

Black Genres – Week 8

- Many of the most commercially important genres to be adapted and accepted into the pop mainstream – blues, jazz, reggae, soul, funk, toasting/Mcing/hip hop/rap, etc. All make the cross over from being directed at a black audience to being directed at a much larger white and black audience.
- May involve the interaction of at least two black communities in their inception and commercialisation – US, Caribbean, UK

Black Genres 2

- 1. Why are Black genres so popular and commercially successful?
- 2. What was the original social function of such music and how does it change with commercial success?
- 3. There is an argument that the black musical experience is at the heart of western popular music, and that the most innovatory developments **all** have their inception in black musical genres.

Experience of Discrimination

- *Black experience of discrimination in America at the root of development of blues and jazz*
- 1. History of black performers in 19th century and the minstrel shows. Work songs, the Holla, Spirituals. White imitations a standard variety act throughout age of Music Halls and Vaudeville's. *Black and White Minstrel Show* standard Saturday Night BBC TV until late 60s.
- 2. Jazz beginnings and the 1920s dance explosion. Cross-over into white society – birth of big band era with bands segregated.
- 3. Delta blues for a black audience – but then electrified in the 1950s and reinvigorated as Chicago blues. Cross over from rhythm and blues to the birth of rock. Rhythm and Blues as a catch-all term for the African American catalogues is supplanted by Soul in 1969.
- 4. Blues/Jazz Scales and **modes of delivery** at the heart of popular music – particularly so with gospel - the singer **articulates and directs the whole** with full involvement (physical and auditory) of audience.

Developments for Black Artists in 60/70s

- During the sixties Black American audiences moved away from mainstream rhythm and blues/rock and roll and Detroit sound of Motown (which gradually found a white audience) towards Soul and later Funk.
- 1. Soul and Disco create a huge following and do retained Black interest – while Progressive Rock, Metal, and guitar bands in general held no interest – case of Jimi Hendrix who had no black following. *Sister Sledge* an example of commercial successful black all girl disco band.
- 2. Black singers in the 70s develop a international following and turn to more global issues – Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, - and the hold of record companies over artists diminishes greatly
- 3. Phenomena of Northern Soul in late 70s working-class Britain.

Soul and Marvin Gaye

- Groups beginning to articulating a stronger Black identity – era of Malcolm X and Black Panther movement.
- Stax records create a distinctive sound.
- Earth Wind and Fire – Grove/Riff based music. Disco gave it commercial success.
- Story of Marvin Gaye - an example of singer developing with the genre – Soul – and becoming aware socially/politically – but becoming a victim of success with drug abuse.

3. Northern Soul

- A phenomena of 70s working-class Britain. First Rave Culture. DJ in charge. Got going in the 60s
- Towns like Wigan, Blackpool, Cleethorpes, Manchester – had clubs (e.g. *Wigan Casino*, *Blackpool Mecca*, Manchester, *Twisted Wheel*) devoted to dance music from obscure 60s Black recording labels copying the Detroit/Motown sound.
- Obsessive collecting of vinyl – the more rare and arcane the better.
- Expectation that people would stay and dance all night. Working class youths traveled large distances across the North to be at the big nights when specialist tracks would be played.

Roots of Reggae

1. The Jamaican experience- the neighbourhood, music (dance music) as a way of life. The social development of Jamaica – and class society on the Island. Gangs and poverty. Example of Jolly Boys acoustic Reggae.
- 2. The sound system – DJs, Dub (the first dance remixes), Toasting, the Version (vocals removed) , the Club . The musical and social tensions.
- 3. Ska, Rocksteady, Reggae, and Ragga, all evolved as music intended for use on sound systems – this made it different from music anywhere else at this time – and thus experimental and innovative.
- 4. Before Marley Reggae had made little impression on the mainstream pop market in UK and US. Also precursors – Ska, Calypso (Trinidad), Mento, etc. – regarded as too naïve and localised for major investment from Record Companies.

Rastafarianism

- Ganga and the religious angle. The story of Marcus Garvey and the Red Star Line. Worship of *Haile Selassie I* and redemption through African repatriation. Spiritual nationality – alternative to US style Black Power movements.
- The social experiences of Jamaicans in Britain after the war. The Windrush (1954) and the generation divide.
- Connection with Punk in late 70s.
- The cross over to mainstream acceptance of Reggae connected to success of Bob Marley.
- International canonisation of Marley after his death and the altering of his message (which was essentially locally based and rooted in Jamaican history and politics) to one of universal fight against oppression.

Reggae

- Refers to rhythmic format that originated in 1968.
- Population shift from 50s to cities – shantytowns around Kingston
- Mento to Ska in late 60s – Skatalites become local celebrities and associate with Rasta religion.
- Close harmony styles in imitation of Chicargo soul – trios (Wailers, Claredonians).
- Social unrest in ghettos reflected Rude Boys songs and tempo slowed down greatly.
- Drum and Bass locked together, plus guitar texture. Rock Steady with emphasis on bass guitar (used like a talking drum that played a definite rhythm.)

Early Reggae

- 1968 Maytals released 'Do the Reggay' – two chord pattern counterpoint to bass and drum. Keyboards and guitar messed together.
- Few singers heard outside Jamaica – Desmond Dekker, Jimmy Cliff, The Arrows.
- Film *The Harder They Come* (1972) achieved international audience for Cliff and many other artists.
- Attracted Chris Blackwell of **Island Records** to back Marley (1945-81) to achieve international fame. Island made a fortune through Marley and he is constantly re-released. *Catch a Fire* (1973) first Island recording – made Marley.

Bob Marley

- Renamed *Bob Marley and the Wailers* in 1975 and remixed for the international (American Market especially).
- Accelerated basic tempo, added blues-heavy amplified rock guitar, gospel female trio (I Threes) and African hand-drumming.
- Great Albums – Exodus (1977), Survival (1979) and Uprising (1980).
- Death from cancer in 1981- brought change in Reggae in Jamaica to Dancehall played on digitalised instruments and is essential DJ music.
- Huge influence on UK music of the time – connection with Punk – host of white imitators – e.g. UB40 etc and indirectly the reggae beat became standard for a large number of 80s white British groups – Specials, Madness, Dexy's Midnight Runners, etc – Factory Records.

Birth of Hip Hop 1

- 1. Late 70s Party scene in the The Bronx. DJs extended the instrumentals by use of two turntables.
- 2. Giving rise to first turntablism skills and break dancing craze. Also graffiti artists part of the culture.
- 3. Exploits of Cool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambata. Mobile disco crews and the scratching and rapping of Bronx Party MCs
- 4. Cool Herc – first to play the same instrumental break back to back – aimed at the B-Boys.
`Apache' by *The Incredible Bongo Band* his signature tune.

Hip Hop 2

- Flash the innovator with equipment – wanted to be able to move seamlessly from one beat speed to another – developed ‘cueing’ listening to one record while playing another. Flitting between two turntables at great speed – seamlessly – providing unbroken beats for dancers.
- Baabaata’s Zulu Nation (organisation to give Hip Hop international status) social importance (alternative to gang warfare). Huge eclectic record collection – used in creative ways and attracted a big following.

Hip Hop 3

- Started in 1974 as live entertainment which seemed impossible to commercialise . MC battles, etc. Improvised verbal sparring (rhyming) over a beat became a prized skill – especially when done a great speed.
- `Rapper's Delight' (1978) first attempt to put it on Vinyl. *Sugar Hill Gang* a manufactured band (by Sylvia Robinson) but went to No.4 on Billbaord charts and showed that recorded Rap had a commercial potential.
- Then in early 80s they all followed `Planet Rock' – sampled elements woven into new sampled tapestry.

Rap in the 80s and 90s - 1

- By end of the century Hip Hop/Rap the most dominant force in pop music industry especially in the USA. During the 1980s it overtook Metal as the key genre in the USA. MTV had started out to exploit Metal but from the 90s looked increasingly to Hip Hop genres for success.

Rap in the 80s and 90s - 2

- 1. Rap goes country wide – big following in the UK.
- 2. Gangsta Rap – West Coast verses East Coast.
Connections with Gangs, Porn industry, Drugs and Urban Low Life across the USA. DefJam records. Cop Killing. LA Police killing of Rodney King.
- 3. Censorship, misogyny, and the threat to middle class American values. Vice President Gore speaks out against Rap. Middle American backlash only fuels white teen interest.
- Rap goes international – regional and ethnic rap (Latin esp). Big white artists – Eminem latest big success.

Useful Books.

- *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life*, by Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton. (Headline, 1999)
- *Black Music in Britain*, by Paul Oliver (OUP Press)

Analysis Examples

- 1. Madonna 'Open Your Heart' from Susan McClary (1991) in *Feminine Endings*, pp.158-162. The feminist interpretation.
- 2. Tagg's 'hypothetical substitution', Richard Middleton (1990), *Studying Popular Music*, pp.180-183.