



**Márcia Lúcia Fontes  
da Conceição e  
Martins Ferreira**

**O Papel da Nova Música Popular no Cinema  
Anglófono (1955-85)**

**The Role of New Popular Music in Anglophone  
Cinema (1955-85)**



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Tese apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Ingleses realizada sob a orientação científica do Prof. Doutor Anthony David Barker, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro

To my family and closest friends for giving me reasons to believe.

## **O júri**

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“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.” (Albert Schweiter)

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**Palavras-chave**

Música Popular, Música nos Filmes, Cultura Juvenil, Subcultura, Adolescente, Rock 'n' Roll.

**Resumo**

A presente dissertação propõe-se apresentar uma perspectiva global do papel da música popular, com particular ênfase para o Rock 'n' Roll, em filmes direcionados para adolescentes, lançados entre 1955 e 1985. Após contextualizar socioculturalmente as três décadas em estudo, este trabalho concentra-se na análise de filmes específicos de cada uma das décadas, de forma a avaliar a evolução da música nos filmes com o passar dos anos e o seu impacto nos espectadores.

**Keywords**

Popular Music, Film Music, Youth Culture, Subculture, Teenager, Rock 'n' Roll.

**Abstract**

This dissertation aims to present an overview of the role of popular music, with particular emphasis on Rock 'n' Roll, in films targeted at teenagers, released between 1955 and 1985. After contextualizing the three decades of study in respect of their social and cultural backgrounds, this work focuses on the analysis of particular films from each decade so as to assess the evolution of, for the most part, pre-recorded popular film music throughout these years and its impact on viewers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Music is to be heard in the background in almost every film even though many times it is not noticed by the viewer and the way it works is considered a mysterious phenomenon that attracts writers and scholars (Donnelly, 2001: 1).

Taking up a subject like music for film was a huge challenge for me as it is extremely difficult to talk about music and establish connections between music and characters or narratives, especially for someone who possesses no specific musical training. It was decided to study the three decades after the birth of Rock 'n' Roll, as my main goals were to analyze in what ways new young musical styles, such as Rock 'n' Roll, had penetrated cinema and also to explore how much music and its influences have changed as the teenagers of the late fifties and early sixties grew older. All things considered, the purpose of this work is to offer an overview of the contribution of popular music to film culture between 1955 and 1985, to see exactly how these new musical styles have been integrated into commercial cinema and to investigate the ways in which music and film have influenced each other. The mid-1980s are my stopping point for two reasons. I cannot deal with all of the last 60 years in a work of this scale, and the mid-1980s, with the advent of MTV and the explosion of widely disseminated pop videos, marks a point at which we start to become saturated with images from popular music. After all, a form has arrived when a director like Tarantino opens a film (*Reservoir Dogs* (1992)) with an extended discussion of a video. The eighties mark the point at which pop becomes as much if not more visual than musical. This is not the case for most of the period under review.

All the chapters place the decade they are dealing with within a sociocultural framework so as to present a broader view of what was going on during the years the films studied were produced, in the attempt to make clear the roles of both music and film as vehicles for expressing the cultural identity and concerns of young people, the target audience for most of the films I have decided to study.

The first chapter of this dissertation attempts to define film music as an area of studies and clarify its role in the film industry. The Musical as film genre and an earlier new style, jazz, are also presented as key elements in conceptualizing cinema's relationship with music and how the new is assimilated. Chapter I is also focused on the second half of the fifties and presents an analysis of the importance and relevance of music in the

films *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956) and *Rock Around The Clock* (1956). These were among the first films to address teenagers specifically and to deal with their behavior, here often represented as disruptive and problematic.

Chapter II looks at the sixties as a decade of social change. Through the analysis of *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), I intend to look at the emergence of a youth counterculture and its relevance as a market segment, especially to the film industry. By analyzing *The Graduate* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969) I intend to show the film applications of a new type of Rock 'n' Roll which is more aggressive/ironic and which came to speak for a generation which was not reconciled to inherited social norms, which equated "settling down" with "selling out".

Chapter III presents an analysis of two very different films: *American Graffiti* (1973) and *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), which were produced in different halves of the decade, and by isolating and contrasting their differences in musical style and form, hopes to show the evolution taking place in both the minds and behavior of youngsters. As represented by these films, the decade begins with an exercise in nostalgia for the early sixties and finishes off with a much more gritty way of getting by in the city by foregrounding its night-life and dancing.

Chapter IV deals with the eighties and picks up the changes American teenagers of the sixties had been through. By analyzing *The Big Chill* (1983), I tried to accompany the mental and emotional transformations (which, as it were, have occurred to the teens represented in *American Graffiti*) over the sixties and seventies, which have changed these Americans into thirty-somethings of the eighties (a popular tv series of this name [*thirtysomething*] ran from 1987-1991 picking up the central motifs of dissatisfaction and disillusionment of *The Big Chill*), intimately concerned with the achievement or otherwise of the goals they had set for themselves. In addition, it was decided to dedicate some analysis to a different type of film: dance films, here represented by *Flashdance* (1983) and *Footloose* (1984). They are targeted at a slightly older demographic, they make a more obvious use of music and, before their break-out success, would have been considered niche interest films. This type of film, probably deriving from the popular success of *Fame* (1980), is about the aspiring performer. The narrative is therefore not coloured non-diegetically by song, music and dance but rather

is centrally about the desire to engage in these activities, indeed to live for them. I have opted to make it therefore the object of some reflection. As I state throughout the chapter, dance films opt for a very heavy soundtrack and the drama seems to obey a wish-fulfillment structure in opposition to the films of John Hughes, for example, which were also very popular in the decade, but which focus on younger, unhappier and troubled teens who try to solve their problems through peer bonding (and for whom music is a form of extra-diegetic mood painting).

Finally, I summarize my findings on the above issues and make some observations about the learning process I went through in executing this research project. My last remarks therefore are some suggestions for where the project might be further taken if I (or other researchers) were to carry on with it as a subject.

## **Chapter I**

### **Film Music, the Film Industry and the Fifties**

The presence of music in films dates back to the silent era, appearing even before the introduction of voice. At the beginning of the twentieth century silent films were often accompanied by the sounds of a live piano playing improvised tunes. Around the 1920's Max Winkler, a music publishing clerk, wishing to improve the quality of film in order to transform cinema into a more attractive art form, presented pianists with a list of cue sheets of already existing pieces to guide their practice as they accompanied the exhibition of films. Along with this, Hollywood studios began experimenting with new sound technologies and by the 1930's classical music was introduced in films with Max Steiner leading to the creation of musical departments. And so a new area of studies was born: Film Music, the association between popular music, which has always played a determinant part in the entertainment industry, and the moving image. The preponderant role that radio acquired as an entertainment medium is the factual proof of the importance of popular music. It was originally invented by Nikola Testa and Guglielmo Marconi and its Golden Age was between 1920 and 1950. Before the advent of television, commercial radio broadcast included news, music, drama, comedies, variety shows and other forms of entertainment such as sports reporting. Its main focus was the broadcasting of music as a form of entertainment and this was the primary means of listening to music. In the fifties radio was supplemented by the advent of television. "American Bandstand", the programme very well portrayed in John Waters' *Hairspray* (1988), was a new means of spreading the latest musical forms and also the way of dancing it.

Whatever its genre, be it jazz, rock, pop, hip-hop, disco or reggae, among many other possibilities, and independently of the public's awareness, film music has had a great influence on the way we perceive narrative itself. It is deeply connected to cultural practices and, according to Kathryn Kalinak (2010: 7) it can do a variety of things, from establishing a time and setting to creating mood and atmosphere or clarifying the events shown. Film music has a great power of triggering emotional reactions from the audience, thus increasing their identification with the characters and narrative. In 1929 90% of the most popular songs in America were film related and the most successful movies were the ones which used originally composed music and lyrics in a structured narrative. In order to fully perceive film music one must not forget that it is, in its essence, music, with a great power of creating meanings through associations, causing effects on listeners through its main features such as tonality, melody, rhythm or even

timbre. Music is, undoubtedly, a great tool for colouring the presentation of social and cultural issues thus having the ability to create reactions.

“America is a melting pot wherein the melodies of all nations are fused into one great new rhythm: Jazz.” In *The King of Jazz*, 1930.

*The Jazz Singer*, the first talking picture, led the way to the introduction of a synchronized sound system, one that proved extremely expensive but utterly profitable, contributing to a great increase in cinema's market share in entertainment and leisure consumption. Cinema was facing an overall decrease in attendance and needed to use all its sources in order to attract a wider range of audiences. The huge investment associated with the development of sound technology led to mergers within the film industry and the industry of leisure and entertainment. Along with this, musicians started facing a new reality: the prospect of a profitable career out of music.

Jazz became a feature of Hollywood films around the 1930's with the multiple aims of compensating for eventual gaps in the narrative, emphasizing the action, creating atmosphere and mood, clarifying time and space and establishing a connection between the audience and the narrative. Many have argued that Jazz expresses ideologies of race, gender and sexuality but when it first appeared in films it was mainly associated with Romanticism. Even though the birth of jazz music is accredited to African American sources the reality is that it first appeared in films which targeted white audiences. Performances from black artists were avoided or limited to very short appearances representing minor scenes in the film, not affecting its narrative. White performers portrayed in films functioned as a vehicle for the popularization of Jazz music in America. The acceptance of the Jazz movement paved the way for African American traditions to blend with those of the white middle class society. By conquering its place in the radio Jazz became hugely popular especially among the youngsters who used it as a way of rebelling against traditional features of former generations.

Throughout the 1930's and 1940's the Musical assumed quite a central place in the world of cinematic genres. This was associated to the fact that in the late 1920's and early 1930's Hollywood studios, after the creation of their own music departments, had a closer connection to songwriters who mastered the art of creating musicals out of recycled music. Musicals had a great ideological power being essentially romantic and conveying an atmosphere of optimism and beauty which stopped being consonant with

what was happening in America in the late 1950's. Musicals presented an easy escape from the problems of Humanity: as long as there was music there was a solution to everything. The pleasure of the musical was in performances, conveying images of a possible utopia in a democratic America, where everyone could live in harmony and reach a successful life through hard work. Taking this into account we can easily understand why the musical was so appreciated in the post-war scene in America: it helped viewers to compensate for the feelings of loss and separation which derived, among other things, from America's participation in the war and the difficulties of social change and reintegration. America became a "melting pot" where several ethnicities mingled together. With the great impact and proliferation of the TV, as (at first) cinema's great rival, along with the birth of "youth" as a market segment, issues such as race and class and the inherent conflicts of values became a constant in society and music was used to express them: this entailed a call for counter-cultural forms, for rock 'n' roll and hedonistic popular music and consequently initiated the decline of the more socially accommodating musical. Rock 'n' roll needs to be seen as a socio-musical phenomenon, deeply associated to the changes occurring at the time. It appealed essentially to youth and it contributed to a significant degree to the proliferation and validation of once marginalized black music. Rock 'n' roll cannot be deeply analyzed without considering its importance in economic terms. From the mid-fifties onwards, cinema was facing a decrease in the number of attendances and had to fight back in order to maintain its position against the potential dangers of television. More than listening to pop stars, young people needed to see them and cinema was a great vehicle for helping them to do so. Mundy (1999: 4-5) claims that popular music on screen has always made specific pleasures available to its audience as it comes ideologically pre-loaded thus representing a set of 'specific practices' which carry implicit ideological positions. Elvis Presley's live appearances are a clear example of young people's need to see their idols. He was certainly not the first popular singer young people identified with but he is worth being mentioned as television and cinema led to a very fast construction and dissemination of his 'visual persona'. Mentioning the development of Elvis Presley's early career Mundy says that

the impact that Presley's visual presence had upon young audiences at his live performances goes largely unacknowledged as an element which appealed to the emerging youth taste culture. It was the way he looked, just as much as how he



sounded, that demanded attention and which created sensation. For young Americans trapped within the behavioural mores of domestic, high-school, suburban decorum, Presley's on-stage performative excesses were as liberating and intoxicating as the music itself. (Mundy, 1999: 112).

### **1.1 Socio-cultural Contextualization of the Fifties**

The fifties were characterized by great changes in social organization in the United States, which is reflected in the habits of the movie going population. Following the Great Depression, which lasted until the early 1940's, with the end of the Second World War, the new highway system and the improvement in consumer society, American families started moving to suburbs where they could get bigger and more comfortable houses to raise their families. Americans got used to this new way of living, entertaining themselves with activities like home redecoration and with their own TV sets, gramophones, portable record players and radios. American families were living further away from movie theaters, which led to a fifty percent decline in movie. Hollywood had to fight back and so a little revolution took place in cinematic practices. Cinema had to reinvent itself. The post-war period also opened the way to the emergence and proliferation of the record sales business, due to the end of shortage of raw materials for the production of records, along with the development of record formats and the increasing demand for recorded music from radio. All these factors led to the maximization of mass sales. There was a limited number of artists, mainly white, who seemed very homogeneous in their style of music. They all performed songs that seemed to have been written out of a recipe, all expressing more or less the same range of feelings in conventionalized ways. The main themes portrayed were related to individual conflicts, struggle and success as well as heterosexual romantic desire. Even though Broadway seemed to ignore musical styles associated with marginal sectors of society, specifically black music, the fact is that the great increase in black people's income and their consequent growing purchasing power, made many radios start playing black music. The spread of "soundies" and the imitations of black artists by white musicians contributed to the popularization of black music.

The 1950's were the birth years of Youth Culture. American teenagers of the fifties were a phenomenon worth being studied. They were aware of the features that made

them special: they saw themselves as a unified group, linked by their age, they had money and they were living in a prospering society. They were recognized by their elders and had institutions (such as high schools) that reinforced their status as a group. All around teenagers were considered as a segment which needed special cares and there was great psychological and physical development around them. The birth of teenagers as a segment represented a boom to the consumer-based economy and gave rise to the emergence of a specific business aimed to satisfy youth, as they were great purchasers of entertainment and art. Market studies started targeting teenagers' preferences and companies used their results in order to try to implement a sort of "brand loyalty" into teenagers that was supposed to last until their adulthood. It was soon found out that peer opinion was far more influential than adult opinion. In fact, most parents relied on their children's opinion when deciding to purchase something. Teenagers were known as "secret persuaders" or "opinion leaders" and so many brands started aiming their advertising campaigns at teenagers, not adults.

The 1950's marked the birth and rise of Rock 'n' Roll as a musical genre. This was a crossover between musical styles mainly characterized by the white appropriation of black blues, boogie and gospel.

The transition of popular music to rock 'n' roll literally shook up the culture, producing not only excitement among youth but also a backlash from conservatives who said it was "primitive and "primal". (Pomerance, 2005: 17).

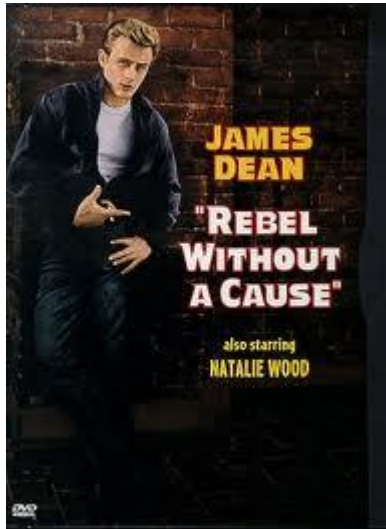
In order to fully understand Rock 'n' Roll we must take into account the listener's identification with popular music. The youth of the 1950's were characterized by America's changing demographics. This new Youth was much more affluent during high school and college, leading to the increasing demand for cultural spaces appropriate to them. Rock 'n' Roll helped to release youngsters from their suburban domestic lives as it was extremely attractive and created a sense of collective and communal experience as it was a common interest. The youth of the fifties were rebels with a cause when they saw in Rock 'n' Roll the emotional affective rejection of prevailing social norms such as compulsory high school attendance and obeying parenting rules. Rock 'n' Roll made its way into the film industry almost immediately after its birth. It expressed the often contradictory feelings of teenagers and became a landmark in teenpics of the 1950's.

However, a paradox was born during this period: access to these cultural forms and entertainment was only possible if teenagers obeyed what they rejected the most: parental power and high school diploma. Teenagers fought to live with the simultaneous desire of both rebellion and conformism. If, on the one the hand, they wished to reject parents and high school, at the same time they aimed for the prosperity both of them delivered. Adults of the 1950's saw Rock 'n' Roll as a menace to social peace. Many argued that Rock 'n' Roll depicted violence and increased criminality rates, claiming that it was music created by semiliterate people of the lower classes. The entertainment business began something similar to a courtship of the teenage years as teenagers accounted for the majority of sales related to popular music and they had money to spend. If they wanted Rock 'n' Roll this was the sound soon to be heard throughout radio stations in America. Cinema couldn't remain neutral to these changing demographics and so what began as an entertainment form for the entire family, combining different generations inside the same theater room, was transformed into an art form almost entirely dedicated to the juvenile audience which remained a niche market until the 70's.

The 1950's were also the birth years of the exploitation cinema, characterized by advertising, promotion and communication between the movie and its viewers. The most successful films were the ones that told stories stating the beliefs of the audience. The exploitation film relied much on the teenage budget and dealt with controversial themes, exploiting both sensational happenings and notoriety, counting on teenage participants. We thus faced the beginning of the "juvenilization" of American movies: in the 1950's films reflected teenagers tastes, not mass tastes. They were the center of the entire industry. And so a new genre was born: the Teenpic. A study from Leo Handel "Hollywood looks at its audience" proved that "the typical moviegoer of the 1950's was a teenager".

Further ahead in my thesis I intend to dedicate myself to the analysis of the role of film music in teenpics of the 1970's. Some movies of this era were nostalgic and made use of the already seen and heard Rock 'n' Roll as a way of perpetuating the cultural features of the already grown-up baby-boomers of the fifties, who still had a major role in defining society and its cultural tastes.

## 1.2. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)



**Pic 1 - Poster Promoting A Rebel Without a Cause**

*Rebel Without a Cause* was one of the first films to portray young people's mobility, in this specific case, in cars and their conflicts with uncaring parents. As Doherty (2002: 84) puts it, it said much about the confusions, doubts and fears of both generations. The film aimed to attract rebellious youth by representing their inner conflicts. James Dean played the part of a teenager who didn't fit in: he didn't know who he was or who he wanted to be and when he looked for his father's guidance

through the depth of his fears he found nothing but lack of understanding, which frustrated him even more.

Doherty (2002: 85) argues that Jim and his close peers seem to have an autonomous existence and adult world is portrayed as peripheral. Mundy (1999: 106) states that they seem to be adrift in a world devoid of direction and love. Jim's character doesn't find it easy to get integrated in his new school and ends up being challenged to a car race where his opponent gets killed. The so-called 'chicken run' inspired the production of many other drag-racing films. The car duel epitomizes the dangers of a thrilling life lived near the edge and culminates with the seemingly necessary death of the too rebellious and beyond adult control youth. Drag racing, alongside with the overtones of rock 'n' roll music, was an opportunity for teenagers to show their courage in search for independence and power.

Like rock 'n' roll, drag racing in the mid-fifties was a controversial, confrontational teenage activity, as much an occasion for subcultural consolidation as an expression of subcultural values. (Doherty, 2002: 87).

The film conveys the notion that the problem of juvenile delinquency is possible to solve as Jim and Judy's characters are recuperated into adult society. Even though it was claimed that rock 'n' roll was responsible for the increase in criminality rates among youngsters and the rise of juvenile delinquency, it was a gold mine for the cinematic industry. Economic reasons spoke louder and so Rock 'n' Roll came to stay in the film industry. The film was considered James Dean's ticket to stardom as he

became known as the first American teenager on screen. The actor became so popular that his most obsessive fans were called ‘Dean-agers’ (Doherty, 2002: 86).

### 1.3. *Blackboard Jungle* (1955)

‘Kids are people and most people are worthwhile. We all need the same thing – patience, understanding and love.’ Dadier’s Wife, in *Blackboard Jungle*

‘Today we are concerned with juvenile delinquency – its causes – and its effects. We are especially concerned when this delinquency boils over into our schools. The scenes and incidents depicted here are fictional. However, we believe that public awareness is a first step toward a remedy for any problem. It is in this spirit and with this faith that BLACKBOARD JUNGLE was produced.’ (*Blackboard Jungle*, written prologue)



**Pic. 2 - Poster Promoting *BlackBoard Jungle***

*Blackboard Jungle*, causing great controversy by dealing with the problem of juvenile delinquency, was the first movie which introduced Rock ‘n’ Roll even though it did so in a very shy way. The movie starts by giving some background images of the city where it was shot, its high school and the main characters to the sound of “Rock around the Clock”. We hear the loud sounds of a saxophone and an electric guitar as the singer’s voice increases in drama and we see the schoolyard of North Manual High School where several kids are dancing, some others hoot a stranger who approaches the front door while others wave at a woman passing by through the iron bars of the fence as if they were prisoners.

In the two minutes and ten seconds it lasts on screen, this combination of image and song – teenagers under detention, Bill Haley singing “Rock Around the Clock” – defined the cultural essence of the music that Alan Freed had just named. It

would be all about disorder, aggression and sex: a fantasy of human nature, running wild to a savage beat. (Miller, 1999: 87-88).

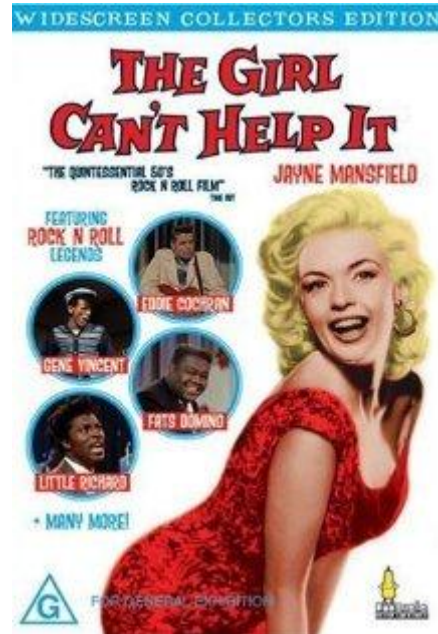
The song which became the rock 'n' roll anthem took only two months to be number one in the Billboard Charts in the United States and turned Bill Haley into the world's first rock 'n' roll star (Miller, 1999: 89). When we see Mr. Dadier entering the boundaries of his school to the sound of these revolutionary tunes we immediately perceive that we are about to witness the inner conflicts faced by young people of the time. The loud sound of the beat of the song connotes power, aggression and violence (Miller, 1999: 92). We can see young people smoking and drinking with a menacing look on their faces, the same look they have during classes. Despite the fact that it may not be considered a teenage movie, as it is targeted at an adult audience, most young people of the time identified themselves with the problems portrayed there. The film relates to a schooling system which was mainly conservative and conveyed anti-materialistic values such as obligation, loyalty and dedication to schoolwork, themes which youngsters did not identify with as they saw no practical utility in them. Teachers and the institution itself failed to understand the gap between their rules and students' desires, leading to a wave of violence and rebellion from students, who fought the established norms. Outside the classroom there was a whole new world of materialistic consumption appealing to teenagers, represented in the sale of mass media products related to leisure, pleasure and sensuality, values opposite to the ones taught inside the classroom. It is worth noting, however, that in the end, there is a rehabilitation of youth due to the efforts of the teacher who doesn't allow himself to give in to students' attacks. Rebellious students are thus portrayed as people who can be reached and rehabilitated into society once the reasons for their behavior are clearly understood.

#### **1.4. *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956)**

The explosive power of rock, psychically profound in a way that called up the explosive power of the Bomb, is central in *The Girl Can't Help It* (Pomerance, 2005: 17).

In order to appeal to audiences Hollywood started shooting outside its studios enabling movie goers to travel in their minds, through these images, to places they had never been before. Thus, the American film industry of the 1950's also took spectators

through deep travels within their souls by relating to their inner thoughts and feelings. This last feature is seen in *The girl can't help it*, one of the first colored films to be shot, where Tom Miller reminisces about the departure of his former love while he listens to the song "Cry me a River". This was a remarkable rock movie as it featured performances from pioneer rock artists. However, it fails to make a point considering rock 'n' roll. On the one hand it gives it some credit because it shows various live performances throughout the movie and it introduces us to the job of the agent, conveying an idea of credibility to the style of music. On the other hand, it is ironical and satirizes teens' ability for deeply appreciating music as it shows



youngsters vibrating to the sound of someone who totally lacks the talent for singing. It makes fun of teenagers for their acceptance of music sung by someone who doesn't know how to do it. Concerning this matter Mundy states that

**Pic 3 - Outdoor promoting *The Girl Can't Help It***

The knowingly appalling song which propels Jerry to stardom, 'Rock Around the Rockpile Blues', stands as explicit criticism of contemporary rock 'n' roll, the more so since Jerry's sole contribution is the interjection of the high-pitched prison 'siren'. Coming from a highly mediated product as a Hollywood film, this attack on the 'authenticity' of another highly mediated cultural process carries unintentional irony. This criticism of rock and its adherents is privileged throughout the film. (Mundy, 1999: 108).

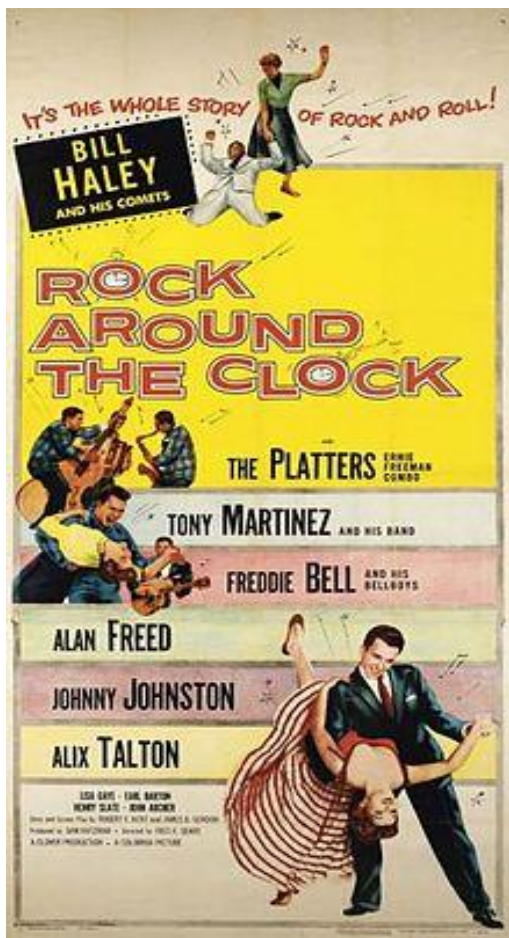
Generally speaking, films of this new era aimed to make people forget about the pressures of their daily lives. The changing role of women as acquiring greater importance in society with their mass entrance in the working world is also a feature of the early 1950's. Women started idealizing stardom in opposition to being at home.

Paradoxically in *The Girl can't Help it*, we are presented with a story about music, in which music is a constant in all, expressing the culture of the time. The film stars Jayne Mansfield in the role of Jerri Jordan, the girlfriend of the famous gangster Marty Murdoch. The girl simply can't sing but Marty employs the failed agent Tom Miller to



transform her into a star within 6 weeks. As she passes by mountains of ice melt, milk bottles pop their caps and man's glasses crack so as to show the astonishing effect of such an attractive lady. "The girl" just "can't help it". Jerri is a woman who, against the odds of the changing American society, doesn't want to enter the business world and wishes for a simple life as a wife and a mother of kids, spending her days within the borders of her kitchen and her house. It is her fiancée who wants her to become a star, even though she lacks the talent for it, and doesn't want her to do anything related to house tasks. Against all expectations and even though lacking the necessary ability to sing Tom Miller manages to get her to yell something that sounds like a siren during a song and this buys her ticket into the music world. One of the popular themes of the time were secrecy and infidelity which are also portrayed in *The Girl can't Help it* as the relationship between Jerri and Tom is kept in secret for the greatest part of the film.

### 1.5. *Rock around the Clock* (1956)



**Pic. 4 - Poster Promoting *Rock Around The Clock***

'Corny: What is that outfit playing up there?

Steve: I don't know. It isn't boogie, it isn't jive and it isn't swing. It's kind of all of that.' (in *Rock around the Clock*)

Thomas Doherty (2002: 54-55) argues that the birth of teenpics in its essence may be attributed to *Rock around the Clock* as this was the first film produced which had teenagers as the main target, to the exclusion of adults, and it was shot to capitalize on the rock 'n' roll craze. Its huge success proved that teenagers alone were able to make a film profitable. Teens had an increasing purchasing power that could feed the financial necessities of theatres and drive-ins throughout America. Rock 'n' Roll became a "must have" in movies aimed at teenagers and, even though the existing generational conflicts caused by this



type of music were quite clear, the huge amount of films having soundtracks containing it came to validate and recognize the great power of Rock 'n' Roll. Minor incidents of violence occurred in theaters during the "Rock Around the Clock" title sequence and in some cities after the screening of the film, thus increasing the association between rock 'n' roll music and disruptive behavior. Marshall Crenshaw (1994: 186) considers the film a forgettable rocksploitation flick as it used the performance of Bill Haley and his Comets, who topped the charts in 1955 with "Rock around the Clock", as well as other famous performers such as the Platters.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

As it has been demonstrated, music has been a constant in films ever since the Cinema Industry was born. Film music is said to have the power to trigger emotions and reactions by creating meanings through associations. The fifties were the birth years of youth culture and of youth as a market segment. Rock 'n' Roll emerged in the second half of the decade as a socio-musical phenomenon and has been associated to the changes happening at the cinema. Films became a vehicle not only for youngsters to hear but also to visualize pop stars, such is the case of *Rock Around the Clock*, which is targeted at youth and shows live performances of Bill Haley and his Comets, clearly helping to promote the band. The films mentioned in this chapter enabled teenagers to express their individual conflicts, more specifically in *A Rebel Without a Cause*, their struggle for success and heterosexual and romantic desire, such is the case of *The Girl Can't help It*. Rock 'n' Roll songs as featured here were seen as a vehicle for youngsters to release their worries but were also portrayed as a menace to social peace as many claimed it depicted violence, as it is seen in *Blackboard Jungle*. During the fifties the entertainment industry was mainly focused on satisfying the tastes of the teenage market, which integrated these cultural products in the commercial mainstream.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE SIXTIES**

## 2.1. Socio-cultural Contextualization

The sixties or the swinging sixties as they are commonly referred to were years of a certain relaxation of some social taboos related to sexism and racism but also years of revolt against the social norms of the time, from young people who refused to accept mainstream liberalism and, in particular, materialism. A counterculture was born that headed towards a social revolution aimed at reacting against the conservatism and social conformity of the 1950's and, among other issues, the military intervention in Vietnam.

The sixties were the birthplace of the Hippie movement. Youth were involved in popular social aspects of the movement towards liberation in society, sexual revolution, questioning authority and government demanding more freedom of rights, of personal expression and hierarchical statuses for women and minorities. The hippie movement also led to the rapid evolution of a youth subculture that emphasized change and



**Pic. 5 - Women's liberation march in New York**

experimentation, encouraging the aesthetic sense, the love for nature, a passion for music, the desire for reflection and strongly marked independence. These were also years of widespread drug use (mostly LSD and Marijuana) and psychedelic music.

Due to the post-war Baby Boom by the end of the decade there was an unprecedented number of young people who were affluent and potentially disaffected becoming the prospective participants in the rethinking of the direction of American Society, having the contribution of Psychoactive drugs working as an intellectual catalyst for change. It was this new generation which was in charge of the non-violent movement which opposed illegalities in Constitutional Civil Rights, namely regarding racial segregation, lack of voting rights among Southern Blacks and segregation in the purchasing and rental of homes. All throughout college campuses students exercised basic constitutional rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly<sup>1</sup> and the right to protest. The understanding of the damage caused by industrialization and the subsequent use of chemicals and pesticides raised awareness about the emerging

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom of assembly refers to the right of coming together in public places, joining in associations and expressing, promoting, pursuing and defending common interests.

problem of pollution. People became more sensitive to the fragility of planet Earth and the increasing need to take care of it led some more fundamentalist groups to a return to the land. The sixties were rich in social movements, such as the feminist movement in which the role of women as traditional housewives and homemakers was challenged by their entrance in the workforce of a new industrial society, motivating them to fight for equality, voting rights, property rights and even reproductive rights. This was also the decade of the sexual revolution aided by the availability of new and more effective forms of birth control which permitted more freedom in the selection of sexual lifestyles outside the confines of traditional marriage and, thus, the notion of recreational sex without the threat of unwanted pregnancy emerged in people's minds. The sixties were also characterized by the need to address minority rights of the gay and the handicapped.

There was a breeze of disillusionment with standard community forms and dissatisfaction with elements of the counterculture emerging from the growing popularity of communes, collectives and intentional communities which originated, among others, the birth of the Green Movement and also a noticeable interest in expanded spiritual consciousness expressed by the spread of activities such as yoga and occult practices.

Young people looked at police forces with distrust, which made the occurrence of confrontation between students and police officers common practice<sup>2</sup>. One of the biggest contributing factors to this rise in protest was the Vietnam War and the consequent division between its supporters and its opponents, leading to the creation of the anti-war movement in 1964. Thousands of youths all throughout the country protested against the



**Pic. 6 - Youth in a manifestation against the war in Vietnam**

war and its policy. Many of the protests of the 1960's were originated on college campuses. These new left-wing movements adopted social activism and led to the development of political identity, alternative lifestyles and social justice organizations

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<sup>2</sup> Police officers were accused of brutality and overuse of violence during political protest, as well as corruption due to the use of false evidence and outright entrapment in polemic cases.

promoting equality and solidarity, valuing human rights and recognizing the dignity of every human being. Steps were taken towards the implementation of equality of opportunity and economic egalitarianism through progressive taxation, income distribution and property redistribution. Activists fought for freedom of thought, liberty of conscience, political liberty, freedom of association and the rights and liberties covered by the rule of law.

The Civil Rights Movement was a key element of the Counterculture Movement using non-violence to assure that equal rights applied to all citizens no matter their differences in race or social status, contrary to what had happened in previous years. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 managed to ban discrimination on the grounds of race, color, religion or national origin and restored voting rights to African Americans. On the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1954 Greensboro became known worldwide as the first city in the South to declare racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, in contrast to the massive resistance felt in states such as Alabama, Arkansas and Virginia.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1955 Rosa Parks, the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement, refused to give her seat on a public bus to a white passenger which led her to being arrested, tried, and convicted for disorderly conduct and violating a local ordinance. African American leaders organized the three hundred and eighty-one day Montgomery Bus Boycott which claimed for a more humane bus transportation system and caused an eighty percent drop in bus revenues. Martin Luther King became a national figure causing a very positive impression by being the eloquent President of the Montgomery Improvement Association.

The sixties were the years that saw the appearance of the hippie communities. The hippies adopted a revolutionary style of dressing, consumed psychedelic drugs, lived in communities and developed a vibrant music scene which spread first throughout America and then throughout Europe eventually reaching the entire world. They refused to be actively engaged with mainstream parties and had the utopian wish of changing society by rejecting its ways. Psychedelic drugs like marijuana and LSD, among others, became a part of the counterculture of the sixties and their consumption was believed to be part of a method of raising consciousness influencing philosophy, art, music and even the style of dress. Famous singers and bands such as The Grateful Dead, Jimmy Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane and The Beatles, which were all said to consume LSD,

raised an increased interest in psychedelic drugs, even leading to the production of several exploitation movies referencing the use of LCD such as *Hallucination Generation*, in 1966, *The Trip*, in 1967 and *Psycho-Out*, in 1968.



**Pic. 7 - Audience attending the Opening Ceremony of the Woodstock Festival in 1969**

The mid-sixties witnessed a sexual revolution, advocating free love and its power, which connected to the idea of the beauty of sex as a natural part of ordinary life led to acceptance of the free mingling of the sexes on university campuses. The end of the decade saw the birth of the Gay Rights Movement which was followed by violent confrontations at Stonewall In, a gay bar in which the homosexual community fought against a legal system which persecuted sexual minorities. Any characterization of the sixties would be totally valueless without taking the issue of Music into account. The Beatles were perhaps the most prominent band of the decade. They appeared at the beginning of the decade in the United Kingdom and rapidly gained popularity and fame in the United States. They were inspired by Bob Dylan, who gave them both lyrical ideas and also introduced them to marijuana. With the advance of the decade and the emergence of the electric guitar, music evolved towards a more electric and psychedelic version of rock, and the Beatles became the exponents of this so-called Psychedelic Revolution. This was also the era of the Music Festivals, namely the Monterey Pop Festival, which launched Jimi Hendrix's career in the United States and the Woodstock Festival, in 1969, which became the symbol of the Hippie Movement. The latter was the symbolic culmination of a decade of social reform and the questioning of authority. Over half a million people attended the festival and transformed that season in what would be forever known as the "Summer of Peace and Love", the "Summer of the Hippie Movement" in defense of the idea of sexual liberation and love. This festival, which symbolically marked the highpoint of the sixties, was the stage for the famous, controversial and improvised performance of America's national anthem "The Star Spangled Banner" by Jimmy Hendrix, the most influential electric guitarist of the sixties. Psychedelic Rock and Acid Rock, music genres which grew out of the San Francisco's Hippie Counterculture were characterized by the increasing use of amplification and sound distortion by manipulating electronic equipment and light shows.



**Pic. 8 – Beatles’ fans waiting to see their show**

The world was swept, mid-decade, by The Beatles, an English rock band formed in 1960, the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed act in the history of pop. They were mobbed at concerts and airports and during their shows girls screamed so loud and so hysterically that their music could hardly be heard. This

intense idealization of the Beatles by their fans became known as Beatlemania. Popular music

would never be the same after them. Even though interested in sex and drugs like most of the music stars of the time, The Beatles kept this low profile and conveyed a respectable image, managing to vary in genres (from pop ballads to psychedelic rock), sometimes even incorporating classical elements in innovative ways and to improve their lyrics, making them exude a sophistication new to pop in the late sixties. Frequently referred to as The Fab Four, The Beatles embodied the sociocultural revolutionary ideals of the era and as early as 1964 they had already become international stars and had invaded the American market. Their first world tour took place in August 1966<sup>3</sup>. The Beatles and the thoughtful messages conveyed in the hit album *Sargent Pepper’s Lonely Heart Club Band* paved the way for their bad-boy twins but still successful Rolling Stones, whose first hit was a cover from the Beatles: “I wanna be your man”. The Beatles are considered the best selling band in history, having sold over a billion albums all over the world.

According to John Mundy (1999: 169) the interest in The Beatles and the popularity of their records began in 1962 when they released their first single in United Kingdom, “Love Me Do”, which was one of the first British single to reach a good position in a chart almost dominated by American Hits. By the end of 1963 their popularity increased greatly as The Beatles produced their first million selling album “With The Beatles” and three very successful singles. The Beatles great success with the public led the press to create a new phenomenon called *Beatlemania*, described as

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<sup>3</sup> However, the Beatles also created some controversy when John Lennon claimed that they were more popular than Jesus and so a boycott against them arose in America. Elvis Presley met with Nixon, the president at the time, asking him to ban The Beatles from entering the United States as they encouraged drug consumption and declared themselves anti-war, which was the same as saying anti-American.

The social phenomenon (...) which finds expression in handbags, balloons and other articles bearing the likeness of the loved ones, or in the hysterical screaming of young girls whenever the Beatle Quartet performs in public. *London Times* (December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1963)

Sandy Gardiner wrote

A new disease is sweeping through Britain, Europe and the Far East...and doctors are powerless to stop it. The name of this new addiction (...) is BEATLEMANIA. Most of the victims have fallen prey to Beatlemania by desire...and the majority of them are teenagers. *The Ottawa Journal* (November 9<sup>th</sup> 1963)

There has never been anything quite like Beatlemania, either before or since (Miller 1999: 213). It was, indeed, an exciting phenomena but it becomes clear from the reading of some chronicles of the time that it almost, if not really, touched silliness.

EMI, which issued the Beatles records in United Kingdom, also owned the Capitol label in the United States. Even though Capitol had rejected some previous singles from the Beatles they then accepted the project and appointed Walter Shenson, an independent producer, to meet with Brian Epstein six months prior to the shooting of *A Hard Days' Night*, and thus arrange for the Beatles to tour America, counting with a live appearance at the Carnegie Hall in New York City and two appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show. At this time the Beatles hadn't yet established themselves in the American market but there was a growing interest in their songs and so the project was merely seen as another low-budget exploitation movie aimed to capitalize on the band's success with the teenage market and to provide another soundtrack album. By the end of 1963, aided by the press which was fuelling Beatlemania, The Beatles alone had sold as many records as all the rest of the British market combined.

American Music of the sixties was characterized by its popular focus, aiming to reach a mass audience with little musical knowledge. The value of pop music is usually measured by the commercial revenues it generates but the music of the sixties is understood differently. It engaged more with the public issues of the day and so voiced the revolution that was taking place at the time. It was an era of rebellion and counterculture where younger generations started questioning everything including authority, big business, government and even smaller aspects of everyday life, giving



rise to currents that affected society as a whole. Bob Dylan also instituted great changes in the musical landscape by producing poetic but yet meaningful protest songs with messages condemning the wrongs of society, which focused on themes such as poverty, the war and racism, and thus became the spokesperson for the counterculture movement of the 1960's. Some of his songs became anti-war anthems and a celebration of civil rights by commenting on the unacceptable policies and procedures of the day.

From the sixties onwards Rock 'n' Roll became an umbrella term for a wide variety of music for young audiences, by fragmenting itself into several ramifications, such as Folk Rock, Bubblegum, Psychedelic Rock, Punk Rock, Heavy Metal, Glam Rock, Grunge, Hard Rock, Progressive Rock, Soft Rock and Trash Metal. All these new styles had a more nuanced approach to the political, moral and social issues of the day but they were essentially against the currents and opinions of the established cultural forms. Rock music was now dealing with political issues such as the American involvement in the Vietnam War and the repressive effects of mainstream culture, of so-called adult white middle class values. The stars of the fifties had faded by the beginning of the sixties. Elvis Presley had joined the Army in 1958, Buddy Holly was killed and many others had almost disappeared, and so the early sixties were a bland period characterized by good looking and well marketed teen idols, the most profitable segment of the music market.

TV acquired a role of increasing importance as a source of entertainment and information, in the shaping of new trends, such as consumerism, which were encouraged through advertising and also in the formulation of new forms of social conduct. Technological improvements, namely the near real time TV news coverage, made it possible to get updated information on whatever was happening all throughout the world. Radio also played a determinative role in the spread of news. Another indicator of the power of the emerging teen market was the overwhelming popularity of *American Bandstand*, a television music show broadcast from 1952 until 1989, featuring daily shows from 1957 until 1963 and then weekly shows. From 1956 onwards it was hosted and produced by Dick Clark, an influential impresario and owner of the Dick Clark productions company. The show kicked off with the name *Bandstand* in Philadelphia by presenting short music videos and occasionally having studio guests, a prefiguring of the video shows which later on, during the eighties, became very popular on TV. Its first host was Bob Harn who, disappointed, decided to change the

show to a dance programme featuring teens dancing on camera while the most popular records of the time were playing in the background to the delight both of dancers and home audiences, mainly composed of adolescents and housewives, who danced and sang along to their beloved tunes. On July 9<sup>th</sup> 1956 Horn was fired after facing moral charges related to drunk driving and association with prostitutes. Dick Clark became the permanent host of the show and started interviewing some teenagers about their opinions concerning the songs played. It eventually went national, becoming known as *American Bandstand* from the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1957 onwards and one of the biggest symbols of the importance of teenager taste and opinion in the shaping of popular music in America. *American Bandstand* is portrayed in the film *Hairspray* (1988) which showed the invisible business which was behind networks.

Perhaps the most lasting American contribution to Rock 'n' Roll music in the sixties were the Beach Boys, formed in 1961 in California, whose innovative songs celebrated idealized visions of surfing and easy beach life. The Beach Boys became popular due to the close vocal harmonies and lyrics reflecting a Southern California youth culture of surfing, cars and romance. They introduced the "theremin" to music, the wildest instrument ever to be used on a hit record producing a spooky vibrating sound. The Beach Boys challenged the Beatles due to their commercial and critical appeal and their seminal album *Pet Sounds* (1966) acted as an inspiration for the *Sargent Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. Due to mental problems possibly connected to his substance abuse, Brian Wilson, the leader of The Beach Boys eventually lost control of the band, which had devastating consequences such as the cancellation of shows preventing the band from regaining the peak it had formerly reached. Despite this incident The Beach Boys are still considered the first amongst American Rock Bands, having had thirty-six American Top 40 Hits and fifty-six Hot 100 Hits, making them the best American selling act with over one hundred million albums sold worldwide.

As it has already been stated, during the Sixties America faced a social revolution shaped by a growing resistance to South Africa's apartheid policy and the several protest actions against the Vietnam War. There was an increased generation gap between alienated teenagers and their respectful parents, the former being the triggers for an era of free love, the feminist movement and gay liberation. The first radical environmental awareness appeared in the sixties and there was the development of the folk and rock protest movement against the romantic songs of Tin Pan Alley. Jazz grew

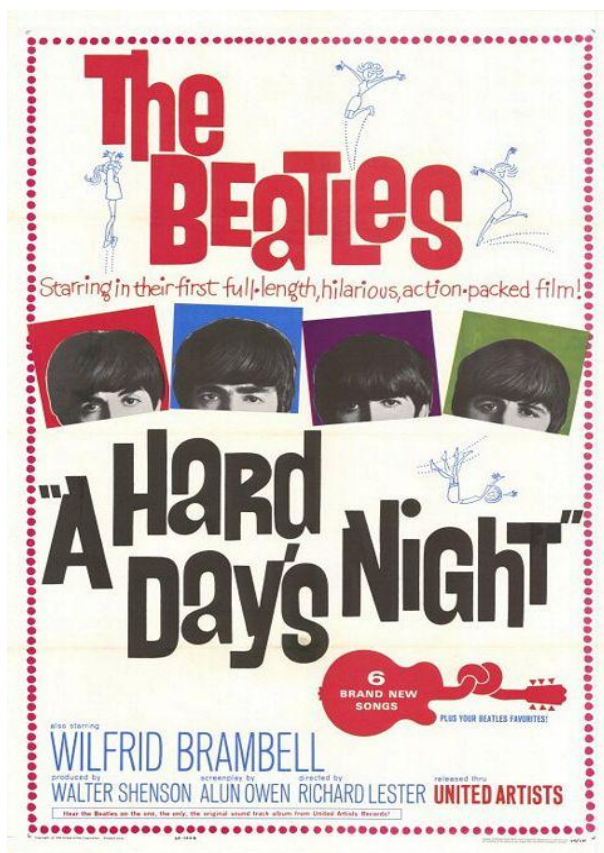
more intellectual as white audiences began to identify themselves with the oppression expressed in the Blues, and Rock became highly associated with “dropping out” and drug consumption and became a mirror of the current movement.

The conflicts at work in 60s society were all clearly expressed in cinema of the decade as it was also a period of profound changes to Hollywood, which had to adapt to technological innovations and the evolution of cultural taste. Many icons such as James Dean and Marilyn Monroe died as others emerged. New stars like Robert Redford, Paul Newman, Dustin Hoffman and Peter Fonda appeared and became immediately successful as they appealed to the younger moviegoers who dominated audiences. Hollywood witnessed complete refreshment as the breakdown of enforcement of censorship in motion picture production made way for new forms of artistic expression and the advent of modern production enabling the issuing of formerly prohibited subjects. In 1961 the Production Code of Administration allowed onscreen scenes of homosexuality as long as they were handled with care. 1964 was an important year in the history of cinema as it was the year the Association of Motion Picture and TV Producers was formed to foster a further revision of the Production Code and thus eliminate many taboos, such as the end of the ban on nudity, which was of particular relevance as pop music movies, not known for their iconoclasm, were starting to be reconceived as art rather than entertainment films. Musical films, which, according to Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknel, lacked storyline and distinguished performances, were now being produced targeting a younger and segmented market, reflecting the growth in importance of the pop music industry and attempting to exploit the success of pop music recording artists, focusing on the visual image of the most successful artists in the music charts who were similarly being promoted and marketed in fan-based magazines. Film production in the sixties was greatly influenced by the record industry and TV. One of the great benchmarks of the era was the Twist Mania. Everybody was dancing to the sound of the twist, independent of their age, skin color or social status and this was shown in movies as a proof of the commercial interests that shaped pop cultural production and consumption. In addition, this helped the fight against racial discrimination as it began to showcase the inestimable contribution of black artists to pop musical culture.

Cinema became only one entertainment option among many and the decrease of cinema attendance led to a drop in the number of films released as well as in the number of

movie theatres<sup>4</sup>. TV gained popularity and notoriety by bringing news in real time directly to the living rooms. Events such as the debates between Nixon and Kennedy as well as Kennedy's assassination, civil rights demonstrations, Vietnam combat, the moon mission and the subsequent landing of astronauts were all covered on TV. With the development of lightweight portable equipment often developed for television, film makers now could shoot on location, thus enabling a faster, more lively dissemination of current images.

## 2.2. *A Hard Day's Night* (1964)



**Pic. 9 - Outdoor Promoting *A Hard Day's Night***

The Beatles' first movie was also the first rock 'n' roll movie to matter to people who didn't like rock 'n' roll. (Crenshaw 1994: 110).

*A Hard Day's Night* was The Beatles' first movie, a promotional low budget film shot with the intention of not only capitalizing on the Rock 'n' Roll craze by generating maximum income from the emerging teenage market but also promoting the album with the same title and extending the Beatles' popularity and longevity with a mature audience (Walker, 1974: 236). The issue of the increasing importance of the teenage market in terms of generating money is

represented in the scene where George is mistaken by a trendsetter and meets with the director of an advertising agency who is worried about launching a new range of shirts for teenagers which will be the future trend. George states that the shirts are hideous and even though suspicious at first, in the end the director agrees to suspend the production

<sup>4</sup> This led to a necessary reconciliation between cinema and TV with studios starting to produce series for network television and the creation of initiatives such as the successful establishment of "Saturday Night at the Movies" a movie night on Saturday's prime-time that enabled viewers to watch films without leaving the comfort of their homes.

of the product. This scene focuses our attention on an emerging market targeted and driven to please the special needs and desires of a teenage population which represented an increasingly important segment of consumerist society and that constituted the significant change for youth-targeted film and film music.

Even though having a narrative of its own and being constructed to seem real, the film has a strong promotional aim. It features seven new songs and some older Beatles' numbers, which helped attract fans based on the groups' existing popularity, allowing the audiences to enjoy them as they got used to the new material. Even though the company had limited ambitions and despite some suspicions from the band members themselves, *A Hard Day's Night* proved to be a major box office success, rendering around 11 million dollars worldwide. In the United Kingdom the album remained in the number 1 position for twenty-one weeks and the title track single for three weeks. Besides that, the film's huge success had a great impact on the band's career, as it helped to consolidate their appeal for the teenage audience, as the Beatles became visible, thus becoming easier to associate names to faces and conveying the image that the



**Pic. 10 - Cover of the Album *A Hard Day's Night***

band members were “available”, as they were carefully never amorously attached to any specific girl in the movie, which caught the attention of even more girls and contributed to their hysteria. The image of The Beatles presented in the film was the one teenagers started following from that point onwards: the boys started letting their hair grow and privileged a clean look. Although looking like clones of each other as they wore matching hairstyles and clothes, the band members proved, during the film, that each of them had a unique and characteristic individuality and way of thinking. The film helped to develop The Beatles' career with adult audiences as the ideology and clever aesthetics present in the film also appealed to older generations that hadn't previously paid much attention to the band. According to Roger Ebert (1996), even though at the time of release of the movie The Beatles were already a publicity phenomenon mainly due to their appearance on “The Ed Sullivan Show,” they were not yet seen as cultural icons. The increase in recognition by the media of the band's cultural savvy also increased credibility with the middle class and intellectual parts of society. As James Miller (1999: 209) argues, Rock ‘n’ Roll had once been associated to savagery, thus appealing to younger segments of

society. However, The Beatles seemed to have the ability to compose and perform their own rock songs that were as exciting and energetic as the typical Rock 'n' Roll from the fifties but remote from any sort of savagery. On the contrary, The Beatles were happy, funny, cheeky and childish, they proved to have an intelligent sense of humour and they had attitude in the way they challenged old traditions. All things considered, it's no wonder they became known as The Fabulous Four or The Fab Four.

John Muir (2007: 134) says that this film is a “mockumentary” as it is not a traditional documentary in which people are sitting down and doing one-to-one interviews with a narrator present. The film breaks with movie decorum and presents modern rock in a pioneering way that has been followed ever since not only in movies but also in TV series featuring real life documentaries. *Time Magazine* called the film “one of the smoothest, freshest, funniest films ever made for purposes of exploitation”. John Mundy (1999: 171) says that *A Hard Day's Night* broke new ground as it rejected the conventional format of pop musicals which had been growing since the fifties. According to the above-mentioned writer even John Lennon, when enquired about the movie, expressed the intention of not wanting to replicate the already well known format of young people proving themselves to be acceptable to older generations who were initially very suspicious of their work. The Beatles wanted to present themselves as they were<sup>5</sup>. They had a decisive role in the creation of a contemporary social revolution in art, clothes and even class (Walker, 1974: 236). The film was considered innovative in a number of ways. The Beatles played themselves in a set of situations, in locations shot to seem as real as possible, such as a train trip, on the train itself and in the train station, which has a documentary validation as these were the sort of images we might find in the news, or in unmediated live performance, or at the TV station or in the studio. The fantastical scenes where they are running free in a field, which were completely new at the time, have come to resemble recurrent elements in what are now considered music videos. Even though they are acting in a fictionalized plot, the film displays their chaotic routine at the height of Beatlemania. The scenes seem so downbeat and convincing, that it is sometimes very difficult to differentiate fact from fiction. The characters talk about themselves in a mocking way as they recognize that the image they convey is manufactured and how they are being handled by their

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<sup>5</sup> The movie helped The Beatles conquer audiences not only among older generations but also younger ones, namely among young men who started imitating their looks.

manager and crew. The Beatles were working class boys who were tidied up to look clean and acceptable to society, but who knew this very well and went along with it for a lark.

John Mundy (1999: 172) argues that the film was greatly influenced by the French Nouvelle Vague<sup>6</sup>, whose films were usually shot with budgetary restrictions, just as *A Hard Day's Night* was. As the directors had frequently limited equipment available the scenes were shot quickly with hand-held cameras leading to less refined but often a more naturalistic appeal, transmitting waves of energy to the audience and in the case of *A Hard Day's Night* presenting London as a lively and exciting city. The films from this French wave were commonly shot in natural locations using natural light. I believe we can see a clear example of this in the scene where The Beatles are running in the park as the song "Can't buy me Love" is playing. In this scene the Beatles seem to be enjoying their freedom, feeling released from the confinements of their celebrity. The scene is shot from different and unconventional angles, altering the speed in which the images interchange to the rhythm of the song. This scene is also an example of a central musical number which is not tied to performance, which means, the scene is accompanied to non-diegetic background music as its musical accompaniment is not to be seen. This also contributes to a rejection of realistic aesthetics in the sense that it was no longer needed to interpret musical numbers, pretending that the performers were playing when they were in fact simply miming. In this scene The Beatles seem to find an escape from pressure and routine: in fact they were very unfree. They were pop stars known all over the world but they lacked the privacy to enjoy their lives in peace. They had all the money to spend but they didn't have the time to do it, as they were stuck to very busy schedules that left them no free time. They were great musicians but their fans were so hysterical during their shows that The Beatles' performances couldn't be heard, as we can see in the last scenes of the film during The Beatles live concert for a TV programme.

If the concert sequence at the end seems especially inspired, it's because the director chose to mix the real, live sound of the screaming audience (the sound man was told to turn on his equipment and get out, and cinematographer Gilbert

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<sup>6</sup> The Nouvelle Vague was a trend which emerged in the late 50's and early 60's which was mainly characterized by the rejection of many formal conventions of traditional filmmaking and headed towards a more naturalistic cinematic technique.

Taylor's hearing was damaged) with the studio recordings at full volume. He thus created the most realistic fake film concert ever shot. (Crenshaw 1994: 111).

The Beatles belonged to the machinery that had produced them in first place. The lyrics and the energy transmitted by "Can't Buy Me Love" is representative of all this kinetics present in the group which is eager to run free and not to be stifled. The film's opening chase sequence, where the song "A Hard Day's Night" is playing in the background and we see The Beatles running away from a crowd of screaming girls who are chasing them is another example of a musical number which is not tied to performance. I believe the audience can feel the hysteria of the fans but also the Beatles' excitement and the energy surrounding them. I find it important to state here that the way the scenes are cut and connected to each other is very common in television. Dick Lester, *A Hard Day's Night's* director had worked in TV specializing in the production of adverts. As in advertisements, *A Hard Day's Night* used a multitude of cameras shooting the same scene simultaneously from different angles and the final result is the product of cutting, editing and choosing the best images in a way that improves the kinetic character of the film. Once again the realism conveyed in this scene is supported by the fact that these were scenes which would very likely be in the news report on TV channels all across the world. It was, for instance, common knowledge that Paul was mobbed by girls in such an intense and reciprocal way that he was known to have serenaded them from his hotel window and that conversely his fans hated all the girlfriends he eventually had.

Richard Lester, the film's director, called the movie a fictionalized documentary (Miller, 1999: 216) as the film was a dramatization of the band surviving a day of exaggerated excitement at the height of "Beatlemania". We see the band members going through several episodic situations and enjoying their fame while they prepare for a fictitious Live Show on a TV Station. All throughout the movie The Beatles are constantly under siege, starting with the first scene where we see them running from girls who are mobbing them at the train station. They almost have to play "hide and seek" to get away from the girls who are pursuing them and to enter the train. The energetic vibes conveyed in the tunes of the title song give the scene a pulse that, along with the screaming girls mobbing the band members, give the movie a realistic feel and I almost feel transported to that time and place, to the hysteria of the Beatlemania, to the despair of wanting to get closer, to eventually touch these recently emerged teenage idols. All the main characters make their first appearance in this rather uncommon



scene. In choosing this song for the title of the film as well as for the opening theme the director leads the audience to the issue of class consciousness. In this case, the idea is transmitted that The Beatles are working people, they also lead a life of hard work but at the end of the day they do come home to rediscover love and thus find meaning to life. "A Hard Day's Night" is a song where the public and private spheres mix together resulting in a classic pop song. The song has a working class note as it conveys the idea that work is a necessary evil and that love and sex are important as the means to reach happiness. This is what, in my view, is associated to The Beatles' songs: fun, amusement, happiness and all the strong emotions associated with this, but with an underlying, sometimes ironic, edge, that things are not straightforward.

Right from the start we understand that the Beatles were rather limited as far as what they could or could not do. They were instructed by their manager, Brian Epstein at the time, on how to behave, how to dress themselves, what hairstyle to wear, whether or not to go to parties and were even incited to reply all their fans' letters, as if they were packaged to suit the desires of their target public: teenage girls. The clear example is the manager's first speech inside the train telling the boys to "just for once behave like ordinary respectable citizens, let's not cause any trouble, pull any stokes". The boys didn't seem to pay a lot of attention to what the manager was saying and behaved as childish young adults who just wanted to have fun and enjoy the moment. The Beatles were even instructed on how to leave the train and enter the car and they were not allowed to drink alcoholic beverages at the cocktail party that preceded the TV Show. As soon as they arrived to the hotel and the manager left the room, after forbidding them to go out, The Fab Four directly headed to the party they had been invited to and seemed to have great fun chatting with the girls they met while the audience listened to some of their hits such as "I Wanna Be your Man", "Don't Bother Me" and "All my Loving". These songs are simple and fun and convey the happy feelings of someone who is having a blast dancing and chatting with whoever they want. All the songs seemed to be sung and directed to the girls who were listening to them because all used the pronoun "you" and they all made claims of fidelity and going steady. The song themselves, as well as the narrative of the story, are targeting a young female audience and this explains the great reaction from girls.

Throughout the movie the audience is presented with comic situations that lead them to perceive The Beatles as witty youngsters who are having the time of their lives: they

mock everybody that gets in their way, like the gentleman that, by chance, sits in the same carriage as them, the journalists in the press conference before the TV Show that ask them silly questions and even their manager and the director of the TV Show whenever they get bossy.

The Beatles are also presented as people in touch with the everyday, sharing some of the needs and fears of ordinary youngsters. We can sense that when Ringo Star admits to being shorter than the others and thus fears being rejected by girls. It might be argued that he says this in an ironic and mocking way, with which I do not disagree because he knows that he is an icon for teenage girls but if we relate this scene to another further in the film where he runs away from the TV Studio and manages to walk around London without being identified or mobbed we become suspicious as to whether he has become an icon because of his good looks or his fame. This is also a statement on the importance of having good looks and a clean appearance in order to succeed with the public. It doesn't matter if one can sing because that can be worked out in the studio afterwards but you must have a clean and appealing image. We can see in the film that even during their train journey and before starting singing the Beatles don't cause a big fuss among girls, they are even turned down in the cafeteria. Benjamin Miller (2011) argues that Ringo Star accepts with grace being the least popular member.

"I Should Have Known Better" is the first real diegetic musical number even though the first verses are accompanied by the band members who are playing cards in the baggage car of the train. When they hear them playing the girls come to join them and seem hypnotized while they listen to the Fab Four. At first we can hear the song but we don't see The Beatles playing nor singing; in this moment the music is non-diegetic as they are playing cards almost as if the song was not theirs but immediately afterwards we watch them playing their instruments and singing the song to an attentive teenage audience. This shift of perspective during the same song resembles the type of images captured in music videos and is a technique which would still be taken up today. If we isolated this song and the images that went along it we could have a very interesting music video to promote the song and the album as it expresses joy and passion. I believe the same feelings are conveyed in the scene where The Beatles are running and jumping around while "Can't Buy Me Love" is to be heard. Leslie Halliwell (1997) says that these innovative features of cutting images to the beat of the music, present in this scene, were the precursors of modern music video, as they anticipated and developed an

aesthetic associated with the current music video. Roger Ebert seems to share this same opinion and states that

“Today, when we watch TV and see quick cutting, hand-held cameras, interviews conducted on the run with moving targets and, quickly intercut snatches of dialogue, music under documentary action and all the other trademarks of the modern style, we are looking at the children of *A Hard Day's Night*”.

At the end of the film we watch The Beatles perform live on a TV show in front of an audience composed of hysterical fans who seem to have lost control of their emotions in a scene that creates energy and excitement. While performing “She Loves You” we get the feeling that The Beatles clearly seem to be having great fun while they sing and see their fans screaming non-stop, some even crying while yelling the names of their favourite band member passionately. We also get a clear picture of the backstage consequences of such heavy popularity. The Beatles spend the day being pushed around by their managers, obeying their commands and almost trapped in the fame that also exalts them.

I believe the film proved to be so appealing to audiences as it showed the band in what seemed to be intimate moments in behind-the-scene scenarios which conveyed realism to the narrative and seemed to give privileged access to The Beatles as real people whose true lives were much more interesting than fiction. The Beatles are presented as four ordinary boys from the working class who, through their talent and hard work, have managed to climb the ladder of success and social status, which clearly hints that social mobility can be a reality for all. The film constitutes a story of success of four working class boys who managed to achieve fame and is a new and vanguard way of packaging pop music. Until the Beatles came along, Pop Music used to be a niche market in cinema. However, from *A Hard Day's Night* onwards pop culture gave the first steps towards becoming the major current in theatrical release films. I would argue The Beatles triggered Pop Music's evolution from marginal to mainstream cinema and also highlighted the importance of television and its techniques as they constituted vehicles for the visualization of Pop people while delivering performances in a lively way. Even though being presented here as cheeky and funny, the Beatles phenomenon was so great that it managed to pave the way for pop music and rock 'n' roll's importance as a means of social expression. As time went by, as we will see later on,

Pop Music and Rock 'n' Roll became the voice of social and political protest, becoming an angry and disaffected branch of entertainment.

### 2.3. *The Graduate* (1967)



**Pic. 11 - Outdoor**  
**Promoting *The Graduate***

*The Graduate*, a satirical comedy shot in 1967, portrays the feelings of alienation, joylessness and isolation of a recent graduate who is questioning the values of society in a decade of deep social and sexual changes. “The Sounds of Silence”, by Simon & Garfunkel, is its theme song and it seems to describe, word by word, the inner turmoil felt by the main characters who are lost and confused, two crossing into adulthood and one moving into old age. Such conflicts are perceived from the beginning of the film. In the first scene Benjamin is sitting on the plane returning from college in Los Angeles. He is surrounded by people but looks shy, lonely and alienated, as if he were lost in this world. As he gets out of the plane and heads to collect his luggage “The Sounds of Silence” by Simon and Garfunkel reinforce Ben’s emptiness and alienation from his surroundings. There is a parallel between this first and the last scene where Ben and Elaine are escaping inside the bus, after Ben has broken up her wedding. In this last scene we can also hear “The Sounds of Silence” and, just like the first scene, the couple seems impassive and isolated from all the other passengers on the bus and their absent-minded looks while they stare, silently, in the front reflect their innocence and naivety. As the lyrics state Ben feels depressed and isolated from the crowd, always trying to find comfort in being by himself and his own thoughts.

“Hello darkness, my old friend  
I’ve come to talk with you again  
(...)  
In restless dreams I walked alone  
Narrow streets of cobblestone  
(...)  
And in the naked light I saw

Ten thousand people, maybe more  
People talking without speaking  
People hearing without listening  
People writing songs that voices never share  
And no one dared  
Disturb the sound of silence

“Fools”, said I, “You do not know  
Silence like a cancer grows” (...) (Simon & Garfunkel, 1996)

There are other scenes throughout the movie that show Ben feeling isolated and lost, like the one at his parents' house where he is celebrating his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, the move to adulthood, a state that he seems to deny. Ben's parents prepare a party for him but they only invite their close friends, leaving behind anyone belonging to Ben's generation. Ben is encouraged to show-off his new scuba-diving equipment as if he were a clown at a party where he is supposedly the center of all the attention, in a scene that borders on absurdity but describes the reality of feeling the need to conform to parental demands. By looking at people through his scuba-diving glasses Ben sees his parents' faces distorted as if he was seeing them through his own point of view as a sign of the rejection of the social moral values of the upper middle class. In other scenes we witness Ben perceiving the world surrounding him through goldfish bowls, under-water scenes and pools. Up to this point Ben seems to lead a life imposed by his parents as he feels obliged to fulfill their expectations. Ben is an innocent youth exploited and soon to be seduced by the representative of an older decadent generation, here in the figure of Mrs Robinson. When he submerges in the pool and the only sound to be heard is his heavy breathing we can associate that movement to his inner search for peace and silence. There are numerous scenes where he dives into the pool in an act of almost despair, such as when his parents are swimming with him and trying to convince him to go out with Mrs Robinson's daughter, Elaine. Ben's constant stare at the fish tank is another indicator of his need for silence and alienation as he seems to be a creature who belongs to another medium. He is the representation of the hollowness present in the American dream of material success. Ben stumbles into an affair with Mrs Robinson as a way of rescuing himself from drowning in the materialistic subculture to which his parents (and the Robinsons) belong. He doesn't seem to fit in either with the adult or the

youngsters' generation, as is shown in the scene where he meets Mrs Robinson for the first time at the hotel. He is surrounded by well-dressed adult couples and youngsters going to a prom and he doesn't seem to fit in with either of the groups. Quite the contrary, it looks as if he is invisible to everyone, as not even the waiters seem to take any notice of him. Instead of joining the rebellious counterculture youth of his generation, he enters a loveless and furtive affair with Mrs Robinson. The rhythm and lyrics of "The Sounds of Silence" emphasize the emptiness and the progress of this affair. Ben shows that he is very confused the first time he meets Mrs Robinson and for a while he shows some regret at being there. In order to clear his mind Ben enters the bathroom and after some seconds of watching a black screen we see the scene dissolve into his image sunbathing on his parents' pool, enjoying his aimless existence. These image cuts and montages, along with the accompaniment of "The Sounds of Silence", transmit the feelings of disorientation, uncertainty of reaching adulthood, the struggle to accept transformation and fear of the future that Ben is holding inside him. And he is definitely not able to communicate with his parents about the problem. When asked about what he has been doing with his life and what his career plans are, Benjamin simply avoids the conversation and provides vague answers. In some of the scenes, we perceive Ben's struggle between tradition and modernity: on the one hand he goes back to traditional values of society when he declares himself not proud of his affair and he expresses the wish to have a relationship where sex and emotional intimacy go together; on the other hand he presents himself as radical by having a scandalous sexual relationship with a married wife old enough to be his mother. After getting to know Elaine better, Ben feels the desire to start a relationship with her, doing the things normal couples their age do which reflects Ben's search for meaning in life. Getting to know Elaine has given him a sudden sense of purpose as her innocence gives him hope of a better future. They decide to go to the Drive-in for something to eat, a place crowded with youngsters listening to "Big Screen Pleasure", a rock song by Simon and Garfunkel, which is playing out loud. Both the energetic rhythm and the lyrics of the song convey ideas of amusement and appeal to the disregard for authority figures represented by the older generations. We can perceive Benjamin's alienation from his own generation as all the others youngsters ignore his request to turn the music down. In order to isolate themselves from the sound of youth of the 60's Ben pulls up the top of his car in an attitude that reflects his rejection of the normal behavior of his peers. Ben falls in love with Elaine and confesses it, revealing the truth about having had an

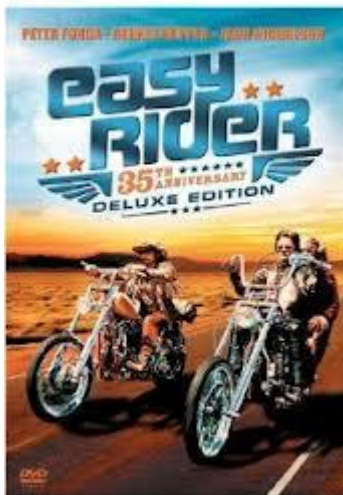
affair with an older woman and she agrees to meet him the following day. “Scarborough Fair” is to be heard, a modern version of a sweet folk song which conveys the hope of the birth of a romantic relationship with Elaine and possibly the construction of a future around this new relationship.

*The Graduate* is a satirical portrait of society of the time: in a time of great shifts in people’s mentality and values younger generations felt uncertain about life after college, involving work, marriage and settling down, given their attraction to ideals of free love and sex out of wedlock. Its soundtrack counts heavily on Simon & Garfunkel’s contribution, an American music duo featuring the singers and songwriters Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. The duo rose to fame in 1965 due to the success of “The Sounds of Silence” but it was in 1967, when the song was included in the soundtrack of *The Graduate* that the duo gained wider popularity and recognition. Simon & Garfunkel produced mainly folk rock songs reminding their listeners of happy past times. The film also constitutes a representation of gender struggles that characterized the 60’s: it is important to bear in mind that the film was shot at the time of the Women’s Liberation Movement in which a new understanding of gender relations came to light: women had assumed total control and power over their bodies with the appearance of the birth control pill. Mrs Robinson is a version of this new type of woman who shows herself open to asserting her body and sexual needs. On the one hand, she retains the pretense of the perfect suburban style of life, living with her seemingly happy family in a rich house with a pool and a garden but on the other hand surrendering to the accomplishment of her most intimate needs, understanding that marriage is not the only solution to find her happiness. She is a wife and a mother but also a lover and an independent woman. She is a witch-like hate figure embodying the hypocrisy of her generation. Elaine also plays a key role in the representation of the social shift in womanhood, finding in herself characteristics both of the innocent traditional and the revolutionary. She shows signs of wanting to conform to the status quo when she agrees to go out on a date arranged by her parents but she also demonstrates her desire to form her own understanding of herself as a woman by deciding to go away and study at Berkeley, the center of many intellectual revolutionary movements related to class, gender and race.

I shouldn’t leave the topic without saying that the film is also filled with comedy and even absurdity, especially in some of the dialogues between adults and Ben. It is curious

to remark the insertion of “Mrs Robinson” at a time in the film when Ben is frantically pursuing Elaine who is studying away from home. The energetic sounds of the guitar in “Mrs Robinson” combine with Ben’s energy while searching for his beloved one. We can hear the song again when Ben is finally feeling glad thanks to Elaine’s forgiveness concerning his affair with her mother. The song is, at this point, a satirical reflection of the values of modern upper middle class. The fast rhythm of the song transmits a light feeling of joy, even if temporary, which combined with the happy look on Ben’s face and his fast movements running up the stairs to his bedroom convey the forgiveness awarded to Mrs Robinson for the sexual awakening she provides and goes on to ironically forgive her for her sins by stating “Jesus loves you more than you should know”.

#### 2.4. *Easy Rider* (1969)



**Pic. 12** Poster Promoting *Easy Rider*

*Easy Rider*, shot with an extremely low budget of under \$400,000 proved to be an enormous financial success grossing \$40 million worldwide. The film has “Born to be Wild” as its central music theme and, as the song clearly expresses, it is about the search for freedom carried out by two rootless bikers who cross what is presented as a conformist and corrupt America in an advanced state of degeneration. *Easy Rider* was a turning point in the history of cinema as it gave the first steps towards a type of cinema which voiced political and social protest and used angry rock ‘n’ roll as a vehicle to convey it. It was, in addition, a film produced by a laid-back commune of creative people: *Easy Rider* portrayed rebels, outlaws, and, by extension, the counterculture as a whole, as victims; they were extinguished by the straight world (Biskind 1998: 74). As Buck Henry puts it, *Easy Rider* was authorless (...) nobody knew who wrote it, nobody knew who directed it, nobody knew who edited it (Biskind 1998: 75).

1969, the year of the film release, was also marked by the Woodstock Festival, the assassination of both Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and Nixon’s election. As the Idealistic 60’s were collapsing, *Easy Rider*, through the characters of Wyatt and



Billy, reflects the hope of liberation and fears of the Establishment by taking the audience on a bike journey throughout virgin landscapes, desert, towns whose inhabitants show no empathy for these modern bikers, a hippie commune and even a graveyard. Spiced with sex, drugs, casual violence and an energetic soundtrack counting on names such as Steppenwolf, Jimi Hendrix, The Band and Bob Dylan, *Easy Rider* shows signs of a new sort of Hollywood about to emerge which presented what seemed to be a more spontaneous and improvisational style, both in acting and dialogue and using rock 'n' roll playing in the background as a way of breaking with conventions. The film's closure shows the casual death of two protagonists as a clear mirror of the tensions and divisions which were being felt all over the United States. The success of this film was an eye opener for anyone in Hollywood who doubted the counterculture was here to stay and fostered the mass production of youth-oriented films. Having mentioned the exceptional referencing of drug culture in the 1960s, which is *Easy Rider* and *Performance*, Nowell-Smith writes:

As for the music, the original rock'n'roll of the 1950s had been enthusiastically adopted by the cinema, not only in the USA and Britain but also in continental Europe, where Luchino Visconti (of all people) staged a spectacular dance number to the sound of Bill Haley's rendition of "Thirteen Women" in his film *White Nights* in 1957. But the new music proved harder to squeeze into a show-biz format and it took the highly original talent of Richard Lester, with the two Beatles films *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965), before the anarchic energy of 1960s pop could be harnessed to cinematic purposes. After that other films followed, including Godard's idiosyncratic *One Plus One* with the Rolling Stones in 1968. There were also documentaries, such as D.A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look back* (1967), tracking Bob Dylan's contested tour of Britain in 1966. But on the whole cinema and rock music continued throughout the 1960s to occupy separate spheres, with remarkably little overlap. (Nowell-Smith 2008: 7)

The film courts some controversy in the way it approaches the topics of drug consumption and freedom. The film opens with a drug smuggling scene where the actors buy a quantity of drugs that they later sell to a drug dealer for a large amount of cash, enough to finance their trip. Captain and Billy commit a crime in order to gain easy money. Drug consumption had become common practice throughout the country, especially on the west coast. As Peter Biskind puts it, "Easy Rider stunned the counterculture with a shock of recognition". As the deal is finalized, "The Pusher" by

Steppenwolf is to be heard. It's a remarkable commentary on the plasticity of film music that the song is clearly against drug consumption and drug dealing and yet the use of drugs is presented in a sympathetic way throughout the movie. "You know I've seen a lot of people walkin' round with tombstones in their eyes but the Pusher don't care, aw, if you live or if you die, God damn the Pusher" ("The Pusher", by Steppenwolf, 1968) seems to be a sign of disagreement with the act showing that drug consumption is an evil in society which may lead to an eventual tragic disclosure of the narrative, in the same way as the Captain's line after the Mardi Gras festival works: "we blew it". The film is full of premonitions of disaster but it's also very contemporary in the themes issued. It expressed the radical movement of individual evolution, the troubles with police and drug consumption which were being faced by some of the youth of the time. The characters search for freedom dissolves into a sense of failure, putting a tragic and unexpected end to their lives. At the time even rock stars were dying from overdoses and self-destruction was an elementary part of music performed specially by bands such as The Doors and Jimi Hendrix. Captain and Billy had been warned during the conversation with George about freedom that common people were afraid of people who seemed free and that fear made people dangerous and he is proved to be right. He was the first of the three to be killed by the representatives of a mainstream society, in a clear sign of the suppressed violence of American social life.

With a gas tank full of money and their minds inebriated by the idea of a new life the two bikers start their adventure moving away from modern society and heading towards freedom to the sound of "Born to be Wild" along an endless road that, all in all, in a more spiritual sense proves to lead nowhere. The song's energetic rhythm is metaphoric of the high speed at which they are travelling and its lyrics convey the notion that while riding their bikes the protagonists have the power to imagine making things happen "Yeah, darlin' gonna make it happen, take the world in a love embrace (...) we were born to be wild". The imagery that accompanies the songs throughout the movie conveys feelings of loneliness, alienation, superficiality and shallowness of relationships, even between Captain and Billy who don't get to engage in deep conversation with each other. Even the hippie commune which was supposed to be a place of shared experiences and beliefs proves to be shallow, as the communards act like self-centered people, alienated not only from society but even from themselves. Predictably, the townspeople in the American south also react very intolerantly to the

long-haired bikers' presence in their territory, once again contributing to their feeling of alienation.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

As we have seen throughout this chapter cinema and pop music in the early 60's, here represented in *A Hard Day's Night*, conveyed a perspective of society where youth fought for love, freedom and happiness. The Beatles are here presented as clean and good looking working class boys who obey all the rules imposed on them and as a result they climb the social ladder and find worldwide fame and recognition, attracting crowds of fans across the generations. Being a pop star during the 60's was the easiest way of moving from being a member of the working class to become a wealthy famous person. By analyzing *The Graduate* we get in touch with a different reality from the one presented in *A Hard Day's Night*. While the film in which The Beatles star the world is seen through a positive perspective of love and happiness allied to the fame and success of a younger generation, in *The Graduate* we are presented with a return to innocence where the younger generation is the victim of an older one in a society where upper middle class values are in an advanced state of corruption. *Easy Rider* shows us a representation of the counterculture of the late 60's in the United States of America, a time when drug consumption was a reality, the hippie movement had come to stay and some people decide to live in communes as a way of declaring their opposition towards mainstream society and the politics of a country they had stopped believing in. Pop music and cinema clearly evolved in a much more politicized way during the late 60s and became the voice of protest of a generation that seemed lost in the dark reality that had sunk in: the assassinations of both Kennedys and Martin Luther King, rioting on and off campuses, America bogged down in a dirty war in Vietnam and all the divisive politics involved in these events.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **THE SEVENTIES**

### **3.1. Socio-cultural Background**

In race relations, religion, family life, politics and popular culture, the 1970's marked the most significant watershed of modern US history, the beginning of our own time. One year alone, 1973, witnessed the end of American intervention in Vietnam, the US supreme court decision in *Roe v Wade*, the exposure of the Watergate conspiracies (...) and the first Arab oil shock. (Schulman, 2001: xiii).

Many commentators have characterized the 70s as a confused decade, lacking the leftist orientation of the 60s and the rightist orientation of the 80s. The decade was marked by an increased political awareness, in which women continued to gain social relevance both in political and economic terms; some even became heads of state outside monarchies and many have gained success in all sorts of business areas. There was also a trend moving away from the communitarian idealism of the hippie movement when Americans started focusing more on their individual selves. In economic terms the decade was not very prosperous for America as there were oil crises in 1973 and 1979 and an unacceptably high rate of inflation throughout the decade which reflected in a high unemployment rate. The early seventies also witnessed a growth in the opposition to the war in Vietnam and more university students continued to protest against it.

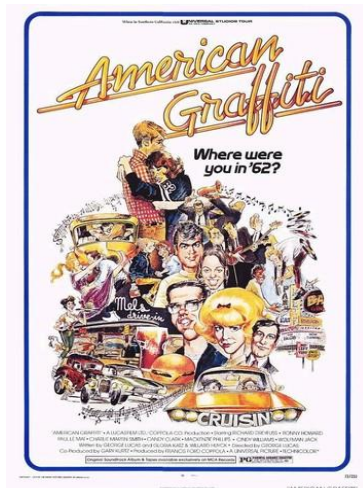
The Watergate scandal and the discovery of a slush fund resulting from the 1972 break-in at the democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington D.C. led to the resignation of President Nixon and, allied to protests against America's participation in the Vietnam War, led to a subsequent low faith in government. The Paris Peace Accords of 1973 ended direct American military involvement in the Vietnam War and temporarily stopped the fighting between North and South Vietnam but proved to have little practical effect. America was facing tough times and the Carter Years didn't bring significant improvement of the conditions faced. Jimmy Carter was President from 1977 to 1981 and even though at the end of his governing years he had managed to decrease both unemployment rates and the deficit, recession still perpetuated. America faced a major crisis when the American Embassy in Iran was taken over in 1979 and the rescue attempts to release hostages held by Iranian students proved to be unsuccessful. There were serious fuel shortages all throughout the country which allied to everything else happening at the time made way for what became known as the "humiliating Carter years". The seventies were heavily marked by increased terrorist acts and urban guerrillas mainly caused by the discontentment of a

large segment of the American population, mainly college-aged youth, who showed their disapproval of America's involvement in the war, of racial tensions and the anti-establishment movement.

The early seventies sadly saw popular rock stars such as Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison dying from drug overdoses and alcohol-related problems. During the same period soft rock and pop rock emerged featuring names such as The Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen, The Carpenters and Elton John. Disco music arose in the mid-seventies, a style of music that first appeared in dance clubs, dominating the second half of the decade and bringing out names such as Bee Gees, ABBA, Village People, Boney M, Donna Summer, KC & The Sunshine Band and many others. This genre became very popular and was easily commercialized, invading all the radio stations. The seventies became a space for the transformation of music culture from a warm campfire to the cool precision of disco lights (Waldrep, 2000: 6). However it proved to be short lived as it fell from grace even before the end of the decade. The end of the decade witnessed the emergence of a more hard-edged rock 'n' roll popularizing names such as Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Queen, The Who and AC/DC.

Both Hollywood films and pop music groups had great influence on the way young people looked, leaving marks not only on the way they dressed but also on their hairstyles.

### 3.2. *American Graffiti* (1973)



**Pic. 13 - Poster Promoting  
*American Graffiti***

*American Graffiti*, produced with an estimated budget of only 777,000 dollars, ended up making a gross profit of around 115 million dollars in America alone, and a turnover of over two hundred million dollars in box office gross and home video sales, not including merchandising, making it one of the most profitable films in the history of Hollywood. It is a nostalgic portrait of teenage life in the 1960's. It was shot in

1973 but represents life in Modesto, a small town in California, in the year 1962 by reflecting the culture of

Cruising and Rock'n'Roll, which was so popular amongst teenagers of the Baby Boom generation of the post-war period. Aimed primarily at a public of 16-20 year-olds the film ended up having a much larger public, as it evoked the dream of eternal youth. George Lucas, *American Graffiti's* director, turned it into one of the first films ever to use music taken almost exclusively from pre-existing recordings, giving this film a realistic documentary feel. Speakers were placed all around the locations where the scenes were shot, such as buildings, streets and in the gym to convey the notion that music was present in all the scenarios of the film and wherever the characters were.

*American Graffiti* has both a funny and a more serious side. It managed successfully to show teenagers, each representing a certain stereotype, with different dreams and goals: a future race car driver (here in the figure of the rebel), the perfect high-school couple who would live happily ever after, a would-be writer and a local nerd. The adventures of these characters represent the essence of the youth in the early sixties. The movie soundtrack covers the main hits of the fifties and sixties, enabling the audience to identify with the past by becoming immersed in a happier time of innocence before the disastrous events of American participation in the war, before the assassination of J. F. Kennedy, a time when teenagers could cruise the streets and talk to people through their car windows while they drove along. According to Mulholand (2010: 132-133), the movie focused on a point in time before the Kennedy assassination, The Beatles and The Stones. A decade when people seemed to have better looks, more glamorous hair, better music, more innocent dreams and better times when compared to the years that

followed. The movie portrayed America as a happy land whose innocence was to fade away as the sixties went by. The evocative character of the movie, by appealing to simpler times and simpler pleasures, transformed it into a major success, in the sense that it reminded an older audience of their own teenage years and the time of their own high school graduation with all its sweet memories. As Greenshaw puts it, watching it is living it. The hits of the fifties and early sixties chosen from the Top 40 to integrate *American Graffiti*'s soundtrack are the embodiment of this innocence by expressing joy through songs whose energetic rhythms transmit fun and are evocative of good times, showing no signs of the conflicts that are yet to come, in opposition to more contemporary songs which reference drug consumption, sex and social violence. The movie portrays the calm before the storm, in the sense that not even John, the most rebellious character, shows any real signs of conflict with the authority figures. Teenagers of the seventies, the decade in which the movie was actually shot started to collect these compilation albums, leading to the establishment of radio stations with an overall nostalgic mood willing to listen to the so-called "oldies but goodies" in resemblance of the popular culture of the previous decade. Radio, in the fifties and early sixties, was the primary means of listening to music. In the seventies, however, we witnessed the appearance of discos and night clubs, places where people went in order to dance to the sound of their favourite songs and have fun.

*American Graffiti* was important because America in 1973 was facing troubled times: it was the tenth anniversary of JFK's assassination, America was negotiating a peace agreement towards its presence in Vietnam, college students were protesting, the Watergate scandal shocked the nation and rock stars were dying, many of them from drug-related problems. There was an overall economic downturn related to the Oil Crisis and thus the abolishing of the cheap energy upon which the teenagers featured in *American Graffiti* depended on for their car culture. The country was facing these tragic incidents and people seemed to be losing pride not only in themselves but also in their nation. This film was a nostalgic retreat back to the times of teen life before having to take adult decisions, reminding grown-ups of how they used to be and feel. *American Graffiti* represented only the fun side of being a teenager in the early sixties. The teenagers who watched the film could either get a glimpse of what they would like their teenage years to be or could relate to their present situation by identifying with the characters in the movie.



*American Graffiti* dealt with the life, habits, likes and doubts of teenagers. The characters are linked by the shared world they inhabit, served up through car radios. In the film, four high school boys engage in one hometown night's fun in Modesto, California and the adventures they all go through during the night not only teach them something about themselves but also shed some light on their destinies (Mulholand, 2010: 133). All references to ideals come from the radio, thus showing the great influence of radio in teenage life. We also have the reference to Wolfman Jack and his radio shows: all of them are, in fact, recorded on tape and not broadcast live. The radio in *American Graffiti* works as the narrator of the film, as the songs played and Wolfman's comments help to narrate what is happening in the movie, sometimes acting as a sort of inner voice of the characters and conveying background information, such as the characters' moods and feelings. The songs are a constant in the film, stopping only in the scene portraying the theft of Steve's car, here perhaps as a way of increasing tension and leading the audience to predict the reason for the music to stop. The music in *American Graffiti* is essential in creating atmosphere and triggering associations to the early sixties. Even though the film portrays happy times, we can sense that these teenagers still feel the need to evolve, to go on with their lives and improve their qualifications by going to university. The future offers no guarantees and as a teenager it is not easy to take decisions that will affect their entire lives. The teens represented in the film show their unease about the times to come.



**Pic.14 - Picture of Mel's Drive-In**

The film starts with the image of Mel's Drive In and we can hear loud and clear the song "Rock Around the Clock" performed by Bill Haley and the Comets. The song appeals to having fun and we understand that the film is set in the late fifties or early sixties by noticing the clothes and hairstyles. As

the music keeps on playing, the audience is introduced to some of the main characters (Steve, Curt and Terry) and from their first appearance we can understand the stereotypes they represent. Terry appears on screen driving a humble motor-scooter and accidentally hits a wall, clearly showing that he will be the clumsy nerd of the group. We can also see Steve, the prototype of the cute boy who dates the most popular girl in

school, stylishly leaning onto his fancy car. “Rock Around the Clock” is still to be heard when we experience the first appearance of Curt, the intellectual boy who arrives in his old and unpretentious car, which Curt doesn’t seem to have a very close connection with. The appearance of the main characters to the sound of such an energetic song as “Rock Around the Clock” implies that this group of teens are about to have some fun. At this moment we also hear first hand that Curt is in doubt as to whether he should leave for college the following day, even though he has been granted a two thousand dollars’ scholarship. The energetic rhythm of the song conveys a feeling of joy and energy, a hint of what is about to come. The characters of the film are meeting at the usual place to start the last night of their high school lives, before going away to college the next day. The lyrics of the song are perfectly integrated in the narrative of the movie and take the audience back to their own graduation prom.

As “Rock Around the Clock” fades away we can still hear some music playing in the background and Laurie, Steve’s girlfriend, makes her first appearance, as if the decrease in the music volume meant that a minor character was appearing, a clear statement of the dominance of males in the film. John, the stereotype of the rebel youngster, also appears in his yellow customized car and we witness Steve and Curt’s discussion of Curt’s doubts about going to college. Steve really wants to go to university and doesn’t seem to understand his friend’s doubts; neither can John. As he tells Curt: “you can’t stay 17 forever”. After the main characters have been presented, the time has come for Wolfman Jack, the only sympathetic adult in the film to be heard by encouraging listeners to “Rock ‘n’ Roll yourselves to Death”. This is an exaggerated notion for sure but shows that Rock ‘n’ Roll and its association with fun and living for the moment is his advice.

As the night sets in at Mel’s Drive In, which is full of teenagers having fun, we can hear the song “Sixteen Candles”, here performed by The Crests, acting as a clear provider of background information important for the understanding of the movie: its lyrics tell us the age demographic of the characters (around sixteen) and evokes the thoughts present in teenagers’ minds: “make your wish come true”. Teenagers feel that they have their whole lives ahead of them and they finally have the power to make decisions, such as whether or not to go to college, whether or not to keep on dating or open their hearts to new relationships, whether to lie about their identities in order to get what they want or to be honest. However, in opposition to the mood of love and tenderness expressed in

the song's lyrics and rhythm, Curt wonders where the dazzling beauty (talked about in the song) truly is and Steve and Laurie talk about breaking up and allowing themselves to see other people while Steve's away at college. By carefully analyzing the song's lyrics we can see that it really works as a premonition of the movie's disclosure: even though they are now talking about breaking up, the song says "Forever and ever", which constitutes a very ironic counterpoint. In the end we find out that they really stay in love forever. In the meantime the song also seems to trigger a nostalgic mood in the slightly older John, reminding him of the time when he started cruising around in pursuit of "teenage queens" and hot rods to race. Terry unsuccessfully tries to persuade a drive-in employee to go out with him. He, just like other characters in the film, is trying to find some company for the night.

We experience a scene of perfect integration of the song into the film's narrative as we hear Del Shannon playing "Runaway" in the background, loudly singing "I wonder, I wah-wah-wah-wah-wonder, why, why, why, why, why, why..." and Curt tells John that he is not sure about going to college the following day. The lyrics offer a clear but indirect commentary on Curt's doubts and personal dilemmas. As we hear the chorus of the song "I'm a walkin' in the rain, tears are falling and I feel the pain, wishing you were here by me, to end this misery..." we see lots of teenagers cruising the busy streets of the small town in all sorts of cars. John and Terry are cruising alone. Even though Curt is tagging along on the backseat of Steve and Laurie's car, he's certainly feeling lonely and wondering "where she will stay", his "little runaway", the mysterious blonde cruising in the white T-Bird. The lyrics of "Runaway" function as the characters' inner voice by expressing the sadness felt at this point in the film's narrative. The song talks about pain which had originated from something that went wrong which, one way or another, can be associated with all the main characters in the film. Steve and Laurie have decided to break up, Curt is feeling lonely and suffering because of his doubts about the future which no one seems to understand, Terry is for the first time cruising in a powerful car but he is alone and John seems to have his life stuck in some moment in the past, not certain of his destination. At the end of the day all of them have the same wish: to have someone by their side to keep them company. The song also refers to the form of introspection that they are all in fact practising. What seems to awaken them all from this reverie is the voice of the DJ Wolfman Jack, whose interventions and songs broadcasted establish a line which connects all the events. The kids may be cruising

alone and not talking to each other but they are all paying close attention to what the DJ is saying and the songs he is playing on the radio. Radio in the fifties and early sixties was of great importance as a means of entertainment and disseminator of information for the population in general but especially for teenagers as they managed to establish a close connection to a DJ they merely listened to but had in fact never seen. By giving emphasis to this radio figure in the movie George Lucas intends to show the relevance not only of Wolfman Jack but also the importance radio once had in teenagers' lives. It is interesting to state here that George Lucas has even written an essay entitled "Radio is a Fantasy", a sign that this was a topic to which he dedicated some of his time.

While cruising around town Curt sees a blond lady cruising alone in a white T-Bird who whispers "I love you". In the background, we hear Frankie Lymon performing "Why Do Fools Fall In Love" and we understand that Curt has suddenly seen the dazzling beauty he has been searching for. Curt persuades Steve to go after the lady's car but he ignores him. If we listen carefully to the song we get the message that falling in love with such a girl is certainly "foolish". Curt is about to leave town to go to college so why bother falling in love with a girl from his town? It's ironic to hear that "love is a losing game" when in fact throughout the whole night Curt keeps on seeing and losing sight of the girl, never being able to really reach her. Laurie has already played the part of the fool and knows that "love is a losing game", as she is losing the one she loves. We also hear that "love can be a shame", which could be associated to the fact that the girl who he sees cruising in the T-bird may be married or in some vague sense not "decent". It is also interesting to note that when Steve shows no understanding of Curt's desire to pursue the lady, he asks them "what's wrong with you people, have you no romance, no soul?" Steve has already proven that he has no romance when he tells Laurie that they should see other people while he's away. It seems like Curt's the only fool falling in love. As well as the songs, Wolfman Jack's whisperings and sounds broadcast from his radio station seem to drive the happenings of the film. Another example is the scene when Terry hits an old man's car and manages to convince the man that it wasn't his fault and gets away with it. The music stops and we can hear the DJ laughing out loud at Terry's ability to dupe the man.

Meanwhile Steve and Laurie are back at the Dance Hall where "At The Hop" is being played live. All the kids seem to be having great fun at the prom. They have no worries on their minds and their single purpose in life seems to be to play practical jokes on

each other. This is a typical high school scenario and the song, with its lyrics and rhythm, motivates students to disburden themselves and do whatever they please “you can rock it and you can roll it, you can stop it and you can stroll it...you can swing it and you can groove it, you can really start to move it...”, as if the idea in teens’ minds was that there was nothing they couldn’t do. As we listen to “She’s So Fine” by the Flash Cadillac, we experience a turning point when Steve understands that he has “to make her” (Laurie) his. However, Laurie is quite sad about the entire situation and decides to dance with another boy because she doesn’t want to dance with Steve. Deep down inside he knows that this other boy “is gonna lose that girl to me” because it is obvious that Laurie is just behaving that way out of anger due to his stated intention of breaking up with her.

The Beach Boy’s “Surfin’ Safari” is playing and we see John and the young girl cruising in John’s car. The girl keeps playing tricks on John who complains by saying that “driving is serious business”! Besides, he turns off the radio saying that he doesn’t “like that surfing shit”, adding that “Rock ‘n’ Roll has been going down ever since Buddy Holly died”. We can clearly see a mini-generational conflict in this scene. John is maybe eight or ten years older than the girl and is still very connected to early classic Rock ‘n’ Roll and the 50’s style of songs. He remains a rock ‘n’ roll fan not willingly to espouse any new music trend. On the same wavelength Wolfman Jack expresses this same intention of remaining faithful to rock ‘n’ roll when he states “Rock ‘n’ Roll yourselves to death,” using the words “Rock ‘n’ Roll” as a verb, which can trigger the thought that unlike other forms of music, rock ‘n’ roll can be a style of life. The Beach Boys were a very recent phenomenon from the early 60’s that, like all musical trends, tended to reach first the younger generations who still didn’t have a defined musical identity, which is the case of the young girl here. For her, the Beach boys “are boss”! Their songs talk about the newly fashionable activity: surfing: “let’s go surfin’ now, everybody’s learning how” urges all teens to come along and take up surfing as it is fun and enjoyable. It may even be compared to the cruising typical of the late 50’s and early 60’s, as both activities involve listening to music (“headin’ out singing our song”) and trying to find a partner (“some honeys will be coming along”). During cruising, boys show off their cars in an attempt to impress girls, while during surfing boys try to impress girls with their fit bodies, their surfboards and their ability to ride the waves. Even though very muted, this constitutes a clear phallic display of cars and surfboards

in an age when men ruled the world and women still occupied recessive positions in society. The principle is the same: listen to some music, preen and show off and find a girl. The film hints (with perfect hindsight) that surfing is there to stay and it will be the next musical trend “It’s getting bigger every day”. The Beach Boys appealed to the pleasures of being in the open air at an uncomplicated time before the social conflict of the 60s flared up.

In *American Graffiti*, we find several themes popular amongst films which represent teenage life. It is a common practice to associate Rock ‘n’ Roll with rebellion and



Pic.15 - John's character talking to the police officer after being ordered to stop the car

conflicts with authority, so we aren’t surprised when we watch the scene where a police officer demands that John stop his car. John lies to avoid getting into trouble and, suspicious, the police officer reminds him

that he “can’t fool with the law”. As soon as the police officer goes away, John

immediately calls him an “asshole” and says the fines he has been given are “chickenshit”. Terry is a perfect example of the typical high school weed, laboring under the unpromising nickname of “Toad”. When he sees a blonde girl walking alone in the street, he tries to catch her attention, not by talking about himself and his qualities but, on the contrary, showing lack of self-confidence, he tries to appeal to the girl by mentioning the fact that he is friends with John, who is a local car racing celebrity. After that, Terry starts complimenting the girl saying that she looks like a pop star tries to impress her by pretending to be the owner of that amazing car, which in fact belongs to Steve. Steve and Laurie are elected king and queen of the prom. Even though they had been arguing they dance very closely to the sound of “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” by The Platters. As we listen to the song’s lyrics “They asked me how I knew my love was true” we hear Laurie speaking about the beginning of their romance and how she was the one to ask Steve out and how, to her amazement, he took three days to kiss her. We are made to believe that Laurie identifies with the lyrics “they said someday you’ll find, all who love are blind, oh, when your heart’s on fire, you must realize, smoke gets in your eyes”. It seems like due to Steve’s decision to break up, she understands that she has been blind to think that their love would last forever. As the song states, in that particular moment she is feeling that her “love has flown away” as he is planning to go

to college away from home and to see other people. Laurie cries while she dances with Steve and by listening to the song it seems like the audience is listening to what is going on inside their heads.

Steve and Laurie keep on dancing together to the sound of “Louie Louie” which reflects the characters’ feelings and mood throughout the scene. This is a very rhythmic rock ‘n’ roll song whose singer could, in fact, be Steve. The words sung voice the words inside Steve’s thoughts “me gotta go”, as he is going away to college the next day, “a fine young girl, she wait for me”, as Steve expects to meet other girls, “me sail ship all alone” as he is possibly going alone to college as Curt gets cold feet. Steve’s time in a small town is done and the time has arrived for him to “sail the sea”. However, the song anticipates the movies’ ending: “It won’t be long me see me love, me take in my arms and then I tell her I never leave again”, as Steve does return to his high school love and chooses to stay and live in the city where he was born and raised. Even though this is a rock ‘n’ roll song full of rhythm and energy, Steve and Laurie dance very close, to the annoyance of the school’s principal, who calls it to their attention, arguing that they “know the rules”. Steve reacts angrily by saying “why don’t you go kiss a duck, marble head?” Rock ‘n’ Roll is the musical style being played during the ball which, at the time, was associated with teenage rebellion and, in this particular scene, it mirrors Steve’s retort to the school’s headmaster.

Wolfman Jack has a permanent presence throughout the movie, even when Curt is pursuing the blonde in the T-Bird and we hear “Barbara Ann” by The Beach Boys. Curt is trying “to take a chance” because this girl has got him “rocking and a-rollin”, meaning that he feels sexually aroused.

John and the young girl decide to go to Mel’s drive-in but when John sees his friends, he gets embarrassed at being seen with such a young girl and lies claiming that she’s his cousin and that he’s sort of baby-sitting her. He hurts the girl’s feelings because she thought that they were developing a friendly relationship and was convinced that John cared about her. In the background we listen to “The Book of Love” by The Monotones, where this disappointment is very clearly stated in the lyrics,

Chapter One says to love her, you love her with all your heart, chapter two you tell you’re never, never, never, never, never gonna part, In chapter three

remember the meaning of romance, in chapter four you break up, but you give her just one more chance (“The Book of Love”, by The Monotones)

As the lyrics state, John gives her some hope in this friendship, then he disappoints her and makes her run away but in the end he goes after her, gets annoyed when he sees that other boys are teasing her and gives her another chance to enter his car, spending some more time with him and they eventually become friends.

“Maybe Babe” by Buddy Holly is to be heard while Wolfman Jack says “Wolfman’s Top 40”. It is worth noticing that all the 39 songs used on *American Graffiti*’s soundtrack came, in fact, from America’s Top 40 Songs of the 50’s and 60’s. This was the single film that bought more record licensing rights than any other in the entire history of Hollywood (Miller, 1999: 317). In fact, the soundtrack album of *American Graffiti* became the most popular compilation of fifties’ Rock ‘n’ Roll music, selling more than one million copies and contributing to the creation of a Rock ‘n’ Roll singles pantheon, forever enshrining a particular vision of American youth and those who wanted to remain young (Miller, 1999 : 317).



**Pic.16 - Terry trying to impress the blond girl by showing off a car he doesn't own**

In an ongoing attempt to impress Debbie and at her request, Terry goes to the liquor shop in order to buy some alcoholic drinks. He is very

nervous at the time because as a minor he can't buy alcoholic

drinks, so he needs to ask older people to do it for him. At first he gets robbed but in the end he manages to buy a bottle just to please the girl. The song playing in the background tells us that Terry really likes Debbie and that he will do anything he can to have her for himself: “you are the one that makes me glad (...) maybe, baby, I'll have you”. Somewhere else in town Curt is sitting alone on top of a stranger's car and has no clue that his troubles are about to start. The song here is “The Great Pretender” by The Platters, and once again the music tells us that Curt is feeling like “the great pretender, pretending that” he's “doing well” when in fact he's “lonely but no one can tell (...) adrift in a world of his own”. While talking to his schoolmates he seems to be feeling good about his decision of not going to college the next day but deep down he must be



having severe doubts about what to do. Besides, he has been longing to find someone dazzlingly beautiful to win his heart and when he finally gets a glimpse of that someone the girl mysteriously disappears leaving him again alone and helpless. While he is all alone wondering about life, some members of a gang mad about his sitting on top of their car appears and all such thoughts suddenly fade away in danger. Curt tries to escape from this conflictive situation but the three boys won't let him get away and make him a sort of prisoner, taking him for a ride in their car. During this ride Curt sees the Blond Lady cruising again while from the radio come the words "I wave goodbye" and Wolfman Jack says "Rock 'n' Roll will stand" as if anyone had any doubts about the future of this style of music or even about the life-style it promotes. Teens identify so much with rock 'n' roll that sometimes it almost works as a sort of therapy and guidance through the teenage years. Faced with the fact that they are running out of gas, the gang who kidnapped Curt for the night decides to head to the minigolf and steal some money from the machines. In the background we hear the Silhouettes singing "Get a Job", a song whose lyrics appeal to the sense of irresponsibility in many teenagers, such as those in the gang, who don't seem to be doing anything positive with their lives. They simply wander around, and judging by the fact that they decide to steal money in order to get petrol they manifest no intention of behaving in accordance to social norms. Through the analysis of the song and its integration in the film's narrative we can relate it to the existing conflict between people who want their lives to move forward by working and making an effort to succeed (such as the owners of the mini-golf who seem to value hard work and dedication to studies) and the ones who seem to have got stuck in their irresponsible teenage years and show no will to improve. Putting it in other words we see the clear example of the conflict between those who are in dull conformity with existing norms and those who show signs of rebellion (but still classically, before the mid-60s, "without a cause").

Getting back to John and the girl, she laughs at Wolfman's patter and says she loves listening to Wolfman even though her mother doesn't let her because the DJ is a negro. This is the first racial reference in the movie and is quite subtle but is

a clear indicator of the racist thoughts that existed at the time. Even though the sixties proved to be crucial years in the fight against institutional racism, during the early years of the decade racial segregation was



**Pic.17 - Wolfman Jack's character broadcasting live**

in many places still in force in America. The figure of Wolfman Jack is surrounded by several myths: the girl says that he broadcasts from a plane that is flying around in circles over the city all the time, the gang that kidnaps Curt and also idolises the DJ says that he broadcasts from Mexico and that they want to be just like him when they graduate. The Wolfman is treated almost like a mythological figure, beyond the human, a presiding deity, whose creed is Rock n Roll. "They will never catch the Wolfman", one of the boys says, as if he were a vigilante fugitive. Wolfman Jack and his radio show act as a sort of mood and thought chorus throughout the night, giving the audience the idea that fifties lyrics can validate teenage aspirations and guide life-choices.

Back to the city we are again confronted with the teenagers' favorite pastime: cruising. Suddenly the girl who is cruising with John is hit with a water balloon which was thrown from a car full of girls passing by them. When both cars stop at the next traffic lights John and the girl jump out of it and, touched by the abandoned and loud rhythm of "Johnny B. Goode" by Chuck Berry do all sorts of evil to the girls' car. The chorus of the song "Go, go, go Johnny go, Go, go, go Johnny go, Go, go, go Johnny go, Go, go, go Johnny go" acts a real stimulus to John's vengeful acts. If we pay attention to the lyrics we find some resemblance between it and John's life: he seems like the drop-out "country boy (...) who never learned to read or write so well" but there is the faith and the hope that "someday" he "will be a man (...) the leader of a big old band". John has indeed turned out to be a really respected figure in town. Even though he is not famous for being able to play the guitar, he is certainly the most famous car racer around and people come from other cities just to race him.

Terry and Debbie are drinking and smoking inside the car near the lake to the sound of "I Only Have Eyes For You". By analyzing the lyrics and their insertion in the film's narrative we can feel a sort of tender irony present in some verses and their application to the film: "my love must be a case of blind love, I can't see anyone but you". It seems that Debbie must be blind for going out on a date with Terry as she is so beautiful and he is so weedy. Besides that she must be blind for believing his lies when he says that he owns that great car, plus a jeep and a motorcycle. However, Terry "only has eyes for" Debbie. In one of the rare moments in the film when no music at all is playing, Terry and Debbie find out that their car has been stolen. The drama in the scene is increased by Debbie's descriptions of some terrifying events that have happened by the

lake which scare Terry out of his wits. True to his teenage idyll, Lucas can hardly think of anything graver than having your car stolen.

To the sound of “To the Aisle” by The Five Satins, we watch Steve and Laurie sitting in the car by the lake talking about their last night before Steve’s departure for college and Laurie is quite clear in her thoughts about the future. “It doesn’t make sense to leave home to look for home, to give up a life to find a new life nor to say goodbye to friends you love just to find new friends.” Steve doesn’t seem to be affected by her words and tries to persuade her to have sex with him one last time before departing, so that he can have something to remember her by. Laurie gets extremely angry and drives away leaving Steve behind, all alone by the lake.

John and Carol are cruising and chatting about Carol’s social constraints caused by her age. She complains that her father doesn’t allow her to stay out late listening to records nor to arrive home late. Switching mood, John and Carol seem to have some fun while bragging about John’s car with a racer (Harrison Ford) who comes from out of town just to meet John. While they race, the music is playing loud in a way that increases the tension of the moment. Basically in the same mood for fun, the gang that have kidnapped Curt decides to initiate him and force him to play his first trick on a parked police prowler. Curt manages to impress the gang with his trick and the comic scene he performs is accompanied by Wolfman Jack’s laughter, who says “Oh, can’t believe it! Feels so good ‘cause you’re sixteen!” Once again we feel Wolfman Jack’s presence, participating directly and indirectly in the scene. The kids celebrate the success of their trick to the sound of “Love Potion #9” by The Cloves. The song tells a funny story of a boy who seeks advice from a gipsy in order to solve his love problems and ends up kissing a police officer. It’s a very rhythmic and fun song. Finally Curt manages to convince the gang, who ultimately prove to be very unthreatening, to let him go. The Wolfman’s voice appears once again to participate in the narrative showing that he has licensed Curt’s most intimate wish which was to be set free: “Bye-Bye, Wolfman makes all your dreams come true” and leaves him with another brilliant idea: The Wolfman will help him find the Lady in the T-Bird.

Laurie cruises alone in her car to the sound of “Since I Don’t Have You” by The Skyliners. The song expresses the sadness and emptiness she is feeling at not having Steve anymore. It seems that he has taken all her happiness and joy and without him life



**Pic.18 - Cars cruising the streets of Modesto**

will lose all its interest. She feels the need to do something in order to recover her spirits and also to retaliate against Steve, so when she sees the racer from out of town she signals him to stop and let her into his car. Nothing that he can say will make her feel better and she prefers to be silent and

continue to suffer over the end of her relationship.

John finally manages to take Carol home, leaving her hysterical by kissing her on the cheek and giving her something to remember him by. Steve meets Curt and suddenly seems to understand Laurie's words back at the lake and starts doubting whether he should go to university. Terry manages to find Steve's car and takes Debbie to the Drive-in, where he finally admits that all he has said was a pack of lies. Debbie seems to understand what was going on and even tells Terry that he can give her a call and they can eventually meet again, should she be free. She kisses him goodbye to the sound of "Crying in the Chapel", by Sonny Til, a song that reflects Terry's sadness due to the fact that the evening is now coming to an end. On the one hand he is happy because he managed to spend the night with the girl he fancied but on the other hand he feels sad and embarrassed about having lied to her, for having drunk until he felt sick and for getting into so much trouble.



**Pic.19 - Curt talking to Wolfman Jack at the radio station**

Outside the city, Curt seeks Wolfman Jack's advice at the radio station but the man working there says he is just an employee playing recorded

tapes of Wolfman's voice. "The Wolfman is everywhere" says

the nice man from the radio station. The man and Curt chat for a while and Curt leaves a note for Wolfman to see if he can help him find the Lady in the T-Bird, saying that it is extremely important that he reach her on that particular night as he might be going to university first thing in the morning. As a sign of understanding of Curt's desire and

trying to persuade Curt to move on with his life, the man invites him to sit down, and talks about how Wolfman pops in once in a while to leave him some tapes and talks about the wonders and beauties he sees all over the world. He promises that he'll try to put the request on the air that night and as Curt leaves he sees the man talking into the microphone, laughing and saying "let's rock 'n' roll to death". Life goes on, no matter what, and so should Curt. He must go away to college and learn about other realities, see the beauties of the world. Curt understands that the man is, in fact, Wolfman Jack! He puts Curt's request on the air and even says that they are personal friends.

In the meantime, John decides to take Terry with him to Paradise Road where he will race the boy who had been looking for him all night. The word is spread that they are about to race and that Laurie is riding in the outsider's car so Steve heads there too. The car where Laurie is racing suffers an accident but she is fine. She sees Steve and they hug each other while he promises not to leave her. *American Graffiti* picks up the ritual of the car race from *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) as somehow central to American teenage experience, but it does not recuperate that film's problematisation of the ritual as self-destructive. Rather in *American Graffiti* the ritual becomes redemptive as people discover through it what they really wanted all along.

Steve and Laurie embrace to the sound of "Only You" by The Platters, a song which expresses the love both Steve and Laurie feel for each other and talks about the change of mind that Laurie's words have originated in him. She made him realize that he had all he needed at home: a family, friends, the love of his life and good prospects for the future - so he doesn't feel the need to go away to college anymore.

Curt also receives a call from the lady in the T-bird proposing to meet that night but he says that won't be possible as he's going away to college. It is curious to remark that "Only You" is not emphatically rock 'n' roll; like "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes", it resembles popular Tin Pan Alley songs written for black vocal harmonies. All throughout the film, we have the perception that *American Graffiti* blends the old with the new, both in the songs chosen and in the conflicts of ideology emerging from the different perspectives of the characters, especially those who differ the most in terms of age.

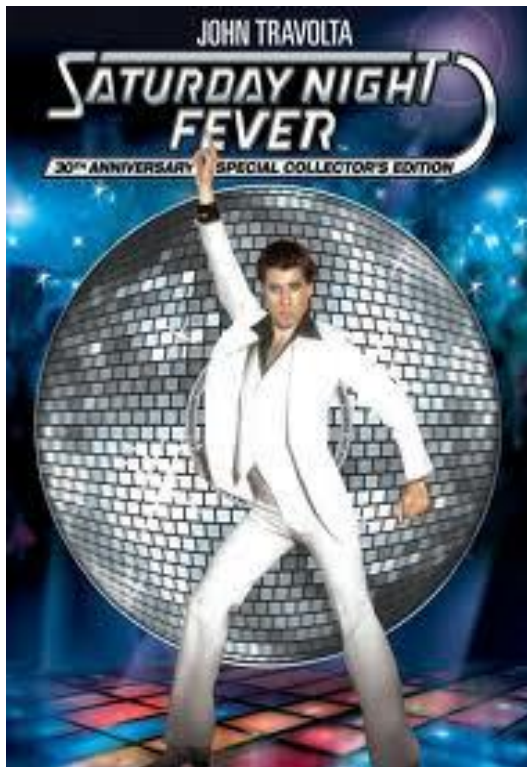
Finally it's time for Wolfman Jack to say his goodbyes. "Little kiss on your ear, Good night sweetheart, I'll see you later." And then "Goodnight, Sweetheart, Goodnight"

from *The Spaniels* plays in the background during the main characters' farewell: they all meet at the airport to say goodbye to Curt, who after all the doubts he had been through, has decided to follow the Wolfman's advice and move on to college. Curt's parents, Laurie, Steve, John and Terry all go to the airport to say goodbye to Curt and so the gang is reunited again for a last farewell. Even the Lady in the T-Bird makes her last fantastical appearance, cruising the airport as the plane flies over the city.

Right at the end of the movie, with only the sound of the airplane in the background, we get a series of texts revealing the future of the main characters: John Milner was killed by a drunk driver in December 1964, Terry Fields was reported missing in action near AnLoc in December 1965; Steve Bolander became an insurance agent in Modesto, California and Curt Henderson became a writer living in Canada. It would be impossible not to notice that we only learn about the future of the male characters. What happens to the ladies doesn't seem to matter (Mulholand, 2010), which proves that mainstream American cinema was still almost exclusively by and for boys. The names of the cast and crew involved in the making of the film are shown to the sound of *Surfin' Safari* by the Beach Boys. It conveys the idea that after a crazy night of Rock 'n' Roll around the city, a life full of joy should await the majority of the characters. However, what we learn about Terry and John's deaths gives the film a bitter-sweet ending which poignantly reconnects the film with 1973, the time of its release. As we have seen, the film starts with a song from Bill Haley (the progenitor of white Rock n Roll) and ends with one from The Beach Boys. In 1962, the time the film represents, The Beatles were preparing to release their first single. Even though not rejecting sixties' rock, as we have The Beach Boys present in the soundtrack, the movie focus mainly on early rock (Mulholand, 2010). The Rock 'n' Roll hits present in the movie evoke in older audiences memories of past events or particular past times that enable the viewers' identification with it. The movie has a clear nostalgic sense by evoking times when life seemed to be easier, innocent times that would never be experienced again. Both the narrative, but more particularly the film's soundtrack, conveys the idea that the early sixties were the calm before the storm. Even though we see teens having fun and making plans full of hope for the future as we listen to tunes that evoke such happiness, viewers of the film are aware that life is far from always having a happy ending. On the contrary, the idea transmitted is that life conditions can change very quickly, even in one magical night, but even then not necessarily according to one's individual will. The

extra narrative scroll give audience the idea that the movie represents a dream world but where people actually end up dying, which is illustrative of the nature of real life outside the film.

### 3.3. *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)



**Pic. 20 - Outdoor Promoting the film  
*Saturday Night Fever***

*Saturday Night Fever* is a dance film in which Tony Manero, an immature young man who spends his weekend evenings at 2001 Odyssey, a Brooklyn disco, where he is the king of the dance floor. The film was commercially successful and its contemporary pop score helped increase the popularity of disco music. The soundtrack of *Saturday Night Fever's* was mainly performed by the Bee Gees, a music group which was founded in 1958 and was composed of three brothers. The Bee Gees had experienced great success in the late 1960's and early 1970's but at the time of *Saturday Night Fever's* release they were going through less popular years. The

participation in the creation of the film's soundtrack, even though they only did so in a post-production phase, was one the highest points in their career and the impact of the album was so huge that it helped increase the craze of disco music. More than 40 million copies of the album were sold placing it in the top five of the best-selling soundtrack albums. The Bee Gees' popularity fell with the decline of disco music.

The film opens with Tony carefully getting ready to leave home: he combs his hair, he thinks about new dance moves, practices them in front of the mirror and goes out into the street walking to the rhythm of *Stayin' Alive* whose lyrics function as a mirror of his thoughts. As we hear the verse "I'm a woman's man" we see Tony looking at and eventually chasing a great proportion of the girls that go past him on his way to work. These initial scenes focusing on Tony and the song help to set the mood of the film and



prepare the viewer for what is about to come: the story of an ordinary young good-looking and very proud boy whose single purpose in life seems to be having fun on Saturday nights at the disco. What counts is the moment and therefore he spends all his money on new shirts and shoes to wear at the disco. The audience immediately associates John Travolta (here Tony Montano) with the song *Stayin' Alive*.

Tony works at a local paint store and has no thoughts of moving much further in life. In the beginning of the film he seems to accept his working condition. He is one of three children of a working class family whose unemployed father seems to have no pride at all, he feels no support from his family and lives in a community with high racial tensions. We can see some signs of the recession that America is going through by analyzing the dramatic effects of unemployment and working life is seen here as something necessary to live but something people should try to forget while not working. The dance floor is Tony's escape from real life misery and while dancing Tony forgets about all his worries. When the music starts Tony feels the need to move, to dance, to be who he wishes and he returns to reality only when the music stops. On the dance floor Tony is the king, the one who has the best moves, the most beautiful and desirable. Music and dancing seem to be represented in the movie as something magical that takes you away from ordinary daily routine.



**Pic. 21 - The cover of *Saturday Night Fever*, one of the best-selling soundtrack albums**

*Saturday Night Fever* conveys the notion that daily life is very banal in a still traditional neighborhood like Brooklyn. Tony has the same routine everyday: he gets up, gets dressed, goes to work, does his job and returns home in the evening to a family that is submerged in frustration. His unemployed father seems to have reasons to argue with the family every day and we can feel the tension growing from the fact that only a small portion of money is entering the house. We can feel that this is a very traditional family when the mother suggests that she could start doing something to earn money and his father considers that as an insult, as if it would make him less of a man. Tony shows some traces of sensitiveness that are not commonly conveyed in young people of his generation by being revolted by his father's constant arguments with his mother and by being content about a very small increase in salary, for instance.



When he goes to the disco on Saturday evenings and becomes the king of the dance floor Tony suddenly forgets all his frustrations and feels elevated as if all his problems have vanished. Listening to music and dancing to it seem to be his sole intention in life, his way of releasing his tensions. Apart from the scene where Tony helps Stephanie move to Manhattan and the last scene when he goes to meet her and apologizes for his abusive behavior, music is only to be heard when dancing is involved. The notion behind this is that music only makes sense if it is meant to be danced to. All the musical and dancing scenes in the movie convey happiness, joy and even glamour. Young people are very careful in getting ready to go out at night, choosing their best outfits before entering the dance floor which, itself, is very different from what was once associated to a place where kids would go to have fun. The disco itself is very dark, the dance floor is raised above the ground, it is paved in a different material and is lighted with special coloured lights which have varied shapes and are turned on and off according to the rhythm of the song being played. Dancing in the disco, as portrayed in the film, is not only a way of having fun, it is also a means of spreading glamour and showing off their fashionable outfits and hairstyles in this special place which is almost seen as a sanctuary whose God is Tony. The musical and dancing moments in the film help to increase tension in the film's narrative as they also reflect the sexual evolution of Tony's involvement with both the female protagonists. These scenes also seem very realistic to me as they are performed in a natural location, the disco, and at a specific and common time for that, on weekend evenings. Music and dancing seem to originate in a natural way and in a natural place for the matter. The fact that in some numbers Tony takes the dance floor for himself shows that he is the main character in the film, the ordinary boy from Brooklyn that just wants to have a good time on a typical Saturday night by releasing the tensions he accumulated during his working week and also reflecting his inner desires and emotions. By the way he dances we can sense his strong sexual attraction to Stephanie and his total lack of emotional interest for Anette or all the other girls he dances with. We can perceive that male importance predominates over women as they are given only secondary roles. Women are regarded by men in general as a form of entertainment. Even though Tony seems to be different from the rest as he refuses all Anette's attempts to have a closer relationship with him due to the fact that he doesn't love her and he would, therefore, lose the respect he has for her, all his friends try to take advantage of women when they can. A clear example of this is the scene when Tony's friends rape Anette in the back seat of a car. She was

frustrated and jealous of Tony entering the competition with Stephanie and decides to take some pills and drink too much. As she is out of her mind she agrees to have sex with both friends. However, when the effect of drugs and alcohol starts to disappear and she comes to face reality she cries and asks them to stop. Tony is present and feels outraged about the friends' behavior but does nothing to stop them. Even without saying a single word this is a clear sign of detachment from his friends, this style of life and this city. It is interesting to note that the film shows some signs of the liberation of women as they have a saying in the choice of their sexual partners and start taking the initiative. Once in the disco a girl approaches Tony and repeatedly tells him that she would like to know if he is as good in bed as he is on the dance floor. She was offering herself to him in front of everybody having no shame whatsoever. We also learn that it is common for boys and girls to go out and have their casual sexual moments on the backseats of cars without even knowing the names of their partners. Anette, who admires Tony with all her heart and soul, offers herself to him numerous times but is constantly dumped.

I believe that we sense a diminishing role of music as the narrative goes by. In the end of the film when Tony finally clarifies his problems with Stephanie, he decides to move to Manhattan and leave behind the life he used to have in Brooklyn we can hear "How deep is Your Love", a very romantic song which sets the change in Tony's character. He stopped being the young boy whose sole aim in life was to be the king of the dance floor and decides to attempt to be a man, to move away from home and find a decent job which can guarantee him a good honest life. Music, which in the beginning of the film is mostly of the disco type, is at first presented as a way of escaping real life dramas by helping the main character to release his mind. As the narrative evolves the music also changes and the more romanticized "How deep is Your Love" brings the character back to what is in fact the nature of reality with the difficulties of life, which is comparable to what happened during the seventies. Even though the disco sound came out as a huge phenomenon and everybody was happily dancing to it, it proved to be very short-lived as it faded away almost as suddenly as it appeared. Tony's evolution and his subsequent perception that real life happened outside the disco may in fact be a premonition that disco sound was not there to stay for long.

### 3.4. Conclusion

As we have seen, the seventies were transitional years in which America had to face the reality that had sunk in: government scandals allied to the oil crisis, high inflation and increasing unemployment rates contributed to America's sense of disillusion with the state of society. By choosing to analyze two completely different styles of films, which use music in different ways, I intend to show the power of film music to trigger emotions and feelings and its influence in creating moods. The soundtrack of *American Graffiti* is exclusively made up of pre-recorded songs, all of which are hits from the late fifties and early sixties, in an exercise of nostalgia for a country in a time when life used to be simpler and more fun. The music in this film is a key factor in triggering nostalgic emotions and helping the audience revive good times that are already gone. *Saturday Night Fever*, in opposition, uses a contemporary pop score to express the darker side of a society which has to accept the economic downturn of the decade and sees work as a necessary evil. By featuring mostly disco music the film's soundtrack helped to generate the craze for disco sound and dancing thus contributing to creating fashions amongst youth who identified with the inner conflicts featured in Tony's character. While using a contemporary score *Saturday Night Fever* shows the audience the dark side of America which the pre-recorded revivalist and evocative soundtrack of *American Graffiti* metaphorically tries to hide away from.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**THE EIGHTIES**

#### **4.1. Socio-cultural Contextualization**

The eighties was a decade of deregulation and also of tremendous population growth all over the world. Ronald Reagan, elected American President in 1980, became known for his fight against communism and the anti-drug campaigns developed by himself and his wife. Cocaine became very popular at the time especially among celebrities and wealthy people and crack emerged as a cheaper version of the drug, aimed at those who couldn't afford cocaine. A crack cocaine epidemic is said to have assaulted American cities in 1984. Drug consumption became a problem of huge proportions leading to several social problems such as the increase of violence and crime rates in cities and also helped the spread of contagious diseases, one of which was the AIDS pandemic. After the AIDS-related death of several celebrities there were numerous protests claiming that action against the spread of the disease should be taken. Along with these, various campaigns against smoking were promoted and there was a general trend towards appealing to an overall politically correct attitude and opposition to all sorts of racist acts towards minority groups. The eighties also witnessed a positive growth in people's concerns about general well-being. There was a growing increase in concern about environmental problems, leading to the implementation of "green policies" and an increasing opposition to nuclear power.

In line with what had already started during the seventies the role of women in society continued gaining prominence with women's massive entrance in the labour market and gay rights became widely accepted in the western world.

The decade was also characterized by several violent attacks on public figures. John Lennon was assassinated on the eighth December 1980 and Marvin Gaye, singer and songwriter, was murdered on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1984. Ronald Reagan and his press secretary were shot in 1981 but managed to survive, and the Pope John Paul II and Margaret Thatcher suffered assassination attempts in 1981 and 1984 respectively.

The eighties was also a decade of great developments in the technological area. Television witnessed a great revolution during the decade due to the widespread of affordable cable TV and the popularization of evening soap operas, talk shows and series. Video games became very popular as well as personal computers, with Apple releasing its first Macintosh computer in 1984. The Walkman, which had already been introduced in the previous decade, gained great popularity especially among young

people and became influential in their lives as it made it possible for teens to listen to music anytime and anywhere. Michael J. Fox's character in *Back to the Future* is a perfect example of the stereotype of the urban youngster who is constantly surrounded by music.

The eighties were so rich in terms of music styles that it makes it very hard to present a good summary of what happened in this area at the time. In order to avoid too extensive a review, I intend to focus merely on the most prominent music styles of the first half of the decade and the ones which will be the object of my study as integral to the films analysed. Madonna and Michael Jackson were considered the most successful pop artists of the eighties using innovative instruments such as the keyboard synthesizer and the drum machine, which became very popular at the time. They shared an eccentric way of dressing, outlandish behavior on stage and dramatic dance routines. Techno and electronic dance music, as well as House music, gained prominence and became mainstream pop music forms. As an example of electronic dance music I might cite "What a Feeling", from the *Flashdance* soundtrack, as representing the power of electronic and dance music when transmitting energy to its listeners. R&B, hip hop and urban music became very popular specially in big cities, featuring names such as Tina Turner, Lionel Richie, Whitney Houston, Denice Williams and Michael Jackson again. The launching of MTV in 1980 helped to launch the phenomenon of the music video, which became a successful business in its own right as it helped promote singles, albums, artists and even films. MTV had a great influence on both the music and film industries and could be considered the 80s most important popular cultural form. Hard Rock, Heavy Metal, Glam Metal and Punk Rock were also very popular in the eighties. Guns N' Roses, Metallica, Iron Maiden, Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Megadeth, Anthrax, AC/DC, Ozzy Osbourne, Van Halen, KISS, and U2 were among the most significant rock bands of the decade. In the second half of the decade, a new style emerged called Teen Pop which covered bands such as New Kids on the Block, Debbie Gibson, Tiffany, New Edition, The Bangles or, as already mentioned, Madonna. Solo artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Tina Turner, Bon Jovi, Prince and Janet Jackson, who were a constant in charts at the time, still remain very popular to this day.

The film industry of the decade covered many genres and became hybrid in the sense that some genres mingled creating hard-to-define films which achieved great popularity. For the purposes of this thesis I would like to focus largely on teen comedies, which

worked closely with the music industry, launched the careers of what turned out to be emerging celebrities and also influenced teenagers' style of behaving and dressing. My main focus throughout this chapter, with exception to *The Big Chill*, will rely on the analysis of films shot in the eighties which used contemporary soundtracks and even so, in opposition to *American Graffiti* or *The Big Chill*, managed to cause a high impact on teenagers as they are the main target of these movies and they don't need a memory to identify with the narrative. Nevertheless I could not proceed without stating that songs can indeed do a lot of good for the films they appear in and that is the reason why pre-recorded songs are used in soundtracks. I would like to cite the case of *Ghost* (1990) which uses "Unchained Melody", dating back to 1955 and which has become one of the most recorded songs of the twentieth century being used in more than twenty different films. During the eighties pop music moved from the form of political and ideological expression it had assumed in the seventies to a much more private and emotional world. "Take My Breath Away", by Berlin, the main music theme in *Topgun* (1990) is a great example of a pop song that has a very personal character and did much good to the film as it became a huge success on its own.

From the eighties onwards the penetration of pop promo in films became normative, as it is shown in *Batman* (1989), which contains a Michael Jackson's pop video. Even though *Batman* is not exclusively targeted at teenagers as seen in this work it is oriented for a youth audience under 25. This film is a clear example of how contemporary songs in a contemporary movie cause a high impact on youth culture.

John Hughes became known as the king of teen pics throughout the eighties by releasing huge hits such as *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and *Ferris Bueller's day Off* (1986) which targeted a younger age demographics. John Hughes had started his working life as an advertising copywriter and from that early moment on he started revealing his good use of vocabulary and rhythm targeted at the supposedly indignities of teenagers' lives. Hughes' audience is made up of younger, unhappy teenagers, mostly wealthy kids who lack attention from their parents and so become troubled teens who seem to solve their problems through music and peer bonding.

*Sixteen Candles* was the first movie to capture the experience of being a white, middle-class, sensitive weirdo teenager in 1980's America. (Gross, 2004: 4). It gained almost

unanimous appraisal for its depiction of middle class school life as it was one of the first films, if not the first, to be exclusively centered around high school life. The message present in all Hughes' films is that wishes do come true and so teenagers feel found and freed while watching them. The soundtracks present in Hughes' films from the eighties are all contemporary and thus contribute to generating crazes and fashions associated not only to the characters but to the performers themselves.

#### 4. 2. *The Big Chill* (1983)



**Pic. 22 - Poster Promoting *The Big Chill***

The one exception to the teen comedy in this section is *The Big Chill* (1983). This film gives its viewers a colourful, entertaining but also troubled look into the current lives of representatives of the first adults which were born in the Baby Boomer Generation but have now become thirty-somethings. The film has an engaging tone as the characters are all presented in an attractive way. It features the story of seven friends who used to study together at the University of Michigan and are then reunited to attend the funeral of one of their friends who has unexpectedly committed suicide. Twenty years on from Lucas's 1962 *Modesto*, college-going and thoughtful Curt

has survived the 60s, accumulated friends and gone out into the world to become a success. But something is missing. The film opens with Marvin Gaye's "I heard it through the grapevine", setting the melancholic mood of the film's beginning through a very repetitive rhythmic base and a lyric about a jilting. All the main characters are shown preparing themselves to attend their friends' funeral. The carefully-chosen soundtrack is loaded with hit songs from the sixties helping to recreate the spirit of regretful reminiscence about the past, when they were all young and free and devoted solely to enjoying their lives, since the apparently senseless suicide of Alex has thrown a pall over proceedings. Throughout the weekend the friends also update each other on the current state of their lives and talk about work, relationships and their problems. They all eat, drink, dance, jog, play football, watch TV, make videotapes of themselves, smoke and have sex as a way of reviving times that are gone - all accompanied by a



soundtrack which reminisces the spirit of idealistic protest and optimism which they have moved away from. The choice of music from the sixties shows the guilt felt by the characters for having exchanged their ideals, for the most part, for successful careers.

The song “You can’t always get what you want” marks the moment, after the ceremony, when the friends greet each other and do some catching up after a long time apart. This rock ‘n’ roll song released by The Rolling Stones in 1969 has a strong downbeat lyric that helps accentuate the melancholic feeling of having lost a friend in such an inexplicable way. The lyrics set the mood for and articulate what’s about to come in the movie: the feeling of disillusionment and loss of direction, of not having accomplished the goals they had set for themselves. Sometimes, as we will see in the movie, we have to accept how things turn out and stop day-dreaming about desires which are difficult to realise. In the end the characters seem to understand that they really get what they need and accept the fact that not everything they once wanted was in fact possible. As the lyric states,

“you can't always get what you want,  
Honey, you can't always get what you want.  
You can't always get what you want  
But if you try sometimes, yeah,  
You just might find you get what you need!”

I believe the film portrays the cooling off and calming down process that takes place with every generation when youngsters develop into adulthood and are faced with the compromises and constraints of life. All characters are given some screen time and viewers get a chance to understand them better by analyzing what they had decided to pack in their luggage. The playful tone of “Tell him” accompanies each character’s unpacking scene, revealing a bit more about each one, and helps to exchange the melancholic mood for a more lighthearted one. The love they felt for each other, in various forms, is about to be celebrated. As the The Exciters’s “Tell Him” says:

“Ever since the world began it's been that way  
For man and woman were created to make love their destiny  
Then why should true love be so complicated? Oh...

I know something about love. You gotta take it and  
Show him what the world is made of, one kiss will prove it

If you want him to be always by your side  
Take his hand tonight and swallow your foolish pride and..."

The careful choice of the music included in the soundtrack, featuring a mixture of rock 'n' roll and soul music, conveys the idea that there has been a change in the characters' way of seeing life. The friends are changing both individually but also as a group and in the way they relate to each other. They seem to have been able to climb higher in their careers during the seventies and currently, in the eighties, they sense that while committed to their professional lives, they have lost their way and betrayed their ideals. Even during the film there is a shift in the characters' mood that goes from the depression at losing a friend to regression (high spirits attained through alcohol and drug consumption and a willed return to their time as college youngsters).

#### 4.3. *Flashdance* (1983)



**Pic. 23 - Poster Promoting *FlashDance***

The first six minutes of this romantic drama draw a clear a picture of Alex's life, in what could be a music video for the song "What a feeling". This may be associated with the fact that Adrian Lyne, a Midas-touch 80s film director, had started by directing TV commercials which use many of the features present in music videos, such as kinetic images, fast cutting in the editing and high-contrast lighting which all together make the imagery very appealing and eye catching. MTV had a key role at this time as a marketing tool for the movie as it used

excerpts from it and ran them as music videos to promote the film. "What a feeling" starts

with simple electronic sounds and the soft voice of a female singer who presents the girl who is riding her bicycle on her way to work as a strong, independent woman who hides her fears deep inside her and who cries silent tears in a world which, in her case, is

literally made of steel as she works as a welder during the day. The beginning of the song transmits nostalgic association that induce the viewer to believe that she leads a very lonely life. However, as we see the sun appearing in the sky the electronic sounds of this dance disco song evolve into much more rhythmic tunes which transmit a strong sense of optimism, strength, energy and movement which, allied to the lyrics and the imagery present in the film, express Alex's inner strength and aspirational nature.

“Well I hear the music, close my eyes, feel the rhythm  
Wrap around, take a hold of my heart  
What a feeling, bein's believin'  
I can't have it all, now I'm dancin' for my life  
Take your passion, and make it happen” (in “What a Feeling”)

This was also the song chosen to accompany her dance audition at the Ballet Hall. Alex works as a welder in a man's world by day and as a Flashdancer at night, which means she is constantly surrounded by men. Once again, as seen in other films especially from the late sixties / early seventies onwards, we get the idea that women are now in full control of their lives. Women's liberation movements have given them the chance to work in professions which were formerly labeled men's jobs. In the specific case of Alex however, it is not very likely that a woman like her would prosper and earn the respect of her fellow workers in the welding trade, not without at least some experience of unwanted sexual attention. At night while she is dancing at Mawdy's, Alex clearly expresses her awareness of being the owner of her body. As she dances to the sounds of “Deep Dish” we perceive that she, like flashdancers in general, although being watched by a predominantly male audience and being an (unattainable) object of desire, she pretends not to notice them.

Flashdancing is a very demanding form of solo dance where dancers, such as Alex during “Deep Fish”, seem to be totally out of control, moving instinctively to the rhythm of the song in movements that seem to be spontaneous and not rehearsed and the speed is only marked by Alex's physical limits. The song has a very strong and marked beat that is accompanied by Alex's fast moves. Alex also dances at Mawby's to the sound of “Man Hunt”, a more metallized and hard rock rock sound where, once again, the wildest features of Alex character come to light. The rhythm in this song is characterized by heavy percussion and some dramatic shifts in the song dynamics. While rehearsing for the ballet audition at home Alex dances to “Maniac”. This is an

electronic song with, once again, a very marked tempo that remains the same throughout the song. We can feel an almost obsessive relation between the rhythm and the theme, just as Alex's relation to dancing is manic in the sense that she lives for it. Alex dances like a maniac while she practices for her audience at the ballet company and takes herself to the very limits. Once again we hear a guitar solo that reminds us of the guitar hero so typical of the eighties. During this specific time, in a more metalized and glam metal rock 'n' roll era the heroes of rock bands were commonly the guitar players and not the singers, as seen in former decades. As an example I can refer Richard Fortus, the guitarist in Guns n Roses whose performances drove audiences to ecstasy more often than the voice of Axel Rose did. Still today the guitar is an object of fetishization and a symbol of rebellion for every teen who wants to leave a mark in the music world.

Alex and Jeanette practice hard in the gym to attain their dreams, the first as a ballet dancer and the second as an ice skater. We see the girls working out to the sound of "I love Rock 'n' Roll" which denotes not only the characters' obsession with dancing and ice skating, but also with rock 'n' roll and its driving beat. Films are rarely explicit about this but rock 'n' roll is often symbolic of sexual energy. These two urban girls may be devoted to the pursuit of their dreams, but the film clearly turns their obsession with fitness and movement into displays of the female body. Films like *Flashdance* re-style and eroticize the dance movie using the techniques of advertising.

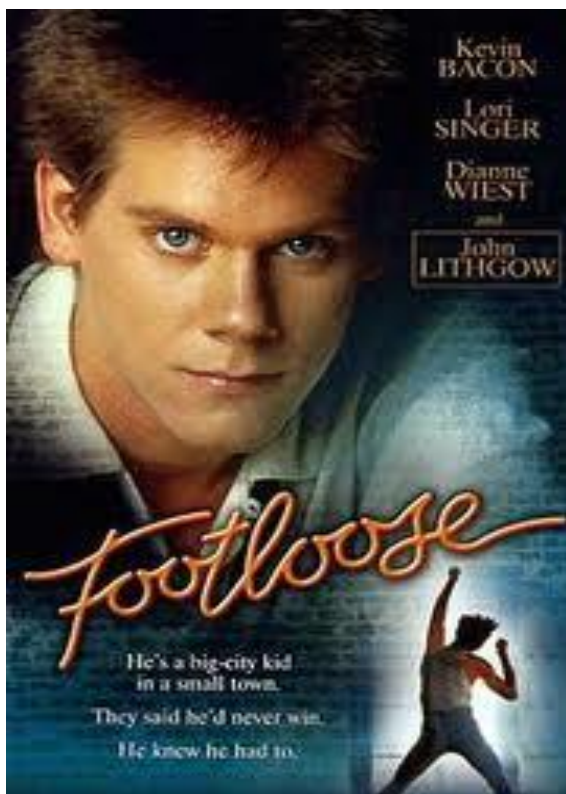
Alex is the prototype of the urban youngster who goes everywhere with her Walkman in an attempt to take a break from the world of hard work she must face every day. While listening to music and, in particular, when dancing, Alex is submersed in her own world, a world of her choosing, listening to the soundtrack of her own life. It seems that Alex had a determinative role in setting youth trends in the eighties. Not only did a great many teens and young adults use their walkmans and return to the gymnasium but teenage girls also adopted Alex's way of dressing, wearing items such as leggings, leg-warmers, off-the-shoulder shirts and cut sweatshirts.

"I'll be here where the heart is" is a romantic ballad with a synthesizer base that gives great emphasis to the sound of the guitar, presenting itself as rather melancholy and downbeat in reinforcement of its lyrics. The song is featured the moment after Alex has learnt about Mary's death, her older mentor, who has always given her moral support.

Alex is seen alone in her house, wandering around aimlessly, feeling lost and confused mourning the death of what was her only shoulder to cry on.

We may establish a parallel between *FlashDance* (1983) and *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) as both films feature dancing as a way of escaping from the dismal effects of the urban reality surrounding them. However, while in *Saturday Night Fever* dancing is seen as a low art and a mere escape from daily routine and a way of having fun at the weekends, *FlashDance* shows dancing as a more refined art form which leads the main character out of the working class ghetto. In *Saturday Night Fever* the hero evolves in the direction of abandoning dancing in order to achieve independence and a fuller adult life; in *FlashDance* the heroine adopts dancing as the purpose of her life and as a route to professional liberation.

#### 4.4. *Footloose* (1984)



Pic 18 - Poster Promoting *Footloose*

The several pairs of feet we see dancing to the sound of “Footloose”, the funky song which gives its name to the film, indicate that we are about to be submerged in 120 minutes of pure energy and dancing. The song underlies the notion of a march which confers a funny and playful tone to the film which, on the other hand, may be associated to the sense of union in a march of revolt performed by teenagers’ characters who unite in order to fight the established norms that forbid rock ‘n’ roll music and dancing in the town. This type of music is forbidden since it is associated

with disruptive behavior, such as alcohol consumption and drug use, and its

eventually dramatic consequences. As the Priest argues, teens should appreciate classical music because it is “uplifting, it doesn’t confuse people’s minds and bodies”.

Ren, the main character in the film, is stopped by the police while driving his car because he is listening to rock 'n' roll. His brand new cassette is apprehended by the officers as it is not legal to listen to such sounds. Ren's character will turn out to be the saviour of the teens in this town who are locked so far away from current developments in music that they don't even know the names of the most successful rock and pop bands of the moment. The verses "Cut loose, footloose, kick off the Sunday shoes Ooh-wee Marie shake it, shake it for me" appeal to the idea of having fun and forgetting social constraints as much as any of the hits from the 1950s. "Playing so cool, obeying every rule" doesn't seem to lead teens' to enjoyable times, so the idea transmitted is that in order to enjoy yourself you must cut loose from everything that is holding you to what older generations consider the correct code of conduct. Similarly, the tunes in "Hurts so Good", through its energetic guitar sounds and funky rhythm, also convey feelings of joy and exuberance that make listeners, both clients and employees in the drive-in, go crazy and dance uncontrollably. The lyrics incite teens to enjoy the moment while they can and forget about the rest. In *Footloose* the older generations are represented by the figure of the Preacher whose first appearance is during a speech in church where he mentions all the problems which will be dealt with in the film: the sorry state of society due to the problematic proliferation of rock 'n' roll music and its association to crime, alcohol and drug consumption, easy sexuality and the relaxed attitude to pornography present not only in albums but also in some censored books that we later see being burnt in the city's school. The teens attending the speech clearly don't identify with the preacher's words, neither do they seem to understand his reasons. His daughter is painting her nails while her father preaches to the community, teens gossip and children fall asleep in a clear sign of generation gap. While talking to his wife the priest says he is "responsible for the spiritual life of this community" and his wife argues that he "can't be a father for everybody". Taking into account his daughter's claims that when the family is at home they hardly speak and that her father only cares about her when she goes out the door, we question whether the priest can be a father at all, even inside his own home.

Despite the Priest's attempts to preserve what he considers to be a mentally and physically healthy life there are teens smuggling drugs during school time, we see dangerous tractor races taking place and we witness rebellious acts from teens who seem to try to make the most of the limited freedom they are granted by their parents.

Ariel risks her life while releasing her tensions and defying death when she stands with one foot in her friend's car and the other on her boyfriend's car while they travel along the road and a truck appears in front of them. She almost gets herself killed just for the sake of experiencing an adrenalin rush caused by serious danger. "The girl gets around" by Sammy Hagar is the rock theme featured during this scene. Its energetic rhythm is full of power and excitement highlighted by the heavy metal sound of the guitars. As we can hear in this song, guitar solos are one of the most remarkable features of rock 'n' roll music of the time. These distorted sounds help to reinforce the notion of wildness and rebellion that are present in the attitude of Ariel's character and in the attitude of teenagers in general. She is a very strong-willed girl whose personality is reflected in the electric and distorted sound of the guitar solos voicing her inner cry for attention, recognition and acceptance of her as she is. "The girl gets around" seems to have been written in order to better portray the girl's character and to set the mood for what is about to happen, as this scene is shown at the beginning of the movie.

“[Boy] hey Cranston, what're you doing with the preacher's daughter?

[Chuck] Anything that I want

[Boy] oh yeah? What does she get out of it?

[Chuck] Everything that she needs

[Ariel] Like you'd know

[Chuck] Well she'd like you to think she was born yesterday

with her innocent looks and her little town ways  
when she's smilin' at me she's got angels in her eyes

But I've seen how she moves  
and this girl really cooks  
she's taught me some tricks you can't learn in a book  
and I'm starting to think she's a devil in disguise

[All] The girl gets around  
she knows what she likes (huh)

I got what she needs  
wait til tonight (just wait)  
We'll both make our moves  
yeah, we'll cover some ground  
the girl gets around,  
around, around, around, around, around,  
good god this girl gets around

[Arial] Yeah he likes to pretend  
he's a man among men  
but with his hand in his pockets  
he can't count to ten  
don't worry baby,  
you're secret's safe with me

[Boys] (Busted!)

[Arial] and he bores me to tears  
with his beer and his bikes  
but I keep him around  
cause when temptation strikes  
I've got the motor  
he's got the key ...

The analysis of the subtext of the last verses of the song shows that it constitutes a metaphorical statement of the character's invitation to sexuality. Arial certainly has an angelic look while in the presence of her father, the representative of good morals and high values but may be considered a devil in disguise as she is constantly defying the norms and for several moments defies death, not only in the early scene where she almost gets killed when heading for a truck but also when she stands still on the railway tracks while the train is heading in her direction. Apart from that, Arial is also representative of teenagers who are opening up to an active sexual life. Despite being aware of her father's hostility to her long absences from home she frequently runs to meet the object of her desires, first her boyfriend and then Ren,. Once again the almost scream-like sounds of the guitar in "The girl gets around" may be compared to Arial's



inner voice which is screaming for freedom in order to be able to do what she wants with her life. During the race scene where Arial's boyfriend and Ren drive tractors as a way of showing their courage, Bonnie Tyler's power ballad "Holding out for a hero" with its rasping voice, pronounced base notes and explosive baroque melodic line embody Arial's cry, not as a girl but as a woman, for an hero/lover in her life. The explosive sounds of percussion instruments and the urgency of the lyrics are intended to enlist listeners' support for the Arial character's transition from a rebel teenager to full-bodied autonomous woman.

The famous scene where Kevin Bacon's character dances alone in an abandoned warehouse is a clear masturbatory scene where the main actor feels the need to externalize his hormones, his sexual feelings and frustrations by dancing on his own, isolated from the rest of the community. The main features of the scene resemble a pop music video. As we can see rock 'n' roll is full of sexual energy and is very heavy on the subtext. In one of the last scenes of the movie, while students dance to the sounds of "Almost Paradise", viewers will perceive that a change has taken place not only in Arial's character but also in the inhabitants of the town. The council has decided to approve the junior prom and the youngsters gather forces to transform a warehouse into a dancing venue. This romantic ballad helps to set the mood for the perfect ending: all the characters seem to be happy with the outcome of their journey towards self-acceptance. Even the preacher and his wife join in this mood of "knocking on heaven's door" from the outside of the ball area and remind themselves of their own youthful times and how much passion they felt for each other. Foreigner's "Waiting for a girl like you", another romantic ballad featured at the end of the film, once again reiterates this state of personal achievement. The voice of the singer denotes a certain degree of tender submission to the loved woman, as if he had been suffering while "waiting for a girl like you". The music here functions as a mere accompaniment to the singer's voice which has all the power. I believe we may establish a parallel between the suffering in the singer's voice and the difficult path Ren had before finding the peaceful moment he is now enjoying as he had to face the difficulties of moving on and adapting to a new city where he knew nobody.

#### 4.5. Conclusion

As I have been stating throughout the earlier chapters, the film music analysed in this work serves the purposes of reinforcing the message conveyed in the narrative and adding colouring to it by helping in the definition of moods or personality traits of certain key characters. The rhythm, combined with lyrics, give the viewers a wider understanding of the action taking place. In films which feature dance prominently, as two of the films I have foregrounded do, popular music has an even more central function. Music releases the irresistible desire to dance and with dance other physical forms of self-expression are released too. Rock 'n' roll is a siren call to pent-up sexuality in most of the films in which it features.

In the specific dance films analyzed in this chapter their rock 'n' roll soundtracks, combined with the dancing accompanying it, present a new type of erotic cinema where the music and dancing scenes sublimate love scenes when physical content cannot be shown. Due to all of what has formerly been stated and allied to the use of high impact images common in advertising the stars of *Flashdance* and *Footlose* become sex symbols.

## **CONCLUSION**

As previously stated in my work, music and film have always had a very close connection from the very beginning of cinema. Silent films were frequently accompanied by the sounds of a live piano or organ, or even a live orchestra. With the subsequent evolution of the film industry, a new area of technical expertise was initiated; integrating often an original musical score to make films more appealing and attractive by helping to point up the periodicity in films and to better convey the moods and feelings of the characters and narrative.

Through the analysis of selected films targeted mostly at teenagers and released between 1955 and 1985, I have discovered that the music present in these films accompanies and reflects the changes that have been taking place in wider society. It's interesting to note that in its early days Rock 'n' Roll was associated with the newly discovered phenomenon of juvenile delinquency, making the portrayal of teenagers highly problematic in the late fifties. During the next decade, Rock 'n' Roll became the voice of protest of this youth generation which started questioning authority, social convention and even government policies. A reaction to the decade of conflict took the form in the seventies of a willful mood of nostalgia, in which America longed for the innocence which had seemed lost in civil strife and opposition to the war in Vietnam. It has been fruitful to see this issue of the relevance of music in films as a way of better defining moods through the eyes of Curt's character in *American Graffiti* who was the typical imaginative teenager of the sixties, who went to college in order to further his studies and improve his life conditions. As we see later on while analyzing *The Big Chill*, characters like Curt went on to spend most of the sixties and seventies, after college, where they started contesting authority and standing up for what they believed to be right and not simply conforming to the imposed norms whenever they went against their principles. However, the evolution of our hypothetical Curts, as represented by *The Big Chill*, suggests that this idealism was just a phase, a response to a *zeitgeist*, after which young adults developed away from their former ideals and sold out in the sense that they found jobs in a world that rewards people for their political passivity. The unexpected meeting of former college friends at a funeral in the eighties, *The Big Chill* works as an exercise in nostalgia for their lost ideals, where they used to believe in the power of young to change the world. In parallel, *American Graffiti* is also an exercise in nostalgia. It was released in the middle of the turmoil of the early seventies but refers back to a small town in the early sixties when teenagers were

innocent, and so reminds Americans of the seventies of what they have lost in those intervening years. *The Big Chill*, analogous to *American Graffiti*, benefits from a soundtrack composed of carefully chosen pre-existing records exclusively released during the presumed heyday of its protagonists and clearly evoking their love of those times. This is the clearest affirmation of the revivalist power of music and its ability to trigger memories and the emotions associated to intense moments of one's life. The characters in both films show their love for music by the way they let it bring to the surface many emotions and behaviors that they have either repressed or have had difficulty in confronting. In *The Big Chill* we are presented with an adult version of the teenagers of *American Graffiti* who have grown up to be people who have attained the maturity and confidence in themselves necessary to overcome the real and symbolic doubts aroused by the suicide of a friend.

From its birth in the mid-fifties until 1985, the Rock 'n' Roll present in teen movies suffered a great evolution from being seen as a marginal genre, in the mid-fifties, in the sense that it was associated uniquely with teenagers and their disruptive behavior into becoming a powerful tool of nostalgia for whole generations, capable of evoking happy and innocent times and reminding adults of former intense moments. However, in contrast with these nostalgic pre-recorded song soundtracks, Rock n' Roll has also had a key role in movies of the sixties, seventies and eighties which used contemporary songs that were often specifically written in order to fit the films as tools for expressing the culture and mood of the moment and also in setting or disseminating trends and fashions amongst teenagers. Simon & Garfunkel's folk-influenced Rock 'n' Roll in *The Graduate*, the soundtrack of which is mainly composed of songs written by the former, is the reflection of a generation which feels lost and confused and expresses this dislocation from life using songs that, though denoting some ironic criticism are never bitter or aggressive. As a reflection of Simon and Garfunkel's own lives, a Jewish duo from New York middle-class families, they are represented in the movie by Ben, who is over-controlled by his parents and feels the pressure to live up to their expectations. Ben's character is representative of the generation where "the kids are alright" (as the phrase was) and are still considered very innocent, a characteristic which is reiterated especially in the sweet piping lyric of "Scarborough Fair", a song which evokes an idyllic rural alternative world. *Easy Rider*, although contemporary to *The Graduate*, combines multiple styles of music and multiple performers in its soundtrack which

places great focus on an angry, more politicized version of Rock 'n' Roll, which mentions hot themes of the moment, such as drug dealing and drug consumption as is the case with Steppenwolf's "The Pusher".

In the seventies *Saturday Night Fever* and its mostly disco-based soundtrack opened the door for a new style of cinema which aimed at capitalizing on and promoting new crazes and setting trends and fashions. The Bee Gees' "Staying Alive", a song written specifically for this film, gave birth to "disco mania" and became the anthem of those who saw dancing as an escape from the stifling effects of urban life and adopted the looks and moves of Tony Manero's character as a way of evading the humdrumness of their working lives. Following in its steps but shot five years later *Flashdance* also featured dancing but presented it as a form of art, as a professional aspiration. The film was mostly targeted at a slightly older segment of the market, young people in their early twenties, and used many of the very attractive features found in the newly emergent MTV videos which allied to Rock 'n' Roll songs, here in particular very symbolic of sexual energy, helped to drive the aspiration to performance and dance which began with *Fame* in 1980. I have also taken into account the case of *Footloose*, as it was also a dance movie but with the particularity of targeting teens in their final high school years. I find it particularly striking that the last movie analysed in my work returns to portraying Rock 'n' Roll, in the eyes of adult characters, as a form of expression associated with teenage delinquent behavior. The film thus reinforces the perception of a generation gap common to films targeted at teenagers, while disavowing the fact that the parents in 1983 are themselves products of the rock generation. Blake Shelton's "Footloose", the film's main theme, resurrects the ideas and rhythms of the songs of the fifties, when Rock 'n' Roll was still seen as a dangerous musical form. However, as the narrative unfolds, viewers can see characters' perspectives changing on popular music. It becomes politically and culturally neutral, just a way of expressing one's individuality and nothing more. Rock 'n' Roll's seductive call to licentiousness and abandon proves to be a paper tiger; it ends up being accepted by the entire community and even gains recognition and validation from older generations. Seen metaphorically and extrapolating from the movie's plot, the film summarizes the process of evolution that society went through in the thirty years between 1955 and 1985, the time it took for rock and pop music to go from marginal to mainstream culture.

Any study of film music and its effects on audiences requires that great attention be paid to the detail of how a scene progresses and how music is integrated to point up moments of exhilaration and emotion. The relationship of different types of music (orchestral, jazz, rock and pop, in their various manifestations) to emotion and intensity is complex and not subject to easy rules of thumb. Future work in this field might entail exploring the scene-by-scene interconnectedness of image and musical theme, something I have not attempted in this overview, preferring rather to show how musical styles are used to captivate specific audiences and then construct empathy for the protagonists' collective dilemmas, which the music then helps to identify as the dilemmas of a generation.

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## Filmography (in order of release)

- *The Girl Can't Help It*. 1956. Dir. Frank Tashlin. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox

Performers: Tom Ewell, Jane Mansfield

Musical Contributions from: Little Richard, Ray Anthony, Julie London, The Platters and Fats Domino, among others.

- *Blackboard Jungle*. 1955. Dir. Richard Brooks. MGM.

Performers: Glenn Ford, Anne Francis

Musical Contributions from: Bill Haley and The Comets, Stan Kenton & His Orchestra, among others.

- *Rebel without a Cause*. 1955. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Warner Bros.

Performers: James Dean, Natalie Wood

Musical Contributions from: Richard Wagner, Harry Warren, Johannes Brahms, among others.

- *Rock around the Clock*. 1956. Dir. Fred F. Sears. Columbia Pictures Films.

Performers: Bill Haley, Rudy Pompile

Musical Contributions from: The Platters, Tony Martinez, among others.

- *A Hard Day's Night*. 1964. Dir. Richard Lester. United Artists.

Performers: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Star

Musical Contributions from: The Beatles

- *The Graduate*. 1967. Dir. Michael Nichols. Studio Players.

Performers: Dustin Hoffman, Anne Bancroft

Musical Contributions from: Simon & Garfunkel

- *Easy Rider*. 1969. Dir. Dennis Hopper. Columbia Tri-Star Pictures.

Performers: Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper

Musical Contributions from: Steppenwolf, The Byrds, The Band, Roger McGuinn, among others.

- *American Graffiti*. 1973. Dir. George Lucas. Universal Studios Home Entertainment.

Performers: Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard

Musical Contributions from: Flash Cadillac, The Heartbeats, The Regents, Buster Brown, The Flamingos, The Big Bopper, The Diamonds, The Monotones, Fats Domino, The Clovers, Buddy Holly, Bill Haley and The Comets, Del Shannon, The Crests, The Platters, The Beach Boys, among others.

- *Saturday Night Fever*. 1977. Dir. John Badham.

Performers: John Travolta, Barry Miller

Musical Contributions from: The Bee Gees, Walter Murphy, The Trammps, Kool & The Gang, among others.

- *The Big Chill*. 1983. Dir. Lawrence Kasdan. Columbia Pictures.

Performers: Tom Berenger, Glenn Close, Jeff Goldblum

Musical Contributions from: Spencer Davis Group, The Rolling Stones, The Rascals, Percy Sledge, Steve Miller Band, The Band, The Exciters, The Temptations, Marvin Gaye.

- *Flashdance*. 1983. Dir. Adrian Lyne. Sony Pictures.

Performers: Jennifer Beals, Michael Nouri

Musical Contributions from: Joan Jet & The Blackhearts, Joe Esposito, Laura Branigan, Irene Cara, Joe Esposito, Shandi Sinnamon, among others.

- *Footloose*. 1984. Dir. Herbert Ross. Paramount Pictures.

Performers: Kevin Bacon, Lori Singer

Musical Contributions from: Kenny Loggins, Shalamar, Sammy Hagar, Karla Bonoff, The Foreigner, among others.

### Other Films Referenced (in order of release)

- *Hallucination Generation*. 1966. Dir. Edward Mann. Trans American Films.

Performers: George Montgomery, Danny Stone

Musical Contributions from: Bernardo Segall.

- *The Trip*. 1967. Dir. Roger Corman. American International Pictures.

Performers: Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper

Musical Contributions from: Mike Bloomfield, The American Music Band, among others.

- *Psycho-Out*. 1968. Dir. Richard Rush. American International Pictures.

Performers: Susan Strasberg, Dean Stockwell, Jack Nicholson

Musical Contributions from: Ronald Stein, The Strawberry Alarm Clock, The Seeds, among others.

- *Mean Streets*. 1973. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Warner Bros.

Performers: Robert de Niro, Harvey Keitel

Musical Contributions from: The Rolling Stones, The Chantels, Eric Clapton among others.

- *That'll be the Day*. 1973. Dir. Claude Whatham. Anglo-EMI Film Distribution.

Performers: David Essex, Ringo Starr

Musical Contributions from: Del Shannon, The Beach Boys, The Drifters, Little Stevie Wonder, Barbara Lewis, among others.

- *Taxi Driver*. 1976. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Columbia Pictures.

Performers: Robert de Niro, Jodie Foster

Musical Contributions from: Jackson Browne, Bernard Herrman among others.

- *Fame*. 1980. Dir. Kevin Tancharoen. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Performers: Eddie Barth, Steve Inwood, Barry Miller

Musical Contributions from: Irene Cara, Paul McCrane, Linda Clifford, among others.

- *Sixteen Candles*. 1984. Dir. John Hughes. Universal Pictures.

Performers: Molly Ringwald, Paul Dooley, Justin Herry

Musical Contributions from: Stray Cats, Annie Golden, Ira Newborn & The Geeks, Patti Smith, among others.

- *Back To The Future*. 1985. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Universal Pictures.

Performers: Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd

Musical Contributions from: Huey Lewis and The News, Eric Clapton, Marvin Berry and the Starlighters, among others.

- *The Breakfast Club*. 1985. Dir. John Hughes. Universal Studios.

Performers: Emilio Estevez, Molly Ringwald

Musical Contributions from: Simple Minds, E.G. Daily, Jesse Johnson, among others.

- *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. 1986. Dir. John Hughes. Paramount Pictures.



Performers: Mathew Broderick, Mia Sara.

Musical Contributions from: The Beatles, The Dream Academy, Yello, Zapp, among others.

- *Pretty in Pink*. 1986. Dir. John Hughes. Paramount Pictures.

Performers: Molly Ringwald, Andrew McCarthy, John Cryer.

Musical Contributions from: Suzanne Vega with Joe Jackson, Jesse Johnson, INXS, New Order, among others.

- *Top Gun*. 1986. Dir. Tony Scott. Paramount Pictures.

Performers: Tom Cruise, Kely McGillis, Val Kilmer.

Musical Contributions from: Giorgio Moroder, The Miami Sound Machine, Kenny Loggins, Berlin, The Righteous Brothers, among others.

- *Hairspray*. 1988. Dir. John Waters. New Line Cinema.

Performers: Ricki Lake, Michael St Gerard.

Musical Contributions from: Chubby Checker, Gene Chanalen, The Champs, Dee Dee Sharp, among others.

- *Reservoir Dogs*. 1992. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax Films.

Performers: Harvey Keitel, Tim Roth, Chris Penn.

Musical Contributions from: Sandy Rogers, Blue Suede, Stealers Wheel among others.

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