, competed over frequencies, and this frenetic activity made for a chaotic and exciting listening experience in which music, lectures, prize fights, and election returns could be found hidden in the static. All of this, once the machine was purchased, was free and, most importantly, live. Phonograph machine sales began a sickening slide (at least for the industry executives) in 1922 and did not recover their 1921 levels until 1945.¹⁸ The notable exceptions were race records, which held steady. Had it not been for Bessie Smith’s recordings the mighty Columbia might have come to ruin.¹⁹ Many families reported delaying phonograph purchases specifically in order to purchase a radio. The Depression years hit the recording industry hard, but damaged the radio less. While purchases of phonograph records were still falling in 1933 (from already low levels), radio sets had begun to recover.²⁰

Not all observers felt the radio represented an adequate substitute for performance, and looked darkly at the future of public life in an age in which people preferred to sit at home with the radio rather than venture out into the public. The British sage G. K. Chesterton suggested

¹⁷ Quoted in Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994, 54.

¹⁸ Phillip Eberly, *Music in the Air: America’s Changing Tastes in Popular Music, 1920-1980*, New York: Hastings House, 1982, 24-25. Predictably record sales bottomed out in the worst Depression years.

¹⁹ Erik Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. I, A Tower in Babel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1966, 129.

²⁰ Ibid., 129; Eberly, *Music in the Air*, 24-25.

that a medical license should be required for broadcasting. Only the old and invalids had an adequate excuse for sitting at home alone with the wireless.²¹

Indeed, radio was not the same as a live performance, as radio personalities discovered. To give an effective radio performance, vaudevillian Eddie Cantor had to in effect fool himself. “What brought my first radio show to life and took it to the top,” he claimed, “was the participation for the first time of a studio audience.”²² The audience not only aided Cantor, but when broadcasted along with the performer, the clapping and laughing also helped listeners identify the proper cues and behave as if they were participating in an event. Radio’s ability to fool a willing audience and sustain an illusion through sound is best seen in the success and celebrity of Edger Bergen. Bergen was a ventriloquist.

Radio’s power to be there at the level of action contrasted with contemporary feelings toward the phonograph. Common reactions to the early phonograph by listeners included outward displays of grief and mourning. Tears were not unusual. Some of Edison’s ideas for the phonograph included using the machine to preserve the words of dead loved ones in a way similar to an album of photographs, an idea that must have resonated with his contemporaries. The discs with their otherworldly pops and hisses seemed to dredge up old sounds, half-forgotten memories, and dead voices, which could be an intense and bewildering experience of a type not normally associated with entertainment. The sounds on the disc did not change and their permanence contrasted sharply with radio’s ephemeral nature. Even advertisements could not escape the phonograph’s perceived morbidity. RCA’s famous *His Master’s Voice* campaign featuring Nipper the dog leaning into a phonograph ear became known worldwide for reasons

²¹ G. K. Chesterton, “On Broadcasting,” *Generally Speaking*, Binghamton, N. Y.: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1929, 33.

²² Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 121.

RCA probably had not anticipated. The ever-loyal Nipper sits perched on what appears to be his master's shiny casket. Later advertisements cropped the picture so as to dispel what was becoming an unsettling but widely accepted rumor.²³ The phonograph preserved and repeated dead sounds, something that could never be associated with radio's simulated performances. Radio was alive.

Resistance to the Record: Early Radio Broadcasting

For different reasons and to varying degrees, broadcasters, musicians, federal regulatory agencies, and the recording industry all opposed playing recorded music on the radio. Broadcasters feared listeners would retreat from an inferior product if they used recordings, while the New Deal consumer and worker advocacy promoted government restrictions on recorded music. The recording industry, already reeling from the impact of radio, believed that the broadcasting of its product for free was a violation of its property rights and thus a threat to viability. Big recording and radio stars, such as Bing Crosby and Fred Warring, agreed with industry policy, while less successful radio and local bands knew from painful experience that every record played meant one less opportunity for a performance. After the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935, musicians unions organized to resist the playing of records over the air.

²³ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 301-302, and William Howland Kenney *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, 8-9.

The networks derogated phonographs as “canned” music, and often prohibited broadcasting discs.²⁴ In both 1930, NBC and CBS banned playing discs. Across the industry, for every 128 broadcast hours every week, only 11 featured prerecorded sound. The networks understood that their deep pockets could deliver regular performances of top stars. Thus it was in their interest to maintain the accepted association that good music meant live music. Station and advertising jingles remained as a dwindling preserve of recorded sound on air.²⁵

Reinforcing the networks’ anti-record bias, the federal government, in the form of the Federal Radio Commission and its 1934 successor, the Federal Communications Commission, took the position that broadcasting phonographs was not in the public interest. New stations had to promise not to play pre-recorded music or be subject to licensing scrutiny when their initial three-year license expired. Agency regulations dictated that any stations that dared broadcast a record had to warn listeners that what they were about to hear was not live. The implication being that recorded music was dishonest, a fraud perpetrated on an unwitting and trusting public. In 1940 the FCC reduced its warning requirement from prior to every record to just once every half hour and eventually phased it out entirely before the end of the war. Their official position, however only served to underscore the more popular and preexisting notion that recorded music was somehow not “real” music.²⁶

Record labels and popular musicians contributed to the anti-disc sentiment. Believing that radio play would lead to a loss of record sales, record companies in the 1930s stamped their

²⁴ An exception would be transcription discs that local stations bought in lieu of live network programming. These cheap on air substitutes never achieved even a supplementary role in radio broadcasting and were becoming something of a rarity by the late 1930s, Smulyan *Selling Radio*, 122-123.

²⁵ David Morton, *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, 86.

²⁶ The higher the frequency, the weaker the signal.

products with NOT LISCENCED FOR RADIO BROADCAST. The Tin Pan Alley-dominated American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) fought a running battle with broadcasters to secure royalties for songwriters and publishers, attempting, with limited success, to cash in on the radio bonanza by negotiating pacts with the National Association of Broadcasters to insure royalty payments from advertising grosses.²⁷ James C. Petrillo, head of the American Federation of Musicians led a years-long effort to eliminate all broadcasting of recorded music. As president of the Chicago Foundation of Musician, Petrillo had long urged musicians to never record their work. He pointed to the advent of sound in theaters and, later, to disc jockeys in radio, as technological changes that had left the vast majority musicians on the “human scrap heap.”²⁸

Court cases in 1940, however, established that prohibitions against recorded music had no legal basis. After purchasing a record, broadcasters owed no further obligation to the artist.²⁹ The resistance to records had operated on aesthetic, legal, and economic fronts. Taken collectively, these views held recordings responsible for lost jobs, decreased listening satisfaction, and declining profits.

All of this is not to imply in any way that because recorded sound was rare the so-called golden age represented an aesthetic triumph. Far from it. Itinerant song jobbers relentlessly pushed onto radio bands Tin Pan Alley’s latest offering, making sure that they worked the song into their repertoire as often as tolerable and beyond. The conventional wisdom in the music business was that radio repetition created sheet music sales – the benchmark of success. A “hit”

²⁷ Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. II*, 110, 218.

²⁸ Marc Coleman, *Playback: From the Victrola to MP3, 100 Years of Music, Machines, and Money*, New York, Da Capo Press, 2003, 40-41.

²⁹ Eberly, *Music in the Air*, 76-77; John A. Jackson, *Big Beat Heat: Alan Freed and the Early Years of Rock & Roll*. New York: Schirmer Books, 22.

constituted 50,000 in sheet sales. Plugging, industry leaders believed, was an essential part of reaching that magic number. By the 1930s some New York stations featured bands that played the top hit multiple times every day. Hits were, as they remain, artistically safe and the practices used in their promotion often amounted to outright bribery. Musicians and arrangers, however, possessed considerable control over what finally came over the air and sheet music, unlike a recording, was sonically flexible.³⁰

Regardless their artistic merit, the fact sheet music sales defined what constituted a hit reveals in another way just how much music in the 1930s music remained a participatory activity. As a set of instructions, sheet music encouraged performance and participation in ways that a record simply cannot. A song was a hit when lots of people played it and interpreted it themselves. When records became the dominant form of music, the song was set and became indelibly associated with one artist. The audiences became passive listeners who were often listening alone.

In a short time radio transformed from an amateurish mix of hack broadcasters and enthusiasts into a heavily capitalized industry in which the national networks developed sophisticated programming strategies, filling the airwaves with what they believed to be the perfectly calibrated mix of music, news, comedy, drama, sports, and chatter. Though offering a much more diverse entertainment and educational palette from today's music and talk-oriented radio, music still dominated golden age radio, accounting for two-thirds of all programmed

³⁰ "The Popular Music Industry," in *The Psychology of Radio*, New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941, 71-109.

airtime.³¹ From the start, music was the backbone of the new electronic medium, as well as the chief form of communication and entertainment.

Radio's Imagined Communities

Similar to print technology, the disembodied voices, sounds, music, and even static of radio “inspired the imagination.” This is especially true of sporting events that required the listener imagine a dynamic, three-dimensional world.³² Depending on the skill of the announcer, the radio sports fans could find themselves transported ringside or out in the sun, waiting for the Bambino to swat one away into the stands. Susan Douglas has said the popularity of sports on the lies in their call for “dimensional listening,” in which the listener experiences satisfaction by creating a visual image in their mind’s eye. Even when not envisioning a world in three dimensions, such as when listening to music, radio nonetheless appealed to the imagination.³³ Invisible performers populated imaginary ballrooms, or perhaps some song lyrics conjured a cinematic scene, with the listener in place of the star. The lack of visual information only served to enhance the intensity of the radio musical experience.

Similar to newspaper readers, radio listeners were often physically alone but knew, and were encouraged to believe, that they were part of a conventional audience. One of the few disc jockey programs that achieved wide popularity during the golden age, Martin Block’s “Make Believe Ballroom,” specifically called attention to radio’s appeal to the imagination. In the

³¹ Alfred Balk, *The Rise of Radio: From Marconi Through the Golden Age*. Jefferson, North Carolina, 2006, 210

³² Benjamin G. Rader, *In It's Own Image: How Television has Transformed Sports*, New York: The Free Press: 1984, 23.

³³ Susan Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 33.

mind's ear, radio connected otherwise isolated listeners not only to the announcer, but to fellow listeners as well, in a world of shared sound.

Benedict Anderson has argued that the nation first came into existence in the minds of readers exposed to the mass media.³⁴ Newspapers and novels invited readers to imagine themselves as connected to the millions of compatriots, not even a fraction of whom they could meet, to say nothing of know and care for, in a lifetime. The nation was collective intellectual achievement that, though exclusive in respect to other nations, blurred class, ethnic, and racial lines, allowing for the formation of strong fraternal bonds. Anderson maintained that these bonds proved so strong that millions in the last two hundred years have willingly died for their respective imagined communities.³⁵

By providing an instant and simultaneous connection, radio operates differently than does print. Marshall McLuhan has called radio a “hot” medium” in that it focuses on a single sense and allows little room for back and forth participation, making it more difficult to establish separation between the self and the medium. Radio works to collective individual listeners even though they may listen alone. The imaginative exercise could be more accurately described as auditory stimulation, with the broadcaster having much more control than an author over the audiences’ potential responses.³⁶

With a book or a newspaper, the characters on the page do not mimic the objects, events, and concepts they describe. Reading at best describes. Print technology is abstract, and the reader assumes an analytical distance. Radio demolishes all distance. No one reads H. G. Wells

³⁴ Ibid., 23-25 makes a similar comparison to Anderson.

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983.

³⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1964, 23.

and prepares for a Martian invasion, but a radio studio combined with the right voice and a sufficient number receivers tuned in can create a public panic. Writing in the dark days of the early 1940s, Theodore Adorno saw the sinister appeal of mass movements and the totalitarian impulse emanating from radio towers. Radio's dark side manifested itself in the, to his taste, neurotic dance style of the jitterbug.³⁷ Whatever the case, radio simulation possessed a dual appeal: its aliveness created excitement, and its imagined communities simultaneously provided security.

Radio's sense of security and imagined community came from a familiarity bred by repetition. The announcer's voice, live and in real time, sounded friendly and arrived at regularly scheduled intervals. Playing the part of the host, he welcomed the listener in, to come join everyone. Today, Paul Harvey and Kasey Kasem offer different versions of radio security, inviting their audiences to comforting and familiar sonic worlds. In the golden age, a studio audience often reassured the listener that he was not alone and helped him figure out how to respond to the disembodied sounds. Owning a set was the invitation, and class, race, gender, and age were not barriers. Radio was inherently inclusive, and, it would seem, made good on the realization of the American creed.³⁸ This would mean that radio not only brought together white North Dakota farmers together for an evening of "Saturday Night Barn Dance," but that it possessed the more impressive potential to unite the Dakotans with rural black Joe Louis fans.

A youth community being built around leisure consumption and the high school experience also tuned into the radio closely, searching for hot dance music. In the Depression-era high schools and universities, dance was an important part of the social lives of the young

³⁷ Theodore Adorno, "On Popular Music," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, The Institute of Social Research, Vol. IX, 1941, 46-48.

³⁸ Douglas, *Listening In*. Douglas claims that radio was "an agent of desegregation" in the 1950s, 222.

and radio often provided the music. The swing style, popular among the young, dominated commercial radio and was especially suited to paired-dancing. “To the young,” historian Lewis Erenberg noted of Depression and war-era youth, “listening and dancing to popular bands was ‘almost as important a part of its daily habits as eating and sleeping...’”³⁹

This prewar youth culture was sensual and social, built around a form of music that appealed directly to the body and that required the presence of others. The high school dancers, along of course with the musicians, controlled the atmosphere and the rules of the dance. If musicians were unavailable, the radio proved an adequate substitute as it was relatively portable and because broadcasters hewed to a standard that attempted to replicate the social nature of a musical performance. Radio, and much less so records, were not required and merely a second or third best option when the real thing was unavailable. In a 1930s survey, ninety-five percent of teenagers said that they talked about dancing “sometimes” and 60 percent claimed “often or very often.”⁴⁰

Erenberg has argued that swing music from the bands of Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, and Charlie Barnet offered the youth culture a modern, cosmopolitan, and inclusive community. The music of African Americans was often interpreted by white ethnic and Jewish players from the pluralistic cities and danced to by a wide-cross section of youth from the suburbs and beyond. When Iowa-born Glenn Miller became a sensation, the music of the city became safe for Middletown. “HINTERLAND GOES HEY,” proclaimed a 1933 *Variety* headline. As swing became ever more popular and the Depression let up slightly, the exciting

³⁹ Lewis Erenberg, “Swing Goes to War: Glenn Miller and the Popular Music of World War II,” in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*, Lewis Erenberg and Susan Hirsch, eds., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 145

⁴⁰ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls’ Culture 1920-1945*. New York: MacMillan, 2004, 101.

nightlife of swing could be found in nightclubs in locales as unlikely as Salt Lake City, Omaha, and Akron, where the music and its value system to be experienced socially and bodily. While Douglas and Levine point to the radio – it was dance that was at the heart of the prewar youth culture.⁴¹

Swing's African-American origins may explain its socially integrative properties. Historian Joel Dinerstein has noted that music in West African societies is a public ritual that attempts to synthesize a collective value system along with all elements of a society through performance. In New York and other American cities, African Americans responded to the metropolis in a similar fashion and developed swing, which synthesized, and according to Dinerstein, humanized the heretofore alienating rhythms of the machine age. Fast, precise, and loud, big bands held out the promise of an inclusive national or international culture.⁴² It is easier to understand why listeners and broadcasters sought live performances, not records, on the air when one considers the social and physical requirements of swing.

Yet experience is fleeting and records and radio have held captive the emotional memory of the swing era. Most Americans have at one time or another felt the pull of radio's tribal drum, and it is rather unsurprising that a nostalgic tradition dominates radio history. A declension model remains the norm in the remembering of radio's great social promise, with either TV ending the "golden age," or some combination of corporate entities and social fragmentation radio's ability to transcend barriers.⁴³ The lack of visual stimulation or group coercion, some

⁴¹ Ibid., 145-46; Lewis Erenberg, "From New York to Middletown: Repeal and the Legitimization of Nightlife in the Great Depression," *American Quarterly*, Winter 1986, 765

⁴² Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture Between the World Wars*, Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003, 4-5.

⁴³ Nostalgic treatments of the "golden age" are best seen in memoirs, such as Ray Barfield, *Listening to Radio*. Praeger, 1996; but textbook treatments are not immune, as Balk's *The Rise of Radio*, (see especially the last chapter) attest. Susan Douglas's personal and impressive

argue, allowed listeners to imagine connecting to people to whom it was otherwise socially forbidden. One wonders, however, if the warm memories of radio's past obscured some troubling aspects of aural communities and technologically mediated social behavior. The real community around swing, rather than its imagined alternative in radio, seems more worthy of admiration.

Commercial radio, audience, and self-expression

Writing in 1937, the unjustly forgotten advertiser Kenneth Goode dismissed radio's much ballyhooed social promise,

Five million radio listeners, rich and poor, campus and mill village, don't spend the evening together! That would bring out the National Guard. Maybe the Marines... Exactly the same rivalrous clashes, oppositions, competitions, and conflicts that exist in nation, state, county, town, neighborhood, family, continue shamelessly unchanged, whether or not the same radio broadcast happens at any moment loosely to conjoin these nations, states, counties, towns, neighborhoods, and families into shiftlessly kaleidoscopic congregations.⁴⁴

For Goode, listening to similar radio programs did not extend or deepen social connections, but this benign illusion had certain benefits. It was one of the factors causing what he believed to be atomized individuals, whether out on isolated farms or in crowded cities, to tune in and hear the ads he and his colleagues had written. Thus radio communities were

Listening in, also indulges in its fair share of nostalgia and declension history. Marc Fisher's *Something in the Air* New York: Random House, 2007, identifies the top forty era as the real golden age that briefly revealed radio's social potential and laments its passing. For an ironic take on radio nostalgia, see Simpson's episode "The Old Man and the Key," whereby correctly tuning a car radio, Grandpa Simpson returns to "...WOMB... warm safe radio...".

⁴⁴ Kenneth Goode, *What About Radio?* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947, 23.

commercially, rather than socially, useful and transformed listeners into consumers. The offerings of familiar songs, delivered with regularity, and an occasional burst of excitement – all carefully calibrated – could serve the diligent marketers of Depression-era America well.

The adoption of commercial radio did not become a reality until the after the Communications Act of 1934. A number of not-for-profit stations and programs had proliferated in the 1920s, and the debate over who should control the public airwaves and what sort of imagined communities should be privileged grew more intense following Roosevelt's election. Many hoped Roosevelt would reduce commercial control over radio. Disunion among educators and not-for-profit broadcasters combined with presidential indifference and skilful lobbying from the networks, however, won passage of an industry-friendly Communications Act, leading to the creation of a generally compliant regulatory body, the Federal Communications Commission.⁴⁵

Since its appearance, Americans had invested great hope in radio. Radio could be used as a tool for cultural uplift, education, political transparency, and social unity. These dreams would be brought to nothing if, as then-Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, observed, “a speech by the President is to be used as the meat in a sandwich of two patent medicine advertisements...”.⁴⁶ By the thirties, however, the powerful national networks were squeezing out local stations with their sponsored programming, and those sponsors were adopting ever more aggressive advertising methods. The public, by and large, had little choice but to accept radio as entertainment and ads. As a result of increasing bigness in the industry, previously anonymous local talent, studio bands and musicians, became less common on the dial, replaced

⁴⁵ Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, Vol. II, 23-28.

⁴⁶ Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 41.

instead by name stars from vaudeville and the recording industry, such as Guy Lombardo and Bing Crosby.⁴⁷

Understanding the desires of an invisible “audience” became the holy grail of American advertisers and broadcasters. The networks and Madison Avenue put massive resources behind some of the brightest minds in social sciences, to unlock the answer to who the audience was, what it listened to, and how could they could more efficiently cater to or exploit it. Douglas tells the fascinating story of Paul Lazarsfeld, and his unlikely journey from continental Marxist intellectual to American corporate researcher by mid-century.⁴⁸ In the 1930s, Lazarsfeld, along with Hadley Cantril and Gordon Allport, inaugurated the first professional studies of the psychology and sociology of radio listening. They brought with them a desire to improve broadcasting, a skepticism of the current network system, and a faith that through better audience research, theory, and analysis they could help radio reach its democratic, cultural, and social potential. Their greatest accomplishments lay in their ability to identify and separate audiences into any number of groups with specific and contrary interests and agendas. Lazarsfeld became the father of niche marketing.

After Cantril and Allport published *The Psychology of Radio* in 1935, radio audience research entered a distinctly scientific phase in which audiences were parsed and cataloged into discrete entities. Though their findings were of immense interest to marketers and the networks, these researchers and writers articulated a consistent skepticism about the structure of America’s for-profit radio system. From the *Psychology of Radio* through the Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton edited *Radio Research*, these early audience researchers pushed for more sophisticated programming and criticized what they identified as lowest common denominator broadcasting.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁸ Douglas, *Listening In*, 124-128.

The Lazarfeld group contained within it differences, but successfully cobbled together a picture of radio's potential that fit with New Deal suppositions. "Radio offers," Edward Suchman declared, "an opportunity to those listeners who cannot afford tickets to the concert hall... It is with these underprivileged but educated listeners that radio music can hope to achieve its greatest success."⁴⁹

Lazarfeld knew the work he and his associates at the Institute of Social Research engaged in would be used by business interests who gave little thought to improving the "life of a community with forward looking economic and social projects."⁵⁰ Nonetheless, like Levine, Lazarfeld believed that business interests could never completely dominate radio, because the medium resisted systematic and centralized control. Lazarfeld made the critical observation that programming from a top-down model would be unacceptable for commercial radio because it would be ultimately prove to be unpopular and listeners would not turn on their sets. Radio's power to reflect and magnify an often-insipid popular culture, however, tempered Lazarfeld's optimism for radio.

If the medium became a mouthpiece to the growing advertising culture that had taken root not only in Madison avenue, but also in everyday language and life, radio listening could damage society and alienate the individual. An advertisement was not just a clever trick, but "a dangerous sign of what a promotional culture might end up with." Citing a 1941 print advertisement for a brewery that pictured a man throwing away a newspaper filled with European war horrors and seeking solace in a beer bottle, Lazarfeld wondered, "What will be the result if symbols referring to such basic human wants as that for peace become falsified into

⁴⁹ Edward Suchman, Radio Listening in America, in *The Psychology of Radio*, New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941, 42.

⁵⁰ Paul Lazarfeld, "Administrative and Critical Communications Research," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, New York: The Institute of Social Research, Vol. IX, 11.

expressions of private comfort and rendered habitual to millions of magazine readers as merchandizing slogans? Why should people settle their social problems by action and sacrifice if they can serve the same ends by drinking a new brand of beer.”⁵¹ Lazarfeld identified the advertising rhetoric, as Daniel Boorstin would later, as a pervasive and antisocial form of communication that was common not only in radio ads but in American public life generally. Its ubiquity made the advertising rhetoric particularly difficult to transcend.⁵²

Lazarfeld continued his research after the war and in 1948 along with Patricia L. Kendall, published the awkwardly titled *Radio Listening in America: The People Look at Radio – Again*. As with earlier research, Lazarfeld and Kendall focus on the national radio audience as a collection of discrete groups. They seem oblivious, however, to some of the major changes then occurring in the medium, including, the effect of increasing airplay of recorded music, radio’s growing mobility – particularly in cars – or even the potential impact of television.⁵³ The authors expressed disappointment with radio broadcasts’ declining quality and exasperation with the choices made by listeners. Casting about for solutions, Lazarfeld and Kendall cited the state-

⁵¹ Paul Lazarfeld, “Administrative and Critical Communications Research,” 11.

⁵² Daniel Boorstin *Democracy and its Discontents: Reflections on Everyday America*, New York: Random House, 1974

⁵³ On ignorance of radio as companionate medium – “People who are absorbed in a specific activity, whether its is homemaking, a demanding job, or a time-consuming hobby, will have little time to expose themselves to any type of mass medium. Accordingly, they will be abstainers, not only with regard to one or two, but all media,” on television “It is true, of course, that television may change this situation in years to come. But our survey contains no information on this point.” *Radio Listening in America: The People Look at Radio – Again*. Report on a survey conducted by The National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago: Clyde Hart, director. Analyzed and interpreted by Paul F. Lazarfeld and Patricia L. Kendall of the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, New York: Prentice Hall, 1948, 7.

owned British radio model as a realistic alternative, an example of wishful thinking in the years when the specter of “creeping socialism” had become a national bogeyman.⁵⁴

Lamenting that radio was moving away from its public mission and toward a vulgarized marketplace filled with economic men, the researchers, made the depressing find that popular music appealed not only to the comic book crowd but also to classical music aficionado.⁵⁵ Popular music, if not preferred by everyone, was not intolerable to anyone either. Though not fans of the “hit tune” these clever academics identified a use for popular music. Playing something on the order of “Jeepers Creepers” would hook large audiences and trick them into receiving more culturally uplifting fare. Of course, the intelligent program manager would have to carefully calibrate the mixture of the popular and the worthy. “The best thing for the broadcaster to do is to keep the volume of educational broadcasts slightly above what the masses want. In this way he may contribute to a systematic rise in the general cultural level without defeating the educational goal by driving audiences away.”⁵⁶

The dishonesty inherent in Lazarfeld’s tactic is striking, and it shows how he had come full-circle from his earlier denunciations of the advertising industry. Instead of hooking the masses with inane popular music for the purpose of listening to an equally inane commercial for chewing gum, Lazarfeld merely substituted some vague notion of uplift in the place of the chewing gum spot. Suchman had articulated a similar notion in 1941, when he presented radio as a gateway medium for the minority of educated but poor listeners. Suchman, however, never advocated tricking these earnest seekers. He had confidence that the works would speak for themselves. In a short span, the high hopes of the radio researchers had fallen into cynicism and

54 The authors were aware of a changing political climate, saying that with the closing of the war, Americans were less willing to view the government as a proper mediator, *Ibid.*, 95.

55 *Ibid.*, 33.

56 Paul Lazarfeld and Patricia Kendall, *Radio Listening in America*, 42.

imitation. The best for educators or concerned parties could hope for was to follow the lead of marketers and assume what they are programming was a commodity intended for the mass man, an alienated ignoramus whose vital facts could be summed up by a diligent statistician.

Like his University of Chicago counterparts, George Fisk at the University of Washington identified radio in the late 1940s as failing in its mission and not connecting listeners. Fisk, however, drew attention to radio's increasing portability and its effect on the imagined community of listeners as potential solutions to radio's social shortcomings. Poor ratings systems, more than anything else, concerned Fisk, who believed stations were confusing mere "hearers," with active listeners. A housewife who had a set turned on to provide background noise to her daily chores, should not be considered "listening" in any meaningful way, and should not be counted as a valid ratings point.⁵⁷ Listeners, in contrast to hearers, actively imagined their aural surroundings. To make sure radio served its public mission, better ratings systems were needed so that broadcasters could cater to listeners. This was hardly a conclusion that would upset advertisers. Listening, Fisk argued, was a habit, one that followed listeners outside of the home, into their cars and on portable radios for summer vacations. Counting this wandering and often solitary listener was of greater importance than merely counting all homebound sets currently in use. "Basic audience trends today rarely prove that people are not listening, but rather that they are not at home, which might not mean the same thing."⁵⁸ As Todd Storz would later, Fisk sought ways to increase listening over hearing so that radio would have a greater impact, and, most importantly, saw the growth audience as the one that was on the move, exploiting radio's newfound portability.

⁵⁷George Fisk, "Defining and Measuring Radio Audiences: A Survey Guide of Radio Stations," George Fisk. *Economic and Business Studies*, Bulletin No. 10, Oct. 1949, Pullman Washington.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.

Taken together, Fisk and Lazarfeld argued that radio stay should stay true to its function as defined by the FCC: to operate in the public interest, convenience, and necessity. Though Lazarfeld took a more dim view of the public's desires, both believed that program managers had a duty to avoid "slavish adherence to popularity ratings."⁵⁹ Unlike the University of Chicago research team who pondered whether Great Britain's model of state ownership was superior to American commercial radio, Fisk saw no fundamental conflicts between commercial programming, the public interest, and effective advertising. "If radio commercials are directed to the logical prospects," Fisk wrote, "the buyer gets more for his advertising dollar, and the salesman gets a bigger and steadier customer, and the radio audience gets more helpful, informative advertising. Everyone benefits!"⁶⁰ Fisk, more so than Lazarfeld, caught the American mood in the post-war era.

Prior to and more astutely than these public-minded observers, the advertiser guru Goode anticipated the major themes that would come to define the postwar Top 40 format. He urged advertisers and program managers to abandon traditional formats, which would allow radio to become more effective at selling products to individual consumers. Smashing conventional network radio wisdom, Goode gleefully declared as few as seven or eight songs of dubious artistic merit, not big budget programming brimming with talented musicians, won enthusiastic audiences. He disdained expert music directors as well as music-savvy sponsors. "However much he pants for Fannie Brice or deplores Seth Parker, an advertiser who happens seriously to seek large scale popularity... might better comprehend the American radio as a mechanism built solidly on the favor of the Bible-buying and song-recognizing millions." These mindless and alienated millions formed undertow of fear in the Chicago researchers *Radio Listening in*

⁵⁹ Ibid., vi.

⁶⁰ Fisk, "Defining and Measuring Radio Audiences," 22.

America, but for Goode and later for Top 40 were a cause for celebration. Admonishing program managers, Goode said, “Strictly speaking, no musical director... should be allowed to select a musical program, any more than any unvulgarized art director should be allowed to dominate an advertisement for the eye.”⁶¹

Four fundamental contentions held Goode’s conception of radio together: one, radio listeners tune in for companionship and therefore seek the familiar and the repetitious. Two, radio is an aural medium and music programming should predominate. Three, that there are no concerns that should extend beyond popularity. Four and most significantly listeners use radio as a means of self-expression. Goode noted that the desire for self-expression in radio primarily manifested itself through music appreciation. Listeners enjoyed their favorite songs not because they spoke to them, but rather because they spoke for them. In this he comes near to Adorno, who argued that popular music listeners appropriated the musical object they heard over the air and identified with it through a process he termed “pseudo-individualization.”⁶² Listeners felt empowered when they recognized a song on the radio, and at some level came to feel that they programmed the station. Lucky Strike’s popular “Your Hit Parade,” Goode observed, asked listeners to guess the ranking of the top three current songs. The program received an astounding 5,000,000 responses a day. Goode concluded that this meant that listeners wanted to feel like they were engaging with their old friend radio while simultaneously asserting their own individual desires.⁶³

Network radio captured huge audiences in the thirties, but not all advertisers believed the battle won. Goode saw commercial radio as a market largely untapped, employing a metaphor in

⁶¹ Goode, *What About Radio*, 154.

⁶² Theodore Adorno, “On Popular Music,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, The Institute of Social Research, Vol. IX, 1941, 48.

⁶³ Goode, *What About Radio?*, 151.

which radio was a vessel in a wild sea in need of a headstrong captain.⁶⁴ In typical misanthropic fashion, Goode attacked the average American as a bible-thumping, ignoramus, driven to exhaustion by work and culturally stunted by lack of education. In this insult, however, Goode unveiled the workings of radio's ability to provide a sense of self-expression.

Busily engaged in the mechanics of pumping information and entertainment to millions of our less lucky countrymen, most of us working at radio are likely to forget that... easy, instant, and riskless... the radio does *emotionally* for America's millions just what the telephone and the automobile do mechanically. All three – automobile, telephone, radio – have one thing in common: they provide *self-escape* into a bigger more interesting world.... In a very different way, but for much the same basic human reasons, radio, the most unrelenting unilateral audience suppressor the world has ever tolerated, has become, in a fantastic reversal of the regularly to-be-expected, America's accepted medium of mass-produced self-expression.⁶⁵

In 1948, just before the sunset of network radio dominance, ABC introduced a new show to involve its listeners in a version of mass-produced self-expression – and they responded by shooting it to the top of the ratings. *Stop the Music* became a phenomenon by offering listeners the chance to name top tunes – played by a live studio orchestra – and win large cash prizes. The band would strike up a popular song, which could be interrupted at any moment by the host yelling, “STOP THE MUSIC!” A lucky listener could then win thousands if he or she correctly identified the song fragment. The combination of giveaways, hit songs, and occasionally unpredictable but always likable hosts proved a winning combination. As to the reality of

⁶⁴ Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 121, Smulyan's admen, taken from the late 1920s and early 1930s, offer a more optimistic and certainly less demeaning picture of radio's audience than does Goode. This difference might exist because they wrote at a time when the networks and commercial radio in general were not yet dominant.

⁶⁵ Goode, *What About Radio?*, 80-81.

audience participation: winning a top prize in *Stop the Music* was a 1 in 25 million shot. People tuned in for the imagined community and the illusion of self-expression.⁶⁶

At no point does Goode address the public interest, and its absence is conspicuous. Goode would have heartily approved of “Stop the Music,” and he takes it for granted that radio existed for commercial purposes, implying that self-righteous do-gooders and government regulators have tacked on an unnecessary hurdle for effective advertisers and broadcasters who were merely attempting to give the public what it wants. The lessons *What About Radio* expounds (and Goode is an expert in repetition) would all be applied by Top 40 station owner Todd Storz in Omaha and by his subordinates in cities across the nation.

Goode’s only short sight is significant. He did not discuss recorded music, except in a brief aside that advertisers would be wise to ignore audience surveys that expressed dislike for mechanical music.⁶⁷ Throughout, Goode, like his academic counterparts speaks of bandleaders, on-air talent, and musicians. Radio was still alive and music an event for Goode. He did not take his argument to its logical conclusion, which would be to dispense with the expensive talent all together and let a perfect copy be played in skillful repetition.

During the era in which radio’s social capabilities, as noted by Levine, were so much on display, Goode pointed to the individual listener and self-expression as the twin keys to understanding and exploiting radio audiences. Both Goode and Levine believed the radio market was segmented, but Goode dismissed any notion of radio as a transcendent medium that crossed social and racial boundaries. Focusing on the individual, Goode’s saw into radio’s future, when the sound coming over the air was no longer so much an invitation to an event, but a tease for purchasing a record.

⁶⁶ Eberly, *Music in the Air*, 168

⁶⁷ Goode, *What About Radio?*, 22.

World War II, Technological Developments, and Television

World War II punctuates the forties, leaving behind two decades with a bloody interregnum, and radio, as with many other aspects of American life, entered a period of uncertainty following the war. The war was the apotheosis and swan song for swing. Glenn Miller enlisted in 1944, and swing followed wherever the troops went. For many troops, the excitement, the freedom, the sexuality, and sociability of swing neatly encapsulated the ideal American Way of Life for which they were fighting. The most popular songs were not rousing patriotic numbers, but sentimental hits, like “White Christmas,” which Bing Crosby introduced in nightclub setting in the film *Holiday Inn*, and hotter swing songs.⁶⁸

In 1940, however, the court ruling forced the FCC to abandon its opposition to canned music. The networks probably would have dropped their resistance anyway as bandleaders and members of the popular swing groups were being called into the service. By the end of the war, over half of the programming on radio was recorded.⁶⁹ Radio and request shows followed the 15 million American servicemen to war, usually providing them with canned music supplied by the recording industry on unwieldy, 16-inch transcription discs.⁷⁰ Many soldiers, however, did not request music, but instead asked to hear the sounds of home, asking for car horns, train whistles, and other recorded sound effects. Radio possessed an uncanny ability to comfort.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Erenberg, “From New York to Middletown,” 775.

⁶⁹ Andre Millard, *America on Record, A History of Recorded Sound*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 185.

⁷⁰ Morton, *Sound Recording*, 104.

⁷¹ Millard, *America on Record*, 187.

While soldiers fighting in Asia, Africa, and Europe sought solace in sound effects, factory workers at home and in Britain were subjected to the first sustained use of Muzak. Though the idea behind musical wallpaper had existed since the twenties, it took a war to convince industrialists that control over the sonic environment could induce higher productivity and could generate a happier, more compliant workforce. Peace did not end Muzak's spread. Sprouting in department stores and conquering dentists' offices across the nation, Muzak allegedly soothed frazzled nerves and put consumers in the mood for shopping. Sound engineers employed the latest in high-fidelity technology to engineer a sonic product as unobtrusive and uniform as possible. Their efforts marked some of the most sophisticated ever in studio manipulation to shape sound, practices that would transform the postwar recording industry and music making in general. Muzak's phenomenal growth – from 800 subscribers in 1940 to 7,500 in 1949 attests not so much to its success in providing therapy or encouraging consumption, but rather to an increasing awareness among Americans of the plasticity of recorded sound and its ability to provide a complement to almost any activity.⁷²

The technological demands of fighting and winning World War II along with the expanding post-war economy led to several innovations in recorded sound and radio that America consumers accepted and made commonplace in the 1950s. The breakthrough of the portable pocket radio, tape recording, the long player and the 45-rpm record, and especially television, combined to give rise to the new audiences and the changing listening habits associated with the Top 40 radio format. Though dominated by the big military-industrial giants such as RCA and Raytheon, the recording industry temporarily broke asunder as the

⁷² William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991, 79-80.

technological developments ended network radio dominance and ushered in a golden age for small, independent record labels, as well as a new genre: rock and roll.

One of the key features of postwar sound was its portability, which allowed for individuals to listen to music anywhere and often by themselves. The portable pocket radio had been a dream of young boys since the early days of radio, a dream fed by comic books and experience with crystal sets. Small, cheap crystal sets were a staple of the prewar Boy Scout set. They were portable and many of the boys who built them naturally assumed that miniature radios would soon be standard part of the consumer radio market. Small firms such as Western Manufacturing in Kearney Nebraska satisfied the demand for radio toys, but major corporations had less success. Portable radios entered the market in the 1920s, and consumers rejected them. Cumbersome novelties, the radios most often served as gifts to high school graduates. The pre-transistor portable had technical – mainly battery – issues that inhibited its popularity. Even so, before the arrival of the first transistors in mid-decade, Americans had bought over 15 million portables, though few received sustained use. Perhaps more significantly, in addition to its technical problems, the portable did not make sense in cultural climate of 1940s. Listening alone in public on a daily basis would have been inappropriate and strange. As the Levine stories indicate, radio's social properties were quite string in the 1930s. The prewar listener would have been likely to have dispensed information and gather fellow listeners than to shield himself from them with headphones.⁷³ Listeners would have to learn how to listen alone before the portable radio made sense.

The transistor solved battery issues, decreasing size and increasing battery life by a factor of six, letting a listener go for up to 30 hours before buying replacing an “A” cell. An

⁷³ Michael Schiffer, *The Portable Radio in American Life*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991, 154-156, 147-149, 168.

achievement of the best minds, with the best facilities, and a large cash commitment, the transistor emerged along with a fantastic amount of media hoopla from the Bell Labs in 1948. Its corporate backers and proud scientists predicted it would revolutionize the industry. The revolution took awhile. Transistors were expensive, and consumers had little patience with or interest in the brittle Texas Instruments, Regency TR-1.⁷⁴ American manufacturers took note and remained dubious of the portable. For the portable to finally take hold required a change in the buying power of the nation's schoolyards, the advent of a new and controversial sound, and the intrusion of Japanese firms – in particular Sony – to produce and successfully market a device that American firms regarded as a toy. In the 1950s, the portable radio may have remained a device of the young, but it was hardly a toy in terms of sales. By 1960, sales of portables were in the millions, transistor radios in the hands and pockets of countless Americans, many of them young and most of those tuned to a Top 40 station.⁷⁵

The durable high fidelity record constituted another technological development that shaped postwar popular music. The innovations that led to “microgroove technology” along with the replacing of shellac with vinyl gave birth to Columbia's long-playing record (LP) and RCA's 45-rpm record. The two competing products allowed for high fidelity recording, which artists such as Capitol's Les Paul and Mitch Miller used to establish the record as the principle musical object in the United States, and, with the LP, extended play up to fifteen minutes a side.⁷⁶ For Top 40 and early rock and roll, the 45 would prove most important, but in the listening habits of the nation, the LP would emerge as the ultimate victor in the overblown “battle of the speeds.” The LP ran at 33 1/3 revolutions, and possessed the added bonus of three

⁷⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 178.

⁷⁶ “John McDonough, “Pop Music at the Crossroads,” *High Fidelity Magazine*, April, 1976, 52.

times as much music. The cheaper and more durable 45 had a playing time of around five minutes, which made it perfect for jukebox operators, for radio stations interested in the top hits, and for kids on a limited allowance.

In 1948 Columbia president Edward Wallerstein introduced the LP, and his rival at RCA, General David Sarnoff, responded with the 45. In retrospect it appears that Sarnoff and RCA were willing to write off the classical and emerging high fidelity audience to Columbia and its long playing record, but Sarnoff supported the 45 because RCA executives discovered that the most popular classical selections were almost all under 5 minutes.⁷⁷ Though Theodore Adorno would have probably agreed with this business acumen and implication concerning American-style music appreciation, RCA lost the classical music buyers (a much more significant market in the 1940s and 1950s than in later decades), and was left with the singles and youth market. In the 1950s, however, this proved to be the high-growth market. In 1949, as radio was beginning to spin more and more records, teenagers reported a collective buying power of \$6 billion. In 1949 full 64 percent of teenagers in urban areas had radios of their own. In the 1950s, teenage radio ownership steadily increased, approaching 90 percent by the close of the decade. While total sets-in-use declined during the same time period, ratings for music programming rose. Popular recorded music was fast becoming the glue that would bind together the postwar youth culture.⁷⁸

Television had the most immediate effect on post-World War II radio and in an indirect, but very real way, popular music. Long in gestation and finally emerging after a Federal Communications Commission's mandated three-year freeze on station licenses in the late 1952,

⁷⁷ David Morton, Jr. *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 138.

⁷⁸ David MacFarland, *The Development of the Top 40 Radio Format*. New York: Arno, 1979, 20, 25.

television replaced radio at the center of the American home and showed itself to be an extremely effective tool for advertisers. A testament to television's marketing power, the Hazel Bishop cosmetics firm reported annual revenues in excess of \$50,000 in 1950 when it bought its first television ads. Two years later, the company took in \$4.5 million.⁷⁹ National advertisers moved their dollars to television, and famous radio personalities, from Bing Crosby to former Nebraskan and KFAB announcer Johnny Carson, along with the not-so-famous but important technical and management personnel, followed suit. Staggered by the twin blow of revenue and personnel loss, total network radio ad sales plummeted from a high of over \$133 million in 1948, to a just under \$55 million by 1955.⁸⁰ Average station revenue likewise fell from \$246,000 in 1947 to \$194,000 in 1953. Adding to network radio's woes rise was the rise the number of AM stations on the air, precipitated by an FCC decision. From 1945 to 1955 the number of radio stations broadcasting in the United States more than doubled, from under 1,016 to 3,987. Not only was there less money to be made because of television but also the competition for scarce national advertisers had become fiercer.⁸¹ Radio would either disappear or undergo a radical transformation.

At the start of the 1950s Americans were still turning to radio for music, but radio had undergone significant changes. As a result of the war and the insights of some broadcasters and industry leaders, the medium had become increasingly receptive to playing recorded music. The machines themselves were more portable, becoming standard features in automobiles and, by the end of the decade, in the pockets of listeners. While transistor technology pulled radio out of the

⁷⁹ Peter Fornatale and Joshua E. Mills, *Radio in the Television Age*. New York: The Overlook Press, 1980, 4.

⁸⁰ "The Radio Networks: Are They Here to Stay? Yes, in One Form or Another," *Broadcasting, Telecasting*, Nov. 26, 1956, 32.

⁸¹ David MacFarland, *The Development of the Top 40 Radio*, 49.

center of the home, television pushed. As a result, music became more mobile, more personal, and more an adjunct to other activities rather than the center of attention. In this context, radio was increasingly less important as a medium that accurately approximated a performance. The musical experience became further removed from a performance and its normal social context.

The postwar era brought about an expanding American economy and an affluent society that reflected these changes in radio in the musical marketplace. Prosperity opened up a world of consumer goods, and records, especially cheap 45s, became integral elements in the lives of many young Americans. A surge in birthrates would give the young people of the postwar era demographic clout. A larger percentage of this cohort enrolled in and graduated from the high schools, which provided them with a stronger sense of cultural separation. Their alienation manifested itself in their aggregate radio and musical choices: Top 40 and rock and roll, respectively. The move out to the suburbs increased privacy for millions of Americans, who could now pursue a variety of entertainment options outside of the public realm, or in the case of children, outside the eyes of their parents. The most successful radio format in the postwar era, Top 40, embodied, exploited, and shaped all of these threads.

Chapter Two

The Top 40 Format: Records on Radio and the Liberation of Sound

On one of his rare days off, Todd Storz enjoyed making the short drive from Omaha to Offutt Air Force Base, the headquarters of the Strategic Air Command, where the nation's nuclear strike force awaited orders to attack the Soviet Union. Before scanning the skies for bombers, he would take out and switch on a tape recorder. The machine captured the shrieks and rumbles from above, delighting the technophile Storz.⁸² He was not alone in plane watching and listening. Roger McGuin, later of the folk rock band the Byrds and writer of the Top 40 radio hit "Eight Miles High" was likewise an airport regular. Plane watching also featured prominently in the 1969 movie *Easy Rider*. In the famous opening scene, recording studio wizard and all-around eccentric Phil Spector arrives outside of the Los Angeles Airport to initiate a drug deal with two heroes of the counterculture.⁸³ Planes, modernity, and sound formed a recreational nexus for those at the cutting edge of postwar youth culture. For Storz, however, plane listening was no idle amusement, but an opportunity to study the raw power of modern sound. His goal was to translate some of what he taped to his stations' signals. B. Mitchell Reed, a famous Top 40 disc jockey, claimed that good Top 40 stations possessed something that could be heard in every sound produced in the radio studio, "...[T]here's an indefinable 'X factor' for any successful radio station... You can hear it by going up and down the dial, it jumps out at you."⁸⁴

⁸² Ken Greenwood, an oral history interview conducted by Brien Williams completed under the auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 2000, 30.

⁸³ *Easy Rider*, dir. by Dennis Hopper (Columbia Pictures), 1969.

⁸⁴ Ray Herbeck, Jr., "Reed's Career Parallels Rock Radio Evolution," *Billboard*, June 17, 1978.

Storz's Top 40 stations jumped off the dial on radios located in cities across the nation, as the format he created spread rapidly throughout the second half of the 1950s. Storz's focus on sound engineering took Kenneth Goode's Depression-era ideas about the radio audience's desire for familiarity, repetition, and self-expression to their logical conclusions. Storz created a sonic brand. The Top 40 sound was unique and the format demanded a fast-paced, hyperventilating style, implying individuality and excitement. Storz standardized his product, so that no matter if you found yourself in Omaha, New Orleans, Oklahoma City, or Miami, you could tune in to a familiar Top 40 station. Finally, he dispensed with all on-air talent other than the disc jockey, and slashed the playlists to under-40 records a week.

His efforts to create a unique sound unlike anything heard at a performance mirrored record producers such as Spector. Understanding that radio was a companionate medium that listeners experienced simultaneously, Storz's stations sought to develop a sense of connection to the disc jockey and among the audience members, especially young listeners. In an age that associated with conformity in the popular memory, his stations, by virtue of sounding like nothing else on the dial, offered listeners an easy opportunity for individuation. Storz firmly believed that his focus on sound was the reason audiences preferred his stations to others. The Top 40 format did not attempt to simulate a performance, and more than anyone who came before him, Storz succeeded in identifying music as sound, separating it from a social experience.

The aloof boss of Mid-Continent Broadcasting's strategy appeared on the surface quite simple. He broadcasted the most popular records over and over again. Following a period of experimentation at KOWH in Omaha beginning in 1949, he and his "brain trust" of young and energetic assistants discovered a formula and in the course of the next decade programmed a

string of stations across the country with devastating results for his competitors. With two notable exceptions, the Mid-Continent stations achieved dominant audience ratings in their respective markets.⁸⁵ As imitators struggled, some successfully others not, to duplicate Storz's winning formula, recorded sound swept across AM dials nationwide. Abandoning the traditional radio practice of relying on sponsors or networks for programming, the new format restored control to independent station managers. To determine those records that were actually popular, Top 40 station managers used market research, local record sales, and call-in requests. They then figured out the most effective arrangement in which to broadcast these surefire hits. For Storz, Top 40 represented popular democracy on air, with no need for the Federal Communications Commission to act on behalf of public interest. To his listeners and the lucky radiomen he invited to join him, the format was alive and a breath of fresh air in an otherwise stagnant industry.

By the end of the 1950s' critics and admirers credited Storz's low budget/high ratings programming innovation with saving or ruining radio, encouraging delinquency, increasing or decreasing the power of the disc jockey, and killing radio's "golden age," among other things. What they missed, perhaps blinded by Storz's uniform programming style and populist ethos, was how his Top 40 format transformed postwar radio into a giant marketplace for the records. As the week's forty most popular records pushed out most other sounds, Americans were given a chance, indeed thousands of chances, to peruse the latest offerings of the recording industry. As in other aspects of postwar life, Top 40 offered Americans more things, in this case more

⁸⁵ Of the seven stations controlled by Mid-Continent, only WDGY in Minneapolis and KOMA in Oklahoma City failed to reach number one. KOMA, purchased in 1958, had the misfortune of arriving in that city after a station with better facilities had already successfully copied Storz's Top 40 format. The case of WDGY was more complex and had much to do with the civic character of Minneapolis and its loyalty to WCCO. David MacFarland, *The Development of the Top 40 Radio Format*. New York: Arno, 1979, 162, 200-204.

recorded music. Top 40 liberated radio and even more than that, sound from the performance, from face to face interaction, and Americans enjoyed or at least tolerated music in their cars, in their shopping centers, in their bedrooms, and increasingly in spaces by themselves.

This chapter argues that taken together, the Top 40 format's reliance on recorded music, disc jockey personalities, record promotions, segmentation of the youth market, and larger-than-life studio-synthesized sound removed popular music from its social context. Once removed from the social obligations of a face-to-face interaction, music became more plastic, and listeners gained greater power over the musical experience. The Top 40 format also assisted in creating a common youth culture, founded in music listening and consumption, that was dependent upon the imagined communities found in radio and on records. The Top 40 format encouraged Americans to think of music as an individual commodity that was portable and available on demand. In doing so, they reduced music to a sonic phenomenon.

Storz and Radio, Pre-KOWH

Storz was born into a prominent Omaha family that owned the regionally successful Storz brewery. At eight, he constructed his first crystal radio set, probably made by a firm in Kearney, Nebraska. By sixteen Storz was a licensed ham operator of W9DYG, and he spent many nights in his parent's home searching for distant call letters and, perhaps, kindred spirits.⁸⁶ After finishing high school at the prestigious Choate School in Connecticut, Storz returned to his home state to attend the University of Nebraska. In Lincoln, he made a name for himself at the

⁸⁶ *Radio's Revolution and the World's Happiest Broadcasters*," audio recording, Richard Fatherley, producer. 1998; Marc Fischer, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution that Shaped a Nation*, New York: Random House, 2007, 3.

campus radio station first by building up the station's technical capabilities and then by running afoul with the FCC. This would become something of a pattern in his later career. According to friend Bill Palmer, Storz extended the station's operating range far beyond the federally-mandated 1 ½ mile radius. "Eventually, FCC agents came around to investigate. It seems the 'little' University of Nebraska station was knocking off a commercial station in Ohio." Storz entered service after only a year in school never to return. He joined the Army Signal Corps for the duration of World War II and with the war over determined to make a career in broadcasting.⁸⁷

Storz began his career in commercial radio following the end of the war, beginning a rapid rise. At a small station in Hutchinson Kansas, he worked as a jack-of-all-trades, doing everything from announcing to sweeping the floor. In 1947, he returned to Omaha, taking a position at KBON. Back home, Storz exhibited iconoclasm as a disc jockey, refusing to play bop and swing in favor of more popular records, telling irate fans that if they did not like what he was playing, they could switch the dial. He moved up to the regionally powerful KFAB, exchanging disc jockey duties for a position in the Omaha station's sales department. His life at this point resembled that of a typical young radioman: rootless and wandering. Storz moved from station to station, finding poorly compensated jobs where available, always looking out for better jobs in other towns.⁸⁸

Storz, however, unlike other radio gypsies, had access to capital. In 1949, a then twenty-six-year-old Storz asked his father to put some family money behind his radio ambition. Perhaps to convince his father of his determination and seriousness, Todd mortgaged a farm in Iowa for

⁸⁷ "Big Noise on Campus," *Omaha World Herald*, Feb. 23, 1987.

⁸⁸ "From Crystal Set to 50,000 Watts, Sweet Sound of Success," *Dundee & West Omaha Sun*, Jan. 29, 1959.

\$20,000 and secured a \$25,000 bank loan. The elder Storz agreed, putting up \$30,000 of his own money and in July of 1949, father and son formed the Mid-Continent broadcasting company. Having long pleased the public with alcohol, the Storz family moved to music. The new corporation purchased Omaha station KOWH, along with its FM partner KOAD for \$75,000. Few people owned FM receivers, and like the *World Herald*, Mid-Continent would use the station only for simulcasting its AM broadcast. KOWH was daytime only and operated on a relatively weak 500 watts. Recalling his days at the University of Nebraska, Storz began working to improve KOWH's technical capabilities. This time, however, he filed for an FCC permit before upping the broadcast power to 1,000 watts.⁸⁹

Formerly owned by the *Omaha World-Herald*, KOWH was a consistent also-ran in the local radio ratings. It had been a part of NBC and later a smaller network, winning some prizes for educational programming but otherwise going unnoticed both within and outside Omaha. In two years under Storz's management, KOWH would claim the top spot in the Omaha market. The station was the "new" KOWH, as disc jockeys constantly reminded listeners, and it became a sensation in Omaha beyond. When Mid-Continent sold the station to *National Review* publisher William F. Buckley for \$822,500 in 1957, the Storzs' Mid-Continent recorded a profit of nearly \$750,000 – ten times the original investment.⁹⁰ By that time, Mid-Continent had moved on to bigger, more lucrative markets, and Storz himself was looking to relocate to Miami. Radio, far from being a casualty of the television age, was dynamic and growing.

Top 40 antecedents

⁸⁹ "KOWH Seeks Permit to Double Its Power," *Omaha World Herald*, July 20, 1949.

⁹⁰ "Storz Sells KOWH for \$822,500, Seven Other AM Stations Sold," *Broadcasting, Telecasting*. April 1, 1957.

In becoming the boy wonder of radio, Storz was not without some guidance. Some independent radio stations did play recorded music continuously before Storz dubbed his acquisition the “new” KOWH in 1949. The so-called “music and news” format predated Top 40 by two decades, having been pioneered at WNEW in New York City and WIND in Chicago during the 1930s. Disc jockey Martin Block had been hosting WNEW’s “Make Believe Ballroom,” since 1939. By the 1940s, the WNEW had refined its format and featured a wide variety of recorded tunes, ranging from 300 to 400, played in long blocks interspersed with regularly scheduled newscasts delivered by strong radio personalities who exhibited an awareness of public service.⁹¹ The disc jockeys at WNEW chose music according to their individual tastes, and the records selected varied, depending on the disc jockey manning the turntables. Instead of a relentless pursuit of popularity, management discouraged the playing of some of the most popular and controversial music, including rhythm and blues. Station manager Bernice Judis was responsible for the programming strategy, and when the more raucous rhythm and blues records were moving up the charts in the 1950s she warned her employees,” Effective immediately: No more screamers are to be played.”⁹² The formula worked and WNEW after World War II was winning the most competitive radio market in the country.

WNEW disc jockeys exercised an amount of control that would have been intolerable to Storz, who made sure that that his disc jockeys’ sophisticated tastes never interfered with what records they spun.⁹³ The promotions and giveaways made famous by Top 40 stations in the fifties were likewise absent from the New York pioneer. WNEW was the most successful

⁹¹ “Radio in Transition,” *Sponsor*. Sept. 7, 1957, 6.

⁹² MacFarland, *The Development of the Top 40 Radio Format*, 98-99.

⁹³ “The Storz Bombshell,” *Television Magazine*, May 1957, 88.

independent (no network affiliation) in New York both before and after television, thanks in large part to the station's belief that radio's function "is to provide a background against which to get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go to the office or do the chores at home. It is best filled by intelligent programming on the music-and-news model."⁹⁴ Storz agreed, but he believed that in order to fully exploit the format, a more scientific and aggressive approach was required. Storz and his stations convinced skeptical advertisers that consumers listened outside the home while actively engaged in other activities, and he brought to these multi-tasking listeners a consistent and steady formula.

Shortly after purchasing KOWH, Storz sent a subordinate to New York to study WNEW's operations. Upon returning to Omaha, Gaylord Avery advised Storz to remove all network programming and transcribed music, which Storz did, first in Omaha and then in every market in which he acquired a station. More than anything, Avery's findings reinforced Storz's pre-existing beliefs. Two studies on local listening habits in the postwar era, both from the University of Omaha, led Storz to the conclusion that the psyche of the radio listener was such that the repetition of popular hits was the best way to achieve a large and occasionally attentive audience. The University of Omaha studies paid attention to car radios, radio's portability, and the effect of television on music. Popular music programs, the studies suggested, did not translate well to television. In the 1950s when millions of televisions were being sold each year, the automobile offered an opening for the enterprising station owner looking for a viable radio audience. Records provided a cheap way to deliver the desired musical product.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ "Is Radio Overdoing Music-and-News?" *Sponsor*, Nov. 14, 1955, 33.

⁹⁵ *Radio's Revolution and the World's Happiest Broadcasters*, Richard Fatherley. 1998; Haruko Ohara, "Comparative Preferences of Radio and Television Programs with Emphasis on Effects of Television of the Preferences of Radio Programs," MA Thesis, University of Omaha, 1952.

For Storz, the listener did not come in a family unit – that was television’s domain – but was a wandering road warrior whose companion was his favorite pop music station.

Industry legends emerged in the 1960s to explain Top 40’s birth, and though disputed by the men closest to Storz, they remain compelling. As the one iteration of the story goes, Storz spent an evening observing barflies at the jukebox. One by one, these men would make their way to the machine, drop in a nickel and out would come that same song that had already been played many times before. This went on until closing time; people spending their hard earned money to hear a song they just heard minutes ago. At last the long-suffering waitress, her shift ended, searched out from her tips a nickel, and dutifully fed it into the machine, and – to Storz’s amazement – punched in the record she’s been forced to listen to all evening.⁹⁶ True or not, the story shows how repetition, records, and jukeboxes influenced the development of KOWH.

The jukebox not only served as a model for Storz, but during the Depression years, the machines had kept the recording industry afloat. In 1934, its first year of operation, the Wurlitzer jukebox sold 5,000 units, five years later 30,000, and by the 1940s hundreds of thousands of record spinning machines were in use, saving the struggling recording industry.⁹⁷ The old shellac 78 records had a short life span of 75-125 plays, and popular shifting popular tastes shifted rapidly, so the successful jukebox operator needed to stay abreast of popular culture and buy thousands of discs.⁹⁸ As jukeboxes spread, record sales surged, and this was especially true in the post-war era. Record sales hit the \$325 million mark in 1947, settled back

⁹⁶ Armstrong and fellow former Mid-Continent employee Harold Soderlund dispute this story, which appears in MacFarland’s book and has become a radio legend of sorts.

⁹⁷ David Morton, *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, 99-100.

⁹⁸ Estimate of 78 lifespan comes from, Millard, *America on Record*, 202.

to a \$250 million a year later, before beginning a long and steady upward ascent.⁹⁹ The years are telling – in 1948 radio recorded its highest revenue ever – just as television was beginning to appear in American homes. The jukebox had keyed the revival of the record up to this point – radio would do so afterwards. Popular tastes would still be paramount, but individual consumers, not the juke operator intermediary, would buy most of the records.

The music publishing industry and the recording industry watched the rise of the record with horror and delight, respectively. Record sales were fast replacing sheet music sales as the benchmark of musical success. Both Columbia artist and repertoire man Mitch Miller and the rock and rollers he despised benefited from the record's ascendance, while songwriters came under pressure as sheet music sales declined. In this context, the disc jockey became a king maker of sorts, feared but rarely ever respected.¹⁰⁰ The shift in the power from New York songwriters to record companies appeared to Tin Pan Alley a disturbing prospect – maybe more disturbing was that the most influential radio stations were also not in New York's network studios, but increasingly in exotic locals such as Nebraska and Texas. Just as rock would move the musical center of the nation South, 1950s radio pulled it to the center.¹⁰¹

Top 40s Midwestern origins in part explain its emergence. The networks, until ABC began raiding the Storz stations for managers after 1956, remained willfully ignorant of the industry's altered landscape. In 1951, network executives in Mutual and NBC were making vague and, for their affiliates, unconvincing declarations about "revitalizing" radio programming

⁹⁹ Millard, *America on Record*, 201.

¹⁰⁰ The disc jockey's power was usually overstated. *Newsweek* ran a typically 1955 article "The Disk Jockey, His Gab, and the Weight He Swings," Emily Coleman, April 11, 1957, 104-105.

¹⁰¹ Bob Chandler, "Sheet Sales Decline, Over-Production, Disks As Song Starter, Deejays – Keys to 1950," *Variety*, Jan., 3, 1951, 320.

in the face of the television leviathan.¹⁰² This they did not do. As late as 1956, NBC was promoting – to their affiliates horror – obsolete programs that featured popular musicians “in person” and “*live* music,”¹⁰³ bringing showers of criticism from industry observers.¹⁰⁴

Independents, far outside of the media centers, had the space to innovate and experiment.

Gordon McClendon, a Texas-sized version of Todd Storz who created his own Top 40 empire in the 1960s, fumed that the problem with struggling radio stations was that “they’ve been pushing down the network lever so long, they’ve lost the spirit to do anything! The fact is, there is better radio in the hinterland than in New York or Los Angeles.”¹⁰⁵ As the network programming fell apart in the 1950s radio stations in Midwest turned America on to the record.

New York and especially Los Angeles would come to imitate the hinterlands, temporarily reversing a long-established mass media dogma. Storz’s Minneapolis chief, Steven Lubunski was lured away to New York and ABC in 1956, and in 1958 KFWB became a phenomenon in Southern California by changing management and going to the Top 40 school.¹⁰⁶ The new managers fired much of the staff and imported personnel from Top 40 stations. B. Mitchell Reed, the station’s featured disc jockey, avoided the axe, and after the programming sea change learned the Top 40 format from three of the newly imported Texas disc jockeys. “It had evolved in the Midwest and this was the first any of us had ever heard of it,” he told *Billboard* in 1978. “For every hour on the air, we had Top 40 schooling... It was tight, fast... [I]t meant knowing exactly what you were going to say over an intro or the outro into your spots. And we used the

¹⁰² William Fineshriber, “AM and TV – To Each Its Own,” *Variety*, Jan. 3, 1956, 108; Niles Trammell, “Formula for Future: Change,” *Variety*, Jan. 3, 1951, 111.

¹⁰³ Advertisement, *Broadcasting, Telecasting*, July, 1956.

¹⁰⁴ Dick Pack, “Poor Richard (Pack’s) Almanac, Being some Random Reflections on Radio and Television and The Day After Tomorrow,” *Variety*, Jan. 4, 1956, 144.

¹⁰⁵ “The Storz Bombshell,” *Television Magazine*, May 1957, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Dick Lubunski, An Oral History Interview Conducted by Phil Eberly Completed under the Auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 1996, 13.

Robert Orbin joke book for a lot of one-liners.” Though corny and mechanical, Reed claimed he welcomed the new style that transformed him from an improvising but sloppy jazz jock to a Top 40 “craftsmen.” He learned how to communicate to the new radio audience, which Reed assumed was younger than he was. Reed would eventually surpass his masters. In the late 1960s, he emerged as a celebrated FM disc jockey playing extended album cuts to that decade’s altered youth audience.¹⁰⁷ Learning and being able to properly deliver the top hits was an arduous process that required discipline to maintain a familiar yet exciting on-air persona.

KOWH – pioneer in repetition

KOWH created and refined the Top 40 format through research and experimentation. Initially under Mid-Continent, the station broadcasts featured an hour of recorded classical music, an hour of popular music, followed by another hour-long block of a different genre. The idea was simple, play music that appealed to every listening group. The first year of operation yielded a profit of \$84.¹⁰⁸ That was unacceptable, and Storz and his lieutenant George “Bud” Armstrong spent the next year, more or less successfully, attempting to figure out how to best judge popular tastes and run a station as efficiently as possible. Lee Baron worked at KOWH in 1951, and remembers Storz and engineers “dickering around with [a jukebox] so it would play records continuously...”¹⁰⁹ Storz eventually abandoned the goal of a fully automated station as impractical, though the dream remained ever in his mind, guiding his efforts in Omaha and beyond.

¹⁰⁷ Ray Herbeck, Jr., “Reed’s Career Parallels Rock Radio Evolution,” *Billboard*, June 17, 1978, 19.

¹⁰⁸ MacFarland, *The Development of the Top 40 Radio Format*. 164-165.

¹⁰⁹ “Another Big Idea,” *Omaha World Herald*, Feb. 23, 1987.

Gauging popularity was difficult, but KOWH began moving toward a formula that worked. Charts were poor indicators, and Storz did not want to try and break records – a dubious undertaking at best. Instead, he and Armstrong relied on about seven or eight local record stores to report sales of new albums. After some arm-twisting, Armstrong convinced jukebox distributors to provide lists of coin returns. The receipts gave a Storz a reading on the Omaha popular recorded music market and represented a major coup that consistently allowed the station to outmaneuver its competitors. Nationally, KOWH remained wary of the trade publications, but Storz did follow and for a time rebroadcast, the influential syndicated show “Your Hit Parade.” According to Armstrong, national charts were only used as a reference to see whether Omaha’s tastes tracked with the rest of the country. They usually did.¹¹⁰

Storz added another key element to the format in 1951, when he hired popular disc jockey Sandy Jackson away from Omaha’s KBON, a station at which Storz had once worked. The Jackson hire was the first of many in which Storz lured young, dynamic on-air talent and technical personnel to join his new operation. Jackson transferred his popular call-in request show to his new home and ratings followed. As a daytime only KOWH had to find audiences outside the youth market when children were at school. The likeable Jackson represented a way into one major daytime audience. “He was the type that appealed to the housewives, you know,” former KOWH employee Bob Sticht claimed, “and he had a fifteen minute segment of his show at eleven o’clock called ‘Sandy Jackson the Grocery Boy’ and he did all the recipes, you know, and they had sponsors of grocery stores and food products.”¹¹¹ Ever anxious to convince

¹¹⁰ George “Bud” Armstrong, an Oral history interview conducted by Brien Williams completed under the auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 1996, 4.

¹¹¹ Bob Sticht, an oral history interview conducted by Bob Ogles completed under the auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 1985, 4.

nervous advertisers that Top 40 appealed to more than just a youth audience, Storz went to great lengths to document the presence of housewives in his audience.

Storz expanded upon the show and factored the records Jackson spun with a second list of the top ten songs. Using this base of requests, record store receipts, and jukebox statistics, the station began to play a base of around 20 songs in repetition mixed in with their regular music library of pop standards. The evidence pointed to an inverse relationship between audience won and number of records played. Despite Storz's findings about the appeal of straight pop, KOWH continued to play big band music, which had vacated the charts years ago, along with other genres. Storz had not wholly committed to popular music and repetition. In 1952 KOWH had become a hit in Omaha, but was not yet a true Top 40 station.¹¹²

A review of the Friday program line-up from 1949 to 1955, when the format had been more or less refined, reveals that dropping programs such as "Back to the Bible," did not happen immediately. The religious staple had a 10 a. m. to 10:30 slot – housewife time in the industry – in the fall of 1950, before falling to 6:30 a year later, and was not totally dropped until 1952. By 1955, even "Make Believe Ballroom" and "Your Hit Parade," programs that had inspired Storz, vanished, having been replaced by local disc jockey shows.¹¹³ In late 1951, the station had established itself as a competitive in the Omaha market, capturing first place in audience share some of the time. By 1953, despite its limitations as a low-wattage, daytime only independent,

¹¹² Interview with Richard Fatherley, 6/14/2006.

¹¹³ "Radio and Television Programs for Friday," *Omaha World Herald*, Sept. 22, 1955; Sept. 21, 1951; Sept. 19, 1952; Sept. 16, 1955.

KOWH firmly entrenched itself as the number one station in Omaha.¹¹⁴ In 1956, a dominant 39 percent of Omaha radio's tuned in – a staggering figure for any station.¹¹⁵

Refining the format in the Big Easy and Beyond

The term “Top 40” did not exist until 1953, when Storz’s Mid-Continent Broadcasting company purchased and revamped a small New Orleans station for a mere \$20,000.¹¹⁶ WTIx faced an entirely different challenge than did KOWH. New Orleans was larger than Omaha and contained a more racially and ethnically diverse population, facts that simultaneously concerned and excited the young Storz, who was anxious to see if his formula could work outside of its Midwestern context. “That city is at least 50 percent Negro,” Storz told *Television Magazine* in 1957, “and there are large French and Hillbilly populations. Yet the pattern is working there on our WTIx. We are operating successfully in the most diverse of markets.”¹¹⁷ Storz was unconcerned that New Orleans also offered many other entertainment options, especially live musical ones with a distinctive regional identity. He understood that radio in the post-war era was not a substitute or an approximation for a lived social experience: he was not in the business of creating make-believe ballrooms. The record was the experience, and he was keenly aware that a national demand for recorded popular music existed. There was a market, young and

¹¹⁴ *The Development of the Top 40 Radio Format*, 165.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 164-69. The numbers for audience share by year for KOWH are as follows: 1949, 4.4 percent, 1950, 20 percent, 1951 45.2 percent, 1956. 39 percent. By 1956, KOIL, a rival Omaha station that operated day and night had successfully adopted the Top 40 format and emerged as a consistent challenger for the number one spot there, eventually overtaking KOWH in 1957.

¹¹⁶ “New Orleans Station Bought by Omahans,” *Omaha World Herald*, Aug 6, 1953.

¹¹⁷ “The Storz Bombshell,” *Television*. 88.

mobile, that was busily, if unwittingly, transcending regional boundaries through their listening styles and radio station preferences.

WTIX won the battle for the New Orleans market by instituting some of the changes made in Omaha: calling itself “the New WTIX,” using promotions and giveaways, cutting all network connections, and by inaugurating one innovation that was not entirely novel: ending the week with a countdown of the top forty hits. The New Orleans ratings leader, WDSU, already broadcast a top twenty-countdown show in between soap operas. Always watching the local Hooper ratings, station manager Armstrong recognized that the music got a much bigger audience than the soaps, and decided that if twenty songs could be popular, for songs could be two times so.¹¹⁸ With twenty extra songs, WTIX’s countdown came on earlier and ended later than its rival, giving the station a progressively larger audience each week.¹¹⁹

The hits countdown formed the bedrock of records played throughout the week with minimal additions or reversions to older pop standards. The average song length rarely exceeded two and one half minutes, and the format policy dictated the disc jockeys play week’s number one hit record at the top of every hour. By 1956 WTIX and other all Storz stations, including the 10,000 watt regional giant WHB in Kansas City, adopted a similar programming strategy, adding at most ten songs to the Top 40, throughout the week.¹²⁰ Though WTIX and WHB, purchased in 1954, were responsible for refining the classic Top 40 format, Storz said “the basic ingredients of success in our operation were cast in the die years ago as the tastes in radio listening began to

¹¹⁸ Radio and television stations in the 1950s had number or different ratings services to choose from, each with its own method of determining audience in a given market, these included, Broadcast Measurement Bureau, C. E. Hooper, Industrial Surveys, A. C. Neilson, and the Pulse. Hooper used telephone interviews, Fisk, “Defining and Measuring Radio Audiences,” 1.

¹¹⁹ By summer of 1954, WTIX secured the number one position in the New Orleans market, moving from a 2 percent market share to nearly 18 percent. “The Storz Bombshell,” *Television Magazine*. May 1957, 89.

¹²⁰ Interview with Richard Fatherley, 6/14/2006.

change in the immediate post-war period,” and that the experience in Omaha at KOWH was essential.¹²¹

The format spread through the acquisitions of the four main Top 40 owners: Storz, McClendon, Gerald Bartell, and Plough Pharmaceuticals Inc., but even within this group Storz was preeminent. He was the first, and his stations instructed the others, particularly McClendon and Plough. Similar to New Orleans, the Memphis market in which Plough operated WMPS possessed a wealth of musical talent both on record and in person. WMPS manager George Plumstead along with a group of Plough personnel made a pilgrimage out to Storz’s WHB in Kansas City. The Plumstead group listened to the sound of the station and his subordinates asked a series of endless questions about playlists, charts, and other Top 40 essentials. When they returned, the managers reprogrammed the station and instant success followed. Plough would reformat its other four stations within months.¹²²

All group owners, despite various programming differences, shared the format’s basic tenets. First and most important was the limited playlist.¹²³ Forty records was an approximation, but generally stations did not exceed this number and tended to stay below it. Disc jockeys did not choose the records that went on the playlist. The program manager made all playlist selections, determining the audience’s desires, based on available charts and surveys. This could be hard bargain for some disc jockeys to accept, as Armstrong recognized when he told his related a favorite dictum, “About the time you don’t like a record, mama’s just beginning to hum it. About the time you can’t stand it, mama’s beginning to learn the words. About the

¹²¹ “Our Respects to Todd Storz,” *Broadcasting, Telecasting*. Sept. 19, 1955.

¹²² Bob Sticht, an oral history interview conducted by Bob Ogles completed under the auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 1985, 6.

¹²³ Lubunski, University Of Maryland Oral History, 5.

time you're ready to shoot yourself if you hear it one more time, it's hitting the Top Ten."¹²⁴

Though not active in programming, the disc jockey was to exhibit a distinctive "personality," revealed in short bursts of chatter about the record, news, weather, listener call-ins, or station promotions. He provided the bridge between the songs and the commercials – which consumed 18 minutes of every hour – pushing the broadcast on at a breakneck pace.

Commercials, to be sure, were the reason for the relentless focus on audience, and were well represented on all Top 40 stations. Top 40 disc jockey Bob Sticht remembered spinning altered records, called "shorty tunes." Engineers created a shorty tune by deliberately shaving precious seconds, sometimes over a minute, off of a song. Shorty tunes allowed the station to sell more advertising, and to trick listeners into thinking they were hearing more music. Sticht said that when Top 40 stations received a song over three minutes in length, it went to the production room for choice edits.¹²⁵ In a way, almost everything on the Top 40 station was a commercial, the songs advertised for the recording industry and the various recorded jingles did the same for local businesses.

The one exception to the commercialized broadcast came in the Top 40 treatment of news. Descended from the music and news format, Top 40 upped the excitement on the news, having disc jockeys shout the AP headlines over the air at 5 to the hour, adding whatever Hollywood gossip, local scandals, and weather developments available and that time allowed. Top 40 stations became known for doing local spot news, which was cheap and easy, covering accidents and crime. Storz's stations regularly made the news for their own activities. In one memorable incident, a KOWH employee was outfitted Dick Tracey-style with a watch recorder. He went incognito to illegal gambling clubs where some of the city's most powerful men played.

¹²⁴ "The Storz Bombshell," 88.

¹²⁵ Bob Sticht, University of Maryland Oral History, 27.

A minor scandal ensued that was quickly forgotten, but the news stories on Storz's penchant for controversy and willingness to pose as an adversarial station remained in minds of young listeners and sponsors. Above all, Storz wanted to keep the sound fresh, or as fresh as a limited playlist allowed.¹²⁶

Record companies, Rock, Race, and Top 40

The synergy that developed between Top 40 radio, the recording industry, and local and national distributors was essential to both the success of the new format and in altering the nation's musical expectations. WTIx, like other Storz stations employed record giveaways to demonstrate to the recording industry the vast and unusually responsive and loyal audiences his stations held. Smart record labels, including many newly established and upwardly mobile ones, worked closely with Top 40 stations to plug their product. When independent record label Atlantic's rhythm and blues star Chuck Willis released the long playing album "The Late Chuck Willis,"¹²⁷ WTIx program director Johnny Barrett chose the song "My Life" and had his jocks give it the single treatment, making the record the station's "Pic Hit" of the week. The station offered to give away 30 free LPs to selected listeners. Enthusiastic listeners inundated the station with over 16,000 letters. The overwhelming response induced Atlantic to release the song as a 45-rpm record. As a favor to the station, the label invited WTIx to be involved in the disc's subsequent promotion. Soon WTIx disc jockeys and local distributors were out at record stores hawking the product.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ MacFarland, *The Rise of the Top Forty Format*, iii.

¹²⁷ The title is apropos; Willis died shortly before the album's release.

¹²⁸ "A WTIx-Willis Hit," *Cashbox*, June 6, 1958, 39.

As much as the above example demonstrates how record labels and radio were interconnected in the postwar era, it also illustrates the power of the disk over performance. WTIx and Atlantic were not trying to promote a star or stoke expectations of an upcoming Willis performance. As the album title makes clear, Chuck Willis would not be performing “My Life” again in this one. The record was not intended to be a pretend performance. It existed in its own right, and was to be enjoyed on the listener’s terms.

Seeing the success of chart reading Top 40 stations and hoping to cash in, department store giant (and soon to be nationally recognized for its segregated lunch counters) Woolworth’s began to use Top 40 station prognosticators to choose which records they should stock. In Dodge City, Kansas, disc jockey Ernie Forrester not only programmed KGNO, but by late summer of 1958, was telling Woolworth manager Jim Houle where and how to display each of the best-selling 75 albums, many of which undoubtedly included African American performers. Forrester went even further, asking his listeners to guess which would be the top album of the week – the winner of the contest would get free Elvis Presley Dog Tag Jewelry. The rock hero recently turned GI was off in Germany, not as far away as Willis, but always as close as a radio or record player.¹²⁹

With the most popular records now at Woolworth’s, young, white Americans had an easier time purchasing the latest rhythm and blues and rock and roll releases. Rhythm and blues had been growing in popularity among white youth since the early 1950s. The African American style was similar to the blues, but featured a more upbeat and electrified sound. Perhaps in a nod to its growing popularity outside of African American circles, *Billboard* in 1949 changed its classification for these records from “race” to “R&B.” Early-fifties jukebox operators were the

¹²⁹ “Woolworth Store Orders From the Cash Box Top 75 Chart,” *Cashbox* August 23, 1958, 21.

first to notice the rising demand for R&B. Astute disc jockeys soon followed and, by 1954, at least 700 of disc jockeys across the nation devoted all their airtime to the rising style.¹³⁰

Distributors of R&B records wanted to take advantage of this increased exposure and their wares began appearing in the farther reaches of suburbia, as *Billboard* pointed out, “Where it was previously necessary for a teenager to go out of his immediate shopping neighborhood and buy a rhythm and blues recording, it is now the neighborhoods that are adding to their coffers thru stocking r&b records...”¹³¹

In this instance, Top 40 acted as an integrating force, putting black performers’ records on the air and introducing new styles to white adolescents. The old radio dream of a national community that transcended race, class, and region seemed possible. The fact that the music was now offered outside of black record stores, however, meant that affluent white youth had less reason to venture outside the suburbs, making physical, face-to-face contact less necessary. Instead this imagined community offered imagined integration via radio and recorded music.

Top 40’s success and the popularity of R&B and later rock records caught the mainstream and industry press off guard, and both were quick to denounce or dismiss radio and youth music styles. From 1954 through 1959 the press sounded multiple death knells for black-inspired rock and its disc jockey enablers. Headlines from the era stand out as evidence of angry confusion, “Rock and Roll Runs into Trouble: More Youngsters Ignore that Primitive Beat (Is it a passing fad?),” asked *The New York Daily News*. The integrating possibilities of Top 40 and recorded music featured prominently and *The Daily News* gave a surprisingly positive assessment of the North Alabama White Citizen’s Council’s efforts to ban rock and roll from

¹³⁰ Among these, “Moondog” Alan Freed is the most well-known. Freed is significant for being one of the first disc jockeys to speak directly to a young audience and play records that were at the time controversial. He was not, as the above number indicates, the only one.

¹³¹ Quoted in MacFarland, *The Development of the Top 40 Format*, 372.

jukeboxes. The industry, out of step with a changing market, initially came out as anti-rock, but showed a bit more measure in its ambivalent accounts that weighed potential profitability against impending social breakdown, acknowledging that “BIZ BIG BUT SO ARE KIDS RIOTS.”¹³² The big biz, the industry assumed, would remain. The riotous kids would calm down pass, and Rosemary Clooney would assume her rightful place amongst the popular music best sellers.

Some of the industry’s problems with rock and roll had to do with the prominence of independent record labels in its early success. A single could be financed by as little as \$1,000. The independents were usually closer to popular tastes, but the majors deep pockets helped them recover. They offered big money contracts and lure away artists initially discovered by the independents. Elvis leaving Sun for RCA is the most obvious example of this. The major labels also bought rock songs made famous by black artists to be re-recorded by white ensembles.¹³³ Some radio stations passed on original hits, opting to wait for the inevitable cover versions featuring white musicians signed to major labels. This made station’s lest susceptible to criticism in areas where groups such as the North Alabama White Citizen’s Council held sway. Even with the racist animus working against youth music and black musicians and, implicitly, the independent labels that produced the records, the majors lost ground. From 1948-51, Victor, Columbia, Decca, and Capitol placed over 75 percent of the hits, but from 1954-58, the majors’ hold on the hits had fallen to 36 percent as 3,000 or so record labels crowded the field.¹³⁴ Partly because of the success of local, Top 40 radio stations, small, independent record companies enjoyed a golden age in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

¹³² “Rock and Roll Runs into Trouble,” New York Daily News, April 12, 1956, and “BIZ BIG BUT SO ARE TEENAGE RIOTS,” *Variety* Wednesday, April 11, 1956.

¹³³ “Indie Calling Tune For Music Biz in Setting Style Trends,” *Variety*. March 23, 1955.

¹³⁴ Millard, *America on Record*, 229.

Top 40, along with the 45-rpm record, made the boom in independent recording a possibility and the two fed off of each other's growth. Small, local stations with no network affiliation were much more willing to play an independent record – if it showed any potential – than were nationally programmed networks. Regionally popular independent rock musicians, such as Kansas' the Bluethings, could count on Storz-owned Oklahoma City's KOMA's 50,000 watts helping to promote their singles.¹³⁵ Focused on their own markets, local stations aided some regional artists while simultaneously contributing to the growing national popularity of rock and roll records.

The connection between the independent boom and Top 40 can be seen in the movement between the two businesses. Sam Phillips was a disc jockey before he became the Sun Records chief, and Bill Haley, of "Rock Around the Clock" fame, left radio for rock and roll stardom. The life of the independent record owner, traveling on tight budgets with a trunk full of records, trying to convince program managers and jocks to give their product a chance, replaced the song jobber of an earlier era as the archetypal music huckster.¹³⁶

The independent spirit associated with rock and roll comes in part from its business history but more from its interracial musical roots. This musical heritage made some stations wary of it. Tom Clay, a Buffalo New York jock, remembers that managers at WWOL did not let him play songs recorded by black artists, forcing him to wait until the inevitable white cover version came out, a practice that was not uncommon in the 1950s.¹³⁷ Race music, however, had

¹³⁵ Richie Unterberger, *Unknown Legends of Rock 'n Roll: Psychedelic Unknowns, Mad Geniuses, Punk Pioneers, Lo-Fi Mavericks & More*, San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 1998, 326.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 230-31.

¹³⁷ Ray Herbeck, Jr., "Rock 25: The Birth, Growth and Strangling of Rock Radio," *Billboard*, Dec. 2, 1978; John Jackson claims that the damage done by white cover versions to independent R & B labels has been overblown. Most of the independent labels signed into deals with the

become a more accepted part of the postwar era radio for a variety of reasons. In 1941 ASCAP songs were taken off the air during dispute over royalties, and to fill the void, radio created their own licensing company Broadcast Music Incorporated. Lacking big name songwriters, BMI focused instead on country western and African American artists who had been ignored by Tin Pan Alley. Though ASCAP songs were back in a short time, the damage had been done, and by 1950, BMI songs dominated the airwaves, which made it possible for more African American records to be heard.¹³⁸

Susan Douglas has argued that heroic white disc jockeys, such as Alan Freed and Murray the “K” Kaufmann, helped integrate the airwaves but that the commercially safe Top 40 format, by limiting disc jockey choice, stifled pop music’s integrating force.¹³⁹ Douglas’s interpretation ignores the fact that Top 40 emerged simultaneously with the era’s hero-jocks and that the allegedly sterile Top 40 stations, by and large, spun many of the same records. The hero disc jockeys did not prefer rock and roll – most listened to jazz – but like Storz played what he believed the audience demanded. Even WWOL in Buffalo eventually gave in to the charts and allowed Clay to play the most popular records, whether the musician was white or not. Again, the capitulation at WWOL to popularity was not unique. If anything, Top 40 and the African-American owned Motown label pursued similar goals – both sought the largest audience and in the process played or produced recorded music that crossed racial boundaries.¹⁴⁰

majors on white cover versions for hit songs. The issue of artists’ compensation, however, is another matter. John Jackson, *Big Beat Heat: Alan Freed and the Early Years of Rock and Roll*, New York: Shirmer Books, 1991, 78.

¹³⁸ John Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 74.

¹³⁹ Douglas, *Listening In*, 248.

¹⁴⁰ WISN in Milwaukee played five hours of rock records in 1958 only to burn the records afterwards in a public display, Fisher, *Something in the Air*, 48.

Cultural pressure did exist, however, and embattled disc jockeys were subject to payola charges and potential jail time. Even the wildly popular Murray the K took pains to present himself as an enemy of out-of-control teenagers and a friend of authority figures. In one of the more transparent efforts to deflect growing hostility to rock and roll, Kaufmann, television's Dick Clark, and a host of other popular disc jockeys began a collection to send underprivileged New York City youth to screenings of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*.¹⁴¹

Storz gave little thought to the social consequences of his programming strategy; he was not in the business of "uplift," whether it be sending kids to Biblical cinematic epics or in squelching the careers of black recording artists. His stations spun any and all popular records on demand.¹⁴² Again and again, Storz maintained that his methods generated the audiences advertisers sought by playing the records the public desired. The charts and the carefully constructed formulas dictated the broadcast, not aesthetes, hyperventilating parents, or segregationists. In response to his critics, Storz claimed that if Chinese music suddenly appeared high on the charts, he would be the first to broadcast it, and most likely in heavy repetition.¹⁴³

Storz's commitment to the market put record buyers at the controls of his stations at the same time that the average age of the record buyer fell. Top 40 was immediately connected to the emerging youth market, and helped popularize one of the era's most important cultural artifacts; the 45 rpm record. Storz's success showed that a new market that was national in scope existed for Top 40 radio. His stations along with the Top 40 stations of his competitors would be central in the cultivation of the youth culture that grew up around postwar radio.

¹⁴¹ "Your D.J. Fights J.D.," *Song Hits Magazine*, Feb. 1957, 28-29.

¹⁴² Marc Fischer, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution that Shaped a Generation*, New York: Random House, 2007, 48.

¹⁴³ "The Storz Bombshell," 86.

Sound Alone: Music as Sonic Commodity

Rock and roll's propulsive, electric sound made for exciting listening and broadcasting, leaving a mark on the employees who manned the turntables in the format's early days. "KOMA had this big 50,000 watt transmitter," former program manager Deane Johnson said, "and our studios were there sitting at the transmitter and when you're playing a rock song that thing was pounding and the lights would go with the music, sort of like a strobe."¹⁴⁴ Storz employees down the line – most of them young men – shared Johnson's feelings that they were part of something new and exciting. To Storz this was not a happy accident but the result of a conscious strategy to capture for radio distinctly modern sounds and broadcast them.

Unlike the roaring jets that fascinated him, Storz's management style was quiet – he listened. Dick Lubunski who ran Storz-owned WDGY in Minneapolis described his boss as hands-off, with exception to the station's sound.

If he came to town, he would usually come a day or two ahead of when you thought he was coming and he would do listening, careful listening, and then you would say, 'Oh Todd, I didn't know you were here.' 'Yeah,' he said, 'I've been listening. What's the matter with you guys? You don't have any promotions going and you're playing all the wrong music... He was interested in the product.'¹⁴⁵

One of the reasons Lubunski might not have known Todd was in town was that he preferred to show up unannounced and check into a hotel room, where he could spend all day listening to radio, analyzing all the stations on the dial.¹⁴⁶ Storz sitting alone in a hotel room

¹⁴⁴ Author interview with Deane Johnson, 6/24/2006.

¹⁴⁵ Lubunski, University of Maryland oral history project, 9-10.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur Carlson, an oral history interview conducted by Phil Eberly completed under the auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 1996, 9.

like a Cold War era spy with a wiretap reveals much about how he conceived of his audience and his employees. He knew, as studies showed, most people listened to music at home – and from his actions it appears he believed they listened alone. He knew too that a simple turn of the dial could spell ruin for his station, and with more and more Top 40 outfits going on the air (a reformatted for Top 40 KOIL would overtake KOWH in Omaha in 1957), Storz's obsession to distinguish his station's sound should not be surprising. His method of doing this amounted to a form of sympathetic listening. Sequestered in a non-descript room, one of the creators of the youth culture tried to place himself in the environment of his audience. Alone and with great variety of sonic options, Storz searched the ether for the jet-airplane sound that would jump off the dial and call him into communion with his fellow listeners.

Following linguist Walter Ong, a group of anthropologists, historians, and ethnographers have argued that the sonic experience tends toward the participatory, the social, and the ritualized. Summarized broadly, this group maintains that whereas sight and reading encourage an analytical and objective detachment, sound and music involve the listener and require active participation.¹⁴⁷ Responding to the postmodern and McLuhian contention that modernity represented the triumph of the visual sense and the ever-present "gaze," the literature on sound turns the focus to the ear as the forgotten sense of the modern world and as one that provides a link back to pre-modern and oral ways of knowing. The literature tends to, although with

¹⁴⁷ 2003 was the break-out year for sound studies, see, Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003 – Sterne takes the second position that listening was vision's co-equal in the sensual revolution that accompanied modernity; two anthologies stand as good introductions to the literature: *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann, New York: Berg, 2003 and *The Auditory Reader*, eds. Michael Bull and Les Black, New York: Berg, 2003. Michael Bull's essays in both volumes are especially helpful.

endless caveats, bestow upon sound connective and utopian qualities that can counteract the allegedly separating and oppressing nature of vision.

Storz endeavored to create a certain kind of oral community in Top 40 by harmonizing his station's sound with that of the records that were defining the emerging youth market and culture. The sound was not pre-modern but hypermodern, electric and fast-paced. Storz and his chief engineer, Dale Moudy engineered a device from a Hammond organ that created a reverb effect similar to the echo sound heard on early rock records,¹⁴⁸ such as Elvis Presley's Sun recordings. The device gave the Storz-owned station and its announcers a booming voice, and, at the time, a unique, identifiable sound no matter what they were saying. In addition to homemade innovation, Storz purchased cutting edge equipment to make his auditory dreams realities, and his stations replaced the old 78s with 45s faster than did their network counterparts. Friend and advertising representative Harold Soderlund described Storz as "an engineer at heart."¹⁴⁹ In this respect, he was similar to Elektra's Jac Holzman or A&M Record's Herb Alpert, postwar record company executives who used technical skills, sensitive and sympathetic ears, and business acumen to build and then transform small record companies into industry giants.

Running a Top 40 operation in the 1950s and early 1960s required an engineer's skills, as the station had to produce most of the sounds outside of the actual records they played. The stations recorded the jingles, advertisements, and public announcements in house. Acetate discs by virtue of wearing out quickly and demanding constant re-cutting, gave to Top 40 stations a freshness that unionized network affiliates lacked. The engineering-minded Storz and the other Top 40 group owners were known for their willingness to invest in the latest technology, and

¹⁴⁸ Author interview with Richard Fatherly 6/14/2006

¹⁴⁹ *Radio's Revolution and the World's Happiest Broadcasters*, Fatherly, 1998.

they were among the first to switch tape cartridges, which unlike acetate discs lasted for years before wearing out and could be erased easily and re-recorded. Ironically, this improvement tended to freeze in time the sound of the Top 40 stations.¹⁵⁰

The sound of the records and of the station itself connected Top 40 listeners in an exciting, modern, and fast-paced imagined community. Unlike a performance, physical interaction was unnecessary among the audience or between the audience and the disc jockeys. Walter Ong has argued that the electronic media, though they seem to resurrect the intimacy of orality, can be more accurately understood as offshoots of literacy. Ong used the example of a town crier versus a pamphleteer in distinguishing oral communities from literate ones. The crier connects the audience by the sound and space they share, while a group given pamphlets bows their heads in silence and reads on their own, at their own pace, listening to their own voices in their own heads. The pamphlet audience read, and Top 40 radio listeners heard, as individuals, and the sounds like the words of the pamphlet are portable.¹⁵¹ Though simultaneous, the radio listener hears alone and in this mind imagines the community to which he belongs. The performances that constituted most prewar broadcasts could never be repeated and implicitly encouraged the audience to social behavior. The communal sounds over Top 40, however, were available for individual consumption at the local record store and encouraged a very different sort of behavior.

Storz's ability to distribute a salable modern sound led him, predictably, to dabble in recording. Unlike Holzman, Dick Clark, Herb Alpert or other successful independent record producers of the era, Storz was not enthralled with artists or the creative process. He was known for making fun of musicians, and looked down on the work that went into making the hit records

¹⁵⁰ MacFarland, *The Rise of the Top Forty Format*, 148-149.

¹⁵¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New York: Routledge, 1982, 74.

that his stations popularized.¹⁵² In a 1959 attempt to diversify Mid-Continent, Storz made feelers into the recording business. Apparently inspired by the runaway success of Alvin and the Chipmunks, Storz purchased the master for the single – “Deck the Cage With Boughs of Holly,” by Parakeet and Canary, and had his stations test the album, *Tweety and Sweetie*. The record did about as well as one would expect a novelty would, and Storz never made a name for himself producing musicians or their cartoon birds equivalents.¹⁵³ He was much better at programming records and working with sound than he was programming artists.

The Top 40 sound represented an achievement in planned spontaneity that focused the listener’s attention solely on the auditory experience at the expense of the visual or social. Partnered dancing, which had been central to youth culture in the prewar era, declined as the new listening styles associated with Top 40 and records colonized the youth culture. The decline in partnered dancing, however, underscores the ways in which the young consumers were not conformists of the mold feared by critics of mass culture. The songs, if one purchased the record, were received and interpreted alone or in peer groups and sparked a more intense and personal relationship between listener and music. Listening and even dancing became individual activities as the social requirements and obligations associated with a live performance faded. The later fragmenting of the popular music and rock music genre into a bewildering array of subgenres follows directly from the methods of listening and appreciating Top 40 radio.

¹⁵² Lubunski, 11.

¹⁵³ “Storz Buys Master,” *Cashbox* November 21, 1959, 63.

Chapter Three

Communities of the Top 40: The Post-war Youth Market, Audience, and Culture

A year to the day after the 1952 “Flood of the Century” struck Omaha, Todd Storz’s “new” KOWH broadcast emergency orders sandwiched between field reports of a swiftly overflowing Missouri River. Switchboards jammed and earnest volunteers crowded City Hall. An outraged Nurses’ Association demanded to know why the city had not called them to duty. Had they tuned in twenty-five minutes prior to or following the storm broadcasts, civic-minded health care professionals and anxious property owners would have heard disc jockey Sandy Jackson explain that the whole exercise was a fake. KOWH had re-broadcast the previous year’s warnings about an impending community disaster.

Unique among Storz’s many and occasionally spectacular radio stunts, the fake flood prank offered listeners no prize. It demonstrated, rather, that the station possessed a sizable, attentive, and trusting audience. Unlike other Storz promotions, no employees ended up in jail, but as usual local outrage from the predictable authority figures followed all the same. Like a merry prankster or class clown, the station defended its trickery as a necessary measure in the new atomic age; “the program was not designed to scare anyone, but to keep people awake to the ever-present threat of emergency.”¹⁵⁴

Prior to the hysteria that swirled around rock and roll in the last half of the 1950s, the most controversial aspects of the Top 40 stations were the sensational promotions and giveaways. These Top 40 staples played upon powerful and pervasive fears of out-of-control

¹⁵⁴ “River Low, KOWH Sends Flood Fears High,” *Omaha World Herald*, April 10, 1953.

youth. By the 1950s, delinquency had become one of the central anxieties of a decade that possessed many. Leftist critics of mass culture, such as Dwight MacDonald, along with conservative defenders of law and order saw commercial radio stations' scavenger hunts, prize contests, and related shenanigans as signs of cultural decline. The popular press joined in as well. *Time* crowned Storz "the King of Giveaways" in 1956, accusing his stations of perpetrating dangerous publicity stunts and for possessing a low regard for their audiences' intelligence. Echoing market researcher Paul Lazarfeld's attitude, *Time* described the one-way nature of Storz's relationship to his audience: "When his listeners are not being told about a new giveaway, they get a steady serenade from the disk jockeys, broken only by stunts and five-minute news broadcasts. Storz permits no cultural note; he allows his stations only 60 records at a time, lets them play only the top 40 tunes of the week, well larded with commercials."¹⁵⁵ The free enterprise system, usually not a target in the Cold War, came under suspicion when the young became consumers.

The unseen young audience tuning into Top 40 radio suggested a potential to blur lines of class and race, uniting youth into its own separate category. The conglomerate youth culture feared to be taking root in the nation's overcrowded comprehensive high schools manifested itself in a vast and growing collective buying power that, critics lamented, worked ever toward the lowest common social denominator. African American rhythm and blues along with rock and roll dominated youth radio, while white working class DAs and pink and black ensembles appeared on the bodies of middle class high school students. Dating shifted from a sometimes

¹⁵⁵ "King of the Giveaways," *Time*, June 4, 1956.

cruel but ultimately harmless adolescent social pecking order toward a “going steady” style that in matters of intimacy seemed to differ little from marriage.¹⁵⁶

Whether they were downwardly mobile delinquents or passive followers of mindless trends and socially destructive fads, the young became a focal point of national concern. The postwar young were “other-directed,” members of a pathetic and “Lonely Crowd,” and, at times, psychotic thrill-seekers.¹⁵⁷ The growing postwar economy, changing technology, and the social milieu of the high school provided the tools with which young Americans crafted their distinctive collective identities, while changes in marketing and demographics would give them greater cultural and social power. In all of this, radio and the musical experience were central.

The furor over Top 40 promotions accomplished two goals, it revealed and then accentuated a commercially significant generational cleavage. The positive reaction of the Top 40 audience combined with the negative publicity from the popular press convinced advertisers that a youth market and perhaps even a common youth culture existed with its own peculiar, and exploitable, ethos and rituals. Top 40 promotions that led to traffic jams, brawling, and ransacked public libraries did nothing to dispel the pervasive fear of juvenile delinquency in the early post-war era, but skillfully and ironically played upon adult anxieties, and raised the awareness of advertisers nationwide. As marketers came to understand that the youth market

¹⁵⁶ For the best study of the era’s fears of youth and delinquency fears, see James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; A close look at the youth cultures, the high school experience, the importance of popular music, and racial anxieties in one city see William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990; An analysis of the meaning of dating in the 1950s and 1960s and its relationship to the expanding leisure economy, see Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

¹⁵⁷ I am referring here to David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950; and Dwight MacDonald, “Masscult and Midcult I and II,” *Partisan Review*, Spring and Fall, 1960, 203-231; 589-631.

was viable and influential in adult consumption, old fears faded, replaced by mainstream images of hip and fun-loving youth. As the targets of this marketing blitz the young came to see themselves as part of a group that was cut-off from and in some ways superior to the adult culture. The music marketplace as heard on Top 40 radio was the strongest pillar supporting the postwar youth culture. The youth culture listened, drove, and danced to recorded sound, providing their everyday life and most banal activities with recorded accompaniment. Recorded music's portability let it to escape the control of adults and youth inscribed their own meaning onto the record grooves.

Alienated Youth: the High School and the Market

The notion of a separate youth culture was not new to the postwar era and neither were age-specific fashion and musical markers designating generational boundaries novel. A mid-nineteenth-century youth culture emerged in New York's Bowery neighborhood, distinguishing itself from the larger working class culture in ways not dissimilar from mid-twentieth century youth. Operating within a coherent working class culture, the Bowery Boys bound themselves together not through workplace associations and fraternal organizations but through stylized use of leisure time and public space. With ample "bears grease" to slick down his hair, the frock-coat wearing, slang-talking Bowery Boy constructed an identity in the ready-made world of fashion. Mixing and matching symbolic items, phrases, and poses from the different classes and types that frequented the neighborhood, the Bowery Boy constructed an identity through pastiche

and consumption. Through the skillful and understood use of symbols, this youth culture suggested new possibilities of social interaction¹⁵⁸

Youth culture in this way can be more accurately understood as subculture, a distinction that owes much to the theories and observations of a group of British sociologists known as the “Birmingham School.” Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Brian Roberts, and John Clarke have argued that alienated groups within cultures created subcultures, through a process of symbolic restructuring of leisure time and activities. When the young were the alienated group, the subculture was by definition a youth subculture. As was the case with the Bowery Boys, most subcultures took shape within working class culture. Bohemians and avant-garde artists of the nineteenth century, however, represent a middle class variant of the same phenomenon. The stylized leisure culture functioned as a response or a solution to problems and crises that faced the class within which the subcultures operated.¹⁵⁹

The leisure economy held special meaning for working and middle class youth subcultures because it reflected some of the anxieties concerning declining social status or meaninglessness of productive labor. For example, a working class corner boy in tee shirt and jeans awaiting the prospect of a service economy job, gloried in “doing nothing” with his friends, while the middle class beat dropped out of the competitive struggle for professional recognition and into a quest for a transcendent experience.¹⁶⁰ In respect to different class experiences, working class subcultures tended to be social in nature and use as point of references places and activities associated with the working class. The middle class youth subculture was

¹⁵⁸ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York: 1790-1860*, ACLS Humanities E-Book, 91.

¹⁵⁹ Stuart Hall, John Clarke, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, “Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview,” in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, New York: Holmes & Meirer Publishers, Inc., 1976, 13, 14.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 60-61.

individualistic in nature and appeared as a political and ideological response. In either case, as the subcultures operated in the realm of leisure and symbol rather than productive activity, all youth subcultures offered a “magical resolution” to class crises and alienation. The eventual failure of the magical solution often led to the subcultures eventual demise or to continual frustration of its members at lack of change in their class or the larger society.¹⁶¹

Identifying adolescents as a separate American class has its origins in the changing work ways associated with the industrialization and urbanization, which led to the removal of the young from economic activity and into schools. At the turn of the century, G. Stanley Hall identified the high school years as a transitional period, one in which peer groups assumed greater importance. Rebellion was natural and identity in flux. Though primarily concerned with young men, Hall maintained that the “storm and stress” of adolescence was the crucible through which all needed to pass in order to reach maturity. Later, Margaret Mead identified the anguish of adolescents as a peculiarly American, rather than a strictly biological, dilemma, one that could and should be assuaged by ceding the young more power over their lives and reducing the negative social consequences to youthful experimentation with different roles.¹⁶² Though they disagreed about the intrinsic nature and value of adolescent suffering, both Mead and Hall

¹⁶¹ John Clarke, “Style,” in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, New York: Holmes & Meirer Publishers, Inc., 1976, 188-190.

¹⁶² My understanding of Hall owes much to Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 101-110; Daniel Thomas Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer*, Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2004, 137; and Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*, New York: Viking, 2007, 63-73; for Margaret Mead, I relied on “Selection from *Coming of Age in Samoa*, in *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volume II 1865 to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 198-204.

carved out for the young a separate identity with goals and experiences distinct from adults and children.

Throughout the twentieth century – with a brief exception during World War II – the number of adolescents attending United States high schools grew, giving more and more young people a sense of themselves as apart as well as an opportunity to construct their own identity. Less than a third of all eligible teenagers were in school in 1920, a figure that rose to nearly three-fourths by 1940 and was almost at 90 percent by 1960.¹⁶³ The teenager, however, was always more of a market phenomenon and came into existence in parts.

The fun loving, consumerist teenager was initially a girl, and the fashion, recording, and film industries of the 1920s were the first to target the young female consumers. Department stores in major cities noted girls shopping without their mothers. Sensing a potential market, the fashion industry responded by segmenting lines to appeal to the emerging market. The film, music, and publishing industries followed suit, targeting girls during the interwar years. All wanted to make headway into the purchasing habits of the nation's future homemakers and primary consumers. A dynamic interaction between girls and these industries existed by the 1940s that was never top down. Demand increasingly drove the prewar youth market. By the end of World War II, young female consumers were exerting considerable control determining which commodities and behaviors defined the collective teenage experience. While psychologists and sociologists fretted about delinquent boys, leaving them on the margins and within Hall's world of storm and stress, "advertisers, media, educators, parents, and girls

¹⁶³ William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, 14.

experimented with the related but distinct concept of the ‘teenager.’”¹⁶⁴ After World War II, the delinquent and teenager identities fused, generating the deep, but short lived, national ambivalence toward youth.

In the 1950s United States, youth became a metaphor for social change and their peculiar world a portent of things to come. The overflowing high schools tested postwar consensus, mixing working class students with their middle class counterparts, and held the potential, after *Brown v. Board of Education* to do the same with race. Changing courtship practices had teenagers abandoning the fiercely competitive and relatively formal “rating and dating system” for “going steady.” Boys and girls not only spent more time with each other – often in the privacy of the family automobile – but they also entered the courtship system based on “going steady” earlier and thus into its ritualistic consumptions practices younger.¹⁶⁵ In addition, increasing affluence elevated the value of leisure time, making its use central to identity formation and a masculine counterpart to the feminine ideal of enlightened consumption could be found in the pages of *Esquire* and by the mid-fifties, *Playboy*.

Beginning with Paul Goodman, intellectuals sympathetic to the emerging youth subculture and hostile to the postwar consensus identified the young as alienated, having been ground down through inhuman educational and occupational institutions of the postwar “system.” Goodman saw the delinquents and idlers allegedly stalking the halls of the nation’s high schools as damning evidence of an “abundant society” that was “simply deficient in many of the most elementary objective opportunities and worth-while goals that could make growing up a possibility.” Maturity, in the affluent society, was not longer possible or desirable. The

¹⁶⁴ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls’ Culture 1920-1945*. New York: MacMillan, 2004, 19.

¹⁶⁵ Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, 48.

unnatural bureaucratic and mechanical order produced youthful cynicism, meaninglessness, and detachment.¹⁶⁶ Radio promotions, like KOWH's fake flood warning, in this context appear as reflections of the youth's frustration with living in an absurd society rather than a collective outburst of joy and energy. As maturity appeared more and more absurd and the youth culture more and more attractive, a considerable number continued to identify with the youth culture long after leaving the years traditionally associated with adolescence.

The pervasive anxiety with high school educational standards, best exemplified by James Conant's well-publicized 1959 sociological review of the comprehensive high school, took the opposite tack of Gilbert. Conant advanced a program to help American educational system meet the challenge of the Cold War that would have ratcheted up the problems Goodman had identified in *Growing Up Absurd*. Released following the launch of Sputnik, Conant believed that a merger of small high schools into ever larger, more diverse institutions would allow educators to address the myriad needs of the young.¹⁶⁷ Conant's rational and measured response came in the midst of national hand wringing, but his enthusiasm for bigger schools did little to address the potential social a more efficient and bureaucratic high school order might produce.

Goodman's analysis would influence 1960s student movements, and the language of the Port Huron statement reflects the dismay over aimlessness and lack of community resulting from the system. Though Conant and others who advocated school reform would find little in common with Tom Hayden, they, like the student leaders, implicitly placed in youth and the social and intellectual institutions associated with it, tremendous importance for the future.

¹⁶⁶ Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, New York: Random House, 1956, 14-16.

¹⁶⁷ James B. Conant, *The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens*, New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1959.

Youth was, in such analyses, isolated scrutinized, and believed to be either the salvation or damnation of the United States.

This is not to suggest that a monolithic youth culture was emerging. High school administrators worked tirelessly to mute group differences, discouraging school fraternities and sororities or combating working class gangs, but social differences from the adult world invariably manifested themselves in the halls of the nation's high schools as middle and working class students tended to segregate themselves as did black and white students. The promise or threat of youth solidarity –whether on radio or in the national magazines – was often more image than reality. William Graebner has pointed out that the potential for youthful racial coexistence and understanding in Buffalo, New York existed, and that its eventual dissolution into mutual acrimony and white flight was an unfortunate but avoidable process that cities across the nation repeated. This was one major conflict that began in the schools and spread throughout the communities.¹⁶⁸

Nonetheless, along with conflict came mutual emulation across, class, gender, and racial lines. In the areas of fashion and music, emulation tended – despite official pronouncements lauding the upward mobility of American workers and efforts to identify the middle class culture as the national culture – to move from the bottom up the social ladder. Elite and middle class fears once confined to the working class or to African Americans, became universalized and were believed to be lurking within youth generally. Thus all youth became a threat and even if these tendencies were latent, youth had become in the minds of many an alien social entity.¹⁶⁹ The rise of the crew cut and intense fixation with American “softness” following the launch of Sputnik can likewise be read as a fear that boys and girls were growing up too much alike. The

¹⁶⁸ William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, 88.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

potential of the mass media to unite young people into a single entity, regardless of class, race, or gender, gave it especial importance in this regard.

James Gilbert's analysis of delinquency fears in the 1950s argues that the development of a separate youth culture cannot be understood without prior reference to the new economic position of adolescents in American society in the post-war era. The 1950s saw a dramatic change in "relationship between adolescents and the modern economy, or for that matter, between every individual in America and the consumer market through which he or she increasingly asserted an identity."¹⁷⁰ Affluence meant, among other things, that one could, through enlightened consumption, manufacture one's personality, and that the leisure economy replaced productive activity as the primary site for identity and social formation. Everyone was now a Bowery Boy. Television created a simultaneous national market, and Gilbert identified the new and dominant postwar medium as responsible for the peculiar cross-class solidarity of postwar youth.

Television, however, was not the electronic connector of choice for the young. "They are addicted to radio ('top tune' programs) and the 30-minute phone call. They are *not* taken with television and tend to be fairly discriminating viewers," *Look* explained to worried adults in one of the more sympathetic treatments of 1950s teenagers (the sympathy was tempered with a suspicion that the young might very well represent a different species of American, taller than their parents and so well-scrubbed they "glistened").¹⁷¹ Television, located in the center of the home, was not under teenage control, but the mobile radio was, making it the key technology in

¹⁷⁰ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 214.

¹⁷¹ "Generation in a Searchlight," *Look*, Jan. 24, 1956, 30-32; the separate species metaphor was popular, "Dissecting Adolescents," *Newsweek*, Nov. 2, 54, while others believed that teenager inhabited their a different "world," in Dorothy Barclay "Inside the World of the Teenager," *New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 25, 1957, 48.

the development and exploitation of the youth market. Unlike other staples of youth culture, including hot rods and teen periodicals, gender, race, or class did not segment Top 40 radio. The hit tune was, as Todd Storz maintained, the common meeting ground, with the potential to transcend social class, gender, and race in a way no other medium could.

The Top 40 promotions – Youth Culture as Youth Market

Giveaways and promotions that poked fun at fears of delinquency and put teenagers in on a collective joke relied on notions of a bumbling and out-of-touch adult society. They were the most visible ways that the Top 40 radio stations encouraged a sense of youth's separation. The majority promotions rewarded listeners with cash prizes or records, and were contained within the leisure economy. Whether a disc jockey threw dollar bills at grasping hands or hid them in library books, the goal of the participant was access to the youth culture via cash that would then be used to purchase the proper commodities and experiences that would place one in the youth culture.

The gold standard of Top 40 promotions, the scavenger hunt, became part of Storz's repertoire early on, first appearing at the Omaha station. In 1951 KOWH personnel hid money at various locations throughout the city. In between songs and commercials, frantic disc jockeys broadcast hints as to the whereabouts of the cash prizes, and equally frantic listeners rushed across town in their cars. Near downtown a traffic jam snarled for blocks, stranding angry commuters and catching the attention of the police. Storz tried to provide some semblance of order. He directed traffic from his car until he noticed police lights and then attempted to escape onto a side street. Officers pulled him over and demanded, "do you want to stay on Farnam

[Street] or do you want to go to jail?” Playing hero to his audience, Storz opted for jail, where he was released on a minimal bond. Omaha youth had a spokesman.¹⁷²

Less than a year after Storz landed in jail, police arrested KOWH disc jockey James O’Neil after he climbed a tree in Omaha’s Turner Park and began throwing money at passer-byes. His fellows back in the studio had broadcast his whereabouts and activities, drawing a sizable and increasingly aggressive crowd. As before, traffic bottled up near the park. Police hauled O’Neil off only to have KOWH broadcast pleas to its listeners to bail him out. They responded, swarming the central Police Station and jamming traffic there.¹⁷³ O’Neill was not released, refusing to be bonded out, a rebel with a cause or at least an audience. As with the Farnam Street giveaway, the money-throwing exhibition showed that automobile listeners were ready to join in on the fun whenever their favorite radio station invited them. KOWH was on their side – it was the institution that stood for youth culture and leisure, in the form of popular records. KOWH promotions rejected the condescension and banal didacticism offered by the schools, print media, and television programs.

Perhaps the most revealing episode occurred in 1956, when KOWH hid six checks worth ten dollars each inside books in the Omaha Public Library. A “mob” rushed the library, grabbing and swinging books to jar loose the checks and rifling through card catalogs, destroying 90 volumes and inciting “chaos” in the stacks. Similar to the phony flood, KOWH offered the tongue-in-cheek explanation that the giveaway was intended to encourage library patronage. Unconvinced, the library demanded and received compensation. Some confused treasure hunters made their way to another bastion of official middle class culture, the Joselyn Art Museum, where the director explained that the museum had no checks hidden behind the pictures or

¹⁷² “Treasure Hunt Jams Traffic,” *Omaha World Herald*, Oct. 29, 1951.

¹⁷³ “Money Stunt Causes Riot,” *Omaha World Herald*, Feb. 24, 1952.

furniture adding “but I’m glad to see you... We have some wonderful exhibits. Wouldn’t you like to see them?” Disappointed, the treasure seekers departed.¹⁷⁴ The pranks, absurd gestures, and publicity stunts of later rock musicians, record company marketers, and the Youth International Party bear a striking resemblance to Top 40 promotions. The adult “squares,” unable to get the joke, responded with confusion and buffoonish anger, while the kids could laugh and feel, for a moment, solidarity and superiority.

Along with municipal officials, the FCC frowned upon such activities, especially in the wake of the 1956 *Time* article that drew attention to Storz’s Top 40 promotions. Network radio affiliates complained to the regulatory body that giveaways directly contradicted the FCC mission to operate in the public convenience and necessity. Desperate to finalize a deal for a major station in Miami, Storz pledged to an increasingly hostile FCC that he would not use promotions and giveaways if allowed to acquire WQAM. The FCC approved the sale following a 4-3 vote.¹⁷⁵ Though a part of the overall programming strategy, promotions did not guarantee long term-success, and WQAM’s subsequent dominance in promotion-less Miami revealed they were not essential. Advertisers by the mid-decade had begun to awaken to the possibilities presented by the youth market.

Storz directed most promotions and giveaways at the automobile listener, who he had earlier identified as the key segment of the post-war radio audience. Suburbanization built on post-war prosperity and the Interstate Highway Act reshaped American cities, and one of the many consequences was that more and more Americans spent a good portion of their days in cars. The transistor transformed the car radio from expensive luxury into an almost standard

¹⁷⁴ “Radio Library Stunt to ‘Encourage Library Patronage’ Backfires, *Omaha World Herald*, June 19, 1956; “KOWH Going to pay \$565,” *Omaha World Herald*, July 16, 1956.

¹⁷⁵ “Give-aways Hit by FCC in Sale,” *Omaha World Herald*, July 24, 1956.

feature by the 1960s. In 1946 nine million cars possessed radios, a figure that climbed to 50 million in 1953.¹⁷⁶ Top 40 group owner Gerald Bartell coined the term “drive time” for that mobile morning and afternoon audience, but it was not only the adults who were a captive audience. By 1961, half of all high school senior boys had their own cars, and an even larger number access to, and in fact expected regular use of, the family car.¹⁷⁷ Not only did General Motors and Ford sell millions of automobiles each year – 352 different models hit showrooms in 1961¹⁷⁸ – the number of cheap used cars similarly skyrocketed, making private transportation ever more available for young people, especially young men.

The car functioned as a private space in which the much-maligned teenager could escape supervision to race or neck (or perhaps both).¹⁷⁹ The hot rod subculture among boys and young men personalized and made even more powerful and noisy Detroit’s mass-produced automobiles.¹⁸⁰ Fears of driving teens, hot rodders or not, went hand in hand with the delinquency scare. National magazines highlighted the dangers, pointing to highway fatalities, lower grades, and pregnancy resulting from youth’s access to cars. Anxiety about cars and driving in general ran high in the 1950s as suburbanization, longer vacations, Interstate highways, larger automobiles, and prosperity made driving and congestion more common and thus more dangerous. The national magazines singled out neurotics, women, “rugged” American men, and even *fat* drunks, for blame, but teenagers remained the focal point of automotive

¹⁷⁶ Peter Fornatale and Joshua E. Mills, *Radio in the Television Age*. New York: The Overlook Press, 1980, 20.

¹⁷⁷ Susan Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 253.

¹⁷⁸ Harold Vatter, *The U.S. Economy in the 1950s: An Economic History*, New York: Norton, 1963, 160.

¹⁷⁹ Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, 86-87.

¹⁸⁰ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History*, New York: Basic Books, 1996, 101.

fears.¹⁸¹ The magazines understood one thing at least: the car had become of even greater importance to postwar American youth culture by offering the young control over space outside home and school. “We wouldn’t care if the cars had no wheels,” said one 1963 college student grateful for the privacy afforded by cars, “just so long as they had doors.”¹⁸² What magazines and scolds may or may not have taken note of was the young driver’s constant companion: not the opposite sex, booze, or high speed, but the radio.

Storz man Ken Greenwood remembered being at WHB in Kansas City, the brainstorming ways to prove that this culture and market was paying attention to radio. “We were sitting around, and I don’t know who started the idea, but it kind of grew and we thought, God, if we could have a scavenger hunt and we could give clues on the air and people would drive around looking for something in their cars, wouldn’t that be a wonderful thing?” This was the meat and potatoes of Storz promotion strategy: lead listeners around the city on serpentine tour questing for cash prizes. Similar to other Storz escapades, the Kansas City incident resulted in negative but lucrative publicity.

Well, WHB did what they called a “Scavenger Hunt.” It terminated in Luce Park, which was a big park in Southeast Kansas City, and one of the guy’s responsibilities was at the last moment to put a turtle in a pond that had WHB written on the belly of the turtle. They ran them across the ASPB Bridge and they ran them all over town, and by this time there was a horrendous crowd of people trailing around, listening to the radio, and looking for clues. The clues finally sent them to Luce Park, and of course they tore up the park, and the particular pond where the turtle was deposited. There wasn’t a cattail left in that pond, and it was just bedlam. That was on a Sunday. The next day, the

¹⁸¹ See, “Neurotics at the Wheel,” *Time*, November 2, 1953, 104; “Female Drivers, Less Deadly Than Male,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 27, 26; “Fat, Drunken Drivers Worse than Thin,” *Science Digest*, Dec. 1953, 34; “Rugged American Blamed for Traffic Accidents,” *Science Digest*, Sept. 1954, 173.

¹⁸² See, “Owning and Operating a Car in High School can Dull the Student’s Zest for Learning,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Feb. 15, 1958, 10; “Lethal Youthful Driver,” *America*, March, 1957, 9; “Number One Dating Menace: The Automobile,” *Ladies Home Journal*, Nov, 1955, 54;

Kansas City Star came out with the headlines that said: “Local Radio Station Closes ASPB Bridge,” or “Raises Pandemonium in Kansas City,” or something – a very, very tough story. We took that story, clipped it out and used it to sell with for at least the next year as perfect evidence of all the people who were listening to radio in their automobiles.¹⁸³

Playing friend to adolescents struggling to develop an identity was a byproduct of what Greenwood reveals was the goal of promotions, convincing advertisers of the commercial viability of the Top 40 audience. Aware of the general fears surrounding the young and the car, Greenwood cleverly employed these to sell the station. The repeated abuse of the public space for the benefit of a private organization, however, is more than curious. Storz maintained that by playing the top hits, his stations were serving the public, giving them what they wanted. Yet it becomes apparent that public spaces – ones actually where families, friends, and even young people gathered – constituted the private playground of the Top 40 station. From libraries, to parks, to roads, Top 40 station promotions took particular glee in abusing public space, mobilizing its denizens to scour the sprawling urban landscape in dangerous and fast moving steel boxes, watching for clues, not traffic, and listening to the top hits over and over again.

Critics such as Goodman argued that this behavior, though unfortunate, was understandable for a generation that had “grown up absurd” in postwar America. The Top 40 scavenger hunt offered a rare opportunity to parody and symbolically refuse the artificial lifestyle the young confronted at school and in the future. Though they acted as a group, the Top 40 audience took on the appearance of a crowd, or in some cases mob, connected by only the most tenuous of bonds. The longer one looks at the situation, it more difficult it is to figure out who the joke was played on or what the point was.

¹⁸³ Ken Greenwood, an oral history interview conducted by Brien Williams completed under the auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 2000,16-17.

At their worst, the promotions revealed atomistic and mutually hostile individuals slamming into each other in pursuit of cash rather than companionship. At WTIK in New Orleans, disc jockey Bob Sticht wound up to jail after climbing a building and throwing dollar bills at the intersection of Canal and Carondelet streets, yelling “I hate money!” Down on the street below, confused pedestrians pocketed the bills, and as the crowd grew. Police nearby had initially looked upon the scene with bemusement, with some even grabbing cash themselves. The situation, however, spiraled out of control and fights broke out. The police finally ended the mayhem and arrested the disc jockey. WTIK wasted no time and broadcast that Bob Sticht was in need of bail money, which was promptly supplied. Sticht remembered the incident and Storz’s strategy fondly, “They brought the people in on everything.”¹⁸⁴

Understanding and Defining Postwar Youth Markets

Young drivers not only had radios tuned to Top 40 stations, but also possessed bulging wallets, something Storz and others had long suspected. By decade’s end *Life* measured the size of the teenage market be \$10 billion. In a photo essay illustrating the universe of consumer goods available to affluent youth, the magazine placed a pair of dancing teenagers on top of a pyramid of commodities. Two cars anchored the fun-filled pile, and phonograph machines, transistor radios, and rock records figured prominently. While appealing, the article and photos nonetheless emphasized the bewildering and voracious appetites of the new generation raised in prosperity. Fear of the young, though present, was waning. The featured female teenage consumer of *Look* possessed brilliantly white teeth, many friends both male and female, and a

¹⁸⁴ Bob Sticht, an oral history interview conducted by Bob Ogles completed under the auspices of the Library of American Broadcasting University of Maryland Libraries, 1985, 14-15.

stunning array of commodities. This was no dirty delinquent, but was an attractive figure – and not only to other teenagers.¹⁸⁵

Similar to Todd Storz's impact on local merchants, Madison Avenue legend Eugene Gilbert helped turn national advertising opinion from dismissive or fearful toward a celebration of youth. Gilbert received national coverage and industry accolades for his campaigns targeting teen audiences and for his crusader-like zeal in convincing the public beyond Madison Avenue that youth culture was a harmless market creation. His career paralleled Storz's. Both arrived at their respective positions in the late 1940s and by the early 1950s emerged as iconoclastic defenders the young advocating a populist, market-friendly explanation of why youth culture seemed so foreign but was in actuality within the American tradition. Gilbert penned articles such as, "Why Today's Teenagers Are So Different," and "Rock and Roll Can't Ruin Us," culminating with his book *Advertising and Marketing to Young People*, an attempt to demystify the teenage consumer, youth culture, and behavior. He summed up the crux of his argument in a 1959 article for *Life*, "Today's teenager is an independent character... [T]he fact is, he can afford to be."¹⁸⁶ The teenager was hardly the mindless and predatory criminal described in an early 1950s *Time* article, "Rebels or Psychopaths," but a cheerful and discerning individualist who knew what he wanted and was able to purchase it.¹⁸⁷

Playing the role of a more respectable sort of Top 40 disc jockey Gilbert posed as yet another spokesman for the young while pioneering new approaches to exploit the same. By the 1960s, criticism of the youth market as non-existent or as capable of only consuming comic books and candy bars had been soundly discredited. The numbers won over advertisers. In

¹⁸⁵ "New \$10 Billion Power: The U.S. Teen-age Consumer," *Life*, Aug. 13, 1959, 78-84.

¹⁸⁶ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 208-210, 248.

¹⁸⁷ "Rebels or Psychopaths," *Time*, December 6, 1954, 64-65.

1964, *Sponsor* noted that even formal menswear could be successfully marketed on Top 40 radio.¹⁸⁸ The kids had cash and were buying a whole host of consumer products as well as influencing their parents' purchases of automobiles and more substantial durable goods.¹⁸⁹ The fear of the 1950s had been replaced in the 1960s with a "celebration of both the economics and culture of youth."¹⁹⁰

This reversal would soon find its way to society at large and James Gilbert has pointed out the irony in the decreasing concern over juvenile delinquency with the rapid and dramatic rise in juvenile crime in the early 1960s (to say nothing of outright generational rebellion on campuses nationwide in the later years of that decade).¹⁹¹ Americans accepted youth culture as a permanent part, and in some ways at the forefront, of mainstream culture. The youth culture and market would continue to develop, mutate, and fragment in the subsequent decades, preceding similar changes in national culture.

That the role of defenders and protectors of a generation born in unprecedented affluence fell on the shoulders of men like Storz and Gilbert remains a fascinating development. Abandoned by the Mass Culture critics as passive and empty vessels and regarded with a mixture of affection, confusion, and fear by their parents, teachers, and political leaders, American youth found their own space in their cars, their schools, or on their feet armed with transistors. The marketers in search of the youth market – outside of radio and some of the clever independent record labels – pursued it clumsily but doggedly as the fifties gave way to the sixties. Confused by what according to studies was a cautious and conservative "faceless mob" Y&R president Edward L. Bond Jr. advised his advertising brethren to "treat youth with authority; protect them;

¹⁸⁸ "Local Radio Sets Teens Hopping for h.i.s.," *Sponsor*, 1964, 34-35.

¹⁸⁹ "Pop's Car is (Mostly) What Junior Would Have Chosen," *Advertising Age*, Sept. 17, 1962.

¹⁹⁰ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 210.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

control them; tell them what to do. Basically they're insecure and afraid to take risks. Reassure them in advertising copy.”¹⁹² Storz, Gilbert, or Jac Holzman, president of Elektra Records, would have howled at such an assessment. Or ignored it all together. They were busy keeping their ears to the ground, avoiding the assumptions that misled the bigger firms. So it was that a typical youth commodity, popular recorded music, became a defining element of this new, acutely self-conscious generation. Like other aspects of youth culture, the use of recorded sound as identity marker would go mainstream in the subsequent years.

The great spokesmen of youth, the disc jockey, came under withering fire from mass media for leading astray an “other directed” youth culture. Disc jockeys spent much of their spare time defending themselves, arguing that they were hardly the trend-setting provocateurs they were made out to be but themselves the followers. To the delight of the major labels and cultural critics, disc jockeys such as Alan Freed were ruined by the payola scandal, and others, such as Dick Clark, forced to divest themselves of lucrative business arrangements.

Print media targeting teenage girls as consumers existed prior to Top 40 and had developed a sophisticated strategy to deflect criticism in the early postwar era. The first and most successful of the teen magazines, *Seventeen*, began publishing in 1944, rapidly selling out its first two press runs of 400,000. Posing as a guardian of upper middle class virtue and taste, *Seventeen* advised its readers in a reassuring, friendly, yet authoritative tone, guiding them through the minefield of American girlhood. Tackling boredom (advice includes “Shampoo your hair and experiment with new hair styles while it’s all malleable with lather”), sex, and fashion *Seventeen* was successful in part because its skilled writers usually took these issues seriously and addressed them with sympathy. Following G. Stanley Hall, *Seventeen* explained

¹⁹² “Youth: The Frontier Market,” *Media/Scope*, June 1964, 82.

that adolescence was a transitional phase and that difficulties were inevitable, but that attentive readers would emerge in tact.

Seventeen also addressed its young readers as consumers, keeping them up-to-date on what to wear, watch, and listen to – the largest section in any 1950s issue was the “what you wear” feature. The production values and sophistication of the advertisements rivaled any of the major adult and family periodicals. This approach compares favorably with Top 40, though the tone of *Seventeen* remained, at least throughout the 1950s, that of a wiser and sympathetic older sister.

Like Storz would later, *Seventeen* publisher Helen Valentine aggressively sought to convince advertisers of the buying power of the teen market, in this case that of upper-middle class girls. A year after *Seventeen*'s 1944 launch, She hired a professional research team out of Princeton, New Jersey, behavior unknown in fashion magazine to discover the desires, demographics, and untapped demand in of American girls. The survey was called “Life with Teena,” and it showed that 66 percent of readers expected to be full-time homemakers, while over three-fourths influenced parents' buying decisions. Clothes, however, were the big selling point, with nearly two-thirds percent expressing strong interest in clothes and 87 percent telling the researchers that they advised their friends in making selections. Valentine would emphasize the other-directedness of her audience, telling advertisers that they only needed to reach and convince a couple of trendsetting young girls and the other directed market would follow. Believing that the market could be reached and could be manipulated, however, were two different things.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History*, New York: Basic Books, 1996, 103-4.

RCA was a frequent buyer of space on *Seventeen*, hawking its portable radio and records players. In one spot, a young woman is shown waking up, breakfasting, applying makeup, walking through town, getting ready for bed, dancing with a man (no other dancers are seen perhaps reflecting the shift to steady dating in the 1950s) always accompanied by a 45 Victrola turntable attachment. The ad was strategically placed next to a *Seventeen* article detailing ways to “Make Money for Christmas.”¹⁹⁴ Another RCA spot displayed two couples in bathing suits clowning around with portable radios. A smiling girl crouches down, balancing a radio on her finger, while a shirtless boy standing above her balances a smaller radio on his head. The ad tells the reader to “play it sweet and cool. Just leave this ad where Mom or Dad is sure to see it. They’re sure to catch on!”¹⁹⁵

The first ad speaks to the role of music as commodity and companion. The portable radio had by the 1950s become an everyday artifact, not a strange accessory, and now it was being marketed as a fashionable accessory for the on-the-move young woman. In the photos the radio, and turntable attachment, share the same frame with the woman – it is implied that with a portable music player, one is never alone. The music is hers and is not shared with anyone, except the sharp-looking young man dancing with her to records. The dancing photo is the only explicit reference to the place of records in youth culture, but the other photos imply, by the absence of parents and others, the portable’s special place in the development of individuality and as a symbol of individual choice. All of her experiences are enhanced by the portable, and in

¹⁹⁴ “Pull a Plum from Our Stockingful of Ways to Make Money for Christmas,” *Seventeen*, Nov. 1957, 112; “There’s an RCA Victor for Every Hour of Your Day,” (advertisement), *Seventeen*, Nov. 1957, 113.

¹⁹⁵ “You’ll be Celebrating Christmas Next July if you get and RCA Victor Portable!,” *Seventeen*, Dec. 1957, 2.

the case of the dancing episode, the portable becomes a prerequisite for gaining admittance to the pleasures of adulthood.

The second spot shows youth culture in its more traditional guises – fun and playful sexuality. The kids, attractive and half naked, will be having fun long after Christmas if they bring the music with them. Recognizing both a more indulgent parenting style and the insider approach of Top 40 promotions, RCA reassures its readers that even though the \$69.95 may seem a bit steep, they can, with little effort, influence their parents Christmas decisions. The phrase “They’ll catch on!” can be read two ways. One is that the kind parent will recognize their child’s craving for portable radio. The other is that the parents, though generally out-of-touch, will be unable to resist their own desire for an RCA and the allure of the fun-loving, ever young lifestyle it and their children represent.

Outside of the advertising copy, *Seventeen*, however, sought to educate, rather than excite, the adolescent senses. It rarely reviewed rock records, preferring an elucidation on “the wild, barbaric rhythms of Prokofiev’s Scythian Suite” to one on the differently wild rhythms of Elvis Presley.¹⁹⁶ Some readers questioned their favorite magazine’s neglect of a decidedly teen-driven phenomenon, but *Seventeen* nonetheless maintained a low-level anti-rock position.¹⁹⁷

Typical of its condescending stance, the magazine enlisted a Barnard College undergraduate to explain to younger readers that rock and roll was all right for kids, but for college students “the

¹⁹⁶ “Teens are Listening to...” *Seventeen*, August 1957, 87.

¹⁹⁷ “Thank you for your Letters,” *Seventeen* April 1957, 4; *Seventeen* did occasionally give rock and roll musicians such as Elvis Presley and Fats Domino some copy, see “The Hollywood Scene,” July 1957, 28, but they tended to lack enthusiasm and point ominously to teen hysteria and inappropriate displays of sexuality “more than 5,000 of his fans besieged the studio; some, when defeated in their efforts to see him on the set, wrote him notes on the walls in various and vivid shades of lipstick.”; more common were pieces like the October 1957 “Teens in the News” that featured “anti-rock and rollites” who had the courage to “brashly wear ‘I Love Ludwig’ buttons to combat the menace. (Presley is the menace; Ludwig’s last name is Beethoven,” 28.

intricacies of chamber music or progressive jazz,” were more appropriate than “odd squalling and moaning grunts of the latest rock and roll favorite.”¹⁹⁸

Seventeen took an indirect line of attack against rock music and the culture of Top 40 radio and 45 rpm records by promoting a traditional, performance based musical experience as a superior alternative. “The Magic is You... in Music” argues that teenage girls should take up instruments as a means to combat social isolation and better get to know themselves. “When you play a musical instrument, it gets you past many a situation where possibly shyness (and who isn’t a little shy) and lack of experience (and who isn’t a little bit unsure, some time or other?) may put you at a disadvantage... You develop a kind of social ease and knowledge of acceptance in your group, and this confidence is worth a great deal in how others may value you, particularly the fellows.” An image of music’s connective power comes in the form of a teenage girl discovering a piano in pine forest and conjuring up a sublime version of “Clair de Lune” for her entranced friends. A sock hop it was not, and the author realizes that the piano in the pine forest may seem a little unrealistic and states that anything, no matter how amateurish (including rock and roll) with verve and energy can produce similar social benefits as long as the player and audience participate.¹⁹⁹

When the magazine published an “open letter” to parents worried about delinquency, it reinforced the magazine’s role as protector and educator, but it alienated some readers. “...The article was ridiculous!... To me, she sounds like a ‘ma-ma’ baby... My parents like rock ‘n roll. I drive a car, and my dad was glad to teach me how. This is more ‘true to life’ than that silly letter.”²⁰⁰ The reader assumes that cars and rock and roll are central to teen identity and

¹⁹⁸ Vivian Finnsmith, “Give me a Simple Song,” *Seventeen*, Jan. 1959, 27.

¹⁹⁹ “The Magic is You... in Music,” *Seventeen*, July 1957, 66-67, 94.

²⁰⁰ “Thank you For Your Letters,” *Seventeen*, Feb. 1957, 4.

independence and resents *Seventeen's* insistence that they are inappropriate elements for the well-adjusted, but still maturing, teen. Significantly, the reader's tone is not one of righteous indignation but scoffing. She writes that the magazine's position towards teen drivers and rock and roll is "silly" and "ridiculous." *Seventeen* is not menacing; it is doddering. Anyone with a radio set can hear the vibrancy of the youth culture of rock and cars that the magazine discredits. Young women do not go paddling off in canoes in search of pine forests and Debussy, but do motor around with the radio tuned into Pat Boone accompanied by steady boyfriends.²⁰¹

Unlike the conflicted *Seventeen*, *Song Hits Magazine*, had no problem trumpeting the arrival of youth culture, crowning Elvis the King of the Baritones²⁰² and plugging a wide range of rock stars in its pages. *Song Hits Magazine* consistently included pieces that not only justified but glorified teen popular recorded music choice, and indicated that an autonomous youth culture, not disc jockeys or even Elvis himself, were responsible for creating youth culture. Reviewing the "Cat's" first movie, *Love Me Tender*, the anonymous copy described the Elvis Presley phenomenon, "His fans number in the millions. They are well organized, and they have one mission in life – to keep Elvis on the top, to buy his records, to have the nation's d.j.'s spin his records and to make him America's number one star attraction."²⁰³ Elvis records may have been cool, *Song Hits* told its readers, but it was the young consumers who held the real power.

As with Top 40, *Song Hits* sponsored many contests, including a "win a date with Elvis" promotion in which a lucky fan's 100-word essay explaining, "Why I want to Meet Elvis," could

²⁰¹ Daniel Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 2004, 136.

²⁰² Presley won his crown via a fan write-in contest that pitted him against rivals such as, Pat Boone, Eddie Fisher, Dean Martin, Nat King Cole, Tony Bennett, Perry Como, Bing Crosby, Con Cornell, and Don Cherry. Pat Boone was named Crown Prince, "1956 King of the Baritones," *Song Hits Magazine*, ct. 1956, 12. Interestingly, *Song Hits* does not normally refer to Elvis the "King," but the "Cat."

²⁰³ "The Cat' Leaps to Success," *Song Hits Magazine*, Feb. 1957, 7.

land them a chance to meet the Cat.²⁰⁴ Though the contest included boys, the copy made clear the preferred gender, and the winner, Andrea June Stevens was later shown in a photo essay illustrating the various phases of her dream date. In a photo would have shocked the editors *Seventeen*, a grinning Presley feeds his adoring fan a hotdog. Another photo shows Elvis sleeping, head on Stevens's shoulder.²⁰⁵ The mixture of sweetness, star worship, and playful crassness, resembled the Top 40 jokes, with the difference being *Song Hits* played upon fears of delinquent sexuality.

It was not always this way. The *Song Hits* of 1950 contained the normal number of "He-Man" body building sets and pimple cream ads, but it also included *Seventeen*-style editorializing. In an essay allegedly penned by Frank Sinatra, Old Blue Eyes warns the nation's girls about the dangers of peer pressure and phoniness, advising them a la *Hamlet*, "to thine own self be true," otherwise they would end up unhappy and in bad situations (one of which was appearing unattractive to Frank and guys like him). Apparently, this particular variety of being true to oneself involved understanding and obeying community standards of sexual modesty. Using too much make-up, focusing on fashionable dress, and other sins of unchecked consumerism and behavior not in accord with traditional girlhood would prove psychologically and socially damaging. Moralizing along these lines, especially if it came directly from the idols, was strictly forbidden six years later.²⁰⁶

The second prizewinners' of the Elvis dating contest, most of whom but not all were female, received a full Elvis Presley album. This sort of prize was not unusual; *Song Hits* preferred to give away records and turntables, good for business for a magazine devoted to the

²⁰⁴ "Win a Date with Elvis Presley," *Song Hits Magazine*, July 1956, 12.

²⁰⁵ "A Date with Elvis, A Dream Come True," *Song Hits Magazine*, Nov. 1956, 6-7.

²⁰⁶ Frank Sinatra, "To Thine Own Self Be True!" *Song Hits*, April, 1950, 2.

recording industry's products, but these commodities were also in demand and esteemed by *Song Hits* readers. In one typical contest, the prizes included three RCA turntables and one RCA radio. The top prize was the portable RCA radio/turntable combo, "the Skipper," which "plays on batteries – anywhere. No cord is needed." The high fidelity but homebound Mark IV was no match for mobile-recorded sound.²⁰⁷ The choices in prizes reflected recorded music's role in youth culture. Recorded music at its best was mobile and offered a means by which one could self-identify as young through records and purchases in the marketplace.

A consistent *Song Hits* defense of rock and roll was, like Storz's defense of Top 40, to appeal to sales figures. The marketplace appeal was inclusive, many of the artists *Song Hits* championed were African American, such as Little Richard, Fats Domino, and the Five Satins. It also proved, at least to the editors, that an autonomous market no longer needed to be instructed as to what it wanted to hear. Writing in the familiar patter of Top 40 disc jockeys, *Song Hits* told its young consumers that they could and should continue to defy the scolds and critics by seizing the record charts, "Every day, new R&R songs are breaking into the pop charts. From this we can safely say the 'Beat' music is movin' and groovin' along. You just keep buying the records and supporting your favorite artists the way you have and Rock 'n Roll will be here to stay."

Sock Hops and Twisting: Social Aspect of the Postwar Youth Musical Experience

Dancing remained a part of youth culture, and at sock or record hops in high schools, public buildings, and country clubs, popular disc jockeys from Top 40 stations armed with a box

²⁰⁷ "Contest, Presley Word Puzzler – WIN These Beautiful Prizes," *Song Hits Magazine*, Oct. 1956, 10-11.

of records entertained eager couples across the country. Historian William Graebner has complained that sock hops represented attempts by unsympathetic adults to inoculate middle class children against the dangers of listening to working class musical styles without supervision, but the events were some of the few that allowed young people to dance to their own music.²⁰⁸ In any case, they represented one decidedly social way of experiencing the recorded music that Top 40 radio stations and their fans had popularized.

At the sock hops, teenagers could dance together to music they had been listening (and perhaps dancing) to alone, a prospect that they evidently found desirable. At their height in the mid-fifties, Storz disc jockey Bob Sticht did two to three hops each week, but complained that though popular, the events paid poorly.²⁰⁹ Clearly, the kids, and perhaps the clever authority figures Graebner suspects of wanting to undercut the raw power of rock and roll, felt compelled to experience music as part of a performance-like event in which they responded directly to sounds, sights, and the presence of others, and have all of the above ritualistically structure their social behavior. The most popular dance styles, however, indicate that the hops incubated new understandings of the purpose of dance and the role of music in youth culture.

Writing a decade after the sock hops' initial popularity, Lucille Blum observed that young dancers of the late 1960s preferred discotheques and records to live performances. Blum argued that at the discotheque dance served a therapeutic role. Dancers could simultaneously pursue individual identity in a group context. The fast and generally unstructured movements they executed did not reflect so much group solidarity or mutual understanding, but provided a sense of freedom and individuality on the dance floor that was perhaps lacking in their more

²⁰⁸ William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era*, Temple University Press, 1990, 39.

²⁰⁹ Bob Sticht, University of Maryland Oral History, 20.

structured roles at school, home, and work.²¹⁰ This style of dance, connected to dances reliant on recorded music, has its roots in the Top 40 both on radio and on television.

Dick Clark, the television disc jockey, helped popularized the do-it-yourself dance style of the 1950s sock hop on the long running “American Bandstand” ABC picked up Clark’s Philadelphia show in 1957, less than a year after it had become a local sensation. “I don’t know,” Clark demurred when asked about why the show appealed to so many adolescents, before explaining, “we use recorded music. Anyone can get records. There’s a lot of unrehearsed dancing by teenagers, and that’s not secret. So there’s just me, about forty records and a hundred and fifty kids doing what comes naturally. That’s all.”²¹¹

The show became a “weekday religion” for teenagers by 1960, spreading the resilient “twist” even to skeptical adults. In 1958, Hank Ballard recorded the “Twist,” and the record sold respectably, but it was the dance associated with it that became a national phenomenon. For reasons that are not clear, Ballard refused to lip sync his record on Clark’s show. One of Clark’s Philadelphia friends at Park-Cameo studios found a capable mimic in Ernest Evans, later re-christened “Chubby Checker” to record a cover version. The record proved a freakish phenomenon, hitting number one in 1960 and again 1962. The affable Checker was more than happy to twist away on *Bandstand*. The dance itself required a few minutes to learn, a fair amount of space between the twister and anyone else, but not a partner. The partner-less twist became the dominant popular dance style of the day.²¹²

²¹⁰ Lucille Hollander Blum, “The Discotheque and the Phenomenon of Alone-Togetherness: A Study of the Young Person’s Response to the Frug and Comparable Current Dances,” *Adolescence*, Winter 1966/67, 365.

²¹¹ Martin Cohen, “Teens are a Time for Fun,” *Radio and Television Mirror*, April, 1958, 56.

²¹² Jim Cogan and William Clark, *Temples of Sound: Inside the Great Recording Studios*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003, 152.

By 1961 the twist had become somewhat passé among teenagers in the know but was exploding in popularity among adults, leading Buddy Deane of Baltimore's WJZ-TV to conclude:

that great portions of the public currently accepting the dance as a 'new' innovation are not those who are the normal everyday record buyers influenced by radio and TV disc jockeys or automatic coin machines... Rather these are adults, or at least sophisticated and ultra conservative teen-agers, virtually untapped previously potential customers for pop record sales or as audiences for disk jockey programs... This I firmly believe... points to a tremendous but unrecognized buying audience for pop records in our normal attempts to reach what we have referred to as the 'great mass.'²¹³

While it is unlikely that he ever referred to it as a "great mass," Clark connected with his audience and proved an able spokesman. He had a hard time in high school and understood the social isolation many of his young audience experienced everyday. "For the first year and a half [in high school], I literally crept around.... I learned a lot from being self conscious and shy that there are a lot of people around who have the same feeling." Records helped Clark cope with isolation and through his passion for them he constructed an identity that allowed him to reach out to others and eventually to make millions of dollars. Beginning in his early teens he collected records by the hundreds and by 1958 possessed over 15,000. This astonishing total did not even include many of the old 78s he had lost or thrown away when he switched to vinyl 45s and LPs. Clark looked at the growing number of adults watching his show as a positive sign that youth culture was achieving mainstream acceptance. "We are pleased that adults enjoy watching us... but even more, it means that the adult population is beginning to see for itself that the music and dancing of teenagers is good, clean fun."²¹⁴

The television viewers of *Bandstand* did not dance with each other, but participated symbolically by moving with the images on the screen to the beat coming out of the speaker.

²¹³ Public's Choice: Jockey's Feel New Twisters Not Teens," *Billboard*, December 1961, 4.

²¹⁴ Martin Cohen, "Teens are a Time for Fun," *Radio and Television Mirror*, April, 1958, 58

After the twist swept the nation, the “great mass” of dancers rarely embraced, but stayed rooted in place. The postwar dancing experience mirrored the postwar listening experience in that it focused attention on the self while paradoxically functioning as a protection against loneliness. The key component was the record. Clark was a record collector who spun broadcast them over television and encouraged kids to dance to them. The records were readily available to the audience and the fun and camaraderie so evident on the show as easy as a trip to the record store. Sound commodities in the leisure economy provided the key to connecting to others, but it was also understood that recorded sound could be enjoyed and experienced individually

Some sociologists in 1954, following the “Lonely Crowd” argument, combed popular music lyrics for evidence of loneliness and attempted to determine whether lonely young people were turning away from the social pressures of their other-directed lives and to their music for sonic solace. The results were somewhat inconclusive, but left the sociologists to believe that adolescents, given little guidance on how to interact with opposite sex found in the banal lyrics of popular records a language suitable to their stunted desires.²¹⁵ Revisiting the issue in 1966 showed that when rock became the dominant genre, the age of the average popular music listener had fallen to under 18, the sociologists found that the lyrics in popular recordings had shifted from a preoccupation with love to themes (though these still accounted for over 50 percent of all pop songs) to a focus on independence and misunderstanding. The individual ego was in danger of dissolution, according to the sociologists, and was asserting itself against the school or officially sanctioned youth institutions in song lyrics. The young music consumer wanted to be free to join the youth culture that was growing ever more prominent. The archetypal teenager

²¹⁵ *The America Journal of Sociology* devoted its May 1957 issue to “The Use of Leisure” and included two studies of popular music and adolescents: John Johnstone and Elihu Katz, “Youth and Popular Music: A Study in the Sociology of Taste,” 563-568; Donald Horton, “The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs,” 569-578.

did not want to rebel or express repressed sexual yearning, the sociologists maintained, rather, he found youth culture more appealing than the alternative, and in recorded sound discovered a forum in which to live out fantasies of power and peer acceptance.²¹⁶

A more straightforward 1960 analysis of teenage music preferences reported that radio was by far the most common means of listening to music, followed by the phonograph. The report also showed that middle class American youth listened to more music than did their working class counterparts, and were also more likely to listen to music as background for other activities. The listening styles emerging from the Top 40 crowd were thus more connected to middle than to working class culture, and the variety of subculture that was emerging was individualistic, as the Birmingham School would have predicted. The study did not take into account portable radios, but indicates that both groups did most of their listening at home. The jukebox was a distant second, and live performance ranked last. Though little was inferred from these findings (the author speculates on the merits and pitfalls of using pop songs as teaching tools), they show how young people found music to be a private affair, but one that at least symbolically reaffirmed peer group connections.²¹⁷

No More Make-Believe, No More Ballroom: The Liberation of Sound from Performance

Before he began his earnest imitation of Storz's Top 40 format, broadcaster Gordon McClendon was known as "the Old Scotchman," and regionally famous for recreating baseball

²¹⁶ Ronald Burke and Robert Grinder, "Personality-oriented Themes and Listening Patterns in Teen-age Music and Their Relation to Certain Academic and Peer Variables," *The School Review*, Summer 1966, 209.

²¹⁷ Victor Baumann, "Teen-age Music Preferences," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Autumn, 1960, 83.

games on the air from Western Union teletype, a practice that was widespread among independent operators.²¹⁸ A skilled radio announcer could pull off the trick, and audiences would settle into following a pretend game. The likely apocryphal story that Martin Block stumbled into the successful golden age disc jockey show “Make Believe Ballroom,” when a performance was cancelled and the quick-thinking Block, armed only with his records, instructed his audience to pretend there was a ballroom illustrates a similar phenomenon in music listening. Top 40 stations, however, no longer attempted to fool their audience into joining a performance. The new radio did not simulate an event, but rather the ownership of a sound and the various social association with that sound simulated. The stations sold youth, energy, and a safe haven – along with implying what one could do while listening and what the music revealed about oneself. The promotions proved an audience existed not only to advertisers, but also convinced young people they were part of a larger and terrifically exciting cohort.²¹⁹ What was more, these ineffable and transitory qualities were made permanent, easily accessible, and individualized by the limited playlist of the popular hits. To join one needed a set, and if this logic of sound ownership is followed to its logical conclusion, one needed a record player and a room of one’s own.

Sociologist Ken Barnes once described the unique pleasure of turning the key, igniting the engine, and then hearing on the radio a song you loathe. Flipping to another station and then another, until at last you strike gold. The song coming out the speakers is yours and you crank the volume and sing in the safety of your car. That music could be one’s own personal property – or if not actually a possession at least psychically so – demonstrates how listeners have

²¹⁸ Carlson, University of Maryland oral history project, 3.

²¹⁹ Feeling that one was a part of this group, as remembered by Marc Fisher, was an experience on the order of the sublime, Fisher, *Something in the Air*, 75.

internalized the shift of music from social event to thing. Along with self-expression, the Top 40 listener likewise possessed great power, scanning the airwaves and choosing the station that matched her own personal idiom.²²⁰

Three things stand out in Barnes's appraisal of Top 40. First, the music is incidental. One does not get in a car in order to listen to music. Rather the music comes along for a ride, and as Storz realized, is a companion. Second, the experience is private. The public road does not intrude upon the private space of the car. In increasingly compartmentalized lives, Michael Bull has argued that recorded music in cars gives the listener power to domesticate urban, public space with private sound, placing herself at the center. Mobile recorded music "enables consumers to create intimate, manageable, and aestheticized spaces in which they are increasingly able to, and desire to, live." In this interpretation, mobile and private sound is a survival and aesthetic strategy designed to ameliorate the centrifugal forces of urban living.²²¹ These three elements speak to the appeal of radio and recorded sound to the young in the 1950s and beyond.

He may not have realized it, but Storz built upon the intellectual foundation of Theodore Adorno, that erstwhile critic of recorded and popular music. In removing any pretense or pretend from the broadcasting of records, Storz's top 40 stations reveled in the music as pure sound and ultimately as a thing. Top 40 radio liberated the record (at least temporarily) from nostalgia and the "dead" moniker that Adorno said made phonograph albums comparable to photographic ones. Generally pessimistic about the uses of recorded sound and radio, Adorno believed that music as thing was best suited for a form that was repetitious and beat-driven. For

²²⁰ Ken Barnes, "A Fragment of the Imagination: Top 40 Radio," *Facing the Music*, Simon Frith, ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1988," 8-9.

²²¹ Michael Bull, "Thinking about Sound, Proximity, and Distance in Western Experience: The Case of Odysseus's Walkman," *Hearing Cultures*, New York: Berg, 2003, 177.

example, dance songs that could be listened to alone and turned on and off at any point in the middle of the song without losing any of the composition's impact were an appropriate genre.²²²

Dispensing with the magician's act of using radio as a device to fool the listener into thinking she was getting the same thing as a performance, Top 40 provided the space for recording artists and labels to innovate with plastic possibilities of recorded sound. The format – which was always dependent upon “filling a void” and responding to local market conditions, began to fragment in the 1960s. New musical niches and styles emerged – although few were specific to place – as music become more and more identified with self-expression. By the late 1980s, the number of radio formats claiming descent from top 40 was in the dozens, with the term Top 40 itself replaced by the less-than-inspiring “contemporary hits radio.”²²³ Shortly after Storz's death in 1964, the format he created lost its primary place in the youth culture to album oriented rock stations operating on the FM dial, where the rule of record was even more prominent. In the 1970s, Top 40 became a nostalgic radio relic and disc jockey Kasey Kasem's comforting and pleasant “American Top Forty” became a syndicated national hit, recalling an era when forty songs supposedly united a listening audience.²²⁴ Though the format itself was gone, Top 40's basic ideas have only grown stronger in the subsequent decades and continue to structure contemporary radio. Radio, with notable exceptions, remains relentlessly commercial; station group owners invest heavily in market research, and rely almost exclusively on recorded music.

²²² Theodore Adorno, “Curves of the Needle,” translated by Thomas Y. Levin, *October*, Vol. 55 (Winter, 1990), 54. The essay was originally published in 1927.

²²³ Ken Barnes, “A Fragment of the Imagination: Top 40 Radio,” *Facing the Music*, Simon Frith, ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1988, 29-39.

²²⁴ David Hinckley, “The Count of Countdowns: Casey Kasem Reading for the Stars Again in New York,” *New York Daily News*, Thursday, March 26, 1998.

When rising incomes allowed Americans like never before to enjoy the “good life,” in private, the hopes educators and public-minded intellectuals pinned on radio had little chance. In the context of the Cold War, the good life was a nerve-racking blessing. As Storz was taking over the Omaha radio market, the city’s daily newspaper blandly declared that new transistor technology would lead to a push button war and cheaper television sets.²²⁵ Innovations in electronics could not be separated from the conflict with the Soviet Union: 45 rpm innovator RCA received an ever-increasing share of its revenue via defense contracts, and the two thirds of the electronics industry’s growth came as a result of military spending.²²⁶ Anxiety underlay the celebration of individual choice in the marketplace.

The good life could also mean the disintegration of old neighborhoods and the decay of proud cities. Storz’s childhood home on Omaha’s “Gold Coast” had lost its cachet even before he bought KOWH. Bedroom communities, in Omaha’s case the west side of town, mushroomed, leading to sprawling suburban areas covered in concrete, traversable only by car.²²⁷ Highways and cars replaced public transportation and the familiar dreams repackaged from the early days of radio that television’s educational promise was unlimited faded with astonishing speed. The television networks excelled at creating entertainment programs that delivered audiences to advertisers. As with radio, little distinction was made between the public and the consumer.

The notion of a cabal of profiteers subverting radio’s public mission in the 1950s, however, is difficult to sustain because the most commercialized form of American radio, Top

²²⁵ “Push-Button War Nearer,” *Omaha World Herald*, Sept. 20, 1953.

²²⁶ Harold Vatter, *The U. S. Economy in the 1950s: An Economic History*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1963, 167.

²²⁷ For a contemporary critique, see *The Exploding Metropolis*, by the editors of *Fortune*, New York: Doubleday, 1958.

40, began as a local and independent phenomenon, driven by an idiosyncratic visionary. Top 40 had developed against the tide of the industry, which the networks dominated in the early 1950s. Skeptical advertisers needed to be convinced first that teenagers could buy more than bubblegum and that other consumers were actively listening. A common Storz trade advertisement claimed that housewives tuned into Top 40 stations while the kids were at school. Advertisers were not alone in their suspicions of the power of the youth market. Major records labels, including Columbia and the early Warner Brothers Music, downplayed the success of Top 40, which rarely spun records from their extensive catalogs.

Beyond its role as a spokesman for the young, however, Top 40 liberated music from its original context in performance. As a record and only a record, sound floated free, as did Americans in the post-war era, who were becoming increasingly mobile and unshackled from traditional social arrangements. Leaving aside aesthetics or notions of progress, economic or otherwise, music as a thing possessed the potential to isolate listeners. In subsequent decades, Americans bought more and more records that radio had introduced over the air; built sophisticated high fidelity systems, and sought identity and meaning in a commodified world of sound. The aesthetic experience, and surely the sonic one, could be intense, but it could also be lonely.

A short history of the evolution of KOWH following its sale to William F. Buckley in 1957 helps place the format's social ethos in context. Buckley's management changed the call letters to KMEO in 1959, along with the format, dropping Top 40, which was losing out to rival KOIL and its superior facilities. Realizing he had bought an overvalued station and that his preferred classical formula was a market loser, Buckley cut his losses and sold both the AM and FM stations to Starr Broadcasting. By 1967, Starr had moved its focus to the FM dial and

reprogrammed KOWH-FM first to a subscriptions-based format in the belief that, though advertisers might not support a classical music station, wealthy listeners would. Unsuccessful, Starr experimented with the popular country western, but again failed to connect with audiences.²²⁸

In 1970, after months of sometimes tense negotiations, a group of primarily black investors known as Reconciliation Inc. purchased the AM and FM stations. For the first time in Omaha broadcast history, the African American listeners of North Omaha had a station that addressed them directly. Headed by St. Louis pitcher Bob Gibson and professional basketball player Bob Boozer, Reconciliation Inc. immediately changed the station's format.²²⁹ In contrast to the giveaways and promotions that the well-heeled Storz believed the public demanded, Reconciliation Inc. sponsored community events like the three-act play "Black is Beautiful" at the city auditorium. At the event, not unlike a soap opera, junior high and high school students performed while a disc jockey spun records. The "phonograph records came to life," as the students acted out the drama to the sounds blasted over the PA system.²³⁰ Aside from direct involvement in the community life, this KOWH also sponsored relief drives for West African nations, asking their audience to give money rather than the normal radio promotion that promised treasure and a ticket to the mass consumption for a lucky listener.²³¹ KOWH had come a long way.

Storz once observed that, "radio stations are licensed by the FCC to serve 'in the public interest.' Isn't it logical that if we have over 40 percent of the available audience... that we must

²²⁸ "Contract for Sale of KOWH Signed," *Omaha World Herald*, April 11, 1957; "KOWH Out; It's KMEO," *Omaha World Herald*, Dec. 31, 1959; "KOWH-FM Flips Tunes," *Omaha World Herald*, June 21, 1967

²²⁹ "FCC Okays 2 Stations to Negroes," *Omaha World Herald*, Jan. 11, 1970.

²³⁰ "Black Musical Menu Has Funky Chicken Routine," *Omaha World Herald*, May 11, 1970.

²³¹ "B.L.A.C & KOWH Sponsor Marathon," *Omaha Star*, October 31, 1973.

be succeeding in upholding our obligation and commission to the public?”²³² KOWH under Reconciliation Inc. came nowhere near a 40 percent market share. Storz’s public was a different entity than that which the FCC or Reconciliation Inc. addressed. It was a group of independent, unconnected consumers because radio was “a purely voluntary listening habit,” in which individuals chose or chose not to participate.²³³ Storz’s voluntary society connected individuals together through shared commodities, in this case 45 rpm records. In the changing cultural milieu of the 1960s, in which popular, albeit long playing, records assumed an ever more prominent role, Storz’s vision of the American listening public would become entrenched, and, oddly enough, a cause of celebration in the counterculture. In the meantime, however, the musical grab bag of the Top 40 format would be replaced by ever-narrower form of broadcasting, segregating genres, time periods, and races to different frequencies.

²³² “From Crystal Set to 50,000 Watts, Sweet Sound of Success,” *Dundee & West Omaha Sun*, Jan. 29, 1959.

²³³ “Our Respects to Todd Storz,” *Broadcasting/Telecasting*, September 19, 1955, 26.

Chapter Four

Making Records, Making Money, Making Connections: The Rise of the Rock Long Player

What's happened to recorded music?" RCA Victor Vice President George Marek asked the Overseas Press Club in 1961. In a series of subsequent off-the-cuff remarks he answered himself and spoke for an entire industry. Marek called attention to the records of the youth culture that had upset industry assumptions and united young people across class, racial, and even national frontiers. The youth culture and its propensity to purchase millions of records, while making RCA fantastic sums of money, had also made the business environment more daunting and raised troubling questions about the future of the record business and even the future of music. American popular recorded music had conquered the world, peacefully uniting peoples even across the so-called Iron Curtain. "I don't know if this has helped out our international relations, but Elvis (RCA's best-selling musician) has a big following in Russia where they tape his records from the radio and cut records on photo plates." Marek marveled at the power of the record to build community. "We don't get a cent of royalties, but you'll have to admit there's a certain one-worldness about it." Where containment had failed, the music of the young may succeed even ending the Cold War.²³⁴

Though Elvis sales no doubt paid for a good portion of his salary, Marek nonetheless voiced alarm at the sounds under which the world was choosing to unite. "We have a trade paper called *Billboard* and if you look at the best seller charts there in Norway, England and practically any other place, you see the biggest sellers are Paul Anka, Ricky Nelson, and Elvis

²³⁴ "Marek Sees 1 Music World," *Billboard*, September 18, 1961, 2.

Presley is the No. 1 artist everywhere – if you can call him an artist.”²³⁵ Marek revealed a surprising level of embarrassment over the source of his wealth. Elvis was extraordinary, but he was probably not an artist. His records were, first and foremost, a social phenomenon and one that was slightly dubious in terms of its cultural value.

Riding the waves of a rising youth tide, Marek simultaneously rejoiced and balked at the brave new sonic world and its raucous, recorded culture. Like his colleagues at the other major labels, he benefited from and was bewildered by the powerful response of young audiences to rock and roll. He represented an industry-wide ambivalence, common in 1961, which would disappear by the end of the decade. By 1970, youth culture would not only be accepted and celebrated by the recording industry, but its values would permeate the industry itself. This made sense – or at least should have to those selling the records. Recorded music had assumed a central position in the youth culture, first in the form of Top 40 radio and increasingly in the recorded artifact.

The Elvis singles that Russians captured off the air would give way to magnificent rock long-players, serious and seriously expensive-to-produce (and top selling) expressions of the youth culture. The recording industry was essential in producing and distributing youth’s popular music for mass consumption both in the United States and around the globe. It likewise assisted in shaping the contours of the new listening experience, but the industry in turn was shaped by the youth culture. Youth culture would transform the making and selling of records and the industry that emerged in the 1970s a very different entity than before. The story of the 1960s is how the industry began to first take seriously the economic potential of the youth culture and then merge with it. Youth culture first went mainstream in the recording industry.

²³⁵ Marek Sees 1 Music World,” *Billboard*, September 18, 1961, 2.

Rise of the Long Player

The long-playing record proved to be most important product in fostering the industry's relationship to youth culture in the 1960s. Developed by Columbia in 1947, the fifteen-minute per side playing length meant that the long player was primarily thought of as the record for older, more affluent, and more sophisticated listeners. It only began gaining popularity among the young in the 1960s, and this change in the young's consumption habits would lead to a series of record-breaking sales years in the 1960s. By mid-decade, the long-player attained a sacrosanct position in a recording industry that had only a few years before hailed the 45-rpm single as the mysterious and unpredictable route to success. The rise of the LP reconsolidated an industry that the single had threatened to fragment. The big companies possessed the facilities and equipment to meet increasing technical demands, the money to pay the huge sums rock musicians commanded, and, as always, the national reach and administrative structure to better distribute their product. The new listening style was intimately linked to the growth of some of the largest firms in the nation.

The rise of the long player changed the way musicians made music as well. Producing records for the rock audience transformed the recording process. Producers no longer sought merely to capture and document a strong performance but to compose different sounds into a sonic image. Record making became a compositional, rather than a documentary activity in which the producer, musicians, and engineers used tape and multitrack technology to rearrange sounds and songs to create novel sonic images that were often impossible to perform live. This shift not only changed the meaning of musicianship, but it also gave young musicians

unprecedented power and wealth. The focus on creating a stand-alone record encouraged a paradoxical relationship between musician and audience that simultaneously increased the physical distance while at the same time fostering intense intimacy.

Throughout the 1950s, the major labels had been slow to adjust to the growing power of the youth market and its demand for singles and rock and roll music. *Billboard* noted in 1961 that the trend toward more producers and more labels scoring hit records was entrenched.²³⁶ The single-buying youth market awed and worried *Billboard* and the industry, which questioned the rock and roll's longevity.²³⁷ Warner Brothers executive Stan Cornyn explained that his superiors and their counterparts at Columbia became confused and in a dynamic market sought security. Warner Brothers retained a strategy that emphasized an extensive catalog of diverse genres – sold on LP – as the key to success. “Now I think back, it’s odd that so little attention was given to singles and Top 40,” Cornyn wrote. “All these industry hot guys, who’d managed the mightiest labels, treating hit singles like they came nineteenth on some agenda, down near warehouse insurance costs. My bosses, seasoned executives, were just dancing on quicksand.”²³⁸ Innovative and talented individuals at Sun Studios, Atlantic, Motown, and A&M and others profited from the majors’ out-of-date business models and their success at selling to the young single-buying consumers increased the independents’ share of the market into the first years of the 1960s.²³⁹

²³⁶ Bob Rolontz, “Columbia and Victor Firms Place Most Records in the BMW Charmed Top 50,” *Billboard*, December 25, 1961, 4.

²³⁷ “Gradual Shift to ‘Good Music’ Creates Quandary for Pop Labels,” *Billboard*, August 21, 1961, 1; “Juke Box Altering Singles A&R: Col, Decca-Coral, Vassar, UA Gear Singles to Ops” *Billboard*, July 17, 1961, 1; Cap Chart Action Marks Singles Rise, *Billboard*, September 18, 1961, 1.

²³⁸ Stan Cornyn, *Exploding: The Highs, Hits, Hype, Heroes, and Hustlers of the Warner Music Group*, New York: Rolling Stone Press, 2002, 25.

²³⁹ Millard, *America on Record*, 229.

Of the upstart record companies that emerged in the 1960s, A&M remained independent the longest and enjoyed the most success. In 1962 trumpet player Herb Alpert and East Coast record promotion man Jerry Moss combined the first two letters of their surnames to form A&M, and over the next three years transformed the label from a one-hit phenomenon into one of the industry's leaders. Starting out as a novelty act that sold hit singles, the label quickly morphed into one that primarily sold LPs by decades end. Desiring a greater share of the profits than they had received from a minor hit on Dot Records, Alpert and Moss released 45 rpm single, "Lonely Bull" on their own. Using studio overdubs and bullfighting noise to suggest a Hispanic atmosphere, Alpert carefully layered trumpet track over trumpet track to produce a unique, mariachi-like sound that would score many subsequent hits. Following the path blazed by other hustling independent label owners, Alpert shipped the single out of his garage and Moss traveled the country to promote the record to radio station program managers and disc jockeys. Despite the A&M's limitations, "Lonely Bull" sold 700,000 units.

From 1964 to 1965, revenue exploded from \$600,000 to \$7.6 million, and in 1965, Alpert formed a performing band to capitalize on the success of the studio-created Tijuana Brass albums. The touring band became one of the top nightclub attractions in the nation, focusing on college campuses and major metropolitan areas. The label began expanding its administrative structure in 1965, when it hired industry veteran Tommy Lipuma as the Artist and Repertoire chief. Among Lipuma's duties would be listening to and evaluating the tapes from hopeful and sometimes desperately lonely amateurs that flooded the label after the Brass hit the big time.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ "A&M Spreading its Wings," *Billboard*, Oct. 9, 1965, 3.

A year later, the Tijuana Brass topped long playing record sales in the United States, besting even the Beatles.²⁴¹

A&M triumphed in part because of its innovation in the studio and in part because of its understanding of the market and cultural climate. Alpert's Tijuana Brass did not in any conventional sense exist until Alpert formed a performing band in 1965, and like Storz, Alpert identified and sought out an audience ignored by the majors. The band exploited and revitalized what the industry called MOR, or "middle of the road." The MOR product, as A&M conceived it, should not be marketed solely toward older listeners, but rather should adopt some of the trappings of rock to find a middle ground between generations of listeners. "...[T]he group is not so frenzied-and-freaky groovy as to alienate the over-thirty-year-old," *Look* enthused, adding that "the boys in the Brass, while they are not male moppets, are not elderly either."²⁴² The Tijuana Brass would not sell itself to a monolithic youth market, but rather to a subset of that market. Though appearing to bridge the generations by offering music that appealed in both mainstream and youth cultures, the Brass can better be understood as discovering and segmenting an audience in between the two.

A&M's vision of the MOR genre meant that the Tijuana Brass, similar to rock bands, saw the young, or a certain type of young person, as an important element to its audience. In support of the band's 1966 tour, A&M bought advertising in nine university newspapers as well

²⁴¹ Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business: The First Four Hundred Years*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 385; "Top LP Artists of 1966," *Billboard*, Dec. 24, 1966, 20.

²⁴² Betty Rollin, "Small Band, Big Sound, The Tijuana Brass," *Look*, June 14, 1966, 105.

as men's magazines, such as *Playboy* and *Esquire*. It attempted to reach girls reading *Seventeen* along with the young women readers of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*.²⁴³

At least in Lincoln, Nebraska the MOR media blitz paid off. Lincoln's Pershing auditorium sold out, and for the first time in the venue's existence offered standing-room-only tickets to accommodate intense demand.²⁴⁴ The industry had long been aware of the profligate record-buying habits college students but only recently had it begun to pursue college students with great intensity. Jumps in enrolment, like the 1,000 extra students coming to Florida in 1966, encouraged universities to begin booking popular music acts, drawing the attention of *Billboard* and record companies.²⁴⁵ A&M listened closely to its audience, accepting unsolicited tapes, answering fan letters, and as the sixties ended, diversifying its roster beyond MOR to include rock artists. Its responsiveness to a changing market driven by young consumers helped it to develop a strategy that enabled a successful transition from single-producing label to one capable of producing high selling long players.

The quicksand of singles and radio play that temporarily froze the majors and enlivened small companies such as A&M eventually turned solid when rock LPs became items of youth devotion. Even as the singles-based Top 40 radio empire conquered the airwaves with 45-rpms in the 1950s, LP sales flew under the radar, growing at a surprisingly brisk clip. In 1950 LP sales stood at \$189 million, a figure that mushroomed to \$603 million by 1960, partly as a result of the high fidelity phenomenon. Though a single was often necessary to break an album, the industry rediscovered to its delight that greater money lay in selling twelve songs rather than

²⁴³ "Media Schedule," Nov. 16, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁴⁴ "Pershing Tickets Sold Out For Alpert, Tijuana Brass," *Daily Nebraskan*, November 16, 1966.

²⁴⁵ Roger Lifeset, "Music on Campus," *Billboard*, Sept. 10, 1966, 6.

two. After 1965, a majority of A&M's revenue came from the sales of Tijuana Brass long players, rather than singles, and the label swiftly moved to sign album oriented rock acts, including anti-MOR recording figures such as Captain Beefheart and Melvin Van Peebles. "All companies are experimenting," A&M artists and repertoire chief Allan Stanton said at the end of 1968. "You have to come up with the album from left field." To further its LP production capabilities, A&M constructed three new studios.²⁴⁶

For the industry as a whole, in 1968, album sales accounted for 82 percent of record sales, having increased over 16 percent in a year in which singles sales remained flat.²⁴⁷ Singles were becoming less necessary to break an album. Record store clerks reported in 1966 that they no longer trusted Top 40 radio stations to play what young people were actually buying. Instead they relied on requests from the young buyers themselves along with their own experience when deciding what and how many new releases to order.²⁴⁸ To profit from an affluent youth culture, a firm had to listen and cater to it. A new and mysterious network in the 1960s youth culture, operating below Top 40's signal, was connecting the young. As a result, power shifted away from Top 40 program managers and fell directly on musicians, the recording industry, and its marketing machine.

Elektra, which became a significant industry player in the latter half of the 1960s, was another independent record label that benefited from the growth in LP sales vis-à-vis singles. Throughout the 1950s, the label specialized in folk albums, aiming at an older, more educated, and more bohemian audience than Top 40. As the folk fad of the early 1960s spawned a number of big selling artists, such as Peter, Paul, and Mary and the Kingston Tri, president and owner Jac

²⁴⁶ "Two Studios of A&M Roll – 3rd Put in Gear," *Billboard*, Dec. 21, 1968, 4.

²⁴⁷ "Record Industry Hits Billion Dollars," *Rolling Stone*, September 26, 1968, 4.

²⁴⁸ Ray Brack and Paul Zakaras, "Detroit Dealers Play Down Chart Value in Sound-Alike Market," *Billboard*, September 3, 1966, 22.

Holzman attempted to play the Top 40 game for his college audience. Rushing out singles, influencing disc jockeys, and signing and maintaining rock bands (the Lovin' Spoonful was one that got away), proved moderately successful, but he was unable to top the charts. Holzman even tried his hand at running a radio station, but felt overwhelmed and quickly sold his interest in a Hartford, Connecticut station. "So I returned to the core, which was always records."²⁴⁹ Holzman did not return to his folk foundation in Greenwich Village, but reoriented the company toward Los Angeles, where A&M was already achieving great success and where a number of ambitious or desperate musicians would end up.²⁵⁰ Known for its electric rock, not folk, Los Angeles would become the center for the recording industry in the 1960s.

Elektra's first rock record, the Paul Butterfield Blues Band sold well, and the label scored its first big hit with the band Love and its 1965 debut album. In the turbulent business climate of the 1960s, Elektra's growing success provided a model for major labels searching for rules of operation.²⁵¹ Elektra became an industry sensation in 1967, when it recorded and released the first Doors record. Following its rise to the top, Elektra stumbled forward, scoring big hits but as a result finding itself unable to cope with the demands placed on its small administrative structure until the overwhelmed Holzman sold out. That the ramshackle Elektra could serve as a legitimate business model for Warner's, which dominated the industry by the end of the sixties and bought Elektra, demonstrates the degree of uncertainty about how to tap the lucrative but fickle youth record buying market.

²⁴⁹ Jac Holzman and Gavan Dawes, *Follow the Music: The Life and High Times of Elektra Records in the Great Years of American Pop Culture*, Santa Monica, Calif.: First Media, 1998, 148.

²⁵⁰ "Disk, 2 Prod. & 7 Pub. Firms Invade LA," *Billboard*, Dec. 7, 1968, 8.

²⁵¹ Holzman and Dawes, *Follow the Music*, 149.

The strategy, at its essence, was to make long playing records, though not necessarily with cuts designed for Top 40 radio play, allow musicians wide latitude in the recording process, and make extensive use of the technologies available in the studio for the production of novel sounds. The intent, or hope, was that the records the rock musicians wanted to make would be better suited to the tastes of an audience that was rapidly changing.

Youth in the Saddle, in the Studio – The Recording Industry, 1965-69

In pursuit of the mysterious audience, A&M Records screened all unsolicited tapes sent to its Sunset Boulevard offices. None of these tapes ever led to A&M signing a new act, but the practice allowed the label to keep an ear to the ground and maintain a tenuous connection to its largely unseen and unheard audience. Rock and roll patriots, anti-rocking ballad singers, and ex-band leaders all sought out the ears of A&M artist and repertoire man Lipuma. The lack of a counterculture element in the submissions is not surprising considering the MOR audience Alpert and Moss originally coveted. This was a significant market; the top selling singles of 1966 included Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler's backlash hit "Ballad of the Green Beret."²⁵² Lipuma, however, declined each and every submission he received with grace and with what must have seemed like somewhat empty encouragement. A&M legal counsel urged Moss in a series of pointed memos to halt the practice and return all correspondence unopened, but Lipuma and

²⁵² "Top Records of 1966, *Billboard*, Dec. 24, 1966, 34, "Ballad of the Green Berets" was the tenth-best selling single.

apparently Moss and Alpert, believed the listening and, in many cases, a response worth the legal risk. Lipuma ignored all warnings from legal counsel.²⁵³

Holzman had maintained close personal relationships with his folk musicians at Elektra, and this experience would help him navigate the psychedelic terrain of 1960s rock industry. Even the savvy Holzman, however, felt insecure about his ears and taste and maintained a company “freak,” talent scout Danny Fields, on the payroll. His most prominent producer, Paul Rothchild, cultivated the practice of “hanging out” with the rock talent in Los Angeles, a craft that David Geffen would turn into a lucrative art form over at Asylum Records.²⁵⁴ Hanging out and gaining trust required giving concessions to rock musicians over aspects of record production.

Holzman turned over authority in the recording process to his musicians partly because he had trouble understanding his intended audience, partly because he had always allowed a fair degree of artistic autonomy, and partly because rock musicians demanded it. Rock musicians had grown up on 45s and Top 40 radio and approached recording rather than performing as central to their career. When the San Francisco-based Grateful Dead, hardly a studio-bound

²⁵³ Ross Porter to A&M Records, May, 11, 1966; Ray King Hughes to A&M Records, May 11, 1966; Robert Gordon to Jerome Moss, June 28, 1966, Moss writes “I presume that submissions in which we may have some interest would come through legitimate music publishers or other persons in the music industry,” rather than unconnected individuals; Bob Gordon to Carol Moss, Sept. 12, 1966, Gordon reiterates his concern, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁵⁴ In the fall of 1968, Holzman founded the short-lived “Elektric Ranch” on the Feather River in northern California to provide “a recording retreat, a quiet place in the country where musicians can get their heads, their bodies and music together... it frees artists from the urban pressures that have caused them to use their instruments and music as an escape... to permit emancipated music to pass through them and back to the city.” The ultimate musicians/counterculture hang out was even open to acts signed to other labels. The Electric Ranch was supposed to operate as a place where musicians could jam and come to mutual understanding, but was better known for casual nudity, drug use, the development unconventional recording devices, and run-ins with the law; “(sic)Electric Ranch is Established,” *Rolling Stone*, October 12, 1968, 4.

band, signed a-then unprecedented \$10,000 advance with Warner's in 1966, the band insisted on a contract stipulating that they had choice in producer, control over cover art, as well as over song selection. These were rights established and older stars such as Dean Martin had never received.²⁵⁵ Following the Dead signing, fellow San Franciscans, the Jefferson Airplane saw its singles begin to rise on the charts. An industry rush to sign San Francisco bands ensued. During the so-called "Summer of Love" in 1967, confused and excited A&R men threw hundreds of thousands of dollars at the counterculture rock scene, signing most of the major acts. By permitting rock bands to fill up their album sleeves with their own art and endless, self-indulgent acknowledgments, the records labels unwittingly aided the notion that the musicians were speaking directly to their audience, a communications that was essential to the rock and roll myth and the fostering of a community through records.²⁵⁶

As in other aspects, Elektra was at the forefront in changing the recording process. Musicians – now called artists – no longer entered the studio and attempted to capture a good performance aided by recording experts. With the Doors and others, the roles of musicians, producers, and engineers folded into each other and the recording process became a collective creative and technical enterprise with the studio an instrument. Two of those responsible for the shift at the ground level, were engineer Bruce Botnick and producer Rothschild. In recording the Doors, Rothchild recalled his approach as,

I didn't want a Doors record to sound like anybody else's records...if you create your own sound, if you've got something unique, the best thing you can do is to keep it as pure as possible, so that it's not copyable. For example, [guitarist] Robby Krieger was enchanted with the wah-wah pedal, which Jimi Hendrix is associated with. But you could buy that off the shelf, and it immediately made any guitar player sound like any

²⁵⁵ Cornyn, *Exploding*, 71,

²⁵⁶ Commenting on acknowledgments, Conryn said, "To us, this was like some guy at Kellogg getting to thank his mom and teachers on the backs of cereal boxes," *Ibid.*, 115.

other guitar player. Instead I said, “I prohibit you from using off-the-shelf-material. Create it. Invent it.”²⁵⁷

The Doors took to Rothchild’s lessons and the former UCLA film students’ subsequent LPs would take months to produce as they played filmmakers, splicing and overdubbing instrument and vocal recordings. Studio composition allowed for producers, engineers and musicians to record multiple performances, called tracks, and then mix and match them to create the song. Thus the songs that appeared on the record were a result of songwriting, improvisation, careful planning, and happy accidents, all caught on tape. Engineers, producers, and the musicians would then carefully manipulate the captured sounds and tracks in a sometimes-tedious enterprise that could take months to complete. The final process resulting in the master was called the mixdown and did not require the presence of the musicians, though they often insisted on being present.²⁵⁸ Studio composition, unlike song writing, emphasized sound over structure, and unlike performance, did not demand traditional notions of virtuosity from the musicians. Studio technique, which only a few years earlier had meant microphone placement, became a complex technological and collective enterprise.²⁵⁹

Students of the studio credit Les Paul and Mary Ford as the first popular musicians to fully take advantage of tape overdubs and studio echoes in their 1951 hit “How High the Moon,” but this sort of studio composition was not widely practiced, and indeed quite impractical, until the 1960s. The rock producer Phil Spector, and his signature “Wall of Sound” revealed the practice’s commercial and artistic potential, which continued with the Beatles, the Beach Boys,

²⁵⁷ Holzman and Dawes, *Follow the Music*, 167.

²⁵⁸ Albin, *The Poetics of Rock*, 13.

²⁵⁹ The two most complete works on the role of the studio in the production of rock and the changing nature of musicianship in the studio are Zach Albin’s, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001 and Theodore Gracyk’s *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996.

and Jimi Hendrix, among others. Studio composition was never limited to rock, as Alpert's career demonstrates, but for a style born in the studio and distributed on record, it was appropriate that rock musicians were at the forefront of the new techniques.²⁶⁰

Among the independents of the 1950s and early 1960s, tape technology had been crucial to their ability to make cheap hit singles and would continue to be important for rock bands engaged in studio composition. Atlantic, in particular its engineer Tom Dowd, was known for being among the first to invest in multi-tracking technology.²⁶¹ Dowd claimed that Atlantic was promoting 8-track equipment "before people knew what that meant... We were recording the Coasters, Bobby Darin, and Ray Charles on 8-track back in 1957."²⁶² Being ahead of the trends was good to Atlantic and in 1968 the label was scored 23 certified gold records, more than any other record company had ever compiled in a one-year period.²⁶³

Tape technology allowed for the construction of novel sounds and planned spontaneity that simple recording did not. The album increased in importance vis-à-vis the performance, and audiences became accustomed to consuming studio-generated sound that often could never be replicated on stage. Even Avalon ballroom-favorite Jefferson Airplane became enamored with studio composition, frustrating an anxiously waiting *Rolling Stone* when the band spent months recording its second long player.²⁶⁴ Though the changes in recording and the rise of the long player eventually benefited the major labels, they did not initially encourage them.

Studio composition's demands burned out some of its pioneers. The difficulty of working with petulant artists in search of sonic perfection fatigued Bruce Botnick. Despite the

²⁶⁰ Zach Albin, *The Poetics of Rock*, 12-13.

²⁶¹ Ibid., *The Poetics of Rock*, 15.

²⁶² "Studios' Track Race Heads to Computer," *Billboard*, Dec. 28, 1968, 58.

²⁶³ "Atlantic Sales Up 85%; Firm Wins 23 Gold Disks," *Billboard*, Dec. 28, 1968, 3.

²⁶⁴ *Rolling Stone* Nov. 9, 1.

great success he enjoyed as a rock engineer, he left popular music to record exclusively for the film industry. “Only later on did we discover the fun of dragging it out,” he remembered sarcastically. “An album that should have taken two or three weeks to do would take eleven months or longer. I just ran out of enthusiasm.”²⁶⁵ Engineers and studio executives would have preferred a shorter recording session, because of the headaches and the costs involved, respectively. The impetus for change came from the musicians and the young audience.

The requirement of “hanging out” with musicians altered the corporate culture at the studio offices as well. While never IBM, the major labels were not known for retaining the services of company “freaks” or assistants named “Tinkerbell.” “Inside Warner Bros. Records, around 1967, the executive look grew slightly shaggier,” Stan Cornyn explained. “Top executives, those craving entente with their artists, heads of hair were less frequently harvested. Beards sprouted like an epidemic of ragweed.”²⁶⁶ Nehru jackets and sideburns were suddenly de rigueur. Publicist Connie de Nave, so at ease promoting 1950s and early 1960s pop groups, gave up on trying to figure out the LP era. “I stopped making decisions for about two years and relied on my house flower child because she would tell me what was going on in the mainstream – I saw but didn’t understand – and then I would make my judgments on what was going down. This happened at every company.”²⁶⁷

Even the pages of *Billboard* had come not only to grudgingly accept but also to celebrate and adopt (on its own terms) the promise of the counterculture. The industry had been feeling the youthquake’s vibrations in LP sales since at least 1965, and by mid-1967 *Billboard* was

²⁶⁵ Jim Cogan and William Clark, *Temples of Sound: Inside the Great Recording Studios*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003, 52.

²⁶⁶ Cornyn, *Exploding*, 111.

²⁶⁷ Mary Harron, “McRock: Pop as a Commodity,” *Face the Music*, ed. Simon Frith, New York: Pantheon Books, 1988, 184-185.

breaking form in its attempts to report on and explain what before had been rather mundane market trends associated with an age bracket. Gone was all trace of condescension or pretense of objectivity. “Significantly,” an unnamed correspondent wrote about the famous 1967 Monterey International Pops Festival, “it was not the performances on stage which made the greatest impression on most of the veteran observers of the concert and pop music scene: it was the festival concept itself...those willing to accept its philosophies as an alternative to extinction.” The review strayed so far from *Billboard* orthodoxy as to identify some bands, particularly The Mamas and the Papas, as “too popular.”²⁶⁸ Suspicion of the mainstream was now part of the mainstream in the music business. While certainly prospering from the purchasing decisions of the youth culture, industry men did not seem to be disingenuous in their approval of the new community for which it called.

As Jimi Hendrix and Big Brother and the Holding Company climbed the charts, the industry mainstay ran editorials aping the attitude and at times rhetoric found in *Rolling Stone*. “In this holiday season of December 1968,” *Billboard* declared, “love lies bleeding.” In uncharacteristic leaps of illogic, *Billboard* linked racial polarization, the Vietnam War, conflict in the Middle East and Africa, to the decision by a few United States’ department store chains to not sell the Rotary Connection album *Peace*. The Chess Records campaign for the album featured a decrepit Santa Claus and had upset some merchants. “The Cadet ad was not drawn up in a moment of frivolity,” *Billboard* intoned. “It represents concern over the state of humanity. It tells it like it is. To regard Santa today as smiling and happy is at once a cruel and deceptive mockery.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ “Fest a California ‘Dream-In,” *Billboard*, July 8, 1967, 24.

²⁶⁹ “Peace on Earth,” *Billboard*, Dec. 21, 1968, 3.

The magazine also pondered how long a group stuffy, unhip, and old men, also known as the United States Congress, could ignore the social, technological, and economic “revolution” brought about by rock before they updated antiquated copyright and antitrust laws in the industry’s favor.²⁷⁰ Newly groovy and self-righteous executives embraced youth rebellion as Dick Clark’s had earlier embraced 1950s rock and roll, and for much the same reasons. It made money and was endlessly exciting. It also stoked the vanity of executives. What could be more gratifying than to learn that the product one is responsible for making is regarded as a solution to anxiety, alienation, and loneliness? The 1960s recording industry rolled hipness, public service, and profitability together as the youth culture and even the counterculture melded with the corporate culture.²⁷¹

Connecting to an Unseen Audience: Intimacy and the Long Player

The LP’s popularity altered the relationship between audience and performer. Listeners in the late 1960s increasingly encountered musicians alone in their room through records. This made the relationship both distant and intimate in new and exciting ways. Despite the communal values held among the musicians and fans in the Greenwich Village folk music circles, Holzman envisioned the record listener as alone with the expertly crafted record. Lacking visual cues or “agitated fans” to induce a standardized response, the record forced the listener into a more intimate and satisfying relationship with the essence of the musical experience: the sound itself. Audiences at performances perhaps having internalized the practices associated with isolated

²⁷⁰ “Congress Faces R ‘n R – Revolution and Rights,” *Billboard*, Dec. 28, 1968, 1, 4.

²⁷¹ Thomas Frank argues that a counterculture that has historically emphasized individual choice seems to be made for consumer capitalism, “Why Johnny Can’t Dissent,” in *Commodify Your Dissent: Salvos From the Baffler*, New York: W. Norton & Co., 1997.

listening seemed, contrary to the stereotype of rock crowds, increasingly subdued. The young people at Shea Stadium for the final live performance of the Beatles did not scream or storm the stage as they had a year before, but listened to their heroes play “Paperback Writer,” and “Yesterday.”²⁷² Record companies began marketing albums as instruments of individual transcendence and sonic head-trips. “You can hold it in your hands...but...not in your mind,” Cadet Records claimed of the Rotary Connection’s self-titled debut album.²⁷³

Making objects that possessed or were believed to possess the power to directly connect to a listener to an artist and thereby produce an overwhelming experience was no mean feat. Recording was no longer a snapshot of a band in peak performance, but a creative endeavor in which musicians and engineers sculpted and rearranged and manipulated discrete sounds into “sonic images.” The challenge, as historian and former sound engineer Zach Albin has noted, was to create a musical experience on record that the listener would return to, again and again, “to the exact set of expressive gestures – a project that seems to run counter to the very nature of performance.”²⁷⁴ Making good long playing rock records put a premium on the intensity of the isolated listening experience.

Fan letters to Herb Alpert exhibit the power of this experience from the fan’s perspective and his responses the bewilderment of the musician. Before the creation of the Tijuana Brass Fan club in the fall of 1966, Alpert normally responded to fan letters via his secretary with a simple form letter, but some letters merited his personal attention. Fourteen-year-old Kate Eheinberger wrote to “the best trumpeter in the world” explaining, “I’m here all alone with just my ‘Whipped Cream’ album to keep me company (I wish I had all your albums but where’s the

²⁷² “Beatlemania Turns to ‘Beatle-Wania,’” *Billboard*, Sept. 3, 1966, 12.

²⁷³ Advertisement, *Rolling Stone*, March 9, 1968, 5.

²⁷⁴ Zach Albin, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001, 50.

money?)” She explained that she had recently quit piano lessons and dreaded a dull future in which she believed she would most likely be reduced to teaching high school – probably algebra. This tragedy could be averted, however, if she received encouragement from Alpert. She promised him that she would “knuckle down and really try hard” at piano and join a combo similar to, but certainly not on the same exalted level as, the Tijuana Brass. After a good deal of pleading, she concluded, “Please give me this. Let’s drop the subject. Whatever happens, I still love you and your music.”²⁷⁵

The girl found great meaning in her experience with the record, just as Holzman’s ideal demanded, and had established some sort of personal connection with an imagined Alpert. The intense affection for Alpert seems odd both because he was not in any sense a conventional teen idol, and because it was coupled with an equally intense despair. Eheinberger described her life as disappointing and lacking either a more meaningful, two-way connection (the request for “encouragement”) or a band of her own in which she could belong, she feared she would remain alone. Her isolation would trap her both in a traditional gender role as a teacher while keeping her stuck within the youth world of the high school. It would be a life that offered little chance at realizing her potential as an individual or to satisfy her desperate need to belong. Listening to the Tijuana Brass helped relieve some anxiety and loneliness, but her consistent, negative comparisons between her musical abilities to those of her favorite band also made it hard for her to continue to believe that she should be playing music. One finds it difficult to imagine Alpert recorded the upbeat and mildly naughty “Whipped Cream (and other Delights)” with this sort of audience reaction in mind.

²⁷⁵ Kate Eheinberger to Herb Alpert, April 23, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

Letters to mass media figures in the early twentieth century also exhibited a tendency toward intense devotion directed at favored stars. In a review of fan letters to a prewar movie studio, Leo Rosten was impressed by the number who “unburdened their ambitions and unhappiness” on the screen stars, pleading for any sort of acknowledgment or words of reassurance. Other letters made bizarre requests, asking for a “piece of gum you have chewed” or offering to switch places with a star’s dog. Rosten’s data showed that persons under 21 penned over 90 percent of such letters, with almost that same percentage being female.²⁷⁶

Stage actors did not receive this sort of adulation, suggesting that it was not the performance or performer, but the medium generating the intensity. In the main, however, fan culture among prewar American girls served as a socializing experience. Girls decorated rooms and lockers with pictures and drawings of favored stars, saw movies together, and requested and traded photos from the studios. The studios benefited by learning through their mailbags, which stars were marketable and which were not. “Creating their own movie fan culture at home and school,” Kelly Schrum said, “offered teenage girls a pleasurable way to interact with stars, dreams and with each other.”²⁷⁷ The girl writing to Alpert, however, does not fit into this description of teen fandom. Alone and writing to a man who was not a teen idol, Eheinberger represented a new phenomenon.

Alpert’s response indicates that he was genuinely concerned. His name, not his secretary’s, graces the letter, and though he includes the standard fan reply form, he adds an additional paragraph. Urging his young fan to continue her piano playing, Alpert stresses that personal satisfaction and social rewards will follow a life of amateur music making. As for her

²⁷⁶ Leo Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1970, 410-11.

²⁷⁷ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls’ Culture 1920-1945*. New York: MacMillan, 2004, 155, 160.

love of the Tijuana Brass, Alpert mentions that “we will continue to make the kind of music you and your friends will continue to enjoy,” despite the fact that the girl explicitly stated that she listened to “Whipped Cream” alone. It seems Alpert would feel better if she were not alone with his record. Alpert indirectly engaged the girl’s loneliness and her fear that she lacks the talent to pursue a career as a professional musician by insisting that personal, social, and musical satisfaction do not depend on whether one makes records or not.²⁷⁸ The gap between audience and performer allowed for the audience to consume records in ways that were quite different from the ways intended by the musician. As a result of this distance, intense and imagined connections to took hold

Another group of letter writers had come to know Alpert and the Tijuana Brass through the record by joining with the band in imaginary performances. An amateur maraca player named Harold Carranza, detailed not only how he enjoyed accompanying his record player but also revealed his fantasy of joining the actual Tijuana Brass on stage, requesting “the pleasure an honor of playing in you band” for one night. Carranza expressed gratitude to Alpert, crediting the Brass records for helping him to develop a unique maraca shaking technique. Like Eheinberger, Carranza listened alone, but unlike her he also participated. Joining the band meant something far beyond the mere pleasure in music. Carranza wanted Alpert to hear his unique personality that came through in his playing technique. He seemed to understand that his request was most likely a fantasy never to be realized, yet he nonetheless felt obligated to write it down and send it to A&M Records. The desire to let the performer know he was there suggests the resonance of a conventional understanding of the musical experience.

²⁷⁸ Herb Alpert to Kate Eheinberger, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

Alpert responded swiftly, explaining that the Tijuana Brass's schedule was unfortunately too tight for him to add an additional maraca player. Again, Alpert seems to have been touched and confused by the fan's devotion and apparent isolation. Alpert signed off with the salutation he reserved for personal correspondences and thank-you notes, "Ole and Best Wishes."²⁷⁹ The studio-centered popular music that emerged in the 1960s increased the distance between musician and performer yet simultaneously made possible imagined, intimate, and intense connections.

A&M believed that other commodities, beyond records and their sleeves, could be sold to its emotionally charged audience offering another connector to the band. It pursued a strategy, at first haphazard then more streamlined, to market a wide variety of Tijuana Brass and Herb Alpert-themed products. These would allow for listeners to access their vinyl friends in a variety of media. A&M rejected a proposal to create franchise-based "Tijuana Taco Stands," and considered but ultimately declined requests by a tie manufacturer for "Tijuana ties."²⁸⁰ As its success mounted, the company sought professional guidance and contracted with Licensing Corporation of America. LCA suggested a long-range approach to licensing, pointing to its success in licensing James Bond movie tie-ins and its extensive work marketing comic book superheroes-related products as evidence that it could reach the young (and apparently male) audiences A&M had in mind. It cautioned A&M not to flood the market, but to choose only

²⁷⁹ Herb Alpert to Harold Carnazza, July 13, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁸⁰ "Jim McCleod to Herb Alpert," July 25, 1966, McCleod asked if he could create a McDonalds-like drive in for tortillas using the Tijuana Brass name and image; "Carl Richards to Gil Friesen," Collection, May 26, 1966, Richards requests to sell Tijuana Brass-themed ties in the Houston area, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

those products that their audience would accept. “Just as Herb Alpert is world famous for his novel and imaginative music, we would attempt to achieve this same reputation for licensed merchandise,” LCA explained in a letter accompanying the licensing contract. “This means the careful selection of items for a coordinated campaign and a long range sustained merchandising effect.”²⁸¹ If one could not be with the Brass in the flesh, one could live a lifestyle licensed by him nonetheless. A&M, however, would prove to have more success selling records than any accessory.

Promotional activities, like record production, shifted in the 1960s toward youth and what the industry believed were its notions of community and authenticity. In selling the Doors’ Southern California-themed sonic dread and decadence, Elektra leased a billboard on Sunset Boulevard as part of the promotion campaign for their debut LP. It was the first time what would later become a common practice had been done. A&M had earlier considered leasing a Sunset and La Brea billboard in late 1966 for the very different image of the Tijuana Brass. A&M and Elektra were also among of the first companies to advertise in *Rolling Stone* but it was Warner’s that exploited the new magazine with the greatest success.²⁸²

Seeing that Top 40 radio was ignoring its “odder artists” Warner’s began taking out unconventional full-page ads in the underground press. Unlike the ham-fisted efforts of rival Columbia, Warner’s adopted an irreverent, knowing, and informal style. One ad assured potential buyers, “You don’t like our records, send in for a free Baggie of Laurel Canyon dirt,” referring to the famous Los Angeles street where musicians and counterculture types lived and

²⁸¹ “Allan Stone to Robert Gordon,” Aug. 25, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁸² Holzman and Dawes, *Follow the Music*, 127; Memo, “Gil Friesen to Art Garcia,” Nov. 29, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

worked. “Joni Mitchell: 90 percent Virgin,” declared another. Although Mitchell considered the ad offensive, most artists appreciated Cornyn’s humor and candor. So did rock writers. *Rolling Stone’s* Greil Marcus found in Cornyn a partner to pull off an elaborate gag that fooled the trades and many fans into believing that Warner’s had recorded “Cow Pie,” an album by the fictitious Masked Marauders, consisting of rock superheroes Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and George Harrison.²⁸³

The intent and effect of the Warner’s ads was in many ways similar to the promotions pursued by Storz-owned radio stations a decade earlier. The audience was allowed in on a joke, this time played on the recording industry and ignorant or unhip fans. The ads promoted a sense of belonging as well as an implied cultural superiority. The irreverent style did not in any way reduce the power of the record being sold, rather its informality enhanced the connective possibilities the record offered. Paralleling the promise of the music, the ads offered one belonging by “getting” the joke (which was actually quite serious) and even more so by purchasing the album.

Radio follows the Record: FM

As young people turned away from the 45-rpm single and its radio advocate, they discovered a new on-air voice. Frequency Modulation (FM) was instrumental in introducing audiences to recently released rock long players, and the new format would take the place of Top

²⁸³ Stan Cornyn, *Exploding*, 115, 124, the gag worked and Warner’s was besieged with pre-orders for the non-existent album.

40 as youth's voice on the radio dial.²⁸⁴ The stereo LP's hi-fidelity capabilities that altered the listening experience could be better appreciated on high fidelity FM stations. In 1967 the FCC prohibited AM simulcasts on FM sister stations in major markets, and left blank hours of programming. Even before this move, the FM dial had emerged as a significant player. In Fresno, California, FM had penetrated nearly forty percent of all homes, and nearly one fifth of all automobiles sported an FM receiver. Despite being associated with the male high fidelity subculture, more women tuned into FM than did men.²⁸⁵ Following the FCC decision, culturally astute FM station managers filled the programming void with rock and what later came to be known as the freeform or album-oriented rock format, giving the records of the young the high fidelity treatment previously reserved for classical or jazz broadcasts. As with Top 40, many industry leaders greeted the FM with suspicion and maintained what seemed to be working: the Top 40 format. Young listeners, however, tuned in to FM to hear the latest sonic creations being crafted in the nation's most sophisticated studios by the wild and wooly men (along with the occasional woman) of rock and commune with their morphing imagined community.

According to *Rolling Stone*, the self-proclaimed voice of youth rock and roll culture in the late 1960s, Top 40 radio had betrayed its audience, having become: "A Rotting Corpse, Stinking up the Airwaves." Tom Donahue, a pioneering FM freeform disc jockey, attacked AM Top 40 with more virulence in *Rolling Stone* than the magazine usually reserved for President Lyndon Johnson. Top 40 was not merely FM radio's competitor, Donahue maintained, but an enemy of youth culture and of its social and artistic progress. The format once served a purpose, but the mindless jingles, rapid-fire disk jockey patter (light years from Donahue's low key on-air

²⁸⁴ It was not always so – before 1967 FM had been associated with high fidelity enthusiasts and classical music.

²⁸⁵ "37 Percent in Fresno Own FM Sets," *Billboard*, October 2, 1965, 12.

persona), and banal two-minute pop records no longer reflected its now more sophisticated audience. “The music has matured, the audience has matured, but radio has apparently proven to be a retarded child,” Donahue sneered. Out-of-touch Top 40 station executives did not understand the importance of the LP, and even ignored their otherwise keen business acumen, as Donahue related, “if a record is selling that is more than seven inches in diameter, they don’t want to hear it, and most assuredly are not going to play it.”²⁸⁶ Only on the FM dial did disc jockeys respect listeners’ desires and intelligences and recognize the long player’s power and meaning. At Donahue’s KMPX disc jockeys played extended and uninterrupted album cuts, letting the LP speak for itself.

Ironically much of Donahue’s criticism of Top 40 sounds like an updated version of Columbia A&R chief Mitch Miller’s famous 1958 denunciation of rock and roll as a social disease and its listeners as bubble-gum chewing cretins.²⁸⁷ Like Miller, Donahue urged disc jockeys to exhibit taste and avoid programming for the lowest common denominator, which in both following the singles charts. Unlike Miller, however, Donahue was a beneficiary of rock and roll and looked the part. “Big Daddy” Donahue wore the clothes, had the beard, and the long hair (albeit a bit grayer – he was nearly 40) that identified him as countercultural. Though he demanded taste, what he really believed in was the market populism Top 40 had abandoned. “Where once Top-40 radio reflected the taste of its audience,” Donahue proclaimed, “today it attempts to dictate it, and in the process has alienated its once loyal army of listeners.” The problem was not that Top 40 was too commercial, but that it had an out-of-date business model. FM stations playing albums were more responsive to a changing market, and thus accurately

²⁸⁶ Tom Donahue, “A Rotting Corpse, Stinking up the Airwaves,” *Rolling Stone*, November 23, 1967, p. 14-15

²⁸⁷ Cornyn, *Exploding*, 30, Miller rebuked disc jockeys at a 1958 convention (sponsored by Todd Storz) for playing rock and roll records over the air.

reflected the current youth culture. The FM rock stations delivered the long-playing musical commodity listeners desired.²⁸⁸

When KMPX made Donahue's its program manager in 1967, the album or "progressive" rock genre accounted for 1 in 4 of the albums on the *Billboard* charts, but the sometimes long, loud, and weird songs were hard to find on AM radio because the Top 40 format restricted song length and catered to a broad audience.²⁸⁹ In seeking an overlooked audience of LP-buying young people, Donahue behaved as Storz's had nearly two decades earlier, overcoming inferior equipment and improvising as he went along. Donahue possessed an iconoclast's reputation, bolstered by his propensity for following an Elvis Presley record with one of Mozart's. He maintained a vocal, if hazy, anti-establishment position. With Donahue at the helm, KMPX rejected advertising spots for tampons, the armed forces, fast food, gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes. He enjoyed mutually beneficial friendships with many of the San Francisco scene luminaries such as Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead who often dropped by the station to chat on air. As the radio industry woke up to the potential of a new audience that was intensely loyal to its favorite station, it learned that an album-oriented rock format could deliver even larger audiences (and sell ads to whoever wanted to buy) by dropping Donahue's political rhetoric and the Magic Flute.²⁹⁰ This realization and the resulting competition among stations turned freeform into a more traditional format, based on playing extended cuts from rock and roll LPs. Unlike the old Top 40 format, however, freeform never promised nor delivered a dominant

²⁸⁸ Tom Donahue, "A Rotting Corpse, Stinking up the Airwaves," *Rolling Stone*, November 23, 1967, p. 14.

²⁸⁹ In the first week of December in 1968, rock LPs held 8 of the top 10 slots on the *Billboard* Chart; "Top LP's," *Billboard*, December 7, 1968, 76.

²⁹⁰ Marc Fisher, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution that Shaped a Generation*, New York: Random House, 2007, 162, 163, 188.

market share, but offered a loyal segment of the radio listening audience, a community that was in reality a niche market.

Another old Top 40 hand and freeform convert, B. Mitchell Reed lauded the changes that professionalized rock radio by the early 1970s. After the initial experimental period at KMPX with Donahue, Reed was hired by KMET in Los Angeles. At KMET music and program directors, acting in the same capacity as their counterparts at Top 40 stations, watched the charts and identified which albums the disc jockeys were to play over the air. The disc jockey then chose the songs from the selected albums, and added an “oldie” into the mix.²⁹¹ Though KMET remained “left of center” as Reed put it, most rock stations ditched anti-commercial language and practices. After Donahue left KMPX in 1968 following a bitter dispute over salaries and equipment upgrades, he landed at San Francisco’s other FM rock station, KSAN, where he abandoned his earlier programming idiosyncrasies and counterculture-inspired advertising prohibitions.²⁹² The resulting format proved much more restrictive – and much whiter – than Top 40, which might follow a the Doors’ “Light my Fire,” with Sinatra’s “Strangers in the Night,” and cap off the hour with the latest offering from Motown. That sort of eclectic combination would have produced howls of listener protest at rock-only FM outlets, who demanded strict genre purity.

Rolling Stone saw the emerging hip business culture as a welcome sign of a youth-driven cultural shift toward authentic community. Former *Down Beat* columnist, part-time revolutionist, and Franz Fanon reader, Ralph Gleason noted with approval the \$50,000 advances

²⁹¹ Ray Herbeck, Jr., “Reed’s Career Parallels Rock Radio Evolution,” *Billboard*, June 17, 1978, 19.

²⁹² Fischer, *Something in the Air*, 165, 176, 187-188 – Donahue’s position was not anti-commercial, but one that insisted on “authenticity”. He prohibited any Motown records from being played, identifying the label’s popular records as plastic and inauthentic, thus typical of Top 40.

and gold watches the Steve Miller Blues Band and the Quicksilver Messengers received after signing with Capitol. “This is absolutely a break with tradition,” Gleason exulted. Not only were unprecedented advances offered, but the labels also gave rock musicians more power in the studio and greater decision-making concerning the cover art. “This society works on money. Change the way the moneychangers change money and you change society. Rock is doing that.”²⁹³ Though he may have expected different results, Gleason was right.

The triumph of youth at the recording studio and in the recording industry’s corporate offices facilitated the triumph of the major labels. As *Rolling Stone* put a serious face on rock journalism, making the old fan magazines seem infantile, the long-playing record with its stereo sound reduced the 45-rpm record to a plaything. Top 40 radio had no place for the ten minute long rock epics that filled ballrooms in San Francisco. The demand for studio-crafted LPs hit the rhythm and blues labels especially hard and Chess, Imperial, and Modern disappeared as the sixties gave way to the seventies.²⁹⁴ From the perspective of Cornyn at Warner’s, the 1960s preference for long playing records represented a maturation of the rock and roll audience. “Singles started being for teens only... For above-teens, the stereo LP became the top sales configuration... LPs made singles seem like foreplay.” Singles as foreplay represented one type of relationship, long players offered the most intimate clinch. Rhetorically opposed to big business and the establishment, rock musicians’ successful big label records centralized the music industry. The record industry centralized while the youth culture fragmented.

The alleged growing up of the audience grew the bottom line of the major labels and fundamentally reshaped music making and appreciation. The ethos of Top 40 – follow the youth

²⁹³ Ralph Gleason, “Changing with Money Changers,” *Rolling Stone*, Feb. 25, 1968, 9.

²⁹⁴ Jerry Wexler and David Ritz, *Rhythm and Blues: A Life in America*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, 183.

audience – now dominated the recording industry but Top 40 itself had been reduced in significance. Though recording engineers sought presence and a musically intense experience,²⁹⁵ the layers separating musician from audience increased, both in personnel and in technology. Nonetheless, listeners formed deep, personal, and imagined connections to the new sonic products, giving credence to the belief that the records were building an authentic community one that was national or perhaps as Marek wondered in 1961, international.

One World in Sound

In August of 1966 United States Senator Thomas Kuchel (R-Calif.) welcomed the Tijuana Brass to the Senate floor, commending the group's international appeal, its unique style, and its contrast to rock roll or what he termed the "discordant sounds and irregular beats." Two weeks previous, A&M Records sent the Senator a suggested speech for the Brass's DC visit, jumping at the chance to have a member of the United States Congress repeat the company line that A&M records brought people together. In the suggested remarks, A&M wanted Kuchel to emphasize the connective potential of the Tijuana Brass on an international level, perhaps hoping that the Brass could take the place of American abstract painters of the early postwar era, becoming Cold War cultural ambassadors "responsible for making friends for their country."

²⁹⁵ According to producer Tony Visconti, the distinctive and urgent "Sound of Rock" comes from compression of tracks. Sound engineers pack oversized drums and guitars into a narrow dynamic range, providing fullness and concentration, which is often accompanied by a spatial distribution via stereo and the separation of instruments, Albin, *The Poetics of Rock*, 124.

Kuchel delivered a more economical speech that also succeeded in taking the focus off of the record and placing it on the performance.²⁹⁶

Kuchel identified the Brass as a performing band – he mentioned “reproductions” only once – while the suggested remarks stressed the Brass’s talents as a recording outfit on par with the Beatles. The Senator credited the band’s unique “style,” for contributing to the group’s international appeal, while A&M explicitly pointed to the “new and distinctive ‘sound,’” correctly implying that a studio generated signature was responsible for the band’s cross cultural and international appeal. “Think of it,” A&M hoped the Senator would say. “Mr. Alpert and his men have more than 11 million albums in the hands of music lovers, 3 ½ million of which are owned by people outside the 50 States of the Union.” With a host of rock acts signed onto the A&M label, the suggested remarks, unlike the Senator’s ultimate speech, did not attack rock music, but instead drew attention to a more general sense of sadness and despair in the world. It was this global ennui that Tijuana Brass records countered by uniting people of many different backgrounds.²⁹⁷

For Alpert and A&M, the Senator’s welcoming address represented another, albeit small, opportunity for publicity, and it made business sense for the label to draw attention to the records, the sound, and the power of connection in its “joyous” music. Kuchel’s ultimate speech offered a more traditional commendation of a group of successful musicians who happened to

²⁹⁶ Congressional Record – Senate, Aug. 25, 1966, 20563-4; From Ben Irwin to Herb Alpert, attached to suggested remarks by senator Thomas H. Kuchel in the congressional record, Aug. 8, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁹⁷ Congressional Record – Senate, Aug. 25, 1966, 20563-4; From Ben Irwin to Herb Alpert, attached to suggested remarks by senator Thomas H. Kuchel in the congressional record, Aug. 8, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles, 20563-4

hail from his Southern California home. The vision presented by A&M also corresponded to the underground *Rolling Stone's*, and showed that the image of a community built in recorded sound was neither an exclusively underground or countercultural phenomenon, but one that was gaining wide popular acceptance in industry circles beyond. Moss and Alpert had listened to their audience and understood that an effective way to market their products was to present them as combating isolation. In this case, the nations of the world stood in for the individuals in the United States, though, of course for the Brass this meant those in the MOR market segment.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Congressional Record – Senate, Aug. 25, 1966, 20563-4; From Ben Irwin to Herb Alpert, attached to suggested remarks by senator Thomas H. Kuchel in the congressional record, Aug. 8, 1966, A&M Records Collection of business papers, sound recordings, music manuscripts, and memorabilia, 269, Music Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

Chapter Five

Youth Culture of the 1960s, Pre-recorded Dreams of Authentic Connection

Reporting from the San Francisco's 1967 "Summer of Love," Joan Didion revealed to readers of *The Saturday Evening Post* a youth dystopia populated by teenage runaways, rape victims, paranoid radicals, drug dealers, and addicts. A yawning emptiness was at the media-certified flowering (or deflowering) of the 1960s youth movement. "We are seeing the desperate attempt of a handful of pathetically unequipped children to create a community in a social vacuum. Once we had seen these children, we could no longer overlook the vacuum, no longer pretend that the society's atomization could be reversed. This was not a traditional generational rebellion." To Didion, the broken kids who congregated at the nightmare world around Golden Gate Park and the Haight sought meaning, identity, and community, but lacked the necessary rules and language with which to build or even talk about their inchoate desires. The postwar youth culture founded in high school and built around consumption was in fact without a real culture. "These were the children who grew up cut loose from the web of cousins and great-aunts and family doctors and lifelong neighbors... They are less in rebellion against the society than ignorant of it, able only to feed back certain of its most publicized self-doubts, *Vietnam*, *Saran-Wrap*, *diet pills*, *the Bomb*," Didion concluded."²⁹⁹

When *Rolling Stone* published its first issue later that fall of 1967, it echoed Didion's sympathy and concern for lonely and isolated young people, but heralded the rock music blaring

²⁹⁹ Joan Didion, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968, 122,

out of stereos and inside Bay Area ballrooms as “the magic that will set you free.”³⁰⁰ Like Didion, the San Francisco-based magazine expressed unease about the runaways and the growing despair in the streets outside its offices. “The mountains and hills have since become repopulated and the Haight-Ashbury is a burned-out vision that leaves a bad taste with many people because of the plain connection between whatever it was that was called ‘the hippy scene,’” founder Jan Wenner lamented. The disillusioned, older, out-of-town journalists (Didion was 32) and record company executives, Wenner claimed, had nonetheless missed the real story. *Time* magazine and television had created the Summer of Love and the social dysfunction that surrounded it. The real youth community was elsewhere.³⁰¹

In her analysis of the young people she met and who guided her through the obscure rituals of the youth counterculture, Didion conflated the mass media. For her television, records, mimeographed broadsheets, and radio were all equally destructive technologies of self-deception. Rock records, *Rolling Stone*, countered, were unique, an unmediated expression of the young and its authentic voice. According to the magazine, young Americans had been communicating to each other for over a decade via rock music and subverting the atomizing tendencies in the dominant culture. “The function of the music was for people to come together (‘and smile upon you brother’) through the medium of dancing and listening.” In this spirit of sociability young musicians created what Wenner dubbed the “San Francisco Sound.” The Great Society, Jefferson Airplane and other seminal Bay Area bands, “realized the existential nature of rock and roll and have learned to use pure sound itself in a meaningful way.” Having liberated pure sound, rock and roll generated a self-sustaining community that stood in opposition to the

³⁰⁰ Phrase from a Lovin’ Spoonful’s 1965 hit, “Do You Believe in Magic,” repeated by 19-year-old *Rolling Stone* founder Jan Wenner.

³⁰¹ Jan Wenner, “Rock and Roll Music,” *Rolling Stone*, Feb. 10, 1968, 16.

American Way of Life. The youth culture was “one borne of rejection of society,” but founded in “honesty, and closeness to other people and the basic necessities of life...” Drawing upon a rock mythology the magazine itself helped to create and perpetuate, the sound, which was now only extant in live performances in a Western corner of the country, was destined, as Elvis and the Beatles had once been so marked, to make its way into the recording studios and thence to radio stations and record stores around the nation and finally to end up in the private rooms of young people. “From this city,” wrote Wenner, “emerged a life style whose implications are to be felt in every part of America.”³⁰² It was an article of faith at the early *Rolling Stone* that, through the enlightened production of and consumption of rock records, the listener could take the first and most important step in banishing loneliness.

Furthermore, Wenner continued, the children across the country were not, as Didion claimed, hopelessly unequipped to face the world, but were in fact becoming better equipped all the time with that socially integrating and transformative tool: the long playing stereophonic rock record. Record companies, influenced by the demands of young consumers, were selling more and more quality rock records to an increasingly receptive and understanding audience. The intense feelings these records generated, *Rolling Stone* argued, not the resulting fashions blown up in the pages of the national magazines and seen on television, bound the young together. Unlike Didion, who pitied her “groovy” talking young guides, Wenner said that the seemingly inarticulate young rock fans were responding appropriately to rock’s emotional power, it was simply impossible to describe these records’ transcendent effects.³⁰³

³⁰² Jan Wenner, “Rock and Roll Music,” *Rolling Stone*, Feb. 10, 1968, 16.

³⁰³ Jan Wenner, “Musicians Reject the New Political Exploiters,” *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 1968, 22.

1960s Youth Culture and Counterculture

By the late 1960s record consumption provided the young, along with the promise of fun and peer identification, authentic community and self-sufficiency. Drugs, rock concerts, discotheques, and political activism, to say nothing of the petty thuggery in the Haight, was a sideshow to the national community that had first sprouted when Top 40 radio began broadcasting records to the youth market. The kids in the youth market had made their own music, created a culture and a community, and were now selling the music to each other (along with the critical help of a few hip adults) on their own terms. *Rolling Stone* grounded itself in that progressive, regenerative rock history, implicitly identifying the authentic youth community with the youth market that it claimed had been (or was in the process of being) transformed by the connective and liberating power of rock music. The fact that young men were in mortal danger – the war in Vietnam was killing thousands – contributed to the sense of urgency and seriousness of purpose in the late-60s youth culture. As the youth market became more self-aware and self-confident in the 1960s, its musical preferences began to diverge, but its longing for community grew stronger and expressed itself in the demand for and the changing use of records.

Many of the negative attitudes toward youth that developed in the 1950s radically altered in the last years of the 1960s, a change reflected in the aggressive marketing campaigns that celebrated aspects of youth culture that had previously been vilified. As hostility toward the young and the fear of juvenile delinquency dissipated, the national media celebrated sincere, fun-loving and exciting youth. In 1966 *Look Magazine* praised the “Open Generation,” for its idealism and energy. Following the lead of the young and successful ad campaigns, stodgy

Dodge urged consumers to join the “Dodge Rebellion Operation ’67.”³⁰⁴ As a result of such attention, the young became ever more conscious of themselves as a distinct group and of the transparency of such strained attempts to appeal to them. And though Dodge or Pepsi might be regarded by some as inauthentic elements in the youth culture, the records in the stores and the songs on the radio were not. To an even greater degree than in the 1950s, the youth market and culture centered on music consumption.

Didion underscored this connection in her description of an encounter with a young hippy at the San Francisco’s famous Avalon: “The Avalon ballroom projects 126 decibels at 100 feet, but to Chet Helms the sound is just here, like the air, and he talks through it.” Amidst the tumult created by some expert practitioners of the San Francisco sound, Chet explained his cohort’s power, “‘...fifty percent of the population will be under twenty-five...they got twenty billion irresponsible dollars to spend.’”³⁰⁵ As the 1960s ended, the youth market and its cultural artifacts were upheld not only as markers of an authentic community, but also as potent talismans of profitability and cohort economic power.

The traditional teen publications, the underground press, record labels, and FM disc jockeys competed for influence in a youth market that continued to grow and simultaneously fragment. The 1950s and early 1960s youth culture had emphasized belonging and spurred establishment fears of other-directed conformism. The Beach Boys’ 1963 invitation “Let’s go surfing now/everybody’s learning how” welcomed young people to a fun-filled group adventure,

³⁰⁴ Jack Shepard, “‘Are You a Teenager?’ ‘Yeah, I’m Afraid So,’” *Look*, Sept. 20, 1966, 48; Advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*, Nov. 18, 1967, 23; Advertisement, *Daily Nebraskan*, Nov. 18, 1966; For more examples of the shift in advertising in the 1960s and an insightful analysis of the mutually reinforcing relationship between the youth culture and advertising, see Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, especially, 105-130.

³⁰⁵ Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, 89 (I don’t think page # is right).

while “Be True to Your School” encouraged allegiance to the most prominent and conventional youth institution. Three years later, the same band released, *Pet Sounds*, an LP dominated by themes of introspection and sonic weirdness.³⁰⁶ By the late 1960s, an element of the youth culture was receptive to records like *Pet Sounds*, and took a more suspicious approach to fun-filled consumerism. The high school, along with the university, became scenes of struggle between youth and adults and among the young themselves. Seeking authenticity, some began to identify the youth community on the basis of which individuals and groups were excluded. Such efforts ironically repackaged the fear of conformism and other direction from fifties social critics.³⁰⁷

Older rock fans, including the college educated, sought new ways to experience music and define themselves in opposition to mainstream or elements of youth culture.³⁰⁸ A larger proportion of high school students were enrolling in universities and colleges. “Higher” education became “postsecondary,” in the 1960s, signaling its connection to high school. The universities contained segmented youth cultures both similar and different from their high school counterparts. Total enrolment enrollment for American colleges and universities more than

³⁰⁶ The Beach Boys, “Surfin’ Safari,” “Be True to Your School,” in *The Very Best of the Beach Boys*, Capitol, 2003; The Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds*, Capitol, 1996.

³⁰⁷ For a full discussion on the exclusive nature of rock and youth subcultures in the 1960s and 1970s, see Simon Frith, “‘The Magic That Can Set You Free:’ The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 1, 1981, and Lawrence Grossberg, “Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 4, 1984.

³⁰⁸ Youth in the United States *was* older. Between 1960 and 1970 the percentage of children under 14 of the total population fell slightly from just under 31 percent of the population to just over 28 percent, while those between 15 and 24 rose from 13.6 percent to 17.8 percent, *The Statistical History of the United State,: From Colonial Times to the Present*, New York: Basic Books, 1976. 10.

doubled from 3.6 million to 7.9 million between 1960 and 1970.³⁰⁹ For the older young, the pillars of 1950s youth culture, including Top 40 radio, were increasingly identified as inauthentic, childish, or manipulative. The underground press of the late 1960s sought to identify and separate authentic expressions of youth culture, particularly in regard to music, from the media-produced counterfeit. These publications threw up a divide between pop and rock music relegating the former to bubblegum and the latter to serious art. In the ongoing quest to define an authentic music and by association, authentic community the “movement” itself appeared suspect, as did any sort of political activism.

The lone hold out at the center of the youth culture was the record. Rock critics and fans might disagree on which records were essential, but they all agreed on the necessity of buying and listening to records. Long playing rock records offered the opportunity for connection but even here great caution had to be exercised, as the wrong records, “More of the Monkees,” say, could make one a laughingstock or worse: a poser incapable of making real connections. A problem long associated with adolescence, belonging, was by the late 1960s hopelessly intertwined with music consumption. And underneath the promises of a new community lay an equally compelling narrative of frustration, cooption, and alienation.

Through music consumption, the young could seek connection in the authentic youth community or stand alone as hardened but self-sufficient individuals.³¹⁰ Fans may have not felt they had to make a choice between community and self, seeking both of these contradictory goals in rock records. As Wenner explained in 1968, “Rock and roll is the only way in which the

³⁰⁹ John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, 260, 261.

³¹⁰ Peter Wicke, *Rock Music, Culture Aesthetics, and Sociology*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 31.

vast but formless power of youth is structured, the only way in which it can be defined or inspected. The style and meaning of it has caught the imagination, the financial power and the spiritual interest of millions of young people.”³¹¹ To transcend the phoniness and isolation of postwar society and make the center hold, *Rolling Stone* exhorted its readers to go turn inward and discover meaning and community between the grooves of rock records.

Evangelists of the Long-Player: *Rolling Stone* and FM rock radio

The name of [the magazine] is *Rolling Stone*, which comes from an old saying: ‘A rolling stone gathers no moss.’ Muddy Waters used the name for a song he wrote; The Rolling Stones took their name from Muddy’s song, and ‘Like a Rolling Stone’ was the title of Bob Dylan’s first rock and roll record.”³¹²

In 1967 *Rolling Stone* located its origin as the mouthpiece of an authentic self-aware youth culture within rock records and attempted to define the nature and goals of the movement it led that would revolutionize the country. The magazine’s manifesto and subsequent grandiose rock histories and interviews were, when at their most effective, presented along with an ironic informality and self-deprecating sense of humor. *Rolling Stone* maintained and expanded upon the sensibility of Top 40 radio, adding a high sense of purpose, an ironic edge, and an obsession with authenticity. In the changing youth culture, *Rolling Stone* defined the its proper attitude and rituals. Though based in San Francisco, the magazine’s writers kept their eyes on the larger, national youth culture and focused on radio, politics, and, more than anything else, rock records.

Rolling Stone’s treatment of rock and youth culture touched a chord with readers, many of who responded with enthusiasm. Buyers of popular music fan magazines found *Rolling*

³¹¹ Jan Wenner, “Musicians Reject New Political Exploiters,” *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 1968, 22.

³¹² Jan Wenner, *Rolling Stone*, November 1967.

Stone's serious approach to rock to be revelation. "But *Rolling Stone* tells it straight out without all the garbage like what groups love spaghetti," Andrea Bronstein wrote in to tell the magazine, adding that she planned to write a report about the magazine for school.³¹³ Here was a publication for the young that did not condescend, such as *Seventeen*, or publish trivialities, such as *Song Hits*. Youth, in *Rolling Stone*, was neither empty fun nor an awkward stage to be exited, but a right-minded attitude to be cultivated and celebrated. Not only the readers of teen magazines, but also older ones who read the critical jazz reviews in *Down Beat* magazine were drawn to *Rolling Stone*.³¹⁴ A new audience existed, and like Top 40 fifteen years before, found a thrill in being addressed for the first time.

From inside the record and radio industries, came additional praise for the new magazine's ambition, artistic insight, and, above all, its "honesty." Stax/Volt, offered its general approval, while Atlantic's Wexler kept up a running correspondence with the magazine. Radio disc jockey Bruce Hathaway of KTSA in San Antonio wrote *Rolling Stone*, "I have mentioned on my afternoon radio show, about this groovy thing, and I have received several requests as to how they can receive the paper."³¹⁵ From the beginning, *Rolling Stone* captured the eyes of an industry unsure about the direction of the market, but that had a gut feeling that the "flower children" might know the way to bigger hits. Originally filled with ads bought by independent record labels, the majors quickly caught on and began buying up space.

Along with its advocacy of the powers of the rock record, *Rolling Stone* brought segmentation to the youth market. The same year that it appeared more traditional teen publications, *Tiger Beat* and *Teen Beat*, also hit the market, showing that the 1950s youth

³¹³ Correspondence, *Rolling Stone*, Nov. 23, 1967, 2.

³¹⁴ Correspondence, *Rolling Stone*, Feb. 24, 1968, 2.

³¹⁵ Correspondence, *Rolling Stone*, Nov. 23, 1967, 2.

magazine formula had not vanished after the Beatles became hippies and released *Sgt. Peppers' Lonely Hearts Club Band*. *Rolling Stone*, though it at times spoke as if the youth were one entity, claimed the artistic and moral high ground and consistently attacked what it saw as the manipulative mass media. *Rolling Stone's* very existence, however, was evidence of a fragmenting of the youth market and culture. Indeed, a recurring element of its record reviews and general editorializing finds its highest sense of purpose in identifying those who are not really part of the ever-dwindling authentic youth culture.

In its early issues, *Rolling Stone* identified FM rock radio as the new broadcast voice of the young. *Rolling Stone* watched with a degree of optimism the rise of the freeform format, giving its readers a city-by-city run-down of its spread, while expressing disgust at the state of affairs on the AM dial. When the spoken-word "Letter to my Teenage Son," an anti-anti-war manifesto read by a middle-aged Wisconsin businessman became the pick hit at many Top 40 stations, *Rolling Stone* saw it as the most audible example of Top 40s decay. Backed by the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the dour father explained that if his son burned his draft card, he stood to disinherit himself (though his mother, being a woman, would probably continue to acknowledge him as her own). More than angry or afraid, *Rolling Stone* was amused by the single's success on Top 40, and implied that "Letter to a Teenage Son" might yet appear on an FM station, but only as a good joke.³¹⁶ FM was a legitimate medium because, unlike Top 40, it broadcast LPs, and "The distinction between Top 40 and underground or 'schlock rock' vs.

³¹⁶ "USA's Hottest New 45 RPM: 'Letter to a Teenage Son,'" *Rolling Stone*, Nov. 23, 1967, 8.

‘good rock,’” Michael Ferrandino wrote in a celebratory essay, “is understood by most members of the youth culture...”³¹⁷

Though it was no “rotting corpse,” FM did not always meet *Rolling Stone*’s high expectations. From its first issue, when freeform was still a San Francisco and New York underground phenomenon, *Rolling Stone* gloomily predicted the favored format’s imminent demise.³¹⁸ They had some evidence of an approaching fall before the format even broke the big time. Disk jockeys battled with station programmers at flagship freeform stations in New York, and even at KMPX, Tom Donahue’s pioneering San Francisco station, a five-week long strike crippled the rock beacon and ultimately led to Donahue’s ouster and subsequent resurfacing at KSAN.³¹⁹ Some listeners quickly tired of the freeform’s eclecticism and disc jockey control. One *Rolling Stone* reader complained that too often the format was, “a half-assed, pseudo-intellectual amalgamation of classical and rock music.”³²⁰ Disagreements, more intense than earlier disputes over who was the “King of the Baritones,” divided the late 1960s youth culture.

Rolling Stone and its readers faced radio, separated between pop on Top 40 and rock-only on FM, with ambivalence. Radio no longer presented itself as the medium through which reconnection to the authentic youth community were possible. Perhaps radio never could provide this. Even though FM rock radio stations attempted to speak directly to their audience through the LP, they still had to cast a wide net, which inevitably diluted the broadcasts power.

³¹⁷ Michael Ferrandino, “Rock Culture and the Development of Social Consciousness,” in *Side-Saddle on the Golden Calf: Social Structure and Popular Culture in America*, George H. Lewis, ed. Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1972, 288.

³¹⁸ “Tom Rounds Quits KFRC,” *Rolling Stone*, Nov. 9, 1967, 1.

³¹⁹ “Rock Radio Grows Up,” *Rolling Stone*, April 6, 1968, 6; “Pop Goes LA Radio – Again,” *Rolling Stone*, Feb. 24, 1968, 8; Bob McClay, “Murray the K on WOR-FM ‘They Screwed it Up,’” *Rolling Stone*, Nov. 9, 1967, 10; “KMPX Strikers Fired, Then Charged with Conspiracy; FCC May Investigate,” *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 1968, 1, *Rolling Stone* provided extensive coverage of the months-long strike at KMPX.

³²⁰ Correspondence, *Rolling Stone*, Nov. 23, 1967, 2.

Further, in order to fully take advantage of the modern listening experience, one should be in control of the music machines. Through its record reviews and editorials, *Rolling Stone* urged its readers to bypass mediation and go directly to the record. If the fractious writers at *Rolling Stone* agreed on one thing, it was that the 1960s individual needed records.

For the new batch of serious rock critics, such as John Landau, rock records represented a technological means to intimate reconnection without any mediation, “[rock] is at its best when it is used to explore the experience of the musician and the listener, when it seeks to entertain as well as provoke, when it realizes that rock is not primarily poetry or art, but something much more direct and immediate than either.” Rock was “simple body music” on record that bound its practitioners to its fans through visceral and authentic emotions and not through performance rituals. The great rock guitarist and performer Jimi Hendrix found greater acceptance in rock press reviews, which often attacked his stage show as too contrived, only after journalists discovered that Hendrix spent hours in the studio perfecting novel sounds a-la the Beatles and Brian Wilson.³²¹ Rock records represented an authentic folk culture of the affect – one that united the young or otherwise marginalized.³²² Listeners had to beware of attitudinizing rockers and their histrionic performances, Landau cited the Doors’ theatrical Jim Morrison as a prime example. These performers, unwittingly or not, created greater distance between listener and musician and thus betrayed the rock record’s connective power. Landau did not say it, but one

³²¹ Lauren Oakley, “Voodoo Child: Jimi Hendrix and the Politics of Race in the Sixties,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds. New York; Routledge, 2002, 213.

³²² Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock*, Oxford University Press, 1972; Belz argued that rock and roll was a music that came into existence through records but was nonetheless a folk art for, 2-13, 45.

can assume he would find a Doors record preferable to a face-to-face encounter with the Lizard King.³²³

The Ideology of Rock: Alienation, Reconnection, and Phonies

Having dealt with lonely listener fan mail during their phenomenal growth in the 1960s, A&M Records developed a *Rolling Stone* marketing strategy that identified its products as unmediated connectors. A&M promoted the 1968 Phil Ochs album, “Tape from California,” with a campaign featuring the folk musician’s personal postcard to his audience. Appearing as a hand-written a poem, accompanied by a photograph of a smiling Ochs relaxing on a deck chair, the text reads “Hi, thought I’d drop you a line/from the beautifulpeople coast,” meaning points west between San Francisco to Los Angeles. Ochs references the National Liberation Front and Che Guevara before hitting his audience with a pointed attack. “They’re not afraid they’re not alone/(you are afraid, you are alone)/Can it be the Way of Liberation/has finally come home?”

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Liberation or not, A&M offered the concerned but informal Ochs and his “Tape from California” as a suitable remedy for isolation by putting the listener in touch with an artist who understood and could sympathize, and hopefully, could help the listener transcend their current situation. The title of the album and places Ochs mentions similarly transports the listener to the “beautifulpeople” coast without having to go to the trouble of actually roughing it on the Haight. Though perhaps such a bold move as joining the NLF may have also ended this debilitating fear

³²³ John Landau, “What’s Wrong with Rock Art,” *Rolling Stone*, July 20, 1968, 19.

³²⁴ Advertisement, *Rolling Stone*, July 20, 1968, 7.

and isolation, one suspects, this was not an option available to most *Rolling Stone* readers. Purchasing the Ochs album would have been an acceptable alternative.³²⁵

Peter Wicke has argued that the notion of a direct connection between fan and rock musician stands as an important, but ultimately deceptive, element of what he terms the “ideology of rock.” Rock critics, desiring serious artists worthy of their attention, and record companies looking to create stars, share much of the responsibility for aiding and abetting the spread of this ideology, but fans drove the phenomenon as well. Records, Wicke emphasizes, were produced through industrial processes with no audience participation, in which musicians, producers, and engineers at best guessed at audience response, perhaps aided by crude statistical data. Rock musicians, especially after signing monies and recording contracts ballooned in the 1960s, lived very different lives than most of their fans. The connection between them was incomplete and mutual understanding limited, but Wicke suggests that these shortcomings sometimes made the records more meaningful to the alienated audiences.³²⁶

Despite its position as the ideologue of rock, *Rolling Stone* exhibited a surprising level of pessimism concerning the fate of the “movement,” or the ultimate fate of the youth culture and the political goals of the New Left. Underneath utopian visions lurked a suspicion that the youth culture’s center was weak, and that reconnection – even through rock records – was more fantasy and reality. The pessimism and paranoia concerning inauthentic expression of youth culture, whether by posers or charlatans, filled the record reviews and endless recapitulations of rock history of the early *Rolling Stone*. Dread was a new and disturbing element *Rolling Stone* inserted into the world of youth publications and was wholly absent from the teen periodicals of the 1950s and early 1960s. At its darkest *Rolling Stone* saw an international youth movement in

³²⁵ Ibid, 7.

³²⁶ Wicke, *Rock Music*, 92.

Didion-esque terms, a giant social centrifuge in which, “the rest of the world, pre-Chicago, pre-Prague, pre-lots, of things once almost reinable, will go spinning off God knows where,” because “youth, with only its age and its music in common, will probably continue to lack unity...”³²⁷

Perhaps contributing to the creeping malaise, *Rolling Stone*'s coverage of the record sales differed only slightly from similar treatment in *Cash Box* or *Billboard*. The reports of million selling LPs and letters wishing for a favored band to “make it in a big way,” exemplified the underground magazine's uncomplicated view of the industry and mass consumption.³²⁸ Both rock musicians and their late 1960s chroniclers felt that as long as rock records made it out to the public, it mattered little where they came from, how they were produced, or what entities profited from their sale.³²⁹ Thus the *Rolling Stone* columnist Ralph Gleason could look at Steve Miller Bands' gold watches, gifts from Capitol Records, with approval. Mary Harron attributes this pro-commercial attitude to youthful naiveté, but *Rolling Stone* exhibited a keen critical eye in debunking the political opportunism of media-anointed movement leaders and also in identifying the commercial origins of youth culture in Top 40 radio. More often than not, *Rolling Stone* depicted hippies as an amusing mass media creation, a product of hyperventilating national media that enterprising hacks from Timothy Leary to Jerry Rubin sought to exploit, while labeling Top 40 a huckster job that had unintended positive consequences for the

³²⁷ Herb Williamson, “In Their Zealous Search for Youth Delegates Were Beaten and Ignored,” *Rolling Stone*, September 28, 1968, 10.

³²⁸ “Beatles' Record-Busting LP May Be Biggest of All Time,” *Rolling Stone*, Dec. 21, 1968, 1, 4; “Record Industry Hits Stride of Billion Dollars,” *Rolling Stone*, September, 28, 1968, 4; Correspondence, *Rolling Stone*, July 6, 1968, 2.

³²⁹ Harron, “McRock,” in *Face the Music*, ed. Simon Frith, 1988, 191.

young.³³⁰ *Rolling Stone* gave some credence to the notion that the youth culture rebels did not exist as anything more than the sum fears or alternately hopes of the nation.

Rolling Stone mocked those – in radio, media, and the entertainment industry – who approached the youth culture as if it were solely a market, defined by hair length, open toed shoes, or Nehru jackets. A review of 1968 rock musical *Hair*, declared, “They look like the hippies we read about in *Time* magazine and they do, or claim to do all the dirty things that *Time* magazine hints such people do.”³³¹ The hippie “lifestyle” as understood by most of the country, according to *Rolling Stone*, contained no deeper meaning than wearing pink and black had in the 1950s. It was a consumer choice, a lifestyle not a legitimate identity, collective or individual. From its perch in San Francisco, *Rolling Stone* cast doubt on the entire movement, and expressed gratitude that the “Summer of Love” had come to a conclusion. “The hippies are still with us,” Gleason complained in 1968. “They are not dead, they’ve only moved a bit. What is now clogging the streets in New York and Boston and Berkeley and Los Angeles is the second and third generation mass media, mass made, cadre.”³³² The millions of the children in the media’s thrall were not accessing the rock record directly and thus for them authentic community had been tragically reduced to a lifestyle that could be mass-produced and mass consumed.

The quality of recordings and playback equipment thus became more than a mere technical or even aesthetic matter, but one fraught with social, cultural, and even spiritual import. In 1967 many labels followed Mercury’s lead in remastering monophonic recordings as “stereo-compatible.” After listening to the product, *Rolling Stone* warned its readers that the rush to

³³⁰ Tom Phillips, “Rock Musicals: The Hippies are from Time Magazine” *Rolling Stone*, July 20, 1968, 8; Jan Wenner, “Musicians Reject New Political Exploiters,” *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 1968, 1, 22.

³³¹ Tom Phillips, “Rock Musicals: The Hippies are from Time Magazine” *Rolling Stone*, July 20, 1968, 8.

³³² Ralph Gleason, “Deathwish of the Hippie Ethic,” *Rolling Stone*, Aug. 24, 1968, 10.

eliminate monophonic records resulted not in the “infinite advantages” of stereo sound, but in poor quality hybrids possessing neither the fidelity of stereo or the charm of the old mono. The industry had the capabilities to remaster their catalogs in stereo, but they were cutting technical corners.³³³ Expressing hope that that the Federal Trade Commission and the Record Industry Association of America would prohibit “phony stereo,” *Rolling Stone* exhibited a rare example of faith in government and industry to fix a major problem, one that could potentially result in a sort of musical false consciousness.³³⁴

A letter interpreting the Beatles’ inscrutable lyrics for “I am the Walrus,” is a typical example of the sort of experience on found in rock records. The words presented the effects of “the bombardment of the world on the individual,” who nonetheless continued to seek transcendence. The Lennon lyric, “I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together,” represented the global urging for “oneness,” the reader concluded. “We can change the station,” he enthused, but “we soon learn that music is really part of the one.”³³⁵ Consumer choice in radio listening and in the record store were essential in this quest for reintegration. In later years this sort of letter would have been a New Age howler, but the fan’s yearning for reconnection and belief that it was possible through rock records was well withing the ethos of the early *Rolling Stone*.

Rolling Stone’s attitude toward new left politics and its rather different promises for oneness was suspicious and hostile. The magazine devoted considerable coverage to the 1968

³³³ *Rolling Stone* was not the only organization concerned about stereo compatible records, Atlantic refused to commit to a production commitment for stereo compatible records because it believed most radio stations’ and consumers’ present equipment could not realize the benefits of compatible records, *Billboard*, Dec. 14, 1968, 3.

³³⁴ Bob McClay, “Industry’s All-Stereo Push Puts the Needle in the Consumer Instead of In-between the Grooves,” *Rolling Stone*, June 6, 1968.

³³⁵ Correspondence, *Rolling Stone*, Feb. 10, 1968, 2.

Democratic Convention in Chicago, where Youth International Party leader Jerry Rubin had invited a number of popular rock and roll bands to play in protest to the Democrats' failure to nominate anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy and to hopefully win media free coverage of New Left politics. The attempt to draft rock and roll into Rubin's political agenda outraged Wenner and *Rolling Stone*. The convention, *Rolling Stone* maintained, was not the place to enact substantive change and Rubin was not the man to lead the young. Politics, whether new left or not, was not up to the task of bringing about "oneness." *Rolling Stone* displayed the same sort of cynicism toward the growing popularity of long hair and Broadway hippy musicals. Politics was equally phony, yet another confidence trick played on the young.

Chicago, for *Rolling Stone*, represented a microcosm of the United States, full of damaged and lonely individuals, "... home of a million pieces that don't fit, can't fit, and never will fit."³³⁶ The lonely yet energetic youth, however, could be assembled into a "rock and roll army" that would easily overwhelm the tired and lifeless forces of reaction, the "paunching 40-year-old men of responsibility" in a generational rout.³³⁷ The real danger against whom this potential host should unite against, however, was lurking close at hand and was to be found neither in the overweight and bitter middle aged, or in the cops.

"There is an enemy," an anonymous correspondent in Chicago warned, "but it's not Hubert Humphrey. And this, in a nutshell, is the 'new' left."³³⁸ The movement was a "self-indulgent farce," a "pointless exercise of campus politics in a grownup world" that had divided the young, appealed to the crudest mass media stereotypes, and thereby made its youthful adherents guilty of all the faults of the regime they opposed. Humphrey, Nixon, and the other

³³⁶ Herb Williamson, "In Their Zealous Search For Youth Delegates Were Beaten and Ignored," *Rolling Stone*, Sept. 28, 1968, 10.

³³⁷ "Everybody's Chicago Blues," *Rolling Stone*, September 28, 1968, 10.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, 10.

would-be leaders had no power over the youth because they had never really listened, at least not by choice, to a rock record. More disgusting therefore was the betrayal of the New Left. By virtue of its youth, these “new political exploiters: could successfully co-opt the movement and turn it into something sterile and ultimately oppressive.

The Yippie! Party’s “grasping itself the potent charm of the music of the young” was a dangerous gambit but one ultimately doomed to failure. Making himself a media figure, Rubin had successfully contributed to the perverting youth culture, turning it into a superficial political exercise whose members were connected only by their long hair and anti-war views. Rubin, however, was deaf to the profound spiritual mission and affective connections latent in rock music. His attempt to co-opt its form, by bringing the Fugs, Judy Collins, the MC5, Country Joe and the Fish, Phil Ochs, and Timothy Leary to Chicago was pure fakery. The choice of marginal rock musicians and an attention-hungry LSD guru showed Rubin did not truly understand rock and roll. “Rubin has also invited the Monkees,” Wenner wrote, only needing to mention the name of that television-created rock band to convict Rubin. “That is where he is at.” Such a sin was impermissible.³³⁹

The Monkees notwithstanding, *Rolling Stone* maintained that rock had liberated its listeners bringing the music of African Americans into the homes of middle class whites, breaking down a whole host of artificial barriers and connecting formerly alienated individuals and groups of the postwar era. “It is indeed so powerful and full of potential as all that, and more,” Wenner rhapsodized. “It has its own unique meaning, it’s own unique style, and it’s own unique morality... it is slowly taking an actionable form.” This form, however, could not be organized like any other political movement, because “...politics, even ‘new left’ politics... is,

³³⁹ Jan Wenner, “Musicians Reject New Political Exploiters,” *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 1968, 22.

after all, still politics.”³⁴⁰ Nowhere does he give any indication that such rock and roll reform could exist in any way other than the most obvious: a trip to the local record store followed by some time alone in one’s room.

Rolling Stone’s vision of social renewal hinged on individual choices made in the music marketplace. Any kind of organizing activity came under suspicion not only for being led by potential tyrants, but also because organizations by their nature produced other-directed conformism. Rock record consumption and listening, on the other hand, put the focus on the individual. “The real revolution is achieved by the individual,” Gleason noted, agreeing with an earlier assessment by rock musician Frank Zappa.³⁴¹ *Rolling Stone* reconciled the contradiction between its individualism and its desire for authentic community by appealing to the deeply felt – yet impossible to articulate – emotions inscribed in records of Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead, and the Beatles. This transcendence bridged the divide between individual and community and could only be accessed through the records, by the isolated listener who reconnected through an affective alliance with other listeners.³⁴² The rock community as defined by the underground press in the 1960s, referred “not to an institution, to a set of people, but to a sensation.”³⁴³ As with the Summer of Love, *Rolling Stone* found the events in Chicago had little to do with the national community they sought because they focused on out-of-date face-to-face communities.

Countercultural Rituals and Collective Loneliness

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

³⁴¹ Ralph Gleason, “So Revolution is Commercial,” *Rolling Stone*, Dec. 21, 1968, 20.

³⁴² The term affective alliances comes from Lawrence Grossberg “Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 4 1984, 228. Grossberg maintains that rock communities empower their listeners through both affective alliances and “encapsulation,” which marks them out from other subcultures and from mainstream society.

³⁴³ Frith, “The Magic That Can Set You Free,” 164.

According to its sympathetic documenter Theodore Roszak, a small but highly visible segment of the young were at the end of the 1960s articulating the most thorough critique of the American Way of Life, and as such it offered the only avenue through which a destructive individualism and a genocidal international policy could be transcended. The young men and women called hippies, Roszak maintained, were in reality a counterculture whose everyday life and holistic worldview were revolutionary appeals. He found hope for modern society in the counterculture's embrace of communal values, its exuberant informality, and its liberated sexuality. Nonetheless, Roszak was ill at ease with the central values, rituals, and artifacts of the youth counterculture, from anti-intellectualism, drug use, and even rock records.

While one cannot avoid being impressed with the innovation and dazzling sophistication of the best pop music, I fear I tend to find much of it too brutally loud and/or too electronically gimmicked up. I am not particularly in favor of turning musicianship and the human voice into the raw material of acoustical engineering. I also feel that the pop music scene lends itself to a great deal of commercial sensationalizing: the heated search for startling new tricks and shocks.³⁴⁴

The LP's overwhelming loudness and studio crafted "dazzling sophistication" along with rock's commercial viability were the very elements that made rock records the central artifact of the counterculture. "...[L]istened to at home at top volume," critic Robert Rosenstone noted, "the music drowns down the individual in waves of sound... Throughout the music – as in youth culture – there is the search for a kind of mystical unity, an ability to feel a oneness with the universe." Rosentone argued that far from diluting the rock record's power, commercial success had made the transmission of intense feelings from individual to individual possible and had also, by creating an imagined community and nationwide peer support, bestowed upon the young

³⁴⁴ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of A Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition*, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1969, 292.

the confidence and security that only strength in overwhelming numbers can bring. So that when they went seeking “oneness” they need not feel alone and vulnerable.³⁴⁵

Whereas Roszak identified LSD use and rock shows as illusory communitarian solutions (he equated rock concerts with beer halls in Weimar Germany),³⁴⁶ these two practices became identified as key communal rituals within and outside the emerging counterculture. The rituals, as Rosenstein argues, represented ways for the young to transcend the mass loneliness of postwar society through a combination of powerful intense emotionalism and by inducing altered frames of reference that allowed the individual to see their position more clearly.

Despite surface differences, both Rosenstein and Roszak agreed that late 1960s youth represented a single and national, rather than diverse and local, association. Who constituted the counterculture within the youth culture, along with where it was located and how individuals gained admittance, however, remains hard to determine. Most college students, it seems, did not use LSD and many of the young did not believe rock records offered either a blueprint for revolution or that rock shows were an expression of a new communal ritual. Yet the counterculture rituals and even more so the attitudes these rituals displayed permeated the youth culture, circulating throughout college campuses and high schools, and on into the national consciousness.

The counterculture was a subset – in many ways the trendsetting element – of the larger youth culture. Peter Braunstein has noted that youth in the 1960s had become less an age exclusive category and more an attitude, making youth more inclusive and open to construction. With the counterculture at the forefront of youth, it was, in effect, probing the boundaries of

³⁴⁵ Robert A. Rosenstone “The Times They are A-Changin’”: The Music of Protest, in *Side-Saddle on the Golden Calf: Social Structure and Popular Culture in America*, George H. Lewis, ed. Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1972

³⁴⁶ Roszak, 41.

mainstream culture, which would sometimes adopt and adapt its new behaviors and values other times reject them. Some rituals and gestures of youth and counterculture were becoming not only more widely known, but appropriated and celebrated in the mainstream. By the mid-1960s solitary dances of youth culture, such as the Watusi, proliferated in discotheques across the country, among men and women who had left school far behind. *Life*, a publication impossible to confuse with *The Berkeley Barb* celebrated this development as early as 1964.³⁴⁷ The young and the youngish constructed and tore down identities in fashion, dance, in a type of play-acting specific to the 1960s, when identity seemed to be particularly in flux. This was the decade in which wig became common fashion accessories. Experimentation with different identities became easier and took on added significance in the expanding leisure economy, and the young especially “played hard,” taking their marketplace acquired identities seriously and believing most sincerely in instant, transcendent change. Those who played the hardest with identities were labeled countercultural.³⁴⁸

By embodying the role with sufficient feeling and acquiring the necessary accoutrements, the young could transform from a Haight-Ashbury denizen one month, to a Bonnie and Clyde inspired militant the next. Identity was molten, and the past easily forgotten. In this interpretation of the counterculture, the communal rituals, from drug use to rock show patronage, were not so much stable practices but gestures in an elaborate game. The young could and did rearrange and play with identity from the set of gestures. Any one of these gestures could be

³⁴⁷ “Discotheque Dancing,” *Life*, May 22, 1964, 97, 99, 104, 105; while the dance, like the hitchhiker may have been easy to master, the article makes it clear that the accessories, including a \$355 Kleibacker black dress may not be items most members of the youth culture could readily acquire.

³⁴⁸ Peter Braunstein, *Forever Young: Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation*, in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds. New York; Routledge, 2002, 250-52.

adopted to suit a certain moment, just as any record could be placed on the turntable to set a desired mood.³⁴⁹ The rituals that became associated with the counterculture, then, should be seen not as initiation rites³⁵⁰ or as epoch making events (Woodstock, for only the most overused example) but as a collection of attitudes, poses, and symbols.

In this imagined community built on shared symbols, the gestures associated with the legendary counterculture of California became key components of the stock set of universal gestures the youth culture had been acquiring since the 1950s. For example, the *Daily Nebraskan* gave students at the University of Nebraska a steady stream of updates from the Golden State, and assured their readers that within ten years, their own modest school on the plains might approach, on a lesser scale, the youth community in full bloom at California-Berkeley.³⁵¹ The Bay Area existed more than as a real place than as a dream workshop where ideas and gestures about fashion, concert hall performances, and crash pads were being manufactured and made ready for the national youth culture.

The perception of the San Francisco scene, whether coming from *Rolling Stone* or *Life*, provided the templates for the proper forms of rock concert patronage, and the attitudes toward drug experimentation. The San Francisco bands played loud and used light shows to create a full sensual experience mediated by electronics. The so-called “acid rock” was an experience that also included the ingestion of LSD or other hallucinogens. As in the listening experience, drugs and concerts held the potential for instant, ecstatic release, a kind of satori that escaped the

³⁴⁹ The “hard play” required of the youth culture meant that roles were adopted with great seriousness, so that even the inane hitchhiker was danced with unsmiling solemnity, Braunstein, 252.

³⁵⁰ Roszak identified drug use as a misguided attempt to explore reconnect to older shamanistic traditions using modern pharmacology as a crutch. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of A Counter Culture*, 176.

³⁵¹ “Berkeley vs. NU: A Close Race,” Feb. 22, 1968; “Haight Hippies Profess Love,” May 5, 1967; “Once There Were Hippies,” Nov. 15, 1967; all selections from *The Daily Nebraskan*.

intellect. Unlike record listening, however, they provided an opportunity for intimate and face-to-face connections and a sense of the carnivalesque. In practice and in the ideal, however, the counterculture rituals, whether communal or alone, tended to reproduce the experience of the recorded listening experience.

For a youth culture that was increasingly alienated from the mainstream, the desire for rituals and traditions to make meaning of their culture grew apace, and some have suggested that rock shows came to fill void. Folklorist Bruce Harrah-Conforth has argued that the rituals of the youth culture emerged in San Francisco's famous ballrooms, which transformed into rock and roll churches unifying all the disparate elements of youth culture. Before the bands began to play at the Avalon, a pre-concert period Harrah-Conforth calls the "first stage," projectors showed cartoons or movies on the screens, the smell of marijuana filled the air, and hip attendants handed out gifts – token, fruit, or some other symbol that told the audience member that they were in a separate space with its own rules. The second stage, the performance, began with

[T]he bombardment of the senses coupled with the freedom of the sanctuary... [T]he overwhelming sounds of the bands assaulted the ears; the light show struck unfamiliar and remarkable images over the whole of the assemblage; the unbounded dance patterns permitted people to reach their peaks in groups or alone, and the assorted smells and sensations found with the sanctuary bombarded the rest of the senses.³⁵²

To Harrah-Conforth, the mass produced record album had distracted most observers from recognizing that the performance was the key event in shaping youth culture values. The "product" functioned as an "icon" to remind young listeners of the real thing. Yet, the Harrah-Conforth's own description of the concert hall as a "sanctuary" and the event itself as leading to

³⁵² Bruce Harrah-Conforth, "Rock and Roll, Process, and Tradition," *Western Folklore*, July, 1990, 310.

isolated ecstatic dancing, shows that the rock concert has very different roots than the traditional American musical performance. The experience Harrah-Conforth describes is focused on the individual to an extraordinary degree. The individual finds herself surrounded and bombarded (Harrah-Conforth is especially fond of the bomb analogy) by electric sound and images. She does not need those around her and can listen alone. It would seem that the concert was a collective attempt to imitate the recorded experience, with the aid of powerful amplifiers, film, and, for some, hallucinogenics. As Evan Eisenberg noted in his philosophical and personal inquiry into the nature and meaning of recorded music, “If rock concerts and festivals were revival meetings, record listening was the regular sacred service.”³⁵³

The amplified electric instruments and the attendant light shows, as Rosenstein suggested, were designed to overwhelm the listener, but this made dancing, talking, or conventional appreciation of the performers difficult. By the close of the 1960s, the great blues-rock singer Janis Joplin found herself pleading with a young New York audience, presumably fans who had heard and had appreciated her records, to approach the stage and dance.³⁵⁴ Eisenberg has noted that those reared to accept the recorded artifact as the legitimate musical experience, are not inclined to dance to performances. Less awkward for them are the solitary dances associated with the discotheque. “People seem more comfortable dancing and courting to mechanical music. The charitable interpretation of this is that it lets them be alone with each other. The other interpretation is that it lets them be alone.”³⁵⁵ Though the rock festivals – those

³⁵³ Evan Eisenberg, *Recording Angel: Music, Records, and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, 2005, 61.

³⁵⁴ Blanker, *Altamont: Pearl Harbor to the Woodstock Nation*, 335 – Blanker attributes the decline in dancing to malign influence of the recording industry’s hype machine and the decline of local “scenes.” He states that Bay Area audiences of the mid-1960s had no trouble dancing to their rock performances.

³⁵⁵ Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*, 81.

grand gestures of collective identity – grew ever larger in the 1960s, culminating in the hundreds of thousands who attended Woodstock and Altamont, the experience grew ever more individualistic.

Public Rituals as Performed by Lonely Listeners: Altamont

Often cited as a death knell for the sixties counterculture, the Altamont free festival – “Woodstock of the West” – can also be read as an event that revealed the powerful connective reach of the freeform FM radio format, the nature and meaning of the concert experience, as well the limits of these imagined communities built in recorded sound. Sol Stern’s essay is the most thoughtful analysis of an event that received scant attention from contemporaries, but has since become a common feature of rock history. Altamont had its origins in the Rolling Stones’ desire to hold a free festival on the West Coast that would recreate the success of Woodstock the previous summer. Capping off their 1969 North American tour, the Rolling Stones, decided on somewhere in the Bay Area for a December festival that would include most of the great San Francisco bands.

The planning was disorganized and the entire event did not come together until the last moment, and yet it nonetheless produced, spontaneously it would have seemed, an enthusiastic community. The Stones repeatedly changed sites for the festival, moving ever further east as various local authorities sought to keep the areas under their jurisdiction from being overrun by the notorious youth counterculture. Despite the chaos, the Stones secured the support of the Grateful Dead and fellow Bay Area heroes, the Jefferson Airplane, Santana, among others. Two days before the show was scheduled to happen, workers ripped down a hastily constructed stage

and moved the sophisticated audio setup to the abandoned Altamont speedway, the location that finally proved permanent. The newspapers, even the underground ones, were unable to keep up with or provide any legitimate publicity for the event – indeed, it was never clear until the music began that the show would actually happen. FM radio, however, remained on top of the situation and reported every twist and turn to its listeners. Even then there were problems, as Stern said, “Different radio stations were carrying conflicting reports (the radio was the only effective source of communication about the concert, since the newspapers were too slow to keep up with the changes).”³⁵⁶ Even so, 300,000 rock fans descended upon the racetrack for one night and an early morning of violence, mass anomie, and rock and roll.

Similar to its AM counterpart a decade ago, FM freeform in the late 1960s was capable of massing great armies of the young who neither knew each other nor the men issuing the summons, but shared an intimate bond through recorded music and an appreciation of the rituals of rock concerts. Todd Storz’s promotions had led to fist fights and traffic jams, but the Altamont festival upped the antisocial ante, and adding murder, assault, and psychosis. Hundreds experienced nightmarish acid trips and others were savagely beaten. Notoriously, the Stones hired Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang as provide security, paying them in beer. In fulfilling their duties, pool-cue wielding Angels beat anyone who approached too near to the stage. As the Stones played, the Angels stabbed to death a young black man. Along with the 300,000 fans, the Angels oversaw the deaths of three others, two in car crashes during the mad scramble to exit the speedway and one who drowned, face down in a puddle. The crowd, sickened and confused by the escalating violence swirling around the stage, nonetheless, stuck it out until the Stones ended

³⁵⁶ Sol Stern, “Altamont: Pearl Harbor for the Woodstock Generation,” in *Side-Saddle on the Golden Calf: Social Structure and Popular Culture in America*, George H. Lewis, ed. Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1972, 323.

their set.³⁵⁷ Stern explained, “We had pushed and shoved each other, been humiliated by the Angels, destroyed the landscape, fouled the air, all just to see this moment, and even now no one could get up, say it wasn’t worth it and go home. Most of the crowd had never seen the Stones in a live performance (emphasis mine).”³⁵⁸

The imagined community of rock records compared unfavorably to the ancient gangster ethos of the Angels – they knew who they were and shared a “mission.” The Angels’ unity gave handful of men armed with primitive weapons the power to terrorize a crowd of hundreds of thousands. The community of rock records even failed to such a degree that many committed radicals looked in vain for a hated police officer to restore order. In any case, once the concert ended and everyone went home, it was the mainstream culture’s authority figures who were left with the responsibility of tending to those brutalized at Altamont. A disillusioned Stern concluded,

We had set out on our trip dreaming a fantasy of marching on Santa Rita with our community of 300,000, ripping off the Alameda County Sheriffs and freeing the prisoners. The reality was that when we beat a hasty retreat from Altamont [that killed two], we left behind the body of Meredith Hunter, one of our people, a kid many of us had probably nodded to on Telegraph Avenue. And the only ones who cared for that battered body, made sure it got from the coroner’s office to a funeral parlor, informed the parents, and now the only ones trying to bring the killers to justice are the Alameda County Sheriffs.³⁵⁹

The national community built over the air and in cars and in rooms revealed itself at Altamont to be just another form of the collectivized loneliness that Roszak and the Wenner believed the counterculture was rebelling against. In perhaps a less dramatic way, this was already evident. Rock musicians became stars with little connection to their audiences other than

³⁵⁷ The Grateful Dead, horrified and shaken, refused to take the stage. The Rolling Stones would use Altamont as a selling point for the Jean Luc Goddard documentary about the 1969 tour, *Gimmie Shelter*, which had captured the show and the murder on film.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 331

³⁵⁹ Sol Stern, “Altamont: Pearl Harbor for the Woodstock Generation, 333.

the recorded artifact and sales figures, and the distance between them and between the individuals in the audience expanded and grew into a dark space. ...[S]oon all the music came from the stage and very little energy came to the stage from the crowds... Eventually, people stopped dancing in front of the bands, not just at big events like Woodstock and Altamont but at the Fillmore, where it all started. Dances became concerts...”³⁶⁰

The great rock festivals, which flourished at the tail end of the 1960s, vanished in the subsequent decade. Local communities fearing the potential arrival of hundreds of thousands of young people balked at giving permits and some rescinded licenses, investors were hard to find who were willing to pay the skyrocketing advances for rock talent and the ever more sophisticated light and sound equipment that had suddenly become necessary. After often dumping \$400,000 before selling a single ticket, promoters could no longer turn a blind eye gatecrashers and (Altamont may have played a hand in this too) had to hire additional security. As with many elements of youth culture, the festivals were grand gestures, not permanent institutions.³⁶¹

If the social ritual of the concert was based in the isolated experience of listening to recorded music, than what of that other alleged pillar of the counterculture: drug use? In the popular imagination, LSD and marijuana figured as integral rituals of the counterculture, accompanying the concert going experience and the group appreciation of recorded music, but the connection between drug abuse and youth has been overstated. Despite the fact that their actual use was somewhat limited, the *Daily Nebraskan* possessed a strong interest in and fascination with LSD and marijuana in its reporting and in its graphic style. The paper simultaneously lamented students’ drinking habits, a drug associated with their parent’s

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 333.

³⁶¹ “Rock Festivals Groovy, but no Gravy,” *Business Week*, August 8, 1970, 20-21.

generation.³⁶² LSD and marijuana represented “youth” drugs as opposed to cigarettes and alcohol, and had a special cultural significance to the young.

Drug use, however, was far from a counterculture invention, and is better seen as a modification of an accepted practice. The mainstream culture consumed mass quantities of mind-altering substances, with physicians writing 123 million prescriptions for tranquilizers in 1965 and an additional 24 million for amphetamines. Alcohol was an acceptable social lubricant, and nicotine and caffeine pepped up workers. “Americans in the 1960s,” historian David Farber has said, “had accepted the intoxicated state as part and parcel of the American way of life.” Americans used drugs to integrate into existing work ways, assist in alleviating the anxiety of raising a family, to dispel awkwardness at social events, or, on the more socially unacceptable level, to escape everyday problems. Drug use was utilitarian and pragmatic. The counterculture, however, experimented with illegal drugs so as to imagine new work, leisure, and community possibilities. The different and adversarial meaning ascribed to youthful experimentation made the drugs and their use controversial, rather than their actual effects or rate of usage.³⁶³

The illegal drug use³⁶⁴ of the young (and primarily white) counterculture claimed descent from earlier black hipster and Chinese immigrant cultures. Tom Wolfe mythologized the mid-1960s freewheeling fun and LSD use of Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters in *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* in 1968. Kesey, along with former Harvard academic Timothy Leary, established the parameters of the counterculture drug experience. The prankster’s candy-colored school bus,

³⁶² Eileen Wirth, “LSD can be a Rewarding Experience, says Cannon,” Dec. 12, 1, *Daily Nebraskan*; for psychedelic graphic design see the flower lettering for weekly column, “The Pot,” Nov. 1, 1967, 2, *Daily Nebraskan*; Column appears in academic year 1967/68.

³⁶³ David Farber, “Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds. New York; Routledge, 2002, 19.

³⁶⁴ LSD was not illegal until 1967

which possessed a state-of-the-art sound system, possessed a collection of rotating and equally colorful characters bent on enjoying the national life in a truly authentic and spontaneous manner. LSD was, like making or listening to music, a means to physical enjoyment and an expression of a joy of life. The more pedantic (at least in his earlier incarnations) Leary advocated LSD as a form of spiritual enlightenment, while rock bands combined fun and spirituality without qualms. Like the black hipster culture, the young drug users (though Kesey and Leary were not young) did not desire pharmacological bludgeons to reshape their psyches to better fit into socially prescribed roles, but as tools of personal growth.³⁶⁵ Drug use, like music, was a way the counterculture could bring into existence a more humane community, as Farber explained about Kesey and the pranksters,

Instead of competing for resources in a socially prescribed marketplace and then retreating into private households to consume goods with a tiny set of loved ones, the Pranksters took their acid visions as a sign of the immensely entertaining, challenging, and occasionally enlightening free spaces people could create if they cared to.³⁶⁶

The drugs were often used to complete the musical experience, and in the case of acid, allow one to, as Leary claimed, “find what is within.” Braunstein has shown how acid was an integral part to appreciating rock light shows. The East Village in Manhattan was the Atlantic Coast mirror of the San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury and had developed a counterculture that frequented discotheques more than it did live shows. The most famous club, the Electric Circus featured, surreal atmosphere where the sound and visual stimuli arrived simultaneously and were “products of a psychedelic drug culture.” The irreverent humor associated with the ads of Stan

³⁶⁵ Jill Jonnes, *Hep-cats, Narcs, and Pipe Dreams: A History of America’s Romance with Illegal Drugs*, New York: Scribner, 1996, 230-31.

³⁶⁶ David Farber, “Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation,” 26.

Cornyn found its way into promotion of the Electric Circus as, “air conditioned (in more way than one”).³⁶⁷

Finding what is within, even if entirely beneficial, was a yet another solipsistic enterprise with little apparent social value. Following the success of the Electric Circus, Cerebrum opened its Soho doors in late 1968 as “an electronic studio of participation.” After exchanging their clothes for transparent togas, dancers would sit on the floor and put on headphones. Talking was not possible or desirable as it would spoil the experience.³⁶⁸ Why one would pay admission for this sort of experience when headphones and drugs were available privately might help explain why Cerebrum proved a dismal failure.

Since the visions of acid trips faded when the few hours were over, their promise was ever ephemeral, as former Leary associate Richard Alpert concluded, “You came into the kingdom of heaven and you saw how it all was and you felt these new states of awareness, and then you got cast out again, and after 200 or 300 times of this... an extraordinary depression set it.”³⁶⁹ Drug use, therefore, was a gesture – heroic or just life affirming – more than it was an organizing ritual in a coherent way of life. The drugged out and scary Haight-Ashbury of the late sixties attests to the limitations of such a lifestyle, though this dark reality was probably not necessary for most to realize the transient nature of the pleasures (and on occasion terrors) hallucinogenics offered. For the purposes of music and youth, however, drug use and its celebration demonstrate again the powerful yearning for a more fulfilling social life and paradoxical response of choosing agents and practices that tended to isolate and strengthen the focus on the self. As Roszak had suspected, the young dreamers in counterculture had not

³⁶⁷ Peter Braunstein, “Disco,” *American Heritage*, Nov. 1999, “<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=2434288&site=ehost-live>

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Quoted in, Jill Jonnes, *Hep-cats, Narcs, and Pipe Dreams*, 235.

distanced themselves from the American propensity for quick solutions through technology and had been betrayed by an inability to imagine a more revolutionary form of resistance and mutual association.

The gestures of the counter culture were significant for community creation in three ways. First, they were connected to the recorded listening experience. Rock concerts were an extension of this, drugs were an enhancement and for some necessary context. Second, they were national and perhaps international in appeal. The counterculture existed more as a national set of gestures (drug use, dance styles, fashion) that was forever in flux and capable of producing tremendous anxiety about “authenticity” than it did as any sort of identifiable community. Third, the gestures sought community in ways that were patently impossible in which to bring it about. They came with a built in paradox, one that was recognized by the more perceptive in the youth culture. This paradox contributed the sense of dread that permeates much of *Rolling Stone’s* exultations of youth and its music and in the music itself, which took on darker hues more distortion as the decade careened toward its end and the coherent youth culture toward its final fragmentation. Technological progress and choice in the market, which were hardly oppositional, had come to define the counterculture and popular recorded musical experience. Disillusionment was bound to follow.

The Weakness of a Pre-recorded Community

The desire to build an authentic community based on affective alliances accessed through rock records did not collapse so much because of any alleged radical individualism of the counterculture, the cooption of the movement by capitalism, or political betrayal, as it did in the

learned behavior of the postwar youth. Records were among first commodities the young purchased. Thus from early childhood, aesthetic and social distinctions were based around consumer choices. Segmented from the adult world, the young in the postwar era first discovered their power in the mass consumption society through the radio stations they dialed in and records they purchased. More than comic books or clothing, music suggests connections in an individual's life over time and to peer groups. Recorded music became the pivot around which fashion and other commodities revolved because it carried more social significance.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, the long understanding of music as a uniquely social human behavior contributed to both the young's investment of great meaning in records and its belief in the socially transformative power of record consumption. In a performance the connection between audience members and musicians is physical and visible, but with the record it is implied and imagined. The elusive and national (at times international) community that *Rolling Stone* appealed to was one that had been brought together not through institutions or face-to-face interaction but through record purchases. It marked a continuation of the youth market and an expansion of its aims.

One *Rolling Stone* reader implicitly questioned whether a direct connection to the artist was possible through the record. In part bewildered, in part tongue in cheek, and in part looking for a freelance job, he asked, "What is a producer? What is an engineer? What do they do? How are the master tapes made? Record companies and other villains? Promotion? Role of radio stations? How are records made in the factories? And finally, how exactly does my record

³⁷⁰ Will Straw, "Consumption," *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, Eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 65, 71.

player work?”³⁷¹ *Rolling Stone* consistently refused to answer most of these questions, with promotion and radio stations the notable exceptions. As to the more mundane and less heroic aspects of record production and consumption, the magazine remained mute. The record was given the preeminent place, but it remained a mystery, and its social power was an ephemeral feeling, not a long-standing institutional reality. The record was, at best, a gesture.

The fears of loneliness and isolation that underlay much of the 1960s were countered by an expansive vision of a new community. In the pages of *Rolling Stone* and the rituals of the counterculture, this new community was national, consumerist, and egalitarian. The community of affective alliances built through recorded sound would be authentic and in opposition to the allegedly plastic American Way of Life. Coming out of the history and experiences of the postwar youth, the vision began to falter in the seventies. The Beatles broke up, *Rolling Stone* left San Francisco and turned into a glossy “rock *Esquire*,”³⁷² the different popular music genres split into subgenres and hostile subcultures, and notions of a unified movement or even a coherent youth culture disappeared. Records became less a staging ground for the construction of a new community, but a refuge for a self under siege, supplemented by new and increasingly mobile technologies that further commodified music, isolated the listening experience, and privatized public space.

³⁷¹ Correspondence, *Rolling Stone*, Dec. 7, 1968, 3.

³⁷² Harron, “McRock: Pop as Commodity,” 193.

Chapter Six

Lonely Sounds: Sonic Self Sufficiency, Personal Control, and Social Shields

Moe Berger, a rig-building fanatic, “set the cart before the horse” and attended his first live concert in 1957. Years earlier, Berger had become a high fidelity enthusiast, an identity he assumed following a successful sonic simulation of an earthquake on a “rig” composed of high priced audio equipment. Since then his desire to simulate sounds had expanded to include music, and in a humorous contribution to *Popular Science* he related his disappointment when he showed up live and in person to experience the real thing with musicians and an audience. He realized that for the first time in his adult music listening life, he could not “adjust the damping control on the amplifier or set the equalization curve on the pre-amp.” Even worse, for someone who had spent years allegedly seeking to recreate the magic of the real thing, the live “strings lacked presence,” and “the music lacked the depth of stereo.” Berger wondered, “where was the explosive force from the percussion?” It dawned on him that he was a captive, powerless, and ultimately unhappy audience member who felt separated from the audience even though he was surrounded by his fellow concert-goers. “The concluding applause,” he noted glumly, “did not stir my emotions.” It was easy to hear – high fidelity was simply “better sound.” Pondering the fantastical works Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms would have created had they had access to modern recording equipment, Berger concluded that he would not trade “my twin triaxial speaker systems for the best seat in Carnegie.”³⁷³

³⁷³ Moe Berger, “How I Made A Big Discovery, Hi-Fi is Better Than Live Music,” *Popular Science*, June 1957, 151-52.

Berger's position remained heretical for most true believers in high fidelity, but for those novices entering the world of quality sound in the sixties and seventies, his position was hardly radical. This was especially true for young consumers, who through their experiences with Top 40 radio and rock records understood that music could be merely sound alone and that it was best experienced alone. The applause and the audience were irrelevant, or at best kind of local color. As the hopes for social renewal faded and national frustration rose in the 1970s, Berger's desire for personal control over recorded would become widespread.

The changes high fidelity introduced in the production and consumption of music that seemed frightening or disturbing to older generations of cultured classical listeners seemed natural to the Top 40 generation. For a small but growing group of men in the 1950s constructing sophisticated audio systems from discrete components, or "rigs," had become something more than a hobby. It was a mission to create using mechanical means and with perfect fidelity the experience of a performance. In the period from 1957 to 1979, the increase of high fidelity stereo equipment in the homes, automobiles, and on the bodies of Americans saw the rise of a very different desire. The listening style they developed would complete the transformation of music into a thing, and listening into a personalized and solitary pursuit. Culminating with the introduction of the Walkman in 1979, music would come to be seen as a source personal empowerment and a social shield, helping to achieve not so much connection but self-sufficiency. To listen to music in 1979 was, in most cases, to listen alone.

High Fidelity's Early Years –High Wattage and High Culture

For the first ten years of the postwar era high fidelity remained the exclusive preserve of technically savvy and financially secure adult male hobbyists. These audiophiles built their own high fidelity “rigs” from discrete parts or difficult-to-assemble kits that required a sophisticated understanding of electronics. The best high fidelity sound, as guidebooks and magazine articles religiously pointed out, never came from prepackaged whole, but from the applied knowledge of the audiophile. The expensive components along with the impenetrable jargon of audiophiles and retailers effectively sealed high fidelity from the mainstream consumer culture. For much of the 1950, audiophiles comprised a recognizable subculture of serious men who pursued equipment with silly names, such as “woofers” (low register speakers) and “tweeters” (high register speakers) with “amazing decisiveness and purpose.” Their goals varied. Most sought (or claimed to seek) an exact sonic replica of the concert hall. Others found their calling in imitating the Doppler effect, or earthquakes, or in testing the sonic limits of their rigs. And there were those whose rigs were primarily markers to impress (or bore and annoy) friends and family.

Whatever their goals, early postwar sound systems offered initiates into the high fidelity subculture a refuge from the public sphere of work, neighbors, and even spouses. It was not all isolation, however. A rig was a ticket into a community of the knowing, and its builder also received great sounding music and a powerful aesthetic experience. Most likely, the average 1950s audiophile sincerely loved the music his machines produced. The subculture’s mouthpiece, *High Fidelity* began publication in 1951, and in its early days assumed its readers possessed considerable taste in and knowledge of classical music. Though it catered to the do-it-yourself hobbyist, the magazine nonetheless printed a number of helpful and friendly “primers” to familiarize high fidelity novices with the equipment and jargon. For the reader to not understand the workings of the new Ampex tape recorder was forgivable. Less forgivable was a

taste in classical music that only extended to snippets of popular favorites, such as Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture.

The magazine also engaged in a practice of ritual reassurance, telling its readers at regular intervals (often at the end of long pieces) that their private hobby enhanced the authentic musical experience: the performance. The credo of the 1950s audiophile, as seen in the pages of *High Fidelity*, proclaimed that performance was primary and the all the sophisticated equipment was in place to democratize what had for most of history had been an elitist pleasure. This position would become less and less tenable as the hobby actually democratized and grew into a mainstream cultural practice.

Building rigs in the 1950s and early 1960s was often a novelty of sorts, a costly game to construct an electronic apparatus that could mimic a phenomenon as sonically complex as an orchestra. The large outlay of money was officially regretted, but always acknowledged by *High Fidelity*. "An interesting observation on the subject," John H. Newitt told the prospective 1957 novice buyer, "is that *good equipment is usually expensive, but equipment isn't necessarily good because it is expensive...*" in any case Newitt concluded, "It is to be strongly emphasized that you should avoid very inexpensive equipment."³⁷⁴

A high fidelity rig meeting the basic requirements was out of the price range of most young people. For those "average listeners" seeking a barely adequate rig, *High Fidelity* went so far as to surmise that they might not even desire to reproduce the sounds of the performance. "The average listener, however, might possibly find that he likes certain modifications of the standard characteristics," Newitt mused. "This amounts to creating a 'new' electronic instrument since the result certainly isn't one of the accepted standards. But the fact that this new

³⁷⁴ John Newitt, "A Hi-Fi Primer, Part 3," *High Fidelity*, October 1957, 57; John Newitt, "A Hi-Fi Primer, Part 4," *High Fidelity*, December 1957, 130.

instrument may sound out of balance to a musician does not necessarily mean that it is unpleasant.”³⁷⁵ Perhaps pleasant, Newitt implied, but certainly not art or “authentic.” Though high fidelity brought near performance-quality music into the home using sophisticated equipment, the official subculture’s understanding the listening experience remained wedded to a traditional understanding of music as performance.

Rigs, if not hidden in cabinets or otherwise disguised, created an unseemly mess wires, knobs, and ugly glass lights all of which jarred with the domestic of ideal upper middle class home. Along with the music making machines, enclosure construction – to hide the equipment – received a considerable amount of attention. Male audiophiles were decidedly unconcerned with the appearance of their machines but women allegedly were. High fidelity was the indoor version of auto repair and the bar-b-que pit. A running joke in the 1950s *High Fidelity* had it that cluck-clucking wives, not distortion and faulty equipment, were the greatest enemy of good sound. The magazine even felt it necessary to dispel a rumor that women possessed inferior ears than did men. This would have provided a scientific rationale – always a plus among audiophiles – that explained the wifely hostility to the expensive and ugly hobby.³⁷⁶ The magazine, outside of *High Fidelity*, that paid the most attention to stereo components and rig construction was, not surprisingly, *Playboy*. Hugh Hefner published the first *Playboy* in 1953 and his magazine consistently promoted the high fidelity system as an essential commodity of the *Playboy* lifestyle.³⁷⁷ High fidelity was exclusive both by income and gender, and for a brief time these barriers bounded the hobbyists together into a community with a coherent set of values and goals.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 130.

³⁷⁶ Gordon Holt, “True or False,” *High Fidelity*, August, 1957, 45.

³⁷⁷ Audio equipment was covered regularly in the “Modern Living” section the 1950s and 1960s era *Playboy*.

The Performance Standard of Early High Fidelity

The technical demands of the hobby and the aesthetic nature of the musical experience produced a natural tension in the high fidelity subculture, one that reflected an anxiety over the changing nature of performance and music appreciation. Was the goal to be as faithful as possible to the original performance, or was it to create new and better ways of experiencing music? Sound systems made it possible for music not only to be repeated, but measured and manipulated, offering the opportunity to improve a flawed performance. Such sonic massaging, however, represented a disturbing prospect to most committed 1950s audiophiles. An engineer in *High Fidelity* worried that stereo rather than helping reach the goal of realism, might not instead be mere gimmickry, while a musician warned that the popularity high fidelity recordings and rigs were already transforming aspiring singers into biological tape recorders.³⁷⁸ The effects on the “average listener” might not be beneath *High Fidelity*’s and the audiophiles’ concern. More alarming, however, were the ways the machinery jeopardized musical art and its producers. Respect for the machines, the warning went out, must never be so great as to overshadow the musicians.

According to sound system guidebooks and *High Fidelity*, the hours spent constructing, maintaining, and upgrading rigs represented a noble quest to recreate, through the application of and science and technology, the exact sound of a live performance. “[Audiophiles] are thoroughly saturated with the tantalizing idea that sound, a complex arrangement of fantastic

³⁷⁸ Norman H. Crowhurst, “Is There Anything Phony About Stereophony?” *High Fidelity*, January, 1957, 57-59, 133; John McCollum, “The Wonderful Rotary Singing Coach,” *High Fidelity*, March 1957, 46-47, 133.

waveforms, can be stuffed into complex electro-mechanical apparatus and emerge amplified, but so unchanged, that the listener is deluded into thinking it is the unmolested original,” one highly technical early 1950s high fidelity guidebook explained before the it entered into page after page of bewildering schematics.³⁷⁹ The stated goal therefore differed little from the old Edison tests. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, Thomas Edison demonstrated the effectiveness of his product by exposing blindfolded listeners to two versions of the same piece of music performed by a single instrument or voice. The test subject guessed which one was “real” and which on was the recording. By choosing the machine or by displaying at least some hesitation meant that his engineers had done their job and that the cylinder was worthy of the consumer’s dollars.³⁸⁰ The rig of a skilled 1950s audiophile should similarly fool a blindfolded visitor into mistaking the sounds coming out of a basement rig to find a full Mahlerian orchestra. “High fidelity” meant that the reproduction was “faithful” to the original performance, but one could also understand the fidelity as a promise from audiophiles to maintain their faith in the conventional understanding of music. The lack of an audience and the strange places music could emerge continued to bedevil audiophiles into the 1960s, who wondered whether they were breaking their faith with the performance.³⁸¹

The meaning of the high fidelity experience, however, from its very beginnings was quite different from that associated with musical performance. Like the garage or the back yard, the room containing the high fidelity rig was a male space, mechanical and outside postwar resurgence of traditional femininity. Even when in the living room, the rig was hidden in

³⁷⁹ Martin Clifford, *High-Fidelity: Design, Construction, Measurements*, New York: Gernsback Publications, 1953, 2.

³⁸⁰ Mark Katz. *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 19.

³⁸¹ For a humorous take on the mundane activities to which music could the audiophile see, see Leslie Rich, “Music for Non-listening,” *High Fidelity*, Nov., 1965, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42.

cabinets and enclosures and only emerged when activated. At that point, it transformed a domestic space into an intimate masculine preserve. The volume a powerful rig produced – especially if used with earphones – surrounded the listener in a sonic embrace that was not possible in any performance. A *Newsweek* cartoon illustrated both the sublime stereo experience and the gendered nature of early high fidelity subculture showing a man reclining to music in ecstasy while his wife looking on with displeasure.³⁸² High fidelity's transformation of music into a personal refuge, along with its technical virtuosity, would be key selling points to both men and women when it made its way into the mainstream in the 1970s.

Though enamored with their creations and committed to improving recorded music, male audiophiles rarely questioned the assumed hierarchy of the musical experience that privileged the performance. A somewhat cranky high fidelity guidebook underscored the faithfulness to performance assumption, which when the guide appeared in 1976 had all but vanished. "All hi-fi enthusiasts," it advised, "should certainly refresh their ears by attending live performances, for it is all too easy to be deluded by 'chromium-plated' equipment into thinking that what is in fact false and indifferent reproduction is better than intrinsically more faithful sound."³⁸³ The guidebook's author expressed a common fear of the 1950s that mechanical virtuosity would replace human creativity and in the process would destroy music's communicative properties along with its beauty. It mattered little whether the recorded version *sounded* better than the performance, as the performance was inherently superior. The anxiety was that the hermetically sealed world of sound the rig created could ultimately become a trap, keeping music lovers from the "real" thing and from other people.

³⁸² Russell Chappell and John A. Conway, "Hi-Fi: The Sweet Sound of Profit," *Newsweek*, July 29, 1957, 71.

³⁸³ Peter Turner, *Introducing Hi-fi*, London: Hodder and Staughton, 1976, 2.

The musical experience in the listening room was, despite official pronouncements on fidelity, designed to disorient. Turn out the lights and then enter the room, *High Fidelity* advised its readers in 1957. “You should experience an upset of your sense of orientation. The massive forces of the pipe organ with its separate choirs of great, swell, solo, and echo show up marvelously in stereo.”³⁸⁴ The lack of an appropriate visual analog to the sonic stimulation had long been one of the intriguing and disturbing elements of recorded sound. A British critic in the 1920s noted that many could not bear to listen to the human voice issuing from a box.³⁸⁵ A darkened room, unfamiliar, and full of sound was not feared in the postwar era – it had become a sanctuary. This same sort of disorientation would be celebrated by the rock-listening youth culture of the 1960s. The mind-altering refuge that high quality recorded sound offered would become especially prominent after a number of outside factors made escape into the private realm much more appealing.

The Rise of Living Room Culture: The Mainstreaming of High Fidelity

The technical origins of high fidelity lay with Columbia and the British record giant Decca, and it was around the long-playing record that companies both small and large offered amplifying equipment, speakers, and other components. For some audiophiles tape offered the greatest sonic rewards, and tape’s cumbersome nature in the 1950s tended to also increase its appeal among a certain type of hobbyist. The phonograph, however, reigned supreme in sales

³⁸⁴ Chuck Gerhardt, “The Recording and Reproduction of Space,” *High Fidelity Magazine*, March 1957, 42.

³⁸⁵ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 19.

and tape found its way only into a small minority of rigs.³⁸⁶ The minimum essential components of all rigs consisted of a tuner and record player, an amplifier, and speakers. In 1957, when high fidelity was an established industry on the verge of breaking mainstream, the major record companies agreed on stereophonic record standard, opening up their extensive catalogs of recorded stereo music and consumers to a previously hidden sonic experience. Throughout the 1950s, the major record companies had been producing masters in stereo sound, so that when they finally agreed to an industry-wide standard, they would be ready. The stereophonic record allowed the high fidelity to transcend hobby status and become a mass phenomenon³⁸⁷

Stereophonic sound (and its less popular sibling “quad”) promised depth and space, replicating the feeling of the concert hall and thereby increasing the rig’s “fidelity” to the original performance. The two channels allowed for sounds to be separated in reproductions, similar to the arrangement of instruments on an imagined stage. Stereo also made constructing a rig a less-expensive endeavor. Stereo rigs, as opposed to their monaural counterparts, achieved high quality sound with small speakers and relatively weak amplifiers.³⁸⁸ By 1957, the hobby began to make major commercial waves, when equipment sales topped \$500 million. Of that total, the industry estimated that \$135 million came from the “cultists” who constructed their own rigs and the rest – the lion’s share – came from first time buyers. The big record companies assisted novices, selling more high fidelity packages. Unlike the kits popular with old-guard audiophiles, the packages required little in the way of assembly or prior knowledge of the technology. Consumer-friendly packages and stereo sound ended high fidelity’s image as “a

³⁸⁶ David L. Morton, *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology*: Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, 134.

³⁸⁷ B. H. Haggin, “Hi- or Hi-er Fi,” *The New Republic*, Nov. 27, 1958, 20.

³⁸⁸ “The Sound Around Us,” *Time*, April 28, 1958, 57.

strange screwdriver and soldering hobby.”³⁸⁹ The rise of the rock long player in the subsequent decade and the conquest of high fidelity subculture by youth culture would further change the meaning of high fidelity and the listening experience overall.

It was not only cost that drove the growth of the high fidelity market, as industry leaders recognized the appeal a sonic refuge held in “The Age of Anxiety.” In the breakthrough year of 1957 the president of Columbia Records, Goddard Lieberman, contributed a breathless account of the rise of new listening patterns to *High Fidelity*, which he claimed were not only increasing his companies’ bottom line but were changing Americans’ understanding of music. Presaging later declarations from *Rolling Stone* and the youth counterculture, Lieberman maintained that records and the act of listening to them at home was revolutionary. The bureaucratic modern world alienated individuals, obscured real pleasure, increased to unnatural levels the speed of life, but good stereo counteracted these trends. “Since we are as much defeated and halted by stress and tension as by any dread disease,” Lieberman wrote, “the long-playing record has come along demanding (and getting) the one thing we apparently could not give: more time.” The high fidelity and recording industries offered a palliative to nervous moderns that not only eased their anxieties but also, and more importantly, initiated a “sensory revolution,” similar to what Marshal McLuhan would make a career expounding. Audio systems restored the organic, tribal drum, unifying fragmented psyches and societies.³⁹⁰

The mass consumption of high fidelity “signalized a new consciousness of sound, a new respect for the ears and hearing, it was as if a new set of taste buds had developed or a new color spectrum had been discovered.” The revolutionary listening behavior of a present and growing,

³⁸⁹ Russell Chappell and John A. Conway, “Hi-Fi: The Sweet Sound of Profit,” *Newsweek*, July 29, 1957, 69; for attacks on high fidelity packages see John Wasley and Ron Hill, *A Guide to Hi-Fi*, London: Pelham Books: 1977, 23

³⁹⁰ Goddard Lieberman, “The Insider,” *High Fidelity Magazine*, May 1957, 34.

if still largely immature and inchoate, appreciation for sound had “brought the attention of an otherwise unaware and indifferent public the excitement of restoring the phonograph and the phonograph record to their rightful place as a means of entertainment.” For a recording industry that had been battered by radio since the 1920s, the phonograph record’s restoration was indeed a welcome development. Lieberman admitted that at present the masses did not fully comprehend high fidelity’s revolutionary potential. Enthusiastic or misled amateurs confused woofers with tweeters, listened to the wrong records, and purchased inferior equipment. Despite these predictable growing pains, the practice of listening to records “had entered the bloodstream” and would slowly work its magic over the nation’s collective consciousness. Adapting old mantras about the educational value of television and radio to high fidelity, he concluded “the American living room had become a scene of cultural activity in which the phonograph record brought the university lecture hall, the theater, and the concert hall into the intimate possession of those who had never known them. Furthermore, this cultural interest can be measured: for we know from the millions of records... that are purchase, that the American interest in living-room culture is quite probably at the highest point in history.”³⁹¹

Exquisite living room culture aside, high fidelity was not without its pratfalls. Lieberman took care to exclude the “hit” song from being part of this consciousness changing mass consumption pattern and engaged in the ritualistic condemnations of those hobbyists who in their obsession to solder out of existence all traces distortion lost sight of high fidelity’s true meaning. These were the men looking at meters instead of listening to Beethoven, those more interested in “naked sound” than real music. This straw man, if he existed at all, was one of a dwindling group and an easy target. The young consumers purchasing rock records (especially Elvis discs

³⁹¹ Goddard Lieberman, “The Insider,” *High Fidelity Magazine*, May 1957, 35.

sold by Lieberman's competitor RCA Victor) were probably more disconcerting to the industry executive. Though one would expect the head of the largest record company to extol the benefits of products that he produced, the importance Lieberman ascribed to (if not all of his conclusions about) high fidelity were not overstated. The rig was a refuge and listening to music there – so different than attending a performance – represented a revolutionary shift. The practice encouraged the development of a new culture based around the home and the privacy it provided. These notions would become commonplace and be expanded in subsequent popular treatments of high fidelity.³⁹²

Toward the end of 1957 the national media blitzed the public with coverage of the social and familial benefits high fidelity offered. *Look* magazine celebrated the connective possibilities high fidelity offered to the suburban family. A photo essay from that year featured two white children resting on stereo equipment, feeding tape into a player, and enjoying the machine in the company of their parents. *Look*, in a move that would have unnerved the editors of *High Fidelity*, attributed the rise in home audio systems to the popularity of Muzak that had piped sounds into factories and shopping centers since World War II. Muzak, significantly, was a genre that had been engineered to function as background music – it made no attempt to imitate a performance. This same quality had made Muzak the bête noir of 1950s audiophiles who saw in it the complete break with fidelity to the performance and the triumph of the banal.³⁹³ The majority of Americans, *Look* concluded, had grown accustomed to navigating public spaces such as shopping center with musical accompaniment and now wanted their everyday lives to be musically enhanced. Stereo offered the opportunity to experience “the extraordinary effect of

³⁹² Ibid., 35.

³⁹³ Leslie Rich, “Music of Non-listening,” *High Fidelity*, Nov., 1965, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42.

being entirely surrounded by recorded sound” in the privacy of their own home.³⁹⁴ Recorded sound was a security blanket for the entire family.

In this vision of high fidelity, recorded sound sheltered the family – rather than just its male breadwinner – from the outside world, amplifying the effect of the postwar domesticity. The adult and the masculine markers of audiophile identity faded somewhat, and the mass media depictions of the high fidelity hobby presented a much more inclusive activity than before. Children and wives were now pictured enjoying the relief, security, and innocent fun private sound systems provided. High fidelity was taking its place alongside the television and becoming part of the family-centered postwar American Way of Life.

Stereo connected nuclear in a way that was not entirely different musical performance had for past communities. High fidelity could assist in defending the postwar family, assuaging nervousness about suburban living and the centrifugal forces of postwar life. It is interesting to note that 1957 was the second consecutive year that rock and roll dominated the charts and split generations along musical lines. There is no hint in most media treatments of high fidelity that rock and roll, which was found mainly on monaural AM radio and cheap 45 rpm singles, had anything to do with long playing stereophonic high fidelity.

Veteran audiophiles of 1957 greeted the simultaneous equipment improvement and mass popularity of their hobby with ambivalence. Some mused darkly on what they assumed had to be a cheap musical experience that suburban music lovers sought. “It has not occurred to them that one man may conduct a symphony better than another,” sniffed the *Atlantic Monthly* in its overview of the first ten years of high fidelity, “They want the new recording, because it will be

³⁹⁴ John Peter, “The Low-down on Hi-fi,” *Look*, Oct. 15, 1957, 67.

the most ‘hi-fi.’”³⁹⁵ The consumer rush for stereo held the potential to excise spontaneity from music. Further, a technologically dependent understanding of musical quality represented a slippery slope that could undermine the centrality of performance in the musical experience and keep the listener home alone.

That the democratization of high fidelity could alter the musical experience seemed obvious, that it would likewise lead to a revolution in musical production was less obvious. As advances in high fidelity convinced orchestra leaders that the record presented an accurate, permanent, and therefore definitive version of their work, they listened to tapes all the more closely, “perfecting” mistakes through repeated takes and employing more controversial practices such as splicing tapes and, later, mixing separate tracks in the studio. High fidelity allowed composers to analyze raw sound that previous equipment could not. Orchestra leaders’ concerns with perfection created a feedback loop with the players, who sensing the changed expectations of their conductors altered the way they approached performance. “At worst it takes the shape of emotional discontinuity,” *The Atlantic* warned. “At best it makes it seem almost as if the players had rehearsed once too often, and had lost their spontaneity.”³⁹⁶ The musicians ended up imitating machines and in the process made their own existence, in World War II musician union leader James Petrillo’s worst nightmare, unnecessary.

Instead of playing for an audience and responding to it, musicians and conductors focused on the sounds on the record that they had produced, but eventually the feedback loop between conductor, record, and musician would expand to the audience. This new element, the *Atlantic* worried, would become accustomed to the modern sound devoid of mistakes and learn

³⁹⁵ John M. Conly, “They Shall Have Music: Ten Years of Hi-Fi,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1957, 84.

³⁹⁶ John M. Conly, “They Shall Have Music: Ten Years of Hi-Fi,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1957, 185.

to enjoy mechanical sounds. This *The Atlantic*, feared would mean that the essence of music – its communicative and connective powers – would be diluted if not destroyed. Because recordings had become more common and because high fidelity stereo components increased playback quality, the potential for audience/musician alienation increased. This did not necessarily mean that reconnection was impossible. Despite of the negative possibilities, *The Atlantic* ultimately believed that once the masses (or a sufficiently large chunk of them) became acquainted with good music and educated themselves sufficiently to its pleasures, their demands for good music would lead inevitably to its production and eventually to their entering a concert hall. Once having experienced the presence of a true performance, listeners would begin to demand from records the closest approximation to the real thing – not mistake free perfection.³⁹⁷

The major record companies, however, had not yet recognized the youth market for high fidelity recordings. The best selling long players of the early 1950s were big band jazz releases such as the 1951 “Benny Goodman Carnegie Hall Concert,” spoken word albums (“John Brown’s Body”), or recordings of Hollywood film soundtracks. Youth music was confined to monaural singles and AM radio. The 1954 release of the *Blackboard Jungle* soundtrack on LP should have set off alarms as to a changing regime in high fidelity music. The MGM film on juvenile delinquency included Billy Haley and the Comets’ “Rock around the Clock,” and hit number one. It would be some years, however, that the long-playing charts came to resemble the singles in representing the young consumer.³⁹⁸ Young listeners brought with them a new definition of fidelity – one that did not find it necessary to reference the performance.

³⁹⁷ Classical music represented a large segment of the recording industry’s revenue – 25 percent in 1957. By comparison, popular music was 40 percent and singles, the most youth oriented of all, 27 percent; John Peter, “The Low-down on Hi-fi,” *Look*, Oct. 15, 1957, 68

³⁹⁸ John McDonough, “Pop Music at the Crossroads,” *High Fidelity*, April 1976, 55.

Youth and High Fidelity

High fidelity guidebooks began to acknowledge the greater participation of the young in the market in latter part of the sixties and early seventies. An example from 1971, *Stereo in Your Home*, makes the standard attacks on novelties and gimmicks that too often seduce naïve listeners when first exposed to high fidelity audio, and it engages in the usual ceremonial bowing to the superiority of live performance. The guidebook also, however, includes a chapter with advice on which manufacturers make the best color organs, then and now common sights at discotheques, and why a potential music lover might want to buy one. It admits that the organs, which covered walls with vivid colors and changing shapes that appeared to move to the beat of the music, did nothing to the sound, but explains that they do provide a “semipsychedellic visual stimulus” that had become increasingly popular.³⁹⁹

One long-standing problem that a well-constructed color organ remedied was the issue of what to do with one’s eyes when listening to recorded music. “Very often people find themselves at odd ends trying to listen to music because they cannot seem to focus their attention on it when there is no visual stimulus,” and, “[A]color organ not only gives this... but also provides some interesting artistic values as well. Walt Disney did this on a grad scale in *Fantasia*.⁴⁰⁰ The color wheel worked more fully enclose the listener by occupying yet another sense.

The color wheel may have also helped remedy another problem associated with listening to recorded – what to do with other people. The guidebook noted that for most listeners using a color wheel on their own, the effects eventually becomes tiresome, and that it often served best

³⁹⁹ Walter G. Salm, *Stereo in You Home*, New York: Auerbach, 1971, 208.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

as a conversation piece for guests, or as an “attention getter.” This latter designation suggests that the color wheel may have helped ease the difficult period of what do once the high fidelity rig was fired up. Evan Eisenberg has noted that listening to recorded music in groups is a notoriously awkward experience. He has observed that listeners nervously flip through magazines, smoke marijuana, drink, or engage in small talk, anything to lessen an uncomfortable feeling.⁴⁰¹ The color wheel solved some of these social issues. Its use as a conversation starter also shows one reason why recorded music was best experienced alone. This was a reality that young listeners were acutely aware.

Not until the mid 1970s did *High Fidelity* begin to acknowledge that the young were becoming major consumers of audio equipment and potential subscribers. Some rock records snuck into the “Lighter Side” review section starting in the 1960s, and in 1977 the magazine finally jettisoned its classical music bent. It subsequently ditched the Lighter Side and added “Backbeat,” which the magazine hoped would not serve a passive pop audience, but an active group of music makers. “We figure there are a lot of equipment-crammed basements around the country where our readers make live recordings,” editor Leonard Marcus explained, “and that we can be of as much service to the active pop recordist as we have been to the classical music listener...”⁴⁰²

By the late seventies, the magazine changed once again, expanding its coverage of popular music including selections from regular contributors to *Rolling Stone* and *The Village Voice*, adding a section on sound technology significantly titled “Surroundings,” and updating the graphical content to achieve an overall more modern feel. A new editor endeavored to reassure

⁴⁰¹ Evan Eisenberg, *Recording Angel: Music, Records, and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, 2005, 59.

⁴⁰² Leonard Marcus, Hello, Backbeat – Farewell Lighter Side,” *High Fidelity*, February 1978, 4.

anxious readers that “visions of familiar landmarks toppling, bastions crumbling” were not so – that despite all appearances, *High Fidelity* had not become *Rolling Stone*.⁴⁰³ He was right; it had not. “Musical America,” a supplement that would not have been out of place in high school band rooms, remained an integral part of the publication, as did reviews of classical music – though images of classical musicians never again graced the cover. The culture beneath *High Fidelity*, however, had shifted decidedly in favor of the young’s understanding of the musical experience.

Anywhere Out of This World: Listening Spaces of the 1970s

In the 1970s exceptional listeners brought music with them wherever they went. President Carter lived a public life surrounded by private music after he had installed a system that piped high quality stereo sound to every corner of the White House. Conducting affairs of state in the Oval Office the president enjoyed “optimized” sound in which the system took into account that room’s unique aural fingerprint, including a particularly troublesome desk. Son Jeff claimed the in a short time the system had become necessity for the entire family. Unlike his voyeuristic predecessors, Carter did not want to listen in to or revisit tape conversations but to tune out distractions. In this desire, Carter was in tune with his era as millions of his fellow citizens also went hi-fi. In a period normally associated with economic malaise, the sale of high fidelity components grew from \$800 million to two and one half billion dollars while at the same time, despite inflation in other areas, the price of stereo equipment declined.⁴⁰⁴ The ability

⁴⁰³ Robert S. Clark, “Newness and Renewal,” *High Fidelity*, July 1979, 60.

⁴⁰⁴ “Talk of the Town: Feeling Good,” *New Yorker*, November 27, 1979, 34; Michael Dillon Thomas, “Strange But True: Hi-Fi Beats Inflation,” *Rolling Stone*, November 1, 66.

personalize one's own sonic space had never been so affordable nor so desirable. In the 1970s, Americans escaped into a sonic environment over which they exercised perfect control.

Listening to popular recorded music became both more private and, paradoxically, more public during the course of the 1970s. High fidelity took listeners into the seclusion of the their own private space, but as the decade closed, the promise of high fidelity included audiocassette systems and hand held portables allowed for this privacy to extend beyond the four walls of the home. These machines and the culturally prominent ideal of self-sufficiency brought listeners back to the public, though they did not bring listeners together. The isolated listening practices encouraged by the increasing popularity of high fidelity audio systems required the privacy of a specially designated space and this requirement did not vanish with portability. Listeners of the late 1970s cut through public space shielded and empowered by their car stereos and portables.

For most of the nine and a half million American households who owned high fidelity sound systems, however, personalized music was confined to one space: the "listening room."⁴⁰⁵ The rare room expressly built (in some cases the home) for the purpose of enjoying high fidelity recorded sound was the gold standard of all committed audiophiles, and was therefore for most a distant dream. Instead Americans made do with their existing private spaces, and the living room, den, or bedroom temporarily became the listening room. For others the automobile, long the domain of radio, offered the best location to enjoy recorded music of one's own choosing. And for a smaller but growing group, the portable with headphones turned any room into a personalized sonic space. The Yeaple Corporation even went so far as to market the "Stereopillow" to add high fidelity sound to sleep.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ "Talk of the Town: Feeling Good," *New Yorker*, November 27, 1979, 34; Michael Dillon Thomas, "Strange But True: Hi-Fi Beats Inflation," *Rolling Stone*, November 1, 66.

⁴⁰⁶ Advertisement, *High Fidelity*, September 1977, 146.

In each example, recorded music offered a mixture of security, escape, and self-possession. The listening room became a sanctuary where one could get lost in sound, or, especially in the case of car audio systems, a space where machines allowed one greater control over the environment. Rarely in the pitches to persuade Americans to construct or upgrade a high fidelity system, however, did marketers present the listening room as offering any sort of recognizable social event or that it would make good on the grandiose promises of social renewal and revolution associated with 1960s rock and roll.

The Listening Room

The 1970s listening room was visually more pleasing than those of earlier decades as the constructing and maintaining high fidelity stereo systems had become gender inclusive. This development caused some degree of ambivalence amongst the old guard audiophiles, who felt that the inclusion of women threatened the integrity of the culture they had constructed. “Never feel embarrassed to base your final choice on how it will look in your room,” *Ms* advised its readers, a declaration that would have been heretical in the pages of *High Fidelity*.⁴⁰⁷

Women’s magazines in the final years of the 1970s ran articles, which often appeared as if they were penned by industry reps, acquainting readers with the benefits high fidelity offered and reassuring them that sound systems were not only for men.⁴⁰⁸ *Ms* went so far as to resurrect old stories about women’s allegedly different hearing capabilities, but this time to argue that

⁴⁰⁷ Robert Serata, “A Non-Fanatic’s Guide to Stereo Buying,” *Ms*, April 1978, 16.

⁴⁰⁸ *Mademoiselle* and *Seventeen* attempted to demystify high fidelity for their readers in the late seventies, “Henry Collins, “How to Buy a Hi-Fi System & How to Decide What’s Right For You,” *Mademoiselle*, August, 1978, 144; “The Buyer’s Guide to Hi-Fi,” *Seventeen*, November, 1978, 146-147.

women possessed superior ears than did men and needed to trust them when negotiating with male clerks.⁴⁰⁹ The articles, though in general quite similar to early “primers” in *High Fidelity*, tended to emphasize the way that audio systems could be manipulated, made to adapt to the domestic spaces allegedly already under female control. “Don’t be embarrassed about liking something for its looks,” *Working Woman* echoed the earlier *Ms* assertion. “A sound system should fit into your room just like anything else.”⁴¹⁰

The focus on personal control of the sound was not only evident women’s magazines, but also present in the mass media’s general approach to audio systems at the end 1970s. “Lean and spare is the look of the Eighties,” *Rolling Stone* predicted in the summer of 1979, noting that men and women were “shoehorning themselves into designer jeans while designing their sometimes tiny rooms with sonic brilliance and visually pleasing equipment. The new appreciation of the audio system’s visual qualities and the demand for better looking audio were manifestations of the growing desire for perfect control over the individual’s environment. The ability to transform private space into one’s own sonic would be a major selling point for stereo components in the 1970s and beyond.”⁴¹¹

The numbers convinced industry leaders that high quality audio components had a truly mainstream market. Pioneer in 1977 identified young women as the top potential target, while John Koss of Koss headphones joined an advertising group in urging his fellow high fidelity manufacturers to reach out to women. Such a reach out effort may have been unnecessary by the late 1970s. Publisher of *Ms*, Patricia Carbine, claimed that 47 percent of subscribers owned

⁴⁰⁹ Robert Serata, “A Non-Fanatic’s Guide to Stereo Buying,” *Ms*, April 1978, 17.

⁴¹⁰ Sound Stereo Shopping: The Pleasures, the Pitfalls,” *High Fidelity*, October 1978, 11.

⁴¹¹ Paul Terry Shea, “Slivers of Silver: Hi-Fi Slims Down,” *Rolling Stone*, June 24, 1980, 66, 70.

separate stereo components – the definition of a high fidelity system. Listening to recorded music on expensive equipment had broken free of its moorings in the male hobbyist culture.⁴¹²

The editors of *High Fidelity* looked on uneasily at the changing profile of the high fidelity consumer. This was perhaps not without justification. As the markers that made the audiophile distinct from the mainstream consumer disappeared, the magazine itself seemed to lose its reason for being. Like the young listener, the woman listener allegedly approached the recorded sound lacking proper reverence, and in their hands the noble ideal of perfect reproduction of a performance gave way to a more mundane goal of personal pleasure and control. “Most of the women in this group knew little, in anything, about audio technology,” *High Fidelity* claimed about female college who purchased stereo systems. “None read an audio magazine regularly and few recalled ever seeing an ad for equipment in the magazines they did read.” Not only were they ignorant of the true value of high quality reproduced sound, but also were too conscious of visual aesthetics when deciding which audio components to purchase. “Are cosmetics important to these women? To the majority, yes.... The bottom line was, ‘When you knock yourself out to make look good, you don’t want a bunch of ugly boxes sitting around.’ One woman added, ‘my husband is just as concerned about that as I am – maybe more so. He’s an interior decorator.’”⁴¹³ The listening room and its rig had become a place explicitly devoted to reflecting or amplifying one’s personality, not a sacred space in which to pay homage to high art or to struggle against nature to reproduce with machines the illusion of presence. *High Fidelity* would cease publication in 1988.

The true audiophiles of the earlier era recognized that the listening room was “part of your high fidelity system” shaping refracting sound waves in unpredictable ways. Though a

⁴¹² Cynthia Peace, “Women and the Man’s World of Audio,” *High Fidelity*, July 1977, 16.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

clever and handy audiophile possessed considerable control over the audio equipment, the physical space itself escaped his mastery. The listening room could be too small, or too boxy, or too hard, or too soft to remain faithful to the original sound source.⁴¹⁴ It seemed to possess its own qualities, a situation that produced anxiety in the pages of *High Fidelity*, not because the audiophile should be able to alter the sound to fit the room, but because the room was frustrating the faithful reproduction of the performance. By the seventies, however, the worries over sonic perfection had faded as the sound system and the room that housed it came to be understood more and more as an extension of the self. “What’s Your Stereotype?” *Teen* magazine asked its young adult female readers as they began to think about stereo components.⁴¹⁵ Whatever music one consumed by the late 1970s was to reflect either a personal idiom, or in the case of *Teen*, an identifiable “stereotype.”

The 1970s listening room transformed a solitary space not into one filled with people, but one that provided art, comfort, and a human touch via a mechanical apparatus. Advertisements for and articles covering home stereo systems implied that scientifically engineered recorded sound, acting as an audio tonic, would ease alienation and anxiety by adding what sounded like life to what was otherwise monotony. Absent from 1970s high fidelity boosterism were any references to the performance, rather it was understood that “it takes high-quality equipment, carefully chosen, to retain the breath of life in reproduced music,” Hans Fantel wrote in *New York Times Magazine*. The most alive music was “blatantly technological” and musicians, producers, and engineers had finally discarded outdated dogma that called for fidelity to the performance and were instead engineering sounds for the man on the living room armchair.

⁴¹⁴ Robin Lanier, “How to Match Your Speakers to Your Listening Room,” *High Fidelity*, June 1975, 58, 61.

⁴¹⁵ “What’s Your Stereotype,” *Teen*, February 1980, 84.

Technology had liberated music from the tyranny of localism, and given listeners the ability to program and color their lives with sound as they wished.

Not only did recorded music and high quality sound provide psychological benefits, but they also revitalized democracy and expanded personal freedom. High fidelity represented a victory for ordinary individual listeners, and *Rolling Stone* credited a number of 1970s consumer electronic devices, from equalizers, to time delay to noise reduction technology, with “increasing the power of the hi-fi buff over his or her equipment.” Claiming the old era of high fidelity, circa 1970, was a time of sonic oppression, *Rolling Stone* noted that in the new golden age one “can tailor the sound of *Dark Side of the Moon* to resemble Pink Floyd at the Cow Palace.” Pink Floyd was an interesting choice, since the rock band was famous for trying as best it could to make its performances conform to the recorded versions. No matter one’s whim, it was now possible that when the listening ended, “you won’t have to get up from your chair because add-ons that automatically turn off your system are available.”⁴¹⁶ Exactly why one might want to continue to remain seated in a silent room is left unexplained. The concert offered the listener little control over the sound and because an event was too “formal” and did not integrate music into everyday life. Cheap stereo technology did.⁴¹⁷

The poverty of a modern life lacking recorded sound was illustrated in an advertisement featuring a stark picture of an empty room with four white walls, one narrow window, and hard wood floors. The copy read “At Technical Sound Industries There’s Never a Day Without Music.”⁴¹⁸ The empty room not only appeared lonely, but intimidating. Private space was a prison in which modern Americans were trapped and alone. Good speakers, and by extension

⁴¹⁶ Karen Ravich, “Add-ons, Complete Control,” *Rolling Stone*, January 25, 1979, 86.

⁴¹⁷ Hans Fantel, “Sound,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 1, 1979, 76-78.

⁴¹⁸ Advertisement, *High Fidelity*, June 1977, 127.

the electronic media in general, capable of delivering high fidelity sound counteracted the free-floating fears of isolation and loneliness and transformed the reality of an alienated existence into something tolerable, even pleasure. And this miracle occurred not just occasionally but every day. Instead of feeling a powerless prisoner, the owner of a high fidelity system was awash in sound over which he exercised complete control – making the kings and lords of the baroque era with their personal chamber orchestras look like pikers.

High fidelity offered virtual reality before the home computer industry had even begun. Not only music, but also “natural sound” and “white noise” had become available to listeners. *Popular Mechanics* claimed that many listeners used such noises to improve the functioning of their “left brain.” Besides helping out a tired cranial hemisphere, recorded sounds of frogs croaking and tides crashing could improve one’s love life, quality of sleep, and concentration.⁴¹⁹ Here psychoacoustics are identified as a new pharmaceutical, a quick and perhaps pleasant curative for neurosis.

Electronics companies often claimed listening to recorded sound on expensive equipment also provided overwhelmed listeners with an escape from social obligations. Stanton Corporation’s 1977 playful advertisement for its quadraphonic headphones featured a series of photos in which individuals wearing the headphones avoided dealing with a variety of domestic problems. In one a woman stood with her eyes closed, blissfully unaware of the crying baby in her arms. The man in the next photo smiled while working a chain saw over what appeared to be house beam, and in a series of three photos, a woman in curlers harangued who responded by remaining seated, peacefully reading a newspaper. A pair of Stanton headphones had relieved these three lucky individuals and allowed them to enjoy the music being piped into their ears

⁴¹⁹ Dave Sagarin, “Ear Conditioners: Shape Your Own Sound Environment,” *Popular Mechanics*, 90

and, most important of all, their own privacy. If, as Jean-Paul Sartre claimed, hell is other people, Stanton offered a tool toward isolated salvation.⁴²⁰

As control over the sonic environment increased and prices of audio equipment fell, the listening room held the potential to transform itself into a music producing center. A do-it-yourself model of music making emerged in the 1970s, a solo counterpart to the proliferation of rock and roll bands a decade earlier, that was decidedly record centric. The dream of the basement recordist was not giving a dynamic performance, but the cutting of record and its distribution to an unseen national audience. Costs probably remained prohibitive for most of those inclined to record at home – in 1979 *Rolling Stone* estimated that transforming a basement, garage, or bedroom into a sound making unit required \$2000 for the four track recorder and at least as much for remodeling and soundproofing (to say nothing of the instruments themselves).⁴²¹ Nonetheless studio systems designed specifically for home use had never before been even this inexpensive, and some first adopters, like Peter Brown, took advantage of the technology, made records, and even scored hits.⁴²²

In telling his story of the journey from anonymity to gold records in the pages of *High Fidelity*, Brown credited “my bedroom in my parents’ suburban ranch house. Or more specifically, the studio I built in it, which – since garbage men don’t exactly earn megabucks – was put together for less than the cost of a Buick.” A part time art school student living his

⁴²⁰ Advertisement, *High Fidelity*, January, 1975, 3.

⁴²¹ Scott Isler, “There’s No Place Like Home,” *Rolling Stone*, June 28, 1979, 68; *Rolling Stone* declared that “Studio technology has reached the point where just about anyone can build a professional home recording studio for not that much money” and then inquiring with recording experts, such as Les Paul, on how to make all these allegedly cheap equipment work, “Be it Ever so Humble: The Experts’ Guide to Growing Your Own Studio,” *Rolling Stone*, Feb. 9, 1978, 82.

⁴²² Boston, a rock band led by MIT graduate Tom Scholz proved the biggest success of the basement recorders, scoring two multi-platinum records in the 1970s that were recorded on equipment Scholz rigged himself.

parents (Brown remained with his parents even after he found success as a recording artist) he purchased some instruments and recording devices. Brown's goal was to make music that sounded like a group, not an individual. He wanted to use his bedroom studio – a place where he no doubt listened to music – to create the illusion of accompaniment. Through trial and error, he found the full sound he was looking for, and after sending out some tapes he was signed by a TK Records. Brown played, recorded, and mixed all the instruments in his bedroom, just as he designed the album covers. If one ignores his decision to remain with his parents, Brown stands a model of self-sufficiency. There was no need for a band, less of one for a label, and no need for the audience until the music had been reduced to recorded form. Had he been inclined less toward R&B and funk, he might have found a home in the burgeoning punk and new wave scene where the do-it-yourself ethos reigned supreme.⁴²³

In Cars: Cassette Systems and the Empowered Listener

As with the listening room proper, the car provided security and control, but with the bonus of power, speed, and mobility – a literal escape. “You may not be able to go very fast on America's highways, what with speed laws intended to prevent everything from death to runnin' out of gas,” *Rolling Stone* complained in 1979, “but you can go loud.”⁴²⁴ If you conveniently ignore the long history of car radio, going “loud” in one's own car was not practical, according

⁴²³ Peter Brown, “A Bedroom Not For Sleeping,” *High Fidelity*, January, 1979, 107-08; For an overview of punk rock and the do-it-yourself ethos, see especially Gillian McCain and Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997, and Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to Voidoids: A Pre-punk History for a Post-punk World*, New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

⁴²⁴ Michael D. Thomas “Life in the Loud Lane: Ultimate Car Sound,” *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1979, 80.

to the late 1970s *Rolling Stone*, until the development of tape technology and the advent of cartridges and cassettes. In 1964 Phillips made possible the transformation of the automobile into a high fidelity sanctuary when it introduced the cassette. By the late seventies, the sound quality of “highway hi-fidelity” had reached the point where the standards had been set and that refinement, rather than innovation, characterized the manufacturers of car stereo components. Prices fell and equipment appeared in more and more cars across the nation.⁴²⁵ The car’s mobility and ability to retain privacy in public space made it an ideal listening space in the late seventies and beyond.

Automobile audio, like the increasing revenue in the recording industry, was connected to the popularity of rock and roll among the young. Top 40 stations in the late 1950s and early 1960s faced daunting production problems sequencing voice, rapid-fire spots, music, and sound effects into a seamless whole with the then existing acetate disc technology. Looped tape cartridges containing jingles and ads began to replace discs in the early 1960s. The cartridges never wore out and could be roughly handled and thrust into the machine, ready to play on cue, all without rewinding. This improved the production’s quality and deskilled the disc jockeys. It also gave an enterprising car salesman, Earl “Madman Muntz” the notion to put a cartridge system in one of the cars he sold. After three years of business, Muntz and his associates had installed 100,000 systems. Telepro manufactured most of the radio cartridge systems before transitioning to individual cars.⁴²⁶ Motorola and Ford began offering their systems as additional features with what became known as the 8-track. The 8-track would itself give way to the

⁴²⁵ Robert Angus, “Car Stereo: Dawn of the High Fidelity Era,

⁴²⁶ Len Buckwalter, “Tapes for Turnpikes,” *High Fidelity*, June 1965, 43.

cassette, when metal or chrome tapes appeared in the early 1970s offering an unbeatable combination high fidelity, convenience, durability, and recording capabilities.⁴²⁷

Car systems suggested from their outset a new approach to high fidelity, one that was connected to youth culture and the visceral power, social meaning, and radical individualism accorded to recorded rock and roll. In advertising a homebound speaker system, E-V SEVEN nonetheless used a photograph of a man standing up through the sunroof of a Volkswagen Beetle, holding a speaker in his arms. The copy of the 1965 spot declared; “Of Beetles, Beatles, and Beethoven!” The implication was that the “bug” and the Beatles were for a type of high fidelity fan who was individualistic and mobile and not committed to the conventional wisdom. This audiophile was young at heart and undeniably hip. “The new E-V SEVEN... is not for everyone. You have to be someone special to appreciate its value. That’s because the E-V SEVEN doesn’t go along with the crowd.” Fidelity to the source meant less compared to the desire of the individual listener and the potential for providing a mobile sonic space. The buyers of E-SEVEN were not beholden to any high fidelity dogma – they knew what they wanted. “There are no claims that it’s the world’s finest loudspeaker regardless of size – none of that malarkey. (You know better so do we.)”⁴²⁸

The car stereo, as with the listening room, was in fantasy form a multimedia center that both protected and connected that also possessed the capability of providing an intense and personalized listening experience. The aging former Top 40 radio listener had by 1979 the opportunity to tune out the fragmenting youth cultures and into their own head. Pioneer was the industry leader in car audio systems, and it marketed its components toward young men, addressing adolescent insecurity and offering its solution in the form of automotive and audio

⁴²⁷ David L. Morton, *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology*, 2004, 160-163.

⁴²⁸ Advertisement, *High Fidelity*, March 1965.

self-sufficiency. High fidelity in the intimate space of the automobile encouraged sexual adventure – brief but intense contact with another human being that had no lasting obligations. Sex became an experience not unlike “really” listening to a good record. The listener inserted the cassette, and got what they wanted from the system, all while maintaining the option to press the eject at any moment. “Have an ‘Eargasm’” a famous and widely reprinted Pioneer ad enthused.⁴²⁹ The accompanying image consisted of 30 separate human ears from men and women of different races. All these ears were assumed to be in ecstasy and alone, though united by their choice of high fidelity sound and their sexual desire. Where the early *Rolling Stone* and the recording industry associated 1960s records with social revolution, Pioneer offered let 1970s consumers’ individual satisfaction on their own terms.

Mobility and freedom of a car audio system made it the next frontier of high fidelity. “[T]he car is the best place to listen to music – outside of a concert hall,” *Rolling Stone* declared, giving ceremonial deference to the event before quickly showing that even performance paled in comparison. “I mean you can really crank it up. Runnin’ down the road at fifty-five mph, you have no neighbors banging on ceilings and walls to get you to *turn it down*. And in that little acoustical environment, it sounds more like you’re up on stage with the performer than down in the audience somewhere.”⁴³⁰ Being a member of the audience in a modern rock and roll show was to be a degraded mass participant, but the car offered the illusion of importance and if not friendship, than imagined adulation and temporary celebrity.

The car had long been constructed as a place of youthful sexual adventure, and the car stereo competent manufacturers marketed the cassette deck as a tool to amplify this

⁴²⁹ Copy of original ad reprinted in *High Fidelity*, September 1979, 66.

⁴³⁰ Michael D. Thomas, “Life in the Loud Land: Ultimate Car Sound,” *Rolling Stone*, June, 14, 1979, 80.

phenomenon. Another Pioneer ad featured two photos of a young man. In the first picture, he rests on a red sports car, holding a woman in short shorts from behind. In the second, he has a woman on each arm. Two of the three women wore pioneer T-shirts with the slogan (a la Patsy Cline) “I’ve gone to pieces.” “Let us fit you to a T,” the company explained.⁴³¹

Purchasing a high-end car audio system gave one “power without corruption” so that one could enjoy the pleasures of the ruling class while retaining a rebellious heart. Pioneer did not model its system on the concert hall. “In search of the ultimate car stereo, we chose of course the home stereo. And broke down the system into its separate components.”⁴³² Once again, music is defined as sound alone and therefore the use of high technology to reduce it down to its essential elements and reconstitute it in improved form becomes possible. To the new listener, this was progress, but to the aging high fidelity aficionado, Quixotically committed to the performance, this represented another misuse of the technology. “Unfortunately, many people are not very perceptive,” Joel Cohen complained about his car stereo system customers.

I find people who own [a delay unit for a car stereo] driving around with the rear channels much louder than the front and the delay shoved way up – a totally unnatural effect. They bought the equipment, and they want to hear it working. All of our talk about accuracy presupposes that the user will not abuse the equipment.⁴³³

Portables and Control – The Sounds of Self-Sufficiency

Personalization and control of recorded sound went a step further as 1979 ended when Sony introduced a hand-held cassette player called the Walkman. The second generation – Walkman II – released three years later, would sell over 2.5 million units, and in the process

⁴³¹ Advertisement, *High Fidelity*, September 1979, 65, 66.

⁴³² Ibid., 66.

⁴³³ Ambience and Space: Six Experts on the State of the Stereo Art,” *High Fidelity*, November, 1979, 57.

become a cultural phenomenon. Sony recognized the appeal of the Walkman in its initial ad campaigns that celebrated the diversity of Walkman listeners, who in one ad included a young and liberated woman and a Buddhist monk. By the mid 1980s, Sony was designing different Walkman's for separate niche markets – it had “lifestyled” the Walkman.⁴³⁴ Control and privacy, along with the knowledge of being among the hip, shaped Sony's marketing efforts and the product became associated with the young, the physically fit, and the hip.

The transistor had led to a more portable radio, one that was even attachable to the body, and so the desire to have sound follow the individual into public space was not new in 1979. What had changed was the amount of control one had over the sound and the meaning of listening alone in public. Retailers began noticing in the early 1960s that playing music to customers on headphones, rather than a traditional speaker arrangement, resulted in doubling the sale of records.⁴³⁵ By the 1960s listeners found that there was something desirable about being immersed in sound that no one else heard. *High Fidelity* kept a close eye on portables – as it did not all aspects of sound recording technology. The magazine, however, tended to see portables as an afterthought – something an audiophile might take on vacation, but only because hauling the rig along was not practical.⁴³⁶ Other portables of the 1970s marketed their wares as mind benders. “It's like listening with your whole body,” declared an advertisement for the “Boom Box.” Bass notes came with a “blast of air” allowing one to not only hear but also “feel the boom box.”⁴³⁷

⁴³⁴ *Doing Cultural Studies, The Story of the Walkman*, Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, Keith Negus, eds. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 64-45.

⁴³⁵ Earphone Doubles Music City Sales,” *Billboard*, November 6, 1961.

⁴³⁶ Stephen Traiman, “Quality Portables for Vacation Entertainment,” *High Fidelity*, May 1977, 66.

⁴³⁷ Advertisement, *Rolling Stone*, July 13, 1978, 6.

Sony, on the contrary, never claimed that the Walkman would overwhelm the individual, or that it was a pale imitation of a stationary audio system in one's room. The Walkman instead was better than all other music systems because its mobility allowed for unprecedented individual control over the environment. Not only did the user acquire a soundtrack, but also a barrier that kept unwanted sounds or unwanted others out. Sony marketed the Walkman as a device that would enhance the powers of or protect the user – making the listener more of who they already were. Music as shield and music as performance enhancer – this was the twin appeal of the portable for joggers and postmodern urban flaneurs.

Sony's chairman and public spokesmen/philosopher, Akio Morita saw the success of the Walkman – before it was a fact – as an inevitable result of the cultural zeitgeist. Everyone, he told *Rolling Stone* in a 1980 interview, would soon have their own personal stereo. Those in rural areas, or those who spent the day out doors would no longer be without music. It is hardly surprising that Morita would predict the overwhelming success of his company's product. What is striking, however, is his assumption, apparently one shared by *Rolling Stone*, that the best music was enjoyed privately, in doors. It was understood that those outside and in the public had been missing something and would welcome the chance to more completely manage their sonic environment and in the process seal themselves off from the distractions, including other people, that currently surrounded them.⁴³⁸

The portable cassette player was the logical next step in the sonic fight to combat loneliness. It did not trap one in a listening room, yet neither did it expose one in the unpredictable public realm. Its private noise and public silence gave one the opportunity to be both among people and yet remain apart – making the Walkman simultaneously subversive and

⁴³⁸ Akio Morita: Sony's Chairman, Part Businessman and Part Visionary, Offers a Look Into the Future of Consumer Electronics," *Rolling Stone*, October 2, 1980, 79.

safe. “We do not return to individualized or privatized emotions when we use the Walkman,” Rey Chow said extolling the device’s liberating and revolutionary aspects, “rather the Walkman’s artificiality makes us aware of the impending presence of the collective, which summons us with the infallibility of sleepwalker.” The presence of the collective is not forced upon the individual by “the loudspeakers of history” that radio or the public address systems of the past had.⁴³⁹ The Walkman did not oppress, rather it allowed one to resist the negative aspects of the collective. One could be public without the fear of losing one’s individuality. The control, the smallness, and the accessibility of the Walkman make this possible. It also obliterated the traditional understanding of music’s social nature and sense of obligation.

Personal control was one of the defining features of the 1970s listening style – the proponents of portable stereo sound argued that the new technologies were expanding democracy and empowering the individual at the expense of the powerful corporate machinery. *Rolling Stone*, in particular, displayed a late-seventies obsession with the control modern technology offered the individual listener. Equalizers, micros, and something as sinister sounding as Advent Corporation’s “Sound Space Control” excited the former revolutionaries at *Rolling Stone* more than any Bruce Springsteen record could, “So, at your option,” *Rolling Stone* explained to its readers, “you could make, say, *Abbey Road* sound as if the Beatles were performing it in your bathroom (two-millisecond delay, wet) or in Albert Hall (sixty-millisecond delay, dry).”⁴⁴⁰ Given *Rolling Stone*’s youth culture roots, this desire to manipulate that culture’s heroes is significant. The Beatles no longer were the avatars whose messages required one’s complete

⁴³⁹ Rey Chow, “Listening Otherwise, Music Miniaturized: A Different Type of Question About Revolution,” in *Doing Cultural Studies, The Story of the Walkman*, Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, Keith Negus, eds. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 139.

⁴⁴⁰ Peter Black, “The Ultimate Audio-Visual Marriage,” *Rolling Stone*, October 5, 1978, 84; Mikal Gilmore, “Excitable Noise,” *Rolling Stone*, July 12, 1978, 60.

attention, but sonic clay in the hands of the modern listener. Technology provided the listener with the choice to accept the Beatles (or Beethoven) as intended, piecemeal, or not all.

As the above examples suggest, the 1970s obsession with control of one's sonic and social environment was not an indication of the individual's strength, but rather its opposite. Sociologist Richard Stivers has labeled devices such as Walkmans "stimulus shields." By creating a sonic bubble around the individual in the public sphere, a stimulus shield protected a weak individual from loneliness as well as from the perception of being alone. These devices became increasingly necessary to postwar Americans. In a competitive and individualistic society, face-to-face were more ambiguous, threatening, and undesirable. Relationships mediated by communications technologies protected the individual. The more one was disconnected from face-to-face interaction and conflict, however, the more one needed protection. Thus the existence of the stimulus shield fed the need for ever-stronger shields.⁴⁴¹

The Walkman, which was marketed from its inception as a tool for the self-confident instead can be better seen as one of despair and a symbol of a culture beset by insecurity and alienation. Embattled individuals lacking the resources or the public space in which to reconnect turned instead to the very devices that are pushing them further apart. The desire for sonic self-sufficiency has resulted in an era of lonely sounds. Wrapped in their own sonic environment, the Walkman user was a microcosm of his culture.

⁴⁴¹ Richard Stivers, *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, 55.

Epilogue

In the post World War II era, loneliness and recorded popular music became linked. For both the performer and audience, the musical experience had become more solitary and mediated over time. This separation occurred in the context of a historically individualistic culture that was placing an ever-greater emphasis on the self. By the 1970s the celebration of the autonomy and sufficiency of the individual had been taken to new extremes with consequences for all aspects of American life. The story of popular recorded music's journey out of the public and into the personal, therefore, represents only one part of a larger national story that includes privatized leisure generally, the expansion of the suburbs, the emergence of niche marketing, individualized spirituality from "born again" Christianity to New Age mysticism, and the emphasis on control over the body. It is a story that also includes the collapse of a liberal consensus, increasing cynicism, and the rise of the new right in politics. The lonely listening style of the late twentieth century therefore should concern anyone interested in the American experience.⁴⁴²

Americans' relationship to popular recorded music and its technologies provides a window through which to understand how other electronic media and information technologies have affected social behavior. Along with stereo rigs, televisions and personal computers have long been identified, among a host of other things, as hedges against loneliness and tools to banish unpleasant moods. As with recorded music, Americans used these devices at home and

⁴⁴²For an interpretation of the 1970s as the apotheosis of many postwar trends, see Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Popular Culture, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge, Mass. 2001.

often alone and in the process altered their relationships with their families, friends, neighbors, and other citizens. A wide cross-section of observers have agreed that in the postwar era a growing social disconnection was related to the peculiar uses for which Americans created for their media and the technologies, with impressive psychological, social, cultural, and political consequences.⁴⁴³

In psychology and communications studies, scholars have blamed media technologies – from the radio, television, and the computer for degrading social connections. Communications studies scholars Brian Spitzberg and Daniel Canary have noted that Americans had incorporated the electronic media into their lives as a form of private practice in ways that potentially exacerbate the growing problem of loneliness in American life. Most Americans, the pair contend, spend their lives moving in and out of loneliness and are thus “situationally lonely.” This is a normal, or at least transitional, state. A smaller group of Americans, however, are trapped in loneliness – the chronically lonely. They are alone, or feel that they are, most of the day and have become resigned to a reality in which reintegration is no longer possible for them. The chronically lonely also tend to be heavy users of electronic media. This is despite the fact that they do not believe, as the situationally lonely do, that television or radio has any socially therapeutic qualities.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ See Phillip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*, Boston Press, 1970; Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, New York, Norton, 1978; for more positive evaluations of the popular postwar focus on the self, see Peter Clecak, “America’s Quest for the Ideal Self: Dissent and Fulfillment in the ‘60s and ‘70s, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983; Tom Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” in *The Purple Decades*, New York: Berkeley Books, 1983, 265-296.

⁴⁴⁴ Daniel J. Canary and Brian H Spitzberg, “Loneliness and Media Gratifications,” *Communication Research*, December 1993, 801-802.

Electronic media pose a problem for the situationally lonely, however, because they replace other activities, and offer a new and relatively stress-free style of relating to others as well as to internal emotions. If a television or a record collection is used “instrumentally” to help extricate one from loneliness, the media may in fact end up produce the opposite result in the long term. “It is feasible,” Spitzer and Canary suggest, “that as social skills deteriorate, people engage in reutilized behaviors that exclude, inhibit, or diminish functional behaviors. As loneliness persists, people become more habituated and less instrumental users of media.”⁴⁴⁵ The use of electronic media, on the rise for a number of “instrumental” reasons at home and work, holds the potential to damage or distort the social fabric.

Systematic psychological inquiry into television’s relationship to loneliness began in earnest in the 1970s, when researchers revealed that television had replaced a number of social activities and seemed to have degraded the expression of the affect in the American household. Not only did television lead to less conversation, but it reduced the number gestures and behaviors normally associated with sociability: smiling, eye contact, “forward lean,” touching, and conversation. By 1978, television owners reported spending more than 10 to 15 percent more time watching television than engaging in conversation. Time spent on household rituals, from family meals, to bedtime activities, and holiday celebrations similarly declined. Television viewing in this context could be regarded as an addiction, a compulsion not unlike alcoholism.⁴⁴⁶

Along with deteriorating interpersonal bonds, the social disconnection associated with using electronic media – again television – has weakened the nation’s political culture. Robert Putnam has argued television arrived in the postwar era and ensured that Americans stayed put in

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 817.

⁴⁴⁶ James P. Flanders, “A General Systems Approach to Loneliness,” in *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy*, eds. Letitia Anne Peplau and Daniel Perlman, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982, 176-77.

their new suburban homes. Television not only ended nightly visits, it turned the outside world into an abstraction, privatized leisure and civic activity, and encouraged the formation of “pseudo connections” that required little effort and dissolved all too easily. By watching television – no matter its content – Americans learned how to cultivate loneliness, and hence community and civic institutions withered along with everyday civility. As television viewing replaced social and civic activities, it led inevitably to a diminution not only of the viewer’s social skills but also his political inclinations. A chronic television viewer, Putnam maintained, became passive and convinced of his own powerlessness. After its effects had been internalized by the baby boom generation by the 1970s, the consequences of television viewing manifested themselves in numbers that showed skyrocketing rates of depression, falling rates of voter participation in national elections, and individual engagement in local government. Television, along with suburbanization, provided the context in which a political culture dominated by fear, apathy, and well-funded corporate interest groups developed: a culture of lonely and alienated individuals. For Putnam, the future of American democracy depends upon Americans changing their present relationships to the electronic media and with each other.⁴⁴⁷

As noted above, television was not the medium of choice of the baby boom generation in its coming of age. Radio and recorded music were far more important. This is not to deny that television may have had a hand in producing the socially poor environment of the 1980s and 1990s Putnam describes, but to call for attention to be paid to the role played by popular recorded music. Music and politics in the 1960s, then, might not be linked in the traditionally way they have been with the rock bands constituting the sonic wing of the new left, but as omens of future political alienation. Likewise the do-it-yourself ethos of 1970s punk rock looks more

⁴⁴⁷ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000, 224, 229, 242, 258-263.

and more like a precursor of up-by-the-bootstraps mentality of the resurgent right of the Reagan eyes.

Outside of McLuhan, few observers placed any great social value in television, but the same cannot be said for personal computing and information technology. According to their progressive advocates, computers would empower individuals and the web would bind them together in voluntary and democratic associations creating a revolutionarily holistic social ecology.⁴⁴⁸ A counter-critique, however, also exists. In a pioneering and provocative study of the subcultures that developed around personal computing, Sherry Turkle argued that the individual personal computer of the 1970s and 1980s offered disillusioned 1960s male seekers a realm in which they gained the power realize their social and personal visions on their own terms. Theirs was a style of computing “characterized by transparency, simplicity, and a sense of control...The computer clubs that sprang up all over the country were imbued with excitement not only about the computers themselves, but of the new kind of social relationships people believed would follow in their wake.”⁴⁴⁹ Yet, just as with music and television, the obsession with control would produce more social distance.

Echoing the early *Rolling Stone* at its most messianic, the organs of the early computer movement adopted as an article of faith that information technologies associated with the Internet would create “knowledge cooperatives,” which would induce an inner revolution among the technologically linked up, bringing into existence participatory democracy and a postmodern and enlightened community. The missionary zeal of men like Apple founder Steve Jobs, whose

⁴⁴⁸ Andrew Kirk, “Machines of Loving Grace: Alternative Technology, Environment, and the Counterculture, in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds. New York; Routledge, 2002, 367, 370.

⁴⁴⁹ Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, 171.

company would in 2000 release Ipod – a Walkman for the twenty-first century – stems from the channeling of their disillusionment with long-player style social renewal into the equally solitary pursuit of building hardware and writing software.⁴⁵⁰

The actual communities that sprung up organically around computers and connected themselves together in the Web were quite different than the dreams in *Byte* or *Whole Earth Catalog*. The young men who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s and became enamored with computing technologies and used their understanding of and control over computers as markers to set them apart. These young men were more familiar with machines and, perhaps as a result, less at ease with other people. Their mastery of the computer, though it often blocked them from the majority of the peers, allowed them entry into the community of “hackers.” Unlike the disillusioned revolutionary but similar to Canary and Spitzberg’s chronically lonely individual, the hacker put little faith in restored social relationships, but invested himself in the machine itself. Most of the hackers Turkle encountered were socially awkward and feared the unpredictability of social situations over which they had less than absolute control, as one hacker concluded about he and his companions failures in dating,

I think computer hackers tend to get very strongly involved in relationships. This is because they are used to having this very close, clear, intimate relationship with the computer and they expect to have the same kind of relationship with a girl. They expect to understand the other person more than is reasonable. People just don’t work like computers.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁵¹ Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self*, 218.

Not only did hacker culture contain within it antisocial and anti-romantic elements, but it was distinctively anti-sensual. In the same way television reduced reality to an “abstraction,”⁴⁵² and recording technologies reduced the performance and to sound waves. Computing when combined with the Web reduced experience to information and offered in its place “virtual reality”—a life on the screen. For Turkle, however, the hackers did not represent an isolated group of cultish individuals, but a canary in the cultural coalmine.

... [T]he computer offers hackers something for which many of us are hungry. Hysteria, its roots in sexual repression, was the neurosis of Freud’s time. Today we suffer not less but differently. Terrified of being alone, yet afraid of intimacy, we experience widespread feelings of emptiness, of disconnection, of the unreality of the self. And here the computer, a companion without emotional demands, offers a compromise. You can be a loner, but never alone. You can interact, but never feel vulnerable to another person.⁴⁵³

The computer, by being personal and by at least mimicking the most rudimentary aspects of thought was an acceptable stand-in for human contact. It also possessed the important virtue of being under the user’s control. It was a machine that would not expose or hurt the user. Like the well-set up rig or the Walkman it was a sanctuary where the self could feel more itself and allow it to connect. It’s anti-sensual nature, however, and its relentless reductionism only exacerbates the anomie Turkle describes.

The World Wide Web, which enjoyed a great deal of favorable press and some wild-eyed utopian dreams, has also exhibited the same pattern as the television, the computer, and recording technologies. The act of learning how to use the Internet and the Web has been shown to increase loneliness, even if the users were directly communicating with another person over the Web. “[E]ven social uses of the Internet were associated with negative outcomes,” concluded a famous 1998 study of the Internet and loneliness, “for example, greater use of

⁴⁵² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 242.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 215.

electronic mail was associated with increases in depression.” The Internet, the researchers discovered, substituted weak ties in place of strong ones, where on-line associates, detached from the day-to-day environment of each other, cannot effectively connect or sympathize with each other. Despite the disturbance it had caused in their lives, most of the study’s Internet users returned to the technology because of the ease of escape and connection it seemed to offer.⁴⁵⁴

The personal listening devices that became common consumer items by the 1980s are a key element in a much larger history. Postwar Americans, living under the threat of atomic annihilation and often in subdivisions of strangers, desired a safer world in which uncertain human relationships that were ever more distant, were held at arms length. The individual having lost connections to others, sought technological empowerment. Music listening devices offered, just like the computer, the personal control that seemed to be rapidly disappearing in all other areas of their lives. Shielding the user from social obligations even down to the innocuous “hello,” and by bestowing upon the listener the power to bring into existence a unique sonic environment, personal listening devices seemed to satisfy the late twentieth-century’s radical individualism. The problem was they also only made the desire for empowerment and control stronger.

Musical performance continues, of course, but it is safe to say that most of the time Americans do not hear music from other human beings, but call it into being from a host of different technological devices. Cheerful Luddites, such as Jonathan Richman, still travel from place to place performing for small audiences, but his music, like that of other popular musicians, is much more accessible as digital information on iTunes. Opportunities for

⁴⁵⁴ Robert Kraut, Michael Patterson, Vicki Lundmark, Sara Kiesler, Tridas Mukopadhyay, and William Scherlis, “Internet Paradox: A Social Technology that Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-being, *American Psychologist*, September, 1998, 1017-1029.

collective experiences remain, but most Americans opt for the solitary or the technologically mediated. In the spirit of Todd Storz, the music and electronics industry have given them what they demanded. That demand will remain strong for the foreseeable future because the social anxieties and anti-sensuality of the current culture show no signs of abating. It would seem that the psychological ill health of Americans is one of the key elements powering economic growth, technological innovation, and musical artistry.

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