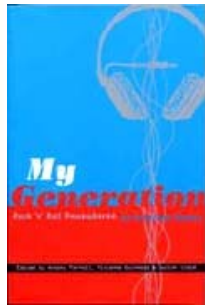


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For rock bibliography, see also <http://www.scaruffi.com/music/books.html>



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It was the Bronx, 1957, by the fire escape window in the bedroom I shared with my two sisters in the four-story walkup in an Irish-going-Black neighborhood. A pile of R&R 45s, often provided by the jukebox man at my mother's waitress job, and a portable victrola provided a kinetic audio mandala. The mantras would come in a few more years. I fantasized travelling into the future and heard the unborn bleeps, blaps and blips of Morton Subotnik's "Golden Apples of the Sun", the first recordings of the Moog synthesizer. Mom, a winter of '47 emigrant, would tell me hurried stories about childhood in Mayo, berry picking and wild donkeys.

In 1960, there was less money, no victrola, no television and another sister. We were one of a few "white" families in Brooklyn's Puerto Rican Park Slope. Boys on the stoops drummed out hypnotic poly-Latin rhythms on the tops of metal garbage cans. By 1961, we had moved to Boro Park, where resident fundamentalist Hassidics didn't share music with "goyum." We had two televisions for a brief time then -- one for the parents and a very old big box with a tiny tube TV for us girls. It didn't always work and we habitually tested and replaced the tubes. When the Beatles first appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, my wicked stepfather banished us to the old box. We frantically banged, turned, adjusted, and prayed Hail Marys to it and caught the performance. To borrow from Lennon's sentiments about Elvis, before the Beatles "there was nothing." Lennon walked into the marrow of my soul. A new sentience began.

The future came closer. In 1965, "Satisfaction" blared from our open bedroom windows over the streets of parading conservative Sabbath-observing Hasidim. I would sing every hit to seduce my girlfriends with a \$25 pawned dreadnought. The purchases and experiences of new 45s and albums, from Mamas and Papas to Jefferson Airplane, and matching chord music books defined the passing years. Street corners became the venue and R&R the religious worldview.

During the second half of the sixties, we lived in Brooklyn's Bensonhurst. The girls' bathroom at high school was crowded and dense with cigarette and pot smoke. I would stand on the radiator and do early Elvis imitations, and the black girls would impersonate hysterical white female fans. Bell bottoms, black armbands, Little Red Books, Afros, and moratoriums against

Viet Nam. TV became pictures accompanied by the Mothers of Invention's "Freak Out" turned up. I was a neighborhood guitar player in a basement rock band. Younger boys would giggle at the way my right breast rested on the curve of my Japanese Strat. On the avenue below a bedroom window above De Palo's Salumeria, you could hear the Fender Twin Reverb that broadcast my 12 String Harmony with the Bill Lawrence pickup. This 16 year old girl was suppose to be mindlessly riding around in a car driven by some guitar pluckin' boy instead of woodshedding -- a "queer" gender disruption amongst the Bensonhurst bimbos and bimbettes. A mother for whom I babysat, reasoned that her younger sister was too boy-crazy and that I was too mad for art and music. The woman's scheme was that we'd have a good influence on each other. So we did. We became lovers. Her mafia father threatened to carve my heart out. Incense, linseed oil and turpentine, painting easels and guitar stands, lava lamps, hot tribadism, the long play of "She's So Heavy", black lights and the art du jour day-glo posters of psychedelic Hendrix filled my room.

In Manhattan, my mother was waitressing lunch shifts near Roosevelt Hospital, where John Lennon would one day be delivered and pronounced dead. We were ever the descendants of Mayo every year down Fifth Avenue at the St. Paddy's Day Parade. The '60s to '70s turn brought an unprecedented mixed bag: superstars, high-heeled low sparks, more intellect and protest. Jazz, soul and rock intensified their mediations. This rebel had long ago torn her dress... and burned her bra. The Electric Circus, Fillmore East and the Stonewall Riots marked the Village. Being a flexible hippie lezbo, I used to spin "disco" in a mafia owned queer bar on Flatbush Avenue. It was the pre-BeeGeeian disco world of what came from soul and Motown: Marvin Gaye, Al Green, Aretha Franklin, the Funkadelics, Isaac Hayes,... yowza! The music in those early discos helped a lot of rock straights become gay-friendly, as they found gay clubs stylish, avant garde and jumpin' with great non-stop creaming dance music.

Cultures, ethnic communities, ideological blocks, and individuals are various. We are Bahktinian bricolage, cacophonies of ideals and agendas. In the years of Woodstock, we sang of love, peace and happiness but abortion was illegal and unaddressed. "My generation" was as conservative as any other on the politics of homosexuality. Rock & Roll brought with it "unisex" clothing but also defined itself with pumping phallocentrism, patriarchal capitalism, and obligatory heterosexuality like the institutional windows and halls that the changing times had promised to shake and rattle.

The unsuccessful portion of our revolution was embodied at Sinead O'Connor's performance at the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Bob Dylan's first CBS album at Madison Square Garden. She entered the stage prepared to perform a Dylan tune. I heard comradely female cheers, delighted alto and soprano choruses. Then, a slow pianissimo of bass and baritone-pitched booing infected the crowd and crescendoed to the force of a lemming stampede. I was aghast. Well, well, well....strange bedfellows indeed... masculinist hegemony waving its freak flag, choosing papist photographs over womens' rights to body and expression.

An Irish woman has full license to rip up the bloody Pope: "slaves of slaves" as Connelly described her and further reduced in the post-revolutionary Irish-Catholic state. When iconoclast Lenny Bruce comically slandered the Pope thirty-some years earlier, he was sanctified by the male subcultural elite. And Saturday Night Live, the show on which she had unexpectedly committed the unforgivable sin of papal rejection, had always been sacrilegious in its humor. No solidarity for Sinead came from the stage. Dylan was a wimpdick lying bag o' shit for not marching out with Sinead and daring that audience to boo them both off the stage.

For me, even in the shadow of Lennon's passing, that was one of the nights that the

music died and, like any religious movement, the so-called counterculture had to face its own disbeliefs and ironies. I had to finally verbalize the nagging reality that Dylan and the boys never raised their guitar pikes in favor of gender equality. They wear and discuss women like pornographic accessories. The Italian Riviera resort mayor who would ban fat or "ugly" women in bathing suits from his seaside jurisdiction could have easily gleaned his sentiments from MTV. The species of Rock and Roll is desperate for an evolution, rather than a revolution, from our own gender hypocrisies and dependence on social and environmental parasitism. That's a tall order in these times when marketing double-speak labels a performance from satellite to our big screen televisions "Unplugged." One faith restoring event was when kd laing won the grammy for best vocalist. I felt an unprecedented quality of pride for her accomplishment and our social progress.

Nevertheless, despite all of its problems and contradictions, I am a rock garden devotee.

A friend asked me, "if you were exiled on an island with ten albums, what would they be?" The choices reveal the contradictory matrices of my Dionysian and Apollonian sides, my penis and Venus envies. Impossible choices, but sitting here writing this article in Mayo, thousands of miles from my massive collection of vinyls and CDs, it's easier to pick out the ones I thrive on in my memories. These are albums that free me, that veritably incite divine hysteria, glee, sensuality and psychic nitty-gritty, the kinds of happiness and liberty that makes "enlightened" rationale irrelevant.

The first that comes to mind is "Electric Ladyland" by Hendrix, "have you ever been," not only experienced, but to electric ladyland? Voodoo Child in all its medley variations on the theme is, ooooh, duende. Crosstown Traffic, well, even on car radio that album makes a happening, in the sense of Dali, in the most mundane hot and humid traffic jam. Nobody ever did or ever will do for guitar what Hendrix did, pure fucking genius is an understatement.

Essential in the collection would be Beatles, but picking from the albums between Sgt. Pepper's to the last one is torture. "Within You and Without You", is an early great third world borrowing for levitating through life. I do believe it's true., an island ethic. The Beatles hippified agape. Lust/love, philosophy, social commentary and spiritual messages are woven throughout. Beatles music soothed the savage beast and racist provincial turf gang Italian boys in Bensonhurst. Lennon's "Woman is the Nigger of the World" is one rare "rock" art song that speaks to the gender inequality issue. Lennon really loved women and had the balls to express it. And on academic discourses such as nation-formation, he was an uncredited trendsetter. For example, "Imagine" preceded Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities", with its subsequent nearly biblical referential value, by about ten years. The Beatles, along with groups such as the Moody Blues' "Tuesday Afternoon" album, and the rock opera Tommy, added orchestral beauty to the rock tundra.

Of the Who albums, "Live at Leeds" compiles some of their best materials in a great live recording. The exhumed version of "Magic Bus" is especially percussive and well arranged. Townsend is always a maestro extraordinaire. Even at 40 something, we keep singing "I hope I die before I get old," celebrating in lugubrious fashion our de, de, degeneration. Caught in the liminal and living in rock, the ironies of ageism beset us. The energy of the album is irresistible, I can clean the whole house in one spin of it AND dance. The "Tommy" opera is probably the closest thing to male rock and roll's pre-Jeannette Wintersonian deconstruction of heroification and holiness. I'll miss it badly in favoring "Leeds", but there are enough cuts from the opera to sustain me.

Put me in a car for four days driving in the mountains of Arizona with one tape and it

would have to be "Avalon" by Roxy Music. Scenic cruising music can't be improved beyond this album, and especially the uplifting carefree affirmation that "more than this there's nothing."

The tracks are self propelling. The hooks rest on dynamite arrangements and theatre. For example, "I was blind, can't you see?" isn't the most clever or profound writing, but with the music attached you feel like you can be redeemed by any past lover. My sisters and I have shared many whirling Lughnasa frenzies in the kitchen with that album.

kd laing's "Engenue" (spelling?) is a recent victory for misfits like myself. The lyrics allow a wide variety of people to identify with the first person, but for a lesbian here is a rare empowering opportunity to hear popular media that actually speaks to her life. Laing's voice, the style, phrasing, dynamic power and theatrics, is awesome and polished. She is soooo cool. Turn it up. Someone always marching brave, here beneath my skin.... soaring..... constant craving.

No island collection would be complete without the double album of James Brown and the Blue Flames "Live at the Apollo Theater", to put you in a "cold sweat." I can relive many a NY apartment grungy get-downer dance marathon with that album.

An atypical bopper, which would have to be available for constant replay, is John McLaughlin's first Shakti album, with the series of live cuts on one side "What Need Have I for This?", "What Need Have I for That?", "I am Dancing at the Feet of my Lord", "All is Bliss", "All is Bliss." Recorded live somewhere in New York, it thrives on the fringes of Hindu classical rock jazz fusion. The violinist, Shankar, and the tabla player set the standards for "tight." The Mahuvishna man was always like a bumble bee looking for somewhere to land and in Shakti he found his element. I remember that album on the turntable for the first time and dancing around my baby niece's crib in Brooklyn back in 1978. She slumbered, already accustomed to loud R&R blasting in the apartment. What a great dance-around-an-angel that was.

It would be hard to pick from the Yoko Ono stuff, the queen mother of punk and new wave, and her collaboration with Lennon. Although "Double Fantasy" is a favorite, it carries too many associations with the days around his murder. So, I'd pick the one that features her best song compositions performed by other great artists such as the B-52s and Elvis Costello. I think she was multi-media cutting edge. To hell with all the jealous petty misogynist and xenophobic cranial-anal inversions who demonized her. From "Fly" to "Thin Ice" and "Every Man has a Woman who Loves Him" to "Beautiful Boy" she has proven herself as a conceptualist, songwriter and producer. No doubt, himself would agree.

Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company's "Cheap Thrills" is the rock-blues album of the century. When Janis sings the blues, she makes even Billie Holiday sound like Shirley Temple. Her voice on "Cheap" is more guttural than the Gyoto Monks and I swear you can hear split notes and multiple intonations in those woahs, wails and whimpers. Was it Southern Comfort or Buddha that made her say "its all the same fuckin day, man"? No matter, each time I hear that album I merge with the performance. A lot of people say Big Brother wasn't such a hot band, but for that magic moment they were perfect. Gershwin, Mama Thornton, Bessie Smith, she brought together American blues in one fatal sweep I often thought Robert Plant was a Joplin wannabee.

For number ten, I'll have to settle on "Blind Faith", the super group, and one of the best albums to live by: "doooo... whaaaat.... yooooou like," "sea of joy" "presence of the lord" and Buddy Holly's "Well Alright": awesome grooves, great hooks, and tight jams, brilliant audio heaven, the perfect accompanying nourishment for trials, tests, tribulations, and celebrations. It blends the best work of the best musicians of the best R&R genre, the raw and cool vocals of

Winwood, the chops of Clapton with a genealogy deep in jazz, black and British music, and the Baker bass drum spine and anarchic ordering.

I'm ready for the island now, in the Bronx, Tucson, or Mayo. "Its just a "foolish dream that you dream, in the nights when lights are low." Rock is as strong a force as ever, and just when you think its had its day, a good new group comes out or an old group releases a great new album. It is ever evolving, and there's room for everybody; "and in the end, the love you take is equal to the love... you make." Rock and Roll is dead, long live Rock and Roll.

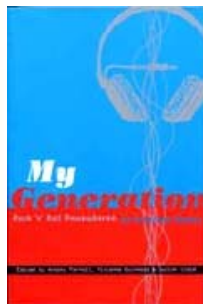
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*"My Generation: Rock' n' Roll Remembered - An Imperfect History."*

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'A fascinating compilation - Some of the recollections are funny, others are moving, and some reveal more about the contributor's life than their taste in music. My Generation is Desert Island Discs With Attitude.'

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'A treasure trove of music, nostalgia and fiery ardour.'

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Ah, we were so much younger then - This is the rhythm of our youth, the backbeat of our revelation, the rock music that changed a generation. My Generation. This extraordinary book makes it your generation too. Dare to turn the page and drop the needle.

Contributors include: Paul Brady, Donovan, Ron Wood, Marianne Faithfull, Noel Redding, Shane MacGowan, Ronnie Drew, Mary Coughlan, Terry Woods, Niall Toner, Mick Hanley, Paddy Moloney, Paul McGuinness, Jim Sheridan, Sebastian Barry, Frank McGuinness, Carlo GÃ©bler, Hugo Hamilton, Joe O'Connor, Dermot Healy, Elgie Gillespie, Patrick McGrath, Fintan O'Toole, Anne Enright, Paul Muldoon, Roddy Doyle, Philip Casey and Colm TÃ³ibÃ©n.

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