

## Special Issue: Love and Rock (Editors' Introduction)

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Four years ago, during a discussion, my friend Mark Duffett of Chester University and I noticed that a central aspect of rock music (the term is taken here in its broadest meaning) was too often neglected by the press as by academia: the place occupied by love songs. The dominant discourse more readily associates rock with transgression, revolt, protest, or rebellion than with the romantic theme, which nevertheless represents, both quantitatively and in terms of economic and artistic achievement, an essential dimension. Unless the love in question is restricted to sex and can be presented as a form of transgression and rebellion (because that's what it's all about, building rock as a language resistance, a grammar of protest), love is rarely considered a worthy subject, but rather an object of consumption without consequence.

Yet rock artists, both men and women, have systematically sung not only Eros, but other forms of love: Agape, compassionate love, courtly love, romantic love, love between man and woman, between men, between women ("Papa Was A Rodeo," The Magnetic Fields), between brother and sister ("Sister," Prince), between parents and children ("Father & Son," Cat Stevens), between friends ("You've Got A Friend," Carole King)... Sometimes love for a dog ("Martha My Dear," The Beatles), a car ("I'm In Love With My Car," Queen) or a pair of shoes ("Blue Suede Shoes," Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley). Sometimes it is only a matter of saying that we were not in love ("I'm Not In Love," 10 CC) or that it is not even about love ("This Is Not A Love Song," PIL).

These are the songs that Mark and I wanted to observe more closely: how to explain that despite their assertive presence, they are not entitled to the same honors, the same official recognition, the same marks of academic and journalistic interest as rebellious songs? Do they only have an emotional impact devoid of any social impact? And in what capacity should we disqualify this type of impact? Would love songs be reserved for specific artists or audiences, on the basis of their gender, age, or social background, disenfranchised artists and public, whose tastes do not deserve the attention of those who write about rock? That there are more serious subjects, more serious than intimate emotions, fragments of amorous discourse, empathy for the other? Yet, if we accept, temporarily, to adopt rebellion and transgression as the sole criteria for assessing the relevance of the rock idiom, even love songs constitute a vector of resistance, to the same extent as more violent, more committed,

more explicitly protesting forms. For example, the treatment of love songs by most punk bands is revealing. Obviously, even if love is an unexpectedly recurrent theme of their repertoire, it is rather to sing the sordid joys of compulsive masturbation (“Orgasm Addict,” Buzzcocks) or to observe with realism (“Love Comes in Spurts,” Richard Hell), cynicism (“If you do not want to fuck me, baby, then baby fuck off,” Wayne County) and disillusionment (“Sometimes I’m thinking that I love you, but I know it’s only lust,” “Damaged Goods,” Gang of Four) the various emotional or physiological manifestations of love. John Lydon summed it up in an interview: “two minutes of squelching...”

But it is precisely this austere, puritanical, asexual look, this rejection of hedonistic enjoyment, the leitmotif of hippie’s “peace and love” philosophy or the very political “enjoy without hindrance” of May 1968, which allow the punk love song to constitute a political act. For there exists an intimate correspondence between “jouissance” and submission (cf. Sade) which makes the rejection of “jouissance” a potential weapon against the market whose ethos is precisely unhindered enjoyment. In its negation of love, punk perhaps gives the key to a fundamental insubordination, a radical challenge to the market. But the place that rock gives to individual inspiration and paroxysmal emotions is also a confirmation of the central role played by love, in the most romantic sense of the term. Rock can indeed be interpreted as a reaction at the same time against the cold rationalism of highbrow, avant-garde music and against the blandness of certain other forms of popular music. By privileging subjectivity and rupture, rock music helped to transform the hackneyed expression of the feeling of love into a demanding exploration, which defies clichés and expectations. Again, those who appreciate rock only by its subversive power can find satisfaction here. For the songs of tenderness and passion, as well as those of disappointed and unhappy loves, the ones that Morrissey says they save your life (“But do not forget the songs that made you cry / the songs that saved your life,” “Rubber Ring,” 1987) contain a seditious charge of an underground, but unquestionable radicality. A chorus like “Let’s Spend the Night Together,” which in 2006 still the Rolling Stones could not sing in China, could cause as much havoc whispered in the ear of a schoolgirl in 1967 as “I wanna be anarchy” thrown to a seasoned punk in 1976.

And what about the somewhat naïve utopia, but reiterated with conviction, stubbornness and a certain courage by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, who assert, with “Silly Love Songs” that “Love is all you need,” that “Love is the answer” (“Mind Games”), even if David Bowie turned it into a joke a few months later in “Cygnet Committee” by saying “We stoned the poor on slogans such as [...] love is all we need”? By taking up this unilateral message of love of religious origins, the Beatles led us to participate in the colossal undertaking initiated by Judaism, Christianity and, on other bases, Buddhism, aimed at destroying the ultimate sacrificial safeguard inherited from traditional societies. Should we neglect and denigrate songs that have given back to the message of love, which two thousand years of not always glorious history had transformed into a stilted and hypocritical morality, its staggering, revolutionary potency? Rebellion and love are indeed the two poles of the rock revolution, which a wall of May 68 summed up thus: “the more I make love, the more I want to make the revolution, the more I make the revolution, the more I want to make love.” Unless, as Petrarch wrote, that singing love simply allows one to hide one’s anguish and one’s tears? *Però, s’alcuna volta io rido o canto, facciol, perch’i ‘no ò non quest’unavia da celare he mio angoscioso pianto.* (So, if I laugh or sing, it’s my only remedy for hiding my tears of anguish). Maybe that’s rock too, some kind of noise so that you can keep on living, and roll back death by a few steps, a few seconds. Always and everywhere, assert the power of life

and love. And perhaps then could we conclude with George Bernanos that “the grace of graces would be to humbly love oneself.” So Mark and I did not have anymore reason not to explore these rock love songs further. We decided to organize a symposium in April 2014 at Paul-Valéry University (Montpellier, France), with papers by more than 40 researchers from 17 countries: proof, if need be, that the scarcity of reflection on the issue had aroused some expectations. Rather than a simple topography of rock love songs, useful but ultimately somewhat pointless and tiresome, we chose to focus the reflection on their impact, somehow to contradict what Nick Hornby writes in *High Fidelity*: “People worry about kids playing with guns, and teenagers watching violent videos; we are scared that some sort of culture of violence will take them over. Nobody worries about kids listening to thousands—literally thousands—of songs about broken hearts and rejection and pain and misery and loss.” Yes, Nick, we did worry about these kids.

In this issue of *JPRS*, we offer a selection of the papers given on the occasion of this conference focusing on the “Latin” perspective: from French rock to its Iberian counterparts, to the geographically and culturally intermediate space of Occitanie. A second selection centered on the English-speaking area was published in Britain in *Rock Music Studies* in February 2018 (Vol 5, Issue 1). On the French side, Solveig Serre and Luc Robène focused on the love discourse expressed by Gallic punk which, from teenage loves to more dangerous experiences, illuminates the transformations of the world and points to the image of a society that needs to be reinvented. Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud looked at the band Eiffel, which since the 90s, contrary to punk, chisels and deconstructs the French language to explore the most complex and subtle love emotions. Yet like his predecessors, by infiltrating the intimacy of interstitial spaces, Eiffel manages to portray a changing world to which the amorous discourse offers its healing grace. The period of the Movidá is the subject of the two articles devoted to Spain. Magali Dumousseau-Lesquer first draws up a panorama of love rock in post-Franco Madrid, highlighting, among other radical challenges, the unprecedented place that women occupied, but also insisting, like the articles on French rock, on the will of artists to highlight a disenchantment specific to the contemporary world and the new sexualities it fostered. Emmanuel Le Vagueresse can then clarify this panorama by focusing on the flagship group of the time, Mecano, which has been able to impose “a vision of love rid of both the conservative diktats of Francoism, but also the excesses or provocations of la Movidá,” a vision between passion and reason, the underground and the mainstream. If Jiří Měšíc dedicates his article to the love songs of Leonard Cohen, he does not leave the Franco-Iberian space insofar as he brings to light in the work of the Canadian the numerous borrowings to medieval poetic forms proper to the Occitan tradition, from courtly love to more mystical explorations. Finally, we will conclude with Tosha Taylor’s article on The Killers, who, in their treatment of love, also reflect a recent evolution, from a masculine rock tradition, made of violence and exacerbated sexual freedom to more contemporary forms that take into account new dimensions such as spirituality or marriage.